

The Reception of Literature in France during the Revolution: An Analysis of Reviews of Women Writers in the *Mercure de France*, 1791-1795

by Jonathan Durham, Department of French Studies, University of Warwick [\[1\]](#)

ABSTRACT

This paper is based on part of a pan-European research project carried out between 2004 and 2007, the aim of which was to create an index of female authors. The full results may be found in the database *WomenWriters*, available at www.databasewomenwriters.nl. One section of this project involved listing and analysing all works, both fiction and theatre, which were reviewed during the period 1791 to 1795 in the *Mercure de France*, the government-funded state journal which was produced during the *Ancien Régime*. Given the generally accepted view that the French Revolution marked a watershed in literary production, establishing what was being published and reviewed at that time is crucial for our understanding of the changing socio-political literary climate.

The eighteenth century was the period of Enlightenment, and many women were active in writing at this time. It was expected, therefore, that a significant number of works written by women would be reviewed in the *Mercure*. However, this was not the case and so the project was expanded to include an analysis of the development of the *Mercure* during the Revolutionary years, the theatre of the Revolution, and the status of female authors in French Revolutionary society. This analysis forms the basis of the first part of this article; the second part examines the reviews of the only two female-authored publications to appear in the *Mercure* during the period 1791-1795, Elizabeth Inchbald's *Simple Histoire* [*Simple Story*] and Charlotte Smith's *Célestine, ou la victime des Préjugés* [*Celestina*].

KEYWORDS: Women writers, Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Inchbald, revolutionary theatre, *Le Mercure de France*, French revolutionary society.

INTRODUCTION: FORMULATING A HYPOTHESIS

Before looking at any issue of the *Mercure*, a researcher might hypothesise that there would be few (but some) women writers reviewed in that publication, some of whom would be French, given the number of female writers in the literary canon. At this time, women participated actively in the Revolution, for example Olympe de Gouges, who published her *Déclarations des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* in 1791, as a suite and accompaniment to the established *Déclarations des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*. If women were historically active, it might therefore be a logical assumption that women would be active in literary production, since literature was a powerful thrust for the French Revolution. It might also be logical, therefore, that the state journal would be reviewing these women, given that the editorship was supportive of the Enlightenment project. Theatre in particular is a driving force of revolution (for example, the rise of the

drame as political manifestation), and one would expect it to enjoy a dramatic increase in popularity and therefore reception, as this was undoubtedly *the* genre for politics.

PRELUDE TO REVOLUTION: THE LITERARY CLIMATE OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Despite the presence of women as heads of state across Europe during the eighteenth century, the literary canon for *femmes savantes* and *femmes d'esprit* was limited during this era. However successful a literary work from a female writer, this would never be enough for her to make a living. Indeed, as English Showalter outlined, writing for women at this time was not a livelihood, but merely a form of self-expression, if not an obsession. (Showalter, 1988: 98) The majority of women who were able to participate in the world of high culture had to do so through the hosting of *salons*, the most famous of *salonnières* probably being Germaine de Staël. However, the majority of these women participating in cultural life – and this is certainly the case for Mme de Staël – were born into this world of privilege.

This was the Age of Enlightenment, an age of tolerance and freedom of expression, in its theories and philosophical discourse (certain historical events may point to the contrary, however, such as the *affaire Calas* (1761) and *affaire du chevalier de la Barre* (1764), two cases of injustice and intolerance through religious fanaticism). It was a pan-European intellectual movement of the eighteenth century, thought to cover much of the seventeenth century too. Enlightenment is best defined by Kant in his 1784 essay *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* [*In answer to the question: What is Enlightenment?*]: [\[2\]](#)

Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen (p. 481).

[Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's reason without guidance from another].

Enlightenment involves three stages: first comes self-emancipation, where a categorical imperative of thinking is required, to overcome the laziness which leads to the inability to use one's reason. Second is political and social emancipation: society's impositions can create a state of immaturity, therefore social and intellectual inhibitions must be eliminated and political freedom must be increased, so one can achieve Enlightenment through the use of one's reason. Third is cultural emancipation, which stipulates that the emergence from immaturity is a historically progressive process, which is achieved on the personal level (*Sapere Aude!* ['Have courage to use your own understanding!'], is the motto for Enlightenment, according to Kant), and on the societal level through education and culture. As long as the subject performs his duties to the state in the *private* sphere, he may engage in critical discourse in the *public* sphere. According to Kant, freedom to publish and debate publicly would gradually enable people to develop the tendency to free thought. Once developed, this affects the character of a people, who, gradually, become more capable of free action, which would eventually influence government. Intellectual freedom must, therefore, precede and prepare the way for greater political and civil freedom, or in other words, Enlightenment.

