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**« EINE REZENSENTIN ZWEIER LITERARISCHER NATIONEN¹ » :
MME DE STAEL, AUGUST KARL BÖTTIGER AND HENRY CRABB ROBINSON
IN WEIMAR**

« She admires the English, among whom she could not endure to live² »

In her correspondences and works, which featured England and Germany, Germaine de Staël displayed complex and contradictory feelings towards the two countries that she respected, if not admired. On the one hand, she praised the English political system (though she was hazy on the differences between England and Scotland and the United Kingdom), free speech, tolerance and literary achievements³. On the other hand, she commended the German « republic of letters » and its philosophy and literature that made up for the « inconveniences » of the German fractured political landscape and provincialism : « Les Allemands ont su se créer une république des lettres animée et indépendante⁴ ».

Before de Staël visited Weimar in 1803, she had already developed a transnational interest in her writings where the cultural-literary and the socio-political overlapped. In *À quels signes peut-on reconnaître quelle est l'opinion de la majorité de la nation ?* (1791) and *De l'influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations* (1796), she explored – at slightly different yet important junctures of French politics – the relationship between government and nation, between state and the people, and the possibility of a good government to respect and negotiate the passions of the peoples⁵. Her *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800) argued for correlation between literary and cultural production of nations and their socio-political and historical contexts, that is, again, the relationship between government and cultural nation. Both interests were interlinked and referenced European political and philosophical ideas, highlighting the (European) interdependence of literature and philosophy⁶. Her *De l'Allemagne* which she compiled whilst in Weimar, was more than a tapping into existing German debates by Jacob Friedrich Bielfeld's, *Progrès des Allemands dans les sciences, les belles-lettres et les arts, particulièrement dans la poésie, l'éloquence et le théâtre* (1752) or Frederick II's *De la Littérature Allemande ; des défauts qu'on peut lui reprocher ; quelles en sont les causes ; et par quels moyens on peut les corriger*

¹ « a reviewer of two literary nations », Jean Paul, « *De l'Allemagne par Mme la Baronne de Staël-Holstein* », *Heidelbergschen Jahrbüchern der Litteratur* (1814), *Jean Paul's Gesämmtliche Werke*, Paris, Baudry, 1843, IV, p. 649.

² James Mackintosh, *Memoirs of the life of the Right Honourable Sir James Mackintosh*, London, ed. Robert James Mackintosh, 1835, I, p. 406.

³ See Robert Escarpit, *L'Angleterre dans l'œuvre de Madame de Staël*, Paris, Didier, 1954.

⁴ Germaine de Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, ed. Simone Balayé, Paris, Flammarion, 1968, I, p. 118.

⁵ Some of these thoughts were picked up again in *Delphine* (1802) which equally explored the relationship between the individual and the state. See Simone Balayé, « Introduction », Germaine de Staël, *Delphine*, Geneva, Droz, 1987, p. 11-50.

⁶ On the reception, see Axel Blaeschke, « "The first female writer of the age" : Zur Staël Rezeption in England », in *Madame de Staël und die Internationalität der Europäischen Romantik : Fallstudien zur Interkulturellen Vernetzung*, dir. Udo Schöning and Frank Seemann, Göttingen, Wallstein, 2003, p. 29-50. See also Roberto Romani, *National Character and Public Spirit in Britain and France (1750-1914)*, Cambridge, CUP, 2004, p. 63-69.

(1780). *De l'Allemagne* rejects the formal and, according to de Staël, conventional literary canon of Southern Europe in favour of the « Northern » (Germany, England, and Scandinavia) free and original creativity. Furthermore, and this was a clear rebuke of the centralisation efforts by Napoleon, she encourages the rise of German identity as a cultural nation (in the sense of Herder) in the face of geo-political particularism and held it up as a model for France⁷.

When de Staël visited Weimar in 1803-1804, she referenced English/Scottish politics, history and culture during her conversations and debates on German philosophy with the Weimar *literati* such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805). The notorious but extremely well connected cultural broker, critic and journalist Karl August Böttiger (1760-1835) recorded these conversations with great interest. His account underscored de Staël's self-fashioning into a pan-European dialogic cultural mediator in order to assemble a « grand historical painting⁸ ». That role, as Koschorke indicates, was limited by de Staël's « self-fashioning loops » which blurred the canvas somewhat and questions, at least for de Staël, the idea of cultural mediation as a critical concept⁹. In the case of de Staël, the juxtaposition and comparison between Germany and England (and always France) was not mediation as conceptualised by Adam Müller, nor the « aesthetic cosmopolitanism » of Jean Paul but a personal, subjective cultural mediation, based on cultural reception, that is, predominately conversation, then reading and translating¹⁰. In Weimar, that reception was shepherded by Karl August Böttiger who appreciated de Staël's provocative debates in his memoirs as they fed into Böttiger's own critical view on the cultural dominance of Goethe and Schiller¹¹.

