

# The gentle art of Persuasion : ethical aesthetics and themes of liberty and nationalism in Germaine de Staël's *Corinne* and political propaganda during the Napoleonic Wars

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Sharon Worley

## The Gentle Art of Persuasion

### Ethical Aesthetics and Themes of Liberty and Nationalism in Germaine de Staël's *Corinne* and Political Propaganda during the Napoleonic Wars

Ce qui caractérise le gouvernement de Bonaparte, c'est un mépris profond pour toutes les richesses intellectuelles de la nature humaine: vertu, dignité de l'âme, religion, enthousiasme, voilà quels sont, à ses yeux, les éternels ennemis du continent, pour me servir de son expression favorite [...].<sup>1</sup>

During the period surrounding the French Revolution and Napoleonic era, authors, artists and critics directed their attention to the moral and patriotic values of society. According to the Enlightenment philosophers all human activity was governed by the mechanical laws of nature. They addressed a broad range of disciplines from scientific classification to epistemology, morality and aesthetics, created an organic worldview in which all activity formed part of a greater unified system of social organization. The Enlightenment's emphasis on rational enquiry and scientific methodology was extended to the humanities in which the laws governing the mechanistic universe could be applied to any discipline and uncovered.<sup>2</sup> Political propaganda during the Napoleonic era represented

1 Germaine de Staël, *Dix Années d'exil*, ed. Paul Gautier. Paris, Plon-nourrit, 1904, p. 21–22.

2 Arthur L. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*. Cambridge, Harvard UP, 2001; Jacques Roger, "The Mechanistic Conception of Life," *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Colloquium Helveticum 38/2007

a continuation of the radical reevaluation of signs and symbols that occurred during the French Revolution to reorient moral values and patriotic sentiments in relation to the citizen's contract with the state. Propaganda continued to take the form of semiotics designed to galvanize patriotic sentiments based on existing theories of social organization, language and allegory. This synthesis of disciplines enabled authors and artists to participate directly in the process influencing social behavior and patriotism, basing their own creative strategies on theories of epistemology that ensured their message would be understood on the psychological as well as intellectual level.

French Neoclassical and Romantic author Germaine de Staël's writings brought her into direct contact with propaganda programs during turbulent events surrounding the Napoleonic Wars. A feminist novelist who viewed literature as a method for modeling moral and patriotic behavior, she is representative of the new active roles for women during the Neoclassical and Romantic periods in which they created role models for society through literature and art during a period of revolution, conquest and revolt occurring during the French Revolution and subsequent Napoleonic era. Through the forum of the salon, gatherings of leading Enlightenment and Romantic intellectuals and politicians hosted by society women, they came into contact with the most important issues of their day and used literature as a feminist response to a male dominated patriarchal society which enabled them to make contributions as significant as their male colleagues. De Staël's *Corinne* (1807), written during the Napoleon Wars, was designed to galvanize patriotic sentiments and encourage readers to join a moral crusade in supporting a patriotic platform. To liberal groups of intellectuals who opposed Napoleon's rise to power and imperialist campaigns, liberty was the most important virtue to instill in audiences in an effort to rally support for opposition and the recruitment of volunteers in the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon. Propaganda in the form of art and literature which reinforced the goals of the Wars of Liberation supported by de Staël, was ultimately based on mechanical laws governing nature and epistemology.

Lynn Hunt, Joan Landes and others have written extensively on semiotic propaganda systems created during the French Revolution as a method of instilling patriotic values and morals among the people. The two movements Neoclassicism and Romanticism acquired political significance reflecting the two opposing political ideologies: the French Revolution, on the one hand, advocated the qualities of liberty, fraternity and equality. German Romanticism became associated with nationalist sentiments inspired by the Wars of Liberation, defined liberty as patriotism and freedom from foreign domination, especially French. The third ideology, Napoleonic imperialism, sought to impose dictatorial rule throughout Europe by appropriating the stoic rhetoric, allegory and imagery of Neoclassicism. The Pantheon designed by Jacques-Germain Soufflot and converted into a temple dedicated to the Great Men of France in 1790 represented the ideals and aspirations of the Republic. During the Napoleonic period, monuments based on Roman imperial monuments, the *Arc de Triomphe*, the *Colonne Vendôme* and *St. Madeline* represented the aspirations of the Empire and Grand Army in which Rousseau's collective will was transferred from the people to the emperor by Napoleon. In Germany, the imagery most closely associated with the Wars of Liberation was inspired by a revival of the Middle Ages. The Gothic style in particular became associated with the nationalist movement to free Germany from Napoleonic oppression. It also reinforced the ideology of feudalism in which vassals swore allegiance to the king. This form of government was not literal but symbolic of the medieval Holy Roman Empire in which devotion to the king was divinely ordained. When Napoleon dismantled the institution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 in Austria, the Gothic Cathedral of Cologne became the focus of a movement to restore and complete the cathedral as a symbol of German national unity.<sup>3</sup> These stylistic forms provided the basis for encoding the forms of Classical Antiquity, reli-

3 W.D. Robson-Scott, *The Literary Background of the Gothic Revival in Germany*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965; Wayne Hanley, *The Genesis of Napoleonic Propaganda, 1796 to 1799*, NY, Columbia UP, 2005; Georges Poisson, *Napoléon Ier et Paris*, Paris, Tallandier Éditions, 2002; Friedrich Meineke, *The Age of German Liberation, 1795–1815*, Berkeley, U of California P, 1977; Hans Kohn, *Prelude to Nation-States: The French and German Experience, 1789–1815*, Princeton, D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1967.



gious medieval and Renaissance art and architecture with a new patriotic significance intelligible to the masses and serving to create models for public morality and social responsibility.

De Staël's literary career formed parallels with other women during the Romantic movement and the era of Napoleonic nationalism. Women authors' lives became closely intertwined with one another during the turbulent events surrounding the Napoleonic wars. De Staël was exiled from Paris in 1803 because her guests were politically subversive in their refusal to give up republican ideals following Napoleon's rise to power. His self-appointment as First Consul for life in 1802 was followed by his self-coronation as emperor in 1804. Upon her exile, de Staël traveled to Weimar and Berlin, Germany where she met Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel in the salons hosted by the Jewish Berlin salon hostesses Rahel Levin and Henrietta Herz. The salon became an important forum for the exchange of ideas among intellectuals in the Enlightenment and Romantic periods. Dorothea Schlegel's childhood friends Levin and Herz hosted Berlin salons that attracted the leading Romantics as well as politicians and nobles. De Staël's relationship with the Schlegels was strengthened by A. W. Schlegel who became her children's tutor and her close companion returning with her to her Swiss Chateau at Coppet where she lived in exile. Friedrich and his wife D. Schlegel remained in close contact with them, occasionally visiting de Staël's estate Coppet where she maintained an active salon with nobles and intellectuals like author Chateaubriand, politician and author Benjamin Constant, salon hostess Juliette Récamier, historian Johannes Mueller and German military officer Prince Augustus of Prussia. D. Schlegel would also translate de Staël's novel *Corinne*. Throughout their association with one another de Staël and the Schlegels were actively involved in efforts on behalf of propaganda for the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon. F. Schlegel, for example, served as propaganda writer for the Austrian government for the Wars of Liberation, and at the end of the war, during the Congress of Vienna, served as First Secretary to of the Austrian Legation to the Diet of Frankfurt. As a group of intellectuals sharing the same political goals and values, they also applied their concepts of aesthetics and literature to a propaganda program based on contemporary theories of social organization and semiotics designed to galvanize patriotic sentiments in their readers. During the Enlightenment, reading was

