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Some Aspects
of the Reception
of English Literature
in France
1800–1840

Thesis for the degree of Master of Philosophy
presented to the Faculty of Arts
of
the University of Glasgow
by
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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to identify and to analyse some aspects of the reception of English literature in France during the period 1800 to 1840. Limiting the study to this period helps to focus more effectively on certain aspects of English influence on French literature. Naturally it is difficult to mention all the writers of this period who were concerned with English literature. It is for this reason that the field of study will be confined to those writers on whose work the influence of English literature is strongest. That does not however prevent the inclusion, on occasion, of references which are not directly related to the selected authors, but which come within the general framework of an examination of English literature itself and contribute to the broader understanding of the subject.

It is well known that in the first half of the nineteenth century in France there was a great dispute between Classicists and innovators. The latter saw that adherence to the rules of Classical poetry was endangering the role of literature, which was becoming inflexible to the point of rigidity. Reality, the actual experience of living, could no longer be expressed if literature remained faithful to the subjects and techniques of the Classical period.

It was not only in relation to English literature that French writers began to criticise the state of literature in France, but English literature was certainly one of the most important agents of change; if French writers wrote about England and the "literature of the North", it was not only to show their admiration for English literature but to point out the deficiencies in French literature and sometimes, by extension, to criticise more or less openly the political situation in France.

In order to bring about a revival in French literature, writers began to search for new, vigorous subjects which would reflect more modern experience and aspects of life neglected by Classical literature. And it was in the choice of subject matter that writers began to openly rebel against the status quo and assert the claims of what came to be called Romanticism. Madame de Staël and Chateaubriand played an important role in the development of the Romantic movement in France and the direction it was to take, although they rarely used the

term itself. It was mainly thanks to these two writers that French literature found the path of Romanticism which English literature had already mapped out during the preceding years.

Chateaubriand, "le pontife du romantisme", as he was sometimes called, and Madame de Staël did not hesitate in recommending to the new generation of writers that they look to the mists of the North for their inspiration. Ossian, Shakespeare, Milton, and later Wordsworth, Walter Scott, Byron, Shelley and, to a lesser extent, Keats were the most important names inscribed by the French school on the banner of the new movement. They were acclaimed as the gods of the French Romantics, and French innovators eagerly drew their inspiration from the new ideas of these giants of English literature. It is important to note that these were not the only English writers who played an important role in the Romantic period, but given the limits of this study I have of necessity been obliged to leave aside, for example, writers such as James Thomson, author of *Seasons*, the Gothic novelists, the Irish bard Tom Moore and still others who were of significance. This source of inspiration marked a watershed in the development of the Romantic movement in France.

In this study we shall examine the influence the selected writers had on French literature. It is important to take into account the fact that French literature benefited from English literature: even if direct borrowing is sometimes not particularly obvious, French literature benefited from an intellectual openness to English influence, a state of mind which moreover was not limited to France and in certain respects extended to the continent as a whole. Did the French accept the new ideas easily? We shall see how this new literature provoked a long confrontation with the ideas about Classical taste which had been dominant for so long.

It remains to give an outline of the plan for this study. In the first chapter, which is devoted to Madame de Staël and her work *De la littérature*, we shall examine the new ideas of this French theorist and intellectual historian, who analyses aspects of English literature which could be useful in the development of the social and literary life of France.

In the second chapter we shall invite Chateaubriand, the leader of the French Romantic movement, to speak to us about his *Essai sur la littérature anglaise* and his relationship with the English poets.

The third chapter will focus on Ossian, the "Homer of the North", and on his influence on French writers such as Madame de Staël and Chateaubriand.

Chapter four will be devoted to Stendhal and his role in the Romantic struggle. In particular, we shall examine his ideas concerning the unities, as expressed in *Racine et Shakespeare*.

In the fifth chapter we shall accompany Victor Hugo and Lamartine in their animated discussion with Shakespeare, Milton and some English Romantic poets.

Amédée Pichot insists on space to present his opinions on English and Scottish literature, given in his famous *Voyage historique et littéraire*. One might be surprised to see the name of Pichot alongside the great figures of French literature, but his presence is essential here, given his enormous importance as an intermediary who introduced English literature to his French contemporaries.

Next we shall examine the role of Sainte-Beuve, partly through his own literary work, but particularly in his critical studies, where he gives the impression of having an encyclopaedic knowledge of English literature and its writers.

Before reaching the conclusion we shall devote a chapter to the role played by the periodical press in the Romantic battle, focusing attention on some of the reviews, particularly the *Globe*.

Chapter I

Madame de Staël and *De la littérature*...

De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales, to give it its full title, contains Madame de Staël's literary, political and personal ideas. At the time when *De la littérature* was published in 1800, there were few signs of a new spirit emerging in French literature. One cannot speak of Romanticism in France at that time. Only the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau expressed a new sensibility which could be described as Romantic or pre-Romantic. For convenience we shall continue to use the term pre-Romantic although the concept itself has been called into question by some authorities.¹

Madame de Staël, following Montesquieu, declared that the ideal of beauty varied according to climate, government and social institutions. She demonstrated the complex relationship between literature and social customs, and also identified the links between literature and political institutions. Her aim was to show the reciprocal influence which literature and all other aspects of social life, including religion, brought to bear on one another. The emphasis given to the socio-political is a clear reflection of the impact of the French Revolution on her way of thinking about literature.

In the first part of her book, Madame de Staël declared that freedom, glory and virtue are inseparable, but that the role of freedom is the most important in the development of literature: the art of thinking is always linked to the preservation of freedom. In addition, democracy requires a fine eloquence and purity of language in order to win the support of its citizens. "Si les hommes appelés à diriger l'état n'ont point le secret de persuader les esprits, la nation ne s'éclaire point et les individus conservent, sur toutes les affaires publiques, l'opinion que le hasard a fait naître dans leur tête."² This shows the extent to which literature and politics are interconnected in the work of Madame de Staël. Relationships between the state of society,

¹ See *Le Prérromantisme: hypothèque ou hypothèse?* Actes du colloque de Clermont-Ferrand ... établis et présentés par P. Viallaneix, Paris, Klincksieck, 1975.

² Madame de Staël, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, Flammarion, Paris, 1991, p.77

religion and philosophy are also set out in detail. The author of *De la littérature...* does not forget to demonstrate in the introduction that the most exalted morality is the source of truly great literature. Before coming to the chapter concerning the literature of the North, which is of particular relevance to this study, Madame de Staël devotes ten chapters to a discussion of ancient and modern literature, in which she examines different peoples and their literature in relation to history.

However, in considering the literature of the North one can clearly see the stumbling block in Madame de Staël's conception of the literature of the North as distinct from that of the South. According to Madame de Staël, the Greeks, Romans, Italians, Spanish and French belong to the literature of the South, of which Homer is the primary source. Ossian, in her view, is at the origin of the northern group which comprises the English, Germans and other peoples of the North. It is rather strange to classify literature according to the geographical situation of the country which produces it. One could hardly deny, for example, that John Milton imitated Virgil when he wrote *Paradise Lost*. Literature refuses to be constrained within limits fixed by geography and time; however Madame de Staël establishes this theoretical distinction between North and South as an analytical framework which allows her to promote her new theories of literature.

