CHAPTER 12

The Napoleon Apocalypse

> Dieu sait quel avenir.
> A. W. Schlegel, *Sur le système continental et sur ses rapports avec la Suède* (1813), 48[1]

Now we come to Staël's memoir *Dix années d'exil*, a text she later abandoned for her *Considérations*. She began to write it in 1811 while confined to house arrest at Coppet by the emperor who had pulped *De l'Allemagne*, and after being jilted at the last by Benjamin Constant. What is the place of this work then in the Staël canon? This chapter makes the argument that *Dix années d'exil*, which contains Staël's portrait of Russia seen just as Napoleon invaded, may be read, somewhat revealingly, as a hermetic text, hiding an apocalyptic vision with Napoleon as one of various demonic figures. This was common coin around 1814, a little later, and is perhaps the moment in Staël's biography at which her faith in reason was most compromised. It further argues that Staël's apocalyptic vision accords with another long-standing but hidden theme of hers: that a sibyl is known by her prophecies. Her complete works bear unexpected testimony to this theme. Some apocryphal or newly attributed Staël texts are also reviewed here, further fleshing out the portrait of Russia that completes her overview of the Europe Napoleon was busy occupying.

Context: *Napoleon/Apollyon*, Pamphlets, Caricatures, Holy Alliance

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* reviews the question of apocalypse. Apocalypse sees Satan as "the prince of this world" (John 12:31); the Messiah though will destroy the Antichrist, bringing the millennium.[2] On apocalyptic readings of this emperor who consumed a generation, the thorough *Dictionnaire Napoléon* is oddly silent, while Georges Lefebvre has one brief mention. That is a shame, for the field is rich and picturesque.

This chapter is previously unpublished.

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The year 1806 offers *The Prophetic Mirror, proving Bonaparte to be the beast that arose out of the Earth* [. . .], as well as Lewis Mayer's *Bonaparte the Emperor of the French considered as the Lucifer and Gog of Isaiah and Ezekiel*. Another handbill lists Napoleon's seven family crowns as the Beast's seven heads. The 1808 handbill, *A Prophecy (From the 13th Chapter of Revelations) alluding to Bonaparte*, uses the Greek numerical alphabet to derive 666 from "Napolean [*sic*] Buonaparte." *The Corsican's Downfall* in 1814 repeats the 666 idea. Also from 1814, *Buonapartiana, ou choix d'Anecdotes curieuses* identifies Bonaparte's magical guardian, the Red Man who appeared to him at the pyramids; Honoré de Balzac reworks this legend in his brief *Histoire de l'Empereur, racontée dans une grange par un vieux soldat*. Jean Tulard has French material from 1816 to 1821: *Lamuel ou le livre du Seigneur* [. . .] *histoire authentique de l'empereur Apollyon et du roi Behemot*; the abbé David's *Second Epître à M. l'abbé Sicard* – "Cet Antéchrist saccage le Delta"; and the *Apothéose de Napoleone Buonaparte ou signalement de l'Antéchrist* [. . .]. In 1827, Jean-Baptiste Pérès's *Comme quoi Napoléon n'a jamais existé ou grand erratum* follows Richard Whately's *Historic Doubts relative to Napoleon Bonaparte* to read Napoleon as a solar myth. "Il est constant que le mot Apollon signifie exterminateur," Pérès writes, a bow to the apocalyptic tradition. I myself am fond of Wendel Wurtz, *Les Précurseurs de l'Antéchrist, l'Apollyon de l'Apocalypse ou la Révolution française prédite par saint Jean l'Evangéliste* (1816), which explains the papal anointment with this "singular" anagram: *Napoléon empereur des Français = le pape serf a sacré un noir démon*. Citing Revelation 9:11, "l'ange de l'abîme, appelé en hébreu Abaddon, et en grec Apollyon, et en latin Exterminatus," Wurtz glosses, "Il fallait un *Exterminateur* pour châtier les nations coupables, et tout le monde conviendra qu'il a parfaitement rempli sa mission."[3]

Caricatures echo this theme. Thomas Rowlandson's *The Consular Family on their last Journey*, from 1804, has devils as coachmen. In George Cruikshank's *Alexander and Bonaparte, or each Emperor his desert*, the devil calls Bonaparte "my darling." The year 1808 brought Cruikshank's *Apollyon, the Devil's Generalissimo, addressing his legions*, starring Napoleon; his *The Trip-Hell Alliance* in 1811, with flames and a three-headed beast, shows the devil inducing Napoleon to kiss the pope's feet while the pope says, "You have sold yourself to the Devil." After Leipzig late in 1813, Germany was flooded with the print *The Devil's Darling*, showing the devil swaddling Napoleon and holding the *légion d'honneur*. Printed beneath is Matthew 3:17, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." The *Corpse-Head* print also attracted attention,

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showing Death and the devil perched on Napoleon's helmet. After Elba, an island series may have encouraged the Emperor's Romantic assimilation to Miltonic and Byronic rebels. *The Corsican's last trip under the guidance of his Good Angel* of April 1815 shows Napoleon and the devil leaving Elba for France; *Boney's Meditations on the Island of St. Helena* of August 1815 shows him with wings and hooves. In Cruikshank's *The Modern Prometheus, or Downfall of Tyranny*, showing Napoleon on Elba in 1814 – the year Mary Shelley eloped – the precise echo of her future subtitle to *Frankenstein* may not be at all fortuitous. Frank Paul Bowman rightly stresses the importance here of "the Evadist theme of Napoleon as he who reconciled Christ and Antichrist," drawing on Romantic interest in Cain: "As extreme and surprising as it may seem, it would be wrong to dismiss this Napoleonic messianism as an insignificant and meaningless eccentricity. It not only entered the popular mind, but it also represents a symptomatic case of political messianism" – a step on the fascist road. Louis de Narbonne said to Napoleon after Lützen, "[S]ome say you are a god, others, that you are a devil; but everyone allows that you are more than a man."[4]

