European Connections 31

Readers, Writers, Salonnieres

Female Networks in Europe, 1700-1900

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Introduction

Recent years have seen a surge of interest in early female literary and intellectual networks such as the English Bluestocking circle. The writings of these mid-eighteenth-century women have been reissued in handsome new editions, major research is currently underway to publish their correspondence, and the women themselves were the subject of an excellent high-profile public exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in London in 2008.[1] Much research to date on female networks has focused on one particular country; the present volume seeks to break new ground by examining links between literary women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries across national boundaries. Tucked away in the National Portrait Gallery's 'Brilliant Women' exhibition were hints that even the Bluestockings felt they belonged to a supranational female 'republic of letters': a portrait of Germaine de Staël was one of the items on display, and the frontispiece to Eliza Haywood's periodical *The Female Spectator* (1744–6), also on show, depicted a Bluestocking-type meeting of four women sitting round a table in the shadow of the busts of the Greek poet Sappho (early seventh century BC) and the French scholar and classical translator Anne Dacier (1654–1720).[2]

The eighteenth century saw the onset of a new age of cosmopolitanism in Europe. There was more interchange between the educated classes than ever

1 See, for example: *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738–1790*, ed. Gary Kelly, 6 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999); *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*, ed. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and the publication that accompanied the 2008 exhibition, Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz, *Brilliant Women: Eighteenth-Century Bluestockings* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2008). In the same year as the exhibition, Nicole Pohl organized a conference on 'Women's Literary Networks: 1580 to the Present Day' at the Institute of English Studies, University of London (8 March 2008).

2 Elizabeth Eger, 'The Bluestocking Circle: Friendship, Patronage and Learning', in Eger and Peltz, *Brilliant Women*, 21–55 (47–8).

before. We find European intellectuals meeting and discussing ideas in the coffee-houses and salons of London and Paris; we find scholars and members of the Academies engaging in pan-European debates on the new philosophy and science. We know that many men of letters benefited from being part of these international networks. For example, they eased each other's paths into circles abroad by writing letters of recommendation (Hume in Edinburgh wrote letters for friends travelling to Paris and Rome), or helped one another to acquire foreign-language publications and scientific specimens (Franklin exchanged letters and specimens with Gronovius in Holland, Buffon in France, Mazzei in Italy, and Peter Collinson, Joseph Banks and Hans Sloane in England).[3] Interchange across borders continued of course into the nineteenth century, taking on a new character at different times and in different places.[4]

But what of Europe's women? To some extent, we might expect the fair sex to be in a different position. Women were not readily admitted to the male worlds of the coffee-house, club and scholarly Academy. They would not always have had the same opportunities as men to travel or to build up contacts with like-minded colleagues abroad. And yet women across Europe were becoming increasingly involved in cultural life in this period and would have been affected by the new cosmopolitan trends too.[5] They would have read the foreign literature which was becoming ever more readily available in translation. By the later eighteenth century, increasing numbers of women joined the ranks of readers, as those from the privileged classes at least were benefiting from improved education and generally had more leisure time than their male counterparts: social commentators even feared that women were damaging their critical faculties by too much reading of prose fiction, and

3 See Thomas J. Schlereth, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in Enlightenment Thought: Its Form and Function in the Ideas of Franklin, Hume, and Voltaire* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 7 and 29.

4 See, for example, *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770–1840*, ed. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

5 For international female networks before 1700, see the essays on Anna Roemers Visscher and Anna Maria van Schurman in *'I have heard about you': Foreign Women's Writing Crossing the Dutch Border*, ed. Suzan van Dijk and others (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2004) and the volume *Early Modern Women and Transnational Communities of Letters*, ed. Julie D. Campbell and Anne R. Larson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

the young woman novel-reader was a figure much mocked in hostile reviews of fiction, and in the works of women writers themselves. Women may also have been able to pick up a foreign language, which would have opened more windows onto other cultures: in Britain and Germany, for instance, knowledge of French was seen among certain sections of society as an important social accomplishment for women. And there were some social spaces where they would have had the chance to mingle with foreigners, most notably the salons. In France, women dominated the salons, as the work of Dena Goodman and others has demonstrated.[6] As they gained opportunities to publish and enter a more public sphere, did they feel an awareness of their particular position as women which drew them to their sisters in other countries, similar to Eliza Haywood's 'Bluestockings' in the *Female Spectator*?[7]

There is evidence in various places that women formed connections with members of their sex abroad. We find women reading and translating the work of foreign women.[8] We also find actual links between women of

6 See Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

7 Incidentally, Eliza Haywood herself used 'translation' and frequent paraphrase of her French female contemporaries to inspire and inform her own amatory fiction. See Kate Williams, 'Passion in Translation: Translation and the Development of the Novel in Early Eighteenth-Century England', in *Remapping the Rise of the European Novel*, ed. Jenny Mander (Oxford: SVEC, 2007), 157–69.

