

# Virgil in French Romanticism: Parallel Novels of Benjamin Constant and Germaine de Staël

*Revised from a paper given to the Virgil Society on 8 December 2012\**

## I

Two highlights of French Romanticism, Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe* (first published in 1816) and Madame de Staël's *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807) have often been related to one another. Both novels treat the complicated relationships between two protagonists, Adolphe and Ellénore, and Corinne and Oswald, respectively – and both stories are written from the perspective of a narrator who shares the author's gender: Constant adopts Adolphe as his hero, Mme de Staël created her Corinne. Both the literary relationships between these novels, and the personal links between their authors, are complicated in their nature. Many studies have been devoted to the works, to their authors and to the historical circumstances in which they came into being.<sup>1</sup> Relatively few, however, treat their ancient literary predecessors, although these might provide a framework for interpretation. It is my hypothesis that, among their other models, the novels are thoroughly inspired - to use a notion from the era from which

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<sup>1</sup> The relationships between *Corinne* and *Adolphe* have been the subject of e.g. Poulet (1978), while Winegarten (2008) devoted a dual study to the lives of Mme de Staël and Constant. See also ch. 15, 'Corinne et Adolphe', in Herold (1981) 374-423. See also the general overview of different types of relationships in romantic literature by Klinkert & Willms (2008) in which *Adolphe* and *Corinne* are treated within a broader perspective of romantic writing (esp. 230-235).

the works originate - by Virgil's *Aeneid*, in structure, plot and use of characters. In other words, the *Aeneid* (its fourth book in particular) may well have served as a common model for both novels.<sup>2</sup>

In order to elucidate this idea, I will first give an outline of Constant's *Adolphe*, after which I will explain part of its historical background, as well as its relations with Mme de Staël and her *Corinne*. Before turning to the discussion of these novels, some remarks about the person and time of both of their authors may be in order, although in more severe – and maybe outdated – literary theories, this extra-literary aspect should not make any difference. Therefore, I will finish with some theoretical considerations on how my interpretations may be placed in the broader context of literary criticism.

My last preliminary remark is on the era called “Romanticism” in the title of this piece: by this designation is meant the era that followed the neo-classical period. These two are not always clearly separated from each other – Gilbert Highet, in *The Classical Tradition* (1949), prefers to speak of “the Time of Revolution” for the whole era of the later eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries, a definition which is not far removed from the experiences of the two authors central to this study.

## II

Benjamin Constant (1767-1830) was born in Lausanne, Switzerland, while his Huguenot family originated from Artois in Northern France. In the revolutionary tumults that held sway over Europe, Constant's political career fluctuated continuously. Having lived in turn in Switzerland, France (Paris), Scotland (Edinburgh) and the Netherlands, in 1802 he was expelled from France, where he had participated in the Counsel of State called the “Tribunat”, due to his unfavorable attitude towards Napoleon. Another cause was the relationship he maintained with Germaine de Staël (1766-1817), who harbored anti-Napoleonic sentiments, and actively supported movements against the regime. In 1790, her family as well had moved from France, where her father Jacques Necker had

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<sup>2</sup> Regarding *Corinne*, there are far more explicit references to Virgil. Saminadayar-Perrin (2000) provides one of the rare studies of the Virgilian model in *Corinne*. She argues that that contemporary literature did not provide apt models for a love-story, while there was no better source of inspiration for an amorous novel set in Italy than the famous epic produced in that same country. In the final stages of the conception of this article, I came across a book chapter by Catherine Edwards, ‘The Return to Rome: Staël's *Corinne*’ (2012), in which she draws a parallel between *Corinne* and *Dido* (186). In general, the book in which this chapter appeared is important for a new approach towards the romantics' view on Roman antiquity (although Virgil's *Aeneid* is still hardly taken into consideration).

served as a finance minister, and a very popular one, under king Louis XVI, to live in Coppet on Lake Geneva in Switzerland, due to the revolutionary changes that had taken place in France. Mme de Staël - her name acquired by her unhappy marriage to a Swedish husband in 1786 - and Constant met in 1794, after which a close friendship developed that lasted until 1811. During these years, both had acquired fame with literary works: Constant mostly with political treatises and Mme de Staël with novels and essays, not to mention her plays and political reflections.<sup>3</sup>

Mme de Staël's new habitat on Lake Geneva enabled her, in imitation of her mother's salon in Paris, to devote her time to thinking, to writing and to discussion with guests who visited her villa. The intellectual circle that thus came into being quite spontaneously did not have any official character, and came to be known, in retrospect, as the "groupe de Coppet". Prominent members of the circle were August Wilhelm Schlegel, Charles Victor de Bonstetten, who wrote a commentary on the last six books of the *Aeneid*,<sup>4</sup> and the historian Jean de Sismondi, who wrote a history of the Italian republics. Apart from Benjamin Constant, other visitors were François-René de Chateaubriand, Lord Byron and Stendhal, who recorded an impression in his travel diary *Rome, Naples et Florence*, for 6 August 1817: "Il y avait sur les bords du lac six cents personnes des plus distinguées de l'Europe: l'esprit, les richesses, les plus grands titres, tout cela venait chercher le plaisir dans le salon de la femme illustre que la France pleure".<sup>5</sup> By the time that Mme de Staël's salon was frequented by this host of international intellectuals, Benjamin Constant was in his late twenties. The contact between the two had been initiated by the Dutch writer Isabel de Charrière, known in Holland as Belle van Zuylen, who, although almost twice his age, was then his mistress.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Here and below, I will focus on the period before and around the conception of *Corinne* and *Adolphe* in 1806, although *Adolphe* only appeared in 1816, one year before Mme de Staël's death in 1817. Further reading about historical contexts and biographical facts may be advisable, e.g. the biographies of Mme de Staël by Winock (2010) or Fairweather (2005).

<sup>4</sup> *Voyage sur la scène des six derniers livres de l'Énéide*, 1804, Geneva. Published at the instigation of Mme de Staël, a close friend of Bonstetten, it aroused enthusiasm in the groupe de Coppet. On the basis of this study, Constant concludes about the second half of the *Aeneid*: "Il y a de l'imagination, mais point d'ordre" (*Journaux intimes*, ed. Roulin & Roth, 96). Note that Edward Gibbon, who tried to woo de Staël's mother, Mme de Necker, for a while, also published *Critical Observations on the Sixth Book of the Aeneid* (London, 1770).

<sup>5</sup> "On the lake's shore, there were six hundred of the most distinguished people of Europe: the spirit, the wealth, the highest ranks, all came to look for pleasure in the salon of the famous lady, regretted by France". (All translations, unless otherwise stated, are by the author of this article).

<sup>6</sup> Winegarten (2008) 8-10; also Constant's *Ma Vie* (ed. Roulin, 2011) 60-61.

Despite Mme de Staël's hesitations, her marriage to the Swedish ambassador in France, and their other love interests, the two ended up being passionate lovers. Due to their far from regular lives, their relationship went up and down, until in 1811, they finally broke up. Four years before that moment, in 1807, they both wrote a novel about impossible relationships between passionate lovers who were able to live neither together, nor separated from one another. The male parts of the couples were both suffering under the often incompatible demands of duty and love.

### III

The narrative of *Adolphe* is presented as a document sent to a fictitious editor, who, in a preceding announcement, explains how the edition of the text came about. The editor claims to have met a traveller in a village called Cerenza (probably today's Cerenza) in Calabria. Several months later, on a journey to Naples, he received the text of the story from the keeper of the inn where they both had stayed. Not knowing what to do with the unexpected gift, he later published the story at the request of a third person, who had known the author of the text. The editor did this, considering that the story so well reflected the sorrow of men's hearts when in love. The book, thus presented in a complex narratological framework, is divided into ten chapters, rounded off by a letter from the man who knew the author, who was also the hero of the narrative, and a response to this letter by the editor.

The hero of the story, named Adolphe, recounts that he moved to the provincial town of D\*\*\* in Germany, after his successful studies in Göttingen and on the brink of a brilliant career, supported by his influential father. In the German town, he meets the wealthy Polish lady Ellénore, who had been brought to France by her mother, when her father had fled to Russia in a period of political turmoil. After her mother's death, Count de P\*\*\* fell in love with her; they resided in D\*\*\* and had two children. There, Ellénore left her family for the young hero Adolphe. While Ellénore passionately sticks to their romance, Adolphe starts to hesitate about their love; his affection gradually decreases. The process of estrangement between the two develops in four different stages and in four different places, D\*\*\*, Göttingen, Caden in Bohemia, and Poland, where Ellénore has inherited the property of her late father. In the last episode, Adolphe accompanies Ellénore to Poland, but is persuaded by an accomplice of his father's, the Saxonian ambassador Baron de T\*\*\*, to quit his liaison and take up his career again. Adolphe, however, keeps on postponing the moment of his departure, due to his compassion for the depressed Ellénore and his own inner weakness. The relationship reaches its depths;

Adolphe often thinks about his death. A friend of Ellénore's attempts to mediate, to no avail. When finally Ellénore, by way of an envoy in possession of letters between Adolphe and Baron de T\*\*\*, finds out that Adolphe had been considering leaving her for quite some time, but has not dared to for fear of insulting her, she suffers a fatal breakdown and dies. It appears from an unsent letter from her hand, which was handed to Adolphe after her death, that Adolphe's thoughts had not gone unnoticed by Ellénore. She had become deeply unhappy and would have preferred that Adolphe had left her, as she herself lacked the strength to leave him. From the framework in which the tale is presented, as sketched above, we may infer that Adolphe spent the rest of his days as a vagabond in Calabria. So much for the story.

