

Idealistic View on the Reality of Revolution: Helen Maria Williams (1762–1827)

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Helen Maria Williams was known in her time as a popular English poet and romantic writer. She was also famous as an author of political observation based on her own testimony of the French Revolution events. Williams also became an admirer of the new ideas of freedom and equality. Between the years 1790 and 1796 she published eight volumes of *Letters from France* and essays relating to the Revolution and therefore she belongs among the most important of the British female interpreters of the French Revolution.¹ Williams sensitively relived the first period of the Revolution which seemed to hope for the creation of a new civil society. However she was later disappointed by the Jacobin dictatorship. Williams as well as another Englishman in France Thomas Paine sympathized with the Gironde. However, when *The Mountain* (La Montagne) was established and its dictatorship started to dominate the Revolution it was, for Williams, the end of hope for freedom. Neither the Directory nor the reign of Napoleon could replace her “Ideal Republic” from the time of the Girondists.

Williams was born in London 1761² into a family of the Dissenters.³ Her mother was of Scottish origin and belonged to the Presbyterians. The veins of her father flowed with Welch blood but he also had French blood from his Huguenot ancestors. Williams’s upbringing and her later education in a liberal religious community had a positive influence on her later ideas of freedom. Early on she became critical of the established social and political order and of the privileges of the traditional hierarchy.⁴ After the death of her father her family moved to Berwick-upon-Tweed, which is located on the north-east coast of England near to the Scottish borders. At the time she was only eight and together with her two sisters she spent her years of childhood in that picturesque environment. Under the patronage of an old family friend, a liter-

1 A. CRACIUN — K. E. LOKKE, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution, 1789–1815*, in: CRACIUN — LOKKE (Eds.), *Rebellious Hearts*, Albany 2001, p. 4.

2 It is possible to find even a birth year 1762, for example, in the Dictionary of National Biography (DNB), S. LEE (Eds.), Vol. 61, London 1900, p. 404.

3 English Dissenters were Protestants who refused in the 16th century to accept Church of England and founded their own churches. There belonged for example, the Adamites, the Anabaptists, the Diggers, the Puritans, the Quakers, etc.

4 Oxford Encyclopaedia of British Literature, *Helen Maria Williams*, <http://www.answers.com/topic/helen-maria-williams>, [2014–04–07].

ary educated nonconformist pastor Dr. Andrew Kippis, she moved in 1781 to London as a young and talented author of her first book *Edwin and Eltruda: a legendary tale*. Dr. Kippis also helped Williams to publish her first poems. She became popular and famous very quickly as a sensitive author and so entered into the prominent London Literary Society. Her new friends were such literary personalities as Robert Burns and Samuel Johnson.⁵ When she published her collection of poems in 1786 the introduction was devoted just to Dr. Kippis: “My first production, the *Legendary Tale of Edwin and Eltruda*, was composed to amuse some solitary hours and without any view to publication. Being shown to Dr. Kippis, he declared that it deserved to be committed to the press, and offered to take upon himself the task of introducing it to the world [...] By the favourable reception this little poem met with, I was encouraged still further to meet the public eye, in the ‘Ode on the Peace,’ and the poem which has the title of ‘Peru’ [...]”⁶ In 1783, Williams published *Ode on the Peace* as an allegorical ode on the conclusion of the American War of Independence. The author didn’t conceal her sympathy for the American colonists and approved of their struggle for independence. All her life Williams was an unshakable pacifist and abolitionist of slavery. When Williams was for the first time in France in 1790, she became acquainted with the views of some politicians relating to the problem of slavery. Mirabeau as one of the most significant personalities of the first period of the revolution became Williams’ first idol. “He is my professed friend (and I must, and will, love him for being so) one of the African race. He proposed the abolition of the slave-trade to the National Assembly.”⁷ Helen hoped that, “The Africans⁸ would not have to suffer long, nor their oppressors to triumph.”⁹ About the war in the Vendée Williams had a clear view. Any natural disasters could not be equal to the horrors of armed conflict. The civil war in the west of France where the outbreak of the conflict was mainly situated was in the Vendée. Although Williams disagreed with the aims of the rebels she expressed her dismay of Republicans fighting methods. She correctly understood it wasn’t conventional warfare but bloody ideological conflict. “If such are the evils attendant on war when men murder each other without resentment; when they scarcely know either the cause of the dispute which brought them into the field, or for whom they are going to shed their blood; what must be the horror of that conflict where every regulation of humanity is considered as conspiracy and treason, where every action becomes laudable in proportion as it becomes ferocious, where murder is the only mark of bravery, and where extermination alone is conquest!”¹⁰ Williams used the notion many times “extermination”

5 S. BLAKEMORE, *Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, and the Rewriting of the French Revolution*, London 1997, p. 153.

6 H. M. WILLIAMS, *Poems*, Vol. 1, London 1786, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/11054/pg11054.html>, [2014-04-07].

7 H. M. WILLIAMS, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790, to a Friend in England: Containing Various Anecdotes Relative to the French Revolution; and Memoirs of Mons. and Madame Du F-----*, 4th Ed., London 1794, p. 48, <http://books.google.cz/books?id=qlxWAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA170&lpq=PA170&dq>, [2014-04-07].

8 The National Convention abolished slavery by decree of 4th February 1794.

9 WILLIAMS, *Letters Written in France*, p. 49.

10 H. M. WILLIAMS, *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France: From the Thirty-First of May 1793, till the Twenty — Eight of July 1794: Of the Scenes Which Have Passed in the Prisons of*

or “total destruction of the enemy”. “*The Proclamation of the convention having invited the soldiers of liberty to exterminate all these robbers, before the end of October [1793 — J. B.]*.”¹¹ Jean-Baptiste Carrier, a representative on mission who was infamously known in Lyon by his brutal forms of executions gave to General Avril on November 30, 1793 clear instructions in a spirit of complete destruction of the enemy: “*Continue, Citizen, to carry terror and death to all the counter-revolutionists of Morbihan [in Brittany — J. B.] and the surrounding communes. Let every individual suspected of incivility or of having dabbled in counter-revolutionary plots be instantly incarcerated in safe prisons. Let every individual whom you may find armed against the Republic or taking part in counter-revolutionary assemblies be instantly put to death and their property consigned to the flames [...] These are my orders to you and you will execute them with all possible activity and zeal.*”¹²

In 1785, Helen Maria Williams befriended Monique Coquerel, wife of Augustin du Fossé who was a French aristocrat from Normandy. He had refused the decision of his father not allowing him to marry with the socially inferior Monique. Consequently, Augustin had been forced to flee to England where he lived with his wife Monique. When it seemed that Augustin's father had changed his mind, and promised his son forgiveness, Augustin came back to France. However, his father was still angry imprisoned him on the basis of a so-called *lettre de cachet*¹³ but Augustin escaped again. When in 1787 his father died, Augustin returned to France and although he was the eldest in the family and therefore heir to the family property he announced that he would give up all property in favour of his younger brother. However, his younger brother conspired against him and Augustin returned back again to London. The spouse du Fossé could come to the French homeland after the Storming of the Bastille.¹⁴ In 1790, Williams described in her *Letters* this story romantically and sensitively with a strong sense of freedom and justice. She expressed her indignation mainly in relation to the unlawful arrest warrants, the so-called letters de cachet, which belonged to the most criticized arbitrary symbols of the old regime. Due to her friendship with the spouse du Fossé Williams was invited to France and visited Paris.¹⁵ This first visit to France was for her crucial. From that time Williams devoted her life to the revolution and to the dream of freedom. At that time, she believed as many other, that the revolution could regenerate the world.

