CHAPTER 17

Voices Lost?
Staël and Slavery, 1786–1830

> Le nécessaire en toute chose a quelque chose de révoltant quand ce sont les possesseurs du superflu qui le mesurent.
>
> *DA* [1810], I 275–276[1]

Staël devoted her life to the idea of freedom; we will see in this final chapter that, unlike many, she also fought against slavery, in life and through her fictions. *Mirza*'s narrator is African; *Pauline* opens in Haiti. Staël's later works from exile contrast reality and metaphor – spiritual slavery, women's domestic slavery, ancient slavery, serfdom in Eastern Europe. As Napoleon falls, Staël meets William Wilberforce. She publishes a pamphlet calling for a world ban on the slave trade, prefaces her daughter's translation of his *Lettre à Talleyrand*, and campaigns for him in Paris. Her last book ends with talk of the slave trade. After her death, friends and heirs continued her work; perhaps no other Romantics in Europe did as much. Where François-René de Chateaubriand's father, for instance, bought Combourg with profits from slavery, three generations of Staël's family worked in succession to end it.

Today, what does this matter? First, it rebuts a myth that Staël and her circle cared only for the rich. Second, it helps to rewrite what ideas like Romantic and liberal meant in postrevolutionary Europe. Third, to the millions taken from Africa, it returns the near victory of 1814 after that of Wilberforce in England in 1807; more voices in the dark over the next thirty years; and the gift of fiction, which offered models for the freed self.

1786–1795: *Mirza,* the Neckers, and the Société des Amis des Noirs

Director of the Compagnie des Indes, Staël's father Jacques Necker is still an orthodox mercantilist in his 1773 *Eloge de Colbert*. By 1784, the

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ex-minister's *De l'administration des finances de France* notes that in the colonies, wealth is measured by the number of those who suffer; he adds that unless an international pact were possible, abolition of slavery would benefit economic rivals. State payments to slavers increased in his absence, 1784–1788, but in the years before the cotton market exploded, the sugar-based world slave trade also declined: 105 French ships were recorded in 1785 versus 31 and 28 in 1791 and 1792. Necker returns to power in 1788: In May 1789, opening the Estates General as effective prime minister of France, he proposes abolishing the slave trade. He adds that of the state's 3,800,000 livres in total grants, 2,400,000 went to slavers, and that Louis XVI has halved these payments – quietly refusing any credit for this idea from his own *Rapport fait au Roi*. Payments are suspended until March 1793, and abolition follows on February 15, 1794. A week after Necker, Wilberforce begins his long campaign in Parliament, citing Necker's example. His ally Thomas Clarkson contacts the Neckers. As Clarkson recalls in 1822, "I received great assistance ... both from Monsieur, and also from Madame Necker, the latter of whom exerted her influence in various ways in my favour." The new Société des Amis des Noirs, led by Jacques Pierre Brissot, Étienne Clavière, Nicolas de Condorcet, and Étienne Dumont, all friends of Necker's rival Honoré Gabriel de Mirabeau, thanks Necker but regrets his compromise; Necker replies "assez sèchement," and the debate produces various pamphlets, amid the ferment of Revolution. Meanwhile, Madame Necker joins their Société. Guillaume Thomas Raynal and Denis Diderot frequent her salon, where Bernardin de Saint-Pierre first read *Paul et Virginie*. As Clarkson suggests, Madame Necker may have been more committed than her husband.[2]

Staël too may have moved Necker toward action. *Mirza* dates from 1786, when Stanislas de Boufflers, governor of Senegal, brought two slaves to France: Staël's Ximéo, and the Ourika whom her friend Claire de Duras made famous. Doris Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney have stressed Staël's new voice; Staël avoids clichés of violence or sexuality, focusing "on Mirza, a black woman and a poetess." Identifying the author with a Black character "is the opposite of what happens in a work like *Bug Jargal*" – or in the work of Prosper Mérimée, or other male Romantics except perhaps Charles de Rémusat. Like Duras, Staël's gender "allowed her to be inclusive racially." Although our narrator is male, "both author and addressee are women," as is Mirza, who enters singing of "l'horreur de l'esclavage." Mirza thus stands alone outside the slave system. After her eloquence saves Ximéo and herself from brutal enslavement, she chooses to

