

# *The Female Novelists of the Emigration of the French Revolution: Presentation of a Literary Scene*

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**ABSTRACT:** The novels of emigration during the French Revolution written by female authors such as Stéphanie de Genlis, Adélaïde de Souza, Isabelle de Charrière, and Claire de Duras constitute a corpus that highlights the notion of hospitality and broadens the scope of its meanings. This article argues that the link between emigration and hospitality is a choice related, among other things, to the female authors' condition in the literary field of their time—i.e., their struggle for professional recognition is an institutional fact determining in many ways their writing choices and practices. It explains, among other things, the critical sensitivity of the multiple aspects of hospitality as it is deployed in the novels of emigration written by women. The term of “literary scene,” borrowed from Judith Schlanger, considers the corpus presented here as a historical scenario impacting the “situations of speech,” and therefore it contributes by identifying the thematic and narrative specificity of a “local” corpus and reflecting on a more global literary phenomenon. By circumscribing a particular literary framework, this article explores the convergence points between the émigré condition and the importance of the environmental qualities of hospitality in the fiction of the female author at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. Thus, it aims to shed light on the specificity of emigration novels written by women.

## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE NOVELS OF EMIGRATION DURING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION written by female authors such as Stéphanie de Genlis, Adélaïde de Souza, Isabelle de Charrière, and Claire de Duras constitute a corpus that highlights the notion of hospitality and broadens the scope of its meanings. Those female authors who lived through the revolutionary years in exile chose to write about emigration and linked this experience to the notion of hospitality. This choice seems to relate, among other things, to their condition as writers in the literary field of their time.

The history of female authors between 1785 and 1825 is the history of a struggle for the recognition of their literary activity, a history that speaks of a double effort, that of overcoming the representations that value the natural singularity of the woman, notably maternity, without necessarily opposing them or even adhering to them.<sup>1</sup> By insisting, as Rousseau does, on the difference of the sexes, the place assigned to women as women, and the qualities they must maintain and improve in the name of nature, the philosopher can “put at a distance” the woman who is obliged “not to leave herself, her sex, to imitate the other sex,” as Sarah Kofman remarks.<sup>2</sup> Plunged into a climate of hostility aggravated by Napoleonic misogyny, the female authors are perceived as agents of transgression by the mere act of writing. They set themselves up in one way or another against the patriarchal, hierarchical order, which belittles and tries to silence them. These tensions inevitably act on their stances concerning their literary activity and imply writing choices.<sup>3</sup> In this context of struggle, it seems no coincidence that the exacerbated sensitivity of one who finds herself rejected and despised as a female author cannot but be interested in the forms of welcome given to the exile. In so doing, she works to broaden the perspectives of a notion so present at the time in political and philosophical discourse.

Proposing a limited corpus of novels composed of works written by women who belong to a similar cultural and linguistic milieu and have experienced emigration and exile in the sole context of the French Revolution is a challenge in the context of an issue devoted to David Damrosch’s book, *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age*. However, this challenge corresponds to the inclusive approach that characterizes *Comparing the Literatures*. As the subtitle indicates, David Damrosch admits from the outset that several methodological perspectives account for how *literatures* circulate worldwide. To compare, he writes, does not always require crossing

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<sup>1</sup> Geneviève Fraisse, *Muse de la raison. Démocratie et exclusion des femmes en France* [Muse of reason: Democracy and exclusion of women in France] (Paris: Gallimard, 1995); Christine Planté, *La Petite sœur de Balzac. Essai sur la femme auteur* [The little sister of Balzac: An essay on the female author] (Lyon, France: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2015); Linda Timmermans, *L'accès des femmes à la culture sous l'Ancien Régime* [Women’s access to culture under the ancien régime] (Paris: Champion, 2005); Huguette Krief, *Vivre libre et écrire. Anthologie des romancières de la période révolutionnaire (1789–1800)* [Living free and writing: Anthology of women novelists of the revolutionary period] (Paris: Voltaire Foundation and PUPS, 2005); Martine Reid, *Des Femmes en littérature* [Women in literature] (Paris: Belin, 2010); Adeline Gargam, *Les Femmes savantes, lettrées et cultivées dans la littérature française des Lumières ou la conquête d'une légitimité (1690–1804)* [Learned ladies, erudite and cultivated in the French enlightenment literature or the conquest of legitimacy (1690–1804)] (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Kofman, *Le Respect des femmes (Kant et Rousseau)* [Respect for women (Kant and Rousseau)], (Paris: Galilée, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> One will recall on this subject the study of the novels of Madame de Duras by Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, “Condition féminine et impuissance sociale: Les romans de la duchesse de Duras,” *Romantisme* 63 (1989): 39–50, and in particular the following passage: “The evil from which the protagonists of Mrs. de Duras suffer seems to us to be the culpabilizing, paralyzing and mortifying internalization of the condition of the ‘colonized’ that the prejudices of a society assigned to her,” 46.

