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Sarah Pogson's *The Female Enthusiast* (1807) and American Republican Virtue

Sarah Pogson's five-act romantic tragedy dramatizes the story of Charlotte Corday's arrest and execution for the murder of Jean Paul Marat.¹ Romantic in style, replete with melodramatic conventions and abounding in stilted language, the play focuses upon a highly controversial historical moment of the French Revolution and an equally controversial historical figure. Although there is little evidence that Pogson's play was ever produced and rather contradictory assumptions by contemporary scholars,² it has been tempting to explore its dramatic merit and political significance at a time when the American nation was struggling to define and secure its identity both internally and externally.

As the event of Marat's assassination was receiving widespread attention in Europe and the United States, accounts about Corday appeared in profusion registering a wealth of primarily conflicting responses in media and art, while in most cases blending reality with imagination. Corday's murderous act underlined the already existing socio-political conflicts, brought about by the age of democratic revolutions, and added to the general sense of insecurity and anxiety at the rapid and somewhat unpredictable social changes on an international level. The very nature of Corday's crime—political and violent—caused a lot of discomfort both in Europe and the United States as it challenged deep-rooted notions of gender

1 Very little is known about Pogson's life. For more information, see Kritzer 18–20. See also Pogson's entry in Mainiero, ed., *American Women Writers*. Pogson is credited with three more plays, beside *The Female Enthusiast*, which were published in *Essays Religious, Moral, Dramatic, and Poetical* (1818). The plays are: *The Young Carolinians*, *The Orphans*, and *The Tyrant's Victims*. For an analysis of *The Young Carolinians*, see Sarah Ford.

2 In her collection of early American women's plays, Amelia Kritzer claims that *The Female Enthusiast* might have been produced at Charleston Theater under the management of Alexander Placide, while Charles Watson's earlier study on Charleston dramatists suggests that the play's "anti-French" sentiments would have disqualified it from reaching the stage (33). Watson suggests that Alexander Placide, "an enthusiastic Republican," would have been against the production of Pogson's drama because of his own pro-French sentiments (26–27).

and politics. In France, representations of Corday followed the political lines of the time and framed a rather contradictory image of her. For the Girondins, she was a heroine of admirable determination, an angel of justice, while for the Jacobins, Corday's murderous act was the product of an aberrant femininity and monstrous sexuality.³

However, while anti-Jacobin accounts were quick to restore Corday's femininity and refute all claims to her monstrous sexuality, their insistence on tracing her motive to a strong feeling of revenge for her lover's death substantially weakened the political significance of her act. The most widely-read text, translated from French and published in England and the United States, Louis Du Broca's *Interesting anecdotes of the heroic conduct of women previous to and during the French Revolution* (1804) promoted an image of Corday as "handsome," "dignified," and "noble" (187, 189).⁴ In chapter VIII, titled "Self-Devotion for Great Objects," Broca provides a sentimentally-tinged description of her as harmoniously embodying the feminine quality of "feeling" and "a masculine energy of understanding" (187). Seeking to capture his readers' interest and trigger their imagination, Broca attempts to provide a plausible justification for Corday's act within the context of her righteous indignation at the murder of her beloved one as well as the injustice and despotism ravaging her country. Based upon the records of the trial and Corday's letters to her father, Broca draws a picture of her as a woman whose "face and person were animated with the bloom of youth and beauty," while "her words were graced with the eloquence of a sage" (194).⁵ Whether the sharp

3 Among the most fervent Jacobins himself, Sade also helped promote a picture of Corday as a monstrous woman capable of the most hideous crime: "Marat's barbarous assassin, like those mixed beings to which one cannot assign a sex, vomited up from Hell to the despair of both sexes, directly belongs to neither" (qtd. in Craciun 201). *The Gazette de France Nationale* (July 20, 1793) characteristically described her as "a virago [...] absolutely outside of her sex" (qtd. in Kindleberger 983). Furthermore, the Jacobins seem to have been convinced that she was a gullible instrument at the hands of Girondins. In England, *The London Chronicle* reiterated the Jacobin theory that Corday was the victim of male anti-revolutionists from Caen (89).

4 *The Times* reported accounts of her trial underlining her noble origins and the fact that her beautiful countenance dispelled "the idea of her as an assassin" (2).