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die "while Ximéo heads a European-style plantation, answering the naïve and patronizing questions of the European narrator." As Jean Starobinski argues, eloquence since Longinus has been a litmus test for free societies. Ximéo redeems himself by telling Mirza's story, addressing the narrator with "an astonishing 'tu'" – the new *thou* of fraternity – as the tale concludes.[3]

Three forces shape Staël's text. First, it answers Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte de Guibert's *Zulmé* (1786), which presents Staël as a Greek priestess and ends in a declaration of love. Staël thus launches her career by seeing herself as African. Second, Staël also draws on her talks with Boufflers, which she records for the king of Sweden as wife of the Swedish ambassador, and on literary tradition. Edward Seeber fills a page with parallels between *Mirza*, Louis Claude de Saint-Martin's *Ziméo*, which had seven editions in six years, and Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, among the nine best-selling English novels in France during the period. Staël's novelty is best judged in this context: Comparing her hero to the Belvedere Apollo is worthy but repeats Saint-Martin, whereas her stress on Black independence and eloquence, even her total condemnation of slavery, mark a radical break with the past. Finally, Mirza is in fact a Persian man's name, today as it was in Joseph Addison's *Vision* or in Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*; Staël and her successors, from Joseph Patrat in 1797 with *Mirza, ou le préjugé de l'amitié* to George Sand with *Le Poème de Myrza* in 1835, uniquely make Mirza female and tied to the slave trade. This may seem proof that Staël knew Gouges's *Zamore et Mirza*, read at the Théâtre-Français in 1785 and retitled *L'Esclavage des Noirs* when performed there in 1789; except that only Gouges's rewrite was African, thus postdating Staël. Mirza's sex change aptly signposts a female abolitionist tradition here, running from Behn through Staël and Gouges to Sand and Duras; author and public alike know that the name was male, making this change no innocent act.[4]

Two other short *récits* continue Staël's involvement: *Zulma* and the *Histoire de Pauline*, set in Saint-Domingue, whose famous opening – "Dans ces climats brûlants, où les hommes, uniquement occupés d'un commerce et d'un gain barbares" – echoes the first sentence of Saint-Martin's *Ziméo.* Staël claims she wrote *Pauline* in 1786, but there are signs that it records her breakup with Louis de Narbonne in 1794. Narbonne's wife owned sugar plantations in the Saint-Domingue Staël attacks, rights Staël had defended in 1792: "[I]l faut . . . qu'on rétablisse votre fortune en Amérique." Staël's salon at that time welcomed both the *négrophile* Girondins and the planters' Club Massiac, with Antoine Barnave, the

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Lameths, and Pierre Victor de Malouet, whom she later saved like Narbonne or Mathieu de Montmorency from the guillotine. Publishing *Mirza* and *Pauline* in 1795, a year after the Convention abolishes slavery, thus helps to establish Staël's uncertain revolutionary credentials. Pauline is married off at twelve to a slaver, like Madame de Lebensei in Staël's novel *Delphine*; the bitter confessional feel continues in *Zulma*, whose Native American heroine finds her lover Fernand with a rival named, curiously, Mirza, kills him, and tells the story to her judges. Narbonne's intendant Félix Ferdinand was in Saint-Domingue; *Zulma* is set on the nearby Orinoco, though Staël's African and American heroines share weapons and names, showing that local color is not her priority.[5]

