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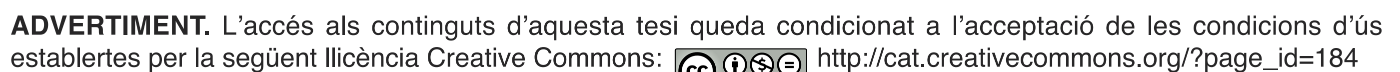
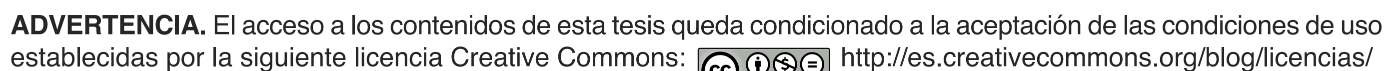
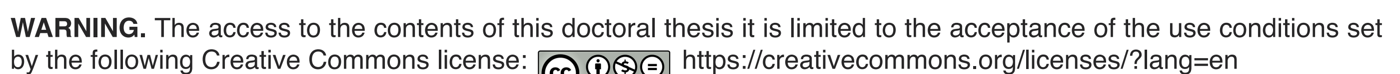
ADVERTIMENT. L'accés als continguts d'aquesta tesi queda condicionat a l'acceptació de les condicions d'ús establertes per la següent llicència Creative Commons:  http://cat.creativecommons.org/?page_id=184

ADVERTENCIA. El acceso a los contenidos de esta tesis queda condicionado a la aceptación de las condiciones de uso establecidas por la siguiente licencia Creative Commons:  http://es.creativecommons.org/blog/licencias/

WARNING. The access to the contents of this doctoral thesis it is limited to the acceptance of the use conditions set by the following Creative Commons license:  https://creativecommons.org/licenses/?lang=en

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"I Partake the Common Feeling": Helen Maria Williams' Political Writings on The French Revolution (1790-1827)

Paula Yurss Lasanta

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“I Partake the Common Feeling”: Helen Maria Williams’ Political Writings on The French Revolution (1790-1827)

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Note about Format

This thesis has been written in general accordance with the *Style Sheet* of the Departament de Filologia Anglesa i de Germanística (UAB). Wherever the *Style Sheet* was inconclusive, the Modern Language Association (MLA) style guide (8th edition) has been followed.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements
Note about format

Introduction 1
i. Research Question 4
ii. Primary Sources 8
iii. State of the Art 13
iv. Thesis Outline 21

Chapter 1
The Historical and Intellectual Context of Eighteenth-century British Radicalism .. 24

1.1.The French Revolution Debate in Britain 24
1.2. Epistolary Writing 33
1.2.1. Habermas' Theory of the Public Sphere 34
1.2.2. Offering the Private to the Public 35
1.2.3. Epistolary Novels 40
1.2.4. Letters and Politics 44
1.3. Sensibility 46
1.3.1. Moral Sense Theory 46
1.3.2. Sentimental Heroines and Men of Feeling 49
1.3.3. Radical Sensibility 51
1.4. Travel Writing 56
1.4.1. The Grand Tour: Travelling for Educational Purposes 60
1.4.2. Women's Travel Writing 63

Chapter 2
"The Golden Age of the Revolution": *Letters Written in France* (1790) and *Letters from France; Containing a Great Variety of Original Information* (1792) 66

2.1. The Fête de la Fédération: Politics as an Affair of the Heart 67
2.2. The Value of Direct Observation: Challenging the Anti-Revolutionary Forces in Britain 75
2.3. Madame de Genlis: The Exemplary Aristocrat 78
2.4. Du Fossés: A Revolutionary Tale with a Happy Ending 85
2.5. *Letters from France; Containing a Great Variety of Original Information* (1792-1793) 89
2.6. The Golden Age of the Revolution is Gone 90
2.7. British Spectator of the Events in France 95
2.8. Conclusions for this Chapter 99

Chapter 3
"The experience of a year of revolutionary government is equivalent to that of fifty years of ordinary life": The Reign of Terror and *Letters Containing A Sketch*......... 102

3.1. "A silence like that of death": Writing the Terror in Retrospective.................. 104
3.2. The Prison Community.. 109
3.3. Madame Roland: Martyr of the Revolution 114
3.4. Suspect, Prisoner and Fugitive 121
3.5. "The Polluted Festival Instituted by a Tyrant": Festival of the Supreme Being 124
3.6. The Authorities of Terror at the Guillotine 130
3.7. "Happy Revolution": The Fall of Robespierre.. 137
3.8. Conclusions for this Chapter 144

Chapter 4
"I already behold everything around us with new optics": The Beginning of the Napoleonic Era 147
4.1. *A Tour in Switzerland* (1798): Writing as a Political Act 147
4.1.1. A New Era in Swiss History: Supporting the Invasion 149
4.1.2. "The Mild Wand of Philosophy".. 158
4.2. *Sketches of the State of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic* (1801) 163
4.2.1. Individual Happiness in the Age of Revolutions... 165
4.2.2. "On the State of Women in the French Republic" 172
4.3. Conclusions for this Chapter 182

Chapter 5
"The Testimony of a Witness will be Heard": End of the Napoleonic Era and the Revolution in Retrospect 186
5.1. *Narrative of the Events* and *Letters of the Events* 186
5.1.1. The Boulevards and the Battlefield 188
5.1.2. The Basilisk's Eye: Napoleon as a Villain 194
5.1.3. Religious Toleration 201
5.2. Writing for Posterity... 207
5.3. *Souvenirs de la Révolution Française*.. 211
5.3.1. "J'ai pu me tromper, mais j'ai toujours été sincère" 214
5.3.2. Attached to France: Williams' Revolutionary Identity 222
5.4. Conclusions for This Chapter 229

Conclusions and Further Research
6.1. Conclusions 233
6.2. Further Research.. 239

Works Cited 241

Introduction

"Indeed I become every day more philosophical, and perhaps what was hitherto appeared to me the greatest of misfortunes, may prove to be my greatest good"

Helen Maria Williams in a letter to Ruth Barlow, Paris April 6-16, 1794

The British divine and writer William Beloe (1756-1817) published in 1817 *The Sexagenarian, or, the Recollections of a Literary Life* in which he discusses the life and work of his fellow contemporary writers. Beloe dedicates Chapter LIII to "H_M_W", which stands for the British author settled in France Helen Maria Williams (1761-1827). The words that Beloe addresses to Williams are not particularly kind or flattering: "How great a contrast is exhibited between this female's first appearance on the theatre of the public, and her last, fatal ending! [...] What is she now? If she lives, (and whether she does or not, few know, and nobody cares) she is a wanderer - an exile, unnoticed and unknown" (1817: 357). Beloe portrays Williams as a former successful author who has fallen out of grace. She has lost so much popularity that her audience has completely forgotten about her, to the point that they are unsure if she is alive or not, and what is worse, they do not care either way.

Williams was perfectly alive and well in 1817, residing in Paris and surrounded by a group of friends who were active in political and intellectual circles. In that same year, Williams had obtained her French citizenship. Her literary career had not ended either, as she had just produced an English translation of *Researches* (1814) by famous naturalist and explorer –and Williams' close friend– Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), and had also began the fifteen-year long translation of the numerous volumes of Humboldt's *Personal Narrative* (1814-29). In fact, according to Deborah Kennedy, it was Williams' translation of von Humboldt's work that Charles Darwin (1809-1882) read and

which sparked his interest in becoming a naturalist (2002: 186). Apart from translating, Williams was also authoring new chronicles of the French Revolution, and *Narrative of the Events which Have Taken Place in France* (1815) had been published just two years prior to Beloe's mean-spirited comments. The way in which Beloe described Williams is certainly exaggerated, since, despite the fact that she had left her home country permanently in 1792, she continued to receive visits by British authors who regarded her as a literary star. In 1816, for instance, Irish author Sydney Owenson (1781-1859), known as Lady Morgan, visited her in Williams' home in the Rue de Bondy in Paris. The following year, in 1817, she was called on by publisher and bookseller Mary Jane Godwin (1768-1841). The circle of friends and connections that surrounded Williams in the mid-1810s attests to the fact that, despite the loss of popularity that her works encountered in Britain, she was still a well-respected literary figure.

Helen Maria Williams rose to fame in the 1780s, a decade in which she published a large number of poetical works,[1] which were very well-received in Britain and granted her the favour of Elizabeth Montagu (1718-1800), William Wordsworth (1770-1850) or Anna Seward (1742-1809). Williams followed the tradition of sensibility to display in her poems the suffering of innocent victims devastated by war and colonialism. In 1790, she published *Julia, a Novel Interspersed with Some Poetical Pieces*, which constitutes a reworking of Rousseau's best-selling epistolary novel, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). Among the poetic pieces interspersed by Williams in her narrative, "The Bastille: A Vision" is of particular interest to literary historians, as it constitutes Williams' first commentary on the French Revolution, a political struggle that would become the main concern for the rest of her literary career. The poem, set in 1776, celebrates the Storming of the Bastille as the poetic voice is a prisoner who narrates the terrible conditions in

[1] For the full list of Williams' poetical works published in the 1780s, see the following section i.

which he is kept and dreams of the day in which the fortress is destroyed. Williams travelled to Paris in 1790 to participate in the celebrations for the first anniversary of the French Revolution. The experiences that she went through during her trip led Williams to publish her first and best-known chronicle of the French Revolution entitled *Letters Written in France* (1790). Two years later, in 1792, she embarked on a second trip to France which would become her permanent home from then on. As she recounts in *Souvenirs de la Révolution Française* (1827), the motivation behind her trip is primarily of a political nature: "The reason, or rather the excuse behind this immigration, was the wish to speak French [...] but the secret and true reason was the hope to closely help in the triumphs of freedom" (1827:10-11).[2] From then on, Williams devoted the most part of her career to produce chronicles of the events she had not only witnessed but also taken part in during the French Revolution. As Gina Luria Walker had already anticipated, "Williams offered a new brand of female dissident proto-journalism using a range of genres to communicate the complexity of issues and early events of the Revolution" (2011: 151). Both the content of these chronicles as the genres in which these are written are a key aspect of Williams' corpus and identity as an author.

Even though the French Revolution was viewed in Britain with moderate respect in 1789 and 1790, the popular opinion increasingly started to regard it with suspicion. By 1798, when Williams had published eight volumes of *Letters* on the Revolution, the periodical *The Anti-Jacobin Review* portrayed her as a fierce Jacobin and interpreted her pro-revolutionary feelings as treason to her native land. Besides, Williams started to lose touch with her British acquaintances, such as Anna Seward and Hester Lynch Piozzi (1741-1821) who urged her to return from France and abandon her writing on political

[2] My translation of "Le motif ou plutôt le prétexte de cette immigration, c'était le désir de bien parler français [...] mais la raison secrète et véritable, c'était l'espoir d'assister de près aux victoires de la liberté".

matters. Due to the increasingly negative reception of her work, and the opposition to the French Revolution in Britain, Williams started to lose the appeal of the British public. In fact, her last work, *Souvenirs*, was only available in French. In posterity "as the British literary canon was developed with a nationalistic fervour, Williams's exclusion was inevitable" (Duckling, 2010: 88). In the late 1980s and 1990s the writings of Helen Maria Williams began to receive critical attention thanks to the work of feminist scholars who undertook the task of recovering texts written by women. However, *Letters from France* (1790-5), and especially its first volume, *Letters Written in France* (1790), have received most of the critical attention when compared to other political texts by Williams. In her own words: "without a doubt, my writings are nothing more than detached and scattered notes, but they make a part of the most magnificent volume" (1827: 3).[3] Williams understands her chronicles as partaking in one of the most glorious times in history. However, Williams' chronicles, as we shall see in this thesis, are original when compared to other narratives of the time due precisely to her unique position with regard to both her gender and nationality. For these reasons, this thesis examines all the chronicles that she produced during the French Revolution.

i. Research Question

The objective of this dissertation is to offer a complete analysis of Helen Maria Williams' involvement in the political debate surrounding the French Revolution. Due to the feminist endeavour to recover texts penned by women, the writings by Williams began to receive critical attention since the late 1980s. Her works have been gradually included in the canon of eighteenth-century British women writers. Williams is mentioned in the

[3] My translation of "Mes écrits ne forment sans doute que des notes détachées et éparses, mais ces notes font partie du plus majestueux volume".

seminal study by Dale Spender *Mothers of the Novel* (1986). Spender includes Williams in the list of women novelists but she does not provide an examination of her texts. Another feminist scholar, Janet Todd, discusses Williams' work in *The Sign of Angellica* (1989), mostly in connection with Mary Wollstonecraft. In Todd's book, Williams is included in the group of British women writers that supported the Revolution together with Barbauld, Hays and Smith. From then on, and as I shall discuss in section ii of the present chapter, most of the studies on Williams have been focused on *Letters* (1790-5).

Writing in the second part of the eighteenth century, Williams was inevitably influenced by the literature of sensibility, explained in more detail in section 1.3. The trend of sensibility has been traditionally understood as focused on physical reactions. However, as the eighteenth century progressed, sensibility started to take on a strong moral and intellectual dimension. This literary mode of expression was considered suitable for women as it appealed directly to their emotions instead of being based on pure reason. The appeal to sensibility by women writers has been mostly studied in connection to poetry and the novel.[4] As a consequence, most women writers of the eighteenth century "are highlighted as novelist, poets, literary critics and playwrights" (Looser, 2000: 5) while their contribution to other areas of knowledge is overlooked and superficially read. The present thesis contends that the use of sensibility as a means to influence political opinion needs to be reassessed, as Williams' writings prove the potential of sensibility for engaging in intellectual debates of political and social nature. Williams' appeal to sensibility is not so much informed by an urge to appear feminine or acceptable or by any assumption of her inferior intellectual capacities. Instead, she

[4] For specific studies on the tradition of sensibility in poetry and the novel in the British context see *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (1990) by John Mullan, *The Poetics of Sensibility: a Revolution in Literary Style* (1996) by Jerome McGann, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: the Senses in Social Context* (1993) by Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel, 1790-1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* (1994) by Nicola J. Watson.

believes that in order to construct a fair and just society, emotions are the force that brings together public and private interests.

When it comes to women writers' engagement in matters of social change, the focus has been put on their discussion of the status and education of women, being Mary Wollstonecraft's work the clearest exponent of this.[5] Even though these studies engaged in the necessary task of researching women's participation in the public sphere with their writings, this study explores Williams' participation in social inquiries not limited to the woman question. I am interested in observing how deep and involved was Williams' engagement in subjects of political debate and whether she felt either included or excluded in the political discussions by dint of her gender. It is also compelling to see if her discussion of the French Revolution was connected to women's rights issues. Williams shows a degree of self-awareness about her intellectual contribution to political history as she writes in *Poems on Various Subjects* (1823): "I have there been treading on the territory of History and a trace of my footsteps will perhaps be left. My narratives make a part of that marvellous story which the eighteenth century has to record to future times, and the testimony of a witness will be heard" (1823: x). Nevertheless, Blakemore (1997) considered that in Williams' description of Revolutionary events, she aimed at convincing her readership of her fictional approach to the incidents she narrates. As women writers frequently approached history and politics with epistolary and autobiographical genres, their engagement with social and political issues has tended to be dismissed as purely subjective. One of the objectives of the present study is to demonstrate that Williams aimed at providing accurate and detailed political and

[5] See *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* by Barbara Taylor (2003), *Mary Wollstonecraft, Pedagogy and the Practice of Feminism* (2013) by Kristin Collins Hanley, *Revolutionary Feminism: the Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1992) by Gary Kelly, *Mary Wollstonecraft: The Making of a Radical Feminist* (1990) by Jennifer Lorch.

historical content. Besides, she precisely wields authority by emphasizing the veracity of her account when compared to other writers of the period.

It should also be noted that Williams found herself in a very unique position compared to other British women writers of her time. Williams developed the largest part of her writing career in France. While other fellow women writers visited France during the revolutionary period, Williams' expatriate status makes her an unconventional figure. Wollstonecraft spent a few months in Paris between 1792 and 1793, and left when the reign of Terror was starting to escalate. Frances Burney, married to a French émigré, stayed in France between 1802 and 1815, coinciding with the largest part of the Napoleonic era, while travelling to England back and forth. By contrast, Williams witnessed the subsequent phases of the French Revolution on the spot and even acquired the French citizenship during the Restoration. For that matter, this study also seeks to explore the extent to which Williams was influenced by the French intellectual context. She was particularly interested in providing her readers with information that was only available in France and which marked the difference between her writing and that of other British authors. Since most of her works were translated into French and, interestingly, her last work was only published in French, this thesis explores whether Williams wrote with a French or British audience in mind. Williams was a mediator of political ideas between Britain and France, and she aimed at offering an alternative to the counter-revolutionary ideas that became increasingly ingrained in Britain. Taking this into account, I am interested in seeing how Williams aimed at influencing the political atmosphere of the country she took residence in. Besides, this study is also concerned with the degree in which Williams feels a participant or an outsider in the intellectual discussions of France due to her nationality, as well as the ways in which her circumstances shape her identity as a writer and intellectual.

This thesis departs from Gary Kelly's statement that the culture of sensibility formed Williams "as an intellectual and writer" (1997: 227). Nevertheless, Williams' narratives of the French Revolution have been studied either in isolation from the rest of her corpus, or together with her early production and reception. For that matter, a complete critical study focused only on her chronicles of the French Revolution is still a necessary task of recovery insofar as Williams' political and social discourse finds a home in them. In taking Williams' corpus as a whole, my research points towards the fact that Williams' aim was to take a stand within the trend of enlightened ideas and, also, spread her views to a general public. Williams' writing displays a method, a style and work discipline that triggers consistent lines of elaborated intellectual thought in order to influence the political debate on the French Revolution.

ii. Primary Sources

The production of Helen Maria Williams spanned over a period of 45 years, being *Edwin and Eltruda* (1782) her first publication and *Souvenirs de la Révolution Française* (1827) her last work. She was a prolific author in a variety of literary genres including poetry, translation, travel-writing, epistolary texts and journalistic chronicles. In the 1780s, while based in London, she produced a large number of poetic works following the tradition of sensibility. Her first poem was entitled *Edwin and Eltruda* (1782), followed by *An Ode on the Peace* (1783) and *Peru* (1784). In 1786, Williams published her first book of poems, *Poems*. From the early stages of her career, Williams used poetry to discuss political and social concerns. In *A Poem on the Bill Lately Passed for Regulating Slave Trade* (1788) she directly alludes to an act passed by the parliament in 1788, the Slave Trade Act. The last work that she produced before delving in the analysis on the French Revolution was the first and only novel *Julia* (1790), already mentioned in the previous

section. The scope of Williams' output changed after 1790 with *Letters Written in France*, as she put poetry and fiction aside in order to focus on the social and political commentary of the French Revolution. Williams went back to England after her first trip to France, and as mentioned earlier, she decided to move to Paris for two years in 1792, although she ended up staying in France permanently. Before embarking for France, she released a poem entitled *A Farewell for Two Years England* (1792). In the 1790s, she published eight volumes of *Letters*, *Letters Written in France*, three volumes of *Letters from France* (1792-3) and *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France* (1795-6), which offer an account of the Terror. Williams travelled to Switzerland in 1794 escaping political persecution and there she gathered the material to publish her travelogue *A Tour in Switzerland*, published in 1798.

Moving into the nineteenth century, coinciding with the early years of the Napoleonic Era, she produced two volumes of *Sketches of the State of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic* (1801). In 1803, Williams translated a series of letters attributed to the former king that appeared in print under the title of *The Political and Confidential Correspondence of Louis XVI*. Nevertheless, the correspondence that Williams transcribed from French into English turned out to be forged, which suggested that Williams had been deceived by the people who sold the correspondence as being original (Kennedy, 2002: 181). As explained by Deborah Kennedy, *The Political and Confidential Correspondence* was received unfavourably by both royalists and Bonapartists and put Williams under the radar of Napoleon's censorship (2002: 181). For that matter, Williams did not produce another chronicle of the Revolution until 1815, after Bonaparte's defeat in the Hundred Days War. In 1809, Williams returned to poetry with *Verses addressed by H.M.W to Her Two Nephews on Saint Helen's Day*, published in Paris despite being written in English. *Narrative of the Events Which Have Taken Place*

in France (1815) and *Letters on the Events which Have Passed in France* (1819) offer an analysis of the Napoleonic era in France, as well as commentaries on the recently established Restoration, focusing on the Second White Terror and the repeal of Napoleon's policies. Williams last book of poems was published in 1823 entitled *Poems on Various Subjects*, which combines already published poems with new ones and a reworking of some of her most well-known poetical productions, such as *Peru*, which was refashioned in 1823 as *Peruvian Tales*. In *Poems* (1823), Williams looks back at a life-long career as a poetess, while in *Souvenirs de la Révolution Française* (1827) she offers a retrospective account of the events she had described in her chronicles from 1790 to 1819. This last work was translated into French by Williams' nephew Charles Coquerel and it constituted the only text by Williams to be available in French only and not in English.

The purpose of the present study is to reconstruct the main tenets of Helen Maria Williams' political thought in her political writings on the French Revolution. To this end, I will examine the intellectual discourse that Williams unfolds through a variety of genres and registers, availing herself of an eclectic base of literary traditions, readings and social contacts that position her as a unique and authoritative voice as an intellectual, one which previous studies on Williams, albeit not scare, have not registered to its full consequence. We shall see how Williams relies on a method of first-hand observation, which is grounded on experience and emphatic emotions to shape her discourse and become an intellectual referent to other contemporary writers. The portrayal emerging out of this analysis, grounded in feminist criticism and the historiography of the French Revolution, is a Helen Maria Williams as a full intellectual, which in turns raises questions about the scope and influence of eighteenth-century women political writers in the intellectual construction of ideas such as freedom, social equality and religious

toleration. My analysis will survey the following works, not taken before as an integrated corpus of political thought: *Letters from France*, *Letters Containing a Sketch*, *A Tour in Switzerland*, *Sketches of the State of Manners and Opinions*, *Narrative on the Events*, *Letters on the Events* and *Souvenirs de la Révolution Française*. The only poetical work analysed in this thesis is *A Farewell for Two Years England* (1782), since it was written at a decisive moment in Williams' career that determined the course of her writing. I have also paid attention to the preface in Williams' translation of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul and Virginia* (1795) and *Poems* (1823). Williams directly delves in a political analysis of the French Revolution in these prefaces. In *Paul and Virginia*, she discusses incarceration and persecution during the Terror, and in 1823 she examines the impact that the French Revolution has had on literary production. These prefaces are worth analysing for this study in order to better examine Williams' self-representation as an author in two key turning points of her career, the Reign of Terror, which marked the beginning of Williams' disillusionment with revolutionary politics, and the Restoration, when she looks back at a life-long literary career reflecting upon the French Revolution. Williams' discussion of the French Revolution transgresses the boundaries of literary genres, as is characteristic of women's participation in the intellectual debates at the turn of the eighteenth century.

For my study, I have focused on the first editions of Williams' texts which are available for the most part in digital format in Google Books, Hathitrust, and Eighteenth-Century Collections Online. Regardless of the online availability of these works for reading purposes, my research for this study has taken me to consult the original items found in the following libraries: the Centre for Research Collections (CRC) at the University of Edinburgh, the National Library of Scotland, the British Library, the Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and his Circle, which is part of the New York Public

library, the National Library of France (BnF) and the Historical Library of the City of Paris. These items have revealed contents of great interest such as marginalia and notes. In my visit to the British Library in London, I had access to Horatio Nelson's own copy of *Sketches* whose annotations evidence the disagreement between the admiral and Williams' analysis of the Revolutionary wars.[6] However, I have not discussed the marginalia for the sake of the discussion of my thesis, as the reception of Williams' work has been dealt with in detail in Deborah Kennedy's monograph. Nevertheless, Nelson's engagement with Williams' writing reveals the complexity of her involvement in the debates of her day as it demonstrates that her work was taken into consideration by the highest military and political actors of her time. Thus, the relevance of Williams' work during her own time deserves to be reconsidered, as she provided to the British readership with the latest information regarding the political atmosphere in France in Revolutionary times, despite the decline of her popularity during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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[6] Horatio Nelson concentrates his annotations on Williams' rendering of the military actions that put an end to the Neapolitan Republic (June 1799). Williams did not travel to Naples, and, for that matter she does not provide an eyewitness account on this instance. Nevertheless, she clarifies that she has obtained information directly from witnesses, although she keeps the identity of the informants a secret:

> The sketch I shall send you, is a plain and unadorned narrative of the leading events which brought about the Revolution and counter revolution of Naples; and though the person to whom I am chiefly indebted for this information, held a distinguished post in the republic, and may consequently be supposed under some undue influence as an historian, yet the facts which he has related are so confirmed by other testimony, that far from having reason for with-holding my assent, I shall probably be accused in many instances, of softening rather than heightening the colours of this dreadful catastrophe" (1801: 123-4).

Besides, she annexes in the appendixes the historical documents (in Italian or French, and she provides a translation into English) that demonstrate the accuracy of her sources. Most of Nelson's comments refute the historical facts provided by Williams. More often than not, Nelson' just underlines the sentence or words that are inaccurate from his perspective and writes "not true" or "lye" next to it. At other times, he contradicts the information provided by Williams. Williams writes that "the court of Naples sent the pilots of its own marine on board the English vessels" (1801: 129). On the side of the page, Nelson writes the following: "Not true No pilot was seen or asked for". Writing about Nelson, Williams claims that he returned to Sicily "after a month's delay in the ports" (1801: 130). Nelson, nevertheless, writes that it took him only "five days". Apart from disagreeing with the facts provided by Williams, his disparaging political stance from Williams also becomes evident in Nelson's notes. Referring to the Neapolitan Republicans executed, labeled by Williams as "illustrious martyrs of liberty" (1801: 222), Nelson writes that "Miss Williams has in my opinion constantly proved that the persons she has named desired Death from the monarchy".

iii. State of the Art

Helen Maria Williams' participation in the political debates of the French Revolution became of interest for the first time in the twentieth century with the publication of Lionel D. Woodward's thesis dissertation *Une Anglaise Amie de la Révolution Française: Helen Maria Williams et ses Amis* (1930). This is the very first study devoted in its entirety to Helen Maria Williams and it focuses, from a historical framework, on the networks, connections and friendships that Williams forged while in France. It was not until the late 1980s, with the rise of feminist interest in recovering literature penned by women writers, that Williams' work started to receive attention by scholarship in English. Dale Spender's influential publication *Mothers of the Novel* (1986) includes Williams on her list of women authors before Jane Austen, but it does not provide an examination of her work. Following this line of recovery of women writers, Janet Todd pays attention to Williams in *The Sign of Angellica* (1989), which constitutes an important publication for the recognition of women's professional participation in the literary market of the eighteenth century. Williams is mentioned in the last section of Todd's study, which focuses on the latter part of the eighteenth century, coinciding with the times of the Revolution. As previously noted in section i, Todd discusses Williams in relation to other authors that supported the Revolution in France, primarily Mary Wollstonecraft, presents Williams as a novelist (1989: 231) and considers her approach to the Revolution to be less thorough than Smith's and Hays' (1989: 226). Todd also brought attention to Williams' writings by editing the facsimile reprint of *Letters From France* in 1975.

The recovery of Williams' work continued in the following decade, 1990s, especially in the area of Romanticism studies. At the turn of the decade, Chris Jones published his article "Helen Maria Williams and Radical Sensibility" (1989)

acknowledging that, for Helen Maria Williams, the rhetoric of sensibility had the potential to inspire political action, as she focuses on collective feelings at the service of the common good, rather than on purely individual emotion. I concur with Jones when he observes that Williams did not only understand the principles of the Revolution at a theoretical level, but she was constantly concerned with the actual implementation of these principles. Vivien Jones (1992) also notices this aspect of Williams' works, which she also finds in Wollstonecraft's writings and that Todd labels as 'Active Sensibility'. For both Chris Jones and Vivien Jones, Williams features in comparison with other canonical names of the period, mainly William Wordsworth and Mary Wollstonecraft. Another example of Williams included together with canonical authors is Nicola Watsons' article "Novel Eloisas: Revolutionary and Counter-Revolutionary Narratives in Helen Maria Williams, Wordsworth and Byron" published in 1992. Watson's article explores how the revolutionary ideas of Rousseau's *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Heloise* influenced Williams' *Letters* (1790-6), Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1805) and Byron's *Don Juan* (1818). Watson focuses on sensibility as a primarily novelistic device, and thus, she analyses how Williams translates the plot of sensibility into her works of non-fictional nature (1992: 81). Watson's study of Williams still presumes that her engagement with political chronicles should be understood through the lens of fictional devices. Focusing particularly on Williams, 1993 proved a fruitful year for studies on her with the publication of Mary A. Favret's *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics, and the Fiction of Letters*, which includes a chapter entitled "Helen Maria Williams and the Letters of History" and deals only with the first volumes of *Letters*. Here, Favret claims that Williams understands the potential of letters as detached from the novelistic tradition as she alludes to the 'Lettre de Cachet', which brings attention to the political implications

exerted by letters in pre-revolutionary France.[7] Favret also pays attention to Williams' allusion to General Dumoriez's correspondence, which brings attention to the uses of letters for political plotting. Thus, Favret concludes that Williams distanced herself from purely individualist experience in her letters to offer her political opinions to the public (1993: 95). Gary Kelly's *Women, Writing and Revolution, 1790-1827* and Eleanor Ty's *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790's* were published in the same year as Favret's book. Ty focuses on Helen Maria Williams' facet as a novelist and reads her first and only novel *Julia* (1790) a strong statement against patriarchal rule. At the denouement of the plot in *Julia*, Williams envisions a community only for females that survives without any economic coverage by men. Ty focuses on Williams' engagement with the domestic world and disregards her allusions to the French Revolution in the novel. Also in 1993, Anne K. Mellor published *Romanticism and Gender* and, even though she does not explicitly mention Williams in the chapter's titles, she devotes several pages to an overview of her work on the Revolution. In his study of British authors who championed the Revolution of 1789, *Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams and the Rewriting of the French Revolution* (1997), Steven Blakemore chooses Helen Maria Williams as one of his case studies that explores the British debate surrounding the French Revolution. In Blakemore's view, Williams aims at presenting her chronicles more as a work of fiction than as an accurate chronicle (1997: 174). However, as he sees it, the appearance of romance that Williams gives to her *Letters* point towards the fact that fiction might be closer to the truth than superficial facts. This study maintains that Williams presented at all times her account as factual and grounded on observation rather than on the imagination. The works dedicated

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[7] For an explanation of how the 'Lettres de Cachet' were used in pre-revolutionary France to impose royal authority see section 2.4.

to Williams tend not to explore her writing beyond the first volumes of *Letters* as exemplified by "Perishable Goods: Feminine Virtue, Selfhood and History in the Early Writings of Helen Maria Williams" (1994/5) by Mark Ledden; "Public Loathing, Private Thoughts: Historical Representation in Helen Maria Williams' *Letters from France*" a chapter by Jack Fruchtman Jr in T*he Intersections of the Public and Private Spheres in Early Modern England* (1996); or "Politics and Commercial Sensibility in Helen Maria Williams' *Letters from France*" (1997).

The early 2000s is a landmark when it comes to the publication of studies on Williams. First, a modern edition of *Letters written in France* was published for the first time in 2001 edited by Neil Fraistat and Susan Lanser. In their introduction to the edition, Fraistant and Lanser highlight Williams not as a single observer of the Revolution but inscribe her writing within a tradition of Enlightened thought that culminated in a political struggle to establish a society grounded on justice and equality. In 2002, Deborah Kennedy released the first, and so far the only one monograph devoted to Helen Maria Williams: *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution*. Kennedy's main contribution is biographical and contextual. She provides a complete background of Williams' literary, cultural and personal influences paying attention to her published works, correspondence and reception of her corpus. Kennedy's book illustrates how Williams progressively lost the favour of British readership, as an increasing conservative tendency demonized the radicalism of the French Revolution. Besides, Kennedy's study demonstrates that Williams paid her incursion on political subjects as a woman writer at a high price, as she became in her native country the example of everything a proper female writer should avoid becoming: unfeminine, violent and disengaged from domestic affairs. Scholars working on Williams are highly indebted to Kennedy's reconstruction of her biographical facts, literary connections, political networks and reception of her work by her

contemporaries. Kennedy had already written about Williams in "'Storms of Sorrow': The Poetry of Helen Maria Williams" (1991) and "Responding to the French Revolution: Williams' Julia and Burney's The Wanderer" that appeared in *Jane Austen and Mary Shelley, and their Sisters* (2000). The book allows Kennedy the opportunity to move beyond *Julia* and *Letters* in order to offer an overview of Williams' complete corpus.

During the 2000s, the efforts to locate Williams within the 'big names' or Romanticism lost momentum in favour of including her works in conversation with other lesser-known women writers of the period. The analysis of the specificities of women writers of the period, and their challenges in professional status within a patriarchal context, led to a critical interest in gathering a canon of Romantic women writers that counterbalanced the traditional one based mainly on male authors. Angela Keane writes a chapter on Williams in her *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s: Romantic Belongings,* and, as she had done in her article "Helen Maria Williams *Letters from France*: A National Romance" (1992), she only deals with the chronicles that Williams published in the 1790s. In her approach to Williams' *Letters*, Keane emphasizes that Williams constructs her narrative of the French Revolution as a romance (2000: 70) and pays attention to the metaphors she employs to convey her political stance. Keane concludes that the predominant metaphors "are of reciprocal commerce, rather than of a specialised access to the collective psyche of the nation" (2000: 15). In *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (2005), Adriana Craciun dedicates one chapter to Williams' rendition of 'The Terror' and the Jacobins. For the chapter "Romantic Patriotism as Feminist Critique of the Empire: Helen Maria Williams, Sydney Owenson and Germain de Staël" in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (2005) and for the article "'The Colour of a Riband': Patriotism, History and the Role of Women in Helen Maria Williams' *Sketches of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic*

(1801)" (2006), Caroline Franklin moves beyond the 1790s and pays attention to Williams' *Sketches* (1801) written in the Napoleonic era. In *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, Franklin argues that since women were denied a space in politics, they turned to history in order to discuss the French Revolution (2005: 555). For her article "The Colour of a Ribband" (2006), Franklin finds that Williams highlighted her role of spectator to not appear as an authority on political matters, but this thesis aims at showing that Williams used her eyewitness positions precisely to grant authority to her texts. Franklin also describes Williams as an "anti-historian" since "she refused to adopt the distanced objective stand of male scholars" (2006: 495). In an article published in 2009 and a book published in 2010, Richard Gravil's provides a comparative approach to Williams and Wordsworth's writings. Gravil observes that Wordsworth's main source for his writings on the French Revolution were Williams' *Letters*, which demonstrates that her work influenced the political debates of the French Revolution in Britain.

The recovery of Williams' work and the interest in her texts continued to grow in the following decade. A modern edition of *Julia* appeared in 2010 (edited by Natasha Duquette), *A Tour in Switzerland* was edited by Patrick Vincent and Florence Widmer-Schnyder in 2011, and *Peru* in 2015 by Paula R. Feldman. In their introduction, Vincent and Widmer-Schnyder challenge Gary Kelly's persistence in seeing Williams' writing as a "feminization of the revolution", a point that Gravil had mentioned before by saying that "Gary Kelly, [...] hardly ever speaks of Williams' view of the revolution without the curious epithet "feminized" as if "her" revolution were a world away from the real world of men" (2009: 58). Curiously enough, Vincent and Widmer-Schnyder find an "unabashedly masculine ambition" (2011: 47) in Williams' Tour, as if the adjective 'masculine' were indicative of Williams' confidence in her intellectual abilities.

Although Williams' facet as a translator has attracted a lot of attention in the recent years,[8] there have also been publications dealing with Williams' involvement in politics. In *Novel Histories: British Women Writing History, 1760-1830* (2012) by Lisa Kasmer, there is a chapter entitled "Helen Maria Williams and the "Regendering" of History" which follows Kelly's emphasis on the epithet 'feminine', as well as Chris Jones' and Janet Todd's interest in 'Active Sensibility'. However, Kasmer does not use Todd's terminology –'active' sensibility– but she rather sees "sympathy as an agential tool" (2012: 80) in Williams' texts. Kasmer pays attention only to Williams' *Letters* (1790-5) and she shows interest in observing the different manners in which women approached history writing. Kasmer concludes that in Williams' case she accesses history writing through the emotions. Jones, by contrast, focuses on the potential of sensibility for social change in Williams' thinking. Georgina Green also brings attention to the political power of sensibility in *A History of Women's Political Thought in Europe, 1700-1800* (2014). Focusing on the enlightened emphasis on transparency, Green explains that Williams sees the Jacobins', and especially Robespierre's attempt to control people's emotional responses as a way to rule over their ideology, again linking emotions with political action. Orianne Smith (2013) also contextualizes Williams' use of sensibility as a force for social and political reform. However, her analysis is different from the authors mentioned above since she pays attention to the religious context in which she participated. Smith observes that, following the Presbyterian tradition in which Williams was raised, and drawing from progressive millennialism, she saw the Revolution as a sign

[8] Examples of this are: "Emotions in Translation: Helen Maria Williams and "Beauties Peculiar to the English Language" (2011) by Louise Joy, ""The Ocean of Futurity, which has no Boundaries": The Deconstructive Politics of Helen Maria Williams' Translation of Paul and Virginia" (2012) by David Sigler, Paul Hague's doctoral dissertation *Helen Maria Williams: The Purpose and Practice of Translation, 1789-182* (2015) and the chapter on Williams in Melissa Bailes' book *British Women's Scientific Writing and Literary Originality, 1750-1830*. Here, Bailes pays attention to Williams' translations of Bernardine de Saint-Pierre, Louis-François Ramond and Alexander von Humboldt.

of the coming of an improved society that would eventually lead humanity as a whole towards perfection. On a similar line, Natasha Duquette's "Dissenting Cosmopolitanism and Helen Maria Williams's Prison Verse" (2020) analyses Williams' translation of a French religious hymn by paying attention to her religious background. Duquette's article shows that, for Williams, religious toleration was one of the main goals to be achieved by the revolution in France.

Revolutionary Women Writers: Charlotte Smith and Helen Maria Williams by Angela Keane appeared in 2013. Here, Keane breaks with the interest in locating Williams within the Romantic canon and considers that Williams is not a Romantic author when compared to Charlotte Smith. She argues that Williams does not focus so much on her individual experiences but in collective history. Due to her constant emphasis on stories in which the oppressed are victimized, Keane observes that Williams' early writings –since Keane only studies Williams' writings until 1798– lack complexity and end up being monotonous. From a different approach, Amy Culley's *British Women's Life Writing, 1760-1840: Friendship, Community, and Collaboration* (2014) identifies that history is not the background but the main concern of authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Grace Dalrymple Elliott, and, of course, Helen Maria Williams. I would add that these authors' interest in contemporary history cannot be detached from their political concerns. In her survey of the first twenty-six letters in Williams' chronicles Louise Duckling claims that Williams "succeeded in establishing a distinct political philosophy" (2010: 75), but there is no consensus among the scholarship, as exemplified by Karen Green in *A History of Women's Political Thought in Europe, 1700-1800* (2014) in which she offers a very brief analysis of Williams' contribution to the political discussion of her time. Green explicitly mentions that she does not consider Williams a political theorist, as she fashions her analysis of the Revolution as a love story, providing

the story of the Du Fossés as an example. Besides, Green finds that Williams relies on poetic justice instead of analysing the causes that trigger the different outcomes of the Revolution (2014: 202).

iv. Thesis Outline

The present thesis is organized in six chapters. Chapter 1 offers an overview of the historical and conceptual framework of my study and starts with a discussion of the different trends of ideas colliding in Britain on account of the French Revolution in France. Section 1.1. contextualizes Williams' work within the debate in order to highlight Williams' unique perspective as an eyewitness of the events in France. The following section, 1.2., provides an overview of the evolution of the epistolary genre throughout the eighteenth century, in order to differentiate the political nature of Williams' *Letters* from the educational or novelistic slant traditionally offered by this genre. Section 1.3. discusses the tradition of sensibility and points towards the different uses given to this literary tradition, that range from a conservative and individualistic tendency of sensibility to a vehicle for social reform, as found in Williams' works. Since Williams' first chronicles of the Revolution, as well as *A Tour in Switzerland*, were fashioned as travelogues, the last section of chapter one is devoted to travel writing, focusing at the end on the particularities of this genre when cultivated by women writers.

Chapter 2 delves into the analysis of Williams' chronicles of the French Revolution. This chapter is concerned with her first volumes of *Letters*, *Letters from France* (1790-2) which narrate Williams' first experiences in the continent. The purpose of this chapter is to study how Williams initially engages with both the politics and intellectual climate of the French Revolution. Besides, my analysis of *Letters* focuses on how Williams reinforces her position as an observer to ground the veracity of her account.

In *Letters from France; Containing a Great Variety of Original Information*, also discussed in this chapter, the optimism of Williams' first account starts to decline as the Jacobins start to gain political ground and displace the Girondin party as the leader of the Revolution. I pay attention to Williams' disillusionment to observe the extent to which she displays her critical thinking as a commentator of the events.

Chapter 3 discusses the second series of *Letters*, *Letters Containing a Sketch*, published in 1795. In these volumes, Williams focuses on the period of the Reign of Terror and positions herself against the revolutionary authorities. This chapter explores Williams' account of her own imprisonment, her rendering of the violent events of the Terror and her involvement with Madame Roland. All of these episodes provide an insight into how Williams envisions herself at the core of the political resistance. Besides, her description of women's executions allows for seeing the connection between Williams' revolutionary and feminist inclinations. Chapter 3 also deals with the Festival of the Supreme Being, in which Williams reveals the complexity of her understanding of the role of feelings for political purposes, as she criticizes that Robespierre restrains the spontaneity of feelings of the attendants to the Festival.

Chapter 4 pays attention to *A Tour in Switzerland* (1798) and *Sketches of the State of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic* (1801). For the analysis of *A Tour in Switzerland*, this study has focused on Williams' engagement with the ideas expounded by Rousseau, William Coxe, and Frédéric-César de La Harpe. As she opposes the representation of Switzerland as a land of democratic values in Rousseau's and Coxe's view, Williams shows her confidence in intellectual discussion, as she does not hesitate to challenge leading intellectuals of her time. Besides, through her commentaries on Napoleon and her meeting with Caspar Lavater, Williams displays her understanding of political success, which for her is not based on heroic deeds but on collective emotions.

In the section dedicated to *Sketches*, the analysis is focused on Williams' evaluation of the improvement of society after the Revolution as she assesses the success of revolutionary political measures. Besides, she focuses on the improvement that the Revolution has had for both peasants and especially for women, which is useful for this study since Williams' reveals herself as an informed and critical commentator of the Revolution.

Finally, Chapter 5 explores Williams' chronicles written at the end of the Revolutionary period with the arrival of the Restoration. In *Narrative* (1815), *Letters on the Events* (1819), and *Souvenirs* (1827) Williams maintains a life-long commitment to the ideas of the French Revolution and defends herself against the attacks coming from the British press. Analysing the arguments that she gives to maintain her reputation as a staunch revolutionary is useful for this study since Williams evaluates in retrospective her own contribution to the fray of political ideas of her time. Besides, Chapter 5 reveals the connection between the French Revolution and other social concerns for Williams, particularly in matters of religious toleration. To conclude, Chapter 6 provides the answers to the research questions this dissertation has posed and develops the final conclusions of this study.

Chapter 1

The Historical and Intellectual Context of Eighteenth-century British Radicalism

1.1. The French Revolution Debate in Britain

Helen Maria Williams' literary career spanned, both chronologically and thematically, 'the war of ideas' in 'the French Revolution debate' and its aftermath. Although the Revolution starts with the Fall of the Bastille on the 14th of July 1789, the 'war of ideas' did not start straightforwardly in Britain. The expression 'war of ideas' here refers to the different opinions in Britain regarding the Revolution in France. Originally, the news of the revolt was overall well-received in Britain. Edmund Burke, whose *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) is considered to be the leading text of the counterrevolutionary side of the French Revolution debate, was captivated by the French insurrection, as we know from his correspondence. Burke, whose case is paradigmatic of the intellectual climate of the time in Britain, reconsidered his political position Regarding the Revolution in France as well as other well-known authors such as Coleridge, Wordsworth, or Southey. The concern of British writer Hannah More was the education of the lower classes. More, who is known for her essays written in an accessible language, produced *Village Politics* (1793) a translation of "Burkean philosophy into working class prose" (Fraistat and Lanser, 2001: 282) in opposition to Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791), which defends the need of the people to protect their rights when the government does not. More's *Remarks on the Speech of M. Dupont* (1793) explains that the British had welcomed the insurrection because they were unaware of the violent turn that the Revolution would take:

> What English heart did not exult at the demolition of the Bastille? What lover of his species did not triumph in the warm hope, that one of the finest countries in the world would soon be one of the most free? Popery and despotism, though chained by the gentle

> influence of Louis the sixteenth, had actually slain their thousands. Little was then imagined, that anarchy and atheism, the monsters who were about to succeed them, would soon slay their ten thousands (More, 1793: 7).

As More describes in this excerpt, the crimes committed by the revolutionaries had outnumbered those of the monarchy they had initially destroyed. More finds it ironic that the revolutionaries overthrew the aristocracy due to their disproportionate use of power.

Just a few months after the insurrection, on the 4th of November 1789, non-conformist -that is to say, a protestant from a church other than the Anglican- minister Richard Price gave a sermon entitled *A Discourse on the Love of our Country delivered on Nov. 4, 1789, at the Meeting-House in the Old Jewry, to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Britain* in order to commemorate the anniversary of the Glorious Revolution in Britain. Due to its recent history, comments and analyses of the French Revolution in Britain tended to establish comparisons with the Glorious Revolution (1688) and/or the American War of Independence (1775-1783). Price had been a defender of the American Independence, and he acknowledged that he had a sound opinion of Louis XVI because he had supported the American cause. However, Price rejects absolutism and recognizes that the king must always be at the service of its people. As a result, if the king fails to do so, resistance and revolt are not only justified but necessary: “power abused justifies resistance” (Price, 1790: 32). The fact that Price produced this text first as an oral discourse, addressed to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain, is significant for how radicalism worked in Britain. Radicalism refers here to a political movement in Britain that started in the 1790s, which was inspired by the discourse on natural rights of the American and French Revolutions. The goals of the movement were political education and parliamentary reform, particularly: “extensions of the franchise, equitable districts of representation and frequency of elections” (Johnston, 2013: 4). Among the participants of the movement

were Joseph Priestley, or Andrew Kippis, Williams' mentor. Examples of radical societies are the London Reforming Society, the London Corresponding Society or the London Revolution Society, to whom Price first delivered the *Discourse* in the form of speech. Radicals celebrate what they considered political victories. In July 1790, there were dinners and celebrations across Britain to commemorate the first anniversary of the Fall of the Bastille (Macleod, 2013: 387). Another example would be the aforementioned meeting on the anniversary of the Glorious Revolution.

Price's text also shows how the French Revolution was seen in Britain through the lens of its own history –in this case, the revolution of 1688. Besides, Richard Price was a Dissenting preacher. When the monarchy was restored in England in 1660 after the failure of the Commonwealth, British laws such as the Act of Uniformity of 1662 limited the rights of those who did not conform to the Church of England to participate in the public life of the nation. The Corporation Act of 1661 and the Test Acts (1673-1678) banned dissenters from public offices to earn a degree from certain schools such as Cambridge or Oxford. As a result, a large number of dissenters migrated to the American colonies. The dissenting community in Britain was largely supportive of the cause for the American Independence.

A Discourse on the Love of Our Country also connects Price to the radical movement, both for its content and for the situation in which it was delivered. For the radical movement, "reading and discussion [...] were the way forward" (38). Radicals also considered the press and pamphlets to be the best medium to spread their ideas because these allowed them to avoid intermediaries. According to Kevin Gilmartin, Burke's *Reflections* also shows the author's "anxieties about the subversive work of newspapers, pamphlets, reprinted sermons [...]" (2007: 4). Burke responds directly to Price in his text. For Burke, the events in France were subverting the order of things and this was inevitably

going to lead the French nation to chaos and tragedy: “The very idea of the fabrication of a new government is enough to fill us with disgust and horror” (1790: 44). His main argument, ‘the Age of Chivalry is gone’, shows the nostalgia for the former social order, which he considered to be natural in contrast with the egalitarian discourse on natural rights defended by the revolutionaries.[9] The ‘Age of Chivalry’ refers to a time where society was characterized by their firm emphasis on patriarchal rule, religious fervour and social distinctions according to rank, with the king at the top. For Burke, once people subvert the pre-established social order they become inhuman, animal and thus, dangerous. He applied the same argument to gender, since the female activists of the revolution abandoned all traits of femininity in his account, for instance the women who marched on Versailles on the 5th of November 1789. The event of the 6th is also narrated with a special gender key since it evokes a rape scene. The queen was deprived by force of her social position, her belongings and her femininity as well. After telling the incident at Versailles, Burke regrets the loss of the status quo: “Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom” (1790: 113). Thus, the Revolution for Burke goes beyond affairs of state and it includes gender, moral conduct, and ultimately, social rules.

That same year, Mary Wollstonecraft published her own defence of the French Revolution as a letter to Burke: *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*. Catharine Macaulay went one step beyond, by publishing her plea for the cause in France as a commentary on Burke’s text: *Observations on the Reflections of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke, on the Revolution in France* (1790). Although

[9] The *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, approved by the French National Assembly on the 26th of August 1789 establishes that “Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good” and that “the natural and imprescriptible rights of man [...] are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression”.

