

Cosmopolitanism or Globalization?: Mme de Staél's Feminist Comparative Literature for Fredric Jameson

Tegan Zimmerman, University of Alberta

In his essay "Globalization and Political Strategy" (2000), Fredric Jameson defines globalization, and in doing so disentangles what he refers to as the "the technological, the political, the cultural, the economic, and the social" (49, 63), but I would add to this list the category of the sexual, to which I will return to in more detail momentarily. Jameson's interest, however, is primarily in forging a politics of resistance to the capitalist exploits of globalization, which for him entails "de-linking" and in some respects a return to a renewed sense of Luddism or Gaullism nationalism (63, 65). Globalization is, of course, for Jameson an overwhelmingly destructive force in our current situation, and permeates our everyday to such an extent that the possibility for change seems, at times, hopeless. Jameson's definition of current globalization necessarily entails or ultimately describes US power in neocolonial terms of empire (nuclear weapons, American human rights/democracy and control over immigration) in relation to the rest of the globe and might be described best as Wallenstein's now well-known relation between the centre-periphery (50). That the imperialist power of the US dominates all aspects of life is undeniable, according to Jameson, and so when he speaks of globalization, he means the nature of US politics as "democratic" in relation to a capitalist free market economy (50-1). My focus in this article is not so much to criticize Jameson's analysis but rather to suggest that a feminist perspective might open up more possibilities for resistance. I further argue that many of the questions Jameson raises about globalization were first articulated and considered

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Tegan
Zimmerman
is a PhD Candidate
in the Program of
Comparative
Literature at the
University of Alberta.
Her dissertation is on
the twentieth century
feminist historical
novel.

by Mme de Staél, literature's first feminist comparatist, in her work *De la littérature dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1799) over two centuries ago.¹

Staél's importance in the literary canon regrettably has been for the most part over-looked. Though, as Sarah Webster Goodwin notes, Staél offers the discipline of comparative literature the "rare example of a feminist critic and scholar" (248), to which I would add author, and is one of the reasons why I see a necessity in comparatists to return to her work. This urgency is felt in Goodwin's claim that "after Germaine de Staél, feminist speculation apparently disappeared entirely from comparatists' methodological debates" and in a footnote, perhaps re-inscribing the erasure she seeks to draw attention to, Goodwin writes again (248):

there lies a story to tell in the erasure of Staél's presence. Consistently, histories of the discipline mention her and then drop the subject [...]. More typical is the overture of praise followed by dismissal offered by Hugo Dyserinck: he calls her work decisively influential, then dismisses it for being limited in its point of view. (252)

Goodwin's point is that there is still a great deal of feminist work to be done on Staél, and thus this article serves as but one entry point into renewing this interest.

One of the most striking features of Staél's work, unlike Jameson's, is her insistence on the power of literature as a strategy and tool against an oppressive political regime. In the case of Staél's writing it is the regime of Napoleonic France which she challenges, and can be likened to the hegemony of the United States today. In *De la littérature*, hereafter referred to as *On Literature*, Staél makes an important attempt to transition from the ideals of the European Enlightenment (reason, science, progress, positivism) to a more Romanticist position (myth, emotion, imagination, constructive comparison, integration). Ultimately, I see this transition as paralleling the predicament of globalization as Jameson outlines it in terms of the Enlightenment and strategies for resistance in a return to Romanticism.² The goal for Staél in this early work is to properly "examine the influence of religion, customs, and laws on literature, and the influence of literature on religion, customs

¹ For the purpose of simplicity all quotations from Staél's works that I use can be found translated into English in Vivian Folkenflik's (ed and trans) *An Extraordinary Woman: Selected Writings of Germaine de Staél*. New York: Columbia UP, 1987.

² I acknowledge that this parallel does not hold up entirely as one could argue that the Enlightenment notion of capital has no relation to our present free market economy of capitalism and likewise that the romantic hero as an individual outsider to the group fuels competition and the individualistic thinking so essential to capitalism.

and laws" (173). Her comparatist approach argues that two distinct literary cultures exist in Europe, one in the North and one in the South, which in Jamesonian terms we might replace as West and East or North and South.

