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## An Inquiry into Cultural Semiotics: Germaine de Staël's Autobiographical Travel Accounts

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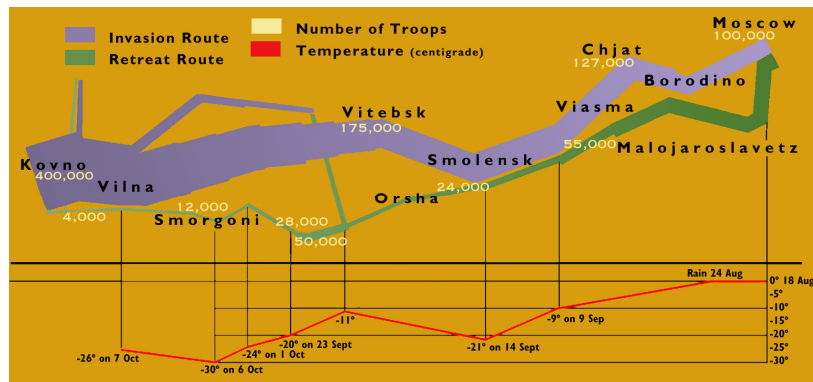
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AN INQUIRY INTO CULTURAL SEMIOTICS:  
GERMAINE DE STAËL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL  
TRAVEL ACCOUNTS



*Europe 1812. Map published with permission from The American Social History Project.*



*Invasion of Russia, 1812. Map published with permission from The American Social History Project.*

Anna Cabak Rédei

**An Inquiry into Cultural Semiotics  
Germaine de Staël's Autobiographical  
Travel Accounts**

Lund University  
Division of Semiotics  
at the Department of Art History and Musicology  
Lund 2007

*Rédei, Anna Cabak*  
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Over hill, over dale, / Thorough bush, thorough brier, / Over  
park, over pale, / Thorough flood, thorough fire, / I do  
wander everywhere, / Swifter than the moonè's sphere; /  
(Shakespeare, *Fairy Land*.)

L'absence diminue les médiocres passions, et augmente les  
grandes, comme le vent éteint les bougies, et allume le feu. (La  
Rochefoucauld, *Max.* 276.)

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For my children



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Lund, June 2007  
*Anna Cabak Rédei*

# An Inquiry into Cultural Semiotics Germaine de Staël's Autobiographical Travel Accounts

The use of the term voice provides a constant reminder that even psychological processes carried out by an individual in isolation are viewed as involving processes of a communicative nature. [...] In this connection both Vygotskij and Bakhtin believed that human communicative practices give rise to mental functioning in the individual. [...] In this context, then, the term voice serves as a constant reminder that mental functioning in the individual originates in social, communicative processes.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

How is dialogue between people and cultures possible? What do we mean by dialogue? What type of communicative act is it? And when may we speak about a communicative act being non-dialogic? And finally, how may we study dialogue in history in order to draw some conclusions about a historical epoch and the people who lived in it?

These are some questions which this inquiry into cultural semiotics is trying to answer. To do that one needs to confront existing models in cultural semiotics with empirical data. Being a cultural semiotician with special interest in cultural history, I've chosen to study the rich material of Mme de Staël's autobiographical travel accounts from her years in exile (1803–1812). Mme de Staël, as a writer and *salonnière*, was indeed in dialogue with the cultural and political elite, the art and the literature of her time. Hence, Mme de Staël's personal narratives may be regarded as results of those relations.<sup>2</sup> She travelled around Europe, met a lot of important

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1. James V. Wertsch, *Voices of the Mind: A sociocultural approach to mediated action* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 12.

2. In this connection I would like to refer to Lisbeth Larsson's discussion about Ebba Witt-Brattström's biography of the poet Edith Södergran. Lisbeth Larsson points out the importance given there to the study of the poet's contemporary contexts and the interplay of literary texts with a focus on how those constituted a

people in salons and at courts, discussed with them, argued with them and above all had conversations with them. Some of the people Mme de Staël met wrote down their memories and impressions of their encounters with her. This has made it possible to study Mme de Staël's cross-cultural encounters as a dialogue between cultures on an individual level as well as on a more general level. Therefore this inquiry may be defined as a study in the *making of dialogue* on a cross-cultural level.

Now, cultural semiotics is about cultural meetings. Cultures, as well as people, need the Other in order to be able to create an image of the self, or one's own culture. The aim of my study in cultural semiotics is twofold: First I want to extend the understanding of the complex relation and dialogue between 'I' and 'thou' in cultural semiotics, instead of focusing on the Saidian perspective of a 'we' creating a 'they', as the Other with whom no dialogue is established.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, I want to shed some new light on Germaine de Staël, her life in exile and her cultural encounters in different parts of Europe, as narrated and commented in her travel accounts as well as in letters and similar source material. Primarily I set out to discuss and further develop existing models in cultural semiotics, notably the ones by the Tartu school and by Göran Sonesson. The term cultural semiotics is perhaps mostly connected to the model presented by the Tartu school in the 1970s. Equally important, though, in the history of semiotics, are the preceding theories elaborated by the Bakhtin circle

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basis for Södergran's construction of her own identity in her poetic writings. See Lisbeth Larsson, *Sanning och konsekvens: Marika Stiernstedt, Ludvig Nordström och de biografiska berättelserna* (Stockholm: Norstedts förlag, 2001), p. 385. Even though I mainly study Mme de Staël's autobiographical writings, the importance of studying the interplay of discourses (written texts as well as other discourses) influential in her construction of a worldview is the same. Those influences may be implicit or explicit in Mme de Staël's own writings, as I show continuously in this inquiry when studying them.

3. Edward W. Said, 'Orientalism igen', in *Från Exilen. Essäer 1976–2000* [Reflections on Exile and Other Essays] (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2006), pp. 153–169, esp. p. 160. For a more detailed discussion of the Saidian perspective see Anna C. Rédei, 'Jagets förhållande till den andre: En kultursemiotisk analys av Mme de Staël's reseberättelse från Habsburg' [The relation of the ego towards the other: a cultural semiotical analysis of Madame de Staël's travel accounts from Habsburg (Galicia)], unpublished MA dissertation, Department of History, Lund University, 6 February 2003.

in the 1920s, and the Prague school in the 1940s. However, due to the specific aims of this study, the focus here is on the recent theories of Professor Göran Sonesson, who has expanded the Tartu school model in important ways, incorporating some insights of the Prague school, the Bakhtin circle and phenomenological philosophy.

This inquiry is in line with Sonesson's expansion of cultural semiotics. My contribution to the theoretical discussion in this connection consists of further integrating some notions and thoughts of Alfred Schutz's phenomenological sociology, notably his theories about *typification*, and the importance of mastering *types*, not only in association with the individual's, or the social group's, understanding and acting in the everyday world, the *lifeworld*, but also in the work of the outside observer studying these types used in a particular setting.<sup>4</sup> In other words—translated to the circumstances of this study embracing empirical studies of Mme de Staël's autobiographical travel accounts—in my work as a semiotician studying history, my focus is on revealing the contextually bound types which Mme de Staël used when understanding her cross-cultural encounters. Using the notion of types in this particular way deepens the understanding of the relation between an 'I' and a 'thou' in cultural semiotical studies.

In short, in order to develop new theories within the field of cultural semiotics, it should be fruitful to confront them with empirical data, as mentioned above. Germaine de Staël's (1766–1817) travel accounts, covering the period between 1803 and 1812, have proved to be a very rich source for such a task. Although they make up the basis and frame of my empirical source material, I also use some of Germaine de Staël's extensive correspondence (she wrote about ten thousand letters!) and notes written during the time of those travels.<sup>5</sup> As Mme de Staël's sojourns in Sweden (1812–1813)

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4. The outlines for an integration of Schutz's theory of typification with theories in cultural semiotics have been drawn by Sonesson. See Göran Sonesson, 'Livsvärldens mediering: Kommunikation i en kultursemiotisk ram', in *Medietexter och medietolkningar: Läsnings av massmediala texter*, eds. Claes-Göran Holmberg and Jan Svensson (Nora: Bokförlaget Nya Doxa, 1995), pp. 33–78.

5. Germaine de Staël's travel notes were published in 1971 for the first time, as I understand it, by Simone Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1971). For the impressive amount of letters written by Mme de Staël, see Claire Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', in *Kwartalnik*



and England (1813–1814) were omitted in *Dix années d'exil*, they are passed over in this study, being vast areas of study in themselves, considering the extensive correspondence not only by Mme de Staël herself, but also the correspondence she inspired. The aim of Mme de Staël's grand tour in 1812 was in fact to reach England, a country that almost figures as a kind of utopia in her travelogue, which suddenly ends at the passage from Finland to Sweden one day in September 1812, to the regret of the historian. But this abrupt ending is in line with what Liliane Weissberg sees as typical of the autobiography, she writes:

Unlike biography, autobiography must remain a fragmented discourse. It relies on the subject's memory, and avoids the conclusion of a life's end.<sup>6</sup>

Those lines reflect at the same time the importance of making a distinction between autobiography and biography, based on the fact that author and subject coincide in the case of the former but not in the case of the latter.<sup>7</sup> Thus, as a biographer of Mme de Staël's life in exile, I take, so to speak, a privileged outside position in relation to the subject-matter of the narrative.

This being so, the inquiry aspires to contribute to new knowledge about Germaine de Staël and her times, the Napoleon era. Thus, I

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*neofilologiczny*, 15, 1968, Warszawa, pp. 31–47, see esp. p. 40. Apparently Mme de Staël did not write any letters from Russia, a conclusion drawn after reading a letter to Mme Récamier written from Åbo, after she left Russia, in which she explains that she has not written to her, or to any other, since she left Galicia, considering it imprudent. The letter is published in Amélie Cyvoct Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar: Madame de Staël et La grande-duchesse Louise* (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, libraires-éditeurs, 1862), pp. 238–239.

6. Liliane Weissberg, 'Introduction', in Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The life of a Jewess*, ed. Liliane Weissberg (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 20.

7. However, important to mention here is that the notion 'auto/biographical practices' contains the distinction of inner and outer, and the analytical implications of that is that the focus is on the interplay between a self and the 'audit self', the socially organized self (written, spoken or pictured) which is context-bound. See Liz Stanley, 'From "self-made women" to "women's made selves"?' in *Feminism and Autobiography. Texts, theories, methods*, eds. Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 40–60, see esp. p. 44.

consider myself as a semiotician at work empirically and not only theoretically. Methodologically I have been inspired by the Bakhtinian notion of *polyphony* in the sense that the biographical study may be viewed as a weave of voices making up different points of view. In that way I hope to be able to convey the complexity of Mme de Staël's cross-cultural encounters on both an individual level and an overarching socio-cultural one, connecting the voices to the context in which they emerged. In that sense, solely guided by what is there, uttered, in the sources, I try to avoid 'that modern form of indiscretion in which the writer attempts to penetrate [...] his subject's tricks and aspires to know more than the subject knew about himself or was willing to reveal', as Hannah Arendt put it in her biography of Rahel Varnhagen.<sup>8</sup> Using the polyphonic perspective means that not only my, the biographer's, voice on a metalevel, that is, from an outside position, is heard but several others belonging to persons who loved or disliked, feared or cherished, were amused or annoyed by Mme de Staël, a woman who seems to have left nobody unaffected.

However, when testing existing semiotical models on the empirical material I have realized that the ideas of the Tartu school and Göran Sonesson have to be complemented by theories focusing on human relations on a more concrete level. The notions denoting the other cultures, from the point of view of the 'home' culture, in those models, i.e. Extra-culture and Non-culture respectively, still make up the core of the analyses. However, these are complemented with other notions in order to deepen the empirical study, which in the end serves to give new theoretical insights to cultural semiotics. Theories in social psychology and sociology have proved to be important in my understanding of the encounters between Mme de Staël and the people she met during her travels. The schemes proposed by James V. Wertsch in social psychology, based on the notions of dialogue and social interplay once developed by the Russian scholars Bakhtin and Vygotsky, have been important tools in my study of the texts, making up the source material of this inquiry. So has the afore-mentioned notion of *typification*, as developed by the Austrian-American social scientist Alfred Schutz. Mme de Staël herself does use types from the start in the travelogue, to a much

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8. Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen.*, pp. 5 and 83.

larger extent than I was at first aware of, in order to be able to grasp the nature of the fellow-beings she met when travelling. The use of types, and the notion of it, is essential in our continuous discussion, because in the world of everyday life, as Schutz writes (with reference to Husserl):

From the outset [...]objects are experienced in their typicality: as mountains and stones, trees and animals, and, more specifically, as birds and fishes and snakes.<sup>9</sup>

In connection with Mme de Staël, and her travelogue, it is highly relevant to add national typifications such as Swiss, French, Germans, Russians, English, and so forth.

Questions regarding the classification of the empirical material in terms of genre are not to any great extent brought up within the frames of this inquiry. However interesting a discussion, it is beyond the scope of the present study. It is enough here to state that de Staël's personal remarks on authentic cultural encounters stand in focus here, whether they originate from personal letters or published travel accounts.<sup>10</sup>

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9. Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers I. The Problem of Social Reality*, ed. Maurice Natanson (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), p. 306.

10. For genre considerations, and adjacent discussions about the importance of Romanticism, regarding Germaine de Staël's autobiographical work and, as I choose to call it, autobiographical novel *Corinne* (1807), I therefore refer to separate papers previously presented. See Anna Cabak Rédei, "‘Jagets’ representationer i text och bild: exemplen Germaine de Staël och Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun" [www.arthist.lu.se/kultsem/semiotics/kultursemiotikb.html](http://www.arthist.lu.se/kultsem/semiotics/kultursemiotikb.html). See also Anna Cabak Rédei, 'Mme de Staël's självbiografiska reseskildring från Tyskland: en "jagets" genre?', in *Kulturstudier i Sverige: Nationell forskarkonferens 13–15 juni, 2005 Norrköping, Sweden*, eds. Bodil Axelsson and Johan Fornäs, Linköping Electronic conference proceedings. Concerning extended examinations of gender, based on a discussion of reception history, I also refer to a previously presented work, where I discuss the circumstances under which Germaine de Staël travelled to Germany in 1803, when she was sent into exile by Napoleon after publishing her controversial epistolary novel *Delphine* in 1802. See Anna Cabak Rédei, 'Madame de Staël and the Quest for Honour: A study in cultural semiotics', in *Proceedings IASS/AIS international conference, Lyon, July 2004*. See also "‘Jagets’ representationer i text och bild', for an extended discussion of gender in the novel *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807) and in Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's *Portrait de Mme de Staël* (1808–1809).

The book consists of five chapters, and the following chapter two starts with an introductory biographical presentation of Germaine de Staël, focusing on her life and work at the time of her exile between 1803 and 1812, accompanied by a short review of how she has been conceived in previous research. The third chapter concentrates on theories of cultural semiotics. After a general introduction of key notions such as Culture, Extra-culture and Non-culture, a more detailed examination of the classical theories in cultural semiotics follows.

The Prague school theories are briefly presented in the perspective of the particular attention it paid to the addressee in the communication process. After that the discussion continues with a similar one concerning the Tartu school's focus on the sender in the interplay between cultures. The notion of Extra-culture is placed at the centre of the debate and continues to be so throughout the discussions. The terms *Culture*, *Extra-culture* and *Non-culture* have proven to be fruitful when studying encounters between cultures on a schematized level. However, the shortcomings of using these terms (the way they are determined in existing models) in conjunction with studying Germaine de Staël's autobiographical travel accounts and her cultural encounters has called for complementations in order to enable: (1) a more flexible approach to the concepts of Ego and Other in the analyses; and (2) a qualitative differentiation of the Other in relation to the Ego in encounters on a more personal level. That is, the other is defined in two ways in cultural semiotics. The Ego might be involved in a dialogue with the Other. In that case, the other represents the Extra-culture from the point of view of the Ego. Or, the case might be the opposite, namely the Ego not being involved, mentally or literally, in a dialogue with the other. In that case the other represents the Non-culture from the point of view of the Ego. In such cases, an argument is made for a sociological phenomenological approach to the inquiry, aiming at deepening the understanding of the classical interpretations of the relations between the Ego and Other once elaborated by the Tartu school. Thus, the notions *Alter* and *Alius* are introduced in the discussion, defining Mme de Staël's typifications of the Other made by her—on an individual level—when meeting people during her travels. The former represents the Extra-culture, the latter the Non-culture from the point of view of Mme de Staël. The cornerstone of such discussions

consists of connecting some insights made by Schutz in sociological phenomenology with some made by the Tartu school in cultural semiotics.

The focus in this inquiry is on Alter and Extra-cultural relations. This focus may be explained by the fact that it reflects Mme de Staël's own, perhaps most important, preoccupation in her autobiographical travel accounts, namely to describe her cross-cultural *meetings* and *dialogues*.

The part of the third chapter concentrating on a discussion about the notion of text, in its literal meaning, in cultural semiotics, involves an examination of the concepts of dialogue and history. Books are examples of texts in both a literal and a cultural semiotical sense. However, in the latter the concept of 'text' is used also in an extended way. In cultural semiotics the term 'text' embraces *all* artefacts (pictures, buildings, film, books and so forth) produced by Culture, that is, all products that are, in one or another way, regarded as meaningful and worth understanding by the particular cultural community in question. James V. Wertsch's elaborations of, among others, Bakhtin's, Vygotsky's and Lotman's theories are important in this connection. For instance, Mme de Staël's autobiographical travelogue is a result of what Wertsch calls a mediated action. Her book is obviously a text in its literal meaning, and as such it is a result of intertextuality. Here the term is also used to describe how her writings are mediated through other 'texts', in the extended cultural semiotical sense, that is, Mme de Staël's writings are in a dialogical relation to the literature, the art, politics and so forth of her time. *Dix années d'exil* refers explicitly and implicitly to other texts (literal) written by other authors, but probably also to what she learned in her salon about politics, arts, history and so forth, from talking and listening to people. More generally put, the Other's word is there, in her writings, overt or covert, for the analyser to reveal its meaning, by connecting it to the author, to the author's word anchored in a specific context, a specific life.

The fourth chapter is devoted to a presentation and analysis of *Dix années d'exil* and Mme de Staël's travels during her time in exile. The investigation concentrates on Germaine de Staël's encounters through her travels, her impressions of what she saw and of the people she met. But it also aims at giving a picture of what other

people, who met her directly or indirectly, thought about her. That way, different world-views will be confronted with each other, and Mme de Staël's world-view will thus emerge in its singularity and in its conformity. The chapter ends with a summary, although analytic résumés are made continuously throughout the text in order to facilitate the reading. These aim at drawing out some of the most important implications of the empirical analysis in terms of cultural semiotics.

Of all the cross-cultural encounters that Mme de Staël undertook between 1803 and 1812, the one with Rahel Levin, perhaps most known under the name of Varnhagen, emerges as the most complex and interesting from a cultural semiotical point of view. Perhaps this is also due to the fact that the source material at hand is rich—their meeting was commented by them both, as well as by a third party—but also the fact that the two women seemed to have so much in common, both being celebrated salonnières, highly cultivated and intellectual. However, Mme de Staël was unable to grasp some important differences between the two, due to her failure to perceive that her interpretative schema did not always coincide with Rahel's. Their meeting also points to the assumption that cultural semiotics is essentially about the Extra-culture, that is, about the encounter between an 'I' and a 'Thou'. In this chapter thus, a specific part of the text concentrates on this meeting that took place in Berlin 1804, making it a case study aiming at suggesting a new understanding of the relations between Culture and Extra-culture on one hand, and of Non-culture on the other. This is also done in the analysis of the meetings Mme de Staël had with Schiller and Goethe in Weimar, which precede the one she had with Rahel Levin in Berlin.

The concluding chapter five presents a suggestion for an elaborated model, extending the ones of the Tartu school and Göran Sonesson, on the basis of new insights obtained in the empirical study.

I would also like to underline that footnotes are used to their maximum. The reason is that, on the one hand, in order to facilitate the reading of the text, I wanted to keep the general discussion uninterrupted. On the other hand, since detailed theoretical, and historical, considerations are important, I wanted to give them special room in the footnotes.

## 2. MME DE STAËL AS A WOMAN AND WRITER

Mais encore une fois, pourquoi votre mère veut-elle venir se mettre immédiatement à la portée de cette *tyrannie*, car vous voyez que je tranche le mot. Qu'elle aille à Rome, à Naples, à Vienne, à Berlin, à Milan, à Lyon: qu'elle aille à Londres si elle veut faire des libelles. Je la verrai partout avec plaisir; mais Paris, voyez-vous, c'est là que j'habite et je n'y veux que des gens qui m'aiment. Si je la laissais venir à Paris, elle ferait des sottises; [...]. Elle ne pourrait se tenir de parler politique.... [...] il n'y a que votre mère qui soit malheureuse quand on lui laisse toute l'Europe.<sup>1</sup>

The actor's actual situation has its history; it is the sedimentation of all his previous subjective experiences. They are not experienced by the actor as being anonymous but as unique and subjectively given to him alone.<sup>2</sup>

The following brief biographical presentation of Germaine de Staël is put together thematically and focuses on the period of her life central to my inquiry, that is, the time of her ten years of exile between 1803 and 1812 which she depicts in her autobiographical travel account. It is at the same time a presentation of contemporary research on Germaine de Staël.

However, it is important first to mention something about her extraordinary upbringing: Germaine Necker was born in Paris in 1766 and died there in 1817 after ten years of exile. She was the daughter of the respectable M. Necker and Mme Necker, both of Swiss origin. Her father had been minister of finance during the

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1. Account from Auguste de Staël's meeting with Napoleon in favour of his mother, at the time of Germaine de Staël's second journey to Germany in 1808 published in Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, pp. 123–125. 'But again, why does your mother want to place herself within immediate reach of this *tyranny*, because as you see I speak my mind. She may go to Rome, to Naples, to Vienna, to Berlin, to Milan, to Lyon: she may go to London if she wants to make pamphlets. I would see her everywhere with joy; but Paris, you see, it is where I live and there I only want people who love me. If I let her come to Paris, she would do stupid things; [...]. She would not be able to keep herself from talking politics. ...' [...] 'No one but your mother would be unhappy when given the whole of Europe.' (My translation.)

2. Maurice Natanson, 'Introduction', in Schutz, *Collected Papers*, vol. I, p. xxviii.

*ancien regime* and her mother held one of the most important salons in Paris. At an early age Germaine Necker frequented people from the Parisian cultural elite, and one of the guests who could be seen in the salon was Denis Diderot (1713–1784). After her wedding to the Swedish ambassador to France, Eric-Magnus Staël von Holstein (1749–1802), in 1786, Germaine Necker was to be known as Mme de Staël, a name connected not only to her success as a writer but also to her fervent political struggle with Napoleon.

Now, what were the literary works that made Germaine de Staël so famous throughout Europe, and continue to be so important? As already mentioned, Germaine de Staël wrote an autobiography during the years between 1810 and 1813 that was published by her son, posthumously in 1821, under the title *Dix années d'exil*, but before that she had published, among other things, two immensely successful novels *Delphine* (1802) and *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807).<sup>3</sup> Especially the latter gave Germaine de Staël the epithet 'l'auteur de Corinne' throughout Europe, something I shall come back to in more detail later on. However, the following overview has two themes, reflecting current and previous research on one hand, but also Germaine de Staël's own preoccupations in her literary production.

### *A brief examination of Madame de Staël's work*

Mourir au monde pour exister à l'écriture, voilà une transaction dont Mme de Staël ne veut pas, postulant ainsi non seulement un programme de vie dans le monde, mais aussi un protocole d'écriture autobiographique bien particulier où le moi ne peut se dire pleinement que dans le blanc des interlignes, couvert qu'il s'est en permanence par le tumulte du monde auquel il s'est engagé une fois pour toutes à participer.<sup>4</sup>

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3. For all translations into English, when not explicitly my own, of Germaine de Staël's *Dix années d'exil* I use: Germaine de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile* (London: Centaur Press, 2005). It is also important to underline that no corrections of the language in the original texts are made when quoting, i.e. quotations are rendered exactly as in the original without comment.

4. François Rosset, 'Madame de Staël et les paradoxes de l'autobiographie dans les *Dix années d'exil*', in *Cahiers Staëliens*, no. 48, 1996–1997, Paris, pp. 53–68, for quotation see p. 65. 'To die in the world in order to exist in the literature, there!



Madame de Staël's travel accounts were published posthumously in her autobiography *Dix années d'exil* (1821). Her travel notes were published by Simone Balayé in 1971, as I understand it for the first time.<sup>5</sup> They are valuable because they contain pieces that were omitted from the official autobiography, as in Paul Gautier's more recent edition of *Dix années d'exil*.<sup>6</sup> *Réflexions sur la procès de la reine* (1793), *De l'influence des passions* (1796), and *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1798) are other well-known, non-fictional works by Madame de Staël. Perhaps, though, the most famous work in this category is her book on Germany, *De l'Allemagne*, which was withdrawn by Napoleon in 1810 for its pro-German attitude (among other things), and therefore could only be published in 1813 during her stay in England. The essay on Rousseau, *Lettres sur le caractère et les écrits de J. J. Rousseau* (1788), should also be mentioned, since *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and *Émile* had such an impact on views of gender.<sup>7</sup> However, it seems as if Madame de Staël is best known today for her novels *Delphine* (1802) and *Corinne* (1807). In this investigation, it is first the circumstances that surrounded the publication of *Delphine* that will be analysed, as it presents part of the explanation of Mme de Staël's position as an 'inner other' in French

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a transaction that Mme de Staël does not want, postulating that way not only a programme of life in the world, but also a very special protocol of autobiographic writing where the self cannot express itself totally except between the lines, covered as it always is by the tumult in the world in which it once and for all was obliged to take part in.' (My translation.)

5. Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël*. They are not to be regarded as a diary, since they often lack one of the most important criteria for that genre, namely chronological order, see Christina Sjöblad, *Min vandring dag för dag: Kvinnors dagböcker från 1700-talet* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1997), p. 72.

6. Madame de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, ed. Paul Gautier (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1904).

7. Rousseau not only occupied Mme de Staël and other French female writers such as Olympe de Gouges (*Declaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*, 1791) but also the English. For example, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote a polemic on the subject under the title of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Apart from their shared literary interests, de Gouges and Madame de Staël also both published in defence of Marie Antoinette (who went to the guillotine in 1793) as a step in their struggle for women's rights (Mme de Staël, *Réflexions sur la procès de la reine*, 1793; and de Gouges as above). For a detailed discussion, see Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French feminists and the rights of man* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1996).

culture.<sup>8</sup> That is, living in a France ruled by Napoleon, Mme de Staël's political adversary *per se*, turned her into an *inner other*. Conversely, to Mme de Staël Napoleon was the Other.

Much interesting work has been done on Madame de Staël, by literary historians and historians alike. Thus it is to the state of research that I will turn first.

### *Madame de Staël, gender, and the public sphere*

The question of gender and the philosophy of the Enlightenment have caught the interest of many scholars, especially historians. The first to be considered here is Carla Hesse's work on women and writing during the Enlightenment.<sup>9</sup> She argues that French female writers succeeded in finding a language that helped them define themselves as subjects, and in that way they were able to take a place in the public sphere despite being regarded as the Other *per se*. It is new historical situations such as these that Hesse calls 'the other Enlightenment', hence the title of her book. Her approach, as Hesse herself mentions, is related to Joan Scott's (1996), but she puts the problem differently: the fact that women were denied citizenship does not alone explain why they were excluded from politics. Furthermore, social prejudices must be taken into consideration. Indeed, Hesse argues, it was surely the latter that were decisive for the women's situation.

One means of escaping from the submissive position, Hesse continues, was for women to use the commercial book market to create a place for themselves in the public sphere. In this particular case we should perhaps add that this was facilitated by the fact that women consumed books in far greater numbers than before. It was a part of their emancipation.<sup>10</sup> Hesse goes on to explain that this new

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8. For more information about inner otherness see Göran Sonesson, 'The Globalization of Ego and Alter: An essay in cultural semiotics', in *Semiotica* 148–1/4, 2004, pp. 153–173, where it is said to characterize an extra-cultural or non-cultural group living in a territory controlled by the Ego.

9. Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French women became modern* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

10. See Madelyn Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist: The emergence of the artist as woman* (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1978), p. 11. She argues that the novel as a genre was not accepted by the conservative cultural elite in the eighteenth century, but in form was well suited to a female public.

public role clashed with the norm that stipulated how women should live. Even though there were female editors working for some very important journals, such as Legroing de la Maisonneuve on *Mercur* and *Etoile*, that did not help Madame de Staël and Olympe de Gouges. Madame de Staël was harshly criticized by the literary critic, 'F.', who published in *Mercur*. He wrote with crude irony of *Delphine* and its author alike.<sup>11</sup> Hesse underlines that these two women, de Staël and de Gouges, were exceptions, Madame de Staël because of her courage in openly holding opinions that were regarded as highly annoying by Napoleon. True, female writers were generally not socially rejected, but it is important to remember that Madame de Staël wrote her most important works after 1800, during the reign of Napoleon, and rather late compared to the other women of the Enlightenment. It was during this period that biological perspectives on gender grew in importance. As a result, women were regarded as too weak mentally to be suited to hold leading positions.<sup>12</sup> Napoleon himself illustrates the spirit of the time well:

Je n'aime pas plus les femmes qui se font hommes que les hommes efféminés. Chacun son rôle dans ce monde. [...] Je ne peux pas souffrir cette femme-là [Madame de Staël]. D'abord parce que je n'aime pas les femmes qui se jettent à ma tête, et Dieu sait combien elle m'a fait de cajoleries.<sup>13</sup>

These comments were made upon the publication of *Delphine*, and they reveal that women who dared to be active in the public sphere were attacked for not being feminine enough, an issue that, as we will see later, occupied Madame de Staël a great deal in her work. That

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11. Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*, p. 46; p. 146. The article is also discussed by Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist*; Simon Balayé, *Madame de Staël. Écrire, lutter, vivre* (Genève: Droz, 1994), p. 234. For a reading of the whole of Fiévée's article, accompanied by an interesting analysis, see Simone Balayé 'Un émissaire de Bonaparte, Fiévée critique de Madam de de Staël et de Delphine', in *Cahiers Staëliens*, no. 26–27, 1979, Paris, pp. 99–116.

12. Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*, p. 131.

13. See Ghislain de Diesbach, *Madame de Staël* (Paris: Perrin, 1984), p. 260. 'I do not like women who make men of themselves any better than effeminate men. Each has its part in this world. [...] I cannot stand that woman [Madame de Staël]. First and foremost because I do not like women who force their services upon me, and God knows how she cajoled me.' (My translation.)

being said, Napoleon did not like effeminate men either; his views of gender were highly traditional.

Another important observation that Hesse makes is the female writers' struggle for artistic autonomy in their work. This right was not self-evident for women. Behind the signature 'F.' lurked the literary critic Fiévée. He did not only dislike *Delphine* as a novel, but its author Madame de Staël too. Nevertheless, Hesse continues, female authors could carve out a niche for themselves by creating fictional characters.<sup>14</sup> Hesse speaks of the narrative strategies that were made possible by the French Revolution. It opened new avenues for women and writing alike.<sup>15</sup> This crucial point is taken further in Valérie Cossy's article on the strategies of Jane Austen and Madame de Staël in the public sphere.<sup>16</sup>

The comparison that Cossy draws between the two authors is interesting. They shared a publisher in England, and by analysing editorial comments, Cossy has been able to study two different strategies and their consequences. She suggests that both Madame de Staël and Jane Austen were subordinate to the same ideological view of women, one that recommended life in an out-of-the-way place, but their reactions to it differed considerably.<sup>17</sup> However, both were very well aware of the risks for women who moved in the public sphere. This was more problematic for Madame de Staël, since she refused to renounce her quest for what she herself called *la gloire*, a term

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14. Carla Hesse writes about how women writers' works were read as private statements, that is, women had not the evident right to evoke the 'opacity rather than the transparency of language'. See Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*, pp. 137–138 (for quotation see p. 137).

15. Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*, see for instance p. 156.

16. Valérie Cossy, 'Germaine de Staël, Jane Austen et leurs éditeurs. L'image de l'auteur à travers quelques éditions du XIXe siècle', in *Études de lettres: revue de la Faculté des lettres de l'Université de Lausanne*, 3, 1993, pp. 69–86.

17. In fact Carla Hesse's outlining of different contemporary images of women writers during the revolutionary era seems to correspond to the apparent actual difference between the two women writers' strategies in the public sphere, namely, 'Images of the woman writer as either an outcast or a rebel, an unmarried sister or maiden aunt (Austen), a libertine cosmopolitan aristocrat (Staël, Charrière), [...] permeate modern culture.' See Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*, p. 43.

synonymous with the quest for public recognition.<sup>18</sup> Madame de Staël wrote:

[...] c'est sans doute une jouissance enivrant que de remplir l'univers de son nom.<sup>19</sup>

[...] le plus beau des principes qui puisse mouvoir notre âme est l'amour de la gloire.<sup>20</sup>

The different ways of navigating in the public sphere are reflected in Madame de Staël's and Jane Austen's skill in negotiating fees for their manuscripts. Madame de Staël was brisk in her relations with publishers, and as a result was well paid, unlike Jane Austen who was much more careful. Cossy illustrates this by noting the differences in fees paid by their common editor: Madame de Staël demanded £4,000 for *Considérations sur la Révolution française*, but Jane Austen was at first only offered £450 for the rights to *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. Perhaps it is only in the light of their posthumous reputations, which Cossy so interestingly discusses, that the consequences of these attitudes emerge. Both women died in 1817, a fact that prompted very different reflections from their publisher, whose view, Cossy argues, seems to have been that Madame de Staël's personality overshadowed her literary achievement, while in Jane Austen's case it was the books that were significant. The price to be paid by a woman seeking recognition in the public sphere seems to have been very high.<sup>21</sup> They had to be careful not to be considered extremely provocative. However, Mme de Staël was likely to have a different strategy with her writings than Jane Austen had, namely to create a platform from which she could act in public life. Thus one

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18. Julia Kristeva, 'Gloire, deuil et écriture', in *Romantisme*, no. 62, 1988, pp. 7–14. Paris; Madelyn Gutwirth, 'Forging a vocation: Germaine de Staël on fiction, power, and passion', in *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities*, vol. 86, no. 3, 1983–5, pp. 242–254.

19. Cossy, 'Germaine de Staël, Jane Austen et leurs éditeurs', p. 71. 'It is doubtless an intoxicating pleasure to fill the universe with one's name.' (My translation.)

20. Madame de Staël, 'De l'influence des passions', in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. III (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1820–1821), p. 45. 'The most beautiful of principles that can touch our soul is the love for glory.' (My translation.)

21. Cossy, 'Germaine de Staël, Jane Austen et leurs éditeurs', p. 79.

should also consider the fact that Madame de Staël's books were very different in content from those of Jane Austen; not only did they choose different strategies (as mentioned above), they also expressed themselves very differently, Madame de Staël being the far more dangerous and subversive of the two. In a way, their behaviour was reflected in their works.<sup>22</sup>

I have touched on the question of women's self-regulating behaviour, or the lack of it, when moving in society or joining the public sphere. But of course, such constraints are governed by the mind, by thought, as Gutwirth indicates in analysing a passage in Madame de Staël's *Essai sur les fictions* (1795). She detects the problems Madame de Staël had in combining her own desire for recognition, *la gloire*, with society's expectations of women. Gutwirth writes: 'She [Madame de Staël] begins as she so often felt impelled to do in speaking of her sex, by making a ritual concession to the conventional view of woman's nature.'<sup>23</sup>

Gutwirth is convinced that eighteenth-century culture was not dominated by women, even though manners and fashion held out just such a prospect.<sup>24</sup> Surely when it came to the legal system and education this was not the case. Here she brings up Montesquieu's epistolary novel, *Lettres persanes* (1721). This well-known novel describes a visit to France by an oriental man, Uzbek. What Montesquieu has to tell us about Uzbek's view of 'western' women is important if we are to understand the power of the discourse on women and Montesquieu's political message. Political despotism fed tyranny also within family relations.<sup>25</sup> The French Revolution perhaps did not change anything in regard to women, but at least the connection between politics and family life had been brought forward. Montesquieu wrote:

Oui, Roxane, si vous étiez ici, vous vous sentiriez outragée dans l'affreuse ignominie où votre sexe est descendu; vous

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22. Life occasionally imitated art. Jane Austen refused to attend a party to which Madame de Staël was also invited, see Cossy, 'Germaine de Staël, Jane Austen et leurs éditeurs', p. 84.

23. Gutwirth, 'Forging a vocation', p. 251.

24. Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist*, pp. 2–3.

25. For an interesting analysis of *Lettres persanes* see Victoria Höög, *Upplysning utan förnuft* (Eslöv: B. Östlings bokförl. Symposion, 1999), pp. 195–223.

fuiriez ces abominables lieux, et vous soupireriez pour cette douce retraite, où vous trouvez l'innocence, où vous êtes sûre de vous-même [...].<sup>26</sup>

What Montesquieu is trying to show here is Uzbek's view of women. It stipulates, in order to justify a despotic order of patriarchal control, that women can only find happiness in a quiet, retiring life. Victoria Höög writes:

*Lettres persanes* is an account of human decay and cleavage expressed in Uzbek's double identities. The sovereign of the seraglio is both enlightened and a despot, the former when he visits the Parisian salons, the latter when in his letters home he marks an unrestricted power over his women's lives. The message of the book is that the sovereign of the seraglio is the most unfree of all, despotism tyrannizes the despot himself, and he becomes an inverted slave nature.<sup>27</sup> (My translation from Swedish.)

Now, it is by requesting a place in public life that Madame de Staël seems to have challenged the patriarchal order the most. But, as Gutwirth also stresses, Madame de Staël was exceptional in the attention that was paid to her work and salon.<sup>28</sup> Unlike Hesse, Gutwirth wants to underline that writing did not rescue women from their subordinate position; on the contrary, society kept women in place by restricting their opportunities for social advancement and

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26. Montesquieu, 'Lettres Persanes', in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Éditions Fernand Roches, 1929), lettre XXVI, p. 59. 'Yes, Roxane, if you had been here you would have felt insulted by this horrible shame your sex had sunk into, you would flee these abominable places, and you would long for this pleasant retreat, where you find the innocence, where you are sure of your self [...].' (My translation.)

27. Höög, *Upplysning utan förnuft*, p. 201. '*Lettres persanes* är en skildring av mänskligt förfall och kluvenhet uttryckt i Usbeks dubbla identiteter. Seraljens härskare är både upplyst och en despot, det ena när han vistas i de parisiska salongerna, det andra när han med breven hem markerar oinskränkt makt över sina kvinnors liv. Bokens budskap är att seraljens härskare är ofriast av alla, despotin tyranniserar despoten själv, han blir en inverterad slavnatur.'

28. Madame de Staël's novels *Delphine* (1802) and *Corinne* (1807) were very successful, and therefore were generally severely criticized in the press, with the important exception of the reviews of Benjamin Constant and Schlegel. See Balayé, *Madame de Staël. Écrire, lutter, vivre*, p. 18; pp. 231–78 (for an overview).

education. She writes: ‘The only revolt possible to them, given the nature of their bonds, would have to have been a revolt of the mind.’<sup>29</sup> Joan W. Scott seems to share this apprehension about a rigid social order when she argues that the exclusion of women was imbedded in the concept of ‘liberté, égalité et fraternité’.<sup>30</sup> The notion of the universal man, or rather the prototypical man, required the omission of woman. Women’s struggle for equal rights contained a paradox: defining injustice also created difference. This, according to Scott, has remained true throughout history.

One explanation, according to both Scott and Hesse, is that biological determinism has for so long been used to formulate the absolute necessity of women’s subordination. However, Scott’s inquiry is framed differently because it depends on Foucault’s notion of discourse; thus women’s subordination, paradoxically, is constitutive within feminism itself. Scott’s foremost aim is to scrutinize the making of women as the Other. As her illustration of the patriarchal order of the Enlightenment, she gives four examples of women from different periods who took up the struggle against convention and social order, amongst them Olympe de Gouges, who was sent to the guillotine. She writes:

When de Gouges argued for women’s inclusion in politics on the grounds of their individuality, she runs up against the self/other problem. In the political discourse of her time, the independent individual was being constituted as the antithesis of the dependent female.<sup>31</sup>

Scott agrees with Hesse on the significance—and liberating force—for women of writing, as it was for de Gouges, for example. It was a way for women to obtain recognition as individuals and citizens.<sup>32</sup> As we have seen, *la gloire* was of utmost concern to Madame de Staël. However, Scott, through her study of political texts written by women as well as by powerful men, has been able to show that the conventional distinction between a female private sphere and a male

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29. Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist*, pp. 15–16.

30. Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 37.



public one remained unchanged throughout the Revolution, in spite of the general turbulence.

Apart from her sex, religion was crucial to Madame de Staël and to the reception of her novel *Delphine* in the Parisian press. I would suggest that religion was closely connected to her perception of herself as a woman. De Diesbach also mentions this, stressing that Madame de Staël was given a Protestant upbringing and was educated at home by her mother, while girls in her position were normally sent to Catholic convent schools.<sup>33</sup> Madame de Staël's parents were Calvinists of Swiss origin. Before the Revolution her father was for a time the Minister of Finance. Her mother was deeply religious in a way that marked her life entirely. The matter of religion was also decisive for her parents when choosing a husband for their daughter. The choice finally fell on the Swedish ambassador in Paris, Eric-Magnus Staël von Holstein, and they were married in 1786.<sup>34</sup>

However, there was another problem that Madame de Staël found difficult to resolve. Her novel *Delphine* was attacked primarily on religious grounds; she was accused of being immoral, as was her heroine *Delphine*, a female character unacceptable in Napoleonic France. Fiévée also made an issue of Madame de Staël's foreign origins: Swiss by birth, Swedish by marriage. He wrote unsparingly in *Mercure* on 1 January 1803:

‘Les Français, écrivait Fiévée dans le *Mercure*, ne lui auront aucune obligation de la manière dont elle les traite; tout son amour est aujourd’hui pour les Anglais, ce qui ne doit pas étonner. Les esprits qui plangent au-dessus de ce bas monde n’ont pas de patrie, et, même à tout autre titre, il est permis à Mme de Staël de n’en point avoir. Née dans un pays qui n’est plus, épouse d’un Suédois, devenue Française par circonstances, n’ayant jamais eu une patrie que par illusion, il est possible qu’elle ne puisse en concevoir d’autre: c’est une veille habitude.’ Antifrançais, c’était un nouveau grief contre *Delphine*.<sup>35</sup>

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33. de Diesbach, *Madame de Staël*, pp. 35–40.

34. Ibid., pp. 66–7. M. Henri Perrochon, ‘Les sources Suisses de la Religion de Mme de Staël’, in *Madame de Staël et l’Europe* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1970), p. 147.

35. Paul Gautier, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1933), pp. 103–104. Fiévée was known to be a follower of Napoleon. The article is published

Perrochon, in his analysis of the importance of religion to Madame de Staël, confirms that it was decisive for the reception of *Delphine*.<sup>36</sup> The novel was criticized on religious grounds: ‘la confession des mourants, les vœux religieux, l’indissolubilité du mariage.’<sup>37</sup>

To conclude, there were three circumstances, over and above her sex, that made Madame de Staël an *inner other* (we will return to the term later on) in the dominating French culture of her time: writing, Protestantism, and foreign birth and citizenship. Those factors made her stick out from the norms in the society, and thereby she became subject to scorn as somebody not quite belonging to the right circles. Also, those three factors played a part in her perception of herself as a woman.<sup>38</sup>

### *Corinne: the female artist*

*Corinne or Italy*’s battles are woven throughout Staël’s career: battles with Napoleon above all [...] with Europe’s post-Revolutionary dispensation, and its imprisonment of women in the domestic sphere—here curiously linked to England, not to France, and with Staël’s own private sorrows, from which this novel helps to free her. Such identical battles may encourage us to see Staël’s fiction and non-fiction as one continuous text, and it can be liberating to treat her as the last of the *philosophes*, like Rousseau or Voltaire, using an eighteenth-century

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in full in Balayé, ‘Un émissaire de Bonaparte’, pp. 104–116. ‘The French,’ wrote Fiévée in *Mercure*, ‘have no obligations towards her because of the way she treats them, all her love today is directed towards the English, which should be of no surprise. The spirits that sail above this base world have no home country, and [...] it is permitted to Madame de Staël not to have any. Born in a country that is no more, wife to a Swede, have become French by circumstances, not having had any home country except illusory, it is possible that she cannot conceive of anything else: it is an old habit.’ Anti-French, that was a new complaint against *Delphine*.’ (My translation.) The Napoleonic code, however, can be seen as an improvement in this regard, and in the end Madame de Staël, as a widow, was in fact entitled to French citizenship.

36. Perrochon, ‘Les sources Suisses de la Religion de Mme de Staël’.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 148. ‘Confession, the taking of vows, the indissolubility of marriage.’ (My translation.)

38. I acknowledge my great debt to Eva Österberg, who in a discussion of de Staël underlined for me the value of viewing historical phenomena as partially overlapping and intertwined in a way that makes a personal life complex to interpret.

discourse which makes *Corinne* inexplicable in nineteenth-century discipline and genre terms.<sup>39</sup>

Germaine de Staël's perhaps most famous book, next to *De l'Allemagne*, was, and still is, her novel *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807). The novel has attracted a lot of research on account of its controversial female protagonist Corinne. When studying it more closely, in conjunction with Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's portrait of Germaine de Staël as Corinne (*Portrait de Mme de Staël*, 1808–1809) it became quite clear to me that Germaine de Staël regarded her protagonist as her Alter-Ego. In fact, such a standpoint is supported by Germaine de Staël herself, if we are to believe Carl Gustaf von Brinkman, who was her close friend and a colleague of M. de Staël from the Swedish embassy in Paris. Brinkman wrote:

Me de Staël avoue elle-même, que son but, en écrivant Delphine, fut de se peindre en *profil*, et par Corinne elle a voulu se communiquer toute entière.<sup>40</sup> (Italics in the original.)

In that sense, a short discussion of *Corinne ou l'Italie* has an important role to play in a biographical survey of Germaine de Staël and her life.

Germaine de Staël wrote the novel during her stay in Italy in 1805. That specific voyage to Italy is not included in her *Dix années d'exil*, probably because she chose another form for using her experiences, that is, the novel. And that also may explain why long passages in the novel remind us of a classical travel account. By choosing the name Corinne for her protagonist she alluded to the tradition from Greek antiquity. Korinna (c. 518–442 BC) was the name of the famous poet who describes in a poem how she won over her male colleague and rival Pindar at a contest.<sup>41</sup> In that way

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39. John Isbell, 'Introduction', in Staël, Germaine de, *Corinne, or Italy* (Oxford & New York, 1998), pp. xiii–xiv.

40. Carl Gustaf von Brinkman, 'Lettre sur l'auteur de 'Corinne'', in *Cahiers Staëliens*, no. 39, 1987, Paris, pp. 139–181, for quotation see p. 148. Brinkman's letter to Martina von Schwerin of 15 April, Stockholm 1813. 'Mme de Staël confesses that her goal in writing Delphine was to paint herself in *profile*, and with Corinne she wanted to mediate herself in total.' (My translation.)

41. Korinna, 'On her self', in *Sappho and the Greek Lyric Poets* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), pp. 150–151.

Germaine de Staël placed her protagonist, and perhaps also herself, in the history of literary fiction. Patrick H. Vincent proposes that *Corinne ou l'Italie* was a modern rewriting of Sappho's life story.<sup>42</sup> That would, in fact, reinforce Germaine de Staël's ambitions to acquire a place in history and hence in the public sphere, otherwise reserved for men.

As mentioned above, the novel contains strong elements of travel account features, which made it difficult to classify for contemporary critics. Some regarded it as a travel account, others as an autobiographical text, yet others possibly, as a sentimental novel.<sup>43</sup> The complications are highly understandable considering that the concluding lines of the novel are written in first person. As Marie-Claire Vallois points out Germaine de Staël's own voice here replaces that of the narrator.<sup>44</sup> Also, the novel is provided with footnotes which point to Germaine de Staël's own experiences in the *lifeworld*, i.e. the world we take for granted as Schutz (disciple of Husserl) defined the term. Thus, Madelyn Gutwirth's suggestion that Corinne's oppressive English stepmother (Corinne's Italian mother died when she was only a small child and her English father

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42. Patrick H. Vincent, *The Romantic Poetess: European culture, politics, and gender, 1820–1840* (Durham, N. H.: University of New Hampshire Press, 2004), p. xviii. In connection with the discussion about the novel's impact on other female artists struggling with the same conventions about women's role in society I would like to mention some passages in Selma Lagerlöf's famous novel *Gösta Berlings saga* (1891). Selma Lagerlöf describes there how the protagonist Gösta was entrusted to take Mme de Staël's *Corinne* in 'three small books bound with a red ribbon' with him in order keep them safe, and in the end had to throw them to the wolves running after his sleigh to win some time while 'the animals tore this prey into pieces'. It is of course tempting to read these passages metaphorically, and doing so one may draw the conclusion that *Corinne* still at the end of the nineteenth century was a controversial and perhaps even a subversive book in the eyes of the public opinion (the wolves/animals?), and it was thus still appealing and important to other women artists trying to make themselves understood and accepted. See Selma Lagerlöf, *Gösta Berlings saga* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 2005), p. 60 and pp. 65–66. (My translation from Swedish.)

43. For a deeper understanding of the problem concerning genre see Simone Balayé, *Madame de Staël: Écrire, lutter, vivre*.

44. Marie-Claire Vallois, *Fictions féminines: Mme de Staël et les voix de la Sibylle* (Saratoga, Calif.: Anma Libri, 1987), p. 179. See also Mme de Staël, *Corinne ou l'Italie* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1985/2003), p. 587; Mme de Staël *Corinne, or Italy* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 404.

remarried) in the novel also can be seen as a portrait of Germaine de Staël's own mother, has very good grounds.

Mme Necker was very religious (Calvinist) with very firm opinions of how a woman should behave, ideals that M. Necker also cherished, and to which Germaine de Staël, to her own great sorrow, never could live up. This is the core, Gutwirth continues, of what *Corinne ou l'Italie* is all about.<sup>45</sup> Corinne's English stepsister Lucile may be regarded as the archetype of that ideal of a gentle, quiet and withdrawn feminine type. In that sense she is the opposite of Corinne, who is famous for her public improvisations and lively artistic personality. If one takes Germaine de Staël's descriptions of her encounters with women during her travels in Europe into account (to which I shall return further on) one may see that these contrasting female ideals constituted a perpetual source of conflict within herself. Germaine de Staël never seemed to have reconciled the ideal that her parents had regarding womanhood with what she actually was, as a writer and intellectual. And this feeling of inner split was probably reinforced, or perhaps even created, by the hostile reception that some critics gave *Corinne*.

The message from several major journals was clear but not new: women who challenged the convention which stipulates that they should live quietly in the domestic sphere will be unhappy (*Journal de l'Empire*).<sup>46</sup> Toril Moi, in a newly written article, focuses on this question of how Germaine de Staël conceived her role as a woman. She crossed the borders between the public and the private, between speech and silence. And, according to Moi, this split and feeling of conflict affected especially the women as a result of a kind of 'backlash' reaction to the Revolution's message about equal rights (see the discussion above of Joan Scott's analysis). Moi, in a very interesting way, shows in her analysis of *Corinne ou l'Italie* that the coronation at the Capitolium (where Corinne is honoured by the public for her improvisations) constitutes a crucial moment for Corinne. Corinne is seen as 'individual, as woman and as human being'.<sup>47</sup>

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45. See Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist*, pp. 157 and 219.

46. Balayé, *Madame de Staël: Écrire, lutter, vivre*, p. 251, for an overview of the reception of *Corinne* in the Parisian press, see also pp. 245–263.

47. Toril Moi, 'Corinne – kvinnornas grundläggande modernitetsmyt', in *Kvinnvetenskaplig tidskrift* 2004 (25): 3, pp. 23–33; for quotation see p. 27.

However, that fictional moment Germaine de Staël tried to recapture in her own life by taking the role as Corinne privately. This, I suggest, was for example visible in her wish to have herself portrayed as Corinne.<sup>48</sup> Carla Hesse gives an additional very interesting perspective on the relation between Mme de Staël, the novel *Corinne ou l'Italie* and the tradition of *salonnières*. She writes:

Corinne's story is the story of a world in which female oral genius no longer has a central place in cultural life. Staël has often been interpreted as suggesting that all forms of female literary talent were to be eclipsed in the modern, bourgeois world. But Staël's own career as a writer belies this conclusion. Corinne, the novel, was published to extraordinary success, despite the official disapprobation of the Napoleonic regime. The cultural change that Staël recorded in her book was the downfall not of women writers, but of women as virtuosi of the spoken word, as *salonnières*.<sup>49</sup>

The following study of Mme de Staël's cultural encounters and her writings will in many ways show what Hesse's concludes here about *Corinne*, and Staël's regret about the vanishing culture of salons in Paris before Napoleon.

Now, according to Philippe Lejeune, readers, from time to time, have good reasons to read fictional texts as autobiographical. By cross-reading the fictional text with other non-fictional texts by the same writer, the reader may come to the conclusion that the fictional one does have autobiographical validity. Anyway, Lejeune continues, the fictional text cannot be classified as an autobiography since the *identity* between the 'speaker' and the name of the author printed on the cover cannot be established.<sup>50</sup> Thus, it is the proper name that constitutes the essential in establishing autobiographical pacts, due to the fact that it is based on two conventions: population data and publishing contracts. Against this background the reader has no reason to doubt that the name of the author on the cover, which

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48. For further discussion on this topic see Rédei, "“Jagets” representationer i text och bild”.

49. Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*, pp. 28–29.

50. Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), see esp. pp. 11–13.

recurs in the text, does not refer to a person with that name outside the text.<sup>51</sup>

I would like to add yet another aspect to Lejeune's stressing of the 'autobiographical space', that is, the relating of fictional and non-fictional texts of an author without reducing the one to the other.<sup>52</sup> Not only do we relate the two types of texts to each other, but in some cases we may also consider the texts in conjunction with the author whom we might know, or know of, to a greater or lesser extent. That was what Napoleon did, when reading *Corinne ou l'Italie!* And he knew Germaine de Staël quite well, at least he knew *of* her, not only quite well, but rather very well. Therefore, his account of her protagonist Corinne is very illuminating in understanding how Germaine de Staël was perceived by him. Paul Gautier makes this point:

Antifrançaise, anglophile, telle est *Corinne*. Et Corinne, c'est Mme de Staël tout entière. Voilà pourquoi Napoléon ne peut pas souffrir ce livre. A Sainte-Hélène, il avoue ne l'avoir lu jadis 'qu'avec le poucé'; il [Napoleon] essaie de le relire, mais il ne peut achever sa lecture, il jette le livre. Mme de Staël s'est si bien peinte dans son héroïne, qu'elle la lui fait prendre en grippe. 'Je la vois, l'entends, je la sens, je veux la fuir, et je jette le livre.' Au physique, la ressemblance est frappante; Corinne, c'est Mme de Staël idéalisée, avec 'ses bras d'une éclatante beauté, sa taille grande, mais un peu forte, à la manière des statues grecques', son regard 'inspiré'.<sup>53</sup> (Italics in the original.)

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51. Ibid., p. 21. However, this is not the case with *Corinne*, as will be shown further on.

52. Ibid., pp. 26–28.

53. Gautier, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon*, pp. 161–162. 'Antifrench, anglophile, such is *Corinne*. And Corinne is totally Mme de Staël. That's why Napoleon cannot stand the book. At St Helena he confesses that earlier he only had skimmed through the book; he [Napoleon] tries to read it again, but he cannot complete the reading, he throws the book away. Mme de Staël is so well painted in her protagonist that he took a dislike to her. "I see her, I hear her, I feel her, I want to escape her, and I throw the book away." The physical resemblance is striking; Corinne is Mme de Staël idealized, with "her conspicuously beautiful arms, her grand physique a little too strongly built, like that of Greek statues", her "inspired" look.' (My translation.)

However, it is sad to think of what Henri Guillemin states when discussing the expectations that Germaine de Staël had about this book at the beginning. She hoped it would sort out things regarding her exile from Paris and make her situation easier. When reading a quoted letter sent to her from her close friend Prosper de Barante it is difficult not to be surprised over how deeply Napoleon and Mme de Staël seemed to have misunderstood each other.<sup>54</sup>

Je suis toujours sans comprendre pourquoi vous l'offrez [votre livre] à l'empereur. [...] Toute chose qui fait que votre nom est rappelé à son souvenir me paraît essentiellement mauvaise.<sup>55</sup> (Brackets in the original.)

The implications of the relationship between Germaine de Staël and Bonaparte will be developed further down.

The above discussion about autobiography is important in the sense that it aims at explaining my choice of source material for the empirical data. I have, as mentioned above, chosen to examine de Staël's travelogue, not her novels. Since a cultural semiotical study focuses on analysing the model one culture makes of itself in the encounters with others, it is pivotal that these encounters really have taken place. Only by comparing Germaine de Staël's descriptions of what she experiences in her meetings with other people during her travels with the opposite parties' accounts about the same meeting may a picture of the model she makes of herself and her culture emerge. In, for instance, *Corinne ou l'Italie*, however autobiographical it might be, there is no true opposite party, *no true other*, that could, in a real sense, talk back to the narrator, or even less to the author.<sup>56</sup> This is a crucial insight that Sonesson puts forward in a recent article criticizing Bakhtin's understanding of the relation between author

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54. Henri Guillemin, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon, ou Germaine et le caïd ingrat* (Paris. Éditions de seuil, 1987), p. 135.

55. Letter from Prosper de Barante, sent from Breslau on 11 May 1807 quoted in Guillemin, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon*, p. 135. 'I still cannot understand why you offer [your book] to the emperor. [...] It seems to me that everything that makes him remember your name is essentially a bad thing.' (My translation.)

56. Carle Hesse points out that *Corinne ou l'Italie* has most often been interpreted as an autobiographical portray of Mme de Staël. See Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*, p. 27.



and hero.<sup>57</sup> This fact may also be illuminated by insights made in phenomenology by Schutz regarding the nature of the other, may it be the ‘fellow-man’ present in time and space to the Ego, the predecessor, or the successor. The definition of the hero, as stated here, may be analogous to the ‘predecessor’, in the sense that the author as the fellow-man, I would suggest, only can have knowledge *about* the hero or the predecessor, may only influence but not be influenced by the hero or the predecessor. The speech of the hero, as that of the predecessor, is not present tense, reserved for the fellow-man present in time and space to an ‘I’, but rather past tense really. Thus, the common-sense world of the past (given in writing or in oral speech), like that of the novel, is closed, static and has ‘*no open future*’<sup>58</sup> (emphasis in the original). Schutz’s definition of the predecessor concerns the *previous fellow-man*, and not the fictive hero that occupies Bakhtin in his studies in literature and the history of it. Only, Schutz’s predecessor and Bakhtin’s hero are both enclosed in ‘texts’. Thus, previous fellow-men (predecessors) may only be known to us through ‘texts’, as for instance oral or written accounts, or through pictures. Now, a more detailed discussion of those matters will follow in the theoretical parts of the inquiry.

### *Napoleon and Germaine: a story of exile*

The biographical overview will now turn to its second theme, as mentioned above, i.e. to the relationship between Germaine de Staël and Napoleon. Perhaps one could say that this theme constitutes Germaine de Staël’s ‘second battlefield’, besides her inner conflict between contemporary normative expectations as to how she should be and the woman she really was.

On n’écrit guère, a-t-on dit, ses *Mémoires*, ses *Confessions* ou son *Journal* que pour s’y justifier ou s’y glorifier aux dépens de ses contemporains.’ Mme de Staël n’a pas manqué à cette règle;

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57. Göran Sonesson, ‘The Pronominalisation of Culture: Dyadic and triadic models of interculturality in the conceptions of the Tartu school, Bakhtin, Cassirer and Peirce’ (in press). For a deeper discussion of genre and autobiographical texts in general and for Germaine de Staël’s in particular see Rédei ‘Mme de Staël’s självbiografiska reseskildring från Tyskland’.

58. Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers II. Studies in Social Theory*, ed. Arvid Brodersen (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), p. 57.

et, parmi ses ‘contemporains’, celui aux dépens duquel elle se glorifie, qu’elle poursuit de sa haine et de sa vengeance, c’est Bonaparte.<sup>59</sup>

This survey, focusing on Germaine de Staël’s autobiography, notably on her travel accounts from Germany and Russia, starts off by discussing her relation with Napoleon, in that sense staying close to the original disposition of the book which starts with a chapter called ‘Causes of Bonaparte’s animosity against me’. Even though Mme de Staël starts from there it may be interesting to remember that Napoleon once was regarded by her as the rescuer from chaos and *Jacobinism*. In a passage, omitted in the 1821 edition of *Dix années d’exil* (but published in *Considérations sur la Révolution française*), a more balanced picture emerges of Germaine de Staël’s initial view of Napoleon. She writes:

[...] je répétais souvent: ‘Si les jacobins triomphent, nous serons peut-être tués; mais si c’est Bonaparte, nous ne pourrons plus vivre.’ Et quand son triomphe fut assuré, je me sentis une difficulté de respirer qui ne m’a pas quitté depuis, et qui est devenue, je crois, la maladie de l’Europe continentale...[...].<sup>60</sup>

At the time of *Le coup d’État du 18-Brumaire* (9 November 1799), Germaine de Staël thus preferred an ‘eventual bad [Napoleon] before immediate assassins.’<sup>61</sup>

Germaine de Staël’s original aim with *Considérations sur la Révolution française* was to write about her father, his political writings and the times. But that work, also published posthumously, for the first time

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59. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, pp. II–III. “‘One scarcely writes, it has been said, one’s *Memoirs*, one’s *Confessions* or one’s *Journal* if not for justifying or glorifying one self at the expense of one’s contemporaries.” Mme de Staël was not exempt from that rule; and among her “contemporaries”, at the expense of whom she glorifies herself, whom she pursues out of hatred and desire for revenge, is Bonaparte.’ (My translation.)

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 383–384. ‘[...] I often repeated: “If the Jacobins triumph, we would perhaps be assassinated; but if it is Bonaparte, we would no longer be able to live.” And when his triumph was assured, I felt difficulties breathing, something I have kept on feeling ever since, and which has become, I think, the sickness of continental Europe.’ (My translation.)

61. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

in 1818 (under the title of *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française*), contains autobiographical elements, in the same way as political pamphlets are to be found in her autobiography.<sup>62</sup> To sum up: Germaine de Staël seems to have been primarily preoccupied with putting forth her thoughts, and not so much with literary form. This was something Goethe observed when reproaching her for ‘her passionate lack of form’.<sup>63</sup> But perhaps her true passions lay elsewhere? She had practically grown up in a salon, her mother’s. When her own Parisian salon, where she once triumphed in playing word games and conversing, and seduced everyone using all her wit and imagination, was denied her by Napoleon, she never stopped regretting it. By bringing her art with her, as a ‘true’ Corinne, she made deep impressions on everyone she met travelling throughout Europe, although she considered the salons in Berlin and Vienna to be pale copies of the French ones.<sup>64</sup>

As a *salonnière* who brought the art of conversation to its perfection, Germaine de Staël represented something genuinely French.<sup>65</sup> In fact, this issue was one of the major reasons for Germaine de Staël’s despair in exile. Because of her art and her salon, it became impossible for Napoleon to let her stay in Paris, since her political discussions were unacceptable to him, as we have seen above.<sup>66</sup> In her travel notes from her first trip to Germany in 1803 and 1804 Germaine de Staël wrote: ‘mais je crois que l’art de la société, les

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62. Stefania Tesser, ‘L’inscription du moi dans le discours politique: Les considérations sur la révolution française’, in *Cahiers Staëliens*, no. 44, 1992, Paris, pp. 29–44, see esp. pp. 30–31.

63. Pierre Kohler, *Madame de Staël et la Suisse* (Paris and Lausanne: Librairie Payot & Cie, 1916), p. 689. ‘son manque passionné de forme.’ (In original.) At the time of Germaine de Staël’s arrival in Weimar in 1803, Goethe had translated her *Essai sur les fictions* which was published by Schiller, see Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël*, p. 22.

64. Aurelio Principato, ‘La conversation et son miroir romanesque’, in *Cahiers Staëliens*, 52, 2001, Paris, pp. 55–77, here see esp. pp. 54–55.

65. Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, p. xvii, quoting Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. See also Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Souvenirs*, vol. III (Paris: Librairie de H. Fournier, 1837), p. 267. ‘On la voyait alors marchant dans son salon, tenant en main une petite branche de verdure, quand elle parlait, elle agitait ce rameau, et sa parole avait une chaleur qui n’appartenait qu’à elle seule; impossible de l’interrompre: dans ces instants elle me faisait l’effet d’une improvisatrice.’

66. For a discussion of this subject in particular see Guillemin, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon*, esp. p. 70; 89. see also Gautier, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon*.

jouissances de la civilisation sont portés au plus haut degré en France.<sup>67</sup> In this connection it is interesting to read her thoughts about the development of the art of conversation in the West in a chapter in *De l'Allemagne* focusing on the subject.<sup>68</sup> But except for the question of Germaine de Staël being exiled from Paris, her salon and friends, there were other reasons for Madame de Staël and Napoleon to fear and hate each other. This is visible in her remark after being exiled because of her first novel *Delphine* in 1802:

Citoyen Consul, il n'est pas de vous, le mouvement qui vous porte à persécuter une femme et deux enfants: il est impossible qu'un héros ne soit pas le protecteur de la faiblesse.<sup>69</sup>

When Mme de Staël's son met Napoleon in 1808, Napoleon is said to have commented:

Votre mère n'est pas méchante; elle a de l'esprit, beaucoup d'esprit; mais elle n'est accoutumée à aucune espèce de subordination.<sup>70</sup>

Napoleon hardly regarded Germaine de Staël as a weak person, and probably his view of her was shared by others, as a proverb shows which circulated around Europe in 1814 saying: 'il faut compter trois puissances: L'Angleterre, la Russie et Mme de Staël.'<sup>71</sup> And

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67. Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël*, p. 32. 'but I think that the art of sociability, the delights of civilization are brought to their highest in France.' (My translation.)

68. Germaine de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', in *Oeuvres complètes*, tome X, part I, ch. IX (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1820–1821).

69. Madame de Staël to Napoleon, 7 October 1803. See Madame de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, ed. Béatrice W. Jasiniski (Paris: Pauvert, 1982), vol. V:1, p. 55. 'Citizen Consul, it is not like you, the manoeuvre that makes you pursue a woman and two children: it is impossible that a hero is not also the protector of the weak.' (My translation.)

70. From Auguste de Staël's notes taken at the time of his meeting with Napoleon in 1808, when Madame de Staël was in Vienna on her second journey to Germany, see Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, p. 122. 'Your mother is not mean; she has wit, a lot of wit; but she is not used to any form of subordination.' (My translation.)

71. The proverb was repeated in baronne du Montet's *Souvenirs* in connection with Mme de Staël's visit in Galicia in 1812, see de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, appendix VII, note 1, p. 406. 'One has to count three powers: England, Russia and Mme de Staël.' (My translation.) See also John Claiborne Isbell, *The Birth of European*

probably, Germaine de Staël was aware of the fact that her political power could harm Napoleon, as she frequented the most influential people one could think of when travelling through Europe.

Now, Paul Gautier suggests: ‘S’il [Napoleon] exile Mme de Staël, c’est qu’il la craint; mais il ne veut être ni odieux, ni ridicule.’<sup>72</sup> The illustrative examples of their communication imply that both parties had difficulties in handling the positions where they found themselves when confronted with each other. Germaine de Staël, when trying to remind Napoleon of her womanhood, relies in her letter on the very same normative conception of how women should be, i.e., to be dependent on and subordinate to manly protection, of which she was a victim. On the other hand, Napoleon refrained from the same convention of liberalism and to versus women that he normally advocated, by overlooking her appeal to stay in Paris. How could that be? In fact, Henri Guillemin suggests that social conventions were foreign to Napoleon generally. Evidently he could be very rude to women, in any case to Germaine de Staël.<sup>73</sup> Napoleon apparently accepted norms as social facts and did not believe that Germaine de Staël would ever fit into any, and thereby end her public liberal political agitations. Thus he seems paradoxically not to have granted her any of the liberties of her sex. By invoking womanhood, Germaine de Staël therefore failed in her communication with Napoleon.<sup>74</sup>

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*Romanticism: Truth and propaganda in Staël's De l'Allemagne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 6; p. 100.

72. Gautier, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon*, p. 185. ‘If he [Napoleon] exiles Mme de Staël it is because he fears her; but he wishes neither to be abominable nor ridiculous.’

73. Guillemin, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon*, p. 138; p. 244, note 16.

74. I have studied this phenomenon of how women, not fitting in with norms, passed beyond the reach of what could be comprehended. When Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun portrayed Germaine de Staël as a female genius, as Corinne, she touched upon something that could not be reconciled either with the tradition of art history or in the society at large (the domains are regarded as interrelated): female beauty and genius. The latter quality was something exclusive to men. For further details see Rédei, “‘Jagets’ representationer i text och bild”. For further reading see also Mary D. Sheriff, *The exceptional woman. Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the cultural politics of art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), esp. pp. 256–257. ‘The place of the genius, that singular creation of nature, was reserved for men and gendered masculine. [...] Woman, Nature, and Genius are merged in Vigée-Lebrun’s image, which recalls her collapsing of the boundaries between natural

Henri Guillemin's point of departure when describing, and interpreting, the relationship between Germaine de Staël and Napoleon Bonaparte is the deep wish of the former to play an important role in the public sphere and to be part of the glorious circle surrounding Napoleon.<sup>75</sup> He writes: 'Germaine veut être la première dame du régime français, quel qu'il soit.'<sup>76</sup> But he also suggests that Madame de Staël was unhappily in love with Napoleon, pointing out a letter which her father sent to her.<sup>77</sup> However, what becomes clear in his book, among other things, is that Germaine de Staël was also very much dependent on Napoleon to get back the 'Necker millions' (two million francs) once lent to the state. The Necker millions constituted the second major obstacle between Germaine de Staël and Bonaparte. They were finally paid back to her, partly, in 1815.<sup>78</sup> Madame de Staël's political motivations are toned down, instead more personal aspects are put in the foreground, in Guillemin's interpretation of her relationship with Napoleon.<sup>79</sup>

Without exaggeration one might say, I believe, that Germaine de Staël hated exile, she could not think of any other place for her to live than Paris. One must remember that Germaine was exiled from Paris, not from France. As Guillemin shows, Madame de Staël, consequently, even regarded Coppet, her father's palace outside Geneva in their homeland Switzerland, as 'foreign', in the sense of

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"feminine" reproduction and "masculine" cultural production in her written and painted self-portrayals as artist-mother. Staël does not blend into the landscape, rather she stands out from it, massive and sublime.'