Macaulay never defended the abolition of the monarchy explicitly, she positions herself against aristocracy. Also, in her revision of British history, she criticizes Hume for being too partial to the sovereign (Green, 2014: 183). In *Observations*, Macaulay writes about the Glorious Revolution, as she had already done in previous texts, where she had claimed that the revolution was incomplete (Looser, 2008: 54). According to Macaulay, "the revolution of 1688-9 and succeeding governments had done nothing to ensure liberty and honest government" (Looser, 2000: 133-134). Her main argument for contradicting Burke is that the French Revolution has not ended yet, so it is impossible to predict if it will conclude badly for French society. Published the following year, 1792, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Wollstonecraft defines Macaulay as "the woman of the greatest abilities, undoubtedly, that this country has ever produced" (1790: 112). In an Olympe de Gouges' manner,[10] Wollstonecraft defends in her text the rights of bourgeois women to participate in public life by having access to paid work and formal education. Interestingly, Wollstonecraft subverts Burke's representation of the French nation as a sexually assaulted wife by changing it for a family in which they all protect each other and, besides, both parents make efforts in educating their children (Mellor, 1992: 256).

Another influential reply to Burke was Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* in two parts (1791-2). Paine was already well-positioned as a political commentator and author due to his participation in the American Revolution, choosing the revolutionaries' side. *Rights of Man* reviews recent French history to account for the sociopolitical oppression endured by the French people. Thus, according to Paine, the insurrection in France was justified on moral grounds. Similarly, the book challenges Burke by stating the idea that inequality is a social construct and humans are born equal. Paine also argues that European countries

[10] French author Olympe de Gouges published in 1791 the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen* bringing attention to the fact that the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen excluded women from the new French citizenship.

should dismantle their despotic governments, as the Americans and French had already done. In the second part of *Rights*, Paine uses the United States as an example of revolutionary success and he believes that the rest of Europe should opt for America as their model. At the same time, Paine is contradicting Burke's argument that the Revolution is necessarily going to be pernicious for society, since the American example proves the opposite. In the second part of the text, Paine suggests radical reforms in economics and social politics. It was published in 1792, the year in which Robespierre accessed power and British newspapers were packed with descriptions of bloody executions and terrible anecdotes. The second volume aroused fierce controversy precisely for its radical agenda, and Paine, accused of seditious libel, fled to France. He was convicted *in absentia*.

Paine was already popular for his participation in the American Revolution, and once in France he became involved in politics. As a result of his reputation in America, and after the success of *Rights of Man*, he was granted a seat at the National Convention. In 1793, the Law of Suspects –which ordered the imprisonment of everybody suspicious of being against the revolutionary cause, even on account of the language they spoke– was enacted. Since Britain was at war with France, all British citizens were considered to be suspects and Paine was imprisoned in the Luxembourg palace (Macleod, 2013: 389), which operated as a prison at the time. Due to the same law, Helen Maria Williams was also imprisoned there by French authorities in October 1793. Being British during the war between France and England made them both potential suspects or counterrevolutionaries. Before the war, in 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft visited France and met Helen Maria Williams as we know from *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) by William Godwin: "Mary carried with her introductions to several agreeable families in Paris. She renewed her acquaintance with Paine. There

also subsisted a very sincere friendship between her and Helen Maria Williams, author of a collection of poems of uncommon merit, who at that time resided in Paris" (1987 [1798]: 238). In France, Wollstonecraft compiled her opinions and experiences on the French Revolution in order to write *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*, published in Britain in 1795. Williams and Wollstonecraft both met Ruth Barlow in France and established with her a long friendship through correspondence.[11] American diplomat Joel Barlow, Ruth's husband, together with John Stone, close friend of Imlay –in turn, Wollstonecraft's lover and father of her first daughter, Fanny– were members of the British Club also known as "The Friends of the Rights of Man, associated at Paris". In 1792, the British Club praised British author Charlotte Smith and Helen Maria Williams at one of their meetings in Paris for promoting the French Revolution in their writings.

During the last decade of the eighteenth century, opposition to the Revolution grew bigger. In the Birmingham riots of 1791, also known as the Priestley riots, a group of counterrevolutionaries attacked the attendants to commemorate the 2nd anniversary of the 14th of July. Their meeting place was destroyed, and the participants were accused by the rioters of plotting a revolution for Britain. Among the attendants, Joseph Priestley, dissenting minister and scientist, was the main target of the attacks and the protesters even broke into Priestley's own residence. His reformist thinking was already known by the public and he had openly supported the American Revolution. After the riots and fearing further retaliations, Priestly fled to the United States.

Counterrevolutionaries also formed their own political associations such as the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans. The repression towards radicals became an open matter when the government started to

[11] Four New Letters: https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001188845

legislate against progressive publications. The king issued the Royal Proclamation Against Seditious Writings and Publications in May 1792 which allowed for the prosecution of Paine's texts, as previously mentioned. This measure reveals in which ways Burke' concern about the power of writing to undermine the established political power and challenge the existing social order was reaching the public opinion. The execution of Louis the XVI in January 1793 worsened the tension towards the sympathizers of the Revolution. His death and that of Marie-Antoinette[12] were perceived in Britain as an example of how cruelty was rampant since the Jacobins, the political club that held government during The Terror, had ousted the Girondins, the more moderate faction. Adding to this, the National Convention declared war on Britain in February 1793, and, from then on, showing alliance for the Revolution in France became to be perceived as being against the British Nation. During the Treason Trials of 1794 approximately thirty members of Radical societies were arrested for, presumably, having plotted against the British government. The Seditious Meeting Act -that limited the number of attendees to public meetings- and the Treason Act -that made possible to charge with high treason those who plotted, or even dreamed of plotting, against the king- of the following year (1795) further made evident that the state repression towards radicalism was harshening.

The opposition towards the French Revolution not only became more evident through state measures. The counterrevolution was also increasing in the British public opinion through the written world. New journals were produced towards the end of the decade and their title could not be more significant: *The Anti-Jacobin, or, Weekly Examiner* (1797) and *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* (1798-1821). After The

[12] An example of this is Penelope Pickering's poem "On the Death of the Queen of France" that pities the queen for having endured distress like no one else before. Also, she violently claims for a divine retaliation: "sure that God [...] will make thy murd'rers tremble for that day" *Poems by Mrs. Pickering. To which are added Poetical sketches by the author, and translator of Philotoxi Ardenæ*. Birmingham [1794].

Terror, Jacobinism in Britain became a synonym for all advocates of the Revolution in France, whether they were supporters of the Girondins, Jacobins, Thermidorians or any other political position in between. Williams clearly exemplifies this situation, since she was labelled as Jacobin in Britain multiple times, even though she maintains her support for the Girondins and throughout her career, as it will be explained later. According to M.O. Grenby, "Jacobinism was simply a label for all that conservatives found detestable within society" (2001: 8). As a result, the expression "Anti-Jacobin" in the title of the magazine already appealed to a public with the same political sensibilities and that identified with the term *Anti-Jacobin*. To further tarnish the reputation of the Jacobins, the *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (1797-8) was translated into English in 1799. *Memoirs* was authored by the royalist priest Auguste Barruel and offered an exaggerated account of the crimes committed by the Jacobins during their time leading the French National Convention.

The literature of the last decade of the eighteenth century also reveals the political climate of the moment. In 1792, Charlotte Smith published her epistolary novel *Desmond*, in which the main homonymous character embodies the political opinion of the radical movement and defends his views against the conservative Brethel. Desmond's arguments eventually change Brethel's mind. For his part, William Godwin decided to present his political ideal in the form of a novel and published *Caleb Williams* in 1794, in which he showed the misfortunes caused by political oppression and legitimizes rebellion against tyrannical power. In opposition to this, quoting Kevin Gilmartin "By the end of the 1790s, deliberate counterrevolutionary expression had worked its way through the entire print register, from newspapers and magazines to satirical prints and verse, history, travel writing, conduct books, and works of devotion" (2007: 15). Of course, the conservative discourse that opposed the revolution also imbued the realm of fiction, particularly with

the novel, producing the 'Anti-Jacobin' novels. These novels did not seek to convince radicals of changing their minds, rather, they were directed to a counterrevolutionary public (Grenby, 2001: 9). Just the existence of Anti-Jacobins challenged already the conservative anxieties about the use that the radicals made of the printed word in order to spread their beliefs. Maria Edgeworth's *Leonora* (1806) offers a good example of how counterrevolutionary discourse and a conservative view of gender roles were intermingled in the French Revolution debate, as already explained. In the novel, one of the characters, Olivia, unmarried, embodies the traditional assumptions about French women: licentiousness, artificiality and vanity. By contrast, Leonora, recently married, represents British manners and shows modesty and virtue. Women who supported the French Revolution, as is the case of Helen Maria Williams, were routinely accused of a deviant sexuality and for transgressing their proper place in society (Blakemore, 1996). What resulted from the 'war of ideas' was a defence in Britain of their values against the French. Quoting Johnston: "Britain emerged from the revolutionary era of 1776-1815 a more conservative country than she had been before" (2013: 12).

1.2. Epistolary Writing

Burke's *Reflections*, Macaulay's *Observations* and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* (1790) are all epistolary texts. Burke's text appeared as "a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Paris", as it is indicated by the last part of the title. Macaulay and Wollstonecraft stated in their titles that their works were designed as responses to Burke. However, although they were letters addressed to Burke this does not mean that he was the recipient. These letters did not start a private correspondence between authors, but they were addressed to the general public in the form of a political pamphlet that contributed to a debate open to the public. As opposed to private correspondence, this

public conversation did not take place through the postal service but through print. However, the range of texts written in epistolary form during the eighteenth century was not limited to pamphlets. Some of the novels mentioned in the previous section such as *Leonora* by Maria Edgeworth or *Desmond* by Charlotte Smith were epistolary. The case of Desmond is especially compelling because it shows an awareness by the author of the potential of the letter for political discussion, showing that politics permeated private communications. As Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook writes in *Epistolary Bodies* "the letter became an emblem of the private while keeping its actual function as an agent of the public exchange of knowledge" (1996: 6), and idea that will be developed in this section.

1.2.1. Habermas' Theory of the Public Sphere

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, published in English 1989 from the German original published in 1962,[13] Jürgen Habermas describes the eighteenth century as "the century of the letter". In this influential philosophical work, Habermas develops his theory of the public and private spheres.[14] In *Structural Transformation*, Habermas studies how society moved from an absolutist government to the democratic model by focusing on the rise of the printed world as the driving force behind it. In his view, before the eighteenth century, government was based on *voluntas*, that is to say, on the sovereign's resolutions. This form of government excluded its subjects[15] from decision making in secrecy and opacity. The increasing accessibility to printed media by

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[13] Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit, 1962.

[14] There are several theories of the public and private spheres. Habermas' *Structural Transformation* enters in conversation with Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958). Arendt does not talk about 'spheres' but 'spaces' because they are geographically divided. The space of politics is labelled by Arendt as 'the space of appearances', which takes place in the city. The space of appearances is the realm controlled by the state and its apparatus. Here, individuals behave merely as "economic producers, consumers, and urban city dwellers" (Benhabib, 1997: 4). The other space defined by Arendt is that of the economy and family.

[15] Especially after the rise of absolutist monarchies, subjects outside the court were banned from participating in state affairs.

a larger public outside the court changed the system of policy-making from *voluntas* to *ratio*, meaning that through print, citizens could reach a consensus on public matters. This debate took place in a realm outside of state control, the public sphere or *Öffentlichkeit*, also translated into English as 'public opinion'. Citizens could now demand more information and transparency which allowed the force of public opinion to question and challenge the absolutist power of the king, before ultimately undermining it in the French Revolution. The rise of the public sphere brought as a consequence the development of a private consciousness, as Habermas asserts. In the public sphere, individual views were spread through pamphlets, books, newspapers, letters or speeches. This polyphony formed what Habermas calls 'the Republic of Letters' in which individual opinions were either validated or refuted, thus the relevance that Habermas gives to private reason in collective discussion.

1.2.2. Offering the Private to the Public

As Samuel Johnson famously wrote in 1777 to one of her correspondents, Welsh author Hester Thrale Piozzi –known for her travelogues, diary and published private letters: "In a Man's Letters you know, Madam, his soul lies naked, his letters are only the mirror of this breast, whatever passes within him is shown undisguised in its natural process" (1788:14). Johnson describes in this quotation the mode of expression that was expected in a letter. By claiming that letters emanate directly from the heart, he implies that it must be a reflection of individual subjectivity and truth. As explained by Dena Goodman in *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (2009), all letters were also supposed to mirror the author's morality. This inner self could be communicated to others provided that the author expressed their subjectivity unfiltered by scientific or literary expressions. Letter-writing became the perfect form for this purpose since it was considered to capture oral

speech. Ideas in letters were expected to flow naturally and spontaneously as they do in oral expression. The publication of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confession*s (1782) was key in securing the letter as the main medium for self-reflection. In *Confession*s, Rousseau's autobiographical passages are complemented by his private correspondence, reinforcing the idea that letters are essential to understand someone's psychology. However, the reader of *Confessions* never engages in the conversations with the Swiss philosopher, because the replies to his letters are not reproduced and the attention is focused only on Rousseau's own written words. Rousseau's correspondence was published during his own lifetime, and he carefully was in control of what was published in order to construct his own self-image. Quoting Mary A. Favret, "Throughout the eighteenth century, the letter's ability to define and confine personal experience had already been subject to a centripetal force which carried the private into the public realm, offering the individual's most intimate self for mass consumption" (1993: 12).

It was not uncommon that the correspondence of a renowned literary figure was made accessible to the public. For instance, the case of the Marquise de Sévigné is paradigmatic. Initially, Sévigné's correspondence circulated clandestinely until its publication between 1734 and 1754, which contained letters penned by Sévigné herself along with the responses that she received. The volume also includes letters by members of her close circle at court in order to provide further insight on the anecdotes that Sévigné narrates. Another instance of the posthumous publication of correspondence, this time in the British tradition, is *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope* (1735), containing letters written by Pope as well as letters addressed to him. In the cases of Sévigné and Pope, their style and ability to communicate ideas to others are used to capture the attention of the reader rather than the inner psychology of the author. Pope gave careful instructions to his editors on how he wanted his posthumous letters to be published (Keymer, 1992:

9), but this was not a unique case. For instance, the British scholar and poet Anna Seward personally selected those letters that she wanted to be included in the posthumous publication of her correspondence. She even made some changes and alterations to the original letters as Barnard demonstrates in *Anna Seward: A Constructed Life: A Critical Biography* (2009). This practice by authors such as Pope or Seward evidence the fact that the spontaneity and frankness that they claimed to offer in their letters responded in fact to a social and literary convention.

Throughout the century, letter-writing established itself as one of the accomplishments that women were supposed to master (Goodman, 2009: 2). While men were taught rhetoric and the formalities of literary expressions, women were encouraged to reproduce their conversation in writing in the most candid possible way. According to Keymer, even mistakes in grammar and spelling were regarded as "emblems of sincerity" (1992: 8). Since women were denied a formal education in the same manner as their male counterparts, letters became the ideal form of expression for them as they would not need formal instruction to master it. Although this trend started in the late seventeenth century[16], during the eighteenth-century manuals on letter-writing became a must in a young lady's library (Goodman: 2009). Manuals reinforced the idea that women learnt through imitation rather than instruction, since most manuals provided models for the user to imitate, such is the case of Louis Philipon de la Madelaine's *Modèles des lettres sur différent sujets* (1761). In English, *The Universal Letter Writer* (1790) includes a wide variety of models ranging from everyday activities such as "soliciting the loan of money from a friend", scholarly topics such as "On the history of England" or philosophical discussions such as "On the practice of virtue", "on death". The Universal Writer even

[16] Puget de la Serre's *Le Secrétaire de la Cour, ou La maniere d'escrire selon le temps* (1634) includes examples of letters grouped together under different sections: Letters of appreciation, Condolence Letters, Compliment Letters etc. Also by de la Serre, *Le Secrétaire à la Mode* (160) contains an essay giving instruction and devices on letter writing followed by several examples.

includes a letter "from a sailor at Plymouth, to his wife in London" which consists of a short paragraph on financial matters.

Apart from books and manuals, both men and women were also expected to learn how to become proficient in letter-writing by engaging in letter exchange and by using the letters of their correspondents as models. There was a universal model that was supposed to be followed by all ladies, and that was Madame de Sévigné. Most of her published letters were addressed to her daughter and this reinforced the assumption that the letter was an intimate and familiar medium of communication. Since women were not expected to receive formal education, they were educated, theoretically, at home by their mothers. This model of female education elicited the publication of conduct books especially targeted to women. The early conduct books offered rules of behaviour to members of high society, being the Italian *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) by Baldassare Castiglione the most representative in this tradition. Castiglione's book is written in the form of a dialogue –following the model of classical philosophical books such as the dialogues of Plato or the Socratic dialogues.

During the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, coinciding with gradual abandoning of aristocratic values, as we have seen in the section dedicated to Haberman's public sphere, conduct books started to target bourgeois society. Lord Halifax' *The Lady's New-Year's-Gift: or, Advice to a Daughter* (1688) shows this change of focus. Written by a Marquess, and dedicated to his daughter, the book exerts authority based on patriarchal values and the hierarchical father-daughter relationship inside the home. Besides, the prescriptions directed to the daughter emphasize how she is expected to behave as a wife and mother rather than at court, as it is indicated by the title of the different sections of the book: "Husband" –the longest section–, or "House, Family, and Children". Although it is not written in letter form, the Advertisement starts with "dear

daughter" (1), the formula that opens correspondence. During the eighteenth century, it is not uncommon to find books written in epistolary form as in the example of Charles Allens' *The polite lady: or, a course of female education. In a series of letters, From a Mother to her Daughter* (1760). Even though they were written by a male author, he appropriates the voice of the mother, to whom was attributed the role of educating daughters always within the limits of the domestic realm. Allen's conduct book also follows the structure of the most influential correspondence of the period, Madam de Sévigné's letters to her daughter. According to the Advertisement, the text aims at teaching the "virtues and good qualities, which [...] constitute the character of a polite and accomplished lady" (vii-viii). Each letter deals with one of the accomplishments that a good lady was supposed to master such as "Sewing" or "Dancing. In the chapter dedicated to writing, the fictional mother writes that the main advantages of literacy are engaging in correspondence and keeping records of relevant information (1760: 10). According to this book the letter does not fulfil a public purpose for a woman. However, the book claims that no accomplished woman can be considered to be such if they "cannot write a distinct and legible hand" (10).

Nevertheless, not all conduct books meant the hidden assertion of patriarchal authority on women's behaviour, although until the latter part of the century most conduct books continued to be written by men (Zuk, 1999: 258). A few years after the publication of Allen's work, Hester Mulso Chapone published one of her major works: *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773). Chapone was a first generation of bluestocking writers in London and her work appealed to Mary Wollstonecraft for its systematic and rational approach to women's learning (Sutherland, 2000: 41). Chapone was associated with the circle of Elizabeth Montagu, who corrected her *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind,* which underwent fifty-seven editions or reprintings between 1773 and 1851 (Staves,

2006: 292). Chapone's *Letters* is, according to Rhoda Zuk, "an innovative work that sets out to construct a course of self-education for girls that would approximate the standard education established and institutionalized for boys" (258). Although women had to educate themselves in a quasi-amateur way when compared to men's academic education, Chapone's conduct book recognizes the intellectual abilities of women (258) as well as the relevance of women's education. In 1790, the aforementioned Catharine Macaulay published *Letters on Education with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects* (1790). Although the title might be reminiscent of the conduct books mentioned in this section, the first two parts of the book uses letters to discuss education as such, which means that the book in fact is a tract on education. She analyses how different branches of knowledge are taught, while including her own observations. Letter XXII is entitled "No Characteristic Difference in Sex", in which Macaulay argues that both women and men possess the same intellectual capacities. The third section deals with theology and metaphysics, which are scholarly matters. Disguised in the form of letters, and with a title that might be reminiscent of a conduct book, the spontaneity and fluidity associated with letters enabled Macaulay to include and combine a large variety of topics.

1.2.3. Epistolary Novels

While letters became more and more associated with female expression, the models they were given to follow tended to be dictated by men. One of the earliest texts in this tradition is *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1669), attributed to the count of Guilleragues. Guilleragues was a French courtier during the times of Louis XVI who was also involved in the world of letters by directing the first weekly periodical in France, *Gazette de France*. He was also a friend of Madame de Sévigné. The *Letters of a Portuguese Nun*

fictionally assembles the love letters of a Portuguese nun to a French military man. As it can be read in the preface to the English edition of Guilleragues' *Letters* (1669):

> The chief excellence of the language of the language of nature, is the force and truth with which it represents our sentiments and emotions, and the power which it possesses of commanding our sympathy.
>
> In this language has the Portuguese nun written her impassioned letters. Letters, which have never yet been read without emotion. (1808: iv)

The spontaneity in letter writing ('language of nature') and strong emotions that had prevailed over the eighteenth century is here associated with one of the first epistolary novels ever produced. The French author Claude Joseph Dorat, also quoted in the English edition of the book, penned a poem on *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* in which he writes that "the Portuguese Letters display the heart of woman" (iv). Dorat himself produced his own epistolary novel *Les Victimes de l'amour, ou lettres de quelques amants célèbres* (1776), a retelling of the love plot of Heloise and Abelard, a narrative dynamic that *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* also evoke. The two quotations from the 1808 text show how the fictional letters of the Portuguese nun had become an emblem of how women should write, even if they were written by a man.

The trend that associated women with love letters spanned throughout the century and attracted authors despite their gender. *Letters from a Peruvian Woman* was published in French in 1747 by the French Madame de Graffigny, whose plays were performed at the Comédie Française. Graffigny's epistolary novel narrates the story of Zilia, a Peruvian woman brought to France through the colonial process. The trope of love appears in the plot, since Zilia is deeply in love with her fellow Peruvian Aza and her friend the Chevalier Déterville who proposes to her –a marriage proposal that Zilia rejects. However, the storyline deals mainly with Zilia's discovery of French manners and culture. Interestingly, the novel includes footnotes which provide further information on

Peru's culture. According to Jonathan Mallison "it is one of the rare eighteenth-century novels to have footnotes, a form of textual writing which allies the novel to the works of scholarship" (2009: xviii). Paula R. Feldman identifies Graffigny's epistolary novel as one of the sources that influenced Williams' *Peru* (2015: 195).

In the British literary tradition, Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748) are regarded as paradigmatic representations of the eighteenth-century epistolary novel in English. In *The Rise of the Novel* (1757), Ian Watt presents Samuel Richardson as one of the authors that contributed to the development of the English novel. According to Watt, Richardson's intention, as well as Daniel Defoe's, was to achieve formal realism, that is to say "full report of human experience" (1957: 32). Richardson delves into the psychology of his characters through their letters but he also pays careful attention to the setting of the novel in order to imbue realistic aspects to the narration. Careful settings of time and place are achieved through the epistolary format, since letters were always dated. Pamela tells the story of a maid seduced by her employer, and all the letters are told from Pamela's viewpoint. Interestingly, Mary Favret specifies that "Pamela was an anomaly in its day" (1993: 35). Favret points out that while the epistolary love plot was developing as a subgenre in the eighteenth century, other epistolary texts about court intrigue, politics and social matters were already well established (1993: 35). The epistolary novel started to increase in complexity throughout the century, moving from single voices narratives to a polyphonic structure. This is already noticeable if we put *Pamela* and *Clarissa* side by side, since the latter includes a variety of narrative levels. Although the letters between Anna and Clarissa cover the greatest part of the first volume, as the plot advances new voices start to interfere in the plot by giving different versions of the incidents that concern Clarissa (Keymer, 1993: 46). As a result, *Clarissa*'s structure allows Richardson to portray the different psychologies of the letter writers, further reinforcing the trope that

associates letter writing with the inner self. At the same time, by giving different versions of the events, Richardson disassembles the idea that letters contain the truth. The polyphony in the text gives a new dimension to the realism that Richardson already strived to find in *Pamela.*

In order to give the most complete version of a story, different voices juxtapose in epistolary novels. The variety of voices not only provides different versions of the story, but these also supply details that are lacking in other characters' point of view which are necessary for the reader. Rousseau's *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), also follows this structure. Robert Darnton describes *Julie* as "perhaps the biggest best-seller of the century" (1985: 242). The different styles in the letters gives each character its own voice, which gives further complexity to both the characters and the story. As Rousseau himself claims in the preface to the book:

> Whoever may resolve to read these letters should arm himself with patience against faults of language, rusticity of style, and pedantry of expression; he ought to remember that the writers are neither natives of France, wits, academicians nor philosophers; but young and unexperienced inhabitants of a remote village. (1767: iv)

Here, Rousseau is displaying the convention of the author as editor, claiming that the letters were found by chance. In this excerpt, Rousseau displays the convention that the 'true' expression in a letter rejects formality. Besides, the protagonists' level of education does not allow them to reproduce scholarly expressions. Julia's own psychological reflections together with the praising tone in which other characters refer to her, give a complete picture of her character and thus Julie became the paradigmatic romantic heroine. The alias that Rousseau gives to Julie, "the new Eloisa" makes reference to Eloisa and Abelard. The very title of the novel already associates the protagonist with a well-known love story with a dramatic ending. The storyline develops itself around a love triangle between Julie, her instructor Saint-Preux and Wolmar, Julie's husband chosen by

his family. It is set in Julie's country house in Switzerland on the banks of lake Geneva. *La Nouvelle Héloïse* deeply influenced Helen Maria Williams, whose *Julia* (1790) is a rewriting of Rousseau's text. As these examples demonstrate: the love plot reinforces the association of letters as pertaining to the realm of women in love while the setting of these novels reinforces a connection between letters, women and domesticity.

1.2.4. Letters and Politics

Scholarship has traditionally linked the eighteenth-century epistolary novel with a love story set on the domestic realm. However, the love plot progressively developed during the eighteenth century while it coexisted with multiple uses of the epistolary form. In *Romantic Correspondence, Women, Politics & the Fiction of Letter* (1993) Mary Favret shows that the letter was also an important political tool for eighteenth century authors (9). For her work, Favret focuses on women writers claiming that "women writers used the familiar letter for entry to the world of politics." However, men did too, and such is the case of Burke's *Reflections*. Regardless of this, Burke decision to use the letter form responded to a deliberate decision, since he had already published philosophical treatises such as *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), proving that he mastered the form. However, the letter form ensured a broader audience.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was a British author whose marriage to Edward Montagu, a British diplomat, allowed her to travel and even spend two years, from 1716 to 1718, in Turkey. During her travels in The Netherlands, Germany, Austria and Turkey, she wrote letters in which she combines a large variety of topics, since she describes the politics in each country as well as their customs. Montagu and her husband spent two years outside Britain, mostly in Turkey, where he worked as ambassador. In 1763, only a

year after her death, her *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M__y W__ty M__e: Written during Her Travels in Europe, Asia and Africa* was published. Of all the countries that she visited, she is mostly remembered for her writings on Turkey, known by convention as "Turkish Embassy Letters". Once in Turkey, Montagu observed how the local women inoculated the smallpox to their children, protecting them from contracting the illness. Montagu applied this method on her own child, and she circulated the practice upon her return to England. Montagu's example illustrates that letter writing allowed women to deal with a variety of related topics, including scientific discovery. "Turkish Embassy Letters" also offer "brief history lessons and treatises on architecture, literature (Turkish and English), manners, and government" (Looser, 2000: 78). In her letters, Montagu repeatedly defies British assumptions about Turkish culture: "These people are not so unpolished as we represent them" (1825 [1763]: 50). She also offers comparisons between British and Turkish on a variety of topics such as government, law, architecture, fashion or literature. There is no nationalistic project behind these comparisons since Montagu's intention is never to enhance the British morals in detriment of the Turkish. In fact, she attempts to translate a foreign culture for her British readers in order to better understand both the British and Turkish characters: "I am almost of opinion they have a right notion of life. They consume it in music, gardens, wine, and delicate eating, while we are tormenting our brains with some scheme of politics, or studying some science to which we can never attain" (1825 [1763]: 50-51). At the same time, these comparisons allow the author to be critical of her own country. In her travelogue, Montagu also enters a conversation with previous authors who have written about Turkey, mostly by criticising and refuting their reports (Looser, 2000: 79). For instance, Montagu's comments on the distinguished works of adventurer and travel writer Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri, whose travels in Turkey are included in his major work *Giro del Mondo*

(1699), translated into English in 1704 as *Voyage Round the World*. Although Montagu praises Gemelli "I honour him in a much higher degree than any other voyage writer", she finds inaccuracies in his narrative: "he says that there are no remains of Calcedon; this is certainly a mistake: I was there yesterday" (1825 [1763]: 48). Montagu demonstrates that she is well informed about what other authors have previously written on the subject matter of her writing, while showing her own analytical skills.

1.3. Sensibility

1.3.1. Moral Sense Theory

In the eighteenth century, the term "sensibility" was understood as a mode of expression that gives prominence to spontaneous emotions over controlled thought. The enlightenment movement sought to discern how humans acquired knowledge of the world around them from the perspective of natural philosophy. As the century progressed, natural philosophy was gradually being substituted by the scientific revolution and the subsequent appearance of the different scientific fields as we know them today –physics, chemistry, geology, biology, etcetera. This was especially noticeable during Williams' career. For instance, when she translated Humboldt's travel narratives, geology and botany were established fields of knowledge. Apart from the relationship between humans and the natural environment, thinkers of the age such as the Earl of Shaftesbury, Hume or Adam Smith, were concerned with the relationship among the members of society and, thus, the question of sympathy became central. Each of these philosophers gave their own nuances to their understanding of sympathy, but they all shared in common the understanding of sympathy as the emotional bonds between human beings. One of the earliest proponents of sentimentalism, or moral sense theory, in Britain philosophy was Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury. Cooper moves beyond Locke's

sensationist theories presented in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) that consider sensation as the source of ideas. Locke determines that all human knowledge is acquired through experience, through the medium of the five senses. However, according to Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Time* (1711), beyond the five senses there is another sense, the heart, which is capable of recognizing natural virtue. As a result, moral sentiments originate from the heart in a spontaneous manner preceding the intellect. For Shaftesbury, every human being, regardless of the culture or religion they were raised in, is naturally capable of judging if an act is morally reprehensible or not. However, natural sentiments could be perfected through reflection, but never depend on fear of retaliation from any figure of authority. To act morally in order to avoid punishment, is not considered a moral act in Shaftesbury's eyes. Anticipating Rousseau, Shaftesbury claimed that "benevolent feelings are natural to man" (Sambrook, 1986: 54).

David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) theorized that people were moved to act as a means to experience pleasure or avoid pain. As a result, their actions came directly from feelings and experience rather than reason. When it came to interpersonal relationships, observing other people's actions produces in the beholder a feeling of pleasure or pain. Sympathy, arising from pleasure, is for Hume a moral mechanism that makes one approve of others, even if we are not affected by them. As a result, sympathy allows a community of people to act according to the general interest. If a good action awakens feelings of pleasure, the observer sees it as a beautiful one. Hume here connects, as Shaftesbury did earlier and as Burke would do later on, the ethic and the aesthetic dimension of any given action. Hume's fellow Scotsman, Adam Smith was also deeply concerned with sympathy in his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) as it can be inferred from the titles of the chapters than open his book, 'On Sympathy' and 'On

the Pleasure of Mutual Sympathy'. Here, Smith differs from Hume. For Hume, an individual should not be moved by self-interest in order to see the moral value of any action, while for Smith, spectators have to be impartial while imagining themselves in the position of others. Smith also claimed that the natural feelings that approve or disapprove of a situation on moral terms do not have to coincide with the expectations imposed by society. He believed that being virtuous meant possessing a superior sensibility to others: "Virtue is excellence, something uncommonly great and beautiful, which rises far above what is vulgar and ordinary. The amiable virtues consist in that degree of sensibility which surprises by its exquisite and unexpected delicacy and tenderness" (1768: 33). This idea of someone who is naturally predisposed to good and superior actions, would later on develop into the heroes and heroines of the novels of sensibility, an idea that I will elaborate further in the following section. Smith also brought up an issue that would worry eighteenth century writers of fiction, the fact that intense feelings could be pretended. In Smith's moral theory, actions can be guided either by rule or virtue. The latter demonstrates that someone possesses true sensibility, since acting according to virtue proves that the action has been guided by what Smith, and others such as Shaftesbury or Hume, considered a natural impulse. According to Chris Jones, as the works of these philosophers were available "in the school-rooms, universities, and Dissenting Academies of the time, and were cited in the leading periodicals" (1993:10). Philosophical discussion reached a large part of the literate population, which explains the widespread influence of the theory of moral sentiments among readers.

According to Northrop Frye, in his essay "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility" (1956), sympathy is one of the characteristics that defines the literature of sensibility. Frye sees the literature of the second part of the eighteenth century as concerned with the process of writing itself rather than the product, which means that the

texts are more concerned with the mood of each episode, rather than with building up an atmosphere that reaches its climatic point in the dénouement. As a result, “Where there is a sense of literature as process, pity and fear become states of mind without objects, moods which are common to the work of art and the reader, and which bind them together psychologically instead of separating them aesthetically” (1956: 149). What Frye defines as ‘pity without an object’ triggers the feelings of sympathy with natural elements, animals, and especially between individuals, or, to use Frye’s words, “the sense that no one can afford to be indifferent to the fate of anyone else” (1956: 150).

1.3.2. Sentimental Heroines and Men of Feeling

After the growing popularity of the novels of sensibility in the second half of the eighteenth century, there was an intense fear of sensibility as being a dangerous trait that would cause fatal outcomes. Going back to the aforementioned Rousseau’s *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), the eponymous heroine, Julie, is an archetypical sentimental heroine whose intense feelings of sexual attraction for Saint-Preux -and reciprocated by him-, leads them to have sexual encounters outside marriage, and even an unwanted pregnancy. However, through reason and male guidance, she walks the virtuous path by marrying an older man, Wolmar. Saint-Preux then becomes the tutor of her children, and Julie finds herself in a position where she has to exercise a strong self-control of her emotions in order to remain virtuous. Rousseau distinguishes between two kinds of love, the one between Saint-Preux and Julie, based on eroticism and bound to terrible outcomes, and the one based on friendship, such as the one between Julie and Wolmar, that brings harmony to the family. In the end, Julie dies in an accident. More often than not, death seems to be the only possible ending for many sentimental heroines within the trend of sensibility. In the case of Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748), the protagonist is happy to die

because she finds herself in a world where it is impossible to maintain her standards of virtue.

Rousseau himself became one of the epitomes of the sentimental hero, or man of feeling. In his *Confessions*, Rousseau presented himself as someone whose ability to experience strong emotions granted him a superior understanding, which was in turn a curse, since his emotions made him deviate from the right path of virtue when he was not able to control them. However, this man of feeling still possessed sympathy towards others, but a world corrupted by self-centered individuals results in the moral corruption of the hero, who is misunderstood by the society he inhabits. The most tragic ending for a man of feeling would be suicide, rather than accidental death in the case of women, as exemplified by Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). Sensibility in literature had brought attention to the idea that the feelings that connected one another in society through sympathy could also cause someone's ruin when the feelings were excessive and uncontrolled, and it would most often than not result in self-harm. Sensibility became negatively connoted as the century advanced, and the novels of sensibility, with their devious sexual conduct, were increasingly regarded as bad examples. Even though Rousseau states in the preface that the story of Julie and Saint-Preux should be taken as a warning instead of a role model, there was a general belief that sentimental fiction could have a negative effect on the reader (Watson, 1994: 28). This idea is exemplified by Henry Mackenzie, author of *The Man of Feeling* (1771). Helen Maria Williams knew Mackenzie personally, as he had visited her literary salon in London before she migrated to France (Duquette, 2020: 85). In his article published in the Scottish periodical *The Lounger*, Mackenzie writes:

> All whose necessities or vanity prompted them to write, betook themselves to a field, which, as they imagined [...] in which a heated imagination, or an excursive fancy, were alone sufficient to succeed; [...] The effects of this have been felt, not only in the debasement of the Novel in point of literary merit, but in another particular still more

> material, in its perversion from a moral or instructive purpose to one directly the reverse. Ignorance and dullness are seldom long inoffensive, but generally support their own native insignificance by an alliance with voluptuousness and vice. (1786: 78)

According to Chris Jones, Mackenzie is namely attacking Rousseau (1993: 3). Strong feelings could make the reader lose connection with reality and even cause madness. In women's case, there was the added danger of being seduced outside the boundaries of respectability. Besides, women were considered to be more easily impressionable, since medical theories of the time that studied the nervous system, established that women's system was weaker than that of men. For example, this idea could be found in Bernard de Mandeville's, author of *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), *A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions* (1711).

1.3.3. Radical Sensibility

Sensibility reinforced social relationships but, over time, it also came to be understood as a movement that emphasized individualism. Sensibility has to be understood as a complex trend with its own contradictions. Different interpretations and understandings of sensibility coexisted together during the last decades of the century. The fact that sensibility stressed social bonds was used as an argument either to defend traditional social structures or to disrupt them. On the conservative interpretation of sensibility, individuals readily sympathize with those they feel connected to, i.e. family, neighbours and fellow-country women and men. Radicals for their part believed that this sympathy was a universal matter that connects all. Love and loyalty towards a husband, father or benefactor were innate and spontaneous and, in order to maintain the patriarchal order, the hierarchical structure within the family was seen as a 'natural mechanism' that allowed for the survival of the family unit. This idea could be extended to a whole nation, where the king acted as a father figure. Burke's reasoning here is diametrically opposed

to the ideas that Rousseau presented in *A Discourse on Inequality* (1755) and *Social Contract* (1762). Rousseau saw that the aristocratic powers were ruling for their own interests only, without taking into account the common interest of the citizens, that Rousseau called general will. Rousseau suggested a model based on horizontal social relationships rather than hierarchy. If the nation was to be understood as a family, the authority comes from the general will of the people, as brothers, not as children of the government/king, hence the motto "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité". This is not to say that pre-revolutionary writers did not believe in natural family bonds. In the case 'The Story of Perourou' by Helen Maria Williams, a child recognizes his father even though he has never seen him. Father and children automatically bond in the story, emphasizing the relevance of family ties. Contradictory as it seems, the aforementioned idea of fraternity was based on the equality of middle-class men, and, as a result women or low-income population were considered 'passive' citizens according to the law of 22 December 1789. Some French authors such as Olympe de Gouges and Marquis de Condorcet did not understand equality on these terms. Gauges wrote *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791) and Condorcet his "On the Admission of Women to the Right of Citizenship" (1790) asking for gender equality. Condorcet's text is a short pamphlet in which the author points at the different inconsistencies in the arguments given by the patriarchal society to exclude women from citizenship. At a time when politicians, replacing the former aristocratic model, strove for universal rights, Condorcet believes that it is a contradiction to exclude half of the population from these universalist claims. The *philosophe* believes that women have the same capacity for reasoning and feeling, and mentions Elizabeth of England or Catherine Macaulay as examples, among others. Condorcet is suspicious of the patriarchal idea that women's voices are already heard in politics through their husband's votes and argues that if their voices were taken into

consideration, women would be allowed to vote themselves. De Gouges' text is framed in a different manner. She follows the structure of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizen* (1789) and extends these rights to women. She goes beyond Condorcet's argument to ask not only for votes, but also for women's participation in the National Assembly. According to de Gouges, if women are judged by the law under the same conditions as men, their voices should be taken into consideration in law making. While Condorcet aims at drawing the attention of the political spheres responsible for women's oppression, de Gouges urges women to become aware of their oppression.

According to Nicola J. Watson in *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel* (1994), conservatives and radicals alike accused the opposing party of being misguided by their own respective excessive sentiments (27). Watson cites the example of Mary Wollstonecraft, who accused Burke of "muddy sentimental thinking" (1994: 27). Another example would be Laetitia Hawkins' response to Helen Maria Williams' *Letters*. Hawkins presents herself as someone who is able to avoid her feelings clouding her judgement: "I [...] have been early taught to distinguish between appearance and reality" (1793: 3). However, as Chris Jones elaborates in *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (1993) the attacks were increasingly directed to those who embraced progressive political ideas. By the end of the century, the trend of sensibility became associated with radical politics. Also, it must be taken into consideration that Rousseau's political philosophy was endorsed by the Jacobins in France, who rose to power in 1792. Rousseau rejected the aristocratic lifestyle since he considered it artificial and that it corrupted the natural benevolence of people. As a result, from the British side, Rousseau, who was already disregarded as the epitome of the excessive and dangerous sensibility, became associated with the politics of the The Terror, and thus, sensibility was to be regarded under the suspicion of Jacobinism. Chris Jones considers that, by contrast to

other literary trends, that become obsolete when aesthetics preferences change, sensibility's demise had to do mainly with political, social and moral reasons (1993:4).

By 1798, the magazine *The Anti-Jacobin Review* (1798-1821) was exerting an important smear campaign against British supporters of the revolution in France. James Gillray's engraving 'The New Morality' illustrates a poem under the same title by George Canning, Tory politician who became Prime Minister three decades later. The poem mocks and satirizes the language of sensibility and mentions well-known pro-revolutionary personalities. Among the names dropped by Canning there is Stone, Williams' live-in lover, together with others such as Roland or Rousseau. The engraving pictures a theophilanthropic mass. Theophilanthropy was a deistic movement founded during The French Directory, that became prominent when one the members of The Directory, Louis Marie de La Révellière-Lépeaux, endorsed it. On the altar of the deistic mass stand Justice, Philanthropy and Sensibility, all three of them wearing Phrygian caps, a revolutionary symbol. Phrygian caps and revolutionary cockades are also worn by most attendants to the mass, together with other revolutionary symbols, such as the French Tricolor, adopted in 1796 as the French flag. In Gillray's engraving, Sensibility is holding a book in her hand, in which the only name visible on the title page is Rousseau, who is also mentioned in Canning's poem for his 'sickly fancy'. Besides, the allegory of sensibility is crying over a dead bird while cruelly putting her foot over Louis XVI's head. As identified by Frye in 'Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility', sympathy towards animals marks a characteristic of the trend of sensibility, exemplified by Robert Burns' poem 'To a Mouse' (1785) or Anna Letitia Barbauld 'The Mouse's Petition' (1773). The comical element here is that those supporters of sensibility show an exaggerated sympathy towards animals while they display cruelty towards their fellow human beings. Under the altar, there is a pile of publications, including rival periodicals such as *Critical*

Review, *Monthly Review* and *Analytical Review*; and titles that had been recently published such as *Wrongs of Woman* (1798) by Wollstonecraft, 'Mrs Godwin Memoir' – mocking Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798)–, Charlotte Smith's *The Young Philosopher* (1798), or *Copies of Original Letters Recently Written by Persons in Paris to Dr. Priestley in America* (1798), being these persons in Paris John Stone and Helen Maria Williams. Near the books on the floor there is a donkey reading Godwin's *Political Justice*, and a crocodile studying Paine's *Rights of Man*. The engraving dehumanizes supporters of the Revolution and reinforces the complex connections between the trend of sensibility, Rousseau, the French Revolution and Williams' circle.

The counter revolutionary side of the debate especially picked on radical women writers. Quoting an article from the first volume of *The Anti-Jacobin*: "a contempt of truth, decency, and decorum, [...] constitutes the general characteristic of a female mind infected with the poison of democracy" (1798: 147). Again in 1798, the poet Richard Polwhele published *The Unsex'd Females*, in which he used the verse form to attack pro-revolutionary women writers. Polwhele's argument was that these authors had rejected their natural roles, since he presents them as "a female band despising nature's laws". Wollstonecraft is the first one mentioned and appears as having lost track of reality since "the fine romances of Rousseau" had ignited her feelings. Godwin's, *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication* had caused scandal by alluding to her erotic relationships and the resulting pregnancies outside marriage. Wollstonecraft's biographical facts were seen as endangering the 'natural' order of the family, which conservatives read as an extension of her efforts to destroy the traditional monarchical order in France. Besides, the book mentions Wollstonecraft suicidal tendencies, a passage marked by the language of sensibility: "Moral reasoning is nothing but the awakening of certain feelings: and the

feeling by which he is actuated, is too strong to leave us much chance of impressing him with other feelings, that should have force enough to counterbalance it" (1987 [1798]: 251). Here, Godwin is speaking in general terms, hence the use of the masculine form 'he', to justify Wollstonecraft's mental state at the moment, caused by intense emotions, and in which the rational picturing of a future time ahead can have little effect over the impressed mind. By 1798, the author Mary Wollstonecraft had become a heroine of sensibility of flesh and bone by having sexual intercourse –and pregnancies– outside marriage, much as Julie, and considering suicide, much as Werther. The negative consequences of strong passions found in fictional literature, were now beginning to be ascribed to radical women writers. The fact that Helen Maria Williams was involved in a romantic relationship with the married John Hurford Stone in France also became a result of her misguided sensibility. She was portrayed as promiscuous in the *Anti-Jacobin Magazine*, such as in this line from volume 9: "Then came Maria Williams Stone [...] Dearly she loves a philanthropic sin call'd fonication, and doth it commit; Nor careth she for modesty a pin" (1801: 519). In order to further reinforce the connection between sensibility and the French, in the review to Polwhele's *Unsex'd Females*, the critic writes that Williams suffers "her mind to be infected with the Gallic mania" (1799: 113). The stories of Madame Roland or Charlotte Corday's involvement in politics and their subsequent executions, further strengthened the negative view of French women in Britain for crossing the boundaries of respectability.

1.4. Travel Writing

As the question of sympathy and emotional bonds became a central issue in the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility, as discussed in the previous section, so did discussions on the nature of individualism, especially at the close of the century.

Travelogues provided a great opportunity to explore the self. Even though travelogues were allegedly written to inform the public about a trip and satisfy their curiosity about far distant places, the writer/observer also included their feelings and experiences while traveling, focusing on the self. According to Mirella Agorni, this comes from the enlightened preoccupation with the empirical method, that appears in autobiographical writing as the compulsive reporting of small details (2002: 99). Likewise, autobiographical details were seen as a mark of the authenticity of the text (Agorni, 2002: 101).

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, travel writing was associated with navigation. Spanish conquistadors such as Cristopher Columbus or Hernan Cortes recorded their chronicle in which they encountered unprecedented natural environments and civilizations. Lacking an understanding of these new sights, reality and fantastical tales are blurred in these chronicles. A well-known example, for instance, would be Colon's encounter with sirens, that today's scholars have identified possibly as manatees. The dreamlike atmosphere of travel narratives became the perfect setting for Thomas More's philosophical text, *Utopia* (1516). The book is set on a fictional island, Utopia, located in the 'New World', which is described by an imaginary explorer, Raphael. The fictitious setting allows More to construct a society in accordance with the humanistic ideas he wants to offer. Utopian fictions of the following century, such as Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1602) or Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1626), follow this model. From a satirical point of view, English author Delarivier Manley reversed the tradition of utopian fiction with her *The New Atalantis* (1709). Manley's New Atalantis is a dystopian place in which women are systematically oppressed. Comparison between cultures provides a fruitful strategy for spreading philosophical ideas, either by praising

other's cultural values and using them as a model to follow, or by presenting the negative aspects and urging the author's community to avoid them.

In Britain, the seamen who travelled to North America published their accounts as well, as in Richard Hakluyt's *Divers Voyages Touching the Discouerie of America* (1582) and *Voyages and Discoveries* (1589), which defined the colonization process. Continuing this process of European colonization of the Americas, the celebrated eighteenth-century British explorer Captain James Cook published the chronicles of his travels around the world and southern hemisphere in the 1770s. Cook was celebrated by Williams' mentor Andew Kippis in *The Life of Captain James Cook* (1788), to which Helen Maria Williams added an ode entitled "The Moirai". In the nineteenth century, Alexander Von Humboldt travelled to America with the intention of classifying and mapping its nature. To circulate the results of his work, Von Humboldt wrote *Personal Narrative* (1807) and *Researches* (1814) –among other titles–, both works translated into English by Helen Maria Williams. By the early nineteenth century, travelogues were adopting an increasingly scientific discourse, which was also reflected in Williams' texts. For instance, in *A Tour in Switzerland* (1798), Williams includes as an appendix a scientific essay on the formation of Alpine glaciers. The essay was not penned by Williams herself: it is in fact a translation of Louis-François Ramond de Carbonnières, French botanist and geologist, who was also a deputy during the French Revolution.

In *Women, Writing and Travel* (2018), Katrina O'Loughlin brings attention to the diversity of travel writing when it comes to its form, but finds the epistolary to be the most notorious one (2018:5). The reason behind this is, according to O'Loughlin, that "the letter [...] is particularly powerful in its representation and connotation of direct experience: staging empiricism, immediacy, and lack of reserve as key components of its authority and form" (2018: 5). Some of the most influential intellectual figures of the time

produced their own travelogues or used this genre to spread their political or philosophical ideas. Amongst the best-known travelogues of the century are Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*, that was mentioned in the section 1.2.4. on epistolary writing, or Voltaire's *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (1733), popularized as *Letters on England*. Montesquieu also chose the genre of travel writing in his *Persian Letters* (1721), even though it is purely fictional here, following the sixteenth and seventeenth traditions. Montesquieu, however, departs from sixteenth and seventeenth century conventions since he does not create an imaginary place, but chooses France and Persia. It has to be taken into consideration, however, that Montesquieu's rendition of Persia is romanticized under the western gaze. The titles just mentioned present the individual in contrast to a foreign culture, hoping to answer the question if the self is entirely formed by the environment. At the same time, travel accounts allowed for the veiled or unveiled critique of the author's home country. In the case of *Letters in England*, by exploring the political system of Britain, Voltaire wants to provide an alternative to the French aristocratic model that he had attacked and mocked –which resulted in his banishment from Paris and, later on, the whole of France, having to spend some time in England. It does not come as a surprise then that the Royal censor forbade its printing and distribution in France and copies already in circulation were destroyed. In Montesquieu's *Letters*, fictional Persian characters arrive in France, and observe that nation through the eyes of 'the other', which allows them to point out the hypocrisy of French high society.

