

ARTICLE

## “Un tel mariage serait une offense mortelle”: Music and the Creative Female Voice in *Corinne ou l’Italie*

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### SUMMARY

Germaine de Staël’s decision to write *Corinne ou l’Italie* as a novel, the generic form particular to the prosaic description of everyday life, figures as an original attempt to bring the female voice into the everyday. In part, the absence of access to music in *Corinne ou l’Italie*, both in dialogue and in description, demonstrates textual resistance to depicting the sublime. Moreover, the tensions that arise in the expression of music in the novel serve to emphasize the tensions that arise in the expression of the female voice in the everyday. I propose here an analysis of the representation of music as a narrative counterpoint of Corinne, primarily, and of Oswald, secondarily, that elucidates the ramifications of both Corinne and Oswald’s impossible marriage and what Simone Balayé traces as the descent into silence that accompanies Corinne’s loss of creativity and inevitable loss of life. Through textual resistance to depictions of music or of the sublime, *Corinne ou l’Italie* critiques social resistance to the enunciation of the creative female voice.

KEYWORDS: Germaine de Staël, *Corinne ou l’Italie*, music, female voice, artist novel, Romanticism, social critique, feminist approach, Rousseau, George Sand

*[P]armi les pressentiments de la vie à venir, ceux qui naissent de la musique ne sont point à dédaigner.*

—Germaine de Staël, *Corinne ou l’Italie*

Pulsing through Germaine de Staël’s artist novel *Corinne ou l’Italie* (1806) is a musical discourse that delineates Romantic aesthetics. In the artist stories of Romanticism, music reigns supreme as the idiom for the expression of the ineffable, and Staël, among other Romantic writers, identifies music as the most sublime of the arts due to its capacity to give rise to a sense of the infinite or of the divine. Understood as a transformative creation of original genius that culminates in an experience of the sublime, music for the Romantics is thus a privileged mode and medium of the communication of the emotions, spirit, or soul. As such, music presides as a benchmark for verbal expression and is understood as more apt than words for sounding out one’s passion or devotion. At the same time, *Corinne ou l’Italie* evinces the fact that, if music is expressive of that which words cannot adequately speak or describe, then, like the mysteries of nature or the divine, music also resists description. With an understanding of music’s prominence as an intermediary between the sayable and the unsayable, between the natural and the supernatural, and between the human and the divine, Germaine de Staël pushes beyond

Romantic musical aesthetics and mobilizes textual resistance to writing music in order to sound out the political and ethical dimensions of narrative itself. Specifically, despite the ostensible prominence of music in Germaine de Staël's vast artist novel, the reader experiences a distinct lack of access to this musical sound; further, this absence parallels the lack of access to the female voice in the narrative and, as such, functions not just to show textual resistance to depictions of music or of the sublime but to critique, through such limits, social resistance to the enunciation of the female voice.

Throughout *Corinne ou l'Italie*, Staël explores the nature of music through discussions about the fine arts as well as about nationality, language, original expression, imitation, memory, physical sensation, and nature. In so doing, she creates a multifaceted dramatization—through dialogue, improvisational monologue, description, and allegory—of nationalistic debates about language, art, and beauty that parallel those found, for example, in Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues*. However, Staël takes a step further to underscore in these nationalistic debates the plight of the female artist in patriarchal European society. For example, Rousseau, who characterizes language as originally a sonorous expression of passion that arose from the breasts of idle dwellers of warm climates, identifies Greek as the most accented and musical of western languages and, therefore, proclaims Greek a language that resembles its emotive origins more so than do northern languages such as English and French. He also claims that language, with the growth of society, “devient plus juste et moins passionné,” and that, as “il substitue aux sentiments les idées, il ne parle plus au cœur, mais à la raison” (Rousseau 230). Corinne too laments the monotony of modern civilization, but, for her, this shift has greater ramifications, as it presages her own surrender to a trajectory from a melodious to a monotonous existence: “Là [en Grèce], sont encore des hommes d'une imagination vive, d'un caractère enthousiaste . . . Je me plaindrais à voir . . . tous les pays où il y a dans les mœurs, dans les costumes, dans le langage, quelque chose d'original. Le monde civilisé est bien monotone, et l'on en connaît tout en peu de temps” (Staël 428–29). At the novel's open, Corinne's sibylline dress, her lyre, her bardic ability to improvise, and her rapport with the audience align her spirit with that of an ancient Grecian, and Corinne herself, through her tribute, aligns the Italian spirit with that of ancient Greece. She also proclaims that her beloved Italian has “un charme musical qui fait trouver du plaisir dans le son des mots presque indépendamment des idées” (83) and that the “vrai caractère de la gaieté italienne . . . c'est l'imagination” (182). However, as a result of her love for an Englishman, Oswald, who would rather she live a quiet, private, domestic life and speak a language that “se laisse aller comme les Bardes écossais à l'effroi du mystère, à la mélancolie qu'inspire l'incertain et l'inconnu” (429), Corinne begins to restrain her natural penchant for creating brilliant effects and, ultimately, removes herself from the public sphere. Despite both Oswald's horrible realization that it is he who has “flétri cette belle imagination” (430) and his momentary rejection of stagnation when he exclaims to Corinne's English step-mother, Lady Edgermond, “[l]e monde eût été bien aride, madame . . . , si l'on n'avait jamais conçu ni le génie, ni l'enthousiasme, et qu'on eût fait de la nature humaine une chose si réglée et si monotone” (459), Oswald flatters himself with the idea that Corinne will eventually adjust to English domesticity, even as he knows that to convince Corinne to live in an unaccented and, indeed, muted society is to persuade her to stifle her vitality in addition to her creativity.