Enlightenment, however, is not just about reason. The reason and rationality are inextricably linked with *la sensibilité*; in other words, as discussed by Mortier (1990), Enlightenment involves hearts and minds: *le cœur et la raison*. *Sensibilité* is a doctrine, according to which our knowledge comes from our feelings. In Germany, this notion of sensibility is best portrayed through the epistolary novel *par excellence*, Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* [*The sorrows of Young Werther*] (1774). This novel gave rise to the phenomenon known as the 'Werther-Fieber': that is to say the copy-cat suicide of the novel's protagonist throughout Europe. In England, the notion is best conveyed through the title of Jane Austen's novel *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). And in France, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and Bernadin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1787) are the best examples of the *roman du sentiment*.

Regardless of any privileges or difficulties for women wishing to write in this Age of Enlightenment, there were many women who were writing, albeit from privileged backgrounds. As stated above, most of these women were writing not to make a living; rather, this was their need for self-reflection and expression. Many of these privileged women writing in the eighteenth century wrote letters, in the tradition of Mme de Sévigné in the seventeenth century. Only when we get into the nineteenth century do we see women begin to make a living from their writing. There are several exceptions, such as Madame de Riccoboni, who was forced to make a living off her writing and theatre in the eighteenth century. However, one such female writer of the nineteenth century is George Sand (née Aurore Dupin), who fled her unhappy marriage to live an artist's life in Paris, albeit under a man's name. In spite of the pseudonym and its quick discovery, Sand's *Indiana* (1832) was a bestseller in its day, selling more copies than Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir* (1830). For further information on women writers in the context of the eighteenth century (especially in the context of women's studies), see Bonnel and Rubinger (1994), Hesse (2001), Martin (2004), and Montfort (1994).

LE MERCURE DE FRANCE: THE STATE JOURNAL OF THE ANCIEN REGIME AND ITS DEVELOPMENT THROUGHOUT FOUR YEARS OF REVOLUTION

Founded by Jean Donneau de Visé, the *Mercure* was first published in 1672, and until 1724 appeared under the title (*Nouveau*) *Mercure gallant*, after which the title was changed to its current form. It is a literary-philosophic journal, later taking on a more political standpoint towards the events of the Revolution (1778), whereas it used to be 'merely a condensed *Gazette de France*' (Censer, 1994: 145). A significant step in the development of journalism, the name refers to the classical god Mercury, the messenger of the gods and the god of commerce. The *Mercure* became the uncontested arbiter of literary taste and the paper of record for news about the court and court society for subscribers in the provinces. Though the editorship was known to be in support of the Enlightenment project, the publication displayed a tone of reticence and restraint, and an apparent muted support. By ignoring the Church, they limited support for Enlightenment, in that they were promoting a secular view of the world. Marmontel briefly edited the journal between 1758 and 1760, before moving onto the similar *Journal des Dames*. At this time readership had grown from 756 to 1778 between the years 1756 and 1764 (Censer, 1994: 145). Approaching Revolution, management of the periodical fell into the hands of Charles-Joseph Panckoucke. In 1756, of the total 756 known subscribers to the journal, just over 50% of these were

nobles and government functionaries; 15% were women. Between 1780 and 1788, readership increased approximately 230%, largely due to the addition of the political section and supplements. During the revolutionary era, the title was changed briefly to *Le Mercure français*, with little effect on the content of the journal. Napoleon ceased its publication in 1811, but the review was resurrected in 1815, and last published, under its present format, in 1825 (until resurrected at the end of the nineteenth century, by Alfred Vallette and his fellow *salonniers*).

Literary criticism in this age was still about the respect of established rules. After the 1750s, it turned to an analysis of the functions of literature and the comparative merits of each genre (Dion, 2006: 135). The evolution of the press in French Revolutionary society is also discussed in Darnton and Roche (1989).

OVERALL FINDINGS

It is true to say that many women were writing during the Revolution (both in France and abroad), despite their inability to make a living out of it, and despite their marginalised position in the literary canon and world of culture. Many were taking to the genres in which they were under-represented. With such genres as the *roman noir*, the sentimental novel (notably Mme de Staël), elegies and romance, women were merely following the established tradition, as discussed in Cook (1982). However, with their political pamphlets and theatrical pieces, they were innovating, to the extent that Mme de Gouges produced a political play. It is also true to say that theatre was a very active genre at this time. The novelist/ playwright Jean Giraudoux (1931) explains the rise of the theatre in Revolutionary France:

Le spectacle est la seule forme d'éducation morale ou artistique d'une nation. Il est le seul cours du soir valable pour adultes et vieillards, le seul moyen par lequel le public, le plus humble et le plus lettré, peut être mis en contact avec les plus hauts conflits (p. 1321).

[The theatre is the only form of moral or artistic education for a nation. It is the only worthwhile night school for adults, the only means by which the public, the most unassuming and the most educated, can be put in touch with conflicts of the highest scale].

These female authors were being read in their native countries and in translation abroad, for example Elizabeth Inchbald's *Simple Story* (*Simple Histoire* in its French translation), which was reviewed in the *Mercure* on 28 January 1792, shortly after its publication. Despite this range of female writers, the state journal for France during the Revolutionary period reviewed virtually none of these authors. The only female authors reviewed in the *Mercure* during the period 1791 to 1795 were:

- Elizabeth Inchbald – *Simple Histoire* [*Simple Story*], 28 January 1792;
- Charlotte Smith – *Célestine, ou la Victime des Préjugés* [*Celestina*], 13 July 1795.