⁷ See Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-1791), *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774), and *Briefen zu Beförderung der Humanität* (1794). See also Judith E. Martin, *Germaine de Staël in Germany: Gender and Literary (1800-1850)*, Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011 ; Stéphanie Genand, « “Je suis entrée dans cette littérature allemande” » : *De l'Allemagne* ou les vertus de l'intercession féminine », in *France-Allemagne : les figures de l'intellectuel, entre révolution et réaction (1780-1848)*, dir. Anne Baillet and Ayse Yuva, Paris, Presses du Septentrion, 2014, p. 65-75 ; John Isbell, *The Birth of European Romanticism : Truth and Propaganda in Staël's De l'Allemagne, 1810-1813*, Cambridge, CUP, 2009.

⁸ James Mackintosh, « *De l'Allemagne*, par Mad. de Staël » (1813), quoted in *National Character and Public Spirit in Britain and France*, p. 89 ; Michel Espagne, « Die Rolle der Mittler im Kulturtransfer », in *Kulturtransfer im Epochenbruch : Frankreich-Deutschland 1770-1815*, dir. Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, Rolf Reichardt, Annette Keilhauer, and René Nohr, Leipzig, Universitätsverlag, 1997, p. 309-330.

⁹ « Selbstinszenierungs-Regelkreise », Benno Wagner-Pitz, « Diskussionsbericht : Literaturkritik als “Literatur” », in *Literaturkritik - Anspruch und Wirklichkeit: DFG-Symposium 1989*, dir. Wilfried Barner, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1990, p. 221-230, citing Koschorke, p. 225.

¹⁰ See « Diskussionsbericht : Literaturkritik als “Literatur” », *ibid.* ; Roberto Simanowski, « System und Witz : Jean Pauls Kosmopolitismus als Effekt des sprachphilosophischen Zweifels », in *Kulturelle Grenzbeziehungen im Spiegel der Literaturen : Nationalismus, Regionalismus, Fundamentalismus*, dir. Brigitte Schultze, Roberto Simanowski, and Horst Turk, Göttingen, Wallstein, 1998, p. 176. On Müller, see Christine de Gemeaux, *De Kant à Adam Müller (1790-1815). Éloquence, espace public et médiation*, Paris, P.U. Paris-Sorbonne, 2012. Müller in fact met de Staël in 1808. On translation, see Stephen Bann, « Théorie et pratique de la traduction au sein du Groupe de Coppet », in *Le Groupe de Coppet. Actes et Documents du deuxième Colloque de Coppet (10-13 juillet 1974)*, dir. Simone Balayé and Jean-Daniel Candaux, Genève-Paris, Slatkine-Champion, 1977, p. 217-233.

¹¹ Karl August Böttiger, *Literarische Zustände und Zeitgenossen : Begegnungen und Gespräche im klassischen Weimar*, ed. Klaus Gerlach and René Sterneke, Berlin, Aufbau, 2005.

De Staël visited England and Germany on several occasions during her lifetime. She travelled to England three times ; firstly, in 1776 as a child, and then in 1793, when she followed Louis Marie Jacques Amalric, Comte de Narbonne-Lara (1755-1813) into exile. Their stay at Juniper Hall near Mickleham, in Surrey, was well documented by Frances Burney (1752-1840) who initially welcomed de Staël enthusiastically but then proceeded to have an unconformable friendship with her¹². Nevertheless, de Staël graciously summed up her experiences :

Le respect, l'enthousiasme, dont mon âme est remplie en contemplant l'ensemble des vertus morales et politiques qui constituent l'Angleterre ; – l'admiration d'un tel spectacle, le repos céleste qu'il me fesoit goûter ; ces sentiments, si doux et si nécessaires après la tourmente de trois ans de révolution, s'unissent dans mon souvenir au délicieux séjour, aux respectables amis, près desquels je les ai éprouvés¹³.

