

JOHN CLAIBORNE ISBELL



# AN OUTLINE OF ROMANTICISM IN THE WEST



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# 1. Romanticism and the Nations of the West

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## 1. German Lands, 1800

Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*

Die Eltern lagen schon und schliefen, die Wanduhr schlug ihren einförmigen Takt, vor den klappernden Fenstern sauste der Wind; abwechselnd wurde die Stube hell von dem Schimmer des Mondes. Der Jüngling lag unruhig auf seinem Lager, und gedachte des Fremden und seiner Erzählungen. Nicht die Schätze sind es, die ein so unaussprechliches Verlangen in mir geweckt haben, sagte er zu sich selbst; fern ab liegt mir alle Habsucht: aber die blaue Blume sehn' ich mich zu erblicken. Sie liegt mir unaufhörlich im Sinn, und ich kann nichts anders dichten und denken. So ist mir noch nie zu Muthe gewesen: es ist, als hätt' ich vorhin geträumt, oder ich wäre in eine andere Welt hinübergeschlummert; denn in der Welt, in der ich sonst lebte, wer hätte da sich um Blumen bekümmert, und gar von einer so seltsamen Leidenschaft für eine Blume hab' ich damals nie gehört. Wo eigentlich nur der Fremde herkam? Keiner von uns hat je einen ähnlichen Menschen gesehen; doch weiß ich nicht, warum nur ich von seinen Reden so ergriffen worden bin; die Andern haben ja das Nämliche gehört, und Keinem ist so etwas begegnet. Daß ich auch nicht einmal von meinem wunderlichen Zustande reden kann! Es ist mir oft so entzückend wohl, und nur dann, wenn ich die Blume nicht recht gegenwärtig habe, befällt mich so ein tiefes, inniges Treiben: das kann und wird Keiner verstehn. Ich glaubte, ich wäre wahnsinnig, wenn ich nicht so klar und hell sähe und dächte, mir ist seitdem alles viel bekannter.

The parents had already retired to rest; the old clock ticked monotonously from the wall; the windows rattled with the whistling wind, and the chamber was dimly lighted by the flickering glimmer of the moon. The young man lay restless on his bed, thinking of the stranger and his tales.

"It is not the treasures," said he to himself, "that have awakened in me such unutterable longings. Far from me is all avarice; but I long to behold the blue flower. It is constantly in my mind, and I can think and compose of nothing else. I have never been in such a mood. It seems as if I had hitherto been dreaming or slumbering into another world; for in the world, in which hitherto I have lived, who would trouble himself about a flower? — I never have heard of such a strange passion for a flower here. I wonder, too, whence the stranger comes? None of our people have ever seen his like; still I know not why I should be so fascinated by his conversation. Others have listened to it, but none are moved by it as I am. Would that I could explain my feelings in words! I am often full of rapture, and it is only when the blue flower is out of my mind, that this deep, heart-felt longing overwhelms me. But no one can comprehend this but myself. I might think myself mad, were not my perception and reasonings so clear; and this state of mind appears to have brought with it superior knowledge on all subjects.<sup>1</sup>

**Novalis**, pen name of **Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg** (2 May 1772–25 March 1801). **Works:** poems—*Hymnen an die Nacht*; novels—*Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*; treatises—*Die Christenheit oder Europa*, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*. Hardenberg was born at the family seat founded in 1287. He studied law at Jena, Leipzig, and Wittenberg from 1790 to 1794, meeting Goethe, Herder, and Jean Paul and befriending the philosopher Schelling and the brothers Friedrich and A.W. Schlegel. He attended Schiller's lectures and they became friends. In 1795, he became engaged to the thirteen-year-old Sophie von Kühn, who died in 1797 of tuberculosis. In 1795–1796, Hardenberg entered the Mining Academy of Freiberg. His first fragments appeared in 1798 in the Schlegels' journal *Athenäum*, under the pseudonym "Novalis." In 1799, he met Tieck and other Jena Romantics. In 1800, he contracted tuberculosis, dying in 1801. His unfinished novels and various fragments were published posthumously by his friends Ludwig Tieck and Friedrich Schlegel.

My own interest in comparative Romanticism began with the question of why the French and German Romantics seemed to have different periods, even centuries; different priorities; and a quite different esthetics. Here, we open with an opening: the first few sentences, after

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1 Novalis, *Henry of Ofterdingen*, trans. by John Owen (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Press, 1842), p. 23.

a short dedicatory poem, of Novalis's historical novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802), a key text from the German *Frühromantik* circle led by Tieck, the two Schlegel brothers, and Novalis himself. Novalis died young the following year, and he wrote in loss: his teen fiancée died in 1797, bringing him from mine management to writing, at first in the lyric poems of the *Hymnen an die Nacht* (1800), and then in this long unfinished novel, or novel fragment.

How after all does a story begin? In this third-person narrative, we begin in the night and under the sign of dream. The parents are asleep. The first sentence, with its clock, its windows, its flickering Moon, might be the start to one of the Grimm brothers' fairy tales a decade or so later. This inanimate world is pregnant with meaning, a theme that will continue throughout Novalis's text. Scholars have argued that *Frühromantik* separates from its predecessor *Sturm und Drang* in its self-awareness, its sense of lucid mission, and that may be. Certainly, Novalis is working from the outset to create a space in which dream and reality, world and hero, bleed into each other. The text is notable for its weight of thought in art—a characteristic of German *Frühromantik*.<sup>2</sup>

Novalis's Germany in this novel is fundamentally that of fairy tale. As in his essay *Die Christenheit oder Europa*, Novalis turns his back on the changing territories the French were then invading in favor of a timeless, medieval space: that of the thousand-year-old Holy Roman Empire which Francis II was finally to end in 1806.<sup>3</sup> In some ways, the Middle Ages lasted longer in German lands than elsewhere in Western Europe; journeymen still traveled, as in Goethe's two-part novel *Wilhelm Meister* (1795–1821), to which *Ofterdingen* was written in answer, or indeed in Schubert's 1823 song cycle *Die schöne Müllerin*. German lands, as Staël notes in *De l'Allemagne* (1813), lacked a capital city to exert its pull.<sup>4</sup> Heinrich, then, meets a stranger and is inspired to travel for his craft. *Ofterdingen* has a historical basis in the medieval world where Novalis

2 Romantic philosophy *per se* is not our topic in this book. Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) has extensive debts to Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, the post-Kantian philosopher.

3 Novalis, *Die Christenheit oder Europa. Ein Fragment* [Christianity or Europe. A Fragment] (1799). Francis II reordered the Empire dramatically with the *Reichsdeputationshauptschluss* (1803); Napoleon created the Confederation of the Rhine in July 1806 and Francis II abdicated weeks later.

4 Germaine de Staël, *De l'Allemagne* [On Germany], 5 vols, ed. by Comtesse de Pange (Paris: Hachette, 1958–1960), I p. 37: "cet empire n'avoit point un centre commun."

places him—there was a *Minnesinger* of that name—but such a figure was also not yet alien to Novalis's German readers, as he would have been to the British or the French. It matters too that, like a fairy tale, Novalis conducts his narrative in the world of dream. The tale opens in dream, as we have seen. It continues via a succession of embedded narratives, and it ends, elegantly enough, in an embedded narrative from which Novalis does not provide an exit. This may be a simple consequence of the story being unfinished; but German *Frühromantik*, beginning with Friedrich Schlegel, was interested in the fragment as art, and it seems equally possible that Novalis came to prefer leaving his readers lost in a dream, like Heinrich himself.<sup>5</sup> Let us add that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) uses exactly the same framing device—leaving us lost in an embedded narrative—to end her story of creature and creator.

Heinrich begins his tale *unruhig* [restless] like Kafka's Gregor Samsa.<sup>6</sup> He is at once immersed in story: a stranger arrives in town with tales to tell, inspiring Heinrich alone with sleepless enthusiasm. Heinrich then notes his own indifference to wealth and his yearning for the blue cornflower that was to become a symbol for the early German Romantics. Storytelling, moreover, is an interesting occupation. First, it is oral; Heinrich may come to writing—his vocation is poetry—but his call comes via the spoken word. It is, in that sense, popular, not courtly; it is typical of the folk that Fichte celebrated in his 1808 *Reden an die deutsche Nation*. This is an epiphanic moment: Heinrich feels as if he has woken from sleep and dream, or as if he had slumbered “into another world,” the text reads, as one might in the *Upanishads*. It is mystical. Heinrich rightly contrasts his prosaic surroundings, where none would trouble themselves about a flower, with his new passion and vision. The

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5 Novalis's notes of February 11, 1800, indicate that *Ofterdingen* was conceived as a poetic response to Goethe's “unpoetic” *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* [Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship]; see Novalis. *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, 5 vols, ed. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960–1988), III 645–652 (11 February 1800). August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel largely constructed their journal *Athenaeum* (1798–1800) in fragments and devoted some thought to that form. Friedrich Schlegel's *Philosophische Fragmente* thus run to over 400 pages in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel Ausgabe* 18: *Philosophische Lehrjahre 1796–1806*, I, ed. by Ernst Behler (München, Paderborn, Wien: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1963), pp. 1–422.

6 Franz Kafka's Gregor Samsa appears in the story “Die Verwandlung” [Metamorphosis] (1915), where he is transformed in the opening sentence into a giant vermin.

stranger's arrival thus divides Heinrich's life in two, into before and after; our little world of dynamic equilibrium may easily be upended by the arrival of a catalyst, which is what this stranger is. Heinrich thus opens his story by separating himself from the world of prose; the whole novel is written under the sign of poetry, as a sort of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which poetry and prose cohabit, and in this, it is both typically German and quite different from the contemporary prose novels of the British and the French.

What are we to make of the stranger here? His role as wanderer was, as we have noted, still quite possible in German lands. His air of magic, remoteness, and story may remind us of a contemporary German preoccupation with supernatural deals—Goethe's *Faust* (1790–1829), Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl* (1814), Weber's *Der Freischütz* (1821), or Hauff's *Das kalte Herz* (1827), for instance. He is a sort of spirit guide for Heinrich, who will forever leave the home life that was his for a new life of adventure and discovery in art. As Heinrich remarks, not all who listen will hear; he alone hears the call in the stranger's words, though he cannot yet express it himself. Genius was topical in 1800, and Novalis here offers a fruitful view of it.<sup>7</sup> First, Heinrich is more akin to the mysterious stranger than to his townsfolk, and even than to his parents, who on the next page greet his sleepless quest with prosaic, if loving, responses. Their routine does not equip them for poetry, a common enough Romantic theme. There is something strange and magical about *genius* for Novalis—"close your eyes with holy dread," writes Coleridge in the same vein in 1797.<sup>8</sup> Second, this genius is isolated. Novalis underlines how Heinrich separates both physically and mentally from those around him, even before he leaves his home and village to wander. Third, he remains fundamentally a *national* figure, indeed a folk figure in a way that the folk themselves can only manage with difficulty. Heinrich will wander across Germany in this novel; it is speech that calls him; he is a sort of everyman, equally at ease with king and peasant and creator, and with the words to express the inner soul of each. Finally, beyond Heinrich's anchoring in, and communion with, the real, the national,

7 On genius, compare Logan Pearsall Smith, "Four Romantic Words," in *Words and Idioms: Studies in the English Language* (London: Constable & Co., 1925) pp. 66–134.

8 "Kubla Khan" in *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 298.

and the true, stands his bridge to a world that lies beyond. He is *vatic*, like Vigny's or Baudelaire's poet figures; his inspiration is otherworldly, and his thinking is both clear and yet unintelligible to the voiceless masses. Some might think him mad, as Goethe's Torquato Tasso appeared mad; in reality, he has acquired "superior knowledge on all subjects."<sup>9</sup>

To conclude: how does Heinrich in 1800 square with the Romantic hero—and artist—figures in German lands and elsewhere in Europe, contemporary and subsequent? After all, he is quite early. Well, he has many successors. We've mentioned Vigny and Baudelaire, nor are they alone in France, while the Germans Brentano, Heine, and Eichendorff inherit and complicate this legacy as they come to lyric poetry.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, studies of the Romantic Poet are not in short supply, from Russia to Poland to the United States or Argentina. It is perhaps worth repeating that this figure, as described by Novalis, is, at the end of the day, a sort of outcast. He is not, and cannot be, understood by the nation he represents. He communes instead like the sibyl, the oracle, the prophet, with a world unlike ours and apparently superior to it. He is *unacknowledged*. This emphatically separates Novalis's hero Heinrich and his successors from the engaged and nationally beloved figure of Corinne, which Staël offers the world in our next section. And Staël will have her own successors in poetry, Victor Hugo among them. German and French Romanticism part company from the outset, they are quite independent national traditions.

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9 Compare Alfred de Vigny, "Moïse" [Moses] and Charles Baudelaire, "L'Albatros" [The Albatross]. Also, Goethe's play *Torquato Tasso* (1790).

10 Clemens Wenzeslaus Brentano, Heinrich Heine, and Joseph von Eichendorff were arguably Germany's three leading lyric poets after the loss of Goethe and Friedrich Hölderlin.



## 2. France, 1807

### Germaine de Staël, *Corinne ou l'Italie*

Après ce qui s'était passé dans la galerie de Bologne, Oswald comprit que Lucile en savait plus sur ses relations avec Corinne qu'il ne l'avait imaginé, et il eut enfin l'idée que sa froideur et son silence venaient peut-être de quelques peines secrètes; cette fois néanmoins ce fut lui qui craignit l'explication que jusqu'alors Lucile avait redoutée. Le premier mot étant dit, elle aurait tout révélé si lord Nelvil l'avait voulu; mais il lui en coûtait trop de parler de Corinne au moment de la revoir, de s'engager par une promesse, enfin de traiter un sujet si propre à l'émouvoir, avec une personne qui lui causait toujours un sentiment de gêne, et dont il ne connaissait le caractère qu'imparfaitement.

Ils traversèrent les Apennins, et trouvèrent par-delà le beau climat d'Italie. Le vent de mer, qui est si étouffant pendant l'été, répandait alors une douce chaleur; les gazons étaient verts; l'automne finissait à peine, et déjà le printemps semblait s'annoncer. On voyait dans les marchés des fruits de toute espèce, des oranges, des grenades. Le langage toscan commençait à se faire entendre; enfin tous les souvenirs de la belle Italie rentraient dans l'âme d'Oswald; mais aucune espérance ne venait s'y mêler: il n'y avait que du passé dans toutes ses impressions. L'air suave du Midi agissait aussi sur la disposition de Lucile: elle eût été plus confiante, plus animée, si lord Nelvil l'eût encouragée; mais ils étaient tous les deux retenus par une timidité pareille, inquiets de leur disposition mutuelle, et n'osant se communiquer ce qui les occupait. Corinne, dans une telle situation, eût bien vite obtenu le secret d'Oswald comme celui de Lucile; mais ils avaient l'un et l'autre le même genre de réserve, et plus ils se ressemblaient à cet égard, plus il était difficile qu'ils sortissent de la situation contrainte où ils se trouvaient.

After what had happened in the Bologna art gallery, Oswald realized that Lucile knew more about his relationship with Corinne than he had thought. He had, at last, thought that her cold silence was perhaps the result of some secret grief. This time, however, it was he who was afraid of the explanation that, till then, Lucile had dreaded. Now that the first words had been said, she would have disclosed everything if Lord Nelvil had so wished, but it was too painful for him to talk about Corinne just when he was going to see her again; he could not bear to commit himself by a promise to talk about a subject which still touched him nearly, to someone with whom he always felt ill at ease and whose character he only partly knew.

They crossed the Apennines and on the other side they found Italy's beautiful climate. The wind from the sea, so stifling in the summer,

brought a gentle warmth at that time. The grass was green; autumn was barely over and already there were signs of spring. In the markets you could see all kinds of fruit, oranges, pomegranates. They began to hear the Tuscan language. In short, all his memories of beautiful Italy returned to Oswald, but unmixed with any hope. All his feelings were connected only with the past. The gentle southern breeze also affected Lucile's frame of mind. She would have been more confident, more lively, if Lord Nelvil had encouraged her; both equally constrained, however, by shyness, and uneasy about each other's attitude, they did not dare talk to each other about what was on their minds. In such circumstances Corinne would have discovered Oswald's secret very quickly and Lucile's as well. But they both had the same kind of reserve, and the more they were like each other in this respect, the more difficult it was for them to emerge from their constrained situation.<sup>11</sup>

**Anne Louise Germaine Necker, baronne de Staël-Holstein** (22 April 1766–14 July 1817). **Works:** theater—tragedies, comedies, dramas; pamphlets; moral treatises; criticism—*Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau, De la littérature, De l'Allemagne*; novels—*Delphine, Corinne ou l'Italie*; short stories; political treatises—*Des circonstances actuelles, Considérations sur les principaux événements de la révolution française*; autobiography—the *Dix années d'exil*. Staël's father Necker was the Director-General of Finance under Louis XVI. As a child, Staël met Diderot and other Enlightenment thinkers in her mother's salon. She married the Swedish Ambassador in 1786, and was present at the Convocation of the Estates General and the Declaration of the Rights of Man. On 11 July 1789, her father was dismissed. Three days later, Parisians stormed the Bastille. Staël left Paris on 2 September 1792, day of the September Massacres, after a meeting with Robespierre. Following liaisons with two noblemen—Narbonne and the Swedish exile Ribbing—she met the brilliant Benjamin Constant in 1794, her companion until 1810. Exiled from Paris in 1795, Staël restarted her Parisian salon and met Bonaparte in 1797. He exiled her once more in 1803—the topic of *Dix années d'exil*. Her work in exile brought her European fame. Beyond her Coppet group, she befriended Europe's Romantics, and also statesmen from Tsar Alexander, in a Moscow as yet unburnt by Kutuzov, and Bernadotte in Sweden, to the Duke of Wellington in occupied Paris. A.W. Schlegel

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11 Madame de Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, trans. by Sylvia Raphaël (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 387.

joined her as her children's tutor, and Lord Byron rowed across Lake Geneva in 1816 to pay her visits. She died in 1817 on the anniversary of the Bastille's fall, much as her friend Jefferson later died on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

Quite a lot has happened at this point in Staël's novel. Over the course of some four hundred pages—or two volumes of a three-volume octavo edition—a love triangle has emerged, binding Oswald, a Scottish peer, to two half-sisters, fair Lucile and dark Corinne. We are near the end of this prose novel or romance—a newish form in 1807, not wholly canonical, often gendered as feminine, and already emerging as a major genre. What then separates Staël's book from any romance of the age, from her contemporaries the Gothic Ann Radcliffe or the sentimental Fanny Burney, the astute Jane Austen or the delicate Mme de Genlis? What in short does Staël offer posterity? Perhaps above all, she offers a Romantic focus on nationhood. What is a nation, after all, and how do we perceive it? Ossianic Scotland separates imperfectly from England in this text, but Italy and the broader United Kingdom, in particular, appear in sharp relief, bracketing absent France.

