Freedom and the Sword: Literary Nationalism and Resistance in Napoleonic Italy

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Censorship and Stolberg's Epistolary Method

Romantic feminist Louise Stolberg adopted the epistolary genre as a method of reporting on the Italian Revolution and the specter of tyranny. It also allowed for imagined spheres where art and literature converged with social and political constructs in war zones. Here the ideal Enlightenment vision of society did battle with the eventuality of martial defeat. From the perspective of the Enlightenment, these could only be grasped in the philosophical nature of democracy, and its expression in salon culture. The subversive influence of women had a pervasive effect on the authors and artists they patronized, creating a homogenous cultural paradigm that warranted victory or criminal conceit. The classical world encoded in the revival of literary texts dating back to Homer and Virgil, and the Renaissance works of Dante and Petrarch became the guiding touchstones for international freedom currents in a culture based on the tension between Enlightenment ideals and corrupt imperial political regimes. In retracing the steps of Homer or Virgil, one discovered a map of freedom in ancient monuments of the past which transcend time and place in the realm of international culture. While celebrating the past, these salon members actively worked for the future in covert strategies that supported Italy's freedom and anticipated the Risorgimento, literally the resurrection of Italian nationalism during the Revolutions of 1848 which lead to the unification of Italy in 1870. Their cultural texts and monuments can be viewed as a coherent propaganda program designed to rally support for their cause: ending Napoleonic hegemony in Europe. As Italians entered the modern era, the public sphere was created. Art, theatre and literature were domains for the exchange of ideas but also the education of the public. By promoting cultural texts that articulated the foundations of a new nationalism, Italians embraced their cultural heritage as the most distinguishing features of a new solidarity. Patrons and their artists and authors consciously chose those key nationalist features that would unite Italians on common ground in forming an imagined community. Unlike their European counterparts who appealed to a growing sense of individualism, Italian authors sought specifically to create a lightning rod patriotic stimulus through their writings. They are prefaced on the assumptions of an imagined community, and one which has mythical yet finite boundaries.[1]

Civil War in Italy and the Landscape of Nationalism

Writing on December 21, 1805, following the victories of Napoleon in Venice and the Tyrol, Louise Stolberg, Countess d'Albany, and former wife of Charles Stuart, leader of a Jacobite Rebellion and the last Stuart Pretender to the British throne, confided to the archiprêtre Ansano Luti, professor of theology and canonical rights, that she found that the *captaine modern* [Napoleon] resembled Caesar, but without the virtues.[2] The ironic comparison could be humorous, but in light of the contemporary political climate, would more likely lead to censorship and arrest. By this time, such comparisons with Caesar had become associated with revolutionary connotations. When Stolberg's lover, Vittorio Alfieri, wrote his play about the assassination of Caesar by "The Second Brutus" in 1789, he dedicated it to the revolutionaries whose activities he and Stolberg observed from the windows of their Paris apartment. Before her execution, Jean Paul Marat's assassin, Charlotte Corday proclaimed the need to execute all Caesars to promote the will of the people. De Staël would later make such explicit comparisons in her survey *De l'Allemagne* in comparing Napoleon to Caesar and the barbarian Attila the Hun which resulted in the book's censorship. Subjected to censorship, the epistolary genre, was used by women as a sphere of action in the political arena, who found the courage to express their views.

From the vantage of Florence, the capital of Tuscany, Stolberg witnessed each phase of the occupation. She discussed each phase of the Italian military campaigns in her correspondence revealing that she was not only well versed in the salon culture of her day, but was also a keen observer of the political offensive and counter offensive. In the year prior to the death of Alfieri, she developed a close relationship with her confidant Luti. Writing in December 1802, Stolberg comments on the Hapsburg Grand Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinand III's renunciation of the throne in 1801 with the creation of the Kingdom of Etruria by Napoleon. The political machinations of France, Russia and Austria created the situation in which he was forced to withdraw from Italy. From any perspective, in her mind, "C'est un grand malheur pour la Toscane que d'avoir un souverain dans cet état"[3] In December 1802, he was compensated with the Dukedom and electorate of Salzburg and made a Prince-elector to the Holy Roman Empire, while Napoleon's sister, Elise, became Grand Duchess of Etruria and ruled from her seat at the former Medici palace, the Palazzo Pitti in Florence. Napoleon's sister Caroline became the Queen of Naples, and his sister Pauline married the Borghese Prince Camillo. Civil war was the result of Napoleon's invasions of Italy. The working classes revolted against army conscriptions imposed by the extended conflicts. The targets were initially Jacobins and subsequently the Napoleonic states. These conflicts sowed the seeds of revolt that would ultimately lead to the unification of Italy during the Risorgimento.[4] Stolberg and members of her salon gave expression to the emerging nationalist agenda by giving aesthetic form to political realities.

Contemporary scholar, Sarah Corse, identifies three stages of nationalist literature: context, canon and the role of the nation. She suggests that a national literature emerges when it reflects the common values and experiences of a people within a national

context. As a result of critical evaluation, a canon of the best examples of literature emerges. Finally, taking into consideration the explicit function of the nation as the lightening rod of common feelings of patriotism creates a distinct genre of literature with nationalist features.[5] The literature and art fostered by the Stolberg circle created a nationalist literature that responded to an evolving nationalist agenda. By relying on an accepted canon of Italian literature, authors like Alfieri and Ugo Foscolo added to a body of literature without alienating splinter political groups. Consequently, they encouraged the cogent features of nationalism that ultimately led to unification. As such, the Stolberg circle in Florence contributed to what Larry Isaac defines as POC (Production of Culture), or a body of work which intentionally reflects the political and social features of a particular movement thereby creating a distinct genre classification.[6] While labor movements at mid-centuries created bodies of work that extolled or vilified the laboring classes, the Stolberg circle returned to what we might call an accumulated repository of nationalist literary references. The nation thus becomes an abstract and virtuous identity to whom people would swear their allegiance without disputing political points. The metaphor of nationalism in Italian literature sought one common point of reference: the acknowledgement of the greatness of Italian culture. At the same time, through literary reference and metaphor, Alfieri's dramas effectively addressed the problems of civil war, and the need to resolve conflicts in the best interest of the people as a whole.

Stolberg's political analysis within the epistolary genre was always accompanied by such literary and aesthetic references which encoded the political events with nationalist literary metaphors. Indeed, the Coppet group with which she was associated seems to have drawn up a cultural paradigm or template for nationalist independence which created an imagined community of future Italian patriots. As cultural anthropologists, they were at the same time political trespassers whose revolutionary activities constituted treason. Unlike the realist dramas of the latter nineteenth century, Stolberg's circle projected the contemporary political drama of transfers of power onto the plots of biblical and classical tragedies. She patronized those authors who drew upon an accepted literary canon which emphasized the overthrow of tyrants by the people. Alfieri's greatest tragedies were written in the years surrounding the American and French revolutions, but their nationalist resonance clearly applied to Italy's future in the wake of such events. The concept of kingship and its frailty could apply to each individual Italian state which sought to retain control of its territory and citizenry.

