

MODERN GENRE EXPRESSION IN THE WORK OF GERMANE DE STAHL

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Annotation: This article examines the poetics of modernity in the literary and aesthetic thought of Madame de Staël. It shows that, while remaining committed to classical norms, Madame de Staël also emphasizes the need for literature to adapt to new historical experience, especially the intellectual and emotional climate of the post-Revolutionary era. The article further explores the role of Christianity, inner reflection, melancholy, passion, and philosophical analysis in the formation of modern literature.

Keywords: Madame de Staël, poetics of modernity, classicism, romanticism, literary thought, aesthetic views, tradition, modern literature, melancholy, Christianity, passion, philosophical analysis.

This title may seem doubly paradoxical. On the one hand, like her contemporaries, Madame de Staël does not use the term “modernity”. This feature appears only occasionally in her writing, and it is almost always used within the framework of the traditional opposition of “classical and modern” views. On the other hand, in the preface to “De la Littérature” she denies that she is a writer working in a modern direction.

From the very beginning, she emphasizes her loyalty to classical, even neoclassical, canons and transfers the discussion not to the field of literary analysis, but to the field of philosophy, which is based on the lessons of history. However, the first work published in 1800 included new poetic genres: here, of course, there was a “new poetics” - not in a clear form, as in “Le Génie du christianisme”, but expressed more diffusely, more delicately; It begins to take shape with the 1795 *Essai sur les fictions* and reaches its final point in 1810 in *De l'Allemagne*.

It is no coincidence that three works that sought to define the characteristics of a new literature appeared simultaneously between 1800 and 1802. After the revolutionary storms, after the Terror, the need to find a method of expression appropriate to this completely new experience becomes self-evident. Although the term “modern” is not used, the feeling of standing on the threshold of another era, of new literary processes, is undeniable.

The chapter devoted to the literature of the great century identifies classicism as the main model for the theory: “La pureté du style ne peut aller plus loin que dans les chefs-d'œuvre du siècle de Louis XIV ; et, sous ce rapport, ils doivent être toujours considérées comme les modèles de la littérature française.” Meaning: The purity of style reaches its highest peak only in the masterpieces of the century of Louis XIV; from this point of view, they must always be considered as the model of French literature.

Of course, this idea is not distinguished by its originality. Nevertheless, it is worth noting how firmly Madame de Staël defended her position against the introduction of any “depravity” or familiarity into language.

“...l'élévation du langage conserve seulement cette dignité de l'homme en présence des hommes, à laquelle ne doit jamais renoncer celui qui s'expose à leurs jugements.” The author here firmly emphasizes that he is far from the innovations of the preface to *Cromwell*; at the same time, in other respects, he borrowed much from that work. It is interesting that he often refers to neoclassical poetics, especially in conspicuous places, such as the preface to the second edition of *De la Littérature*. Voltaire, Chateaubriand, although he criticized his poetic weakness in his work *Génie*, attributed the main part of his talent to the influence of Christianity.

At the same time, in “De l'Allemagne” this model, unlike other models, « Our great dramatic poets often covered contemporary themes.¹ Nor is there any temptation to develop the

¹ Simone Balayé. *De l'Allemagne*. – Paris: F. Flammarion, 1968. – P. 254.

art of dramatic expression. The analyses in the chapter on declamation may seem strangely conservative, for example, the judgment on the style of speech in tragic speech is as follows: "There is a general flow, a conventional accent which is in force in the Alexandrian verses, and the most passionate movements rest on this pedestal, which is like the necessary data of the art."²

It is necessary for literature to be in harmony with modern thought. Whereas classical poetry is only a model to be imitated, romantic poetry has a living source of inspiration.

If the poetry of the ancients is purer as an art, the poetry of the moderns is more tearful; but for us the question is not between classical poetry and romantic poetry, but between imitating the one and drawing inspiration from the other. While the literature of the ancients is a literature copied for the moderns, romantic or chivalric literature has its own local roots, which our religion and social institutions have created.³ This analysis allows us to reconcile the apparent contradiction between the tendency towards formal classicism and the desire for modernity of the subject: Madame de Staël appreciates in modern French literature the manifestation of the most classic of its modern forms of expression. In this respect, she clearly defines her style.

The obstacle associated with the lack of perfection in the arts is thus overcome: romantic poetry is capable of perfection, but this is not primarily due to its form, but because it must become a reflection of the modern spirit, express new experience. To achieve this adaptation, it is necessary to get rid of the only hardened aspects of classical norms and to grasp the seeds of renewal.

The most important of these seeds - it is on this basis that Chateaubriand builds his entire argument in the *Génie du christianisme* - lies in the transformation of customs and mentalities under the influence of Christianity. While classical literature relies on ancient models, particularly Greek tragedy, where fate reigns supreme, modern thought finds its foundation in the concept of Providence (Divine Destiny). The famous *Stalcha* "theory of climates", which transferred the analyses of Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws* to the literary level, is known to be extremely effective: it seeks to determine the characteristics of the peoples of the south and the north and the impact of the invasion of the peoples of the north on the revival of literature.

