CHAPTER 3

Madame de Staël, Minister for War?
Narbonne's "English" Program under the Assemblée législative

> Madame de Staël a dirigé toute la machine du gouvernement depuis le mois de décembre.
>
> *Correspondance politique*, January 18, 1792[1]

In this chapter, we will focus on a working partnership. The traditional narrative of the revolutionary Assemblée législative (1791–1792) offers an inexplicable couple: an *idéologue* Madame de Staël combined with a failed Brumairian Louis de Narbonne, a society thinker and the plotter of a coup. "Quelle gloire pour Mme de Staël et quel plaisir pour elle," wrote the queen when Narbonne became minister for war, "d'avoir ainsi toute l'armée . . . à elle!"[2] Marie-Antoinette saw here a salon intrigue, and historians have repeated this old topos of the weak but authoritarian man and his intriguing mistress. But analyzing the couple's writings offers the means to grow beyond this legend of caprice and iron fist. We will find the trace of a team effort divided between two professionals, and a progressive program for which Staël appears to have been the inspiration, if not the author.

Throughout her life, Staël never stopped writing; it was surprising to find almost no composition of hers during this key period. But she also helped others to express themselves, as Jean-Charles-Léonard Sismondi, August Wilhelm Schlegel, Charles-Victor de Bonstetten, or Benjamin Constant attest: At home from birth within European politics but banned as a woman from direct action, she spent her life encouraging the men she came across. And Narbonne, perhaps the natural son of Louis XV, could aspire to the highest rank. On June 11, 1793, she sends him her *Projet d'ouvrage sur les constitutionnels*: "J'écrirai de mon côté, mais votre paresse vous ferait prendre tout ce que je vous enverrais . . . Quinze jours après cette lettre, vous recevrez la première partie."[3] Narbonne in fact published

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little, and here is the proof that Staël collaborated in his writings. We lack such proofs for his speeches to the ministry, a period when their correspondence has disappeared; we have no Narbonne manuscript with her revisions, nor trace of any direct counsel.

Staël's part here will remain then in the domain of hypothesis; the connections I allege come entirely from examining the texts themselves. But this is one of the keys to the Coppet method. The group's writings were born in a common fund of lost conversations: Any hunt for sources here may be badly reasoned, if not a distortion. Renouncing any search for textual priorities, I propose doing something more useful by proving that these writers share a common fund of thought, and that there exists what we may call a Coppet program. That is what I propose to do for the ministry of Narbonne.

Narbonne is named minister for war on December 6, 1791, and gives his first speech the following day. He is dismissed by the king on March 9, 1792, the day after the support of the three generals published in the *Journal de Paris* and of his unfortunate call to the "membres les plus distingués de cette assemblée" (*CRF* 270). War is declared on April 20. For these ninety-four days, we have forty speeches of Narbonne before the Assemblée. He debates with his colleagues but also inspects the borders and prepares France for war, his principal function. Jacques Godechot is mistaken in repeating that "il contribua, mais sans grande énergie, à préparer l'armée française au conflit" (*CRF* 634 n. 29). Contemporaries insist instead on the boundless energy that distinguishes Narbonne from his colleagues, as reflected in the Assemblée debates after his dismissal: "[L]e seul homme qui dans ce moment paraissait au niveau de ses devoirs ... a paru hétérogène à un ministère qui semble avoir adopté l'inertie comme système de sa conduite," says the Constitutionnel Louis Ramond de Carbonnières. Rouyer, whom the Jacobins respect, says the same thing: "Celui qui avait de l'activité est renvoyé et celui précisément que vous avez hautement improuvé ... n'est pas remplacé." Antoine Barnave says that "le renvoi de Narbonne tient du vertige," and adds, "Moi, j'aimais Narbonne."[4]

People have reproached Narbonne long enough with a ministerial negligence he could not forestall. It is time for rehabilitation; he had his hands tied, more even by the Assemblée than by a powerless king. Day after day from December 18 onwards, he repeats the same request to the deputies: for the 51,000 men the army lacks. On January 23, he asks "quel inexplicable sentiment pourrait entraîner à vouloir la guerre, et à rejeter tous les moyens d'avoir une armée"; on the 25th, they rule at last on

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recruitment. On February 26, he insists again on "la stagnation dans laquelle se trouve mon administration" for lack of a response to his requests and gives legislators a list of twenty letters he has sent them since October that remain unanswered. Preparations for war were indeed inadequate, but the minister could do little.