Alfieri first met Stolberg in 1776 at her salon in Florence. She was 24 and in 1772 married to the Last Pretender to the British throne, Charles Stuart. Charles himself was a revolutionary character whom Alfieri considered a tyrant. In 1745, with the promise of support from the French king Louis XV, Stuart invaded England with the intent of retaking the throne for the Stuart line and his Jacobite followers. He succeeded in capturing Holyrood, the ancient palace of Scottish kings, but was subsequently defeated when his 12,000 French soldiers did not arrive. Stuart escaped to France, while members of his army were executed, and Scots were banned from wearing kilts and playing

bagpipes by the English king George II. Following the death of Charles in Rome in 1788, Stolberg and Alfieri moved to Paris where they opened a literary salon and witnessed the French Revolution. The relationship that arose between Stolberg and Alfieri can be viewed as a revolutionary statement on his part. By wooing Stolberg away from Stuart, Alfieri succeeded in displacing a deposed would-be king, a theme repeated so frequently in his tragedies. After meeting Stolberg, his biographer writes that he decided not to leave Florence in order to be near her, and at the same time to expatriate himself from the city. As a member of the Piedmontese nobility and vassal of the King of Sardinia, Victor Amadeus III, Alfieri could not leave the kingdom without his permission, and all Alfieri's writings, regardless of the place of publication, had to be approved by the kingdom's censors. Violators were subjected to severe penalties. In an effort to free himself, Alfieri divested himself of his property and title, and turned it over to his sister Julia, Countess of Cumiana.[7] The code of the prince or tyrant who fails to correctly interpret and implement the will of his subjects is a theme repeated throughout Alfieri's writings. The critical acceptance of his work was based on centuries of literary production and interpretation of an established biblical and classical literary canon. The application of these coded terms, king, vassal, tyrant, liberty, was dependent upon the context of its application. Thus, in referencing the literary text together with the political news in the context of correspondence was tantamount to treason because it identified the subversive followers of revolution. Alfieri, however, did not wait for random metaphorical associations, he dedicated his tragedies to specific political leaders. Thus, from the overt dedications of his "First Brutus" to George Washington on December 31, 1788, and his "Second Brutus" from Paris, 1789 to the Future People of Italy, each of Alfieri's literary works was a revolutionary statement applied to a contemporary political context.

With the aid of Alfieri, the classical canon was restored to its original context: Italy. The tyrannical chimeras of Caesar and Medici were superimposed on the political theatre of modern Italy. Trading their moral code and patriotic tendencies for the furtive criminal shadows of treason, the Stolberg circle shaped the literary features of Italian nationalist propaganda in its early stage. With the dedication of each new literary work, Alfieri advocated treason and the rebellion against tyranny. His writings attest to the effectiveness of Enlightenment period philosophy where authors such as Jean Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire claimed to have uncovered existing natural laws of society in the *Social Contract* and *Idées républicains*. The natural moral laws of society and government were revealed through Alfieri's tragedies and political tracts. Because they were encoded in the context of classical history and Enlightenment philosophy, they raised no immediate suspicions. It was only in the mode of correspondence that the context was revealed. Stolberg bore the risk. Her observations were not only limited to the observation of transfers of state under the Napoleonic empire, she also noted that as the sovereign of Venice, Ferdinand possessed the financial backing to wage wars. The bad government would not have the power to become a republic again. Ferdinand's Austrian alliance precipitated the invasion of Tuscany by Napoleon which resulted in the Treaty of Luneville in 1801. In 1797, he concluded a treaty with Napoleon which

resulted in heavy war levies paid to France, and the confiscation of some of Florence's most valuable artworks which were removed to the new *Musée Napoleon* in Paris. Stolberg's comparison of the political reality to the character, King Saul in the Bible, or Shakespeare's King Lear,, the Celtic king who divides his estate among his three daughters after going mad, describes the plight of modern Italians who failed to rally to the cause of nationalism to prevent the division of the nation among the competing imperialistic forces of France and Austria. However, King Saul was closer to her heart. One of Alfieri's tragedies was about King Saul, and like many of his tragedies, is laced with revolutionary connotations, and specifically civil war. Alfieri's tragedy, *Saul,* was an apt analogy to the occupation of Italy. Civil war was the outcome of Napoleon's strategy as he occupied states, changed governments and replaced rulers. The tragedy is concerned with a battle between the Israelites and Philistines. However, the real conflict takes place between David and Saul, and Saul and his conscience. The prophet Samuel has died after anointing David the new king of the Israelites. Though David is married to King Saul's daughter, Michal, this enrages the old king who seeks to eliminate his rival. Without David's support as a warrior in battle, the Israelites are doomed to lose and perish. Saul has a dream in which the hand of God smites him with a thunderbolt. This event foreshadows the death of Saul and defeat of the Israelites under his leadership. Once he is surrounded by his enemies, Saul commits suicide by falling on his sword.[8]

The plot is concerned with the fitness of the king to rule. As in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Saul like Oedipus, demonstrates his inability to rule by instigating a paranoid purge of his rival. The sword is a motif which recurs throughout Alfieri's drama and signifies the rightful ruler through his valorous deeds. In 1803, Stolberg commissioned Fabre to create a painting based on the drama. Here we see Saul's vision of God wielding a thunderbolt like a sword over Saul's head. This foreshadowing of the old the king's death is complemented by a group of dead soldiers on the right hand side of the composition (Fig. 1).[9] The moral code is implied by the biblical context, while contemporary political context is given in the letter. When called upon, the people would assuredly follow the directions of plot structures which promoted common ethical values and the eradication of political oppression. If one did not support the moral right, one would suffer the moral consequences. The power of nationalist literature in this context appealed to an emerging public sphere who would become the audience of authors and politicians. It was consciously cultivated by Stolberg's literary salon circle whose members intended to channel revolutionary impulses into nationalist ones.

Through the epistolary genre, Stolberg emerges as one of the most powerful foreign patrons in Italy. Her influence stretched to the epicenter of the Italian revolutionary movement. The movement was directly inspired by the French revolutionary model, and sought to shape Italian nationalist identity in the midst of foreign invasion and conquest. In 1790, Stolberg's salon in Paris included the leading salon figures and revolutionaries such as Joseph and André Chénier, Mirabeau and Josephine de Beauharnais. Chénier wrote to Alfieri: "C'est une belle et bonne chose que cette liberté, mais il est bien dur de la voir prendre possession d'un pays."[10] From

the vantage of Paris in 1790, clearly half the battle was won through literary and visual propaganda. The politicization of literary arts became the driving force behind Stolberg's salon and patronage which allied her with the greatest Italian patriots of her time. From her correspondence, one can determine the desired impact of her activities. She discovers that the political landscape of modern Europe was continually shifting, and that through her personal connections, she is able to guide the ship of state to its desired destination: a model of national unity and political democracy. Her close relationship with Alfieri was complemented by that with the Neoclassical painter and pupil of Jacques Louis David, Francois Xavier Fabre. Fabre painted the portraits of Alfieri and Stolberg (fig.s 3 & 4), along with other leading intellectuals and politicians in Italy such as Foscolo and Lucien Bonaparte. In her letter she mentions that Fabre had just received a commission for three paintings for the new church in Arezzo. In the same year, Fabre completed the painting entitled, *The Vision of Saul* (fig. 1). Stolberg relied upon such metaphoric parallels to encourage the unification movement in Italy from a grassroots movement of nationalist based revolutionaries who hinged their hopes on the fulfillment of a nationalist destiny to the authors and artists who gave voice and form to their political stirrings. She mentions that he received a commission for three history paintings from the church. The Cathedral of Arezzo itself was a repository of great renaissance art including work by Donatello, Giotto, Andrea della Robbia and Piero della Francesca. To the Gothic structure was added the Neoclassical chapel of the Madonna del Confort in 1796. Combing Neoclassical art with Italy's vast repository of religious art is a distinguishing characteristic of the Italy's nationalist movement which Germaine de Staël would later give expression to in her novel *Corinne* (1807). The need to communicate with poor illiterate peasants was achieved through the traditional medium of the Church.

