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TRANSITS

Staël's Philosophy of the Passions

SENSIBILITY, SOCIETY,
AND THE SISTER ARTS

Edited by Tili Boon Cuillé
and Karyna Szmurlo



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To our mentors (our source of inspiration)
and our children (our hope for the future).

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66. Nancy K. Miller, "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," in *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 25–46.
67. The subject of women's desires in the life and art of Staël is assiduously pursued in Madelyn Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist: The Emergence of the Artist as Woman* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978).
68. "Dans le voyage de la vie, la femme est le guide, le charme et le soutien de l'homme" (*Maximes des Orientaux*). *Explications des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture et gravure des artistes vivans, exposés au Musée Napoléon*. . . (Paris: Dubray, Imprimeur du Musée Napoléon, 1808), 37.
69. For sustained analysis of Staël's engagement with the visual arts, see my chapter on Germaine de Staël in my unpublished dissertation, "Portraitistes à la plume: Women Art Critics in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France," (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2007).

GERMAINE DE STAËL DEFINES ROMANTICISM, OR THE ANALOGY OF THE GLASS HARMONICA

Fabienne Moore

ACCORDING TO William Zeider, world-class glass harmonica player and composer: "There is a story printed in an early Irish musical dictionary of how, upon his return to America, while his wife was asleep, Benjamin Franklin went up to the attic of his Philadelphia home and set up his Glass Armonica which she had not yet heard. Upon completing this, he started to draw forth its 'angelick strains.' Floating down from above, these sounds were apparently so heavenly, that 'his wife awakened with the conviction that she had died and gone to heaven and was listening to the music of the angels.'"¹ What kind of instrument is the glass harmonica, to produce such angelic music that Mrs. Franklin imagined herself dead and in heaven? Rubbing a wet finger around the rim of a drinking glass creates a very pure musical note whose pitch varies according to the amount of water in the glass. In the second half of the eighteenth century, a more elaborate version of this party trick involving sets of singing glasses became a musical pastime during social gatherings. The *Encyclopedia* defined the sounds emitted as *musique des verres*, favorably describing its harmony while attributing its origin to Germany and drawing a comparison with an ancient Persian practice:

GLASSES, Music of, (Arts) A few years ago we invented with the help of glasses a new kind of harmony very flattering to the ear. . . .

The instrument used for this effect is an oblong box, in which are aligned and attached several round glasses of different diameters, in which one pours water in various quantities. By rubbing a wetted finger on the rims of these glasses, which are slightly curved in, one draws very sweet, very melodious and long lasting sounds; and in this manner one is able to play very pleasant tunes.²

After listening to a performance by a virtuoso player, Edward Hussey Delaval (1729–1814), Benjamin Franklin was so fascinated by this new sound that he set his inventive mind to work improving upon the possibilities of musical glasses. He had glasses of different diameters blown, each corresponding to a note, instead of filling glasses with water. He removed the stems and bottoms from the glasses, inserted corks in the holes in the bottoms and mounted them one after the other on a horizontal spindle. The spindle was rotated rapidly by means of a foot pedal (like an old fashioned sewing machine), and the player sat in front of the machine and touched moistened fingers to the edges of the rotating glasses. The first model was completed in 1761 and—in honor of the musical Italian language—he baptized it the “armonica,” borrowing the Italian word for “harmony.” In a 1762 letter, he enthusiastically shared his invention with his friend and supporter, the Italian scientist Giambattista Beccaria, whom he thought would appreciate this new instrument “as it is an instrument that seems peculiarly adapted to Italian music, especially that of the soft and plaintive kind.”³ Franklin proceeded with a lengthy and exact description of how to cut and tune the glasses, how to fix them to a spindle, and how to draw a tone with one finger as they turn around. He then explained in a passage evocative of Père Castel’s 1740 description of his “harpsicord for the eyes” [*clavecin oculaire*]:

My largest glass is G, a little below reach of a common voice, and my highest G, including three complete octaves. To distinguish the glasses the more readily to the eye, I have painted the apparent parts of the glasses within side, every semitone white, and the other notes of the octave with the seven prismatic colours, viz. C, red; D, orange; E, yellow; F, green; G, blue; A, indigo; B, purple; and C, red again; so that glasses of the same colour (the white excepted) are always octaves to each other.⁴

Franklin ends the letter with advice on how to perform:

This instrument is played upon, by sitting before the middle of the set of glasses as before the keys of a harpsichord, turning them with the foot, and wetting them now and then with a sponge and clean water. The fingers should be first a little soaked in water, and quite free from all greasiness; a little fine chalk upon them is sometimes useful, to make them catch the glass and bring out the tone more readily. Both hands are used, by which means different parts are played together. Observe, that the tones are best drawn out when the glasses turn from the ends of the fingers, not when they turn to them.

The advantages of this instrument are, that its tones are incomparably sweet beyond those of any other; that they may be swelled and softened at pleasure by stronger or weaker pressures of the finger, and continued to any length; and that the instrument, being once well tuned, never again wants tuning.

