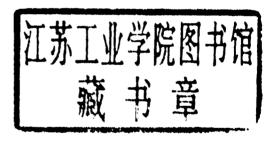
Tracing Women's Romanticism Gender, history and transcendence

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Kari E. Lokke





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NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

Quotations from the central novels under discussion – *Corinne, Die Günderode* and *Consuelo/La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* – are given both in English and in the original language with the page numbers of the editions used in sequence after the entire block of quoted material. For economy of space, quotations from non-fiction works of Staël, Arnim, and Sand are present only in English translation. I've used published translations where available; otherwise translations are mine.

Contents

	Acknowledgments	vi vii
	Note on Translations	VII
	Introduction: Romantic abandon	1
1	"The vast tableau of destinies": Germaine de Staël's <i>Corinne</i> , enthusiasm, and melancholy	23
2	"The sweet reward of all our toil": Content of mind in Mary Shelley's Valperga	57
3	Beyond impossibility: Bettine von Arnim's <i>Die Günderode</i> , "an ideal relation realized"	84
4	Rewriting Romanticism: George Sand's Consuelo and revolutionary history	117
	Epilogue: Comic flight and the winds of fate: Isak Dinesen's <i>The Dreamers</i>	150
	Notes	163
	References	183
	Index	193

Introduction

Romantic abandon

Enthusiasm is no passion of the drawing-room, or of the pence-table: its home is the heart, and its hope is afar.

Letitia Landon

This project began as a book about sublimity and ended as a book about history. My original focus on discourses of transcendence shifted gradually to a recognition of a collective endeavor on the part of women writers of Romanticism to transform the societies in which they lived. Accordingly, the term sublimity is supplemented by its feminized and politicized variant, enthusiasm. Thus this study began as an effort to identify and understand conceptions of aesthetic and spiritual transcendence in four women writers of the Romantic era - Germaine de Staël, Mary Shelley, Bettine von Arnim, and George Sand - and concluded in the realization that these novelists all envisage self-transcendence, both artistic and spiritual, as participation in historical process. Margaret Fuller, who in the mid-nineteenth century already saw Staël, Arnim, and Sand as constituting a coherent group with similar talents, similar aims, and similar foibles, identifies, in her own inimitable voice, the task of these and all nineteenthcentury women artists as follows: "I would have Woman lay aside all thought, such as she habitually cherishes, of being taught and led by men." Fuller continues:

[W] omen must ... retire within themselves, and explore the ground-work of life till they find their peculiar secret. Then, when they come forth again, renovated and baptized, they will know how to turn all dross to gold, and will be rich and free though they live in a hut, tranquil if in a crowd. Then their sweet singing shall not be from passionate impulse, but the lyrical overflow of a divine rapture, and a new music shall be evolved from this many-chorded world.

(p. 121)

In this book I trace precisely this development from the self-destructive emotional excess of Staël's Corinne to the inspired artistic freedom of Sand's Consuelo. I argue that an idealist and spiritualized understanding of the woman artist's role in historical process made this emancipatory movement possible. Furthermore, the distinctive mysticism of these writers is grounded in their shared experiences as women, just as their collective endeavor to change their respective societies compelled them to discourses of transcendence. Thus, my study seeks to comprehend the many-chorded "new music" that arose from novelistic portraits of female creativity in women's roles as poets, philosophers, and prophets at a time when nineteenth-century European women sought to establish themselves as artistic professionals.

Accordingly, I examine here meditative, mystical, and utopian visions of religious and artistic transcendence in the novels of women Romanticists as vehicles for the representation of a gendered subjectivity that seeks detachment and distance from the interests and strictures of the existing patriarchal social and cultural order. My position, in its recognition of the oppositional nature of these novelists' spiritual commitments, accords with that of Naomi Schor whose George Sand and Idealism is one of the few critical works to address this strain of nineteenth-century women's writing. Schor writes:

[I]dealism, as it is appropriated by Sand, signified her refusal to reproduce mimetically and hence to legitimate a social order inimical to the disenfranchised, among them women. Idealism for Sand is finally the only alternative representational mode available to those who do not enjoy the privileges of subjecthood in the real.²

Yet whereas Schor focuses upon the implications of the politics of idealist representation for novelistic style and genre, my interest here shifts to the idealist novel as a privileged locus of nineteenth-century women's historiography and as a central contribution of women writers to the visionary Romantic tradition from which literary critics have so often excluded them.