Drawing from Rousseau's division of Europe into the warm, passionate South—Greece and Italy, in particular—and the cold, intellectual North—Germanic countries, England, and France (i.e., Paris)—Staël thus establishes the framework for Oswald's silencing of Corinne. For

Rousseau, degradation of the first languages was, in part, due to the uniting of distant peoples: the invasion of the Southerners, with their warm, untamed and sonorous language, by the Northerners with their cold, constricted, and articulated language. *Corinne ou l'Italie* dramatizes this opposition and fear of invasion during a gathering in Corinne's salon, when the French Count d'Erfeuil voices his fear of cultural blending: “[q]ue deviendraient le goût, l'élégance du style français après un tel mélange?” (177). Corinne's opinion of such a “mélange,” an opinion that suggests a more universal concern of expression in communication, is clear from the beginning of the novel when she responds to Oswald's disappointment in her choice to speak Italian: “quand on a comme moi parlé plusieurs années de sa vie deux ou trois langues différentes, l'une ou l'autre est inspirée par les sentiments que l'on doit exprimer” (73). This small exchange, in which Oswald shows his anxiety over Corinne's choice to speak in Italian, functions as a *mise en abyme* of the conflict that pervades Corinne and Oswald's relationship: Oswald's anxiety over Corinne's attachment to Italy and Italian culture and, consequently, his incapacity to accept Corinne in her entirety—that is, as both English and Italian.

Corinne's rejection of d'Erfeuil and Nelvil's desire to maintain distinct national identities and to maintain the status quo within national borders functions to challenge, while it employs, the discourse of aesthetics that privileges original expression over imitation. Kant, for one, esteems the genius as someone whose originality at once breaks the mold and creates a new mold for others to emulate (Kant, *Critique* §46). However, Kant's account of “genius” in his *Critique of Judgement* (1791) is subtended by the alignment of the unbounded sublime with men and the beautiful, or the limited, with women, as explicated in his early text, *Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764) and even earlier in Edmund Burke's 1757 aesthetic treatise, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Germaine de Staël rejects this alignment in her decision to make her main character an acclaimed woman artist who, through her sublime expression, displays her originality. Corinne's artistic talent, as “poète [*sic*], écrivain[e] [et] improvisatrice,” is that of creativity and invention (Staël 49). Upon d'Erfeuil's claim that “il faut imiter, autant qu'on le peut, les parfaits modèles” (176), Corinne anticipates A. W. Schlegel's 1808 lectures on aesthetics, in which he would claim that “mere imitation is always fruitless” (Schlegel 21), by responding frankly to d'Erfeuil that “l'imitation est une espèce de mort” (Staël 177). More critically, when Corinne vehemently refutes Lady Edgermond's standards of behavior for women, she effectively argues that the socialization of imitation is lethal for the human spirit: “il ne lui suffisait pas que je menasse la même vie qu'elle, il fallait encore que ce fût par les mêmes motifs” (366). In an attempt to describe her torment in England to Oswald, she employs the language of the expression/imitation binary to demand for women the same opportunities that men have for personal expression: “Chaque femme comme chaque homme ne doit-elle pas se frayer une route d'après son caractère et ses talents? Et faut-il imiter l'instinct des abeilles, dont les essaims se succèdent sans progrès et sans diversité?” (366).<sup>1</sup> However, in aspiring for equality, Corinne's mobilization of a gendered discourse, one that categorically excludes women from the definition of original genius, undermines the rhetorical style of her questions in that the normative answers—those of Burke and Kant, and available for Oswald to repeat—effectively deny Corinne her implied and desired responses.