In honour of your musical language, I have borrowed from it the name of the instrument, calling it the Armonica.⁵

The new instrument unexpectedly surfaces in Germaine de Staël’s *On Literature*, the first instance of an association between the Romantic movement not yet constituted and an instrument which, together with the Aeolian harp, gradually became emblematic of heightened sensitivity, rêverie and transcendence. My purpose in this chapter is to sketch the unusual history of this rare instrument, then to analyze how and why it could provide Staël with a fertile analogy to describe English and German romantic poetry and the ambivalence at its core. Franklin’s description of his invention already alerts us to the kinship between the exceedingly “sweet” sounds of the armonica and Italian music—in particular, its “soft and plaintive kind.” If Enlightenment debates on music constituted the common backdrop to Franklin’s comments and Staël’s references to the armonica, by the end of the eighteenth century Staël’s contribution significantly surmounted a whole set of binary oppositions stalling such debates (including nature vs. artifice, physical vs. metaphysical, voice vs. instrument, melody vs. harmony, masculine vs. feminine). Moreover, the pressing need to characterize and define romantic poetry ten years later in her work *On Germany* led Staël back to an instrument that effectively tested its listeners’ sensibility by introducing a measure of pain in pleasure, akin to Staël’s own reception of overly vague and abstract romantic poetry. From sounds full of sweetness praised in Franklin’s correspondence to the dangerous lure of (romantic) musical and poetical abstractions analyzed in *On Germany*, perceptions of the glass harmonica allow us to approach the evolution of sensibility and its expressions, both from the original perspective of a forgotten instrument and from the perspective of Staël, who invokes it in order to expose the limitations of both the Enlightenment and Romanticism.

Musicologist Heather Hadlock and Thomas Bloch, one of the most prominent musicians currently performing and recording with the glass harmonica, have studied this curious instrument from a socio-cultural, literary, and musical perspective.⁶ While Bloch researched the musical properties of the glass harmonica and pondered its decline, Hadlock investigated the symbolic conjunctions between women and an instrument that—like the harp—embodied femininity.⁷

The following characteristic verses from 1785, by British poet William Hayley, underscore both the gendering of the glass harmonica and the metaphorical instrumentalization of the female body:

Woman, I say, or dame or lass,
Is an *Harmonica of glass*,
Celestial and complete:
If new, or by some trials known,
It matters not
A single jot;
When rightly touch'd, its every tone
Is ravishingly sweet.⁸

François-René de Chateaubriand would also later gender the instrument as feminine in the 1826 prose epic *Les Natchez* when evoking the fields of paradise, where "a mortal would think that his ear perceived the plaintive accents of a divine armonica,"⁹ an interesting revision of a fragment originally describing Christian paradise, and at first intended for the *Génie du christianisme* (*Genius of Christianity*, 1802):

A ravishing music rises endlessly from everything. Sometimes, there are uninterrupted shivers, similar to the rare vibrations of an Aeolian harp if touched by the soft breath of the wind during a silent summer night; sometimes a mortal would think that he heard the plaintive accents of a divine armonica, these whispers of glass, which do not seem to belong to anything earthly.¹⁰

Chateaubriand's initial analogy and its rephrasing appropriate the instrument for strictly poetic and suggestive effects, such as the striking metonymic metaphor "sighs of glass" [*soupirs de verre*] born of the imaginative search for transcribing the divine. Staël's own genius consists in a *critical* appropriation—namely, evoking the instrument to debunk a series of aesthetic and cultural dichotomies. Neither Bloch nor Hadlock mention Staël, yet her original perspective adds a new and more critical dimension to the instrument's close association with the feminine. Unpacking the history of this instrument with its heavenly notes and bizarre fate allows for a better understanding of the aesthetic pertinence of Staël's definition and the implications of her musical revisionism.

The quotation at the origin of my inquiry occurs in chapter xii of *On Literature*, titled "De la littérature du Nord" [Of Northern Literature]:

Melancholy poetry is not capable of infinite variety. The shudder we feel at certain natural beauties is always the same feeling; the emotion that the poetry retracing this feeling inspires in us is *very close to the effect of the armonica*. The soul, gently shaken, takes pleasure in prolonging this condition as long as it can bear it. What makes us feel tired after a while is not the poetry's fault, but the weakness of our own organs; what we feel is not bored, but exhausted, as if by *aerial music which we have been enjoying a little too long*.¹¹

Just before this passage Staël gives the names of three representative, early romantic poets: Edward Young, famous for his *Night Thoughts* (1742), James Thomson, who celebrated the poetry of nature in *The Seasons* (1730), and the German Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, who revived sacred poetry. The three poets have in common a melancholy perspective. Shuddering and shaking (*frémissement* and *ébranlement*) are physical as well as emotional and mental reactions: body and soul shiver as they contemplate nature's sublime spectacle, a shiver prolonged by the poetic experience of reading poems that capture this awe. Though a direct influence is unlikely, Staël's analogy echoes Friedrich Schlegel's portrayal of the philosopher Jacobi's "sensitive character . . . resonating everywhere like a far away harmonica of the world of the mind."¹²

Staël analyzed readers' response to romantic poetry based on two co-determinants: first, the weakness of our organs limits our sensorial perception, therefore melancholy poetry—while emotionally powerful—generates fatigue; secondly, weariness also arises if a perfect aesthetic experience lasts too long. Clearly, for Staël, duration attenuates aesthetic pleasure, leading her to argue that discontinuity, not continuity, should be sought; otherwise the absence of variation creates "a kind of uniformity," which turns pleasure into discomfort and pain. In her novel *Corinne, or Italy*, moments when the soul vibrates in unison with a duet of voices, while delicious and tender, would become excruciating if they lasted too long: too perfect a harmony sustained for too long would "break the accord."¹³ One experiences this paradox while listening to even just a few minutes of music performed on the glass harmonica, which is delightful at first, but whose high pitch is difficult to sustain acoustically after a while.¹⁴

