Women Writers in Revolution: Feminism in Germaine de Staël and Ding Ling

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WOMEN WRITERS IN REVOLUTION:
FEMINISM IN GERMAINE DE STAËL AND DING LING

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by
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WOMEN WRITERS IN REVOLUTION:
FEMINISM IN GERMAINE DE STAEL AND DING LING

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Preface

I chose the topic of feminism in widely disparate times and places because I am a feminist, a globalist, and interested in history. Germaine de Staël and Ding Ling seemed to present women worthy of study because they each had enormous influence through their writings in their own times. Further, they were representative of extremely different cultures. De Staël is a product of western civilization, Ding of the east; de Staël was involved in one of the first great modern revolutions, Ding took part in one of the last; de Staël fought for democracy, Ding for communism. Yet, despite these enormous differences, both women wrote feminist works incorporating many similar themes.

Even though the older translations I have used employ the Wade-Giles system of transliteration, I have used the Pin-yin system throughout unless directly quoting something using the Wade-Giles system. Where a title is in Wade-Giles, I have listed it as such, putting the Pin-yin version in parentheses. In keeping with Chinese convention, I have put family names first and given names last, unless already anglicized.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ....................................................... iii

Preface ........................................................................ iv

Abstract .......................................................................... vi

Introduction ....................................................................... 1

One. Germaine de Staël—Her Life ................................. 10

Two. Germaine de Staël—Selected Works ...................... 37

Three. Ding Ling—Her Life ............................................. 70

Four. Ding Ling—Selected Works ................................... 89

Conclusion ....................................................................... 114

Works Consulted ............................................................... 123
Abstract

In this essay, the concern is feminism in the writings of the two revolutionary women, Germaine de Staël, who lived and wrote during the French revolutionary era, and Ding Ling, who lived and wrote during the Chinese Communist revolutionary era.

The main theme of the essay is to determine whether the feminism in their work is of a similar nature despite the vast differences in the times and places in which they each lived. Concomitantly, the theme is also an attempt to discover through such similarities if feminism is of a universal nature.

Through biographical sketches and analysis of selected works, the two women are compared within their historical context. The conclusion is, despite many differences in their lives and works, there are significant similarities which seem to indicate that many aspects of feminism do indeed cross lines of time and space.
Introduction

During revolutions throughout modern history, while men are fighting for their political rights, one must wonder what women think when they hear slogans of liberty and equality for all other people, but are themselves excluded. For half the population to be denied the very goals venerated by the revolution in an exciting atmosphere of new ideas and idealism must generate questions, if not resentment. And, since these revolutions occur in different times and places, yet frequently have some remarkably similar elements, again one wonders if the women who do react do so in a similar manner.

There are essentially two types of revolutions: political (as mentioned above) and societal, including intellectual revolutions. Political revolutions essentially exist to change an inadequate or unpopular government. There are frequently common elements in the way these radical changes are accomplished. According to one influential study of political revolution, The Anatomy of Revolution, by Crane Brinton, many modern revolutions have been generated for many of the same reasons. Included among
these reasons, Brinton lists unusual financial difficulties amid generally economically progressive cultures, an alienated intellectual leadership, and a sense of injustice and class antagonism.\textsuperscript{1} The basic progress of political revolutions consists of stages from dramatic agitation, through the rise of opposing parties and a brief period of success, to the rule of the extremes and a "Thermidorian Reaction"-- the counter revolution.\textsuperscript{2} Such revolutions are usually violent and abrupt.

Conversely, social revolutions are usually deeper and may take much longer to accomplish. In a political revolution, a small group of people overthrow the government and replace it with something new; in a social revolution, not only the political structure but also the social and intellectual structures are changed. This process often involves convincing the masses to ignore tradition and embrace an alien idea as an integral part of their daily lives. The industrial and the Darwinian revolutions serve as examples of revolutions which encompassed a radical change in the fundamental mores of society.

There is another societal revolution which started about the time of the industrial and Darwinian revolutions, but has not yet been completed. It is the women's


\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., 78-79, 86, 128, 158, 206.
revolution. Perhaps it has not been accepted as well because many people think it benefits only half of the population, or perhaps because it is global in scope rather than confined to one country (like a political revolution) or the western world (like our examples of social revolution). Whatever the reason, feminists the world over are still involved in the struggle for basic equality.

Apart from its global nature, the feminist revolution differs somewhat from other societal revolutions. Actually, the feminist revolution shares some characteristics with political revolutions because in one respect the feminist revolution is political. Women, as citizens of a nation, have traditionally had few civil rights, whereas Darwinians or industrialists did—providing they were men. Therefore, not only did women have to change the processes of government but the minds of society at large as well.

Women have enjoyed varying degrees of success in this venture in differing parts of the world. Perhaps the greatest changes have been seen in this century. In 1900, in most countries around the world women did not have the right to vote and, therefore, had no political voice. Their complete lack of power went beyond the political sphere. Women did not have power in the homes they ran nor even what should have been the inherent power over their own bodies. Today one of the most debated issues of personal freedom is the right to choose whether or not to bear a child. Women
have suffered many other personal infringements, though, as a consequence of having no political say. The rape and beating of wives was not illegal; in China women had their feet cruelly bound; in India widows committed suicide on their husband's funeral pyres; and female infanticide was not unusual, especially in countries where resources were scarce. The trauma of female circumcision on unanesthetized little girls is currently a hotly debated topic. Of course boys also suffer this pain and indignity, but it appears to be more crippling to girls. Though there are many people who apparently still think a woman does not have the right to control her own body, as debate over abortion, circumcision, and the abhorrent amount of marital and relationship violence that still goes unpunished illustrate, a revolution in women's fundamental rights has occurred.

Influential leaders of the modern feminist revolution include such notables as Mary Wollstonecraft, author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), and Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan in the 1990's. Among those women that would grace a complete list must be counted Germaine de Staël, an influential writer during the French Revolution, and Ding Ling, another influential author, who wrote during the Chinese republican and communist revolutions.

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\(^{3}\)Gloria Steinem, Revolution From Within (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1992), 224.
These women, though they emerged from widely diverging cultures, times, and places, had much in common. They were each an only child, highly educated for their times, and involved in a great modern revolution. They were also each talented feminist writers. Further, even though their cultures were very different, perhaps they were not quite as different as they might first appear. De Staël came from the Judeo-Christian ethic, which classified women as being imbued with the "moral guilt for the fall of humankind," and was therefore a patriarchal religion. Ding was a product of the Confucian tradition which advocated the subjugation of women to men as part of its tenet of filial piety. Therefore, it too, was a patriarchal system, and there were similarities in the women's broader sociological system as well as in their family situations--leading one to speculate that similar feminists could emerge from cultures as disparate as those of eighteenth century France and twentieth century China.

Another striking similarity between de Staël and Ding is that each of these women had power in times when women simply were not powerful. De Staël influenced the French

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5 For a discussion of how few women were powerful enough throughout history to be included in history books, see Lerner, Creation, 5.
Revolution, though in very indirect ways, and always through a man, but Ding actually played an active and official role in the revolution and in the government. These strong and intelligent women were powerful as writers, too, each of them affecting their society through their work. It is in their work that they are most similar and have had the greatest influence, as both women proved to be ardent feminists whose ground-breaking works still inspire those interested in the study of gender—broaching such subjects as sexuality, subjugation, and equality—still inspire those.

In 1789, one of the world’s first modern revolutions was fought in France. Women played a significant role in the French Revolution. In October of 1789, hordes of women marched on Versailles demanding bread. This demonstration was one of the most spectacular ways in which women were involved in the French Revolution, but they played many and diverse roles. For those concerned with the revolution, the women of France, as the men, were either royalists or republicans, but whatever their political leanings they participated. Women functioned as soldiers, rioted, and were even influential voices behind the scenes. The salons, run by upper class women, frequently were the places where momentous decisions of policy were made. One of the most influential of all the salons was hosted by Germaine de Staël. She was a woman in a unique position of power, yet all her power at the time of the revolution was derived from
the influence she had on various men. This influence manifested itself in different ways. As the daughter of Necker, the Controller General, she held sway with him and also had an entree into political society. Through her salon and her intelligence, she was able to influence political giants of the revolution, and finally, especially in the later years of the revolution, de Staël enjoyed influence over these men who held key positions in the new government and who had been her lovers.

After the revolution, de Staël came more into her own. Though she still frequently influenced events through the men in her circle, she also managed to make a name for herself as a writer. Through her popular essays and fictions, de Staël was able to participate in the restructuring of society not only through men but more directly as well. Nonetheless, she did not fight directly for women's rights, and though most of her writings were imbued with feminism, women essentially won no new rights in the new republic based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The world has made rapid and profound changes since the French Revolution. Industrialization, technology, and scientific knowledge have all grown immensely. Yet the situation of women—for all its dramatic changes—has not changed enough. It is true that women (over a large portion of the world) now have the right to vote, the right to be
educated, and the right to claim all the perquisites of full
citizenship. However, they still do not have what de Staël
and other feminists—both preceding and succeeding her—have
yearned for. Women still do not have psychological and
societal equality.

Almost two hundred years after the French Revolution,
and thousands of miles away, in a radically different
culture, men and women fought another of the world’s modern
revolutions. In China, in 1949, the Communist Party under
the leadership of Mao Zedong, finally ended the years of
revolution that had started with the 1911 overthrow of the
Qing dynasty. Though one was republican and one communist,
the French and Chinese revolutions were similar in some
respects. The differences between them were cultural,
temporal, and political; the similarities lay within the
oppressed peoples demands for their rights. Among the
oppressed (in both revolutions) were women.

As in the French Revolution, women of the Chinese
Revolution filled many roles. They too fought as soldiers,
but in this revolution, they did not have to disguise
themselves as men to do so. Chinese women rioted as their
earlier French counterparts did, and they were even allowed
to hold offices themselves. When considering that this
revolution was fought in the twentieth century, the idea of
a woman holding her own political office does not seem
particularly farfetched. However, this was in China, where
the Confucian teachings of filial piety (subjecting children to parents, and men to women, among other such dictates) had held women in subjection for centuries. Progressing from bound feet to political office almost overnight is indeed revolutionary. However, though Chinese women were allowed to directly influence some policy, they also used writing as a means to have some input into decision-making. This particular influence was especially important prior to the successful culmination of the revolution, and one of its chief practitioners was Ding Ling. Like de Staël, she wrote both essays and fiction, but concentrated on fiction. Ding’s emphasis was almost wholly on the place of women in society, as was de Staël’s, but they both also wrote about revolution.

These two women, from disparate times and places, both played roles in great revolutions, mainly as writers, and they both advocated feminism not as an ideal but a necessary way of life. Their lives, and the feminism in their works, will form the basis for this study in an attempt to see how two such radically different times and cultures could produce two seemingly similar women. That these two women chose to champion their feminism as part of the revolutions in which they were respectively caught gave them an added bond. However, as much as they were committed to their national revolutions, they were even more committed to their feminist revolution.
Germaine de Staël--Her Life

Among the major writers of the French Revolution must be counted Germaine de Staël. From the day of her birth on April 22, 1766 to her death on Bastille Day, July 14, 1817, de Staël was intimately associated with the Enlightenment, the Revolution, and Napoleon. Educated in the tenets of the Enlightenment, Germaine de Staël confronted the challenges of political and social revolution.

Despite the aristocratic hauteur of the ancien régime, France was a leader of the European movement into the modern era, being the center of the Enlightenment. This movement was personified by such giants as Rousseau and Voltaire. Though these two men were especially profound and prolific, the intellectual revolution was widespread. Many great thinkers and writers, artists and scientists emerged at this time and focused on a myriad of subjects, as exemplified in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*. All knowledge was attainable, and men were perfectible. However, it seems clear that only men were perfectible, women were—with few exceptions—considered overemotional and incapable of the logic required by this age of reason. Nonetheless, some women participated in the intellectual world of the Enlightenment. A few of them wrote, but women’s predominant position in the
intellectual hierarchy was as hostess to the famed salons. These were weekly soirees led by glamorous women wherein the brightest wits of the day met to propound, discuss, and exchange repartee. During the enlightenment, one of the more successful practitioners of this art was Suzanne Curchod Necker, who passed the skill on to her daughter, Germaine de Staël.

De Staël was born into a wealthy bourgeois family. Though not of the nobility, her family was nevertheless quite distinguished. Her mother was Suzanne Curchod, a Huguenot and member of the minor nobility. Curchod’s father, a Protestant minister, educated his daughter far beyond the normal level for a woman of the eighteenth century, and Curchod, in turn, gave her daughter an extraordinary education as well. However, Curchod’s life did not remain idyllic. She suffered a broken romance in which the future renowned historian Edward Gibbon followed his father’s advice and threw Curchod over. Much worse though, as a young woman with both parents dead, she was

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reduced to taking a position as governess, virtually the only job available to a respectable woman forced to make a living. She never forgot Gibbon but she soon put memories of him aside for another successful man, eventually marrying the future French cabinet member Jacques Necker.

The young Germaine de Staël’s father, Jacques Necker, Louis XVI’s famous Director General of Finance, influenced her even more. Necker, like Curchod, came from a religious family of many ministers. However, he did not follow a theological or scholarly life, but went into banking when just fifteen years old, about 1747. Being a quiet and intelligent man, he did well. For the next twenty-five years Necker worked in the world of finance, speculating his way to a fortune. By 1764, having decided he needed a wife, he set about wooing a young woman named Germaine de Vermenoux. Instead of pursuing that relationship, Necker soon fell in love with and married de Vermenoux’ governess, Suzanne Curchod. From this marriage was born Anne Louise Germaine Necker (later de Staël). Her father adored her, and she adored him.

De Staël’s mother, though, was not as demonstrative as her father, or even as affectionate as she had been with

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2There is no specific indication that Germaine de Staël was named after Germaine de Vermenoux, but it seems likely. Since most scholarship agrees that Necker was very happy with his wife, it leads speculation that it was a sentimental gesture to the way they met.
either Gibbon or Necker. Instead, she focused her attention on making de Staël into the perfect woman. Apparently she believed wholeheartedly in the Enlightenment’s philosophy on the perfectibility of man—even applying it to women. Nonetheless, Madame Necker chose as a model for the education of her daughter, Rousseau’s famous book *Émile*. It is interesting that she chose the protagonist Emile, rather than the book’s female character, Sophie, who was confined to studying subjects suitable for a female. Madame Necker, as a proponent of the principles of the Enlightenment, ignored the very model she had selected. *Émile*’s education prescribes twelve years of free and natural growth—far from the corrupting influences of society—in a pastoral setting, before even being taught to read. De Staël’s education was completely the opposite. She read early and prolifically, conversed with many of the great men of the day at her mother’s salon, and rarely spent any time in the country. Some of the men she delighted with her precocious observations included Marmontel, Diderot, and the abbé Raynal. When de Staël was eleven, her father was appointed Director General of Finance. This lofty position probably increased the young Germaine’s contacts with the high society of Paris, but the strain of such an education told on the child. She suffered a nervous breakdown. At twelve, when the fictional Emile might begin to emerge from his isolation, de Staël was finally allowed to enjoy some
isolation of her own. A companion—a little girl named Catherine Huber—was chosen to play with de Staël, and she was sent to the Necker country estate at Saint-Ouen, just outside Paris.

The year 1778 was eventful for de Staël. The introduction of a playmate and the move to the country allowed her imagination to grow. She also grew very close to her father that year; they developed an adulation for each other that was to influence de Staël's entire life. She always maintained that of all the men she loved, none could compare with her father. Without these opportunities, de Staël might have been more staid and stilted like her mother, and not as passionate and imaginative as her life and works portray. De Staël’s mother lamented this fact saying "It is nothing, absolutely nothing, in comparison with what I wanted to make of her." Presumably, having suffered the fate of a gentile woman on her own, Madame Necker wished to avoid such a fate for her child. She did her best, and it was during this year that de Staël met the great Voltaire. She and her mother made a pilgrimage to his bedside, not long before his death. De Staël was impressed but thought Voltaire was too irreverent. Even at twelve,

3 Although Suzanne Curchod showed a very passionate nature in her early love letters to Gibbon, she was extremely aloof and restrained by the time she was a mother, constantly trying to curb her daughter's emotionalism.

4 Herold, Mistress, 31.
she was already a strong, educated, independent thinker—as demonstrated in one of her earliest writings, a comedy entitled "The Inconveniences of Parisian Life." Ironically, she spent many years trying to return to those "inconveniences" from exile.

De Staël’s relationships with her parents suggest several reasons for her strong feminist bent. Her mother chose to educate her like a boy, both in choosing a male model in Emile and in the way she actually went educated her mind instead of having her pursue a domestic curriculum. It is conceivable that Suzanne Curchod, herself highly educated, was embittered by having to hire herself out as a companion. While de Staël’s mother was subtly influencing her to be more masculine (whether intentionally or not) her father was doing the same. Not only was he an extremely strong role model for his only child, as a successful banker and statesman, but he encouraged her to consider herself equal to men. Necker expected his daughter to speak her mind in the illustrious company they kept and even had a masculine nickname for her, Monsieur de Sainte-Escritoire—Lord Holy-Desk. With such influences it is not surprising de Staël became such an ardent feminist.

