

# Chateaubriand's Alter Egos: Napoleon, Madame de Staël and the "Indian savage"

Fabienne Moore

In May 1800, after eight years of exile, Chateaubriand finally returned to Paris. This return to a post-revolutionary motherland is vividly pictured in the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (MOT I 440-42). Paris was home to a topsy-turvy world of disguised identities, of enriched former revolutionaries, of republicans on their way to becoming Imperialists. Poor and unknown—nobody had heard of his *Essai sur les Révolutions*—published in 1797 Chateaubriand settled in an "entresol" symbolically located next to the "rue des Saints-Pères" (MOT I 439) and itself a symbol of Chateaubriand's uncomfortable standing between the ground floor of obscurity and the first floor of fame. The editing of the manuscript of the *Génie du christianisme* was taking longer than expected and Chateaubriand was growing impatient and concerned that someone would precede him in offering new ideas to rejuvenate an exhausted French society. This concern was exacerbated by the publication of two successive editions of *De la littérature* (in April, then November, 1800) by Madame de Staël. Chateaubriand later recalled how during a night of insomnia (caused by the love song of two mourning doves he had bought!) he decided to challenge Mme de Staël by writing a letter, which he knew his friend Fontanes, editor of the *Mercur de France*, would publish in his journal. The strategy worked: "Cette boutade me fit tout à coup sortir de l'ombre; ce que n'avait pu faire mes deux gros volumes sur les *Révolutions*, quelques pages d'un journal le firent" (MOT I 444).

Recounted in 1837, thirty-six years later, further revised in 1846, the incident is characteristically played down by Chateaubriand's rich, albeit selective, memory. Beyond its witty figurative sense, the word "boutade" reveals Chateaubriand's combative gesture of pushing ("bouter") de Staël away from the territory he intended to chart. This effort to displace de Staël at the outset of his career<sup>1</sup> betrays the enormously ambitious political, ideological and literary agenda laid out in the letter to Fontanes.

Published on December 22, 1800 (1er nivôse IX), the sixteen-page letter is a provocative critical analysis of de Staël's *De la littérature*,<sup>3</sup> and it made Chateaubriand's name. Clearly intended as a political, ideological and literary manifesto, this letter is an overlooked document full of insights, contradictions, ambitions, confidence and "confidences" (in the French meaning of the word: secrets). In the run of Chateaubriand's long life, the letter reads as Act I of his confrontation with three alter egos: Napoleon, de Staël, and the "Indian savage"—three figures at the heart of Chateaubriand's alterity within romanticism.

As early as the second paragraph of his letter, Chateaubriand insinuates that Mme de Staël "a bien l'air de ne pas aimer le gouvernement actuel" (107). Having just returned to Paris from Coppet—her estate in Switzerland—at the end of December, de Staël's fears were immediately aroused by this questioning of her political allegiance.<sup>3</sup> She protested to her friends who conveyed to Chateaubriand how unwise it would be not to have Necker's famous daughter on his side. Four months later, in the preface to *Atala*, he made amends and bowed to de Staël's "beautiful talents."<sup>4</sup> Pleased by this new and mysterious voice and intrigued by the success of *Atala*, a forgiving de Staël opened the door to her salon and actively sought to remove his name from the list of *immigrés*. The letter to Fontanes offers a fascinating subtext to the precise historical moment of Napoleon's rise to power and the ensuing political chess game between the ruler and two of his most challenging contemporaries.

A triangular love-hate relationship between Chateaubriand, de Staël and Napoleon linked the three contemporaries throughout their lifetime. The trio became entangled in a web of mutual admiration and resentment. Napoleon was equally fascinated by the talent of each writer, yet feared them both. The Republican sympathies and pro-revolutionary sentiment of de Staël made her dangerous, and her salon made her powerful. By contrast, Chateaubriand, although an *immigré* and a friend of the royalists, soon deployed, through *Atala* and the *Génie du christianisme*, an agenda in tune with Napoleon's efforts of reconciliation with the clergy, and was therefore seen by the general in a better light than de Staël.