Like Balzac and Mary Shelley, Staël is tied by an unexpected link to this forgotten Napoleonic corpus. During Staël's 1813 stay in Stockholm, a Swedish pamphlet appears, attributed to her in translation, oddly, from the German: *Napoleon's Dream or Enghien's Shadow in Moscow*. I missed this unknown pamphlet in 1995, but the German is a clue; in 1809, Starke in Prussia borrows James Gillray's old caricature, *Political Dreamings*, under the title *Napoleons Traum* for the magazine *London-Paris.* The sleeper is now Napoleon, and the nobility's headless corpses are "those of the duc d'Enghien and Villeneuve … Fox, although long since dead, still continues to chant the *Ça ira*." Death on stilts tramples on the Code civil, while the ghost of Andreas Hofer points to the guillotine. This is close to the Swedish pamphlet text, which Staël probably saw, although I'm not convinced she wrote it. In 1813, the Swedish court is mystical: Joseph de Maistre in *Du Pape* remarks of Gustav IV, "[C]'est dans l'Apocalypse qu'il étudie la politique." Long after the Duke of Sudermania's coup, in 1815, the queen asks Jean Bernadotte, "Comment osez-vous comparer votre Bonaparte … à un envoyé de Dieu, lui qui n'est qu'un suppôt de Satan?" Mystics think Napoleon the Antichrist after Eylau; the British and Foreign Bible Society believes that he "ne pouvait être que cet Apollyon de l'Apocalypse." Auguste Viatte, the authority in the field, remarks, "[C]e genre de millénarisme ne laisse pas d'être fort répandu vers cette époque," citing old friends of Staël's like Louis-Marie-François de

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Divonne and Johann Kaspar Lavater: "Le temps de la réédification du temple est arrivé"; "[U]ne immense puissance des ténèbres va régner avec un bras de fer." As Lavater reiterates his apocalyptic reading of the Revolution, joining Maistre, Jacques Cazotte, Johann Heinrich Jung Stilling, and others to oppose Augustin Barruel's talk of a Masonic plot, he stresses how apocalyptic readings of Revolution and Napoleon coincide: "[L]'Antéchrist est le plus grand despote de tous les despotes, et il me semble s'annoncer par les démocrates français." Staël and Constant will both stress this democratic despotism.[5]

Similarly, it is worth linking apocalypse to millennium when reading Maistre on the Holy Alliance – "[U]ne grande révolution religieuse est inévitable en France" – or Staël for that matter on Madame de Krüdener in 1815, "avant-coureur d'une grande époque religieuse qui se prépare pour l'espèce humaine." These different topoi are fragments of a shared body of thought, present when least expected; Staël's last known publication reviews her friend Elzéar de Sabran's *Le Repentir*, a Boehmist and Martinist poem ending with Messiah and millennium, though Staël ignores all that. Citing Staël's words to the tsar, "désigné par la Providence pour établir la tolérance dans la religion et le gouvernement représentatif dans l'ordre social," Viatte adds, "Notons le *rationalisme* volontaire de cette phrase." Indeed, *De l'Allemagne* remarks, "L'obscurité dans l'analyse des choses de la vie prouve seulement qu'on ne les comprend pas" (*DA* IV 280). Staël is no hermetist by inclination.[6]

As with Staël's "mystical episode" at Coppet, so her views in 1812–1813, as she writes her *Dix années d'exil*, also gain in resonance by comparison with August Wilhelm Schlegel, who was with her until March 1813. Schlegel's *Mémoire sur l'état de l'Allemagne*, sent to Bernadotte in October 1812, presents Napoleon as the personification of evil on earth. War with him is holy war, a "guerre de Dieu et de l'homme." Staël for her part wrote to Jean-Charles-Léonard Sismondi in May 1812, "Le monde est toujours dans les ténèbres, mais il est guidé par une main qui ne saurait l'égarer," adding, "Depuis Jésus-Christ, la révélation de la vertu n'a pas été attaquée si systématiquement . . . Je veux tout faire contre ce mal." March 1813 witnesses Constant's *De l'esprit de conquête*, Schlegel's *Sur le système continental*, and Staël's *Réflexions sur le suicide*, and Paul Gautier stresses parallels between the last two pamphlets in particular – Schlegel also twice writes like Constant of Napoleon's "esprit de conquêtes." Both Staël and Schlegel praise Bernadotte for uniting "la chevalerie du républicanisme à la chevalerie de la royauté." Schlegel adds, "La nation suédoise, si illustre dans l'histoire," and Staël, "Cette nation suédoise, jadis si célèbre par ses

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exploits"; Schlegel writes, "Cette élection est pour la Suède l'aurore d'un nouveau jour de gloire et de prospérité," and Staël says, "La Suède chérit en vous le présage de sa gloire." Schlegel's preface may indeed be Staël's work: Europe is changing quicker than this book, it states, but justice is inalterable; success is an argument for the many. Had Napoleon won, he would not have lacked apologists, but losing is inexcusable. France has only to ask, to obtain a lasting peace; Napoleon's art lies in replacing global goodwill by calculating egoism, for states and individuals alike, but as Europe's public spirit revives, nations will regain their independence. Later Schlegel passages also echo Staël – on the *gouffre* that is Spain; on Europe's terrible leveling, a crushing of national character under "uniformité machinale" while England, "merveilleux foyer de lumières et de perfectibilité," remains afloat "comme l'Arche au milieu du déluge." As Gautier notes, Staël in October 1812 calls England "l'arche qui a sauvé l'exemple de tout ce qui est beau dans ce déluge de boue," and the phrase returns in her *Dix années*. Claiming disingenuously that "je ne me mêle point ainsi de politique," Staël asks a friend to repeat that Schlegel wrote this pamphlet: "Il ne faudrait pas parler de moi dans l'article de la gazette, mais dire seulement que Schlegel est l'auteur." She then does just that in *L'Ambigu*. I suspect that Staël read and helped shape Schlegel's manuscript, given his near-total political inexperience.[7]

So much for Sweden. Tsar Alexander, a Freemason since 1803, was partial to the Book of Daniel, and was reading it, legend has it, when Staël's friend Julie de Krüdener walked in. "So the king of the north shall come . . . and the arms of the south shall not withstand, neither his chosen people" (Daniel 11:15). Francis Ley remarks that Julie's daughter was the only witness, and her journal records that the tsar was not "convaincu de son élection particulière pour opérer cette grande œuvre." Staël faced similar obstacles with Bernadotte, but in 1812–1813, both women incited these men to abandon diplomatic tradition and ally with England against France. This echoed a power realignment in Russia among the tsar's three groups of counselors: liberals led by Frédéric-César de La Harpe, the "lobby polono-jésuite" led by Joseph de Maistre, and mystics like Alexander Golitsyn. Since 1808, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand and Klemens von Metternich had been telling the tsar he must save Europe; after victory at Leipzig late in 1813, the tsar, the Austrian emperor, and the king of Prussia – the future signatories of the Holy Alliance – knelt before their troops to thank God. What made this war *holy*? Enlightened Europe had avoided the term until 1789 raised the ante. Spain's Catéchisme civil in 1808 reads, "De qui procède Napoléon? – De l'enfer et du péché."