8 For women readers, see the other publication to arise from our 2008 Chawton conference: *Women Readers in Europe: Readers, Writers, Salonnières, 1750–1900*, ed. Katherine Astbury, Hilary Brown and Gillian Dow, *Women's Writing* 18.1 (February 2011). For women translators, see, for example, Hilary Brown, 'The Reception of the Bluestockings by Eighteenth-Century German Women Writers', *Women in German Yearbook*, 18 (2002), 111–32; Hilary Brown, *Benedikte Naubert (1756–1819) and her Relations to English Culture* (Leeds: Maney, 2005), Chapter Two; Gillian E. Dow, '"Je me suis permis, suivant ma coutume, quelques légers changemens": Jane Austen Translated by Isabelle de Montolieu', in *Traduire les discours amoureux, 1660–1830*, ed. Annie Cointre and Florence Lautel-Ribstein (Metz: Centre d'études de la traduction, 2006), 285–97; Suzan van Dijk, 'Isabelle de Charrière (1740–1805) – die Schriftstellerin in der Rolle der Übersetzerin: Zur französischen Ausgabe des Romans *Nature and Art* von Elizabeth Inchbald', in *Übersetzungskultur im 18. Jahrhundert: Übersetzerinnen in Deutschland, Frankreich und der Schweiz*, ed. Brunhilde Wehinger and Hilary Brown (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2008), 65–85. For a more general discussion of 'gynocentric translation' – women translating women and sometimes dedicating their translations to women – and

different nationalities, established through correspondence, visits, or contact in the salons. There are cases of women writers dedicating their work to women abroad, and sending copies of their most recent publications for their continental sisters' libraries. It seems that many women did indeed feel empathy with each other due to their position as women. Readers and translators may have been explicitly drawn to a type of foreign literature which reflected elements of female experience; they may have empathized with certain social and political concerns which were peculiar to their sex in this period. Some appear to have modelled their literary efforts on the productions of their female predecessors, in some cases translating their work and then being inspired by this in their own writing.[9] One is struck by the fact that women often looked to more established female traditions elsewhere as they themselves began to take up their pens. It appears that many budding writers evoked illustrious women abroad in an attempt to legitimize their activities or in their search for literary models. On publication, reviewers frequently categorized women writers by comparing them to their foreign counterparts: one need only look at the number of references to women writers as 'the French Hannah More', or 'the German George Sand' to see how much this was the case. For women across the continent, it is the French – with their line of women writers stretching from Madeleine de Scudéry and Françoise de Graffigny to Germaine de Staël and George Sand – who seem to be a main source of inspiration.[10]

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how this helped to form a cross-cultural female literary tradition in the eighteenth century, see Julie Candler Hayes, *Translation, Subjectivity, and Culture in France and England, 1600–1800* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), Chapter Five.

9 See Katherine Astbury, 'Translating the Revolution: Therese Huber and Isabelle de Charrière's *Lettres trouvés dans des portes-feuilles d'émigrés*', in *Translators, Interpreters, Mediators: Women Writers, 1700–1900*, ed. Gillian E. Dow (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 99–110.

10 Literature on this topic includes: Sabine Koloch, 'Madeleine de Scudéry in Deutschland: Zur Genese eines literarischen Selbstbewußtseins bürgerlicher Autorinnen', in *Gender Studies in den romanischen Literaturen: Revisionen, Subversionen*, ed. Renate Kroll and Margarete Zimmermann, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: dipa, 1999), I, 213–55; Gesa Stedman, '"Channel Crossings": Zum Verhältnis französischer und englischer Autorinnen im 19. Jahrhundert', ibid., 256–76; Judith E. Martin, 'Nineteenth-Century German Literary Women's Reception of Madame de Staël', *Women in German Yearbook* 18 (2002), 133–57.

