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# Staël's Cosmopolitan Enthusiasm

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While Germaine de Staël was raised in an environment of constant dialogue and interchange and while this conversational acumen is transplanted into her literature, there is another dimension to her work that instead emphasizes a more ineffable form of expression, which she integrates with her conception of enthusiasm, and into a cosmopolitan vision. The French Revolution's early dreams for increased equality seemed to have dissipated for women amidst the authoritarian nature of the Napoleonic period, but within the silence that remained, Staël saw hope for ongoing fulfillment of the seeds of the Enlightenment. Staël and Napoleon are frequently juxtaposed as two rival voices struggling over the soul of revolutionary France and Europe, with their antagonistic relationship oftentimes exemplified with the saying, "Bonaparte had so persecuted her that in Europe one had to count three Great Powers: England, Russia, and Madame de Staël."<sup>1</sup> At stake between Staël and Napoleon are two different silences and separate conceptions of the nation, a militaristic and oppressive view characterized by Napoleon's silence of reason, and the passionate ineffability of enthusiasm with which Staël's writing is profoundly imbued.

Enthusiasm for Staël is a form of exaltation, a luminous force that inspires a love of beauty and underlies great ideas, revealing a touch of

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1. Quoted in Kathleen Kete, *Making Way for Genius: The Aspiring Self in France from the Old Regime to the New* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); however, Kete suggests that this frequently cited phrase overemphasizes the binary opposition established around Staël and Napoleon, missing something better captured in a more to the point, albeit less dramatic original version, which stresses her freedom: "On her second trip to Germany, a new acquaintance noted that there were only three free powers in Europe: England, Russia, and Madame de Staël" (64).

the divine. In *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1799), Staël defines successful literature by its ability to enthuse, which is closely related to its Greek origins of *en* and *theos*, or “having God within.”<sup>2</sup> She describes how literature produces a sort of movement in readers that disposes them to moral action, one aligned with the ancient Greek lawgivers’ belief in the power of music, eloquence, and poetry to initiate an *ébranlement*, a “shocking” or “shaking,” with both physical and internal impact that inspires reflection and enthusiasm.<sup>3</sup> The pre-eighteenth century sense of enthusiasm held a connotation of religious rapture or ecstasy, and even delusion or possession, but its generalized meaning signifies more of a fervour or zeal. Staël’s employment of enthusiasm is in certain ways related to earlier political history in which it is associated with a divine immediacy that claims authority from God over the law, and is therefore linked to rebellion or revolution where it also serves as a critical, pathological category, as in antinomianism or religious civil war.<sup>4</sup> Although Staël channels this earlier and rebellious sense of the term, she invests it with a new pacific sentiment, a cosmopolitan force that she employs to animate her literature. I will demonstrate how Staël channels this silent force into the mute landscapes of her novel *Corinne ou l’Italie* (1807) and her earlier short story “Mirza ou Lettre d’un voyageur” (1795) with powerful ineffable moments that underscore the

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2. See Francine du Plessix Gray, *Madame de Staël: The First Modern Woman* (New York: Atlas & Co., 2008), 116–17.

3. See Roger Pearson, *Unacknowledged Legislators: The Poet as Lawgiver in Post-Revolutionary France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 185. Pearson further notes how Napoleon may have seen in Staël an opposing sort of lawgiver as well (189).

4. After the revolution of 1688–89 in England, enthusiasm there served as a pejorative term for advocacy of any political or religious cause in public, as it was viewed as instigating the atrocities of the English Civil War. Enthusiasm is associated with superstition and fanaticism in Rousseau in a similarly ambivalent way, since he also praises a sublime eloquence that can lead to theocracy. Kant struggles with this ambivalence about enthusiasm in the potential for confusion between *Enthusiasmus*, communion with a higher nature, or *Schwärmerei*, fanaticism due to the inflammation of the mind beyond the appropriate degree by a principle. Enthusiasm is aesthetically sublime for Kant, approaching what is moral and ideal, whereas fanaticism represents a form of delusion. See Jean-François Lyotard, *Enthusiasm: la critique kantienne de l’histoire* (Paris: Galilée, 1986). The combination of an idea with an affect can spur action and events which break the continuum of history, such as the French Revolution, yet also hold the potential for barbarism, as when declarations of universal freedom are also linked with violations of liberty.

cosmopolitan influence of enthusiasm. While Staël is condemned into exile by Napoleon for the political message that he reads in her literature, this essay argues that she depicts the dual-faceted nature of exile as an experience of isolation but also as a source of inspiration, which I consider in scenes of solitude and moments of enthusiasm to illustrate how they might inaugurate new forms of cosmopolitan political community. Silence, and its political import, serves in Staël as one among other media of enthusiasm, which include music, nature, literature, and oratory poetic improvisation, all of which also spark enthusiasm or represent manifestations of it. While silence plays a fundamental role in these different modes of enthusiasm, and enthusiasm is an affective force emanating from within, voice is equally central to Staël's work. Silence is often inscribed within moments of poetry, improvisation, or song, and thus operates alongside voice to call attention to oppression. Staël coopts an imposed, despotic silence from its oppressive hold, reinvigorating it with a new spirit by countering the castigation of forced exile with enthusiasm.

