

Missing Les Muses : Madame de Staël and Frances Burney

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Margaret Anne Doody

Missing *Les Muses*: Madame De Staël and Frances Burney

In May 1793 Madame de Staël was puzzled and indignant. Frances Burney, the novelist whom she had regarded as a friend since her coming as an exile to England, had turned cold, refused to stay under her roof, avoided her visits, and at last practically admitted that she had dropped her. Susanna Burney Phillips, Frances's sister, wrote to Frances about Madame de Staël's reaction:

Poor Me. de St. has been greatly mortified & disappointed & hurt by the failure of the Friendship & intercourse she had wished to maintain wth. you – of that I am sure – I fear too she is on the point of being offended – *I* am not likely to be her confidante if she is so, & only judge fro[m the] Nature of things, & from her character, & a kind of *dépit* in her manner once or twice in speaking of you – She ask'd me if you wd. accompy. Mrs. Lock back into the Country. I answered that my Father wd. not wish to lose you for so long a time at once, as you had been absent from him as a Nurse so many days – after a little pause “Mais est-ce qu'une Femme est *en tutelle* pour la *vie* dans ce Pays?” she sd. – “Il me paroît que votre Soeur est comme une demoiselle de quatorze ans?” (Berg MS., SBP to FB, letter of 14 May 1793; see note in *Journal and Letters*, II, 123, and see *Diary and Letters*, V, 189-97)¹

- 1 I am deeply indebted to the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lennox and Tilden Foundations, for permitting me to read the Burney collection of manuscripts, including the hitherto unpublished letters by Susanna Burney Phillips, Frances Burney's younger sister. Susanna had been married to Molesworth Phillips in 1782. He proved an unreasonable and even a cruel husband in later years, and his treatment may have led to her early death in 1800. His absences in early 1793 may have been a relief to her, but Susanna and Molesworth shared political opinions, and, when the French émigré group had to break up housekeeping, she supported his offer to take some of them in under their own roof.

The phrase *Journals and Letters* (henceforth referred to as *J&L*) refers to *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay) (1791-1840)*, ed. Joyce Hemlow and others, 12 vols., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972-1984.

In using the term *en tutelle*, Madame de Staël avails herself of a legal concept dating back to Roman law; a Roman girl was *in tutela*, subject to the authority of her father or brother unless and until such authority was passed on to her husband. De Staël's capacity for cultural analysis finds expression in her indignant question. In Madame de Staël's complaint that Frances seemed to be treated like an adolescent girl, Susanna had seen an opening for soothing explanation, confirming the notion that English females are always *in tutela*:

I did not oppose this idea, but enlarged rather on the constraints laid upon females, *some* very unnecessarily, in England – hoping to lessen her *dépit*; it continued, however, visible in her countenance, tho' she did not express it in words. (*Ibid.*)

Frances Burney herself was hurt and embarrassed. In the autumn of 1792 an interesting band of French émigrés, refugees from the fury of the French Revolution, had settled in Juniper Hall, in Mickleham in the county of Surrey, near the home of Frances Burney's friends William and Frederica Locke, who lived in nearby Norbury Park². The Lockes were interested in offering support to these intelligent and well-born constitutionalists, who included the comte de Narbonne and his wife; Madame de la Châtre and her son; Talleyrand (as an occasional visitor); and Lafayette's good friend Alexandre d'Arblay. Madame de Staël came to join them in late January 1793. This was just after the guillotining of King Louis XVI had signalled the shocking end of the

Diary and Letters refers to *The Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay*, ed. Charlotte Barrett, 7 vols., London, Henry Colburn, 1854. Charlotte Barrett (Frances Burney's niece) translates into English any lengthy passage given in French in the original, but Susanna is skilled not only at participating in conversations in French, but also in recording them.

- 2 William Locke (SBP usually spells his name "Lock") was an important landowner and a staunch liberal sympathizer. The French friends he gathered round him were not the conservative aristocrats who were also émigrés at this time, but the moderate reformers who had believed in the construction of a new Constitution for France. In the eyes of many of the English, such "constitutionnels" were as guilty as the most bloodthirsty of Jacobins of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. William Locke's position and patronage could help preserve the émigrés from insult, but even he did not always succeed.

constitutionalists' fair hopes. The anxious émigrés were in a state to need and appreciate the consolations of friendship.

Madame de Staël at age 26 was already a celebrated author and critic; she had read Burney's novels *Evelina* and *Cecilia*. The latter novel in particular had received a good deal of notice in France; Laclos had chosen to review it in a long and favorable article³. Burney was much the senior of the two women, and the more established author. She had her fortieth birthday in June 1792, and her first published novel had appeared long ago, in 1778. The beginning of the acquaintance of Germaine de Staël-Holstein and Frances Burney offered a promising friendship.

The two women promised each other they would study French and English together, and began to exchange letters in each other's language. Burney was diffident about speaking French in public, but her early journals show that she could record a drawing-room conversation in that language – not an easy task for an English-speaker. She read French literature. Frances Burney's diffidence about speaking the language perhaps arose from the odd circumstance of her own (partially concealed) French identity. Frances' mother, Esther Sleepe, was the child of French immigrants, and (after her mother's death) Frances had been partly brought up by her maternal grandmother Mrs. Sleepe, *née* Dubois. Burney's French relatives moved in circles scarcely aristocratic or intellectual; Burney's timidity about speaking French may have resulted from a fear of dropping into classbound or regional mispronunciations, or linguistic vulgarisms, rather than from the straightforward Anglo-Saxon reluctance to depart from the mother tongue.

Burney and de Staël had much in common, in that they were neither of them the straightforward products of a dominant culture within which they lived and wrote. Germaine, *née* Necker, was the daughter of Jacques Necker and Suzanne Curchod. Both parents were Protestants, and neither was well-born by the standards of the

3 Laclos chose to review the novel, and his review appeared in three articles in the *Mercure de France* in 1784 (17 and 24 April and 15 May). He ranked Burney's novel very high, saying it was excelled only by *Clarissa*, *Tom Jones*, and *La Nouvelle Héloïse*.

French aristocracy. Suzanne Curchod, daughter of a Protestant pastor, was working as a governess when Necker met her. Necker, a Swiss immigrant to France, had risen to be finance minister to the King. Germaine was thus an anomaly, by birth a woman of the people but highly educated, and socially formidable, with great acquaintance among the French *noblesse*, despite moderately “low” and certainly foreign origins. She spoke French like a native of France (as she was), but in the eyes of orthodox Roman Catholics or ultra-nationalists she was not (and never has been) acceptable as a true Frenchwoman. (Even now, much of the best work on de Staël emanates from Geneva.) Germaine’s devotion to her father (parallel to Burney’s extreme devotion to Dr. Charles Burney) ensured that she could never wish to drop her Swiss and Protestant identity. Indeed, her father’s modest estate at Coppet near Geneva was to prove a constant refuge to her in later life, when she was banished from France. In order to secure her marriage to a Protestant, her parents had married Germaine off to the Swedish baron of Staël-Holstein, with very little consultation of their daughter’s feelings. Germaine Necker entered a loveless if useful union; money and position enabled her to found a *salon*. Yet this marriage meant that she became doubly a foreigner within France, technically of her husband’s nation.

Frances Burney was likewise on the cusp of both national and class identities. She was the descendant of a family of Scots immigrants, the MacBurneys, who had in the previous generation dropped the “Mac”. Mrs. Thrale at first acquaintance took it for granted that Frances, daughter of a music master, was not “a lady”. Frances’ mother’s family had even less position in the world; they were poor immigrants, and not only French but Roman Catholic. Frances’ loved grandmother Dubois was a Roman Catholic. On observing the Gordon Riots, Burney learned how great was the English prejudice against her grandmother’s co-religionists. She herself was to marry a French exile who was a Roman Catholic. In the case of each of these remarkable women, national and religious identity did not correspond to the norm. In the case of neither author could linguistic identification (as writer in French or in English) speak the full truth of her identity.

After her release from servitude at the court of Queen Charlotte, where she had been largely cut off from acquaintance, Burney was in a humor to relish some touch of the world, some novelty. She was willing to brave speaking in French, and even to practice writing in that language. She was interested in the émigrés, and at first very taken with the brilliant *baronne*.

Madame de Staël's own errors in writing English made her seem less formidable. She wrote to Frances in English (on or about 19 February 1793):

Tell me, my dear, if this day is a charming one, if it must be a sweet epoch in my life: do you come to dine here with your lovely sister [Susanna Burney Phillips], and do you stay night and day till our sad separation? I rejoice me with that hope during this week; do not deceive my heart.

I hope that card very clear, mais, pour plus de certitude, je vous dis en français que votre chambre, la maison, les habitants de Juniper, tout est prêt à recevoir la première femme d'Angleterre. (Madame de Staël, *Correspondance Générale*, Vol III, 394-395)⁴

When she wants to be truly clear, de Staël has to drop into French.

Germaine de Staël's high estimation of Frances Burney at that time seems to have been genuine. She told Burney that her father Jacques Necker had fallen into deep depression at the failure of his efforts to defend the King (in the autumn of 1792), and that he was unable to undertake any kind of activity "till somebody put *Cecilia* into his hands...it caught him and 'soothed & regaled' him...when nothing else could touch or interest or amuse him" (Burney, *J&L* II: 18). Madame de Staël's devotion to a father was another bond between herself and Frances Burney, who had an extraordinary filial devotion to her surviving parent. But Madame de Staël's devotion to Necker might be seen as a signal of trouble to come; it is noticeable that in Burney's life her relationships with other people, male or

4 Madame de Staël's letters are quoted from the edition of her *Correspondance Générale*, ed. Béatrice W. Jasinski, 6 vols., Paris, Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1962 -. The chief correspondence of the Mickleham period, with extensive commentary by the editor, is to be found in the second part of the second volume, published in 1963. Subsequent references are to this edition, and citations will be made in the text without further annotation.

female, who equalled her in extravagant filial piety, were likely to end badly⁵.