The two writers shared an awed admiration (which later turned into rebellious opposition) for the new leader. Both had the ambition to entice him into adopting their vision of literature: de Staël, a liberal in the line of her Protestant heritage, embraced the progressivist vision of the eighteenth-century and the ideals of the Revolution. Chateaubriand, turned anti-revolutionary by the atrocities of the Terror, wanted to restore peace by re-establishing Catholicism. Impatient to emerge from his obscurity, Chateaubriand did not hesitate to seize the opportunity to position himself on the same

side as Napoleon, using de Staël as a temporary target to bring attention to his future work in contrast to hers, and to win himself the general's sympathy. The strategy was successful if short-lived: Chateaubriand gained a position at the embassy in Rome but three years later, when the First Consul turned dictator and ordered the execution of the Duke d' Enghien, he immediately resigned from the position Napoleon had procured him.<sup>5</sup> From then on, his outspoken resistance would match de Staël's vindictive attacks.

As a man of power, responsible for the destinies of millions and carrying the hopes of a whole country, Napoleon embodied a virtual alter-ego for Chateaubriand: the romantic character in action whom he aspired to become. The reality of Napoleon's despotism, which de Staël had forseen, was perceived as a betrayal of his political genius and spurred Chateaubriand into an increasingly active participation in French politics. Victor Hugo similarly became involved in politics, raising the question of the nature of French romanticism in relation to politics (should one speak of political romanticism or romantic politics?).

The movement of admiration followed by disappointment, the witnessing of virtualities caught up and thwarted by realities, the irreducible difference between the aspirations of his own ego and the accomplishments of his alter-ego, all represent dualities embedded within Napoleon but also within de Staël and, as will be seen later, the Indian, the three living archetypes in relation to which Chateaubriand defined himself at the outset of his career.

The blatant political opportunism of young Chateaubriand accounts to some extent for the bad faith of his criticism against de Staël's work. Delving into the ideological underpinnings of the letter, one is struck by an unpleasant, condescending tone which could easily lead one to bypass the validity of Chateaubriand's arguments, as well as their profound novelty and originality.

Chateaubriand feels "obligé, malgré moi, de porter . . . un jugement sévère" upon the author of *De la littérature*. Speaking of himself in the third person plural using the pronoun "ils" (authority disguised as modesty), and using the indeterminate pronoun "on" to refer to de Staël (condescension disguised as respect), Chateaubriand writes:

*Ils [les esprits pédantesques comme moi] voudraient qu'on eût creusé plus avant dans le sujet; qu'on n'eût pas été si superficielle; que, dans un livre où l'on traite de la chose la plus grave du monde, la pensée de l'homme, on eût moins senti l'imagination, le goût du*

sophisme, et *la pensée inconstante et versatile de la femme*. (111)  
[my italics]

This arrogant, misogynist, and *ad feminam* remark would be just that, if it were not the site of a remarkable reversal: de Staël is blamed for so-called typically feminine faults while the rest of the letter, often under the guise of compliments, complains about her intellectualism—"Votre tête est forte" (122). In other words, her writing has too much thought and not enough heart. Chateaubriand reverses the traditionally gendered qualities of heart and mind to ascribe to himself passion and emotion while casting de Staël as a cold, philosophical mind (but a mind, of course, which has still much to learn: "votre talent n'est qu'à demi développé") (122). Chateaubriand denigrates, through de Staël, the intellectual emancipation and recognition women sought throughout the eighteenth-century, the better to reveal his own emancipation from a masculinized Reason. No longer a Rousseauist self-reflexive gesture delivered in confessional mode, his is a loud claim for a new post-revolutionary man. The tables are turned: the "face à face" is now between the sensitive man turning his back on the Enlightenment and the sensible woman embracing her role in the lineage of the *femmes des Lumières*.

An influential and affluent woman of letters, de Staël possessed what Chateaubriand would seek all his life: a name, a fortune, a salon, an estate. Yearning to be recognized and re-integrated into French society, the yet unknown writer saw in her a woman of power, a feminine, virtual alter-ego. Coppet was not quite the international meeting house it would become a few years later, but for Chateaubriand, then and until de Staël's death, it represented comfort, independence and wealth. Her melancholy and pain at being exiled by Napoleon would never be understood by Chateaubriand: all he saw was this magnetic pole whose peace and distance attracted him even though he resisted its intellectual, liberal circle.