Corinne's impulse to appeal to Oswald's reason issues from her inability to convince Oswald, through an appeal to his emotions, to embrace her in all of her paradoxical complexity: Italian and English; woman and genius. Early in their relationship, Corinne urgently attempts to

familiarize Oswald with as many works of art as possible in order to give him a sense of her as a whole. Both Anne Deneys-Tunney and Damien Zanone define Corinne's relationship to Italy through art as metonymic (Deneys-Tunney 58; Zanone 52). In revealing to Oswald the images of Italy, including its ruins, cathedrals, sculptures, and paintings, Corinne also reveals to him various portraits of herself. Moreover, by acting as his tour guide, Corinne seeks to develop a sympathetic rapport with him: "Je ne sais si je me trompe, reprit Corinne, mais il me semble qu'on se devient plus cher l'un à l'autre, en admirant ensemble les monuments qui parlent à l'âme par une véritable grandeur" (Staël 98). To this Romantic project, Schelling accords an inherent peacefulness: "the outward expression of the work of art is one of calm, and silent grandeur, even where the aim is to give expression to the utmost intensity of pain or joy" (Schelling 225). Thus, as Corinne observes ancient works of art, she voices not only such an aesthetic ideal of tranquil grandeur but also its affective alignment with her southern temperament. However, this approach to intimacy with Oswald also means that only through fragmentation can Corinne give an impression of the whole of Italy and, by association, of herself; by way of a metonymic tour of herself, Corinne hopes to develop the love that is between herself and Oswald, but the infinite "Corinne"/"Italy" remains only partially defined: just as it is impossible for Corinne to show Oswald every artifact of Italy, it is impossible for her to show every artifact of her being. Indeed, as Damien Zanone suggests, Corinne's attempts to establish herself metonymically in Italy run the risk of rendering her inaccessible "à force de ne la voir qu'à travers un afflux de modèles grandioses" (Zanone 53); as such, her Italian tour fails in that the quantity of associations makes it difficult to locate either "Corinne" or "Italy" in the text. The sheer multiplicity of forums for reflection on art, including visits to museums and conversations in Corinne's salon, suggests the desire to represent simultaneously the vastness of, and the impossibility to exhaust, the infinite Corinne.

The idea of infinity emerges in *Corinne ou l'Italie* not only through sight but also through sound, and the degree to which art bridges the eternal void between Corinne and her admirers depends upon the art form. In the novel, Staël delineates a distinct Romantic hierarchy among the various fine arts that functions in relation to the following series of binaries: concrete/abstract; imitation/expression; ideas/emotions; corporeal/incorporeal; finite/infinite; and human/divine. For example, while sculpture "se révèle je ne sais quel dessein de la divinité sur l'homme" (216), it "ne saurait présenter aux regards qu'une existence énergique et simple, tandis que la peinture indique les mystères du recueillement et de la résignation, et fait parler l'âme [*sic*] immortelle à travers de passagères couleurs" (222). At the apex of this hierarchy—painting over sculpture, and architecture over both sculpture and painting—is not only the art form that Rousseau, along with the German Romantics, privileges above the others but also the one that Corinne and *Corinne's* narrator most esteem: "Parmi les arts, la musique seule peut être purement religieuse" because "[d]e tous les beaux-arts, c'est [la musique] qui agit le plus immédiatement sur l'âme [*sic*]" (224–25; 247). It is this immediate effect that *Corinne's* narrator likewise ascribes to "la grace divine" (247). Maintaining nationalistic delineations, the narrator also reveals his bias in his preference for Italian music and the musicality of the Italian voice:

Qui n'a pas entendu le chant italien, ne peut avoir l'idée de la musique. Les voix, en Italie, ont cette mollesse et cette douceur qui rappelle et le parfum des fleurs et la pureté du ciel. La nature a destiné cette musique pour ce climat: l'une est comme un reflet de l'autre. . . . Les autres la dirigent vers telle ou telle idée, celui-là seul s'adresse à la source intime de l'existence, et change en entier la disposition intérieure. Ce qu'on dit de la

grâce divine, qui tout à coup transforme les cœurs, peut, humainement parlant, s'appliquer à la puissance de la mélodie. (247)

Music, unlike painting and sculpture, does not represent natural phenomena and is not fixed either by materials or to ideas. Even while Corinne assigns universality to religious paintings, such as Raphaël's, that are "à l'instant entendus part tout le monde, et l'attention n'est point détournée de l'art pour deviner ce qu'il représente" (222), she insists that the paintings are, indeed, representations. A decade later, Schopenhauer will further explain how this distinction—of music as a non-mimetic art form—makes music's effect so much more powerful than the effects of the other arts: "music is by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the Ideas, but a *copy of the will itself*, the objectivity of which are the Ideas. For this reason the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence" (Schopenhauer §52). That music may evoke feelings of gravity or gaiety, or that one song may be associated with a prayer and another with a parade, does not fix music to narrative:

Les paroles que l'on chante ne sont pour rien dans cette émotion; à peine quelques mots d'amour et de mort dirigent-ils de temps en temps la réflexion, mais plus souvent le vague de la musique se prête à tous les mouvements de l'âme [*sic*], et chacun croit retrouver dans cette mélodie, comme dans l'astre pur et tranquille de la nuit, l'image de ce qu'il souhaite sur la terre. (Staël 250)

Unlike the plastic arts Corinne and Oswald contemplate, such as the sculpture of Apollo or the painting of Saint Cecilia, music does not encode historical, or mythical, non-musical sources: music is both source and product. Moreover, even more than the monuments Corinne shows Oswald, music has the capacity to fill the void between individuals and to draw them together: "Il n'y a plus de vide . . . la vie est remplie. . . Oswald était resté obstinément loin de Corinne pendant la première partie du concert; mais . . . il se rapprocha doucement, et Corinne l'entendit respirer auprès d'elle dans le moment le plus enchanteur de cette musique" (248–49). Free of semantic content, music thus offers Corinne and Oswald a chance for intimacy that is free from the restrictions of fixed ideas and social dictums.