Madame de Staël's endorsement of the powers of *Cecilia* might be interpreted as flattery designed for Frances Burney's ears alone, but de Staël certainly knew Burney's novels, although probably in their French translations. It is noticeable that in her *Essai sur les fictions* (first published 1795), Madame de Staël places *Cecilia* high in the rank of novels, if among the works on a slightly lower level than *Clarissa*; *Cecilia* ranks among "les chefs d'oeuvre" of the kind of novel that deals with the delicate principles of feminine conduct, and is on a level with *La Princesse de Clèves* and *Paul et Virginie*⁶.

- 5 In the period after writing *Cecilia*, Frances Burney had been in love with George Cambridge; he seemed for a while to be paying her marked attentions but what first appeared like a courtship never came to anything. Frances was still suffering from this painful episode of unrequited love when she entered the dismal service at the court of Queen Charlotte in July 1786. George Cambridge was religiously devoted to his father Richard Owen Cambridge, whose talents he admired excessively; the only work George ever produced as a writer was an edition of his father's collected works. Hester Lynch Thrale (Mrs. Piozzi) had been devoted to her own father, whose early death she could interpret as making her the victim of the unhappy marriage to the brewer Thrale into which her mother and other family members forced her. Frances Burney's friendships with both of these filial friends were marked by pain and rupture.

Madame de Staël could vie in filial devotion with any of the eighteenth century's children. In *Corinne* she transfers this practically neurotic father-idolizing devotion to Oswald, but the works of his father that Oswald quotes are excerpted from Necker's private writings.

- 6 See Madame de Staël, "Essai sur les Fictions", first published with a reprinting of *Zulma* and with other novellas in 1795.

La Princesse de Clèves (1678) by Madame de Lafayette had long been considered a classic of French fiction. *Paul et Virginie* by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre was published in his *Etudes de la Nature* in 1787. Set mainly in Mauritius, the story was immensely popular both as story of the heart and as exotic idyll. Napoleon was to reward its author with a pension and decorations – a great contrast to his treatment of the author of *Delphine*.

It seems apparent that Madame de Staël had read Burney's *Cecilia* only in the French translation; at the commencement of her friendship with Burney, encouraging Frances to write to her in French, she compliments "Your card in French, my dear, has already something of your grace in writing English: it is *Cecilia* translated." (*Correspondance*, II: 389).

De Staël's genuine esteem for the celebrated English writer may have made her the more apt to make errors in penning epistles in an unaccustomed tongue to an author so celebrated.

Frances Burney had a reciprocally high opinion of Madame de Staël: "she is one of the first women I have ever met with for abilities & extraordinary intellects" (FB to Dr. Charles Burney, 4 February 1793, *J&L* II:10). Frances Burney admired de Staël for her personal courage as well as for her brilliance. She knew that Madame de Staël had saved a number of the "Constitutionnels" from massacre by harboring them in her house, the residence of the Swedish Ambassador, at risk to herself. Madame de Staël had also shown courage and resourcefulness in her flight from France. Impressed with the story of her escape, Burney shuddered at the fact that the Ambassador's young wife had to accept the escort of Jean-Lambert Tallien, "one of the worst wretches of the Convention... to save her from massacre" (*J&L* II:17). Burney's first impressions of the newly-arrived celebrity are all enthusiastically favorable:

She is a woman of the first abilities, I think, I have ever seen. She is more in the style of Mrs. Thrale than of any other celebrated Character; but she has infinitely more depth, & seems an even profound politician & metaphysician. She has suffered us to hear some of her works in MSS. which are truly wonderful, for powers both of thinking & expression. (FB to Dr. Burney, 16-19 February, 1793; *J&L* II :17)

Frances enjoyed listening to Madame de Staël read aloud Voltaire's tragedy *Tancrède* "till she blinded us all round". Madame de Staël seemed almost irresistible, even her lapses of English endearing: "She is the most charming person, to use her own phrase, *that never I saw*" (FB to Dr. Burney, 16 February 1793, *J&L* II:15). Madame de Staël also treated the company to the beginning of the draft of a work in progress: "Made. de Staël read us, the opening of the work '*Sur le bonheur*'. It seems to me admirable." (*Ibid.*, 15). Later, during Madame de Staël's last days in England, M. d'Arblay was to spend much of his time transcribing de Staël's essay, also called "L'influence des passions", for Susanna and other friends; thus, Frances subsequently could have had access to a copy of this treatise (SBP, letters of May 1793, Berg MS).

The first month or so of acquaintance with Madame de Staël really marks the first occasion when Burney had anything approaching a close friendship with a female author whose work she could genuinely admire. But this experience was nipped in the bud. Dr. Charles Burney, who ever kept a watchful eye on the proprieties of his unmarried daughters, was not going to have his “Fanny” associating with an adulteress. (The rumor was true; de Staël had had a protracted affair with the comte de Narbonne, who was in fact the father of her two children; ironically, that affair was coming to a close in the Spring of 1793.) Dr. Burney genuinely disliked the émigré group, believing that the enlightened liberal intelligentsia had paved the way for disorder and democracy in France. He was encouraged in his detestation by Edmund Burke and Anna Ord, old friends who greatly disliked Frances Burney’s new association. Charles Burney, the son of a poor Scottish immigrant family, threw in his ideological lot most ardently with the extreme aristocrats and royalists. His displeasure at Madame de Staël’s immorality was doubtless sincere, and his casting of stones (as in the case of his scorn at Mrs. Thrale’s marriage to a mere musician) was untroubled by any sense of the glassiness of his own house. (By this time Charles had probably forgotten that he had not been married to Esther Sleepe at the time of the birth of their first child.) Dr. Burney evidently took alarm upon receiving Frances’s long letter of 16-19 February. He did not want his daughter to visit Madame de Staël at Juniper Hall. Frances must not stay under the same roof as an adulterous woman. His letter to his forty year-old daughter begins in thunder (“Fanny! What are you abt. and where are you?”), although the epistle is quite subtle, including an acknowledgment of Madame de Staël’s abilities:

I am not at all surprised at your acct. of the captivating powers of Made de Stahl. It corresponds with all that I had heard abt. her, & with the opinion I formed of her intellectual & literary powers on reading her charming little Apologie de Rousseau. – But as nothing human is allowed to be perfect, she has not escaped censure. (Dr. Burney to FB, 19 February, 1793; Berg MS; cf. *J&L* II:20)

He is discreet in indicating the cause of this “censure” : “Her house was the center of Revolutionists previous to the 10th. of Augt. after

her Father's departure, & she has been accused of partiality to M. de Narbonne" (*Ibid.*). (Dr. Burney was not one to send downright libels through the post.) But the lightest hint should suffice:

I know this will make you feel uncomfortable – but it seemed to me *right* to hint it to you – If you are not absolutely *in the House* of Made. de S. when this arrives, it wd. perhaps be possible for you to waive the visit to her by a compromise, of having something to do for Susey. (Berg MS; *J&L* II:21)

Charles Burney's daughter knew how to interpret her tactful father's "hint": she annotated the letter on receipt: "On Madame de Staël – & exhortation to decline visiting her at Juniper Hall" (Berg MS.; cf. *J&L* II:20). Frances could be thus "exhorted" because her unmarried status made her vulnerable. She was still under her father's control – and she had recently injured him and the family prospects in escaping from Court service. It behoved her to comply. As the editor of Madame de Staël's *Correspondance* complains, Frances Burney was no heroine on this occasion: "Son horreur de la singularité ne lui permettait pas d'être une Delphine" (editor's note, *Correspondance*, II:398). Madame de Staël eventually caught on; on 5 May she confronted Burney in "a violent attack, upon my concealing the circumstances to which I owed my *secession* from her society & correspondence" (FB to SBP, letter of 5 May 1793; *J&L* II: 105). Burney tacitly admitted the "secession" but assured the provoked Madame de Staël that she was "not at liberty to reveal" the causes. Frances presumably had given in to her father the more readily in order not to set her father more fully in opposition to the courtship (already far advanced) between the middle-aged spinster and one of the aristocratic émigrés, M. d'Arblay, the gallant captain a year younger than Frances. Letters and *thèmes* in French were written by Frances very faithfully to Alexandre d'Arblay, and the pair were eventually to be married in July 1793, despite Charles Burney's initial opposition. The only income Frances and Alexandre had to live on was Frances' pension from Queen Charlotte. Burney's caution, once her father threatened her with ill-repute in consorting with Madame de Staël, would have been heightened by fear of losing the Queen's good favor and her annual allowance if the rumor got about that Frances Burney consorted with abandoned adulteresses of the French

“démocrate” party. Frances’ relationship with Alexandre d’Arblay had to be pursued very discreetly indeed; the courtship made Burney vulnerable to ridicule, and she was nervous about paragraphs getting into the papers – as seems to have happened.

Yet, with all her secret hopes and a prudence well-founded (as she was about to defy her father and her world), Frances Burney was certainly not happy about bringing off the near-rupture between herself and Madame de Staël. The withdrawal of friendship was accomplished with consummate tact; Burneys never quarrelled openly if they could possibly prevent it. Frances merely resisted the invitation for “la première femme d’Angleterre” to take advantage of the *chambre* and *maison* awaiting her, and removed herself as often as possible from any chance of conversation. Relations between de Staël and Burney’s sister Susanna, and with Burney’s friends the Lockes, remained fully amicable. Indeed, Madame de Staël drew upon the Lockes for an illustration of the perfect marriage and the highest degree of love in the final version of her essay “De l’Influence des Passions sur Le Bonheur des Individus et des Nations”⁷.