In our extract—which is in fact a complete chapter—Oswald returns to Italy with his English bride, Lucile. Chapter lengths vary in *Corinne ou l'Italie*, and this one is unusually short. But markers of Italy abound, and a national contrast to Britain appears and drives our plot. It is a pivotal moment, and past and future loom in this tight space—memory “unmixed with any hope,” Staël writes. The door of the future is shutting, which may surprise; 1807 seems early from a French historical perspective, a national tradition which defines this text as liminal or ‘Preromantic,’ since the pivotal 1830 *bataille d'Hernani* between Classics and Romantics in France is still two decades ahead. But from various, perhaps more universal angles, *Corinne ou l'Italie* is late.

Lateness is a Romantic characteristic. If Newtonian revolution in science heralded a new belief in human progress—with new talk of perfectibility, to which Staël herself was party, after Turgot in 1750—then every Romantic artist in the West confronts the weight of the past, a past which may perhaps be superseded as they look to create new art.<sup>12</sup> A.W. Schlegel's famous Vienna lectures on drama are devoted to the past,

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12 Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, *Tableau philosophique des progrès de l'esprit humain* [A Philosophical Illustration of the Advances of the Human Spirit] (1750).

and end with two pages on the future; from Moscow to Montevideo, Romantics look to shape the future by reworking the past they inherit.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, key Romantic touchstones—Rousseau, Ossian, Percy—date from the 1760s, while the world that most Romantic artists live in postdates two major revolutions; the American one of 1776 and the French one of 1789.<sup>14</sup> Those are definitional moments, as is the French armies' sweep across Europe, 1794–1815—weighing more in the balance than Britain's *Lyrical Ballads* or Germany's literary magazine *Athenäum*, two much-cited, if somewhat less-read, epochs in national myth and each dating as it happens from 1798–1800. Finally, Staël herself, famous before the Revolution, was no neophyte by 1807, that Empire year; there is a reason for Oswald's weariness. Europe's Romantic movements are a disparate bunch, with wildly different founding moments, and one could do worse than refocus on 1789–1815 and how those startling years of Empire and Revolution redrew the map of the West.

"Destinies of women," one fine study of Staël's work is titled.<sup>15</sup> 1789 meant not only the Rights of Man, it meant Olympe de Gouges and the Rights of Woman; it meant Charlotte Corday, Mme Roland, and Marie Antoinette. All four women went to the guillotine.<sup>16</sup> Much excellent work has retraced the considerable pressure exerted in France to return Frenchwomen to the private sphere, post-1789, and here stands another fundamental contribution of Staël's *Corinne ou l'Italie*, that wildly successful novel, to the century that followed: the gap between

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13 August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* [Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature] (1809–1811).

14 Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote several texts fundamental to later Romantic authors, among them *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* [Julie or The New Heloise] (1761). James Macpherson's *The Works of Ossian*, based apparently on fragments of Scottish oral poetry, appeared in 1765, and Bishop Thomas Percy's *The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* the same year.

15 Simone Balayé, "Destins de femmes dans *Delphine*," *Cahiers staëliens*, XXXV (1984), pp. 41–59.

16 Olympe de Gouges wrote a declaration of the rights of women; Charlotte Corday assassinated Jean-Paul Marat; Marie-Jeanne Roland, like Corday a Girondin, hosted a salon for her Revolutionary husband; Marie-Antoinette was Queen of France. On French pressure on public women after 1789, there is now considerable published work, for instance Olwen H. Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), *Rebel Daughters. Women and the French Revolution*, ed. by Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), and Marilyn Yalom, *Blood Sisters. The French Revolution in Women's Memory* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

the public Corinne and the private Lucile. Both sisters are sensitive to others, but Corinne chooses speech and action, whereas Lucile—from England, where men remain at the table while women retire to wonder if the tea is hot—chooses silence and reserve. Paradoxically, England's well-established public sphere seems less open to women than Italy's narrower one. In Rome, Corinne can triumph at the Capitol, while Lucile cannot even tell her husband she knows his heart. Staël had seen first-hand how the public sphere closed for Frenchwomen after 1789. The topic is a constant in her various treatises and fictions, and Corinne in turn shapes her successors, from George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver—explicitly—in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) to Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia" (1838), that dark-haired bride who returns from beyond the grave to possess her successor. Corinne in dying instructs Lucile in how to make her daughter resemble Corinne.

Lucile has secrets. She knows more than she says, as Oswald discovers, and this is a characteristic of the voiceless and the disenfranchised. Their respective information and silence produces a sort of hall of mirrors for them, a strange married *gavotte* which Corinne would have ended, as Staël writes. Not only would Corinne have seen the truth, she would also have spoken it, as Saint-Preux speaks the truth in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), that touchstone text for early Romantic Europe. This is a tribute to Corinne's genius, but also to her authenticity. Meanwhile, Lucile and Oswald choose silence to avoid inflicting pain. "Transparence and obstacle," Starobinski called his Rousseau study, and that is precisely Staël's erotics.<sup>17</sup> Staël lived this debate in her relations with Benjamin Constant, who put their biography into his short novel *Adolphe* (1816); there's a moment in the movie *Blood Simple* where the hero can't kill another man, but he can bury him alive, and similarly, Oswald and Lucile pay a price for their compunction. It is ironic that this silence plays out amid Italy's openness and its appeals to pleasure—oranges, pomegranates. This is the land where Goethe's lemon trees bloom, "wo die Zitronen blühen," as Mignon sang.<sup>18</sup> And we, as readers, know every

17 Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, La Transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris: Plon, 1957).

18 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Mignons Gesang" [Mignon's Song], in *Goethes Sämtliche Werke*, 20 vols (Leipzig: Insel, [n.d.]), II, p. 141. The song, famously set to music by Franz Schubert, opens Book Three of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1796).

secret by this point, we know the plot. Strangers have their secrets, but these two tourists are no strangers to us. We all enter the conclusion with shared baggage, and that is part of how story endings work.

Italy in our extract shows us how life could be. It is a land passing directly from autumn to spring and thus bypassing winter—this just as Staël's conclusion gets underway, under the sign of a slow death. History is a curious thing, mixing past, present, and future, and any return is fraught with difficulty. That is the kernel of Hegel's dialectics: in history, thesis and antithesis will yield a difficult synthesis at the end, as novelty and repetition play out.<sup>19</sup> Oswald has a wound which reopens earlier in the novel; he thereby resembles the medieval Tristan or the Guigemar of Marie de France, in an age when medieval texts were being rediscovered and revalued. That wound is the tangible mark of the past on Oswald's body, a sign that he is compromised. Oswald and Corinne each have a pathology, like us all—they each have their cross to bear, or as Racine's Phèdre neatly puts it, "mon mal vient de plus loin," my hurt comes from further away.<sup>20</sup> Oswald is not the first—one thinks of Goethe's *Werther* (1774)—but he is early in a long line of brooding Romantic heroes later exemplified by Byron's equally successful verse romance "Childe Harold", in 1812–1818.

If *Corinne* is a machine for reading, how has that machine operated in the two centuries from 1807 to the present day? This seems a fair question. What is the quality of its art? Well, genre theory here plays its role. From a modern perspective, Staël might have benefited from an editor, she might have tightened her focus; but the same could indisputably be said of Melville's sprawling *Moby-Dick* (1851), that mid-century American classic. What then makes Staël appear so diffuse? The answer is in part that Staël has so much she wants to say. Her novel is not *Corinne*—a romance title—but instead *Corinne ou l'Italie*, and in the nineteenth century it was shelved with guidebooks. Staël has, as a British journal put it, "created the art of analyzing the spirit of nations and the springs which move them."<sup>21</sup> As with Melville then, her global vision is not a bug, but a feature. This returns us to the question of novels, quite

19 See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* [Lectures on the Philosophy of World History] (1837).

20 Jean Racine, *Phèdre*, Act I sc. iii, l.269, in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Seuil, 1962), p. 250.

21 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 4 (December 1818), p. 278.

topical in 1807—because novels seem uniquely suited to this enterprise; they are, in that sense, a uniquely modern genre.

Finally, we face some geopolitical questions. When *De l'Allemagne* reached the censors in 1810, Napoleon's Minister of Police told Staël her work "n'était pas français" [was not French].<sup>22</sup> In that age of French exceptionalism, it matters that Staël in *Corinne* chose to celebrate the United Kingdom and Italy with France occluded between them. Her novel contains no mention of Napoleon's political transformation of the peninsula, while the many Italian artworks Napoleon carted off to Paris are here silently restored to their owners. Staël was born Genevan and Protestant, like Rousseau, and she spent her career liminal from a French national perspective, with a good portion of that time in exile. She is less French, in the end, than European, as her early European fame confirmed. Among the Romantics, such international success is unusual. And looking, like Napoleon, at the Italian peninsula, Staël makes some pertinent choices. First, she unites it in the person of Corinne. Second, she visits the length and breadth of it—Venice, Milan, Florence, Rome, Naples. She is comprehensive. Third, she removes from the peninsula its oppressors and occupiers, be they French, Spanish, or Austrian. Italy is given over to the disenfranchised Italians. Fourth, and last, Staël proposes a contract built on credit, between the individual genius—in politics, thought, or art—and the silent people or nation they represent. This is Corinne's role, from the book's title onward. The idea was new when Staël wrote in 1807, though fundamental to her thought, and it was later borrowed by generations of Romantics around the globe in founding their national literatures. It doubtless helped make Italy possible.

Come 1816, with her article on translation in Milan's *Biblioteca italiana*, Staël played a pivotal role in the emergence of an Italian Romantic movement.<sup>23</sup> This role was political as much as it was esthetic. By and large, the Italian Romantics admired her, from Leopardi to Pellico to Manzoni, though none features in 1807's *Corinne ou l'Italie*. Staël, like

22 "quoique le général Savary m'ait déclaré [...] que mon ouvrage n'était pas français" [although General Savary declared to me ... that my last work was not French], in Madame de Staël, *De l'Allemagne* (1958–1960), I, p. 10.

23 On Staël's 1816 article, see John Claiborne Isbell, "The Italian Romantics and Madame de Staël: Art, Society and Nationhood," in *Rivista di letteratura moderna e comparate* L.4 (1997), 355–369 [henceforth "Staël and the Italians"].

Corinne, traveled Italy in search of a national identity. What Oswald hears in fact is Tuscan, not Italian, speech, just as Farinata degli Uberti does in Canto Ten of Dante's "Inferno."<sup>24</sup> Manzoni, after all, wrote *I promessi sposi* in 1825–1826 in Lombard dialect, and as Staël observes, the Apennines split the peninsula down the middle. 'Italy' in 1807 was not a given; Staël did her part to create it, and that work earned her credit with American and European readers, and Italians to begin with. Staël may be early by French standards, captured as she is amid Napoleonic Europe, but she is by no means 'Preromantic,' if anyone ever was that convenient teleological fiction. She is instead building a new art, one made for the new world of stereotype printing, wood-pulp paper (a little later), and an international mass market. She does so to good effect.

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24 Farinata greets Dante as a Tuscan: "O tosco che per la città del foco / Vivo ten vai così parlando onesto" [O Tuscan who through the city of fire / Goes by alive, thus speaking honestly]—"Inferno," Canto X, ll. 22–23, in Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia* [The Divine Comedy], ed. by Natalino Sapegno, 3 vols (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1982–1984), I, p. 111.



### 3. Spain, 1814–1815

#### Francisco Goya, *Tres de mayo* 1808



Francisco de Goya, *El Tres de Mayo* (1814), oil on canvas, Museo del Prado. Photograph by Papa Lima Whiskey 2 (2012), Wikimedia, Public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:El\\_Tres\\_de\\_Mayo,\\_by\\_Francisco\\_de\\_Goya,\\_from\\_Prado\\_thin\\_black\\_margin.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:El_Tres_de_Mayo,_by_Francisco_de_Goya,_from_Prado_thin_black_margin.jpg).

**Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes** (30 March 1746–16 April 1828). **Works:** portraits—*Caprichos*; *Los desastres de la guerra*; *Dos de mayo* 1808 and *Tres de mayo* 1808; *Pinturas negras*. Goya was born into a middle-class family. He studied painting under Anton Raphael Mengs, then in Rome, being appointed court painter in 1789 and Director of the Royal Academy in 1795. Goya married in 1773, before suffering an illness in 1793 which left him deaf. In 1807, Napoleon entered Spain to begin the Peninsular War. Goya remained in Madrid, and a physical and mental breakdown followed. The extent of Goya's involvement with the court of Napoleon's brother Joseph I is not known. The Bourbon Ferdinand VII returned to Spain in 1814, but relations with Goya were not cordial. Goya's *Los desastres de la guerra* comment both on the Peninsular War

and on Ferdinand VII's move to crush liberalism after his return. His fourteen *Pinturas negras* were executed in oil directly onto the plaster walls of his house. He moved to Bordeaux in 1824—the year of the new French invasion—dying there in 1828. His body was re-interred in Madrid.

What is the meaning of this wash of darkness? Well, to begin with, like Picasso's *Guernica*, it is among the great anti-war paintings of all time. It is a companion piece to Goya's *Dos de mayo 1808*, hanging like that canvas in the Prado Museum in Madrid. The two paintings chronicle then-recent Spanish history: on 2 May 1808, after Napoleon installed his older brother Joseph on the throne of Spain, the citizens of Madrid rose up against the occupying French in the person of the Emperor's mamelukes, slaughtering many. French reprisals followed on 3 May, as shown in Figure 1. Goya witnessed both uprising and reprisals, and with final French defeat after six years of Peninsular War, he came in 1814–1815 to paint these two canvases. We might add that the paintings also mark a pivotal moment in the history of Europe, one in which France's grand Revolutionary dream, as lived by the subjects—not citizens—of Europe's various kingdoms and principalities, ended. Beethoven wrote his third—or *Eroica*—symphony “for a great man,” that man being Bonaparte. He then learned the man had crowned himself emperor, and so rededicated the piece “to the memory of a great man,” because Bonaparte was dead to him.<sup>25</sup> The infant French Republic's war of survival, waged after 1792 against Europe's various invading sovereigns, turned offensive in 1794 after the battle of Fleurus, as France's citizen armies, with superior gunpowder (thanks to Lavoisier) and tactics, began their sweep across the continent.<sup>26</sup> At first, they created republics as they went—in the Low Countries, in Switzerland, and in the Italian peninsula—but as Bonaparte became Napoleon, so he began installing new sovereigns in their stead, often from among his

25 A copy of Beethoven's score bears the deleted, hand-written subtitle, *Intitolata Bonaparte* [Titled Bonaparte]. In 1806, the score was published under the title *Sinfonia Eroica, composta per festeggiare il sovvenire di un grande Uomo* [Heroic Symphony, Composed to celebrate the memory of a great man]. See Carl Dalhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to His Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 23–25.

26 Lavoisier: Seymour H. Mauskopf, “Lavoisier and the improvement of gunpowder production,” in *Revue d'histoire des sciences* 48.1–2 (1995), 96–122.

family. Not many would support the French invaders for the purpose of replacing their local ruler with a French one, and it is this turn in history that Goya records. In 1789, as in 1792 at the birth of the Republic, France had stood for the voiceless—for the millions, the downtrodden and disenfranchised. By 3 May 1808, the French citizen army had been reduced to literally faceless cogs in the Emperor's arsenal of war and conquest. Facing them were the people of Madrid, those proud but humble members of the Spanish nation. The new national ideal of liberation had crossed over in a sort of *translatio imperii* from the citizens of France to those countries they were occupying.

So, the French. In Goya's companion piece, *Dos de mayo 1808*, the mamelukes are individuals full of life and independent agency. Not here, where the citizen-army, the *levée en masse*, is a bare faceless diagonal, cutting through the sweep of the canvas behind leveled bayonets. Its troops are following orders, quite visibly lacking free will or independent volition. Standing for France, they have come to represent a great, unending war machine and nothing else. All the life and volition in this canvas is to the left, where the Spanish stand awaiting death. The French here exemplify a singular military virtue, that of discipline, a virtue which does not meaningfully define citizenship. They are superbly trained to execute orders, as shown by their discipline in slaughtering unarmed civilians: not one soldier questions the orders they have been given. The light in this scene, as often in Baroque paintings—say, by Georges de La Tour—comes from a lantern at their feet, which their bodies partly obscure. It lights them from behind, leaving them largely in shadow while falling starkly on the Spanish facing them, both those standing and those stretched out dead in a pool of their own blood. The sky above—the entire top third of the canvas—is black, as it is in, say, Caravaggio's *Martyrdom of St Peter*, a martyrdom where the Lord is nowhere to be seen.

For this is martyrdom. The frontmost Spaniard standing and awaiting execution is a tonsured priest, hands clasped in prayer. This shows Imperial France in action, as seen by Goya from Catholic Spain. Just behind the priest and dominating the canvas is a standing Christ figure, arms outstretched as if for crucifixion. Like Jesus in Palestine, the man is no big fish; he is an anonymous and simple man, in linen shirt and trousers like any citizen of Madrid. At the feet of these Spaniards

there is no lantern, there are only the dead—the French are bringing up captives in batches and executing them by firing squad. And behind this group, head in hand, stand those who await their turn for execution. Looming up into the black nighttime sky is a church spire, a mere detail of architecture in this scene where the only priest we see is about to be shot. Finally, it seems worth noting that the Spanish display a total lack of military discipline. They are not even in uniform. This is because the French are slaughtering civilians, but it also heralds the war that was to come, the world's first *guerilla* war—a new mode of warfare which here found its Spanish name. All over Spain, after Napoleon's crowning of his brother Joseph and the massacres of 3 May, citizens rose up against the French. For six years, Spanish *guerrilleros* pinned down an entire French army, to Napoleon's cost, and they had largely defeated the French in Spain by 1814. This Peninsular War was Wellington's focus before Waterloo, and it helped to shape the history of Europe.

Europe in 1808 looked very different from Europe in 1814–1815, when Goya returned to this bloody incident to create his two masterpieces. All of Spain was liberated by then; across Europe, the kings were coming back. Napoleon was in Elba, then Cannes, then St Helena. The pressing need to respond that Goya—like the Spanish people—may have felt in 1808, had surely dwindled by 1814, given Napoleon's retreat from Moscow in 1812 and France's ensuing and total defeat. With Metternich and the Congress of Vienna, the twenty-five-year dream launched by the French Revolution in 1789–1815 was at an end. What was its aftermath? Ironically, in 1824, the restored French Crown marched into Spain again, in order to suppress liberal ferment. The period 1776–1826 saw independence for every colony on the American mainland south of Canada, as France, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom lost the territories they held, in part in consequence of Napoleon's continental plans for Europe. Simón Bolívar plotted his New World wars of liberation from there.<sup>27</sup> Spain by 1826 was a different and smaller country than Spain in 1789, or even than occupied Spain in 1808; Goya's paintings in these terms, from a Spanish perspective, mark less a turning point or pivot than a frail interlude of foreign ideals caught between long periods of Bourbon repression.

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27 Simón Bolívar, in Europe 1800–1807, returned then to Venezuela to launch his revolution.

