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Readers, Writers, Salonnières: Female Networks in Europe, 1700-1900; The Life of Madame Necker: Sin, Redemption and the Parisian Salon; British Literary Salons of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries

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examine spiritual questions such as: “How does the visionary poet transform human consciousness? How does the poet position herself productively in relation to the social and existential realities of human experience? To what extent might the teachings of the Bible serve as a guide for the visionary poet in the modern age?” (144). Central to Watkins’s argument is the idea that, for Barbauld, the transformation of society will not be effected through violence or force, but through the benevolent power of love and a refusal of conflict. Barbauld therefore refuses the Miltonic tradition of visionary thought that “requires the visionary poet to enter explicitly and openly into intellectual and imaginative warfare with prevailing forms of cultural and ideological authority” (145). Rather, she embraces the possibilities for change opened up when the principle of love rather than conflict provides the sustaining impetus for visionary transformation.

Watkins suggests that while conventional Christian sentiments are at the heart of many of the works in Barbauld’s volume, the poet’s Dissenting background is evidenced in the way in which she refuses to “be wedded to a narrow or reductive orthodoxy in her effort to understand and articulate love” (168). He applauds her questioning approach to visionary poetry, arguing that her “vision is flexible, shaped according to the material circumstances of human experience, and her prophecy is inviting rather than threatening, showing a path toward a better world for those who wish to follow it” (203). Watkins’s own vision of Barbauld, presented in *Anna Letitia Barbauld and 18th Century Visionary Poetics*, is a useful one. His detailed exploration of the intellectual and visionary scope of Barbauld’s poetry will no doubt have a significant impact on the way in which this still underappreciated writer is subsequently viewed.

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Readers, Writers, Salonnières: Female Networks in Europe, 1700–1900, edited by Hilary Brown and Gilian Dow, Bern, Peter Lang, 2011, vi + 283 pp.

The Life of Madame Necker: Sin, Redemption and the Parisian Salon, by Sonja Boon, London, Pickering and Chatto, 2011, viii + 184 pp.

British Literary Salons of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries, by Susanne Schmid, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, ix + 252 pp.

Aristocratic social gatherings, or salons, as they came to be known in the wake of Germaine de Staël's hugely popular *Corinne* in 1807, exert as much fascination today as in the nineteenth century for obvious reasons: our society's cult of celebrity and love of gossip has only intensified, facilitated by new social networking tools (including an aptly named on-line magazine) that seemingly amplify the experience of the salon on a global scale. As with early historians of the salon phenomenon such as Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, this curiosity also owes something to our nostalgia for what we imagine to be the felt intimacy and knowability of the salon, the immediacy of its human relations. Without the proliferation of print and digital technologies, the salon would probably not be studied, or idealized to the same extent (who, after all, enjoys being "alone together"?). Answering to the interests of feminist and material history, and banking on the academic popularity of the related notions of sympathy and cosmopolitanism, research on salons has thrived in the last thirty years. Important studies by Dena Goodman, Petra Wilhelmy-Dollinger, and Steven Kale among others have been published on French and German salons. Despite being a pan-European institution and hence a natural topic for comparative criticism, however, no monograph to my knowledge yet exists on the salon across the Continent. Such a book would ideally require working knowledge of at least five or six languages and even more literary traditions, the ability to go beyond rigid literary periodizations, and the mettle to confront a ballooning archive. It would also have to address a number of methodological problems that regularly resurface in studies on salon sociability, including defining what we mean by "salon," conceptualizing its ideology, and establishing its chronology. Is it true, as Thackeray once wrote, that "tea-parties are the same all the world over" (qtd. Jay, in Brown and Dow 157), or did salon culture and the forms of sociability that define it differ in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, or Russia?