7 The Lockes figure in chapter iv, “De l’amour”:

J’ai vu, pendant mon séjour en Angleterre, un homme du plus rare mérite, uni depuis vingt-cinq ans à une femme digne de lui: un jour, en nous promenant ensemble, nous rencontrâmes ce qu’on appelle en anglais des *Gipsies*, des Bohémiens, errant souvent au milieu des bois, dans la situation la plus déplorable: je les plaignais de réunir ainsi tous les maux physiques de la nature. *Eh bien!* me dit alors M. L., *si, pour passer ma vie avec elle, il avait fallu me résigner à cet état, j’aurais mendié depuis trente ans, et nous aurions encore été bien heureux!* – *Ah! Oui*, s’écria sa femme, *même ainsi nous aurions été les plus heureux des êtres!* Ces mots ne sont jamais sortis de mon cœur. Ah! qu’il est beau ce sentiment qui, dans l’âge avancé, fait éprouver une passion... qui rassemble dans l’âme tout ce que le temps enlève aux sensations...Quoi! C’est dans la réalité des choses humaines qu’il existe un tel bonheur, et toute la terre en est privée, et presque jamais l’on ne peut rassembler les circonstances qui le donnent! (*Oeuvres de Madame la Baronne de Staël-Holstein*, 3 vols, Paris, Lefevre, 1858 II:56. Other essays by Madame de Staël are here cited from this edition, but quotations from her novels are taken from modern editions.)

One notices that the Lockes’ response to the gypsies deflects attention from the poverty and possible wretchedness of these other human beings. In William Locke’s suddenly romantic musings, we can read a certain amount of postur-

During that spring of 1793, Madame de Staël still wrote to Frances, asking, for instance, for assistance in helping another émigrée raise some money by disposing of some very valuable lace. Burney attempted to do the party at Juniper Hall a service in finding them a servant according to specifications; this servant, a tall and ugly Scots-woman, was, however, disliked by Madame de Staël, who claimed (in a letter to Narbonne) to be afraid of her: “cette servante écossaise... Mon Dieu, une folle, renvoyez-la bien vite” (*Correspondance*, II: 440). But by this time Germaine de Staël understood clearly that she had been dropped by Frances Burney. Burney’s acknowledgment of an intentional coldness deeply offended Madame de Staël, and Burney’s expressions of regret added to the offence, instead of appeasing. The differences in character between the two women show clearly here. Burney thought that were she in de Staël’s position, she would rather have heard some regret in the explanation, and she had not intended to add to the other party’s wrath – as she had to realize she had done. The *éclaircissement* was, however, only partial; there was a limit to how much truth Frances would blurt out, even under Germaine’s questions. Susanna, safely defended by marriage from having to obey a father, continued to maintain the friendship with both Madame de Staël and Narbonne, and even let her idolized child, little Norbury, take expeditions with them. Susanna enjoyed their conversation, and entertained them in her home, even if she felt that Madame de Staël did not take sufficient heed of the proprieties:

Our eveng. was very pleasant...Me. de S. is, with all her wildness & blemishes, a delightful companion, & M. de N. rises upon me in esteem & affection every time I see him – their minds in some points ought to be exchanged – for he is as delicate as a really feminine Woman, & evidently suffers when he sees her setting *les bienséances* aside, as it often enough befalls her to do. (SBP to FB, 14 May 1793, Berg MS.)

ing; the influence of Prior’s *Henry and Emma* would seem (naturally enough) to have escaped Madame de Staël. William Locke seems to rise to a cultural demand or at least intuition that any female encounter with gypsies should command an erotic response.

Susanna's relative *sang-froid*, in marked contrast to Frances' pained alarm, is not the least surprising element in the whole tangled matter.

In Madame de Staël's last letters written to Burney during her residence in England, de Staël understandably takes a rather sarcastic tone, teasing the older woman about knowing her "secrets" (presumably Frances' burgeoning love for M. d'Arblay). Germaine is indomitable and a trifle taunting, even while expressing a limited surviving amity:

Je vois bien, my dear Miss, que vous voulez vous acquitter à force de services. Mais si vous vous étiez permis de lire Voltaire, je vous dirais ces deux vers un peu changés:

Un sentiment est cent foix au-dessus
Et de l'esprit et de la bonté même.

Oublions et le bonheur et le malheur de notre liaison ensemble, pour retourner au doux penchant de la reconnaissance. (Madame de Staël to Frances Burney, 11 May 1793, *Correspondance*, II:439)

Returning to her forceful French (except for the gibe concealed in "my dear Miss") Germaine de Staël tells Frances Burney directly that Burney must not imagine she can compensate by services rendered for friendship withdrawn. What Burney has left out is *sentiment*, though she may try to make up for it with wit (*esprit*) and good works (*bonté*); de Staël cuttingly denies her the qualities of Voltaire's *inconnue*, who is told she cannot compensate for lack of love with "de l'esprit et de la *beauté* même" (see Note, *Correspondance*, II:439). But, de Staël indicates, Burney will never recognize the insult concealed in the quotation, because Burney is a mere "Miss", so schoolgirlish and niminy-piminy as not to be *allowed*, not to *allow* herself, to read Voltaire. De Staël has established her superiority, to her own satisfaction, before continuing with the generous but realistic proposal that they forget both the happiness and the unhappiness of their relationship and fall back on the mild inclination of mere acquaintance.

Germaine de Staël's image of herself included generosity of spirit as well as spontaneity – qualities she values in her own heroines, Delphine and Corinne. De Staël's personality, as that comes through in Susanna Burney Phillips' letters, would have pleased de

Staël, as true to her own idea of herself – although at times one can feel that she is acting the role of large-hearted and impulsive Germaine de Staël. On her departure from England, she sent through Susanna a last sadly magnanimous message to Frances Burney:

After giving me a variety of charges – or rather entreaties, to watch & attend to the health, spirits, & affairs of the Friends she was leaving, she sd. to me – “Et dites [*sic*] a Mlle. Burnet [*sic*] que je ne lui en veux pas de tout – que je quitte le pays l’aimant bien sincèrement – et *sans rancune* –”

The emphasis indicates that de Staël thought there certainly was room for rancor; the pride in her statement that she wants nothing from Burney hardly seems intended to conceal both anger and wounded affection, and all of these emotions were to be transmitted. It cannot have been easy for Frances Burney to read either this speech or Susanna’s surprised attempt to respond for the absent Frances and supply the missing reciprocal affection:

I assured her earnestly, & wth. more words than I have room to insert not only of yr. admiration but affection – & sensibility of her worth – & chagrin at seeing no more of her – I hope I exceeded not too much yr. wishes – mais il n’y avoit moyen de résister – She seemed pleased, & sd. “Vous êtes bien bonne de me dire cela” – but in a low & faint voice, & dropt the subject –. (SBP to FB, ? 24 May 1793; Berg MS.)

Frances Burney was certainly not at all happy with the way in which this relationship had foundered. She wrote ruefully and with unusual frankness about it to Frederica Locke:

I have regretted excessively the finishing so miserably an acquaintance begun with so much spirit & pleasure, and the *dépit* I fear Made. de St[aël] must have experienced. I wish The World would take more care of itself and less of its neighbours. I should have been *very safe*, I trust, without such flights, & distances, & breaches! (FB to Frederica Locke, 23 May 1793; *J&L* II: 123)

Frances picks up Susanna’s word *dépit* to describe Madame de Staël’s reaction. Both defensive reaction and a spice of spite are sensed in Germaine de Staël’s controlled and wounded *dépit*.

In the life of participants, such an unhappy episode is not a minor incident, but one likely to stick in the mind of renouncer and

renounced alike. Their shipwrecked friendship was an important experience for both Burney and de Staël. Commentators have associated Delphine's experience of social rejection with the behavior of Parisian society to Madame de Staël at a ball in 1800; some former friends shunned her when it was known that Napoleon was displeased with her⁸. Undoubtedly, this was also an important experience, but the personal and long-drawn out betrayal (as de Staël must have felt it) of Burney's coolly pragmatic behavior to her, at a time when she was in need of friendship and very vulnerable, seems more closely related to events and reactions in *Delphine*.

When Burney wrote to Susanna in May 1793 regretting Madame de Staël's wrath and the ill effect of her attempt at explanation intended "to clear the matter, & soften to Made de Staël any pique or displeasure", it was really too late. Madame de Staël left Mickleham on 22 May, and after one night in London went directly on to the Continent. By mid-May, Frances was not staying near Mickleham and its fascinating émigrés, but was paying a visit at Chesington, formerly the abode of her friend Mr. Crisp. Chesington was the place where she had lived while writing much of *Evelina* and the greater part of *Cecilia*. Burney was trying to get inspiration to get going on her new novel, but she seems instead to have been revolving the immediate past. Her regretful letter to Frederica Locke of 23 May is defensive as well as regretful: "But there seemed an absolute resolution formed to crush this acquaintance, & compel me to appear its wilful renouncer" (*J&L* II:123). Burney self-excusingly declines to find a subject for her verbs – she will not directly accuse the cabal of her father, Anna Ord, and the Burkes, nor will she take responsibility herself. In syntactic choice she renders herself the passive object acted upon by a greater and impersonal force. The ending of this letter to Frederica Locke expresses a different kind of helplessness, in a comically-expressed wistful uncertainty:

8 Avriel Goldberger cites this incident in her introduction to her translation of *Delphine*, referring to J. Christopher Herold's biographical study. See Goldberger, "Introduction" to *Delphine*, transl. Avriel H. Goldberger, DeKalb, IL, Northern Illinois University Press, 1995, xiii-xiv, and Herold, *Mistress to an Age: A Life of Madame de Staël*, New York, Bobbs Merrill, 1958, 222-223.