It is interesting to note that both these authors are English women, and were reviewed in translation. While the project may seem disappointing in terms of the volume of results for the *WomenWriters* database, it did raise some interesting points about the development of the *Mercure* during the period 1791-1795, and the literary climate of the

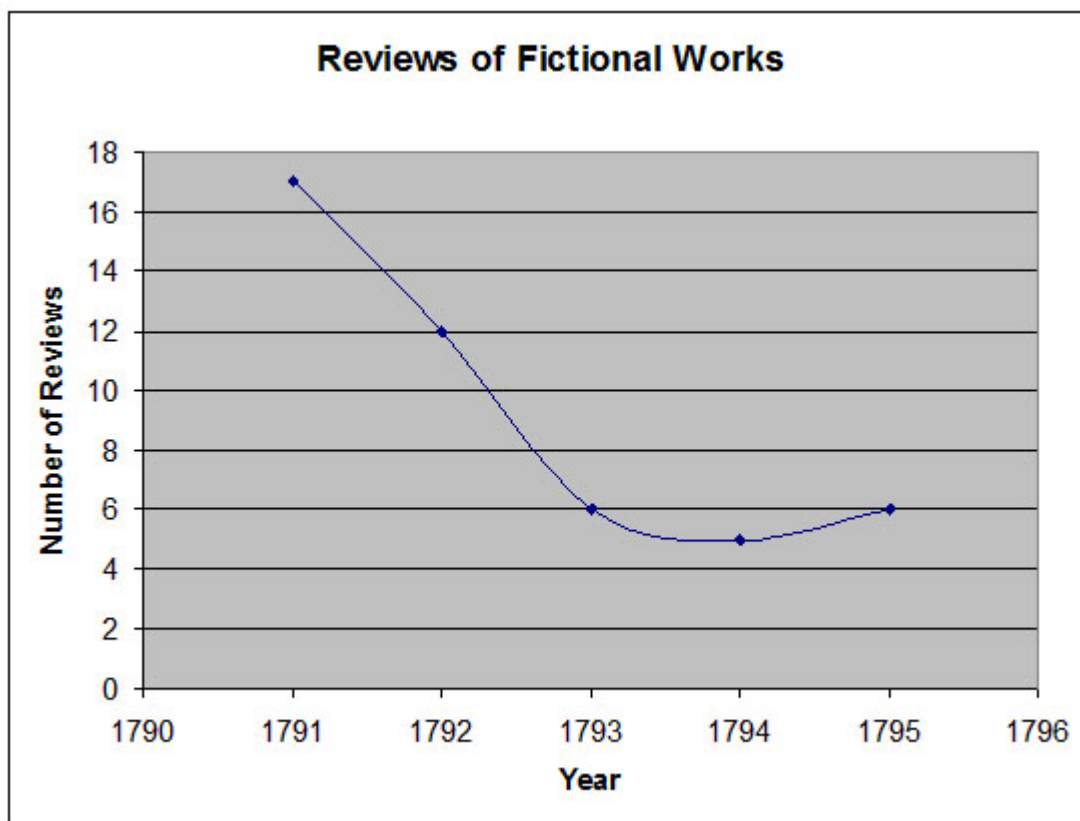
French Revolution – specifically it raised the question of why the state journal of the Revolution was not reviewing, and by implication supporting, the female talents of the day. Although these findings are perhaps surprising, they do allow us to define a small corpus which we may examine in detail, and for this reason the analysis of these two reviews will form the basis of this article.

The majority of literary work which was reviewed by the *Mercure* during the Revolution, apart from theatre, was non-fiction. This ranged from universally topical issues such as the dangers of smoking, to works which were indicative of their historical context, such as debates on education, divorce and associated morality, and the glorification of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who tied into the debate on education, due to the nature of his works and theories.