In 1790 Williams visited the revolutionary Paris just one day before the Festival of the Federation which took place on the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille.

Paris, London 1796, pp. 195–196, <http://books.google.cz/books?id=-zguAAAAMAAJ&pg=P A23&lpg=PA23&dq>, [2014–04–07].

11 Ibidem, p. 210.

12 E. H. CARRIER (Eds.), *Correspondence of Jean-Baptiste Carrier (People's Representative to the Convention) during His Mission in Brittany, 1793–1794*, London 1920, pp. 136–137, <https://archive.org/details/correspondenceof00carrich>, [2014–04–07].

13 Lettres de cachet were letters signed by the King of France, countersigned by one of his ministers, and closed with the royal seal. By this *lettres de cachet* could be a subject sentenced without trial and without an opportunity of defence to imprisonment in a state prison or ordinary jail.

14 WILLIAMS, *Letters Written in France*, pp. 123–194.

15 BLAKEMORE, *Crisis in Representation*, p. 154.

Activities preceding this Festival were held the same day July 14, 1790, and celebrated by the French across their country. Celebrations were originally associated with receiving bundles of defence items for towns and villages. These bundles of defence items or bundles of federation help were given as a result of panic called the Great Fear.¹⁶ The foundations of the federated unions were accompanied by the formation of the National Guards according to the Paris model and by the establishing of new municipalities. These new alliances were celebrated and the core of the Festival consisted of a parade of the National Guards and this was accompanied by the flag consecration with the national oath. An important role was played by the Catholic Church and public Mass was held.¹⁷

The similar process, but more festive and elaborated with the participation of the so-called *fédérés*, who were coming from different parts of France, had the Festival of the Federation in Paris. *Moniteur* dated July 16, 1790, gave a detailed report about this event. “*The General Festival of the Federation presented us with the most impressive sight which until now has not been seen by any free man. The Champ de Mars became a place where the nation was gathered and ready to have a ceremony. One could see the results of the efforts of citizens of all classes who built this amphitheatre.*”¹⁸ A magazine reported that across the river a bridge of boats was built leading directly to the triumphal arch which was the gate to the Champ de Mars. The spectators of the Festival could read before entering the bridge patriotic inscriptions such as: “*We can be armed only by our nation and its laws; die in defence of our homeland and live for her love. Devote our efforts to create a constitution where [...] The poor will no longer be afraid of their oppressors and are under the protection of the constitution [...]*”¹⁹

Williams stepped into the capital full of a euphoric atmosphere of brotherhood and freedom just the day before the celebration. Many contemporaries who gave a report of this event described the spectators of the Festival having real tears of joy in their eyes. Williams brought a detailed description not only about the celebration but also about the atmosphere that prevailed among the people and which immediately “infected” everyone who was at that time in Paris. Williams’s description of the Festival became very popular in Britain after its publication. She noted that no description of this event was good enough and that only a personal participation could give a person a real picture of that great day. The day before the Festival, people gathered for Mass in Notre-Dame where the participants were listening *Te Deum* devoted to the

16 The Great Fear (*Grande Peur*) is the name of the panic in the summer 1789, which dominated the French countryside after the fall of the Bastille. Among the villagers were spreading rumours of an aristocratic conspiracy and invasion of foreign troops as a revenge for the storming of the Bastille. Panic was also reflected in attacks of peasants on the castles, where they were burning letters of privileges. Subsequently, the National Constituent Assembly by the August Decrees in 1789 abolished the feudal system with noble rights and privileges.

17 M. OZOUF, *Revoluční svátky 1789–1799*, Brno 2006, pp. 49–50.

18 *Gazette nationale ou Le Moniteur universel, Vendredi 16 Juillet 1790 — Deuxième année de la Liberté*, in: Réimpression de l’ancien *Moniteur*, Vol. 5, Paris 1841, p. 130, <http://books.google.cz/books?id=VbM9AAAAYAAJ&pg=PA241&lpg=PA241&dq>, [2014–04–07].

19 *Ibidem*, p. 197.

memory of the conquerors of the Bastille. “People, your enemies advance, with hostile sentiments, with menacing looks! They come to bath their hands in your blood! Already they encompass the walls of your city! Rise, rise from the inaction in which you are plunged, seize your arms, and fly to the combat! God will combat with you!”²⁰ Although, at the beginning it was raining heavily, the Festival took place in a joyfully tearful atmosphere. “In the street, at the Windows and on the roofs of the houses, the people, transported with joy, shouted and wept as the procession passed. Old men were seen kneeling in the streets, blessing God that they had lived to witness the happy moment [...] and crowds of women surrounded the soldiers holding up their infants in their arms, and melting into tears promising to make their children imbibe, from their earliest age an inviolable attachment to the principles of the new constitution.”²¹ According to Helen there was only one cause of dissatisfaction, the king swore in a prepared pavilion and not on the Altar of the Homeland as the Marquis de Lafayette. Some even demanded the commander of the National Guards Lafayette to persuade the King to swear again on the altar.²²

Within the Festival several theatre plays were written. One of them deserves attention because of its author, a future member of *The Committee of Public Safety* (Comité de salut public) and an infamous *representative on a mission* Collot d’Herbois, who together with his colleague Fouché brutally pacified the rebellious Lyon. He wrote a comedy, *Patriotic family, or Federation* (La Famille patriote, ou la Fédération)²³ which had a premiere on July 16, 1790. Collot d’Herbois celebrated the young French freedom together with an immense crowd of people assembled on the Champ de Mars. This presentation of brotherhood was considered as a moral victory and the strength of the new unity of French people.²⁴ All regional borders in France seemed to be at that moment deleted and the inhabitants of Provence as well as Brittany felt particularly French. It was the main goal of this Festival. However, unity rapidly disintegrated under the influence of new political events, particularly relating to religious matters. French unity was limited only for the summer days in 1790. Williams returned in her mind to this event within terror and compared this “unaffected” Festival with the artificial and affected Festival of the Supreme Being.

When Williams was writing her report about the Fest of the Federation she hoped to arouse the same sympathies and emotions in her readers. However, many of her natives didn’t perceive French events with such euphoria as Williams who believed that the Revolution was ready to regenerate world. “And strangers, when they visit France, will hasten with impatience to the Champ de Mars, filled with enthusiasm which is awakened by the view of the place where a great scene has been acted. I think I hear them exclaim: Here the Federation was held! Here an assembled nation devoted themselves to freedom!”²⁵ But when Williams returned in autumn 1790 to her country, she under-

20 WILLIAMS, *Letters Written in France*, p. 3.

21 Ibidem, pp. 9–10.

22 Ibidem, p. 16.

23 J. JOHNSON (Ed.), *The Analytical Review of History and Literature, Domestic and Foreign*, Vol. 8, London 1790, p. 119, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433082493788;view=1up;seq=1>, [2014–04–07].

