

STAËL, ROMANTICISM AND REVOLUTION

Two centuries of sexism have hidden Germaine de Staël's place in international history. Straddling the divides of the French Revolution, Napoleonic Europe, emergent nationalism, and European Romanticism, and playing pivotal roles in those movements, she was also a friend of Byron, Thomas Jefferson, and Tsar Alexander. Extensive archival research and a complete contextual overview of Staël's writings here restore Staël's canonical status as political philosopher, historian, European Romantic theorist, and revolutionary. While the term *stateswoman* is not commonly used, it describes Staël aptly, acting as she necessarily did through men around her. The brilliant game of masks and proxies imposed on her by patriarchy is detailed here, alongside her unending fight for the oppressed, from the nations of Napoleon's subjugated Europe to the victims of the Atlantic slave trade. **This title is part of the Flip it Open Programme and may also be available Open Access. Check our website Cambridge Core for details.**

JOHN CLAIBORNE ISBELL is a scholar, educator, and poet. He has published in French and English on Staël and on European Romanticism, starting in 1994 with *The Birth of European Romanticism: Truth and Propaganda in Staël's "De l'Allemagne"* (Cambridge University Press). His most recent monograph is *An Outline of Romanticism in the West* (2022).

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN ROMANTICISM

Founding Editor

Marilyn Butler, University of Oxford

General Editor

James Chandler, University of Chicago

Editorial Board

Claire Connolly, University College Cork

Paul Hamilton, University of London

Claudia Johnson, Princeton University

Essaka Joshua, University of Notre Dame

Nigel Leask, University of Glasgow

Alan Liu, University of California, Santa Barbara

Deidre Lynch, Harvard University

Jerome McGann, University of Virginia

David Simpson, University of California, Davis

This series aims to foster the best new work in one of the most challenging fields within English literary studies. From the early 1780s to the early 1830s, a formidable array of talented men and women took to literary composition, not just in poetry, which some of them famously transformed, but in many modes of writing. The expansion of publishing created new opportunities for writers, and the political stakes of what they wrote were raised again by what Wordsworth called those ‘great national events’ that were ‘almost daily taking place’: the French Revolution, the Napoleonic and American wars, urbanization, industrialization, religious revival, an expanded empire abroad, and the reform movement at home. This was an enormous ambition, even when it pretended otherwise. The relations between science, philosophy, religion, and literature were reworked in texts such as *Frankenstein* and *Biographia Literaria*; gender relations in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *Don Juan*; journalism by Cobbett and Hazlitt; and poetic form, content, and style by the Lake School and the Cockney School. Outside Shakespeare studies, probably no body of writing has produced such a wealth of commentary or done so much to shape the responses of modern criticism. This indeed is the period that saw the emergence of those notions of literature and of literary history, especially national literary history, on which modern scholarship in English has been founded.

The categories produced by Romanticism have also been challenged by recent historicist arguments. The task of the series is to engage both with a challenging corpus of Romantic writings and with the changing field of criticism they have helped to shape. As with other literary series published by Cambridge University Press, this one will represent the work of both younger and more established scholars on either side of the Atlantic and elsewhere.

See the end of the book for a complete list of published titles.

STAËL, ROMANTICISM AND REVOLUTION

The Life and Times of the First European

JOHN CLAIBORNE ISBELL

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-36272-6 — Staël, Romanticism and Revolution
John Claiborne Isbell
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009362726

DOI: 10.1017/9781009362719

© John Claiborne Isbell 2023

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2023

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 978-1-009-36272-6 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will
remain, accurate or appropriate.

L'exil m'a fait perdre les racines qui me liaient à la France et je suis
devenue par mes goûts européenne.
Germaine de Staël, May 5, 1814, in *Correspondance générale* VIII 510

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	page ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xiii
Introduction	I
1 The Painful Birth of the Romantic Heroine: Staël as Political Animal, 1786–1821	4
2 Revolution and the Private Sphere: <i>Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Zulma, Recueil de morceaux détachés</i> , 1786–1795	12
3 Madame de Staël, Minister for War? Narbonne’s “English” Program under the Assemblée législative	30
4 The Social Contract for Staël and Constant, or Does Liberty Have a Sex?	41
5 When the Light of Reason Fails: <i>De l’influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations</i> , 1796	51
6 Imaginary Europe: <i>De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales</i> , 1800	58
7 Suicide, Meaning, and Power in the <i>Querelle</i> of <i>Delphine</i>	68
8 My Father, Myself: Staël and the <i>Manuscrits de M. Necker</i>	82
9 Italy, or Corinne	89
10 Interlude: In Search of Romantic Theater	100

