

CHARLOTTE WEST

Charlotte West, *A Ten Years' Residence in France, during the Severest Part of the Revolution; from the Year 1787 to 1797, Containing Various Anecdotes of Some of the Most Remarkable Personages of That Period* (London: Printed For William Sams, No. 1, St. James's-Street; And Robert Jennings, 2, Poultry, 1821).

We owe a debt to Amy Culley, whose research on the personal narratives of British women living in France during the Revolution led to our interest in Charlotte West.¹ As Culley notes, while *A Ten Years' Residence* appears in Barbara Kanner's index, *Two Hundred Years of British Women Autobiographers: A Reference Guide and Reader* (New York and London: Prentice Hall, 1997), there seems to have been no critical interest in the text, and information on its author is sketchy.

Indeed, there is some question whether 'West' is a pseudonym and to what extent the narrative is fictional: **in addition to many factual inaccuracies of date and place**, she has a remarkable ability to be present at many of the major events of the Revolution (**the French royal family stay at her house after being turned back from Varennes; she and her husband go to Paris to apply for a permit to leave the country and are there just after the execution of the king; they witness Charlotte Corday going to execution**). In the absence of contemporary reviews it is difficult to determine to what extent readers responded to the work as history or fiction. But, as Culley has pointed out to us, the royal bookseller, William Sams, did publish other first person narratives of individuals caught up in historical events like West.

Notes

1. See Amy Culley, 'Women's Life Writing 1760–1830: Spiritual Selves, Sexual Characters, and Revolutionary Subjects' (unpublished PhD thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2007), which includes a chapter on four British women writers in the French Revolution, one of whom is Charlotte West.