regarded as the most important method of improving both public education and morals. Both de Staël and D. Schlegel used literature to represent models of the ideal state. In each novel, the main characters and protagonists form microcosms of society in which the authority of the ideal state is expressed through the dynamic interactions of the fictional characters. The emotional relationships between characters drew on theories of morality and aesthetics which were designed to rouse the reader's passions and persuade them to adopt the author's position.<sup>4</sup>

De Staël's ideals of liberty had been formed as part of her education and upbringing. She was raised in her mother Suzanne Curchod's salon which included famous Enlightenment thinkers like Diderot, Marmontel and Gibbon, who revered and discussed the work of monumental philosophers Rousseau and Voltaire. Curchod-Necker raised her daughter according to Rousseau's handbook on childrearing, *Emile*, and she and the intellectuals who attended her salon demonstrated their profound admiration for Voltaire when they commissioned a portrait bust of him by Pigalle.<sup>5</sup> One of de Staël's early essays was on Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* in which she analyzes and approves Rousseau's use of the novel and the model of the family as the basis for teaching moral values to society.<sup>6</sup> The salon, called the Republic of Letters by Dena Goodman, formed an independent political body of cosmopolitan thinkers who created models for egalitarian forms of government during the absolute monarchy of Louis XVI.<sup>7</sup> During the Revolution, the ideas of Voltaire, Rousseau,

4 Maria Fairweather, *Madame de Staël*, London, Constable, 2005; Carola Stern, "Ich möchte mir Flügel wünschen." *Das Leben der Dorothea Schlegel*, Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1990; Walter Consuelo Langsam, *The Napoleonic Wars and German Nationalism in Austria*, NY, Columbia UP, 1930, 43; Siegmur Hellerich, *Religionizing Romantics: The Catholico-Christian Camouflage of the Early German Romantics: Wackenroder, Tieck, Novalis, Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel*, Frankfurt a.M., Peter Lang, 1995, p. 199.

5 J. Christopher Herold, *Mistress to an Age: A Life of Madame de Stael*, NY, Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1958, p. 24–25.

6 Germaine de Staël, "Letters on Rousseau," *Major Writings of Germaine de Staël*, trans. Vivian Folkenflik. NY, Cornell UP, 1987; Nicole Fermon, *Domesticating Passions: Rousseau, Woman, and Nation*, Hanover, NH, Wesleyan UP, 1997; Penny Weiss, *Gendered Community: Rousseau, Sex and Politics*, NY, New York UP, 1993.

7 Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*, Ithaca, Cornell UP, 1994.

Montesquieu and Sieyès were instrumental in forming her beliefs about liberty which became the single most guiding intellectual concept in her views regarding creating role models for society. At the same time, her father Jacques Necker, a wealthy Swiss banker, served as the king's Minister of Finance, and sought to avert the encroaching crisis which precipitated the French Revolution. He wrote about his experiences in the administration of Louis XVI in his *Compte Rendu*, but also wrote essays on the French Revolution, morality and religion.<sup>8</sup> While de Staël and her milieu comprised of liberal French aristocrats and intellectuals such as Chateaubriand and Constant did not support the radical Jacobins and the Reign of Terror, they did support legislative models of government, especially constitutional monarchies based on the English model. Intellectuals among this milieu identified with Great Men of France, Voltaire, Rousseau, Mirabeau, Marat and others, who had been immortalized when their remains were transferred to the Pantheon in 1790 becoming synonymous with the lofty ideals of the Enlightenment and virtues of the Republic.<sup>9</sup> They formed an elite class of cosmopolitan intellectuals symbolized by the nobility. De Staël had acquired her own title of baroness when she married the Swedish ambassador to France, Eric Magnus de Staël-Holstein in 1786. This new intelligentsia became active in the years surrounding the Revolution, and took their responsibility towards the public seriously in opposing Napoleon's imperialist ambitions when they threatened the foundation of civilization and the egalitarian goals of the Enlightenment. De Staël's worldview formed by the Enlightenment and Republican period in France maintained that the abstract virtue and state of liberty was the ultimate goal towards which nations should evolve and develop. Literature played an instrumental role in her view in shaping the moral and political goals of the people. She believed in the Enlightenment view of a perfectible utopian society, and published works with the sole intention of raising public consciousness and improving the moral values of society. Abstract virtues became synonymous with

8 Robert D. Harris, *Necker: Reform Statesman of the Ancien Regimem* Berkeley, U of California P, 1979.

9 Mark K. Deming, "Le Pantheon Revolutionnaire," *Le Pantheon: Symbole des revolutions: De L Eglise de la Nation au Temple des grands homes*, Montreal, Picard Editeur, 1989.

individual achievement. De Staël, perhaps more than any other intellectual of her age, most closely embodies the continuing spirit of liberty in her effort to raise public consciousness through archetype and allegory during the entire duration of the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>10</sup>

De Staël, who lived in Paris during the Revolution and Directory, follows the model of Rousseau's *Social Contract*, in which the state is regarded as an extension of the individual who forms a social contract with existing paternal authority. The model of the family group within the noble estate, and the resolution of conflict form the basis of freedom and justice. Rousseau's theory formed the most significant basis of theories of legislative government which ultimately undermined monarchical authority in France during the Revolution. His *Social Contract* presented the mechanical laws of motivational drives that explained freedom as a significant element of any political model. Rousseau's theory influenced the later Revolution and Republic's legislative government. It was essential in forming concepts of freedom and liberty promulgated by French intellectuals. Rousseau proved that freedom was a right based on laws underlying social dynamics. During the French Revolution, his ideas were transformed into archetypal icons of liberty symbolized by allegorical figures like liberty which transformed the old cultural vestiges of monarchy and church into a new lexicon of republican patriotic values. These iconic archetypes were reinforced by Neoclassical art like Jacques Louis David's Neoclassical paintings *Oath of the Horatti* or *Brutus* which reinforced Republican political values and patriotism. Critics such as Denis Diderot reinforced the function of history and genre painting as a means of teaching moral values to the public, affirming their purpose as visual illustrations of approved social behavior.<sup>11</sup> De Staël

10 Madame de Staël, "Literature Considered in Relation to Its Relation to Social Institutions," *Politics, Literature, and National Character*, trans. & ed. Morroe Berger, News Brunswick, NJ, Transaction Publishers, 2000; Simone Balayé, *Madame de Staël: Lumières et liberté*, Paris, Éditions Klincksieck, 1979, p. 33–119; Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*, Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers UP, 1992, p. 213–306; Madelyn Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist: The Emergence of the Woman as Artist*, Chicago, U of Illinois P, 1966.