When the novel was published on 6 June 1816 by Henry Colburn in London (with a more or less simultaneous edition in Paris from Treuttel and Würz), correspondences with Constant's personal life were immediately supposed and sought for.<sup>7</sup> In his preface to the second edition, Constant rejects every correspondence between the hero of the story and himself.<sup>8</sup> Just as Chateaubriand is not supposed to be recognized in his René and Mme de Staël in her Corinne,<sup>9</sup> so, he states, he does not resemble Adolphe.<sup>10</sup> And yet, the main concern of his contemporaries, as well as critics up to the Second World War, remained the parallels between Constant's personal life and the events described in

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<sup>7</sup> "Various papers have given the public to understand that the short novel of *Adolphe* contains circumstances personal to me and to individuals really existing". So Constant in a letter 'To the Editor of the *Morning Chronicle*' dated 23 June 1816 (*Adolphe*, ed. Rudler, 1919, 157). The order in which the first editions appeared is hard to reconstruct. Conventionally, the first two editions are considered to be the ones from London and Paris in 1816, while the third edition is that of 1824. The preface to the last (in which Constant mistakenly states that the book had appeared ten years earlier, instead of eight); is normally printed as the preface to the third edition heading in editions from 1824 onwards see for the problem *Adolphe*, ed. Rudler, 1919, lxxix-lxxxvi; ed. Leuwers, 1989, 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> "Neither Ellenore, nor Adolphe's father, nor the Count of P\*\*\* have any resemblance to any person I have ever known. Not only my friends, but my acquaintances are sacred to me". (tr. from *Adolphe*, ed. Rudler, 1919, 157).

<sup>9</sup> Charles de Constant, Benjamin's cousin, who severely disapproved of Benjamin's novel, wrote to his sister Rosalie on 22 July 1816 regarding Constant's praise of Mme de Staël in the preface to the second edition: "Basse flatterie à mes yeux après tout ce qui s'est passé entre eux". (see *Adolphe*, ed. Rudler, 1919, lxxix).

<sup>10</sup> "Cette fureur de reconnaître dans les ouvrages d'imagination les individus qu'on rencontre dans le monde, est pour ces ouvrages un véritable fléau. Elle les dégrade, leur imprime une direction fautive, détruit leur intérêt et anéantit leur utilité", quoted from the preface to the second edition, as printed in *Adolphe*, ed. Leuwers, 1989, 35. ("This mania for recognizing, in works of imagination, individuals we meet in society is a real curse for these creations. It belittles them, gives them a false purpose, ruins their interest and destroys their utility". tr. Mauldon, 2009, 81-82).

Adolphe.<sup>11</sup> This, of course, also prompted the question about the identity in real life of Adolphe's unhappy mistress Ellénore. Several candidates were proffered. Firstly, the above-mentioned Mme de Charrière († 1805), whom Constant had met in 1786.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, the married Charlotte de Hardenberg, who had proposed to divorce her husband when Constant considered divorcing his wife Wilhelmine von Cramm in 1793 (they had been married for four years). Thirdly, Mme de Staël, with whom he had entertained a passionate relationship from 1794 to 1811. This last caused a temporary break-up with Mme de Charrière, and professed to have borne a daughter, Albertine, to Constant, within her marriage to Auguste de Staël.

Furthermore, in 1800, Constant had fallen deeply in love with Anna Lindsay, an Irish belle married with two children. Without going into details as to when Constant was involved with which woman, it must be said that most of these relationships were recurrent, the most passionate and consistent of them being that with Mme de Staël. During the years 1805 and 1806, in the last two months of which year Constant wrote his *Adolphe*, many of Constant's earlier relationships culminated in one way or another: Anna Lindsay became his mistress for a second time; Mme de Charrière died at the end of 1805; Charlotte de Hardenberg reappeared on the scene in 1806 and divorced her second husband. Half a year after Charlotte had fallen heavily ill, in late 1808, they married secretly (Winegarten, 2008, 202). During these years, Constant kept visiting and accompanying Mme de Staël. After Charlotte revealed the marriage to her, Mme de Staël was enraged, but still sought Constant's companionship, until in 1811 they broke up, never to be reunited again.<sup>13</sup> Constant went to Germany with Charlotte, and five years later to London, where he published his *Adolphe*. Mme de Staël was indicated as the main source of literary inspiration, at which she did not take offence. One year later, she died.

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<sup>11</sup> After the third edition of 1824, Stendhal in the *Monthly Magazine* of 1 December 1824 comments that there are correspondences with Mme de Staël "dont M. Constant fut l'ami très intime pendant plusieurs années". In his 'Lettres de Paris par le petit-fils de Grimm' no. 10 (16 September 1825), published in the *London Magazine* (October 1825), Stendhal says: "On dit dans le monde que Benjamin Constant s'est peint lui-même".

<sup>12</sup> Wood (1982) draws attention to the interesting collaboration of Charrière and Constant on a novel (probably in the period 1787-88) which Constant baptised *Lettres d'Arsillé fils, Sophie Durfè et autres* - the novel provides, as it were, a missing link between Charrière's *Caliste* and Constant's *Adolphe*, in which the difficulty of decision-making by reluctant men is explored.

<sup>13</sup> From 1814 to 1815, the famous and popular Juliette Récamier was the next target of Constant's indomitable womanizing.

In fact, it is of no avail to look for one particular woman as the model for Ellénore, who appears to have traits of several women Constant knew in his life. Important motifs such as the married woman with two children (~ Anna Lindsay), or the death of Ellénore, who was ten years older than Adolphe (~ Mme de Charrière), may be associated with women in Constant's life. The quarrelsome relationship across many years and Ellénore's noble origin bear the marks of Mme de Staël. Still, it is Charlotte de Hardenberg with whom Ellénore shares most of her traits.<sup>14</sup> In his diary of 30 October 1806, when staying near Mme de Staël in Rouen, after having visited Charlotte in Paris for a week, Constant writes: "Commencé un roman qui sera notre histoire" and one day later: "Avancé beaucoup ce roman qui me retrace de doux souvenirs".<sup>15</sup>

During the process of writing, Constant considered introducing a second woman into the story, witness a note in his diary on 28 December 1806, after he has read his novel to M. de Boufflers: "On a très bien saisi le sens du roman. Il est vrai que ce n'est pas d'imagination que j'ai écrit. *Non ignara mali*. Cette lecture m'a prouvé que je ne pouvais rien faire de cet ouvrage en y mêlant un autre épisode de femme. Ellénore cesserait d'intéresser, et si le héros contractait des devoirs envers une autre et ne les remplissait pas, sa faiblesse deviendrait odieuse".<sup>16</sup> Apparently, he gave up the idea. The Latin quote is, of course, borrowed from Dido's words in *Aen.* 1.630, addressed to Aeneas: *non ignara mali miseris succurrere disco* ("not being ignorant of misfortune, I learn to help the wretched"), which underlines the personal experience from which Constant draws. Furthermore, Constant mentions the "effet bizarre" which the novel had at the occasion of two other recitals (24 February and 28 May),<sup>17</sup> in the second case adding the remark: "Il est donc impossible de faire comprendre mon caractère".<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> As supposed e.g. by Herold (1981) 418. See for further discussion Delbouille (1971), who warns against reading *Adolphe* as a biography of Constant. Charlotte is also supposed to be the model of the heroine in Constant's *Cécile* (discovered posthumously and published in 1951); see Winegarten (2008) 169 and Roulin (2011) 205, n.3 – who also points out parallels between *Adolphe* and *Cécile*, 205-212 *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> See *Journaux intimes*, ed. Roulin & Roth, 1952, 300-301 (with photographic reproduction of the handwritten page).

<sup>16</sup> "The audience grasped the meaning of the novel very well. Indeed, I did not write from imagination. *Non ignara mali* [I have gone through all this myself]. The recital demonstrated that mixing the story with another female episode should not bring the work any further. Ellénore would cease to arouse any interest, and if the hero would contract but not fulfill duties towards another woman, his weakness would turn hideous".

<sup>17</sup> *Journaux intimes*, ed. Roulin & Roth, 319, 332.

<sup>18</sup> "It is therefore impossible to make my soul comprehensible".

## IV

In his preface to the third edition, Constant tells us about the initial goal of his book: "... cette anecdote, écrite dans l'unique pensée de convaincre deux ou trois amis réunis à la campagne de la possibilité de donner une sorte d'intérêt à un roman dont les personnages se réduiraient à deux, et dont la situation serait toujours la même".<sup>19</sup> Constant does not state explicitly that he had any model in mind when composing his narrative. Still, comparison with the story of Dido and Aeneas, seen as a narrative of two characters, may be of interest. In the latter case, the situation does not "remain the same", which provides us with a difference when comparing to Ellénore and Adolphe: while the first couple does separate, the second does not, to the misfortune of both pairs and with the same fatal result. What *fatum* is for the ancient story, determinism is for the romantic: a man does not escape his destiny.