Do you know anything of a certain young lady who eludes all my enquiries, famous for having eight sisters, all of uncommon talents? I had formerly some intercourse with her, & she used to promise she would renew it whenever I pleased: but whether she is offended that I have slighted her offers so long, or whether she is fickle, or only whimsical, I know not, – all that is quite undoubted, is, that she has concealed herself so effectually from my researches, that I might as well look for Justice & Clemency in the French Convention, as for this former friend in the plains and lanes of Chesington, where, erst, she met me whether I would or no! – (J&L II:124)

She must have written in the same vein to Susanna; her sister, concerned that Frances get going on a writing project of financial use to herself and d'Arblay, replied

I am excessively sorry yr. Muse is so shy my dearest Girl – I flattered myself, that Lady wd. have been productive of some substantial advantage to us.

Oddly, Susanna concludes this short note with another reference to a sore subject:

And now adieu my dearest Girl – Made. de S. is probably now at Ostend – (SBP to FB, 28 May 1793, Berg MS.)

Burney had already lamented in similar terms to her father:

As to les Muses – they are the most skittish ladies living – *one*, with Bowls & Daggers, pursues – another with a Mask escapes – However, I wind round & round their Recesses, where of old I found them – or where, rather, they found *me* – & perhaps we may yet encounter in some green Retreat (FB to CB, 17 May 1793, J&L II:121)

We note in this letter that the Muses are identified in the French term – *les Muses*. They are “skittish ladies” who both pursue and escape – just as Madame de Staël could be identified as both pursuing Burney and escaping from her. Yet they cannot be found in their “Recesses”, or “green Retreat”. In the letter to Frederica, the Muse who does not exist – the Muse of the Novel – is identified as a young lady of uncommon talents, who has formerly had “intercourse” with Frances, but who is now “offended”, her “offers” of association “slighted so long”. Susanna’s letter of 28 May seems to confirm the hidden association. The Muse – not just the Muse of comedy, well-known

Thalia, but the missing Muse, the Muse both of the Novel and of women's writing – has become a figure for Madame de Staël – injured, absent and already as far away as Ostend. In this figurative version of the story, the powerful and inspiring female, the “former friend”, has not been dropped but is the “renouncer”, lying concealed where once she was almost too often present, gone when she is earnestly sought after.

It does not seem accidental that the Muses were chary of Burney after she had given such a blow to the life of intellect and of friendship. In the event, the new novel was a long time in coming, even though Burney needed a saleable work for the most practical of reasons. *Camilla* was not published until 1796. The novel that Burney was planning in Chesington during the courtship spring of 1793 was going to be largely scrapped⁹. *Camilla*, the novel that emerges in 1796, unlike Burney's last novel, *The Wanderer*, says nothing directly about the French Revolution. *Camilla*, however, deals most extensively with French fiction, and of all Burney's fictional works it is the one most concerned with the positive aspects of female friendship.

In this novel Burney's relation to Madame de Staël can be traced, including Burney's own thinking about de Staël's literary subjects: the effect of the passions on individuals and on cultures, the culture's relation to the emotions, the nature of happiness, the need for liberty. In this novel, too, the game of rejection and renunciation is imposed on the heroine with very bad results. *Camilla* in turn was to have its impact on Madame de Staël's first novel, *Delphine* (1802).

In *Camilla*, the heroine, whom we follow from childhood, is a member of an extensive family. Her father, the clergyman Mr. Tyrold, is gentle and well-meaning; her mother, high-minded and severe. Mr. Tyrold's brother, who possesses an estate, is the ignorant good-hearted Sir Hugh, who tries to run everybody's lives for them. The

9 See my analysis of the history and nature of the largely abortive novel with the heroine “Clarinda” in *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1988, 199-214.

heroine is thus from childhood situated within a web of different forms of control and lines of authority. A good deal of damage is done. Sir Hugh allows little Eugenia, uninoculated, to catch small-pox, and later drops her off a see-saw; Eugenia is deformed and crippled for life. Children in the guardianship of adults are not necessarily in good hands. Seen from one aspect, the novel is a discussion of damage, rules, and tutelage.

One of de Staël's subjects is Rousseau; Dr. Burney praises her "charming little" work on Rousseau in the very letter in which he damns her behavior and acquaintance. It is safe to assume that Frances Burney, too, had read de Staël's *Lettres sur le caractère et les écrits de J.-J. Rousseau* (1788). In that early work, Germaine de Staël had argued against Rousseau's attempt to turn the woman into a passive being, arguing that energy of soul is needed for woman to fulfill her hard duties. In the "Préface" of 1814 she is more emphatic on this point: "si vous ne respirez enfin l'air dans une région plus vaste, vous n'êtes qu'une poupée bien apprise" (*Oeuvres*, I:2). Despite her objections to casting woman as the well-taught doll, de Staël conceded Rousseau's understanding of the female heart; she declared that he was fundamentally right about the need or desire for women to subject themselves to men:

Enfin il (Rousseau) croit à l'amour; sa grace est obtenue: qu'importe aux femmes que sa raison leur dispute l'empire, quand son coeur leur est soumis? qu'importe même à celles que la nature a douées d'une ame tendre, qu'on leur ravisse le faux honneur de gouverner celui qu'elles aiment? Non, il leur est plus doux de sentir sa supériorité, de l'admirer, de le croire mille fois au-dessus d'elles, de dépendre de lui...de se soumettre volontairement, d'abaisser tout à ses pieds... ("Sur Les Écrits de Rousseau", *Oeuvres* (1858), I:8-9)

These Rousseauian positions are examined in Burney's *Camilla*, which critically examines (without denying) the desire of woman to submit voluntarily to the man she loves, and to look up to him as superior. Burney's biggest target in her third novel would seem to be Rousseau's *Emile* (1762), a book which sets forth as ideal the constant mentoring of children. The male child is to have a tutor, his guide, philosopher and friend in all affairs of life, including choosing a mate. As for the girl, she is to be closely under the care of her mother, taught

how to be feminine by playing with dolls, sewing and being constantly obedient without reasoning. Women do not have an innate sense of justice, Rousseau claims, and easily bear being affronted and misused, whereas the spirit of a boy will revolt against injustice.

Both the boys and girls in *Camilla* are closely tutored, and all run into difficulties. The most disastrous case of bad mentoring is the most Rousseauian. Young Edgar Mandlebert, a neighbor, and the juvenile heir to a valuable estate, is mentored by his tutor Dr. Marchmont. Like the ideal Rousseauian tutor, Dr. Marchmont does not see his business done as his charge enters adulthood. He informs his pupil's manliness, and supervises his pupil's sexual coming of age. Unlike the tutor of Emile, who is also a projection of the author Jean-Jacques, Dr. Marchmont cannot create an ideal woman for his pupil – indeed, he is evidently unconsciously afraid of any woman dragging Edgar out of his lonely orbit. Dr. Marchmont's own bad experience of marriage quite patently is both effect and cause of the misogyny which he tries to pass on to Edgar. Damagingly, he plays on Edgar's self-distrust, arguing that women are going to like him for his estate, and that it is unlikely that any woman will love him solely for himself. Edgar must find the woman who truly loves him before he makes any move to woo her – advice echoing the tutor's advice to Emile. Meanwhile, Camilla has been taught to control the expression of her natural feelings. She must not look interested in Edgar – that would put her in a weak and unfeminine position. Moreover, she is told, if she appears interested in Edgar, people will think her mercenary. In trying to follow the impossible advice and “act natural”, Camilla tries to prove that she is sincere and not mercenary, while yet sustaining the feminine reserve that her own father warns her is absolutely necessary.

Edgar, trying to make sure that he has some power over Camilla, undertakes to act as tutor-Mentor himself. His chief test is his endeavor to persuade Camilla to reject the proffered friendship of Mrs. Arlbery, a dashing older woman of the neighborhood. (It seems patently officious of young Edgar to assume a position *in loco parentis* in relation to a young woman who has a full kit of parents.) Edgar uses his exhortation as a test of whether Camilla is frivolous or serious, and also as a test as to whether she is both interested in him and

worthy of him. But Camilla is attacked by a counter-Mentor (or mock-mentor), the disagreeably feminine Miss Margland (who wants her charge Indiana to marry Edgar). Miss Margland points out that Camilla's obedience to this young man can be constructed as paying him marked attentions. Miss Margland is right; a desire to abase herself before Edgar is making Camilla accept his tutelage, while he is playing at putting her *en tutelle* to him. Stung by this recognition, Camilla miserably defies Edgar's authoritarian wish, and takes up the acquaintance with Mrs. Arlbery. Edgar cannot give up his interest in Camilla, pursuing her even to Tunbridge Wells when she goes there on an expedition with Mrs. Arlbery.

Edgar is always watching and judging Camilla, always measuring her by exaggerated standards and secret rules. Burney said she did not want to write "a staring Love Story," (*J&L* III:136). Indeed, the "Love Story" turns into a tormented spy story, a story of espionage and surveillance that seems to reflect Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) as well as to parody Rousseau's support of surveillance. According to Rousseau, a man must watch a woman closely. He cannot hold her in discourse, for women are trained to be dishonest. Women are voiceless or at least wordless spectacles – they require to be watched by attentive erotic observers. The story of *Camilla* exhibits the futility and degradation inherent in such a notion. If she agrees with de Staël that one cannot be a doll (like the doll-like Indiana), Burney also queries de Staël's raptures about erotic submission.