It is in the speeches of Narbonne to the Assemblée, rather than in his other activities, that one might find Staël's influence. The lion's share deal with technical considerations. But on that arid and coherent background, whose style was visibly not a priority, emerge passages that are more philosophical and independent of the argument. Thus, the minister turns on March 6 to history: "*Deux pays ne peuvent jamais offrir des similitudes parfaites; mais l'esprit humain cherche l'expérience à travers les Empires et les siècles*." (I use italics in this chapter to indicate a Staëlian tone or echo in Narbonne's texts.) If such phrases seem in a certain fashion *alien* to the object of Narbonne's speeches, they correspond directly to Staël's writing and priorities. In the absence of manuscripts, one must repeat that Narbonne may have written everything himself; I desire above all to underline the couple's shared thought, but every circumstance suggests actual collaboration.

Some passages in Narbonne's speeches find a precise echo in Staël's texts. On January 11, 1792, Narbonne says to the deputies that "*l'Assemblée constituante a renversé toutes les erreurs; la gloire qui vous reste doit se composer de bienfaits réels*." Staël said in 1791 that the benefits of the Assemblée would be slow but solid: "La révolution permettait des succès plus rapides; chaque jour produisait un bien, en détruisant un abus."[5] In his report on the borders of February 18, Narbonne suggests that "*les chefs dont les opinions sont les plus constitutionnelles, sont en même-tems ceux dont les régimens donnent l'exemple . . . de la plus exacte discipline*." In her 1818 *Considérations,* Staël will oppose the army of the virtuous Jean Victor Marie Moreau, which "avoit conservé toute la simplicité républicaine," and that of Napoleon Bonaparte, which "s'écartoit chaque jour davantage de l'esprit patriotique" (*CRF* 327–328). Narbonne here calls the army a "*citadelle mobile*"; in *De l'Allemagne*, Staël compares the Austrian armies to "des forteresses ambulantes" (*DA* I 104). Lastly, in 1793, Narbonne in England and Staël in Switzerland intervene, the one in the king's trial, the other in the queen's trial, each insisting on the *rhetoric* of the accusers: "[D]ans l'accusateur," she says, "l'éloquence même est un assassinat" (*Reine* 44); Narbonne declares for his part that "*tous les caractères de l'assassinat appartiennent déjà à l'instruction du procès. Les expressions des orateurs qui ont parlé dans cette cause, loin de rappeler l'impartialité du juge, surpassent la féroce ivresse de la vengeance personnelle*."[6]

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Other passages in Narbonne's speeches, without an exact equivalent in Staël's works, surprise either by their style – "*l'ardeur inquiète de la liberté*," he says on December 14 – or by a typically Staëlian rhetoric that is somewhat less suitable for a minister for war. His first speech on December 7 thus offers four Staëlian ideas in three lines: "*[C]e sentiment d'honneur, caractère distinctif des Français . . . qui ne leur rappelant plus des idées féodales, doit devenir l'impulsion de tous en cessant d'être le privilège de quelques-uns*." On January 11, 1792, he speaks to the deputies of the "*principe qui vous interdit toute conquête, . . . ce principe qui est un des plus beaux titres de la constitution à l'amour des peuples*," adding that "*il a pu en coûter, peut-être, d'être d'un parti tout puissant, alors qu'il pouvoit abuser de sa force; mais on nous menace d'un assez grand nombre d'ennemis pour faire cesser ce scrupule*." Two weeks later, on the 23rd, Narbonne speaks of resigning: "*Cette résolution prise par un homme de bonne foi, peut produire un moment de découragement dans ceux qui lui ressemblent*." One last example of this resemblance in tone and method appears on February 24, in a discussion of the new "drapeaux aux trois couleurs" that had just been sent out to the troops. The old flags would be sequestered; Narbonne speaks of an officer "qui les a portés de l'autre côté du Rhin," and sums up his argument in a metaphor, as Staël does so often: "*Cortez, résolu de faire la conquête du Mexique, détruisit ses vaisseaux pour mettre ses soldats entre la victoire et la mort*."[7]