She writes:

two completely different kinds of literature [...] Southern and Northern [...]. What I am going to call Southern literature includes the Greeks, the Romans, the Italians, the Spanish, and the French of Louis XIV's time. English works, German works, and a few writings of the Danes and Swedes must be classified as Northern, along with the literature that began with the Scottish bards, Icelandic fables, and Scandinavian poetry. (174-75)

The differences between the two types of literature that Staél identifies consider climate, imagination, tendency towards melancholy, spirit of a people, treatment of nature, and religion, all of which are the markings of Romanticism, but Staél makes one extremely important and brave divergence in her analysis of literatures by including a respect for women. Staél sees this respect for women more in the North, and thus she favors Northern literatures.

Arguably, it might seem that Staél's writing no longer reflects a contemporary reality – after all we no longer think of European literature as North or South – yet this does not necessarily entail that we can, nor should, ignore her position. Staél's unique feminist perspective invites a questioning of the role of woman in her patriarchal society, and, during this time, she sensed the necessity and urgency of a collective effort from women in order to improve their social situation. A collective initiative by women, Staél argues, will lead to social change. Staél identifies patriarchy as one of the chief problematics of her time, and here we might benefit from reading the Napoleonic years as a time of admonishing monarchies in order to implement civil codes and law. In both instances, the mode of economics changes but the structure of patriarchy remains stable, suggesting that capitalism today, like the feudal, monarchist, and civil economics of Staél's day, are actually all modes of patriarchy. Thus, modern-day capitalism, as an advanced mode of patriarchy, should not be as closed up as Jameson believes to preempt disturbances or ruptures, and that changing patriarchy itself, as recognized by Staél, might prove more difficult than altering any economic system.

I should be clear, however, at this point, that Staél herself does not make the explicit link between economics and patriarchy, and that she is, of course, an educated member of the elite; therefore, she is not disadvantaged in terms of wealth and, accordingly, she never writes on the issue of class structures. The claim

that capitalism or commodification is not a phenomenon independent of patriarchy but rather merely an advanced form of an economy centered on men, competition and ownership is my own and seeks to combat what I see as missing from both Staél and Jameson when we compare their works; Staél does not take into consideration class when she focuses on the issue of woman,³ and Jameson, to reiterate, does not take gender into enough consideration in its relation to capitalism.⁴ Staél, nonetheless, calls for nothing short of a radical transformation of patriarchal values and she argues that French culture keeps woman subordinate by not letting her have any lofty ideas or means to express herself in conversation; if we look to Jameson and his understanding of globalization, might it be that we need to combat patriarchy first from within itself if we are to change/challenge the current state of globalization? Again, this is another reason why Jameson might look to feminist literature for the kind of collective resistance he is seeking.

Jameson might look favorably on Staél's kind of influential resistance: Staél, during the final years of her career, continued to refuse science by writing extensively from exile; and, by the time of 1807, she revised her initial division between North and South literatures, desiring instead a reconciliation between the two. Promoting a more holistic approach, evident in her works, *Corinne ou Italy* (1807), *L'Allemagne* (1810) and *De L'Esprit des Traductions* (1816), Staél believed that changes within France would and could come about only in resituating woman and the woman writer. For Staél, writing and women's writing held enormous potential as a political tool and means for resisting and undermining Napoleonic patriarchy; Staél in all of her works (treatises, plays, novels, and so on) emphasizes the centrality of a female consciousness, a focus Jameson might consider as strategic if patriarchal capitalism is to be undermined.

3 Many influential feminist-Marxist works addressing capitalism have been written, including identifying the gender blindspot in Marx's work by Heidi Hartmann in her essay "The Unhappy Marriage Between Feminism and Marxism: Towards a More Progressive Union." In this work Hartmann attempts to unite feminism and Marxism by challenging patriarchy and capitalism separately. In response to Hartmann many feminists including Iris Young reject what is referred to as a dual systems theory. Young instead puts forth a notion of a single and unified theory of capitalist patriarchy which elevates the category of a division of labor and, in particular, the 'gender division of labor' as being equal if not more important than class. While I accept Young's analysis, I feel it is important to extend her notion of a unified theory by suggesting in terms similar to Azizah Al-Hibri that capitalism is a mode of patriarchy. In contrast to Al-Hibri and Young, however, I approach the division of labor as informed by Luce Irigaray's perspective of sexual difference. Irigaray's discussion of patriarchy and masculine economies from her essay "Women on the Market" is implicit in much of this article.

