THE PROFESSIONALIZATION
OF WOMEN WRITERS IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain is the first full study of a group of women who, though they have been dismissed as mere domestic, conservative, and imitative novelists, were actively and ambitiously engaged in a wide range of innovative publications, as well as in creating the formal and informal institutions of the republic of letters. Working at the height of the century and contributing to its proliferation of print materials from the 1740s onwards, these women – Frances Sheridan, Frances Brooke, Sarah Scott, Sarah Fielding, and Charlotte Lennox – were welcomed as participants in the literary and even political public spheres. Using personal correspondence, records of contemporary reception, research into contemporary print culture, and sociological models of professionalization, Betty A. Schellenberg challenges oversimplified assumptions of women’s cultural role in the period, focusing on those women who have been most obscured by subsequent literary history, whether traditional or feminist.

Betty A. Schellenberg is Associate Professor of English at Simon Fraser University. She is the author of The Conversational Circle: Rereading the English Novel, 1740–1775 (1996), co-editor of Reconsidering the Bluestockings (2003), and co-editor of a volume in the forthcoming Cambridge Edition of the Correspondence of Samuel Richardson.
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BETTY A. SCHELLENBERG
It is not the bringing known Characters again upon the Stage that is, or can be decried, if it is done with equal Humour and Spirit, as in their first Appearance; but it is building so much on Public Approbation as to endeavour to put off a second-rate insipid Piece, void of the Spirit of the first, that ought to meet with universal Censure.

(Preface to *Volume the Last*, by Sarah Fielding, 1753)
For Anne,
Ruth, Linda, and Kathie
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Like the work of the women writers who are the subjects of this study, my book is embedded in a culture of letters and arises out of the oral and print exchanges which embody that culture. While the attachment of one author’s name to the title page obscures those exchanges, I am grateful for the opportunity to acknowledge my debts here.

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Quotations from the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review* are cited throughout using the abbreviations MR and CR. Because the publishers of the original editions of works by the principal writers in this study are germane to the argument, their names are provided in citations of these editions. In other cases of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts, city and date only are provided.