There was one more momentous event in de Staël’s life in that busy year of 1778. A twenty-nine year old junior

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diplomat from Sweden, Eric Magnus Staël von Holstein, formally applied to Monsieur Necker for Germaine’s hand in marriage. She was very young, but she was very rich and the daughter of a powerful man, despite her bourgeois birth. Staël was not the only man who wanted to marry the heiress. Other suitors included an impoverished prince and William Pitt the younger, Prime Minister of England. However the prince was too poor, and Pitt and Germaine Necker did not particularly care for each other. She did not especially care for Staël either, but he was persistent. After much negotiation, the marriage was arranged. On January 14, 1786, Germaine Necker became Madame de Staël.

She was most unhappy. From the beginning, Staël ran up gambling debts and kept expensive mistresses. Furthermore, though he was apparently quite charming with other women, with his wife he seems to have been quite boorish. It was a marriage of convenience, providing money for him and the position (and freedom) only marriage could confer on a woman in the late eighteenth century.

Nevertheless, de Staël tried to be a good ambassadress if not a good wife. She took Swedish lessons, sent reports to Gustavus III, her new king, and began her own salon at the Swedish embassy. Her native intelligence, excellent education, social and political connections and unique experience made her an exemplary hostess. Europe and America’s elite flocked to her door. De Staël’s guests
included Thomas Jefferson, the marquises de La Fayette and de Condorcet, and the bishop of Autun, Talleyrand. It was often at these salons, in the years just prior to the revolution, that the aristocratic component of the revolution was fomented. Jefferson of course had just played a major role in one of the world’s first republican revolutions—de Staël and most of her other guests soon would, despite the fact that many of them favored a constitutional monarchy instead. However, the last years of the ancien régime did not foreshadow the horror and the terror to come. De Staël kept busy. Apart from her reports to the king of Sweden, she also produced two plays, "Sophie, or the Secret Feelings," and "Jane Gray,"; her well-known Letters on the Writings and Character of Jean-Jacques Rousseau; and a daughter, Gustavine. Amidst all this activity, de Staël also found the time to have affairs with two prominent men, Talleyrand and comte Louis de Narbonne. Not everything went smoothly for de Staël, though. In 1788, Louis XVI exiled her adored father (though he had already left office) over a political fight with the king’s chief minister, Calonne. However, he was soon recalled and offered the position of Controller General of France, with all the powers of a prime minister.\footnote{Necker’s own view was that he was a caretaker until the Estates-General met.}

\footnote{For a more complete version of this incident see Herold, \textit{Mistress}, 74-76.}
The populace of Paris was overjoyed at Necker's recall. Not only did they firmly believe he could fix France's finances, but as part of that change many expected a constitution as well. After all the Estates General had been called; surely reform must follow. In May of 1789, de Staël watched the representatives march triumphantly to the opening session, but the atmosphere of optimism in Paris did not last. Almost immediately the Third Estate clashed with the First and Second Estates, eventually repudiating the king's absolute power and affirming the Third Estate's commitment to reform, but, according to Albert Soboul, "this attempt at a peaceful bourgeois revolution...failed." Necker was again dismissed, leading to riots in Paris and convincing de Staël that it was her father's exile that led to the fall of the Bastille. This public outcry convinced Louis XVI to hastily summon him back, and he returned to Paris in triumph.

Germaine de Staël was ecstatic at the outpouring of emotion for her father. It reinforced her conviction that he was a glorious hero, and she greatly admired glory.

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7 Germaine de Staël was optimistic about the revolution, but her happiness was clouded by the death of her first born child, Gustavine in April, 1789.


However, the revolution had begun and the Great Fear of July and August lessened many thoughts of glory. In October, de Staël witnessed the women's march on Versailles from inside the palace. She seemed much relieved that "those who that very night had perhaps wanted to assassinate (the queen) shouted her name to the skies," after Marie-Antoinette's show of courage. After these riots, France quieted somewhat and busied itself with forming a new system of government. De Staël wrote her Eulogy of M. de Guibert and bore a son by Narbonne, naming him Auguste.

However her year was marred by the resignation of her father, in 1790, his popularity seriously eroded by his actions and the continuing economic crisis, yet he left with the beau geste of giving the nation two million francs of his personal fortune. Meanwhile, de Staël's own influence was growing. Many of the most powerful moderates gathered at her salon to discuss the Constitution which was instituted in September of 1791, after the abortive flight of the royal family in June. Though de Staël disagreed with much of it, by the end of the year, she was experiencing her own triumph. De Staël had succeeded in having her lover Narbonne appointed Minister of War. The numerous satirists


11 Right after his return, Necker championed the unpopular aristocratic army commander, Besenval. For a fuller account see Herold, *Mistress*, 86-87.
of the age were as active as de Staël. She was frequently a target, but this incident earned her the title of "principal slut of the revolution."\textsuperscript{12}

Just a few months later, de Staël suffered through trials even the satirists probably would not have wished on her. Pregnant with her second child by Narbonne, she had to watch as he ignominiously left office. If it is true, as Talleyrand thought, that de Staël wrote many of Narbonne's speeches, then she lost much more than just her lover's office. Then on August 9, 1792, the monarchy fell, and on the tenth the Republic of France was born, and de Staël's world turned upside down. The country was being invaded, her monarchist friends were fleeing or risking beheading and imprisonment, and Narbonne was being actively sought by angry revolutionaries. De Staël proved her mettle. She hid several of her friends, including Narbonne, in the Swedish Embassy, claiming diplomatic immunity when militant republicans tried to search her residence. A friend took Narbonne to England, but de Staël's friends Lally-Tollendal and Jaucourt were in prison under a sentence of death. De Staël chose one of the leaders of the Governing Committee of the Commune because he also wrote and convinced him to free Jaucourt--someone else had helped Lally-Tollendal.\textsuperscript{13} In an

\textsuperscript{12}Winegarten, Madame, 38.

\textsuperscript{13}For further information on de Staël's exploits, see Herold, Mistress, 114-118. Though Herold claims that de Staël was responsible for freeing Lally-Tollendal, more
attempt to save another old friend, the abbé de Montesquieu, de Staël was herself accosted by "a swarm of old women, issued from hell."\textsuperscript{14} She too had to face the Committee. With her usual aplomb she was reciting the code of diplomatic immunity when Manuel (to whom she had appealed for Jaucourt and Lally-Tollendal) rescued her from the mob. Though she remained in custody all day, she received a new passport, and Tallien (who later routed Robespierre) escorted her out of Paris.

By the time she reached her family estate at Coppet, 1,368 prisoners had been killed in Paris.\textsuperscript{15} Here she carried on her efforts to help unfortunate friends and gave birth to another son, Albert. Not long after the birth she left Coppet for Juniper Hall in the English countryside where she was largely supporting Narbonne, another old lover, Mathieu de Montmorency, Jaucourt, Lally-Tollendal and others. However, despite meeting the British novelist Fanny Burney there (who she very much liked) de Staël’s visit was less than she had hoped. Narbonne was evidently growing tired of her, and even her new friend, Miss Burney, took her father’s advice not to get too close to such a notorious woman. Distressed, de Staël went back to Coppet, unable to

\textsuperscript{14}Herold, \textit{Mistress}, 117.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 119.

recent scholarship suggests otherwise. See Winegarten, \textit{Madame}, 40.
find happiness with her lover in England and horrified by the Terror in France.

Though she poured much of her emotion into *On the Influence of the Passions*, she continued to live quite passionately, as well. She did not let her love for Narbonne keep her from dallying with Count Adolph Ribbing who only recently had assassinated King Gustavus III of Sweden, thus saving Monsieur de Staël from losing his ambassadorship. This was a short-lived affair however, and added to de Staël’s grief was the death of her mother in May, 1794. However, de Staël’s life soon improved. The Reign of Terror ended in July, 1794, with the fall of Robespierre, and though Narbonne broke off the romance between he and de Staël, she soon found solace. In September she met the love of her life, Benjamin Constant.

Like de Staël’s, Constant’s childhood was spent among adults and books. However erudite and eloquent he was though, he was not nearly as prolific a writer as de Staël. The only work he ever managed to complete and publish was his famous novel *Adolphe*, a distinctly autobiographical work. Constant’s rather bizarre upbringing, by some strange and frequently unsavory characters, left him rather prone to gambling, and he was often in de Staël’s debt. Since the two were so volatile together, they frequently tried to leave each other. Constant was hampered in his efforts to
In 1795, when Sweden was the first country to establish relations with the new French government, the de Staëls returned to Paris. Constant went with them. Together, he and Madame de Staël reopened her salon despite the civil unrest still seething in the streets. De Staël was also busy writing *Reflections on Peace* and had just published her *Essay on Fiction*. Nevertheless, a deputy to the National Convention accused her of being a royalist (though others accused her of sympathizing with the Jacobins) and she had to leave Paris again. Not long afterward, the royalists attempted a *coup d'état*, foiled by the army. Napoleon was in command of the troops in Paris. De Staël was implicated for aiding aristocratic friends; Constant was arrested. However, de Staël was able to free him on a personal appeal to the Director, Barras. The Committee of Public Safety formally exiled her only to rescind the order almost immediately. Instead of returning to Paris, De Staël and Constant left for Switzerland, where she finished *On the Influence of the Passions*, publishing it in the fall of 1796. Though earlier that year, she was under order of arrest should she go back to Paris, by December, she was allowed to return.

In France again, 1797 was a busy year for de Staël. In June she bore a Constant a daughter, Albertine. With
Constant, de Staël then founded a moderate’s club and helped her old friend Talleyrand be appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. De Staël helped engineer this appointment for an even more personal reason than to aid an ex-lover, the deposed minister had signed her arrest warrant. However, there was probably still another reason for her intercession on Talleyrand’s behalf. De Staël’s choice as Minister of Foreign Affairs was not enough. The government had to be strong. Completely underestimating Napoleon, it is likely that de Staël was an active proponent of the coup d'état of 18 Fructidor (September 4) strengthening Napoleon and weakening the royalists. Because of the ensuing purge of royalists—including many of her friends, some of which she rescued—she later disavowed any role in the coup, claiming only to have assisted Talleyrand in achieving his appointment. Conversely, he attributed the overthrow (though not its aftermath) to de Staël. She would later change her opinion that Napoleon was "the best republican in France" and would regret having helped him on his climb to power.

16 On de Staël’s return, her husband’s creditors immediately applied to her for the payment of his extensive debts. Monsieur de Staël’s gambling and womanizing cost his wife much money, and even more in favors. Talleyrand repaid his debt for his post by insinuating to the Swedish government that France would like Monsieur de Staël to hold the office of Minister Plenipotentiary.

17 Herold, Mistress, quoting a July 24, 1797 letter from de Staël to Meister. 178.
Despite de Staël’s attempts to court Napoleon, it is possible that she never trusted him. According to Herold, de Staël wrote (though she did not publish) a tragedy in verse entitled Jan de Witt that paints an unflattering portrait of a man strikingly like Napoleon. Of course, he did refuse her request not to invade the Swiss canton of Vaud, a request meant to save her father’s feudal income. Nevertheless, de Staël praised Napoleon in the book she was then writing, On the Present Circumstances Capable of Ending the French Revolution. However, she also began one of her best known books that was, in its subject matter, somewhat prophetic of her future relations with Napoleon. This was On Literature Considered in its Relations with Social Institutions.

While Napoleon was on the Egyptian expedition, France’s government was weakening. De Staël’s constant outspokenness, and Constant’s two unsuccessful bids for a seat on the Directory, compelled France to once again exile de Staël, in July of 1799. That autumn, while on her way to Coppet, she met Madame Recamier. They were to form a deep friendship that lasted the rest of de Staël’s life. At Coppet, de Staël may have taken part in an intrigue. Her manuscript of On the Present Circumstances, written prior to

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18 This was probably done more out of her great love for her father than any scruples about political interference. However, it is interesting that she would deny freedom to the Swiss when she had defended it so fiercely for Frenchmen.
the Brumairian coup, virtually outlined their program of ending the revolution, stabilizing the government, and providing a general amnesty.\textsuperscript{19} Herold theorizes that de Staël’s arrival back in Paris on the first day of the coup lends credence to the possibility of her involvement in the \textit{coup d’état} of 18-19 Brumaire (November 9-10). If de Staël did indeed contribute to this insurrection, she probably later regretted it. Napoleon had gained more power. This time it was to the supreme office in France.

By December, Napoleon was First Consul. De Staël kept her influence on the government when Constant (with her help) was nominated to the Tribunate, and with the reinstatement of her influential salon. However, as early as January, 1800, a speech of Constant’s annoyed Napoleon and compromised de Staël. Though many salon patrons—even Talleyrand—sent their hasty regrets for that evening, Napoleon’s brother Joseph (who frequently championed de Staël against his brother) made an appearance. Napoleon had asked Joseph what de Staël wanted, whereupon she answered that it was not a matter of what she wanted but of what she thought.\textsuperscript{20} This incident precisely illustrates one of the most frustrating questions feminists are asked, along with the very simple answer. Napoleon’s patronizing tone and its implicit bribe could only have annoyed de Staël. She did

\textsuperscript{19}Herold, \textit{Mistress}, 184.

\textsuperscript{20}Winegarten, \textit{de Staël}, 54.
not want to be bought off; she wanted to be treated as an equal. Though de Staël did not openly, or perhaps even consciously fight for women's rights per se, there is no question that she took the equality in the revolutionary slogan of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" to encompass her, if not all women. If Napoleon did not understand her answer, she clarified her position by publishing *On Literature*. Despite harsh criticism of de Staël and the feminism in her book, it was very popular. The press was particularly vicious, saying de Staël's theories were futile, or could lead to anarchy, and Napoleon gave a full fifteen minutes to reading this lengthy book.\(^{21}\) After a brief period of ostracism—in which she once again found herself unwelcome in Paris—de Staël's reluctant guests returned.

As she was strengthening her position, so was Napoleon. While she began her novel *Delphine*, he won the battle of Marengo, in June, 1800. Taking advantage of Napoleon's victory, Necker met with the general to intercede on behalf of his daughter. She was allowed to come back to Paris. With her there, Constant renewed his attacks on the government, and Napoleon renewed his attacks on de Staël. Her immense influence can be seen in Napoleon's threat

*Serve notice to that woman...to her illustrious highness that I am neither a Louis XVI nor a Barras. Advise her not to block my path, no*

matter what it is, no matter where I choose to go. Or else, I shall break her, I shall crush her.\textsuperscript{22}

Nonetheless, he was approaching the peak of his power, and de Staël’s attempt to unify the royalists and republicans against him was futile. As de Staël watched her estranged husband die on the road to Coppet, Napoleon claimed power virtually for life.

De Staël continued to criticize Napoleon. In the preface to \textit{Delphine} she dared him to do what he would to quiet her, maintaining that the public would hear her anyway. His response was to exile her from Paris, a move he may have regretted. Complying, de Staël went to Geneva. There she met several British subjects who—as many men were wont to do—became quite enamored of her. War was about to break out between France and Britain when de Staël, her British admirers, and a Russian agent who was also taken with her, rendezvoused in secret to prevent a duel, Napoleon concluded de Staël was plotting against him. Despite such suspicions, though, Napoleon permitted de Staël to return to France if she would stay at least ten leagues from Paris. Always anxious to return to Paris, de Staël did not comply, and in October of 1803, Napoleon amended the order to forty leagues. She was not content to reside in the French countryside that far from Paris; thus she and Constant

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Ibid.}, 229.
immediately left for Germany, a move which was to lead to one of her most important works.

Though de Staël did not care much for Frankfort, she fell in love with Weimar. Here she met Goethe, Schiller, and other important thinkers of the early days of the Romantic movement. According to Vivian Folkenflik and others, de Staël was herself one of the early Romanticists.\(^{23}\) However much this may be true—and in many ways it was—she also never wholly lost the qualities of the Enlightenment she had learned as a child. It was that mixture of romanticism and reason that enables de Staël to triumph in Germany and then to present German culture so effectively to the French in her *d'Allemagne*. De Staël left intellectual Weimar for social Berlin. Though she preferred Weimar, it was in Berlin where—among other leading romanticists—de Staël met August Wilhelm Schlegel. Though he was hardly the leading figure of the Berlin romantics, he too had an admixture of reason in his intellect that made him an excellent teacher of romanticism. A combination of his penury, de Staël's charm, and haste, worked to allow her to engage him as a tutor for her children. On April 18, 1804, she received word of her beloved father's grave illness and departed immediately for Coppet. On April 22, Constant—who had been traveling—told her of Necker's death.