As we have seen, Ellénore herself gets the traits of several women from Constant's experience. But these are not only women of flesh and blood, but also of words and phrases.<sup>20</sup> Constant, like his peers from the *groupe de Coppet* at Lake Geneva, was very well versed in classical literature. In his diary, Constant constantly refers to his reading of classical works. When we consider possible literary models, if we look beyond more recent examples such as the Abbé Prevost's *Manon Lescaut* (1731), Rousseau's *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) or Chateaubriand's *René* (1802), in which the restrictions imposed on love-affairs by social expectations are thematized, some well-known examples from classical literature come to mind. Famous abandoned ladies, like Catullus' Ariadne, Euripides' Medea, but above all (because of the fatal outcome) Virgil's Dido, show remarkable similarities with Ellénore in Constant's *Adolphe*. It might be that similar themes evoke similar wordings, but there is more.

To begin with the first of the triad: when Ariadne, having left her home and family with no chance of turning back, is in her turn left by Theseus on Naxos while sleeping, she screams in a long lamentation that no man should ever be trusted any more on his word, that she had left all she had, but that, on the other hand, she is prepared to live humbly as a slave at her master's feet, if only Theseus would free her from her dreadful position. The complaint ends with the invocation of the Furies, the goddesses of vengeance (Catul.

<sup>19</sup> "... that anecdote, written with the unique thought of convincing two or three friends gathered together in the countryside of the possibility of bestowing a certain interest on a novel in which the characters are only two in number, and whose situation always stays the same".

<sup>20</sup> The "intertextual heroine", in Stephen Hinds's terminology, as quoted by Hardie (2014, 52), in his explanation of "the intertextual density of Dido".

64.143-201). The same arguments return in Ellénore's reproaches against Adolphe after he had gone from D\*\*\* to Göttingen at his father's request. Ellénore had made him promise that he would return in two months, which he did not. In a letter she then wrote him, as voiced by Adolphe:

“Que demandait-elle? De vivre inconnue auprès de mois ... Elle m'avait tout sacrifié: fortune, enfants, réputation; elle n'exigeait d'autre prix de ses sacrifices que de m'attendre comme une humble esclave, de passer chaque jour avec moi quelques minutes, de jouir des moments que je pourrais lui donner” (ch. 5).<sup>21</sup>

Ellénore's arrival in Göttingen immediately follows on the letter. She slanders his character; their conversation ends up in a quarrel: “on eût dit que nous étions poussés l'un contre l'autre par des furies”.<sup>22</sup> The similar motifs in this typical scene of fighting lovers suggest that Constant wrote the scene with Catullus' Ariadne on his mind.

Once Ellénore has arrived in Göttingen, Adolphe's father takes measures to remove her from town: he orders her to depart by the next day. Adolphe's love for her revives, and he visits her early in the next morning: “Elle était couchée, ayant passé la nuit à pleurer; ses yeux étaient encore humides, et ses cheveux étaient épars”.<sup>23</sup> This scene mirrors the situation in Euripides' *Medea*. She too had left her fatherland to follow her lover Jason, but was constrained to leave the town of Corinth after Jason had proposed to marry the king's daughter. Euripides' play opens with the nurse recounting the sorrow of Medea, who has been weeping all night because she had to leave the town that same day.

The correspondences of the events as described in *Adolphe* with Catullus' and Euripides' narratives are not continued in the outcome of the love-story, as Adolphe again and again decides to stay loyal to Ellénore. This, however, does not result in a narration that is entirely opposite to that of the supposed model: the similarities remain in Ellénore's reactions to the threat of being left. Constant is a very keen observer of the lover's mind, male and female alike, while adapting classical models to his own novelistic needs. Description of the ways of the human heart, supplemented by the characters' reactions to and thoughts about their own and others' emotions, is the most important addition to the storylines from classical literature, to which we will return in the treatment of Mme de Staël's *Corinne* (see especially n.66).

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<sup>21</sup> “What did she ask of me? ... To live near me in obscurity. ... She had sacrificed everything for me: money, children, reputation. She asked no recompense for her sacrifices other than to wait for me like a humble slave, to spend a few minutes every day with me, to enjoy those moments that I could give her”. (All translations of *Adolphe* are from Mauldon, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> “It was as if the Furies were urging us on against each other”.

<sup>23</sup> “She was in bed, having spent the night in weeping; her eyes were still wet and her hair unkempt”.

Virgil's *Aeneid*, book 4 in particular, also provides a sub-text for Constant's *Adolphe*. The love between Aeneas and Dido is central to the first half of this famous epic: Aeneas, on his way to a new land for the penates of fallen Troy, lands on the northern coast of Africa, where he finds another refugee from the East, queen Dido, building the city of Carthage. Dido falls in love with this unexpected but noble passer-by, who has suffered so much trouble in war and on his sea-journey. She, prompted by her sister Anna, is even prepared to reconsider her decision never to marry again after the death of her husband Sychaeus. This decision prevented the Carthaginians from entering into relations with neighbouring peoples by a royal marriage. Aeneas, however, attracts the foreign queen's interest and enjoys her hospitality in the company of his fellow Trojans (Dido and Aeneas even come close to marrying), but is sandwiched between his duty (*pietas*) to reach a new home-country (*patria*) for the Trojans and their ancestral guardian gods and his ephemeral love (*amor*) for Dido. It takes a repeated visit by the messenger-god Mercury, sent by Jupiter, to remind the man of his duty. So the friction between *pietas* and *amor* is the conflict which Virgil's Aeneas has to face. This is not so different from the circumstances in which Constant's Adolphe finds himself, although this character does not seem to be moved by a sense of duty at all, which makes him, in some respects, an anti-Aeneas.

Nevertheless, the narrative's characters do show remarkable similarities with Dido and Aeneas. First we have the talented but wavering Adolphe, who gets trapped by the choice between his loyalty to his love and his career, as envisaged by his father. Facing him, there is the wealthy Ellénore, who has fled from her home-country, Poland, and leaves her husband and children out of sheer love for Adolphe, with no hope of turning back. Their unquiet relationship revives every time Adolphe is on the verge of departing to seek a better future. The interventions of an ambassador in Poland on behalf of his father, in order to liberate Adolphe from his desperate position, prove fruitless. On the other hand, Ellénore's friend tries to persuade Adolphe to stay, while Ellénore is languishing at her home. In other words, the protagonists and the actors are Adolphe (Aeneas), urged by his father (Jupiter) and his ambassador count Von T\*\*\* (Mercury) to do his duty, and Ellénore (Dido), who betrayed her husband count Von P\*\*\* (Sychaeus) and tries to persuade Adolphe through the intervention of a confidante (Anna). It all ends with Ellénore's final collapse, which parallels Dido's suicide. Ellénore's love turned into bitter grief, described as *vulnus* ("wound") or *furor* ("fury") in Virgil's Latin idiom. In fact, Constant's *Adolphe* is the story of Aeneas had he not chosen his duty: exile and desperation are the result.

The corresponding structure of the narratives is reflected in similarities on a more detailed level, for example the arguments used in quarrels. When Ellénore has heard in Caden that her father has died, and wants Adolphe to accompany her to her homeland in order to lay claim to her paternal estate, she uses the argument that the people are hostile towards her: “Vous m’avez fait manquer ... à un devoir sacré .... Mais, certes, je n’irai pas seule dans un pays où je n’ai que des ennemis à rencontrer” (ch. 6),<sup>24</sup> which is close to what Dido says to Aeneas in 4.320-01: *te propter Libycae gentes Nomadumque tyranni / odere, infensi Tyrii*.<sup>25</sup> Both women sacrificed their honor for their lovers, while they use the hostility of their vicinity as an argument to convince their partners to stay loyal.

Ellénore shows several traits of Dido, especially in the later parts of the novel, when her impending death lingers like a dark cloud above the action. The theme of the lonely vigil, encountered in *Aen.* 4.522-32, is reflected in Ellénore’s words: “Comme tout est calme, me dit Ellénore; comme la nature se résigne! Le cœur aussi ne doit-il pas apprendre à se résigner?” (ch. 10).<sup>26</sup> Already in ch. 7, this theme occurred when Adolphe was wandering through the night.<sup>27</sup> Both heroes, Ellénore and Dido, are longing for death, in order to be freed from mortal sorrows. While this theme may not be derived directly from Virgil, as it is very common in classical as well as romantic literature (one only has to think of Goethe’s “Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh”), there are other similarities which betray a more specific Virgilian vein. Ellénore screams to Adolphe (at the end of ch. 8): “Adolphe ... vous ne savez pas le mal que vous faites; vous l’apprenez un jour ... quand vous m’aurez précipitée dans la tombe”,<sup>28</sup> which is similar to the threat Dido

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<sup>24</sup> “You made me neglect a sacred duty. (...) but I definitely will not go alone to a country where I will meet only enemies”.

<sup>25</sup> “Because of you the Libyan tribes and Numidian chiefs hate me, the Tyrians are my foes”. (All Virgil translations are from Fairclough / Goold, unless otherwise stated).

<sup>26</sup> “How calm everything is’, said Ellénore, ‘how resigned nature seems! Ought not the heart also learn to resign itself?’”

<sup>27</sup> “Je parcourus des champs, des bois, des hameaux où tout était immobile. De temps en temps, j’apercevais dans quelque habitation éloignée une pâle lumière qui perçait l’obscurité. Là, me disais-ja, là, peut-être, quelque infortuné s’agite sous la douleur, ou lutte contra la mort”. (“I walked through fields and woods and hamlets where everything was still. From time to time I would see, in some distant dwelling, a dim light piercing the darkness. There, I would reflect, perhaps there some unhappy creature lies tossing in pain or struggling against death”).