One of the characteristics of travel writing is its hybrid nature. All the texts mentioned move beyond the scope of politics or social criticism and include descriptions of fashion, social life, historical landmarks, landscapes or scientific discoveries. For example, Montagu introduced vaccination in England, a custom that she had observed in Turkey and that she wrote about in her *Letters*. More than a decade afterwards, Voltaire

observed it in England, dedicating a chapter to 'Inoculation of Smallpox'. There is also a chapter on *Letters on England* dedicated to telescopes. Voltaire paid a lot of attention to the intellectual climate of the country he was staying in, as a result, the book includes chapters such as "On Chancellor Bacon", "On Mr. Locke" or "On Descartes and Newton".

1.4.1. The Grand Tour: Travelling for Educational Purposes

Although from the aforementioned travel writers only one of them is British, the interest in travel literature was thriving in England in the second half of the eighteenth century. So much was the case that Goethe makes an allusion to British travelers in *Faust Part II* (1832): "The British now –they're a much-travelled nation– they seek out old battlefields and waterfalls, musty old classic sites and ruined walls" (1994 [1832]: 82). The type of travel mentioned by Goethe here is markedly different from Montagu's husband's diplomatic journey or Voltaire's banishment due to political persecution. Goethe is referring here to travelling with the purpose of polishing the traveller's education, as was the case of the Grand Tour. After enlightened philosophers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had theorized about the benefits of travelling, the British elite started to consider travelling through the continent, especially Italy, France, Switzerland and Germany, as the perfect grand finale in a gentleman's education.

Francis Bacon, known in philosophy for advocating for the method of observation, included an essay entitled 'Of Travel' in the third edition of his *Essays* (1625). The essay opens as follows: "Travel, in the younger sort, is a part of education; in the elder a part of experience" (1996 [1625]: 374). In Bacon's eyes, traveling was an important mechanism for self-development, but also for understanding the world around

us. For that reason, he encouraged travellers to keep notes and diaries of what they had observed:

> It is a strange thing, that in sea voyages, where there is nothing to be seen but sky and sea, men should make diaries; but in land travel, wherein so much is to be observed, for the most part they omit it; as if chance were fitter to be registered than observation. Let diaries, therefore, be brought in use. (1996 [1625]: 374)

Bacon gives relevance here to first-person observation. Although in Bacon's time travel was mainly restricted to courtiers and the high aristocracy, as the bourgeois classes started to accumulate wealth through commerce, it also became increasingly more accessible to the upper middle classes. An example of this non-aristocratic traveller would be the British novelist Laurence Sterne, who came from a military family. Sterne talked about the advantages of travelling as follows:

> -To learn the languages, the laws and customs, and understand the government and interest, of other nations, - to acquire the urbanity and confidence behaviour, and fit the mind more easily for conversation and discourse; - to take us out of the company of our aunts and grandmothers, and from the track of nursery mistakes; and, by shewing us new objects, or old ones in new lights , to reform our judgements; - by tasting perpetually the varieties of Nature, to know what is *good*, by observing the address and arts of man, to conceive what is *sincere*; - and, by seeing the difference of so various humours and manners, - to look into ourselves, and form our own. (1873: 224)

Travelling was useful for gaining social skills, such as conversation, that were considered necessary for making good impressions in high society. At the same time, Sterne emphasizes travelling as a masculine domain, since it allowed young men to distance themselves from the female-dominated space of the household. Finally, from a philosophical standpoint, traveling is central for self-development, since it teaches the traveller what is genuinely good and truth, which were central categories in the Theory of Moral Sentiments or the Cult of Sensibility, as explained in the section On Sensibility. In 1760, Johnson moved beyond the individual aspect of travelling to find in travel writing a social purpose. In his essay number 97, Johnson implies that with the flourishing of the

Grand Tour, travelogues have become monotonous and uninteresting: "The greater part of travellers tell nothing, because their method of travelling supplies them with nothing to be told" ([1760]: 387). Johnson argues for an educational type of touring that is pedagogical not only for the author, but also for the readers:

> He that would travel for the entertainment of others, should remember that the great object of remark is human life. Every nation has something peculiar in its manufactures, its works of genius, its medicines, its agriculture, its customs and its policy. He only is a useful traveller, who brings home something by which his country may be benefited ([1760]: 389).

On the one hand, Johnson is here following the enlightened belief that human progress is linear, while, on the other hand, justifies the colonization process for the improving of the metropolis. This essay by Johnson exemplifies how, by the second half of the century, travellers were expected to follow a patriotic agenda.

As mentioned earlier, one philosopher who was very active in this literary and philosophical trend was Rousseau, and, not surprisingly, he also devoted a section of his *Émile, or Treatise on Education* (first published in 1762 and translated into English in 1763) to travelling for educational purposes. Travelling is a part of the education of the young Emile:

> Travel pushes a man toward his natural bent and completes the job of making him good or bad. Whoever returns from roaming the world is, upon his return, what he will be for his whole life. More men come back wicked than good, because more leave inclined to evil than to good. In their travels ill-raised and ill-guided young people contract all the vices of the peoples they frequent and none of the virtues with which these vices are mixed. But all those who are happily born, whose good nature has been well cultivated, and who travel with the true intention of informing themselves, return better and wiser than they left. It is in this way that my Emile will travel. (2010 [1762]: 645)

Again, the emphasis on self-development can be noted. According to Rousseau, travels would mould someone's character for the rest of their lives. However, Rousseau, in his fixation with moral corruption warns the reader about the dangers that might arise from

travelling. Since young men tended to travel by themselves, being far from the supervision of their parents or tutors, the experience could be regarded as a test.

1.4.2. Women's Travel Writing

According to Barbara Korte, "The Grand Tour was for a long time a male preserve" and, when women traveled, "they were mostly accompanied by their husbands and families" (2000: 43).

However, travel writing was not a masculine domain only, especially after circulation in print of Montagu's *Letters,* that "inaugurate both a belles lettres and polemical genre of writing available to women [...] creating a new language of authority and subjectivity for women through travel" (O'Loughlin, 2018: 15). Besides, In the 1770s, the decade after the publication of Montagu's *Embassy Letters*, the number of travel accounts published by women rose exponentially" (O'Loughlin, 2018: 12). O'Loughlin also situates the interest in women's travel writing within polite culture, which favoured the circulation of private letters as exemplified by Sévigné (2018: 8). The recovery of women's writing in the eighteenth century focused primarily on the novel, overlooking travel writing. As a result, to this day the number of studies devoted to women's travel narratives is comparatively very small (O'Loughlin, 2018: 8). In spite of this, from the 1990s onwards feminist scholars have identified some particularities in women's travel writing. In 1991, Sara Mills published *Discourses on Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, paying attention mainly to the period that spans from the 1850s to the early twentieth century. Later on, in *An Anthology of Women's Travel Writing* (2002), Mills together with Shirley Foster, recognize that the scholarship has focused particularly on those travel narratives by women that present the woman traveller as adventurous and exceptional. This tendency has neglected the

narratives by women who assumed a more conventional understanding of femininity (2002: 1). Bohls, focusing specifically on the eighteenth century, explains that while women were excluded from the production of treatises, they were encouraged to write about their picturesque tours (1995: 2), responding to the belief that travel writing did not require formal education as treatises did. In travel writing, authors could naturally collect their emotional responses to different sceneries and situations encountered along the way. As a result, Bohls reaches the conclusion that travel writing "gave women writers the opportunity to engage with philosophical concepts without directly trespassing on the more forbidding territory of the treatise" (1995: 6). Mirella Agorni has observed how travel writing has been approached differently depending on the gender of the writer. Travelogues by women have tended to be assimilated to autobiographies (2002: 98). Agorni also observed that travel writing allowed women to delve into their personal experiences, which became worthy of attention in the context of travel. While women at home were constrained by a rigid patriarchal order, their experiences on the road allowed them to reimagine their position in society.

Foster and Mills find that travelogues by women tend to pay more attention to domestic life (2002: 10). As a result, women travellers often display a particular attention to women's situation in different cultural contexts, as exemplified by Montagu interest in the seraglio or harem. When traveling, women had access to places restricted only to women. In this manner, women writers could offer alternatives to men's orientalist construction of eastern women. Montagu emphasized in this manner that her account offered a unique perspective and unparalleled subject matters: "I am sure I have now entertained you with an account of such a sight as you never saw in your life, and what no book of travels could inform you of, as it is no less than death for a man to be found in one of these places" (1825 [1763]: 97). Being gendered a woman gives Montagu an

authority, that she acquires from experience, to openly challenge the male orientalist gaze: "Now that I am a little acquainted with their ways, I cannot forbear admiring either the exemplary discretion or extreme stupidity of all the writers that have given accounts of them" (1825 [1763]: 112). However, British women observed their counterparts overseas from a western stance that tended to reinforce the them/us paradigm. In the case of Montagu, for example, she describes the Turkish bath as 'the women's coffee house', filtering a Turkish tradition under western eyes. This strategy also served the purpose of translating a foreign culture for the reader's at home by using familiar terms. At the same time, the last quotation by Montagu exemplifies the new emphasis on elite sociability, characteristic of late seventeenth- and eighteenth- century culture, which was moving away from the realm of the court (O'Loughlin, 2018: 1).

Chapter 2

‘The Golden Age of the Revolution’: *Letters Written in France* (1790) and *Letters from France; Containing a Great Variety of Original Information* (1792)

Williams’ *Letters written in France*, published in 1790, has attracted most of the scholarly attention when compared to the rest of her works. Angela Keane indicates that Williams’ early production is lacking in “depth and variety in social discourse” (2013: 87), while Karen Green states in *A History of Women’s Political Thought in Europe 1700-1800* (2014) that “rather than giving a political analysis of the frightful events that she relates, Williams falls back on poetic justice” (202), and thus minimize her contribution to political thinking when compared to other contemporary women writers such Catharine Macaulay or Mary Wollstonecraft. Jacqueline Leblanc goes in the same direction when she indicates that Williams’ “‘emotional ecstasies’ as of political restructuring often strike readers as lacking serious critical perspective” (1997: 26). In this chapter, I will try to prove that Williams’ intensity of feelings towards the revolution respond to the philosophical and political atmosphere of the time and serve Williams to assert her position on the debates about the French Revolution. Williams’ emphasis on feelings goes much further beyond what Gary Kelly identifies as “feminine sympathy” as her strategy to convey her political arguments. In *Crisis in Representation*, Steven Blakemore presents Williams’ strong emotions as an antithesis of Wollstonecraft’s rationality and even suggests that *Letters* should be read as a work of fiction (174). Reading it as fiction, though, would mean neglecting Williams’ input into the lively debates sparked by the French Revolution in Britain, and the reasons behind choosing sensibility as a mode of expression. I concur with Vivien Jones, who considers that “the *Letters* offer an authoritative analysis of the revolutionary debates” (1992: 191), and I also maintain that

it is necessary to provide a further analysis of the political and intellectual dimensions of Williams' texts.

2.1. The Fête de la Fédération: Politics as an Affair of the Heart

Williams' first volume of *Letters*, *Letters Written in France to a Friend in England* (1790), offers an account of Williams' first trip to France in the midst of the French Revolution. Williams sails to Paris exactly twelve months after The Storming of the Bastille, since she dates her first letter on "the day before de Federation" (1). Deborah Kennedy confirms this information in *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution* after a letter from Williams to her friend Colonel Barry in which she details her travel plans (2002: 57). The volume narrates Williams' trip during three months in the summer of 1790, with visits to Paris and Rouen, where her sister was hosted by the family friends, the Du Fossé family (Kennedy, 2002: 54). Monsieur Du Fossé became Williams' friend escaping imprisonment in France before the revolution, and the whole story of this family is detailed in section 2.4. According to Williams seeing the injustice endured by his friend is what awakens her support for the French Revolution. As a result, in her travelogue, Williams goes far beyond the simple narration of France's monuments or costumes, since, as I will explain next, there is a clear interest in politics from the very beginning. Williams was visiting France during a crucial moment in their national history, and the defence of the French Revolution is evident throughout the volume. Williams sees the Revolution as "the triumph of human kind" (1790: 14), noting that the Revolution was a landmark not only for France, but for global history.

Williams' arrival, on the 13th of July 1790, coincides with an early stage of the Revolutionary process, in which an initial optimism prevailed. As it has been explained in 1.1., the revolution had just been well received in Britain even by those who would

later on turn against it, such Anna Seward or Edmund Burke, who would not publish his *Reflections* until November in that same year. In France, the representatives of the Third State had formed the National Assembly, ending with the Estates-General, and thus, the interdependence between politicians and the court. Williams comments on this event in her *Letters*, as exemplified by the following excerpt, that also shows the hopeful attitude of the author towards the Revolution at this point in her career:

> I cannot help remarking, that, since the Assembly does not presume to set itself up as an example to this country. We seem to have very little right to be furiously angry, because they think proper to try another system of government themselves. Why should they not be suffered to make an experiment in politics? I have always been told that the improvement of every science depends upon experiment. (219-220)

The National Assembly was intensely debating the future of the French monarchy - The Royal Family had just left Versailles for the Tuileries in Paris in October-. Williams sees this political atmosphere in a positive light. The National Assembly had finally separated itself from the aristocratic powers and had even gained the authority to limit the monarchy's power, which had held an absolutist rule until 1789. In order to justify her political stance, in this excerpt, Williams makes use of the rhetoric of the Enlightenment, approaching political events as an experiment worth trying. With the publication of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) a century earlier, Locke had attacked the rationalist philosophy that had prevailed in the Cartesian model by rejecting the existence of innate ideas. In turn, Locke believed that knowledge was only acquired through observation and direct experience, and that experiences would imprint ideas on the mind that worked as a tabula rasa. The following century, Hume established with his theory of Causal Inference that even if the cause of any given event was the same, the result would not always turn out in the same manner. Drawing from this philosophical environment, Williams concludes that the nation will know

how to govern themselves after they have experienced different forms of Government. The outcomes of the Revolution could not be predicted, even if other revolutions had happened in Europe, such as the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Politics also appears here as a scientific discipline. Natural philosophies were conducted upon experiment and Williams argues in very explicit and straightforward themes in favour of extending the same method to the social sciences, in this case, politics. Here she connects philosophical theory with specific current events: the example that the Assembly purports itself to be.

Williams' opinion of the National Assembly is further legitimated after she narrates her visit on Letter VI. Compellingly, she compares French and British politics, favouring the French. Emphasizing the politeness of the French, Williams explains how she managed to gain access to the National Assembly:

> My sister and I were admitted without tickets, by the gentleman who had the command of the guard, and placed in the best seats [...] We had no personal acquaintance with this gentleman, or any claim to his politeness, except that of being foreigners and women; but these are, of all claims, the most powerful to the urbanity of French manners (1790: 42).

Consistent with a burgeoning tradition of travel writing by women, as explained in 1.4.2., her status as a woman allows Williams to enter public spaces that would have been denied to her in Britain. She makes this claim even stronger by stating: "I believe, however, that if the fame of Mr. Fox's eloquence should lead a French woman to present herself at the door of Westminster Hall without a Ticket, she might stand there [...] without being permitted to pass the barrier" (1790: 43). France thus becomes for Williams a place where she can observe and mingle with the political spheres. At the same time, the fact that foreigners are allowed to enter the National Assembly shows that the French are completely open when disclosing their form of government. This offers a sharp contrast with French politics of the *ancien régime*, which were conducted in secrecy. What is more, she discharges all accusations of conspiracy that have been spread in Britain: "I am

told that everyday [France] witnesses a conspiracy" (1790: 217). Williams' uses her visit to the National Assembly to highlight the progress that the French have achieved with the Revolution. At the same time, her personal experience gives her evidence that contradicts the rumours extended in Britain.

As the previous quotes from the travelogue show, Williams directly delves into politics with her travelogue, as the quotation from pages 219-220 demonstrate. Even though it is clear from Williams' previous texts that she had been invested in writing for political causes, throughout *Letters*, she presents her commitment to the Revolution as a spontaneous sentiment that had only arisen once she had visited Paris and experienced the new revolutionary atmosphere:

> Did you expect that I should ever dip my pen in politics, who used to take so small an interest in public affairs, that I recollect a gentleman of my acquaintance suprized me not a little, by informing me of the war between the Turks and the Russians, at a time when all the people of Europe, except myself, had been two years in the possession of this intelligence? (103).

This claim seems completely contradictory with Williams' previous writings for its apparent indifference. Duckling writes that "Williams is following a well-established female literary tradition" (2010: 79). Self-effacement was common in eighteenth-century texts by women and it tends to disguise the author's real ambitions. Not presenting themselves as authorities also allowed women writers to avoid criticism, and thus, reach a larger audience. Duckling also points out that in 1790 Williams "strongly denies any personal pretensions to intellectual debate" (2010: 78) and "her writing appears to operate within apparently normative gender ideals" (2010: 78) but Duckling sustains that "Williams' persuasive performance actually enables her to move beyond traditional gender boundaries" (2010: 78). As explained in 1.2., spontaneity was associated with truthfulness in epistolary and travel writing. At the same time, the radical branch of

sensibility understood that spontaneous empathic feelings moved society towards a common goal. Following that line of thought, Williams observes that:

> It is very difficult, with common sensibility, to avoid sympathizing in the general happiness. My love of the French Revolution is the natural result of this sympathy, and therefore my political creed is entirely an affair of the heart; for I have not been so absurd as to consult my head upon matters of which it is so incapable of judging (1790: 66).

Williams' political claims in *Letters* (1790) are strong, but she maintains that they are the product of sympathy rather than scholarly thinking. Williams seems to be self-deprecating when she admits that her head is not capable of forming political judgements. I coincide with Angela Keane when she writes that "Williams claims to 'feel' rather than 'judge' the revolution, not simply to appear more feminine and therefore less threatening to her readership, but to foreground the significance of emotion and sensation in the public world" (2013: 101). In this quotation, Williams is embracing the Theory of Moral Sentiments, in which sympathy is the force that brings together the members of a community. Anthony Cooper, earl of Shaftesbury argued that "man is endowed with a moral sense or natural faculty which [...] enables him to distinguish right from wrong [...] immediately, spontaneously and intuitively" (Sambrook, 1986: 53). Williams presents herself as an active woman of feeling, whose empathic feelings take her to participate in the political debate. She was living at a time in which feelings were at the core of the intellectual discourse.

This emphasis on feeling was not limited to printed literature, but it also became part of the political harangues. Historian of the French Revolution Lynn Hunt explains in *On Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (1986), that, in the meetings in the National Assembly: "Orators spoke directly to the hearts of the auditors [...], and they expected to produce in them immediate emotion. This expectation was the translation into political practice of Rousseau's notion of authenticity, the condition in which citizens are

transparent to each other" (1986: 45). Rousseau, who deeply influenced the political theories of the French Revolution, as already noted in 1.3.1. and 1.3.2. He had advocated for political transparency in contrast to the obscurity of court politics. In order to dispel any doubts on potential hidden interests, revolutionaries "placed a premium on authentic emotion" (Hunt, 1986: 45). To rely on the head, that is to say, rational thinking, and complicated modes of expression, was disregarded inasmuch as they resembled the opacity and secrecy of the aristocratic privilege. Rousseau, in his *Letter to D'Alembert on Spectacles* (1758):

> The heart of a man is always right concerning that which has no personal relation to himself. In the quarrels at which we are purely spectators, we immediately take the side of justice, and there is no act of viciousness which does not give us a sentiment of indignation so long as we receive no profit from it. (1960 [1758]: 24)

In the famous epistle to one of the main authors of *The Encyclopedie*, Jean le Rond D'Alembert, Rousseau rejects that a theatre is established in his hometown, Geneva. As a result, *Letter to D'Alembert* provides a perfect example for Rousseau's theories that reject artificiality and affection, so influential for Radical Sensibility as previously explained. This quotation shows that, in the trend of thought developing during the second half of the eighteenth century, the 'heart' became the centre for legitimate selfless feelings. Williams wants to inscribe herself in this line of thought, and legitimate her support of the Revolution inasmuch as it is purely disinterested. Her only commitment is to the improvement of society, without claiming any personal gains from the Revolution. Thus, Williams appears as a heroine of feeling, which legitimizes her political opinions, and reinforces her ideological alliances.

Williams also praises the leaders of the Revolution for catalysing the power of emotion in order to spread the positive values of the revolution among the French:

> The leaders of the French Revolution are well acquainted with the human heart. They have not trusted merely the force of reason, but have studied to interest in their cause the most powerful passions of human nature, by the appointment of solemnities perfectly calculated to awaken that general sympathy which is caught from heart to heart with irresistible energy, fills every eye with tears, and throbs in every bosom (1790: 61-62)

At this stage of the Revolution, a moderate political stance was dominating the political atmosphere. Williams, as I shall explain throughout my dissertation, aligned herself with the Girondin creed. For that reason, she finds herself in line with the ideological stance of the revolutionary leaders, who, at this time were preparing the first anniversary of the 14th of July, or Fête de la Fédération, "probably the most elaborate public spectacle in European history" (Fraistant and Lanser, 2001: 9). Williams admires how such a spectacle is capable of awakening the people's emotion and bond them together for a political cause, but, more importantly, she praises the revolutionary leaders for recognizing the potential of emotion in political propaganda.

La Fête Révolutionnaire, 1789-99 (1976), published in 1988 in English as *Festivals and the French Revolution*, by French historian and philosopher Mona Ozouf, recovers the significance that revolutionary festivals had in shaping political culture during the revolutionary period in France. The book specifically dedicates one complete chapter to the Fête de la Fédération. Mona Ozouf had already explored this aspect of The French Revolution in academic articles such as, "Space and Time in the Festivals of the French Revolution" (1975). Hunt echoes Ozouf's theories and explains that these festivals replaced the displays of power of the king, a tradition initiated by Louis XIV to solidify among his subjects the legitimacy of the Bourbon family. These celebrations consisted, for example, of Royal entrances, in which the subjects were expected to receive the king after a successful political trip; or the erection of temporary –and sometimes even permanent– monuments, such as arches the triumph or carrousels, which was the name given at the time to equestrian and military paraders. As the eighteenth century advanced,

the enlightened fray of ideas had criticized these festivities for their intricacy and obscurity, which was assimilated to superstition (Ozouf, 1988: 3). Although these traditions lost force during the rule of Louis XV and Louis XVI, the revolutionary leaders saw their potential for strengthening the loyalty of the people to the revolutionary enterprise. According to Hunt, "The festivals reminded participants that they were the mythic heroes of their own revolutionary epic" (1986: 28). The festivals were much more than a celebration of power, they were the means to consolidate the power of the recently born National Assembly. Festivals also served to educate their attendants on the principles of the new form of Government.

In section "XI" of the aforementioned *Letter to D'Alembert*, Rousseau welcomes popular festivals as an alternative to the theatre, where people gather "in the open air, under the sky" (1960 [1758]: 24). The festival envisioned by Rousseau celebrated love and what he considered to be 'natural' bonds, and it consisted of young members of the community finding potential spouses. The festival, according to Rousseau, reinforced sympathy and horizontal connections, rather than rigid hierarchies, as in the case of Louis XIV's festivals. In 1790, political leaders saw the relevance of exalting the rupture with the aristocratic hierarchical order. As a result, in the festival of the 14th of July 1790, the king sat together with the politicians just like all the other political leaders, a gesture that became a very powerful symbol of the new order of Government in France. Williams praises this spirit on 'Letter II': "Already in the Champ de Mars the distinctions of rank were forgotten; and, inspired by the same spirit, the highest and lowest orders of citizens gloried in taking up the spade, an assisting the persons employed in a work on which the common welfare of the state dependent" (1790: 6). Again, following the ideals of Radical Sensibility, what brings the citizens together is working towards a common goal. There

are no personal gains represented in the festival, and this reinforced the revolutionary spirit among the attendants, including Williams herself.

The Fête de la Fédération became a very important date in the memories of those who had attended the Revolution. The relevance that Williams gives to the celebration is paralleled in other accounts of the history of the French Revolution. For instance, Madame de Tourzel, Governess of the Children of France between 1789 and 1792, dedicates a complete chapter to describing the Federation in her Memoirs, published in French in 1883. However, Tourzel held an open royalist stance which is evident in her account of the Federation. She coincides with Williams in that "Everyone wanted to take part in the work" (1886 [1883]: 156). By contrast, Tourzel describes the same works at Champs de Mars in the following manner: "At one and the same time there might be seen at work labourers, citizens, Carthusian and other monks of various orders, soldiers, pretty women, men and women of every class and social status, all working to the best of their ability. Some concealed the feelings aroused by the constraint to which they were condemned" (1886 [1883]: 156). Tourzel's choice of words "constraint" and "condemned" dismantle the idealized picture of the event as it was pictured in pro-revolutionary accounts, such as Williams'. All in all, the Federation became a central element in understanding the revolutionary atmosphere of 1790, and Williams describes it in a manner that aligns her own feelings with the revolutionary ideology of the time.

2.2. The Value of Direct Observation: Challenging the Anti-Revolutionary Forces in Britain

Williams was perfectly aware of the strong opposition that the French Revolution provoked in Britain and therefore, the main objective of her *Letters* is to challenge these assumptions and defend the Revolution. As a result of her observations, Williams is able

to draw her own conclusions and move in a separate direction. This objective is especially evident in the last letter. Only a few pages before, Williams writes that: "I was told, before I left England, that I should find that French liberty had destroyed French urbanity. But everything I have seen and heard, since my arrival in France, has contradicted this assertion" (1790: 197). Williams turns to the enlightened argument that considered that a society was as advanced as its display of civility. Williams brings attention to France's 'urbanity' to prove that the Revolution has not submerged France into chaos and primitiveness, and that the country is moving towards progress and not the opposite -as claimed by Edmund Burke in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. At the same time, similar to Elizabet Montagu's approach in her *Turkish Embassy Letters*, and explained in 1.4.2., the experience obtained by visiting the country gives Williams the authority to challenge widespread opinions in her native country. For instance, as mentioned in 2.3., the example of Madame de Genlis dismantles the misconceptions in Britain regarding the manners of French women.

The last chapter of *Letters* narrates Williams' trip back to England by boat. The purpose of the last letter, as I shall elaborate on, is to offer an alternative account to the misconceptions in Britain regarding the Revolution in France. However, the first two pages of Letter XXVI narrate the hardships of her trip by boat when crossing the English Channel. Williams endures a "violent storm" (1790: 215) that "became so serious as to exclude every idea but that of preparing to die with composure" (1790: 215-216). Williams is here following the trope of the adventurous traveller, increasingly popular during the eighteenth century and consolidated by the Romantic movement. British author and literary critic, William Hazlitt, "depicts the English Traveller –or, at least, the best and properly 'English' sort of English traveller– as someone who courts adversity, who seeks out suffering and discomfort" (Thompson, 2007: 2). As explained by Carl

Thompson, “one of the distinctive self-fashionings sought by the Romantic traveller [...] is that of the misadventurer” (2007: 8). Williams uses this trope, though, to introduce her defence of France. After she has proven that she can be considered a ‘properly English’ traveller, to use Thompson’s terminology, and has secured a respectable position, she follows on to criticize British attitudes towards the Revolution.

Despite the dangers of the trip, politics is the main subject matter of the last letter of the volume. While she is entertaining the idea of dying, “I [Williams] could not help being diverted with the comments on French customs, and French politics, which passed in the cabin” (216). Williams is diverted because the arguments used in the conversations that she hears are neither informed, nor serious enough to discredit the revolutionary project. For instance, one of the sailors complains of the fact that he had not been able to get drunk in France. Williams shows the rough manners of the British sailor without stopping to consider or analyse his statement. However, the civility of the neighbouring country, France, is reinforced throughout the travelogue. On her arrival on solid ground, Williams finds that the misjudgements on the Revolution neither are limited to the less privileged members of society nor are the result of lack of education. When she reaches England, she hears the same judgement from her acquaintances: “I own it has surprised me not a little, since I came to London, to find that most of my acquaintance are of the same opinion with the sailor” (1790: 217):

> I hear nothing but crimes, assassinations, torture and death. I am told that everyday witnesses a conspiracy; that every town is the scene of a massacre; that every street is blackened with a gallows; and every highway deluged with blood. I hear these things and repeat to myself, Is this the picture of France? Are these the images of that universal joy, which called tears into my eyes, and made my heart throb with sympathy? (1790: 217)

The France pictured here is a land of horrors, offences and violence. However, in her own experience, she has found reasons to cry out of joy, not out of fear of pain. Her bodily reactions, as it was understood in the trend of sensibility, prove her point. While the

negative accounts that she has heard of are only based on descriptions (that she debunks), she provides an account of her bodily sensations. Readers of Williams' travelogue have followed her across more than 200 pages that praise the improvement of French society after the fall of the *ancien régime* in which Williams has never mentioned bloodsheds or massacres. Thus, Williams states that the rumours circulating in Britain concerning France are rough exaggerations.

2.3. Madame de Genlis: The Exemplary Aristocrat

Williams dedicates one full chapter, or letter, to her encounter with French author Madame de Genlis. During the last decades of the eighteenth century, Genlis had acquired fame for her tracts on education, especially *Adelaide and Theodore, or Letters on Education* (1783). In this work, following the Enlightenment emphasis on experience, she rejects that children's education should be based on books and scholarly matters. Genlis does not envision a different education for Madelaine and Theodore on account of their gender, as opposed to Rousseau's Émile and Sophie. Gillian Dow explains that *Adelaide and Theodore* became a phenomenon across Europe (2007: ix), and not surprisingly, Williams assumes that her readership is familiar with Genlis' works. She opens Letter V as follows:

> I am just returned to a visit to Madame Sillery, whose works on education are so well known and so justly esteemed in England, and who received me with the most engaging politeness. Surely the French are unrivalled in the arts of pleasing; in the power uniting with the most polished elegance of manners, that attentive kindness which seems to flow warm from the heart. (1790:33)

Here, Genlis is referred to as Sillery, since her husband held the title of Marquise de Sillery. After stressing French good manners once again, Williams praises Madame de Genlis for her merits and intellectual achievements. Genlis was the tutor of the Duke d'Orleans' children, but Williams carefully decides not to disclose this information until

she has highlighted her intelligence and courtesy. Besides, Williams attributes Genlis' exquisite behaviour to the fact that she is French and not because she is a member of the aristocracy. Steven Blakemore explains how "it had been common for writers on proper female conduct, whatever their politics, to invoke the supposed behaviour of Frenchwomen as exemplifying what must at all cost be avoided in Britain" (1996: 675). Williams refutes this accusation by reversing the argument and presenting French women as models of conduct.

In this regard, Blakemore (1996) explains that the British general opinion regarded Frenchwomen's behaviour as improper and dangerous since, in conduct books, Frenchwomen were depicted as the antithesis to British femininity. French manners were equated, according to Blakemore, to a venereal disease that had the potential to infect British women, who would in turn lose their good qualities by assimilation to the French. Again, Williams inverts this broad belief by narrating her meeting with a young British lady educated by madame de Genlis. This lady must have been Stéphanie Caroline Anne Syms or her sister, Hermine, two British young girls who were brought up and educated by Genlis. The origins of these ladies or the reasons why they were put under Genlis' care are still unknown to this day. After praising her intelligence, Williams adds that "this young lady talked of her own country with a glow of satisfaction very grateful to my feelings" (1790: 41). Contrary to what would have been expected at the other side of the channel, this young lady has not lost her patriotic feelings. Instead of being influenced by France's lifelong enmity with the British, madame de Genlis has cultivated all positive qualities in her pupil, including the love of her country. Williams suggests here that love and appreciation for the French and French culture is not incompatible with honouring Britain.

Although at the beginning of letter V Genlis is introduced as 'Madame Sillery' the nomenclature changes as the chapter unfolds and she is called after her husband's family name, Brûlart, since both Sillery and Genlis refer to the names given by their aristocratic titles. This does not respond to Williams' revolutionary ideology only, but to Madame de Genlis' convictions: "she was renounced with her title the name of Sillery, and has taken that of Brulart" (1790: 36). Williams uses this encounter with Madame de Genlis to exemplify that, despite the news of the émigrés that were fleeting France for fear of losing their status or property, there were French aristocrats who avidly supported the Revolution. According to Williams, these émigrés are to be held responsible for the misrepresentation of the French reality in Britain: "One cause of general dislike in which the French revolution is held in this country, is the exaggerated stories which are carefully circulated by such of the aristocrats as have taken refuge in England" (1790: 222). Genlis' example provides the opposite opinion. Again, Williams suggests that the scope of the Revolution in Britain is limited, and by travelling there herself, she could compose the real picture. Genlis discusses her political opinions in an interview with Helen Maria Williams:

> She talked to me of the distinctions of rank, in the spirit of philosophy, and ridiculed the absurdity of converting the rewards of personal merit into the inheritance of those who had perhaps so little claim to honours, that they were a sort of oblique reproach to their character and conduct (1790: 36).

Madame de Genlis' political stance changed with the course of the events, today, she is mostly known for her support of Napoleon and, later, her support of the monarchy. Carolina Armenteros –who describes Genlis as "a royalist with republican sensibilities" (2013:55)– has demonstrated that "Genlis shares with Rousseau the fundamental conviction that the quality of the soul is the primary determinant of politics" (2013: 63). At this point in the Revolution, Madame de Genlis was defending a monarchical

constitution. Although letter V is not dated, the conversation between Genlis and Williams had to take place during the summer of 1790, and this coincides with the National Assembly passing the Decree Abolishing Hereditary Nobility and Titles on June 19th of the same year. Genlis welcomes the recent political changes, shared with Williams, as it is obvious from her defence of meritocracy, which constituted a burning issue in Enlightened thinking. For instance, Voltaire had praised Chinese meritocratic system in his *Essay on Universal History, the Manners, and Spirit of Nations*:

> Mankind cannot possibly frame a better government than where everything is decided by great tribunals, subordinate to each other, the members of which are not admitted till after severe examination [...] In such government, it is impossible the emperor should exercise any arbitrary power. The general laws flow from him: but, according to the constitution, he can do nothing without taking previous advice of persons educated in the study of laws, who are elected by votes. (1759: 296-297)

For Voltaire, meritocracy limited the power of the monarch. Since the members of the tribunals were chosen for their knowledge and abilities, their authority was well respected and they could act independently from the king's wishes. Another influential example is Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (1776), that attacks the monarchy, and especially hereditary rights. Paine considered, in the Spirit of the American Revolution, that "For all men being originally equals, no one by birth could have a right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all others for ever" (1819 [1776]: 14). Paine defends that a hierarchical social structure goes against creation since all people are equal in a natural state.

In Genlis' case the defence of meritocracy was not at odds with her support for the Royal Family. She tutored the princes of Orleans, Louis Charles, Adélaïde and Louis Philippe –referred to here as Monsieur de Chartres. The latter would become King of the French in 1830. In Genlis' views, their lineage was not sufficient to hold claims for the throne –in fact, at this time, Louis Philippe was not in direct line of succession– and providing them with a superior education was the means to secure their place in the

highest echelons of political power. Williams put the focus on Genlis' achievement by describing the merits of the princes, who, through education, would be fitted to be active members in a post-revolutionary society, despite their social status. In Williams' rendition of the princes, they lack any of the vices attributed to aristocrats, since they are "remote from arrogance" (1790: 36). Arrogance was one of the negative outcomes in hereditary succession according to Thomas Paine (1792 [1776]: 10), but the example provided by Genlis' efforts demonstrate that arrogance can be prevented when the members of the royal family are educated on Revolutionary principles. Williams' meeting with the young Louis Philippe surprises her in a positive manner, as she finds him "a confirmed friend to the new constitution of France, and willing, with the enthusiasm of a young and ardent mind, to renounce the splendour of his titles for the general good" (1790: 35). Williams demonstrates thus the commitment of the aristocrats who have remained in France to the new forms of policymaking when the future king shows here an inclination and predisposition to accept the claims of his subjects. By the end of the volume, Williams reaches the following conclusion: "Must I be told that my mind is perverted [...] because I do not weep with those who have lost a part of their superfluities, rather than enjoy that the oppressed are protected, that the wronged are redressed, that the captive is set at liberty, and the poor have bread?" (1790: 218). The examples that Williams has provided show how the stories of the émigrés circulating in Britain present, according to her, a superficial, privileged and selfish viewpoint. The well-being of the majority must be a priority, and even more so when the highest members of the French aristocracy that she has met welcome the Revolution.

Williams nevertheless recognizes that not all aristocrats in France hold the same opinion in this regard:

> There may be arguments against hereditary rank sufficiently convincing to such an understanding as Madame Brulart's; but I know *some* [my italics] French ladies who

> entertain very different notions on this subject; [...] who have carried their love for aristocratical rights so far as to keep their beds, in a fit of despondency, upon being obliged to relinquish the agreeable epithets of Comtesse or Marquise, to which their ears had been so long accustomed (1790: 36).

Madame Brûlart's superior understanding, resulting from her knowledge of the philosophical and educational trends of the enlightenment, makes her the perfect fit to embrace the revolutionary ideology. Williams presents the other side of the coin, those of the aristocrats who regret their loss of power and status. However, she renders their inability to adapt themselves to the new situation as nothing more than a "fit of despondency". At the same time, the negative of these ladies to renounce their titles, show that Genlis has chosen to go by the name Brûlart not only due to the new decree, but because she is truly convinced with the idea. Be that as it may, Williams highlights that the nostalgic ladies she has described constitute only an exception. This is evident in the quotation aforementioned by using the adverb some with my italics. On the following page, Williams continues to demonstrate that counter-revolutionary aristocrats are by no means representative of the majority:

> But let me do justice to the ladies of France. The number of those who have murmured at the loss of rank, bears a very small proportion to those who have acted with a spirit of distinguished patriotism, who, with those generous affections which belong to the female heart, have gloried in sacrificing titles, fortune, and even personal ornaments, so dear to female vanity, for the common cause (1790: 37).

The French Revolution has given women the opportunity, as Williams shows here, to publicly participate in politics and to support a common cause. These ladies provide another contrast to the émigrés she has mentioned before, who grieve for the loss of their property. Williams demonstrates that the loss of titles and possessions is not a revolutionary imposition by force, but a deliberate gesture by revolutionary supporters. The exemplary attitude of the women who have donated their belongings to support the revolution, leads Williams to affirm that "The women have certainly had a considerable

share in the French Revolution" (1790: 37). Williams presents the Revolution in France as a political fight in which women are welcomed while acknowledging their political actions.

Both aristocratic men and women renounced their titles and properties, but Williams pays a closer look to specifically feminine ways of supporting the Revolution. For that purpose, she pays attention to Madame de Genlis' fashion choices, which reveal a full commitment to the French Revolution. On page 38, Williams describes madame de Genlis' medallion, made up of stones from the recently fallen Bastille with the word 'Liberté' written in gems. Besides, the stones are red, blue and white, the same colours as the national cockade. Lynn Hunt explains that "all men were required to wear the tricolor cockade" (1986: 59), while women such as Madame de Genlis chose to display their political alliances in the same manner as men but by giving a feminine twist to it. Medallions and cockades were not the only ornaments that indicated the support to the revolutionary ideology, "colours, adornments, clothing, plateware, money, calendars and playing cards became "signs of rallying" to one side or another" (1986: 53). The use of revolutionary symbols offered women in France the chance to become part of the revolutionary movement since symbols "constituted a field of political struggle" (1986: 53). While showing one's political commitments, symbols were also used in a didactic way. Much like the revolutionary festivals, mentioned in section 2.1, symbols were used to educate the population on revolutionary values. In Genlis' case, the word 'Liberté' on her medallion emphasizes one of the three foundations of revolutionary thinking in France 'Liberté', 'Egalité', 'Fraternité'.

2.4. Du Fossés: A Revolutionary Tale with a Happy Ending

The part of *Letters Written in France* that has drawn more scholarly attention is the story of Williams' friends the Du Fossés. Williams devotes seven chapters to it –letters XVI to XXII–, approximately one quarter of the whole book. The Du Fossés were a French married couple, in which the husband had to migrate to Britain, where he became the French tutor for the Williams sisters. Williams narrates how the couple, even though they belong to different social classes, fall in love and decide to marry. Monsieur Du Fossé's father does not approve of the marriage, since he wants his son to marry someone belonging to the same social scale. In order to prevent the marriage, the father decides to appeal to a 'Lettre de Cachet'. During the *ancien régime*, French subjects could appeal to the king in order to intervene in their affairs without the need of a proper trial in a court of law. Through the 'Letter de Cachet', the king authorized an arrest. When the 'Lettre de Cachet' was issued, Monsieur Du Fossé was imprisoned and, later on, he managed to escape to Britain. In March 1790, the Constituent Assembly suppressed the 'Lettres de Cachet' since they saw it as an example of the arbitrary power of the king. Thanks to the Revolution, Monsieur Du Fossé is able to reunite with her wife and son since he is then protected from being imprisoned again. Besides, the Baron Du Fossé, Monsieur's father, dies at the end, liberating his son from the constraints of his prejudices and control.

In *Letters* (1790), Williams has already positioned herself against a hierarchical social structure, as shown in Williams' passage on Madame de Genlis. For Jacqueline Leblanc, the couple represents the revolutionary values of social equality, since they each belong to different social classes (1997: 36). The example of the Du Fossé shows that, once despotism has fallen, the ties of love and sympathy have the potential to become stronger. As the emergence of the Revolution allows the family to reunite, the couple becomes an embodiment of the recent story of their country, symbolising the

achievements of the Revolution at an individual level (1997: 223). Duckling goes on the same line when she points out that Williams blends the public and the private in the story of the Du Fossé family, that becomes an example "of how personal lives are inextricably linked with the machinery of national politics" (2010: 80). The story of the Du Fossés also offers a counterpart to Burke's *Reflections*. Burke emphasized the distress and vulnerability of the Royal family, showing feelings of a more private kind. In the case of the Royal Family, and according to Burke, the French Revolution destroys the natural ties and order of the family. However, Williams shows with her tale that the unlimited despotic power of the king had the potential of disrupting family life in France. For her part, Williams chooses to tell the story of an unknown family, with whom none of her readership could relate with, as opposed to Burke's example. Burke extols patriarchal rule, since, as stated on 1.1., the king acts as a father for the whole nation. The oppressive Du Fossé father incarnates the arbitrariness of both despotic monarchy and patriarchy.

The whole story of the Du Fossés attacks the 'Lettre de Cachet' as an example of the absolutist power of the French monarchy, much in line with the ideas defended by Mirabeau in his L*es Lettres de cachet et des prisons d'etat* (1782), translated into English as *Enquiries concerning lettres de cachet*. After 1789, Mirabeau became a prominent political leader of the Revolution -he would be elected President of the French Assembly in January 1791-, and, in her visit to the National Assembly, Williams witnesses Mirabeau's intervention: "We also saw Monsieur Mirabeau l'aîné, whose genius is of the first class" (1790: 47). Before starting his political career, however, Mirabeau had been imprisoned twice as a result of two 'Letters de Cachet' requested by his father. In the introduction of Mirabeau's *Enquiries*, he presents the 'Lettres de Cachet' as "the strongest arm of arbitrary power" (1787 [1782]: xiv). Mirabeau draws from enlightened debates, primarily natural rights and the separation of powers to defend his position. According to

him, all people are born free, and the ‘Lettre de Cachet’, having the power to illegitimately imprison anyone, goes against this right. At the same time, the Lettres show the illimited power of the king, who has the power to unfairly contradict or declare himself above the judicial power: “Wherever monarchy is not limited, chance alone can preserve it from tyranny” (1787 [1782]: 133). The word tyranny, which was characteristic of the pre-revolutionary discourse, is frequently used by Mirabeau in his argumentation. For her part, Williams considers that his friends’ incarceration present a particular example of the tyrannical use of power arising from the ‘Lettres de Cachet’. In Williams’ views, the misfortunes undergone by Monsieur Du Fossé were “the inflictions of tyranny, and you will rejoice with me that tyranny is no more” (1790: 109). Once again, Williams’ opinions coincide with the predominant discourse among the supporters of the Revolution in France.

Williams introduces the Du Fossé’s narrative as “the history of my friends” (1790: 123) reinforcing the emotional implications that this story has for her. Before Williams delves into their story, they already appear in her travel chronicles, for example, when Williams’ family, together with the Du Fossés, visit a convent in Rouen (1790: 116). In his study on literature and Friendship, Mangano explains that “The language of friendship saturated nearly every sphere of eighteenth-century life” (2017: 8), while it was frequently exalted in epistolary literature (2017: 4). The most influential authors and thinkers of the century frequently participated in this cult of friendship, such as Samuel Johnson, who famously said that: “Life has no pleasure higher or nobler than that of friendship” (1824 [1758]: 88). Williams insists on the fact that the intense affection between her and the Du Fossés allows her to reinforce the emotional response of the reader. First of all, she appeals to the feeling of sympathy of the reader: “You, my dear friend, who have felt the tender attachments of love and friendship, [...] who understand the value at which tidings

from those we love is computed in the arithmetic of the heart, [...] You can judge of the feelings of Mons. Du Fossé" (1790: 163). As explained in 1.3., the eighteenth-century trend of sensibility emphasized emotional bonds based on sympathy to achieve a common goal. Williams aims at her readership supporting Du Fossé's cause, and this is achieved through building a sympathetic reaction from her readership. Using the line of argument characteristic of the literature of sensibility, Williams equates being able to forge friendships with caring for others beyond self-interest. Following this logic, if the reader has been able to connect emotionally with people outside the family, they should be able to connect with the Du Fossés. Williams also appeals to friendship to justify her political stance. "I am glad you think that a friend's having been persecuted, imprisoned, maimed, and almost murdered under the ancient government of France, is a good excuse for loving the revolution" (1790: 95). As I have explained at the beginning of this chapter, Williams, influenced by theories on moral sentiments, presents her support of the French Revolution as arising from her empathy towards the French people. The private feelings of friendship blend with a public cause, as Williams herself explicitly mentions: "I must acknowledge, that, in my admiration of the revolution in France, I blend the feelings of private friendship with my sympathy in public blessings" (1790: 71). The story of Williams' friends shows how public affairs have a direct impact on the private sphere of the family.

While disclosing social and political problems, the story of the Du Fossés, with its happy ending, resembles a typical love plot. In Williams' words: "Has it not the air of a romance? and are you not glad that the denouement is happy? - Does not the Baron die exactly in the right place; at the very page one would choose?" (1790: 193). Williams' readers, used to attending plays at the theatre, or accustomed to the novels of sensibility that were so fashionable at the time, would have probably associated the narrative of the Du Fossés with a traditional romance, but Williams makes sure that the readership reaches

this conclusion by mentioning it explicitly. Lynn Hunt, when analysing the political discourse of the French Revolution, determines that most rhetoric during its early stages was unintentionally constructed in the form of comedy. Hunt follows Northrop Frye's definition of comedy: "The simplest form of comic structure is the one in which a young man wishes to marry a young woman, with the sympathy of the audience, but is prevented from doing so by some sinister or absurd social situation" (1965: 2). Specifically, in the case of the early period of the French Revolution, the conflict typically confronts a father and his son: "Comedy turns on a conflict between an older social order [...] and a new one, and this conflict is often represented as one dividing a son who wants freedom from his more arbitrary and conventional father" (1986: 34). The content, the plot, and terminology of the story show a connection to the prevailing political discourses of the French Revolution.

2.5. *Letters from France; Containing a Great Variety of Original Information* (1792-1793)

Williams' stay in Britain after the Summer of 1790 lasted less than a year. In July 1791, she set for France with the intention of spending the next two years there, as she made clear with the publication of the poem *A Farewell for Two Years, England* (1791). However, despite a short stay of three months in June 1792, Williams spent the rest of her life in the continent. In *Farewell*, Williams reinforces her commitment to the French Revolution while showing awareness that the attitudes towards the political situation in France were increasingly hostile in Britain. Williams' adherence to the French Revolution is for her a commitment to the improvement of humanity as a whole, not exclusively the French people. She had insisted in *Letters* that her support for the Revolution in France arises from a strong sense of sympathy, which she presents as a pure and innocent feeling.

The attacks on the British supporters of the Revolution, such as herself, is for Williams the result of lack of understanding: “those narrow souls [...] who meanly think that sympathy is a crime” (1791: 7). Her support for the Revolution does not mean for her the loss of patriotic feelings towards her native country, and she emphasizes her patriotic enthusiasm with the following lines: “my heart to thee [Albion] shall spring,/To thee its first, its best affections bring” (1791: 6). Williams shows in this manner that supporting the French cause is not a betrayal of British morals and values. In fact, she sees that her country people have forgotten their recent story, and laments that a country that has already fought for freedom in The Glorious Revolution (1688), would condemn the events across the channel: “Shall her [Albion’s] sons, in this enlighten’d age, assume the bigot-frown of papal rage nor tolerate the vow to Freedom paid, if diff’ring from the ritual they made?” (1791: 7). Here, Williams places at the same level the counterrevolutionaries in Britain and the supporters of the *ancien régime*. In France, the counter-revolutionary movement did not only mean adherence to the monarchical institution, but also the support for the former state of affairs and the privileges held by the clergy. Williams implies that Britons, due to their lack of awareness of the revolution in France, were siding unknowingly with the Catholic church, disregarded in Britain after the Restoration as an oppressive system and attacked during the Enlightenment as being superstitious.