\(^{23}\)De Staël, *Major Writings*, 1-2.
Before she even arrived at Coppet, Napoleon proclaimed the Empire. Though her grief was intense, perhaps the thought of joining battle for democracy once again gave her the spirit to carry on, although she declared loyalty to the Bonapartes in hopes of obtaining a pardon. In an act of closure, de Staël read through her father’s papers, then wrote *On the Character of M. Necker and his Private Life*, publishing it with his manuscripts. Having decided against marriage with Constant that summer, de Staël left France for Italy shortly after Napoleon crowned himself Emperor in December of 1804. Instead of a pardon, all she received was the right to travel unmolested on a French passport. As her children’s tutor, Schlegel accompanied the party. He stayed for seven years.\(^{24}\)

Italy was somewhat cathartic for de Staël. Although she first claimed a national lack of understanding, she later stated that—outside of Paris—Rome was the only city she could love. While being royally treated, de Staël also managed to have another love affair that played a large role in the novel she had planned before even embarking on her trip. Her lover was Dom Pedro de Souza e Holstein; her book was *Corinne*.\(^{25}\) Though he was a man of some substance, Dom

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\(^{24}\) He left only because he was ordered to by the Prefect, after helping de Staël save her manuscript *On Germany* from the censors. Herold, *Mistress*, 408.

\(^{25}\) Dom Pedro was Prime Minister of Portugal and the future Duke of Palmella.
Pedro did not fare as well as the book in either de Staël’s affections or in history. *Corinne* has survived as one of de Staël’s best works.

In June of 1805 de Staël returned to Coppet to begin the novel. She began yet another affair, this time of rather longer standing, with Prosper de Barante, who became the second model for Corinne’s hero. Though working mainly on her novel, de Staël also managed to write a play, *Hagar in the Desert*, while also entertaining the usual coterie of Coppet guests and juggling several affairs, and even more flirtations. She also continued to badger the French government (hence Napoleon) for the two million francs owed her father’s estate and for permission to live closer to Paris. However, her enemy Napoleon was not idle. In December of 1805, he won the battle of Austerlitz, the first of a series. Despite his victories, he was not inclined to give in, and de Staël spent 1806 traveling from Coppet ever closer to Paris with her retinue.

In the spring of 1807 she managed a secret visit to Paris, but that and the publication of *Corinne* shortly thereafter—despite, or really because of its success—incurred Napoleon’s wrath anew. De Staël had no hope now of returning to her beloved Paris any time soon. She flirted with the notion of going to the United States (even writing to her friend President Jefferson about it) but after a brief stay at Coppet set out for Vienna in late 1807. Soon
after she left, her son Auguste appealed to Napoleon to revoke de Staël’s exile, but to no avail. However, de Staël neither quit trying nor let her disappointment curtail her social life. She did not care much for Vienna, but made the rounds of society with her usual aplomb.

During the summer of 1808, de Staël started yet another of her most celebrated books, *On Germany*, and her friend Joseph Bonaparte (who frequently interceded with his brother on her behalf) became king of Spain. However, her lover and friend of so many years, Benjamin Constant, married Charlotte von Hardenberg in an attempt to break with de Staël who had bewitched him so long. As Napoleon continued his victories in Europe, de Staël continued her exile. Nevertheless, she was allowed to return to Coppet in 1809. However, this stay was not to be of long duration. After the enforcement of censorship was strengthened in February, 1810, de Staël moved to Chaumont to be near her publisher. Though the censor (her friend, Portallis) passed the first two volumes with only minor revisions, her publisher imprudently gave proofs to the press. While the third volume was at the censorship office, the contents of the first two were brought to Napoleon’s attention. Originally inclined to allow them to be printed, he later changed his mind. On September 24, 1810, de Staël was ordered to surrender all the manuscripts and copies of *On Germany*, and furthermore, to leave France within twenty-four hours. She
successfully hid the original manuscript and bargained for a week to get ready. Then de Staël returned to Coppet. While there she was continually harassed, and when her old friends Mathieu de Montmorency and Juliette Recamier visited her, they too were exiled. During this time, though, she also met the dashing young officer John Rocca, who she later married. In April of 1812, in secret, she bore his son but never reared him. The boy spent his life with a pastor near Nyon. Pregnancy this late in de Staël’s life (she was almost forty-eight) compromised her health. This frailty and her virtual imprisonment became too much to bear, and in May she escaped her confinement.

Thus began a long journey across Europe that at times had elements of a chase. Though she started by going to Vienna, de Staël’s main objective was Russia. In 1812, that was Napoleon’s main objective too. De Staël visited Moscow and admired its quaintly elaborate wooden palaces scant months before Muscovites burned them in response to the French occupation. She then visited St. Petersburg. Though charmed by the Russian people, she had no wish to fall prey to Napoleon in occupied Russia; she left for Sweden in early September. Her old friend General Bernadotte, who had been proclaimed the Crown Prince of Sweden by its people though he was originally a Frenchman, met her in Stockholm. Perhaps sensing, perhaps merely hoping for Napoleon’s imminent defeat, de Staël championed the effort to bring
about the European alliance that soon challenged Napoleon. As part of this political intriguing, she supported Bernadotte in his pretension to the throne of France. Stimulated by such events she started the third of her major works, *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution*, and also worked on another book, *Ten Years in Exile*.

In January of 1813, de Staël published *Reflections on Suicide* then in June left for England. She was very celebrated in Regency England, enjoying the company of such famous romantics as Lord Byron and Coleridge. As it always seemed to do when de Staël was enjoying a new peak, tragedy struck again. Her son Albert was killed in a duel. Despite her grief, de Staël continued promoting Bernadotte, and finally published *On Germany*. When Napoleon suffered defeat at Leipzig after his ignominious loss in Russia, it seemed that her propagandist attempts for Bernadotte might succeed. In 1814 the European allies invaded France, and in April Napoleon abdicated. Though Bernadotte did not receive the throne, de Staël happily returned to Paris and, somewhat less happily, supported the Bourbon restoration.

The reign of Louis XVIII proved brief however. By March of 1815 Napoleon was triumphantly returning from Elba. Just days before he reached Paris, de Staël fled to Coppet. During the Hundred Days, her old lover Constant ingratiated himself with the Emperor (who proclaimed he had reformed)
and was given the task of composing the new constitution. Constant’s new status and de Staël’s new exile were also brief. In June 1815, Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo and abdicated again, and again Louis XVIII came to the throne.

Finally de Staël was received at a French court for the first time in many years. Though she had some misgivings, she swore allegiance to the king. Personally, at least, it was worth it. In addition to her reception at court, de Staël finally received the two million francs owed her since the revolution. With a dowry now in hand, (her fortune having been somewhat diminished by the forced travel and the generous sums she had loaned) de Staël’s daughter Albertine was wed to the duc de Broglie. However, the end of de Staël’s exile had come too late for her to enjoy it. Exhausted and not in the best of health, she retired to Coppet. She did not retire completely, though. During the last years of her life de Staël continued to work for liberty by working to end slavery.

While at Coppet she renewed her acquaintance with Byron who frequently sailed or swam across the lake to visit her. She also married John Rocca and acknowledged their son in her will. In October of 1816, de Staël and Rocca--dying of tuberculosis--went to Paris for the winter season. Sadly, de Staël was not able to enjoy much of it. In February of 1817, she suffered a stroke. Though she regained consciousness, and all mental facilities, she never
recovered from her paralysis. For three months she held court from her bed. On Bastille Day, 1817, she died. Though she would rather have died in complete control of her body as well as her mind, it is likely that such an intelligent and intellectual woman was pleased she had retained those qualities at least. She was buried, as she wished, at her father’s feet in the family mausoleum at Coppet. Her husband died a few months later. Though de Staël and her husband were both dead, her legacy lived on in her political successors the "Doctrinaires," and in the posthumous publication of Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution, Ten Years of Exile, and her Complete Works.
Germaine de Staël--Selected Works

Historian Gerda Lerner essentially defines feminist consciousness as "the awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group" and as a result they suffer wrongs which must be righted.\textsuperscript{1} Frequently the rise of feminism is thought to date from the early suffragist movements in the nineteenth century, but Germaine de Staël, writing in the eighteenth, was certainly conscious of gender bias. In this early stage of feminism, though, de Staël and her peers were generally not agitating for such political advantages as the right to vote. Their concerns were centered more on issues such as education, independence, and satisfying roles outside marriage.\textsuperscript{2} Though they still strongly identified their feminity with motherhood, de Staël apparently did not, virtually ignoring it in her work.

Women had few rights in the late eighteenth century; the Enlightenment was a brief period when they enjoyed better treatment. Germaine de Staël took full advantage of that. She, like several other women, exercised great influence over policy-makers through the medium of her

\textsuperscript{1}Lerner, \textit{Creation}, 14.

\textsuperscript{2}Lerner, \textit{Creation}, 136-137.
salon. However, unlike most society women, de Staël also exercised great influence over those policy-makers and the educated public through her books. Such luminaries as Goethe and Chateaubriand praised her works, but then, as today, she had her detractors as well. Nonetheless, whether one agrees or disagrees with the prevailing literary criticism of her style, one must acknowledge her impact on society.

While she was writing, the main thrust seemingly perceived in her works was that of the Revolution—liberty. Looking back about two hundred years, the reader can see that an integral part of that liberty she wrote of was liberty for women. De Staël never particularly claimed to be a feminist, but virtually the whole body of her work proclaims it. Even her earliest published piece, *Letters on Rousseau*, though outwardly denying women, is so focused on them that it is obvious de Staël thinks women should be considered equal. It is fascinating to note how much more aware she is of her feminism in her preface to the 1814 edition (published twenty-six years after the original 1788 edition) making a comment on the domestic slavery of women. Yet de Staël tried to defend Rousseau’s sexism in the *Letter on Spectacles*. The reason for this could lie in her mother’s intention of educating de Staël according to Rousseau’s principles, or it could lie in de Staël’s tendency to the romantic in certain areas. Yet her defense
is somewhat lopsided. With one phrase she condemns him, with the next she exalts his views.

Rousseau tried to prevent women from taking part in public affairs and playing a brilliant role, but how much pleasure he gave them when he talked about them! Ah! he may have tried to deprive them of some rights foreign to their destiny, but how he gave them back the ones that belong to them forever!

De Staël continues in this vein, concluding that "...he believes in love, he is forgiven...." This would almost seem to be sarcasm, but considering de Staël's age, the age in which she lived, and her further comment where she does "reproach Rousseau on women's behalf with one wrong,...of claiming...that women are incapable of painting passion with warmth and truth, one must conclude that she was sincere. De Staël also feels compelled to defend Rousseau's The New Heloïse, pointing out that it was a novel after all--a love story--and based on the older work Abelard and Heloïse, intimating that Rousseau could not be held solely responsible for its moral contents. She then continues that Rousseau must be excused because of his respect for conjugal love. However, in her 1814 preface, de Staël expands on this idea in a way she did not really mention in her earlier essay. Her position on marriage in this later preface holds more true to the life she lived than to that perfect and romantic conjugal bliss Rousseau spoke of and de Staël dreamed of. She questions her audience "...what happens to communication

3De Staël, Major Writings, 42.
between souls if there is no analogy between minds? What are we to think of a man whose pride is so modest that he prefers blind obedience in a wife to enlightened sympathy?"  

De Staël answers her own question saying that only equality can lead to conjugal bliss. As Vivian Folkenflik points out in her introduction, de Staël also pleads her case for the education of women, despite Rousseau’s denial of any education for women other than that necessary for running a household.

De Staël’s commentary on Rousseau’s taste for music and botany was a very short piece that did not touch on the subject of women, and neither did her reflections on his character, focusing as it did on the man himself. Feminism in de Staël’s Essay on Fictions is confined to de Staël’s implicit equal treatment of male and female writers and characters. Nowhere in this essay does she differentiate between authors by sex, yet she—as a female writer—was following one of the few intellectual courses open to women in the late eighteenth century. Considering the chiefly domestic place of women in society then, there were a significant number of women writing, such as Madame Roland, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Jane Austen, as well as de Staël. Furthermore, virtually all of de Staël’s protagonists are women, yet she does not treat the subject in her essay on fiction. By not directly addressing the issue of gender in

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4Ibid., 41.
fiction, she makes a statement that equality in writing and criticism should be a matter of course, particularly in light of the feminism inherent in her fictions.

Before she was even twenty years old, and prior to the French Revolution, de Staël wrote three novellas that amply demonstrate her concern with gender issues. The first of these, "Mirza," is a romantic tale of love between two people of warring tribes in Africa. The protagonist Ximeo is a prosperous sugar farmer, demonstrating how the crop can be raised profitably without slave labor. He tells the narrator (though told in the first person, the narrator, interestingly, is a man) of the extraordinary woman he met while out hunting. He thought he fell in love with her and convinced the woman, Mirza, that he had. She then fell in love with him. Later Ximeo realized that he did not love her and told her. When Ximeo is then taken prisoner and about to be sold into slavery, Mirza offers herself in his place. The white trader, recognizing virtue even in these "savages" gives them both their freedom. "Gives" de Staël points out, as though their freedom were his to give.

As Ximeo first became aware of Mirza, he related that he

\[\text{could not recognize any of the words young girls enjoy singing over and over again. Love of liberty and hatred of slavery—these were the subjects of the noble songs that struck me with admiration.}^{5}\]

\[^{5}\text{De Staël, Major Writings, "Mirza," 83.}\]
In the above passage de Staël implies that women too have brains that can reason and make moral choices. She further illustrated the point in the next paragraph by saying that the woman, Mirza, was not outwardly beautiful. The implication, of course, is that she was inwardly beautiful. That a woman could be admired for her intelligence and morals, rather than for her beauty and "femininity" in late eighteenth century France was a radical idea. De Staël compounded this notion by describing Mirza’s education by a Frenchman. De Staël had thrown out the "ideal" woman—beautiful and brainless—and replaced her with virtually the antithesis of that ideal, then made her an object of admiration. Despite the strong statement that made, one wonders how much de Staël scorned physical beauty on philosophical grounds, and how much she denied it on personal grounds. De Staël was intelligent, educated, and decidedly not outwardly beautiful. As one of the most prominent scholars writing on de Staël, Madelyrn Gutwirth, says, "Mme. de Staël wants Mirza’s gifts, which are the very stuff of her freedom, to constitute her beauty..."6

Further, Mirza taught Ximeo what she knew. The fact that the female character was teaching the male character was an obvious hint that superior and inferior positions, as it were, should be determined on a case by case basis rather than on gender lines. She made the same point throughout

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6Gutwirth, Madame, 71.
point throughout this story on the basis of race as well. An early precursor of her antislavery work in the last years of her life can be seen in "Mirza." It is clear that de Staël's ideas of liberty extended to all people, though she did not believe in universal enfranchisement. The heroine of this story, though a woman and almost a slave, is intelligent and educated. That is where de Staël is in keeping with her times. Yet she was ahead of her times as well. More than on gender or slavery issues, she also foreshadowed the romantic movement with her ideas of an almost mystic love and idealization of the noble savage.7

In "Adelaide and Theodore," de Staël gives the role of Rousseau's Emile to a young girl. Adelaide spends her first fourteen years in the country with a religious and romantic spinster. This particular education did accomplish its goal—"the sight of a beautiful countryside made her dream, the sound of a violin brought her back to town. It also had drawbacks, putting her in such a state that her "young soul was in constant turmoil."8 When Adelaide and her rather

7The early nineteenth century Romantic movement incorporated such elements as the veneration of emotion over reason, a love of nature and individual freedom, an idealization of the Middle Ages, which was tied in with a new devotion to Christianity in response to the deism of the Enlightenment, a love of the exotic, and the idea of a tragic hero. In de Staël's works, we see tragic heroines, a love of individual freedom, and the veneration of emotion, but not at the expense of reason.

8De Staël, Selected Writings, "Adelaide and Theodore," 93 and 92, respectively.
dissolute uncle moved into the city and thus society, the only life available to a young, ignorant lady of society was an endless round of often vacuous entertainment with an eye toward marriage, children and more of the same. The romantic sentimental mind, with no serious purpose to engage it, was given to pleasures with no satisfaction—a complaint of some bourgeois women that still exists today. De Staël seems to be decrying romanticism as being oppressive to women, though in many ways she was an early romanticist. Concomitantly, she seems almost to attack Rousseau's model of education in a theme parallel to her attack on society women. In both cases, the women were seen from a chauvinist perspective to be frivolous and overly-sentimental.

