

MUTE ELOQUENCE:  
POLITICS OF SILENCE IN FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT LITERATURE

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Adam James Schoene  
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Adam James Schoene, Ph. D.

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This dissertation interrogates the political force of silence in the fictional and philosophical writings of Montesquieu, Diderot, Rousseau, and Staël around the profound moment of change of the Enlightenment, revealing a mute eloquence at the core of both language and the law. Exploring a range of mute spaces such as the seraglio, the convent, the patriarchal family, and the prison, it demonstrates how the fictional women confined within these settings co-opt silence to achieve newfound autonomy in their *esprit*, and in the struggle against despotism. While silence, on the one hand, may signify oppression, this project elucidates how it also operates at different levels: as a politically emancipatory expression of the passions conveyed by the epistolary form in Montesquieu; by way of the body and its gestures, and through a *pacte tacite* that enunciates political desire in Diderot's philosophical dialogue and fiction; within language and friendship in Rousseau, as well as in his notion of the general will; and as a form of cosmopolitan enthusiasm inspired by nature, poetry, music, and exile in Staël. Silence permeates the various symbolic spaces of this study, while also operating at a rhetorical and a political level that is leveraged by the authors in numerous ways to reveal sites of disenfranchisement and injustice. Although each chapter examines different forms or modalities of silence, central threads that connect

them are the positive potential for channeling passion into new political occupations and possibilities, the enduring challenge to combat androcentric political systems, and emerging alternatives to despotic forms of governance. Ineffability is transformed into a mode of agency, with revolutionary impact in both political discourse and the *demos*.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Before pursuing a Ph. D. in Romance Studies at Cornell University, Adam Schoene completed degrees in French and International Relations at Tufts University and its Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. He received graduate fellowships to study at l'Institut de hautes études internationales et du développement and at l'Université de Genève. He enjoys teaching language, literature, film, culture, and writing. His work appears in a variety of academic journals and edited volumes. Adam served on the Editorial Board of *Diacritics* and as Managing Editor of *Eighteenth-Century Studies*.

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## INTRODUCTION

“J’ai dit cent fois que, si j’étois mis à la Bastille [I have said a hundred times that if ever I was put in the Bastille],” writes Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Confessions*, “j’y ferois le tableau de la liberté [I would create the tableau of freedom there].”<sup>1</sup> Initially constructed to defend Paris from threats of external invasion, the Bastille’s transformation into a penitentiary to detain prisoners and to enforce government censorship led it to become one of the most iconic symbols of despotism, culminating with its storming in the French Revolution. Defiant against the menace of unwarranted persecution and imprisonment, Rousseau’s observation illuminates how confinement might also inspire newfound creative possibility, with political freedom born of imposed seclusion. Like the prison for Rousseau, the seraglio, the convent, the patriarchal family, and France itself under Napoleonic rule become emblems for despotism converted into settings of newfound autonomy by the *philosophes* who dramatize them in their fictional writings. Beyond their confined nature, these spaces share a silence that is on the one hand oppressive, but that also holds affirmative power, as it may be co-opted or channeled towards more emancipatory ends by the protagonists who contend with it. By tracing the conscription of

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions*, in *Œuvres complètes de Rousseau*, 5 vols., edited by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1959), 1: 274. Rousseau, *The Confessions and Correspondence, Including the Letters to Malesherbes*, edited by Christopher Kelly, Roger D. Masters, and Peter G. Stillman, translated by Christopher Kelly (Hanover: Dartmouth College, 1995), 141.

silence beyond an imposed tool for subjugation, I aim to identify its rhetorical and political potential for redistributing power to the people in a time of revolutionary change in France.

This project draws its title from Rousseau, who rests at the center of it with the prominence that he attributes to “mute eloquence” in his work. Silence is pervasive in his writing, from its rhetorical role in the discourses and letters, to the ineffable eloquence of the heart within his fiction, the trajectory into solitude of the autobiographies, and the silent gathering of “the people” who unite and look inwards to feel the general will in *Du contrat social*. In his *Essai sur l’origine des langues*, Rousseau underscores the expressive capacity of an originary figural and gestural language that operates beyond the spoken word, while offering a haunting example of *éloquence muette* in citing the macabre tale of the Levite of Ephraim from the Book of Judges of the Hebrew Bible: “Quand le lévite d’Éphraïm voulut venger la mort de sa femme, il n’écrivit point aux Tribus d’Israël, il divisa le corps en douze pièces et les leur envoya” [When the Levite of Ephraim wanted to avenge the death of his wife, he did not write to the Tribes of Israel, but divided her body into twelve sections which he sent to them].<sup>2</sup> The powerful imagery of this shocking act of the Levite carries an immediacy and impact conveying far more than any speech or letter, with his wife’s *corps morcelé* depicting torment at its most gruesome level, while simultaneously serving as the paragon of expressivity. In contrast to the lengthy and inefficient trials and speeches in which language may be abused and crimes left unpunished, imagery like that embodied by the *corps morcelé* of the Levite’s wife offers the

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<sup>2</sup> Rousseau, *Essai sur l’origine des langues* in *Œuvres complètes de Rousseau*, 5 vols., edited by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1995), 5:377. This translation is my own.

potential for justice, while also underscoring the injustice that is inflicted upon the female body and against women. Rousseau will moreover rewrite this tale in his lyrical prose poem, *Le Léviste d'Éphraïm*, born of his own profound alienation and suffering, as it is composed amidst his flight from France after the condemnation of *Émile* by the Parlement de Paris, and it further testifies to his subjective experience as *corps morcelé* facing the limitations of language.<sup>3</sup> His poem also

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<sup>3</sup> This underlying lack in language may be exploited to detrimental ends, as depicted within the degeneration in language traced within the conjectural history of Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, yet it may also be productive in recourse to a silence that allows new political and subjective possibilities to emerge. For more on the *corps morcelé*, see Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XI, Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris; Éditions de Seuil, 1973). The dismembered figures of Hieronymus Bosch's paintings capture the imaginary image of the fragmented body for Lacan, depicting moral and religious themes in a phantasmagorical style. Rousseau paints a similar tableau in rewriting the *Léviste*, finding inspiration and redemption in a moment of darkness within this religious tale. The silence at the heart of the *Léviste* is symptomatic in revealing both disparities within the political body and an underlying lack in language, while simultaneously restorative in its potential to vindicate, as well as to incarnate Rousseau's own *corps morcelé*. Rousseau claims the *Léviste* as his most cherished work, holding it in high esteem because its composition during such an agonizing personal moment attests to the strength of his heart in the face of adversity, and perhaps it is in its revelation of the costs of repudiating hospitality that he also finds solace as he is forced to flee from Montmorency, transforming his flight into a form of freedom through his writing. I incorporate this analysis of the *Léviste* and further expand upon it in relation to silence

offers political lessons, as while its female sacrifice helps to temporarily restore peace and unity to the Israelite society,<sup>4</sup> it serves to underscore divisions and social exclusion, much like that conveyed by the eponymous protagonist of *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* who exclaims on her deathbed: “Rien ne fait tant de mal aux femmes que le silence !” [Nothing hurts women as much as silence!].<sup>5</sup> “Silence is violence” is an enduring refrain in a world of ongoing offense against women, yet silence might also be politically channeled to reveal and bring voice to this suffering.

Published in 1762, the same year that Rousseau composes *Le Lévitte d’Éphraïm*, his *Du contrat social* is similarly imbued with forceful mute eloquence. Political parallels may likewise be drawn between these texts, as the *Lévitte* is set during a time when Israel has no monarch, so

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in Rousseau in “Éloquence muette: Rousseau and *le corps morcelé*,” in *Silence, implicite et non-dit chez Rousseau / Silence, the Implicit and the Unspoken in Rousseau*, edited by Brigitte Weltman-Aron, Ourida Mostefai, and Peter Westmoreland (Leiden: Brill, *Forthcoming*).

<sup>4</sup> In spite of the somber content of the *Lévitte* and the inexcusable violence it depicts in the brutality inflicted upon the female body, the *corps morcelé* also embodies an act of political renewal, as the people symbolically dismember and eventually repair themselves by restoring the unity of the Israelites.

<sup>5</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse: lettres de deux amans habitans d’une petite ville au pied des Alpes*, in *Œuvres complètes de Rousseau*, 5 vols., edited by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1961), 2:705. Rousseau, *Julie, or The New Heloise: Letters of Two Lovers Who Live in a Small Town at the Foot of the Alps*, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, 13 vols., edited by Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, translated by Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 2:579.

the tale serves to dramatize a model of freedom that arises when the people have the capacity to govern themselves. While this freedom is positive in protecting the people of Israel from despotic leadership, conflict ensues when competing particular interests collide. The biblical version of the *Lévite* is frequently interpreted as a defense of monarchy in its account of the conflict that unfolds by the end of the period of the Judges, however Rousseau's rewriting underscores the importance of the people in establishing their own political concord and dynamism, rather than emphasizing the traditional necessity for one leader. In contrast to a political head or orator inspiring the people into action, it is the mute sign of the fragmented body of the Levite's wife that unites them in response to this outrageous injustice. *Du contrat social* offers an associated model that is centered upon the people as the subject of their own collective political will, but who lack a mouth to express it, and rather than deliberating over this *volonté générale* [general will], they must look inwards to feel it speak before voting upon it. As Arash Abizadeh has described this silent gathering of the people, it requires a "self-disclosure of sentiment directly from one heart to another, a transparent revelation of consciences," which serves as a "silent voice" that fulfills Rousseau's yearning for both authenticity and universality.<sup>6</sup> Rousseau characterizes debate as a serious danger to the general will, banishing communication prior to the voting period since rhetoric may be used to serve particular interests. The general

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<sup>6</sup> See Arash Abizadeh, "Banishing the Particular: Rousseau on Rhetoric, Patrie, and the Passions," *Political Theory* 29.4 (2001): 556–582. Abizadeh describes Rousseau as choosing a "silent voice," or an "absent presence": "Rousseau wants authenticity and so needs voice and presence; and he wants universality and so needs silence and absence. In fact [. . .] he takes a stab at opting for both: he chooses a silent voice; he chooses an absent presence" (565).

will is moreover initially instilled within the people through the mute eloquence of the external figure of the legislator, who employs the force of persuasion, as opposed to oratory eloquence.<sup>7</sup> The legislator has recourse to a sublime and lyrical language to *persuader sans convaincre*, and uses this unique access to another order of authority in order to unite an otherwise fragmented political body.<sup>8</sup> The legislator's main function is to help constitute the republic, addressing the underlying temporal enigma of the deferred nature of foundation, or the paradox of how the contract may be formed prior to the existence of a people with a general will to engage in such an act. Although force and desire are conflated in relation to law within the silence at the origin of a contract that both constrains and emancipates, this silence may also be its most powerful attribute in its capacity to unite, and it is this tacit dimension that Rousseau channels politically.

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<sup>7</sup> For more on persuasion and mute eloquence in *Du contrat social*, see Bryan Garsten, *Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009), 59–62.

Garsten notes that while Rousseau draws on the example of Cicero, his preference for persuasion is different than the Ciceronian ideal of oratory, as it is instead based upon silence. He furthermore elucidates how Rousseau initially employs but later strikes the word “eloquence” from this portion of *Du contrat social* in favor of persuasion, as if to silence eloquence itself.

<sup>8</sup> “Ainsi donc le législateur ne pouvant employer ni la force ni le raisonnement, c’est une nécessité qu’il recoure à une autorité d’un autre ordre, qui puisse entraîner sans violence et persuader sans convaincre.” [Thus the legislator is unable to employ either force or reasoning, and must have recourse to another order of authority, which will lead without violence, and persuade without convincing.] Rousseau, *Du contrat social* in *Œuvres complètes*, 5 vols., edited by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964), 3:383.

While this project has its roots in Rousseau, it gives equal attention to his Enlightenment interlocutors to consider how the voices of the oppressed might emerge from silence, as that of the people resonates through the general will. Rousseau's political thought is informed by both Montesquieu and Diderot, and Staël engages with all three of them in different ways, while simultaneously formulating her own unique vision and influential authorial voice. These four *philosophes* employ writing to uncover sites of oppression amidst the profound moment of change of the Enlightenment, revealing a mute eloquence at the core of both language and the law, while combating misogynistic and despotic political structures through different modalities of silence that offer alternative avenues towards newfound freedom. Their fictional works are of particular relevance in that they envision such emancipation before it exists in the world beyond, as well as in their treatment of different mute settings. Silence permeates the various symbolic spaces, while also operating at a rhetorical and a political level that is leveraged by these authors in different ways to reveal sites of disenfranchisement and injustice. My approach is to compare one or two of the fictional works of each author alongside a political essay, treatise, or dialogue, underscoring how literary fictions may contribute to renegotiating social structures and to the political meaning of literature. I analyze the impact of the birth of the novel and evolving forms, such as epistolarity or dialogue, to illustrate how different genres channel silence to help speak "the people" as they articulate their desire and challenge unjust conceptions of law and politics. While each chapter examines different forms of silence, central themes that connect them are the positive potential for channeling passion into new political occupations and possibilities, the enduring challenge to an androcentric model of politics, and emerging alternatives to despotic forms of governance. Women are subjected to domination and violence in these works, as in the case of the *corps morcelé* of the Levite's wife, but play a central role as fomenters of revolution,

transforming their silencing into new articulations of freedom. Silence is frequently also part of a cycle with dialogue, or may lead to speech by other means at the individual and collective levels, thus becoming a mode of agency with revolutionary impact in political discourse and the *demos*.

I begin with Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, examining the mute space of Persian protagonist Usbek's seraglio, and underscoring silence in alignment with Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* conception of *esprit*. While silence is on the one hand employed as a weapon to suppress dissent and to instill fear and order in the seraglio, it is also co-opted by Usbek's wives, who rewrite the laws by inscribing their subjugation in letters and subversive acts to establish a more emancipatory system unencumbered by despotism. The second chapter brings together Diderot's dramatic and artistic theories with two of his fictional writings, *La Religieuse* and *Le Neveu de Rameau*, to demonstrate how his emphasis upon bodily gesture helps to illuminate his desire to attack religious and political corruption through a fermentative form of action. Like the despotic spaces of both the seraglio and the convent that Montesquieu and Diderot symbolically transform through their fictional works, Rousseau attempts to convert the patriarchal Wolmar estate of *Julie* into an emancipatory site, as conveyed through its silence, an equalizing force that elides difference to instill a pact of friendship and transparency, yet one that remains threatened by elements of inequality. Driven from France by the Revolution and later by Napoleon, Staël dedicates her work to "la France silencieuse mais éclairée, à l'avenir plutôt qu'au présent" [the silent but Enlightened France, to the future rather than the present], foregrounding powerful female protagonists who transcend the borders of nations, yet who must contend with violence

and exile as well.<sup>9</sup> Through the silences of *Delphine*, *Corinne*, and “Mirza,” I argue that Staël depicts the dual-faceted nature of exile as an experience of isolation, but also a source of inspiration and enthusiasm, which I explore in scenes of solitude and moments of non-verbal communication to illustrate how they attempt to inaugurate a new cosmopolitan community.

I view this work as complementing and continuing the dialogue with previous scholarship on silence, while offering a new contribution in interpreting it through a multifaceted political lens during the Enlightenment period. Diana Schaub, Elizabeth Wingrove, and Joan Scott help to inform my conception of silence in relation to *esprit*, sovereignty, epistolarity, and the veil in Montesquieu, while the work of Daniel Coleman and Pierre Saint-Amand is central to my thinking of silence and the body as political in the fiction and dialogue of Diderot. Alongside Jacques Derrida and Étienne Balibar, Bryan Garsten and Juliet Flower MacCannell contribute much to my understanding of Rousseau’s mute eloquence, in addition to Lori Marso, whose work is also crucial to my approach to ineffability in Germaine de Staël, as is that of Lauren Ravalico and Paul Hamilton. A notable interlocutor in relation to this overall project is Elisabeth Loevlie, whose *Literary Silences in Pascal, Rousseau, and Beckett* richly explores silence through readings of Pascal’s *Pensées*, Rousseau’s *Rêveries*, and Beckett’s *Molloy*, *Malone meurt* and *L’Innomable*. Loevlie forges a trailblazing pathway in examining the relationship between these French texts and the unspoken by aligning literary silence with instances of repetition, aporia, and implosion, suggesting that it is through these devices that the authors employ silence

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<sup>9</sup> Germaine de Staël, *Delphine*, *Œuvres complètes de Madame la baronne de Staël-Holstein* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1967), 1:337. This translation is my own.

in an undoing of linear time.<sup>10</sup> My project follows Loevlie's attention to French literary silence, but varies in its theoretical emphasis upon the politics of ineffability, as well as in its focus on different authors (or texts, in the case of Rousseau) and upon the Enlightenment more broadly.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to those who engage with silence in the eighteenth century and in the works around which I construct this study, it also draws inspiration from others who have employed silence in generative ways. The thirteenth-century *Roman de Silence* of Heldris de Cornuälle is notable in this regard in its challenge to purportedly natural foundations of the social order, with female protagonist Silence disguised as male in order to circumvent rules around the prevention of inheritance to women in England. While this tale addresses issues of gender politics and raises questions about women's lack of voice, it proposes an ultimately favorable pathway for Silence in her ascendancy to the role of queen.<sup>12</sup> Ensuing employment of silence may also be traced as a force of political contestation in a multitude of genres and contexts, considered in relation to: the

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<sup>10</sup> Elisabeth Loevlie, *Literary Silences in Pascal, Rousseau, and Beckett* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> My work also benefited from valuable dialogue with participants of the 2017 Rousseau Association American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Annual Meeting Panel and Twentieth Biennial Colloquium on "Silence, The Implicit and the Unspoken in Rousseau," as well as with those in the 2018 International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Seminar for Early Career Scholars on "Silence in Eighteenth-Century Arts, History and Philosophy" in Viterbo, Italy. Edited volumes featuring scholarship from these events are currently underway.

<sup>12</sup> Heldris de Cornuälle, *Roman de Silence*, in *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, edited and translated by Sarah Roche-Mahdi (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1992).

passionate and political French theatrical stage, with *l'amour muet* of Cornelian drama, or Jean Racine's tragic silence; Stéphane Mallarmé's poetic silence; Jean Bruller's *Le Silence de la mer* resistance; Samuel Beckett's silence of the absurd; or the silence surrounding Algeria channeled by authors like Albert Camus, Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, Assia Djebar, or Leïla Sebbar. As this range of examples illustrates, silence resonates broadly on both the literary and political levels, as an eloquence beyond the spoken word that has long served to fuel creative inspiration.

On a theoretical level, silence is also central to an expansive variety of approaches, some of which I will directly draw upon or more subtly engage with over the course of this study. Silence is central to psychoanalysis for Jacques Lacan, and may also be extended to the ethical realm, as in Antigone's silent act, or to the hysteric Lui of *Le Neveu de Rameau*, as I will examine in Diderot.<sup>13</sup> Jacques Rancière's *La Méésentente* staging of Pierre-Simon Ballanche's retelling of Livy's account of the plebeians and the patricians on Aventine Hill demonstrates the political impact of a speech act in relation to the realm of the sensible, and his *La Parole muette* illustrates the notion of "mute speech" around the unique moment of the realist novel.<sup>14</sup> Rancière

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<sup>13</sup> Lacan situates silence at the very core of the psychoanalytic act. The symptom is figured as *mutisme* in the supposed speaking subject, and silence is furthermore employed to "cadaverize" the position of the analyst in incarnating the role of the absent Other, revealing a lack that is central to subjectivity and to the human psyche. Silence is symptomatic, thus also revealing.

<sup>14</sup> See Jacques Rancière, *La Méésentente: politique et philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 1995). Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, translated by Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). See also Rancière, *La Parole muette: essai sur les contradictions de la littérature* (Paris: Hachette littératures, 1998). *Mute Speech: Literature,*

is also present in a certain sense in my reading of Rousseau alongside Derrida's consideration of friendship and his notion of "the secret," but my analysis delves deeper into the multifaceted political nature of silence than Derrida or Rancière undertake in their respective approaches.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond the French context, there are a number of theorists of silence with whom I do not directly engage, but who may be considered as important background interlocutors. John Cage's famous three-movement 4'33" composition challenges the boundaries of what constitutes music through his use of silence, while also offering a possible political statement about the nature of expression and communication by shifting the focus in these silent moments to the sounds of the audience rather than the performers. My exploration of music and politics in Diderot, Rousseau, and Staël could be read in dialogue with Cage's use of silence. Susan Sontag's "The Aesthetics of Silence" considers silence in modern art, of relevance in the manner that she theorizes the paradoxically destructive and generative potential of silence, while revealing its multiplicity of possible interpretative formulations.<sup>16</sup> One of the areas that Sontag addresses that has particular resonance with my project is the notion of the annihilation of the perceiving subject in the act of contemplation, which may be read in line with Diderot's artistic and dramatic conceptions, in

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*Critical Theory, and Politics*, translated by James Swenson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*. Paris : Galilée, 1994. Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, translated by George Collins, (NY: Verso, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence" in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 3–34.

connection with the work of Michael Fried.<sup>17</sup> The “sensual speech” that Sontag identifies in the natural biblical language of Adam as a sort of unmediated, expressive instrument of the senses, free of distortion and illusion, is also in resonance with my reading of Rousseau, as both address the arts inheriting the problem of language from religious discourse, and thus underscore the notion of corruption and degeneration. Finally, Susan Cain’s *Quiet* emphasizes the silent power of Rosa Parks, whose action in refusing to give up her seat on the bus speaks louder than words, along with other figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Mahatma Gandhi, to demonstrate how “introversion” may re-shape politics.<sup>18</sup> She extends this political claim to the present day in her praise of silence and advocacy for spaces that are amenable to individual thought and reflection.

While the eighteenth century will serve as my primary point of departure and frame of reference, I look back to the earlier seeds of the Enlightenment, onwards into the nineteenth century with Staël, and at times, to the contemporary moment. Initially constructed around the tenets of freedom, progress, and tolerance, the Enlightenment has also often been criticized as promoting a totalizing worldview to serve the interests of a select few, and as having failed to truly attain its ideals. I thus address intersections of ongoing relevance to issues such as religion and the veil, gender equality, sexual freedom, nationalism, popular sovereignty, migration, and social justice. Although France is the principal setting for this exploration, it will also extend to regions beyond such as the Middle East, Switzerland, Italy, and Senegal, with silence becoming

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<sup>17</sup> Fried, Michael, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>18</sup> Susan Cain, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking* (NY: Crown, 2013).

imbued with an increasingly cosmopolitan dimension as it is taken up by those from different backgrounds and regions of the world who instill it with newfound political meaning. The *philosophes* employ new literary forms and representations of silence to enunciate what is often left unspoken or not yet obtained, imagining political freedom through their fictional tales. Underlying these innovations and fictional narratives are the rays of hope for a more enlightened world, a world perhaps yet unrealized, but one in which silence no longer signifies oppression.

## CHAPTER 1: MONTESQUIEU’S SPIRIT OF SILENCE

*Quelquefois le silence exprime plus que tous les discours.*<sup>19</sup>

Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*

The tale of Anaïs and Ibrahim, adapted from *Les Mille et un jours* by François Pétis de la Croix (1710–1712), and recounted as a story within a story by Persian traveler Rica to his companion Usbek in Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes*, dramatizes the force of silence in the politics of despotism.<sup>20</sup> After over a week of rapturous pleasure in a seraglio of men (a satirical reversal of the usual structure), the spirit of Anaïs is suddenly moved to escape from the euphoria to shut herself away, alone in a room of her celestial palace, where she has found blissful refuge since being murdered by her husband Ibrahim for contesting his cruelty. She is driven to this solitude by a feeling that she has enjoyed her happiness without having passed a single one of “ces moments tranquilles où l’âme se rend . . . compte à elle-même et s’écoute dans le silence des passions” [those quiet moments when the soul takes stock of itself . . . and listens to its own

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<sup>19</sup> Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*, in *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu*, 2 vols., edited by Roger Caillois (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1951), Livre XII, chapitre XII, « Des paroles indiscrètes », 2:442. [Sometimes silence expresses more than any form of speech]. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, “Of Indiscreet Speeches,” 12.12. This translation is my own.

<sup>20</sup> A portion of this chapter appears in my article “Silence in the Seraglio: Women and Legislation in Montesquieu.” Copyright © 2019 American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies. This article first appeared in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Volume 52, Issue 4, July, 2019, pages 395–410. Published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

voice, in the silence of the passions].<sup>21</sup> This lack of reflective retreat is uncharacteristic for a woman who spent almost her entire life in meditation due to the confinement that Ibrahim imposed prior to slaying her for challenging his authority, but a life of contemplation has enabled her to cultivate “l’esprit vraiment philosophe” [a truly philosophical mind].<sup>22</sup> In this particularly pensive moment of her new ethereal afterlife, Anaïs’ thoughts return to the ongoing suffering of her former companions, the co-wives of Ibrahim who continue to endure his maltreatment. In an act of compassion that illustrates the Arabic meaning of her name, “to bring peace and tranquility to the heart,” Anaïs sends one of her heavenly male attendants down to earth to relieve her confidantes of their suffering by assuming the physical form of Ibrahim, expelling him from his seraglio and performing his conjugal functions, then liberating the women from the requirement of wearing the veil, while throwing open the harem. From her moment of seclusion, and through compassion that drives her to action, Anaïs shifts the focus of her passions away from her own pleasure to combat the despotic silence imposed upon her companions. Anaïs thus inspires a radical transformation within the social space of the seraglio, with implications that resonate in the political sphere beyond, in the outside world that the women may now join, and in the broader governmental system of despotism embodied by Ibrahim’s authoritarian rule.

Although Anaïs is a spirit, no longer under the influence of the despot, her actions have

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<sup>21</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, in *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu*, edited by Roger Caillois (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1949), 1:345, Lettre CXLI. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, translated by Margaret Mauldon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 191, Letter 135.

<sup>22</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 345, Lettre CXLI. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 191, Letter 135.

resonance upon the wives that remain under Ibrahim's rule, and anticipate the spirit of the revolt to come in Usbek's seraglio. As Rica's account precedes the passionate finale to this cataclysmic revolt, it serves as a satirical alternative to this outcome, and evinces the depth of domination that afflicts the seraglio. Judith Shklar captures this despotic impact in her account of Montesquieu's Orient as "a nightmare territory of the mind in which the worst human impulses govern," as the social order operates around a universal fear: "Absolute silence reigns and everyone rises and retires at exactly the same time, each in her own cell. Spies and intrigue prevent any conspiracy, indeed any communication, between the women. The master can then 'capture' their hearts, because his agents have already 'subjugated their minds.'" <sup>23</sup> While Shklar's evocation of an inflexibly governed seraglio powerfully captures the psychological tenor of fear and oppression within this silence, I will explore its more emancipatory potential by analyzing instances like Anaïs', where a certain degree of freedom emanates from silence born of solitude and ensuing acts of contestation, which mirror the related actions of Usbek's wives that lead to revolt.

Yet their revolution is short-lived, ending in death, and commentators such as Julia Douthwaite and Lisa Beckstrand have noted that Montesquieu's depiction of women and their challenge to male authority in the novel does not offer a true image of liberation. <sup>24</sup> Mary McAlpin analyzes the *Lettres persanes* in relation to the space of the salon as a utopian topos,

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<sup>23</sup> Judith N. Shklar, *Montesquieu* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 46.

<sup>24</sup> See Julia Douthwaite, *Exotic Women: Literary Heroines and Cultural Strategies in Ancient Régime France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 100, and Lisa Beckstrand, *Deviant Women of the French Revolution and the Rise of Feminism* (Madison, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), 27.

offering her own reading of the story of Anais, while also underscoring the conflicting judgments of critics of Montesquieu's sexual politics, with some decrying him for androcentrism and others extolling him for profeminism.<sup>25</sup> I do not aim to resolve this contradiction, but rather to interpret it through a different analytical lens that emphasizes both the despotic and the emancipatory potential of the politics of silence depicted in the novel. In spite of its tragic finale and failure to depict a genuine example of women's self-government, the *Lettres persanes* underscores the revolutionary possibility of channeling repressive silence into a challenge to despotic principles.

My analysis will focus upon the *Lettres persanes*, but will also draw on *De l'esprit des lois*, as I link silence with legal spirit as central in the transition from despotism to liberty. I begin by exploring the imbrication of despotism and the passions in the mute space of Usbek's seraglio, underscoring the transformative potential and the political force of silence in connection with Montesquieu's conception of the spirit. I then trace the means by which Usbek's wives rewrite the laws of the seraglio, co-opting its silence in various ways: by using it to nurture philosophical thought and cultivate political imagination; as an expression of the emotional drives of the passions, capable of serving a positive rather than harmful political role through non-verbal, subversive action; and as an impetus to generate epistolary correspondence enabling a transgressive political voice. I conclude by evaluating the contemporary resonance of the *Lettres persanes* with the veil controversy, accentuating their ongoing capacity to both conceal

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<sup>25</sup> Mary McAlpin, "Utopia in the Seraglio: Feminist Hermeneutics and Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*," in *Gender and Utopia in the Eighteenth Century: Essays in English and French Utopian Writing*, edited by Nicole Pohl and Brenda Tooley (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 87.

and reveal. Although the *Lettres persanes* does not illustrate true emancipation, it offers examples of how despotic silence might be challenged and altered into a mode of revolt.

### SILENCE IN THE SERAGLIO

The *Lettres persanes* opens with noble Persian travelers, Usbek and Rica, in a scene of silent prayer as they visit the holy Muslim city of Qum in 1711; the journey on which they embark presents a stark contrast to the enclosed space of Usbek's seraglio, and it is one that develops within the realm of desire.<sup>26</sup> Usbek desires knowledge, and his unique and laborious quest will draw him away from his comfortable, noble life: "Rica et moi sommes peut-être les premiers parmi les Persans que l'envie de savoir ait fait sortir de leur pays et qui aient renoncé aux douceurs d'une vie tranquille pour aller chercher laborieusement la sagesse" [Rica and I are perhaps the first Persians whom the appetite for learning has prompted to leave the land of their birth, and forsake the charms of a peaceful life in favor of the arduous quest for wisdom].<sup>27</sup> Usbek's departure is as much a mission to extend the boundaries of his knowledge as it is an escape from the threat of persecution, as after condemning the vice and corruption of his society, bringing "la vérité jusques aux pieds du trône" [truth to the very foot of the throne] by exercising

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<sup>26</sup> Andrew Kahn, "Explanatory Notes," in Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 245. While Montesquieu situates Rica and Usbek in mute prayer at the tomb of the Virgin Fatima, whom he describes as daughter of Muhammad who gave birth to twelve prophets, Kahn mentions: "Montesquieu appears to have confused the daughter of Muhammad with another Fatima, whose tomb was located at the Great Mosque at Qum."

<sup>27</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 133, Lettre I. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 4, Letter 1.

his impotent virtue and speaking “un langage jusqu’alors inconnu” [a language unknown until that time], he provokes the jealousy of the ministers at court, without gaining the favor of the prince.<sup>28</sup> Instead of feeling hope or anticipation for his pending journey, Usbek is troubled:

J’ai senti une douleur secrète quand j’ai perdu la Perse de vue, et que je me suis trouvé au milieu des perfides Osmanlins. A mesure que j’entrois dans les pays de ces profanes, il me sembloit que je devenois profane moi-même. Ma patrie, ma famille, mes amis, se sont présentés à mon esprit ; ma tendresse s’est réveillée ; une certaine inquiétude a achevé de me troubler et m’a fait connoître que, pour mon repos, j’avois trop entrepris. Mais ce qui afflige le plus mon cœur, ce sont

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<sup>28</sup> “Dès que je connus le vice, je m’en éloignai ; mais je m’en approchai ensuite pour le démasquer. Je portai la vérité jusques aux pieds du trône ; j’y parlai un langage jusqu’alors inconnu ; je déconcertai la flatterie, et j’étonnai en même temps les adorateurs et l’idole. Mais quand je vis que ma sincérité m’avoit fait des ennemis ; que je m’étois attiré la jalousie des ministres, sans avoir la faveur du Prince ; que, dans une cour corrompue, je ne me soutenois plus que par une foible vertu, je résolus de la quitter.” Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 140, Lettre VIII. [As soon as I became aware of vice, I distanced myself from it, approaching it later only in order to expose it. I brought truth to the very foot of the throne, where I spoke a language unknown until that time; I confounded the flatterers and simultaneously astonished both the worshippers and the idols. But when I saw that my sincerity had made me enemies, that I had provoked the jealous of minsters without gaining the favour of the prince, and that all that protected mein a corrupt court was my impotent virtue, I determined to leave.] Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 11, Letter 8.

mes femmes : je ne puis penser à elles que je ne sois dévoré de chagrins.

[I felt a secret pang on taking a last look at Persia, at finding myself surrounded by perfidious Ottomans. The further I penetrated into the land of those infidels, the more I felt an infidel myself. My homeland, my family, and my friends filled my thoughts; my affections reawakened; a nagging anxiety added to my unease, and made me realize that I had embarked on an enterprise too great for my own peace of mind. But above all, my heart is troubled about my wives: I cannot think of them without being overcome with distress.]<sup>29</sup>

In addition to capturing the political tensions and religious divisions between the Turkish Sunni and the Persian Shiites, Usbek's disquiet over leaving his seraglio is also marked by a deep-seated jealousy, as he has doubts about his wives' fidelity during his absence. Usbek claims to be so lacking in feeling that all desires have abandoned him, an impotence that is reflected in his inability to physically be with his wives while away, as well as in his incapacity to trust them, or any of his servants to watch over them. He notes that not even his friends would be of any help in maintaining order within the seraglio, since they remain ignorant of its distressing secrets. It is a foreboding space ultimately inspiring greater suspicion and sadness in Usbek than joy and contentment, as he is uncertain whether or not his wives are fully committed to him. Usbek's encounters with the sociable women in Paris are dramatically juxtaposed with the silent seraglio setting, as his desire for knowledge is tempered by unrelenting insecurity over his wives' desire, driving him to increasingly despotic governance in absentia through fear.

The silence of the seraglio is often depicted in the critical literature on Montesquieu as

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<sup>29</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 137–38, Lettre VI. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 8, Letter 6.

representative solely of Usbek's oppressive influence over his wives, which is evident in his employment of despotic methods, exerting total control to ensure compliance with his desires. Shklar adopts such a perspective on this silence, underscoring its oppressive function, alongside the virulent strain of jealousy that motivates Usbek: "It is a despot's passion, and his harem must have no existence apart from his own. It is not an ambition that can be fulfilled, but that does not prevent Usbek from trying, at a horrible cost to his wives."<sup>30</sup> The eunuchs are charged with the demanding mission of keeping constant watch over the seraglio "dans le silence de la nuit, comme dans le tumulte du jour" [in the silence of the night as in the bustle of the day]," as Usbek instructs them to both command and obey his wives, to be "le fléau du vice et la colonne de la fidélité" [the scourge of vice and the pillar of fidelity].<sup>31</sup> While ensuring that Usbek's wives remain faithful to him, through forceful means if necessary, the eunuchs must also try to keep the wives happy, obeying their wishes and requests so that they remain in a peaceful state. The marginal position of the eunuchs is evident in the liminal space that they occupy, both in terms of

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<sup>30</sup> Shklar, *Montesquieu*, 39.

<sup>31</sup> "Tu fais la garde dans le silence de la nuit, comme dans le tumulte du jour ; tes soins infatigables soutiennent la vertu lorsqu'elle chancelle. Si les femmes que tu gardes vouloient sortir de leur devoir, tu leur en ferois perdre l'espérance. Tu es le fléau du vice et la colonne de la fidélité." Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 134, Lettre II. [You keep watch equally in the silence of the night as in the bustle of the day; your tireless attentions support virtue when it wavers. If the women you guard wished to deviate from their duty, you would make them lose all hope of doing so; you are the scourge of vice, the pillar of fidelity.] Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 5, Letter 2.

their physical constitution and in the role they must fulfill, serving as both slaves and despots, intermediaries caught between Usbek and his wives. In contrast to Usbek's initial account of himself as a pious and virtuous knowledge-seeker, his letters to the eunuchs reveal a dark side of which he himself seems unaware.<sup>32</sup> The head eunuch speaks of the silence of despotism as he writes to Usbek about his first experience in another seraglio:

J'entrai dans ce sérail, qui fut pour moi un nouveau monde. Le premier eunuque, l'homme le plus sévère que j'aie vu de ma vie, y gouvernoit avec un empire absolu. On n'y entendoit parler de divisions ni de querelles : un silence profond régnoit partout ; toutes ces femmes étoient couchées à la même heure, d'un bout de l'année à l'autre, et levées à la même heure ; elles entroient dans le bain tour à tour ; elles en sortoient au moindre signe que nous leur en faisons ; le reste du temps, elles étoient presque toujours enfermées dans leurs chambres.

[I entered the seraglio, which for me was a new world: the chief eunuch, the sternest man I have ever known, ruled it as absolute master. There, divisions or quarrels were unknown; complete silence reigned throughout it; all the women retired to bed, and got up, at the same hour year in, year out; they went in turn to

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<sup>32</sup> See Diana Schaub, *Erotic Liberalism: Women and Revolution in Montesquieu's Persian Letters* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995), 15. Schaub expounds upon the link between the two sides of Usbek: "Enlightenment and cruelty are juxtaposed. Far from abating, this split between Usbek's head and his heart, his wisdom and his women, increases as the novel progresses. Even in remove, he remains a captive of the harem's dynamic."

the bath, and came out at the smallest signal we made to them; the rest of the time, they were almost always shut into their rooms.]<sup>33</sup>

The smoothly running seraglio is characterized by complete silence and confinement, with each woman acting in the same manner, but in isolation. This strict obedience is born from fear: “On n’entend parler que la crainte, qui n’a qu’un langage, et non pas la nature, qui s’exprime si différemment, et qui paroît sous tant de formes” [Nothing is heard but the voice of fear, which has only one language, instead of nature which expresses itself so diversely and appears in so many different forms].<sup>34</sup> The world Usbek creates around a culture of fear is portrayed as unnatural, eliminating the richness of diversity. As Sheldon Wolin reveals, the erasing of all difference from the seraglio means that its space is occupied by Usbek’s will alone, which becomes the law: “Despotism is sufficient unto itself; around it there is only emptiness.”<sup>35</sup> While Wolin, like Shklar, and most other commentators rightly emphasize silence as characteristic of the disciplinary, regulative order of this despotism driven by fear, there is another dimension to it.

In contrast to this singularly oppressive silence of the seraglio that is emphasized by accounts such as those of Shklar and Wolin, I will trace a more emancipatory perspective that also emerges from silence but leads to speech by other means at both the individual and

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<sup>33</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 224, Lettre LXIV. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 84, Letter 62.

<sup>34</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 223, Lettre LXIII. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 82, Lettre 61.