Written halfway through Staël's own period of exile by Napoleon, *Corinne ou l'Italie* channels an enthusiasm born of silence, with Corinne's poetic improvisation extending this influence to a cosmopolitan sphere. Corinne's enthusiasm is often inspired by or aligned with nature and also with music. Toril Moi has described *Corinne ou l'Italie* as an opera, with Corinne shifting from an initially "excessive expressivity" to a position of total silence, yet one that she herself desires after Lord Oswald Nevil's "deafness" to her love and his marriage to her younger half-sister, Lucile.<sup>5</sup> Staël's *Corinne* unfolds in Italy between 1794–95, rather than when it was written in 1806–1807, thus avoiding direct commentary on the French takeover of Italy and Napoleon's self-coronation as King there in 1805. Staël instead rewrites this moment with the dramatic coronation of the poet Corinne at the Capitoline Hill, witnessed by Oswald, who is instantly struck by her artistic capabilities and genius. His love for Corinne is inexorably interwoven with his experience of Italy, and as the semi-eponymous

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5. Toril Moi, "A Woman's Desire to be Known: Expressivity and Silence in *Corinne*," in *Untrodden Regions of the Mind: Romanticism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Ghislaine McDayter (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), 143–75, 169.

title suggests, Corinne and Italy seem transposable at times, as she comes to embody it, or even to inaugurate nationalism.<sup>6</sup>

The French word *nationalité* first appears in *Corinne*, yet its political contours for Staël extend beyond the limits inscribed within a nation-based model of the social contract, like that of Rousseau, as Corinne is of mixed origins, with an English father and Italian mother. From its first appearance, *nationalité* for Staël is both characterized and enhanced by its diversity, in contrast to the Napoleonic emphasis upon national uniformity, as is evident in Corinne's description of her dual education and upbringing: "Je pouvais donc me croire destinée à des avantages particuliers, par la réunion des circonstances rares qui m'avaient donné une double éducation, et, si je puis m'exprimer ainsi, deux nationalités différentes."<sup>7</sup> In further contrast to Rousseau's *Du contrat social* aversion to representation, Corinne, of a hybrid national background, comes to represent Italy, but with her melancholic resilience perhaps allegorically embodying a national suffering which could well be that of France, or any other country also threatened by conquest. Suzanne Guerlac furthermore suggests that rather than representing solely a national emblem, Corinne engenders eloquence itself.<sup>8</sup> I argue that this eloquence of voice and articulation is matched by a mute eloquence inspired within enthusiasm that Staël generates from silence in *Corinne*, with a drive to combat the scourge of despotism by supplanting claims to power through violence with those of love.<sup>9</sup> Writing for a silenced people, Staël brings a bolstered energy of political renewal to this silence, lodging a cosmopolitan force within a vision of *nationalité* that stands in opposition to Napoleonic empire. Instead of influencing the people through conquest or decree, Corinne

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6. See John Isbell, "Introduction," in Germaine de Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, trans. and ed. Sylvia Raphael (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), vii–xx, xx.

7. Germaine de Staël, *Corinne ou l'Italie*, in *Œuvres complètes de Madame la baronne de Staël-Holstein, tome I*, (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1967), 786; "I could therefore think that it was my destiny to have particular advantages because of the unusual circumstances of my dual education and, if I may put it that way, two different nationalities" (*Italy*, 256).

8. See Suzanne Guerlac, "Writing the Nation (Mme de Staël)," *French Forum* 30.3 (Fall 2005), 43–56.

9. For more on the role of love in Staël's political thought, see Lori Jo Marso, *(Un)Manly Citizens: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's and Germaine de Staël's Subversive Women* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

employs language and silence that serve as part of a conversation with the people, celebrating their diversity.