In his letter Chateaubriand attempts to conceal the similarity of their imaginations by opposing their natures: he links his own sensitivity to his religious convictions and by opposition observes that de Staël's writing displays scant religious faith. I should remark that by religion or Christianity, Chateaubriand always means Roman Catholicism. The underlying criticism is therefore always directed against de Staël's Protestantism. Both writers wanted Napoleon to embrace their respective beliefs. De Staël, contrary to Chateaubriand's assertions, was convinced of the necessity of religion but believed that only Protestantism was compatible with a republic. Catholicism seemed to her more favorable to dictatorship. As Simone Balayé put it, she advocated a "foi clairvoyante" (71). Chateaubriand, profoundly

shocked by the anti-clericalism of the Revolution and its legacy of ruined churches, foresaw, like Napoleon, that the reinstatement of Catholicism could reunite a country still under shock.

The issue of religion is at the center of the letter and at the heart of the two writers' works and lives.<sup>6</sup> It is refracted in two other sets of oppositions: nationality and social class. To Chateaubriand's Catholic, French, aristocrat background one can oppose de Staël's Protestant, Swiss, bourgeois upbringing. Chateaubriand points out in the letter that they both arrived at the same conclusion through opposite paths:<sup>7</sup> philosophy and religion. This "aveu" is a powerful indicator of the source of tension between the two contemporaries. Finding himself deprived of the symbolic drawing room, Chateaubriand transplanted the seed of his new ideas outside this traditional aristocratic sphere into the common sphere of the Church. In an opposite gesture, de Staël, protected by her bourgeois background, rebuilt the site of the philosophical salon by bringing in politics.

The point of conjunction and departure of their paths is the aesthetic value that each attributed to melancholy as the essence of poetic spirit. Chateaubriand had no doubt been impressed by de Staël's remarkably novel analysis of the melancholy genius; his ready embrace of it is both an agreement and an appropriation of what would become a romantic paradigm. Perhaps to distance himself from de Staël, but more probably to delineate some of the ideas of his book to come, the *Génie*, Chateaubriand expressed his disagreement not with de Staël's conclusion but with her method, which he derogatorily called her "system", based on the theory of perfectibility.<sup>8</sup>

Agreeing with de Staël that the knowledge of the passions is more developed in modern literature than in the Ancients, Chateaubriand sought to demonstrate that Christianity, not the increasing perfection of mankind, is at the origin of this development. By establishing a new scale of virtues and vices, and consequently creating a battle between flesh and spirit, Christianity set the stage for heightened dramatic pathos. Where de Staël envisioned the ongoing progress of the human mind in its quest for self-knowledge, Chateaubriand perceived, on the contrary, a remarkable consistency through time and history, with perhaps a heightened capacity for illusion—his sole, negative concession to perfectibility. Chateaubriand concedes that our mode of expression might have improved, but the metaphysics of the Ancients was equal, if not superior, to ours. The essential character of metaphysics has remained the same: "Tout est doute, obscurité, incertitude en métaphysique" (110). The profound pessimism expressed in this key sentence is the dominant undertone beneath the brash attitude of Chateaubriand's letter. Chateaubriand was, in many ways, a pessimistic Christian for his belief never incorporated the hopeful moment of the resurrec-

tion, so important in the Catholic faith. The Christian genius was for him solely the genius of melancholy to the exclusion of any joy. It is as if there were to be no redemption, no promises, no future beyond, but a future only replicating the present, melancholy moment. Chateaubriand dwells only on the present state where "l'âme s'échappe", speaking of "un vague infini où la pensée aime à se perdre" (113). Is Christianity the source of melancholy in Chateaubriand's letter because of the absence of a savior? Although this conclusion can be inferred, in fact, it does not interest Chateaubriand, whose exclusive emphasis on man's aimlessness and loneliness reveals that he is only fascinated with a state of being, a state of feeling, and not with its reasons. Its nature is to be precisely "sans objet": "la mélancholie s'engendre du vague des passions lorsque ces passions sans objet se consomment d'elles-mêmes dans un coeur solitaire" (114). *René* will embody this self-consumption/consumption of the self.