Such phrases, which may seem independent of the argument, are more than an ornament Narbonne employs to decorate his speeches. In these general ideas, he shows views larger than those of his clerks; we find there what we may call his personal program.

Let us recall what this program is, and how Narbonne and Staël are here distinguished. These are circumstantial speeches; and Staël, despite her earlier panegyric to Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte de Guibert, another military theoretician, is unacquainted with recruitment problems or the relations between soldier and citizen. As is natural, Narbonne insists on the value of order and discipline; he speaks more often than she does of his confidence in Louis XVI. But a Staëlian model serves as a basis for his thought, which one may resume thus: The great danger in the interior is the mistrust that hamstrings all political action and leaves the field open to both extremes. One must submit the Assemblée to a centrist coalition that alone will represent silent France, since the Revolution has brought us a truly popular government. This government will unite order and liberty and be directed by an aristocracy of talent. Those who oppose it, from inside or outside, reject the will of the people: They are rebels, a "*minorité*

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turbulente," as Narbonne says on March 6, a Staëlian idea if ever there was one. War, finally, can only be excused to defend the new constitution. This model rejoins in every point that of Staël in her series of *Réflexions sur la paix* in 1794–1795, and it differs little from that of Constant, Staël's new friend, in his famous later brochures of 1796–1797.[8]

"Quel fatal sentiment que celui de la défiance," Staël will say in 1795, still obsessed by the idea of a centrist coalition after the failures of Jacques Necker and Narbonne (*RPI* 176). Narbonne notes the refusal of confidence coming to him from the Jacobins in particular, which makes him stumble at every step. Under the empire, he will say to Villemain that he thought it necessary "d'agir sur une grande partie de l'Assemblée par la confiance, l'union, la solidarité du pouvoir sincèrement offerte et donnée."[9] But he senses the problem as he comes to power on December 10, 1791, when he begs the Assemblée to "faire connaître l'ordre du jour aux ministres" so that he can "en avoir connaissance autrement que par les journaux." He adds, "*[N]os intérêts, nos ennemis sont communs*," and regrets these "*défiances sans objet, ces précautions pour avoir des rapports avec nous*" that reign in the Législative. His speech of January 11 offers a sample of revolutionary rhetoric that recalls the young Staël: "*La confiance fût-elle même un acte de courage, il importeroit au peuple comme aux individus de croire à la prudence de la hardiesse*." On March 6, three days before his fall, Narbonne is still speaking of it: "*[O]n peut jeter une sorte de défaveur sur le besoin que j'ai de parler sans cesse de la nécessité de la confiance mutuelle*." He quotes the Americans, a people who "*avait aussi des ennemis dans son sein; mais il n'imagina, pour les détruire, d'autre moyen que la confiance en ses amis*." Gilbert de La Fayette and the Triumvirs – Adrien Duport, Barnave, Alexandre de Lameth – shared these ideas; for Narbonne, the terms are Staëlian.

