

INTRODUCTION

The Corinna of England, and a Heroine in the Shade was published anonymously in two volumes in 1809 by B. Crosby & Co., based in London. This was the first and only edition of the novel. The anonymous author was well known to the reading public of the time, having previously published numerous novels, amongst which the most famous were *The Duke of Clarence; a Historical Novel* published in four volumes as early as 1795 by the London publisher William Lane, *Frederic and Caroline, or the Fitzmorris Family. A Novel*, published in two volumes by B. Crosby & Co. in 1800, *The Winter in Bath*, published in four volumes by the same publisher of *The Corinna of England* in 1807, and *The Woman of Colour*, published in London by Parry & Co. in 1808. After 1809, another novel, *The Dead Letter Office; and a Tale for the English Farmer's Fire-Side*, published in two volumes in London in 1811 by Crosby, has been attributed to the same author. On the whole, the author published fourteen novels between 1795 and 1811, most of them under the pseudonym of E. M. F.¹

The identity of the anonymous author, however, is still being debated and has never been entirely clarified. *A Feminist Companion to Literature in English* (1990) identifies the author as E. M. Foster. The editors describe Foster as a prolific and conservative author, based in London, who was well known at the end of the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. More recently, Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling have observed how the identity of the anonymous author has been variously attributed to Mrs E. G. Bayfield, J. H. James and to Mrs E. M. Foster.²

1 The full title of the novel refers to the author's previous novels: "The Corinna of England; and a Heroine in the Shade; a Modern Romance, by the Author of "The Winter in Bath", "The Banks of the Wye", "The Woman of Colour", "Light and Shade" &c. &c'. *The Banks of the Wye; or Two Summers at Clifton: a Novel* was published in London by C. & R. Baldwin in 1785, *The Woman of Colour: A Tale* was published in London by Parry & Co. in 1808, and *Light and Shade: A Novel* was published in Bath by R. Cruttnell in 1803.

2 James Raven, Peter Garside and Rainer Schöwerling, *The English Novel 1770–1820: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 210. E. G. Bayfield, however, published a collection of poems, *Fugitive Pieces*, in 1805, thus making it unlikely that she published her novels anonymously.

The difficulty of identifying the author with certainty has affected the reception of the novel, which had almost entirely been neglected until recently. However, as the unravelling of its connections to the more famous *Corinne, or Italy* (1807) by Germaine de Staël will demonstrate, the novel acquires a fundamental importance for a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and philosophical context which influenced British writers at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In particular, the detailed discussion of and direct references to some of the most topical issues of the time makes *The Corinna of England* a precious text for the interpretation of the British reception of the political, social and cultural influences coming from continental Europe.³

The Corinna of England was one of the first British responses to the publication of Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy*. It was prevalently directed to a conservative portion of the contemporary reading public, reiterating a defensive attitude towards British culture and society against an increasingly popular continental influence.

Soon after its publication in 1807, Staël's novel had an enormous success all over Europe. It was translated into English the same year and went through fourteen editions between 1807 and 1810. In spite of its phenomenal success, however, the novel was received as a controversial work and it was often criticized for the moral dubiousness of its eccentric heroine. Many contemporary critics stressed not simply the unconventionality of the character of Corinne, but emphasized her foreignness, or, more precisely, her un-Britishness.

The *Annual Review*, for example, in 1807 claimed that Corinne's apparent forwardness and freedom of manners 'would be deemed perfectly irreproachable in the softer climate of Italy', but they 'might be received with a frown in these drilling regions of the north'. The anonymous reviewer continued by stressing the national specificity of Corinne's character:

In appreciating its merits, we must constantly bear in mind that the scene does not lie in England, but in Italy. Nothing can be more improbable than the conduct of Corinna, or more unnatural than her character, if, as is commonly the case, with vulgar and ordinary readers, our own country is to be considered as the epitome of general character, and as the standard of propriety for general conduct.⁴