11 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston, 1998; Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, New Haven,

draws on the existing authority of Neoclassical allegory imbued with republican symbolism in her novel *Corinne* through references to major Neoclassical paintings like David's *Brutus* or Guerin's *Phèdre* which form the center piece of Corinne's private art collection, or ruins and monuments like the temple of the Sibyl at Tivoli, located across from her villa, or Capitoline Hill, where she is crowned as a muse of music and poetry, and the Pantheon, where she plans to be buried among other great figures such as Raphael and the Kings of Italy. The Neoclassical style had become synonymous with Republican virtues transposed from its original historical context onto the contemporary circumstance and events surrounding the Revolution and establishment of the Republic by both art critics and efforts by the new French Republican government to reeducate its citizens with symbols of abstract patriotic virtues and civic identity. Her character Corinne, is a projection of herself and her political agenda, as well as an allegorical muse symbolizing liberty, and the emotions she arouses through passion and drama are intended to influence the reader to support liberty as a patriotic virtue and a political position. The purpose of her novel was to raise public consciousness during Napoleon's campaigns in Italy, and promote traditional Republican values symbolized by Neoclassicism and Roman monuments as opposed to imperialism and tyranny.<sup>12</sup>

Closely related to the motivational drive and social dynamics of Rousseau, Herder traced the origins of Germans to common ethnic and linguistic ties as the basis of nationalism and communal identity. During the Wars of Liberation, Herder's theories of national development formed the basis of German propaganda used by German nationalist propaganda writers during the Wars of Liberation including Ernst Moritz Arndt, Adam Mueller and Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Herder traced the origins of nations to language and early folklore. The language of a folk could also be traced to its earliest origins in

Yale UP, 1985, p. 211–254; Denis Diderot, *Diderot on Art*, ed. & trans. John Goodman, vol. I. New Haven, Yale UP, 1995.

- 12 Germaine de Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, trans. & ed. Sylvia Raphael, NY, Oxford UP, 1998; Enrico Bruschini and Alba Amoia, "Rome's Monuments and Artistic Treasures in Mme. de Staël's *Corinne* (1807): Then and Now," *Nineteenth Century French Studies*, 22 (1994), p. 314; Guilia Pacini, "Hidden Politics in Germaine de Staël's *Corinne ou l'Italie*," *French Forum*, 24 (1999), p. 169.



folklore and music. Literature thus represented the natural expression of national identity and was used to rally patriotic sentiments during the Wars of Liberation in Germany. De Staël's cultural survey of German Romanticism *De L'Allemagne* included a discussion of Herder's philosophy as the basis of German nationalism. She recognized that Germany's efforts to win the war against Napoleon depended upon propaganda strategies that encouraged nationalism and ethnicity among the fragmented political states through literature. The heroic archetypes of Schiller's "William Tell," "Maid of Orleans," or Goethe's *Goetze von Berlichingen* demonstrate national unity and communal identity through literature in the plots of heroes and heroines who defeat foreign invaders. She recognized that the emphasis on the German national hero would serve as a powerful anecdote for Napoleon's cult of the emperor in which individual freedom was surrendered to the will of the emperor. All of Napoleon's military campaigns beginning with Italy, where he first began appropriating the cultural patrimony of Italy, served to enhance his persona among the Grand Army, to whom his imperial monuments were dedicated, and the public. His military victories made him a national hero who threatened the cult of liberty established during the French Revolution with which de Staël identified with through her character Corinne. The threat was personified through his portraits and imperial monuments such as Canova's sculpture of Napoleon as the god of war Mars, or David's *Coronation of Napoleon* in Notre Dame Cathedral. This imagery effectively revoked both the former balance of power in the European nations and Rousseau's social contract in which the leader acts in the best interest of the collective will of the people.

Following her exile, de Staël's traveled to Germany in 1803 where she met the Schlegels along with leading German Romantic intellectuals at Weimar and Berlin salons. She met Schiller and Goethe in Weimar, and discussed philosophy and literature with Fichte and the famous Jewish salon hostess Rahel Levin in Berlin, both of whom were close friends of the Schlegels. The result of her German trip was a comprehensive survey of German Romantic literature published first in England due to censorship, *De l'Allemagne* (1813), introduced German Romantic culture to European audiences. The survey was originally sent to French publishers in 1810, but Napoleon's censors prevented her from publishing the book due to her transparent sup-

port of the German resistance movement. The Minister of French police, René Savary, Duc de Rovigo, who replaced Joseph Fouché in 1810, wrote that her work was not French, adding “nous n’en sommes pas encore réduits à chercher des modèles dans les peuples que vous admirez” (“we are not yet reduced to seek for models amongst the people you admire.”)<sup>13</sup> The objection by censors lay in her emphasis on literature as an expression of German nationalism which had the capacity to foment a popular revolt against Napoleon. John Claiborne Isbell, for example, notes that Werner’s “Attila the Hun” is a veiled allusion to the imperialist campaigns of Napoleon. German literary archetypes, such as Schiller’s “William Tell” and “Maid of Orleans,” provided the heroic role models for contemporary patriotic emulation, but were also based on scientific theory like Herder’s *History of Mankind*. Whereas Rousseau stressed the natural laws which defined liberty and legislative government as a natural right for society, Herder emphasize literature as the defining characteristic of national unity, cultural identity and patriotic values. Through literature, the nation would also be presented with patriotic role models for emulation. De Staël’s *De l’Allemagne* and her review of Herder’s ideas in the context of her analysis of German literary archetypes provide the reader with the same scientific basis for literary analysis which Rousseau’s *Social Contract* provided for French literature. In Germany, for the first time, de Staël placed literature in a scientific anthropological perspective which defines it as a natural expression of the identity of a people. De Staël’s work thus had enormous import for the German nationalist movement which otherwise lacked a centralized form of government at a time of national crisis and fragmentation. Her work establishes literature as possessing an important function within a politico-scientific model.<sup>14</sup>

De Staël’s enduring close contact with the Schlegel brothers reinforced her basic views concerning correlations between morality

13 Maria Fairweather, *Madame de Staël*, London, Constable, p. 371–77.

14 Germaine de Staël, *De l’Allemagne*, reprinted by John Murray, London, 1813, préface, p. xviii–xxi. Cf. Germaine de Staël, *On Germany*, London, John Murray, 1814, vol I, p. v–vii; John Claiborne Isbell, *The Birth of European Romanticism: Truth and Propaganda in Staël’s De l’Allemagne 1810–1813*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge UP, 1994, p. 55–100; Michael Polowetzky, *A Bond Never Broken. The Relations between Napoleon and the Authors of France*, London, Associated UP, 1993, p. 135–137.