2.6. The Golden Age of the Revolution is Gone

The volumes published after Williams travelled to France in 1791, mark a change in her point of view regarding French politics, since she is no longer a casual traveller but, rather, she becomes a resident in France. The political situation had also dramatically changed since her first visit. In *Letters* (1790), Williams presents herself as committed to the Revolutionary cause in a broad sense. After 1791, Williams begins to take sides on

the disputes held between the different revolutionary parties. Williams starts to present herself as a supporter of the Gironde, known for being more moderate in comparison to the opposing party, the Jacobins. The political divisions were complex and more nuanced, and the dichotomy Girondin/Jacobin is seen today as simplistic. However, as I shall show, Williams fully embraces this distinction. From, the second volume of *Letters* onwards, she aligns herself explicitly with the Girondins, and thus situates her ideology within the then-current French historical context and intellectual climate, since in Britain the debate was principally divided between the supporters of the revolution and its detractors, the Anti-Jacobins, as explained on 1.1. As she is no longer a traveller, she does not see the conflict from a British perspective anymore. Williams always believed in the revolution as a necessary stage to obtain freedom and social equality, however, this does not restrain her from being critical of those who, according to her, betray the revolutionary ideals.

The sphere of influence of the Jacobin party began to increase in 1791, and the election of Mirabeau, a member of the Jacobin party, to preside over the French Assembly, was a clear example of this. However, her criticism is not directed to Mirabeau, who Williams had explicitly admired in the first volume, but to Robespierre. Besides, within the Jacobins themselves the tensions were noticeable: "Mirabeau, as president, once dared to call Robespierre to order for talking against a decree already passed by the National Assembly" (Brinton, 2011 [1930]:117). In 1792, the Girondins continued to lose their influence. The events of the year 1792, such as the insurrection of the 10th of August or the September Massacres, made evident that the Revolution was taking an increasingly radical turn. *Letters from France: Containing A Great Variety of Interesting and Original Information Concerning the Most Important Events that Have Lately Occurred in that Country* was published in 1793 and narrates the events of the previous year. The first letter opens with the Insurrection of the 10th of August, when

armed supporters of the revolution attacked the Royal Family at the Tuileries Palace, resulting in a fight between the protesters and the Swiss Guard, who protected the king. Six weeks later, on the 21st of September, the National Convention declared the Republic.

The episode that concerns Williams the most throughout the volume published in 1792 is the September Massacres. Compared to the insurrection, the massacres are "a conflict far more terrible: a conflict between freedom and anarchy, knowledge and ignorance, virtue and vice" (1793:3). She divides the actors of the Revolution between two separate categories "the real patriots" (1793: 3), those who defended the Revolution in its early days, and "a set of men" (1793: 3), referring to the Commune Provisoire de Paris. During the summer of 1792, the Paris Commune, in charge of the Government of the city of Paris, refused to comply with the orders of the Legislative Assembly, the primary organism of political power at that stage of the Revolution. Adding to this, on September 2nd, members of the Paris Commune encouraged the killing of more than one thousand prisoners held in Parisian prisons. To this day, the name of the revolutionary leader behind the orders for the executions is still uncertain, as well as the identity of the executioners. When referring to the events of early September, Williams goes as far as proclaiming that: "Never in the annals of tyranny have we heard of power more shamefully abused" (1793: 3). Williams renders the Jacobins as a more tyrannical power that the absolutist monarchy the French people had revolted against back in 1789. The argument that Williams introduces here, is sustained throughout the rest of her writing career, especially in *Letters Containing a Sketch* (1795), as I will elaborate on in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

In her emphasis on distinguishing the essence of the early Revolutionary movement from the atmosphere of 1792, Williams presents the leaders of 1792 as desecrating the revolutionary symbols: "They have beheld the inhuman judges of that

night [Second of September 1792] wearing the municipal scarf which their polluting touch profaned" (1793: 4). She had supported the revolution before the British public, but Williams disassociates her early revolutionary creed from the actions of the Paris Commune led by Danton, Hébert, Desmoullins and, especially, Robespierre. The Jacobin leader is presented as a dictator and the greatest enemy of the revolution:

> At the head of this band of conspirators is Robespierre [...] fanatical and exaggerated imprudence in his avowed principles of liberty, possessing that species of eloquence which gives him power over the passions, and that cool determined temper which regulates the most ferocious designs with the most calm and temperate. His crimes do not appear to be the result of passion, but of some deep and extraordinary malignity, and he seems formed to subvert and to destroy (1793: 7).

From the first pages of the book, she repudiates a leader that she portrays as fanatical and manipulative. Furthermore, it is his lack of feelings that makes him a dangerous figure inasmuch as in Williams' 'active sensibility', emotions are necessary to attain a just revolution. Williams connects feelings with positive qualities and their absence acquires negative connotations.

While Robespierre appears as a horrific villain, those who support them are, in Williams' words, "conspirators". Williams describes the leaders of the commune as plotting the massacres while hiding their true intentions from the National Legislative Assembly. Some of the more moderate leaders, such as Condorcet, Brissot or Veginaud, were still members of the Assembly in September 1792. By presenting the massacres as a plot by the radical faction, Williams renders the moderates innocent: "they [the conspirators] contrived to make the Assembly itself ignorantly acquiesce in their diabolical projects" (1793: 11). In this manner, Williams minimizes the responsibility of the Assembly, which she still firmly defended. Between pages 14 and 17, Williams reproduces some excerpts of the accusation against Maximilien Robespierre, in which moderate politician Louvet de Couvray, accuses Robespierre of the massacres. The

accusation was printed by the National Convention, and Williams translated some of its parts, thus making the document available to the British readership.

After studying revolutionary rhetoric, Lynn Hunt has demonstrated that there was an obsession with conspiracy in the French Revolution (1986: 39). Rousseau had insisted on the relevance of authenticity, see 1.3.1., and, simultaneously, the public imagination associated obscure politics and conspiracy to the absolutist monarchy of the *ancien régime*. Hence, the revolutionaries in power tended to accuse other revolutionary factions of obscurantism in order to secure that power. In François Furet's words:

> Obsession with conspiracy thus became a discourse common to all, to be held on either side of power. Those who were excluded from it used the discourse to conquer power. Those who held power used it to warn the people of the constant and formidable threat posed by that other and less fragile power. So the Revolution eventually had to face a cynical version of the aristocratic plot in which those who wielded power might call for the unmasking of a conspiracy only in order to reinforce their own position. (1981: 55-56)

The unified nation that Williams had rendered in 1790 becomes after 1791 the arena of factional politics in which ones accused the others of betraying the original revolutionary spirit.

Williams is aware of the fact that the events of 1792 would tarnish the reputation of the cause in France: "Surrounding nations, who might perhaps have been animated by the example of a country which has served as a model to the rest of Europe, have heard of the Second of September, and have shrunk back into the topor of slavery" (1793: 4). Williams believed, as it had been already demonstrated, in the Revolution as a universal cause. Absolutist monarchies were still common in Europe in 1792, exemplified by Prussia, Spain, Russia or Sweden. In her enthusiasm for the cause, Williams hoped that these countries would sooner or later follow the events in France. She thus concludes that the spirit of the events of 1792 is in fact detrimental for the universal cause. At the same time, as it has been explained with the Fête de la Fédération, she admired the feelings of

fraternity and collaboration that she had witnessed in 1790. She now observes how the factions and divisions between the political actors are confronting the revolutionaries, who have deviated from the original common cause, which was the destruction of the *ancien régime*. She laments the increasingly confrontational atmosphere: "What is become of the transport which beat high in every bosom, when an assembled million of the human race vowed on the altar of their country, in the name of the repressed nation, inviolable fraternity an union - an eternal federation! This was indeed the Golden Age of the Revolution" (1793: 6). She describes the earlier days of the Revolution described in *Letters Written in France* as a Golden Age that is no more. However, she still keeps hope and believes that the early spirit can be retrieved: "Those disorders which may for awhile convulse the infant republic, will cease with the lives of their perpetrators, who can assassinate individuals, but cannot assassinate opinions, which appear to be widely diffused" (1793: 17-18). Williams maintains that the ideals she had herself ascribed to in 1790 are still held by the majority, and the responsibilities of the massacres form just a small number of the supporters of the French Revolution. The state in which the recently proclaimed republic finds itself is just temporary, which justifies, despite the violent crimes committed in the name of the Revolution, that she continues to support the Revolution.

2. 7. British Spectator of the Events in France

Scholars such as Blakemore and Leblanc have argued that Williams presents the events as a spectacle, a mere theatrical representation which diminishes her point of view as lacking accuracy. The term spectacle was well extended to refer to the events in France, as exemplified by the following excerpt from Edmund Burke's correspondence: "As to us here our thoughts of everything at home are suspended, by our astonishment at the

wonderful Spectacle which is exhibited in a Neighbouring and rival Country –what Spectators, and what actors!" ([1789] 2013, 377). However, for Williams, the fact that she is able to see with her own eyes what is going on in the neighbouring country, validates her account. She has already expressed this idea in *Letters* (1790): "one must have been present, to form any judgment of a scene" (1790: 5). As opposed to Burke, Macaulay or Wollstonecraft (see 1.1.), Williams was describing the Revolution onsite. Wollstonecraft would travel to France later on, in 1792, for a short visit, but her *Vindication of the Rights of Men* was written before she travelled to the continent. Williams takes advantage of her unique perspective and uses this argument to confer authority to her texts: "While you observe from a distance the great drama which is acting in France, I am a spectator of the representation-. I am placed near enough the scene to discern every look and every gesture of the actors, and every passion excited in the minds of the audience" (1793: 2). This 'you' also applies to the readership, who is British, and thus Williams secures her position as an informed author on revolutionary matters. She emphasizes that she has experienced the events first-hand and she can provide a truthful testimony of the real situation.

The position of the 'spectator' here implies an enlightened emphasis on observation. In the British context, for instance, the Earl of Shaftesbury uses the term 'spectator' in a similar manner. When he describes how our minds identify virtue in other people's character he writes that "The mind, [...] is spectator or Auditor of other minds" (1714: 29). Appropriately, this philosopher's employment of 'spectator' in this example serves him to emphasize in which ways detailed observation is the basic element of his thought process. This term was even chosen by Addison and Steele for their daily publication, *The Spectator*. In 1744, British author Elizabeth Haywood founded *The Female Spectator* (1744-46). "Like the original *Spectator* of Addison and Steele,

Haywood's periodical and conduct books of this period mingle abstract advice with short narratives designed to illustrate the advice; the narratives are usually said to be true stories, sometimes of events directly witnessed by the writer" (Staves, 2006: 246). Williams' insistence on observation follows the journalistic tradition of her time, and she extends it to her role of British correspondent of the Revolution in France.

Another aspect that differentiates the volumes published after Williams' second trip to Paris from *Letters Written in France*, is the attention that Williams pays to footnotes and appendixes. Although footnotes are already in use in the 1790 text, these are usually employed to translate a French sentence into English or to make a French concept understandable to a British readership. In contrast, in the later volumes, footnotes tend to be employed to refer to her sources. Other women writers of the period had already extensively quoted her sources, such as the French author Louise-Félicité de Kéralio-Robert. Carla Hesse explains that, in her *History of Elizabeth, Queen of England* (1786), Kéralio-Robert is aware of the preconceived ideas considering women writers of history as not being reliable enough (2001: 88). In *British Women Writers and the Writing of History, 1670-1820*, Devoney Looser writes that despite their valuable impact on historical discourse: "What women had to face that men did not, of course, was the "problem" of their sex, assigned by a culture that usually did not imagine for them an equivalent place in history or in history writing" (2000: 27). In order to avoid these accusations, footnotes abound in Kéralio-Robert's *History*, as well as the publication of a Fifth Volume dedicated entirely to reproduce documents she has consulted and quoted. In a similar manner, Williams includes appendixes at the end of each volume. For instance, she includes the correspondence between Dumorier and General Miranda, Williams' friend, regarding the campaigns of the war in 1792. Being a woman, Williams was denied access to military matters, but she gains knowledge of them through her

friendships. Being close to the actors involved in the Revolution gives her access to information that she would have been otherwise deprived of, which allows her to present herself as an informed writer and witness of historical developments just unfolding.

The multi-authored aspect of the volume also makes it original when compared to the first. Culley comments on this aspect of Williams' work, observing that: "Her letters therefore accrue new layers of relational exchange and reinforce her earlier experiments with collaborative authorship" (2014: 165). Letters 2,3,4,5,6 and 12 deal with military matters and are not written by Williams. Williams justifies these letters as being penned by authors who have "the best information on the subject that France could afford" (1993: advertisement). The authors of these letters, however, are not explicitly identified. The review of Williams' *Letters* on *The Analytical Review* (1793) considers that "all the letters, except those respecting the campaign of 1792, which are said to have been written by Mr. Stone, and the concluding one, which is attributed to Mr. Christie, are from the elegant penn of Miss Williams" (127). Mary A. Favret (1993: 81) and Deborah Kennedy (2002: 98) sustain that these letters are authored by John Stone and Thomas Christie. Stone would have been present in the military campaigns as a gun-runner (Favret, 1993: 232), while Christie was one the founders of the *Analytical Review*. It is thus significant that the Analytical Review in particular identifies Christie's hand in the letter. Christie belonged to the group of British authors who sided with the revolutionaries in France. Similarly to Williams, Christie had travelled to France in 1790 and subsequently published his two volumes of *Letters on the Revolution in France* in 1791. The difference between Christie's *Letters* and Williams' *Letters* (1790) is noticeable. Christie employs a less casual tone, and his book is not organized according to the trip's itinerary and chronology, as Williams' is. Christie organizes his text responding to the different points he aims at proving, for instance, Letter I is a direct criticism of Burke, and Letter IV is

dedicated to “the Territorial Division of the Kingdom, Administrative Assemblies, and National Assembly”.

2.8. Conclusions for This Chapter

This chapter has explored *Letters Written in France* (1790) and *Letters from France; Containing a Great Variety of Original Information Concerning the Most Important Events that Have Lately Occurred in that Country* (1792). Both texts were written during the early years of the French Revolutionary project, in which the moderate parties, that share Williams’ ideology, dominated the political arena. In the first volume, with the Fête de la Fédération, Williams identifies herself with the values and beliefs celebrated at the festival. Green observes that “rather than giving a political analysis of the frightful events she relates, Williams falls back on poetic justice” (2014: 202). However, through her description of the Federation, she offers an analysis of the changes experienced by the French citizens after the Revolution by praising the erasure of distinctions of rank and the feeling of fraternity. The spirit of fraternity especially moves Williams as she sees the French people move together towards a common cause, the overthrow of the absolutist monarchy. She describes her meetings with renowned intellectual French figures, as in the case of Madame de Genlis, that Williams’ quotes, in order to show the reader that both she and Genlis shared their views on the Revolution. Even though Leblanc considers that Williams’ Letters (1790) “often strike readers as lacking serious critical perspective” (2016: 26), my analysis has shown that she engages in the political discussions of the time. Through her conversation with Madame de Genlis, Williams provides a condemnation of hereditary rights, as well as a defence of the necessity of giving the royal family a Revolutionary education. As the Revolution advances, the Girondin start to lose political force, and Williams describes de Jacobins as responsible for the violence.

Williams divides the political actors in two groups. On the one hand, there are the moderates, which she considers to be the only true revolutionaries as they represent the values of the political climate at the Fête de la Fédération. For her rejection of the opposing party, the Jacobins, Williams draws from the rhetoric of the French Revolution by alluding to accusations of tyranny and conspiracy. Together with her denouncement of the 'Lettres de Cachet', Williams also aligns her political argumentation to that of relevant revolutionary figures, such as Mirabeau.

The Story of the Du Fossés also coincides with the rhetoric of the French Revolution. As is characteristic of the optimism of the early phases of the Revolution, Williams embeds in her observations of France the story of her friends, the Du Fossés. Duckling (2010:82) has identified that the structure of the story of the Du Fossés coincides with sentimental novels. This study has connected their story with the prevailing structure of the political discourses at the time. As explained by Hunt, the political rhetoric at the National Assembly offered a comedic structure (1984: 34), that is also found in the story of the Du Fossés. The comedic plot revolves around a couple who are not allowed to be together due to external forces, but they finally overcome the barriers to achieve a happy ending. In the case of the Du Fossés, the couple must come apart due to a 'Lettre de Cachet, but, thanks to the Revolution, they are able to reunite, and thus the family embody the political situation of their country, liberated with the fall of the oppressive *ancien régime*. In this manner, Williams shows that the political atmosphere has a huge impact on people's private life, and thus intermingles the public and private spheres. In order to obtain the support of her readership, Williams chimes with the eighteenth-century moral philosophical theories based on sympathy. She follows the logic of the theories of sensibility throughout both *Letters Written in France* (1790) and *Letters from France* (1792).

This chapter has also examined Williams' position as an eyewitness of the events in France. Franklin (2005: 552) and Duckling have (2010: 79) interpreted the witness stance as a literary strategy to distance herself from the events in order to appear more feminine and thus, more acceptable. However, this study considers that the significance that Williams gives to her role as an observer, situates her in a tradition of empirical thinking, dominant during the Enlightenment. During the eighteenth century, the observer, or spectator, was a conventional figure in the journalistic discourse. The fact that she has visited France during the Revolution, something that most of her contemporary British authors have not, provides strength and credibility to her account. At the same time, she obtains from experience the arguments that contradict the extended misconception in Williams' native island regarding the Revolution in France.

Chapter 3

'The experience of a year of revolutionary government is equivalent to that of fifty years of ordinary life': The Reign of Terror and *Letters Containing A Sketch.*

Letters Containing A Sketch of the Politics in France, from the Thirty-First of May 1793, till the Twenty-Eight of July, 1794 (1795) deals with a crucial moment in the history of the French Revolution, The Reign of Terror. Historians have established the duration of the Reign of Terror between September 5, 1793, when Bertrand Barère, a member of the Committee of Public Safety, famously declared that "terror would be the order of the day" and July 28, 1794, marking the execution of Robespierre. It nearly coincides with the dates of Williams' *Letters Containing a Sketch*. The Terror is characterized by the execution and mass incarceration of French citizens on account of being 'counter-revolutionary', as I shall later elaborate on. At the same time, besides the French Revolutionary Wars, there was a civil war in the French department of La Vendée. Sympathizers of the monarchical government and defenders of Catholicism, took up arms and formed the Catholic and Royal Army, confronting the Republican Army. Historians choose to mark the 5th of September as the beginning of the Reign of Terror, with the mass incarceration of people without trial. Williams was herself affected by the 'Law of Suspects', but she chose to start her account of the Terror with the Insurrection of 31st May, that definitely marked the fall of the moderate party from the Revolutionary Government. Interestingly, after her third volume, the second part of the title changes and the third volume is published as *Letters Containing A Sketch of the Politics in France from the Various Scenes which Passed in Various Departments of France During the Tyranny of Robespierre* (1795). The title explicitly alludes to Robespierre as the main responsible leader for the Terror. Williams had already presented him as a villain in her *Letters from France* (1793), and she continues to do so in *Letters Containing A Sketch*.

The twenty-eight of July 1794, the closing date in the series, marks the arrest and execution of Robespierre.

As a firm defender of the Girondins, the Insurrection of the 31st of May meant the beginning of a new era in Revolutionary politics for Williams. By that time, the Republic was experiencing a strong economic crisis, the enormous debts incurred by the Bourbon administration –the original reason behind the calling of the States General in 1789- were added to the enormous cost of the Revolutionary Wars, which was increasing since the French Coalition was defeating the Revolutionary Army in 1793. The inflation stemming from the economic crisis, resulted in the exorbitant inflation. After four years, the general feeling was that the revolution had not improved the living conditions of the French. Hébert, a Jacobin and Montagnard, explicitly blamed the Girondin party (Slavin, 1999: 141), which still held a majority at the National Convention. On the 31st of May, representatives of different Paris sections and sympathisers of the more radical factions, declared that Paris was in insurrection against the Girondins (Slavin, 1999: 146). This action was followed by an attack on the Tuileries. On the 2nd of June, 6000 armed insurgents entered the convention and forced the suspension of Girondin politicians. The ceased politicians were tried together on the 24th of October 1793. As a supporter of the Girondins, Williams saw the events in May as the end of an era in French Politics. As it has been explained in the previous chapter, even after the September massacres, Williams was still optimistic and believed that the spirit of the early years of the Revolution would soon be restored. As we shall see, Williams takes on a more pessimistic stance in *Letters Containing a Sketch* and emphasizes the Girondins as the martyrs of the Revolution. The law of suspects put Williams in jail between October and November 1793, where she shared the experience of imprisonment with the Girondins, and, as a result, she became part of the repressed community.

3.1. "A silence like that of death": Writing the Terror in Retrospect

The first volume of *Letters Containing A Sketch* (1795) opens in a dramatic manner, already pointing to the unfortunate situations that Williams will narrate throughout the nine letters that follow. Following a lapse of two years, Williams resumes the correspondence: "After so long a suspension of our correspondence, after a silence like that of death" (1795, vol. I: 2). Williams' last volume of *Letters from France* was published in 1793, the same year that she was imprisoned under the 'law of suspects.' In 1794, the year after her incarceration, she travelled to Switzerland escaping the political uncertainty of France, as I will develop on Chapter 4, and in fact, Williams located the writing of Letter I in Switzerland, September 1794. The distance between the first set of letters and the second does not only result from the chronological separation, it also draws attention to the life-changing experiences undergone by the author. The first volume deals mainly with Williams' incarceration, which she writes in retrospective since the letters are dated afterwards. During the lapse of two years, from 1793 to 1795, several of her friends, such as Madame Roland or Lasource, were executed. At the same time, during her time in prison, her life was at the hands of the Committee of Public Safety. Naturally, Williams' experience is fraught with uncertainty, as she was aware of the fact that she could be sent to execution. For that reason, resuming the correspondence bestows the letter with "life-giving power" (1993: 90), to use Mary A. Favret's expression. Being able to write and receive letters again is, for Williams, a symbol of her recently acquired freedom and a reminder that she has survived the Reign of Terror.

In her preface to her translation of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul and Virginia* (1795), Williams explains the reasons behind the two-year period of silence. As indicated by David Singler, Williams' "translation of Bernardin's novella was, during her lifetime,

her most popular and well-regarded work. It was the most successful of some twenty translations of Paul et Virginie" (2012: 575). *Paul and Virginia* was published in the same year as *Letters Containing A Sketch*, and Williams explains in the preface that, during her time behind bars, she set herself the task of working a few hours a day on the translation. The preface offers a denunciation of the situation endured by authors during the Terror. In her translations, Williams does not limit herself to reproduce the story of the original text, but she includes political information in order to spread her opinion. Here, Williams refers to the Reign of Terror again as the "the tyranny of Robespierre" (iii), pointing to 'the Incorruptible' as the main political actor of the period. The most obvious outcome of Williams' persecution is her time in prison. However, she tells the reader that she had endured domiciliary searches:

> Amidst the minute vexations of Jacobonical despotism, which, while it murdered in mass, persecuted in detail, the resources of writing, and even reading, were encompassed with danger. The researches of domiciliary visits had already compelled me to commit to the flames a manuscript volume, where I had traced the political scenes of which I had been a witness (1795: iv).

According to this anecdote, Williams had already produced a volume of *Letters Containing A Sketch*, that she had to sacrifice to escape arrest, imprisonment, and potentially death in the guillotine. Siding with the Girondin party was a strong enough reason at that stage of the Revolution to be sent to death. Besides, her attacks against the most radical parties of the political entourage could have been interpreted as 'counter-revolution'. Williams was aware of the fact that, due to the circumstances, writing had become for her a political act. This idea transpires when she recounts about some of her writings being seized by the authorities: "some [sonnets] are indeed lost [...] having been sent to the Municipality of Paris, in order to be examined as English papers; where they still remain, mingled with revolutionary placards, motions and harangues" (1795: vii-viii). The other types of texts mentioned by Williams, placards, motions and harangues,

are clearly connected to the sphere of political activism. Placards and harangues spread political ideas among the people, while the harangues are directed to political actors, and the ways that the authorities treat literature is not different from other forms of political texts. Even though Williams writes her account of the Terror in retrospect, she still emphasizes her role as an eyewitness and her reliance on observation: "If the pictures I send you of those extraordinary events be not well drawn, it is at least marked with the characters of truth, since I have been the witness of the scenes I describe, and have known personally all the principal actors" (1795, vol. I: 2). As explained in 2.7., her status as a British woman living in Paris confers reliability to Williams' account. As many of the authors involved in the debate surrounding the French Revolution in Britain - see 1.1.- did not stay in France for long, the fact that she is witnessing the event makes her chronicles unique. Williams' reputation as a political writer, together with the situation in which she found herself when translating Bernardin's texts embroils Williams' translation in the politics of the moment. Besides, it also anticipates the political situation of the near future, since during the Napoleonic wars France and Britain disputed the colony of Mauritius, or Île de France, where Bernardin's story is set (2012: 577). Williams chooses the name Mauritius for her translation, even though Bernardin had chosen the name Île de France, something that Singler interprets as Williams "accomplishing at the literal level what the British government would achieve in actual fact some twenty years later" (2012: 576). However, this study shows that Williams explicitly decides to make her translation political through her preface, in which she demonstrates has not been a mere passive spectator of what was going on in France, but she has also personally suffered the consequences of the political turmoil.

Taking into account all the volumes of *Letters*, Williams is never more entangled in the political turmoil as she is during her arrest and time served in prison. Despite her

continuous and explicit support for the Girondin party, whose members were largely imprisoned while Williams spends time in jail, this is not the reason behind Williams' arrest. As it has been mentioned earlier, 'The Law of Suspects', issued on the 17th of September 1793, makes Williams one of the seven thousand people that entered Parisian prisons between the years 1793-94 (Olivier, 1981: xiii). The Law allowed for the imprisonment of people without trial just on the grounds of being suspicious of counter-revolution. The term 'counterrevolutionary' was not only used to refer to the royalists, who wanted to restore the Bourbon monarchy, but it was also applied to those who wanted to overthrow the *ancien régime* and believed in a moderate stance that separated their views from those of the Committee of Public Safety. One could be imprisoned because of their friendships and family ties with a political dissident, or because someone had accused them of saying, writing or acting in a counter-revolutionary way. The relatives of émigrés, people that had migrated outside France, were sent to jail. Interestingly, those who had done the opposite, that is to say, migrated to France, were considered suspects under the law as well. This is the case of Helen Maria Williams and her family. As a result of the broad definition for suspect, they became "the bulk of the prison population" (Olivier, 1981: xii). According to Olivier, "This new law laid down a very wide definition of suspects that made it possible to reach all the enemies of the Revolution with the utmost ease" (1981: xii). As explained on 2.6., however, Williams claims that she is not an enemy of the revolution, but its friend, and subverts the rhetoric employed by the political power on the Terror by rendering the Jacobins responsible for the downfall of the Revolution in France. Williams, having positioned herself against any form of abusive power, condemns the 'Law of Suspects': "This impolitic and savage decree, in open violation to the rights of nations [...] was put into execution, and though it met with universal reprobation, yet as terror was the order of the day, no one felt sufficiently bold to demand

its repeal" (1795, vol. I: 149). Williams explains that the public opinion generally disapproves of the 'law of suspects', but the government has taken such a violent turn that people fear voicing their disagreement. Here is another instance of the leaders of the terrors as even more repressive and arbitrary than the absolute monarchy, since they have silenced people's opinion by force of fear.

The abusive power exercised by the government is also noticeable in the constant atmosphere of tension and anxiety that Williams describes. Before being arrested, one of Williams' friends, who remains anonymous in the narrative, brings her the news regarding the passing of the new law: "a friend, who rushed into the room, [...] with great agitation told us that a decree had just passed" (1795, vol. I: 6). Both the news, and the way in which her friend communicates them, add to the anxious mood of Letter I. The news perturbs Williams and her family who "passed the night without sleep, and the following day in anxiety and perturbation not to be described" (1795, vol. I: 6). The tension continues to build up during the following day, until they start to believe that they are not going to be imprisoned after all. Even though Williams fits into the category of suspects, the arbitrariness of the authorities becomes evident one more time. Williams and her family do not receive any notification, and no legal procedure is followed, for that reason, their arrest depends on the caprice of the administration. Instead of arresting her in broad daylight, she is arrested in the middle of the night, showing that the detention is conducted in secrecy and obscurity, which goes against the transparency that a democratic government should strive for: "At two in the morning were awakened by a loud knocking at the gate of the hotel, which we well knew to be a fatal sign of our approaching captivity" (1795, vol. I: 7). From that moment on, Williams spent the months of October and November incarcerated, first in the prison of Luxembourg and later on in the Anglaises, former convent of English Conceptionists or 'blue nuns'.

3.2. The Prison Community

Williams is arrested by two commissionaires of the revolutionary committee of her section. After 1790, Paris was divided in 48 sections –or districts– and each had its own civil and revolutionary committee. While the civil committee dealt as mediators between the neighbours and the Commune, the revolutionary committee was dedicated to surveilling foreigners. Before going to prison Williams is taken to the committee-room, where, among all the detainees, the only women there are Williams and her family. However, they are the only ones taken to the Luxembourg prison, while the rest of prisoners are sent to the Madeleines: “We discovered afterwards that this was owing to the humanity of the commissionaires who arrested us” (1795, vol. I: 10) since in “the Luxembourg, [...] we should find good accommodations, while at the Madelonette’s scarcely a bed could be procured” (1795, vol. I: 10-11). The Luxembourg, according to Olivier “was the pleasantest, perhaps the most comfortable of the ‘political prisons’” (1981: 30), it had been a royal palace built in the 17th century, surrounded by gardens in the French style. Inside the prison, the conditions were better than in other ‘maisons d’ arrêt’ and the rules less strict, owing to the benevolence of the prison keeper, Benoit. Williams uses her gender as the only differentiating mark between her and the rest of the prisoners, and she attributed the favourable treatment to being a woman: “our two commissionaries behaved towards us as if they remembered that we were defenceless women in a land of strangers” (1795, vol. I: 11). In 2.2, I explained how Williams had access to the National Assembly because the guard favours them for being both foreigners and women. Here is another example of how Williams deals with her situation in France, to gain access to certain spaces that would have been otherwise denied to her.

In the Luxembourg, men and women were allowed to spend time together during the day, and the prisoners killed time together by playing cards and also making music. As a result, Williams found herself as part of a united prison community: "Our prison was filled with a multitude of persons of different conditions, characters, opinions and countries" (1795, vol. I: 18). This diversity, instead of separating the inmates, brings them together in the true spirit of *fraternité* that characterised, for Williams, the early moments of the Revolution (see 2.1.):

> The system of equality, whatever opposition they met with in the world, was in full extent practised in the prison. United by the strong claim of common calamity, the prisoners considered themselves as bound to soften the general evil by mutual sacrifices; and strangers meeting in such circumstances soon became friends. The poor lived not upon the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table, but shared the comforts of the repast; and here was found a community of the small stock of goods, which belonged to the whole without the necessity of a requisition (1795, vol.I: 20).

Williams presents the prison as a place where the universal values of the French Revolution, such as equality, solidarity and comradery, bring the community together. This contrasts with the atmosphere of conspiracy, confrontation and uncertainty in the Parisian streets which, as explained in the previous section 3.1. I agree with Amy Culley's analysis when she finds that in Williams' autobiographical account "the prison is imagined as a temporary community and a space invested with the social values lacking outside its walls" (2014: 152). Contrary to the leading political discourse that justified the mass incarcerations of citizens as being a threat to the Republic, Williams finds the prison as one of the only repositories of the early revolutionary spirit.

"The strong claim of common calamity" was the spirit that united the community of the Luxembourg during Williams' time there, but his excluded those associated with Robespierre and Jacobinism: "Whenever any new prisoners arrived, the rest crowded among them, and hastened to calm their minds by the most soothing expressions of sympathy. Not such were the emotions excited by the appearance of Maillard, who was

one of the murdered on the second of September" (1795, vol. I: 33). Williams had blamed Robespierre for the September Massacres, as explained on 2.6. According to Williams' words, even though the jail population of the Luxembourg was diverse, they ideologically rejected anyone associated with the Jacobins. In Williams' account, prison becomes the space for the Girondin resistance. Even though she was arrested due to her nationality, her imprisonment allows her to become part of the Girondin community. Since the very first moment she enters the Luxemburg, the recollection of the moderate politicians permeates her account. Williams describes how after the Insurrection of the 31st, the prison is devised to receive the political prisoners: "Our apartment, with several adjoining, had soon after the event of the 31st of May been prepared for the imprisonment of the deputies of the coté droit" (1795, vol. I: 15). She occupies the room that had been allotted to Charles Éléonor Dufriche-Valazé, known as Valazé, who had been imprisoned on the 2nd of June 1793 together with other Girondins (see 3). Valazé had become a powerful symbol of the recent persecution of the Girondins, since, before being condemned to death on the guillotine, he committed suicide in front of the Revolutionary Tribunal. He had been tried with the other Girondins arrested on the 2nd of June, and he had preferred to take his own life rather than dying in the hands of their persecutors.

Williams' involvement with the imprisoned Girondin community is most evident in the relationship that she forged with politicians Charles Alexis Pierre de Genlis Sillery and Marc-David Alba Lasource "two members of the convention" (1795, vol. I: 40). Sillery was Madame de Genlis' husband. In *Letters written in France* (1790), Williams had praised the political ideas of madame de Genlis, as discussed on 2.3. For his part, the marquise de Sillery had been involved in the politics of the French Revolution from the very beginning, as he had been a deputy of the Estates General in 1789. In 1793, he was arrested with other Girondin deputies of the National Convention. Meanwhile, Lasource

was the President of the Convention between April and May 1793. Williams specifies that the political prisoners and her family had already bonded outside the walls of prison, since they were “two persons in whose society we had passed some of the most agreeable hours of our residence in France” (1795, vol. I: 40). Williams continues to develop this idea when she compares her meetings with Lasource in jail with the ones outside. Williams explains how Lasource frequented her home prior to her arrest: “After the day had passed in the fatigue of public debates, he was glad to lay aside the tumult of politics in the evening, for the conversation of some literary men whom he met occasionally at our tea table” (1795, vol. I: 44). With these words, Williams shows that she had created a space at her own home where she mingled with the most important literary and political figures of the moment such as Lasource. On the one hand, this further reinforces her position as an informed writer due to her viewpoint at the very core of the events. At the same time, it highlights her involvement with the Girondins, since this shows her participation in their social circles, which fashions her as a trusted and respected figure among the Girondin politicians.

Williams was well aware of the fact that being a suspect on account of her nationality was a smaller risk than being accused of her support of the Girondins. She knows perfectly well that the meetings with Sillery and Lasource could cause her execution: “the discovery of these visits would indeed have exposed us to the most fatal consequences; but our sympathy prevailed over our fears” (1795, vol. I: 44). The word sympathy here goes beyond the affections of friendship, and shows involvement with the political cause. As explained in 2.1., Williams describes her involvement with the French Revolution as a matter of sympathy. In this quotation from page 44, the author shows the extent to which she is willing to put herself at risk with her involvement with the Girondins. During the Terror, jail had become a place for the political resistance of the

Girondins, in which Williams participates, for example when she describes how she talks with Sillery in whispers, knowing that their political rivals are constantly controlling them. Williams also transcribes in French and, later on translates into English, a religious hymn composed by both Sillery and Lasource, that Natasha Duquette has analysed in her study of dissenting cosmopolitanism and Williams' prison verse. Duquette writes that "Williams's background as a religious Dissenter informed her willingness to secretly meet with two political prisoners" (2020: 87). Lasource was a Huguenot, and Williams firmly defended the freedom of the protestants in France as I will elaborate on in Chapter 5. Although Williams religious sentiments might have played a part in her relationship with Sillery and Lasource, the fact that they were both Girondin leaders imprisoned after the 31st of May, a cause that Williams had discussed at length in *Letters Containing a Sketch*, also motivated their proximity in the Luxembourg.

Lasource and Sillery were two of the twenty-one deputies that had been expelled from the national convention in early June. This was the first trial against members of the Gironde since the 31st of May. Williams narrates how upon their arrival after the trial, both of her friends "related to us what had passed" (1795, vol. I: 53). Through the friendships reinforced in jail, Williams gains access to the testimony of the accusers in one of the events that marked the course of the French Revolution. With the telling of the anecdote, Williams renders her friends as martyrs for the cause of the French Revolution, something that she will continue to develop through her *Letters Containing a Sketch*. Despite the verdict of the Revolutionary Tribunal, which condemns the accused to death on the guillotine: "Our friends returned from the tribunal with their minds much elevated. Lasource described in his eloquent language the noble enthusiasm of liberty, the ardent love of their country, the heroical contempt of death which animated his colleagues" (1795, vol. I: 53). In this excerpt, Lasource and their colleagues meet the conditions to be

considered martyrs. Following Janes and Hoen's historical analysis of martyrdom and terrorism (2014), they show in their chapter devoted to the French Revolution that martyrs remain faithful to their beliefs, regardless of the consequences this might have, including death, in the same manner as the early Christians did not recant their religion despite persecution. Lasource, until the very last moment of his life, maintains his commitment to the cause of their liberty and the improvement of the French nation. Besides, following the precedent of the passion of Jesus Christ, martyrs are ready to accept death in an exemplary and stoic manner. Janes and Hoen bring attention to the fact that, in order to be considered a martyr, one had to suffer for their whole community, not just for themselves (2014: 5). This is the case of the Gironde deputies here, who died for having represented a political opinion shared by many outside the convention.

3.3. Madame Roland: Martyr of the Revolution

Throughout the volume, Williams continues to emphasize her friendship and connections with Girondin martyrs. According to Kennedy, "of the many distinguished friends she paid tribute to in her published works, none was more revered than Madame Roland" (2002: 95). As I will explain in this section, Williams admires Roland, and she inscribes her memory along with the Girondin martyrs of 'The Reign of Terror'. Williams claimed in 1795 that she and Roland had been acquainted for a long time (195). Three decades later, in *Souvenirs de la Révolution Française* (1827) Williams writes that before the Terror, they participated together in the political life of Paris: "I went with her to the jacobin meetings many times, but I am not talking about the jacobins of Robespierre's race, but of the times when Brissot and Vergniaud climbed to their tribune" (1827: 73).[17]

[17] My translation of "Je fus plusieurs fois avec elle aux séances des jacobins, mon pas les jacobins de la race de Robespierre, mais du temps où Brissot et Vergniaud montaient à leur tribune".

Williams' Girondin friend set the example of the early days. At the same time, she distances herself from Robespierre's political ideas as much as possible. While Williams presents Roland as a great friend, there is no mention of Williams in Roland's memoirs. Interestingly, Williams' *Sketches of the State of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic* (1801) was translated into French that same year by Sophie Grandchamp, who is described by Siân Reynolds as "one of the Mme Roland's few close female friends" (2012: 151). Grandchamp was very close to the Roland couple, since she also worked as an editor and proof-reader of Monsieur Roland's texts (Reynolds, 2012: 159). In the preface to her translation of *Sketches*, which consists of an open letter to Williams, Grandchamp claims that it was her friendship with Williams that motivated her to pursue her translation (1801: v).

As she had done with Lasource, Williams also admires the resilience shown by Madame Roland. Williams celebrates her firmness during her trial: "When brought before the revolutionary tribunal she presented the most heroical firmness, though she was treated with such barbarity, and insulted by questions so injurious to her honour, that sometimes tears of indignation started from her eyes" (1795, vol. I: 197). As shown on 1.3.1., self-control was the main characteristic of a virtuous heroine of sensibility. In Walker's words: "The concepts of virtue and self-sacrifice became intimately linked over the course of the eighteenth century as novels of sensibility grew in popularity" (2001: 405). The identification with Roland and a heroine of sensibility is further reinforced by the adjective 'heroical' paired with firmness, which refers to her self-restraint. Even though Roland in this instance is constantly mistreated by her judges, she endures the suffering. However, she allows her emotions to flow albeit maintaining her composure. A heroine of sensibility is someone who feels intensely but manages in the end to exert self-control over her emotions, and this is precisely what Roland does here. Her tears

completely differentiate her attitude from the coldness and lack of feelings that Williams had reproached the Jacobins (see 2.6.). Besides, the description of her trial consolidates Williams' dichotomy that constructs the Girondins as virtuous and the Jacobins as villains/monsters. To further strengthen this dichotomy, Roland's last words give further evidence of Williams' defence of the Girondin party as the true believers in the cause of freedom. Right after perishing, she exclaims: "Ah Liberty! how hast thou been sported with!" (1795, vol. I: 201). Her last words go to the cause of liberty she had strongly defended since 1789, showing a strong commitment to it since the very last moment of her life. Walker writes that "with those words, faithfully described by her friends, she became a martyr passing into history and legend as a great heroine" (2001: 412). 'Her friends' here refers to the Girondin supporters, and Williams contributes with her *Letters Containing a Sketch* to consolidate the image of Roland as the heroine of the French Revolution.

Roland's attitude towards death enhances her virtuousness and further elevates her to the status of a martyr: "her memory is embalmed in the minds of the wise and the good, as one of the glorious martyrs who have sealed with their blood the liberties of her country" (1795, vol. I: 199). Williams did not witness Roland's execution because she was imprisoned at the time. Nonetheless, Williams describes an anecdote that took place that day to further prove the strength of mind of her friend. During the Terror, the prisoners were sent to the guillotine in groups. In this situation, being the first one to be executed was considered a privilege, since they could spare themselves of seeing the others die while waiting their turn. On the 8th of November 1793, that privilege was granted to Roland for being a woman. However, observing the fear and constraint demonstrated by one of the prisoners, Roland yields her privilege to him. This contradicts the stereotype of the time, that considered that due to women's weaker nervous system,

they were more prone to be impressionable. At the same time, this meant that they were less capable than men to control their impulses, as explained in section 1.3.1. However, in this anecdote it is Roland and not the condemned man in this anecdote who shows control and courage. Williams goes to the extent to explicitly claim that, in front of the guillotine, women show more courage than men:

> Among the victims of the tyrants, the women had been peculiarly distinguished for their admirable firmness in death. Perhaps this arose from the superior sensibility which belongs to the female mind, and which made it feel that it was less terrible to die, than to survive the objects of its tenderness. (1795, vol. I: 213)

Sensibility, associated mainly to women and weakness, is in this except the source of courage and strength, traditionally male qualities.

According to Janes and Hoen, "it is important to understand the work of martyrdom as being a collective effort" (2014: 4). Madame Roland herself inscribes her death within the common sacrifice of the Gironde: "You think me worthy, then, of sharing the fate of those great men you have assassinated. I will endeavour to go to the scaffold with the courage they have displayed" (1795, vol. I: 199). Williams only reproduced the words uttered by Roland, without analysing the implications of Roland's statement. Even though she is a woman, and hence she is being denied public participation in politics, she is tried and executed as one of them. On the one hand, this brings attention to the injustice that women face when denied political rights, as claimed by Olympe de Gouges in *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791) (see 1.3.2.). On the other hand, it demonstrates that even though denied a place as a deputy in the Convention, women negotiated the public sphere and managed to exert influence in political matters, even if they claimed that they only participated in politics by showing support and commitment to a cause. In her defence, published as Appendix III in the first volume *Letters Containing a Sketch*, Roland claims to have never overstepped the boundaries of

women's property: "I have never overpassed the limits prescribed me by my sex" (1795, vol. I: 283). In contrast, in her *Memoirs*, published in 1795, despite all the claims for female property Madame Roland describes having written official letters which were signed by her husband, and in this manner, she exerted influence over political affairs (Thomas, 1989: 78).

Roland was executed on the 8th of November 1793, which coincides with the time Williams was imprisoned. For that reason, she cannot offer a witness account of her execution. However, Williams is able to paint a first-hand picture of Roland's incarceration. Roland was arrested in June, while Williams was not incarcerated until October. Madame Roland was arrested on June 1st right after the Insurrection of the 31st of May and taken to the Abbaye prison. After complaining to the authorities of the irregularities surrounding her arrest and imprisonment, she was released to be detained on the same day, this time following all the standard procedures (Thomas, 1989: 76). She was then taken to Sainte Pélagie on the 25th of June, where Williams paid a visit: "I visited her in the prison of St. Pélagie, where her soul, superior to circumstances, retained its accustomed serenity [...] and I found her reading Plutarch" (1795: 196). The fact that Roland is reading Plutarch is by no means a mere coincidence. First of all, as explained by Mortimer N.S. Sellers, the eighteenth-century republican tradition looked at the Romans as the models to follow: "American and French republicans thought of themselves as part of a 2,000-year-old tradition originating in Rome" (2004: 248). Although Plutarch wrote his most famous work, *Plutarch's Lives*, after the fall of the Roman republic, his work collects the biographies of illustrious Greeks and Romans, and many of them belong to the republican period. For instance, it includes the biographies of Poplicola, involved in the overthrow of the monarchy, or Cicero, who defended the republican model when it started to lose power. The aim of Plutarch's book was to present

heroic lives as models for virtue that the readership should follow. Finding Roland reading Plutarch, inscribes her in the tradition of republicanism and, at the same time, the stoic attitudes displayed in *Lives*. Plutarch was also associated by Rousseau to the republican tradition. In the *Confessions*, Rousseau found in Plutarch the origin for his political ideas: "Plutarch, in particular, became my favourite author [...] These interesting books, and the conversations they occasioned between my father and me, shaped that free and republican spirit" (2000 [1782]: 8-9). In her *Memoirs*, originally published in 1795, Roland makes a similar statement: "Plutarch seemed to be exactly the food that suited my mind. [...] From that period, I may date the impressions and ideas which rendered me a republican, though I did not dream at the time that I should ever become the citizens of a republic" (1825 [1803]: 64). Rousseau and Roland here had their political ideas developed at an early age in an almost spontaneous manner. This is consistent with the eighteenth-century tradition that considered children learnt through 'impressions' that would later on form their character. Roland shows in her *Memoirs* that her political beliefs were republican even before the revolution had not yet started, contradicting the accusations of having plotted against the Revolution. Williams follows and reinforces this idea in her description of Roland's imprisonment, and wants to demonstrate that Roland is a life-long republican and that she has been unfairly accused.

Williams explains in her *Letters Containing a Sketch* that her involvement with the imprisoned Madame Roland did not end with her visit to Sainte Pélagie. She explains that Roland confided her with some documents that would exonerate her, if not before the Revolutionary Tribunal, at least before the public opinion:

> I must add, that some papers in her justification, which she sent me from her prison, perhaps with a view that some happier period, when the voice of the innocent may be heard, I should make them public, I was compelled to destroy, the night on which I was myself arrested, since, had they been found in my possession, they would inevitably have involved me in her fate (1795, vol. I: 198).

This excerpt shows the extent to which Williams was willing to risk her own safety in order to participate in the resistance of the Girondins. Her attitude is also consistent with what has been discussed in 3.2., when Williams brings attention to the fact that if her meetings with Sillery and Lasource were discovered, this would have had fatal repercussions for her and her family. At the same time, Williams hints at the fact that very valuable political documents of the time were circulating in her possession. In this sense, her friendship with Madame Roland puts Williams in the midst of political affairs. When she started to fear that she was going to be persecuted or imprisoned herself, Williams explains how she tried to hand down Madame Roland's documents to others, but they refused to do so in order to save their lives:

> I employed every means in my power to preserve those precious memorials, in vain; for I could find no person who would venture to keep them amidst the terrors of domiciliary visits, and the certainty, if they were found, of being put to death as an accomplice of the writer. (1795, vol. I: 198-199)

Williams presents herself here as an accomplice to Madame Roland. By telling this anecdote, Williams shows, on the one hand, that she agrees with Roland's political creed but, most importantly, she demonstrates that she has not only witnessed the events, but she has participated, acted and been involved in the Revolution together with the major actors of the French political scene. Right before and during her imprisonment, Roland together with the Girondin party had been attacked in pamphlets and speeches, which made Madame Roland a well-known figure in France. Less than a decade after the publication of Roland's *Memoirs*, British author Mary Hays presents Roland as "the heroine of the French Revolution" (1807 [1803]: 307) and vindicates the role that Roland played during the Revolution since *Female Biography* is the first compilation about women that includes Roland (Walker, 2011: 157). Hays shared political opinions with dissenting philosophers, mainly Wollstonecraft and Godwin, with whom she closely worked with as well as sharing her friendship. According to Andre McInnes,

Wollstonecraft's influence on Hays' Female Biography is noticeable in her account of Roland (2011: 276). Hays praises Roland for her ability to manage her intellectual education together at the same time as she copes with her duties in the household, which would go in line with both Hays' and Wollstonecraft's agenda for female education. In McInnes' words Hays implicitly agrees "with Madame Roland, and Wollstonecraft herself, that women's education must be improved not only in order for women to accomplish their domestic function, but in order to fully develop their potential in private and public life" (2011: 282). For Williams' part, by telling this anecdote, Williams shows on the one hand, that she agrees with Roland's political creed but, most importantly, she demonstrates that she has not only witnessed the events, but she has participated, acted and been involved in the Revolution together with the major actors of the French political scene.