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
11	Napoleon Pulps His Enemies: Censors, Police, and <i>De l'Allemagne's</i> Lost 1810 Edition	109
12	The Napoleon Apocalypse	124
13	Romantic Spain and National Resistance: Staël, Rocca, and the <i>Mémoires sur la guerre des Français en Espagne</i>	143
14	A. W. Schlegel, Staël, and Sismondi in 1814: The Groupe de Coppet and the <i>Confédération romantique</i>	151
15	The Italian Romantics and Madame de Staël: Art, Society, and Nationhood	173
16	Inventing the French Revolution: Staël Considers National Credit, 1789–1818	185
17	Voices Lost? Staël and Slavery, 1786–1830	200
	Conclusion: <i>La Vie dans l'œuvre</i>	212
	<i>Notes</i>	214
	<i>Select Bibliography</i>	268
	<i>Index</i>	284

Preface

His legs bestrid the ocean: his rear'd arm
 Crested the world.

William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, act V, scene ii

“Think you there was, or might be, such a man . . .?” Cleopatra muses. And Dolabella brings her mistress back to reason: “Gentle madam, no.” Who indeed could bestride the ocean? Germaine de Staël’s fame, as it happens, extended in her day from Monticello to Moscow. What then has befallen that fame in the afterglow of posterity?

This study explores Staël’s work and action, hoping that in unearthing a true portrait of her – in bringing, as she put it, a stone to the collective pyramid – some sense of what has been lost will be restored to thought. In so doing, it offers a glimpse of the Groupe de Coppet that surrounded Staël in those years. Benjamin Constant, Jean-Charles-Léonard Sismondi, and August Wilhelm Schlegel play their parts in this story of European Romanticism at its inception, bearing their liberal standard from the Bastille’s fall in 1789 to July 1830 and the new *Roi des Français*. Art and politics were, for these thinkers, inseparable. They lived and died *engagés*, under Napoleon, Louis, or Louis-Philippe as they had under Citizen Robespierre.

“Le génie n’a pas de sexe,” Staël allegedly declared, and in this hope she was perhaps optimistic. Staël’s gender may not determine each word she wrote, but it shapes each book she put out on her European stage, as it shapes the two long centuries of her reception. English lacks the term *stateswoman*, as French lacks the term *femme d’État*; the role of Jacques Necker’s daughter is literally inexpressible in either language. Even in literature, gender boundaries marked each step Staël took. They shaped her European exiles; they shaped her omissions; they shaped her in sickness and in health. Necker’s son might perhaps have governed France; for his daughter, such an option did not exist. What hope then had any other woman of the age of shaping their nation’s destiny? Olympe de Gouges, like Madame Roland, like Marie-Antoinette, went to the guillotine.

Staël for her part turned out to be unlucky in a variety of lesser ways. Straddling as she does both century and nation divides, she has faced her share of tribalism, from French scholars, German scholars, Italian scholars, from those nineteenth-century scholars who believe their period began in 1830. She has, in brief, been decanonized. What after all can British credit theory mean in France? What can a Frenchwoman know of Immanuel Kant or Johann Wolfgang von Goethe? How can a Pre-Romantic expect to grasp what we might call the Romantic dilemma? It seems worthwhile, in assessing Staël's long and contested game at cards with history, to remember the hand she had been dealt. Europe, for instance, was thrust upon her – hence her regret for the rue du Bac. Staël often thought the same of the fame she experienced, though posterity is not well placed to regret the woman's lived unhappiness – for she was indeed unhappy – at the expense of what she left our world.

Yes, Dolabella, there was a person who bestrid the ocean. Not Napoleon, who lost his fleet twice over to Lord Nelson and had to sell Louisiana to Staël's friend Thomas Jefferson. But Staël had her part in shaping George Eliot's and Alexander Pushkin's thinking, just as she shaped Ralph Waldo Emerson's and Giacomo Leopardi's. She intervened in divided Germany and Italy as she intervened in Russia or Sweden. Her sun set long ago, but it may be time to see again that dawn of hope for humanity on whose behalf she once went into exile.