Corinne's alignment with the people is evident from her first appearance and coronation in Rome, as depicted through the perspective of Scottish traveler Lord Oswald Nevil, who is initially despondent upon his arrival in Italy, yet soon finds himself drawn to and electrified by Corinne's enthusiasm. Mourning the recent death of his father, Oswald is emotionally and physically ill (coughing up blood as we first encounter him), thus opening Corinne's story with his own melancholic travails. His solitude and despair at losing his father is compounded by the isolation of entering a foreign land, along with a sentiment of being lost among the Italian crowd. Awakening to a brilliant sunshine and the sound of church bells ringing, Oswald is soon taken in by the spectacular event of the coronation of Corinne, who is introduced as a poet, writer, and improviser, and one of the most beautiful women in Rome. Corinne's impact upon Oswald is striking, as her inspired display of genius at the capitol contagiously stirs his own enthusiasm, while challenging his convictions, since her talent is publicly recognized, in contrast to English customs: "Il n'y avait certainement rien de plus contraire aux habitudes et aux opinions d'un Anglais que cette grande publicité donnée à la destinée d'une femme; mais l'enthousiasme qu'inspirent aux Italiens tous les talents de l'imagination, gagne, au moins momentanément, les étrangers, et l'on oublie les préjugés mêmes de son pays, au milieu d'une nation si vive dans l'expression des sentiments qu'elle éprouve."<sup>10</sup> Beyond inspiring an exalted state of enthusiasm in Oswald that alleviates his melancholy and enables him to view Corinne in a more favorable light than that of the English women, her appearance is allied with the crowd, as she makes her entrance on a chariot amidst a triumphal procession, drawn by four white horses, like a goddess surrounded by clouds.<sup>11</sup>

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10. Staël, *l'Italie*, 662; "There was certainly nothing more contrary to the customs and opinions of the English than this publicity given to the fortunes of a woman, but the enthusiasm which all imaginative talent arouses in the Italians infects foreign visitors, at least momentarily. They even forget their native prejudices when they are among people who express their feelings so vividly" (*Italy*, 21).

11. Corinne's alignment with the people is further evident: "L'admiration du peuple pour elle allait toujours en croissant, plus elle approchait du Capitole, de ce lieu si fécond en souvenirs. Ce beau ciel, ces Romains si enthousiastes, et par-dessus tout Corinne, électrisaient l'imagination d'Oswald; il avait vu souvent dans son pays

Corinne's outfit embodies multiplicity, with a white Indian headscarf wound around her head, and a blue stole that could be a revolutionary allusion. She is furthermore likened to Domenichino's Sibyl, bestowing her prophetic or divine qualities, which combined with the mystery surrounding her last name and her origins, further contribute to the enthusiasm that she inspires in the people around her.

While Corinne's poetic improvisations accompanied by the music of her harp enable her to pay eloquent homage to the beauty of nature and to Italy, she further moves the people through her employment of silence. Corinne's poetry is described as an intellectual melody which can express the charm of the most fleeting or subtle impressions, and, imposing silence upon her audience at times with it, she transports them into an exalted and uplifted spiritual state, inciting their enthusiasm. She listens to what her audience requests for her to improvise, but also to what they do not say, as during her coronation when she first catches a glimpse of Oswald, who is melancholic in the crowd. Corinne's passionate sensibility, which inspires her poetry, also enables her to read his heart, as he notes: "Corinne, sublime amie, vous qui lisez dans les cœurs, devinez ce que je ne puis dire."<sup>12</sup> In their initial encounter, she senses his grief even without knowing of the death of his father, and silences the audience as a form of paying homage to the deceased. Referring to Rome as the land of tombs, Corinne shifts her previous tone to evoke the splendour of its ruins and ancestors, linking its funeral urns with abandonment to nature's beauty in death.<sup>13</sup>

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des hommes d'État portés en triomphe par le peuple, mais c'était pour la première fois qu'il était témoin des honneurs rendus à une femme, à une femme illustrée seulement par les dons du génie: son char de victoire ne coûtait de larmes à personne; et nul regret, comme nulle crainte, n'empêchait d'admirer les plus beaux dons de la nature, l'imagination, le sentiment et la pensée" (Staël, *l'Italie*, 663); "The nearer she came to the Capitol, that place so rich in memories, the more the crowd admired her. The beautiful sky, the wildly enthusiastic Romans, and above all Corinne, fired Oswald's imagination. In his own country he had often seen statesmen borne in triumph by the people, but it was the first time he had witnessed honour done to a woman, to a woman renowned only for the gifts of genius" (*Italy*, 23).

12. Staël, *l'Italie*, 857; "Corinne, my most perfect friend, you who can read the heart, who can imagine what I cannot express" (*Italy*, 393).