3.4. Suspect, Prisoner and Fugitive

After her stay at the Luxembourg, Williams is taken to a different Parisian prison, together with her family and other British women. They were taken to The Anglaises, which had previously been a convent for English Benedictine nuns, hence its name. The nuns had been imprisoned within their own convent, so they constituted a great part of the prison population. Williams' lodgings here were less comfortable, but again, it is the prison community what makes the imprisonment tolerable: "One circumstance tended to make our situation tolerable, which was that true spirit of fraternity that prevailed in our community, consisting of about forty female prisoners besides the nuns" (1795, vol. I: 185). As explained on 3.2., the community inside prison represents the true values of the French Revolution, in this case fraternity. I agree with Tonya J. Moutray when she writes that "valorizing their Enlightened ethos and collective endeavours in the community,

Williams argues that these English Catholic women, although resistant to the Revolution, embody the very principles of the New Republic" (2016: 91). During her previous volumes of letters on the French Revolution, Williams had been very critical with the Catholic Church, that she saw as a symbol of the old regime in France. Using the rhetoric of the enlightenment, Williams had written that Catholicism was "a sad stumbling-block to reason" (1790: 113). However, by 1795 her perspective was completely subverted, since, in Williams' eye, it is the Jacobins who act arbitrarily by imprisoning the nuns.

After spending two months with the nuns and the community of the Anglaises, in November 1793, Williams was finally released from prison thanks to a French connection. In *Letters*, Williams omits most of the details of her liberation and she keeps the identity of her connection unknown. Nevertheless, in *Souvenirs*, written in 1827 and revisiting her past experiences, the reader learns the name of her liberator, Jean Derby, president of the National Convention between March and April 1793. In *Souvenirs*, Williams wants to give Derby the recognition he deserves for putting himself at risk in order to obtain Williams' and her family's freedom: "Jean Debry was an ardent revolutionary, yet he did not associate himself with the Jacobins. In this position, responding for foreigners was a dangerous service to return, especially for the English" (1827: 74).[18] Williams understands that revealing Debry's involvement in her release could potentially put him in danger. For that matter, she provides a less thorough description of the events in *Letters*:

> He [...] saw a long procession of coaches pass through the streets filled with English prisoners, whom, just torn from their families and their homes, were weeping bitterly. Deeply affected by this spectacle, he flew to Paris with the resolution of obtaining our liberty, or of sharing our prison. (1795, vol. I: 204)

[18] My translation of "Jean Debry était un ardent révolutionnaire, et cependant il ne frayait pas avec les jacobins. Dans cette position, c'était un dangereux service à rendre que de répondre pour des étrangers, et surtout pour des Anglais".

In *Letters Written in France*, sensibility works as a call for Williams to support the Revolution, as explained in 2.1. In the lines quoted above, sensibility awakens in his friend the strength to involve himself in the release of Williams and her family. However, her release from prison does not put an end to Williams' troubles. The second volume of *Letters Containing A Sketch of the Politics in France* opens with Williams' return from prison "immediately after our release from prison we quitted our apartments in the centre of the town, and tried to shelter ourselves from observation in an habitation situated in the most remote part of the fauxbourg Germain" (1795, Vol. II: 2). Williams renounces the active social life she held in Paris among the supporters of the Revolution, in order to protect herself. This reinforces the ideas developed in 3.2. and 3.3., when Williams shows that her social connections put her under the radar of the authorities.

While in the first volume she had been persecuted by the law of suspects, she now falls victim to the law of the 26th of Germinal, that prescribed all nobles and foreigners to leave the city of Paris. As a result, Williams is sentenced to wandering the Paris provinces. However, Williams situation is swiftly resolved: "Two benevolent commissaries of the revolutionary committee [...] enabled us to return to Paris, and thus snatched us from the class of the suspected and the proscribed" (1795, Vol. II: 11). Similarly to her release from prison, sensibility again awakens the commissaries' sense of justice that allows Williams to be exempted from leaving Paris: "To their humanity we probably owe them; and I shall ever recollect with gratitude that noble courage which led them amidst the cruel impulse of revolutionary government [...] to pause and succour the unfortunate" (1795, Vol. II: 11). In Williams' eyes, these commissaries go against the revolutionary tribunal to defend a fair cause. Sensibility is aligned with the principles of the early French Revolution, based on justice and the common good.

3.5. “The Polluted Festival Instituted by a Tyrant”: Festival of the Supreme Being

Williams was finally freed from political persecution and this allows her to stay in Paris and witness the events that happened in the French capital during 1793 and 1794. As explained in 2.1., when Williams arrived in Paris, the very first event she observed was the Fête de la Féderation, which she received with enthusiasm and praise for its display of Revolutionary values. Four years later, during the Reign of Terror, Williams witnesses the Fête de l’Être Suprême, or Festival of the Supreme Being. In contrast with her description of The Federation, she receives this new festivity in a negative light, describing it as “the polluted festival instituted by a tyrant” (1975, vol. II: 86). This time, the celebration did not commemorate a revolutionary landmark, but the implementation of the new state religion that was supposed to unify the beliefs of the French. During the Revolution, the political power had aimed at limiting the privileges held by the Catholic church. In November 1793, a state religion was established, named the Cult of Reason, replaced the following year by the Cult of the Supreme Being. The Cult of Reason rejected that religious truths were obtained through revelation, as in Catholicism, and considered that creeds needed to derive from rational thinking. On the 10th of November 1793, a celebration of the cult of reason took place in Notre Dame, in which religious symbols were burned. As a result, the Cult of the Supreme Being became to be interpreted as a synonym for atheism. Robespierre, who considered atheism as a disruptor of the social order, established the Cult of the Supreme Being on the 7th of May 1794, six months after the celebration of Reason. This new revolutionary religion recognized the existence of a god and creation, and rejected all forms of atheism. According to the revolutionary agenda, the new religion needed a festival to consolidate the latest faith. Nira Kaplan explains that “Festivals [...] with their symbols, parades and public participation, were particularly important in encouraging the correct social behaviour for

republican citizens" (2003: 245). The differences between the two cults became especially evident by the symbolism of the festival in which an allegory of atheism was burned.

The Festival of the Supreme Being was designed by painter Jacques-Louis David, who choreographed the representation. This was the first thing that Williams criticizes regarding the celebration since she considered spontaneity as a symbol of transparency inspired by the theory of moral sentiments (see 2.1.). The restrained atmosphere in the Festival of 1794 is the main difference that she finds with the Federation, which she had immensely enjoyed:

> Ah, what was then become of those civic festivals which had hailed the first glories of the revolution! [...] What was become of those moments when no emotions were preordained, no feelings measured out, no acclamations decreed; but when every bosom beat high with admiration, when every heart throbbed with enthusiastic transport, when every eye melted into tears, and the vault of heaven resounded the bursts of unpremeditated applause! (1795, vol II.: 87).

Williams portrays the festivals of the early days of the revolution as spaces in which emotions were given free reign. Besides, in the Federation, people's feelings are in unison, not because they are directed, but because the festival itself inspires the same emotions among the spectators and participants. In 1790, the fact that people experienced the same emotions brought them together in the common cause of the Revolution. In Williams' account, the Festival of the Supreme Being acquires monotonous tones and its attendees behave as unenthusiastic automats. However, other accounts of the time, motivated by other political agendas present a different description of the celebration. Joachim Vilate, who had been a member of both the Revolutionary tribunal and the Committee of Public Safety, describes the festival in his *Causes Secrètes de la Révolution du 9 au 10 Thermidor* (1794). Even though the book was written by Vilate to disassociate himself with Robespierre, Vilate describes a happy atmosphere at the Festival: "hope and

happiness shone on every face: women enhanced their embellishment with the most beautiful fineries" (1794: 32).[19] As in 2.1., when a royalist understanding of the festival is at odds with Williams rendering, Vilate offers a different interpretation. For that reason, in her passage on the Festival of the Supreme Being, Williams sides with an anti-Jacobin, and more particularly, anti-Robespierre construction of the event.

Vilate's account of the festivity omits one of the details that shocks Williams the most. When the celebrations in honour of the Supreme Being are taking place, the guillotine is noticeable in the background:

> From this profusion of gay objects, which in happier moments would have excited delightful sensations, the drooping soul now turned distasteful. The scene of carnage seemed mingled with these lavish sweets; the glowing festoons appear tinged with blood; and in the background of this festive scenery the guillotine arose before the disturbed imagination. (1795, vol. II: 89)

In contrast with Vilate, Williams offers an appalling interpretation of the scene. In her view, it is impossible to distinguish between the religious festivity promoted by Robespierre and the transgressions of his government. The political point of view filters the scene in a way that recalls her first visit to France. In *Letters Written in France*, Williams writes after her trip to Versailles: "We are just returned from Versailles, where I could not help fancying I saw in the back ground of that magnificent abode of a despot, the gloomy dungeons of the Bastille" (1790: 83). In this case, even though the Bastille was not actually visible from Versailles, it is the first thing that comes to Williams' mind. As in the example of the Festival, in her visit to Versailles, Williams makes her own political position evident when describing the scene. Regardless of Versailles being a magnificent building, she cannot help thinking about it as a symbol of oppression, since while the king lives comfortably in Versailles, the victims of the absolutist monarchy are

[19] My translation of "L'espérance et la gaieté rayonnaient sur tous les visages: les femmes ajoutoient à l'embellissement par les parures les plus élégantes".

deprived of liberty in prison, much like her friend Monsieur Du Fossé (see 2.4.). Now, once the monarchy has been overthrown, the authorities of the Reign of Terror represent in Williams' account the excesses of an oppressive government. Williams presents them as lacking humanity and compassion, since while they celebrate the religious festivity, martyrs have perished at the guillotine, such as her friends Lasource, Sillery, and Roland (see 3.2. and 3.5).

In order to further prove that the Festival of the Supreme Being had deviated from the original spirit of the early festivals, Williams brings attention to Robespierre's actions and attitudes that day. In her representation of the Jacobin politician, Williams goes beyond the negative representations that show him as a ruthless human being devoid of emotions, as explained in 2.6., and adds biblical elements to further reinforce the depiction of Robespierre as a tyrant and agent of evil:

> Upon a tribune in the centre of the theatre, Robespierre as president of the convention appeared; and having for a few hours disencumbered the square of the revolution of the guillotine, this high-priest of Molock, within view of that very spot where his daily sacrifice of human victims was offered up, covered with their blood, invoked the Parent of universal nature, talked of the charms of virtue, and breathed the hope of immortality. (1795, vol. II: 90).

Williams highlights that the festivity is only temporary, a short hiatus among the daily executions. The scene depicted here acquires gory tones and Robespierre appears as the "high-priest of Molock". Molock, or Moloch, is the Canaanite god of human sacrifices mentioned in the Bible. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), Moloch is one of the fallen angels, who constantly engages in violence and declares war to the Gods. Metaphorically, Williams presents Robespierre as an evil force who attacks the 'true' values of the French Revolution. While the victims sacrificed for Moloch were thrown into the fire, Robespierre's sacrifices occur in the guillotine. This gruesome image appears in stark contrast with Robespierre words, that underscore virtue and universal nature. With this,

Williams depicts Robespierre as a hypocrite, who momentarily turns a blind eye to scenes of violence he himself has ordained, to present himself to the nation as concerned with virtue. In his analysis of Robespierre's understanding of virtue, Jonathan Smyth writes the following:

> Robespierre had a very singular and personal sense of rightness of action, both public and private, and this led him to an almost circular concept of morality. For him, an action could be classified as 'good' for no other reason than that it arose from 'good' principles, and if it was then performed by a 'virtuous' man the circle was complete. If these criteria were fulfilled, any action, however stark, however apparently unfeeling, however heedless of any claims of friendship or of the solidarity owed to close associates must, by definition, be in and of itself 'virtuous', and therefore something from which only good results could flow. (2016: 11)

Robespierre moral principles derive, like Williams', from the eighteenth-century trend of sensibility, see 1.3. However, Williams and Robespierre understand virtuous actions in an entirely different manner. For Williams, the feelings of friendship, family ties and solidarity are inseparable from any good deed. For instance, in 3.4., Debry, when he obtains Williams' freedom is moved by a strong sense of solidarity. In the case of the Du Fossé family, explained in 2.4., individual happiness is as important as the common good. Williams vindicates this idea all throughout her literary career, from *Letters Written in France* with the story of the Du Fossés, to *Souvenirs*. In 1827, reconsidering her experiences in France as a whole, Williams writes that, from a historical point of view, "without a doubt, the duration and the fate of an individual life is nothing. It is too insignificant an atom within the history of nations, but this atom is something of concern for the individual" (1827:3).[20] In this passage, Williams detaches herself from an understanding of history that disregards each individual life, because for her, reaching the common good is only a worthy endeavour if it guarantees that it will have a positive impact at an individual level.

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[20] My translation of "Sans doute la période et le sort d'une vie individuelle n'est rien. C'est un atome tout-à-fait insignifiant dans l'histoire des nations, mais cet atome est bien quelque chose pour l'individu".

The fact that Robespierre occupies the centre space of the main celebration in Paris is used by Williams to further delve into Robespierre's hypocrisy. Between pages 90 and 91, Williams describes how the president of the Convention descends the tribune in order to set fire to the image of atheism. Thus, he works as the leader of the ceremony, or priest. This is surprising since, on the one hand, the revolutionary government had attacked priests as symbols of the old regime. On the other hand, in his speech delivered on the 7th of May 1794, that proclaimed the new religion, Robespierre had detached the Cult of the Supreme Being from Catholicism and had claimed that there would be no priests involved (Smyth, 2016: 22). Williams elaborates on her criticism of Robespierre when she writes that: "Robespierre [...] caused a line of separation to be made between himself and the other deputies of the convention, and marched at some distance before them, like a captain at the head of his band" (1795, vol. II: 92). According to Williams' rendering, Robespierre himself establishes a hierarchy during the procession that puts him on a superior level compared to the rest of politicians. Interestingly, in her comment on the Festival of the Federation, she had written that the king was presiding the ceremony together with his family and the members of the convention (1790: 12), showing that there were no hierarchical distinctions among those at the head of the celebration. Consequently, Williams again presents Robespierre as despotic, who has forgotten that in the early days of the Revolution, all politicians occupied the same space.

Williams' initial enthusiasm evolved into a harsh criticism of the revolutionary government after 1793. In *Letters Containing a Sketch*, she goes to the extent of aligning herself with Edmund Burke's words. Williams and Burke were in 1790 on opposing sides of the debate in Britain, as elaborated on 1.1. When describing the festival, Williams quotes a well-known statement from *Reflections on the Revolution in France*: "I thought of that passage in Mr. Burke's book, "In the groves of *their* academy, at the end of every

vista I see the gallows!" Ah Liberty! best friend of mankind, why have sanguinary monsters profaned thy name, and fulfilled this gloomy prediction!" (1795, vol. II: 89-90). In his book on the Revolution, Burke had anticipated that by overthrowing the power of the old institutions, French society was destined to violence and chaos. Williams evokes this prediction and admits that, in a way, Burke had guessed correctly. However, she specifies that those to blame for the increase in violence are "sanguinary monsters" who have "profaned" the cause of liberty. Again and again throughout the volumes of *Letters Containing a Sketch* Williams insists that only a small portion of the revolutionary leaders are responsible for the Reign of Terror, and, having other politicians managed the course of events, Burke's prediction would have never been fulfilled. Williams believed that The Terror was a result of a lack of understanding of the ideals of the French Revolution. By contrast, Burke believed that terror was the revolutions' only possible outcome, and this point of view differentiates the position of the two authors. Nevertheless, the fact that Williams agrees with Burke in the passage quoted above shows Williams' pessimistic view of the revolution during the years 1793 and 1794.

3.6. The Authorities of Terror at the Guillotine

In the first volume of *Letters Containing a Sketch*, Williams had focused on the executions of the Girondins, that she depicted as martyrs of the cause of liberty, as explained on 3.2. and 3.3. The first volume deals mainly with the early days of the Terror, while on the second one, Williams moves to the events of 1794. As already mentioned before, historians date the end of the terror with Robespierre's execution, 28th July. However, in the months prior to Robespierre's downfall, political leaders of the Terror were successively tried and executed. The first leader to be condemned to perish at the guillotine was Jacques-René Hébert. Hébert held a prominent role in the downfall of the

Girondins in 1793, but he disagreed with Robespierre on key events of the Revolution. Hébert was a member of the Cordeliers, or ultra-radicals, and he had been the proponent of the Cult of Reason, substituted by Robespierre's Supreme Being (see 3.5.). Besides, Hébert had accused queen Marie Antoinette of sexual depravity and having had intercourse with her own son. For all these reasons, Williams sees his execution as a matter of justice: "There appeared so much of retribution in the circumstances that attended the death of Hébert and his colleagues, that it seems as if Heaven were visibly stretching forth its arm to punish the guilty" (1795, vol. II: 17). The fact that Williams explicitly expresses that Hébert is guilty, is in stark contrast with the opinions she had displayed concerning the executions of the Girondins, who she had presented as innocent victims.

The greatest difference between Hébert's and the Girondins' execution is the attitude they show when facing death. Williams had presented the leaders of the Terror as conspirators and the Girondins as the true defenders of the Revolution. In the following passage, Williams moves one step forward and, while she praises Girondin courage, she ridicules the radicals as cowards: "The behaviour of Hébert and his associates upon the approach of death was far different from that of the innocent sufferers who had consciences void of reproach" (1795, vol. II: 17). On the following page, Williams describes how Hébert and his associates start to imagine dreadful scenes: "terrific phantoms covered with blood seemed to pursue their steps, and with menacing looks prepare to drag them to the abysses of deeper horror: they fancied they saw the headless trunks of murdered victims encumbering the ground; they heard human groans and shrieks sounding hollow through the vaulted passages; while the knife of the guillotine, like Macbeth's aërial dagger, hung suspended before their affrighted imagination" (1795, vol. II: 18). The comparison with Macbeth further reinforces the fact that Hébert is guilty.

Macbeth, the protagonist that gives name to Shakespeare's famous play, gives prominence to his ambitions of gaining political power over the morals of his actions. However, he cannot escape guilt and lives terrified by the remorse which sometimes takes shape as visions, as in the case of the flying dagger that Williams mentions. The reference to Macbeth implies that, like the Shakespearean protagonist, Hébert and his followers have claimed their way to the political top by renouncing their morals. Besides, Macbeth believes himself to be undefeatable, but he dies beheaded in the end. There is a parallelism in the way both Macbeth and Hébert perish, and Williams suggests that Hébert was so sure of his political position he was not expecting to be accused, tried and executed. The visions that Hébert and his followers experience tell the reader that they are truly guilty since the ghosts of their crimes follow them before death, causing fear and restlessness. Hébert is nevertheless not the only one tortured by their past political actions. Another example is Pierre-Gaspard Chaumette, whose political opinions were in line with Hébert. Even though he was arrested at the same time as Hébert, Chaumette was not executed until the following month. Chaumette was executed together with Gobel, former archbishop of Paris, who renounced his faith and defended anti-clericalism, which brought him close to both Hébert and Chaumette. According to Williams, Gobet is guilty of apostasy and having promoted atheism. For his part, Chaumette is "one of the leaders of the conspiracy of the 31st of May" (1795, vol. II: 37). Not surprisingly then, Williams assesses both Chaumette's and Gobel's facial expressions to find fear and remorse: "Their aspect testified that Death appeared to their perturbed spirits, not in the form he wears to suffering innocence, to whom he comes the messenger of peace, but armed with all his stings, and clad in all his terrors" (1795, vol. II: 37). Williams explicitly defends that while the innocent, as in the example of Roland (3.3.), adopt a calm stance, meaning that they are sure of their innocence.

The case of Hébert is dealt with in the first letter (or chapter) of the second volume. Letter II addresses the executions of other relevant political leaders, particularly Danton, Desmoulins, Fabre d'Eglantine and Philippeaux. Danton was a well-known politician - president of the Convention in 1793- who led the moderate side of the Jacobins, also known as 'the Indulgents'. Fabre d'Eglantine, author and poet apart from politician, had been the right-hand man of Danton during his time as a Minister of Justice in 1792. Apart from a politician, Desmoulins was a noted journalist. In December 1793, Desmoulins started the publication of the newspaper *Le Vieux Cordelier*, which promoted the views of the Indulgents. Philippeux, also an Indulgent, had been sent to the Vendée (see 3) to defend the Republican side. These four politicians were executed together on the same day, 5th of April 1794, only a few days after Hébert who perished on the 24th of March. What differentiates Williams' approach in Letter II from the account of Hébert's execution is that the execution of Danton, Desmoulins and Fabre enables her to further criminalize and attack Robespierre. Meanwhile, with Hébert's case, as previously explained, Williams' aim is to demonstrate that Hébert is a criminal, and the same goes for Chaumette and Gobet.

The stories of Danton and Desmoulins as told by Williams show Robespierre as a cruel figure, devoid of any personal feelings or attachments. First of all, Williams explains the attachments that bring together Robespierre, Danton and Desmoulins at a personal rather than political level. Danton had defended Robespierre in front of the convention from the accusations of being responsible for the September massacres, a situation that could have put an end to Robespierre's political career. In the case of Desmoulins, Robespierre's ruthlessness becomes even more evident, since they had both been very close friends since their school days. In Williams' view, the attachments of friendship were inseparable from politics, as exemplified by the story of the Du Fossés,

see 2.4. Besides, both Danton and Desmoulins have the capacity to feel empathy while Robespierre is always cold and emotionless. For Williams, drawing on the trend of sensibility explained on 2.1., emotions are a symbol of transparency. Thus, Robespierre's lack of emotions renders him a manipulative and calculating person. For instance, Desmoulins shows compassion when he opposes the law of suspects (1795, vol. II: 25), the same law that put Williams in prison. In the case of Danton, he had decided to confront Robespierre about his arrest, but the latter adopts an unyielding demeanour: "Danton, after a long conversation, finding that he was unable to move the implacable Robespierre, who listened to him with a look of insulting malignity, shed some tears, and left the room" (1795, vol. II: 27). Danton's tears disclose his more vulnerable and human side, while Robespierre's lack of them make him unnatural. In the excerpt just quoted, Robespierre appears as completely unaffected by Danton's distress. Robespierre and Saint-Just had warned their revolutionary colleagues of the dangers of pity: "To have pity and spare the life of a convinced aristocrat, of a nonjuring priest, of a counter-Revolutionary peasant, endangered the larger acts of benevolence by which the Revolution had dismantled the Old Regime and restored to the people what they had lost" (Reddy, 2001: 195). While Williams was also determined to achieve the common good, she criticized those like Robespierre aimed at completing the Revolution at the expense of neglecting sympathy.

In her *Letters*, Williams partakes in a narrative of the French Revolution that would become established in the mid-nineteenth century with the chronicles by Michelet, Carlyle or Lamartin. These historians: "considered the private emotions of its subjects as a legitimate part of the historian's concern [...] [and] the revolutionaries were depicted as rounded individuals, with private lives as well as public faces, whose lives, hearts, and minds were as relevant as their formalized ideas" (Linton, 2013: Introduction). Interestingly enough, Williams recognizes Danton's responsibility in two crucial events

of the revolution, the September Massacres and the Insurrection of the 31st of May 1793. However, she focuses on his humane and compassionate side: "Yet will all these crimes upon his head, Danton still possessed some human affections: his mind was still awake to some of the sensibilities of our nature; his temper was frank and social, and humanity in despair leant upon him as a sort of refuge from his worst oppressor" (1795, vol. II: 31). Here, Williams subverts the dichotomy Robespierre/Danton constructed by the rhetoric of the Terror that compared them as "as virtue to vice, incorruptibility to veniality, industriousness to indolence, faith to cynicism" (Furet and Ozouf, 1988: 214). Throughout all the volumes of *Letters Containing a Sketch*, Williams illustrates her disagreement with Jacobin values. The incorruptibility that made Robespierre a virtuous figure, is for Williams a sign that he prioritized his own interests to the common good of the French Nation, and thus, this characteristic makes him monstrous in her account.

As seen in 3.3., not only the politicians who held chairs at the conventions or who led political clubs were sent to execution. The case of Madame Roland shows that those who involved themselves in political affairs on a more private sphere were also susceptible to fall victims of political power. On the Jacobin side, Lucile Desmoulins and Marie Marguerite Françoise Hébert, who climbed to the guillotine together on the 13th of April 1794, share the same fate as their Girondin counterpart Madame Roland. Lucile Desmoulins was a journalist like her husband Camille, while Marie Marguerite Hébert was a former nun who married Jacques René in 1792. The case of Madame Desmoulins serves Williams once again to bring attention to the cruelty of the authorities of the Terror, since she was innocent of the crime she was accused of: "the unfortunate Madame Desmoulins was dragged to the scaffold because a letter was written to her which it was clearly proved had never been sent" (1795, vol. II: 34-35). Madame Desmoulins' accusation shows that the administration of the revolution, in their implacable search of

enemies of the Revolution, become increasingly paranoid, to an extent that it is eventually absurd. The law of suspects and the executions of Girondins, as Williams had depicted them (see 3.1. and 3.2.) were already indicative of the fact that people had been accused on very feeble grounds. The fact that they are now accusing their own colleagues and their families, shows that the political situation has completely gone astray. Besides, Williams continues to reinforce the inhumanity of Lucile's accusers: "For her [Lucile Desmoulins'] fate no eye except those of her barbarous judges refused a tear" (1795, vol. II: 31). Here, the lack of feelings of the judges separates the authorities of the Reign of Terror from the people they rule over. While in the early days of the Revolution Williams had portrayed the political leaders as in unison with the people's feelings, as explained on 2.1., the judges of 1794 are the only ones unmoved by Madame Desmoulins' unjust situation. Williams even calls the judges "assassins in the robes of justice" (1795, vol. II: 34), insinuating that occupying a position of authority does not mean that they are using power in a righteous manner, further reinforcing the depiction of the Jacobins as despots.

Madame Desmoulins also faces death in a courageous manner and again she incites the sympathy of the crowd: "The people, as Madame Desmoulins passed along the streets to execution, could not resist uttering exclamations of pity and admiration" (1795, vol. II: 36). Compared to Jacques-René Hebert's or Chaumette's executions, whose sense of guilt and remorse torment him, Williams' account of Madame Desmoulins demeanour corresponds to someone innocent. This contrast is made explicit when Williams claims that: "Far different from the meek and placid resignation with which Madame Desmoulins made the sacrifice of life in all its bloom and freshness, was the behaviour of Chaumette" (1795, vol. II: 36). Interestingly, Chaumette, Lucile Desmoulins and Marguerite Hébert all attend execution together. However, Madame Hébert's disposition is completely different to that of her husband and Chaumette: "She [Lucile Desmoulins] [...] went with

a placid smile upon her countenance to execution, conversing with her companions in the cart, particularly with the wife of Hebert, who was put to death at the same time, and met her fate with equal firmness" (1795, vol. II: 35). What is striking here, is that these two women's husbands had been political rivals. In fact, Williams considers Desmoulins responsible for Hébert's fall. Strangely enough, their wives stand above the political quarrels and offer support to each other. Instead of exchanging accusations on their respective spouses' death, they "deplored their mutual loss" (1795, vol. II: 36) together. Right before passing away, they embrace each other. As had happened to Williams in prison (see 3.2.), undergoing the same adversities –not only their execution but also the fact that they have very recently widowed– brings them together. As Williams illustrated in her account of the Fête de la Fédération, explained in 2.1., what she admired in politics is the potential to bring people together towards a common goal. However, she condemns the spirit of rivalry that had filtered political life after 1792. Madams Hébert and Desmoulins present a lesson in humanitarianism by giving prominence to familial ties over political alliances.

3.7. "Happy Revolution": The Fall of Robespierre

As Williams had promised with the title, *Letters Containing a Sketch* ends with the arrest and execution of Maximilien Robespierre. The third volume depicts a complete new picture of French society after the downfall of the Incorruptible that sets an optimistic tone again, which resembles the enthusiasm of *Letters Written in France* (1790). Letter I opens as follows:

> My pen, wearied of tracing successive pictures of human crimes and human calamity, pursues his task with reluctance; while my heart springs forward to that fairer epocha which now beams upon the friends of liberty - that epocha when the French republic has cast aside their dismal shroud, stained with the blood of the patriot, and bathed with tears of the mourner; and presents the blessed images of justice and humanity healing the deep wounds of their afflicted bosom: when the laws of mercy are but the echo of the public

> opinion, of that loud cry for the triumph of innocence, of that horror of tyranny which hangs upon every lip, and thrills at every heart. The generous affections, the tender sympathies so long repressed by the congealing stupefaction of terror, burst forth with uncontrollable energy; and the enthusiasm of humanity has taken place of the gloomy terror of despair, as suddenly as, when the massy ice dissolves in the regions of the north, summer awakens her clear rills, her fresh foliage and her luxuriant flowers. Not to have suffered persecution during the tyranny of Robespierre, is now to be disgraced; and it is expected of all those who have escaped that they should assign some good reason, or offer some satisfactory apology for their suspicious exemption from imprisonment (1795, vol. III: 1.2).

In this passage, Williams shows France as healing after Robespierre's fall. The end of the Terror is more than a victory for the opposing party, but for the nation as a whole since it is the French Republic who casts away the shroud. Besides, the victims being called 'patriots' without any mention of political labels, renders them as victims for their country. The fact that Williams mentions the public opinion and finds that "every lip" raises their voice against Robespierre, further reinforces the idea that all citizens of France rejoice for the fall of the last government. Throughout not only *Letters Containing a Sketch*, but also in *Letters From France* (1793), Williams had criticized Robespierre and his associates for their lack of empathy, as explained on sections such as 2.6. or 3.6. As a result, generosity and sympathy appear to be restored, which were the emotions that Williams considered necessary to move people together towards a common future. It makes sense then that Williams uses the metaphor of ice to represent the lack of sensibility that became illustrative of the period, in her view. The fall of Robespierre is represented in the passage as the arrival of summer after a long cold winter in which feelings were suppressed as indicated by the words "congealing stupefaction". The arrival of the summer brings back prosperity to Paris, as indicated by the metaphors that allude to abundance, "luxuriant flowers", "fresh foliage". Finally, Williams explains how the victims of the oppression during the Terror, including Williams herself, wear their misfortune as a badge of honour. Their persecution shows that they were brave enough

to position themselves against the trend of ideas defended by the authorities of the terror, and this leaves them clear of any suspicion of having supported their way of ruling.

Williams, however, is suspicious of this exaltation of feeling. Writing at the turn of the eighteenth century, when the trend of sensibility started to be questioned, as explained in 1.3., Williams nevertheless distrusts the outbursts of feeling in the summer of 1794:

> Happy, thrice happy is he who has been immured in a dungeon, and has been unfortunate beyond the common lot! To him the social circle listens with attention, for him the tender beauty wakes her softest smile -- for him await all private and public honors; he might lay claim to the possession of the highest offices of the state, and may aspire in proportion as he has suffered (1795, vol. III: 3).

During the aftermath of the terror, the narrative that exalts the victims as martyrs has favoured the appearance of a myth in which misfortunes are exalted, a narrative in which Williams herself has taken part. Historian of the French Revolution Colin Jones writes that: "Greater press freedom after 9 Thermidor and the release of many prisoners soon generated freewheeling horror stories about the atrocities committed on Revolutionary *journées* and about the prisons of the Terror" (2014: 22).[21] As explained in this excerpt by Williams, persecution during the terror opens the door to social respectability and political prestige. Victimization, thus, becomes a way of obtaining political advantages. Williams believed that empathic feelings had to be directed towards the common good, whereas in the quotation they are used to obtain personal gains. Nevertheless, despite the negative consequences that this spirit of sensibility may result in, they are surpassed by its benefits: "But after all the cruelties that have passed, how soothing is the moment when pity becomes the fashion, and when tyranny is so execrated that to have been its victim is glory! The tears of compassion now flow even for those objects whom once to

[21] The 9th of Thermidor in the Republican Calendar corresponds to the 27th of July in the Gregorian calendar.

commiserate was death" (1795, vol. III: 4). For Williams, French people need to express their feelings openly in order to heal after what she sees as the traumatizing experience of the Terror. Showing compassion for the victims is useful inasmuch as it discloses the unfair oppression that was inflicted upon them.

Regardless of the truthfulness of the emotions and victimization, there is no question that the 27th and 28th of July 1794 changed the course of the Revolution. Colin Jones puts this date as a landmark of the French Revolution, together with the 14th of July 1789, the 10th of August 1792, which marked the end of monarchical power, and the day that Napoleon seized power, the 9th of November 1799 (2014: 689). Williams dedicates the last letter of the third volume of *Letters Containing a Sketch* entirely to the events that took place during the 26th, 27th and 28th of July 1794. In order to discredit Robespierre's political action and to justify his execution, Williams again presents him as a dictator, which makes him an enemy of democracy and freedom, which were the ideals for which the French Revolution initially stood up for. In order to highlight his hypocrisy, Williams puts the focus on his tyrannical practices, his suspicious way of making politics and his cowardice. All these three characteristics in Williams' portrayal of Robespierre's behaviour on the last days of his life, make him the complete opposite of the strong republican virtues that he had defended. For that reason, she refers to his arrest and execution as a "happy revolution" (1795, vol. III: 177), because once again France abolished a despotic government, as they did in 1789.

In 1793, Williams had described Robespierre and the Jacobins as a "band of conspirators" (1793: 7), a statement that was analysed in 2.6., suggesting that they were conspiring in order to obtain political power. Interestingly, after being the leaders of the Republic, they continue to plot and deceive, betraying the Republic ideal of transparency. This way of making politics would equate Robespierre to court politics, where royal

favours, arbitrariness and secret schemes marked the political atmosphere. The day before Robespierre was taken into custody, he had given a speech at the National Convention implying that he was about to convict several deputies on charges of counter-revolution, but he refused to give their names. Fearing for their safety, those members of the Convention that took the accusations personally met that night to stop Robespierre the following day. In Williams' eyes, the Jacobins' true intentions were to dissolve the Convention and seize absolute power, as one of Robespierre's collaborators advanced at the Jacobin Club: "The president of the revolutionary tribunal was the next commentator on Robespierre's speech, and pronounced without any reserve, that the Convention should be purified also, which implied the entire dissolution of the representative body" (1795, vol. III: 160). The president of the tribunal at the time was René-François Dumas, an open Robespierrist. However, according to Williams, dismantling the Convention was not the only conspiracy that Robespierre and his followers were working on. In a modus operandi that resembles the September Massacres of 1792, Williams explains that the same day that Robespierre's mysterious speech was being pronounced, very strange activities were taking place in the Parisian prisons. In her account, the prison authorities had ordained large excavations on the courtyards of Parisian prisons, implying that there were going to be mass killings. This would mean that Robespierre and his associates from the Jacobin Club had the plan to set up a dictatorship. They were going to obtain absolute power by seizing political institutions and escalating their politics of terror.

According to Williams, Robespierre had already been controlling most of the political agencies, even when he had not been appointed as the visible leader: "[Robespierre's] secession from the committees had not rendered him less the master of their operations" (1795, vol. III: 164). It was commonplace at the time that Robespierre was behind the Revolutionary Tribunal deciding who was sent to the guillotine. Fouquier-

Tinville, public prosecutor of the Convention during the Reign of Terror, denies that Robespierre was behind his actions. However, he describes that Robespierre was working closely with the Revolutionary Tribunal:

> I have never supplied to Robespierre the list of people that had to be judged every day. It [the list] cannot have been [supplied] by any other than the heinous Dumas who went to his [Robespierre's] house everyday, and who was known to be one of the cooperators of all his declamations (1911: 202).[22]

Even though Fouquier-Tinville denies all charges to be saved from being condemned as one of Robespierre's accomplices, the fact that he points at others as being collaborating with Robespierre shows that it was believed at the time that Robespierre was ruling behind the scenes. Williams uses the term dictatorship only once to refer to the Committee of Public Safety (1795, vol. III: 52). But when she refers to Robespierre's abuses of power, she tends to use vocabulary that recalls the time of the absolute monarchy, which is not surprising given the political climate of the time. Williams describes Robespierre as "the absolute monarch of the Jacobins" (1795, vol. III: 159). For Williams, regardless of Robespierre having declared a war on counterrevolutionaries, his abuse of power was a return to the injustices of the *ancien régime*.

To complete her criticism of Robespierre, and to further discredit him, Williams caricatures and ridicules him as a coward. Robespierre, from the tribune, had always exhibited a strong character and firmness of mind. However, Williams' version of the events would expose Robespierre's true personality and demonstrate that his attitude was an imposture. Besides, the Republican values entailed a life-long commitment to the political cause and, as a result, true defenders of the Revolution accepted death in the guillotine with composure and integrity, see 3.2. and 3.3. Williams narrates the last hours

[22] My translation of "Je n'ai point fourni de liste à Robespierre des personnes qui dévoient être mis en judgement chaque jour [...] elle n'a put l'être que par le scélérat Dumas qui se rendoit tous les jours chez lui, et qui étoit même un des coopérateurs connu de toutes ses déclamations".

of Robespierre as follows: "Robespierre was found in an apartment of the hotel, and was sternly reminded by a gendarme that a supreme being really existed. Robespierre held a knife in his hand, but had no courage to use it; the gendarme fired at him with a pistol, and broke his jaw bone" (1795, vol. III: 172-173). Williams alludes to the Supreme Being[23] to imply that Robespierre had lost his own ideals, so he cannot commit to cause forever. Besides, it further emphasizes Robespierre's hypocrisy, imposing a belief on the French nation to later on not follow it himself. Finally, he does not have the courage to commit suicide, unlike the Girondin Valazé, as described on 3.2. There were different accounts of the event circulating at the time. According to Marie-Helene Huet, the only source of Williams' version of the account were the words of the gendarme himself, named Merda, who spread the rumour in Paris (1997: 198). Merda later published his *Précis historique des événements qui se sont passés dans las soirée du 9 Thermidor* (1825), perpetuating his version. Williams' *Letters Containing a Sketch*, written before Merda's publication, echo the rumour. The official version, which is found in the reports from the Committee of Public Safety, tell that Robespierre attempted at shooting himself and ending his life but he missed. French historian Albert Mathiez wrote that: "the theory of suicide has all contemporaneous testimony in its favour [...] The story of the shot fired by Merda (or Méda) the gendarme is very dubious" (1927:217). Historians today such as Collins Jones (2014: 91) opt for Mathiez's interpretation.

After the fall of Robespierre, and with it the end of the Terror, Williams regains hope in the cause of the French Revolution that she had lost during 1792, 1793 and 1794:

> It is some relief, while I am struggling through the gloomy history of these horrors, that I see again the dawn of that glorious light which will chase them away. The last stroke has been given to that vile and degrading system, which ignoble usurpers had framed; we may now approach the altar of Liberty with confidence and hope; the hideous spectres that haunted it have fled for ever (1795, vol. II: 214).

[23] The Cult of the Supreme Being is explained on 3.5.

Williams sees the events of the Terror as a bump on the road that had momentarily deviated the Revolution from its true course. Besides, she sees that having experienced the worst of the Revolution, the revolutionaries will not allow for the situation to happen again. However, Williams is aware of the fact that the Revolution's recent history will tarnish the reputation of the French Revolution for good:

> These horrors must stain the page of the revolution for ever. The bloody characters must remain indelible on the wall, a dreadful but instructive lesson to future ages, and to those countries which are destined to labour through revolutions, and who will learn, while they contemplate this terrific chart, how to avoid the rocks on which Liberty has been nearly wrecked.
>
> Dreadful indeed has been the crisis we have passed! Yet it is some consolation, amidst this mighty mass of evil, that France is at length beginning to learn wisdom from the things she has suffered. (1795, vol. II: 214)

In the end, the cause of the Revolution must learn the lesson from history. Williams sees the Revolution as a universal cause, as she had defended in *Letters Written in France*, as explained in 2.1. For that reason, the 'crisis', as Williams refers to the Terror here, offers a teaching not only to France but to all those countries that will in the future fight against an oppressive system.

3.8. Conclusions for This Chapter

This chapter has focused its analysis on *Letters Containing A Sketch of the Politics in France, from the Thirty-First of May 1793, till the Twenty-Eight of July, 1794*, published in 1795. This second series of *Letters* by Williams focuses on the period labelled by historians as the Reign of Terror, marked by an authoritarian turn in the French authorities, in which Robespierre became the most visible figure. Williams tells her imprisonment under the law of suspects in Luxembourg and later on in The Anglaises where she gains access to the repressed community of the Girondins, and she puts a special emphasis in her connection with Madame Roland. She defends throughout the

volume her criticism of the Jacobin rule since they exert power through fear and thus, she celebrates the downfall of Robespierre. After my analysis, I conclude that in her work Williams:

- The literature of sensibility put an emphasis on the role of the victim in order to move the readership and achieve an aesthetic impact. Williams goes beyond the aesthetic dimension of sensibility to explore its potential as a calling for political action. She uses the example of her release from prison, as she is liberated by Coquerel, who is moved to action after having observed the British prisoners suffering on their way to jail. Unlike Charlotte Smith in *The Emigrants* where she defends that the knowledge of suffering during the Revolution enables her to connect with the natural environment, Williams' sensibility is focused on the urban context and sees sensibility as a force to further connect members of the same political cause. As explained by Watson, "in post-Terror England, it becomes harder to authorize the voice of individual feeling as a form of legitimate rational protest" (1994: 39). However, in her narrative of the Terror, Williams presents the story of the victims as the driving force behind her and others' –such as Debry– involvement in the political scene. Williams sees herself as a victim of the terror, but at the same time, this status as victim informs her self-awareness of being a participant in the French political scene.
- In order to assert authority and to gain accuracy and insight in her analysis of the events, Williams presents herself not only as a spectator but as a participant of the events. She participates in the events through writing, either by putting herself at risk when openly denouncing the Jacobin Government or by keeping relevant documents that contain valuable political information, as in the case of Madame's Roland papers. For that matter, I consider that Williams adopts the role of a

political activist in her writing. As we have seen, this approach adds a nuance to how these episodes from the French revolution are narrated by British authors who were witnesses to the Revolution, as Williams relies not only on her political sympathies with the Girondins but her involvement in the Girondin resistance.

- Following the tradition of sensibility, sharing common misfortunes with other political prisoners involved her in a community of prisoners. As explained by Culley "in the autobiographical accounts of Williams and Elliott the prison is imagined as a temporary community" (2014: 152). However, Elliott does not use her experience in Jail to defend the political ideas of a revolutionary party as Williams does when she highlights the collective effort of the Girondin when resisting Jacobin rule. For that matter, Williams does not see herself as an outsider within the Revolution but a participant, despite her nationality. Williams' community is shaped not only by a common experience behind bars, but by the adherence to a political creed.

In the next chapter, I will explore Williams' account of her trip to Switzerland, *A Tour in Switzerland* (1798) in which she defends the need for the Revolutionary troops to continue to spread the cause of liberty in Europe. I will also offer an analysis of *Letters Containing a Sketch* (1801), where she analyses if the Revolution has improved the well-being of the French at an individual level, demonstrating that the impact of the Revolution has been positive. Her factual and sensitive approach to the events and their purport as a key historical moment leads her to adopt a feminist stance to challenge women's situation in France and denounce the fact that women are excluded from politics.

Chapter 4

"I already behold everything around us with new optics": The Beginning of the Napoleonic Era

4.1. *A Tour in Switzerland* (1798): Writing as a Political Act

In March 1798, the French army occupied Switzerland marking the end of the Old Swiss Confederacy and the beginning of the new Helvetic Republic. In that same year, Williams released her *A Tour in Switzerland* (1798). As explained by Deborah Kennedy, this timing "automatically and deliberately involved the book in the politics of the moment" (2002: 128). After becoming a permanent resident in France in 1792, Williams nonetheless chose the travel writing genre for her *Letters*. In *A Tour in Switzerland*, Williams actually embarked on a trip to Switzerland in 1794 that lasted for six months, coinciding with the last months of the Reign of Terror. During the trip, she took notes of the different places that she visited. However, it was not until 1798 that she decided to publish them and turn the notes into a travelogue. Throughout her *Tour*, Williams makes allusions to her diary: "I made a number of notes of what I had myself seen" (1798, vol. II: 10). Williams had used her position as an eyewitness of the events to substantiate her authority as a commentator of French politics. Even though the travelogue was published four years after her trip, she provides her readership with first-hand chronicles of the events she had directly observed. *A Tour in Switzerland* is also fundamentally different from *Letters from France* and *Letters Containing a Sketch* (see chapters 2 and 3) since in *A Tour* Williams made no longer use of the epistolary form. She chose to organise her *Tour* in different chapters, which are in turn divided into subtitles, providing a list of the contents in each section. In this manner, the book resembles more an encyclopaedic structure in which the reader can easily access specific information.

In 1798, when *A Tour in Switzerland* was published, the Directory had assumed the position of the government, marking the end of the National Assembly. However, Williams continues to comment on the Reign of Terror, connecting *A Tour* with the previous series of letters, *Letters Containing a Sketch*. Williams' trip to Switzerland took place in the last years of the Terror, and it was during that time when she was taking notes for the travelogue, which explains why Williams focused on the politics of Terror rather than on the new Directory. Besides, the *Anti-Jacobin, or, Weekly Examiner*, a British counterrevolutionary publication and forerunner of the *Anti-Jacobin Review* (see 1.1.), had started to circulate in November 1797. These magazines demonized the French Revolution, drawing on the crimes committed during the Terror, and equating all supporters of the Revolution in France with supporters of the Jacobin Club, which had dissolved on the 12th of November 1794. Since Williams' works were published for a British public, Williams wanted to distance herself from the Jacobins. Williams opens chapter 1 with a strong criticism of the Jacobin regime calling it a "new species of tyranny which assumed the name of revolutionary government" (1798: vol. I: 1). She slanders the Jacobin leaders by portraying them as being as oppressive as the Bourbon monarchy, as she had done in *Letters Containing a Sketch* and explained in Chapter 3.

In *Letters Containing a Sketch*, Williams explains how she is persecuted under the law of Suspects and the decree that prevented foreigners to reside in Paris, as noted in 3.1. and 3.4. At the same time, her connections with well-known members of the Gironde, such as Sillery and Lasource (see 3.2.) and Madame Roland, for whom she held relevant political documents (see 3.3.), made Williams vulnerable to accusations of having conspired for the Girondins against the Revolution. Significantly, in *Tour*, she claims for the first time that the political pressure that she underwent in 1793 and 1794 was due to her denunciation of the current political affairs through her writing:

> I was not merely involved in the common danger which threatened every individual in France, but had claims to particular proscription. It was not only remembered by many of the satellites of Robespierre, that I had been the friend of the Gironde, of Madame Roland, martyred names which it was death to pronounce, but that I had written a work, published in England, in which I traced, without reserve, the characters of our oppressors. (1798, vol. I: 1-2)

In this passage Williams is claiming her proximity to Madame Roland, a key figure in Girondin politics, and, as a result, she is implying her own relevance and involvement in the same cause. More importantly, she highlights the political repercussion of her own writings on the Terror. In 1798, Williams had completely abandoned the timid stance she had held in 1790, presenting her political writing as an affair of the heart, see 2.1. Now, she involves herself in political action through her writings and goes one step beyond by presenting herself as one of the first authors who dared to condemn The Reign of Terror: "No danger could be more imminent than that of living under the very tyranny which I had the perilous honour of having been one of the first to deprecate, and to proclaim" (1798: vol. I: 2). She puts herself in the position of an influential writer whose political opinions are not only heard by the British public but that also provoke distress in the French government. As we shall see, Williams presents her writing as a political act in itself as it seeks the intervention and transformation of public opinion.

4.1.1. A New Era in Swiss History: Supporting the Invasion

As explained on 1.4.1., one of the most common destinations of the Grand Tour was Switzerland. However, Williams detaches herself from the Grand Tour by emphasizing that the reasons that took her to Switzerland are mainly political, and that she is not embarking on an educational or pleasure trip. As mentioned in the previous section, each chapter in *A Tour in Switzerland* is outlined by different subtitles that anticipate the content. In chapter 1, right after "Introduction", Williams introduces "Motives of my Journey to Switzerland". In this section, she explains that the government of Robespierre

had turned France into a bloodshed. Williams justifies her trip by explaining that she was given the opportunity to obtain a passport at a time when it was difficult to escape the country, see 3.4. The manner in which she obtained the passport, or the legitimacy of it, is kept obscure. By maintaining this secrecy, her status as a political fugitive is reinforced. Not only is the purpose of her travel connected to the political events, but also to the publication of the work itself: "It is the present moral situation of Switzerland that justifies the appearance of these volumes, in which an attempt is made to trace the important effects which the French Revolution has produced in that country, and which are about to unfold a new era in its history" (1798, vol. I: 1). This perspective differentiates her *Tour* from other travel narratives of the time, such as Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796) in which personal circumstances prompt the author to take the trip and, subsequently, publish the travelogue. In Williams' case, both the trip and the publication of the volume are inseparable from the political atmosphere that she encounters in France.

France and the Revolution are a continuous presence in Williams' description of Switzerland, apart from the reasons behind her trip. In *A Tour*, she provides a description of the political organization and customs of the different Swiss cantons, but she uses it as an opportunity to also comment on the French capital: "I have endeavoured to give an additional interest to my journal, by connecting the view of the manners and customs, with a comparative picture of the present state of Paris" (1798, vol. I: Preface). Williams had already published eight volumes on French politics, usually focusing on Paris as the epicentre of revolutionary affairs. French politics was Williams' main subject of interest as well as her area of expertise. In the case of *A Tour in Switzerland*, Williams uses her comments on France as an appeal to the originality of her own travelogue when compared with other narratives of travels around Swiss lands.

At the same time, the comparative slant also marks the difference between *A Tour in Switzerland* and Williams' previous volumes of letters, which focused only on France. The use of subtitles, for example, makes the comparison explicit: "Comparative View of the Spirit of Commerce in France, before, and since the Revolution" or "Comparative View of French and Swiss Peasantry before the Revolution".