Of a similar opinion was the anonymous reviewer of *Le Beau Monde*, who, in September 1807, commented that Corinne was a character utterly incomprehensible for Englishwomen accustomed to a different social environment and suggested

3 Only recently the novel has been the object of critical attention. In particular see: Angela Wright, 'Corinne in Distress: Translation as Cultural Misappropriation in the 1800's', *CW³ Journal*, 2 (Winter 2004), <http://www2.shu.ac.uk/corvey/CW3journal/issue%20two/wright.html>, and Silvia Bordoni, 'Parodying Corinne: Foster's *The Corinna of England*', *CW³ Journal*, 2 (Winter 2004), <http://www2.shu.ac.uk/corvey/cw3journal/Issue%20two/bordoni.html>.

4 *Annual Review*, 6 (1807), p. 673.

that Madame de Staël should ‘give us one of her own accomplished and fascinating heroines, in English customs, and with English virtues, and English morality’.⁵

This general perplexity with regard to Corinne’s un-Britishness and the call for a British counterpart to the popular heroine was cleverly exploited by the author of *The Corinna of England*. Perceiving a common discontent with the foreignness of Corinne’s manners and talents, the author clearly saw an opportunity to recreate such character in a British provincial context and to exploit its comic potentiality. The parodical intent of the novel, however, serves not only the evident purpose of ridiculing the character of Corinne and what it represents, but also to advocate the rightness and the superiority of British society and culture. In this way, the comic surface of the novel only hides a more serious concern about the invasion of British literature by fashionable foreign heroines and, consequently, the need to re-impose the traditional morally impeccable and timid heroine.

This rejection of the eccentric and foreign woman in favour of a more nationally pure and domestic model was actually part of a widespread literary phenomenon which recently has been signalled as a British counter-tradition to the Italianate Corinne. As Eric Simpson has argued, this counter-tradition popularized the figure of the domestic-oriented and conservative British woman poet.⁶ This tradition became very popular soon after the publication of Staël’s novel and it was actually the first widespread response to *Corinne*, much before the novel and its heroine became popular with the works, amongst others, of Byron and Hemans.⁷

The Corinna of England is part of this counter-tradition which felt the need to re-establish the predominance of British society and British values in the contemporary literary production. The fact that the author chooses to satirize and parody one of the most successful foreign authors of the time in order to communicate the need to re-impose British secular values is not, therefore, surprising. Staël’s novels and philosophical works had contributed enormously to popularize the influence of foreign cultures and literatures. In particular, Staël’s philosophical works had discussed the importance of cultural and national pluralism, whereby the contamination between cultural and literary traditions of different European nations becomes the key element to social progress and

5 *Le Beau Monde*, 2 (September 1807), p. 91.

6 Eric Simpson, “‘The Minstrels of Modern Italy’: Improvisation Comes to Britain’, *European Romantic Review*, 14 (September 2003), pp. 345–67.

7 For a detailed discussion of the influence of *Corinne* on Byron, see Joanne Wilkes, *Lord Byron and Madame de Staël: Born for Opposition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); Silvia Bordoni, ‘From Madame de Staël to Lord Byron: The Dialectics of European Romanticism’, *Literature Compass*, 3 (2006), pp. 1–16. For the influence of *Corinne* on Hemans, see Nanora Sweet and Julie Melnyk (eds), *Felicia Hemans: Reimagining Poetry in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

political emancipation.⁸ *Corinne*, furthermore, had introduced the figure of the eccentric, independent and talented woman artist, who, by definition, defies early nineteenth-century traditional ideas of womanhood and questions the well-rooted notions of national purity and feminine propriety. As it will become progressively evident, therefore, *The Corinna of England* parodies not simply Staël's novel, particularly the character of Corinne, but, more broadly, what the novel represented in the emerging Romantic and sentimental tradition.