4 Jameson has been criticized by Terry Eagleton for refusing to discuss gender, but as Jane Marcus notes in "Storming the Toolshed," Eagleton too is also guilty of this act of unforgivable omission. She writes that "even a Marxist critic like Jameson is loyal to the old boys" (265).

At the time of writing *L'Allemagne*, hereafter referred to as *On Germany*, which is one of Staél's last written works, the empire of Napoleonic France was at its height in promoting an insular identity in terms of religion, art, politics and literature, while at the same colonizing and imposing French rule over most of Europe and the globe. The parallels between Napoleonic France and neo-colonial America today are striking. During her time, however, Staél realized that while literature could invoke a sense of community and a shared past, as seen in pre-nations, e.g., Germany and Italy, it could also unite other communities, such as woman, which were not dependent solely on national boundaries or linguistic commonality. Staél's voice(s) constitute a continuation in woman's literary tradition by tracing a genealogy of woman's writing and, like her Romanticist contemporaries who drew on folklore traditions such as *Ossian*, the *Nibelungelied* or the *Iliad*, Staél looks to the ancient Greek poetesses Sappho, Korinna, and the sibyls as expressing an alternative writing tradition – woman's writing tradition.

Regardless of the fact that a common language or a heroic past is not shared by women, Staél suggests woman shares a past of patriarchal oppression as evidenced in literary writings by women and writings about women by men. Staél's attempt is to recuperate and create a feminine genealogy of literary women (sibyls, Sappho, Korinna) that runs congruent and in opposition to the masculine oral tradition of wars, epics, political figures and heroes. In her literary re-inventions, particularly in her novels *Delphine* and *Corinne ou Italy*, and her treatments of Sappho and Korinna, Staél crowns her female protagonists Delphine and Corinne as literary successors. Thus, by resituating the woman and woman poet as powerfully subversive in the Napoleonic patriarchy, Staél reemphasizes that the leitmotif in all her works is the centrality of a female consciousness. These novels challenge the patriarchal order in their nostalgic longing for maternal origins associated not with the Enlightenment, but with antiquity. Staél's interpretation of the creative genius as female is deliberate and supports the argument that she provides a counter "voice" in a now male dominated Romanticist era (Blake, Chateaubriand, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, and so on). Staél's novels, however, do not simply look nostalgically to a common female literary past but aim to re-center and give critical space to the literary talents of women for the present and future. Jameson too reflects on the nature of the community and nation, and though he advocates the collective, he resists advocating communitarianism or a strong style of nationalism, which is precipitated when communities feel simultaneously empowered and threatened. This nationalism is seen during the nineteenth century, for example, with the advent of Finland's *Kalevala*, Scotland's *Ossian*, leading up to twentieth century Nazism and Fascism (64, 68). In response to this dilemma Staél advocates the art of translation

and a literary identity that is fluid, multiple and plural.

The kind of harmful resistance to globalization in terms of insular nationalism that Jameson worries about is brought to light by Staél when she discusses the difficulty women have in giving themselves a voice and identity within the patriarchy. The tension found in *On Literature* between nations as having a unique identity that shouldn't be contaminated by other nations, and the simultaneous need for literature to cross nations in order to strengthen national identity is articulated by Jameson (68). He writes, "in all these situations we see the discursive struggle between the claims of the particular and those of the universal – confirming Chatterjee's identification of the fundamental contradiction of the nationalist position: the attempt to universalize a particularity" (66). Jameson's dilemma, however, was recognized much earlier by Staél, and for whom, it is no longer a problem in her later writings. Charlotte Hogsett suggests that after *On Literature* there is a shift in Staél's thinking and that the "essence of a nation as the fundamental way of being" is put aside in favour of a more complex approach to identity (106-8). Massardier-Kenney, like Hogsett, suggests that translating the literature of other nations and reading other national literatures becomes of key importance for Staél in her later writings.

Massardier-Kenney writes, "Staél's valorization of the oral over the written [...] is a valorization of the process of translation over original 'pure,' 'uncontaminated' texts, that she optimistically emphasizes that it is in the retelling of the story in another language or from another point of view that cultures can be revitalized" (145). A claim in favour of translation coincides with Staél's feminist perspective, which she hopes will revitalize French culture, and here we can read Jameson's analysis of neocolonial America. Translation, Staél argues, forces the nation and a people to look not only inward but beyond their own culture or political/linguistic borders. There is the call to embrace an other – not consume the other (Jameson 57). Staél's recognition that one must look within and beyond one's self seeks to consider woman beyond the lens of man, or in Jameson's words, that woman will no longer consume/be consumed. The act of translation as defined by Staél resonates nicely with Jameson's position because Staél, the now infamous Romantic social rebel, reduced to the status of other, and exiled to the margins of France, speaks from the unique vantage point of a woman.