Apart from the claims of originality, Williams compares France and Switzerland to highlight the former as a freer country than the latter. Gary Kelly, Chris Jones and Deborah Kennedy argue that in *A Tour in Switzerland* Williams participates in a critique of the government of the Swiss cantons in order to defend the French invasion. Patrick Vincent and Florence Widmer-Schnyder go in the same direction when they write that: "Her [Williams'] aim is to show, [...] that Switzerland was in reality not free in comparison with the newly founded French Republic" (2011: 10). Every time she describes her arrival to a new destination in Switzerland, she dedicates a few paragraphs to analyse how the canton is governed, usually concluding that the government functions in an aristocratic and hierarchical manner. For instance, in her visit to Fribourg, Williams observes that "The government of Fribourgh, like those of Lucerne and Soleure, is a confirmed aristocracy. The power is centred in the hands of a council of two hundred, who, with various divisions, and subdivisions of authority, hold the absolute sovereignty" (1798, vol. II: 193-4). The impenetrability of the political system that Williams describes here, together with the hierarchical structure of power, resembles court politics. Besides, the power structure in Fribourg is not an exception, as it also reproduced in other Swiss areas, such as Lucerne and Soleure. In this manner, Williams challenges the myth that constructed Switzerland as a stronghold of republican virtue and positions herself in line with the ideas of Frédéric César de la Harpe (1754-1838), ideologist of the Helvetic Republic. The tone with which Williams attacks Swiss governments is reminiscent of the

strong language she had used in *Letters Containing a Sketch*, as elaborated on in the previous chapter. She labels the Swiss power structure as "usurpation in the eyes of the people" (vol. I: 172); "the abuses which exist in these Swiss governments" (vol I: 216); "reins of arbitrary power" (vol.: 216); "the government is nothing but a mere oligarchy, incompatible with every idea of free political institution" (vol. II: 58); "civic degradation" (vol. II: 58); or "their governors have instituted the most illegal and arbitrary customs" (vol. II: 140). The same tone is employed to attack the Jacobins. For instance, she labels them as "the pestilential reign of terrorism" (vol. II: 89). The direct and harsh way of criticizing the political organization of the country she is visiting serves two purposes. On the one hand, as previously explained, she is challenging the widespread construction of Switzerland as a bastion of republicanism. On the other hand, she is also asserting her position as an outspoken reporter, a persona that she keeps throughout the book.

Marc Lerner explains that in the eighteenth century, Swiss cantons were governed through three different models: "the patrician-aristocratic constitution in cantons such as Bern, the guild-dominated republican constitution of cities such as Zurich or Basel, and the "pure democratic" *landsgemeinde* constitution of the inner Swiss Cantons, the rural cantons in the central part of the country" (2011: 11). *Landsgemeinde* is a German term that refers to the system of government based on popular assemblies that participated in decision-making through direct and non-secret vote. According to Sterhammer, Piccitto, and Vincent, the French Revolution appropriated the *Landsgemeinde* with their popular assemblies (2015: Introduction). Taking the Swiss territory as a whole, the *Landsgemeinde* constituted only an exception. Fréderic César de la Harpe wanted to make the public aware of the diversity in the Swiss forms of government as a way to demystify Switzerland, bringing attention to the fact that not all cantons were governed by popular assemblies. In fact, the Canton of Vaud, where he came from offered a very different

picture of Swiss politics from the *Landsgemeinde*. In the 16th century, the canton of Vaud was invaded by the canton of Bern. Despite the revolts in the early eighteenth century to obtain independence from Bern, Pays de Vaud continued to be subject to the Bernese Government until 1798. La Harpe published *Essai sur la Constitution du Pays de Vaud* (1796) in Paris where he adopted a Vaud nationalist instance and urged for the intervention of French troops to liberate the canton. In their introduction to the 2011 edition of Williams' *A Tour in Switzerland*, Patrick Vincent and Florence Widnmer-Schenyder argue that La Harpe knew Williams' work on Switzerland and respected her knowledge on political matters:

> La Harpe clearly knew that Williams had reproduced him verbatim in her account. In the margins of the copy of a French translation [of *A Tour in Switzerland*] dedicated by Williams to La Harpe [...] he highlights his own ideas in several places. In a letter dated 19 March 1802, La Harpe recommended Williams to Alexander I as a literary correspondent on English subjects, an arrangement that unfortunately never worked out. A year later, he sent a copy of the French translation of Williams tour to the Tsar. (2011: 39)

The fact that La Harpe suggested Williams' correspondence to the monarch proves that he considered her an authority on English issues. At the same time, he also sent him Williams' *Tour*, which proves that he agreed with Williams' rendering of his own native country. Thus, through her writing, Williams involved herself in La Harpe's nationalist cause.

In her defence of La Harpe's ideas and the Directory's subsequent decision to invade Switzerland, Williams was also positioning herself against the tide of British public opinion. The work of eighteenth-century writers Joseph Addison, Oliver Goldsmith and William Coxe contributed to the consolidation in Britain of the stereotype of the swiss people as virtuous and republican (Estherhammer, Piccitto and Vincent, 2015: Introduction). Another eighteenth-century phenomenon, Rousseau, had largely participated in this mythification of Switzerland. Even though Rousseau's popularity was

decreasing in Britain at the turn of the eighteenth century for its association with the French Revolution (see 1.3.2.), his writings had been immensely popular in Britain. For instance, in his *Letter to D'Alembert* (1758), he had opposed himself to the opening of a theatre in Geneva. According to Rousseau, the theatre would mean the downfall of the city, because the industriousness of the swiss would be replaced by the lazy and luxury-driven attitudes of the Parisian inhabitants. In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau praised the Genevan form of government: "I was born a citizen of a free state and a member of its sovereign body [...] How happy I am, each time that I reflect on governments, always to find new reasons, in my researches, to cherish the government of my country!" (1994 [1762]: 45). As explained here, Rousseau highlights the freedom that the democratic system grants its citizens and he presents it as the ideal system of government. Rousseau's popularity, together with the works by Addison, Goldsmith and Coxe drew together an ideal of Switzerland as a democratic land whose inhabitants, living secluded in the mountains, had not been spoiled by the emerging consumer society. Swiss cantons, that worked as small republics, were the complete opposite of centralized states governed by a despotic monarchy, as in the case of France in the Old Régime, Spain, Austria or Russia. For that reason, "France's controversial invasion of Switzerland in the winter of 1798 [...] marked a significant turning point in British responses to the French Revolution" (Vincent and Widmer-Schnyder, 2011: 11). According to the British view, the French Revolutionary troops were not liberating Switzerland, but the complete opposite, they were limiting their freedom. The events of 1798 also turned former British supporters of the Revolution into their opponents. The invasion "helped Foxite Whigs and former radicals, among them Coleridge and Wordsworth, turn away from Revolutionary politics, making Swiss liberty as a counter-revolutionary alternative to French-*républicanisme*" (Estherhammer, Piccitto and Vincent, 2015: Introduction). In order to counteract the

growing outrage of the British people towards the French Revolution, Williams does not hesitate to address the aristocratic and despotic way of ruling in Switzerland.

Of all the accounts of Switzerland pointed to earlier, the one that Williams mentions the most in A *Tour in Switzerland* is the one by William Coxe. Compared to Addison and Goldsmith, the publication of Coxe's *Travels in Switzerland* in 1789 was the closest in time to Williams' trip. It had been published only five years before Williams set foot on Swiss soil. Williams directly opposes Coxe's rendering of Switzerland. Coxe praises the city of Basel because its inhabitants are educated and interested in intellectual pursuits and literature. For her part, Williams writes that "whatever were the Halcyon days of taste and learning in the period of Mr. Cox's visit, it is a melancholy fact that his literary spirit has entirely evaporated since his departure" (1798, vol. I: 115). As explained by Patrick Vincent and Florence Widmer-Schynder: "Williams's narrative uses a trenchant form of irony bordering on sarcasm that is often quite amusing and that systematically deconstructs earlier, romanticized representations of Switzerland in poetry, fiction and travel literature" (2011: 44). In this case, Williams, through irony, leaves open the possibility of challenging Coxe's description of Switzerland.

As explained on 1.1., Williams positioned herself in opposition to Burke's understanding of the French Revolution. Surprisingly, during the Terror, Williams momentarily sides with Burke as explained on 3.5. However, in *A Tour in Switzerland* she resumes her attack on Burke's ideas, as she had previously done in *Letters Written in France* (as in 2.2.). In 1798, Williams continued to demonstrate that Burke's assumptions about France were mistaken: "The irreverence of religion, however, which Mr. Burke considered as one of the primary causes of the French Revolution, is not, as heretofore, the *ton* amongst persons of former rank and fashion" (1798, vol. I: 73). Williams explains that the love for religion is not extinguished in France, especially among the high classes,

who maintain the religion of their parents. For that reason, Williams invalidates Burke's analysis on the French Revolution since the premise that he uses to predict the failure of the Revolution is proven wrong by Williams' observations regarding the state of religion in France. Nonetheless, Burke is not only inaccurate in his analysis of the Revolution in France, his rendering of Switzerland is also mistaken in Williams' view. Interestingly enough, Williams associates Burke's ideas on Switzerland to those by William Coxe. Chapter V narrates Williams' visits to Berne, which she describes as an "aristocratical canton" (1798, vol. II: 198) where the "power of the government of this canton is the least limited of any in Switzerland (1798, vol. II: 199). For their part, Coxe and Burke had praised Berne's government: "To this testimony [Coxe's] may be added that of Mr. Burke, who asserts, that the Republic of Berne is one of the happiest, most prosperous, and best governed countries on earth" (1798, vol. II: 199). Coxe and Burke describe the government in Berne as always aiming at the well-being of their subjects. Williams contradicts this assumption by alluding again to the situation of the Pays de Vaud. A canton such as Berne that subdues another to their rule, and that represses the desires of part of its subjects, who want independence of the Canton of Vaud, cannot be considered other than an oppressive government for her. Williams bring attention to the appropriation of Vaud property by the authorities of Berne: "some Sovereign Burgher of Berne [...] lives in a fine chateau [...] which once belonged to the dignitaries of the Pays of Vaud" (1798, vol. II: 153). Williams presents the Sovereign as an extension of aristocracy, as he enjoys better living conditions than the majority of the population, but his properties and estate have been acquired as the result of an act of undue appropriation.

Williams also offers an alternative to Rousseau's description of Switzerland. As previously explained, his writings had a profound effect in the mythification of Switzerland as morally superior to corrupted Paris. Among all the works by Rousseau,

and given its popularity, the influence of *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, set in Switzerland, "went a long way to popularize the Swiss as noble savages" (Estherhamimer, Piccitto and Vincent, 2015: Introduction). For that reason, Williams directly alludes to Rousseau's epistolary work to present her alternative account of Switzerland. When visiting the canton of Valais, where Rousseau's novel is set, she writes that:

> All in nature is still romantic, wild, and graceful, as Rousseau had painted it; but the shooting charm associated with the moral feeling, is in some sort dissolved. The soft image of the impassioned Julia no longer hovers around the castle of Chillen, which is now converted into a Swiss Bastille, and guarded by a stern soldiery. (1798, vol. II: 179-180)

Williams distinguishes between two myths surrounding Switzerland, one related to its sublime landscape, that Williams confirms and that she frequently describes in her travelogue, and another referring to the virtuousness of its governors and citizens. The castle of Chillon, that Williams spells here as "Chillen", had traditionally served as a prison in the 16th Century for the House of Savoy. After 1733, it had become a state prison that Williams labels here as the 'Swiss Bastille'. In fact, after the French intervention, Chillon ceased to be a prison and became an armoury. The allusion to the fortress shows that the situation in France before the French Revolution and that of present Switzerland is not so different as Rousseau promoted. The Storming of the Bastille marked the beginning of the French Revolution, and Williams alludes to this powerful and vivid image to justify the irruption of the French troops in Switzerland.

Williams also criticises Rousseau's *Social Contract*. In Chapter XXVII, she narrates her visit to the Canton of Glarus, that she refers to by the French name of 'Glaris'. This canton was actually governed by a popular assembly or *Landsgemeinde*. Williams is aware of the fact that this type of government is praised by her republican contemporaries: "The popular assemblies of the little Cantons have excited the

enthusiasm of generous minds, who fancied that they saw in those democracies the return of the age of the old Romans, and the republicans of Greece" (1798, vol. II: 79). According to Marc Lerner, there was a tendency to idealize the history of Switzerland and to describe its democracy as coming from ancient times. However, "the idea of centuries-long republican continuity of the Swiss Confederation is a constructed myth" (2011: 18). Williams dismantles the myth by describing the conflicts in the meetings, which challenge the idealization of the direct democracy as peaceful: "the history of Switzerland furnishes terrible examples of the furious passions at those meetings" (1798, vol. II: 79). Thus, Williams wants to bring to the fore the downside of direct democracy and suggests that a representative system would avoid pressures and clashes among the government and citizens. Using an ironic tone, she mentions the Genevan author: "Rousseau had probably overlooked those inconveniencies of Democracy, when, in his Social Contract, he treated representative government as a political heresy" (1798, vol. II: 80). Williams, by showing the negative aspects of direct democracy, puts Rousseau's political theories into question.

4.1.2. "The Mild Wand of Philosophy"

As it has been explained on 2.2., Williams appeals to experience in order to confer authority to her writing. In *Letters*, she had emphasized that her chronicles were a first-hand narration of the political situation in France, and she now assures her readership that they can expect the same in the present volume about Switzerland. However, the trip took place four years before the publication of *A Tour in Switzerland* and Williams' travelogue serves the ideological purposes of the political situation in 1798 rather than 1794. For that reason, Williams also adds relevant information in the current state of politics. In a journalistic mode, she goes over her previous notes and brings them up to date. Williams

describes in detail how the French invasion has operated in the cantons. In Chapter XXV, for example, Williams explains how the Revolutionary troops accede to mediate in the conflict between the government of the canton of Grison and its citizens, who had recently revolted. Due to the inefficacy of the Grisons, the French Army finally settles the matter in favour of the revolted subjects. This example shows that, in *A Tour in Switzerland*, Williams' experiences from 1794 are blended with the journalistic report of the most recent events. Williams also updates her narrative to praise Napoleon. In 1794, when Williams travels around Switzerland, Napoleon had not even been appointed General of the Army yet. However, by 1798, he had successfully won the battles of Lodi, Arcole and Rivoli in the Italian campaigns against Austria, which had elevated Bonaparte to the status of a military hero for the Revolutionary Army. The Napoleon described in *A Tour in Switzerland* is the rising celebrity of 1798. She presents him as a great military man, but, what is more, she praises him for expanding the cause of liberty:

> What swells the heart with reverence, is not the hero standing in the breach, it is the benefactor of his race converting the destructive lightening of the conqueror's sword into the benignant rays of freedom, and presenting to vanquished nations the emblems of liberty and independence entwined with the olive of peace (1798, vol. II: 56).

Williams, who had adopted a pacifist stance throughout her whole literary career, compliments Bonaparte for bringing peace to the liberated territories. In subsequent works, especially after Napoleon's coup d'etat in 1799, Williams harshly criticizes and opposes him. However, *A Tour in Switzerland* is a reflection of Williams' political position at the time. She wants her travelogue to be more than a pleasure read and, for that purpose, she keeps her readership informed by expressing her opinions on the latest events.

After the exclamations of admiration towards Napoleon, Williams explains that a new era is starting in the way history and politics are told and understood. The idea that

the French Revolution was a complete rupture with the past was characteristic in the thinking of revolutionaries and according to Lynn Hunt "the will to break with the national past distinguished the French from previous revolutionary movements" (1984: 27). The clearest example of complete fracture with the *old régime* is the creation of a new calendar that broke with the previous timescale. However, Williams had celebrated the end of the Terror and, in 1801, she perceives the beginning of a more peaceful time: "Happily a new era opens to the world; the maddening charm of the poet is at length dissolved by the mild wand of the philosophy, and the heroes meed arises from other exploits than those of multitudes destroyed, and provinces desolated" (1798, vol. II: 37). Williams is referring to a time when historical events were narrated by poets and she distances her writing from this historical and even epic tradition. She had already detached herself from this epic tradition in page 56, when she decided to praise Napoleon for his role as a benefactor rather than hero or conqueror. Williams places her work in line with this new way of commenting politics, which is much more moderate and objective.

Before the French Revolution, Williams had inscribed herself in the tradition of the poet/historian: "To describe an important event with accuracy, and to display with clearness and force the various causes which combined produce it, would require all the energy of genius, and the most glowing colours of imagination" (1786, vol. II: 53). After 1789, and as her work continues to mature, Williams claims that her work is becoming more objective. In order to write about the recent events, her starting point is not inspiration anymore as it was in 1786. The shift in Williams' self-awareness is not only noticeable in her published works. In her private correspondence, Williams expresses that she increasingly sees herself as a philosopher. In a letter to her friend Ruth Barlow, Williams writes: "Indeed I become every day more philosophical, and perhaps what has hitherto appeared to me the greatest of misfortunes, may prove to be my greatest good"

(1937 [1794]: 45). These words were written in 1794, precisely when Williams was touring Switzerland, and just a year before the publication of *Letters Containing a Sketch*. She implies here that with a philosophical thinking and method she can produce her best thinking. In her personal correspondence, Williams acknowledges that she is embracing a new mode of thinking that is inextricably bound up with an evolution in her style of writing.

Contemporary reviewers of Williams' work also saw a distinction in her facet as a poet and as a commentator on political matters. In 1799, *the Anti-Jacobin Magazine* lamented Williams' turn towards politics: "Helen Maria Williams is doubtless, a true poet. But it is not extraordinary, that such a genius, a female and so young should have become a politician" (1799: 30). In June 1798, the *London Review* writes that "As a Poetess, Miss Williams attracts us much more than as a politician" (1798: 390). The reviewer grounds their argument on gender: "We cannot forbear to observe, that in our opinion an *English* female of excellent natural endowments and acquired accomplishments might have been much better employed than in thus energetically advocating a cause, that has poured on almost every country in Europe the horrible calamities of war and civil bloodshed" (1798: 390). Political conflicts are not a proper subject of discussion for a woman writer in the critic's eyes. In *British Women Writers and the Writing of History, 1670-1820* Devoney Looser writes that despite the fact of being undoubtedly taking part in the construction of historical discourse, "what women had to face that men did not, of course, was the "problem" of their sex, assigned by a culture that usually did not imagine for them an equivalent place in history or in history writing" (2000: 27). As previously explained, in *A Tour in Switzerland*, Williams does not present herself as being in any inferior position to deal with history or politics on account of her gender, but this is something that affected her reputation as a writer,

especially after the publication of *A Tour in Switzerland*. The strong opposition that women had to face in the public opinion might precisely be that which Williams considered "the greatest of misfortunes" in her letter to Ruth Barlow.

On account of her gender, Williams' role as an intellectual was denied by the reviews in her own country. Meanwhile, in Paris, Williams was accepted by the leading intellectuals and political figures of her time. Examples of this are her visits to Madame de Genlis (see 2.3.), or to Madame Roland (see 3.3.), or her rendezvous with French author Bernardin the Saint Pierre for tea at Williams' house in Paris (1795: 6). However, the physical distance from Paris does not hinder Williams from making social connections with well-known personalities of her time. In Zurich, Williams visits Swiss philosopher Caspar Lavater (1741-1801), whose political ideas were in line with Williams' purpose in *A Tour in Switzerland*. At an early age, Lavater had criticized the corruption in his own country in a pamphlet entitled *Der ungerechte Landvogd oder Klagen eines Patrioten* (1762) or *The Unjust Governor or the Complaint of a Patriot*. Here, he criticized the governor of the Canton of Grüningen for being corrupt, and thus had already challenged the well-spread view of Swiss governors as morally virtuous. Williams explains that it was not uncommon for travellers who made a stopover in Zurich to visit the Swiss philosopher: "We staid long enough at Zuric to visit its first literary ornament Lavater. It being known that he is willing to receive strangers, no traveller of any lettered curiosity passes through the town, without paying him the homage of a visit" (1798, vol. I: 66). Surprisingly, Lavater returns the visit: "He came to pay me a visit, which I was taught to consider as an unusual compliment, since it is his general rule not to return the visits of strangers" (1798, vol. I: 70). In this manner, Williams differentiates herself from the rest of the travellers, suggesting that she possesses more than 'lettered curiosity'. The reciprocity of Lavater's visit implicitly attests of Williams' status as a thinker. Williams

briefly alludes to the topics of the conversation between her and Lavater, who talked mainly about time and religion. Interestingly enough, he made an impression on Williams in that "there was more of feeling than of logic in his conclusion" (1798, vol. I: 71). In this manner, Lavater is here following the tradition of sensibility, explained on 1.3., in which spontaneous feeling is given prominence to articulated thoughts. Williams hints here at the fact that feelings are intrinsically connected to intellectual abilities and the pursuits of the mind.

4.2. *Sketches of the State of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic* (1801)

In 1801, three years after the publication of *A Tour in Switzerland*, Williams published a new volume of letters about France entitled *Sketches of the State of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic, Towards the Close of the Eighteenth Century, In a Series of Letters* (1801). With this work, Williams returns to the epistolary genre. Published in 1801, the political situation of both France and Switzerland had enormously changed since 1798. Williams' first allusion to Bonaparte is explained in 4.1.2., where she had praised Napoleon for the success of his military campaigns as Commander of the French Army. By 1801, when *Sketches* was published, Napoleon had seized power in France after the Coup d'Etat of the 18th of Brumaire, which took place on the 9th of November 1799. This Coup meant the end of the Directory, that had ruled France since the overthrow of Robespierre and the Jacobins in 1794, and the beginning of the French Consulate, with Napoleon as First Consul. In *Sketches*, Williams criticizes the Directory for exerting power in an arbitrary manner and not being professional enough to fulfil their roles as governors:

> They were not hypocrites, when they tyrannized, their tyranny was open, undisguised; when they plundered, there was no dissimulation, it was equally overt, frank and liberal. They felt not the worth of that fine patrimony of glory which had been bequeathed to

> them by genius and heroism, - and which they, with foolish prodigality, threw away. The fault, however, belongs perhaps less to themselves, than to those who committed to their hands so precious a trust as that of public happiness. (1801, vol. I: 103).

Although the Directory acted in a tyrannic manner, to Williams, they do not seem as dangerous as the Jacobins. As explained in section 2.6. of this thesis, Williams distrusted the Jacobins and she saw malignity in their lack of transparency. Here, the fact the members of the Directory do not conceal their misgovernment of France, shows them as incompetent and disinterested governors rather than evil forces.

When it comes to Switzerland, the Helvetic Republic that Williams had so enthusiastically welcomed was collapsing due to the Swiss resistance to the occupation. Meanwhile, the Swiss territory became a battleground for the War of the Second Coalition (1798-1802), in which monarchical powers such as Austria and Russia fought against the Revolutionary Army. Williams, who had formerly praised the Revolutionary Army as bringing peace to the Swiss territories, as explained throughout 4.1., criticises the troops in *Sketches* for the brutality of their actions. Williams exclaims in a lamenting tone: "Alas! Can no other offerings be made to liberty than those of human blood? [...] Must the trophies of liberty be numbered by nations slain, and countries desolated" (1801, vol.I: 9). With these words, she shows that she had envisioned a different outcome for the invasion of the French troops. As someone who has defended pacifist inclinations throughout her career, her disappointment becomes evident. Interestingly, she holds The Directory responsible of the failure of the troops in Switzerland: "Is it likely that when armies of the Republic had swept away privileged despotism from the conquered countries, the establishment of a directorial despotism more capricious and insupportable could have been suffered?" (1801, vol. I: 102). According to Williams, the political malpractice of the Directory is even worse than the aristocratic governments she had found when she was travelling and conversing with others in the Swiss cantons.

Together with informing her readership of the latest political events in France and neighbouring countries, the purpose of *Sketches of the State of Manners* is to make amends to the claims she had made in 1798. Although she still defends that the French troops had the potential to bring peace and freedom to Switzerland, she wants to clarify that she has been deeply disappointed by the turn of the events she had failed to foresee. At the same time, throughout *Sketches*, she defends herself from the attacks that her previous publications have received, as mentioned in the preceding section 4.1.2. In *Sketches*, she adopts an assertive and fearless tone facing the attacks. She writes of herself that: "a certain traveller through Switzerland, who fled from France, to avoid becoming the victim of that terror; and who will never be intimidated even by the insinuation of being a revolutionary scribe, from declaring her aversion to injustice, or cruelty, whether aristocratical, or demagogical" (1801, vol. I: 80). With these words, Williams reinforces her independent thinking. Her political opinions do not come from a blind faith in the revolutionary authorities, as she has demonstrated by criticizing the Directory. She ensures her readership that she always displayed her genuine opinion, which is always informed by her belief in the cause of liberty, instead of any alliance with revolutionary factions.

4.2.1. Individual Happiness in the Age of Revolutions

Historians have traditionally delimited the period of the French Revolution from the Fall of the Bastille, 14th of July 1789, to the Coup of Brumaire, 9th November 1799, which brought Napoleon to power as leader of the Consul. The Coup of Brumaire marks the beginning of the Napoleonic era. Although the periods were defined by historians in retrospective, Williams evidences in her writing that she is aware that Napoleon's rise to power will take the course of the Revolution in a different direction. In Letter XII, entitled

“The Return of Bonaparte”, Williams writes: “I already behold everything around us with new optics” (1801: 317). As she anticipates a profound change in the French government, Williams rethinks the political fights of the last decade and evaluates the outcome of the Revolution. Instead of paying attention to the laws, measures, and advancements conducted by the Government, Williams decides to examine how these revolutionary measures have affected French citizens at an individual level. According to her, private feelings are inseparable from historical discussion:

> […] in the enormous scales that weight the fate of nations private sufferings are as a feather in the balance - if however, this be philosophy, my heart is still at a remote distance from its elevated heights - I have not yet learnt to wipe away the bitter tears which fall for actual, positive miseries, by speculations of future probable good, and to reason with those calculators in the presence of their bleeding victims. (1801, vol. I: 13)

Even though Williams had admitted in private that she saw herself becoming everyday more philosophical, as explained in 4.1.2., she distances herself from philosophy in this passage. Using an ironic tone, she criticises the ongoing dispassionate direction that she observes in the social sciences. Williams criticizes the authorities of the Revolution in its subsequent phases, who saw themselves as heirs of the philosophes’ thinking. She believes that in experimenting with new forms of government, they have overlooked the impact of their decisions on the population. Williams rejects a detached approach to politics and sees it as dangerous as it can potentially overlook and neglect the people’s needs at an individual level. Her emphasis on private feelings is characteristic of the literature of sensibility as explained on 1.3. Following this tradition of sensibility, Williams’ had already shown in her writing a stern interest in recording particular experiences, an example of this being the story of the Du Fossés, narrated in *Letters* (1790), as already indicated in section 2.4 of this thesis.

In Letter V, after a decade of observing the Revolution in France, Williams provides an evaluation of the improvements attained by the French population. She sets

the discussion as a response to a question by her fictional correspondent: "you [...] desire a reply from me to your question, whether the mass of individual happiness has been increased, or lessened by the Revolution" (1801, vol. I: 36). After settling the topic of discussion in her Letter, she provides an answer from different viewpoints, as she pictures different answers by a Jacobin, a "friend of the Republic" and an aristocrat. In her usual denunciation of Jacobinism, Williams writes that Jacobins would not recognize that any improvement has been made. For them, "despotism has only changed hands" (1801, vol. I: 36). As explained by Williams, the Jacobins consider all political positions that depart from their political creed to be royalists, even if they plead the cause of the Republic (1801, vol. I: 36). Besides, the only glorious time in the Revolution was for them the year that spans from the summer of 1793 to the one of 1794. On the other hand, the aristocrat would lament the loss of their properties and titles, very much in line with the ideas that Williams had already defended in *Letters*, explained in 2.3.

'The friend of the republic', the group in which Williams inscribed herself in, would acknowledge that the French economy does not find itself in its finest hours. However, the supporters of the Republic are not discouraged by the present economic situation, since they understand that the Revolution is a long process. First of all, the internal conflicts together with the war against the neighbouring countries is inevitably having a negative impact on the economy: "it should be remembered that for ten years past France has been struggling for its civil and political existence against the combined powers of Europe, beyond the frontiers, and the partizans of despotism an anarchy, within" (1801, vol. I: 37-38). However, Williams is hopeful that the internal upheaval was coming to an end, as explained in 3.7. At the same time, she is convinced that the liberating ideals of the French Revolution will eventually reach other countries, as she had defended for Switzerland: "The contagion of liberty and equal rights, [...] may,

perhaps, with infectious rapidity, spread far beyond its borders" (1801, vol. I: 60). If the antagonist countries convert to the Revolution, they would cease in their resolution of stopping the Revolution. The friend of the Republic also finds an advantage in the Revolution that the aristocrat fails to see. While the aristocrat egotistically regrets the loss of their property and richness, in a positive light, the friend of the Republic sees a more equal distribution of richness among the citizens: "The abolition of the law of primogeniture, by equalizing hereditary fortunes [...] has become the most sure and powerful support of the Revolution" (1801, vol. I: 39). Williams is convinced that, in the long run, the future generations that descend from the aristocracy will welcome the measures rejected by their parents since their living conditions have been improved through the fair distribution of inheritance among siblings.

Letter VI continues to answer the question of whether or not the Revolution has increased the bulk of individual happiness in France, focusing this time on the rural population. According to Williams, the Revolution needs to make the improvement of the working conditions of the peasants a priority: "It is for that unfortunate extensive part of the family of humankind that revolutions ought to take place" (1801, vol. I: 50). According to her, the peasants were the part of the French inhabitants that suffered the most from despotism, since they enjoy worse living conditions than the rich: "the wealthy finds means to alleviate the weight of despotism. The rich man is sheltered from a thousand evils that accumulate on the head of the indigent" (1801, vol. I: 51). As explained by John Markoff, the peasantry had been an active force in the Revolution, and at the same time, their situation had concerned revolutionary leaders since 1789. The discussion of seigneurial rights marked the revolutionary drift of the peasants' insurrections, since in the seventeenth century the peasantry had mostly complained about royal taxes, while, towards 1789, Markoff identifies a tendency to attack seigneurial

targets (2010: 12). However, the peasantry did not constitute a uniform mass with the same interests across France, as they were very active in defending royalism in the Vendean wars, for instance. In spite of focusing most of her political discussion on the events happening in Paris, Williams believes that, since France is a "farming country" (1801, vol. I: 58) where two thirds of its population work in agriculture, the improvement of their situation is the most necessary to increase the overall happiness of the nation. Williams celebrates the eradication of the *corvée*, which was the name given to the compulsory work that peasants had to perform for the landlords without receiving any wages. Due to the lack of remuneration, Williams equates the *corvée* to slavery. Besides, according to Williams, the Revolution has not only granted the peasantry better working conditions, it has also had a positive effect on their moral standards:

> In the commune where he once dragged his reluctant steps to bend before some arbitrary mandate of seigneurial vexation, or do fealty and homage for some privileged exactions, he now stands erect, a free citizen; he finds none superior to himself, but such of as the law, which is the same for the whole (1801, vol. I: 53).

Williams, who had asserted that "the principle of Revolution is resistance to oppression" (1801, vol. I: 118), is following in this excerpt the Republican tradition that understands freedom as lack of domination. While the peasants were under the sway of the landlords, they could not be considered free, even if the landlord treated them in a kind manner.

In her discussion of the peasantry, Williams adopts a gender-based perspective to denounce that agricultural work affects women more negatively than it affects men, as it will be elaborated later on in this section. In order to denounce the hard living and working conditions that women experienced in rural France, Williams quotes British author and economist Arthur Young, specifically his travelogue *Travels in France During the Years 1787, 1788, 1789* (1792). Young's interest in agriculture came from his experience as a farmer managing his family state, that resulted in the publication of several books on rural

economy, being *The Farmer's Letters to the People of England* (1767) the most well-known, and later on he edited the agricultural magazine A*nnals of Agriculture*. Young then started to travel around the rural areas of Britain, where he directly observed agricultural work, a practice that he continued in other places of Europe, mainly Ireland and France. Young visited France during the years of the French Revolution, but, unlike Williams, he was not in favour of the revolutionary cause. As much as he was favourable to agricultural reform, Young did not believe that the context of the Revolution would eventually improve agricultural labour and for that reason he published *A Plain and Earnest Address to Britons, Especially Farmer*s (1792), signed by 'a farmer', and *The Example of France, a Warning for Great Britain* (1793). Coinciding with Burke's views, Young saw the Revolution as an attack on private property which was inevitably going to impoverish the country in the long run: "The quarrel now ranging in that once flourishing kingdom, is not between liberty and tyranny, or between protecting and oppressive systems of government; it is, on the contrary, collected to a single point. - It is alone a question of property" (1792: 4). Following this, Young declares that the British landlords should protect their property by avoiding that their subordinates obtain the right to control prices or wages:

> Let the farmers of this kingdom represent to themselves a picture of what their situation would be, if their labourers, their servants, and the paupers whom they support by poor-rates, were all armed [...] decreeing what the price of all the farmer's products should be; what wages should be paid to servants, and what pay to labourers. Under such a system of government I beg to ask, what security would remain for a single shilling in the pockets of those who are at present in a state of ease and competence. (1792: 5-6)

In order to guarantee a peaceful continuation of the present state of affairs in the British countryside, Young insinuates that landlords should prevent a revolt from the labouring peasants, which would disrupt the forces of labour and consequently have a negative impact on the economy. Interestingly enough, Young's attitude towards the peasantry of France during the French Revolution is at odds with Williams' perspective, as it has just

been explained. Williams believed that the least wealthy classes should be given priority when it comes to reform. She also celebrates the fact that the peasantry can now survive and prosper without being subject to the dominion of a landlord.

Williams reproduces word by word a passage from Young's *Travels* that describes the terrible condition in which a woman peasant finds herself. Williams sees the origin of the peasant women's misfortunates in the oppressive system of the *ancien régime*, and acknowledges that the Revolution has had a positive impact on them: "while I am speaking of the actual benefits derived to the peasant, let me not forget the partner of its labours. For her the Revolution has done much" (1801, vol. I: 54). In this manner, Williams contradicts Young's predictions, that the Revolution would bring chaos to the countryside and in turn degrade the well-being of both landlords and labourers. Young's passage explains how the peasant woman lacks the money necessary to buy more cattle and thus feed her seven children, since they owe a great part of their income to the seigneur and taxes. In this manner, Williams proves the main point in her discussion of rural economy, that seigneurial rights are oppressive to the workers. Besides, after getting rid of seigneurial rights, the peasantry enjoys more money to invest in their well-being. Following that line of argument, Williams clearly addresses Young: "let him write as many *warnings* as he pleases, who will reflect without gladness that if the *franchars* of wheat be lost to the Seigneur [...] the poor little horse eats the four franchars, and is fattened, and the seven children are clothed, instructed, and fed?" (1801, vol. I: 57). In this manner, Williams persists in her criticism of British counterrevolutionaries for being more concerned with regretting the potential loss of their richness rather than the improvement of the lower classes. Williams' gendered approach to the discussion of the peasantry is also compelling, and evidences the tendency in *Sketches* to focus specifically on women's issues. Williams observes that the woman peasant, apart from the oppression

she suffers due to her class condition, is further burdened by her gender. Williams ventures to say that: “I am inclined to think that they work harder than the men” (1801, vol.I: 56), since they have to toil in the fields, while giving birth and taking care of the family. Even though Williams believes that the Revolution has had a positive effect on the peasants, and that extends to women peasants, she is doubtful whether the Revolution has improved women’s lot as a whole, as it will be explained in the following section 4.2.2.

4.2.2. “On the State of Women in the French Republic”

Williams opens *Sketches of the State of Manners* answering the criticism she has received in Britain. As Williams had already demonstrated in her writing her profound aversion to the Jacobins (see 2.6. and chapter 3 in its entirety), she deplores the accusations of being a Jacobin and refuses to defend herself on this point: “Against the imputation of Jacobinism I should deem it degradation to make the least defence” (1801, vol. I: 6). Apart from being accused of supporting the Jacobins, reviewers reproached her that, being a woman, she had decided to write mainly about history and politics, as it was explained on 4.1.2. On this issue, Williams writes: “I am aware if the censure which has been thrown on writers of the female sex who have sometimes employed their pens on political subjects, nor am I ignorant that my name has been mentioned with abuse by journalists, calling themselves Anti-Jacobins” (1801, vol. I: 6). With these words, Williams shows an awareness that due to the topic of her writing, she is overstepping the boundaries of her gender. After acknowledging the criticism in the preface, she proceeds to offer two volumes about politics that support the French Revolution, showing that the conservative and misogynist attacks do not hinder her from writing.

Interestingly, Williams defends other women writers who have chosen a similar

path to hers. This is the case of Italian writer based in Naples Eleonora Fonseca Pimentel, who, like Williams, had been a celebrated poet in the early years of her career. However, her political drive changed the course of her writing since she cast aside the form of poetry in favour of journalism. After 1799, Fonseca Pimentel was in charge of the revolutionary journal *Il Monitore Napoletano*. When the British army overthrew the Neapolitan Republic in 1799 as part of the war of the Second Coalition, Fonseca Pimentel was hanged in the summer together other defenders of the Republic, such as Francesco Carracciolo who had led the military defence of Naples against the British. Williams first introduces the Neapolitan writer for her intellectual and literary achievements, as she has previously done when writing about other fellow female writers, as in the case of Madame de Genlis (see. 2.3.): "Eleonora Fonseca, a woman highly esteemed for her literary acquirements, and who had excited, at a very early period of her life, the particular notice of Voltaire" (1801, vol. I: 215). Fonseca Pimentel is able to access through her writing the favour of someone like Voltaire, hugely well-known for writings on social and political commentary, areas of knowledge denied to women as previously explained. Unfortunately, the same medium of expression that had granted her good reputation, would in 1799 justify her execution: "Madame Fonseca was guilty of having loved the cause of liberty, and of having written in its favour" (1801, vol.I: 220). Williams exposes here the injustice to which women were subdued in a society in which they were denied a voice in politics but at the same executed for their political opinions. Fonseca Pimentel perishes in the same manner as Carracciolo, for example, a military man.

Williams' claim in the preface anticipates a concern with women's situation that culminates in Letter XXVI, entitled "On the State of Women in the French Republic". Caroline Franklin refers to this section as "an uncharacteristically 'feminist' outburst" (2005: 553). Williams had already anticipated her concern for women's situation, or

vindicated the political role of women, as explained in 3.3. and 3.6. However, she does not frame those concerns as explicitly as in Letter XXVI, where she positions herself in favour of women's access to education and women's access to the job market. Be that as it may, the main purpose of the letter is to denounce that the French Revolution had been a missing opportunity to advance towards women's rights. Williams recognizes that the Revolution has somewhat improved women's situation, especially since the establishment of equal division of hereditary property, that can potentially grant women some economic independence. Women had also made progress since, after the Revolution, they enjoyed more protection from "that cruel tyranny of paternal authority" (1801, vol. II: 51), referring to the fact that parents are no longer allowed to send their daughters to a convent or to choose their future husband.

Nevertheless, Williams considers these measures to be insufficient: "These advantages may have been deemed sufficient to have obtained for the Revolution somewhat more of female's smiles. But the women may reply that the question is not whether they have gained by the Revolution, but whether they have gained as much as they thought" (1801, vol. II: 51-52). Letter XXVI was reprinted in *The New Annual Register*, and through this medium Williams took part in the defence of women's rights in Britain, together with other authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft or Mary Hays.

Before introducing her arguments in favour of women's rights, Williams defends that women in France do not involve themselves in politics. "Amidst the war of domestic factions which have disturbed the internal repose of the Republic, the ladies have hitherto, whatever may have been their secret wishes [...] preserved a strict neutrality" (1801, vol. I: 51). At first glance, this statement could be understood as if Williams was defending that women in France consider politics and improper subject matter for them and, as a result, they have pushed themselves into the background. The use of the expression

‘whatever may have been their wishes’, indicates that they are actually inclined to voice their opinion but they restrain themselves. At the same time, the phrase hints that the reason for their lack of involvement in politics is not disinterestedness, an idea that is reinforced by the following statement: “let no surly Republican suppose that this indifference proceeds from insensibility” (1801, vol. I: 49). Be that as it may, the ‘strict neutrality’ Williams refers to seems to be ironical, because, in her previous works she had spoken about women who had voiced their political opinion, such as the example of Madame Genlis in section 2.3. of this thesis.

Williams eventually states that their neutrality is the result of the lack of hope they have in politics since their needs have been neglected:

> That the almost universality of Frenchmen should have readily embraced, and, notwithstanding all its phases and of ominous aspect, should have adhered to the Revolution, is not surprising; the vast majority have been great and substantial gainers. The women, indeed, participate in some of those advantages at second-hand; but they may be allowed to entertain doubts whether the positive benefits they enjoy from the change, form a sufficient subsidy to tempt them to depart from their neutrality” (1801, vol. I: 50-51).

In Williams’ eyes, the French Revolution, by liberating the people from the oppression of a monarchical government is unquestionably a positive change, even for women. However, their liberation is not complete for women and that is why they enjoy the benefits of the revolution ‘at second hand’. For Williams, the revolutionary movement has failed to recognize that, regardless of the monarchy being overthrown, there are other structures of oppression that hinder women from obtaining full freedom. Besides, over the course of the Revolution, women were increasingly excluded from politics. One of the first achievements of the Revolution was the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. The fact that the Declaration only observes “Men are born and remain free and equal in rights”, while women’s place in society remains invisible. For that reason, Joan Wallach Scott considers that the Declaration “succeeded in rallying patriots to the

Revolution [...] it also made possible the discontent of those (women, slaves, and free men of colour among them) who were excluded from citizenship by the terms of the constitution promulgated two years later" (1996: 19). While women remained invisible in the declaration, they were explicitly excluded in the Constitution of 1791 that Wallach Scott mentions. The constitution of 1791 differentiated between active and passive citizens, the former enjoyed both political and civil rights, while the latter were denied participation in political life. In order to be considered an active citizen, one had to be a man of above 25 years old and pay more than three livres a year in taxes (Hammersley, 2015: 472). As a result of this, women and the lower classes became excluded from active citizenship. The constitution of 1793 did not recognize the distinction between active and passive citizens. This further excluded women, since citizenship was extended to all men above 21 years of age, but women were no longer considered citizens. In November of that same year, women's political clubs were banned. Paradoxically, the more inclusive the political sphere was for men, the more it ostracized women.

The exclusion of women from political life and later on from citizenship did not go unquestioned. Williams acknowledges the work of well-known revolutionaries such as Condorcet, who, as mentioned on 1.3.2., published in 1790 a pamphlet entitled "On the Admission of Women to the Right of Citizenship". Here, he argued that universal rights could not be considered universal as long as they excluded women, that conformed more than half of the population. Williams also comments on *De la Condition des Femmes dans la République*, by Charles Theremin, a work which had just been published in 1799. Theremin discussed the role of women in ancient republics, namely Greece and Rome, and reached the conclusion that in antiquity women enjoyed more independence than they did during the Revolution (1799:6). This independence, granted that they were more attached to the political system they lived in. Even though Theremin believed in

granting women more public responsibilities to secure their loyalty to the French Republic, such as leading public festivals or being members of family courts, these new spaces had to be attached to what were considered to be feminine spaces, such as family and the spectacle. However, Theremin insists that women should not be granted the right to vote, since the husband's ballot already represented the wife's voice, since a couple must entertain common interests. Although Williams does not explicitly claim in favor of women's suffrage, she dismantles Theremin's arguments, exposing the inconsistencies in the arguments that hinder women from exerting political rights. Interestingly enough, Williams detaches her voice from this counter-argumentation, and answers in a hypothetical tone what she believes that a champion for women rights, that she calls Thalestris –queen of the Amazons– would say. First of all, she explains that marriage, even though it constitutes a civil unity, does not nullify each person's will. She also adds that "if civil liberty be the consequence of political liberty, it is not clear how from this union women can remain civilly single, and politically married" (1801: 59), and thus finds inconsistencies in Mr. Theremin's own arguments. Williams also shows that Theremin contradicts himself in the case of single women or widows, since they do not have a husband to unite their interests with, she wonders who does defend unmarried women's interests. Williams carefully claims to only be raising doubts while she does not have a resolved position on the matter: "These are points of casuistry I do not pretend to settle" (1801: 60). In this manner, she detaches herself from the controversy and protects herself from the potential attacks she would receive for defying gender boundaries.

Letter XXVI also deals with women's access to education and professions. These topics bring Williams' work closer to the ideas of other contemporary champions of female rights, such as Catharine Macaulay and Mary Wollstonecraft. These authors were also on the radical side of the debate on the French Revolution, as discussed in 1.1. in

Letters on Education (1790), Macaulay defended that women's intellectual inferiority was nothing more than a "prejudice" (1790: 49) and asserted that women should have access to education, just like men do, in order to better fulfil their roles as daughters and wives:

> The social duties in the interesting character of daughter, wife, and mother, will be but ill performed by ignorance and levity; and in the domestic converse of husband and wife, the alternative of an enlightened, or an unenlightened companion, cannot be indifferent to any man of taste and true knowledge. (1790: 49)

According to Macaulay the duties attributed to women, regardless of being performed in the private sphere of the home, are better performed by educated ladies. Mary Wollstonecraft defended the same argument in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Williams also defends this argument in *Sketches*:

> Although destined to be the companion of man through life, let her not aspire to the lofty privilege of comprehending his studies or becoming the associate of his labours. –She to whose forming care the first years of the Republican youth are confided, is expected to instil principles which she has never imbibed, and teach lessons which she has never learned. (1801:55)

Williams perceives as contradictory that women are expected to educate their children, while they remain uneducated themselves. At the same time, she believes that the subjects commonly taught to women, such as music and dancing (1801: 55), are unnecessary to instruct their children in the love of liberty and republicanism, topics that need a more philosophical sort of education to be understood, in Williams' view.

However, the fact that women will be more perfectly fit for their maternal and marital duties is not the only advantage that Williams finds in educating women. As she sees it, women's' access to knowledge would also make their attachment to the Republic stronger:

> What claims has the Republic to the attachment of that part of the human race from whom it withholds the first privilege of our nature, the first gift of Heaven - instruction and knowledge? How should the heart of woman glow with the love of liberty, or her understanding assert to the force of truth? - She receives no lesson in the schools of wisdom and philosophy (1801: 55).

The fact that women are not educated explains why they were detached from political matters, as Williams had claimed at the beginning of Letter XXVI, and previously explained in this section. If women do not understand politics, it follows that they will not participate in them. Concomitantly, those women who had received scholarly instruction also detach themselves from politics after seeing that they have deliberately excluded from it, as it makes them disillusioned with the Revolution:

> While inscriptions on every portal where instruction is dispensed throughout the Republic, invite men to enter, while, in every region of learning which he seeks to explore, his path is carefully traced, his footsteps firmly guided, and the accumulated wisdom of ages unfolded to his research, she, whose bosom glows with the sacred ray of genius, or the proud desire to pre-eminence, finds the gates of learning rudely barred against her entrance. (1801: 54)

The fact that a Republic based on 'liberté' and 'egalité' grants the rights to education to some, while denying it to others, is a strong enough paradox for making women reconsider any claims to liberty.

At the same time, between the years 1791-1795, despite all the political turmoil, the revolutionary leaders showed concern for the improvement of the educational system in France. In 1791, the Committee of Public Education, called Committee of Public Instruction after 1793, was created by the Convention to broaden the access of citizens to a formal education. However, women were deliberately excluded from public schools. Since they were expected to manage the household affairs, it was believed that they would gain nothing useful for their future learning outside the home. Mirabeau showcased this argument in *Travail sur l'Éducation Publique* published in 1791: "I will suggest few things about women's education. Men are destined for employment, and they should be

improved in public spaces. Women, by contrast, are destined to indoor life, and, perhaps. they should not exit the father's house apart from very rare occasions" (1791: 35).[24] Here, Mirabeau reinforces gender roles and the separation of spheres to argument in favour of making public education an exclusively male domain. Mirabeau, who had been praised by Williams as noted in 2.4., provides a perfect example for understanding Williams' disappointment with the treatment given to women by the revolutionary authorities. Women like Williams expected that the Revolution would bring more freedom to all members of society, however, she saw that the champions of liberty that she admired, such as Mirabeau, overlooked women's interests.

Williams considers that having access to education will improve the situation of women in France. However, in order for women to fully embrace the Revolution and the Republic they also need the means to provide for themselves: "when she is supplied with the means of knowledge and of honorable independence, then will she kneel [...] and bless the tutelary sway of the Republic" (1801: 56/57). Williams explains that women are sometimes led to marriage in order to find a livelihood, which comes at the expense of their own and their partner's happiness. Marriage was increasingly regarded throughout the century as a relationship based on companionship and affinity, and Williams considered that women sometimes sacrificed this affinity in favour of economic security (1801: 56). At the same time, Williams shows concern for widows, who lose their income with their husbands' death. Williams believes that the State should provide women with the opportunity of taking "honorable and dignified employments" (1801: 56). The emphasis on honour and dignity implies the possibility for women to access ways of providing for themselves without having to resort to prostitution. In *Vindication of the*

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[24] My translation of "Je proposerai peu de choses sur l'éducation des femmes. Les hommes destinés aux affaires, doivent être élevés en public. Les femmes au contraire, destinées à la vie intérieure, ne doivent peut-être sortir de la maison paternelle que dans quelques cas rares".