The Corinna of England recreates the dynamic of Staël's novel. The opposition between Corinne and the angelic Lucile, Corinne's half-sister, is replicated in a reversed way. Clarissa, the Corinna of England, is an eccentric, untalented and morally ambiguous anti-heroine, while the young, timid and chaste Mary Cuthbert, Clarissa's orphaned cousin, becomes the real heroine of the story, or, as the novel's subtitle suggests, 'a heroine in the shade'. The triangular love plot which dominates *Corinne* is similarly replicated, with both Clarissa and Mary aspiring to conquer the reserved and conservative hero, Montgomery, the Lord Nelvil of the story.

As it soon becomes clear, the character of Clarissa takes inspiration from Staël's Corinne and it is represented as a travesty to the famous *improvisatrice*:

But the superiority of Miss Moreton's talents [...] were calculated only for display; there was nothing solid or substantial in her abilities or acquirements, no depth of argument in her declamatory harangues, in which she had practised, from the early age of fifteen, to the attentive auditors round her father's table. (p. 13)

To some extent, Clarissa is the victim of her father's romanticized imagination, which had seen in her the British equivalent of the talented Italian *improvisatrice*. He encourages her to cultivate and express talents she does not possess with the devastating effect of creating a totally awkward creature, alienated and isolated from her surroundings.

The English provincial setting which constitutes the background to the novel is also an important element of the parody. The story of *Corinne* is for the most part set in Rome, one of the most cosmopolitan and artistically stimulating cities in eighteenth-century Europe. By contrast, *The Corinna of England* is set in a small village near Coventry, the manufacturing and commercial core of the emerging English bourgeoisie, anchored to the traditional moral and domestic values. The conversion of the Italian setting into an English provincial setting accentuates the absurdity and therefore the comicality of the character of Clarissa.

Corinne, or Italy became such a literary success during the first decade of the nineteenth century that few could ignore or remain indifferent to it. The parodical construction of the novel and its comic effect, therefore, must have been striking

8 See in particular, *De La Littérature* (1800), *De L'Allemagne* (1810) and *De L'Esprit des Traduction* (1817). Germaine de Staël, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 17 vols (Paris: Treuttel et Wurtz, 1816).

to contemporary British readers who were experiencing the *Corinne* effect. Even those who had actually resisted reading the novel, knew about this literary phenomenon and were familiar with the character of Corinne, her artistic talents and her unhappy love story. By using the story of Corinne and transposing it into a parodical novel, therefore, the anonymous author of *The Corinna of England* was aware that she could appeal to a vast portion of the contemporary reading public, entertaining both those who liked and those who did not like Staël's novel.

More importantly, *Corinne* influenced more or less directly much of the literature produced in Britain in the first few decades of the century, thus coming to symbolize and being identified with the new emerging sensibility and philosophy. Parodying *Corinne*, therefore, had implications far beyond the mere comical reproduction of the novel. It implied satirizing on a whole set of emerging notions, sentiments, philosophical and political ideas.

The fact that the parodical intent of the anonymous author was in fact directed not simply to the character of Corinne but, more generally, to the new literary fashion that Staël's heroine had come to represent is clear. Describing the faults in the character of Clarissa, for example, the narrator easily extends the critique to a more generalized state of mind:

Superficial in every acquirement and every accomplishment, she attempted every thing; fond of the new school of manners, and of philosophy, 'philanthropy' and 'benevolence' were words which were constantly jingling in her ears; and, the inflated victim of vanity and self-conceit, was easily persuaded, that she was the succouring angel that was sent to patronise genius and virtue on earth. She had a great tincture of romantic fervour and enthusiasm in her manners, which was called 'energy,' a word well understood in the new vocabulary of the moderns, and which has been too frequently made use of to require any explanation here [...]. (pp. 13–14)

In this passage, the author is questioning the very essence of the new emerging Romantic sensibility. Through the ridiculousness and artificiality of the character of Clarissa, the novel is dominated by the critique of what the narrator defines as the 'new school of manners' and his devotees.