Acknowledgments

This book has been long enough in the making that it seems almost impossible to remember every person who helped it along its way. Let me begin by thanking Simone Balayé, who as president of the Société staëlienne was ever gracious in encouragement, as well as Frank Bowman, Avriel Goldberger, and Madelyn Gutwirth, always equally encouraging and generous with their time. Many members of the Société staëlienne, and various *constantiens*, have contributed to this project: Jean-Daniel Candaux, Stéphanie Genand, Othenin d'Haussonville, Norman King, Kurt Kloocke, Florence Lotterrie, Lucia Omacini, Jean-Pierre Perchellet, François Rosset, and Susan Tenenbaum, among others. The final chapter was written for Doris Kadish. I would also like to thank Anne Estevis and Felicity Teague for their helpful suggestions. Much of the book was assembled at Indiana University, and the project took final shape at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. My thanks go to both institutions, as to Cambridge University Press. I would particularly like to thank Bethany Thomas, who has fielded this book through the process of publication. Various libraries have also contributed, notably the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the British Library, the Cambridge University Library, the Indiana University Library, and the Universitätsbibliothek Wien.

The book was prepared for publication in Oxford, with grateful thanks to Andrew Verschoyle and Claire Coull, and in Paris under the auspices of the LIS laboratory – *Lettres, Idées, Savoirs* – and its directors, Anne Raffarin and Pascal Sévéric. I am also very happy to thank my copy editor with Cambridge University Press, Lisa Sinclair, who went above and beyond the call of duty.

Several chapters in this book appeared in earlier versions in French or English, in a variety of journals and conference proceedings. Those publications are acknowledged in the notes that open each relevant

chapter – but let me say that this monograph was a years-long project, and my sincere thanks go out to every editor involved.

I dedicate this book to the person who more than any other made it a reality after all these years: my wife, Margarita.

Abbreviations

Germaine de Staël

- OC *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Auguste de Staël and Victor de Broglie, 3 vols (1820–1821; Geneva: Slatkine, 1967)
- Agar *Agar dans le désert*, in *Œuvres dramatiques*, ed. Aline Hodroge, Jean-Pierre Perchellet, Blandine Poirier, and Martine de Rougemont, 2 vols (Paris: Champion, 2021), 531–546
- Aspasie *Aspasie*, in *De la littérature et autres essais littéraires*, ed. Stéphanie Genand (Paris: Champion, 2013), 701–709
- CA *Des circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la Révolution et des principes qui doivent fonder la République en France*, ed. Lucia Omacini (Paris and Geneva: Droz, 1979)
- CG *Correspondance générale*, ed. Béatrice Jasinski *et al.*, 9 vols (Paris: Pauvert, Hachette, Klincksieck–Champion, 1960–2017)
- Cléopâtre *Cléopâtre*, in *De la littérature et autres essais littéraires*, ed. Stéphanie Genand (Paris: Champion, 2013), 745–758
- Corinne *Corinne ou l'Italie*, ed. Simone Balayé (Paris: Champion, 2000)
- CRF *Considérations sur la Révolution française*, ed. Jacques Godechot (Paris: Tallandier, 1983), but compare *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française*, ed. Lucia Omacini, 2 vols (Paris: Champion, 2017)
- CSt *Cahiers staëliens* (Paris, 1962–)
- CV Simone Balayé, *Les Carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël: Contribution à la genèse de ses œuvres* (Geneva: Droz, 1971)

xiv	<i>List of Abbreviations</i>
DA	<i>De l'Allemagne</i> , ed. comtesse Jean de Pange with Simone Balayé, 5 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1958–1960)
<i>Delphine</i>	<i>Delphine</i> , ed. Simone Balayé and Lucia Omacini, 2 vols (Geneva: Droz, 1987–1990)
DL	<i>De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales</i> , ed. Axel Blaeschke (Paris: Garnier, 1997)
DxA	<i>Dix années d'exil</i> , ed. Simone Balayé and Mariella Vianello Bonifacio (Paris: Fayard, 1996)
EF	<i>Essai sur les fictions</i> , in <i>De la littérature et autres essais littéraires</i> , ed. Stéphanie Genand (Paris: Champion, 2013), 19–65
<i>Geneviève</i>	<i>Geneviève de Brabant</i> , in <i>Œuvres dramatiques</i> , ed. Aline Hodroge, Jean-Pierre Perchellet, Blandine Poirier, and Martine de Rougemont, 2 vols (Paris: Champion, 2021), 555–603
IP	<i>De l'influence des passions</i> , in <i>Lettres sur Rousseau, De l'influence des passions et autres essais moraux</i> , ed. Florence Lotterie (Paris: Champion, 2008), 111–302
<i>Jean de Witt</i>	<i>Jean de Witt</i> , in <i>Œuvres dramatiques</i> , ed. Aline Hodroge, Jean-Pierre Perchellet, Blandine Poirier, and Martine de Rougemont, 2 vols (Paris: Champion, 2021), 431–522
LR	<i>Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau</i> , in <i>Œuvres de jeunesse [Lettres sur Rousseau, Zulma, Recueil de morceaux détachés]</i> , ed. Simone Balayé and John Isbell (Paris: Desjonquères, 1997), 35–99
<i>Necker</i>	<i>Du caractère de M. Necker, et de sa vie privée</i> , in <i>Œuvres complètes</i> , ed. Auguste de Staël and Victor de Broglie, 3 vols (1820–1821; Geneva: Slatkine, 1967), II 261–290
<i>Notice</i>	Albertine Necker de Saussure, <i>Notice sur le caractère et les écrits de Madame de Staël</i> , in <i>Œuvres complètes</i> , ed. Auguste de Staël and Victor de Broglie, 3 vols (1820–1821; Geneva: Slatkine, 1967), III 1–24
<i>Paix</i>	<i>Réflexions sur la paix</i> , in <i>Des circonstances actuelles et autres essais politiques sous la Révolution</i> , ed. Lucia Omacini (Paris: Champion, 2009), 83–119