<sup>35</sup> Sheldon Wolin, “Montesquieu and Publius: The Crisis of Reason and *The Federalist Papers*,” *The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and the Constitution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 109.

collective levels, which I follow Marshall Berman in situating as sexual and political liberation, but differ in conceiving how this transformation is enacted. Berman identifies sexuality as the central symbol of the *Lettres persanes*, standing for itself in expressing a demand for greater freedom in sexual life, while also embodying the authenticity of the individual, demanding profound changes in the structure of social status and political authority.<sup>36</sup> In highlighting a radical gap between people's social and real identities, Berman suggests that repression is implicit in the structure of the text, while underscoring the revolt of Usbek's wives:

Expression of one's natural sexual desires means rejection of repressive social roles which deny the right to be oneself; the wives' assertion of sexual choice and preference is *ipso facto* a declaration of political independence. The act that defines them as women establishes them as *Menschen*, members of the human community; it is an achievement which destroys the myth of their inferiority [...] used to keep them down.<sup>37</sup>

Although Berman's account situates woman as destroying the myth of inferiority, his conflation of her "natural" sexual desires with "the right to be oneself" fails to offer a truly emancipatory framework, as woman remains positioned as a counterpart to man, as a sexual object, even if she is the one with sexual desires. As woman must either become man in this vision, or desire in the

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<sup>36</sup> Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2009), 30–31. Berman notes that Montesquieu defends adultery and promiscuity, divorce, and even incest at different moments of the *Lettres persanes* in advocating for greater sexual freedom.

<sup>37</sup> Berman, 30.

same way, sexual difference is effaced and is situated as antithetical to the notion of unity. I will return to this point in the contemporary context of Joan Scott's work on the veil controversy in France. Like Berman, I situate the acts of Usbek's wives as emancipatory, but rather than conceiving freedom by positioning woman's desire as the same as that of man, I will accentuate the simultaneous veiling and unveiling enacted both through the actions of the wives and their writing of the letters, as well as the role of silence as a structural position underlying this revolt. It is through this silence, veiling, and unveiling that Montesquieu reveals the suffering of the women, while also enabling them to voice the injustice and to rewrite the laws of the seraglio.

Before considering examples of the ways by which Usbek's wives rewrite the laws of the seraglio, it is instructive to explore the contrast that Montesquieu establishes between Persia and France to understand the difference in the political character of these nations. As Usbek attempts from afar to restrict the freedom of his wives in the Persian seraglio, he encounters the openness and unrestrained sociable character of the French nation. In order to grasp the emancipatory potential of silence as channeled by Usbek's wives, we must first turn to Rica and the idea of *l'esprit* before exploring the related, but distinctive spirit within the seraglio. Where Usbek is largely depicted as one who holds firm to the despotic and veiled character of Persia, he must be read alongside Rica, as one who unveils a certain spirit to the French nation.

#### RICA AND THE FRENCH SPIRIT

In contrast to Usbek, who is amenable to exploring French philosophy, but continually laments his enduring state of unbearable exile from Persia, Rica is more open to the spirit of the French nation. It is from Rica that we learn of the tale of Anaïs, as related through the voice of the female sage, Zuléma. As Pauline Kra has noted, Rica is itself a feminine-sounding name, and

the word *rica*, in Latin, also refers to the veil worn by women during religious sacrifices, suggesting an affinity between the figure of Rica and the female revolt to follow in the seraglio.<sup>38</sup> In his first letter, sent from Paris, Rica speaks of the fast-paced, astonishing character of the city, and then describes the central role of women as fomenters of a revolt against the pope, “[un] magicien plus fort que [le prince]” [a magician even greater than the prince],” in response to the bull *Unigenitus dei filius*, an apostolic constitution promulgated by Pope Clement XI in 1713, which opened the final phase of the Jansenist controversy in France.<sup>39</sup> Montesquieu is referencing the pope’s condemnation of Pasquier Quesnel’s propositions explaining the aims and ideals of the Jansenist party as heretical in *Réflexions morales sur le Nouveau Testament*, and taking particular aim at the proposition asserting the right of women to read holy scripture and to

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<sup>38</sup> See Pauline Kra, “The Name Rica and the Veil in Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes*,” *Studi Francesi* 42.1 (1998): 78–79.

<sup>39</sup> “Ce que je te dis de ce prince ne doit pas t’étonner : il y a un autre magicien plus fort que lui, qui n’est pas moins maître de son esprit qu’il l’est lui-même de celui des autres. Ce magicien s’appelle le pape. Tantôt il lui fait croire que trois ne sont qu’un, que le pain qu’on mange n’est pas du pain, ou que le vin qu’on boit n’est pas du vin, et mille autres choses de cette espèce.” Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 166, Lettre XXIV. [What I tell you about this king should not astonish you, for there is another magician even greater than he, who exerts no less a mastery over his mind than he himself enjoys over the minds of others. This magician is called the Pope; sometimes he makes the king believe that three are only one, that the bread he eats is not bread, or that the wine he drinks is not wine, and countless other things of that nature.] Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 31, Letter 22.

learn the mysteries of religion. Rica alludes to this event and stresses the influence of the Parisian women:

Ce sont les femmes qui ont été les motrices de toute cette révolte, qui divise toute la cour, tout le royaume et toutes les familles. Cette Constitution leur défend de lire un livre que tous les chrétiens disent avoir été apporté du ciel : c'est proprement leur Alcoran. Les femmes, indignées de l'outrage fait à leur sexe, soulèvent tout contre la Constitution : elles ont mis les hommes de leur parti, qui, dans cette occasion, ne veulent point avoir de privilège.

[It is the women who were the fomenters of this revolt, which divides the entire court, the entire kingdom, and every family. This *Constitution* forbids women to read a book which all Christians claim was brought down from heaven; it is, in fact, their Qur'an. The women, indignant at this insult to their sex, are raising every possible objection to the *Constitution*; they've won over the men, who in this case don't want to be privileged.]<sup>40</sup>

On the one hand, this passage can be read ironically, suggesting the men do not wish to bear the biblical laws alone or at all, and the very book the women are demanding the right to read may also serve to further enslave rather than emancipate them, with its restrictive stance toward women. At the same time, this passage showcases the women of Paris challenging the oppressive forces of religion, as Rica reveals their revolutionary potential, later reinforced in the story of

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<sup>40</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 166, Lettre XXIV. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 32, Letter 22.

Anaïs, which the Persian women will take to another level in their seraglio rebellion.<sup>41</sup>

Whereas Usbek's despotic nature is embodied in the silence that reigns over his seraglio, as Schaub and others such as Kra persuasively underscore, Rica brings to light the more public, sociable character of the French spirit. In a letter to Usbek, Rica reveals that he has learned more from the women of Paris in one month than in thirty years in the seraglio:

Je ne connois les femmes que depuis que je suis ici ; j'en ai plus appris dans un mois que je n'aurois fait en trente ans dans un sérail. Chez nous, les caractères sont tous uniformes, parce qu'ils sont forcés : on ne voit point les gens tels qu'ils sont, mais tels qu'on les oblige d'être. Dans cette servitude du cœur et de l'esprit, on n'entend parler que la crainte, qui n'a qu'un langage, et non pas la nature, qui s'exprime si différemment, et qui paroît sous tant de formes. La dissimulation, cet art parmi nous si pratiqué et si nécessaire, est ici inconnue : tout parle, tout se voit, tout s'entend ; le cœur se montre comme le visage ; dans les mœurs, dans la vertu, dans le vice même, on aperçoit toujours quelque chose de naïf.

[I've only come to know women since I've been here; in one month I've learnt more than I would have learnt in thirty years, in a seraglio. In Persia, all characters are identical because they are forced; we never see people as they are, but as they are constrained to be; in that enslavement of the heart and mind you hear nothing but the voice of fear, which speaks only one language, and not the voice of nature,

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<sup>41</sup> The rebellion in the seraglio has actually occurred before the tale of Anaïs, but is not discovered until later due to the time lapse between when the letter is sent and when it is received.

which expresses itself in such different ways and assumes such different forms. Dissimulation, among us so widespread and so essential an art, is here unknown; all is said, all is seen, all is heard; the heart, like the face, reveals itself; in customs, in virtue, and even in vice, you are always conscious of something artless.]<sup>42</sup>

As Rica has not served as master of or left behind a seraglio like Usbek, he appears more open to alternative possibilities of government beyond despotism, which he sees as linked to the visible nature of the French people and the means by which they open their private lives up to the public, in contrast to the dissimulation and concealment of the Persian seraglios. While infidelity is not permitted in the seraglio, it is tolerated by the men of French society, and frankness around it builds a shared spirit by revealing that which is hidden or repressed in Persia. Only in France where the veils are torn away do trust and security in human relations seem to become possible, but as Joan Scott has shown in her recent work on the veil, emphasis on the visibility and openness of seductive play between men and women serves to veil a constitutive contradiction of French republicanism, which I will return to within the contemporary context.<sup>43</sup>

Rica further reveals how the French sociability might likewise impact national political structure, with women serving as a spring behind the machine of government. He describes a particular talent required to please Parisian women: “il consiste dans une espèce de badinage

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<sup>42</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 223, Lettre LXIII. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 82–83, Letter 61.

<sup>43</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, “Symptomatic Politics: The Banning of Islamic Head Scarves in French Public Schools,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 23.3 (Winter 2005): 106–27, 121.

dans l'esprit, qui les amuse en ce qu'il semble leur promettre à chaque instant ce qu'on ne peut tenir que dans de trop longs intervalles" [this consists in a kind of banter, a playfulness of mind, which amuses them, in that it seems at every instant to promise something that can only be fulfilled, alas, at too infrequent intervals], which he then links with the system of government: "Ce badinage, naturellement fait pour les toilettes semble être parvenu à former le caractère général de la nation : on badine au conseil ; on badine à la tête d'une armée ; on badine avec un ambassadeur" [This banter, which is perfectly suited to informal morning visits, seems to have become part of the general character of the nation; there is banter at the council, among military leaders, in conversation with an ambassador].<sup>44</sup> The banter in the French spirit (*badinage dans l'esprit*) derives from *badiner* (to joke) or *badin* (fool), suggesting both an informality and an irony in Montesquieu's association of it with liberty. Ursula Gonthier rightfully situates this "banter" in dialogue with Addison and Shaftesbury's theories of sociability and politeness in English society, contrasting French social practice with the values of rational communication in the English public sphere. Gonthier notes how Montesquieu is likely in discourse with Shaftesbury's perception of the "witty banter" within French society as an impediment to reasoned discussion, symptomatic of an oppressive government, with public reason cultivated only in a social setting that is emancipated from the royal court.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to the despotic

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<sup>44</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 223, Lettre LXIII. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 83, Letter 61.

<sup>45</sup> Ursula Haskins Gonthier, *Montesquieu and England: Enlightened Exchanges, 1689-1755* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), 31. Gonthier cites A. Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. L.E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31–36: "It is the persecuting spirit has raised the bantering one, and

silence of the seraglio, the openness that Montesquieu depicts in Parisian society may play a positive role if the “banter” is transformed into more formal and meaningful dialogue, like the eventual rewriting of the laws that will be forged in the revolt by Persian women. So while Montesquieu’s depiction of banter is an ironic critique of French society, it nonetheless reveals a potential for creativity that may be fostered through discussion, shaping the general character of the nation in a powerful way during the transitional period of the Regency. This general character of the nation may be considered as an early version of Montesquieu’s vision of the general spirit (further developed in *De l’esprit des lois*, which I will consider shortly), and Rica’s observations reveal the necessity of women and sociability in constructing this spirit, as the manners of private life extend into those of social and political life. Rica develops this link even more explicitly in a later letter that describes a network of women that operates behind the political scenes:

Mais c’est qu’il n’y a personne qui ait quelque emploi à la cour, dans Paris ou dans les provinces, qui n’ait une femme par les mains de laquelle passent toutes les grâces et quelquefois les injustices qu’il peut faire. Ces femmes ont toutes des relations les unes avec les autres et forment une espèce de république dont les membres toujours actifs se secourent et se

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want of liberty may account for a want of true politeness.” Gonthier also notes Montesquieu’s endorsement of Shaftesbury’s principles of natural sociability in the story of the Troglodytes, whose survivors are those that see themselves as one great family. This may be read in refutation of arguments for self-interest, such as that of Bernard Mandeville, who suggests that practicing virtue cannot lead to a thriving society.

servent mutuellement : c'est comme un nouvel état dans l'État ; et celui qui est à la Cour, à Paris, dans les provinces, qui voit agir des ministres, des magistrats, des prélats, s'il ne connaît les femmes qui les gouvernent, est comme un homme qui voit bien une machine qui joue, mais qui n'en connoît point les ressorts.

[The fact is, everyone that holds a position at court, whether in Paris or the provinces, has a wife or lady friend through whose hands passes every favour and, sometimes, every injustice he may dispense. These women are all acquainted with one another and form a sort of government, whose ever-busy members assist and oblige one another; it's like a new state within a state; and the bystander at the court in Paris or the provinces, who watches ministers and magistrates and prelates carrying out their duties, unless he knows the women who control them, is like a man watching a machine function without being aware of the springs that drive it.]<sup>46</sup>

This sociable feminine republic operates behind the scenes of the French monarchy, and is thus in a sense concealed, but Rica unveils its operation through his revelation of its springs.

Yet alongside a couched endorsement of the role of sociability within French politics, there is also a critique of the excessive publicity and sexual immorality of Parisian women, so we must interpret Rica together with Usbek's worries. As "banter" might also be an expression of criticism leveled against Parisian artifice, it speaks to the theatrical and duplicitous side of Paris,

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<sup>46</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 291, Lettre CVII. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 145, Letter 105.

suggesting that Rica is blind to the danger of revealing too much. A tendency to consider Rica as secondary and superficial, and Usbek as the primary philosophical character, does not account for the mutually significant and interconnected nature of their differing perspectives, which when considered together, offer a more complete picture of Montesquieu's thought, and perhaps of his own character as well.<sup>47</sup> This approach is further indicated by his insistence on thinking law and principle as relational (based upon *rappports* in *De l'esprit des lois*),<sup>48</sup> rather than as monological or foundational. As Schaub asserts: "From Rica, we learn how one might conjoin Usbek's sense with the sensibility of Usbek's wives, offering a way to overcome the despotic disjunction between his wisdom and his women."<sup>49</sup> Rica's depiction of French society may seem open towards its women, yet these accounts are satirical, and the perspectives of the Parisian women are mediated through Rica's voice, suggesting that these women do not experience true freedom, but are still posited as the counterpart to man, so we must look to the women of the seraglio for a more truly emancipatory struggle. While we are not to follow Rica wholeheartedly or to endorse sexual immorality, his openness to the public character of French society, when read alongside Usbek's philosophy, suggests a pathway to combining the feminine spirit of French monarchy with the laws and institutions of a new form of republic.

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<sup>47</sup> Montesquieu himself may be seen as possessing the opposing qualities of both Rica and Usbek – a penchant toward candor and open-heartedness alongside a need for dissimulation and silence.

<sup>48</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), 188. Arendt describes this relational definition of law as a Roman interpretation.

<sup>49</sup> Schaub, 150.

## SPIRIT AND MODERN REPUBLICANISM

Despotism is the most pervasive form of government for Montesquieu, but is just one among a range of possibilities encountered by the protagonists of the *Lettres persanes*, and likewise explored in his later *De l'esprit des lois*. The principles of fear, honor, and virtue, identified in the latter work as crucial in shaping the “spirit” of the law, operate in relation to the different systems of government that he outlines. Schaub incisively illuminates these connections in *Erotic Liberalism: Women and Revolution in Montesquieu*, so in this section I outline the contours of her argument, which I engage with and build upon in my analysis of silence in the text. As Schaub’s study illustrates, fear is the passion that Usbek channels to rule over his seraglio in the *Lettres persanes*, and it is also identified by Montesquieu in *De l'esprit des lois* as the driving principle of despotism. While fear of the ruler is the principle that functions as a motivational behavior on the part of the subjects to enable despotic governments to endure, the original principle of monarchy is honor, or the desire to attain greater rank and privilege: for democratic republics, it is virtue, or the willingness to put community interest above private ones. Although the general principles of these different forms of government are not enunciated as explicitly in the *Lettres persanes* as in *De l'esprit des lois*, the events that unfold in the seraglio serve to demonstrate their effects. In a letter to Rica, his friend Rhédi confesses:

Une des choses qui a le plus exercé ma curiosité en arrivant en Europe, c’est l’histoire et l’origine des républiques. Tu sais que la plupart des Asiatiques n’ont pas seulement l’idée de cette sorte de gouvernement, et que l’imagination ne les a pas servis jusques à leur faire comprendre qu’il puisse y en avoir sur la Terre d’autre que le despotique.

[When I first arrived in Europe one of the subjects that most exercised my

curiosity was the history and origin of republics. As you know, most Asians have not the faintest concept of this type of government, and their imagination has not even enabled them to grasp that any form other than despotism can exist upon the earth].<sup>50</sup>

As Rhédi's letter suggests an effort to expand the Oriental political imagination, Anaïs' action in sending her male attendant as a new Ibrahim to relieve her confidantes of their suffering is also a springboard towards more democratic political horizons. Her act is driven by a virtuous passion, emerging in the solitary moment in which she quells her amorous one, as it establishes the well-being of her fellow wives above her own interests; in liberating these women from Ibrahim's repressive regime, her tale is a presage to the discovery by Usbek's wives of alternative possibilities to their enslavement under his despotism.

I follow Schaub's reading of the *Lettres persanes* as an effort to combat what Montesquieu later identifies in *De l'esprit des lois* as a natural tendency towards despotism by channeling the force of the spirit towards a modern form of republicanism, which steers the passions into a positive political role, like that exhibited in the virtuous act of Anaïs, in contrast to a seraglio governed by fear. Hannah Arendt likens Montesquieu's appeal to principle to a sort of performative virtuosity, rather than a fixed rule, with principles as sources of motion that provide the common ground in which the laws are rooted and from which the actions of citizens spring.<sup>51</sup> Usbek describes most European governments as monarchical, but then questions

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<sup>50</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 327, Lettre CXXXI. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 174, Letter 125.

<sup>51</sup> Arendt aligns the political spirit of modernity with the time "when men were no longer

whether such entities have ever actually existed, doubting the possibility of equally sharing power between “le Peuple et le Prince” [the people and the prince], and characterizing monarchy as “un état violent, qui dégénère toujours en despotisme ou en république” [an unstable state that invariably degenerates into despotism or republicanism].<sup>52</sup> Rica, as well, challenges the

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satisfied that empires would rise and fall in sempiternal change; it is as though men wished to establish a world which could be trusted to last forever, precisely because they knew how novel everything was that their age attempted to do. Hence, the republican form of government recommended itself to the pre-revolutionary political thinkers not because of its egalitarian character but because of its promise of great durability.” Arendt, 224.

<sup>52</sup> “La plupart des gouvernements d’Europe sont monarchiques, ou plutôt sans ainsi appelés ; car je ne sais pas s’il y en a jamais eu véritablement de tels ; au moins est-il difficile qu’ils aient subsisté longtemps dans leur pureté. C’est un état violent, qui dégénère toujours en despotisme ou en république : la puissance ne peut jamais être également partagée entre le Peuple et le Prince ; l’équilibre est trop difficile à garder. Il faut que le pouvoir diminue d’un côté, pendant qu’il augmente de l’autre ; mais l’avantage est ordinairement du côté du Prince, qui est à la tête des armées.” Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 281, Lettre CII. ”Most European governments are monarchical, or rather bear that label, for I do not know whether such governments have ever actually existed: at any rate, it is impossible that they should last long: such states are unstable, and invariably degenerate into despotism or republicanism. Power can never be shared equally between the people and the prince; the balance is too difficult to maintain, power necessarily always diminishing on the one side while increasing on the other; as a rule, however, the advantage is to the prince, who holds the armies.” Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 136, Letter 99.

monarchical regime in his depiction of the king as a great magician: “D’ailleurs ce roi est un grand magicien : il exerce son empire sur l’esprit même de ses sujets ; il les fait penser comme il veut. S’il n’a qu’un million d’écus dans son trésor, et qu’il en ait besoin de deux, il n’a qu’à leur persuader qu’un écu en vaut deux, et ils le croient” [Furthermore, this king is a great magician: he exerts his dominance over the very minds of his subjects, for he makes them think whatever he wishes: if he has one million gold pieces in his treasury, and he needs two, he has only to persuade them that one gold piece is worth two, and they believe him].<sup>53</sup> As Schaub reveals, the *Lettres persanes* shows the corruption of the original monarchical principle of honor into vanity, or self-interest, which becomes fear in a despotic regime, but may also serve as the grounds for a modern commercial republic. Modern republicanism for Montesquieu differs from the ancient variety in that it is based upon liberty rather than virtue, as *De l’esprit des lois* traces within the context of the government of England. Anaïs is exemplary in how to emerge from the state of despotism through her compassionate (heavenly) spirit, and as a philosophical legislator figure of good *esprit*, capable of guiding her fellow citizens towards a modern republic based upon liberty.

Spirit may on the one hand be considered as the character of the nation, as well as a means by which new manners and mores might be introduced that help to shape the law itself. Montesquieu announces his intention to examine the diversity of laws and mores in *De l’esprit des lois*, emphasizing the immense variation in the spirit or character of an array of different nations, which he attributes to a host of factors, ranging from natural elements to history, custom,

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<sup>53</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 166, Lettre XXIV. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 31, Letter 22.

religion, institutions, manners, and additional forces.<sup>54</sup> Usbek explains the indescribably powerful element of the spirit of a nation when he first sets eyes upon a Christian city:

C'est un grand spectacle pour un Mahométan de voir pour la première fois une ville chrétienne. Je ne parle pas des choses qui frappent d'abord tous les yeux, comme la différence des édifices, des habits, des principales coutumes. Il y a, jusque dans les moindres bagatelles, quelque chose de singulier que je sens, et que je ne sais pas dire.

[When he first sees it, a Christian city presents a wonderful spectacle to a Muslim. I do not mean things that make an immediate impression on every visitor, such as the difference in the buildings, the dress, and the principal customs: but even in the tiniest details there is something so strange, something I can feel, but cannot put into words].<sup>55</sup>

This spirit of a nation is inarticulable, as it lies within manners and a performative combination

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<sup>54</sup> See Dennis Rasmussen, *The Pragmatic Enlightenment: Recovering the Liberalism of Hume, Smith, Montesquieu, and Voltaire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 59–60.

Rasmussen comments on the diversity within *De l'esprit des lois*: “As every reader of the work discovers, it virtually overflows with examples drawn not only from modern Europe and ancient Greece and Rome, but also from such then far-flung places as Persia, China, Japan, India, Muscovy, Tartary, and various nations and tribes in Africa and the Americas. Montesquieu later asserted that the subject of the work was nothing less than ‘the laws, customs, and diverse manners of all the peoples on earth.’”

<sup>55</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 164, Lettre XXIII. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 30, Letter 21.

of power and freedom, with *pouvoir* meaning both power, and the capacity *to be able* to shift the law.<sup>56</sup> As Schaub eloquently expresses, in addition to serving as a descriptive quality of a nation, spirit itself may become a means of shaping the law: “Montesquieu’s discovery of the general spirit represents an epoch in the art of legislation. It is a legislative compass, making it possible freely to navigate the political universe, no longer hugging the coastline in the manner of ancient mariners.”<sup>57</sup> But legislators must also understand the character or spirit of those for whom they are legislating, and it is precisely this disjuncture that unfolds within the rift between Usbek and his wives. I now return to the seraglio to illuminate how its silence is altered through alignment with the spirit.

#### EMANCIPATORY SILENCE

Instead of serving as merely a space of suppression, the seraglio shifts into a site of rebellion as Usbek’s wives transform its silence in various ways, the first of which is to exercise their imaginative faculties. An early letter from Usbek’s wife Fatmé links imagination with ineffable passion, which on the one hand encapsulates her amorous desire for Usbek, but also

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<sup>56</sup> Arendt notes that Montesquieu distinguishes between two different types of freedom: philosophical, “which consists ‘in the exercise of will,’ (*Esprit des lois* XII, 2), and political freedom, which consists in *pouvoir faire ce que l’on doit vouloir* (ibid., XI, 3), whereby the emphasis is on the word *pouvoir*. The element of power in political freedom is strongly suggested by the French language, in which the same word, *pouvoir*, signifies power and ‘to be able.’ Arendt, 301.

<sup>57</sup> Schaub, 138.

expresses a capacity for this passion to become inflamed and transform into violence, a presage to the later revolt.<sup>58</sup> Correspondence from wives Zachi and Zephis similarly proclaim passion for Usbek, while simultaneously indicting his despotic system that frustrates and oppresses them in the seraglio.<sup>59</sup> In a letter from another wife, Zélis, she describes her wish to move her daughter with Usbek to the seraglio upon her seventh birthday, perpetuating the cycle of subordination in which the wives are inextricably entangled. Although at first appearing compliant to the all-encompassing reign of her husband over the seraglio, Zélis conveys the initial seeds of rebellion, describing the impact of the seraglio's isolation, as well as how she imaginatively transforms a space of solitude into one of pleasure:

Mais, quand les lois nous donnent à un homme, elles nous dérobent à tous les autres et nous mettent aussi loin d'eux que si nous en étions à cent mille lieues[...] Cependant, Usbek, ne t'imagine pas que ta situation soit plus heureuse que la mienne : j'ai goûté ici mille plaisirs que tu ne connois pas ; mon imagination a travaillé sans cesse à m'en faire connoître le prix ; j'ai vécu, et tu n'as fait que languir.

[But when the Law gives us to a man, it takes us from all others, placing us as far from them as if we were 100,000 leagues away ... Nevertheless, Usbek, do not imagine that your situation is happier than mine; here in the seraglio I have tasted

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<sup>58</sup> For more on the revolt, see Jean-Marie Goulemot, "Vision du devenir historique et formes de la révolution dans les *Lettres persanes*," *Dix-huitième siècle*, 21 (1989): 13–22.

<sup>59</sup> See Kra, "Montesquieu and Women," *French Women and the Enlightenment*, edited by Samia Spencer, Bloomington, 1984, 272–78.

a thousand pleasures unknown to you; my imagination has worked unceasingly to make me appreciate their value; I have lived, whereas you have barely existed.]<sup>60</sup>

From her silence and imprisonment, Zélis confesses to being happier than Usbek through her imagination, conveying pleasure in his misgivings and efforts to increase his surveillance over her, noting how his suspicions, jealousy, and unhappiness are signs of his dependence upon her. While Zélis may indeed be happier than Usbek, this imaginative freedom does not necessarily translate into political liberty, yet it does serve as a creative impetus for writing, which I will address in the context of illicit epistolarity, and it is through her imposed silent confinement that Zélis is drawn to express her passionate voice through writing. Imagination is not intrinsically tied to silence, as it is rather that which is inaccessible to others, yet the silent seraglio is in contrast to the noisy “banter” and frenzy of the social environment of Parisian society, which may inspire creativity through conversation, but does not provide an atmosphere conducive to channeling these imaginative thoughts into writing.

Although Zélis appeals to Usbek to continue to have her guarded to ensure his happiness, claiming to fear nothing but his indifference, she identifies her strength grounded in passion, which she later channels into an act of revolt, demonstrating another emancipatory instance, in this case moving beyond imagination to encompass an expression of the passions through non-verbal, subversive action. “[La nature] nous a mises dans le feu des passions, pour les faire vivre tranquilles” [Nature gave us the fire of passion so that (men) could live in peace],” writes Zélis to Usbek, describing how women, like men, have desires, but nature destines them to employ these

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<sup>60</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 221–22, Lettre LXII. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 81–82, Letter 60.

feelings solely to ensure that the men will remain happy.<sup>61</sup> In contrast to the Parisian women that Usbek and Rica encounter during their travels, who have complete freedom in their interaction with men, Zélis recognizes the constraint upon the passions of the Persian women, who must remain concealed from view. The paradoxical nature of Usbek's quest for knowledge is evident in this realization: although as an abstinent philosopher away from his seraglio he succeeds in gaining access to new truths of which he was previously unaware, such as the benefits to society of the sociability of the women of Paris, he remains a slave to his own despotic passions in his tyrannical reign over the seraglio. Usbek's lack of vision and self-awareness is further ironic in his dream for his daughter with Zélis, Fatima, whom he also wishes to become the honor and ornament of the seraglio for which she is destined, to be guarded by no fewer than ten eunuchs: "Qu'elle n'ait sur sa tête que des lambris dorés et ne marche que sur des tapis superbes" [May

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<sup>61</sup> "La Nature, industrieuse en faveur des hommes, ne s'est pas bornée à leur donner des désirs : elle a voulu que nous en eussions nous-mêmes, et que nous fussions des instruments animés de leur félicité ; elle nous a mises dans le feu des passions, pour les faire vivre tranquilles ; s'ils sortent de leur insensibilité, elle nous à destinées à les y faire rentrer, sans que nous puissions jamais goûter cet heureux état où nous les mettons." Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 222, Lettre LXII. [Nature, ever industrious on behalf of men, did not stop at inspiring desires in them, but determined that we women should also have desires, and be the living instruments of men's felicity; nature gave us the fire of passion so that they could live in peace; if they should lose their insensibility, she has destined us to ensure that they can regain it, without our ever being able to share in that state of bliss which we enable them to enjoy.] Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 81, Letter 60.

her head always be sheltered by golden canopies and her feet tread only upon magnificent carpets] professes Usbek in a letter to Zélis, “et, pour comble de souhaits, puissent mes yeux la voir dans toute sa gloire !” [and to crown my wishes, may my eyes look upon her in all her glory!].<sup>62</sup> Usbek yearns to be the only one to lay eyes upon his daughter and his wives, which makes Zélis’ ensuing act of allowing her veil to drop on her way to the mosque of particular potency in revealing herself before a crowd of people with her face almost uncovered. “Veils allows for great play in fantasies of invisibility and visibility,” writes Scott, “darkness and light, blindness and full sightedness,” while also citing psychoanalyst Elisabeth Roudinesco, who describes the veil as a curtain that shrouds a woman in silence.<sup>63</sup> The indeterminacy behind the meaning of the veil or its lifting may be viewed as kindred to the multiplicity of meanings that lie beneath silence as well, and Zélis’ lack of explanation for her gesture embraces this deliberate obfuscation of meaning. Although lifting her veil does not necessarily embody true freedom in the sense that this may be viewed as making herself available to the gaze of other men, it is her decision to do so, and she does not choose to explain this act, but instead lets the gesture speak for itself, with this silence adding greater force to the subversive impact. Upon learning of this

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<sup>62</sup> “Dieu veuille que son mari la trouve aussi belle et aussi pure que Fatima. Qu’elle ait dix eunuques pour la garder ; qu’elle soit l’honneur et l’ornement du sérail où elle est destinée . . .” Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 241, Lettre LXXI. [God grant that her husband find her as beautiful and as pure as Fatima ; let her have ten eunuchs to guard her and may she be the honour and the ornament of the seraglio for which she is destined. . . .] Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 99, Letter 69.

<sup>63</sup> Scott, 118.

incident from the head eunuch and receiving word of a letter for one of the wives intercepted in the seraglio, Usbek suspects this letter was for Zélis, and orders his servant to “examinez cela avec des yeux de lynx” [watch her with the eyes of a lynx].<sup>64</sup> Like the wives of Ibrahim who unveil themselves after being liberated by Anaïs in the utopian fantasy recounted by Rica to Usbek, Zélis embraces her own passion in this silent act of revolt, which now extends beyond the realm of imagination and into that of deeply expressive gesture.

The silence and enclosure that initially serve a complicit role in enabling despotism become associated with the creative faculty of the mind and action, as witnessed in Zélis’ revolt, and most dramatically enacted in Roxane’s culminating suicidal act. As the seraglio begins to fall into a severe state of chaos and confusion, Usbek receives word that “il se passe des choses horribles” [unspeakable things are happening],<sup>65</sup> and he resorts to ordering increasingly harsh punishments for the eunuchs to inflict upon his wives:

Recevez par cette lettre un pouvoir sans bornes sur tout le sérail : commandez avec autant d’autorité que moi-même. Que la crainte et la terreur marchent avec vous ; courez d’appartement en appartement porter les punitions et les châtimens. Que tout vive dans la consternation ; que tout fonde en larmes devant vous.”

[With this letter I grant you unlimited power over the entire seraglio; command there with all the authority that I myself would wield; may fear, may terror be your companions; hasten from room to room bearing punishment and retribution;

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<sup>64</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 363, Lettre CXLVIII. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 206, Letter 140.

<sup>65</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 364, Lettre CL. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 206, Letter 142.

may they all pass their days in dread, may they all weep bitterly in your presence].<sup>66</sup>

Usbek's wrath and brutality are a direct response to a transformation of the silence of the seraglio into revolt by his wives, and his slave Solim further reveals the transgressive nature of silence by aligning it with criminal action: "Si je gardois plus longtemps le silence, je serois aussi coupable que tous les criminels que tu as dans le sérail" [If I remained silent any longer, I would be as guilty as are all the criminals you keep in your seraglio].<sup>67</sup> Solim perceives a shift in the formerly subservient climate of the seraglio, with its inhabitants lacking their once zealous ardor to serve Usbek, while noticing in the smallest things "des libertés jusqu'alors inconnues" [a bold freedom hitherto unknown].<sup>68</sup> This freedom is embodied by Roxane, who takes a lover and shares her name with the adulterous heroine of Racine's tragedy, *Bajazet*. Andrew Kahn notes how

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<sup>66</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 363, Lettre CXLVIII. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 205–06, Letter 140.

<sup>67</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 364, Lettre CLI. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 207, Letter 143.

<sup>68</sup> "On ne trouve plus sur le visage de tes femmes cette vertu mâle et sévère qui y régnoit autrefois ; une joie nouvelle, répandue dans ces lieux, est un témoignage infallible, selon moi, de quelque satisfaction nouvelle ; dans les plus petites choses, je remarque des libertés jusqu'alors inconnues." Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 365, Lettre CLI. [I no longer observe, on the faces of your wives, that resolute, severe virtue that I used to see; a new joyfulness, which is everywhere evident, is to my eyes infallible proof of some new satisfaction ; I notice, in the smallest things, a bold freedom hitherto unknown.] Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 207, Letter 143.

Montesquieu learned much from neoclassical stage technique, and particularly from the timing and reversals that create tension in *Bajazet*, evident in his blunt revelations from the seraglio and his arrangement of the letters that create a “stunning *coup de théâtre*” at the end.<sup>69</sup> Due to the way the letters are arranged, it is not Usbek, but Roxane who has the final words, “je me meurs” [I am dying], in an act of self-sacrifice that ends the letters with the ultimate silence of her suicide (which opens a space of subversive potential for those who survive her), but not until after she has confessed.<sup>70</sup>

“Ce langage, sans doute, te paroît nouveau” [My language will no doubt seem new to you], proclaims Roxane in her final letter to Usbek, in which she admits to following the pretense of being his faithful wife, while keeping secret in her heart what should have been proclaimed “à toute la Terre” [before the whole world], rewriting his laws to conform with “celles de la Nature” [those of nature], and therefore maintaining her own independent spirit.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> See Kahn, “Introduction,” in Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, xix. Kahn underscores the parallel between the Roxane of the *Lettres persanes* and that of *Bajazet*, whose fate depends entirely on the absent emperor Bajazet.

<sup>70</sup> “Mais c’en est fait : le poison me consume ; ma force m’abandonne ; la plume me tombe des mains ; je sens affoiblir jusqu’à ma haine ; je me meurs.” Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 373, Lettre CLXI. [But it is over; the poison consumes me; my strength abandons me, the pen falls from my hand; I feel that even my hatred is fading away . . . I am dying.] Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 213, Letter 150.

<sup>71</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 373, Lettre CLXI. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 213, Letter 150.

After being discovered by Solim in the arms of her lover, who is then killed by the eunuchs, Roxane poisons herself in order to follow the only man who gave her a true reason for living. Usbek's self-delusion is further intensified in that he had falsely suspected Zachi of disloyalty, maintaining complete confidence in the virtue of Roxane, failing to heed her prior warnings as she lamented the exceedingly untenable environment of the seraglio, with all of the wives locked up alone in their rooms, unable to speak to one another, and the sole remaining freedom as one of tears. As Schaub analyzes, Roxane explains her actions in an equally "fluid" finale, one that Schaub compares to the ellipsis that completes *De l'esprit des lois*, or the trickle of a river with which his *Considerations* concludes,<sup>72</sup> describing this last letter as "[drowning] Usbek in a final violent flow of ink":

Comment as-tu pensé que je fusse assez crédule pour m'imaginer que je ne fusse dans le Monde que pour adorer tes caprices ? que, pendant que tu te permets tout, tu eusses le droit d'affliger tous mes désirs ? Non ! J'ai pu vivre dans la servitude, mais j'ai toujours été libre : j'ai reformé tes lois sur celles de la Nature, et mon esprit s'est toujours tenu dans l'indépendance.

[How could you suppose me so credulous as to believe that the sole purpose for

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<sup>72</sup> Schaub, 133: "*The Spirit of the Laws* virtually ends with an ellipsis (in a chapter entitled "Continuation on the same subject"): 'Italiam, Italiam . . . I lose the treatise on fiefs where most authors have begun it' (XXXI.34). Similarly, the *Considerations* ends in a trickle: 'I have not the courage to speak of the miseries which followed: I will say only that, under the last emperors, the empire, reduced to the outskirts of Constantinople, ended like the Rhine, which is no more than a rivulet when it loses itself in the Ocean' (XXIII)."

my existence was to adore your caprices? That while you refused yourself nothing, you had the right to frustrate every desire of mine? No: I may have lived in servitude, but I have always been free: I have rewritten your laws to conform to those of nature, and my spirit has always remained independent.]<sup>73</sup>

As with the spirit of Anaïs who liberates the wives of Ibrahim from the seraglio, or Zélis who drops her veil in a subversive moment, Roxane aligns her own silent act with her independent spirit, rewriting the laws by speaking a new language of freedom to which Usbek was previously deaf. While the Parisian women experience complete visibility in public and serve as the spring behind the government, their sociability is of such an extreme nature that the private sphere is essentially obliterated, and they lack the privacy and the solitude necessary for writing. Being visible may thus also represent a loss of freedom, as in the case of the veil, where its lifting could on the one hand embody an emancipatory gesture, but may also be interpreted as enabling objectification of woman under the gaze of man. Yet the veil is also worn by males in some cultures as a sacred act, or as a means of warding off evil, and the concealment from the gaze that it offers and the silence in which it may enshroud its wearer could enable a welcome space of privacy. The veil might also be likened to the act of writing and its inherent instability, as with Derrida and the concept of the *pli*, which draws together the notion of the fold, the letter, and the veil, with writing as an act that is capable of both opening and closing, of revealing as well as concealing. Similarly, silence in Persia as imposed by despotic politics ushers in a new language, instigated within isolation that inspires the imagination, with laws being rewritten first in the

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<sup>73</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 372, Lettre CLXI. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 213, Letter 150.

heart, and then as an expression of the passions through rebellious non-verbal action. This new language begins privately within the heart, but enters the public sphere through action inscribed in letters.

#### EPISTOLARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL FREEDOM

As the French and Persian societies conceal and reveal persecution in different ways, Montesquieu seems to prescribe a twofold remedy enacted through the epistolary form, as the letters born of oppressive silence also offer Usbek's wives a voice, and bring inner sentiments to public light. Leo Strauss has observed that many political philosophers have reacted to the threat of persecution by disguising their most controversial and heterodox ideas, concealing as well as revealing, in a similar spirit to the trajectory followed by the characters of the *Lettres persanes*.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> See Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Strauss describes esoteric writing: "Persecution, then, gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing, and therewith to a peculiar type of literature, in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines [...] But how can a man perform the miracle of speaking in a publication to a minority, while being silent to the majority of his readers? The fact which makes this literature possible can be expressed in the axiom that thoughtless men are careless readers, and only thoughtful men are careful readers. Therefore, an author who wishes to address only thoughtful men has but to write in such a way that only a very careful reader can detect the meaning of his book" (25). Strauss also addresses Montesquieu in the context of the debate around *De l'esprit des lois*: "Montesquieu himself, as well as some of his contemporaries, believed that *De l'esprit des lois* had a good and even a wonderful plan; Laboulaye still believed

While suicide was considered a civil crime and a religious offense, Roxane rewrites the laws by both secretly betraying Usbek and revealing the truth in writing about this illicit act. Usbek himself has advocated for the right to suicide in an earlier letter, speaking to the injustice of the very sort of legislation that he propagates in his seraglio: “Il me paroît, Ibben, que ces lois sont bien injustes. Quand je suis accablé de douleur, de misère, de mépris, pourquoi veut-on m’empêcher de mettre fin à mes peines, et me priver cruellement d’un remède qui est en mes mains ?” [It seems to me, Ibben, that these laws are most unjust. When I am crushed by physical pain, by poverty, by scorn, why should anyone wish to prevent me from ending my suffering, and cruelly deprive me of a remedy which lies in my own hands?].<sup>75</sup> By questioning why he should have to accept, against his will, a covenant which he has had no part in making, Usbek raises a strikingly similar claim to that eventually put forth by Roxane. Like her challenge to his authority, Usbek questions the extent of his own subjugation to the prince under a regime of iniquitous rights, when all do not receive the same distribution of advantages, pondering why he should not have a right to renounce existence when it becomes a burden to him. The concealing and revealing that Zélis, Roxane, Usbek and other characters demonstrate is also evident in the

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that the apparent obscurity of its plan as well as its other apparent literary deficiencies were due to censorship or persecution. One of the most outstanding present-day historians of political thought, however, asserts that ‘there is not in truth much concatenation of subject-matter, and the amount of irrelevance is extraordinary,’ and that ‘it cannot be said that Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* has any arrangement” (28).

<sup>75</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 246, Lettre LXXVI. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 103, Letter 74.

very form of the letters, conducive to expressing “both voice and voicelessness,” as Elizabeth Wingrove has shown in highlighting the impropriety of the epistolary form itself: “Ambiguously private and public, expressive and strategic, material and rhetorical, the letter engendered new opportunities for political contestation on the part of illegitimate speakers.”<sup>76</sup> This contestation is not born of silence alone, and again strays from the idea of unveiling as the necessary form that emancipation must take, but speaks to the unique capacity of writing and the epistolary form to simultaneously express and withhold, veil and unveil, conceal and reveal. While Usbek tries to restrict correspondence between his wives and others, letters secretly hidden in the seraglio also serve to reveal their private thoughts, both to the recipient, as well as to the broader public of the readers. As they enable Roxane to defy Usbek’s rule, the letters also permit Montesquieu to challenge the beliefs of the authorities of his time, while avoiding persecution or censure by the Church.

Although Montesquieu was obliged to publish the *Lettres persanes* anonymously in Holland to avoid condemnation, he was nonetheless writing during a unique moment of change in France, which also finds its way into the letters. Born into a period marked by poor harvests and famine, involvement in international disputes, and heavy taxes in the later years of Louis XIV, Montesquieu however evokes the possibility for national revival after the king’s death in

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<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Wingrove, “Sovereign Address,” *Political Theory* 40.2 (April 2012): 135–164, 139.

Wingrove draws upon Jacques Rancière’s notion of “illegitimate speakers” to retrace the story of an obscure Bastille prisoner, Geneviève Gravelle, whose letters to the French king serve as an exemplary model of “going postal” in eighteenth-century France as a pathway toward new forms of both sociability and political critique.

1715.<sup>77</sup> In a letter to his friend Rhédi, Usbek writes: “Le monarque qui a si longtemps régné n’est plus. Il a bien fait parler des gens pendant sa vie ; tout le monde s’est tu à sa mort. Ferme et courageux dans ce dernier moment, il a paru ne céder qu’au Destin” [The monarch who reigned for so long is dead. He caused a lot of talk while he was alive; at his death, everyone fell silent. Steadfast and brave at the end, he seemed to submit only to destiny].<sup>78</sup> While the silence of the people could be one of mourning, it is also that of possibility, as different perspectives and opportunities emerge from this regime shift.<sup>79</sup> With Philippe II, Duke of Orléans, installed as Regent during the minority of King Louis XV, a sense of freedom was felt by many in this period of the Regency (September 1715 to February 1723), which gained a reputation for a new spirit of intellectual liberty.<sup>80</sup> Andrew Kahn describes how this freedom was also a liberty of spirit in a world where scientific achievements and speculative philosophy, animated by the legacy of Descartes, served to challenge previously acclaimed theological conceptions. Kahn situates Montesquieu among this new generation seeking truth and progress through immersion in the scientific spirit of the age of Enlightenment, pointing to the significance of the idea of spirit in the conception of the role of *philosophe*: “In 1694, shortly after Montesquieu’s birth, the

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<sup>77</sup> Kahn, “Introduction,” Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, ix.

<sup>78</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 267, Lettre XCII. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 123, Letter 89.

<sup>79</sup> See Runyon, 172. Runyon aligns this comment with other remarks in several surrounding letters to suggest that Montesquieu is drawing an allusion between Louis XIV and Satan at this point, in a hidden way, through his chain of secretly echoing letters.

<sup>80</sup> Kahn, “Introduction,” Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, ix.

Académie française published its dictionary in which the term *philosophe* is defined as “a man who by liberty of spirit [*esprit*], stands above the normal duties and obligations of civic and Christian life. This is a man who refuses nothing, who is constrained by nothing, and who leads the life of the Philosopher.”<sup>81</sup> Like the spirit of Anaïs, who cultivates a philosophical strength of mind from a lifetime of reflection, freeing herself from Ibrahim, the *philosophes* envision new hope after Louis XIV.

Usbek, too, discerns promise in the liberty of spirit of the philosopher, embodied in his own intellectual curiosities, and in the scientific progress he witnesses in Western philosophy. In his letter to Hassein, Dervish of the Mountain of Jaron, whose own enquiring mind “brille de tant de connoissances” [shines with so much learning], Usbek describes the lofty achievements he sees in French philosophy:

Il y a ici des philosophes qui, à la vérité, n’ont point atteint jusqu’au faite de la sagesse orientale : ils n’ont point été ravis jusqu’au trône lumineux ; ils n’ont ni entendu les paroles ineffables dont les concerts des anges retentissent, ni senti les formidables accès d’une fureur divine ; mais, laissés à eux-mêmes, privés des saintes merveilles, ils suivent dans le silence les traces de la raison humaine.

[There are philosophers here who have never attained the heights of oriental wisdom; they have never been exalted to the luminous throne, nor heard the ineffable words with which the concert of angels resounds, nor known the fearsome experience of a divine ecstasy; but on their own, deprived of any

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<sup>81</sup> Kahn, “Introduction,” Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, x.

knowledge of holy marvels, they follow in silence the path of human reason].<sup>82</sup>

Silence again arises as a pathway to freedom, but in this context, with a philosophical passion overtaking one of religious fervor associated with clerical authority. Usbek expresses awe at how far this silent guide has taken these French philosophers in unravelling the mysteries of the universe, following the presuppositions of Cartesian physics and mechanics that God is the ultimate cause of the motion of the universe, but challenging the miracles of revealed religion and emphasizing the miraculous nature of philosophic discoveries. In contrast to the religious figures who have been raised to the “trône lumineux” [luminous throne], scientists have made discoveries of the elementary but powerful laws of nature without the aid of religion. Religion is presented more as a man-made mechanism determined by social structures and existing for coherence in society rather than as a transcendent truth leading to enthusiasm and zealotry. Usbek’s observation to Hassein on philosophy is in stark contrast with the earlier correspondence from holy sage, Mehemet Ali, servant of the prophets, who lambasts it:

Le zénith de votre esprit ne va pas au nadir de celui du moindre des immaums.

Votre vaine philosophie cet éclair qui annonce l’orage et l’obscurité ; vous êtes au milieu de la tempête, et vous errez au gré des vents.

[The zenith of your intellect does not reach the nadir of that of the least of our imams. Your empty philosophy is the lightning that heralds a storm and darkness;

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<sup>82</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 274, Lettre XCVII. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 129, Letter

you live in the heart of the tempest, and drift at the will of the winds].<sup>83</sup>

This critique of philosophy presages Usbek's own language in his letter to Hassein, when he speaks of the fluctuating nature of legislation, with laws as subject to change as the minds of the men who propose and observe them, but Usbek situates French philosophers as uniquely positioned in contrast to the typical legislators. While open-spirited regarding Western government and seemingly free from the theologically-enslaving passion that he critiques within governments, Usbek remains enslaved by his passion for his wives, and Mehemet Ali's denunciation of Western philosophy seems descriptive of Usbek's governance of the seraglio.

As Usbek does not ultimately follow his own silent guide of reason in Persia, he is unable to transmit the French philosophic liberty of spirit to his seraglio, and thus comes to realize that he has enslaved himself within his despotism. Like Louis XIV who seems to continue to hover above his throne even after his death, reigning through the restrictions that he has created and imposed upon the Regent, Usbek's presence has haunted the seraglio throughout the letters, and the final imagery he evokes is that of self-imprisonment, revealing the depths of his own despair:

J'irai m'enfermer dans des murs plus terribles pour moi que pour les femmes qui y sont gardées. J'y porterai tous mes soupçons ; leurs empressements ne m'en déroberont rien ; dans mon lit, dans leurs bras, je ne jouirai que de mes inquiétudes ; dans un temps si peu propre aux réflexions, ma jalousie trouvera à en faire. Rebut indigne de la Nature humaine, esclaves vils dont le cœur a été

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<sup>83</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 274, Lettre XCVII. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 24, Letter 17.

fermé pour jamais à tous les sentiments de l'amour, vous ne géiriez plus sur votre condition si vous connoissiez le malheur de la mienne.

[I shall shut myself away behind walls that will be more terrible for me than for the women who are guarded within them; I shall bring with me all my suspicion; their ardour will not erase any of it from my mind; in my bed, in their arms, I shall dwell only on my misgivings; at a time so little suited to reflection, my jealousy will find food for thought. Worthless rejects of the human race, base slaves whose hearts have been forever closed to feelings of love, you would no longer lament your condition if you knew the misery of mine.]<sup>84</sup>

While Usbek condemns himself to the silence of his own seraglio, he is nevertheless also in a sense freed by the ensuing revolt. As Montesquieu notes in *Mes pensées*, despotism is refuted in the person of the despot himself, and by removing Usbek from his role as despot through their action, his wives free Usbek from the tyranny that he inflicts upon himself.<sup>85</sup> Usbek's despotism is not solely characterized by physical domination, as there is also a psychological dimension. He describes at an earlier moment the threat of diminishing population in connection with Islamic religious restrictions, identifying how a good Muslim man with many wives might become

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<sup>84</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 368, Lettre CLV. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 210, Letter 147.

<sup>85</sup> Montesquieu, *Mes pensées*, in *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu*, 1:1435. Montesquieu, *My Thoughts*, 1818. In this sense, Montesquieu echoes Plato's commentary on the tyrant in the *Republic*.

buried under his “triumphs” and unable to successfully fulfill the role of father.<sup>86</sup> In pondering how one man alone can employ so many subjects of both sexes for his own pleasure, while nullifying their value to the state and rendering them useless for the propagation of the species, Usbek fails to recognize himself as implicated within this scheme as absent father. Although he both tyrannizes and empowers the castrated eunuchs as figures to dispense the supreme law of absolute silence in the seraglio, it is as Alain Grosrichard asserts, the mother who triumphs, as Usbek’s wives succeed in giving birth to freedom from despotism.<sup>87</sup> They do so by assuming the role of enlightened judges of Usbek’s character and of the oppressive laws of the seraglio, combating this system through their revolt. The wives may be considered as legislators in the sense that their revolt goes beyond displacing the ruler alone, as it unmasks the despotic ruling doctrines embedded within law and philosophy, combating them with a new form of *esprit*, like that conveyed in the tale of the spirit of Anaïs.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 299–301, Lettre CXIV. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 152–155, Letter 110.

<sup>87</sup> “Dans l’ombre du harem, veillant sur le sceau, la Mère triomphe.” Alain Grosrichard, *Structure du sérail : La fiction du despotisme asiatique dans l’Occident classique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979), 232. [In the shadow of the harem, as custodian of the seal, the Mother is triumphant]. Grosrichard, *The Sultan’s Court: European Fantasies of the East*, translated by Liz Heron (New York: Verso, 1998), 188.

<sup>88</sup> See also Vickie B. Sullivan, *Montesquieu and the Despotic Ideas of Europe: An Interpretation of “The Spirit of the Laws”* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017) and Sharon R. Krause, “Despotism in *The Spirit of the Laws*,” in *Montesquieu’s Science of Politics: Essays on*

## THE SPIRIT OF SILENCE

While silence is imposed as a despotic technique in the seraglio, it is more than merely a tool of oppression, as it also serves as an avenue toward freedom. Although the voices of the Parisian women working behind the “machine” of the French government are mediated through Rica’s inflections, the Persian women offer direct access to their passions in their letters, which serve as testament to their silence and actions. By both concealing and revealing themselves, Usbek’s wives access a new language beyond the verbal word, seizing the subversive potential of the unspoken, and the epistolary form. Freedom is not always born of a linear process leading from silence to voice, and may at times be found in silence itself, which in the *Lettres persanes*, serves as a springboard to action when aligned with spirit. The spirit of Anaïs is a philosophical as well as feminine one, curious and open to new possibilities that she accesses through silence and introspection, which enable her to cultivate her imagination and her mind, also signified by the word *esprit*. “Souvent, en redisant les mêmes paroles, on ne rend pas le même sens” [It often happens that in repeating the same words they have not the same meaning] writes Montesquieu

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“*The Spirit of the Laws*,” edited by David W. Carrithers, Michael A. Mosher, and Paul A. Rahe (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 231–72. Krause and Sullivan demonstrate how for Montesquieu, despotism threatens the East as well as the West, and may be lodged within us as an ever-present threat. Sullivan illustrates how Montesquieu sees continuity between the ancients and the moderns in the history of despotism, identifying the despotic impulse to dominate others in the philosophy of certain thinkers as well, like Plato, Aristotle, and Machiavelli, whom Montesquieu identifies as “legislators” in *De l’esprit des lois*.

on signification in *De l'esprit des lois*: “ce sens dépend de la liaison qu’elles ont avec d’autres choses. Quelquefois le silence exprime plus que tous les discours” [This meaning depends on their connection with other things. Sometimes silence expresses more than any form of speech].<sup>89</sup> Like Montesquieu’s openness to the laws, customs, and diverse manners of the many peoples on earth, the spirit of silence itself holds a multiplicity of interpretive possibilities.

This variety of perspectives is also reflected in the range of viewpoints expressed in the vast array of letters that Montesquieu interlaces in what he describes as a secret chain,<sup>90</sup> and in their political nature. As Wingrove illustrates how “illicit epistolarity” might enable new

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<sup>89</sup> Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, 442. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 12.12. This translation is my own.

<sup>90</sup> Montesquieu addresses the notion of a secret chain in relation to his unique innovation in form, of being the first to write a *novel* in letters, in his introduction to the 1754 edition: “Mais, dans la forme de lettres, où les acteurs ne sont pas choisis, et où les sujets qu’on traite ne sont pas dépendants d’aucun dessein ou d’aucun plan déjà formé, l’auteur s’est donné l’avantage de pouvoir joindre de la philosophie, de la politique et de la morale, à un roman, et de lier le tout par une chaîne secrète, et, en quelque façon, inconnue.” Montesquieu, *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu I*: « Quelques réflexions sur les *Lettres persanes*, » *Lettres persanes*, 129. [In the letter form, where the participants are not chosen and the subjects treated do not depend on any design or predetermined plan, the author allows himself the advantage of adding philosophy, politics, and ethics to the novel, and of linking it all together by a secret, and in a sense, unrecognized chain]. Montesquieu, “Some Reflections on the *Persian Letters*,” in *Persian Letters*, 227.

opportunities for political contestation on the part of illegitimate speakers,<sup>91</sup> Geoffrey Bennington likewise demonstrates the political character of the letter, emphasizing the following obscure statement drawn from a short text by Montesquieu, entitled *De la politique*: “C’est l’invention des postes qui a produit la politique” [It is the invention of the post which has produced politics].<sup>92</sup> Bennington notes the disturbing simplicity of this sentence, which he describes as all the more so due to its isolation within the text caused by blanks which cut it off from its immediate context, but what he does not address is that the preceding sentence is in fact a reference to Thucydides, who is known for ending his account of the Peloponnesian War

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<sup>91</sup> Wingrove’s exploration of epistolarity is in the context of claims-making as it took shape in the waning years of monarchical rule. She describes her argument: “Central to that politics is a bid for sovereign address: the capacity to direct one’s words to another and in so doing, to presume or perform power over their meaning and effects . . . I suggest that *ancien régime* sovereignty had a genre—epistolarity—and in adopting, adapting, and subverting those generic practices, speakers illegitimate and otherwise made sovereign claims of their own” (139–140).

<sup>92</sup> Geoffrey Bennington, *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction*, (New York, NY: Verso, 1994), 244. Montesquieu, *De la politique*, in *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu*, 1:118.

Montesquieu’s *De la politique* essay argues that politics suffers from being too complicated, refined, and full of detours, and thus in a sense, too postal, and even too “noisy” about the oftentimes secretive nature of its message. What interests Bennington is how Montesquieu’s argument repeats the structure of its object in the writing of his own text, and that what Montesquieu ultimately seems to desire is a postal network which would itself be a secret.

midsentence.<sup>93</sup> Like the silence of Thucydides, which speaks to the political richness of the unspoken, Montesquieu employs this structure throughout his text in numerous ways, but most powerfully in the context of the revolt. In painting the manifold passions of the seraglio (which are never entirely quieted by reason) within its range of silences, he gives political voice to diverse and marginal figures such as the eunuchs and Usbek's wives in staging contestation. The despotic silence of the seraglio is not transformed in a singular way, but rather through a variety of modes: by using it to nurture philosophical thought and cultivate political imagination; as an expression of the passions through non-verbal, subversive action; and as an impetus to generate epistolary correspondence that enables a transgressive political voice. The imposed despotic silence of the seraglio is transgressed by the publicity of speaking in the letters themselves, although this is still linked to private conversation until it is revealed as the letters are collected and published by someone other than the female author, unveiling her view.

There are multiple implications for this epistolary unveiling, which may also be treated as veiling in a sense as well. We encounter the French women of the *Lettres persanes* through Rica, and although the letters from the seraglio give voice directly to the Persian women, behind this feminine voice is male author, Montesquieu. This raises the question of whether a male is indeed able to successfully occupy and convey a feminine position, or if this view must remain veiled, a

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<sup>93</sup> See Schaub, 133–35. For more on Thucydides and the silence of the demos, see John G. Zumbrennen, *Silence and Democracy: Athenian Politics in Thucydides' History* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2008).

perplexity which other male authors following Montesquieu will continue to explore.<sup>94</sup> Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* offers a female voice considering the conditions of women, while employing a similarly satirical view of French life as that of the *Lettres persanes* through the perspective of a fictional foreigner, a young Incan princess named Zilia. Like Usbek, Zilia experiences the void and anguish of belonging within a new and decentered French world, yet unlike the Persian women who are killed or commit suicide in the *Lettres persanes*, Zilia lives on autonomously, choosing to remain a virgin and to carry forth independently without marrying. Sharon Diane Nell suggests that Zilia applies her narrative to "maintain the veil of the hymen intact," referencing the hymen's capacity to protect and conceal the female sexual organs, while underscoring its connection with the veil and writing (established by Derrida), noting how Zilia's narrative serves to remove herself from circulation in society as a sexual object.<sup>95</sup> In contrast to the fictional letters of Montesquieu and Graffigny, Wingrove unveils the actual voice of Bastille prisoner Geneviève Gravelle by way of her letters, showing how in addition to fueling the plots of novels, the uncertainty of the letter's circulation might also shape public events, revealing how monarchical rule was challenged through an obscure, or a veiled female voice,

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<sup>94</sup> Diderot's *La Religieuse* is particularly relevant in his creation of the figure of Suzanne, who is forced to take up a religious veil, as is Rousseau's numerous references to veiling or unveiling, particularly in his authorship of *Julie*.

<sup>95</sup> Sharon Diane Nell, "Sadistic and Masochistic Contracts in Voltaire's *La pucelle d'Orléans* and Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*; or, What Does the Hymen Want?," in Greg Forter and Paul Allen Miller, *Desire of the Analysts: Psychoanalysis and Cultural Criticism* (Albany: SUNY Press), 2008, 208.

simultaneously unveiled by the letter. Yet once the French republic is eventually established, whose voices are included, and what does the symbol of the veil embody in relation to citizens and difference?

With unveiling as one of the predominant images and expressions of revolt by Usbek's wives, this enduring symbol holds striking resonance within the contemporary political context. "Sa vertu farouche était une cruelle imposture" [Her fierce virtue was a cruel deception], decries Solim of Roxane, "c'était le voile de sa perfidie" [the veil that concealed her perfidy].<sup>96</sup> Whereas removal of the veil by Zélis and as inspired by Anaïs is a subversive gesture in the *Lettres persanes*, and continues to be so in a range of contexts today, it is also increasingly being reappropriated as a symbol of revolt in the opposite sense. Recently, tales have emerged of non-Muslim women *donning* the head scarf as a way of showing solidarity against Islamophobia, demonstrating how veiling may be emancipatory. Joan Scott addresses the uncertainty around the signification of the veil (and its conflation with the headscarf) as symptomatic of a deeper problem that lies at the very heart of French republican universalism: "that of reconciling the growing diversity of the population with a theory of citizenship and representation that defines the recognition of difference as antithetical to the unity of the nation."<sup>97</sup> Such a view justifies the marginalization of those from non-European cultures who do not separate public and private in the same way, as embodied by the veil. Others such as Tunisian author Hélé Béji, writing in the context of the Arab Spring, speculate that the veil has transformed from its traditional image and

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<sup>96</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 371, Lettre CLIX. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 212, Letter 149.

<sup>97</sup> Scott, 109.

meaning, and has come to represent a protest by the poor against life without any future.<sup>98</sup> This variety of approaches toward the veil and its significance speaks to how people might project their own cause or image onto it, and to Montesquieu's interest in the full range of meanings of different practices. Whereas social media might now replace epistolarity as the vehicle of revolt, Montesquieu's vision and openness to a plurality of religious perspectives continue to echo.

Echoes are a fitting metaphor for the *Lettres persanes*, like the links of the secret chain that tie the letters together, resonating between East and West, and like the silence of the still unrealized aspirations of the Enlightenment that echoes forth today in ongoing struggles for gender and sexual equality, religious tolerance, political freedom, and rights. Randolph Paul Runyon connects Montesquieu's own scientific interest in the echo with his application of this strategy in the letters, as he was exploring echoes in the physical world in his "Discours sur la cause de l'écho" at the same time that he was also writing the *Lettres persanes*.<sup>99</sup> The letters will frequently repeat precisely the same word just uttered in the preceding or an earlier letter, but they do so at a different register and in a different context. Their enduring impact may depend most upon how readers as active participants receive them and apply the messages within their own unique contexts and to their own struggles and silences. As Montesquieu suggests in *Mes pensées*, there is a performative element to countering despotism, as "ce n'est point avec des déclamations qu'il faut attaquer le despotisme, mais en faisant voir qu'il tyrannise le despote même" [it is not with declamations that despotism needs to be attacked, but by showing that it

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<sup>98</sup> See Hélé Béji, *Islam Pride: Derrière le voile* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2011).

<sup>99</sup> Randolph Paul Runyon, *The Art of the Persian Letters: Unlocking Montesquieu's "Secret Chain"* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 248.

tyrannizes the despot himself].<sup>100</sup> The letters are richly conducive to demonstrating this claim, perhaps most eloquently so within their moments of silence, both in the space of the seraglio, and in the world beyond its walls. As Rica observes in his first encounter with Parisian theater: “Toutes les passions sont peintes sur les visages, et exprimées avec une éloquence qui, pour être muette, n’en est que plus vive” [Every emotion is displayed on the faces of these people, and conveyed with an eloquence which is all the more effective for being silent].<sup>101</sup> This eloquent silence will echo among those to follow Montesquieu on the Enlightenment stage.

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<sup>100</sup> Montesquieu, *Mes pensées*, 1435. Montesquieu, *My Thoughts*, 1818.

<sup>101</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 172, Lettre XXVIII. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 36, Letter 26.

## CHAPTER 2: DIDEROT'S SILENT FERMENTATION

*Et que ces forces intimes au corps ont leur action hors du corps ;  
d'où naît le mouvement ou plutôt la fermentation générale de l'univers.*<sup>102</sup>

Denis Diderot, *Éléments de physiologie*

“Ce ne sont pas des mots que je veux remporter du théâtre” [When I leave the theater, I do not want to come away with words],<sup>103</sup> writes Denis Diderot, “mais des impressions” [but with impressions].<sup>104</sup> The truest test of theatrical success for Diderot depends not upon language, but rather upon feeling. In his *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, he describes his efforts to study movements and gesture by recounting the details of an experiment he conducts at the theater: “Moi, je mettais mes doigts dans mes oreilles, non sans quelque étonnement de la part de ceux

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<sup>102</sup> Denis Diderot, *Éléments de physiologie*, in *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Jules Azzézat and Maurice Tourneux (Paris: Garnier, 1876), 69. [And these forces within bodies act on what is outside of the body; from this the movement or rather the general fermentation of the universe is born.] Diderot, *Elements of Physiology*. This translation is my own.

<sup>103</sup> Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique*, in *Œuvres esthétiques*, Edited by Paul Vernière (Paris: Garnier, 1968), 197. Translation from Elena Russo, *Styles of Enlightenment: Taste, Politics, and Authorship in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 217.

<sup>104</sup> This chapter is derived, in part, from an article published in *Law and Humanities* on 2018-01-02, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/17521483.2017.1397347>. Adam Schoene, “Embodying Law in Diderot’s *La Religieuse*,” in *Law and Humanities*, 12.1 (2018): 5–16.

qui m'environnaient ... Je m'embarrassais fort peu des jugements, et je me tenais opiniâtrement les oreilles bouchées, tant que l'action et le jeu de l'acteur me paraissaient d'accord avec le discours que je me rappelais" [I put my fingers in my ears, much to the astonishment of those around me ... I paid little attention to their judgments, and stubbornly kept my ears plugged as long as the actions and gestures of the actor seemed to correspond with the dialogue I recalled].<sup>105</sup> Diderot relates with amusement the surprise of those around him in witnessing that he manages to shed tears at the appropriate moments, even with his ears continuously blocked. Central to this silent interchange is the relationship between actor and spectator, a connection that Diderot further explores in his *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, where he argues that actors are able to communicate emotions most consistently and convincingly when they do not actually feel these sentiments at all. Inspired by English actor and playwright, David Garrick, Diderot hypothesizes that actors who become too overcome by emotion while performing lose control of their skills in gesture and elocution, and should instead create the illusion of the extremes of passion by studying their roles meticulously, while exercising rational constraint by distancing themselves from emotional attachment to them.<sup>106</sup> The most effective form of dramatic

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<sup>105</sup> Diderot, *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 359. Diderot, *Letter on the Deaf and Dumb*. This translation is my own.

<sup>106</sup> As with his theatrical partiality for gesture, Diderot likewise refers to the spectator in an art gallery as playing the role of a deaf person interpreting sign language, generating narrative out of that which is not vocalized, but expressed through a visual painting of the body's speech. In Michael Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), he underscores Diderot's analogizing of the craft

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of the actor and that of the artist through his dramatic conception of painting in the *Salons*, as well as in his two early treatises on theater, the *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* and the *Discours de la poésie dramatique*, in which Diderot calls for the development of a new stage dramaturgy that would find in painting the inspiration for a more convincing representation of action than those provided by the theater. In contrast to the elaborate *coups de théâtre* that were popular in his time, Diderot felt that more visual, and often silent pictorial *tableaux* were better suited for moving audiences to their full capacity: “The spectator in the theater, he maintained, ought to be thought of as before a canvas, on which a series of such *tableaux* follow one another as if by magic” (Fried, 78). Like the actor in Diderot’s *Paradoxe sur le comédien* who must distance himself from emotional attachment to the role he is portraying in order to effectively impact the spectator, Fried underscores the paradoxical relation between painting and beholder, with the painter necessarily negating the beholder’s presence through silent absorption to establish the fiction that no one is standing before the canvas. Diderot further stresses pantomime over declamation, as in his *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, when he emphasizes the sublime effect of Lady Macbeth’s body language as she somnambulizes, while obsessively washing her hands. Diderot’s perhaps most well-known contribution to the theatrical world is the notion of the “fourth wall,” in which the actors ignore the audience and imagine a fourth wall in its place so as to better concentrate upon their performance, which will in turn result in a more effective delivery, as in being negated, the spectator will also be better convinced of the veracity of the performance. Like the reconfiguration of the theatrical space that comes to separate the actor from the audience, while empowering the spectator, Diderot’s artists must paradoxically distance

expression is through the silent speech of the body, transmitted by the self-aware actor, which may excite an emotional response in the audience.

Although Diderot did not write an openly political treatise like those of Montesquieu or Rousseau, his emphasis on silence and bodily gesture in his theatrical writing helps to illuminate his political conceptions, as I will examine within the context of *La Religieuse* and *Le Neveu de Rameau*. Whereas silence in Montesquieu is transformed by its appropriation and alignment with the spirit of the law, for Diderot, its embodied expression offers a more direct access than the spoken word alone to passion that serves a political role. This is apparent in Suzanne Simonin's ardent struggle against the gender inequality and corruption of the Church in *La Religieuse*, where she is forced into becoming a nun. As in the confined seraglio of the *Lettres persanes*, Suzanne struggles within the mute space of the convent against a silence that is oppressive in its isolation and restriction of speech, movement, and action. Yet it is also liberating in that it incites a fermentative reaction in her body that leads her to write a political claim against the Church through her memoirs, which chronicle her physical torture and are hidden upon her very body. While the cold silence of the convent differs from the dramatically eloquent silence that Diderot describes in the theater, both spaces are transformed through the force of the body. Suzanne has been viewed by some critics as an accomplished performer, like that of the *Paradoxe*, but I will argue that it is her body instead that governs her, compelling her to act upon her desires, which are of both a carnal and a political nature in that she transgresses sexual restrictions while writing a legal claim for freedom that she conceals upon her body. The vigorous force of the body is

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themselves from the "delirium of enthusiasm," or their very own sensibility, to more effectively represent emotion.

similarly apparent in the pantomime of the titular figure of *Le Neveu de Rameau*, Lui, most notably in his virtuosic ability to passionately portray the full orchestra of humanity through his gestures, mimicking its traits and emotions to reveal the imitative nature of social life, and challenging others to break through a uniformity that education and conventions introduce: “C’est un grain de levain qui fermente qui restitue à chacun une portion de son individualité naturelle. Il secoue, il agite, il fait approuver ou blâmer, il fait sortir la vérité, il fait connaître les gens de bien, il démasque les coquins, c’est alors que l’homme de bon sens écoute, et démêle son monde” [He is like a grain of yeast that ferments and restores to each of us a part of his natural individuality. He shakes and stirs things up, makes us praise or blame, makes the truth come out, disclosing the worthy and unmasking the scoundrels. It is in this way that the sensible man listens and sorts out his world].<sup>107</sup> The Nephew, like the Nun, challenges Diderot’s conception of the ideal actor, as it is his body that drives him, with his pantomime revealing that silence is not distinct from speech. The Nephew’s pantomime is political in its challenge to the bourgeois philosophy and morality of both his dialogical opponent, Moi, and the king, who does his own pantomime, but one quite different from the Nephew’s embodiment of multiplicity. By exploring the figures of the Nun and the Nephew, I will argue that Diderot employs the body as a fermentative political force.

## VOWS OF SILENCE

Diderot initially assumes the voice of fictitious protagonist Sister Suzanne Simonin as

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<sup>107</sup> Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, in *Œuvres*, edited by André Billy Reliure (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1951), 426–27. Translations are my own.

part of a prank,<sup>108</sup> but it evolves to more caustically serve as a scathing political attack upon the

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<sup>108</sup> The “Préface-Annexe” to *La Religieuse* explains how it grew out of an elaborate hoax that Diderot (with the help of Grimm and Madame d’Épinay), played on one of his friends, the Marquis de Croismare, who was drawn in by the historical court case of Marguerite Delamarre, a nun who had petitioned to have her vows annulled. A second, fictitious nun was invented by Diderot, who crafted fake letters written by this nun in order to entice Croismare back to Paris from retirement in his château near Caen. See Diderot, *The Nun*, 187, and Diderot, *La Religieuse*, in *Œuvres*, 1413–16. Suzanne’s moral voice is inseparably intertwined with Diderot’s own, and both of their undertakings as authors begin with familial conflicts which serve as impetus for their writing. The problematic element of Diderot’s endeavor to assume a woman’s voice is evident in the initial framing of his work as a hoax, and is further complicated by the multitude of descriptions of female figures suffering from weakness, madness, and hysteria, yet the strength of Suzanne’s presence and her individual voice are also a testament to Diderot’s understanding of the adverse potential effects of the cloistered life. Diderot’s father briefly forced him into a monastery in 1743 after learning that Diderot wished to marry Antoinette Champion, whom he considered an inappropriate match due to her lower class, fatherless status, and lack of a dowry. In addition to Diderot’s own experience of forced confinement within a religious institution, his younger sister, Angélique (born in 1720), was overworked and driven insane within a convent, and died there in 1749, shortly after the death of their mother (also named Angélique, as Diderot would name his daughter, as well). Suzanne’s struggle against forced religious vocation similarly begins with her family, as they seek to conceal her

convent, as well as the corruption of the Ancien Régime itself. Principally written in 1760, yet frequently revised by Diderot in the following decades, *La Religieuse* was first published in its novel form in 1796, twelve years after Diderot's death, amidst the revolutionary period of intense questioning of traditional authority and growing disquiet about the role of the sacred and the divine in French society. The oppression and self-determination within Suzanne's story resonate with that of the revolution, and the convent comes to embody a religious but also a political microcosm, emblematic of the disorders associated with the larger body politic in its revelation of a twisted axis of power between family, State, and Church. Mita Choudhury has trenchantly illustrated how the convent served as a powerful metaphor in eighteenth-century France, similar to both the seraglio and the Bastille, infusing elements of each, but representing an even more compelling symbol of tyranny and social disorder.<sup>109</sup> I will build upon this claim by analyzing

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illegitimate status by banishing her into monastic silence, which drives her to commit an illicit act of revelation through her writing.

<sup>109</sup> See Mita Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 6–7: “Like the seraglio, the convent was a highly charged erotic space, one where the oversexed and the impotent coexisted in an uneasy fashion, ready to explode at the slightest provocation. And like the Bastille, the convent served as a dumping ground for the state and the family to dispense with undesirable individuals whose presence jeopardized the social order. . . . Both the seraglio and the Bastille were fluid symbols, changing as French political culture itself transformed. Nonetheless, the seraglio was a fictional construct, a reified ‘other.’ And, although very real, the Bastille remained static, a prison of the Old Regime. But the convent was an institution whose internal makeup and place in the larger

how Suzanne's struggle to escape from the convent is viscerally driven by the silently fermentative reaction of her body, and how the suffering inscribed upon it fuels an acerbic political critique.<sup>110</sup>

Whereas monastic silence is intended to promote spiritual ascendancy, self-knowledge, and harmonious living, for Suzanne it first serves as a form of punishment and imprisonment. She is forced to take up the veil against her will to atone for the actions of her mother, who has given birth to Suzanne outside of her marriage, and thus pressures her teenage daughter into the convent to preserve this secret, along with the cohesion and financial well-being of the family. Suzanne's entry into the world of the convent is accordingly depicted as foreboding, with her mother to be replaced by a series of abusive Mother Superiors. Without any means to support herself, Suzanne is swayed through the cruelty of her mother,<sup>111</sup> assisted by her spiritual director,

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society continued to evolve. . . . Thus, the special symbolic resonance of the convent lay in the relationship between the institution's own changing structure and purpose and the seismic political and cultural shifts taking place in eighteenth-century France.”

<sup>110</sup> See Angelica Goodden, *Diderot and the Body* (Oxford: Legenda, 2001), for more on how Diderot was strongly attracted to literary genres such as the novel, “that sought to maximize this dynamic potential, wanting to move beyond the static verbal portraiture practiced by seventeenth-century writers and those whom they influenced” (9).