The story continues on a journey into the country when Adelaide finally meets Theodore, of whom she has heard so much. His reputation for sensibility has proven true, and the two fall in love. They decide to marry, against his mother's wishes, and do so secretly. Back in Parisian society the idyll is spoiled. The secret nature of their marriage and Adelaide's charms ensure a stream of admirers. Theodore becomes jealous. He leaves Paris in despair. Adelaide, unknown to him, is pregnant with their child. She too leaves Paris, trying to find Theodore at his mother's house, but even she does not know where he is. Finally, the women are led to him by some of his worried peasants. He is ill. Theodore is carried back to his house, and as he lies
dying, Adelaide reveals that she is pregnant. He charges her to care for the child, though she has professed that she will not outlive him. She promises to give the child life, and Theodore dies in her arms. Adelaide lives quietly throughout the rest of her pregnancy. Then, as soon as the baby is finally born, Adelaide swallows opium to join her husband, leaving behind a son. Theodore’s proud and prudish mother and Adelaide’s dissipated uncle reared the child. De Staël ended the story claiming that the combination of firmness and sweetness in the surrogate parents produced "an accomplished being of the unfortunate fruit of love and happiness." De Staël obviously thought that sensitivity and reason, emotion and intelligence must combine to temper each other and provide a balance. The fact that Theodore was so much like Adelaide conveys the message that men were as susceptible to emotion as women, providing yet another reason for equality.

The third novella, "Pauline," is about another young, uneducated girl. This time she lives in the colonies and is married to a planter at the age of thirteen, a rich businessman who is eager to add her fortune to his. Pauline is left to her own devices all day, and so falls prey to some unscrupulous but amusing men. One of them, Theodore, falls in love with her, and she likes him, but she allowed

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him to have sex with her, which leads to a change in their feelings. Her ardor was fired, but his was cooled. De Staël appears to be warning young women of the sexual double standard that exists today, but in her time, among women in arranged marriages, such scandal would have been downplayed. Unfortunately for Pauline, her empty lonely way of life contributed to indiscretion, and she admitted her misery when Theodore abandoned her. His cousin, who first turned Pauline’s thoughts to parties and flirtations, claims that he loves her, but she does not believe him. However, he wears her down, and then she truly thinks she is lost.

In the meantime, Pauline has been left a very wealthy widow. She decides to marry the roue Meltin until an old friend of the family arrives from France. Unbeknownst to anyone, the older widow takes the younger one back to France with her. It was then that Pauline received her education, reading and reflecting alone because of her shame and remorse. After finally succumbing to her friend’s pleas, Pauline went into town one day and there met the dashing officer Édouard. He was wounded in an attempt to save one of his men, and Pauline helped care for him for quite some time. Of course they fell in love. However Pauline was still too filled with guilt to indulge her feelings. At this point in de Staël’s life, she was apparently still of the impression that a woman must be an asexual creature. On the basis of the many lovers she had, she presumably later
changed her mind. With increased age and assurance came an increased radicalism and feminism, as seen in the transition of most of her female characters from women who defined themselves by the men in their lives to women like Corinne who knew they could stand alone, though they might choose not to. Pauline was both youthful and impressionable though, and was even more troubled by Edouard's stated admiration of womanly virtue. Actually, he comes off a trifle priggish saying

as a sensitive man capable of a love verging on idolatry, I do not hesitate to say that there can be no happiness with a woman whose memories are not pure.\(^\text{10}\)

However, he does add that this is because the woman will always question herself. In this explanation, Edouard does two things. He takes some blame off the woman for being "impure," and he illustrates classic symptoms of the self-blame of victims. Though this is a phenomenon seen in victims of all types, women have frequently experienced it in poor relationships.

Nonetheless, after Pauline made an attempt to banish Edouard from her life, and he made attempted suicide, she gave in and married him. The couple had a semblance of happiness at first—they even had a child, but then Edouard met someone from the islands who informed him of the details of Pauline's life there. Despite Pauline's confession and

\(^{10}\text{De Staël, Major Writings, "Pauline," 127.}\)
Edouard’s earlier claims, he still loves her and determines to duel her detractor. Edouard wins the duel. However, Pauline’s guilty feelings do not allow her to live with herself and she falls into a fever and dies. De Staël makes it clear that the couple should have been happy saying that time could have soothed the situation, but seems to sacrifice her practicality to her sentimentality. Yet, once again, as in "Adelaide and Theodore," de Staël equalizes the genders by making Edouard as romantic and sensitive as Pauline, as well as making Pauline intelligent and independent. Despite her youthful extravagances, de Staël’s intellect and feminism shine through.

On the occasion of de Staël’s marriage, Guibert wrote a tribute to her wherein he called her Zulma and compared her to a priestess of Apollo or a muse.\(^{11}\) In reference to this she named a story—or "fragment" as she called it—"Zulma." She also referred to it as "this piece of writing, which belongs to my soul more than anything else I have done."\(^{12}\) "Zulma" is the story of a young girl who falls passionately in love with a youth named Fernand. He educates her which only makes her love him more. Zulma saves his life many times, often at great danger to herself, and even saves his mother’s life. When Zulma finds him at another woman’s feet, however, she kills him. At her trial she tells this

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\(^{11}\) Gutwirth, Madame, 46.

\(^{12}\) De Staël, Major Writings, 141.
story to justify herself so that her parents will not share her fate, as is the custom of her people. They do acquit Zulma, but she then kills herself, saying Fernand's murder shall not go unavenged.

This story is not as sentimental as the other novellas. The passion comes through far more powerfully in "Zulma"; it is sentimental, even somewhat saccharine in the others. It is in this story that de Staël justifies that romantic craving for an all-encompassing love that she looked for all her life. In one sense she found it with Benjamin Constant. Though they rarely made each other happy, they were definitely unhappy apart. It is revealing that in the story she considered the closest to her soul, the woman is intelligent, educated, eloquent, strong, proud, and just, as well as passionate. De Staël was all those things too, albeit she never was so impractical as to kill--herself or anyone else--for love.

"Zulma" was originally written as a preface to The Influence of the Passions on the Happiness of Individuals and Nations. De Staël wrote it shortly after the Reign of Terror, commenting "What a time I have picked to write a treatise on the happiness of individuals and nations!"¹³ This timing greatly influenced her writing. In The Influence of the Passions, she intimated that revolution was not worth the pain and horror it generated, yet all her novellas and

¹³De Staël, Major Writings, 151.
many of her later works disclaim that, saying that love, liberty, and honor were all worth death. She is somewhat contradictory in this piece, hoping that the changes wrought by the revolution will somehow be worth the pain of it but also hoping that no others will follow the lead of the French into a long and bloody revolution.

In keeping with this antipathy for war, in a section entitled "On the Love of Glory," de Staël really does not even touch on any military glory. Instead she concentrates on the glory of virtue and genius.\(^\text{14}\) In On Vanity, de Staël says that "...glory is based on the noblest elements in man's nature; ...but vanity fastens onto things which have no real value..."\(^\text{15}\) She then continues, saying "in women everything is either love or vanity."\(^\text{16}\) Though this sounds like a rather chauvinist view of women, de Staël explains such a harsh statement by saying that "the same efforts which can earn glory and power for men almost never get anything for women except ephemeral applause and a reputation for intrigue."\(^\text{17}\) Thus, she intimates that women are forced into a position of choosing love or vanity. De Staël shows her impatience with some women who play on the role bestowed on their gender, but, again, also chastises

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\(^\text{14}\)De Staël, Major Writings, 157.

\(^\text{15}\)Ibid., 158.

\(^\text{16}\)Ibid., 159.

\(^\text{17}\)Ibid.
men for forcing them to such deceits and conceits. Even a hint of bitterness creeps in when she—who was not particularly beautiful—says

The face of a woman is always a help or a hindrance in her life story, whatever the strength or range of her mind, however important the things which concern her. Men have wanted it to be this way. And the more determined men are to judge a woman according to the advantages or faults of her sex, the more they hate seeing her embrace a destiny contrary to her nature.¹⁸

It is interesting that de Staël, steeped in the prejudices of her time, also sees intellectual women as embracing a "destiny contrary to her nature," (emphasis added) despite the fact that she herself is an intellectual woman. This bias is seen throughout her work on the passions, however. While encouraging women to strive for excellence, she admonishes them not to let themselves succumb to vanity, and that they will have to live with unhappiness. Here de Staël's romanticism is evident again. She maintains that even glory is not enough, that women must have love. Based on the sentiments expressed in her other works, one must surmise that men must have love too, though she does not explicitly say or even really imply it in the Passions. Nonetheless, she does say that men have failed to "trust in superiority" or "recognize the influence of genius or

¹⁸Ibid.
virtue," which does imply that the work is not directed at women alone.\textsuperscript{19}

In the section on philosophy, de Staël states that "the philosopher has...freed his thoughts from the yoke of passion...."\textsuperscript{20} Since de Staël thinks women are such passionate creatures this seems to intimate that only men may be philosophers. It is clear throughout the body of her works that she also believes men to be passionate beings, which seems then to question the validity of men as philosophers as well. \textsuperscript{21} Apparently, she is therefore, setting the philosopher above the masses as an extraordinary person, that--particularly as seen later in \textit{Corinne}--can be either male or female.

De Staël's work \textit{On Literature Considered in Its Relationship to Social Institutions} portrays a geographical determinism, wherein de Staël equates northern poetry with sadness and nobility, while she equates southern writing with voluptuousness. It is important to understand that she wrote \textit{On Literature} after her sojourn in Germany, where she was much enamored of the new romantic poets and philosophers. Part of de Staël's preference for the north can be attributed to her claim that "northern people have

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 164.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 166.
\item \textsuperscript{21} De Staël herself was also a philosophic and passionate creature, of course.
\end{itemize}
always respected women" more than their southern counterparts and that "women enjoyed independence in the North; elsewhere they were condemned to slavery." In the section on German literature, de Staël claims that Goethe's Werther "reminds virtue of the necessity of reason." Though she does not relate this to a gender issue, it is again evident that she is writing about all people, men and women alike.

In the second part of On Literature, de Staël considers "The Present Condition of Intellectual Activity in France and its Future Progress." She introduces this portion with the hope and fear expressed in the Passions that the French Revolution might be a "new era for the intellectual world," or "simply a terrible event." She also claims that liberty educates a people, which is analogous to her contention in her stories that education liberated the women therein. However, de Staël seems to think that the education of liberty has had an intoxicating effect, that rather than freeing all people, it has forced them all into the vainglorious folly women were accused of in the Passions. However, she also (rather contradictorily) states that women lose charm and dignity with the loss of their innocence, and implies that a people may also lose their dignity from the

22 Ibid., 179.
23 Ibid., 184.
24 Ibid., 185.
excesses of revolution. Nonetheless, de Staël maintains that in a republic "women are nothing if they cannot make an impression on others by whatever will distinguish their natural elevation." She cautions though, that women should be even more circumspect in a republic than under a monarchy. De Staël extends this caution to men as well. Though she thinks women have to be even more careful than men, she is once more essentially equating the genders, and stressing that social conventions are necessary for all people in a civilized society.

De Staël expands on the situation of women in society (and women writers in particular) in the section devoted to female authors. She rues the fact that "their triumphs and failures are equally and completely arbitrary," but believes that "a day will come when philosophical legislators will give serious attention to the education of women." De Staël is also disgusted by the situation in which women are damned as criminals if they try to gain any power, or doomed to remain slaves if they do not. Further, her bitterness appears once again when she says that "Men are quite willing to tolerate women's degredation of the heart, so long as it is accompanied by mediocrity of the mind." In the rest of

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25Ibid., 197.
26Ibid.
27Ibid., 201.
28Ibid.
the section, de Staël compares how women writers fare under the different systems of monarchy and republic. Though she finds plenty of fault with both systems, de Staël ultimately prefers the republican system, not surprising knowing her propensity for liberty.

The biggest problem de Staël discusses within a monarchical system is ridicule, and she writes about it in a fashion that makes her reader think de Staël must have experienced much of that ridicule. Indeed, she did, but since most of her writing was at least published after the revolution, one wonders why she equates it with monarchy, unless she is thinking of Napoleon as a monarch. Of course, de Staël says that in a republic, women writers are hated. Certainly she felt that too. Nonetheless, she maintains that writing in a republic is better than writing in a monarchy. Since she does not mention such obvious drawbacks as the lettres de cachet of the ancien régime, or the expulsion she suffered under the directory not long before the publication of On Literature, in 1800, one can only assume that she preferred the more equalizing emotion of hatred to the humbling feeling of ridicule. Still, she contends that "since the Revolution men have deemed it politically and morally useful to reduce women to a state of the most absurd mediocrity."\(^{29}\) This leads into a justification and plea for the education of women, claiming

\(^{29}\)Ibid., 203.
among other things, that educated women will be better mothers.\textsuperscript{30} Though the piece on women is fairly lengthy, de Staël’s position is succinctly described in the following passage:

> Enlightening, teaching, and perfecting women together with men on the national and individual level: this must be the secret for the achievement of every reasonable goal, as well as the establishment of any permanent social or political relationships.\textsuperscript{31}

Although de Staël finds the most fault with men for their treatment of women, she also chastises women for their lack of solidarity. Finally, de Staël concludes that public opinion in general has made a woman writer an object of pity, rather than the object of curiosity it considers her.

With the rise of Napoleon’s power, de Staël turned from essays to write a novel, \textit{Delphine}. Though her writing had matured somewhat since the novellas, the novel lacked the strength of some of those earlier pieces, most notably "Mirza" and "Zulma." Yet they have many similarities. \textit{Delphine} is also the love story of an intelligent and emotional woman. The writing device used was a series of letters between various characters. Within this correspondence, Delphine’s story and feminine frustration unfold. As in all of de Staël’s stories, there is much that is autobiographical. Like de Staël she is intelligent and

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 205.
outspoken; unlike her, Delphine is beautiful. Delphine also suffers many of the wrongs de Staël wrote of in her section on women writers in On Literature. In fact, this story is essentially a fictionalized account of that piece. De Staël also uses Delphine as a vehicle to reaffirm her belief in liberty and republicanism in the face of Napoleon's increasing power. Both her feminism from On Literature and her republicanism are evident in a conversation that Delphine relates.

Lovely Delphine! Why on earth do you voice opinions which arouse such passionate hatred? opinions which are—perhaps rightly—so repellent to people of your class?³²

Initially Delphine gains her love because of her intelligence and beauty; finally she loses it because of her outspokenness and the jealousy of bored society women. Like virtually all of de Staël's fiction, Delphine has an unhappy, even tragic, ending. Though de Staël's romantic style is often flowery, her feminism provides a strong and graceful framework that gives Delphine a sincere quality. Though she is realistic in her portrayal of a late eighteenth century French society man when Leonce (the love interest) says "I am convinced Delphine will subordinate her actions to my wishes," she is hopeful when she continues with him saying "her way of thinking may liberate mine."³³

³²Ibid., 213.
³³Ibid., 214.
Ultimately, neither happens. Despite Leonce's final rejection of Delphine, he is not wholly unliberated, though, enjoying Delphine's intelligence, and even some of her unconventional ways.

In one of the strongest passages of Delphine, Leonce—though embarrassed—does not condemn her feminism. Delphine, while waiting to be received by the queen, takes pity on a young woman whom the rest of the court is shunning because of her tarnished reputation. Though Delphine hesitates to compromise herself in Leonce's eyes, she decides that "society's rules are once again contrary to the real will of the soul."\textsuperscript{34} She then pointedly crosses the room to converse with the poor creature. In describing the event, Delphine observes that "men may seduce women but they like to keep the right to punish them for being seduced."\textsuperscript{35} This statement has a somewhat bitter tone as de Staël reflects on the unfairness of the sexual double standard. Later, in Delphine's defence of herself to Leonce, she cries

\begin{quote}
That unfortunate woman's misery was what should have hurt you,....how can we possibly understand what made her a lost woman? Was her husband a protector, or a man who did not deserve to be loved? Did her parents take care of her education? Did her first choice treat her gently, or blight every hope of love, every sense of delicacy? Oh! Women's fate depends on men in so many ways!\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., 222.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., 223.
De Stael concludes this impassioned and indignant speech of Delphine's by reminding (or perhaps teaching) the reader that one is not another's judge, and that "one would have to be more than her judge to refuse her comfort for the torture of public humiliation." Finally, Delphine asserts her independence by telling him that she will not play emotional games with him, and neither will she compromise her integrity, whatever he or society may think of her.

Leonce concurs with Delphine on her necessity to remain true to herself, even saying that he loves her as she is though he does not always agree with her. Leonce proves less true than Delphine, though, and after he leaves her she regrets that "a woman's fate is over and done with when she has not married the man she loves." Again, de Stael makes Delphine's words slightly bitter when she continues, saying "Society has left women's fate only one hope: when the lottery is drawn and lost, it's all over."

Though this was not really true in de Staël's case, she was a very unconventional woman, with assets of wit and wealth others did not often have. Other women of her time were more like the character of Madame de Vernon, penniless

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37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 228.