Christianity does not provide answers, it creates a state of confusion valorized by Chateaubriand over the clarity of philosophy. In opposition to the importance of analysis, argumentation and understanding ("entendement") in de Staël's search for truth, Chateaubriand knows of no answers but in man's guts—"les entrailles de l'homme" (113). To the fire of the melancholy man's burning heart, he contrasts the striking metaphor of a "cercle de boue" in which philosophers like de Staël have enclosed/buried their thoughts. Their disclosures have forsaken the spiritual and the mysterious: "Ainsi tout est désenchanté, tout est mis à découvert par l'incrédule" (121). For Chateaubriand "les hautes lumières de la philosophie" are ill-named for they are lighting but a tomb, a crypt, an abyss of death.

To portray de Staël as an atheist was to misread her entirely. For Balayé the concept of perfectibility in *De la littérature* is linked with "the conviction that religion is a moral support, a guide" and, above all, "a source of happiness" (82). She viewed Catholicism, on the other hand, as interfering with sensitivity in its attempts to channel it—therefore always dangerously close to becoming an instrument of power. Catholicism is described under its darkest aspects in *Delphine*, almost, Balayé writes, as "une religion d'esclaves" (92), whereas Protestantism embodies freedom.

De Staël's deep belief in the progress of humanity and her vision of a better future are a counterpoint to Chateaubriand's pessimism and nostalgic turn towards the past. Why, then, the melancholy in her work (and life) and by extension her theory of melancholy? For de Staël, it is the melancholy of a present never matching the *ideal future*. Conversely, melancholy pervades Chateaubriand's work (and life) because the present does not match an *ideal past*. The medium of expression chosen by each writer is symbolic and in keeping with his or her vision: eloquence for de Staël, memory for

Chateaubriand. With eloquence, she tried to swerve friends and politicians into adopting and implementing the derailed, liberal ideals of the Revolution. With memory, Chateaubriand reinvented a past to help endure his present fallen condition.

The surprising ambiguity at the heart of the letter, which also finds itself embedded in *Atala*, is that Catholicism is not only a source of melancholy, but of unhappiness and evil. An exaggeration of the dictates of Catholicism causes the Indian *Atala* to swallow poison for fear of betraying unreasonable vows, thereby denying herself the happiness of a union with the semi-European Chactas. The story does not explain why, long after her death, Chactas has not yet converted to Catholicism in spite of his promise to *Atala*. It is a silence fraught with ambiguity about the good brought about by the religion of the Fathers. In the letter to Fontanes the ambiguity appears in the positive and negative terms surrounding religion: Christian religion is described as "un vent céleste qui enfle les voiles de la vertu, et multiplie les orages de la conscience autour du vice" (108); he further comments that "le christianisme seul a établi ces terribles combats de la chair et de l'esprit, si favorables aux grands effets dramatiques" (109). He gives the example of *Héloïse* who served a "Dieu jaloux, un Dieu qui veut être aimé de préférence; il punit jusqu'à l'ombre d'une pensée, jusqu'au songe qui s'adresse à d'autres que lui" (109). The pain, however, is a source of pleasure. Chateaubriand identified with the paradoxical feeling of pleasure in pain, of joy in grief, experienced by the early Christians and renewed by similar adverse historical trials during an anti-religious Revolution. It would form the basis of the "mal de siècle" prefigured by Chactas and embodied in *René*.