and aesthetics. Both were literary critics who wrote on drama, literature and art. Friedrich Schlegel, who married D. Schlegel, wrote extensively on Romantic criticism, and established the Romantic movement in Germany when he defined Romantic poetry as “a progressive, universal poetry” in a constant state of becoming.<sup>15</sup> De Staël also developed her own theory of literature in which Romantic “enthusiasm” and the “involuntary [moral] impulse”<sup>16</sup> of the reader would be stimulated by the arousal of powerful feminine emotions, thereby influencing the moral and patriotic values of the reader through aesthetics. De Staël’s major essay on the subject “Literature Considered in Its Relation to Social Institutions” establishes causal relationships between the social history of a people, its culture, and its political patriotic values. Liberty was the highest aspiration of any national development according to de Staël, and literature and aesthetics were the essential means of achieving that ideal state. The influence of women in literature as authors and heroines represented a further advancement of society in which the powerful empathic emotions of women had the capacity to stimulate an ethical response from the audience and reader. Sensibility refers to the ability of the author, male or female, to convey their feelings, eloquence, enthusiasm and morality to their audience. But the French Revolution opened new doors for women’s participation in culture. While they have not yet been given a leadership role, she states that their sensitivity aided the progress of literature by sensitizing men to the volatile emotional constitution of women, enabling them to feel greater nuances of feeling expressed in literature. Emotions like fear, regret, devotion and indignation animate modern literature and characterize its advanced and evolved level of intellectual development. It is through this empathy that literature has the capacity to move the reader through enthusiasm and mold their characters and morals. She praises Rousseau as the author of “pure democracy” and attributes freedom of thought to liberty as an abstract virtue the nation should emulate. Literature was the most effective method of influencing

15 Friedrich Schlegel, “Athenaeum Fragment #116.” *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments*. Trans. Peter Firchow, Minneapolis, U of Minnesota P, 1971.

16 Germaine de Staël, “Literature Considered in Its Relation to Social Institutions,” *Politics, Literature, and National Character*, trans. & ed. Morroe Berger, New Brunswick, NJ, Transaction Publishers, 2000, p. 143.



society and politics. She equates perfect virtue with perfect beauty, and follows the correlation between aesthetics, morality and epistemology presented by Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke. In her view the Enlightenment authors Montesquieu, Rousseau and Condillac were those who advanced the republican spirit and the revolution which “must be completed.” The basis of political freedom according to de Staël is morality, and authors inspire patriotism through the heroic deeds of their fictional characters who make the moral actions of their readers as spontaneous as an involuntary moral reflex. Her essay takes the form of a chronological survey of European literature beginning with Classical Antiquity. In this context, she may have been among the first authors to apply the term romantic or “romanesque” to the chivalric poetry of the Middle Ages, according to Pauline de Pange, in reference to the “Old French Tales [which] describe the adventures of chivalry.”<sup>17</sup>

While Neoclassicism and the Enlightenment formed one lexicon of propaganda, Romanticism having its origins in the romantic chivalric tales of the French Middle Ages formed another. The nationalist foundation of German Romanticism was first articulated by Herder in his writings on the causal relation between linguistic, national and cultural values reinforced her view that literature, music and aesthetics formed the basis of persuasion in political propaganda in influencing the collective will or German Volk. In the introduction to *De l'Allemagne* (1813) de Staël states the importance of establishing a communal identity through German literature to create a unified front against Napoleon:

J'ai dit dans mon ouvrage, que les Allemands *n'étoient pas une nation*; et certes ils donnent au monde maintenant d'héroïques démentis à cette crainte. Mais ne voit-on pas cependant quelques pays germaniques s'exposer, en combattant contre leurs compatriotes, au mépris de leurs alliés mêmes, les Français? [...] La soumission d'un peuple à un autre est contre nature. [...] Il y a trois ans que je désignais la Prusse et les pays du Nord qui l'entourent comme *la patrie de la pensée*; en combien d'actions généreuses cette pensée ne s'est-

17 De Staël, “Literature Considered in Its Relation to Social Institutions,” *Politics, Literature, and National Character*, p. 143; Pauline Gräfin de Pange, *August Wilhelm Schlegel und Frau von Staël: Eine schicksalhafte Begegnung*, Hamburg, H. Goverts, 1940, p. 23.

elle pas transformée! Ce que les philosophes mettaient en système s'accomplit, et l'indépendance de l'âme fondera celle des États.<sup>18</sup>

Through her association with her German milieu she was able to actively implement a resistance against Napoleon and support German liberation efforts.

The two women's respective novels D. Schlegel's *Florentin* (1801) and de Staël's *Corinne* (1807) are thus significant in the history of women authors who used literature as a method of influencing the moral and political structure of society. Using characters and settings based on an idealization of their real life surroundings, they created fictional models contemporaries would strive to emulate. They explore the dynamics of human and ethical behavior through the medium of love relationships and aesthetics as motivators for political loyalty. Romanticism advocated love as one of the means of stirring the emotions and intuiting intimations of the divine. The model of the family and familial dynamics served as the underlying basis of Rousseau's patriarchal society in which authority was established through the model of the family. Morals for society as a whole were demonstrated within the model of a single family in the genre of the novel as in Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* or F. Schlegel's *Lucinde* (1799). F. Schlegel's novel was based on Schlegel's illicit relationship with D. Schlegel after they met in 1797, and prior to her divorce from Simon Veit. Both novels are concerned with personal freedom and bonds of familial loyalty, but imply that moral choices and individual freedom serve as the basis of social unity. The novel publicly humiliated D. Schlegel in front of her contemporaries, and her subsequent novel *Florentin* (1801) in essence corrects the image of the family unit as the basis of social order. Her political agenda places her novel within the genre of novels which united love and war such as Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* or Napoleon's *Eugene and Clisson* in which romantic love forms a metaphor for a patriotic sacrifice for one's country.