This rapprochement between the literary object and the individual, immersed in his social context, creates the basis for a softening of the soul, and thereby leads to the emergence of a new sublime of an entirely different kind - based on the heart and sympathy. Thus, Christianity, which, unlike Stoicism, pays more attention to the passions, allows the joint development of literature and philosophy.

Moreover, the softness of Christianity, which, unlike Stoicism, combines sensitivity with morality, gives rise to a new emotion - melancholy - which is an important source of modern poetry.

"Le genre humain n'avait pas encore atteint, s'il est permis de s'exprimer ainsi, l'âge de la mélancolie; l'homme luttant contre les souffrances de l'âme ne leur opposait que la force, et non cette sensible résignation, qui n'étouffe point la peine et ne rougit point des regrets. Cette résignation peut seule faire servir la douleur, même aux plus sublimes effets du talent."⁴ Meaning: If it is permissible to say so, humanity has not yet reached the age of melancholy; in the struggle against mental suffering, man resists it only by force, but not by an obedience based on a sensitive observation that does not stifle pain and is not ashamed of regret. Only in this observation can pain be made to serve even the highest manifestations of talent.

Here too, *De la Littérature* advances a reasoning that is completely parallel to the analysis in *Du Génie*. Although she encounters the same limitations due to her strict desire for proof, Madame de Staël insists that the ancient authors did not have the ability to understand

² Simone Balayé. *De l'Allemagne*. – Paris: F. Flammarion, 1968. – P. 218.

³ Mme de Staël. *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*. – Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1800. – P. 213.

⁴ Mme de Staël. *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*. – Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1800. – P. 70.

melancholy. Her deep knowledge of German literature provides her with excellent examples, and on this basis she emphasizes what she considers to be a very positive aspect - that melancholy brings literature closer to philosophy.

Another unique idea is that he believes that women played a leading role in the evolution of emotions. In his opinion, the inferior position of women in Greek society prevented the ancients from imagining a spirit of mutual sympathy, that is, true love:

“La privation absolue d'une telle affection se fait apercevoir, non seulement dans la peinture de l'amour, mais dans tout ce qui tient à la délicatesse du cœur.” Meaning: The absolute absence of such affection is clearly visible not only in the depiction of love, but also in all situations related to the delicacy of the heart.

However, it is precisely the emotions that have become unknown in this way - “the capacity for long-lasting dreams” and melancholy.

Thus, all factors lead to an enrichment of emotions in the modern era, which gives this poetry an unprecedented human depth. The essay *De l'influence des passions*, written in 1796, concludes that it is impossible to express the intensity of passions: one must remain silent in the face of horror. *De la Littérature* also encounters a difficulty at this traumatic point, and it is not without reason that the word “passion” is almost absent. The problem is discussed only at the end of the work, as if by way of exegesis. For “it is not enough to shake the heart, it is also necessary to illuminate it”⁵. The writer who sets out to describe passions faces two dangers: if he does not sufficiently understand his moral duty, he may arouse disordered passions in the reader; and if he fully understands the extent of this disorder, he faces the impossibility of writing:

“A certain degree of passion inspires poetry; a degree beyond that drives it aside..”⁶ *De la Littérature* represents the first attempt to overcome this traumatic experience: reason must prevail over passion, and philosophy must restrain and direct literature. The author writes:

“La philosophie, en généralisant davantage les idées, doit donner plus de grandeur aux images poétiques. La connaissance de la logique rend plus capable de faire parler la passion.”⁷ Meaning: Philosophy, as it generalizes ideas, should give poetic images greater grandeur. And the knowledge of logic allows for a more impressive expression of passion.

Thus, a new path opens up for modern literature: to combine the depiction of feelings with philosophical analysis in order to put an end to the excesses of passions that the Reign of Terror provoked.

This model of balance is manifested in the direction that Madame de Staël called the “German school,” and this is not limited to German literature. Indeed, although the natural talent of the French is evident in the analysis of passions, the process of renewal is evident in the works of the following authors:

“T. -T. Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Chateaubriand, etc., [who] in some of their works, are all, even without their knowledge, of the German school, that is to say, they draw their talent only from the depths of their souls.”⁸

This intuition, already present in *De la Littérature*, becomes even more assertive in *De l'Allemagne*: Madame de Staël declares her admiration for the mysticism and sensitivity characteristic of the northern peoples and offers France an example of a “literature of feeling.”

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⁷ Mme de Staël. *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*. – Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1800. – P. 285.

⁸ Germaine de Staël. *De l'Allemagne*. Paris, 1810. – P. 162.

2. Simone Balayé. De l'Allemagne. – Paris: F. Flammarion, 1968.
3. Germaine de Staël. De l'Allemagne. Paris, 1810.