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Staal-Delaunay's *Détours* to Intimacy: the emergence of the autobiographical writer and
reader from the Bastille

Marguerite-Jeanne de Staal-Delaunay described her imprisonment in the Bastille (from December 1718 to February 1720), as 'le seul temps heureux que j'aie passé en ma vie', and the Bastille itself as, paradoxically, 'le lieu où l'on est le plus libre' (*Mémoires*, 199, 170). If she could be happy inside the Bastille, it was because she was unhappy in the world outside. The origin of this unhappiness, as Staal-Delaunay tells us on the first page of the memoirs, was another contradiction: an education of 'distinction', given to a woman who discovered herself, on the level of rank and fortune, to be 'rien' (65). The memoir departs from available textual models, as has been noted by the small number of critics who have engaged with the author. The text (published posthumously in 1755, dated to 1740-42 by Charlotte de Parscau, 146) has the intimacy of a letter, and its critiques of wordly vices recall *moraliste* writing. It departs from both, however, in its length and continuous narrative. The author served the duchesse du Maine and was sent to the Bastille as part of the fallout from the Cellamare Conspiracy, but readers who hoped for political memoirs were frustrated. Voltaire (330) wrote that Staal-Delaunay 'paraît plus occupée des événements de la femme de chambre que de la conspiration du prince de Cellamare.' The text recounts a love affair, but shares little else with English scandal memoirs based on the lives of actresses and libertine noblewomen. As a record of self-development, it might have something in common with pious narratives of conversion, but differs from them in emphasising individuality and unusualness, and minimising redemption. It differs in a similar manner from other narratives of *embastillement*. Texts from the *légende noire* of the Bastille, such as Constantin de Renneville's *Histoire de la Bastille* or Henri Masers de Latude's memoirs, aimed to portray a community of sufferers, alike oppressed by the senseless despotism of *lettres de cachet*.¹ For Staal-Delaunay, senselessness and the despotic exercise of power were to be found

outside the prison, in the hierarchies of the *monde*.

Staal-Delaunay's memoirs have been named as a precursor to Rousseau's *Confessions* (see e.g. Hersant, 599, and Seth's introduction to the *Mémoires*, 64). A new kind of writer apparently emerges from Staal-Delaunay's period of imprisonment: one able to establish the authority to make unusual unhappiness the main focus of a text, and to craft an unusual text as the most effective vehicle for its communication. Just as important to understanding the project shared by Rousseau and Staal-Delaunay is the new kind of reader which each text calls into being. This is, rather than a court of public opinion, the reader of autobiography who is addressed intimately, as an individual multiplied. Rousseau, however, explicitly claimed his text as a model for anyone else who wished to know themselves (2), whereas Staal-Delaunay framed her text as of possible interest only to herself (65). This is the first of several denials, refusals to claim, and refusals to tell. Staal-Delaunay stubbornly keeps the narrative within the confines of her own perspective, whilst refusing to make any positive claim about the value of that perspective or the techniques through which she communicates it. This has been observed by Luba Markovskaia who, in a monograph treating *la prison heureuse au dix-huitième siècle*, has shown how Staal-Delaunay instrumentalised the theme of shortsighted-ness (her vision was extremely poor) to refuse the role of witness (71-72; 243). Disavowals of authority are common in early modern texts, but may also reflect the particular anxiety attendant upon a woman writing. Carol J. Singley has observed that, 'In its extreme, anxiety silences, blocks, or kills creativity. It may also express itself indirectly, in the form of politeness, circumlocution, deference, or denial' (8-9). Even as it is concerned with speaking the truth of the self, and with critiquing the false speech of the *monde*, the text is rich in all these ways of not-saying, which I call, using Staal-Delaunay's terminology, *détournement*. This suggests how fraught it was to offer, in place of a witness to the political machinations of *les grands*, the experience of the *femme de chambre*.