It is thus also my hope that this comparatist study - certainly one of the first of its kind to treat English, French, and German women novelists of the nineteenth century – will enrich the terrain of Romantic studies by revealing the significance of hitherto unexamined contributions on the part of women authors to landscapes of Romantic transcendence. Whereas critics as varied as Margaret Homans, Marlon Ross, Anne Mellor, and Stuart Curran have asserted that traditional and restrictive associations of women with nature, immanence, and the body in Western culture exclude them from the discourse of transcendence that forms the heart of Romantic aesthetics and metaphysics, I argue that these novelists create feminine and (proto-)feminist visions of spiritual and artistic transcendence that constitute a critique of Romanticism from within.³ Despite its title, then, this book does not seek to set up gender-complementary models of Romanticism or to suggest that Romantic philosophy and art were inherently inimical to women's values and interests. Rather, I hope to shed light on women's contributions to Romantic aesthetics, historiography, and novelistic practice in order to encourage reconfigurations of Romantic studies that acknowledge

women's vital and as yet insufficiently understood contributions to the central cultural debates of the day.

Furthermore, my choice to focus on the novel, rather than on poetry, as an exemplary Romantic genre, counters and questions the privileging of poetry in both the traditionalist, masculinist criticism of Abrams, de Man, and Bloom and those aforementioned critics writing against them in their re-evaluations of the cultural meaning of Romantic transcendence. This emphasis on poetry as the quintessential Romantic genre crosses national boundaries, moving beyond the focus on the six canonical poets of British Romanticism, and is reflected in the prestige of Hölderlin studies, for example, within the field of Germanistik and the prominence of Baudelaire in French Romantic studies. My aim here is not to undermine the significance of the recent (re)discovery and re-evaluation of the women poets of the Romantic period, critical efforts which I believe have produced the most exciting and significant work of the last decade in the field of Romantic studies. Rather, I wish to highlight the breadth of women writers' previously unacknowledged contributions to European Romanticism in the realms of the aesthetic theory and historiography encompassed by the genres of the Künstlerroman and the historical novel respectively. Focus on the novel furthermore illuminates women's contributions to the most socially influential literary genre of the nineteenth century, one in which, as Mellor has shown in Mothers of the Nation, women had already achieved pre-eminence by the end of the eighteenth century.4

My study, then, is complementary to the work of these previously mentioned critics whose writings reveal the power of nineteenth-century female genius to create within what Stuart Curran terms "the hegemony of male values" (p. 207). I choose a different emphasis for my analysis: the metaphors and textual strategies through which these writers did in fact assert their right to direct communion with divinity, their right to membership in a visionary company, and, perhaps most importantly, to historical agency. In asserting these rights and expressing their anger, sorrow, and frustration at the devaluation of their talents, beliefs, and accomplishments, female Romanticists participated not only in the redefinition of feminine sensibility but also in the reconceptualization of the relation of body to spirit, thought to action, myth to history, as well as the rethinking of concepts of vision and transcendence, of divinity itself. There have been few comparative studies of women Romanticists, and as yet no books seeking to establish communalities of experience and expression among women Romanticists of different nationalities.⁵ I envisage the task of this study, then, as the delineation of an international and cosmopolitan women's Romanticism that intersects with, but is also distinct from, that Romanticism which, up until the last two decades, scholars have conceived of as eminently and almost exclusively masculine.

Thus this book also seeks to comprehend and illuminate the quasi-mystical language in which these novelistic portraits of the female artist and visionary are drawn, as well as the relation of that language to idealist conceptions of history that informed the Romantic era. Furthermore, the artistic and professional

efforts of the nineteenth-century novelists under discussion here inevitably are set against the backdrop of the aftermath of the French Revolution and culminate in the work of Arnim and Sand written in the decade leading up to the Revolutions of 1848. Beginning with Staël's disillusionment with the Napoleonic outcome of the French Revolution, this book comes full circle to conclude with Sand's novel Consuelo set in the decades prior to the 1789 Revolution, a novel suggesting both the inevitability of that Revolution and the possibility that its outcome might have been different had artists such as Sand's Consuelo been politically active in that social upheaval.