geographical and linguistic borders: “For many of us today, comparison begins at home.”<sup>4</sup> To consider the plurality of literatures and to try to apprehend it broadly, it is necessary to study the relations woven between literary creation and its framework of reference and activity, its local anchorage. In this perspective, Judith Schlanger highlights in an article entitled “Literary Scenes” the theoretical weaknesses of René Étiemble’s *Essais de littérature (vraiment) Générale*. In contrast to the principle of omniscience—to know everything, to encompass everything—that presides in Étiemble’s essay, she prefers to defend the idea of a plurality of literatures. She writes:

The literature does not appear then as the accumulation and deposit of the literary works, as an enormous and inert corpus, as a museum. It seems a highly voluntary activity played out in multiple local scenes, according to concrete situations, through environments charged with desires, disputes, and awareness of obstacles and objectives. Moreover, these speech situations (historical, political, sociological, ideological, ideal, or traditional) can become an object of proper study. Much better than the books, authors, or genres, the literary scenes are considered in their scenarios and history, which can become the units of meaning.<sup>5</sup>

Considering the corpus presented here as a historical scenario impacting the “situations of speech,” I aim to show how the struggle for professional recognition of these women, whose right to speak in the public arena was denied, is an institutional fact determining their writing choices and practices. It is a question of circumscribing a particular literary framework, that of novels of emigration that reveal the impact of exile on a vision of the world that changes, evolves, and progresses. Through situations of welcome and encounter, the fictional narratives present both the idea of opening up to new horizons, emancipation, and solidarity, on one hand, and the painful experience of alienation, the exacerbation of identities, and the withdrawal into oneself on the other. In this sense, I borrow the term “literary scene” from Judith Schlanger. If my investigation remains “local,” it is, however, carried by a movement that opens toward the outside. The novels of emigration, and, more particularly, those written by female authors, privilege, through the theme of hospitality, an anxious questioning of the possibilities of a “living together,” a recurrent term today that Paul Ricoeur defines “as the putting together of the act and the art of inhabiting.” The philosopher continues: “I insist on the word ‘inhabiting’: it is the way of humanly occupying the surface of the earth. It is to live together.”<sup>6</sup> For these novelists, I would suggest hospitality is not only a matter of crossing borders and taking refuge. The constraints imposed on both hosts and guests provide the basis of hospitality. Despite the often-painful circumstances that cause it, emigration offers a horizon of new possibilities.

<sup>4</sup> David Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Schlanger, «Les scènes littéraires,» in *Où est la littérature mondiale?* [Where is the world literature?], ed. Christophe Pradeau and Tiphaine Samoyault (Saint-Denis, France: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2005), 93: «La littérature ne se présente pas alors comme l’accumulation et le dépôt des œuvres littéraires, comme un corpus énorme et inerte, comme un musée. Elle apparaît plutôt comme une activité extrêmement volontaire qui se joue dans de multiples scènes locales, en fonction des situations concrètes, à travers des milieux chargés de désirs, de contentieux, de conscience d’obstacles et d’objectifs. Et ce sont ces situations de parole (situations historiques, politiques, sociologiques, idéologiques, idéales ou traditionnelles) qui peuvent devenir un objet d’étude propre. Bien mieux que les œuvres, les auteurs ou les genres, ce sont les scènes littéraires, considérées dans leurs scénarios et dans leur histoire, qui peuvent devenir les unités de sens.»

<sup>6</sup> Paul Ricoeur, «Étranger, moi-même» [Stranger, myself] (lecture, Semaines sociales de France, L’Immigration, défis et richesses [Immigration, challenges and riches], 1997,) <https://www.ssf-fr.org/articles/54123-etranger-moi-meme>.

Furthermore, these rules nourish and change the relationships between those who host and those who come from elsewhere. Leaving and abandoning one's usual points of reference for a foreign place, often threatening but potentially rich in surprises, allows one to free oneself from the constraining and demeaning prejudices of a patriarchal society and to build a more relaxed way of life—or at least one that is different from what one knows. Exile invites new encounters, encourages openness to the unknown, and offers a recognition of the other that renews and redefines self-knowledge.<sup>7</sup> It is recognizing and welcoming.

