

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN BRITAIN

**SERIES TWO: POPULAR WOMEN'S
MAGAZINES**

PART 4: La Belle Assemblée and Continuations, 1806-1832



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The Social and Political Status of Women in Britain

Series Two: Popular Women's Magazines

Part Four: La Belle Assemblee and Continuations, 1806-1832.

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The Social and Political Status of Women in Britain is a major microform programme making available nineteenth and early twentieth century journals produced for women.

Series One provides coverage of rare political, reforming and professional journals. Series Two is devoted to those aimed to have a more popular appeal.

This fourth part of the second series is made up entirely of a near complete run of the important literary and society journal La Belle Assemblée, 1806-1832. La Belle Assemblée is fascinating in that it was published during a period in which society's views about women change significantly. When it was launched it was unapologetically and outspokenly committed to the improvement of the female mind. It was not afraid to tackle any issue or to enter disputes with their male counterparts. It denied that women were in any sense intellectually inferior to men and, if that was the appearance this was due to "an improper mode of education and study, or an inexcusable indulgence of parents". It covered politics, public affairs and encourage readers to write in and contribute to its lively letters page. However, as the Regency period passed the journal started to conform to a new image of women. Politics disappeared from its pages altogether and the letters pages became a thing of the past. It concentrated on the domestic sphere almost entirely, with culinary advice, fashion articles and rather insipid stories. How and why those changes came about is a subject still awaiting full examination.

Another area in which La Belle Assemblée proved important was in the sphere of advertising. As Cynthia White observes in Women's Magazines, 1693-1968 (Michael Joseph Ltd, London, 1970) it was "a pioneer in adding to its annual volume an eight-page compendium of advertisement for a variety of products ranging from books and remedies, to dress, furnishings and entertainments". These are a valuable resource for the social historian and equally reflect the changing nature of attitude to women. They also provided much needed income to pay for the high quality fashion illustration on which La Belle Assemblée prided itself.

As the struggle for circulation became more difficult and the competition became more intense the owners of the three leading women's magazines of the time - The Lady's Magazine, The Lady's Monthly Museum and La Belle Assemblée - agreed to merge their publication. Our coverage of La Belle Assemblée stops at this point, in 1832, after which the content of all three journals became identical and rather stereo-typed, even though they maintained their separate titles until their joint collapse and disappearance in 1847.

Thanks are due to Boston Public Library for permission to reproduce the journal which also originally appeared in the much larger History of Women series available from Research Publications.

William Pidduck
Development and Production Director
Research Publications Ltd.

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Part 4: La Belle Assemblee and Continuation 1806-1832.

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