The Literary Salon and Revolution

At Coppet, Switzerland de Staël created a networking of intellectuals who promulgated literary texts encoded with nationalist agendas. Many of these individuals had contact with Italy in a significant way creating a networking of cross cultural signatures. De Staël herself, author of *Corinne* (1807) set in Napoleonic Italy, Charles Bonstetten, *Voyages sur la Scene des six derniers Livres de l'Énéide* and JCL Sismondi, *Histoire de la renaissance de la liberté en Italie* visited and maintained close contact with Louise Stolberg's Florence salon throughout the Napoleonic wars. Stolberg's Florence salon can be regarded as one of the salon satellites of de Staël's Coppet salon; its fiercely anti-Napoleonic coterie created a visual text of Italy as the embodiment of cultural freedom and the classical ideal. Inspired by the fight for freedom again Napoleonic domination, Italy's greatest authors of the period, Alfieri and Foscolo, established important connections with Stolberg's Florentine salon during the most important periods of their careers which coincided with the Napoleonic campaigns in Italy. They promoted the classical, the medieval and Renaissance histories of Italy through their literary endeavors. Their literary output was complemented by the great contemporary Neoclassical artists patronized by Stolberg, Fabre and Antonio Canova.[11]

Stolberg was politically active, like de Staël. In Paris she lived at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in the Faubourg Saint-Germain at the time of the Revolution of 1789, and frequented de Staël's salon that included Andre Chénier, whom she and Alfieri met in 1787, and Stephanie Genlis. Chénier was executed by guillotine four years later, while Stolberg and Alfieri escaped to England in 1791. When the French Republican army arrived in Florence in 1799, Alfieri and Stolberg were forced to flee temporarily, as they had been forced to flee Rome, when the French occupied the city in 1793. Napoleon's French Republican army entered the city of Florence, and by 1807, Elise Napoleon reigned as the new Kingdom of Etruria as Grand Duchess. Earlier in 1793, Fabre accepted a diplomatic commission and painted the portrait of the sister of King of Tuscany, Marie-Theresa of Austria. In 1802 Napoleon offered to restore the library confiscated from Stolberg and Alfieri during the Reign of Terror. While Napoleon restored her pension from Charles Stuart in exchange for Alfieri's library, he forced her to reside in Paris from 1809-10 where she was interrogated about her politically subversive salon, and a possible Stuart heir. Her relationship with Napoleon became further antagonized by his refusal to grant restore her annuity at this time.[12]

Fabre had also fled Rome when the French arrived, and rather than return to Paris, he moved to Florence where he was patronized by émigrés. Stolberg and Alfieri lived in Florence from 1793-1803 at their palazzo overlooking the Arno River, *Gianfigliazzi,* where Fabre became their intimate friend and they entertained the leading intellectuals of the day at Louise's salon. Following Alfieri's death in 1803, Fabre became romantically involved with Stolberg, and upon her death, she bequeathed him her art collection which formed the original collections of the *Musée Fabre* in Montpellier, France founded by Fabre. Fabre's Neoclassical paintings reflected the style of David's pupils in their Republican values and Classical subjects. They served as a counterpart to the liberal democratic political values of Alfieri himself who wrote important Neoclassical plays, but also expressed in his political views on literature and liberty in his writings *The Prince and Letters* (1778) and *Of Tyranny* (1800). Both works articulate the views on liberty de Staël and her circle during a period of revolution, conquest and rebellion.

The Prince and Letters (1778) is written from the historical perspective of Machiavelli's *The Prince*, with the recent history of modern absolute monarchy and censorship in mind. Alfieri experienced difficulties with censorship based on the content of his plays. His play *The Pazzi Conspiracy* that recreates the assassination of Guiliano de Medici during the Italian Renaissance as a Shakespearean *Romeo and Juliet* love story was prohibited from production without the permission of the Pazzi family. Written prior to the French Revolution, Alfieri describes the prince as a tyrant who lacks an appreciation of the liberal arts, and seeks to dominate the greatest number of people. In order to wield his control over the population, Alfieri concludes that the prince prefers "ignorance and blindness" in his subjects. Alfieri concludes that the purpose of literature is to instill political and moral virtues in citizens. Since the principality will not protect letters, in Alfieri's view, letters become perfected when they demonstrate liberty under a corrupt regime.[13] *Of Tyranny* (1800) completes Alfieri's definition of the unjust absolute

ruler, but more importantly, both works articulate the context in which his Neoclassical plays were performed. Tyranny, defined by Alfieri, is a criminal activity in which the ruler fails to uphold the laws of the state. However, he holds Rousseau's position, that the only valid laws are those that have been made by elected representatives as "social contracts" and reflect the "will of the majority."[14] Thus, any ruler acting without a legislature and a constitution was corrupt and criminal, in his view. This view of tyranny immediately placed Alfieri in opposition to Napoleon. Alfieri's tragedies reflect his political sentiments in their use of heroic archetypes that uphold liberty against tyranny. When Alfieri's Brutus commands the assassination of Caesar, he does so as a representative of liberty executing a tyrant who refuses to restore Rome's Republican freedoms.[15]

Italy as a Code of Freedom: Alfieri's Two Brutuses

Alfieri decided to write his two Brutuses after receiving a letter in 1785 from Paris from the Countess of Albany, Louise Stolberg, telling him how much she enjoyed the performance of Voltaire's *Brutus*. Alfieri joined her shortly thereafter in Paris and wrote his versions of *Bruto Primo* and *Bruto Secondo*. Thus, the dramas coincided with the key events in the French Revolution. The dedications of his "First Brutus" to George Washington on December 31, 1788, and his "Second Brutus" from Paris, 1789 to the Future People of Italy, indicate the correlation he perceived between theatre and revolution. The heady days of the revolution were witnessed by Alfieri and Stolberg from their Paris apartment where they entertained the leading revolutionary intellectuals at their salon. The act of writing, publishing and performing the classical literary dramas was itself an act of revolution. The people would naturally refer to the example of history and great art for their political role models. Democracy was the implicit outcome of such literary formulas. The two Brutuses invoke the power of the people by demonstrating the sacrifice of blood relations for collective power. As such, they are revolutionary documents which invalidate class structures and replace them with Rousseau's collective will.