Staël's novels and philosophical works are taken as emblematic of the romantic fervour and enthusiasm to which Clarissa has ridiculously devoted herself. Staël had firstly introduced her idea of enthusiasm in her travel journeys and in *Corinne*, before developing it into a philosophical concept in *On Germany*. In Chapter IV of *On Germany*, in particular, Staël defines enthusiasm as 'the nature of all [...] disinterested and exalted sentiments', representing the attempt to fuse moral, aesthetic, religious and metaphysical ideals into a single attitude: 'enthusiasm rallies itself to the harmony of the Universe, it is love of the beautiful, elevation of the

soul, the delight in unselfishness all united into one and the same feeling.⁹ What the author of *The Corinna of England* sarcastically describes as the ‘new school of philosophy’, therefore, represents, the artistic and philosophical ideal which the emerging Romantic authors in general, and Staël in particular, had expressed in the forms of sentiments, feelings, emotions and a philanthropic and benevolent attitude towards human nature.

By the time *The Corinna of England* was composed and published, however, this Romantic ideology had progressively been associated with a tendency to over-sentimentalism both in literature and society.¹⁰ The author exemplifies this over-sentimentalized attitude in the character of Clarissa and in her ridiculous actions. The exaggeration of her feelings and the artificiality of the language she uses serve the purpose of ridiculing a whole set of attitudes which had become extremely fashionable in sentimental literature and amongst its reading public, especially young women.

The character of Clarissa and her international circle of friends, for example, serve the purpose of ridiculing the emerging cosmopolitan and multicultural fashion in British culture and society. Staël’s works are particularly ridiculed for proposing and perpetrating such anti-British ideology. In *Corinne* Staël created a cosmopolitan heroine whose character and talents are the result of her being the hybrid product of Italy and Britain, and of her wide knowledge of European literatures and cultures. Corinne hosts an international salon in Rome where she discusses the differences and similarities between literatures of different countries and where she preaches the need of integrating European cultures. In *The Corinna of England*, the author sarcastically reproduces a similar context. Clarissa patronizes an international group of artists which reminds the readers of Corinne’s cosmopolitan salon, with the important difference that Clarissa’s protégés are actually people with no talents. Rather than promising artists in search of success, the group consists of an extravagant Italian singer who spends her days reclining on a sofa, a French musician with ridiculous manners, a painter who can only paint copies of copies and an old biologist whose only field of research is Clarissa’s garden. Clarissa’s closest friend, Chevalier d’ Aubert, is a married French emigrant, who enchants her patroness by praising her talents and stressing her similarity to Staël’s *improvisatrice*. All, the author clearly suggests, live in promiscuity with no respect for moral boundaries. By reconstructing Corinne’s international circle of friends in

9 Germaine Staël, *De l’Allemagne*, ed. Jean de Pange and Simone Balayé, 4 vols (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1960), vol. 4, p. 187 (my translation).

10 See Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Synda McMillen (ed.), *Sensibility in Transformation: Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics* (London: Associated University Press, 1990).

a comical way, the author clearly criticizes Staël's philosophical considerations on nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

In *On Literature* (1800), in particular, Staël had articulated the importance of national distinctiveness and cosmopolitanism at the same time. While she still promoted national identity and cultural specificity, Staël also suggested the need to overcome the limits of national belonging in the effort to integrate and amalgamate aspects from different cultures and societies. By celebrating the possibility of choosing 'une patrie de la pensée' (an intellectual homeland) over any imposed ideal of national identity, Staël promotes forms of interaction and cooperation between different national and cultural entities. This idea emerges also in *Corinne*, where by creating an Anglo-Italian heroine, Staël celebrates nationalism in terms of confrontation and interaction, instead of promulgating the idea of nationalism constructed in terms of opposition. Corinne's multicultural salon, where different cultures and societies are discussed and compared, is exemplary of Staël's promotion of national interaction.