39 Ibid.
and at the mercy of not always understanding men. She says of her guardian that though he meant to be kind,

he considered women as toys when they were children and...pretty mistresses when they were young ladies, without anything to say on rational issues at any time.40

According to Madame de Vernon, it was this treatment—received as a child—that forced her into a life of dissimulation. Here de Staël seems to be saying that if men think women play silly games—and she agrees that many do—it is because men have forced them into it. This undue societal influence of men over women is exponentially enlarged by the financial power of men over women. Madame de Vernon was forced into a repellent marriage because she had no money. This marriage "confirmed her childhood notion that ...sex and poverty made (her) an unhappy slave...(for) her tyrannical owner."41

It is interesting that in this, as in most of de Staël’s other feminist works, the story does not end happily. It is not pleasant to think that she holds out no hope for the happiness of feminist women, nor does that notion fit with her essays, or the way she led her own life. Perhaps it was the influence of the romantics, or possibly a strong message that women must work hard for change. In any event, once again, de Staël’s quest for all-encompassing

40Ibid., 230.
41Ibid., 231.
love based on intelligence, liberty, and equality is thwarted in her stories as well as in her life.

With Napoleon at the peak of his power, and de Staël in exile from her beloved Paris, one can well imagine that her next novel would also have an unhappy ending. What is usually considered her greatest work of fiction was written during and after her trip to Italy in 1805-1806. In Corinne, de Staël paints a portrait of a lovely, accomplished, intelligent, and even lauded woman who is foiled in love. Corinne is an extemporaneous poet of unknown origin. While being given the laurel crown for her contributions, a young melancholy man sees her. He admires her greatly. Finally he meets her and the two explore philosophy and the arts together as they travel through Italy. (This was very much what de Staël and her new young lover Pedro de Souza did.) However, despite the promise of the relationship, Oswald—Corinne’s admirer—must do his duty, and marries the young woman his deceased father had picked out for him. She is Corinne’s half-sister, decided on only after Corinne herself had been rejected because of her step-mother’s jealousy. The message is clear. Even though Corinne is everything a woman could be, and even receives acclaim for it, as long as this is an unusual situation, the gifted woman will lose at love. Only when women and men are equal will there be a chance for the type of great and lasting love, built on equality, that de Staël
yearned for. After the publication of Corinne, de Staël was frequently referred to by that name. It is true that Corinne was essentially de Staël, but neither de Souza (the early model for Oswald) nor Prosper de Barante (Oswald’s later model) were de Staël’s true love. If that role belonged to anyone, it was to Benjamin Constant. It is interesting to note that one of the problems that beset Constant’s and de Staël’s relationship from the outset was his family’s objection to such an odd woman. Though it is true that de Staël was married when first she and Constant met, the family continued to disapprove of the relationship even after her widowhood. Since she had money and position, it is difficult to see what other objection Constant’s relatives could possibly have had.

Perhaps de Staël—somewhere in her innermost thoughts—wondered if she were physically attractive enough for Constant. She was certainly not a great beauty, yet she bestowed beauty on most of her heroines. Corinne was no exception, but de Staël seems to be of two minds as to the import of such attractiveness. Though this theme runs throughout many of her stories, Corinne particularly

42 Though equated with Corinne, de Staël was also Oswald. Not only did the two share the journey to Italy following the death of their fathers, but one gets the distinct impression that de Staël’s entire description of Oswald’s wit, fortune, and generosity, combined with intense loneliness, were autobiographical. This is reinforced by Oswald’s initial aversion to, then later enchantment by Italy, just as de Staël herself experienced.
illustrates the duality of de Staël’s feelings about this supposedly desirable quality for femininity. In her initial depiction of Corinne, de Staël calls her "poet, writer, improvisator, and one of the most beautiful women in Rome." Beautiful is important, but only after descriptions of intelligence and talent. However, when Corinne’s public is first heard speaking of her, it is of her talent and genius that they speak, omitting any mention of her beauty. Though Corinne’s loveliness is described frequently throughout the story, it is her inner qualities that de Staël finally chooses to be her paramount traits, and it is these inner qualities which de Staël both shared and venerated as ideal. In the midst of all this description of beauty and talent though, one anonymous Roman drives home an important (and practical) feminist point. He agrees that everyone honors her, but replies "but she does not favor anyone; she is rich, and independent." Because of her economic status, she does not have to try to please a man, or anyone, to fill her basic needs.

Finally, though, de Staël refutes much of her own feminist stance when Corinne glances at Oswald "begging for the protection...a woman can never do without, no matter how

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43 Ibid., 250.
44 Ibid.
superior she may be." De Staël does attribute this weakness to the romantic notion of sensibility. However, the passage is immediately followed by one in which Oswald’s conviction that he could depict Corinne better after looking at her than the poets of Rome could describe her talents in their odes, calls into question de Staël’s thoughts at the time. Perhaps she is so heartbroken at the loss of her father that she feels particularly lonely and vulnerable in her role as a strong woman.

Corinne, like many of de Staël’s stories, imbued both the heroine and hero with the qualities de Staël most valued: intelligence, sensitivity, and honor. To read it makes one sad that de Staël never found what she was looking for, and that in the two hundred years since, gender relations have not advanced to the point which she envisioned, making relations based on equality as elusive today as they were when de Staël lived and wrote.

Despite de Staël’s personal griefs at that time, her writing was at its height. She was a prolific, popular, and gifted author. Her next work was On Germany, and it served to introduce the people of France to Germany and to Romanticism as it was blossoming. Because of the nature of the piece, only portions of it portray de Staël’s feminism. Interestingly, the section on love in marriage has far more bearing on her views of womanhood than does the section on

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Ibid., 253.
women. De Staël apparently did not hold German women in particularly high esteem. After making her usual assertions that women must live through men, while men live only for themselves, she describes German women. Ironically, what de Staël admires in them is presumably just what most men would admire in them: their bblondehair and pleasant voices, their modesty and unquestioning loyalty. These are exactly the sorts of things de Staël fought against as the qualities to admire in a woman. Perhaps such an anomaly is merely de Staël's way of being diplomatic however, as she continues her description of their "sugary language" and incapacity to judge. More in keeping with de Staël's style is her section entitled "Love Within Marriage."

This essay echoes de Staël's often expressed theme of love based on equality. Religion enters into this equation because de Staël is writing of marriage. Though she claims that "religion may not make any distinctions between the obligations of husband and wife...the world certainly does," many theologians and feminists would argue with that statement. Nonetheless, de Staël makes her point that the social contract between a man and a woman upon entering a marriage is decidedly off balance.

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47 Ibid., 295.

48 Ibid., 318. It is interesting that de Staël says the preferred feminist "husband and wife" rather than the much more common "man and wife."

I will love you passionately for two or three years, says the man....then....I will be cold and bored at home, and try to be pleasant elsewhere. As for you, who are usually more imaginative and sensitive than I am, and have no career or distraction such as the world offers me--you who live for me alone, while I have a thousand other things to think about--you will be satisfied with the second-rate, frigid, part-time goddess that suits me to give you, and despise any homage that might express higher, more tender feelings.  

In her adamancy, de Staël shows a rare glimpse of her feelings of women's superiority, surprising in view of her continual insistence on equality. One must forgive her after all for this burst of bitterness, when one considers the abuse she received for being an intellectual woman and proud of it. She perhaps sums it up best when she quotes a fable, saying

A game for thee,
But death for me.

De Staël also presages modern psychological beliefs about victimization with her statement that "blame is always ready to turn against the victim." This is a theme that is not fully developed in de Staël's works, but is common, and particularly used in discussions of relationship abuse in many modern feminist works. De Staël introduces another rare subject in the piece on love and marriage. Though she was a mother of four, and motherhood was and is integral to

49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 319.
51 Ibid.
feminist theories, de Staël does not often discuss it. Even when she does bring up the subject in this section, her remarks are cursory. De Staël merely mentions that of course mothers love their children, because it is such an easy relationship, but that neither children nor parents can take the place of a mate. Considering how she felt about her father, this is surprising. However, one must remember that she frequently called her father her lover, her friend, her father, and even her all. One may garner from the little she said about children that she felt only disdain when Napoleon made his famous remark that the worthiest woman was the one who bore the most children.

Even though de Staël's drama "The Mannequin" revolves around a father and daughter, and her suitors, it does not particularly explore the parent-child relationship either. What it does concentrate on are familiar themes, those of Germany and France and those of men and women. She even connects the two, claiming that all the goodness in the hero comes from "all ranks and all nations." In this play, Sophie, the heroine, becomes exactly what men profess to want, "a cardboard doll," in order to (successfully) show them that is not at all what they want, and that they will find real satisfaction with a woman worthy of themselves.

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52Ibid., 327.

53Ibid., 347.
De Staël’s *Reflections on Suicide* was written chiefly to refute her earlier defense of it. Like her advocacy of suicide, her condemnation of it is essentially asexual. This reaffirms her inherent belief—discernible in her work even where seemingly contradictory to some of her statements—that women and men are equal beings. Conversely, her *Considerations on the Main Events of the French Revolution*, does reflect on the peculiar situation of women. Her personal memories of such momentous events are of course feminized. At the same time, the people with whom de Staël witnessed the Revolution were usually women as well. Though de Staël remembered her own hopes seeing the Estates General march, she also remembered another woman’s fears. According to de Staël, Madame de Montmorin, though a woman of "no intellectual distinction whatsoever," predicted great disaster. She and virtually her entire family died as victims of the Revolution. The other memories de Staël writes on concerning women are connected to her own exile. She rather proudly claims to be the first woman Napoleon banished, though she points out that he exiled many. He did this, de Staël claims, because

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54 *Delphine* contained this defense. See Gutwirth, *Madame*, for a discussion of it. As it was not particular to women, it is not included in this essay.

women annoyed Napoleon as rebels; they were of no use to his political designs, on the one hand, and were less accessible than men to the hopes and fears dispensed by power, on the other.\textsuperscript{56}

She intimates that Napoleon did not understand women and was therefore afraid of them, and particularly afraid of bright, witty, Parisian women.

De Staël expands on her thoughts on exile in her work \textit{Ten Years of Exile}. The first section, titled "Why Bonaparte Hated Me," reaffirmed her belief in freedom and equality, when she stated "the Emperor Napoleon's biggest grudge against me was my constant respect for true liberty."\textsuperscript{57} The rest of the piece is devoted to reminiscences of her time traveling the French countryside, trying to publish \textit{On Germany}. De Staël lived four more years after she wrote on her exile, but she did not write any more. It is a shame that she did not write her impressions of Russia, after her travels there, just ahead of Napoleon's invading army. Yet de Staël finally was allowed back to her beloved Paris and divided her last days between there and Coppet, an admired and respected woman.

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., 371.

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., 374.
Broadening the scope of this essay is an Asian woman, the extraordinary feminist author Ding Ling. Her life and works spanned an amazingly active revolutionary phase of history. Prior to the twentieth century China enjoyed a society somewhat stable in its traditionalism. Though dynasties came and went in a cyclical pattern of rebellion, reform, corruption, and rebellion, religious, societal, and familial mores changed at a much slower pace, at least partly due to the prevalence of Confucianism. However when the Qing Dynasty was overthrown in 1911, it was not replaced by another dynasty. Instead the entire nation experienced years of imperialist, nationalist, and communist struggle finally culminating in the successful establishment of the present communist government in 1949.

During this period of upheaval the roles of gender, class, culture, education, and religion all came into question. The ancient Confucian ideal of filial piety (the respectful subordination to one's superiors, notably that of women to men in the context of this paper) suffered particularly from the modernization of China. The May Fourth Movement (1915-1921) was especially stringent in its
rejection of the Confucian tradition and its fascination with western culture. This glorification of the west in the May Fourth era is rather ironic in that it stemmed from anger against a decision by the Western powers (at the Versailles peace talks) to give Shandong to Japan. Though western politics may have angered, western culture intrigued. A new literature grew out of the movement based on western styles of "romanticism, realism, naturalism, and symbolism."¹ This revolutionary setting proved the perfect background for Ding Ling.

Ding was probably born in 1904, a time which allowed her not only to witness all of twentieth century China's turmoil but also to participate in most of it.² Though only seven during the 1911 revolution, at fifteen—the precocious daughter of a radical feminist mother—Ding played an active role in the May Fourth Movement of 1919. This particular cultural and intellectual revolution was to color her life, and she became one of the principal writers of that movement. One way or another, either as activist or acted upon, Ding was also involved in the early Communist


²Various dates have been given as the year in which Ding was born. See Chang Jun-mei, Ting Ling: [Ding Ling] Her Life and Her Work, Institute of International Relations (Taipei, Taiwan: National Chengchi University, 1978), 1, and Yi-tsi Feuerwerker, Ding Ling's Fiction, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 151.
movement, the anti-Japanese nationalist movement of the early thirties, Yanan Communism, the Communist Revolution of 1949, the anti-rightist movement of the 1950's, and the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. She emerged triumphant after finally surviving the Gang of Four, living until 1986. Ding Ling and her country experienced the violent contortions of revolution together. This is not the proper forum to decide whether or not China grew to political or cultural maturity, but a close examination of Ding’s life and writings clearly map her progress in both communism and literature.

Ding Ling’s earliest years, though not typical, did not foretell any proclivity toward revolution. She was not a rebellious child. However circumstances virtually ensured a revolutionary life. She came from a fairly well-to-do landlord class family. Interestingly, they were from the progressive province of Hunan. It was there that the first Chinese Soviet was established, in 1927. Mao Zedong also

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3For a chronological listing of the major events in Ding Ling’s life until 1957, see Chang, Ting Ling, 146-150. For the date of her death, see Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 96.


came from Hunan, and his life frequently paralleled Ding Ling's. Not only did she come from a rather liberal province, but, presumably, from a liberal family as well. Ding's mother had an unusual amount of education for a woman, and her uncle was a local reformist. Her father was apparently a charming and generous dilettante who squandered his inheritance. It can be speculated that his influence on Ding's life manifested itself in her own freewheeling economic lifestyle. However, a more convincing argument is that her father's influence was far more important in an indirect way. Because his lavish lifestyle was followed by his early death, Ding's mother was left a young and impoverished widow, seemingly at the mercy of her in-laws pleasure. The end result of her widowed mother's status had a profound impact on Ding's life.

Yu Manzhen, Ding's mother, was no ordinary Chinese widow though, and 1909 (when Ding's father died) was no ordinary year. In those last years of the Qing Dynasty, the prevalent atmosphere was one of reform and modernization in an attempt by the Qing Dynasty to forestall revolution. In the midst of that climate Yu challenged the idea of filial

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6Ding, I Myself am a Woman Tani E. Barlow, ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 18.
7Chang, Ting Ling, 1, and Ding Ling, I Myself, 17.
8Spence, Gate, 256.
9Ding, I Myself, 17-18.
piety and declined to follow the traditional role of widows—living passively and quietly, beholden to her in-laws. Instead, she unbound her feet, left her husband’s family, and took advantage of her scholar-class education to go back to school.

The concomitant circumstances of having a radical feminist mother and an early inundation in liberal education combined to make possible the woman who was Ding Ling. According to Tani Barlow, Yu disliked conventional fables of weak and evil women, so she changed the stories she told Ding to glorify such historic heroines as "Madame Roland, martyred in the Revolution of 1789, and Qiu Jin, heroine of the Revolution of 1911." In light of this it is not particularly surprising that Ding grew up to be both a feminist and a revolutionary. Barlow asserts, though, that it was the later May Fourth Movement that truly shaped Ding’s cultural and intellectual life.

Apart from such feminist socialization at home as these modified tales and the strong female role models presented to Ding by her mother and her educated feminist friends (including the later martyred Xiang Jingyu) Ding also received a modern formal education. Though the family moved several times while Yu pursued her own education, Ding

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10 Ding, I Myself, 18.
11 Ibid., 19-20.
12 Ibid., 20.
managed to attend school regularly, from kindergarten on. Except for the fact of her regular attendance, there was nothing especially remarkable about Ding's education until she reached high school. In various schools she was a student activist and heard lectures by such western liberals as John Dewey and Bertrand Russell. At the Provincial Second Girls' Normal School in Hunan, she became immediately aware of the burgeoning May Fourth Movement. Though her formal academics were suffering, Ding was meeting progressive people and gaining a broader perspective on life. She chanted revolutionary, but also feminist and even communistic (though she was not yet a communist) slogans about self-awareness, self-decision, independence, co-operation, freedom, and equality. (One cannot avoid reflecting how Germaine de Staël must have heard the very similar French revolutionary slogans of liberty, equality, and fraternity). During this time, in the early 1920's, Ding must also have been exposed to Mao Zedong because her school newspaper provided the forum for his (now) well-known essays on the deplorable status of women.

By now a rebel, Ding and some other girls applied for admittance to a boys' school in Changsha, the progressive

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13 Chang, Ting Ling, 3-6, passim.