<sup>28</sup> “Adolphe. . . , you do not know what harm you are causing; you will find out one day, you will find out through me, when you have driven me into the grave!”

utters to Aeneas in *Aen.* 4.307-08: *nec moritura tenet crudeli funere Dido*.<sup>29</sup> In the final chapter (10), having read the correspondence between Count Von T\*\*\* and Adolphe, Ellénore throws herself on a couch (“Elle s’était jetée sur son lit sans prononcer une parole”).<sup>30</sup> This is, *mutatis mutandis*, what Dido does when in distress about Aeneas’ departure.<sup>31</sup> In both cases, the women are watched over by servants, which makes the scene even more dramatic.

The question might be posed whether these correspondences, either on a structural or lexical level, or in conjunction, show direct derivations from a Virgilian example. And if so, whether Constant consciously tried to construct a story on a Virgilian basis, and whether he expected the reader to read it through a Virgilian lense. These questions may never be answered with certainty in every case, but I believe some degree of conscious modelling is certainly present. However, our experiment is also about how far the reader can go in reading the story through Virgil, while asking if this way of reading yields anything for the interpretation of the narrative.

One more example to illustrate this point. Adolphe speaks to himself in ch. 7 as follows:

“Elle m’accuse sans cesse, disais-je, d’être dur, d’être ingrat, d’être sans pitié. Ah! Si le ciel m’eût accordé une femme que les convenances sociales me permissent d’avouer, que mon père ne rougît pas d’accepter pour fille, j’aurais été mille fois heureux de la rendre heureuse”.<sup>32</sup>

When we replace Adolphe by Aeneas, Ellénore by Dido, “mon père” by Jupiter and the “convenances sociales” by *fata*, these words would have been very apt for Aeneas when looking into his own heart (had he been prone to do so). The situation Adolphe finds himself in is opposite to *Aeneas*’, in as much as the former chooses to stay loyal to his love, while the latter does not. Adolphe may be read as a reaction to *Aen.* 4, in which the hero choose an alternative path and must face the consequences of that choice. In this sort of approach to the narrative, I do not insist on pointing out direct (verbal)

<sup>29</sup> “Does the doom of a cruel death for Dido not restrain you?” (tr. adapted from Fairclough / Goold).

<sup>30</sup> “She threw herself on her bed without speaking a word”.

<sup>31</sup> *Aen.* 4.391-02: *suscipiunt famulae conlapsaque membra / marmoreo referunt thalamo stratisque reponunt* (“Her maids support her, carry her swooning form to her marble bower, and lay her on her bed”).

<sup>32</sup> “She never stops accusing me, I said to myself, of being hard, ungrateful, pitiless. Ah! If heaven had granted me a wife whom my father would not have blushed to accept as his daughter, I would have found immeasurable happiness in making her happy”.

echoes, but rather wish to apply a certain way of reading the text, which the author was most probably aware of when composing his narrative.

## V

As stated above, Constant was surely influenced in writing *Adolphe* by his all but placid relationship with Mme de Staël, as his cousin Charles and Stendhal already perceived. Mme de Staël appears to have already read the novel in 1806, when *Corinne*, written around the same time, appeared.<sup>33</sup> The London-based professor G. Rudler, the first critical editor of *Adolphe*, in his introduction to his 1919 edition, indicates many correspondences between the novel and *Corinne*. Since then, it has become standard to treat the two books together in accounts of Constant's and Mme de Staël's lives. Moreover, both the authors were well versed in Virgil, and the parallels with the *Aeneid* indicated in *Adolphe* are matched by parallels and explicit references to Virgil in *Corinne*. So the investigation of Virgilian parallels may be a good way of exploring the relations between the two books.

When *Corinne ou l'Italie* (written between April 1805 and November 1806 and published in May 1807)<sup>34</sup> appeared, Mme de Staël was already a celebrated author. Following her political treatises (*Réflexions sur la paix*, 1794), theoretical considerations about literature (*De la littérature*, 1800) and a novel (Delphine, 1802), *Corinne* may be viewed as a mixture of political, literary and historical themes gathered in one narrative framework, with a plot, many motifs and a limited number of fictitious characters. The structure, as I will demonstrate, has a thoroughly Virgilian flavor.

*Corinne* consists of twenty chapters, subdivided into 102 subchapters of varying length. The first part is devoted to the arrival and residence in Rome of a certain Oswald, Lord of Nelvil, from Scotland, accompanied by a French friend, Count d'Erfeuil. Oswald is on one year's leave from his regiment. The day after Oswald arrives, the famous poetess Corinne (who is called after Pindar's contemporary of that name)<sup>35</sup> is crowned as a tribute to her poetical and musical genius. Let us take a look at the

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<sup>33</sup> The exact chronological relationships are hard to determine, but surely *Corinne* must have been conceived earlier, although it appeared only half a year after Mme de Staël seems to have read a version of *Adolphe* – in November 1806 she writes “Benjamin s'est mis à faire un roman, et il est le plus original et le plus touchant que j'ai lu” (quoted by Rudler in *Adolphe*, 1919, xiii).

<sup>34</sup> For the early editions of *Corinne*, see Balayé in *Corinne*, 1985, 610.

<sup>35</sup> See Isbell (1998) xvi.

moment Corinne, Mme de Staël's alter ego, arrives at the Capitol for the ceremony:<sup>36</sup>

“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 personnes; et nul regret, comme nulle crainte, n’empêchait d’admirer les plus beaux dons de la nature, l’imagination, le sentiment et la pensée.

Oswald était tellement absorbé dans ses réflexions, des idées si nouvelles l’occupaient tant, qu’il ne remarqua point les lieux antiques et célèbres à travers lesquels passait le char de Corinne”. (2.1)<sup>37</sup>

The scene of Corinne’s entrance is reminiscent of the scene where Dido in Carthage is spotted by the yet unseen Aeneas: *Haec dum Dardanio Aeneae miranda videntur, / dum stupet, obtutuque haeret defixus in uno, / regina ad templum, forma pulcherrima Dido, / incessit magna iuvenum stipante caterva* (*Aen.* 1.494-97).<sup>38</sup> When entering Carthage, Aeneas is moved by the depiction of scenes from the Trojan war. When Dido arrives, he only has eyes for her and

<sup>36</sup> Corinne is described as a Sibyl: “Elle était vêtue comme la Sibylle du Dominiquin, un schall des Indes tourné autour de sa tête, et ses cheveux du plus beau noir entremêlés avec ce schall” (“Attired like Domenichino’s Sibyl, an Indian shawl was twined among her lustrous black curls”), and when climbing the stairs of the Capitol: “la Sibylle triomphante entra dans le palais préparé pour la recevoir” (“the all-conquering Sibyl entered the palace prepared for her reception”). Portraits by Domenichino of the Cumaean Sibyl (one version to be dated circa 1616, now in the Villa Borghese; another circa 1622, now in the Capitoline Museum) were used as a basis for a portrait of Mme de Staël by François Gérard (1810) – the portrait show similarities with Corinne’s description here (the curly hair, the shawl).

<sup>37</sup> “The nearer she approached the Capitol, so fruitful in classic associations, the more these admiring tributes increased: the raptures of the Romans, the clearness of their sky, and, above all, Corinne herself, took electric effect on Oswald. He had often, in his own land, seen statesmen drawn in triumph by the people; but this was the first time that he had ever witnessed the tender of such honors to a woman, illustrious only in mind. Her car of victory cost no fellow mortal’s tear; nor terror nor regret could check his admiration for those fairest gifts of nature — creative fancy, sensibility, and reason. These new ideas so intensely occupied him, that he noticed none of the long-famed spots over which Corinne proceeded”. (All translations of *Corinne* are from Hill & Landon, 1833).

<sup>38</sup> “While these wondrous sights are seen by Dardan Aeneas, while in amazement he hangs rapt in one fixed gaze, the queen, Dido, moved towards the temple, of surpassing beauty, with a vast company of youths thronging round her”.

forgets the surroundings, however beautiful. The same happens to Oswald, for whom the classical scene provided by the Roman antiquities is totally obliterated by the sight of Corinne.<sup>39</sup> “Her car of victory cost no fellow mortal’s tear” may also contain a hint to *sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt*<sup>40</sup> in *Aen.* 1.462, just before the quoted passages from the *Aeneid*, where Aeneas cries about the hardships suffered in war.<sup>41</sup>

Just as in the case of *Adolphe*, what counts is not so much an immediate imitation, with lexical and thematic similarities, as the reading of *Corinne* from a Virgilian perspective. Although I do suppose that Mme de Staël sometimes used the *Aeneid* as a model even for details, it is more important that the interpretation of the novel may be directed by keeping the *Aeneid* in mind. There are similarities and differences in every layer of the narration. For example: the fact that this scene from *Corinne* is positioned in Rome may electrify the reader as much as Corinne affects Oswald. Imagine that Rome was founded by Aeneas’ offspring, after Aeneas left Dido in Carthage with fatal result, and that the same genius who is crowned at the Capitol is staged as a Dido rediviva, spotted by a Scotchman. The effect of these parallels, once acknowledged, will be that a continuous process of comparison may occur, a kind of intertextuality that adds an extra dimension to the reader’s experience.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Constant comments, in one of three reviews of the book, on this scene (in *L’esprit des journaux*, July 1807, vol. VII, 51): “Avant cette époque [*sc.* de la maturité], la nature lutte contre des règles qu’elle ne conçoit pas clairement; et c’est durant cette lutte que l’homme est en proie aux égarements de l’imagination comme aux orages du cœur. C’est ainsi qu’Oswald se présente, lorsque, pour la première fois, il rencontre Corinne. Sans doute, dès cette première rencontre, le destin de tous deux est décidé. Ils ne peuvent pas être heureux ensemble, ils ne pourront plus être heureux séparés”. (“Before that age [of maturity], human nature struggles with rules which it does not comprehend properly; and it is during that struggle that men are subject to the wanderings of the imagination and storms of the heart. Thus Oswald presents himself when he meets Corinne for the first time. Undoubtedly, from that first acquaintance, the fate of both of them is determined. They cannot live happily together, nor will they be able to be happy when separated”).