As their titles reveal, the four novels at the heart of this study make female development their focus: Corinne (1807), Valperga (1823), Die Günderode (1840), and Consuelo (1842-4). As female Bildungsromane, each of these novels takes a female character from youth into maturity, teaching her hard-won lessons along the way. More explicitly and specifically, as portraits of female artistry and creativity, each of these novels belongs to a subgenre of the Bildungsroman, the Künstlerroman. Though it is hardly necessary, this study reminds us once again that for nineteenth-century women artists, Staël's Corinne, or Italy (1807) unquestionably establishes itself as the originary portrait of European female genius. Clearly, the novels of Shelley, Arnim, and Sand constitute responses to the overwhelming emotional power and cultural resonance of this novel and its self-destructive heroine that are not always easy for us to understand today.⁶ Whereas Valperga and Consuelo represent conscious novelistic revisions of Corinne, Arnim's autobiographical Die Günderode seeks to come to terms with the story of her friend the poet Karoline von Günderode, whose fate mirrored that of the fictional Corinne, by suppressing that tragic narrative and replacing it with the story of her own life-affirming artistic development.

The traditional *Bildungsroman* is, of course, a fundamentally conservative form, narrating, as it does, the growth of the middle-class young man from callow and idealistic youth to his integration into the societal status quo through bourgeois marriage and proper professional placement. Like Goethe's prototypical Wilhelm Meister, the hero survives disappointment and disillusionment by compromising with the societal powers that be. As Franco Moretti writes in *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, compromise is "not surprisingly, the novel's most celebrated theme." Furthermore, this genre is politically as well as culturally conservative; "the classical *Bildungsroman* narrates 'how the French Revolution could have been avoided'" (p. 64) and disavows that Revolution, seeking to deny "the irreversibility of its effects" (p. 73). The novels under discussion here, on the other hand, seek to envisage how the world might look had the Revolution succeeded in implementing its original republican and egalitarian aims and to imagine the collective psychic changes that would be necessary for that implementation.

Corinne, Die Günderode, and Consuelo, then, were all clearly written as retorts to the political and social complacency of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister (1795–6). In her opening improvisation, Staël's Corinne prophetically echoes the doomed Mignon's "do you know the land where orange trees bloom...?" from the

Lehrjahre, thus inviting her public to reread Goethe's novel from the perspective of its sacrificial victim.⁸ And Arnim, whose notorious stylization of herself as Mignon in Goethe's Correspondence with a Child (1835) was read even at the time as an implicit attack on his Olympian aloofness, creates in her subsequent narrative persona, Bettine, a figure who claims to be that earlier character now reincarnated and full of exuberant life. Finally, Sand's Consuelo rewrites the sequel to the Lehrjahre, Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre (1821), replacing the middle-class Wilhelm with its "gypsy" heroine Consuelo and substituting utopian socialism for the conservative and authoritarian ideology of Goethe's prototype.

As female Bildungsromane, then, these novels inevitably follow a different path from that of the traditional Bildungsroman, a narrative path that bears comparison to that delineated in such studies as The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development, edited by Elizabeth Abel et al., Susan Fraiman's Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development, and Lorna Ellis's Appearing to Diminish: Female Development and the British Bildungsroman, 1750–1850.9 At the same time, however, the female Künstlerromane that I examine here also exhibit crucial differences from the larger category of female Bildungsromane, works such as Pride and Prejudice, Emma, Jane Eyre, The Mill on the Floss, that are the subject of these earlier studies. Indeed one of the central purposes of this study is to shed light on a number of remarkable examples of this little-known and little-studied genre so that it will no longer be possible for critics to claim that "the woman artist is a missing character in fiction" or to bemoan the absence of "serious literary work" by women depicting their artistic struggles. 10 Such assertions reveal the Anglophone bias of much feminist criticism of modern fiction in their obliviousness to the work of such authors as Staël, Caroline Auguste Fischer, Caroline Pichler, Lou Andreas-Salomé, Sibilla Aleramo, and Isak Dinesen, an imbalance this comparatist study seeks to redress.¹¹ A notable exception to this Anglophone limitation is Evy Varsamopoulou's The Poetics of the Künstlerinroman and the Aesthetics of the Sublime which traces the twentieth-century legacy of Staël's Corinne from H.D. to Christa Wolf and Marguerite Duras and thus continues from the modernist era where mine concludes. Though couched in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Varsamopoulou's conclusions bear comparison to my own emphasis upon these writers' sense of participation in a historical and artistic process beyond the individual: "The protagonists' and narrators' relation to their literary forerunners (male or female) is characterized by a desire to prolong, repeat and participate in their own and others' literary art and discourse on the sublime, perceived as a virtual venue."12