Other characters also fall into various difficulties, often largely owing to an intention to do right. Poor young Eugenia, made heiress of her uncle Hugh's estate in reparation for her injuries, is kidnapped by a charming fortune-hunter who turns into an abusive husband as soon as he is sure of her. Once damage is done, it is not easily repaired. The novel's supposedly happy ending, in which Edgar and Camilla are united, may leave us with severe doubts as to the probable happiness of this couple; Edgar's conduct brought Camilla to a state of dementia, while his obedience to his tutor nearly destroyed him psychologically.

The males who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of the system of surveillance and control of women are in Burney's novel very visibly damaged by it. They become glacial, without feeling, or

prey to suppressed and unresolved emotion, like Marchmont, still burning with resentment against the wife he never fully possessed. The masculine idea is in fact built upon a notion of sovereignty over women, of notional male “rights” so absolute that they must be always challenged as soon as a woman has a voice of her own. The men thus see women as inherently dangerous; the more dangerous they feel women to be, the more likely the males are to identify *themselves* as incompetent and unlovable.

There are two women who are marked out as dangerous acquaintances for Camilla and her sisters. Mrs. Arlbery, the dashing widow, is an independent thinker with a biting wit. Her comments on the other characters are shrewd as well as amusing. When the heroine does defy advice and go and visit her, readers will be cheered; we may also see in this scene a hidden wish that Frances Burney could have visited Madame de Staël. (“I wish The World would take more care of itself and less of its neighbours”.) If Mrs. Arlbery is Madame de Staël, she is also Frances herself. Burney’s sister Esther detected the resemblance:

Mrs. Arlbery (whom we are apt to call *d’Arblay*) entertains me extremely & with all her Caprices, she has so much wit & sense that it is impossible not to like & almost love her... (EBB to FBd’A: British Library, Egerton MSS. 3690, ff. 114-115)

Frances Burney herself had been on the receiving end of caution in acquaintance; she had been warned against – much to her surprise and chagrin. In 1784 William Locke had asked his wife Frederica to see less of Frances, giving her “a Lecture...upon her want of Moderation”. He thought his wife was too emotional, even threatened with madness; her chief sign of want of “Moderation” was her ardent friendship for Frances Burney – which Locke chose to treat as an excessive infatuation, a menace to his wife’s reason¹⁰. Perhaps the

10 Frederica Locke told Frances Burney about her husband’s fears for her reason, and his desire that she spend less time and attention on Frances, in early August 1784, as the two women were taking a country drive. Burney was very upset by this conversation and (uncharacteristically) suffered from an attack of faintness. She records the upsetting conversation in a letter to SBP, 10 August 1784, Berg MS. See also *The Life in the Works*, 165-167.

Lockes' union was not quite as idyllic as Madame de Staël wished to believe. At any rate, Burney knew what it was to be cast in the role of the dangerous acquaintance, to be (almost) the renounced instead of the "renouncer". The modern reader is likely to see little wrong with Mrs. Arlbery, except that she wants Camilla to grow up, and that she wishes her friend Sir Sedley Clarendel might fall in love with and marry the girl. Mrs. Arlbery's lack of sympathy for Edgar is refreshing, and never seems to be reprehended by the author.

The other dangerous woman is Mrs. Berlinton, a beautiful young woman married off young, and during the course of the story in danger of committing adultery. She has been brought up by a stern aunt who was always preaching hell-fire; consequently, the young woman is a prey to sensibility and sensational ideas (*Camilla*, 487). Nothing charms her that is not expressed in hyperbolic terms. Mrs. Berlinton first appears in the novel when she is discovered in an out-of-doors space reading a letter in the moonlight. She is observed by Camilla and an empty-headed teenager, little Miss Dannel; these ladies, "invited by a bright moon", wander into a meadow, where they are scared by "a figure in white":

'She's talking to herself!' exclaimed Miss Dannel; 'Lord, how frightful!' and she clung close to Camilla, who, mounting a little hillock of stones, presently perceived that the lady was reading a letter. (388)

The observers, engaging in some (feminine) surveillance themselves, see a man come and address the woman in white. Silly Miss Dannel is at first scared, then intrigued: "La! ... how pretty it looks. I dare say it's a lover.'" (388). The lady, however, begs the man to leave her; when he seems reluctant, Camilla chivalrously comes to the lady's rescue by entering through a hedge, and the pursuer draws back.

Mrs. Berlinton is altogether a romantic figure – her weakness is that she is romantic to herself (387-89). She lives largely through reading, but her taste in books, including *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, is not in itself bad. The invocation of the "*Peruvian Letters*" (*Camilla*, 606) reminds us of a possible ending to this novel other than the conventional marriage. Characters in Burney's novel undergo, like Zilia, loss of inheritance and changes in identity.

Germaine de Staël's first novel *Delphine*, published six years after *Camilla* (which had been translated into French in 1798) seems intimately connected with Burney's third novel. Burney's example was of great importance to de Staël – as a challenge, as well as a model. During the more flourishing season of her acquaintance with the Burney sisters, Germaine de Staël had discussed Burney's novels with Narbonne, d'Arblay, and Susanna. Susanna described the conversation to her sister:

We then talked over Zeluco, from thence fell on *Cecilia & Evelina*, & Made. de S.'s own Novels. – She spoke enthusiastically of *Cecilia* – & sd. that the power of forming a new, ingenious yet *natural* Story was what she felt herself most deficient in, & what she most respected in you. She gave me the plan of one of her own Novels, adding "*Mlle. Burney* n'auoit pas osé hasarder cela?" Wth. more Sincerity than perhaps I ought to have used, I sd. laughing "Je ne sçais ce qu'elle auroit osé – mais elle n'auoit pas *voulû* hasarder cela." – She told me, a little piquée I thought, that her Mother, the most severe of Judges, had read this novel of hers, et n'y avoit rien trouvée à redire – en effet the moral to be drawn from it & the conclusion were nothing less than *libre* – tho the Subject wd. have seemed a little so to you & me. (SBP to FB, 5 April 1793, Berg MSS.)¹¹

The "Novels" of de Staël here most likely refer to the novellas published with the "Essai sur les Fictions" in 1795. De Staël sees herself as a more daring writer than Burney, who is bound by the proprieties – yet de Staël, in a touchingly youthful and rather comic

11 The novels of her own that Madame de Staël was discussing were most likely her youthful works still in the process of revision, and not yet published. The work of which she gave an outline might perhaps have been *Zulma*. Originally intended as a chapter in the essay "De l'influence des passions", as an example of how extreme the passion of love can be, *Zulma* was published in 1794, and again in 1795, where it appeared with the "Essai sur les fictions" and three new novellas, all of which the author says she wrote before she was twenty. I would vote for *Pauline* as the next most likely candidate for the subject to discussion here; it is most emphatic in painting a picture of the effect of an unhappy arranged marriage on an unformed and very young girl, and her seduction by an older man. In saying the story was "nothing less than *libre*", Susanna, paraphrasing de Staël in a recognizably Burneyesque locution, means that she said the story was the opposite of libertine in its meaning and moral tendency.

turn, defensively brings in her own “Mother” to vouch for her moral sense. Burney is a rival to be respected, if surpassed, because she has the power of forming a new and yet “natural” story. De Staël’s own later works exhibit her engagement with Burney’s power of story.

Delphine is a philosophic novel, visibly the work of a writer whose interest lies more largely in setting out the current conflict of ideas and principles than in creating a “story”. This work follows in the steps of Rousseau, the philosophic novelist *par excellence*, rather than of such essentially novelistic writers as Prévost or Richardson – although de Staël has obviously studied both of these carefully. The epistolary narration of *Delphine* is ultimately derived from Richardson, but a Richardson partly filtered through *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, in which characters write entire letters of social observation which need not contribute to the emotional action.

It is not to slight de Staël to suggest that the material she uses to think with is also partly borrowed from Burney. Authors often re-work each other’s material. A number of other works thread through the fabric of *Delphine*, including, as in *Camilla*, Graffigny’s *Lettres d’une Péruvienne*. Zilia’s closing sentiment about finding value in life itself: “Je vis! je suis! j’existe!” is echoed by Delphine in the middle of the novel: “je sentoie en moi le plaisir de vivre...un sentiment vif et doux de l’existence.” (*Delphine*, Troisième Partie, lettre xxxix, p. 561; see translation by Avriel H. Goldberger, p. 253)¹².