A Mixed Reception

Franklin's popularity and connections throughout Europe helped spread his invention in courts and salons: "Some 400 works were composed for it, some

unfortunately lost, and probably about 4,000 instruments were built over the course of some seventy years.¹⁵ The notoriety of gifted performers contributed to the instrument's popularity. Franklin himself, true to his idiosyncratic tastes, liked to play Scottish ballads.¹⁶ The future queen Marie-Antoinette was taught at the Viennese court by Marianne Davies (1740–1792), the eighteenth-century's best player, who spent the end of her life in a mental hospital. The notorious Viennese doctor and hypnotist, Franz Anton Mesmer, used the glass harmonica to relax his patients as part of his treatment and to convey and reinforce magnetism. Furthermore, as per Leopold Mozart's correspondence, we know that father and son admired Mesmer's performance in Vienna in 1773, and that seventeen-year-old Mozart had the opportunity to play Mesmer's armonica himself. Later, in spring 1791, Mozart wrote two pieces for the blind armonica player Marianne Kirchgassner (1769–1808).¹⁷ On December 10, 1803, during her first journey to Germany, Staël wrote a letter to her father from Göttingen, in which she tells of having taken two armonica lessons: if she succeeds in playing it, she plans to buy one in Paris. Tellingly, just before this reference, Staël informs Necker that she has sent him an Aeolian harp—affordable and easy to transport in contrast to the expensive and fragile glass harmonica:

I'm sending you what is called here an Aeolian harp. You'll only receive it in about two months. I'll explain to you in my first letter how it needs to be exposed to a draft wind to emit sounds that you'll hear in another room. It also produces them in the middle of the garden when it is well set between leaves, and it's a rather soft effect for whoever loves to dream. Besides, it is an inexpensive amusement and if it works in your home, we can order some: it costs eighteen francs, including packing. I have taken two armonica lessons; if I manage to play, I'll buy one in Paris, but not here. It's expensive and fragile.¹⁸

Responses to the glass harmonica grew passionate and ranged from initial praise to gradual distrust and dismissal. Among its enthusiasts were Johann Sebastian Bach, Niccolò Paganini, Thomas Jefferson, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Théophile Gautier, and George Sand. In her 1848 novel *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* (*The Countess of Rudolstadt*), Sand encapsulated this musical devotion, speaking of "the magical voice of the armonica, that recently invented instrument, whose vibrant, penetrating quality was a wonder unknown to Consuelo's ears, was borne on the air, and seemed to descend from the dome that lay open to the moonlight and the refreshing breezes of the night."¹⁹ According to its detractors however, the

instrument drove performers and listeners to mental disturbance and insanity. A negative press account from 1798 underlined how "it excessively stimulates the nerves, plunges the player into a nagging depression and hence into a dark and melancholy mood, that it is an apt method for slow self-annihilation."²⁰ A *Traité des effets de la musique sur le corps humain* (*Treatise on the Effects of Music on the Human Body*) by Joseph Louis Roger in 1803 warned that "its melancholy tone plunges you into dejection . . . to a point the strongest man could not bear it for an hour without fainting."²¹ As I mentioned, some interpreters went mad—among them, one of the best, Marianne Davies—and "the Armonica was accused of causing evils such as nervous problems, domestic squabbles, premature deliveries, fatal disorders, animal convulsions. The instrument was even banned from one German town by the police for ruining the health of people and disturbing public order (a child died during a concert)."²² Eventually the glass harmonica became a prop in theatrical parodies of Mesmerism.²³

We know today that the 30 percent lead content of the blown glasses might have been responsible for the mental illnesses that befell its performers. But this modern, prosaic hypothesis does not suppress the instrument's association with physical and moral danger, very much in the background of Staël's analogy. There seems to be a strange curse on the glass harmonica. The one man responsible for its revival in the twentieth century, the only person able to recreate the instrument in the 1980s, Gerhard Finkenbeiner, disappeared with his plane in 1999 off the Massachusetts coast.²⁴

The Instrumental Imaginary

The glass harmonica's haunting past, which I have just evoked, is part of what one might call "the instrumental imaginary" [*l'imaginaire de l'instrument*], namely a world of connotations brought about by its distinctive sound, at once captivating and dangerous, treacherous in its very sweetness akin to the fascination of a siren's song. Epithets used to describe its sound (angelic, heavenly, celestial, ethereal) often referred to the otherworldly due to the instrument's unique physical properties. This is its great paradox: the evocation of the metaphysical, superhuman realm can be attributed to the instrument's distinctive physical attributes and human acoustic limitations. First, its very pure sound—almost exclusively high-pitched—rapidly approaches ultrasounds, not perceptible to a human ear but affecting babies and pets such as dogs. Ultrasounds were discovered later, but popular intuition had already grasped the phenomenon at the time. Secondly,

variations are impossible, unlike the ability to modulate breath when playing the flute, for instance, or when the wind blows through an Aeolian harp. The sound is actually mechanical and cannot be fully expressive. Staël's warning against the fatigue born of a lack of variation therefore captured the armonica's unusual, monotone vibrations, and she transferred the instrument's musical uniformity to melancholy poetry.