As a medium of intimacy and intimate expression, music in *Corinne ou l'Italie* also bridges the gap between the past and the present, as well as between external and internal experience. Further, music's ability to evoke the past creates a sense of infinitude, and, in this sensation of the infinite, Corinne senses the divine and seeks an ideal union with Oswald through love as she does with God through faith. As a momentary physical vibration that appears and vanishes and that, like the present moment, both is and is not, music "is at once transferred to the tablets of memory. The tones merely resound in the depths of the soul, which are there by seized upon in their ideal substance, and suffused with emotion" (Hegel 3: 344). The memory of this music, then, is saturated with the deeply personal emotion with which the listener had suffused the tones. When Corinne hears the Italian singers, she cannot use language to express adequately "l'émotion que [elle] ressenti[t]," and "tous [ses] souvenirs se ranimèrent" (Staël 384). The singers' music and accent cause Corinne's heartbeat to race and revive emotions that she had not felt for six years. Reminded not only of the country but also of the life she left when she moved to England, Corinne elucidates a vital connection between music and memory: "rien ne retrace le passé comme la musique; elle fait plus que le retracer, il apparaît, quand elle l'évoque, semblable

aux ombres de ceux qui nous sont chers, revêtu d'un voile mystérieux et mélancolique" (384). Michel Delon, who discusses sensory reception as a link to the past through the sudden and involuntary evocation of memories in response, for example, to a sight, smell, or sound, proposes that because memories serve as traces of a lost origin, physical sensations also serve to suggest a larger absence (Delon 130); Anne Deneys-Tunney, particularly in her analysis of Rousseau's work, also examines the concept of the voice as a bearer of traces of a lost origin and unpacks a specific reading of the female voice in Rousseau's work as one that "carries within itself the affective memory of the child's first rapport to the Other" (Deneys-Tunney 56). The narrator of *Corinne ou l'Italie* is both attuned to a connection between music, memory, and loss and sensitive to its impact on both Corinne and Oswald: "La musique réveille les souvenirs que l'on s'efforçait d'apaiser . . . [et] une impression mélancolique se mêle à la gaieté qu'elle cause" (Staël 247–48). In her youth, Corinne still has sufficient optimism to drive through the cloud of melancholy that settles in when she moves to England after the death of her mother. The Italian singers' music only briefly intensifies the pain of her loss—of her mother, her homeland, and, most recently, her father—before it intensifies even more her will to escape the silence that floods Lady Edgerman's house for the "étoile brillante qui lui promet un heureux sort" (386). However, by the point at which Corinne decides to tell Oswald the story of this past—that is, not much more than halfway through the novel, and in a written narrative rather than in person—Corinne has already begun the descent into the silence and shadows that widen the insurmountable gap between herself and Oswald and, ultimately, that shroud her swan song.

Even from the start of the novel, wherein Germaine de Staël initiates a discourse of opposites, she aligns, as Simone Balayé observed, Corinne with music and Oswald with silence or non-music (Balayé 18–19). Oswald, unable to reconcile Corinne's behavior with her "pur accent insulaire," unsuccessfully tries to define Corinne according to his own categories: "Sûrement, . . . l'anglais est votre langue naturelle; celle que vous parlez à vos amis" (Staël 68; 73). It is Oswald's decided "orgueil national" that moves Corinne to abandon her preceding universality, to interrupt Oswald, and to place herself in opposition to him: "Je suis Italienne" (74; 73). In Corinne's subsequent defense of Italy, which she saturates with the pronoun "nous," she not only defines herself as Italian; she also implicates herself as both not-French and not-English (74). At this point in the narrative, neither Oswald nor the reader has any indication of Corinne's mixed heritage, and we take her at her word when she identifies herself as Italian. Even after "[Corinne and Oswald] commençaient à dire *nous*" (107), national distinctions do not completely recede into the background; rather, they continue to infuse all of Corinne and Oswald's interactions. During the excursion to the Vatican, the narrator explains that, in relation to the nature of the paintings' subjects, "Oswald et Corinne différaient d'opinion . . . ; mais cette différence, comme toutes celles qui existaient entre eux, tenait à la diversité des nations, des climats et des religions" (221). Oswald, trapped within the rigid dialectics imposed by his father and by his fatherland, seeks to understand Corinne only from within his own framework of ideals. His persistence in asking Corinne to follow him to England and his apparent neglect of her earlier statement that "[elle a] beaucoup souffert . . . pour vivre en Italie" (74) confirm his inability to develop a dialogic exchange with Corinne that would allow him to understand her and to sympathize with her.