5 As the *Journal de Perlet* recorded on July 18, 1793: "Marat's murderer confessed everything; she displayed neither fear nor remorse. She responded to all questions put to her with a precision, an imperturbability, and a sangfroid that astounded the audience. Whenever she spoke, there was complete silence, for her voice, though assured and pleasant, was soft" (qtd. in Kindleberger 981-982).

In the United States, contemporary media reports followed the same line of thinking. For example, in January 1796 issue of *The Rural Magazine; or, Vermont Repository*,

language of gender stereotyping was employed to serve political exigencies or the literary medium to imaginatively capture the vague motives behind Corday's act, the political resonances of her transgression became increasingly difficult to contain even in a period of widespread social and ideological crisis.

As it was expected, the theater of the time responded to the challenge that Corday's story posed and various dramatizations of her act appeared primarily in Europe,⁶ while in the United States the story of Corday seems to have been silenced.⁷ On a political level, the reason for this neglect can be traced to the fact that, at the time, the United States was experiencing a period of social tension and political divisiveness exacerbated, to a large extent, by the aftermath of the French Revolution.⁸ Though the French Revolution had proved the universalist appeal of the ideals of the American war of independence and consolidated the United States' position in the new republican world, it gradually began to challenge America's claims to ideological consensus and political coherence. As a matter of fact, the French Revolution provided a stage on which party oppositions were transformed into partisan speeches and activities. The political resonance of the French Revolution magnified the crucial ideological differences between Federalists and Republicans regarding the true locus of "the people" in a republic

Corday is portrayed as "modest and dignified" emphasizing the difficulty "to conceive how she could have armed herself with sufficient intrepidity to execute the deed," while a few years later, in 1802, the first issue of *The New England Quarterly* insisted that Corday's "graceful manners," "modest demeanour," "softness" and "dignity" were evident indications of a heavenly mind (qtd. in Lewis 43). See also Craciun 202–03.

- 6 In post-revolutionary France, romantic tragedies about Corday were very popular, while in England, dramas depicting this fateful event were performed outside London or in unlicensed playhouses (Nielsen 169). In Germany, Christine Westphalen provided her own interpretation of Corday herself and the motives behind her act in her anonymously published historical tragedy *Charlotte Corday: Tragödie in fünf Akten mit Chören* (1804). For an analysis of the play, see Hilger 71–87.
- 7 With the bright exception of Pogson's play, there is no other record of an American play of the time dealing with Marat's assassination. There is also Charlotte Barnes' romantic tragedy, *Charlotte Corday* (1851), which appeared much later and which exists only by title. See Meserve, *Heralds of Promise*; Meserve, *Outline History*; Moody.
- 8 Within the context of American politics, the French Revolution intensified the already existing conflict between Federalists and Jeffersonians whose divergent views on political allegiances and social regeneration formed a distinct political ideology that wavered between fear of unrestrained republican enthusiasm and distrust of aristocratic rule. More importantly, however, the imminent prospect of the War of 1812 accentuated the already existing political differences over the system of government and the economic future of the United States.

and the changing relation between citizens and the new structures of power.⁹ While the two Revolutions had brought the New and the Old World together on an ideological plane of shared universal truths and values, the aftermath of the French Revolution awoke Americans to a sudden realization of the anarchic potential of a misguided people.¹⁰ Although American nationalism was based upon a political discourse that promoted a romantic association with the abstract concept of American exceptionalism and the peculiar conditions of the American Revolution,¹¹ it was affected by the repercussions of the French Revolution and the subsequent war between Britain and France in ways that began to question the meaning of the American revolutionary rhetoric and challenge nationalist consensus.

The American theatre was inevitably drawn into the mounting national controversy between Federalists and Republicans over practical issues of nation making and social construction.¹² It is within this context that *The Female Enthusiast* attempts to articulate a more complex ideological perspective underlying the rapid flow of political ideas across the Atlantic as well as their interactive effect.