From her childhood Madame de Staël was very well informed on the subject of English literature; her parents, who were interested in England, introduced her to the English language. Other important influences were her travels in England and the friends of her parents who came regularly to Madame Necker's salon where foreign literature, especially English, was an important topic of conversation. This influence, the first to which Madame de Staël was subject, can be seen in the ideas she expressed in her various works. Madame de Staël did not conceal her admiration for the English poets and their spirit of philosophical enquiry, which, however, did not exist in the poems of Ossian. "Ossian n'a presque jamais d'idées réfléchies: il raconte une suite d'événements et d'impressions."³ Ossian had no model to follow; he was the original poet. It was later that literature began to develop thanks to the introduction of new

³ *Ibid*, p.204

ideas. It is therefore logical that one later finds new ideas which did not exist in the time of Ossian.

According to Madame de Staël, climate plays an important role in the literary differences between North and South. In effect, she creates a national stereotype of the "English": they live apart on their island beneath a dark and overcast sky, buffeted by a chill wind: these elements make of the English a people of unbending character, intensely public-spirited and jealous of their freedom. In addition the Christian religion and Protestant dogma create in them a kind of spiritual harmony: they have national values and show themselves to be courageous and enterprising in defence of their native land. Madame de Staël believed that exalted ideas were to be found in northern poetry because it focuses on meditation and this makes it immune to the appeal of superstitions. "La poésie du Nord est rarement allégorique; aucun de ses effets n'a besoin de superstitions locales pour frapper l'imagination."⁴ For Madame de Staël philosophy is the general framework by which English life is bounded on all sides. The isolation of a nation encourages it to create a different kind of life in which things may have a different meaning than they do for other nations. The role of religion is also crucial: it is thanks to the Protestant religion adopted in the North, which introduces the idea of individual examination of conscience, that the mind becomes more philosophic in outlook.⁵

The philosophical mind is not the only sensibility which is characteristic of the literature of the North; there is also the respect which northern peoples accord to women. This was what interested Madame de Staël in English women, although she was puzzled by the fact that to all intents and purposes they had no significant role in public life. She felt that English women should thank God that they belonged to a country where they were "most truly loved".

Here Madame de Staël takes the opportunity to express her personal feelings, and to promote a cause of crucial importance to her by comparing the position of women in England with that of their French counterparts. English writers and novelists consider woman as a source of inspiration. The English woman is respected because she is independent and because

⁴ *Ibid*, p.208

⁵ Note that the words "philosophe" or "philosophique" just as the words "progrès" or "liberté" emphasise the continuation in Madame de Staël's work of ideas and attitudes inherited from the age of the enlightenment. From this point of view Madame de Staël is not an innovator.

in England there is a genuine understanding of the importance of women in society. The French woman, on the other hand, remains under the yoke, subject to the man who treats her like a servant. "Les peuples septentrionaux, à en juger par les traditions qui nous restent et par les mœurs des Germains, ont en de tout temps un respect pour les femmes, inconnu aux peuples du Midi; elles jouissaient dans le Nord de l'indépendance, tandis qu'on les condamnait ailleurs à la servitude."⁶

In the chapter entitled *Du principal défaut qu'on reproche, en France, à la littérature du Nord*, Madame de Staël begins with these words: "On reproche en France, à la littérature du Nord de manquer de goût."⁷ But the French, as the English say, "... are easily shocked by things that are not French." Moreover, one must not forget to say that good taste is a criterion of French Classicism, and that Madame de Staël's thinking, in spite of the novelty of some of her ideas, still retains certain features of Classicism. Years were to pass before Romanticism became established in France, whereas the spirit of Romanticism had already existed for some time in English and German literature. English style, for example, had been freed from conventional metre well before this happened in France. According to Madame de Staël, one cannot criticise differences in taste: several elements such as climate, type of government and culture, among others, determine these differences and explain them. A fixed notion of taste, "le bon goût" of the Classicists, is replaced by varying, variable notions of taste in literature which makes artistic progress possible. This is the reason for the Romantics' self-expression, made possible by the artistic freedom which they themselves established.

In 1776, Madame de Staël, who was then ten years old, made her first trip to England, where she saw Shakespeare played in London, having already read his works. This experience, which became engraved in the little girl's memory, is reflected in her discussion of Shakespeare, whom she admired at first, but later went on to criticise. In her opinion, he does not follow the rules of art. Taste, in Shakespeare, is linked to his expression of the sublime. "Ne disons donc pas que Shakespeare a su se passer de goût, et se montrer supérieur à ses lois.

⁶ *Ibid*, p.211

⁷ *Ibid*, p.212

Reconnaissons au contraire qu'il a du goût quand il est sublime, et qu'il manque de goût quand son talent faiblit."⁸

To show her knowledge of Shakespeare and to reflect his importance in relation to her argument, Madame de Staël devotes an entire chapter to him, entitled *Des tragédies de Shakespeare*, which she introduces by showing that Shakespeare "did not imitate the Ancients". This was already a way of distinguishing the work of the English poet from French Classicism. But how can one explain, however, the measure of Italian influence in *Romeo and Juliet*? Must one deny that different literatures are the branches of a single tree whose roots run deep into the past? This undermines part of her own argument regarding the distinction between North and South.

Shakespeare's too philosophical cast of mind led him to use irony in his representation of different scenes. In the opinion of our theorist, it is better to read Shakespeare's plays than to see them performed; the speed of dramatic action obscures many of the ideas which confirm the profundity of his work. "Shakespeare, qu'on veut appeler un barbare, a peut-être un esprit trop philosophique, une pénétration trop subtile pour le point de vue de la scène; il juge les caractères avec l'impartialité d'un être supérieur, et les représente quelquefois avec une ironie presque machiavélique; ses compositions ont tant de profondeur que la rapidité de l'action théâtrale fait perdre une grande partie des idées qu'elles renferment: sous ce rapport, il vaut mieux lire ses pièces que de les voir."⁹

The author of *De la littérature...* does not hide her admiration for Shakespearian tragedies such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, among others. In her opinion, however, Shakespeare succeeds in uniting the most sublime aspects of his work with the worst expression of bad taste in these plays, since they present comic and serious elements mixed together.

Another feature of Shakespeare's work was the representation of emotions of a type which the Ancients had often avoided developing, such as the fear of death. In *Hamlet*, *Richard III* and other plays, scenes of horror wounded the sensibility of a Classical audience not yet accustomed to see such scenes, which were to become an important element in Romantic

⁸ *Ibid*, p.215. In approaching her study of Shakespeare's work, Madame de Staël continued and developed the ambivalent attitudes of Voltaire (see his *Lettres Philosophiques*).