<sup>111</sup> When Suzanne attempts to contest assuming her vows, she is met with cold resistance by her mother, followed by an ensuing physical interchange between them, as if theatrical figures in motion, to which Suzanne's body responds with corporeal imagery more powerful than words: “Là je montai dans une voiture où je trouvai ma mère seule qui m'attendait; je m'assis sur le

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devant; et le carrosse partit. Nous restâmes l'une vis-à-vis de l'autre quelque temps sans mot dire; j'avais les yeux baissés, et je n'osais la regarder. Je ne sais ce qui se passait dans mon âme; mais tout à coup je me jetai à ses pieds, et je penchai ma tête sur ses genoux; je ne lui parlais pas, mais je sanglotais et j'étouffais. Elle me repoussa durement. Je ne me relevai pas; le sang me vint au nez; je saisis une de ses mains malgré qu'elle en eût; et l'arrosant de mes larmes et de mon sang qui coulait, appuyant ma bouche sur cette main, je la baisais et je lui disais: «Vous êtes toujours ma mère, je suis toujours votre enfant . . .» Et elle me répondit (en me poussant encore plus rudement, et en arrachant sa main d'entre les miennes): «Relevez-vous, malheureuse, relevez-vous.» Je lui obéis, je me rassis, et je tirai ma coiffe sur mon visage. Elle avait mis tant d'autorité et de fermeté dans le son de sa voix, que je crus devoir me dérober à ses yeux. Mes larmes et le sang qui coulait de mon nez se mêlaient ensemble, descendaient le long de mes bras, et j'en étais toute couverte sans que je m'en aperçusse. À quelques mots qu'elle dit, je conçus que sa robe et son linge en avaient été tachés, et que cela lui déplaisait.” Diderot, *La Religieuse*, 277–78. [There I got into a carriage where my mother was waiting for me alone; I sat on the front seat and we set off. We sat facing each other in complete silence. I lowered my eyes, not daring to look at her. I do not know what was happening in my soul, but suddenly I threw myself at her feet and put my head on her knees. I said nothing, but sobbed and was hardly able to breathe. She pushed me away firmly. I did not get up. My nose started bleeding; I grabbed one of her hands, despite her efforts to avoid me, and, bathing it in my tears and my blood, I pressed my mouth to it, kissing it and saying: ‘You’re still my mother; I’m still your daughter . . .’ She replied (pushing me away yet more violently and tearing her hand from mine): ‘Get up, you wretched girl, get up.’ I did as she said, sat down again, and pulled my headscarf down over my

Father Séraphin, into believing that her only choice is to take up the veil. In contrast to the calm and ponderous silence purported to enable spiritual ascendancy within the religious community, it instead first serves a similarly hostile impact to that which Suzanne experiences within her family, as she is forced to embark upon a descent into darkness and isolation, rather than towards divine religious enlightenment. The silence of the crowd surrounding Suzanne as she is coerced into assuming her vows is stifling, yet it is matched by the physical resistance of her own body: “Lorsqu’il fallut entrer dans le lieu où je devais prononcer le vœu de mon engagement, je ne me trouvai plus de jambes; deux de mes compagnes me prirent sous les bras; j’avais la tête renversée sur une d’elles, et je me traînais” [When I had to enter the place where I was to make my vows, I found I could no longer walk. Two of my companions took me by the arms. I rested my head on

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face. She had spoken with such authority and firmness that I felt I had to hide myself from view. My tears and the blood streaming from my nose mixed together and dripped down my arms, and I ended up covered in it without noticing. From a few things she said I realized that her gown and undergarments had been stained and that she was not pleased.] Diderot, *The Nun*, translated by Russell Goulbourne (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 14–15. Suzanne’s internal desperation and the motion of her soul is matched by external movement, as she throws herself at her mother’s feet, grabs her hand, and is violently rebuffed, with her blood and tears as testament to her suffering, flowing for only the first of many instances in the novel. As Suzanne becomes a prisoner, locked in and excommunicated within her family, this mirrors what she will face in the convent, underscoring a dark complicity between family and Church.

the shoulder of one of them, and I dragged myself along....]<sup>112</sup> The harsh silence that reigns over

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<sup>112</sup> Diderot, *La Religieuse*, 276. Diderot, *The Nun*, 13. “Tout le monde était debout; il y avait de jeunes personnes montées sur des chaises, et attachées aux barreaux de la grille; et il se faisait un profond silence, lorsque celui qui présidait à ma profession me dit: « Marie-Suzanne Simonin, promettez-vous de dire la vérité? — Je le promets. — Est-ce de votre plein gré et de votre libre volonté que vous êtes ici ? » Je répondis, « non ; » mais celles qui m’accompagnaient répondirent pour moi, « oui. » « Marie-Suzanne Simonin, promettez-vous à Dieu chasteté, pauvreté et obéissance ? » J’hésitai un moment ; le prêtre attendit ; et je répondis : « Non, monsieur. » Il recommença : « Marie-Suzanne Simonin, promettez-vous à Dieu chasteté, pauvreté et obéissance ? » Je lui répondis d’une voix plus ferme : « Non, monsieur, non. » Il s’arrêta et me dit : « Mon enfant, remettez-vous, et écoutez-moi. — Monseigneur, lui dis-je, vous me demandez si je promets à Dieu chasteté, pauvreté et obéissance ; je vous ai bien entendu, et je vous répons que non... » Et me tournant ensuite vers les assistants, entre lesquels il s’était élevé un assez grand murmure, je fis signe que je voulais parler ; le murmure cessa et je dis : « Messieurs, et vous surtout mon père et ma mère, je vous prends tous à témoin... » À ces mots une des sœurs laissa tomber le voile de la grille, et je vis qu’il était inutile de continuer. Les religieuses m’entourèrent, m’accablèrent de reproches ; je les écoutai sans mot dire. On me conduisit dans ma cellule, où l’on m’enferma sous la clef. ” Diderot, *La Religieuse*, 276–77. “Everyone was on their feet; some young women had climbed up on chairs and pressed themselves against the grille. Everyone fell completely silent when the person presiding at the ceremony said to me: ‘Marie-Suzanne Simonin, do you promise to tell the truth?’ ‘I do.’ ‘Are you here by your own free will?’ I replied ‘No,’ but the nuns accompanying me replied ‘Yes’ on my behalf. ‘Marie-Suzanne

the religious community alongside the machinations of the nuns impede Suzanne from exercising her voice, so it is her body that responds instead, revealing a more powerful resistance than words alone might convey. She loses mastery over her limbs as she drags herself across the church, an act that strikes against the injustice of the forced nature of her vocation, which her body will rebel passionately against as she transforms the convent into a space of pleasure and liberation, gaining a freedom over it that resonates on a political level against the gender and religious cruelties enacted by the State.

The fermentative force that Suzanne unleashes upon the convent is immediately evident in early interactions with her initial Mother Superiors. The first, although aware of Suzanne's despondency at becoming a nun, nonetheless attempts to convert her to the role, commenting

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Simonin, do you swear to God that you will be chaste, poor, and obedient?' I hesitated a moment. The priest waited. And then I replied: 'No, Monsieur.' He repeated the question: 'Marie-Suzanne Simonin, do you swear to God that you will be chaste, poor, and obedient?' I replied more firmly: 'No, Monsieur, no.' He stopped and said: 'My child, calm down and listen to me.' 'Monsieur.' I said to him, 'you have asked me if I swear to God that I will be chaste, poor, and obedient. I have understood the question, and my answer is no...' And turning at that moment towards the congregation, most of whom were now muttering things, I indicated that I wanted to speak. The muttering stopped and I said: 'Gentlemen, and especially you, my father and my mother, I call on you all to witness...' As I spoke one of the nuns drew the curtain across the grille, and I realized that it was pointless continuing. The nuns surrounded me and reproached me vigorously; I listened to them in silence. I was taken to my cell and locked in."

Diderot, *The Nun*, 13–14.

upon her beauty, while instructing her in comportment, as Suzanne describes:

« Sœur Suzanne est une très-belle religieuse, on vous en aimera davantage. Çà, voyons un peu, marchez. Vous ne vous tenez pas assez droite ; il ne faut pas être courbée comme cela... » Elle me composa la tête, les pieds, les mains, la taille, les bras ; ce fut presque une leçon de Marcel sur les grâces monastiques : car chaque état a les siennes.

[“Sister Suzanne is a very beautiful nun, and we will love you all the more for that. Now, let’s have a look at you. Turn around. You’re not holding yourself quite straight; don’t lean forward like that...” She showed me how to carry myself, my head, my feet, my hands, my body, and my arms. It was almost like being given a lesson by Marcel on convent style, for each way of life has its own].<sup>113</sup>

This first attempt to regulate Suzanne’s body fails, as after seeing a deranged nun who has been driven mad by life in the convent, she enacts the scene of physical resistance in taking her vows. At the next convent in which she finds herself (Longchamp), Suzanne’s interactions with a new Mother Superior are met with only little more success, as although she is treated with fairness and compassion by the sole figure who seems to bring genuine affection to the role, this second Mother Superior loses her ability to serve as a source of inspiration after interacting with Suzanne. The impact Suzanne has upon Mother Superior is evident in her dramatic description:

Elle se jeta subitement à genoux, je l’imitai. Je crus que j’allais partager son transport, je le souhaitais ; elle prononça quelques mots, puis tout à coup elle se

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<sup>113</sup> Diderot, *La Religieuse*, 269. Diderot, *The Nun*, 7. As Goulbourne notes, Marcel is an allusion to the eighteenth-century dancing master, who also gave lessons to the young Louis XV.

tut. J'attendis inutilement : elle ne parla plus, elle se releva, elle fondait en larmes, elle me prit par la main, et me serrant entre ses bras : « Ah ! chère enfant, me dit-elle, quel effet cruel vous avez opéré sur moi ! Voilà qui est fait, l'esprit s'est retiré, je le sens : allez, que Dieu vous parle lui-même, puisqu'il ne lui plaît pas de se faire entendre par ma bouche... » En effet, je ne sais ce qui s'était passé en elle, si je lui avais inspiré une méfiance de ses forces qui ne s'est plus dissipée, si je l'avais rendue timide, ou si j'avais vraiment rompu son commerce avec le ciel ; mais le talent de consoler ne lui revint plus.

[She suddenly fell to her knees, and I did likewise. I thought I was going to share in her ecstasy: that is what I wanted to happen. She said a few words and then suddenly went silent. I waited in vain. She said nothing else, stood up, burst into tears, took hold of my hand, and, holding me in her arms, said: 'Oh! Dear child, what a cruel effect you've had on me! That's it, the Spirit has left me, I can feel it. Go, and may God speak to you himself, for it does not please him to do so through my mouth.' In fact, I do not know what had happened to her, whether I had stirred in her a mistrust of her own strength which has not been dispelled since, whether I had made her afraid, or whether I had really come between her and God. Whatever had happened, she never regained her ability to console others.]<sup>114</sup>

Whenever Suzanne is around her, Mother Superior claims that God has withdrawn, and that his spirit has fallen silent, which in turn instills a fear in her to carry on speaking. Her melancholy

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<sup>114</sup> Diderot, *La Religieuse*, 290–91. Diderot, *The Nun*, 27.

comes to match that of Suzanne, and with a tormented soul, her agitation soon overcomes her, so she prepares for her inevitable death by having a coffin moved into her room.<sup>115</sup> Suzanne's

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<sup>115</sup> This coffin scene evokes that of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. Diderot will explicitly express his admiration for Richardson in his 1758 *Discours sur la poésie dramatique* and in his 1762 *L'Éloge de Richardson*. After over a decade-long hiatus in fiction-writing since his 1748 *Bijoux indiscrets*, Diderot's return to this genre is frequently linked with his admiration of the work of Richardson, most notably for what Diderot sees as its emotionally charged, lifelike rendering of the real world, enabling the reader to become absorbed in the fictional illusion of the text, like the ideal artist's absorptive painting, which brings about aesthetic participation that also creates moral impact. Russell Goulbourne elaborates on this form of influence by establishing a link with Diderot's *Salons* admiration for Jean-Baptiste Greuze's "moral paintings" that express concern for the decay of society due to the immoral lifestyle of the aristocracy, inspiring the beholder through didactic messages that may help to restore honest moral and family values. In his introduction to *The Nun*, Goulbourne compares Greuze's art with that of novel-writing, highlighting the potential for moral impact: "In the Salon of 1763 [Diderot] refers to Greuze's art as 'moral painting', and in the Salon of 1765 he praises the artist's ability to depict subjects ripe for treatment by a novelist: 'Here is your painter and mine, the first of our artists to have taken it upon himself to invest art with morals and to link together events in such a way that it would be easy to make a novel out of them.'" ("Introduction," in *The Nun*, xxviii). Richardson's fiction-writing may be seen as operating in a parallel manner to Greuze's painting, which Diderot extends to *La Religieuse* in his September 1780 letter to Jacques-Henri Meister: "It is full of moving tableaux... It is a work that painters should leaf through constantly; and if

impact upon these first convent leaders is dramatic, and continues to grow in its force throughout her narrative, taking hold of the bodies of the ensuing Mother Superiors whom she encounters.

Suzanne's influence upon the succeeding Mother Superior increases in its intensity, while escalating to upend the entire convent, setting it into a reactive frenzy. Her force is in direct opposition to that of this Mother Superior at Longchamp, who unsettles the convent with capricious leadership: "En un moment la maison fut pleine de troubles, de haines, de médisances, d'accusations, de calomnies et de persécutions: il fallut s'expliquer sur des questions de théologie où nous n'entendions rien, souscrire à des formules, se plier à des pratiques singulières" [In an instant the convent was filled with unrest, hatred, malicious gossip, accusations, calumny, and persecution. We were made to discuss theological issues that we did not understand in the least, to subscribe to formulae and adopt strange practices].<sup>116</sup> Suzanne

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only vanity allowed it, its real epigraph would be: Son pittor anch'io [I too am a painter]." ("Introduction," in *The Nun*, xxviii). Goulbourne cites this letter referencing Diderot's echoing of Corregio's 1525 reaction to Raphael's Saint Cecilia in Bologna, and draws this artistic parallel into dialogue with the kind of "Richardsonian" reading experience that Diderot seems to want to recreate in *La Religieuse*. In addition to Diderot's alignment of *La Religieuse* with the artistic craft, protagonist Suzanne also likens her own descriptions and encounters to the process of painting at several moments of the novel. It is through her painted accounts of the imposed vows of religious silence and of the torture inflicted upon her body by the nuns that she is able to point the reader to the immoral nature of her forced vocation, and to a freedom extending beyond the tyranny of the convent.

<sup>116</sup> Diderot, *La Religieuse*, 297. Diderot, *The Nun*, 32.

refuses to be drawn into theological controversy, and in an act of resistance, sings the praises of the former Mother Superior, encouraging the others to follow her, incurring the wrath of the new tyrannical ruler. Claiming to be for the rules and against despotism, Suzanne displays her political acumen by assiduously studying the guidelines of the order until she knows them by heart, avoiding exploitation by refusing to go beyond these duties, and using the book as her defense when challenged. Although Suzanne's unscrupulous performance of her duties leaves little room for attack on these grounds, Mother Superior uses her position to rally the entire community to make Suzanne's life miserable through invented faults, accompanied by vicious treatment and punishment. The nuns are transformed into executioners, dragging Suzanne, bruised and bloodied into a dungeon where she is locked in isolation for days with merely a piece of bread and a pitcher of water, only to further torture her upon her release by conducting an exorcism upon her. Suzanne observes that the urge to torment and destroy others may gradually weaken in the real world, yet it endures in convents, increasingly impacting her the more she resists the religious life, and from the depths of her constraint and suffering, she witnesses the stirring of "animal instincts," with a violence unknown to the world beyond.

These "animal instincts" are triggered as a result of the seclusion of the convent, and Suzanne's experience with a final Mother Superior (at Sainte-Eutrope) reinforces an earlier message that the first Superior offers about the intertwining of pain and pleasure within the convent, as Suzanne's writing is also driven by the sexual inscription of the convent upon her body. Isolation is portrayed by Diderot as suppressing a fundamental human need for sociability, which may encompass same-sex encounters, as suggested by Suzanne's tryst at Sainte-Eutrope: "Le premier soir, j'eus la visite de la supérieure; elle vint à mon déshabiller; ce fut elle qui m'ôta mon voile et ma guimpe, et qui me coiffa de nuit: ce fut elle qui me déshabilla. Elle me tint cent

propos doux, et me fit mille caresses” [On the first evening, the Mother Superior came to visit me; she came in as I was getting undressed. It was she who took off my veil and wimple and brushed my hair for bed; it was she who undressed me. She said a hundred sweet things to me and stroked me a thousand times].<sup>117</sup> While some have critiqued Diderot’s depiction of same-sex intimacy as mere titillation for the male reader, it might also be interpreted more openly as in line with his materialism<sup>118</sup> and as a testament to his perception of fluid and polymorphous forms of

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<sup>117</sup> Diderot, *La Religieuse*, 333. Diderot, *The Nun*, 95–96.

<sup>118</sup> Both silence and physical movement are inherent in the materialism that permeates much of Diderot’s fictional writing. For Diderot, physical and chemical forces serve as vital principles of energy and organic existence, as they are the source of matter endowed with motion. This movement may also be applied to the variable form of sexuality that Diderot depicts in the same-sex female relationships of *La Religieuse*, in contrast to the strictures of the Church that attempt to impose a uniform conception of sexuality. A similar critique is evident in his *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, and Diderot’s materialism finds its perhaps most evident fictional expression in *Le Rêve de D’Alembert*, a series of dialogues demonstrating that matter is not fixed but subject to evolution, with life forever in movement, undergoing constant mutation. A skeptical view of language is also comically voiced in this work by the figure of Bordeu, who shows how speaker and listener might attach radically different ideas to the same linguistic sign, illustrating the indeterminate mobility of language as well. Yet it is the movement of the body that seems to speak most powerfully, as in a notable scene portraying Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* partner, D’Alembert, as he babbles materialist philosophy in his sleep, where we are shown how the free associations of his dream speech generate erotic fantasies, culminating in a nocturnal

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emission. The body communicates even more dramatically in *Les bijoux indiscrets*, Diderot's allegorical first novel, which portrays Louis XV as Mangogul, sultan of the Congo, and proprietor of a magical ring that brings voice to the body by making the female genitalia speak about their sexual infidelities. It is the sultan's mistress, Mirzoza, a veiled allusion to Madame de Pompadour, who describes the philosophical implications of the allegory, with the soul as a function of the organ, governed by a materialist system, in contrast to a spiritualist vision of the soul as a different substance that is distinct from the body it animates. See Miran Božovič's "The Omniscient Body," in *Lacan: The Silent Partners*, edited by Slavoj Žižek (New York: Verso, 2006) for more on the contrast between spiritualism and materialism in *Les bijoux indiscrets*.

Although the *bijoux* speak or emote loudly, their noises are often nonetheless stifled or inaudible, problematizing the efficacy of the spoken word and revealing the limitations of vocal expression, while suggesting the greater possibility of the body to signify. In *The Function of the Dream and the Body in Diderot's Works* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2004), Jennifer Vanderheyden describes the genitalia as a "second" voice, which may only speak by silencing the "other" voice of the same body, with the subject and object exchanging places, as in an act of annihilation. She draws an extended comparison between the subject of the tableau vivant and the Freudian subject of the dream, arguing that the body's "painted" nonverbal capacity to convey thought in the manner of a tableau vivant is part of an oscillation between stasis and movement, similar to Freud's usage of the statue as that which simultaneously honors and annihilates: "The self-annihilation of actor returns us to the statue, of mobility within immobility... Diderot's materialist conception of matter included a natural oscillation between flesh and marble, movement and stasis... It is in just this alternation between life and death that

sexuality, as well as a critique against the intervention of the Church and the State condemning these relations, representing an empowering alternative sexual possibility for the cloistered women of the convent. Although Suzanne claims to be uncertain of the nature of the relationship that Mother Superior initiates with her, she does however possess the knowledge to describe these intimate encounters in detail, revealing that she is a willing, even if unaware, participant in them. While Suzanne's receptivity to these sexual advances is ambivalent, and she is fundamentally exploited by this Mother Superior and marginalized by the other nuns who are jealous of the relationship and the preferential treatment that it facilitates, Suzanne transforms the convent into a space of pleasure and freedom through her body, gaining sexual autonomy that will mirror her political liberation.

Whereas Mother Superior is driven mad by her passion, Suzanne directs her fervent force into a political act of writing, crafting a persuasive account of all that has been inflicted upon her body through her memoirs addressed to the Marquis so that he will be moved to come to her aid, and to Monsieur Manouri, who offers legal support that will enable Suzanne to rescind her vows. Suzanne's desire to leave the convent is distinctive from numerous other convent stories of the time (or before) in that it is not driven by passion for a man or anybody outside of the convent, but rather by her thirst for freedom.<sup>119</sup> Her writing is of a silent nature, as it is born from within,

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the body can better signify" (78).

<sup>119</sup> "On ne dira pas, du moins, comme de la plupart des autres, que je sois entraînée hors de mon état par une passion déréglée: je ne vois personne, je ne connais personne. Je demande à être libre, parce que le sacrifice de ma liberté n'a pas été volontaire. Avez-vous lu mon mémoire?"

*Diderot, La Religieuse*, 281. [At least it will not be said of me, as it is of most of the other nuns,

but also gestural in that it is written by and later concealed upon her body, in order to defend the very right to her body. It is in this sense political, and further emblematic of the moment that, out of ambition and the love of luxury, Suzanne's family, like the Ancien Régime, sacrifices part of itself to ensure another more privileged part secures a more comfortable life.<sup>120</sup> Instead of

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that I was driven out of my way of life by some unruly passion. I see nobody and know nobody. I want to be free because my freedom was sacrificed against my will. Have you read my statement?"] Diderot, *The Nun*, 46.

<sup>120</sup> "C'est là que l'ambition et le luxe sacrifient une portion des familles pour faire à celle qui reste un sort plus avantageux; c'est la sentine où l'on jette le rebut de la société. Combien de mères comme la mienne expient un crime secret par un autre !" Diderot, *La Religieuse*, 312.

[This is the place where ambition and the love of luxury sacrifice one part of a family in order to ensure that the other has a more comfortable life. It is the sink into which the dregs of society are thrown. How many mothers like mine atone for a secret crime by committing another!] Diderot, *The Nun*, 76. See also Lisa Jane Graham, "A la recherche du père perdu: Guillaume Nicloux's *La Religieuse* (2013)," *Fiction and Film for French Historians: A Cultural Bulletin*, Volume 4, Issue 5, March 2014. Graham contrasts Nicloux's film adaptation of the film with the novel, citing Diderot's more open ending: "Diderot's novel raised a serious question about the plight of women on the cusp of the modern era: what were their options in a world without fathers to control or protect them? His novel is more troubling than Nicloux's film, which evokes this oppressive society but dismisses its constraints. Nicloux makes women's subjectivity depend on paternity whereas Diderot imagined a world in which men and women were no longer docile royal subjects but not yet citizens."

accepting this fate, or the complicity of her family and the Church in their willingness to oppress and torture her for economic gain, Suzanne fights back by covertly penning a letter to a lawyer to rescind her vows, exposing the injustice of her plight through her powerful narrative. She is suspected of such an act and punished by Mother Superior of Longchamp out of fear that she will reveal the secrets of the inhumane nature of the convent to the outside world, and she is strip-searched by nuns who rightfully suspect she has hidden paper and ink on her body.<sup>121</sup> Yet they are moments too late, as Suzanne's claim has already made its way to the world beyond, but with the odds still heavily against her, as she notes the political challenge of winning such a case:

Il est difficile de l'emporter, surtout à des tribunaux, où l'habitude et l'ennui des affaires ne permettent presque pas qu'on examine avec quelque scrupule les plus importantes; et où les contestations de la nature de la mienne sont toujours regardées d'un œil défavorable par l'homme politique, qui craint que, sur le succès d'une religieuse réclamant contre ses vœux, une infinité d'autres ne soient engagées dans la même démarche: on sent secrètement que, si l'on souffrait que les portes de ces prisons s'abâtissent en faveur d'une malheureuse, la foule s'y porterait et chercherait à les forcer. On s'occupe à nous décourager et à nous résigner toutes à notre sort par le désespoir de le changer. Il me semble pourtant que, dans un État bien gouverné, ce devrait être le contraire : entrer difficilement en religion, et en sortir facilement. Et pourquoi ne pas ajouter ce cas à tant

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<sup>121</sup> This is another moment that is reminiscent of Richardson, as in *Pamela*, Mr. B demands Pamela's letters from her bosom and later threatens to strip search her in order to find her writings, wherever they may be upon her person.

d'autres, où le moindre défaut de formalité anéantit une procédure, même juste d'ailleurs ? Les couvents sont-ils donc si essentiels à la constitution d'un État ? Jésus-Christ a-t-il institué des moines et des religieuses ? L'Église ne peut-elle absolument s'en passer ? Quel besoin a l'époux de tant de vierges folles ? et l'espèce humaine de tant de victimes ?

[It is difficult to win, particularly in courts that have become so used to, and so bored with, cases that they rarely examine at all scrupulously, even the most important ones, and where claims like mine are always looked upon unfavourably by the judge who, thinking politically, worries that the success of one nun appealing against her vows would lead to a whole host of others trying to do the same thing. It is secretly felt that if the gates to these prisons were allowed to be flung open for one unfortunate nun, then a whole army of nuns would surge forward and try to force them open. Determined efforts are made to discourage us and to make us all resign ourselves to our fate, in despair of ever being able to change it. Yet it seems to me that in a well-governed state, the opposite should be the case: it should be difficult to enter the religious life and easy to leave it. And why not add this case to all those others where the slightest error in procedure negates the whole process, however justified that process may be? Are convents so essential to the constitution of a state? Did Jesus Christ institute monks and nuns? Can the Church really not do without them? What need has the bridegroom of so many foolish virgins, and what need has the human race of so many

victims?]<sup>122</sup>

Suzanne displays political skill in this assessment, as well as in the way by which she crafts her case, maintaining her integrity by not resorting to the tactics of her malevolent oppressors (but instead taking measures to protect both her parents and the Church), while fulfilling all of her duties in the convent, and even upholding her religious belief; she simultaneously secures a level of protection from further persecution by turning the public eye upon her case, while guiding her lawyer in making a persuasive political claim that radically questions the moral validity of the deeply entrenched religious and political structures through a stirring testament of her suffering.

Suzanne's employment of writing to mobilize the law and the public eye upon the private world of the convent illustrates her political ability to transform a space of subjugation into one of liberation, but she does so in a manner that is in stark contrast to Diderot's ideal actor, as it is her passions and her body that seize control over any form of self-mastery in order to guide her towards freedom. Like the stage of the ideal actor, the convent is a space of silence, and it is not through verbal speech, but through her body that Suzanne is ultimately successful in achieving autonomy. However, neither the theatrical stage nor the convent are entirely mute settings, and Suzanne's dramatic persuasiveness is perhaps most evident in her striking singing voice and in her ability to play the harpsichord.<sup>123</sup> Suzanne's talent as a musical performer adds significance

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<sup>122</sup> Diderot, *La Religieuse*, 340. Diderot, *The Nun*, 73–74.

<sup>123</sup> One of the most notable harpsichord performance scenes is when Suzanne first enters the convent and plays a piece from Rameau's *Castor et Pollux*, which contains one of the most famous operatic funeral lamentations by Telaira, daughter of the sun, who is caught between the

to her presence in the convent, while connecting her to society as people witness her perform in church, and she also hints at several times that it could be a future means of earning a living once she escapes beyond the walls of the convent. Tili Boon Cuillé considers musical tableaux as privileged sites for aesthetic innovation and social resistance, noting in particular Diderot's use of the *clavecin oculaire*, or visual harpsichord, in his *Lettre sur les sourds et les muets* as an instrument capable of playing in color rather than sound.<sup>124</sup> This imaginary instrument possesses a unique ability to produce visually what cannot be heard, by portraying through its array of colors an expressive simultaneity that language is unable to convey. Suzanne similarly paints emotional multiplicity as she performs on the harpsichord, transforming the convent into a fermentative political forum for justice through her body and her passions, which in turn spark reactions in those whom she encounters. She is ultimately liberated through her body's expression, as she escapes from the convent and is free to choose her own future, even if her pathway may still remain fraught in a society riddled with destructive gender and political inequalities. Her writing (or Diderot's), might also be viewed as an embodied performance exceeding words, as she externalizes her inner turmoil while conveying the torture inflicted upon her body. Suzanne stands apart from Diderot's conception of the ideal actor in that she is unable

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two brothers, and addresses her father, expressing her wish to die. Another notable performance by Suzanne leads in to her seduction by Mother Superior of Sainte-Eutrope.

<sup>124</sup> Tili Boon Cuillé, *Narrative Interludes: Musical Tableaux in Eighteenth Century French Texts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 40. Cuillé highlights the tension between the imagery of the tableaux and its surrounding text, emphasizing the impact is less from the action in the scene, but rather in the character's *reaction*.

to exercise restraint over her body, but instead conveys her passion through it, as resistance and as the inscription of her suffering laid upon it. Her passionate narrative reverberates beyond the walls of the convent, transcending her fictional role by transforming into an embodied justice that will haunt the social and political body.

#### SILENT FERMENTATION

At the end of *La Religieuse*, Suzanne acknowledges an element of deception inherent in the “seductive” nature of her narrative,<sup>125</sup> which Diderot will bring to its deepest tenor with another dramaturgical figure in his next fictional work, *Le Neveu de Rameau*. The unintentional nature of this “seduction” speaks on the one hand to the preeminence of the powerful force of the

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<sup>125</sup> See Goulbourne, xxiv, for further analysis of Suzanne’s recognition of this “deception” at the end of her account, in connection with the fluid borders between reality and fiction, and the seductive aspects of her narrative: “Je me suis aperçue que sans en avoir le moindre projet, je m’étais montrée à chaque ligne aussi malheureuse à la vérité que je l’étais, mais beaucoup plus aimable que je ne le suis. Serait-ce que nous croyons les hommes moins sensibles à la peinture de nos peines qu’à l’image de nos charmes ? et nous promettrions-nous encore plus de facilité à les séduire qu’à les toucher ?” Diderot, *La Religieuse*, 423. [I have realized that, though it was utterly unintentional, I had in each line shown myself to be as unhappy as I really was, but also much nicer than I really am. Could it be that we believe men to be less sensitive to the depiction of our suffering than to the image of our charms, and do we hope that it is much easier to seduce them than it is to touch their hearts?] Diderot, *The Nun*, 152. Goulbourne also notes that “aimable” in this context might actually be better understood as something closer to “charming” or “attractive.”

body, but also ironically figures Diderot's sense that his readers may not be moved by Suzanne's suffering alone, which could be a critique of the eroticization of women as both a condition of and corruption of compassion or pity. While the Nephew's deceptive character is of a different variety that lies in stark opposition to Suzanne's more virtuous spirit, he serves as a similarly fermentative political force, which I will explore in relation to both his dialogue with Moi and his nonverbal bodily communication. Like Suzanne, the Nephew is a performer, drawing upon the musical legacy of his family, and while failing to live up to the creative genius of his uncle, he succeeds in captivating his audience through his mimicry and gestures, moving them with his performances, which also resonate on a political level. The Nephew, too, challenges Diderot's conception of the ideal actor, as it is his body that drives him, with his pantomime revealing that silence is not distinct from speech. Although pantomime serves as a seemingly universal trait that appears to embody a lack of freedom, with even the king engaging in some form of beggary and dependence, the Nephew's pantomime is of a different nature and it serves a particular fermentative and revelatory function. I will analyze how the Nephew's pantomime functions to illustrate the contradictions within society and politics, and then examine the response of Moi, where silence takes on a different sense, in affirmation of individual agency. In addition to the silence that exists within dialogue and even sound itself, as the Nephew evokes at one point, I will also address its function in the *pacte tacite*, which inverts the "cry of nature" to reveal a deeper truth about unspoken animal aggression, also firmly rooted within the body, with fermentation as a driving political force.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Patrick Coleman, *Anger, Gratitude, and the Enlightenment Writer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Diderot's dialogic writing does not initially appear as the likeliest of places to discover silence, and *Le Neveu* could perhaps even be described as one of his noisiest works. Its titular figure caricatures the nephew of one of the most prominent French musical personalities of the era, Jean-Philippe Rameau, and the Nephew is satirized as a rogue figure who values self-interest and deceit over truth and morality, and is also capable of imitating an entire orchestra. While *Le Neveu* is in many ways a clamorous, exclamatory work, it is nonetheless shrouded in silence from its inception, as like the *Paradoxe*, it was unpublished in Diderot's lifetime, and is never mentioned in his other works or correspondence.<sup>127</sup> Patrick Coleman has incisively explored this

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<sup>127</sup> In his Seminar XVII, Jacques Lacan emphasizes the contingency of *Le Neveu* finally finding its way into the public sphere from its initially hidden status and unknown authorship (222): "Un type comme Diderot quand même sortait *Le Neveu de Rameau*, le laissait tomber de sa poche. Quelqu'un d'autre le portait à Schiller qui savait tout juste ce qu'était Diderot. Diderot ne s'en est jamais plus occupé. C'est en 1804 que Schiller l'a passé à Goethe qui l'a traduit immédiatement, et nous n'avons eu jusqu'en 1891... ça, je peux vous le dire parce que j'ai le volume... jusqu'en 1891 qu'une retraduction française de la traduction allemande de Goethe, qui avait d'ailleurs complètement oublié qu'elle était parue un an après, qui l'a peut-être même jamais su : on était en pleine bagarre n'est-ce-pas, franco-allemande... Bref complètement inaperçue cette traduction de Goethe, je vous dis : Goethe lui-même ne savait pas qu'elle était parue." Jacques Lacan, *L'envers de la psychanalyse (1969-1970) XVII*, 329. [A character called Diderot published *Le Neveu de Rameau*, let it fall from his pocket. Someone else took it to Schiller, who knew very well it was by Diderot. Diderot never worried about it. In 1804, Schiller passed it on to Goethe, who immediately translated it and, up until 1891 — I can tell you this,

irony, suggesting that Diderot's silence about *Le Neveu* may be discerned within the text itself: "The most deeply dialogic of Diderot's dialogues was never brought by its author into actual conversation with others. One might say that in *Le Neveu* the author dialogues with himself. This is surely true, but the secrecy surrounding the work makes us wonder about the social stakes of this inner exchange."<sup>128</sup> As with his own life experience that helps to inform his conception of *La Religieuse*, Diderot's personal investment in *Le Neveu* is suggested by his apparent insertion of himself into the roles of *Moi* and *Lui*, with a multitude of references to his own life and network, which also extend into the political sphere. One example of such an intersection is with Charles Palissot de Montenoy, whose scandalous play *Les Philosophes* (1760) ridicules Diderot and *Le Fils naturel* (1757), and serves as a point of attack in *Le Neveu*; the success of *Les Philosophes*, in contrast to the relative shortfall of Diderot's *Le Père de famille* (1758),<sup>129</sup> may serve to fuel the discussion between *Moi* and *Lui* about brilliance and failure. Diderot's motivation to leverage failure into success mirrors the Nephew's ability to turn his personal misfortune into

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this, because here is the tome, which I brought from my own library – we only had a French retranslation of the German translation by Goethe, who, moreover, had completely forgotten about it one year after it appeared, and who perhaps never saw it, for they were in the midst of that Franco-Prussian brawl... Goethe himself was no doubt unaware that it had appeared.]

Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis (Vol. Book XVII)*, translated by Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007).

<sup>128</sup> Coleman, 192.

<sup>129</sup> *Le Père de famille* takes up similar themes as those of *La Religieuse*, as it concerns a poor woman of unknown parentage struggling to avoid being sent to a convent.

creatively fruitful endeavors, as Diderot's dramatic ideas are more potent when interlaced with his prose fiction and dialogue, with their celebration of the body's silent eloquence on prominent display.

The Nephew demonstrates how what is morally undesirable may be creatively productive by illustrating that his lack of effectiveness with language is surpassed by his corporal discourse, which we encounter through his interactions with Moi, a philosopher who narrates their meeting. Like the many chess duels that occur at the Café de la Régence, the dialogic contest between Moi and Lui also unfolds at this location, with the Nephew's arrival rousing Moi from his routine, and from his silent ruminations.<sup>130</sup> The Nephew shakes the philosopher out of his own thoughts,

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<sup>130</sup> Moi evokes the notorious line: "Mes pensées, ce sont mes catins" [My thoughts are my prostitutes], revealing the depths of his absorption within his own mind shortly before the arrival on scene of Lui, whose noisy entrance contrasts with this silent contemplation: "Un après-dîner, j'étais là, regardant beaucoup, parlant peu, et écoutant le moins que je pouvais; lorsque je fus abordé par un des plus bizarres personnages de ce pays où Dieu n'en a pas laissé manquer. C'est un composé de hauteur et de bassesse, de bon sens et de déraison. Il faut que les notions de l'honnête et du déshonnête soient bien étrangement brouillées dans sa tête ; car il montre ce que la nature lui a donné de bonnes qualités, sans ostentation, et ce qu'il en a reçu de mauvaises, sans pudeur. Au reste il est doué d'une organisation forte, d'une chaleur d'imagination singulière, et d'une vigueur de poumons peu commune. Si vous le rencontrez jamais et que son originalité ne vous arrête pas ; ou vous mettez vos doigts dans vos oreilles, ou vous vous enfuirez. Dieux, quels terribles poumons. Rien ne dissemble plus de lui que lui-même." Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, 425–26. [One day I was there after dinner, looking on a great deal but not saying much,

which Jean Starobinski movingly frames as a means of forcing Moi to encounter both exteriority and variability.<sup>131</sup> These experiences are evident in the stark contrast between the Nephew's seemingly degenerate and deceitful character in relation to the philosopher's virtuous quest for truth, yet Moi is able to access a more dynamic and comprehensive form of knowledge through his interactions with Lui. His admiration for Lui's skill as a pantomime performer of humanity overrides his contempt for his immorality, and, Lui embodies the unspoken voice of otherness, operating like "a grain of yeast" that stirs things up within, enabling a new truth to emerge.<sup>132</sup> It

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listening as little as possible, when I was accosted by one of the most bizarre people in this country (and God has made sure we don't lack such types). He is a mixture of loftiness and depravity, of good sense and buffoonery. The notions of honesty and dishonesty must be really badly confused in his head, for he shows without ostentation that nature has given him fine qualities, and has no shame in revealing that he has also received some bad ones. Beyond that, he's endowed with a strong constitution, a remarkably warm imagination, and an extraordinary lung power. If you ever meet him and his originality does not hold your attention, you'll either put your fingers in your ears or run off. God, what terrible lungs! Nothing is more unlike him than himself.] Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew*.

<sup>131</sup> Jean Starobinski, *Diderot, un diable de ramage* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2012), 124.

<sup>132</sup> "C'est un grain de levain qui fermente qui restitue à chacun une portion de son individualité naturelle. Il secoue, il agite, il fait approuver ou blâmer, il fait sortir la vérité, il fait connaître les gens de bien, il démasque les coquins, c'est alors que l'homme de bon sens écoute, et démêle son monde." Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, 426–27. See also Karlis Racevskis' "Michel Foucault, *Rameau's Nephew*, and the Question of Identity," in *The Final Foucault*, edited by James

is from this antagonism that Moi is further able to develop an enhanced self-understanding, as well.

The Nephew's pantomime is an inherent trait, and while he lacks the musical talent of his illustrious uncle, his gesticulation possesses a lyrical force that transcends language and conveys music's evocativeness, revealing a different facet to the Nephew than the combative dialogue of his conversation with Moi alone suggests. Within their dialogue, Lui displays his disreputable character, imparting to his son that money is more important than all else, while mourning his deceased wife due to the fact that he could have profited by prostituting her, which stands in stark contrast to the affectionate family life and bourgeois morality embodied by Moi. Although Lui admits to being a social parasite who preys upon all, and Moi vehemently objects to his arguments as the voice of philosophical and moral fortitude, their rapport shifts as the Nephew performs his pantomime, contorting himself into the perspectives of all those he describes, and captivating Moi and his broader audience. This is particularly evident in the Nephew's depiction of an entire orchestra; in addition to seeing Lui ventriloquize all the instruments and noises, Moi

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William Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988). Racevskis cites Foucault's *Folie et Déraison* situation of the Nephew as a sort of modern incarnation of the Buffoon, describing the element of truth that also exists alongside the deceptive element of his character (24): "The persona of the young Rameau constitutes an effective critical device because it is an individual unlike all others around him. Rameau is not part of the system, his perspective places him clearly outside the realm of culture and its norms – yet without severing his ties completely, since he still depends on it for survival. What separates Rameau from others is, as Foucault observes, his complete inability to be a hypocrite."

is struck by his stunning representation of the full spectrum of humanity, nature, and also silence:

Que ne lui vis-je pas faire ? Il pleurait, il riait, il soupirait il regardait, ou attendri, ou tranquille, ou furieux; c'était une femme qui se pâme de douleur; c'était un malheureux livré à tout son désespoir; un temple qui s'élève; des oiseaux qui se taisent au soleil couchant; des eaux ou qui murmurent dans un lieu solitaire et frais, ou qui descendent en torrent du haut des montagnes; un orage; une tempête, la plainte de ceux qui vont périr, mêlée au sifflement des vents, au fracas du tonnerre; c'était la nuit, avec ses ténèbres; c'était l'ombre et le silence, car le silence même se peint par des sons.

[What didn't I see him do? He cried, he laughed, he sighed, he looked tender or calm or angry—a woman who was swooning in grief, an unhappy man left in total despair, a temple being built, birds calming down at sunset, waters either murmuring in a cool lonely place or descending in a torrent from the high mountains, a storm, a tempest, the cries of those who are going to die intermingled with the whistling winds, the bursts of thunder, the night, with its shadows—silent and dark—for sounds do depict even silence.]<sup>133</sup>

Lui illuminates how silence is not detached, but rather coexists with speech and sound. In contrast to his initially seeming ineptitude and bumbling character, this description of the Nephew's performance and ability to paint even silence attests to the efficacy of his role as an imitator, and he further likens music to the art of painting: "Le chant est une imitation, par les sons d'une échelle inventée par l'art ou inspirée par la nature, comme il vous plaira... des bruits

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<sup>133</sup> Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, 456.

physiques ou des accents de la passion; et vous voyez qu'en changeant là-dedans, les choses à changer, la définition conviendrait exactement à la peinture, à l'éloquence, à la sculpture, et à la poésie" [A melody is an imitation using the sounds of a scale invented by art or inspired by nature, whichever you like... an imitation of the physical sounds or accents of passion. You see that, by changing some things in this definition, it would fit exactly a definition of painting, oratory, sculpture, and poetry].<sup>134</sup> The accents that the Nephew evokes and describes are marks of nature that carry a primal energy of an originary, passionate language, one that conveys this accent even without articulation. As Starobinski suggests, accent also represents individuality, possessing a truth linked to nature that common language oppresses, with the verity of the passions embedded in a theater of accents, revealed through the body of the actor.<sup>135</sup> Although he

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<sup>134</sup> Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, 450. Coleman explores Diderot's interpretation of music imitating nature as reaching beyond conventional notions of imitation as a clear correspondence of art to its object toward an esthetic of the sublime.