75. Henri Guillemin states in the preface that his book, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon, ou Germaine et le caïd ingrat*, aims at outlining the exact relation between Germaine de Staël and Napoleon, with the help of documents previously unknown, which until then had been little known despite the important book published by Gautier, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon*.

76. Guillemin, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon*, p. 79. 'Germaine wants to be the first lady of the French regime, no matter what.' (My translation.)

77. Ibid., p. 47, see also pp. 78–79. The quoted letter from 5 January 1801 says: 'Je me suis toujours affligé, [...] de ton amour malheureux pour le Général Consul, [...].' 'I'm still distressed about your unhappy love for the General Consul.' (My translation.)

78. Ibid., p. 219 ('Epilogue').

79. Ibid., esp. pp. 80–81.

not being Paris.<sup>80</sup> Germaine de Staël was Swiss by birth, and Swedish by marriage, but mentally, as we have seen, she regarded herself as French, or rather as Parisian. However, as we also will see in the coming analysis, this was something relative to the truly cosmopolitan Germaine de Staël.

Why, then, did she choose to go to Germany instead of staying quietly at Coppet? Out of vanity? To some extent one could perhaps answer yes to that question. Guillemin, by referring to notes which Madame de Staël wrote to her father in 1803, suggests that she was initially not interested in going to Germany, but that she considered going there only because people in Paris thought that she would fear Germany, not being sure of her success there.<sup>81</sup> In a letter to her father sent from Frankfurt, written at the same time, she explicitly gives expression to her despair when leaving Paris: ‘ Ah! Il est impossible de vivre ailleurs que dans sa patrie, et quand cette patrie est Paris [...]’.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps she initially was not so interested in going to Germany, but in due course I think she changed her mind. *De l’Allemagne* could be said to be a proof of that, even though she always missed Paris. In fact, Guillemin indicates, by referring to another letter sent from Germaine de Staël in Frankfurt to her father, that she planned to go back to Paris in secret.<sup>83</sup> However, the most interesting aspect perhaps of that letter is not only the view she displays regarding Paris, but rather what she conveys about her opinion of Geneva. It is by *comparing* the two cities she comes to the conclusion, or rather the comparison in itself makes such a conclusion possible, that she feels much less at home in Geneva.<sup>84</sup> Thus, she apparently felt herself exiled whenever she had to leave Paris, even if it was for Coppet. However, people in general probably did not consider the situation in the same way as she did, but regarded Switzerland as her home country. From a semiotical point of view, this is very

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80. Ibid., p. 73. Guillemin refers to a letter Germaine de Staël sent to Napoleon before going to Germany in 1803, and which is not mentioned by her in *Dix années d’exil*.

81. Ibid., p. 238, note 14.

82. de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, vol. V:1. p. 109. Letter from Germaine de Staël sent to her father from Frankfurt, 15 November 1803.

83. Guillemin, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon*, esp. p. p. 81–82.

84. de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, vol. V:1. p. 119. Letter from Germaine de Staël sent to her father from Frankfurt, 22 November 1803.

interesting and we will come back to this matter further on. Thus, Madame de Staël writes to her father:

Le grand malheur de ton séjour à Genève pour moi, c'est qu'il finit tout intérêt sur mon exil; il n'en est pas de même de tout autre endroit, où je parais infiniment moins chez moi qu'à Paris.<sup>85</sup>

Béatrice W. Jasinski, the editor of *Correspondance générale*, provides a very interesting piece of information in a footnote regarding this passage in Germaine de Staël's letter. The first line reveals that Germaine de Staël was very self-conscious regarding her exile, and the added footnote is most instructive: 'to annul the exile, it is necessary that she *appears* as exiled' [emphasis in the original]. Therefore a stay in Geneva with her father would be unsuitable, since members of the government, as many of her friends, would find that all too natural.<sup>86</sup> And she continues:

Je te prie d'avoir la bonté de réfléchir sur tout cela, car, plus que jamais je me suis convaincue qu'il n'y avait que Paris pour moi; je déteste l'Allemagne, l'Angleterre est impossible, et l'on ne sait ce que vaut la France que quand on voyage.<sup>87</sup>

However, Germaine de Staël's feelings for Germany changed along the road, and more importantly, were *relative* depending on where she found herself, even though she kept on being convinced that there was no place on earth that could replace Paris. But as we will see, her conception of Paris, her home culture, i.e. Ego-culture, was very much based on the Paris of salons before *l'Empire*. During the

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85. Ibid. Letter from Germaine de Staël sent to her father from Frankfurt, 22 November 1803. 'The great misfortune with your sojourn in Geneva for me, is that it ends all interest in my exile; there is no other place after all, where I would appear boundlessly less at home than in Paris.' (My translation.)

86. Ibid., note 1.

87. Ibid. Letter from Germaine de Staël sent to her father from Frankfurt, 22 November 1803. 'I beg you to have the kindness to think about all this, because, more than ever I am convinced that there was nothing but Paris for me; I hate Germany, England is impossible, and you do not know how much France is worth until you travel.' (My translation.)



Napoleon era the culture of salons changed—read degenerated—to a great extent, according to Madame de Staël.<sup>88</sup>

What Guillemin tries to show in his book is that Germaine de Staël perhaps was not, as she herself was trying to convey, so idealistic and politic in her ardent antagonism towards Bonaparte, but rather far more pragmatic in order to get her Parisian salon and the Necker-millions back. By drawing attention to letters, especially the ones sent to Bonaparte (that were never answered) and Benjamin Constant's diaries, Guillemin brings out many interesting and illuminating facts. To Napoleon things were not so simple, it seems. Metternich (Austrian diplomat and from 1809 foreign minister for about 40 years) recalls in his writings what Napoleon once said to him in 1810, when he brought up the subject of Madame de Staël:

Si Madame de Staël [...], voulait ou savait être royaliste ou républicaine, je n'aurais rien contre elle; mais elle est une machine à mouvement qui remue les salons. Ce n'est qu'en France qu'une pareille femme est à craindre, et je n'en veux pas.<sup>89</sup>

Bonaparte feared Madame de Staël, and therefore one might conclude that he realized that he could not exercise any power over her in Paris. In that sense one could argue that there were limits to her pragmatism in her relation to him. She had the habit of following her opinion. In any case, Bonaparte seemed to have distrusted it, he could never quite rely on her behaving loyally.

Therefore, the renewed attempt to gain Napoleon's trust and appreciation by sending him a book, this time *De l'Allemagne* failed, to Germaine de Staël's utmost distress. Even though the book had passed the censors it ended up being stopped in the printing press. Guillemin cites a letter written by Germaine de Staël to Napoleon, which is not presented in *Dix années d'exil*, where she hopes that he

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88. Principato, 'La conversation et son miroir romanesque', pp. 58–59.

89. Maria Ullrichová, *Lettres de Madame de Staël conservées en Bohême* (Prague: Éditions de l'Académie tchèque des sciences, 1959), p. 87. 'If Madame de Staël [...], wanted to, or could, be royalist or republican, I would have nothing against her; but she is a machine of movement who stirs up the salons. Only in France is such a woman to be feared, and I do not want to have anything to do with her.' (My translation.)

will read it and approve of it, or rather perhaps of her, and begs him to reconsider his decision to exile her from Paris.

[...] je prends la liberté de présenter à Votre Majesté un ouvrage sur l'Allemagne. Si Elle daigne le lire, il me semble qu'Elle y trouvera la preuve d'un esprit capable de quelque réflexion, et que le temps a mûri. Sire, il ya dix ans que je n'ai vu Votre Majesté et huit que je suis exilée. Huit ans de malheur modifient les caractères [...].<sup>90</sup>

The response to Germaine de Staël's book on Germany is published in her *Dix années d'exil*, however. It came from de Rovigo at the police, as a reply to a letter sent by her, informing her that her exile was not only a result of the fact that Napoleon could not find a place 'worthy of him' in the book, but rather was to be understood as a natural consequence of the direction her life-course been taking for several years.<sup>91</sup> The book, de Rovigo continues, is not French. Therefore he had it stopped and her exile reinforced.<sup>92</sup>

However, on 2 October (1810) Germaine de Staël writes two letters, one to Napoleon and one to the queen of Holland, Hortense (Napoleon's stepdaughter, Joséphine's daughter, 1783–1837). The latter was also meant for Bonaparte, indirectly. In that letter she gives an explanation why there is no homage to Bonaparte in the book. Since she finds herself in disgrace, 'deprived of her fortune and her native country', a homage of that character would be nothing else than a supplication and therefore a proof of disrespect.<sup>93</sup>

In the spring 1812 Germaine de Staël left Coppet for her second grand tour in Europe, through Habsburg and Russia. Her travel

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90. Guillemin, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon*, pp. 154 and 155. The letter was given to Juliette Récamier on 25 September 1810 to be brought to Paris and to Bonaparte. However on the same day *De l'Allemagne* was stopped at the printing house by the police. '[...] I take the liberty to present to His Majesty a work on Germany. If He pleases to read it, it appears to me that He will find proof of an esprit capable of some reflection, and which times have matured. Sire, it has been ten years since I last saw His Majesty and eight since I was exiled. Eight years of unhappiness modify the character. [...].' (My translation.)

91. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 171. The letter was sent from de Rovigo to Madame de Staël on 3 October, 1810. Germaine de Staël was exiled from France.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

93. Guillemin, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon*, p. 157.

account ends suddenly (inexplicably) with a short report from the passage by boat from Åbo (Finland) to Stockholm (Sweden) where she arrived on 24 September 1812.<sup>94</sup> In June the following year, Germaine de Staël travelled to England and stayed there until May 1814 when she went back to Paris. Napoleon had abdicated on 6 April that year. She was finally free to return to the culture which she regarded as *her* culture.

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94. Germaine de Staël abandoned her writing of *Dix années d'exil* in order to write *Considérations sur la révolution française*, see Rosset, 'Madame de Staël et les paradoxes de l'autobiographie', p. 56.

### 3. CULTURAL SEMIOTICS IN PERSPECTIVE

Imagine the concept of Culture defined as a system, a structure, in the sense that Saussure once defined it.<sup>1</sup> Imagine then this Culture in the process of communicating with another Culture, another system, and the outlines of the general problem of cultural semiotics are thus defined.

#### *The study of text within semiotics*

Cultural semiotics relies on the models first introduced by the Tartu school in the 1960s. The Tartu school takes on the heritage of the Russian Formalists, the Bakhtin circle, and the Prague school. In the process, however, the Tartu school has come to neglect important aspects of the earlier models, which, following the view propounded by Sonesson, we are here going to reintegrate. At the same time, we will reactualize the phenomenological inspiration so important in the Prague school.

The Russian Formalists' view of textual studies (highly influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics), in the 1910s to 1920s, only concerned itself with intra-textual analyses, focusing on the elements making the artwork stand apart from everyday reality, by means of the process of estrangement. However, as Sonesson has observed, the very idea of a series of successive phases of 'making strange' the perception of the artwork, implies a history of art and perception.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the dissociation from this 'formalist' view constitutes a theoretical link between the Bakhtin circle, that started off by criticizing the formalists, the Prague school in the 1930s and 1940s, and the Tartu school in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> However, in an essay on

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1. A structure is determined here as a unity consisting of parts that define each other internally, and thereby get meaning. Those parts, Sonesson continues, are for analytical reasons divisible into groups of binary oppositions. See Göran Sonesson, *Bildbetydelser* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1992), p. 50.

2. In short, in order to 'make strange', there needs to be a conception of regularity, whether it concerns poetry or art. See Göran Sonesson, 'The Culture of Modernism: From transgression of art to arts of transgression', in *Visio*; 3,3, in *Modernism*, eds. Marie Carani & Göran Sonesson, 1998/1999, pp. 9–26.

3. For a more detailed overview see Sonesson, *Bildbetydelser*, pp. 35–37. The following quotations illustrate some important social aspects theoretically linking the Bakhtin circle to the Prague school: 'The poet's audience, the readers of a

Shklovsky, Jan Mukařovský (one of the most influential members together with Roman Jakobson and Felix Vodička) of the Prague school, points to the fact that one may find traces of ‘extra-aesthetic values’ in the former’s formalist views. In other words, Shklovsky was not always, according to Mukařovský, consistent in limiting his views only to concern the text (in its literal meaning) itself.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand the formalist definitions of different functions that language could have, a practical one and a poetical one, were questions that the Prague school took over and developed, precisely because they address the art experience as *an act of communication* having different purposes.<sup>5</sup> Therefore connections between the two are as important, perhaps, as are the differences. Another important link between the Bakhtin circle and the Prague school was the reviewing of Saussure’s distinction between *langue* (the system) and *parole* (the individual speech act).

Bakhtin’s notion of *heteroglossia* stipulates that all types of languages in a specific context at a specific time stand in a dynamic relationship to each other, therefore linguistic studies have to take the whole context into consideration.<sup>6</sup> The concept also abolishes another

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novel, those in the concert hall—these are collective organizations of a special type, sociologically distinctive and exceptionally important. Without these distinctive forms of social intercourse there are no poems, no odes, no novels, no symphonies.’ M. M. Bakhtin, and P. N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A critical introduction to sociological poetics* [1928] (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 11., and: ‘If the process of perception is the crucial aspect of the aesthetic function, then the subject’s role in art must be redefined. He cannot longer be seen as an irrelevant individual who merely superimposes his private associations upon a socially shared meaning, but as an active force indispensable to the genesis of meaning.’ Peter Steiner, ‘Mukařovský’s structural Aesthetics’, in Jan Mukařovský, *Structure, Sign, and Function: Selected essays by Jan Mukařovský* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. vii–xxxix, for quotation see esp. pp. xxxii–xxxiii.

4. F. W. Galan, *Historic Structures: The Prague school project, 1928–1946* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), p. 37.

5. Sonesson, *Bildbetydelser*, p. 102.

6. M. M. Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’, in *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001). For a deeper discussion of Bakhtin’s essay see Anna Cabak Rédei ‘József Eötvös and the Age of Hungarian Reform’, in *Modernisation and Tradition: European local and manorial societies 1500–1900*, eds. Kerstin Sundberg, Tomas Germundsson & Kjell Hansen (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2004), pp. 107–131. In fact Saussure found it necessary to define a ‘science that he called *semiology*, which was to “study the life of signs in society” and whose “laws also

distinction of Saussure's: the one between synchrony and diachrony, as every utterance at every instance contains both aspects.<sup>7</sup> More explicitly, the Prague school points out that diachrony is only a succession of synchronies, and that diachrony is always contained within synchrony by anticipation. And Jakobson explicitly refers to Voloshinov (another member of the Bakhtin circle) in conjunction with bringing forth his theories defining parole as containing both individual and social aspects.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, at heart of cultural semiotics (according to the Tartu school as will be shown shortly) lies Saussure's concept of sign as an entity 'composed of "signifier" (material substance) and "signified" (mental concept)' which 'allowed Saussure to argue that no real, natural link existed between the two but rather a conventional, unmotivated or arbitrary one.'<sup>9</sup>

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were to be applicable to linguistics'. (Translation from Swedish is mine; emphasis in the orig.) See Sonesson, *Bildbetydelser*, p. 25. For comments on this well-known passage in Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* see also Paul Cobley, 'Introduction', in *The Communication Theory Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 3. However Ferdinand de Saussure, when commenting on phenomena outside language, underlined that not even fashion could be said to be totally arbitrary (only verbal language is), because the human body decides the limits for it. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Kurs i allmän lingvistik* (Staffanstorps: Bo Cavefors Bokförlag, 1970), p. 104.

7. Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 35.

8. Roman Jakobson, 'Langue and parole: Code and message', in *Roman Jakobson: On language*, eds. Linda Waught & Monique Monville-Burston (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 98.

9. Cobley, 'Introduction', p. 2. See also de Saussure, *Kurs i allmän lingvistik*, pp. 94–95. However, Husserl's influence on the Prague school is important, as will be shown further on. Concerning the concept of the sign, Husserl's (and Piaget's) is highly adequate when studying 'meaning', or rather how things can make sense to us, in a wider sense as is done within cultural semiotics: 'a sign is composed of *two joined elements, of which one is experienced to be directly present to the mind without being its theme, the other not being directly present to the mind but being its theme*, i.e. to which the interest is directed.' Sonesson, *Bildbetydelser*, p. 80. (My translation from Swedish.) Now, important in a historical overview is also Benveniste's critic of Saussure for having a too narrow definition of the sign. Benveniste argues that Saussure's definition has to be transgressed, which can be done in two ways according to him: (1) by intra-linguistic studies which opens up for the study of a new dimension—that of discourse—within semantics (here thus defined as distinct from semiotics, being solely occupied with the study of the linguistic sign in the narrow sense) and

Later on structural linguistics and classical information theory make up other links that join the Prague school with the Moscow/Tartu school.<sup>10</sup> The Prague school and the Tartu school models constitute the core of, and basis for, what traditionally is considered to constitute the field called cultural semiotics. However, this inquiry is mainly concerned with the Tartu school, since it was the Tartu school which developed theories explicitly aiming at analysing the semiotics of culture, focusing on studying and explaining specific historical periods in Russia characterized by Western influences (for example the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). Important in this context is also James Wertsch's sociocultural semiotics, studying the use of texts (as tools, in this being influenced by Vygotsky's theory about the interaction between subject and object by mediation of culture-bound words/tools) produced in a specific culture.<sup>11</sup>

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(2) by trans-linguistic studies of texts which call for a 'metasemantics'. This would constitute the basis for the 'second generation' of semiology, extended by the use of new methods. So, Benveniste seems to hold on to the view that semiotics was a science within linguistics, but then argues for the study of semantics, studying the sign on the level of *parole*. See Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1974), p. 66. Roland Barthes, in short, inverted Saussure's definition of semiotics that stipulated that linguistics was a part of the former, by writing: '[...] it appears increasingly more difficult to conceive a system of images and objects whose *signifieds* can exist independently of language' and; 'In fact, we must now face the possibility of inverting Saussure's declaration: linguistics is not a part of the general science of signs, even a privileged part, it is semiology which is a part of linguistics: to be precise, it is that part covering the *great signifying unities* of discourse. By this inversion we may expect to bring to light the unity of the research at present being done in anthropology, sociology, psycho-analysis and stylistics round the concept of signification.' (Emphasis in the original.) Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), p. 10; p. 11. For a thorough discussion of Barthes' analysis of the Panzani advertisement see Sonesson, *Bildbetydelser*, pp. 190–203, Sonesson scrutinizes Barthes' point of departure according to which all pictures are in some sense determined by language.

10. The Prague school linguists Roman Jakobson and N. S. Troubetzkoy also had a direct influence on the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. See Copley, 'Introduction', pp. 3–4. However, as Sonesson pointed out to me in this connection, information theory only became an element in Jakobson's work after Jakobson's arrival in the USA, and at that time one may question whether Jakobson still can be said to represent the school.

11. Lev S. Vygotskij, *Tänkande och språk* [Myshlenie i rech] (Göteborg: Daidalos AB, 2001). Alex Kozulin takes a similar stand to Wertsch in this specific aspect of

In the light of my studies of Germaine de Staël's autobiographical travel account, and of other texts describing her encounters when travelling, I have found other components in the theories developed by the Prague school that could be of importance when refining existing models in cultural semiotics, that is, the one once developed by the Tartu school model, extended by Sonesson.<sup>12</sup> In short, it is chiefly the Prague school's focus on the receiver's precedence of interpretation in the act of communication that is important here, because it illuminates the discussions about dialogical relations in general, and Mme de Staël's in particular. It is the receiver's ability to fill in the gaps between his or her perception of the message (the artwork) and the sender's (the artist's) intentions with it, that decides whether the act of communication might be said to have succeeded or not. Also important is the Prague school's view of diachrony being present in synchrony, because it illuminates the discussions about Mme de Staël's autobiographical writings being immersed in its historical context, which might be considered as a system within a system, i.e. within History as a system. This theoretical insight about the relation between diachrony and synchrony in the study of language was presented already by Bakhtin in his philosophy of language, as we have seen, and carried over in a more elaborate form by the Prague school.

A short survey of some notions elaborated by the Prague school that are of particular interest here will now follow below.

### *The Prague school and the focus on the receiver*

The history of a system is in turn a system. Pure synchronism now proves to be an illusion: every synchronic system has its

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Vygotsky's theory, see Alex Kozulin, 'Psychological Tools: A sociocultural approach to education', in *Language as a Psychological Tool* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1998). For Wertsch's development of the notion of 'mediated action' see especially James Wertsch, *Mind as Action* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

12. The Prague school was primarily occupied with developing theories aiming at systematizing the study of literary and linguistic history. See Galan, *Historic Structures*, p. x.



past and its future as inseparable structural elements of the system [...].<sup>13</sup>

When addressing the Prague school model, I shall focus primarily on the questions dealing with theories regarding the importance of the receiver and contextual norms in the process of communicating. Mme de Staël, when entering other cultures, was also in a position of a receiver of cultural ‘texts’ from that other culture. When studying her travelogue, letters, and other of her non-fictional written texts, one can get a picture of where problems arose in her ability to assimilate ‘texts’ from the other culture, i.e. her ability to understand the other culture. In this sense I go beyond the Prague school model’s concentration on the relation between the artist, artwork and art interpreter, and focus on the underlying and more general concepts of addresser, communicative act and addressee. Since I occupy myself strictly with an inquiry regarding encounters between people and cultures and not so much with literary studies in themselves, however interesting, I will concentrate on the phenomenological aspects of the Prague school communication model. That is why Mukařovský will play a central role throughout. These aspects are important because they led to the theory of the function of the receiver as the one finishing the artwork by filling in the ‘gaps’ between the artist’s (sender’s) intention reflected in the artwork and the experience of the receiver. In this sense, the Prague school complements the approach of the Tartu school by attributing a task to the receiver, which goes beyond the negative one of deformation.

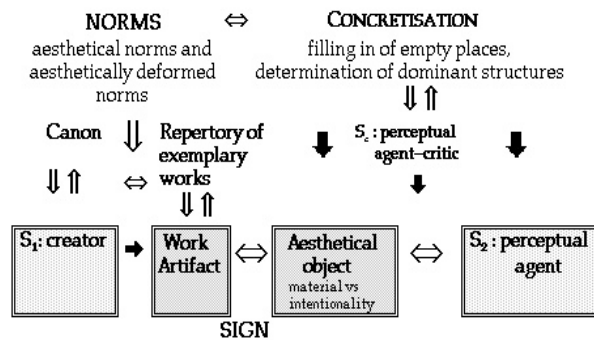
This process, when it succeeds, is a measure of both the artist’s and the art interpreter’s knowledge of cultural norms and texts (here understood within the frames of cultural semiotics, that is, ‘text’ as the term for all artefacts produced in the culture concerned).<sup>14</sup>

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13. Tynjanov and Jakobson in Galan, *Historic Structures*, p. 7.

14. It is illuminating in this connection to consider the Husserlian perspective, in a general sense, on the nature of perception, including the notion of horizon, best explained perhaps with the example of the dice: even if we only see parts of the dice, we apprehend it in its wholeness, because its shape and character are known to us. Casebier writes: ‘The horizon of an act includes possible perceptions that can also disappoint rather than fulfil our expectations about the object. If the conflict between background beliefs and current perception is so great, then Husserl speaks of the intended object being “cancelled”.’ Allan Casebier, *Film and Phenomenology*: 44

Secondly, the presentation of the Prague school theory also aims at discussing structures in relation to studies that go beyond the artwork itself and focus on the interplay between artwork and context, such as literary history or, as in the case of the Tartu school, the dynamics of historic evolution.



*Schematic illustration of the Prague school model, made by Göran Sonesson. Filled arrows show direct influence, others more complex relations.*

As is shown here, the complex process of understanding, that is, giving meaning to the sign (the artwork), takes place in the receiver's act of perception. As already touched upon, the act can be said to have succeeded when the receiver has been able to transform a mere object into an aesthetic object, or more generally, into an object that is comprehended, i.e. meaning this or that. However, in analysing Mme de Staël's cultural encounters, I sometimes use this theory in an extended way, that is, the concept of object is enlarged to also include verbal discourse which is not artistic. In conversation, for instance, gaps of meaning, which may arise between the enunciator and the listener (receiver), are filled in by the latter, in order to keep the discussion going. However, in conversation the positions of enunciator and listener are constantly changing, to a greater or lesser degree.

Now, in order for the act of perception to succeed the creator and the receiver must share a set of norms, which are socially and culturally determined. That is, both the creator and the receiver are

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*Toward a realist theory of cinematic representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 24.

subject to the norms prevailing in the specific cultural and social context. Artworks are often dominated by the aesthetic function (referring to the sign itself), as is the case in for instance poetry. But in the case of non-fictional works, as for instance Mme de Staël's *Dix années d'exil* the text is dominated by its referential function (referring to a context outside the work), though the aesthetic function is by no means absent, only it is not the dominant one. In the sense of the Prague school, dominance is ascribed to elements of an artefact which are not only prevalent, but which also redefine other elements for their purpose. Thus, in the work of Mme de Staël, at least in *Dix années d'exil*, aesthetic elements may appear to be subordinated to practical aims.

The aesthetic norm, to which the model above refers, can be concretized, or 'filled in', in two ways: as belonging to *canon* (thus fulfilling a specific set of implicit or explicit rules) or as referring to a set of exemplary works. 'Norms exist, according to Mukařovský, in the collective consciousness: it has a forcing character.'<sup>15</sup> That does not mean that an artist could not side-step the norm, but such a move is always done in relation to a specific norm, often aiming at creating new norms. Now, if art movements contain a destabilizing factor (the endeavour of the creator to create something new), the norm, here specifically the aesthetic norm, remains anchored outside the field of art being present, although not dominant, in other domains such as ceremonies, political manifestations, advertising, food and so forth, which thus have a stabilizing effect on the norm.<sup>16</sup>

Mukařovský and the Prague school were influenced by Husserl's phenomenology via the Polish philosopher Roman Ingarden and the German psychologist and linguist Karl Bühler.<sup>17</sup> Bühler's *Organon* model constituted the basis for the development of the notion of function within the Prague school. Besides the three functions elaborated by Bühler, Jakobson defined an additional three, among which the most known, perhaps, in literary studies is the *poetic function* (which interested Jakobson already in Russia before he joined the

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15. Sonesson, *Bildbetydelser*, p. 109. For this passage in the overview I am heavily indebted to Göran Sonesson and his book *Bildbetydelser*.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

17. Galan, *Historic Structures*, p. 175. Galan points out that Husserl gave lectures in Prague in 1935.

Prague school), oriented towards the message itself, i.e. to the sign itself. However, the poetic function is not the only one in poetry, or in verbal art, but it is the *dominant* one.<sup>18</sup> Mukařovský discusses this problem in a similar way when showing that in architecture, for instance, the practical function dominates over the aesthetic, although he thinks architecture belongs to the domain of arts.<sup>19</sup>

Jakobson also used the classical communication model developed by Weaver and Shannon in order to create a basis for studying language and its functions, to which I will return when discussing the Tartu school.<sup>20</sup> Mukařovský concentrated on one of these functions, the aesthetic, as we will see further down. But first something must be said about Ingarden's theories and the phenomenological implications they had for the Prague school model.

René Wellek was influenced by Ingarden's theory which stipulated that a work contained semantic constructions which, when put in the social and literary context where they had once arisen, became open for analysis and understanding. Between those constructions exist a type of semantic gaps, says the theory, which are filled in by the receiver, i.e. the reader, when confronted by his or her own aesthetic experiences. Thereby the work is completed and attains 'the final "polyphonic harmony," its actual Gestalt.'<sup>21</sup> Mukařovský appropriated this idea about the interplay between aesthetic norms and their social milieu. A general sketch of this idea was presented in brief at the beginning of this discussion.

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18. According to genre the aims of a poem may vary, a fact that gave rise to a complementary model in which Jakobson stipulates another set of linguistic functions. For further information about Jakobson's theories about the different functions of language see Roman Jakobson, 'Lingvistik och poetik', in *Poetik och lingvistik*, eds. Kurt Aspelin & Bengt A. Lundberg (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Pan/Norstedts, 1974).

19. Jan Mukařovský, 'On the Problem of Functions in Architecture', in *Jan Mukařovský: Structure, function and sign*, eds. John Burbank and Peter Steiner (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1978), see especially p. 250.

20. However, the original communication model operated beyond matters as time and space and did not include any historical dimensions. But in the Prague school version such dimensions were of concern, and on this point the model pointed towards the Tartu school model, which is the first 'semiotic theory which explicitly was about cultures in their entirety.' See Sonesson, 'Livsvärldens mediering', pp. 33–78, for quotation see p. 59.

21. Galan, *Historic Structures*, p. 73.

But, Mukařovský repeated, ‘downplaying Wellek’s emphasis on the value-guided nature of his process, all concretizations, all literary commerce, can materialize only with a view to the horizon of norms and conventions and habits, even though these must vary socially, nationally and historically.’<sup>22</sup>

Felix Vodička, in his reception theory, not only learned from Mukařovský but also from Ingarden, in the same way as Mukařovský did, i.e. the idea of the artwork’s completion in the meeting with the receiver.<sup>23</sup> Vodička’s contribution to the Prague school, continues Galan, was his concern about ‘literary and social norms which motivate the reception of poetic works in various periods of history’.<sup>24</sup> The important implication of such a standpoint is thus that ‘despite their close interdependence, the structures of norms and those of literary forms are not totally isomorphic and that, as a consequence, historians are obliged to pursue two fields of research.’<sup>25</sup>

In his book *Aesthetic function, norm and value as social facts* [1935, 1936] Mukařovský touches upon this question about the relation between the individual and social.<sup>26</sup> Mukařovský argues that individual aspects decide an artwork’s aesthetic or non-aesthetic

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22. Ibid., p. 75. The emphasis on the social dimensions and their importance for the receiver’s capacity for, and ways of, concretizing an artwork is echoed in contemporary theories about reading and readers. See for example Jan Thavenius, ‘Text och tolkning’, in *Medietexter och medietolkningar. Läsningsar av massmediala texter*, eds. Claes-Göran Holmberg and Jan Svensson (Nora: Bokförlaget Nya Doxa, 1995), pp. 211–237, see esp. p. 219. For a discussion about contemporary theories in narratology and the different views of the relation between author, context and reader, see also Bo G. Jansson, *Episkt dubbelspel: Om fiktionsberättelser i film, litteratur och tv* (Uppsala: Hallgren & Fallgren Studieförlag AB, 2006), esp. p. 221 (the issue of implied authors and readers). But also, stressing cross-cultural influences as being the result of structural relations, the work of Mukařovský points forward to the Tartu school. Mukařovský writes: ‘As soon as Russian and Slavic influences in general have become more strongly felt, they have always strengthened the national specificity of Czech literature, its individuality in contrast to others, which, despite all their beneficence, have weakened this individuality. [...] This is how influences appear, if we proceed from dialectic and, thereby structural relations among literatures.’ Mukařovský, *Structure, Sign, and Function*, p.7.

23. Galan, *Historic Structures*, p. 153.

24. Ibid., p. 154.

25. Ibid., p. 157.

26. Jan Mukařovský, *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts* (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor University Press, 1970).

values, but regarded from a social contextual point of view the aesthetic function is stable. As an example of this Mukařovský points to the fact that the aesthetic function in the art of cooking is more important in France than it is in Czechoslovakia. In that sense one can detect links between the Prague school and the Tartu school model in cultural semiotics. Put otherwise, the Tartu school theories may be seen as a result of a systematization of what can be said to be particular to one culture's perception of itself at a certain time (studied in its relation to another culture). The art of cooking can thus be defined as a 'text' (in the extended semiotical sense) in France, that is, it constitutes an idea of a cultural heritage. Other links between the two schools can also be found in the more general assumptions that Mukařovský makes in theory about the social collective and its importance for as well the production of artworks as for the reception of them.

Thus, the aesthetic is not an immanent feature in the artwork itself, nor can it be linked to any special feature of the artwork. The aesthetic function is not decided totally by the individual, it is established and stabilized by the collective. The collective, or social unity, defines the norm for both the artwork and how it should be perceived. So, ways of reception are thus socially determined, which implies that one and the same object may be perceived as aesthetic by one group but not necessarily by another. Thereby 'taste' is social marker, and can be used to stress social positions in society. The aesthetic function operates as a mechanism for inclusion and exclusion, an idea central also to the Tartu school using the terms of Culture, Extra-culture and Non-culture to indicate the same phenomena in the encounters between cultures. Mukařovský explicitly refers to Husserl in this context, in particular to his notion of *noesis*, which includes knowledge of two kinds: (1) *eide*, intellectual and (2) direct perception.<sup>27</sup> As we will see in the coming chapter, Mme de Staël's writings, when showing her attempts to understand what she actually perceives, reveal that she made use of both ways of acquiring knowledge. Often the intellectual, however, dominates over knowledge through direct perception when she decides and writes about the object concerned.

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27. For further information, see *ibid.*, p. 25.

The methodological implication of Mukařovský's theoretical standpoint is thus that the study of an artwork must focus on finding the system tying the artwork to its specific social context. It is important to remember that in order to study an artwork and its meaning, in a historical perspective, one must take into consideration the fact that this can only be done on the basis of a hypothetical aesthetic value that is perpetually negotiated. It is the artworks of Mme de Staël, and their interplay with contemporary political, cultural and aesthetical discourses, that are at stake in this inquiry. Although not a representative of the Prague school, the philosopher and semiotician Ernst Cassirer sums up this thought neatly, connecting the ideas touched upon by Mukařovský to theoretical and methodological issues central to cultural semiotics:

In all examination of cultural formations the *analysis of becoming*, which resides essentially in the study of cause and effect, contrasts with the *analysis of work* and the *analysis of form*. It is the analysis of work that constitutes the actual fundamental bedrock. [...] We must have penetrated their meaning; we must understand what they have to say to us. This understanding possesses its own method of interpretation: an independent and highly difficult and complex 'hermeneutics.' [...] Here we are not inquiring into the formations, the works of culture—nor are we inquiring into the general forms in which they represent themselves to us. We are inquiring into the mental *processes* from which they have emerged and of which they constitute the objective expression.<sup>28</sup>

With these words of Cassirer we may leave the presentation of the Prague school for now, in order to continue with a discussion of the topic of the Tartu school, underlining, though, that it is exactly the 'inquiring into the mental *processes* from which' Mme de Staël's autobiographical and other non-fictional texts have emerged that this study aims at.

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28. Ernst Cassirer, *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences: Five studies* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 97.

### *The Tartu school theses*

In semiotics, the notion of Culture is not specified, but rather is used as a tool to analyse a meeting of cultures; in a sense, it is the study of how the *Ego-culture* defines itself in relation to others. The prefix of Ego refers to Sonesson's theory that the Culture is where the Ego is, that is, it is portable.<sup>29</sup> Mme de Staël, for instance, does not leave her Culture, that is, her mental image of her culture, even when travelling. This is something that will be analysed in the empirical study. In other words, Culture is the seat of the Ego in terms of intelligibility and appreciation. Your own culture is usually the culture you understand best and also appreciate the most. Intelligibility, the cornerstone in the formation of Ego-culture, presupposes organization. The starting point for all enquires into Culture is the fact that the act of human communication—the creation, exchange and storage of information—has a certain organization or unity. For example, algebra is organized and communicated according to the 'rules' of maths, and thus maths forms the Ego-culture for the mathematician, in terms of intelligibility and, we may suppose, esteem; maths also forms the *Non-culture* for the person who is not a trained mathematician, for whom algebra only represents disorder, and presumably should not be accorded esteem either. This can be applied to cultural meetings of the most literal kind, where people visit countries that they consider remote.

According to the Tartu school theses, as revised and elaborated by Sonesson, cultural semiotics makes several theoretical assumptions:<sup>30</sup>

- All sign systems (language, images, gesticulations, etc.) are organized as structures and operate only in concert, supporting one another.
- No sign system can function in cultural isolation.

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29. Göran Sonesson, 'Ego meets Alter: The meaning of otherness in cultural semiotics', in *Semiotica* 128–3/4, 2000, 537–559.

30. The discussion starts here with an overview of the thesis in cultural semiotics stipulated by the Tartu school by Ju. M. Lotman, B. A. Uspenskij, V. V. Ivanov, V. N. Toporov, A. M. Pjatigorskij, 'Theses on the Semiotic Study of Culture', in *Semiotics of Culture* (Lisse: The Peter de Ridder Press, 1975).



• Cultural semiotics is the study of the correlation of different sign systems.

• Culture is inseparable from its opposite, Non-culture.

• Culture is defined from within, or by scientific meta-texts (that are often a part of the culture that is to be described).

• Culture is characterized by organization (information), and its opposite, Non-culture, by chaos and disorder. Both are defined by Culture.

• Culture defines Non-culture, but in the act of definition, Culture (or Ego-culture) is itself defined. Definition is a process of excluding and including information. Organization is defined as 'text', chaos as 'non-text'.<sup>31</sup> Culture always creates Non-culture with regard to its own needs.

• *Extra-culture* represents a certain degree of disorder, but not to the same extent as Non-culture. Culture strives constantly to absorb, and thus to organize, this disorder.

• Culture can be characterized as oriented towards a 'speaker' or occasionally to an 'audience'. A text may be guided by the 'speaker' (the public follows the poet) or the 'audience' (the poet follows the public); the difference between speaker-oriented and audience-oriented cultures is analogous. In speaker-oriented cultures, the 'audience' is expected to recreate and fill in the parts of the speaker's message ('code') that do not overlap with his own 'code'; in audience-oriented cultures it is the opposite.<sup>32</sup>

• Synchronic analyses are the preferred method in reconstructing the past. The literary meaning of a text may be analysed on different levels: from the definition of the general intention of the text to a study of phonemes and signs.

• From the semiotic point of view culture may be regarded as a hierarchy of particular semiotic systems, as the sum of the texts and the set of functions correlated with them, or as a certain mechanism which generates these texts.<sup>33</sup>

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31. 'Text' here defines the artefacts produced by culture, in contrast to the Non-culture which only produces non-texts, those texts that cannot be understood or be valued by the defining culture. See Sonesson, 'Ego meets Alter'.

32. Sonesson, *Bildbetydelse*.

33. Lotman, Uspenskij, Ivanov, Toporov, Pjatigorskij, 'Theses on the Semiotic Study of Culture', p. 19.

Madame de Staël is an interesting case to study in this context. She related to European culture in a complicated and ambiguous way. This due to the fact that the animosity against Napoleon decided to a large extent Mme de Staël's definition of herself and her Ego-culture. Accordingly, she tended thus to divide other cultures and other people into two groups: those who were on her side against Napoleon and those who were not.

Now, she wanted to be part of Culture—French Enlightenment culture—and she certainly defined her salon in Paris as her Ego-culture. But her sex and origins made her Extra-culture in relation to the male-dominated truly French culture. Also, those facts, combined with her political activities, made her an inner other (here to be understood as someone living within a territory occupied by someone representing the Other from the point of view of the former).<sup>34</sup> That is, Mme de Staël was to live in a France that was taken over and occupied by Napoleon, who, from Mme de Staël's point of view was Other. More specifically, Napoleon can be defined as being *Alter* to Mme de Staël. Hence, Alter is the fellow-man representing Extra-culture on an individual level. Thus, Alter is here to be understood as the Other with whom one is engaged in a dialogue, in the sense that one expects to be understood, on one hand, but also expects to get a response, on the other hand. Therefore Alter is the opposite to *Alius*, the Other from whom one does not expect, or want, a response, for several reasons, to which we return shortly. However, travelling in Europe she may have defined what she met either as Culture, Extra-culture, or Non-culture, depending on whom she met and in what context.

### *The canonical model and its revision*

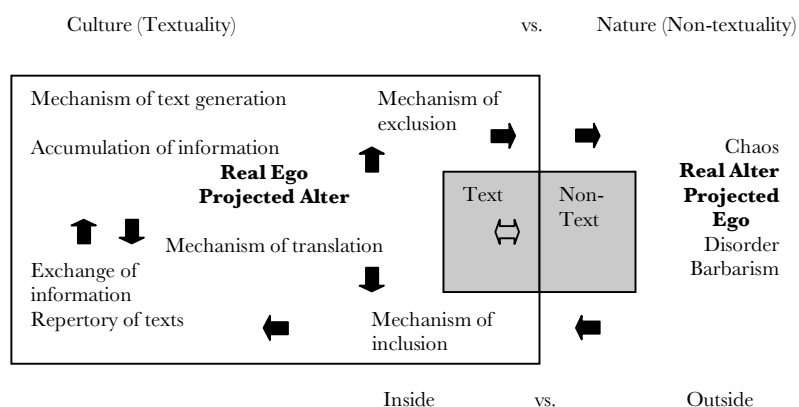
Göran Sonesson's principal aim in his article 'Ego Meets Alter: The meaning of otherness in cultural semiotics' is to characterize the difference between the notions of Non-culture and Extra-culture by tracing analogous divisions in pronominal usage.<sup>35</sup> In doing so, he has extended what he calls the *canonical model* once developed by the Tartu school. The most important element in this extension is the

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34. For more information about inner otherness see Sonesson, 'The Globalization of Ego and Alter', pp. 153–173.

35. Sonesson, 'Ego meets Alter'.

redefinition of Culture in relation both to Non-culture and to Extra-culture; the point he makes is that Culture stands much closer to Extra-culture than to Non-culture.<sup>36</sup> In connection with the extended model Sonesson writes about the ‘*axis of conversation or dialogue*, joining Ego and Alter’, unlike the ‘*axis of reference or nomination*, which connects the former to the thing meant’, what Sonesson later called *Alius*, that is, the other whom we do not expect to act upon us in a dialogic sense.<sup>37</sup> In short we will come back to a discussion about the term. Now, the Ego-culture, being where the Ego, ‘the subject having the model’ is, is thus portable and may be, as Sonesson writes, ‘projected to [...] an imaginary Culture which is built up around the projected Ego.’<sup>38</sup> Mme de Staël can be said to have projected her Ego-culture on to the German (which we will see in the next chapter) in terms of the most valuable, but not in terms of intelligibility in the same way as Peter I, as analysed by the Tartu school, to whom, Sonesson writes, ‘Culture may well have been outside Russia [...], in terms of attributed value, but in the sense of ease of understanding, it is a good guess that Russia remained more cultural.’<sup>39</sup>



*Sonesson's inverted model (projection of Ego onto the other culture), schematized by Sonesson.*

36. Sonesson, *ibid.*, draws parallels between people and cultures in the manner first suggested by Bakhtin, Lotman and Peirce.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 545.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 541.

39. *Ibid.*

This assumption leads Sonesson to conclude that the *canonical* model (see the schematization below) is rather illustrating *Herodotus's rule* which says that the closer the neighbour lives the 'better' he or she is thought to be, than *Homer's rule* which points to the opposite.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, while the Tartu school is occupied with analysing the contrast between Culture and Non-culture, Sonesson wants to include Extra-culture too.<sup>41</sup> Yet, like the Tartu school, Sonesson stresses the importance of segmentation as the criterion for separating texts (information) from non-texts (incomprehensibility).<sup>42</sup> Another of Sonesson's aims has been to render explicit the criteria for the separation of Texts from Non-texts tacitly used by the Tartu school: these criteria (which may happen to give contradictory results) turn out to be order, value, meaning and intelligibility, among others.<sup>43</sup> Text, as defined in cultural semiotics by Sonesson, is the notion of what goes in and out of the Ego-culture, in Lotman's terms a text is a result of a regulative system, of which the Ego-culture is an example. This, Sonesson continues, implies a potential for non-texts outside the Ego-culture to be transformed into texts through entering the system.<sup>44</sup> Extra-texts (esteemed and understood to a certain degree), coming in from outside the Ego-culture, are thus deformed in order to fit the norms, and other regulative principles, prevailing in it.

Another difference between the Tartu school and Sonesson, is that the cultural semiotics of the latter is embedded in a phenomenological conception of the everyday lifeworld. The concept of Culture, as we have seen, is defined by Sonesson as the place where the Ego is situated mentally, which often coincides with the actual physical whereabouts of the Ego, unless travelling. It is in its way a portable centre, a statement to the effect that the Ego may appropriate different semiotic spheres. Although Culture is located with the Ego, some criteria defining Culture may be projected on to

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40. Ibid., p. 542.

41. Extra-culture produces 'Extra-texts', that may partly be understood by culture.

42. Text in the broad sense used in cultural semiotics, meaning everything produced in culture (information), in contrast to the Non-text.

43. Sonesson, 'Ego meets Alter', p. 542.

44. Göran Sonesson, 'The Concept of Text in Cultural Semiotics', in *Sign System Studies* 26, eds. Peeter Torop, Michail Lotman & Kalevi Kull (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 1998), pp. 88–114.

the other. In such cases, a dialogue is established and an Extra-cultural relationship is created. However, as stated in cultural semiotics, the model, or mental scheme, one culture makes of itself only emerges in the meeting with the other culture. Thus, cultural semiotical studies concentrate on the meeting between cultures.

Deriving his inspiration from parallels between persons and cultures suggested by Peirce and Bakhtin alike, Sonesson posits an equivalence of Culture, Extra-culture, and Non-culture, with the philosophical instances termed Ego, Alter and Alius, respectively. Bakhtin's theory of understanding the other stipulates that understanding is only possible by a retreat into the self. Referring to Bakhtin, Sonesson writes: 'In our terms, Non-culture can only be transformed into Extra-culture by taking one's own ultimate stand in Culture.'<sup>45</sup> On a pronominal level this may be expressed as follows: the Extra-culture that we are on speaking terms with may be defined as a *thou*, the Non-culture that we only speak about may be defined as an *it*. The axes of conversation unite Ego with Alter in opposition to the topic of conversation, as mentioned before. Cultural semiotics is thus the study of the relationships between cultures, or rather, of the models a culture makes of itself in relation to the other. In discussing Tzvetan Todorov's book on the discovery of America, Sonesson writes:

In fact, the very term 'discovery' (as well as 'conquest') point to the egocentric roots of cultural modelling which we have already observed. The fact that the model may in some respects be reversed is of course particularly poignant. There's even a place for those who would project their Ego onto the other culture.<sup>46</sup>

We will now turn to a further exploration of the nature of the other, in order to establish an important distinction between the other as the literary hero, as Bakhtin defined it, and the other as the fellow man sharing time and space with other fellow men: the cultural semiotical study will thus take a phenomenological turn. In a recent

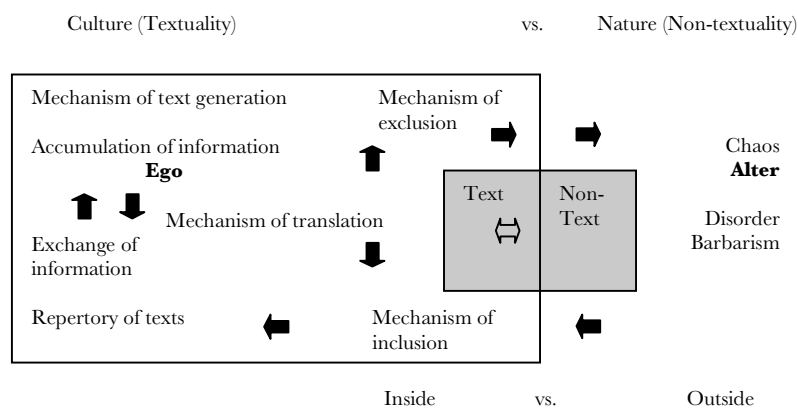
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45. Sonesson, 'Ego meets Alter', p. 544. In this article, Sonesson uses the term 'Aliquid' instead of 'Alius', which is used in this sense in his later articles, such as 'The Pronominalisation of Culture'.

46. Sonesson, 'Ego meets Alter', p. 546; The full title of Tzvetan Todorov's book discussed by Sonesson is *La conquête de l'Amérique: La question de l'autre*.

article Sonesson has introduced the notion of *Alius*, as touched upon earlier, to define the absolute other. Sonesson's discussion is helpful also in the sense that it implicitly encircles the 'thou', that is, the possible other, to which the main interest of this inquiry is rather directed. The reason for that is that it reflects the importance of the relation between Ego-culture and Extra-culture in cultural encounters, and thus the relation between an 'I' and a 'thou' in human crosscultural interaction.<sup>47</sup> But I shall return to that question further down when continuing the discussion of the relation between an 'I' and a 'thou', in cultural semiotics, in connection with Schutz's phenomenological sociology, a discussion which in the end aims at revising existing models.

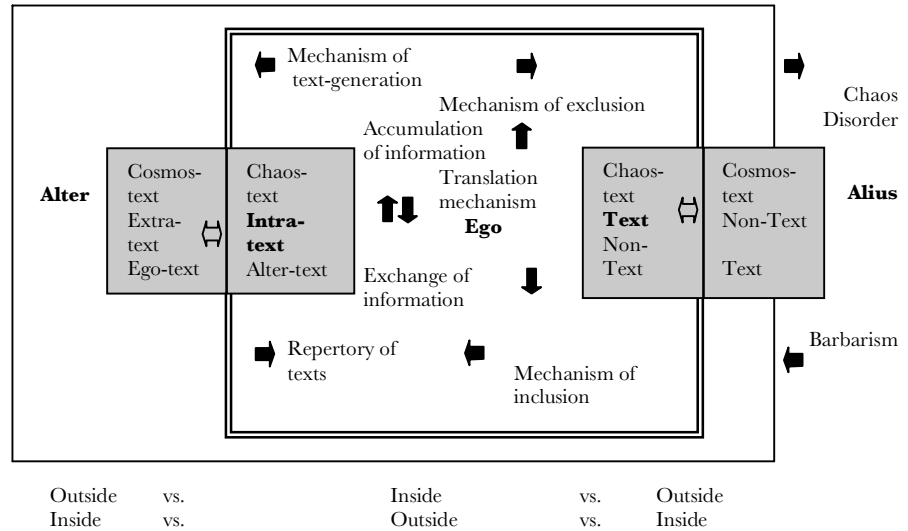
Now, the schematized illustrations of the canonical model of the Tartu school on one hand, and the extended model (including Extra-culture) by Sonesson on the other, show neatly what has been discussed here, namely, the different relations the Ego may establish with the other, and how texts go in and out of Ego-culture. Both illustrations show the fundamentally asymmetric relation between the Ego and the Other; between Ego-culture and Non-culture in the canonical model, the extended model including Extra-culture.



*The canonical model, schematized by Sonesson.*

47. Sonesson, 'The Pronominalisation of Culture'.

Culture (the Textual)  
*Extra-culture*  
 (the *Extra-textual*)  
 Second person (Anti-ontive) vs. *Intra-culture*  
 (the *Intra-textual*)  
 Person (Auto-ontive) vs. Nature (the Non-textual)  
 Non-person (An-ontive)



*Sonesson's extended model (including Extra-culture), schematized by Sonesson.*

To sum up more concretely: Mme de Staël, as a specific individual in a specific historical setting, may be said to manifest, by expressing her experiences in writing, the Ego-culture through her personal experiences of other people and other texts (in both a literary and a broad sense). The study to follow is thus preoccupied with reconstructing Mme de Staël's subjective point of view of certain events, but also to put her views in perspective by giving other people's subjective points of view of the same events, in which they participated, indirectly or directly. By doing so, a pattern will emerge that uncovers the nature of cultural meetings, from the point of view of the Ego-culture (being the notion of a set of rules and the sum of all artefacts/texts produced by those), the necessary centre of knowledge and perception.

### *Cultural semiotics and the study of history*

In theory and method, the Tartu school also shows how cultural semiotics also belongs to historical studies. Since culture can be seen as a system of relations established between the individual and his or her surroundings this, as Uspensky writes:

[...] permits us, among other things, to regard history in a semiotic perspective: from a certain point of view, the historical process present itself as a system of communication between the *socium* and the reality that surrounds it, in particular between different *sociums* and yet as a dialogue between the historical personality and the *socium*.<sup>48</sup> [Emphasis in the original].

As becomes clear here, the semiotic approach to the study of history implies an interest in both the system and the individual, or better put perhaps, in the interplay between both. That way, semiotics brings forth the individual as an actor in historical processes. Lotman illustrates this problem by asking if Byronism in Europe would have been possible without Byron. With this Lotman wants to argue for

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48. B. Uspenskij, 'La genèse de l'école sémiotique de Tartu et Moscou', in *Sémiotique de la culture Russe* (Lausanne: L'âge d'homme, 1990), pp. 9–19, for quotation see p. 19. The translation from French is mine. 'Ceci permet entre autres de voir l'histoire dans une perspective sémiotique: sous un certain angle de vue, le processus historique se présente comme un système de communication entre le *socium* et la réalité qui l'entoure, en particulier entre des *sociums* différents et pourtant comme un dialogue entre la personnalité historique et le *socium*.' Now, the social dimension in the notion of code in the Tartu school model emerges here, and in that sense establishes another link to the Prague school which highlighted the importance of norms in the production and the consumption of artistic works. However, Uspensky's use of *socium* also brings the Tartu school closer to the socio/ethic semiotics of the Bari school, being influenced by, among others, Bakhtin, Charles Morris, Peirce and Rossi-Landi (as represented by Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio). See especially <http://digilander.libero.it/dplat/testi/sign/srossi.htm>, chapter 1, part 3. Now, inquires in cultural semiotics with a focus, not only on the class aspect, but also on, for instance, gender, sexuality and ethnicity necessarily, as I see it, imply an uncovering of hegemonic discourses (in the sense that Foucault made clear) governing the interplay between system and individual at a certain point in time.



the view that a historical fact in retrospect is a result of the individual and the unpredictable.<sup>49</sup>

I will dwell for a while on this problem formulated by Lotman in an article dedicated to defining the role of semiotics, in the science of history, since it is highly relevant for this inquiry. Now, what can texts, as source materials, tell us about history?

Lotman starts off by stating that (verbal) texts make up the source material of the historian (today historians also use pictures, films and various other material artefacts).<sup>50</sup> The historian's work means decoding those texts already coded, reality being subordinated by the rules of language, by the original author. The historical event is thus a result of cultural valuation on two levels: on the level of the original author on one hand and on the level of the historian on the other.<sup>51</sup> As the historian has to reconstruct the context in which the text emerged and uncover 'genre codes', the result is additional codification.<sup>52</sup>

Lotman argues that not only the positivistic approach within the history of science might be criticized (for only focusing on 'great men'), but also the critique put forward by *l'histoire nouvelle* (perhaps better known as the *Annales school*) arguing for a shift of focus to the advantage of the individual (in the sense of ordinary men, in contrast to 'great men') and to the 'unconscious movement of the masses' (and the interplay between the two).<sup>53</sup> The slogan of Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch who said 'l'histoire des hommes, non d'homme' illustrates this new way of advancing history, according to Lotman.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the search for 'l'histoire presque immobile', as Lotman quotes Fernand Braudel saying, became popular. Now, according to Lotman, this perspective must also be criticized for describing

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49. Jurij M. Lotman, 'Semiotiken och historievetenskapen', in *Den inre teatern*, eds. Magnus Florin & Bo Göranson (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1996), pp. 63–87.

50. For an illuminating discussion of film as source material within the science of history see Tommy Gustafsson, 'Filmen som historisk källa: Historiografi, pluralism och representativitet' [The motion picture as historical source material—historiography, pluralism and representation], in *Historisk tidskrift*, 126:3, 2006, pp. 471–490 (Summary in English).

51. Lotman, 'Semiotiken och historievetenskapen', p. 66.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

historical processes as movements beyond individual contribution: 'History is neither a totally conscious process nor is it totally unconscious.'<sup>55</sup> (My translation from Swedish). It is in the field of tension between those two poles that historical processes arise, Lotman continues.

Now, the historical event gets deformed from the start as it is subordinated to the organization of language, but it goes through additional deformation when interpreted by the historian.<sup>56</sup> Lotman claims that Prigogine's work on random phenomena in physics, biology and chemistry is also valid for the science of history. Hence 'the random and the regular' cease to be two 'incompatible notions', but instead emerge as 'two possible states for one the same object'.<sup>57</sup> The parallel between unconscious processes and the conscious movements of the individual is thus established. Lotman writes:

The understanding of this in a new light points to the necessity of a historical semiotics, i.e. an analysis of how this human entity, who will be facing choice, imagines the world. In a sense this comes close to what the 'new history' calls 'mentality'.<sup>58</sup> (My translation from Swedish.)

The historical cultural semiotics implies reconstruction as theory and method, Lotman continues. In other words, the task of the cultural semiotician is to reconstruct the Ego-culture emerging, i.e. the sphere of encounters between the individual and his fellow men, in the source material at hand. Reconstructing the Ego-culture thus implies reconstructing a certain 'world-view'. Husserl explains the word:

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55. Ibid., p. 69. However, when considering for example Febvre's book, *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle: La religion de Rabelais*, Lotman's critique appears perhaps too general, because in that book Febvre not only discusses historical movements devoid of actors, but also gives room to Rabelais in the analyses.

56. As we can see here, the deformed texts are extra-texts, in a cultural semiotical sense, and those can have their origin in another culture as well as in another realm of time, from the Ego-culture point of view (which is the point of view of the historian).

57. Lotman, 'Semiotiken och historievetskapen', p. 78.

58. In connection with this Lotman points to the research done by semioticians like Toporov, Uspensky, Ivanov, among others, which, he argues, shows how promising historical cultural semiotics is. (However, to those names mentioned by Lotman, we must add his own.) Lotman, 'Semiotiken och historievetskapen', p. 79.

To express it more completely: the historical environment of the Greeks is not constituted by the objective world in our sense, but by their ‘world-view’, i.e. of that world which is subjectively valid to them, with the total reality that they included in it, including for instance their gods, demons etc.<sup>59</sup> (My translation from Swedish.)

In the following the interest will be directed towards the theoretical foundation of the Tartu school, which lies behind Lotman’s discussion about the nature of historical semiotics—cultural semiotics—that, at heart, deals with the relation between an ‘I’ and a ‘thou’. The following discussion will focus on that particular problem.

### *Alter and Alius*

By introducing the distinction between Alter and Alius, Sonesson aims at elucidating the relationship between a ‘thou’ (Alter) and an ‘I’ (Ego) in dialogue about something.<sup>60</sup> Alter appears on the axis of conversation or dialogue, whereas that something which is spoken about is situated on the axis of reference or nomination. In connection with this discussion Sonesson points out that Bakhtin (in the latter’s philosophy of language), and others in his circle, in spite of their emphasis on the dialogue concept, do not consider the other as a potential listener or speaker. But then, Sonesson asks, how can the other get access to the Ego? Or in other words, how can we understand the other? How did Mme de Staël understand the people she met during her travels? How was her dialogue, her communication with the Other possible? In this inquiry I will try to answer those questions more specifically.

Now, Sonesson makes the important observation, in connection with this, in his critique of Bakhtin that it is only in our lifeworld, our ordinary world that we take for granted, that an exchange of ‘seeing’ may take place between individuals, in contrast to the realm of a written text, where it is only the author who can see and speak to the hero, but not vice versa since the latter is enclosed in the text. Thus, while in the lifeworld the ‘Ego’ and the ‘Alter’ may change places,

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59. Edmund Husserl, ‘Den europeiska mänsklighetens kris och filosofin’ (*Die Krisis des europäischen Menschentums und die Philosophie*, 1954), in *Fenomenologin och filosofins kris* (Stockholm: Thales, 2002), p. 89.

60. Sonesson, ‘The Pronominalisation of Culture’.

obviously this may not occur in the relation between author and the hero in a literary text. This state of things is made clear by Schutz when discussing the Lifeworld status of the predecessor, also enclosed in verbal texts like Bakhtin's hero, as discussed later in connection with his phenomenological sociology. We may only get information about the predecessor via sources such as, for instance, books, or other textual source materials, consequently the predecessor cannot change position with the 'Ego' (here the reader subject) in an act of interpreting those texts about a past. However, this fact of the hero, in Bakhtin's terms, not being a real Alter in relation to the author (or to the reader, one may add)—that is, a real other person with whom one is engaged in a dialogue, and with whom the Ego (Bakhtin's author) may change position—is *sometimes not obvious* in Bakhtin's discussions of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels, where one may read the following:

The hero's word is created by the author, but created in such a way that it can freely develop its own inner logic and independence as the word of another person, as the word of the hero himself. As a result it is removed not from the author's intention entirely, but simply from his monological field of vision [...].<sup>61</sup>

Sonesson, when continuing his critic of Bakhtin seeming to confuse the special relation between Ego and Alter and author and hero, writes:

It may be necessary to distinguish the relationship between persons (Peirce's tuism, the Bakhtinian dialogue, etc.) from the thing character of signs ('Werk'/opus/reification). And the latter must be kept separate from the resistance offered by the material world. Starting out from the egocentric definition of cultural semiotics, however, everything else turns out to involve differentiations within the sphere of alterity.<sup>62</sup>

Lotman's discussion about this relationship between author and hero may shed light on the distinctions made here. He writes:

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61. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* [1929] (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1973), p. 53.

62. Sonesson, 'The Pronominalisation of Culture', p. 10.

Communication to oneself of already known information takes place in all cases when the rank of message is raised. When, for instance, a young poet reads his poem in print the message remains textually the same as it was in his manuscript text. Yet being translated into new system of graphic signs which have another degree of authority in the given culture it acquires supplementary value.<sup>63</sup>

This illustrates what Lotman calls autocommunication, a phenomenon connected to place, or better perhaps, culture. Lotman starts off from Jakobson's model, but extends it: the Ego produces a message, in a certain context with the aid of certain codes, addressed to the Ego in another context. The message is then interpreted with other codes and thus ends up being altered. The poet, described in the quotation above, will therefore read the printed poem with different eyes, depending on the codes valid in the new context. A possible conclusion of Lotman's theory, expressed in the terminology used in this inquiry, is therefore that the autocommunication takes place between the Ego and the 'Ego *as* Alter', but not between the Ego and a real Alter, that is, between one individual and another, which is the subject of this study. However, further down a discussion of text will follow in order to encircle the nature of source materials at hand, in this connection texts (in the literal sense), for the outside observer studying a specific culture at a specific point in history.

Now, as was disputed above, the encounter between Ego and Alter takes place in what we called the lifeworld, or the world we take for granted, as Husserl's disciple Alfred Schutz defines the term.<sup>64</sup> However, the lifeworld is not to be understood as a system of signs, as the Ego-culture in cultural semiotics. The lifeworld designates the foundation from which systems (signs) may emerge, and in that sense it holds a privileged position in relation to the latter.<sup>65</sup> Lotman and Uspensky, from the perspective of cultural semiotics focusing on the systems of signs, therefore put it differently: 'Reality [...] is perceived

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63. Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), p. 21.

64. Sonesson, *Bildbetydelser*, pp. 309–310.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 310.

as a text (of a lower level) that also must be decoded.<sup>66</sup> That perspective will largely be kept here too. In short, this discussion about the distinction between Bakhtin's definitions of author and hero on one hand and the definitions of Ego and Alter on the other hand, aimed at encircling how the *concept of dialogue* will be used in this inquiry. That is, dialogue is defined here as the relation designating a true act of communication between Ego and Alter, between an 'I' and a 'Thou'.

However, in the discussion about the nature of the relation between Ego and Alter it is illuminating to add important insights from Schutz's work, in the hope of deepening the understanding of some notions in cultural semiotics, and thereby also extending the model. So, let us proceed.

### *Ego and Alter in we- and they-relations*

Whereas I experience the individual Thou directly in the concrete we-relation, I apprehend the contemporary only mediately, by means of typifications.<sup>67</sup>

Schutz's sociology is a result of a 'creative application of two master tools: phenomenology analysis and the general sociological methodology of Max Weber'.<sup>68</sup> For Schutz, human acting makes up the core of the sociological study, which in its turn can be studied on the basis of: (1) in-order-to motives (purpose) and (2) because motives (causality). So, the individual acting along with his or her in-order-to-motives anticipates a certain reaction from the other, i.e. that the in-order-to-motives will 'become because motives' of the other.<sup>69</sup> How then may we study these intersubjective relations? Schutz refers to Max Weber whom he thinks has solved the problem in a fruitful way: the observer replaces the actors in a specific social situation by ideal types created by the observer himself or herself. But for this technique to function the types have to be relevant and adequate

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66. Ju. M. Lotman & B. A. Uspenskij, 'Authors' Introduction', in *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, ed. Ann Shukman (Ann Arbor: Dept. of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan, 1984), p. x.

67. Schutz, *Collected Papers II*, p. 41.

68. Arvid Brodersen, 'Introduction', in Schutz, *Collected Papers II*, p. x.

69. Schutz, *Collected Papers II*, p. 2.

from the point of view of the actor and his lifeworld.<sup>70</sup> Schutz's assumptions here are compatible with those stated by Lotman and Uspensky when defining the cultural semiotical study as reconstructing the social and cultural context in which the individual that is the object for the inquiry in question lived his or her life at a certain point in history.<sup>71</sup> But the knowledge in this case can only be reached indirectly, for instance through narratives, Schutz writes:

[...] the signs used in communication are, first of all, elements in an objective system of meaning and completely anonymous. Yet the signs are also manifestations of the conscious life of the communicator, and I can shift my attention from the objective context of the sign to the subjective configuration who used the sign in a specific communicative act. By this shift of perspective I achieve a kind of pseudo-contemporaneity of my own conscious life with the conscious life of the communicator.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, knowledge of the past is possible by constructing types through which we indirectly can study, with the aid of narratives (or texts in the extended meaning), a specific social context and the individual. Now, very briefly, the schemes of typification that all of us, according to Schutz, need in order to be able to interpret and orient ourselves in the lifeworld also serve as a source of the models that we elaborate as members of a specific social or cultural setting.<sup>73</sup> The latter fits in with the definition of the Ego-culture, especially if we take the following words by Schutz into consideration:

Typification consists in disregarding those individual features in the typified objects, facts, or events which are irrelevant to the actual problem at hand. [...] For instance, we think of people as Frenchmen or Germans, Catholics or Protestants,

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70. The types also have to be consequent (within the frames of logic) and compatible (scientific). See Schutz, *Collected Papers II*, p. 2.

71. However, it is important to stress that Schutz's interest was primarily directed to studies of contemporary fellow men, that is, of groups of people who physically share time and space, although Schutz discusses the relevance of the method also in connection with studies of worlds (historical and future) of which we can have knowledge indirectly. See Schutz, *Collected Papers II*, pp. 22–23.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

73. For further information about Schutz's typification scheme see *ibid.*, pp. 237–238.

aliens or neighbors [...]. Each of these terms designates a type, and all individuals falling within such a type are considered as being interchangeable with respect to the typified trait.<sup>74</sup>

The example of Mme de Staël's travel account shows that, in order to understand what she sees during her travels, she created types in the sense Schutz states here. I will give several examples in my analysis later on.

Another parallel can be made between Schutz's notion of in-group and Ego-culture, in the sense that both notions imply that relations are asymmetric: members in the in-group as those in the Ego-culture identify themselves with their sphere of belonging, and make it the centre of the understanding of others.<sup>75</sup> What is at stake here is thus to reconstruct Mme de Staël's types, the ones she used when interpreting the encounters she had with other people, in order to create notions reflecting those 'original' types. The terms Ego, Alter and Alius are, in this inquiry, used as such notions in order to be able to reconstruct and interpret her cultural encounters with other individuals, although in an abstract and generalized sense.

The notions of Ego-culture, Extra-culture and Non-culture models/types thus reflect Mme de Staël's constructions of other cultures at a more collectivistic level. Now, the discussion held here aimed at showing some parallels between notions in cultural semiotics and in Schutz's sociology. More specifically it aimed at establishing a link between the latter's definition of types and the use of the terms Ego, Alter and Alius in the former. The notions of Ego, Alter and Alius are thus hereafter to be viewed as *ideal types* on an *abstract level*, I repeat, and as such may function as *analytical tools* for the semiotician in the work of reconstructing the Ego-culture in the interplay with other cultures. In this inquiry they are central in the analyses of Mme de Staël's cross-cultural encounters described in her autobiographical travel accounts.

As already stated, the Ego-culture is to be viewed as the system, or mechanism, determining what texts (artefacts) may enter (from the outside) or be produced within its sphere. The question that remains

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74. Ibid., p. 239.

75. Ibid., pp. 244–245.



to be answered thus is what characterizes such a text produced in the Ego-culture.

### *Text and Culture*

The essence of culture is such that in it what is past does not 'pass away,' that is, does not disappear as events do in the natural flow of time. [...] This cultural memory, however, is constructed not only as a storehouse of texts, but also as a kind of generative mechanism. A culture which is united with its past by memory generates not only its own future, but also its own past, and in this sense is a mechanism that counteracts natural time.

A living culture cannot be a mere repetition of the past—it invariably gives birth to structurally and functionally new systems and texts. But it cannot but contain within itself the *memory* of the past.<sup>76</sup>

The memory inherent in the concept of Culture is also manifested on the level of text, and thus opens up for the possibility of structural transgressions. Bakhtin, Lotman continues, is the first to underline the semiotic aspects about such ambiguities, embedded in the author's text. Undetermined elements are distributed in the text (viewed as a structure) and thereby get a new unambiguous meaning.<sup>77</sup> Thus, ambivalence as a dynamic mechanism within Ego-culture is possible because the system (the Culture) has a memory which once defined what texts are permitted within its sphere. This

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76. Ju. M. Lotman & B. A. Uspenskij, 'The Role of Dual Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture (up to the end of the eighteenth century)', in *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, p. 28.

77. Y. M. Lotman, 'Un modèle dynamique du système sémiotique', in *Travaux sur les systèmes de signes*, eds. Y. M. Lotman & B. A. Ouspenski (Bruxelles: Complexe, 1976), pp. 77–93, see esp. p. 88. Bakhtin expresses this thought neatly by writing the following: 'The ultimate semantic authority of a creative writer is by no means capable in every historical situation of being expressed in the direct, unrefracted, unconditional authorial word. When one's own personal "final" word does not exist, then every creative plan, every thought, feeling and experience must be refracted through the medium of another person's word, style and manner, with which it is impossible to directly merge without reservation, distance and refraction.' Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 167.

memory is always there, although not always in the foreground.<sup>78</sup> For instance, Mme de Staël's book about Germany seems to be as much about her France, the Ego-culture, as about Germany, that is, German genius in literature is only admitted to a certain extent. Mme de Staël discusses the German culture in *De l'Allemagne* by fixing some 'true facts' (implicitly and explicitly) about the Ego-culture, being superior in what does really matter to her, and probably to many other French people: drama and the art of conversation, especially the latter being of essential importance to Mme de Staël, at least so it seems. In that particular sense, Mme de Staël's voice represented perhaps a whole culture.