An examination of what Staal-Delaunay does not say can be complemented, following a route suggested by Gabrielle Verdier, by looking to more positive capacities claimed by Staal-Delaunay; notably, that of being a skilled reader. We will, in the first part of this essay, see how the clear-sighted understanding she developed in childhood is counterposed to the many different scripts which Delaunay encountered in the *monde*. The author establishes her authority and sincerity by being able to judge these scripts, but not reliably reproduce them. Her period of imprisonment, to which this essay subsequently passes, is depicted as one of insulation from a *mondain* cacophony, where the author could acquire positive knowledge of herself, of the value of occupations and the validity of conventions. She gives as the source of the critiques and analyses which we read in the memoirs a romantic correspondence with the chevalier de Menil, undertaken whilst they were both imprisoned. Staal-Delaunay appended a selection of the letters to her text as proof of her moral conduct, of the 'vérité' of her story, and the consistency of her feelings (188). The memoirs are concerned throughout with what can and cannot be known, with directness and *détournement*, disclosure and concealment, communication between self and other. I will suggest, at the close of this article, that the way in which both Menil (who abandoned her) and the duchesse du Maine (who would not let her go) failed Delaunay is depicted as an epistemic lack: they could not understand her unique unhappiness in the world, her unique happiness in prison. The memoirs call into being – subtly, ever disavowing the authority to do so – a reader able to recognise the disavowed value of Staal-Delaunay's life story.

Delaunay sums up her life trajectory on the very first page:

Il m'est arrivé tout le contraire de ce qu'on voit dans les romans, où l'héroïne, élevée comme une simple bergère, se trouve une illustre princesse. J'ai été traitée dans mon enfance en personne de distinction; et par la suite je découvris que je n'étais rien, et que rien dans le monde ne m'appartenait. Mon âme, n'ayant pas pris d'abord le pli

que lui devait donner la mauvaise fortune, a toujours résisté à l'abaissement et à la sujétion où je me suis trouvée: c'est là l'origine du malheur de ma vie. (65)

Delaunay's upbringing causes her to develop without an internal *pli*: she cannot easily bend in response to pressure from those with power over her. She further depicts herself as having learned, in childhood, no *détournement*: the bending of speech and truth which is the object of ambivalence in her life and her text. Indulged by the Abbess and the nuns of Saint-Louis, when she did wrong, 'accoutumée à trouver l'excuse de mes fautes dans leur aveu, rien ne me portait à chercher des détours' (68). Her curiosity was indulged, too: 'je questionnais perpetuellement, et l'on me répondait toujours' (67). The openness of her education bequeathed her a clarity of judgement and clear-sightedness which allowed her to apply Bible stories to day-to-day life and, later, to read and understand Descartes' *Recherche de la vérité* (70). But she enjoyed a power over others – illusory, for it was really a reflection of the Abbess's power – which encouraged an unreflecting despotism. The nuns and other pensioners were constrained to 'me faire une espèce de cour', 'soumis' to Delaunay's 'petit empire' (68). The ironising gaze of the memoirist marks this first illusion through an antithesis, and a moral lesson: 'Enfin j'avais acquis, quoique infiniment petite, tous les défauts des grands. Cela m'a servi depuis à les excuser en eux, et m'a fait voir avec quelle facilité on se persuade que tout est fait pour soi' (68-69). This first lesson also offers an insight into Staal-Delaunay's own techniques of suggestion, neighbour to the *détournement* which she so often critiques when recounting the actions of others. An instance of self-accusation, a claim to *understand* the faults of *les grands*, primes the reader to see those to whom Delaunay will later find herself subjected as spoiled children who never grew up.

In that opening passage, Delaunay also confronts the reader with a contradiction between literature and life, denoted by the topsy-turvy princess and shepherdess.ⁿ³ As a child, Delaunay was an excellent reader of books but, having little knowledge of herself or

the outside world, she had to discover through trial and error that reading could create scripts which ran within herself, distorting her perceptions. A passion for novels and romances raised romantic desires, initially 'sans objet déterminé' (70). 'Sentiments imaginaires, puisés dans les romans' distorted her perception (71), shaping a series of men, at this stage only ever brief presences in her life, into objects whose reality fell comically short of the novelistic ideal. The objects of infatuation are hardly recognisable from one meeting to the next; 'esprit' and 'bonne compagnie' turn out to be merely 'un son de voix agréable' and a modicum of 'l'air du monde' (78). But, as time went on, she learned how to harness this power as a writer, hiding and controlling her feelings. Still young, she fell seriously in love with the brother of her close friend Mlle de Silly with a passion which would endure for many years. Rather than resorting to a confidante, which she considered a humiliation, Delaunay wrote a series of love stories in which she starred alongside M. de Silly (87). She suggests that these writings were trivial and derivative, but these early texts still allowed her to exercise the power of concealment. Her 'vains écrits ... ont gardé mon secret, car ils n'ont jamais vu le jour'. The memoirist understood this as a refusal of femininity to a certain extent, remarking derisively of another young woman that, 'Les femmes n'ont rien de plus pressé que de dire leur secret' (90). Her own early act of concealment through writing anticipates her later alienation from other women in the *monde*. In other domains, too, she learned the value of *détournement* through study: when she missed Mlle de Silly, or worried about her own future when the Abbess's position was challenged, she offered other objects of concentration up to her mind, objects which 'le détournent et l'éloignent insensiblement' from the source of distress (74).