It matters perhaps that Goya's art seems closer to that of his French contemporaries—David, Géricault, Delacroix—than to the British—Turner, Constable—or to German painters like Friedrich or Runge. *Tres de mayo 1808* might easily be a Géricault painting, like, say, 1819's *The Raft of the Medusa*. This is not the British world of Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire* or Constable's *The Haywain*, or indeed the German world of Friedrich's 1818 *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*. What does it mean, then, to call Goya a Romantic? We review in Chapter Two how very few of Europe's and America's canonical Romantics admit the term in describing their own art. The term Romantic began in Germany as a term of abuse. We might remember both that the term was highly charged for contemporaries both *pro* and *con*, and that as we contemplate the shape of Europe and the Americas, 1776–1848, it becomes rather difficult to pretend that no great international watershed in thought, art, and society is underway. This book argues that it is, and that its nature is anchored in the double revolution of 1776–1789, as in the people's voice celebrated in the opening words—“We, the people”—to the Constitution of the new United States.<sup>28</sup> It matters that Europe's and America's various subject peoples, as constituted back in 1700, could view themselves as citizens by 1800. This is the world of Goya's painting. It matters that Beethoven—whom musicologists name Classical—wrote the *Eroica* for Bonaparte, and that his fellow Classical composer, Mozart, produced his opera *Die Zauberflöte* in homespun and national German, like Weber's later *Der Freischütz*, not in the courtly Italian of his own *Don Giovanni*.<sup>29</sup> Was there in fact an international Romantic civilization? I believe there was, irrespective of any local division in time or place or topic that academic disciplines may find convenient. It stretches from Moscow to Montevideo; it has its role in architecture, in furniture, in landscaping, and in costume, as it does in literature and music, in painting, and even sculpture—Canova, Thorvaldsen—and in the thought of Kant or Hegel, Rousseau or Emerson, Jefferson or Hume. It is, in fact, by the standards of history's innumerable esthetic movements, unusually universal in scope. It is marked by the new technologies of the Industrial Revolution,

28 The Constitution of the United States, written in 1787, opens “We, the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union [...]”

29 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte* [The Magic Flute] (1791), libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder.

which started in the United Kingdom, and is shaped in politics by French and American revolution and empire, retraced in daily life by the troubled period's international Regency or Empire Style. It is a new age, one of stereotype printing and wood-pulp paper; the mass markets thus made possible; and concomitant market-driven thickening of line in art: a Romantic triangle of production.

Spain, too, matters in this broad story, as do the events of 1808. Regardless of later Spanish history, this moment marked both an end to French pretensions to be liberating Europe's subject peoples—as the French had alleged since 1794—and a start to the moment when those European subjects began liberating themselves; often, as in Spain, in a bid to eject the French, those occupiers, from their national soil. This theme would play out among the Italian Romantics after 1816, engaged with Metternich's Austrians, and among the Romantics of Eastern Europe in the following decades, dealing as they did with foreigners speaking mostly German or Russian, with Austria, Prussia, and Russia in particular. It is why Goya may matter more to European and American Romanticism than the Spanish Romantics who followed him in the narrower days of the Bourbon Restoration—Rivas, Larra, Espronceda, Zorrilla—and why Bolívar or San Martín may matter more to Western Romanticism, when all is said and done, than Argentina's Romantic poets like Echeverría or Hernández. It turns out that Spain, as seen here by Goya, was as much of a dream as France was. The return of the Bourbons established that.

#### 4. The British Isles (England), 1818

##### Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*

"Farewell! I leave you, and in you the last of humankind whom these eyes will ever behold. Farewell, Frankenstein! If thou wert yet alive and yet cherished a desire of revenge against me, it would be better satiated in my life than in my destruction. But it was not so; thou didst seek my extinction, that I might not cause greater wretchedness; and if yet, in some mode unknown to me, thou hadst not ceased to think and feel, thou wouldst not desire against me a vengeance greater than that which I feel. Blasted as thou wert, my agony was still superior to thine, for the bitter sting of remorse will not cease to rankle in my wounds until death shall close them for ever.

"But soon," he cried with sad and solemn enthusiasm, "I shall die, and what I now feel be no longer felt. Soon these burning miseries will be extinct. I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My spirit will sleep in peace, or if it thinks, it will not surely think thus. Farewell."

He sprang from the cabin-window as he said this, upon the ice raft which lay close to the vessel. He was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance.<sup>30</sup>

**Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley;** née Godwin (30 August 1797–1 February 1851). **Works:** novels—*The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*, *Lodore*, *Falkner*, *Valperga*, *The Last Man*; travel writing—*Rambles in Germany and Italy*; biographical articles. Mary also edited the works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Mary's father was the radical philosopher William Godwin; her mother, the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, died after giving birth to her. She was raised by her father, meeting Coleridge and others. In 1814, she met the young Percy Shelley, who was already married. She, Percy, and her stepsister, Claire Clairmont, left for France that year; Mary returned pregnant and Godwin refused to see her. Mary lost that child. Percy's first wife, like Mary's half-sister Fanny Imlay, committed suicide; Percy was ruled morally unfit for custody of his children. He and Mary married in December 1816. The couple had spent that summer in Geneva with Clairmont, Lord Byron, and Byron's physician Polidori. Byron proposed that all tell a ghost story, and Mary at last thought of *Frankenstein*. She later

30 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 207.

wrote that the preface was Percy's, who also provided help in editing. Facing legal threats—loss of custody, debtors' prison—the couple left Britain for Italy in 1818. Mary lost two more babies before giving birth to her only surviving child, a son. In 1822, her husband drowned when his boat sank during a storm off Viareggio. Mary returned to England, meeting Washington Irving and Prosper Mérimée, raising her son on a stipend from his grandfather, editing Percy's work, and writing until her death in 1851. It seems likely that she remained a political radical throughout. At her death, the family found in her desk a copy of Percy's *Adonais*, folded round the remains of his heart.

Given her parents—William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft—Mary Shelley was, during her lifetime, almost certainly better-known than her husband Percy, whose poetry, by and large, went unread. That may not be the case today, but the monster she created is better-known to millions than its author is; an odd case of a creation eclipsing its creator, but then, Romanticism itself long ago took on a life of its own in which it has co-opted the various artists and thinkers with whom it came into contact. Fame too has a life of its own, and Mary Shelley, like Staël before her, was defined by her parents' fame from childhood on. Across Romantic Europe, Godwin in particular was a symbol of free-thinking and anarchism, while Wollstonecraft's 1792 *Vindication of the Rights of Women* stands her alongside Olympe de Gouges in a struggle for women's rights shaped by the French Revolutionary dream of 1789.

It is in this context that Mary Shelley, aged eighteen and staying by Lake Geneva with Shelley and the notorious Byron, conceived her novel, which she published anonymously two years later. It is, like *Faust* or *Don Giovanni*, one of the great Romantic myths.<sup>31</sup> Mary died in 1851, long outliving her doomed husband, and wrote more novels—*The Last Man* (1826), *Lodore* (1835)—but none approached her early success. Few authors—Rimbaud, perhaps—have been this good this young.

In this extract, we find ourselves on her novel's closing page, and the monster—the creature—is speaking. A good deal has happened already; Victor Frankenstein has conceived, in youthful enthusiasm and pride in science, his galvanic and Promethean experiment, and the monster he thus creates—bringing the dead to life—has committed a string of

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31 Mozart, *Don Giovanni* (1787), libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte.



murders for which Victor has been both blamed and pursued by justice. Meanwhile, Victor has himself been pursuing it, a chase that ends in the frozen Arctic with Victor dead as his creation weeps. The creature has been a sort of *Doppelgänger* for Victor, and now, as in posterity, it stands and speaks while Victor has fallen by the wayside. It speaks in a found text, which was a common eighteenth-century novelistic device, lending both a framing narrative and a plausible back story to the tale we read. The eighteenth century particularly favored epistolary novels—for instance those of Richardson, Rousseau, Montesquieu, or Goethe—in a society where people wrote long and frequent letters and where prose fictions *per se* were generically and ethically compromised.<sup>32</sup> Letters to structure a fiction, to advance a plot, addressed concerns that the eighteenth century's novel writers found important, and such epistolary fictions sold without difficulty. We have here, then, the creature's reported speech, in Walton's continuation of his dead friend Victor's story, as set forth in letters home from the Arctic. And as in Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, we never leave that closing frame. We are left, in these closing words, on the ice where the creature vanishes into the darkness. It makes for a compelling ending, one without an exit, where we finish up trapped in the Arctic and the heart is crushed. This is a composite narrative, like Laclos's 1782 *Les Liaisons dangereuses*—a kaleidoscopic array of first-person speech.<sup>33</sup>

As for the plot, it somewhat resembles her father Godwin's own brilliant Jacobin novel *Caleb Williams* (1794), in which Caleb is framed for crimes he did not commit: "My life," Caleb begins, "has for several years been a theatre of calamity."<sup>34</sup> Shelley's novel can fairly be called Gothic, a genre in vogue enough at this turn of the nineteenth century, in Britain and Germany in particular, for Jane Austen to parody it in *Northanger Abbey* (1817). The genre starts perhaps with Horace Walpole's *The Castle*

32 Samuel Richardson wrote the wildly popular *Pamela; or Virtue rewarded* (1740) and *Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady* (1747). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). Charles de Secondat de Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes* (1721). Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774).

33 On first-person discourse in the British Jacobin novel of the 1790s, to which Mary Shelley has a clear debt, see Gary Kelly, "Romantic Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. by Stuart Curran, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 187–208.

34 William Godwin, *Things as They Are; or The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), ed. Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 5.

of *Otranto* (1764), and some British high points include Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), and Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). John Polidori, with the group on Lake Geneva, published *The Vampyre* in 1819, the first modern vampire story. There is also some parallel between the accursed creature, lost in the Arctic, and the figure of the Wandering Jew: Eugène Sue's eponymous 1844 potboiler thus opens at the Bering Strait. This was a great age of exploration; witness the voyages of Captain Cook or Bougainville in the Pacific, of Alexander von Humboldt through Latin America, of Lewis and Clark crossing the new Louisiana Territory.<sup>35</sup> By 1818, the Russians and the British were pushing into the Arctic—but reaching the two poles remained a century away.

So much for our framing and our scene. The creature's words also echo various contemporary vogues, starting with that of Prometheus. George Cruikshank published his anti-Napoleonic engraving, *The Modern Prometheus*—Mary's subtitle—in 1814. Promethean revolt runs like a red thread through Romantic thought; it is central to *Faust* and *Don Giovanni*; it is the theme of Percy Bysshe Shelley's splendid 1820 verse drama *Prometheus Unbound*. "Pain is my element, as hate is thine," Percy there writes.<sup>36</sup> Just as Victor Frankenstein is Promethean, in revolt against God's ordering of life and death, so too is Victor's creature Promethean, and in revolt against its personal demiurge. This accursed world of suffering, pride, and madness is also the world of outcasts like Cain. The creature, who is a murderer, exults in suffering and revolt, somewhat as Matthew Lewis's monk exults in evil. Its death will be by fire, on a pagan funeral pyre, and as for an afterlife, the creature—"if it thinks"—is agnostic. After all, its whole existence has been an afterlife, from the moment of its creation on Victor's laboratory slab. Horror, which frames the creature's narrative, is the *raison d'être* of the Gothic genre. Here, that appears newly anchored in the sublime, which mattered a good deal to recent theorists, from Edmund Burke's 1757 *A Philosophical Enquiry into*

35 Captain James Cook made three voyages to the Pacific: 1768–1771, 1772–1775, and 1776–1780. Louis-Antoine, Comte de Bougainville circumnavigated the globe in 1763. Alexander von Humboldt traveled in Latin America from 1799–1804. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark crossed the new Louisiana Territory to the Pacific at President Jefferson's direction from 1803–1806.

36 "Prometheus Unbound," in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 218: Act I, 1.477.

the *Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* to Immanuel Kant's 1790 *Critik der Urtheilskraft*. For these theorists, nature is a key locus of the sublime, as it is in the Arctic setting of this extract. Nature and solitude, as seen here, are also curious reworkings of Rousseau's preoccupations in his 1782 *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*. They are two themes destined for great success throughout the nineteenth century, both in the vatic figure of the poet and in the nature this vatic figure embraces. Just as nature and solitude, horror and the sublime, are here reworked, so too are the Romantic topoi of enthusiasm and melancholy.

The very existence of the creature is predicated on Luigi Galvani's 1780 experiment, which ran an electric current through a dead frog's leg to make it twitch. Just as eighteenth-century Britain had seen its share of sea journeys, so again in Galvani sociohistorical context has impact. In what world is this text conceived and published? It bears mention, for instance, that Frankenstein has assumed the female prerogative of birth; he bypasses love in marriage to embark on a sterile journey of the mind, like Dante's damned Ulysses, Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, or the scientists behind mustard gas or the atomic bomb.<sup>37</sup> Like her mother's *Vindication*, Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* thus matters in the history of women. Facing the displacements of Britain's Industrial Revolution—the brave new world of Whitney and Arkwright, the spinning Jenny and the cotton gin, of enclosures, the railroad, Adam Smith, and industrial production—was Britain's Luddite movement of textile workers in open revolt throughout Nottinghamshire, 1811–1816.<sup>38</sup> In 1819, a local magistrate sent cavalry after a peaceful Manchester crowd calling for parliamentary reform, an incident known forever after as Peterloo. Mary Shelley tells her tale of science gone haywire, the first mad scientist story, against this backdrop of British progress and its discontents. As for Europe—Shelley wrote her text in the new Switzerland—the continent had, in 1816, just seen the French nation's international revolution,

37 Dante, who did not read Greek, was unaware that Ulysses returned home. He puts him near the bottom of the *Inferno* after Ulysses summons his crew to the "mondo sanza gente" [world without people]—in *Dante Alighieri* (1982–1984), I, p. 294: Canto XXVI, l.117. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798) in *Coleridge* (1931), p. 187.

38 Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin and Richard Arkwright the spinning frame, two inventions which in fact prolonged the slavery-based cotton economy in the antebellum American South.

dear to both Shelleys' hearts, crash to an end with Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo in 1815, and the return of the kings to the thrones of Europe. The Shelleys left in 1818 for subjugated Italy, and Mary did not return to England until after her husband's death in 1822. Their friend Byron, meanwhile, died young in 1824, fighting for Greek freedom at Missolonghi.

Today, Mary Shelley's creature has stolen Victor's name. The creature argues in this closing speech that remorse makes its agony "superior" to Victor's, much as Percy's Prometheus in his suffering is superior to Zeus. Then it departs across the ice, and this jagged text, as composite a thing as the creature itself, comes to an end. We bid farewell. And what does this ending mean, for the creature, for readers, for the author? Well, for the creature, it means it gets the last word. Its creator, enemy, and rival is now as dead as the creature was when lying on that slab. The creature is accursed, a scapegoat and outcast, but not voiceless at the close; it can say, like Shakespeare's Caliban in *The Tempest* (1611), "You taught me language; / and my profit on't, is, I know how to curse."<sup>39</sup> Indeed, one might see the legacy of William Wilberforce's long campaign against the Atlantic slave trade in filigree behind this figure who is, after all, "a Man and a Brother," as Wedgwood's famous anti-slavery medallion then had it.<sup>40</sup> As for the readers, we are left stranded in the Arctic, and our last companion is this monster and murderer. Its departure into the wastes is in turn not without recalling the last line of Percy's epochal sonnet, "Ozymandias" (1818)— "The lone and level sands stretch far away."<sup>41</sup> The vision that ends *Frankenstein* was, in short, a shared vision for the Shelley marriage, in the years 1816–1822, and one they cared a good deal about.

Finally, what did this ending mean for Mary Shelley herself? At the end of the day, as life and history played out—Percy's death by drowning, the emergence and consolidation of the Metternich Restoration in Europe, the continuing advance in Britain, Europe, and the Americas of the Industrial Revolution—it meant a retreat of sorts

39 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act I sc. ii, ll. 363–364, in *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 1616.

40 William Wilberforce helped inspire Josiah Wedgwood's anti-slavery medallion of 1787, in white with a black figure, which reads "Am I not a Man and a Brother?"

41 "Ozymandias" (1818) in *Shelley* (1952), p. 550.

from being a Regency author into being a Victorian one, a shift which entailed a variety of choices and obligations. It is some way from the explosive revolt that ends Mary Shelley's first novel to the more settled meditations of *Lodore* and *The Last Man*. That new environment is perhaps safer, but it loses the dream of revolution, it loses mythic weight. And with this arc, as the widowed Mary Shelley advanced through the years, came a certain respectability. That was perhaps hard to imagine in 1816, for this daughter of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, but it was increasingly common for many Englishwomen in particular—George Eliot, say—in the consolidating universe of the long-lived Queen Victoria and of her German consort. As we rediscover Britain's women Romantics—and they are not few in number—Mary Shelley's trajectory from youth to widowhood becomes, in some ways, exemplary. Britain's various women Romantics overlap in theme and biography with its six canonical male poets, those "happy few"—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and these days, Blake—but like those other, often better-selling contemporary British poets Thomas Moore, or George Crabbe, or Sir Walter Scott for that matter, they also have their own life and their own cross to bear.<sup>42</sup> Our grasp of Romanticism in the West, like our grasp of the history of women, will only gain from our focus on this essential and foundational complexity.

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42 Broadview has re-edited some of Mary Shelley's later novels: *The Last Man* (1826), ed. by Anne McWhir, 1996, and *Lodore* (1835), ed. by Lisa Vargo, 1997. "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers"—*Henry V*, Act IV, sc. iii, l.60, in *Shakespeare* (1974), p. 960. Stendhal dedicated his writing to "the happy few" (quoted in English).

## 5. Russia, 1825–1832

### Alexander Pushkin, *Evgenii Onegin*

<p>«Мой дядя самых честных правил,          Когда не в шутку занемог,          Он уважать себя заставил          И лучше выдумать не мог.          Его пример другим наука;          Но, боже мой, какая скука</p> <p>С больным сидеть и день и ночь,          Не отходя ни шагу прочь!          Какое низкое коварство          Полуживого забавлять,          Ему подушки поправлять,          Печально подносить лекарство,          Вздыхать и думать про себя:          Когда же чёрт возьмёт тебя!»</p> <p>Так думал молодой повеса,            Летя в пыли на почтовых,          Всевышней волею Зевеса          Наследник всех своих родных. —          Друзья Людмилы и Руслана!          С героем моего романа          Без предисловий, сей же час          Позвольте познакомить вас:          Онегин, добрый мой приятель,          Родился на берегах Невы,          Где, может быть, родились вы          Или блистали, мой читатель;          Там некогда гулял и я:          Но вреден север для меня.</p>	<p>'My uncle always was respected,          But his grave illness, I confess,          Is more than could have been expected:          A stroke of genius, nothing less!          He offers all a fine example.          But God, such boredom who would          sample</p> <p>As day and night to have to sit          Beside a sick-bed – think of it!          Low cunning must assist devotion          To one who is but half-alive;          You puff his pillow and contrive          Amusement while you mix his potion;          You sigh and think with furrowed brow:          "Why can't the devil take you now?"</p> <p>'Tis thus the gay dog's thoughts are          freighted,          As through the dust his horses fare,          Who by the high gods' will is fated          To be his relatives' sole heir.          Friends of Ruslan and fair Ludmila,          For my new hero prithee feel a          Like kinship, as he takes his bow;          Become acquainted with him now:          Eugene Onegin, born and nourished          Where old Neva's grey waters flow,          Where you were born or as a beau,          It may be, in your glory flourished,          I too strolled there – not recently:          The north does not agree with me.<sup>43</sup></p>
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43 Alexander Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin. A Novel in Verse*, trans. by Babette Deutsch (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 19–20.

**Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin** (6 June 1799–10 February 1837). **Works:** long poems—*Ruslan and Liudmila*, *The Captive of the Caucasus*, *Evgenii Onegin*; plays—*Boris Godunov*; prose—*The Queen of Spades*. Pushkin was born into Russian nobility; his maternal great-grandfather, Abram Petrovich Gannibal, born, it appears, in what is now Cameroon, was kidnapped, made a page boy to the Ottoman Sultan, and then presented as a gift to Tsar Peter the Great. He rose to be *Général en Chef*, in charge of sea forts and canals in all Russia. Alexander spoke mostly French until the age of ten; he became acquainted with Russian through speaking with household serfs and his nanny. At the Lyceum, Pushkin was influenced by Kant and by the French Enlightenment, particularly Diderot and Voltaire. He became committed to social reform and emerged as a spokesman for reformers, resulting after 1820 in time away from the capital in the Caucasus, Crimea, and Moldavia. There he joined an organization working, like Byron, to overthrow Ottoman rule in Greece, and wrote two poems which brought him acclaim: “The ‘Captive of the Caucasus’” (1822) and “The Fountain of Bakhchisaray” (1824). In 1823, Pushkin again clashed with the government, which exiled him to his mother’s rural estate from 1824 to 1826, though he was summoned to Moscow after his “Ode to Liberty” was found among the belongings of the Decembrist rebels. Around this time, he met and befriended Adam Mickiewicz during the latter’s own exile, and also married the sixteen-year-old Natalia Goncharova, one of Moscow’s most celebrated beauties. He met and supported the writer Nikolai Gogol after 1831. In 1837, Pushkin was killed in a duel with his brother-in-law, Georges-Charles de Heeckeren d’Anthès, a French officer serving in Russia who had attempted to seduce the poet’s wife.

By common consent, Russian literature takes flight with Pushkin, and this is not unusual in the history of European Romanticism. Across Eastern Europe in particular, Romantic authors are foundational. What is perhaps unusual in this tradition is Pushkin’s wit, sophistication, and polish; he stands comparison with any nation’s preeminent Romantic poet, be it Goethe or Hölderlin, Wordsworth or Keats, Hugo, Lamartine, or Leopardi. In Russia, he is a national hero. His is also the first verse romance here, though Northern and Eastern Europe saw others, from Tegnér’s Swedish *Frithiofs Saga* in 1825, through to Mickiewicz’s Polish *Pan Tadeusz* in 1834 and Shevchenko’s Ukrainian *Haidamaky* in 1841, to Petöfi’s Hungarian *János vitéz* (John the Valiant), in 1845. Curiously, the

form cannot be called central to French, German, or Italian Romantic production, but it did play an outsize role in shaping Europe's Romantic movements after Byron used it for *Childe Harold*—a European success—in 1812–1818. Byron returned to it in his rather funnier *Don Juan*, a touchstone text for *Onegin* (1825–1832). Across the British Isles, in fact, Southey, Scott, and Thomas Moore showed the form's staying power; it covers Eastern Europe; and Longfellow helped found American poetry with it, in *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855) in particular. It is a fitting pendant to the undoubted and lasting success of the novel during Europe's Romantic era.

There is a fine line between verse romance and the epic. A.W. Schlegel might argue that epic ended with the Classical world, and that Chaucer, Tasso, and Camoëns are working in a new form, the romance, bequeathed to them by the Christian Middle Ages. In romance, for instance, the divine tends to yield to the popular and magical as an agent of the plot. The new interest in romance that typified the later eighteenth century is marked by the success of Ossian as a counterweight to Homer, and by parodies like William Combe's now-neglected *Three Tours of Dr. Syntax* (1809–1821), the first of them in search of the picturesque—Hudibrastic fun serialized in Britain from 1809 to 1811. It is also fair to say that heroes of romance may be ironized in a way impossible for Virgil or Homer, which is emphatically *Onegin's* case.

One irony of *Onegin's* lasting popularity in Russia is that he is, like the title characters of Byron's *Don Juan* or Lermontov's *Hero of Our Time* (1840), very much an anti-hero.<sup>44</sup> Reading *Onegin* is a bittersweet experience, to some extent unique in European Romantic literature, though one thinks of Heine. Romantic irony is common enough, but giving us empathy for our hero while making him fundamentally compromised is less common. Alfred de Musset has that knack in *On ne badine pas avec l'amour* (1834). Pushkin opens his love story—for it is a love story—with *Onegin* awaiting his wealthy uncle's death. Mid-romance, *Onegin* will duel with and kill his best friend Lensky for, after all, no reason, and that moment is dropped into the narrative like a pebble into a stream without interrupting its onward flow. From the opening lines, *Onegin* is an entitled young man—an heir, an inheritor—somewhat

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44 Mikhail Lermontov, *Geroi nashego vremeni* [A Hero of Our Time] (1840).



along the lines of Dickens's Pip in *Great Expectations* (1860), or Balzac's Eugène de Rastignac in *Le Père Goriot* (1834), or for that matter, Pierre Bezukhov in Tolstoy's later *War and Peace* (1867).<sup>45</sup> Onegin is, in short, a 'superfluous person,' as the Russian saying had it, one of European Romanticism's young minor nobles. From the outset, Onegin is disabused and *blasé*. He is, like Oswald or Frankenstein but unlike, say, Heinrich von Ofterdingen, very modern. Europe's Romantics were equally ready to dive into the Christian Middle Ages or to remain in the chaotic present, relying on a dialectic that divided post-Classical Christian Europe and its productions from the Greek and Roman art that had shaped European output since the Renaissance. Victor Hugo for instance is equally comfortable, in his prose fictions, in medieval Paris or the Paris of 1793 or 1830.<sup>46</sup> This book argues that the agendas of Romantic Neoclassicism on the one hand, and Romantic medievalism on the other, work in tandem and coexist in the minds of more than one author of the era. Certainly, Pushkin combines Romantic and Neoclassical elements.

Onegin strikes a Byronic pose. He is belated—which may surprise, as Russian literature here commences. Topical, modern, witty, he is not a man for enthusiasm, and in that, he contrasts markedly with the Tatiana who falls in love with him. Like his narrator—"The north does not agree with me"—he is a child of pleasure and ease. He is after all very young. And what does it mean to be young, not old, in this world? Well, it means to be lovable. To see possibility stretch out before you, as Lensky does before his death. It means perhaps to be *authentic*, in contrast to the trimming and hypocrisy to which the old are often reduced. To be poor, though one may have expectations, and to depend on uncles for our inheritance. It may mean to have solidarity with those who will later die poor—as heirs like these will, in theory, not—and thus to see value in revolution, like Julien, who has nothing, or the aristocratic Mathilde who loves him in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830).<sup>47</sup> That is how *Evgenii Onegin* opens.

45 Lev Tolstoy, *Voina i mir* [War and Peace] (1867).

46 Compare Victor Hugo, *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831), *Les Misérables* [The Wretched] (1862), *Quatrevingt-treize* [Ninety-Three] (1874).

47 Stendhal [Marie-Henri Beyle], *Le Rouge et le Noir: Chronique du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* [The Red and the Black: Chronicle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century] (1830).

Testaments mattered to the Romantics as they do to anyone. They separate families from strangers. Within families, they separate old and young along hierarchical lines. They bring the weight of societal inertia, of impersonal structuring principles, to bear on the Promethean individual. They compromise free will and independence, as in the case of Jarndyce v. Jarndyce in Dickens's 1852 *Bleak House*. Onegin will live his life representing the family name, and aristocratic honor matters enough to him to fight a duel with his best friend over it. It is worth remembering that peasant heroes are not common in the Romantic era; Stendhal's Julien Sorel is one. It is instead common for this art which is focused on the folk—on recording the people's voice—to do so via the minor nobility; indeed, kings and queens are not rare in Romantic pages. Here, we might turn a moment to Pushkin's own life, and the story of Russia in the years leading up to 1825–1832, when this poem was published. Pushkin fought more than one duel, and that is how he died. He ran afoul of the new tsar, Nicholas I, in the 1825 Decembrist uprising, and was exiled from St Petersburg in consequence. The liberal dreams that had attached to Tsar Alexander I, around 1813 as he founded the Holy Alliance, had dissipated as he consolidated power. Serfdom remained unreformed throughout the empire. That is the backdrop to Onegin's feckless adventuring.

The text is not short of Romantic baggage. Big Romantic themes are handled lightly, as in Byron's *Don Juan*, in Stendhal's epigraphs to *Le Rouge et le Noir*, and in Almeida Garrett's chapter rubrics for his *Viagens na minha terra* (1846). Pushkin combines name-dropping with wit—*Ruslan and Liudmila* was his own poem, published in 1820. This lightness of touch, this humor in narrative, is the world laid out by Laurence Sterne in his novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767). From the opening words of a book, both reader and author form an implicit contract, and it is worth asking how that contract looks in Pushkin. What do we know of our hero? What do we know of the author and narrator? Are they, for instance, Russian like ourselves? Onegin, the protagonist, we have discussed. The young Pushkin was well enough known by 1825 that the Decembrists viewed him as their inspiration, and fame and its specific mechanics have their role in Pushkin's storytelling. Let us mention that like Alexandre Dumas, Alexander Pushkin had African ancestors, but unlike Dumas, he did not find himself excluded from the canon on that

basis. As for Pushkin's narrator, he (or she) is complex. To begin with, he speaks in a fluent stanza form, which again has its debt to Byron's *Don Juan* and the poem's brisk and elegant *ottava rima*. This is a novel in verse, as Pushkin announces on his title page, thereby complicating genre theory. Prose fiction is not typically the home of the lyric moment, but Pushkin has found a genre which allows the two to be combined. The narrator is, if not omniscient, then certainly well-informed, hence the topical name dropping. He is an educated man addressing the educated—not always a priority in Eastern European verse romance. He is *blasé* and tends to report Onegin's behavior without undue commentary or judgment. He is easily bored, as in the story's final line: "As, my Onegin, I drop you" (214). In short, he is very civilized, a fine companion for our journey through Onegin's adventures.

Let us return for a moment to the opening extract. Our own reader's contract with Pushkin and this book takes shape quickly. The young author, in 1825–1832, was already famous, with liberal leanings that had seen him exiled from St Petersburg. The narrator is *comme il faut*, a suitable and entertaining companion for our reading. Our protagonist is, from the opening stanza, not a hero in the traditional sense, but compromised, if not an anti-hero. The opening, like any opening, is a tuning fork that will determine the tone of every page thereafter, and Pushkin hits that note with aplomb. Every page of Onegin's subsequent thought and action is informed by these opening stanzas. Openings are tricky things, but Pushkin makes the difficult look easy. This entire 'novel in verse' is never heavy-handed or slow; even Lensky's death, as noted, goes by like a breath of air in this light plotting. And yet, that is Onegin's best friend, and he won't be coming back. It is not easy to look this easy, and that is what Pushkin does. It seems all the more worth recognizing that Pushkin has contrived to be entirely Russian and national—to speak to generations of Russians—in a text full of echoes of his broad European reading; that he has opened a national literature with a tone notable for its world-weariness; that he is polished and elegant where you might expect earnest simplicity, if not mediocre art; that he is, at the end of the day, really very old, like his narrator, where you might expect him to be young. There is a certain miracle to it all, a certain magic and wonder. It might make Pushkin smile from beyond the grave.

## 6. The United States, 1826

### James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*

Chingachgook grasped the hand that, in the warmth of feeling, the scout had stretched across the fresh earth, and in an attitude of friendship these two sturdy and intrepid woodsmen bowed their heads together, while scalding tears fell to their feet, watering the grave of Uncas like drops of falling rain.

In the midst of the awful stillness with which such a burst of feeling, coming as it did, from the two most renowned warriors of that region, was received, Tamenund lifted his voice to disperse the multitude.

"It is enough," he said. "Go, children of the Lenape, the anger of the Manitou is not done. Why should Tamenund stay? The pale faces are masters of the earth, and the time of the red men has not yet come again. My day has been too long. In the morning I saw the sons of Unamis happy and strong; and yet, before the night has come, have I lived to see the last warrior of the wise race of the Mohicans."<sup>48</sup>

**James Fenimore Cooper** (September 15, 1789–September 14, 1851).

**Works:** novels, notably the Leatherstocking series; political tracts—*A Letter to My Countrymen*; naval writings—*History of the Navy of the United States of America*. Cooper spent his boyhood and old age in Cooperstown, New York, a town founded by his father. He attended Yale University but was expelled for pranks—a donkey on campus, an exploding door. In 1806, Cooper joined the merchant marine and saw an American crewmate impressed into the British Royal Navy. He joined the United States Navy as an officer in 1811, marrying into a Loyalist family the same year. Cooper published *The Spy* in 1821—America's first bestseller—before moving on to the Leatherstocking series from 1823 to 1841, featuring Natty Bumppo, a woodsman at home with the Delaware Indians. Cooper moved his family to Europe in 1826, befriending the Marquis de La Fayette, though he was no fan of aristocracy in politics. He returned to the United States in 1833 and published the broadside "A Letter to My Countrymen." Cooper admired Jefferson and Jackson; Whig editors attacked anything he wrote. Cooper's death was followed by a memorial service in New York led by the writers Daniel Webster, Washington Irving, and William Cullen Bryant.

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48 James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1986), pp. 349–350.

By the 1820s, a new European vogue for prose historical romances, launched by Sir Walter Scott in 1814 when he switched from verse to prose with *Waverley* (1814), had crossed the Atlantic. Cooper became famous with *The Spy* (1821), but he pivoted his five *Leatherstocking Tales* around *The Last of the Mohicans* in 1826, and indeed the book anchors his fame today. Just as Scott spoke for a junior partner in the British enterprise—Scotland has played second fiddle to England since the Act of Union in 1707—so Cooper gave voice to a junior partner in the emerging Anglosphere, the new United States. In 1826, the Declaration of Independence was just fifty years in the past; the constitution dated only from 1787, and in the War of 1812—that sidebar to Europe’s titanic Napoleonic struggle—the British had taken the new nation’s capital and burned its White House. America was not yet the world power it became after the Civil War; it remained federal, agricultural, provincial, frontiersy. It is against this backdrop that Cooper chose to place his scout Natty Bumppo—Hawkeye—in late Colonial days, the time of the French and Indian War. That was North America’s piece of the Seven Years’ War between France and the United Kingdom, which played out between 1756–1763 from the Caribbean to India. One could imagine, after independence and the War of 1812, that Cooper might be anti-British, and the sentiment is common enough in American history. His villains are instead the French, who gave determinative support to the War of Independence, along with the Hurons, their former Indian allies. New nations sometimes align unexpectedly within existing power dynamics.

The short paragraphs above close Cooper’s novel. Tamenund, the speaker, is an indigenous tribal leader—though European settlers and Indian tribes were to fight and kill each other for another century on the nation’s Western frontier. Cooper’s decision to make Uncas a hero, and to give Tamenund the last word, may be gauged in its radicalism by Echeverría’s contemporary and pivotal Argentine verse romance, “La Cautiva” (1837), whose heroine’s capture by bloodthirsty Indians shapes his plot and title. The two nations have their differences, reflecting their different stories: boasting to an Argentine friend of my Native American ancestry, I was—to my surprise—commiserated with. It was not entirely apparent, in 1826, that American Indian power in North America would forever end, but in fact The Prophet’s defeat at Tippecanoe in 1811,

combined with the Creek War in 1813–1814, had ended all organized indigenous resistance east of the Mississippi. Furthermore, Lewis and Clark had, in 1804–1806, crossed the entire new Louisiana Territory—Indian Territory—with their guide Sacagawea and, like Keats’s Cortez of 1816, reached the Pacific.<sup>49</sup> The whole breadth of North America was within the new colonial nation’s grasp. This is the context for Cooper’s pregnant title—*The Last of the Mohicans*—and for Tamenund’s closing words.

How might one expect Europeans and non-Europeans, in 1826, to interact? Cooper’s novel is focused on this topic. Technology plays its part here. The first successful steamboats appeared in the 1780s, opening up the great rivers of the planet—the Yangtze, the Congo, the Mississippi, the Orinoco—to navigation and thus launching the era of gunboat diplomacy.<sup>50</sup> The world’s continental interiors became accessible to European firepower and, indeed, the European powers spent much of the nineteenth century acquiring as much of the globe as they could manage, primarily in competition with each other. Local populations, in their varying states of economic, sociopolitical, and military development, were subjugated or wiped out. If the eighteenth century was a great age of exploration—the British Captain Cook was murdered in 1779 on the remote Hawaiian archipelago—the nineteenth was an age for imperialism, in which the new United States took part: annexing Hawaii from its last queen, for instance, in 1898. It is nostalgic, not to say sentimental, for Cooper to set his novel during the Seven Years War, a time when colonizing powers and Native American tribes could negotiate on an almost equal footing. Such was not the case in 1826. We might also note that America’s then-ongoing pillage of the West African coast—the Atlantic slave trade—is effectively invisible in this novel. It would be another forty years before the young, slave-owning American republic came to address that issue, after 1861, and at the cost of some 600,000 dead. The story of these interactions played out differently in Latin America, for various reasons. It was a region which

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49 “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” in *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. by Harry Buxton Forman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 39: “Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes / He star’d at the Pacific [...].”

50 On steamboats and gunboat diplomacy, see Paul Johnson, *The Birth of the Modern. World Society 1815–1830* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

saw comparatively less genocide than the United States, though indeed it saw its share, as well as more assimilation and cohabitation. The Western frontier in the United States was a place of slaughter.

Cooper is, then, offering his readers something exotic, a native exoticism which would very likely have been less apparent to readers in any other of the Americas' new nations. As Uncas represents a sort of noble savage, in Rousseau's tradition, so too does he represent a lost civilization, much like those Mayan step pyramids—notably Chichén-Itzá—revealed to the world by Stephens and Catherwood in 1842–1843.<sup>51</sup> *Who gets to speak?*—one might ask of Romantic texts featuring non-European characters. Here, as in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the last word is given to a speaker standing outside of Eurocentric civilization, that European project to which these two novels' authors and audiences belong. This leap into otherness, only hinted at in the eighteenth century, is a central Romantic preoccupation, and indeed a fundamental contribution of the Romantic period to the world. We see it early in Ossian, Percy, or Herder, in the era's calls for compilations of texts from sources alien to their authors—the Grimms' fairy tale collections or A.W. Schlegel's Sanskrit critical editions.<sup>52</sup> This is a new value system, focused on authenticity and on the recognition of human diversity, on a desire to preserve the complexity of what exists before it is lost in the march of progress and revolution. It is anchored in a certain vision of history, one where new things replace old ones, not always for the better, and old ones can be mourned. We see it in the great historians of the age, from Michelet to Niebuhr or Ranke; we see it in the historical sweep of novelists like Manzoni, Hugo or Thomas Hardy, Tolstoy or Melville. It continues to shape modern thought. It is, at the end of the day, why Scott's and Cooper's contemporaries so loved historical novels.

It matters too that Cooper's main character—the hero of the *Leatherstocking Tales*—is not Native American but European. Natty Bumppo is a woodsman, at ease in the Native American universe, but remaining a colonist at the same time. It seems perhaps unlikely

51 Frederick Catherwood and John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatán* (1842) and *Incidents of Travel in Yucatán* (1843).