1796–1813: History, Metaphor, and Local Acts of Kindness

With abolition in 1794, French slavery debate lost focus for the next twenty years. Bonaparte's restoration of slavery – with the ocean British – touched France itself little until his fall, though it did make the task of British abolitionism easier. Staël's work parallels these events, with slavery largely a metaphor from history until 1814. Above all, Staël equates slaves and women, as Flora Tristan will. *De l'influence des passions* remarks, "La nature et la société ont déshérité la moitié de l'espèce humaine" (*IP* 207); Staël ghostwrote as much for Charles Maurice de Talleyrand in 1791, and an 1814 preface to her *Lettres sur Rousseau* talks of "esclavage ... domestique" (*LR* 46). Corinne says, "[E]nchaîne-moi comme une esclave à ta destinée" (*Corinne* 387); Sapho asks Cléone, "[N]e peux-tu pas me prendre pour ton esclave?" (*Sapho* 917). *De la littérature* elaborates: "Tout se ressentait, chez les anciens ... de l'odieuse institution de l'esclavage." Only with Christianity did women begin to be "de moitié dans l'association humaine" (*DL* 138–139). Since the manuscript *Des circonstances actuelles*, Staël's remarks have softened on ancient Athens, where slaves outnumbered citizens four to one (*CA* 374); in *De la littérature*, she notes only its small population, where "les femmes n'étaient de rien dans la vie" (*DL* 83). "Chaque fois," she concludes, "qu'une classe inférieure est sortie de l'esclavage ou l'avilissement, l'espèce humaine s'est encore perfectionnée" (*DL* 11–12). A telling moment in *Corinne* shows that Staël's sympathy depends not only on her gender, but also on her own wounding from prejudice. Corinne is meeting Oswald: "[E]n commençant sa toilette, ses cheveux noirs, son teint un peu bruni par le soleil d'Italie, ses traits prononcés ... lui inspirèrent du découragement sur ses charmes" (*Corinne* 447). Staël's dark-haired heroines are all daughters of Mirza and

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will face blonde rivals throughout the Romantic age. In 1890, the Black author Mrs. A. E. Johnson returns to Staël for her moral novel, *Clarence and Corinne; or, God's Way*, and the moment bears thought, as suffering leads her Black Corinne to autonomy.[6]

In 1802, after Britain's return of slaveholding Martinique, Bonaparte reinstitutes slavery, thanks in part to Joséphine's *parti créole*. The French slave trade briefly resumes during the months of the Paix d'Amiens; slave entry to France is banned; freed soldiers remain free in theory. Staël and François-René de Chateaubriand both evoke Toussaint Louverture; Staël writes to Joseph Bonaparte, "Pouvez-vous nier la perfectibilité de l'espèce humaine quand les noirs commencent à parler constitution?" Chateaubriand meanwhile writes from his Breton château – bought with slave trade proceeds – "Qui oserait encore plaider la cause des Noirs après les crimes qu'ils ont commis?" In September 1803, Staël writes of Toussaint in Haiti, captured in June 1802, and Magloire Pélage in re-enslaved Guadeloupe, where 8,000 died. The crass refusal to negotiate with Toussaint has lost the island, with resistors drowned, Staël remarks, as in the Vendée: "[O]n en a jeté dix-huit cents à la mer sans forme de procès. Il y a à présent aux galères de Toulon des généraux nègres en habit de généraux, et tout ce que la violence et le mépris de l'homme peuvent faire inventer de cruel a été prodigué contre ces infortunés. Pour te donner une idée de la législation contre cette couleur," she describes Pélage, who had run Guadeloupe but was seized like Toussaint and taken to France. Bonaparte, she writes, wanted Pélage condemned, but the judges were insisting on actually judging him: "J'ai parlé beaucoup en faveur de ce Pelage, sans lequel nous n'aurions pas gardé la Guadeloupe." Her informant, a general, "trouve bien vilain aux nègres de se pendre, sans égards pour leur propriétaire." Madame de Pange suggests that Pélage's release in November was "grâce sans doute à l'intervention de Mme de Staël"; this may indeed be true. Staël was exiled for ten years two weeks later.[7]

1814–1817: Direct Action and Wilberforce

Fleeing to London via Moscow in 1812–1813, Staël has a thousand plans to end Napoleon's tyranny: putting Jean Bernadotte on the French throne, linking Wellington and Tsar Alexander, publishing *De l'Allemagne*. Her focus changes when she meets William Wilberforce. The man who got the British slave trade abolished now wants a world ban, but with the war's end nearing, the trade is poised to resume in France. In February 1814, Wilberforce hears that Staël wants to meet him more than "any other