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Mademoiselle de Krüdener notes in 1807, "[D]ans toutes les églises russes . . . il a été ordonné aux prêtres *de maudire Bonaparte*, de le faire regarder comme l'*Antéchrist*." Turning like Mademoiselle de Krüdener – or Staël's *Considérations* – to the Catéchisme impérial, Jung Stilling identifies Napoleon not as "l'Antéchrist lui-même, mais seulement . . . le précurseur de l'Antéchrist." For Madame de Krüdener, the Bible's other angel was the tsar she called "l'élu du Seigneur," elected not only to free Europe from Napoleon–Apollyon, ender of the thousand-year Holy Roman Empire, but also to install a new Christian era. In 1814, the works of Jung Stilling, Jakob Boehme, Emanuel Swedenborg, and Madame Guyon shape the tsar's essay for his sister. Jean-Baptiste Capefigue claims to have seen the original manuscript of 1815's Holy Alliance in the tsar's hand, with the word *Sainte-Alliance* added by Julie de Krüdener. She uses the phrase in an earlier letter, but Daniel 11:30 says "alliance sainte" in the tsar's French Bible. Echoing the famous Congress of Wilhelmsbad in 1785, the alliance sought to establish the millennium by the union of the churches, then a routine mystical preoccupation. In any case, Metternich revised the treaty, deleting for instance the word *subjects* that had stood alongside *sovereigns* in the proposed universal brotherhood. "C'est d'un mélange d'idées religieuses et d'idées politiques libérales qu'est sortie la conception de la Sainte-Alliance," Metternich later remarks. Alexander in Russia proclaimed the original text on Christmas Day, 1815, but as he drifted to the right, the phrase *Holy Alliance* became a byword for hypocrisy. This is the loam in which Staël's arguments take shape.[8]

Dix années d'exil

> Ne voient-ils pas de tous côtés les sentimens les plus vils, l'avidité la plus basse s'emparer chaque jour d'un caractère de plus?
>
> Staël, *DL* [1800], 12

We may argue that the Holy Alliance was hijacked like the Revolution itself, a bid for freedom borrowed to oppress. To judge it, we must resituate its birth in contingency, and the same applies to Staël's own attack on Napoleon in the *Dix années*. For this is a rich and subtle text; religion is only one strand in an argument that also compares Napoleon to Xerxes and Richard III, but it does recur. Indeed, Staël's early stress on religion serves to frame her discourse, including a nod to mystic talk of God as "grand célibataire":

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> [I]l n'est pas telle chose qu'une créature de notre espèce . . . [O]n peut dire qu'il est le grand célibataire du monde . . . C'est un habile joueur d'échecs dont la partie adverse est le genre humain . . . L'empereur Napoléon est un système autant qu'un individu, et l'on verra dans la suite de ce récit que tous les effets de l'irréligion sur le cœur humain ont été manifestés par son existence. (*DxA* 48–49)

Other epithets dot Staël's narrative: "ce grand avilisseur," "fléau du genre humain," "cet ennemi des hommes et de Dieu" (162, 115, 176). So far, these terms might fit an Attila, but Staël elsewhere leans directly on the Bible: "celui qui était la clef de voûte de l'enfer"; "l'homme qui semble une révélation du mauvais principe sur cette terre"; "l'infernal génie qui a trouvé dans la bassesse des hommes le point qu'Archimède cherchait pour soulever le monde" (165, 282, 74). Bonaparte says to the Anciens, "Je suis le dieu de la guerre et de la fortune." Staël calls him "ce Premier Consul appelé le père de la Nation qu'il allait dévorer," and in homage to Job 41:1, "le grand Léviathan qui voulait tout envahir" (71–72, 118, 148).[9]

These remarks offer an explicit hermeneutic framework for readers to apply throughout Staël's text: "L'infernale magie de la méchanceté lui avait soumis la terre," she writes; "[I]l sait parfaitement le mauvais côté de chacun"; "une volonté tout à la fois diabolique et mathématique"; "les feux de l'enfer dont il dispose" (308, 86, 115, 277). Staël collects, for instance, Napoleon's remarks on religion: "[S]i Dieu règne dans le ciel, moi, je commande sur terre"; "Je veux rétablir la religion comme vous la vaccine, l'inoculer pour la détruire" (83, 110). His rule is a "sorte de révélation du principe du mal" (110). Napoleon, Staël notes, often professed his "absence absolue de religion . . . [I]l me paraît plus enclin à se croire lui-même un dieu" (125). When a *fête* says that Napoleon shared the empire with Jupiter, Staël observes that his companion now is Pluto, god of the dead, and she compares him later to "ces idoles des Lapons encensés par la peur" (118, 310). This explicit religious frame gives ad hominem thrust to many of Staël's indirect remarks: for instance, "[O]n voit la divinité de la peur régner en France" (189). Similarly, juxtaposition can give theological focus to seemingly vague passages: "si le chaos était chargé d'endoctriner le monde," Staël muses, pondering Napoleon's proclamations, then adds that "Bonaparte avait l'enfer dans le cœur et le chaos dans la tête" (114). Is calling Pierre-François Réal an "âme damnée de Bonaparte" (179) a simple metaphor? How about seeking France's deliverance from the "sortilèges de l'enfer qui la tenaient enchaînée" (295)? In the *Considérations*, Staël tends to read Napoleon as a Faust figure. That

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occurs here –"[L]es divinités infernales le poussent en avant et je ne sais . . . s'il pourrait s'arrêter"; immortality may be "une des conditions de son pacte avec le diable" – but the Emperor figures more often in the *Dix années d'exil* as Mephistopheles: "[I]l dirait comme Satan du haut de la montagne: 'Les royaumes d'Asie sont à moi'" (192, 93, 302). Staël's manuscript notes for the text repeat this theme: "Le diable qui juge ses ennemis selon la loi de Dieu"; "la révolution du démon, de Satan"; "celui qui promet les royaumes du haut de la montagne" (414, 484, 505). France, Staël writes, is fighting "sous l'étendard de l'enfer" (508).

