
H-France Review Vol. 14 (January 2014), No. 5

Annie K. Smart, *Citoyennes: Women and the Ideal of Citizenship in Eighteenth-Century France*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2012. xii + 244 pp. works cited and index. \$79.00 U.S. (cl.), \$39.99 US (pb.) ISBN-13: 978-1611493542; ISBN-10: 978-1611494785

Review by Jennifer Heuer, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Annie Smart builds on a growing body of scholarship that seeks to define citizenship as encompassing more than the right to vote and to hold political office. She foregrounds a vision of “civic motherhood,” in which the home serves as a site for generating both private subjectivity and public virtue. *Citoyennes*, particularly mothers, play a crucial role in this process. She contends that for many eighteenth-century and revolutionary French writers, “by creating the bonds that attach all citizens to the state, the *citoyenne* acts as a linchpin for the ideal state grounded in the principles of social contract and equality” (p. 3).

To advance this argument, Smart takes a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on a corpus of novels, educational treatises, art, and popular theater. Following a basically chronological structure, she examines both eighteenth-century productions and those from the Revolution. This is a creative and ambitious tactic, revealing connections between different domains and thinkers, and allowing her to explore long-term developments. At the same time, her choices give the book a somewhat uneven structure. The first three chapters focus on specific works: Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762), Sebastien Mercier’s *L’an 2440* (1771), and Félicité de Genlis’s *Adèle et Théodore* (1782). Olympe de Gouges serves as a transitional figure in both the range of works Smart examines and their publication dates, and she analyzes several of Gouges’s political writings from 1788 to 1791. In the last two chapters, Smart moves directly into the Revolution, and examines a much wider variety of materials, including Jean-Louis David’s prerevolutionary paintings, several speeches pertaining to the abolition of women’s clubs, Jacques-Philippe Lesueur’s watercolors, and three vaudevilles from the Year II.

Smart sets up her analysis with a theoretical overview of citizenship, and particularly engages with Habermas’s *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.^[1] She is explicit that she does not want to apply his theory directly to eighteenth-century texts, but rather to complicate the divisions that underpin contract theory. She argues that while seeing citizenship as increasingly complex, scholarship still tends to treat the intimate and the public sphere as fundamentally opposed. She contends that eighteenth-century and revolutionary thinkers often saw the home as central in creating both domestic and civic virtue. She also argues that scholars have tended either to postulate an abrupt break between aristocratic gender roles and Revolutionary experiments or to see a longer-term continuity based on the cult of domesticity and the exclusion of women from political life. She traces a significant continuity, but one in which women appear as civic individuals both before and during the Revolution.

The first chapter begins with *Emile*, the work most likely to be familiar to her readers. Rather than focus on the figure of Sophie in Book Five, she calls attention instead to Book One, where Rousseau constructs a very different model of femininity, the civic mother. He dedicates *Emile* to the “good mother who knows how to think,” a phrase that Smart returns to throughout the book. She argues that Rousseau predicates an egalitarian society on women’s role in the home; mothers play a vital role in

generating the bonds of love that underpin a virtuous state. She does not minimize the problems of Sophie as a passive and subordinate character; indeed she asks whether “Sophie can be saved?” But she also suggests that the model of a thoughtful mother may have been at least as influential. Here, as she acknowledges, her work particularly parallels that of Jennifer Popiel, although she stresses somewhat different themes.[2]

Chapter two addresses Sébastien Mercier’s *l’An 2440*, a contemporary best seller that has often been overlooked as a precursor to Revolutionary discourse.[3] Connecting it with her earlier theoretical analysis, Smart argues that Mercier’s work can be read as a novelization of Habermas’s *Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere*. It imagines a transition from an absolutist realm into a more modern, democratic bourgeois public sphere. In this light, Smart emphasizes the role of the intimate sphere in reproducing citizens and values in Mercier’s utopian society. She also pays particular attention to Mercier’s shift from paternal to maternal iconography to represent the state. Smart’s analysis here is intriguing, but seems somewhat underdeveloped.