But these positive applications of *détournement* had no power over Delaunay's environment. When the Abbess died, Delaunay, with no independent financial resources which would allow her to remain in the convent, was plunged into the *monde*. Women's spaces in the *monde* were experienced by the young Delaunay as a series of prisons. There

were material aspects to this: where she could go and how she could use her time were constrained. But the language and values of such spaces, which Staal-Delaunay depicts as complex systems unmoored from truth, also trapped her in a kind of labyrinth whose *détours* she could not navigate. We can understand the *monde* as a realm of heteroglossia, in which Delaunay was often constrained to ventriloquise, with varying degrees of success. n4 The major tension of this section of the text arises from Staal-Delaunay's need to explain to the reader how she eventually succeeded in becoming the confidante of a princess of the blood, while still remaining essentially a stranger to this environment. She does this by depicting her successes as quasi-accidental. Her interactions with the duchesse de la Ferté, her first patroness-cum-tyrant, are a case in point. Delaunay's sister, in service with the Duchess, vaunted all the 'sciences qu'elle prétendait que je possédais, dont elle éstrophiait les noms' (96). The Duchess, whose ideas 'n'avaient nul rapport l'une à l'autre' (97), 's'échauffait l'imagination' in turn (96), and was so prejudiced in Delaunay's favour by the time they met she took Delaunay's 'simples', even 'plats' remarks as evidence of quasi-divinatory powers (96). The Duchess asked Delaunay to write a letter on her behalf to Desmarets:

Tenez, mademoiselle, on va vous donner du papier, vous n'avez qu'à écrire. – Hé quoi, madame? lui répondis-je fort embarrassée. – Vous tournerez cela comme vous voudrez, reprit-elle. Il faut que cela soit bien: je veux qu'il m'accorde ce que je lui demande. – Mais, madame, repris-je, encore il faudrait savoir ce que vous lui voulez dire. – Eh! Non, vous entendez. (96)

In contrast to the powers ascribed to her, Delaunay presents her own speech as hesitant and halting. So, it is only more surprising that she was able to stitch together, from a few 'propos décousus', 'justement tout ce que [la duchesse] voulais lui mander' (97). For Delaunay, the letter can only succeed in the realm of appearance. But her interlocutor is presented as unable to make a distinction between appearance and substance. Staal-Delaunay thereby presents

herself as an authoritative narrator able to hierarchise different modes of speech, in spite of the fact that this is the first of many scenes of writerly subjection. n5

The Duchess would now try to find Delaunay a position as a tutor and companion to a young noblewoman, but this apparent boon served only to hand over control of Delaunay's time and movements. Dragged about the town, she became painfully conscious that 'je n'étais plus au temps d'avoir une volonté, ni de résister à celle des autres' (97). If she wanted to see acquaintances like Fontenelle or the abbé de Saint Pierre, she had to choose times when the Duchess, now her jailor, would not visit her at her convent, for 'Il n'était pas à propos qu'elle sût que j'en sortisse pour d'autres que pour elle' (106). Getting ahead in the *monde* means mastering empty or false speech, but Staal-Delaunay depicts all her conscious attempts to do this as (appealing) failures. After initial attempts to place her came to naught, de la Ferté suggested keeping Delaunay in her own household. Fearful, having seen her sister's fate, that she would end up as a *femme de chambre*, Delaunay tried some double-dealing. She did everything possible to put the Duchess off, while lamenting her lack of employment to Malezieux (intimate of the duchesse du Maine with whom she now hoped to find a place). This episode is a tissue of letters from other people, with Delaunay's replies only reported, emphasising her dependency (109-111). Unfortunately, everything came out: Malezieux showed Delaunay's letters to de la Ferté in an attempt to unravel the 'énigme' of Delaunay's continued unemployment (110). A furious de la Ferté did send Delaunay to the duchesse du Maine as she wished – but as the *femme de chambre* she had tried to avoid becoming.