The model of the family set within historical references to Classical Antiquity, the Middle Ages or Renaissance, revived morals virtues associated with those historic revivals. Through association and

18 Germaine de Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, 1813, préface, p. xviii–xxi. Cf. de Staël, *On Germany*, p. I, vii.

memory, they serve as moral indicators and historic referents for social and patriotic responsibility. De Staël uses the setting of Neo-classical Rome to emphasize the Republican values of Ancient Rome which guide the ethical actions of her heroine. D.Schlegel, by contrast, relies on the German model of the estate in which medieval feudal ties between the lord and his subjects for the basis of political unity and moral action. De Staël and D. Schlegel worked within a cultural milieu which was directly affected by the French occupation of Germany during the Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. As she witnessed the Revolution and early Republic, symbols of nationality and patriotic values were systematically reassigned to French cultural and historical artifacts. This process of nationalization according to Lynn Hunt took all the emblems of monarchy and the medieval history of the divinely ordained institutions and reassigned them new abstract Republican values. This was intended to reorient the people according to a new semiotic system which ascribed virtues to symbols which reinforced the patriotic values of the state and the contract of its citizens. The new focus of worship shifted from the king, the church and the Virgin Mary, to the abstract allegorical figure of liberty, or Hercules defeating the hydra of tyranny.<sup>19</sup> As a result of the intellectual currents in Paris, de Staël's own views developed in accordance with prevailing models of constitutional government. Liberty according to political and critical essays she wrote during this period, became the goal toward which nations developed. National culture had an impact on how quickly nations achieved that modern state of evolution, or whether they continued to follow other less advanced political models. The love of tyranny or freedom could be gauged from the cultural values, literature and nationalist propensities of the people. Her intellectual political values were based in rational analysis of the political transformations which occurred in Paris, however, her idolization of the abstract value liberty was personified through the allegorical figure of a woman. This woman became the muse and her fictional character Corinne, the subject of her novel *Corinne*. During Napoleon's rise to power from First Consul in 1799 to Emperor in

19 Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, Berkeley, U of California P, 1984; Joan Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France*, Ithaca, Cornell UP, 2001.

1804, these values were challenged and subverted by his imperialist ambitions. Consequently, her most important goal in life, freedom of speech on the subject of liberty, was obstructed by Napoleon who accused her and her salon of conspiracy against his regime. Her ideas about liberty and her motivation to continue to use literature and aesthetics as a medium for advancing the ideals of liberty developed in direct response to Napoleon's tyranny and oppression which often was directed at her personally as a result of views. Napoleon, for example claimed later from Saint Helena that de Staël's Swiss Chateau Coppet had "become a veritable arsenal against him."<sup>20</sup> His chief of police Fouché continued to monitor her activities throughout the war, and report back to Napoleon. In 1803, he exiled her from Paris, forcing her to move to her family's estate at Coppet, Switzerland. Shortly thereafter she took two major trips to Germany and Italy where she met intellectuals and gathered research for her survey of German Romantic culture *De l'Allemagne* and *Corinne*. Both regions became significant cultural centers of icons and archetypes for nationalist propaganda to de Staël. Germany represented Romanticism, a concerted military strategy to defeat Napoleon, while Italy represented the cultural ideals and heritage of Republican Rome and liberty. The two styles and cultures: Neoclassicism, associated with the Enlightenment, Revolution, the Republic and Empire, and Romanticism, the style of the German Wars of Liberation, formed lexicons of patriotic values. The first French invasions of the Rhineland and Italy that occurred under the Republic during the 1790s effectively stimulated regional feelings of nationalism based on cultural heritage: the German Middle Ages in the Rhineland with Cologne Cathedral at its center contributed to a revival of feudal religious and nationalist heritage, while appropriation of Italy's Classical patrimony in the form of its most valuable artworks taken as war booty by Napoleon which formed the collections of the *Musée Napoléon* contributed to a renewed interest in Italian nationalism and Roman Republican values.<sup>21</sup>

20 Madame de Staël, *Ten Years of Exile*, NY, Saturday Review Press, 1972, p. xxiv.

21 Cecil Gould, *Trophy of Conquest: The Musée Napoléon and the Creation of the Louvre*, London, Faber and Faber, 1965; T.C.W. Blanning, *The French Revolution in Germany: Occupation and Resistance in the Rhineland, 1792–1802*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983, p. 207–254.

After returning from Germany in 1804, de Staël's second major trip was to Italy where her novel *Corinne* (1807) was set. During the same year Napoleon would be crowned emperor in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, and the following year crowned the King of Italy. Napoleon's victories over the Germans, Russian and Spanish followed in rapid succession, with his first major victory over the Austrians and Russians at Austerlitz in 1805.<sup>22</sup> Her novel is written as a Romantic reaction against tyranny and dictatorship which cloaked itself in former Republican symbolism. Her novel conjured up the classical ruins of Antiquity, and the Republican values with which Classical monuments and allegory became associated during the Revolution and Early Republic in France, and actively sought to reverse the imperial symbolism Napoleon was reestablishing in Paris with his program of monuments based on Classical imperial prototypes. Antonio Canova took Napoleon's commission to sculpt his portrait as the god of war Mars in 1803–06, and the *Apollo Belvedere* and David's *Brutus* were on display in the Musée Napoléon. The *Vendôme Column* for example was erected on a site the French ministry had originally designated for a statue of Charlemagne and subsequently Napoleon after his coronation. The column was topped by a statue of Napoleon and decorated with a spiral relief depicting Napoleon's campaign of 1805. Based on the *Column of Trajan* at the Roman Forum, it was dedicated to the Grand Army and designed under the direction of the director of the *Musée Napoléon*, Vivant Denon.<sup>23</sup> De Staël's novel includes references to Capitoline Hill, where *Corinne* is crowned as a muse of liberty, the temple of the Sibyl located across from her villa, and the Pantheon where she plans to be buried, serve as iconic cues to Classicism as the source of Republicanism, not imperialism. These references serve to recall by association the source and model of the original Republican iconography during the period of the French Republic.

De Staël's own theory of literature was a political application of contemporary theories of nationalism, linguistics, aesthetics and eth-

22 James Sheehan, *German History, 1770–1866*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 235–388; Friedrich Meinecke, *The Age of German Liberation, 1795–1815*, ed. Peter Paret, Berkeley, U of California P, 1977.

23 Georges Poisson, *Napoleon 1er et Paris*, Paris, Tallandier Editions, 2002, p. 111–159.

ics. Living through the turbulent period of the Revolution and conducting her Paris salon with guests who represented leading intellectuals like Chateaubriand and Constant, theories of legislative government and liberty continued to form the main topic of intellectual debate and political reform. These egalitarian views were also demonstrated through literature which was designed to inspire its readers to emulate the moral and patriotic goals of fictional protagonists. The author whom she was most influenced by was Rousseau. Rousseau's theory was essential in shaping these intellectuals basis sense of freedom and liberty. The origin of government according to Rousseau could be traced to the social pact of a people made for the mutual benefit of its members. The resulting collective moral body replaces individuality and has a common self, life and will which becomes a city, state or republic. Since this pact is voluntary, Rousseau argues that the sovereign of the state cannot act with an interest which runs contrary to that of the people. The civil state develops when instinct is exchanged for morals and a duty to act in accordance with laws. The freedom of the individual continues to be expressed in the collective will of the people. The laws set forth by Rousseau represented an indisputable theory which explained the contract between the people, the state and its government. Freedom or liberty represented the highest development of humanity and was expressed as a moral value.<sup>24</sup> Later French political writers like Montesquieu *De l'esprit des lois* (1787), and Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès *Qu'est ce que le Tiers Etat?* (1789), drew on Rousseau's theory in formulating their own models. For authors like de Staël, who actively engaged in French politics, establishing the moral imperative of liberty became the sole aim of literary endeavor. But her literary theory was based directly on her political convictions and moral values which had been shaped by Rousseau. Writing in *Considérations sur la Révolution française* (1818) de Staël reiterates her theory that an effective republican government must be based on abstract impartial laws to implement the general will, and protect the people's rights and liberty. Political justice was the natural result of a model that balanced legislative, judicial and executive powers, and could not be enforced without it:

24 Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston, London, Penguin Books, 1968.