Indeed, the authors I introduce have neither the political and philosophical scope nor the prestige of Germaine de Staël. She is considered the “only woman in literary history to have played such a role while pursuing her work; she advocates not orthodoxy, but freedom of thought and diversity.”<sup>8</sup> The exceptional cosmopolitan character of the “Groupe de Coppet” embodies from 1792—the date of the exile of de Staël—“the European spirit,” to borrow the expression of Laetitia Saintes, herself quoting Stendhal.<sup>9</sup> De Staël's travels and interactions with strangers inspired novels such as *Delphine* (1802) and *Corinne* (1807). Her two pioneering theoretical works—*De la littérature*, published in 1800, and *De l'Allemagne*, written in 1810 but only published in 1813 in London—place her among the pioneering actors at the origins of comparative literature, a place Damrosch grants her in his book. Indeed, de Staël's female colleagues did not advocate the cosmopolitanism of de Stael, nor did they overturn the barriers that forbid access to the Republic of Letters. However, they did contribute to the emergence of novelistic literature in which different cultures and languages confront each other, judge each other, measure each other, and intertwine. Moreover, the literary adventure of these writers who knew other countries, languages, and literatures, and who took the floor at a given moment in history to tell the story of emigration and exile, has an impact that still resonates today in other adventures, those of feminism, as well as those of hospitality toward minorities or groups that face discrimination.

In this article, I will proceed as follows: first, I briefly outline the meanings of the notion of hospitality during the revolutionary era; next, I discuss the experience of exile lived by the female authors to contextualize the novels of emigration that I present here. In the restricted framework of an article, I will only dwell on one novel to illustrate my point. I propose therefore a more detailed reading of Isabelle de Charrière's 1793 novel, *Lettres trouvées dans des portefeuilles d'émigrés*. I aim to underline the place that the theme of hospitality occupies in these texts. To conclude, I propose considering this corpus's specific “literary scene,” to use Schlanger's term.

## HOSPITALITY: COSMOPOLITANISM VERSUS NATIONALISM

In 1795, when the end of hostilities between the coalition armies and the young French republic was in sight, Kant published *Zum Ewigen Frieden*. The date is not insignificant, according to René Schérer, who considers that Kant relies on the idea of the existence of peoples, of nation-states in the process of emerging, and, consequently, on the necessary tolerance for a peaceful

<sup>7</sup> This is what Paul Ricoeur says in *Parcours de la reconnaissance* [Path of recognition] (Paris: Stock, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Laetitia Saintes, «Germaine de Staël, Citoyenne du Monde: Le Cosmopolitisme dans l'Œuvre Staélienne» [Female citizen of the world: Cosmopolitanism in Staël's work], *Lumen* 38 (2019): 74, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1059273ar>. See also Simone Balayé and Jean-Daniel Candaux, ed., *Le Groupe de Coppet. Actes et documents du deuxième Colloque de Coppet. 10–13 July 1974* [The Coppet group: Proceedings and documents of the second Coppet colloquium] (Geneva: Slatkine/Champion, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> Saintes, «Germaine de Staël,» 75.

cohabitation on earth.<sup>10</sup> Kant places hospitality as the keystone of world peace and titles his third article, “The cosmopolitan right shall be limited to the conditions of universal hospitality.”<sup>11</sup> However, this universal principle has its limits in practice, as the rest of the article shows. The principle of hospitality essentially consists of granting a right of a visit to foreigners on the condition that they behave peacefully and accept the host country’s rules.

The universal dimension of Kantian hospitality echoes the 1789 declaration of the natural rights of man and citizen. For a defender of individual liberties like Nicolas de Condorcet, war should not revoke the right to asylum. On December 29, 1791, he declared, “The land of France belongs to liberty, and the law of equality must be universal there.”<sup>12</sup> However, if the declaration corresponded to the young republic’s values, the historical events led to the revolutionaries’ radicalization and the Reign of Terror during 1792–94. A summary but effective division between those who adopt the republican ideals, the patriots, and those who oppose them, the traitors, reveals the political tensions Kant recorded in his project of universal peace.

Accused of treason, the noble émigrés ally with foreign powers to overthrow the revolutionaries and defend their actions by shifting the contract’s terms with the fatherland. The feelings of honor and respect they share for the monarchy in peril designate them not as traitors but, on the contrary, as authentic servants of the fatherland. The fatherland, they say, is not confused with the territory; it takes its meaning in “the meeting of the laws under which [we] once lived.”<sup>13</sup> The inward-looking effects of fears for the sovereignty of a nascent nation based on adherence to a shared set of beliefs and the counter-revolutionary discourses defining the notion of “homeland” reflect the rise of nationalism that Kant had foreseen even before it took off in the nineteenth century. The Revolution expanded the notion of citizenship to include residents of all ranks of society within a nation clearly defined by geographic boundaries. Simultaneously, it introduced the idea that citizenship’s legitimacy depends on the individual’s loyalty to the revolutionary government, as seen in a revolutionary thinker like Saint-Just.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, it significantly curtailed the right to asylum.

The political debate unfolds in the novels through the central theme of hospitality. How do the inhabitants of the host countries receive the migrants? How do the latter behave toward their hosts? Through the multiple representations of hospitality, opportunities for openness and solidarity emerge between individuals from different social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. On the other hand, hospitality failures almost always reflect a close relationship with the aristocrats’ refusal to accept the Revolution and their powerlessness in its face. From this denial emerges a narrow and limited conception of love and human relations, the corollary of a rigid identity that characterizes many aristocrats proud of their privileges and prerogatives. Through

<sup>10</sup> René Schérer, *Zeus hospitalier. Eloge de l’hospitalité* [Hospitable Zeus: Praise of hospitality] (Paris, La Table Ronde, 2005), 53.