From her clausturation on de la Ferté's pleasure, Delaunay, described as a defeated captive (112), would land in a cell-like room at the duchesse du Maine's seat. The description of her lodgings, (as Markovskaia has also observed, 236), recalls the arrival scenes of prison-writing: Delaunay was in 'un entresol si bas et si sombre, que j'y marchais pliée, et à tâtons: on ne pouvait y respirer, faute d'air, ni s'y chauffer, faute de cheminée.' She was also trapped

in the 'indélébile' identity of a *femme de chambre*. Her fellows in service are described as mere creatures: 'un troupeau de moutons' fully immersed in their particular stratum of the *monde*, their patterns of thought and speech are as incomprehensible to her as those of de la Ferté. 'On peut prendre quelque ascendant sur des gens qui ont des vues saines, des intérêts connus, des passions ordinaires: il n'en est pas de même de ces sortes d'esprits, dont les idées sont à l'envers, les mouvements à contresens, et les bas intérêts cachés dans la poussière' (114). Delaunay, lacking an internal *pli*, can neither wield power over nor inspire affection in her companions, who are depicted in this passage as all folded over and twisted about. Some parallels with and distinctions from prison memoirs can here be seen. Exposure to the chaotic and meaningless speech of fellow prisoners is a recurrent feature of Renneville's *Histoire de la Bastille* (e.g. in his narrative of his incarceration with the crazed villain Sorel, 299). Conversely, solidarity with other prisoners is essential to memoirs such as Renneville's or Latude's; each author must show that the victims of despotism are numerous. n6 Staal-Delaunay, meanwhile, depicts herself as a privileged subject, one whose very ineptness at *détournement* alienates her from those who might be considered her fellow sufferers – and recommends her to the reader.

There is no shame in succeeding with the duchesse du Maine: unlike de la Ferté, she expressed herself with 'justesse', 'netteté' and 'rapidité', struck by objects in the world and reflecting them like a mirror (125). But how to be noticed by her, from Delaunay's position of 'profonde obscurité' (121)? During her period of unhappy, menial service, she continued to write. She was, however, anxious about authorship, circulating a poem on some minor disagreement amongst the duchesse du Maine's entourage anonymously (116). When she did succeed, it would be via a highly *détourné* route, but again presented as the work of 'hasard' rather than design (124). She wrote a witty letter to Fontenelle, he showed it to other people, they took copies, these copies were seen by the duchesse du Maine who began to favour her.

Not only was Delaunay's route to success indirect: her depiction of the Duchess is, too, a masterwork of suggestion. A much crueller portrait of the Duchess exists, in which Staal-Delaunay casts her frankness in a negative light, writing that 'Son commerce est un esclavage; sa tyrannie est à découvert' (La Harpe, 53). In the memoirs, Staal-Delaunay is scrupulously loyal, but encourages the reader to draw their own conclusions. The fact that Delaunay could not obtain a better position by addressing the Duchess directly suggests the tyrannical power of the latter. A direct plea, in prison writing, is invariably either ignored or punished (see e.g. Renneville, lvi; Latude, vol.2, 74). The impossibility of direct request and response, as between equals, would be newly evident on a later occasion when Delaunay and the Duchess quarrelled. A series of intermediaries had to repair the breach; and Staal-Delaunay never affords an active role to the Duchess. Of one mediator, it is said that '*On l'avait chargée de m'apaiser et me retenir*' (145, my emphasis). Another promises Delaunay that her she will be relieved of her remaining *femme de chambre* duties, but such a reward for remaining must be deferred, so that the Duchess might not seem to have been forced to make concessions. The episode of the letter and the quarrel, taken together, encourage the reader to see *détournement* as emanating from the *monde* and the great who rule over it – but, at the same time, Staal-Delaunay practises this *détournement* in her text, encouraging the reader to form a negative judgement of the Duchess which is never directly expressed.

Delaunay's indirect success brought mixed results. Her duties became lighter in many respects, but her time was subjugated to the Duchess's insomnia. Sitting up with her, to read to her and listen to worries about the status of her family under the Regency, was a punishing obligation (131). And if the way that the duchesse du Maine commanded her writing was nothing like Delaunay's experience of writing for de la Ferté, nor was her pen her own. She was able to write theatre for the Duchess's *nuits blanches* (and she would, after the completion of the memoirs, have a play publicly performed). She never expresses frustrated