List of Abbreviations

xv

- Reine* *Réflexions sur le procès de la reine*, in *Des circonstances actuelles et autres essais politiques sous la Révolution*, ed. Lucia Omacini (Paris: Champion, 2009), 33–66
- RfS* *Réflexions sur le suicide*, in *Lettres sur Rousseau, De l'influence des passions et autres essais moraux*, ed. Florence Lotterie (Paris: Champion, 2008), 341–395
- RMD* *Recueil de morceaux détachés*, in *Œuvres de jeunesse*, ed. Simone Balayé and John Isbell (Paris: Desjonquères, 1997), 121–231
- RPI* *Réflexions sur la paix intérieure*, in *Des circonstances actuelles et autres essais politiques sous la Révolution*, ed. Lucia Omacini (Paris: Champion, 2009), 133–182
- Sapho* *Sapho*, in *Œuvres dramatiques*, ed. Aline Hodroge, Jean-Pierre Perchellet, Blandine Poirier, and Martine de Rougemont, 2 vols (Paris: Champion, 2021), 879–944
- Signes* *A quels signes peut-on connaître quelle est l'opinion de la majorité de la nation?*, in *Des circonstances actuelles et autres essais politiques sous la Révolution*, ed. Lucia Omacini (Paris: Champion, 2009), 559–566
- Traductions* *De l'esprit des traductions*, in *De la littérature et autres essais littéraires*, ed. Stéphanie Genand (Paris: Champion, 2013), 595–611
- Zulma* *Zulma*, in *Œuvres de jeunesse*, ed. Simone Balayé and John Isbell (Paris: Desjonquères, 1997), 101–120

Others

François-René de Chateaubriand

- GC* *Essai sur les Révolutions: Le Génie du christianisme*, ed. Maurice Regard (Paris: Pléiade, 1978)
- Mot* *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, ed. Maurice Levaillant and Georges Moulinier, 2 vols (Paris: Pléiade, 1946–1951)

Benjamin Constant

- Annales BC* *Annales Benjamin Constant* (Lausanne, 1980–)
- ECU and Liberté* *De l'esprit de conquête et de l'usurpation; De la liberté des anciens comparée à celle des modernes*, in *De la liberté chez*

List of Abbreviations

- les modernes: Ecrits politiques*, ed. Marcel Gauchet (Paris: Livre de Poche/Pluriel, 1980)
- Force and Réactions* *De la force du gouvernement actuel de la France et de la nécessité de s'y rallier/Des réactions politiques* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988)
- PP* Etienne Hofmann, *Les "Principes de politique" de Benjamin Constant* [. . .], 2 vols (Geneva: Droz, 1980), II: *Texte*

A Note on Staël Editions

A critical edition of Staël's *Œuvres complètes* is in progress. The *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française* (2017) uniquely reproduces the author's final manuscript, while the *Œuvres dramatiques* (2021) doubles the Staël theater corpus. Other volumes contain previously unknown Staël texts. *Delphine* (2004), edited by Lucia Omacini and annotated by Simone Balayé, two leading experts in the field, lacks the *avant-texte* that makes the earlier Omacini Droz edition still valuable. *De l'Allemagne* (2017), edited by Axel Blaeschke, chooses a source text Staël did not edit and lacks the thorough manuscript documentation of the Pange–Balayé Hachette edition, which therefore remains useful.