"He who is unable to live in society," states Aristotle, "must be either a beast or a god." Staël in turn insists on the radical antithesis between Napoleon and humanity, on "son caractère inconciliable avec le reste de la création" (192). She borrows her old *idéophobe* joke at his expense – "[L]es principes de la liberté produisaient en lui l'effet de l'eau sur les hommes atteints de la rage" – but adds a new, demonic twist: "[Q]uand par hasard il rencontre un honnête homme, on dirait qu'il éprouve une sorte de frémissement." She adds, "Quand il rencontre l'honnêteté . . . on dirait que ses artifices sont déconcertés, comme les conjurations du démon par le signe de la croix" (101, 189, 99; cf. 145). These signposts invite a hermetic reading of Staël's first meeting with Bonaparte: "Je reculai par un instinct de terreur," she tells us (50). Just as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Mephistopheles is "Der Geist der stets verneint," the spirit who always says no, so Napoleon in the *Dix années* is the antithesis of England; if in England opposing politicians leave Parliament together, so in France the Emperor strikes Jacobins and royalists at once, the balance of justice matching a balance of crime (103). On the English sea, Staël feels "sous la puissance immédiate de la Divinité," and an English speech uplifts her heart: "[C]ette voix, qui tout à coup répondait à mon âme, me semblait descendue du ciel" (282, 152). When Bonaparte's hireling "osa porter sa main souillée sur l'arche du Seigneur" – that is, England – Staël observes, "vertu, dignité d'âme, religion, enthousiasme, voilà quels sont à ses yeux les éternels ennemis du continent" (92). In this Manichaean world, another figure is Bonaparte's antithesis, and Staël is explicit: It is her father Jacques Necker, who worked to harmonize with heaven rather than to "évoquer à soi tous les moyens déchaînés par l'absence des lois divines et humaines" (227). France's cash debt to Necker is "la dette la plus sacrée" – "[J]e ne lève jamais les yeux au ciel sans penser à lui," Staël reflects (227, 219). When the heroine returns to Coppet, her echo of Genesis is no accident: "[J]e vis l'arc-en-ciel se lever sur la demeure de mon père; j'osai prendre ma part de ce signe d'alliance" (204; cf. Genesis 9:13–17).[10]

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Little so far has suggested a vision of history; and indeed, devil without apocalypse is common enough. But our puzzle has other pieces; let us begin with *la race humaine*. Napoleon, Staël writes, is making "la race humaine anonyme"; "[I]l feint de se faire comprendre à la race humaine dont il a pris la figure" (68, 378). He has made pain ridiculous, "dernière insulte que les génies infernaux puissent faire supporter à la race humaine" (224). "L'homme dont dépend encore la race humaine," she calls Napoleon; the Russians are "chevaliers de la race humaine," and the war a "question du sort de l'espèce humaine" (71, 310, 76). "Son règne devait coûter près de dix millions d'hommes à l'espèce humaine," Staël writes in the highest casualty figure I have ever seen, and she concludes, "[L]a destinée réserva peut-être cet adversaire imposant pour un temps où le genre humain aurait mérité sa grâce par ses malheurs" (74, 69). Here apocalypse and millennium appear explicitly, giving sudden depth to Staël's talk of Napoleon as a demonic figure. God, she writes, is "celui qui l'a créé pour nous punir et l'anéantira pour nous absoudre," since "le malheur du monde est placé sur la tête de Bonaparte" (125, 180).

Staël thus gazes into the future. The theme is sketched out early: She learned to know the true Bonaparte "longtemps avant que l'Europe eût compris le mot de cet énigme," with her pain serving as "cette seconde vue dont parlent les Ecossais" (45, 67). Like Cassandra, Staël's early warnings went unheard: "Je voyais venir la tyrannie tantôt à pas de loup, tantôt la tête levée" (75). Indeed, despite some mention of millennium – Spain gave "le signal de la résurrection du monde," Napoleon must fall because "l'homme a une conscience et l'univers un Dieu" – Staël wrote this book under a black star, and the concept of apocalypse without millennium recurs (112, 117). "Tout est anéanti en Europe," she notes; "[C]e sont les richesses morales qui ne reviennent plus ou du moins qui sont perdues pour des siècles" (237). Napoleon's despotism will leave "les malheurs et les ténèbres aux générations futures" (133). For centuries or forever – Staël is unsure. "Rien enfin ne recommence parmi les hommes dans un espace de temps qui n'est pas assez considérable pour que la race humaine soit renouvelée," she argues, but adds, "[I]l suffit que le souffle de cet homme ait approché des établissements qui tendent à l'amélioration de l'espèce humaine pour qu'ils soient à jamais empoisonnés" (73, 302).

This was the winter Moscow burned. And here is another curiosity: Staël tells Dmitri Pavlovitch von Taticheff in 1814 that she has *mailed off* "ce que j'ai écrit sur l'incendie de Moscou, sur la résistance des Russes" (25) and that it will soon be published – an exciting prospect, since Staël was maybe the last Western author bar Stendhal to see the old Moscow,

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weeks before Napoleon's army; but her *Dix années* has no such text. However, Simone Balayé remarks that "[c]et écrit n'est pas sans rappeler celui d'Albertine de Staël" (25), and indeed, Balayé's edition of Albertine's text, which she dates to February 1813, notes twelve close echoes in Staël's contemporary *Dix années*. "Bonaparte leur devait les feux de l'enfer dont il dispose," writes Staël's daughter; "Hennissements entendus où il y avait des prières, prêtres tués sur le seuil des églises," both texts repeat. This is a bitter tale: When French soldiers mark a Russian peasant's hand, he cuts it off and gives it to them; mad with cold and hunger, they are seen to "manger les cadavres de leurs semblables ou dévorer leurs propres bras." Staël visibly used this text of her daughter's, as it in turn used a brand-new Russian pamphlet. Did Albertine, fifteen, write about cannibalism for her own instruction? Since Albertine routinely helped Staël to make fair copies, it seems logical to suggest that this fair copy is linked to the *Dix années* manuscripts, left unused thanks in part to taboos on women discussing war and perhaps to Staël's pain at France's humiliation – much as Staël earlier passes over the Terror, "ce temps incommensurable" (*IP* 134).[11]