⁹ Madame de Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, Firmin Didot Frères, Libraires Editeurs, Paris, 1838, p.81

theatre. "Dans les tragédies de Shakespeare, l'enfance et la vieillesse, le crime et la vertu, reçoivent la mort, et expriment tous les mouvements naturels à cette situation. Quel attendrissement n'éprouve-t-on pas lorsqu'on entend les plaintes d'Arthur, jeune enfant voué à la mort par ordre du roi Jean, ou lorsque l'assassin Tirrel vient raconter à Richard III le paisible sommeil des enfants d'Edouard?"¹⁰

Madame de Staël denounces the images of violence, the longueurs, the repetitiveness and the "incoherent images" which she considers faults in Shakespearian composition. Moreover, she does not accept the succession of comic and tragic scenes which the English admired. This succession is far from being acceptable to the critical mind. "La foule des spectateurs, en Angleterre, exige qu'on fasse succéder les scènes comiques aux effets tragiques... Les jeux de mots, les équivoques licencieuses, les contes populaires, les proverbes qui s'entassent successivement dans les vieilles nations, et sont, pour ainsi dire, les idées patrimoniales des hommes du peuple, tous ces moyens, qui sont applaudis de la multitude, sont critiqués par la raison."¹¹

Tragedies which are invented are, according to Madame de Staël, superior to tragedies taken from English history. In the first kind, the unities of time and place are not respected. "Les irrégularités de temps et de lieu y sont beaucoup plus remarquables."¹² Many of her contemporaries criticised the absence of the unities of time and place, whereas Madame de Staël insisted only on unity of action.

The author of *De la littérature...* considers Shakespeare a political liberal in his historical tragedies which represent love of freedom and one's native land. In these tragedies all the circumstances surrounding the characters, such as the political, moral and social context, are clearly portrayed.

The French rejected "the Shakespearian rebellion" against the rules they respected for fear of falling into chaos. In time this resistance became weakened by the flood of new ideas which the arrival of English literature brought into France. Classical tragedy was to be superseded by the new type of tragedy for which Shakespeare was the model. Society was changing and these

¹⁰ *De la littérature*, p.218

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.223

¹² *Ibid*, p.223

changes required the creation of a new theatre which could be enjoyed by all classes of society. The majority of French people considered the role of the theatre to be very important because it was capable of representing all aspects of intellectual life. Moreover, the theatre, as a cultural and educational medium, can influence the public in favour of a particular taste in literature. Some years later, the idea of a revolution in the theatre became a national necessity in order to improve the state of literature, which the Romantics saw as the true voice of society.

Before leaving this chapter, we should note that Madame de Staël calls for a national literature rooted in the history and religion of France. Tragedy remains her preferred genre, partly because it represents her own torments and the failure of her emotional life, and partly because it is a very important literary genre, one which is both noble and prestigious.

In *De la littérature...* the author devotes an entire chapter to English comedy. After the heights of tragedy, this subject may be surprising, but in her opinion the type of humour adopted by writers is the mirror in which one can see clearly the true face of a society, changing according to the social and political changes the nation undergoes. Madame de Staël goes further in explaining literature in terms of politics and the state of society: in England the political constitution does not encourage true comedy, because it does not encourage people to divine the ideas and thoughts of others. In monarchies each person wishes to discover secrets in order to have influence with the ruler. Let us look at the way Madame de Staël expresses this idea: "Dans les états monarchiques, où l'on dépend du caractère et de la volonté d'un seul homme ou d'un petit nombre de ses délégués, chacun s'étudie à connaître les plus secrètes pensées des autres, les plus légères gradations des sentiments et des faiblesses individuelles... l'Angleterre est gouvernée par un roi; mais toutes ses institutions sont éminemment conservatrices de la liberté civile et de la garantie politique."¹³ In England the way of life encourages the people, who are "absorbed in business", to relax. "La vie domestique, des idées religieuses assez sévères, des occupations sérieuses, un climat lourd, rendent les Anglais assez susceptibles des maladies d'ennui; et c'est par cette raison même que les amusements délicats de l'esprit ne leur suffisent pas."¹⁴ Madame de Staël systematically advances her socio-

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.230

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.229

political argument. In her opinion, the political constitution and the way of life are the two most important factors preventing the existence of true genius in comedy. It is for these reasons that it is impossible to find among the English a comic author such as Molière. England in general understands nothing of true comedy because northern literature is not interested in humour. However one can find a "subtle wit" and "amusing jokes" in Congreve and Sheridan. These two writers are exceptions and do not alter the general principle. As for Shakespeare, his plays show only "popular caricatures". "Shakespeare et quelques autres ont représenté dans leurs pièces des caricatures populaires, telles que Falstaff, Pistol, etc, mais la charge en exclut presque entièrement la vraisemblance".¹⁵

Here the author analyses the ideas of some humorists and comic poets, comparing them to French writers who are, in her judgment, the masters in this field. One can see to what extent Madame de Staël had recourse to national stereotypes: the French are witty, the English serious ...

Before bringing our consideration of English comedy to an end, it is important to note that Madame de Staël had almost the same point of view as her contemporaries concerning Shakespeare. This combination of feeling sympathy for his work and being troubled by certain aspects of it was a common feature in Shakespearian criticism of the time.

In *De l'imagination des Anglais dans leur poésie et leur roman* Madame de Staël finds that English novels are based on images derived from the religion of the North, but that the true superiority of the English lies in their aptitude to unite "les réflexions philosophiques aux sensations produites par les beautés de la campagne."¹⁶ The lack of "grâce dans tout ce qui exige de la légèreté d'esprit" renders the English incapable of imitating the Italians of the Renaissance period in literature. In the view of the author of *De la littérature...*, English poetic meditations are sad, but this sadness is the result of the isolation of their island, which is cut off from the continent. This isolation plays an essential role in their observation of nature, which is portrayed in their work.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.232

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.236

What is it the defining characteristic of English poetry? Madame de Staël's answer is that the general tone of English poetry is clearly apparent in the sombre imagination of Young. In reading Young, one's attention is drawn to the melancholy which permeates everything he wrote. "Young juge la vie humaine, comme s'il n'en était pas; et sa pensée s'élève au-dessus de son être pour lui marquer une place imperceptible dans l'immensité de la création:

'... What is the world? A grave.

Where is the dust which has not been alive?

... What is life? A war.

Eternal war with woe..."¹⁷

How melancholy...! The ideas in this are great but sombre. It seems that sorrow is an important source of ideas. Young prefers the milieu of the tomb where sorrow reigns, and this sorrow appeals to Madame de Staël, who finds it delightful.

It seems that meditation on the destiny of man can take place only in the atmosphere of melancholy which the English poets prefer. The author of *De la littérature...* compares Gray and his country churchyard, where everything loses its value and life and death become equal, with Goldsmith and his deserted village. Nor does she shrink from criticising the melancholy poetry of Ossian and Young for its monotony and uniformity.