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person." The words are from his diary, full of Staël in Spring 1814, with an odd soul-searching tone that may suggest he felt attracted by her – common enough. Staël arranges dinner for February 19 at the Duke of Gloucester's, with Thomas Erskine and Samuel Rogers. "I must read her *L'Allemagne*," notes Wilberforce. Staël is "quite like her book, though less hopeful," he writes that evening. She invites him again to join Lord Harrowby, James Mackintosh, and Samuel Rogers, her Whig friends: "I will not however, please God, enter and be drawn into that magic circle." On the 22nd, Wilberforce sends Staël "my books, for which she had almost asked"; he then writes coyly refusing dinner. Reversing roles, Staël pursues him: "Ne croyez vous pas que c'est aussi être Missionnaire que de causer avec les personnes un peu dignes de vous entendre?" By March, London society is placing bets: Staël "said she was sure I would come, because I had said I would." Prodded by Thomas Bowdler, Wilberforce dines again with Staël and the Whigs: "She talking of the final cause of creation – not utility but beauty." The next day, his diary notes the fever "is not yet gone off." Thanking the Duke of York at Freemason Hall, Wilberforce notes Staël's presence. She describes the scene in her *Considérations* (*CRF* 529). As Wilberforce remarks, Staël also told Mackintosh that he was "the best converser I have met with in this country."[8]

In May, Staël is back in conquered Paris with the Allied armies. Bernadotte is focused on Norway, to be joined to Sweden in November, but the abolitionist campaign is in full swing: pamphlets, translations, plans. The Treaty of Paris gives France five years to abolish the trade; days earlier, Staël sends word to Wilberforce "que l'empereur de Russie m'a dit que l'abolition de la traite des nègres aura lieu au congrès." She writes again in June, asking him to ask the Tsar for an interview: "C'est une âme généreuse vraiment . . . et je l'ai vu rougir à l'idée de la traite des nègres." In Paris, abolition is seen as code to stop France regaining her colonies. As Spain returns to Santo Domingo, Lord Castlereagh collects proof for Talleyrand that French Saint-Domingue is not to be recaptured; slave trade north of the Niger has ceased, and Wellington backs instant abolition there. Staël's *Œuvres complètes* date her *Appel aux souverains* from 1814, but the world's catalogs do not mention the pamphlet. I have a copy, and the *Appel* is datable by its text; it mentions Louis XVIII, unlikely if not impossible before April 11, and the forthcoming Treaty of Paris. Staël opens with England's abolition of the slave trade. Despite outcries, abolition freed millions without damaging "true" commerce – a pragmatic abolitionist topos of the time. Staël compares this cause to a crusade,

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writing of war in Africa and ships so crowded that slaves would take up more room dead. Alfred Berchtold mentions that Staël's talk of "longs cercueils" is, curiously, quoting Robespierre: She tactfully calls him "un écrivain français."[9]

In August, Staël writes to Bernadotte: "Le genre humain est bien loin de la liberté dans ce moment." When Wilhelm von Humboldt laments French indifference, Wilberforce replies by asking Staël to "overlook and correct the French of a piece which I am writing . . . I would not impose on you the laborious drudgery of translating the whole." A week later, he replies to Humboldt, proposing a "society of literary men" in Paris and mentioning his new pamphlet for Talleyrand. Humboldt, Prussian envoy at the Congress of Vienna, is doubtful: "[C]et établissement nuira beaucoup à la bonne cause. Tout le monde se gendarmera contre cette Société. Le souvenir de celle des amis des noirs se réveillera. Des hommes très zélés . . . sont détestés pour des motifs politiques." Doris Kadish notes in France "a profound mistrust of anti-slavery writing and abolitionism . . . Little was said about the plight of slaves until the 1820s." She adds that abolitionism was perceived as "a women's issue"; this is true, from Aphra Behn to Harriet Beecher Stowe. France has no Wilberforce to rescue the cause from Jacobinism, and power leaves Paris for Vienna after the Congress opens on August 29. September also sees Staël's friend Jean-Charles-Léonard Sismondi's *De l'intérêt de la France à l'égard de la traite des nègres*, with two new editions the same year. Like Benjamin Constant in 1813's *De l'esprit de conquête*, Sismondi argues that the slavers are archaic, missing an economic revolution. The immense Spanish American market is the future: "L'humanité est devenue un bon calcul." "Ils reprochent aux Africains la barbarie qu'ils ont créée," he concludes. Staël shares his themes, writing to Sismondi in October that people like his brochure, which she is distributing: "Je l'ai d'abord remise au ministre des Finances, qui arrive à l'humanité par l'économie. J'espère que l'on renoncera à l'expédition de St-Domingue."[10]