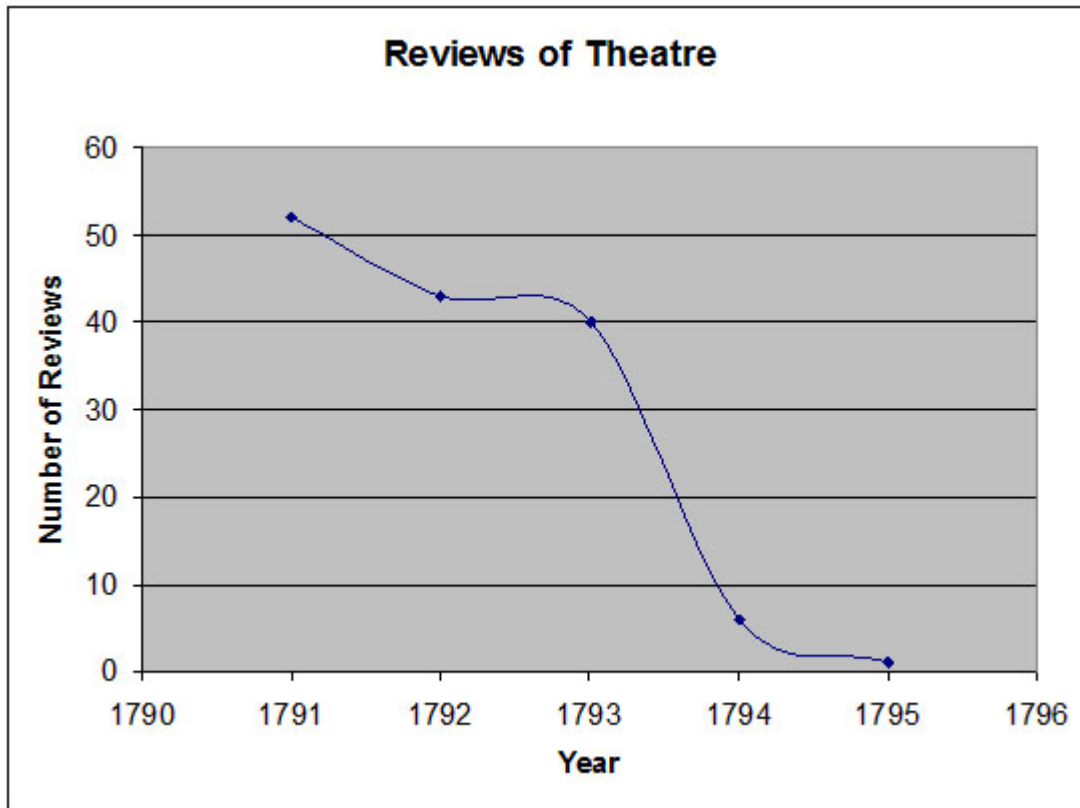
The main literary genre and medium during the Revolutionary years was the theatre. Nearly 150 plays were reviewed by the *Mercure* during the period 1791-1795, and it is very interesting to see when these plays were reviewed, ranging from 52 in 1791, to one in 1795. This is indicative of the historical context, as one would expect that the production and reviewing of literature would decline sharply during the years of the Terror (for more on the historical context, see Andress (2006)).

The total number of works of fiction (that is to say novels mainly, but this also includes short stories and poetry) reviewed during the period 1791-1795 was 46, of which two were by female authors.

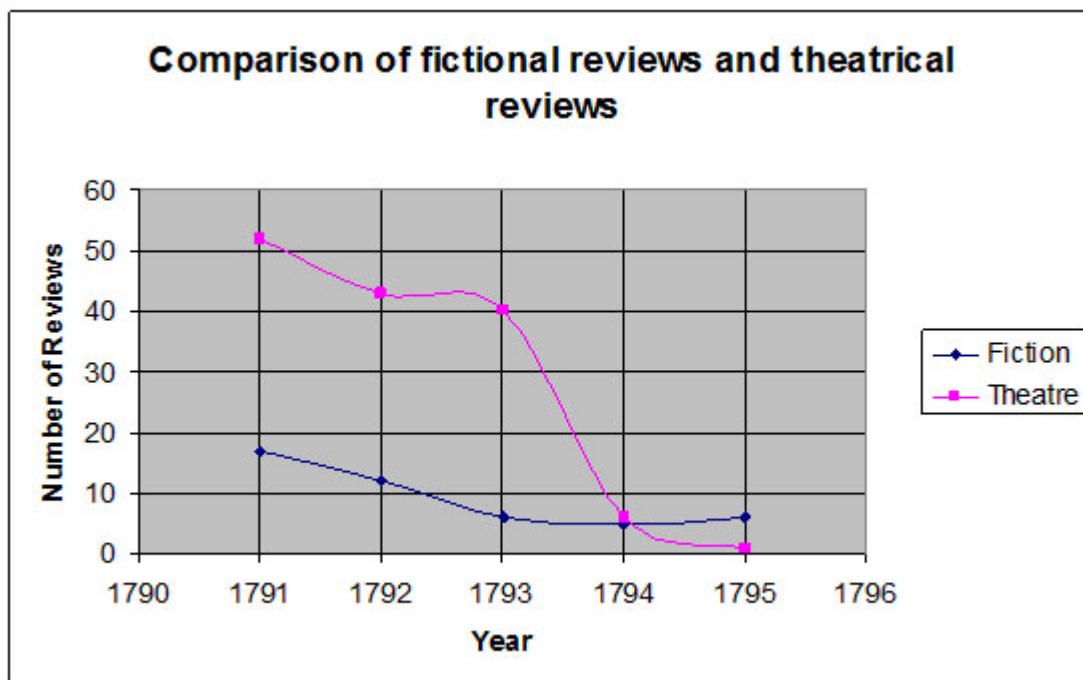
The total numbers for each year were as follows:



As for theatre, there were no women playwrights reviewed during the period. The total number of plays reviewed during the period 1791-1795 was 141, which is broken down on the following graph:



Comparing fiction and theatre reviews, the chart looks like this:



Theatre, therefore, was by far the most popular genre to review.