As the aforementioned feminist critics of the genre have emphasized, earlier studies of the *Bildungsroman* assumed a male protagonist and a masculine pattern of development; they describe "'human development' in exclusively male terms" and generally follow one central hero in his process of maturation and social integration.¹³ If this social integration involves, for the masculine hero, marriage and a fitting middle-class profession, the four novels under discussion here, as *Künstlerromane*, present an obvious and direct challenge to such a narrative pattern. One cannot, of course, in any real sense, speak of professional choice for

any European woman in the first half of the nineteenth century, and novels from Mary Hays's Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796), Mary Wollstonecraft's Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman (1797), and Mary Robinson's The Natural Daughter (1799) to Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847) and Villette (1853) address this issue explicitly. In the case of the female artist, however, the conflict between aspiration toward public, creative self-expression and marriage/domesticity is extreme in the utmost degree. Indeed, for the woman artist, marriage and professional development are mutually exclusive. This absolute conflict, then, accounts for the radicalism of these novels, a radicalism that Linda Huf, in The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman, finds in the female Künstlerroman even today, 14 Indeed, as a subgenre of the Bildungsroman, the female Künstlerroman represents a profound critique of that genre from within. If the novel devoted to the male artist also critiques bourgeois society, it does so from a much more individualistic, even anti-social, perspective that diverges radically from the female tradition I am exploring here. One need only think of the German tradition that ranges from Wackenroder and Tieck's artist heroes, tormented by, but unable to escape, their own self-absorption, and E.T.A. Hoffmann's obsessive Ritter Gluck (1809) or Councillor Krespel (1819) to Thomas Mann's Death in Venice (1911) or Tonio Kröger (1903) for obvious examples of this striking divergence between male and female traditions.¹⁵

Ultimately, the heroines of Staël's, Shelley's, and Arnim's novels reject marriage explicitly and consciously; the compromise that characterizes the traditional Bildungsroman is unknown to them. In the novels studied here, none of the heroines accepts the necessity of the manipulation of appearances that Lorna Ellis suggests is crucial to the maturation process of the protagonists of the female novel of development if they are to "manipulate societal expectation in order to promote their own welfare" (p. 23) "to find a compromise between self and society, [and] to form a bridge between their views of themselves and those of the men they love" (p. 33). Sexually experienced before she meets Oswald, Corinne makes it clear that she wishes to be his lover and companion, but it is not at all apparent at the outset that she wants to be his wife. Shelley's Euthanasia chooses her republican ideals over marriage to her betrothed once he becomes her political enemy. And Bettine von Arnim's protagonist prefers female friendship and the mentorship of an elderly Jew to what she fiercely terms "the moth-eaten joys of domestic bliss." Finally, Sand's Consuelo marries the aristocratic Albert, Count Rudolstadt at the conclusion of that novel only when it is clear that he is dying and that their union will never be consummated. And in the sequel, La Comtesse de Rudolstadt, once Albert has symbolically died and come back to life a new man, this Catholic ceremony is nullified by and replaced with an egalitarian union, celebrated under the auspices of the secret revolutionary society of Invisibles whose only female leader demands a radical redefinition of bourgeois marriage. The political prescience of these novels is rendered evident by the fact that they undoubtedly anticipate the genre that Rita Felski has recently described as "most clearly identified with contemporary feminist writing ... the narrative of female self-discovery, in which access to self-knowledge is seen to require an explicit refusal of the heterosexual romance plot."16