24 OZOUF, p. 64.

25 WILLIAMS, *Letters Written in France*, pp. 107–108.

stood that not everybody was so uncritical of the Revolution as she was. She didn't hide her surprise when she found that the many of her friends in London were far from sharing her optimistic view of the Revolution. Further the work of Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, caused her bitter indignation. Opinions of Burke were not only very critical of what she considered to be a new dawn of freedom but his scepticism about the Festival of the Federation was for her unacceptable. He claimed that the enthusiasm of the Federation was only a trick.²⁶ According to Williams, many English visitors to France were spreading reports full of alleged horrors, and she only heard descriptions of the crimes, murders and deaths.²⁷ She didn't believe the reports of the British newspapers so she was indignant and disappointed from the misinterpretation of the revolutionary events. She asked herself: "Must I be told, that my mind is perverted, that I have become dead to all sensations of sympathy because I do not weep with those who have lost a part of their superfluities, rather than rejoice that the oppressed are protected, that the wronged are redressed, that the captive is set at liberty, and that the poor have bread?"²⁸

However, when the first two volumes of Williams's *Letters Written in France* were published, where she showed her enthusiastic celebration of the Festival of the Federation, the British public accepted her work positively and her description of the French events had also an effect on public opinion. "*The Letters written in France [...] by Helen Maria Williams, formed an elegant and pleasing production which will not diminish the reputation which the fair writer has deservedly acquired in public opinion.*"²⁹ By such a commendable form began a British magazine, *The New Annual Register* in its review of Williams's work. According to the magazine, *The Letters* reflected the author's immediate impressions concerning various matters of the Revolution which Williams described colourfully and with interest. About her report of the Festival of the Federation the magazine wrote that it was full of enthusiasm and words of freedom. "*She is, indeed, an enthusiast in the cause of liberty; and never loses an opportunity of describing the exultation which she felt on beholding its triumphs over despotism and oppression.*"³⁰ However, it is true that in Williams' work confluent her personal views with the events described and thus the effects of *the Letters* are very emotional. In *The Letters* you can only find one mention of violence. Williams did witness the lynching of a baker accused of storing bread and she was describing what she saw "*immediately opposite La Maison de Ville [...] laterne at which, for want of a gallows, the first victims of the popular fury were sacrificed.*"³¹ Looking at the dead man, Helen felt her body freeze and for the first time, according to her words, "*she lamented the revolution.*"³² However, she then argued that in history there had been no

26 BLAKEMORE, *Crisis in Representation*, p. 165.

27 WILLIAMS, *Letters Written in France*, pp. 216–217.

28 Ibidem, p. 218.

29 G. G. J. — J. ROBINSON (Eds.), *The New Annual Register or General Repository of History, Politics and Literature for the Year 1790*, London 1791, p. 253, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/p?id=uc1.a0001882364;view=1up;seq=6>, [2014-04-07].

30 Ibidem, p. 253.

31 WILLIAMS, *Letters Written in France*, p. 81.

32 Ibidem.

revolution without blood and violence and the fight of twenty-four million French, who desired freedom, there would surely be public acts of revenge.³³

The interpretation of the Revolution by Williams in her first work therefore acts as a sublime and a series of pure events and she seemed to refuse to include any violence. Even the so-called October day, which Edmund Burke strongly denounced, was for Helen only an act which finally led to a general pleasure. Williams was not a witness of the hectic October days but she did visit Versailles as an already emptied royal residence which looked like a museum of the *Old regime* (Ancien régime). The guide showed her the Queen's bedroom whence Marie Antoinette barely escaped before a furious attack of fishwives (poissardes) and market women. She also saw the memorable balcony where the humbled queen stood in front of an angry mob. Williams noted symbolically that the same room which was connected with this balcony was the same room where King Louis XIV³⁴ had died and so the monarchy of the old type finally died. Williams emphasized that King Louis XVI was very popular and people in the streets sang instead of *Long live Henri IV!* (Vive Henri IV!) a song with new words about the civil King Louis XVI. For Williams everything seemed to be in order similarly to the anonymous author of *The Good new* (La Bonne nouvelle). "*The King is back from Versailles and his heart is filled with two different feelings, which show his good character [...] He learned about the goodness of people who loved him, but he was filled by sorrow over ministers and courtiers who lied to him and he believed them [...] We must hope, finally we have our king back.*"³⁵ In fact, the royal family was transported to Paris under degrading circumstances and accommodated in the Tuileries palace which had been uninhabited for a long time. From that time they became prisoners of the Revolution. The King was a natural and simple man who lacked the royal behaviour of his ancestors. He walked in the castle garden in simple clothes and looked more like a burgher than a King. In the Tuileries his Royal Guard were replaced by a National Guard and maybe the King believed that by his simple appearance he would be closer to people because his guardians were in fact common people from Paris such as artisans and small traders. However, the respect was built in the eyes of the common people not only by actions but also by ostentatious bearing. The Parisians saw in the King only a man who looked like them, who had a big belly and a big appetite. People in Paris lost all respect for Louis not only because of the propaganda of the radical press but also due to National Guard members, who were spreading through the capital, that their King is only a mere mortal with a big nose and clumsy gait.³⁶ Sacred reverence for the king was thus irretrievably destroyed. Louis became in the eyes of Parisians an equal partner who could easily be humiliated and insulted. Arthur Young, who briefly stayed in Paris in January 1790, brought the picture of the situation of the royal family in the following description: "*After breakfast a walk in the gardens of the Tuileries, where there is the most extraordinary sight that either*

33 Ibidem, pp. 61–62.

34 Ibidem, pp. 83–84.

35 Anonym, *La Bonne nouvelle*, Paris [cca 1789–1790], p. 4, <http://bibliotheque-desguine.hauts-de-seine.net/desguine/Bibliotheque-virtuelle/Tous-les-ouvrages?order=ascendindate&page=19&lang=fr>, [2014–04–07].

36 G. BORDONOVE, *Ludvík XVI.: Král mučedník*, Praha 2003, pp. 167–168.

*French or English eyes could ever behold in Paris. The King walking with six grenadiers of the malice filled bourgeoisie [The National Guard — J. B.] [...] The doors of the gardens are kept shut in respect to him, in order to exclude everybody but deputies or those who have admission-tickets. When he entered the palace the door of the gardens were thrown open for all without distinction, though the queen was still walking with a lady of her court [...] A mob followed her talking very loud, and paying no other apparent respect than of taking off their hats wherever she passed.*³⁷