In a book on remembering James Wertsch explicitly sets out to elaborate Lotman's theories, when discussing the role of memory.<sup>79</sup> It is in particular Wertsch's questioning of the traditional division of the study of memory into individual and collective that is of interest here, the former traditionally examined within psychology and the latter within sociology. Wertsch writes:

From this perspective, memory—both individual and collective—is viewed as 'distributed' between agent and texts, and the task becomes one of listening for the texts and the voices behind them as well as the voices of the particular individuals using these texts in particular settings. In this approach, performances [...] are inherently 'multivoiced' [...] rather than the product of an isolated speaker or cognitive agent.<sup>80</sup>

The multivoiced nature of any speech act, or text, comes forth when we 'respond' by asking ourselves where the story came from, in the first place.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the dividing line between the individual and the collective may only be uncovered by studying how they interrelate, in the distribution the one is dependent on the other.

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78. Lotman, 'Un modèle dynamique du système sémiotique', for this discussion see esp. pp. 88–89.

79. James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). In this Wertsch borrows from 'Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Lotman, Stock, and several other figures [...]' Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, p. 28.

80. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, p. 6.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Now firstly, Wertsch argues that the metaphor of ‘collective memory’ is not very fitting for modern societies since the latter half of the twentieth century, since they are rather heterogeneous by nature. Secondly, when studying memory, the focus, Wertsch continues, should be on the relation between social and individual processes. And finally, a third way to erase the distinction between individual and collective memory is by examining the autobiographical memory.

Wertsch gives a concrete example of the problems that can arise when separating the collective memory from the individual by pointing at an event in connection with an exhibition about World War II at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., arranged in the mid-1990s. Veterans and historians had different opinions about what happened in 1945, but in the end the point of view of the former would win. A reason for that, Wertsch argues, was that they could invoke an autobiographical memory and in ‘doing so, these groups spoke in a voice that reverberates much more strongly with the public than some of the parties involved in this debate had anticipated.’<sup>82</sup>

The collective memory is anchored in the interpretation of history, and the point Wertsch wants to make here is that both are subjects to change. Our conceptions about history are based on contemporary needs; in the terms of cultural semiotics we could say that the Ego-culture deforms texts coming from outside (in terms of another time or/and culture) in accordance with its own needs. Now, the importance of text, in Wertsch’s terminology termed cultural tool (basically referring to texts in a literal meaning), is paramount in the study of history. And a cultural tool is used ‘as an appropriate narrative that will allow people to bring an experience into understanding.’<sup>83</sup> Important cultural tools are thus narratives, which have two functions: a referring one and a dialogic one.<sup>84</sup> And narratives may have two types of referents: empirical and fictive. Wertsch is concerned with the former, as is this inquiry. Thus, narratives, as cultural tool, are texts produced in the Ego-culture.

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82. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

84 The functions of narratives here are thus equivalent respectively to the axes of reference and conversation stipulated by Sonesson, as we have seen earlier.

What characterizes those narratives? Wertsch's description fits well with our concern here, namely to establish a definition of 'text', in order to shed some light on the source material for this inquiry: Germaine de Staël's autobiographical travelogue.

Narratives organize the past into a coherent units (Wertsch explicitly refers to Ricoeur and Mink here). But at the same time as they make understanding possible, they also limit it. Narratives are both referential and dialogic, but, as Wertsch explains:

In contrast to the referential function, which concerns the relationship between narratives and the settings, actors, and events they depict, the dialogic function concerns the relationship between one narrative and another. From this perspective, it is essential to recognize that narratives do not exist in isolation and do not serve as neutral cognitive instruments. Instead, they are embedded in concrete discourse characterized by dialogic and rhetorical opposition.<sup>85</sup>

Now, this double function of the narrative also creates an equally double function of the memory: to give a true image of the past on one hand, and to give the group a useful narrative around which it can construct an identity on the other hand. In that sense, Mme de Staël's *Dix années d'exil* is no exception: it aspires to tell a true story, from Mme de Staël's point of view, and at the same time it gives a narrative which other banished French people could use in their identity forming. Now, what constitutes such a 'textual community'?<sup>86</sup>

In connection with the discussion of the issue of 'implicit and imagined communities' Wertsch touches upon important questions from the point of view of cultural semiotics, namely that it is in the meeting with the other that the model of the Ego-culture emerges.<sup>87</sup> Thus, the community is implicit, so to speak, when its members use a set of cultural tools without being conscious of the way they are using them. But at the very moment when some members of the group look upon other members, using other cultural tools, as 'traitors' the community will strive to strengthen its sense of sameness, that way

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85. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, p. 59.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

the implicit community turns into imagined ones of different kinds, sometimes whole nations, or to use our terminology, whole cultures.<sup>88</sup> Wertsch summarizes: the difference between the two communities is constituted by the difference in using cultural tools. In one case the members are not conscious of the way they are using them and have no aim with using them, in the other case, on the contrary, the aim is explicitly to strengthen the spirit of the community. This process of installing a sense of community, through control of the collective memory, may be initiated on different institutional levels within the state. Wertsch is primarily occupied with the role education has in this process of making nations, which to many are nothing but constructions.<sup>89</sup>

In short, remembering presupposes cultural tools (here foremost narratives) and is thus a result of mediation.<sup>90</sup> In this sense Wertsch's theory is in line with Lotman's definition of the Ego-culture also being a storage of texts (information), making other texts possible and others impossible, from the point of view of its members (equivalent in many respects to the 'in-group' as defined by Schutz). In the following, I will dwell a little on a more detailed discussion about Wertsch's notion of cultural tools. The reason for that is that Wertsch, in this particular discussion, focuses on the relation between the individual, the act and the context, in a way that is most illuminating for the understanding of the nature of text as it is defined in cultural semiotics.

#### *Agent and act: or author and text*

James Wertsch is occupied with defining the nature and use of text within a particular socio-cultural sphere on one hand, and how these can be used in the study of historical narratives on the other hand.<sup>91</sup> Wertsch's point of departure is the theory that stipulates that the focus in the studies of those narratives must be on both the actor (for instance the author) and the 'cultural tool', that is, the cultural norm, or expressed differently, the discourse (in a similar way that Foucault

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88. Ibid., p. 63; p. 64.

89. Ibid., p. 69. Wertsch is in this connection referring to works by Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and Hobsbawn & Ranger.

90. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, p. 46.

91. James V. Wertsch, *Mind as Action*.

used the term *discours*). Wertsch's work aims at uncovering the relation between narratives and the cultural, political and social context in which they were produced.

I stated that the task of sociocultural analysis is to understand how mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional, and historical context. This formulation could now be revised to read: The task of a sociocultural approach is to explicate the relationships between human action, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, and historical contexts in which this action occurs, on the other.<sup>92</sup>

Thus, since human action is indirect in the sense that cultural tools are involved, Wertsch speaks about 'mediated action', which is to be studied in connection with the context in which it emerged.

Language is a cultural tool involved in mediated actions, and thus the question here is how language can represent the past. Put this way, the question takes Lotman's assumption about the role of texts (here chiefly texts in the literal sense) serving as source material for the historian a little further by focusing on the nature of the text itself. Wertsch's basic presumptions rely on Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, discussed earlier. This implies that Wertsch stresses the importance of studying the context in which texts once emanated, in order to capture their meaning. That is, the analysis centres on examining how heteroglossia, i.e. other people's different words in the context, was brought into the text by the author and his or her intentions. What is important to add here is that Bakhtin's notion implicitly has a pragmatic perspective, that is, the reader plays an active role in giving meaning to a text. This also implies that a text is subject to many different interpretations.

Important here is also Wertsch's underlining of the importance of examining the coherence, or the lack of it, in the texts. By doing that the analyser may draw conclusions regarding the possibilities and the limits of the cultural tools used, something that comes forth in the text in different ways. The more skilful the author is in his use of cultural tools, the more coherent is his or her text, and vice versa.<sup>93</sup> Wertsch suggests three themes in the study of historical texts: events,

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92. Ibid., p. 25.

93. Ibid., pp. 80–87.

theme and construction of the main character(s).<sup>94</sup> In the case of Germaine de Staël's autobiographical travel account those three points are represented by (1) her travels and encounters, (2) the relation between her, her family and Napoleon and (3) the construction of herself as representing the true French (in opposition to Napoleon 'the Corsican') in cultural encounters with different representatives of what she potentially considered Extra-culture or Non-culture.

Germaine de Staël's autobiographical travel account constitutes a very rich source material reflecting the individual as well as the collective, emerging in her meetings with contemporary social conventions on one hand and with other cultures on the other. When analysing her text one may observe that the model she constructs of herself as a woman, intellectual and French (of Swiss origin!) varies in her writing depending on whom she meets. When describing other cultures her understandings are dependent on other texts (produced in her Ego-culture, France) as well as on her own perceptions. From time to time her perception does not coincide with the 'official' storytelling of her Ego-culture, and in those passages her text tend to lose in coherence, in the way Wertsch has stated.

To use Jakobson's theory of linguistic functions, Mme de Staël's autobiographical account is dominated by a referential function, i.e. the text is oriented towards the context, in contrast to poetry dominated by the poetic function, oriented towards the sign/message itself.<sup>95</sup> Now, the semiosphere, or as we say here, the Ego-culture as a model, represents the mechanisms of homogeneity but it is by no means static, as we have seen. In the encounters with other cultures and other texts it enters into a dynamic relationship, which opens up for the creation of new texts originating from the outside, but deformed by the Ego-culture in order to fit in with its own needs.

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94. Ibid., pp. 88–91.

95. Jakobson, 'Lingvistik och poetik'. In Lotman's terminology Mme de Staël's text would best be described as a metatext and as such being an example of what he calls a second communication-modelling system, using the natural language, which, in itself makes up the primary communication-modelling system *per se*. That is, all other texts (in the extended sense) depend on the natural language in Lotman's theory. See Ju. M. Lotman, 'Primary and Secondary Communication-Modeling Systems', in *Soviet Semiotics*, ed. Daniel P. Lucid (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

Mme de Staël's travel account illustrates this mechanism of Ego-culture transforming outside Texts to Extra-texts, by filling in the gaps in the process of translation. This process of filling in gaps, theorized by the Prague school presupposes, as I see it, that a minimum amount of codes, theorized by the Tartu school, overlap between the Ego-culture and the Extra-culture.

We will now continue with a cultural semiotical presentation and analysis of Mme de Staël's *Dix années d'exil*.



#### 4. *DIX ANNÉES D'EXIL*: MME DE STAËL AND EUROPE

Striving for glory organizes the life of the naive hero, and it is glory that also organizes the story of that life—its glorification. To strive for glory is to gain consciousness of oneself within the civilized mankind of history (or within a nation), it means to found and build one's own life in the possible consciousness of this civilized mankind; to grow in and for others, and not in and for oneself; to assume a place in the proximate world of one's contemporaries and descendants. [...] In rendering others heroic, in establishing a pantheon of heroes, I seek to become a participant in such a pantheon, to place myself in it, and to be guided from within it by the longed-for future image of myself that was created in the likeness of others.<sup>1</sup>

The endeavour to glorify life is the cornerstone in what Bakhtin defines as the heroic form of autobiography and biography, to which Germaine de Staël's *Dix années d'exil* belongs, I am inclined to say. Her father, Germaine herself and others willing to join the struggle against Napoleon, and his despotic regime, are the heroes in her life-telling. In that connection Bonaparte appears as the direct opposite party, and in a sense as the hub around which the story unfolds. François Rosset writes:

Ainsi, l'image du moi qui se construit dans ce texte autobiographique procède de la perception et de l'assimilation de deux images tierces: celle de père individuel, de *mon* père et celle de l'homme qui s'est arrogé le titre de père de la nation [...]. Le texte s'organisera donc selon une double opposition: celle des deux images, des deux statues paternelles et celle du sujet (Mme de Staël) qui refuse l'autorité de père collectif autoproclamé.<sup>2</sup> (*Italics in the original.*)

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1. M. M. Bakhtin, 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity', in *Art and Answerability*, eds. Michael Holquist, Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), p. 156.

2. Rosset, 'Madame de Staël et les paradoxes de l'autobiographie', p. 58. 'That way, the image of the self that is constructed in the autobiographical text proceeds from the perception and the assimilation of two triadic images: that of the

Bakhtin, referring to the categories hero, time and plot, discusses five types of texts.<sup>3</sup> Two of those are of the utmost interest for the present study: the travel account and the autobiography. The hero of the travel account, according to Bakhtin, is not in focus for the author's attention, that place is occupied by the environment. Nations, cities, cultures, nationalities, social groupings and their specific terms of living make up the central elements in the travel account. The picture of the human being, when such a picture exists, is static and no room is given to her personal evolution. The world is a place of differences and contrasts, and life oscillates between different opposing conditions: success/failure, happiness/unhappiness, victory/loss etc. The travel account is formed by a static view of the world order organized in binary polarities, and it emerges as fragmentary and disintegrated. The time perspective is not very developed and historical dimensions are missing. The biographical time is not considered and therefore descriptions of the hero's ageing, the way from childhood to old age, are lacking. The only time dimension to be found is the 'adventure time', which is characterized by its immediacy: time markers referred to, in an arbitrary way, are moments, hours and days.<sup>4</sup>

Autobiographies have never existed in a pure form, according to Bakhtin. It is only a principle for creating the hero. Pure self-narrations do not exist, they are always created in relation to something outside the Ego in time and space. Now, there are similarities between the heroes in the autobiography and the travel account in the sense that they are both rather static and are not developed on a personal level, apart from when they focus on crises or happiness/unhappiness. On the other hand, the life course of the hero can take different shapes during the unfolding of the narrative. Bakhtin writes:

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individual father, of *my* father and that of the man who has claimed the title father of the nation [...]. The text organizes itself, thus, around a double opposition: that of the two images, the two father statues and that of the subject (Mme de Staël) who refuses the authority of the self-proclaimed collective father.' (My translation.)

3. M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986). See esp. 'The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism (toward a historical typology of the novel)'.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

In a biographical novel (especially autobiographical and confessional), the only essential change in the hero himself is his crisis and rebirth (the biographical hagiographies of the crisis type, Augustine's *Confessions*, and so on). The conception of life (idea of life) that underlines a biographical novel is determined either by life's results (works, services, deeds, feats) or by the category of happiness/unhappiness (with all of its variations).<sup>5</sup>

The binary opposition of happiness/unhappiness also organizes the destiny of the autobiographical hero, and thereby resembles the one in the travel account. However, the plot is not the same in the two different genres. The autobiography is based on the characteristic elements in all life-telling narratives: birth, school years, marriage and so on.<sup>6</sup> Also, the use of descriptions of minor characters and milieus (cities, countries and so on) in the autobiography, differs from the travel account. In the travel account they may be pictured rather superficially, whereas in the autobiography they may be given an important role in the relation to the hero. According to Bakhtin:

This makes it possible, in depicting the world, to surmount [...] the naturalistic fragmentation of the travel novel [...]. Because of the link with historical time and with the epoch, it becomes possible to reflect reality in a more profoundly realistic way. (Position, occupation, and kinship were masks in the travel novel, [...]; here they acquire a life-determining essence. The links with secondary characters, institutions, countries, and so on are no longer superficially adventurous by nature).<sup>7</sup>

In the travel account it is the hero, *per se*, who moves, deprived of personal traits, but this is not the case generally with the autobiography. The hero's character is given from the outset in the travel account and does not change in the course of the narrative. The events, Bakhtin writes, 'shape not the man, but his destiny'.<sup>8</sup> Thus, accordingly, the heroes of the travel account and the

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5. Ibid., p. 17.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p. 19.

autobiography are not given any potential to develop continuously because the texts have other aims.<sup>9</sup> But as the well-known example of Rousseau's *Confessions* shows, this is not always the case; here the development of the self constitutes the central theme of the book. On the whole, Bakhtin's dichotomy seems too sharp; there is, over time a vast variety in the genre of autobiography. However, it is useful as a starting point in the discussion of Germaine de Staël's texts.

When it comes to Germaine de Staël's autobiographical travel account the discussion of genre in fact becomes complex. *Dix années d'exil* is composed of two parts: the first is more autobiographical in a traditional sense and the other is rather a travel account. That is, several genres come into play in the book.

Both Christina Sjöblad and Eva Hættner Aurelius show, with the help of Bakhtin's theories, that autobiographical writing is often dialogical and does not always aim at describing the Ego itself, even though it sometimes does so.<sup>10</sup> Christina Sjöblad also has an interesting survey of the differences between diaries and autobiographies, even though the similarities outnumber the differences on an overarching level. Most interesting is the observation that Christina Sjöblad makes when stating that the diary has a more fragmentary character than the autobiography.<sup>11</sup> When it

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9. When describing the image of the hero in the biographical (and in the autobiographical, we must add) novel (in contrast to the hero of the *Bildungsroman*) Bakhtin writes (Here I give the previous quotation in full): 'The hero here is not the moving point that he was in the travel novel, devoid of inherent characteristics. Instead of abstract, sequential heroization, as in the novel of ordeal, the hero is characterized by both positive and negative (he is not tested, but strives for actual results). But these features are fixed and ready-made, they are given from the very beginning, and throughout the entire course of the novel man remains himself (unchanged). The events shape not the man, but his destiny (though it may be a creative destiny). (Emphasis in the original.) Bakhtin, 'The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism', p. 19.

10. Sjöblad, *Min vandring dag för dag*. Eva Hættner Aurelius, *Inför lagen: Kvinnliga svenska självbiografier från Agneta Horn till Fredrika Bremer* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1996).

11. Sjöblad points in fact to a phenomenon that Vygotsky was also preoccupied with, namely inner speech, characterized by its use of predicative clauses depending on the subject, that is, what is spoken about, being implied to everyone involved in the conversation. He gives the example of people waiting at the stop for the tram to arrive: when somebody sees it coming it is only necessary to say 'It's coming' for everyone to understand what is happening. Vygotsky also mentions

comes to letters, in the case of Mme de Staël, their functions seemed to have varied. Sometimes letters apparently were for others than the addressee to read, and sometimes, Germaine de Staël at least, marked out that the information was meant only for the initial receiver.<sup>12</sup> Eva Hättner Aurelius also points to the essential fact in Bakhtin's theory about the polemical dimensions of the autobiography: 'I.e., one may often associate autobiographies with some sort of conflict of religious, political or juridical nature.'<sup>13</sup>

Now, it is interesting to note what Germaine de Staël says about Jean-Jacques Rousseau's hero in his *Confessions*: 'Enfin je trouve qu'il a écrit ses mémoires plutôt pour briller comme historien que comme héros de l'histoire.'<sup>14</sup> Germaine de Staël's words imply that Rousseau's book was not primarily to be perceived as self-centred. Many critics in, for instance, Sweden implicitly had held this against *Confessions*, saying that the focus on the Ego puts the social and the political aside.<sup>15</sup> Well, nothing like that can be said about Germaine de Staël's autobiography, which in long passages even misses the essential marker for the Ego, the personal pronoun 'I'. Rather, she gives almost all her attention to political issues, which of course is highly understandable for a person living in political exile for ten years—a theme we will now turn to.

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Tolstoy's novels in this connection as being rich sources of these types of clauses used in the outer speech, due to the author's frequent theme of a 'psychology of understanding'. Vygotskij, *Tänkande och språk*, pp. 438–439. I would like to suggest the idea of the diary being a genre in between inner and outer speech, the latter generally dominated by other structural forms, as Vygotsky points out in the book mentioned above.

12. For example, Mme Necker de Saussure's (Germaine's cousin) letter to Mme de Staël was shown (partly) to 'all our fine esprits here'. See de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, vol. V:1, p. 212. See also a letter sent from Germaine, London on 14 April 1814, to her cousin where she puts explicitly 'this between us' within brackets. Thus, letters exchanged between the same persons on different occasions could be of different status, depending, of course, on which type of information was conveyed. However, since Mme de Staël apparently saw a need to put out 'ceci entre nous', one may draw the conclusion that letters generally were more or less public, at least in her circles. The letter in question is published in Kohler, *Madame de Staël et la Suisse*, esp. p. 629.

13. Aurelius, *Inför lagen*, p. 45.

14. Madame de Staël, 'Lettres sur les écrits et le caractère de J. J. Rousseau' [1788], in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. I (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1820–1821).

15. See Aurelius, *Inför lagen*, p. 288.

## Dix années d'exil: *the journeys to Germany and Russia*

Parmi toutes les attributions de l'autorité, l'une des plus favorables à la tyrannie, c'est la faculté d'exiler sans jugement.<sup>16</sup>

Fiévée, as we have seen above when I quoted his lines in *Mercur*, represented the intellectual power at the time when Germaine de Staël's ten years of exile began. The notion of France in her letters and travel accounts was the France of her father's day, the days of the salons. Expressed in cultural semiotic terms, she can be said to have projected her Ego-culture by segmenting France in time. Like many others, she was appalled by the turn which the Revolution took later on: thus Fiévée and his sort in her view represented what in cultural semiotics is called Non-culture, defining what seemed to her to be unintelligible and the least valued, as opposed to Culture which represents the opposite, in the sense of value and intelligibility.

She never completely rejected, let alone freed herself, from traditional normative views of womanhood, so neatly expressed in her novel *Corinne*. At the same time, she wanted honour and respect, *la gloire*, as an artist in the public sphere. Another part of Mme de Staël's Ego-culture was, inevitably, the fact that she was a woman. This, however, implied ambiguous reactions in her.

This very complex problem for Germaine de Staël also becomes clear in her encounter with a German woman. In her travel notes, she reports seeing a German woman on a boat crossing the Rhine:

Il y avoit dans mon bateau une vielle femme allemande paisiblement assise sur sa charrette, et ne pensant pas à descendre, même pour traverser la rivière. -- 'Vous êtes bien calme', lui dis-je. - 'Pourquoi faire du bruit?' me répondit-elle. Elle avoit raison: pourquoi faire du bruit?<sup>17</sup>

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16. Madame de Staël, 'Considerations sur la révolution française' [1810–1813], in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. XIV (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1820–1821), p. 295. 'Of all attributes of authority, one of the most advantageous for tyranny is to exile without judgement.' (My translation.)

17. Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël* p. 30. 'On the boat was an old German woman who peacefully sat on her cart, and did not think of going off, not

This passage is followed by what might be best described as an apology for the opposite attitude of the old woman being so calm, that is, making a fuss. For Madame de Staël, *la gloire* also meant creating a turmoil by sticking out. Significantly, Balayé notes that this specific passage was omitted from her book on Germany, *De l'Allemagne*.<sup>18</sup> However, it is not to be found in *Dix années d'exil* either. In fact, Germaine de Staël's autobiographical account from her first journey to Germany is very brief, and this is probably due to the fact that she reconsidered her initial plan to write an extensive travel account in order to write a book on German culture and literature instead, i.e. *De l'Allemagne*.<sup>19</sup>

Des dragons vomissent de feu sur le seuil du temple de la gloire, et vingt chevaliers ont péri sans pouvoir le franchir! Il ne faut pourtant pas donner à ses ennemis la joie de vous avoir terrassé, et la seule noble vengeance qu'un coeur généreux puisse se permettre, c'est de poursuivre sa carrière et de marcher en avant, quoique de profondes blessures aient affaibli le coeur.<sup>20</sup>

The dragons, whom Madame de Staël refers to, are clearly an allegory for men like Fiévée. Despite her praising the calm of the German woman, who sat peacefully on her cart, there is no doubt that Madame de Staël had chosen a very different path. In her comment on the German woman, she seems to have a dialogue with herself: writing about the Other turns out to be a step in the creation of the self. Projecting the conventional view of women onto the unknown German woman, Madame de Staël imposes Culture on Non-culture, in a similar way as Peter I did when trying to reform

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even for the route over the river. "You are very calm," I say to her. "Why make a fuss?" she answered me. She was right: why make a fuss? (My translation.)

18. Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël*, p. 30, note 33.

19. Charles Joret, 'Madame de Staël et Berlin', in *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 1, janv.-mars, 1902, Paris, pp. 1-28, see esp. p. 2, note 1.

20. Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël*, p. 31. 'The dragons belch forth at the threshold of the temple of honour [...]. Though one must not offer the enemies any joy over defeating you, and the only noble revenge that a generous heart may allow itself is to go on with the career and march ahead, no matter how deep the wounds are that weakened the heart.' (My translation.)

Russia according to Western ideals.<sup>21</sup> She is not in a real dialogue with this woman, for she did not speak German even though she started to learn reading it during her stay in Weimar, nor was she acquainted with women from the lower classes.<sup>22</sup> To her, they must have represented a Non-culture in the sense that the attitude of the old German lower-class woman was not quite understandable—nor, in the end, really esteemed.

However, it is important to stress the differences between Mme de Staël's relation to the German woman, and Peter the Great's to his Russian subjects. In the former case, both criteria of the Non-culture, from the Ego-culture's point of view are fulfilled. Mme de Staël does not want any reaction from the woman, and vice versa, she does not want to act upon her; nor would she understand very much of any reaction from the woman in question, and vice versa, nor would she be able to make herself understood. The German woman was thus an *alius* to Mme de Staël. In the latter case it is more complicated. The criterion of unintelligibility was hardly applicable to Russia and the Russians from Peter the Great's perspective.<sup>23</sup> Uspensky also shows very interestingly that Peter used his knowledge of the Russian culture in order to influence his subjects.<sup>24</sup> On the basis of this view, I would suggest that Tsar Peter's conduct has more similarity to that of Cortez, the latter acquiring knowledge about the Maya culture, and thereby establishing an extra-cultural relationship to it, in order to

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21. Lotman & Uspenskij, 'The Role of Dual Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture', esp. p. 25. Sonesson, 'Ego meets Alter', pp. 537–559.

22. However, she had started to learn German already in 1799, and her first teacher was Wilhelm von Humboldt. See Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël*, p. 207.

23. This perspective is suggested also by Sonesson, see Sonesson, 'Ego meets Alter', p. 541.

24. Uspensky shows very interestingly that Peter the Great knew how to use the codes in order to reach his own goals. He writes: 'Les actes de Pierre n'auraient donc pu être perçus différemment dans la "langue" de l'époque: aux yeux des gens d'alors, tout se passait comme s'il avait publiquement proclamé être l'Antéchrist.' 'Peter's acts could not have been perceived differently in the "language" of the epoch: in the eyes of the people at the time, everything proceeded as if he had publicly proclaimed himself Antichrist.' (My translation.) B. A. Ouspenski, 'Historia sub specie semioticae', in *Travaux sur les systèmes de signes*, eds. Y. M. Lotman & B. A. Ouspenski (Bruxelles: Complexe, 1976), p. 149.



subjugate the Mayas.<sup>25</sup> Thus, I am suggesting that Russia to Peter I was Extra-cultural, rather than Non-cultural, although the tsar was returning from ‘abroad’ (in the eyes of Peter’s antagonists) to Russia, while in the case of Cortez it was the opposite. This shows what Sonesson proposes, that the Ego-culture is portable, it is where the ego is.<sup>26</sup>

Now, as we will see, in the case of Mme de Staël’s travel account the cultural encounters described are predominantly Extra-cultural. However, there are some more examples of Non-cultural character to be found in Mme de Staël’s text. Analogous to the narration about the German woman is the encounter with the Polish peasants in 1812 which Mme de Staël describes in a similar way. I will return to this later.

#### *The writing of the first journey to Germany: general outlines*

The common trait of the hero in the autobiography and the travel account, as we remember from the discussion of Bakhtin, is that he or she in fact may be in the background in relation to the events. This coincides with Christina Sjöblad’s and Eva Hættner Aurelius’ questioning of autobiographical writing as exclusively a genre of the ‘I’. And as Sjöblad makes clear, the autobiography (as well as the diary) stands on the border between fact and fiction.<sup>27</sup>

However, since Germaine de Staël’s overarching purpose in writing *Dix années d’exil* seems to have been to obtain restitution for the injustices Napoleon did to her father and to herself, this tends to spill over to the parts in the book describing her travels, especially the one dealing with Germany. This part is dominated by events, and in that sense it fulfils the criteria for the autobiography as well as for the travel account, i.e. the heroes and other figures are depicted statically and schematically while the dynamic lies in the events. Paradoxically though, the report from Germany is characterized by a lack of descriptions regarding the milieu, i.e. one gets no clear picture of what the places Germaine de Staël visits, or the people she meets,

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25. For the discussion about Cortez in a cultural semiotic perspective see Sonesson, ‘Ego meets Alter’, pp. 537–559; for the passage on Cortez see pp. 549–550.

26. Sonesson, ‘Ego meets Alter’, p. 541.

27. Sjöblad, *Min vandring dag för dag*, p. 59.

look like. But more importantly, as just pointed out, this passage on Germany is dominated by events, although events taking place in France! However, to Germaine de Staël, writing her autobiography, this did not matter, because her life was conflated with politics, especially of course French politics. Therefore, one could argue, the travel narrative in a traditional sense was put aside in order to give room for the overall purpose of the autobiography: to put things right and to compromise Napoleon. On the other hand, in these parts of the text the first person form is almost abandoned and it tends to come close to a political pamphlet in style.

However, the travel account from Germany begins traditionally in the first person, and we get to know something about how Germaine de Staël starts her journey to Germany, and that Benjamin Constant is with her. But this is done very briefly. On the other hand, she describes very intensively her worries about her daughter Albertine, five years old, who got sick in Frankfurt. This is the only information about age given in the text. In connection with this a tribute to her father follows, which seems to be inserted regardless of the context. Thereafter comes a report that she had arrived in Weimar, followed by a very short description of some people she met there: Goethe, Wieland, Schiller and the duke and duchess of Weimar. Thus, from reading *Dix années d'exil*, we do not get to know very much about Germaine de Staël's stay there. What encounters did she have, and what was the outcome of those?

#### *Weimar (14 December 1803 to 1 March 1804)*

Now, Madame de Staël's visit to Weimar, where she arrived in December 1803, was an enormous success. She was celebrated not only by the prince's and princess's courts, but also by Goethe, Schiller, and Wieland. For example, her account of Duchess Louise is highly idealized, perhaps precisely because it is a synthesis of the two contrasting female roles (housewife and heroine) from which she cannot free herself. In *De l'Allemagne* she wrote:

La grande-duchesse Louise est le véritable modèle d'une femme destinée par la nature au rang le plus illustre; sans prétention comme sans faiblesse, elle inspire au même degré la confiance et le respect. L'héroïsme des temps chevaleresques

est entré dans son âme sans lui rien ôter de la douceur de son sexe.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, Germaine de Staël ends her account from Weimar with a tribute to the duke and duchess of Weimar, she writes:

La société du duc et de la duchesse de Weimar me plaisait extrêmement, et je passai là trois mois, pendant lesquels l'étude de la littérature allemande donnait à mon esprit tout le mouvement dont il a besoin pour ne pas me dévorer moi-même.<sup>29</sup>

The duchess of Weimar, Louise, became a life long friend of Germaine de Staël, as their long correspondence confirms.<sup>30</sup> And Germaine de Staël seemed to have perceived Weimar almost as an alternative to her Ego-culture, as a letter sent from Berlin to duchess Amélie, mother of Duke Charles-Auguste of Weimar, shows: 'Je me plais ici, mais je m'y sens en voyage et j'avais en peu de temps considéré Weimar comme une patrie.'<sup>31</sup> It is interesting to observe the comparison Germaine de Staël makes in her letter: it reinforces the cultural semiotical theory which says that the concept of culture only emerges in the meeting with another. Indeed Germaine de Staël's letter to Duchess Amélie also, paradoxically, conveys that Berlin seemed to have reminded her more of Paris than Weimar, but in this case it was apparently no advantage to Germaine de Staël.<sup>32</sup>

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28. Comte d'Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l'Allemagne* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1928), p. 73. 'The Duchess Louise is a true model of a woman destined by nature to reach the highest celebrity; without pretensions as well as weakness, she inspires in equal measure confidence and respect. A heroism of the age of chivalry has entered her soul without removing anything of her sex's mildness.' (My translation.)

29. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 108. 'The company of the duke and the duchess of Weimar pleased me extremely, and I spent three months there, during which the study of German literature gave to my mind the excitement I needed in order not to tear myself apart.' (My translation.)

30. See Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*

31. Joret, 'Madame de Staël et Berlin', p. 8. 'I like it here, but I feel as if I am travelling and for a short while I did consider Weimar as my homeland.' (My translation.)

32. *Ibid.*, p. 8. Also, as a letter from Charlotte de Stein, friend of Goethe, confirms, the warm feelings were mutual, Mme de Staël seemed to have been

However, when approaching a closer semiotical analysis of some of the encounters Germaine de Staël had during her travels that are described in *Dix années d'exil*, an important criterion of selection has been that those can also be scrutinized from the other person's point of view. This turned out to imply that a third party often, not always, is involved in the form of a correspondent to which the encounter is told. This is the case with for instance, the encounters with Schiller and Goethe, whom, alongside Wieland, Germaine de Staël met in Weimar. Another criterion has been the quality of the description of the encounter, with regard to what is important for my study in cultural semiotics. That is, texts that are specifically informative regarding cultural issues are of particular importance. Thus, in the following section special attention will be paid to the encounter between Madame de Staël and Schiller on one hand, and with Goethe on the other, taking into account the autobiographical text, her book on Germany, as well as some of her letters and those of Schiller and Goethe.

### *Mme de Staël, Goethe and Schiller*

À Eisenach, j'ai trouvé une femme française par les émigrés complètement, qui m'a très bien reçue, et m'a montrée des lettres de Weimar qui semblent prouver que la cour me recevra très bien. Mais on y dit que les grands hommes (Goethe et Schiller) ont une peur terrible de me parler en français et qu'on ne sait pas si, de peur, ils en s'en iront pas; mon succès à Weimar est donc incertain. Je crois cependant que je m'en tirerai; mais qu'est-ce que c'est que s'en tirer? C'est comme des chemins: arriver sans avoir le cou cassé, résultat qu'on aurait obtenu en ne bougeant pas.<sup>33</sup>

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widely appreciated in Weimar. See Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l'Allemagne*, pp. 77–78.

33. Letter to M. Necker sent from Mme de Staël in Gotha on 10 December 1803 in de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, vol. V:1, p. 134. The letter is also published to a large extent in Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l'Allemagne* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, éditeurs, 1928), pp. 35–44. 'In Eisenach I found a woman who had become totally Frenchified by the emigrants, who received me very well, and who showed me some letters from Weimar which seem to prove that the court will receive me very well. But there it is said that the great men (Goethe and Schiller) are terribly frightened of having to speak to me in French and that it is not known whether, out

Mme de Staël est réellement à Francfort [...] et nous pouvons nous attendre à la voir bientôt ici. Pourvu qu'elle comprenne l'allemand, nous en aurons raison; mais lui expliquer notre religion et lutter contre la volubilité française, c'est là une tâche trop rude.<sup>34</sup>

Even though Mme de Staël could be quite sure, from reading some letters from Weimar concerning her arrival there, that the court would receive her well, her success was still uncertain, because these letters also told her that it was not certain that the 'great men (Goethe and Schiller)' would be able to make it out of fear of having to speak French to her. And her fear of their fear was confirmed by Schiller when writing to Goethe in order to inform him that Mme de Staël was soon to be expected in Weimar, and that they had to face the fact that she might not understand German, which would make their task of explaining German religion to her very hard, to say nothing about the struggle with 'the French volubility' they also could expect.

However, things turned out rather well with both Schiller and Goethe. The encounter between Schiller and Mme de Staël was perhaps the most successful; they seem to have developed a mutual esteem for each other which they expressed in letters (Mme de Staël also in her book *De l'Allemagne*). With Goethe however, it was different: Mme de Staël recognized his genius but seems to have regretted Werther in him. Goethe on the other hand also recognized Mme de Staël's wit and talent. However, moving reluctantly from Jena in order to come to Weimar to see her (upon her wish), he tried

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of fear, they will make it or not; my success in Weimar is thus still uncertain. I do think though that I will manage; but what does it mean to manage? It is like the roads: to arrive without having one's neck broken, a result that one could have achieved without moving.' (My translation.)

34. Letter from Schiller to Goethe sent at the time of Mme de Staël's visit to Frankfurt (13 November to 3 December 1803) published in Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, p. 35. This letter and others between the two famous German writers, are, according to the Lenormant, drawn from the correspondence between Goethe and Schiller published by M. Saint-René Taillandier in *Magasin de Librairie*, see p. 34 note 1. 'Mme de Staël is really in Frankfurt [...] and we can expect to see her here soon. Provided that she understands German, we will get the better of her; but to explain our religion to her and to struggle with the French volubility, that is too hard a task.' (My translation.)

to make her come to him instead and wrote: ‘You will lighten these sombre days and the infinite nights will pass as moments.’<sup>35</sup> (My translation from French.) Mme de Staël answered:

Je suis la personne du monde la plus indifférente à tout le matériel de la vie, et j’y penserai encore moins que de coutume quand je serai avec vous. Je vous dis cela pour que vous n’imaginiez pas de me recevoir comme une dame de Paris, mais comme la femme du monde qui a le plus pleuré à *Werther* et au *Comte d’Egmont*.<sup>36</sup>

In order not to intimidate Goethe, it seems, Mme de Staël in her letter asks Goethe not to worry about any defects concerning the lodgings by saying that material things do not matter to her, and even less so when she will be with him. She stresses that he should not think of receiving her as a ‘lady from Paris, but as the woman who most in the world has cried at *Werther* and *Comte d’Egmont*.’ (My translation.)

Mme de Staël’s answer to Goethe is interesting, because obviously she realized that the concept of ‘a lady from Paris’ was known to Goethe, and that it was associated with refined manners that obliged certain standards regarding material things in the world. In fact, the concept seemed to have worked as a type, in Schutz’s sense, that is, here, a model used in a specific cultural-social context and which is handed over from generation to generation, *to both* Mme de Staël and Goethe. Therefore one might speak about a *stereotype* being circulated. Mme de Staël apparently counted on Goethe understanding her way of referring to the type, being on speaking

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35. Goethe in a letter to Mme de Staël published in Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l’Allemagne*, p. 90. Already on 15 December 1803 Mme de Staël wrote to Goethe expressing her wish to see him, see de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, V:1, p. 145, and Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l’Allemagne*, p. 89.

36. Letter from Mme de Staël in Weimar to Goethe sent on 18 December 1803, see de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, V:1, p. 150, and Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l’Allemagne*, pp. 90–91. ‘I’m the person who is the most indifferent in the world to material things in life, and I’ll think about them even less than usual when being with you. I tell you this so that you will not think of receiving me as a lady from Paris, but as the woman who most in the world has cried at *Werther* and *Comte d’Egmont*.’ (My translation.)

terms with him, that is, Goethe from Mme de Staël's point of view belonged to the extra-Culture. Goethe was Alter to Mme de Staël.

The notion is used here, we repeat, as a type based on Mme de Staël's model of the world and her typifications, so to speak, or as Schutz would have put it: a type as a result of the outside observer making a model of the observed's typifications and way of behaving in a specific context. And probably Goethe did indeed grasp the meaning of the typified concept, but also, perhaps, Mme de Staël most likely used the type because she identified herself as 'a lady from Paris', although saying that for the occasion she was prepared to give up some material aspects of it. The type 'lady from Paris' seemingly worked as an integral part of Mme de Staël's construction of her identity in relation to others, as it worked the other way around. Hence, between Goethe and Mme de Staël there was seemingly a consensus about the type in use.

In fact Mme de Staël, in her turn, used a specific type from her French context, that is, from her Ego-culture in order to grasp Goethe and to make him graspable for her implied readers who most likely were the French contemporaries from her Ego-culture. In *De l'Allemagne* she wrote:

Ce qu'on nous raconte de l'entretien de Diderot pourroit donner quelque idée de celui de Goethe; mais, si l'on en juge par les écrits de Diderot, la distance doit être infinie entre ces deux hommes. Diderot est sous le joug de son esprit; Goethe domine même son talent: Diderot est affecté, à force de vouloir faire effet; on aperçoit le dédain du succès dans Goethe, à un degré qui plaît singulièrement, alors même qu'on s'impatiente de sa négligence. Diderot a besoin de suppéler, à force de philanthropie, aux sentiments religieux qui lui manquent; Goethe seroit plus volontiers amer que doux; mais ce qu'il est avant tout, c'est naturel; et sans cette qualité, en effet, qu'y a-t-il dans un homme qui puisse en intéresser un autre?

Goethe n'a plus cette ardeur entraînant qui lui inspira Werther; mais la chaleur de ses pensées suffit encore pour tout animer.<sup>37</sup>

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37. de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', ch. VII, p. 240. 'What we have been told about Diderot's conversation can give some idea about Goethe's; but, if one judges him on the basis of Diderot's writings, the distance between the two men ought to be

Now, Goethe could match Diderot when it comes to the art of conversation, according to Mme de Staël here. Although the chapter is dedicated to Diderot's genius, it is not obvious who is the 'winner' of the two illustrious men in the comparison Mme de Staël makes here. When it comes to writing, Mme de Staël continues, the distance though is infinite between Diderot and Goethe, the former being under the 'yoke' of his esprit in contrast to the latter, who 'dominates even his talent'. For the rest, Diderot has to compensate for the absence of religious feelings through philanthropy, whereas Goethe is happy to be bitter rather than 'sickly-sweet'; but, Mme de Staël concludes, Goethe is most of all natural and she ends with the somewhat rhetorical question: 'and without that quality, in fact, what is there in man that could interest another man?'

It is not obvious whom Mme de Staël prefers, Diderot or Goethe. Considering that this description figures in a book dedicated to the German genius in literature, Goethe does not seem to stand out as the more brilliant of the two men, because we know from Mme de Staël's own letters that she did not appreciate, nor understand, German metaphysics. For example, she wrote about Goethe in a slightly different way in a letter to her father sent from Weimar on 2 February 1804:

L'homme le plus supérieur d'ici sans aucun doute, c'est Werther-Goethe, mais il a un amour-propre d'une nature aussi bizarre que son imagination. Il se croit inspiré d'une manière surnaturelle. Il est spinotiste, et à la tête d'une nouvelle philosophie dont c'est l'idée. Il croit donc que le monde idéal

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infini. Diderot is under the yoke of his esprit; Goethe dominates even his talent: Diderot is affected, because he wants to make an effect; one perceives contempt for success in Goethe, to an extent which pleases extraordinarily, even though one gets impatient at his negligence. Diderot needs to compensate, out of philanthropy, for the religious feelings which are absent in him; Goethe would gladly be bitter rather than sickly-sweet; but what he is most of all, is natural; and without that quality, in fact, what is there in man that could interest another man? Goethe does not have that exciting passion which Werther inspired in him; but the warmth of his thoughts is sufficient enough to animate everything.' (My translation.) The contemporary notion of 'implied reader' was anticipated, although that specific term was not used, by the Prague school when stipulating the influence of context-bound norms on both the artist and the receiver/interpreter of the artwork. See Sonesson, 'Livsvärldens mediering', pp. 33–78, see esp. p. 57.



et réel n'est qu'une pensée qui est Dieu, et il se croit plus près de cette pensée qu'aucun être vivant, de manière qu'il est impossible de savoir en conversation si l'on ne heurte pas sans y songer sa religion de lui-même.<sup>38</sup>

In this letter, where Mme de Staël describes 'Werther-Goethe' as a Spinozan with a strange self-love, which she is afraid of hurting without knowing it when conversing with him, he does not appear as natural. Now, I would like to suggest that the rhetorical question Mme de Staël put above is directed against Napoleon and his like in France, a country being 'staged' in a way that was typical of the age according to Lotman, who continues: 'Specific forms of staginess move out from the theatrical stage and take command of life. First and foremost this applies to the culture of Napoleon's France.'<sup>39</sup>

Secondly, one might ask oneself whether it was not Werther Mme de Staël preferred before Goethe, and Werther being the passionate, Goethe only the warm, comes closer in some important respects to the description of the affected Diderot. In fact, Mme de Staël seems to have disliked Goethe as a person to the same extent that she seems to have loved Werther as a character. But as we have seen, and will be seeing more of later on, in this epoch literary characters could play important roles as types in everyday behaviour, in the sense of giving meaning to it for the acting individual but also for the outside observer trying to interpret other people's behaviour. In short, taking an intense liking to Werther does not appear as odd, considering the times. Mme de Staël wrote to her father from Weimar on 15 December 1803:

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38. Letter from Mme de Staël in Weimar to M. Necker sent on 2 February 1804, see de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, V:1, pp. 215–216, and Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l'Allemagne*, p. 104. 'The most superior man here is without doubt Werther-Goethe, but he has a self-love of a nature that is as bizarre as is his imagination. He thinks himself inspired in a supernatural way. He is Spinozan, and under the head of a new philosophy of which that is the idea. He believes thus that the ideal and the real world are nothing but an idea that is God, and he thinks himself closer to that idea than any living human being, in a way that it is impossible to know when conversing whether one hurts him without thinking of it his religion of himself.' (My translation.)

39. Jurij M. Lotman, 'The Theatre and Theatricality as Components of Early Nineteenth-century Culture', in *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, p. 147.

Goethe me gâte beaucoup l'idéale de Werther. C'est un gros homme sans physionomie, qui veut être un peu homme du monde, ce qui ne veut rien à demi, et qui n'a rien de sensible ni dans le regard, ni dans la tournure d'esprit, ni dans les habitudes; mais c'est du reste un homme très fort dans l'ordre de pensées littéraires et métaphysiques qui l'occupent.<sup>40</sup>

Again Mme de Staël exposes her disappointment that Goethe does not live up to the image she has made of Werther, something that is not perhaps fair to the creator of the character. She describes Goethe as a fat man without looks, and who lacks sensitivity. But, she adds, he is very strong in his literary thinking and in metaphysics. Now, we know that Mme de Staël did not at all appreciate German metaphysics, so it is not perhaps too hard for her to give Goethe some credit for that quality. When it comes to literature things are not so obvious. If one keeps in mind that Mme de Staël wrote the book on Germany to launch, one could perhaps say, the German literary genius, Goethe's position was unquestionable. However, the art form that Mme de Staël probably esteemed the most was perhaps not literature after all, but conversation. However, here it does not become clear how much Goethe actually counted in connection with that (he was in a previous quotation compared with Diderot, as we have seen). Mme de Staël wrote in *De l'Allemagne* in the chapter discussing Goethe:

En Allemagne, on ne sait pas dépenser son talent dans la conversation; et si peu de gens, même parmi les plus distingués, ont l'habitude d'interroger et de répondre, que la société n'y comte pour presque rien; mais l'influence de Goethe n'en est pas moins extraordinaire.<sup>41</sup>

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40. Letter from Mme de Staël in Weimar to M. Necker sent on 25 December 1803, see de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, V:1, p. 163, and Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l'Allemagne*, p. 85. 'For me Goethe destroys much of the ideals of Werther. He is a fat man without features, who wants to a certain extent to be a man of the world, which is only half true, and who has nothing sensitive in his look nor in his temperament or habits; but he is otherwise a man very strong in the literary and metaphysical thoughts that occupy him.' (My translation.)

41. de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', ch. VII, p. 243. 'In Germany one does not know how to use one's talent in conversation; and so few people, even among the most distinguished, have the habit of questioning and answering, that society is almost

Thus, in Germany there is no talent for conversation, and as a consequence society is not worth very much, something that Mme de Staël regrets. However, Goethe's influence is extraordinary despite this, she continues. A conclusion that could be drawn is that Mme de Staël needed German geniuses for the book *De l'Allemagne*, and Goethe was probably generally considered to be highly suitable for such a position (not to forget that Mme de Staël very much appreciated *The Sorrows of Young Werther*). In that sense one may say that Mme de Staël launched Goethe as representing the German literary genius-type *per se*. One reason for that could have been the fact that Goethe was a recognized writer and Mme de Staël, having the implied reader in mind, was well aware of that. However, when writing letters to her father she probably had no other reader in mind than him, and possibly some other members of her family. Hence, her letters 'home' might be regarded as more or less private. Therefore she probably felt that she could speak more freely about her true opinions about Goethe, and her regret that the latter did not resemble Werther. Thus, the Werther-type representing Mme de Staël's own construction of the German genius-type becomes more obvious in those letters. Hence, the inconsistency in Mme de Staël's opinions about Goethe, expressed in her different writings, might be explained by this inner conflict she probably had concerning Goethe's genius. Furthermore, the notion of implied reader is implicit in the definitions of genre, as I see it. Thereby Mme de Staël's different ways of expressing herself in *De l'Allemagne*, a highly official, not to say, polemical book, and in the letters 'home' to her father might be explained.

So far, it seems thus that the book on Germany is in many ways, and perhaps most importantly, about Mme de Staël's Ego-culture, the culture of the Parisian salons before Napoleon took over. Diderot, as we know, frequented the salon of Mme and M. Necker in Germaine's childhood. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the description of Goethe is done in comparison with Diderot's genius, which in the end seems to get the better of it. On the other hand Mme de Staël's relation to Schiller seems to have been closer, and her appreciation of him comes forth often in her letters, and in *De*

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worth nothing; but the influence of Goethe is nevertheless extraordinary.' (My translation.)

*l'Allemagne* of course. But in some respects she misses in him what she missed in Goethe, namely the art of conversation.

As a concluding remark about Mme de Staël's encounter with Goethe one must stress that Mme de Staël certainly did not expect to meet Werther in Weimar. She seems however to have made a type out of Werther's character, which thus was made to represent the German genius and passion that she loved, and in comparison Goethe lost. By putting an overt question stressing the importance of being natural, Mme de Staël's narrative about Germany is suddenly interrupted for a moment, in order, it seems, to address strictly Ego-cultural matters. The question does not only appear as rhetorical but also personal. Mme de Staël seems to put the master narrative of Napoleon's France into question, by referring implicitly to the mannered social life there, by bringing up the opposite, namely the natural ways of German genius. At the same time she creates an alternative narrative, around which other constructions of identity may be formed. Perhaps it is in this connection that the German literary genius played the most important role for Mme de Staël, and that Napoleon understood this? Why else had *De l'Allemagne* to be withdrawn? Using Wertsch's term one might say that Mme de Staël seemed to be aiming at creating a new cultural tool, which could be used by others who had fallen into disgrace in the eyes of Napoleon.

Now, things turned out differently with Schiller, with whom Mme de Staël evidently established a dialogue founded on mutual respect and approval, despite the fact that Mme de Staël apparently kept on arguing against German metaphysics. But first, Mme de Staël sent a letter to her father on 25 December 1803, telling him about Schiller and Goethe. The former she met for the first time when visiting Duchess Louise's salon.<sup>42</sup> It is in fact the same letter, quoted above, in which she regretted that Goethe could not be measured with Werther's ideals. But when it comes to the part dealing with Schiller no such regrets are to be found, she writes:

Schiller a un ordre d'idées sur la littérature tout à fait à lui et ne s'embarasse de rien d'autre dans ce monde. C'est un grand homme maigre, pâle et roux, mais dans lequel on peut

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42. According to Mme de Staël herself she met Schiller in the Duke and Duchess of Weimar's salon. See de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', ch. VIII, p. 248.

découvrir de la physionomie, ce qui est très rare en Allemagne. Il parle très difficilement français, mais la pensée, et il en a, se fait toujours entendre. Son amour-propre ne consiste pas, comme celui des Français, dans l'irritabilité ni dans la vanité [...]. Tout ce qu'il voit, tout ce qu'il sait, il en fait de la littérature, mais jamais il ne fait le tour de la littérature par dehors; il reste toujours concentré dans ces livres ou dans lui-même. Il résulte de cela plus d'originalité que de goût. Il m'a fait un compliment auquel j'ai été sensible: il m'a dit que j'étais la seule personne qui réunissait les réflexions d'une âme solitaire avec la grâce d'une femme du monde. Il est doux et bon dans son amour-propre: rien ne le froisse, et il a d'ailleurs quelque chose de plus intellectuel que les amours-propres qui veulent des louanges instantanées.<sup>43</sup>

Now, in contrast to Goethe, Schiller is a man with features, something that is 'rare in Germany'. But like Goethe, Schiller is mostly, if not totally, occupied by literature and his own thoughts, according to Mme de Staël. Schiller, again in contrast to Goethe, is 'mild and good' in his self-love. But most importantly perhaps, Schiller succeeded in giving Mme de Staël a compliment to which she was 'sensitive'. Mme de Staël repeats the compliment in the letter to her father: 'he told me that I was the only person who combined the reflections of a solitary soul with the grace of a woman of the world.' (My translation.) Now, Schiller seemed to have mastered two narratives here: apparently he understood what attracted Mme de

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43. Letter from Mme de Staël in Weimar to M. Necker sent on 25 December 1803, see de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, V:1, p. 163, and Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l'Allemagne*, pp. 84–85. 'Schiller has certain ideas about literature that are totally his own and does not care about anything else in this world. He is a tall, thin man, pale and red-haired, but in whom one can detect some features, something that is very rare in Germany. He has great difficulties in speaking French, but the thoughts, and he has some, always make themselves heard. His self-love does not consist, like that of the French, of irritability nor vanity, on the contrary he is totally in his opinions [...]. Everything that he understands, everything that he knows, he turns into literature, but he never lets literature take the tour outside; he always stays concentrated on his books or on himself, the result of this is rather originality than taste. He gave me a compliment to which I was sensitive: he told me that I was the only person who united the reflections of a solitary soul with the grace of a woman of the world. He is mild and good in his self-love: nothing offends him, and for the rest he has something more intellectual about his than the self-love of those who want instantaneous praise.' (My translation.)

Staël in the German culture, and he might even have guessed her regret about not meeting this lonely refined soul of the young Werther in Goethe. By attributing it instead to her, he seems to have touched upon something very important to her. Then, by juxtaposing Wertherian qualities with Mme de Staël's identity, that is, her model of herself, as a lady from Paris, he secured the success of the compliment. In short, by mastering the cultural tool of Mme de Staël's Ego-culture, Schiller could sense in what way Germany stood in an Extra-cultural relation to her.

Although Schiller had difficulties in speaking French, he may be said to have belonged, also statistically, to Mme de Staël's Ego-culture. In 1792 Schiller was honoured by the Première Assemblée Législative in France for his drama *Brigands*, and under the name of M. Gille he was also given French citizenship (something that at this time was denied Mme de Staël).<sup>44</sup> The re-naming of Schiller is an obvious example of how the mechanism of Ego-culture (in this case France) works: in order to permit texts (in the extended semiotic sense) from the outside to enter into the inside they are deformed to suit one's own the culture. Now, this fact of Schiller's work being adopted as an Extra-text (that is, belonging to the Extra-Culture) by Mme de Staël's Ego-culture may to a certain extent explain why Mme de Staël took a liking to Schiller as *almost* an equal, despite the fact that she did not like nor understand German metaphysics. However, Schiller's opinion about Mme de Staël was as ambiguous as hers about him. In a letter to his friend Koerner sent on 4 January 1804 Schiller wrote:

Ma pièce que j'ai promise au théâtre de Berlin pour la fin de février m'absorbe tout entier, et voilà que le diable m'amène la philosophe française [...], qui est bien, de toutes les créatures vivantes que j'ai rencontrées, la plus mobile, la plus prête au combat et la plus fertile en paroles. Mais c'est aussi la plus

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44. See Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, p. 11. See also Carla Hesse who brings forth the fact that during the Revolution (in 1804 the Napoleonic code reaffirmed that the citizenship of women was to be dependent on their husbands' nationality) women's nationality was determined by their fathers' or husbands' citizenships. Therefore Mme de Staël was considered to be, as we have seen, Swiss and later on Swedish. See Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*, p. 35; pp. 65–66.

cultivée, la plus spirituelle des femmes, et si elle n'était pas réellement intéressante, je ne me dérangerais pas pour elle.

Tu peux, d'ailleurs, penser combien une telle apparition, un tel esprit, placé sur les sommets de la culture française tout à fait opposé à la nôtre, et qui nous arrive subitement du fond d'un autre monde, doit contraster avec la nature allemande, et combien elle diffère de la mienne. Elle éloigne de moi toute poésie, et je m'étonne de pouvoir faire encore quelque chose. Je la vois souvent, et comme, par-dessus le marché, je ne m'exprime pas facilement en français, j'ai tellement de rudes heures à passer! On est obligé pourtant d'estimer et d'honorer hautement cette femme pour sa belle intelligence, son esprit libérale et ouvert de tant de côtés.<sup>45</sup>

To Schiller things are clear when writing this letter: the French culture that Mme de Staël represents is completely different from the German, and differs very much from his own. To him, she seems to arrive from 'the bottom of another world' and 'removes all poetry' in him to an extent that he is 'surprised to still be able to do anything at all'. On top of it his French is not so good and he complains about the hard hours he has to spend with the 'French philosopher', as Schiller calls her. But Schiller ends his letter with words that reveal his warmth and esteem for Mme de Staël: 'One is obliged, however, to esteem and highly honour this woman for her fine intelligence, her liberal spirit that is open to so many things.' (My translation from French.) Despite the differences Schiller put forward here between

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45. Letter from Schiller to Koerner sent on 4 January 1804, published in Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, p. 37. 'My play which I have promised to the theatre in Berlin for the end of February is totally absorbing me, and then the devil brings me the female French philosopher [...], who is good, of all the living creatures I have met the most mobile, the most ready for combat and the most fertile in words. But she is also the most cultured, the most witty of women, and if she were not really interesting I would not put myself out for her. You could, for the rest, imagine how much such an appearance, such an esprit, placed at the peak of the French culture that is completely opposite to ours, and who arrives suddenly from the bottom of another world, ought to contrast with the German nature, and how much it differs from mine. She removes all poetry in me, and I am surprised to still be able to do anything at all. I see her often, and as, on top of it, I do not express myself easily in French, I really have to endure hard hours! One is however obliged to esteem and highly honour this woman for her fine intelligence, her liberal spirit that is open to so many things.' (My translation.)

Mme de Staël's French culture and his own German culture, he cannot, and probably does not wish to, deny Mme de Staël's qualities and the benefits of her Ego-culture. And her excellence in conversation, the paramount art form of Mme de Staël's Ego-culture, did not go unnoticed; Schiller wrote to Goethe, before the latter was to arrive in Weimar, in approving terms:

[...] on ne trouve pas en elle un trait disparate ou faux. Voilà pourquoi, malgré la différence de sa nature aux nôtres, on se sent à l'aise près d'elle; on peut tout entendre de sa part et on se sent disposé à tout lui dire; elle est la représentation aussi parfaite qu'intéressante du véritable esprit français.<sup>46</sup>

Now, what Schiller says here is that, despite the difference between her nature and the German nature, one feels comfortable being next to her because she is interesting to discuss with. Here Schiller does not make an issue of his poor French, and continues in his letter to express again his admiration for her wit: 'she is the perfect, as well as the most interesting, representation, of the true French esprit.' (My translation.) It seems thus that Mme de Staël succeeded in living up to the type she has made of herself as a true Parisian salonnière, a type that was known and shared, it appears, by Schiller. But also, from the letter one could draw the conclusion, perhaps, that it was Schiller who had to adapt to Mme de Staël's manners and language in order to keep the conversation going. In this sense one might speak about France being the sender culture, to use Sonesson's term, i.e. that culture to which the other culture, thus being the receiving culture, was expected to adjust itself.<sup>47</sup> Undoubtedly France held that position in the world during the eighteenth century. Such an argument is based on an analogy with the Tartu school thesis stipulating that a culture may be speaker-oriented or audience-

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46. Ibid., p. 40. 'One does not find in her any disparate or false trait. That is why, despite the difference between her nature and ours, one feels comfortable being next to her; one can hear anything from her and one feels disposed to say anything to her; she is as perfect, as interesting, a representation of true French esprit.' (My translation.)

47. Sonesson defines America as the modern sender culture in a discussion about globalization, extending the Tartu school notions of speaker- and audience-oriented cultures. See Sonesson, 'The Globalization of Ego and Alter', pp. 153–173.



oriented. In the first case the auditeur is expected to follow and to adapt to the speaker, i.e. the sender of the message. The Tartu school here talks about the public following the poet, instead of the other way around which would be the case in an audience-oriented culture. But how did Mme de Staël perceive the situation? In *De l'Allemagne* she wrote:

Je me servis d'abord, pour le refuter, des armes françoises, la vivacité et la plaisanterie; mais bientôt je démêlai, dans ce que disoit Schiller, tant d'idées à travers l'obstacle des mots; je fus si frappée de cette simplicité de caractère, que portoit un homme de génie à s'engager ainsi dans une lutte où les paroles manqueraient à ses pensées [...].<sup>48</sup>

Mme de Staël announces here that in the beginning she used the French weapons 'animation and pleasantry' in the conversation with Schiller, but soon she understood what Schiller was saying, and at that moment she was astonished at the simplicity of his character that made him engage in the 'struggle' despite the fact that his thoughts 'lacked' the words. Now, Mme de Staël seems thus to have adapted her way of conversing in order to meet Schiller half way. But she does not seem to do that out of interest in *what* Schiller is saying but rather out of compassion for his attempt, despite his poor French, to embark on a discussion with her, using the 'French weapons'. It is not what Schiller is saying that impresses her, but his *engagement* in the discussion. So, in short, the French culture appears as the superior one after all to Mme de Staël, in comparison to the German, something that probably was grasped also by contemporary readers. I shall come back to that in the concluding remark of this section about Mme de Staël's visits to Weimar and Berlin. Here again the theory in cultural semiotics stipulating the position of the Ego-culture as being the paramount culture, from its own perspective, in the encounter with the other appears: in the end *De l'Allemagne* was perhaps about the Ego-culture as much as it was about Germany?

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48. de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', ch. VIII, p. 248. 'I used at first, in order to refute him, the French weapons, animation and pleasantry; but soon I elucidated what Schiller said, so many ideas through the obstacles of the words; I was so surprised by the simplicity of character, that made the man of genius engage in that way in a struggle where his thoughts lacked the words.' (My translation.)

Perhaps it was even more about the Ego-culture? The latter culture emerged as the more cultural, refined and esteemed to Mme de Staël. In a letter to her father dated 18 December 1803 Mme de Staël wrote:

Non pas Wieland, mais Goethe et Schiller ont la tête remplie de la plus bizarre métaphysique que tu puisse imaginer; et comme ils vivent solitaires et admirés, ils inventent seuls et font recevoir sans difficulté ce qu'ils ont inventé. C'est un public très facile que celui de l'Allemagne, et sous ce rapport tu peux en rabattre de mes succès; or un public très facile gâte le talent des auteurs.<sup>49</sup>

In this letter to her father Mme de Staël again brings up the 'bizarre metaphysics' that Goethe and Schiller purport, and again her regret about their lack of skill in the art of conversation comes forth: a public as easy as the German one 'destroys the talent of the authors.'

However, despite her disliking of German metaphysics, Mme de Staël is engaged in a dialogue with both Goethe and Schiller; she expects to be understood and she expects them to answer back in a way that she can understand. They represent the Extra-culture to Mme de Staël, thus Goethe and Schiller act as real *alters* in their relation to her. Through the type of the German genius that Mme de Staël created and used in order to comprehend the German literary giants *per se*, Schiller and Goethe (and Wieland), she succeeded in establishing a relation which apparently was fruitful, in one way or another, to all parties, although, paradoxically, the *Werther-type* (thus stemming from an Extra-text, i.e. the novel) was perhaps more applicable in relation to Schiller than to Goethe. Here we are returning to one of the problems that occupied the Prague school: the receiver filling in the gaps of knowledge (concerning sociocultural

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49. Letter from Mme de Staël in Weimar to M. Necker sent on 18 December 1803, see de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, V:1, p. 152, see note 5 on p. 151 informing about the date of this letter being incorrectly the 15th when published in Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l'Allemagne*, p. 63. 'Not Wieland, but Goethe and Schiller have their heads full of the most bizarre metaphysics that you could imagine; and since they live solitary and admired, they invent things on their own and have no difficulties in gaining a reception for what they have invented. It is a very easy audience in Germany, and under these circumstances you can abandon your illusions about my success; but an easy audience destroys the author's talent.'

norms, canon, set of exemplary works and so forth) between the author of an artwork and him- or herself. In that sense understanding of the concept of Extra-text not only deals with the question of a text overlapping (culturally, socially) to a certain degree with the Ego-text produced in the Ego-culture, as theorized by the Tartu school, but it also deals with the question of it overlapping *enough*, and in a specific way (culturally and socially), for the reader, viewer etc. to be able to fill in the gaps of 'knowing-how'. Mme de Staël was probably sensitive to the Werther-character because she belonged to the cultural avantgarde of the time, having access to *Athenäum* (1798–1800), the influential magazine for those interested in the aesthetics of Romanticism, published by the Schlegel brothers. And in the end, this made her more sensitive to Schiller than to Goethe. Now, returning to the issue about the art of conversation: when Mme de Staël met Rahel Varnhagen in Berlin, the famous salonnière, she thought that she had met her equal in the art of conversation. But as it turned out, Rahel Varnhagen was not of the same opinion, perceiving Mme de Staël as stiff and naïve intellectually.

Germaine de Staël left Weimar on 1 March and arrived in Berlin a week later. In Berlin she met, among others, Fichte, Rahel Levin (the future Mme Varnhagen von Ense), Brinkman, Auguste Wilhelm Schlegel who was later to be engaged as the tutor of Germaine's children, the Prussian royal family and its court.<sup>50</sup> The encounter with Rahel Levin, which took place at a party given by Brinkman, is very interesting for our purpose: the cultural clash between the two highly witty women, was not apparent to Germaine de Staël, but obvious to Rahel Levin who wrote down her impressions of it the following day. We will return to their meeting shortly in a detailed semiotical analysis.

However, in Germaine de Staël's account of her stay in Berlin, this rich social life of hers does not come to the fore. That position she reserved for reports from the political turbulence in France, as touched upon above.

#### *Berlin (8 March to 19 April 1804)*

The account from Berlin contains few autobiographical markers, in comparison to the one from Weimar. Germaine de Staël is more

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50. Joret, 'Madame de Staël et Berlin', pp. 5, 6 and 21.

occupied with describing the prince and the government of Prussia. In that sense, her writings remind us of, for example, Diderot's when visiting Catherine II in Russia 1773–1774.<sup>51</sup> The following may illustrate that type of political writing in *Dix années d'exil*:

le régime militaire avoit empêché l'opinion de prendre de la force, et l'absence d'une constitution dans laquelle chaque individu pût se faire connoître selon son mérite, avoit laissé l'état dépourvu d'hommes de talent capables de le défendre.<sup>52</sup>

After making this observation about Prussian society, Germaine de Staël continues with a relatively long exposition on the necessity of having a constitution according to the English model, that is, a constitutional monarchy. Then, all of sudden, she changes her mind regarding Prussia and states that even though there is a lack of a constitution (so important to her political convictions), 'Berlin is one of the happiest countries on earth and the most enlightened.'<sup>53</sup> Now, it seems that Madame de Staël exaggerates things by describing the same Prussia that she criticized earlier in these opposing terms. Her view of Berlin is perhaps better understood when compared to what she loathes the most, the order of the Napoleonic France.

Germaine de Staël finishes her travelogue of Berlin with a reflection upon Prince Louis-Ferdinand. His way of life, which appears to have been disorderly, is described with some sweeping words, but when it comes to the prince's opinion about Napoleon, which coincides with her own, Germaine is more thorough. The prince is depicted as a warm and enthusiastic man, i.e. his character is made to correspond to traits that Mme de Staël generally

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51. See Denis Diderot, *Mémoires pour Catherine II*, ed. Paul Vernière (Paris: Éditions Frères, 1966). For a more extended analysis of this theme see also Anna C. Rédei, *Russia in a Western Mirror: A presentation of Denis Diderot, Mme de Staël and André Gide* (Lund: Centre for European Studies at Lund University, 2001), www.cfe.lu.se.

52. de Staël, 'Dix années d'exil' [1810–1813], in *Oeuvres complètes*. vol. XV (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1820–1821), p. 87. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 48. 'the military regime had prevented the public opinion from acquiring strength, and the absence of a constitution in which every individual could make himself known by his merit had left the state unprovided with men of talent, men capable of defending it.'

53. Madame de Staël, 'Dix années d'exil' [1810–1813], in *Oeuvres complètes*. vol. XV, pp. 88–89, 'Quoi qu'il en soit, Berlin étoit un des pays les plus heureux de la terre et les plus éclairés.'

appreciated in people. In this way, Louis-Ferdinand emerges as a trustworthy ally and there is no need to question his judicious capacity. Germaine de Staël closes the chapter on Berlin after this passage in a now familiar non-personal tone and style. The following chapter is devoted to the news of Moreau's and Pichegru's conspiracy against Napoleon, which reached her in Berlin. In her telling of the events in France she does not use the first person pronoun 'I'. It is interesting to note that the word and epithet 'enlightened' also appears (as in the depiction of Prussia, as we have seen) in the description of the hero of the conspiracy, Moreau. From this, one may come to the conclusion that this word stood for something that mattered very much to Germaine, and therefore she attributed it to things and persons as a marker of the good and highly valued. It was Ego-culture, in short.

Still in Berlin, another scandal reached her ears and Germaine de Staël opens the following chapter in a dramatic way:

Un matin, à huit heures, on m'éveilla pour me dire que le Prince Louis-Ferdinand était à cheval sous mes fenêtres, et me demandait de venir lui parler.<sup>54</sup>

The scandal in question is the assassination of Louis d'Enghien, member of the French royal family of Bourbon. However, the marker 'I' is scarcely used when Germaine exposes her rage against Napoleon for having Louis d'Enghien executed. This political pamphlet makes up the longest chapter in her travelogue from

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54. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, ed. Paul Gautier, p. 119; for the letter in full see pp. 393–401. Further down on the page Gautier provides, in note 2, the interesting information, which adds to the dramatic description Germaine gives of this particular morning, that Germaine used to receive the prince in the morning, for various not-so-pleasant reasons, which she reveals in a letter from Berlin on 1 April 1804 to her cousin: 'Croiriez-vous que ce séduisant prince Louis, qui a de l'esprit et une belle figure prussienne, a la parole toujours embarrassée après diner, et que je préfère avec soin de lui donner rendez-vous le matin? Et c'est le Lovelace allemand!' (Emphasis in the original.) 'Would you believe that this seductive Prince Louis, who has esprit and a beautiful Prussian face, always speaks in an embarrassing way after dinner, and that I prefer with care to give him rendez-vous in the morning? It is the German Lovelace!' (My translation.) See also de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 53. 'One morning I was awoken at eight o'clock and told that Prince Louis-Ferdinand was on a horseback under my window and wished me to come and speak to him.'

Germany! When the prince delivered this awful news to Mme de Staël, according to her, ‘the expression of his countenance was the presage of revenge or death’.<sup>55</sup> It may not be too hasty to assume that the expression on Louis’ face was a projection of Germaine de Staël’s own feelings.