Add to these elements the fact that the instrument is extremely difficult to build and exceedingly fragile, as Staël wrote to her father, which is why so few survived from its heyday. It also remains somewhat of a scientific enigma: "The actual vibrational modes which produce the sound are not at all well understood . . . the underlying physics of the . . . 'Glass Harmonica' remains as mysterious as its sound."²⁵ In its delicacy and mystery, Franklin's invention escapes reality and rationality. The instrument was a marvel of engineering progress and precision that emitted an indefinable music: on the one hand, a modern invention in the spirit of the Enlightenment and, on the other, a sensual and quasi-mystical experience in the spirit of Romanticism. The paradoxical combination of these two aspects mirror the Enlightenment's intrinsic contradictions, the fascination for all things mechanical—witness the craze for mechanical dolls and the invention of the metronome, clashing with the perpetuation of sensibility as well as the irrational, the spiritual, or the sacred. The glass harmonica was not merely metaphorical, it literally embodied this dualism. According to Hadlock:

The immediacy of its effect on the listener—its ability to produce a spontaneous, sensuous response—made it the perfect instrument for the "age of sensibility." Yet that same immediacy raised doubts about the intellectual and aesthetic status of the armonica's music, for its "automatic" effect on listeners could be discounted as a mere mechanical response to a physical stimulus.²⁶

The novel instrument echoed a split aesthetic, with a fault line that also ran beneath the eighteenth-century debate about music pitting defenders of French music, most notably Jean-Philippe Rameau and Jacques Cazotte, against partisans of Italian music including Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Denis Diderot.²⁷

Enlightenment Music

A reminder of the aesthetic and musical dichotomies of the quarrel on "Enlightenment music," as Béatrice Didier strikingly put it in the synesthetic title of her

book *La Musique des Lumières*, helps to situate the glass harmonica and to give the context of Staël's analogy at the turn of the nineteenth century. I will leave aside the political undertones of this musical division along national boundaries to concentrate on its aesthetics: the case of Italian vs. French music was the case of voice vs. instrument. On one side, Italy, the feminine and the voice. On the other, France, the masculine and the instrument. On the Italian side stood melody; on the French side harmony. Expression belonged to the Italian, the feminine, the natural, the vocal, and the melodic, whereas imitation was associated with the French, the masculine, the artificial, the instrumental, and the harmonic. This overly schematic picture aligns a rich set of oppositions that characterize comparisons between French and Italian music, which Rousseau recapitulated in part I, letter XLVIII of his epistolary novel, *Julie, or the New Heloise*.²⁸ When Saint-Preux writes to Julie of "his conversion from French to Italian music,"²⁹ he criticizes the former as consisting in "a mannered poetry unakin to nature . . . shouts that make the sounds not more melodious but more noisy."³⁰ He denounces "the forced style and all the French frills . . . that boring and lamentable French song that is more like the cries of colic than the transports of passion."³¹ On the contrary, when listening to Italian music, Saint-Preux's imagination takes flight and his emotions flow:

At each phrase some image entered my brain or some sentiment my heart; the pleasure did not stop at the ear, but entered the soul; . . . I thought I was hearing the voice of grief, rage, despair; in my mind's eye, I saw mothers in tears, lovers betrayed, furious Tyrants.³²

Saint-Preux's aesthetic epiphany, that pleasure derived from music could be experienced at far deeper mental, emotional, and spiritual levels, engaging not only the ear, but "the brain," "the heart" and "the soul," is couched in terms of a newly discovered *jouissance* (as opposed to "coliques" à la française) that Saint-Preux is eager to share with his beloved, and Rousseau with his readers. In addition, as Rousseau argued in his *Lettre sur la musique française* (*Letter on French Music*, 1753) and later, his *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, "parole" as conveyed in songs is essential, which is why "Like Rousseau, Diderot does not much appreciate purely instrumental music. It strays from the essence, the origin of music, which is founded upon language."³³ Instruments were suspicious, more a luxury item than a genuine musical source.³⁴ At the same time, in the wake of Rousseau and influential treatises on language theory, writers dissatisfied with versification as ornamental rather than melodic generated poetic experiments in prose that introduced orality and

musicality to escape from the neo-classical confines of eighteenth-century poetry. The opera quarrel is mirrored by a second quarrel around the liberties taken by experimental prose poems in seeking a rejuvenated "parole," and expressive rhythms by shunning the "instrument" of verse.³⁵ While the philosophes could not accept a strict imitative view of instrumental music, namely the mimetic understanding of music dominating the century, desiring freer expression, a similar resistance occurred in literature.³⁶ Such was the aesthetic environment from which Staël's new approach to reading literature and listening to music emerged.