The plot of Alfieri's *The First Brutus* differs from Voltaire's and Catherine Bernard's (1647) versions in that the act of treason is limited to the signatures of Brutus's sons Titus and Tiberius on a petition to reinstate the Etruscan king. The sons are condemned to death by their father, and their only defense is that they hoped to appease the king's wrath if he attempted to retaliate against Brutus following the restoration of monarchy. The tragedy opens with Brutus's reference Lucretia's suicide following her rape by the king's son, Sextus, which sets the stage for the Roman's revenge against the Tarquins. Brutus himself withdraws the dagger from Lucretia's her still "palpitating heart." By overthrowing the Tarquin dynasty, the Romans establish the first Roman Republic in 509 BCE. What is remarkable about Alfieri's tragedies is that they are tailored for a revolutionary audience. The key characters proclaim their lines for contemporary audiences who would respond to key coded archetypes. The complexity of the plots has thus been simplified for modern audiences. They are tailored for an audience who would agree to support a revolutionary agenda. This would entail a violent and bloody

overthrow of the existing social structure. Key terms are repeated throughout which support the essential revolutionary acts of the lead characters. Blood, tyrant, sword, dagger, citizen are repeated in sequence throughout each drama. Alfieri, also introduces the people as separate character or chorus which reinforces the contemporary political application to revolutionary Paris and the future revolution in Italy. Act I Scene I opens with a dialogue between Brutus and Lucretia's widower Collatinus, later joined by the People. The terms flow in a sequence as follows: sword (ferro/pugnal_), blood (sangue_), sword, sacred, sorrow, revenge (vendetta), universal Rome, sword, sword, revenge, blood, Roman blood, universal vengeance, blood, liberty, revenged, dagger, Rome, citizens, blood, stigma, blood. The modifying phrases specify their correct interpretations:

COLLATINUS:

…Restore to me at once
That **sword** of mine, with which beloved **blood**
Is reeking yet…In my own breast…(1.1:1-4)

BRUTUS:

This **sword,** now **sacred**, in the breast of others
Shall be immerged, I swear to thee. – Meanwhile
Tis' indispensable, that in this forum
Thy boundless **sorrow**, and my just **revenge**
Burst unreservedly before the eyes
Of **universal Rome** (1.1: 5-10).

Col. Rendimi, or via, mel rendi
Quel mio **pugnal**, che dell'amato **sangue**
Gronda pur anco…Entro al mio petto…

Bruto. Ah! pria
Questo **ferro, omai sacro**, ad altri in petto
Immergerassi, io 'l guiro. _ — Agli occhi intanto
Di **Roma intera**, in questo foro, é d' uopo
Che intero scoppi e il tuo **dolore immenso**,
Ed il **furor mio giusto**. (1.1)[16]

The nouns begin to resonate with universal and thus contemporary significance, as if calling upon all free people to join the revolutionary cause. The specific case of Lucretia becomes the battle cry for both ancient and future Romans to pick up their arms and discard their shackles of slavery. By extension, the audience understand the tradition of Brutus within the context of the American and French revolutions.[17]

The *Second Brutus* takes place at the end of the Roman Republic with the stabbing death of Gaius Julius Caesar by the Senate led by Marcus Junius Brutus during the Ides of March in 44 BCE. Caesar had plunged Rome into civil war by attempting to assume full control of the republic as a dictator. The plot of Alfieri's *Second Brutus* is again concerned with the willingness of the patriot Brutus to sacrifice all, family, prestige

and power, to uphold the fidelity of the principles of the Republic. When Caesar begins to wield power like a dictator and war monger, Brutus gives the command to have him assassinated, despite the fact that Caesar is his natural father, and has named him as his successor:

BRUTUS:

I, as a son wept and entreated him:
And also, as a citizen conjured him
To drop the infamous design: ah! What
Did I not do, to change him from a king?
I e'en, entreated from him as a gift
Death; which from his hands I should more have prized
Than all his surreptitious royalty:
But all in vain: in his tyrannic breast
He had resolved to reign, or die. I then
The signal gave to kill him…(Sc.III;Act V)

Alfieri's experience of nationalism to this point was conditioned by Italian politics in which petty tyrannical nobles vied with foreign powers to occupy and rule the diverse Italian states. When Alfieri followed the events of the American and French Revolutions, he followed the tide of a global movement towards democracy. Inspired by the Enlightenment and neoclassical revival, he embraced a literary code fashioned from the genre of Classical literature and history. The names had been invoked and re-invoked since the establishment of official theatres as organs of monarchy across Europe. By the late eighteenth-century however, the plots began to resonate with contemporary political convictions. Originally promoted by heads of state as vehicles for engendering patriotism and literacy, the plots soon applied to the discontent of contemporary citizens. When Alfieri invokes the name of Brutus, he supports revolution and democracy.

Aflieri's journey towards democracy began in the year of the American Revolution in 1776. He moved to Pisa and decided to confine himself to the study of Latin and Latin translations of Greek tragedies, in addition to reading Italian authors such as Dante and Petrarch, Alfieri says that he traveled to Tuscany in April of 1776 in hopes of "unfrenchifying" himself. His first tragedies, *Philippe* and *Polynice* had been written in French. He vowed afterwards to become as "proficient in my native tongue as the most learned philologist in Italy."[18] At Pisa, after being introduced to the leading *literari*, he planned to write the sequel to *Polynice, Antiqone* in Tuscan verse, while translating *Polynice* into verse. He found it was important to distinguish between iambic and epic verse. Using "eleven syllables in epic composition, it was necessary to form an arrangement of words, of sounds perpetually varied and broken, of phrases short and energetic, which distinguish tragic from all other kinds of blank verse…".[19] Alfieri believed that the study of Italian authors would result in his ability to synthesize their phraseology with his own [political] ideas.[20] Alfieri's study of Classical and Italian

authors is entirely dependent upon his perception of contemporary Italian history, and his desire to see a new unified Italian nation emerge from the revolutionary movement initiated by the American and French revolutions.

The history of Italian rule underwent a transition during Alfieri's time. The old noble families like the Medici or Farnese who had historically ruled the Italian city states died out and were replaced by modern enlightened despots who ruled portions of Italy along like colonial holdings. Naples and Sicily for example, were ruled by the Spanish Habsburgs until 1700 until the last ruling heir died without issue. Sicily was subsequently occupied by French and Austrian armies vying over the Spanish dynasty's holdings. Thus, Italian rulers were frequently Europeans who received territory in Italy as a result of a European or colonial conflict. When the last ruling Farnese in Parma died, the throne went to his niece, Elizabeth Farnese, who ruled in Madrid as the Queen of Spain. Her son Don Carlos, subsequently acquired the duchies of both Parma and Tuscany.[21] Alfieri's later tragedy about the Medici heir Don Carlos, then resonates with the history of Italy and the transition of states prior to the Napoleonic era.