The essays in this volume discuss female networks spanning Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Holland and Denmark. They take us from the *conversazioni* of eighteenth-century Genoa, Rome and Venice, where female writers, travellers and singers congregate to talk and recite poetry, to late nineteenth-century Holland, where the feminist Reinoudina de Goeje (a.k.a. Agatha) decides to publish her adaptations of a Frenchwoman's fairy tales. In the first four essays, we learn more about the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European salons. In the opening piece, Marianna D'Ezio examines the salons of eighteenth-century Italy as a meeting-place for Italian and British women of letters. By the 1750s, a number of British women were venturing abroad on Grand Tours and found themselves welcomed into the residences of fashionable Italian *salonnières*. Writers such as Hester Thrale Piozzi and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu were impressed by Italy's tradition of honouring female intellectuals (Laura Bassi, Maria Gaetana Agnesi), while the Italian Elisabetta Caminer Turra, for one, eagerly read and reviewed the writings of her British female contemporaries (Mary Seymour Montague, Hester Mulso Chapone, Mary Wollstonecraft). The women were inspired by each other as they came to occupy a more prominent place in European cultural life.

In Eve-Marie Lampron's essay, the focus shifts slightly from British-Italian connections to Franco-Italian ones. For Frenchwomen, too, visited the Italian salons, and Italian women travelled to Paris. They often sustained their friendships through correspondence. Although there were some inequalities in their intercourse (unknown writers were sometimes excessively in awe of the more famous), their contact with each other helped them to explore their identities and establish themselves as literary women.

Marjanne E. Goozé takes us to the salons in Berlin hosted by Jewish women such as Henriette Herz and Rahel Varnhagen. Goozé shows how the German salons were modelled to some extent on earlier French ones, and looks at the attitudes of Herz and Varnhagen to their French contemporaries Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis and Germaine de Staël. Herz and Varnhagen both met Genlis and Staël in person and were familiar with their publications; they wrote of the Frenchwomen in their letters and memoirs (although it was Dorothea Schlegel who would translate Staël's *Delphine* and *Corinne, ou l'Italie* into German). Herz and Varnhagen were very much aware of the French *salonnières* and French women writers, but ultimately developed their

own version of salon sociability and ways for women in Germany to participate in the public sphere.

The fourth of these essays on salon culture, by Nicole Pohl, describes the assemblies of Dorothea von Kurland in Berlin, Löbichau, Carlsbad, Paris and Vienna. Kurland's guests included a number of French women writers such as Genlis and Staël (indeed, it was during an evening at Kurland's that Herz first met and struck up an acquaintance with Staël). Pohl argues that Kurland was 'very much part of [the] internationalizing feminine social landscape of the late eighteenth century' and that 'Europe's borders became cosmopolitan in Kurland's salon' (p. 81).

Next, Laura Kirkley focuses her attention on two British writers who were steeped in the culture of contemporary France. Helen Maria Williams and Maria Edgeworth both formulated responses to Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*, a novel informed by the philosophical and pedagogical ideas of Rousseau. Kirkley offers close readings of the two English 'translations' of Bernardin's text: Williams's *Paul and Virginia* (1795) and Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801). Kirkley is careful to place Williams and Edgeworth within the context of a cosmopolitan female literary tradition. She emphasizes how Williams was influenced by revolutionary ideas in France and was well-acquainted with writers such as Genlis and Manon Roland; Edgeworth met, read and wrote about many French women writers and had, for example, translated Genlis's *Adèle et Théodore* into English. Kirkley draws comparisons between the responses of British and French women writers to Rousseau's ideas about gender.

Suzan van Dijk's piece turns to one of the beacons of nineteenth-century European women's writing, George Sand, and provides us with a first overview of Sand's extensive correspondence with other female writers. Sand corresponded with many women in France, of course, but also with women in Britain, Germany, Poland, Italy, Romania and Bohemia. Dijk explores Sand's attitudes to other women writers and their work. In some cases, we learn, Sand gave concrete assistance to younger female colleagues who were trying to establish themselves in print.

Elisabeth Jay's essay reminds us of the cosmopolitanism of nineteenth-century British women writers. British women who made their way across the Channel include Frances Trollope, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë and Margaret Oliphant, and many found entry

into the 'sophisticated female space' of the Parisian salon (p. 151). Jay maps out some of the networks forged in the French capital; taken together, she says, 'the stories of these women putting each other in touch with the social and professional lifelines afforded by the salons certainly help to diminish that sense of exceptionality that clings so persistently to the individual narratives of Victorian women's achievement' (p. 158). Jay concludes her piece by exploring how experiences in Paris seem to have influenced the work of Gaskell and Oliphant.