The essence of her praise addressed the English moral and political virtues, love of liberty and reason, enhanced and protected by Enlightened (Northern) Protestantism – a trope that reoccurs in her later evaluation of England and echoes some points in Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques* or *Lettres anglaises* (1734).

The third sojourn in England was between 1813 and 1814 where de Staël mixed in much more prominent society at Holland House with guest such as Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816), Lord Byron (1788-1824), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), Robert Southey (1774-1843) and James Mackintosh (1765-1832). Whilst she recounted her travels across Europe in her *Dix années d'exil* (posth. 1818), her travels to England in June 1813 and her visit there until May 1814 are missing from this account, though documented by her contemporaries¹⁴. Thus Gunnell concludes, « [l]'histoire de l'année qu'elle passa en Angleterre est l'histoire de ses conversations¹⁵ ». These conversations were to be the basis for a complementary study to *De l'Allemagne* on the literature and philosophy of England which she already, if briefly, referenced in writing in *Réflexions sur la paix adressées à M. Pitt et aux Français* (1795) and in *De la littérature*. Jaskinski suggests that it was in the end her *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française* (1818) which fulfilled this role¹⁶. When de Staël left England, this time perhaps without regrets, she expressed her admiration again : « J'admire ce pays : à quelques égards je m'y plais ; mais il faut en être pour les préférer à tous les autres. Nos habitudes continentales valent moins, mais nous conviennent mieux¹⁷. »

¹² Linda Kelly, *Juniper Hall : An English Refuge from the French Revolution*, London, Faber & Faber, 2009.

¹³ Cited in Frances Burney, *Diaries and Letters of Mme D'Arblay. Edited by her Niece Charlotte Barrett*, London, published for Colburn by Hurst and Blackett, 1854, III, p. 513-514.

¹⁴ On the Holland house sojourn, see Doris Gunnell, « Madame de Staël en Angleterre : une année d'exil (juin 1813-mai 1814) », *RHLF*, n° 20/4, 1913, p. 868-898 ; Angelica Goodden, *Madame de Staël : The Dangerous Exile*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 222-265 ; Thomas Moore, *Life of Lord Byron*, London, Murray, 1844 ; *Holland House Papers*, British Library, in particular « Holland House Dinner Books, 1799-1845 » [MS 51950-51957] ; Henry Richard Holland, *Foreign Reminiscences*, ed. Henry Edward Holland, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1851 ; Lloyd Charles Sanders, *The Holland House Circle*, London, Methuen, 1908. I thank Carmen Casaliggi for the references to the Holland House Papers.

¹⁵ « Madame de Staël en Angleterre : une année d'exil », p. 868.

¹⁶ Béatrice W. Jaskinski, « Madame de Staël, l'Angleterre de 1813-1814 et les *Considérations sur la Révolution française* », *RHLF*, n° 66/1, 1966, p. 12-24.

¹⁷ Letter by Mme de Staël to Wilhelm Schegel, 26 september 1813, quoted in « Madame de Staël en Angleterre : une année d'exil », p. 867.

When going to Germany in 1803, de Staël in fact went to what was a conglomerate of many small territories enclosed in the Holy Roman Empire – this political landscape of the German nation changed considerably between her first visit in 1789 and her last in 1812 on her way to London. At the time, Weimar was reigned by Duke Carl August of Saxe-Weimar and of Saxe-Eisenach (1757-1828) who continued the work of his mother, Anna Amalia (1739-1807) to keep Weimar as the centre for classical culture. De Staël chose Weimar to extend her enforced exile in Germany and to visit the « capitale littéraire » of Germany¹⁸. In a letter to her father, Jacques Necker, she wrote :

Il faut que je donne un prétexte à mon expédition d'Allemagne, et les hommes de lettres de Weimar en sont un suffisant. Enfin, je me déciderai là. À chaque station j'espère toujours qu'elle sera la dernière¹⁹.

De Staël had clearly been aware of the cultural significance of the small town : « On appelait Weimar l'Athènes de l'Allemagne, et c'était en effet le seul lieu dans lequel l'intérêt des beaux-arts fût pour ainsi dire national, et servit de lien fraternel entre les rangs divers²⁰. » Weimar was in turn, also aware of de Staël through her occasional writings such as *Essai sur les fictions* (1795), translated by Goethe in the same year, and *De l'influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations* (1796) which was translated into German in 1797²¹. Her novel *Delphine* (1802) was banned in Saxony and, as it is always the case with censorship, attracted even more attention from the Weimar intellectuals. Thus, de Staël arrived in Weimar as a prominent figure.