Albertine's text was not published in Staël's lifetime – like the *Dix années* itself, which Staël abandoned in favor of her *Considérations* and evidently did not return to. Balayé has studied the links between Staël's two late histories: Staël deletes entire passages from the first manuscript to reuse them in the second. In December 1810, she announces her new "vie de mon père"; the encrypted fragments of *Dix années d'exil* date from this same winter and may be the same text. Staël returns to *Dix années d'exil* in winter 1812, moving on to the *Considérations* in London in 1813. With Napoleon's defeats after Moscow, attacking him loses urgency and relevance, while justifying the Revolution becomes indispensable. Staël's focus on action thus leads her to the opposite path from those lickspittles who slander Napoleon after the Restoration. And yet, the *Considérations* still bear traces of the old Napoleon: "Il tourna toutes les belles choses en ridicule," she writes: "Il fallait cependant donner un principe de vie à ce système de dérision et d'immoralité" (*CRF* 369). Like Jung Stilling and Mademoiselle de Krüdener, Staël appeals to the Catéchisme impérial, which states that if we don't love Napoleon, "alors nous encourrons la damnation éternelle. Fallait-il croire, toutefois, que Bonaparte disposait de l'enfer dans l'autre monde, parce qu'il en donnait l'idée dans celui-ci?" (*CRF* 376). Another passage develops hints found in the *Dix années*: "En me promenant au haut du Kremlin … je pensais qu'il était donné à Bonaparte de voir les empires à ses pieds, comme Satan les offrit à notre Seigneur" (*CRF* 430). Yet in the *Dix années*, Napoleon made this very

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offer, and Staël's continuation confirms that she has dropped apocalypse for the Faust legend, a small but crucial concession to the fallen – but human – Corsican: "Mais c'est lorsqu'il ne lui restait plus rien à conquérir en Europe, que la destinée l'a saisi . . . C'est alors que le démon de l'orgueil et de la folie se saisit de Bonaparte . . . [C]'est à Dresde qu'il a méconnu la dernière apparition de son génie tutélaire" (*CRF* 431–432). Compare *De l'Allemagne* on Gottfried August Bürger's "Wild Huntsman": "[L]'ardente volonté du chasseur . . . se déprave . . . chaque fois qu'il résiste à sa conscience" (*DA* II 200). That hunter repeatedly ignores his guardian angel and is damned.[12]

Sibyls

Evidence suggests that Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte de Guibert's 1786 portrait of Staël, *Zulmé*, profoundly influenced her own self-perception thereafter. Zulmé, says Guibert, is Apollo's favorite priestess at Delphi, and Staël's first novel is called *Delphine*. Staël's early *Mirza* responds to *Zulmé* point by point, while her *Zulma* echoes its heroine's name; Sapho too is "la favorite d'Apollon" (*Sapho* 881), and *Corinne ou l'Italie* shows countless traces of this theme. Staël's cousin cites long extracts from *Zulmé* in Staël's first biography, and a recent study bears the title *Madame de Staël et les voix de la sibylle*. Indeed, Apollo's favorite priestess, at Delphi, can be none other than the Pythia, whose frenzied oracles were interpreted by a male priest – making it all the more curious that this recent study has not a word about Staël's thoughts on women and prophecy. The Germani, Staël writes in *Des circonstances actuelles*, consulted their women "comme des oracles . . . Ils croyaient à leurs impressions comme à la boussole du bien ou du mal" (*CA* 266). "La nature," states *De l'Allemagne* a decade later, "n'est pour l'homme que les feuilles éparses de la sibylle dont nul, jusqu'à ce jour, n'a pu faire un livre" (*DA* IV 244).[13]

What then are Staël's thoughts on prophecy? "C'était une personne plus passionnée que prévoyante," she writes of Corinne. Her cousin Albertine remarks, "Delphine ne prévoit rien," and of Staël herself that "[l]e ciel l'avait faite imprévoyante" (*Corinne* 188; *Notice* 16, 33). Certainly Staël's heroines march blindly forward, but that is not the whole story, as her cousin reminds us in her concluding paragraph: "Sans entrer dans le temple même, elle . . . a préludé aux chants sacrés devant cette multitude païenne de cœur, qui encense les muses et lapide les prophètes" (*Notice* 54). In these circumstances, denying the gift of prophecy will be an apt *captatio benevolentiae*, and Staël elsewhere recalls the pain the gift might

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inflict: Shakespeare "rendait des oracles lorsqu'il était agité"; "[L]a prêtresse qui rendait les oracles, se sentait agitée par une puissance cruelle" (*DL* 198; *Corinne* 339). That passage in *Corinne* continues with a recurrent Staël topos, a handle to her theme of blindness: "ces fleurs encore fraîches et brillantes, mais qu'un point noir causé par une piqûre mortelle menace d'une fin prochaine." Compare *De l'Allemagne*: "[B]ientôt ce grain noir, qui se remarquait à peine sur l'horizon intellectuel, s'est étendu jusqu'au point de replonger l'univers et l'homme dans les ténèbres" (*DA* IV 68).

Like Cassandra, Staël's heroines do seem to see the future but simply cannot change it: "[I]l se peut que ce ciel orageux n'ait menacé que moi," announces Corinne; "[L]e cœur, tout faible qu'il est, ne doit pas se méprendre aux signes funestes d'une destinée irrévocable" (*Corinne* 277, 368). As the sky darkens again, Corinne meditates: "[I]l m'avertissait de l'avenir ... [I]l porte mon deuil" (*Corinne* 376). A passage on a nun's taking of the veil, "avis solennel qu'une femme résignée donne aux femmes qui luttent encore contre le destin," here makes explicit Staël's gender-based reading of fatality (*Corinne* 395). Balayé elegantly remarks of *Delphine*, "[P]eut-être le progrès de l'espèce humaine doit-il passer par la souffrance individuelle et le sacrifice," and Delphine herself muses, "[Q]uelquefois je me persuade que l'Être-Suprême a abandonné le monde aux méchans, et qu'il a réservé l'immortalité de l'âme seulement pour les justes" (*Delphine* I 551). For men, in Staël's view, this is arguable, but it is certainly true for women, and that divide lies at the heart of her writing – hence, perhaps, the radical bipolarity of Staël's work, split between optimism and pessimism, dialectic and fiction, public and private, head and heart: "[O]n peut plaider pour la vie, et il y a cependant assez de bien à dire de la mort" (*Corinne* 351). Madelyn Gutwirth, Charlotte Hogsett, and Anne Amend have analyzed this well.[14]