9 Although both Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans considered themselves advocates of republican ideals, their vision of the new society that was taking shape in America differed considerably. Deeply conservative and elitist, the Federalists promoted commercial relations with Britain and “interpreted the Revolutionary mandate to mean the creation of a representative government responsive to, yet independent of, the popular will” (Ben-Atar and Oberg 8). On the other hand, Jefferson and his supporters sought the support of southern planters and northern laborers and championed decentralized authority and popular government (Appleby 165).

10 A staunch Federalist, John Adams feared that “it is society and social order that are threatened by the French Revolution” (qtd. in O’Neill 457), while he insisted that human passions need to be contained by political institutions (O’Neill 464). On the other hand, Republican Hugh H. Brackenridge added a sentimental note to his support of the French Revolution: “The heart of America feels the cause of France.... She is moved, impelled, elevated, and depressed with all the changes of her good and bad fortune; she feels the same fury in her veins” (qtd. in Burstein 176).

11 Benedict Anderson, referring to the American nation, observes that “it is difficult today to recreate in the imagination a condition of life in which the nation was felt to be something utterly new. But so it was in that epoch. The Declaration of Independence in 1776 makes absolutely no reference to Christopher Columbus, Roanoke, or the Pilgrim Fathers, nor are the grounds put forward to justify independence in any way ‘historical,’ in the sense of highlighting the antiquity of the American people” (193).

12 Just like the revolutionary period when the theatre played a significant part in promoting either Whig or Tory ideas, in the 1790s the theatre was used by both Federalists and Democratic Republicans as a public medium to expound their respective viewpoints and reach out to the largest possible audience (Wilmer 53–79).

While the majority of American romantic tragedies written in the first half of the nineteenth century used historical material from the distant or immediate past to confirm the sustained validity of the republican ideals,¹³ *The Female Enthusiast* challenges the American people to re-examine their social values and political system. Although by the time *The Female Enthusiast* was written, the French Revolution had been removed from the arena of political debate in America, the story of Corday is revived in an attempt to call attention to the essential discrepancy between American revolutionary ideals and the realities of social conflict, political animosity, and exclusionary practices in the process of nation making. Pogson's play traces two major transitional moments in the American political history of the time: the sudden shift in popular consciousness from enthusiastic reception of the French cause to intense skepticism, and the transition from the unifying rhetoric of the American Revolution to the emergence of political antagonism and party opposition. Furthermore, Pogson's decision to embark on an interpretation of Corday's political act allows her to reintroduce the largely overlooked issue of women's political role in a democratic society.¹⁴ However, Pogson's dramatic venture could prove essentially precarious. Although Corday's premeditated act of murder had earned her a prominent place in cultural imagination and artistic expression,¹⁵ she could not easily fit within a political discourse of female empowerment and visibility without running the risk of compromising her womanliness. Especially in the United States, the image of Corday was intensely problematic as the concept of the politicized woman was inextricably linked to the ideological parameters of the American Revolution and its widely advertised promise of republican regeneration. While the idea of republican womanhood

13 In the first half of the nineteenth century, the popularity of romantic tragedies on the American stage revealed the general tendency of the American playwrights to both entertain and instruct their audiences. From James N. Barker's *Pocahontas; or, La Belle Sauvage* (1808) to Augustus Stone's *Metamora; or, The Last of the Wampanoags* (1829) and from John H. Payne's *Brutus; or, The Fall of Tarquin* (1818) to Robert M. Bird's *The Gladiator* (1831) and George H. Boker's *Francesca da Rimini* (1855), romantic tragedies in America combined the stilted language of moral instruction with the universal themes of freedom, patriotism, love and honor, a spectacular setting and flamboyant acting.

14 Pogson follows the example of a number of early American women writers who turned to drama, and more specifically poetic drama, in an attempt to explore the complex, and rather ambiguous, relationship between women's rights and American national identity. See, Mercy O. Warren's *The Sack of Rome* and *The Ladies of Castile* (1783–1785), Frances Wright's *Altorf* (1819), Charlotte Barnes' *Octavia Bragaldi* (1837), and Julia W. Howe's *Leonore; or, The World's Own* (1857).