Although English friends of Williams tried to convince her not to go back to France because of the unstable political situation, she was determined in 1791, to move to France for two years. On this occasion it was published her poem *Farewell for two Years to England*, in which she said goodbye to her country to celebrate French freedom.³⁸ She came to Paris just in time, when the royal family was caught in Varennes, after their attempt to flee the country. Williams was in the first period of the Revolution really happy and between the years 1791 and 1792, she met prominent revolutionaries including Robespierre, Vergniaud, Brissot, general Miranda, Barère, Madame Roland, who became her good friend, she was in touch with her native Mary Wollstonecraft and also with Thomas Paine. Williams identified her own views with the policies of the Girondists.³⁹ She returned to England for a short time in 1792, where she convinced her mother and sisters Cecilie and Persis, to follow her to France.⁴⁰ Williams opened her own salon in the Rue Helvétius, where she invited many prominent guests who sympathized with the Girondists. This relatively expensive lifestyle probably paid for her intimate partner John Hurford Stone to found, in France, several factories for wallpaper cotton and silk. At the time of this relationship with Helen, John Hurford was still married but living separately from his wife. He divorced in 1794 but there is no evidence that he married Williams although they stayed together for the rest of their lives. Stone as well as Thomas Paine were members of *the British Club* (the British Club or Friends of the Rights of Man associated in Paris). His activity was associated with espionage in favour of the French government relating to the possibility of an invasion into Britain.⁴¹ Members of the club were a mixture of English, Scottish and Irish nationals, who had remained faithful to the Revolution even after the September massacres and who had stayed in a hostile status to their native land. The members of the club were for example Thomas Paine, Robert Merry, John Oswald and also Helen Maria Williams. After the achievements of the Republican army over the Austrian army, members of the club issued on November 18, 1792 a resolution to the National Convention. In it they proclaimed their republican solidarity with the French Republic. At that time, president of the club was John Hurford

37 A. YOUNG, *Travels in France during the Years 1787, 1788, 1789*, London 1794, p. 300, <https://archive.org/details/arthuryoungstra00bethgoog>, [2014-04-07].

38 G. G. J. — J. ROBINSON (Eds.), *The New Annual Register, 1791*, London 1792, p. 270, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433082425061;view=1up;seq=7>, [2014-04-07].

39 BLAKEMORE, *Crisis in Representation*, p. 155.

40 *Classic Poetry Series*, Helen Maria Williams, 63 Poems, The World's Poetry Archive 2012, http://www.poemhunter.com/i/ebooks/pdf/helen_maria_williams_2012_6.pdf, [2014-04-07].

41 BLAKEMORE, *Crisis in Representation*, p. 155.

Stone.⁴² It is not sure whether Williams knew about the activities of John Hurford Stone but in Britain after the September massacres she was openly accused of treason against her own country along with Stone.⁴³

When Williams returned from England to Paris with her whole family preparations were being made for an insurrection which on August 10, 1792 (La journée du 10 août) resulted in an attack on the Tuileries. Helen saw part of these events from the window of the hotel where she was living and the brutality of the attack shocked her. She even helped an injured Swiss guardsman who was trying to hide on the stairs of her hotel from his fierce persecutors and she gave water to this dying man. The following day, she decided to look at the battlefield and what she saw shocked her. On the ground lay the mutilated bodies of massacred Swiss Guards and it is hard to imagine that Williams, according to the description of British critics was coolly walking without showing any regret among the naked dead bodies. James Boswell in his work *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, previously characterized Williams as a gentle and charming lady. Later he deleted the attribute “amiable” and added to the passage relating to the formerly celebrated Williams, that “*she has not only written in favor of the savage anarchy with which France has been visited; but she walked without horror, over the ground at the Tuileries, when it was strewn with the naked bodies of the faithful Swiss guards. The Guards who were barbarously massacred for having bravely defended against a crew of ruffians, the Monarch whom they had taken an oath to defend.*”⁴⁴ According to the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, “*she [Williams — J. B.] can not expect any expression of love but only resistance*”⁴⁵ Laetitia Hawkins described Williams in her work *Letters on the Female Mind* (1793), almost as a rebel who was associated with the most radical mob of market women and fishwives. Respectable and decent woman could not celebrate the Revolution especially not after the fall of the monarchy.⁴⁶ Hawkins also believed that Helen on August 10, 1792 saw the mutilated bodies of guardsmen but did not show any sign of emotion. Laetitia Hawkins equally reflected concerns that Williams would no longer be able to remain a respectable Englishwoman.⁴⁷ In fact, there were abusive reports in Britain which stained the name of Williams and many people really believed those lies. After the September massacres, Williams stayed in her apartment in Rue Helvétius in Paris and never returned to England and she became a “*Persona non grata*”.⁴⁸

Williams remained loyal to the Revolution not only after the execution of Louis XVI but also when the French Republic entered the war against Britain. Williams was

42 CRACIUN — LOKKE, p. 4.

43 BLAKEMORE, *Crisis in Representation*, p. 157.

44 *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Chronicle, For the year 1795*, Part 2, London 1795, pp. 672–673, [http://books.google.cz/books?id=jawUAAAQAQAJ&pg=PA873&lpg=PA873&dq=\[2014-04-07\]](http://books.google.cz/books?id=jawUAAAQAQAJ&pg=PA873&lpg=PA873&dq=[2014-04-07]).

45 *Ibidem*, p. 672–673.

46 S. BLAKEMORE, *Revolution and the French Disease: Laetitia Matylda Hawkins’s Letters to Helen Maria Williams*, in: *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 1996, pp. 683–685.

47 BLAKEMORE, *Crisis in Representation*, p. 155.

48 *Ibidem*, p. 156.

a sympathizer for the policy of the Girondists and therefore she was concerned about the internal political situation concerning the worsening conflict between the Girondists and the Montagnards. “*The commune of Paris claimed an equal right to share with the Jacobins the honours of the triumph over the monarchy [...] and having the fatal period of the massacre of September humble the legislative assembly into the dust, they thought that the same daring conduct could give them the same superiority over [newly elected legislature — J. B.] the National Convention.*”⁴⁹ In fact, responsibility for the inability to suppress the September massacres on the one side stood in complete passivity of the Minister of the Interior Roland, on the other side stood in inactivity and indifference of the Minister of Justice Danton. Although the next day Roland condemned the massacres he didn’t have in contrast to Danton influence on the activities of the Paris sections and the police committees. The Paris Commune as the next influential body of political power resolved the problem of uncoordinated brutal murdering by nominating investigative commissioners who hadn’t to prevent another killing, but only to instil a “legal” character to the massacres by establishing of people’s courts. In fact, no one openly protested against the massacres either from fear or simply because of approval of these murders.⁵⁰

The election of the National Convention on September 1792 was held in the atmosphere of September massacres and Williams expressed, that “*many deputies were chosen whose pretensions to this trust arose more from the strength of their lungs than of their talents, and whose harangues made up in noise what they wanted in argument [...]*”⁵¹ Williams pointed to the future behaviour of the Jacobins who used policy of physical intimidation and constant blaming the opposition of treason. The political struggle which subsequently broke out in the National Convention was held in an atmosphere of constant personal attacks and threats. Williams explained the electoral success of Jacobins in Paris as a result of dictatorial activities of Commune and popular societies. Deputies such as Robespierre therefore didn’t act as a representative of the people, but as a triumphant conqueror.⁵² In fact, of the seven millions eligible voters only about 6% took advantage of the franchise. Low voter turnout even more radicalized the political regime. The north and east of the country were in direct military emergency⁵³ and major urban areas were intimidated by brutal political practices. A good example was in Paris where to vote meant a good deal of courage.⁵⁴ Therefore

49 H. M. WILLIAMS, *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Scenes Which Passed in Various Departments of France During the Tyranny of Robespierre and of the Events Which Took Place in Paris on the 28th of July 1794*, London 1795, pp. 60–61, http://books.google.cz/books?id=dzkuAAAMAAMAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false, [2014-04-07].