<sup>11</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 82.

<sup>12</sup> Archives parlementaires [Parliamentary archives], volume 36, in Sophie Wahnich, *L’Impossible citoyen. L’étranger dans le discours de la Révolution française* [The Impossible citizen: The foreigner in the discourse of the French Revolution] (Paris: Albin Michel, 2010), 108.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted by Fernand Baldensperger, *Le Mouvement des idées dans l’émigration française; 1789–1815*, vol. 1 [The movement of ideas in French emigration, 1789–1815] (New York: B. Franklin, 1968), 299.

<sup>14</sup> See Marilyn Maeso, “Reforming the French People: The Creation of the Revolutionary Citizen and the Role of Institutions in the Works of Saint-Just,” *The French Revolution* 6 (2014), <https://journals.openedition.org/lrf/1093>.

the successes and failures of hospitality, female novelists of emigration thus inscribe the tensions of exile, between openness and closure, between inclusion and exclusion, and between cosmopolitanism and nationalism.

It is an intersubjective relationship of recognition that establishes a form of hospitality. Beyond the representation of individual welcome situations engaged in the plot's development within the framework of interactions between the protagonists of a novel, the interrelational dynamics recounted inscribe hospitality. What is at stake in the act of welcoming and being received is the reciprocity of an exchange that operates a change and does not leave one unscathed, a gesture of openness to the other allowing one to change one's personality. For it is not just a matter of opening one's door to the stranger but of making room for them as well, and therefore having to contain oneself and accommodate the changes of an initial arrangement. This movement, of course, also concerns the guest. It is also necessary to consider hospitality's protective dimension, which sociologist Joan Stavo-Debaugue defines as a "matter of the size of the environment, but also of the resistance and plasticity of the elements that make it up, which must be able to 'absorb' what arrives; knowing that those who arrive are sometimes in a flow, in a crowd, and a group, and therefore in strength."<sup>15</sup> The act of welcoming is not only a gesture of openness; it implies, at the same time, closure and a prohibition of entry to malicious or even potentially dangerous assailants. If the fictional émigrés remain, for the most part, travelers despite themselves who leave for the unknown, dependent on the welcome that their foreign hosts will be willing to give them, the various stagings of hospitality resonate with the political news.

### **EXILE IN LIFE AND THE NOVEL: BETWEEN CONFINEMENT AND OPENNESS**

Women who wrote emigration novels came mostly from the French aristocracy and went into exile during the last decade of the eighteenth century because of the revolutionary events. Stéphanie de Genlis, born in 1747 in a castle in Burgundy, was the first woman in charge of the children's education of the royal family in France. She fled France in 1792 and her husband was guillotined in 1793. During her eight years of exile in Switzerland, Germany, and England, she lived from her pen and returned to France in 1800. Abroad, she wrote dozens of unpublished texts, among which were manuals for learning English or German intended for French émigrés who did not know the language of their host country. She also published in 1798 a long epistolary novel entitled *Les petits émigrés*, which I will discuss later. Adélaïde de Souza is officially the daughter of a farmer-general and a noblewoman, but her origins remain doubtful. She lost both her biological parents at the age of six. She married the much older Count de Flahaut, who was later executed during the Revolution, while she emigrated to England with her son, Charles. We find her in Switzerland, then in Holland, and finally in Germany. She returned to France under the Directorate and married M. de Souza, a gentleman and diplomat from Portugal, in her second marriage. Adélaïde de Souza wrote novels during her exile in England to support herself. Her first work, *Adèle de Sénange*, published in 1794, became a bestseller. However, it was not until 1811 that she retrospectively wrote a novel on emigration, entitled, *Eugénie et Mathilde ou Mémoires de la famille du comte de Revel*. In this novel, she questioned the order of values established by the

<sup>15</sup> Joan Stavo-Debaugue, Martin Deleixhe, and Louise Carlier, "HospitalitéS. L'urgence politique et l'appauvrissement des concepts" [HospitalityS. Political urgency and the impoverishment of concepts], *SociologieS*, March 13, 2018, <http://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/6785>.