On trouve dans quelques constitutions modernes comme article constitutionnel: *le gouvernement sera juste et le peuple obéissant*. S'il étoit possible de commander un tel résultat, la balance des pouvoirs seroit bien inutile; mais pour arriver à mettre les bonnes maximes en exécution, il faut combiner les institutions de manière que chacun trouve son intérêt à les maintenir. Les doctrines religieuses peuvent se passer de l'intérêt personnel pour commander aux hommes, et c'est en cela surtout qu'elles sont d'un ordre supérieur; mais les législateurs, chargés des intérêts de ce monde, tombent dans une sorte de *duperie* quand ils font entrer les sentimens patriotiques comme un ressort nécessaire dans leur machine sociale. C'est méconnoître l'ordre naturel des événemens, que de compter sur l'effets pour organiser la cause: les peuples ne deviennent pas libres, parce qu'ils sont vertueux, mais parce qu'une circonstance heureuse, ou plutôt une volonté forte les mettant en possession de la liberté, ils acquièrent les vertus qui en dérivent.<sup>25</sup>

The goal of de Staël's political writings was to identify the majority to protect the moral imperative described in Rousseau's *Social Contract*. Her main concern is with the public welfare of the majority. She defines public welfare as an ideal goal for society as a whole and the best interest of the majority. In the aftermath of the Revolution, royalists still sought to reestablish the power of the nobility, while radical factions wanted to advance the extreme violence of the Jacobins. Prior to the execution of the king, Louis XVI, she could still safely advocate a constitutional monarchy claiming the abuses of absolute monarchy had been abolished by the Revolution. The majority interest was served by abstract values such as liberty and equality. During the Directory, her political values became more abstract. Political morals represented ethical values which had to be implemented to serve the majority interests. Fiction would become the most effective method in her view of establishing these values in society. In an essay "Of Public Opinion" written in 1799, she again addresses the issue of the majority. Here, by contrast, rather than addressing bipartisan politics, she appeals to historical models and abstract virtues, and motivational laws of Rousseau's *Social Contract*:

Le liberté des temps anciens, c'est tout ce qui assurait aux citoyens la plus grande part dans l'exercice du pouvoir. De ces deux grandes différences sort la nécessité, pour la République en France, de ne pas exiger, de ne pas peser, de prendre pour guide une morale préservatrice plutôt qu'un système de dévouement qui devient

25 Germaine de Staël, *Considérations sur la Révolution française*, ed. Jacques Godechot, Paris, Tallandier, 2000, p. 243.

féroce lorsqu'il n'est point volontaire; enfin, de songer que la perfectibilité dans l'art social ayant rendu le bonheur privé plus facile, a d'autant plus éloigné des sacrifices au bien public.<sup>26</sup>

De Staël interprets Rousseau theory as absolute laws of nature which must be obeyed. Her theory of fiction, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* written in 1800 outlined her theory regarding the influence of literature on nationalism. Her ideas formed in reaction to the recent military victories of Napoleon and his meteoric rise to power as First Consul for life the same year. Sieyès, whose *Qu'est ce que le Tiers Etat?* articulated the egalitarian goals of the subsequent National Assembly, yielded to Napoleon's political ambitions when he joined his cabinet. The French ideologues soon followed, and the philosophical basis of liberty was subsumed in Napoleon's dictatorial and imperialist political ambitions. De Staël's work forms one of the most significant examples of intellectual freedom during this period of oppression and censorship. Her outspoken criticism of Napoleon together with her literary works which implemented her theory of liberty and literature brought her into direct conflict with Napoleon who regarded her as a subversive threat to his regime and resulted in her exile of 1803. Her theory continued to emphasize the importance of Rousseau basic laws of social organization:

L'amour de la patrie est une affection purement sociale. L'homme, créé par la nature pour les relations domestiques, ne porte son ambition au-delà, que par l'irrésistible attrait de l'estime générale; et c'est sur cette estime, formée par l'opinion, que la talent d'écrire a la plus grande influence. A Athènes, à Rome, dans les villes dominatrices du monde civilisé, en parlant sur la place publique, on dispoit des volontés d'un peuple et du sort de tous; de nos jours, c'est par la lecture que les événement se préparent et que les jugements s'éclairent.<sup>27</sup>

Literature, according to de Staël, is the most significant method of influencing the ethics and political models of society. She equates "perfect virtue" with "perfect beauty." Thus, she follows aesthetic

26 Germaine de Staël, *Des circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la révolution et des principes qui doivent fonder la République en France*, ed. Lucia Omacini. Paeris, Libraire Droz, 1979, p. 112.

27 Germaine de Staël, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, ed. Paul van Tieghem. Paris, M.J. Minard, 1959, v. I, p. 27.



philosophy of Kant, Burke and Joshua Reynolds who perceived direct correlations between aesthetics, morality and epistemology. The basis of political freedom, claims de Staël, and its highest development is represented by morality. Morality, according to Enlightenment views was inseparable from both perfection and aesthetic beauty. Authors inspired the heroic patriotic deeds of citizens through their art. De Staël further identified a spontaneous moral reflex that an author could stimulate in the reader. Authors, in her view, played an essential role in elevating the morals of society through literature. The virtues she identifies as the “true guarantor” of liberty are “eloquence and reason.” Sensibility referred to the ability of authors to convey their feelings, eloquence, enthusiasm and morality to their audience. De Staël also believed that women impart a special emotional dimension to literature through their sensitivity which enabled them to arouse tender emotions, and thus inspire the moral actions of the reader. While she observes that women have not yet been given a leadership role in literature, she states that their sensitivity aided the progress of literature by sensitizing men to the volatile emotional constitution of women. It enabled men to feel greater nuances of feeling expressed through literature. The nuances of emotions like fear, regret, devotion and indignation animate modern literature and characterize its advanced and evolved level of intellectual development. It is through this empathy that literature has the power to move readers and mold their character and morals. French literature, observes de Staël, traces its origins to Classical Antiquity, which served as a significant model of moral values to Enlightenment society. The new feature of literature which stages and scrutinizes causal social factors also has the ability to form role models for society and direct its citizens toward positive egalitarian political goals. De Staël believed in the perfectible historical progression of society in which the spread of knowledge and moral values by authors would result in a perfect republican utopian society based on liberty:

La liberté, la vertu, la gloire, les lumières, ce cortège imposant de l'homme dans sa dignité naturelle, ces idées alliées entr'elles, et dont l'origine est la même, ne sauroient exister isolément. Le complément de chacune est dans la réunion de toutes. [...] Le progrès de la littérature, c'est-à-dire, le perfectionnement de l'art

de penser et de s'exprimer, sont nécessaires à l'établissement et à la conservation de la liberté.<sup>28</sup>

In De Staël's opinion, the Enlightenment authors Montesquieu, Rousseau and Condillac advance this republican spirit and revolution which "must be completed." Her view of causal factors between religion and morals, climate and government, literature and historical development, reveal the profound impact of Enlightenment thinking with respect to causality and reason in determining historical outcomes. Her emphasis on the unique role of women in bringing out the sensitivity required to effectively use literature for the purpose of modeling society is indicative of her feminist perspective. At the same time she demonstrates a practical application of semiotics and Classical allegory as a cue for the orientation of social and patriotic values.