The glass harmonica overturned staid oppositions: here was an instrument, named for the harmony of its music, which turned out to be intensely expressive. In other words harmony and instrumentality did not have to be incompatible with expressivity. Indeed, the glass harmonica conjured up a *supernatural*, a numinous musical sphere: music played on the glass harmonica escaped the confines of imitation (of sounds in nature) by lifting listeners into the imaginary realm of the otherworldly. Describing a concert with flute, harpsichord, violin and voice, Louis-Sébastien Mercier distinguished the celestial music of the glass harmonica with superlatives:

In the next room, one could hear a concert. There were soft flutes accompanying the sound of voice. The high-pitched harpsichord and the monotonous violin yielded to the enchanting organ of a beautiful woman. Which instrument has more power over the heart! And yet the perfected armonica seemed to challenge it. It produced the fullest, the purest, the most melodious sounds that could flatter one's ear. It was a ravishing and celestial music that resembled in no way the racket of our operas, where men of taste, sensitive men, look for consonance and uniry but never find them.³⁷

For Mercier "the perfected armonica" rivaled with the human voice—a provocative claim that effectively transcended the by now sterile dichotomy between French instrumentalist music and Italian vocal melodies. Moreover, this exceedingly complex, rare, and fragile instrument, though epitomizing the kind of material luxury that one would expect Rousseauian adepts to criticize, produced music so "celestial" as to lift the listener into a higher *immaterial* realm. However, as I mentioned, the expressivity praised by Mercier was but short-lived, as mechanical uniformity could soon take over. Hadlock justly writes of the armonica as a "poetic sign of liminality."³⁸ That the glass harmonica was Mesmer's indispensable instrument to achieve therapeutic magnetism confirms the instrument's perceived

association with superior forces, the connection of its music with the occult and the uncanny (to use an ancient and a modern term).³⁹

The glass harmonica offered evidence that Enlightenment dichotomies could be overcome, an objective at the heart of Staël's aesthetic analyses. Indeed, Staël's merit as a "revisionist" of musical aesthetics and a precursor of Romantic sensibility was to legitimize the autonomy of music by insisting on its spiritual and metaphysical properties—leaving aside, though not discounting, its imitative aspect.⁴⁰ Though absent from James Johnson's rich cultural history, *Listening in Paris*, hers is an important contribution in the gradual evolution of musical experience from the Enlightenment to the 1830s. As early as 1800, she had conjoined a new mode of listening (away from imitation toward affect) documented by Johnson, with literary models (Young, Thompson and Klopstock) that provided in turn the vocabulary to express this new aesthetic understanding of music as expressive rather than strictly referential. A new type of "listener" in the realm of music and poetry, Staël searched for an adequate language to express the emotions aroused by melancholy poetry as well as to describe the ineffable music of the glass harmonica.

Germaine de Staël's *On Germany*

The second occurrence of the glass harmonica in Staël's writing appears when she refers to the instrument in *On Germany* to explain Jean-Paul Richter's poetic style, emphasizing yet again the ambivalent *pleasure in pain* aroused by the armonica:

[Jean] Paul [Richter]'s sensitivity touches the soul but does not strengthen it enough. The poetry of his style resembles the sound of the armonica, which delights at first then hurts after a few moments, because *the exaltation it arouses does not have a fixed object*.⁴¹

Staël adds here another reason—besides our sensorial limitations and the monotony of uniform sound—why rapture turns into pain when listening to the armonica or reading Jean Paul Richter's verse. The absence of a determined object, the want of spiritual direction that would match spiritual elevation, the lack of a referent behind and beyond the sound means the listener loses herself in vagueness, in abstract and sterile phantasms.⁴² Staël's measured criticism reminds us that, while she advanced the cause of music's autonomy, it would still take some years before music could be appreciated abstractly, for its own sake, without a ref-

erential anchor.⁴³ Similarly, her critical distance vis-à-vis Richter's romantic poetic exaltation reflects a sensibility that still retains Enlightenment boundaries.⁴⁴

In a graceful and symbolic aesthetic move, Staël displaced the classic string instrument of the lyre with the recent invention of the glass harmonica. The analogy between the harmonica's crystalline vibrations and the shivers of "the soul, gently shaken" [*l'âme, doucement ébranlée*] is emblematic of the displacement of the Greco-Latin tradition in favor of new inspiration coming from England and Germany. The musical sensibility at the core of Staël's understanding of Romanticism succeeds (at least in her theoretical writings) in overcoming the pictorial mimesis central to the neoclassical aesthetic that still dominated the Enlightenment.⁴⁵ A similar revision is at work during the Enlightenment and accelerates towards the end of the century from treatises such as Charles Batteux, *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle*, François-Jean de Chastellux, *Essai sur l'union de la poésie et de la musique* (*Essay on the Union of Poetry and Music*, 1765), Michel Paul Guy de Chabanon, *De la Musique considérée en elle-même et dans ses rapports avec la parole, les langues, la poésie et le théâtre* (*Of Music Considered Independently and in Its Relations with Speech, Languages, Poetry, and Theater*, 1785), and Bernard-Germain-Étienne de Lacépède's *Poétique de la musique* (*Poetics of Music*, 1785).⁴⁶ This revision, in which painting still serves as a systematic analogy to describe music (the musician "paints"), culminates in Mercier who, in contrast, reverses the customary superiority of painting over music: "We do not talk about Paradise's paintings, but about the music that one will hear there; it's because a melodious tune is more touching than a gallery of paintings."⁴⁷ And indeed, as we saw earlier, Chateaubriand twice describes the music heard in paradise by referring to the glass harmonica. One finds two more revealing analogies in his later writing: in the 1844 *Vie de Rancé* (*Life of Rancé*), the melancholy penitence of the Christian hermit Rancé is compared to "a voice at the bottom of the sea, like the sounds of the armonica, born of water and crystal, and that hurt,"⁴⁸ and in the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (*Memoirs beyond the Grave*, 1848), his adolescent self conjures up his imaginary lover [*la sylphide*] from the "liquid sounds" of the glass harmonica.⁴⁹ Writing on Chateaubriand, whose metaphors become musical when exploring melancholy, Yves Hersant interrogates this change: "Why this slide toward music whereas the theme of melancholy was for a long time the prerogative of painters? Why, in the representation of the darkest of temperament, this passage from the pictorial to the musical?" Hersant sees the source of this change in the shifting *medical* conception of melancholy during the Enlightenment—a melancholy no longer generated by a brooding mind or black bile but located in

overly sensitive hearts. Now associated with sensibility, it turned to music as an artistic expression more congenial than painting. Musical theories, too, reinforced the change: "During the XVIIIth century a 'melancolisation' of music responds to the musicalisation of melancholy."⁵⁰