This radical refusal of compromise inevitably carries a heavy cost for the protagonists of these nineteenth-century novels, and the depiction of the high price these women artists pay for freedom is one of the central tasks of these four authors. For Corinne, the price of freedom is ultimately life itself, as Oswald's rejection of her in favor of her blonde, virginal, and domestic half-sister Lucile precipitates her self-willed demise at the conclusion of the novel. Like the powerful brightness of Staël's vision of female genius, the intensity of the pall that Corinne's abandonment and melodramatic death cast over future nineteenthcentury depictions of the artist heroine is difficult to describe and hard to fathom. 17 Yet, if the costs are high, so, ultimately, Shelley, Arnim, and Sand reveal in their responses to Staël, are the rewards of freedom. Indeed, I read the representations of spiritual and aesthetic transcendence in this cosmopolitan tradition of women's idealist novels as responses to the ubiquitous cultural presence of Staël's portrait of the artist as abandoned woman. Whereas nineteenth-century poets such as Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, and Karolina Paylova exploited this persona of the lovelorn female, victim of betrayed love, to the fullest, even as they covertly challenged it, female fiction and prose writers were explicitly and pointedly critical of the myth of the woman artist as Ariadne abandoned by Theseus, Sappho betrayed by Phaon, or Dido by Aeneas. 18

This, then, is the central argument of this book: that in the *Kiinstlerromane* of Staël, Shelley, Arnim, and Sand, disappointment with Romantic passionate love becomes a catalyst for the cultivation of heightened political, spiritual, and historical awareness. This disappointment becomes as well a synecdoche for disillusionment with (masculinist) Romanticism itself and its obsessions with melancholy, Byronic, Promethean will, and masculinist conceptions of culture and *Bildung*. For these women writers of Romanticism, Romantic transcendence means not self-aggrandizement as it does for Wordsworth, Byron, Chateaubriand, or Musset but rather an abandonment or dissolution of the individual self through historical, political, and spiritual efforts that culminate in a revelation of the divinity of collective selfhood.

Accordingly, these novels tell the tale, not of one central character's development into maturity but of the interplay of double or multiple narratives that tell the stories of several women's interconnected lives. In *The Voyage In*, Abel et al. argue that female novels of development frequently reveal "a disjunction between a surface plot, which affirms social conventions, and a submerged plot which encodes rebellion; ... a plot that charts development and a plot that unravels it" (p. 12). Similarly, Susan Fraiman, in *Unbecoming Women*, demonstrates convincingly that multiple, divided, and split narratives play a key role in the female *Bildungsroman*, and that, alongside the conventional marriage plots, these novels tell other stories "in a spirit of protest, challenging the myth of courtship as education, railing against the belittlement of women, willing to hazard the distasteful and the indecorous" (p. xi). According to Fraiman, these counternarratives – the story of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, to name the most obvious example – "account for growing up female as a deformation, a gothic

disorientation, a loss of authority, an abandonment of goals" (p. xi) even as they are ultimately subsumed into the traditional marriage plot.

In the female Künstlerroman, these submerged, defiant stories take front and center stage as the plot opens up to multiple narratives of several women's lives and the focus shifts - sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically - from malefemale relationships to relations among women. Mentorship of women by women is thus central to female development in each of these texts as their authors seek to move beyond the traditional courtship and marriage plot where, frequently, as in Emma, it is the husband to be who mentors his young fiancée. Clearly, then, in their demonstrations that women, and women artists in particular, must find their own ways out of imprisoning patriarchal strictures, these four novels embody their authors' individual understandings of Margaret Fuller's exhortation that women should "lay aside all thought ... of being taught and led by men" (p. 121). Rather than highlighting recognition of individual accomplishment and genius, the focus on mentorship valorizes influence on the future, even at the cost of abandoning self-interest and accepting anonymity.