15 Ding, I Myself, 21-22.
provincial capital of Hunan. The idea of co-education in the provincial China of the early 1900's was fantastic, but at least one liberal administrator accepted it. Though Ding was a successful co-ed (she was first published at this time) her extended family was somewhat distressed by the situation. She broke off her arranged engagement "on the grounds that she owned her own body" and left for the exciting city of Shanghai where she was first--though rather ineffectually--exposed to the Communist Party. It was the early twenties, and Ding was a very young woman.

Somewhat restless in Shanghai, Ding and her best friend Wang Jianhong decided to move to Nanjing where they joined the Anarchist Party and became even more involved in feminist issues. Unable to support themselves--educated and independent Chinese women were not yet an accepted phenomenon--Ding and Wang moved to Shanghai. There both young women matriculated at Shanghai University where they

16 Ibid.
17 Chang, Ting Ling [Ding Ling], 6.
19 Ding, I Myself, 22, and Chang, Ting Ling, 7-8.
20 For a fuller discussion of anarcho-feminism in early twentieth century China, see Ding, I Myself, 22, and Peter Zarrow, "He Zhen and Anarcho-Feminism in China," The Journal of Asian Studies 47.4 (November, 1988): 796-813.
21 Ding, I Myself, 23. However, Chang Jun-mei says that Ding and Wang returned home for a brief time first. Chang, Ting Ling, 9.
met many early communist leaders, although they never completed their formal education. Wang took up residence with the famous writer and activist Qu Qiubai, who was also undoubtedly an influence in Ding's radical education.\textsuperscript{22} Despite such influences and friendships, Ding moved to Beijing, still apparently dissatisfied.\textsuperscript{23}

The move to Beijing was also a move into another phase of Ding's life. Without formal university training there were no jobs for a woman of Ding's class. In an attempt to be self-sufficient, she even toyed with the thought of becoming a movie star--getting as far as a screen test and loathing the degradation of it.\textsuperscript{24} Though somewhat drawn to academics, Ding failed the entrance examinations for Beijing University; attracted to study, she opted for a typically anarchist program of self study instead.\textsuperscript{25} She read the famous Russian and French writers, being especially enamored with Gustave Flaubert.\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Madame Bovary} was apparently her favorite work.\textsuperscript{27} Such immersion in literature also manifested itself in other ways. Ding began to write again

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Chang}, \textit{Ting Ling}, 9-10.
\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ding}, \textit{I Myself}, 23.
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid, 24.
\textsuperscript{25}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27}Yi-tsi Feuerwerker, \textit{Ding Ling's Fiction}, 27, and \textit{Chang}, \textit{Ting Ling}, 14.
herself, writing her first published (though not until 1927) short story, "Mengke" based loosely on her abortive attempt at stardom. She also sought out other writers eventually falling in love with one. He was the man in her first common-law marriage--Ding did not believe in civil marriage. His name was Hu Yepin.

Ding's and Hu's lives together were romantic, but not idyllic. Neither of them were particularly thrifty, and though Ding's mother regularly sent them money, their own incomes were sketchy. The resultant "feast or famine" lifestyle did not appear to bother the couple, but their respective work did. Hu's writings did not sell very well, but Ding began to publish regularly and impressively. Her first two stories, "Menke" and "Diary of Miss Sophie," were published in the prestigious journal Fiction Monthly within just a few months of each other. Furthermore, by the publication of "Miss Sophie" Ding was one of the featured authors on the cover. She then published "In the Dark" in Short Story Monthly, China's "leading progressive literary

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28 Ibid., 25.
29 Ding, I Myself, 24.
30 Chang, Ting Ling, 15.
31 Anderson, Two Modern, 31-32.
32 Spence, Gate, 258-259 passim.
33 Ibid., 259.
As Yi-tsi Feuerwerker said, "Ding Ling was well on her way to becoming one of China's most celebrated--and in the eyes of some, notorious--women writers."\(^{35}\)

Unfortunately for Ding's private life (as well as for her admirers) Hu was not doing as well.\(^{36}\) This distressed Ding, who threatened not to write (and even left some manuscripts unfinished) until Hu was doing better.\(^{37}\) Their friend Shen Congwen--later to become one of China's major literary figures--lived with Ding and Hu.\(^{38}\) The tensions engendered by poverty and the triangular social situation consisting of Ding and Hu's sexual affinity, Shen and Hu's friendship, and Ding and Shen's literary success must have been very trying. Hu eventually left to take a teaching position in Shandong. This move proved to be what their marriage needed. Hu came into his own as a communist activist, and Ding regained respect for him.\(^{39}\)

Significantly, the courage and conviction shown by Hu, as well as his later arrest and martyrdom at the hands of the nationalist Guomindang faction (during a major offensive by Chiang Kaishek to abolish the Jiangxi Soviet, in 1931)

\(^{34}\)Ding, I Myself, 25.

\(^{35}\)Feuerwerker, Ding, 6. See also Chang, Ting Ling, 24.

\(^{36}\)Spence, Gate, 262-263, passim.

\(^{37}\)Anderson, Two Modern, 32.

\(^{38}\)Ding, I Myself, 24.

\(^{39}\)Spence, Gate, 263.
seem to have influenced Ding on her own road to communism. Of course, the executions of Xiang Jingyu (a leading woman activist and her mother's dear friend) and Yang Kaibui (one of Ding's schoolmates and Mao's wife) probably also influenced Ding's political choice. Though about twenty-three other suspected communists were killed with Hu, only he and the four other authors in the group were memorialized as martyrs. Nonetheless, the correlation between her husband's death and her induction into the Communist Party seems quite clear. Ding joined the Party in 1932. She became much stronger in her communistic actions if not also in her convictions. Ding became editor of Beidou (Big Dipper) the literary journal of the League of Left-Wing Writers and published "Shui" (Flood) which was "hailed by Communist critics as a landmark example of a new proletarian fiction." In keeping with her reaffirmed radicalism, she paid homage to her husband in two short stories written about the night of his death. They were "A Certain Night," written in 1932, and "From Night till Daybreak," probably written just a few months after Hu's death. Ding also

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40 Spence, Gate, 264, and Feuerwerker, Ding, 8.
41 Spence, Gate, 279-280.
42 See Chang, Ting Ling [Ding Ling], 56-57.
43 Feuerwerker, Ding, 8.
44 Feuerwerker, "The Changing Relationship Between Literature and Life," in Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era, ed. by Merle Goldman (Cambridge. MA:
wrote her reminiscences of Hu Yepin almost twenty years later.\(^{45}\) Her leftist leanings are readily apparent in such details as the singing of the "Internationale."\(^{46}\) It is not surprising that her husband’s death at the hands of the Guomindang strengthened her communist convictions.

When, in 1933, the Guomindang kidnapped her, it could only serve to further her commitment to the Communist Party.\(^{47}\) The details of what happened during the three years of Ding’s captivity are hazy. One account--by the man who arrested her--told of a quiet and not particularly harsh imprisonment in a house in Nanjing.\(^{48}\) However, the fact of detention alone was evidently quite distressing for Ding. She later said that the enforced leisure made her restless and unable to write.\(^{49}\) Thinking she was dead, Ding’s friends and interested leftists everywhere mourned her loss, and Shen Congwen wrote his *Reminiscences of Ding Ling* memorializing her.\(^{50}\) However, Ding was far from dead.

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\(^{46}\) Feuerwerker, *Ding*, 70.

\(^{47}\) *Ibid.*, 8–9. There has never been a full or satisfactory account of Ding’s capture or the three years she spent as a prisoner. For one possible explanation, see Chang, *Ting Ling*, 60–64. See also Spence, *Gate*, 298–301.

\(^{48}\) Chang, *Ting Ling*, 62–64.


\(^{50}\) Feuerwerker, *Ding*, 8 and 40, and Chang, *Ting Ling*, 61–62.
Given a certain amount of freedom, she escaped to Shanghai in 1936. From there she went to Xian, and thence to Baoan—the seat of the Chinese Communist Party.\textsuperscript{51} It is a shame she never published the story of her escape and harrowing trip across China; traveling both on foot and on horseback dressed as a common soldier, it would surely have made a good story.\textsuperscript{52} When she finally reached Party headquarters, Mao himself welcomed her with a reception and two poems he had written for her.\textsuperscript{53} It was an auspicious beginning to a new and satisfying (though not terribly prolific) phase in Ding's life.\textsuperscript{54}

Yanan Communism was a unique experience in living ideology. In 1937, China was fighting a war of resistance against the encroachments of Japan. The Guomindang and the Communists allied themselves temporarily against the "foreign devils" in what proved to be a brutally long struggle, stretching as it did into World War Two. While maintaining their end of the United Front (the Guomindang-Communist alliance) though, the Communists took advantage of their new relative freedom from Guomindang persecution to carry their communist message to the people. This goal was accomplished in a number of ways. A vast majority of the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Feuerwerker, Ding, 9.}
\footnote{See Spence, Gate, 301-302, and Feuerwerker, Ding, 9.}
\footnote{Ibid., 9.}
\footnote{Feuerwerker, Ding, 92.}
\end{footnotes}
soldiers were either working class or peasantry, over half were members of the Party, and most could read. These attributes contributed to their sincerity. Though experienced, they were young, considering themselves fighters, not soldiers, a word which carries negative connotations to the Chinese, and generally a highly disciplined and moral lot. Further, Edgar Snow makes the point that the "Red" Army was a truly national army. Not only were most provinces and many aboriginal groups represented, but many of the veterans had personally experienced large parts of China while on the famous Long March to escape the Guomindang.

With the gun-carrying soldiers marched troops of another sort. The Northwest Front Service Corps, "organized and directed" by Ding, brought literature and theater to the people. It was a propaganda tool, but it firmly established the indispensable place of culture in the Communist Revolution.

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55 Snow, Red, 258-260.
56 Ibid., 260. For a detailed analysis of the Red Army's success with the indigenous population, the entire chapter in Snow, 257-262 is quite helpful.
57 Feuerwerker, Ding, 94-95. For more information on the Corps and the Red Army, see Agnes Smedley, China Fights Back: an American Woman with the Eighth Route Army (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1938).
58 Feuerwerker, Ding, 97-104, passim.
One of the characteristics of the Chinese Communist Revolution, though, has been its sudden reversals of policy. Ding wrote to advance the revolution and had spent years writing and performing propagandist plays for the illiterate and uninformed Chinese masses, but in May, 1942, that was no longer good enough. Having personally praised Ding such a short time before, Mao now publicly chastised her in his "Yanan Talks."\(^{59}\) Apparently, he thought her editorship of a few critical articles, and most notably Ding's own critical articles and stories, were too harsh and might divide the Party.\(^{60}\) A piece she wrote on women entitled "Thoughts on March 8" was particularly offensive to Mao, as he thought it put the needs of women above the needs of the Party.\(^{61}\) Accusers also found fault with such stories as "In the Hospital" and "Night" as being too negative. This reaction was the start of the First Literary Rectification Movement (1942).\(^{62}\) After a two year period of rehabilitation Ding returned to writing. She had taken Mao seriously, and her writing lost much of its introspection, becoming more exemplary of ideal Communists and their lives.\(^{63}\)

\(^{59}\) These were more formally known as Chairman Mao's "Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art."

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 100.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 100-104, passim.

\(^{62}\) Chang, *Ting Ling*, 87.

\(^{63}\) Feuerwerker, *Ding*, 111.
Nevertheless, by the time Ding started publishing again, in 1944, she immediately regained any popularity that may have waned during her enforced silence. Though her writing had a sharper propagandist vein than ever before, her talent carried the pieces, winning praise even from Mao.⁶⁴ Taking advantage of her renewed position, in 1948 Ding produced her first novel, concerning land reform and the activization of the peasantry. Reaffirming her complete reintegration into the Party's good graces, *The Sun Shines Over the Sangkan River* won a Stalin Prize of the second order in 1951. During the period between publication and prizewinning, Ding had not been idle, attending various conventions and serving as a cultural ambassador and representative of the Chinese Communist Party. Reinstatement was thorough. In the early 1950's, Ding also served on the editorial boards of two important literary magazines. The significance of such power was immense during these first few years of the new Communist government, particularly with regard to Mao's ideas on the importance of culture to the revolution.⁶⁵

The situation was far from static, however, and Ding once again fell victim to the turbulence of a revolutionary society. Despite the Russian endorsement of Ding's novel the Chinese Communists soon found fault with it. Though

⁶⁴Chang, *Ting Ling*, 100.

⁶⁵Ibid., 121-122.
written in the properly communist vernacular of the countryside, about properly communist peasants and cadres, critics raised objections that characterization and imagery were too bourgeois. Oddly, even her use of the language of the people was condemned as being too harsh.\textsuperscript{66} Ding Ling’s checkered career was faltering again. Though the fifties started auspiciously for Ding, they ended tragically. In 1957 Ding was once more condemned, this time resulting in her purge from the Party.\textsuperscript{67}

Furthermore, Ding was expected to become a better communist, so was sent to the Great Northern Wilderness to perform grueling physical labor under spartan circumstances.\textsuperscript{68} Twenty-one years later, in 1978, Ding published her account of that time in the short story "Du Wanxiang." Ding wrote it just prior to the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution that began in 1966.\textsuperscript{69} Apart from that fictionalized account of her life in the Chinese countryside, those twenty-one years are lost to history, unless there is some Chinese language account not cited by the English language literature. Her novel The Sun Shines

\textsuperscript{66}Ibid., 116.

\textsuperscript{67}Ibid., 116-118, passim.

\textsuperscript{68}Feuerwerker, Ding, 1.

\textsuperscript{69}Ding, I Myself, 329.
Over the Sangkan River received severe criticism once again during the Cultural Revolution, as a "rightist" work.\footnote{Zhao Jianfen, unpublished interview on August 28, 1993.}

During the "lost" years of Ding's life, China underwent much turmoil. In the spring of 1958, Mao initiated the "Great Leap Forward," in which citizens of China were supposed to mobilize in order to conquer adverse economic conditions. Home workshops were supposed to manufacture all manner of goods to fill the orders factories could not keep up with; every plot of land, however small, was to be utilized for food production. By sheer human willpower, China was supposed to make the great leap to a "communist utopia."\footnote{June Grasso, Jay Corrin, and Michael Kort, eds., Modernization and Revolution in China (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1991), 174.} Though not altogether successful, the inherent anti-intellectualism of the Great Leap Forward paved the way for the later anti-intellectualism of the Cultural Revolution of the 1960's. This was yet another attempt by Mao to reconsolidate power under the guise of anti-rightist sentiments. The tenets of the Cultural Revolution assumed that all previous culture was based along class lines and, therefore was uncommunist. By giving free reign to communist youths to turn in "rightists" Mao purged the government.\footnote{Ibid., 204-205.}
Ding was finally restored to her deserved place in modern Chinese literary circles in the late seventies as a result of renewed liberalism after Mao's death in 1976. Again, the restoration was complete. Ding was appointed membership in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.\textsuperscript{73} Ding lived on until 1986, but there is nothing in English to indicate that she wrote any further. Though she apparently gave some interviews, Ding seems to have led the rest of her life in peaceful quiet with her husband, Chen Ming.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{73}Feuerwerker, Ding, 1.

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., vii.
Though an extremely controversial writer through her entire career, Ding’s writing still reads well. Despite their frequently obvious propagandist intent, Ding manages to infuse her characters—especially the women—with complexities and depth that convince the reader of their reality. The reader must care because Ding makes her characters live. Many of Ding’s stories also have exciting revolutionary backgrounds that intrigue the reader, keeping one in suspense or provoking deep thought. However, it is Ding’s strong feminist women that make her writing so compelling. This strength is exemplified in one of her earliest and best known works, "The Diary of Miss Sophia," which relies exclusively on character to carry it.

What I found most intriguing about the inherent feminism in Ding’s writings was the definite current of a classic victimization scenario with women cast in the role thus prescribed by centuries of subjugation. From her mother’s bound feet to Ding’s decision not to publish in the face of her husband’s publishing failure, the subordination of women was a constant and traditional factor in Ding’s (and other Chinese women’s) life. The low self-esteem,
depression, and pathetic need for approval that are concomitant with victimization are apparent in many of Ding’s female characters. In later stories, this is frequently resolved when the character finds acceptance and affection within the comforting arms of the Communist Party. In earlier stories, there are instances of auto-erotic and homosexual behavior on the part of women, suggesting that women would be safe with other women. "The Diary of Miss Sophia" is especially evocative of the woman-as-victim theme.

It is the story told by a young tubercular woman, angry at her life situation. It is written in a rather stream of consciousness style as if it really were the diary of the young Sophia. She pours her heart out in her diary in a never-ending stream of self criticism, which is both typically feminine and typically Communist Chinese. (However, the Chinese Communist Party was still rather amorphous at the time when Ding was writing "The Diary." It raises interesting questions as to the relationships between women, the Party, and the role of subordination in the lives of millions of Chinese Party members.) What Sophia wants most is someone to understand and appreciate her for what she really is. What she realizes is that first she must appreciate herself.