13. Marie-Claire Vallois describes how Corinne's personal discourse is silenced and substituted by that of the silent monuments of Rome that however speak to the soul with their grandeur: "The heroine's lost voice is inscribed in her stone double: a fossil voice ready to live." Marie-Claire Vallois, "Voice as Fossil. Madame de Staël's *Corinne or Italy*: An Archaeology of Feminine Discourse," *Tulsa Studies in Women's*

Silence is a means to inspire Oswald and to access this melancholic history, which also serves to generate enthusiasm, offering hope for political renewal by invoking the grandeur of the past.

In addition to Corinne's ability to read Oswald's unarticulated sentiments or to silence the crowd and inspire enthusiasm, her own silence becomes a prominent symbol with political force. After following Oswald to England and Scotland, and realizing that he has fallen for her younger half-sister, Lucile, Corinne renounces him, opting never to speak with him again, which serves as a pivotal turning point. Madelyn Gutwirth suggests that Corinne's silence in the second half of the novel represents symbolic death,<sup>14</sup> whereas Toril Moi aligns it with Corinne's desire, as she ultimately *chooses* silence, offering a stark contrast to her earlier poetic expressiveness in Italy.<sup>15</sup> I would extend these implications to the political sphere by suggesting that Corinne's silence is moreover driven by a contrasting belief regarding nationality to that espoused by Oswald, as he is unable to distance himself from his father's preference that he marry a purely English woman, and thus chooses Lucile, even though she does not bring him the same happiness as Corinne. Corinne's silence distances her from Oswald, while reaffirming a composite conception of *nationalité*, as in her earlier employment of this term, expressing appreciation for national difference and for the benefits that may arise from this multiplicity. While both France and Italy have become silenced under Napoleon's reign, which aims to efface difference through conquest, Corinne's chosen melancholic silence is affirmative of a desire to embrace the national diversity that she embodies, inspiring enthusiasm among the people with it.

One of the most powerful scenes of such enthusiasm is Corinne's performance at Cape Miseno, just before she reveals her history to

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*Literature* 6.1 (Spring 1987), 47–60, 53. Vallois further notes how this substitution is implicit from Corinne's first appearance at the Capitol on the chariot, where she is likened to a statue. See also, Marie-Claire Vallois, *Fictions féminines: Mme de Staël et les voix de la Sibylle* (Saratoga: Anma Libri, 1987).

14. Madelyn Gutwirth, "Du silence de Corinne et de sa parole," in *Benjamin Constant, Madame de Staël et le groupe de Coppet: actes du deuxième Congrès de Lausanne à l'occasion du 150<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la mort de Benjamin Constant et du troisième Colloque de Coppet, 15–19 juillet 1980*, ed. Étienne Hofmann (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1982), 427–34.

15. Moi, "A Woman's Desire to be Known," 169.



Oswald, as her silence in this moment serves a unifying role in bringing together and captivating a crowd of both English and Italians alike. Similar to the lofty setting where the protagonist of Staël's earlier *Delphine* (1802) crosses the mountains from France to Switzerland and looks down upon Lake Geneva and the Vaud countryside amidst nature's silence, Corinne derives enthusiasm from her melancholic state at the summit of Cape Miseno in Italy, a sacred poetic site that enables her to spark the divine within herself and to inspire her audience to think beyond the national divisions that might separate them. She has led Oswald on a journey through the land of Virgil's grave and Petrarch's laurel tree, and she stages this summit gathering as a parting gift, with her empathic poetry also conveying the shifting ground of their relationship; as Mount Vesuvius looms in the distance, the surrounding landscape mirrors and dramatizes their conflict. Like the Tiburtine Sybil animated by divine inspiration, Corinne gazes at the islands around her, ruminating upon kindred condemned exiles who have viewed their native lands from a distance:

“O terre! toute baignée de sang et de larmes, tu n’as jamais cessé de produire et des fruits et des fleurs! es-tu donc sans pitié pour l’homme? et sa poussière retourne-t-elle dans ton sein maternel sans le faire tressaillir?”

Ici, Corinne se reposa quelques instants. Tous ceux que la fête avait rassemblés jetaient à ses pieds des branches de myrte et de laurier. La lueur douce et pure de la lune embellissait son visage, le vent frais de la mer agitait ses cheveux pittoresquement, et la nature semblait se plaire à la parer. Corinne cependant fut tout à coup saisie par un attendrissement irrésistible: elle considéra ces lieux enchanteurs, cette soirée enivrante, Oswald qui était là, qui n’y serait peut-être pas toujours, et des larmes coulèrent de ses yeux. Le peuple même, qui venait de l’applaudir avec tant de bruit, respectait son émotion, et tous attendaient en silence que ses paroles fissent partager ce qu’elle éprouvait.<sup>16</sup>