Thus the interactions of Corinne, her half-sister Lucile, and Juliette, Lucile's daughter by Oswald, dominate the conclusion of Staël's novel, overshadowing the heroine's bitter reproaches of her weak and unfaithful lover. Before dying, Corinne passes on the legacy of her own female genius to Juliette, suggesting the possibility of unifying her sister and herself, the light and the dark, the domestic and the artistic, the private and the public, the spiritual and the passionate, in one woman, as well as revealing Staël's own recognition of her vital role in a tradition of Western female artists. Though troubling and self-contradictory, the conclusion of Corinne at least holds out the hope that growing up female for the young Juliette will not have to entail a "deformation" and "an abandonment of goals" (Fraiman, p. xi).

Similarly, Shelley's Valperga: or, The Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca (1823) tells the tale of three extravagantly named female characters, Euthanasia, Countess of Valperga, Beatrice, and Mandragola who correspond to the archetypes of Mother, Maiden, and Crone and may be said to represent the collective and mythic development of women throughout European history. These three fictional figures are connected to each other through their relationships to the historical figure of Castruccio Castracani, the fourteenthcentury prince whose life and rise to political power is documented in Machiavelli and Sismondi. Though the novel opens with Castruccio's rise to power and his love for both Beatrice and Euthanasia, the story of the relationship between these two women soon supplants the courtship plot and becomes the heart of the novel as Euthanasia seeks to comfort and counsel Beatrice after her seduction and abandonment by Castruccio. Beatrice's fate reads quite literally as a gothic "deformation" of that destiny traditionally granted to a protagonist like Wilhelm, for both her taking of a lover (Castruccio) and her travels (an expiatory pilgrimage to Rome) - obligatory moves for the male hero of the Bildungsroman - are ultimately figured as horrific psychic and physical rapes that destroy her spirit. At the conclusion of Valperga, however, Shelley offers Euthanasia's wisdom as a direct

answer to the gothic horror and despair of Beatrice when Euthanasia seeks to enlighten Beatrice, who has become a Paterin heretic cursing God as the principle of evil in her response to abandonment by Castruccio, with a [proto-] feminist parable of the cave. In this scene of female instruction, Euthanasia elucidates a vision of meditative transcendence guided by an "inner light" that determines the regulation of mental faculties termed "powers"; thus she internalizes the power struggles that are the narrative and thematic key to *Valperga* and suggests that the only true power one can ever claim is power over oneself.

Arnim's 1840 autobiographical and lyrical Briefroman Die Günderode is also built upon the mirroring of the lives of two young women in their mutual development toward creative self-expression. Ostensibly the record of Bettine's admiration and love for the poet Karoline who clearly serves as her counselor and mentor in the opening letters, the novel also records, like Valperga, the opposition between one woman's victimization by masculinist cultural norms and another's firm and defiant self-assertion. Never mentioning or even hinting at the historical Karoline's tragic abandonment by her married lover Friedrich Creuzer, Arnim portrays her Karoline's melancholy vulnerability as the product of her unrealized artistic ambition and her fears that she will never achieve and be recognized for artistic greatness, never join the ranks of canonical (male) greatness. Thus it is not erotic but cultural abandonment that she dreads. Her internalization of masculinist norms of artistic accomplishment and recognition dooms her. And it is fear of societal censure and bourgeois hegemony - astutely figured by Karoline as a many-headed hydra – that renders her incapable of living up to the ideals that she and Bettine advocate in their newly conceived Schwebe-Religion, a revolutionary religion of female courage and activism.

In Sand's Consuelo (1842-4), the doubling of the female development narrative takes the form of a merciless critique of Corinne and her author, as Sand's gifted and innocent heroine is set in contrast to the (pointedly named) prima donna Corilla, who, in her uncontrolled emotionality, her promiscuity, and vanity, sells herself body and soul to her profession. More interestingly and generously, Sand reveals female mentorship and guidance to be crucial to Consuelo's development in two relationships fundamental to the novel. First, Consuelo's Freemasonic/ Illuminist initiation includes a pivotal encounter with a spiritual elder of Les Invisibles who turns out to be the mother of Consuelo's betrothed Albert who has taken refuge in this revolutionary society from an unhappy, stultifying marriage. Echoing the political programs of Sand's feminist contemporaries, the Saint-Simoniennes, this sibylline figure states unequivocally to Consuelo that she has a right to sexual fulfillment in her marriage and that acceptance of union without physical passion would be spiritually destructive and wrong. Her entire message to Consuelo is grounded in the precept of the "divine equality of man and woman" as she furthermore makes it clear that it will be Consuelo's task, as a member of Les Invisibles, to educate women in particular, women of all classes and countries, about their vital part in the battle to destroy intellectual and economic tyranny, the goal toward which this secret society strives. Even more radically and originally, Sand's narrative reveals that the occult marriage celebrated at the