Her visit was documented amongst others, in the correspondences of Schiller, Goethe, Duke Carl August of Weimar and the Englishman Henry Crabb Robinson – each oscillating between admiration, respect and, at times, annoyance for the illustrious visitor. The other, more infamous, chronicler of her visit, Karl August Böttiger²², and the focus of my study, came to Weimar in 1791 as Director of the Wilhelm-Ernst-Gymnasium, where prominent philosophers and scholars such as Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), Johann Heinrich Voß (1751-1826), Friedrich Wilhelm Riemer (1774-1845) and Johann Karl August Musäus (1735-1787) taught. Through this social network, he became very quickly part of the Weimar literary circle, started to publish philological and archaeological writings and edited the periodicals *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* (until 1803), *London und Paris* (until 1805), and Wieland's *Neuen Teutschen Merkur*²³ (1790-1810). Böttiger's notorious journalistic impressions of Weimar were published in the posthumous and satirical *Literarische Zustände und Zeitgenossen in Schilderungen aus Karl Aug. Böttiger's handschriftlichem Nachlasse* (1838) where he did not hold back from gossip and

¹⁸ Letter by Mme de Staël to Joseph Bonaparte, 3 december 1803, quoted in Olaf Müller, « Madame de Staël und Weimar : Europäische Dimension einer Begegnung », in *Europa in Weimar : Visionen eines Kontinents*, dir. Hellmut Seemann, Göttingen, Wallstein, 2008, p. 292.

¹⁹ Letter by Mme de Staël to Jacques Necker, in *Correspondance générale*, V, ed. Béatrice W. Jasinski, Paris, Slatkine, 1982, p. 122.

²⁰ *De l'Allemagne*, I, p. 125.

²¹ See « Madame de Staël und Weimar », p. 292.

²² Julia A. Schmidt-Funke, *Karl August Böttiger (1760-1835) : Weltmann und Gelehrter*, Heidelberg, Winter, 2006 ; Karl Wilhelm Böttiger, *Karl August Böttiger : Eine biographische Skizze*, Leipzig, Brockhaus, 1837.

²³ See Dirk Sangmeister for a detailed biography, « Der federflinke Carl August Böttiger in und über Weimar », *Manuskripte*, n° 4, 2011, p. 51-77.

irreverence. Sangmeister suggests that he published about 10000 small articles in German and other periodicals reviewing literature and theatre performances ; in short, commenting on the Classical German scene²⁴. His contemporary Garlieb Merkel concluded that Böttiger acted as one of the most important cultural broker at the time who brought « eine grössere Masse von Kenntnissen und Gedanken in Umlauf gebracht, als vielleicht irgend ein anderer Deutscher Schriftsteller²⁵ ». Initially, Böttiger wanted to publish his reminiscences of his time in Weimar between the years 1791 and 1804 as *Reliquien oder Weimarische Nächte* but the publisher Friedrich Perthes in Gotha declined given that such publication would « Mehrere geradezu beleidigen²⁶ ». His son Carl Wilhelm, in the end, published a two-volume edition in 1838, *Literarische Zustände und Zeitgenossen in Schilderungen aus Karl Aug. Böttiger's handschriftlichem Nachlasse*, which did nothing else but confirm Böttiger as an irreverent « Alleweltsschwätzer und Sicophant²⁷ ».

When de Staël arrived in Weimar, Böttiger had, like the others, already been familiar with her work, particularly as he reviewed the German translation of *De l'influence des passions* in the *Neuen Teutschen Merkur* in 1796. Debating German philosophy by Kant, Schelling and Fichte, and enjoying the debates with Goethe and Böttiger, de Staël collected impressions, understanding and insight²⁸. In these conversations, England, France and Germany served as playful juxtapositions and contrasts particularly as one crucial mediator was Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867). The exchanges illuminate de Staël's intellectual journey during the few months in Weimar when she was collecting notes for her manuscript of *De l'Allemagne* and show her fashioning herself as cultural mediator not only between France and Germany but also between England and Germany. However, Böttiger's journals also confirm that de Staël's cultural mediation was personal and subjective, restricted by *a priori* conceptions and over-reliant on conversation and second-hand mediation as primary source : « Elle ferma donc les yeux et ouvrit la bouche et les oreilles²⁹ ».