With the French press closed to abolitionist articles, Staël's daughter Albertine translated Wilberforce's pamphlet, which Staël prefaced. He wrote back, "I should be void of all feeling, if I were not deeply sensible how much I owe you for all the zeal you manifest for our *good cause*." "This indeed may be justly termed a Holy war," he adds: "Believe me, we cannot fail." He asks Staël to give Sismondi his 1807 volume and a letter of thanks: "Sismondi's pamphlet is excellent." Meanwhile, Humboldt has convinced him that a society must wait. By mid-October, printers have Albertine's translation, but Humboldt now reports that no printer in Paris

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will print it unpaid. Victor de Pange suggests that Staël wrote her *Appel* because the French press was closed. The *Appel* was written and published in London, but France's closed press does solicit the Talleyrand pamphlet. Villiers reviews events: Wellington distributed the pamphlet, along with the 1807 volume that Staël had had translated at Wellington's suggestion, and its diffusion "secured the notoriety of his pamphlet on the continent." Sismondi writes, "I am persuaded it has been much read at Paris." Villiers later proposes a new translation; Sismondi thinks this pointless and reviews Albertine's work: "[D]ans son ensemble elle est écrite d'une manière qui fait une impression profonde." What matters is to see Wellington, Wilberforce, Staël, and Sismondi in concerted action, focused on the future of France and of freedom in 1814.[11]

On October 20, Wilberforce writes directly to thank Sismondi. Five days later, he notes, "I have received from Chateaubriand a letter which is far from satisfactory. Such I really grieve to say I should have expected if I had credited what had been reported by his enemies of his trimming politics." Meanwhile, Albertine writes to Sismondi that she has translated "une petite brochure sur la traite des nègres que M. Wilberforce a envoyée à ma mère et que lord Wellington doit faire publier." The text is more than that, since it contains the first French publication of the infamous slave ship diagrams, a decade before Clarkson; but the two known editions of her daughter's work have no Staël preface. Did Staël write for a projected reedition? I would sooner suspect a political decision on her part. Her text contrasts Wilberforce's struggle with France's anti-British propaganda, talking of Methodism and altruism: She mentions "ceux qui font de l'espèce humaine deux parties, dont l'une, à leur avis, doit être sacrifiée à l'autre," and concludes in praise of Wellington. The *Appel* in May had praised the Tsar instead; perhaps Staël already sensed his shift toward reaction. She writes to Wilberforce on November 4, as the unprefaced translation appears, thanking him for the "plume d'or" that Thomas Babington Macaulay had presented to Albertine. By late autumn, France has abandoned the Saint-Domingue reconquest project, and Wellington announces that French slavers are banned north of the Niger's mouth. These are two small victories for humanity, and Staël's work is part of their story; it may be that she felt her work was done. As Léon-François Hoffmann remarks, "Que Mme de Staël se soit résolument engagée dans les troupes abolitionnistes ne fait aucun doute." Edith Lucas and Gaston-Martin also tie Staël's return in 1814 to the resurgence of French *négrophile* literature.[12]

Sismondi writes to Wilberforce in January and March 1815, as Napoleon leaves Elba, saying that French resistance is not a question of