50 S. SCHAMA, *Občané, kronika Francouzské revoluce*, Praha 2004, pp. 651–652.

51 WILLIAMS, *Letters Containing a Sketch*, pp. 60–61.

52 *Ibidem*, p. 61.

53 The Legislative Assembly declared war on Francis, not as The Holy Roman Emperor but as the King of Bohemia and Hungary hoping that they wouldn’t have to enter a war with the whole Empire. After the execution of King Louis XVI, which took place on January 21, 1793 entered the war against France alongside Austria and Prussia also Great Britain, Spain, Republic of the United Netherlands and also German and Italian states.

54 SCHAMA, p. 663.

the Jacobins triumphed in the capital. The Girondists were elected predominantly from the departments and this had for them future fatal consequences. Paris sent to the National Convention the most militant Jacobins such as Robespierre, Marat, Danton, Santerre, Fabre d'Églantine, Desmoulins, and Collot d'Herbois⁵⁵ who Williams compared to Caligula.

In Britain Helen Maria Williams was uncompromisingly criticized not only for her attempts to present her political opinions on the revolutionary events but also because she was dishonest in her “immoral” relationship with the still married John Hurford Stone. *The Anti-Jacobin Review* described the couple as notorious revolutionaries. In Britain Stone was accused of treason and espionage. A magazine mentioned this matter even in 1799, it stated that the present partner of Williams “Mr. J. H. Stone is the brother of the person who about two years before was on a charge of carrying out a treasonable correspondence with France, in conjunction with one Jackson, who was convicted in Dublin, on a similar accusation”.⁵⁶ Through this contact with his brother John Harford Stone as a member of the British Club in Paris held correspondence with English radicals and with some radical Whigs. He even investigated for the French government the possibility of an invasion of Britain.⁵⁷ In *The Anti-Jacobin Review* John Hurford Stone was also presented as a friend of Talleyrand.⁵⁸ The magazine by this relationship piled even more dishonour on Stone in the eyes of the British public. *The European Magazine* was more polite to Williams and in her next issue of *The Letters*⁵⁹ she received minimum negative criticism. Nevertheless in reviews it was repeated several times that the work would be better quality if she avoided numerous political commentaries. Her naivety and uncritical admiration for some men of the Revolution was only proof that her feminine tenderness and sensuality blinded her common sense. “But we will excuse everything to partiality and personal attachment.”⁶⁰

The Anti-Jacobin Review clearly showed the view concerning the status of women in social life when the magazine quoted one of the parts of the historical tract⁶¹ printed in 1641, “How to cure a woman so possessed” [possessed of a factious spirit — J. B.]. This passage was also addressed to „citizen” Helen Maria Williams. “A woman, being the weaker vessel, shall have the application of a weaker remedy; let her obey her husband when he hath taken his cure, and do not disdain to conceive that he is both a King and a Bishop, one that is capable both of moral government and divine.”⁶² *The Anti-Jacobin Review* em-

55 Ibidem, p. 665.

56 Anonym, *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine or, Monthly Political and Literary Censor*, Vol. 1, London 1798, p. 147, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=inu.30000080768397>, [2014-04-07].

57 BLAKEMORE, *Crisis in representation*, p. 157.

58 *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, Vol. 1, p. 147.

59 H. M. WILLIAMS, *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France: From the Thirty-First of May 1793, to the Twenty — Eighth of July 1794. Of the Scenes Which Have Passed in the Prisons of Paris*, London 1795.

60 *The European Magazine and London Review Containing the Literature, History, Politics, Arts*, Vol. 28, London 1795, p. 42, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015018405145>, [2014-04-07].

61 *A Medicine for the Times, or an Antidote against Faction*, London 1641.

62 *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, p. 363.

phasized, that although the tract was written in the seventeenth century it was still current for the present life.

In contrast to the members of the military *Society of Revolutionary Republican Women* (La Société des républicaines révolutionnaires), Williams never fought for the equal political rights of women. Her ideals were virtuous women, good wives, but also women full of spirit and intellect such as Madame Roland, Charlotte Corday and even Madame Élisabeth, sister of Louis XVI. All these women were significant by their strength, consistency and heroic demeanour in the world of men both before the revolutionary tribunal and on the way to the guillotine. Ideals for Williams were Roman matrons, who were good wives and mothers and when it was necessary came forward to show their heroic spirit in encouraging men in battle. During the reign of terror Williams perceived the suffering of women in prisons as a result of the bloodthirsty and reckless policy of the Jacobins. They dishonoured and sent women to the scaffold. Similarly to *the Revolutionary Republican Women*, Williams also emphasized the historical role of women and their ability to manipulate men and politicians. Therefore they often mentioned influential mistress' of the French kings and also pointed to mythical women. On a session of *the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women* in the fall of 1793, they celebrated some famous women of history including the Amazonians: "I will remind you of the virile and warrior like vigor of that colony of Amazonians whose existence has been cast into doubt because of people's jealousy of women [...] What all these examples prove is that women can form battalions, command armies, battle, and conquer as well as men?"⁶³ In contrast to the romantic Williams, women such as Claire Lacombe or Paoline Léon, demanded equal rights for both sexes in political life and even called for representation in the army.

Most of the women didn't engage in the struggle for equal political rights and persisted in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idea of women as partners of men, but still in a subordinate position. However there was a group of women who demanded their rights from the beginning of the Revolution through *the Cahiers de Doléances* (the Lists of grievances — J. B.) but these were largely anonymous. There were requirements for better and a higher quality of education, equality in marriage, i.e. gender equality, and some of the women even proposed electoral law for women. Marquis Nicolas de Condorcet, philosopher and future follower of the Girondists, argued that if women had to pay taxes, they had the right to self-representation.⁶⁴ He was one of the few men, who were willing to accept and openly promote the idea of social and political equality for women. In 1790, Condorcet in his essay *On the Admission of Women to the Rights of Citizenship* (Sur l'admission des femmes aux droits de Cité), emphasized the prejudices of men against the opposite sex. "For example, have they [enlightened men — J. B.] not all violated the principle of the equality of rights in tranquilly depriving one-half of the human race of the right of taking part in the formation of laws by the exclusion of women from the rights of citizenship? Could there be a stronger proof of the power of habit, even among enlightened men, that to hear invoked the principle of equal

⁶³ D. G. LEVY — H. B. APPLEWHITE — M. D. JOHNSON, *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1795*, Chicago 1981, p. 167.