On 13 December 1803, Charlotte Serviere (1773-1862), the daughter of a perfumer and wine merchant in Frankfurt, wrote to her acquaintance Henry Crabb Robinson to announce the arrival of de Staël in Weimar :

Sie werden sehr leicht ihre Bekanntschaft machen können, denn sie liebt die Gesellschaft der Männer und hauptsächlich Ihre Nation. Sie spricht sehr gut englisch. Sie ist nach Weimar gegangen um über die deutsche Philosophie zu schreiben (von der sie wahrscheinlich wenig weiß) und über ihren Einfluß auf die deutsche Nation. Suchen Sie etwas von dem Eindrücke

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁵ « a larger amount of knowledge and insights into circulation than any other German writer », Garlieb Helwig Merkel, *Skizzen aus meinem Erinnerungsbuch. Denkwürdigkeiten und Charakteristiken aus meinem Leben*, dir. Uwe Hentschel, Bonn, Bernstein Verlag, 2010, p. 50.

²⁶ « to downright offend some people » (my translation), cited in « Der federflinke Carl August Böttiger », p. 57.

²⁷ « a busybody gossip and sycophant », letter by Schiller to Christian Gottfried Körner, 24 march 1800, cited *ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁸ On de Staël and Schelling, see particularly Margaret R. Higonnet, « Madame de Staël and Schelling », *Comparative Literature*, n° 38/2, 1986, p. 159-180 ; on de Staël and Schlegel, see the special issue, « August-Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845) : les années Staël », *Cahiers staëliens*, n° 66, 2016.

²⁹ « Madame de Staël en Angleterre : une année d'exil », p. 869.

zu erfahren, den sie in W. macht und der Rolle die sie da spielt und schreiben Sie mir es getreulich wieder³⁰.

According to Böttiger, Mme de Staël was not much enamoured with Frankfurt. She stayed for three weeks during which her daughter Albertine fell ill. She was not fond of the salonnière Sophie von La Roche (1730-1807) but appreciated the company of the host Sophie Elisabeth von Schwarzkopf (1774-1806) who during de Staël visit also welcomed « zwei Engländer Busby und Osborn³¹ » whose conversation she particularly enjoyed.

Böttiger met de Staël first possibly in January 1804 and was pleasantly surprised by her : « Hat man sich nur erst eine halbe Stunde ihr gegenüber oder neben ihr auf dem Sopha befunden ; so ist man von ihrem Geiste unwiderstehlich ergriffen³² [...] ». De Staël spoke no German so Böttiger introduced her to young Robinson who had come to Germany in 1800, and who had been a student at the University of Jena since 1801 – Serviere was pleased³³. On 14 January 1804, Böttiger wrote to Robinson :

Die Frau von Staël, von deren Lippen Geist und Honigrede strömt wünscht Ihre Bekanntschaft, mein teuerster Herr und Freund ! Sie sehnt sich nach einer philosophischen Unterredung mit Ihnen und beschäftigt sich jetzt mit den Cahiers über Schellings Aesthetik, die ich, dank Ihrer Güte, besitze. Sie hat sogar einiges davon mit bewundernswürdiger Kunst ins Französische übersetzt³⁴.

De Staël appreciated the lecture notes and set out to translate them immediately with Benjamin Constant who had joined de Staël at that point. Meanwhile, Robinson contacted de Staël directly, and offered her three of his Goethe translations for her perusal :

³⁰ « It will be easy for you to meet her as she loves the company of men and particularly your nation. Her English is very good. She has gone to Weimar to write about German philosophy (of which she most certainly knows little) and on its influence on the German nation. Try to find out about the impression she makes in Weimar and her role there and relate it to me truthfully » (my translation), in Hertha Marquardt, *Henry Crabb Robinson und seine deutschen Freunde : Brücke zwischen England und Deutschland im Zeitalter der Romantik*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964, I, p. 103.

³¹ « two Englishmen Busby and Osborn », Karl August Böttiger, *Literarische Zustände und Zeitgenossen*, p. 359. The editors have not identified the visitors but it could possibly have been Thomas Busby (1755-1838), the composer.

³² « After only half an hour opposite her or next to her on the sofa, one is completely captured by her spirit [...] » (my translation), *ibid.*, p. 347-348.

