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Karyna Szmurlo, ed., *Germaine de Staël: Forging a Politics of Mediation*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, University of Oxford, 2011. xix + 311 pp. Summaries, bibliography, and index. £65; \$115 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-7294-1024-3.

Review by Beatrice Guenther, Bowling Green State University.

Germaine de Staël's writings and political activism during the French Revolution and its (Napoleonic) aftermath continue to fascinate readers even as the bicentennial of her death approaches. This excellent collection of essays, edited by Karyna Szmurlo and which explores Staël's politics of mediation, contributes multiple insights into her rich, complex oeuvre. Szmurlo is already well-respected as editor of *The Novel's Seduction: Staël's 'Corinne' in Critical Inquiry* and as co-editor (with Madelyn Gutwirth and Avriel Goldberger) of *Germaine de Staël: Crossing the Borders*, to mention just two examples of her influential scholarship.[1] In her introduction to this volume, Szmurlo explains how the concept of mediation can act as a filter to connect the diverse aspects of Staël's literary and political works.

Mediation can be understood, on the one hand, as a reflection on the transforming and transformative effects of media (petitions, letters, press, but also conversation). Interdisciplinarity, however, can also be read as a mediating practice, as can the practice of social networking. Particularly relevant for Germaine de Staël, the connections between "multiple language communities"—whether through travel, cultural criticism, translations or critical reception—constitute further politicized forms of mediation (p. 5). This edited collection of essays moves decidedly beyond the scholarship on Staël's literary production in order to explore her contributions to politics and cultural criticism. By focusing on the concept of mediation, moreover, the volume succeeds in shedding light on how Staël was marked by the Enlightenment, "a massive collaborative enterprise, [which] emerges as a saturation of mediating acts with decisively transformative effects" (p. 4).

The volume is divided in two parts with the first, longer section focused on Staël's "Revolutionary engagements" while the second section is entitled, "In time and space: cultural cross-currents." The text is cogently framed both by Szmurlo's introduction and by Madelyn Gutwirth's preface, the latter proposing that this fine volume counters Staël's two-hundred year reputation—sometimes marred by "a history of denigration" (p. xv)—with an assessment less polarized by gender-based conflict. After sketching in the critiques of Staël's contemporaries and successors (Bonald, de Maistre, Sainte-Beuve, as well as those by more recent, favorable critics such as Moers, Hogsett, and Dixon), Gutwirth identifies other ways in which Staël can be read as a mediator: bridging the Enlightenment and early Romanticism in addition to straddling disciplines such as psychoanalysis, philosophy, and sociology. Gutwirth's point that Staël's oeuvre lends itself better to the intersection of performance theory and the study of national identity rather than to the focus on structuralist or post-structuralist studies of *langue* is persuasive for a writer like Germaine de Staël "who gloried in mutability and the new" and thus "remains a touchstone...of ongoing struggle" (p. xix).

Karyna Szmurlo's presentation of the volume in her introduction reminds us that Staël's salon functioned as a "platform of reconciliation" (p. 7) rather than contributing to the social and intellectual polarization of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France—an insight that Napoleon himself recognized,

which can in part explain, Szmurlo argues, his attempt to silence his rival's voice. In her introduction, Karyna Szmurlo draws attention to the many connections underlying the chapters, written by literary critics, political scientists and historians, which focus on the wide range of Staël's writings and her political activism: among others, her early phase (her defense of Marie Antoinette or her reflections on peace, addressed to William Pitt); her better-known works (*Corinne, ou l'Italie; De l'Allemagne*); her posthumous writings (*Dix années d'exil; Considérations sur la Révolution française*); and the social networking associated with the Groupe de Coppet. This engaging volume on Germaine de Staël also includes studies of nineteenth-century writers who helped to promote her work, including her British readers (Carlyle and Mackintosh, for instance) and American intellectuals such as James Marsh. Szmurlo's concluding words underscore Staël's continuing relevance for readers today: "Staël was in search of a medium reflecting the living interaction of social forces...[This volume] may appeal, with its retrospective reflection on mediation and also its own participation in acts of mediation, to a broader constituency that will further explore Staël's unique place in the history of global interaction" (p. 20).

Five of the chapters target explicit examples of Staël's political activism: Ève Beausoleil's study of print, privacy and opinion in the French Revolution (1789-1799); Paul Spalding's analysis of Staël's role in liberating Lafayette; Catriona Seth's work on Staël and Marie-Antoinette; Ann T. Gardiner's "From group to traveller's network," which evaluates Staël's (reconfigured) sociability; and Doris Kadish' chapter on patriarchy and abolition. Ève Beausoleil provides a behind-the-scenes look at Staël's correspondence in order to document the network of connections that the writer established through her systematic examination of journals along with the reproduction and dispersal of information, made possible through the careful monitoring of secure postal routes and her expert negotiations aimed at the production of printed texts in concert with her "friends who were themselves authors, editors or intermediaries in the process of publication" (p. 34).