The fear of the center's usurpation by extreme parties is among the key ideas in Staël's thought. It dominates in the *Considérations*, published in 1818, but Staël already writes in 1794 of a "traité secret des Jacobins et des aristocrates, pour anéantir ensemble tout l'intervalle de raison qui les sépare" (*Paix* 95). Already in 1791, before Narbonne's failure, she insists on the direct link between this reign of extremes and the silence of the uneasy majority: "[Q]uand les ennemis de la Révolution semblent d'accord avec ceux qu'ils ont l'air de haïr, pour faire durer les craintes . . . la Nation, en suspens, n'ose pas se rassurer" (*Signes* 561). The nation's disquiet is a central topos of Narbonne's speeches at this same time. Staël also sees a connection between extreme ideas and ambitious mediocrities, another idea we find in Narbonne after his dismissal, speaking on 2 April of

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"*rapports secrets entre les ennemis connus et extérieurs de la Constitution, et des hommes, qui prenant le nom de patriotes . . . semblent avides de détruire tous ceux, qui dans toutes les carrières, méritent un peu de confiance.*"[10]

In 1802, Staël dedicates her *Delphine* to "la France silencieuse" (*Delphine* 90). Facing calumny and exile, this will become a recurring theme in her thought, but it dates from 1790 at the latest, the year when Necker's fall brings her crushing disappointment. On April 16, 1791, she deepens her thought in a long article published in Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard's journal *Le Publiciste* titled *A quels signes peut-on connaître quelle est l'opinion de la majorité de la nation?* She there evokes the moderate party she believes destined to govern, "un parti plus fort . . . et plus énergique que les deux extrêmes opposés," and proclaims that "si les chefs d'un tel parti sont rares, rien n'est plus nombreux que l'armée qui attend leur signal pour savoir où trouver le bien qu'elle désire."[11] Narbonne, who speaks before the Assemblée, cannot offer so direct and precise a discourse. He thus declares that "*la Constitution seule peut rallier la France*" and that "*une immense majorité veut la liberté*" (January 11, March 6), reserving thereby a place for order and liberty at the same time – which incidentally had the result of sidelining both aristocrats and Jacobins. In her 1791 article, Staël also said "que la majorité de la nation veut et voudra toujours l'égalité et la liberté; mais qu'elle désire l'ordre." On April 12, 1792, after his departure, Narbonne asks that one "se rallie à la Loi": "*[O]n doit porter au scrupule, une opinion dont le véritable triomphe peut seul assurer l'ordre et la liberté.*"

The excellent historian Georges Lefebvre has argued that Staël and Narbonne joined action to words. With the Feuillant colleagues of Narbonne, such as Barnave, not wanting war, Nicolas de Condorcet may, he remarks, have brought to Narbonne the bellicist leaders of the Gironde to form a centrist alliance of circumstance. Staël speaks in fact in the *Considérations* of "l'ascendant de M. de Narbonne sur le parti populaire" (*CRF* 270); but Béatrice Jasinski has neatly distinguished true from false in all this political to-and-fro. War did not unite Coppet and the Gironde; the search for a bridge between king and nation did.[12]

With Staël and Narbonne, it is in fact often a question of the people's will. Staël even arrives, without having read Johann Gottfried von Herder, at ideas on the *Zeitgeist* that will triumph in the nineteenth century: "Dès qu'il y a un mouvement public," she writes in 1794, "il crée toujours des hommes pour en profiter." She thus condemns the royalist émigrés, who "ne voyaient qu'une émeute dans une *ère* de l'esprit humain" (*Paix* 93). Narbonne makes the same observation on January 11 and March 6, 1792: "*Quand la volonté générale est aussi fortement prononcée qu'elle l'est en*

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France, en arrêter l'effet n'est au pouvoir de personne"; "*En considérant la force publique en elle-même on trouve qu'elle n'existe jamais que par le rapprochement des opinions vers un homme ou vers une idée*" (March 6). Many similar phrases can be found in Narbonne's speeches: "*[V]oudrions-nous laisser penser que notre gloire dépendait d'un seul homme, et qu'un siècle ne rappelle qu'un nom!*" (December 14). This will be a leitmotif of Staël's in speaking of Napoleon. Even formulas of Narbonne's such as "*l'esprit public est la véritable force de tout gouvernement libre*" (February 29) rejoin a thematics made fashionable by Necker's *Compte rendu au Roi* in 1781.