The application of theories of aesthetics to literature as the best method for advancing the moral and patriotic goals of society was supported by Enlightenment philosophers. Condillac's theory of epistemology designated signs which were connected to perceptions. Recall and association too were functions of signs. This abbreviation and designation of the idea by its sign could be used to conjure complicated intellectual ideas. In using the example of the salons, the setting where de Staël and D. Schlegel exchanged the newest and most complex ideas in Enlightenment and Romantic philosophy, Condillac writes that one's ability to follow changes in the topic of conversation is dependent upon the audience's capacity to retrieve and make associations between ideas:

L'attention que nous donnons à une perception qui nous affecte actuellement, nous en rappelle le signe: celui-ci en rappelle d'autres avec lesquels il a quelque rapport: ces derniers réveillent les idées auxquelles ils sont liés: ces idées retracent d'autres signes ou d'autres idées, et ainsi successivement.<sup>29</sup>

The early government of the French Republic as Landes has shown relied on the work of Condorcet and Condillac, Abbé Grégoire and others, in formulating propaganda programs that used the sign and

28 De Staël, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, v. I, p. 20.

29 Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*, ed. Jacques Derrida, Paris, Galilée, 1973, p. 126.

symbol to influence public opinion and form new standards of moral and patriotic values. Iconography was used to restore legitimacy to the new Republic. Landes quotes Abbé Gregoire, for example, who stated specifically that in order to “republicanize” the government, the legislator must use “the language of signs” to “impress the senses, to awaken republican ideas” and mold national character.<sup>30</sup>

Certainly de Staël, appropriated this methodology and used it in her own program for creating role models for patriotic social behavior. The use of visual symbols was so enthusiastically advocated, asserts Landes, that they suggested a fusion of figurative imagery with language based on contemporary theories of the origin of language like Condorcet whose theory held that the “mind grasped the figurative and the literal sense simultaneously.” De Staël lived in Paris conducting her salon during Revolutionary transition and radical re-orientation in which Christian and monarchical symbols were systematically stripped of their former associations with social legitimacy and imbued with new Republican significance. The Virgin Mary, for example was replaced by the Grecian allegorical figure of Liberty, which de Staël extolled as the goal of all human and social development of nations. Notre Dame was converted to a temple of Reason presided over by the abstract virtues of liberty and reason, while Ste. Geneviève was converted to the Pantheon, and a temple dedicated to Reason and the Great Men of France, when Voltaire’s remains were interred there in 1791, followed by Rousseau and martyrs of the revolution Jean Paul Marat, and Mirabeau. The Enlightenment luminaries that she had revered as a young woman in the Paris salon of her mother Suzanne Curchod-Necker were now elevated to the status of idolized abstract intellectual virtues.<sup>31</sup>

In her novel *Corinne*, de Staël elevated her character Corinne to the level of a classical allegorical muse representing liberty. Corinne’s relationship with the English aristocrat Oswald, Lord Nevil provides the pretext for rousing human passions and emotions through love relationships. It draws directly on her theory of literature as the means of inspiring her reader to moral action. Set in the ruins of

30 Quoted in Joan B. Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France*, Ithaca, Cornell UP, 2001, p. 28–29.

31 Emmett Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution*, New Haven, Yale UP, 1989, p. 204–05, 343.

Classical Antiquity, de Staël, also relies on the symbolic associations her reader would make with Classical Antiquity as representative of Republican political virtues and liberty. This association was established by Neoclassical painting and drama prior to the Revolution, and continued as the style for Republican propaganda up until the time of Napoleon. Corinne's villa overlooks the Temple of the Sibyl at Tivoli, and her art collection contains some of the greatest Neoclassical paintings including David's *Brutus*, and Guérin's *Phèdre*. Both subjects were drawn from Classical Antiquity and appeared in later French Neoclassical dramas. According to Robert Herbert, Voltaire's *Brutus* became closely associated with the events precipitating the execution of the king Louis XVI for treason, while Euripides *Phaedre* rewritten by Racine was one of de Staël's favorite dramas which she performed in the lead role numerous times at her Chateau Coppet and again for the Viennese nobility.<sup>32</sup> Powerful associations with dramas such as these drew on the reader's ability to make an association between the moral values portrayed within a historical context and a contemporary political application. Naturally the reader would choose to support liberty as the most important Enlightenment value, recognizing the errors of treason in support of a corrupt monarchy, in the case of *Brutus*, or the fallible nature of corrupt irrational self-interest in *Phèdre*. The morals of novels, according to de Staël, could be apprehended more from the "internal emotions of the soul, than to the events they relate." Retribution for wrongdoing, rewards for stoic sacrifice, empathy for misfortune formed the basis of the audience's ability to apply fiction to their own lives.<sup>33</sup> The stoic moral virtues of Corinne culminate in her coronation at the capitol as a muse and priestess of liberty. She also confides to Oswald that she plans to be buried in the Pantheon where Raphael and the Kings of Italy were buried. References to the capitol and Pantheon also allude to her fame as an abstract moral political virtue representing liberty,

32 Robert Herbert. *David, Voltaire, Brutus and the French Revolution: an essay in Art and Politics*, NY, Viking Press, 1972; Warren Roberts, *Jacques Louis David, Revolutionary Artists: Art, Politics and the French Revolution*, Chapel Hill, U of North Carolina P, 1989.

33 Germaine de Staël, "Essay on Fiction," *Major Writings of Germaine de Staël*, NY, Columbia UP, 1987, p. 73–74.

and her association with the Great Men of the French Enlightenment interred at the Pantheon in Paris.

Allegory allowed the artist to encode abstract values in imagery. One of the most frequently portrayed allegorical symbols in France during the Republic was that of Liberty. Portrayed wearing a Roman laurel wreath, or a Phrygian cap, she was representing defeating the hydra of despotism. Allegories such as these drew on Condillac's categories of perception and association between image and abstract thought. De Staël's novel perhaps for the first time, featured allegory as a fictional character. Her allegorical character was also intended to reverse images of Napoleon as Apollo the sun king, and his imperial aspirations which were expressed in the iconology of Roman imperial monuments, and his military campaigns in which he exacted a symbolic tribute of Italy's greatest artworks including the *Apollo Belvedere*, the *Capitoline bust of Brutus*, and *Laocöon*.