aristocracy through the critical analysis of complicated and often painful family relationships distorted by the external injunctions of a social order that had gone astray in many respects. Isabelle de Charrière, born in 1740 at the castle of Zuylen near Utrecht, daughter of a descendant of a wealthy merchant family of Antwerp and a father who was a baron and marshal, married Charles-Emmanuel de Charrière, a Swiss nobleman, in 1771. She spoke and wrote Dutch, English, French, Italian, and Latin, but wrote her literary work in French. Established in 1787 in Neuchâtel, she was at the crossroads of Europe and received news from all sides. Isabelle de Charrière offers us two novels of emigration, *Lettres trouvées dans des portefeuilles d'émigrés* (1793) and *Trois femmes* (1796), that formulate a strong political criticism of the French nobility and sketch the features of a project of female emancipation. Claire de Duras, born in 1777 to a Breton father, Admiral de Kersaint, a Girondin aristocrat guillotined in 1793 for opposing the king's execution, and a white Creole mother from Martinique, Claire d'Eragny, left for the United States during the Revolution. She then went to Martinique, returned to Europe via Switzerland, and settled in England in 1795 among the society of emigrant nobles. Once established in London, Claire de Duras learned English, Italian, and Latin. She married the Duke of Duras in 1797 and returned to France under the Empire. Wife of the first gentleman of the chamber, she lived during the Restoration in the high spheres of Parisian society. She held the most influential salon in Paris, rue de Varenne, during the reign of Louis XVIII, between 1816 and 1826. A close friendship bound Claire de Duras and the Prussian scholar Alexander von Humboldt, as evidenced by their recently published correspondence. Humboldt introduced to Goethe the books of de Duras, which the latter read with great interest. Humboldt charmed his interlocutors far beyond the circle of scholars, and the American painter Charles Willson Peale described him thus in society: "Humboldt possesses a surprising volubility of speech, it is amusing to hear him speak English, French, and Spanish and combine these languages in his rapid speech." With de Duras and his no less illustrious friend, Chateaubriand, he found a friendly and intellectually tolerant space that went beyond the French or Prussian point of view. They spoke, in the words of Humboldt, "the European!" Humboldt was in no hurry to return home, not only for professional reasons but also for personal reasons related to his love for the French language in which he wrote his works and for the tacit freedom of morals that allowed him to live his homosexuality more peacefully. Finally, the friendship between de Duras and Humboldt sheds light in many ways on the personality of a novelist who chooses as heroes and heroines of her novels downgraded characters who cannot adapt to the expectations of a rigid and inflexible entourage. She wrote, in this context, *Olivier ou le Secret*, which implicitly deals with the homosexuality of the eponymous character and his inability to live this otherness that he deplors. She also wrote *Ourika*, the story of a young black woman raised with love by an aristocrat but whose destiny is plagued by the double gesture of inclusion and exclusion of French high society toward her.

From this very varied corpus, the essential idea emerges that the experience of emigration and exile cannot be lived in the same way by men and women whose gender determines their social and cultural status. Insofar as the women of the French aristocracy are subject to a system of values, rules, and constraints that often contrast with those that frame the lives of male aristocrats and define their ethos as noblemen, the overthrow of the ancien régime acts differently on women. As the only historical example of this sexual distinction, I will take the constitution of the counter-revolutionary armies of the princes, the brothers, and cousins of King Louis XVI. It is a bellicose reaction with multiple motivations that I will not present here. However, whatever

the reasons that pushed the nobles to fight against their own people, this choice corresponds in many ways to the chivalric ethos of the noble. This presence of the emigrant knight-goes-to-war, which appears in most emigration novels, including those written by female authors, is central to the male authors' novels. The best-known example is *L'émigré* (1797), a novel considered by literary critics to be the best of its kind, written by a man, Sénac de Meilhan. The hero, the Marquis de Saint Alban, is an emigrant who fights for his king; wounded, he is welcomed and cared for by a family of German nobility. He falls in love with the tender Countess of Loewenstein, but even as their union becomes possible, he returns to fight, is taken prisoner, and ends his life to avoid being beheaded. Sénac de Meilhan perfectly fills the boxes of the sentimental novel, the historical novel, and the metafictional reflection. Unlike Sénac de Meilhan, the female novelists prefer to approach the space of fiction to explore the heroines' subjectivity as they wonder how to reorganize themselves in a foreign country, adapt to strange customs, and reorient themselves in a world that overturned its order. In other words, the points of focus in the novels of emigration written by women are in the dynamic relationships and relations built between characters. A close reading of the novels mentioned above confirms this suggestion.

Throughout a long career, de Genlis wrote an impressive number of educational essays, plays, successful novels, historical short stories, and political texts, such as the pamphlet in defense of hospitality, *Discourse on Luxury and Hospitality Considered in their Relations to Mores and National Education*, published in 1791. In this short essay, she strives to put hospitality at the heart of revolutionaries' education and social reforms for the sake of diplomacy, economics, and peace. She defends the idea that the practice of hospitality is both a traditional virtue for society's good and a pedagogical means for developing an interest in others in children. When she wrote *Les petits émigrés*, she used the epistolary form to depict several aristocratic families' emigration, allowing her to multiply the points of view. It is a program of life as complete as possible that de Genlis develops through her novel. A plurality of stories of emigration and experiences of exile compose a work where the great voices shatter the idea of homogeneity of the nobility. From different generations, political positions, destinies, and scattered aristocratic families, who found refuge in the countries bordering the "Hexagon" (France), the characters tell of their peregrinations, setbacks, and worries. The Armilly family, the Ermont family, the Boissière family, Lord Arthur Selby, and many others meet and cross paths, form alliances, and separate; they experience reversals of situations that force them to disguise themselves and change addresses and identities. By developing a whole program of life in exile, Genlis transforms the painful experience of uprooting, separation, and precariousness into an experience of training, learning, and emancipation.