Although only one of the three books under review is explicitly comparative, the three taken together provide at least some answers to the above questions. Luckily, despite de rigueur references to Habermas, they do not waste too much time trying to legislate whether the salon belongs to the public, the private, or to some third, hybrid sphere. They do on the other hand attempt to define the salon, more or less concurring with Dena Goodman's influential description of it as a disinterested form of reciprocity where women were the crucial mediating figures and that answered to female needs of education and self-expression. In the background of two of these studies hover the three grandes dames of French salon culture, Madame du Deffand, Madame Necker, and her daughter Germaine de Staël. Necker and Staël are of course the main actors in Sonia Boon's biographical study, which shows how Suzanne Necker carefully groomed her daughter to become the archetypal Romantic salon hostess and the "Mistress of the Age." The ethos or ideology inculcated by Necker stipulated, among other things, that the hostess should enable conversation, that subjectivity should be kept carefully at bay (Hegel describes the perfect salon participant as "an actor who plays an endless number of parts" [112]), and that classes should be able to mingle, praise being doled out based on quality of mind and conversation rather than on social origin. "The supreme challenge of composing a salon was orchestrating the guest list," as Elizabeth Jay nicely puts it, "for once admitted another formal invitation was never required" (Brown and Dow 148). The supreme function of the salon, borrowing Bourdieusian terms, was as an agent of consecration: both women and men made use of the salon to develop their networks and increasingly also their

professional careers. The fact that Staël looked down upon German salon hostesses during her visit in 1804, whereas Caroline de la Motte Fouqué took up their defense, or that Rahel Varnhagen and Henriette Herz criticized Staël's overbearing personality while admiring her work (see Brown and Dow 68, 89), suggests tensions, as well as differences, between the *salonnières* of different nations.

Hilary Brown and Gillian Dow's edited volume comes closest to my imaginary monograph on the salon across the Continent, suggesting that internationally authored essay collections are perhaps the best way to apprehend the salon phenomenon as a whole. The thirteen essays, culled from a conference at Chawton House Library in May 2008, are generally of high quality, and I found a number of them to be both very useful and interesting. The introduction claims that the collection "seeks to break new ground by examining links between literary women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries across national boundaries" (1). Read all together or as clusters, these "thirteen case studies" as the editors call them (9), do indeed provide us with an innovative history of female networks spanning from France to Italy across two centuries, in turn offering the groundwork for a wealth of exciting new research possibilities. The overarching question uniting these essays may strike feminist scholars as a bit naïve, but can be justified in the context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century culture: "As they gained opportunities to publish and enter a more public sphere, did [these female authors] feel an awareness of their particular position as women which drew them to their sisters in other countries?" (3).

The first four chapters draw a very nice picture of earlier female networks spanning Britain, France, Italy, and Germany thanks to the Grand Tour. Marianna D'Ezio maps out the many salons, or rather *conversazione*, recorded in the journals of the best-known British women travelers, including Lady Anne Miller and Lady Craven (many of the journals on the Italian side remaining largely untapped). Poetry was the chief topic of conversation, the presence of English guests was a "sign of distinction" (14–15), and the salons of Rome and Venice, notably that of Isabella Albrizzi, ruled supreme. Among other things, D'Ezio touches on the fascinating phenomenon of *casini*, intimate get-togethers run by women outside of their own homes (25). Albrizzi is also discussed alongside two other celebrated Venetian hostesses, Giustina Renier Michiel and Paolina Grismondi, in Eve-Marie Lampron's essay on French–Italian networks. Basing herself on archival research, she argues that these relationships enabled "a prominent place on the literary scene" (32) and that celebrity was an important motivation for salon culture: "Fame . . . works as a catalyst for sociability, just as sociability can provide the necessary contacts enabling authors to achieve celebrity" (34). Lampron's is one of several essays that suggest that women writers were not always "sisterly." The French and English often criticized Italian women for being uneducated, whereas the latter accused the French of being cold (44–45). In the next, also genuinely comparative essay, Marjanne Goozé looks at the French salon "as a touchstone for assessing its influence on the Berlin salons" (52–53). We learn, for example, that Berlin hostesses offered only meager fare as opposed to French (59), and that French hostesses often published, while the Germans did not (60). Goozé concludes that "German-Jewish salon women were not mimicking the French *salonnières*: they were adopting and adapting social behaviours and activities to their own needs and circumstances" (64). The fourth essay, by Nicole Pohl, discusses Dorothea von Kurland's salons, which moved around between Berlin and Latvia, providing "a unique nexus between Enlightenment Europe's West and East" (74). Kurland was the lover of Talleyrand, the correspondent of Metternich and hence an influential figure in European politics. Resisting

the Realpolitik of the age, her cosmopolitan gatherings were “instrumental in creating . . . a European civil space” (89).