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money as it was in England, but "liée uniquement à des passions nationales." On March 29, a week after Constant famously drafts the Acte additionnel for the Hundred Days, Napoleon abolishes not slavery but the slave trade – rhetorical gesture or sop to England, it seems worth noting when Staël attacks Sismondi, like Constant, for rallying to the Emperor: "[A]vez-vous donc oublié ce que vous écrivîtes l'année dernière sur l'Angleterre à propos de la traite des nègres?" After Napoleon's second fall at Waterloo, Louis XVIII maintains this abolition in theory, a long step forward from 1814 and a victory that Staël, Constant, and Sismondi all contributed to. Yet in practice, and illegally, the French slave trade resumes once more.[13]

Staël's last works bear traces of her epochal 1814 campaign. She writes to Thomas Jefferson at Monticello in 1816, "Si vous parvenez à détruire l'esclavage dans le midi, il y aura au moins au monde un gouvernement aussi parfait que la raison humaine peut le concevoir." "Liberté et religion," she writes in 1815, "se tiennent dans ma pensée," and her *Dix années d'exil*, which Auguste sent Wilberforce, links slavery and atheism: "[L]es hommes éclairés en France voulaient se consoler de l'esclavage de ce monde en cherchant à détruire l'espérance d'un autre" (*DxA* 110). It also has two pages on Bonaparte's violated treaty with Toussaint Louverture (*DxA* 114–115), called "sans doute un grand criminel" in a remark that shocked Wilberforce, and a defense of Russian serfdom, reflecting Staël's fading hopes for a liberal tsar, last trace of 1814's Holy Alliance: "[C]et esclavage de Russie ne ressemble pas dans ses effets à celui dont nous nous faisons l'idée dans l'Occident . . . [L]es grands et le peuple . . . ressemblent plutôt à ce qu'on appelait la famille des esclaves chez les anciens, qu'à l'état des serfs parmi les modernes" (*DxA* 270). Staël was less tender in London in spring 1813 when told that a Russian serf was happy and free: "Heureux, c'est fort bien; mais libre! Parmi toutes les définitions de la liberté, je n'ai jamais rencontré l'esclavage."[14]

The *Considérations* are sharper, prompting Wilberforce to comment that he was "extremely struck" by them:

> I had no idea she possessed so much sound political judgement, combined with considerable shrewdness in discernment of the characteristic traits of human nature in different classes and individuals. How clever are her remarks on the courtier minister, and how skillfully she slides over the weaker parts of her father's character. How much better and more true are her principles than those of our modern factious reformers.

Hannah More writes to him, "In short she appears to me to be a splendid error." Staël's whole sixth *partie* is a hymn to freedom, opening with a chapter titled "Les Français sont-ils faits pour être libres?" Alongside placid

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scenes – the ray of sunlight entering Parliament when the British slave trade is abolished (*CRF* 568) – stands Staël's answer to a nationalist cliché the *Dictionnaire Napoléon* still repeats: On the Continent, people said that the slave trade had been abolished "afin de ruiner les colonies des autres pays . . . Si l'on en avait cru les colons, il fallait être jacobin pour désirer qu'on n'achetât et ne vendît plus les hommes." When Britain pronounced abolition, Staël writes, "presque toutes les colonies de l'Europe étaient entre ses mains" (567). More curious still is Staël's linking of the French and Haitian Revolutions:

> Aucun peuple n'avait été aussi malheureux depuis cent ans que le peuple français. Si les nègres à Saint-Domingue ont commis bien plus d'atrocités encore, c'est parce qu'ils avaient été plus opprimés . . . Les fureurs des révoltes donnent la mesure des vices des institutions . . . On dit aujourd'hui que les Français sont pervertis par la révolution. Et d'où venaient donc les penchants désordonnés qui se sont si violemment développés dans les premières années de la révolution, si ce n'est de cent ans de superstition et d'arbitraire? (304)

To Staël, the slavery question is not tangential: It conditions her vision of France and the future – making her refusal, throughout her career, of the slave-despot metaphor that contemporaries from Robespierre onward used with abandon all the more remarkable. For Staël, slave means slave, not someone in a monarchy. It is fitting that the *Considérations*, Staël's last major work, should end with a hymn to human freedom: "S'agit-il de l'abolition de la traite des nègres, de la liberté de la presse, de la tolérance religieuse, Jefferson pense comme La Fayette, La Fayette comme Wilberforce" (606) – fitting also that her heirs continued her struggle.[15]