52 Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* [Children's and House Fairy Tales] (1812–1815); on August Wilhelm Schlegel's scholarly work, see Roger Paulin, *The Life of August Wilhelm Schlegel. Cosmopolitan of Art and Poetry* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0069>.

that Cooper's readers in 1826 would have been ready for the Apache hero, Winnetou, who earned Karl May 200 million readers a century or so later, though Longfellow's providential *Hiawatha* (1855) matters a great deal here.<sup>53</sup> The United States were taking shape, in literature as in politics and society; Thoreau, Irving, Emerson, Poe, Longfellow, and Hawthorne all began the American project around this time. Amid this early group, Cooper stands out for an epic scope largely unrivalled until Melville's 1851 *Moby-Dick*; he is indeed at work creating the American epic. And this returns us to that thorny Romantic question: is a modern epic possible? One answer might be: does it matter, if romance will perform that genre's traditional function? And the case can be made that it does just that. A way to achieve this goal is to produce novel cycles, like Cooper here or Balzac in *La Comédie humaine*. The new genre's values and esthetics may yet differ from those of Homer and Virgil, but its sweep and weight may be equivalent.

What has happened, then, as this particular novel closes? Well, an intrigue has played out, involving heroism, treachery, and romance, against a backdrop of war, loss, and a shifting in human alliances. Individuals with their virtues, their foibles, and their free will appear on society's vast chessboard, which they can only partly grasp and only begin to influence. The impersonal forces of history operate, leaving participants to be remembered for good or ill by posterity. It is grand Romantic stuff, well-conceived and well-executed, like Scott's wildly successful Waverley novels, like the Romantic tragedies—*Egmont* (1789), *Don Karlos* (1787), *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* (1801)—of a Goethe or a Schiller, like the novels of Balzac. And now, Tamenund will speak. First, Chingachgook and Hawkeye shake hands over the grave of Uncas. These two representatives of two very different civilizations weep together in a moment of friendship, male bonding, and mutual loss. Now Tamenund breaks his silence, as we have seen, to say, "It is enough." He doesn't say a lot—echoing an old Native American trope—but his words are to the point. He speaks of the Manitou, his world spirit or god. "The pale faces," he says, "are masters of the earth." "My day has been too long," he goes on to remark. This is 1757, a time that was by 1826 vanishing into the past, as Irving's 1819 *Rip van Winkle* pointedly reminds us. But

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53 Karl May found immense international success in a series of novels starring his Apache hero Winnetou, despite having never visited America.



already, American Indian power has been broken. There is in history a path to extinction in which some things die while others flourish, and it is not always the bad which dies, as we have said, and the good or noble which triumphs. Tamenund has seen, in his last words to the gathering, "the last warrior of the wise race of the Mohicans."

Why, finally, does Cooper write? A variety of themes emerge in this closing extract. It matters that men bond here and women are not foregrounded; that Natty Bumppo is a crack shot; that two men weep. It matters that Tamenund is laconic; that he speaks of his alien god or spirit; that the pale faces do not end the novel, but he does. And it matters that the United States was a new republic in 1826, yet Tamenund is old; that these provincial, if not semi-barbaric figures have the dignity of epic, since the United States, after all, saw itself as provincial, indeed minor, in art until the 1960s. Or, indeed, that this ending walks a fine line between melodrama and the sublime; that it is good writing, but also simple writing; that some here have bursts of feeling, while others remain poised. It matters, finally, that in this New World with its new republics, the tale is one of old and young, of old and new. That the reader has made this journey with Cooper, despite, say, the prominent French role in American independence, despite the War of 1812, the burning of the White House, and the Battle of New Orleans. It matters that all this history is recent and local, and that American literature starts like this.

## 7. Eastern Europe (Poland), 1834

### Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz*

Razem ze strun wiele	He lifts his hands, then both together fall
Buchnął dźwięk, jakby cała janczarska kapela	And smite at once, astonishing them all.
Ozwała się z dzwonekami, z zelami, z bębenki:	A sudden crash bursts forth from many strings
Brzmi Polonez Trzeciego Maja! — Skoczne dźwięki	As when a band of janissaries rings
Radością oddychają, radością słuch poją;	With cymbals, bells, and drums. And now resounds
Dziewki chcą tańczyć, chłopcy w miejscu nie dostoją —	The Polonaise of May the 3rd! It bounds
Lecz starców myśli z dźwiękiem w przeszłość się uniosły,	And breathes with joy, its notes with gladness fill;
W owe lata szczęśliwe, gdy senat i posły,	Girls long to dance and boys can scarce keep still.
Po dniu Trzeciego Maja, w ratuszowej sali,	But of the old men every one remembers
Zgodzonego z narodem króla fetowali,	That Third of May, when Senators and Members
Gdy przy tańcu śpiewano: «Wiwat Król kochany!	in the assembly hall with joy went wild,
Wiwat Sejm, wiwat Naród, wiwat wszystkie Stany!»	That king and Nation had been reconciled; “Long live the King, long live the Sejm!” they sang, “Long live the Nation!” through the concourse rang.
Mistrz coraz takty nagli i tony natęża;	The music ever louder grew and faster,
A wtem puścił fałszywy akord jak syk węża,	Then suddenly a false chord—from the master!
Jak zgrzyt żelaza po szkłe: przejął wszystkich dreszczem	Like hissing snakes or shattering glass, that chilled
I wesołość pomieszał przeczuciem złowieszczem.	Their hearts and with a dire foreboding filled.

Zasmuceni, strwożeni, słuchacze zwątpili,	Dismayed and wondering the audience heard:
Czy instrument niestrojny? czy się muzyk myli?	Was the instrument ill-tuned? Or had he erred?
Nie zmylił się mistrz taki! On umyślnie trąca	He had not erred! he struck repeatedly
Wciąż tę zdradziecką strunę, melodyję zmaca,	That treacherous string and broke the melody,
Coraz głośniejsz targając akord rozdzasany,	And ever louder smote that sullen wire,
Przeciwko zgodzie tonów skonfederowany:	That dared against the melody conspire,
Aż Klucznik pojął mistrza, zakrył ręką lica	Until the Warden, hiding face in hand,
I krzyknął: «Znam! znam głos ten! to jest Targowica!»	Cried out, "I know that sound, I understand;
I wnet pękła ze świstem struna złowróżąca;	It's Targowica! Suddenly, as he speaks,
Muzyk bieży do prymów, urywa takt, zmaca,	The string with evil-omened hissing breaks;
Porzuca prymy, bieży z drążkami do basów.	At once the hammers to the treble race, Confuse the rhythm, hurry to the bass. <sup>54</sup>

**Adam Bernard Mickiewicz** (24 December 1798–26 November 1855). **Works:** drama—*Dziady* [Forefathers' Eve]; epic—*Pan Tadeusz*, *Konrad Wallenrod*; newspaper articles. Mickiewicz was born in or near Navahrudak, now in Belarus. The region lay within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania until the third and final partition of Poland in 1795, when it became Russian: Mickiewicz is thus a national poet in three countries. He attended university in Vilnius. In 1817, Mickiewicz and his friends created an organization with ties to a pro-independence group. In 1822–1823, as Mickiewicz published his first poetry collections, a government

54 Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz*, trans. by Kenneth R. MacKenzie (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1992), pp. 564–566.

search for secret student organizations led to arrests. These included Mickiewicz, who was banished further into Russia. In five years there, he published *Konrad Wallenrod* (1828) and befriended Pushkin. Mickiewicz left Russian soil in 1829 for Berlin, where he attended Hegel's lectures, then for Prague and Weimar where he met Goethe. After a stay in Rome, Mickiewicz journeyed to German-occupied Poland (Poznań), Geneva, and Paris in 1832. There he published *Pan Tadeusz* (1834), married, and worked from 1840–1844 as chair of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the Collège de France. In 1848, Mickiewicz organized a military unit to support the Polish insurgents—which saw no action—and was visited at home by the ailing Frédéric Chopin. In 1849, he founded a newspaper, writing over seventy articles for it in order to promote democracy, socialism, and other Revolutionary and Napoleonic ideals. Mickiewicz supported France's Second Empire and also the Crimean War, hoping it would lead to a restored Poland. His last composition was a Latin ode in praise of Napoleon III. He traveled to Constantinople in 1855, looking to organize Polish and Jewish forces to fight against Russia, and died there that year, likely of cholera. His works served as inspiration for Polish uprisings against the powers that had partitioned his nation out of existence.

Simply put, Poland in 1834 did not exist. It had ceased to exist with the Third Partition of Poland, carried out by the Russian and Austrian Emperors and the King of Prussia. The new French Emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, briefly created a ghost of Poland, the Grand-Duchy of Warsaw, from 1807 until 1815, when that territory was again partitioned between Prussia and the Russian tsar. Not until 1918 did Poland reappear on the map. This is why Adam Mickiewicz, born in Russia, wrote and published *Pan Tadeusz* in Paris. Nationalism, if not downright tribalism, tends to shape canon formation, and nowhere more so than in nations' foundational Romantic texts. The Russians have spent generations overlooking Pushkin's cosmopolitanism in favor of his 'Russian soul.' In the Mickiewicz Museum in Warsaw, staff speak only Polish; the man's internationalism has fallen by the wayside, just as in Prague's Kafka Museum, where Kafka's own native German is not understood. An old saying holds that a dialect is a language without an army. Compare Ján Kóllar's German title for his 1836 pan-Slavic study, *Reciprocity between the Various Tribes and Dialects of the Slavic Nation*,

where the lack of available referents seems to have prompted Kóllar's odd lexical choices—tribes, dialects—to frame his argument. Eastern Europe raises issues for nation-builders that were less prevalent in those Western regions—the United Kingdom, German lands—where these ideas were first elaborated. The nation-states of Eastern Europe were largely created *ex nihilo*, unlike their languages, by *fiat* of the Allied Powers in 1918. Slovakia and the Czech Republic, like the states of the former Yugoslavia, have redrawn their borders since 1991. In Ukraine, Taras Shevchenko founded a national literature in the 1840s, though Ukraine only attained nationhood briefly between 1917–1921, and then again after 1991. Meanwhile, in Western Europe, Hendrik Conscience's Flemish-language historical novel, *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* (The Lion of Flanders, 1838), records a nation that existed as a dynastic county from 862 to 1795, and has not existed since. The Flemish independence movement splits the modern state of Belgium down the middle, a small echo of nationalism's toxic potential—as exemplified in Hitler's expanded German Reich or, for instance, those irredentist postcards for sale in Budapest's National Gallery in 2010, showing borders as they might be, with all Magyars in Europe part of one Hungary. This is the background to Mickiewicz's achievement, and to his place with *Pan Tadeusz* in the canon of Polish authors. Romanticism and nationalism go hand in hand across the nations of the West; it is, in a real sense, the people's voice.

In our extract, Jankiel plays patriotic songs on his dulcimer to an assembled crowd: "The Polonaise of May the 3<sup>rd</sup>" and "Targowica." It helps here to be Polish; on 3 May 1791, a truncated Poland ratified its liberal constitution, and then at Targowica on 27 April 1792, in one of Poland's many betrayals, a group of Polish-Lithuanian nobles formed a confederacy to reject that document. These are references destined to be tribal, and that is broadly true of Mickiewicz's entire verse romance. It is difficult to overstate such works' national prestige, but foreign readers face confusion, even tedium in such moments, and that in turn risks leaving foundational Romantic authors like, say, Petöfi, Shevchenko, Conscience, or Echeverría relegated to the narrow national boundaries they themselves promoted.<sup>55</sup> For nationalism is a two-edged sword.

55 For Sandór Petöfi, see the English/Hungarian edition of *John the Valiant* (London: Hesperus, 2004); for Taras Shevchenko, see *Selected Poetry* (Kiev: Dnipro, 1977), also bilingual.

Poland is a nation much-betrayed; in 1834, Polish memories remained fresh of the country's renewed deletion from the map at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Mickiewicz understandably, even rightly, chooses instead to recall an earlier moment of national betrayal, elegantly putting the reminder into music and leaving a Jewish musician to recall it. The story of the Jews in Poland is painful and complex, but Mickiewicz gives space to Jankiel in his narrative. This plot unfolds during the Napoleonic Wars, a time for Poland's last brief and compromised independence prior to 1918. It was at least possible to dream. Poland's ties to France are thus worth a mention. Chopin, like Mickiewicz, died in Paris, and it was Napoleon who bought a partitioned Poland those eight years of partial independence. The man is a hero in *Pan Tadeusz*.

Our scene is a people's gathering, and Jankiel's music—suitably, a *polonaise*—is not courtly or complex. Romantic composers—Chopin, Liszt—borrowed folk elements for inspiration.<sup>56</sup> One might call Jankiel's music limited, as one might call *Pan Tadeusz* less witty than *Evgenii Onegin*, but such a statement would to an extent be beside the point. First, I am no judge of Polish-language folk epic, though the choice of fourteener couplets may seem less than ideal. Second, as with the above composers, Mickiewicz is to an extent consciously rejecting courtly norms of elegance, although his heroes belong once again to the minor nobility, as is so often the case in Europe's Romantic texts. Third, as we have seen, creating a national art involves a certain amount of hermetic referencing; there are tribal flags needing to be planted, and Mickiewicz does that, like countless Romantics. This art is not courtly and cosmopolitan, it is popular and local. The man also wrote edgier work—*Konrad Wallenrod* (1828), say, or the fine drama *Dziady* (1822). His short national epic about the Teutonic Knights—*Konrad Wallenrod*—is interspersed, interestingly, with songs that serve to advance the plot. But *Pan Tadeusz* is his *Iliad*.

What role does music have in this extract, or indeed in literature in general? Here, it is martial, designed to rouse its listeners to resistance against the occupier, and is effective in so doing, as Mickiewicz relates. It creates enthusiasm, that quintessential Romantic emotion. It readies people to fight, to resist, to create an army. This aim—to stir

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56 On folk influence in Frédéric Chopin and Franz Liszt, critics cite Chopin's mazurkas and Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies*.

up passion through music—is not alien to the German Wagner in his near-contemporaneous theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>57</sup> It is a non-Aristotelian view of art, in its lack of interest in catharsis. More broadly, Romantic authors had considerable interest in music, and folk music in particular. We see this play out in Britain and in German lands, places where, after Bishop Percy, the ballad tradition is collected in anthologies and revived in lyric poetry, and also, as noted, in the works of Europe's Romantic composers.<sup>58</sup> Traditional musical forms—symphony, concerto, sonata—make space in this period for new forms—*étude*, *nocturne*, *ballade*. Chopin, that other Pole in exile, is a master of this redefinition. Lastly, music since the Greeks has been fundamental to poetry. This is true in lyric verse, but it is also true in epic and verse romance, which are of course separated from their sister, prose, by their musical structural elements, such as meter and rhyme. *Pan Tadeusz* lingers in the mind as prose can do only with the greatest difficulty.

Finally, what is to be major, after all, and what is to be minor in our canons? One might say that Mickiewicz is major in Poland and minor—indeed, largely unread—outside its borders. This is part of Eastern Europe's importance in the story of Romantic civilization. Its recurrent and explicit nation-building exercise exposes some of the fault lines of the Romantic project—“We, the people”—which were simply less apparent in the nations further West. Eastern Europe has its own history of silencing and oppression. It is telling, indeed fitting, that Mickiewicz in his nation-building project gives that dulcimer to Jankiel the Jew. Poland was in 1834 a nation of outcasts, and Mickiewicz has no interest in further dividing the citizens of a country which then lacked an army, a capital, or even borders to be policed. Its citizens were subjugated: this tale first published in Paris is that Polish voice returned. It is impossible, of course, to know which countries may rise, and which ones fall, in the course of human history. Mickiewicz had seen cosmopolitanism; he wrote this work in Parisian exile and after earlier exile in Russia. But unlike, say, Pushkin or Almeida Garrett, he chose

57 Richard Wagner developed his *Gesamtkunstwerk* theory in two 1849 essays, “Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft” [The Art Work of the Future] and “Die Kunst und die Revolution” [Art and Revolution].

58 On ballads, see Bishop Thomas Percy, *The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) and Clemens Brentano and Ludwig Achim von Arnim, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn Alte deutsche Lieder* [The Boy's Magic Horn Old German Songs] (1805–1808).

to pass that cosmopolitan knowledge over silently in his plot. He may seem unphilosophical here, even a little folksy, when compared with the worldly elegance of a Pushkin, a Heine, a Leopardi. He may indeed seem over-sincere in his nationalist intensity. But Mickiewicz wrote this work in exile from a country that did not exist. In his museum today, in a Warsaw rebuilt after the great Russo-German betrayal of 1944, the staff still speak only Polish.



## 8. Northern Europe (Denmark), 1835–1837

### Hans Christian Andersen, *Eventyr, fortalt for Børn*

Snedronningen. Syvende historie. Hvad der skete i  
 snedronningens slot, og hvad der siden skete

Lille Kay var ganske blå af kulde, ja næsten sort, men han mærkede det dog ikke, for hun havde jo kysset kuldegysen af ham, og hans hjerte var så godt som en isklump. Han gik og slæbte på nogle skarpe flade isstykker, som han lagde på alle mulige måder, for han ville have noget ud deraf; det var ligesom når vi andre har små træplader og lægger disse i figurer, der kaldes det kinesiske spil. Kay gik også og lagde figurer, de allerkunstigste, det var forstands-isspillet; for hans øjne var figurerne ganske udmærkede og af den allerhøjeste vigtighed; Det gjorde det glaskorn, der sad ham i øjet! han lagde hele figurer, der var et skrevet ord, men aldrig kunne han finde på at lægge det ord, som han just ville, det ord: Evigheden, og snedronningen havde sagt: "Kan du udfinde mig den figur, så skal du være din egen herre, og jeg forærer dig hele verden og et par nye skøjter." Men han kunne ikke.

## The Snow Queen. Seventh Story. Of the Palace of the Snow Queen and What Happened There at Last

Little Kay was quite blue with cold, indeed almost black, but he did not feel it; for the Snow Queen had kissed away the icy shiverings, and his heart was already a lump of ice. He dragged some sharp, flat pieces of ice to and fro, and placed them together in all kinds of positions, as if he wished to make something out of them; just as we try to form various figures with little tablets of wood which we call "a Chinese puzzle." Kay's fingers were very artistic; it was the icy game of reason at which he played, and in his eyes the figures were very remarkable, and of the highest importance; this opinion was owing to the piece of glass still sticking in his eye. He composed many complete figures, forming different words, but there was one word he never could manage to form, although he wished it very much. It was the word "Eternity." The Snow Queen had said to him, "When you can find out this, you shall be your own master, and I will give you the whole world and a new pair of skates." But he could not accomplish it.<sup>59</sup>

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59 H.C. Andersen, *Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales. A New Translation*, trans. by H.B. Paull (New York: Scribner, 1867), pp. 116–117.