Opposing this general will, Narbonne sees only rebels: "*Plus une Nation a de rebelles à combattre, plus il lui importe d'engager, par son estime, tous ceux qui se rallient à sa cause*" (January 11). For Narbonne, the term refers primarily to émigrés; in December 1791, he calls on the officers in Metz, where soldiers were deserting, not to hesitate "entre le roi et des rebelles," and adds on January 11 that "*la cause de la noblesse est étrangère aux rois comme aux peuples*." If the aristocrats were undermining the constitution by their resistance, the Jacobins for their part calumniated the executive power en bloc with impunity; but Narbonne, already suspect to the left as much for his birth as for his sympathies – he had accompanied the Mesdames de France, the daughters of Louis XV, to Rome – cannot condemn them explicitly. Writing in spring 1791 in her friend Suard's journal, Staël does not have this problem; she can fight on two fronts at once, as throughout her life. Thus, she notes that aristocrats and Jacobins "conviennent également de déférer à la volonté générale" but are very far from it. She further declares that "la nation ne partage aucun des excès des Jacobins," while writing of the émigrés that "il ne faut plus compter parmi les citoyens français ces partisans de l'Ancien Régime" (*Signes* 560–564).

And yet, others too claimed to be speaking in the name of the people. One finds in the term *populaire* the weak point in the model Narbonne offers, the source of the incomprehension and defeat of the moderates. In 1795, Staël regrets "l'époque de l'Assemblée constituante, lorsqu'il n'y avait en France que deux partis" (*RPI* 142). Narbonne does not accept in 1792 that the Législative might be different: "*[C]omme on s'est plu depuis quelque temps à séparer le parti populaire des amis de la paix et des partisans de la guerre, je crois utile de déjouer ce nouveau moyen de division*" (March 6). What then is this popular party? Narbonne speaks of it on March 6 in his *Opinion des trois généraux*, a sort of manifesto of the moderate coalition they were trying to construct. Today, he says, one can still "compter sur l'esprit national …, mais … *que deviendrait-il si l'Assemblée nationale*

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laissait s'établir deux partis dans le parti populaire, en continuant à souffrir que plusieurs de ses membres parlassent du roi avec défiance . . . [?] *Les amis de la liberté ont besoin du roi, le roi a besoin des amis de la liberté.*" Narbonne here expresses a wish sooner than a reality, which he defines on December 14 by saying that "*la patrie et le roi ne sont plus qu'un*"; he always refused to believe in the king's double game, that unavoidable rock on which the hopes of the Constitutionnels were to founder.

In reality, the monarchical constitution of 1791 was assailed on every side. Jérôme Pétion de Villeneuve himself writes in the *Moniteur* on February 27, 1792, "On injurie, on viole tous les jours la Constitution, et voilà ce qui aigrit le peuple qui la veut et qui l'aime." Staël proclaims in 1791 "que l'existence d'un roi, armé par la constitution d'une force suffisante pour faire exécuter les lois, était nécessaire à la France"; she does not accept the Republic until after her encounter with Adolph Ribbing, in late 1793. Narbonne who, say the historians, was bellicist, announces to the Assemblée on March 6 that "pour se décider sur la guerre ou la paix, il faut savoir seulement si les étrangers renoncent ou prétendent se mêler de notre Constitution," an argument that returns often in his speeches. He develops his thought the same day; to protect the constitution, one must strengthen the army – not to invite war, but to prevent it: "[S]e montrer prêt à la faire est le moyen le plus sûr de l'éviter."[13]