<sup>135</sup> For more on accent and truth, see "L'accent de la vérité" in Starobinski, *Diderot, un diable de ramage*, 139–59. Starobinski establishes a connection between the notion of accent and genius, citing Rousseau's claim in his article "Génie" in the *Dictionnaire de Musique* that a "genius" of music paints tableaux with sounds, making even silence speak, bringing forth ideas through sentiments, and sentiments by accent, along with the passions: "Le Génie de Musicien soumet l'Univers entier à son Art. Il peint tous les tableaux par des Sons ; il fait parler le silence même ; il rend les idées par des sentiments, les sentiments par les accents ; et les passions qu'il exprime, il les excite au fond des cœurs" (144). [The genius of the musician submits the entire universe to his art. He paints all portraits by sounds; he makes even silence speak; he renders ideas by

does not possess the same genius as his uncle, the musician, or as effective a skill with words as Moi, the philosopher, the Nephew's ability to apprehend and interpret accent is conveyed through pantomime that induces profound changes in others.<sup>136</sup>

The Nephew's pantomime moreover serves a political role, which may be discerned in his ability to assume an infinite multitude of positions, as well as in the shift that occurs within Moi. Pierre Saint-Amand astutely describes the Nephew as a "pantomime-parasite ... embodying the sum of all trades and professions . . . plunging politics into the vortex of human contradictions through his positional ballet . . . portraying man as an imitative being par

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feelings, feelings by *accents*, and the passions that he expresses, he stirs them in the depths of hearts.]

<sup>136</sup> Coleman also draws a parallel between the temporal nature of Rousseau's musical conceptions and the silence of the Nephew's performances that convey a sort of absence: "Their merit lies in their evocative power, a power all the more impressive in that Lui's sole instrument is his own body. Not only does he transcend the spatial limitations of that body by conveying sounds produced by a whole orchestra of players, he seems to transcend the temporal basis of music itself. In his *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, Rousseau had argued that all musical effects were predicated on measured intervals of time. Silence is a structured interval between sounds. The silence conveyed by Lui is something more; the embodied presence of Lui and his seamless outpouring of sound points, in fact opens out, to an absence beyond it. This momentary transcendence of the body in the body is what elicits Moi's admiration" (210).

excellence, which is precisely what the merry-go-round of pantomime is all about.”<sup>137</sup> Saint-Amand interprets the pantomime as embodying the polyphonous multiplicity of music, passions and interests, linking it with political pluralism, while situating the Nephew as outside the circuit of social exchange, yet at the same time at the center of its complex crossroads. The Nephew dons masks to portray the different roles of all whom he encounters, while unmasking the hypocrisy of those unaware that they, as well, are taking up artificial positions defined by social conventions. The political implications of the pantomime become perhaps most evident near the end of the dialogue, as Moi claims that nearly everyone does some steps in the dance of the pantomime, including the king:

Le souverain ? . . . Et croyez-vous qu’il ne se trouve pas, de temps en temps, à côté de lui, un petit pied, un petit chignon, un petit nez qui lui fasse faire un peu de la pantomime ? Quiconque a besoin d’un autre, est indigent et prend une position. Le roi prend une position devant sa maîtresse et devant Dieu ; il fait son pas de pantomime. Le ministre fait le pas de courtisan, de flatteur, de valet ou de gueux devant son roi. La foule des ambitieux danse vos positions, en cent

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<sup>137</sup> Pierre Saint-Amand, *The Laws of Hostility: Politics, Violence, and the Enlightenment* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 108. Saint-Amand contrasts Diderot’s treatment of politics with others who address it more directly in theories and writings, including Montesquieu and Rousseau: “We could say that the very element that constituted the stumbling block to his predecessors’ theories – what I have called the obscure realm of morals and manners – became Diderot’s preferred object of contemplation for a text like *Rameau’s Nephew*” (105–06).

manières plus viles les unes que les autres, devant le ministre. L'abbé de condition en rabat, et en manteau long, au moins une fois la semaine, devant le dépositaire de la feuille des bénéfices. Ma foi, ce que vous appelez la pantomime des gueux, est le grand branle de la terre... Mais il y a pourtant un être dispensé de la pantomime. C'est le philosophe qui n'a rien et qui ne demande rien.

[The king? ... Don't you think that, from time to time, he finds beside him a little foot, a little curl, a little nose which makes him go through a little pantomime? Whoever needs someone else is destitute and takes up a position. The king takes up a position before his mistress and before God; he does his pantomime steps. The minister goes through the steps of courtesan, flatterer, valet, or pauper in front of his king. The crowds of ambitious people dance your positions in hundreds of ways, each more vile than the rest, in front of the minister. The noble abbey in his office bands and his long cloak goes before the agent in charge of the list of benefices at least once a week. My goodness, what you call the pantomime of beggars is what makes the world go round... But there is however one who can do without pantomime. That is the philosopher who has nothing and who asks for nothing.]<sup>138</sup>

Like Rousseau, who presents a similar line of thought in his *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* on how the need for others corrupts and turns people into social actors, Moi equates pantomime with a sort of dependence and pandering, or “taking up positions,” which includes even the king. While Moi excludes solely himself (as philosopher) from the dance, he too, has done a sort of

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<sup>138</sup> Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, 501.

dance with Lui throughout the dialogue, and has also been transformed by his pantomime. As such, the Nephew's pantomime is different from the pantomime of all the rest, as he embodies multiplicity itself, and instead of play-acting roles, he loses mastery of his body and seemingly actually *becomes* these roles, impacting his interlocutors in a convincing, fermentative manner. Like the variable nature of the Nephew's physical appearance, temperament, and social position over the course of the dialogue, there is also an ironic form of role reversal in Moi, mirroring the satirical strategy of Horace, Diderot's favorite Latin poet, whom he acknowledges in *Le Neveu* with the epigraph: "Vertumnis, quotquot sunt, natus iniquis" ("A man born under the baleful influence of Vertumnus").<sup>139</sup> Drawn from the second book of Horace's *Satires*, also known as the carnival satire, the theme of the world turned upside down offers Diderot a fitting structure for his work (the full title is in fact *Le Neveu de Rameau ou La Satire seconde*), with Moi and Lui restaging Horace's Roman Saturnalia feast, where the distinction between the free and servile classes is abolished, and slaves and masters change places.<sup>140</sup> Like Vertimnus, the god of change and seasons who could shift his form at will, the Nephew morphs himself with his pantomime, using it even to become a philosopher of sorts, challenging the ground upon which Moi stands.

Moi's transformation reveals the extent of the fermentative impact of the Nephew upon him, as he experiences intense new moral convictions and feelings of individuality in response to their interaction. The deepest indication of this shift within Moi comes shortly after he hears Lui

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<sup>139</sup> Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, 425.

<sup>140</sup> A similar role reversal will be employed in Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* (1796), and *Le Neveu* is also frequently interpreted as anticipating Hegel's master-slave dialectic.

laud an Avignon renegade for both stealing from his former benefactor and reporting him to the Inquisition to be burned.<sup>141</sup> As the Nephew transitions from this horrifying story into a majestic fugue accompanied by pantomime gestures, Moi becomes unsettled and retreats into a shared moment of silence with the Nephew until he soon begins to wander around while whistling.<sup>142</sup> Coleman situates the moment of silence after Lui recounts this tale as the pivotal moment of the text, contrasting it with the earlier silence explored above that is depicted by the Nephew as he is imitating the orchestra.<sup>143</sup> For Coleman, in contrast to the first orchestral silence that dazzles Moi, this second silence serves an affirmation of the integrity of the self within Moi, and it emerges from an experience of the sublime that is triggered through the Nephew. Whereas Coleman emphasizes this as a moment of transformation in Moi that enables him to distance himself from being impacted by Lui by realizing that the Nephew is too alienated to even serve as a personal mediator of what comes to expression in him, I would instead underscore the

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<sup>141</sup> Lui also aligns this renegade as equal to Palissot in integrity, and it is thus likely safe to assume that Diderot is striking back against Palissot's criticism of him in *Les Philosophes*.

<sup>142</sup> "Après un moment de silence de sa part et de la mienne . . ." Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, 450. [After a moment of silence on his part and mine . . .]

<sup>143</sup> For a description of the contrast between the first silence of Lui and the later one that is shared with Moi, see Coleman: "Its function is to point to Moi's very different silence, which is no longer that of the bourgeois philosopher, dazzled into speechlessness by Lui's virtuosity. Rather, in this silence Moi takes in and processes the "disturbing idea" that upset him. The fact that to do so Moi abandons dialogue, Diderot's favored mode of dealing with challenging ideas, suggests that Moi must, and can, undertake this task himself, independently of others" (223).

pivotal role of Lui in enabling Moi to call into question the value of his philosophy. The Nephew does not possess the same self-aware mastery as that of the ideal actor, but is still absent from his own emotions during his performances, and also achieves a similarly moving result in transforming Moi, since their overall dialogue serves to distance Moi from his former unwavering bourgeois convictions. While Moi is able to condemn the Nephew for his immorality at the end, he also adopts some of his attributes in likening himself to Diogenes, who uses his own lifestyle and behavior to critique the social values of a corrupt society, toughening himself against nature through a vagabond lifestyle, which may also be interpreted as similar to that of the Nephew. Moi is perhaps better able to see the world in continual flux as depicted through the persistent motion of the Nephew's pantomime, increasing his self-confidence by opening himself to the diverse and contrasting forms of human interactions, to the unresolved tensions that inform life and politics. Yet the Nephew's concluding "rira bien qui rira le dernier" [the one who laughs last, laughs best] suggests that he might however still outlive his opponent, which recalls the animal world embodied within the *pacte tacite*.<sup>144</sup>

A parody of the unwritten code of civility, the *pacte tacite* is also the law of the jungle, embodying the Nephew's instinctive interpretation of the unspoken rules of animal behavior.<sup>145</sup> Coleman situates it as a satirical inversion of the Enlightenment cliché about the "cry of nature,"

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<sup>144</sup> Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, 504.

<sup>145</sup> For more on the *pacte tacite*, see Coleman. He describes its satirical nature as follows: "The whole passage can be seen as an ironic inversion of the Enlightenment cliché about the 'cry of nature,' that voice of instinctive goodness which erupts to attack social violence and corruption in the name of a more profound reality" (204).

as it emphasizes self-interest and animalistic survival instincts over a state of innate goodness:

Quand on nous prend, ne nous connaît-on pas pour ce que nous sommes, pour des âmes intéressées, viles et perfides? Si l'on nous connaît, tout est bien. Il y a un pacte tacite qu'on nous fera du bien, et que tôt ou tard, nous rendrons le mal pour le bien qu'on nous aura fait. Ce pacte ne subsiste-t-il pas entre l'homme et son singe ou son perroquet?... Si l'on mène un jeune provincial à la Ménagerie de Versailles, et qu'il s'avise par sottise, de passer la main à travers les barreaux de la loge du tigre ou de la panthère ; si le jeune homme laisse son bras dans la gueule de l'animal féroce, qui est-ce qui a tort ? Tout cela est écrit dans le pacte tacite. Tant pis pour celui qui l'ignore ou l'oublie. Combien je justifierais par ce pacte universel et sacré, de gens qu'on accuse de méchanceté ; tandis que c'est soi qu'on devrait accuser de sottise.

[People who take up with us, surely they know us for what we are, self-interested souls, vile and deceitful? If they understand us, then everything's fine. There is a tacit agreement that they will be good to us and sooner or later we will pay back the good they've done us with something bad. Isn't this the agreement that exists between a man and his pet monkey or parrot? ... If one takes a young man from the provinces to the zoo at Versailles and his foolishness persuades him to stick his hand through the bars of the tiger's or panther's cage, and if the young man leaves his arm in the throat of the ferocious animal, who's in the wrong? All that is written in the tacit agreement. Too bad for the man who does not know or who forgets it. How many of those people accused of viciousness I could justify by appealing to this universal and sacred pact, whereas people should accuse

themselves of stupidity.]<sup>146</sup>

While the *pacte tacite* may be read ironically, the Nephew also reveals a side of political society to which Moi does not seem to have given proper consideration within his royalist conservatism, suggesting that he may actually be enslaved by his own classical convictions, with his morality serving to distort his natural inclination for survival, which may make him complicit in his own exploitation by those in positions of power. As opposed to a written political compact with established content, the tacit nature of the Nephew's contract means that it is defined more by one's experience in the world, and he furthermore describes it as a universal and sacred pact. While Diderot's *pacte tacite* differs from Rousseau's social contract in its universal and animalistic nature, it shares a sacredness and silence at its very core that enables freedom.<sup>147</sup>

Although absent in the text, Rousseau may also be seen as silently present throughout. The Nephew's antagonistic dialogue with Moi is evocative of Rousseau's own debate with Rameau; as the madness of the Nephew enables Moi to think more profoundly about his own political conceptions, the debate that divides Rameau and Rousseau in the *querelle des bouffons* over French and Italian opera, or harmony and melody, will fuel much of Rousseau's creative output as well. For Diderot, as for the Nun and the Nephew, it is not enough to recount a story

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<sup>146</sup> Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, 443.

<sup>147</sup> Diderot's conception of the general will in his "Droit naturel" *Encyclopédie* article offers a similar contrast, as Rousseau considers the will less as a universalized abstract ideal, and more as a political duty held by citizens. He however aligns with the element of Diderot's conception that entails following personal conscience in the "silence of the passions," which leads more to a disclosure of the will in a public assembly, as opposed to any debate over it.

with words alone, as it is more powerfully conveyed through embodied theatrical performance, whereas Rousseau will condemn the theater on moral grounds, arguing that its pretense may lead to duplicity in real life. Yet Diderot and Rousseau's own real-life relationship is theatrical in its sentimental and antagonistic intensity, perhaps most evident in Rousseau's dramatic account of his visit to Diderot in the Vincennes prison, where he is locked up for writing his *Lettre sur les aveugles* in 1749. Upon stumbling into Diderot's cell "dans une agitation qui tenait du délire" [in a state of agitation bordering on delirium], Rousseau describes throwing himself intensely into his friend's arms in an emotionally-charged moment of affection: "Je collai mon visage sur le sien, je le serrai étroitement sans lui parler autrement que par mes pleurs et par mes sanglots ; j'étouffais de tendresse et de joie" [With my face pressed against his, I was hugging him tightly, without speaking other than through my tears and sobs, for I was choked with tenderness and joy].<sup>148</sup> As Diderot infuses this silent fermentative potential of the body into his fictionalized,

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<sup>148</sup> This translation is my own. My reading is inspired by Robert Zaretsky and John T. Scott's description of this scene in *The Philosopher's Quarrel: Rousseau, Hume, and the Limits of Human Understanding* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 20. Rousseau underscores the state of *delire* [delirium] of this moment: "Ce que je me rappelle bien distinctement dans cette occasion, c'est qu'arrivant à Vincennes j'étais dans une agitation qui tenait du délire. . . . Mais retenu deux ou trois jours chez Mme Dupin par des soins indispensables, après trois ou quatre siècles d'impatience je volai dans les bras de mon ami. Moment inexprimable ! il n'était pas seul. D'Alembert et le trésorier de la Sainte-Chapelle étaient avec lui. En entrant je ne vis que lui." Rousseau, *Confessions*, 341. [What I do recall very distinctly on this occasion is that, when I arrived at Vincennes, I was in an agitation that bordered on delirium. . . . But being held back for

theatrical figures of the Nun and the Nephew, the pathway leading Rousseau to visit his friend in prison in Vincennes also serves as the sight for another transformative illumination, brought on by an announcement in the *Mercure de France* for an essay contest on the question as to whether “le progrès des sciences et des arts a contribué à corrompre ou à épurer les mœurs” [the progress of the sciences and arts has contributed to corrupting or to purifying morals], to which Rousseau would react in response: “À l’instant de cette lecture je vis un autre univers, et je devins un autre homme” [The moment I read these words I saw another universe and I became another man].<sup>149</sup>

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two or three days at Mme Dupin’s by essential concerns, after three or four centuries of impatience I flew into my friend’s arms. Inexpressible moment ! He was not alone. D’Alembert and the Treasurer of the Ste. Chapelle were with him. Upon entering I saw only him.] Rousseau, *The Confessions*, 293–94.

<sup>149</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, also recounted in Zaretsky and Scott, 20. “Cette année 1749, l’été fut d’une chaleur excessive. On compte deux lieues de Paris à Vincennes. Peu en état de payer des fiacres, à deux heures après midi j’allais à pied quand j’étais seul, et j’allais vite pour arriver plus tôt. Les arbres de la route, toujours élagués, à la mode du pays, ne donnaient presque aucune ombre, et souvent, rendu de chaleur et de fatigue, je m’étendais par terre n’en pouvant plus. Je m’avisai, pour modérer mon pas, de prendre quelque livre. Je pris un jour le *Mercure de France*, et tout en marchant et le parcourant, je tombai sur cette question proposée par l’académie de Dijon pour le prix de l’année suivante . . .” Rousseau, *Confessions*, 342. [That year 1749 the Summer was excessively hot. From Paris to Vincennes adds up to two leagues. Hardly in a condition to pay for cabs, at two o’clock in the afternoon I went on foot when I was alone, and I went quickly so as to arrive earlier. The trees on the road, always pruned in the fashion of the

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country, gave almost no shade, and often exhausted from the heat and the fatigue, I spread out on the ground when I was not able to go any farther. I took into my head to take some book along to moderate my pace. One day I took the *Mercury of France* and while walking and glancing over it I fell upon this question proposed by the Academy of Dijon for the prize the following year . . . ]  
Rousseau, *Confessions*, 294.

### CHAPTER 3: ROUSSEAU'S MUTE ELOQUENCE

*Les langues se taisent mais les cœurs parlent.*<sup>150</sup>

Giambattista Marino, *Adone*

Rousseau's luminous conversion on the road to Vincennes prefigures another passionate transformation, one that he depicts within the eloquent silence of *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*.<sup>151</sup> The dual prefaces to this work reveal the drastic shift in Rousseau's rapport with Diderot from this moment of inspiration en route to visit his confidant in prison, with the initial monological preface preceding a second dialogical one between "R," who identifies himself as Rousseau, and "N," a mystery man of letters who is nowhere named, but is in striking resonance with Diderot.<sup>152</sup> Rousseau sends the initial two books of *Julie* to Diderot in January of 1757, yet after a series of epistolary exchanges, fails to ever engage in a discussion with him about them, instead lapsing into an inimical silence, with the second *Préface* perhaps filling this void in the

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<sup>150</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 1671. [*The tongues fall silent, and the souls speak.*] Rousseau, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, 459.

<sup>151</sup> A portion of this chapter appears in my article "Silence and the Passions in Rousseau's *Julie*." Copyright © 2019 American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies. This article first appeared in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, Volume 48, August, 2019, pages 209–26. Published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>152</sup> Susan K. Jackson convincingly lays out the case for Diderot as "N" in the second *Préface* in "Test and Context of Rousseau's Relations with Diderot," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 20.2 (Winter 1986–1987): 195–219.

form of a fictional dialogue.<sup>153</sup> It may also be read as a continuation of their intertextual debate, following Diderot's *Le Fils naturel*, which Rousseau views as an indictment of his own exile, and Rousseau's *Lettre à d'Alembert* challenging Diderot's *Encyclopédie* partner, with the second *Préface* serving both as a defense of his work, and as the chance for Rousseau to pay back the master of dialogue with one of his own. While Rousseau and Diderot's friendship devolves from tender affection into silent enmity, *Julie* portrays the different transformation of passionate love into friendship, and an alternate, affirmative silence which I will align with Rousseau's politics.

“Qu'apprend-on dans la petite sphere de deux ou trois Amants ou Amis toujours occupés d'eux seuls?” [What does one learn in the small sphere of two or three Lovers or Friends constantly wrapped up in themselves?] probes N in the *Préface* to *Julie*, which also serves as a debate over the utility of the novel form itself.<sup>154</sup> R's response that “on apprend à aimer l'humanité” [one learns to love mankind] underscores the centrality of sentiment to Rousseau's

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<sup>153</sup> In the “Préface de la Nouvelle Héloïse ou Entretien sur les romans, entre l'éditeur et un homme de lettres,” N levels charges of immorality against the novel, asking: “Cette correspondance est-elle réelle, ou si c'est une fiction ? (11)” Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 11. [Is this correspondence real, or is it a fiction?] Rousseau, “Preface of the New Heloise or Conversation About Novels between the Editor and a Man of Letters,” *Julie, or The New Heloise*, 7. R refuses to respond, arguing that it does not matter.

<sup>154</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 14. Rousseau, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, 9. While Rousseau himself critiques the novel form, he also views it as a useful moral tool for corrupt peoples in revealing the falsity of the maxims of large societies, in a similar manner to his disapproval of theater for the people of Geneva, yet endorsement of it in Paris.

literary project in *Julie*, while signifying one of his core political precepts as well. The political importance of the heart is perhaps most evident in “the people” of *Du contrat social; ou Principes du droit politique*, who look silently inwards to feel the general will, rather than engaging in any form of debate before voting on it. This is a further fitting parallel to draw with the *Préface* dialogue in that Rousseau’s formulation of the general will is largely inspired by Diderot’s earlier consideration of it, which is a secularized revision of the concept previously offered by Malebranche. “La volonté générale est dans chaque individu un acte pur de l’entendement” [The general will in each individual is a pure act of understanding], writes Diderot, “qui raisonne dans le silence des passions sur ce que l’homme peut exiger de son semblable” [that reasons in the silence of the passions about what man can demand of his fellow man].<sup>155</sup> Where Diderot and Malebranche share a vision of the will emanating from a mutual understanding of members of the “human species,” Rousseau formulates it less as a universalized abstract ideal, and more as a political duty held by the citizens of nations. He furthermore advocates for a disclosure of the will in a public assembly, as opposed to discussion about it, and Rousseau’s version is thus aligned with silent feeling. Looking inwards to the heart and teaching how to love, the professed lessons of *Julie*, therefore also serve as part of a political project, which the diverse perspectives within the novel might help us to better conceive. Following Montesquieu’s employment of the epistolary mode to express a multitude of different subjective positions, Rousseau engages it for both literary and political exploration in his novel.

Like the despotic spaces of both the seraglio and the convent that Montesquieu and

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<sup>155</sup> Diderot, *L’Encyclopédie*, « Droit naturel, » ARTFL Encyclopédie Project. Diderot, *Encyclopedia*, “Natural Rights,” ARTFL Encyclopédie Project.

Diderot co-opt and symbolically transform through their fictional works, Rousseau attempts to convert the seemingly patriarchal Wolmar estate of *Julie* in the village of Clarens, Switzerland into an emancipatory site, as conveyed through its silence, which serves as an equalizing force that elides difference to instill a pact of friendship and transparency. While Clarens has frequently been explored as an imitation of an order of political society, less focus has been directed towards its silent dimension.<sup>156</sup> I thus begin by analyzing an ineffable scene of camaraderie at Clarens, the *matinée à l'anglaise* in Book V, which I will interpret as a paradigmatic example of how we might read Rousseau's mute eloquence politically, especially if considered in relation to the tacit elements of the contract of *Du contrat social*. I next resituate the transformation from passionate love to friendship as beyond merely a linear movement, while

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<sup>156</sup> Timothy M. Scanlan's "Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Silence," *Modern Language Studies* 7.2 (Autumn 1977): 59–76, offers a rich global perspective on silence in Rousseau's corpus, with a brief but incisive treatment of Clarens, yet does not elaborate extensively upon the *matinée à l'anglaise* that I will explore here. Maria Leone's "La « *matinée à l'Anglaise* » ou l'expérience du supplément heureux Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Cinquième partie, lettre 3" (*L'Information littéraire*, n°2, avril–juin 2001) explores the *matinée* in greater depth than Scanlan's treatment of the scene, however not as closely in connection with Rousseau's politics as I will interpret it. Richard L. Frautschi's "Some Eighteenth-Century French Stances of Silence" (*Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 79, 1971) and Elisabeth Loevlie's *Literary Silences in Pascal, Rousseau, and Beckett* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) distinguish different categories of silence, but do not address the *matinée*.

drawing upon Jacques Derrida's notion of *aimance* and Étienne Balibar's *Citoyen sujet* to suggest that the friendship Rousseau proposes holds political force as well, in its unique power to transgress and reconfigure previously prohibited stations, as with the shift in sovereignty to the formerly subjugated people found in *Du contrat social*. Derrida's *Politiques de l'amitié* illustrates the centrality of friendship to political thought in its capacity to combat tyranny, while simultaneously revealing the tyrannical risks within friendship as well. Rousseau also captures this aporia in the *matinée* and in the multifaceted relationships of *Julie*, and I will argue that in his alignment of friendship with silence as depicted in the space of Clarens, he presents a politics that attempts to subvert the androcentric model upon which the Wolmar estate initially seems to be built, therefore offering an avenue towards a more inclusive form of democracy. Nevertheless, inequality, class difference, and coercive organization ultimately persist in Clarens, revealing that it is no model of democracy, but by shining the spotlight upon Julie, Rousseau foregrounds a powerful female figure whose governance might be seen as extending beyond a solely domestic sphere, in contrast to the exclusionary limits that he elsewhere seems to lay out for women. I conclude by aligning *Julie* with the psychological domain of the general will as democratic drive.

#### CLARENS AND THE *MATINÉE*

As a remote haven of shared harmonious coexistence and transparency, Clarens has been interpreted by some as representing an ideal form of society, while others deem it a dystopia. *Lettres de deux amans, habitans d'une petite ville au pied des Alpes*, the second portion of the title of *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (and the title of the original edition), evokes the alpine setting of Clarens, a village on the shores of Lake Geneva, near where Rousseau himself grew up. This title emphasizes the passionate love between Julie and her former tutor St. Preux,

around which the initial half of the story revolves, preceding Julie's marriage to the nobleman Wolmar, arranged by her father the Baron d'Étange, who disapproves of the class difference of St. Preux. Julie and Wolmar raise a family at the Wolmar estate in Clarens, which is often read as a political microcosm, with Julie herself arguing that that it is an imitation of the order of political society.<sup>157</sup> Yet there is frequent debate over the contours of participation within this space, and over the distinction between domestic and political "family," with the two often detrimentally collapsed.

While there is a tendency to align Rousseau's avowed depiction of the feminine with the family, a space of private domesticity, and the masculine with the state, a public realm comprised solely of male citizens, recent commentators have offered more nuanced studies that complicate this opposition. Elizabeth Wingrove suggests that Rousseau makes the nondeliberative, unutterable electoral image of the general will eloquent through his fictional depictions of women, insisting on their agency to offer an alternative version of political participation,<sup>158</sup> and Lori Marso similarly sees Rousseau's female protagonists as offering a broader version of

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<sup>157</sup> "L'ordre qu'il a mis dans sa maison est l'image de celui qui regne au fond de son ame, et semble imiter dans un petit ménage l'ordre établi dans le gouvernement du monde." Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 371. [The order he has brought into his house is the image of the one that prevails in his heart, and seems to imitate in a small household the order established in the governance of the earth.] Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, 305–06.

<sup>158</sup> Elizabeth Rose Wingrove, *Rousseau's Republican Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

citizenship that ultimately undermines the gender boundaries he elsewhere seems to construct.<sup>159</sup>

Speaking directly to the political implications of *Clarens*, Juliet Flower MacCannell analyzes it as an ironic representation of a patriarchal order based on the suppression of Julie's female desire, arguing that *Clarens* is best understood not as a utopic ideal, but rather as a critique of a fundamental fantasy of the "Regime of the Brother," as "farcical repetition of the dream of patriarchy, figured as the utopia of *Clarens*—the place where desire is never admitted."<sup>160</sup>

Andrew Billing likewise perceives *Clarens* as a site where Rousseau attacks despotism by imitating its oppressive elements in order to distinguish between paternal and political power, situating the difference between family and state as an essential tenet of his critique, yet maintaining the affective relational aspect of an *adoptive* version of the family as what is most political in *Clarens*, with the state acting as a surrogate parent, educating its citizens by inculcating an affective patriotic sentiment.<sup>161</sup> Julie's participation in this process may be

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<sup>159</sup> Lori Jo Marso, *(Un)Manly Citizens: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's and Germaine de Staël's Subversive Women* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

<sup>160</sup> Juliet Flower MacCannell, *The Regime of the Brother: After the Patriarchy* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 89.

<sup>161</sup> Andrew G. Billing, "Political and Domestic Economy in Rousseau's *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*," *Romanic Review* 100.4 (2009): 473–91. Billing refers to political education in Rousseau as a process of metaphorical adoption, as the state must take over the duty of educating future citizens from their natural fathers, and become a surrogate or adoptive parent, substituting law for nature. The state however substitutes for the father by *becoming* like a mother, with its

understood as problematizing the distinction between the domestic space as feminine and the public as masculine by feminizing the political as it is revealed in the contractual relations of Clarens. While following these readings in considering the space of Clarens as emancipatory in its incorporation of Julie in the governance of a private sphere that is simultaneously public, I will shift the focus to explore the politics Rousseau enacts with his silent tableau of friendship, suggesting that it is through the force of this silence that Rousseau reconfigures the social order.

The arrival of St. Preux, Julie's former tutor turned lover, to the bucolic Clarens represents a radical shift in their relationship, which is overseen by her husband Wolmar. Born into a lower station in life than the aristocratic Julie, middle-class St. Preux separates himself from her in an effort to quell their illicit romance and to protect her virtue, yet his journey around the world brings him back to her years later, and to a community modeled after his own sentimental principles. "J'y mène une vie de mon gout" [Here I lead a life to my liking], writes St. Preux to friend Milord Édouard Bomston of his first impressions of Clarens, "j'y trouve une société selon mon cœur" [here I find a society after my heart].<sup>162</sup> This society after the heart could refer to St. Preux's affection for Julie herself, as well as to her governance role in establishing a compassionate community he deeply admires. Clarens is characterized as much by its heart and shared spirit of benevolent goodwill as by its complete transparency, as St. Preux's return is by the invitation of Julie and her upper-class husband Wolmar, who is fully aware of the formerly passionate relationship between his wife and St. Preux. Often compared to the *Du*

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love embracing the children as a condition for patriotic sentiment and identification of citizens with the general will.

<sup>162</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 441. Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, 363.

*contrat social* figure of the legislator,<sup>163</sup> whom I will return to shortly, Wolmar is presented as quasi-divine, and of superior intelligence, seeing all of man's passions yet experiencing none, and he is thus able to read into Julie and St. Preux's hearts, and to help them "reform" their sentiments. In noting that it is the former Julie d'Étange rather than Julie Wolmar with whom St. Preux is in love, Wolmar considers it possible for this reformation to succeed: "Qu'ils brûlent plus ardemment que jamais l'un pour l'autre et qu'il ne regne plus entre eux qu'un honnête attachement; qu'ils soient toujours amans et ne soient plus qu'amis" [That they should burn more ardently than ever for each other, and that nothing more than an honest attachment should any longer prevail between them; they should still be lovers and be no longer but friends].<sup>164</sup> It is this unconventional project that Wolmar oversees, and while his intervention has been interpreted as noble by some critics and despotic by others, I will instead explore the silent force of the "petit ménage" that results, as captured most acutely within the *matinée à l'anglaise* scene.

A striking moment in which Julie, St. Preux, and Wolmar share a morning of silent communication and reciprocal transparency at the Wolmar estate in Clarens, the *matinée à l'anglaise* might also offer richer depth and clarity to Rousseau's political vision. Breakfast is

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<sup>163</sup> Fayçal Falaky draws one such vivid comparison in *Social Contract, Masochist Contract: Aesthetics of Freedom and Submission in Rousseau* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014), describing the legislator as, in many respects, "the carbon copy" of Wolmar, who exerts influence through "hidden and seemingly nonauthoritarian measures" (149–50).

<sup>164</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 508. Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, 417. The contradiction in this proposition calls into question what becomes of the ardent burning, and whether there is a form of sublimation at play in which love is somehow purified of its libido.

described by Julie as a meal of friendship, and one of the few moments when we are actually permitted to be solely what we are. It is important to note the exclusions that condition this gathering, as to create an intimate circle, *les étrangers*, *les valets*, and *les importuns* are left out.<sup>165</sup> Yet the silence of the *matinée* is benevolent and intensely expressive for those who do partake in it, exceeding the capacity of language to encapsulate the deep sense of redemptive harmony that it alone conveys. St. Preux describes this scene in a letter to friend Milord Édouard:

Après six jours perdus aux entretiens frivoles des gens indifférens, nous avons passé aujourd’hui une matinée à l’angloise, réunis et dans le silence, goûtant à la fois le plaisir d’être ensemble et la douceur du recueillement. Que les délices de cet état sont connues de peu de gens ! Je n’ai vu personne en France en avoir la moindre idée. La conversation des amis ne tarit jamais, disent-ils. Il est vrai, la

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<sup>165</sup> “Les étrangers ne sont jamais admis le matin dans ma chambre, et déjeunent dans la leur. Le déjeuner est le repas des amis ; les valets en sont exclus, les importuns ne s’y montrent point, on y dit tout ce qu’on pense, on y révèle tous ses secrets ; on n’y contraint aucun de ses sentiments ; on peut s’y livrer sans imprudence aux douceurs de la confiance et de la familiarité. C’est presque le seul moment où il soit permis d’être ce qu’on est : que ne dure-t-il toute la journée !” Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 488. [Outsiders are never admitted to my room in the morning and have breakfast in their own. Breakfast is the meal of friends; the house staff are excluded, the unwanted do not intrude; we say everything we think, we reveal all our secrets, we constrain none of our sentiments; there we can give in without imprudence to the satisfactions of confidence and intimacy. It is practically the only moment when we are permitted to be what we are; would it could last all day!] Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, 401.

langue fournit un babil facile aux attachements médiocres. Mais l'amitié, Milord,  
l'amitié ! Sentiment vif et céleste, quels discours sont dignes de toi ?

[After six days wasted in frivolous discussions with indifferent people, we have today spent a morning in the English manner, gathered in silence, enjoying at once the pleasure of being together and the bliss of contemplation. How few people know the delights of that state! I saw no one in France who had the slightest notion of it. Conversation among friends never runs dry, they say. It is true, the tongue furnishes mediocre attachments with a facile babble. But friendship, Milord, friendship! Powerful and heavenly sentiment, what words are worthy of thee?]<sup>166</sup>

There are certain religious resemblances in the scene of the *matinée*, such as the fact that it begins "after six days wasted in frivolous discussions," evoking the same length of time as the biblical story of creation, and in the description of a friendship of a "celestial" nature.<sup>167</sup> As with the positive role for silence in this scene of friendship, Rousseau's political conception of the general will similarly effaces power asymmetries and difference by bringing the people together

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<sup>166</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 557–58. Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, 456.

<sup>167</sup> Philip Stewart also notes in his introduction the potential religious significance of the fact that Rousseau always writes "St. Preux," in contrast to Saint Preux, making reference to a playfully fictive saint (Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, xvii).

to feel it in silence.<sup>168</sup> In *Du contrat social*, he writes: “If, when an adequately informed people deliberates, the citizens were to have no communication among themselves, the general will would always result from the large number of small differences, and the deliberation would always be good.”<sup>169</sup> The *matinée* may also be considered as emulating an ideal political state for Rousseau, as it likewise balances liberty and interdependence, with the participants together in a small group of kindred hearts, yet silently absorbed in their own activities, like the people of *Du*

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<sup>168</sup> This gathering of the people is also evident in Rousseau’s desire to unite them through public festivals in open air spaces, in contrast to the division of the actor and the spectators that he views as a risk within the theatrical audiences of the *Lettre à d’Alembert*.

<sup>169</sup> Rousseau, *On the Social Contract* in *Social Contract, Discourse on the Virtue Most Necessary for a Hero, Political Fragments, and Geneva Manuscript. The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, edited and translated by Judith R. Bush, Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly (Hanover: University Press of New England), 1994, 4:147–48. [Si, quand le peuple suffisamment informé délibère, les Citoyens n’avoient aucune communication entre eux, du grand nombre de petites différences résulteroit toujours la volonté générale, et la délibération seroit toujours bonne.] Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 5 vols., edited by Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964), 3:371. While this silent deliberation is viewed by some as stifling dissent, it may be viewed more affirmatively as preventing the possibility of misleading rhetorical appeals in order to sway the debate.

*contrat social* looking inward before voting on the general will.<sup>170</sup> While Rousseau's politics often appears to relegate women to the private sphere, the *matinée* places Julie at center stage, serving as a guide in how to love, not solely as a virtuous wife and mother in the domestic sphere, but also as a friend. The fact that the morning is spent in the English manner is furthermore in critical contrast with the French (and most notably Parisian) style of alienating babble that does not convey anything authentic, as the *matinée* is a form of communication that is based not upon words, but rather upon sentiment. The letter to Milord Édouard, who is in England, draws him into this intimate circle (although he is likewise kept at a distance as an epistolary interlocutor), which on the one hand could be merely a textual device to advance the plot, but could also be interpreted as extending the boundaries of friendship, or of the general will in relation to politics, which the social contract ultimately roots in national patriotic bonds.

In addition to the silent nature of the people of *Du contrat social*, who feel rather than deliberate over the general will, it is moreover initially instilled within them through the ineffable influence of the heteronomic figure of the legislator, of a superior intelligence (as Rousseau notes that Gods would otherwise be needed to give laws), who employs the force of persuasion instead of oratory eloquence.<sup>171</sup> The legislator has recourse to a sublime and lyrical

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<sup>170</sup> The *matinée* configuration might also run parallel to Rousseau's *Rêveries* description of St. Pierre Island on Bièvre Lake, where he succeeds in balancing his solitude with the company of a small group of close companions.

<sup>171</sup> [Il faudroit des Dieux pour donner les loix aux hommes.] Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 381. For more on persuasion and mute eloquence in *Du contrat social*, see Bryan Garsten, *Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009), 59–62.

language, and uses access to another order of authority to unite an otherwise fragmented political body, with the endurance or longevity of the polity as the test of overall effectiveness. The legislator's primary function is to help constitute the republic, addressing the underlying temporal enigma of the deferred nature of foundation, or in other words, how the social contract may be formed prior to the existence of a people with a general will to engage in such an act. In addition to addressing the lack of a means for the body politic to speak collectively, the legislator also holds powerful insight into the future and serves to fill a gap, the blind spot of the people:

Le corps politique a-t-il un organe pour énoncer ses volontés ? Qui lui donnera la prévoyance nécessaire pour en former les actes et les publier d'avance ? ou comment les prononcera-t-il au moment du besoin ? Comment une multitude aveugle, qui souvent ne sait ce qu'elle veut, parce qu'elle sait rarement ce qui lui est bon, exécuterait-elle d'elle-même une entreprise aussi grande, aussi difficile qu'un système de législation ? De lui-même, le peuple veut toujours le bien, mais de lui-même, il ne le voit pas toujours. La volonté générale est toujours droite, mais, le jugement qui la guide n'est pas toujours éclairé. Il faut lui faire voir les objets tels qu'ils sont, quelquefois tels qu'ils doivent lui paraître, lui montrer le bon chemin qu'elle cherche, la garantir des séductions des volontés particulières, rapprocher à ses yeux les lieux et les temps, balancer l'attrait des avantages présents et sensibles par le danger des maux éloignés et cachés. Les particuliers voient le bien qu'ils rejettent ; le public veut le bien qu'il ne voit pas. Tous ont également besoin de guides.