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16. Staël, *l'Italie*, 775–76; “‘Oh, land bathed in blood and tears, thou has never ceased to produce fruit and flowers! Hast thou then no pity for man? And does his dust return to thy maternal bosom without making it tremble?’ At this point, Corinne paused for a few moments. All those gathered together there for the festivities cast branches of myrtle and laurel at her feet. The gentle, pure moonlight made her face more beautiful; the fresh sea wind blew her hair about in a picturesque manner, and nature seemed to enjoy adorning her. But Corinne was suddenly gripped by an irresistible emotion; she looked round at the enchanting place and the wonderful evening, at Oswald who was there but perhaps would not always be there, and tears

In contrast to the violence that Corinne evokes in her reference to the land of “blood and tears,” her poetic gathering offers a uniting experience for her audience from different nations, one that is almost sacred, as reinforced by the mythical symbolism of the branches of myrtle and laurel that the people cast before her. The melancholic wave that overcomes her is transmitted to the crowd, as they emulate her silence, and while her words convey feelings, her tears offer an ineffable message that joins her audience in shared enthusiasm through a transformative artistic experience, one that is perhaps capable of inspiring reconciliation and of reclaiming the greatness of the Roman past while surpassing arbitrary national divisions.<sup>17</sup> Situating herself in line with legendary women who have suffered in love before her, Corinne transforms her sadness and exile into a sacred form of poetry and suggests that grief is capable of penetrating through the clouds to translate a divine music inaudible to most mortal ears into a noble enthusiasm. She earlier describes this enthusiasm as “surnaturel,” inspired by, while also escaping, the laws of nature, and she rewrites these laws in a cosmopolitan manner through poetic improvisation in different languages, while also conveying the silent, divine unifying verses that uplift the soul.<sup>18</sup>

Corinne's silence further exemplifies a deific quality that achieves its richest tenor in her final song. Although on her deathbed and too weak to speak or improvise, Corinne nonetheless hosts a farewell performance for Oswald as well as for Italy, which also concludes

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flowed from her eyes. Even the common people, who had just applauded her so noisily, respected her emotion, and they all waited silently for her words to tell them of her feelings” (*Italy*, 236).

17. For more on tears in *Corinne*, see Lauren Fortner Ravalico, “Liquid Union: Listening through Tears and the Creation of Community in *Corinne*,” in *Staël's Philosophy of the Passions: Sensibility, Society, and the Sister Arts*, ed. Tili Boon Cuillé and Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 131–49.

18. “Je crois éprouver alors un enthousiasme surnaturel, et je sens bien que ce qui parle en moi vaut mieux que moi-même; souvent il m'arrive de quitter le rythme de la poésie, et d'exprimer ma pensée en prose; quelquefois je cite les plus beaux vers des diverses langues qui me sont connues. Ils sont à moi, ces vers divins dont mon âme s'est pénétrée” (Staël, *l'Italie*, 675); “At such times I think I experience a supernatural enthusiasm and I have the definite feeling that the voice within me is of greater worth than myself. It often happens that I depart from poetic rhythms and express my thought in prose; sometimes I quote the finest verses of the different languages I know. They are mine, those divine verses which imbue my soul” (*Italy*, 46).

Oswald's journey there (that begins as the novel opens) in a cyclical manner, yet with a different form of melancholy than his initial sadness over the loss of his father. Corinne gathers a crowd in a room at the Florence Academy on a stormy winter's day in January to present an ode to a Rome that does not banish women but instead recognizes their genius, and she then submits to the "tombeaux silencieux [de] divinité bienfaisante," at peace with this silence and impending death.<sup>19</sup> Her lines are performed by a young girl dressed in white and crowned with flowers, as Corinne sits silently in the shadows covered by a veil, which stands in stark contrast to her initial resplendent performance at the capitol but is also a testament to her resolve, as she has channeled her melancholy over losing Oswald into reinforcing the divinity of enthusiasm within herself as a poet. The triumphal chariots that first carried her to Rome transform into a funeral procession as she offers the stage to a new lead, yet one who recites Corinne's lines to help carry forth her poetic legacy, much like she has coached her niece Juliet to sing and speak Italian, cultivating a surrogate cosmopolitan citizen, as if to counteract Juliet's solely English biological lineage of parents Lucile and Oswald.<sup>20</sup> Corinne's ring that she returns to Oswald is a harbinger of her death, rather than a symbol of their union, as it signifies the end of the relationship and leads to her eventual demise. Grievous emotion, however, also becomes a source of strength, as it enables Corinne to ignite her own enthusiasm, silently transcending her plight, while moving and inspiring the crowd through her melancholic song sung by a promising youthful performer, offering hope for future peace. The future that Staël envisions is one in which national difference and diversity may be celebrated, rather than spurned, within *Corinne* and as a political allegory for a Europe under Napoleon.

