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Julia V. Douthwaite, *The Frankenstein of 1790 and Other Lost Chapters from Revolutionary France*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2012. xiii +317 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 13: 978-0-22616058-0.

Review by Nanette Le Coat, Trinity University.

For many years, critics characterized the closing decade of the eighteenth century as a period of literary dormancy. Julia Douthwaite, in her *The Frankenstein of 1790 and Other Lost Chapters from Revolutionary France* sees it, to the contrary, as an enormously productive period yielding a vast corpus of fiction announcing “the new shapes of literature to come in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (p. 1). The recuperation of revolutionary fiction is, of course, not an entirely new enterprise. Malcolm Cook’s 1982 study initiated this reassessment by categorizing revolutionary fiction by genre. More recently, Carla Hesse and Huguette Krief have analyzed the historical and political inflections offered by women authors at this literary turning point, and Stéphanie Genand has revealed the significant contribution of émigré writers.^[1] What is novel about Douthwaite’s approach is the way she uncovers vivid, but little known fictional evocations of revolutionary characters and events and points to the way these fictions “prompted later writers to retell the same stories” (p. 7).

Four chapters structure Douthwaite’s study. The first addresses gender and the ambivalent representations of the legendary women who marched on Versailles, the so-called *poissardes*. Challenging the interpretation whereby the march signified the women’s efforts to subvert royal authority, Douthwaite finds that the march was intended rather to reestablish a bond with the father-king. Nonetheless, this revolutionary action was interpreted as evidence of the *poissardes’* radicalism. Henceforth they would be characterized by the political Right as violent, foul-mouthed shrews intent on reversing the natural order.

Douthwaite draws for this chapter on a wide range of contemporary evidence, from the brochure, *Les Jupons de Madame Angot*, to the pseudo-popular newspaper, *La Mère Duchesne*. Fictions such as the satiric *Le Château de Tuileries* or Suremain’s *Melchior Ardent* reveal, in Douthwaite’s deft interpretation, the deep male anxiety provoked by the active political engagement of women. As she argues in the coda that concludes the chapter, women’s political activism continued to elicit male hostility well into the twentieth century, when suffragettes were ridiculed in reactionary invective. While there is an evident historical lineage between the French *poissardes* and American suffragettes, the discussion of L. Frank Baum, author of the Oz novels, seems a bit forced, especially since Baum distanced himself from the early feminist leanings of his journalism in his farcical representation of an all-female insurrection in *The Marvelous Land of Oz*.

The Enlightenment’s enthusiasm for invention and technology inspire the literary exploration of Douthwaite’s second chapter. Here she reveals a striking discovery: Mary Shelley’s famous *Frankenstein* actually had an antecedent in François-Félix Nogaret’s *Le Miroir des événements actuels, ou La Belle au plus offrant; Histoire à deux visages* (1790). The heroine of Nogaret’s political allegory is the young orphan, Aglaonice, who offers herself in marriage to the man who can create the most inspiring invention. Having considered the offerings of six suitors, Aglaonice’s choice comes down to Frankenstein, whose

life-sized flute-playing automaton charms her feelings, and Nicator, whose automaton dispenses bounteous wealth. Eschewing the more negative associations of automatons as mindless machines, Nogaret presents the suitors' inventions as being fruit of scientific creativity and rationalism that have practical benefit to the heroine, and, by extension, to the nation. They also serve as a metaphor for the Revolution's hope for regeneration. But Nogaret made considerable revisions to his novella in the 1795 edition. Gone was the anticlerical screed which followed the original version. The fact that the second edition was much more a conventional love story and less a political allegory may reflect either Nogaret's political caution in the overheated climate of 1795 or his diminished enthusiasm for social engineering.

The coda for this chapter is far more convincing than that of the previous chapter. Scientific optimism was not without anxiety about the possibility of error in human manipulation of human destinies. Douthwaite finds in the publication history of Shelley's *Frankenstein* a similar trajectory of the myth. Like Nogaret, Shelley modified her story from the first to the third editions. In its frequent recourse to mechanical metaphors, the third edition suggested an apparent shift in the explanation of the monster's animation. No longer was it Frankenstein's "spark of life" and its vitalist underpinnings that brought the monster to life but more mechanical causes. In Douthwaite's reading, this change of emphasis clearly attributed the tragedy of the monster's destructive course to human rather than divine agency.

Two documents constitute important "lost chapters" in the formation of the interpretive discourse surrounding Louis XVI's ill-fated flight to Varennes and the question of whether the king was to be blamed for his betrayal of the people or pitied for his tragic fate and that of his family. The first is J.-J. Regnault-Warin's *Le Cimetière de la Madeleine (1800-1801)*, the second an edition of the king's correspondence by the British expatriate Helen-Maria Williams. Analysis of these texts constitutes the third chapter of Douthwaite's book. While the inclusion of twenty *pièces justificatives* in Regnault-Warin's *Cimetière* might argue for a reading of the novel as an apology for the king's actions, other aspects of this complex narrative—the knowing complicity of one of its principal characters, the king's confessor, the Abbé Edgeworth; the account of the cowardice and idiocy of his brothers; and, most importantly, the author's perhaps opportunistic profession of admiration for the wisdom of the Republican government—undermine that view. Ultimately, the novel seems less an apology for the king than a sensationalist attempt to exploit the contradictory emotions attached to his demise.