Milton shows a formidable intelligence in *Paradise Lost*, where he succeeds in uniting poetic imagery with ideas. He takes his place among the greatest of poets. "Ce qui fait de Milton l'un des premiers poètes du monde, c'est l'imposante grandeur des caractères qu'il a tracés. Son ouvrage est surtout remarquable par la pensée; la poésie qu'on y admire a été inspirée par le besoin d'égaliser les images aux conceptions de l'esprit."¹⁸

But why is it that the English have a sombre imagination when their customs and form of government grant them a contented life? Madame de Staël's answer is as follows: "C'est que la liberté et la vertu, ces deux grands résultats de la raison humaine, exigent de la méditation: et méditation conduit nécessairement à des objets sérieux."¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.240

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.237

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.241

The importance of language as a means of expression leads Madame de Staël to analyse the English language. She finds it a language full of energy because it suggests emotions rather than expressing them. It is not as harmonious to the ear as the languages of the South. However, thanks to the energy of its pronunciation, it has some advantages as a language of poetry. It has a greater influence on the soul than the French language can produce. To make her analysis easier to understand, Madame de Staël gives the reader the following example: "Lorsque Macbeth, au moment de s'asseoir à la table du festin, voit, à la place qui lui est destinée, l'ombre de Banquo qu'il vient d'assassiner, et s'écrie à plusieurs reprises avec un effroi si terrible: *The table is full*, tous les spectateurs frémissent. Si l'on disait en français précisément les mêmes mots, *La table est remplie*, le plus grand acteur du monde ne pourrait en les déclamant faire oublier leur acception commune; la prononciation française ne permettrait pas cet accent qui rend nobles tous les mots en les animant, qui rend tragiques tous les sons, parce qu'ils imitent et font partager le trouble de l'âme."²⁰

Here again Madame de Staël takes the opportunity to raise an issue of great importance to her, showing that English women are the source of the energy which inspires English writers to their great achievements, especially in the field of the novel. Women are loved and respected because their existence is "La principale cause de l'incépisable fécondité des écrivains anglais en ce genre. Les rapports des hommes avec les femmes se multiplient à l'infini par la sensibilité et la délicatesse."²¹ The fertile inspiration of English literary tableaux is founded therefore on the power of love and the domestic virtues.

The admiration which Madame de Staël feels for English poets leads her to offer them as examples for French poets to imitate. As for English novels, they are lengthy; however they contain philosophical ideas and observations on morality. "Tous les autres romans français que nous aimons, nous les devons à l'imitation des Anglais. Les sujets ne sont pas les mêmes; mais la manière de les traiter, mais le caractère général de cette sorte d'invention appartiennent exclusivement aux écrivains anglais."²² Here she is thinking particularly of Richardson and his French imitators.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.242

²¹ *Ibid*, p.243

²² *Ibid*, p.245

Madame de Staël finds that religion plays an important role in life generally, but that the free religion (Protestantism) gives importance to philosophy. "La religion chrétienne, telle qu'elle est professée en Angleterre, et les principes constitutionnels tels qu'ils sont établis, laissent une assez grande latitude aux recherches de la pensée, soit en morale, soit en politique."²³

The author makes a comparison between English philosophy, which in her opinion is scientific in nature, and French philosophy, which is completely different in character. "La philosophie française tient davantage au sentiment et à l'imagination, sans avoir pour cela moins de profondeur; car ces deux facultés de l'homme, lorsqu'elles sont dirigées par la raison, éclairent sa marche et l'aident à pénétrer plus avant dans la connaissance du cœur humain."²⁴ Northern philosophy is not interested in observation, which explains why the English have a liking for metaphysical theories and, at the same time, have no taste for the passions. It is for this reason that "La Bruyère, le cardinal de Retz, Montaigne, n'ont point d'égal en Angleterre."²⁵ Nevertheless, and in contradiction to what she has just explained, utilitarianism and empiricism are held to be two of the characteristics of English thought. On the question of eloquence, Madame de Staël finds that the English are greater poets than prose-writers, thanks to their language: the English language suits poetry – as we have already remarked – more than prose. "Les Anglais, dans leur poésie, portent au premier degré l'éloquence de l'âme; ils sont de grands écrivains en vers; mais leurs ouvrages en prose participent très rarement à la chaleur et à l'énergie qu'on trouve dans leur poésie."²⁶ The English associate poetry with imagination, whereas they consider prose as the language of logic. However, there exist among the English some good prose-writers such as Addison and Bolingbroke, among others, though it is significant that here she refers to writers who are pre-Romantic, to say the least.

The French language, according to Madame de Staël, favours prose, and French writers can better stir the passions of the human heart in prose.

In the chapter entitled *Des femmes qui cultivent les lettres* Madame de Staël deals with a question which is almost a personal one. She criticises the malice and hostility shown by a

²³ *Ibid*, p.247

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.247

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.247

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.250

society which will not accept women's claim to be equal with men, a society which does not even recognise ability in women writers. The author of *De la littérature...* was the first woman in France to voice a new idea concerning feminist claims. From this point on she did not hesitate to use her own experience in promoting the cause of women, and that led her to generalise from her own impressions. Men never tired of repeating that "la force de pensée n'a pas d'existence chez les femmes". Madame de Staël found in this statement the source of the anti-feminist movement.²⁷ "Dans les monarchies, elles (les femmes) ont à craindre le ridicule, et dans les républiques, la haine."²⁸

Logic insists on equality between men and women because they are the two essential elements on which society is founded. To make it possible for society to advance, it is essential that education and instruction are offered to everyone and that all the obstacles which might hold women back should be set aside. There is an element of rebellion against the status quo in Madame de Staël's open assertion that women are the equals of men. "Eclairer, instruire, perfectionner les femmes comme les hommes, les nations comme les individus, c'est encore le meilleur secret pour tous les buts raisonnables, pour toutes les relations sociales et politiques auxquelles on veut assurer un fondement durable."²⁹

How could women deal with the hostility and criticism directed against them? There was only one solution: to apply justice and equality between women and men in all the different spheres of life.

It seems that for women to achieve recognition for their qualities of mind was not permitted; there was always someone who would despise their efforts and put them off, making some well-worn excuse such as the reputation of men or the social order. Women were required to remain within the confines fixed by social convention. Should they wish to leave these confines, the consequences could be dangerous. "Un homme peut, même dans ses ouvrages, réfuter les calomnies dont il est devenu l'objet: mais pour les femmes, se défendre est un désavantage de plus; se justifier, un bruit nouveau. Les femmes sentent qu'il y a dans

²⁷ Note, however, that the word "feministe" appears for the first time in 1837 and the concept did not pass into general use before the end of the nineteenth century.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.333

²⁹ *Ibid*, 338

leur nature quelque chose de pur et de délicat, bientôt flétri par les regards mêmes du public: l'esprit, les talents, une âme passionnée, peuvent les faire sortir du nuage qui devrait toujours les environner; mais sans cesse elles le regrettent comme leur véritable asile."³⁰

The French Revolution, founded on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, was incapable of changing the traditional Classical mentality which led men to treat women in an inhuman manner. The principles of the Revolution should be applied in society without making any distinction between women and men. For the time being it seemed that the three principles did not apply to women.

In the opinion of the author of *De la littérature...* woman, in every country, finds herself in a pitiable situation. In England, however, she is loved and respected. Nevertheless, in Shakespeare's time, she had not yet taken up her role in society. Moreover, women had no influence in political life. In *Considérations sur la révolution française* Madame de Staël writes: "Les femmes en Angleterre sont accoutumées à se taire devant les hommes, quand il est question de politique."³¹

Des femmes qui cultivent les lettres is a personal chapter about the position of women. The dominant idea is that giving the feminine element its proper place in social life would bring about "l'équilibre des valeurs de l'art".