The travelogue ends with an account of the sickness and death of M. Necker. Naturally this chapter is very personal and the marker of the first person pronoun is frequently used. Germaine de Staël is devastated by the news of her father’s death, but even in this section politics are at stake, because politics was an issue that joined them both. The chapter begins as follows:

Mon père eut encore le temps d'apprendre l'assassinat du duc d'Enghien, et les dernières lignes que j'ai reçues, tracées de sa main, expriment son indignation sur ce forfait.<sup>56</sup>

To conclude then, one might say that the section dealing with Germaine de Staël’s visit to Germany, in large part, if not for the most part, is preoccupied with French domestic politics and diatribes against Napoleon.

Perhaps that is the reason why we learn so little from the travelogue when it comes to the lively social life she led in Berlin. For instance, Mme de Staël does not mention in the book the encounter with Rahel Levin, who was her equal in many ways, and which made an impact on both. However it was rendered, as mentioned above, by a friend of Mme de Staël’s: Brinkman.

### *The encounter with Rahel Levin*

Neither of these women was blessed with physical beauty. [...] Yet both wielded extraordinary power through force of personality, mind, and word, were famous during their lifetime, and have remained so ever since. Their tremendous prestige is all the more curious insofar as both endured a painful marginalization. Rahel was doubly marginal by being

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55. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 54. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 120.

56. Mme de Staël, ‘Dix années d’exil’ [1810–1813], p. 106. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 58. ‘My father lived long enough to hear of the assassination of the Duke d’Enghien, and the last lines which I received that were traced by his own hand, expressed his indignation at this atrocity.’

Jewish and by defiantly discarding her heritage. Germaine, while born an insider, became an outsider through the enmity of Napoleon, who banished her from Paris and later from France altogether.<sup>57</sup>

Rahel Levin (1771–1833; Rahel Varnhagen after her marriage in 1814) had one of the most important salons in Berlin, and was known for her wit. It was thus Brinkman, the Swedish attaché in Berlin, who formerly worked at the Swedish embassy in Paris where he got to know Mme de Staël, who brought Madame de Staël and his friend Rahel Levin together by inviting them to a party.<sup>58</sup> And it is through Brinkman, thus a mutual friend, we learn about their encounter, which he describes as very successful. But Brinkman was mistaken about the success. He could not know that the day after the party, Rahel Levin noted down her own opinion about her encounter with Mme de Staël, which differed very much from Brinkman's impression of it.<sup>59</sup>

Now, as Lilian R. Furst points out in her article, Mme de Staël and Rahel Levin 'at first glance' give the impression of being very different.<sup>60</sup> The former belonged by birth to the wealthy and privileged, while the latter referred to her 'infamous birth' as a Jewess, an origin that Rahel sought to escape by assimilating the German culture.<sup>61</sup> Well, Mme de Staël would probably never have referred to her own origin that way; on the contrary, she considered herself to belong to the 'right' culture, as we have seen. Thus, Mme de Staël's and Rahel Levin's view of their respective positions in society was seemingly very different indeed, as were their explanations for their respective marginalizations. However, the

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57. Lilian R. Furst, 'The Salons of Germaine de Staël and Rahel Varnhagen', in *Cultural Interactions in the Romantic Age: Critical essays in comparative literature*, ed. Gregory Maertz (New York: State University of New York Press, Albany, 1998), pp. 95–103, quotation p. 97.

58. According to different sources Brinkman brought them together either at a dinner party given by Dorothea von Courland or at a soirée hosted by Brinkman himself, see Furst, 'The Salons of Germaine de Staël and Rahel Varnhagen', p. 101.

59. Brinkman's description is published in Haussenville, *Madame de Staël et l'Allemagne*, p. 176.

60. Furst, 'The Salons of Germaine de Staël and Rahel Varnhagen', p. 95.

61. Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, p. 174.

years between 1790s and 1806 (after 1806 the growing antisemitism was felt in the Prussian provinces) were exceptional in German history, acknowledging several *salons* hosted by Jewish women.<sup>62</sup> Solovieff, however, points to a difference at the core of what may seem to be a shared platform, namely, their salons. He shows that the nature of the two salons diverged in an important aspect: at Rahel Levin's salon (visited by the Humboldt brothers, Schleiermacher, Prince de Ligne, Gentz, Brinkman among others) 'one talks about everything except politics—in contrast to Mme de Staël's salon—because there were (as yet) no liberties to be defended.' (My translation.)<sup>63</sup> But on the other hand, both Rahel and Germaine, as *salonnières*, 'departed from norms more than they conformed to them [...] upholding the custom of female sovereignty.'<sup>64</sup> Solovieff also points out that the ideas of the French revolution had perhaps liberated the women (read 'feminists') in Germany more than in France, where 'authoritarian regimes did everything in order to suppress it [...] as in the case of Mme Roland, Olympe de Gouges and Mme de Staël.'<sup>65</sup> (My translation.)

However, Rahel Levin seems to have corresponded more to contemporary ideals of womanhood than Mme de Staël did. She regretted her lack of education in youth, but Solovieff draws the conclusion that this regret might have been a result of wanting to escape 'all accusations of lack of femininity'.<sup>66</sup> (My translation.) This was something Mme de Staël had had to suffer, as we have seen. As we have also seen, Mme de Staël expressed ambiguous opinions about normative prescriptions as to how a woman should be.

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62. In France, however, the tradition of salons hosted by women flourished already during the seventeenth century. Furst, 'The Salons of Germaine de Staël and Rahel Varnhagen', pp. 97–98. Hannah Arendt brings up in this connection Grattenauer's pamphlet 'Against the Jews' (where no distinction between assimilated Jews and 'caftaned Jews' is made) which spread antisemitism in Prussia and Berlin in the beginning of the nineteenth century. See Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, p. 148.

63. Georges Solovieff, *Rahel Varnhagen: Une révoltée féministe à l'époque romantique* (Paris & Montréal: L'Harmattan, 2000), p. 50. 'On y parle de tout sauf de politique—à l'opposé du salon de Mme de Staël—car il n'y avait pas (encore) de libertés à défendre.'

64. Furst, 'The Salons of Germaine de Staël and Rahel Varnhagen', p. 98.

65. Solovieff, *Rahel Varnhagen*, p. 10.

66. *Ibid.*, pp. 47; 49.



However, Mme de Staël could not free herself totally from the norm stipulating that women should live quietly and withdrawn in domestic life.

Now, both women seem however to have shared one physical feature: vivid dark eyes. However, a count by name of Salm (Josef or Hugo, both naturalists) gave the following portrait of Rahel, underlining the excellence of her conversation, which reminds us very much of what Mme de Staël's interlocutors have transmitted:

Ni grande ni belle, de constitution délicate, les traces de douleurs surmontées lui donnaient une expression très touchante. Son teint pur et frais, en harmonie avec ses yeux noirs et vifs, témoigne de la force saine de tout son être. [...] Cette femme indépendante, d'une esprit extraordinaire, intelligente comme le soleil, avec cela si bonne de cœur et en toute chose elle-même, comprend, ressent tout, et ce qu'elle dit sous forme de paradoxes amusants est souvent si juste et si profond que cela vous revient des années après et vous oblige à réfléchir et à vous étonner! Avec quelle grâce et liberté elle savait animer, éclairer, réchauffer. [...] Et que de choses ne disait-elle pas! Je me sentis comme dans un tourbillon et ne pouvais plus distinguer ce qui dans ses déclarations merveilleuses et inattendues était de l'esprit, de la profondeur, de la fantaisie, du génie, ou bien de la bizarrerie ou du caprice.<sup>67</sup>

It is in the physical description that Rahel seems to diverge the most from Mme de Staël (except for the eyes). Rahel emerges here as quite fragile and delicate, thus more feminine than Mme de Staël, who is

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67. Ibid., pp. 52–53. 'Not grand nor beautiful, of a delicate constitution, traces of sorrows that had been overcome gave her a touching expression. Her skin was pure and fresh, in harmony with her black vivid eyes, which show the sane force of her total being. [...] This independent woman, with an extraordinary esprit, intelligent like the sun, along with this so good-hearted and in all being herself, understands, feels everything, and what she says in the form of amusing paradoxes is often so just and so profound that it comes back to you years afterwards and forces you to think and to be astonished! With such grace and liberty she knows how to animate, elucidate, heat. [...] And what things she said! I felt like being in a whirlwind and could no longer distinguish what in her marvellous and unexpected declarations was out of esprit, profoundness, phantasy, genius or rather out of something bizarre or capricious.' (My translation.)

instead often described as quite stout. When it comes to the art of conversation and goodness of heart Rahel and Germaine seem to match each other nicely. I would suggest that Rahel's mastering of conversation hindered Mme de Staël from perceiving the differences between the two when they met, as she was so fascinated to have met her 'equal' in the genre. In a letter to Clemens Brentano (belonging to the Romantic movement in Germany) of 3 August 1813 Rahel gives her view of her role when mixing with society, which might shed light on why her encounter in 1804 with Mme de Staël failed:

J'aime infiniment la société depuis toujours et crois fermement être née pour cela, non sans vergogne, destinée et préparée que je suis pour cela par la nature. J'ai une infinie présence et rapidité d'esprit pour saisir, répondre, discuter; un grand sens pour les êtres et toutes sortes de circonstances; je comprends l'humour et la peine et aucun objet même saugrenu qui pourrait survenir ne m'est étranger. Je suis modeste, ne me livre que par la parole, peux garder le silence longtemps, aime tout ce qui est humain et *tolère* presque *tout* le monde.<sup>68</sup>  
(Emphasis in the original.)

Rahel seems rather self-assured when it comes to her talents as *salonnière*, and I would say that she had good grounds for that, as the portrait made above by count Salm confirms. But other descriptions also confirm her charms.<sup>69</sup> The most important properties Rahel underlines herself in the quotation, she shared with Mme de Staël: the quick intellect that grasps, answers and discusses to the enchantment of the interlocutors. However, other qualities that seem important to Rahel, such as the feeling for, and understanding of others, and—perhaps particularly—her modesty and her capacity for keeping silent for a long time are features not present to the same extent, it seems, in Mme de Staël's relations. I would suggest that

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68. Ibid., p. 50. 'I always loved society infinitely and I strongly believe I was born for that, not without shame, destined and prepared as I am for that by nature. I have an infinite presence and intellectual rapidity to grasp, answer, discuss; a grand feeling for human beings and all sorts of circumstances; I understand humour and pain and no subject even absurd which might come up is foreign to me. I am modest, I only leave myself to the word, may keep silence for a long time, love everything that is human and *tolerate* almost *all* people.' (My translation.)

69. For more examples see Solovieff, *Rahel Varnhagen*, pp. 49–50.

those qualities made Rahel Levin more feminine in other people's opinion, because they conformed to the norm stipulating women's behaviour. Now, Mme de Staël, in that sense, was thus more controversial. Also, it seems that Mme de Staël's lack of modesty, or rather perhaps femininity, was most annoying to Rahel Levin, who was a sharp critical observer of Madame de Staël and women of her type. She summarizes the problem of womanhood very neatly, and Mme de Staël's fear of not being regarded as sufficiently feminine:

Madame de Staël ne se défait jamais de cette peur que les femmes aux talents littéraires ne soient jamais considérées comme suffisamment féminines, ou que leurs oeuvres ne soient jamais placées aussi haut que celles des hommes.<sup>70</sup>

Hook-Demarle demonstrates that Rahel Levin would have refused to accept Madame de Staël's depiction of German women in *De l'Allemagne*, reacting to the kind of imagery with which Madame de Staël was to describe Duchess Louise. (*De l'Allemagne* was not published until 1813, while Rahel Levin's remarks date from Madame de Staël's visit to Berlin in 1804.)

At the time of their meeting Rahel was acquainted with Mme de Staël's *De l'influence des passions*, and therefore might have formed herself an image of the well-known author. Rahel was probably unknown to Mme de Staël, before she was introduced to her in Berlin. In that sense one might suggest, perhaps, that Rahel was better prepared when meeting Germaine.

Since Mme de Staël and Rahel Varnhagen looked very differently on their origin, in relation to the sociocultural norms dominating their respective countries, they also regarded the 'foreignness' of other cultures very differently when travelling. Rahel Levin belonged to the group of German Jewish intellectuals, well educated with highly intellectual interests, and fluent in French. She was the daughter of a prosperous jeweller, 'benefiting from the philosemitism

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70. Rahel Levin-Varnhagen, 9 January 1820, in Marie-Claire Hook-Demarle, 'Madame de Staël et les femmes allemandes, un malentendu positif', in *Cahiers Staëliens*, no. 25, 1984, Paris, pp. 9–40, for quotation see p. 31. 'Madame de Staël can never do away with the fear that women with literary talent will not be regarded as sufficiently feminine, or that their works will never be placed as high as those by men.' (My translation.)

of Frederic II of Prussia, but she was eventually confronted with the hostility of the bourgeoisie and the nobility'.<sup>71</sup> Arendt argues that Rahel felt rejected by society, i.e. by the 'socially acknowledged', who meant so much to her, being equated with the 'real' world.<sup>72</sup> As Kristeva points out, antisemitism emerged from its latency after 1810, when the new regime came into power. The Enlightenment notion of the universality of man that, despite its paradoxes, laid claim to equality, was in 1810 overshadowed by nationalism. However, in 1804 Berlin society may well have seemed familiar to Madame de Staël, since it showed a similarity to pre-revolutionary Paris.<sup>73</sup>

In that sense, Rahel Levin's inner otherness was of another kind than Mme de Staël's, since her 'native land had never been Prussia [...] but rather the protection and enlightened views of Frederick the Second'.<sup>74</sup> Hannah Arendt points here to Prussia not mentally being the native land of Rahel Levin. Thus, Rahel was living under a 'protector' occupying a territory that she otherwise did not regard as the land of her Ego-culture. But as we will see, Arendt's interpretation here might be slightly modified. To Mme de Staël things were the opposite. Napoleon, not representing Ego-culture for her, was nevertheless ruling the territory that in fact was her native land, which also coincided with her Ego-culture, although she politically did not belong to it, being denied French citizenship.

Now, Rahel Levin had another relation to 'foreignness' than Mme de Staël, seeking not to be reminded of her origin, whereas Mme de Staël, on the contrary, sought foreignness in order to confirm hers and make it remembered. Hannah Arendt interprets Rahel's drive to erase her Jewishness as follows, in connection with the latter's journey to Paris 1800:

In the opacity of foreign places all specific references to yourself are blurred. It is easy to conquer unhappiness when the general knowledge that you are unhappy is not there to disgrace you, when your unhappiness is not reflected by

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71. Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2001), p. 52.

72. Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, p. 220.

73. Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l'Allemagne*, pp. 164–171.

74. Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, p. 179.

innumerable mirrors, focussed upon you so that it strikes you again and again. [...] It is easy to forget yourself when the reason for all your unhappiness, your 'infamous birth,' is not recognized, not observed, not counted.

'Foreignness is good'; to submerge, to be no one, to have no name, nothing that serves as a reminder; [...].<sup>75</sup>

As we can see from this quotation, Germaine's intentions with travelling could not have been more different from Rahel's as interpreted by Arendt, as Germaine did not at all want to blur and make things be forgotten. Now, what happened during their encounter that made Rahel and Germaine form such different opinions about it?

From the outset Mme de Staël asked for Brinkman's opinion about Rahel Levin, questioning that a 'petite Berlinoise' could have enough esprit to match the Parisian standard. Brinkman describes their conversation:

Que pensez-vous de cette prétention? Une petite Berlinoise que ferait de l'effet dans les cercles de Paris! ... Trouvez-vous donc qu'elle a tant d'esprit?<sup>76</sup>

Now, apparently to Mme de Staël, Rahel was a Berliner, and she does not seem to perceive that Rahel represented the specific group of German Jewish intellectuals. Brinkman not only assured Mme de Staël that Rahel possessed a strong intellect, but also dared to 'compare' it with hers.<sup>77</sup> Excited by this, Mme de Staël asked to meet Rahel Levin, and Brinkman introduced them to each other at a soirée at the Swedish embassy. Mme de Staël immediately took Rahel aside to a sofa in the corner and they spent over an hour talking.<sup>78</sup> Afterwards Mme de Staël approached Brinkman and praised Rahel Levin, and he answered her by repeating the praise Rahel had given her after having read *De l'influence des passions*, only regretting that the author was not German, because if she had been

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75. Ibid., p. 138.

76. Solovieff, *Rahel Varnhagen*, p. 74. 'What do you think of that pretension? A little Berliner who would make an impact in the circles of Paris! ... Do you think that she has got that much esprit?' (My translation.)

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid..

she would have known everything. Mme de Staël consented to this statement, and asked Rahel to approach in order to, in her turn, praise her in front of Brinkman, whose account is given by Solovieff:

‘Elle est étonnante ... vous êtes bien heureux de posséder ici une amie pareille—vous m’écrirez ce qu’elle aura dit de moi.’ Bien avant, Madame, lui réplique-t-il, vous saurez ce qu’elle a dit de vous, depuis longtemps, après votre livre sur les Passions: ‘Voilà une femme dit-elle, qui *saurait tout* si elle était une *Allemande*; j’espère qu’elle le saura un jour, car malheureusement quelqu’un en philosophie doit *tout savoir* pour savoir vraiment *quelque chose*!’ ‘Mon Dieu, s’écria Mme de Staël, comme c’est vrai! Comme elle a raison; à cette époque j’étais bien loin de tout savoir”. Là-dessus elle fit un signe à Rahel de s’approcher. ‘Ecoutez, Mademoiselle, vous avez ici un ami qui sait vous apprécier à votre juste valeur, et si je restais ici, je crois que je serais jalouse de votre *supériorité*’—‘Vous, Madame? sourit Rahel; oh non, je vous aimerais tant et cela me rendra si *heureuse* que vous ne seriez jalouse que de *mon bonheur*, car qui pourrait jamais vous en inspirer un pareil?’<sup>79</sup> (Emphasis in the original.)

Now, Rahel’s comment on Mme de Staël’s *De l’influence des passions*, cited by Brinkman, shows indirectly that Rahel did indeed feel that she belonged to the German culture, when confronting Mme de Staël’s attempt at doing philosophy. That only illustrates the

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79. Ibid. “She is brilliant ... you are very happy to have a friend like that—you must write to me about the things she will say about me.” “Before that, Madame,” he answered her, “you shall know what she has said about you for a long time, after your book about Passions: ‘There! a woman’ says she, ‘who *would know everything* if she was *German*; I hope that she will be that one day, because unfortunately anyone in philosophy should *know everything* in order to really know *anything*!’” “My goodness,” exclaimed Mme de Staël, “how true that is! How she is right; at that time I was far from knowing everything.” Thereafter she gives a sign to Rahel to approach: “Listen, miss! You have here a friend that should appreciate you the way you deserve and I think that, if I stayed here I would be jealous of your *superiority*.” “You, Madame,” smiled Rahel; “oh non, I would love you so and that would make me so *happy* so you would be jealous only of *my happiness*, because who could ever inspire in you a thing like that.” (My translation; emphasis in the original.) For this account by Brinkman see also Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l’Allemagne*, pp. 175–6, and Furst, ‘The Salons of Germaine de Staël and Rahel Varnhagen’, pp. 101–102.

mechanism of Ego-culture, emerging in the *meeting* with the other. So, in relation to Mme de Staël, Rahel modelled herself as belonging to the German culture (if not to the Prussian), i.e. it emerged as her Ego-culture, and therefore she regretted that Mme de Staël did not belong to it. That is, *De l'influence des passions* would have been perfect if had been written by someone German.

In fact, Rahel Levin was devoted to Goethe, especially to his novel *Wilhelm Meister* (to which the characters Aurelia and Mignon refer here) a novel Mme de Staël criticized.<sup>80</sup> And as Arendt suggests, Goethe provided Rahel with a tradition to which she could connect:

Because she understood Goethe, and understood herself only through him, he almost served her as a substitute for tradition. She professed him as a religion, kept 'company' with him, let him introduce her to German history. He was 'eternally my guarantor that I do not merely live fearfully among fleeting ghosts, my superior master, my most compassionate friend; of him I know what hells he had looked into.' [...] She could refer to Aurelia and Mignon when she told about herself and her isolation. He had accompanied her from earliest youth to age: 'In short, I grew up with him, and after a thousand separations I always found him again; he never failed me.'<sup>81</sup>

Rahel seems to have projected her Ego-culture on the German culture, to which she only partly belonged, a fate she shared with other German Jews. In the end Rahel seemed to have acknowledged her origin, and thereby the person she really felt she was, something we will come back to. Now, Goethe's works were thus Ego-texts for Rahel, that is, they mediated the projected Ego-culture. Kristeva proposes that *Wilhelm Meister* was 'an important source of stimulation for getting rid of her originality to become "a human among humans," tantamount to being German, or rather a parvenu. Arendt suggests on this score that Goethe's role in the history of the Jewish people was to facilitate the Jews' entry into German culture under the guise of the cultivated Jew.'<sup>82</sup> So, seemingly, in order to

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80. Georges Solovieff, *L'Allemagne et Madame de Staël: En marge d'un 'evenement'* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1990), p. 116, note 42.

81. Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, p. 170.

82. Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, p. 64.

understand Rahel, one had to understand Goethe, which Mme de Staël only did to a certain extent. Paradoxically, Rahel only met Goethe twice, as a young girl in Karlsbad (1795) and as married woman (1815), because, according to Arendt, he was ‘the sole person whom she never wanted to know’.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps it is not too hasty to say that it was almost the other way around with Mme de Staël seeking out Goethe, but failing to understand his works in many important ways.

Now, in the conversation quoted above Mme de Staël is Alter, representing the Extra-culture, to Rahel, and vice versa. Obviously they were on speaking terms, and nothing in the exchange points to enmity between the two. On the contrary, Rahel’s exquisite reply to Mme de Staël when claiming that she would be jealous of her superiority if she stayed in Berlin, illustrates a touching courtesy: Mme de Staël’s jealousy would make Rahel so happy that she would only envy her happiness. Now, this exquisiteness might also be a result of Rahel Levin’s mastering the art of conversation, a skill, a cultural tool in Wertsch’s sense, which Mme de Staël, as we have seen, did not believe she could achieve outside Paris. In fact, the day after their meeting Rahel gave another account of her impression of Mme de Staël.

Rahel Levin noted with irony and anger how Madame de Staël argued without sensitivity, exaggerating the novelty of her ideas, and in fact not understanding much of other cultures.

Comme ces personnages voyagent [...], ces gens riches, ces dames de la société, ces femmes de lettres qui ne savent parler que français et ne veulent entendre partout que leur propre langue, La pauvre! elle n’a rien vu, rien entendu, rien compris, hormis ce que MM. Schlegel et Ancillon, et madame la princesse une telle ou madame la générale une telle et quelques maîtresses de maison plus ou moins sottes ont bien voulu lui dire. Et puis, elle ne sait pas voir. Elle vous fait caracoler, comme un escadron, ses trois idées nouvelles à travers les plus vieilles civilisations de l’Europe. N’a-t-elle pas honte! Est-ce

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83. Ibid., p. 229. See also Furst, ‘The Salons of Germaine de Staël and Rahel Varnhagen’, p. 101.



ainsi qu'on touche à de pareilles choses et ne faut-il-pas, pour le saisir, des outils intellectuels autrement neufs?'<sup>84</sup>

Unlike many others, Rahel Levin had not fallen for the charms of Madame de Staël. But why? Even Goethe and Schiller, who admittedly had taken to her, had praised Madame de Staël for her determination to understand and portray Germany.<sup>85</sup> It seems that in Rahel Levin, Madame de Staël met a new type of woman of whom she had no experience. Despite their shared interest in literature, they were not obviously on speaking terms, as Rahel Levin's notes show. Rahel seems to have distrusted Madame de Staël. Madame de Staël, meanwhile, failed to notice this, and praised Rahel Levin in front of Brinkman for her wit.

To Rahel Levin, Madame de Staël probably represented Extra-culture after all, i.e. was an Alter to her, in terms of intelligibility, for she herself spoke French, had lived in Paris, and knew the literature; but in terms of value, Madame de Staël even represented Non-culture to Rahel Levin. Madame de Staël apparently never mastered the cultural tool, in Wertsch's sense, of the exclusive salons of the German Jewish intellectuals. However, it seems to me, when reading Kristeva, that the two women had more in common than being *salonnières*, that is, more than purely intellectual dimensions were involved, which existentially may have been more important. Both were very occupied with securing 'a personal destiny' from a position of being inner others, that is, being part of what they considered, to some degree at least, to be the Ego-culture, but at the same time being excluded from it to a certain extent, in a perspective of gender

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84. Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l'Allemagne*, pp. 176–7. 'As those persons travel [...], those rich, those ladies of Society, those authors who cannot speak any other language than French and only want to hear their own language wherever they go. Poor thing! she has seen nothing, heard nothing, understood nothing apart from what M.M. Schlegel and Ancillon, madam the princess so and so or madame the general so and so and some more or less ignorant hostesses wanted to tell her. She makes her three new ideas turn somersaults, like a squadron of cavalry, through the oldest civilizations in Europe. She ought to be ashamed of herself! Is it in that way that one touches upon those questions and does it not require, in order to come to grips with it, newer intellectual instruments.' (My translation.)

85. Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l'Allemagne*, pp. 127–8.

and religion.<sup>86</sup> In other words, in 1804, living in a territory ruled by Alter (after all Frederick the Second was not Jewish although he was their ‘protector’) that is, by someone not representing the Ego-culture, made both Rahel Levin and Mme de Staël into inner others in some sense.<sup>87</sup> That said, they reacted very differently to their ‘foreignness’, as discussed above.<sup>88</sup> Rahel Levin’s experiences as a Jewess seeking a place in the public sphere might have been similar to Madame de Staël’s in the sense that they were both women, but they were very different in other respects. Being a Jewess in Prussia, even one converted to Christianity, at the beginning of the nineteenth century was probably more difficult than being a Swiss woman in France.

Rahel Levin might, in some aspect, have recognized herself in, or rather projected herself on, Madame de Staël, the Alter, but she was clearly unable to sympathize with her. Why? One reason might be that it would be a good ten years—and then only as Christian, aristocratic Friederike Varnhagen—before Rahel Levin would even begin to attain that position in society which Madame de Staël had when they met.<sup>89</sup> Perhaps it is not too rash to assume that in 1804 Rahel Levin already longed for a different life, and it rankled. Another aspect, similar to the previous one, might have been that Mme de Staël also had achieved fame as an author already in 1804, something that Rahel would only attain posthumously by way of her husband publishing her letters and diaries. Solovieff writes that Rahel proved, after the publication of *Corinne*, to be jealous of the success of the novel, and sought to diminish the glory of it. This was unlike Rahel, Solovieff concludes.<sup>90</sup> Lilian R. Furst also brings up Rahel Levin’s mixed feelings for Mme de Staël:

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86. Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, p. 53; for an analysis of Hannah Arendt’s biography of Rahel Varnhagen, see also pp. 48–69.

87. See Sonesson, ‘The Globalization of Ego and Alter’, pp. 153–173.

88. See Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, p. 57; Hannah Arendt, ‘Rahel Varnhagen’, in *Ord&Bild*, no. 2–3/2002, pp. 85–107. See also chapter 12, ‘Between pariah and parvenu’, in Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, pp. 237–259.

89. Hannah Arendt describes Rahel Levin’s struggle for social recognition as pariah becomes parvenue, see Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, pp. 237–249.

90. Solovieff, *Rahel Varnhagen*, p. 75.

Rahel's reactions to the French interlocutor were more muted and mixed. Her correspondence contains almost fifty references to Staël: she praises her *Considérations sur le principaux événements de la révolution française* (1789), but is mostly critical of *De l'Allemagne*, and thinks that she has misread Rousseau. Though discombobulated by Staël's whirlwind manner and want of repose, she nevertheless repeatedly expresses keen regret at her early death.<sup>91</sup>

However, what she seems to have found most objectionable was that Madame de Staël was French and aristocratic. Rahel Levin herself was a German patriot, in the sense that has been discussed above, and as a Jewess she most likely had experienced the hostility of the aristocracy, the class Madame de Staël represented, and equally the class she herself longed to join, finally succeeding with her marriage in 1814.<sup>92</sup> In fact, she expressed in a letter to her friend David Veit on 28 November 1795 how much she 'detested the social classes' and that she did not want to belong to anything other than the class of human beings, although she admitted, perhaps with regret, that one does belong to a class, after all.<sup>93</sup> Thus Madame de Staël represented an Extra-culture to Rahel Levin, and not only in the intellectual sphere.

What then of Madame de Staël in this encounter? It strikes me that Madame de Staël, in failing to understand Rahel Levin, was only partly in dialogue with her, deforming Rahel Levin's 'text' according to her own needs. Mme de Staël wanted only to see, it seems, the *salonnière* in Rahel, thus concentrating more perhaps on the form of the 'message' than its content. From Rahel Levin's description we learn that Madame de Staël always conversed on her terms, expecting others to adapt to her view of herself as French, the representative of French culture. This Rahel Levin was not prepared to do, unlike the German aristocracy perhaps. To Madame de Staël, Rahel Levin represented Extra-culture in terms of intelligibility—transforming information in accordance with French culture—but also in terms of value. This appraisal was not based on Rahel Levin herself, but on what Madame de Staël made of her in the interplay

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91. Furst, 'The Salons of Germaine de Staël and Rahel Varnhagen', p. 102.

92. Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, pp. 63–4.

93. Solovieff, *Rahel Varnhagen*, p. 49.

with her own self-creation as a French intellectual. Madame de Staël failed to grasp one of the most important aspects of Rahel Levin's personality, her Jewishness. But again, Rahel did not want to display her origin, which might to a certain degree explain why Mme de Staël did not perceive it. As we have seen, there were probably other reasons for Rahel Levin's ambiguous attitude towards Mme de Staël. In 1819 Rahel reflected upon her origin in the following way, interpreted by Arendt:

'Can one entirely get away from what one truly is; away, far away, like a feeble little ship driven far off on a vast ocean by wind and tempest! The one thing that in truth still concerns me personally, that has sunk deep into my heart and lies down at the bottom, dark and heavy as granite—that far down, I cannot see; I let it lie; like a poor worker who loses himself in the operations of life all week long and perhaps on Sunday can come close to its real essence.' That is the way it is for the person who is required to appear to be what she does not wish to be. She had at last rid herself of Rahel Levin, but she did not want to become Friederike Varnhagen, *née* Robert. The former was not socially acceptable; the latter could not summon up the resolution to make a fraudulent self-identification. For 'all my life I considered myself Rahel and nothing else.'<sup>94</sup> (Emphasis in the original.)

Now, Mme de Staël, although banished by Napoleon, probably never considered the idea of trying to be anyone else than Mme de Staël, born Necker, daughter of the former minister of finance Jacques Necker. On this point, perhaps, the most important difference between Mme de Staël's and Rahel's perception of themselves and of the world emerges.

#### *Mme de Staël and German Romanticism: conclusion*

In Berlin, Germaine de Staël also found Fichte, who, like Rahel, is not mentioned in the travelogue. Their meeting, as documented, illustrates well what Georges Solovieff brings up in his book on

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94. Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, pp. 246–247. In 1810 Rahel had taken the name Robert, as her brother Ludwig had done before her (and as all her brothers did when baptized). Four years later, when Rahel underwent baptism, she changed Rahel to Friederike, according to the customs. See Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, p. 175.

Germaine de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*, namely that she could only partly take in the philosophy of the German Romanticism.<sup>95</sup> For some reason Mme de Staël does not mention their encounter in her *Dix années d'exil*. However, their meeting is of such an illuminating nature for our inquiry, that it will briefly be brought up here to contribute to the making of the framework of the understanding of Germaine's conception of Germany. Mme de Staël asks Fichte to give her a presentation of 'your system' in a few minutes. Very quickly, however, she interrupts him with a comment that Baron Münchhausen obviously is a striking example of 'your system'.

'Maintenant, Monsieur Fichte, pouvez-vous me donner dans le moins de temps possible, par exemple en un quart d'heure, un aperçu rapide, une idée de votre système, de façon à me faire comprendre ce que vous entendez par *votre moi*, car je n'y vois absolument pas clair?' [...] Mais à peine avait-il parlé dix minutes, que Mme de Staël, qui l'écoutait avec la plus sérieuse attention, l'interrompit soudain d'un air ravi: 'Oh! cela suffit, Monsieur Fichte, cela suffit; voyage du baron Münchhausen est le commentaire le plus frappant de votre système'. Le visage de Fichte revêtit une expression tragique, et tous les auditeurs prirent l'air de gens qui assistent au cinquième acte d'un drame. Mme de Staël seule ne parut rien remarquer [...].<sup>96</sup> [Emphasis in the original].

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95. Solovieff, *L'Allemagne et Madame de Staël*. See also: 'De l'Allemagne is simultaneously an Enlightenment and a Romantic text, and that tension is no cause for regret, it is a magnificent source of pleasure for the reader.' Isbell, *The Birth of European Romanticism*, p. 219.

96. Lady Blennerhassett, *Madame de Staël et son temps (1766-1817)*, vol. III [1890] (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 2002), pp. 91-92. "'Now, Monsieur Fichte, could you give me in the shortest time possible, for example in one quarter of an hour, a quick survey, an idea of your system, in a way that I could understand what you mean with *your me*, because I can absolutely not see it clearly.'" [...] But he had hardly spoken for ten minutes, when Mme de Staël, who listened to him with the most serious attention, suddenly interrupted him with a delighted air: "Oh! That would be enough, Monsieur Fichte, that would be enough; I understand you perfectly. An adventure of Baron Münchhausen's travels is the most striking commentary on your system." Fichte's facial expression assumed a tragic look, and every listener took on an air of people present at the drama's fifth act. Only Mme de Staël seemed not to notice [...].' (My translation.) One would better mention here that the source of this quotation is not stated by Blennerhassett. However,

Fichte could never forgive, nor forget this episode, and Mme de Staël for her part admitted that Fichte remained more or less unintelligible to her.<sup>97</sup>

Now, according to Georges Solovieff when analysing *De l'Allemagne*, Germaine de Staël was generally unable to understand German Romanticism. Nor was she wholly enthusiastic about it. That could explain why Germaine de Staël only discusses one of Goethe's major novels in *De l'Allemagne: The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). And that due to its theme of passion.<sup>98</sup> And as we have seen in earlier discussions, Werther seems to have constituted a type for Mme de Staël in the meetings she had in Germany, and to which, paradoxically, Goethe could not live up. Now, concerning the author, Mme de Staël neglected important aspects of Goethe's works; thus irony, which was an essential element in the literature of Romanticism, is an example of what she failed to discuss.<sup>99</sup> The concept of irony played a central role in Romanticism, and it is essentially based on Friedrich Schlegel's interpretation of Fichte's division of the 'I' in an empirical (temporal) one and an absolute (eternal) one. Friedrich Schlegel meant that the irony-theme comes to its perfection in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1796), because the author's presence is felt throughout the text. This was something that Mme de Staël criticized the novel for.<sup>100</sup>

According to Solovieff, it was this notion of *Doppelgänger* in German Romanticism that Mme de Staël seemed to have found the hardest to come to grips with.<sup>101</sup> Why? She probably was well acquainted with the concept, since she had had access to the Schlegel

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Comtesse Jean de Pange uses Blennerhassett as a source when quoting this passage (with slight moderations) considering this meeting between Fichte and Mme de Staël adding: 'La rencontre de Mme de Staël avec Fichte a été spirituellement racontée par Lady Blennerhassett dans son livre auquel il faut toujours revenir.' (The encounter between Mme de Staël and Fichte have been wittily told by Lady Blennerhassett in her book to which it is always necessary to return.' (My translation.) Comtesse Jean de Pange, *Mme de Staël et la découverte de l'Allemagne* (Paris: Edgar Malfère, 1929), p. 56–57.

97. Blennerhassett, *Madame de Staël et son temps*, vol. III, p. 93. See also de Pange, *Mme de Staël et la découverte de l'Allemagne*, pp. 56–57.

98. Solovieff, *L'Allemagne et Madame de Staël*, p. 110.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 116, note 42.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

brothers' review *Athenäum*, which had been so important to early Romanticism, and therefore there is no obvious explanation to this problem. Solovieff points out that Mme de Staël grew up in a French Cartesian tradition that made it difficult for her to take in German metaphysics, about which she was ambivalent. And, Solovieff continues, in *De l'Allemagne* she underestimates the role metaphysics played in the German world-view.<sup>102</sup> Also Schiller, as discussed above, was of that opinion. In a letter to Goethe, written during Mme de Staël's visit to Weimar, Schiller recognizes her 'insurmountable aversion to idealist philosophy'.<sup>103</sup> Thus, there were shortcomings in Germaine de Staël's understanding of the German Romantic literature, and the reason for that might be the fact that she had not read all the central works. Furthermore, she did not read German before 1803. Solovieff mentions that she had not, for example, read Schelling.<sup>104</sup> Another explanation may be found in considering the question of whom Germaine de Staël had in mind when she wrote *De l'Allemagne*. Solovieff refers to Simone Balayé, who argues that Mme de Staël avoids the most advanced aspects of German Romanticism in order not to frighten French readers.<sup>105</sup> That assumption might be slightly modulated if we consider one of these potential contemporary French readers. Alexandre Soumet (1788–1845) underlined in his book *Les scrupules littéraires de Mme de Staël* [Literary Cautions of Mme de Staël] in 1814, the same year *De l'Allemagne* was (re)published in Paris, some lines Mme de Staël wrote, in the chapter on Schiller, saying that French drama was superior to all.<sup>106</sup> However Soumet, poet, dramatist and academician (Académie française, 1824–1845, seat 27), was himself an admirer of Schiller.<sup>107</sup> And as such Soumet criticizes Mme de Staël for insufficient analyses of Schiller's drama *Marie Stuart*, and perhaps also for not sufficiently appreciating it.<sup>108</sup> Thus, Soumet wrote the following—perhaps with

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102. Ibid., p. 126; 128.

103. Lenormant, Coppet et Weimar, p. 41.

104. Solovieff, *L'Allemagne et Madame de Staël*, p. 27.

105. Ibid., p. 109, note 2.

106. de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', p. 248.

107. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandre\\_Soumet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandre_Soumet);  
[http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandre\\_Soumet#.C5.92uvres\\_diverses](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandre_Soumet#.C5.92uvres_diverses).

108. Alexandre Soumet, *Les scrupules littéraires de Mme de la baronne de Staël* (Paris: Delaunay, 1814), pp. 37–39.

some irony, considering the title of the book—pointing out what he seemed to have lacked in *De l'Allemagne*, namely a discussion of (German) Romanticism:

Madame de Staël n'a point oublié que les Français considéraient le théâtre comme leur domaine exclusif, et c'est surtout, en abordant les questions dramatiques, qu'elle semble craindre de blesser notre susceptibilité littéraire. Un critique a déjà fait observer que l'expression de *genre romantique*, cette expression si orgueilleuse de se reproduire sans cesse dans les ouvrages de M. Slegchel et Sismondi, ne se montre qu'une seule fois dans le livre *de l'Allemagne*, et semble y demander grâce pour sa nouveauté.<sup>109</sup> (Emphasis in the original.)

In connection with the question of who the implied reader was of *De l'Allemagne*, the presumption that the work on Germany was mainly addressed to the French contemporary reader is supported by Germaine de Staël's own words. She ends her vast work on the German genius with the following exaltation of France as the land of glory and love, with a potential to be the masters of the world—if only the right spirit could win:

O France! terre de gloire et d'amour! si l'enthousiasme un jour s'éteignoit sur votre sol, si le calcul dispoit de tout, et que le raisonnement seul inspirât même le mépris des périls, à quoi vous serviroient votre beau ciel, vos esprits si brillans, votre nature si féconde? Une intelligence active, une impétuosité savante vous rendroient les maîtres du monde; mais vous n'y

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109. Ibid., p. 27. 'Madame de Staël has not forgotten that the French viewed the theatre as their exclusive domain, and it is especially when she approaches questions concerning drama that she seems to be afraid of wounding our literary susceptibility. One critic has already observed that the expression *romantic genre*, this so proud an expression which is constantly rendered in the works of M. Slegchel and Sismondi, only shows up once in the book *de l'Allemagne*, and there it seems to ask for mercy for its novelty.' (My translation.) The quoted lines are most probably a commentary on what Mme de Staël writes in *De l'Allemagne* about the superiority of the dramatic tradition in France, when rendering a meeting with Schiller. See de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', ch. IX, p. 248.



laisseriez que la trace des torrens de sable, terribles comme les flots, arides comme le désert!<sup>110</sup>

In a note to this phrase quoted above, Germaine de Staël informs the reader that it was these lines that had upset the police the most regarding the book, and she adds that it seemed to her that it could hardly have displeased the French. What does she mean by the French? Well, the French of her Ego-culture, i.e. the France before Napoleon. The opening lines of the quotation seem to meet all the expectations of an Ego-text, the glorification of the home country being the main theme in an uncontroversial manner, i.e. being in accordance with the master narrative, in Wertsch's sense, of France. However, Mme de Staël appears to use this cultural tool in a rhetorical way, that is, breaking it in order to create a new meaning.<sup>111</sup> The glory of the home country suddenly seems more to be a potential, something that could be, if it had not been for the actual state of things, that is, war and its terrible consequences. Thus, Mme de Staël seems to hint: had it not been for Napoleon and his wars, France, through intelligence and wit, would have ruled the world. And finally then, how did she consider the Germans? To summarize: Mme de Staël understood and valued German Romantic culture only partly. Expressed in cultural semiotical terms one could say that Germany was the Extra-culture in relation to her model of the Ego-culture.

Soumet, paradoxically, being part of the elite culture in Napoleon's France, criticized Mme de Staël for not discussing German literature in the way it deserved and in the opening pages of

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110. de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', p. 546. 'Oh France! earth of glory and love! if enthusiasm one day embraced your soil, if calculation decided everything, and reason only inspired even the contempt for danger, to what would your beautiful sky serve, your brilliant minds, your nature so rich? An active intelligence, a trained vehemence would make you the masters of the world; but you only leave traces of torrents of sand, terrible as floods, arid as the desert.' (My translation.) In a note to this phrase further down on the page Germaine de Staël explains that 'This last phrase is the one that had most excited the indignation of the police against my book; it seems to me, though, that it could not have displeased the French.'

111. For this meaning of rhetoric within semiotics see Göran Sonesson, 'La rhétorique du monde de la vie', in *Modo dell'immagine*, Acts of Fifth Congress of the International Association for Visual Semiotics, Sienna, ed. Pierluigi Basso (Bologna: Esculapio, 1998), pp. 93–112.

his book, mentioned above, he puts the question, or rather he ‘dares to affirm’ that Mme de Staël’s book on Germany ‘would not have looked the same if it had not been written for French readers’:

J’ose affirmer que son livre ne serait pas exactement le même, s’il n’avait pas été composé pour être lu par des Français.<sup>112</sup>

Apparently, Schiller’s work was regarded as Extra-texts by the French elite culture. Soumet’s critique of Mme de Staël’s *De l’Allemagne* is intriguing and it raises the question why she discussed Schiller the way she did. There was seemingly nothing political that would have prevented her from praising Schiller, as he was acknowledged in France. Perhaps Soumet had a point in asking whether it was lack of courage that prevented Mme de Staël from writing against a ‘literary prejudice’, but he continues ‘that courageous pen with which she so often has pursued the inclinations of egoism in man and the despotism of tyrants’.<sup>113</sup> Thus, cowardice may perhaps not explain it all.

In line with what has been argued above, the Ego-culture which Mme de Staël defended was not Napoleonic France. Mme de Staël’s Ego-culture, her platform when criticizing that other France, seems to have been a model of a more ‘true’ and ‘pure’ France. Soumet is probably right when claiming that *De l’Allemagne* was meant for the French reader, but that the French reader was perhaps more specific than that, i.e. primarily the implied reader belonged to Mme de Staël’s Ego-culture and only secondly to contemporary France. This may also explain why she only partly could esteem and understand the German culture: her major concern was the dialogue with the French. And it may also explain why Napoleon disliked *De l’Allemagne* to such a degree. But also, Soumet perhaps did not grasp Mme de Staël’s intentions with the text, i.e. the cultural tool she used when writing it, and therefore could not understand why Mme de Staël did not thoroughly discuss German literature on its own premisses. There was seemingly no major political obstacle in Napoleonic France that would prevent her from doing that, especially if one considers that F. Schlegel, together with his wife Dorothea (among

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112. Soumet, *Les scrupules littéraires de Mme de la baronne de Staël*, p.4. (My translation.)

113. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

other things, translator of *Corinne* and collaborator at *Athenäum*), moved to Paris in 1802, after F. Schlegel's novel *Lucinde* had caused a scandal for being immoral, and his career at Jena failed. Napoleon used to invite artists and scholars, as Solovieff writes in connection with the Schlegels moving to Paris, and they hoped to be able to 'propagate for German literature, to create an Academy and to publish a journal, *Europa*'.<sup>114</sup>

Germaine de Staël's journey in Germany was, as I mentioned above, brutally disrupted by the news that reached her, on her way to Vienna, of her father's death at Coppet. Not until several years later would she complete her study of Germany by going to Austria a second time in the winter 1807–1808. There is no clear answer to the question why Germaine de Staël did not write about her sojourn in Vienna in *Dix années d'exil*. Lenormant, with the support of some letters Mme de Staël sent from Vienna to Duchess Louise of Weimar and her intimate friend Juliette Récamier, comes to the conclusion that she disliked both the political system and the social customs. However, it is interesting to note that Germaine de Staël gives two accounts of how she perceived social life in Vienna. In a letter to Duchess Louise she seems happy over the way she was received by the court at a time of fêtes, on the other hand she exclaims to Juliette Récamier in another letter: 'Lucky is the one that has not seen foreign countries when they have their feasts.'<sup>115</sup> (My translation.) This points to the complexity of using letters as source material. A lesson one can learn from this example is that the focus, when interpreting the letters, has to be placed on the *relation* between the intended receiver and the sender in order to fully grasp the meaning of an exchange. Perhaps then, on the basis of this example, one could argue that Germaine de Staël was more sensitive regarding her connection to France when writing to Juliette Récamier than when writing to Duchess Louise of Weimar. My assumption is that it was France that mattered the most to Mme de Staël, in *all* her relations, to a greater or lesser degree, depending on situations and locations.

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114. Solovieff, *Rahel Varnhagen*, p. 27.

115. Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, p. 129; for Mme de Staël's dislike of the system see p. 135; for quoted examples from Mme de Staël's correspondence used in the book see letters sent to Duchess Louise (Vienna, 19 January 1808) pp. 115–120; and to Mme Récamier (Vienna, January 1808) see pp. 128–129.

She wrote to her cousin Mme Necker-de Saussure, from Weimar on 11 January 1804, on the subject of Goethe, Schiller and German art in general: ‘I always find our art superior, but I like to understand the motives behind this superiority.’<sup>116</sup> (My translation from French.) Well, in this she describes in a nutshell what we here call Ego-culture, the type and analytical tool developed in cultural semiotics in order to be able to analyse the model one culture makes of itself in relation to the other, whether it be Extra-culture or Non-culture. Germany in its essence appears as the Extra-culture from Mme de Staël’s point of view, in the sense that she is on speaking terms with her peers in the German cultural elite and values them, although they do not live up to all her ideals stemming from the Ego-culture, the Parisian salon of her youth.

*The second journey to Germany: Vienna 1807–8*

Ainsi, pour Mme de Staël, à dater de *Corinne*, l’Europe entière la couronna sous ce nom.<sup>117</sup>

Coppet finit-il par se faire aimer de vous, après que vous l’avez tant fait aimer aux autres? Il n’est bruit que des enchantements que vous avez su y transporter. Mais qu’est-ce que tout cela, je le crains, pour apaiser tout ce qui se remue au fond du cœur que fit *Corinne*! [...].<sup>118</sup>

In December in 1807 Germaine de Staël left Coppet for Vienna, and her second trip to Germany. In the above quotation, Camille Jordan puts the finger on a puzzle, why was Coppet never enough to Germaine de Staël? Apparently the castle and the life there were

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116. Letter sent by Mme de Staël from Weimar on 11 January 1804 to Mme Necker-de Saussure, see de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, V:1, p. 188. ‘Je trouve notre art toujours supérieur, mais j’aime à voir le motifs de cette supériorité.’

117. M. Sainte-Beuve quoted in Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, p. 82.

118. Blennerhassett, *Madame de Staël et son temps*, vol. III, pp. 244–245. Letter sent from Camille Jordan from Lyon on 10 September 1807, to Mme de Staël. ‘May Coppet end up by being loved by you, after you have made so much making it loved by others? There are no sounds there apart from the ones coming from the enchantments you have been able to bring. But what is all that, I’m afraid, to soothe all that moves at the bottom of the heart that is *Corinne*’s! [...].’ (My translation.)

lovely, as were the surroundings. Perhaps Mme de Staël gives the best answer herself to that question. She had a need for changes:

J'ai un besoin de variété et une crainte du changement qui me rend à peu près le bonheur impossible partout ailleurs que dans cette ville qui change toujours et reste toujours la même.<sup>119</sup>

In the description of what most probably is Paris, Germaine de Staël gives an illuminating example of how the Ego-culture, i.e. Paris to Mme de Staël, works according to the classic theory in cultural semiotics developed by the Tartu school. For example, every artefact coming from outside the culture considered as one's own can only be apprehended and valued after being transformed to fit the norms and *canon*, ruling in the Ego-culture. Thus, artefacts can be said to be deformed in one or another way according to the needs of the Ego-culture, a notion which is to be understood as an analytical tool in order to define the culture, and its set of rules, having the position of being the centre, i.e. the point of departure, in a relation to another. Mme de Staël's Ego-culture (Paris in the narrow sense), when travelling through Europe, emerges neatly in her writings. When considering and describing people, literature, theatre and so forth, her point of departure is *almost* always the Parisian culture which she perceives as hers.

Now, the Ego-culture can thus in one sense be perceived as always being the same, at the same time as it changes, often unnoticed, by taking in artefacts coming from outside, which are thereby deformed. Thus, norms, or rather the system of norms, set out possibilities and

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119. de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, vol. VI, ed. Béatrice W. Jasinski (Paris: Pauvert, 1993), p. 341, see also footnote 14 on page 342 explaining what city Mme de Staël probably alludes to in her letter. 'I need variety and I fear change, which makes happiness almost impossible everywhere except for that city which changes all the time and stays all the time the same.' (My translation.) Letter sent from Mme de Staël in Berne to Friederike Brun on 6 December 1807. The letter is also partly published in *Madame de Staël et son temps*, vol. III, p. 246, but there the original dating 'ce 6 Xbre' has been wrongly interpreted as 6 October 1808. A misinterpretation that Béatrice W. Jasinski (see note 2 on the same page 341 as referred to above) credits P. Kohler for having observed and adjusted in his book, *Madame de Staël et la Suisse*, note 2, p. 479.

limits for what can be comprehended in the Ego-culture, i.e. it guarantees stability at the same time as it makes change possible.

Now, although Germaine de Staël did not write about her visit to Vienna in *Dix années d'exil* I have chosen to bring it up, albeit only parenthetically, for several reasons. One is that it might be considered as a continuation of her first trip to Germany, another is that research has shown that she made some very important acquaintances during her stay there, which provides important and useful information for interpreting her next major journey, only this time rendered in her autobiography: the one to Russia, via the Habsburg empire, in 1812.<sup>120</sup>

In his book on Germaine de Staël's relation to the young Austrian count Maurice O'Donnell, whom she had met for a few days in Venice in 1805 and taken a liking to, Jean Mistler provides valuable information concerning how Germaine de Staël was perceived in Europe at that time, as well as how she perceived things from her point of view when frequenting the salons of Vienna. Early on in Mistler's book, when reading one of Germaine de Staël's letters to O'Donnell, one understands that she was not all that firm, at this moment, in her decision to go to Vienna. Or rather, her objective had perhaps become more complex, i.e. more personal? Mme de Staël wrote to O'Donnell:

‘[...] je me borne donc à vous dire mille amitiés, et vous demande de m'écrire vite et souvent jusqu'au 20 novembre, jour où je partirai pour l'Allemagne ou l'Italie selon que les événements et vos lettres me décideront.’<sup>121</sup>

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120. Officially she was going to Austria in order to let her children study German, Ullrichová, *Lettres de Madame de Staël conservées en Bohême*, p. 17. Apparently this is also what Napoleon thought that Mme de Staël was doing, saying to Auguste de Staël that it was a good thing that she was in Vienna, ‘elle va apprendre l'allemand.’ See Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, p. 122.

121. Jean Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1926), p. 22. Letter sent by Mme de Staël from Coppet on 3 October 1807 to Maurice O'Donnell. ‘I restrict myself thus to express my respects, and ask you to write to me quickly and often right up to 20 November, the day I'll go to Germany or Italy according to what the circumstances and your letters make me decide.’ (My translation.)

Before deciding to go to Vienna Germaine de Staël wanted to make sure that people she knew would be in town. She counted on meeting Prince de Ligne (they already knew each other through their respective works), but she also very much wanted to see O'Donnell again. In fact, Maria Ullrichová in later research unhesitatingly states that Mme de Staël's essential motive in going to Vienna was to see O'Donnell, who was by profession an officer in the Austrian army, and to whom she was very attracted.<sup>122</sup> Now, one and a half months later, she wrote again to O'Donnell stressing that she is sure to have a good time in Vienna, if only those interested in her would show her some benevolence. Implicitly, thus, she seems to ask to be reassured about social matters before making her decision where to go.<sup>123</sup> Later in the letter she tells O'Donnell that the question of having permission from Napoleon to leave (a fact customary at the time) was already settled, and not without delight, it seems; she adds:

[...] il [Napoleon] me l'a fait donner en ajoutant même que son intention était que ses ambassadeurs fussent très bien pour moi, ainsi que la prudence est en règle (ceci entre nous).<sup>124</sup>

Paradoxically, one of the encounters Mme de Staël had during her stay in Habsburg proved to be of the utmost political imprudence, and in her case, at least, this was fatal. In Teplitz, a well-known watering-place, or rather perhaps hydro, in Bohemia, where Mme de Staël arrived late in May 1808, she met Friederich von Gentz, among other ardent antagonists to Napoleon. (She left Vienna on 22 May for Prague.)<sup>125</sup>

At that time she could not know how fatal this encounter would be to her relation to Napoleon; in fact, it caused a rupture between the

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122. Ullrichová, *Lettres de Madame de Staël conservées en Bohème*, p. 17.

123. For Prince de Ligne's readings of Mme de Staël see Ullrichová, *Lettres de Madame de Staël conservées en Bohème*, p. 16.

124. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 24. Letter sent by Mme de Staël from Coppet on 17 October 1807 to Maurice O'Donnell. '[...] he [Napoleon] had it given to me adding that his aim was to see to that his ambassadors would treat me well, thus that prudence is the rule (this between us).' (My translation.)

125. *Ibid.*, p. 58. Her route back to Coppet went mainly through Prague, Teplitz, Dresden, Weimar, Frankfurt and Basel. Gentz was also a close and lifelong friend of Rahel Varnhagen's, see Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, pp. 144–160.

two. But first, Gentz (German publicist and politician), at this time, was of the opinion that British constitutionalism was the best resistance against the ideas of the French revolution, which he had initially welcomed. His growing antipathy against France made his writings incompatible with the politics of neutrality that Prussia conducted and in 1802 he moved to Vienna. As a publicist he also represented English interests, being economically supported by the English government, primarily in repudiating Napoleon's politics of war. After 1809 Gentz attached himself closer to Metternich, whom Mme de Staël also met, as mentioned above, in Teplitz.<sup>126</sup>

Gentz, according to Mistler, came into his own, not surprisingly, considering his political stance at the time of their meeting, in Mme de Staël's company. That Gentz, at this moment, knew all about Jacques Necker, and was a friend of Brinkman's must have been of great help when he initiated the relationship.<sup>127</sup> And Mme de Staël for her part forgot that enemies of Napoleon also became enemies of France.<sup>128</sup> However, Mme de Staël's notion of France was different depending on what time she referred to: the France of Napoleon was not her France. To her, then, there was no contradiction in hating Napoleon and loving France. On 28 June, 1808, once informed of their meeting, Napoleon wrote on that very same day a letter to his minister of police, Fouché, ordering him and all foreign agents to control and spy upon Madame de Staël wherever she went: to him, her connection with Gentz meant more or less treason.

Mme de Staël a une correspondance suivie avec le nommé Gentz, et s'est laissée engager avec la clique et les tripoteurs de Londres. Je désire qu'elle soit surveillée à Coppet, et que vous fassiez donner des ordres en conséquence au préfet de Genève et au commandant de la gendarmerie. Cette liaison avec cet individu ne peut être qu'au détriment de la France. Vous ferez connaître que jusqu'à cette heure on ne l'avait regardée que comme une folle, mais qu'aujourd'hui elle commence à entrer dans une coterie contraire à la tranquillité publique. J'ai

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126. *Svensk uppslagsbok*, vol. 11 (Malmö: Förlagshuset Norden AB, 1949), pp. 487–488.

127. Maria Ullrichová, 'Mme de Staël et Frédéric Gentz', in *Madame de Staël et l'Europe* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1970), p. 81.

128. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 153.



ordonné également au ministre des Relations extérieures de faire connaître cela à tous mes agents dans les cours étrangères, et de la faire surveiller dans tous les lieux où elle passera.<sup>129</sup>

This passage shows that for Napoleon, France as a country could not be separated from Napoleon, its emperor. To him, Mme de Staël in terms of esteem is Non-culture, starting off as a crazy woman ('une folle') but ending as an enemy. What Sonesson has pointed out in this connection is that a basic criterion for the Non-culture would rather be that it is the one that makes war against us.<sup>130</sup> Clearly, Napoleon does not want any dialogue with Mme de Staël; on the other hand, she wants him to respond to her acts, because she is depending on him for several reasons, for instance, she wants him to put an end to her exile. In that sense, Napoleon represents Extra-culture (Mme de Staël still wants to live in 'his' capital) and therefore he is Alter, someone Mme de Staël expects and wants an answer from. Now, returning to Mme de Staël's relation to Gentz, it is interesting to note Gentz's opening impression of Mme de Staël that reveals an ambiguity. He wrote in a letter to his friend Adam Müller on 29 May (1808), the day after their first meeting:

J'ai eu peur des éclairs, du jaillissement de son esprit, ce genre que je n'aime pas comme vous le savez. Au contraire je la trouvais très à l'aise et très carrément grande, engageante à la conversation comme encore aucune femme dans le monde—

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129. Ullrichová, *Lettres de Madame de Staël conservées en Bohême*, p. 24. See also Gautier, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon*, p. 182. 'Mme de Staël has a continuous correspondence with the man called Gentz, and she has let herself be absorbed by the coterie and the swindlers of London. I want her to be under surveillance at Coppet, and that you give the orders accordingly to the préfet of Geneva and to the commander of the police. This relation with this individual cannot be anything but a detriment to France. You will make this circulate that up until this hour she has only been regarded as a fool, but from today on she is beginning to join a coterie opposed to public tranquillity. I have likewise given the order to the foreign minister to spread this to all my agents in the foreign courts, and to have her watched in all the places that she might pass.' (My translation.)

130. Sonesson made this point clear to me when commenting on my text.

on a l'impression qu'on pourrait parler éternellement avec elle.<sup>131</sup>

In the first line Gentz expresses the fear of Mme de Staël's art of conversation, which he had before meeting her, but then he discovered its charms. In fact, Gentz's initial fear resembles that which both Goethe and Schiller felt before meeting her. And like Gentz, Schiller, at least, ended up being enchanted by talking to Mme de Staël. However, some years later Gentz's opinion of her had completely turned to its opposite, as he became more conservative. Gentz, when speaking about Mme de Staël for the last time, expressed his dislike of *Dix années d'exil*.<sup>132</sup> In a letter sent from Baden to his friend Pilat in 1820 he wrote about her madness, which irritated him just as much as Bonaparte's tyranny:

'Je lis entr'autres les *Dix années d'exil* de Mme de Staël, et je me fâche dix fois plus contre sa folie inguérissable que contre la tyrannie de Bonaparte. Il a eu proprement dit tout à fait raison contre cette femme ...'.<sup>133</sup>

As Ullrichová observes: Gentz, the worst enemy of Napoleon, had turned into his ally regarding Mme de Staël.<sup>134</sup> Perhaps Gentz had also, at this time, been influenced by Metternich, who shared Napoleon's dislike of educated women.<sup>135</sup> In line with this opinion, Metternich in a letter in 1819, had condescendingly called Mme de Staël an 'amazone'.<sup>136</sup> Paradoxically, these two men had had an exchange of letters in 1803 concerning *Delphine*, which Gentz liked very much, in contrast, as it appears, to Metternich, who was at the

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131. Ullrichová, 'Mme de Staël et Frédéric Gentz', p. 86. 'I fear the lighting flashes, the outpouring of her esprit, this type of things that I do not like, as you know. On the contrary I found her very easy and resolutely very noble, charming in her conversations like no other woman in the world—one has the impression that one could talk for an eternity with her.' (My translation.)

132. Ibid., p. 90.

133. Ibid., p. 91. 'I read among other things *Dix années d'exil* by Mme de Staël, and I get ten times more upset by her incurable madness than by the tyranny of Bonaparte. He was in fact completely right regarding this woman...'. (My translation.)

134. Ibid., p. 91.

135. Ullrichová, *Lettres de Madame de Staël conservées en Bohème*, p. 88.

136. Ullrichová, 'Mme de Staël et Frédéric Gentz', p. 84.

time chancellor in Vienna.<sup>137</sup> The same ambiguity, the blend of fear and fascination, which Gentz expressed regarding Mme de Staël's wit and art of conversation comes forth also in many accounts made by members of Viennese society who met Mme de Staël.

Now, the consequence of Mme de Staël's relation to Gentz, that is, the surveillance of her, ordered by Napoleon, was to become very painful to her. It became obvious to her once she returned to Coppet and throughout her grand tour in 1812.<sup>138</sup> However, as the documents published by Ullrichová show, Mme de Staël was under surveillance by the Austrian police already during her stay in 1807–1808, as she was during her second visit to Habsburg in 1812.<sup>139</sup> In 1807–1808 the Austrian police was not sure of the aim that Mme de Staël had with her visit. There was even a suspicion, faulty as we know, that she could have been sent out by Napoleon.<sup>140</sup> During the time, between her arrival in Vienna at the end of December 1807 and her departure approximately five months later, however, she was also under surveillance—but this time by members of the society that she frequented in Vienna, and this time more out of curiosity and fascination than out of hostility.<sup>141</sup> In Mistler's book we can follow

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137. However, Gentz did not approve of *Corinne*, which he generally found bad as a novel. Ullrichová, 'Mme de Staël et Frédéric Gentz', pp. 83–84.

138. The prefect of Geneva reported on 12 November 1811 that Mme de Staël's isolation in Coppet was still augmenting. The banishment of Schlegel, the exile of Matthieu de Montmorency, for making excursion with Mme de Staël, and of Madame de Récamier, for visiting her for one day in Coppet, was of course a very hard blow to her. See Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, pp. 277–278. In fact, the second part of *Dix années d'exil* begins with an account of the circumstances of the withdrawal of *De l'Allemagne* in 1810, and for those concerning the banishment of Montmorency and Mme Récamier. A whole chapter (no. III) is devoted to the excursion Mme de Staël made with Montmorency in Switzerland. Obviously, the misfortunes of her friends made Mme de Staël suffer a great deal, which is reflected in her text, by words and by the amount of pages dedicated to the story. See Madame de Staël, 'Dix années d'exil' [1810–1813], pp. 165–176; de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, pp. 95–100. But also, her friend Claude-Ignace de Barante (the father of Prosper de Barante) was removed in 1810 from his office as prefect of Léman, a position he had had since 1803, for being too benevolent to Mme de Staël. See Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', pp. 31–47, see esp. p. 39.

139. Ullrichová, *Lettres de Madame de Staël conservées en Bohême*, pp. 106–156, documented reports from the police in Prague (1808) and Brno (1812).

140. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 36.

141. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

many of these interesting observations noted down in different ways.<sup>142</sup>

During the first days of her visit, noted down by Loulou von Thurheim in her memoirs, Mme de Staël received in her salon Maurice O'Donnell, the young Russian Uvarov, attached to the Russian embassy, and Prince de Ligne.<sup>143</sup> Uvarov was a close friend of O'Donnell, and an admirer of Mme de Staël. Later on this friendship made Mme de Staël break with Uvarov, since she thought that he had, from her point of view, a bad influence on O'Donnell, or rather on her relationship with O'Donnell. However, Uvarov's version of Mme de Staël is important here. Not only does it shed light on the cultural aspects coming into play in their relationship, but it also shows more personal sides of Germaine de Staël.

But first, Germaine de Staël's worries about how she would be received in Vienna were soon calmed: Mme de Staël arrived as a true celebrity and was talked about accordingly. But people were not wholly benevolent. Her physical appearance was put in focus in a cruel way and, according to Mislter, all were of the opinion that she was ugly. But as I have shown elsewhere, an explanation for this might be that people expected to meet Corinne. Instead they met Mme de Staël.<sup>144</sup> In the same way as Goethe could not live up the Werther-type Mme de Staël had constructed of the German man, Mme de Staël could not meet the demands, although she perhaps tried, of others expecting her to be, or rather to look like, Corinne. In other words, the Corinne-type (incarnating beauty and wit) that she and others, accordingly, had created of her worked as a *stereotype*. In this case one might say that the Corinne-type became, in the connection with its author in real life, an image of French female beauty and charm. In other words, the notion of stereotype stipulates types that are shared and used *by both parties* involved in the dialogue. Mme de Staël tried and wanted to match the image (or type) others expected and wished from her.

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142. Ibid.

143. Ibid., p. 31. Or Lulu von Thurheim, as her name is spelled in Georges Solovieff, 'Madame de Staël vue par la comtesse Lulu von Thurheim', in *Cahiers Staëliens*, no. 41, 1990, Paris, pp. 73–80.

144. Rédei, "Jagets" representationer i text och bild'.

Be that as it may, in this case Mme de Staël was blamed for being unrealistic regarding her looks. Loulou von Thurheim, essentially fond of Mme de Staël, was surprised to note that Germaine de Staël, being so witty, seemed to have such illusions concerning her physical appearance.<sup>145</sup> One evening at Princess Lichtenstein's, as recalled by Thurheim, when death was the subject of their conversation, Mme de Staël exclaimed, with a tremulous voice:

Ah! quand je pense qu'il me faudra mourir, et que ses bras, cette poitrine seront la proie d'ignobles reptiles (sic).<sup>146</sup>  
(Commentary in the original.)

Charles Zinzendorf, who notoriously wrote down his observations of Mme de Staël in his diary, less sympathetic perhaps towards her than Loulou von Thurheim was, wrote on this subject on 16 January (1808) that Germaine de Staël disgusted her with her appearance.

Elle [Mme de Staël] est si malpropre, elle mâchait quelque chose, tout cela me déplut.<sup>147</sup>

The reason for dwelling on the subject of Mme de Staël's physical appearance in the eyes of others is that it reveals something typical, so it seems, of her character: that of idealizing, of making models of herself. Perhaps it is not too hasty to say that Mme de Staël, as a woman, created Corinne to be the model of herself, and the Parisian culture of salons to be her homeland. Corinne's wit and artistic skill in making improvisations is perfectly compatible with the milieu of the salons in which Mme de Staël grew up. The analogy suggested indicates that Mme de Staël seemed unusually reluctant to take in the outside world and other people's view of her, keeping out on all levels by making models, one might say. Mistler also recounts other

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145. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 33.

146. Ibid., p. 33. 'Ah! when I think that I will die, and that these arms, this chest will be the prey of ignoble reptiles (sic).' (My translation.) This passage is presented slightly differently in Solovieff, 'Madame de Staël vue par la comtesse Lulu von Thurheim', p. 77. 'quand je contemple ces bras, cette gorge que nul oeil ne peut regarder sans volupté et que je me les représente la pature d'imondes reptiles—je me ses frissonner de pitié et d'horreur.'

147. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 33. 'She is so coarse, she chewed on something, all that disgusted me.' (My translation.)

occasions when Mme de Staël in an obvious way could not grasp other people's opinions about her.<sup>148</sup>

However, people tended to forget all about physics once they got to listen to Mme de Staël. The writer Caroline Pichler was very enthusiastic about Mme de Staël's voice, and wanted to stenograph her words.<sup>149</sup> And the young M. Uvarov still remembered later on in 1842 seeing Mme de Staël and Prince de Ligne conversing, which he compared to 'unbelievable fireworks, whose marvellous rockets still can be traced out with delight in my memory'.<sup>150</sup> Perhaps Uvarov had also read Prince de Ligne's fine and famous portrait of Mme de Staël, as Donna Elvire, which begins 'De Mme de Staal (sic!)' and pays tribute to her genius:

Donna Elvire est une espagnol fière de l'esprit d'un pere et d'une mere qui n'avaient pas la millième partie Sien. Elle a bien mieux encore que de l'esprit; elle a du genie, ou pour mieux dire, c'est un genie elle-même, et genie puissant, genie profond, genie fécond, genie createur, genie d'improvisation, enfin beau et bon genie, car c'est aussi de la bonté. ce n'est point en feu d'artifice, qui finit par être triste et obscur; [...].<sup>151</sup>

This ingenious side of Mme de Staël's character was something that her portraitist Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun captured so nicely. After having closely studied her facial expressions when reciting poetry, a scene set up by Vigée-Lebrun, she wrote in her *Souvenirs* that

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148. *Ibid.*, pp. 42–44. The account renders a performance Mme de Staël made in a play at Princess Lichtenstein's, that she herself was satisfied with, as she expressed in a letter to Sismondi. On the other hand, Zinzendorf's diary reveals that Mme de Staël's act was not at all appreciated, something that also comes forth in Caroline Pichler's and Loulou von Thurheim's memoirs.

149. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

150. *Ibid.*, p. 35. 'feu d'artifice inouï dont les merveilleuses fusées se retracent encore avec délices à ma mémoire.'

151. Ullrichová, *Lettres de Madame de Staël conservées en Bohême*, pp. 54–55. 'Donna Elvire is a proud Spanish woman, esprit of a father and a mother who had not a millionth part of hers. She has more than just esprit; she has genius; or better expressed, it is genius in itself; and a forceful genius, a profound genius, a fecund genius, creative genius, genius of improvisation, in short a beautiful and good genius, because there is also goodness. It is not only fireworks, which finish by becoming sad and obscure; [...].' (My translation.)