Here in résumé is the political program laid out by Narbonne before the Assemblée législative. Some have suggested that he had elements of a second program he kept under wraps. Lefebvre speaks of it, leaning perhaps overmuch on Antoine-François Bertrand de Moleville, who detested Narbonne. Certain details remain clear, however: The five roll calls per day that Narbonne imposes prevent visits to the clubs; the transfer of the National Guard into the regular army, a desperate solution he comes up with to cover France's 51,000-soldier gap, would result in "le désarmement du peuple." His speeches to the deputies may in fact have been two-edged; but what partisan of order likes to see an armed crowd?[14]

Staël's collaboration could be quite useful for Narbonne in this circumstance. The minister was flooded with work; the executive was inert if not hostile; war threatened abroad, the country was in disorder, the Assemblée mistrustful. To save the state, Narbonne could not count on the executive; he needed to win a majority in the Assemblée, and, for that, to become popular. Since he needed to speak and speak well every day before the deputies, why not let himself be aided by Staël, who had so visible a gift for the eloquence of the tribunal?

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Until now, this chapter has neglected the question of political context, but one cannot be entirely silent about it. The Constitution of 1791 leaned on the king, and the king had already fled to Varennes. His household was so aristocratic that the duc d'Orléans was spat on there, on the head. In an otiose Council, Claude Antoine de Lessart in Foreign Affairs fought against war, and Antoine-François Bertrand de Moleville in the navy favored the counterrevolution. Frankly, there was no more government. Neither the Montagne nor the Gironde yet dominated at the Assemblée; but they already had for them the clubs and the gallery, and their constant harassment played on the mistrust – well-earned, after all – of the Assemblée in general. Narbonne says it in his *Mémoire au Roi* on February 24: "*La méfiance des intentions du roi est une des plus terribles armes des républicains.*"[15]

People also distrusted the army, because France in 1792 possessed two distinct armed forces: a disciplined and professional regular army, suspected of aristocracy despite mass emigration of its officers, and the armed citizens of 1789, the National Guard. With Narbonne wanting to submit the guards to the army, one can understand the resistance of the deputies. It in fact took the disasters of 1793 to create a national army that the nation no longer distrusted.

In a revealing paradox, it was precisely the support of the generals that brought about Narbonne's fall on March 9, 1792. Toward the end of February, as Lefebvre writes, "un redressement vigoureux ne pouvait être ajourné." Paris was in disorder, the southeast in a state of civil war; desertions and mutinies continued in the army; "l'ascendant de Narbonne lui-même s'était évanoui." In Narbonne's opinion, chaos loomed. Jasinski detects a triple attempt by Narbonne to save the state, by having himself named prime minister in the English fashion: appeal to the king first on February 24 – his *Mémoire au Roi* was put in the *armoire de fer* – then to the queen toward the end of February and finally to the nation on March 9. According to his enemy Bertrand de Moleville, when Narbonne suggested to Marie-Antoinette that she name him prime minister, she "lui demanda *s'il était fou.*"[16] It is clear that Narbonne sought a solution to the crisis in leaning at last on the Girondins and the army, and that he failed. Much has here been said of Staël's influence, and in fact this *coup de main* was only a vigorous extrapolation of the political model Narbonne and Staël had been promoting since December 1791.

This dream of a popular king and prime minister irresistibly recalls the precedent of Necker as well as the British example so honored at Coppet. Staël may even have collaborated on the article on this topic that appeared

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on March 9, 1792, the day of the catastrophe: "Observations sur le ministère anglais."[17]