Madame de Staël, in spite of her celebrity in the world of politics and literature, suffered from the injustice perpetrated by men: her work *De la littérature...* was greeted by a polemic secretly orchestrated by the government. The first Consul had no liking for her and even forbade her to remain in Paris after finding evidence which linked her to opposition groups. In *Dix années d'exil* she gives an explanation for this which portrays her as someone who was victimised as a result of her struggle for a noble cause: "Le plus grand grief de l'empereur Napoléon contre moi, c'est le respect dont j'ai toujours été pénétrée pour la véritable liberté."³²

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.340

³¹ *Considérations sur la révolution française*, quoted by Robert Escarpit in *L'Angleterre dans l'oeuvre de Madame de Staël*, Marcel Didier, Paris, 1954, p.123

³² Madame de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, Garnier, Paris, 1906.

De la littérature... is a work which reveals two kinds of literature: Classical literature and what would later be called Romantic literature. The first addresses itself to the mind, while the second speaks directly to the heart. The author explains why writers must choose new models and reject the old. Times have changed and the old rules have become obsolete, or at least in need of modification. Madame de Staël is introducing a new kind of literature. She asks French writers to draw their inspiration from the English without giving too much importance to the "errors in taste" which exist in their work. Inspiration and new ideas can be derived from the literature of the North, the principal features of which are melancholy, philosophical tendencies, love of liberty and solitude, and respect for women. Literature for Madame de Staël is none other than the expression of the feelings of a nation.

Before bringing this chapter to its conclusion, we should note that in spite of the undoubted influence of English literature, Madame de Staël and Chateaubriand, who will be discussed in the following chapter, are interested in English literature only because it serves to reinforce their own attitudes and ideas. English literature is studied less for its own sake than for the examples it can provide to justify pre-existing attitudes to politics, religion, questions of good or bad taste, and other subjects besides.

Chapter II

Chateaubriand and English literature

Le Paradis perdu suivi de l'Essai sur la littérature anglaise, published in 1836, late in Chateaubriand's literary career, are the two texts which contain the essence of Chateaubriand's thinking on the subject of English literature, containing as they do the arguments and examples which are to be found dispersed among his other writings, dating back to the start of his literary career. In the *Essai sur la littérature anglaise* Chateaubriand examines many English authors; however, we shall limit our study of the work in order to focus on the following writers: Milton, Shakespeare, Lord Byron and Walter Scott. *Le Paradis perdu suivi de l'Essai sur la littérature anglaise* was the fruit of long study on the part of Chateaubriand, who was familiar with the English language and English ideas. He had spent eight years in exile in England and returned to France in 1800. But to what extent was his knowledge of the English language useful to him? In his essay he says: "J'ai revu Londres comme ambassadeur après l'avoir vue comme émigré: je crois savoir l'anglais autant qu'un homme peut savoir une langue étrangère à la sienne."³³ Before discussing the translation of *Paradise Lost*, it is as well to say that Chateaubriand, as a "partisan résolu du merveilleux chrétien", believed that literature must conform to the beliefs and spirit of society, which meant that in his view Christian poetry was essential to Christian society. This was the starting point from which, very early in his literary career, he threw himself into the study and translation of *Paradise Lost*, though his translation was not published until much later, in 1836.

The translation of *Paradise Lost* was for Chateaubriand an immensely important work, the roots of which went all the way back to his early days: the original was present in his mind for more than forty years. It was an immense challenge, but he fought hard to avoid making the same mistakes which he had made in *Le Génie du Christianisme*. The original text is difficult, but Chateaubriand took enormous care to transpose it successfully into his own language. "Ce

³³ Chateaubriand, *Le Paradis perdu suivi de l'Essai sur la littérature anglaise*, Garnier frères Editeurs, Paris, undated, p.241

qu'il m'a fallu de travail pour arriver à ce résultat, pour dérouler une longue phrase d'une manière lucide sans hacher le style... ce qu'il m'a fallu de travail pour tout cela ne peut se dire... J'ai refondu trois fois la traduction sur le manuscrit et le placard...³⁴

Was this translation, which had taken such a long time to produce, faithful to the original? It is said that there is no such thing as a perfect translation, but what Chateaubriand achieved is, to say the least, a satisfying one. The following translation of a passage from Book II is an illustration of this:

"Thus roving on
In confus'd march forlorn th'adventurous Bands
With shuddring horror pale, and eyes agast
View'd first thir lamentable lot, and found
No rest: through many a dark and drearie Vale
They pass'd, and many a Region dolorous,
O'er many a frozen, many a fierie Alp.
Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens and shades of death,
A Universe of death, which God created by curse
Created evil, for evil only good.
Where all life dies, death lives and nature breeds,
Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,
Abominable, inutterable, and worse
Than Fables yet have feign'd or fear conceiv'd
Gorge and Hydras and Chimeras dire."³⁵

Now let us look at the translation which Chateaubriand gives us: "Ainsi errantes dans leur marche confuse et abandonnée, les Bandes aventureuses, pâles et frissonnant d'horreur, les yeux hagards, voient pour la première fois leur lamentable lot, et ne trouvent point de repos: elles traversent maintes régions douloureuses, par-dessus maintes alpes de glace et maintes alpes de feu: rocs, grottes, lacs, mares, gouffres, antres et ombres de mort, univers de mort que

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1

³⁵ Jean Gillet, *Le Paradis Perdu dans la littérature française*, Librairie Klincksieck, Paris, 1975, p.610

Dieu dans sa malédiction créa mauvais, bon pour le mal seulement; univers où toute vie meurt, où toute mort vit, où la nature perverse engendre des choses monstrueuses, des choses prodigieuses, abominables, inexprimables, pires que ce que la fable inventa ou la frayeur conçut: gorgones et hydres et chimères effroyables."³⁶

The influence of *Paradise Lost*, or rather the spirit of Milton generally, is very obvious in several of Chateaubriand's works, including *Le Génie du Christianisme* and *Les Martyrs*. He constantly expresses his admiration for the great English poet whose work was for him a fruitful source of description and imagery. The last lines he wrote on the subject of Milton and *Paradise Lost* are revealing: "On sent en effet dans ce poème, à travers la passion des légères années, la maturité de l'âge et la gravité du malheur; ce qui donne au *Paradis Perdu* un charme extraordinaire de vieillesse et de jeunesse, d'inquiétude et de paix, de tristesse et de joie, de raison et d'amour."³⁷

It was the period of exile spent in England which made Chateaubriand realise how thin French poetry was before the Revolution. It was difficult for him to resist the genius of Milton whose influence led him to devote a long period of his life to the study of his work, and to write the poem *Milton et Davenant*. The *Essai sur la littérature anglaise* is a work in which, among other themes, the author sums up his literary judgment on the Romantic movement. More than thirty-five years after his exile, Chateaubriand's ideas had greatly changed. Several elements played an essential role in this transformation: his knowledge of English literature, the tragic experiences he had suffered during his exile, and the fact that, with the passage of time, he had become more a contemplative than an observer.

According to the rules of taste it was not acceptable at the turn of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century to step outside the Classical framework which had for long existed in France. English literature contained ideas and embellishments admired by many French who did not have the courage to admit their admiration or to set aside the ancient rules which limited their freedom. It was only a matter of time.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.610

³⁷ *Le Paradis Perdu suivi de l'Essai sur la littérature anglaise*, p.471

Chateaubriand admired many English writers and poets and regretted having misjudged them in earlier days. He does not hesitate to acknowledge the genius of Shakespeare which gives profound expression to human passions. Thus he insists on defending Shakespeare as a Classicist, since the great events of which he is the centre could not be ignored. The author of *L'Essai sur la littérature anglaise* finds that deficiencies in taste are not the responsibility of Shakespeare, who had done all he could to further the development of literature.