In their dialectic relationship, Corinne cannot escape her position as an object of comparison, as Oswald cannot restrain from comparing Corinne to her opposite, her half-sister, Lucile, who was also Oswald's father's choice of ideal partner for him. Corinne, able to

sympathize with Oswald due to her experience in England and her understanding of British culture, surrenders to Oswald and willingly sacrifices, for love, that which most threatens Oswald's sense of order. Corinne justifies her loss of talent, and her removal from the public sphere, as necessary to accommodate her "passion profonde": "Le talent a besoin d'une indépendance intérieure que l'amour véritable ne permet jamais" (430). The narrator, however, does not allow Corinne to convince the reader that this love entails any degree of mutuality: "Corinne avait tort, pour son bonheur, de s'attacher à un homme qui devait contrarier son existence naturelle, et réprimer plutôt qu'exciter ses talents" (431). Only Corinne's resignation and silence eventually move Oswald's heart to pity; however, his sympathy does not prevent him from insisting on his concept of what is good for Corinne (439). Due to imposed and self-maintained personal, parental, and cultural restrictions, Corinne and Oswald are unable to achieve the ideal union for which Corinne longs. Both Oswald's inability to match Corinne's sacrifice and his rejection of her sacrifice in his acceptance of Lucile destroy any possibility of a reciprocal love between them.

The effect of the personal and cultural resistance to reciprocal love between Corinne and Oswald multiplies with textual resistance to the depiction of music and, consequently, of the impossibly sublime female voice. Nineteenth-century scholar Béatrice Didier aptly poses a fundamental question "de tout roman qui met en scène un musicien: comment évoquer la musique?" (Didier 117). Often, the textual resistance to writing music produces, on the one hand, a surplus of metaphors and metonyms to convey either the sound of the music or the effect of the music on the listener: music that is bright or dark, shining or flashing; music as sparking, glowing, or burning embers or flames. On the other hand, authors frequently fill the silence of written text with tangential narratives on musicians or musical aesthetics. Across the board, authors employ musical vocabulary both in technical descriptions of musical sound and in descriptions of human emotions or interactions. The terms *resonance*, *resonate*, *rhythm*, *tempo*, *harmony*, *dissonance*, and *resolution* may serve to offer the reader an idea of the sound the characters hear; they may also serve to describe a certain understanding of the affective as well as physical, or physiological and sensorial, registers of human existence and social interaction.

At first glance, music cascades throughout Germaine de Staël's text. Preceding Corinne's introductory arrival in Rome is "une musique très belle et très éclatante," and, at her entrance, "[l]a musique se fit entendre avec un nouvel éclat" (Staël 51; 53). Corinne provides musical accompaniment to her improvisations, discusses musical aesthetics with her companions, attends concerts with Oswald, hears music in the wind, and teaches her niece to play the lyre. However, despite the numerous identifications of the presence of music in the text, there is a distinct absence of music in the text. For example, the Italian singers' music, which Corinne distinctly claims to have caused her "exaltation" (385), does not manifest itself in the text. The closest the reader arrives to recognizing a mere fraction of what Corinne hears depends on the reader's familiarity with the effect of music fading with distance as the Italians depart and "répétaient de loin en loin, en chantant, un adieu" (385). Béatrice Didier describes the compound textual resistance to the portrayal of Corinne's improvisations when she comments: "Le texte que nous lisons non seulement est censé être une traduction en prose français de vers italiens, mais il lui manque l'accompagnement musical" (Didier 117). Peggy Phelan, in her work on performance ontology, writes that "[t]o attempt to write about the undocumented event of performance is to invoke the rules of the written document and thereby alter the event itself" (Phelan 148). During the parlor discussions, Corinne and her companions can describe music only in terms of abstract

concepts such as the soul, emotion, and infinitude. Even at the one moment in which the narrator most prepares the reader for a presentation of music, the narrator's documentation of the music ends as soon as it begins: "Le concert commença" (Staël 247). Not only does the simple past, *commença*, encode an already completed action and, therefore, deny access to the start of the concert, but the narrative that does follow detaches itself, as it were, from the orchestra and expounds at great length upon musical aesthetics.

Finally, and tragically, even the one person who is most in tune with music loses her connection to music, and the moment when Corinne can no longer hear music in the text of her life marks her irreparable destruction. Scholarship on *Corinne ou l'Italie* focuses on this fundamental relationship between both music's and Corinne's presence in the text: Simone Balayé, for example, traces the descent into silence that accompanies Corinne's loss of creativity and inevitable loss of life. When Balayé states, "[l]a musique, elle, disparaît" (29), she also signals the disappearance of Corinne, as "[Corinne] est la musique" (19). Madelyn Gutwirth describes Corinne's descent as an unnatural death: the loss of creativity reduces this extraordinary woman to an ordinary (i.e., silent) woman (Gutwirth 432–33). Indeed, *Corinne's* narrator reports that "when she no longer heard the music . . . she fell to the ground without consciousness" (Staël 505). At the close of this literal and figurative chapter, the absence of music, not only from the ears of the readers but from the ears of Staël's improvisatrice, renders a moment of total narrative silence that foreshadows the ultimate silencing of Corinne.