[Has the body politic some organ by which to articulate its wishes? Who will give it the foresight it needs to produce acts of will and publicize them in advance, or

how, in time of need, will it make them known? How can the blind multitude, often ignorant of what it wants, because it seldom knows what is good for it, accomplish by itself so large and difficult an enterprise as a system of legislation? The people, of itself, always wants the good, but does not, of itself, always see it. The general will is always in the right, but the judgment guiding it is not always enlightened. The general will needs to be shown things as they are, and sometimes, as they ought to appear, to be taught which path is the right one for it to follow, to be preserved from the seductiveness of particular wills, to have comparisons of times and places made for it, and to be told of those remote and hidden dangers which counterbalance the attractions of visible, present advantages. Individuals can see the good and reject it; the public desires the good and cannot see it. All equally need guides.]<sup>172</sup>

The legislator becomes the eyes for the body politic, resolving the prospective lack of cohesiveness that may result from the pursuit of particular interests over the general will. As passage from the state of nature to the civil state requires a remarkable sort of change in the people, they need an external and superior kind of mind to help them channel the general will. Although Rousseau claims the legislator may not apply force, but must instead “persuader sans convaincre” [persuade without convincing], this conflates force and desire in relation to law, and the deployment of rhetoric is both necessary to found the state, as well as the signal of its

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<sup>172</sup> Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 380. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, translated by Christopher Betts (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 75.

decline.<sup>173</sup> Speech is akin to a form of combat, as language becomes linked to partial association, which Rousseau will also underscore in his *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, with the most authentic form of communication being that which is free of representation, or expressed through imagery, like the divided body of his slain wife that the Levite of Ephraim sends to the twelve tribes of Israel to help avenge her death. As the eloquence of the ancients expresses most when it is spoken least, and Émile learns never to speak too much, the general will that is felt through a silent gathering serves as the voice of the people of *Du contrat social*, with self-disclosure of sentiment transmitted directly from one heart to the next in transparent revelation of one's conscience. Rousseau must pose as the agent of reason to give the law to political discourse, and so must the legislator act as if not the author of the text of the law. Since citizens maintain their freedom only if the laws they are constrained to follow are authentically their own, their freedom is grounded within patriotic attachment, and it is furthermore conditioned upon certain exclusions, most notably that of women and foreigners.

As *Du contrat social* remains ultimately rooted in the nation and women appear absent from the public sphere (as in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*), Milord Édouard's role as the distant friend, and Julie's relinquishing of her central place in Clarens in eventually dying to save her

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<sup>173</sup> Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 383. "Ainsi donc le législateur ne pouvant employer ni la force ni le raisonnement, c'est une nécessité qu'il recoure à une autorité d'un autre ordre, qui puisse entraîner sans violence et persuader sans convaincre." [Thus the legislator is unable to employ either force or reasoning, and must have recourse to another order of authority, which will lead without violence, and persuade without convincing.]

son are absences that haunt the text, unsettling the same political and gender boundaries that Rousseau seems to put into place. While St. Preux's tender friendship with Milord Édouard appears to conform to the fraternal role of the brother in the androcentric structure of friendship, his English background challenges the nation-based model of fraternity upon which Rousseau's politics is constructed, revealing a threatening and foreign element to the figure of the friend, as I will further explore in what follows. Milord Édouard's absence from the *petit ménage* allows its passionate story to unfold, while his own love story is omitted from the narrative and included as a supplement to the text, which further accentuates the national difference that haunts Rousseau's conception of the general will. Julie similarly threatens to tear the fabric of the fraternal order by reigning alongside (or above) her husband over the domestic economy of Clarens, and in establishing a relation that is based upon friendship with her former lover. As Christie McDonald has noted, friendship becomes the basis for all relationships in this society, with silence as its language.<sup>174</sup> Wolmar is compelled to speak about the positive nature of friendship's bond after a

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<sup>174</sup> Christie Vance (McDonald) describes the sentimental language of Clarens in relation to the artificial one of Paris in "La Nouvelle Héloïse: The Language of Paris," *Yale French Studies*, 45 (1970): 127–36, 134: "The exquisite silence of this small society completely opposes the inane babble which St. Preux describes at the dinner party in Paris. Far from being a measure of friendship, language in Paris tends to alienate men from any real communication. In Clarens, silence becomes the true language of friendship—and friendship is the basis for all relationships in this ideal society." See also Christie McDonald, "From Rousseau to Occupy: Imagining a More Equal World," in *Rousseau and Dignity: Art Serving Humanity*, edited by Julia V. Douthwaite (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 132–55.

moment of silence, as he clasps together the hands of Julie and St. Preux: “Notre amitié commence; en voici le cher lien; qu’elle soit indissoluble” [Our friendship is beginning, its dear link is here, may it be indissoluble].<sup>175</sup> This could on the one hand capture Wolmar’s magnanimity and intensity of emotion, but it could also be interpreted as a form of decree, revealing a despotic dimension in that he does not seem to give Julie and St. Preux the choice to determine their own status. This despotic possibility is later reflected in the gravity of Julie’s deathbed pronouncement on the more oppressive side to silence: “Rien ne fait tant de mal aux femmes que le silence !” [Nothing hurts women as much as silence!].<sup>176</sup> Yet as with the general will, there is also new political freedom that emanates from silence, if only as a fictional tableau. Before returning to the *matinée* in order to analyze its silent dimension in relation to the broader politics of Clarens in correspondence with the silent workings of the general will of *Du contrat social*, I will briefly turn to Derrida to explore his conception of the political nature of friendship, which is also of relevance to *Julie*.

Like Rousseau, Derrida sees political potential in the aporetic nature of friendship, and thus offers further grounds to better understand the emancipatory silent eloquence of *Julie*. In *Politiques de l’amitié*, Derrida presents friendship as a political problem, beginning from the death of the friend in the “O mes amis, il n’y a nul amy” [O my friends, there is no friend] apostrophe, which he situates as a performative contradiction in its lodging of the other or the enemy in the heart of the friend.<sup>177</sup> Friendship is unstable and unpredictable, as the love of the

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<sup>175</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 424. Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, 349.

<sup>176</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 705. Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, 579.

<sup>177</sup> Derrida, *Politiques de l’amitié*, 43. Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 27.

neighbor may transform into lust for possession, and the voice of the friend could likewise resemble a spectral appeal, revealing an even deathly element in friendship in its ability to consume the self. Yet friendship may also combat despotism, as at its core it is an *act* of loving, and whereas the enemy is essential for theorizing the political for someone like Carl Schmitt, Derrida challenges this discourse by substituting *hostis* for enemy, emphasizing the “guest” element of the etymology over that of a purely adversarial antagonism.<sup>178</sup> Friendship is political for Derrida in its potential for a “democracy to come,” and is similarly threatened internally by its own logic, as it is unable to resolve its contradictions, yet it is this autoimmunity, or prospect of destroying itself from within, that also opens new possibilities within friendship and democracy, allowing space for fluctuation and contestation. Derrida illuminates the political genealogy of friendship by tracing the history of his opening quotation, connecting it with Aristotle’s claim that good lawgivers have shown more concern for friendship than for justice, and with Montaigne’s notion of a sovereign friendship in the *Essais*. Taking issue with both Aristotle and Montaigne’s exclusion of women from this realm, Derrida offers a radical revision of this traditional fraternal conception of friendship, employing it to underscore the intertwined nature of sovereignty and democracy, as well as the conflict between them in relation to a plurality of people within the single entity of a nation. Derrida’s concerns thus closely intersect with Rousseau’s, and both establish a foundational role for silence within their politics of

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<sup>178</sup> For more on Derrida’s critique of Schmitt, see Andrew Johnson, *Viral Politics: Jacques Derrida’s Reading of Auto-Immunity and the Political Philosophy of Carl Schmitt* (Saarbrücken, Germany : Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010).

friendship and democracy.<sup>179</sup>

It is through Nietzsche that Derrida aligns friendship most closely with silence, drawing upon *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* [*Human, All Too Human*] to reveal the destructive nature of speech, which could be a refrain of Rousseau. Nietzsche's rejoinder to "O my friends, there is no friend" is that it is an error or deception that leads us into becoming friends, and that we have learned to keep silent in order to remain friends. Derrida's response is that friendship is preserved by silence, with friends protecting themselves from its illusion by remaining silent about the truth of the "fond sans fond" [bottomless bottom] upon which it is founded.<sup>180</sup> This uncertain and shifting ground from which friendship is born parallels the foundational emptiness

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<sup>179</sup> *De la grammatologie* is the most evident place to explore connections between the thought of Rousseau and Derrida. Although I will not pursue this direction further here, I accordingly examine the role of silence in the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, as well as in Rousseau's autobiographies in relation to Derrida's *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre* in "Reuniting Speech and Song: Reading Sebbar with Rousseau," *The French Review* 90.3 (2017): 39–49.

<sup>180</sup> "La protection de cette garde assure la vérité de l'amitié, sa vérité ambiguë, celle par laquelle les amis se protègent de l'erreur ou de l'illusion qui fondent l'amitié, plus précisément sur le fond sans fond desquelles se fonde une amitié pour résister à son propre abîme." Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, 71–72. [The protection of this custody guarantees the truth of friendship, its ambiguous truth, that by which friends protect themselves from the error or the illusion on which friendship is founded – more precisely, the bottomless bottom founding a friendship, which enables it to resist its own abyss.] Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 53.

of the demos, the nothingness from which it derives its power,<sup>181</sup> and Derrida seems to channel Rousseau in aligning silence with the social bond. Yet Derrida's tacit agreement reference again invokes the inversion we saw with Diderot: "Et comme les amis savent cette vérité de la vérité (la garde de ce qui ne se garde pas), il vaut mieux qu'ils gardent le silence ensemble. Comme d'un commun accord. Accord tacite cependant par lequel les séparés sont ensemble sans cesser d'être ce qu'ils sont destinés à être—et sans doute le sont-ils alors plus que jamais : dissociés, solitarisés, singularisés, constitués en altérités monadiques (*vereinsamt*)" [And as the friends know this truth of truths, they had better keep silent together. As in a mutual agreement. A tacit agreement, however, whereby those who are separated come together without ceasing to be what they are destined to be – and undoubtedly what they more than ever are: dissociated, 'solitarized', singularized, constituted into monadic alterities (*vereinsamt*)].<sup>182</sup> While this atomistic distance seems closest to Diderot's ironic formulation of the social contract in *Le Neveu de Rameau* as an animalistic *pacte tacite*, it also evokes the tension between particular interests and the general will inherent in Rousseau, and the foundational paradox dramatized in the figure of the legislator, who aims to transform human nature, *d'instituer un peuple*. Where Nietzsche rejects social contract theory as the reflection of a slave morality which aims to "seduce the strong and convert them to the morality of the weak," for Rousseau the silence of the

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<sup>181</sup> My thinking here is informed by Rancière's excluded "part of no part" in *La Méésentente* or Claude Lefort's "empty place" of power at the heart of democracy in his *Essais sur le politique : XIXe-XXe siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), or "The Question of Democracy," *Democracy and Political Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1988).

<sup>182</sup> Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, 73. Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 54.

*demos* signifies a virtuous order in which sovereignty expresses itself as collective autonomy.<sup>183</sup> Speech represents a menace to this order, threatening to divide the people by revealing the secret underlying force of contractual foundation upon a “bottomless bottom.”

In addition to Derrida’s shared political alignment of silence and friendship, his conception of *aimance* helps to shed further light upon *Julie*, as Étienne Balibar illustrates in *Citoyen sujet*.<sup>184</sup> Returning to the context of Clarens, we might consider the initially amorous relationship between St. Preux and Julie as the error or deception that Derrida describes in deconstructing friendship from Aristotle to Nietzsche, as the “open secret” upon which the bond of friendship is initiated at Clarens by the legislator-like Wolmar, who forces them to be free (of their forbidden love) and to enter into friendship by conjoining their hands in the gardens where this love first blossoms. Much like the legislator aims to transform human nature, Wolmar too seeks to alter the sentiments of St. Preux and Julie. Yet the transformation that occurs is far from a simple shift from passionate love into friendship, and it is here where Derrida’s conscription of *aimance* is beneficial. A term coined in 1927 by French linguist and psychoanalyst Edouard Pinchon, *aimance* initially served as a means to designate a concept of object attraction that would not necessarily entail sexual satisfaction.<sup>185</sup> Derrida’s adoption of this term furthermore

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<sup>183</sup> Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 42.

<sup>184</sup> See Étienne Balibar, *Citoyen sujet et autres essais d’anthropologie philosophique* (Paris: PUF, 2011).

<sup>185</sup> Balibar recounts the origin of *aimance* in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, edited by Barbara Cassin, translation edited by Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and

stems from his own friendship with Moroccan author Abdelkébir Khatibi, who employs *aimance* in his work to reconfigure the distinction between love and friendship, describing a form of love that exists *within* friendship.<sup>186</sup> For Derrida, this third term that is neither love nor friendship helps to identify “an indeterminate affect that circulates among modalities of love and friendship on a spectrum of sentiments that defy description or enumeration.”<sup>187</sup> Balibar considers *aimance* in this respect as somewhat parallel to Freud’s theorization of the category of *pulsion*, with its neutralization of the active/passive opposition in desire, which may too be relevant for thinking of Rousseau’s conception of the general will, with a present, active democracy, but one that is also silent. I will expand upon Balibar’s treatment of *aimance* in relation to the passions and the new configurations of friendship that develop between Julie, St. Preux, Wolmar, and Julie’s cousin Claire to further illuminate how Rousseau’s silent experiment in *Julie* also serves a

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Michael Wood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014): “[*Aimance*] was coined in 1927 by the French linguist and psychoanalyst Edouard Pichon, a figure who influenced Lacan. *Aimance* was interestingly picked up by the francophone Moroccan writer Abdelkebir Khatibi, who used it as a general title for his poetic works. It is from Khatibi, a close friend, rather than Pichon, that Jacques Derrida borrowed the term” (605).

<sup>186</sup> In addition to serving as an active affinity in interpersonal relations, *aimance* for Khatibi is also manifest in sites of passage or resistance in encounters between cultures, nations, and spirituality. See Abdelkébir Khatibi and Marc Gontard, “L’aimance et l’invention d’un idiome,” in *Œuvres de Abdelkébir Khatibi. II, Poésie de l’aimance* (Paris : Éditions de la Différence, 2008).

<sup>187</sup> Balibar, *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, 605.

political function.

## SILENCE AND THE PASSIONS

*Aimance* helps to demonstrate that St. Preux and Julie's relationship undergoes a more complex shift than a mere transition from love into friendship, as it furthermore entails a sort of reconfiguring of roles, while incorporating Wolmar and Julie's cousin Claire d'Orbe, along with the servants of Clarens within it, thus moving beyond simple coupling to establish a new form of sovereign friendship and politics. Joan DeJean has rightly noted that many commentators seem to ignore the significance of the first half of *Julie*, instead privileging the latter books, as the silence of the *matinée* and the politics of Clarens indeed take on their deepest meaning when viewed in relation to the context of the initial romance.<sup>188</sup> Prior to the silence of friendship in the *matinée* at Clarens, both the beginning and the end of Julie and St. Preux's romance are also characterized by moments of silence. The initial silence between them is one of innocence that is lost with the exchange of words as their passion intensifies, which also eventually leads to their transgression and downfall, and communication then ceases for a number of years as St. Preux is traveling the world, prior to his reappearance at Clarens.<sup>189</sup> Language thus leads to corruption,

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<sup>188</sup> Joan E. DeJean, *Literary Fortifications: Rousseau, Laclos, Sade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>189</sup> Vance (McDonald) situates this initial silence in relation to the figural language of the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*: "Lovers do not speak the language of reason. Theirs is the language of feeling, and feeling according to St. Preux, must be expressed in images. They recapitulate the first language of man in their language of love" (131). Vance also notes the significance of the

and the pact of friendship represented by the *matinée* and sealed within the Elysium upon St. Preux's homecoming seems to represent a return to innocence. It also transforms St. Preux's relationship with Julie into a new form beyond mere coupling, as it incorporates Wolmar, as well as Claire, who has already played a significant intermediary role between St. Preux and Julie. In contrast to the historically purely male structure of friendship, the women now gain access to roles to which they were formerly restricted, and these self-declared "inséparables" become a sovereign community that is characterized by silent, transparent communication between souls.

In addition to the equalizing silence of friendship that opens up this formerly male-dominated tradition to include Claire and Julie, there is also a transformation that occurs in the male protagonists which enables them to occupy new spaces as well, as is evident in another scene of silence, when St. Preux is allowed access into Julie's bedroom for a visit as she is gravely ill with smallpox. After being granted entry into this intimate, female space by Claire, who swears St. Preux to silence so as not to disturb Julie, he may only communicate through gesture, taking up Julie's hand and covering it with kisses,<sup>190</sup> while exposing himself to her illness in the process, thereby dramatizing the deathly risk of the friend that Derrida delineates. John O'Neal identifies even more at play in this moment, noting that St. Preux is also stripped of his voice and even given a different name (as this scene is also the first time that he is called "St.

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talisman that Julie sends to St. Preux, which he preserves as an emblem of their non-verbal communication.

<sup>190</sup> Julie describes this gesture as an immediate form of communication between souls, much like that of the *matinée*.

Preux”), along with a new “transgendered” identity, not in the sense of being sexually altered or emasculated, but rather of abandoning his former male voice and identity, entering Julie’s room to care for her in an altered, more spiritual sense than that of the former passionate encounters.<sup>191</sup> For O’Neal, this transgenering is illustrative of an intersection between spirituality and gender confusion that he sees as characteristic of the Enlightenment, which might also be evident in the eunuchs of Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes*, in the encounters between the nuns of Diderot’s *La Religieuse*, or in the pantomime of *Le Neveu de Rameau*, with the Nephew’s acting out female roles. This moment of transgression in Julie’s bedroom likewise reconfigures the psychological composition of St. Preux, as Rousseau seems to employ this gender neutralization and erasure of difference to concretize the silent, egalitarian space of friendship, while enabling St. Preux and Julie to still maintain a passionate connection within their hearts, even if she is married to Wolmar. As Rousseau’s social contract redistributes sovereignty to the people, to whom it was formerly denied, St. Preux gains entry to a space that was previously forbidden, elevating the well-being of Julie, Wolmar, and Clarens, akin to the general will, above his particular interests. Although he is unable to physically unite with Julie as he formerly did, this constraint upon their passionate relationship enables St. Preux a new form of freedom in friendship, as this altered state enables him to communicate with her on an enhanced level that connects their inner spirits.

Like St. Preux, Wolmar too, seems to undergo a form of conversion through his relationship with Julie and friendship with St. Preux, shifting from an initially paternalistic and aristocratic position to a similarly more transgendered and egalitarian stance, renouncing his

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<sup>191</sup> John C. O’Neal, *The Progressive Poetics of Confusion in the French Enlightenment* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 143–47.

particular interests to that of the general will. Wolmar first establishes contact with Julie through his military friendship with her father, the Baron d'Étange, and soon achieves an understanding of the importance of virtue and of the general character of man. Instead of being driven by the pernicious passions of *amour propre* and vainly concerned about how others might view him differently if he were to occupy lower ranks,<sup>192</sup> he instead comes to embrace the primitive passion of *amour de soi*, exploring different stations that may help him to compare and understand them all,<sup>193</sup> “making himself into an actor in order to become a spectator” of judging virtuous conduct, as he further describes his desire to change his own nature to become an *œil vivant*, or living eye.<sup>194</sup> This flexibility and openness to occupying different positions in order to become more virtuous is evident in Julie’s impact upon Wolmar’s professional life, as he ascribes to her his choice to become a peasant and a gardener. It is similarly evident personally, as he is active in allowing Julie’s friendship with St. Preux to blossom, even inviting him to live at Clarens and to tutor his children with full knowledge of the formerly romantic nature of their relationship. While Wolmar is initially characterized by his cold and controlling nature, his ability to share his household with St. Preux suggests a certain fluidity and transformation of

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<sup>192</sup> There is ambiguity surrounding Wolmar’s origins, alluded to in footnotes, although never revealed to the reader.

<sup>193</sup> This is evocative of Rousseau’s own professional trajectory, as described in the *Confessions*.

<sup>194</sup> “Je me fis acteur pour être spectateur.” Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 492. [I made myself an actor in order to be a spectator.] Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, 403. Here Wolmar might also be viewed as advocating for the general will, which may, too, be considered as an *œil vivant*.

character that is brought on by the desire of Julie, and this metamorphosis is also evident within the *matinée*.

In the midst of the *matinée* while Julie, St. Preux, and Wolmar are lost in their own silent reveries, yet together in each other's company, the scene is punctuated by another role reversal which underscores Julie's governance, elevating her to a position that is neither purely romantic nor domestic.<sup>195</sup> The children enter the space along with chambermaid Fanchon, and maintaining stereotypical gender roles, the women embroider as the men read the gazette and speak of the king, when Julie mentions that she envies sovereigns only the process of making themselves beloved. St. Preux describes Wolmar's response, which serves to reveal a transition of roles:

N'enviez rien, lui a dit son mari d'un ton qu'il m'eût dû laisser prendre; il y a longtemps que nous sommes tous vos sujets. A ce mot, son ouvrage est tombé de ses mains ; elle a tourné la tête, et jeté sur son digne époux un regard si touchant, si tendre, que j'en ai tressailli moi-même. Elle n'a rien dit : qu'eût-elle dit qui valût ce regard ? Nos yeux se sont aussi rencontrés. J'ai senti, à la manière dont son mari m'a serré la main, que la même émotion nous gagnait tous trois, et que la douce influence de cette âme expansive agissoit autour d'elle et triomphait de l'insensibilité même. [. . .] C'est dans ces dispositions qu'a commencé le silence dont je vous parlais : vous pouvez juger qu'il n'étoit pas de froideur et d'ennui. Il n'étoit interrompu que par le petit manège des enfants ; encore, aussitôt que nous avons cessé de parler, ont-ils modéré par imitation leur caquet,

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<sup>195</sup> See O'Neal's *The Progressive Poetics of Confusion in the French Enlightenment* for a detailed and perceptive description of this reversal, 153.

comme craignant de troubler le recueillement universel.

[“Envy nothing,” her husband said in a tone of voice he should have left to me; “We have all long been your subjects.” At this word, her needlework fell from her hands; she turned her head, and cast on her husband such a touching look, so tender, that I myself thrilled at it. She said nothing: what could she have said to equal that look? Our eyes also met. I could tell from the way her husband clasped my hand that we were all three caught up in the same emotion, and that the sweet influence of that expansive soul was acting around her, and overcoming insensibility itself. It was in this frame of mind that the silence I was speaking of began; you can well imagine that it was not one of coldness and boredom. It was interrupted only by the children’s little frolics; even then, the minute we stopped talking, they moderated their chatter in imitation, as if fearing to disturb the general contemplation.]<sup>196</sup>

Wolmar and St. Preux affirm Julie’s reign over them, and in aligning herself with the king, she redistributes his sovereignty, with love and friendship as her guiding precepts.<sup>197</sup> Julie’s silent and persuasive force in solidifying these bonds is evocative of Derrida’s concept of *aimance* in

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<sup>196</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 559. Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, 457.

<sup>197</sup> Love and friendship here could also be aligned with subjection to Julie as sovereign, in which case the political structure of monarchy configures their love for Julie as a mechanism of power, and not its emancipatory dissolution. This reign of love could also be seen as borrowing from the courtly love tradition that idolizes and deifies the power women supposedly exert over their male lovers.

that it exceeds both love and friendship, with a driving energy that founds new intersubjective possibilities, replacing particular interests with a stronger desire for the general will. Julie displaces Wolmar as legislator, dropping her needlework and instead taking up the position of the *œil vivant* in the mute eloquence of her penetrating gaze, as Wolmar and St. Preux clasp hands in union, a reversal of the earlier moment between Julie and St. Preux in the gardens. Julie also supplants St. Preux as tutor, as Wolmar, St. Preux, and the children now become her disciples. Claire's daughter Henriette corrects the boys' errors as they read a book together, mirroring the men's misreading of the gazette; this suggests a similar ascendancy over them, and a role in carrying forth the message of love taught by Julie, her surrogate mother whom she will further channel and incarnate after Julie's death. The children's mimicry of this silence demonstrates its originary and enduring resonance, and the advancement of Julie beyond merely a passionate or familial role. Her ability to purvey a silent force to unite those around her beyond their own particular interests reveals the centrality of the message of love at the heart of the *matinée*.

Claire similarly affirms Julie's strength with her claim that "ma Julie, tu es faite pour régner" [my Julie, you are born to reign], and their connection further underscores the unique and political nature of the friendship among these *inséparables*.<sup>198</sup> In addition to Julie's fostering bonds of friendship with her former lover and between St. Preux and her husband, her relationship with her cousin Claire offers a model of female friendship that lies in stark contrast to this formerly male-dominated political tradition outlined by Derrida; *Julie* provides a response

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<sup>198</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 409. Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, 336.

to another question that Derrida raises, that of the role of the sister, or why women are left out.<sup>199</sup> Julie and Claire's friendship serves to address the exclusion of women from the realm of political friendship, and one indication of their kindred, transparent hearts is evoked within the very name "Claire," which means *clair*, or "clear," in close relation to the Clarens lakeside setting, as Jean Starobinski has perceived.<sup>200</sup> Alongside one another nearly throughout the novel, Claire and Julie describe themselves as sharing one soul, and decide to raise their families together after the death of Claire's husband, with Julie taking care of Henriette, and Claire overseeing the education of Julie's sons. After bearing witness to Julie's earlier romance with St. Preux, being present during their first encounter and helping to facilitate it, Claire almost becomes romantically entangled with him herself, but remains true to her cousin, and even spends the night in bed with Julie shortly before her death, leading some commentators to speculate that they share an amorous relationship. My interest is more in how Claire and Julie's friendship could be understood as calling into question the foundations of the patriarchal model that Rousseau elsewhere seems to defend, and how we might interpret their relationship as dramatizing the social contract. This is perhaps most evident in Claire's proclamation:

Ton empire est le plus absolu que je connoisse : il s'étend jusque sur les volontés,  
et je l'éprouve plus que personne. . . . Ton cœur vivifie tous ceux qui

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<sup>199</sup> MacCannell also eloquently foregrounds the question of the sister in *Julie* in *The Regime of the Brother*.

<sup>200</sup> See Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, la transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

l'environnement, et leur donne pour ainsi dire un nouvel être dont ils sont forcés de lui faire hommage, puisqu'ils ne l'auroient point eu sans lui. . . . Est-il possible de te voir longtems, sans se sentir pénétrer l'âme des charmes de la vertu et des douceurs de l'amitié ?

[Your empire is the most absolute I know. It extends even to the wills of others, and I am more subject to it than anyone. . . . Your heart vivifies all those around it and gives them so to speak a new being for which they are forced to pay tribute to yours, since they would not have obtained it otherwise... Is it possible to see you for long without feeling one's soul filled with the charms of virtue and the comforts of friendship?]<sup>201</sup>

Julie's silent "empire" may be viewed as political in that she is helping to construct a social bond psychically structuring "the people" around her heart, and altering human nature by creating a new communal being that extends beyond their particular wills. There is nevertheless a despotic element that remains within Julie's "empire," implied by this word, and in the fact that the people are forced to pay tribute to her, but she has displaced force with love, and replaced the paternalistic reign of the king. Although Julie has only male children, her friendship with Claire enables her to become a surrogate mother to Henriette, who embodies a future female citizen with a unique capacity to reign, or even a new version of Julie, already herself a new Héloïse.

Julie takes the struggle of the earlier Héloïse one step further through the legacy of friendship she instills in Clarens, which carries forth after her death. The Héloïse of the twelfth-

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<sup>201</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 409–410. Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, 336.

century letters also has a love affair and maintains epistolary correspondence with her tutor Abélard, exhibiting resistance to established oppressive orders against women. Peggy Kamuf aligns Julie's story with that of Héloïse, who contests the institution of marriage and the space of the convent, suggesting that Julie is similarly "positioned at the juncture of one social order which can no longer sustain its claim to legitimate power and another which must succeed to that claim without violence."<sup>202</sup> Julie's nonviolent resistance to this social order is evident in her combat with her father, who employs physical violence against her (resulting in the death of her unborn child) when she confesses her love for St. Preux; although Julie respects her father's wishes by instead marrying Wolmar, she combats the despotic patriarchal hierarchy without violence by generating a community based upon love and friendship. This community both enables her to maintain her love for St. Preux, as well as to have a daughter in Henriette to carry forth her legacy, thanks to Claire, to whom her heart remains perhaps most intimately attached. As with the religious background of Héloïse, Julie becomes increasingly absorbed in spiritual education as her death approaches, and beyond embodying a new Héloïse, she could even be viewed as a new Christ-like figure whose message is love. The final letter of the novel is from Claire, ventriloquizing Julie in its last lines:

Que son esprit nous anime, que son cœur joigne tous les nôtres; vivons toujours sous ses yeux. J'aime à croire que du lieu qu'elle habite, du séjour de l'éternelle paix, cette âme encore aimante et sensible se plaît à revenir parmi nous, à retrouver ses amis pleins de sa mémoire à les voir imiter ses vertus, à s'entendre

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<sup>202</sup> Peggy Kamuf, *Fictions of Feminine Desire: Disclosures of Heloise* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 10.

honorer par eux, à les sentir embrasser sa tombe et gémir en prononçant son nom. Non, elle n'a point quitté ces lieux qu'elle nous rendit si charmants ; ils sont encore tout remplis d'elle. Je la vois sur chaque objet, je la sens à chaque pas, à chaque instant du jour j'entends les accents de sa voix... J'entends murmurer une voix plaintive ! ... Claire ! ô ma Claire ! où es-tu ? que fais-tu loin de ton amie ? ... Son cercueil ne la contient pas tout entière... il attend le reste de sa proie... il ne l'attendra pas longtemps.

[May her spirit inspire us: may her heart unite all of ours; let us live continually under her eyes. I like to believe that from the place where she dwells, from the abode of eternal peace, it pleases that still loving and sensible soul to return among us, to find her friends filled with her memory, to see them imitate her virtues, to hear herself honored by them, to feel them embrace her tomb, and moan as they utter her name. No, she has not departed these premises which she made so charming to us. They are still quite full of her. I see her in every object, I feel her at every step, at every moment of the day I hear the strains of her voice... I hear a plaintive voice murmur! . . . Claire, O my Claire, where art thou? What does thou far from thy friend? . . .her coffin does not contain all of her. . . it awaits the rest of its prey. . . it will not wait for long.]<sup>203</sup>

In stark contrast to previous models of binary pairings in love or friendship, like that in the tale of the original Héloïse, Julie's relationships and her legacy are based upon an equalizing network

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<sup>203</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 744–745. Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*,

of relations that bond the people of Clarens together around her message, enabling the reciprocal participation of everyone. Her reign appears democratic to a certain degree, but also evokes the menace that Derrida identifies within the silence of friendship, which becomes a deathly silence in the final lines of *Julie*, as she beckons Claire to join her, to carry forth the sacred bonds of friendship within a world that eternally transcends all language. The image of the Elysium that was once a garden of Eden for the passions reveals its Elysian side, along with glimpses of a “democracy to come” in the friendships born of *aimance* at Clarens.

### THE DEMOCRATIC DRIVE

Clarens represents a dramatization of the general will as psychical polity or drive,<sup>204</sup> with friendship offering a means to explore how individuals reconcile their own interests with the greater community, which extends beyond Julie, St. Preux, Wolmar, and Claire, and into the broader Clarens population. Clarens is not an egalitarian society, as it is broken into different classes, and although the Wolmar estate is silently organized around a system of openness and transparency, there remains some separation between private and public society, as well as certain power asymmetries, with spaces that are off limits to the servants.<sup>205</sup> Much like friendship

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<sup>204</sup> Here I follow Balibar, Kamuf, and especially MacCannell’s description of how Rousseau employs a vocabulary of desire at the very point where the democratic body emerges: “The motive of the ‘people,’ the ‘democratic’ drive is thus seen by Rousseau as a dialectic of desire, of a competition between eros and thanatos” (MacCannell, 66).

<sup>205</sup> These spaces include the Elysium, the Apollo Room where special meals are held, as well as some of the inner chambers. See John C. O’Neal, “Morality in Rousseau’s Public and Private

operates as a liberating constraint in regulating the passions, there is also a form of restriction exerted upon the Clarens servants, which St. Preux describes in comparison to the limitations within a republic: “Dans la République on retient les citoyens par des mœurs, des principes, de la vertu : mais comment contenir des domestiques, des mercenaires, autrement que par la contrainte et la gêne ? Tout l’art du maître est de cacher cette gêne sous le voile du plaisir ou de l’intérêt, en sorte qu’ils pensent vouloir tout ce qu’on les oblige de faire” [In a Republic citizens are restrained by morals, principles, virtue: but how can domestics, mercenaries, be contained other than by constraint and coercion? The master’s whole art consists in hiding this coercion under the veil of pleasure or interest, so that they think they desire all they are obliged to do].<sup>206</sup> A characteristic move of Rousseau’s, this hidden coercion is evident within the psychological attachment of the Clarens servants to their masters, Wolmar and Julie, whose behavior and virtue they seek to emulate, which enables them to live in concord with one another; in order to truly love and to live like their masters, the servants must also love one another equally.<sup>207</sup> While classes exist within Clarens, and power enables the masters to coercively shape the climate of the community, this difference is essentially effaced through the love that the servants share for their

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Society at Clarens,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*. 89e Ann ée, No. 1 (Janvier–Mars 1984).

<sup>206</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 453. Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, 373.

<sup>207</sup> Similar hidden force is evident in the figure of the legislator of *Du contrat social*, as well as in the tutor of *Émile*.

masters and for one another.<sup>208</sup> St. Preux likens this love to the Christian charity that is merely spoken of in church, yet truly experienced at Clarens without being articulated.<sup>209</sup> As with the silence of the *matinée*, this love of the Clarens domestics is unspoken, but rather silently felt, as the servants emulate the equalizing and transparent climate within their own interactions, often rendering services for one another in secret, internalizing a system of self-governance based upon virtue.<sup>210</sup>

While a silent *demos* formulated around collective desire creates something new and beyond the strictures of a sovereign head or coupling, as within the heightened friendship read through the lens of Derrida's *aimance* and enacted within *Julie*, its forceful potential carries a threat as well, one that erodes the boundaries between self and other. Clarens is constructed around the goodwill of Julie and Wolmar, but they have screened all of the servants together in

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<sup>208</sup> A paradigmatic example of the equality at Clarens is the moment of the grape festival, when masters and servants work and eat together side by side.

<sup>209</sup> St. Preux expresses the similarities and differences in relation to Christian charity: "C'est ce qu'on nous dit tous les jours au Temple sans nous le faire sentir; c'est ce que les habitants de cette maison sentent sans qu'on leur dise." Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 462. [That is what they tell us every day at Church without bringing us to feel it; it is what all the inhabitants of this house feel without being told.] Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, 380.

<sup>210</sup> "On fait plus; on les engage à se servir mutuellement en secret, sans ostentation, sans se faire valoir." Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 463. [They go further; they invite them to help each other silently, unostentatiously, without making a show of it.] Rousseau, *Julie, or, The New Heloise*, 380.

order to avoid bringing in those whose presence suggests any antipathy might result, raising the question as to what comprises the criteria for such an assessment. Whereas such screening might be possible within the private realm, displacing citizens from the public sphere based upon the potential to create discord may be prejudicial. While particular interests are allowed to coexist within the context of the general will, is anything prospectively lost by its silent, “equalizing” force? Considering the general will as a democratic drive is helpful for envisioning a politics of fluctuation and plasticity, but one that is also founded upon a coercive force, casting a shadow that may haunt the people in its destructive threat to the self, subordinating individual voices to a shared feeling. Just as Derrida’s *aimance* suggests something beyond love or friendship, in the context of *Julie*, it also entails sublimating a part of the self, an act that may prove beneficial or harmful. St. Preux appears to gain only a greater sense of self within the space of Clarens; however, Julie dies as a result of the act of saving her son from drowning, so she may be seen as losing her self, while simultaneously sustaining life in the community that she has built.

Clarens may be considered as a political testing ground for Rousseau, incarnating the love and virtue of Julie and the silent, sacred bonds of friendship that she instills within the people, but it is also a community that must endure in her absence. The deathly finale extends the model of friendship embodied by the *matinée* beyond Julie’s family and friends into the greater Clarens community, while destroying its very foundation by converting Julie into a sort of heteronomic figure, similar in ways to the legislator, whose message of love lives on within them.<sup>211</sup> As Julie and St. Preux learn to reconfigure their passions into something more inclusive

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<sup>211</sup> It is also important to note the distinction between the heteronomic figure of the legislator and that of Julie, as she is said to “reign” at Clarens prior to her death, whereas Rousseau notes that

beyond Clarens, the people must continue to reform their own passions to serve a purpose that is greater than their particular interests. Clarens stands as a space between the state of nature and the corrupted Parisian world of artifice and vain chatter, with its silence as an antidote to potentially intractable debate, and as a means of restoring the sentiment and feeling that may be lost within the misleading platitudes of language. Like the empty center of the address,<sup>212</sup> Clarens possesses a silent and empty political center with the death of Julie, but one that perhaps offers a polity that endures, and the hope for a “democracy to come” within a new vision of friendship.

Although women may not seem to hold an equal place with men in much of Rousseau’s

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examples of lawgivers such as Lycurgus abdicate *before* giving laws to Sparta. The Clarens community may be considered as founded upon the love that Julie elicits as the social bond, and as Rousseau notes the test of the true legislator is the endurance or longevity of the polity, the Clarens political community must be able to live on after the death of Julie.