In choosing his themes, Alfieri made corollary references to contemporary and historic kings. The First and Second Brutuses were preceded by his play *Agis* which Alfieri dedicated to Charles I of England on May 9, 1786:

> As you received your death from the sentence of an unjust parliament, so this king of Sparta received his from the wicked judgment of the Ephori. But just as the effects were similar, so far were the causes different. Agis, by re-establishing equality and liberty, wished to restore to Sparta her virtue and her splendor; hence he died full of glory, leaving behind him an everlasting fame. You, by attempting to violate all limits to your authority, falsely wished to procure your own private good: hence nothing remains of you; and the ineffectual compassion of others alone accompanied you to the tomb.[22]

From the perspective of Italian patriotism, he made allusions to European wide events and historic cultural and literary landmarks. His literary journey was one of heroism. He plunged the depths of Italian culture and history to collate a concise program for the nation's progress toward democracy. This program of self-chastisement and renewal could not have been possible without Stolberg. She inspired him as surviving model of both monarchical dynasty and literary genii like Dante's Beatrice. She represented both the Stuart dynasty in exile, and the revolutionary impulse to displace the authority of foreign interloper. Alfieri writes in his autobiography that he was motivated to become an author and write tragedies by "an ardent love, and a hatred approaching to madness against every species of tyranny…" [23] The transposition of historic characters onto literary ones is a hallmark of Alfieri's drama, and one that extended to his personal relationships and political figures. For example, when Stolberg's estranged husband, Charles Stuart died in Rome in 1788, Alfieri writes that "she had lost in him only a tyrant, and not a friend."[24]

In the years preceding the French Revolution, Alfieri came to the realization that the people had been betrayed by politicians and philosophers who promised them freedom. His dramas include specific motives and formulas for his characters as a blueprint for anyone who seeks to carry out revolutions in any time or place. He refers to the statement by Machiavelli to the extent that his "heart was torn asunder on beholding the holy and sublime cause of liberty betrayed by self-called philosophers."[25] If philosophers as great as Rousseau and Voltaire could not incite the required revolutionary impulse, then it was up to dramatists to act out the prescriptive. The actors could be transformed and transcribed onto individual character parts.

Stolberg's salon was undoubtedly an important influence in researching de Staël's novel, *Corinne*. The republican themes and Medici reference were personified in the figures of the nobility she entertained in her salon. J.C.L. Sismondi remained in constant contact with Stolberg as de Staël wrote the novel, apprising her of its progress, and promising to send her a copy.[26] Italy personified the republican hopes of the literary salons connected with de Staël. Its classical heroes immortalized in the revival of classical antiquity and Neoclassicism became the standard model throughout Europe during the Napoleonic Wars, inspiring patriotism and revolt against Napoleonic imperialism. Italy, during the occupation by Napoleon, as predicted by Alfieri, inspired some of the greatest Republican literature and art while oppressed by the tyranny of censorship. The common themes of de Staël, Sismondi and Alfieri, reveal literature as a genre for portraying heroic role models for emulation by contemporaries attending the salon. Literature and art merged with life, creating a unified propaganda front and a continuation of the goals of the early Republic to defeat the hydra of tyranny and create an ideal state based on liberty.

Between the years of Napoleon's first invasion of Italy in 1795 and his defeat at Waterloo in 1815, Italian culture underwent a remarkable period of transition in which its unique features of nationalism were created. Unlike the period style of Neoclassicism which swept across Europe in the 18th century, Italian nationalism sought to identify those signifiers that expressed Italian hopes of independence and patriotism. In this context, Neoclassical literature and artwork becomes uniquely Italian in its derivation from ancient and modern Italian sources. The love of country refers solely to Italia, and the romantic life cycle celebrated by its patriot, Foscolo, suggests a variant of nature worship akin to German Romantic nationalism. Italian nationalism derives from a love of *patrie* which runs deep into the roots of the Italian soil and extends back to the time of the Classical world. The writings and artwork celebrated by these modern poets included Dante, Petrarch, Machiavelli, Michelangelo plus classical sources like Sophocles. The most profound expressions of patriotism would be the sacrifice of oneself for their country. It is here that Foscolo's writings provided the appropriate context to commemorate the sacrifices of Italy's patriots.

The church of Santa Croce in Florence houses the tomb monuments of some of Italy's leading cultural heroes suggesting a conscious writing of history that imprints itself literally upon the soil of *patrie*. Foscolo, Alfieri and Stolberg's tombs joined those

of the cultural heroes they promoted through their writings and patronage: Alfieri's tomb commissioned by Stolberg from Canova in 1808 (fig. 2), lies between the tombs of Michelangelo and Machiavelli. The Renaissance artist, Lorenzo Ghiberti and architect, Leon Battista Alberti are also buried there. The church also houses artwork by some of the greatest Italian Renaissance artists: Giotto, Luca della Robbia, Vasari, Donatello and Andrea Orcagna.

The European perception of Italy, according to modern scholar, Joseph Luzzi, went through a transition between 1775 and 1825 from being "Europe's "museum" to its "mausoleum."[27] Authors Foscolo, de Staël and Goethe facilitated this change through their writings which shifted to a new focus from Neoclassicism to the repository of bodily remains and tombs. While Luzzi's analysis and comparison of de Staël *Corinne* (1807) and Foscolo's later *Lettere scritte dall'Inghilterra,* written in exile in England illuminate the ex-patriot's perception of the disparaging remarks about modern Italy implicit in *Corinne,* a comparison of *Corinne* and Foscolo's *Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* (1806) reveal far more similarities among the three authors. Following Goethe's example, Foscolo and de Staël created a genre in Italian culture that celebrated the relics of patriotism during an age of Napoleonic tyranny. Indeed, de Staël's *Corinne* appears to be the feminist successor to Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* and Foscolo's *Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis.* The shift to the bodily remains of great cultural heroes represented a shift from Neoclassicism to Romanticism that celebrated the soul of the individual as the ultimate expression of freedom. In a letter dated September 7, Florence, Foscolo's hero writes:

> Open the window wide, Lorenzo, and from my room greet my hills …you will find the solitary willow under whose weeping branches I lay prostate for many hours thinking of all my hopes. An when you come near the summit you may hear a cuckoo which seemed to call me every evening in its mournful meter…The tree in which it used to hide itself casts a shadow over the ruins of a little chapel where in ancient times a lamp used to burn before a crucifix. It was shattered by the storm in that night which has left my spirit even today, and as long as I live, terrified by shadows and remorse. And those half-buried ruins in the darkness looked to me like sepulchral stones, and I often thought of erecting my tomb there among those secret shades. And now? Who knows where I shall leave my bones?[28]

This question is answered by the poet in a series of letters in which he confesses his love for his country in the guise of love letters to a woman, Terese. Etymology is significant, and the literal ruins of the stones become in the poet's mind, "the ruin of whole peoples" who exploit the term liberty. The love letter to his nation continues in Foscolo's subsequent sonnets, *Of Tombs.* We learn that the poet's intense Romantic feelings find corporeal expression in the monuments and literature and history of the Italians.