Apocalypse without millennium. That bleak vision recurs in Staël's works, a "repos de douleur" paving the way for generations of European Romantics. "Quand le soleil disparaît de l'horizon des pays du nord," say the *Dix années d'exil*, "les habitants de ces contrées ne blasphèment pas ses rayons" (*DxA* 46). Her cousin comments, "[U]ne sorte de terreur la saisissait à l'idée de la stagnation de l'existence," and Corinne laments with "le cri de la douleur, cri monotone à la longue" (*Notice* 41; *Corinne* 473). Georges Poulet has splendidly reviewed Staël's complex oscillation between impatience and despair: "[S]'il est une situation qui plus que toute autre est insupportable à Mme de Staël, c'est une situation sans issue, une imagination sans direction, un avenir barré." These are affairs of the heart, and *De l'influence des passions* in particular offers a time-based

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reading of the passions: "[N]ous … recommençons l'existence avec l'espoir de moins" (*IP* 154). The sufferer's past, "prenant dans sa pensée la place qu'occupait l'avenir," fills the mind with abysses as vast as were "les heureux champs de l'espérance"; "[I]l n'y a rien dans le passé, il n'y a rien dans l'avenir," since the passions "n'offrent pas même l'illusion d'un espoir et d'un avenir" (*IP* 169–170, 216). This is Promethean suffering. "Prométhée, sur son rocher, s'apercevait-il du retour du printemps, des beaux jours de l'été?" (*IP* 284). "Cette succession de peuples détrônés n'est point une véritable fatalité," states *De la littérature*, which dwells on the topic, and *De l'Allemagne* remarks, "[L]es arts, comme le sentiment, ont une admirable monotonie, celle dont on voudrait faire un moment éternel" (*DL* 127; *DA* III 380). At the Interlaken festival, Staël writes that "une histoire, toujours la même, ne semble qu'un seul moment dont la durée est de plusieurs siècles" (*DA* I 294), but Claude Reichler has rightly stressed Staël's profound ambivalence here: "La célébration du mythe immobile de l'Helvétie, sous la plume d'un écrivain qui s'est fait le chantre de la perfectibilité et du progrès, est chargée d'ambiguïtés." "Des ténèbres profondes," Staël adds, "environnaient ce point lumineux," neatly inverting her *grain noir* topos, and she offers a pendant to Interlaken in reviewing Zacharias Werner's *Der 24. Februar*, with the words "pourquoi du temps dans ce lieu" (*DA* I 288, III 158). "Le mythe," writes Reichler, "s'est emparé de la durée et lui imprime son inertie"; pastoral dream yields to nightmare. "*Pourquoi faire du bruit?*" says Staël's elderly companion crossing the Rhine (*DA* I 194). Curiously, Staël's vision of stagnation is often linked to flowing water, rather than still lakes or pools. In *Corinne*, a monastery well trickles, women pour tea, and both evoke stagnation; the falls at Schaffhausen mirror the centuries' thundering monotony (*Corinne* 245, 350). These are clocks of a sort – "la clepsydre qui convient à cette solitude."[15]

Staël's works may thus look discreetly forward, but they do so above all by describing the past. *Delphine* and *Corinne* both occur in past historical time; *De la littérature* opens with the Greeks; the *Considérations* combine France's finished Revolution, Staël's dead father, and England's history after 1649. Staël's apparent silence about the future sharply divides her from the great philosophies of history of her age, running from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing through Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottfried von Herder, and Nicolas de Condorcet to William Godwin, Charles Fourier, G. W. F. Hegel, and Karl Marx, a series of men quite comfortable with prophecy. Corinne is both penetrating and focused on posterity, but she rejects prophecy for improvisation, the future for the present. And if Staël's

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every action focuses unblinkingly on the future, while the *future* itself in her work seems oddly absent, perhaps the answer to this paradox lies precisely in the closing pages of her different works – the *Réflexions sur le procès de la reine*, for instance, from 1793: "malheur au peuple qui aurait entendu ses cris en vain . . . L'espérance des nations, si longtemps attachée au destin de la France, ne pourrait plus entrevoir dans l'avenir aucun événement réparateur de cette génération désolée" (*Reine* 60). Yes, this is indeed the voice of prophecy, emerging curiously to end this female text. Compare Staël's *Réflexions sur la paix*: "[S]i la paix n'est pas conclue cet hiver, il est impossible de prévoir au centre de quel empire les Français la refuseront l'année prochaine"; "[V]os victoires se confondant avec vos carnages, ne laisseraient plus dans votre histoire que les annales de la mort . . . France, terre souillée de sang et de crimes . . . [L]a honte de ta destinée retomberait sur nous tous" (*RP* 100, 111, 114). Something is going on here: It seems that Staël has discovered a way to end her works with prophecy while not disturbing her readers. In 1795, her *Essai sur les fictions* ends with "si" and the conditional; the *Passions* closes with an apostrophe – "Et vous, Français" – then a final speech that opens, "Heureuse, si j'ai pu convaincre" (*EF* 65; *IP* 301). *Des circonstances actuelles* turns again to France: "En vain vous irez porter au bout du monde le renom de la puissance française, vous étonnerez, mais vous n'obtiendrez rien" (*CA* 347). In 1800, *De la littérature* seems at first an exception: "L'époque du retour à la vertu n'est pas éloignée," it reads, but not in conclusion (*DL* 358). Yet Wilhelm von Humboldt announced its subject as the future of art in the new century, and its long second part bears this title: "De l'état actuel des lumières en France, et de leurs progrès *futurs*" (*DL* 283; my italics).[16]