15 Corday began to figure in a number of paintings, poems, novels, and plays. For visual representations of Corday, see Gelbart 201–221; Walczak 254–261.

granted American women a space where it was acceptable to discuss politics and public events, it nevertheless limited women's role and activities to the domestic sphere as their contribution to the American republican society was channeled through their essentially feminine capacity as wives and mothers. Through her act, Corday had transcended the ideological boundaries of republican femininity and entered a predominantly masculine sphere of aggressive behavior. Even Judith Sargent Murray, one of the leading literary figures of post-revolutionary America who enthusiastically vouched for women's active participation in the political restructuring of society, becomes surprisingly laconic when referring to Charlotte Corday. In her essay "Observations on Female Abilities" (1798), Murray makes profuse, and rather emotionally-charged, references to a number of well-known historical women who defied tyrants, cried for justice, took up arms and fought in battle with unprecedented courage. Murray praises women's fortitude, ingenuity, perseverance, and patriotism as she links examples from Greek and Roman history with contemporary instances of female bravery (17). However, when the name of Charlotte Corday inevitably comes up, Murray seems to lose her enthusiasm as she shows a sudden reluctance to explore Corday's personality any further: "[t]he French women—Charlotte Corday—But our dispositions unexpectedly multiplying, a recollection of our engagement can alone suppress their evidence" (23).

While Murray avoids the challenge to discuss the limits of women's political power, Pogson chooses to explore the social parameters of Corday's violent act of resistance. Conforming to the aesthetics of the romantic tragedy, the play conveys a stifling atmosphere of fear and oppression through extensive use of stilted verse and long soliloquies. Le Brun, one of the oldest characters in the play and the tutor of Charlotte's brother, provides the proper moralizing as he paints a rather bleak and disheartening picture of reality. He laments the loss of political self-control and moderation and regrets the total absence of any form of reaction:

Some demon seems to hover over France,
 Infusing rancor in the gentlest breasts.
 World of tribulation, I' m weary of thee.
 Thy storms destroy; thy calms are voids we fly from.
 Nothing satisfies the ever-restless soul:
 It boils or stagnates in cold apathy.
 Few, few blessed spirits taste the balmy sweets
 Of that supreme and only true delight
 Springing from a mind well regulated— (155)

It is within this context that Charlotte begins to seek answers to questions regarding the true meaning of democracy and freedom. From the opening lines of the

play, Pogson establishes the political dimensions of Charlotte's personality. Despite the pervasive atmosphere of fear and coercion, she experiences an invigorating awakening to a sense of personal responsibility and social duty:

[H]ad I stayed in peaceful ignorance—
That duty which led me first to ask of wars,
And governments, and other scenes than those
Enfolding sweet domestic harmony.
Then to a wider field my views were opened.
Simplicity retired, but my heart throbbed
With keenest sensibility—alive
To virtue and humanity....
But oppression
Stalks abroad, and stains even the peaceful
Paths of life with blood! Merciless ferocity
Sways, with uncontrolled dominion!
A monster spreads destruction! And while he
Desolates, calls aloud, 'Tis liberty!
Why do his black deeds remain unpunished?
Is there not one avenging hand to strike? (140)

As she expresses her frustration and rage, Charlotte painfully realizes that blatant social injustice and senseless political violence have been devastating her country for a long time:

The chord of harmony is broke forever.
Since the blest spirit of my mother fled...
Peace fled with her—and discord sprang in France. (141)

While the male characters of the play show a striking indeterminacy in dealing with the general atmosphere of chaos and disorder and, like Le Brun, mainly engage in philosophizing, Charlotte begins to develop a dynamic political consciousness that will soon transform her into an active political agent. Armed with strong patriotic sentiments and a vigilant conscience, Charlotte is prepared to transcend the limits of her gender identity and assume a catalytic role in the public events of the French Revolution:

Let me, then, whisper that foul name: Marat,
And the last conflict end. The monster's name
Steals every thought, and female weakness flies.
With strength I'm armed, and mighty energy

To crush the murderer and defy the scaffold.
 Let but the deed be done. For it, *I'll die*.
 For it, I sacrifice—I quit—myself
 And all the softness of a woman's name...
 The innocent again shall walk in safety. (147)

In Act II, in a highly sentimental scene in “a wood,” where “thunder is heard,” providing the necessary audio effect that signals the beginning of her undertaking, Charlotte emerges from her painful process of self-awareness as a purely political being, powerful and determined not to let the past or any “fond recollections hold [her] thoughts from vengeance and Marat” (147–148).