Madame de Staël was not beautiful but her lively face compensated for that:

Madame de Staël n'est pas jolie, mais l'animation de son visage peut lui tenir lieu de beauté. Pour soutenir l'expression que je voulais donner à sa figure, je la priais de me réciter des vers de tragédie (que je n'écoutais guère), occupée que j'étais à la peindre avec un air inspiré.<sup>152</sup>

I have left to the artist to close the discussion about beauty, or the norms we make about female beauty. Vigée-Lebrun made it clear, in the portrait as well as in her *Souvenirs*, that Mme de Staël was an exception, a phenomena, that left nobody unaffected.

However, this artistic ability to improvise was also turned against Mme de Staël. Lagarde noted down that Mme de Staël did not talk, she improvised. She liked to be brilliant in society, but she did not appreciate the company of women:

[...] Dans les conversations générales, disait-on, elle voulait plutôt éblouir que plaire...elle ne causait jamais, mais improvisait toujours... Elle aimait le monde, où elle brillait tant; mais elle aimait très peu la société des femmes, qui offrait généralement moins de ressources à un esprit tel que le sien. Les femmes ne lui ont pas pardonné, quelque éclat qu'elle fit jaillir sur leur sexe.<sup>153</sup>

The above lines by Lagarde are interesting, because they reveal among other things some cultural aspects of the Viennese animosity against Germaine de Staël. In fact, what Lagarde held against her is in line with the complaints that two other Germans before him had

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152. Vigée-Lebrun, *Souvenirs de Madame Louise-Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun*, vol. III, pp. 262–263. ‘Madame de Staël is not beautiful, but her lively face may compensate for beauty. In order to keep the expression of her face that I wanted to give, I asked her to recite some verses from the tragedy (that I hardly listened to), occupied as I was with painting her with an inspired look.’ (My translation.)

153. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 47. ‘In the general conversations, as it is said, she wanted rather to shine than to please...she never talked, but always improvised ... She liked society, where she glowed so much; but she did not fancy the company of women, which generally was less of an asset to an esprit like hers. The women never did forgive her, no matter what éclat she caused to well forth over their sex.’ (My translation.)

expressed at the time when Mme de Staël was approaching Germany back in 1803–1804. Schiller, as we know, when writing to Goethe to ask whether Germaine de Staël really was in Frankfurt, expressed his fears of having to ‘struggle with the French volubility’ when receiving her in Weimar.<sup>154</sup>

Schiller was, like almost everybody else, fascinated and impressed by Mme de Staël’s wit. So too was Goethe, but her way of leading conversations tired him as well and he ‘placed this quick movement of conversation on an equal footing with a game of marbles.’<sup>155</sup> In short, Mme de Staël succeeded in living up to the type defining French art of conversation, and through her brilliance managed to alter the prejudice (types of Non-culture character) that Schiller, Goethe and others had, turning it into a fruitful type making dialogue possible (types of Extra-culture character), although sometimes tiring to Goethe.

Now, there were other reasons than cultural and social ones for the difficulties Mme de Staël had in Vienna. There were also hard political issues that caused her trouble. In Vienna they had not forgotten Mme de Staël’s political stance at the beginning of the French revolution, and likewise had not forgotten the cruel destiny that Marie-Antoinette had met.<sup>156</sup> Again, Uvarov made a remarkable observation about the delicate mutual compromise made between Mme de Staël and Prince de Ligne, resulting in the fact that no serious words about 1789 were exchanged:

Par un compromis réciproque et de fort bon goût, jamais un mot sérieux sur 1789 ne fut échangé entre madame de Staël et le prince de Ligne: là, il y avait incompatibilité complète;

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154. Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, p. 35. ‘Provided that she understands German, we will overcome; but explaining our religion to her and struggle with her French volubility, there we have too hard a task.’ (My translation.)

155. Ibid., p. 43. ‘[...] assimilait à une partie de balle ce mouvement rapide de la conversation.’

156. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O’Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 47. However, Germaine de Staël published a text in 1793 trying to defend Marie-Antoinette from the injustice with which she was treated. For further readings see Madame de Staël, *Réflexions sur le process de la reine* [1793] (Paris: Éditions de Mercure de France, 1996).



jamais ils n'auraient pu s'entendre sur quoi que ce fût qui eût rapport à la Révolution.<sup>157</sup>

Now, this illustrates the foundation of the encounter between one culture, or the individual representing the culture, and another. The notion of deformation was discussed earlier in connection with terms on which one culture, that is, the Ego-culture, can apprehend another culture outside its own. In that sense one may argue that the relation between Mme de Staël and Prince de Ligne was based on the principle of deformation, both adjusting themselves in order to be on speaking terms. Their relation was on Extra-cultural terms, *partly* overlapping regarding ways of life and social values.<sup>158</sup> Prince de Ligne was in short an Alter to Mme de Staël, that is, someone she was in true dialogue with.

Now, in their case the relation seemed to have been a result of mutual 'benevolence', that is, not only from Prince de Ligne's side, who is portrayed in an essay by Uvarov, but also from Mme de Staël's, who probably was well aware of their different political standpoints.<sup>159</sup> In this essay, Uvarov described Prince de Ligne's salon in Vienna where Mme de Staël was seen. In connection with that description he also gives some information about the Prince's contact with, and opinions of, the Neckers in Paris before the revolution, which were not favourable, because of his attachment to Queen Marie-Antoinette, according to Uvarov.

En France, avant la révolution, le prince de Ligne n'avait guère vu et il avait fort peu goûté M. Necker. Madame Necker l'avait prodigieusement ennuyé, et de l'ambassadrice de Suède il ne gardait que le souvenir d'une personne dont la laideur n'était pas douteuse, qui se mêlait de politique et faisait des phrases. Vivement attaché à la reine Marie-Antoinette et

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157. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 48. 'By way of mutual compromise and very good taste, never was a serious word concerning 1789 exchanged between Madame de Staël and Prince de Ligne: there was an absolute incompatibility; never could they have agreed upon anything in relation to the Revolution.' (My translation.) See also Comte Ouvaroff, *Esquisses politiques et littéraires* (Paris: Plon frères, 1848), p. 123.

158. Mme de Staël published Prince de Ligne's *Lettres et pensées du Prince de Ligne* in Geneva 1809.

159. Ouvaroff, *Esquisses politiques et littéraires*.

chevaleresquement épris d'elle, le contact du ministre genevois ne pouvait être que déplaisant au prince de Ligne. Il fallait toute l'aménité de son caractère, tout l'exquise délicatesse de ses manières, pour ne plus voir dans madame de Staël, fugitive et déjà proscrite en 1808, qu'une nature d'élite et tout exceptionnelle qui, par les éminentes qualités de son cœur autant que par la haute portée de son esprit, avait droit à la bienveillance générale.<sup>160</sup>

We cannot really know to what extent this description of Prince de Ligne's relation to the Neckers is mixed with Uvarov's personal opinions of Mme de Staël, which were not very friendly. However, Marie-Antoinette apparently belonged to the Ego-culture, from the prince's point of view. The revolution ought to have made France Non-culture to Prince de Ligne, the cruel destiny of the royal family being unacceptable to him and to many others in Europe (as for instance Catherine II in Russia). So, in order to give Mme de Staël, a woman of exceptional esprit, not only a benevolent reception of a reasonable and general kind, Prince de Ligne had to use all his good manners and amiability, according to Uvarov. And Prince de Ligne seemed to have succeeded in that, out of good will, or out of honest appreciation, we cannot tell from Uvarov's text (although it points implicitly to the former alternative), because Mme de Staël apparently enjoyed his company.

But when leaving aside the events of 1789, Mme de Staël's and Prince de Ligne's relation sparked. Uvarov continues in his description of his direct impressions, showing how he enjoyed watching them converse:

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160. Ibid., pp. 122–123. 'In France, before the revolution, Prince de Ligne hardly saw and very little enjoyed M. Necker. Madame Necker annoyed him very much, and the Swedish ambassadress he only remembered as a person of an indubitable ugliness, who meddled with politics and was a phrasemonger. Deeply attached to Queen Marie-Antoinette and courteously taken by her, the contact with the Genevan minister could only be unpleasant to Prince de Ligne. It demanded all amiability of his character, all the exquisite delicacies of his manners, in order no longer to see Mme de Staël, fugitive and already exiled in 1808, only as an elite nature and totally exceptional who, through the eminent qualities of her heart as through the high level of her spirit, who had the right to a general benevolence.' (My translation.)

Il serait difficile d'exprimer le plaisir infini que nous donnait ce ravissant spectacle: jamais le prince de Ligne ne fut plus fin, plus coquet, plus ingénieux; jamais madame de Staël ne fut aussi brillante; seulement il y avait en lui une légère, une imperceptible teinte d'ironie qui, sans blesser madame de Staël, lui opposait une sorte de résistance passive qui n'était pas sans attrait pour elle.<sup>161</sup>

However, Mme de Staël generally had the last word in the conversations since she spoke quicker than the others who had to abandon their mother tongue. This gave her enemies.<sup>162</sup> In fact, Mme de Staël hardly had to leave her mental culture, the Ego-culture, since the encounters seemed to be settled on her terms.

Lagarde wrote two satirical works in verse on the subject of Germaine de Staël, one he called *Fragment du poème du premier de mai à Vienne* (1808). In one passage he wrote:

La voilà, se dit-on, cette femme immortelle / Qui sera pour  
son sexe une gloire éternelle. / Ah! me suis-je écrié, c'est donc  
à ses vertus / Que l'on vient prodiguer de si juste tributs, /  
[...].<sup>163</sup>

By this time the Austrian police also came to a similar conclusion, as Viennese already society had, about Germaine de Staël. The head of the police concluded that the core of Germaine de Staël's nature was constituted of her taste for social life and of her desires to shine and not of an 'execution of some premeditated plan'.<sup>164</sup> In the police archives there was apparently information of very disparate quality to be found concerning Mme de Staël and her business. Mistler has come across a very interesting pamphlet, probably unpublished, that

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161. Ibid., p. 123. 'It would be difficult to express the infinite pleasure this charming performance gave us: never was Prince de Ligne more delicate, more coquettish, more ingenious; never was Madame de Staël as brilliant; only there was in him a slight, imperceptible trace of irony which, without hurting Madame de Staël, put up a sort of passive resistance to him which was not without delight to her.' (My translation.)

162. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 49.

163. Ibid., p. 52. 'There she is, one says to oneself, that immortal woman / Who will be an eternal glory to her sex. / Ah! did I exclaim, it is thus on her virtues / That one recently lavished tributes so well-founded, / [...].' (My translation.)

164. Ibid., pp. 57–58.

gives a satirical picture of Germaine de Staël and her relation to her co-traveller A.-W. Schlegel, who at the time gave lectures in literature, which caught the attention of Viennese society. The pamphlet is given the form of a supposed confession by Mme de Staël, and stylistically it is a pastiche of the way the author of *Corinne* expressed herself.<sup>165</sup> Now, parts of that pamphlet are instructive when it comes to Mme de Staël's supposed motive in coming to Germany. In fact, the unknown author brings up the same question as was discussed earlier in connection with her first journey to Germany: Mme de Staël's self-consciousness about her exile and the glory she wanted to connect to it. The pamphlet states:

Je ne pensais pas un mot de ce que je disais, je me moquais d'eux sous cape quand ils avaient la bonhomie de me croire sincère, mais débusquée du premier chemin que j'avais pris pour arriver à la gloire, il fallait bien m'en frayer un nouveau et chercher sur les bords du Danube et du Rhin ce que j'avais perdu sur ceux de la Seine.<sup>166</sup>

Now, Mistler writes that he does not entirely share the opinion of Paul Gautier concerning the francophobia reigning in Vienna at the time. Even though Schlegel's lectures contained strong francophobic elements, Mistler thinks that the former exaggerated his influence, in the preface to his course, regarding the German nationalistic movement. As Mistler writes, Romanticism was not a purely literary activity, 'in Vienna as in Germany, it was accompanied by a wakening of a national feeling' and Mme de Staël could observe the first signs of this in Vienna, a society that she found, to her regret, not sufficiently German. And she complained over the fact, regarding the literary atmosphere, that the salons in Vienna totally lacked a German character, and that their imitation of the French was too servile.<sup>167</sup> And as Mistler confirms in this connection, a long list of

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165. Ibid., p. 123.

166. Ibid., p. 129; 132 (the author of the pamphlet was unknown). 'I did not think a word of what I said, I made fun of them covertly when they had the foolishness to believe me sincere, but driven out from the first route I had taken to reach glory, it became necessary for me to make myself a new way and search on the river-beds of the Danube and Rhine what I had lost on those of Seine.' (My translation.)

167. Ibid., pp. 59–60.

names could be made of all these who visited Mme de Staël's salon, 'all grand magnates of the empire: Austrians, Hungarians, Poles received Mme de Staël and visited her'.<sup>168</sup>

The list is provided by Rossetini, and among all persons that are named, some already mentioned here, several were important, especially the Russian diplomats, to Mme de Staël when making her grand tour to Russia, in the sense that she could set off rather well instructed. Another person among these acquaintances worth mentioning is the Polish Princess Lubomirska, whom Mme de Staël met again in 1812 when travelling through Habsburg.<sup>169</sup> Her account of their meeting in *Dix années d'exil* is very interesting, and will be brought up in the next section. Mme de Staël mentions briefly the fact that the German emperor, as she calls him, was at the same time 'constitutional chief' of the empire and head over his 'own country' and therefore had to satisfy 'different interests'.<sup>170</sup>

Although Mme de Staël appears to be aware, in *De l'Allemagne*, of the empire's geographical extent, she still seems to be surprised to find it, from her point of view, not sufficiently German. Furthermore, Germaine de Staël recognizes, also in *De l'Allemagne*, that the Polish and the Russians constitute the charm of Viennese society, and, she continues, since they only spoke French they contributed to the dislodgement of the German language.<sup>171</sup> And as Mistler notes, Mme de Staël's lacking capacity to problematize why Vienna differs from her conception of Germany also comes forth in her observations regarding the architecture: 'Vienna resembles Italy rather than Germany,' she discovered, 'but she did not search for the reason for this'.<sup>172</sup>

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168. Ibid., p. 38.

169. See Olga Trtnik Rossetini, 'Le séjour de Mme de Staël à Vienne pendant l'hiver 1807–1808 (d'après le Journal inédit du cte Charles de Zinzendorf', in *Rivista di letteratura moderna e comparata*, vol. 20, no. 3–4, September–December, 1967, Firenze, pp. 305–326, see esp. pp. 324–326.

170. de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', p. 68. The German emperor Franz II became in 1804 Franz I, emperor of Austria, and in 1806 the German-Roman emperorship was given up.

171. Ibid., p. 95.

172. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 59. See also de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', p. 75.

In comparing the two Germanies, i.e. Vienna and Weimar, the former came off the worse, in the view of Mme de Staël. To her the Viennese society was frivolous and superficial, and she missed the poetic and philosophical discussions in which she had taken part in Weimar. Although very fond of music, she does not devote many pages in her book on Germany to the important role played by music in the artistic life of Vienna (or in Germany generally), something that surprises Lenormant.<sup>173</sup> Apparently, she felt that Weimar was more in an extra-Cultural position to her, and her Ego-culture (Paris), than was Vienna. And Goethe, whom she had met in Weimar, noted accordingly on 26 May 1808 that she was almost a compatriot and a nice neighbour:

Nous méritons d'être encouragés par le bon vouloir d'une voisine et d'une demi compatriote, et de nous refléter dans le miroir qu'elle nous présentera si aimablement.<sup>174</sup>

Thus, the conclusion to draw at this point, as has been done in earlier discussions, is that Extra-cultural relations are built upon a true dialogue between the parties engaged, in contrast to Non-cultural relations, which are initiated by the Ego-culture alone. Thus, in the latter case, the other party is not necessarily involved in the 'relationship', as we have seen in the example with the German woman on the ferry. Also, the example of Mme de Staël's different opinions about Vienna and Weimar suggests, it may be adequate to talk about degrees of Extra-cultural relationships, depending on how many criteria are fulfilled in the particular encounters. To be more exact, Weimar, to Mme de Staël, represented Extra-culture in two respects: value and intelligibility. Vienna, or rather Viennese society, on the other hand, seems only to have met one of these criteria in the eyes of Mme de Staël: intelligibility she could communicate in society

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173. Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, pp. 134–136.

174. Blennerhassett, *Madame de Staël et son temps*, vol. III, p. 275. 'We deserve to be encouraged by the benevolence of a neighbour and demi-compatriot, and to reflect ourselves in the mirror she is going to present to us so complaisantly.' (My translation.) However, in a letter sent from Dresden on 30 May 1808 to O'Donnell she writes that she already spoke of Austria with a 'patriotic sentiment'. But in this case one cannot know whether she missed O'Donnell rather than Austria. See Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 157.

in Vienna, and it was at least partly understandable to her. But she did not appreciate Vienna very much. However, already at this point I would like to suggest the idea of dialogue being the paramount and overarching criterion for Extra-cultural relations, and thereby being superior to other criteria defined in that connection by the Tartu school as esteem and intelligibility (the latter however primarily applicable to 'texts' in the extended semiotic meaning). Dialogue in the sense of an 'I' expecting and wanting a response from a 'thou', that is, a relation between Ego and Alter, has been described by Sonesson as a relation characterized by its axis of conversation.<sup>175</sup> Thus, Alter may represent Extra-culture in different ways, and to a different degree.

However, the reason why Mme de Staël, in her writings, shows relatively little interest in understanding Viennese society is not obvious, as we have seen. Perhaps one could make the suggestion that the salons of Weimar and Berlin (although there were differences between the two) had more overarching traits in common with the ones in Paris, which Mme de Staël had grown up with. Reading, in *De l'Allemagne*, her account of the Viennese salons, written from a social rather than cultural point of view, this becomes clearer. She observes, to her regret, that in the Viennese salons *hommes de lettres* are not mixed with the nobility, which leads to a stiff society where people read too little and 'the result of this separation of classes is that the litterateurs lack in grace, and people of the society seldom gain instruction'.<sup>176</sup> And, she continued later:

La société ne sert point en Autriche, comme en France, à développer l'esprit ni à l'animer.<sup>177</sup>

However, perhaps the sojourn in Vienna was more important than she was willing to admit? This is a question that we will return to a little further down.

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175. Sonesson, 'The Globalization of Ego and Alter', p. 159.

176. de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', pp. 85–86. 'Il résulte de cette séparation des classes que les gens de lettres manquent de grâce, et que les gens du monde acquièrent rarement de l'instruction.'

177. de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', p. 88. 'Society in Austria does not serve, as in France, to develop the esprit nor to animate it.' (My translation.)

Olga Trtnik Rossetini comes to another conclusion than Mistler, primarily based on new readings of Uvarov's portrait of Mme de Staël. However, she suggests that Uvarov's descriptions show that Mme de Staël, on the contrary, had an interesting time in Vienna.<sup>178</sup> We have already seen some samples in the quotations of Uvarov's description of Germaine de Staël's and Prince de Ligne's relation above, and here follows another one stressing the lively and friendly conversations between 'Corinne' and the Prince de Ligne:

Quand Corinne s'envolait au septième ciel par une explosion d'inimitable éloquence, le prince de Ligne la ramenait petit à petit dans son salon de Paris. Quand lui, à son tour, se jetait follement dans les causeries parfumées de Versailles ou de Trianon, madame de Staël se hâtait d'indiquer en quelques paroles brèves et énergiques, [...], l'arrêt de cette société condamnée à périr de ses propres mains.<sup>179</sup>

Uvarov's portrait of Mme de Staël's and Prince de Ligne's relationship shows that it must have been a very tender one. Each party respected the other's sense of loss: Mme de Staël of her Parisian salon and Prince de Ligne of the era of the *ancien régime*. This also points to what has been discussed earlier: Mme de Staël's preoccupation with her Ego-culture, i.e. her model of herself (Corinne as a type and stereotype) and her home culture (Paris). Uvarov seems to have chosen to replace 'Mme de Staël' with 'Corinne' when wanting to describe the joy Mme de Staël apparently must have expressed when feeling 'at home'. This points to what we have seen earlier in this inquiry, namely that the Corinne-character figured as a stereotype in the encounters Mme de Staël had with

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178. Rossetini, 'Le séjour de Mme de Staël à Vienne pendant l'hiver 1807–1808', pp. 323–324. The portrait of Mme de Staël, referred to here is in fact included in Uvarov's writings about Prince de Ligne. See also Ouvaroff, *Esquisses politiques et littéraires*, pp. 117–141. At the time of the publication of this work Uvarov was minister of education in Russia.

179. Ibid., p. 124. 'When Corinne fled away to the seventh heaven through an explosion of inimitable eloquence, Prince de Ligne took her back little by little from her salon in Paris. When he, on the other hand, threw himself foolishly into conversations redolent of Versailles and Trianon, Madame de Staël hurried to point out, in some brief and vigorous words, [...], the cessation of that society doomed to vanish by its own hands.' (My translation.)



others. Uvarov uses the Corinne-type, when referring to Mme de Staël, more than once in the essay about Prince de Ligne. In fact, in the opening pages she seems to be included in the narrative to such a degree that one might perhaps say that the essay, at least to a certain extent, deals with the triadic relationship between Uvarov (as biographer), Prince de Ligne and Mme de Staël. Uvarov describes Mme de Staël's spectacular entrance to Prince de Ligne's modestly sized and furnished salon as follows:

Dans ce petit salon grisâtre, modestement meublé et si étroit qu'il était difficile de s'y placer debout quand il y avait du monde, parut un soir madame de Staël, radieux météore qui occupait la curiosité publique, et dont nous tirâmes plus tard fort bon parti. D'abord le prince de Ligne se trouva médiocrement prévenu en sa faveur. L'exaltation dramatique de Corinne lui parassait quelque peu ridicule, et son néologisme, en fait d'esprit de salon, lui était antipathique.<sup>180</sup>

Prince de Ligne, like Schiller and Goethe before him, was initially suspicious of Mme de Staël's exalted manners and art of conversation *à la Corinne*, but in the end fell for her charms. In that sense, Mme de Staël seemed at the start to have represented the Non-culture to Prince de Ligne, that is, was *Alius* to him, but as time went by and he got to know her she became a true *Alter*, representing Extra-culture, as stated above. However, we cannot really know whether Prince de Ligne himself used the Corinne-type to the same extent in his relation to her as Uvarov does in the essay.

Prince de Ligne called Mme de Staël allegorically Donna Elvire, as seen in a quotation above, but the Spanish heroine in his portrait has many traits in common with Corinne: esprit, genius and champion of improvisations. In that sense, Prince de Ligne, like so many others, probably used the salon-type, incarnated in the Corinne-figure, in his relation to Mme de Staël, which likely pleased

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180. Ibid., p. 122. 'In this small salon, greyish and modestly furnished and so narrow that it was difficult to stand up when it was crowded, Mme de Staël turned up one night, a radiant meteor who aroused people's curiosity, and from whom we derived advantage indeed. At first Prince de Ligne found himself to be fairly badly disposed towards her. The dramatic exaltation of Corinne seemed a bit ridiculous to him, and her neologism, in fact in the spirit of salons, was unpleasant to him.' (My translation.)

her. In fact, the Donna Elvire text is a fine example of how Ego-culture deforms texts coming from the outside, by mastering them in accordance with its own needs and wishes. Who is doing the talking in Prince de Ligne's portrait of Mme de Staël, to put the question in the way Wertsch does? I am inclined to say that the Donna Elvire text is Prince de Ligne's commentary on Mme de Staël's model of herself as Corinne rhetorically exaggerated, iterating attributively the word genius several times, in the quotation repeated here: 'She has more than just esprit; she has genius; or better expressed, it is genius in it self; and a forceful genius, a profound genius, a fecund genius, creative genius, genius of improvisation, in short a beautiful and good genius, because there is also goodness.'<sup>181</sup> (My translation.) Thus, the voices of both are refracted in the text, but on Prince de Ligne's terms, the prerogative of Ego-culture.

Now, Uvarov seemed to have been closely connected to Mme de Staël by their mutual friendships, among others, to Prince de Ligne and, in this case more importantly perhaps, to Maurice O'Donnell. Why then is Uvarov not mentioned in *Dix années d'exil*? It is even more puzzling since he was in Russia during Mme de Staël's sojourn there in 1812.<sup>182</sup>

The explanation seems to be that before Mme de Staël's departure from Vienna she had understood the real nature of Uvarov's friendship to her, which proved to be not so friendly after all. He did not believe in Mme Staël's feelings for his close friend Maurice O'Donnell and she accused him later on, in her letters to the latter, of 'frivolous faithlessness' and of trying to intervene.<sup>183</sup> As time went by Mme de Staël continued, in another letter to O'Donnell, to speak of Uvarov in a brusque way:

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181. Ullrichová, *Lettres de Madame de Staël conservées en Bohème*, pp. 54–55.

182. Nor is Mme de Staël mentioned by Uvarov, and 'apparently he had no desire to see her again'. Georges Solovieff, 'Madame de Staël et ses correspondants russes (Lettres inédites en français)', in *Cahiers Staëliens*, no. 1, March 1962, Paris, pp. 4–30, for quotation see p. 22.

183. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, see for example p. 224. (Letter sent from Coppet on 6 August 1808 by Mme de Staël to Maurice O'Donnell). See also Rossetini, 'Le séjour de Mme de Staël à Vienne pendant l'hiver 1807–1808', p. 322.

Sans parler de ce dédain pour les lettres éloquentes qui valent bien les perfides faussetés d'un Russe francisé, [...].<sup>184</sup>

Some new elements alluding to the Russian origin of Uvarov, 'the Frenchified Russian', are now to be found in Mme de Staël's statements, in accordance with her frustration over the deteriorating relationship with O'Donnell. In the end, before announcing that she would stop writing to Uvarov, she called him a 'little self-righteous Tartar'.<sup>185</sup> As we see, nationhood and cultural aspects come to the fore when sentiments, rather than rational thinking, are involved when making judgements. However, this way of reacting was apparently not foreign to Uvarov either, as Mme de Staël's last billet to him, before leaving Vienna in 1808, shows:

vous deviez venir à 8 h. chez moi ce soir—tout furieux que vous êtes contre mon goût parisien, souvenez-vous que ce goût m'a fait trouver vos vers et votre esprit charmant et venez me dire adieu—j'espère ce soir Mad. De vrbna et la princesse thérèse.<sup>186</sup>

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184. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 231. Letter sent by Mme de Staël from Berne on 14 August 1808, to Maurice O'Donnell. 'Without speaking of the mockery for eloquent letters which are worth as much as the faithless falsenesses of a Frenchified Russian, [...].' See also Rossetini, 'Le séjour de Mme de Staël à Vienne pendant l'hiver 1807–1808', p. 322.

185. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 233, in the same letter sent from Mme de Staël to O'Donnell from Berne, 14 August 1808. She called him 'petit fat tartare.' In a letter sent from Coppet on 13 September 1808, Mme de Staël informs O'Donnell that she will stop writing to Uvarov in order to prevent the 'tracasseries' that would come out of it, counting that her 'silence' would instruct him of her opinions of him. See *ibid.*, p. 245.

186. Piotr Zaborov, 'Madame de Staël et ses correspondants russes (textes originaux)', in *Cahiers Staëliens*, no. 13, Décembre 1971, Paris, pp. 44–54, for quotation see p. 48 (billet no. 15). 'You should come at 8 o'clock to my place—even though you are all furious about my Parisian taste, remember that this taste made me find your verses and your esprit charming and come to say farewell—I expect tonight Mad. De vrbna and Princess thérèse.' (My translation.) Zaborov announces that the original orthography is kept when citing Mme de Staël's billets and letters. Some of the billets to Uvarov are also to be found in a slightly modified way in Solovieff, 'Madame de Staël et ses correspondants russes', pp. 4–30. For that particular billet sent to Uvarov quoted above see p. 16 and note 28, where Solovieff informs that Princess thérèse refers to Princess Thérèse Jablonovskaya.

Nationhood was obviously an issue also to Uvarov, and both of them seemed to have been very well aware of the cultural differences between them, and tended to use these in order to explain reasons for having different opinions of things. Both returned to cultural typification here: Mme de Staël to Russians at heart being ‘Tartars’ and Uvarov to Parisians having ‘Parisian taste’. An even worse category, in fact, seems to be Russians who have adopted French manners without serving Mme de Staël’s needs. Uvarov, ‘un Russe francisé’ belonged to that category, as we have seen above. Mme de Staël appears almost to have been offended when coming across it in Uvarov, or rather, her Ego-culture did not permit any Russians, no matter how French in manners, unless they were useful to her. In the end Uvarov became *Alius* to Mme de Staël. She had announced to O’Donnell, as we have seen, that she would stop writing to him, and probably she stuck to her word since she seemed not to have cared to visit him when travelling to Russia.

Now, the samples of their correspondence presented above point to very interesting elements in Mme de Staël’s way of mapping the outside world of people and cultures. Furthermore, this source material allows us to ask the engaging question: did Mme de Staël’s conceptions of Russia and the Russian change when she actually visited the country, or did they remain the same? I shall give a short answer to that question already here: no, essentially Mme de Staël kept on having an ambivalent, not to say unfavourable, opinion about the Russians in general (with some exceptions), which will become clear at the end of this chapter when discussing Mme de Staël’s stay in St. Petersburg. We shall now return to *Dix années d’exil*, and Germaine de Staël’s autobiographical travel account from Habsburg and Russia in 1812.

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See also p. 15, in that article, for a previous note to Uvarov where Mme de Staël comments on the verses dedicated to her, which she finds ‘charming’, and from a literal point of view she will brag with them in Paris, but in Vienna, she continues, she is ‘happier’ about his ‘friendship than proud of his poems’.

*The grand tour 1812: travelling to Russia (via Habsburg)*

Bizarre sort pour moi, que de fuir d'abord les François, au milieu desquels je suis née, qui ont porté mon père en triomphe, et de les fuir jusqu'aux confins de l'Asie!<sup>187</sup>

It must have been a bizarre feeling for Mme de Staël, when travelling through Russia, to know that the French troops were behind her, and as she writes above, to have to flee from the people among whom she was born, 'to the borders of Asia'. And as we will see, Mme de Staël's travel account from Habsburg and Russia is mixed with reports of Napoleon's actions in Europe, having him metaphorically close on her heels when travelling through Russia.

Mme de Staël left Coppet on 23 May 1812, or rather fled, to escape her growing dissatisfaction with the isolation forced upon her by Napoleon and his regime. In fact, she fled Coppet in a state of fear and despair, regretting having had to leave first France and now Switzerland by order of a man less French than herself.

C'est ainsi qu'après dix ans de persécutions toujours croissants, d'abord renvoyée de Paris, puis reléguée en Suisse, puis confinée dans mon château, puis enfin condamnée à l'horrible douleur de ne plus revoir mes amis et d'avoir été cause de leur exil, c'est ainsi que je fus obligée de quitter en fugitive deux patries, la Suisse et la France, par l'ordre d'un homme moins Français que moi; car je suis née sur les rives de cette Seine, où sa tyrannie seule le naturalise.<sup>188</sup>

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187. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 276. 'What a capricious destiny, for me to flee at first from the French, among whom I was born, and who had carried my father in triumph, and now to flee from them even to the borders of Asia!' de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 140.

188. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 227. 'In this manner, after ten years of continually increasing persecutions, first sent away from Paris, then banished into Switzerland, afterwards confined to my own chateau, and at last condemned to the dreadful punishment of never seeing my friends, and of being the cause of their banishment: in this manner was I obliged to quit, as a fugitive, two countries, France and Switzerland, by order of a man less French than myself: for I was born on the borders of that Seine where his tyranny alone naturalises him.' de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 114.

In Germaine de Staël's claim to leave 'two countries', both France and Switzerland, lies a paradox, because how can one be 'banished' into one's home country? That is in fact what Mme de Staël says here when writing that she was 'first sent away from Paris, then banished into Switzerland', but further down she explains that she was forced to leave, as a refugee, her two home countries.<sup>189</sup> To her, Paris was the primary home country, or better, it was her Ego-culture, as emerges in her travelogues. Therefore, to be banished by that Corsican Napoleon was not only an act of tyranny but also a great insult to her who 'was born on the borders of that Seine where his tyranny alone naturalises him'.<sup>190</sup> And Napoleon perpetually accused Germaine de Staël of not being French, but Swedish or Swiss. Thus one might say that Germaine de Staël's and Napoleon's warfare against each other concerned Paris, which, viewed as a concept, also contained different political ideas.

In that sense, Mme de Staël, as has been discussed earlier, had a position of inner otherness, her Ego-culture being occupied and governed by Alter, not belonging to the Ego-culture (Napoleon). Napoleon being Alter, and not Alius, to Madame de Staël, probably is based on the fact that she was depending on him, as we have seen, and therefore wanting, or rather needing a dialogue with him. From Napoleon's standpoint, on the other hand, Mme de Staël was Alius, belonging to the Non-culture and with whom he did not want any contact.

Now, the example of Mme de Staël's grand tour in 1812 illustrates what a venture it was at that time of her to travel. To reach England, the 'word' that 'revived' her 'spirits', she had thus to travel east through Habsburg and Russia, in order to get to Sweden where she arrived in September 1812 and left, for England, on 9 June 1813.<sup>191</sup> Setting off from Coppet she travelled through places such as Innsbruck, Munich, Salzburg and Linz before arriving in Vienna on 6 June 1812.

Since Mme de Staël's last sojourn there in 1808, many things had changed. In October 1809 a peace treaty was signed between France and Austria at Schönbrunn, in which the latter had to pay a high

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189. Ibid., p. 114.

190. Ibid.

191. Ibid., p. 113. See also de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 224.

price.<sup>192</sup> An example illustrating what Austria lost is the Grand Duchy of Warsaw's acquisition of eastern Galicia, something that created political inconsistencies which Mme de Staël observed when arriving in Vienna 1812. Also, in 1810 Napoleon had married the Habsburg emperor's oldest daughter Marie-Louise (Maria Louisa), at the time eighteen years old, as a result of political agreements.<sup>193</sup> Thus, Austria was at this point an ally of Napoleonic France, and Germaine de Staël made the following remarks concerning the difficult implications this had for Austrian politics. Austria had to send 30,000 men to Poland:

Trente mille hommes étaient envoyés par le gouvernement autrichien pour rétablir la confédération de Pologne à Varsovie, et presque autant d'espions s'attachaient aux pas des Polonais de Gallicie, qui voulaient avoir des députés à cette confédération. Il fallait donc que le gouvernement autrichien parlât contre les Polonais, en soutenant leur cause, et qu'il dît à ses sujets de Gallicie: 'Je vous défends d'être de l'avis que je soutiens.' Quelle métaphysique! On la trouverait bien embrouillée si la peur n'expliquait pas tout.<sup>194</sup>

However, 'the Poles are the only Europeans who can serve under the banners of Napoleon without blushing'.<sup>195</sup> In her opinion of the Poles Mme de Staël took a political stance, it seems, in a debate originating in the French political discussions of the 1770s.<sup>196</sup> Now, Austrian

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192. Herman Lindqvist, *Napoleon* (Stockholm: Norstedts förlag, 2004), p. 379.

193. *Ibid.*, pp. 385–396.

194. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 244. 'Thirty thousand men were sent by the Austrian government to restore the confederation of Poland at Warsaw, and nearly as many spies were attached to the movements of the Poles in Galicia, who wished to have deputies at this confederation. The Austrian government was therefore obliged to speak against the Poles at the very time that it was acting in their cause, and to say to her subjects of Galicia: "I forbid you to be of the opinion which I support." What metaphysics! They would be found very intricate, if fear did not explain everything.' de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 122.

195. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 123. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 244–245.

196. In 1768 a confederation against the Polish king (Stanisław II), who had tried to reform the constitution, was formed in Bar by anti-Russian patriots and a civil war broke out. Russian troops intervened and after diplomatic bargaining Poland was divided for the first time by Russia, Prussia and Austria in 1772. In 1791 a completely new constitution was initiated. And in 1792 Russian troops intervened

realist politics, as Mme de Staël conceived them, were not a result of consensus. It was something that was imposed on the Austrians by the government. Perhaps this may explain the inherent paradoxes in

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again, although Stanisław had warned against too brusque anti-Russian policies. Russia and Prussia agreed upon Poland's second partition in 1793. The new constitution was abandoned and Stanisław August was put in the shade, and Kościuszko emerged, with the consent of the Sejm, as the new leader. With his troops Kościuszko started an insurrection against the three powers behind the partition of the country. The war ended with Warsaw's capitulation and Stanisław August Poniatowski's abdication. Although Poland as a state vanished from the map in 1795, it survived as a concept. After that the myth of Poland as Christ among nations, with its source in the victorious battle against the Turks to which Poland contributed, outside Vienna in 1683, was reinforced. See Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, *The Wheel of Polish Fortune. Myths in Polish Collective Consciousness during the First Years of Solidarity* (Lund: B. Törnquist Plewa; distr. Lund University, 1992). This trait was something that Mme de Staël might have picked up, because the image of Polish people as very religious dominates her description of them in *Dix années d'exil*. In 1807 Napoleon gave the Poles, many of whom had fought under the French flag in the hope of support for their cause, their former land that Prussia had had to cede in the peace negotiations in Tilsit. The Grand Duchy of Warsaw was thus established. *Svensk uppslagsbok* (Malmö: Förlagshuset Norden AB), vol. 22, 1957, pp. 1273–1274. See also Kristian Gerner, *Central Europas historia* (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Natur och Kultur, 1997), pp. 286–288. For Catherine II's interference with the domestic affairs of Poland at the time—she had for example called the Confederates 'rebels', see Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Political Writings of Rousseau*, vol. II, ed. C. E. Vaughan (Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 1915), p. 370. In the French political debate at the time Baudeau, supporting the ideas proposed by *les physiocrates*, encouraged the reforms initiated by Stanisław August. However, J.-J. Rousseau as a republican was against the reinforcement of royal power in Poland. He connected the notion of democracy with that of patriotism. See Stanisław Fiszer, *L'image de la Pologne dans l'œuvre de Voltaire* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, University of Oxford, 2001), pp. 172–173. Furthermore, Rousseau supported the ideas of the Confederates, even though he seems to have admitted that the Confederation was violent as a movement, but explained this by invoking the necessity of it. See J.-J. Rousseau, 'Considerations sur le gouvernement de Pologne', in *The Political Writings of Rousseau*, vol. II, pp. 470–471. It seems here as if Mme de Staël embraced Rousseau's ideas of the connection between democracy and patriotism. See also Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The map of civilization on the mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 235–283. In fact, Claire Nicolas suggests that Rousseau's text on Poland had the greatest impact on Mme de Staël's sympathy for Poland, see her 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', p. 32. And in a passage in the chapter on Prussia in *De l'Allemagne*, which was omitted by the Napoleonic censorship, she expresses her opposition to the partition of Poland, see Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', p. 43.



her account of her visit to Vienna. During the first ten days of her stay, she claims, everything was pleasant and the general opinion was against Napoleon:

Les dix premiers jours que je passai à Vienne ne furent troublés par aucun nuage, et j'étais ravie de me trouver ainsi au milieu d'une société qui me plaisait, et dont la manière de penser répondait à la mienne: car l'opinion n'était point favorable à l'alliance avec Napoléon, et le gouvernement l'avait conclue sans être appuyé par l'assentiment national.<sup>197</sup>

On the other hand, the police surveillance, entrusted to M. de Hudelist in the absence of Metternich who was in Prague, of which she was a victim gave her a difficult time.<sup>198</sup> After some days in Vienna the police started to follow Mme de Staël everywhere and she wrote laconically in her travelogue: 'This method of exercising the police appeared to me to unite both the French Machiavellianism and German clumsiness.'<sup>199</sup> But the consequences of this persecution were obvious also on a personal level, and it is with grief Mme de Staël concludes that this time she was not welcomed at the court, because she was in disgrace with Napoleon:

[...] j'avais déjà passé un hiver à Vienne, très bien accueillie par l'empereur, l'impératrice et toute la cour: il était donc difficile de me dire que cette fois on ne voulait pas me recevoir, parce que j'étais en disgrâce auprès de l'empereur Napoléon, surtout lorsque cette disgrâce était en partie causée par les éloges que j'avais donnés dans mon livre à la morale et au génie littéraire des Allemands.<sup>200</sup>

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197. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 243. 'The first ten days which I passed at Vienna, passed unclouded, and I was delighted at thus finding myself again in a pleasing society, whose manner of thinking corresponded with my own; for the public opinion was unfavourable to the alliance with Napoleon, and the government had concluded it without being supported by the national assent.' de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 122.

198. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 245, note 1.

199. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 124.

200. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 245–246. '[...] I had formerly passed a winter at Vienna, and been very well received by the Emperor and Empress, and by the whole court: it was, therefore, rather awkward to tell me that this time I would not

However, she met many of her acquaintances from 1808, among others she rejoined Prince de Ligne, Gentz, Princess Lubomirska, the Russians Balk and Golowkin whom she had received at Coppet, but she also paid official visits to the ministers of Russia, Prussia and Sweden.<sup>201</sup>

At Vienna Mme de Staël was very worried about her and her fellow-traveller Rocca's passports, needed in order to get to Russia. In her preoccupation with the matter she involved all her friends, and Gentz, 'little gallant', complained in his diary that since he was the only one who had some influence over Hudelist, Mme de Staël had finally received her passports (for Galicia), but the matter of settling the affair had given him more than one 'unpleasant moment', and Mme de Staël's presence had this time been more of an 'annoyance than pleasure' to him.<sup>202</sup> Now, this time too, Zinzendorf, whom she had met the last time she visited Vienna in 1807–1808, noted in his diary his impressions of a reception at Mme de Staël's where the subject of her itinerary was discussed:

Madame de Staël fait son plan d'aller à Stockholm par Kiew, Odessa, Constantinople, les îles de l'Archipel; par Rhodes et la Sicile. Quelle confusion dans la tête!<sup>203</sup>

This note made on 12 June by Zinzendorf corresponds to the one made by the police two days later regarding Mme de Staël's travelling plans, entitled '*La troisième Croisade*, where Napoleon [...] would not be included.'<sup>204</sup>

Anyway, there were other troubles concerning the passports. Since the true relation between Mme de Staël and Rocca was not revealed,

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be received because I was in disgrace with the Emperor Napoleon; particularly as this disgrace was partly occasioned by the praises which I had bestowed in my book on the morality and literary genius of the Germans.' de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 123.

201. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, pp. 280–285.

202. *Ibid.*, p. 281. The translation from French is mine.

203. Zinzendorf, *Journal*, 12 June, in Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 282. 'Madame de Staël has made her plans for going to Stockholm through Kiev, Odessa, Constantinople, the Aegean; through Rhodes and Sicily. What confusion in her head!' (My translation.)

204. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 282. The translation from French is mine.

the situation became even more difficult. Rocca was at the time presented as her secretary (in fact, she was later on to marry him secretly).<sup>205</sup> In that situation Mme de Staël turned to Metternich after her arrival at Brno in Moravia on 15 June 1812. (The circumstances for Mme de Staël had become precarious since it became obvious to her that she could not remain in Vienna after the return of the French ambassador.<sup>206</sup>) However, it is interesting to note that in the edition of *Dix années d'exil* (1821) edited by her son the following passage is omitted, which shed light on how Mme de Staël tried to resolve her desperate situation, and the risk she was running of not getting to Russia:

L'envoyé de Suède, sous la protection duquel j'étais, demanda pour moi au bureau des Affaires étrangères, dirigé par M. de Hudelist en l'absence de M. de Metternich, un passeport qui me permît de sortir d'Autriche par la Hongrie, ou par la Gallicie, suivant que j'irais à Pétersbourg ou à Constantinople.<sup>207</sup>

It is a puzzle why this passage was omitted. What made the editor leave out these lines in 1821? Were there any political reasons for that? Nevertheless, in a letter from Brno of 30 June to Metternich, where she addresses him in order to get the help with the passports, Mme de Staël explicitly invokes her status as 'the widow of the Swedish Ambassador'.<sup>208</sup>

[...] comme j'étois pressé de partir et que j'avais sur mon passeport un secrétaire, Mr Rocca s'est cru autorisé à continuer de me suivre sous ce titre—arrivée a Brünn le gouverneur lui a défendu de me suivre plus loin et lui a ordonné de suivre la route de Prusse et m'a interdit à moi

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205. Ullrichová, *Lettres de Madame de Staël conservées en Bohême*, p. 91.

206. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 247. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 124.

207. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 248, see also note 2 for the text version in the edition of 1821: 'Je fis demander au bureau des Affaires étrangères, dirigé par un subalterne ...'. Madame de Staël, 'Dix années d'exil' [1810–1813], p. 222. For the English translation of the 1821 edition see de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 125. 'I addressed the office for foreign affairs, directed by a subaltern during the absence of M. Metternich, for a passport which would enable me to go to Petersburg or to Constantinople.'

208. Ullrichová, *Lettres de Madame de Staël conservées en Bohême*, p. 92.

veuve de l'Ambassadeur de Suede et avec un passeport suedois de retourner à Vienne ou d'y envoyer mon fils aussi Suedois ou même un des mes gens pour écrire à mes amis ma situation et réclamer leur appui [...].<sup>209</sup>

It is interesting to note that Metternich later on recalled this affair in his memoirs and in connection with that described an encounter between Mme de Staël and the director of police M. Hager. She had asked him for permission to present the young Rocca (to the salons of Vienna), and he had answered by questioning if they had to start a war for the sake of her love for Rocca (who was subject to the French authorities as a member of the armed forces), to which Mme de Staël replied: 'Why not?' Metternich's comment on that was: 'This proves that in this world esprit alone will not do much.'<sup>210</sup>

Now, apparently Mme de Staël had a Swedish passport and seemed not to hesitate to invoke that fact when needed. But on the other hand, she did not consider herself, as we have seen, to be anything but Parisian. This illustrates the discrepancy between her mental construction of her nationality and her juridical one. And, as we also have seen, in her encounters throughout Europe it was her model of herself as Parisian that mattered the most. This situation became an issue between Napoleon and Mme de Staël in their mutual attempts to win their battle. The issue is central for the understanding of the relation between the *Corsican* and the *Swiss Swedish*. Comtesse de Pange wrote that Napoleon did not consider Madame de Staël as French, which he constantly kept on repeating for her. Earlier research, thus, has made the point that to him, she did not have the right way of thinking and in terms of civil status, she

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209. Ibid., p. 92. '[...] since I was in a hurry to leave and that I had in my passport a secretary, Mr Rocca thought himself to be authorized to continue with me under that title—once arrived in Brünn the governor forbid him to continue any further with me and ordered him to take the Prussian route and prohibited me, the widow of the Swedish ambassador and with a Swedish passport, from returning to Vienna or from sending my son there, also Swedish, and even one of my people from writing to my friends about my situation and asking them for support [...].' (My translation.)

210. Ibid., p. 93. The translation from French is mine. See also Blennerhassett, *Madame de Staël et son temps (1766–1817)*, vol. III, p. 443–444.

was born by a father from Geneva and a mother from Waadt, and married to a Swede.<sup>211</sup>

Nevertheless, at the time when Mme de Staël, according to the travelogue edited by her son, wrote to Metternich to ask for help with the passports, she did not know whether he (or the Austrian emperor) was aware of the harsh treatment that the local government in Brno gave her and her companions.

However, in the edition of *Dix années d'exil* later edited by Paul Gautier, Mme de Staël seems more certain that neither Metternich nor the Austrian emperor knew about these 'absurd platitudes' she had to put up with in Brno, but in fact there is reason to believe the contrary.<sup>212</sup> Anyway, she received the passport for Rocca at last. And in a letter which was found among the reports at the police in Brno she thanks the governor in Moravia, and not Metternich, for settling the matter.<sup>213</sup> What also comes forth in the letter is that the Russian

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211. de Pange, *Mme de Staël et la découverte de l'Allemagne*, p. 63. 'Mme de Staël was not French according to Napoleon; he reproached her perpetually for that and did not cease to blame her for that through the words of his ministers and through his journals. He wanted to tell that she did not have a 'classical' way of thinking, she diverged from the tracks; and Napoleon on the contrary sought to re-establish the tradition in order to master the shadows from the past. As regards civil status, born of a father from Geneva and a mother from Waadt, wife of the Swedish ambassador, Mme de Staël was not French; the affirmation of the Corsican was true [...]' (My translation.)

212. Madame de Staël, 'Dix années d'exil' [1810–1813], p. 225. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 127. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 251–252, and in note 1 on the latter page Paul Gautier observes that the orders probably were given by higher instances than Germaine de Staël herself imagined. In this he was right. Ullrichová's research shows to what a great extent the governor of Moravia was dependent on Vienna, see Ullrichová, *Lettres de Madame de Staël conservées en Bohême*, esp. pp. 124–125, for all the reports on Mme de Staël at the police in Brno see pp. 124–156. On top of the surveillance by the Habsburg police, it seems also that Mme de Staël had a source of information among her staff that helped them in their work, see Norman King, 'Un récit inédit du grand voyage de Madame de Staël (1812–1813)', in *Cahiers Staëliens*, no. 4, Mai 1966, Paris, pp. 4–26.

213. Simone Balayé comes to another conclusion than Ullrichová, pointing to the fact that in the letter Mme de Staël refers to a previous encounter with the person to whom she addresses the letter. Mme de Staël did not meet Metternich since he was not in Vienna at the time of her sojourn. However, she did meet the governor of Moravia in Brno. The letter was thus addressed to him, not on the 4th of July (as in Ullrichová) but on the 7th, see Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de* 160

emperor had sent her passports to Russia, ‘together with the most flattering expressions’.<sup>214</sup>

On 1 July 1812 Mme de Staël, with her children Albertine and Albert, left Brno for Galicia (Rocca had to join them later). And Germaine de Staël wrote in *Dix années d’exil*, in connection with her departure for Galicia, a rather critical passage about the Poles. They were lazy and ignorant, but proud, and the contrast between luxury and poverty was sharp. Her text is full of ethnic and national typifications, or prejudices.

Les Polonais aiment leur patrie comme un ami malheureux: la contrée est triste et monotone, le peuple ignorant et paresseux: on a toujours voulu la liberté, on n’a jamais su l’y établir. Mais les Polonais croient devoir et pouvoir gouverner la Pologne, et ce sentiment est naturel. Cependant l’éducation de peuple y est si négligée, et toute espèce d’industrie lui est si étrangère, que les juifs se sont emparés de tout le commerce, et font vendre aux paysans, pour une provision d’eau-de-vie, toute la récolte de l’année prochaine. La distance des seigneurs aux paysans est si grande. Le luxe des uns et l’affreuse misère des autres offrent un contraste si choquant, que les Autrichiens y ont apporté des lois meilleures que celles qui existaient. Mais un peuple fier, et celui-ci l’est dans sa détresse, ne veut pas qu’on l’humilie, même en lui faisant du bien, et c’est à quoi les Autrichiens n’ont jamais manqué. [...] On voit à chaque poste de la Gallicie trois espèces de personnes accourir autour des voitures des voyageurs, les marchands juifs, les mendiants polonais et les espions allemands. Le pays ne semble habité que par ces trois espèces d’hommes. Les mendiants, avec leur longue barbe et leur ancien costume sarmate, inspirent une profond pitié; il est bien vrai que s’ils voulaient travailler, ils ne seraient plus dans cet état: mais on ne sait si c’est orgueil ou paresse qui leur fait dédaigner le soin de la terre asservie.<sup>215</sup>

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Staël, p. 274, note 63. For comments and the letter in question see Ullrichová, *Lettres de Madame de Staël conservées en Bohême*, pp. 94–95.

214. Ibid., p. 95.

215. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, pp. 257–258. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, pp. 129–130. ‘The Poles love their country as an unfortunate friend: the country is dull and monotonous, the people ignorant and lazy; they have always wished for liberty; they have never known how to acquire it. But the Poles think that they can and

This rather long passage concerning the history of Poland and the Poles seems inserted in the text (viewed here as a mediated action as Wertsch defined it), and contradictory. As such it appears like a mixture of her own impressions and of reflections on others' words. The Bakhtinian question arises: Who is doing the talking?<sup>216</sup> In Wertsch's sense that question may be reformulated: what cultural tool did Mme de Staël use when writing about Poland? A good guess is that she relied on sources from her Ego-culture, namely authors of the Enlightenment.

The first lines state that the Poles, who 'love their country as an unfortunate friend', are 'ignorant', 'lazy', and they 'always wished for freedom', which they never succeeded in attaining. The Polish landscape is 'dull' and 'monotonous'. For instance Rousseau, who we know Mme de Staël admired, wrote in 'Considerations sur le gouvernement du Pologne' the following:

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may govern Poland, and the feeling is natural. The education however of the people is so much neglected, and all kind of industry is so foreign to them that the Jews have possessed themselves of the entire trade, and make the peasants sell them for a quantity of brandy the whole harvest of the approaching year. The distances between the nobility and the peasants is so immense, the contrast between the luxury of the one and the frightful misery of the other is so shocking that it is probable the Austrians have given them better laws than those which previously existed. But a proud people, and the Poles are so even in their misery, does not wish to be humbled even when they are benefited, and in that point the Austrians have never failed. [...] At every post-house in Galicia there are to be seen three descriptions of persons who gather round travellers' carriages: the Jew traders, the Polish beggars, and the German spies. The country appears exclusively inhabited by these three classes of men. The beggars, with their long beards and ancient Sarmatian costume, excite deep commiseration; it is very true that if they would work they need not be in that state; but I know not whether it is pride or laziness which makes them disdain the culture of the enslaved earth.'

216. Bakhtin's notion of 'heteroglossia' is very fruitful as an analytical tool, aiming at defining different discourses within the text, and thereby its context where it once was created. See Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the novel', pp. 259–422. Important to mention here is also Voloshinov's concept of 'reported speech' whose implication for the study of language he defines in line with the philosophy of dialogue of the Bakhtin circle as follows: '[...] the true object of inquiry ought to be precisely the dynamic interrelationship to these two factors, the speech being reported (the other person's speech) and the speech doing the reporting (the author's speech).' (Emphasis in the original.) V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 119.

[...] et la Pologne, cette région dépeuplée, dévastée, opprimée, ouverte à ses agresseurs, au fort de ses malheurs et de son anarchie, montre encore tout le feu de la jeunesse; [...].<sup>217</sup>

Thus, Rousseau's (who never went to Poland) description of the Poles being 'oppressed'; Poland being 'in the middle of its misfortunes and its anarchy' still shows 'passionate youth'; the land being 'depopulated and devastated', seems to be refracted in Mme de Staël's account. Even though her narrative reflects what she actually observed and perceived, one cannot rule out that Ego-texts influenced her observation and filtered out things and events that did not fit in with the Ego-culture's model of Poland, the other culture. In this connection Wertsch discusses narratives as organizing the past of a socio-cultural sphere, in doing which they both make accounts of the past possible and put a limit to them. Also, narratives recounting the past have two functions, according to Wertsch, that is, to tell the true story and to give a useful one for the community, the Culture. Mme de Staël's *Dix années d'exil* fits well into that definition.

Lotman made it clear also that texts, or rather narratives here, in a culture, do not disappear entirely because the Culture which once produced and permitted the texts keeps them in memory (as a stock of information). We may also add that this is also valid for texts in the extended sense as artefacts produced in Culture. Some texts, or narratives, may not be used in certain periods, but in others they turn out to be useful to the Culture and thus 'remembered', that is, used again to create new narratives, as Wertsch has shown by defining them as mediated actions. Rousseau's account of Poland seemed to have been a useful cultural tool, as a narrative, to Mme de Staël. In the ending lines of the quotation about Poland she underlines the pride of the Poles, which make them shun humiliation. Why?

Now, even though the Austrians have brought them better laws, limiting the 'shocking contrast' between the people living in luxury and the ones living in 'horrible misery', they never 'failed' to humiliate the proud Poles. Implicitly this passage seems to show that

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217. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Considerations sur le gouvernement de Pologne', in *Oeuvres complètes III* (Dijon: Éditions Gallimard, 1964), p. 954. '[...] and Poland, this depopulated, devastated, and oppressed region, open to its opponents, in the middle of its misfortunes and its anarchy, still shows passionate youth; [...].' (My translation.)



Austria, after allying itself with Napoleon, is becoming Non-culture to Mme de Staël, while she is projecting Ego-culture on to Poland in the sense that she attributes the country pride in relation to antagonists, but probably not in other ways. That is, the Poles in Galicia are seemingly made into her allies in the struggle against Napoleon, although the former only indirectly by being occupied by Austria. The Polish people she writes about in the quotation is rather to be defined as *Alius* to Mme de Staël. She did not want them to answer her in any way, nor would they have succeeded in attempting to do so, probably. This way of describing the Poles in Galicia perhaps made her account a useful narrative for others in disgrace with Napoleon, or for those generally not agreeing with his politics. What other influences may be detected in Mme de Staël's account of her passage through Poland?

*Poland, Mme de Staël and French politics*

We know that Mme de Staël kept Rulhière's book on Poland and Russia in her library, just like the one on Mme Geoffrin (who had been in Poland to visit her protégé King Stanisław August), including her letters.<sup>218</sup> Mme Geoffrin, also called the 'reine-mère de Pologne' because of her close relation to Stanisław August, was an acquaintance of Mme Necker.<sup>219</sup> Furthermore, M. Necker had in 1781 been offered by Stanisław August to come to Poland to govern the finances of the state.<sup>220</sup> Also, Germaine Necker knew a lot of influential Polish families, as for instance those of Czartoryski, Radziwiłł, Potocki and Lubormirski, and she also knew personally some of those who had been active in the Confederation of Bar, such

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218. For the book on Mme Geoffrin, *Eloges de Madame Geoffrin [...]*, par M.M. Morellet, Thomas et d'Alembert; suivis de lettres de Madame de Geoffrin et a Madame de Geoffrin [...] (Paris: H. Nicole, Librairie stéréotype, 1812), see Simone Balayé, 'La bibliothèque de Madame de Staël', in *Cahiers Staëliens*, 23, 1977, Paris, pp. 77–80. For the book by Rulhière see *ibid.*, pp. 48–54, esp. p. 52. The title of the book mentioned: Claude-Carloman de Rulhière, *Histoire de l'anarchie de Pologne et du démembrement de cette république, suivie des Anecdotes sur la Révolution de Russie en 1762*, publ. 1807, and also a separate edition with the title *Id. Histoire ou anecdotes sur la revolution de Russie en l'année 1762*, publ. 1797.

219. Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', esp. p. 31.

220. *Ibid.*

as Dumouriez.<sup>221</sup> Prince de Ligne was also an important source of information to her, since he regarded Poland as one of his six or seven home countries.<sup>222</sup>

Already Germaine Necker, thus, was probably quite well informed about the political situation of Poland. And it was three events in the dramatic development in Poland that especially interested Mme de Staël: ‘the insurrection of Kościuszko in 1794, the formation of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw (1806–1807) and the Napoleon campaign of 1812.’<sup>223</sup> But the Polish question was also important since it divided the enlightened thinkers into two camps: for Russia or for Poland. Larry Wolff points out that Rousseau, already at the time he wrote *Contrat social* in 1762, was a critic of Peter I and at the time of Poland’s first partition in 1772 he ‘became the declared enemy of Catherine.’<sup>224</sup> Thus, in 1778, the year when both Rousseau and Voltaire died, two standpoints concerning the Polish and the Eastern European question were formulated: ‘Voltaire for Russia against Poland, Rousseau for Poland against Russia.’<sup>225</sup> However, Voltaire did not go to St. Petersburg, nor did Rousseau go to Warsaw. ‘Rather, Poland and Russia provided Rousseau and Voltaire respectively with alternative visions of Eastern Europe’, Larry Wolff continues, and at the same time as these parts of Europe functioned as regions for enlightened ‘ideological experimentation’.<sup>226</sup>

Now, when trying to answer the question more concretely as to where Mme de Staël got the information about the character of the Poles and their history, one may assume that the historian Claude-Carloman Rulhière’s writings had also had an important impact on

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221. Nicolas, ‘Madame de Staël et la Pologne’, pp. 31–33. See also Claire Nicolas, ‘Correspondants polonais de Madame de Staël’, in *Cahiers Staëliens*, no. 25, 1978, Paris, pp. 45–54.

222. Nicolas, ‘Madame de Staël et la Pologne’, p. 32.

223. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

224. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 236.

225. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

226. *Ibid.*, p. 236. It was Denis Diderot who finally made that trip to St. Petersburg and Catherine II. He arrived in October 1773 and departed in March 1774. For a similar reasoning on this subject matter about Voltaire’s and Rousseau’s views on Russia and Poland respectively see Martin Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), esp. pp. 52–53.

her. As mentioned above, the cause of Poland occupied French politics in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Influential contemporary thinkers like Mably, Rousseau, Baudeau and Marat, among others, wrote about Poland, but the subject was not the main preoccupation for any of these; only Rulhière gave it an important place in his *œuvre*.<sup>227</sup> But paradoxically, Rulhière had only hours of experience of Poland (Rousseau had none, as already discussed), which he got when staying the night in Warsaw on his way to Russia (where he, in contrast, stayed for months, in St. Petersburg) in 1762.<sup>228</sup>

However, Claire Nicolas, concerning Mme de Staël's discussion about the Polish Constitution of 3 May 1791, raises the question whether Mme de Staël was not influenced by Mably's *Du Gouvernement et des lois de la Pologne* when addressing the matter. It was mainly the right of inheritance of the throne, the reinforcement of the royal power and the abolition of the 'liberum veto' that was brought up by her in one of her early political texts in 1794, where she also pays homage to Kościuszko, perhaps as a result in line with the 'cult of grand men that she professed'.<sup>229</sup> Nevertheless, Rulhière read from his manuscripts of 1782 in the salons of Paris, 'including that of Mme Necker', i.e. in the one Germaine where once grew up.<sup>230</sup>

If we refer to the above discussion of the political debate in France at the time of the first partition of Poland in 1772, the paradoxes of

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227. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 272.

228. *Ibid.*, p. 274.

229. Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', p. 37. The text by Mme de Staël has the title *Réflexions sur la paix adressées à M. Pitt et aux Français*. Mme de Staël kept *Collection complète des œuvres de l'abbé de Mably* in her library, see Balayé, 'La bibliothèque de Madame de Staël', pp. 63–79, see esp. p. 74. Apart from Russia's influence in Poland it was also 'the problem of Poland itself' and Mably exclaims in his correspondence to his likewise truly pro-Poland fellow writer Rulhière, who himself referred to his rapid journey, during Holy Week in 1762, through the country by calling it that 'dreadful voyage': 'What a land, Poland! I would just as soon travel in Tartary!' Mably's conventional outrage at conditions of travel in Poland was quite equal to that of Mme Geoffrin. 'To avoid sleeping on the ground, bring with you your bed,' he warned Rulhière. 'To avoid dying of hunger and thirst, carry with you provisions and even water, for the Poles are of a swinishness (*cochonnerie*) and laziness which extinguishes even the crudest industry.' (Emphasis in the original.) See Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 275.

230. *Ibid.*, p. 276. See also Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', p. 32.

Mme de Staël's descriptions of the Poles as on the one hand being heroic, fighting for their country, and on the other being ignorant and lazy may be explained.<sup>231</sup> At the time of Mme de Staël's grand tour Poland re-emerged as the Grand Duchy of Warsaw on Napoleon's initiative in 1807. The Polish people's struggle for their country again became a topic, at least for Mme de Staël, who apparently was well instructed about the Confederates' warfare.<sup>232</sup>

As Claire Nicolas so aptly shows, Mme de Staël's close friend Prosper de Barante also played an important role in this connection. In a letter to Madame de Staël, he wrote about the unselfish, self-sacrificing Polish patriots:

Je n'ai pas vu vos amis polonais; le prince Joseph Poniatowski...le comte Stanislas Potocki...Ce sont des patriotes que tous ces hommes-ci. L'argent, la vie, rien ne leur coûte, c'est un dévouement qu'on ne se figure pas, et tout cela sans savoir pourquoi, sans réflexion, sans prévoyance, à la légère. Cette frivolité m'avait d'abord prévenu contre eux; mais cependant, il est impossible de ne pas les admirer de leur amour de la patrie. Je vous dirai quelque jour tout ce que j'ai

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231. In a letter from Coppet to Étienne Dumont (Genevan priest) on 16 May 1807 Mme de Staël speaks about her reading of Rulhière's book on Poland, as she had apparently done in a letter to Prosper Barante, since he reproaches her for not giving the book the credit it merited. See Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', pp. 40–41. For the letter to Dumont *in extenso* see de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, VI, pp. 246–247.

232. Then, to Rulhière and Rousseau alike the Confederates of Bar, who rose against Russia in 1768, were the heroes in the conflict with King Stanisław August over how Poland should be governed, and the civil war ended with the intervention of Russian troops and the first partition of Poland in 1772. See Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 237. Rulhière died in 1791, and not until 1805, under Napoleon, was his work *Histoire de l'anarchie de Pologne* published, Wolff writes: 'It was then edited in such a way as to render it no longer anti-Russian, thus cancelling its whole political perspective. The word "barbarian" was elided wherever it referred to the Russians. Such was the intimate relation of partisan alternatives—for Russia or for Poland—merely a matter of editing, and the distinction between civilization and barbarism was also subject to arbitrary elision and revision.' Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 277.

éprouvé d'impressions différentes sur cette Pologne à force de la regarder.<sup>233</sup>

In a letter sent from Breslau about two weeks later Prosper de Barante wrote to Mme de Staël about his ambiguous impressions of Poland: the disorder in Warsaw, the patriots and the medieval social structure with nobles on the one side and the enslaved people on the other.

J'ai quitté la Pologne sans regret...le désordre de cette grande ville de Varsovie m'ennuyait et me déplaisait.

Je ne sais ce que deviendra la Pologne, mais j'ai vu assurément un des beaux exemples de patriotisme que l'on puisse concevoir: j'ai vu aussi une nation constituée comme les Européens l'étaient tous au XIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle, les nobles seuls forment le peuple, le reste étant ilote....<sup>234</sup>

Now, it seems as if Mme de Staël primarily took a liking to the Polish patriotism and their fight for independence, as Barante did, and Rousseau, among others, before him. But also Napoleon himself was

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233. Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', p. 39. Letter sent to Mme de Staël from Prosper de Barante in Warsaw on 16 January 1807. 'I have not seen your Polish friends; the Prince Joseph Poniatowski...Count Stanislas Potocki...They are patriots like all those men. Money, life, nothing is dear to them, it is an unimaginable self-sacrifice, and all that without knowing why, without reflection, without anticipation, in a thoughtless way. This frivolity I held against them at first; but however, it is impossible not to admire their love for their country. I'll tell you one day everything about all the different impressions I have got from this Poland by observing it.' (My translation.) Mme de Staël mentions in a letter to Claude-Ignace de Barante (Acosta, 2 February 1807), the father of Prosper, that she had received a letter from her son dated 16 January, but in a note Béatrice W. Jasinski states Breslau as the place of dispatch, see de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, VI, pp. 186–187, note 2. However, it was probably sent from Warsaw, see note below.

234. Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', p. 39. Letter sent to Mme de Staël from Prosper de Barante in Breslau on 29 January 1807, where he mentions that he has left Poland. Therefore the letter sent on 16 January to Mme de Staël was probably sent from Warsaw, see note above. 'I have left Poland without regret ... the disorder of that big city Warsaw annoyed me and displeased me. / I do not know what will become of Poland, but I have doubtless seen one of the most beautiful examples of patriotism that one can conceive of: I have also seen a nation constituted as all the European ones were in the thirteenth century, the nobles only form the people, the rest being enslaved ...'. (My translation.)

astonished, as observed by Barante in his *Souvenirs*, by this patriotism, facing the Polish ‘delirium’ in Poznań in 1806: ‘Je vois qu’il n’est pas aisé de détruire une nation.’<sup>235</sup> On the other hand, Poland was a disordered, displeasing backward country. Barante’s descriptions are in line with what Mme de Staël wrote some years later on her passage though Poland in 1812.

However, in 1806 the manuscript by Rulhière, that had influenced the image of Poland of the Parisian political thinkers and salon visitors, was withdrawn by the government and again subject to editions, this time to ‘restore Rulhière’.<sup>236</sup> Talleyrand was at the time foreign minister, and had the original manuscript of 1783 at his disposal, which he now found ‘too restrained in its republicanism’.<sup>237</sup> Napoleon, however, found that Rulhière’s pro-Polish stance was ‘appropriate to the international moment’.<sup>238</sup> So, finally in 1807 Rulhière’s work on Poland was published in its full length of ‘four volumes’.<sup>239</sup> The handling of Rulhière’s manuscript shows, in fact, how the Culture is preoccupied with providing useful narratives to the community, in connection with Napoleon perhaps better, imposing them, aspiring to give a true account, as we have discussed earlier in connection with Wertsch’s sociocultural theories. Now, apparently Rulhière was also an important source for Napoleon regarding Poland.<sup>240</sup> Mme de Staël wrote to Étienne Dumont about the impact of Rulhière’s work.

En littérature rien n’a fait de l’effet que l’histoire de Pologne de Rulhière; on l’a imprimée parce qu’on y disait du mal des Russes, mais malgré l’exagération partielle de l’auteur, il y a dans cette historie le mérite et l’intérêt des mémoires. Au reste, les histoires du 18<sup>ème</sup> siècle doivent avoir cette couleur jusqu’à

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235. Nicolas, ‘Madame de Staël et la Pologne’, p. 41. ‘I see that it is not easy to destroy a nation.’ (My translation.)

236. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 277.

237. *Ibid.*, pp. 277–278.

238. Napoleon had re-established a Polish state, when creating the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, partially in order to put pressure on Russia ‘fighting in the Third Coalition against France’. For further information and quotation see Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 278.

239. *Ibid.*, p. 278.

240. Nicolas, ‘Madame de Staël et la Pologne’, p. 41.

la Révolution, car l'Angleterre exceptée, il n'y a eu que des anecdotes parmi les nations.<sup>241</sup>

It is important, though, to stress that Mme de Staël took her political stance in another context than Rulhière. To her it was Napoleon's politics that were in the foreground, which overshadowed the conflict between the Poles and the Russians. Also important to note is that at the time of Mme de Staël's journey in 1812, the ideas of the Enlightenment were to some extent replaced by those of Romanticism, a movement that Mme de Staël was an early advocate of in France. Mme de Staël made the following remark in *Dix années d'exil*. She thought that the Poles with their struggle for independence were the only people worth any interest, among all the people Bonaparte dragged behind him. She also believed that Napoleon deliberately tried to turn the Poles against Russia.