Conclusion: 1817–1830

Hoffmann remarks that "la Société de la Morale chrétienne, fondée en 1821, prend le relais des Amis des Noirs." The Société published extensively, and this field deserves study. Much is available in World Microfilms (1978), *Anti-Slavery Collection*, Reel 18. Before his early death, Staël's son Auguste is the society's president: "Cette question me préoccupe tout entier," he writes. Walter Scott owns Auguste's works. Wilberforce gives Auguste an introduction to Edinburgh society: "You are descended from persons whom Africa must reckon among her benefactors." The châteaux of Broglie and Coppet hold seven Wilberforce letters to Auguste and a short biography of Auguste with a few lines Wilberforce wrote for

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Albertine, saying how much he appreciated Auguste's friendship. Like his sister Albertine and her husband Victor de Broglie, Auguste's work for abolition deserves more study. The two men's first visit to England in May 1822 is indicative. When Chateaubriand proposes breakfast at the embassy, a modern critic suggests that Chateaubriand wanted to introduce Broglie to Wilberforce; it seems more likely that Chateaubriand, neglected ambassador and supremely gifted self-publicist, hoped to leverage Broglie to meet Wilberforce himself, and failed. Wilberforce preferred to meet Staël's two heirs unaccompanied by hangers-on. Under the Bourbons, Staël's heirs can only protest, like her friends Sismondi or Constant, laughed at in the Assemblée in 1821 – Constant replies that whenever one speaks of whips and torture, it is natural to hear laughter on the right. That year, Albertine writes to Wilberforce about her husband's efforts amid "l'indifférence du public," a public more concerned by English self-interest and by Greek Christians under the Turks. Broglie and Constant again speak out against the slave trade in 1822; at Constant's death in 1830, Martinicans are among the forty people who pull his hearse. After the 1830 revolution, Broglie directly shaped French progress toward abolition. Wilberforce writes that seeing him as prime minister gives hope to "the friends of justice and humanity." He presides over the Société pour l'abolition de l'esclavage after 1834, and an official commission after 1840. Victor de Pange notes that

> [m]any shelves of the library in the chateau of Broglie and four files in the Archives are devoted to the numerous publications and pamphlets for and against the abolition of slavery . . . Broglie combined with Tocqueville in further efforts, and he obtained the King's consent to the ordinances of 1840 and 1845 which at last after so many years completely abolished slavery in the French colonies.

But that is another story.[16]

What links these names is Staël and her work at Coppet. Staël's sex, her religion, her life of revolution and exile all fed the flame that drove her struggle forward. Anchored thus in the particular, Staël's thought, however, trained in the Enlightenment, strives constantly toward universal and timeless truths. This brings a special excitement and power to her discussion of freedom and its antithesis, slavery, in the age of the Déclaration des droits de l'homme. In the history of abolitionism, many aspects of Staël's thought are curious: her broad refusal of the slave-despot metaphor; her geographical and historical sweep; her refusal of topoi designed apparently to short-circuit discussion, like the Christian slaves in Greece and Algiers;

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her talk of domestic and spiritual slavery; her using the Haitian Revolution to understand 1789 in France, or at least 1793. Thirty-odd years of thought about freedom will produce some words on slavery, but Staël and her circle joined deeds to words. Much of Staël's work requires this pragmatic reading, such as the focus on the slave trade over slavery so common to her age, which may suggest people less upset over "property" than over a demonic variant of world commerce. For politics is a messy business. As Joan Baum argues, "Napoleon's orders to restore slavery in the West Indies would free the English abolition movement from the 'taint of Jacobinism' and give it new life" (8). Twenty years later, after Wellington's troops fired on the poor at Peterloo in 1819, Wilberforce's abolitionism suddenly looked like a distraction for the rich, and he was attacked for valuing distant slaves over English workers. Frankly, it remains true that abolition began in Europe as a Whig enterprise. But that hardly makes it less sincere, or its achievement less absolutely good.[17]

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