The radicalism in "The Diary of Miss Sophia" is twofold. One aspect of it lies in the stylization, the
other in the thought. Stylistically, it is a wonderful example of the sort of changes being wrought by the May Fourth Movement. This story uses practically every ground-breaking form that Ding can introduce: western-style structure, vernacular language, a bold, daring admission of emotion and desire, and punctuation—hitherto virtually unused in the written Chinese language. The second revolutionary feature of the story lies in what was written, not in how it was done. That Miss Sophia, a decent young Chinese woman experienced lust, had desires, opinions and ideas was a shocking (and probably titillating) public revelation. Further, as discussed above, these desires were not just sexual, and when they were sexual, were not just heterosexual. Now, approximately sixty years later, some of these subjects are still taboo. For a Chinese woman to write about them just a few years beyond the breaking of such cultural norms as female bondage, foot-binding, and female infanticide was (and is) absolutely astounding.

The radical content and style of this story could not have survived independent of the feminism Ding displayed. Certain stylistic components (such as the western structure, punctuation, and the use of the vernacular) are inherently asexual. Nevertheless, the confessional quality—as expressed in Miss Sophia—was a consequence of the author's feminism, and certainly the radical content is feminist in the extreme. Though this is starkly evident in the theme of
Sophia’s lust (which she denies by claiming it is love) for the handsome Ling Jishi, it is more telling elsewhere. It is in the quiet clues that slip by, almost unnoticed (as when Sophia’s friend Yunjie, the unhappy bride, apparently commits suicide to escape her traditional Chinese wifely role) that Ding drives home her feminist rhetoric.¹

In a way less subtle, yet almost subliminal, Ding also conveys her feminist stance through the sub-theme of Sophia’s low self-esteem and loneliness typical of people in abused and subordinate positions. Though women as abused subordinates seem to be the main thrust of "Miss Sophia," other feminist themes appear. Sexuality is a major point both in Sophia’s lust for Ling and in the hints at homosexuality and masturbation.² Perhaps Ding is using these forbidden subjects for their shock value, but she also conveys that—in her opinion—women are equal to men in this arena as well as in others. For instance, Ding stresses gender equality through Sophia’s obvious pride in her own intelligence.³ She even states it when Sophia indicates in her relations with her friends Weidi and Jishi that she wants to be treated as an equal—not a delicate thing on a

¹Ding, I Myself, 62-63.

²Ibid., 50-51 for masturbation, and 71-72 for homosexuality.

³Ibid., 69,73.
pedestal. Other clues are less pronounced. Sophia (and many of Ding's female characters) have unbound feet, untraditional lives, and even western names. It is interesting that really only Ding's women have westernized names, as though she were trying to emphasize a correlation between feminism and modernism.

Miss Sophia addressed non-feminist radical thought as well. The reader detects a burgeoning leaning toward what is later Ding's communism. The sexy Ling Jishi is not only the object of Sophia's lust, but also a metaphorical reference. His unusually tall height and his overseas home (Singapore) are indications of his westernness. This becomes pertinent when Miss Sophia rails at him for only wanting money. Ding spells it out for the reader, saying "He wants to be a capitalist...that is the extent of his ambition!"

She then continues to revile him for being a glittering, attractive package, but cheap, ugly, and uncaring on the inside.

This concomitant attraction to the west (that was such a large part of the May Fourth Movement) and repulsion by greedy capitalism formed a dichotomy in Ding's ideology that was not easily resolved. Eventually she eschewed the west in favor of communism, but she retained many western

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4 Ibid., 69, 71.
5 Ibid., 58.
6 Ding, I Myself, 68.
literary conventions such as the ones discussed earlier. However, this attraction may have partly contributed to Ding's frequent troubles with the Party.

The main theme in another of Ding's early stories, "A Woman and a Man," asks some questions about feminism through the device of pitting modern Wendy against traditional Ajin in a conflict over a man. Again, Ding's choice of names is very important. Not only are the women's names symbolic of their characters, but the man they compete for has chosen a Japanese sounding name for himself--Ouwai Ou--indicative of his political ignorance in the face of Japan's hostility to China.7

In a style reminiscent of "Miss Sophia's Diary," "A Woman and a Man" consists largely of a character's thoughts. As Ouwai Ou travels to a clandestine meeting with the married Wendy, he considers the ramifications of her modernity. He is really much more comfortable with the traditionally subjugated Ajin, but there is something irresistible about Wendy. Perhaps it is partly a manifestation of the forbidden fruit syndrome, but Ding makes it clear that the feminist Wendy, for all her many flaws, is the more desirable character:

No one would ever believe that Ouwai Ou, who could be completely overcome by even a second-rate whore whom he'd transfigured into a dramatic, romantic courtesan, no one

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7Ibid., 84. Also see note number one under "A Woman and a Man," 356.
would believe him capable of resisting the advances of a woman whose noble spirit even he could recognize.\(^8\)

As the title states, "A Woman and a Man," like most of Ding's early work, focuses on the relationships between men and women. However, as she did in "Miss Sophia," Ding also displays her growing political awareness in areas other than feminism. Despite Ouwei Ou's sycophantic tendencies, he not only recognizes the inherent nobility of Wendy's feminism, but the inherent inequality of China's class system as well. Interestingly, Ding uses the plight of rickshaw drivers to demonstrate such communistic tendencies since they virtually became the literary symbol of the oppressed under-classes in China.\(^9\)

"Yecao" is more autobiographical than most of her early works in that it looks at her self and her experience as a writer and not only in her various gender defined roles. Ding essentially gives herself the title role, allowing the reader to glimpse behind the scenes. This tale is also a departure from earlier stories because it concomitantly depicts the woman as less weak and dependent. However, the editor of *I Myself am a Woman*, Tani E. Barlow, reminds one that the theme of feminine weakness was still of fundamental

\(^8\)Ibid., 88.

\(^9\)Among the authors using rickshaw drivers to illustrate class differences were Pearl Buck and Shu Qingchun in his famous *Rickshaw Boy*. 
importance and would continue to be basic to Ding’s writing.\textsuperscript{10} Clearly, the universal "feminine weakness" of emotionalism is examined; Yecao asks if she can stifle her own emotions.\textsuperscript{11} Yet, despite Barlow’s admonition, Ding does not seem to consider this weakness in women to be absolutely inherent but—at least to some extent—inherited, saying "...but gradually, she turned her thoughts to the social environment that caused women to overemphasize emotions, then to how pitiable women are."\textsuperscript{12} Obviously, in this and other stories, Ding blamed society for at least some of women’s ills, just as she blamed society for problems suffered by the peasantry and the proletariat. It was this belief that the Party should concern itself with sexist issues as well as economic ones that caused Ding trouble with the First Literary Rectification Campaign in 1942.

Just a year after writing "Yecao," in 1930, Ding produced an important work in two parts. This was the novella "Shanghai, Spring 1930." The two parts are parallel studies of two groups of friends living amid the excitement and fervor of China’s most progressive city during a very active year. In the first part, the conflict revolves around Ruoquan, a modern writer who is becoming very revolutionary, and his friend Zibin, another writer who

\textsuperscript{10} Ding, \textit{I Myself}, footnote one, 356-57.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 105.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
wants to keep the old traditionalism. Zibin's live-in girlfriend, Meilin,\textsuperscript{13} is torn between her affection and admiration for her lover and Ruoquan's provocative ideas.\textsuperscript{14} Ding uses single facets of her characters to argue certain points she wishes to make. Zibin argues with Ruoquan about the importance of freedom in literature; Ruoquan advocates Communism, and the use of literature to spread its message. Meilin gives us the feminine perspective. She loves Zibin but finally discovers (as did Miss Sophia) that she must be true to herself and that involves embracing the ideas Ruoquan has woken in her. In a session of self-analysis, Meilin becomes a feminist.

She should have known her separate social status would disappear....having read a lot of classical and romantic fiction, her ideal had been to throw over everything for love....(b)ut now things were different....(s)he needed something else! She wanted her own place in society.\textsuperscript{15}

It is significant that Ding attributes Meilin's prior submissive attitude partly to having read classical literature. Of course the classics did involve the concept of filial piety including woman's submission to man, but she also indicates in this passage that Meilin is deciding in

\textsuperscript{13}Elsewhere in the story, (p.133.) Meilin is called Zibin's wife. Since Ding never actually legally married any of her husbands one can probably assume she considered these two characters married.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 118.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 125.
favor of Ruoquan's revolutionism in all its aspects, and away from Ziblin's traditionalism in all its forms. Apart from the subliminal advocation of modern literature, Ding is telling us that feminism and communism are tied together.

Ding's feminist message is as strong as ever, but the fact that she wrote this story just prior to joining the Communist Party is not surprising in view of the growing strength of her communist message. Descriptive rhetoric shows her abhorrence for capitalism.

Pot-bellied businessmen and blood-sucking devils wizened and shriveled from overwork on their abacuses were going at full tilt in the careening money market, investing and manipulating to increase their exploitation of the laboring masses and to swell their astronomical wealth.\textsuperscript{15}

However the Communist Party was busy sympathizing with and supporting the workers who "worked harder and got weaker."\textsuperscript{16}

Finally, the plight of women and workers completely convinces Meilin that her romantic love for Zibin cannot compete with the masses claim upon her. She leaves him for the Party. With this conclusion Ding seems to be saying that though women may be somewhat prey to their emotions, ultimately they are rational enough for their heads to dominate their hearts.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 128.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 128-29.
Part Two takes a different perspective. In this story, it is the woman who fails to respond to the call of communism. Actually, she is depicted as representing all that is considered worst in both femininity and capitalism. Flighty and frivolous, she thinks only of her own pleasure and comfort. She too has a western name. Yet by this time (1930) the westernness of her name, Mary, is no longer a symbol of progress but one of decadence.

Mary has been away from her boyfriend Wang Wei for some time. She had left him suddenly with no explanation, then quite unexpectedly sent a peremptory telegram demanding that Wang meet her the next day. Though he was anxious to see her and prompt to meet her, Wang had changed in the months they had been apart. He had become an active Communist. It soon becomes apparent that Wang and Mary have nothing in common anymore. Wang is similar to Meilin of Part One in that he attempts to retain his personal love in the face of his ideology, and fails. However, Mary and Zibin are not as parallel. Whereas Zibin is trying to hang on to traditionalism, Mary is very modern. She has merely taken the wrong direction. Though Zibin is really the more sympathetic character, one gets the impression that Ding sees more potential in Mary. Misguided, she is nonetheless searching for a new and better way of life, rather than being content with the old, as Zibin is. Finally, Wang, like Meilin, cedes the stronger claim on his life to the Party.
However, it is Mary who leaves Wang though it was Meilin that left Zibin. In both instances the women are the stronger characters. Ding is clearly advocating communism, but even if subconsciously, she is equally advocating feminism.

"Net of Law" is a complex story of desperation. For the first time, Ding has changed her characters from the educated middle class progressive youth of China to representatives of young, angry, and bewildered slum-dwellers. Meiquan and his wife Acui are happy to begin with though. Meiquan’s job in the factory is not easy, nor is Acui’s life at home. Still, they have jobs, a place to live, nice neighbors, and each other. They would like a child, but in the meantime, they have Gou Yazai, a three-year-old neighbor boy, that Acui likes to spoil. However, Ding foreshadows the coming tragedy through the raw ugliness of the life around them. The neighbors are greedy, the child is beaten. He is beaten because his father is perpetually drunk. His father is drunk because he has lost his job and cannot care for his family. It is awful, but it is realistic. As Tani Barlow puts it:

A matter-of-factness suffuses the story. Of course women suffer more than men. Of course women die so that men can unite in proletarian brotherhood and a war of national salvation. Of course poverty inflicts injustice. Of course a
miscarriage of justice and a miscarriage of a fetus are synonymous.\textsuperscript{17}

It is this matter-of-fact attitude that gives this story such power and pathos. It is a mark of Ding’s talent that she could so strongly portray that of which she really had no experience.

Acui, in this story, is not as central as the women in most of Ding’s earlier stories. Rather she is a catalyst for the desperate acts of the men, which in turn are born of their intolerable position in a capitalist society. Barlow contends that Ding is going to great lengths to show that of men are not the agents of women’s oppression but merely the immediate instruments of the oppressors.\textsuperscript{18} Nonetheless, though society has crushed men with unbearable burdens, it is still the women who bear the brunt of the pain. Not only must they share their husband’s back-breaking labor and debilitating poverty, they are the ones who must suffer under their husband’s anger at the terrible injustice of it.

Meiquan, Acui’s husband, loses his job at the factory, because he trusts a neighbor with the message that his wife is sick and he cannot come in. The neighbor’s cousin needs a job, and the message is not delivered. So by staying with his miscarrying wife, and doing the noble thing, Meiquan destroys his life. Soon he is drinking with his unemployed

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 172.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
neighbor. Drinking of course uses the little money they have while lowering his chances of finding work. Conversely, rather than indulging in escapism Acui is working harder. She is also now taking in laundry. Further this causes her trouble with her neighbor because they are now in competition. The circumstances of extreme indigence in a capitalist system pit neighbor against neighbor in a vicious struggle for survival until Meiquan goes to kill the man who betrayed him at the factory. Finding only the man’s wife at home, he hacks her to death. The innocent woman pays for the man’s misdeeds. Meiquan escapes. The authorities arrest Acui instead, vowing to hold her until Meiquan gives himself up. He finally decides to do so, and is tried and executed, but it is too late. Acui has died in prison and again the innocent woman pays for the man’s misdeeds. In "Net of Law" men are certainly the victims of an unjust economic system, but women suffer not just because of their economic status but also because of their gender. Once again, though, Ding’s communist message is growing ever stronger. She is constantly and consistently concerned with the plight of women.

Ding’s first novel "Mother" was never finished to her satisfaction. Written in 1932 and 1933, it is a fictionalized biography of her mother. The relationship between a mother and daughter must always be special. Ding’s relationship with her mother was even more so. It
was from her that Ding received her uncommon education and her strong sense of femininity. As discussed earlier, Ding’s mother, Yu Manzhen, was one of the early Chinese feminists, unbinding her feet, getting an education, and rejecting her traditional role as dutiful widow and daughter-in-law when her reprobate husband died. Naturally a biography of her must concentrate on feminists aspects of her life. What is particularly interesting about the feminism in "Mother" is the description of the life of early feminists in China. Unfortunately, much of this description has been cut from the available English translation "out of consideration to Western readers."\(^{19}\)

"Mother" chronicles the processes by which Manzhen grows from a new widow somewhat overcome by her unfamiliar status to a self-assured, educated, and decisive woman. When the story opens (at least that part in translation) Manzhen is in something of a state of denial. She is continuing her life rather as if nothing had changed. It is her longtime faithful servant (also a woman) Yao Ma that gently forces her to face reality with her constant prodding to economic self-reliance.\(^{20}\) It is almost as though Ding is crediting her mother’s first exposure to feminism to another woman’s feminism that was born of sheer necessity. However, it is not until Manzhen has been fulfilling her

\(^{19}\)Ibid., 201.

\(^{20}\)Ibid., 205-210, passim.
traditional widow's role, and living with her in-laws for some time, that she really becomes aware of feminist possibilities. This awareness occurs as a combination of her growing restlessness in the role of dependent poor relation\textsuperscript{21} and her talk with Yunqing (her progressive minded brother) about the opening of a teacher's training school for women.\textsuperscript{22}

Even before Manzhen's feminine awakening there is a sense of identity as—and dissatisfaction with being—a woman growing in both her and the women around her. Talk about foreigners leads to a comparison between foreign and Chinese women:

They don't bind their feet; they bind their waists....(t)hey can go to school, though, and are free to do all kinds of things like going into politics or becoming an official. They have a much better life than we Chinese women have.\textsuperscript{23}

The conversation continues in a way that places more blame on class rather than on gender for the ills women suffer. However, the wet nurse reminds them that "poor women have to suffer in their own way."\textsuperscript{24} The idea that rich women suffer shows Ding's insistence that gender inequality is a thing separate from, though affected by, class inequality. Again,

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 213-214.
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 215-16.
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 209.
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
this was an attitude that gained censure for Ding more than once, but she maintained it throughout her writing career.