WOMEN WRITERS

In spite of the large number of women writing during the Revolutionary years, and of their innovations in doing so, none of these women were reviewed by the state journal during the period 1791 to 1795. In fact, there were only two women reviewed out of a total of 187 fictional reviews, including theatre. This makes up approximately 1% of reviews during these five years. The two female authors that compose this 1% were foreign: namely, Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821) and Charlotte Smith (1749-1806).

Mrs Inchbald was born in 1753 into a family of middle-class Catholics in Suffolk, England, and was later to become one of the most famous female writers of her time. She wrote not only novels, but was known as a critic and playwright too. Published in 1791, seven years after the theatrical work *Mogul Tale; or, The Descent of the Balloon* (1784) which was to mark the beginning of her 27-year career, *A Simple Story* was her first novel. This was an era that stipulated that all literature have a suitable moral lesson, and Mrs Inchbald provided one: women should have a proper education, an argument in contrast to that of Rousseau, who believed that women should be trained simply to please men. It is therefore not difficult to see why this text was chosen by the editorship of the *Mercure*. Her dramatic experience enabled her to hit upon strong situations while her purely literary gift enabled her to clothe them in good form. But the criticism aimed at her – that prevalent ideas on education and social convention spoil the work of a real artist – is true, except that a real artist would not have allowed the spoiling. Mrs Inchbald was criticised for having extra-literary purpose. Her ideas on education and social convention spoil the work, and a 'real artist' would not have allowed this to happen (Ward, 1907: 21). Nevertheless, this overt criticism is not as apparent among the French, and in particular in the review of 28 January 1792 in the *Mercure*. Despite not very much happening in the novel (writes M. G..., the reviewer), it is praised for its *vraisemblance*, its literary merit, and its *sensibilité*, or '*connaissances du cœur*' ['knowledge of the heart']. As with all eighteenth-century reviews of any decent length, the reader is treated to a lengthy summary of the plot, which in this case is approximately 78% of the entire article. The review contains praise for the translator, and starts by listing Inchbald's success in the theatres of London. 'Ce succès nous paraît mérité [...] elle est d'une singularité piquante' [To us, this success is deserved [...] this is a one-off].

Also born into a middle-class family and raised in southern England, Charlotte Smith was an English Romantic poet and novelist whose works have been credited with influencing Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. Although Mrs Smith was clearly an important writer of the time, she is perhaps not as well-known as she ought to be. The same applies to Mrs Inchbald. Nevertheless, there is a renewed interest in Smith scholarship in English faculties as critical editions of her works are beginning to be published. This is similar to the growing interest in modern day times in Mme de Graffigny, particularly by feminist critics.

Around the time of the Revolution in France, Mrs Smith began to write fiction to earn a living. *Emmeline* appeared in 1788, *Ethelinde* in 1789, then followed *Celestina* (1791), *Desmond* (1792) and *The Old Manor House* (1793), her most famous work. She continued to publish novels up to six years before her death at the age of 57, and as can be seen here, she published novels at a very fast rate. As stated above, the social conditions into which Mrs Smith was born would have helped her a great deal in this. It was Mrs Smith's *Celestina* that made it into the review section of the *Mercure*; however.

Celestina appeared as Mme de Rome's 1795 translation *Célestine, ou la Victime des Prejugés*. The review was published in the 13 July 1795 edition of the *Mercure*, and was the longest literary review seen in the journal for quite some time. Again, the translator and her translation, although she was to remain anonymous in this article, were praised, particularly for her 'connaissances anglaises' [English knowledge]. Once again, and as can be expected from literary reviews of the eighteenth century, the review was mainly a plot summary (63%), and the text was very well received by the French, largely due to its moral standards and its *vraisemblance*. The review finishes thus:

Tel est le canevas de ce Roman, dont les détails, les incidents, les épisodes excitent le plus vif intérêt.

[Such is the tapestry work of this novel, among which the details, the incidents, and the episodes arouse the most thrilling interest.]

INCHBALD V SMITH: COMPARING THE REVIEW OF 1792 WITH THAT OF 1795

Both reviews deal with female English writers in translation towards the end of the eighteenth century, and as such these reviews are highly similar.

One finds all one would expect to find in an eighteenth century literary review. The reviews are largely plot summary – or analysis, as the reviewer likes to think of it – Inchbald 78% v Smith 63%. While the proportion, and by implication the length in terms of the rest of the article, of the plot summary / analysis has decreased over the three years, the overall length of the article has not. Smith's review was found to be much more rambling than that of Inchbald. Smith's reviewer spends two pages discussing the English as a nationality, the success of their literature due to their novels having respect for 'des mœurs' and flagging up the role of honour, whilst sandwiched in the middle of this is a sentence or two admitting the failure of French literature to do this, before the Revolution at least. French novels were unable to provoke any interest or to display any character. The review starts by claiming that a nation's morals are embedded in its literature, and goes on to say that the morals of the English have a character 'très remarquable', which, one must assume, can only be taken as a compliment.