Like Regnault-Warin's novel, Helen-Maria Williams's *Correspondance politique et confidentielle* (1803) presents a pseudo-documentation which presumably sets the record straight by presenting the reader with the king's own letters. But the letters have been proven to be forgeries. And, like Regnault-Warin's novel, Williams's text is slippery. While the selection of letters purport to document in the king's own words his fidelity to his flock, Williams's sardonic commentary underscores the gulf between his declarations and his actions. Louis's account of his intentions is marked by self-pitying delusion, a tendency which the editor does not fail to point out. But the fact that readers could fail to note this ironic register is borne out, ironically, by Napoleonic consulate censors who, ignoring Williams's acerbic editorializing, saw the letters as presenting the king as virtuous and enlightened. In the end, what interests Douthwaite about these narratives is not their truth value, but the influential role they had in mediating the memory of the king.

Douthwaite finds echoes of Louis' self-delusion and solitude in Balzac's *Père Goriot*. Both the king and the aging merchant are rejected father figures. They lose legitimacy through their weakness and tragic miscalculations: "Both men operate on the assumption that if they give away power or refuse to fight for it, they will be loved" (p. 144). Louis capitulates to his subjects' wishes at Versailles only to find himself condemned by them for his betrayal; Goriot gives up his fortune to advance his daughters' social ambitions but dies abandoned by them.

Ultimately, Louis and Goriot are both displaced not only because of their own miscalculations, but because there is no longer room for them in the new social configuration. In order to assert their own legitimacy, the Jacobins needed thoroughly to delegitimize Louis' claim to power. In the course of the Revolution shifts in power accelerated. Douthwaite's fourth and final chapter describes how a negative literary campaign combined forces with political delegitimization to end the Terror. Within the space of less than two months, Robespierre went from being president of the Convention to execrated outlaw. This abrupt change in status was initiated by the Convention's decision to condemn Robespierre to death, but his elevation to mythic status as a super-criminal was fostered in the post-Thermidorian period by an abundant production of sensationalist pamphlets and biographies.

"How Literature Ended the Terror" seems a fitting way to conclude an account of this key chapter in French literary history. Douthwaite makes a thoughtful methodological choice in electing to study the *Journal de Paris national's* daily coverage of unfolding events at the height of the Terror and in its aftermath. Moderate in its politics and widely subscribed, the journal offers insight into how the Revolution might have been experienced by a large sector of the French public. Particularly dramatic is the reportage of the deliberations of the Revolutionary Tribunal. As the number of the condemned escalates, column space is given over exclusively to lists, and commentary on the events virtually disappears in a kind of stunned acquiescence. After the emotional crescendo of Thermidor, there is a decrescendo as judiciary accounts give way to a mixture of poetry, reviews, prison memoirs, and narratives recounting the horrifying misdeeds of political criminals.

Our historical understanding of the Revolutionary moment is necessarily provisional, but Douthwaite succeeds in bringing to our attention certain distinctive features of the literary/ political landscape. What characterized the *Journal de Paris*, like other contemporary journals such as *Le Moniteur* or *La Décade philosophique*, was its hybrid nature. In the journal's pages national and international *faits divers* rubbed shoulders with business news and theater reviews. As political events changed, new rubrics emerged only to disappear again as other realities became more salient. This hybridity was not unique to journalism. As the texts analyzed by Douthwaite reveal, a widespread generic promiscuity prevailed. Take Nogaret's *Miroir des événements actuelles*, for example, which the author himself characterized as an "erotico-political-patriotic historiette." One of the period's most popular forms of publication was the *Mélanges politiques et littéraires* where authors such as Morellet, Bonald, and others presented an amalgam of their political and literary essays to the public. The publishing strategies of writers as well as the mixed rubrics of journals reveal that political and literary events were assumed to be of interest to the same reading public who understood that these genres intermingled and could not be easily disentangled.

It was not simply literary form that was hybrid in this period. The literary-historical figures who dominate Douthwaite's chronicle all assumed at various moments a grotesquely hybrid form. Louis was represented in popular caricature as a pig with a human face, Robespierre as a menacing snake, and Frankenstein's creature, who aspired to be human, was destined to remain a monster. What are we to make of these hybrid figures? What do they tell us of the literary afterlife of the French Revolution? One lesson they seem to offer is the moral malleability of human beings and the terrifying consequences when even those who once aspired to virtue fall prey to their weaker natures. Even those who admire the Revolution's social achievements are obliged to acknowledge that fear and anxiety are important parts of its legacy.

NOTE

[1] Carle Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), Huguette Krief, *Entre Terreur et vertu: Et la fiction se fit politique . . .* (1789-

1800) (Paris : Honoré Champion, 2012), Stéphanie Genand, ed., *Romans de l'émigration, 1797-1803* (Paris : Champion, 2008).

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