writerly ambitions as such, though some discontent may be indirectly expressed at the subject matter allotted to her as a woman writer: 'une comédie ... qu'on me obligea de faire, faute de trouver aucun poète (car on la voulut en vers) qui acceptât un pareil sujet' (126). If Delaunay was writing regularly, then, she remained an actor in someone else's drama, as is made clear in her depiction of the Cellamare Conspiracy as a play for which she did not know the script. Her 'rôle' in 'notre grande pièce' (139) would ultimately land her in the Bastille, and the arrest is described the 'catastrophe' that strikes precisely halfway through the memoirs, with appropriate foreshadowing (128, 147, 151, 158). But the actual relation of the conspiracy, with many twists and turns but very little actual information given, is another masterpiece of concealment. 'Je me dispense' she writes, 'd'expliquer leur plan, parce que je n'y ai jamais rien compris; et peut-être n'en avaient-ils point' (143). Again, from a claim not to comprehend the speech of others, and a suggestion that their speech was mere *badinage*, Delaunay draws a form of authority – one through which she is transformed from hired pen or ventriloquist to autobiographer. She deprives the Voltairean reader of the political secrets they were hoping to find, claiming their attention instead for the 'événements de la femme de chambre'.

The *monde*, then, was a labyrinth of distorted speech; we pass now to Delaunay's literal imprisonment in the Bastille, where she would find her paradoxical liberty. Up to this point, the memoirist has drawn her authority from being an outsider able to identify, but not reliably practise, senseless or false speech. Within the Bastille, the emphasis shifts to disclosure, clarity, and truth, in both the text itself and the letters which are given as proof of the counter-intuitive experience recounted. This does not imply that her portrayal of the Bastille is entirely trustworthy. Staal-Delaunay's memoirs make an important contribution to what has been termed the *légende dorée* or *rose* (Markovskaia, 196) of the Bastille. No author writes approvingly about the Bastille purely on its own account; any apology for it always aims to cast some other space as the true location of tyranny. Marmontel's much later

memoirs (1800) enact this reversal in an explicitly political vein. His gentle presentation of his eleven-day imprisonment is offered as evidence both that his case was viewed sympathetically (vol.1, 336), and that a more humane regime was put in place in the prison in the latter half of the century (337). It further supports a claim made later in the memoirs about "real tyrants", when he recounts the storming of the Bastille: 'le despotisme de la licence est mille fois plus redoutable que celui de l'autorité, et la populace effrénée est le plus cruel des tyrans' (vol.2, 315). Delaunay, for her part, was objectively well treated compared to the prisoners' whose stories are recorded in, say, Renneville's *Histoire*. Changes to the regime under the Regency, her status, perhaps a deliberate tactic by the interrogator Le Blanc: such factors may have insulated her from the tortures, the extorsions of money and possessions – and sex, from imprisoned women (lx-lxi) – which are therein recorded. But she also foregrounds, like Marmontel, the positive aspects of her experience, contributing to the *légende dorée* in the service of a *légende noire* of society. In a letter to Menil, she states that she found in prison 'l'affranchissement de la tyrannie que le monde et tout ce qu'il contient exerce sur nous' (*Œuvres*, 35). The narrative portion of the text is never quite so explicit, but everything tends, as with her depiction of the Duchess, to bring the reader to a damning conclusion.

In the Bastille, Delaunay felt able to establish truths about herself, and thence wider truths. To Menil again: 'c'est ici que j'ai véritablement fait connoissance avec moi. Jusque-là je ne savois pas trop qui j'étois. Je me prenois tantôt pour une personne, tantôt pour une autre. Je sais présentement à quoi m'en tenir non-seulement sur cela, mais sur beaucoup d'autres choses' (*Œuvres*, 35). In the memoirs, she attributes her tranquillity to the absence both of others' desires, and of one's own desires raised by envy:

Il est vrai qu'en prison l'on ne fait pas sa volonté; mais aussi l'on n'y fait point celle d'autrui: c'est au moins la moitié de gagné. L'éloignement de toutes sortes d'objets y

écarte les désirs, ou l'impossibilité d'en satisfaire aucun les étouffe dès leur naissance.

Il n'en est pas de même dans la servitude: tout s'y offre et se refuse en même temps à nos souhaits. (*Mémoires*, 170)

Without the alienating presence of others, the self, and its needs and desires, can be tested (an important caveat, here, is that Delaunay did rely on the presence of her own servant, Mlle Rondel, to whom I shall return at the very end of the essay). Another letter to Menil (*Œuvres*, 15) describes the rhythm of her days, which she was at last able to set for herself. Prayer, study, tea with the *lieutenant du roi* Maisonrouge, a walk. Then her *toilette*, lunch, piquet with Rondel, needlework and reading. The memoirs present the Bastille as a sealed space in which to test the real value of different activities. She describes an 'expérience' or experiment, in which she discovered that cards and needlework, noblewomen's pastimes which she had previously found to be insipid, have as their 'véritable fonction' the relaxation of the mind after the (ungendered) activity of serious study (*Mémoires*, 171).