Through the remainder of the story, Manzhen’s feminism grows ever stronger. She is greatly influenced by Teacher Jin Xiansheng and makes up her own mind to attend school before she asks her brother’s advice on the matter.²⁵ Interestingly, though her modern brother gives his blessing to Manzhen’s decision, he has forbidden his own wife to attend school—even though he admits her intelligence—so that she can run his household.²⁶

Finally the women’s growing sense of female identity culminates in an oath of sisterhood. It is only after their sense of self is firmly established that they start thinking much about other political matters.²⁷ Some of them agree that they want to help the revolutionaries in righting the wrongs of their society.²⁸ When the revolution finally comes to their little village, the women—as they have been through most of history—are left at home to carry on as best they can. Yet Ding seems to say that, though it is still heartbreaking, frustrating, and tedious, at least they now understand why the rebellion is occurring.²⁹

²⁵Ibid., 219.
²⁶Ibid., 221.
²⁷Ibid., 242.
²⁸Ibid., 242-245.
²⁹Ibid., 256-59.
"Affair in East Village" is about a peasant family who, in an attempt to survive, sell their daughter Qiqi to an old landlord. The situation is brought on by poverty and the class system, but as it was in "Net of Law," it is the women who pay the highest prices. One conversation—described as small talk—is about an attempt at female infanticide. It is called "unfortunate" that someone came in and saved the baby, and no one "scolded" the mother for her attempt. Ding's use of mild language here says much about the attitude toward female infanticide prevalent in rural China, even among those joining the revolution. Finally the peasants rise and kill the old landlord, and though the women join in, it is too late for Qiqi. Her life has already been ruined. Still, the land reforms and economic situations of the peasantry are a main theme in this story, indicating once again Ding's commitment to communism as well as feminism.

Revolutionism and feminism share a symbiotic relationship in "New Faith." In this story, an old woman who thinks only of her family is caught by the Japanese. She sees her granddaughter brutally raped and dragged off. She sees her grandson bayoneted repeatedly. She herself is raped and tortured, then left for dead. When the family finds her, her anger gives her the strength to recover, yet the family thinks only her body has recuperated because the

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30 Ibid., 271.
old woman insists on telling everyone the horrible details of what she has witnessed. Throughout the time of her telling though, attitudes change. The old woman convinces some people to join the guerrillas. Her sons and daughters-in-law lose some of their embarrassment and even gain a new respect for her, and her granddaughter Jingu discovers in the old woman a strong female role model. Even the old woman’s attitude changes. She loved her family, but she was dependent on their love, and so was fearful of them. However, after finding her own place as an incendiary, stirring people to rebellion, she finds that she is no longer afraid of her sons. She still loves them, but she is independent.31 As she has become a revolutionary, so has she become a feminist. The story concludes with the old but strong woman giving speeches for the Women’s Association, exhorting foot-bound women to fight for their rights and their country.

"When I Was in Xia Village" shows a different side of what could happen to a woman used by the Japanese. In this story the girl is severely censured, though the original rapes were not her own fault, and subsequent trips into Japanese territory were as a spy for her country. Tani Barlow speculates that perhaps Ding was attempting to reverse, at least metaphorically, an association she found intolerable in Communist Party practice.

31Ibid., 293-94.
between a woman's political loyalty and her sexual chastity.\textsuperscript{32}

However as Yi-tsi Feuerwerker points out in her discussion of this story, it is the Communist Party cadre, Ah-Kwei, who comments on "how wretched it is to be a woman."\textsuperscript{33}

In this story, the narrator, a Party member and writer (almost certainly Ding Ling) discovers quite a commotion while staying in a small town. It seems a hometown girl who had been raped by the Japanese, and then gone back as a spy, has come home. Not only is she disgraced, it is visible in her venereal disease. Reactions to the girl differ among the townspeople. Some are more progressive and understanding. Others are more traditional and judgmental. Her family wishes to marry her off quickly to remove the stigma. Zhenzhen, the woman herself, has conflicting feelings. She says she is "unclean, and with such a black mark (she doesn't expect any good fortune to come (her) way."\textsuperscript{34} However, she continues "I'm doing this for myself, but I'm also doing it for the others. I don't feel that I owe anyone an apology."\textsuperscript{35} The story ends with Zhenzhen

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., 299.


\textsuperscript{34}Ding, \textit{I Myself}, 314.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid.
concluding, as did Sophia and Meilin before her, that her self-esteem must come from within.

Though not fiction like the other pieces included herein, "Thoughts on March 8" is an extremely important work. Written in 1942, it led directly to censure by Mao. Composed for International Women's Day, Mao apparently thought it focused too much on the plight of women and found too much fault with the Party for its handling of that problem. Ding opens the essay by asking when it will "no longer be necessary to attach special weight to the word 'woman' and raise it specially." Though she concedes that Yanan (communist) women have it better than others, she nevertheless lambastes the Party for its double standards in the treatment of male and female comrades. She continues the essay by discoursing on the unjust fate of all women in such areas as marriage, parenthood and divorce, but makes it clear that women should be able to expect more from the Party than the same old traditional views of woman's place. She then exhorts women to take their fates into their own hands by keeping happy and healthy, using their brains, and persevering. Nowhere does Ding lay out so clearly and succinctly her feminist ideology.

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36 Ibid., 317.
37 Ibid., 317-18.
38 Ibid., 320.
Some years later, in 1949, when Ding had been returned to the good graces of the Party, she repaid the favor with a realistic piece on land reform workers in the villages. This story was called "People Who Will Live Forever in My Heart: Remembering Chen Man." However as politically correct as Ding tried to be, she could not restrain herself from incorporating her feminism in the story. It was an old woman, Chen Man, who first recognized the good the visiting cadres were trying to accomplish and urged her neighbors to accept it. Yet she was not elected to the Peasant's Organization. Ding is careful to have some women elected, but intimates that it is because of Chen's background that she is not elected, and it is because of her womanhood that she has the background she does. Nonetheless, as the Party wishes, Ding ends this story on an optimistic note, with the cadres realizing what a remarkable old woman and wonderful comrade Chen is.

The last story in Ding's translated works is "Du Wangxiang." It was written just prior to the Cultural Revolution of the 1960's, which then sent Ding into virtual exile for twenty years. After her return to communist society she revised this story. In its present form it is extremely complimentary of the Chinese Communist Party. So much so that it is difficult to imagine how it could possibly have been otherwise prior to its revision. It
would be interesting to see a translation of the first version.

"Du Wangxiang" opens with a lovely description of the Chinese countryside but then abruptly shifts to the unbelievably hard life of an eight-year-old girl. The contrast seems to highlight the difference between the possibilities for and the realities of China. However, Wangxiang's life improves marginally following her marriage into a family in a neighboring village. Then, in 1951, when Wangxiang is seventeen, her life changes dramatically.

The Communist Party comes into the steppe region where Wangxiang lives, and she feels as if her longed for mother has returned. Actually, her mother has been dead since Wangxiang was a small child, but a middle-aged woman comrade, and then the Party itself, embraces Wangxiang. "She was no longer a friendless, pathetic woman who only knew how to toil and how to avoid vicious, brutal scolding and abuse."³⁹ The Party teaches her to read, trains her as a cadre, and gives her authority to go along with the responsibility she has always had. Wangxiang feels that "(s)he had found her real mother."⁴⁰ The symbol of motherhood as used for the Party is significant on several levels. The most obvious of course is the literal interpretation of the Party giving birth to the people. In

³⁹Ibid., 335.
⁴⁰Ibid.
a sense, when the land reforms were carried out, the Party did indeed impart life onto the people. There is also a broader interpretation of the Party as mother being the source of comfort, knowledge, and nurturing. Of course this also imposes a certain responsibility onto the Party to care for its "children." It is also telling that Ding selected a mother figure when her own mother had done so much to shape her. Finally, one must note that Ding chose to represent the goodness of the Party as female. Although it could be argued that the mother image—including birth as it does—is necessarily a more nurturing one than that of fatherhood, it does not negate the importance of the chosen female image. In a society tradition-bound in filial piety, fatherhood as a symbol would likely be highly influential. (Certainly the idea of a benevolent father creator has prevailed in the Judeo-Christian tradition for centuries.) Nonetheless, Ding chose to symbolize the Party as a woman, emphasizing this selection by her choice of a woman in the title role, and again by her choice of a woman in the role of mentor to Wangxiang. These choices carry a strong message that women occupy an important place in both family and nation and are able to care for both. The rest of the story chronicles Wangxiang's travels and work in the Great North Wasteland, where Ding herself worked. It is an optimistic and propagandist work, but it has a charm and power to it that
convince the reader of Ding's sincerity. Finally, Ding Ling's heroine has come into her own.
Conclusion

There have been many women revolutionaries—some fought as soldiers, side by side with men, others battled in different ways—in the great revolutions of the world. The revolution wherein women make up the bulk of the fighters is still being fought. It is the women’s revolution. For centuries women have declared their right to be equal to men. The rallying cries have not always been the same through the ages, in this century women fought for the rights to vote, to work, and to receive equal pay for equal work. They have fought for the right to control their property and their bodies. In what is probably the longest revolution in history, women are still fighting these battles. The revolution is by no means won.

Germaine de Staël and Ding Ling are but two of the illustrious women who devoted large parts of their lives to the cause of this revolution. It is because of them, and women like them, that the women’s revolution gained much of its early impetus and leadership in various places around the world. Though separated by over a hundred years, both de Staël and Ding were among the vanguard of feminists in their respective cultures. And though there is no specific evidence that Ding ever read de Staël, the May Fourth
writers (like Ding) were greatly influenced by the romantics (like de Staël).\(^1\) A definite thread of continuity runs through the writings of these two women.

It is evident from the similarities in de Staël’s and Ding’s works that feminism is indeed universal in many of its manifestations. It could be argued that the similarities in their personal lives led to the parallels in their works because in many ways their lives followed the same path. As Crane Brinton suggested in *The Anatomy of Revolution*, both these women revolutionaries came from well-to-do backgrounds.\(^2\) In Marxian terms, this would have left them leisure time in which to philosophize, yet Ding did not really have that luxury. Her background was upper middle class, but her mother was widowed young and chose to fend for herself rather than take on the subjugated role traditional to a widowed Chinese daughter-in-law. Therefore, though both Ding and de Staël came from bourgeois families, wealth was not the major factor that contributed to each of them becoming strong feminists and revolutionaries.

One shared characteristic of their middle class upbringing, however, was education. Each of them had

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extraordinarily educated mothers, and each of them had extraordinary educations themselves. It is significant that their mothers—the most influential women in their lives—were themselves intelligent and had received far more learning than most women of their respective times and cultures. Because de Staël and Ding each grew up in an environment where educated women were the norm (for them in particular, not for most women of their times) they learned to expect education for women. Their uncommon education contributed a great deal to their convictions that equality—not just in education, but in all matters—was, and should be, a matter of course.

Beyond their education, though, the two mothers also presented their daughters with strong feminine role models. De Staël’s mother hosted a successful salon wherein she conversed on an equal footing with some of the greatest minds of the century. This too, must have given the young and impressionable de Staël the idea that women were on a plane with men. Though Ding’s mother did not frequently host the great minds of China, she was a positive model for her daughter in other ways. She was one of the earliest wave of Chinese women to unbind their feet, and Ding’s were never bound at all. Also Ding’s mother refused to follow convention and become a virtual slave to her parents-in law, choosing instead to pursue an education and make her own living.
Ding credited her mother with being the guiding influence in her life in her novel "Mother." De Staël would have given that credit to her father, but however much influence her father had, a strong, positive, female to look up to throughout her life had a profound effect on de Staël. She certainly did owe much to her father too. Not only did his money and position give her an entree into society at large, it gave her entree into a very rarified society. The men and women (though particularly the men) who patronized her mother’s salon were not just rich and aristocratic. Because of de Staël’s father’s political position, the circle of people with whom de Staël was familiar from an early age were the poets and philosophers, artists and politicians of the age. They were intelligent, educated, and concerned people. This was the norm to de Staël. Just as she expected all women to be intelligent, educated, and respected because she and her mother were and always had been, she expected all people to be intelligent, educated, and concerned because everyone she had ever known was just that way. Certainly, she knew there were less intelligent or educated people—men and women—in the world, but her ideas of the norm were based on what she knew best.

This rather elitist idea was also somewhat the case with Ding, but in a slightly different way. Ding did not receive her ideas about what people were like from her father’s friends, but from her mother’s. Yet they too were
some of the most intelligent and forward thinking people of their day. Furthermore, many of them were women. Ding’s mother’s friends were frequently the women with enough intellect and strength to rebel against their expected subordination and unbind their feet, educate themselves and their daughters, and work toward a new existence for women. So Ding, like de Staël, learned young that people were concerned and intelligent. They both had high expectations.

As mentioned above, however, Ding did not derive these from her father. Though he seems to have been a kind man, he was rather dissolute, and died young, leaving his widow penniless. If she learned a lesson from him, it was probably that a woman must learn to take care of herself rather than depending on a man. This seems to have been borne out by her life. Though she lived in several long-term monogamous relationships, she never formally married.

De Staël’s father, on the other hand, was extremely responsible and lived well into her adulthood. He used to tease de Staël, calling her a man when she wrote. His teasing could have given her the impression that only men wrote, or it could have made de Staël think that a woman could do anything traditionally reserved for men. It seems to have affected her both ways and to have been exacerbated by the prevailing sentiments of the time. De Staël did think women were capable of virtually anything, yet at times she seemed to question that. Nonetheless, de Staël’s father
presented her with a strong male role model throughout her life, one that she thought was perfection personified. Perhaps this accounts for the fact that de Staël spent her life looking for the perfect lover, but never finding him, and Ding did not ever expect to find him. Though she did reveal a romantic yearning for the perfect mate in "Miss Sophie," Ding did not make this the theme of virtually all her stories as de Staël did.

Apart from the influences of their youths, both Ding and de Staël also shared other similar circumstances. Each of the women lived in an age of upheaval, and each of them took advantage of that to break out of the mold preordained for women of their respective cultures. Both of them agreed, at least to some degree, with the revolution being fought in their countries, and each of them influenced those revolutions. De Staël worked behind the scenes to have her choices appointed to high office, or to help compose documents or speeches of great import. Ding actually held office herself. And of course, they both relied heavily on their writings to influence the nation, and so influence policy. Probably because of their success, they were also each maltreated by the highest official of the country (Napoleon and Mao, respectively). In de Staël’s case, it was not someone she had specifically worked to bring to office, in Ding’s case it was. But in both cases, it was someone who--after holding the supreme position for a while--
-became tyrannical, and in both cases, it was a man. It is not surprising that it was a man who was the head of government in both early nineteenth century France and early twentieth century China. Nevertheless, it is significant that both these men felt so threatened by a woman that each had to send his own particular female nemesis into exile, not once but repeatedly. Obviously, these women were showing some strength and popularity, and raising questions that neither Napoleon nor Mao wanted to answer. Because both de Staël and Ding were behind the revolutionary governments that these men ended up heading (although Napoleon later ended that government by declaring himself emperor) it was obviously their politics of equality—and therefore feminism—that Napoleon and Mao found most disturbing.

Finally, Ding’s and de Staël’s similarities that are most striking are found in the themes that run through their works. These are such things as the education of women, the liberation of all people, equality in love, social equality, and—perhaps most important—sexual equality. Both of these women, in their works and in their lives, stressed the importance of sexual equality as an essential prerequisite in the quest for general equality. Because the main difference in men and women is a sexual difference, when the disparity in sexual mores is erased, the disparity in societal expectations of gender must necessarily disappear.
The other main gender theme that these two women lived, though they did not always write about it (Ding treated the subject more than de Staël, probably due to cultural and temporal differences), was equality in vocation. Women in de Staël’s age—at least upper-class women—did not work. Though upper-class women in traditional Chinese society did not work either, the Communist system Ding was helping to usher in required that all adults work. Therefore, Ding and de Staël treated these subjects rather differently. Ding both held high positions and wrote about women working in responsible jobs; de Staël was able to work only for herself, as a writer, and wrote about women writers.

It is interesting that neither of these women chose to write about such a universally feminine characteristic as motherhood. Ding dealt with the subject to some degree as it pertained to her own mother, but her novel "Mother" was really not about motherhood per se but was about her mother’s feminist struggle. Though both women were mothers, neither of them emphasized maternity as one of the integral struggles of feminism. Perhaps this was a denial of the necessity of women to play that role. This interpretation is in keeping with their obvious feminism in both their lives and works.

Another significant point of similarity between de Staël and Ding is that both women were atheists. Perhaps they just could not justify buying into the myths that Eve
was created from Adam, and the wellspring of all sin, or that women should, by virtue of their gender, be subordinate to men because of their gender. Perhaps they could not see how any just god could possibly exist in the face of the injustice in the world, including that to women. In any case, the Judeo-Christian and Confucian ethics that were their respective heritages both advocate patriarchal systems, oppressive to women. Their atheism and feminism may not have had a causal relationship, but there certainly was some correlation between the two.

It is evident through the similarities in their writings and chosen lifestyles that de Staël and Ding shared many of the same concerns. It is also evident through the disparities in their situations that their feminism shared characteristics that prove at least some universality in the ongoing struggle of feminism. Presumably they would hope that the struggle for equality will continue until one day the other revolution that they each fought for—the feminist revolution—will be won.
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________. "Ting Ling’s ‘When I Was in Sha Chuan’ (Cloud Village)," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 2.1 (Autumn, 1976) 255-279.