The principles of representation, figuration, and imitation defined visual arts, and by extension neoclassical poetics based on the *ut pictura poesis* precept that prevailed throughout the eighteenth century. By contrast, music was gradually understood less as a representational mode than an expressive mode, signaling a shift from an aesthetic of mimesis to one of sensibility—as Johnson has documented—thereby opening the door to idealism, mysticism, and enthusiasm, which for Staël dominated German genius but was sorely lacking in the French, Cartesian analytical mind and tradition. Following Rousseau, Staël suggested the incompatibility between musical sensibility and a purely sensualist appreciation (similar to tasting fruit or seeing colors) that would disunite physical and spiritual, the senses and the soul.⁵¹

Is there music for those incapable of enthusiasm? A certain habit makes harmonious sounds necessary to them, they enjoy them like tasteful fruit or colorful decorations. But did their entire being resonate like a lyre when, in the dead of night, silence was suddenly broken by songs or by those instruments resembling a human voice? Did they feel then the mystery of existence in the tenderness that reunites our two natures and collides, in a single *jouissance*, sensations and the soul? Have their heart's palpitations followed music's rhythm? Did an emotion full of charm teach them those cries that have nothing personal, those cries that do not ask for pity but deliver us from an anxious pain pricked by the need to admire and to love?⁵²

Staël's interrogative style and her evocation of a dual *jouissance*, sensual and spiritual, echo here Saint-Preux's exaltation at discovering music's full potential. Staël's comparison of the romantic or enthusiastic person to a resonating Orphic lyre perfectly translates the new way of hearing and listening that Johnson demonstrates is taking place in theaters and concert halls at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁵³ However, the critical analogy of the glass harmonica shows that while Staël identified the spiritual longings of Romanticism, she also made visible a glass ceiling, so to speak: Romantic poetry, like chords from the glass harmonica, could only reach a certain height before reaching the limits of expression and communication.