Laura Kirkley’s essay on “Translating Rousseauism” sits a bit awkwardly between two very homogeneous clusters on early- and late-Romantic networks, the first taking Staël as their model, the second George Sand. It sets out to analyze how Helen Maria Williams’s translation of *Paul et Virginie* and Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* both adapt Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s Rousseauistic novel. I felt the comparison to be bandy-legged, and the essay too long, rehearsing familiar material and over-interpreting Williams’s interpolated sonnets. The claim that Maria Edgeworth “could presume widespread readerly knowledge of Williams’s *Paul and Virginia*” (93) is unconvincing, given that she obviously read it in the original, and I do not understand on what basis the author casts Williams as a “Solitary Walker” after her escape from prison in 1793 (102). On the contrary, Williams was less sympathetic to Rousseau’s ideas in the second half of the 1790s. Susan Van Dijk’s distant reading of George Sand’s “star-shaped network” of female correspondents (123) couldn’t be more different from Kirkley’s close analysis. By drawing up and organizing the names of the 46 women correspondents (14 of these foreign) by generation and by date of publication, she very helpfully shows how the author actively shaped her network, including and excluding correspondents (like on today’s Facebook), aiming for quality literature. Again, Sand’s relations with other female writers was not necessarily sisterly: she admired older writers including Desbordes-Valmore and Girardin, but was less sympathetic to lesser known or younger authors, refusing to meet Margaret Fuller or even her own English translator (130–31)! Some women, on the other hand, felt obliged to shun George Sand’s salon, as Elizabeth Jay reminds us in her highly engaging, well-written study on British women writers and the mid-nineteenth-century Parisian salon. Despite having lost much of their clout, these salons “exerted an undeniable attraction for British writers and artists, and especially for women” (147), acting as “social and professional lifelines” where women writers could network, gain professional recognition, and educate their daughters (158). After showing how men and women experienced Paris differently, Jay describes several salons run by British expatriates, including that of Mary Mohl whose guest list had been passed down by Juliette Récamier (148), before focusing on Elizabeth Gaskell’s and Frances Trollope’s stays in Paris.

In the next essay, Kerstin Wiedmann examines intertextual references to George Sand, a “common denominator” (167) that created a “virtual female network” (178) among mid-nineteenth-century German women novelists, among them Therese von Bacheracht. Ursula Jung then looks at the reception of Germaine de Staël and George Sand in Spain, work which overlaps with studies by Susan Kirkpatrick. I was not convinced by her explanation of why the nationalist writer Cecilia Böhl rejects Staël’s *Corinne*, given the latter’s celebration of national genius (195). Gesa Stedman’s essay is on the reception of *Corinne* across the Channel and the question of female genius, focusing on Geraldine Jewsbury, Dinah Mulock Craik, and Grace Aguilar. It is a theme that has already been amply explored, but the author fails to cite important work by other scholars, notably Kari Lokke, and takes too long to get to her examples. Furthermore, she ignores Sand’s *Consuelo* (1841), which had modified the theme of the female genius by the second half of the century. Maire Fedelma Cross’s interesting essay on socialist Peruvian-French writer Flora Tristan as a reader and writer asks more questions than it gives answers. She calls her a “*salonnière sans frontières*” (230); for her the salon “was composed of encounters

during her international journeys that prompted her to read and be read” (219) and that gave her a critical awareness of women in different social conditions and countries. Alison Martin writes about Danish writers Mathilde Orsted and the Horner sisters as translators of scientific literature, a fascinating area of study but peripheral to the rest of the essays. In the final article, Daphne Hoogenboezem goes full circle by looking at Dutch author Reinoudina de Goeje’s late-nineteenth-century rewritings of the seventeenth-century salonnière Madame d’Aulnoy’s fairy tales, an “example of a transhistorical and international female network” (275) that also perfectly describes all the papers in what is indeed a groundbreaking collection.