Inchbald's review does not shy away from going into the reviewer's prejudice on the nation whose novel he is reviewing. After a glowing review for *Simple Story*, the author ends with a small comment about his distaste for a certain character (the reviewers of the *Mercure* did not hold back their recommendations for any improvements for a text, however small). In this case, the character is simply dismissed as, 'Il nous semble que ce personnage ne pouvait se trouver que dans un Roman Anglais', [It seems to us that this character could appear only in an English novel], for his incivility and lack of *sensibilité*. On the subject of *sensibilité*, this is a major criterion for judging a text, and has been used to the author's advantage here. The text contains many 'connaissances du cœur' and 'l'art de produire de grands mouvements par de faibles ressorts, de porter le trouble dans l'âme par un mot, un geste, un regard, un silence' [The art of producing grand effects by simple means, to touch the soul by a single word, a gesture, a look, a moment of silence]. Similarly, *Simple Story*, described as a 'tour de force', is praised for its characterisation. As if a reviewer could not do the text justice, he feels the need for a page-length quote to introduce the protagonist Dorriforth.

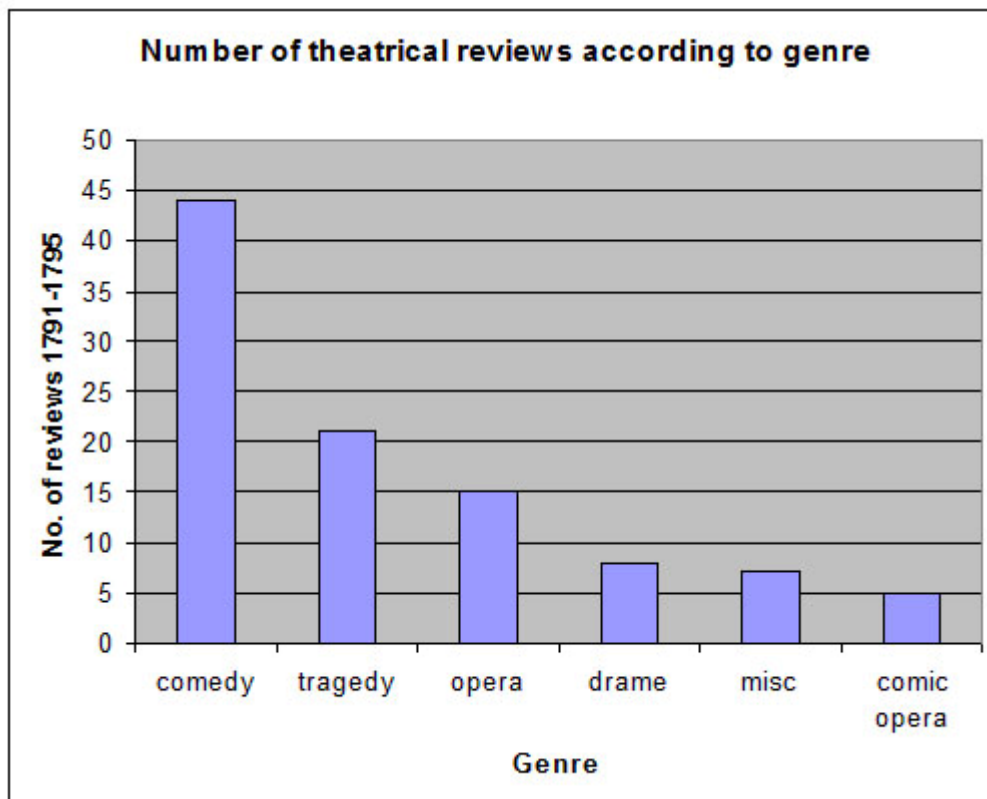
Although this is also the case for *Celestina*, it is much less so. *Vraisemblance* and characterisation are merged into a single sentence, whereas once before these would have required their own paragraphs. All in all, there is little said in terms of analysis of the text in the case of Charlotte Smith.

In both cases the reviewer points out the author's success with the text in hand and with previous texts. This comes immediately with Inchbald, but with Smith, the reviewer only gets round to the topic of the author and her text after two pages' digression about morals and the English. Success is measured in both cases by the number of re-editions of the text, and the time phase for this to date. Praise is given in both cases for the translator – although M. Deschamps does receive more praise and credit as a translator than does the unnamed female translator of Charlotte Smith – the former is credited with having produced a rendition that could easily be the original.

FRENCH THEATRE DURING THE REVOLUTION

We have noted above the pedagogical powers of the theatre during the Revolution by the example of Giraudoux. Evidence for this can be found in the database created as part of this project. Theatrical reviews compare to fictional reviews (novels) 141 to 46 – a difference of approximately 3:1.

The most common genres found to be reviewed were the following:



These results displayed on the graph go against expectations *slightly*. Tragedy is expected to be highly popular, as is opera/ comic opera. However, it would be expected

that the *dramas* were more popular and the comedies less so, to a certain extent that they should swap places on the chart.