³³ James Vigus, « “You surely don't wish to cure Anglomania with Anglophobia” : Henry Crabb Robinson's Debate on National Character and the English Reception of German Literature in the *Neue Berlinische Monatschrift* in 1803 », *Angermion*, n° 9/1, 2016, p. 43-70 ; Stefanie Stockhorst, « Das klassische Weimar aus englischer Sicht. Zum Funktionswandel des Reisens um 1800 am Beispiel von Charles Gore und Henry Crabb Robinson », in *Reisen um 1800*, dir. Helmut Peitsch, Munich, Peter Lang, 2012, p. 31-51 and « Gelehrte Geselligkeit und europäischer Kulturtransfer. Zur Deutung des produktiven Zusammentreffens von Henry Crabb Robinson und Mme de Staël in Weimar », in « *Weimar ist ja unser Athen.* » *Mit Seume in Weimar. Vorträge des Colloquiums zu Johann Gottfried Seume in Oßmannstedt 2007*, dir. Jörg Drews and Gabi Pahnke, Bielefeld, Aisthesis, 2010, p. 119-140.

³⁴ « Mme de Staël from whose lips intelligence and flattery flow freely, requests your acquaintance, my dearest Sir and friend ! She yearns for a philosophical conversation with you and is studying the Cahiers on Schelling's aesthetics, which, thanks to you, I have. She has already translated some of them into French with remarkable skill » (my translation), cited in Jean-Marie Carré, « Madame de Staël et Henry Crabb Robinson, d'après des documents inédits », *RHLF*, n° 19/3, 1912, p. 539.

If you wonder at my assurance, Madam, you will also admire my zeal, which at the risk of exposing myself, leads me to present you with a few poetical translations from the great poet of whom I might say as Ben Johnson said of Shakespeare, I honour him on this side Idolatry. I should not have dared to do this had I not remarked your partiality for the English language. This circumstance alone can render my copies tolerable, for though you may not be versed enough in the German to feel all the inimitable beauties of the original, you are too acute a critic in the English, not to perceive the deformities of my Imitations³⁵.

On 26th of January, Böttiger invited Robinson to de Staël for further enlightenment into German idealism : « Hoffft Frau von Staël vergebenst auf einige Ansichten der Schellingschen Naturphilosophie durch Ihr erleuchtendes Medium³⁶ ? »

In a letter to his brother, Robinson understood de Staël's self-fashioning quickly :

I was invited to her in order to be interrogated on the new philosophy, and saw clearly enough that I was used. I did not suffer myself to be deceived by her compliments or discontented by her railleries but had the pure pleasure of seeing thro' & understanding the comedy she was playing. [...] Mad. de Stahl [*sic*] is one of those persons who with a most acute understanding and elegant wit has nothing else. She has not the least sense for poetry and is absolutely incapable of thinking a philosophical thought. Her philosophy is only a mass of observations connected together by a loose logic and poetry is for her [...] only rhetoric in verses ; she cannot preserve anything in poetry more than fine passages³⁷ !!

Higgonet had shown in detail how Robinson's exposition of Schlegel has shaped de Staël's understanding of Schlegel, particularly, which lecture notes she found useful for her own project so much so that « she reworked them for her own purposes, condensing, reorganising, translating, and evaluating³⁸ ». De Staël was enthusiastic to have found such a willing and generous mediator and praised him in front of Carl August : « J'ai voulu connaître la philosophie allemande ; j'ai frappé à la porte de tout le monde ; Robinson seul me l'a ouverte³⁹. » Böttiger saw this slightly differently. In a note, he remarked that « Robinson steckte im Wasser, während sie in der Luft schwebte. Keines konnte in das Element des andern gelangen. [...] Ich verschaffte ihr Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling. von Frieß⁴⁰ ».

This difference, according to Böttiger, decreased during the course of the visit with intense debates between de Staël, Robinson, but also Wieland, Goethe, Anna Amalia and Carl August. De Staël grew so confident in her understanding of Schelling that on 20th February, she lectured the Duke on Schelling's aesthetics⁴¹. On this occasion, the Duke and de Staël were guests at the *Jägerhaus* of the

³⁵ Cited in Jean-Marie Carré, « Madame de Staël, H. C. Robinson et Goethe », *The Modern Language Review*, n° 11/3, 1916, p. 316-317.