That the Bastille should represent a kind of laboratory space, with privileged access to truth, is particularly startling given that negative depictions of it generally highlight the falsehood of jailors and the epistemic powerlessness of prisoners. Imprisoned by *lettre de cachet* and therefore outside of judicial process, prisoners may not have known what motivated their arrest, or whether and when they might undergo a trial or be released. Indeed, Cesare Beccaria, in the section of his *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764) treating the 'Promptness of Punishment' (39-41) succinctly identified uncertainty as a form of torture, and arbitrary detention as a punishment unjustly meted out before sentencing. In Renneville's relation of his own detention, we see how rumination arises from the way in which the prisoner's thoughts, fixed ever on the world outside, cannot be tested against evidence (Renneville, 37). The guards' only law, meanwhile, is to 'ne jamais dire la vérité' (53); Delaunay, too, calls it a place in which 'On ne s'explique point' (*Mémoires*, 163), even if the

monde is, for her, the primary location of false speech. There are some resonances between the depiction of truth, falsehood and the acquisition of knowledge in Staal-Delaunay's and Renneville's texts. Renneville wrote that, if nothing relating to the outside could be tested, faith and fortitude could: he read the gospels over and over again to find, thanks to their inner light in a place characterised by impenetrable obscurity, new truths each time (59). This parallels truths that Delaunay accessed, in a more secular vein, through self-examination. Delaunay further used the Bastille as a comparative space for the testing of convention. When Menil was caught with in her cell and punished by being sent to a *cachot*, she tried to claim authority over M. Le Blanc by arguing that any misdeed 'n'était telle que par rapport au lieu'; he, lacking experience, 'ne connoissait de règles que celles de la geôle' (192). Conversely, of the rapid progress of her affair with Menil, she justifies their conduct to the reader with respect to 'Le pays que nous habitons': 'non seulement on y parle, mais on y pense tout autrement qu'on ne ferait ailleurs' (179). Writing much later to her friend d'Héricourt about the memoirs, Staal-Delaunay expressed some anxiety about the shocking speed at which the affair progressed; this is given as a reason to marshal original evidence to her argument, by appending some of the letters, 'lesquelles font filer la connoissance' (*Œuvres*, 396).

As Menil would abandon her after his release the letters could not, in the end, attest to a true love; they attest instead to the blamelessness of her conduct and, further, to her enduring preference for the Bastille over the *monde*. They are offered as 'le tissu de cette aventure: elles sont les actes originaux qui en atteste la vérité' (188). And indeed, a quick examination of their progression actually offers, in *raccourci*, the very trajectory from *mondain* ventriloquism to autobiographical writing to which the memoirs attest. The correspondence was initially overseen by Maisonrouge. The early letters offer an example of the *détournement* familiar from her relations with the duchesse du Maine, though rather less fraught: they are explicitly addressed to Menil, but Maisonrouge is entreated, in the third

person, as their shared 'patron' (*Œuvres*, 4, 26). Delaunay deploys a variety of devices in these productions, including citation (extended references to Molière's *L'École des femmes*, 11-12) and parody (a rewriting of Phèdre's famous *tirade* to Hippolyte in Racine's play, 14). But the tone becomes gradually more intimate, and a fully secret correspondence begins. The secret letters include the passages on tyranny cited above; others on her desire for material and emotional independence (36); and on the love of serious study which she developed in the Bastille (40). Her time there facilitated – not only through seclusion but also through disclosure to a reader – the first formulation of the life narrative which would be communicated in her memoirs.

We now arrive at the failures which would motivate the writing of the memoirs and the creation of a new kind of reader: failures to find her newly recognised self understood by those who have the power to change Delaunay's life. Early in the affair Menil, referring to a fantasy in which he found himself locked up forever in the Bastille with Delaunay (175), proposed by casting a marriage between the two as a form of 'cette parfaite félicité' (181). This might be seen as a rather clumsy proposal, comparing marriage to life-imprisonment, making us think of the old misogynistic joke – "you get less for murder". But in the context of Delaunay's reversed understanding of the *monde* and the prison, the proposal seemed to constitute a genuine offer to remain, as far as possible, within the Bastille, even after leaving. The language of truth and appearance is ever-present: the chaos of her feelings 'enfin se débrouilla: je démélai que j'étais vivement touchée des sentiments qu'on venait de me montrer; je vis un libérateur qui venait briser les chaînes de ma servitude' (182). Her sentiments became clear, but her vision of the future and her understanding of Menil as a liberator would prove false. After Menil was released, she lost her solitude, forced to socialise with other prisoners (which she experienced as 'nouvelles chaînes', *Œuvres* 202), and her peace, trying to interpret Menil's ever more sporadic letters.