Next, Spalding's chapter on Lafayette documents how between 1792 and 1797, Staël was able to negotiate her social network both skillfully and creatively in order to help liberate Lafayette from the anti-Revolutionary European coalition armies. Spalding's analysis provides a detailed, historical account of how Germaine de Staël's interventions on behalf of Lafayette can be read as a template for private and international cooperative initiatives. Catriona Seth's nuanced analysis of the ambiguous relationship between Staël and Marie-Antoinette compares Staël's early political pamphlet in defense of the queen [1793] with her later judgment [1818], published posthumously and which continued the defense of Marie-Antoinette. Of particular note are Seth's insights into Staël's rhetorical strategies—her use of "words as weapons," for instance, the argument that "the former queen cannot have been both a frivolous nitwit and a dangerous reactionary agent, two charges frequently levelled at her—even nowadays" (p. 57). Seth's chapter adds an interesting twist by proposing that the two women resembled one another, despite obvious discrepancies between their situations, in that both had transgressed by becoming public figures, thereby also becoming targets of the gutter press. In short, Seth's detailed analysis constitutes a persuasive account of Staël as "mediator between the ancien régime and modern times" (p. 62).

Of special interest is Ann T. Gardiner's historical research on the members belonging to the Groupe de Coppet and her redefinition of the group as a network. By drawing on Mark Granovetter's sociological concept of the "strength of weak ties" (p. 157), Gardiner investigates how Staël's family estate near Geneva in Coppet functioned as an alternative public sphere. Gardiner explores how the exocentric focus of Coppet (in contrast to the egocentric focus of salon culture) was particularly well-suited to gather together heterogeneous individuals distinguished by age, education, class, and national identity; she argues that Coppet functioned as a way station for travelers on their way to Italy but who followed different practices of travel, embarking, for instance, on an educational Grand Tour, or evading the

Napoleonic dictatorship or (also) engaging in Coppet's "laboratory of [political and scientific] ideas" (p. 165). Gardiner concludes that the château de Coppet as transnational and transdisciplinary meeting place functioned both as a refuge and as a public sphere temporarily displaced to the margins of Napoleonic France.

By focusing on patriarchy and abolition, Doris Kadish's comparison of Necker's *De l'administration des finances de la France* with the evolution of Staël's own thought, (which draws, in part, on two early short stories, "Histoire de Pauline" and "Mirza") also highlights in important ways the intersection of Staël's private and public spheres. The contrast of three quite different symbols of patriarchy in Staël's lifetime (Jacques Necker, her biological, deeply respected father, Napoleon, and the British abolitionist, William Wilberforce) allows Kadish to track how Staël, despite her role as dutiful daughter, could begin to distance herself from her father's theoretically abolitionist, but still paternalistic attitude toward slaves.

Several of the chapters in the volume address the literary, even poetic quality of Staël's writings--and this in quite diverse ways. Carrie Klaus contrasts Staël with two of her contemporaries, Isabelle de Charrière and Cornélie Wouters, in order to explore the representation of French and foreign identity in their literary works. Klaus highlights how Staël destabilizes the clearcut distinction between the two terms and notes how, from differently hybrid vantage points (English, Swiss, French), each of the three writers makes use of the discourse of national identity in order to advocate peaceful coexistence, thereby contributing "to the conversations on the reshaping of Europe on the eve of the nineteenth century" (p. 90).

Four of the other chapters, also marked by a more literary critical approach, target Staël's Italy. Nanora Sweet's reading of *Corinne, ou l'Italie* follows an erudite, though somewhat associative argument in order to chart the work's poetic as well as Italianate qualities. This study of Staël's recuperation of Italy describes the intersection of "poetic and political design" underpinning *Corinne* (p. 233). The overview of critics like Geneviève Gennari and Simone Balayé--in addition to other more recent Staël specialists--is followed by a parsing of references to Roman, medieval and more modern Italian literary models at play in Staël's novel. Whereas Nanora Sweet is interested in tracing conversations, which reflect Staël as a "major theorist of Europe" (p. 243), Clorinda Donato and Robert Casillo both set out to evaluate the accuracy of Staël's representation of Italy. Donato throws into relief how Staël's contemporary, Ugo Foscolo, countered her "static," even fossilized, portrayal of Italian culture and politics as unredeemingly closed to modernity (p. 181). Donato does go on to propose that it was Staël's Italian mentor, Vincenzo Monti, who blocked her access to more engaged, Romantic writers like Foscolo.

In opposition to Donato, Robert Casillo argues that the continued circulation of Italian stereotypes in Staël's works should prompt readers to seek out their credibility: the "deficiencies of [post-Renaissance Italian] civilisation" and lack of a public sphere as well as the Italians' private virtues, their appeal to the totality of senses, spontaneity and passion (p. 196). While the contrast in this chapter of Staël's and Stendhal's accounts of Italy is an important one, the blurring of the line between "real" national characteristics and representations of such national identity, on the one hand and on the other, the incorporation of less recent criticism on stereotyping, make this chapter somewhat less persuasive.