In saturating her text with the intangible and the ineffable—odor, music, memory, religion, infinity, divinity, and death—Germaine de Staël critiques not only the limits of language but the limits of traditional representations of gender. Diane Long Hoeveler proposes that Corinne's performances throughout that novel suggest "a new but aborted romantic feminine sensibility": "Staël attempted in her novel . . . to invent a type of female romanticism that would rival in its performative potential the dominant male discourses of Romanticism that she knew all too well, that is, Ossianism, Prometheanism, Faustianism, Rousseauvianism, Alfierianism, or Wertherism" (Hoeveler 134). As Béatrice Didier highlights, Staël is not simply the *metteur en scène* of an artist in order to show "les problèmes qui se posent à tout artiste" in a manner "pathétique" and "essentiellement poétique and musicale"; rather, she inscribed the drama of "*une* artiste" and of the rejection of the mythical association of women, music, and madness: specifically, Corinne falls into a state of delirium that Didier associates with illness and not with creativity (Didier 107). Toril Moi too reads *Corinne ou l'Italie* as an attempt to revise traditional notions of gender and, in her discussion of Hegelian dialectics that deny women subjectivity, describes Corinne "as the perfect antidote to Hegel's unindividualized, generic family woman" in that she "wishes to be recognized as a human being in her own right in a society that does not consider this to be an option for women" (Moi 156). Further, Deneys-Tunney argues that "the very genre of the novel itself works against Madame de Staël's ideological project to construct the model of a musical and universal feminine voice" (Deneys-Tunney 61). As such, I raise a question parallel to Beatrice Didier's question about music in literature: how is a writer to evoke the female voice in the novel?

The more Corinne sacrifices her will to Oswald, the less even she can hear music, and, while it is precisely Corinne's talent as a performer that subverts notions of essentialism, the moments in which she stops acting are those that catalyze her decline—into love and into death—and reinscribe her body and actions with signs of conventional femininity. Hoeveler



argues, moreover, that Corinne’s death, which she sees as Corinne’s only “true” and culturally acceptable act, belies Corinne’s subversive potential to impact social conventions as her performances otherwise remain “bracketed and framed as standing apart from other social practices that occur within a culture” (Hoeveler 136). The ineffectiveness of Corinne’s performances as a new model of universality and, thus, as a form of social and cultural disruption, Hoeveler contends, is something both Staël and Corinne recognize from the start of the novel (133; 134; 136). While Anne Deneys-Tunney describes Corinne as initially universal, “transcending nationalistic particularities” and existing “outside of gender differences” when “outside of love,” she reads her as ultimately existing in love, within a gendered (passive, female) role and without a voice (60; 59). Deneys-Tunney asserts that both positions—inside and outside of universality—present the absence of an individual, subjective voice. She concludes by depicting that, as is the case with music, the art that lends itself the least to discursive representation, the female voice cannot be located in *Corinne ou l’Italie*.

Germaine de Staël’s decision to write a novel, the generic form that is particular to the prosaic description of everyday life, figures as an original attempt to bring the female voice into the everyday. If *Corinne ou l’Italie* denotes, as Anne Deneys-Tunney writes, “music as the feminine way of expression” that is “frightening” for men like Oswald or d’Erfeuil (58), then I propose that the tensions that arise in the expression of music in the novel serve to emphasize the tensions that arise in the expression of the female voice in the everyday. Therefore, if music, in its attempted representation but distinct absence, functions in *Corinne ou l’Italie* as a metaphor for the female voice, it does so by demonstrating not only the linguistic and generic resistance to describing the indescribable but also the linguistic and generic assistance in silencing the unspeakable. Indeed, even the introduction of the talented little Juliette as Corinne’s student works to reconfirm that there is no place for the extraordinary, creative female genius in the kind of male-authored, heroic, and English historical narrative that Oswald works to generate. In an examination of the flattening of Corinne’s accent that results from the kinds of shifts in language and genre that Béatrice Didier discusses (cited above), Yota Bataski apprehends just what is so unsettling about this little girl whose hair, eyes, and Italian pronunciation so perfectly resemble Corinne’s:

No wonder, then, that the use made of Juliette can be felt to be a betrayal of Corinne’s own significance in the novel, at least insofar as Corinne represents the triumph of both artistic originality and cultural hybridity. . . . The late introduction of Juliette may thus offer a regressive conclusion. . . . In becoming a faithful reproduction of Corinne, she seems to reaffirm the mystique of the original and to serve the particular rather than the universal. (Batsaki 39–40)