Through a combination of theory of symbol, perception and fiction de Staël and her German colleagues formulated a program of resistance which would re-instill Republican moral values, placing a premium on liberty and dispelling the tyranny of despotism. De Staël's character Corinne ultimately draws on human emotion to instruct the viewer and show that her allegorical association liberty is an ideal the reader should emulate. In refusing to displace her English half-sister who was previously engaged to Oswald, Corinne returns to Italy where she dies of unrequited love. Her heroic self-sacrifice allows the English estate as a patriarchal model of social authority to remain in tact through primogeniture. The emphasis on the estate in her case reflects both a preference for a constitutional monarchy based on the English model, as well as an archetype of social order. De Staël acquired her noble title through marriage to the Swedish Baron Eric Magnus de Staël-Holstein who served as ambassador to France prior to his premature death in 1802. But nobility among her friends and associates became symbolic of intellectual nobility represented by the Enlightenment *philosophes* and Republic of Letters. The emphasis on emotions roused by unconsummated unrequited love and death were intended to stir the reader through Romantic "enthusiasm." De Staël believed that the portrayal of her heroine could transform society on a broad scale through the semiotic system she employed which was rooted in French Revolutionary propaganda. The leaders of the early Republic like Abbé Gregoire for example,

had written that visual signs should be used to “awaken republican ideas.” Corinne as an allegory of liberty, the monuments of Classical Antiquity like the Pantheon and Capitol, as well as her art collection are all examples of symbolic icons encoded with republican symbolism.<sup>34</sup>

In using the character of Corinne, the muse and heroine, de Staël also illustrates the role of women in the role of orator using literature, drama and art as modes of communication to influence patriotic feelings. Rousseau and Herder both wrote essays on the origins of language taking into consideration the role of communal societies in forming identity through their relation with the external world. Rousseau wrote that art and music, like language, communicated signs with a moral meaning, rather than mere aesthetic sensations:

L’homme est modifié par ses sens, personne n’en doute; mais faute de distinguer les modifications nous en confondons les causes; nous donnons trop et trop peu d’empire aux sensations; nous ne voyons pas que souvent elles ne nous affectent point seulement comme sensations [...] mais comme signes ou images, et que leurs effets moraux ont aussi des causes morales.<sup>35</sup>

Like Herder, Rousseau perceives a close correlation between music and poetry believing them to form a common origin preceding languages. Music and “melody do not affect us merely as sounds, but as signs of our affections, of our feelings,” according to Rousseau. Music directly expressed feeling and was the animate voice of the soul. Corinne’s Greek muse served to stir the elemental civilizing forces of nations using its original form of communication: music and poetry symbolized by her lyre. Friend and portrait painter Elisabeth Vigée-LeBrun portrayed de Staël as her heroine and muse Corinne where she is represented with her lyre, the instrument that serves to unite civilization stirring both moral and patriotic feeling. De Staël wrote an early essay on Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Héloïse* in which she

34 Madelyn Gutwirth et al., *Germaine de Staël: Crossing the Borders*, NJ, Rutgers UP, 1991; Lori Jo Marso, *(Un)Manly Citizens: Jean Jacques Rousseau’s and Germaine de Staël’s Subversive Women*, Richmond, MD, John Hopkins UP, 1999; Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers UP, 1992.

35 Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Essai sur l’origine des langues*, ed. Charles Porset, Bordeaux, Ducros, p. 147.



discussed the importance of the novel in creating models of moral behavior for society using the model of the family unit and love relationships. Her knowledge of Herder is apparent in her cultural survey of German Romanticism *De l'Allemagne* in which she discusses his essay on the Hebrews as an early biblical people whose moral values and national identity were shaped by literary heroic archetypes. In shifting her attention to Germany, de Staël did more than simply write a cultural survey, she found parallels in German Romantic thought which confirmed her own beliefs about the role of art and literature in creating moral and patriotic role models. The arts and literature while they possessed distinguishing national characteristics, were essentially the same in terms of value and function. It was essential to address propaganda from the perspective of human passions, because the passions ruled the temperament of humanity. Without the element of human emotion, de Staël wrote, "government would be as simple as a machine as any lever the force of which is proportional to the weight it has to lift, and man's destiny would be evenly balanced between his desires and the possibility of satisfying them."<sup>36</sup> Patriotism, politics and government could thus be influenced by the emotions and desires expressed in literature and art. When de Staël was prevented from directly participating in the legislative process through her political writings by Napoleonic exile and censorship, she turned exclusively to an analysis of propaganda in art and literature, to determine the motivational drives of humanity, and its striving and development towards justice and liberty. As an author who sought to overthrow an unjust regime, she sublimated her message in the form of the fictional role models and archetypes found in the novel and literary criticism to reach the broadest reading public, and influence their perceptions of patriotism and nationalism.

36 Germaine de Staël, "The Influence of the Passions on the Happiness of Individuals and Nations," *Major Writings of Germaine de Staël*, trans & ed. Vivian Folkenflik, NY, Columbia UP, 1987, p. 153; De Staël, *On Germany*, op. cit., I, v-vi; de Staël, "Letters on Rousseau," *Major Writings of Germaine de Staël*, op. cit.; Mary Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art*, Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996.

## Abstract

Les écrits de l'auteure néoclassique et romantique française Germaine de Staël la mirent en contact direct avec les programmes de propagande durant les événements turbulents entourant les guerres allemandes de libération. En tant que romancière qui voyait la littérature comme une méthode permettant de modeler le comportement moral et patriotique, elle est représentative du nouveau rôle actif que jouèrent les femmes au cours des périodes néoclassique et romantique pendant lesquelles elles créèrent des modèles de comportement par l'entremise de la littérature et de l'art dans une époque de révoltes et de conquêtes, celle de la Révolution française et de l'ère napoléonienne. Grâce aux salons fréquentés par les principaux intellectuels et hommes politiques romantiques et des Lumières que tenaient les femmes de la société, ces dernières furent en contact avec les plus importantes questions de leur époque et se servirent de la littérature comme d'une réponse féministe à une société patriarcale dominée par les hommes, ce qui leur permit d'avoir une influence aussi significative que leurs collègues masculins. *Corinne* et *De l'Allemagne* de Madame de Staël, écrits pendant les guerres napoléoniennes, étaient conçus pour galvaniser les sentiments patriotiques et encourager les lecteurs à se joindre à la croisade morale en soutenant une plateforme patriotique. Pour les groupes d'intellectuels progressistes qui étaient opposés à la montée au pouvoir et aux campagnes impérialistes de Napoléon, la liberté était la plus importante vertu à inculquer à leur public dans un effort visant à gagner son soutien. La propagande sous forme d'art et de littérature renforçait les objectifs des guerres de libération contre Napoléon et était finalement fondée sur les théories de l'esthétique, de l'épistémologie et de la moralité.