⁶⁴ J. ABBAY, *Feminism in the Revolution*, in: *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 80, No. 1, 1975, pp. 45-46.

rights in favour of perhaps some three, or four hundred men,⁶⁵ who had been deprived of it by an absurd prejudice and then forget it when it concerns some twelve million women?”⁶⁶ Condorcet therefore argued, either no individual in mankind had true rights, or all had the same. “And he or she votes against the rights of another, whatever may be his or her religion, colour, or sex, has by that fact abjured his own rights.”⁶⁷ If somebody argued that women didn’t contribute to research natural sciences, the development of art, or didn’t excel in literature, then Condorcet wondered, for what reason men gained the civil rights, although more of them also contributed nothing excellent to society. Due to prejudices should those rights be received exclusively only by a small group of intellectuals. It would be according to Condorcet absurd and ridiculous. At the end of his essay Condorcet claimed there were no other differences between men and women except for sexual and therefore women would have full civil rights.⁶⁸

In 1791, Olympe de Gouges in her famous work *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (La Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne) vigorously questioned the men: “Tell me, what gives you sovereign empire to oppress my sex? Your strength? Your talents? Observe the Creator in his wisdom; survey in all her grandeur that nature with whom you seem to want to be in harmony, and give me, if you dare, an example of this tyrannical empire. Go back to animals, consult the elements, study plants, finally glance at all the modifications of organic mater [...] everywhere they co-operate in harmonious togetherness in this immortal masterpiece.”⁶⁹ In *The Declaration* de Gouges demanded civil rights for women and women’s right to representation in the National Assembly. This *Declaration* was a female equivalent of *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* of 26 August 1789 which granted civil rights only for men. Therefore de Gouges created her own inventory of requirements of natural and civil rights for women. When Jacobins came to power de Gouges was for her radical views on the civil rights for women but also for her criticism of some revolutionary attitudes brought before a revolutionary tribunal and was guillotined in November 1793. Briefly after de Gouges execution a crowd of restless women assembled before the Paris Commune to protest against the abolition of the female militant *Society of Revolutionary Republican Women*. Pierre-Gaspard Chaumette at that time president of Paris Commune appeared before the assembled crowd of women and radically condemned the efforts of women engaged in exclusively male affairs. He reminded women of their place in the family and their duty to care for husbands and kids. Chaumette argued the typical view of Jacobins that respectable woman didn’t stay at the tribune of the National Convention didn’t talk about policy in cafes or in the popular societies but her place was in the household. According to the vision of Jacobins a woman had an obligation to prepare her household for the arrival of her hus-

65 Perhaps he is thinking of actors there.

66 *The First Essay on the Political Rights of Women*, in: A. D. VYCKERY (Ed.), *Translation of Condorcet’s Essay “Sur l’admission des femmes aux droits de Cité”*, Letchworth 1912, p. 5, <https://archive.org/details/thefirstessayont31550gut>, [2014-04-07].

67 *Ibidem*, pp. 5-6.

68 *Ibidem*.

69 O. GOUGES, *La Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*, Paris 1791, http://www.adequations.org/IMG/article_PDF/article_a364.pdf, [2014-04-07].

band who spent a hard day at work. The role of a woman was to teach her sons to love liberty and their country and if necessary to lay down their lives for the homeland. Chaumette's speech was several times interrupted by enthusiastic applause from other members of the Commune and bystander spectators. In the end Chaumette reminded the assembled women "*this haughty wife [Madame Roland — J. B.] of a stupid, perfidious husband [Jean-Marie Roland, former Minister of the Interior — J. B.] [...] who thought herself fit to govern the republic and who rushed to her downfall; remember the impudent Olympe de Gouges, who was the first to set up women's societies, who abandoned the cares of her household to get mixed up in the republic, and whose head fell beneath the avenging knife of the laws*".⁷⁰ Chaumette ended his speech by stating that the deputation of women wouldn't be heard again and the Council wouldn't receive any more deputations of women. Thenceforth all their requests and individual complaints were brought before the magistrates in Paris.⁷¹

Women were actively engaged in every significant event of the Revolution. They were among the crowds at the Bastille on July 14 and they played a major role on the October days in 1789. In July 1791, they also took part in the signature campaign on the Champ de Mars organized mainly by the club of the Cordeliers which ended up shooting into the crowd. This became known as "the massacre of the Champ de Mars". Women as legally armed forces also participated in the insurrection on August 10, 1792 and they were helpful during the siege of the National Convention at the beginning of June 1793 known as the insurrection against the Girondists. By 1790 there was in Paris *the Fraternal Society of Patriots of Both Sexes Defenders of the Constitution* (La Société fraternelle des patriotes de l'un et l'autre sexe, Défenseurs de la Constitution) where men as well as women were actively engaged and they called each other "brother" and "sister". The members were such personalities as Jacques René Hébert, Jean-Lambert Tallien, Paoline Léon, Théorigne de Méricourt and even for a short time Madame Roland.⁷² In the spring of 1793 a group of republican women who radically demanded their involvement in the military sphere, founded *the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women*. The Paris Commune wrote on May 10, 1793 about this event a brief report: "*Several citizens presented themselves to the secretariat of the municipality and in conformity with the law concerning municipal regulations declared their intention of assembling and forming a society which admits only women*".⁷³ The significant members of the society were Paoline Léon, Claire Lacombe, Constance Evrard and Anne Félicité Colombe.⁷⁴ Some of them such as Léon and Lacombe co-operated also with a revolutionary group the so-called Enragés.⁷⁵ Many members of this club were active from the first days of the Revolution. Williams perceived these women very negatively,

70 LEVY — APPLEWHITE — JOHNSON, pp. 219–220.

71 Ibidem, p. 220.

72 R. B. ROSE, *Socialism and the French Revolution: The Cercle Social and the Enragés*, in: Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, Manchester 1958, pp. 155–157.

73 LEVY — APPLEWHITE — JOHNSON, p. 149.

74 D. G. LEVY — H. B. APPLEWHITE, *A Political Revolution for Women? The Case of Paris*, <https://libcom.org/history/political-revolution-women-case-paris-darline-gay-levy-harriet-b-applewhite>, [2014-04-07].

75 ROSE, pp. 156–157.

mainly because of their hostile attitudes towards the Girondists and because of their uncompromising refusal of the policy of free trade. Lacombe and Léone belonged to ardent advocates of the program of Enragés⁷⁶ so automatically they came into conflict with the economic ideas of the Girondists. In the course of the uprising of 31 May and 2 June 1793 armed protesters besieged the National Convention and the *revolutionary republican women* belonged to these insurgents. Williams then indignantly remarked that “Robespierre with his commune, his Jacobins, and his body guard of revolutionary women were involved in the attack. These women stood in the passages of the convention armed with poniards which they pointed at the bosoms of any deputies tempted to leave the hall [...]”.⁷⁷ According to this report, the Jacobins legally armed women to use their help and their militant attitudes against the opposition in the Convention. However, when the Jacobins fixed their position of power the same people who previously had supported arming woman decided to take action against radicalized republican women. These women constantly called for radical economic measures and thereby even more destabilized an already quite unstable political situation.

Because of the enforcement of the maximum prices for basic foods the republican women got into a serious dispute with another distinctive Parisian force, with the market women and fishwives. Among the revolutionary republican women and the market women conflict broke out on whether it is appropriate for women to wear the red cap, whether it is suitable to arm women and even to require entry into the National Guard. Market women eventually helped Jacobins to pacify republican women. There were some fights in public and young radical women could hardly defend themselves against the blows of gross market women.⁷⁸

Louis-Marie Prudhomme, who published a radical newspaper *Les Révolutions de Paris* was known for his opposition to feminists and belonged to the defenders of the traditional role of women. He got involved in a campaign conducted by the National Convention and the Paris Commune which was directed against the radical republican women and against any political activities of women. According to Prudhomme certain women were so impudent who questioned the moral preaching of such an important member of the Commune as Chaumette was. Prudhomme indignantly

⁷⁶ Initially detached from the political fight between the Montagnards and the Girondists stood the so-called Enragés who were a dispersed group of street agitators such as Roux, Varlet or Leclerc and who demanded strict control of the distribution of grain, the introduction of *maximum prices* concerning basic food, progressive taxation for the rich people and severe penalties for “the speculators” who stored food and grain in order to raise the prices of these products. They also demanded that the assigned as the only legal tender. Initially neither the Montagnards nor the radicals and influential members of the Commune such as Marat and Hébert didn’t accepted the uncompromising requirements of the Enragés. But gradually the Montagnards in coalition with supporters of the Commune accepted part of their demands because their policy of maximum prices and attacks on “the rich egoists” (*riches égoïstes*) fully responded to the requirements of the streets and therefore to radical movement of the *sans-culottes*. The result of the first success of policy of the *sans-culottes* was the Decree of 4 May 1793 which imposed the first maximum prices.