Bataski’s analysis of Juliette as merely a “faithful reproduction” or “ventriloquist copy” of Corinne gestures towards the decline in creativity that marks the end of Corinne’s life. Like all of the other works of art in the novel, Juliette is another iteration of Corinne and, like the plastic arts Corinne discusses, Juliette embodies an aesthetics of mimesis: “[Juliette] tenait une harpe en forme de lyre, proportionné à sa taille, de la même manière que Corinne; et ses petits bras et ses jolis regards l’imitaient parfaitement. On croyait voir la miniature d’un beau tableau” (Staël 575). Indeed, Oswald’s perception of Juliette as a perfect imitation of Corinne both “enable[s] the poet to live on” and “reaffirm[s] the mystique of the original,” as Bataski argues (39). As a copy, or literal translation, of Corinne, Juliette becomes for Oswald a recording, in a sense, of

Corinne's performances. Unlike the concert that the narrator must distort to evoke, and unlike the Italian singers' music that readers can access only through their memory of their experience with a similar musical event, through Juliette, Corinne's song will be accessible to Oswald upon demand. However, such on-demand listening will endlessly repeat what Peggy Phelan identifies as the ontology of performance: "the disappearance of the object is fundamental to performance; it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who longs always to be remembered" (Phelan 146–47). Thus, at the same time as Juliette evokes Corinne, her mimetic talent repeats the erasure of Corinne's original, creative, and improvisational performances; indeed, it does away with any need for the original as well as any future possibility of originality, and Oswald's trembling at his first sight of Juliette's mimetic reproduction of Corinne suggests his nervous recognition of such an appalling victory. The continuation of the novel's story after Corinne's death, as it follows Oswald, Lucile, and Juliette back to England, compounds silence with silence, as life must continue but only in its most domestic—or prosaic—and mimetic form.

Germaine de Staël's *Corinne ou l'Italie* stands as an important precursor to both German and French musical fiction that reinforce, explore, or subvert gender norms. We can even situate Staël's novel at a point of divergence in the representations of the female artist towards, for example, E. T. A. Hoffmann's musical fiction on the one hand and George Sand's on the other. In Hoffmann's tale "A Report on the Latest Adventures of the Dog Berganza" (1814), both Berganza the mastiff and the Traveling Enthusiast feel threatened by Germaine de Staël's Corinne as she "flings wide the gates of poesy, art, and literature," and they are relieved only as "her prestige disappears . . . and she perishes irretrievably in her own lack of femininity or rather, in her distorted femininity!" (Hoffmann 99). If both the dog and the traveler praise "pretty and poetic" Corinnes, Berganza presents a harsh critique of the persistent portrayals of a Corinne "past her prime" and, moreover, of women past their prime, such as Germaine de Staël, who portray themselves as Corinne (98–99). Thus, whereas for the prosaic, unartistic male (e.g., Oswald), the female genius must abandon her glory, for the male artist (e.g., Hoffmann's "Traveling Enthusiast"), she should rather die than abandon her divine stature: if she renounces her art for love and marriage, she falls into banality; if she continues "past her prime," she becomes a monstrosity. George Sand's *Lélia* (1833) attests to this risk, as does *Lélia*'s suicide in Sand's 1839 rewrite. Consumed by her unsuccessful search for a community of equals, whether in poetry, religion, philosophy, or society, *Lélia* exiles herself into the solitude that precipitates her death. Isabelle Naginski describes *Lélia* as exceptional in that she is "the first female character (with the possible exception of Corinne) to embody successfully the Romantic urge for solitude" (Naginski 131); however, for *Lélia*, and for Sand, this solitude runs counter to the creation of community and thus is detrimental to the future of humanity. *Lélia* too embodies a voice that the world is not ready to hear, and, in her destruction, she sounds out both herself and, for those who have been listening, her lyrical predecessor Corinne: "Moi, sibylle, sibylle désolée; moi, esprit des temps anciens, enfermé dans un cerveau rebelle à l'inspiration divine, lyre brisée, instrument muet dont les vivants d'aujourd'hui ne comprendraient plus les sons, mais au sein duquel murmure comprimée l'harmonie éternelle!" (*Lélia* [1839] II: 158). If, as Naginski inquires, *Lélia*'s "malady" is that she is "a character who is an author in search of a voice" (Naginski 124), it is also that she an author in search of someone to hear her voice.