The main situation of de Staël’s novel, however, speaks much more of Burney than of Graffigny. Delphine, a beautiful young widow, is determined to live according to the highest ideals, and to find out herself what makes for happiness. This heroine, although warned by the pious and phlegmatic Matilde, daughter of her best friend Sophie de Vernon, that her independence of mind injures her reputation and will put off suitors, cannot believe this. It is, how-

12 The edition of *Delphine* is the critical edition edited by Simone Balayé and Lucia Omacini, 2 vols., Geneva, Librairie Droz S.A., 1987. The whole of the novel itself is in the first volume, so the volume number is not repeated in references, which will appear with page numbers in the text. The translation alluded to is that by Goldberger, as in note 8 above.

ever, her ill fortune to fall in love with Léonce, a man of Spanish descent who is ultra-careful of his honor and nicely critical of women's behavior. The relation between Delphine and Léonce becomes very visibly a revision of that between the younger and more inexperienced Camilla and Edgar. Delphine's situation is peculiarly painful because, before she knew Léonce, she helped to arrange a marriage between him and Matilde, largely because of her best friend's insistence. Madame de Vernon is charming, intellectual, witty and serious, a fascinating and interesting character whom Delphine adores. In her enthusiastic desire to find the highest path and to give the sincerest marks of true affection, Delphine does not understand the calculation within Madame de Vernon, nor the hidden contempt for Delphine harbored by this "friend", even as she takes advantage of the generous young woman in pursuing her own ends. Like Camilla, Delphine is impulsive and thoughtless, and, as in Camilla's case, others judge her severely for those qualities. Madame de Vernon coolly comments on her supposed friend, even while reporting on her success in getting this huge gift from her:

Madame d'Albémar, la plus jolie et la plus spirituelle femme qu'il y ait, ne s'imagine pas qu'elle doive soumettre sa conduite à aucun genre de calcul; c'est ce qui fait qu'elle peut se nuire beaucoup à elle-même, jamais aux autres. Elle voit tout, elle devine tout, quand il s'agit de considérer les hommes et les idées sous un point de vue général, mais dans ses affaires et ses affections, c'est une personne toute de premier mouvement. (Première partie, lettre ix, 129-30; trans. Goldberger, 29-30)

This character type is clearly delineated by Burney in her heroine, whom we know from her childhood; the qualities of liveliness and impulsive affection are visible in Camilla at nine years old, and involve her in perplexity when she has reached the age of courtship at seventeen:

Her qualities had a power which, without consciousness how, or consideration why, governed her whole family. The airy thoughtlessness of her nature was a source of perpetual amusement; and, if sometimes her vivacity raised a fear for her discretion, the innocence of her mind reassured them after every alarm... Her spirits were volatile, but her heart was tender.... (51-52)

A reflection of the way in which Burney saw herself (she was, after all, a Gemini, an air sign), Camilla is “volatile” and “airy” (the author at first intended to call her “Ariella”). Camilla’s heart is always generous; she is not willing to calculate, nor to maneuver for her own benefit. At the age of nine she is happy to relinquish her fortune to her injured little sister, a decision she never regrets, though others regard it as a disappointing and vexing loss.

Like the impulsive and airy Camilla, Delphine is surrounded both by people who calculate upon and exploit the innocent and impulsive, and by people who simply observe and misread the conduct of others. Léonce is both unconsciously exploitative and a stubborn misreader. He confesses to his English friend M. Barton that he agrees with “the prejudices of my ancestors” and holds reputation and public opinion paramount.

Savez-vous pourquoi, jusqu’à présent, je me suis défendu contre l’amour, quoique je sentisse bien avec quelle violence il pourroit s’emparer de moi? C’est que j’ai crainct d’aimer une femme qui ne fût point d’accord avec moi sur l’importance que j’attache à l’opinion, et dont le charme m’entraînât, quoique sa manière de penser me fit souffrir. J’ai peur d’être déchiré par deux puissances égales, un coeur sensible et passionné, un caractère fier et irritable. (Première partie, lettre xviii, 163; trans. Goldberger, 46)

Having consented to the arranged marriage with Matilde, the irritable and stiff Léonce falls unwillingly in love with Delphine, even though convinced she is not worthy of his passion. He is shocked at hearing that she is an admirer of Rousseau, and takes issue with her when she replies that “que de tous les sentimens, l’amour de la liberté, me paroît le plus digne d’un caractère généreux” (Première partie, lettre xxv, 190). Léonce rebukes her as tactfully as he can:

je désirerois seulement savoir s’il étoit vrai que vous vous livriez souvent à témoigner votre sentiment à ce sujet, et si nul intérêt ne pourroit vous en détourner. (Première partie, lettre xxv, 190; trans. Goldberger, 60)

Léonce follows this up with what might be called the Mentor-as-lover trick:

– Quoi! me dit-il, avec un charme inexprimable, si vous aviez un ami qui désirât vous rapprocher de sa mère, qui craignît tout ce qui pourroit s'opposer à ce desir, vous céderiez à ses conseils? – Oui, lui répondis-je, l'amitié vaut bien plus qu'une telle condescendance!

Il prit ma main, et après l'avoir portée à ses lèvres, avant de la quitter, il la pressa sur son coeur. Ah! ce mouvement me parut le plus doux, le plus tendre de tous, ce n'étoit point le simple hommage de la galanterie; Léonce n'auroit point pressé ma main sur son noble coeur, s'il n'avoit pas voulu l'engager pour témoin des ses affections. (Première partie, lettre xxv, 191; trans. Goldberger, 61)

This seems a conflation of several scenes in *Camilla*. Two of these scenes involve Edgar's request – as a test of Camilla's sincerity as well as of her good behavior – that she not visit the dangerously fascinating and worldly Mrs. Arlbery (*Camilla*, 236-7; 267-68). The third is a reconciliation scene which becomes a betrothal:

'You will not speak to me!' cried he; 'you will not trust me! shall I call you cruel?'...holding out to him one hand, while with the other she covered her face: 'Forgive me', she cried, 'I entreat...for I scarce know what I say'.

Such a speech, and so accompanied, might have demolished the stoicism of an older philosopher than Edgar; he fervently kissed her proffered hand, exclaiming: 'Forgive you! can Camilla use such a word? has she the slightest care for my opinion? the most remote concern for me, or for my happiness?'

...

Every other emotion, now, in the vanquished Camilla, every retrospective fear, every actual regret, yielded to the conquering charm of grateful tenderness; and restoring the hand she had withdrawn: 'O Edgar', she cried, 'how little can I merit such a gift! yet I prize it...far, far, beyond all words!'

The agitation of Edgar was, at first, too mighty and too delicious for speech, but his eyes, now cast up to heaven, now fixed upon her own, spake the most ardent, yet purest felicity, while her hand, now held to his heart, now pressed to his lips, strove vainly to recover its liberty. 'Blest moment!' he at length uttered...

Again speech seemed too poor for him. Perfect satisfaction is seldom loquacious; its character is rather tender than gay; and where happiness succeeds abruptly to long solicitude and sorrow, its enjoyment is fearful... Sudden joy is sportive, but sudden happiness is awful. (*Camilla*, Book VII, ch. v, 544-545)

In both *Camilla* and *Delphine* an apparently straightforward romantic exchange, with many apparently pleasant elements of rococo

idyll, is shot through with ironies. An ironic perspective extends to the social constructs and prohibitions operated by and through the characters.

The narrative tone of the passage of *Camilla* quoted above, like the sentiment within the authorial comments at the end, is remarkably close to the tone of a scene in *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807). In *Corinne*, the author allows herself to use the third-person narrating voice and the kind of commentary found in Burney's later books:

... il [Oswald] n'aperçut pas qu'un sentiment de délicatesse empêchait Corinne de profiter de l'émotion d'Oswald pour le lier par un serment. Peut-être, d'ailleurs, est-il dans la nature d'un amour profond et vrai de redouter un moment solennel, quelque désiré qu'il soit, et de ne changer qu'en tremblant l'espérance contre le bonheur même. (*Corinne, ou l'Italie*, Bk VIII, "Les statues et les tableaux", ch. 4, 231; trans. Goldberger, 153)¹³

Unlike the more pensive Corinne, young Delphine has initially great capacity for hope, and little tendency to doubt. As both dashing young widow and romantic dreamer, Delphine combines qualities of both Mrs. Arlbery and Mrs. Berlinton with many of the leading qualities of Burney's heroine, the thoughtless, generous and spontaneous Camilla. Léonce sees Delphine in the moonlight; in Wertheresque style she is first viewed while regarding the inscription on a monument. She then steps out of the shadows into the moonlight: "Je serois resté ... si je n'avois vu Delphine sortir du bosquet pour lire aux rayons de la lune, une lettre qu'elle tenoit entre ses mains" (*Delphine*, Seconde partie, letter xi, 305-306; trans. Goldberger, 121). When Léonce at last approaches her, she trembles and nearly faints, leaning against a tree for support. He recognizes his own letter, and falls on his knees before her. As watcher, the hero in this scene combines the roles of spying Edgar with those of an observant Camilla, the ignorant Miss Dennel and certainly the false Bellamy, Mrs. Berlinton's designing suitor. Léonce, too, like Bellamy, rushes

13 The edition is *Corinne ou l'Italie* ed. Simone Balayé, Paris, Gallimard, 1985. English-speaking readers are referred to the recent translation by Avriel Goldberger, *Corinne, or Italy*.

References to this text are given after references to the French edition, which appear with page numbers after quotations in the text.

out and accosts his lady while she reads his letter, falling on his knees like the melodramatically romantic (and scheming) mock-Wertheresque lover in Burney's scene.

In de Staël's novel we do not have the framing humor of Burney, who has a thirteen-year-old girl present to gasp "La! how pretty it looks! I dare say it's a lover". If de Staël dares go much further than Burney in matters of sexuality ("elle a voulu hasarder cela", we may say), she is not so daring in applying disconcerting humor or a multiplicity of views to her emotive scenes. But she picks up Burney's interest in the relativity of viewers and scene, the possibilities of endless misinterpretation that arise when everything human beings do is supposed to fit into one standard mould, and to be transparently interpretable.

Struggling with her own feelings and ideals, Delphine often forgets or does not know that she is being closely observed by Léonce. Her endeavor to assist another woman (trapped in a miserable marriage from which she is trying to escape) to meet her lover clouds Delphine's own reputation; the visiting gentleman is thought to be attracted by herself, and for a while the censorious Léonce is thoroughly repulsed. Like Edgar Mandlebert, he is very strongly aware of the barometer of his own esteem.

