



Accursed Politics: Some French Women Writers and Political Life, 1715-1850

Renee Winegarten

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Accursed Politics? a potent phrase used by one of Jean Jacques Rousseau's female characters? probes the intriguingly subtle equivocations revealed by six highly gifted and fascinating French women writers who were deeply involved in the political life of their day. Ostensibly denied any public political role, they paid lip service to the conventional pieties and went their own way. Their activities, as elegantly described by Renee Winegarten, ranged widely through the political spectrum. "Scandalous" Alexandrine de Tencin, former nun and popular novelist, enjoyed promoting her brother's political career while criticizing the monarchy of the ancien régime. Manon Roland, fascinated with politics from girlhood, a revolutionary of the first hour, shared in her husband's Girondin ministry and left important memoirs. Claire de Duras, loyal but tormented liberal royalist and author of far-seeing novels, worked tirelessly to serve the political career of her friend Chateaubriand. Félicité de Genlis, famed novelist and educationist, onetime lover of Philippe Egalité and tutor to his son, Louis Philippe, moved from revolutionary commitment to conservatism. Germaine de Staël, born into politics, was not only an influential novelist but a political thinker, one of the founders of political liberalism in France. And George Sand, whose controversial novels raised the consciousness of women and helped change their status, was long preoccupied with politics; she worked on the extreme left and called herself a communist. In *Accursed Politics*, Ms. Winegarten brings these absorbing women to life in a piece of history that has considerable resonance for our own time.

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