conclusion of La Comtesse de Rudolstadt will be fulfilling because Consuelo is, in reality, marrying a feminized man who has himself fully lived the experience of Romantic abandonment, and who, even more importantly, has evinced the capacity to serve as a nurturer and a maternal protector of his beloved. Albert is significantly and repeatedly associated with Consuelo's mother, the wandering musician whose spirit has guided her daughter throughout the novel. Marriage, Sand seems to be suggesting, will be mutually satisfying when men become (like) women!

The shared counsel of the female characters central to these novels is rooted in a meditative and often mystical consciousness that finds its source in a temporary withdrawal from worldly engagement that corresponds quite precisely to Margaret Fuller's Transcendentalist admonitions to her female contemporaries that they "retire within themselves, and explore the groundwork of life till they find their peculiar secret" so that they can "come forth again, renovated and baptized," and, ultimately, free. This movement within also resembles the exploration of the inner self – the spiritual, moral, and emotional development that Marianne Hirsch, in "Spiritual Bildung," sees as distinguishing the fate of the female protagonist of the Bildungsroman from her more worldly male counterpart. For Hirsch, however, the "exclusively spiritual development" of the heroines of Wilhelm Meister, The Mill on the Floss, Effi Briest, and The Awakening constitutes a diminution, an acquiescence to patriarchal limitation, and, in the final analysis, "a death warrant" (p. 26) for the self as a whole. She writes:

Like Eurydice, our four nineteenth-century protagonists remain forever trapped and lost in their underworld caverns. For them, inwardness affords no sustained insight, introspection no more than glimpses of self-knowledge. Subjectivity is not an assertion of individual identity and imaginative power, but a dissolution, an extinction. The inner life thus becomes not a locus of knowledge and power but the place, in the words of Jane Austen, of "feelings unemployed."

(p. 47)

The plot of the female *Bildungsroman*, telling the story of "the potential artist who fails to make it" (p. 28), is for Hirsch cyclic, entropic, repetitive, and profoundly ahistorical.

In contrast, the novels under discussion here clearly represent introspection as indeed leading to insight, self-knowledge and ultimately to historical agency, though that agency is *not* predicated solely upon *individual* identity or imaginative power. In both their congruence with and ultimate departure from Hirsch's narrative, these female *Kiinstlerromane*, a subcategory of the novels she discusses, confirm the power of her analysis at the same time that they also show how explicit focus on the even partially realized female artist enables a certain liberatory movement toward collective knowledge and power, toward historical intervention. In order to depict the historical agency of the female artist, these novelists must of necessity *rewrite* history, since previous historiography, focusing

on public and political realms, had excluded women a priori. Each of these texts, then, makes a significant contribution to nineteenth-century historiography as it was practiced by women who were excluded from formal, academic writing of history.¹⁹