Another emigration novel, *Eugenie et Mathilde*, by Adélaïde de Souza, tells the story of the movements of the family of the comte de Revel, forced to emigrate. The protagonists settle in Brussels, then in The Hague, and finally on the Baltic's shores at the end of their resources. This novel focuses primarily on the family unit functioning before and during the emigration. The ordeals the Revels go through reveal the deficiencies of the aristocratic family model and the damage caused by the parents' mistakes, such as the decision to entrust the education of their eldest daughter, Ernestine, to the maternal grandmother or the decision to place their youngest daughter, Eugénie, in a convent from her early childhood and finally to force her to take monastic vows. The political unrest that forced the family to live under the same roof for the first time fueled tensions and caused permanent friction. The Revolution, which destabilized the country,



had repercussions within the family circle, which was itself destabilized, thus revealing the flaws in its previous functioning.

Another form of complexity appears in a short novel by Claire de Duras, which places for the first time in the history of romance literature a heroine of African origin, a “negro”; it is *Ourika*, a novel published in 1823. Ourika was torn from her native land when she was just a baby and was taken in and raised with love by the Marquise de B\*\*\*, who gave her the education she would have given to her daughter. Ourika had the exceptional opportunity to develop her talents, and she had many. Until age fifteen, she felt pampered, admired, protected, and happy. However, when she becomes aware of her racial otherness through the representative of the social order, who reminds the marquise of her duties and class obligations, Ourika realizes that what has made her happy is also making her unhappy. Given her culture and knowledge and her talents’ development, she is condemned to be accepted nowhere and by no one. Apart from the reflection provoked that the combination of good faith and total indifference in the blind marquise to the complex destiny of her adopted daughter, it is captivating to wonder about Ourika’s reaction: Who does not feel a sense of rebellion toward this society that rejects her? Suppose the Revolution that appears in the novel’s background makes her hope for a moment for a change of racial paradigm? In this case, she nevertheless consents to the coercive norms to which she would have happily submitted if only she were not Black or had remained unaware of her otherness.

The novel *Lettres trouvées dans des portefeuilles d’émigrés* by Isabelle de Charrière offers a variety of situations that illustrate the richness of the notion of hospitality and, more particularly, its political dimension. The novel tells the story of Germaine, a young émigré who lives in London with a distant relative, the Duchess of\*\*\*. The heroine describes in letters to her fiancé, Alphonse, her life in London among the French émigrés. She expresses her love and concern about her father’s reluctance toward Alphonse, whose political convictions do not match his. Alphonse, who wishes to solve the conflict rather than fight against his people, is reluctant to join Condé’s warlike army, as Germaine’s father would have hoped. Although the novel is mainly devoted to the exchange of ideas concerning the Revolution’s reasons and consequences, the rise of violence leading to anarchy and chaos, and the choices to take to ease the tensions between the opposing political camps, the epistolary exchanges often evoke the virtue of hospitality, defined as kindness, affability, and attention to the other. These exchanges also evoke the social—even political—consequences of inhospitable behavior such as elitism and self-centeredness on the side of the French émigrés.

Living in London with the Duchess of\*\*\*, a wealthy émigré and distant relative of her father, Germaine criticizes in her letters the reprehensible behavior of this relative, who leads an ostentatious lifestyle hardly appropriate to her emigrant status. During social evenings at the duchess’s house, French émigrés rub shoulders with their English peers without really knowing each other. Germaine, for example, witnesses a scene where the hostess mocks a lord who speaks poor French, embarrassing him and even ridiculing him to better entertain her émigré friends. To amuse oneself at the expense of the other is an art of persiflage well known in the Parisian libertine salons. Still, it is little appreciated in England, especially in these troubled times, as shown by the words of Lady Caroline, an English noblewoman, who says she is disappointed by the frivolous behavior of the French émigrés:

Humanity and pity drew me to your Duchess; I thought that a woman far from her husband, her parents, her country, whose rank and fortune were annihilated, was a woman to be pitied

and that she could not be too welcome in the country where she was seeking asylum. The first visit I made to her left me with all my impressions, but without you and the pleasure I took in seeing you, the second would have been the last.<sup>16</sup>