**Hans Christian Andersen** (2 April 1805–4 August 1875). **Works:** plays; travelogues; novels; poems; fairy tales—*Eventyr, fortalt for Børn*. Andersen's father received an elementary school education, while his mother was a washerwoman who remarried after her husband's death and sent Andersen, aged eleven, to a school for the poor. Andersen's short story of 1829 featuring Saint Peter and a talking cat earned him a small royal grant which took him to Italy, a trip he fictionalized in his first novel, published in 1835 to instant acclaim. Andersen went on to publish nine fairy tales in three installments, from 1835–1837. Reviews of the first two condemned his informal style and lack of moral lessons for children. The third booklet contained "The Little Mermaid"—Andersen's creation, though influenced like Staël's *Corinne ou l'Italie* by La Motte Fouqué's *Undine* (1811)—and "The Emperor's New Clothes." These established Andersen's international reputation; his eventual 156 tales have been translated into more than 125 languages. In 1847, Andersen met Dickens in England, who like him was preoccupied by the victims of poverty and the Industrial Revolution. In 1857, he stayed at Dickens's home for five weeks until asked to leave. Dickens gradually stopped all correspondence between them, which confused and disappointed Andersen. Andersen often fell in love with unattainable women; thus, his story "The Nightingale" was written for Jenny Lind. He evidently experienced same-sex attraction as well, though apparently without acting on it.

It would seem a little odd for a survey on Romanticism to contain no mention of fairy tales. Here we are, then, amid the stories for all ages that Andersen wrote in Danish, but for the whole world. Denmark had shrunk somewhat after the Napoleonic Wars, as it was to shrink again after 1860. After siding with France, Denmark had seen its capital twice shelled by the British fleet, and at the Congress of Vienna, Norway was passed from Denmark to Sweden, though Denmark retained Greenland. For Denmark, the Restoration period was nevertheless a golden age, that of Kierkegaard and the sculptor Thorvaldsen, as well as of Andersen in literature. In 1848, Denmark became a constitutional monarchy, whereas most of Europe saw that particular year's liberal revolutions crushed. We may then ask, as we contemplate contemporary Scandinavia—Sweden's much-translated writer Tegnér, for instance—whether Denmark was a major or a minor European power; whether Scandinavia matters; about

the Baltic and the North Sea. Denmark is a pleasant and civilized place, but how does it, and the Baltic, weigh in Europe's balance? It seems worth suggesting that Europe, as we understand it, consists of more than its Great Powers. The European continent is a mix of large and small nation-states and languages; its fabric contains metropolises and forests just as it contains mountains, rivers, and plains. Without that complexity, Europe would be some other place. It deserves celebration, or at the very least presentation exactly as its complex history has made it. It matters, then, that Denmark today is smaller than it was, and that in this small land, Andersen wrote these tales for little people.

There is a statue of the Little Mermaid in Copenhagen harbor, and Andersen himself is the subject of a national myth, in which a popular artist creates almost independently of book learning, relying instead on the simple but resonant genius of the folk. This myth is quite Romantic. But as folklorists will tell you, folk art tends to form top-down instead of bottom-up; and in point of fact, Andersen's Little Mermaid has her debts to Friedrich de La Motte-Fouqué's German *Undine* of 1811, just as Kai's distorted vision in *The Snow Queen* has its debts to Kant's vision of the *noumenon*—ultimately unknowable—in 1781's *Critik der reinen Vernunft*. Andersen's sources can, in short, sometimes be highbrow and foreign, a fact which may seem the antithesis of the myth he inhabits. This is not an obvious topic for Danish pride, contrasting as it does top-down and bottom-up, home and abroad, truth and fiction. But Denmark is, after all and unavoidably, part of the Europe amid which it sits, and Andersen in his internationalism reflects that simple truth. So, we may well ask: is Andersen *authentic* in the end? Is this writing folk art, or is it refined? German scholars have shown that the Grimms' fairy tale collections of 1812–1815, presented to Romantic readers as a compilation of authentic popular speech, were in fact the product of art and careful editing. We might expect an artist to want to craft their work, and Wordsworth's talk of a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," for instance, should not obscure that simple truth.<sup>60</sup> Authentic folk art may ultimately be as unknowable as the *noumenon* itself.

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60 *Lyrical Ballads*, preface to the second edition (1800) in William Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 740: "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity [...]"

Andersen has read more widely than is sometimes credited. But it may be that his speech is popular in a way that his sources are not. He has an ear for the *sermo humilis*, the speech actual people on Copenhagen's actual streets might use. And this, more than Andersen's use of Kant, may help explain Andersen's fame abroad, one unmatched by any other Romantic author writing in Europe's less-spoken and less-studied languages. Almeida Garrett, Mickiewicz, Shevchenko, or Conscience, for instance, cannot begin to rival Andersen's international prestige. Simplicity is hard, and Andersen remains simple. Andersen is also writing a kind of wisdom literature; his tales tilt toward morals much as a preacher might. And this, once again, is hard when writing a text for all ages of people, as Andersen must make his points lightly. It's worth noting, then, that *fairy tales* is only one meaning of his Danish title *Eventyr*, which also means *adventures*. His is a world of dream, wishing, and magic; the ground may shift beneath our feet, but the heart is true. It is a world, put simply, which has a point.

What games does Andersen play with us? Byron, Pushkin, Garrett, Sterne, Diderot, or Stendhal are all full of games. Much of that scope for play is unavailable to Andersen, but his tales remain playful; they are indeed adventures, and we advance through them on a voyage of discovery and surprise. Andersen may seem very Danish, but he was a keen traveler, and his tales remain open at all times to novel things, alien things, to the magical and the unknown. A key gift of Andersen's is to present his novelties, his surprises, in the simplest and humblest terms; in words that make immediate sense. Indeed, he knows how to tell a story. In our extract, for instance, we are almost at the end of the story of *The Snow Queen*. Gerda and Kai, friends from infancy, have been separated, and Gerda has come on an exhausting quest to find and rescue her dear friend. Now she has found him at last, in the extreme North, sitting in the Snow Queen's palace. The tale has a certain grandeur to it. And Kai is playing a game. Play, almost by definition, involves a leap of imagination. As Gombrich notes in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* (1985), this leap is the definitional moment around which art is constituted; we take a stick and call it a horse.<sup>61</sup> Play involves the creation of a reality parallel to

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61 E.H. Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and other essays on the theory of art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1985), p. 4: "The 'first' hobby horse [...] was probably no image at all. Just a stick which qualified as a horse because one could ride on it."

our own, and yet independent of it; we play at war, but no actual war takes place. Children play—hopscotch, baseball, tic-tac-toe—to discover how to process the world. The stakes in play are only make-believe; they mimic actual stakes but are not actual. And so, Kai plays. What is he doing? He is assembling ice shards into patterns. Games are, by definition, futile, and Kai's occupation here certainly qualifies. For ice is a sterile thing, like the *isklump* that is now Kai's heart, while the ice on this palace floor has no structural, ornamental, or Utilitarian function. At the same time, the Snow Queen's promise to Kai—"the whole world and a new pair of skates"—shows she is not to be trusted. It is, after all, Satan's promise to Christ in Matthew 4: 8–9, with that new pair of skates to show how little she expects common sense or logic in response.<sup>62</sup> And Kai calls this the game of reason.

Now, various nineteenth-century thinkers, including many Romantics, devoted real effort to rejecting the somewhat monochrome Enlightenment that the eighteenth century had bequeathed them. Keats, for instance, remarked that Isaac Newton "had destroyed all the Poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to a prism."<sup>63</sup> It was, similarly, a cliché in Restoration thinking to attribute the French Revolution to the writings of the *philosophes*, which is why the child Gavroche in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862), just before he is shot dead by the forces of order, sings "Je suis tombé par terre, / C'est la faute à Voltaire."<sup>64</sup> Andersen is working within that tradition, which makes it all the more curious that Kai's inability to see things as they are, thanks to the shard of glass stuck in his eye, directly echoes Kant's observation that our senses allow us knowledge of the *phenomenon* alone, leaving the *noumenon*—the thing in itself—unknowable. Andersen has rather neatly borrowed Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) to offer his own critique of reason in the young person of Kai. It is, though, precisely the unchecked use of the intellect that Andersen is cautioning against, somewhat as Mary Shelley

62 *Holy Bible*, Authorized King James Version (1611), Matthew 4: 8–9: "the devil [...] sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world [...] And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee [...]."

63 Robert Gittings, *John Keats* (Boston & Toronto: Little, Brown & Co., 1968), p. 177: Lamb and Keats told Wordsworth at a gathering in 1817 that Newton "had destroyed all the Poetry of the rainbow, by reducing it to a prism," and then drank "Newton's health, and confusion to mathematics."

64 *Les Misérables*, "Jean Valjean," I, ch. 15, in Victor Hugo, *Romans*, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1963), II, p. 468.

did in the person of Victor Frankenstein. And Kai is working on a puzzle, struggling like Frankenstein to build a composite, if not organic whole, out of the icy fragments available to him. Fragments are curious things—as Friedrich Schlegel had shown—but in the end, Kai has only fragments to work with. This is perhaps a male proclivity. Certainly, Gerda seems immune to the Snow Queen and to the appeal of the ice shards at Kai's feet. She is the hero of this story, as the Snow Queen is the villain. If Kai's world is sterile, Gerda's is not; it is anchored in the heart and reflects a value system unimpressed by the Snow Queen and all her trappings. Unlike Kai, Gerda is not playing; she instead has a job to do.

Kai wants to write the word *eternity* in order to earn the Snow Queen's promised reward. This is not explicitly Christian, but it leans towards it. Eternity is many things, and one of them is a Christian afterlife, the nature of the dwelling-place of God. Kai's own stake here is clear—to get that promise—but it is unclear what the Snow Queen might get out of this. Is she simply amusing herself at Kai's expense? Or would success open some door for her, grant her some needful thing? Perhaps it would, much as Satan sought to profit from tempting Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. This is a dystopian scene, and Kai appears already marked for death in its opening sentence; Gerda will arrive like a breath of spring. There will be no mystical unveiling, only a homespun, if fraught, reunion of two dear friends, and a return from the Snow Queen's palace to a land where it is summer once again. Andersen has evidently read Kant and La Motte-Fouqué—or at least read of them—just as he has read the Bible. But his ethics in art and storytelling, with its focus on what is popular and what is childlike, propels Andersen along a path designed to reshape both his actual body of work into a mythical one, and Andersen himself into something he only partly was: a simple man, more interested in telling stories on his own behalf, and for his listeners, than in reading the various books that others around the world had already written. Andersen emerges from this process as homespun as his young heroine Gerda. And he seems, in the end, to have found a sort of eternity, without journeying through the Snow Queen's palace of ice.

## 9. The Italian Peninsula, 1835

### Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti*, *L'infinito*

Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle,	This lonely hill was always dear to me,
E questa siepe, che da tanta parte	and this hedgerow, which cuts off the view
Dell'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude.	of so much of the last horizon.
Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati	But sitting here and gazing, I can see
Spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani	beyond, in my mind's eye, unending spaces,
Silenzi, e profondissima quiete	and superhuman silences, and depthless calm,
Io nel pensier mi fingo; ove per poco	till what I feel
Il cor non si spaura. E come il vento	is almost fear. And when I hear
Odo stormir tra queste piante, io	the wind stir in these branches, I
quello	begin
Infinito silenzio a questa voce	comparing that endless stillness with this noise:
Vo comparando: e mi sovvien	and the eternal comes to mind,
l'eterno,	
E le morte stagioni, e la presente	and the dead seasons, and the present
E viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa	living one, and how it sounds.
Immensità s'annega il pensier mio:	So my mind sinks in this immensity:
E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo	and foundering is sweet in such a sea. <sup>65</sup>
mare.	

**Giacomo Taldegardo Francesco di Sales Saverio Pietro Leopardi** (29 June 1798–14 June 1837). **Works:** poems—*Canti*, *Canzoni*; philosophical works—*Pensieri*, the *Zibaldone*; prose—*Operette morali*. Leopardi was born into minor nobility in Recanati in Italy's Papal States, where his father gambled while his mother focused on rebuilding the family's finances destroyed by that habit. Leopardi was taught by two priests,

<sup>65</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti: Poems*, trans. by Jonathan Galassi (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010), pp. 106–107.

but mostly taught himself in his father's library. He read and wrote Italian, Latin, ancient Greek, and Hebrew. Leopardi suffered for years from ankylosing spondylitis. In 1816, he sent a letter to the *Biblioteca Italiana*, which put him on the map, arguing against Staël's article in that journal inviting Italians to turn from the past to foreign literature to reinvigorate their writing. Leopardi maintained that Italians should not allow themselves to be contaminated by modern literature, but instead look to the Greek and Latin classics. A poet must be original, Leopardi wrote, not suffocated by study and imitation. Meanwhile, he spent much of 1816 translating the second book of the *Aeneid* and the first book of the *Odyssey*. Leopardi returned to Europe's Classic-Romantic debate in his *Discorso di un Italiano attorno alla poesia romantica*, and in 1817, his influential correspondent Giordani visited and became a lifelong friend. In 1822, Leopardi visited Rome and in 1824 he was called to Milan as an author. In Florence, in 1827, he met Manzoni, though they disagreed, and he returned to Recanati in 1828. He left again from 1830–1832, finding company among the liberals and republicans seeking to liberate Italy from Austria. Leopardi moved to Naples hoping to benefit from the climate but died there during the cholera epidemic of 1837. A friend kept him from a common grave.

This small, brilliant, multifaceted gem is the work of Giacomo Leopardi, a man who lived, like the poet Heine in his Parisian exile, an invalid and in considerable pain.<sup>66</sup> His spinal deformation indirectly contributed to his early death. Leopardi was born in Recanati, a small city-state—until Italian unification in 1860—in the Marche on Italy's Adriatic Coast. We may feel, with Klemens von Metternich, that Italy then was "a geographical expression," but the Italian language had subsisted since Dante, in its Tuscan *lingua franca* and local dialects.<sup>67</sup> Leopardi published his short volume of *Canti*, or *Odes*, shortly before his death in 1837, but he had been working on them since 1818, for almost twenty years. And those years had seen a good deal. The Austrians had held Milan since 1707; the Venetian Republic also became Austrian in 1797, after an independent millennium, and Austria in fact took the

66 Heine was bedridden for his last eight years, on what he called his *Matratzengruft* or 'mattress-grave.'

67 *Mémoires [...] laissés par le Prince de Metternich*, ed. Richard de Metternich, 4th edn, 8 vols (Paris: Plon, 1883–1886), VII 415: 6 August 1847.



entire Italian North in 1815 when Napoleon's short-lived Kingdom of Italy was dissolved. After Waterloo, Austria in Italy fiercely suppressed any liberal or national agitation, and Italy's leading Romantics were brought to heel. In 1816, the year Staël's Milan article on translation crystallized a northern Italian Romantic movement, the somewhat older Foscolo chose English exile. In 1821, the Austrians imprisoned the leading Romantics Borsieri and Pellico—who wrote *Le mie prigioni* (1832) about those prison years—and they exiled Berchet, author of the *Lettera semiseria* (1816). In 1827, Manzoni published his great historical novel *I promessi sposi* in Lombard dialect, about a plague-ridden Lombardy occupied by Spanish troops. Leopardi continued to work at his art. In central Italy, where the Marche lie, the Papal States survived until Italian unification. In the South, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies lasted until Garibaldi conquered it, also in 1860, for Cavour's new Kingdom of Italy. Leopardi, like a good number of Europe's Romantic authors, was writing for a nation which did not exist.

This ode "L'infinito" is in part about difficulty and τέχνη or craft. "Que ton rêve flottant / Se scelle / Dans le bloc résistant," [May your floating dream / Seal itself / Into the resisting block], writes Théophile Gautier, and Leopardi has done just that, much as Michelangelo removed from his block of marble all the stone that was not David.<sup>68</sup> The resulting art is perhaps as miniature in the end as one of Gautier's own 1852 "Émaux et camées", but it is chiseled and arguably perfect. It is, as art, antithetical to the prolixity of a Boiardo, an Ariosto, a Tasso, to the verbosity of the countless Italian *improvvisatori* Staël points to in *Corinne ou l'Italie*.<sup>69</sup> This work of Leopardi's is hard, including for the reader, and that has made his art travel poorly. Leopardi deserves better of posterity; he has, like Hölderlin in the 1790s, few sculptural rivals in lyric in Europe's Romantic stage.<sup>70</sup> There are great Romantic lyric poets—Pushkin, Heine, Wordsworth, Keats, Hugo—but it seems to me

68 "L'Art" [Art], in Théophile Gautier, *Emaux et camées* (Geneva: Droz, 1947), p. 132.

69 Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Orlando innamorato* [Orlando in Love] (1483–1495), Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* [Orlando Mad] (1516), Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata* [Jerusalem Delivered] (1581).

70 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, trans. by Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil, 2004) presents Hölderlin's difficult lyric in bilingual format, as the bilingual *Leopardi* (2010) makes Leopardi accessible to non-Italian speakers.

that the British or French Romantics, for instance, tend not to chisel in this fashion.

What is Leopardi up to? For one thing, he is making a Horatian claim about brevity and discipline. "Less is more," we have been told. "Put your poems away for nine years," Horace wrote, and Leopardi put his odes away for twenty.<sup>71</sup> This labor may be described as a neoclassical priority, one that bows to the poets of Greece and Rome. Passion is perhaps central to Leopardi's vision, but he will not let it shape his craft. His "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" is, as Wordsworth had prescribed in 1800, instead "recollected in tranquillity."<sup>72</sup> Yet, in point of fact, Leopardi is at work explaining how art matters, and in that, if not in his timeless craft, he rejoins all Europe's Romantics. Because Leopardi has a crystalline vision of the lyric moment, a crisp awareness of what is organic to his poem and what is not. As his brevity attests, he knows how to leave things out. This combination of intense emotion with perfect craft is not typical of eighteenth-century poetry. A Voltaire, for instance, lacks it, though Voltaire could certainly versify, and here the Romantics perhaps add to their forebears.<sup>73</sup> Leopardi's vision of the lyric moment sees in it a springboard for open-ended thought; he does not need to put it all on the page, the readers' minds will do that for him. This insight gives Leopardi's work a strange tension, just as Pushkin's bittersweetness gives Pushkin a tension of his own. This new tension also lets Leopardi redefine what is minor and what is not. The Romantic period, like others before it, saw much talk in favor of big poems versus little poems; Leopardi chooses the little and sets out to make it infinite. Starting from the lyric moment, what is local becomes universal; this focus on the small to show the big is typical, as it happens, of biblical thought, but not of Greek or Roman thinking, and it separates Leopardi from his Horatian model. He is unique and weird—which is, to an extent, a Romantic dream. Pope in England, that great Augustan, called wit

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71 "Nonumque prematur in annum", *Ars poetica*, l.389, in Horace, *Satires and Epistles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 116.

72 *Lyrical Ballads*, preface to the second edition (1800) in William Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 740.

73 Voltaire wrote lyric, dramatic, and epic poetry, all with more apparent elegance than passion.

"What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd."<sup>74</sup> Such familiarity for readers is emphatically not Leopardi's goal in art. Romanticism, in its international outline, made Leopardi's weirdness possible; it's there in *Frankenstein*, it's there in *Onegin*, it's there in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. It is a reminder of why Leopardi matters today.