<sup>40</sup> “Here, too, are tears for misfortune and human sorrows pierce the heart”.

<sup>41</sup> See Hardie (2014, 16) for a treatment of a chapter from the 19<sup>th</sup> century reception of these famous words, *lacrimae rerum*, that have become “a motto for a worldview felt as a peculiarly Virgilian sensibility”.

<sup>42</sup> What Corinne sings (“Italie, empire du soleil; Italie, maîtresse du monde; Italie, berceau des lettres, je te salue” [“Italy, empire of the Sun; Italy, mistress of the World; cradle of literature; I salute you”], etc.) may remind the reader of the *laudes Italiae* in *Geo.* 2.136-75 (see for an analysis Harrison, 2007). As I confine myself to the *Aeneid* as a “reading model”, passages from Virgil’s other works are outside the scope of this study.

Another example. When, in ch. 1.4, Oswald reaches Ancona, a fire occurs, and many people in the town have to be evacuated. A problem arises in a building which turns out to be a madhouse. Oswald single-handedly rescues six victims and is praised as a hero – or even an angel – by the inhabitants of Ancona. In ch. 3.2, the rumor of his heroic deed has already preceded his coming to Rome. Through the report of Oswald’s friend Count d’Erfeuil, who was present in Corinne’s home when her friend Castel-Forte told about Oswald’s exploits in Ancona, we learn about Corinne’s reaction. Oswald has asked for further proof of her interest for him, after she had noticed him at the Capitol; d’Erfeuil replies:

“J’ai réservé le plus fort pour la fin. Le Prince Castel-Forte est arrivé et il a raconté toute votre histoire d’Ancone, sans savoir que c’était de vous dont il parlait: il a raconté avec beaucoup de feu et d’imagination, autant que j’en puis juger ... D’ailleurs la physionomie de Corinne m’aurait expliqué ce que je n’entendais pas. On y lisait visiblement l’agitation de son cœur! Elle ne respirait pas, de peur de perdre un seul mot; quand elle demanda si l’on savait le nom de cet Anglais, son anxiété était telle, qu’il était bien facile de juger combien elle craignait qu’un autre nom que le vôtre ne fût prononcé. Le prince Castel-Forte dit qu’il ignorait quel était cet Anglais; et Corinne, se retournant avec vivacité vers moi, s’écria: ‘N’est-il pas vrai, monsieur, que c’est Lord Nelvil?’ – ‘Oui, madame’, lui répondais-je, ‘c’est lui’; et Corinne alors fondit en larmes. Elle n’avait pas pleuré pendant l’histoire; qu’y avait-il donc dans le nom du héros de plus attendrissant que le récit même?”<sup>43</sup>

Oswald’s fame has impressed Corinne even more than the overwhelming impression made by his appearance and behavior – just as before Aeneas entered the stage in Carthage the exploits and disasters of the Trojan war were already carved on the temple front.<sup>44</sup> Just like Aeneas and Dido (*Aen.* 1.595-610: Aeneas addresses the queen; 1.615-30: Dido replies to him), the two protagonists only later have the chance talk to one another, when

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<sup>43</sup> “I kept the strongest to come last. The Prince Castel Forte related the whole of your adventure at Ancona, without knowing that it was of you he spoke. He told the story with much fire, as far as I could judge ... Besides, Corinne’s face explained what I should not else have comprehended. ’twas so easy to read the agitation of her heart: she would scarcely breathe, for fear of losing a single word: when she enquired if the name of this Englishman was known, her anxiety was such, that I could very well estimate the dread she suffered, lest any other name than yours should be pronounced in reply. Castel Forte confessed his ignorance; and Corinne, turning eagerly to me, cried, ‘Am I not right, monsieur? was it not Lord Nevil?’ ‘Yes, madame’, said I, and then she melted into tears. She had not wept during the history: what was there in the name of its hero more affecting than the recital itself?”

<sup>44</sup> Bruce Gibson attentively remarks that the narrating of a story before the arrival of the main character (as is recounted here) or in the actual presence of the main character is an epic element. The latter occurs in Hom. *Od.* 8, the case of Demodocus, who sings of the adventures of Odysseus in his presence, of which the singer is unaware; similarly the prince of Castel-Forte recounts Oswald’s story “without knowing that it was of you he spoke”.

Oswald makes the acquaintance of the crowned singer through the mediation of the prince of Castel-Forte.<sup>45</sup> Comparison with the hypothesized model shows a difference in that Corinne had already spotted Oswald at this stage (ch. 2.3), which slightly modifies the scenario – still, the rumour that preceded the coming of the hero is an element that leads to the same emotional effect.

In the model, *Aen.* 2 and 3, Aeneas tells the queen about his sufferings in war and about his journey to Carthage. In Mme de Staël's narration, however, a comparable act is only rendered in reported speech ("il a raconté toute votre histoire d'Ancone"), voiced by a character other than the actor in the reported events: Corinne is then said to be moved by the narration of events, which is again reported to the main actor. Thus, the direct confrontation between the two main figures in the model is transformed into a more complex narration with different layers of focalisation. By this transformation, the focus shifts to the reaction of the recipient, at the expense of the act of narration by the actor himself. Still, Corinne's crying in the absence of the person discussed may be based on a similar situation in the *Aeneid*, where Dido cries after a conversation with her sister Anna about Aeneas: *sic effata sinum lacrimis implevit obortis* (*Aen.* 4.30).<sup>46</sup> In this same scene, another emotional effect on Dido is shown: she is impressed by Aeneas' countenance, looks and voice: *multa viri virtus animo multusque recursat / gentis honos; haerent infixi pectore vultus / verbaque* (*Aen.* 4.2-5).<sup>47</sup> A comparable impact on Corinne as a listener to Oswald occurs in a conversation about Italian and English tragedy: here, Corinne is impressed by the tone of Oswald's voice and his behavior while the object of her veneration is present (ch. 7.2):

"Oswald aurait pu parler longtemps encore sans que Corinne l'eût interrompu; elle se plaisait tellement et dans le son de sa voix, et dans la noble élégance de ses expressions, qu'elle eût voulu prolonger cette impression des heures entières".<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Oswald's acquaintance with Corinne is prepared for by d'Erfeuil and the gentleman who tells the story of Ancona, Castel-Forte, so that the role of Ilioneus, who prepares (unknowingly) for the coming of Aeneas to Dido's court (*Aen.* 1.520-60), is divided over two characters in Mme de Staël's narrative. In fact, Aeneas is already present in the cloud that veils him. A hint to this scene may be read in 4.1: "Ces paroles, et l'accent avec lequel Corinne les prononça, dissipèrent un peu le nuage qui s'était élevé dans l'ame de lord Nelvil". ("The words, the accent of Corinne, somewhat dispersed the clouds that gathered over Nevil's thoughts").

<sup>46</sup> "So saying, she filled her breast with upwelling tears".

<sup>47</sup> "Of her mind rushes back to the heroes' valour, oft his glorious stock; his looks and words cling fast to her bosom".

<sup>48</sup> "Oswald might have spoken much longer ere Corinne would have interrupted him, so fascinated was she by the sound of his voice, and the turn of his expressions [that she would have like to prolong this pleasure for hours]". Hill & Landon (1833) 114-15 misses the part between square brackets, which I supply from Raphael (2008) 117-18.

An intricate web of intertextuality unfolds when the different situations are compared: Corinne hears about Oswald, who is absent, and cries after receiving confirmation of his identity (3.2); she listens to him in his presence, and is impressed by his voice and countenance (7.2); while in the *Aeneid*, Dido listens to Aeneas' recounting of Troy directly (end of *Aen.* 1 to the end of *Aen.* 3) and later talks about him with her sister, and shows herself impressed by his stories and behaviour, after which she cries (*Aen.* 4.1-55). The emotional effect described in the latter scene is transposed to two different situations in Corinne's case: the former (corresponding with the narration of *Aen.* 2, which is transposed to the narration about Ancona) in Oswald's absence, the latter in his presence.

