Conclusion
La Vie dans l'œuvre

À nous deux maintenant!

Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot* (1835), closing words

Eugène de Rastignac gazes out over Restoration Paris and issues a Promethean challenge to end Honoré de Balzac's book. There is something larger than life to many a Romantic hero, and that is the case of Staël in her wanderings from the reign of Louis XVI to that of his brother Louis XVIII, from Napoleon's France to London via a Moscow not yet in flames. The shape of Europe was apparent to Staël because she spent long years of exile traversing it. Few living authors thus loomed over Romantic Europe, and few indeed held the Revolution in their hands. She was Napoleon's worthy enemy, standing for dignity and freedom as he stood for dictatorship and war.

Two centuries of thinkers now have bent their minds to Staël, her works, her action, and a dynamic consensus has perhaps emerged. Staël's complete works are being reedited for the first time since son and son-in-law undertook that pious duty two centuries ago, in 1820–1821. The list of works attributed to her has grown, complete with critical apparatus, while some pragmatic Restoration compromise has been removed. Staël's true face may be the more apparent.

What this book contributes in its turn is perhaps a wrinkle to how we view Staël in action. *La Vie dans l'œuvre*, David Glass Larg called his neglected study of her back in 1924. This monograph hopes to have honored his vision. It analyzes both meaning and publication to retrace Staël thinker and actor, through regimes and decades, via the texts she chose to publish or not to publish after all. The hope is that this somewhat laborious work will show Staël's free will at play – almost on a daily basis – in the charged field of revolutionary, Napoleonic, and Restoration Europe. Staël, in her Coppet circle, her allies, her enemies – we will glimpse the shape of the Romantic West. All nations, as Benedict Anderson has noted,

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are imagined communities, and this is true not only of France, Germany, Italy, or Spain but also of the European project, from Staël on to Robert Schuman. Between 1786 and 1821, and indeed down to the present day, Staël had her part in imagining this community of nations. The part she played deserves rediscovery: She is, in a real sense, perhaps the first European.

Historians since Jürgen Habermas have described a public sphere shaping European life from the eighteenth century through the French Revolution. This study argues that the concept plays a major role in Staël's thought. As a woman, Staël had every reason to distrust the negative liberty then emerging in political thought, which effectively relegated women from *agora* to *oikos*, to that home as a castle celebrated by contemporaries like the Marquis de Sade. Staël offers instead a contract between a silent nation and the genius that speaks for it, one that was destined for great success in the Romantic world that slowly eclipsed her. It extends in her somewhat universal thought from credit theory in economics to politics and art, and she elaborates it across her works in her plays and novels, her historiography, her vibrant political writings. It is, in the words of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1818), "the spirit of nations." *We the people*, begins America's Constitution, as Staël's new concept of *nationality* begins to emerge. The evolution of that concept is another story.

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