Staél redefines one of the crowning characteristics of the Romanticist period, the hero as outsider (Lord Byron typically exemplifies the Romantic individualist hero who fought for revolutionary Greece and self-exiled himself from England)

to include the heroine, and by supporting a more cosmopolitan approach to literature in order to make "conversation live and ideas move" (*On Germany*, 296). Staél's insistence on literatures crossing borders promotes her notion of cosmopolitanism – that is, as a "citizen of the world" ("Cosmopolitanism"). Staél's methods are a strategic means to undermine masculine nationhood and literatures as sovereign and redefine the nation's identity by rewriting woman's identity. Silvia Bordoní argues that "in Staél's European ideal, nationalism and cosmopolitanism are not in conflict, but rather integrate with each other" (138). Jameson again might turn to the power of feminist literature or collective literatures in rethinking the definition of nation and globalization more favorably. Staél's understanding of literature, as I have been arguing throughout this article, is applicable to global politics and can be strategic in resisting gendered labor and the feminization of poverty in favour of a more fair and just globalization – for example, by introducing a unitary minimum global wage.

Staél, to reiterate, found inspiration in the translations of literature but she equally, if not more so, propounded the potential of the literary salon. Taking advantage of one of the few spaces where a woman could voice her opinions, though how much respect her monumental guests such as Goethe gave her are questionable, Staél nonetheless used her literary salon as a place or setting for ideas to be put into circulation. Forging a unique identity, as seen in the Romanticist's recuperation of folklore and myth, was of key importance to Staél's salon discussions and further suggests that a sense of self whether as a woman, or a nation, can and must be realized through the other and through literature. The other is a precondition for identity, and without acknowledging the literature of other nations, the nation's own literature becomes stagnant and incapable of growth. Doris Kadish writes that "Staél advocates translation as the necessary condition to keep national literatures alive" (140), and that it is through reading the literatures of other cultures that new literary forms are born. National literatures must not be afraid to seek inspiration and influences from different nations/cultures, even if these influences reject one's own national/cultural stance – for Jameson this would be Islam versus the United States. Could reading more Islamic literature (not published or circulated by an American company but one that circumvents the US altogether) be a mode of resistance? Is this even a possibility, given Jameson's characterization of American bestsellers, TV programs, and films (59, 66-67)?

In *De L'Esprit des Traductions* (1816), Staél confirms: "No loftier service can be rendered to literature than transporting the masterpieces of the human mind from one language to another [...] the imported beauty that a translation brings

with it gives the national style new turns of phrase and original expressions" (162-63). Thus, literature is emancipatory and the foundation is an exchange of communication. Jennifer Birkett likewise perceives Staél's thinking of the individual in relation to society in *Corinne*, and analyzes Staél's position in terms of Jürgen Habermas's theory of "communication community" (though Habermas was not concerned with women's voices). Birkett reinterprets the rights of women and the function of comparing literature as "a central preoccupation in Germaine de Staél's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807), and one which is returning to contemporary agendas with a political urgency equal to that of its feminist theme, is the problematic of the relation between the individual subject and the social and political community" (2). Thus, just as Birkett re-reads Staél's concept of literature as complex, her feminist insistence on woman's integration into society serves as a strong foundation in an exchange of communication.

Surprisingly, it is from the place of exile – a common and recurring theme both within comparative literature and globalization – that Staél's most subversive voices emerge. Like Sappho before her, she speaks from her exile in order to undermine the patriarchal regime of Napoleonic France. Angelica Goodden asks, "how does writing beget exile, and exile writing?" (10). Goodden interprets Staél's political exile as circular: her writing in exile is powerfully subversive and because her voice is a threat to the norm she is exiled. To reiterate, Staél was exiled by Napoleon for her work being deemed "un-French" especially her book *On Germany*, which exalted the German spirit compared to her own French culture. Exile for Staél, then, is as much about literature as it is about gender – she is banished for challenging both. Not only is Staél herself exiled, but anyone who communicates with her is likewise subject to banishment, which was the fate of Mme. Recamier and M. Mathieu de Montmorency (*Considerations on the Main Events of the French Revolution*, 372).