Smart then turns to *Adèle et Théodore*, written as a direct response to Rousseau’s educational theories. Félicité de Genlis promoted a powerful figure of a mother-educator, the baronne d’Alamne, and unlike Rousseau, she imagined an academically rigorous education for a young woman. Genlis was unlike the Swiss writer in other ways. She promoted an image of a virtuous society founded in hierarchy and religion, rather than equality, liberty, and contract. But Smart argues that there were also implicit connections between her work and Rousseau’s. Both imagined “mothers who know how to think” as central to moral and civic reform.

Chapter four, “Speaking as a citoyenne,” unpacks some of Olympe de Gouges’s lesser-known political writings before turning to her now-famous Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen. Smart challenges the notions both of the writer as a romantic outsider and as someone with “only paradoxes to offer,” to take one of Gouges’s phrases made famous by Joan Scott’s work.[4] Here Smart emphasizes the consistency in Gouges’s thought. Smart argues that if we see the intimate sphere as connected to civic experience rather than opposed to it, contradictions start to disappear. Unlike earlier authors, Gouges herself claimed the term *citoyenne* as a personal identity as well as an abstract ideal, and did so beginning in 1788, before the word became part of a standard repertoire of the Revolution. But she also constructed herself as a woman writing for the nation, whose gender and patriotic zeal gave her authority to speak as a public person.

Chapter five, “Representing the républicaine,” opens with David’s two paintings, *Oath of the Horatti* (1785) and *Brutus and Lictor* (1789). Smart uses the paintings to explore a gendered division of space, which Joan Landes and others have claimed prefigured revolutionary outcomes.[5] She argues that the works present a divide between a space of male patriotic action and one of female private sentiment. But they also call this division into question: *Brutus* especially depicts the central male figure as morally problematic in sacrificing his sons for the *patrie*.

She then moves to 1793, to suggest that even during the struggles over the closing of women’s political clubs, republican speech was far from monolithic. Chaumette depicted good republican mothers as confined to private concerns in a home that offered an escape from the public arena. But others, including Amar and the author of a short anonymous piece that appeared in the *Moniteur*, presented a civic role for women in a politicized private sphere. Jacques-Philippe Lesueur’s watercolors, particularly *Young Girls Defending a Liberty Tree* and the *Heroine of Saint-Mithier*, and the images submitted for an art competition in April 1794, further serve to illustrate how women could be portrayed as engaged civic individuals. Here it is a shame that the publisher did not provide better quality images of the artwork she analyzes. Smart refers to telling details of clothing or expression that are difficult to see in the grainy black and white reproductions.

The final chapter, "Staging the citoyenne in French revolutionary theater," continues to explore representations of women as active *citoyennes*. Smart concentrates on three vaudevilles from 1794, choosing them because of their relative literary merits and their representative themes of patriotic virtue. She opens with the *Intérieur d'un ménage républicain* to explore the image of a mother who instructs everyone in republican virtue. Here Smart makes an interesting observation that home appears as the hearth of civic virtue for both men and women. The playwright Chastenet mocks a servant's blind devotion to religion, but not a husband's domestic role. *La discipline républicaine* features Cécile, who intervenes when Victor is arrested for stealing bread.

The pardoned hero then proves his patriotism by saving the life of a representative of the Republic. *Epreuves du Républicain* depicts Francial, a municipal officer falsely accused of embezzling army supplies. His lover Denise proves his innocence. In the latter plays, Smart highlights women's roles in encouraging men to support the *patrie* and oppose its enemies.

Smart's conclusion that plays depicted *citoyennes* not as passive spectators, but as advocates for the republic, and did so with the approval of Jacobin censors, is less surprising than she claims. Other scholars have shown how the theater of the radical revolution could depict women as sensitive and vulnerable, but also more insistently patriotic than men.[6] Smart is, however, more original in trying to reconceptualize how theater relates the place of the home and family to the *patrie*.

Overall, the title and subtitle accurately represent the subject of the book. This is explicitly a book about *citoyennes*. Smart's focus on representations of women provides a coherence to her narrative, but it largely leaves aside questions of how understandings or models of male behavior and identity may have evolved during the eighteenth century or the Revolution.