In Sand's two-part musical novel *Consuelo* (1842) and *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* (1844), the eponymous heroine confronts head on, and vehemently opposes, the move of male artists to impose their fantasy upon her and then fault her for not fulfilling their ideal. According

to her teacher, Nicolo Porpora, and her friend, young Joseph Haydn, Consuelo's desire to share her life and love with someone goes against her destiny; acting upon this desire would thus be an abomination of her divinity and would leave *her*—as it will Corinne—with lamentable regret. Indeed, as the setting of the novel positions Porpora's and Joseph's decrees against love prior to the setting of *Corinne ou l'Italie* and, thereby, anticipates Corinne's fall from the spotlight and her failing health, Corinne's "fate" would likewise stand as evidence in support of Porpora and Joseph's position. As though in confirmation of their point, in her final improvisation, Corinne regrets having sacrificed her talent, and thus her divinity, for love: "J'aurais remplis ma destinée, j'aurais été digne des bienfaits du ciel, si j'avais consacré ma lyre retentissante à célébrer la bonté divine manifestée par l'univers. . . . Ah! si je n'avais aimé qu'elle [la divinité], si j'avais placé ma tête dans le ciel à l'abri des affections orageuses, je ne serais pas brisée avant le temps" (Staël 582–83). In the minds of Sand's readers, then, Corinne's lament works to give weight to Porpora and Joseph's argument and, moreover, does so through the voice of the heroine, as Corinne herself comes to identify with and vocalize the male artist's fantasy of the sublime female artist.

However, Consuelo's responses to Porpora and Joseph's prohibition issue from and demonstrate the strength and independence of her conviction that, if she will not relinquish the cultivation of her art, the path of the isolated, ego-centered artist is nonetheless not hers: "Mon maître, il me semble que vous outragez la nature humaine en proscrivant ses plus nobles passions. Il me semble que vous étouffez les instincts que Dieu même nous a donnés, pour faire une sorte de déification d'un égoïsme monstrueux et antihumain" (Sand, *Consuelo* 140). Even with her selflessness and her desire to see the best in those she loves, Consuelo distinguishes herself through an independence of mind that empowers her not to cede her will in matters that go against her principles. Unlike Porpora's other disciples, Consuelo does indeed love "l'art pour lui-même" (139); however, unlike Porpora himself, she makes no distinction in her life between her fidelity to the practice of her art and her fidelity to her loved ones, and holds that, for her, the one is inseparable from the other:

Le ciel m'a donné des facultés et une âme pour l'art, des besoins de liberté, l'amour d'une fière et chaste indépendance; mais en même temps, au lieu de me donner ce froid et féroce égoïsme qui assure aux artistes la force nécessaire pour se frayer une route à travers les difficultés et les séductions de la vie, cette volonté céleste m'a mis dans la poitrine un cœur tendre et sensible qui ne bat que pour les autres, qui ne vit que d'affection et de dévouement. Ainsi partagée entre deux forces contraires, ma vie s'use, et mon but est toujours manqué. (567)

The opposing wills in this novel of the sacred and the profane act to confine Consuelo to one sphere or the other, neither of which would allow her to achieve her ideal. Madelyn Gutwirth, in her analysis of the lament Corinne expresses in her final improvisation, writes that "[s]i [Corinne] avait écouté plus attentivement son talent que son cœur, l'expérience n'aurait pas pu si facilement la terrasser. Elle aurait pu garder le don de la parole, dont l'intrusion de l'amour l'a privée, en la réduisant à l'état de femme ordinaire, destinée au silence public" (Gutwirth 433). For Consuelo, however, this regret itself would have been thoroughly problematic because, rather than calling for a change to the structure that dictates one plight or the other, Corinne's lament reinforces that very structure. In the context of a world that cannot comprehend, much less accommodate or support, personal conviction in an acclaimed female singer of impoverished

origins, Consuelo's quest to have art, liberty, and love thus becomes the driving force for the novel's events.

The loss of Consuelo's performing voice would seem to replicate the loss of Corinne's were it not for Sand's revision of the end of Corinne's story: when Consuelo abandons the theater, it is for a mutual love that has already proven itself, a love that imposes no restraints on the singer's desire to continue her career. Consuelo leaves the public stage and public acclaim not because she is no longer supported as an artist by her husband; she suddenly loses her performing voice when she no longer needs to choose between art and love, and she joins with her musical husband and children to bring music to the people who do not have access to the great European opera theaters. Rather than descending the throne into silence and death, Consuelo follows a new path and finds a new voice, as it is she who communicates their revolutionary message of love and liberty, especially when Albert loses himself in his visions. It is this alternative, undomesticated ending—communal, musical, and free, even if in exile—where we find a charitable and attentive society that takes pains to listen to and to transmit the voice of an extraordinary female artist. With Lélia, Consuelo, and Sand's other artist heroines that follow in their steps, Sand's novels respond to and re-voice Staël's call for the revision of society into one in which, especially for love, the extraordinary woman would not need to suppress the myriad sounds of inspiration; one that includes space for new voices and new texts; and, finally, one that lends a compassionate, attentive ear to multiple, hitherto unheard or silenced voices. In Consuelo, Corinne sings not again but anew.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1953, Jacques Lacan will discuss in detail how communication between bees functions solely through mimicry. The “wagging dance” through which bees relay information as to the location of nectar is completely void of subjectivity and too closely tied to reality to be a language (Lacan 84–85).