The comical reproduction of Corinne's international circle of friends in *The Corinna of England* suggests a critique of Staël's ideas. The anonymous author exaggerates national stereotypes in such a way to present them as irreconcilable. More specifically, she depicts Clarissa's international friends in contrast to English values and customs. The laziness, promiscuity and superficiality of Clarissa's multicultural salon is clearly in opposition to the integrity and morality of the conservative English characters who embody English values in the novel, especially Mary Cuthbert, Clarissa's innocent cousin, and Montgomery, the Lord Nelvil of the story, who aspires to become a clergyman. By ridiculing Staël's philosophy of multiculturalism, the author promotes national and cultural purity. More importantly, she depicts conservative English values and customs as superior to those of the other nations represented in the novel, such as Italy and France. In the novel, national purity clearly triumphs over any form of cultural contamination.

References to Staël's works become explicit in the course of *The Corinna of England*. In particular, Clarissa and her French friend are enchanted by the reading of *Delphine* and *Corinne*.

In Chapter XI of the first volume, Clarissa and her entourage of friends are reading *Delphine*, Staël's first widely-read novel, published in 1802. *Delphine* is a beautiful and young widow of independent means and independent views, who likes brilliant conversation. She preaches enthusiasm and displays a romantic and passionate nature. She dislikes constraints and loves liberty, promotes women's independence and advocates divorce. She falls in love with Léonce, a charismatic nobleman who respects honour and social conventions and who will eventually marry *Delphine*'s chaste and religious cousin.

Clarissa admires both Staël and *Delphine* for their common pathos and passionate feelings. Even the conservative and cynical Montgomery has read the

novel and seems to appreciate at least some of its parts, as he comments that the novel is 'an interesting production' and the author 'certainly very great' (p. 50). The discussion, however, is soon orientated towards two opposite poles, that of the libertine and over-sentimental Clarissa and that of the conservative and morally strict Montgomery. Both positions centre around extreme opinions: Clarissa admires Delphine for her sentiments, feelings and passions and she describes her behaviour as 'enchanting'; Montgomery, on the contrary, sees Delphine's sentiments and passions as dangerous, if not despicable. He defines 'pernicious' and 'immoral' her principles, with particular reference to the disrespect of marriage vows, and criticizes Staël for delivering her thoughts on the subject of divorce 'very freely for a woman writer' (p. 51). His admiration is undoubtedly directed towards Mathilda de Vernon, the chaste and reserved cousin of Delphine, who will become the wife of the contended Léonce, and refers to her as an 'exemplary character', while Clarissa considers her as a 'cold-hearted prude', a 'rigid devotee as ever professed Catholicism', and 'as chilling, and forbidding in her manners', as her own aunt Deborah Moreton (p. 51).

Although the discussion of *Delphine* is mainly structured quite simplistically on the two different moral views of Clarissa and Montgomery, the issues at stake appear, in fact, to be more complicated. The Chevalier D'Aubert, Clarissa's French protégé, assuming that Montgomery had read the English translation of Staël's novel, suggests that this divergence of opinions is actually due to the differences between the two languages. This initiates an important dialogue between Montgomery and D'Aubert, which is not simply based on moral differences, but on national and cultural confrontations. The two seem to agree on the fact that Delphine is 'no common character'. However, while D'Aubert seems to perceive some similarities between Delphine and her patroness, Montgomery clearly states that 'it is a character not to be found with *us*' since, he continues, 'our atmosphere is too foggy for such volatile spirits; it is not composed of such inflammable materials; the imagination of *our* ladies (bating a few exceptions) is not so vivid; and the genius of the nation yet makes the prudent conduct of our women its peculiar care!' (p. 52). This is a clear reference to Staël's philosophical discussion of the differences between northern and southern countries, societies and cultures, which she first introduced in *On Literature*. In it, Staël developed the idea that the cultural habits which differentiate the north from the south are mainly originated by the difference in climate and society. This idea is even further developed in *Corinne*, where the eponymous heroine is a half-English and half-Italian woman poet who finds success and freedom in Italy but is rejected and misunderstood in Britain.¹¹

11 For a discussion of Staël's works and ideas see: Madelyn Gutwirth, Avriell Goldberger and Karyna Szmurlo (eds), *Germaine de Staël: Crossing the Borders* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