Throughout the play, Charlotte acquires an unprecedented eloquence as she is given plenty of opportunities to express her devotion to republican liberty and social justice projecting at the same time her intense psychological need to transform “virtue” and “liberty” from abstract political ideals into defining principles of social life in a democratic society. Gradually, her political awakening and her gender identity begin to merge in a way that confuses the other characters. When her brother Henry finds out about her design, he cannot hide his astonishment and attributes her decision to ill-judgment and uncontrolled fervor while, at the same time, he underestimates her ability to carry out such a dangerous venture on her own:

This is wonderful¹⁶! Charlotte, thou art lost.
 Enthusiastic¹⁷ girl, these sentiments
 Are worthy of a Roman, yet are vain.
 Oh, could I save thee!....
 Soon I shall overtake my Charlotte,
 And the sure weapon of destruction
 Shall be guided by a stronger hand. (154)

In Act III, the mood of the play changes as the pace of action accelerates and the language no longer conveys abstract truths and philosophical wanderings but rather the more tangible reality of manipulation and violence. Act III begins with Marat's passionate speech to the citizens of France:

Citizens! These difficulties shall cease,
 And the head of each base conspirator—
 Each foe to liberty and equality
 Shall roll beneath us, an abject football.
 My countrymen, enlightened sons of France:

16 “Wonderful” here means “amazing” (Kritzer 154).

17 “Enthusiastic” here means “fanatical” (Kritzer 154).

Ye—ye, who comprehend *true* freedom!....
Destroy—destroy!
Justice calls aloud, destroy! Well ye know
Whose blood to spill—and whose to spare—without
The tedious mockeries of courts and judges.
Judge for yourselves—and quickly execute. (155–156)

In his speech, the notions of “liberty” and “equality” sound as dangerously distorted instruments of political propaganda. Marat incites the people to violent action while taking advantage of the current tumultuous situation in order to gain political power:

MARAT: I feel a demigod—(*Struts about.*) How ennobled
By the boundless confidence of such men—(*Points to them.*)
Fellow citizens! I live to serve you. (*Exit* MARAT.)
CHABOT: (*Advances.*) We, to support the champion of freedom,
And unanimous in defense of him—
We swear to stand or fall with great Marat
The people’s friend. (*Exit all.*) (157)

For the Americans of the time, Marat’s words must have struck a most sensitive chord. In post-revolutionary America, the rhetoric of republican virtue, which connected individual morality with national well-being, served as a restraining mechanism against prioritizing one’s personal ambitions and pursuits over the common good, and as an ideological shield against the danger of the people’s democratic excesses. Marat stands for the Americans’ worst nightmare. He hides his own ulterior motives behind noisy and passionate speeches about “the sentiments of true republicanism” (157). His populist politics, on the one hand, and the people’s conditioned response to his call for mindless action, on the other, seriously question the viability of a republican society and its foundations of social regeneration and private and public morality. In Charlotte’s mind, the murder of Marat will not only put an end to a series of atrocious crimes in the name of democracy and freedom, but more importantly, it will, in an extreme yet absolutely essential way, like a gangrenous part that needs to be severed, prevent any further contamination of the body politic:

No other hand will rise. No other eye
Will throw death’s fiat on the subtle serpent.
No more shall guileless innocence be stung
By his envenomed tongue and thirst of blood;
Nor shall those brave men his savage sword condemn
Add to the mound of butchered victims. (157)

Remaining faithful to the idea that Charlotte's act was the result of a conscious decision spurred by a higher sense of social morality and justice, Pogson stages Marat's assassination in a most dramatic manner:

CHARLOTTE: First—feel this sharper weapon! Die, monster!
 (*Stabs him. MARAT falls.*) There is an end to thy destructive course!
 Thou *ignis fatuus*¹⁸ that deceived the simple;
 Murderer of prisoners—of priests defenseless—
 Of helpless women—die! The innocent
 Shall live. Now art thou death's prisoner.
 MARAT: In sin's lowest depths, alas, I perish!
 Thy friends, young woman, are too well avenged.
 How did'st thou find this courage? Oh, great God!
 God? that sacred name should not proceed
 From my polluted lips. (158)