The threat of Oswald's eventual return to Scotland also plays a part in this stage of the narration, in 7.1. The thought of this terrifies Corinne, who stipulates that Oswald at least prepare her for his leave, before the moment comes:<sup>49</sup>

“Je ne sais pas, quand je vois ce beau jour, s'il ne me trompe point par ses rayons resplendissants, si vous êtes encore là, vous, l'astre de ma vie. Oswald, ôtez-moi cette terreur, et je ne verrai rien au-delà de cette sécurité délicieuse. – Vous savez, répondit Oswald, que jamais un Anglais n'a renoncé à sa patrie, que la guerre peut me rappeler, que... - Ah! dieu, s'écria Corinne, voudriez-vous me préparer? ... et tous ses membres tremblaient comme à l'approche du plus effroyable danger. – Hé bien, s'il est ainsi, emmenez-moi comme épouse, comme esclave... (...) Non, répondit Oswald, je n'hésite pas, tu le veux, Hé bien, je le jure, si ce départ est nécessaire, je vous en préviendrai, et ce moment décidera de notre vie”.

In the dialogue, Corinne proffers the same options as Ellénore did when facing Adolphe: to take her with him as his wife, or even slave. The preparation for the departure is very important for Corinne, who keeps insisting on it. By her insistence, she means to protect herself from the emotions that beset Dido - who was not prepared for the bad news - when she had heard about Aeneas' departure and furiously addresses him: *dissimulare etiam sperasti, perfide, tantum / posse nefas tacitusque mea decedere terra?* (*Aen.* 4.305-06).<sup>50</sup> So, in Corinne's case, the moment of separation is repeatedly

<sup>49</sup> “I ask the fair day if it has still a right to shine; if you, the sun of my being, are near me yet? Oswald, remove this fear, and I will not look beyond the present's sweet security’. – ‘You know’, replied he, ‘that no Englishman should renounce his country: war may recall me’. – ‘Oh God!’ she cried, ‘would you prepare my mind?’ Her limbs quivered, as if at the approach of the most terrific danger. ‘If it be even so’, she added, ‘take me with you — as your wife— your slave!’ ... ‘No’, returned he, ‘you wish it; and I swear, if my departure be necessary, I will apprise you of it, and that moment shall decide our fate’”.

<sup>50</sup> “False one! Didst thou hope also to block so / foul a crime, and to pass from my land in silence?”

discussed. In 15.1, having returned from a trip to Campania, she is again in distress about the prospect of Oswald's departure, which he had just announced to her:

“Quoi! vous partez; quoi! vous allez en Angleterre sans moi? – Oswald se tut. – Cruel! s'écria Corinne avec désespoir, vous ne répondez rien, vous ne combattez pas ce que je vous dis. Ah, c'est donc vrai! Hélas! tout en le disant, je ne croyais pas encore. – J'ai retrouvé, grâce à vos soins, répondit Oswald, la vie que j'étais prêt à perdre; cette vie appartient à mon pays pendant la guerre”.<sup>51</sup>

The passage contains an echo, though not in a literal sense, of Dido's *perfidie* in Corinne's 'Cruel'. Oswald's reaction shows his piety towards his country in times of war, a situation not entirely similar to Aeneas', although the choice of duty over love remains the same. At certain points, Oswald's departure is linked to Corinne's eventual death, such as in 15.1: “Le départ d'Oswald pour l'Angleterre lui paraissait un signal de mort”; and in 15.2, Corinne, expressing the oracular power of a suffering heart, cries to Oswald: “Que signifie donc cette palpitation douloureuse qui soulève mon sein? Ah! mon ami, je ne la redouterai pas, si elle ne m'annonçait que la mort”, while at the end of that same passage Corinne's silent thoughts are expressed in “Pourquoi ne me laissez-vous pas mourir?”<sup>52</sup> None of these instances, that are only a few of many references to an impending death (cf. *e.g.* the end of ch. 14), is either a direct prediction or threat towards Oswald, but together they add to the morbid atmosphere that exists between the two lovers at the prospect of their separation.

## VI

The lovers' situation had become complicated after Corinne and Oswald departed for a journey to Campania. Apart from the incompatibility of their characters, the reason why Corinne and Oswald are not able to stay happily together is that Oswald is destined by his late father to marry another woman, namely Lucile, who lives in England. Corinne is devastated when she learns of this obstacle to a sound relationship, especially since Lucile,

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<sup>51</sup> “At last she took his hand, crying, ‘So, you return to England without me’. Oswald was silent. ‘Cruel!’ she continued: ‘you say nothing to contradict my fears; they are just, then, though even while saying so I cannot yet believe it’. – ‘Thanks to your cares’, answered Nevil, ‘I have regained the life so nearly lost: it belongs to my country during the war’”.

<sup>52</sup> 15.1: “His departure for England appeared the signal for her death”; 15.2: “What portends, then, the heavy palpitation of my heart? Ah, love, I should not fear it, if it were but my knell!”; “Why will you not let me die?”.

as it is later revealed to the reader in a letter from Corinne to Oswald (ch. 14: ‘Histoire de Corinne’), is a half-sister of hers. Oswald, just like his counter-character Adolphe, is caught between a sense of duty to his father and *patria*, and his love for his Italian muse, Corinne. At the same time, frictions occur relating to the societal surroundings of the protagonists: they are not married, and still choose to travel together, which leads to disapproving comments among their social circle.<sup>53</sup> Different conceptions of love and marriage in different countries and their cultures are also a theme, and form part of the collision between *amor* and *patria*. In fact, Mme de Staël, who is generally inclined to investigate national characters in literary forms (for example in *De l’Allemagne*, 1810), emphasizes this theme in *Corinne ou l’Italie* by making Corinne half-English and half-Italian (while the gentle and moderate Count d’Erfeuil embodies the French counterpart to these national stereotypes).<sup>54</sup> In other words, the theme of friction between *amor* and *patria* may not be inspired by or taken from Virgil directly, but the theme that was so masterly exploited by the Roman epicist may at least direct the reader’s experience in pacing through the text. In doing so, the reader will certainly not be discouraged by the many allusions that de Staël either implicitly or explicitly incorporates in the narration.

Unlike in *Adolphe*, in *Corinne* Virgil is explicitly named, which provides us with a means to indicate Virgilian influence. Often, direct allusions to Virgil serve only as embellishments of the narrative, in order to evoke the great past of Rome: Thus, in descriptions of a walk on the Aventine hill (4.5) and through the villa Borghese (5.3), the landscapes evoke Virgil:

“La poésie vient encore embellir ce séjour. Virgile a placé sur le mont Aventin la caverne de Cacus”.

“La statue d’Ésculape est au milieu d’une île, celle de Vénus semble sortir de l’ombre; Ovide et Virgile pourraient se promener dans ce beau lieu, et se croire encore au siècle d’Auguste”.<sup>55</sup>

Virgil’s *Aeneid*, however, is also directly referred to in other parts of the novel. On their trip to Tivoli, Corinne leads Oswald through the gallery, where they study the paintings (8.4):

<sup>53</sup> E.g. a trip made by Corinne and Oswald, about which see below, is received with repugnance by Corinne’s entourage in Rome, especially in the mouth of Castel-Forte, as Corinne’s behavior, travelling with a man who is not her husband, can hardly be considered ladylike.

<sup>54</sup> In the same review as quoted above (n.39), Constant speaks about “l’opposition qui existe entre la nature et le climat d’Angleterre, et la nature et le climat d’Italie”, which Mme de Staël puts to literary use in order to underline the differences between the peoples of those countries.

<sup>55</sup> “Poetry also has embellished this spot: it was there that Virgil placed the cave of Cacus”. “Esculapius stands in the centre of an island; Venus appears gliding from a bower. Ovid and Virgil might wander here, and believe themselves still in the Augustan age”.

“Le premier [tableau] représente Énée dans les Champs-Élysées, lorsqu’il veut s’approcher de Didon. L’ombre indignée s’éloigne et s’applaudit de ne plus porter dans son sein le cœur qui battrait encore d’amour à l’aspect du coupable. La couleur vaporeuse des ombres, et la pâle nature qui les environne, font contraste avec l’air de vie d’Énée et de la Sibylle qui le conduit. Mais c’est un jeu de l’artiste que ce genre d’effet, et la description du poète est nécessairement bien supérieure à ce que l’on peut en peindre”.<sup>56</sup>

The ekphrasis – one in a series of descriptions of the paintings in Tivoli – concerns a painting by the German painter Friedrich Rehberg, which in turn refers to the famous scene in *Aen.* 6.450-76, where Dido – indeed veiled in clouds, but not in the Elysian fields – turns her back on Aeneas.<sup>57</sup>

Virgil is even more present in the first parts of the second half of *Corinne*. Oswald and Corinne go on a journey to Campania, where Virgil is all around. Just in between the account of the early life of Oswald (ch. 12) and that of Corinne (ch. 14), and therefore at a dramatic peak of the narration, Oswald and Corinne visit Virgil’s tomb, that overlooks the bay of Naples (13.3):

“Il y a tant de repos et de magnificence dans cet aspect, qu’on est tenté de croire que c’est Virgile lui-même qui l’a choisi; ce simple vers des Géorgiques aurait pu servir d’épithaphe:

*Illo Virgilium me tempore dulcis alebat*  
*Parthenope ...*

Ses cendres y reposent encore, et la mémoire de son nom attire dans ce lieu les hommages de l’univers. C’est tout ce que l’homme, sur cette terre, peut arracher à la mort”.<sup>58</sup>

The visit to the grave is more than a tribute to the ancient poet. It contains a poetical program: Mme de Staël shows how Virgil’s images and words are revived by later

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<sup>56</sup> “There is the meeting of Dido and Aeneas in the Elysian fields: her indignant shade avoids him; rejoicing to be freed from the fond heart which yet would throb at his approach. The vaporous colour of the phantoms, and the pale scenes around them, contrast the air of life in Aeneas, and the Sibyl who conducts him; but in these attempts the bard’s description must far transcend all that the pencil reaches”.