To some extents, Montgomery's discussion of *Delphine* seems to reiterate Staël's ideology. Women such as Delphine, Montgomery argues, cannot exist in Britain, since British women are generally educated following the principles of propriety and good moral conduct. A libertine and passionate woman such as Delphine would be at odd in Britain, exactly in the same way that the eccentric and sentimental Clarissa is alienated in the provincial English setting of the novel. The idea that Clarissa is seen not simply as an eccentric and unconventional woman, but also as being 'foreign' to British customs, and therefore unaccepted by the surrounding conservative society, becomes even more explicit when she tries to imitate Staël's Corinne.

The reading of *Corinne* is introduced in Chapter XV of the second volume. The novel enraptures Clarissa. She feels that she can fully identify with the Italian woman of genius. The narrator observes that *Corinne* 'was the very work to suit the taste of Miss Moreton; for though she had neither judgment or knowledge to appreciate the beauty or the truth of the historical remarks [...] yet her imagination was enamoured of the character of Corinna' (p. 76). The reading of Staël's novel triggers in Clarissa the need to emulate Corinne with evident comic outcomes. Clarissa perceives in the heroine's energetic pursuit of Lord Nelvil, in her rejection of all common forms, her enthusiastic disposition and her extemporizing faculty an image of her own character and talents. Chevalier D'Aubert remarks that Clarissa's genius is similar to Corinne's, and he starts addressing her as 'the Corinna of England'. From here, the narrator explains, 'the sickly brain of Miss. Moreton became inflamed, and she resolved to imitate the inimitable Corinna, whenever opportunities should offer of discovering her genius to the world' (p. 77).

At this point of the novel, the anonymous author constructs an overtly comic parallelism between the story of Clarissa and that of Corinne. With the intention of imitating Corinne, for example, Clarissa decides to improvise a speech for the peasants of Coventry. Her improvisation is a mockery of Corinne's famous improvisation at the Capitol, on the occasion of her coronation as poet laureate. In it Corinne displays her physical beauty and her intellectual powers; she celebrates the poets who have preceded her in representing the poetic talents of Italy and she boldly encourages her compatriots to regain the political freedom and the cultural dignity that for so many years had characterized their country, presently enslaved by foreign tyrants.¹²

Clarissa's speech is sarcastically shaped after Corinne's improvisation: she celebrates her ancestor Lady Godiva, and she praises the glory and power of the arts. She then turns her speech into a quasi-political declamation when she instigates

12 Germaine de Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, ed. and transl. Avriel Goldberger (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 26–31.

the peasants to abandon their honest and humble jobs in order to pursue artistic careers:

Citizens of Coventry! my countrymen, attend! Accident has led me hither to be a pleased witness of your spectacle of this day, and of the patriotic enthusiasm which is excited in your bosoms! [...] – Ye Citizens of Coventry, free men of an ancient city, behold this day *another* woman speaks! *another* woman asserts the glorious prerogative of her sex, the bold freedom of thought and action, hitherto so exclusively, so unjustly confined to men alone! – People of Coventry, and I do I then behold you sunk to a state of effeminacy and servitude! [...] *Men!* possessed of capacious minds, of soaring genius, of depth of intellect; how do I behold you engaged? (p. 82)

At the answer that they are engaged in providing bread for themselves and their children, and in ‘honest industry, Clarissa replies: ‘Shame, shame on these inglorious occupations’, since men have arms ‘to chisel out the hero’s form’, and eyes that ‘with Promethean fire can animate their work’ (p. 82). Significantly, the result of the *Corinna of England*’s improvisation is the instigation of a riot and public turmoil among the peasants. Instead of acclamation and glory, like *Corinne*, Clarissa receives only scorn and disrespect.