Upon meeting Germaine de Staël in Venice, the Italian hostess Giustina Renier Michiel commented: “She speaks very highly of her father, but never of her mother, an excellent woman, who wrote a little volume of excellent maxims” (Lampron, in Brown and Dow 43). For a long time Staël overshadowed her mother, and despite positive accounts such as Renier Michiel’s, Madame Necker was remembered mainly for raising her daughter in an overly rigid fashion and for jealously guarding her husband, the finance minister Jacques Necker. It is not easy to reconcile Suzanne Necker’s negative reputation with Gibbon’s youthful celebration of her as the beautiful, modest, and talented daughter of a Swiss pastor (when Gibbon’s father forbade their union, he famously “sighed as a lover” but “obeyed as a son”). Several studies have sought to explain this dissonance and to treat her in a more sympathetic light, notably descendant Paul Gabriel d’Haussonville’s 1882 biography, an essay and several chapters by Dena Goodman, and the 2006 issue of the *Cahiers Staëliens* dedicated to Madame Necker. In *The Life of Madame Necker*, Sonja Boon also wishes to rehabilitate her. Its opening parodies the tone of *Tattler*: “Suzanne had it all: beauty, brains, virtue and the coveted prize, a wealthy and politically powerful husband” (1). The rest of the book sets out to explain how wrong this outward image was, and why. Boon gives only a bare-bones biography of her early years, devoting a single line to her relationship with Gibbon, then moving on to her marriage when she “dedicated herself wholly to her daughter’s moral and intellectual development” (2), hosted an influential Friday salon, founded and directed a charity hospital, published several treatises, and wrote prolifically enough for her husband to publish the posthumous five-volume *Mélanges*. Despite such an outwardly successful life and career, Boon very rightly points out how Madame Necker must have suffered a strong sense of alterity stemming from her religious, national, and social origins: “Madame Necker, Swiss, Calvinist and *bourgeoise*” (18). The book’s approach is original and it contains many insights, but its title is misleading and it will no doubt disappoint those hoping to learn about Suzanne Necker’s life history in any detail. Informed by the turn to the body in theory and more directly by autopathography, or the reading of identity through embodied experience, Boon principally discusses “Necker’s body, which functioned both as a stage for her public performance of self and, at the same time, as a site of deep psychic and somatic suffering” (2). To do so, she develops a theoretically sophisticated argument that she presents very clearly in her introduction, but which gets too often repeated in each of the five chapters. The book explores “relationships between gender, piety and illness” (3) and shows how “the suffering body . . . was the canvas that displayed her emotional states” (4–5), suffering being a way for Necker to “manage” her sense of exile and guilt (5). Its five chapters cover five embodied identities: elite, Calvinist, maternal, sick, and divine. Borrowing from Kristeva, Boon’s central argument is that Necker’s “stigmatized body served as the site of critical abjection” (14).

Chapter 1 provides a nice discussion of salon culture and of the *salonnière*, comparing the salon with a mirror, and the *salonnière* with a musician. Suzanne Necker importantly altered the function of the hostess by transforming duty to one's class into duty to society as a whole. The second chapter looks at her upbringing and the sense of filial guilt she developed following the death of her parents. Chapter 3 dwells on Necker's relation to her mother and to her daughter, both of which are marked by guilt. Staël's education was modeled on Rousseau's *Emile* (81), and her mother's salon became her classroom. Boon justifies such a moralized upbringing on the basis of her argument that Necker wanted to display her religious and cultural alterity through maternal virtue, but it is hard not to see it simply as narcissism. In the next chapter Boon also tries to revise received views of Necker as hypochondriac by arguing that her staging of disease was linked, again, to her sense of alterity. While the idea of illness as form of expression is perfectly viable in an age of generalized hypochondria among the educated, it is impossible by chapter's end to say exactly what caused her illness: religion, filial guilt, homesickness, class, gender, or all of the above. In this chapter, as elsewhere, explanations are theoretically overdetermined but short on biographical and textual evidence. For example, we are never given the possible causes of Necker's early death at 57. Instead of a conclusion, the last chapter analyses Necker's macabre last will, in which she asks to be conserved in alcohol and placed in a lead coffin with a glass cover, where her husband's remains were to be buried beside hers (115). Boon once more justifies this as a result of the complex interaction between gender, piety, and illness, yet Madame Necker apparently neglected one essential component of Calvinism here, modesty. In short, I was not always convinced by Boon's arguments in defense of Suzanne Necker, and regretted how much space was devoted to theory and to summaries of various cultural contexts (epistolarity, sensibility, salons, Genevan Calvinism, Huguenots, virtue, mother-daughter relationships in feminist theory, eighteenth-century ideals of hygiene, etc.). Absent in this book is Necker's life as recorded not through her body but by means of her many accomplishments, her large textual corpus, as well as through the many positive accounts of contemporaries such as Renier Michiel.