Rights of Woman, Mary Wollstonecraft had also defended women's employability outside the home and suggested some professional paths for women, mainly related to the medical domain. In *An Appeal to the Men of Great Britain on Behalf of Women* (1798), Mary Hays goes one step further to consider women fit for professions related to the law. Even though Williams does not explicitly recommend any particular profession for women, she implicitly suggests that her scope for women's possibilities is broader than the one envisioned by Wollstonecraft and Hays. In her characteristic ironic tone, Williams writes that, when asking for more opportunities, women

> […] do not aspire to the rank of Leaders of armies, or Rulers of States, or wish to exercise the functions of Ministers of or Directors; though such has often been the administration in the Republic, that the nation, while it was making experiments, would probably had acted not unwisely, had it made the trial. (1801: 52)

Williams implies here that women could potentially be as fit as men to lead politics or military campaigns, considered to be the most masculine of domains. Warfare and politics were considered an improper subject for women to write about let alone actively participate in them. This excerpt also highlights the misogynistic tendencies of the revolutionary authorities, who are willing to experiment with politics and government, but they never considered women could be part of the way society is constructed.

As Letter XXVI progresses, Williams further argues in favour of women's capacity for political service. As explained in the previous chapter, specifically on sections 3.3. and 3.6., Williams had praised the strong commitment to the revolutionary cause displayed by women such as Jeanne Marie Roland and Lucile Desmoulins during the Terror. Written six years after *Letters Containing a Sketch*, Williams also praises in *Sketches* the courage shown by women in Naples who "have exhibited the most sublime examples of greatness, generosity and courage" (1801: 65). Williams develops in Sketches the arguments that she had anticipated in 1795, as noted in 3.3., stating that

women's sensibility makes them more capable of courage instead of rendering them weaker than men. This subverted the common argument of the time, that established that, due to their weaker nervous system women were not capable of the fortitude required to participate in politics. Williams writes that "it was women, who, in those days of horror, proved that sensibility has its heroism" (1801: 63). In the specific case of the Terror, Williams gives recognition to the women that had a share in the resistance against Robespierre's rule, such as the moral support that women gave to political prisoners or the unrelenting activism in demanding the government that prisoners were fairly tried and released. In this manner, Williams grants value to everyday actions that take place in the private realm, when heroism is typically associated with public affairs, such as political or military victories. At the same time, she brings attention to the fact these gestures, despite going unnoticed in the chronicles, nevertheless contribute to the revolutionary cause.

4.3. Conclusions for This Chapter

Chapter 4 has analysed *A Tour in Switzerland* and *Sketches of the State of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic*, published at the turn of the eighteenth century and coinciding with the beginning of the Napoleonic era. Williams gathered the materials for *A Tour* for years before publishing the work, coinciding with her trip around the country. She decided to publish her book in 1798, the year of the French invasion of Switzerland and the creation of the Helvetic Republic, in order to argue in favour of the invasion. To that end, Williams updates the notes she had taken in 1794 to inform her readership of the latest events in Europe concerning the Revolution, while she discusses her observations of the country. For that matter, *A Tour in Switzerland* becomes a heterogeneous work that blends travel narrative and description of landscape, with socio-political observations and

Williams' opinions on the political atmosphere of 1798. For the purpose of my thesis, I have mostly focused on the political slant of Williams' *Tour*. Interestingly, Williams was aware that, by writing about politics, Williams was putting her own safety at risk, and, for that matter, her writing became a form of activism.

In order to defend the need for a Revolution in Switzerland, Williams had to challenge the mythification of Switzerland in the collective imagination of the British people. In his works, Rousseau had presented Switzerland as a more fair and virtuous society than the neighbouring France. At the same time, he had praised Swiss political organizations in popular assemblies. Since the works of Rousseau had a tremendous impact in the second half of the eighteenth century, his ideas about Switzerland were well-established in Europe, and for that matter, the French invasion of Switzerland was surrounded by strong controversy. Williams explicitly opposes Rousseau's views by highlighting Swiss government as aristocratic and despotic. At the same time, Williams shows the downside of the *Landsgemeinde*, that far from appearing peaceful and fair in her account, she shows them as moved by interests and political pressures. Williams also challenges William Coxe, influential in Britain for his *Travels in Switzerland*. While Coxe praises the Swiss as virtuous, well-learned and deeply interested in literature and culture, Williams renders them as mainly concerned with their economic improvement. Williams also positioned herself in favour of Swiss political writer Cezar La Harpe who had defended the independence of the Pays de Vaud from Berne and who requested the participation of the French troops in settling the matter. Although Patrick Vincent and Florence Widmer-Schyner consider that in *A Tour in Switzerland*, Williams detaches herself from Sensibility (2011:13), this study has shown how Williams praises Lavater from displaying emotions rather than pure reason, which is the main line of thought in the trend of sensibility. Vincent and Widmer-Schyner consider that Williams' writing in A

Tour "is distinctly unsentimental; rather, it is ideological through and through" (2011: 42). This statement overlooks the fact that for Williams, as it has been demonstrated in chapters 2, 3, and the present one, ideology is inseparable from feelings.

Sketches of the State of Manners was published after the Coup of Brumaire, which brought Napoleon to power. This new change in the power dynamics of the French Republic, together with the fact that Williams had already witnessed a decade of revolutionary events in France, provides Williams with the insight to value whether the Revolution has been effective in improving the overall happiness of the French. Although she acknowledged the precarious economic condition in which the Republic finds itself, Williams is hopeful as she sees the crisis as temporary. Among all the measures implemented by the revolutionary authorities, Williams praises the loss of hereditary rights the most. She argues that the distribution of richness would eventually improve the economy of the nation. Besides, Williams pays special attention to the peasantry that conformed two thirds of the French population. Williams considers the rural workers a priority for the Revolutionary agenda, as they are the most oppressed by the aristocratic hierarchy. Taking this into consideration, Williams celebrates the abolition of seigneurial rights for both economic and moral reasons. In her discussion of the rural economy, Williams explicitly disagrees with British economist Arthur Young, who had professed counter-revolutionary views and who argued in favour of maintaining the hierarchy in the rural economy as means to maintain peace and social stability. Interestingly, in her discussion of the agricultural workers, Williams acknowledges the particularities of women in that context and argues that their situation is more complicated than that of men, as they have to combine their labour in the fields with taking care of their families. In her discussion of Williams' defence of women's liberation, Franklin overlooks Williams' comments on female rural workers. In this manner, the picture that Franklin

provides of Williams' feminism appears as more bourgeois-centred than this study has shown.

The gender-based perspective displayed by Williams in her criticism of Young is also evident throughout *Sketches*, particularly in her letter entitled "On the State of Women in the French Republic". Here, Williams criticizes the revolutionary movement for overlooking the particularities in women's situation, which she believes has distanced women from political action. Williams claims that, if the Revolutions want to ensure that women adhere to the cause, they have to improve their place in society. In order to achieve that, Williams defends that women gain access to education and the professional world, as means to be intellectually and economically independent from men. Williams does not explicitly argue in favour of women's suffrage; however, she refutes the arguments against women's right to vote given by authors such as Theremin or political leaders such as Mirabeau. Vincent and Widmer-Schyner see Williams' emphasis on influencing the political thinking of her readership as an evidence of "the unabashedly masculine ambition of her work" (2011: 47). In the previous chapters together with the present one, especially on section 4.2.2., this study has evidenced that Williams does not perceive politics as a male arena and she defends the participation of women not by assimilation to men's political attitudes, but rather, in women's own terms.

Chapter 5

'The Testimony of a Witness will be Heard': End of the Napoleonic Era and the Revolution in Retrospect

5.1. *Narrative of the Events* and *Letters of the Events*

Williams consistently wrote chronicles of the French Revolution between the years 1790 and 1801. In that decade, she produced ten volumes of *Letters* (including *Letters Containing a Sketch* and *Sketches of the State of Manners*) and two volumes dedicated to Switzerland. In 1815, fourteen years after *Sketches*, Williams returned to her narratives of the French Revolution with *Narrative of the Events Which Have Taken Place in France from the Landing of Napoleon Bonaparte Till the Restoration of Louis XVII*, which was followed in 1819 by *Letters on the Events which Have Passed in France since the Restoration in 1815.*[25] After a long hiatus, however, Williams emphasizes that her commitment to the Revolutionary cause is as strong as it had been in the 1790s: "The interest I once took in the French Revolution is not chilled, and the enthusiasm I once felt for the cause of liberty still warms my bosom" (1819: 1). Williams presents the Revolution here as a lifelong commitment, which shows a continuity between the early *Letters* and the volumes published well into the nineteenth century. Interestingly, the choice of words echoes *Letters Written in France*: "I acknowledge that my heart caught with enthusiasm the general sympathy [...] and I shall never forget the sensations of that day, "while memory holds her seat in my bosom"" (1790: 14). For thirty years, Williams maintains her enthusiasm for the cause of liberty, despite all the different stages the Revolution has gone through. Her adherence to the cause has remained intact because the

[25] I will refer to *Narrative of the Events Which Have Taken Place in France from the Landing of Napoleon Bonaparte Till the Restoration of Louis XVII* as Narrative, and to *Letters on the Events which Have Passed in France since the Restoration in 1815* as *Letters on the Events* to differentiate this volume from the first volumes of letters published in the 1790s.

origin of her feelings is natural and spontaneous, they spring for the heart. Williams here follows once again the trend of sensibility to emphasize the truthfulness, transparency and disinterestedness of her political inclinations, as she had done in 1790, see 2.1. This idea is further emphasized when Williams claims that "Those who believed as firmly as myself in the premises of the revolution, [...] no doubt continue, like me, to love liberty" (1819: 2). Williams is clarifying for her readership that, despite the different phases that have shaped the history of France in recent years, her political enthusiasm is still alive. During the Napoleonic era, Williams found herself disconnected with the publication of political chronicles. As it will be explained in 5.1.2, she was under the radar of Napoleonic censorship and in order to avoid imprisonment she did not publish chronicles under Bonaparte's rule. For that matter, emphasizing her interest in the Revolution, is suggesting that she is still informed enough on political matters to continue to publish her political commentaries.

The political circumstances had enormously changed since 1801. The period between 1800 and 1815 was marked by the Napoleonic rule that started with the Consulate (1799-1804) and continued with Napoleon's self-proclamation as emperor in 1804, which ended with the fall of Napoleon after the Hundred Days War in 1815. The Napoleonic era came to end by the Bourbon Restoration, which meant a return to the form of government of the *ancien régime*. Apart from Gary Kelly (1993), who examined Williams' whole corpus and the nineteenth century chronicles in particular, *Narrative* and *Letters on the Events* have comparatively received less critical attention than *Letters* and *Letters Containing a Sketch*, despite the fact that they offer a significant insight on Williams' discussion of the fray of ideas during Napoleon's rule and the Bourbon Restoration. Since then, Amy Culley notes a decade after the publication of Kelly's work that "Williams' *Letters from France* has been the focus of important scholarly work in

recent years, although her nineteenth-century historical writing is less well known" (2014: 160). Taking into consideration the lack of scholarship today on the nineteenth-century chronicles written by Williams, my aim for this chapter is to provide a close reading of *Letters on the Events* and *Narrative*, paying attention to Williams' method for conveying her revolutionary stance and criticism of Napoleon's rule in her writing.

5.1.1. The Boulevards and the Battlefield

Williams had extensively justified her authority on revolutionary matters based on her position as an eyewitness of the events in France, as already noted throughout this study, and more specifically in 2.2. However, she focuses her narrative on the public events that she observes, rather than on her private experiences in France. Even though she uses the epistolary form to convey her opinions, her own private life is pushed into the background. In fact, when she mentions private affairs she tends to apologize in advance, as if her personal incidents disrupted the reading: "Before I begin, however, let me say a few words of myself; which I shall do with all possible brevity" (1815: 7). Even though she explicitly mentions that when she deals with private matters she does so with "all possible brevity", the passage that follows this statement deals in fact with the reasons for her former support to Bonaparte. Hence, she is not providing the reader with any personal information but rather she is giving the context of her political opinion. Similarly, in *Letters on the Events*, published four years later, she continues to excuse herself when a personal incident is mentioned: "If I may speak an instant of myself" (1819:32). Interestingly enough, this statement is followed by a paragraph in which Williams narrates the execution of Girondin politicians M. de Sillery and M. de La Source, explained in 3.2. Thus, the narration in this paragraph is centred on political figures and not on Williams' personal anecdotes. In *Letters on the Events*, nevertheless, Williams

discusses an intimate subject, which is her mother's burial, mentioned in a footnote. This footnote is of a considerable length and it occupies the bottom of three pages in which Williams describes the cemetery in Paris where both Catholics and Protestants are buried together. The description of the place is exhaustive but the fact that her mother is buried there is only mentioned momentarily: "that spot where my mother reposes is encircled with Scotch firs" (1819: 24). This spot in Paris is used here as an example of peaceful coexistence between different Christian faiths. Besides, religious toleration is a subject that concerns Williams in *Letters on the Events*, and that will be examined as we shall see in section 5.1.3. Williams' personal life appears only in the background but it does not sustain the narrative, in fact, it allows her to introduce reflections on public debates. Hence, I agree with Culley when she argues that Williams "rejects autobiography as a mode of isolated introspection and exploits its potential for sympathetic connection and historical engagement" (2014: 59). Culley suggests here that Williams departs from the confessional tradition within epistolary writing, described in 1.2.2.

Another characteristic of Williams' works is the polyphonic aspect of it, with frequent quotations from other authors, pieces of conversations and even letters written by other hands, as explained in 2.5. In 1815, she continued to include a wide variety of testimonies ranging from generals and politicians to foot soldiers. Her location and vivid reporting, where she gave voice to the direct actors of the events she describes, puts together a complete picture of the state of public opinion. Williams employs some of these interviews to emphasize her connections with revolutionary figures or authorities, as she had done in the 1790s in her meetings with Genlis (2.2.), Roland (3.3) or Lavater (4.1.2.). Continuing with this practice, she tells in *Narrative* her meeting with Tadeusz Kościuszko, renowned Polish military leader. Kościuszko fought in the American Revolutionary Wars siding with the United States, and he later became a national hero in

his homeland after leading the uprising against Russian rule in 1794, in which he defended the autonomy of Poland. Williams had always shown sympathy for different nationalistic endeavours, an example being her defence of the Pays de Vaud discussed in 4.1.1. As J.R. Watson observes: "The example of Poland was one which helped strengthen feeling, during the 1790s especially, against oppressors of all kinds" (2003: 67). That Williams and Kościuszko shared the same political opinion comes as no surprise, but moreover, they were close friends according to Williams' narration:

> I called on him one day to bid him farewell, having read in the official paper of the morning his address to the Poles on the subject of recovering their freedom, being named to the command of the Polish army by Bonaparte. Kosciousko heard me with a smile at my credulity; but on my shewing him the address with the signature, he exclaimed, "This is all a forgery" (1815: 151).

This passage fulfils two objectives. On the one hand, Williams reinforces the proximity to a well-known figure and she clarifies that they knew each other prior to this meeting. The tone in which she describes it implicitly denotes a familiarity between them. At the same time, the fact that Kosciuszko himself finds mistakes in the official papers, by considering them forgery, is in fact validating Williams' own argument. She quotes a prestigious figure criticizing how Napoleon manipulates information, a point that she also makes in her text. Kościuszko allows Williams to glean first-hand political information concerning the emperor from a source that sees him on a daily basis. In this manner, she is able to obtain the most recent news about Napoleon.

As mentioned earlier and throughout my study, Williams' position as an eyewitness is always reinforced to legitimize her contribution to the fray of opinions regarding the Revolution in France. In N*arrative of the Events,* nevertheless, she becomes very specific when referring to the precise moment in which she witnessed the events. When Williams discusses the Battle of Paris, that took place between the 29th and 31st

of Paris, Williams records the exact chronology of the events, as it elicited the restoration of the monarchy and forced Napoleon to his first exile. This idea becomes obvious in Letter XI, when describing the coalition forces entering Paris on the 30th of March 1814:

> The first attack made by the allied armies was to the north of Paris, and was confined to skirmishes and distant cannonade. At three in the morning, on the 30th June, I was awakened by the first roar of cannon. (1815: 230)
>
> On the 30th March, 1814, I had been awakened also, at the first dawn of the day, by the roar of cannon placed on the very same theatre, that of the hills, which overlook my window. (1815: 232)

Williams is referring to the armies of the sixth coalition, formed by the monarchical forces in Europe, Russia, Austria, Prussia, Great Britain, Spain and Sweden that grouped together after Napoleon's failed attempt to invade Russia. In such a crucial moment in the history of France, Williams was living in the midst of the historical moment and so close to the events that she could observe the cannonade from her window. The events appear as having been noted and recorded in a diary, since she is able to provide the exact moment in which they happened: "The musketry [...] ceased altogether at about three in the afternoon" (1815: 233). As a result, she provides her readership with a very first-hand chronicle. To this end, she additionally identifies herself as a Parisian citizen when she uses the pronoun "we" to refer to the inhabitants of the city:

> I then went on the boulevards [...] and what sinister presages might be read in every visage of the crowd! On examining the hostile passions portrayed in every countenance, it seemed as if the assembled multitudes waited only the signal for civil war. We appeared to be treading on a mine ready to receive the spark of explosion (1815: 215).

Williams emphasizes here the feeling of despair among the Parisians citizens. Even though Paris had witnessed numerous uprisings since 1789, it was the first time during Williams' stay in Paris that the French capital had become a battleground in an international conflict. The failed Russian expedition made evident that the Napoleonic Army had lost the momentum and winning streak that Williams discussed in *A Tour in*

Switzerland, see 4.1.2. For that matter, the French were concerned about the uncertain future of their government. Williams is able to convey this sense of uncertainty to her readership, because she has experienced it herself. The common feeling of uncertainty brings Williams together with the Parisian inhabitants as it had happened in her first visit to France, when Williams bonded with the attendants to the Festival of the Federation, discussed in 2.1., after experiencing the same enthusiasm for the common good. Here, the atmosphere is neither happy nor celebratory, but rather, a shared sense of fear and concern anticipates the disaster. Williams chronicles are not a mere description of historical events, but rather, through her chronicles, the readership is able to discover not only what happened but also the emotional impact of the events on the participants and witnesses.

When *Narrative* was published, Williams was not naturalized as a French citizen yet, since she was about to obtain the citizenship in 1817.Williams' *Narrative* was translated into French by Jean Baptiste Joseph Breton de La Martinière (1777-1852), French translator and illustrator, and thus reached a continental audience. Nevertheless, she wrote in English and the British public was the first one she addressed with *Letters* (1790). Williams was fully aware of her role as an interpreter of the recent history of France for a British readership. Her role as a mediator prompts her to take an inconsistent and ambiguous position within French society. On some occasions, she is one more among the French citizens, implying her profound understanding of French society. In other instances, she writes as a foreigner in order to connect with her audience. This position also enables her to keep some distance from the events and reinforce the idea that she is taking on a critical perspective on them. In her book chapter, entitled "Citizen of the World, 1789-1792, Kennedy describes Williams' position as "internationalist" since "The essence of her experiment in France [...] is not one of foreignness, but one of belonging, so that her political agreement with revolutionary ideals acts as a bond

between her and the people around her" (2002: 56). I agree with Kennedy in that Williams adopts an internationalist position and this certainly continues to be applicable in *Narrative of the events* (1815) and *Letters on the Events* (1819). However, this internationalist position took on new nuances in 1815 and 1819. Having experienced the Revolution and the Empire, what bonds Williams with the inhabitants of Paris is not so much her political creed but that they share common experiences resulting from the political turmoil taking place in those decades, as mentioned earlier.

Despite the fact that Williams mingles with the Parisian crowd on the Boulevards, her own situation in France remains problematic. At times, she presents herself as another Parisian citizen while in other instances of the text she reminds the reader of her foreign status:

> Here I saw, what to others appeared an army of foreigners, my own countrymen, and heard them talking familiarly my own language. I could not resist holding discourse with these Waterloo heroes, and I hope my French friends will forgive me if I felt a little proud of being an Englishwoman. (1815: 250)

The fact that she is proud that the foreign armies had victoriously entered Paris seems to be a contradiction for someone who had always sided with the French in international matters, as explained in 4.1. when discussing *A Tour in Switzerland*. However, in *Narrative* she positions herself against Napoleon, and thus she celebrates that he has been overthrown. At the same time, the English language allows her to converse with military figures who have experienced the war at first hand. On the one hand, her British nationality allows her to obtain information directly from the British soldiers. On the other hand, her status as a Parisian resident allows her to witness the battle from the front. Her ambiguous or even marginal position grants Williams access to spheres that would have traditionally been denied to her, as it had happened in 1790 with her visits to the National Assembly mentioned in 2.1. In 1815, she accessed the battlefield and the military camp,

domains restricted to men: “I sometimes take a walk in this wood [The Bois de Boulogne], and sometimes visit the English camp” (1815: 322). Her wanderings around the military tents allow Williams to observe the most sentimental and intimate side of the soldiers when she witnesses a funeral for a Scottish soldier:

> I saw some of those brave fellows wipe their eyes. This was not the moment when the soldier, in the fury of battle, rushes on death [...] this was the calm hour of milder emotion, and the heart had leisure to feel - this was death, but not under the form in which the brave are accustomed to despise it. They were going, in a foreign land, to render the last duties to their comrade, who would see his home no more! (1815: 322)

Williams presents here a picture of war that frequently goes unnoticed. Williams subverts the glorification of a soldier's death in the midst of the battle, frequently represented in the epic tradition. Williams shows that far from the context of the battlefield, the soldier’s death is mourned rather than lauded. Consistent with her previous chronicles, in this excerpt Williams shows more concern for individual feelings than for the grand historical events. In her view, history is created by individual stories and experiences. For her, casualties are not regarded as a necessary part of the historical conflict, which takes place only in the background of the narration. As shown in this fragment, Williams puts the focus of her narration in individual loss and feelings of sorrow. For her, heroism resides in the ability to display one’s feelings in the military camp instead of suppressing emotions in the battlefield.

5.1.2. The Basilisk’s Eye: Napoleon as a Villain

As explained in chapters 2 and 3, Williams vilifies Robespierre as the main responsible agent for the Terror. In fact, as discussed in 2.6., 3.5. and 3.7., Williams shows the worst part of Robespierre as an evil force deprived of feelings of sympathy. In both *Narrative* and *Letters on the Events*, written right after the end of the Napoleonic era, Bonaparte fulfils the role of the greatest villain. The misgovernment of the Jacobins appears in

explicit connection to Napoleon's rule in Williams' text: "There still existed the remains of a party in France which had during a short time wielded the sceptre as despotically as Bonaparte himself. This was the faction of the Jacobins" (1815: 38); Williams will take this connection one step further when she describes Napoleon as the "revival" of Jacobinism. She presents the Emperor and the Jacobins, the two evils that have emerged from the Revolution, as joining forces in their quest for power: "The great mass of the citizens of France admitted not the possibility of Bonaparte's reformation, and saw nothing but slavery in the revival of Jacobinism, and its junction with imperialism" (1815: 83). In these passages, Williams draws a comparison between Jacobinism and Bonaparte, and presents them as equally despotic. Besides, the French people, having witnessed the different stages of the revolutionary quest, do not trust the reformation of their political leaders. For that matter, Napoleon appears in the last quotation as an emperor who lacks the support of his people.

Williams had vilified Robespierre for his impassioned disposition that rendered him wicked and cruel. As already explained, for Williams, influenced by the literature of sensibility, empathic feelings were the driving force that moved humanity towards the common cause, as noted in 1.3.2. and 2.6. However, Williams who saw Napoleon as moved by his own interests rather than driven by the common good, considered Napoleon's display of feelings to be deceptive:

> The tenderness professed by Bonaparte for the people, and his sympathy for their sufferings under the reign of the Bourbons, raised a smile on the lips of the Parisians [...] The almost universality of France [...] exulted in the hope that this [Napoleon's] abundant excess of tenderness was about to expose him to the punishment so long due to his crimes (1815: 15-16).

When a powerful figure like Napoleon shows tenderness and sympathy in public, this becomes suspicious of lack of sincerity in Williams' eyes. For her, Napoleon provides

another example of how feelings can be dangerous when they are insincere and used to manipulate others. Thus, Napoleon's fake sentiment leads Williams to further enhance her portrayal of his scheming disposition. Rigged emotional responses cannot hold the sense of community since this must come from a spontaneous collective and simultaneous experience. At the same time, the politics of the *old regime* were associated with intrigue and conspiracy, and thus, deception. For that matter, transparency and sincerity were regarded as fundamental traits in the character of a virtuous ruler. Williams further characterizes Bonaparte as the villain of her chronicles, by giving him the power of annihilating any empathic feelings in others. When talking about the young men that join the imperial army, she describes that "Those very youths, who had left their paternal home, full of the tenderest emotions of domestic sorrow [...] No sooner reached the army to which they had been dragged with reluctant steps, than they became new beings. Napoleon fixed his basilisk's eye upon them, and they were fascinated by his glance" (1819: 128). Williams implies that not only is Bonaparte an embodiment of evil but he uses his malignant qualities as part of his appeal to attract his followers. Napoleon appears here as a corruptive force that annihilates the humanity and empathy of the young soldiers.

In the first pages of *Narrative*, Williams alludes to Madame de Staël when referring to Napoleon: "I shall begin with the second volume of Napoleon's history, or, to use the words of Madame de Staël, of Bonaparte's adventures" (1815: 5). The allusion to her fellow woman writer Madame de Staël is especially compelling in this instance, because Staël's rivalry with Napoleon was well-known at the time. Williams' words here imply that she sided with Staël in her rejection of the emperor. Williams was interested in Staël's productions, which were highly regarded in Europe during the early nineteenth century. In 1818, *Considérations sur les Principaux Événements de la Révolution Française*, translated into English as *Considerations on the Principal Events of the*

French Revolution, by Madame de Staël was published posthumously, as she had passed away the preceding year. The main subject of her work, a memory of her experiences during the Revolution, clearly resonated with Williams' interests. For that matter, when Sydney Owenson (1781-1859) visits Williams in Paris in 1816, it does not come as a surprise that she finds her reading Staël's *Considerations*: "we had scarcely warmed into intimacy over the subject of Madame de Staël's new work on the Revolution" (1829: 169). In *Considerations*, together with other works such as *Dix Années d'Exil*, translated as *Ten Years of Exile* (1821) Staël shows her contempt for Napoleon.

Even though Williams and Staël wrote from different perspectives, since Staël had received an aristocratic education, which Beatrice Guenther describes as "marked by a complex blend of wealth, privilege and social status" (2012: 203). Besides, Staël consistently defended a parliamentary monarchy, following the British model, while Williams had espoused her support of a Republican model. Nevertheless, both authors coincide in their contempt for Napoleon despite their support for the revolutionary cause. Staël also alludes to supernatural similes to emphasize Napoleon's inability to rule the country: "When he [Napoleon] encounters honour anywhere, it may be said that his artifices are disconcerted, as evil spirits are conjured by the sign of the cross" (1821: 27). Napoleon is compared to a possessed malignant spirit in order to allude to his deceitful manners and lack of honour. Even though Staël is exiled from France, she continues to exert political influence through her writings. Even though she does not directly denounce the Emperor, since this would have meant that her book was banished in France –and in spite of this *On Germany* was banned–, she decides to prove her disapproval of him by refusing to praise him:

> Bonaparte wished me to praise him in my writings, not assuredly that any additional praise would have been remarked in the fumes of the incense which surrounded him; but he was vexed that I should be the only writer of reputation in France who had published

> books during his reign without making any mention of his gigantic existence, and at last with inconceivable rage he suppressed my work on Germany. (*Considérations*, 471)

Even though Staël considers herself the only author who decides to resist Napoleon's demands, Williams also experiences the consequences of neglecting Bonaparte's name in her writing as the following anecdote suggests:

> Bonaparte considered the English newspapers as good as diplomatic dispatches, and containing more accurate information of the state of Europe than the reports of his emissaries at foreign courts. His translators made such strange blunders in the transcript of names, that he often collated the translation with the original. In one of these surveys, my name fell under his notice, prefixed to a few verses I had written on the peace at Amiens. He inquired why they were not translated? The translator, to whom I was acquainted, answered, that this had been omitted in conformity to his orders to translate nothing of literature, or poetry, in which his name was not mentioned. But could this be possible? –An Ode on the Peace, without any mention of the Great Pacificator! –*Le Grand Pacificateur*! –words, which now resounded throughout all France; words that were engraved on marble in palaces, and stuck up below his bust, placed at a signpost at the door of every hedge-alehouse on the highway.
>
> The ode was translated; and if the First Consul was angry at what was omitted, he was far more irritated at what he found: this was the epithet of the *subject* waves, applied to England [...] This was touching a jarring string indeed this was declaring myself of the faction of sea-despots. It was almost treason: but I had friends at court, and therefore escaped with a slight punishment, inflicted a few months after the prefect of police, who arrested me, and my whole family, on the pretext of examining my papers; from which ordeal I came triumphant, having been detained a prisoner only twenty-four hours. (1815: 286-288)

Williams was arrested after this incident, and, as in the preceding passage, her writing places her in the midst of political affairs. Williams' writings become a tool for resistance against the prevailing power in this instance, as it had been the case during the times of the *Terror*, when her flagrant denunciation of the Jacobin leaders puts her on the radar of the Committee of Public Safety:

> The English newspapers came regularly to the committee of public safety, in which passages from my letters were frequently transcribed, and the work mentioned as mine; and those papers were translated into French for the members of the committee [...]. Thus I passed the winter at Paris with the knife of the guillotine suspended over me by a frail thread. (vol.I: 1795: 173-4).

Here, the publication of her writings in Britain makes her a threat for the authorities. As explained chapter 2.6., Williams had been very explicit in her criticism of the Jacobins. However, in times of Napoleon, an author does not need to directly attack the emperor to be accused of treason. This passage is particularly interesting because this time it is not a fragment from her *Letters* that is censored but a poem. In noting this, she highlights that her writings, regardless of their genre, are always immersed in political argumentation. Besides, the fact that her texts receive political consideration allows Williams to present herself as an influential writer. Interestingly enough, in this case, Williams shows her disagreement with Napoleon's political manoeuvrings not by openly criticizing his governance but by deliberately avoiding any direct allusion to him, which becomes an act of resistance. Despite the control exercised by the government on writers, as Williams explains, she nevertheless avoids punishment thanks to one of her connections. As she had done in telling the anecdote of her liberation, explained in 3.4., when she conceals Debry's involvement in her release, Williams omits the identity of the friend that pleaded her cause before Napoleon. Throughout her productions, Williams emphasizes that she is well-connected among Parisian circles. Nevertheless, having revolutionary friends and acquaintances, her connections tend to put her at risk rather than acting in her favour, as explained in the previous passage.

The aforementioned anecdote draws together several of Bonaparte's attitudes that portray him in a negative light. In the passage, Napoleon appears as an egotistical figure, obsessed with finding his name on the literary works. In fact, Napoleon's name needs to be explicitly mentioned for a work to be considered worthy of translating it into French. Besides, his name is engraved 'throughout all France', to further reinforce his image as one of a self-absorbed individual. However, the epithet chosen to refer to Napoleon, 'The Great Pacificator' is ironic in Williams' view. Even though Williams had celebrated him

for bringing the cause of liberty all over Europe, see 4.1.2., her perspective about his actions had dramatically changed in the past decades. In *Narrative*, before this anecdote is introduced, she had already presented him as a manipulative figure, whose emotions are only feigned to attract the sympathy of the public. For that matter, Williams implies that his role as *pacificateur* is nothing more than a façade. Napoleon's constant surveillance of the press also makes him an authoritative figure, someone who restricts the freedom of speech and expression. In fact, Napoleon had established a strong system of censorship that he himself supervised (Goldstein, 1989: 137). The freedom of the press had been a controversial issue during the years of the French Revolution. In 1791 censorship from Louis XVI's administration was abolished so as to build a freer country. However, in 1794, coinciding with the Terror, censorship was appointed again and it continued during Napoleon's rule. In fact, the number of newspapers that circulated in Paris was limited to only four, which explains why Napoleon turns to the British newspapers in order to find accurate information in Williams' anecdote.

In the end, as it had happened with the Jacobin government, Bonaparte's Empire was overthrown. She writes that since the foreign armies have left Paris, "The French were no longer prisoners in their own land, the cup of humiliation, which was full, had not been suffered to overflow; and they hailed their emancipation with transport […] All was in strong and delightful contrast with the gloomy horror of the preceding year" (1819: 154).[26] She had already followed a similar approach when narrating the overturn of Robespierre (section 3.7.), whereby she establishes a contrast between the past situation and the new one, emphasizing the positive qualities of the latter: "Paris once more reassumes a gay aspect" (1795, vol. III: 6). As with Napoleon's defeat, Robespierre's fall

[26] Williams, *Letters on the Events*,154.

gives the impression of going back to a more peaceful and prosperous time, even if it comes hand in hand with the monarchy.

5.1.3. Religious Toleration

Williams had always been concerned throughout her career with religious toleration, but it does not appear disconnected from the French Revolution. Evan Radcliffe writes that "to dissenters in the early 1790s, the Revolution raised hopes of change in Britain, change that could include an improvement in their own position" (1997: 67). "As a formidable commentator within the dissenting community", Duckling believes that Williams found hope in the Revolution for the betterment of the dissenter's position (2010: 75-76). However, she finds that in France, despite the ideals spread in the first months of the Revolution, religious persecution is still an issue. As a result, religious toleration constitutes a pressing concern for her. After the Reformation and the European Wars on Religion, organised religion was called into question and the debate extended into the eighteenth century. Although religious toleration has traditionally been regarded as the focal point of the European Enlightenment, Juan Pablo Díaz observes that theological debates were of a heterogeneous nature (2017). Arguments on toleration were given by Christians, atheists and deists alike during the time in which Williams wrote her chronicles. She regarded toleration as an extension of the cause of liberty throughout her career, but it is in *Letters on the Events* where she discusses it in depth. Williams receives to her horror the news about the violence against Protestants in the South of France during the White Terror (1815). Four of the letters within *Letters on the Events*, entitled "Persecution of the Protestants", were even published separately in 1816 as *On the Late Persecution of the Protestants in the South of France*. This proves Williams' efforts to include her voice in the debate on religious toleration. In Kennedy's view, "because of

the importance of her work on the French Revolution, critics have minimized if not altogether ignored her contribution to the writing of Protestant history" (2002: 190). However, this topic never appears isolated from her previous interests, since she connects it to the French Revolution in her narrative.

In the "supplementary letter", added as the last letter of *Letters on the Events*, the following words can be read: "While the Protestants were persecuted, the French were enslaved, and despotism and intolerance are always found in the same page of French history" (1819: 198). In this closing chapter, she establishes the connection between the French Revolution and religious freedom. For Williams, the cause of liberty means the end of oppression. When the people in France are tyrannized by the government, intolerance and discrimination are inevitable and vice versa. The Protestants appear as firm supporters of the revolutionary cause, and Williams calls them "true friends of liberty". "The hour of emancipation arrived; the revolution took place, no doubt hailed by the protestants like the day-star from on high" (1819: 28). As a conclusion of her book, Williams continues to argue in the next that: "She [France] knows that national and Protestant liberty, which have one common origin, are the natural guardians of each other and are destined to perish or live together" (1819: 199).

Before delving into the analysis of the recent violent events that she is concerned about, she provides the historical and political context that has fostered the present situation. She goes back to one of the most traumatic times in French Protestant history, the French Wars of Religion during the 16th century. In Williams' words: "The protestants again opened the page of French history, and read the long series of their persecutions and wrongs. Let us follow them a moment in the retrospect –they saw the dreadful day of St. Bartholomew" (1819: 17). The St. Bartholomew Day massacre took place in 1572, during the French Wars of Religion, and consisted of a series of attacks by

the Catholic majority on the Huguenots, resulting in thousands of deaths. Williams offers the reader the necessary context for understanding the recent events which is further compounded by the fact that she explicitly mentions some of the documents that she has consulted in order to research about this historical period, such as the letters of Madame de Maintenon. Madame de Maintenon's morganatic marriage with Louis XIV put her in a position of power. During the rule of Louis XIV, anti-Huguenot measures were promoted. The Sun King established the dragonnades and several edicts, being the Edict of Fontainebleau (1685), the one that expelled Huguenots from France. Williams writes that "Madame de Maintenon sometimes treats the persecution of the protestants as an affair of finance" (1819: 21). By going back to Maintenon's text, she shows her interest in learning history directly from the participants. She also points towards Maintenon's disregard of French subjects as individuals, since they are only an "affair" for her. As explained throughout this study, Williams had claimed during her writing career that the common good can never be achieved at the expense of anyone's personal well-being.

Once she has explained the events that took place in the second half of the 1600s, she continues to draw a parallelism between the situation in 1815 and the early years of the Revolution: "the massacres of 1815 could be traced as proceeding in a direct line of connection from the massacres of 1790. The same fanatics grasped the dagger, and the same order of victims felt the stroke" (1819: 16). Williams offers here a timeline of the events that have led to the massacres she is now denouncing. She displays her understanding of history as a continuous development of events that lead one to another. To use a more Godwinian term, historical events appear here as a "chain". Godwin wrote in his *Political Justice* that every event in the universe is the result of a "great chain of causes" (1793: 281). As William St Clair has shown, Godwin and Williams knew each other personally (1989: 45) and Williams' "volumes of published letters [...] found their

way into Godwin's *New Annual Register*" (1989: 158). The *New Annual Register* was founded in 1780 by Williams' mentor Andrew Kippis, who was also Godwin's tutor at Hoxton (St Clair, 1989: 9). Godwin was in charge of the annual's historical part from 1784 to 1791 (Marken, 1953: 478). In 1791, the *New Annual Register* wrote that Williams was a "favourite of the public, and consecrated to humanity and liberty" (1791: 270). Both Williams' *Letters* and Godwin's *Political Justice*, were published in 1793 by the same house, G.G. and J. Robinson. Besides, Godwin's *Political Justice* became easily accessible due to its popularity, so Williams was most likely aware of his philosophical theory even though she does not explicitly elaborate on its theoretical aspects. However, there is a crucial difference between their respective lines of thought. Godwin considered that:

> He therefore who regards all things past, present and to come as links of an indissoluble chain, will, as often as he recollects this comprehensive view, be superior to the tumult of passion; and will reflect upon the moral concerns of mankind with the same clearness of perception, the unalterable firmness of judgement, and the same tranquillity as we are accustomed to do upon the truths of geometry. (1793: 316-7)

Williams differentiates her thinking from Godwin's in the relevance that she gives to passion. Williams does not consider that emotions diminish the soundness of an argument. On the contrary, after having experienced the events, she constantly shows in her narrative how the individual lives of the people cannot be disentangled from historical events: "Who had not wept for a brother, an affianced lover, a husband, or a son?" (1815: 65-66). Williams regrets here that war and political turmoil make an indelible mark in the familiar, sentimental and personal lives of its participants.

In order to argue in favour of political toleration, Williams makes reference to Voltaire: "Voltaire had also brought persecution to disgrace; the multitude had adopted the opinions of the Encyclopedists [...] toleration was the general fashion; and the great revolution approached" (1819: 27). Here Williams connects once again the ideals of the

French Revolution with religious toleration. For Williams, the objective of the Revolution goes beyond abolishing the monarchy, she also wants the Revolution to get rid of other forms of oppression, such as religious intolerance. In this quotation, Williams presents the intellectual spirit in France in the decades right before the French Revolution started, coinciding with the time Voltaire was being active with his writings. In those times, as explained by Renwick, "elites were, as the century progressed, looking with increasing disapproval upon the negative treatment of Protestants as being unworthy of a polite and cultured society" (2009: 183). Correlatively, by using Voltaire's argument, she situates her argument within the French context regarding religious toleration. The *philosophe* had played a relevant role in the debate on toleration, especially after Jean Calas's sentence and subsequent torturous execution in 1762. Calas, a Protestant merchant, was accused of having murdered his son because he had converted to Catholicism when his son had in fact committed suicide. Voltaire's interest in the case led him to publish *Treatise on Toleranc*e (1763). In this work, Voltaire attacks religious fanaticism, which made him a spokesperson for toleration in France. Among different religions, and especially among different Christian faiths, Voltaire denounces Catholicism for its bigotry: "There still some fanatics among the Calvinist population, but it is evident that there are far more among some Catholics" (2000 [1763]: 25). Besides, Voltaire cherished other countries' policies on tolerance, including England, China, Turkey, India and Persia. Since Voltaire was directly rendering France as an intolerant country, the work was banned.

In his *Letters on England* (1778), Voltaire shows interest in experiencing what he considered a more tolerant society. For that matter, he describes his visits to dissenting circles in London –among them Presbyterians, the church to which Williams belonged– proving that a peaceful coexistence of different religions is part of a prosperous nation. It

is not coincidental then, that Williams sided with Voltaire. However, Williams does not limit her defence of toleration to just describing the ideas of a philosopher like Voltaire. Williams puts the ideas of Voltaire in a contemporary context, and instead of focusing on Calas, she describes the situation of 1815. After the return of the monarchy, in an outburst of violence, counterrevolutionaries retaliated against their ideological opponents. Even though the conflict has been mostly interpreted by historians as a reaction towards the Revolution rather than a religious issue (McCoy, 2015: 131), McCoy argues that "religious policies of the Revolution and Napoleon's Concordat were at once the sources of the violence of 1815 and the reason why the White Terror was the last major outburst of Catholic-Protestant conflict in France" (2015: 132). However, this issue needs to be invisible in the historical documents that record this event, since they were written from the ultra-royalist perspective (McCoy, 2015: 131). Williams provides a counterpoint to official accounts of the white terror, since she denounces the event as an attack on the Protestant Religion. Besides, her account is written from both a revolutionary and protestant point of view. When mentioning Voltaire, Williams is not interested in discussing toleration in general as a philosophical issue, but rather, she wants to call attention to a particular incident that she denounces. Williams recognizes that with the Affair Calas, Voltaire had triggered a reaction of conscience "his magical pen defended the protestant victim, and dragged his persecutors to light" (1819: 18). In the same manner, she wants to expose the counterrevolutionaries in the South of France as responsible for the massacres, she even ventures to single out specific individuals, such as the sub-prefect of Languedoc: "many persons were massacred in broad day before the house of the sub-perfect. That frigid spectator of crimes was punished by no court of justice, because there is no penal statute against a hard heart" (1819: 52). Again, Williams brings attention to lack of emotions as an essential trait in a villain. Even though the

judiciary system does not condemn lack of empathy, Williams counteracts his impunity by making his crimes public through her writing. If Voltaire had been able to stimulate a widespread discussion on the situation endured by the Protestants in pre-revolutionary France, Williams attempts at doing her part in the early years of the nineteenth century.

5.2. Writing for Posterity

Letters on the Events is the last chronicle by Williams that deals with contemporary French politics. After 1819, Williams' next production in prose is *Souvenirs de la Révolution Française* (1827), published in the same year of Williams' passing, which also marks Williams' last work on the French Revolution. Between *Letters on the Events* and *Souvenirs*, Williams produced *Poems on Various Subjects with Introductory Remarks on the Present State of Science and Literature in France* (1823). The volume published in 1823 is Williams' second book of poems. The first one, *Poems* (1786), appeared before she embarked on her first trip to Paris and even before the Bastille was demolished. For the purpose of my study, I am focusing on Williams' productions in prose; however, a look into the preface and introductory remarks to *Poems on Various Subjects* shows Williams' emphasis in asserting control over her reputation at the dawn of her career. In a study focused on poetry, Andrew Bennet explains that in the eighteenth century, writers became increasingly concerned with the afterlife of their works (1999: 1). As I shall elaborate on later on, Williams appeal to posterity moves beyond the boundaries of poetry and it is also noticeable in her last work in prose, *Souvenirs*, which translates into English as "memories", offers an account in retrospect of the events she had already described in the chronicles I have discussed throughout my dissertation. Before, Williams had judged the Revolution in the midst of it, while in *Souvenirs*, she applies all the knowledge of the events she had acquired in the last four decades. What is more, she also provides a revision

of her own work, since she makes amends in the points she has changed her opinion about while she defends herself in other instances. Interestingly, in *Poems on Various Subjects*, she also revisits poems that had been already published while she adds some unpublished pieces. In both *Poems on Various Subjects* and *Souvenirs*, Williams shows an interest in asserting control over the reputation of her works, both in verse and prose.

In the preface to *Poems on Various Subjects*, Williams makes some remarks on her narratives: "My narratives make a part of that marvellous story which the eighteenth century has to record to future times, and the testimony of a witness will be heard" (1823: x). Here, Williams shows awareness in the fact that she has experienced a unique moment in history and that her works are inseparable from their context. At the same time, Williams finds herself now at a time in history in which the events of the Revolution are no longer the breaking news, but rather, since the time has gone by, her texts are now approached by the new generations as means to learn about past history. For that matter, she appeals to the younger generation of readers that she assumes would be unaware of her work: "My literary patrons belonged to 'the days of other years', when a ray of favour sometimes fell on my early essays in verse. I can now only expect that, it being the nature of the English public to be just, I shall meet with no more severity than I deserve" (1823: xiv). In this passage, Williams is directly talking to her English readership, and thus, her intention is to exert control over her reputation in her home country. Williams' poetry was very well received at the beginning of her career, an example being Godwin's affirmation in *Memories of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, where Williams is described as "an author of a collection of poems of remarkable merit" (1798: 102) while he forgets to mention her political works in prose. As shown in 4.1.2., after she started to devote her writing to political issues, she increasingly faced more opposition in Britain. She nonetheless confronted that criticism in *Sketches* as noted in 4.2. She was

perfectly aware of the fact that her works were increasingly perceived in a negative light. At the same time, in the nineteenth century she had not been as active in producing chronicles of the Revolution as she had been during the 1790s. Williams even ventures to claim that she is now "considered a stranger in England" (1823: xiii-xiv). Due to the lack of popularity that she experiences in England, she collects her best poetic works, with the necessary amends, in *Poems on Various Subjects*. Four years later, she resolves to do the same with her chronicles of the Revolution, as she recaps in *Souvenirs* the events already discussed in her *Letters*, *Sketches* and *Narratives*, as it will be explained in section 5.3.

The changes she makes to the poems she decides to recover for publication in 1823 already indicate that Williams understands her writing in a different light when compared to her early writings. The poem that offers more alterations from the original publication is *Peru*, published in 1784 and included in *Poems on Various Subjects* as "Peruvian Tales". This study cannot possibly go into the two versions that Paula R. Feldman has already provided in her preface to *Peru and Peruvian Tales* (2015). What is compelling for the present discussion, though, is that in 1823 Williams detaches her poem from history writing: ""I have now adopted what appears to me a more appropriate denomination, that of Peruvian Tales in Verse; I have not ventured to dignify them with the appellation of historical" (1823: xi). As Feldman explains, the genre of tales had become "the most popular genre in Britain" (2015: 20) and Williams' decision responds to the literary tastes of her time (2015: 20). As noted in 4.1.2, in her approach to history writing, Williams had rejected the epic tradition. At the same time, the label 'tales' seems appropriate since *Peru* tells the history of fictional characters, unlike most of Williams' chronicles, which are riddled with anecdotes that come from her experience rather than imagination. Andrew Bennet (1999) finds in the Romantic appeal to posterity an interest

in achieving an everlasting literary celebrity, however, Williams' case is original here since she is concerned with aligning her early work and her later facet as a chronicler of the French Revolution. Since she delves into history writing in her prose, she separates her previous work on Peru from the historical tradition, showing in this way that her approach to history is based on experience and observation rather than on epic conventions.

The preface to *Poems on Various Subjects* also offers a defence of French literature, as the second part of the title indicates. According to Williams, newspapers in Britain have claimed that poetry in France has suffered a process of degeneration in the last years: "Before I close these pages I cannot resist seizing the occasion of protesting against the opinions which have of late gone forth in England [...] I consider it the more a duty to offer some remarks on this subject" (1823: xiv). Even in a book of poems, Williams devotes a few pages to analyse the present situation of France, since she conceives it as her duty. In this manner, writing becomes for Williams a form of public service. Besides, what bothers Williams the most is that the degeneration of literature is attributed to the influence of the Revolution in the cultural environment of France. Williams contradicts this assertion and writes that "French eloquence, shackled in a thousand ways before the Revolution, burst at once into splendour, when the delegates of the people were permitted to proclaim their rights, and discuss their interests" (1823: xvi). Before the Revolution, the French were expected not to displease the court, and this puts a constraint when expressing themselves. Being able to discuss topics that actually have an impact on others, that is to say, talking or writing for a cause, enhances eloquence. Williams claims that the "purest source of eloquence is found in the love of liberty" (823: xvi), and her love of freedom inspired her to produce the greatest part of her work, so politics is not for her at odds with literature, but just the opposite, as she had defended

throughout her career. In this manner, Williams upholds that the Revolution has had a positive impact on poetry while she reaffirms her support of the cause.

5.3. *Souvenirs de la Révolution Française*

As explained in the previous section 5.2., *Souvenirs* is the last work produced by Williams in which she provides a recap of the events she had described in her chronicles of the French Revolution. Williams died in 1827, and the publication of *Souvenirs* in the same year testifies that she was concerned with the revolutionary cause until the last moments of her life. The fact that the Revolution had been a lifelong commitment for her is a constant topic in this narrative from the first pages:

> This small work will allow to see, if I don't deceive myself, that in the always constant and solid progress of the revolutionary ideas after twenty-five years, nothing has been more constant than the opinions of my own heart, its unwavering loyalty to the cause of liberty, or, in other words, to the cause of the human race. Driven since my youth by the midst of the great events of the French revolution, its sacred principles became my cult and my idol. (1827:2)[27]

Here, Williams asserts that despite the changes in revolutionary governments, her faith in the principles of the Revolution has persisted. At the same time, she asserts that the events witnessed in the 1790s have left an indelible mark in her thinking. According to Williams, the content of *Souvenirs* will reveal that her commitment to the French Revolution was always strong.