Parmi les nations que Bonaparte traîne après lui, la seule qui mérite de l'intérêt, ce sont les Polonais. Je crois qu'ils savent aussi bien que nous qu'ils ne sont que le prétexte de la guerre, et que l'Empereur ne se soucie pas de leur indépendance. Il n'a pu s'abstenir d'exprimer plusieurs fois à l'empereur Alexandre son dédain pour la Pologne, par cela seulement qu'elle veut être libre; mais il lui convient de la mettre en avant contre la Russie, et les Polonais profitent de cette circonstance pour se rétablir comme nation.<sup>242</sup>

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241. Ibid., p. 41. Letter sent from Coppet on 16 May 1807. For the letter to Dumont *in extenso* see de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, VI, pp. 246–247. 'In literature nothing has made an impact such as Rulhière's history of Poland: it has been printed because in it bad things are said about the Russians, but despite the author's partial exaggeration, there is in this history the qualifications and interests of the memoir. Besides, history from the eighteenth century ought to have that flavour up to the Revolution, because with the exception of England, there have only been anecdotes among the nations.' (My translation.)

242. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 244. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 123. 'The Poles are the only nation of those which Bonaparte drags after him that create any interest. I believe they know as well as we do that they are only the pretence for the war, and that the Emperor does not care a fig for their independence. He has not even been able to refrain himself from expressing several times to the Emperor Alexander his disdain for Poland, solely because she wishes to be free: but it suits his purposes to put her in the van against Russia, and the Poles avail themselves of

That way, Mme de Staël was not forced to choose sides, Bonaparte was the enemy of both Poland and Russia. Perhaps she was right in judging Napoleon for his cynical political play, if one considers what he said to M. de Balachov: ‘Croyez-vous que je me soucie de ces jacobins de Polonais?’<sup>243</sup> This she does, in her travel account from Russia and elsewhere, by regretting that Tsar Alexander had not crowned himself king of Poland ‘and thereby associated the cause of this oppressed people with that of all generous minds!’<sup>244</sup> Another example of this will follow below.

However, as we know, Mme de Staël was also pro-Russian, and Tsar Alexander was her ally in the struggle against Napoleon. In fact, in her *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française* she pays tribute to him for having given rights to the Russian part of Poland:

Mais l’empereur Alexandre s’est-il livré à des pensées égoïstes lorsqu’il a donné à la partie de la Pologne qu’il a acquise par les derniers traités les droits que la raison humaine réclame maintenant de toutes parts?<sup>245</sup>

And in a letter she wrote that Alexander ought to declare himself king of the Poles, to re-establish their nation:

Savez-vous ce qu’il faut à présent, c’est tâcher de désintéresser les Polonais de la question...L’empereur Alexandre devrait se déclarer leur roi pour qu’ils redevinssent une Pologne.<sup>246</sup>

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that circumstance to restore their national independence.’ See also Nicolas, ‘Madame de Staël et la Pologne’, p. 46.

243. Ibid., p. 46. See also Blennerhassett, *Madame de Staël et son temps (1766–1817)*, vol. III, p. 442. Mme de Staël herself renders the conversation in her travelogue from Russia, see de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 275. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 140. “‘Do you think,” said he to M. Balasheff, “that I care a straw for these Polish Jacobins?””

244. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 140. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 275.

245. Nicolas, ‘Madame de Staël et la Pologne’, p. 47. ‘But has the Emperor Alexander indulged in egoistic thoughts when he has given to the part of Poland which he has acquired in the latest treaties, rights that human reason now demands in all parts?’ (My translation.)

246. Letter to Galiffé quoted in Nicolas, ‘Madame de Staël et la Pologne’, p. 47. ‘Do you know what is required at the moment, it is to try to make the Polish



Perhaps Mme de Staël in the end took a stance, after all, in favour of the Russians, or rather for Tsar Alexander?

Mme de Staël's handling of the account of Poland illustrates what Wertsch discusses about mediated actions, i.e. narratives. Mme de Staël's narrative is from time to time contradictory, a result of, I would suggest, other voices mingling with her own, which had other aims. The cultural tools used by Rulhière or Rousseau provided Mme de Staël with a cultural narrative that was only partly useful to her, because she had other aims, namely to establish a narrative of the wrong-doings of Napoleon and the heroism of his antagonists. Therefore Mme de Staël cannot take a stance against Tsar Alexander. This explains, I would also suggest, the gaps in her narrative that must be filled in by the reader in order to grasp the meaning of her text, to use some insights made by the Prague school. In order to be able to do that, on the other hand, the context in which Mme de Staël's narrative was created has to be re-constructed, to use some insights made by the Tartu school. Thus, Mme de Staël emerged as a highly political author with a sometimes hidden, and sometimes overt, agenda, which caused her narrative to sometimes be semantically incoherent.

Especially two types that are used, not only by Madame de Staël as we have seen, when apprehending the Poles, come to the fore here: the proud and nationalistic Pole. These types, not at all unsubstantial, when considering the Poles' own national narrative (cultural tool), proved to be useful to Mme de Staël in her construction of a useful narrative: they seem to have appealed to her perception of herself and Ego-culture. In other words, these types may have reflected her own pride in belonging to, in some respects,

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disinterested in the question... The Emperor Alexander should declare himself their king so that they may become a Poland again.' (My translation.) For the letter to Galiffé see also Kohler, *Madame de Staël et la Suisse*, p. 616. Kohler informs the reader about the circumstances when those lines to Galiffé were written: Mme de Staël was then in Sweden, where she arrived from Russia, via Finland, on 24 September 1812, trying to persuade Bernadotte to support Russia in the war. 'Elle met tout en jeu pour le jeter dans le parti de la Russie, pour qu'il prête au tzar un appui, promis mais différé' (ibid.). See also de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 275; and de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 140. 'How unfortunate for this nation that the Emperor Alexander had not taken the title of King of Poland, and thereby associated the cause of this oppressed people with that of all generous minds!'

an equally vanishing culture: the Parisian culture of salons, and her nationalistic defence of that France. In fact, one might perhaps say that at heart she felt herself to be the true ambassadress of that culture, rather than anyone else. Her account of her years in exile points in that direction indeed, I would argue.

### *Journey through Galicia*

Now, in Germaine de Staël's account from Galicia, Austria is depicted as the main enemy of the Poles, although that was only partly true since it concerned only the ones living in Galicia. But again, since the Austrians belonged to the Western Europe that Mme de Staël cherished, i.e. Germany, they are to her in a strange way more civilized no matter what, giving the Poles 'better laws' than they previously had, as seen above.<sup>247</sup> It is peculiar also that in the quotation cited above she depicts the men with 'long beards and ancient Sarmatian costume' as beggars, because the invoking of a mythical Sarmatian origin was a trait of nobility, although they were not necessarily economically better off than other people, and in fact she seems puzzled herself by the sight of these odd 'beggars', to which she cannot find an explanation and continues: 'but I know not whether it is pride or laziness which makes them disdain the culture of the enslaved earth.'<sup>248</sup> Mme de Staël's confusion when trying to fit her culture-bound understanding of Sarmatians with what she actually perceives, points to Wertsch's theory about how narratives tend to become less coherent when hesitation occurs about what cultural tool to use in a specific situation. One reason for this confusion might be that the invocation of the Sarmatian origin sometimes meant two different things in Poland and in French literature, notably from the Enlightenment. In *Charles XII* (1731) Voltaire described the Swedish king's warfare in the eastern parts of Europe and commented on the barbarian origin of its people. Larry Wolff, quoting Voltaire, writes:

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247. Ibid., p. 129.

248. Ibid. Likewise, in contemporary Hungary the Hungarian nobility, to show true patriotism and to legitimize their status, invoked their mythical Scythian Eastern origin. Although often enough they were not economically better off than other people, they were exempt from paying tax, and thereby privileged. See Rédei, 'József Eötvös and the Age of Hungarian Reform', pp. 107–131, esp. p. 117.

The Tartars were brigands and yet hospitable to Charles XII: ‘The Scythians, their ancestors, transmitted to them this inviolable respect for hospitality.’ Like Voltaire’s Pole-Sarmatian, his Tartar-Scythian remained a barbarian of the ancient world. It was such a successful formula that, 50 years later, travellers like Coxe and Ségur would discover Scythians all over Eastern Europe.<sup>249</sup>

In this connection, the non-Scythian and non-Sarmatian Austria, at the core, seemed to be in a more Extra-cultural relation to Mme de Staël than Galicia, which in fact appears as Non-culture to her. This becomes obvious further on in her travelogue. While still in Galicia she wrote about processions of religious people and humble common people, in a rather remote manner:

On rencontre sur les grands chemins des processions de femmes et d’hommes portant l’étendard de la croix, et chantant des psaumes; une profonde expression de tristesse règne sur leur visage; je les ai vus, quand on leur donnait non pas de l’argent, mais des aliments meilleurs que ceux auxquels ils étaient accoutumés, regarder le ciel avec étonnement, comme s’ils ne se croyaient pas faits pour jouir de ces dons. L’usage des gens du peuple, en Pologne, est d’embrasser les genoux des seigneurs, quand ils les rencontrent; [...].<sup>250</sup>

It is interesting to compare these lines in *Dix années d’exil* with those in a letter sent from Wadowice on 7 July 1812 to her friend Mme Récamier. While she expresses sympathy with the religious and poor

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249. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 93. Also Baron Munchausen (a character Mme de Staël apparently knew, as shown by the example of her encounter with Fichte discussed earlier), may be added, in Raspe’s famous book *The Travels and surprising adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1785) he saw the barbaric Scythians in Eastern Europe, and related them specifically to Hungary. See Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 105.

250. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, pp. 258–259. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 130. ‘You meet upon the high roads processions of men and women carrying the standard of the cross, and singing psalms; a profound expression of melancholy reigns upon their countenance: I have seen them when not money, but food of a better sort than they had been accustomed to was given them, turn up their eyes to heaven with astonishment, as if they considered themselves unfit to enjoy its bounty. The custom of the common people in Poland is to embrace the knees of the nobility when they meet them; [...].’

people, at the same time she feels that they belong to a less *civilized* Europe:

Vous ne pouvez pas vous faire une idée, mon ange, de l'émotion que votre lettre m'a causée. C'est au fond de la Moravie, près de la forteresse d'Olmütz, que ces paroles célestes me sont arrivées. J'ai pleuré des larmes de douleur et de tendresse en entendant cette voix qui m'arrivait dans le désert comme l'ange d'Agar. Mon Dieu, mon Dieu! si l'on ne m'avait pas séparée de vous, je ne serais pas ici.[...]

J'ai rencontré sur le chemin des gens du peuple qui allaient implorer Dieu dans leurs misères, et, n'espérant rien des hommes voulaient s'adresser plus haut. Déjà l'on commence à sentir qu'on a quitté l'Europe civilisée. Quelques chants mélancoliques annoncent de temps en temps les plaintes des êtres souffrants qui, lors même qu'ils chantent, soupirent encore.<sup>251</sup>

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251. Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, pp. 230–231. 'You cannot imagine, my angel, the emotion your letter caused me. It was at the far end of Moravia, near the fort of Olmütz, that those celestial words reached me. I shed tears of pain and tenderness when hearing that voice which came to me in the desert like the angel Agar. My God, my God! If I had not been parted from you, I would not have been here. [...] / I have met persons from the common people on the road who went to implore God in their misery, and, expecting nothing from mankind they wanted to address themselves higher up. Already one starts to feel that one has left the civilized Europe. Some melancholic songs announce from time to time the complaints of these suffering beings who, even when singing, still sigh.' (My translation.) See also de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 258–259, note 1. Mme de Staël is here likely referring to the biblical scene *Agar dans le Désert* that she had played at home, at that she performed again during her stay in Vienna 1807–1808. See Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 40. In fact, Ouvaroff gives a description of this event in Vienna, as being part of the audience, in his essay on Prince de Ligne, who took him aside after the performance and said: 'n'êtes-vous pas enchanté et ne trouvez-vous pas la pièce excellente? Mais, à propos, quel est donc son titre? — Agar dans le désert, répondis-je naïvement. — Eh! Non, non cher petit, vous vous trompez, c'est la Justification d'Abraham.' "Are you not enchanted and do you not find the passage excellent? But, by the way, what is the title of it then?" "Agar in the desert," I answered naively. "Eh! no, no, my little dear, you are mistaken, it is the Justification of Abraham." (My translation.) Ouvaroff, *Esquisses politiques et littéraires*, p. 126. Apparently Prince de Ligne could be very ironic concerning Mme de Staël's doings. Moravia is a region in the Czech Republic and Olmütz is the German name for the Czech town of Olomouc.

The second part of the quotation does not deviate from her observations in *Dix années d'exil*, and in fact, in its general outline, not from any other observation that Mme de Staël was, as we have seen, familiar with. And as Claire Nicolas notices, Mme de Staël's understanding of the poverty that she saw on the roads, and the reasons behind it, was highly limited: 'daughter of a banker and friend of magnates' and furthermore as an 'enemy of Napoleon, she would not say a word about the abolition of serfdom in the Grand Duchy of Warsaw.'<sup>252</sup> In our terms the Polish people represented the Non-culture to Mme de Staël, in the sense that she, with her background, was unable to understand what she perceived, although she expresses her empathy in her notes. But again, that empathy may have had its roots in politics, her personal political agenda. In that way, she may have used the Polish cause in the same way as Napoleon did, but of course for opposite reasons. But just as with the German woman on the ferry, Mme de Staël acted on the Polish people, who were not expected to answer her, in short; she *did not wish* to establish a dialogue with them because they served other purposes. They represented *Alius* and thus the question of a true dialogue is *not possible* (literally and/or mentally).

Another passage, in the same letter of 7 July to Mme Récamier, sheds light on the mechanism of comparison involved when understanding cultures. Poland is described as the 'the most sombre country on earth, and where German seems' to Mme de Staël to be her 'mother tongue', to such an extent is Polish 'foreign' to her.<sup>253</sup> Thus, Germany appeared to Mme de Staël as the Ego-culture *in comparison* to Poland, the Non-culture.

However, as Nicolas so aptly observes, Mme de Staël's ability and delight to really discover Poland was hindered by the exhaustion caused by the surveillance of the Austrian police, which made the circumstances under which she travelled specifically hard, and consequently she gives more attention to the persecutions she was a victim of than to the 'country she traverses.'<sup>254</sup>

But more interesting perhaps, in the sense of more personal and original, in Mme de Staël's letter to Mme Récamier are the opening

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252. Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', p. 45.

253. Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, p. 231.

254. Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', pp. 44–45.

lines, because they reveal the image Mme de Staël made of her Ego-culture. Of course, they also reflect the affection Mme de Staël surely had for her intimate friend, but the depth of their relation, which is discussed in a book by Maurice Levaillant with the title *Une amitié amoureuse*, is beyond the scope of this inquiry.<sup>255</sup> However, besides their close friendship Mme Récamier also seemed to represent something else, important but more abstract, to Mme de Staël, namely the exquisiteness of French culture and beauty.<sup>256</sup> In fact Mme Récamier was known for her beauty all over Europe, and in that sense functioned as a kind of ambassadress for French culture. Mme de Staël, when deciding upon the portrait of Corinne in 1807, thought first of Mme Récamier as a model for Corinne.<sup>257</sup>

Perhaps it is not too hasty to suggest that the Corinne-type, as previously discussed, is a blend of Mme Récamier's beauty and Mme de Staël's wit, and as such a highly idealized image of the France Mme de Staël so loved. In this Mme de Staël followed the French tradition of letting female figures represent abstract concepts, as for instance the Marianne figure was made to designate the French Revolution.<sup>258</sup> So it is when Mme de Staël, deeply touched, hears the voice of Mme Récamier behind the words that reached her in the 'desert, like the angel of Agar.'<sup>259</sup> Apparently, being in Poland was

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255. Maurice Levaillant, *Une amitié amoureuse: Madame de Staël et Madame Récamier* (Paris: Hachette, 1956).

256. In a letter to Mme Récamier sent from Geneva in 1812, before her departure from Coppet, Mme de Staël's expresses something that might support such a hypothesis, when complaining over how bored she is, how much she misses France: '[...] je ne sais pas vaincre mes souvenirs et mes goûts de France. Ah! vous qui réunissez tout ce qui me plaît dans ce genre à tout ce que j'estime ailleurs, faut-il donc que je sois ainsi séparée de vous!' The letter is published in Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, p. 223. '[...] I cannot vanquish my memories and my taste for France. Ah! you who reunite all that pleases me in that genre in fact all that I appreciate, do I have to be separated from you that way!' (My translation.)

257. Letter to Henri Meister, 7 August 1807. de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, VI, p. 289.

258. Isbell, 'Introduction', in de Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, p. xiii.

259. However, Louis de Jaucourt, 'who probably never saw Hungary' when writing about Hungary in the *Encyclopédie*, quoted Voltaire 'who also never saw Hungary' (emphasis in the original): 'In vain, says M. de Voltaire, nature has placed in this land mines of gold and silver, and the true treasures, grains and wines; in vain she has formed there robust men, well made, spiritual! One saw almost nothing more than a vast desert.' Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 186.

like being in the desert to Mme de Staël. She thus described the nature of the landscape of the Non-culture, in which Mme Récamier, as the incarnation of the Ego-culture, descended upon her like the angel of Agar.

*Visits to Princess Lubomirska*

Princess Lubomirska (born Czartoryska and widow of the grand field-marshal of Poland, Stanisław Lubomirski) had been an old acquaintance of Germaine Necker and her family since before the revolution. She was one of the most frequent guests at the French court and an ardent enemy of Napoleon.<sup>260</sup> In short, Mme de Staël had a lot in common socially, politically and culturally with Princess Lubomirska. Mme de Staël already met her in 1807–1808 during her first stay in Vienna (as we have seen), and was also to meet her this time when travelling through the Habsburg empire.

So, Mme de Staël made a detour one day to go and see a ruined castle of Princess Lubomirska. Again she uses the word desert to metaphorically describe the Polish landscape, and the roads were in such a bad state that it was ‘impossible to form an idea’ if one had not travelled through Poland before.<sup>261</sup> On her arrival at the castle she made the following remarks about the great contrast between luxury and poverty: there was no white bread but exquisite wine, etc. But the kindness of the people and the generosity of the nobles must be praised:

Il n’y avait ni pain blanc ni viande, mais un vin exquis de Hongrie, et partout des débris de magnificence se trouvaient à côté de la plus grande misère. Ce contraste se retrouve souvent en Pologne; il n’y a pas de lits dans les maisons même où règne l’élégance la plus recherchée. Tout semble esquisse dans ce pays, et rien n’y est terminé; mais ce qu’on ne saurait trop louer, c’est la bonté de peuple et la générosité des grands: les uns et les autres sont aisément remués par tout ce qui est bon

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Thus, ‘desert’ as a metaphor, it seems, for the landscape of the Non-culture, in the terminology of cultural semiotics, was not new.

260. Rossetini, ‘Le séjour de Mme de Staël à Vienne pendant l’hiver 1807–1808’, pp. 309–310.

261. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 261. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 132.

et beau, et les agents que l'Autriche y envoie semblent des hommes de bois au milieu de cette nation mobile.<sup>262</sup>

Even though Mme de Staël's travel account is not very original in its description of Poland (the image of Poland as 'pays des contrastes' was 'conventional'), as Claire Nicolas points out, there are however some observations that seem to be rather specific to her.<sup>263</sup>

Perhaps Mme de Staël did not escape the description of contrast when depicting Poland, but some of those are specifically interesting: the bipolarity between the sketchiness of the 'mobile' Poland and the woodiness of the Austrians. The former is characterized, in this passage, by the goodness of the people (that she could hardly know anything about) and the generosity of the great (with whom she was friends), and the latter by the agents they sent out to spy on her. Thus, Poland with its air of not being 'terminated' is contrasted with the 'wooden men' ('de bois', meaning made of wood) sent out by Austria (wooden being an epithet corresponding to the rigidity of the agents). Mme de Staël also seems to use this description, in her writing, of things being unfinished, in the sense of being unsettled, to define observations that do not fit into her experiences of ordinary life, but do fit with her preconception of less civilized cultures. We will see further examples of that later on when discussing Mme de Staël's travelogue from Russia.

On her way to Russia Mme de Staël passed Princess Lubomirska's castle Łańcut, a journey that started dramatically: Mme de Staël was informed that she was only allowed to stay in Łańcut for eight hours, and to ensure that orders were followed one of the superintendents was to escort her into the castle and stay there until she left (which he

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262. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 262. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 132. 'They had neither white bread nor meat, but an exquisite Hungarian wine, and everywhere the wrecks of magnificence stood by the side of the greatest misery. This contrast is of frequent recurrence in Poland: there are no beds, even in houses fitted up with the most finished elegance. Everything appears sketched in this country, and nothing terminated in it; but what one can never sufficiently praise is the goodness of the people and the generosity of the great: both are easily excited by all that is good and beautiful, and the agents whom Austria sends there seem like wooden men in the midst of this flexible nation.'

263. Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', p. 45.



did in the end, to Mme de Staël's great regret).<sup>264</sup> As a result of these persecutions, Mme de Staël, as she describes it, 'was seized with a nervous attack'.<sup>265</sup> Lenormant maintains when commenting upon Mme de Staël's situation that *Dix années d'exil* was her 'revenge and eloquent malediction that she threw on her persecutors.' That was perhaps one of the reasons, although implicit, why Metternich did not like the book.<sup>266</sup>

However, the descriptions of the passage are mostly preoccupied with the annoyances that the Austrian agents caused her and her hosts. Mme de Staël was seized with an unspeakable shame over the fact that an agent was ordered to follow her into the castle and not leave until she did. Mme de Staël remarked that it was unheard of that an agent would sit at the table of a great nobleman without being invited:

Mais conçoit-on un ordre de choses dans lequel un commissaire de police s'établisse à la table d'un grand seigneur, tel que le prince Henri, ou plutôt à celle de qui que ce soit, sans son consentement?<sup>267</sup>

After leaving Łańcut, Mme de Staël travelled through Lwow, capital of Galicia, to the Russian frontier.

### *Travel through Russia or De la Russie*<sup>268</sup>

Je vous ai vu, Sire, aussi grand dans l'adversité que vous l'êtes maintenant au sommet des prospérités humaines, et j'ai entendu de Votre Majesté à Pétersbourg des paroles que je lui

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264. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 264–265; 268. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 134; 136.

265. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 135. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 266.

266. Ullrichová, *Lettres de Madame de Staël conservées en Bohème*, p. 97.

267. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 267. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 135. 'But can one conceive a state of things in which a commissary of police should plant himself at the table of a great nobleman like Prince Henry, or rather at that of any person whatever, without his consent?'

268. Olga Trtnik Rossetini, 'Madame de Staël et la Russie d'après les articles parus en U.R.S.S. sur l'influence française en Russie au début du XIXe siècle', in *Rivista de letteratura moderna e comparate*, vol. 16, no.1, Marzo 1963, Firenze, pp. 50–67, see esp. p. 58. The second part of *Dix années d'exil*, it has been suggested, could be entitled 'De la Russie' to stress the importance of the work.

demande la permission de transmettre à la postérité dans mon premier ouvrage.<sup>269</sup>

Il est rare, Sire, de pouvoir dire à un souverain du fond de son âme: Ne prenez conseil que de vous-même; mais je crois le salut de L'Europe assuré s'il en est ainsi.<sup>270</sup>

In this admiring and polite manner, Madame de Staël wrote to Tsar Alexander, hoping that he would be the one to save Europe after the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815). Mme de Staël met Tsar Alexander I (1777–1825) and the two empresses in St. Petersburg, and it is to these encounters she probably refers in the passage quoted above when she asks for permission to transmit to posterity the words of the tsar in her autobiography, *Dix années d'exil*.<sup>271</sup> In the second quotation Mme de Staël touches upon a question she kept on coming back to, namely, the importance of staying true to oneself. In the name of that she encouraged the Germans to be German, and later on regretted that the Austrians were not sufficiently so. But when it came to Russia and the Russians, the message became somewhat ambiguous, as we will see further on when discussing her travelogue. This may also explain, in fact, why Mme de Staël mentally never seemed to leave her salon, as pointed out in earlier discussions of Uvarov's account of Prince de Ligne's encounters with Mme de Staël.

Now, the Empress Elisabeth's mother was born Princess of Darmstadt, thereby a relative of Mme de Staël's close friend, the Grand Duchess Louise of Saxe-Weimar. The latter was her aunt. In a letter to her mother the empress wrote, shortly after Mme de Staël

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269. Madame de Staël, Alexandre I, 'Lettres de l'empereur Alexandre I<sup>er</sup> et de Madame de Staël. 1814–1817', in *La revue de Paris*, Janvier–Février, 1897, Paris, pp. 5–22, for quotation see esp. p. 6, letter sent from London on 25 April 1814 to Alexander I. 'I have seen you, Sire, as grand in adversity as you are now at the summit of human prosperity, and I have heard from Your Highness at St. Petersburg words that I ask you the permission to transmit to posterity in my first work.' (My translation.)

270. Madame de Staël, Alexandre I, 'Lettres de l'empereur Alexandre I<sup>er</sup> et de Madame de Staël. 1814–1817', in *La revue de Paris*, pp. 6–7, letter sent from Coppet on 8 June 1815 to Alexander I. 'It is rare, Sire, to be able to say to a sovereign from the bottom of one's soul: Do not take advice from anybody else than yourself: but I think the salvation of Europe is assured that way.' (My translation.)

271. Madame de Staël, Alexandre I, 'Lettres de l'empereur Alexandre I<sup>er</sup> et de Madame de Staël. 1814–1817', in *La revue de Paris*, p. 6, note 1.

had left Russia for Sweden, that she believed that ‘an imagination like hers had found a great deal of nourishment here at this moment’, but she also expressed doubts about Mme de Staël’s intention of writing a book on Russia, because it would be ‘difficult to write cleverly about a country one has visited so little’.<sup>272</sup> This remark seems important here, since Mme de Staël’s reporting from Russia in her travelogue often (but not always!) looks more like a result of her lively imagination, although generally in line with the imagining that others before her had written down on Russia, than of strict observation. On the other hand, the correspondence with the tsar is filled with adequate discussions about the political situation in France at the beginning of *La Restauration* (1814–1830) after the fall of the first empire. Perhaps one may suggest here that Mme de Staël as a writer was primarily under the spell of the budding Romanticism, but as a politician she was more of a clear-sighted advocate of liberalism. A comparison of her accounts in the travelogue with her letters to Tsar Alexander will shed some light on this complexity in Mme de Staël’s authorship. But also, the correspondence points to the fact that Europe had changed.

At the time of the Enlightenment it was France that ‘ruled’ Europe and men like Voltaire and Diderot gave advice to Catherine II in order to help Russia to rise from its darkness. Diderot was the one of the two who actually went to Russia. In October 1773 he arrived in St. Petersburg where the empress expected him, whom he describes in a letter as having the ‘soul of Brutus and the charms of Cleopatra.’<sup>273</sup> (My translation.) Diderot wrote down the discussions he had had with Catherine II in a book called *Mémoires pour Catherine II*.<sup>274</sup> And Germaine de Staël was surely well acquainted with the

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272. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, pp. 332–333, note 2. (Quotation translated by me from French.)

273. Diderot in a letter of 24 December 1773 to Princess Dashkoff in Denis Diderot, *Denis Diderot correspondance*, ed. Georges Roth (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1966), vol. XIII, p. 135. ‘Je l’ai trouvée telle que vous me l’aviez peinte à Paris: l’âme de Brutus avec les charmes de Cléopâtre.’

274. Diderot, *Mémoires pour Catherine II*. The texts that were handed over to Catherine II were not known to the general public in France until 1899. But the content, at least, was probably known to Germaine de Staël, since Diderot was seen in her mother’s Parisian salon. However, as Jacques Proust points out, the text is an imaginary staging of the Truth meeting its ideal Empress. See Jacques Proust, ‘Diderot et l’expérience russe: Une exemple de pratique théorique au XVIIIe 182

ideas of Diderot, since he was one of the prominent visitors to Mme Necker's salon in Paris. And the Neckers were politically interested, and M. Necker belonged to the liberals who supported the revolution.<sup>275</sup>

But her way of approaching the Russians sometimes differs from Diderot's, which demonstrates the fact that she found herself in a transit period between the Enlightenment (representing the ideas she grew up with) and Romanticism (ideas she embraced later in life). This may also to some extent be explained by the fact that Diderot saw very little of Russia apart from St. Petersburg during his stay, whilst Mme de Staël had to travel through quite large parts of Russia, because of Napoleon's invasion that had started in June, in order to reach St. Petersburg, and in the end Stockholm.<sup>276</sup> But in sum, the idea that Mme de Staël had totally freed herself from the 'prejudices diffused by her compatriots and especially by Diderot', as Blennerhassett suggests, might not be sustainable.<sup>277</sup> As will be argued further on, they shared the view that nothing could defend autocracy and serfdom, i.e. they were both true democrats in the spirit of Montesquieu.

Therefore, in the end, Mme de Staël likewise in *Dix années d'exil*, as well as in letters, often came to the conclusion that the Russians, at the core, were barbaric. However, she did not seem to understand the reason behind this, because her enchantment with Tsar Alexander prevented her from seeing the institutional autocracy

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siècle', in *Studies on Voltaire and The Eighteenth Century*, 154, ed. Theodore Besterman (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institution, 1976), p. 1780.

275. See also Rédei, *Russia in a Western Mirror*.

276. Diderot expressed his regrets at having seen so little of Russia, especially not having had the opportunity to visit Moscow, in a letter to Mme Necker on 6 September 1774. See *Denis Diderot correspondance*, ed. Georges Roth, vol. XIV, p. 72. She and A.-W. Schlegel were in fact some of the last foreigners to see Moscow before the Russians torched it on 16 September 1812, the night after Napoleon had captured the city. See Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël*, p. 289. And at that time Mme de Staël experienced a Moscow with 'Fifteen hundred churches [that] attested the devotion of the Muscovite people.' (Commentary in brackets is mine.) And, Mme de Staël continues further on, 'the sun seemed to take a pleasure in shedding his rays upon these glittering cupolas.' de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 159. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 308; in note 2 (same page) the editor adds the information that in 1730 Weber counted 1,500 churches; p. 310.

277. Blennerhassett, *Madame de Staël et son temps (1766–1817)*, vol. III, p. 450.

embedded in the Russian imperial tradition. In that sense one might perhaps detect some similarities with Voltaire's delight with Catherine II, with whom he corresponded for many years. Voltaire also set out to write the history of Russia and Peter I, which he did as part of his book *Histoire de l'empire de Russie sous Peter le Grand* (first volume, of two, published in 1759), where he puts forward the image of Peter I as 'the hope of civilization to Scythians, Huns, Slavs, and Sarmatians'.<sup>278</sup> Mme de Staël borrowed the book written by Voltaire during her stay in Sweden, among other books on Russia and Poland.<sup>279</sup>

The question of genre is also relevant in the discussion of the texts written by Mme de Staël and by Diderot. Mme de Staël's travel account is published within the framework of her autobiography, and therefore belongs to a specific genre (even though Mme de Staël's work is a mosaic of different genres). Denis Diderot's account of his discussions with Catherine II is a political philosophical work in the form of a dialog, not with Catherine II perhaps but rather with the French public, as we will see, and therefore belongs to a likewise specific genre, but of a quite different sort. But the form of this pseudo-conversation was perhaps dictated by necessity, because, as Larry Wolff writes:

The barrier that separated philosophy and power, aligned with the curtain between Western Europe and Eastern Europe, meant that Diderot had travelled across a terrestrial semi-diameter to address himself.<sup>280</sup>

But actually Diderot did not address himself, as Larry Wolff himself puts it later on, by seeking to address Catherine II. He 'found himself addressing his friends in France, for it was really only to them that his Russian experience was relevant'.<sup>281</sup> The statement follows the ideas of Bakhtin, stating that there cannot be any monologue in an

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278. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 209.

279. Balayé, 'La bibliothèque de Madame de Staël', esp. p. 52. Mme de Staël explicitly refers to the 'best historian of Russia', when rendering the destiny of Novgorod. Apparently she used the information she got from books on Russia. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 164. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 317.

280. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 224.

281. *Ibid.*, p. 225.

absolute meaning, every word has an addressee that is separated from the speaking subject in time or/and in space, or as Bakhtin puts it: ‘Pure self-accounting—that is, addressing oneself axiologically only to oneself in absolute solitariness—is impossible.’<sup>282</sup>

Returning to the discussion about Mme de Staël’s relation to the ideas of Diderot, one might say that politically, if one limits the question to concern the Russian institutions of autocracy and serfdom, they express very similar opinions in their respective texts.<sup>283</sup> Mme de Staël would surely endorse what Diderot wrote in *Mémoires pour Catherine II*. The population, he felt, should be encouraged, through prosperity and liberty:

C’est donc la population qu’il faut encourager, et la population, comment s’encourage-t-elle? Par l’aisance, par la liberté, par tous les moyens dont un souverain [dispose], pour rendre ses sujets heureux.<sup>284</sup> (Commentary in the original.)

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282. Bakhtin, ‘Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity’, p. 143.

283. Diderot wrote another political text, more explicitly critical to the Russian autocracy, with the title *Observations sur le Nakaz*, his commentary on Catherine II’s *Nakaz (Instruction)*, which he wrote after his return to The Hague in the spring 1774 (but was not published in France its entirety until 1921) on his way back to France. Catherine wrote the Instruction in connection with the opening of the Legislative Commission (which was opened in 1767 but closed in 1768), but it was not meant for the Russian public, only for Europeans, who received it well. Voltaire was one of those who praised it. See Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres politiques*, ed. Paul Vernière (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1963), p. 332. Catherine II dismisses Diderot’s comments, after having his texts sent to her, and after reading *Observations sur le Nakaz*, in a letter to Grimm of 23 November 1785, calling them ‘babble’. See Katarina II, *Lettres de Catherine II à Grimm* (S. Peterburg’: Tipografiya Imperatorskoy Akademii nauk’, 1878), pp. 372–373. But in an earlier letter to Grimm sent on 18 March 1785 Catherine had expressed fears about what Diderot might have written, she wrote: ‘[...] faites-moi avoir les œuvres de Diderot; vous les paierez ce qu’on en demandera; assurément elles ne sortiront pas de mes mains et ne feront tort à personne; envoyez-moi cela avec la bibliothèque de Diderot.’ [...] see to that I get the works of Diderot; you pay for them as demanded; certainly they will not change hands and will not harm anyone: send them to me with Diderot’s library.’ (My translation.) See Katarina II, *Lettres de Catherine II à Grimm*, p. 327. In 1765 Catherine II had bought Diderot’s library, the latter needing the money, and then left it to him, see Wolf, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 222.

284. Diderot, *Mémoires pour Catherine II*, p. 208. ‘It is thus the population which is necessary to encourage, and the population, how is it encouraged? By prosperity,

We will come back to more detailed examples of this in Madame de Staël's travelogue, after setting up the political liberal framework in which she also operated.

*Mme de Staël's correspondence with Alexander I: the glowing liberal meets the hesitant one*

Quelle position dans l'histoire que celle de Votre Majesté! Désintéressé dans cette question, chevalier de l'Europe et pouvant seul nous préserver de l'ancien arbitraire et de la nouvelle tyrannie, il y a au fond de votre cœur une conscience de vérité qui n'existe nulle part. Sire, au nom de Vous, soyez toujours Vous, c'est mon unique prière.<sup>285</sup>

As is obvious in this quotation from one of Madame de Staël's letters to Alexander, Mme de Staël is thus turning to the tsar of Russia with her prayers for Europe, in this case she particularly refers to Switzerland, and in order to be of help she begs him to always stay true to himself. The tone is quite different from the one Diderot had with Catherine II, as discussed above. In the same letter Mme de Staël also turns to the tsar of Russia in gratitude for giving Switzerland the necessary support for its liberalism. And it is the cause of liberalism that stands in focus in their correspondence, Mme de Staël being truly worried about the political situation in France after Napoleon's fall.

Claire Nicolas conveys very interesting information about some sources of Mme de Staël's political standpoints, which were previously presented also by Simone Balayé in the introduction, and by Countess de Pange in the preface to *Lettres à Ribbing*.<sup>286</sup> The latter

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by liberty, by means of all instruments that a sovereign [disposes], to render his subjects happy.' (My translation.)

285. Madame de Staël, Alexandre I, 'Lettres de l'empereur Alexandre I<sup>er</sup> et de Madame de Staël : 1814–1817', in *La revue de Paris*, p. 7, letter sent from London on 25 April 1814 to Alexander I. 'What a position in history Your Majesty has! Disinterested in this question, knight of Europe and the only one who can preserve us from tyranny, the old arbitrary one and the new one, there is at the bottom of your heart an awareness of truth that exists nowhere else. Sire, in the name of You, stay always Yourself, that is my only appeal.' (My translation.)

286. Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', p. 35. Mme de Staël, *Lettres à Ribbing* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

discusses Mme de Staël and the cult of heroes that she acknowledged, and presents an interesting part from *De l'Allemagne* about the 'Hero' that was not included in the fixed edition, but which, the author argues, might be one of the most important texts in the literature of Romanticism.<sup>287</sup> A quotation from that part might be very illuminating when we try to understand Mme de Staël's delight not only in Ribbing, but also in Tsar Alexander, to give only one example of the many men she expressed her adoration for in *Dix années d'exil*. Mme de Staël described the hero as follows. He is strong but forgives the weakness of human nature:

[...] il pardonnera tous les défauts de cette foible nature humaine qui ne peut même porter ce qu'elle a de bon en soi pour chanceler et tressaillir, mais dès qu'il apercevra de la fermeté dans la bassesse [...] il s'éloignera de ces hommes qui peuvent être sur cette terre des instruments de la divinité, mais qui n'ont plus en eux la trace de son image...<sup>288</sup>

However, this particular mixture of strength and weakness in the character of the imagined hero, who is furthermore 'proud without being severe, who blames nothing according to imposed rules, but only according to the impulses of the heart', may also be applied when interpreting Mme de Staël's portrait of a woman, namely of Duchess Louise of Saxe-Weimar, whom Mme de Staël, later on praised (see below), for her heroic way of keeping her dignified manner when facing Napoleon at the time of his invasion of Prussia and the victory at Jena in October 1806. Mme de Staël describes Duchess Louise as follows in *De l'Allemagne*:

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287. Comtesse de Pange, 'Preface', in Mme de Staël, *Lettres à Ribbing* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 10.

288. Ibid., p. 10. '[...] he forgives all the wants of this weak human nature which cannot even bring out what is good in it in because of falter and tremor, but when he perceives firmness in the baseness [...] he leaves these men who might be on this earth instruments of the divine, but no longer bear the trace of his image...'. (My translation.) For Mme de Staël's description of Ribbing's heroic character, which is also dominated by these contrasts that makes up the whole, see Simone Balayé, 'Introduction', in Mme de Staël, *Lettres à Ribbing* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 23.



La grande-duchesse Louise est le véritable modèle d'une femme destinée par la nature au rang le plus illustre; sans prétention comme sans faiblesses, elle inspire au même degré la confiance et le respect. L'héroïsme des temps chevaleresques est entrée dans son âme sans lui rien ôter de la douceur de son sexe.<sup>289</sup>

In a letter of 13 October (1807) to Grand Duchess Louise, Mme de Staël praises her directly for her conduct, probably in connection with the events of 1806, by saying that it had 'heroic traits that both sexes should display'.<sup>290</sup> It is very interesting to compare how she describes Grand Duchess Louise, who is chivalrous in manners, with what she wrote in a preceding chapter in *De l'Allemagne* where she links chivalry and liberalism by saying that: 'Nothing grand can be accomplished henceforth without stemming from a liberal impulse which has succeeded chivalry in Europe.'<sup>291</sup> (My translation.)

The combination of ancient chivalry and modern liberalism is important. In short, what the heroes in *Dix années d'exil* have in common is their joint struggle against Napoleon, in one or another way, but primarily of course for their respective country, and thereby, at least to Mme de Staël it seems, also for liberalism. But before returning to the question of liberalism, and the correspondence between Mme de Staël and Tsar Alexander, the 'chevalier de l'Europe', something may be said briefly about Adolphe Ribbing's influence on Mme de Staël's political development because there is 'no doubt he exercised, through his ideas, a great influence on her'.<sup>292</sup> (My translation.)

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289. Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l'Allemagne*, p. 73. 'Duchess Louise is a true model of a woman destined by nature to reach the highest celebrity; without pretensions as well as without weakness, she inspires, to the same degree, both confidence and respect. A chivalrous heroism has entered her soul without removing anything of the mildness of her sex.' (My translation.) See also de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', p. 138.

290. de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, VI, p. 318.

291. de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', p. 61. 'Rien de grand ne s'y fera désormais que par l'impulsion libérale qui a succédé dans l'Europe à la chevalerie.'

292. Balayé, 'Introduction', p. 19. 'Car il est hors de doute qu'il exerça sur elle, sur ses idées une grande influence.' Ribbing's first name is the source of the title of Benjamin Constant's novel *Adolphe*. See Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', p. 35, note 15.

Ribbing, whose death-sentence for participating in the conspiracy against the Swedish king Gustav III in 1792 was transmuted to banishment, spent some time in France before arriving in Switzerland in 1793 (the visit lasted until March 1794) where he met Mme de Staël.<sup>293</sup> Ribbing sympathized with the ‘Girondins’, a party that was formed in 1791 by some deputies and was influenced by ideas of federalism.<sup>294</sup> As Simone Balayé shows, Mme de Staël’s political convictions were also a result of her love for Ribbing.<sup>295</sup>

Although many of the ideas that Ribbing professed were recognized around 1789 by, among others, Mme de Staël and her friends, he ‘went further than they’ and ‘for the first time a republican was to play a decisive role in the life of Mme de Staël’.<sup>296</sup> And as Simone Balayé sums up, after studying the fragments of Ribbing’s memoirs and some letters: ‘Everywhere appears the love for liberty, the hate for privileges.’<sup>297</sup>

Considering that Mme de Staël had had such a close relationship to Ribbing, a man so firm and radical in his political ideas, one has to ask oneself how that affected her relations to the royals and the magnates she frequented throughout Europe. Did for instance Prince de Ligne, whom we have discussed earlier, connect Mme de Staël not only to the pro-revolutionaries but also more specifically to Ribbing, one of the men behind the murder of Gustav III?<sup>298</sup> And what did

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293. *Ibid.*, p. 35, note 15. Ribbing, among four others, was sentenced to death for the assassination of King Gustav III, but was in the end granted amnesty. Only Anckarström among the conspirators against the king was executed. The regicide at the opera in Stockholm in 1792 was made into history by, among others, Eugène Scribe who wrote the libretto that inspired Verdi to compose the opera *Un ballo in maschera* as a result, Anckarström figuring there as the prominent gestalt for Renato. However, the political censorship forced Verdi to place the plot in America, and thus it no longer deals with the Swedish king but with an English governor in Boston. For the interesting discussion of the conspiracy in Stockholm and the link to Verdi’s opera see Eva Österberg, ‘Skottet på Operan: Politiskt våld och dess representationer’, in *Våld: Representation och verklighet*, eds. Eva Österberg & Marie Lindstedt Cronberg (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), pp. 35–54.

294. Nicolas, ‘Madame de Staël et la Pologne’, p. 35. *Le Petit Robert* (Paris: Société du nouveau littré, 1976), p. 785.

295. Balayé, ‘Introduction’, p. 20.

296. *Ibid.*

297. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

298. Apparently, Ribbing, during his stay (after he was banished from Sweden) in France and Switzerland, was regarded with suspicion by the authorities also *because*

Tsar Alexander know about her connection to Ribbing? From the correspondence, at least, between Tsar Alexander and Mme de Staël one can tell that the former was not all too comfortable with the role Mme de Staël tried to impose on him as the hero and guarantee for liberalism in France (and Switzerland) after the fall of Napoleon.

The political situation in France worried Mme de Staël very much. It was the question of the representation in the two chambers that occupied her most in the correspondence with Tsar Alexander. She feared a return to the politics of the *ancien régime*.<sup>299</sup> And again she turns to the tsar in solemn terms by saying that the ‘posterity demands from Your Majesty a last energetic effort in favour of the cause of the human kind.’<sup>300</sup> Tsar Alexander answered that letter of Mme de Staël with some reservation. He did not want to be given the responsibility to save France all alone:

[...] j’ai cru nécessaire de ne pas différer d’y répondre, dans la vue de rectifier l’opinion que vous y énoncez sur la responsabilité qu’entraînerait pour moi le succès plus ou moins complet de l’œuvre difficile entreprise pour le salut de la France. La Providence divine ne m’a point appelé seul à décider cette grande question.<sup>301</sup>

The tsar would repeat his message to Mme de Staël in several letters that it was not up to him alone to see to it that the political situation in France developed in the right direction, that is, a direction in line

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*of his close relation to Mme de Staël. See Svensk uppslagsbok, vol. 24 (Malmö: Förlagshuset Norden AB, 1957), p. 11. (Emphasis is mine.)*

299. Madame de Staël, Alexandre I, ‘Lettres de l’empereur Alexandre I<sup>er</sup> et de Madame de Staël. 1814–1817’, in *La revue de Paris*, p. 11, letter sent from Lausanne on 9 September 1815 to Alexander I.

300. Madame de Staël, Alexandre I, ‘Lettres de l’empereur Alexandre I<sup>er</sup> et de Madame de Staël. 1814–1817’, in *La revue de Paris*, p. 11, letter sent from Lausanne on 9 September 1815 to Alexander I. ‘[...] et la postérité réclame de Votre Majesté un dernier effort énergique en faveur de la cause de l’espèce humaine.’

301. Madame de Staël, Alexandre I, ‘Lettres de l’empereur Alexandre I<sup>er</sup> et de Madame de Staël. 1814–1817’, in *La revue de Paris*, p. 12, letter sent from Alexander I in Paris on 14 September 1815 to Mme de Staël. ‘[...] I believed it necessary not to postpone answering [it], in order to correct the opinion that you express regarding what my responsibility may entail in the more or less complete success of the hard work undertaken to save France. Divine Providence has not appointed me alone to decide this great question.’ (My translation.)

with the opinions that Mme de Staël's advocated. However, there is no reason to believe that either of them was totally unaware of the fact that they might have had different agendas concerning the future of France. Likewise, the tsar repeated that it was up to divine Providence alone to 'crown our efforts'.<sup>302</sup>

Mme de Staël admired Alexander's *ukase* (decree promulgated by the tsar) concerning the Jesuits of Poland in the treaty signed by Austria, Russia and Prussia in Paris on 14 September 1815 (26 September according to the Gregorian calendar) in which she perceived 'a grand and beautiful intention of tolerance' regarding freedom of (Christian) religion.<sup>303</sup> She comes back to the matter in a letter later on when troubled over the fact that political statements in favour of liberty tend not to become real, and the freedom of religion that 'Your Majesty has sanctioned in such a solemn way in Sainte-Alliance is the one that runs the highest risk in France'.<sup>304</sup> (My translation.) Sainte-Alliance, or the Holy Alliance in English, refers here to the treaty signed by Austria, Russia and Prussia in Paris mentioned above. But again Tsar Alexander refers to the fact that it would take time to change things in France in his answer to Mme de Staël, which ends their correspondence, as published in *La revue de Paris*, only some months before Mme de Staël died in Paris on 14 July 1817.<sup>305</sup> He wrote:

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302. Madame de Staël, Alexandre I, 'Lettres de l'empereur Alexandre I<sup>er</sup> et de Madame de Staël: 1814–1817', in *La revue de Paris*, p. 15, letter sent from Alexander I in St. Petersburg 4/16 April 1816 to Mme de Staël. (4 April according to the Julian calendar, 16 April according to the Gregorian). The Russian orthodox church still follows the Julian calendar. See Per-Arne Bodin, *Historien och evigheten: Essäer om Ryssland* (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma, 2005), p. 91.

303. Madame de Staël, Alexandre I, 'Lettres de l'empereur Alexandre I<sup>er</sup> et de Madame de Staël: 1814–1817', in *La revue de Paris*, p. 13, letter sent from Florence on 26 February 1816 to Alexander I.

304. Madame de Staël, Alexandre I, 'Lettres de l'empereur Alexandre I<sup>er</sup> et de Madame de Staël: 1814–1817', in *La revue de Paris*, p. 21, letter sent from Paris on 14 December 1816 to Alexander I. 'La liberté des cultes que Votre Majesté a consacrée d'une façon si solennelle dans la Sainte-Alliance est ce qui court le plus de risques en France.'

305. Apparently their correspondence constitutes of those eight letters published in *Revue de Paris*. See Solovieff, 'Madame de Staël et ses correspondants russes', p. 25.

D'ailleurs j'aime à penser que si tout en France n'est pas encore au niveau de vos désirs, que s'il existe des obstacles à l'affermissement de la Restauration, ces obstacles seront levés à une époque prochaine [...].<sup>306</sup>

This hesitation, which Mme de Staël seemed to feel behind the words of Tsar Alexander, was apparently not unfounded. Martin Malia writes that: 'Despite Alexander's moralizing liberalism, that status quo represented nothing less than an attempt to restore the international Old Regime of the previous century.'<sup>307</sup>

The great Russian poet Pushkin knew all of Mme de Staël's work, and he applauded *Dix années d'exil* for paying tribute to Russia in the portrayal of the country.<sup>308</sup> In fact, Pushkin's article was simultaneously a defence of Madame de Staël's book. Pushkin's compatriot Muchanov had also commented on *Dix années d'exil* but dismissed it. Obviously he had come to an opposite conclusion than Pushkin and criticized the book for the 'lack of observation and a

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306. Madame de Staël, Alexandre I, 'Lettres de l'empereur Alexandre I<sup>er</sup> et de Madame de Staël. 1814–1817', in *La revue de Paris*, p. 22, letter sent from Alexander I St. Petersburg on 24 February 1817 to Mme de Staël. 'Besides I love to think that if everything in France is not at the level of your wishes, if there are obstacles in the strengthening of the Restoration, these obstacles will be removed in the next era [...].' This was the last letter sent from Tsar Alexander, a very tardy answer where he 'discourages her from corresponding with him'. (My translation.) It was her son that answered the letter on 5 August 1817 informing Tsar Alexander of the sorrows that had fallen upon their family and transmitting the last words of Mme de Staël, which included him: 'le destin de la France repose sur l'Empereur Alexandre.' ('the destiny of France depends on the Emperor Alexander'; my translation.) See Solovieff, 'Madame de Staël et ses correspondants russes', p. 29. Mme de Staël could probably not foresee that Tsar Alexander would change his politics and turn despotic. But she was not alone in this. For instance, her Russian translator, author and reformer of the Russian language Karamzin (1766–1826) wrote in his memoirs in 1810: 'Russia is still million strong, and the autocrat is a sovereign inspired with zeal for the public good. If being human, he commits errors, he undoubtedly does so with good intentions—this itself is a indication that they will probably be corrected in the future.' Nikolaj Karamzin, *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia*, ed. Richard Pipes (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 204. Curiously enough Mme de Staël does not mention in *Dix années d'exil* seeing Karamzin at a dinner given by Rostopchin in Moscow. See Rossettini, 'Madame de Staël et la Russie', p. 59. See also de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 311, note 1.

307. Malia, *Russia under Western eyes*, p. 91.

308. Rossettini, 'Madame de Staël et la Russie', p. 52.

total ignorance of the country'. Apparently Muchanov was one of those Russians who despised the French, those 'Françailions tâillons' ('fastidious French', my translation) that came to Russia with little 'knowledge and fabulous expectations'.<sup>309</sup>

Not only Mme de Staël influenced Pushkin, as we will see an example of later on, but also Benjamin Constant, and the former impatiently awaited Prince Vyazemsky's translation of the latter's novel *Adolphe* (who owed the title to Ribbing, as we have seen), published in 1816 and which indirectly tells the passionate story of his and Mme de Staël's relationship.<sup>310</sup> Vyazemsky was one of the most refined Russians in the age of Romanticism, and apart from admiring Constant he also had a great respect for Mme de Staël, among other French authors.<sup>311</sup> Likewise, he appreciated *Dix années d'exil* a lot because he regarded himself also as an exile. In her discussion on this subject, Olga Trtnik Rossetini underlines the profound influence Benjamin Constant had on many Decembrists.<sup>312</sup> Further on, Trtnik Rossetini also stresses the importance of Mme de Staël to Pushkin and the whole group of liberals at the time.<sup>313</sup> Furthermore, Romanticism, and hence Pushkin's heroes among others, had a great influence on the Decembrists, which was a group of officers who made an uprising against the tsar (Nicholas I) in order to limit the power of the tsar (through some sort of constitution) and to abolish serfdom.<sup>314</sup>

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309. For the interesting discussion about Pushkin's article see Rossetini, 'Madame de Staël et la Russie', pp. 52–53. See also: 'Russia, 1825. Reading Muchanov's critique of Staël, Pushkin remarks, "Mme de Staël is ours, do not touch her!" He is angry enough to publish an article honouring *this extraordinary woman*; citing a friend, he calls her "the first to render full justice to the Russian people". Durylin goes on to discuss "the profound influence of Mme de Staël on Pushkin and all the liberal group of his period".' (Italics in the original.) Isbell, *The Birth of European Romanticism*, p. 3.

310. Ibid., pp. 53–54. For a brief presentation of Adolph, see *Histoire de la littérature française*, eds. P.-G. Castex, P. Surer, G. Becker (Paris: Hachette, 1974), p. 526.

311. In Moscow Mme de Staël met, among others, Karamzin, Vyazemsky, Rostopchin. See Solovieff, 'Madame de Staël et ses correspondants russes', pp. 4–30, esp. p. 18.

312. For this discussion see Rossetini, 'Madame de Staël et la Russie', p. 54.

313. Ibid., p. 55.

314. For an interesting discussion on the connection between the Decembrists and Romanticism see Ju. M. Lotman, 'The Decembrists in Everyday Life', in

One of Lotman's points in discussing the understanding of the behaviour of the Decembrist in everyday life is his underlining of the importance of connecting it to literature, which served as a source of inspiration for many officers who imitated the literary heroes found in works by Romanticists like Pushkin, Byron, Marlinsky and Lermontov.<sup>315</sup> Thus, a Decembrist's behaviour becomes a behaviour-text, in the sense that it acquires meaning when connected to a literary plot.<sup>316</sup> Lotman writes:

In a romantic work of art the new type of personal behavior emerges on the pages of a text and is transferred from there to life.<sup>317</sup>

Now, Lotman's notion of behaviour-texts (ways of behaviour) implies that an action can only be understood indirectly through the mediation, as Lotman suggests here, of literary characters. This way of looking at the function of mediation has some similarities to Alfred Schutz' sociological-phenomenological theory of typification, without which we would be unable to understand others and the common world that we share. However, the difference between the use of literary characters by the Decembrists and the use of types by Schutz is important to stress: in the case of the latter, types are used as analytical tools created by the observer (although based on typifications inherent in the world of everyday life in which the group, or individual subject of the study, lives), in the case of the former the characters are there from the beginning and only the link between them and the individual is to be established by the observer. That said, typification, it may be concluded, is at stake in all relations to some extent, more in what Schutz calls 'they-relations' than in concrete 'we-relations', but as he writes: 'Whereas I experience the

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Ju.M. Lotman & B.A. Uspenskij, *The Semiotics of Russian Culture* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Contributions, 1984), pp. 71–123, esp. pp. 86–93. Schiller was another important link between Romanticism and the Decembrists. See also Per-Arne Bodin, *Ryssland och Europa: En kulturhistorisk studie* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1994), pp. 114–115.

315. Lermontov duelled with Prosper de Barante (the close friend of Mme de Staël's), which proved fatal to the former. Solovieff, 'Madame de Staël et ses correspondants Russes', pp. 4–30, for quotation see p. 11.

316. Lotman, 'The Decembrists in Everyday Life', pp. 86–93, esp. p. 86–87.

317. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

individual Thou directly in the concrete we-relation, I apprehend the contemporary only mediately, by means of typifications.<sup>318</sup> Important here, I would repeat, is also that not only are contemporaries experienced through typification, so are predecessors.<sup>319</sup> The literary characters important to the Decembrists, in the sense that they give meaning to their actions, could in this case, I would suggest, be seen as the other fellow-man, the predecessor, because both stand in the same relation to an 'I' in that they can only influence but not be influenced.

Now we must return to the discussion about Mme de Staël's influence on Russian romantic literature and the Decembrists, by finishing it with suggesting that Mme de Staël was a forerunner also in this respect. As we have seen, her autobiographical novel *Corinne* not only reflected the author's views of the norms stipulating how a woman should look and behave, but also seemed to have provided a model character for Mme de Staël herself in everyday life. At least many of her readers viewed Mme de Staël in the light of Corinne. Thus, Mme de Staël's behaviour became a behaviour-text. In a way one could argue that she had to invent a female genius in literature, because there were too few of them, or perhaps none at that time. But *Corinne* also reflected, although implicitly, something 'typical of the period of Romanticism', namely 'to fuse the biographical and artistic texts into one.'<sup>320</sup>

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318. Schutz, *Collected Papers* II, p. 41.

319. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 46.

320. Ju. M. Lotman, 'The Poetics of Everyday Behavior in Russian Eighteenth-century Culture', in *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, p. 252. Now, the uprising, which took place in December (hence the name of the group) 1825, was ill organized and easily put down. The uprising was also a result of the Russian part in the alliance against Napoleon, and the participation in European politics, which meant that Russian officers had the chance to acquaint themselves with western European ideas, had led to a recognition of a European identity. See Bodin, *Ryssland och Europa*, pp. 114–115. Geoffrey Hosking adds that insights connected to those experiences from warfare and Western life 'intensified Russian patriotism'. Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire 1552–1917* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1997), p. 172, see also pp. 153–182 for further information about the Decembrist movement. In this context, one might perhaps also suggest that patriotism as such was reinforced by influences from Romanticism, if one considers how it was developed by German thinkers, as we have seen in discussions held here. In a way one might perhaps say that the Decembrist's uprising was an attempt from 'below' to westernize Russia, in



*‘Allons en Russie’*<sup>321</sup>

C’est le 14 juillet que j’entrai en Russie; cet anniversaire du premier jour de la Révolution me frappa singulièrement [...].<sup>322</sup>

En effet, dans cet empire russe, si faussement appelé barbare, je n’ai éprouvé que des impressions nobles et douces: puisse ma reconnaissance attirer des bénédictions de plus sur ce peuple et sur son souverain!<sup>323</sup>

Lady Blennerhassett, when discussing Mme de Staël’s travelogue, comments on the author’s independence regarding her compatriots’ prejudices against Russia and the Russians.<sup>324</sup> But when expressing that the Russian empire was ‘falsely termed barbarous’, she had, in the preceding proposition, mentioned that the first man that received her in Russia was a Frenchman, previously employed at her father’s

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contrast to Peter I’s attempt from ‘above’. In both cases there was a question of projecting the Ego-culture (i.e. Western Europe) on to another culture (Russia). In both situations it was also a question of defining what we call the Ego-culture, according to criteria for the most valuable, and thus the criteria for intelligibility was overshadowed, at least in the case of Peter the Great as it is discussed by Lotman & Uspenskij in their essay ‘The Role of Dual Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture’, p. 25. See also Sonesson, ‘Ego meets Alter’, pp. 537–559, esp. p. 541. Now, in the case of the Decembrists it is perhaps more difficult to tell, since the uprising was put down. In sum, through Pushkin Mme de Staël may be said to have influenced a liberal uprising against despotism in Russia. In that way, Auguste de Staël’s appeal for indulgence in the introduction to *Dix années d’exil* (edition 1820–1821) with his mother’s inability to foresee that politics in Russia would change direction towards oppression within a couple of years, might perhaps in this light be reconsidered to a certain extent.

321. ‘Allons en Russie’ was a vaudeville produced in Paris in 1802, based on Diderot’s dreams about Russia but also on other travellers’ expectations of success. In 1812 Napoleon used the refrain again. See Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 225.

322. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 271. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 138. ‘It was on the 14th July that I made my entrance into Russia; this coincidence with the anniversary of the first day of the Revolution particularly struck me [...].’

323. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 372. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 138. ‘In fact, in that Russian empire, so falsely termed barbarous, I have experienced none but noble and delightful impressions: may my gratitude draw down additional blessings on this people and their sovereign.’

324. Lady [Charlotte] Blennerhassett, *Madame de Staël et son temps (1766–1817)*, vol. III, p. 451.

bureau.<sup>325</sup> Now, we will have reason to come back to that question, later on in the inquiry, as to whether Mme de Staël really had freed herself from contemporary French prejudices against Russia or not. What must be briefly discussed here is her particular situation on the threshold between Enlightenment and Romanticism, the former generally judging the foreign Europe, or rather *l'Europe Oriental*, as basically barbarous while the latter movement praised the exotic side of the alien.<sup>326</sup>

An important example in this connection is the contemporary author-rival of Mme de Staël, namely Chateaubriand, whose novel about Atala (*Atala*, 1801) and the character's visit to America (where the author himself had been for about five months in 1791) is a well-known example of exotic literature. The novel was then reworked and included in Chateaubriand's work *Le génie du christianisme* (1802), which Mme de Staël read. At least she borrowed it, during her stay in Stockholm.<sup>327</sup> However, Mme de Staël was most probably very well acquainted with most of Chateaubriand's works, as he was with hers. In a letter to Maurice O'Donnell sent from Coppet in 1808 she comments on A. de Humboldt's travelogue, by saying that she found it interesting, although 'he imitates too much M. de Chateaubriand and mixes science with poetry in a way that damages both of them; but the subject is majestic, and that nature in America is so impressive, it is to ours as the hero of Antiquity is to the men of our time [...]'.<sup>328</sup> (My translation.) As we can see, she stumbles between the enlightened demand of scientific rationality and that of romantic

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325. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 372. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 138.

326. In this connection it is important to mention J.-J. Rousseau's influence on the Romantic movement in France, a man crucial to the Enlightenment but also its major critic, by for instance the concept of the natural man, *le bon sauvage*, setting the simple way of life against the commercial and superficial. The concept also contains a reaction to the classical rationalism. Thus, imaginations and feelings played an important role for Rousseau as a novelist. See *Histoire de la littérature française*, eds. P.-G. Castex, P. Surer, G. Becker, p. 498. See also Rédei, 'József Eötvös and the Age of Hungarian Reform', pp. 107–131, esp. pp. 107, 127.

327. For Chateaubriand see *Histoire de la littérature française*, eds. P.-G. Castex, P. Surer, G. Becker, pp. 533–538. For Mme de Staël's possible reading of Chateaubriand's works see Balayé, 'La bibliothèque de Madame de Staël', esp. p. 71.

328. Letter sent from Coppet by Mme de Staël on 1 August to Maurice O'Donnell, see de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, VI, p. 499.

poetry in expressing the impressions of foreign countries. In fact, she seems not to be able to decide which one is the best. At the same time as she praises the subject of Humboldt's travelogue she praises the impressive American nature with an analogy more poetic perhaps than scientific. Now, a link between Chateaubriand's work on America, in either of the forms, and Mme de Staël may thus be established, and thereby a connection to the exotic side of Romanticism.

Peter Ulf Møller writes that 'an obvious function of national Romanticism in Russian literature, as well as in other nineteenth-century European literatures, was to create inspiring images of national identity.' As we will see, Mme de Staël was not unaffected by that aspiration, more neatly expressed in the travelogue through Russia than elsewhere in *Dix années d'exil*.<sup>329</sup> This can partly be explained by the fact that the travel account from Russia is the richest and largest among those in the book. It may also be explained perhaps by Mme de Staël's increased feeling of being in a remote place, thereby more exotic, which triggered her imagination and inspiration. Or, as Empress Elisabeth put it in a quotation above, Mme de Staël had found in Russia 'a great deal of nourishment' for her imagination. But also, the lack of consistency concerning the images of the Russian (which could be more or less a result of Mme de Staël's inspiration) may be explained by the fact that her travelogue is non-fictional, i.e. it makes claims, at least, of being true. A perhaps less flattering 'reality', sometimes difficult for her to understand, tends to sneak in, so to speak, in her perceptions of Russians and Russia that make up the foundation of her descriptions.

### *Kiev*

Résolue à poursuivre mon voyage en Russie, j'entrai dans l'Ukraine, dont Kiev est la capitale; elle fut jadis celle de la Russie, et cet empire a commencé par établir sa capitale au midi. Les Russes avaient alors des rapports continuels avec les Grecs établis à Constantinople, et en général avec les peuples

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329. Mme de Staël's book *De l'Allemagne* is perhaps the best example in all her works of this tendency within Romanticism.

de l'Orient, dont ils ont pris les habitudes sous beaucoup de rapports.<sup>330</sup>

In summarizing the historical consequences of Russia, which had its beginning in the Kiev empire, Mme de Staël correctly observes the links between the former and Constantinople. Further on she explicitly mentions the importance of the fact that Vladimir in Kiev, at the end of the tenth century, chose to adopt Christianity in its Byzantine form.<sup>331</sup> Mme de Staël seems to have been acquainted with Russian history, but nevertheless the 'Greek churches' in Kiev do not at all resemble the ones in France, Germany or England, they 'rather remind us of the minarets of the Turks and Arabs'.<sup>332</sup> Mme de Staël obviously seemed delighted with being in a remote place *outside* Europe, and continues to express her enjoyment of the Russians' oriental habits, which in many ways resembles her description of the Polish people she met when travelling through Galicia. She notices their religious rituals, their long beards and oriental clothes; she did not want to see them in European clothes, as that would be yet another sign of Napoleon's despotism:

Les Russes ne passent jamais devant une église sans faire le signe de la croix, et leur longue barbe ajoute beaucoup à l'expression religieuse de leur physionomie. Ils portent pour la plupart une longue robe bleue, serrée autour du corps par une ceinture rouge; l'habit des femmes a aussi quelque chose d'asiatique, et l'on y remarque ce goût pour les couleurs vives qui nous vient des pays où le soleil est si beau [...]. Je pris en peu de temps tellement de goût à ces habits orientaux, que je n'aimois pas à voir de Russes vêtus comme le reste des

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330. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 277–278. This passage in the text in the 1904 edition is slightly modified, therefore see also Madame de Staël, 'Dix années d'exil' [1810–1813], p. 253. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 141. 'Determined to continue my journey through Russia, I proceeded towards Kiev, the principal city of the Ukraine, and formerly of all Russia, for this empire began by fixing its capital in the South. The Russians had then continual communication with the Greeks established at Constantinople, and in general with the people of the East, whose habits they have adopted in a variety of instances.'

331. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 280–282. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, pp. 143–144. For the Christianizing of Kiev see Bodin, *Ryssland och Europa*, pp. 11–18.

332. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 144. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 281.

Européens; il me semblait alors qu'ils allaient entrer dans cette grande régularité du despotisme de Napoléon, [...].<sup>333</sup>

Now, the romantic exotic onset may be a result of the style of the era of Romanticism, but it is also explained by something more concrete. Mme de Staël reinforces, or better constructs according to her own needs, the otherness of the Russians, that is, their non-European identity in order to absorb and deform the Russianness. That way the Non-culture in terms of value, which Mme de Staël in this particular case does not apply to Russia, is marked out, i.e. Napoleon and his empire. But again, the passage quoted shows that it is probably Napoleon that truly concerns Mme de Staël, and not the Russian people, who are not expected to act upon her speech. In that sense they, as *Alius*, appear as representing Non-culture to Mme de Staël. That said, one might suggest that Mme de Staël probably wants to make Napoleon act upon her (directly or indirectly), according to her needs, because she seems not only to address posterity in general in her writing here, but perhaps Napoleon in particular (as we have seen in earlier discussions). Napoleon therefore emerges as *Alter* in connection with Mme de Staël. Thus, in that sense Napoleon is *not* representing the Non-culture to Mme de Staël, because she expects him to understand, or at least to respect, her points of view, as she wants, in her turn, to appear like somebody who understands his, and thereby being trustworthy when pointing out to others (contemporary and future imagined readers) how wrong they are.

Now, it is interesting to note that when speaking of the Russians Mme de Staël does not really know how to define them. Are they people from the South, 'or rather from the East', or people from the North. She finally decides that Russians are people from the South / East ('l'Orient' in the French edition), for she derives the latter from

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333. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 279. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 142. 'The Russians never pass a church without making the sign of the cross, and their long beards add greatly to the religious expression of their physiognomy. They generally wear a large blue robe, fastened round the waist by a scarlet band: the dresses of the women have also something Asiatic in them: and one remarks that taste for lively colours which we derive from the East, where the sun is so beautiful, [...]. I speedily contracted such a partiality to these oriental dresses, that I could not bear to see the Russians dressed like other Europeans: they seemed to me then entering into that great regularity of the despotism of Napoleon, [...].'

the former.<sup>334</sup> Even though, Mme de Staël continues, the Russians at court have European manners, ‘which are nearly the same in all countries’, the Russian nature is oriental.<sup>335</sup> Also, the houses in Kiev look like tents and, Mme de Staël continues:

[...] et de loin la ville a l’air d’un camp; on ne peut s’empêcher de croire qu’on a pris modèle sur les maisons ambulantes des Tartares pour bâtir en bois des maisons qui ne paraissent pas non plus d’une grande solidité.<sup>336</sup>

It is possible that Mme de Staël, in the account of the Tartar style of housing in Kiev, implicitly sees that as a result of the invasion of Kiev in the thirteenth century by the Tartars and the Mongols. For 250 years Russia was dependent on these Asian great men.<sup>337</sup>

In Kiev Mme de Staël met General Miloradovich, a ‘real Russian; brave, impetuous, confident, and wholly free from that spirit of imitation which sometimes entirely robs his countrymen even of their national character’.<sup>338</sup> And further on Mme de Staël regrets that she could not go to a ball to which she was invited. She appreciated the sense of being close to the East, being inspired by people who were hardly European.

Le général Miloradovitch m’invita, pour le soir même de mon départ, à un bal chez une princesse moldave. J’eus un vrai regret de ne pouvoir y aller. Tous ces noms de pays étrangers,

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334. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 145. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 284. Perhaps she was not acquainted with the theory of the Scandinavian origin of the Kiev empire. The Norman theory, as it is called, has been an important issue in Russian historiography since the beginning in the eighteenth century. The theory is to a large extent based on passages found in Nestor’s (1056–c. 1113, a monk in the Cave monastery in Kiev) chronicle, which, among other things, tells the story (for the year 862) of how a Swedish princely house was sent for to rule in Kiev and to put an end to the reigning chaos. For further information see Bodin, *Historien och evigheten*, pp. 18–22.

335. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 145. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 284.

336. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 278. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, pp. 141–142. ‘[...] and at a distance, the city appears like a camp; I could not help fancying that the moveable residences of the Tartars had furnished models for the construction of those wooden houses, which have not a much greater appearance of solidity.’