³⁶ « Is Mme de Staël hoping in vain for some clarifications on the natural philosophy of Schelling by your enlightening mastermind ? » (my translation), quoted in « Madame de Staël et Henry Crabb Robinson, d'après des documents inédits », p. 540.

³⁷ Letter by Henry Crabb Robinson to his brother [either Thomas or Habakkuk], cited in *Crabb Robinson in Germany, 1800-1805. Extracts from His Correspondence*, dir. Edith Morley, London, Oxford University Press, 1929, p. 133-134.

³⁸ « Madame de Staël and Schelling », p. 176.

³⁹ Cited in « Madame de Staël et Henry Crabb Robinson, d'après des documents inédits », p. 541.

⁴⁰ « Robinson was stuck in the water whereas she floated in the air. Neither could reach the sphere of the other. [...] I acquired Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling by Frieß » (my translation), Karl August Böttiger, *Literarische Zustände und Zeitgenossen*, p. 349. Böttiger is referring to Jakob Friedrich Fries (1773-1843) and his book *Reinhold, Fichte und Schelling* (1803).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

dilettanti art collector and merchant Charles Gore (1729-1807) who had been a fixture at the Court of Weimar since 1791. On 24th and 25th of February 1804, Böttiger reports that de Staël brought up the virtues of the English at the table and caused « 3 bis 4 mal bei der Herzogin ventilirten Streit⁴² ». This was, according to Böttiger, de Staël's flaw :

Sie liebt die Klugheit u. *Aufklärung* auf Unkosten aller übrigen Völker. Nur in Norddeutschland sei eine ähnliche Masse von Aufklärung u. doch auch nur in den obern Ständen. In England sei jeder Karrenschieber und Coal-heaver so aufgeklärt⁴³ [...].

Everyone including Constant and Böttiger were outraged :

Der Herzog widerlegte sie politisch, Constant moralisch, Wieland sagte, alles was die Engländer gutes hätten, komm aus ihrer Constitution, die uns so sehr fehlt, ich machte den Mangel großer Dichter u. Schriftsteller und das isolirte, einseitige, mit Vorurtheilen angefüllte des Volks geltend⁴⁴.

On other occasions, Böttiger reports conversations that filtered into de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* ; the advantages and disadvantages of the German, French and English language. For instance, on 25th of January, de Staël talked about her struggles with learning German, particularly because the prose style « sei unbegreiflich schwer durch die Einschachtelungen und Einschiebungen so vieler Zwischensätze⁴⁵ ». Later, she marvelled that German was indeed related to English given its clumsiness in expression⁴⁶. Nevertheless, de Staël pronounced that she wanted to translate everything « was in deutscher Prosa gesprochen und geschrieben werde, ohne Verluste zu übersetzen⁴⁷ », but to stay away, as Robinson suggested from the start, from poetry. Wieland, Böttiger accounts, interjected at that point with a witty reference to Klopstock who had analysed the differences between the European languages in his fragment essay, *Grammatische Gespräche* (1794) where he attempted to show that German is the most precise and pure language⁴⁸. We have no reported comment on the part of de Staël on that occasion.

De Staël toyed with national stereotypes. Juxtaposing the « plaisanterie » of the French with German « pédanterie » of language, she concluded : « [c]'est la manie

⁴² « three or four times an argument, vented at the Duchess's » (my translation), *ibid.*, p. 380.

⁴³ « She loves the intelligence and enlightenment [of the English] at the expense of all other nations. Only Northern Germany displays a similar enlightened disposition and only amongst the upper classes. In England every carriage-pusher and coal heaver is so enlightened [...] » (my translation), *ibid.*

⁴⁴ « The Duke confutes her on political, Constant on moral grounds. Wieland says [,] the advantages that the English enjoy result from their constitution which we lack so much, I must redirect the attention to the deficiency in great poets and writers and to the insular, partial and prejudiced people » (my translation), *ibid.*, p. 381. Indeed, Böttiger records several other conversations where the literature of England was debated, condemning Pope as definitely inferior : *ibid.*, p. 374.

⁴⁵ « is unbelievably hard because of the interlacing and insertion of so many parentheses » (my translation), *ibid.*, p. 356.

⁴⁶ « höchst widrige Schwerfälligkeit », *ibid.*, p. 388.

⁴⁷ « everything that was spoken and written in German prose without exception » (my translation), *ibid.*, p. 388.