Another point that differentiates *Souvenirs* from Williams' previous productions is that it was not published in English. The book was translated into French by Williams' nephew Charles Coquerel, and it was sent for publication in Paris. Even though an English

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[27] My translation of "Ce petit ouvrage laissera voir, si je ne m'abuse, que dans le progrès toujours constant et ferme des idées de la révolution française depuis vingt-cinq ans, rien n'a été plus constant que les opinions de mon propre coeur, sa fidélité inébranlable à la cause de la liberté, ou, en d'autres termes, à la cause de l'espèce humaine. Entraînée dès ma jeunesse au milieu des grands événements de la révolution française, ses principes sacrés devinrent mon culte et mon idole".

version is mentioned in Coquerel's preface: "This translation has been done faithfully after the English manuscript, that hasn't been published in London yet" (1827: viii),[28] neither the London edition nor the manuscript have ever been found (Kennedy, 2002: 210). Being only available in French, *Souvenirs* is the least well-known work by Williams and the one that has received less critical attention. The preface by the translator also consolidates Williams' intentions and vindicates Williams' role in the French Revolution:

> Having thrown herself early in the midst of the storm of our revolution, due to her willingness and enthusiasm, having embraced its principles with all the patriotic fervour of a woman, she has been a spectator of what has happened; she had been acquainted with the main actors of those great days. Her salon always remained open, and it is known that the public events, and especially the passions, that carries them, reflect themselves accurately enough in social interactions. (1827: viii)[29]

The description that Coquerel provides of her aunt coincides with the way she had portrayed herself throughout her literary career. First of all, he highlights her eagerness to participate in a political cause in which, even though it does not take place in her country, she involves herself with patriotism. This statement brings further attention to Williams' hybrid position between two nations, Britain and France. At the same time, Coquerel reinforces Williams' position as a spectator of the events, something that she had defended throughout her career in order to give validity to her account. Nevertheless, Williams does not appear here as a mere spectator, since she mingles with the revolutionary figures and participates in political discussion with them through her salon. The mention of Williams' salon is compelling since Williams tends to minimize the relevance of her salon in her previous publications, probably to protect herself from

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[28] My translation of "Cette traduction a été faite fidèlement sur le manuscrit anglaises, qui n'a pas encore paru à Londres".

[29] My translation of "S'étant jetée de bonne heure, par volonté et par enthousiasme, au milieu des orages de notre révolution, en ayant ambrassée les principes avec toute la ferveur du patriotisme d'une femme, elle a été spectatrice de ce qui s'est passé; elle est liée avec les auteurs principaux de ces grands jours. Son salon est toujours resté ouvert, et l'on sait que les événements publics, et surtout les passions, qui les amènent, se réfléchissent assez fidèlement dans les rapports de la société".

political persecution. However, in *Souvenirs*, Williams vindicates her salon as a way in which she participated in the public sphere of the time, as it will be discussed further in this chapter. Coquerel also vindicates that emotions played a great part in the political atmosphere of the time, an idea that Williams had claimed through her chronicles and discussed in 2.1., 2.4., 3.2. and 4.2.1.

Despite the sexist remark in the passage quoted before, Coquerel affirms that despite of her gender, Williams' participation in the French Revolution gives her the necessary knowledge and authority to write about politics:

> It is instructive for us to listen to what she tells us about what she saw. It constitutes another testimony in the inquiry of posterity. Her book is just an account, in which things and men are judged with the frank and naïve sensibility of a woman who, wiser than a lot of men, she has closely seen the abuses of freedom and the transformations of the French, without reaching the conclusion that freedom is a bad thing, and that we are not worthy of it. (1827: vi)[30]

For Coquerel, Williams' account of the Revolution is valuable because each testimony has the potential to provide information for the future generations. As Coquerel sees it, it is necessary to listen to witnesses in order to complete the puzzle of the events and provide an informed judgment of the Revolution. Coquerel recognizes that the experiences of a foreign woman are valuable for the French in their aims to reassemble the pieces of their history. The fact that he presents Williams' account as simple and naive, could be interpreted as diminishing Williams' book. Coquerel's statement perpetuates Williams' image as a naive author whose political discussions are not sophisticated enough, a reputation that lasts to these days, Anne K. Mellor explicitly uses the term "naive" (1992: 261) while Karen Green perpetuate this image of Williams when she writes that "rather

[30] My translation of "Il est instructif pour nous de l'entendre nous raconter ce qu'elle a vu. C'est un témoin de plus dans l'enquête de la postérité. Son livre est un simple récit, où les choses et les hommes sont jugués avec la sensibilité franche et naïve d'une femme, qui, plus sage que beaucoup d'hommes, a vu prés les abus de la liberté et les mutations des Français, sans conclure que la liberté est une mauvaise chose, et que nos en sommes indignes".

than giving a political analysis of the frightful events that she relates, Williams falls back on poetic justice" (2014: 202). Nevertheless, taking into account Williams' emphasis on truthfulness and spontaneity[31], which follows the literature of sensibility, Coquerel's statement can be read as defending the truthfulness of Williams' interpretation of the events.

5.3.1. "J'ai pu me tromper, mais j'ai toujours été sincère"[32]

The reception of Williams' work in Britain was increasingly negative, as explained in 4.1.2. The purpose of my study is not to offer an analysis of how the attacks in the British press affected Williams' reputation, but this section will examine how Williams defended herself from criticism in *Souvenirs*. Deborah Kennedy (2002) and Louise Duckling (2010) have already demonstrated how the reception of Williams' work in Britain had a profound effect in the loss of her popularity and good reputation as a writer. In the 1780s Williams had "established a respectable reputation for herself within an intellectual circle" (Duckling, 2010: 74), while at the end of her career "Williams came to embody the archetypal image of a wanton and wild Revolutionary woman" (Duckling, 2010: 75). As noted in 4.2.2., Williams was accused by the British press of siding with the Jacobins. Williams, who had devoted the greatest part of her *Letters* to denounce the violence of Jacobinism, was outraged by these allegations and stated that defending herself in this instance would have been degrading. However, in *Souvenirs*, written almost three decades later, Williams decides to fight against defamation. Written at the very end of her career, Williams' newfound emphasis in clarifying for the public the real intentions of her writings, despite the misinterpretation spread in Britain, shows a clear intention of

[31] See 2.1. and 3.5.

[32] "I might have erred, but I have always been truthful" (my translation).

defending her future reputation. In fact, Williams herself explicitly asserts that defending herself is the main purpose of *Souvenirs*:

> Most importantly, I believe I have the duty [...] I must reject an accusation against me by some English writers, who find that I have changed my opinion in the latest years, and who, to put it directly, have declared me duly convinced of political apostasy. My duty, like my wish, is to discredit them, not by appearing to be complaining about this reckless judgement, because complaining is not answering, but by offering to the public the abbreviated sketch of my views, my judgements and even my actions, in the midst of the magnificent scenes of the drama that I witnessed. (1827: 1-2)[33]

Williams understands the need to defend herself is more than a wish but a duty and almost an obligation. She does not devise a future in which she is perceived as a counter-revolutionary writer, after having defended the revolution throughout her life. Besides, even though she had considered a degradation to defend herself against the accusations of Jacobinism, she feels compelled to reject royalism. Even though Williams had harshly criticized the Jacobin party, as explained in 2.6. and throughout chapter 3, devoted to Williams' writings on the Terror, she feels more slandered by the charges of royalism. In Britain, as explained in 1.1., supporting the French Revolution came to be equated with Jacobinism. However, being accused of royalism would mean for Williams to be accused of renouncing her life-long beliefs, as she had always supported the cause in France. At the same time, in the first page of *Souvenirs*, Williams explains how she aims to defend herself. By giving a sketch of her views and judgements, she aims at providing an articulated defence. In fact, Williams had been accused of royalism since she had celebrated the downfall of Napoleon with the arrival of the Restoration. However, in *Souvenirs*, she devotes a major part of her work to feature Napoleon and his imperialism

[33] My translation of "Je crois le devoir surtout [...] je dois repousser une accusation dirigée contre moi par quelques écrivains de l'Angleterre, qui trouvent que j'ai changé d'opinion pendant les dernières années, et qui, pour tout dire, m'ont déclarée dûment convaincue d'une apostasie en politique. Mon devoir, comme mon désir, est de les réfuter, non en paraissant me plaindre de ce jugement téméraire, car se plaindre n'est pas répondre, mais en offrant au public l'esquisse abrégée de mes vues, de mes jugements et même de mes actions, au milieu des scènes majestueuses du drame dont je fus témoin".

as a sort of despotic power, which could be equated to the oppressive monarchy that the Revolution initially battled against. Following this line of argument, Napoleon does not represent the Revolution for her but the monarchy, and for that reason, she remains revolutionary until the very end.

Later on in the narrative, Williams explicitly names "those writers" who disapproved of her writing, by tracing the attacks to the counter-revolutionary journal the *Anti-Jacobin*. This journal had been lambasting Williams' work since the beginning of its publication, as explained in 4.1.1. Williams explains the reasons why she did not defend herself earlier:

> Since the earliest times of the revolution, we had often heard a repeated saying, a bit worn, according to which the friends of liberty were seen as brothers and friends of the jacobins. A newspaper that created a big impact then, the *Anti-Jacobin*, that was published in England, reproached me for a thousand offences. The journalists were expecting to cause me a very violent affliction; they believed that they were causing me all the pain that they wished for [...] But, unfortunately, the *Anti-Jacobin*, a necessary reading in the tea circles in London, was completely unknown in Paris [...] When a friend of mine brought me later on the complete collection of the *Anti-Jacobin*, we had just recently left the regime of terror; and the epigrams by the English journalist seemed to be light pinpricks to me, after the agitations of this storm. My spirit was then well filled with other ideas, and my soul had risen to a very serious tone to allow the jokes to reach it. (1827: 44-45)[34]

First of all, Williams did not feel the need to defend herself in the late 1790s because she was well-respected in the French circles. This claim is also made at the very beginning of *Souvenirs*, in which Williams clarifies that her self-defence is only directed towards the British newspapers: "The reproaches [...] that came from the British newspapers that held

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[34] My translation of "Dès les premiers temps de la révolution, nous avons souvent entendu répéter un adage un peu usé, par lequel les amis de la liberté sont regardés comme frères et amis des jacobins. Un journal qui fit une forte sensation alors, l'*Anti-Jacobin*, qui paraissait en Angleterre, m'accabla, moi, de mille invectives. Les rédacteurs espéraient me causer un très-violent chagrin; ils croyaient me faire tout le mal qu'ils me souhaitaient. [...] Mais, par malheur, l'*Anti-Jacobin*, lecture obligée des cercles à thé de Londres, était alors totalement inconnu à Paris [...] Et quand un ami de Londres m'apporta plus tard la collection complète de l'*Anti-Jacobin*, nous sortions tout récemment du régime de la terreur; et les épigrammes du journalist anglais me paraissaient des piqûres d'épingles bien légères, après les agitations de cette tempête. Mon esprit était alors rempli de bien d'autres idées, et mon âme était montée à un ton trop sérieux pour que des plaisanteries pussent l'atteindre".

hostile opinion of France, that is to say, of the French people, had little affected me" (1827: 3).[35] Besides, Williams finds that the resentment that this journal showed towards the French Revolution had more to do more with a British rivalry with the French nation, rather than with the actual revolutionary process. In the 1790s, Williams had just experienced the Terror, and her mind was more set in the events she witnessed in France than in the opinions and debates circulated in Britain. She was experiencing the events while others were just talking about it, without being personally affected by the terror, an idea that is reinforced by the contrast between the tea circles and turmoil that took place during the terror in France, that she refers to as a storm. Thus, Williams believes that, while the British newspaper enjoys the privilege of joking about the Revolution, in France, they experience it with the seriousness worthy of a political event such as the French Revolution.

Williams also criticizes the oversimplification of the party politics of the French Revolution, since they equate the support of the Revolution with being a Jacobin, while in France they were several revolutionary factions confronted against each other, something that she had meticulously demonstrated in her *Letters*. Also, she observes that the press that has attacked her, made use of rigid labels to attack her work without understanding the nuances that differentiate various ideological positions. In fact, she writes that "I have talked about me the least that I have been able to, in order to entirely clear me away from the accusation of Jacobinism, that nevertheless they used against me with as much ingenuity as those who later on honoured me by calling me a *ultra-royalis*t" (1827: 122-123).[36] In this passage, she shows the mischaracterization of the revolutionary

[35] My translation of "Des reproches [...], partis des journaux de l'opinion anglaise hostile à la France, c'est-à-dire, à la nation française, m'auraient peu touchée".
[36] My translation of "J'ai parlé de moi le moins que j'ai pu, pour me laver entièrement du reproche de jacobinisme, qui cependant m'a été adressé avec autant de candeur que lorsque plus tard on me fit l'honneur de me traiter d'*ultra-royaliste*".

parties by her slanderers, since she has consistently proven her rejection of the Jacobins and her denounce of absolutism. Williams shows here her belief in the fact that the Revolution needs to be understood by the parameters of the people who made it and experienced it. This idea appeared explicitly in *Sketches*, when Williams writes that "we must not, I believe, measure the French Revolution by the sober calculations of a Dutch Republican, nor with the reflecting and constitutional analysis of an English patriot" (1801, vol. I: 45-46). Williams claims here that the French Revolution should be judged within the context of France, since the point of view of other countries, that enjoyed more political liberties than France did before 1789, becomes too severe towards the French. For that matter, Williams mingles with the French, and provides the opinions of the actors in the events, instead of a dispassionate opinion written from afar.

The accusations of ultra-royalism appeared towards the end of Williams' career when she rejoices that Napoleon has been overthrown. Since Bonaparte's fall meant the beginning of the Bourbon Restoration, that lasted until 1830, Williams' position here was interpreted as welcoming the return of the royal family. The accusations of royalism, however, had been frequent in the course of the Revolution and it was not uncommon that revolutionary factions called each other 'royalist'. In fact, Madame Roland was accused, tried and executed on account of royalism, as explained in 3.3. However, the political atmosphere had completely changed since Roland's execution, and, amidst the Bourbon Restoration, the accusations of royalism do not put Williams at risk of political persecution. What concerns Williams the most here is that she wants to be remembered in posterity as someone who had always defended the revolution and who was not afraid of the consequences of fighting for a political cause. Williams tries to prevent a narrative that represents her in posterity as someone who had rejected the Revolutionary cause. In

Souvenirs, as she approaches her discussion of the Hundred Days, Williams clarifies the reasons behind her political position after Bonaparte's surrender:

> I reach now, in the course of these quick thoughts, to the historical point where I have been accused of *royalism*, *ultracism*, and of having betrayed the cause of my first principles. Here, I must simply repeat, and always with the same honesty, that my joy at Napoleon's downfall was extreme; but I wasn't expecting that, I admit it, that the satisfaction that this triumph of liberty inspired me would be misinterpreted, and that it would be seen as the desertion of a cause that I will never desert. It is possible that, in the future, the military glories of the eagles of Austerlitz will make people forget the abuses and the despotism of the victorious; but us, his contemporaries, his subjects, and, it has to be said, his slaves, we could not be as forgetful. (1827: 175)[37]

Here, Williams once again reinforces the historical value of people's experiences. At the same time, she criticizes the historical accounts of Napoleon rule that prioritize the military success of Bonaparte to his management of France first as a consul and later as an emperor. According to her, this understanding of history will in the future turn invisible the voices and experiences of those who suffered Napoleon's rule, such as herself. She explicitly mentions in *Souvenirs* the writings of French historian Philippe de Ségur (1780-1873), who had just published his *Histoire de Napoléon* in 1824. When discussing Ségur's publication, Williams states that "what should give the readers a sense of something great and even sublime, is not Napoleon's conduct but that of the army" (1827: 168-169).[38] Again, Williams prioritizes collective history to a militaristic narrative. Furthermore, she inscribes herself as one of the voices that have suffered from Napoleon's rule, and this gives her a unique perspective of the events. In fact, she presents her

[37] My translation of "J'arrive maintenant, dans le cours de ces réflexions rapides, à l'endroit historique où j'ai été accusée de royalisme, d'ultracisme, et de trahison envers la cause de mes premiers principes. Je dois ici simplement répéter, et toujours avec la même sincérité, que ma joie à la chute de Napoléon fut extrême; mais je ne m'attendais pas, je l'avoue, que la satisfaction que ce triomphe de la liberté m'inspira serait interprétée en mal, et qu'on y verrait l'abandon d'une cause que je n'abandonnerai jamais. Il est possible que, dans l'avenir, la gloire militaire des aigles d'Austerlitz fasse oublier les abus et le despotisme du vainqueur; mais nous, ses contemporains, ses sujets, et, il faut bien le dire, ses esclaves, nous ne saurions être aussi oublieux".

[38] My translation of "Ce qui doit donner aux lecteurs l'idée de quelque chose de grand, et de sublime même, ce n'est pas la conduite de Napoléon, mais celle de l'armée".

criticism of Napoleon not as a personal choice, but as a result of public opinion in which she partook. Simon Bainbridge explains that in British perspective, "Napoleon became an 'imaginary' figure [...] a 'fabrication' created to embody their political and personal hopes and fears" (1995: 1). Williams appears in her nineteenth-century production as completely disconnected from the British tradition, since she advocates for the demystification of Napoleon. She rejects an individualistic interpretation of Bonaparte in order to observe him from the perspective of French public opinion.

In order to defend her decision to celebrate Napoleon's downfall, Williams consistently presents him as a dupe of monarchical power. For that matter, in Williams' eyes, if Bonaparte was acting like a despotic king, to rejoice at the arrival of the restoration was in fact the result of her revolutionary inclinations. For that matter, she presents his policies as "modern feudalism" (1827: 158).[39] At the same time, Williams does not only defend herself from the accusations in the newspapers, but she wants to ensure that her future readers can have a complete understanding of her political position throughout her literary career, and that she has always been consistent with her defence of the French Revolution. Williams looks back to the times when she wrote *A Tour in Switzerland* and *Sketches*, where she had provided a favourable image of Napoleon, to justify that her former opinions were in line with her revolutionary faith:

> I was experiencing the most painful mix of feelings, and I renounced my admiration with great difficulty. I had to clear myself of all these beautiful dreams of my imagination, and finally regard him as he was. After this time, I did not praise him anymore, neither in prose nor in verse. (1827: 137)[40]

Williams, as time goes by, discovers that Napoleon was not behaving as the revolutionary hero she envisioned in *A Tour in Switzerland*, see 4.1.2. However, she acts accordingly

[39] My translation of "Féodalité modern".

[40] My translation of "J'éprovai alors le plus pénible mélange de sentiments, et je ne renonçai que bien difficilement à mon admiration. Il me fallut dissiper moi-même tous ces beaux rêves de mon imagination, et le contempler enfin tel qu'il était. Depuis cette époque, je ne l'ai plus loué, ni en prose ni en vers".

to her political beliefs, and subsequently decides to position herself against him. For that matter, she makes amends to compensate for her former belief in Bonaparte. She does not only provide a negative view of him in her works published during the Restoration, but she also challenged him directly through her writing, making her opinion clear not only to the public but to Bonaparte himself, as explained in 5.1.2.

Williams' chronicles of the French Revolution are different from the works of Burke, Wollstonecraft and Macaulay, as noted in 1.1., since Williams emphasizes her position as a participant of the events. Coinciding with the time of the publication of *Souvenirs*, British authors continued to produce works commenting on the events of the French Revolution, as Hazlitt's *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* (1828-1830) and Walter Scott's *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* (1827) demonstrate. Hazlitt knew Williams' work as he reprinted in the appendix of his Life of Napoleon a fragment from Williams' account of her time in prison with Sillery and Lasource (Kennedy, 2002: 111). In her portrayal of Napoleon in *Narrative*, *Letters on the Events* and *Souvenirs*, Williams' adopts a different stance from that of Scott and Hazlitt. Influenced by Burke's early attacks on the French Revolution, Scott's *Life* is written from an anti-revolutionary point of view, and he reads the restoration of the Bourbons as a triumph of "divine justice" (Friedman, 1988: 101) and a necessary return to the old order. Hazlitt directly opposes Scott as he adopts a revolutionary position and celebrates Napoleon as a hero. This celebratory approach shows itself in his celebration of Napoleon's return from his exile in Elba on the 20th of March 1815: "It was the greatest instance ever known of the power exerted by one man over opinion" (1852 (1828): 119). Besides, "he sees Napoleon as maintaining the principles of the Revolution" (Bainbridge, 1995: 189), and does not find a connection between his imperial attitudes and monarchic despotism. For her part, as already explained in this section, Williams is critical of Napoleon's return, but she maintains at

the same time a revolutionary stance. Besides, Hazlitt's account of Napoleon participates in this glorification of Bonaparte's figure that, according to Williams, renders the experiences of those who suffered under his oppression invisible. Unfortunately, since Williams' *Souvenirs* did not appear in English, Williams was excluded from the debate in Britain surrounding Napoleon, as she is left out in Bainbridge study of representations of Napoleon in British Romanticism (1995).

5.3.2. Attached to France: Williams' Revolutionary Identity

As mentioned in section 5.3.1. Williams maintains that, even though her work has been harshly criticized in Britain, her reputation has been favourable in France, her country of residence since 1792. In 1824, she moved to Amsterdam with her oldest nephew Athanase Coquerel, where she wrote *Souvenirs* (Kennedy, 2002: 210). However, her time in the Netherlands was merely temporary as she returned to France in 1827. In the last page of Souvenirs, Williams clearly states that she wishes to spend the last days of her life in France and to be buried there: "that country [France] [...], where I will spend the few years left of my life, and where I will finally ask for the hospitality of a tomb" (1827:201).[41] She was in fact buried in Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, following her will. In the end, Williams had spent around three decades in France, almost the same amount of time she lived in Britain. Besides, her time in France coincides with the peak of her literary production and her move from poetry towards political writing. In the eighteenth century, a time which was crucial for the definition of both the British and French national identity, Williams finds herself at a crossroads. She is aware of her ambiguous position, and in the last page of *Souvenirs*, apart from declaring her wish to

[41] My translation of "Ce pays [...] où je passerai le peu d'années de la vie qui me reste, et auquel je demanderai enfin l'hospitalité d'un tombeau".

spend the last moments of her life in France, she writes that England is for her "this native island that will always be so dear to me, and to which I am proud of belonging to" (1827: 201).[42] However, she describes herself as "a person attached [...] to this France, by all the memories of a long residence, by the memory of public calamities in which I have had my part" (1827: 201).[43] The fact that she refers to 'this' France, means that she became attached to the country that France became after 1789 with the outbreak of the French Revolution. Besides, apart from the prolonged residence in France, she is attached to the French identity for having participated in the French Revolution. For these reasons, I suggest that Williams constructs her identity not so much as a response to a national category, but to her adherence and participation in the French Revolution, which explains why Williams was so concerned in proving that she had always been loyal to her revolutionary ideals as explained in the previous section, 5.3.1.

In her influential study of the creation of the British national identity, Colley (1995) identifies that the 'Briton' identity was developed throughout the eighteenth century. The period was marked by an intermittent military conflict between France and Britain, as these two powers chose different sides in international struggles including the Wars of succession in both Spain (1701-1714) and Austria (1740-1748), the Seven Years War (1756-1763), the American Revolutionary War (1755-1783) and, after 1792, in the context of the French Revolution, both the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. After all these struggles, the British viewed France as their utmost rivals, thus, "eighteenth-century Britons [...] regularly defined themselves in opposition to what they saw as being French characteristics and manners" (Colley, 1995: 250). However, as already explained in 2.3., Williams does not reject French manners but praises their decorum. Leanne Maunu, in

[42] My translation of "Cette île natale qui me sera toujours si chère, et à laquelle je suis fière d'appartenir".
[43] My translation of "Une personne attachée comme moi à cette France, par tous les souvenirs d'une longue habitation, par la mémoire des calamités publiques dont j'ai eu ma part".

her discussion of the interplay between national and gender identity in the work of British women writers (2007), argues that women authors wrote as part of a community, which conferred authority to their texts as they were writing for a common cause rather than a strictly personal position, which could potentially be dismissed as women's capacity for rational thinking was put into question. Maunu introduces her study with an analysis of Anna Laetitia Hawkins' response to Williams' *Letters*, in which Hawkins envisions a female community based on gender identity rather than on political affiliation. For this reason, Maunu writes that "Many women writers wanted to make it *seem* as if they were writing as members of a fairly stable community, even if such a community was composed of many different women with many different beliefs" (2007: 17) and this perspective "united both conservative and radical authors alike" (2007: 17). However, Laetitia Matilda Hawkins writes from a counter-revolutionary position, and articulates her *Letters on the Female Mind* against the ideals of the French Revolution and women's participation in political writing. For that matter, the ideal feminine qualities proposed by Hawkins directly exclude Williams. In turn, Williams' sense community is not informed so much by gender identities but by political beliefs.

The political faction that Williams displayed more attachment to was definitely the Gironde, as explained in sections 2.6., 3.2. and 3.3. In *Souvenirs*, three decades after the end of Terror, Williams maintains her commitment to the Girondins, even though her cause appears in her writing as having been forgotten by the French. Williams, keeping the martyr narrative that she displayed in *Letters*, and explained in sections 3.2., 3.3. and 3.5., remembers the Girondins as follows:

> The French nation, chasing their rapid destiny [...] did not pay these renowned martyrs a big enough attention. Dying for the homeland is not a service that should be forgotten that quickly [...] Me, however, a foreigner in France, I still cry for them, if France forgets them. Having enjoyed their friendship is glorious for me, and having been able to, not

> without danger, to give them some kind of attachment during the last of their glorious days. (1827: 62)[44]

In this passage, Williams represents the Girondins as fighting for a national cause, as proven by use of the expression 'dying for the homeland'. This approach to the memory of the Girondin party is different from the one displayed by Williams in *Letters*, where they appear as 'friends of liberty' in a way that transcends national borders, since Williams understood the French Revolution as a cause for the whole of humanity. Even though Williams presents herself as a foreigner here, this does not prevent her from acknowledging the deeds that the Girondins did for their homeland. In her analysis of Williams' *Letters*, Amy Culley observes that Williams identifies herself with the Girondins as she "writes herself into a community of revolutionary martyrs, prisoners, and mythologized Girondins" (2007: 185). Culley's observation is still applicable to *Souvenirs*, as Williams, apart from keeping their memories alive, inscribes herself in her community as she has shared not only their friendship, but put herself in danger as part of the persecuted community.

Williams shows in *Souvenirs* that, living among the French, she participates of a community that has both supported the revolution and suffered amidst the political turmoil of the last decades. Writing in retrospect of the 9 of Thermidor, already discussed in 3.7., Williams observes that what unified the revolutionaries as a community was the grief experienced during the Terror:

> The voice of a country rose from all sides, and the general indignation, if suppressed for a long time, bursted energetically. All around France, a community of pain and anger assembled all parties [...] This general scream [...] adopted the form of a true *reaction*.

[44] My translation of "La nation française, poursuivant ses destinées rapides, et entraînée dans le tourbillon des événements, n'a point faite une assez grande attention à ces martyrs célèbres. Mourir pour la patrie n'est pas un service qui se doive si vite oublier [...] Moi, cependant, étrangère en France, je les pleure encore, si la France les oublie. Je regarde comme une gloire pour moi d'avoir joui de leur amitié, et d'avoir pu, non sans péril, leur donner quelques marques d'attachement dans les derniers de leurs glorieux jours".

> But I can attest, as I had personally seen what happened [...] that this backwards reaction had nothing of royalism. (1827:88)[45]

In this passage, Williams clarifies that the reaction against the Jacobins did not mean support for the royal cause, as dismissing Napoleon did not mean royalism for her, as explained in the previous section 5.3.1. Although Williams' commitment with the Girondin is evident in *Letters*, as Culley notes (2014), I also mark that in *Souvenirs*, Williams goes beyond the circle of the Girondins to identify herself with all of those who have fought for the common cause. The Gironde ceased to exist as a party with the Terror, and, when recalling the 9th of Thermidor Williams moved beyond the Girondin/Jacobin categories. Williams' account of the Terror clearly denies the Jacobins the category of 'true revolutionaries', as noted in 2.6. and chapter 3. Overall, in this passage she sees the reaction of the terror as coming from disparaging political parties. In fact, as she explained in *Letters Containing a Sketch*, the Terror confronted different views within the Jacobins. For that matter, in the passage mentioned before, Williams does not completely exclude the Jacobins from this "general indignation".

As previously explained, Colley has shown that the British national identity was largely forged by the opposition to the French. After almost a century of intermittent armed conflict between the two neighbouring countries, on the 18th of June of 1815, the battle of Waterloo, which became decisive in resolving the conflict. In Waterloo, the coalition forces led by the British Duke of Wellington claimed victory over the French troops. In France, this defeat rushed Napoleon's abdication and marked the beginning of the monarchic restoration. The Battle of Waterloo also consolidated Britain as the greatest global power, which initiated a 50-year period of imperial expansion for Britain known

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[45] My translation of "La voix du pays s'éleva de toutes parts, et l'indignation générale, si long-temps comprimée, éclata énergiquement. Dans toute la France, une communauté de douleur et de colère réunissait tous les partis [...] Ce cri général [...] prit la forme d'une véritable réaction. Mais je puis affirmer, en personne qui vit ce qui se passait, qui prenait la plus vive part aux événements du jour [...] que cette réaction, ce mouvement rétrograde n'était point du royalisme".

as Pax Britannica. In Britain, right after the victory "in the state-sanctioned press, victory over the detested French other was presented as an incomparable event in national history" (Shaw, 2002: 10). Nevertheless, Colley (1995: 321), Shaw (2002: x) and Cox (2014: 23) explain that after the initial celebratory tone, the response to the victory on the British side tended to be assumed in a pessimistic tone. Wordsworth in his *Thanksgiving Ode* (1816) presents Napoleon as an evil power and celebrates his defeats, but mostly denounces the wickedness of war. In *Souvenirs*. Williams thinks in retrospective of a such a decisive event as Waterloo, also displaying a melancholic mood:

> I admit that I experienced a feeling of national vanity, when I learnt about the noble achievements of the English in the camps of Waterloo [...] Nevertheless I lamented the misfortunes of the brave French army, abandoned again by their leader. I was in Holland when the last commemoration of the battle of Waterloo took place [...] But I didn't attend any of these ceremonies. I was thinking of myself, in the midst of the joy of the multitude, that this was not for me, who I had for such a long time shared the destiny of the French, and who I had, in a manner of speaking, for a long time eaten the same bread and drank from the same cup, to rejoice in that fifty thousand children of this motherland had fallen on the bloody dust of the plains. (1827: 183)[46]

In this passage, Williams acknowledges a British national pride, which is quickly overcome by her attachment to the French. For that matter, she believes that she has no place in the commemorations of the British victory at Waterloo, even though Britain is her country of residence. Interestingly, consistent with the tone of *Souvenirs*, Williams maintains in this passage her aversion towards Napoleon and presents him as a military leader who neglects the soldiers. In this manner, Williams reinforces her portrayal of Napoleon as an egotistical leader more concerned in obtaining individual glories than in the cause of liberty. In the British context, Williams' position is peculiar since she

[46] My translation of "J'avoue que j'éprouvai un sentiment de vanité nationale, quand j'appris les nobles exploits des Anglais dans les champs de Waterloo [...] cependant je déplorai les malheurs de la brave armée de France, délaissée encore par son chef. J'étais en Hollande quand eut lieu la dernière commémoration anniversaire de la bataille de Waterloo [...] Mais je n'assistai à aucune des cérémonies. Je songeais en moi-même, au milieu de l'allégresse de la foule, que ce n'était pas à moi, qui avais si long-temps partagé les destins des Français, et qui avais pour ainsi dire si long-temps mangé du même pains et bu dans la même coupe, à me réjouir de ce que cinquante mille des enfants de cette patrie étaient tombés sur la poussiè sanglante de la plaine".

emphasizes her revolutionary beliefs but is critical of Napoleon at the same time. The British responses to the Napoleonic era tended either to completely reject the revolution and present Napoleon as a monster, as is the case of Wordsworth's *Thanksgiving Ode* or Scott's *Life of Napoleon*, or to embrace Napoleon as a revolutionary hero, as portrayed in Hazlitt's *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* (1828) or Byron's *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte* (1814). However, the revolution was not understood in such Manichean terms across the channel. Madame de Staël, forcefully opposed Napoleon as explained in section 5.1.2., but she aligned herself with the Revolution as she saw it as "the third era in the process of social order –the establishment of representative government– a point towards which the human mind is directing itself from all parts" (1818:14). For Staël, as for Williams, the Revolution was a necessary step in the progress of humanity, but this did not prevent them from being critical of Bonaparte.

As already mentioned in 5.1.1., Kennedy used the expression 'citizen of the world' (2002: 52) to refer to Williams' internationalist inclinations. In the same vein, Tone Brekke writes that "For women writers such as Williams, Smith and Wollstonecraft, cosmopolitanism became part of a politics that experimented with the possibility of sympathetic identification across differences and nationhood" (2013: introduction). On the same topic, Leanne Maunu considers that "Williams essentially adopts a cosmopolitan mindset, writing as a citizen of the world, rather than as a nationalist" (2007: 31). Even though Williams clearly adopts a universalist position when she celebrates the revolution as 'triumph of mankind', as discussed in 2.1., and in the second page of Souvenirs, where she refers to the Revolution as 'the cause of human race', see 5.3. Interestingly, the passage from Souvenirs quoted before departs from this cosmopolitan vision. Thinking about Waterloo, she regrets the enormous loss of French lives, but she keeps silent about the British casualties. Williams departs here from a cosmopolitan mourning of all victims

of Waterloo, as displayed by Lord Byron in the third canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1816). "How that red rain hath made the harvest grow! /And is this all the world has gained by thee, /Thou first and last of fields! king-making Victory?" (1816: 11). Here, revisiting the battlefield brings back the echoes of the past violence, without explicitly alluding to any of the sides of the conflict. According to Conin, in his rendering of Waterloo, Byron "constructed a voice that could seem to accommodate all the discordant voices of a fractured nation" (2000: 91). Even though Williams experiences national pride, her refusal to participate in the celebration in order to honour the memory of the French, is at odds with the political atmosphere of her native country.

5.4. Conclusions for This Chapter

This chapter has explored Williams' political works published after the Napoleonic era, *Narrative of the Events*, *Letters on the Events*, and her posthumous work *Souvenirs de la Révolution Française*. In *Narrative*, Williams presents Napoleon as the main villain of her account, occupying the same position as Robespierre did in her chronicles of the Terror. In *Letters on the Events*, Williams delves into the defence of religious toleration and denounces the violent attacks towards the protestant community in France. In *Souvenirs*, Williams offers a retrospective re-evaluation of her participation in the cause of the French Revolution. After analysing the aforementioned works, I conclude the following:

- Williams' national identity is inconsistent throughout her career, ranging from outsider to part of the revolutionary community. As a foreigner, she accessed the military camps to obtain information directly from the English. However, after cohabitating with the Parisian citizens, she provides an analysis of the Revolution through a French lens. Thus, I conclude that Williams' position in the margins

allows her to maintain a fluid national identity. Williams makes use of either national perspective to articulate her arguments in favour of the French Revolution. As a foreigner she appears as a more impartial observer of the events and access spaces otherwise denied to her, such as the British military camps. Nevertheless, she makes use of a French position to highlight the fact that she has shared common experiences with the French community, which gives her a deeper understanding of the events she is telling when compared with either the British commentators on the Revolution, or the younger historians who did not witness the revolution themselves.

- Williams' political position differs from the predominant understanding of the Revolution in Britain in the nineteenth century, which were either revolutionary and supported Napoleon, or royalist and critical of the Emperor. For her part, Williams denounces Bonaparte's rule but maintains that she is still committed to the cause of the French Revolution. The writings by Hazlitt and Scott on Napoleon are considered fundamental works in the British discussion of the Napoleonic era, while Williams' contribution to the debate is overlooked. Williams grounds her criticism of Napoleon in her experiences in France to convey authority to her narrative. More than two decades after *Letters*, the participants in the revolutionary debate have changed, but nevertheless, Williams still puts forward the idea that her physical presence in France conveys veracity to her chronicle.
- In her discussion of religious toleration, Williams focuses on the injustices endured by the protestant community in France. Besides, when Williams discusses freedom of worship, she partakes of the French intellectual context, as in comments on Voltaire's *Treatise on Toleration*. Even though the question of religious toleration could also be applied to the situation in Britain, since

dissenters enjoyed less opportunities than members of the dominant Anglican church, Williams moved beyond this debate on to the French situation, focusing on the Catholic violence towards Protestants. Gravill observes that the target public of *On the Late Persecution of Protestants* was Williams' British audience (2009: 63). However, she did not discuss the atmosphere of toleration in Britain and thus, she does not aim at contributing to the debate in her home country. By contrast, her emphasis on reporting the events in France shows that Williams adopted the role of a journalist and correspondent of French matters for a British public.

- She defends her posthumous reputation against the attacks from the British conservative press. Her concern with the future reception of her work is not so much informed by the Romantic emphasis on appealing to posthumous celebrity and achieving immortality through her writing. Denying any royalist inclinations, she inscribes her memories within the revolutionary cause to ensure that in the future, her chronicles become a historical document that tells the history of the Revolution from a revolutionary perspective. For that matter, I conclude that Williams vindicated her contribution to the debate on the French Revolution as the main contribution of her literary career.
- Williams' outlook on the Revolution has been understood as "cosmopolitan" (Coleman, 2015: 130). However, I observe that, in her nineteenth-century productions, Williams inconsistently moves from a universalist to a French patriotic stance. This is also evident in her discussion of the Battle of Waterloo, where she laments the French casualties, disregarding the victims of the rival armies. Although Williams "embraces a sentimental politics of the heart within a

universal community" (Culley, 2007: 33) for most of her career, in this episode of Souvenirs empathic feelings connect her with the French nation.

Narrative of the Events and *Letters on the Events* constitute Williams' last chronicles of the French Revolution. Finally, Williams recapitulates in *Souvenirs de la Révolution Française* her experiences in France after more than three decades witnessing and participating in the Revolution. Having analysed in Chapter 2, 3, 4 and 5 Williams' political works, I will present the conclusions of my study in the following chapter.

Conclusions and Further Research

6. 1. Conclusions

This study has explored Williams' corpus of chronicles of the French Revolution to offer an analysis of her participation in the intellectual debates surrounding political and social reform in the revolutionary era. Williams offers a unique perspective on the debate as she was a British author living in France. As a result, this study seeks to examine how Williams' physical presence in France was negotiated by the author in order to contribute to the political discussions in Britain. At a time in which women's participation in the political discussion was regarded as improper, I have paid attention to how Williams validates herself as a writer and asserts authorial control. On account of both her gender and nationality, this dissertation has looked into the ways Williams felt as a participant or outsider in the intellectual debates of her time. Due both to her British nationality and residence in France, I have inquired into whether or not Williams found herself excluded from the political discussion in both the British and French context.

In the 1780s, Helen Maria Williams enjoyed in Britain a good reputation as a poet of sensibility. She used poetry to engage in debates of social and political nature, namely the American Revolution and the Anti-Slavery Campaigns. After 1789, Williams immediately sided with the revolutionaries in France and as a result, she travelled to Paris in 1790 to celebrate the first anniversary of the Revolution. From that moment onwards, although some of Williams' poetry is politically charged, she casted aside her poetical productions to produce her chronicles of the French Revolution, *Letters from France* (1790-195). Chapter 2 has explored Williams' chronicles produced in the early years of the Revolution (1790-2). In *Letters*, Williams wields authority by emphasizing her position as an observer of the events, as opposed to Burke, Macaulay or Wollstonecraft,

who were writing about the French Revolution from their residences in Britain. Williams, influenced by the literature of sensibility, reinforced the emotional connections that consolidated her support for the revolutionary cause, not only in the domestic realm, as in the case of the Du Fossés, but more compellingly, in the public domain with her participation in revolutionary celebrations. At a time when the literature of sensibility was regarded as increasingly individualistic, Williams explored its potential for collective engagement in a political cause which went beyond the support of the French Revolution as an event that changed history and brought with it a series of rights and liberties which she further explores in her work. Besides, in Chapter 2, I observed how Williams describes her meeting with madame de Genlis, a renowned intellectual. Throughout Williams' chronicles, her conversations with philosophical figures continue to be narrated and includes personalities such as Madame Roland and Caspar Lavater, described in chapters 3 and 4 respectively. The telling of these conversations serves for Williams the purpose of participating in the intellectual queries of her time as she includes her discussion of social and political issues in the narration of these meetings.

Chapter 3 focuses on Williams' *Letters* published after 1795. The political situation in France changed dramatically from 1792 to 1794, as the Revolution took a violent turn labelled by historians as 'the Terror'. The brutality in France was observed unfavourably in Britain which increased the opposition towards the Revolution in France. The political party that dominated the French political scene between 1793 and 1794 were the Jacobins, and all supporters of the Revolution in France came to be equated with Jacobinism. Nevertheless, Williams rejects this oversimplification, and emphasizes her own involvement with the Girondin party, more moderate in nature. In Chapter 2, I looked into how Williams went beyond the individualistic claims of sensibility in order to use emotions as a tool for communal bonding in order to achieve social change. In Chapter

3, I look at how Williams' understanding of the power of sensibility was a driving force behind political action. Apart from using sensibility in order to gain her reader's support for the cause of the Revolution, she observes that empathic feelings have the capacity to urge individuals to involve themselves directly in the political scene. In fact, Williams' sensibility moves her to transcend her status as an eyewitness and observer of the Revolution to assume the position of a political activist. In her rejection of Jacobin rule, she became both part of the community of the Girondin and a political actor by lending her service to leading Girondin figures, Roland, Sillery and Lasource in particular. Besides, after being imprisoned due to the law of suspects, Williams takes part in the Girondin resistance as she shares imprisonment with political prisoners. For that matter, despite her nationality, Williams becomes directly involved in the events and moves from the position of an outsider to an insider in the resistance against the Jacobins.

Chapter 4 of this thesis has explored Williams' production at the turn of the century, coinciding with the beginning of the Napoleonic era. *A Tour in Switzerland* moves beyond the scope of France, but Williams still focuses her work on the defence of the French Revolution. In her travelogue, Williams participates in the intellectual debates of her time to position herself against the mythification of Swiss virtue by directly opposing the ideas of Rousseau and Coxe. For that reason, I conclude that in *A Tour*, Williams partakes in a confident manner in intellectual reason. However, I reject that this confidence should be interpreted as "masculine" (Vincent and Widmer-Schyner, 2011: 47). Williams bases her criticism of Rousseau and Coxe in her own experience and observations in Switzerland, again reinforcing her role as eyewitness to ground her arguments. In Sketches, Williams challenged the work of Arthur Young and argued in favour of the rights of rural workers, detaching her views from the emerging rise of capitalism. Therefore, I do not observe that "Williams celebrates the crude popular culture

of an emerging capitalist consumerism" (Leblanc, 1997: 31). Chapter 4 also looked into Williams' claims on women's rights. In a chapter entitled "On the State of Women in the French Republic", Williams rejects the paternalistic arguments offered by French authors such as Théremin and Mirabeau and argues that the Revolution should look at women's situation from their own perspective. Williams displays her disappointment for the Revolution since it has neglected women's needs and denied them a voice in politics. For that matter, I conclude that Williams understands the French Revolution as a cause that goes beyond the eradication of aristocratic and ecclesiastic privileges. For her, the Revolution should encompass liberation from all forms of oppression, including the one experienced by women. Following this idea, in Chapter 5, Williams also appeals to the potential of the French Revolution in order to achieve religious freedom in France.

Chapter 5 has explored Williams' chronicles written after the Napoleonic era. Although written during the monarchic restoration, Williams continually reinforces that her commitment to the cause of liberty is still strong in *Narrative of the Events*, *Letters on the Events* and *Souvenirs*. After experiencing the progress of the Revolution for more than two decades, Williams acquires a unique perspective that differentiates her from the predominant accounts of the Napoleonic era in Britain. After *Letters*, Williams maintains throughout her career that her position in the midst of the events grants the truthfulness of her narrative. In *Souvenirs* Williams moves one step further, to emphasize that the last three decades of experiences in France provide her with the necessary material to offer a reconsideration of the French Revolution. Compared to the younger generation of authors, Williams draws the material to construct her narrative from her memory rather than books or historical documents. For that matter, Williams vindicates the value of memory and experience for history writing. She believes that a complete historiographical reconstruction of any event should not overlook the voices of those who lived through the

political turmoil. For that reason, she detaches herself from a more contemporary understanding of history, that aims at analysing the events from a dispassionate point of view. This dispassionate approach was considered to be more accurate, against memories who were dismissed as historically valuable documents for their strong appeal to memory and emotion. Williams vindicates the interplay between memory and history and offers her memoirs a document of historical value.

As a response to the research questions posed at the beginning of this study, I conclude that Williams grounds the authority of her work in experience. Williams' appeals to memory, experience or sensibility go beyond the intentions to appear more feminine and thus be acceptable, which is the interpretation that Fay (1998: 78), Blakemore (1997: 164) or Duckling (2010: 79) have given to Williams' appeal to emotions. Her use of sensibility is opposed to the individualist turn that this literary trend was taking in the last decades of the eighteenth century, as in the influential *Confessions* by Rousseau. Williams' approach to sensibility is also radically opposed to the more conservative understandings of Sensibility that predominated in Britain at the turn of the Century. For instance, while Hannah More also employs sensibility to vindicate the value of philanthropy, Williams believes that change does not come as a result of individual and sporadic actions but of mass mobilization to achieve radical changes in the political system. Williams advocates for a distribution of richness regulated by the revolutionary government instead of scattered actions of charity. In her account, compassion is at the centre of political action, as it moves people despite of their gender, to take part in the events with a collective change in mind and not only to alleviate suffering at an individual level. Williams sees politics as a collective effort and does not envision the future of nations as being only at the hands of political leaders. She explores the potential of acting in politics from the context of small and every-day actions.

The results of this study serve to conclude that Williams' aim was to take a stand within the trend of enlightened ideas and, also, to spread her views to a general public. Williams wrote with a British readership in mind. However, she was particularly interested in providing her readers with information that was only available in France and which marked the difference between her writing and that of other British authors. Her work clearly aims at being informative and critical. She aimed at reaching an audience at large that wanted to be informed and she was not restricted to only gaining the favour of women readers. She is not merely describing the events, but she also has an ideological purpose in mind. Although she involves herself in political action beyond the scope of her writing, she is also aware of the power of writing to influence the political atmosphere. At a time when women were denied access to the public sphere on account of their gender, Williams makes use of everyday actions together with writing to take part in the public arena. Besides, Williams does not see the divisions between the public and private as rigid and fixed, as she brings constant attention to how political decisions affect people on an everyday scale. Although this approach has been understood as domestic by Mellor (1992: 264) or Duckling (2010: 79), this dissertation has shown that Williams is not confined to the sphere of the home. In her discussion of individual affairs, Williams pays attention to public spaces such as prisons, salons, the streets and the battlefield.

Williams did not feel an outsider in the French debate regarding her nationality as she saw the cause of liberty from a universalist point of view. I agree with Kelly in that "she distances herself from Britain" (1993: 218). Her position in France, nevertheless, reveals that she feels more of an outsider within the British context. Even though Williams uses her position as a foreigner to enter different spaces that would have otherwise been denied to her on account of her gender, such as the military camps, she aligns her sympathies with that of the French in the case of military victories, such as the case of

Waterloo discussed in Chapter 5. Leanne Maunu finds that, in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth, women appealed to a nationalistic discourse in order to make claims in favour of women's emancipation. Nevertheless, Williams resorts to a revolutionary identity to make such claims. For her, women's rights and dignity are inseparable from an advancement of society at all levels, which would be granted by a revolution that overthrows the old social order. Williams believes that women's detachment from politics has to do with the fact that their peculiarities are overlooked by political leaders. Besides, at a time when women writers were essentially and in various ways advocating for women's education so as to adjust or accommodate to their role in the domestic realm as wives and mothers, Williams contends that education would also improve their capacity to act in the political arena. In her view, education would also allow them to gain intellectual independence and a better grasp of their commitment to a political cause.

6.2. Further Research

As already noticed in the introduction, the contribution by women writers to the debate on the French Revolution in Britain has been well documented by feminist scholarship. Especially in the bicentennial of the French Revolution, coinciding with the years of the 1980s and the early 1990s, a myriad of works on the participation in the debate by Macaulay and Wollstonecraft redefined their positions as intellectuals in late-eighteenth century Britain. For further research, I believe that the works of other British women writers who were involved in the French Revolution also deserve to be taken into consideration. The participation in the debate on the French Revolution in Britain by Wollstonecraft and Macaulay, who argued in favour of the Revolution, is well documented. Nevertheless, they observed the Revolution from across the channel –despite Wollstonecraft's trip to France in 1792. I find that the texts by women who were

physically present in France in the Revolution are especially compelling as they offer a unique perspective of the events, as my study on Williams has shown. For that matter, I am interested in the work of Charlotte West, *A Ten Years Residence in France During the Severest Part of the Revolution* (1821) and Grace Dalrymple Elliott, *Journal of my Life During the French Revolution* (1859). I believe that their positions as foreigners in France allowed them more freedom to display their political ideas in a confident manner as they appealed to experience to wield intellectual authority. It would be compelling to explore if these women, despite their political inclinations, also appeal to sensibility and empathic feelings to inscribe themselves in a political cause. Both West and Elliott were royalists. It would therefore be interesting to explore if due to their anti-revolutionary position they felt more connected to the British intellectual debate. How do women writers' political stance inform the way they exert authority over political matters in their work?

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