Anticipating his book, the *Génie du Christianisme*, and his later epic poem, *Les Martyrs*, Chateaubriand returns to the beginnings of Christianity, when persecution led to exile, isolation and self-imposed rules of penitence "pour fléchir la colère céleste" (114). One feels how his imagination was exclusively captivated by the remarkable proximity to death which characterized the experience of the early Christians. It drove them to build monasteries in the most inhospitable places, thereby matching their sadness with a forlorn and dreary nature in an alliance envisioned by Chateaubriand in terms of the poetry of the sublime:

Oh! comme ils devaient être tristes, les tintements de la cloche religieuse qui, dans le calme des nuits, appelaient les vestales aux veilles et aux prières, et se mêlaient, sous les voûtes du temple, aux derniers sons des cantiques et aux faibles bruissements des flots lointains! Combien elles étaient profondes les méditations du soli-

taire qui, à travers les barreaux de sa fenêtre, rêvait à l'aspect de la mer, peut-être agitée par l'orage! la tempête sur les flots! le calme dans sa retraite! des hommes brisés sur des écueils au pied de l'asile de la paix! l'infini de l'autre côté du mur d'une cellule, de même qu'il n'y a que la pierre du tombeau entre l'éternité et la vie! (115)

Such a passage is meant to refute the validity of de Staël's dichotomy between Northern and Southern literature which Chateaubriand saw as incompatible with evidence provided by literary history. Evocative of Ossianic themes, this passage naturally led Chateaubriand to examine the Scottish bard Ossian whom de Staël praised in her book as the "Homer of the North" and who was central to her argument.

Chateaubriand's criticism is at its most perceptive in this analysis. Instead of passing a negative judgment upon James Macpherson's forgery, Chateaubriand displays the evidence: material evidence, neither the paper nor the runic characters of the manuscripts were used in Scotland at the time; contextual evidence, forgeries were common in England; and, most of all, historical evidence, that is, anachronism within the poetic text. Chateaubriand points out that he is relying on his own first-hand observations of the Indians (still primitive to some extent), affirming that the Scottish bard's conception of time, because of its abstraction and awareness of the future, is not compatible with primitivism.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, the fact that Ossian's poetry is permeated with the concept of "le beau idéal moral" indicates that it could only have been written in a more advanced society, and more importantly for Chateaubriand, in a Christian society. In support of his demonstration, he rightly compares, in order to oppose, Ossian's poetry to primitive Scandinavian poetry, the latter fraught with brutality and acts of vengeance. Here again Chateaubriand invokes the American Indians, and more precisely the death song of the Iroquois, similar in its blunt violence to the Scandinavian poems, to prove that only a Christian could have written the words of Ossian. The author, therefore, was Macpherson, "[un] très bon chrétien" according to Chateaubriand, who half-ironically concludes: "Il a chanté sa montagne, son parc, et le génie de sa religion" (119).<sup>10</sup> To prove that Ossian's poetry was the work of a contemporary was to undermine de Staël's system which rested on Ossian's influence on Northern literature. Having debunked Ossian, Chateaubriand triumphantly reinstates Shakespeare, Young, Pope and Richardson as Christian writers under the influence of the melancholy of their religious ideas.<sup>11</sup>

Far from casting away Ossianic poetry, Chateaubriand candidly portrays himself as also having been once under the spell of the Scottish bard, and admits that it took several years of exile amid scholarly circles in Lon-

don to "disabuse" him. Indeed, one should remember that the *Essai sur les révolutions* is as outspoken and enthusiastic about Ossian as de Staël's work. The letter to Fontanes, written three years later, shows that Chateaubriand still highly valued Ossian, to the point of admitting he now never goes out without carrying Homer in one pocket and Ossian in the other! (120). This little anecdote says it all: like the vast majority of his contemporaries, Chateaubriand believed that Macpherson's act of forgery "sans doute, ne détruit rien du mérite des poèmes de *Temora* et de *Fingal*; ils n'en sont pas moins le vrai modèle d'une sorte de mélancholie du désert, pleine de charmes" (119-20). The authenticity of the poems was crucial to de Staël's theory but secondary to Chateaubriand in his search for true poetry.

Essential to this quest, a third figure surreptitiously emerges in Chateaubriand's letter: the Indian savage, perhaps the most intimate and yet the most overlooked persona in the writer's life and work. The encounter with the New World and the Indians, whom he discovered during an enthusiastic five month trip in 1791, although fraught with contradictions and paradoxes, was an epiphany celebrated over and over again under different forms throughout his work and correspondence. The ending of the letter is extraordinary: it is a mixture of arrogance and naïveté, of condescension and sincerity, of transparent allusions and unconscious yearnings. Chateaubriand puts on the voice of the Indian to teach his "neophyte" ("ma néophyte"). Mme de Staël, a lesson (the possessive pronoun and the substantive "neophyte" are daringly disrespectful).

