

## An “Englishwoman’s Private Theatrical”: Helen Maria Williams and the New Female Citizen\*

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### Abstract

Helen Maria Williams’s writing moves beyond boundaries of different kinds. Williams’s eight-volume *Letters from France: Containing Many New Anecdotes Relative to the French Revolution, and the Present State of French Manners*, for example, is a combination of several genres, including travel narrative, letters, and her first-hand reports of the events in France between the years 1790 and 1796. This is a study of the first volume of *Letters Written in France* (1790), comprising twenty-six letters. In this paper, I will endeavour to show the ways in which Williams moves beyond a national frame and employs the epistolary form to provide a trans-

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national outlook at the French Revolution. I will argue that Williams's *Letters from France* is an important form of cultural and literary participation that enables the reconfiguration of modern nationhood and cosmopolitanism, and allows a new definition of female citizenship to emerge.

**Key Words:** Helen Maria Williams, national identity, universal benevolence, cosmopolitanism, female citizen