Staël uses her device even where it seems least workable, ending *Du caractère de M. Necker* for instance with a subtle oracle: "[U]n caractère si bon . . . on ne le reverra plus; ni les hommes, ni moi, nous ne le reverrons plus" (*Necker* 290). *Corinne* ends with the phrase "[J]e l'ignore." *Agar dans le désert* announces, "Ismaël sera le tige d'un grand peuple"; *Geneviève de Brabant*'s last reply reads, "Un pressentiment t'avertit que ce bonheur ne peut durer" (*Agar* 544; *Geneviève* 589). *De l'esprit des traductions* closes with a vision of Italy: "Les Italiens doivent se faire remarquer par la littérature . . . sinon leur pays tomberait dans une sorte d'apathie dont le soleil même pourrait à peine le réveiller" (*Traductions* 605). Staël writes this more than once of France: "La France ne peut être sauvée que par ce moyen"; "Si par quelques malheurs invincibles la France était un jour destinée à perdre pour jamais tout espoir de liberté" (*IP* 220; *DL* 252). "Il n'y a plus de France," we read in 1807 (*Corinne* 302). "Nous en sommes,"

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states *De l'Allemagne*, "à cette époque de la civilisation où toutes les belles choses de l'âme tombent en poussière" (*DA* IV 394), and this manifesto has perhaps Staël's most famous ending:

> O France! terre de gloire et d'amour! si l'enthousiasme s'éteignait un jour sur votre sol ... à quoi vous serviraient votre beau ciel, vos esprits si brillants, votre nature si féconde? Une intelligence active, une impétuosité savante vous rendraient les maîtres du monde; mais vous n'y laisseriez que la trace des torrents de sable, terribles comme les flots, arides comme le désert! (*DA* V 230)

Sismondi's contemporary treatise, *De la littérature du midi de l'Europe*, ends analogously, and Percy Shelley's *Ozymandias* (1818) is not dissimilar. Staël had her pulped *De l'Allemagne* text with her in Stockholm, as Napoleon's empire crumpled and she worked on her *Dix années d'exil*, but she chose to publish neither. Instead, she published her *Réflexions sur le suicide*, which ends thus:

> L'imagination se représente cette belle France qui nous accueillerait sous son ciel d'azur ... [C]e retour nous apparaît comme une sorte de résurrection terrestre ... mais si la bonté céleste ne nous a pas réservé un tel bonheur, dans quelques lieux que nous soyons nous prierons pour ce pays qui sera si glorieux, si jamais il apprend à connaître la liberté, c'est-à-dire la garantie politique de la justice. (*RfS* 384)

Staël, in short, is focused on action in March 1813. That is the meaning of *De l'Allemagne*'s new preface: "[C]e que les philosophes mettaient en système s'accomplit" (*DA* I 12) – hence *Delphine*'s dedication in 1802 to "l'avenir plutôt qu'au présent"; hence Staël's verdict, opening the *Considérations*, that "après une lutte et des malheurs plus ou moins prolongés, le triomphe des lumières a toujours été favorable à ... l'espèce humaine" (*Delphine* I 90; *CRF* 63). Is this Herder, or Maistre? In a sense, the question is immaterial, and indeed the gulf may be narrower than we believe. Compare Staël's friend Constant: In 1796, *De la force du gouvernement actuel* lists four successive revolutions, against theocracy, slavery, feudalism, and nobility; by 1824, his *De la religion* sees humankind's religious journey as a laborious but constant progress, leading to unrestricted religious sentiment. Staël's own world history also divides into four eras – heroic times, patriotism, chivalry, and the love of liberty – and, as with Constant, religion anchors her philosophy: "[L]'on ne rendra désormais quelque jeunesse à la race humaine, qu'en retournant à la religion par la philosophie" (*DA* IV 150). "Le beau est dans notre âme,"

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states *De l'Allemagne*, "et la lutte au dehors" (*DA* IV 281). Staël's vision of perfectibility thus parallels her millenarian friends. "Je crois le mysticisme . . . *une réformation de la Réformation*," she writes in 1815. "Il se peut qu'un jour un cri d'union s'élève," reads *De l'Allemagne* (*DA* V 84), uniting the world's faiths. Compare her *Réflexions sur le suicide*: "On ne peut considérer l'existence que sous deux rapports, ou comme une partie de jeu . . . ou comme un noviciat pour l'immortalité" (*RfS* 355). *De l'Allemagne* says this more cautiously: "Il en est qui croient voir en tout deux principes, celui du bien et celui du mal," adding, "Si chacun de nous veut examiner attentivement la trame de sa propre vie, il y verra deux tissus parfaitement distincts; l'un qui semble en entier soumis aux causes et aux effets naturels; l'autre dont la tendance tout-à-fait mystérieuse ne se comprend qu'avec le temps" (*DA* V 157, V 93–94). Staël may have liked this image, since her cousin Albertine repeats it: "[L]a vie ressemble à ces tapisseries des Gobelins, dont vous ne discernez pas le tissu quand vous le voyez du beau côté" (*Notice* 52).[17]

This faith anchors Staël's hope in the future, despite the Terror, despite the burning of Moscow, despite Waterloo. Her *Dix années d'exil* observes, "[A]insi toute entreprise dans laquelle l'homme ne fait entrer Dieu pour rien doit périr," and this is optimism after all: "[I]l est un sanctuaire de l'âme où jamais son empire ne doit pénétrer" (59–60, 168). Staël adds, "Notre propre conscience est le trésor de Dieu" (109). Thus, quiet signs of cheer sometimes counter her omens, like the rainbow over Coppet. Geneviève declares that God's will "se fait sentir à moi par des rapports inconnus"; Oswald remarks to Corinne, "[J]'ai souvent éprouvé dans ma vie des secours extraordinaires" (*Geneviève* 577; *Corinne* 388). Corinne replies, "[I]l n'y a personne, je crois, qui n'ait au fond de son âme une idée singulière et mystérieuse sur sa propre destinée." Entering Russia on Bastille Day, July 14, three weeks ahead of the French, Staël hears her father's name and finds it "un heureux augure"; as she climbs the Kremlin, it occurs to her that Napoleon "pourrait se promener sur cette même tour . . . mais le ciel était si beau que je repoussai cette crainte" (277). Considering what she calls "les trois temps de l'existence," Staël notes in 1796 that the passion of crime drives its victim blindly into the future, "approchant sans cesse d'un but qui s'éloigne toujours devant lui," "non qu'au-devant de lui l'espérance apparaisse, mais parce que l'abîme est derrière" (*IP* 289, 239, 236). This is Napoleon's exact case. Perhaps what such men lack, above all, is a bridge between yesterday and tomorrow, "tout ce qui traite du passé avec l'avenir" (*IP* 237). *Corinne* may lament first love, "avant que le souvenir entre en partage avec l'espérance"

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(*Corinne* 53), but a marriage of hope and memory seems a wiser choice, and Staël finds it, interestingly, in art – calling rhyme "l'image de l'espérance et du souvenir" (*DA* II 106). And here is a reason to write our stories as well as living them, even – or perhaps, especially – at moments when all hope seems lost.