The staging of Marat's actual murder in Pogson's play must have been a daring choice at a time when theatrical conventions and the audience's shared cultural codes did not tolerate the representation of raw violence on stage, especially violence committed by a woman. In her attempt to undercut the prevailing depictions of Charlotte as a monstrous woman or a gullible accomplice, Pogson creates a character of human dimensions, a sensitive daughter, a caring sister, a tender fiancée. Above all, however, Charlotte is presented as a political being with an extraordinary capacity for reasoning and courageous action. Pogson's insistence upon the construction of her as a paragon of feminized virtue facilitates her entrance into the public world of politics. When Charlotte is discovered and arrested for Marat's murder, she fearlessly exclaims that her act was spurred by "the cause of virtue" adding that "a woman's arm, when nerved in such a cause, is the arm of an avenging angel" (159):

Think not I am a foe to liberty!
 My father is a real patriot;
 My brother, at this moment, joins the friends,
 Soldiers of liberty! Not assassins.
They should sink beside that fallen enemy
 To all but anarchy and cruelty. (*Points to MARAT.*)
 To know that, by his death, thousands are free
 Fully repays the danger I incur! (159)

18 "Delusion" (Kritzer 158).

Pogson consistently uses the concept of virtue in order to argue that the viability of a democratic social order depends upon its national character and also to render the distinction between public and domestic spheres politically insignificant, especially at times when human rights and dignity are at stake. Charlotte's militancy introduces a radical form of political activism which, discomforting though it might have seemed to early nineteenth-century American audiences, it, in fact, points to the emergence of a female political consciousness that is realized in the commitment to social justice and political morality.¹⁹ In the play, virtue, gender, and nationhood are tightly interrelated concepts defined within the larger political context of republicanism. By giving Charlotte Corday protagonistic status for the first time in American drama, Pogson brings back into attention American women's political potential. The French Revolution prompted American women's active involvement in public life and political matters in a way that the American Revolution had not as its ensuing ideal of Republican Womanhood created an essential paradox: on the one hand, it acknowledged women's political contributions and celebrated their patriotism, while, on the other, denied them any sense of civil existence beyond their traditional roles as wives and mothers. However, with the outbreak of the French Revolution and the resurgence of the language of republicanism, American women ventured once again into the public sphere.²⁰ But this time, their claim to share in political culture was marked by a desire to form a distinctive female political identity fostered by transatlantic ideas and events. According to Susan Branson, American women "were equipped with sufficient information and experience to begin to construct political identities for themselves that drew from America's revolutionary origins as well as those of France" (74–75). Although American women's support for the French Revolution was not universal and gradually began to wane when the horrors of the revolutionary excesses were made known, the dissemination of women's political activities on both sides of the Atlantic through the nation's press made

19 Referring to American women in the 1790s, David Waldstreicher points out that "revolutionary practice had meant for many of them a new awareness of public life, and, like French women of the same era, they quickly responded to this experience with new claims of rights, particularly to education, property holding, divorce, and... claims for the relevance of their political opinions" (166–167).

20 American women used public celebrations of the French cause as an avenue to the political sphere, adopting new clothing and forms of address and engaging in a wider array of public activities. By the end of the 1790s, deteriorating relations with France provoked American military preparations that included public ceremonies in which women in the capital presented militia banners and participated in protests against the French (Branson 56).

possible the creation of a space in public politics where women were recognized as efficacious members of the polity.

When the French Revolution became a point of contention between the Federalists and the Republicans, American women's public role gained new political significance. In their effort to secure women's allegiance, both parties relied heavily upon the ideology of republicanism which stressed women's contribution to the common good on the basis of their newly defined capacity as upholders of morality.²¹ However, the Federalists, despite their social conservatism, were more willing than Republicans to enhance women's place in public political culture. On the other hand, while Republicans challenged social hierarchy and class distinctions and argued for a more inclusive polity, they privileged white manhood at the expense of white women and people of color.²²