The reason for this is that the *drame* is less a literary work, and more a political manifestation, of which there was a great proliferation during these Revolutionary years. As regards comedies, nobody puts it better than Didier: 'L'heure n'est pas au rire' [There's not a lot to laugh about at the moment]. Although this period is certainly not the genre's high time, comedy does enjoy a significant popularity during the Revolutionary years, despite Didier's statement. This is in keeping with the research results of a team of Americans headed by Emmet Kennedy (Kennedy *et al.*, 1996).

Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that these are only works reviewed by the state journal, and do not reflect literary production. This raises an interesting question as to what type and for what reasons the *Mercure* reviews a literary work, as it does with the fiction with regard to women writers. There were many French women writing, yet none of them were reviewed. There were French women writing theatre, a lot of which was received positively, yet none of the plays were written by women were reviewed. To an extent, the *Mercure* is searching for political plays, so why not include in the literary review that by Mme de Gouges? Themes of equality and justice before the law, anti-clericalism, the fight against prejudice, the liberty of the individual, all are to be found in the Parisian theatres of these years.

What marks Revolutionary theatre out from the rest of theatre in French literature, or more precisely all theatre produced hitherto, is the style and vocabulary of the *spectacles*. *Le Mariage de Figaro* is a good example of this. Theatre is brought down with regards to its style, so that it includes all the 'plebs' that would once have been banished from theatres around Paris. They were even introduced on stage, and throughout Beaumarchais's *Trilogie Espagnole*, they succeed in outwitting the count. It is interesting to compare this with French theatre of the preceding century, most notably in Racine's *Phèdre*. The reason for the degradation in the theatrical public is due to the Revolution's considering theatre as a tool for public education, as outlined above. If it is to be part of 'l'instruction publique', then this needs to include the Third Estate as well. At around 1792-94 one no longer reverences the previously-established social conventions, such as title and class. One is simply a citizen (*citoyen(ne)*) and the so-called language of the Republic is used in discourse between all. *Tutoiement* is more common on the stage. For more on French Revolutionary theatre, see Carlson (1966).

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS: THE RECEPTION OF LITERATURE DURING THE REVOLUTION

An analysis of the reviews of the state journal during the period of the French Revolution, more specifically, the Terror and its immediate prologue and epilogue, can provide the (literary) historian with an invaluable first-hand insight into the events of the Revolution, and perhaps in particular, the *vie quotidienne* of the Revolution.

A historical or political approach to the *Mercure* between 1791 and 1795, involving an analysis of the weekly events and how they are reported by the state journal, would certainly provide a good insight into the events of the Revolution using the *Mercure* as a viable primary source (especially given the newly added politics and current affairs

section). However, this paper has taken a literary approach, which involves looking at the *literature* of the day, and doing so one gains not only insight into the literary climate of the Revolution, which is important in itself, but also the events of the Terror, the daily life, what was happening in terms of development of thought, what was being read/ played/ reviewed at a certain point. This can be done through the recording of:

1. fictional works;
2. theatrical works;
3. non-fiction.

This project started with the aim of such an analysis of the first two, while keeping an eye on the third. An analysis of the reviews and a look at the primary texts themselves were what this project has concentrated on, with reference to the reception of female writers during the Revolution (and by implication, the position of women in Revolutionary society), and the theatre of the Revolution.

Fiction and women's writing

A recording of the 46 fictional reviews found that only two of these reviews concerned female authors, who were read in translation from English.

One would wonder why the government-funded journal of the day was not reviewing French female writers, when it is known that there are plenty of them, and that they are venturing into new territory where the men had not yet been, and creating their own innovations in these domains.

A close reading of the two English texts sheds some light onto this matter, for they both concern suitable moral lessons, which was required of all literature at this time. This leads back to Rousseau, who was the man of the moment in the non-fiction reviews across the five years of the journal, for he was involved in the debates on education and the place of women in society (see *Emile, ou de l'éducation* (1762)). Nevertheless, Mrs Inchbald goes against Rousseau, for the moral lesson in her novel is that women should have a proper education. This is therefore an input into the debate on education and the place of women in French society surrounding Rousseau. Moral standards and *vraisemblance* were also important factors in the positive nature of the review, and the reason for its being selected to be reviewed by the editorship of the *Mercure*.

French revolutionary theatre

A literary approach to the Revolution would claim that it is the theatre of all media and literature that is the most powerful in terms of a driving force for the Revolution, a point which may well be played down by scholars taking historical and/or political approaches. This is in agreement with the novelist Giraudoux, in that the theatre is *the* only form of moral or artistic education for a nation.

The rise of the *drame* as political manifestation and less as literary work is indicative of this point, as is the lowering of the tone on the stage. Compare, for example, *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1784) by Beaumarchais with Racine's *Phèdre* (1677). The latter, forming part of the Classical tradition, provides a traditional intrigue involving high-ranking members of society, written in verse (the alexandrin), it is *vraisemblable*, and conforms admirably to the three unities and 'les bienséances' (an agreed concept of

what is acceptable on the stage). Beaumarchais may well take a traditional subject of the comedy genre (the intrigue of Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin*); however, the play marks, above all, a break with the bienséances, in that the servants (Figaro) succeed in outwitting the count (Almaviva). Beaumarchais's *oeuvre* falls into the category of the *drame*, and it is generally speaking a political manifestation (it is another debate entirely as to whether he is a 'révolutionnaire'). Once again, however, despite many female playwrights writing during the Revolution, in particular Mme de Gouges who wrote political theatre, none of these were reviewed by the editorship of the *Mercure*.