Seeking simultaneously to [re]animate exempla of past political or aesthetic agency and to project them into the future, these novelists belong to that category of historian defined, according to Michel de Certeau, by their claim "to reencounter lived experience, exhumed by virtue of a knowledge of the past."20 Their Orphic efforts, mirrored by the journeys of their characters, bring to light a rich cast of beloved Eurydices, both male and female, historical and fictional. Indeed, Romantic women writers' historiographical premises and motivations imply a narrative technique, in de Certeau's terms, or, in this case, a novelistic method. This historiographic "tendency valorizes the relation the historian keeps with a lived experience, that is, with the possibility of resuscitating or 'reviving' a past. It would like to restore the forgotten and to meet again men [sic] of the past amidst the traces they have left. It also implies a particular literary genre, narrative" (pp. 35-6). For Staël and her descendants, this narrative exists in an intense and conflicted, love-hate relation to the narrative of Enlightenment progress typified by Kant's Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose (1784) and Conflict of the Faculties (1795-9) and transcendentalized in Schiller's Naïve and Sentimental Poetry (1795). The idealism of the writers featured in this study is inevitably shadowed by a dark knowledge peculiar to a woman's perspective. Hence the prevalence of Gothic or uncanny moments in each of these novels, moments haunted by revivified ghosts of both the near and painful as well as the distant and abysmal past. The other type of history delineated by de Certeau "ponders what is comprehensible and what are the conditions of understanding," bringing "historians back to the methodological hypotheses of their work, ... to principles of intelligibility that might produce relevance and even 'facts,' and finally, back to their epistemological situation, present in all research characteristics of the society in which they are working" (p. 35). This type of history is perhaps best represented in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by empiricist and positivist histories from which woman, as both subject and object, was largely excluded as "other."

De Certeau's categorizations help us understand the affinities, at first perhaps puzzling, between women's historiography and the rationalist/idealist traditions of Kant, Godwin, and Hegel, as opposed to the empiricism grounded in Locke and Hume. The faith in the power of pure thought that is evinced in these novels, a faith typical of idealist philosophy, is certainly also understandable in feminist terms, given the contrast between the freedom of thought open to these women and the restrictions placed upon their "objective" experience. Indeed the rationalist Godwin's fascinating essay "On History and Romance" (1797) provides intriguing parallels to the treatment accorded history in the novels studied here. Explicitly attacking the historical writings of Hume and Voltaire, and seeking to defend the novel or romance as he terms it from charges of effeminacy and frivolity, Godwin boldly asserts that "[i]t must be admitted

indeed that all history bears too near a resemblance to fable" and that "[n]othing is more uncertain, more contradictory, more unsatisfactory than the evidence of facts." The answer of Wollstonecraft's lover and Mary Shelley's father to Hume and Voltaire is, fittingly, historical romance, grounded in the knowledge of individual character and leaving aside abstractions to study human "passions and peculiarities" (p. 361). The tables are now turned: "the writer of romance then is to be considered as the writer of real history; while he who was formerly called the historian, must be contented to step down into the place of his rival, with this disadvantage, that he is a romance writer, without the arduous, the enthusiastic and the sublime license of the imagination, that belong to that species of composition" (p. 372).

Certainly, *Valperga* and *Consuelo* belong to Godwin's category of historical romances and are also historical novels in the strict sense of the term in that they place their fictional female characters in relation to prominent historical figures and represent the political realities of their times as determining their heroines' fates. These novels clearly demonstrate women's commitment to and expertise in this genre that dates back to the decade that produced Godwin's essay – the 1790s – and women novelists' strong contemporaneous responses to the French Revolution, well before Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814) that is generally identified as originating this genre.²² *Corinne* and *Die Günderode* are also grounded in extensive meditations on history, both as it was lived and represented, and as it informs the heroines' fundamental values and choices – moral, aesthetic, and political.

In the initially puzzling conclusion to Godwin's essay, individual history is subsumed into the kind of collective vision that is the aim of the novelists studied here. The tables are turned once again as this collective history of "successive multitudes," the necessitarian Godwin suggests, becomes the province of the historian/scientist after all:

Here then the historian in some degree, though imperfectly, seems to recover his advantage upon the writer of romance. He indeed does not understand the character he exhibits, but the events are taken out of his hands and determined by the system of the universe, and therefore, as far as his information extends, must be true. The romance writer, on the other hand, is continually straining at a foresight to which his faculties are incompetent, and continually fails. . . . That principle only which holds the planets in their course, is competent to produce that majestic series of events which characterizes flux, and successive multitudes.

(p. 372)

Significantly, whereas the atheist Godwin denies the capacity of foresight to the novelist, the spiritual orientations of the women writers featured here lead them to claim a kind of prophetic vision and to depict their heroines as mystically comprehending the "system of the universe" in moments of enthusiasm that allow concourse with historical ghosts.²³