Notes

1. Cited in *The Glass Armonica: Benjamin Franklin's Magical Musical Invention*, http://www.glassarmonica.com/armonica/franklin_armonica2.php#tthFtNAAI. Franklin named the instrument "armonica" without an "h" and I will follow his usage. While subsequent spellings in French vary, English spelling is generally "glass harmonica." The glass instrument should not be confused with its wind namesake, the mouth harmonica, invented in 1821 (Thomas Bloch, *L'Armonica de verre ou Glassharmonica: données et synthèse historique, organologique, acoustique et bibliographique sur l'instrument de Benjamin Franklin et sur les instruments dérivés* [Paris: Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique, 1989], 18 and 36).
2. "Venes, musique des" in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2011 Edition), ed. Robert Morrissey, <http://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu/>. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
3. Letter from Benjamin Franklin to Giambastita Beccaria, July 13, 1762, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, <http://www.yale.edu/franklinpapers/>, cited in *The Glass Armonica*, http://www.glassarmonica.com/armonica/franklin_correspondence/1.html.
4. *Ibid.*, 10:126.
5. *Ibid.*, 10:126. For Franklin's complete correspondence relating to the glass harmonica, see *The Glass Armonica*, http://www.glassarmonica.com/armonica/franklin_correspondence/index.php.
6. Heather Hadlock, "Sonorous Bodies: Women and the Glass Harmonica," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53 (2000): 506–42.
7. "The harp. An instrument renewed from the Ancients, our masters in every genre; a harmonious instrument with cords that unite naturally with the sweet accents of voice. The posture that it requires casts a favorable light on the development of all graces. Then, a beautiful woman's head conveys enthusiasm and ravishment; her delicate, docile fingers fly about the strings; sounds seem to descend from the heavens; a rounded arm unfolds, a pretty foot moves forward and seems to attract all eyes. This instrument, a rival to the harpsichord, is in fashion, and the queen's predilection for it further contributed to its preference by the Court and the city" (Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, ed. Jean-Claude Bonnet [Paris: Mercure de France, 1994], 2:1290).
8. William Hayley, "Epigram on this Question: 'Which Is the more Eligible for a Wife, a Widow or an Old Maid?'" Essay on Old Maids, in *A Philosophical, Historical, and Moral Essay on Old Maids. By a Friend to the Sisterhood*. 3 vols. (London: 1785), 3:173–74.
9. François-René de Chateaubriand, *Les Natchez*, ed. Gilbert Chinard (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1932), 4, 174.
10. Chateaubriand, "Fragments du Génie" in *Essai sur les Révolutions. Génie du Christianisme*, ed. Maurice Regard (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 1337. When reworking this passage more than twenty years later to insert it in his prose epic on the Indians, *Les Natchez*, Chateaubriand adopted neo-classical tropes to ennoble his prose (feminine gendering of the harmonica, "ouïr" instead of "entendre"), thereby taming his more poetic and original first draft. The glass harmonica and the Aeolian harp are often contrasted, as we will see subsequently.
11. My emphasis; Germaine de Staël, *On Literature*, in *Major Writings of Germaine de Staël*, ed. and trans. Vivian Folkenflik (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 178.
12. August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, Fragment 449, *Athenaeum*, in *Kritische Ausgabe*, 3 vols., quoted by Tzvetan Todorov, *Théories du symbole* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), 197. Founded by August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, the literary journal *Anatheum* was published from 1798 to 1800. However, it seems Staël became acquainted with the Schlegel brothers' works only after the publication of *On Literature* and during her first trip to Germany (1803–1804) when she convinced August-Wilhelm Schlegel to return with her to Copper to be her children's preceptor. Whereas the chapter on German literature in *On Literature* does not refer to the Schlegels, by the time she published *On Germany*, Staël was thoroughly familiar with the writings of both brothers, which she analyzes and compares. See Germaine de Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, ed. Simone Balayé (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968), 2:69–75 and 152–54.
13. "The wonderful correctness of two voices in perfect harmony, in the duets of the great Italian masters, produces a delightfully touching emotion, one which, however, cannot be prolonged without a kind of pain . . . the soul then vibrates like an instrument in an accord with others which would be broken by too perfect a harmony" (Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, ed. and trans. Avriel Goldberger [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987], 162). For an analysis of music in Staël's *Corinne*, see Tili Boon Cuillé, "Staël's Sweet Revenge," in *Narrative Interludes: Musical Tableaux in Eighteenth-Century French Texts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 173–203; and Anne Deneys-Tunney, "Corinne by Madame de Staël: The Utopia of Feminine Voice as Music within the Novel," *Dalhousie French Studies* 28 (Fall 1994): 55–63.
14. See recordings by Thomas Bloch, *Glass Harmonica: Mozart, Beethoven, Donizetti, Schulz, Roellig, Naumann, Reichardt, von Holt Sombach, von Apell, Bloch* (Naxos, 2001) and Bruno Hoffman, *Music for Glass Harmonica* (Vox Unique, 1990).
15. Bloch, *Glass Harmonica*, in-leaf 4.
16. "I play some of the softest Tunes on my Annonica, with which Entertainment our People here are quite charmed, and conceive the Scottish Tunes to be the finest in the World. And indeed, there is so much simple Beauty in many of them, that it is my Opinion they will never die, but in all Ages find a Number of Admirers among those whose Taste is not debauch'd by Art" (Letter from Benjamin Franklin to Sir Alexander Dick, December 11, 1763, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 19:384, cited in *The Glass Armonica*, http://www.glassarmonica.com/armonica/franklin_correspondence/8.html).
17. Adagio in C and Adagio and Rondo for Armonica, Flute, Oboe, Viola, and Cello. See *The Glass Armonica*, <http://www.glassarmonica.com/armonica/mozart.php>.
18. Germaine de Staël, *Correspondance générale de Madame de Staël*, ed. Béatrice Jasinski and Othenin d'Haussonville (Paris: Hachette, 1982–1985), 5:139–40. See also Simone Balayé ed., *Les Carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël* (Genève: Dmz, 1971), 61–62.
19. George Sand, *Consuelo*, in *Consuelo. La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*, 2 vols., ed. Léon Cellier and Léon Guichard (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 2:478–79.
20. In 1798 Friedrich Rochlitz wrote in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*: "There may be various reasons for the scarcity of armonica players, principally the almost universally shared opinion that playing it is damaging to the health, that it excessively stimulates the nerves, plunges the player

into a nagging depression and hence into a dark and melancholy mood, that it is an apt method for slow self-annihilation. . . . Many (physicians with whom I have discussed this matter) say the sharp penetrating tone runs like a spark through the entire nervous system, forcibly shaking it up and causing nervous disorders.' He went on to give some warnings: 'If you are suffering from any nervous disorder you should not play it, / If you are not yet ill you should not play it excessively, / If you are feeling melancholy you should not play it or else play uplifting pieces, / If tired, avoid playing it late at night.'" Cited in *Yatri's Glass Armonica*, <http://www.crystallmusic.com/glassarmonica.hunl>.

21. In his *Method to Teach Yourself Armonica* (1788), J. C. Miller answered objections: "It is true that the Armonica has strange effects on people. If you are irritated or disturbed by bad news, by friends or even by a disappointing lady, abstain from playing, it would only increase your disturbance." Cited in *Yatri's Glass Armonica*, <http://www.crystallmusic.com/glassarmonica.hunl>.
22. Bloch, *Glass Harmonica*, in-leaf 4.
23. Pierre Guigoud-Pigale, *Le Banquet magnétique* (Londres [i.e., Lyons], 1784); Louis-Nicolas Marechal, *Le Magnétisme animal. Mesmer ou les sons* (London: James Fleisher, 1786).
24. Michael Pollack, "Glass, Wet Fingers and a Mysterious Disappearance," *New York Times* (December 12, 2001).
25. Nigel Bunce and Jim Hunt, "The Glass Harmonica," *The Science Corner* (College of Physical Science, University of Guelph, March 29, 1989).
26. Hadlock, "Sonorous Bodies," 509.
27. See Part I of Cuillé, *Narrative Interludes*.
28. For a more thorough contextualization, see Cuillé, "Introduction: Tableau Theory," in *Narrative Interludes*, 1–21.
29. *Ibid.*, 4.
30. Rousseau, *Julie, or the New Heloise*, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, eds. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997), 6:108.
31. *Ibid.*, 110. See also Julie's reply, letter LII in *ibid.*, 117.
32. *Ibid.*, 109.
33. Marie Naudin, "Madame de Staël, précurseur de l'esthétique musicale romantique," *Revue des sciences humaines* 139 (Juillet–Septembre 1970), 394.
34. For her part, Staël suggests a musical (and pictorial) appreciation preceding the origin of language: "If we were able to imagine the impressions to which our soul was susceptible before coming to language, we would better understand the effect of painting and music" ("Des beaux-arts en Allemagne," in *De l'Allemagne*, 83–85).
35. For more on this subject, see my *Prose Poems of the French Enlightenment: Delimiting Genre* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).
36. Cuillé makes important distinctions between Rousseau's vehement criticism of French music and language, and Diderot's more nuanced and open-minded musical appreciation based in part on his belief that French language could improve (Cuillé, "Diderot and Musical Mimesis," in *Narrative*