Delphine, however, very like Camilla who feels such guilt at being thought to try to woo a suitor from Indiana, feels guilty about even having attracted Léonce's attention. As in *Camilla*, both parties to the "Love Story" undergo intense vacillations, and rarely feel the same affection or repulsion simultaneously. Neither pair is really surrounded by friends. Madame de Vernon, the pretended best friend of Delphine, is jealous, critical and hostile. Madame de Vernon has her own fish to fry – as perhaps Madame de Staël thought Burney had her own interests to serve in 1793, sustaining her reputation at the court of Queen Charlotte and carrying on her secret courtship with d'Arblay. That courtship had wrenched Alexandre, a close friend, away from Germaine de Staël. Burney's real objectives had rendered Madame de Staël inconvenient, even expendable. The story of *Delphine* really turns on an important "rupture". If a major event in *Camilla* is the heroine's making friends with Mrs. Arlbery against Edgar's advice (an action the mirror opposite of Burney's behavior

over Madame de Staël), the center of de Staël's novel is a supposed friendship that turns out to be a sham, in which the younger and more impulsive woman is mistreated by an older woman with a colder heart, though possessing a very charming veneer. Talleyrand thought that *he* was a model for the treacherous Madame de Vernon¹⁴. It is disconcerting to think that Madame de Vernon could in some respects be a satiric portrait of Frances Burney. Sophie de Vernon in the end expresses regret about the rupture, and feels some shame at the betrayal, but she has relentlessly pursued her own interests, and determined cold-bloodedly to marry Matilde to Léonce. (Jane Austen's charmingly poisonous and strong-willed heroine Lady Susan Vernon of *Lady Susan* seems to be modelled on Sophie de Vernon.) Sophie does not think delicate deception any crime. When Delphine expects Madame de Vernon to help set matters straight with Léonce, this "friend" very subtly confirms him in his worst thoughts of Delphine. Having got what she wanted out of Delphine (including a great deal of money), she is (or so she thinks at first) content to drop the young woman. This rupture, brought into the open by Delphine's impulsive heart, is very painful to her. In similar wise, in May 1793, Germaine de Staël by frank and skilled questioning had insisted on bringing Burney's behavior and intentions at least partially into the open. She had then had to live with the fact that someone she loved and admired had, as she felt, slyly betrayed her.

Léonce, once married to the stiffly virtuous Matilde, cannot be happy. Formerly extremely moralistic in denouncing sexual misconduct, Léonce wishes to forsake his marriage vows and enjoy sexual and emotional fulfillment with Delphine, who would thus be making of herself the kind of woman he had fulminated against. Their compromises with passion and respectability satisfy neither of them – and they eventually fall. There can, however, be no chance for happiness for Delphine in this arrangement. Indeed, the women of

14 Talleyrand, a former lover of the author, commented on the first appearance of *Delphine* "Madame de Staël has disguised both herself and me as women in her novel". Others also thought he resembled Madame de Vernon. See Vivian Fokenflik, Introduction to *An Extraordinary Woman: Selected Writings of Germaine de Staël*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1987, especially 3; 23.

the novel do not and cannot find happiness. Men can behave as they wish without paying any price as long as they are emotionally free. Not to be emotionally free leads to self-tormenting for men and women alike. Some are deprived of any snatch at even a delusory happiness. Like Camilla, Delphine has a sister (in her case a sister-in-law) who is disfigured. Mlle d'Albémar, unlike the more naive Eugenia, early counted herself out of the realms of sexuality and marriage: "j'ai senti, presqu'au sortir de l'enfance, qu'avec ma figure, il étoit ridicule d'aimer. Imaginez-vous de quels sentiments amers j'ai dû m'abreuver; il étoit ridicule pour moi d'aimer!" (Première partie, lettre vii, 117; trans. Goldberger, 23)

Eugenia's learning the hard lesson of her "ugliness" supplies central episodes of the middle of Burney's novel; the crippled and pock-marked girl finds out at the end of her childhood that she is considered an object of derision. *Delphine* arguably has nothing as subtly cruel as the scene of Eugenia's exposure – Mlle d'Albémar's recognition of her disfiguring ugliness at least lies mercifully in the past. The story of *Delphine* comes to a revolutionary climax in 1792, with Léonce being executed by firing squad and the heroine committing suicide. But, as with *Camilla*, the main story is a tale of social violence, of which overt and literal violence seems but a natural outcome. The exquisite pain of social rejection, the group's power to create psychic torment in ordinary social occasions – these are themes of *Camilla*. They may even be somewhat softened in *Delphine*, in which the characters, rather older than those in Burney's *Picture of Youth*, have more grip on their own lives.

The firing squad and the poison phial might seem a long way from Burney. Indeed, de Staël received so much criticism for her ending that she wrote a second ending in which hero and heroine live chastely during the Revolution, Léonce fighting and dying in the Vendée and Delphine dying of a broken heart. (Her son substituted this ending in the *Oeuvres complètes* of Madame de Staël published in 1820.) The difference between the first (or real) ending of *Delphine* and Burney's ending to *Camilla* is not as great as one might expect. We should remember that when Burney began to plan the novel that at last became *Camilla*, the Muse of the Dagger and the Bowl

offered herself repeatedly and the comic muse – the Muse “with a Mask” – fled. There is death and violence at the ending of *Camilla*; the comic muse’s mask only pretends to conceal the grimace of pain. True, there is a “happy ending”, with a marriage. But Eugenia and Camilla both nearly die; Eugenia barely escapes being murdered by her husband. The bloodstained corpse of her sister’s husband, dead by his own hand, helps to overturn Camilla’s mind during her final ordeal. Enough bloodshed and horror enter the story for us to feel the revolutionary world of violence making itself felt. Implicitly, if not explicitly, *Camilla* is a revolutionary novel, a novel about the repressions and desires that feed the outbursting of violent conduct. *Camilla* is also a discussion of current affairs in England, in which the virtue of Englishwomen had become a moral battle-cry of the conservative anti-revolutionary party – of those for whom even Lafayette and Alexandre d’Arblay, let alone the adulterous *baronne*, were wicked creatures.

Delphine, that story of amatory spying and the pressures on an impulsive and generous-hearted woman who tries to be sincere, is a reworking of *Camilla* that includes overtly revolutionary elements. Through the transparent web of the social and amatory narrative, we are always watching the Revolution advancing towards readers and characters. De Staël is obviously influenced too by the careless and violently spendthrift world of *Cecilia*, in which the wealthy classes seem to be dancing on the edge of destruction. As de Staël could not have known during her acquaintance with Burney, the plays that the English author had written between *Cecilia* and *Camilla* were bloody and violent¹⁵. Something of the darkness of those tragedies had got into *Camilla*. Burney’s novel is a novel about destruction. De Staël seems to have read it most attentively, however irritated she

15 For a study of Burney’s tragedies as well as the complete texts of the tragedies from the manuscripts, see the “Introduction” by Peter Sabor to the first volume as well as the entire second volume of *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor and Stewart J. Cooke, London, Pickering and Chatto, 1995.

De Staël probably heard at some point of the production of the one Burney play actually staged in the author’s lifetime, her tragedy *Edwy and Elgiva*, which did not succeed in its one night at Drury Lane, 21 March 1795.

may have felt at its author. In *Delphine*, Burney is triply present, as the treacherous Madame de Vernon, as the well-meaning and thoughtless Camilla who serves as model for Delphine, and as the guardian genius of this kind of novel. Burney is both figure of scorn and character, target and satiric butt and inspiration. She is, that is, the Muse of *Delphine*.

In her own last novel, Burney turns to de Staël as a Muse. She now writes directly about the French Revolution (as de Staël had already done in *Delphine*). She draws upon what she had learned of the émigrés in Mickleham in 1792-93 to trace the story of an émigrée. Burney uses the experience of Madame de Staël in particular. Tallien, “one of the worst wretches of the Convention”, who escorted de Staël out of France, becomes transmogrified into the commissary, Juliet’s pursuer. He is her gross and blackmailing spouse by imposition, a violent but vulgar stand-in for Robespierre the tyrant. Burney’s last novel plots the Revolution’s violent turns and changes from 1792 to 1794. Her heroine is, like Germaine de Staël, heroic in saving a life, and even more ingenious in making her escape. Juliet, called “Julie” by her French friends within the novel (an echo of the names of both Shakespeare’s and Rousseau’s heroine), is a woman of many nationalities (or none); she seems like a stand-in for both de Staël and Burney.

In making *Delphine* so directly a commentary on the French Revolution and the need of society for further change – change of such a magnitude as to be unmeasurable for her generation – de Staël had alienated Napoleon, who tried to suppress the book. Burney in *Camilla* did not draw an overt connection between political events and her story, but she could have said of it many of the things that Germaine de Staël says about her story in her “Quelques Réflexions sur le but moral de Delphine”. In this essay, de Staël speculates that society in general prefers to reward characters “egoïstes et durs”, even though each of us individually may prefer a character like Delphine – sensitive, imprudent and generous. The hard enclosed characters support society in maintaining the collective stability that resists change, and they are valued as a protection against mutability (*Oeuvres*, I:869). The treatment of women is a special arena for the exhibition of society’s power, and women should

know that even brilliance and goodness on their part cannot stand against social opinion.

The “Préface” of *Delphine* makes us focus our attention on the human heart which is both enigma and open revelation:

Observer le coeur humain, c'est montrer à chaque pas l'influence de la morale sur la destinée: il n'y a qu'un secret dans la vie, c'est le bien ou le mal qu'on a fait; il se cache, ce secret, sous mille formes trompeuses...mais tout-à-coup votre sort se décide, le mot de votre énigme se révèle, et ce mot, la conscience l'avoit dit bien avant que le destin l'eût répété. (Préface, *Delphine*, 81-82)

In taking the human heart as her subject, de Staël repeats the move of Burney, who thus begins *Camilla*: “The historian of human life finds less of difficulty and intricacy to develop, in its accidents and adventures, than the investigator of the human heart in its feelings and its changes” (7).