Finally, it must be borne in mind, and has been throughout the duration of the project, that these are only works *reviewed* by the state journal, and do not reflect literary *production*. This raises the interesting question as to what type of literature, and for what reasons the *Mercure* reviews a literary work, and particularly, why the editorship, known to be supporters of High Enlightenment, are effectively supporting secularism by ignoring the up-and-coming female writers of the day. This paper has reflected on why the editorship chose to review Elizabeth Inchbald in 1792 and Charlotte Smith in 1795, but the question remains: why did the journal not review and promote French literary talent among female authors?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the University of Warwick for its Undergraduate Research Scholarship Scheme, coordinated by Dr Rachel Maunder of the Centre for Academic and Professional Development, which provided the funding for this project over six weeks in July and August 2007. I would also like to thank my supervisor Dr Katherine Astbury of the Department of French for her support and guidance, which was invaluable both to me and the project.

NOTES

[1] Jonathan Durham is currently studying French literature at the Sorbonne in Paris as the third year of a French and German degree at Warwick.

[2] This and all other translations are my own.

REFERENCES

Primary sources

M. G. (1792), 'Simple Histoire' in *Le Mercure de France*, 28 January 1792

Anonymous reviewer (1795), 'Célestine, ou la Victime des Préjugés' in *Le Mercure de France*, 13 July 1795

Secondary sources

Andress, D. (2006), *The Terror: Civil War in the French Revolution*, London: Abacus

Bonnel, R. and C. Rubinger (1994), *Femmes Savantes et Femmes d'Esprit: Women Intellectuals of the French Eighteenth Century*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing

Carlson, M. (1966), *The Theatre of the French Revolution*, New York: Cornell University Press

Censer, J. R. (1994), *The French Press in the Age of Enlightenment*, London: Routledge

Cook, M. C. (1982), 'Politics in the fiction of the French Revolution, 1789-1794', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 201, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, pp. 232-340

Darnton, R. and D. Roche (eds) (1989), *Revolution in Print: The Press in France, 1775-1800*, London: University of California Press

Didier, B. (1988), *La Littérature de la Révolution française*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France

Dion, R. (2006), 'Critique Littéraire', in Aron, P., D. Saint-Jacques and A. Viala (eds), *Le dictionnaire du littéraire*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, pp. 134-35

Giraudoux, J. (1931), *Le Discours de Chateauroux*, feuilleton du *Temps*, 10 November 1931, quoted in *Transactions of the Seventh international congress on the Enlightenment (Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century)*, SVEC 265, Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1989

Hesse, C. (2001), *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern*, Woodstock: Princeton University Press

Kant, I. (1784), 'Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?', in *Berlinische Monatsschrift*. Dezember-Heft. pp. 481-494, in Christian Neuhäuser (ed.), (2007), <http://www.uni-potsdam.de/u/philosophie/texte/kant/aufklaer.htm>, accessed 25 July 2007

Kennedy, E., M-L. Netter, J. P. McGregor and M. V. Olsen (1996), *Theatre, Opera, and Audiences in Revolutionary Paris: Analysis and Repertory*, London: Greenwood Press

Martin, C. (2004), *Espaces du féminin dans le roman français du dix-huitième siècle*, SVEC 2004 (1), Oxford: Voltaire Foundation

Montfort, C. R. (ed.) (1994), *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1789*, Birmingham, Alabama: Summa Publications, inc.

Mortier, R. (1990), *Le Cœur et la Raison*, Oxford: Voltaire Foundation

Rodmell, G. E. (1990), *French Drama of the Revolutionary Years*, London: Routledge

Showalter, E. (1988), 'Writing Off the Stage: Women Authors and Eighteenth-Century Theater', *Yale French Studies*, 75, 98

Ward, A. W., A. R. Waller, W. P. Trent, J. Erskine, S. P. Sherman and C. Van Doren, *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, in 18 Volumes (1907–21). Volume XI, *The Period of the French Revolution*, Online edition: New York: Bartleby.com, 2000 (www.bartleby.com/cambridge/), H. V. Routh, <http://www.bartleby.com/221/1213.html>, accessed 25 July 2007

To cite this paper please use the following details: Durham, J. (2008), 'The Reception of Literature in France during the Revolution: An Analysis of Reviews of Women Writers in the *Mercure de France*, 1791-1795', *Reinvention: a Journal of Undergraduate Research*, Volume 1, Issue 1, <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/go/reinventionjournal/volume1issue1/durham> Date accessed [*insert date*].

© Reinvention: a Journal of Undergraduate Research (2008). Full copyright remains with the author.