In these terms, it is perhaps worth looking at Leopardi's last line and its weight. The whole poem is in a sense an Archimedean lever to reach that point. Why does this poem exist, we might ask? What is Leopardi's place in the Romantic or Neoclassical enterprise, what is his legacy? "E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare," Leopardi writes, *Shipwreck is sweet to me in such an ocean*. Leopardi is making a claim about dissolution; that into life's humdrum to-and-fro, epiphany may fall, bringing a glimpse of infinite or absolute order. And we as humans may feel the tug of that infinity, as if in a trance, calling us from this warm bath into some other reality, a world that lies athwart our own, like the world Heinrich glimpses to open Novalis's novel. This is a Romantic insight, at home in the nineteenth century and alien to the eighteenth. It is the world of German yearning, of what is unspeakable and unknowable in the end. And Leopardi's trigger, as we have noted, is minor enough that another eye might overlook it; it is a hedgerow blocking his view. Leopardi's eye, in short, is unique and privileged. It has seen what is difficult of seeing; it notices. "To see a World in a Grain of Sand," writes Blake in England a little earlier, and that is Leopardi's program.<sup>75</sup> It is Leopardi's great and personal insight that the fundamental Romantic search for the sublime—that characteristic nineteenth-century activity—could be answered in a hedgerow blocking our view. What is a poet after all? Can modern poetry be written, and if it can, what use will it have? Shelley's vision of poets as "the unacknowledged legislators of the world" is not alien to Leopardi on his Adriatic Coast. Leopardi has seemingly chosen an ivory tower—like Nerval—in the twenty years of silence he elected, in order to focus on the minor, the little, the overlooked; he does not appear to be at work creating the Italy for which Garibaldi worked so

74 Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism" (1711) in *Pope. Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 72.

75 "Auguries of Innocence," in *Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes (Bloomsbury: Nonesuch, 1927), p. 118.

hard.<sup>76</sup> And yet, Leopardi is indeed shaping Italy in 1835. He is giving that peninsula new meaning and purpose, giving the nation, so to speak, the backbone it had lacked or neglected for all these years. Ten thousand hours, they say, will make a master, and Leopardi is a man who put in those hours. He is a different kind of patriot, chiseling away at the language and our thought in order, in T.S. Eliot's words, to "purify the dialect of the tribe."<sup>77</sup> The year 1835, that midpoint in peninsular history between post-Napoleonic repression and Garibaldian unification, was a perfectly good moment to redefine what being Italian means. Being Italian may have seemed easy in Staël's eyes, but it is, says Leopardi with his crippling spinal deformity and his forty short years on Earth, as difficult as you would like it to be. It is chiseled and laconic, it has a Roman weight. Poetry is good for such a task; there is a reason Primo Levi heard Dante "like the voice of God" on his Auschwitz work detail, as he recited the speech of Ulysses in Hell to Pikolo who wanted to learn Italian. "Fatti non foste a viver come bruti," Levi declaims to Pikolo, "ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza" [You were not made to live as brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge].<sup>78</sup> Poetry is a little thing, and Leopardi, in his *Canti*, is certainly portable. But if we take our time over these short pieces, as Leopardi clearly did, we too may come to a point where a hedgerow opens onto the infinite; we may readjust our priorities; we may be patriots of a different sort. These reasons are as good as any for reading Leopardi—and indeed, for taking our sweet time in doing so, though it may be years.

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76 *Sylvie. Souvenirs du Valois* [Sylvie. Memories of the Valois] (1853) in Gérard de Nerval, *Œuvres*, ed. By H. Lemaitre (Paris: Garnier, 1966), p. 591: "Il ne nous restait pour asile que cette tour d'ivoire des poètes, où nous montions toujours plus haut pour nous isoler de la foule." [Our only remaining shelter was that poets' ivory tower where we climbed ever higher to isolate ourselves from the crowd.]

77 "Little Gidding" in *Collected Poems 1909–1962 by T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), p. 218.

78 Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man and The Truce* (London: Penguin/Sphere, 1979), p. 119.

## 10. Latin America (Argentina), 1838/1871

### Esteban Echeverría, *El Matadero*

Los federales habian dado fin á una de sus innumerables proesas.

En aquel tiempo los carniceros degolladores del Matadero eran los apóstoles que propagaban á verga y puñal la federacion rosina, y no es difícil imaginarse qué federacion saldria de sus cabezas y cuchillas. Llamaban ellos savaje unitario, conforme á la jerga inventada por el Restaurador, patron de la cofradia, á todo el que no era degollador, carnicero, ni salvaje, ni ladron; á todo hombre decente y de corazon bien puesto, á todo patriota ilustrado amigo de las luces y de la libertad; y por el suceso anterior puede verse á las claras que el foco de la federacion estaba en el Matadero.

The Federalists had carried out another of their many deeds of heroism. At that period, the cut-throats of the slaughter yard were the apostles who by rod and fist spread the gospel of the rosy federation, and it is not hard to imagine the sort of federation that would spring from these butchers' heads and knives. In accordance with the cant invented by the Restorer, patron of their brotherhood, they dubbed 'barbarous Unitarian' anyone who was not a barbarian, a butcher, a cut-throat, or a thief; anyone who was decent or whose heart was in the right place; every illustrious patriot or friend of enlightenment and freedom. From the events related above, it can clearly be seen that the hotbed of the Federation was in the slaughter yard.<sup>79</sup>

**José Esteban Antonio Echeverría** (September 2, 1805-January 19, 1851).

**Works:** poems—*Los Consuelos*, *Rimas*, *La Insurrección del Sur*, *Elvira o la novia del Plata*; short stories—*El Matadero*. Echeverría was an Argentine poet, fiction writer, and liberal political activist. Early on, he spent five years in Paris, 1825–1830, where he discovered the Romantic movement, and he became one of its promoters on his return to Argentina. In Buenos Aires, he joined a group of young intellectuals who organized the *Asociación de Mayo* (named after Argentina's May 1810 Revolution), aspiring to develop a national literature. Echeverría also worked for the overthrow of the *caudillo* of Buenos Aires, Juan Manuel de Rosas. In 1840, he was forced to go into exile in nearby Uruguay, where he died in

<sup>79</sup> Esteban Echeverría, *The Slaughter Yard*, trans. by Norman Thomas Di Giovanni and Susan Ashe (London: Friday Project, 2010), p. 32. *Unitarian* here refers to one of Argentina's two warring early parties, opposing the Federalist *caudillo* Rosas and seeking greater central authority from Buenos Aires.

1851—just before the fall of Rosas, whose Federalist supporters are the topic of this story.

We have already seen in Europe how often emergent national literatures, in this time of Romanticism in art and revolution in politics, encountered a native speaker—a Mickiewicz—ready to bring out a substantial new text in their neglected idiom, often a national epic or a historical novel, designed to give that idiom's speakers a foundational national moment. The moment is there in Polish, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Croatian, and Swedish; it is there in Flemish, Finnish, and Estonian; it is there in Russian with Pushkin. And so, Europe's various nations and ethnicities—its language communities—to this day often return to touchstone canonical texts produced in that brief Romantic period and with those priorities. Crossing the Atlantic, this project shapes the art of Longfellow and Cooper, and we might anticipate finding it across Latin America and the Caribbean as well. But curiously, at first it seems thin on the ground. Just as Spain's and Portugal's Romantic authors mostly come late, so too, throughout Latin America, as in the islands of the Caribbean, do foundational Romantic authors cluster post-1850—delayed perhaps because these new nation-states mostly shared Spanish as the language of government and empire, amid a tapestry of indigenous idioms, though that seems impossible to determine.

Caribbean literature pre-1850 centers on Cuba and Haiti, and it has a strong anti-slavery element. Cuban anti-slavery works include Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* in 1841—first published in Cuba in 1914—a love story about a slave (Sab) in love with his mistress, and Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Francisco*, again abolitionist, written in 1839–1840 though also published much later. José María Heredia y Heredia, a Cuban exile who lived in the United States and Mexico, fills Neoclassical form with a Romantic focus on nature—a hurricane, Niagara Falls—and on Cuban independence. After 1826, Spain had lost all her American colonies but Cuba and Puerto Rico, and chose severe repression, including torture, to prevent further losses, as Heredia also chronicles. In Mexico and throughout Central America, I have yet to find foundational Romantic authors before 1850, while South America's new nations offer few early names: Venezuela's Andrés Bello is Virgilian, and Ecuador's José Joaquín de Olmedo writes odes to South American independence, like the 1825 “La victoria de Junín: canto a Bolívar.” Outside Cuba and perhaps francophone Haiti, early Caribbean

or Latin American Romantics seem then mostly to be found in Brazil and Argentina.

A Brazilian Romantic movement began in 1836, a decade after independence from Portugal, through the efforts of the expatriate poet Gonçalves de Magalhães. Several young poets, such as Casimiro de Abreu, began using Romantic topoi, stressing passion, nature, the nation, and colloquial speech. Novelists like Joaquim Manuel de Macedo, Manuel Antônio de Almeida, and José de Alencar became famous after 1840. Meanwhile in Argentina, Esteban Echeverría returned from Paris in 1830 promoting democracy and Romantic literature. The poems in his *Los Consuelos* (1834) introduced Romantic art to Latin America, while in his *Rimas* (1837) the long centerpiece, “La Cautiva,” was among the first Latin American poems anchored in local color (the Andes and the pampas). In 1845, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, future president of Argentina, published *Civilización y barbarie: Vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga*. Written during exile in Chile, it is another vehement attack on the cult of the strong man exemplified by Rosas. The dearth of early Latin American Romantics is particularly pointed, in that almost the entirety of the Americas won independence from Europe in the half-century 1776–1826, which is quite specifically the Romantic era. Why did the region’s authors not mirror the political achievements of Bolívar and San Martín? The question seems worth asking. After all, those liberators’ focus was, precisely, to empower the people’s democratic voice, as happened in North America’s Thirteen Colonies in 1776 and in France in 1789. Several Latin American writers in the ensuing century—Octavio Paz, Mario Vargas Llosa, Pablo Neruda, Gabriel García Márquez—won Nobel Prizes, which only deepens the mystery.

In any case, here is Echeverría’s *El Matadero* from 1838, a tad late alongside Europe’s foundational Romantics, but early in Latin American terms. Echeverría died in exile and the story was unpublished until 1871; it is allegedly the most-studied story in South American school classrooms. Its plot is simple: a crowd at the Buenos Aires slaughter yard torture and murder a passer-by, whom they accuse of being a political Unitarian, since he is not wearing the Federalist insignia worn in support of the *caudillo* Rosas. Literary precedents for such mob violence seem somewhat thin on the ground in Romantic Europe and the Americas. Murder and even cannibalism appear in the Gothic tradition, in Byron’s *Don Juan*, in Géricault’s *Le Radeau de la Méduse*, but few Romantic texts

show mob violence—Louvét de Couvray, *L'Amour traqué* (1793); stories of Heinrich von Kleist like *Das Erdbeben in Chili* (1807); perhaps Zacharias Werner's tragedy of fate, *Der vierundzwanzigste Februar* (1808); Hendrik Conscience's novel *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* (1838); Edgar Allan Poe's tale *Hop Frog* (1849); Staël's lost play *Jean de Witt*; perhaps Victor Hugo's novel *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831); on occasion, Dickens and Balzac. It seems odd to note the dearth of mob violence in narratives across Europe by those so close in time to France's Reign of Terror; perhaps the topic seemed unsuited to their various objectives. Earlier, there are elements of such violence in, say, Voltaire's *Candide* (1759), before they disappear from plots.

And what are Echeverría's objectives in putting this violence front and center? To begin with, Echeverría anchors his story in the grotesque. That is not to say that it is grotesquerie gratuitous and purely to shock, as sometimes in the Gothic tradition after Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. It instead serves a double social purpose: paradoxically, it suggests both that the slaughter yard's frequenters are depraved, and that the suffocating milieu they inhabit is the reason for it, as in Victor Hugo's *Cour des miracles* in *Notre Dame de Paris*. Because, in fact, Echeverría believed in, and worked hard for, the transformation of the urban poor. In France, 1825–1830, he read avidly, including French socialist religious thinkers like the Lamennais who wrote *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière religieuse* (1817–1823) and *Paroles d'un croyant* (1834). Bowman traces French ferment about such ideas in *Le Christ des barricades, 1789–1848*, reviewing the role of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and over time, Hugo.<sup>80</sup> Echeverría's May Association published its 1838 manifesto as the *Dogma socialista de la asociación Mayo*, where that term's closeness to, say, a Lamennais matters. Thus, this short story stresses the extreme poverty on show in the slaughter yard, alongside the grotesque struggles of the poor to obtain food to eat. It also heavily ironizes the actions of the Catholic Church during the flooding that frames the narrative, though these esthetic choices seem local and not equivalent to, say, Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. Second, Echeverría focuses on the lawlessness of these supporters of Rosas—as in his closing paragraph—and the violence makes this graphic. A judge appears who

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80 Frank Paul Bowman, *Le Christ des barricades 1789–1848* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1987).



is at ease with torture; proposals trade between judge and mob; a man is tortured and suddenly dies. This, Echeverría suggests, is the world of the dictators, which may have contributed to the text's enduring South American popularity. Third, this mob seems a demonic variant of the people or nation so fundamental to Romantic thought. We may ask where, under Rosas, does the Argentinian nation reside? In answer, it seems reduced to scrambling in the mud for bull's testicles to feed spouse or children. It is participatory, if not complicit, in the equalizing mud. This is a world—and the Nazi death camps repeated this lesson—where the only organizing is by the goons. How can an Echeverría, or a young Unitarian, hope to reach through the veil of brutality and terror to those scrabbling in the mud? It matters perhaps that this 1838 story was left in the manuscript when Echeverría fled for Uruguay, and that, in the words of its first editor, “the shakiness in the handwriting [...] may be the result of rage rather than fear.”<sup>81</sup> That is the very phrase the Unitarian offered his torturers and killers.

To conclude: I know nothing quite like this text, or with quite its urgency, in the Romantic literature of the Western world. The scene is unremittingly brutal; the irony, as in our extract, is savage. Echeverría focuses intensely on the mud, the filth, the obscenities, the casual violence and crime, and the system of oppression and degradation that underlies, as it undercuts, the bourgeois niceties of, say, the established church in the city of Buenos Aires. A bull is slaughtered as its testicles preoccupy the crowd; a passing stranger is caught, stripped, tortured, and murdered by the mob. Few other Romantic texts have such a plot. It is also, almost by definition, intensely local in its descriptions and its Argentine narrative. Echeverría has taken the local color that distinguishes his previous year's “*La Cautiva*” and gone one better. We are there on every page of his story, and right to the end, in the flood-soaked, mud-infested slaughter yard.

Lastly, this dramatic tale suggests that Latin American, or at least Argentine Romanticism, can be both characteristic and different from all the Romanticisms of the North, which seem to have produced nothing quite like this. It is brutal, it is compassionate. It engages with the poor; with oppression; with hunger; with violence and crime. It is quite modern after all. It seems worth a look.

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81 Echeverría, *The Slaughter Yard*, p. xiii.

## 11. The Low Countries (Belgium), 1838

### Hendrik Conscience, *De Leeuw Van Vlaanderen*

Tijdens de oorlog van het jaar 1296, wanneer de Fransen gans West-Vlaanderen hadden ingenomen, bood het slot Nieuwenhove hun een hardnekkige tegenstand. Een groot getal Vlaamse ridders hadden zich onder Robrecht van Bethune erin opgesloten, en wilden het niet overgeven zolang één van hen zich kon verdedigen. Maar het groot getal vijanden maakte deze heldenmoed ten onnutte; zij sneuvelen meestal op de muren der vesting. Door de omvergeworpen wallen in het slot tredende, vonden de Fransen niets anders dan lijken; en daar zij hun woede op geen vijanden konden verzadigen, staken zij het kasteel in brand, braken de muren af en vervulden de grachten met gruis.

At the time of the conquest of West Flanders by the French, in the year 1296, the castle of Nieuwenhove had offered them an especially obstinate resistance. A great number of Flemish knights had shut themselves up within it under Robert de Bethune, fully resolved to listen to no proposals of surrender so long as a single man remained in a condition to defend himself. But their valor was in vain against the overpowering force of their assailants; most of them perished, fighting desperately on the ramparts. The French, on entering through the breach effected by their engines, found not a living soul within the walls; and for want of living beings upon whom to wreak their vengeance, they fired the castle, and afterward deliberately battered down what the flames had spared, and filled up the moat with the rubbish.<sup>82</sup>

**Henri (Hendrik) Conscience** (3 December 1812–10 September 1883). **Works:** novels—*In't Wonderjaar* [In the Year of Miracles], *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* [The Lion of Flanders], *The Conscript*; history—*History of Belgium*. Conscience's father was a French Napoleonic veteran who married an illiterate Fleming. She died in 1820, leaving two boys for their father to raise. The young Hendrik fought in the Belgian revolution of 1830 and was a pioneer of writing in Flemish. His father thought it so vulgar of his son to write a book in Flemish that he evicted him. In Antwerp, Conscience met King Leopold I, who ordered *In't Wonderjaar* to be presented to every Belgian school. In 1838, he had great success with his novel *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen*—it inspired “De Vlaamse Leeuw” or *The Flemish Lion*, long the unofficial and now the official

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82 Hendrik Conscience, *The Lion of Flanders*, trans. by A. Schade van Westrum (New York: Collier, 1906), p. 278.

anthem of Flanders. He published over a hundred novels and novellas and achieved considerable success. After 1855, translations of his books began to appear in English, French, German, Czech, and Italian. He was given various official positions. The French writer Alexandre Dumas plagiarized two chapters of Conscience's book *The Conscript* to produce a novel of his own, appropriately called *Conscience*.

In this novel, Henri "Hendrik" Conscience writes about a political unit—this was in the days before there were nations—which ceased to exist in 1795. It had a long run, close to a millennium from 862 CE, but has yet to return to the map. Aptly enough, Conscience sets his novel in the thirteenth century, a golden age for the unit in question: Flanders. A dynastic county until 1795, Flanders has, since 1830, constituted one half of the bilingual nation-state of Belgium, which covers roughly the territory of the old Austrian Netherlands. So, what defines Flemish identity today? It seems a question worth asking. Is it that lost thousand-year history? Drawing modern borders based on past European boundaries might seem self-evidently catastrophic. Is it the Flemish language? That is, in essence, Dutch, as spoken by millions to Flanders's north. Is it the region's Catholicism? Faith does little to distinguish Flemings from Walloons (or from the French for that matter), though making just that distinction seems the driving force behind Flemish agitation for splitting Belgium down the middle. In short, this Flemish Romantic text raises problematic, indeed foundational questions about popular national movements—the West's Romantic dream, after all—and their legacy today.

After the French victory at Fleurus in 1794, the former Austrian Netherlands became four new *départements* of, first, the expanding French Republic, and then the expanding Napoleonic Empire. Opposition to French Revolutionary policies did much to unite the area's bilingual population, and Hendrik Conscience shows traces of that fraught period in this book. In 1815, these lowland territories were joined to the new Dutch Crown, until the 1830 Revolution brought the new Belgian republic a progressive constitution—then in 1831, after a hasty congress in London, the throne that Europe's Restoration politics demanded, in the royal person of a Protestant German nobleman, Leopold I of Saxe-Coburg, who unlike his new Catholic subjects was not given to speaking Flemish around the house. Belgium's 1830 revolution had been liberal

and popular—it began, curiously, at a performance of Auber's 1828 opera *La Muette de Portici*—but like France's 1830 July Revolution, it simply brought the Belgian nation a new boss when the dust cleared, and one whose descendants still reign. Subsequent years were to oppose liberal and reactionary hopes among Flemings and Walloons alike.