⁴⁸ Klopstock also suggested in his *Fragmente über Sprache und Dichtkunst* (1779) that English is an amalgam blurring clarity and precision of expression. When reading Milton, he commented : « Wer sieht hier nicht ein Gemälde mit Oelfarben, in dem aber zugleich hier eine Hand, dort ein Fuß, und da wohl gar ein Kopf bald in Pastell und bald in Wasserfarben, dies noch dazu mit keiner guten Auftragung gemalt sind », in Heinrich Düntzer, *Klopstocks Oden*, Leipzig, Wartig, 1875, p. 301.

des Allemands de tout dire⁴⁹ ». Her brief chapter on Weimar in *De l'Allemagne* underscores the apparently typical German sincerity that was to be found also in literature :

Herder venait de mourir quand je suis arrivée à Weimar ; mais Wieland, Goethe et Schiller y étaient encore. Je peindrai chacun de ces hommes séparément dans la section suivante ; je les peindrai surtout par leurs ouvrages, car leurs livres ressemblent parfaitement à leur caractère et à leur entretien. Cet accord très rare est une preuve de sincérité : quand on a pour premier but en écrivant de faire effet sur les autres, on ne se montre jamais à eux tel qu'on est réellement ; mais quand on écrit pour satisfaire à l'inspiration intérieure dont l'âme est saisie, on fait connaître par ses écrits, même sans le vouloir, jusqu'aux moindres nuances de sa manière d'être et de penser⁵⁰.

This earnestness, according to de Staël, was authentic and reflected in the conversations and sociability she encountered in Weimar. Ultimately, she did not truly warm to the German disposition and declared the English way of being as the desired middle ground : « L'esprit anglais tient le milieu entre l'esprit allemand et l'esprit français, c'est un moyen de communication entre les deux. Je vous [Robinson] comprends mieux qu'aucun Allemand⁵¹ ».

Böttiger's account of de Staël's visit to Weimar is illuminating, not only in the detailed description of de Staël's encounter with the famous Weimar elite but in the recording of her conversations with her German hosts and English visitors to Weimar. His account of her visit underscores de Staël's partiality for the English conversation and language, the « British directness » which juxtaposed the French « plaisanterie » and the German « pédanterie⁵² ». Thus, Böttiger reports a conversation with an unnamed visitor about Edward Gibbon's work where de Staël suddenly switched from English to French to gossip about her mother's brief engagement to Gibbons⁵³. On another occasion, it was the Englishman who was the only honest one : one evening, when de Staël's read a translation of Goethe's *Die Braut von Korinth* (1797), she missed a crucial point which only Robinson dared to point out to her and de Staël exclaimed : « You have all praised me. Robinson alone corrected me ; thank you Robinson⁵⁴ ». It was this assumed « British directness » which de Staël tried to cultivate in herself.

In his *Literarische Zustände und Zeitgenossen in Schilderungen aus Karl Aug. Böttiger's handschriftlichem Nachlasse*, Böttiger accentuated Mme de Staël's role as provocative, direct, yet often uninformed and biased cultural mediator – a role which he assumed himself, seeking to rattle the predominance of Goethe and Schiller in Weimar. Mme de Staël's cultural ambivalences, misinformation and stereotypes served him well in his own journalistic endeavours⁵⁵.

⁴⁹ Karl August Böttiger, *Literarische Zustände und Zeitgenossen*, p. 352 and p. 356.

⁵⁰ *De l'Allemagne*, I, p. 123-124.

⁵¹ « Madame de Staël et Henry Crabb Robinson », p. 541.

⁵² « britischen Geradausgehn », Karl August Böttiger, *Literarische Zustände und Zeitgenossen*, p. 352.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

⁵⁴ « Madame de Staël et Henry Crabb Robinson », p. 541.

⁵⁵ « Böttiger's Wirkungskreis befand sich genau dort, wo sich diese Macht-und Interessenkämpfe ereigneten », Klaus Gerlach, « Zur Textkritik von Handschriften », in *Was ist Textkritik ? Zur Geschichte und Relevanz eines Zentralbegriffs der Editionswissenschaft*, dir. Gertraud Mitterauer, Ulrich Müller, Margarete Springeth, Verena Vitzthum, Berlin, de Gruyter, p. 19. On the conflict between Böttiger, Schiller and Goethe, see « Der federflinke Carl August Böttiger », p. 60-63.