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19. "Le grand mystère de la mort, quel qu'il soit, doit donner du calme. Vous m'en répondez, tombeaux silencieux! vous m'en répondez, divinité bienfaisante!" (Staël, *l'Italie*, 862); "The great mystery of death, whatever it may be, must grant peace. You assure me of that, silent tombs; you assure me of that, beneficent divinity!" (*Italy*, 402).

20. Corinne's dark features and Venetian-style black dress stand in further contrast to the lighter appearance of her half-sister Lucile, and although their characters are also opposed, Lucile begins to emulate Corinne near the end of the novel in an attempt to please Oswald, who comes to realize that he misses Corinne's genius and splendor.

While Staël develops a vision of *nationalité* that expands beyond the frontiers of the nation within the figure of Corinne, this cosmopolitanism is germane to her thought from early on, as it is perhaps even more strikingly evident in the protagonist of her earlier short story “Mirza ou Lettre d’un voyageur,” published in 1795 but written in 1786, prior to both the Revolution and the rise of Napoleon, which serve as the unacknowledged backdrop to her novels. Staël is most often considered within a European context, but “Mirza” extends beyond these borders into the heart of Africa, recounting a fictional love story between two Senegambians, Mirza and Ximéo, from the warring Kingdoms of Cayor and Jolof. Although promised in marriage to Ourika, the daughter of his father’s sister, Ximéo is enamoured with Jolof neighbour Mirza, whose song about the love of freedom and the horror of slavery attracts him, and this song is further enhanced by the foreign nature of her language. Mirza sings in French learned from a Frenchman discontented with his own country, who settles in Senegal and shares the knowledge misused by Europeans and the philosophy whose lessons they follow poorly. By reading French books and reflecting upon them from her silent mountain solitude, Mirza develops a form of cosmopolitan enthusiasm, which further inspires Ximéo: “À chaque mot qu’elle me disait, mon intérêt, ma curiosité redoublaient; ce n’était plus une femme, c’était un poète que je croyais entendre parler; et jamais les hommes qui se consacrent parmi nous au culte des dieux, ne m’avaient paru remplis d’un si noble enthousiasme.”<sup>21</sup> Like Corinne’s poetic acumen and command of Italian, Mirza’s bridging the distance between warring tribes through French song offers further affirmation of Staël’s commitment to a pacific community that transcends borders.

Staël’s cosmopolitanism is further evident in her stand against the blight of slavery in “Mirza,” a cry for a political structure based upon a more inclusive form of morality. Although taken with Mirza, Ximéo

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21. Staël, “Mirza ou Lettre d’un voyageur,” in *Œuvres complètes*, 72–78, 74; Staël, “Mirza, or a Traveler’s Letter,” trans. Françoise Massardier-Kenney, University of Georgia, accessed June 16, 2017, [http://slavery.uga.edu/texts/literary\\_works/mirzaenglish.pdf](http://slavery.uga.edu/texts/literary_works/mirzaenglish.pdf). “My interest, my curiosity, increased with every word she said; she was no longer a woman that I was hearing, she was a poet. Never had those of my countrymen who devote themselves to the cult of the gods seemed filled with such a noble enthusiasm” (5).

eventually betrays her by continuing to pursue his vows with Ourika, yet Mirza nonetheless jumps to his defence after he is captured in battle and about to be sold into slavery to the Europeans. She demonstrates her intellectual and physical strength in proclaiming:

Européens ... c'est pour cultiver vos terres que vous nous condamnez à l'esclavage; c'est votre intérêt qui vous rend notre infortune nécessaire; vous ne ressemblez pas au dieu du mal, et faire souffrir n'est pas le but des douleurs que vous nous destinez: regardez ce jeune homme affaibli par ses blessures, il ne pourra supporter ni la longueur du voyage, ni les travaux que vous lui demandez; moi, vous voyez ma force et ma jeunesse, mon sexe n'a point éterné mon courage; souffrez que je sois esclave à la place de Ximéo.<sup>22</sup>

As she faces Ximéo's captors, Mirza employs more of a strategic approach to save Ximéo than in her earlier song that passionately contests the horrors and injustice of slavery, but she still asserts her own strength and courage as a woman against "the hideous yoke of slavery" the letter begins by denouncing.<sup>23</sup> This moves the governor to free her and Ximéo, noting that so much nobility of soul would have shamed

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22. Staël, "Lettre," 76; "Europeans ... it is to cultivate your land that you condemn us to slavery; it is your interest which makes our misfortune necessary; you do not seem to be evil gods, and tormenting us is not the goal of the suffering you will have us bear. Look at this young man weakened by his wounds; he will neither be able to withstand the long march nor the work that you will require of him; yet look at me, see my strength and my youth; my sex has not sapped my courage; let me be a slave in Ximeo's place" ("Letter," 8).