The next three essays deal with the reception of Sand and Staël among women writers in nineteenth-century Germany, Spain and England. Kerstin Wiedemann indicates how novelists in Germany engaged in their work with Sand's subversive ideas about love and marriage. Wiedemann explores different forms of intertextuality (direct references to the French author, echoes of Sand's plots and characters, discussions of Sand's ideas), with particular reference to Ida, Countess Hahn-Hahn's *Gräfin Faustine* (1842) and Therese von Bacheracht's *Alma* (1848). Wiedemann argues that Sand played a major part in bringing into being the new genre of the 'novel of female emancipation'.

Ursula Jung turns her attention to Spain and questions how far Sand and Staël acted as role models for the first generation of female authors in the 1840s. For a brief time, the French writers seem to have presented women with a bold and progressive model for their own writing, as in Germany. Jung discusses Gertrudis Gómez, who appears to have absorbed radical ideas from Sand in novels such as *Sab* (1841) and *Dos mujeres* [*Two Women*] (1842). But Jung also considers the more conservative writer Cecilia Böhl von Faber ('Fernán Caballero') who defines herself in opposition to female predecessors such as Sand and Staël and writes novels espousing traditional family values and gender roles. It is novels in this vein which will dominate in Spain in the later part of the nineteenth century.

Gesa Stedman looks at the reception of Staël's *Corinne* in England and analyses three less well-known adaptations of the novel: Geraldine Jewsbury's *The Half-Sisters* (1848), Dinah Mulock Craik's *Olive* (1850) and Grace Aguilar's story 'The Authoress' (1853). Jewsbury, Craik and Aguilar all address Staël's theme of the place of the creative woman in society. Stedman shows how the three English writers adapt *Corinne* for a new cultural context, specifically by rewriting the ending to make it accord better with the Victorian discourse on emotions. These re-writings are documents of the 'cultural exchange between

France and England instigated by Staël and in particular by her novel [which points] to the creation of a factual and fictional community of women (writers) whose shared interest lay in the vexed problem of wanting to be accepted as women and as artists or writers at the same time' (pp. 207–8).

We move on in the next two essays to women who were part of political and scientific networks. Máire Fedelma Cross's piece examines Flora Tristan, the French author of Peruvian origins whose reading, writing and networking had a distinctly international flavour. Tristan was particularly interested in the social situation of women in different countries, and believed in the 'role of women authors as a liberating force' (p. 218). In Peru, Tristan read Staël and Roland, for example; Sand and Wollstonecraft had an important influence on her writing; and when she travelled to London, Tristan was moved to record her thoughts on writers such as Harriet Martineau and Frances Trollope and on the place of women in English society. Tristan, also active in international socialist politics, sought through her life and work to advance the position of her sex.

Alison E. Martin reconstructs the links between Mathilde Ørsted, daughter of the Danish physicist-philosopher Hans Christian Ørsted, and Leonora and Joanna Horner, daughters of the British scientist Leonard Horner. Mathilde, Leonora and Joanna were part of an international scientific community in which women played a more significant role than has often been acknowledged. Mathilde Ørsted met the Horner sisters in London while accompanying her father of one of his professional visits abroad and thereafter corresponded with them. After Hans Christian Ørsted's death, the Horner sisters published an English version of his *Aanden i Naturen* (1850), called *The Soul in Nature* (1852), which they dedicated to Mathilde. Martin sees the Mathilde-Leonora-Joanna nexus as an example of how women formed 'productive connections' with each other in the male-dominated world of science and how they helped to establish the place of women within this international community.

In the final essay in the volume, Daphne M. Hoogenboezem explores how two women – Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy in seventeenth-century France and Reinoudina de Goeje ('Agatha') in nineteenth-century Holland – work on the same material, with Agatha adapting D'Aulnoy's tales along modern feminist lines for Dutch children. Hoogenboezem describes how Agatha makes changes to her source texts to promote even more explicitly women's

education and autonomy. Hoogenboezem shows that Agatha develops some of the proto-feminist aspects already present in D'Aulnoy's work, and thus there is a degree of solidarity between these two female authors at a distance of nearly two centuries.

These thirteen case-studies throw up a wealth of intriguing links between women of letters in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is tempting to see such links as evidence of the existence of a supranational female literary tradition. We must be careful, however, not to separate women's networks or women's writing from the wider context of European literature. As we read here, international networks often included men as well as women; women read and translated literature from male as well as female pens; and women could and did feel ambivalence and even hostility towards one another. Then, as now, of course, women were not defined solely by their gender, and they certainly did not only seek out connections with members of their own sex. But studying female networks in this period can surely shed new light on European women's writing. We will be able to gain a better idea of the extent to which the first generations of literary and intellectual women in Europe were aware of each other and each other's work, and of how this shaped their writing and their entry onto the European cultural scene.