As with her early infatuations, her passions had caused her to mis-perceive the object of her desire. In writing the memoirs, Staal-Delaunay replaces this distortion of her own perception into a command of that of the reader. For instance, when recounting the arrival of the duc de Richelieu, also involved in conspiracy against the Regent, at the Bastille, Staal-Delaunay refuses to leave the limits of her viewpoint at the time of narration: 'Le lecteur (si jamais lecteur y a de ce manuscrit) aimerait mieux savoir pourquoi le duc de Richelieu fut mis à la Bastille, et le détail de son affaire, que les minuties qui me regardent; mais je n'en fus pas assez instruite pour en rendre compte' (184). Her command of the reader's experience is displayed in the style of the Bastille section, too – in place of the uncertainties and the thicket of letters found in the "Duchesses" section of the text, the author guides us steadily towards the end of the affair with marked foreshadowing. Of Menil, she writes that, 'il ne voulait pas *encore* me perdre', 197; 'je ne savais pas *alors* qu[e le bonheur] n'existe point dans le monde', 182, both my emphasis). When he left her for someone else, she lost the understanding and reflection she had thought she had found in love. She rewrites the letters into an autobiography because the affair fails; the projected happiness was lost, and the story of the unhappiness emerges in its place, seeking a reader who *will* understand, through fully inhabiting her perspective.

Although her life after release from the Bastille is not uneventful, her presentation of this period is only half the length of the Bastille section. In it, any further sense of personal development falters, and the text ends rather abruptly, with portraits of her friend Mme de Bussy and of the duc du Maine. What is made very clear is that, back in the Duchess's service, surrounded by speech unmoored from truth, she was back in prison. Delaunay was no longer a *femme de chambre*, but was still required to read to the Duchess all through the night: 'ces exercices pénibles me firent bientôt regretter le repos de ma prison' (221). Despite the very different circumstances which governed her relationships with Menil and the

Duchess, both are ultimately depicted as failing Delaunay in the same way: with no profound knowledge of themselves, they were unable to perceive and understand her. She makes this clear by relating the way in which each tried to keep Delaunay attached to them through unthinking, reactive desire. Delaunay wrote to Menil, when she suspected his infidelity, to tell him that she would look to marry elsewhere. His response was unreadable because in a sense over-readable, 'semblable à ces oracles mystérieux, dont les divers sens ne manquent pas de se prêter à ce que l'on désire' (229). He seemed to be trying to keep the affair alive even while scheming to marry someone else; she acidly comments that, 'il n'est rien de si indifférent qu'on ne tâche de ressaisir au moment qu'il nous échappe.' Of the Duchess, Staal-Delaunay had already noted a 'répugnance générale de se défaire de ce qu'elle a' in their earlier quarrel (146); in this later period, the Duchess was full of 'pièges' to prevent Delaunay from leaving her (230). In the very negative portrait of the Duchess, not published with the memoirs, this tendency is presented as almost an automatism: 'Elle dit ingénument qu'elle a le malheur de ne pouvoir se passer des personnes dont elle ne se soucie point ... On la voit apprendre avec indifférence la mort de ceux qui lui faisaient verser des larmes, lorsqu'ils se trouvaient un quart-d'heure trop tard à une partie de jeu' (La Harpe, 54).

Henceforth, Delaunay would seek escape through routes that would not rely on her passions, with their tendency to distort perception. But, in a repetition of her first period in the *monde*, all potential escapes proved further prisons. She tried the convent where she grew up but, constantly sought and importuned, realised that it was just another court, where the same demands were made of one's time and affection as in the *monde* (240). Various possible marriages were explored, but judged potential traps. Adrien Dacier, widower of the famous translator, made a serious offer but she, knowing that she could not respond to his passion, '[s]e plaisais à éluder' (229). A dear friend proposed too, but his finances turned out to be an 'espèce de labyrinthe, où l'on ne voyait point d'issue' (241). She would eventually marry the

Baron de Staal, an overlooked Swiss officer who hoping to advance under the Duke's protection. Too late, she learned of serious limitations to the independence she would gain from the marriage, and by the time she went to the altar she considered herself a 'victime, liée et ornée' (248), having only tightened the chain between her and the Duchess (249).