The American women of Pogson's generation soon realized that their claims to public identity were thwarted by the very promises of Jeffersonian republican thought which located political culture in the community of white males and relied upon a naturalized concept of womanhood. The resurrection of Charlotte Corday's story, though falling within the romantic tragedy aesthetic framework of distant time and place and universal theme, is particularly timely in the sense that it portrays an educated white woman from a prosperous family as the casualty of the failure of the democratic experiment. Charlotte laments the precariousness of the democratic ideal and is filled with disappointment and anger at the painful realization of her country's unashamed betrayal of its own values and nationalist principles:

CHARLOTTE: I am prepared
 To stand the charge, as one whose act was just,
 And for the welfare of my suffering country,
 Whose gratitude and justice will proclaim me
 A benefactor—not an assassin.
 CHABOT: Thou art mistaken, mad enthusiast!
 France will condemn thee to the guillotine—
 CHARLOTTE: If such my doom, France is the fettered slave

21 According to Rosemarie Zagari, "Republicans, like their Federalist counterparts, sometimes mobilized women for public processions and partisan rallies, as visible demonstrations of popular support for their cause" (125).

22 As Jeanne Boydston explains, "it was... the nature of white manhood to combine the liberty and restraint necessary to achieve and maintain political freedom; it was the nature of women, African Americans, and Native Americans not to be capable of achieving and maintaining that combination" (259).

Of factious, criminal, blood-thirsty men—
And soon will fall beneath *a weight of crimes*.
CHABOT: Lead on! (Charlotte *walks out with dignity*.) (166–167)

Michael Warner has observed that the rise of nationalism initiated a disjuncture between actual and merely imaginative participation in public life. As real politics diverged from those of discourse, “the public of which women were now said to be members was no longer a public in the rigorous sense of republicanism, and membership in it no longer connoted civic action” (173–174). In the case of American women, this disjuncture permitted them to be included in the “national imaginary” as discursive symbols of the political contribution of female domesticity but not as real public actors. In the years following the electoral revolution of 1800 and Jefferson’s rise to presidency, the ideology of American republicanism failed to conceal its own paradoxical nature: on the one hand, it promoted a radical language of democracy while, on the other, it replaced old hierarchies with new ones thus perpetuating social prohibition and cultural exclusion.

Through *The Female Enthusiast*, Pogson portrays a model of femininity that falls within the category of women of intelligence and heroism who derive their identity from their public accomplishments than from their relation to men as mothers and wives. Charlotte stresses an active, rather than a passive or marginal, brand of female patriotism. In the final act of the play, she consciously sets a precedent of heroic patriotic action and female political activism:

’Tis but the body’s death; my fame shall live,
And to my memory a tomb arise
On which all France will read and venerate
The act for which now ordains my death.
For now, as when my steps shall mount the scaffold,
I feel the strong conviction that I bleed
For the benefit of my poor country;
And should the demon of carnage present
Another fiend as murderous as Marat,
May he soon share the horrid monster’s fate,
And the true patriot who dares cut him off
Find in his country’s gratitude reward. (175)

Although Charlotte’s transgression must be punished by death, her name survives in popular consciousness through her construction as an allegorical figure of virtue and justice. In her study on death and femininity, Elizabeth Bronfen has argued that the death of a woman “emerges as the requirement for the preservation of existing cultural norms and values or their regenerative

modification” (181). In this sense, Charlotte’s public death constitutes an effective communicative act, a symbolic force that aims to modify a political order that undermines the very ideals it claims to espouse. The closing lines of the play appear to issue a warning that the “regenerative modification” of society can be achieved only in a country where liberty is cherished and the true meaning of democracy ensures social equality, political stability, and justice. Such a country is the United States of America where the idea of social reconstruction has arisen from America’s peculiar conditions. Although Pogson appears to be fully aware that the emergence of multiple, and often contradictory, political meanings as the aftermath of the American Revolution have seriously complicated the powerful interplay between political rhetoric and practice, she is nevertheless confident that it is precisely these complications which empower Americans to question their own political system and protest their exclusion from the revolutionary legacy:

HENRY: But we must part, and cross the Atlantic wave—
Seek that repose we cannot here possess.

....

Come where quiet reigns.
Under the protection of America,
Domestic ease securely reposes.
There, we may yet enjoy tranquility;
And, ’midst the sons of true-born liberty,
Taste the pure blessings that from freedom flow. (181)

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