Similar remarks are made by another character in the novel, the abbé de \*\*\*, who writes to Alphonse, his young protégé:

Isn't it distressing to see these unfortunate Frenchmen compromising themselves in the minds of foreigners by their frivolity, indiscretions, nasty gossip! One will believe them incorrigible, and who will cry over people to whom misfortune does not give a moment of circumspection, over this nobility which requires that one respects it, shows itself without dignity, generosity, or anything which could make it respectable! Between them, the individuals tear, vilify themselves, and then claim they must be honored in mass. What then is this dignity of a body that is not composed of the grace of its members [...]<sup>17</sup>

The question of hospitality lies at the heart of the epistolary exchanges, which express the concerns of the protagonists aware of the political frictions. Through her letter writers, Isabelle de Charrière observes how the principle of honor, which characterizes the identity of the nobility, was perverted and emptied of its ethical value well before the Revolution. As a result of this moral degradation, openness, empathy, and concern for others were compromised, causing deep divisions within the nobility itself. Germaine, who reports Lady Caroline's words, and the abbé de \*\*\* in his letter both draw attention to the causal link between the selfishness of the privileged class and the people's uprising. In short, hospitality is a way of life that determines a world vision. In this sense, the political issues are intertwined with a reflection on the attitude of rude émigrés.

The notion of hospitality expands when émigrés become aware of their mistakes during their exile and seek to correct them. By adapting to their new situation, they gain a deeper understanding of the other, which leads to a form of redemption. This is the case of the Vicomte des Fosses, another émigré character in the novel. Wishing to disprove his reputation as a licentious French libertine to win the love of Lady Caroline, he first withdraws from the company of his compatriots. He goes to live in the countryside, where he undergoes a period of learning about hospitality that transforms him. He tears himself away from the social world he had always known and chooses a retreat to get to know others. He seeks the hospitality of the Catholic priest of a village in the "Herford-Shire valley," respecting the principle of reciprocity necessary for living together in good faith. In asking for lodging, he proposes an agreement that the host

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<sup>16</sup> Isabelle de Charrière, *Lettres trouvées dans des portefeuilles d'émigrés* [Letters found in wallets of émigrés] (Paris: Côté-femmes éditions, 1993), 72 (first published 1793). "L'humanité, la pitié m'attirèrent chez votre duchesse; je crus qu'une femme éloignée de son mari, de ses parents, de sa patrie, dont le rang et la fortune s'anéantissaient, était une femme fort à plaindre et qu'on ne pouvait trop l'accueillir dans le pays où elle cherchait un asile. La première visite que je lui fis me laissa toutes mes impressions; mais sans vous et le plaisir que je pris à vous voir, la seconde aurait été la dernière."

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 58: "N'est-il pas désolant de voir ces malheureux Français se compromettre dans l'esprit des étrangers par leur frivolité, leurs indiscretions, leur méchant commérage! On va les croire incorrigibles; et qu'est-ce qui pleurera sur des gens à qui l'infortune ne donne pas un instant de circumspection, sur cette noblesse qui exigeant qu'on la respecte, se montre sans dignité, sans générosité, sans rien de ce qui pourrait la rendre respectable! Entre eux, les individus se déchirent, se vilipendent, et puis ils prétendent qu'en masse ils doivent être honorés. Qu'est-ce donc que cette dignité d'un corps qui ne se compose pas de la dignité de ses membres?"

and his guest explicitly define. To stay in the priest's house with his servant, what can he give in return? Here is an extract from his story:

Then I went forward with my three or four words of bad English, and the master of the house having approached, it happened that we were at the house of the village priest who, half French, half Latin, offered me hospitality very honestly. I had a good supper and slept even better. The next day, after considering my host, his house, and his children and having informed myself a little about how everything is done here, I asked if they could keep us there and proposed the conditions of the agreement I wished to make. My host asked for three days to think about it, and at the end of these three days, it was concluded that La Flèche and I would earn our food and lodging here through our work. La Flèche's work consists of planting, sowing, pruning when the weather is good, cutting wood when it rains, and doing all the cartwright that is needed, which is precious because, before La Flèche (a very good cartwright), they had to go quite far to mend carts and plows. As for me, I help to do everything in the garden and the meadow; besides that, I teach French, mathematics, and drawing to the two sons of the parish priest, pretty children thirteen and fifteen years old.<sup>18</sup>