Foscolo gave form to a movement that would characterize Italian culture during the Napoleonic era. Intensely patriotic, the resistance movement of Italians became synonymous with Neoclassicism in all its myriad forms. Through literature and art, thinkers tried to grasp the essential elements of national culture that explained the unique characteristics of Italian culture and provided reasons for maintaining their independence. The list of monuments — literary and artistic — culminates in the preservation of their creator's tombs in churches. Christianity becomes the locus of the soul, and the tombs of the greatest writers and artists are enshrined in churches. The commitment to death demonstrates to Italians that their lives and culture will extend beyond the grave: "Shaded by cypresses and kept in urns/ Consoled by weeping, is the sleep of death…" [29]

Healing the Rifts of Civil War within the Aesthetic Fabric of Nationalism

The networks of artists and authors included native Italians like Foscolo, Alfieri, and Canova, as well as Europeans who had embraced Italy as the embodiment of liberty and nationalism like Lord Byron, de Staël, Fabre and Stolberg. Europeans who formed part of this cultural milieu watched the advance of Napoleonic ambitions through a Italian-European lens of a code of freedom. Foscolo helped to initiate this movement. He was the first writer to place Italy's cultural heritage in the context of the Napoleonic advances into Italy. Drawn into de Staël's coterie through Stolberg's Florence salon, Foscolo's writings find echo in *Corinne* in the heroine's contemplation of Italian culture and monuments as an expression of the poetess/sibyl's soul and identity. Foscolo's poem *Of Tombs* precedes the publication of *Corinne* by a year in 1806, and embodies the same sentiments expressed by de Stael's heroine.

Foscolo's patriotic agenda differs however from that of Alfieri. Foscolo relies upon the literary traditions of Italians, without issuing a call to arms directly. In seeking to conjure the forces of nationalism, he falls back on dreams, myths and literary figures. Foscolo's literary output, like that of Stolberg's lover, Alfieri, was directly inspired by the Napoleonic invasions of Italy. When Foscolo moved to Venice in 1792, his talent was recognized by the salon hostess, Isabella Teotochi. Called the Venetian Madame de Stael by Lord Byron, or the Venetian Antigone by others, she was his first introduction to the literati who promoted Italy's nationalist cultural dialogue that produced the encoded lens of freedom. Foscolo's brief affair with the salonniere resulted in his retreat to the Euganean Hills which he reproduced as the setting for *Last Letters.*[30]

His poem, *Of Tombs,* like his novel, *The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* creates a mythology for contemporary Italy laid upon the foundations of its classical historic past. He concocts a formula that is elucidated by the encoded history of Italy. It is a creation myth which emerges from and returns to the dust of one's nation, one's ancestors, and quite literally, one's bones:

> A force that never tires, wears all things out,
> Never at rest; and man and tombs of men,
> The final shape of things, and the remains
> Of land and sea are all transformed by time.[31]

The timeless force described by Foscolo is the stuff from which nationalist hopes impinge. It takes form over the centuries in the creations of Italy's writers and artists, and ultimately, embodies what soldiers and patriots would find virtuous and moral in society during the Napoleonic wars in Italy. Foscolo reaches out to his fellow patriots and artists in arms. Victory is assured is they stand their ground and fight for their homeland. With victory behind him, Foscolo later looked back and wrote hymns in praise of his homeland. His *Hymn I* for example, creates a vision of the hill of Bellosguardo with Canova by his side. Venus is a recurrent theme in Foscolo's works, and is transformed into the goddess of liberty. The incantations to liberty cause her to emerge from the forum of the salon where women like de Stael and Stolberg make sacrifices to her name in the form of patronage of authors and artists who conjure her image by reinterpreting her forms from the past. She takes the shape of contemporary women as well, like Countess Antonietta Fagnani Arese who directly inspired his novel *Ortis,* and who referred to him interchangeably as Ortis and Werther in their correspondence while she was translating Goethe's novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.[32]

The retaliation and revolt against Napoleonic hegemony among Italy's patriotic literati begins with Canova's statue, *Antigone Mourning the Dead Eteocles and Polynices* (1798-99) (Museo Civici Venenzia) . Executed two years after Napoleon's descent into Italy, it commemorates the play by Alfieri, *Polynices,* written in Rome in 1781 shortly after Canova moved there from Venice. Alfieri's writing anticipated a civil war in Italy and the need to reinforce nationalist sentiments. His dedications and choice of acting cast show that he intended the plots to apply to contemporary and future culture politics in Italy in the wake of the American Revolution and prospects for a unified Italian republican state. The sequel *Antigone* begins with the decree of Creon regarding the burial of the two brothers who died fighting in the civil war. It was written a year later and "dedicated to Francesco Gori Gandellini, A Citizen of Sienna." When it was performed in Rome at the private theatre of the Spanish ambassador, Aflieri played the role of Creon. The Duke di Ceri played Haemon, and the Duchess di Ceri play Argeia; the Duchess di Zagarolo played the role of Antigone.[33] It begins with the death of the two brothers who die fighting in a civil war. According to the play by Sophocles (442 BCE), the declared king of Thebes, Creon, rules that Eteocles will be honored with a proper burial while Polynices will not. His body will be left out to rot and be devoured as carrion prey. When Oedipus's daughter, Antigone, defies Creon and secretly attempts to scatter some earth on her brother, Polynices's remains, she is punished with a death sentence and sealed in a tomb where she commits suicide.[34] The significance was important in the context of the Napoleonic invasions of Italy for it created a virtual civil war as Italians initially welcomed Napoleon as a liberator who defeated the ruling Hapsburg dynasty and established the Cisalpine republic. Their hopes of independence were quickly crushed as Napoleon continued his campaigns south toward the Papal States, confiscating Italy's greatest art treasures for the newly created *Musée Napoleon* along the way. Persuading Italians to join the cause of independence and expel the French became the focus of cultural programs fostered by salon women and the artists

and authors they patronized. The coded icons of king, tyrant, and rebel were re-channeled into the contemporary drama of citizen and revolutionary. If citizens swore devotion to the nation, they were prepared to sacrifice their lives to uphold its integrity. They were preparing to undertake such explicit revolutionary acts to preserve the nation.

When Napoleon deposed Pope Pius VI, Canova returned to his native city, Possagno. The city held great significance for him as being emblematic of his commitment to Italian independence and nationalism. Throughout the conflict between France and Italy, Canova remained loyal to the cause of his homeland despite prominent commissions he received from Napoleon. His oeuvre suggests that he served two masters, included his statue of Napoleon as the god, Mars. But clearly, those works he created of Italian subjects held the greatest personal significance. He personally later commissioned the Tempietto (1819) in Possagno where he and his brother, who inherited the statue from him in 1822, were buried. Canova had previously executed a painting depicting *Mourning the Dead Christ* which was located above the high altar of the Tempietto.[35] The resurrection of the dead, then, becomes a common theme in Neoclassical art and literature during the Napoleonic wars, suggesting the hopes for a union of Italian city states and the defeat of Napoleon. If the patriot-soldier's imminent death was too traumatic, it could be sublimated into the icons of family: mother-virgin, child, and Christ. Swearing devotion to a beautiful mother goddess, lady, queen, or virgin and preparing for the tomb or womb was aesthetically more palatable than engaging in overt acts of violent warfare. This is where the second tier of Italian nationalism in literature surfaces. And again, it was supported by a lengthy history of Italian art and culture spanning the period of ancient Rome and the cult of Venus to the Christian period of the Virgin Mary and the Vatican.