The ensuing sermon is a parable illustrating the abstraction of philosophy and prompting de Staël to take up charitable work to fill out the vacuum of her life. It sketches in a short scene the woman of the Mount Apaches who goes and consults the "jongleur" of the wilderness to find out whether or not there are "bons génies." She worries because she envisions secret wounds in every man, like so many "crocodiles" lurking at "the bottom of wells."<sup>12</sup> The "jongleur" replies that she has to believe in good "génies" precisely because she is unhappy and needs hope. The "grand Esprit" has to make her feel pain, has to strike her in order for her to turn towards others and help them. The metaphoric style sounds strikingly naive after the preceding critical argument. The tale is a refutation of de Staël's philosophy and a transparent appeal to raise Chateaubriand from obscurity and poverty. The parable ends with the "jongleur" returning "dans le creux de son rocher" (123). Immediately after, Chateaubriand bids adieu to his friend and ends the letter, thereby completing the double-identification: as the "grand Esprit" who stung de Staël to get her to react (which she did), and as the visionary "jongleur" advocating Christian charity. One can imagine him going back to his "entresol" after having thus spoken!

I would argue that within the tragicomic aspect of this scene lies Chateaubriand's divided soul. In many respects, he identified with the Indian woman's estrangement. She represents his alienated self, that of an aristocrat finding himself outside of history, in the same way the Indians slowly found themselves thrust from their own land, a dispossessed self like the Indians, exiled from their spirits. Beyond the biographical implications of this identification, this fundamental attraction becomes an assimilation as well as the re-creation of a new voice, a new language, "la langue des forêts" (122). Chateaubriand's idea of poetry is, then, the prose of the Indian, the melancholy voice of fallen innocence. Inscribed in this poetic prose is the alteration, soon to become a disappearance, of the primitive, hence the powerful meditative undertones which appealed to the next generation. Chateaubriand thought he would discover in America an ideal space to match his ideal past. Yet he found no such America, but instead so-called primitive and savage Indians already corrupted by civilization and, one must add, Christian religion. The shocking discovery led him to take up the role of the *jongleur* of the disappearing tribe, namely, his class.

The figure of the *jongleur*, a nomadic troubadour who recited or sang poetry while playing an instrument, projected onto the American scene, is a complete anachronism. In their remarkable account of the emergence of prose in France, Wlad Godzich and Jeffrey Kittay have shown the central role of "this individual and the signifying practice that is centered around him":

In the High Middle Ages, in a mostly illiterate society, the *jongleur*, by means of his trained memory and what it stored, represented an important cultural institution. The texts, epic and otherwise, that were his stock-in-trade constituted the cultural patrimony of the collectivity . . . His function, particularly at the beginning, was not to innovate or add to his patrimony but to preserve it . . . The *jongleur* was judged not on the content of his recitations and songs, which in any case the audience was familiar with, but on the style of his presentations. He was believable because his performance evidenced that he had served his apprenticeship, that he had been trained by others who "knew", that he was "in the know." He had to be a master at the complex task of performing a narrative, as well as of reciting other forms of discourse. And it was the way in which he fulfilled these expectations that showed him to be a keeper of tradition, a transmitter of law, a person worthy of credit and, therefore, one whose authority is not put into question. (xvi)

As the authors show further on, the signifying practice of this fascinating metamorphic character leads him to the brink of the commingling of poetry and prose—the groundbreaking achievement of Chateaubriand's subsequent writing.

Chateaubriand had seen in America what Napoleon and de Staël had not: Rousseau's noble savage.<sup>13</sup> From the beginning to the end of his career, this knowledge gave him the means to distance himself and treat his two famous contemporaries with superiority—the superiority of the one who knows. As I have tried to show, however, his is also the knowledge of an already lost paradise. This knowledge is why, at the outset of a career which will be formidable, the "melancholy mohican" (to take up Lautreáumont's phrase) inscribes death as the possibility and condition of a new form of writing. Contemplating himself in the fate of the Indian, of Mme de Staël and of Napoleon, Chateaubriand embodies this "mélancholie au miroir" of which Starobinski so eloquently spoke in his work on Baudelaire's poetry.