Smart is also most concerned with cultural representations, "the ideal of citizenship," rather than law or lived experience, although she also wants to challenge the assumption that there was a rupture between what women did and how they were represented. She observes that archival scholarship has revealed instances of real women acting as citizens, but that scholars have often depicted women as needing to resist an oppressive and monolithic discourse of Rousseauian femininity (pp. 4, 157, 206). Here she seems to be taking aim largely at works from the 1980s. As she suggests in passing, more recent research tends to present a more complicated view of the relationships between representations and practice.[7] She occasionally sets up similar strawmen elsewhere. For example, chapter five "challenges the notion that revolutionary discourse privileged a model of the depoliticized 'Rousseauian' republican motherhood, a model that constructed the *citoyenne*... as passive, silent, and limited to purely private concerns." (pp. 17-18). This challenge is implicitly directed against interpretations like Joan Landes' 1988 *Women and the Public Sphere*. Yet Smart overstates the degree to which most scholars treat "revolutionary discourse" as uniform or coherent, even in regards to gender.[8]

Throughout the book, Smart points to intriguing connections between authors and artists from the eighteenth century to the Revolution, noting both deliberate engagements with earlier figures (especially Rousseau) and less intentional echoes. She argues that although her subjects had very different versions of the ideal society, they all envisioned women as civic individuals who acted for the common good, and as members of the nation who were supposed to be devoted to perpetuating the ideals of the state (p. 240).

However, the structure of the book to some extent limits the extent of her claims. Smart pays close attention to the context of individual works, but provides more historical context for those from the Revolution than the Enlightenment. A different work might consider broader evolutions or continuities from the 1760s through the 1780s. It is hard to dispute the contemporary popularity of works like *Emile* or *l'An 2440*. Yet, as with any series of case studies, Smart's selection leaves open the question of whether another set of choices would have provided a different narrative. Similarly, it is difficult to

judge the contemporary resonance of the ideals she identifies. With some small exceptions, Smart makes a strategic decision not to look at the reception of or critical reactions to the works she studies.

Smart's choice of ending her chronology with *les Épreuves*, a play from August 1794, is logical for an argument tracing continuity from the eighteenth century to the Revolution. It suggests that certain ideals of citizenship persisted after the immediate experience of the Terror, but it also avoids engaging with potential arguments that more repressive images of gender and family were mobilized during the Thermidorian reaction or later 1790s, partly as a reaction against the political and legal power of women forged during Revolution.^[9]

There is a certain ambivalence in *Citoyennes*. In places, Smart offers a strong argument about the enduring importance of civic motherhood, but in others, she pulls back to suggest more simply that the ideal of the *citoyenne* existed alongside that of Sophie or the depoliticized republican mother. Such ambivalence may itself be inherent to a study of gender and citizenship in the period. Overall, this is a well-written, clearly argued, and thoughtfully provocative book.

NOTES

[1] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans., Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

[2] Both argue for the importance of the home in creating ideals, although Smart places less emphasis on the development of self-control. Jennifer J. Popiel, *Rousseau's Daughters: Domesticity, Education, and Autonomy in Modern France* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008).

[3] The book has received most attention for its treatment of slavery. See, for example, Laure Marcellesi, "Louis-Sébastien Mercier: Prophet, Abolitionist, Colonialist," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 40 (2011): 247-73.

[4] Joan Scott, "'A Woman Who Has Only Paradoxes to Offer': Olympe de Gouges Claims Rights for Women," in *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, ed., Sara Melzer and Leslie Rabine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 102-120, and eadem, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[5] Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[6] See especially Erica Joy Mannucci, "Le militaire dans le théâtre de la Révolution française," in *Les Arts de la scène et la Révolution française*, ed., Philippe Bourdin and Gérard Loubinoux (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2004), pp. 381-395 and Eva Bellot, "Marianne sur les planches: Les héroïnes anonymes du théâtre de la révolution française," *Annales historiques de la révolution française* no. 1 (2012): 69-92. Dominique Godineau's work on Years II and III highlights similar themes in contemporaneous sans-culotte rhetoric.

[7] Alyssa Sepinwall, "Robespierre, Old Regime Feminist? Gender, the Late Eighteenth Century and the French Revolution, Revisited," *Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 1 (2010): 1-29.

[8] Lynn Hunt, for example, argues that contradictions were central to Jacobin policy towards women. Lynn Hunt, "Male Virtue and Republican Motherhood," in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, ed. Keith Baker (Oxford: Permagon, 1994), pp. 195-210.

[9] Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 313.

Jennifer Heuer
University of Massachusetts Amherst
heuer@history.umass.edu

Copyright © 2014 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172