Burney here announces her intention of dealing with “the wilder wonders of the Heart of man; that amazing assemblage of all possible contrarieties, in which one thing alone is steady – the perverseness of spirit which grafts desire on what is denied” (*Ibid.*). Unlike de Staël, Burney does not promise a moral universe in which destiny is the equation of the heart’s behavior; rather, she indicates we cannot understand either our own heart or that of another. Burney is always somewhat more skeptical than de Staël about finding in the world a rational pattern; as an artist she never supports the claim that one’s fate and one’s conscience coincide.

In *The Wanderer*, Burney pursues the conflict between the individual woman and society, but with more attention to the connection between society’s lethargies, or its failures, and its emotional standards. She here responds to de Staël’s second novel, *Corinne, ou l’Italie*. The heroine of *Corinne* is a performer, an *improvisatrice*, who delights in swaying an admiring public by playing and singing or chanting her own poetic compositions. Burney’s heroine, disguised and still without her proper name (in the first part of the novel she is known as “Ellis”) is a reluctant performer – pointedly *not* a show-off like Corinne. But she does inspire admiration. When, like Corinne, she takes part in a play (unlike de Staël’s heroine, she is *forced* to take part by the sudden defection of another amateur

actor, and the play is a comedy) Ellis-Juliet makes (like de Staël's heroine in *Romeo and Juliet*) a brilliant impression.

...her performance... seemed the essence of gay intelligence, of well bred animation, and of lively variety. The grace of her motions made not only every step but every turn of her head remarkable. Her voice modulated into all the changes that vivacity, carelessness, pride, pleasure, indifference, or alarm demanded. Every feature of her face spoke her discrimination of every word; while the spirit which gave a charm to the whole was chastened by a taste the most correct...

A performance such as this, in a person young, beautiful and wholly new, created... a delight so unexpected, that the play seemed soon to have no other object... all seemed vapid and without merit in which she was not concerned; while all wore an air of interest in which she bore the smallest part; and she soon never spoke, looked, nor moved, but to excite pleasure, admiration, and applause, amounting to rapture. (*The Wanderer*, Book I, ch. xi, 94-95)¹⁶

Burney has never created a character like this before, a female who can bear being gazed at, who has the talents of the virtuoso, and star quality – and one can see here the direct influence of de Staël's brilliant heroine. Like Corinne, Ellis-Juliet is capable of reflecting all the passions in her art, and of intensely heightening the experience of the observer.

Like Corinne, Ellis combines music with words, and in music too she is a mistress of the passions. She arouses a high and spiritual admiration in Harleigh, and the attention of the group – even of her enemies and persecutors – when she is overheard playing the harp:

A new movement was now begun; it was slow and pathetic, and played with so much taste and expression, though mixed with bursts of rapid execution, that the whole auditory was equally charmed and surprized; and every one, Mrs. Maple herself not excepted, with uplifted finger seemed to beseech attention from the rest.

An Arpeggio succeeded, followed by an air, which produced, alternately, tones sweet, yet penetrating, of touching pathos or impassioned animation; and announced a performer whom nature had gifted with her finest feelings, to second, or rather to meet the soul-pervading refinements of skilful art. (73-74)

16 *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties*, ed. Margaret A. Doody, Robert L. Mack and Peter Sabor, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991. All further references are to this edition.

Juliet is, like Corinne, a *performer* – despite her efforts to shun the social definition of such a person in England. Unlike Corinne, she is not wealthy enough to do as she likes, and play for her chosen admirers when and as she chooses; Juliet is in danger of being caged, tamed, made to act as the inferior object of spectating eyes. When she has to put her talents to work to earn a living, prosaic problems – regarding the state of her health, the danger of a cold or hoarseness, the cost of hiring a harp – interfere with Romantic creativity.

Juliet brings to an England desolated by its own wealth, stuffiness and prudishness a much-needed breath of inspiration. The condemnation of England in *The Wanderer* is scarcely weaker than that in *Corinne*, and much in the same mode. In Book XIV of *Corinne* the heroine describes her desolate life styled in the monotonous complacency of small gentry in a provincial area of the north of England, where her father himself seems to have suffered under the burden of “médiocrité” cast upon him: “tout s'éloignait à mes regards, l'enthousiasme de la nature, des beaux-arts, des sentiments; et mon ame me tourmentait comme une flamme inutile qui me dévorait moi-même...” (364).

Both heroine and anti-heroine of *The Wanderer* object to the stifling mediocrity, the stagnation, the provincial resistance to ideas and feelings. Juliet belongs to England by birth, and to France by education; she is treated by the English as an undesirable foreigner. A similar fate met the half-English Corinne when the young girl is transplanted from Italy to Britain. Like de Staël's heroine, Burney's Juliet does not go by her real name, and (as is the case with both authors and both heroines) her parentage is shadowy, her nationality confused and mixed. Both heroines represent the pain of the multinational person facing a culture of strict identities strengthened by exclusion. Both heroines are courted and made miserable by an over-conscientious and somewhat censorious young Englishman. In the case of Corinne, the gloomy Oswald is smitten by doubt as to the talented and fearless performer's suitability as a wife; similar doubts bedevil the conscientious Albert Harleigh as he struggles to understand his Incognita. In Burney's novel, the heroine has to work for her living, and encounter the underside of British society; Burney

implicitly faults de Staël for leaving the working class and economic conditions out of her accounting. In neither of her novels does de Staël care much about what the poor feel or suffer.

Burney is, however, creatively indebted to de Staël's own fearless representation of the female voice as a voice of value. Voice is a major metaphor in *The Wanderer*. The influence of *Corinne's* plea for female creativity seems to be playing through Burney's own explanatory and self-defensive dedicatory preface to *The Wanderer*, where for the first time she publicly and clearly justifies her writing. Burney's long enforced residence in France, when she was trapped by the Napoleonic war into staying there with her husband and son from 1802-1812, had given her a new understanding of the French experience of the Revolution, and a new grip on the problems of diverse identity. Protracted residence in another country had probably offered her a refreshed perception of what exile in England had meant to Germaine de Staël, as well as to Alexandre d'Arblay. Madame de Staël was on her mind – the publishers sent to de Staël (currently back in England) an advance copy of *The Wanderer*¹⁷.

Both authors, in the four novels they wrote between them at the turn into the new century, represent public opinion and reputation as burdens upon the mind of woman who cannot act for herself while she is surrounded by watchers. The man's right to make a spectacle of her, to watch and to judge, is but an aspect of his assumed ownership of woman. This overlordship has not been touched by actual or mooted social change. Both novelists note how often women themselves put this system to work for their advantage against less fortunate or less calculating sisters. It is part of the irony of their resemblance that Burney and de Staël were both informed and inspired by the unhappy relationship between them, with its *bonheur et malheur* that could not be forgotten, but was best creatively transformed. They became each other's unwilling Muses.

17 Burney claims that the publishers sent an advance copy of the first volume of *The Wanderer* to eminent readers including Lord Byron, William Godwin and Madame de Staël, and that these readers were all favorable in their responses; see the letter to James Burney, 10-12 July 1815, *J&L* VIII:317.

Résumé

Nous proposons ici une étude de l'amitié troublée entre Frances Burney et Germaine de Staël, amitié qui fut brutalement interrompue mais dont l'influence se fait sentir dans plusieurs romans importants de ces deux auteurs. Nous retraçons le développement de leur relation entre janvier et mai 1793, période durant laquelle Germaine de Staël séjourna à Mickleham dans le Surrey (Angleterre), auprès d'amis de Frances Burney. Séduite par la fille de Necker, Frances suivit néanmoins le conseil de son père Charles Burney qui s'opposait à toute relation entre elle et une femme non seulement adultère mais connue pour ses penchants démocratiques; il en résulta une rupture presque complète entre les deux femmes. La soeur de Frances, Susanna Burney Phillips, jouissait en tant que femme mariée d'une plus grande autonomie vis-à-vis de son père et réussit à préserver ses relations d'amitié avec Germaine de Staël. Les lettres de Susanna à sa soeur, lettres encore inédites, donnent de Mme de Staël des images pleines de vie, rendant même l'impression de sa voix au cours des conversations. Ces lettres (déposées à la Berg Collection à New York) constituent un corpus important et inédit dont cet article a bénéficié. Le langage figuratif de Frances Burney après sa rupture avec son amie du Continent reflète le rôle d'inspiratrice et de "Muse" qu'occupa Mme de Staël dans son oeuvre. Les deux écrivains restèrent profondément affectées par cette rupture. On en trouve les premières traces dans *Camilla*, roman dans lequel Frances Burney met en scène ses regrets secrets et illustre les principes incarnés par Mme de Staël à travers trois personnages. Puis, à son tour, Mme de Staël évoque sa rivale dans *Delphine* à travers le personnage de Mme de Vernon, amie dont la fausseté trompe l'héroïne. La trame de *Delphine*, avec son héroïne imprudente confrontée à un amant intraitable, ressemble à celle de *Camilla*. Tandis que Mme de Staël ne cessa de lire l'oeuvre de Frances Burney, celle-ci s'inspira aussi de l'auteur de *Corinne*, roman qu'elle imite et interroge tout au long de son *Wanderer*. A travers ces quatre romans, les deux écrivains s'inspirent l'une de l'autre et transposent leur difficile amitié.