Clarissa tries then to imitate Staël’s heroine and to act as *Corinne* does in the novel. She, for example, prefers walking the streets of London unprotected instead of going in a carriage, since, in strict obedience to *Corinne*’s model, she chooses the pedestrian excursion, like Staël’s heroine had done in Rome. Of course, Clarissa observes, *Corinne* had never chosen a female companion; but ‘had she been left the guardian of an orphan cousin, Miss Moreton was confident she would not have left her behind’ (p. 98). In hearing of the illness of one of her friends, Clarissa rushes to visit him, since ‘*Corinna* gone immediately to Lord Nelville on hearing of his illness!’, even if this means worsening her already scandalous behaviour and compromising her cousin’s reputation (p. 97).

The effects of Clarissa’s actions are morally disastrous, and, at the end of the novel, she dies while trying to escape a fire in Covent Garden. This leaves the true heroine, Mary Cuthbert, the only inheritor of a large fortune. With the death of Clarissa and the marriage between Montgomery and Mary Cuthbert, the author replicates the ending of Staël’s novel, where *Corinne* dies in solitude after Lord Nelvil’s marriage with her half-sister Lucile.

The parallelism between the two novels is mainly constructed with a parodical intention. However, Clarissa is often associated with *Corinne* and *Delphine* not simply for comical purposes. In particular, the narrator and the most conservative characters in the novel, such as Deborah Moreton, Clarissa’s aunt, and Montgomery, consider Clarissa together with Staël’s heroines *Delphine* and *Corinne* as characters belonging to the same category of women. All are seen as unconventional, eccentric, feminist, egocentric, and exhibitionist women. More importantly, they are seen as ‘foreign’ to English customs and society. *Delphine*

is seen as 'impetuous in her feeling, so hasty in her resolves, so regardless of the customs of the world!', and Corinne is described as a passionate, unconventional and enthusiastic character, while her artistic talents and poetic genius are never mentioned in the novel (p. 52). In the narrator's words, Clarissa, like Delphine and Corinne, appears as 'no common character'. From a conservative point of view, therefore, women seem to be judged not for their genuine or pretentious artistic talents, but for their ability to conform to a strict and morally impeccable idea of femininity. After all, the final message of the novel seems clear: the death of the eccentric Clarissa erases from society the unordinary woman, while the triumph of the timid and chaste Mary re-establishes the supremacy of the proper lady. The death of both Corinne and Clarissa, although tragic in Staël's novel and comical in Foster's, takes us straightforwardly to a conclusion: there is no place in society for unconventional and unordinary women, but only for chaste and angelic women, like Lucile and Mary. The triumph of the Lucile/Mary kind of woman implies that the talented Corinne and the eccentric Clarissa are both unfitted for society. Their strangeness eludes the passive end domestic ideal of womanhood that the author seems to propose as the only acceptable model.

In this way, *The Corinna of England* seems to confirm what Staël had initially suggested in *Corinne*: England, specifically provincial England, does not welcome eccentric, exuberant, artistic women who want to display their more or less genuine talents in public. This does not exclude the possibility that England would welcome a different kind of genius in women, one that could co-exist with the ideal of the proper lady. *The Corinna of England*, however, does not suggest any alternative model for female talent, since the other female characters are only concerned with domestic duties, and do not show any interest in the arts. This seems to assert the superiority of conformity over any form of eccentricity and to establish British religious and moral values as exemplary.

Furthermore, both *Delphine* and *Corinne* were politically controversial novels. Soon after the publication of *Delphine*, Napoleon banished Staël from France for the revolutionary and anti-Napoleonic content of the novel. Similarly, *Corinne's* celebration of political and social freedom in a country tyrannized and enslaved by Napoleon had a clear political meaning. From this point of view, therefore, by parodying Staël's novels, the anonymous author of *The Corinna of England* also expresses a political opinion, dominated by an anti-revolutionary, anti-French attitude and by a reinvigoration of the idea of Britain as politically and morally superior to other European countries. In creating an anti-heroine on the example of the liberal, politically engaged and cosmopolitan Corinne, the author reiterates her own beliefs in the traditionally conservative and nationalistic heroine.