Conclusion

Space and time are the frame of our existence. Staël's *Dix années d'exil* manuscripts – for such they remained until 1821 – are doubly contingent: written in Sweden about Russia, empire's margins, in a Europe now hard to imagine, as a great dictator retreated from Moscow across a winter landscape stirring with revolt. Amid such fragments, it seems apt to encounter three brief contemporary texts, unpublished, anonymous, or apocryphal, which may also be Staël's work: her daughter Albertine's retreat from Russia, which I believe is Staël's; Schlegel's *Système continental*, which she likely revised; and the Swedish *Napoleons Dröm*, based on a German borrowing of an English caricature, which she probably saw and had little or no part in. These texts and the *Dix années d'exil* manuscripts share a homage to apocalypse, born of Napoleonic contingency, which may seem equally alien today; yet as Bowman observes of the "Napoleon as Christ" topos, that homage points back from the margins with lessons for all our work.

First, a lesson for Staël and the Groupe de Coppet: In March 1813, Schlegel, Staël, and Constant publish the *Système continental*, *Réflexions sur le suicide*, and *De l'esprit de conquête* respectively; Constant and Schlegel join Bernadotte's *état-major* in Hanover, publicists, like Staël, for the man's candidacy to the throne of France. This lost continuum also shapes Staël's husband John Rocca's *Mémoires sur la guerre d'Espagne*, written during their Swedish winter, and it is no accident that Staël's *Dix années d'exil* routinely compares Russia to Spain, as if Europe met at its edges – an *Orient–Midi* pairing worth a closer look. Memories of this moment also linger in 1814, a year later, when Staël, Schlegel, and Sismondi publish *De l'Allemagne,* the *Conférences de Vienne*, and *De la littérature du midi de l'Europe* in Paris and are dubbed a *confédération romantique* by the press. Finally, the question of the passage of time, which this focus on apocalypse brings into sharp relief, may hold a key to Staël's thought, as we have seen, and even to her reasons for writing. Staël clearly likes sibyls for a reason, and she ends text after text with a nod to the future.[18]

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Second, a lesson for the shape of Europe: Besides its local use for Balzac and Mary Shelley, the forgotten corpus of Europe's anti-Napoleonic apocalypse certainly played its part in Napoleon's career, a spur while in power, a rival voice after Moscow and Waterloo. Europe's struggle against France in 1812–1814 had a grounding in apocalyptic propaganda that we have seen recur in England, Spain, Germany, Russia, and Sweden, the genesis of the Sixth Coalition. In 1814, Madame de Chastenay lists England, Russia, and Madame de Staël as three great powers in Europe. Staël's Swedish activity is a pivotal moment in this story, pushing Bernadotte, Sweden's regent, to leave the French alliance for England and Russia with Norway as prize, which he does, and then to seize the French throne from his old fellow general in 1814, which he does not. The *Dix années d'exil* appears at last in 1821, the year of Napoleon's death. With the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, Bonapartist legend wins out, a posthumous victory of sorts over his dead enemy; but the figure of Bonaparte – *The Modern Prometheus* – remains a stumbling block for all of Europe and America's Romantic liberals, and Staël's text is part of that narrative.[19]

Third, a lesson for readers today: If Staël's works are indeed full of the future, how could we have missed it? Sibyls and prophecy are interdependent phenomena. The answer may be that of necessity, critics progress while focusing on the past. "J'écris," writes Stendhal, "comme on fume un cigare, pour passer le temps"; that thought is radically alien to Staël, whose goal is ever action. A routine cliché long argued that with the failure of 1789, Europe's Romantic dreamers abandoned action for Gérard de Nerval's ivory tower, the future for the past. Jerome McGann ended this cliché for Britain with *The Romantic Ideology* (1983), but it remains all too common elsewhere. Restoration Paris is full of wild-eyed revolutionaries, from Simón Bolívar to Adam Mickiewicz to Karl Marx, and this is the humus of French Romantic thought; the Revolution is not over. When Chou En-Lai was asked what he thought of the French Revolution, he replied, "It is too early to tell." Staël may flirt with quietism, and her *Dix années d'exil* contains a fine page on that topic (*DxA* 226), but she too is a fighter, and like Byron, Victor Hugo, or Alessandro Manzoni, like Heinrich Heine, Alexander Pushkin, or Henry David Thoreau, she does not intend to give up.[20]

This brings us back, in closing, to the question of why the *Dix années d'exil* was abandoned during the summer of 1813. Here are some answers, among many: Looking back on the past from England, and with her battle won, perhaps Staël found these grapes of wrath too bitter. Perhaps she felt

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that Napoleon's fall was not the time to attack him and risk attacking France; perhaps the new Europe taking shape brought new work to be done; perhaps she felt constricted by this form. As Margot Irvine notes, "Le récit de vie d'une femme au début du dix-neuvième siècle est un genre particulièrement codifié." I argue in Chapter 9 for Staël's formal novelty in the *Dix années d'exil* – her new Romantic heroine, elaborated in her novels and plays, here steps through fiction's mirror into autobiography, a device that continues her intricate game between public and private spheres and allows Staël to offer herself and Napoleon as rival visions of France, if not of Europe. That would not prevent Staël's dissatisfaction with the form, and indeed she opens with a disclaimer: "Ce n'est point pour occuper le public de moi que j'ai résolu de raconter les circonstances de dix années d'exil" (45). But as François Rosset argues, this formal disavowal is the key to something bigger. If Staël is too small for center stage, the same applies to Elba's fallen tyrant, and what counts for the future is the system he represents, which did not vanish with the fall of Paris in 1814. At the peak of Napoleon's power, *De l'Allemagne* worked hard to label this man exceptional, suggesting that after his death, "history will resume its normal march"; the *Considérations* resituate Napoleon and Robespierre together in a story that begins in England in 1649 and ends up tracing the same despotism in the France of Louis XVIII. Contingency has its price, after all, and the price for the *Dix années* was to be abandoned by its author in favor of other work.[21]

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