In the author's view, Shakespeare was endowed with comic genius rather than tragic: he was a poet who rarely reached the heights of tragedy. "Le caractère dominant du fondateur du théâtre anglais se forme de la nationalité, de l'éloquence des observations, des pensées, des maximes tirées de la connaissance du coeur humain et applicable aux diverses conditions de l'homme; il se forme surtout de l'abondance de la vie."³⁸ In his work, Shakespeare does not hesitate to depict the different classes of society together, as they co-exist in real life: he represents life in all its variety. The admiration Chateaubriand felt for Shakespeare was short-lived, however: he criticised the founder of English theatre on the grounds that his style does not require any effort. The following lines reveal Chateaubriand's main reaction to Shakespeare: "Si pour atteindre la hauteur de l'art tragique il suffit d'entasser des scènes disparates sans suite et sans liaison, de brasser ensemble le burlesque et le pathétique, de placer le porteur d'eau auprès du monarque, la marchande d'herbes auprès de la reine... le festin du riche et la détresse du pauvre; quiconque aura écrit d'heure en heure son journal aura fait un drame à la manière du poète anglais."³⁹ Chateaubriand held that all artistic genres had their own rules and that these rules were perfectly natural. They had their origin in Nature itself, and it was for this reason that Chateaubriand found Racine more natural than Shakespeare. In spite of this, Chateaubriand recognised that Classical tragedy was beginning to lose its position and importance, and, in his view, would soon sink into oblivion. Taste had changed and as a result the actor who played in Classical tragedy and the public who enjoyed and appreciated it were losing interest. "La tragédie classique, avec ses unités et ses décorations immobiles, paraît et doit paraître froide: de la froideur à l'ennui il n'y a qu'un pas. Par là s'explique, sans l'excuser,

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.452

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.353

l'outré de la scène moderne, le *fac-simile* de tous les crimes, l'apparition des gibets et des bourreaux, la présence des assassinats, des viols, des incestes, la fantasmagorie des cimetières, des souterrains et des vieux châteaux."⁴⁰ Here Chateaubriand is criticising melodrama and "Gothic" theatre.

But what is the attitude of the author of the *Essai...* towards Shakespeare? We have already noted that the ideas of Chateaubriand become more contemplative with the passage of time; he does not conceal the fact that he had erred in the previous judgments of Shakespeare contained in certain sections of *L'Essai sur la littérature anglaise*: "J'ai mesuré autrefois Shakespeare avec la lunette classique, instrument excellent pour apercevoir les ornements de bon ou de mauvais goût, les détails parfaits ou imparfaits; mais microscope inapplicable à l'observation de l'ensemble, le foyer de la lentille ne portant que sur un point et n'embrassant pas la surface entière. Dante, aujourd'hui l'objet d'une de mes plus hautes admirations, s'offrit à mes yeux dans la même perspective raccourcie."⁴¹ Finally Chateaubriand retains some aspects of the ambivalence of Madame de Staël's view of Shakespeare.

Generally speaking, one can say that French theatre was in a pitiable situation, crushed by the rules of taste and the imitation of the Ancients whose influence was still powerful. This could explain why the English theatre was slow to inspire imitation in France, and also why English theatre played a determining role in the development of French theatre in the nineteenth century.

Chateaubriand also began to develop an interest in poetry. Before considering the importance he accords Lord Byron, it is interesting to note that Byron had drawn inspiration from French ideas, especially those of Rousseau, Voltaire and even Chateaubriand himself, to whom Byron addressed a letter of praise at the time *Atala* was published. This inspiration, which Byron's work then spread anew in France, explains why he was more quickly and more completely appreciated there, since the source of many of his ideas was to be found in the great French writers. It was thanks to his genius that he succeeded in transforming these ideas and putting them in a new framework which the French found irresistibly appealing. Another

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.355

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.442

reason, no less important, was that the generation of the 1820s, tormented in heart and mind, adopted melancholy as their Muse. The youth of this generation was attracted by suffering, and found in the works of Byron a voice which responded to their sorrow.

Chateaubriand's attitude to Byron had not always been the same: he changed his ideas about the author of *Childe Harold*. At the beginning one observes that Chateaubriand did not appreciate the beauty of Venice; it was only after he read *Childe Harold* that Chateaubriand changed his mind. The author of *L'Essai sur la littérature anglaise* compared his life to that of Byron, emphasising the points of similarity, even mentioning the places which gave rise to their meditations, places which sometimes were the same. "Les endroits les plus abandonnés, un préau d'orties, un fossé planté de chardons, tout ce qui était négligé des hommes, devenaient pour moi des lieux préférés, et dans ces lieux Byron respirait déjà."⁴²

In Chateaubriand's view, Byron was a man whose violent nature made him melancholy; what increased the wildness in him was the accident he had suffered which left him lame. Byron's restless spirit sought out despair in solitude.

Chateaubriand greatly admired Byron's lyricism which gave expression to passion and misfortune, and which, according to Chateaubriand, was typical of the English character.⁴³ He felt that Byron's genius was better appreciated in France than in England, and that the French were able to understand the particular emotions he expressed in his work. "... son génie est mieux compris de nous; il aura plus longtemps des autels en France qu'en Angleterre. Comme *Childe Harold* excelle principalement à peindre les sentiments particuliers de l'individu, les Anglais, qui préfèrent les sentiments communs à tous, finiront par méconnaître le poète dont le cri est si profond et si triste."⁴⁴

In *L'Essai sur la littérature anglaise*, Chateaubriand, right from the beginning of the section devoted to Walter Scott, is quick to criticise the celebrated Scottish writer for being responsible for the corruption of history and the novel. "Il me semble avoir créé un genre faux, il a, selon moi, perverti le roman de l'histoire: le romancier s'est mis à faire des romans

⁴² Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*, Garnier frères Editeurs, Paris, 1889, Volume II, p.141

⁴³ It is interesting to note that Chateaubriand, who presented himself as a defender of Christianity, was able to admire Byron in spite of the latter's attitude towards religion.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.212

historiques, et l'historien des histoires romanesques."⁴⁵ Here, the standpoint is essentially the classicising one which refuses to accept the mingling and confusion of literary genres. However, he does not deny that Sir Walter Scott remains a writer who deserves considerable respect. "Mais l'un des grands mérites de Walter Scott à mes yeux, c'est de pouvoir être mis entre les mains de tout le monde: il faut de plus grands efforts de talent pour intéresser, en restant dans l'ordre, que pour plaire en passant toute mesure; il est moins facile de régler le coeur que de le troubler."⁴⁶ These reservations about Scott's work distinguish Chateaubriand from the generation which followed. In Chateaubriand's view, Scott did not wish to penetrate to the heart of his characters and their feelings; he remained on the surface. But his relative lack of interest in character stems from the nature of the historical novel. The important elements on which the historical novel is based are local colour, an accurate portrayal of events, and the observation of social customs.

History and the historical novel owe much to Scott, who refused to accept that history should be limited to explanations or accounts of past events when it could "bring the past to life". It is in this respect that Scott's novels enhanced the perception of history.