As the final example of the volume's chapters on Italy: Paola Giuli's "Poetry and national identity: *Corinne*, Corilla and the idea of Italy" illuminates the novel in a compelling way by reading the fictional protagonist against her real-life model, the *improvisatrice* Corilla Olimpica. In addition to providing a clear historical overview of Corilla's trajectory as crowned poet laureate in Rome, Giuli highlights the gendered assumptions that devalued both Corilla's and *Corinne*'s literary genius as "involuntary"

production (p. 225). She also draws out the political ramifications of Staël's choice to place Corinne at the center of her novel on Italy: "In truly deconstructive fashion, Staël subverted the negative connotation of a feminine and feminised Italy. [Italy as feminised] can be strong, deep and glorious. The woman of genius can be a model and a hope for the future Risorgimento of her nation" (p. 231).

A third thread linking several chapters of this volume concerns the question of Staël's political affiliation: how to understand the paradox of her commitment to the (early phases of the) Revolution along with her advocacy for a bicameral parliament, an implicitly aristocratic construct modeled on the English House of Lords. In complementary ways, the chapters by Chinatsu Takeda, Aurelian Craiutu, Susan Tenenbaum, and Jean-Marie Roulin elaborate on Staël's politics of moderation. Takeda draws on *Considérations sur la Révolution française* in order to examine in depth the significance of Staël's "liberal interpretation of the French Revolution" (p. 91). In addition to rehabilitating the value of *Considérations* as an example of political historiography, her chapter contextualizes Staël's thought in relation to Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois*, Montlosier's *De la monarchie*, and Toqueville's *De l'Ancien Régime* as a way to shed light on Staël's and her contemporaries' debate about feudal constitutionality, which included the call for a second chamber: a way to preserve the "stability of the property order" (p. 97).

Jean-Marie Roulin juxtaposes Staël's political writings and *Corinne* (among other literary works) in order to examine how the rhetoric of exile and homeland transforms the concept of a "return," where "the new can be shaped only by means of a restoration, because progress must also be based on continuity" (p. 147). Roulin notes that Staël's greatest works are written after her returns from travel (p. 143), and his analysis of Necker's triumphant return to Paris underscores the connection for Staël between this return and the regeneration of the French collective identity (p. 144). Building first on the politics of moderation and civility practiced by the groupe Coppet, Aurelian Craiutu explores the political solutions developed by Staël and her anti-Napoleonic collaborators as they adapted the constitutional principles of "complex sovereignty," "neutral power," and the "intertwining (*entrelacement*)" in opposition to the separation or division of powers (p. 119).

Finally, Susan Tenenbaum's analysis of honor is particularly effective in elucidating how Staël drew on the vocabulary of the ancien régime in order to counter unchecked sovereign rule. Staël's defense of the *thèse nobiliaire* as a support of group privilege and a check on arbitrary sovereign power, thus casting the *thèse* implicitly as pre-Revolutionary, allowed her to develop an effective discourse challenging Napoleon's modernity. Defining Napoleon's regime as a reversion to an ancient form of despotism, Staël could also denounce his reinstatement of aristocracy as illusory, ultimately disempowering—one motivated, moreover, by fear rather than by honor.

Two thought-provoking and engaging chapters end this collection of essays on Staël's politics of mediation, and both emphasize the reception of Staël's *De l'Allemagne*. Eric Gidal investigates the triple relation connecting Staël's *On Germany* with French censorship, including its transformation and ultimate destruction of her work in 1810, and the British press—the re-publication of her text in London in 1813 and the journalistic responses to it. Gidal explores Staël's concerns with the durability of French conversation and culture, concluding that *De l'Allemagne* offers national literature as a principle of mediation between citizens and friends, thereby providing a mechanism of public discussion that is "less an aesthetic or social ideal than the rhetorical protocols and enabling technologies of a modern age" (p. 276).

Alternatively, Ulrike Wagner's examination of *De l'Allemagne*, which is framed by the American transcendentalists' reception of the work, focuses on innovative, though not often explicated, aspects of

Staël's cultural analysis. By shifting the focus from *On Germany's* chapters on Kant to analyze instead Staël's recasting of the *Querelle des anciens et des modernes* through the filter of Winckelmann and Herder's "historico-empathetic" practice (p. 254), Wagner can explain persuasively how Staël redefines the relevance of the past's authority—not by restoring or improving on classical standards but by reconstructing these imaginatively, thus translating, transforming, and renewing them for successive generations. Wagner connects the transnational recasting of the past in *De l'Allemagne* to Staël's chapters on education: "The learning of ancient languages and the study of their histories and representational complexities forced students to abandon their point of view and to familiarise themselves with modes of thinking and conceptions of truth different from their own" (p. 255). Wagner makes a compelling case to explain the transcendentalists' interest in Staël in that she proposes that both affirm the vital link between the "regeneration of a religious faith and a vibrant cultural life" made possible through linguistic, mental and spiritual exercises" (p. 261).

This volume with its extensive bibliography is an absorbing and timely addition to Staël scholarship and will appeal to a broad readership through its impressive sweep of her writings.

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[1] Madelyn Gutwirth, Avriel Goldberger, and Karyna Szmurlo, eds., *Germaine de Staël: Crossing the Borders* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991) and Karyna Szmurlo, ed., *The Novel's Seductions: Staël's 'Corinne' in Critical Inquiry* (London: Associated University Presses, 1999).

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