<sup>212</sup> While it is need that dictates the first gestures, language for Rousseau is born of passion, and is initially figurative. Only poetry is spoken at first, with reasoning coming later, as the transposition of ideas for passion is eventually linked to words. He describes this transitional process in the fable of the giant in his *Essai sur l’origine des langues*, an initial act of denomination. As Derrida and Paul de Man have argued, this passage is paradigmatic in its illustration of the referential indeterminacy of language, or the empty center that the address enters into life. Much like the figurative nature of the initial languages that Rousseau describes in the *Essai*, he also creates an ideal world, “un monde idéal,” at the beginning of his *Dialogues*, where communication also seems to be largely nonverbal.

political writing, *Julie* reveals certain dimensions of his thought that privilege the female position as he adopts the perspectives of women by composing stirring letters written by them, like both Montesquieu and Diderot before him.<sup>213</sup> The unparalleled success and acclaim of *Julie* among readers suggests a unique strength in the feminine voice, which Rousseau underscores in the power he attributes to Julie in the *matinée*. Julie and her surrogate daughter Henriette assume leadership positions above the men in this scene, accentuated by a silence that is affirmative in its commanding role as a benevolent and equalizing force. In aligning this silence with that of the *demos* of *Du contrat social*, I have sought to outline how it embodies something beyond love or friendship, in a kindred spirit to Derrida's notion of *aimance*, as a new popular sovereignty aligned with the psyche. Julie furthermore rewrites the politics of friendship in her relationships with St. Preux and Claire, forging bonds that transgress prescribed roles, reconfiguring the passions to construct purposeful social bonds around desire, as structured both politically and symbolically. Extending the political model of friendship beyond its past social inequalities, Clarens comes to embody a political microcosm for Rousseau's vision of the social contract, with Julie breathing life into this community, which is born as the *demos* around her love and sustained in her absence. Julie is exceptional as an agent producing general will of silence at Clarens, channeling the oppressive silencing of women under patriarchy into a more just system, albeit one that still contains elements of inequality and force. Clarens inevitably falls short of an egalitarian society; yet, Rousseau does channel a powerful female protagonist in Julie, who may be seen as haunting his political writing by transcending the very limits that he seems to

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<sup>213</sup> That is in Montesquieu's revolutionary letters by Usbek's wives, and in Diderot's depiction of Suzanne Simonin.

prescribe, as other commentators have similarly articulated. I have aimed to build upon this claim to demonstrate how Julie co-opts silence, employing it towards emancipatory ends. While the general will cannot be represented and does not possess a body with a mouth to express itself, Julie dramatizes its potential, feminizing it and underwriting it with desire reforged into a silent political bond of friendship that overwrites or suppresses an originary division in the community. As Julie is ultimately unable to live in Clarens, her spirit endures, along with the silent resonance of the *matinée* as a moment to further democratize by incorporating those who remain excluded.

## CHAPTER 4: STAËL'S INEFFABLE ENTHUSIASM

*Quelquefois aussi j'achève sur ma lyre,  
par des accords, par des airs simples et nationaux,  
les sentiments et les pensées qui échappent à mes paroles.*<sup>214</sup>

Germaine de Staël, *Corinne ou l'Italie*

As daughter of banker and statesman Jacques Necker and Suzanne Curchod, hostess of one of the most popular salons of Paris, Anne Louise Germaine Necker, the future Baronne de Staël-Holstein, was raised in an intellectual climate, and was in a sense born into the principles of Rousseau from an early age.<sup>215</sup> Where Rousseau despises the contrived elements of discourse and writing, Staël likewise condemns judgments based on partisan praise and calculated affront, instead valorizing writers who speak to “la France silencieuse mais éclairée, à l’avenir plutôt qu’au présent” [the silent but enlightened France, to the future rather than the present], as she

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<sup>214</sup> Germaine de Staël, *Corinne ou l'Italie* in *Œuvres complètes de Madame la baronne de Staël-Holstein, tome I*, (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1967), 675. [Sometimes, too, with chords and simple, national melodies, I complete on my lyre feelings and thoughts I cannot express in words.] Germaine de Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, translated and edited by Sylvia Raphael, introduction by Johns Isbell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 46.

<sup>215</sup> A portion of this chapter appears in my article “Staël’s Cosmopolitan Enthusiasm.” Copyright © 2019 Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies / Société canadienne d’étude du dix-huitième siècle. This article first appeared in *Lumen*, Volume 38, 2019, pages 89–104. Published by Les Presses de l’Université de Montréal.

explains in the preface to her first novel, *Delphine* (1802).<sup>216</sup> The early revolutionary dreams for increased equality of the 1790s seemed to have dissipated for women amidst the authoritarian nature of the Napoleonic period, but within the silence that remained, Staël saw hope for ongoing fulfillment of the seeds of the Enlightenment. Her desire to bring these dreams to fruition was already evident in her earlier engagement with Rousseau in one of her initial writings, *Lettres sur les ouvrages et le caractère de J.-J. Rousseau* (1788), in which she expresses admiration for his passionate style and ideas, but critiques his denial of a place in public affairs for women; thus while paying homage to his overall corpus and emulating his style, she offers a new challenge to his views. This contestation becomes further pronounced in Staël's later battle with Napoleon, who condemns her for the political message that he reads in *Delphine*, and soon drives her into exile. Staël and Napoleon are frequently juxtaposed as two rival voices striving over the soul of revolutionary France and Europe, with their antagonistic relationship oftentimes exemplified with the saying: "Bonaparte had so persecuted her that in Europe, one had to count three great powers: England, Russia, and Madame de Staël."<sup>217</sup> At stake between Staël and Napoleon are

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<sup>216</sup> Germaine de Staël, *Delphine*, in *Œuvres complètes de Madame la baronne de Staël-Holstein* (Geneva : Slatkine Reprints, 1967), 1:337. This translation is my own.

<sup>217</sup> Quoted in Kathleen Kete, *Making Way for Genius: The Aspiring Self in France from the Old Regime to the New* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 64; however Kete, suggests that this frequently cited phrase overemphasizes the binary opposition established around Staël and Napoleon, missing something better captured in a more to the point, albeit less dramatic original version, which stresses her freedom: "On her second trip to Germany, a new acquaintance

two different silences and separate conceptions of the nation: a militaristic, oppressive view characterized by Napoleon's silence of reason,<sup>218</sup> and the passionate ineffability of enthusiasm that is evident in Staël's *Delphine, Corinne* (1807), and "Mirza" (1795) where she revives Rousseau's mute eloquence of the heart, but aligns it with a more expansive political vision.

While Staël was raised in an environment of constant dialogue and interchange and transplants this conversational acumen into her writing, there is a less frequently explored dimension to her work that instead emphasizes more silent forms of communication.<sup>219</sup> One example of this tacit element of Staël's writing is evident in the significance that she places upon listening in her novels, as Lauren Ravalico has incisively explored within the context of

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noticed that there were only three free powers in Europe: England, Russia, and Madame de Staël."

<sup>218</sup> See Richard Boyd's "Tocqueville and the Napoleonic Legend" in *Tocqueville and the Frontiers of Democracy* (Edited by Ewa Atanassow and Richard Boyd, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) for analysis of the variety of views towards Bonaparte, as in contrast to Staël's condemnation of him as the paragon of conquest and despotism, others are more sympathetic to him, seemingly drawn in by an allure of heroism, power, and grandeur.

<sup>219</sup> Noticeable exceptions to this tendency are Simone Balayé, *L'Éclat et le silence* : "Corinne ou L'Italie" *de Madame De Staël* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000) and Toril Moi, who also considers silence in *Corinne* in "A Woman's Desire to be Known: Silence and Expressivity in *Corinne*" in Ghislaine McDayter, *Untrodden Regions of the Mind: Romanticism and Psychoanalysis*. *Bucknell Review* 45.2 (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), 143–75.

*Corinne*.<sup>220</sup> Ravalico notes how Staël's childhood friend Jeanne-Catherine Rilliet-Huber described listening as a formative element in Staël's own upbringing and development as a writer, recounting a scene from dinner at the Necker household in which Staël was not allowed to talk during dinner, but would instead listen: "Her eyes followed each speaker's movements and seemed to be jumping in front of their ideas. She never opened her mouth, and yet her body was so expressive that she seemed to speak in turn."<sup>221</sup> We might see Staël as lodging this same force within her female protagonists, the outspoken Delphine and the eloquent poet Corinne, whose words carry significant influence, but whose listening abilities enable them to achieve a richer knowledge that exceeds language. Ravalico describes this process as listening at an intersubjective level, not pursuing the literal meaning of language content, but rather operating at

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<sup>220</sup> See Lauren Fortner Ravalico, "Liquid Union: Listening through Tears and the Creation of Community in *Corinne*," in *Staël's Philosophy of the Passions: Sensibility, Society, and the Sister Arts*, edited by Tili Boon Cuillé and Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 131–49.

<sup>221</sup> Catherine Rilliet Huber, "Notes sur l'enfance de Mme. de Staël," *Cahiers staëliens* 60 (2009), 63, in Ravalico, "Liquid Union: Listening through Tears and the Creation of Community in *Corinne*," 146. Ravalico also cites Dena Goodman's alignment of this process of attentive listening by Staël as reinforcing Michael Fried's theory of absorption. See Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 79–88.

a deeper range that entails internalizing the desire of the other.<sup>222</sup> Listening may be most hauntingly resonant in the final inscription on the tree next to Delphine's grave, with which her story concludes in the form of an unanswered call: "On ne me répond pas, mais peut-être on m'entend" [No one answers me, but it may be that someone hears].<sup>223</sup> In the context of *Corinne*, Ravalico emphasizes the interrelation between listening and crying, citing the characters' nostalgia for gracious listening, while staging a silent conversation between their bodies in emotional pain expressed through the non-verbal language of tears.<sup>224</sup> Empathetic listening may thus serve as an active mode of communication, as grounds for the creation of community, and it is in this light that I will further interpret the silences that enliven Staël's fiction, yet my focus is on how this community might be established and born of an ineffable sentiment of enthusiasm that serves a political function.

In *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1799), Staël establishes the political history and potency of literature, and defines successful such

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<sup>222</sup> Ravalico draws a connection between this psychoanalytic form of listening and Roland Barthes' essay, "Le Grain de la voix," in which he defines grain of voice as the quality of human vocal instrument that makes use of language while also going beyond it toward "a visceral and bodily essence to be perceived by the listener." (139)

<sup>223</sup> Staël, *Delphine*, OC, 646. Staël, *Delphine*, translated and with an introduction by Avriel H. Goldberger (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), 468. Goldberger notes that Staël is quoting a line from her mother's *Mélanges* saying that the verse has been engraved on a funeral urn (468).

<sup>224</sup> Ravalico, 139.

literature by its ability to enthuse, a belief that she furthermore puts into practice in her own writing. Enthusiasm for Staël is a form of exaltation, a luminous force that inspires love of beauty and underlies great ideas, and it is also closely related to its Greek origins of *en* and *theos*, or “having God within us.”<sup>225</sup> As Roger Pearson has richly demonstrated, Staël draws upon the ancient lawgivers of Greece as a model for this form of inspiration.<sup>226</sup> She describes how literature produces a sort of movement in readers disposing them to moral action, which she aligns with the ancient Greek lawgivers’ belief in the power of music, eloquence, and poetry to cause an *ébranlement*, a “shocking” or “shaking,” with both physical and internal impact that inspires reflection and enthusiasm:

Les chefs-d’œuvre de la littérature, indépendamment des exemples qu’il présentent, produisent une sorte d’ébranlement moral et physique, un tressaillement d’admiration qui nous dispose aux actions généreuses. Les législateurs grecs attachaient une haute importance à l’effet que pouvait produire une musique guerrière ou voluptueuse. L’éloquence, la poésie, les situations dramatiques, les pensées mélancoliques agissent aussi sur les organes, quoi qu’elles s’adressent à la réflexion. La vertu devient alors une impulsion involontaire, un mouvement qui passe dans le sang, et vous entraîne

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<sup>225</sup> See Francine du Plessix Gray’s *Madame de Staël: The First Modern Woman* (New York: Atlas & Co., 2008), 116–117.

<sup>226</sup> See Roger Pearson, *Unacknowledged Legislators: The Poet as Lawgiver in Revolutionary France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 185. Pearson further notes how Napoleon may have seen in Staël an opposing sort of lawgiver as well (189).

irrésistiblement comme les passions les plus impérieuses.

[The masterpieces of literature, apart from the models they present, produce a kind of intellectual and physical shock, a quiver of admiration that inspires us to generous deeds. The Greek legislators attached great importance to the effect that martial or sensuous music could produce. Eloquence, poetry, dramatic situations, and melancholy thoughts, though they appeal to reflection, also affect our senses. Virtue thus becomes an involuntary impulse, a movement that courses through one's blood, and sweeps one along irresistibly like the most powerful passions.]<sup>227</sup>

The pre-eighteenth century sense of enthusiasm held a connotation of religious rapture or ecstasy, and even delusion or possession, but its generalized meaning signifies more of a fervor or zeal. Staël's employment of enthusiasm is in certain ways related to earlier political history in which it is associated with a divine immediacy that claims authority from God over the law, and is therefore linked to rebellion or revolution where it also serves as a critical, pathological category, as in antinomianism or religious civil war.<sup>228</sup> Although Staël channels this earlier and

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<sup>227</sup> Staël, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 201. Staël, *Literature Considered in Its Relation to Social Institutions in Politics, Literature, and National Character*, edited and translated by Morroe Berger (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 143.

<sup>228</sup> After the Glorious Revolution in England, enthusiasm there served as a pejorative term for advocacy of any political or religious cause in public, as it was viewed as instigating the atrocities of the English Civil War. Enthusiasm is associated with superstition and fanaticism in Rousseau in a similarly ambivalent way, since he also praises a sublime eloquence that can lead

rebellious sense of the term, she however invests it with a new pacific sentiment, an ineffable, cosmopolitan force that she employs to animate her literature.

The communities that Staël's silences dramatize within her fictional writing assemble powerful networks of women and transcend the borders of nations, thus carrying her political vision beyond the more limited scope of her predecessors. Staël might be seen in comparison as building upon Montesquieu's rationalist humanism and similarly looking towards the politics of England as a model, or like Diderot, as privileging the body as a system of communication with the power to exceed language in its expressiveness, and perhaps most evidently, as adopting Rousseau's spirit of sentimental expressiveness. Yet the reign of her fictional heroines extends beyond the seraglio, the convent, or the remote space of Clarens, transferring the sphere of their influence to the realm of the nation itself, and to the global order, introducing a cosmopolitanism exceeding the boundaries of the political aesthetics envisioned by those preceding her. Driven from France by the Revolution and later by Napoleon, Staël's writing might also reflect her own

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to theocracy. Kant struggles with this ambivalence about enthusiasm in the potential for confusion between *Enthusiasmus*, communion with a higher nature, or *Schwärmerei*, fanaticism due to the inflammation of the mind beyond the appropriate degree by a principle. Enthusiasm is aesthetically sublime for Kant, approaching what is moral and ideal, whereas fanaticism represents a form of delusion. See Jean-François Lyotard, *L'enthousiasme: la critique kantienne de l'histoire* (Paris: Galilée, 1986). The combination of an idea with an affect can spur action and events which break the continuum of history, such as the French Revolution, yet also hold the potential for barbarism, as when declarations of universal freedom are also linked with violations of liberty.

experience of persecution, as well as the creative vision that she cultivates from her time in exile. Staël's philosophy of enthusiasm is related to love, signifying a sacredness within, often felt in exile, but also with others. Through the silences of protagonists Delphine, Corinne, and Mirza, I argue that Staël depicts the dual-faceted nature of exile as an experience of isolation, but also as a source of inspiration and enthusiasm, which I explore in scenes of solitude and moments of non-verbal communication to illustrate how they might inaugurate new forms of political community.<sup>229</sup> Silence, and its political import, serves in Staël as one among other media of enthusiasm, which include music, nature, literature, and oratory poetic improvisation, all of which also spark enthusiasm or serve as manifestations of it. I will trace these different modes of enthusiasm, emphasizing how silence plays a fundamental role in different ways within each of them, while showing how enthusiasm itself is an ineffable, affective force emanating from within. Like those before her, Staël co-opts an imposed, despotic silence from its oppressive hold, reinvigorating it with a new spirit by countering the castigation of forced exile with enthusiasm.

#### DELPHINE'S UNANSWERED CALL

Set between 1789 and 1792 amidst the early stages of the French Revolution, *Delphine* tells the story of a romance between the aristocratic widow Delphine d'Albémar, a generous and outspoken supporter of the Revolution, and French-Spanish noble Léonce de Mondoville, whose

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<sup>229</sup> This offers another point of contrast with Rousseau, who is also in "exile" (self-imposed at first, from Geneva), and who claims the place (or no-place) of this exile enables him a critical perspective.

actions are largely driven by public opinion and evince his fidelity to the ideals of the Ancien Régime. Delphine rejects the social conventions that drive Léonce and many around her in Paris, instead applying her own code of moral conduct to situations that fall outside the realm of what is considered socially acceptable. Whereas Léonce is conditioned by his militaristic upbringing and sense of duty to obey the rules, Delphine's underlying motivation is her love and concern for others, which is most strikingly evident in her support of her distant cousin Matilde de Vernon's relationship with Léonce, both financially and emotionally, even though Delphine herself is also in love with him. Written in epistolary form, the narrator claims in the preface to have removed anything political from the letters, yet she also asserts a message of truth to be found within this fiction. As noted above, she dedicated *Delphine* to "la France silencieuse mais éclairée, à l'avenir plutôt qu'au présent" [the silent but enlightened France, to the future rather than the present],<sup>230</sup> suggesting that the unrealized ideals of the Revolution might still be achieved after Napoleon, or that what remains unsaid in the past might be spoken in the future. While many are marginalized and silenced by the Revolution, the guillotine, or in Napoleon's ascent to power and rule through construction of what Lori Marso frames as a "hyper-masculinist conception of politics,"<sup>231</sup> Staël sees promise within the embers of the Enlightenment, which she reignites with *Delphine*, and as I will trace in what follows, through the transformation of exilic silence into enthusiasm.

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<sup>230</sup> "Ils s'adressent à la France silencieuse mais éclairée, à l'avenir plutôt qu'au présent."

Germaine de Staël, *Delphine*, OC, 337. This translation is my own.

<sup>231</sup> See Lori Jo Marso, *(Un)Manly Citizens: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's and Germaine de Staël's Subversive Women* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 81.

In contrast to military force, music is one alternate medium of enthusiasm for Staël, with both passionate and political impact. Delphine experiences the sentiment of enthusiasm when she sings the role of Dido (from Niccolò Piccinni's 1783 opera),<sup>232</sup> prompted by her love for Léonce, and once again when Léonce arranges a surprise musical party for her at her country residence, as another wave of enthusiasm elevates her soul in an almost divine manner, beyond the realm of language: "Et quel langage en effet conviendrait mieux aux anges que cette mélodie, qui pénètre bien plus avant que l'éloquence elle-même dans les affections de l'âme! il semble qu'elle nous

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<sup>232</sup> "La beauté de cet air, l'ébranlement de mon cœur donnèrent, je le crois, à mon accent toute l'émotion, toute la vérité de la situation même. Léonce, mon cher Léonce laissa tomber sa tête sur le piano : j'entendois sa respiration agitée, et quelquefois il relevoit, pour me regarder, son visage baigné de larmes. Jamais, jamais je ne me suis sentie tellement au-dessus de moi-même; je découvrais dans la musique, dans la poésie, des charmes, une puissance qui m'étoient inconnus: il me sembloit que l'enchantement des beaux-arts s'emparoit pour la première fois de mon être, et j'éprouvois un enthousiasme, une élévation d'âme dont l'amour étoit la première cause, mais qui étoit plus pure encore que l'amour même." Staël, *Delphine*, OC, 374–75. [From the aria's beauty and my heart's turbulence, I think, my tones rang with all the emotion, all the truth of the situation itself. Léonce, my dear Léonce, let his head fall on the piano: I heard his labored breath, and occasionally he would raise a face bathed in tears to look at me. Never, never have I felt that I was so outdoing myself. I was discovering power and charm as yet unknown to me in the music and in the poetry. For the first time, the spell of the arts seemed to take hold of my being, and I felt an enthusiasm and elevation of soul that had love as its prime cause, but was purer still than love.] Staël, *Delphine*, 65.

exprime les sentimens indéfinis, vagues et cependant profonds, que la parole ne sauroit peindre” [And indeed what language would be more fitting to the angels than this melody that makes its way so much further into the soul’s affections than eloquence itself! It seems to express for us the vague, undefined yet deep sentiments that the spoken word could not portray].<sup>233</sup> While Delphine’s enthusiasm appears to be inspired by her love for Léonce, the passions are also political for Staël, as she makes clear in *De l’influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations* (1796), in which she analogizes the character of the nation to that of a person whose constitution depends upon the disposition of the passions. Written during the Terror, this treatise is specifically concerned with the passions in relation to the fanaticism of revolutionary violence, and is therefore largely associated with their mastery in this context. As her treatise suggests, if left unmitigated, the passions might prove detrimental to both the happiness of the individual, and the well-being of the nation, but like Rousseau before her, Staël is likewise attuned to their benefits, which her *Essai sur les fictions* (1795) also stresses, issuing a call for a tutelage of the passions to moderate and direct them toward suitable ends. Enthusiasm is one such way of doing so by channeling passion into politics, as Delphine’s love for Léonce is intertwined with and deterred by her political convictions, and through her fictional story, we as readers are moved by the events, perhaps experiencing our own form of enthusiasm.

Like the musical *ébranlement* Delphine experience from Dido’s aria, her love takes a tragic turn.

Delphine’s love is a sentiment that she must reconcile in the silence of exile, as Léonce marries Matilde, and Delphine departs and takes up vows in a Swiss convent, yet she finds a new form of freedom from within this solitude. As Staël writes in *De la littérature*: “Il faut donc

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<sup>233</sup> Staël, *Delphine*, OC, 515. Staël, *Delphine*, 280.

exister seul, puisqu'il est interdit de secourir le malheur, et qu'on ne peut plus rencontrer l'affection. Il faut exister seul pour conserver dans sa pensée le modèle de tout ce qui est grand et beau, pour garder dans son sein le feu sacré d'un enthousiasme véritable, et l'image de la vertu" [One is forced, therefore, to stand alone, since relieving misery is forbidden and love can no longer be found. One must stand alone to preserve in one's mind the idea of all that is great and beautiful, to protect within one's bosom the sacred fire of true inspiration (enthusiasm) and the image of virtue].<sup>234</sup> Although Delphine loves Léonce, she chooses virtue and enthusiasm above her own romantic passion in deciding to leave him, and it is from the silence of exile that she is able to cultivate the "feu sacré" [sacred fire] of these sentiments within herself.<sup>235</sup> When Delphine questions amidst the isolation of the convent whether her *caractère enthousiaste et passionné* is possibly an initial step towards madness, she looks to literature for solace, for an alternative form of community than the society of artifice and opinion to which Léonce is beholden and from which she has escaped:

J'ai voulu lire; j'ai cherché les tragédies, les romans que j'aime: je trouvois autrefois du charme dans l'émotion causée par ces ouvrages; je ne connoissois de la douleur que les tableaux tracés par l'imagination, et l'attendrissement qu'ils me faisoient éprouver étoit une de mes jouissances les plus douces: maintenant je ne

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<sup>234</sup> Staël, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, 206. Staël, *Literature Considered in Its Relation to Social Institutions*, 151.

<sup>235</sup> "D'un enthousiasme véritable" is also suggestive of a true versus a false enthusiasm, of a psychologically, politically, and religiously dangerous nature casting its shadow, particularly considering that Delphine is in a convent at this moment.

puis lire un seul de ces mots, mis au hasard peut-être par celui qui les écrit, je ne le puis sans une impression cruelle.

[I have tried to read, I have sought out the tragedies, the novels that I love; there was a time when I enjoyed the emotion they aroused; all I knew of pain was drawn by imagination, and the compassion it inspired was one of my sweetest pleasures. Now I cannot read one of those words perhaps randomly set down by the writer without reacting bitterly.]<sup>236</sup>

Failing to find a book that truly lays unhappiness bare, Delphine becomes author of one as she describes her misfortune through letters and fragments, which she continues to write from exile. Like Diderot's Suzanne, whose memoirs composed from her isolation in the convent attest to her misfortune and serve a political role, Delphine's retreat to the the convent and to writing also testify to her revolutionary political convictions. Although she has willingly sought refuge in the convent, Delphine is not there for religious reasons, but rather to defend her own moral beliefs, which stand in contrast to those of Léonce and the society of France from which she has fled. She has escaped from the harmful calumny and machinations of her own society by crossing the border into Switzerland, much like Staël establishes her own community in Coppet, yet it has come at a significant cost, as she has chosen to leave behind the man whom she loves.

Delphine's exilic emancipation is furthermore evident in her crossing beyond national boundaries and encountering the solitary landscape and the silence of nature that surrounds her, standing in sharp contrast to the society and artifice of Paris. While this separation is a painful rupture in that it detaches her from Léonce, it is also voluntarily embarked upon and liberating:

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<sup>236</sup> Staël, *Delphine*, OC, 561. Staël, *Delphine*, 349.

Ce jour m'a été plus pénible encore que tous les autres; j'ai traversé les montagnes qui séparent la France de la Suisse, elles étoient presque en entier couvertes de frimas; des sapins noirs interrompoient de distance en distance l'éclatante blancheur de la neige, et les torrens grossis se faisoient entendre dans le fond des précipices. La solitude, en hiver, ne consiste pas seulement dans l'absence des hommes, mais aussi dans le silence de la nature. . . . Quelque temps après, les postillons arrêterent ma voiture, pour me montrer, de la hauteur de Saint-Cergues, l'aspect du lac de Genève et du pays de Vaud; il faisoit un beau soleil; la vue de tant d'habitations, et des plaines encore vertes qui les entouraient, me causa quelques momens de plaisir; mais bientôt je remarquai que j'avois passé la borne qui sépare la Suisse de la France; je marchois pour la première fois de ma vie sur une terre étrangère. . . . O France! ma patrie, la sienne, séjour délicieux que je ne devois jamais quitter; France! dont le seul nom émeut si profondément tous ceux qui, dès leur enfance, ont respiré ton air si doux, et contemplé ton ciel serein! je te perds avec lui, tu es déjà plus loin que mon horizon. . . Me voici jetée dans un pays où je n'ai pas un soutien, pas un asile naturel ; un pays, dont ma fortune seule peut m'ouvrir les chemins, et que je parcours en entier de mes regards, sans pouvoir me dire: là-bas, dans ce long espace, j'aperçois du moins encore la demeure d'un ami. Eh bien ! je l'ai voulu, j'ai choisi cette contrée où je n'avois aucune relation ; je n'ai pas cherché ceux qui m'aiment, ils auroient pu me demander d'être heureuse. . .

[This day was more painful still than all the others: I crossed the mountains separating France from Switzerland, they were almost completely covered with

hoarfrost; at intervals black fir trees broke up the dazzling whiteness of the snow, and the swollen streams could be heard from deep in the chasms. Winter's solitude does not lie in merely the absence of men, but also nature's silence...

Some time later, the postillions stopped the carriage at the height of St. Cergues to show me the view of Lake Geneva and the surrounding Vaud countryside; in the lovely sunshine, the sight of so many dwellings surrounded by still verdant plains brought me a few moments' pleasure, but I soon realized that I had crossed the border separating Switzerland from France: for the first time in my life I walked on foreign soil... France! Land of my fathers and of his; delightful country I was never meant to leave. France! Whose name alone so deeply moves all those who from childhood on have breathed your sweet air and gazed on your serene skies! I lose you along with him; you are already beyond my horizon... Here I am thrown into a land where I have no support, no natural sanctuary; a land whose paths can be opened to me by my wealth alone, and whose whole territory I scan, unable to say to myself: over there, in that broad space, I can at least make out the home of a friend. Well! I willed it; I chose this land where I have no relations. I did not seek out those who love me, they might have asked me to be happy...]<sup>237</sup>

Delphine's uneasiness at crossing into Switzerland is attached to her sense of rootedness in France, as well as her desolation at being away from Léonce, yet her decision to embark upon such a difficult voyage is a testament to her virtuous conviction. Her vantage point from far above Lake Geneva overlooking the Vaud landscape on her trek is reminiscent of Saint-Preux's

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<sup>237</sup> Staël, *Delphine*, OC, 562. Staël, *Delphine*, 350–351.

exilic wandering in *Julie*, yet here Delphine is the new actor and female citizen born from this exile. Delphine is not entirely alone, as like Julie, she also has a surrogate daughter, Isore, whom she has brought along with her on this journey per the request of a friend (to provide refuge from a dangerous situation), thus cultivating a new order of cosmopolitan female education. While nature mirrors Delphine's interior sentiments of solitude and isolation, its silence is also in contrast to the sophistries of Paris that have harmed her, and to the sloganeering of the Terror, as the Revolution took an increasingly dark turn from the ideals of the Enlightenment espoused by Delphine, with distinctions between patriotism, virtue, and terror becoming increasingly blurred. Switzerland offers a space of natural refuge in opposition to the violence sweeping over France, and whereas Léonce is a proponent of military force, Delphine's enthusiasm is grounded in love.

The positive potential of the silence of exile is underscored when after the death of Matilde in childbirth, Léonce finds Delphine, who considers rescinding her religious vows to be with him, yet Léonce remains unwavering in his commitment to the primacy of public opinion. When Delphine and Léonce reunite in Switzerland, the chance at happiness is within their reach, but Léonce worries about what French society might say should it learn of this unconventional relationship. A friend, Henri de Lebensei, tries to reason with Léonce through a recourse to nature in a letter, emphasizing the chance at happiness that may exist in solitude with Delphine:

Repoussez les fantômes qui pourraient vous intimider encore; regardez le ciel, revoyez la nature, parcourez pendant quelques heures les montagnes qui nous environnent, considérez la terre de leur sommet, et dites-moi si vous ne sentez pas que toutes les misérables peines de la société restent au niveau du brouillard des villes, et ne s'élèvent jamais plus haut. Croyez-moi, les rapports continuels avec les hommes troublent les lumières de l'esprit, étouffent dans l'âme les principes

de l'énergie et de l'élévation ; le talent, l'amour, la morale, ces feux du ciel, ne s'enflamment que dans la solitude. Léonce, vous pouvez être heureux dans la retraite, vous le serez avec Delphine. Vous êtes tous les deux pleins de jeunesse, d'amour et de vertu, et vous formez le projet d'anéantir tous ces dons avec la vie ! Dans les beaux jours de l'été, sous un ciel serein, la nature vous appelle, et la méchanceté des hommes vous rendroit sourds à sa voix ! L'intention du Créateur ne se manifeste qu'obscurément dans toutes ces combinaisons de la société, que les passions et les intérêts ont compliquées de tant de manières ; mais le but sublime d'un Dieu bienfaisant, vous le retrouverez dans votre propre cœur, vous le comprendrez au milieu des beautés de la campagne, vous l'adorerez aux pieds de Delphine !

[Reject the specters that might still intimidate you; look at the sky; see nature once more, wander through the mountains all around us for a few hours, contemplate the earth from their summit and tell me if you do not feel that all of society's wretched griefs remain at the level of city fog, never rising any higher. Believe me, constant interchange with men clouds the mind's insight, stifles the principles of energy and elevation in the soul; talent, love, morality—those flames from heaven—catch fire only in solitude. Léonce, you can be happy in seclusion: with Delphine, you will be. You are both full of youth, love, and virtue: and both of you are making plans to destroy all those gifts along with life! In the beauty of summer days, under serene skies, nature calls to you and human spitefulness would deafen you to its voice! The creator's intention is but obscurely manifest in all the workings of society that have been complicated in so many ways by

passion and selfishness; but in your own heart you will find the sublime purpose of a beneficent God, you will understand Him amid the beauties of the countryside, you will worship him at Delphine's feet!]<sup>238</sup>

The energy and elevation of the soul is stifled by conversation and society, whereas a life with Delphine is equated with silence, nature, and enthusiasm, which possess a near spiritual, sublime quality. In contrast to the imagery of a cold and stagnant winter like that Delphine experiences in her first excursion across the border, the emphasis in her reunion with Léonce is upon summer's serenity, with the flames of enthusiasm catching fire with the newfound prospect of shared solitude.<sup>239</sup> Yet Léonce's refusal to yield from social convention in fearing judgment for his relationship with Delphine, adherence to tradition in upholding the values of the Ancien Régime, and eventual retreat into a military mode drive him back to France to fight for the Monarchists in the Vendée.

Léonce's decision to return to France for combat is also inflected by a scene of silent enthusiasm triggered by music, mirroring the earlier inspiration of Delphine in singing the part of Dido and upon her hearing the music in the garden, while underscoring their political divide. Whereas this moment of enthusiasm is linked to love for Delphine, it is intertwined with the military for Léonce, which beckons to him just as Delphine attests that she could never become

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<sup>238</sup> Staël, *Delphine*, OC, 617. Staël, *Delphine*, 434.

<sup>239</sup> As the critique of the social first leads to solitude in the convent followed by the ensuing prospect of happiness through *shared* solitude, here solitude might also be considered as drawing into relief distinctions between private versus public/political life, revealing the necessity of some relation to another.

his wife after witnessing his hesitation to overcome social opinion and conventions to be with her:

Dans ce moment, un régiment passa sous mes fenêtres, et une musique militaire très-belle se fit entendre. Léonce, en l'écoutant, releva la tête, avec une expression de noblesse et d'enthousiasme si imposante et si sublime, qu'oubliant toutes mes douleurs, encore une fois je m'enivrai d'amour en le regardant ; il devina mes sentimens, et laissant tomber sa tête sur mes mains, je les sentis inondées de ses pleurs.

[Just then, a regiment went by under my windows; we heard splendid military music. Hearing it, Léonce raised his head with a look of noble enthusiasm so awesome, so sublime, that forgetting all my sorrows once more, I was intoxicated with love as I gazed at him. He guessed my feelings and, dropping his head on them, flooded my hands with his tears.]<sup>240</sup>

While this moment is initiated by the sounds of the military music, it inspires an enthusiasm in Léonce beyond words, and although Delphine's own enthusiasm is related to love, a form of silent interchange occurs between them that is expressed through tears.<sup>241</sup> Claiming his soul calmed by this music, and sensing an "intelligence céleste" protecting Delphine, Léonce bids her

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<sup>240</sup> Staël, *Delphine*, OC, 632. Staël, *Delphine*, 441.

<sup>241</sup> Delphine's love for Léonce when he communicates enthusiasm linked to public life and war on the opposing side of the Revolution demonstrates the capacity of love to transcend political difference, and perhaps also to play a political role as a stronger countervailing force to that of violence.

farewell, after which she reflects that although he did share with her the feelings engrossing him during the music, she perceives they reflect his desire to go to war. While unwilling to align her own political views with Léonce's steadfast commitment to the military defense of the precepts of the Ancien Régime, Delphine remains resolute in her love for him, and it is paradoxically through her enthusiasm for the ideals of the Revolution that she arrives at the decision to continue loving him, but never to become his wife. These different modes of inspiration from the music reveal the opposing political views, with internal conflicts echoing the external division overtaking France, as their romance becomes a form of political allegory for an intractably divided nation.

Yet as much as their conflicting political perspectives divide them, Delphine and Léonce are bound by their respective forms of exile and enthusiasm, which converge one final time, leading to their demise, but also to freedom, as they choose to die on their own terms. While helping a friend to escape from being shot, Léonce is captured by the Revolutionary army in Verdun and sentenced to death. Upon finding him alone in his prison cell with nothing but a medallion containing a lock of her hair as his sole remaining possession, Delphine rushes to try to save him, making a successful eloquent plea for the judge overseeing his case, but this ruling is quickly overturned by the prosecutor who arrives from Paris. Throughout their story, Léonce and Delphine fall prey to misunderstandings caused by a calumnious society, or become victims of circumstances as their good deeds lead to twists of fate that inevitably pull them away from one another, but in the end, they come to terms with their separate positions and respective freedom as they choose their own deaths. Léonce's refusal to seize a final opportunity for a reprieve by signing an attestation that he was merely passing through France as a traveler, as well as his repudiation of the chance to be released at the last minute by his executioners, inciting

them to kill him instead, are indicative of his resolve to die. This choice is matched by Delphine, who rather than accepting a wedding ring, uses one filled with poison to end her life as she accompanies Léonce on his walk to the scaffold to be executed. A striking sense of liberty is nonetheless evident in their final moments, and particularly as they are locked up in prison<sup>242</sup> on their last night together:

Léonce et Delphine se trouvèrent seuls, au commencement de cette nuit solennelle qu'ils devaient passer ensemble, dans cette sombre prison qu'éclairait une lumière pâle et tremblante ; ils entendirent le geôlier refermer sur eux les verrous. « Ah ! s'écria Delphine ! si ces portes pouvaient ne plus s'ouvrir ; si le jour pouvait ne jamais se lever, quels lieux de délices vaudraient cette prison ! Léonce, pourront-ils t'arracher à moi ? »

[Léonce and Delphine were alone now, at the beginning of the solemn night they would spend together. In that dark prison, lit by a pale and fluttering light, they heard the jailor bolt shut their door. "If only those doors could never open again!" Delphine exclaimed. "If only day would never dawn! What scenes of delight could rival this prison? Léonce, can they tear you away from me?"]<sup>243</sup>

From this solitude and the silence as Delphine watches over Léonce in his sleep, she experiences a sense of freedom in choosing to die with him, but of her own accord. Although her tale ends

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<sup>242</sup> This allusion to emancipation from within prison is also reminiscent of Rousseau's

*Confessions* claim that if ever he were ever put in the Bastille, he would paint the tableau of freedom there.

<sup>243</sup> Staël, *Delphine*, OC, 640. Staël, *Delphine*, 455.

tragically, Delphine succeeds in choosing her own pathway and never backs down from her political convictions, offering a message for the future so that others who follow may be driven by enthusiasm to be equally engaged, and to choose their own destinies. The message inscribed on the tree next to her gravestone ends her story with an unanswered call: “On ne me répond pas, mais peut-être on m’entend” [No one answers me, but it may be that someone hears].<sup>244</sup> Perhaps it is Staël herself who takes up this call by creating another female exemplar of enthusiasm in the figure of poet Corinne.

### CORINNE’S SILENT SONG

Written halfway through Staël’s own period of exile, *Corinne ou l’Italie* further channels the enthusiasm born of silence in *Delphine*, with Corinne’s poetic improvisation extending this influence to an even broader cosmopolitan sphere. Much like Delphine, Corinne’s enthusiasm is often inspired by or aligned with music, and Toril Moi has even described *Corinne* as an opera, with Corinne shifting from an initially “excessive expressivity” to a position of total silence, but one that she herself desires after Lord Oswald Nevil’s “deafness” to her love and his marriage to her younger half-sister, Lucile.<sup>245</sup> Staël’s *Corinne* unfolds in Italy between 1794–1795, rather than when it was written (in 1806–1807), thus avoiding direct commentary on the French takeover of Italy and Napoleon’s self-coronation as King of Italy in 1805. Staël instead rewrites this moment with the dramatic coronation of the poet Corinne at the Capitoline Hill, witnessed by Oswald, who is instantly struck by her artistic capabilities and genius. His love for Corinne is

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<sup>244</sup> Staël, *Delphine*, OC, 646. Staël, *Delphine*, 468.

<sup>245</sup> Moi, 169.

inexorably interwoven with his experience of Italy, and as the semi-eponymous title suggests, Corinne and Italy seem transposable at times, as she comes to embody it, or even to inaugurate nationalism.<sup>246</sup> The French word *nationalité* first appears in *Corinne*, yet its political contours for Staël extend beyond the limits inscribed within Rousseau's nation-based social contract, as Corinne is of mixed origins, with an English father and Italian mother. From its first appearance, *nationalité* for Staël is both characterized and enhanced by its diversity, in contrast to the Napoleonic emphasis upon national uniformity, as is evident in Corinne's description of her dual education and upbringing: "Je pouvais donc me croire destinée à des avantages particuliers, par la réunion des circonstances rares qui m'avaient donné une double éducation, et, si je puis m'exprimer ainsi, deux nationalités différentes" [I could therefore believe myself destined to peculiar advantages, by the fortuitous circumstances, which had given me a double education, and, if I may so express myself, two different nationalities].<sup>247</sup> In further contrast to Rousseau's *Du contrat social* aversion to representation, this woman of a hybrid national background comes to represent Italy, but with her melancholic resilience perhaps allegorically embodying a national suffering which could well be that of France, or any other country also threatened by conquest. Suzanne Guerlac furthermore suggests that rather than representing solely a national emblem, Corinne engenders eloquence itself.<sup>248</sup> As with *Delphine*, I argue that this eloquence is matched

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<sup>246</sup> See John Isbell, "Introduction," in Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, translated and edited by Sylvia Raphael; introduction by John Isbell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), xx.