Scott's influence on French literature was enormous; it is enough to note that in 1830 out of 111 English novels published in translation in France, 82 were written by Scott.⁴⁷ However, the popularity of Scott owed relatively little to Chateaubriand.

The celebrated Scottish writer influenced not only French novels but also French poetry. Anthologies of his poetical work were translated in 1825. His *Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne* had an enormous influence on Victor Hugo, who borrowed many of the images and ideas for his work *Les Orientales*. But why should such a writer, who had a glorious reputation in France, encounter resistance on the part of Chateaubriand, who was openly critical of him? The answer can only lie in a form of jealousy when one considers that from 1820 to 1830 an entire generation was seduced by Sir Walter Scott. "Modistes et duchesses, depuis le simple peuple jusqu'à l'élite intellectuelle et artistique de la nation, tout subit la

⁴⁵ *Essai sur la littérature anglaise*, p.542

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.542

⁴⁷ Philippe Van Tieghem, *Les influences étrangères sur la littérature française*, PUF, Paris, 1961, p.204

fascination et le prestige. Jamais étranger n'avait été populaire à ce point parmi nous; et même, de 1820 à 1830, aucun nom français ne fut en France plus connu et glorieux."⁴⁸ Chateaubriand, who had influenced a generation of French historians and who aspired to the noble rank of historian himself, was hardly willing to accept a rival of the calibre of Scott.

Before bringing this chapter to a close, we should note that Chateaubriand gives a fuller account of English poetry, but the focus of this study has been on Milton, Shakespeare, Byron and Scott: the four great English writers who were acclaimed as the muses who inspired French Romantics with their fertile ideas and new images.

⁴⁸ Louis Maigron, *Le roman historique à l'époque romantique*, Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, Paris, 1912, p.51

Chapter III

Ossian and French writers

Periodicals always have an important part to play in the domain of literature. Enthusiastic journalists found in English literature a seam they could exploit. *Le Journal étranger* and *La Gazette littéraire*, one after the other, published the poems of Ossian: the former began in September 1760 to publish the "poésies erses" accompanied by critical notes. The *Gazette littéraire* then followed the same route, publishing the work from 1764. It was thanks to these publications that Ossian had already come into fashion in France in the eighteenth century.

It cannot be denied that these publications of Suard played a major role in the popularity of three English poets: Ossian, Young and Gray. Suard paid great attention to French taste: he chose from Ossian those parts of his work that he knew would be appreciated by the French public. One could say that Ossian was the poet Suard presented to the French as a model for imitation.

But the question which arises is this: why was Ossian so greatly admired in France? Alfred Hunter gives the following reply: "Ossian, par contre, faisait entrer dans sa poésie des choses qui n'avaient pas de place dans la belle littérature française. Quand il comparait le sein d'une pucelle à la neige sur la bruyère agitée par le vent, l'imitateur dut tout transporter ou tout perdre et, protégé par l'exotisme même de l'original, on osa généralement tout transporter, ce qui fait qu'on saisit un peu de l'harmonie de la prose mesurée de Macpherson."⁴⁹

Macpherson's *Ossian*, Young's *Nights* and Gray's *Elegy* – these three English works shaped and directed the earliest stage of French Romanticism.

The early nineteenth century was the most splendid period in Ossian's career in France: his reputation grew thanks to Napoleon Bonaparte who admired his work and chose him as his favourite poet. It was said that Napoleon took a copy of the Gaelic poetry with him on all his campaigns. Even in his misfortunes Napoleon remained faithful to Ossian, who accompanied

⁴⁹ Alfred C. Hunter, *J.B.A. Suard, Une introduction de la littérature anglaise en France*, Librairie Ancienne Edouard Champion, 1925, p.105

him even to Saint Helena. "Ossian fut aussi le bien-aimé du conquérant. L'empereur conservera toujours en effet pour le barde l'admiration du général: 'Voilà qui est beau!' disait-il à Arnault. Il fonda à Paris l'*Académie celtique*: les poèmes erscs l'accompagnèrent comme *l'Iliade* et *l'Odyssée* Alexandre dans toutes ses campagnes."⁵⁰ The most influential figures in literature of Napoleon's time had a great admiration for Ossian, and these two figures were Chateaubriand and Madame de Staël.

Chateaubriand considered Ossian to be the purest source of universal poetry, and his admiration led him to compare Ossian with Homer. It is difficult to establish the exact date of Chateaubriand's discovery of Ossian. In his *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* he tells us: "Je reconnais que, dans ma première jeunesse, Ossian, Werther, les *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, les *Etudes de la nature* ont pu s'apparenter à mes idées."⁵¹ The admiration Chateaubriand felt for Ossian led him to read his work and to retain a feeling of respect for him. He translated some sections of his work which he published in the *Mercure de France* right at the beginning of his literary career.

During his exile in England Chateaubriand took the opportunity to read those poems of Ossian which had not been translated into French. He himself translated some of John Smith's Ossianic verse. Was Chateaubriand's translation a success? He said that the great poet was not all that difficult to translate, but later he admitted: "J'ai fait disparaître les redites et les obscurités du texte anglais, ces chants qui sortent les uns des autres, ces histoires qui se placent comme des parenthèses dans des histoires... Nous voulons en France des choses qui se conçoivent bien et qui s'énoncent clairement. Notre langue a horreur de ce qui est confus, notre esprit repousse ce qu'il ne comprend pas tout d'abord... Je suis persuadé qu'on peut toujours dégager une pensée des mots qui la voilent, à moins que cette pensée ne soit un lieu commun guindé dans les nuages."⁵²

Before discussing his influence on Chateaubriand, let us try to understand why the latter felt at home with the poetry of Ossian. In his *Nouvelles confidences*, Lamartine offers us an

⁵⁰ A. Tedeschi, *Ossian en France*, Milano Tipografia Sociale, 1911, p.69

⁵¹ Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, Garnier Frères, Paris, 1889, Volume IV, p.132

⁵² *Oeuvres*, quoted by P. Van Tieghem in *Ossian en France*, F. Rieder, 1917, Volume 2, p.188. Once again one notes the classicising tone of Chateaubriand's literary criticism. There is a gap between much of his criticism and his own literary practice.

explanation: "Monsieur de Chateaubriand, gentilhomme, né sur les grèves de l'Océan, bercé au murmure des vents et des flots de sa patrie, jeté ensuite, par le hasard de sa naissance, plus que par ses opinions incertaines, dans les champs errants de l'émigration, puis dans les forêts d'Amérique, puis dans les brouillards de Londres, était l'Ossian français: il en avait dans l'imagination le vague, les couleurs, l'immensité, les cris, les plaintes, l'infini."⁵³

Chateaubriand admires nature in Ossian, and finds in it tranquillity, rêverie and a feeling of sorrow. He not only loves Ossian's portrayal of landscape, his appreciation leads him to borrow from it colours, impressions and situations. Let us look more closely at the way he paints this landscape:

Je m'avançais vers la pierre grisâtre...
 Du haut d'un mont une onde rugissante
 S'élançait...
 Le noir torrent, redoublant de vigueur,
 Entraîné fougueux dans la forêt obscure
 De ses sapins...
 Se regardant dans un silence affreux,
 Des rochers nus s'élevaient, ténébreux,
 Leur front aride et leurs cimes sauvages
 Voyons glisser et fuir les nuages...
 Mais tout s'efface, et, surpris de la nuit,
 Couché parmi des bruyères laineuses,
 Sur le courant des ondes orageuses
 Je vais pencher mon front chargé d'ennuis.⁵⁴

Could it be said that Ossian's influence on Chateaubriand was superficial? It is undeniably true that almost the same images used in Ossian appear in the works of Chateaubriand, and the similarity of feeling is not simply coincidental.