⁷⁷ WILLIAMS, *Letters Containing a Sketch*, p. 73.

⁷⁸ SCHAMA, p. 816.

remarked that these women continued demanding to wear “*the red caps, pantaloons and pistols in their belts*”.⁷⁹ According to this journalist these women were running around the streets of Paris insulting decent citizens by their behaviour and appearance. Prudhomme noted that these women eventually could be considered federalist conspirators and at that time such an accusation was equal to the death penalty. “*Our women the so-called revolutionaries are well paid, but poorly organized. They wanted to start to convince citizens in the market and in the section Contract-Social [...] to adopt their way of clothing [...] People’s Justice didn’t take place without turmoil. The National Victory Square and its surroundings were full of such scenes. This commotion came up to the General Assembly of the Section whose civic officials acted with the greatest wisdom and firmness.*”⁸⁰

According to Williams’s uncompromising judgment the revolutionary republican women were only the successor of fishwives and market women. “*A certain class of the women of Paris, who gave themselves the title of revolutionary women, had been service auxiliaries to the conspirators [the Montagnards and the members of the Paris Commune — J. B.]. These actions had taken place at the poissards and those, who not having all the energy which the present exigencies required, had yielded the palm of their hands to their revolutionary successors.*”⁸¹ Williams noted that these republican women activists resolutely demanded “*the exclusion of the former nobles from every function civil or military, the renewal of all the administrations throughout the republic, the examination of the conduct of the ministers, the arrest of every suspected person, the raising of the whole nation in mass, and the obligation of women to wear red caps.*”⁸² Williams described the situation just before the uprising against the Girondists when these militant radical republican women demanded as well as their male colleagues from Cordeliers club, “*to decree that suspect men will be placed under arrest immediately, that the revolutionary tribunals will be set up in all the Departments and in Sections of Paris [...] We ask that you [the legislators — J. B.] establish in every city revolutionary armies composed of sans-culottes [...] that the army of Paris be increased to forty thousand men, paid at the expense of the rich*”.⁸³ Their revolutionary program called for a systematic politics of terror against the enemies of the Republic — the Girondists, aristocrats, hoarders, speculators.⁸⁴ These requirements were in many points the same as the demands of the Enragés. Williams noted that after winning the Montagnards in the National Convention they then turned their backs on women’s demands. Prudhomme gave women advice how to be a true patriots and his description of the role of women was practically a reflection of the general ideas of the Jacobins on the status of women in new republican society. “*Citizens, be good daughters, hardworking and sensitive wives; modest and wise mothers. The true patriotism lies in fulfilling these responsibilities [...] and not in wear-*

79 *Les Révolutions de Paris, dédiées à la Nation*, No. 213, 7 au 14 Brumaire de la République Française, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k10513761.image.langEN.r=Les%20R%C3%A9volutions%20de%20Paris>, [2014-04-07].

80 *Ibidem*.

81 WILLIAMS, *Letters Containing a Sketch*, p. 139.

82 *Ibidem*, p. 140.

83 LEVY — APPLEWHITE — JOHNSON, pp. 150-151.

84 *Ibidem*.

ing red caps, pantaloons and a belt with pistols. Leave these matters to men who were born to protect you and provide you happiness. Women, wear clothing appropriate to your sex."⁸⁵

The results of the campaign against the women's club were two significant and simultaneous final speeches of Fabre d'Eglantine and Jean-Baptiste Amar and the subsequent decrees prohibited any engagement of women in political life. Fabre was a poet, one of the authors of the revolutionary calendar and an active participant of the dechristianization movement. He vigorously condemned all attempts to arm women and accused members of women's clubs that they weren't mothers, daughters and sisters of families, but rather adventuresses, female knights-errant, emancipated girls, and Amazons. Therefore he demanded a quick solution to this situation because these women were still in the streets and disrupting public peace. Amar was a dreaded member of the Committee of the General Security and among other things the author of the indictment of Girondist deputies. He clearly explained that women weren't in any way able to deal with policy issues because of their mental and physical distinctions. Amar asserted, women were too shy, modest, and mentally weak and therefore they could hardly withstand the onslaught of government affairs. Therefore, he proposed to issue appropriate decrees against any "feminine" activities.⁸⁶ Prudhomme in his journal *Les Révolutions de Paris* noted, "*The National Convention prohibits by its decrees organizing such clubs (all women's clubs — J. B.). In patriotic societies women will be tolerated only as quiet and peaceful listeners; [...] They have prohibition to assemble [...] They can deal only in a family circle*".⁸⁷ The first Decree was issued on October 29, 1793: "*No person of either sex may constrain any citizen to dress in a particular manner. Everyone is free to wear whatever clothing [...] of their sex which seems right to them [...]*"⁸⁸ Everyone who violated this decree was considered and treated as a suspect and prosecuted as a disturber of public peace.⁸⁹ The second decree of 30 October 1793 ordered the prohibition of all clubs and popular societies of women.⁹⁰ The Jacobins didn't only prohibited female radical militant societies but they broke with any women's attempts at civic activity. From this time women were forced to remain only in their households and any meetings of women were considered illegal.

Finally, Williams had to come to terms with the fact that the Revolution was hit by an unprecedented intensity of violence which escalated in a "legal" way into an official policy of terror. Although, initially after the fall of Robespierre she hoped for a return to her ideal "republic of the Gironde", it never happened. For Williams there were no future periods comparable to the beginnings of the French republic. According to Williams the Revolution in its first period went the right way and was determined to realize and distribute its "noble and immortal principles of freedom".

⁸⁵ *Les Révolutions de Paris*, No. 213.

⁸⁶ L. HUNT (Ed.), *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, New York 1996, pp. 135–138.

⁸⁷ *Les Révolutions de Paris*, No. 213.

⁸⁸ *Collection complète des lois, décrets, ordonnances, règlements, et avis du Conseil d'Etat*, Vol. 6, Paris 1834, p. 262, <http://books.google.cz/books?id=SUcUAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl>, [2014-04-07].

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 266.