A unifying call to women, Staél's Romanticist works threaten the power of the most influential exemplar of individualism for the nineteenth century, who is not a creative artist at all, but a military man: Napoleon Bonaparte. Staél's exile raises the question, what does it mean for a woman to be exiled from a republic to which she is not even a citizen? Can she be "un-French" when she is legally not permitted to be French? Whose laws is she really defying or breaking? The law of God, the father or the Emperor? Staél poses as a threat to the regime of patriarchy and nationalism by refusing silence; she answers back by introducing the works of the German Romantics to France with her work *On Germany*, thereby epitomizing the political perspective of a feminist comparatist. Returning to Birkett's analysis

of Staél and the "communication community," must one today reject technological information advances such as the internet entirely in order to combat capitalism, which often seems to be Jameson's position? Must writers, like Staél, always be exiled and in exile in order to write and speak back and against hegemony, and what forms will this writing now take?

Staél's espousal of the Romanticist movement offers, as I have noted, a transition into cosmopolitanism, a circulation of literary ideas and citizens in support of a communal cultural space (Bordoni 134). Silvia Bordoni further argues that Staél's approach is dialectical, as she sees the particular interests of individuals merge in favour of a cross-cultural view that transcends national identities and borders, creating, according to Bordoni, "a communal cultural space where literary and social specificities merge and influence each other, for a self-sufficient intellectual terrain" (134). Staél thus shows the instability and artificiality of both national and gender boundaries, and it is no longer about opposing literatures, nations, and genders, but a comparative and dialectical process; Staél promotes integration and negotiation. She writes, "Romantic literature is the only literature [...] that can still grow and find new life" (*On Germany*, 302). Is this what we are in need of today? A renewed post-nationalist or transnationalist sense of Romanticism informed by the politics of feminism? For Staél, writing is about finding a feminist voice that resonates with the people; likewise, translating involves not just duplicating the original but understanding the spirit of the poem so that it appeals to the language or culture in which it is being read. It is literature, not France or any nation that is Staél's home; and this is the feminist lesson we must apply in relation not only to comparative literature as a discipline, but Jameson's theory of globalization.⁵

In *On Literature*, Staél takes up her position from the margins in an attempt to disrupt, create, design, define, and express herself in ways a hegemonic society restricts. Literature for Staél is a space created by the subversive voice, and it is her vehicle for social change and advocating women's rights. The "art" of translating involves not just duplicating the original, seeing a Starbucks and McDonalds on every street corner, but is about cross-fertilization and hybridity. Though Staél's literary entirety is Europe, and an upper-class educated elite, one can easily extend her thinking to a world-view of globalization. Staél attempted to "bind literature

⁵ Goodwin suggests that "because of the historical association between comparative literature and nationalism [...] and because comparative literature, even more than national literatures, traditionally defines its concerns around an elite and exclusively male canon – its sources, influence, branches, and subcanons – it has resisted with particular force the inroads of a feminist criticism" (249).

and society in a universal perspective, without compromising the individuality of each cultural and social entity, but respecting the *entirety* of a nation" (Steinwach and Isbell qtd. in Bordoni 137). Thus, Staél would not reject American culture entirely – after all American influences can only strengthen the literatures of other nations – but for Staél it is not a one way street: other nations must necessarily influence the US to the same, or at least to some meaningful extent. However, Jameson might question whether this is even possible (66-67).

To conclude Staél's argument for de-territorializing literatures, promoting translation and feminism is instructive, and insightful when read alongside the twenty-first century work of Fredric Jameson, who seeks a radical rethinking of current globalization. Jameson suggests "de-linking" and a return to a form of Ludism, whereas Staél suggests it is through reading the literatures of other cultures that new literary forms are born and ultimately new technologies for reading and writing will emerge. Her feminist view "de-links" from a nationalist perspective in favour of an "interlinking" cosmopolitanism. By constructively comparing literatures Staél encourages dialogue and communication – both politically necessary acts in combatting patriarchal capitalism – and her position offers an alternative resistance to the problems of globalization in which Jameson outlines but, by failing to consider gender, is unable to offer viable solutions.

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