Interludes, 25–55). See also James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), in particular, "Expression as Imitation," 35–50.

37. Louis Sébastien Mercier, *L'An deux mille quatre cent quarante. Rêve d'un en fur jamais* (London: Gale ECCO print editions, 2010), 428.
38. Hadlock, "Sonorous Bodies," 509.
39. "Music in mesmerist practice became an intangible correlative of the magic/magnetic objects that increased the body's receptiveness and changed the atmosphere, causing magnetism to flow more freely and inducing trance or collapse ('crisis')" (Heather Hadlock, *Mad Loves: Women and Music in Offenbach's Les Contes d'Hoffmann* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000], 52). For a more detailed discussion on "the mesmerist paradigm" and how its discourse anticipated Freudian psychoanalysis, see Hadlock's "Mesmerizing Voices: Music, Medicine and the Invention of Dr. Miracle," in *Mad Loves*, chapter 2, 42–66.
40. "Merit is due to Madame de Staël for legitimizing the autonomy of music by neglecting its imitative aspect on the one hand, and on the other by insisting on its spiritualist and metaphysical properties" (Naudin, "Madame de Staël," 394).
41. My emphasis; Staël, "Des romans," in *De l'Allemagne*, 2:52.
42. See the sentence preceding the insertion of René's story in Chateaubriand's *Génie du Christianisme*: "We witnessed the birth of this guilty melancholy which rises in the midst of passions, when these passions without object consume themselves in a solitary heart" (716). Unlike Staël, Chateaubriand emphasized here "guilty" melancholy.
43. On this transitional period, see Johnson, "In Search of Hartnony's Sentiments," in *Listening in Paris*, 206–27.
44. "Romantic effects are the accents of a primitive language that all men do not know and that becomes foreign to several countries. We soon cease to hear them if we do not live with them; and yet this romantic harmony is the only one that preserves in our hearts the colors of youth and the joy of life. . . . Nature placed the strongest expression of the romantic character in sounds and it is especially to the sense of hearing that we can impress in a few strokes and in an energetic manner extraordinary places and things. Smells give rise to quick and great perceptions, albeit vague; perceptions by sight seems to interest the mind more than the heart; we admire what we see, but we feel what we hear" (my emphasis; Etienne-Pivert de Senancour, *Obermann* [Paris: Garnier, 2003], lettre 38, *De l'expression romantique et du "ranch des vaches"*, 183–85. Also cited in Gérard Gengembre, *Le Romantisme en France et en Europe* (Paris: Pocket, 2003), 19 and in Fernand Baldensperger, *Sensibilité musicale et romantisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1925), 34.
45. "As long as there is no opposition between the poem and music, we give way to the art that must always win over all the others. For the delicious reverie into which it projects us destroys the thoughts that words can express, and as music awakens in us the feeling of the infinite, everything that tends to particularize the object of the melody must diminish its effect" (Staël, "Des beaux-arts en Allemagne," in *De l'Allemagne*, chapter 32, 83–84).
46. See also Guillaume André Villoteau, *Recherches sur l'analogie de la musique avec les arts qui ont pour objet l'imitation du langage, pour servir d'introduction à l'étude des principes naturels de cet art*, 2 vols. (Paris: L'Imprimerie Impériale, 1807).

47. Metcier, *Tableau de Paris*, 1290.
48. Chateaubriand, *Vie de Rancé*, ed. George Condominas (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), 194.
49. Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, eds. Maurice Levaillant and Georges Moulinier (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), 1, 3:95.
50. Yves Heisaut, "Une lyre où il manque des cordes," in *Chateaubriand: Le Tremblement du Temps*, ed. Jean-Claude Berchet (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1994), 279-88. On the medicalization of sensibility during the Enlightenment, see Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
51. For an analysis of Stäël's knowledge of Rousseau's writings on music, and her strategic incorporation of distancing from Rousseau's views on music in her novel *Corinne*, see Cuillé, "Revoicing Rousseau: Stäël's *Corinne* and the Song of the South" in *Phrase and Subject: Studies in Literature and Music*, ed. Delia Da Sousa Correa (Oxford: Legenda, 2006), 100-11.
52. Stäël, "Influence de l'enthousiasme sur le bonheur," in *De l'Allemagne*, 313.
53. Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 270.