and exercise the political influence of Mme de Stael. This is indeed a strange form of rehabilitation.

Steven Vincentz’s book suggests a more fruitful approach to Mme de Stael. He shows that both Constant and she thought deeply about the emotions and their effects on politics. They believed that the right kind of emotions was needed to sustain a liberal political regime. In particular, they believed that increased “enthusiasm” could combat the endemic selfishness and narrowness of French political culture. Is it not possible, then, that Mme de Stael’s very effusiveness—her willingness to express strong emotions—was, in fact, a way for her to live her liberal principles? If so, then Mme de Stael’s emotional aides would not be just an embarrassing aberration or sign of psychological distinction, but an inexcusable part of her political philosophy. In fact, the importance accorded by Mme de Stael to “rational” constitutionalism on the one hand, and expressive individualism (Vincentz, p. 162) on the other, may very well be one of the most distinctive and original contributions she and Benjamin Constant made to modern liberalism.

Even more disappointing is how often Winocick employs the words of her critics to describe Mme de Stael. Many insulting comments are reproduced with little or no commentary provided by the author, leaving one to speculate why they are there. For example, Winocick faithfully repeats, again and again, that Mme de Stael was domineering toward her lovers. Not surprisingly, then, that they all left her. She was, according to Winocick, “trop dominatrice pour ne pas susciter à la longue chez ses amants un désir d’émancipation” (p. 158). With alike condemnation bordering on misogyny, Winocick amplifies a comment made by Constant: “Sire domine par une femme qui n’est on ne pas dire au 16, c’est un comble que Benjamin exprime en termes plus dignes” (p. 188). Winocick is also relentless when it comes to her critics’ commentary on how ugly she was. Mme de Stael was “une femme au physiognomie peu flatteuse,” (p. 59), “privee de beaute physique” (p. 83); generally unattractive (p. 39); “laide” (p. 178); “l’âge de vinque et gauche de corps” (p. 263); “laide” again (p. 477). She apparently had a “corps abîmé” (p. 406), a disappointing physical appearance (p. 902), and was a “grosse femme lourde” (p. 448). In his concluding chapter, entitled “Qui étais-vous, Madame de Stael,” Winocick repeats, this time on his own authority, that “Germinal de Stael n’était pas bel” (p. 500). He also speculates, without any convincing proof, that Madame de Stael’s supposed ugliness caused her considerable emotional distress.

As the coup de grâce, Winocick appears unappreciative of many of de Stael’s writings, especially her novels. These are now “obsolet” (p. 314). Once again, we read that she had a tendency to exaggerate. Delphine is too heavy and clearly not a masterpiece. Corinne is too chatty. De l’E domicile reads too much like a travel guide to appeal to the modern reader. Her Considération sur la Révolution has been superseded by countless other such works. It is therefore not surprising that no one reads Mme de Stael anymore. If Winocick’s goal really was to rehabilitate her reputation, one has to ask oneself with friends like this, who needs enemies?