In de Stael's *Corinne,* the heroine returns to Florence from England prior to her death, and goes to *San Lorenzo* where she contemplates Michelangelo's tombs of the Medici. Bonstetten, who traveled back and forth between de Stael's and Stolberg's salons gave literary form to the steps of the nationalist "passion" with his biblical *Voyage sur la Scene des Six Derniers Livres de l'Énéide* (1808).[36] The creation of a myth of nationalism relies on reciting the heroes of the fatherland who over the course of centuries since the time of its founding by Virgil's Aeneas, are repeated in myriad forms that coalesce to form the nationalist colossus whose spirit is conjured by literary shamans to confront the threat of Napoleon. Members of Stolberg's circle created the literary equivalent to monuments such as France's *Pantheon of Great Men* in 1791 in Paris initiated with the removal of Voltaire's remains to the former Ste. Genevieve. Germany would later follow with its Valhalla of Germans (1830-44), commissioned from architect Leo von Klenze by Ludwig I of Bavaria in 1814, it is a Doric order temple filled with marble busts of great German writers and philosophers.[37]

While one might recite the names of great male authors and artists who filled a national treasury over the centuries, the spirit of reincarnation lies in the female creative force. The abstract Neo-platonic concept of the goddess Venus becomes the resurrecting

force of the Virgin Mary through an alchemical process. In forming the Italian salon circles, women like de Stael and Stolberg revived the sacrificial rites of ancient goddesses and pagan worship. They conjured the spirits of nationalism and reinvigorated the new generation with the hopes of fulfillment. While Corinne muses on her future tomb in the Pantheon in Rome, she becomes the creative goddess sowing the seeds of future generation. The Neo-platonic concept of virginity had its origins in Renaissance Italy. Even Antigone's death becomes a resurrection of light when Creon opens her tomb to find the consummation of his son and his Oedipus's daughter in a suicide pact dedicated to the eradication of the king's tyranny. With the revival of classical antiquity, its pagan deities were interpreted as having a dual material and divine significance. Educated humanist Florentine patrons like the Medici could thus safely worship Christian monotheism and enjoy the fruits of their classical idealism and mythology simultaneously.

In 1823, Barbarina Brand, Lady Dacre's translation of Foscolo's *Essay on Petrarch* was published in London. This work together with Foscolo's "Essay on the Text of the Divine Comedy" (1825) would be his last published works prior to his death in 1827 and entombment at Santa Croce. Both literary works postulate the cyclical premise of Italian art and literature of the Napoleonic Age: nationalism and resurrection. As Stephano Josso argues, Dante was associated with both Italian nationalism and patriotism because of the political content of his work and life. He created a common experience for Italians in a "common imagination and rhetoric." They are termed imagined because they are continuities which only exist in the mind. By referring to the common cultural experience Dante's Inferno, Foscolo avoided the divisive political conflicts of civil war and focused on the theme of Love and the Virgin. Invoking Dante was tantamount to invoking Italian nationalism and it unique correlation between literature and patriotism. It was a tradition first revived by Alfieri who referred to Dante poetically as his "Great father Alighier/if from the skies/This thy disciple prostrate thou dost see/Before the gravestone, shaken with deep sighs…"[38] When Foscolo subsequently invoked Petrarch, he was building on the same revolutionary rhetoric which subsumed violent impulses to the common tree of Italian literature and the beautiful neo-platonic figure of Venus and the Virgin Mary who appealed to the literati and peasantry alike.

> Although Petrarch has contrived to throw a beautiful veil over the figure of Love, which the Grecian and Roman Poets delighted in representing naked it is so transparent that we can still recognize the same forms. The ideal distinction between two Loves sprang at first from the different ceremonies with which the ancients worshipped the CELESTIAL VENUS, who presided over the chaste loves of girls and wives; and the TERRESTRIAL VENUS, the avowed tutelary deity of the gallantries of ladies, who played a distinguished part in those times….[39]

According to Socrates: "Beauty, is illuminated by a light which directs and invites me to contemplate the soul which inhabits such a form ; and, if the soul be as beautiful as the body, it is impossible not to love it. But there can be no beauty of soul

without purity." In writing about to his deceased lover, Laura, Petrarch investigates the nature of the soul as a reflection of perfect beauty. The adulation nationalist inspired art and literature by salon women reveal the nature of the soul through platonic love. Physical love may fade and die, but the sonnets to the soul are eternal. Corinne, then represents a composite of these nationalist and Neo-platonic impulses. In rejecting Oswald in favor of platonic love, she returns to its source in the ideal forms created by the poets and artists of Italy. Her literary character was inspired by actual female improvisers performing as members of Arcadia in Italy. Diane Long Hoeveler notes that when Corinne performs the tarantella folk dance, she invokes the spirit of Italian nationalism by transferring her emotions to the spectator through her ritualized steps.[40]

Salon culture in Italy was enhanced by association called Arcadia which promoted the membership of women and the revival of classical antiquity. Arcadia was a unique intellectual movement founded in Rome in 1690 to promote classical antiquity, satellites were established throughout Italy and it immediately attracted women members, though they remained outnumbered relative to men. Women who joined include de Stael and Corilla Olympica, the poet laureate in 1776, upon whom de Stael is believed to have based the ceremony of her character, Corinne's crowning at the capitol. Scenes like this suggest that Petrarch's and Socrates' concepts of platonic love informed the spectacles that promoted a feminine element. The eternal feminine then in the guise of platonic love played a crucial role in disseminating the concept of patriotism during a time of national crisis. Patriots could identify with the hopes of the nation, but also the expression of idealism through centuries of culture. Women were at the center of Italian salon culture like their European counterparts. However, Italian salons included a cross-current of European influences as Europeans flocked to Italy to participate in the Grand Tour and study of Classical Antiquity.[41]

Foscolo's invocation of the eternal feminine recalls the relationship between the poet Dante and his believed Beatrice. Conjuring up her image from the ashes of hell in *Of Tombs* causes the heavenly gates of St. Peter's to materialize before him. Her presence becomes a chimera of female deities that coalesce to form the concept of the divine from the depths of hell: "I pray the Muses help me call up heroes."[42] She is the creative nationalist force that conjures the male divine at a time of national crisis. It is the same spirit that causes the Greeks to defeat the Trojans, but withheld their victory from Ulysses on his journey of exile and not home. Foscolo credits the female nymph whose union with Jove produced the fifty sons of Priam, the king of Troy, for producing the Roman Julian line. The Muses "makes the deserts glad with song/ and overcome the silence of a thousand centuries."[43] The tomb then becomes a receptacle for the soul and the ashes from which the soul is called forth to assume new more fantastic forms for future generations of patriots who protect its sacred soil. The Risorgimento, or resurrection of future patriots would find its ultimate fulfillment in the unification of Italy in 1870.

Figure 1. Francois Xavier Fabre. *The Vision of Saul.* 1803. Musee Fabre. Montpellier, France.

Figure 2. Antonio Canova. *Tomb of Vittorio Alfieri*; (1808). Santa Croce, Florence, Italy.