However, the breaking point came when the perfect ideas were abused and distorted by “cruel monsters” ignoring all the basic principles which the Revolution proclaimed from the beginning⁹¹ and which were embodied in *the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*. The Jacobins became a symbol of terror. “*But what eternal regrets must the lovers of Liberty feel, that her cause should have fallen into the hands of monsters ignorant of her charms, by whom she has been transformed into a Fury, who, brandishing her snake like whips and torches, has enlarged the limits of wickedness, and driven us back into regions of guilt hitherto unknown!*”⁹² Williams had to recognize that the very act of violence which was an integral part of the Revolution and which culminated in a period of terror couldn’t be erased from history. The question was how to approach this problem. The only possible way was the defence of the principles of liberty, which in themselves were clean and moral. It was human errors and ambitions in the proceedings which defiled the ideas of Revolution and stigmatized liberty for many contemporaries. The Jacobins didn’t only abuse their power but also the notions of liberty and brotherhood which they liked to use in the National Convention, in their clubs and in popular societies. The Revolution, whose most talented men were sent to the scaffold, degenerated into the power of these men. Williams admitted that nothing could erase the stain of blood on the face of liberty. “*No crimes have exceeded those which the tyrant and the fanatic have committed in the name of Freedom [...]*”⁹³

Even from this episode of revolutionary terror Williams was able to profit something in favour of the French nation. She hoped that the French people learned from these perverse events and that they would never let oppression on anyone. She believed that after these experiences they would recognize the tyrant from the virtuous man and that they would forever remain vigilant to preserve freedom. “*The guilty commune of Paris exists no longer; the den of the Jacobins is closed; and the whole nation roused into a sense of danger by the terrible lesson it has been taught can be oppressed no more.*”⁹⁴ Williams emphasized that in France scarcely existed a family or an individual who wouldn’t lose friends or family members during the terror “*who seems from the grave to call upon them with a warning voice to watch over the liberties of their country*”.⁹⁵ Williams also hoped that the unfortunate French events would be an instructive lesson “*to future ages and to those countries which are destined to labour through revolutions*”.⁹⁶ After Thermidor Williams noted, that the French could finally again proceed to the altar of freedom with confidence and with hope for a new beginning. Hideous spectres of terror forever disappeared and a delicious fragrance of incense would again rise to heaven.⁹⁷ Thus poetically Williams expressed her faith in a remedy of human character. In her work she expressed indignation over a lack of principles of some revolutionaries such as Bertrand Barère. But opportunism was often only the result of fear of life and worry over the fate of loved ones. Express of dissatisfaction was equal to

91 WILLIAMS, *Letters Containing a Sketch*, p. 211.

92 Ibidem, p. 212.

93 Ibidem, p. 257.

94 Ibidem, p. 258.

95 Ibidem.

96 Ibidem, p. 213.

97 Ibidem, p. 214.

the death sentence. Despite the fact, Williams condemned these people as immoral and without conscience because her friends gave their lives for freedom. She was outraged when she saw “people who were called to liberty, bending their necks, like the votaries of the storied assassin of the mountain [faction La Montagne — J. B.] at the nod of their tyrant [...] to see a nation which possessed Rousseau, Mably and Voltaire, prostrate in frantic enthusiasm before the shrine of Marat, like the idolaters [...] whose devotion rose in proportion to the hideousness of their gods.”⁹⁸ Williams believed that history would judge between Brissot and Robespierre, between the Gironde and the Mountain. “History will not confound those sanguinary and ambitious men who passed along the revolutionary horizon like baneful meteors, spreading destruction in their course [...]”⁹⁹

Although Williams tried to justify the violent character of the Revolution and emphasized the purity of its original ideas, many contemporaries were sceptical. “It appears, indeed, that the only crime which the French have been guilty of, in the eyes of this female Republican writer is the violation of the Majesty of the People and their Representatives.”¹⁰⁰ Thus the *Gentleman’s Magazine* which was always an uncompromising critic of the revolutionary events, commented on Williams’s defence of the Revolution. About her mourning for the victims of the terror, the magazine alleged that it was only ridiculous sensitivity because in the case of the fate of Marie Antoinette she didn’t express any regret.¹⁰¹ The magazine showed no sign of understanding for Williams’ defence of the Revolution. “In short, the whole of this little work, as of all others which the same melancholy event has produced demonstrates that the French Revolution is a tissue of atrocious crimes, inconsistent follies, and unprecedented miseries [...]”¹⁰² According to the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, the French Revolution stood against humanity and religion.¹⁰³ A less critical attitude towards Williams was expressed by the *European Magazine*. Although it is also observed that Williams didn’t show any sorrow for the fate of the Queen. When Marie Antoinette was compared to infamous Roman women such as promiscuous Messalina and Agrippina who was accused of an incestuous relationship with her son Nero, Williams didn’t defend the unhappy Queen. She didn’t show any significant opposition to this nonsense and false accusation by which the Queen was accused of alleged sexual harassment of her son Louis. The main creator of this humiliating accusation was Hébert. The *European Magazine* blamed Williams mainly from her indifferent description concerning the fate of the Queen, which was so different from her other emotionally and passionately defended cases.¹⁰⁴ However, the magazine finished its assessment of Williams’s work fairly favourably. “Notwithstanding the contagion of her philosophical friends, the opinions of our fair Authoress appear uncontaminated where it is most important for them to be pure.”¹⁰⁵ The magazine apparently reacted to the Williams’ compassion for the victims of

98 Ibidem, p. 137.

99 Ibidem, p. 78.

100 *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 1795, p. 673.

101 Ibidem, pp. 672–673.

102 Ibidem, p. 673.

103 Ibidem.

104 *The European Magazine*, 1795, Vol. 29, p. 42.

105 Ibidem, p. 44.

terror and her sensitively retold stories of the fates of known but also of unknown people.

For the rest of her life Williams remained faithful to republican ideals and never returned to England where she was ostracized. In her native country she was depicted in traditional colours of criticism as ferocious fury, Amazon infected with the French disease. Great Britain was on the question of the status of women very conservative. This previously celebrated authoress suddenly became a condemnable woman because of her interest in politics, which was purely a male affair. Therefore she betrayed her gender and ultimately also her homeland.¹⁰⁶ Williams brought satisfaction neither to the government of Directory nor to Napoleon. She died emotionally broken and disappointed in Paris in December 1827.¹⁰⁷ Although the French Revolution was hit by terror, this breakthrough event affected her life and she never turned away from its civic ideals and principles.

ABSTRACT

The French Revolution had in that time fundamental importance and affected by different intensity also ideological developments in other European countries including the United Kingdom. Helen Maria Williams was known in England as a popular English poet and romantic writer. As well as many foreign admirers of Revolution also Williams left her native country under the influence of French Revolution events. In Paris she immediately succumbed to the Federation Festival charm. Williams's almost uncritical revolutionary idealism remained until the time when *The Mountain* (La Montagne) was established and its terror started to dominate the Revolution. From 1790 to 1796 Williams published eight volumes of *Letters from France* and in this way she informed the British public about revolutionary events. Williams's *Letters* are also an important source of information needed for understanding her relationship to the revolutionary events. In my article I will focus not only on some of her views on the Revolution but I will also deal with the reaction of British press to her *Letters*. The important part of this article will be the question of women's rights because Williams devoted a large part of her work just the fate of women during the Revolution.

KEYWORDS

Helen Maria Williams; the French Revolution; the Rights of Women; the Festival of the Federation; the September Massacres

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¹⁰⁶ BLAKEMORE, *Revolution and the French Disease*, pp. 673–691.

¹⁰⁷ BLAKEMORE, *Crisis in Representations*, p. 162.