<sup>247</sup> Staël, *Corinne ou l'Italie*, 786. Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, 256.

<sup>248</sup> See Suzanne Guerlac, "Writing the Nation (Mme de Staël)," *French Forum* 30.3 (2005): 43–57.

and inspired by an enthusiasm that Staël generates from silence in *Corinne*, with a drive to combat the scourge of despotism by supplanting claims to power through violence with those of love. Again writing for a silenced people, Staël brings a bolstered energy of political renewal to this silence, lodging a cosmopolitan force within a vision of *nationalité* that stands in opposition to Napoleonic empire. Instead of influencing the people through conquest or decree, Corinne employs language and silence that serve as part of a conversation with the people and that celebrates their diversity.

Corinne's alignment with the people is evident from her first appearance and coronation in Rome, as depicted through the perspective of Scottish traveler Lord Oswald Nevil, who is initially despondent upon his arrival in Italy, yet soon finds himself drawn to and electrified by Corinne's enthusiasm. Mourning the recent death of his father, Oswald is emotionally and physically ill (coughing up blood as we first encounter him), thus opening Corinne's story with his own melancholic travails. His solitude and despair at losing his father is compounded by the isolation of entering a foreign land, along with a sentiment of being lost among the Italian crowd. Awakening to a brilliant sunshine and the sound of church bells ringing, Oswald is soon taken in by the spectacular event of the coronation of Corinne, who is introduced as a poet, writer, and improviser, and one of the most beautiful women in Rome. Corinne's impact upon Oswald is striking, as her inspired display of genius at the capitol contagiously stirs his own enthusiasm, while challenging his convictions, since her talent is publicly recognized, in contrast to English customs:

Il n'y avait certainement rien de plus contraire aux habitudes et aux opinions d'un anglais que cette grande publicité donnée à la destinée d'une femme ; mais l'enthousiasme qu'inspirent aux italiens tous les talents de l'imagination, gagne,

au moins momentanément, les étrangers ; et l'on oublie les préjugés même de son pays, au milieu d'une nation si vive dans l'expression des sentiments qu'elle éprouve.”

[There was certainly nothing more contrary to the customs and opinions of the English than this publicity given to the fortunes of a woman, but the enthusiasm which all imaginative talent arouses in the Italians infects foreign visitors, at least momentarily. They even forget their native prejudices when they are among people who express their feelings so vividly.]<sup>249</sup>

Beyond inspiring an exalted state of enthusiasm in Oswald that alleviates his melancholy and enables him to view Corinne in a more equitable light than that of the English women, her appearance is allied with the crowd, as she makes her entrance on a chariot amidst a triumphal procession, drawn by four white horses, like a goddess surrounded by clouds.<sup>250</sup> Corinne's outfit

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<sup>249</sup> *Corinne ou l'Italie*, 662. Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, 21.

<sup>250</sup> Corinne's alignment with the people is further evident: “L'admiration du peuple pour elle allait toujours en croissant, plus elle approchait du Capitole, de ce lieu si fécond en souvenirs. Ce beau ciel, ces romains si enthousiastes, et par-dessus tout Corinne, électrisaient l'imagination d'Oswald ; il avait vu souvent dans son pays des hommes d'état portés en triomphe par le peuple ; mais c'était pour la première fois qu'il était témoin des honneurs rendus à une femme, à une femme illustrée seulement par les dons du génie ; son char de victoire ne coûtait de larmes à personne, et nul regret, comme nulle crainte, n'empêchait d'admirer les plus beaux dons de la nature, l'imagination, le sentiment et la pensée.” *Corinne ou l'Italie*, 663. [The nearer she came to the Capitol, that place so rich in memories, the more the crowd admired her. The beautiful

embodies multiplicity, with an Indian headscarf wound around her head, in white, a blue stole that could be a revolutionary allusion, and she is furthermore likened to Domenichino's Sibyl, bestowing upon her prophetic or divine qualities, which combined with the mystery surrounding her last name and her origins, further contribute to the enthusiasm that she inspires in the people around her.

While Corinne's poetic improvisations accompanied by the music of her harp enable her to pay eloquent homage to the beauty of nature and to Italy, she further moves the people through her employment of silence. Corinne's poetry is described as an intellectual melody which can express the charm of the most fleeting or subtle impressions, and imposing silence upon her audience at times with it, she transports them into an exalted and uplifted spiritual state, inciting their enthusiasm. She listens to what her audience requests for her to improvise, but also to what they do not say, as during her coronation when she first catches a glimpse of Oswald, who is melancholic in the crowd. Corinne's passionate sensibility, which inspires her poetry, also enables her to read his heart, as he notes: "Corinne, sublime amie, vous qui lisez dans les cœurs, devinez ce que je ne puis dire" [Corinne, sublime friend, you who read into the heart, guess what I cannot say].<sup>251</sup> In their initial encounter, she senses his grief even without knowing of the death of his father, and silences the audience as a form of paying homage to the deceased. Referring to

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sky, the wildly enthusiastic Romans, and above all Corinne, fired Oswald's imagination. In his own country he had often seen statesmen borne in triumph by the people, but it was the first time he had witnessed honour done to a woman, to a woman renowned only for the gifts of genius.] Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, 23.

<sup>251</sup> Staël, *Corinne ou l'Italie*, 857. Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, 393.

Rome as the land of tombs, Corinne shifts her previous tone to evoke the splendor of its ruins and ancestors, linking its funeral urns with abandonment to nature's beauty in death.<sup>252</sup> Silence is a means to inspire Oswald and to access this melancholic history, which also serves to generate enthusiasm, offering hope for political renewal by invoking the grandeur of the past.

In addition to Corinne's ability to read Oswald's unarticulated sentiments or to silence the crowd and inspire enthusiasm, her own silence becomes a prominent symbol with political force. After following Oswald to England and Scotland and realizing that he has fallen for her younger half-sister, Lucile, Corinne renounces him, opting never to speak with him again, which serves as a pivotal turning point. Madelyn Gutwirth suggests that Corinne's silence in the second half of the novel represents symbolic death,<sup>253</sup> whereas Toril Moi aligns it with Corinne's desire,

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<sup>252</sup> Marie-Claire Vallois describes how Corinne's personal discourse is silenced and substituted by that of the silent monuments of Rome that however speak to the soul with their grandeur: "The heroine's lost voice is inscribed in her stone double: a fossil voice ready to live." Marie-Claire Vallois, "Voice as Fossil: Madame de Staël's *Corinne or Italy*: An Archaeology of Feminine Discourse," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 6.1 (1987): 47–60, 53. Vallois further notes how this substitution is implicit from Corinne's first appearance at the Capitol on the chariot, where she is likened to a statue. See also *Fictions féminines: Mme. de Staël et les voix de la Sibylle* (Saratoga: Stanford French and Italian Studies, 1987).

<sup>253</sup> Madelyn Gutwirth, "Du silence de Corinne et de sa parole," in *Benjamin Constant, Madame de Staël et le groupe de Coppet: actes du deuxième Congrès de Lausanne à l'occasion du 150e anniversaire de Benjamin Constant et du troisième Colloque de Coppet, 15–19 juillet 1980*, Ed. Étienne Hofmann, (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1982).

as she ultimately *chooses* silence, offering a stark contrast to her earlier poetic expressiveness in Italy.<sup>254</sup> I would extend these implications to the political sphere by suggesting that Corinne's silence is furthermore driven by a contrasting belief regarding nationality to that espoused by Oswald, as he is unable to distance himself from his father's preference that he marry a purely English woman, and thus chooses Lucile, even though she does not bring him the same happiness as Corinne. Corinne's silence distances her from Oswald, while reaffirming a composite conception of *nationalité*, as in her earlier employment of this term, expressing appreciation for national difference and for the benefits that may arise from this multiplicity. While both France and Italy have become silenced under Napoleon's reign that aims to efface difference through conquest, Corinne's chosen melancholic silence is affirmative of a desire to embrace the national diversity that she embodies, inspiring enthusiasm among the people with it.

One of the most powerful scenes of such enthusiasm is Corinne's performance at Cape Miseno, just before she reveals her history to Oswald, as her silence in this moment serves a unifying role in bringing together and captivating a crowd of both English and Italians alike. Similar to the lofty setting where Delphine crosses the mountains from France to Switzerland and looks down upon Lake Geneva and the Vaud countryside amidst nature's silence, Corinne derives enthusiasm from her melancholic state at the summit of Cape Miseno in Italy, a sacred poetic site that enables her to spark the divine within herself and to inspire her audience to think beyond the national divisions that might separate them. She has led Oswald on a journey through the land of Virgil's grave and Petrarch's laurel tree, and stages this summit gathering as a parting gift, with her empathic poetry also conveying the shifting ground of their relationship; as Mount

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Vesuvius looms in the distance, the surrounding landscape mirrors and dramatizes their conflict. Like the Tiburtine Sybil animated by divine inspiration, Corinne gazes at the islands around her, ruminating upon kindred condemned exiles who have viewed their native lands from a distance:

« O terre ! toute baignée de sang et de larmes, tu n'as jamais cessé de produire et des fruits et des fleurs ! Es-tu donc sans pitié pour l'homme ? Et sa poussière retourne-t-elle dans ton sein maternel sans le faire tressaillir ? » Ici, Corinne se reposa quelques instants. Tous ceux que la fête avait rassemblés jetaient à ses pieds des branches de myrte et de laurier. La lueur douce et pure de la lune embellissait son visage ; le vent frais de la mer agitait ses cheveux pittoresquement, et la nature semblait se plaire à la parer. Corinne cependant fut tout à coup saisie par un attendrissement irrésistible : elle considéra ces lieux enchanteurs, cette soirée enivrante, Oswald qui était là, qui n'y serait peut-être pas toujours, et des larmes coulèrent de ses yeux. Le peuple même qui venait de l'applaudir avec tant de bruit respectait son émotion, et tous attendaient en silence que ses paroles fissent partager ce qu'elle éprouvait.

[‘Oh land, bathed in blood and tears, thou has never ceased to produce fruit and flowers! Hast thou then no pity for man? And does his dust return to thy maternal bosom without making it tremble?’ At this point, Corinne paused for a few moments. All those gathered together there for the festivities cast branches of myrtle and laurel at her feet. The gentle, pure moonlight made her face more beautiful; the fresh sea wind blew her hair about in a picturesque manner, and nature seemed to enjoy adorning her. But Corinne was suddenly gripped by an irresistible emotion; she looked around at the enchanting place and the

wonderful evening, at Oswald who was there but would perhaps not always be there, and tears flowed from her eyes. Even the common people, who had just applauded her so noisily, respected her emotion, and they all waited silently for her words to tell them of her feelings.]<sup>255</sup>

In contrast to the violence that Corinne evokes in her reference to the land of “blood and tears,” her poetic gathering offers a uniting experience for her audience from different nations, one that is almost sacred, as reinforced by the mythical symbolism of the branches of myrtle and laurel that the people cast before her. The melancholic wave that overcomes her is transmitted to the crowd, as they emulate her silence, and while her words convey feelings, her tears offer an ineffable message that joins her audience in shared enthusiasm through a transformative artistic experience, one that is perhaps capable of inspiring reconciliation and of reclaiming the greatness of the Roman past while surpassing arbitrary national divisions. Situating herself in line with legendary women who have suffered in love before her, Corinne transforms her sadness and exile into a sacred form of poetry, and suggests that grief is capable of penetrating through the clouds to translate a divine music inaudible to most mortal ears into a noble enthusiasm. She earlier describes this enthusiasm as *surnaturel*,<sup>256</sup> inspired by while also escaping the laws of

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<sup>255</sup> *Moi*, 169

<sup>255</sup> *Staël, Corinne ou l'Italie*, 775–76. *Staël, Corinne, or Italy*, 236.

<sup>256</sup> “Je crois éprouver alors un enthousiasme surnaturel, et je sens bien que ce qui parle en moi vaut mieux que moi-même ; souvent il m’arrive de quitter le rythme de la poésie et d’exprimer ma pensée en prose ; quelquefois je cite les plus beaux vers des diverses langues qui me sont connues. Ils sont à moi, ces vers divins, dont mon âme s’est pénétrée. *Staël, Corinne ou l'Italie*,

nature, and she rewrites these laws in a cosmopolitan manner through poetic improvisation in different languages, while also conveying the silent, divine unifying verses that uplift the soul.

Corinne's silence further exemplifies a deific quality that achieves its richest tenor in her final song. Although on her deathbed and too weak to speak or improvise, Corinne nonetheless hosts a farewell performance for Oswald as well as for Italy, which also concludes Oswald's journey there (that begins as the novel opens) in a cyclical manner, yet with a different form of melancholy than his initial sadness over the loss of his father. Corinne gathers a crowd in a room at the Florence Academy on a stormy winter's day in January to present an ode to a Rome that does not banish women, but instead recognizes their genius, and she then submits to the "tombeaux silencieux" [silent tombs] and the "divinité bienfaisante" [beneficent divinity], at peace with this silence and impending death.<sup>257</sup> Her lines are performed by a young girl dressed in white and crowned with flowers, as Corinne sits silently in the shadows covered by a veil, which stands in stark contrast to her initial resplendent performance at the capitol, but is also a

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675. [At such times I think I experience a supernatural enthusiasm and I have the definite feeling that the voice within me is of greater worth than myself. It often happens that I depart from poetic rhythms and express my thoughts in prose; sometimes I quote the finest verses of the different languages I know. They are mine, these divine verses which imbue my soul.] Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, 46.

<sup>257</sup> "Le grand mystère de la mort, quel qu'il soit, doit donner du calme. Vous m'en répondez, tombeaux silencieux ; vous m'en répondez, divinité bienfaisante !" Staël, *Corinne ou l'Italie*, 862. [The great mystery of death, whatever it may be, must grant peace. You assure me of that, silent tombs; you assure me of that, beneficent divinity!] Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, 402.

testament to her resolve, as she has channeled her melancholy over losing Oswald into reinforcing the divinity of enthusiasm within herself as a poet. The triumphal chariots that first carried her to Rome transform into a funeral procession as she offers the stage to a new lead, yet one who recites Corinne's lines to help carry forth her poetic legacy, much like she has coached her niece Juliet to sing and speak Italian just like her, cultivating a surrogate cosmopolitan citizen, as if to counteract Juliet's solely English biological lineage of parents Lucile and Oswald.<sup>258</sup> Like the fatal poison-filled ring employed by Delphine, Corinne's ring that she returns to Oswald is a harbinger to her death, rather than a symbol of their union, as it signifies the end of the relationship and leads to her eventual demise. Grievous emotion however also becomes a source of strength, as it enables Corinne to ignite her own enthusiasm, silently transcending her plight, while moving and inspiring the crowd through her melancholic song sung by a promising youthful performer, offering hope for future peace. The future that Staël envisions is one in which national difference and diversity may be celebrated, rather than spurned, within *Corinne*, and as a political allegory for a Europe under Napoleon.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Corinne's dark features and Venetian-style black dress stand in further contrast to the lighter appearance of her half-sister Lucile, and although their characters are equally opposed, Lucile also begins to emulate Corinne near the end of the novel in an attempt to please Oswald, who comes to realize that he misses Corinne's genius and splendor.

<sup>259</sup> Rousseau's remarks on Charles-Irénée Castel, abbé de Saint-Pierre's *Projet de paix perpétuelle* proposal of an international organization to maintain peace in Europe however raise the question of whether the condition for such an international politics is actually conquest and Empire. Rousseau's hesitation to endorse such a project is related to his fear about the elevated

## INTER(NATIONALITÉ) AND INEFFABLE ENTHUSIASM

While Staël develops a vision of *nationalité* that expands beyond the frontiers of the nation as embodied within the figures of Delphine and Corinne, this cosmopolitanism is germane to her thought from early on, as is evident in the protagonist of her short story “Mirza ou Lettre d’un voyageur,” published in 1795, but written in 1786, prior to both the Revolution and the rise of Napoleon that serve as the backdrop (albeit unacknowledged, in the latter case) to her novels. Staël is most often considered within a European context, but “Mirza” extends beyond these borders into the heart of Africa, recounting a fictional love story between two Senegambians, Mirza and Ximéo, from the warring Kingdoms of Cayor and Jolof. Although promised in marriage to Ourika, the daughter of his father’s sister, Ximéo is enamored by Jolof neighbor Mirza, whose song about the love of freedom and the horror of slavery attracts him, which is further enhanced by the foreign nature of her language. Mirza sings in French learned from a Frenchman discontented with his own country, who settles in Senegal and shares the knowledge misused by Europeans, and the philosophy whose lessons they follow poorly. By reading French books and reflecting upon them from her silent mountain solitude, Mirza develops a form of cosmopolitan enthusiasm, which further inspires Ximéo: “A chaque mot qu’elle me disait, mon intérêt, ma curiosité redoublaient; ce n’était plus une femme, c’était un poète que je croyais entendre parler; et jamais les hommes qui se consacrent parmi nous au culte des dieux, ne

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level of conflict that may result, as he notes that it must be based on the former Roman Empire, that it would need to be instituted through war and conquest, and that it may lead to the tyranny and domination of the “potentate” who might head it.

m'avaient paru remplis d'un si noble enthousiasme" [My interest, my curiosity, increased with every word she said; she was no longer a woman that I was hearing, she was a poet. Never had those of my countrymen who devote themselves to the cult of the gods seemed filled with such a noble enthusiasm].<sup>260</sup> Like Corinne's poetic acumen and command of Italian or Delphine's ineffable enthusiasm, Mirza's bridging the distance between warring tribes through French song offers further affirmation of Staël's commitment to a pacific community that transcends borders.

Staël's cosmopolitanism is further evident in her stand against the blight of slavery in "Mirza," a cry for a political structure based upon a more inclusive form of morality. Although enamored by Mirza, Ximéo eventually betrays her by continuing to pursue his vows with Ourika, yet Mirza nonetheless jumps to his defense after he is captured in battle and about to be sold into slavery to the Europeans. She demonstrates her intellectual and physical strength in proclaiming:

Européens, dit-elle, c'est pour cultiver nos terres que vous nous condamnez à l'esclavage; c'est votre intérêt qui vous rend notre infortune nécessaire; vous ne ressemblez pas au dieu du mal, et faire souffrir n'est pas le but des douleurs que vous nous destinez: regardez ce jeune homme affaibli par ses blessures, il ne pourra supporter ni la longueur du voyage, ni les travaux que vous lui demandez; moi, vous voyez ma force et ma jeunesse, mon sexe n'a point énervé mon courage; souffrez que je sois esclave à la place de Ximéo.

[Europeans, it is to cultivate your land that you condemn us to slavery; it is your

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<sup>260</sup> Staël, « Mirza ou Lettre d'un voyageur », *OC*, 74. Staël, "Mirza, or a Traveler's Letter," translated by Françoise Massardier-Kenney, University of Georgia, [http://slavery.uga.edu/texts/literary\\_works/mirzaenglish.pdf](http://slavery.uga.edu/texts/literary_works/mirzaenglish.pdf), 5.

interest which makes our misfortune necessary; you do not seem to be evil gods, and tormenting us is not the goal of the suffering you will have us bear. Look at this young man weakened by his wounds; he will neither be able to withstand the long march nor the work that you will require of him; yet look at me, see my strength and my youth; my sex has not sapped my courage; let me be a slave in Ximeo's place.]<sup>261</sup>

As she faces Ximéo's captors, Mirza employs more of a strategic approach to save Ximéo than in her earlier song that passionately contests the horrors and injustice of slavery, but she still asserts her own strength and courage as a woman against "le joug affreux de l'esclavage" [the hideous yoke of slavery] the letter begins by denouncing.<sup>262</sup> This moves the governor to free her

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<sup>261</sup> Staël, « Mirza ou Lettre d'un voyageur », *OC*, 76. Staël, "Mirza, or a Traveler's Letter," 8.

<sup>262</sup> "Mirza" begins with the following tale: "Permettez que je vous rende compte, madame, d'une anecdote de mon voyage, qui peut-être aura le droit de vous intéresser. J'appris à Gorée, il y a un mois, que monsieur le gouverneur avait déterminé une famille nègre à venir demeurer à quelques lieues de là, pour y établir une habitation pareille à celle de Saint-Domingue; se flattant, sans doute, qu'un tel exemple exciterait les Africains à la culture du sucre, et qu'attirant chez eux le commerce libre de cette denrée, les Européens ne les enlèveraient plus à leur patrie, pour leur faire souffrir le joug affreux de l'esclavage. Vainement les écrivains les plus éloquents ont tenté d'obtenir cette révolution de la vertu des hommes." Staël, « Mirza ou Lettre d'un voyageur », *OC*, 72. [Allow me, Madam, to apprise you of an anecdote from my trip, which you may find interesting. A month ago, in the town of Gorée, I heard that the governor had persuaded a Negro family to come and live a few miles away so as to establish a plantation similar to the one found

and Ximéo, noting that so much nobility of soul would have shamed these Europeans enslaving them, and Mirza is furthermore described as irradiated by the soul within just before delivering her plea, unlike a mortal, but resembling an angel instead, and possessing a supernatural quality like that attributed to Corinne. Mirza indeed channels her enthusiasm towards cosmopolitan ends for peace and against slavery, embodying the luminous form of exaltation characteristic of *en* and *theos*, or having God within.

Mirza's story, like those of Delphine and Corinne, similarly ends on the somber note of her death, but it is likewise her chosen path as she stabs herself through the heart with an arrow after receiving word of her and Ximéo's freedom, unable to carry forth due to his infidelity, yet nonetheless living on in a sense. Ximéo recounts Mirza consoling him from beyond the grave:

J'ai renfermé dans un tombeau les tristes restes de celle que j'aime quand elle n'est plus, de celle que j'ai méconnue pendant sa vie. Là, seul quand le soleil se couche, quand la nature entière semble se couvrir de mon deuil, quand le silence universel me permet de n'entendre plus que mes pensées, j'éprouve, prosterné sur ce tombeau, la jouissance du malheur, le sentiment tout entier de ses peines; mon imagination exaltée crée quelquefois des fantômes; je crois la voir, mais jamais elle ne m'apparaît comme une amante irritée. Je l'entends qui me console et

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in Santo Domingo. He had imagined, surely, that such an example would incite Africans to grow sugarcane, and that, by drawing to their territory the free trade of this sugar, Europeans would no longer take Africans away from their homeland and make them suffer under the hideous yoke of slavery. In vain have the most eloquent writers attempted to obtain this revolution by appealing to the goodness of men.] Staël, "Mirza, or a Traveler's Letter," 3.

s'occupe de ma douleur.

[I have shut in a tomb the sad remains of the one I love when she no longer is, of the one I failed to appreciate when she lived. There, in solitude, when the sun sets, when all of nature seems to be overcast with my mourning, when universal silence lets me hear my thoughts, then only can I feel, prostrate before this tomb, the enjoyment of grief, the full feeling of its sorrows. My exalted imagination sometimes creates ghosts; I think I see her, but she never appears to me as an angry lover. I hear her consoling me and attending to my grief.]<sup>263</sup>

Like the spiritual superegoic presence of Rousseau's Julie at Clarens following her death, Mirza's supernatural force endures as a source of love and enthusiasm, exalting Ximéo's imagination amidst the melancholic universal silence of sunset. The narrator of this tale in the form of a letter notes that there was nothing that could be said to console Ximéo, so he no longer dares speak to him, but instead writes his story to sanctify the name of Mirza, *l'ange d'amour*.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Staël, « Mirza ou Lettre d'un voyageur », *OC*, 77. Staël, "Mirza, or a Traveler's Letter," 9.

<sup>264</sup> "Son calme sombre, son désespoir sans larmes, aisément me persuadèrent que tous mes efforts seraient vains; je n'osai plus lui parler, le malheur en impose; je le quittai le cœur plein d'amertume; et pour accomplir ma promesse, je raconte son histoire, et consacre, si je le puis, le triste nom de sa Mirza." Staël, « Mirza ou Lettre d'un voyageur », *OC*, 78. [His somber calm, his tearless despair, easily convinced me that all my efforts would be pointless. I no longer dared speak to him; misfortune inspires respect. I left him, my heart full of bitterness, and I tell his story to fulfill my promise and sanctify, if I can, the sad name of his Mirza.] Staël, "Mirza, or a Traveler's Letter," 10.

As Staël's early short story suggests, literature, like music, poetry, nature, and other ineffable intersubjective experiences, becomes a powerful source for conveying and inspiring enthusiasm, a concept that she further develops in the literary silences of *Delphine* and *Corinne*, and throughout her lifetime in works such as *De la littérature dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1799), *De l'Allemagne* (1810/1813), and *Dix années d'exil* (1821). In *De la littérature*, Staël describes literature as "the guardian of the sacred fire of enthusiasm," and explains how it might serve to foster a community out of exile, unhappiness, and isolation:

Ces écrits font couler des larmes dans toutes les situations de la vie ; ils élèvent l'âme à des méditations générales qui détournent la pensée des peines individuelles ; ils créent pour nous une société, une communication avec les écrivains qui ne sont plus, avec ceux qui existent encore, avec les hommes qui admirent, comme nous, ce que nous lisons. Dans les déserts de l'exil, au fond des prisons, à la veille de périr, telle page d'un auteur sensible a relevé peut-être une âme abattue : moi qui la lis, moi qu'elle touche, je crois y retrouver encore la trace de quelques larmes ; et par des émotions semblables, j'ai quelques rapports avec ceux dont je plains si profondément la destinée.

[Such writings can draw tears from people in any situation; they elevate the soul to more general contemplation, which diverts the mind from personal pain; they create for us a community, a relationship, with the writers of the past and those still living, with men who share love for literature. In the desolation of exile, the depths of dungeons, and on the verge of death, a particular page of a sensitive author may well have revived a prostrate soul: and I who read that page, I who am touched by it, believe I still find there the trace of tears, and by feeling similar

emotions I enter into some sort of communion with those whose fate I so deeply  
grieve.]<sup>265</sup>

Like her predecessor Rousseau and her own literary protagonists, Staël is no stranger to exile, which she incorporates into her fiction, and into recounting her own experience fleeing Napoleon in *Dix années d'exil*, describing the pain of being forced to leave multiple countries, while also forging a community beyond national borders by recounting this persecution through her writing. Although Napoleon attempts to censor her works and to stifle her voice, Staël employs both her nobility of expression and her ineffable enthusiasm to combat his offensives, demonstrating the

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<sup>265</sup> “Il faut exister seul, pour conserver dans sa pensée le modèle de tout ce qui est grand et beau, pour garder dans son sein le feu sacré d’un enthousiasme véritable . . . Le type de ce qui est bon et juste ne s’anéantira plus; l’homme que la nature destine à la vertu ne manquera plus de guide; enfin (et ce bien est infini) la douleur pourra toujours éprouver un attendrissement salutaire. Cette tristesse aride qui naît de l’isolement, cette main de glace qu’appesantit sur nous le malheur, lorsque nous croyons n’exciter aucune pitié, nous en sommes du moins préservés par les écrits conservateurs des idées, des affections vertueuses.” Staël, *De la littérature dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, 39. [One must stand alone to preserve in one’s mind the idea of all that is great and beautiful, to protect within one’s bosom the sacred fire of true [enthusiasm] . . . Those writings that are the guardians of ideas and virtuous love at least protect us from the arid sorrow born of loneliness, the icy hand that misery lays heavily upon us, when we believe we cannot arouse even the slightest compassion.] Staël, *Literature Considered in Its Relation to Social Institutions*, 150, 151.

strength of the soul and the political power of literature to combat the tides of despotism.<sup>266</sup> She returns once again to enthusiasm in the final chapter of *De l'Allemagne*, attributing a unique degree of it to Germany, which also serves to highlight what is lost in France under Napoleon.<sup>267</sup>

In spite of what is lacking, enthusiasm remains as a divine yet humanized force, as creative potential that may inspire a more egalitarian sense of community and lead to moral regeneration, which Staël aligns with this period of silence and the cosmopolitan conception of *nationalité* in her literature. While the melancholic tales of Delphine, Corinne, and Mirza all conclude with death, they also conjure a hopeful, ineffable facet that channels the revitalizing energy of deeply felt emotion. Staël's enthusiasm stands in stark contrast to Napoleonic force in that it represents intellectual rather than military might, and serves to direct the passions into a more expansive, positive role, replacing the *ennui* that forced exile is aimed to afflict with a

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<sup>266</sup> Some may argue that Staël is still relying upon French culture and politics as the constituent power that forms international community, and thus minimizing the way that internationality cast through this French lens may become tyrannical and persecutory. Yet her openness to and exilic experience within a plurality of countries, and her incorporation of multiple nationalities within the identities of her characters may be understood as fostering a more cosmopolitan politics that is not derived from any one nation alone, as in the case of Corinne's *double éducation*.

<sup>267</sup> Schiller's "Ode to Joy" in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is one frequently cited later example of such German enthusiasm. For more on enthusiasm in relation to Germany and *De l'Allemagne*, see Paul Hamilton, *Realpoetik: European Romanticism and Literary Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 51–55.

liberating and animating sense of existence.<sup>268</sup> Paul Hamilton likens this sentiment to a fascination that becomes both a literary and a political imperative for Rousseau, with whom Staël first begins her career as an author, while also noting Montesquieu's influence in terms of national geographical contextualization, to which I would add his conception of *esprit*.<sup>269</sup> I have sought to underscore the political impact of silence across related intersections, with Diderot's emphasis upon the body as another affinity shared by Staël, whose final *Corinne* image is of her heroine gesturing to the moon as Oswald approaches her deathbed.<sup>270</sup> Even if born of sorrow, enthusiasm holds the potential for exaltation, the ability to uplift the soul in an enlarging movement that may also help elevate character, perhaps even cultivating the true democratic spirit of enlightenment.

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<sup>268</sup> While enthusiasm may hold constituent power, the question remains as to what interstate form and force would still be needed to establish and govern a transnational community, and how it might respond to Napoleonic force.

<sup>269</sup> Hamilton, 45, 53. The *Lettres persanes* serves as another point of comparison with Staël's work in its treatment of cultural difference and in the philosophical female legislator figures of Usbek's wives, who might be considered as harbingers to Staël's female protagonists, carrying forth their *esprit* and revolutionary struggle for emancipation.

<sup>270</sup> Katherine Dauge-Roth examines how early scientific ideas about the physiological influence of the moon on women became a popular trope in the debates over male-female equality in France during the early modern period. See "*Femmes lunatiques: Women and the Moon in Early Modern France*," *Dalhousie French Studies* 71 (2005): 3–29.

## CONCLUSION

Like Montesquieu's fascination with echoes, and the links that unite his "secret chain" of letters, he may be read in dialogue with the *philosophes* who follow as they similarly take up his conscription of silence in an effort to turn the tides of despotism. As Usbek's wives revolt against the strictures he imposes upon them within the seraglio, they offer a striking example of co-opting silence to more emancipatory ends through epistolary correspondence that enables them a transgressive political voice. The new language of freedom that the Persian women develop through their writing and action is fueled by a discontent mirroring that percolating in prerevolutionary eighteenth century France, which Montesquieu captures through the form of the epistolary novel that speaks "the people" in a powerful new manner. Diderot likewise assumes the mantle of the people through the marginal figures of the Nun and the Nephew, showcasing the silent, yet fermentative force of the body that is also prominent in his dramatic theory, while demonstrating how self-mastery may prove an elusive ideal. Unable to exercise control over her body, Suzanne upends the convent, transforming its tyrannical silence into an emancipatory political claim written upon her body, while Lui's fits of pantomime serve to stir Moi from his previously unquestioned bourgeois convictions, demonstrating Diderot's skilled employment of the dialogic form to assert a political statement. In spite of his own fraught silence with Diderot, Rousseau similarly inscribes a forceful mute eloquence at the origin of both law and language, which he employs to question the despotic familial foundations with fictional protagonist Julie, unsettling the androcentric structure of his own social contract. Staël's female heroines further challenge the political model of her mentor, infusing silence with a cosmopolitan enthusiasm that expands the frontiers of the social contract to embody a more diverse and truly multiform people, as France itself becomes a space of silence, with dueling forces struggling to define its meaning.

As Staël's work at the dawn of the nineteenth century illustrates, the struggle for a more equitable politics that is true to the ideals of the Enlightenment does not end with the Revolution, but persists, and silence is perhaps all the more powerful in today's increasingly interconnected, yet clamorously fragmented world. After surviving the February 14, 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, Emma Gonzalez employed a powerfully symbolic silence during the 2018 "March for Our Lives" rally against gun violence, an act that captivated the attention of the world and contributed to her entry into the spotlight as an influential political activist. The recent kneeling protests during the national anthem by NFL football players to bring awareness to violence against Black Americans exemplify another contemporary nonverbal political act. The "Me Too," and "Time's Up" movements against sexual misconduct offer powerful examples of women leveraging the public platform as a means to draw attention to and oppose injustice, building a culture whereby "silence is violence." This emancipatory transformation of silence might also be situated in line with the women of the *Lettres persanes* as epistolary fomenters of revolution, with Suzanne's legal plea for freedom when she is silenced in *La Religieuse*, or Julie's central role in the mute politics of Clarens, and the ineffable enthusiasm of Staël's female protagonists that extends beyond national borders.

Border zones offer another contemporary illustration of the political power of silence, as is evident in the lip-sewing practices of migrants and refugees. In 2016, a number of refugees in Calais, France, participated in a hunger strike and sewed their lips shut as a protest against their forced eviction by French security forces and the demolition of what was referred to as the "Jungle," a migrant community with temporary tents and housing structures for thousands. The protestors held up signs requesting a site visit from international human rights bodies, the end of evictions and attacks, and the opening of borders. Similar protests took place among

migrants seeking to enter Greece, drawing international recognition to these acts of self-muting. Banu Bargu aligns such dissent with Michel Foucault's conception of *parrhesia*, underscoring how it may make legible an alternative political landscape by speaking truth to power through transgression of the boundaries between bodies and speech, reason and affect, and violence and nonviolence. Arguing for an expanded conception of agency, Bargu contends that these acts unsettle dualisms often ascribed to those who perform them, like that of victimhood and perilous agency, with self-muting offering inroads to a new form of subjectivity. As sites of "exception" where resistance is often deemed unlikely, self-managed muting and starvation demonstrate efforts to gain sovereignty over oneself, and while *parrhesia* traditionally represents an act of telling all, it may also be enacted through practice, with silence serving to dramatize the truth.<sup>271</sup> This embodied silence is a form of disobedience aimed to counteract structures of domination, as migrants fleeing sites of violence and injustice find themselves further impeded by similar forces at the periphery of other nations, and thus inscribe this inequity upon their own sovereign bodies.

As with these and other contemporary examples, the shifting of the body politic as the people themselves claim power in a time of revolutionary transition in France is characterized by an interplay of both silence and dialogue, with powerful ineffable moments leading to new articulations of freedom. Self-muting and co-opting oppressive silence serve to register protest in ongoing political struggles and contexts, demonstrating the rhetorical persistence of ineffability, as well as the enduring challenge of representation within an entity comprised of a multitude of voices. The difficulty of representing such a diversity of perspectives is often evident when one

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<sup>271</sup> See Banu Bargu, "The Silent Exception: Hunger Striking and Lip-Sewing," *Law, Culture and the Humanities* (May 24, 2017): 1–28, 7.

person claims to speak on behalf of the people or to express the general will, as is perhaps most strikingly apparent in the figure of Maximilien Robespierre. Articulate advocate for democratic institutions and the poor, as well as a professed opponent of the death penalty, Robespierre leads the charge behind the execution of King Louis XVI, and ushers in the most radical phase of the Revolution, the Reign of Terror. The Revolution is often traced back to the words of the *philosophes*, as their writings are recast by Robespierre in his mixture of virtue and terror (culminating in his enactment of a Festival of the Supreme Being drawn from the page of Rousseau's *Du contrat social*), which inspires fear amidst this veer towards dictatorship, with widespread conviction of alleged counter-revolutionaries under simple suspicion and without trials in the name of justice. Yet in stark contrast to Robespierres's oratorical prowess and verbosity, he is eventually rendered speechless, as a hole is blown through his jaw with a pistol, and maintains silence before his accusers until the moment of his legendary final cry during his own execution. In a revolution that begins with the *philosophes*, inflected through Robespierre's interpretation and his silencing of the law in the name of the sacred force of the people, his own voice is muted and degenerates into a primal scream as the people reclaim their voice from their oppressed position.

Olympe de Gouges illuminates how the specter of monarchy continued to haunt France in its struggle over a power now resting within the people yet belonging to no one. Written during a transitional moment after the death of the king, Gouges' *Les trois urnes* pamphlet that led to her arrest and execution suggested that in order to quell the violence and strife overtaking the nation, the people must decide how best to govern themselves.<sup>272</sup> Like the post mortem continuity of monarch and monarchy that Ernst Kantorowicz later identifies in the problem of the king's two

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<sup>272</sup> Olympe de Gouges, *Les trois urnes*, 1793, [https://www.olympedegouges.eu/three\\_urns.php#](https://www.olympedegouges.eu/three_urns.php#).

bodies, the body natural and the body politic, or Claude Lefort's vision of the disappearance of the leader as political body as the empty space that marks the founding moment of democracy, Gouges' pamphlet also reveals this challenge, while vesting the decision in the people of how to best govern themselves by choosing between three forms of government: a unitary republic, a federalist government, or a constitutional monarchy.<sup>273</sup> With the mention of this last word, Gouges is convicted of going against the general will by Robespierre and the Jacobins, who sentence her to death for attempting to reinstate monarchy. As Gouges will attest in later works penned in her months in jail during which she is denied an attorney, the charges against her are based upon a poorly interpreted understanding of her text which in reality pays solemn homage to "natural" sovereignty. In her study on women of the French Revolution and the rise of feminism, Lisa Beckstrand underscores how among the many killed during the Terror, it is significant how the women were accused of especially "deviant" behavior. Beyond merely participating in the Revolution through writing and action, they were alleged to have "sacrificed nature" to do so, and more specifically, their feminine nature, as each was accused of having forgotten the virtues said to suit the maternal and spousal roles of her sex.<sup>274</sup> In addition to her famous redrafting of the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, Gouges also rewrites Rousseau's *Du contrat social* in a postscript to her *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*, replacing it with her own version based upon gender and marriage equality, thereby

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<sup>273</sup> Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016). Lefort, *Essais sur le politique : XIXe-XXe siècles*. Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*.

<sup>274</sup> Lisa Beckstrand, *Deviant Women of the French Revolution and the Rise of Feminism*, 131.

contesting a gendered conception of citizenship limited to men. In addition to the gendered nature of Gouges' struggle, it may be understood as one over the very nature of the general will.

While the rampant and noisy voice of public opinion seems to drive much of the political sphere from the eighteenth century to the present, silence offers powerful possibilities for truth and freedom to emerge, and for the *demos* to counteract the stifling nature of despotism. The literary depictions of the silent spaces of the seraglio, the convent, the patriarchal family, the prison, and France under Napoleon demonstrate the capacity of the disenfranchised to convert these formerly oppressive and limiting spaces into sites of emancipation by co-opting the force of ineffability to transform their domination into freedom. Their own silencing becomes the basis of their fraught claims to speak truth to power, and sovereignty is frequently asserted through the act of writing, perhaps initially existing only within the realm of fiction. Through these fictional narratives, liberty is often first imagined, and then transplanted into the world beyond as the *demos* comes to vocalize its claim to power. It is of silence that the voice of the people is born.

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