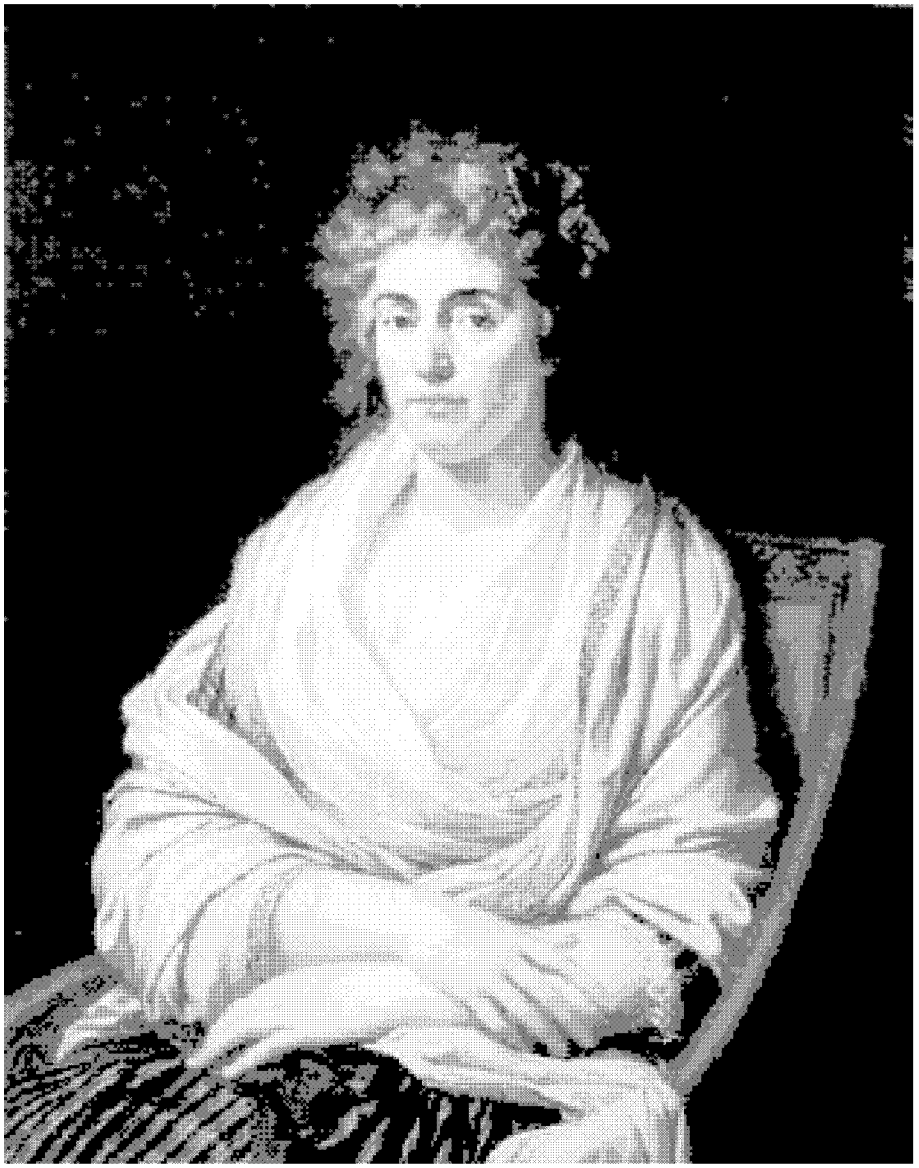

Fig. 3 Francois Xavier Fabre. Portrait of the Countess of Albany. Louise Stolberg. 1793. Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

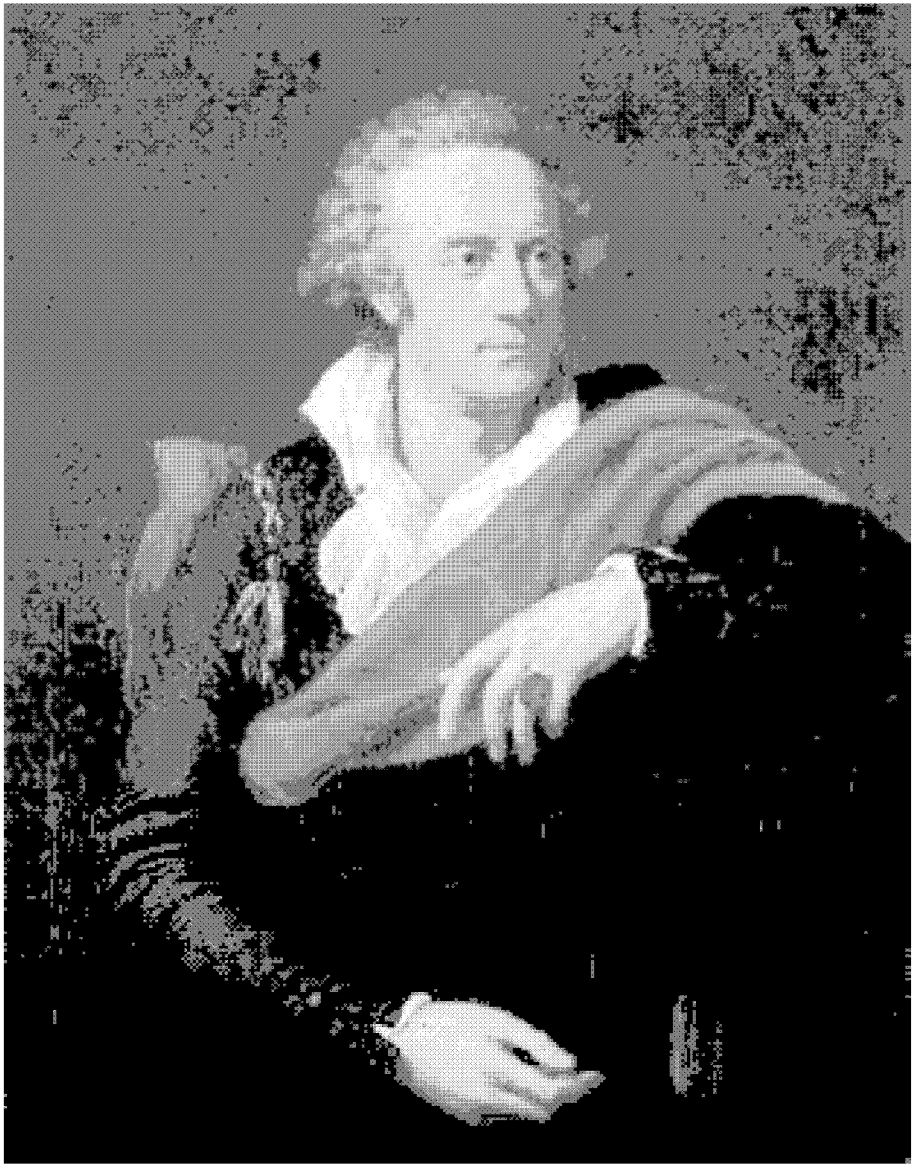

Fig. 4. Francois Xavier Fabre. Portrait of Vittorio Alfieri. 1793. Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

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