<sup>57</sup> See Belnap Jensen (2013) for an analysis of the collection of paintings viewed by Corinne and Oswald, and the pan-European and anti-Napoleonic sentiment that speaks from the fictitious collection.

<sup>58</sup> “Such is the magnificent repose of this spot, that one is tempted to believe the bard himself must have selected it. These simple words from his *Georgics* might have served him for epitaph: — *Illo Virgilium me tempore dulcis alebat / Parthenope*. “Then did the soft Parthenope receive me’. His ashes here repose, and attract universal homage, — all, all that man on earth can steal from death”. The quote is from *Geo.* 4.563-64, the last-but-two verses from the famous epic about agriculture. Mme de Staël erroneously translates *alebat* with “accueillait” (‘received’) instead of “nourrissait” (‘fed’). See Balayé in *Corinne* (1985) 622.

generations. Many have written their names on the grave – indeed, it was a famous destination for travellers - but among them, according to Corinne, only Petrarch has been worthy to do so.

Then, in ch. 13.4, a second moment of poetic glory follows, an improvisation by Corinne. As in the scene on the Capitol, where Oswald met Corinne, the verses the latter improvises are thoroughly inspired by Virgil, who is not only mentioned by name, but is also evoked by the elements Corinne's words contain: lake Avernus, the rivers Acheron and Phlegeton, the city of Cumae, the Sibyl's cave and Apollo's temple, which are so prominently present in the *Aeneid's* sixth book.<sup>59</sup>

After the Campanian episode, where Oswald and Corinne act like they are married (the word "marriage" occurs several times, there is a reference to the "Madone de la Grotte", where marriages are contracted), Oswald gives Corinne a ring which his late father had destined for his son's wife, as a gift for the future. Oswald and Corinne even read a letter from the former's father, as if he were speaking from the underworld. The most vehement quarrels arise about the eventual return of Oswald to Scotland, in which Corinne, as we have seen, uses similar arguments to Ellénore in *Adolphe* and Dido in the *Aeneid*.

## VII

As to the overall structure of *Corinne*, the narration consists of two parts. The first ten chapters are devoted to Oswald's arrival in Rome, his meeting with Corinne and their adventures in and around Rome. One of the trips they make outside Rome

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<sup>59</sup> "J'aperçois le lac d'Averne, volcan éteint, dont les ondes inspiraient jadis la terreur; l'Achéron, le Phlégéton, qu'une flamme souterraine fait bouillonner, sont les fleuves de cet enfer visité par Énée ... / La ville de Cumes, l'autre de Sibylle, le temple d'Apollon, étaient sur cette hauteur. Voici le bois où fut cueilli le rameau d'or. La terre de l'Énéide vous entoure, et les fictions consacrées par le génie sont devenues des souvenirs dont on cherche encore les traces. // Un Triton a plongé dans ces flots le Troyen téméraire qui osa défier les divinités de la mer par ses chants: ces rochers creux et sonores sont tels tel que Virgile les a décrits. L'imagination est fidèle, quand elle est toute-puissante. Le génie de l'homme est créateur, quand il sent la nature, imitateur, quand il croit l'inventer". ("A dead volcano now, I see thy lake / Avernus, with the fear-inspiring waves / Acheron, and Phlegeton boiling up / With subterranean flame: these are the streams / Of that old hell Aeneas visited. // ... The town of Cuma and the Sibyl's cave. / The temple of Apollo mark'd this height; / Here is the wood where grew the bough of gold. / The country of the Aeneid is around; / The fables genius consecrated here / Are memories whose traces still we seek. // A Triton has beneath these billows plunged / The daring Trojan, who in song defied / The sea divinities: still are the rocks / Hollow and sounding, such as Virgil told. / Imagination's truth is from its power: / Man's genius can create when nature's felt; / He copies when he deems that he invents"). The slashes represent the line breaks in the printed text (/for a single break and // for a blank line).

is a visit to Tivoli, where they also pay honor to the Sibyl's temple.<sup>60</sup> The first part is characterized by conversations about literature, music, art, religion, history and national stereotypes, embellished with frequent ekphrasis of the marvels of ancient Rome and Italy. The developing romance between Oswald and Corinne connects the scenes as a guiding motif. Then, in the second part (chs 11-20), starting with the journey to Naples, the narrative covers Oswald and Corinne's trip to Venice, Oswald's return to Scotland, his relationship and finally his marriage with Corinne's half-sister Lucile, Corinne's undercover journey to England, Oswald and Lucile's trip through France and Northern Italy to Florence – where Corinne had settled after Oswald's departure – and finally their meeting up with Corinne, who has a part in the education of Oswald's and Lucile's child. In Corinne, who has fallen heavily ill, only a shadow of her former glory is left. After a reconciliation with her sister, her former lover and their child, Corinne dies. Oswald, who had chosen his duty instead of his passions, and Lucile return to Scotland and live on.

So we can distinguish a “sedentary” part in the first ten chapters, in which the visit to Tivoli is the most extensive trip, followed by a “nomadic” part in chapters 11 to 20. There is a movement from a rather static narration, characterised by conversation and manageable passions, within a relatively continuous backdrop, towards a dynamic narration of travel, love and betrayal, which ends in Corinne's death. The break, which occurs just before the middle of the book, has been noticed since the very first appearance of the novel. Besides the change of scene and transformation of character, Christopher Herold (1981, 375) adds the observation that there is an “intensification of tone”, from a “novel of ideas” towards “an act of passion and revenge”. According to this same division into two parts, Poulet distinguishes between the “passion” and the “après-passion”, a division that also occurs in *Adolphe*, though in differing circumstances. *Corinne* describes the “après-passion” after a rupture, while *Adolphe* is about a progressive lack of love within a relationship.

The structure also inverts the composition of the *Aeneid*, in which six books of Aeneas' travels on the Mediterranean Sea are followed by six books of war in Italy. Corinne has the Italian books as its first part, while the traveling part begins with a stay in the surroundings of Naples: even if the inversion is not deliberate on the author's part (which can hardly be imagined), the *Aeneid* again provides a framework for the reader's interpretation.

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<sup>60</sup> See n.36, above. In ch. 19.6 a portrait of Domenichino's Sibyl is visited and commented on by Oswald and his wife Lucile.

## VIII

In both novels under discussion, we saw echoes of Virgil's *Aeneid* in the depiction of the relationships between the protagonists in several respects: for the male characters (Adolphe and Oswald), the choice between love and duty; for the female (Ellénore and Corinne), the reactions to the impending departure of their lovers. In both cases, Aeneas and Dido may have served as models. The novels also contain other shared themes, such as the ladies' prayers to be brought as slaves to a new home, their tears, their threat of death if the men leave, the hostility of their vicinity and the sacrifices they made for the men. The characters of *Adolphe* may be retraced on Virgil's example; the overall structure of *Corinne* also has some superficial similarities to the *Aeneid*, although its characters tend more to diverge from the model. On the other hand, in *Corinne*, there are many explicit references to Virgil as a poet and to his work. All in all, Virgil's *Aeneid* proves to be a very fruitful model for these somewhat sentimental, but still very convincing, pictures of impossible loves in the romantic era.

We must ask whether the Virgilian model is unique to the parallel novels here discussed. In modern studies about these two novels, the name of Virgil practically never occurs. Virgil, however, was one of the heroes of romantic painting since Napoleon opened up the realm of Italian art by his conquest of Italy<sup>61</sup>. While Homer was the preferred poet in neo-classicist times, a position which he maintains in Germany up to the present day, in Switzerland (Fuseli), France (David, Ingres, Guérin) and England (Wright, Reynolds, Turner), Virgil became the iconic author above all others.<sup>62</sup> The predominance of Virgil in figurative arts may very well be connected with his position in literature. After all, Virgil was a poet himself. We must remember that for artists from the Renaissance onwards, the relationships between different art forms was the object of a lively debate and theorizing, far more than it is today. Reflections of this debate may be seen in the text of *Corinne*:

<sup>61</sup> Brown (2012) 311.