In Conscience's 1838 historical novel, the Dutch—those foreign overlords of 1815–1830, who tried more than once before 1839 to recapture their lost southern territories—are not mentioned. This is perhaps logical, since the northern Netherlands were, in the thirteenth century, both behind Flanders in economic and cultural development, and also utterly lacking in the political autonomy or army needed to threaten one's neighbors. But Conscience finds a villain necessary, and the French serve that purpose. This makes for an interesting story. When Mickiewicz writes in 1834 of Poland's various betrayals, those were quite recent, and the betraying powers, namely Russia, Prussia, and Austria, still controlled all of Poland. None of those neighbors is popular in Poland today. But when Conscience vilifies the French—they are, in his plot, deceitful, brutal, and alien, and they rely as occupiers on a fifth column of traitors to Flanders—he is appealing to a past which was by then centuries old, in order to stir up new and fresh animosities. This approach is not without precedent in Romantic Europe—Sir Walter Scott writes of long-ago English betrayals of the Scots—but that man's Scottish homeland remained effectively under English rule, whereas 1795's invading French had left Belgium in 1815 and not returned. What then is Conscience's agenda? Does he see the rather different Orleanist France of 1838 as a clear and present danger? Are the French a stand-in for the Dutch Crown, which was quite literally at work trying to recapture Belgium until 1839? Is Conscience wildly swinging at all comers, blaming any neighbor who ever entered Flanders for shaping that land's compromised fate? Any of these ideas is possible, and they would be in keeping with the work of many a Romantic author—a Mickiewicz, for instance—looking to build a nation-state in the face of external threats. The task has its merits. But finally, all these explanations seem inadequate. This is, perhaps, intended as nothing more than a rollicking good yarn. But it also seems possible that Conscience has a specific Flemish agenda, one still available today; namely to focus, via the French, inside Belgium's borders on that fifth column he singles

out for vituperation, the Lilyards, those medieval Flemings who allied themselves with them. Conscience finds room to treat the King of France as noble, but the Lilyards are allowed no such room, as Conscience leaves a clear space for contemporary and factional intra-Belgian debate within his picturesque thirteenth-century plot. The 1830s were a period of considerable Flemish agitation in Belgium: societies were founded, appeals made for the use of Flemish in government, and books published in Flemish. That is the backdrop to Conscience's work.<sup>83</sup>

Conscience invites us to know our own distant Middle Ages: dates, architecture, heraldry, and so forth. Details are fictionalized, but the plot focuses on real events: the situation in occupied Flanders leading up to 1302's Battle of Courtrai or of The Golden Spurs, a crushing defeat for France. The Flemish burghers—clothworkers, for instance—did in fact play their part in this story, and that data point dovetails with Romantic populist priorities. But like Romantics across Europe, Conscience declines to anchor his plot in non-noble protagonists. Nobles are praised and play major roles, a fact which would have horrified the Revolutionary French, but which made perfect sense, across Europe, with the crushing of the Revolutionary enterprise after 1815. It is also worth noting that Conscience's hero, Robert of Bethune, spoke no Flemish and was absent at the battle. A French war machine is on display in this passage, as in Goya's *Tres de mayo 1808*. And Conscience makes room for brutality; here, the French raze the castle of Nieuwenhove, much as the Romans razed Carthage then salted its earth to end the Punic Wars. I've seen an eighteenth-century print of this castle, and it was visibly not in ruins. Thus, I have no evidence for Conscience's storyline. Today, the place is a hotel. But perceived atrocities are powerful motivators when you want to rile up a crowd—“Remember the Alamo,” went the cry that parted slave-holding Texas from free Mexico after 1836. Conscience is creating a mythic past for the unrepresented Flemish nation, and such myths are powerful things. For the book's Flemish readers, one may argue French rule had not ceased even by 1838; it continued on under the united Belgian national government. Compare for instance the linguistic status of French in Quebec before the 1960s, a language looked down on and even banned in public spaces: thus around 1960, an American colleague

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83 Sir Walter Scott's novels set in Scotland include *The Monastery* (1820) and *Kenilworth* (1821), both set in the 1500s.

of mine in a Montreal department store spoke French and was told to “Speak white.” Language politics around the globe is rarely as self-evident as it might appear, or as it might have appeared to Europe’s and America’s various Romantic authors.

In closing, what is Belgium, after all? Is it a *nation* in the Romantic sense? One thinks of those irredentist postcards—*Hungaria irredenta*—still unashamedly for sale in 2010 in Budapest’s National Gallery. Nationalism is a toxic thing, or at least, it has toxic potential; it also has a life of its own that, like Frankenstein’s creation, will escape the grip of those who wield it. What nation exactly is Ukraine? Or Germany? Where are their borders? National myths are important, but they deserve caution; the brave little Belgium that the second German *Reich* marched over in 1914 was also the colonizer of the Belgian Congo, that vast swathe of Africa where nationhood visibly played out in other terms. People need heroes just as they need scapegoats, but in reality, things are rarely so convenient. Who are our scapegoats here to be? The French? The Dutch? The Walloons? And who then are to be our heroes? Let us swear an oath to Flanders, that vanished state. Let us embrace its proud yet humble people—who are, after all, much like people everywhere—in Romantic enthusiasm, be they citizens or subjects. The ins and outs of history—its vicissitudes—are, as the Kurds or the Irish might tell us, in the end no basis on which to draw a nation’s borders, to determine a people’s autonomy or self-rule. Perhaps that old Romantic dream—the one in which each nation on Earth gets to speak for itself—is not such a terrible dream after all, when seen *sub specie aeternitatis* and freed, if need be, of its local agents. Perhaps the West’s Romantics were, in their own way, right.

## 12. Portugal, 1846

João de Almeida Garrett, *Viagens na minha terra*

Prova-se como o velho Camões não teve outro remédio senão misturar o maravilhoso da mitologia com o do cristianismo. — Dá-se razão, e tira-se depois, ao padre José Agostinho. — No meio destas disceptações académico-literárias, vem o A. a descobrir que para tudo é preciso ter fé neste mundo. Diz-se neste mundo, porque, quanto ao outro, já era sabido. — Os Lusíadas, o Fausto e a Divina Comédia. — Desgraça do Camões em ter nascido antes do romantismo. — Mostra-se como a Estige e o Cocito sempre são melhores sítios que o Inferno e o Purgatório. — Vai o A. em procura do marquês de Pombal, e dá com ele nas ilhas Beatas do poeta Alceu. — Partida de whist entre os ilustres finados. — Compaixão do marquês pelos pobres homens de Ricardo Smith e J. B. Say. — Resposta dele e da sua luneta às perguntas peralvilhas do A. — Chegada a este mundo e ao Cartaxo.

It is shown that old Camoens had no choice but to mingle the legends of classical mythology with those of Christianity. — Father José Agostinho is first considered right then wrong. — In the midst of these academic-literary disceptations the author comes to discover that one needs faith for everything in this world. — This world, because, as far as the other is concerned, he knew it already. — The Lusiads, Faust and the Divine Comedy. — Camoens's misfortune in being born before the romantic period. — The Styx and Cocytus are shown to be better places, after all, than Hell and Purgatory. — The author goes in search of the Marquis of Pombal and comes upon him in the Blessed Isles of the poet Alcaeus. — A game of whist between the illustrious deceased. — The marquis shows pity for Richard Smith and J.B. Say, poor fellows. — The marquis and his eyeglass answer the author's pretentious questions. — Return to the real world and arrival in Cartaxo.<sup>84</sup>

**João Baptista da Silva Leitão de Almeida Garrett**, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount of Almeida Garrett (4 February 1799–9 December 1854). **Works:** poems—*O Retrato de Vénus*, *Hymno Constitucional*, *Hymno Patriótico*, *Camões*, *Dona Branca*, *Romanceiro e Cancioneiro Geral*; plays—*Catão*; political texts; prose fiction—*O Arco de Santana*, *Viagens na Minha Terra*. Garrett was born to a *fidalgo* of the Royal Household and his Irish-Italian wife. In 1809, his family fled Soult's French invasion for the Azores. There, he

84 Almeida Garrett, *Travels in My Homeland*, trans. by John M. Parker (London: Peter Owen, 1987), p. 43.

was taught by his uncle, the Bishop of Angra. In 1818, he enrolled at the Coimbra university law school, publishing “O Retrato de Vénus,” a work prosecuted as immoral. Although Garrett did not take an active part in the 1820 Liberal Revolution, he contributed two poems, the “Hymno Constitucional” and the “Hymno Patriótico.” A coup led by the Infante Dom Miguel in 1823 forced him to seek exile in England. He had just married his friend’s twelve-year-old sister. In England, he began his association with Romanticism, discovering Shakespeare and Scott. Garrett left for France in 1825 where he wrote “Camões” and “Dona Branca,” poems often considered the first Romantic works in Portuguese. In 1826, he returned to Portugal, but in 1828 was again forced to settle in England. He took part in the liberal Landing of Mindelo in 1832, and under the new constitutional monarchy briefly served as Consul General to Brussels. In 1843, Garrett published *Romanceiro e Cancioneiro Geral*, a mixture of his own lyrics with folk lyrics and ballads somewhat in the vein of Percy’s 1765 *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, and then his 1846 *Viagens na Minha Terra*. He divorced his first wife in 1835 to marry a seventeen-year-old. He died in 1854 and was buried beside Luís Vaz de Camões.

And so, we come to Portugal, where the Romantic enterprise seems to have arrived a tad late. It is, we may argue, a liminal country, perched as it is alongside Spain on the Atlantic edge of the Iberian Peninsula. The territory achieved independence around 1100 and has maintained it, almost unbroken, ever since. Portugal was, with Spain, a major figure in early European exploration, colonialism, and the Atlantic slave trade, acquiring an empire stretching from Brazil to Angola, Mozambique, and various trading outposts on the coasts of Asia—Goa, Macau. The French invasion of the peninsula after 1807, when Portugal refused to accede to Napoleon’s Continental System, broke peninsular links with the colonies for Spain and Portugal alike. With British aid, the Portuguese expelled the French after 1812, but from 1807 to 1821, Rio de Janeiro was Portugal’s capital. 1820’s constitutionalist insurrections across Portugal, and Brazil’s declaration of independence in 1822, were followed by Lisbon’s reinstatement. At the death of King John VI in 1826, his son Pedro I left Portugal for the Empire of Brazil, an empire perched amid America’s new republics. Briefly King of Portugal as well, he soon bowed to popular pressure and abdicated the Portuguese



throne in favor of his seven-year-old daughter Maria. Dissatisfaction at Pedro's constitutional reforms led the 'absolutist' faction to proclaim his brother Miguel King of Portugal in a second coup in 1828. In the ensuing Liberal Wars, Pedro forced his brother Miguel to abdicate and go into exile in 1834, placing his daughter Maria back on the Portuguese throne. This political and dynastic struggle—lasting from 1820 to 1834, between Portugal's liberals and absolutists but stretching from Portugal to her former colony Brazil—is the backdrop to Almeida Garrett's work.

Let's look now at the text. To begin with, Almeida Garrett's title is an explicit homage—he names the man—to Xavier de Maistre's 1794 *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (Journey Around My Bedroom), a book written under house arrest and in good-hearted parody of such works as the French explorer Bougainville's 1771 *Voyage autour du monde*. Xavier de Maistre is the lesser-known, less political brother of Joseph de Maistre, that theorist of tsarist absolutism. Almeida Garrett was, though a peer of the realm, also a liberal, exiled to Britain and France from 1823–1826 and again from 1828–1832, a period ending with the landing at Mindelo, in which he took part, and which hastened the close of the Liberal Wars.<sup>85</sup> In short, Almeida Garrett seems more interested here in Maistre's tone than in his politics, and that is typical of this charming book.

Almeida Garrett opens every chapter with a long rubric, a prefacing device that shapes and redirects his more traditional narrative portions at every step. The device is both ironic and playful, and it has a certain humility to it. Nor is this framing device without precedent; it is fairly common in British eighteenth-century novels, such as Henry Fielding's influential *History of Tom Jones* (1749), whose long, witty titles serve a parallel function. Fielding's novelistic successor, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767), is (along with Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768)) yet more fundamental among Almeida Garrett's many sources, focused as both novels are on wit, play, charm, digression, and the unexpected.<sup>86</sup> To do this, Almeida Garrett requires an educated reader, one who shares his cultural baggage and is prepared to treat its inertial weight with impartial and equal lightness, much as Pushkin does. Thus,

85 Joseph de Maistre wrote the *Soirées de Saint Pétersbourg* [Evenings of Saint Petersburg], 1821.

86 Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–1767); *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768).

we might want to know that Jean-Baptiste Say was a liberal French economist, and the creator in this field of Say's Law, while "Richard Smith"—*Ricardo* in Portuguese—is likely that still more famous Scottish economist, Adam Smith of *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), combined with that other modern free trader, David Ricardo. The book has a patina of learning, lending it glamor. Camoëns and his *Lusiads* will be no surprise to Portuguese readers; but *Faust* and *The Divine Comedy*, presented in parallel, form a sort of Romantic manifesto, which the author then complicates by referring next to the ancient lyric poet Alcaeus of Mytilene.<sup>87</sup> Almeida Garrett is unprepared to be labeled or categorized: Romanticism informs his thinking but does not circumscribe it, he remains open to things of value from any tradition, including the Classics. This is, of course, a position common to a great number of Europe's Romantics, as I argue below, and one rare in art prior to their appearance.

Almeida Garrett is, in a word, late. And how does that shape his writing? Well, it helps to make him acutely aware of fashion, of what is *in* and what is *out*. It is Almeida Garrett's aim to leaven with pleasure any information he has to provide us; that is his contract with the reader. "Take light things seriously and serious things lightly," said the French in the run-up to 1789, a philosophy which allowed aristocrats to mount to the guillotine with a last *bon mot* for their executioner. Almeida Garrett may choose to cite foreign liberal economists in his text, Smith and Say (and perhaps Ricardo), but he will do so off-handedly—"those poor fellows." This is an ironizing approach, where the author cannot be held responsible for his learning because he refuses to take it in earnest. "Old Camoëns," he writes, to preface his Romantic argument that Camoëns inevitably mingled Classical and Christian material. The author is playing a game in which we readers are invited to participate—"A game of whist," the author writes, "between the illustrious deceased." There is a certain universal learning to which all things on Earth are of equal value and importance. It may seem that when nothing is taken seriously, we have no values left with which to form a judgment, and yet, this text has not been leveled into uniformity. It is instead individual, even unique; it has flavor. And that flavor derives from its playfulness;

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87 Luís Vaz de Camões, *Os Lusíadas* [The Lusiads] (1572).

Almeida Garrett is prepared to be atypical, indeed eccentric, as is any Romantic worth their salt. We've seen how rare this position is in Europe prior to, say, Rousseau or Diderot. But this eccentricity does not in fact make the author minor; true, he has found an unusual window through which to look at the world, anchored as it is in play, but his view from there takes in the planet, or at least a good portion of Europe. And if Almeida Garrett is not prepared to be minor, neither, we may say, is the Portuguese nation, as exemplified in this text. Nor, for that matter, is Portuguese art. The author has traveled, in his years of exile, to England and to France; he has observed two of the nineteenth century's major economic, military, and cultural powers. But he has then chosen to return to Portugal. It is in this context that we might consider his self-deprecation and wit. It is not unlike that of a Pushkin or an Andersen, and it seems well suited to those who write on Europe's margins. There is poise here, a certain ease, and there is even perhaps a sort of wisdom.

To explore the world, we may as well begin just where we find ourselves. A fishing boat, goes the story, left the Portuguese Algarve—under French occupation since 1807—to inform the king in faraway Brazil that their village had been liberated from the French. Portugal, that old seafaring country, is a good place from which to observe the planet: all Europe stretches to the East, and to the West and South lie the territories of Portugal's Atlantic slave trade. Portugal was already cutting itself loose, by 1846, from its old imperial narrative, and Almeida Garrett had already risked his life in 1832 to help reform the nation. But that is not his topic in this book. His topic is, instead, everything. Art matters: Camoëns, Dante, Goethe, Alcaeus. The sciences matter: Smith, Ricardo, Say, those "poor fellows." The author had seen England in person—the Industrial Revolution, Utilitarianism, the enclosure movement, popular unrest. But for now, he tells a Portuguese story. Which sciences make our lives better, and which arts? The question would not be alien to a Mary Shelley. Which beliefs improve our existence? These are wisdom questions after all. "Father José Agostinho," writes Almeida Garrett in this extract, "is first considered right then wrong." That is perhaps not so different from Goya's position on theodicy in 1814, in his electric *Tres de mayo 1808*. Almeida Garrett has, by this time in the century, seen many things. But he is, like the young Pellico in his various Austrian prisons, not bitter about it, nor does he belabor the point.

Finally: the people's voice. Almeida Garrett is, one can argue, a sophisticate; not for nothing was he a peer of the realm, a returnee from exile in England and France. Can this book nonetheless be called a people's book, an example of popular art? I believe it fairly can. Our narrator, our pair of eyes if you like, is, as in Pushkin's *Onegin*, concerned not to bore us, full of information, playful and even ludic with the most serious things. But the world we travel through here is, in the end, that of everyday Portuguese existence. There is a little religion, a little romance. There is work being done and simple conversation being had. This vision shows us the inner life and also the autonomy of the Portuguese people; it is what defines them, their national character. This national life had perhaps, after Brazil's departure in 1822, become less world-shaping than it once was, or than that of contemporary England, France, or Germany, but it was not subordinate to anyone. It had, and has, its place in the concert of nations. The author, like Portugal, may indeed lack international prestige, but that is our loss. Portugal's liminal European position perhaps encourages the author to focus on boredom, on pleasure, on inattention—indeed on Schlegel's arabesque, that definitional aspect of comedy, governing the works of a Gozzi or a Sterne.<sup>88</sup> It also informs his mechanics of reading. Almeida Garrett's art opens playfully onto the world in its infinite variety, but it does so from within a self-contained, organic whole. And that organic whole is defined by the Kingdom of Portugal's national borders, and by the Romantic homeland through which Almeida Garrett journeys.

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88 Arabesque: *Brief über den Roman*, in *Gespräch über die Poesie*, pp. 284–362, in *Friedrich Schlegel II: Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1796–1801)*, ed. by Hans Eichner (1967), p. 331. Or as A.W. Schlegel says of the Greek Old Comedy, “a seeming aimlessness reigns throughout”—August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur I*, ed. by Edgar Lohner, in *Kritische Schriften und Briefe VII* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne, Mainz: W. Kohlhammer, 1966), p. 133 (lecture XI): “eine scheinbare Zwecklosigkeit und Willkür herrscht darin.” Carlo Gozzi was the author of *L'amore delle tre melarance* [The Love of Three Oranges] (1761) and *Turandot* (1762).