On February 24, the leaders of the army are in Paris. Narbonne, at the council session, presents his *Mémoire au Roi*, which Lefebvre and Jasinski thus summarize: The extreme parties, divided on everything else, are, on a single matter, "*d'une scandaleuse conformité . . . [I]ls sont ligués pour tout détruire*." Chaos is looming, thanks to "l'inertie du gouvernement." The king has only to govern, leaning on the Constitutionnel party and on bourgeois proprietors, but their ardor depends on their confidence. They must be certain that the king is truly attached to the constitution. This memoir opens a ministerial crisis – the circumstances, "menaçantes pour Bertrand et Lessart, semblaient accroître les chances de leur adversaire," that is to say Narbonne, because the report of the committees against Bertrand de Moleville is ready at last; and on February 28, Prussia declares that a move against the émigrés in Trier would be a casus belli. On March 1, Narbonne allegedly says to the Council, "[S]i j'avais en ce moment cinq ministres à proposer au roi en votre place, je les lui proposerais."[18]

Marshal Luckner appears before the Assemblée on February 26; on March 3, General La Fayette deplores the division of the Council and attacks Bertrand de Moleville: "[S]a retraite serait aussi utile au roi que celle de M. de Narbonne lui serait funeste." On March 5, the *Journal général de l'Europe* exposes this imbroglio. On the 6th, the *Courrier extraordinaire* returns to the topic to support Narbonne: "Quoique abandonné de presque tous ses confrères, . . . il aura les patriotes pour lui . . ., s'il sait apprécier les circonstances, il peut . . . s'acquérir une gloire immortelle . . ., il faut qu'il sache s'entourer de l'opinion publique." That *opinion publique* may resemble the general will so often mentioned at the time. And yet, this information "ne pouvait guère venir que de Narbonne," as Lefebvre puts it, "[P]laçant le ministre sous l'égide de la faction Brissot, il le compromettait irrémédiablement." On March 8, finally, Narbonne asks at the tribune "que l'Assemblée nationale se prononce fortement pour l'ordre." That very morning, the *Journal de Paris* had published the letters of support of the three leaders of the army and Narbonne's response: "Cette publication, qu'on attribua à Mme de Staël et aux Girondins autant qu'à Narbonne, fit l'effet d'une bombe." "Par son intrigue militaire," Lefebvre concludes, "le ministre . . . s'était vu abandonner par presque tout le monde . . . [L]e temps des brumairiens n'était pas encore venu." From 1792 to 1947, Jacobin historiography thus sought to see in Narbonne a new Oliver Cromwell or Bonaparte in search of a throne; but it was Pitt he was hoping to become.[19]

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Conclusion

This chapter is a tribute to the earlier studies of Lefebvre, Jasinski, and Jean Poperen. Here I add a new panel, tracing the direct relation between Narbonne's speeches and his efforts at national recovery; in this light, Narbonne regains a political responsibility that radically alters the meaning of his ministry. He was no Brumairian; what he sought from December onward was a popular link between the throne and the Assemblée, as repeated in his speeches, like the link Necker had established in 1789. Such a perspective allows new insights into the neglected role of the liberal nobility in this "bourgeois Revolution," into the practice of the Constitutionnels during this period, and into their part in the declaration of war.

Staël's role in this ministry also acquires new meaning. Legend accords her two actions above all: the nomination of the Feuillant ministry on December 6 and its fall on March 10. She is thus attributed two *intrigante*'s caprices, two acts born in the *oikos* and which touch on the male revolutionary *polis* only by coincidence; in between, one might say, she busied herself making noise in her salon. This chapter suggests on the contrary to what extent Narbonne's program reflects her political thought.

Whatever its extent, the collaboration with Narbonne also marks a determinative episode in the career and thought of Necker's daughter. Staël's future friendships bear its traces, as with her desire to support her friends Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, Ribbing, Constant, and others. Her ideas on war, on politics, on the Revolution, from 1792 to 1817, are affected by it; that is a vast subject I can only touch on here. And if Staël indeed collaborated on these speeches, as every circumstance suggests, it would be almost the only political writing of hers to survive from before the shame, she might say, of the Terror. One might find in it the program she could have proposed to save the state from invasion, at a catastrophic moment in the history of France. For the rest of her life, her feeling of liberal responsibility will lead her to seek – with some success, as it happens – this same definitional influence on the future of her country.[20]

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