The moral redemption of the young libertine takes place thanks to the establishment of a contract of hospitality based on a reciprocity principle that goes far beyond the utilitarian dimension of a dwelling for which one pays rent. The Christian call to practice hospitality by sharing resources and needs is combined here with a more secular conception of hospitality based not only on pecuniary reciprocity but, above all, on the idea that hospitality leads to openness to the other and oneself. Both parties get to know each other through studying their respective languages, sharing daily tasks, and having conversations. Moreover, the hospitality experience makes the viscount aware of the egalitarian dimension of work that abolishes the differences between him and his servant, La Flèche. He writes on this subject: "His master . . . It is he who does not want to cease calling me thus, although it is rather ridiculous, when we both work, for others, with the same works."<sup>19</sup> The typical fate that binds the émigré and his servant in the face of the revolutionary events changes the traditional hierarchical relations, as the viscount notes: "Farewell to my ties and their indispensable breadth; I am no longer suffocating dressed in a ton of muslin."<sup>20</sup> Finally, learning the language of the other is considered a strong gesture of opening, insofar as it is built in and by a principle of reciprocity. Speaking the host's speech, that of the inviter, and that

<sup>18</sup> De Charrière, *Lettres trouvées*, 85–86. "Alors je m'avançai avec mes trois ou quatre mots de mauvais anglais et le maître de la maison s'étant rapproché, il se trouva que nous étions chez le Curé du village qui, moitié français, moitié latin, m'offrit fort honnêtement l'hospitalité. Je soupai bien et dormis encore mieux, et le lendemain, après avoir considéré mon hôte, sa maison, ses enfants, et m'être un peu informé de la manière dont tout se passe ici, je priai qu'on voulût bien nous y garder, et proposai les conditions du traité que je désirais de faire. Mon hôte demanda trois jours pour y penser, et au bout de ces trois jours il a été conclu que La Flèche et moi gagnerions ici notre nourriture et notre logement par notre travail. Celui de La Flèche consiste à planter, semer, émonder, quand il fait beau temps, à couper du bois quand il pleut, à faire tout le charronnage dont on a besoin; ce qui est précieux; car avant qu'on eût La Flèche, (très bon charron) il fallait aller assez loin pour raccommo-der les charriots et les charrues. Quant à moi, j'aide à faire tout ce qui se fait au jardin et au pré; mais outre cela je donne des leçons de français, de mathématiques et de dessin aux deux fils du curé, jolis enfants de treize et quinze ans."

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 87. "Son maître . . . C'est lui qui ne veut pas cesser de m'appeler ainsi, quoique cela soit assez ridicule, lorsque nous travaillons tous deux, pour autrui, aux mêmes ouvrages."

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. "Adieu mes cravates et leur indispensable ampleur; je ne suffoque plus à grands frais dans trois aunes de mousseline."

of the guest favors conviviality and testifies to a sincere desire for communication and mutual understanding. This is also the case of Germaine, who studies English to escape the duchess's negative company and get closer to Lady Caroline, a character who opens up new horizons to her.

Isabelle de Charriere's contribution to the theme of hospitality unfolds in this novel between the political dimension of a privileged class whose identity is going through a crisis with irreversible consequences and the individual dimension of people characterized by an openness to the other. She presents hospitality as a condition for social, emotional, or cultural recognition.

## CONCLUSION

The female authors I present here subtly scrutinize the experience of emigration to draw out the importance of the environmental qualities of hospitality. Because emigration blurs the traditionally agreed-upon frameworks and norms of conduct, the emigrant character is confronted with the need to act autonomously in the private and public space she occupies with others. Some novels unfold plots along which a process of awareness, empowerment, and moral change toward an ethic of care and solidarity develops. The novelists who describe the arrogance, condescension, and rudeness of émigrés with little respect for the laws of hospitality—these “bad guests”—highlight the consequences of malicious behavior not only in terms of the circumstantial interactions of the plot but also in terms of a more general reflection on the political and cultural repercussions of a refusal to reevaluate the system of the old regime in the light of revolutionary events.

The points of convergence between the émigré condition and that of the female author at the turn of the century shed light on the specificity of emigration novels written by women. We find a more objective approach that complicates the controversy around the image of the émigré and the values he embodies.<sup>21</sup> The brief biographies presented here testify to the marginal position of women in the literary field and the impact of the historical context and their experiences during emigration. We also observe modes of behavior that are more attentive to the other—to the unknown—and we note a recurrent desire among the characters to know, understand, and share communications. These factors, among many others, provoke, both collectively and individually, an identity crisis that invites women to recount the exile through fiction.

To conclude, by choosing to study a “local” corpus, a “literary scene,” I want not only to identify its thematic and narrative specificity but also to reflect on a more global literary phenomenon. It is vital to think about the novel writing of emigration by female authors in comparison to their male colleagues by formulating the hypothesis that the experience of emigration changes according to gender. It is equally significant to consider the interest in the theme of hospitality by these women concerning the struggle they are waging for recognition and a benevolent welcome in the field of their artistic activity. A

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<sup>21</sup> Istvan Cseppentő, “Les Romans de l’émigration au féminin” [Female emigration novels], in *Destins romanesques de l’émigration*, [Romantic destinies of the emigration], ed. Claire Jacquier, Florence Lotterie, and Catriona Seth (Paris: Desjonquères, 2007), 270–86.