Sensitive readings by Hersant (557) and Markovskaia (244) have suggested that the text which emerges from Staal-Delaunay's life was an attempt to recreate a space in which the author could seclude herself from the *monde*. Like Rousseau's *Confessions*, the text is certainly at times a dwelling for the author, where she can relive past happiness. But, like Rousseau's it is also a justification, an attempt to remedy misperception: a call for understanding where Menil and the Duchess fell so painfully short, addressed to a reader capable of *not* disappointing. In closing, I would like to offer two specific comparisons to Rousseau, which we are now in a position to make: the first concerns social class, and the question of who can write an autobiography; the second concerns the way in which autobiographical writing is "true". Rousseau, in the text known as the *Préambule de Neuchâtel*, claimed that, as he had traversed different social classes, his point of view was not subject to the prejudices of rank (788). Staal-Delaunay traced the unhappiness which motivated the memoirs, as well as her ability to read the *monde*, to the combination of an elite education with an absence of money or nobility. Although the audacity of both authors should not be understated, each was internal enough to the elite to be read in the first place: to engage a readership who could then have their expectations overturned by the subject matter. Voltaire spoke disparagingly of Staal-Delaunay's preoccupation with 'les événements de la femme de chambre'. But, when he further jested that he eagerly awaited the publication of Mlle Rondel's memoirs, the *femme de chambre* of the *femme de chambre* is marked out as a woman for whom writerly authority seems to have been really impossible.

A point of divergence between the authors lies in the kind of claims they make to

truth. Rousseau set himself against earlier life writing by claiming that he would hide nothing, rather than presenting only his most attractive *profil*, as Montaigne had done (787): thus do we encounter both moral and sexual abjection in the text. Of her sexual adventures, Staal-Delaunay is said to have quipped that 'je ne me représenterai qu'en buste', wittily avowing a certain measure of falsehood or *détournement* (Seth's introduction, 63). In distinction to Rousseau's famed fantasy of perfect transparency, Staal-Delaunay's depiction of her life makes clear that, when negotiating the disjunction between writing and the world, a total absence of *détour* is not feasible. We apprehend the world through many scripts. In order for her writing to communicate the truth of her experience to the reader, against both *mondain* falseness and other narrative models, she had to deploy a *détournement* resembling, but distinct from, that which she accused others of unthinkingly practising. Thus are the salacious detail of scandalous memoirs, the neat ending of the fairy tale, and the secrets of political memoirs, at once suggested and suppressed. Does she also lie? What are we to make of the very different depictions of the Duchess's character? Is the crueller portrait true, and the gentler portrait of the memoirs false? To seek truths about other people in the memoirs is, I think, the wrong track. What Staal-Delaunay endeavoured to show to the reader was, rather, the coherence of her self over time. That 'L'amour de la liberté est sa passion dominante, passion très malheureuse en elle, qui a passé la plus grande partie de sa vie dans la servitude', as she wrote in a self-portrait (*Mémoires*, 239), and as she repeatedly told Menil in her letters. Her lifelong examination of truth and falsity in speech and writing, across childhood reading, *mondain* heteroglossia, through clausturation and back out, is what allowed her to authoritatively craft the truth of her unhappiness, in her autobiography.

Notes

n1: As Isabelle Rouet has observed, Staal-Delaunay shows no solidarity with other women; the text can only be considered feminist insofar as she critiques the kind of subjecthood

produced by the activities and roles allotted to women in contemporary society (65).

n2: She used a range of different names and orthographies; I use 'Staal-Delaunay' to refer to the author of the memoirs, and 'Delaunay' to refer to the protagonist.

n3: This disjunction is discussed at length by Rouet, and by de Parscau in a section treating Staal-Delaunay as an *anti-héroïne* (290-295).

n4: My use of the terms heteroglossia and ventriloquism take inspiration from a reading by Christine Roulston of Austen's *Emma* as a navigator of different discourses.

n5: For further examples of how authority emerges from heteroglossic text, see Valerij Tjupa's *living handbook of narratology* entry on heteroglossia, paragraphs 7-8.

n6: Renneville does this by intercalating the stories of other prisoners and departing from 'la juste Chronologie de la Bastille' to place similar themes together (374); Latude notably in a scene in which, scratching through the walls of his prison, he discovered a host of other prisoners there, like him, for offending the tyrannical Mme de Pompadour (vol. 1, 182-184).

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