337. Bodin, *Ryssland och Europa*, pp. 53–54.

338. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 145. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, pp. 283–284.

de nations qui ne sont presque plus européennes, réveillent singulièrement l'imagination. On se sent, en Russie, à la porte d'une autre terre, près de cet Orient d'où sont sorties tant de croyances religieuses, et qui renferme encore dans son sein d'incroyables trésors de persévérance et de réflexion.<sup>339</sup>

Russia, at least Kiev, definitely belonged to the East for Mme de Staël. And as is revealed in the text, the more eastern the construction of Russia gets, the more Mme de Staël's imagination is nourished. However, it is extremely interesting to consider a Russian view of the meeting between General Miloradovich and Madame de Staël described so vividly in *Dix années d'exil*. In a letter to Vyazemsky, Pushkin comments on the passage quoted above in *Dix années d'exil* by saying that the Russians had no shame in front of foreigners; they compelled Miloradovich to perform a mazurka for Madame de Staël.

Nous n'avons devant les étrangers ni orgueil ni honte ...  
devant Mme de Staël nous obligeons Miloràdovic à exceller  
dans la mazurka.<sup>340</sup>

Obviously, when Mme de Staël complimented the general for being a true Russian, she did that according to the model she had of Russia, a model reflecting Mme de Staël's own needs to project their Ego-culture, according to the criteria of the most valuable, on to the

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339. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 285. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 146. 'General Miloradovich invited me the very evening of my departure, to a ball at the house of a Moldavian princess, to which I regretted very much being unable to go. All these names of foreign countries and of nations which are scarcely any longer European, singularly awaken the imagination. You feel yourself in Russia at the gate of another earth, near to that East from which have proceeded so many religious creeds, and which still contains in its bosom incredible treasures of perseverance and reflection.'

340. Pushkin in a letter to Vyazemsky sent on 27 May 1826. Trtnik Rossetini, 'Madame de Staël et la Russie', p. 51. See also de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 285, note 1. 'We have in front of foreigners no pride no shame ... in front of Mme de Staël we forced Miloradovich to excel in the mazurka.' (My translation.) In fact, Miloradovich was to combat the French at the battle of Moscow (the battle of Borodino) and later on was one of those assassinated in 1825 in connection with the uprising against Nicholas I. See Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël*, p. 281, note 109. The battle of Moscow is the French name for what the Russians call the battle of Borodino. See Steven Englund, *Napoleon: A political life* (New York: Scribner, 2004), p. 519, note 51.

Russian culture. But Pushkin, the Russian poet *par excellence*, although benevolent to Mme de Staël, seemed almost to have been offended as a Russian by the general's servility in front of Mme de Staël.

*From Kïev to Moscow*

Je n'ai rien vu de barbare dans ce peuple; au contraire, ses formes ont quelque chose d'élégant et de doux qu'on ne retrouve point ailleurs. [...] j'en [les atrocités dans l'histoire de Russie] accuserais plutôt les boyards, dépravés par le despotisme qu'ils exerçaient ou qu'ils souffraient, que la nation elle-même.<sup>341</sup> (The commentary in brackets is mine.)

As we can see from this quotation, according to Mme de Staël, the Russian people cannot be accused of barbarity; that belonged to the boyars, the Russian noblemen. As with the Polish peasants Mme de Staël cannot be assumed to have known very much about the Russian peasants and the circumstances under which they lived. Rather she was far more familiar with the life of noblemen. However, what she in the text calls boyars do seem to belong to a special class which she does not connect to the noblemen whom she praises in her travelogue. Nor does she connect the despotism to the tsar. The boyars emerge in her account as a construction of a Non-culture, in the sense of being the least valuable, in order to save the projected Ego-culture, defined here as her ally Russia against Napoleon. But as we will see, in the most important sense, namely intelligibility, it must rather have been the peasants who belonged to the Non-culture, who were *Alius* to Mme de Staël. But the most important for the moment is that, according to Mme de Staël, things were not only so.

Mme de Staël also observed that Russia was a country where social boundaries were hard to define.

Le peuple n'est pas pauvre; les grands savent mener, quand il le faut, la même vie que le peuple; c'est mélange des privations

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341. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 286–287. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 146–147. 'I have as yet seen nothing at all barbarous in this people; on the contrary their forms have an elegance and softness about them which you find nowhere else. [...] but these [the atrocities of the Russian history] I should rather lay to the charge of the boyars, the class which was depraved by the despotism which it exercised or submitted to, than to the nation itself.' (The commentary in brackets is mine.)



les plus dures et des jouissances les plus recherchées qui caractérise ce pays. Ces mêmes seigneurs, dont la maison réunit tout ce que le luxe des diverses parties du monde a de plus éclatant, se nourrissent en voyage bien plus mal que nos paysans de France, et savent supporter, non seulement à la guerre, mais dans plusieurs circonstances de la vie, une existence physique très désagréable.<sup>342</sup>

Mme de Staël seems to explain this capacity of all Russians to endure hard physical strains by saying that the severe climate and the earth ‘place man in a continual struggle with nature’.<sup>343</sup> Even though Mme de Staël did not fully detect the major differences in living conditions between the people and the noblemen, she noted the contrast within the circumstances of the noblemen’s everyday life. And to them, Mme de Staël continues, magnificence is the whole point of wealth. There is, she claims, something gigantic about the Russians—they give grand presents and they showed great courage in seeing Moscow being burnt:

C’est plutôt comme magnificence qu’ils aiment la fortune, que sous le rapport des plaisirs qu’elle donne; semblables encore en cela aux Orientaux, qui exercent l’hospitalité envers les étrangers, les comblent de présents et négligent souvent le bien-être habituel de leur propre vie. C’est une des raisons qui expliquent ce beau courage avec lequel les Russes ont supporté la ruine que leur a fait subir l’incendie de Moscou. [...] Ce qui caractérise ce peuple, c’est quelque chose de gigantesque en tout genre: les dimensions ordinaires ne lui sont applicables en rien. [...] chez eux tout est colossal plutôt que proportionné,

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342. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 291. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 149. ‘In Europe you see everywhere the contrast of wealth and poverty; but in Russia it may be said that neither one nor the other makes itself remarked. The people are not poor; the great know how to lead, when it is necessary, the same life as the people: it is the mixture of the hardest privations and of the most refined enjoyments which characterises the country. These same noblemen, whose residence unites all that the luxury of different parts of the world has most attractive, live, while they are travelling, on much worse food than our French peasantry, and know how to bear, not only during war, but in various circumstances of life, a physical existence of the most disagreeable kind.’

343. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 149. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 291.

audacieux plutôt que réfléchi, et si le but n'est pas atteint, c'est parce qu'il est dépassé.<sup>344</sup>

In connection with Mme de Staël's notice of the Russian desire for the magnificent, it is interesting to consider Bodin's study of the consequences which the adoption of Greek Christianity had for the development of thought in Russia. In Russian orthodoxy the aesthetical side of the divine service became much more important and central than in the Western church. Also, in the orthodox service descriptions of the ordinary life are lacking, they tend to 'disappear in all this grandeur', something that Mme de Staël put her finger on when being puzzled by the observation that the Russian nobility in ordinary life knew, when necessary, how to endure the hard conditions under which the people lived.<sup>345</sup> In sum, the interest in the beauty (and the ritual) of Christianity has 'sometimes implied an interest in the superficial, an over-confidence in form as a content-generating element'.<sup>346</sup> (My translation.) Whether Mme de Staël was familiar with this specific historiography that connects customs to religion or not, I do not know, but she did perceive this particular inclination for the magnificent among the Russian magnates and she returns to it many times in her travelogue. A fine example of this is an observation she made when visiting Moscow, and which she presents as follows: 'Their churches bear the mark of that taste for luxury which they have from Asia: you see in them only ornaments of gold, and silver, and rubies.'<sup>347</sup>

The Russian character, however, is depicted quite differently from the landscape which Mme de Staël finds 'extremely monotonous'

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344. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 292–293. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 150. 'It is rather as magnificence that they love fortune, than from the pleasures they derive from it: resembling still in that point the Easterners, who exercise hospitality to strangers, load them with presents, and yet frequently neglect the everyday comforts of their life. This is one of the reasons which explains that noble courage with which the Russians have supported the ruin which has been occasioned them by the burning of Moscow. [...] What characterises this people, is something gigantic of all kinds: ordinary dimensions are not at all applicable to it. [...] with them everything is colossal rather than well proportioned, audacious rather than reflective, and if they do not hit the mark, it is because they overshoot it.'

345. Bodin, *Rysland och Europa*, p. 15.

346. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

347. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 156. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 303.

and which she felt when travelling through it a ‘sort of nightmare which sometimes seizes one during the night, when you think you are always marching and never advancing’ and it also appeared ‘like the image of infinite space’ and to ‘require eternity to traverse’.<sup>348</sup> Mme de Staël observes pleasant as well as unpleasant sides of the Russians and their society. Theft runs side by side with hospitality and the common Russians ‘give as they take’ as a result of lack of education, and in ‘this mode of life there is a little resemblance to savages’.<sup>349</sup> But on the other hand ‘there are no European nations who have much vigour but those who are what is called barbarous, in other words, unenlightened, or those who are free.’<sup>350</sup> Again, Mme de Staël rescues her construction of her projected Ego-culture by putting it against the most detestable, that is, Napoleon and his allies. Mme de Staël apparently was prepared to negotiate her culturally bound pre-understanding of barbarous countries in order to create a coherent mental universe that fitted her needs. Although Mme de Staël is quite consistent in her opinion, expressed in *Dix années d’exil*, that a good Russian is a true Russian, she praises Peter the great and his reforms aiming at making Russia more Western. Mme de Staël apparently supported Peter I’s reforms, and she wrote:

La réputation d’invincible que des succès multipliés ont donnée a cette nation, la fierté naturelle aux grands, le dévouement qui est dans le caractère du peuple, la religion, dont la puissance est profonde, la haine des étrangers que Pierre I<sup>er</sup> a tâché de détruire pour éclairer et civiliser son pays, mais qui n’en est pas moins restée dans le sang des Russes, et

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348. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 147. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, pp. 287–288. See also Mariella Vianello Bonifacio, ‘Les Dix années d’exil: pour une poétique du récit de voyage’, in *Cahiers Staëliens*, no. 43, 1992, Paris, pp. 46–62, see esp. pp. 47–48 (p. 48 for quotation below). The author discusses very interestingly how Mme de Staël oscillated between a scientific tone and a literary one in the second part of *Dix années d’exil*, that is, the one describing her travels in 1812. She aimed at establishing links between nature and the human spirit, according to travelogues during the Enlightenment (Montesquieu is perhaps the best known advocate of this theory), but also at rendering her ‘impressions’ (as a forerunner of Romanticism); in that way she succeeded in uniting ‘the travel of “exploration” and that of “impressions”’.

349. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 151. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 295.

350. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 151. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 295.

qui se réveille dans l'occasion, toutes ces causes réunies font de cette nation un peuple très énergique. Quelques mauvaises anecdotes des règnes précédents, quelques Russes qui ont fait des dettes sur le pavé de Paris, quelques bons mots de Diderot, ont mis dans la tête des Français que la Russie ne consistait que dans une cour corrompue, des officiers chambellans et un peuple d'esclaves: c'est une grande erreur. [...] On ne saurait trop le répéter, cette nation est composée des contrastes les plus frappants. Peut-être le mélange de la civilisation européenne et du caractère asiatique en est-il la cause.<sup>351</sup>

Now, Mme de Staël explains the contrast that she conceives in the Russian character by their mixed origins: both European and Asian. European in manners, through Peter the Great's reforms, the historiography of which she was well acquainted with, but Russian, i.e. Asian by nature, that seems to be Mme de Staël's conclusion.<sup>352</sup>

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351. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 296–297. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 152. 'The reputation of invincible which their multiplied successes have given to this nation, the natural pride of the nobility, the devotedness inherent in the character of the people, the profound influence of religion, the hatred of foreigners, which Peter I endeavoured to destroy in order to enlighten and civilise his country, but which is not less settled in the blood of the Russians, and is occasionally roused, all these causes combined make them a most energetic people. Some bad anecdotes of the preceding reigns, some Russians who have contracted debts with the Parisian shopkeepers, and some *bons-mots* of Diderot, have put it into the heads of the French that Russia consisted only of a corrupt court, military chamberlains, and a people of slaves. This is a great mistake. This nation it is true requires a long examination to know it thoroughly, but in the circumstances in which I observed it, everything was salient, and a country can never be seen to greater advantage than at a period of misfortune and courage. It cannot be too often repeated, this nation is composed of the most striking contrasts. Perhaps the mixture of European civilization and of Asiatic character is the cause.' (Emphasis in the original.)

352. When considering Mme de Staël's reflection on the contrasts that she perceived between Asian and European traits of the Russian, Per-Arne Bodin's analysis of the importance of a letter sent around 1510 from the monk Filofey to Vladimir III of Moscow is very illuminating, although it cannot be rendered in this inquiry other than very briefly. Filofey wrote: 'Two Romes have fallen, but the third remains, and a fourth shall never be.' (My translation) Bodin continues to explain that Filofey was here referring to the fact that the old Roman Empire had fallen, as Byzantium, with its capital Constantinople the *New Rome*, had been conquered by the Turks in 1453, and 'the empire that still remained was Russia.' (My translation.) Bodin, *Ryssland och Europa*, for both quotations see p. 63. See also Hosking, *Russia*, p. 6. Some years later in 1480 Russia succeeded in

In fact, Mme de Staël lays her finger on the bipolarity, that is ‘the either-or’, of the development of Russian history, as discussed by Lotman and Uspensky, who wrote that underneath official ‘Christian patterns of behavior’ were the pagan ones ‘hidden and as it were non-existent’ and continued:

The ‘Age of Enlightenment’ did not abolish but inverted this structure. The energetic struggle which was carried on by the secular state and the system of education against the Church monopoly in the sphere of culture was suddenly reinterpreted in the mass upper class consciousness as the regeneration of paganism. The coexistence of two religions persisted, but their relations were reversed: public, official life, ‘fashionable’ ethics and secular patterns of behavior quickly absorbed the reanimated pre-Christian or Eastern features (‘pagan’ features from the Orthodox point of view—the maintenance of this point of view while the essence of the outlook is changed is significant).<sup>353</sup>

And as the Slavist Per-Arne Bodin points out, the official Christianization of Russia in 988 meant that Russia became a part of Europe.<sup>354</sup> This part of Russian culture and society became more

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overthrowing the Mongolian supremacy that had reigned in Russia for 250 years. When the Russian princes started to call themselves tsars at the end of the fifteenth century it ‘reminded the subjects of both the khan [...] and the Byzantine emperor.’ (My translation.) Bodin, *Ryssland och Europa*, p. 67. Henceforth the way of ruling, Bodin continues, stemmed from these two ‘tsar-identities’, which facilitated a barbaric way of acting, or rather ruling. Bodin, *Ryssland och Europa*, p. 68. See also Hosking for a quotation from Michael Cherniavsky: ‘if the basileus signified the holy tsar, [...] then the khan, perhaps, stood for the absolutist secularised state, arbitrary through its separation from its subjects.’ This ambivalence was vividly exemplified in the personality of Ivan the Terrible, and was to persist for centuries thereafter.’ Hosking, *Russia*, p. 7. Mme de Staël was perhaps familiar with this historiography, when reflecting upon the origin of the Russians. Nevertheless, when considering the destiny of Novgorod she seems to turn things round, in order to connect real despotism with Napoleon, she writes: ‘Persons have been pleased to say that freedom was not reclaimed in Europe before last century; on the contrary, it is rather despotism, which is a modern invention.’ de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 163. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 316.

353. Lotman & Uspenskij, ‘The Role Of Dual Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture’, p. 21.

354. Bodin, *Ryssland och Europa*, p. 12.

obvious to Mme de Staël when she visited the magnates of St. Petersburg. But before arriving in the ‘new’ capital (established in 1712) of Russia, she arrived in the ‘old’ one, that is, Moscow.<sup>355</sup> However, on the road to Moscow she makes the observation that poetry, eloquence and literature were not yet to be found in Russia.

La poésie, l'éloquence, la littérature, ne se rencontrent point en Russie; le luxe, la puissance et le courage sont les principaux objets de l'orgueil et de l'ambition; toutes les autres manières de se distinguer semblent encore efféminées et vaines à cette nation.<sup>356</sup>

From here Mme de Staël goes on to discuss Russian serfdom, not without embarrassment, according to the editor Paul Gautier in a note.<sup>357</sup> The difficulties seem to derive from the fact that Mme de Staël cannot connect something so bad and un-enlightened as serfdom to Russia, as it has the function of being her projected Ego-culture.

Although, she continues, all enlightened people want to abolish serfdom, and no one more than Tsar Alexander, it cannot be understood in Western terms, because ‘the ties which connect the grandees with the people resemble rather what was called a family of slaves among the ancients than the state of serfs among the moderns.’<sup>358</sup> But later on, during her visit to Moscow, Mme de Staël took part in the discussion concerning sacrifices that had to be made because of the war and wrote that she had ‘some difficulty in accommodating’ herself ‘to the expression, *giving men*, but the peasants themselves offered their services with ardour, and in this

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355. Although Peter the Great’s enemies, the conservative branch of the Russian orthodox church, especially the *old believers*, never acknowledged St. Petersburg as a city, and even less as a capital replacing Moscow, something that would in fact imply, to the *old believers*, the inconceivable idea of a fourth Rome. See Bodin, *Historien och evigheten*, p. 206.

356. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 298–299. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 153. ‘Poetry, eloquence and literature are not yet to be found in Russia; luxury, power, and courage are the principal objects of pride and ambition; all other methods of acquiring distinction appear as yet effeminate and vain to this nation.’

357. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 299, note 1.

358. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 153. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 299.

war their lords were only their interpreters'.<sup>359</sup> (Emphasis in the original.)

Lorsque je passai devant ces palais entourés de jardins, où l'espace était prodigué dans une ville comme ailleurs au milieu de la campagne, on me disait que le possesseur de cette superbe demeure venait de donner mille paysans à l'État; cet autre, deux cents. J'avais de la peine à me faire à cette expression, *donner des hommes*; mais les paysans eux-mêmes s'offraient avec ardeur, et leurs seigneurs n'étaient dans cette guerre que leurs interprètes.<sup>360</sup> (Emphasis in the original.)

Contrary to Diderot, but in conformity with Voltaire, Mme de Staël is prepared to defend the despotism of the greats by referring to the enormous size of Russia which makes the pressure on the individual less pronounced. Mme de Staël regrets the absence of a middle class and the bad effects this has on the development of literature and art, but on the other hand she recognizes the, according to her, good effects such a state of affairs has on the relation between the nobility and the people, which becomes more, so to speak, direct and affectionate.<sup>361</sup> She defines serfdom from the landowners' point of view, and compares the relation between them and the peasant with family ties.

This is something that the *Slavophiles* did about thirty years later, where the idea of the tie between the tsar and the peasant became the cornerstone of what would be called *the Russian idea*.<sup>362</sup> But in fact,

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359. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, pp. 155–156. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 303. In literature this system has been ruthlessly explored by Nikolaj Gogol in his satirical book *Dead Souls* (1842).

360. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 302–303. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, pp. 155–156. 'As I was passing before these palaces surrounded by gardens, where space was thrown away in a city as elsewhere in the middle of the country, I was told that the possessor of this superb residence had given a thousand peasants to the state: and of that, two hundred. I had some difficulty in accommodating myself to the expression, *giving men*, but the peasants themselves offered their services with ardour, and in this war their lords were only their interpreters.'

361. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, pp. 153–154. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 299–300.

362. For Slavophilism and literature see D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature from its Beginnings to 1900*, ed. Francis J. Whitfield (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1999), pp. 169–172. The Slavophiles, critics of

as Geoffrey Hosking suggests, already at the time of the war of 1812 and the battle of Borodino this idea was sown, because the war brought the nobility closer to the serfs in that they had a feeling of sharing ‘a common fate’, and in that sense the war ‘broadened the potential social base of Russian patriotism’.<sup>363</sup>

Very briefly it should perhaps be mentioned that about 1840 a movement, politically liberal or socialist, was formed under the title of Westernizers, who were opposed not only to Slavophilism but also to ‘official Russia’.<sup>364</sup> This conflict between Westernizers and Slavophiles is important in Russian history since it deals with Russia’s relation to the West. And as Boris M. Paramonov argues, this conflict, as it took shape in the nineteenth century, reflected ‘the Romantic reaction to the French revolution and the Enlightenment’.<sup>365</sup> And Mme de Staël, standing in between these currents of ideas, mirrored both in her travelogues. The influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau apparently created a common platform in this connection. Paramonov sums up:

If Westernizers saw the state as a conduit for the Western spirit and credited it with civilizing Russia, Slavophiles considered it a necessary evil, a legal-rational political form alien to the people’s ethical sensibilities and inimical to the nation’s historical destiny. Nineteenth-century Slavophilism is reminiscent of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s deep mistrust of science, technology, and progress. The place of the noble savage in the Slavophile teaching was assigned to the Russian peasant, whose simplicity, endurance, and faith defeated the

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Peter the Great’s reforms and the westernization of Russia, found that ‘the true values of Russia were communal, embodied in the peasant masses of Russia and their way of life in the village [...]. The Slavophile discovery of the people (*narod*) did not amount to socialism, not even to democracy, but it could seem at times to be either or both.’ (Emphasis in the original.) Abbott Gleason, ‘Ideological structures’, in *Cambridge companion to Modern Russian culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 103–124, for quotation see p. 110.

363. Hosking, *Russia*, p. 171.

364. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, p. 172.

365. Boris M. Paramonov, ‘Historical Culture’, in *Russian Culture at the Crossroads*, ed. Dmitri N. Shalin (Boulder & Oxford: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 11–39, for quotation see p. 12.



‘enlightened’ emperor Napoleon. Lev Tolstoi’s novel *War and Peace* was perhaps the best literary rendering of Slavophilism.<sup>366</sup>

Mme de Staël, in fact, embraced ideas both of the future Westernizers and the Slavophiles, at least in two respects: liberalism and nationalism, the latter referring to her repeated appeal to the Russians to stay Russian.

### *Moscow*

Quelqu’un disait avec raison que Moscou était plutôt une province qu’une ville. En effet, l’on y voit des cabanes, des maisons, des palais, un bazar comme en Orient, des églises, des établissements publics, des pièces d’eau, des bois, des parcs.<sup>367</sup>

On se rappelait Rome en voyant Moscou, non assurément que les monuments y fussent de même style, mais parce que le mélange de la campagne solitaire et des palais magnifiques, la grandeur de la ville et le nombre infini des temples, donnent à la Rome asiatique quelques rapports avec la Rome européenne.<sup>368</sup>

Here, Madame de Staël is reminded of Rome, when she sees Moscow—‘Rome asiatique’. It is interesting in this connection to compare what Germaine de Staël wrote about Rome and the Italians when she visited Italy in 1804–1805. The novel *Corinne* is the fruit of

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366. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

367. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, pp. 301–302. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 155. ‘It has been well said by someone that Moscow was rather a province than a city. In fact, you there see huts, buildings, pieces of water, woods and parks.’

368. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 305. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 157. ‘One was reminded of Rome in seeing Moscow; but because the mixture of solitary country and magnificent palaces, the grandeur of the city and the infinite number of its churches give the Asiatic Rome some points of resemblance to the European Rome.’ However, it is interesting to compare what she wrote in her travelogue with her travel notes where she called Moscow ‘Rome tartare.’ And that the city had ‘Immensité. Les églises décorent une ville.’ As Balayé notes, Moscow/Rome tartar is a ‘strange comparison’. Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël*, p. 285. For the concept of Moscow as the third Rome in Russian history see also Lotman and Uspenskij in ‘The Role of Dual Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture’, pp. 6–7.

that visit. However, in her notes, which served as the basis of the novel, she wrote that the Italians ‘had something Oriental over them’ and that was something ‘barbaric in the architecture of St. Paul and the Antiquity.’<sup>369</sup> (My translations.)

Perhaps it is not too hasty to draw the conclusion that words like ‘Oriental’ and ‘barbaric’ were used to define the foreign, which sometimes was welcomed and other times less so, at least on the surface. But on a deeper level, how did Madame de Staël conceive of the foreign? Well, we shall return to that question shortly. In Moscow Mme de Staël met Count Rostopchin whom she described as a hero able to maintain an original conversation:

Le fameux comte Rostopchine, dont le nom a rempli les bulletins de l’Empereur, vint me voir, et m’invita à dîner chez lui. Il avait été ministre des Affaires étrangères de Paul I<sup>er</sup>. Et sa conversation avait de l’originalité, et l’on pouvait aisément apercevoir que son caractère se montrerait d’une manière très prononcée, si les circonstances l’exigeaient.<sup>370</sup>

When visiting the Countess Rostopchin in her country house in Moscow, Mme de Staël describes it solemnly as the house that the count himself set on fire when Napoleon’s army invaded Moscow:

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369. Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël*, p. 167; pp. 200–201. In the original: ‘Les Italiens ont quelque chose des Orientaux’ and ‘Du barbare dans l’architecture de S[ain]t-Paul et de l’antique.’

370. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 311, in note 1 the editor comments that Rostopchin had called her ‘Une pie conspiratrice’ (‘A conspiring magpie’; my translation) and that if she had known about that she would not have been flattered. Rostopchin tells the event himself, and those words, according to him, were uttered in a dispute with Mme de Staël at a dinner party in Paris in 1817 (where he stayed 1816–1819, being in disgrace with the tsar). Balayé underlines, though, that even if the pieces of information come from Rostopchin they are not necessarily always correct. See Simone Balayé, ‘Mme de Staël et Rostopchine’, in *Cahiers Staëliens*, no. 16, 1973, Paris, pp. 73–76, esp. p. 73; 75. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 160. ‘The famous Count Rostopchin, with whose name the Emperor’s bulletins have been filled, came to see me, and invited me to dine with him. He had been minister for foreign affairs to Paul I, his conversation had something original about it, and you could easily perceive that his character would show itself in a very strong manner, if circumstances required it.’

[...] c'est à cette maison, l'un des plus agréables séjours de la Russie, que le comte Rostopchine a mis lui-même le feu à l'approche de l'armée française. Certes, une telle action devrait exciter un certain genre d'admiration, même chez des ennemis. L'empereur Napoléon a cependant comparé le comte Rostopchine à Marat, oubliant que le gouverneur de Moscou sacrifiait ses propres intérêts, et que Marat incendiait les maisons des autres; ce qui ne laisse pas cependant de faire une différence.<sup>371</sup>

However, Rostopchin denied, in a letter to his friend Count Romanzov, that he had set Moscow on fire. According to him Napoleon had put the blame on him to save his own reputation, and to Rostopchin's regret many Russians believed him, and he continues:

[...] —moi qui a perdu à toute cette histoire près d'un million; car Woronowo et tous les établissements sont brûlés; ma maison de campagne, qui me coûtait 150,000 roubles, brûlée par ordre suprême de Bonaparte; ma bibliothèque, mes tableaux, mes estampes, mes instruments de physique, tout a été pillé et saccagé!<sup>372</sup>

However, if one considers the event in the light of the Russian warfare against Napoleon the problem becomes complex indeed. Steven Englund writes in his book on Napoleon that the latter had miscalculated the importance of the capture of Moscow because 'the Russian nobility had long accepted St. Petersburg as the capital of

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371. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 312. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, pp. 160–161. '[...] it was to this house, one of the most agreeable residences in Russia, that Count Rostopchin himself set fire, on the approach of the French army. Certainly an action of this kind was likely to excite a certain kind of admiration, even in enemies. The Emperor Napoleon has, notwithstanding, compared Count Rostopchin to Marat, forgetting that the governor of Moscow sacrificed his own interests, while Marat set fire to the houses of others, which certainly makes a considerable difference.'

372. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 312, note 1. '[...] — I who have lost nearly a million from this whole story; because Woronowo and all the establishments are burnt down; my farm, which cost me 150,000 roubles, burnt down on the supreme order of Napoleon; my library, my paintings, my engravings, my physics instruments, everything has been pillaged and devastated.' (My translation.)

their empire, and they now joined their tsar in the great effort to throw back the foreigner'.<sup>373</sup> Now, Hosking has shown, as discussed above, how the war against Napoleon created a patriotic feeling not only among the nobility but also among the people. If one studies Rostopchin's lines to his friend in the light of the conclusion which Englund draws, one might ask oneself where the decision to set fire to Moscow was taken, although any answer to this question is beyond the scope of this inquiry.<sup>374</sup>

As we have seen, Rostopchin visited Paris in 1816–18, in disgrace with the tsar, accused of the conflagration that destroyed Moscow.<sup>375</sup> Be that as it may, to Mme de Staël in 1812 Rostopchin was a hero. And she explains this by referring to the Russian nature, contesting Diderot. The Russians had something wild about them and their vice was violence, but they were not corrupted:

Aucune nation civilisée ne tient autant des sauvages que le peuple russe; et quand les grands ont de l'énergie, ils se rapprochent aussi des défauts et des qualités de cette nature sans frein. On a beaucoup vanté le mot fameux de Diderot: *Les Russes sont pourris avant d'être mûrs*. Je n'en connais pas de plus faux; leurs vices mêmes, à quelques exceptions près, n'appartiennent pas à la corruption, mais à la violence. Un désir russe, disait un homme supérieur, ferait sauter une ville; la fureur et la ruse s'emparent d'eux tour à tour, quand ils veulent accomplir une résolution quelconque, bonne ou mauvaise.<sup>376</sup>

However, in 1817 at least the relationship between Mme de Staël and Rostopchin was rather cold. Perhaps this was due to the fact that

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373. Englund, *Napoleon*, p. 377.

374. *Ibid.*, p. 377.

375. Solovieff, 'Madame de Staël et ses correspondants russes', p. 25.

376. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 313. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 161. 'No civilised nation has so much in common with savages as the Russian people, and when their nobility possess energy, they participate also in the defects and good qualities of that unshackled nature. The expression of Diderot has been greatly vaunted: The Russians are rotten before they are ripe. I know nothing more false; their very vices, with some exceptions, are not those of corruption, but of violence. The desires of a Russian, said a very superior man, would blow up a city: fury and artifice take possession of them by turns when they wish to accomplish any resolution, good or bad.'

Rostopchin was in disgrace with Tsar Alexander, whom Mme de Staël appreciated a lot. Or perhaps it was due to the changed political situation, France being defeated and as a result Mme de Staël's patriotism increased?<sup>377</sup>

Now, the author and member of the French academy Victor-Joseph-Etienne de Joy recalled in a letter a dispute that Mme de Staël and Rostopchin had at one of those dinner parties given by members of Parisian society. The dispute concerned an article written by Benjamin Constant in *Mercur de France* where he launches the idea that Tsar Alexander's actions aimed at transforming the Russian people into a nation (an idea that in fact is supported by contemporary historiography, as we have seen).<sup>378</sup> De Joy noted that Mme de Staël argued that the nobility was so far ahead of the people in Russia that the nobles had to go back for the people to develop. Rostopchin answered that the same could be said about France, and Mme de Staël replied that this could easily be done, because the French upper class would nevertheless be the superior one in Europe:

Mme de Staël: 'Oui, Comte, le niveau de développement des grandes masses du peuple russe est resté inchangé depuis Pierre le Grand. La noblesse a tellement dépassé le peuple qu'elle doit reconnaître la nécessité de revenir en arrière.'  
Rostopchine: 'Oui, Madame, mais on pourrait donner le même conseil à la France.'  
Mme de Staël: 'Il nous est facile de revenir en arrière, car de toute façon nous resterions en avance

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377. However, Balayé shows, by quoting Rostopchin's son-in-law Marquis (Anatole) de Ségur, that Mme de Staël was annoyed that Rostopchin had declined, in keeping with his general dislike of grand dinners, an invitation to one, and she did not conceal her irritation when meeting him. See Balayé, 'Mme de Staël et Rostopchine', p. 75.

378. Solovieff, 'Madame de Staël et ses correspondants russes.', p. 25. There are reasons to believe that the soirée in question is the one given by the Duke de Cars, on 20 May 1817. Rostopchin wrote, concerning the dispute over Constant's text, that, 'everyone was on my side, but one fears Mme de Staël more than one loves her.' (My translation.) See Balayé, 'Mme de Staël et Rostopchine', p. 75. This passage is interesting to reflect upon because it confirms that Mme de Staël was unique and had an exceptional position in society after all, although it created an inner conflict within her, as we have seen, between on one hand wanting to be loved and seen as woman, in a normative traditional sense, and on the other hand wanting to be respected as an intellectual and artist, a position traditionally reserved for men.

sur tout le monde.’ Rostopchine: ‘Dans ce cas, Madame, donnons l’exemple, vous et moi: Je suis prêt à retourner dans mes forêts, sous l’ombre du château de mes pères, et vous, de votre côté, retourner aussi quelque arrière, vous vous trouverez dans le bureau de banque de votre père, et nous verrons si vous y aurez gagné...’.<sup>379</sup>

Apparently, Mme de Staël, in this situation, gave voice to an opinion held by many French at this time and thus her model of the Ego-culture conformed in that sense. But in 1812, being in Russia, it was not evident that Mme de Staël would say that the French were ‘ahead of all’. Here, regardless of her appreciation for Russia as an Extra-culture, or projected Ego-culture, her appreciation of the French intellectual culture as her true Ego-culture comes forward in a rather arrogant way. However, the question that Rostopchin put forward reveals that he considered Mme de Staël’s Ego-culture to be that of her father (metaphorically M. Necker’s bank office), that is, probably Switzerland rather than France. Maybe this was his way of returning the insult made by her.

Before leaving Moscow Mme de Staël repeats in her travelogue, as Paul Gautier puts it, ‘one of her favourite ideas’ that she had ‘developed in her book *De l’Allemagne*’: ‘But the Russians have, like so many other continental nations, the fault of imitating the French literature, which, even with all its beauties, is only fit for the French themselves.’<sup>380</sup>

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379. Solovieff, ‘Madame de Staël et ses correspondants russes’, pp. 25–26, see also note 48, p. 25; apparently their conversation echoes in a letter from Princess Tourkestanoff to Ferdinand Christin and thereby in St. Petersburg. ‘Mme de Staël: ‘Yes, count, the level of the development of the masses in Russia has not changed since Peter the Great. The nobility has surpassed the people to such a degree that it has to recognize the necessity of going backwards.’ Rostopchine: ‘Yes, Madame, but one could give the same advice to France.’ Mme de Staël: ‘It is easy for us to go backwards, because in any case we would remain a head of all in the world.’ Rostopchine: ‘In that case, Madame, let us give an example, you and I: I’m prepared to return to my forests, under the shadow of the castle of my ancestors, and you, for your part, when also returning somewhat backwards, you will find yourself in the office of your father’s bank, and we will see if you shall win there...’ (My translation.)

380. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 314, see also note 1. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 162. But the call to the Russian to develop their own literature and art was not new. Diderot expressed the same ideas in his article ‘La Russie’ that was published

### *St. Petersburg*

La fondation de Pétersbourg est la plus grande preuve de cette ardeur de la volonté, qui ne connaît rien d'impossible; [...] la ville est bâtie sur un marais, et le marbre même y repose sur des pilotis; mais on oublie en voyant ces superbes édifices, leurs fragiles fondements, et l'on ne peut s'empêcher de méditer sur le miracle d'une si belle ville bâtie en si peu de temps. Ce peuple, qu'il faut toujours peindre par des contrastes, est d'une persévérance inouïe contre la nature, ou contre les armées ennemies.<sup>381</sup>

As is visible in these lines, the surroundings of St. Petersburg and the circumstances of which the city was built is something that particularly occupied Mme de Staël.

Altogether, Mme de Staël seemed more preoccupied by the surrounding countryside when she was in St. Petersburg, even though descriptions of what she perceives along the road do indeed appear throughout the travelogue. Perhaps this sharpened observation was reinforced by the knowledge of the dramatic history of the foundation of the city, which apparently inspired Mme de Staël a lot. And of course there was the sea and the Neva. Mme de Staël wrote:

En arrivant à Pétersbourg, mon premier sentiment fut de remercier le ciel d'être au bord de la mer. Je vis flotter sur la Néva le pavillon anglais, signal de la liberté, et je sentis que je pouvais, en me confiant à l'Océan, rentrer sous la puissance immédiate de la Divinité; c'est une illusion dont on ne saurait

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in 1774 in *Raynal's Histoire des Deux Indes* (known to be hostile towards Russia). See Herbert Dieckmann, 'Les contributions de Diderot à la correspondance littéraire' et à "L'Histoire des Deux Indes", in *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, Octobre-Décembre, vol. 51, 1951, Paris, pp. 417–440, see esp. p. 426.

381. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 318–319. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 164. 'The foundation of Petersburg offers the greatest proof of that ardour of Russian will, which recognises nothing as impossible: [...] the city is built upon a marsh, and even the marble rests on piles; but you forget when looking at these superb edifices, their frail foundations, and cannot help meditating on the miracle of so fine a city being built in so short a time. This people which must always be described by contrasts, possesses an unheard of perseverance in its struggles with nature or with hostile armies.'

se défendre, que de se croire plus sous la main de la Providence, quand on est livré aux éléments, que lorsqu'on dépend des hommes, et surtout de l'homme qui semble une révélation du mauvais principe sur cette terre.<sup>382</sup>

The thought of contrasting men and nature in this way may also be seen as a result of her wish to symbolically convey her inner state of mind, and not only of historical facts known to her. This interpretation may be supported by Mariella Vianello Bonifacio's article that discusses the way Mme de Staël depicted the nature in her travelogue from 1812 (as we have seen in a previous note). Bonifacio focuses on two distinctions in the narrative: those dealing with nature and with customs. Thus, the images of the first belong to the personal level of Mme de Staël and becomes representations of her 'personal landscape' ('paysage personnel'), those of the second serve to give information of political historical matters, often revealing the author's taste for the picturesque.<sup>383</sup>

A neat, and beautiful, example of this mixture can be found in the passage where Mme de Staël describes Neva:

Les édifices sont encore d'une blancheur éblouissante, et la nuit, quand la lune les éclaire, on croit voir de grands fantômes blancs qui regardent, immobiles, les cours de la Néva. Je ne sais ce qu'il y a de particulièrement beau dans ce fleuve, mais jamais les flots d'aucune rivière ne m'ont paru si limpides. Des quais de granit de trente verstes de long bordent ses ondes, et cette magnificence du travail de l'homme est digne de l'eau transparente qu'elle décore. [...] Les Russes habitants de

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382. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 319. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 165. 'On my arrival at Petersburg my first sentiment was to return thanks to heaven for being on the borders of the sea. I saw waving on the Neva the English flag, the symbol of liberty, and I felt that on committing myself to the ocean, I might return under the immediate power of the Deity; it is an illusion which one cannot help entertaining, to believe one's self more under the hand of Providence, when delivered to the elements than when depending on men, and especially on that man who appears to be a revelation of the evil principle on this earth.'

383. Bonifacio, 'Les Dix années d'exil', p. 49. As we have seen, descriptions of this kind are not frequent in Mme de Staël's travel account from Germany in 1803–1804, which in comparison is very brief. This probably due to that her aim of that journey in the end was another, namely to write, not a travelogue, but a book on Germany, its literature and customs.



Pétersbourg ont l'air d'un peuple de Midi condamné à vivre au Nord, et faisant tous ses efforts pour lutter contre un climat qui n'est pas d'accord avec sa nature. Les habitants du Nord sont d'ordinaire très casaniers, et redoutent le froid, précisément parce qu'il est leur ennemi de tous les jours. Les gens du peuple, parmi les Russes, n'ont pris aucune de ces habitudes; les cochers attendent dix heures à la porte, pendant l'hiver, sans se plaindre; ils se couchent sur la neige, sous leurs voitures, et transportent les mœurs des lazzaroni de Naples, au soixantième degré de latitude.<sup>384</sup>

Mme de Staël describes the buildings as 'grand white phantoms' which are 'immobile' and which look at the 'reaches' of Neva. Those descriptions constitute a very poetic element in a passage that continues with more scientific enlightened descriptions of the nature of the inhabitants of St. Petersburg, and the city's climate. Noteworthy also is that Mme de Staël does not seem to connect the ability of the common Russian to endure severe circumstances with despotism. Also, the climate is depicted as an 'enemy' which the inhabitants have to fight in their 'everyday' life. Now, the poetic elements in Mme de Staël's description give echoes in the very well known poem by Pushkin himself, who, as we have seen, read and appreciated *Dix années d'exil*. Pushkin wrote about St. Petersburg and its founder, in his famous poem *The Bronze Horseman* (1833), which is a praise of the city but 'also a dramatization of the human cost inflicted

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384. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 321–322. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 166. 'The buildings still possess a dazzling whiteness, and at night when they are lightened by the moon, they look like large white phantoms regarding, immovable, the course of the Neva. I do not know what there is particularly beautiful in this river, but the waves of no other I had yet seen ever appeared to me so limpid. A succession of granite quays, thirty versts in length, borders its course, and this magnificent labour of man is worthy of the transparent water which it adorns. [...] The Russian inhabitants of Petersburg have the look of a people of the South condemned to live in the North, and making every effort to struggle with a climate at variance with their nature. The inhabitants of the North are generally very indolent and dread the cold, precisely because he is their daily enemy. The lower classes of the Russians have none of these habits; the coachmen wait for ten hours at the gate during winter, without complaining; they sleep upon the snow, under their carriage, and transport the manners of the Lazzaroni of Naples to the sixtieth degree of latitude.' For additional analyses of images in Mme de Staël's travelogue from St. Petersburg see Bonifacio, 'Les Dix années d'exil', p. 52.

on its inhabitants by building it on such a unsuitable site'.<sup>385</sup> Pushkin wrote in the prologue:

Thrive, Peter's city, flaunt your beauty, /Stand like unshaken  
Russian fast, /Till floods and storms from chafing duty /May  
turn to peace with you at last; [...].<sup>386</sup>

Mme de Staël's images in her description of Neva, the buildings and the threatening nature always prepared to strike back on the human supremacy are felt in Pushkin's poem. In that sense one might perhaps add to Mme de Staël's *curriculum vitae* that she was, indirectly of course, one of the founders of the *myth of St. Petersburg* that became so important in Russian literature in several ways, also by being subject to critique. Pierre R. Hart writes: 'Detractors, including Fedor Dostoevsky, would seize upon those same traits [with reference to Pushkin's poem] as proof of its impersonal, alien essence.'<sup>387</sup>

Germaine de Staël's study of the statue of Peter the Great that Catherine II engaged Falconet (French artist and friend of Diderot) to make, reveals that at heart she supported these monarchs' way of westernizing Russia, although in other contexts, to which we will return, she questions the success of the process, perhaps being unconscious of the fact that she gets inconsistent in doing so. Mme de Staël wrote:

En face de la maison que j'habitais à Pétersbourg était la statue de Pierre I<sup>er</sup>; on le représente à cheval, gravissant une montagne escarpée au milieu de serpents qui veulent arrêter les pas de son cheval. Ces serpents, il est vrai, sont mis là pour soutenir la masse immense du cheval et du cavalier; mais cette idée n'est pas heureuse; car, dans le fait, ce n'est pas l'envie qu'un souverain peut redouter; ceux qui rampent ne sont pas

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385. Hosking, *Russia*, p. 294.

386. Alexander Pushkin, 'The Bronze Horseman', in *Collected narrative and lyrical poetry*, ed. Walter Arndt (Woodstock and New York: Ardis Publishers, 2002), p. 428. For a Russian original version of this passage in Pushkin's poem see for example: A. C. Pushkin, *Sochineniya v trekh tomakh*, tom vtoroy (Moskva: gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoy litratury, 1954), p. 252.

387. Pierre R. Hart, 'The West', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 85–102, quotation p. 89.

non plus ses ennemis, et Pierre I<sup>er</sup>, surtout, n'eut rien à craindre, pendant sa vie, que des Russes qui regrettaient les anciens usages de leur pays. Toutefois l'admiration que l'on conserve pour lui est une preuve de bien qu'il a fait à la Russie; car cent ans après leur mort les despotes n'ont plus de flatteurs. On voit écrit sur le piédestal de la statue: *A Pierre premier, Catherine II*. Cette inscription simple, et néanmoins orgueilleuse, a le mérite de la vérité. Ces deux grands hommes ont élevé très haut la fierté russe: et savoir mettre dans la tête d'une nation qu'elle est invincible, c'est la rendre telle, au moins dans ses propres foyers; [...].<sup>388</sup>

Apparently Mme de Staël was familiar with Russian historiography: Peter the Great's reforms created hostility among many Russians and he was among those regarded as the antichrist on earth because of his aims to further decrease the power of the church, a process that included blasphemous elements.<sup>389</sup>

However, when *regarding* the statue, reading the inscription, Mme de Staël embraces the westernization process of Russia that started with Peter the Great and continued with Catherine II. It could be interesting to insert that Falconet, in a letter to Catherine II, brings up the matter of the serpent and the function it has of 'supporting the immense volume of the horse and the horseman' which obviously

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388. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 319–320, see also note 1 (p. 320); Marquis de Custine 'seems to have remembered Mme de Staël' (My translation.) Custine wrote another well-known travelogue from Russia *La Russie en 1839* (1843), and as Paul Gautier shows, Custine's rendering of his observations of the statue very much resembles Mme de Staël's. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 165. 'Just facing the house which I inhabited at Petersburg was the statue of Peter I, he is represented on horseback climbing a steep mountain, in the midst of serpents who try to stop the progress of his horse. These serpents, it is true, are put there to support the immense weight of the horse and his rider; but the idea is not a happy one: for in fact it is not envy which a sovereign can have to dread: neither are his adulators his enemies: and Peter I especially had nothing to fear during his life, but from Russians who regretted the ancient customs of their country. The admiration of him, however, which is still preserved is the best proof of the good he did to Russia: for despots have no flatterers a hundred years after their death. On the pedestal of the statue is written: *To Peter the First, Catherine the Second*. This simple, yet proud, inscription has the merit of truth. These two great monarchs have elevated the Russian pride to the highest pitch; and to teach a nation to regard itself as invincible, is to make it such, at least within its own territory: [...].'

389. Bodin, *Ryssland och Europa*, p. 103.

Mme de Staël knew about. In the same letter Falconet speaks of Peter the Great who ‘met envy on his way’.<sup>390</sup> Now, Catherine II’s answer to Falconet concerning the serpent is memorable, she wrote: ‘There is an old song that says: if it’s necessary it’s necessary: there! my answer to the serpent.’<sup>391</sup> (My translation.) Diderot gave him a similar response: ‘Leave that Serpent there under his feet. Did not Peter, did not all grand Men have one to crush? Is it not the true symbol of all kinds of wickedness used to stop the successes, to raise obstacles and to depress the work of grand Men? [...] Besides it does good & it is of a mechanic indispensable necessity & very secret.’<sup>392</sup> (My translation.)

Nevertheless, because Mme de Staël did not have time to complete *Dix années d’exil*, and the book therefore was edited by others, her direct impressions, no matter how inconsistent a text they make up, seem to be left as they originally were perceived by her. This gives additional values to the material: narrative consistency is perhaps more a result of editing and genre, of reflections in retrospect, than of how we mentally, and actually, observe things around us in ordinary life. The concept of ordinary life is here understood in a phenomenological sense, that is, in the sense implied by Schutz’s (and Husserl’s) notion of ‘lifeworld’.

Now, Mme de Staël reinforces the connection between Peter the Great and Catherine II, already present in the inscription by calling

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390. ‘Correspondance de Falconet avec Catherine II, 1767–1778’, in *Bibliothèque de l’institut Français de Petrograd*, tome VI, ed. André Mazon (Paris: Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, 1921), p. 89. Letter sent from Falconet to Catherine II, St. Petersburg, 31 July 1769. The function of the serpent was thus to prop up the work of art.

391. ‘Correspondance de Falconet avec Catherine II, 1767–1778’, in *Bibliothèque de l’institut Français de Petrograd*, tome VI, ed. André Mazon, p. 93. Letter sent from Catherine II to Falconet, St. Petersburg, 7 August 1769. ‘Il y a une ville chanson qui dit; s’il faut il faut: voilà ma réponse au serpent [...]’

392. *Denis Diderot correspondance*, vol. XIII, p. 118. ‘Laisse ce Serpent là sous ses pieds. Est-ce que Pierre, est-ce que tous les grands Hommes n’en ont pas eu à écraser? Est-ce que ce n’est pas le véritable symbole de toutes les sortes de méchancetés employées pour arrêter les succès, susciter des obstacles et déprimer les travaux des grand Hommes? [...] D’ailleurs il fait bien & il est d’une nécessité mécanique indispensable & très secrète.’

them both ‘great men’.<sup>393</sup> To her a Russian *female tsar* was perhaps inconceivable? Be that as it may, Mme de Staël’s thoughts when looking at the statue differed from Diderot’s view not only of Peter I but also of Catherine II, whom he indirectly tried to encourage to break with the total focus on the westernization of Russia, initiated by the former, by invoking the example of the Greeks who stimulated ‘in their own country barbaric talents, then second-rates, then first-rates’.<sup>394</sup> (My translation.) Rousseau, whom Mme de Staël admired, more or less shared Diderot’s opinion concerning Peter I and his reforms, saying that the tsar only ‘had the talent of a copyist’ and ‘had no true genius’.<sup>395</sup>

Mme de Staël, when observing the church built by Paul I, the church of Our Lady of Kazan, she saw, to her regret, the effects of the rapid attempts to westernize Russia. But somehow she did not seem to connect her observations directly to Peter the Great’s reforms. Mme de Staël wrote:

Le matin suivant je me rendis à l’église de Notre-Dame de Kazan, bâtie par Paul I<sup>er</sup>, sur le modèle de Saint-Pierre de Rome. L’intérieur de l’église, décoré d’un grand nombre de colonnes de granit, est de la plus grande beauté; mais l’édifice lui-même déplait, précisément parce qu’il rappelle Saint-Pierre, et qu’il en diffère d’autant plus qu’on a voulu l’imiter. On ne fait pas en deux ans ce qui a coûté un siècle aux premiers artistes de l’univers. Les Russes voudraient, par la rapidité, échapper au temps comme à l’espace; mais le temps ne conserve que ce qu’il a fondé, et les beaux-arts, dont

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393. ‘Great men’ seems to be a more correct translation of ‘grands hommes’ (see translation in the note above), as originally expressed by Mme de Staël in both editions of *Dix années d’exil*, that is, the one from 1821 and the one from 1904.

394. Diderot, *Mémoires pour Catherine II*, p. 208.

395. Quotation from *Social Contract (Contrat social)* in Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 199. See also Jean Jacques Rousseau, ‘Contrat social’, in *The Political Writings of Rousseau*, vol. II, p. 56 (for the quotation in full). ‘Pierre avait le génie imitatif; il n’avait pas le vrai génie [...]. Quelques-unes des choses qu’il fit étaient bien; la plupart étaient déplacées. [...] Il a d’abord voulu faire des Allemands, des Anglais, quand il fallait commencer par faire de Russes. Il a empêché ses sujets de devenir jamais ce qu’ils pourrissent être, en leur persuadant qu’ils étaient ce qu’ils ne sont pas.’

l'inspiration semble la première source, ne peuvent cependant se passer de la réflexion.<sup>396</sup>

Again, very strikingly, Mme de Staël brings forth her dislike of Russian imitations of the West. But this time the critique has a ring of patronizing, the artists creating St. Peter's church in Rome were 'the first artists of the universe', and this implies that the Russian artists never may aspire to be anything else than of second order unless they develop their own art. The Russians also lack the art of conversation so important, perhaps the most important form of art, to Mme de Staël. Her regret of this is expressed in the reflections she made after some visits to the most magnificent homes of the high nobility. But first, one example of how Mme de Staël usually paid attention to the people, in this case long-bearded merchants, namely by describing their religious side. One Sunday, probably 23 August, she was invited to Count Orlov.<sup>397</sup> Mme de Staël depicts how they fêted the peace between England and Russia characteristically. The people made the sign of the cross and thanked heaven.

Nous étions tous émus, et nous applaudîmes à cet air national pour tous les Européens; car il n'y a plus que deux espèces d'hommes en Europe, ceux qui servent la tyrannie et ceux qui savent la haïr. Le comte Orlov s'approcha des marchands russes et leur dit que l'on célébrait la paix de l'Angleterre avec la Russie: ils firent alors le signe de la croix, et remercièrent le ciel de ce que la mer leur était encore une fois ouverte.<sup>398</sup>

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396. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 324. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 167. 'The next morning I repaired to the church of Our Lady of Kazan, built by Paul I on the model of St. Peter's at Rome. The interior of this church, decorated with a great number of columns of granite, is exceedingly beautiful; but the building itself displeases, precisely because it reminds us of St. Peter's: and because it differs from it so much the more, from the mere wish of imitation. It is impossible to create in two years what cost the labour of a century to the first artists of the universe. The Russians would by rapidity escape from time as they do from space: but time only preserves what it has founded, and the fine arts, of which inspiration seems the first source, cannot nevertheless dispense with reflection.'

397. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 328, note 1. See also Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël*, p. 298, note 194.

398. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 329. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 170. 'We were all much affected, and applauded this air, which is become national for all

Mme de Staël noted the great hospitality among the nobility in St. Petersburg where the host often enough not ‘knew half of the persons’ who dined at the table, as the example of count Strogonoff shows.<sup>399</sup> Mme de Staël wrote:

Il est aisé d’en conclure que ce que nous entendons, en France, par les plaisirs de la conversation ne saurait s’y rencontrer: la société est beaucoup trop nombreuse pour qu’un entretien d’une certaine force puisse jamais s’y établir. Toute la bonne compagnie a des manières parfaite; mais il n’y a ni assez d’instruction parmi les nobles, ni assez de confiance entre des personnes qui vivent sans cesse sous l’influence d’une cour et d’un gouvernement despotiques, pour que l’on puisse connaître les charmes de l’intimité.<sup>400</sup>

And Mme de Staël continues further down on the same page to say that the Russian magnates often give the impression of being more witty than they turn out to be:

Le début est presque toujours d’un homme ou d’une femme de beaucoup d’esprit; mais quelquefois aussi, à la longue, l’on ne retrouve que le début. On ne s’est point accoutumé, en Russie, à parler du fond de son âme ni de son esprit; on avait naguère si peur de ses maîtres, qu’on n’a point encore pu s’habituer à la sage liberté qu’on doit au caractère d’Alexandre.<sup>401</sup>

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Europeans; for there are no longer but two kinds of men in Europe, those who serve tyranny, and those who have learned to hate it. Count Orloff went up to the Russian merchants and told them that the peace between England and Russia was celebrating; they immediately made the sign of the cross and thanked heaven that the sea was once more open to them.’

399. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 170.

400. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 330. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 170. ‘The same practice prevails in many other houses at Petersburg; it is natural to conclude from that, that what we call in France the pleasures of conversation cannot be there met with: the company is much too numerous to allow a conversation of any interest even to be kept up in it. In the best society the most perfect good manners prevail, but there is neither sufficient information among the nobility, nor sufficient confidence among persons living habitually under the influence of a despotic court and government, to allow them to know anything of the charms of intimacy.’

401. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, pp. 330–331. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 171. ‘The *début* is almost always that of a gentleman or lady of fine understanding; but

Again Mme de Staël shows herself to be all too willing to see Alexander I as representing a break in the traditions of autocracy embedded in the empire of Russia. And she concluded the discussion by expressing some appreciation for the lucid conversations one could nowadays have in Russia, while at the same time underlining that this conversation was still much inferior to that in Paris:

Le silence de l'Orient est transformé en des paroles aimables, mais qui ne pénètrent pas d'ordinaire jusqu'au fond des choses. On se plaît un moment dans cette atmosphère brillante, qui dissipe agréablement la vie; mais à la longue on ne s'y instruit pas, on n'y développe pas ses facultés, et les hommes qui passent ainsi leur temps n'acquièrent aucune capacité pour l'étude ou pour les affaires. Il n'en était pas ainsi de la société de Paris: on a vu des hommes formés seulement par les entretiens piquants ou sérieux que faisait naître le réunion des nobles et des gens de lettres.<sup>402</sup>

Mme de Staël represented France, a country that at this time presented both the most valuable European culture, at least to many members of the Russian nobility, as we have seen earlier, and the enemy. But as we will see later on, things seemed to have changed dramatically after Napoleon's invasion of Moscow. Therefore one must ask oneself whether this distrustfulness, which Mme de Staël felt among the Russians, was not a natural result of the political and

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sometimes also, in the long run, you discover nothing but the *début*. They are not accustomed in Russia to speak from the bottom of their heart or understanding; have not yet been able to accustom themselves to that wise freedom, for which they are indebted to the character of Alexander.' (Emphasis in the original.)

402. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 331–332, see note 1 where Paul Gautier points to some lines in Marquis de Custine's travelogue from Russia in 1839 showing that his experiences of Russian society are very much the same as Mme de Staël's, writing that they 'receive you out curiosity, then reject you out of prudence.' (My translation from French.) de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 171. 'The silence of the East is here transformed into amiable words, but which generally never penetrate beyond the surface. One feels pleasure for a moment in this brilliant atmosphere, which is an agreeable dissipation of life; but in the long run no information is acquired in it, no faculties are developed in it, and men who pass their life in this manner never acquire any capacity for study or business. Far otherwise was it with the society of Paris; there we have seen men whose characters have been entirely formed by the lively or serious conversation to which the intercourse between the nobility and men of letters gave birth.'



cultural situation, more than any mentality of the Russian society. This problem will be touched upon shortly. Now, in the chapter to follow in *Dix années d'exil* Mme de Staël is entirely occupied with depicting Alexander I and his family. As we have seen from their correspondence after Mme de Staël's return to Paris in 1815, she had great faith in the tsar. This is also displayed in the portrait of him in *Dix années d'exil*:

J'ai toujours considéré comme un signe de médiocrité cette crainte de traiter les questions sérieuses, qu'on a inspirée à la plupart des souverains de l'Europe; ils ont peur de prononcer des mots qui aient un sens réel. L'empereur Alexandre, au contraire, s'entretint avec moi comme l'auraient fait les hommes d'État de l'Angleterre, qui mettent leur force en eux-mêmes, et non dans les barrières dont on peut s'environner.<sup>403</sup>

England to Mme de Staël represented the ideal state and in many ways Ego-culture, next to the France that was no more, that is, the France in the early days of the revolution. Therefore to compare Alexander I's manners with those of English statesmen seems natural to her, the Ego-culture being the model of the most valuable and sought for. And Mme de Staël devotes large passages to the deceitful person of Napoleon, also referring to Alexander I's thoughts about his former relations with him. The problem of slavery, still not abolished in Russia, comes up in the conversation between her and the tsar. She wrote that the Russian administration had many drawbacks, order and knowledge were lacking. Nevertheless, the nation was not to blame, as they had put up such noble resistance:

Il m'exprima de désir, que tout le monde lui connaît, d'améliorer le sort des paysans encore soumis à l'esclavage. 'Sire, lui dis-je, votre caractère est une constitution pour votre empire, et votre conscience en est la garantie. — Quand cela

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403. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 334. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 172. 'I have always regarded as a proof of mediocrity that apprehension of treating serious questions with which the best part of the sovereigns of Europe have been inspired; they are afraid to pronounce a word to which any real meaning can be attached. The Emperor Alexander, on the contrary, conversed with me as statesmen in England would have done, who place their strength in themselves, and not in the barriers with which they are surrounded.'

serait, me répondit-il, je ne serais jamais qu'un accident heureux'. Belles paroles, les premières, je crois, de ce genre qu'un monarque absolu ait prononcées! Que de vertus il faut pour juger le despotisme en étant despote!<sup>404</sup>

Mme de Staël, like many others, believed in Tsar Alexander's good will to improve the conditions of the people in Russia, and if had not been for Napoleon 'the dispenser of evil to the world' the tsar would be 'solely occupied with the improvement of his country, and in attempting to establish laws which would guarantee to it that happiness of which the duration is as yet only secured for the life of its present ruler'.<sup>405</sup> Also, the tsar is not responsible for the prevailing despotism, according to Mme de Staël. It is imposed, so to speak, on him by the nobility who wished to maintain the despotic order, especially the great nobility in St. Petersburg 'have less liberality in their principles than the emperor himself. Accustomed to be the absolute masters of their peasants, they wish the monarch, in his turn, to be omnipotent, for the purpose of maintaining the hierarchy of despotism.'<sup>406</sup>

Even though Germaine de Staël recognized the tradition of autocracy in Russia, and one of the most poignant consequences of it, namely serfdom, she continues throughout the text to see Tsar Alexander as an exception. She wrote:

De là vient que toute éducation est finie à quinze ans; on se précipite dans l'état militaire le plus tôt possible, et tout le reste est négligé. Certes ce n'est pas le moment de blâmer un ordre de choses qui a produit une si belle résistance; dans un temps plus calme, on pourrait dire avec vérité qu'il y a, sous les rapports civils, de grandes lacunes dans l'administration

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404. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 337, this was rendered also in *Considérations sur la Révolution*, see note 1. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 174. 'He expressed to me the desire, which all the world knows him to entertain, of ameliorating the state of the peasants still subject to slavery. "Sire," said I to him, "your character is a constitution for your empire, and your conscience is the guarantee of it." "Were that even the case," replied he, "I should only be a fortunate accident." Noble words! The first of the kind, I believe, which an absolute monarch ever pronounced!' Serfdom was not abolished until 1861.

405. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 175. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 339.

406. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 174. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 337.

intérieure de la Russie. L'énergie et la grandeur sont dans la nation; mais l'ordre et les lumières manquent souvent encore, soit dans le gouvernement, soit dans la conduite privée des individus. Pierre I<sup>er</sup>, en rendant européenne la Russie, lui a donné sûrement de grands avantages par l'établissement d'un despotisme que son père avait préparé, et qui a été consolidé par lui. Catherine II, au contraire, a tempéré l'usage du pouvoir absolu, dont elle n'était point l'auteur.<sup>407</sup>

As we can see, Mme de Staël was mentally hindered from profound analysis of what she observed in Russian society because whatever was lacking in it did not matter any more since 'an order of things, which has produced so noble a resistance' cannot be all that bad.<sup>408</sup>

Now, projecting her Ego-culture on to the Russian culture (and the English) had troublesome consequences for Mme de Staël's conception of herself. Apprehending herself as representing the true French wit and refinement in contrast to the despotic 'Corsican', she found herself in a position where she had to explain why she fêted the alliance between Russia and England. Mme de Staël describes the scene, taking place at a dinner party given by Prince Narishkin when the prince wanted to salute the alliance between Russia and England. Madame de Staël was sad, she did not want to salute the defeat of France. Instead she wished for the defeat of him who suppressed both France and the rest of Europe, in order to restore the true French:

M. Narischkine, au milieu de ces plaisirs variés, proposa de porter un toast au succès des armes réunies des Russes et des

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407. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 338–339. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 175. 'The result of this is that young men's education is finished at fifteen years of age; they are hurried into the army as soon as possible, and everything else is neglected. This is not the time certainly to blame an order of things, which has produced so noble a resistance; were tranquillity restored, it might be truly said that under civil considerations, there are great deficiencies in the internal administration of Russia. Energy and grandeur exist in the nation; but order and knowledge are still frequently wanting, both in the government, and in the private conduct of individuals. Peter I, by making Russia European, certainly bestowed upon her great advantages; but these advantages he more than counterbalanced by the establishment of a despotism prepared by his father, and consolidated by him; Catherine II, on the contrary, tempered the use of absolute power, of which she was not the author.'

408. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 175.

Anglais, et donna, dans cet instant, le signal à son artillerie, presque aussi bruyante que celle d'un souverain. L'ivresse de l'espérance saisit tous les convives; moi, je me sentis baignée de larmes. Fallait-il qu'un tyran étranger me réduisît à désirer que les Français fussent vaincus! 'Je souhaite, dis-je alors, la chute de celui qui opprime la France comme l'Europe; car les véritables Français triompheront s'il est repoussé.' Les Anglais, les Russes, et M. Narischkine le premier, approuvèrent mon impression, et ce nom de France, jadis semblable à celui d'Armide, fut encore entendu avec bienveillance par les chevaliers de l'Orient et de la mer qui allaient combattre contre elle.<sup>409</sup>

Baron Stein, an exiled German wrote in a letter on 17 August 1812 to his wife that he had met Mme de Staël at Narishkin's and described her in the following words:

J'ai vu Mme de Staël; elle a une apparence de bonté et de simplicité, quoiqu'elle ne veuille pas se donner la peine de plaire: un certain art de laisser-aller et un extrême abandon expliquent les nombreuses imprudences de son langage, excusables d'ailleurs par sa position au milieu d'une capitale comme Paris et d'un peuple gâté et excité par toutes les passions. [...] je crois qu'elle ne plaira pas ici; car le goût littéraire manque en Russie, et les femmes y sont extraordinairement paresseuses.<sup>410</sup>

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409. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 345. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 178. 'M. Narishkin in the midst of this variety of pleasures, proposed to us to drink a toast to the united arms of the Russian and English, and gave at the same moment a signal to his artillery, which gave almost as loud a salute as that of a sovereign. The inebriety of hope seized all the guests; as for me, I felt myself bathed in tears. Was it possible that a foreign tyrant should reduce me to wish that the French should be beat? I wish, said I then, for the fall of him who is equally the oppressor of France and Europe; for the true French will triumph if he is repulsed. The English and the Russian guests, and particularly M. Narishkin, approved my idea, and the name of France, formerly like that of Armida in its effects, was once more heard with kindness by the knights of the east, and of the sea, who were going to fight against her.'

410. Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, pp. 234–235. 'I have seen Mme de Staël; she has an appearance of kindness and of simplicity, although she does trouble not herself to please: a certain art of carelessness and an extreme lack of restraint

This letter, summarizing observations made at a gathering at Narishkin's, is very interesting because Baron de Stein turns things around: to him Mme de Staël represented a 'spoiled people', 'heated by all their passions' and her 'art of carelessness' explained her frequent usage of an imprudent language. Here, Mme de Staël appears as uncivilized as the Russians, only in a slightly different way.

However, Baron de Stein very much liked Mme de Staël's readings of her manuscript of *De l'Allemagne*, which he had heard at Count Orlov's.<sup>411</sup> On the other hand, Mme de Staël called Baron de Stein 'a man of antique character, who only lived in the hope of seeing the deliverance of his country'.<sup>412</sup>

Now, Mme de Staël's 'kingdom', that is, a France without Napoleon, was thus allied with Russia and England forming the model of her Ego-culture. After discussing her feelings about high politics comes a passage preoccupied with more down-to-earth observations about slavery:

Des Kalmouks aux traits aplatis sont élevés chez les seigneurs russes, comme pour conserver un échantillon de ces Tartares que les Esclavons ont vaincus. Dans ce palais Narischkine couraient deux ou trois de ces Kalmouks à demi sauvages. Ils sont assez agréables dans l'enfance, mais ils perdent, dès l'âge de vingt ans, tout le charme de la jeunesse; opiniâtres, quoique esclaves, ils amusent leurs maîtres par leur résistance, comme un écureuil qui se débat entre les barreaux de sa cage. Cet échantillon de l'espèce humaine avilie était pénible à regarder: il me semblait voir, au milieu de toutes les pompes du luxe, une image de ce que l'homme peut devenir quand il n'a de dignité ni par religion ni par des lois, et ce spectacle rabaisait l'orgueil que peuvent inspirer les jouissances de la splendeur.<sup>413</sup>

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explain the numerous imprudences of her language, pardonable otherwise by her position in the milieu of a capital like Paris, and among a people spoiled and heated by all their passions. [...] I do not think she will please here; because of the want of literary taste in Russia, and the women there are extraordinary lazy.' (My translation from French.) See also de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 347–348, note 1.

411. Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, pp. 235–236. Letter sent from Stein to his wife on 31 August 1812.

412. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 193. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 370–371.

413. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 345. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, pp. 178–179. 'Kalmucks with flat features are still brought up in the houses of the Russian

Obviously, this contrast between the Tartar slaves and their masters which she noticed at Narishkin's was difficult for her to digest, and in her travelogue from Russia there are, as we have seen, several remarks about her reactions to the way the Russians seemed to treat their slaves.

But not only Tsar Alexander himself is exempt from Asiatic manners and despotism, so are the empresses, about whom Mme de Staël wrote:

Le respect des mœurs est déjà bien plus grand qu'il ne l'était, à Pétersbourg, du temps de ces souverains et souveraines qui dépravaient l'opinion par leur exemple. Les deux impératrices actuelles ont fait aimer les vertus dont elles offrent le modèle. Cependant, à cet égard comme à beaucoup d'autres, les principes de morale ne sont point fixement établis dans la tête des Russes. [...] Un certain désordre d'imagination ne permet pas de trouver du bonheur dans la durée. La culture d'esprit, qui multiplie le sentiment par la poésie et les beaux-arts, est très rare chez les Russes, et, dans ces natures fantasques et véhémentes, l'amour est plutôt une fête ou un délire qu'une affection profonde et réfléchie.<sup>414</sup>

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nobility, as if to preserve a specimen of those Tartars who were conquered by the Slavonians. In the palace of Narishkin there were two or three of these half-savage Kalmucks running about. They are agreeable enough in their infancy, but at the age of twenty they lose all the charms of youth: obstinate, though slaves, they amuse their masters by their resistance, like a squirrel fighting with the wires of his cage. It was pitiful to look at this specimen of the human race debased; I thought I saw, in the midst of all the pomp of luxury, an image of what man may become when he derives no dignity either from religion or the laws, and this spectacle was calculated to humble the pride which the enjoyments of splendour may inspire'.

414. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 348–349. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 180. 'The respect for morality is already much greater than it was at Petersburg in the time of those Emperors and Empresses who depraved opinion by their example. The two present Empresses have made those virtues beloved, of which they are themselves the models. In this respect, however, as in a great many others, the principles of morality are not properly fixed in the minds of the Russians. [...] A certain irregularity in the imagination does not allow them to find happiness in what is durable. The cultivation of the understanding, which multiplies sentiment by poetry and the fine arts, is very rare among the Russians, and with these fantastic and vehement dispositions, love is rather a fête or a delirium than a profound and reflected affection.'

The ‘customs of Asia, which meet you at every step, prevent the females from interfering with the domestic cares of their establishment’ which ‘are directed by the husband, and the wife only decorates herself with his gifts, and receives the persons whom he invites’.<sup>415</sup>

Thus, the Russians in general are not yet civilized and are described as a nation of nature rather than one of culture. Mme de Staël continues: ‘The refinements of civilisation in all countries alter the sincerity of character, but when a sovereign possesses the unlimited power of exile, sending to Siberia, &c. &c., it is something too strong for human nature.’<sup>416</sup> There! However: ‘None of these reflections, we know, apply to the present government, its head being, as Emperor, perfectly just, and as a man, singularly generous.’<sup>417</sup>

### *The defeat of Moscow*

Un étranger me dit que Smolensk était pris, et Moscou dans le plus grand danger. Le découragement s’empara de moi. Je crus voir recommencer la déplorable histoire des paix d’Autriche et de Prusse, amenées par la conquête de leurs capitales. [...] Je n’apercevais pas l’esprit public, l’apparente mobilité des impressions des Russes m’empêchait de l’observer. L’abattement avait glacé tous les esprits, et j’ignorais que, chez ces hommes aux impressions véhéments, cet abattement précède un réveil terrible.<sup>418</sup>

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415. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 180. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, pp. 347–348, see also note 1: Paul Gautier suggests a reading of Masson and the chapter entitled *Gynécocratie* (despite its slight cynicism) that indicates what Mme de Staël ‘could not or did not want to say’. (My translation from French.) Mme de Staël could on good grounds assume that what she wrote in her book would also be read by the Emperor and his family, among a great many others.

416. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 181. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 349.

417. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 181. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 349.

418. de Staël, *Dix années d’exil*, p. 355, note 1: Smolensk was taken by Ney and Davout on 17–18 August 1812. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, pp. 184–185. ‘A stranger told me that Smolensk was taken and Moscow in the greatest danger. Discouragement immediately seized me. I fancied that I already saw a repetition of the deplorable history of the Austrian and Prussian treaties of peace, the result of the conquest of their capitals. [...] I did not perceive the public spirit; the apparent

Yes, Mme de Staël was right about that, the defeat of Moscow aroused a vehement hostility against all that was French. We shall come back to that shortly.

But when visiting the Institute of St. Catherine, Mme de Staël met nothing but kindness and warmth. The young lady students welcomed her by reading pieces of French literature, including some parts of M. Necker's *Cours de morale religieuse* (1800), and Mme de Staël commented: 'Beyond the empire of Bonaparte, in all countries posterity commences, and justice is shown towards those who even in the tomb have felt the attack of his imperial calumnies.'<sup>419</sup> Now, things changed and the poet Ernest-Maurice Arndt, exiled partner and biographer of Stein, noted Mme de Staël's reactions to an event at the French theatre in St. Petersburg. There are different versions of the event, but here I use the version rendered by Simone Balayé based on the text by Arndt. Rocca, in the company of Mme de Staël's son, went to the theatre to see French actors perform Racine's *Phèdre*. However, at the theatre, there were tumultuous events and provocations against the French. When they came back from the theatre to tell Mme de Staël and her guests, Arndt being one of them, about the event Madame de Staël burst into tears, exclaiming 'Those barbarians, not to want to hear Racine's *Phèdre*!'.

Mme de Staël donna une scène qui nous fit souvent sentir que, lorsque les Français ont des sentiments d'amour pour leur patrie, ils sont par trop de ce que nous avons trop peu. Les acteurs français à Pétersbourg donnèrent *Phèdre*. Rocca, l'ami de Mme de Staël et son fils étaient au théâtre. Nous autres qui avions été invités à midi par cette femme célèbre étions encore à la table. Mais, voyez! nous les vîmes revenir quelque peu bouleversés. Ils racontèrent qu'il y avait eu au début de la pièce un tel tumulte, de telles invectives contre les Français et le théâtre français de la part des Russes, que la représentation avait dû être annulée et cela s'était bien passé ainsi. [...] Et Mme de Staël! elle oublia temps et lieu et ne sentit plus qu'elle

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inconstancy of the impressions of the Russian prevented me from observing it. Despondency had frozen all minds, and I was ignorant that with these men of vehement impressions, this despondency is the forerunner of a dreadful awakening.'

419. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 187. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 359.



et son peuple; elle sortit d'elle-même, éclata en sanglots et dit:  
'Les barbares, ne pas vouloir entendre la *Phèdre* de Racine!'<sup>420</sup>

Speaking from her heart, the Russians turned out to be barbarous the minute they overtly rejected French culture. Lotman, on the other hand, gives an interesting explanation of the ambivalent behaviour of the Russians in the wake of Peter the Great's reforms: 'One did not have to become a foreigner, but to behave *like* one.'<sup>421</sup> And, as Lotman continues, this adoption of foreign customs could sometimes have the paradoxical result of intensifying the 'antagonism to foreigners'.<sup>422</sup> Thus: 'Everyday behavior was turned into a set of signs for everyday behavior. [...] Daily life took on features of the theatre.'<sup>423</sup> The conflict that the Russian nobleman felt being a Russian with westernized behaviour, according to Lotman, turned his actions 'into a game' since 'popular lifestyle' did not disappear from society.<sup>424</sup> Mme de Staël noted this dualism within the character of the Russian gentry when mixing in the social life of St. Petersburg. However, in this connection it is therefore interesting indeed to render Mme de Staël's commentary on Racine's *Phèdre* in

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420. Balayé, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël*, pp. 310–311. 'Mme de Staël gave a scene that makes us often feel that when the French have feelings of love for their country, they have too much of what we have too little. The French actors in St. Petersburg staged *Phèdre*. Rocca, Mme de Staël's friend and her son were at the theatre. The rest of us who had been invited at midday by this celebrated woman were still at the table. But, you see! we saw them coming back slightly shaken. They told us that at the beginning of the play there was such a tumult, such invectives against the French and the French theatre on the part of the Russians, that the performance had to be cancelled and this is what really happened. [...] And Mme de Staël! she forgot time and place and she felt nothing but herself and her people; she was beside herself, burst out into tears and said: "The barbarians, not wanting to hear *Phèdre* by Racine!"' (My translation.) Lady Blennerhassett in *Madame de Staël et son temps*, tome III, p. 460, renders the event also on the basis of Arndt's text and in a similar way to Balayé (*Mes voyages et pérégrinations avec le baron de Stein*, pp. 56–60; *Souvenirs de ma vie extérieure*, pp. 168–169). However, in Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, pp. 237–238, Mme de Staël is presented as being at the theatre herself and therefore the event is rendered in a quite different way, as Simone Balayé remarks in note 267 on page 311 in the work referred to above.

421. Lotman, 'The Poetics of Everyday Behavior in Russian Eighteenth-century Culture', p. 233.

422. Ibid.

423. Ibid., p. 234.

424. Ibid.

another context, namely in Germany, noted down by Uvarov in his journal during her sojourn in Vienna in 1807–1808. Georges Solovieff refers to Uvarov's notes:

Dans son journal, Ouvaroff remarque que Mme de Staël est moins laide qu'il ne s'attendait. Il est conquis par l'art fin de sa conversation, mais observe son intention secrète d'être originale. Il trouve ses arguments d'une logique peu solide, comme par exemple que le goût est une qualité digne de mépris, que Racine est bien moins intelligent que les écrivains allemands (qu'elle est prête à citer), que l'anarchie n'est destructrice que par ses résultats, que la France désire établir chez elle une constitution dans l'esprit anglais, qu'il n'y a pas la moindre anarchie en France, etc.<sup>425</sup>

According to Uvarov's journal Mme de Staël expressed another view of the importance of Racine, which implies, in fact, that if the Germans had declared something similar to what the Russians did in St. Petersburg her response would have been different. Quite natural, if one considers that at the time of Mme de Staël's sojourn in Vienna she was preparing her extensive work on the German literary genius, that is, *De l'Allemagne*. We also have reason to assume that the German culture was in a more Extra-cultural relation to Mme de Staël than the Russian culture was, in the sense of (1) geographical closeness (to France and Switzerland), (2) intelligibility (she knew how to read German) and, (3) value (she believed in the German genius). Now, this underlines the idea of the Ego-culture constructing the other culture according to its own needs, stipulated within the theories of cultural semiotics. In short, the notion of culture is relational.

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425. Solovieff, 'Madame de Staël et ses correspondants russes', pp. 4–30, quotation p. 10. 'In his journal, Uvarov remarks that Mme de Staël is less plain than he expected. He is conquered by the fine art of her conversation, but observes her secret aim to be original. He finds her arguments not very solid, as for example that taste is a quality that merits contempt, that Racine is much less intelligent than the German writers (whom she is ready to cite), that anarchy is destructive only by its results, that France wishes to establish in the home country a constitution in the spirit of the English one, that there is not the slightest anarchy in France, etc.' (My translation.)

*The departure from St. Petersburg and the journey to Sweden through  
Finland*

La nouvelle de l'entrée des Français à Smolensk arriva pendant la conférence du prince de Suède et de l'empereur de Russie; c'est là qu'Alexandre prit, avec lui-même et avec le prince royal, son allié, l'engagement de ne jamais signer la paix. 'Petersbourg serait pris, dit-il, que je me retirerais en Sibérie. J'y reprendrais nos anciennes coutumes, et, comme nos ancêtres à longues barbes, nous reviendrions de nouveau conquérir l'empire. — Cette résolution affranchira l'Europe!' s'écria le prince de Suède, et sa prédiction commence à s'accomplir.<sup>426</sup>

Mme de Staël left St. Petersburg on 7 September 1812 (the same day as the battle of Borodino).<sup>427</sup> But before leaving that city she had the opportunity to meet the legendary Russian general Prince Kutuzov who was about to take the command in time of the battle at Borodino, outside Moscow. General Kutuzov was the other hero of Mme de Staël, and in her 'need for a personal antithesis to Napoleon,' she 'saw in Kutuzov the military antithesis—in Alexander the civil antithesis'<sup>428</sup> (My translation from French.) Mme de Staël describes him as follows:

J'allai le voir la veille de son départ. C'était un vieillard plein de grâce dans les manières, et de vivacité dans la physionomie, quoiqu'il eût perdu un œil par une de ses nombreuses blessures qu'il avait reçues dans les cinquante années de sa carrière

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426. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 366–367, note 1 (p. 366): the conference took place at Åbo on 27–30 August 1812. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 191. 'The news of the entrance of the French into Smolensk arrived during the conference of the Prince of Sweden with the Emperor of Russia; and it was there that Alexander contracted the engagement with himself and the Prince Royal, his ally, never to sign a treaty of peace. "Should Petersburg be taken," said he, "I will retire to Siberia. I will there resume our ancient customs, and like our long-bearded ancestors, we will return anew to conquer the Empire." "This resolution will liberate Europe," exclaimed the Prince Royal, and his prediction begins to be accomplishing.'

427. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 370, note 2.

428. Solovieff, 'Madame de Staël et ses correspondants russes', pp. 4–30, quotation p. 22.

militaire. En le regardant, je craignais qu'il ne fût pas de force à lutter contre les hommes âpres et forts qui fondaient sur la Russie de tous les coins de l'Europe; mais les Russes, courtisans à Pétersbourg, redeviennent Tartares à l'armée; [...] je fus émue en quittant cet illustre maréchal Kutusov; je ne savais si j'embrassais un vainqueur ou un martyr, mais je vis qu'il comprenait la grandeur de la cause dont il était chargé. Il s'agissait de défendre, ou plutôt de rétablir toutes les vertus morales que l'homme doit au christianisme, toute la dignité qu'il tient de Dieu, toute l'indépendance que lui permet la nature; [...].<sup>429</sup>

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429. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 368–369, see also note 1, informing about the portrait Tolstoy made of Kutuzov, who died in 1813, in his *War and Peace*. In fact, Tolstoy depicts several military heroes—based on real persons—in that book, whom Mme de Staël met and admired: besides Kutuzov there are at least Miloradovich and Suchtelen (both the father and the son), the latter are not mentioned in *Dix années d'exil*, although the son Pavel Petrovitch (representing romantic heroism to Mme de Staël) had at the time, despite his youth, fought two wars against Napoleon, see Solovieff, 'Madame de Staël et ses correspondants russes', pp. 18–19). Apparently Pavel Suchtelen's heroism did not go unnoticed even to Napoleon himself, who confronted him, when having been taken prisoner together with a whole group of Russian officers. Suchtelen then answered Napoleon by quoting some lines from *Le Cid* (written in 1636 by Pierre Corneille): 'Je suis jeune, il est vrai, mais aux âmes bien nées / La valeur n'attend point le nombre des années.' [I am young, it is true, but in well-born souls / Valor does not wait for the count of years.] Napoleon ordered a picture of this theme to be painted for the Tuileries Palace. This episode shows, with classic precision, the train 'stage-life-canvas': the young Suchtelen encodes his behavior with the norms of the theatre, while Napoleon unerringly singles out from a real life situation a subject for a painting.' Ju. M. Lotman, 'The Stage and Painting as Code Mechanisms for Cultural Behavior in the Early Nineteenth Century', in *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, p. 165. As we have seen, Mme de Staël did something similar when having her self-portrait as Corinne made by Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, the triad being however: fiction-life-canvas. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 192. 'I went to see him the day before his departure; he was an old man of the most graceful manners, and lively physiognomy, although he had lost an eye by one of the numerous wounds he had received in the course of a fifty years service. On looking at him, I was afraid that he had not sufficient strength to struggle with the rough young men who were pouncing upon Russia from all corners of Europe: but the Russian courtiers at Petersburg become Tartars at the army: [...] I was moved at taking leave of this illustrious Marshal Kutusov; I did not know whether I was embracing a conqueror or a martyr, but I saw that he had the fullest sense of the grandeur of the cause in which he was employed. It was for the defence, or rather for the restoration of all

It is interesting to note that the Asiatic side of the Russian is viewed as something advantageous in connection with war and strength. As we have seen, not only Mme de Staël makes that connection but also Tsar Alexander himself, referring to the ancestors from Siberia.

So, in connection with the hero Kutuzov, and his war against Napoleon, the Tartar origin was associated with strength and thus regarded as an asset. One may, by way of conclusion, suggest that Mme de Staël used the Tartar origin of the Russians as a type, often in form of a prejudice, in her relation to them, when they did not fulfil her expectations—as the case of Uvarov also shows. However, at times when the Russians did meet her expectations of being her allies against Napoleon, she regarded them as civilized. But, as she writes in the quotation above: ‘the courtesans in St. Petersburg *become again* Tartars in the army’. (Emphasis is mine.) These lines illustrate that Mme de Staël probably thought the Russians to be Tartars at heart, that is, the state of being Tartars they return to, sooner or later. In specific situations, though, the Tartar origin apparently emerges as something basically good, namely at war with Napoleon. Then the type seems to be used by the Russians and Mme de Staël alike, to indicate skill in war, thus as a stereotype.

Mme de Staël entered Åbo, at the time the capital of Finland which had been under Tsar Alexander’s supremacy since 1809, but ‘he treated this new province very well’.<sup>430</sup> She wrote further down that Åbo had a university and showed some efforts to have an intellectual culture, but the climate was hard:

Je m’embarquai à Abo, capitale de la Finlande. Il y a une université dans cette ville, et l’on s’y essaye un peu à la culture de l’esprit; mais les ours et les loups sont si près de là pendant l’hiver, que toute pensée est absorbée par la nécessité de s’assurer une vie physique tolérable; et la peine qu’il faut pour cela dans les pays du Nord consume une grande partie du

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the moral virtues which man owes to Christianity, of all the dignity he derives from God, of all the independence which he is allowed by nature; [...].’

430. de Staël, *Ten Years’ Exile*, p. 195.

temps que l'on consacre, ailleurs, aux jouissances des arts de l'esprit.<sup>431</sup>

Mme de Staël's description of the bears being so close to the university during the winter provoked some reactions. Muchanov, a critic of Mme de Staël, remarked in an article what he called the 'pleasantry' referring to her description of the bears and wolves existing in the surroundings of the university of Åbo.<sup>432</sup>

Mme de Staël's autobiographical travel account stops suddenly after a description of the passage by sea to the isle of Åland, situated between Finland and Sweden. She did not have the time to finish it because of other writing projects, as already mentioned. But as Christopher Herold wrote: 'No Russian Rahel Levin could have said of her, with a sneer, that she had 'seen nothing, heard nothing, understood nothing': Germaine saw and absorbed everything, with an intensity, a freshness, a directness, that one misses in her descriptions of Germany and Italy. [...] For once Germaine's eyes were wide open.'<sup>433</sup> However, my study above suggests otherwise, namely that the nature of Ego-culture deforms and models other cultures according to its own needs. Thus, Mme de Staël turned things in order for them to fit her model of herself and her Culture. In that sense the reader of *Dix années d'exil* learns perhaps more about her Ego-culture than about Russia, although the former emerges in the encounter with the latter.

#### *Summary and concluding remarks*

Germaine de Staël's autobiographical travelogue mainly presents Extra-cultural encounters. However, two ways of projecting the Ego-culture on to the other come to the fore when analysing Mme de

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431. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 375–376. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 195. 'I embarked at Abo, the capital of Finland. There is a university in that city, and they make some attempts in it to cultivate the intellect: but the vicinity of the bears and wolves during the winter is so close that all ideas are absorbed in the necessity of ensuring a tolerable physical existence; and the difficulty which is felt in obtaining that in the countries of the north, consumes a great part of the time which is elsewhere consecrated to the enjoyment of the intellectual arts.'

432. Rossetini, 'Madame de Staël et la Russie', p. 53.

433. J. Christopher Herold, *Mistress to an Age: A life of Madame de Staël* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1959), p. 414.

Staël's descriptions in letters and in *Dix années d'exil*: (1) on to the Non-culture; and (2) on to the Extra-culture.

The strict Non-cultural encounters in Mme de Staël's text appear to be few: the German woman on the ferry, the peasants along the roads in Habsburg Galicia, and the Russian lower-class people. Mme de Staël's imposes her own word, her own model of the world, on those groups of people who are not expected to react, to enter into a dialogue about what is said to them, even if they could be human beings, fellow-men, in a common lifeworld. To Mme de Staël the Non-cultural meetings, it seems, serve vital needs. The German woman on the ferry illustrates a conflict within Mme de Staël concerning her role as a woman. Mme de Staël, being an intellectual woman and writer in need of a public arena, came into conflict with the established norms stipulating how a woman should be, that is, devoted to her domestic obligations (as Napoleon and the men in power made clear). This, as I understand it, made Mme de Staël aware of the problems her chosen path would cause her, and one of the most hurtful to her, perhaps, was the public questioning of her womanhood. The dialogue with the German woman on the ferry Mme de Staël rather has with herself, regretting, it seems, that she could not accept her lot (according to the norms) as a woman and stop making a fuss. We have seen the same theme in the characters of *Corinne*, where Lucile, Corinne's English half-sister, represents the ideal (and normative) type of womanhood, being gentle and quiet, devoted to her husband and withdrawn from worldly activities. Corinne is Lucile's opposite, being vivid, creative, artistic, in short, a woman taking her place in the public sphere. The Corinne-character emerges, as we have seen, as a stereotype (designating Frenchness) used by Mme de Staël (Ego-type) as well as by other people she met during her travels.

In a sense, the Polish peasants whom Mme de Staël meets on the road are described with similar intentions, it seems. They are also depicted as subjugated, not so much to norms as it appears in Mme de Staël's writing, but to a backwardly inhuman system making these people rely solely on Providence. Turning in despair to religious comforts was something that probably was not unknown to Mme de Staël, who took a great interest in spirituality and religion herself. But again, the peasants are not expected to have a word in this matter, Mme de Staël does not address them in order to establish a dialogue.

Coming to the Russian people, the coachmen Mme de Staël saw in St. Petersburg, it looks as if it is their ability to quietly endure hard circumstances, in this case the severe climate, which catches Mme de Staël's interest. Again, she appears not to care about knowing what really made the coachmen endure waiting outside, sleeping on the snow under their carriages (as she writes in the travelogue) waiting for hours in the cold for their masters. Probably the endurance of these coachmen was forced upon them by their masters, rather than being a quality of their character. But again, such a truth was not interesting to Mme de Staël, because it did not fit her needs, that is, to keep her world-view intact. The Russian nobility served in the narrative, as we have seen, as heroes and allies in her struggle against Napoleon. Therefore they cannot also appear as inhuman masters, sustaining a system that Mme de Staël, the liberal, so often in her text displays as undesirable.

In short, the people in these examples of the Non-culture were not expected to produce any texts, that is, to answer the words that are addressed to them indirectly. Mme de Staël, as it seems from reading her descriptions, did *not overtly* address them. In Schutz's sense Mme de Staël was not performing a communicative act, 'supposed to be interpreted by the Others as signs of what I mean to convey. Gestures, speech, writing, etc., are based upon bodily movements.'<sup>434</sup> In connection with such non-dialogical performances another term for the other has been introduced, designating a type: the German woman on the ferry, the Polish peasants, and the Russian coachmen are *Alius* to Mme de Staël, in contrast to *Alter*. However, they all served a need to Mme de Staël, otherwise she would not have mentioned these encounters in her travelogue; at least that is a good guess. From an outside position, when reconstructing the circumstances behind *Dix années d'exil* (and some letters) we may thus say that the German woman, the Polish peasants, and the Russian coachmen represented the Non-culture to her, in terms of intelligibility and some lack of appreciation (although not always lack of sympathy). But they fulfilled a need and therefore in that sense served the Ego-culture, the model Mme de Staël makes of herself and her culture. But as is also becoming clear, these groups of people, although they are human beings sharing time and space with Mme

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434. Schutz, *Collected Papers* I, p. 218.



de Staël, are *Alius* to her, a notion reserved for the other (the hero) enclosed in the text, or the fellow-man, not being able or not being expected to answer back.<sup>435</sup> Thus, the concepts of Non-culture and Extra-culture are models, represented one might say by *Alius* and *Alter* respectively on an individual level. Thereby the notions serve as analytical tools for the outside observer in the work of reconstruction of the lifeworld (the world we take for granted or the world of daily life) and the Ego-culture (as a system for producing ‘texts’) of which a particular text emerged, in our case Mme de Staël’s autobiographical travel account.<sup>436</sup>

However, as mentioned earlier, Mme de Staël’s travel accounts are rather filled with what we call Extra-cultural meetings, illustrated by her encounters with Rahel Levin/Varnhagen, Schiller, Goethe, Duchess Louise, Prince de Ligne, Tsar Alexander and many others. Those meetings are all characterized by their dialogic nature, as we have seen in the discussion above. Mme de Staël enters the dialogue in order to make herself understood but also with the ambition of being understood in her turn, *the way she expects*. This points to the fact that also Extra-cultural relations are fundamentally asymmetric, the Ego-culture being the dominant party in the relation. As an outside observer, by analysing documents Mme de Staël herself often did not know of, we are able to reconstruct, to a certain extent at least, the nature of the encounters described by her. By expecting to be understood on her terms Mme de Staël often fails to conceive that the encounters only *seem* to be dialogic, in the Extra-cultural sense. In the encounter with Prince de Ligne, for example, there were political issues that could not be addressed, the prince being essentially someone regretting the French revolution altogether, as we have seen. From Mme de Staël’s point of view, which is the subject of this inquiry, Prince de Ligne had to suppress, one might imagine, his political stances when visiting Mme de Staël. In other words, his texts

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435. For a discussion of *Alius* see Sonesson, ‘The Pronominalisation of Culture’.

436. Schutz clarifies in connection with types and the model the social scientist makes of the world in order to be able to study it as follows: ‘This model, however, is not peopled with human beings in their full humanity, but with puppets, with *types*; they are constructed as though they could perform working actions [overt acts upon the outer world] and reactions.’ (Emphasis is mine; italics in the original.) Schutz, *Collected Papers I*, p. 255. However, it is important to stress here that types are based upon a principle of relevance referring to the world of daily life.

(answering speech in this case) are likely to have been devoid of politics, or rather, his true political convictions. In that sense, Prince de Ligne seemed to have been somebody mastering, to a certain degree, the cultural tool of Mme de Staël's Ego-culture and the model she made of herself within its frames, praising her authentic genius and esprit, always sparkling in contrast to the fireworks that end being only darkness, in his portrait of her.

But on the other hand, Mme de Staël and Prince de Ligne had a lot in common, for example the spirit of conversation developed to its perfection in the salons, at least in the ones in Paris if we are to believe Mme de Staël, at the time of the *ancien régime*, that is, as they once were before the era of Napoleon. Now, Prince de Ligne produced texts, in the extended sense, which were partly overlapping with the ones produced in Mme de Staël's Ego-culture. At least, overlapping to such a degree that the gaps between Extra-Culture and Ego-culture can be filled in by the latter, in the sense that we learned from the Prague school. Mme de Staël expressed nothing but appreciation of Prince de Ligne in her writings. Prince de Ligne, in short, appears as corresponding to the type Mme de Staël used in her everyday life, that is when moving in the circles of high society. But as Schutz points out, every individual has his or her own 'unique biographically determined situation' and therefore 'our systems of relevances', that is, what is important to us, 'must necessarily differ'.<sup>437</sup> Schutz continues:

Yet, as another basic axiom, I take it for granted until counterevidence is offered—and assume my fellow-man does the same—that the differences originating in our private systems of relevances can be disregarded for the purpose at hand and that I and he, that 'we' interpret the actually or potentially common objects, facts, and events in an 'empirical identical' manner, i.e., sufficient for all practical purposes.

This general thesis of the reciprocity of perspectives which involves idealizations by which [...] typifying constructs of objects of thought supersede the thought objects of my and my

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437. Ibid., p. 316.

fellow-man's private experience is the presupposition for a world of common objects and therewith for communication.<sup>438</sup>

From the perspective of cultural semiotics here, we might say that Mme de Staël's description of Prince de Ligne illustrates what Schutz brings up, namely, that Mme de Staël took for granted that his world-view corresponded to hers. This position also illustrates the nature of Ego-culture, being the point of departure, in an asymmetric way, in relation to the other being typified, according to (1) the knowledge at hand of the fellow-beings sharing the Ego-culture and (2) one's own needs. Thus, 'any communicative process must, therefore, involve a set of common abstractions or standardizations'.<sup>439</sup> And typification is a result of this need, expressed so neatly here by Schutz. Also, the fact that Mme de Staël always used her mother tongue, French, when communicating with Prince de Ligne and others, probably contributed to the other fact that she did not seem to change her way of typification. Despite travelling she stayed, so to speak, in the sphere of the Ego-culture; at least that is the impression one gets from reading her own descriptions, something that is reinforced when reading other people's descriptions of her.

Now, from the source of Uvarov's observation we may, as outside observers, show some details that explain why Prince de Ligne was Alter, and thus representing the Extra-culture after all, no matter how close Mme de Staël felt their relationship to be. And despite the fact that the prince apparently regarded himself as French, at least occasionally, as the epigram of Uvarov's portrait of him shows, giving the words the prince addressed to Talleyrand in 1805: '[...] Il n'y a plus que vous et moi de Français.'<sup>440</sup> ('There are no more French left than you and I'; my translation.) The example of the Extra-cultural relation Mme de Staël had with Prince de Ligne shows that what is from one point of view regarded as Ego-culture is considered to be Extra-Culture from another point of view. Thus, when the criterion of the most valuable is involved besides intelligibility, the two perspectives are sometimes not easily distinguishable from each

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438. Ibid..

439. Ibid., p. 323.

440. Ouvaroff, *Esquisses politiques et littéraires*.

other, from the point of view of one, or of several, being engaged in the encounter. Schutz illustrates a similar situation when writing about the speaker's assumption that the listener will be able to understand correctly what is said, sharing his knowledge of the 'common situation', and therefore sees no need to express all details.<sup>441</sup> But as we have seen, the speaker may occasionally be mistaken about the listener's ability, and benevolence, to understand. In this connection we speak of the term Alter, who, in contrast to Alius, emerges as the real other, with whom the ego can establish a dialogue.

The Non-culture (as discussed above), when the value-criterion is involved, on the contrary shows that what at first seems to be dialogical (Extra-cultural) turns out to not be that in the end. The other party does not then belong to the Extra-culture, that is, is not expected to act upon it, only to serve as an image, or projection of it.

However, when it comes to the dialogical relation, the situation can be reversed, which the example of Mme de Staël's relation to Napoleon shows: she might have disliked him profoundly and on the surface appeared as not wanting to be on speaking terms with him, but in many ways *Dix années d'exil* in its entirety is addressed to him, as to the other's unspoken word as Bakhtin puts it, and what he caused her and her family.<sup>442</sup> By writing as she did (as we have seen so many examples of in previous discussions), she wanted to enter a dialogical relationship (direct or indirectly) with him, only this time *on her terms*, using her pen in accordance with her Ego-culture. Napoleon, in the light of this, appears as Alter, but in another sense than Prince de Ligne does, as we have seen, since Napoleon, for his part, did not wish any dialogue with Mme de Staël. Thus, the dominating objective criterion for defining the Non-culture and Extra-culture from the point of view of the Ego-culture seems to be to what extent an encounter is dialogical, that is, including the other party's word (voice). The criteria of value and intelligibility are accordingly considered as relational, appearing in tandem or separately, the one

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441. Schutz, *Collected Papers I*, p. 268.

442. Bakhtin speaks of the dialogic word as the double-voiced word in his book on Dostoevsky's poetics, which refers not only to the object but also to another word, uttered by someone else. See Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, esp. pp. 151–153.

prevailing over the other, depending on the situation from the Ego-culture's point of departure.

Again it must be stressed, our sources for Ego-culture are texts (literary and others). However, for Mme de Staël, whose Ego-culture is scrutinized here, encounters always appear to her advantage in the descriptions she makes of them, because they had the function of supporting the model she made of herself. In the second turn thus, an analysis of those descriptions shows how the mechanisms of Ego-culture function, turning outside texts into Ego-texts by transforming and deforming the information in order to fit own needs. There, it seems to me in any case, lies on one hand the root of many of Mme de Staël's misconceptions of the nature of her cross-cultural encounters. And on the other hand, there lies the subject of the cultural semiotical analysis, that is, to reconstruct the Ego-culture and the Ego (as type) of Mme de Staël in the encounters with other cultures and other people.

Mme de Staël's portable Ego-culture was that of France, or even Paris, before Napoleon—the enlightened milieu of the witty salons. From this perspective, a poor German woman or a Polish peasant with whom she could not have a dialogue, were *Alius* representing Non-culture. In a sense, her enemy Napoleon was also *Alius* and Non-culture. However, in another sense, he was *Alter* and Extra-culture with whom she in fact desperately wanted a dialogue. Most of the travel encounters, though, must be regarded as *Alter*, illustrating Extra-culture; this is true as regards Rahel Levin, for example, as well as the Prince de Ligne, although to a varying degree.

Another important aspect of the analysis has been to show to what extent Mme de Staël depended on typification in her writings about her cultural encounters, typifications both as literary types (*Corinne*, *Werther*) and as national stereotypes, for example. I will return to this issue in the next chapter.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Germaine de Staël was born in Paris in 1766 and died there in 1817. She was born Germaine Necker, but after her marriage in 1786 to the Swedish ambassador in Paris, Eric-Magnus Staël von Holstein, she became known as Mme de Staël. Germaine was the daughter of M. Necker who was Minister of Finance during the *ancien régime*. Her mother Mme Necker had one of the most important salons in Paris at the time. Both M. Necker and Mme Necker were of Swiss origin, thus so was Germaine. With that background, Mme de Staël was born into the cultural elite. But being of Swiss origin and Calvinist, Germaine Necker was given an education at home by her mother, and was not sent to Catholic convent schools as girls of her position normally were.<sup>1</sup>

The question of religion was felt in her first novel *Delphine* (1802) and it was attacked in the press, on religious grounds, for being immoral and ‘anti-French’.<sup>2</sup> The female character was unacceptable in Napoleonic France, and so was Mme de Staël as she was far too independent and liberal in her opinions.<sup>3</sup> Those circumstances made Mme de Staël an *inner other*, that is, she was, from her point of view, living under the rule of somebody who was Other.<sup>4</sup>

In 1803 she was thus exiled from Paris by Napoleon. That year constitutes the beginning of Mme de Staël’s ten-year exile, which she describes in her autobiographical travel account *Dix années d’exil*, published posthumously in 1820–1821. Mme de Staël decided then to go to Germany, and she collected her reflections of the German literary genius in the book *De l’Allemagne*, withdrawn by Napoleon for its pro-German attitude in 1810 and published only in 1813 in England. However, there could also have been additional reasons for the withdrawal. As I have suggested in this study by connecting text passages with influential contextual political and philosophical discourses, i.e. Ego-texts from Mme de Staël’s point of view, the book

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1. de Diesbach, *Madame de Staël*, pp. 35–40.

2. Gautier, *Madame de Staël et Napoléon*, pp. 103–104. Fiévée, who was one of the sharpest critics of *Delphine*, was known to be a follower of Napoleon. Fiévée’s article is published in full in Balayé, ‘Un émissaire de Bonaparte’, pp. 104–116.

3. Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*, p. 46; p. 146.

4. For the notion of inner otherness see Sonesson, ‘The Globalization of Ego and Alter’, pp. 153–173.

might have contained passages of a hidden polemical nature, the content of which was grasped by Napoleon and his like.

In my analysis, I have tried to interpret Mme de Staël's cultural encounters in Europe, when she was in exile. My starting points have been, primarily, the concepts of Ego-culture, Extra-culture and Non-culture as elaborated by Göran Sonesson, and the concepts of types and typification as used by Schutz in his phenomenological sociology, for example. Extra-culture and Non-culture are, from the point of view of the Ego-culture, defined in terms of the extent to which they are valued and understandable to Ego-culture. I have also introduced the concepts *Alter* and *Alius*, as representations on an individual level of Extra- and Non-culture. I will return to these concepts later. First, however, let us follow Mme de Staël's journey and my interpretations of her—and others'—texts.

In Weimar, Mme de Staël's first proper stop in Germany, she met Goethe, Schiller and other important people. Through analyses using Sonesson's extended cultural semiotical model I have shown how the mechanism of Mme de Staël's construction of her Ego and Ego-culture came forth in her meetings. By comparing her accounts of her meetings with those written down by Goethe, Schiller and others, I obtained a picture of how dialogical relations function between cultures. One conclusion drawn is that dialogue is always on the terms of the Ego, or more generally, of the Ego-culture, to use Sonesson's term. This became even more obvious when studying the encounter between Mme de Staël and Rahel Levin (the future Rahel Varnhagen) in Berlin, the next major stop Mme de Staël made in Germany. At the time Rahel Levin held an important salon in Berlin, which in many ways was equivalent to Parisian salons. Thus, on the surface the two *salonnières* seemed to have a lot in common, but by reading Rahel Varnhagen's diary notes commenting on their meeting the true nature of her opinion of their encounter emerged. Mme de Staël was apparently only in a restricted way on speaking terms with Rahel, failing to grasp Rahel's specific biographical experiences as a Jewess.

Now, returning from Germany abruptly because of M. Necker's death in 1804, Mme de Staël travelled again in 1805, this time to Italy. *Corinne ou l'Italie*, Mme de Staël's second novel, was published in 1807 and was an immense success. The novel readdresses the woman question through the main character Corinne. By studying the novel,

and connecting it to other contextual discourses, I have demonstrated that Corinne was in many ways a portrayal of Mme de Staël's own alter ego. This hypothesis was reinforced by the fact that Mme de Staël had her portrait made as Corinne, by the recognized artist Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (*Portrait de Mme de Staël*, 1808–1809). In fact, the Corinne-figure became an important element of the author's own self understanding, as it became for others when embarking on a dialogue with her. This became clear to me when examining, besides Mme de Staël's own accounts, letters and other written comments by people who met Mme de Staël's on her travels through Europe. Thus, the Corinne-figure functioned as a type, more specifically as a stereotype as I have suggested here, working in both ways.

In 1807–1808 Mme de Staël again decided to leave her castle Coppet, situated by Lake Geneva, for a second journey to Germany. This time she went to Vienna and the Habsburg Empire. Mme de Staël did not include this tour in her autobiographical account, perhaps because she considered that the journey was described in *De l'Allemagne*. Nevertheless, I found it fruitful to connect Mme de Staël's journey to Vienna to the others included in *Dix années d'exil* (Germany 1803–1804, Russia, via Habsburg, 1812). That way I have been able to show continuity in Mme de Staël's political agenda, that is, an agenda working against Napoleon, and how it seemed to have determined all her encounters to a very large extent. Also, very rich material is to be found in form of written texts describing Mme de Staël from the other's point of view in dialogue with her. For example, Prince de Ligne's relation to Mme de Staël is documented, by himself and by others, in a way that has enabled a deeper analysis of Mme de Staël's modelling of her Ego-culture. A study of de Ligne and de Staël showed, among other things, how a mutual compromise was the condition for their relation. Politically Prince de Ligne could not accept the French revolution, since he used to be an admirer of Marie Antoinette. Mme de Staël, being known for her liberal ideas, apparently had to stand back when it came to the subject of the Revolution. The result was a mutual understanding not to address the year of 1789, something that was noticed by a friend of them both, the Russian diplomat Uvarov.<sup>5</sup> I have concluded, on the basis

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5. Mistler, *Madame de Staël et Maurice O'Donnell 1805–1817*, p. 48. See also Ouaroff, *Esquisses politiques et littéraires*, p. 123.



on their relation, among several others, that the wish for dialogue in itself is the paramount criterion for Extra-cultural relations. Other criteria such as the degree of esteem versus the other culture and its intelligibility are subordinated to this very wish to establish a dialogical relation, from the point of view of the Ego. Prince de Ligne thus represented Extra-culture to Mme de Staël, and was thus alter to her.

In 1812 Mme de Staël again left Coppet for her *grand tour* to Russia, via Habsburg. The map of Europe had changed since the last time Mme de Staël visited Vienna in 1807–1808. In 1809 a peace treaty was signed between Napoleonic France and Austria, and in 1810 Napoleon had married the Habsburg emperor's oldest daughter Marie Louise (Maria Louisa), as a result of political agreements.<sup>6</sup> When studying Mme de Staël's accounts from the travels through Poland and Habsburg Galicia, I pointed to some passages that showed how Mme de Staël is likely to have been influenced by Ego-texts such as the ones by Rousseau and Diderot, to mention a few. The French enlightened political discourse from the end of the eighteenth century, concerning conflict between Poland and Russia, echoes in Mme de Staël's own accounts, although the political situation of the day had changed very much. In the end Mme de Staël seems to have taken a different stance than Rousseau, whom we know she admired a lot, in her view of Russia. Mme de Staël admired, and believed in, Tsar Alexander, since he was on her side in the struggle against Napoleon. By examining their correspondence and the chapter she wrote about the Russian tsar in *Dix années d'exil* this admiration and trust become visible. However the tsar's position in their political discussion becomes, on the other hand, increasingly unclear. History has shown that he was not the convinced Western-like liberal that Mme de Staël thought him to be, although he was Alter to her in the sense that she was in dialogue with him.

In fact, the issue of Russia both resembling and differing from the West is something that Mme de Staël touches upon throughout her travels in Russia. When describing her visits in *Dix années d'exil* to the homes of the aristocracy in St. Petersburg, Mme de Staël senses a discrepancy between the Western outer appearance of people and

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6. Lindqvist, *Napoleon*, pp. 385–396.

their Eastern origins in their treatment of their servant slaves. Other French enlightened discourses regarding the nature of less civilized people may also be felt in Mme de Staël's accounts. Below I will come back to that problem when summarizing the discussion of the notion of texts. Now, in September 1812 Mme de Staël left St. Petersburg for Stockholm (via Åbo).

In the inquiry I have pointed out how Mme de Staël's autobiographical travel accounts were influenced by her culture-bound understandings of other cultures as well as her own culture. All her reflections on other cultures were dependent on her ideas of her Ego-culture. I have shown to what extent they tended to be governed by her political agenda, which was based on her strong dislike of Napoleon and his warfare. In the first case dialogical analyses of contemporary texts on the state of Europe have been important when revealing Mme de Staël's relation to those.

However, Mme de Staël's accounts also bears witness of her readings of contemporary written texts, that is, dialogicity in a general sense. There is reason to dwell a little more on that here. The term intertextuality usually defines the relation between written texts (although dialogicity in Bakhtin's philosophy of language is not restricted to written texts). The concept of dialogue, in the way it is used here in connection with analysing Mme de Staël's writings, as put forth by Kristeva, points to three dimensions in the definition of the word: 'between the author and the reader in conjunction with the contemporary and historical context.'<sup>7</sup> In this connection, as I have proposed throughout the study, Mme de Staël, being *une femme de lettres*, was very much influenced by literature of different kinds in her own autobiographical writings, as for instance drama, novels and political historical treatises. Sometimes those influences are explicit in her writings, sometimes they are implicit and only become visible through careful contextual analyses.<sup>8</sup> On other occasions, it may be

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7. Rédei, 'József Eötvös and the Age of Hungarian Reform', pp. 107–131, for quotation see p. 111. See also Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A semiotic approach to literature and art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 71–72.

8. Jan Thavenius writes, in connection with the problem of reading: 'If one considers the reader as a social being and not as an isolated individual, then she is formed by both general ideologies and discourses for reading which she shares with others. When one believes that not only the text but also the reader is active, it

impossible to show textual influences. However, one can still argue that there is a fluid of inter-discursivity in the sense that Mme de Staël's ideas were in line with the general discourse of Enlightenment.

The study has shown that texts written by enlightened thinkers like Diderot and Rousseau were seemingly influential on Mme de Staël's own thinking and writing. If one considers Diderot's article 'Scythes, Thraces et Gètes' published in the *Encyclopédie*, there are some similarities to be found with the descriptions that Mme de Staël gives of the equally foreign, in her view, Sarmatian-Polish people she met on the roads to Galicia, and later on while travelling through the territory: they all come from the extreme edge of Europe, a position that Mme de Staël referred to as being outside the civilized Europe.<sup>9</sup> The article is worth bringing up since it may indeed represent an Ego-text to Mme de Staël, being included in the *Encyclopédie*, and thereby deepening what has been concluded before in this inquiry about the Enlightenment's discourse on barbaric people and its influence on Mme de Staël's writings.

Hence, according to Diderot, the Scythians lived in tents—an assumption that echoes in Mme de Staël's account of the houses in Kiev which she describes in *Dix années d'exil* as reminding her of the ambulant houses of the Tartars.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Scythians, Sarmatians and Tartars all seem to designate some remote people, geographically and historically, of more or less barbaric nature in the French enlightened discourse of the eighteenth century.

In her observations of the Poles she saw on the roads in Galicia Mme de Staël continues to stress the religious nature of the people. They are depicted as looking profoundly sad while pinning all their

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leads to an interactive view of reading.' The conclusion is thus that 'nothing may exist outside the social contexts'. (My translations.) See Thavenius, 'Text och tolkning', pp. 214–215. Now, Mme de Staël as an active reader was formed by her Ego-texts, as we say here, which in the end formed her own writing, as we have showed here as well.

9. Denis Diderot, 'Scythes, Thraces et Gètes', *Encyclopédie IV (Lettres M–Z)*, eds. John Lough and Jacques Proust, in *Oeuvres complètes*, tome VIII (Paris: Hermann, éditeurs des sciences et des arts, 1976), pp. 309–12, see esp. p. 309. For Mme de Staël's account see a letter sent from Wadowice on 7 July 1812 by Mme de Staël to Mme Récamier, published in Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, pp. 230–231.

10. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, p. 278. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, pp. 141–142.

hopes on the mercy of God to improve their misery.<sup>11</sup> Something similar comes out in Diderot's article when describing the Scythians as having some idea about God, and admitting another life. Diderot wrote:

Les *Scythes* ont eu quelque idée de Dieu. Ils ont admis une autre vie; ils en concluaient qu'il valait mieux mourir que de vivre; cette opinion ajoutait à leur courage naturel. Ils se réjouissaient à la vue d'un tombeau.<sup>12</sup>

Mme de Staël does not take the miserable living conditions of the Poles as far as Diderot does when describing the Scythians, but his idea of the Scythians being extraordinarily courageous and his explanation for it reminds us of the account Mme de Staël's close friend gives of the Poles. Prosper de Barante wrote in a letter from Warsaw to Mme de Staël expressing his astonishment over the patriotism of the Poles and that saving their country was more important to them than saving their own lives.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps it is not too hasty to conclude that the discourse of the Enlightenment, reflected in Mme de Staël's autobiographical travel accounts, regarding these groups of people originating from regions of the extreme edge of Europe, more or less expressed the same desire as hers, namely to delimit enlightened civilizations from those still living in darkness. And living in darkness, according to Diderot, seems to have been equivalent to living in perpetual readiness for military action. He wrote about the Scythians, and the other barbaric people, that they 'furent instruits autant que peuvent l'être des peuples qui vivent toujours en armes'.<sup>14</sup> In the light of this definition of barbaric people as living in a state of 'readiness for (military) action' Mme de Staël's implicit critic against Napoleon in her closing lines of her book on

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11. de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, pp. 258–259. de Staël, *Ten Years' Exile*, p. 130.

12. Diderot, 'Scythes, Thraces et Gètes', p. 310. 'The *Scythians* had some idea of God. They admitted another life; they concluded that it was better to die than to live; this opinion was added to their natural courage. They rejoiced at the sight of a grave.' (Emphasis in the original; my translation.)

13. Nicolas, 'Madame de Staël et la Pologne', p. 39. Letter sent to Mme de Staël from Prosper de Barante in Warsaw on 16 January 1807.

14. Diderot, 'Scythes, Thraces et Gètes', p. 312. '[...]were educated as one can be when coming from people who always live in readiness for action.' (Emphasis in the original; my translation.)

Germany appear even more polemic. That part of *De l'Allemagne* has been quoted at length in the previous chapter, and according to Mme de Staël it was these particular lines that upset the police the most, and the book was, as we recall, withdrawn by Napoleon in 1810.<sup>15</sup> She expresses there her regrets that France is using force in order to rule the world, instead of intelligence. That way the contemporary enlightened reader might have sensed Mme de Staël's potential hidden linkage between barbarism and warfare, thereby establishing a connection to Napoleonic France as being barbaric as well.

These very same lines that were referred to above also imply an echo from Buffon's (1707–1788) article 'De la nature'. Buffon was not directly connected to the *Encyclopédie*. In 1751, however he was to submit an article with the title 'Nature', which he never delivered in the end.<sup>16</sup> In the article Buffon rhetorically asks what mankind could achieve for itself if the will was guided by intelligence and governments by the wish to make their subjects 'less unequally unhappy':

Et que ne pourrait-il pas sur lui même, je veux dire sur sa propre espèce, si la volonté était toujours dirigée par l'intelligence! Qui sait jusqu'à quel point l'homme pourrait perfectionner sa nature, [...]. Y a t-il une seule nation qui puisse se vanter d'être arrivée au meilleur gouvernement possible, qui serait de rendre tous les hommes, non pas également heureux, mais moins inégalement malheureux, en veillant à leur conservation, à l'épargne de leurs sueurs et de

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15. de Staël, 'De l'Allemagne', p. 546. For the original quotation see chapter four in this inquiry, only the translation is repeated here: 'Oh France! earth of glory and love! if enthusiasm one day embraced your soil, if calculation decided everything, and reason only inspired even the contempt for danger, to what would your beautiful sky serve, your brilliant minds, your nature so rich? An active intelligence, a trained vehemence would make you the masters of the world; but you only leave traces of torrents of sand, terrible as floods, arid as the desert.' (My translation.) In a note to this phrase further down on the page Germaine de Staël explains that 'This last phrase is the one that had most excited the indignation of the police against my book; it seems to me, though, that it could not have displeased the French.'

16. *Les encyclopédistes: Pages choisies* (Paris: Mignot, env. 1912), p. 48.

leur sang par la paix, [...] ? Voilà le but moral de toute société qui chercherait à s'améliorer.<sup>17</sup>

The goals for the ideal society that Buffon sketches in the quotation, one may conclude, contrast sharply with the state of affairs of the contemporary society that Mme de Staël found in Napoleon's France. Even though we cannot always tell whether she was directly influenced by the words of other authors, it is obvious that her own texts are related to the enlightened discourse of the France she loved, the one predating Napoleon.

Now, this way of connecting Mme de Staël's written accounts from other cultures to the context in which they emerged has revealed the weave of other texts and discourses, which Mme de Staël was aware of while constructing her own texts. Thus, her texts are, like all texts, here considered as mediated actions in Wertsch's terms. That is, they are polyphonic. This means, according to Wertsch, that all human action is indirect because cultural tools are always involved. In the case of writing, the author uses context-bound discourses (as for instance other written or oral narratives) to create his or her own text. Now, Mme de Staël's writings are also a result of her using particular cultural tools (mostly other written texts as we have seen), in order to make her texts appealing to the readers she wanted to address. The Enlightened discourse on the Other, that is: on more or less barbaric, or more or less ancient people, is reflected in Mme de Staël's accounts of what has been defined in this inquiry as Non-culture, represented by Alius on an individual level. Thus, no dialogue was established.

Similarly, by connecting an interesting passage written by Jean Le Rond d'Alembert (1717–1783), one of the *encyclopédistes*, to Mme de Staël's travel accounts from Vienna I may also reveal to what extent she was dependent on Ego-texts, that is, texts produced by her Ego-

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17. M. de Buffon, 'De la nature', in *Les encyclopédistes. Pages choisies*, p. 70. 'And what could he not achieve for himself, that is, for his own species, if the will was always guided by intelligence! Who knows to what point man could ameliorate his nature, [...]. Is there one nation that can brag about having arrived at the best possible government, that could make all men, not equally happy, but less unequally unhappy, by keeping watch over their preservation, over the economizing of their sweat and blood through peace, [...] ? There! the moral goal of every society which seeks to ameliorate itself.' (My translation.)

culture. Ego-culture has here been defined as the most valued and the best mastered from the point of view of the Ego. Now, Mme de Staël, was in dialogue with the people she met in Vienna, and the Viennese society was a culture which she could partly understand and partly value. Thus, Vienna was, in our terms, Extra-culture to Mme de Staël, with respect to intelligibility and value. Mme de Staël regarded Viennese society as frivolous and superficial. In Weimar she had enjoyed the poetic and philosophical discussions, something that she apparently missed in Vienna. Even though Mme de Staël liked music very much, that does not show in her book on Germany, although music played an important role in the artistic life of Vienna (and in Germany generally). This surprises Lenormant in her research on Mme de Staël.<sup>18</sup> But if we consider what d'Alembert had to say about music in the introduction to the *Encyclopédie* we may get an explanation for this. d'Alembert expresses the opinion that music is the less important art among the imitative arts because it only can handle a limited amount of images.<sup>19</sup> So, music was apparently not considered to be the most valued art form in France at this time, something that Mme de Staël was probably sensitive to.

Mukařovský, in the book *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts*, discusses the relation between the individual and social.<sup>20</sup> Although Mme de Staël personally valued music for its aesthetic values, her Ego-culture, her social context, thought of it as less important. In this connection Mukařovský points to the fact that even though individual taste may decide an artwork's aesthetic or non-aesthetic values, the aesthetic function stays firm from a social contextual point of view. For instance, as Mukařovský argues, the aesthetic function in the art of cooking is more important in France than it is in Czechoslovakia. In other words, the art of cooking, as text in the extended sense (i.e. as an artefact produced in Ego-culture), is highly valued and skilfully mastered in the French culture.

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18. Lenormant, *Coppet et Weimar*, pp. 134–136.

19. Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, *Inledning till Encyklopedien* ['Discours préliminaire des editeurs', in *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts etc.*, Paris, 1751] transl. Jan Stolpe with introduction by Tore Frängsmyr (Uppsala: Bokförlaget Carmina, 1981), p. 69.

20. Mukařovský, *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts*.

A link may also be established here to Wertsch's theories about how the individual memory is connected to the collective. Since they are linked, Wertsch continues, the study of memory must of necessity focus on the relation between individual and collective processes. Thus, by connecting Mme de Staël's account from Germany to d'Alembert's introduction in the *Encyclopédie*, the relationship between her and her social contexts (or Ego-culture) emerges. In this inquiry such dialogical relationships have been discussed.

Gender aspects have also been important in my study of Mme de Staël's relation to her social context. As we have seen, the social norm about how women should live (quietly and withdrawn) created an inner conflict in her, perhaps best expressed in her novel *Corinne* (1807). However, gender did not seem to be important to Mme de Staël herself, at least not when accounting for her encounters with other women, or with people in general. It seems a little paradoxical, since it was apparently important to her in her self-understanding. However, other people seemed to have been more interested in Mme de Staël's ways and looks as a woman, as has come forth when I have discussed observations made by the opposite party in her cross-cultural encounters.

Now, concerning the specific gender aspects of Rahel's and Mme de Staël's cross-cultural encounter, Rahel raised the century-old question while commenting on Mme de Staël: the intellectual and literary woman's fear of not appearing feminine enough in the public eye on one hand, and not getting enough appreciation for her work on the other.<sup>21</sup> Rahel was probably right about that, Mme de Staël never seemed to be able to free herself from the fear of not being sufficiently feminine. From this example, and from others presented in this study, we may speak about social and context-bound typifications ruling conduct and thinking. In the specific case of Rahel's view of Mme de Staël, the focus lies on gender and nationality. In the discussions about types and typifications in this inquiry, Alfred Schutz's theories in phenomenological sociology have

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21. Rahel Levin-Varnhagen, 9 January 1820 in Hoock-Demarle, 'Madame de Staël et les femmes allemandes', pp. 9–40, see esp. p. 31. 'Madame de Staël can never do away with the fear that women with literary talent will not be regarded as sufficiently feminine, or that their works will never be placed as high as those by men.' (My translation.) For the original quotation see chapter four in this inquiry.



been important. When both parties in an encounter use the same specific type in the dialogue with each other I have termed it a stereotype. The social norm making up the womanhood-type, which Rahel brings up here, was also shared by Mme de Staël, that is, the social norm was, at least so it seems, internalized by both. This also points to the dialectical relationship between the individual and the social collective.

Janet Shibley Hyde and Kristen C. Kling write about the ‘stereotype threat’ when discussing, among many other things, students’ (at different levels) results in tests of mathematic skill from gender and social perspectives. Showing the complexity of how different tests may reinforce and promote reigning stereotypes regarding gender and ethnicity, the authors argue for the crucial importance of creating tests that are, so to speak, neutral, in order not to discriminate against specific social groups undertaking the test. As the example of the study of Asian women shows, Asian women increase their scores in maths when their identity is connected to their ethnicity, while they decrease them when their identity is connected to their womanhood. (In the long run, though, ‘erroneous stereotypes’ must be ‘eliminated from public consciousness’).<sup>22</sup>

Now, Mme de Staël, as a true *salonnière*, also represented the enlightened France. Since Rahel had herself made a reputation as the Berlin equivalent, one would think that she would have appreciated Mme de Staël in some basic respects. But apparently she did not, as notes written down in her diary the day after her encounter with Mme de Staël show, which has been analysed in the previous chapter.<sup>23</sup>

An explanation may thus be that there were other factors that were of greater importance to Rahel. It seems that to her, Mme de Staël fulfilled the stereotype of the culturally superior Parisian upper class lady. The stereotype was clearly dear to Mme de Staël, as has been shown, but strongly disliked by Rahel who represented another culture and had very different biographical experiences. Regardless of their different relations to the stereotype, it was as such

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22. Janet Shibley Hyde & Kristen C. Kling, ‘Women, Motivation, and Achievement’, in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 25 (2001), pp. 364–378, for quotation see. p. 375.

23. Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et l’Allemagne*, pp. 176–7.

internalized by both, but for different reasons. The complexity of their encounter points to the importance, which is stressed by Hyde and Kling, of focusing on several co-existent socially based stereotypes in function on specific occasions. In other terms, the *intersectional* perspective on the interplay between different social categorizations operating in social encounters is crucial when studying the same. Nina Lykke has argued explicitly for the importance of adopting a relative perspective when analysing the nature of social strata, such as gender, ethnicity, age and sexuality, and their impact on public opinion and behaviour.<sup>24</sup> Intersectional analyses are thus defined as the study of the interplay between different social and cultural categorizations, from a certain point of view.

I will now return to the central notions which have been the basis for the cultural semiotical analyses conducted in this inquiry of Mme de Staël's cultural encounters with Germany, Habsburg and Russia. The notions Ego-culture, Extra-culture and Non-culture have been at the core of those analyses, as have the notions Alter and Alius. Alter represents, on an individual level, Extra-culture, Alius Non-culture from the point of view of the Ego, representing the Ego-culture. I have argued for studying *the degree of dialogue* involved in a cross-cultural encounter as the determining factor when deciding to what extent an Extra-cultural relation has been established, from the point of view of the Ego-culture. If some dialogue is possible, it is a meeting between Ego-culture and Extra-culture. If no direct dialogue is possible whatsoever, it is a confrontation between Ego-culture and Non-culture. I have also shown the usefulness of analysing the typifications operating in cross-cultural encounters between an Ego and Alter, or Alius, inspired in this by Schutz's phenomenological sociology. Analyses of Mme de Staël's dialogical relationships have thus focused on an individual level in the empirical studies, therefore the notions Alter and Alius have been in frequent use throughout the inquiry, which has mostly been an inquiry into the Extra-cultural relationships that Mme Staël established. The observation that the

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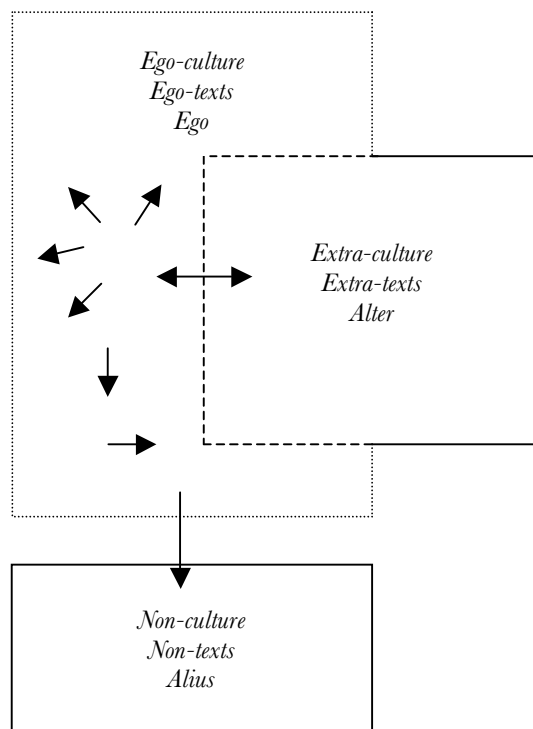
24. Nina Lykke, 'Nya perspektiv på interseksjonalitet: problem och möjligheter', in *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*; 2005 (26): 2/3, pp. 7–17, and Nina Lykke, 'Interseksjonalitet—ett användbart begrepp för genusforskningen', in *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*; 2003 (24): 1, pp. 47–56.

Ego-culture stands in a dialogical relation to the Extra-culture on an axis of conversation, that is, is an 'I' engaged in a dialogue with a 'Thou', has previously been made in Sonesson's extended model.<sup>25</sup> This inquiry confirms the correctness of this observation, based on empirical analyses. In that way my work may be seen as a confirmation of Sonesson's theories. However, the empirical analyses of this study tend to suggest that the *dialogicity* in itself is the most important criterion for defining intercultural relationships, from the point of view of the Ego-culture. The absence of it defines the Non-culture, from the point of view of the Ego-culture. Therefore the other criteria such as valuation and intelligibility, originally stipulated by the Tartu school, are defined here as being subordinated to dialogicity itself, which is characterized by the expectations of the Ego to be understood and to understand the other. Extra-cultural relationships are thus (in contrast to Non-cultural ones), as I have shown throughout the empirical analyses, primarily characterized by the wishes and expectations of dialogicity, and only secondary by valuation and intelligibility, which *possibly* come with dialogicity, so to speak. Occasionally Extra-cultural relationships may fulfil both the criteria of valuation and intelligibility, and sometimes only one of these criteria is met. This is shown in the discussion of Mme de Staël's views of Weimar and of Vienna. In the case of Weimar the dialogic relation was characterized by having elements of both appreciation and intelligibility. However, Mme de Staël's opinions of Vienna indicate that in that dialogic relation only the sub-criterion of intelligibility was satisfactory fulfilled.

Now, putting the criterion of dialogicity at the core of the cultural semiotical analyses, I therefore would like to call the model below the *dialogical model*, further pointing up the structural difference between Non-culture and Extra-culture, from the point of view of the Ego-culture.

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25. Sonesson, 'Ego meets Alter', pp. 537–559.



*The dialogical model.*

The dialogical model illustrates, as mentioned above, the close relationship between Ego-culture and Extra-culture from the point of view of the Ego. By doing so, the model also shows the remoteness (mentally and often also geographically, as Sonesson has shown) of the Non-culture, being structurally different from the Ego-culture and the Extra-culture, from the point of view of the Ego. *Alius* represents the Non-dialogical relationship between the Ego and the Other, in contrast to *Alter*, representing the Other with whom a dialogical relationship is established. The empirical study of Mme de Staël's autobiographical travel accounts have shown this by pointing to the differences in the degree of dialogue which she establishes with people she meets during her travels.

The qualitative difference in Mme de Staël's relationships, as it emerges from her descriptions, is sometimes obvious. Her account of the Polish people she met on the roads differs very much from the ones of, for instance, Goethe, Schiller, Prince de Ligne or Tsar

Alexander, when considered in the light of the notions of Alter and Alius, or Extra-culture and Non-culture. The descriptions of the former are thus characterized by the absence of dialogue, Alius not being expected and not able to take part in the communicative act. In the second case, there was a willingness to understand and to make understood from both sides engaged in the dialogue. Extra-texts, from the perspective of the Ego, overlap in terms of value and intelligibility with the texts produced in the Ego-culture, that is, with Ego-texts. The Ego may thus 'fill in the gaps', as the Prague school theory has taught us, between her own cultural and social norms and those of the other culture, the Extra-culture. On the other hand, Alius, representing the Non-culture may only produce Non-texts, which are, from the point of view of the Ego, equivalent to Non-information in the sense of value and intelligibility. Alius may not take part in the dialogical communicative act.

The dialogical model which I have presented also points to the asymmetric relationship between the Ego-culture on one hand, and Extra-culture and Non-culture on the other, by iconically illustrating it with the sizes of the 'boxes'. Also, the broken lines framing the box of the Ego-culture illustrate that only the Ego-culture is open by nature (relatively speaking, as Ego-culture is restricted in the sense that the other culture is understood through the use of types), that is, has the possibilities to expand in knowledge. The Ego-culture both models itself and expands its self-understanding in the meeting with the other culture, that is, in the encounter with the Extra-culture. This is illustrated in the dialogical model by the contrasting solid lines framing the Non-culture box (not engaged in dialogue), and partly the Extra-culture (engaged in dialogue) box, stressing the nature of the Extra-culture being the culture partly valued and understood, from the point of view of the Ego-culture. The illustration, on a general level, points to the asymmetric relation, i.e. the Egocentricity inherent in all models in cultural semiotics, where the Ego-culture is always the dominant party and has the privilege of deciding the Other, whereas Extra-culture and Non-culture can never take that position in relation to the Ego-culture. Thus, cultural relations are always on the terms of the Ego-culture. The empirical study of Mme de Staël's autobiographical travel accounts has shown the subjective nature of cultural understandings, and in that sense functions as an illustration and at the same time a deepening of Sonesson's model.

The arrows in the model designate the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion of texts in the semiotically extended sense, that is Ego-cultural artefacts and expressions, from the point of view of the Ego-culture. The dialogic relationship between Ego-culture and Extra-culture results in Extra-texts being admitted and/or allowed to enter in the Ego-culture. By entering they are deformed according to the needs of the Ego-culture. In contrast, the Non-texts from the Non-culture may never enter into the Ego-culture because they are not wanted nor are they intelligible. The Non-culture is a creation of the Ego-culture according to the latter's needs. In this sense, the dialogical model is in line with the Tartu school's and with Sonesson's, except for the fact that it partly integrates Extra-culture with the Ego-culture (however, Extra-culture can never be collapsed into the Ego-culture, the former always being defined as the other of a certain kind from the point of view of the latter). However, the Extra-culture is partly open to expansion through the Ego-culture, to some extent. The Ego-culture's view of the Extra-culture can be modified through the dialogical relationship. For instance, Mme de Staël accepted in the end the idea of Tsar Alexander, representing the Extra-culture, as being civilized in spite of referring to his Siberian origin when she wants to evoke strength and warfare skill. However, what has become clear in this study is that the understanding of the Extra-culture, from the point of view of the Ego-culture, is always linked to the specific needs of the latter. Tsar Alexander's Siberian origin was only valuable to Mme de Staël since it was evoked in connection with their common struggle with Napoleon, although for Mme de Staël this conflict was on a more personal level.

The cultural semiotical study of Mme de Staël's autobiographical travel accounts has also been, I would like to suggest, a biographical survey of her years in exile. Therefore, my analyses might also perhaps be considered as an experiment in the writing of biography.

My study of Mme de Staël's life in exile between 1803 and 1812, on the basis of her own autobiographical writings from that period, fits into the description Lisbeth Larsson makes of today's biographical writing, often characterized by viewing the male or

female subject for the study as a ‘product’ of his or her time.<sup>26</sup> However, in my biographical inquiry the question of intertextuality is of the utmost importance, because Mme de Staël used other texts to create her own text, forming an expression of her world-view, of her Ego-culture. In that sense, problems requiring analyses inspired by psychology are not in focus. However, since my study is occupied with analysing texts describing Mme de Staël’s cross-cultural encounters from both parties involved in the dialogue, other people’s psychological analyses of her behaviour are of course important. Therefore I have called my study polyphonical, taking the voices of others into consideration when analysing Mme de Staël’s life, and giving their point of view of the encounters almost as much attention as Mme de Staël’s. Christina Carlsson Wetterberg argues in similar terms when defining the aim and strength of the biography by stressing its ‘concrete’ attempt to ‘capture the complexity in the encounter between an individual and her time.’<sup>27</sup> (My translation.) Wetterberg continues:

It is reasonable to think that in each era and in each cultural context there exists a given repertoire of ways of thinking, ways of appearing and ways of acting. To be a human is to belong to a culture in this sense, and to say that a human being acts freely is in this perspective almost naive. That is not to say that the human being is totally subordinated to the dominating structures or discourses of the time.<sup>28</sup> (My translation from Swedish.)

From the perspective of this inquiry it is also important to underline that the analytic focus lies on different *points of view*; on one hand those Mme de Staël had of herself and the world, and on the other hand those held by other people commenting on her and her world-view. The polyphony of this inquiry is in that sense similar to the one Lisbeth Larsson aims at in her study of the marriage between Marika

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26. Lisbeth Larsson, ‘Biografins återkomst’, in *Med livet som insats: Biografen som humanistisk genre* (Lund: Sekel Bokförlag, 2007), pp. 51–59, see esp. p. 57.

27. Christina Carlsson Wetterberg, ‘Att biografiera en kvinnlig intellektuell’, in *Med livet som insats. Biografen som humanistisk genre* (Lund: Sekel Bokförlag, 2007), pp. 127–140, for quotation see p. 127.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

Stiernstedt and Ludvig Nordström, giving room to both views of it.<sup>29</sup> Now, Mme de Staël's points of view, like those held by others, are in their turn points of view of other 'texts' (verbal, written or other artefacts in a specific culture) which are in their turn points of view, and so forth.

As we have seen, Mme de Staël used certain cultural tools in the construction of herself and her culture, and thus formed a view of the Other (through typifications) in the same way as did her counterparts in the dialogues she was involved in. However, those particular cultural tools used by the Other do not stand in focus in this inquiry to the same extent as those used by Mme de Staël, making up her Ego-culture. In this way, the biographical aspects of this inquiry, I would suggest, could be said to be in line with what Eva Österberg's calls the *network biography*, focusing on the network that the subject of the biography is a part of.<sup>30</sup> But I would also like to think that this inquiry into Mme de Staël's years in exile fits into what Österberg defines as the *existential biography* since it is preoccupied with encircling Mme de Staël's 'life project', at least the most important aspect, namely, her political struggle against Napoleon and her attempts to restore the memory of her father, which she thought had been disgraced by the former.<sup>31</sup> I have tried to show how this project of hers dominated her political and ethical outlooks on other people and cultures. For instance, as I repeat here, her devotion to Tsar Alexander was presumably a result of his antagonism against Napoleon more than anything else. The exile, forced upon Mme de Staël by Napoleon, can be said to make up the 'big bang' of her life, being a moment of upheaval in her life course. It is therefore interesting to study for many reasons, cultural semiotical as well as

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29. Lisbeth Larsson writes: 'In the fight for priority of interpretation where the human being seeks the right to define herself and others, which is what stands at the centre of this book, the different narratives constantly play off against each other.' (My translation.) Larsson, *Sanning och konsekvens*, p. 21.

30. Eva Österberg, 'Individen i historien: En (o)möjlighet mellan Sartre och Foucault', in *Det roliga börjar hela tiden: Bokförläggare Kjell Petersson 60 år den 20 december 1996* (Stockholm: Clio, 1996), pp. 321–332. In stressing the importance of studying the network of which the subject of the biography is a part, Eva Österberg's focus is similar to the one that Liz Stanley puts forward in connection with biography and feminism, which is referred to in the introduction to *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, theories, methods* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 14.

31. Österberg, 'Individen i historien', p. 326.



biographical in a more general sense.<sup>32</sup> And to a certain extent, since the inquiry also takes an interest in Mme de Staël's work and political intellectual agenda it may also—perhaps—be regarded, at least partly, as a 'lifework biography'.<sup>33</sup>

### *Epilogue*

I have been thinking for quite a while of how to finish my cultural semiotical inquiry into Mme de Staël's autobiographical writings about her ten years in exile. Suddenly I was caught by the wish to give that question to Mme de Staël herself, because I thought I owed her that. But how could that be done? Inspired by Natalie Zemon Davis's prologue to her study of three women of different religions with the common destiny of belonging to the seventeenth century I found a way of making the dialogue between myself, the author, and Mme de Staël possible.<sup>34</sup> I realized that it would be fair to change positions, to give Mme de Staël the chance of commenting on my work, and also, perhaps, to give me the opportunity to justify the way I have described her life and her difficulties in the period of turmoil and exile in the years between 1803 and 1812. In other words, I wanted to give to Mme de Staël the imaginary position of being the Ego in relation to me, although she was doubtless always the Ego in her Ego-culture.

Natalie Zemon Davis wrote in her imaginary dialogue with the three female subjects of her book:

*Marie de l'Incarnation*: I've read it. I'm scandalized. Imagine her enclosing me in a book with such godless women.<sup>35</sup>

When reading those lines, I realized that Mme de Staël could have similar objections to my book:

*Mme de Staël*: I've read it. I'm scandalized. Imagine her enclosing me in a book with that brutal man Napoleon!

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32. Ibid., p. 327.

33. Ibid., p. 326.

34. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three seventeenth-century lives* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 1–4.

35. Ibid., p. 1.

What can one say to that?

*The biographer* (standing up for herself): That is not totally fair of you, Madame. I've enclosed you in a book with Napoleon—that is true, but your friends are there too! And a lot of admirers as well! And the perspective is yours, as you and your perception of your culture has been the starting point of the semiotic analysis. Certainly, Madame, to be such a centre of attention—ce n'est pas mal quand même, n'est-ce pas?

I may only hope that Mme de Staël would agree with me there.

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