Among Necker's maxims praised by Renier Michiel (and ignored by Boon) is one that celebrates the grandeur of English aristocracy, which does not have to live under a strong monarch as in France (Necker 2: 294). Madame Necker, like her husband and her daughter was an anglophile who admired Britain as a model of civil liberty and pioneer of modernity. Their circle at Coppet was an outpost of British-style liberalism on the Continent during the First French Empire. In her chapter on English society in her *Considerations on the French Revolution*, Staël argues that it is precisely because of these more advanced liberal institutions that salon culture did not have the same traction on political affairs in Britain as in France. "It is not in these intellectual feasts that the society of England consists," she writes, before criticizing social events in London for being too crowded and unexclusive, and therefore not on par with Parisian salons (3: 276). Cultural historians have tended to agree, excluding British forms of sociability from their discussions of salon culture. Elizabeth Jay, for example, writes that "the gatherings in large London houses, reigned over by political hostesses, were not comparable because their focus was too narrow and yet their invitation list too large and indiscriminate, while London's lionizing literary parties or Unitarian Manchester's evenings of rational discussion seemed a little tame by contrast with the exotic mix to be found in Parisian salons" (Brown and Dow 150).

Susan Schmid's attempt in *British Literary Salons* at "restoring British salon sociability" as a culturally important site and at showing a continuum between the bluestocking tradition and mid-nineteenth-century sociability (2) is therefore both bold and salutary. Unfortunately, for reasons both of content and form, I was sorely disappointed. Her monograph is abundantly researched, with a usefully large bibliography, and it is strong on book history, but suffers from a lack of ideas, genuine arguments, or convincing close readings. One sometimes gets the impression of reading previously published articles stitched together, and the book would have deserved professional copy-editing. Too much space is devoted to biographies of the three women hostesses that the author chose to focus on, Mary Berry, Lady Holland, and Countess Blessington, as well as to summaries of their works. These personalities are more familiar than the author suggests, hence the necessity of rehearsing so much basic information is questionable. Although the book argues that little scholarship existed on the topic before the "rediscovery" of these women writers by feminist critics (8, 26), it mainly relies on the many wonderful resources produced during the nineteenth- and early-twentieth century, including the Berry sisters' *Journals and Correspondence*, Marie Lichtenstein's *Holland House*, or Madden's *Life and Correspondence of Blessington*. Without these pioneer texts, much of what we know today about Romantic-period women writers would be lost.

Chapter 1, titled "Traditions and Theories," gives brief histories of the Parisian salons and the Bluestockings, before defining the salon. Its proposition to approach salons as "non-places" in order to justify including a variety of different social configurations is in my mind not very helpful, since no one challenges the idea that salons could be peripatetic and take various forms. The introduction touches on but unfortunately fails to develop some differences with Continental salons, such as the fact that sociability is not primarily women-defined in England (5). Other significant differences between Britain and the Continent, such as the size of social gatherings or the fact that the literary field had professionalized much earlier in Britain, are not addressed. The book as a whole suffers from this absence of a comparative dimension to help bring out the specific features of English salons; tellingly, Staël's important chapter on English sociability goes unmentioned. The author furthermore never justifies her choice of her three salonnières. Why not discuss Hester Thrale Piozzi, the Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Morgan, Lady Jersey, or even William Roscoe's Dissenting Athenaeum in Liverpool? Chapters 2 to 4 are devoted to Mary Berry, editor of Madame du Deffand's letters, best friend of Walpole, and "by far the cleverest woman in England" according to Staël (51). For more than thirty years Berry organized small dinner parties at her home on North Audley then Curzon Street, yet only three pages in three chapters discuss her actual "salon." Schmid shrinks away from discussing Berry's sexuality, and notably her relationship with Anne Damer. She devotes more space to her admittedly fascinating travels, but sadly ignores her many political remarks on the Revolution and also never discusses her interesting comparative volumes on English and French society, *Social Life in England and France* (1828, 1831). I partly disagree with the book's claim that Berry "shrank from reporting very subjective encounters or emotions" and that "she did not warm to Romantic aesthetics" (61). Yes, Berry does claim in several places that she is not a romantic. Yet her splendid first reaction to the Alps, which I cite below, suggests the contrary and would have deserved to be mentioned instead of quoting Walpole's overly familiar tirade:

The scenes presented to the eye are the most sublime that the imagination can form. They fill the mind with great ideas, and leave it impressed with a degree of admiration, which attempts not to express itself by words. I experienced this so forcibly that when I arrived at Chamouni, after being for nearly six hours surrounded by these new and astonishing views of nature, I sat down perfectly absorbed in a confusion of ideas, every one of which seemed too great for my mind, and could neither speak myself nor hear others on the subject (Berry 1: 30).