<sup>62</sup> Fuseli: *Dido's death* (1781). David: *Aeneas fleeing from Troy* (1798); Ingres: *Virgil reading the Aeneid to the Emperor Augustus* (1812); Guérin: *Aeneas recounting the Misfortunes of Troy to Dido* (1817). Wright: *Virgil's tomb, with the Figure of Silius Italicus* (1779); Reynolds: *Dido's death* (1781); Turner: *Aeneas and the Sibyl, Lake Avernus* (1798), *Dido and Aeneas* (1814); *Dido building Carthage: or the Rise of the Carthaginian Empire* (1815). On Turner's paintings see now Hardie (2014) 206-07 (in the chapter 'Art and Landscape'). Literary penchants in the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century may be mentioned: Goethe's friend Charlotte von Stein wrote a tragedy, *Dido*, in 1794; Schiller translated the second and fourth book of the *Aeneid* in 1792 (Hardie, 2014, 64).

music, poetry, literature and painting are treated in this voluminous work.<sup>63</sup> The recital of Corinne in Campania, near Cape Misenum, is in fact an ekphrasis, not so different from a painted scene like Turner's *Aeneas and the Sibyl, Lake Avernus* from 1798. The ekphrasis, situated in Tivoli, of Rehberg's painting of Dido is in turn a description of a painting based on Virgil's scene of Dido in the underworld. In other words, Virgil was all around, in figurative arts as well as literature (not to mention musical compositions).<sup>64</sup> This central position is also reflected in the veneration that he received from travellers: Virgil's grave was considered the ultimate goal of the Grand Tour. His *Eclogues* and *Georgics* served as a source of inspiration for rustic scenes;<sup>65</sup> his *Aeneid* was a point of departure for the depiction of the human heart.<sup>66</sup> In short, there is every reason to suppose that Virgil's central position in art also held for literature.<sup>67</sup>

Summing up, reading *Adolphe* and *Corinne*, or rather *Adolphe* and *Ellénore* and *Corinne* and *Oswald*, is reading about their creators Benjamin and Germaine in their guise

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<sup>63</sup> A painting of Mme de Staël was posthumously commissioned from the painter Gérard, who portrayed Corinne in the guise of Mme de Staël with mount Vesuvius in the background. Belnap Jensen (2013) 254 comments on the painting: "In *Corinne at Cape Miseno*, Vesuvius is the centerpiece of a sublime landscape, and its dark emissions blend into ominous clouds that threaten the figures below. The charged atmosphere of the natural world mirrors the narrative tensions imbued in this scene from Staël's novel, wherein the inspired protagonist invokes the lineage of wronged women to which she belongs". See further on this portrait Sherrif (2013) 226.

<sup>64</sup> In 1790, Christopher Pitt had translated the *Aeneid* into English. Anne-Louis Girodet, who also illustrated Virgil, translated his work into French. In 1798, the publisher Pierre Didot released this illustrated Virgil in a luxury edition in Paris, for which he won a gold medal one year later (Patterson, 1988: 'The Didot Virgil: Representation of Counter-Revolution', 242-48). On Mme de Staël's preference for Virgil, see Selden 2006, 7-8.

<sup>65</sup> See Martindale (1997) (especially 118-23) for a discussion of the use of Virgil's *Eclogues* in pastoral descriptions in renaissance and later times; Liversidge (1997) for Virgil's presence in landscape painting.

<sup>66</sup> Brown (2012) 313, 317 and Saminadayar-Perrin (2000) 163, who quotes from the *Essai sur les fictions* (ed. Ramsay, 1979, 28) in which Mme de Staël proposes the idea of "une réécriture moderne de l'épopée virgilienne": "Lorsque Didon aime Énée ... on regrette le talent qui aurait expliqué la naissance de cette passion par la seule peinture des mouvements du cœur". The essay is included in the edition of Bordas (2006, 231-78). Thus, Mme de Staël takes Virgil as a model to be surpassed when it comes to the descriptions of the movements of the human heart, where Virgil lacks imagination. See also Edwards (2012) 185 (and n.6).

<sup>67</sup> The notion of "imagination", which occurs in several of the quotes above (and 202 times in *Corinne*), is important for the conception of arts of any kind. It would lead us too far to go into the theory of "imagination", but for present purposes, it should be remarked that "imagination", or "active participation of the viewer (or artist)", encapsulates all kind of arts, and in a way unites them. Mme de Staël begins her *Essai sur les fictions* (1795) with the clause "Il n'est point de faculté plus précieuse à l'homme que son imagination" ("there is no faculty more precious to man than imagination")

of Aeneas and Dido. Both authors treat problematic loves, while using the relationship of Aeneas and Dido as model for their description, at least for some of the motifs from which the narration is constructed.<sup>68</sup> By taking the *Aeneid* as a model for their novels, they present themselves as the revived antique lovers, which corresponds to a poetic ideal of the romantic period, as expressed in *Corinne* in the scene of the visit to Virgil's grave.

Dido is, as is well known, an amalgam made out of narrations about Medea, Ariadne and possibly others. Similarly, attention to the use of Dido in the portraits of Ellénore and Corinne to my mind considerably enriches the reading of *Alphonse* and *Corinne*, whose reciprocity becomes clearer through the parallels which are based on the same model. Virgil's *Aeneid* serves as a sub-text which adds to the reader's interpretation, just as Virgil's *Aeneid* can never be fully understood without knowledge of Homer, or James Joyce's *Ulysses* can hardly be understood without Homer's *Odyssey*. This kind of sub-text is, in Gérard Genette's terminology, the "hypotext", which, as an integral part of the narration, directs the reader in his interpretations. Hypotext manifests itself in different ways in *Adolphe*, *Corinne* and *Ulysses*: the first of these lacks any explicit hint of the supposed model; the second only contains reminiscences of the model in scenes and quotations, while the reader is invited to interpret the last of these three, from the title onwards, as a new *Odyssey*.<sup>69</sup> As to the first two, what remains hidden for the modern reader under the surface of the text, may have been entirely clear-cut for the contemporary readership, at least for the extended *groupe de Coppet*.

So, for the two novels discussed, we may state that passions were described along Virgilian lines. Virgil's *Aeneid* is a point of departure for the narratives, pursued by the use of imagination - for author as well as reader. This conclusion may differ from the established view that romanticism moved away from classicism in its literary forms and ideas about men and human culture (see, similarly, Saunders *et al*, eds, 2012). This is, however, a problem that cannot be addressed only on the basis of the analysis of two related novels, although it is better not to exclude classical models beforehand, as Virgil, at least, was so clearly present in the imagination of romantic artists. But it remains to be seen if other novels of the period also fit this model.

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<sup>68</sup> Note that Charlotte von Stein, being abandoned by her lover the famous Goethe, wrote an autobiographical novel titled *Dido* (1794).

<sup>69</sup> See the Penguin edition of *Ulysses*, introduced by D. Kiberd (London, 2008). Joyce's friend and literary scholar Stuart Gilbert made a scheme of - among other items - chapter titles, keyed to the Homeric passages to which scenes in *Ulysses* referred. The scheme, authorized by Joyce himself, was published in Gilbert's *James Joyce's Ulysses, A Study* (London, 1930).

Apart from what may have been the frame of reference for both of the authors, the reader's experience is paramount for the construction of the narration. When reading *Corinne*, I lost confidence in my reading hypothesis after Oswald and Corinne had visited Campania and Virgil's grave. In particular, Corinne's trip to Scotland, maybe already implausible in itself, seemed so un-Virgilian to me, that I thought for more than two hundred pages that I had lost Virgil, like Dante had to let him go when entering the Purgatorio. Oswald's departure with his wife and child to Italy, to be finally more or less reconciled with Corinne, had the same effect. Until, at the very end, as Corinne is about to die (20.5):

“Elle s’assit, chercha des yeux à découvrir Oswald, l’aperçut, et, par un mouvement tout-à-fait involontaire, elle se leva, tendit les bras vers lui, mais retomba l’instant d’après, en détournant son visage comme Didon lorsqu’elle rencontre Énée dans un monde où les passions humaines ne doivent plus pénétrer”.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, just before Corinne dies, the following scene is described (20.5), which shows clear parallels with Dido's death, who searches for the light and sighs before dying (*Aen.* 4.692: *quaesivit caelo lucem ingemuitque reperta*):<sup>71</sup>

“Elle leva ses regards vers le ciel, et vit la lune qui se couvrait du même nuage qu’elle avait fait remarquer à lord Nelvil quand ils s’arrêtèrent sur le bord de la mer en allant à Naples. Alors elle le lui montra de sa main mourante, et son dernier soupir fit retomber cette main”.<sup>72</sup>

What manifests itself here is the predictive force of the hidden model, and the power of postponement. When Virgil is not quite expected anymore, he reappears. At the same time, Mme de Staël gives us an interpretation of Virgil's underworld, as impervious to human passions – this is apparently what separates the human being from dead souls. The image Mme de Staël makes appear before the reader's eye - the meeting of Dido and Aeneas in the underworld - is crucial in the *Aeneid*. The Virgil Society's first president, T. S. Eliot, indicated it as the most convincing case for the “civilized”

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<sup>70</sup> “Seating herself, her eyes sought Oswald, found him, and involuntarily starting up, she spread her arms; but instantly fell back, turning away her face, like Dido when she met Eneas in a world which human passions should not penetrate”.

<sup>71</sup> “She searched (with her eyes) for the light in the sky and sighed having found it”. Precisely these words are cited by Mme de Staël in her *De l'influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations* (1796).

<sup>72</sup> “She raised her eyes to heaven; the moon was covered with just such a cloud as they had seen on their way to Naples. Corinne pointed to it with a dying hand — one sigh — and that hand sunk powerless”.

epic that the *Aeneid* is. Dido's behavior meets the expectations of the unfaithful lover. It is that of a betrayed woman who acts like the unfaithful lover expects her to behave: rejecting him. This example of civilized intercourse, "maturity of manners" and "absence of provinciality", so remote from the anger of Homeric heroism, is part of what makes Virgil's *Aeneid* practically the only classic in history, "our classic, the classic of all Europe". For the romantic period, a good proof for this seems to be provided by the parallel novels of the utterly European authors Benjamin Constant and Germaine de Staël.

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*Image from wikicommons.*



J.M.W. Turner, *Aeneas and the Sibyl, Lake Avernus* (1798).

*Courtesy of Yale Centre for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.*