New York University

## Notes

I wish to thank Ann Gardiner and Robert Dimit for their careful reading of the first version of this paper.

1. The displacement becomes erasure in the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* where Chateaubriand denies de Staël any precedence and systematically presents *De la Littérature* as contemporaneous with the *Génie*, a blatant anachronism. Surprised she avoided his name—it was unknown in 1800—he remarks ". . . un talent supérieur à évité mon nom dans un ouvrage sur la *Littérature*" (MOT I 418).
2. "Lettre au C. Fontanes sur la seconde édition de l'ouvrage de Mme de Staël" [décembre 1800] (C 106-123). The letter is simply signed "L'auteur du Génie du christianisme".
3. Napoleon had just escaped from a failed coup and reprisals were to be feared.
4. ". . . dès lors que j'ai offensé, j'ai été trop loin: qu'il soit donc tenu pour effacé ce passage. Au reste, quand on a l'existence et les beaux talents

- de Mme de Staël, on doit oublier facilement les petites blessures que nous peut faire un solitaire, et un aussi ignoré que je le suis" (A 263).
5. Jean-Pierre Richard speaks of the brutal moment when the paths of the two contemporaries separated as a "divorce spectaculaire": "Ce moment est . . . celui du meurtre, du meurtre dirigé contre le passé. Chateaubriand reconnaît dans l'assassinat du duc d'Enghien un acte d'émancipation terroriste. A travers ce crime . . . Napoléon tue une deuxième fois le roi, liquide l'ancien monde" (156).
  6. All her life De Staël will try to rally Chateaubriand to her religious principles, but their doctrinal differences will remain the major point of contention between them.
  7. "Il sera divertissant pour vous, de voir comment deux esprits, partant de deux points opposés, sont quelquefois arrivés aux mêmes résultats. Mme de Staël donne à la philosophie ce que j'attribue à la religion" (106).
  8. For a contextual analysis of the "querelle de la perfectibilité" and a study of de Staël's political thought, see the opening chapter of Lucien Jaume's *L'individu effacé*.
  9. "J'ai vécu parmi les sauvages de l'Amérique, et j'ai remarqué qu'ils parlent souvent des temps écoulés, mais jamais des temps à naître" (119).
  10. The characteristics of Christian faith embedded in the text of Ossian and brought to light by Chateaubriand's pursuit of his "idée fixe," Christianity, should be added, within Dwyer's otherwise enlightening chapter, to the "characteristics of sublimity and sentimentality [as] the most conclusive proof that the poems were the products of an eighteenth-century forger and not a third-century bard" (166-7).
  11. "Pour moi, mon cher ami, vous voyez que j'ai tout à gagner par la chute d'Ossian, et que chassant la *perfectibilité* mélancolique des tragédies de Shakespeare, des *Nuits* de Young, de l'*Héloïse* de Pope, de la *Clarisse* de Richardson, j'y rétablis victorieusement la mélancolie des idées religieuses. Tous ces auteurs étaient chrétiens; et l'on croit même que Shakespeare était catholique" (120).
  12. Chateaubriand uses exactly the same comparison at the end of *Atala* (159). On the disturbing sexual symbolism of the crocodile in this story, see Caroline Bailey's very perceptive psychoanalytic reading. Her analy-

sis extends to the parable concluding Chateaubriand's letter, in particular the link between the image of the crocodile and the image of the tree, woven together in the *jongleur's* last words. In the light of Bailey's reading, it is tempting to imagine the all powerful Mme de Staël as the living embodiment of the "maternal agency (*vagina dentata*)" symbolized by the crocodile, "carrying the threat of destruction/castration" (150).

- 13 "Ce farouche idéal de 'noble sauvage', dont on ne sait plus très bien s'il est né du côté des indiens du Canada, ou du côté de Brocéliande, hante par intermittance la carrière de Chateaubriand . . ." (Berchet 16)

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