Lady Holland and Holland House, the “most prestigious” of the three salons studied in the monograph (72), are the topics of chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 5, perhaps the book’s strongest, usefully reports on what it calls “the Holland House set.” Unlike Staël, the author does not question the fact that the sheer size of the dinners at Holland House might disqualify it as a salon. Nor does she effectively deal with the accusations that Lady Holland acted as a tyrant in her living room (much like Staël and other hostesses). Schmid quite rightly points out the merits of Holland’s unpublished travel writing, which is indeed idiosyncratically splendid despite her Whiggish anti-Catholic prejudices, and she touches on Lady Holland’s fascination for and fetishizing of Napoleon. Chapters 6 and 7 on Countess of Blessington, who hosted four “salon-like formations, three in London” (133), again open with a summary of her life and of her *Conversations of Lord Byron*. It moves on to an interesting sub-chapter on Nathaniel Parker Willis, an American dandy in Europe, then looks at Blessington’s sociability as reflected in the “all-pervasive theatricality” of Italy (149). From Italy, Schmid moves on to Ireland, then to Blessington’s silver fork novels, and finally to her work as editor of keepsakes. How Blessington was able to balance the salon’s ideology of disinterestedness with her many professional activities, what she herself called “the stock in trade of the modern poetess,” is not touched upon. *British Literary Salons* closes without any real conclusion other than the fact that “a lot more work can be done about women and their circles” (175).

Some questions that remain unresolved after reading these three books include the degree of intimacy a social gathering needed in order to be considered as a salon, as well as the extent to which politics could or should play a part in salon culture. They also do not directly address the vexed question of how the Romantic salon differed from its Enlightenment predecessor, in particular in regard to the age’s new cult of personality, its ideology of nationalism, but especially its professionalization of literature (which so obviously clashes with the salon’s professed disinterestedness). Furthermore, both nineteenth-century (Sainte-Beuve, Ancelot) and twenty-first century historians (Goodman, Kale) have regularly felt the need to precisely date the demise of the salon; that the books under review here do not do so is no doubt salutary, but one is uncertain whether the salon culture they describe is time specific, or if the same forms of sociability outlived the eighteenth, nineteenth, or even twentieth centuries. Last but not least, despite the tensions, jealousies, and varying social forms referred to above, one is left wondering how significant the differences were between the salon cultures of Europe.

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Novel Histories: British Women Writing History, 1760–1830, by Lisa Kasmer, Madison and Teaneck, Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2012, x + 187 pp.

The Female Romantics: Nineteenth-Century Women Novelists and Byronism, by Caroline Franklin, New York and London, Routledge, 2013, xv + 253 pp., 9 illustrations.

While Lisa Kasmer's and Caroline Franklin's studies overlap in the writers and texts they consider, the two books raise distinct questions as they add to recent work on how Romantic women prose writers engage with history. Franklin's work concentrates on how the particular literary and historical phenomena of Byronism shaped the fiction of women writers from a range of countries in Europe and American publishing between the early days of Byron's fame and the later years of Victoria's reign. Kasmer examines women writers of history, whether historical fiction or nonfiction biography and history, who wrote in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Drawing on theories of historical writing by Hayden White, Mark Salber Phillips, and Devoney Looser, Kasmer's study outlines a theory of historical fiction and history writing where rapidly solidifying genre conventions of the novel illuminate questions of narrativity in history. Focusing on a few decades when increasing stratification of gender roles and professionalization in history writing meant that women's social position and role as writers were becoming more restricted, the book opens with Jane Austen's juvenile *The History of England from the Reign of Henry the Fourth to the Death of Charles the First* (ca.1790) serving as an exemplum to tease out the gendering of historical genres in early-nineteenth-century England. Austen's work positions the domestic novel, a feminine-gendered genre featuring "humorous depictions of manners" against "serious" masculine genres such as epic or history, "focus[ing] on heroic public events" (2). Austen's parody collapses this distinction, mixing gossip and conjecture with verifiable historical fact and juxtaposing historical personages