23. "Mirza" begins with the following tale: "Permettez que je vous rende compte, madame, d'une anecdote de mon voyage, qui peut-être aura le droit de vous intéresser. J'appris à Gorée, il y a un mois, que monsieur le gouverneur avait déterminé une famille nègre à venir demeurer à quelques lieues de là, pour y établir une habitation pareille à celle de Saint-Domingue; se flattant, sans doute, qu'un tel exemple exciterait les Africains à la culture du sucre, et qu'attirant chez eux le commerce libre de cette denrée, les Européens ne les enlèveraient plus à leur patrie, pour leur faire souffrir le joug affreux de l'esclavage. Vainement les écrivains les plus éloquents ont tenté d'obtenir cette révolution de la vertu des hommes" (72); "Allow me, Madam, to apprise you of an anecdote from my trip, which you may find interesting. A month ago, in the town of Gorée, I heard that the governor had persuaded a Negro family to come and live a few miles away so as to establish a plantation similar to the one found in Santo Domingo. He had imagined, surely, that such an example would incite Africans to grow sugarcane, and that, by drawing to their territory the free trade of this sugar, Europeans would no longer take Africans away from their homeland and make them suffer under the hideous yoke of slavery. In vain have the most eloquent writers attempted to obtain this revolution by appealing to the goodness of men" ("Letter," 3).

these Europeans enslaving them; just before delivering her plea, Mirza is further described as being irradiated by the soul within, more resembling an angel than a mortal, and possessing a supernatural quality like that attributed to Corinne. Mirza indeed channels her enthusiasm towards cosmopolitan ends for peace and against slavery, embodying the luminous form of exaltation characteristic of *en* and *theos*, or having God within.

Mirza's story, like that of Corinne, similarly ends on the somber note of her death, but it is likewise her chosen path as she stabs herself through the heart with an arrow after receiving word of her and Ximéo's freedom, unable to carry forth due to his infidelity yet nonetheless living on in a sense. Ximéo recounts Mirza consoling him from beyond the grave:

[J]'ai renfermé dans un tombeau les tristes restes de celle que j'aime quand elle n'est plus, de celle que j'ai méconnue pendant sa vie. Là, seul quand le soleil se couche, quand la nature entière semble se couvrir de mon deuil, quand le silence universel me permet de n'entendre plus que mes pensées, j'éprouve, prosterné sur ce tombeau, la jouissance du malheur, le sentiment tout entier de ses peines; mon imagination exaltée crée quelquefois des fantômes; je crois la voir, mais jamais elle ne m'apparaît comme une amante irritée. Je l'entends qui me console et s'occupe de ma douleur.<sup>24</sup>

Mirza's supernatural force endures as a source of love and enthusiasm, exalting Ximéo's imagination amidst the melancholic universal silence of sunset. The narrator of this tale in the form of a letter notes that there was nothing that could be said to console Ximéo, so he no longer dares speak to him, but instead writes his story to sanctify the name of Mirza, *l'ange d'amour*.<sup>25</sup>

24. Staël, "Lettre," 77; "I have shut in a tomb the sad remains of the one I love when she no longer is, of the one I failed to appreciate when she lived. There, in solitude, when the sun sets, when all of nature seems to be overcast with my mourning, when universal silence lets me hear my thoughts, then only can I feel, prostrate before this tomb, the enjoyment of grief, the full feeling of its sorrows. My exalted imagination sometimes creates ghosts; I think I see her, but she never appears to me as an angry lover. I hear her consoling me and attending to my grief" ("Letter," 9).

25. "Son calme sombre, son désespoir sans larmes, aisément me persuadèrent que tous mes efforts seraient vains; je n'osai plus lui parler, le malheur en impose; je le quittai le cœur plein d'amertume; et pour accomplir ma promesse, je raconte son histoire, et consacre, si je le puis, le triste nom de sa Mirza" (Staël, "Lettre," 78); "His somber calm, his tearless despair, easily convinced me that all my efforts would be

As Staël's early short story suggests, literature becomes a powerful source for conveying and inspiring enthusiasm, a concept that she further develops in the literary silence of *Corinne*, and throughout her lifetime in works such as *De la littérature*, *Delphine*, *De l'Allemagne* (1810/1813), and *Dix années d'exil* (1821). In *De la littérature*, Staël describes literature as the guardian of "le feu sacré d'un enthousiasme véritable,"<sup>26</sup> and explains how it might serve to foster a community out of exile, unhappiness, and isolation:

Ces écrits font couler des larmes dans toutes les situations de la vie; ils élèvent l'âme à des méditations générales qui détournent la pensée des peines individuelles; ils créent pour nous une société, une communication avec les écrivains qui ne sont plus, avec ceux qui existent encore, avec les hommes qui admirent comme nous ce que nous lisons. Dans les déserts de l'exil, au fond des prisons, à la veille de périr, telle page d'un auteur sensible a relevé peut-être une âme abattue: moi qui la lis, moi qu'elle touche, je crois y retrouver encore la trace de quelques larmes; et par des émotions semblables, j'ai quelques rapports avec ceux dont je plains si profondément la destinée.<sup>27</sup>

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pointless. I no longer dared speak to him; misfortune inspires respect. I left him, my heart full of bitterness, and I tell his story to fulfill my promise and sanctify, if I can, the sad name of his Mirza" ("Letter," 10).

26. "... pour garder dans son sein le feu sacré d'un enthousiasme véritable" (Staël, "De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales," in *Œuvres complètes*, 196–334, 206); "... to protect within one's bosom the sacred fire of true inspiration [(enthusiasm)]" (Staël, "Literature Considered in Its Relation to Social Institutions," in *Madame de Staël on Politics, Literature, and National Character*, ed. and trans. Morroe Berger (New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 139–256, 151).

27. Staël, "De la littérature," 206; "Those writings that are the guardians of ideas and virtuous love at least protect us from the arid sorrow born of loneliness, the icy hand that misery lays heavily upon us, when we believe we cannot arouse even the slightest compassion. Such writings can draw tears from people in any situation; they elevate the soul to more general contemplation, which diverts the mind from personal pain; they create for us a community, a relationship, with the writers of the past and those still living, with men who share our love for literature. In the desolation of exile, the depths of dungeons, and on the verge of death, a particular page of a sensitive author may well have revived a prostrate soul: and I who read that page, I who am touched by it, believe I still find there the trace of tears, and by feeling similar emotions I enter into some sort of communion with those whose fate I so deeply grieve" ("Literature," 151).

Like her predecessor Rousseau and her own literary protagonists, Staël is no stranger to exile, which she incorporates into her fiction and into recounting her own experience fleeing Napoleon in *Dix années d'exil*, describing the pain of being forced to leave multiple countries, while also forging a community beyond national borders by recounting this persecution through her writing. Although Napoleon attempts to censor her works and to stifle her voice, Staël employs both her nobility of expression and her ineffable enthusiasm to combat his offensives, demonstrating the strength of the soul and the political power of literature to combat the tides of despotism. She returns once again to enthusiasm in the final chapter of *De l'Allemagne*, attributing a unique degree of it to Germany,<sup>28</sup> which also highlights what is lost in France under Napoleon.

In spite of what is lacking, enthusiasm remains as a divine yet humanized force, as creative potential that may inspire a more egalitarian sense of community and lead to moral regeneration, which Staël aligns with this period of silence and the cosmopolitan conception of *nationalité* in her literature. While the melancholic tales of Corinne and Mirza conclude with the silence of death, they also conjure a hopeful, ineffable facet that channels the revitalizing energy of deeply felt emotion. Staël's enthusiasm stands in stark contrast to Napoleonic force in that it represents intellectual rather than military might and serves to direct the passions into a more expansive, positive role, replacing the *ennui* that forced exile is aimed to afflict with a liberating and animating sense of existence.<sup>29</sup> I have sought to underscore the affirmative political impact of silence as it is woven into Staël's fiction, like the final image of her heroine Corinne gesturing to the moon as Oswald approaches her deathbed.<sup>30</sup> Even if born of sorrow, enthusiasm holds

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28. Schiller's "Ode to Joy" in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is one frequently cited example of such enthusiasm. For more on enthusiasm in relation to Germany and *De l'Allemagne*, see Paul Hamilton, *Realpoetik: European Romanticism and Literary Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 51–55.

29. See Hamilton, *Realpoetik*, 45, 53. Hamilton likens this sentiment to a fascination that becomes both a literary and a political imperative for Rousseau, with whom Staël first begins her career as an author.

30. Katherine Dauge-Roth examines how early scientific ideas about the physiological influence of the moon on women became a popular trope in the debates over male-female equality in France during the early modern period. ("Femmes lunatiques: Women and the Moon in Early Modern France," *Dalhousie French Studies* 71 (Summer 2005), 3–29).



the potential for exaltation, the ability to uplift the soul in an enlarging movement that could also help to elevate character, perhaps even cultivating the true cosmopolitan spirit of enlightenment.<sup>31</sup>

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