⁵³ Lamartine, *Les nouvelles confidences*, Hachette, Paris, 1900, Volume IV, p.284

⁵⁴ Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres*, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1969, Volume III, p. 535, *Le soir dans une vallée*.

Chateaubriand finds in Ossian's verse the most complete expression of nature in the northern world. His influence on landscape in Chateaubriand's writing is a profound and permanent one. This influence is greatly in evidence in the pages of *Les Natchez*. Elements of Ossian can be seen in the style and especially in the themes of melancholy and sadness: "Un jour j'étais assis sous un pin: les flots étaient devant moi, je m'entretenais avec les vents de la mer et les tombeaux de mes ancêtres."⁵⁵

The following passage from *Ossian en France* is essential reading here: "Chateaubriand est le premier grand nom de la littérature française que nous trouvions profondément influencé, profondément modifié par Ossian; ce n'est pas encore assez dire: qui ait dû à Ossian la forme de ses rêves et la parfaite expression des émotions les plus profondes de son coeur... Le paysage qui parlait à son coeur avec tant d'éloquence, et le sentiment..., ce vague à l'âme, ce désir de vivre ailleurs, cette envie de mourir, toute cette mélancolie qu'il a fondue dans la sienne, qu'il a absorbée en lui, et qui à travers son oeuvre a revécu dans ses descendants."⁵⁶ It is interesting to note here that Chateaubriand translated long sections of Smith's English text. This translation forms a part of his *Oeuvres*, and he gives it the title *Poèmes traduits du gallique en anglais par John Smith*. Here is the translation of an ode followed by the original:

"Triste et abandonnée est ma demeure, disait la chanson; aucune voix ne s'y fait entendre, si ce n'est celle de la chouette. Nul barde ne charme la longueur de mes nuits: les ténèbres et la lumière sont égales pour moi. Le soleil ne luit point dans ma caverne: je ne vois point flotter la chevelure dorée du matin, ni couler les flots de pourpre que verse l'astre du jour à son couchant. Mes yeux ne suivent point la lune à travers les pâles nuages; je ne vois point ses rayons trembler à travers les arbres dans les ondes du ruisseau... Ah! Que ne suis-je tombé dans la tempête de Dorla! Ma renommée ne se serait pas évanouie comme le silencieux rayon de l'automne qui court sur les champs jaunis, entre les ombres et les brouillards."⁵⁷

This is Smith's original version:

"Forlorn and dark is my dwelling in the storm of night. No friendly voice is heard, save the cry of owl from the cleft of her rock. No bard is nigh in my lonely care, to deceive the tedious

⁵⁵ Chateaubriand, *Les Natchez*, Henri Colburn, Paris, 1827, p.271

⁵⁶ *Ossian en France*, Volume II, p.209

⁵⁷ Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres III*, quoted in *Ossian en France*, Volume II, p.190

night. But night and day are the same to me; no beam of the sun travels here in my darkly dwelling. I see not his yellow hair in the east; nor, in the west, the red beam of his parting. I see not the moon, sailing through pale clouds, in her brightness; nor trembling, through trees, on the blue face of the stream... O that I had fallen in the strife of Dorla, that the tomb had received my Milina! Then had the fame of Duthona passed away, like autumn's silent beam, when it moves under the brown fields between the shadows of mist."⁵⁸

In analysing the translation in comparison with the original, one can see that the author of *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* omits "in the storm of night, from the cleft of her rock, is nigh in my lonely care, but, sailing, in her brightness, that the tomb had received my Milina." However he adds "disait la chanson, le matin, l'astre du jour, mes yeux ne suivent plus", and "je ne vois point" is repeated. Note that Chateaubriand's translation is happier than the original in spite of the sorrowful imagery. He uses the classic periphrasis as in the example of "l'astre du jour" to avoid using the word "solcil". The personal feelings of the French writer are not sufficient to make him completely faithful to the original.

Madame de Staël became aware of Ossian's work in her youth. It was thanks to Suard, who frequented her mother's salon, that she found the melancholy imagery in his poetry, and according to her mother she adored everything which made her weep. He became one of her favourite authors. It is important to note here that while her response to Ossian was one of admiration, he did not have any influence on her first literary works. However later on in *De la littérature*, Madame de Staël praised him in chapter eleven of Part I, which she devotes to the literature of the south: "Il existe, ce me semble, deux littératures tout à fait distinctes, celle qui vient du Midi et celle qui descend du Nord, celle dont Homère est la première source, celle dont Ossian est l'origine."⁵⁹ The ideas expressed in Ossian's work, such as the brevity of human life, recurring thoughts, and characteristic elements, such as melancholy, were delightful to her; she discovered in him that philosophical poetry and sombre imagination which are so suited to meditation on the destiny of man. If Ossian's philosophy lacks profundity, she

⁵⁸ John Smith, *Duthona*, quoted in *Ossian en France*, Volume II, pp. 189-190

⁵⁹ *De la littérature*, p.203

believed it was because he was original, in the sense of being at the origins of "northern" poetry.

The author of *De la littérature* presents Ossian as the "Homer of the North", and sees in him the first northern poet and the true source of English and German literature.

In chapter one we have already noted the admiration Madame de Staël felt for Ossian, which brings us to this question: why did she not accord Ossian the same importance in the works which followed *De la littérature*? Is it because she was sensitive to the criticisms of Chateaubriand and Fontanes who felt she had made an error of judgment when she wrote that Scandinavian poetry had the same emotional tone as the Gaelic poetry? In a long letter which Chateaubriand wrote to Fontanes, he devoted pages to the question of Ossian, and criticised Madame de Staël's point of view. Here is an excerpt from the letter: "La mémoire de Madame de Staël l'a trahie lorsqu'elle avance que les poésies scandinaves ont la même couleur que les poésies du prétendu barde écossais. Chacun sait que c'est tout le contraire. Les premières ne respirent que brutalité et vengeance..."⁶⁰

P. Van Tieghem observed that: "L'ossianisme de Madame de Staël avait été plutôt une curiosité de son esprit qu'une adhésion de son coeur... Elle a fidèlement cru à l'authenticité d'Ossian, elle a été sensible à sa mélancolie, elle s'est servi de son nom comme d'une maîtresse pièce pour édifier un système d'histoire littéraire qui devait s'effondrer bientôt, la partie durable de son oeuvre ne lui doit à peu près rien."⁶¹ The first generation of Romantics which followed on from that of Chateaubriand and Madame de Staël was influenced by the poetry of Ossian. At the age of sixteen, Lamartine began to read Ossian, who became his favourite author. He did not hesitate to call him "the Homer of my early years". It is interesting to note here once again the comparison between Homer and Ossian. Both were considered by the Romantics to be original poets, which tied in with their ideas on natural man and the search for purity in the origins of humanity.

It was thanks to his contact with the world of Ossian that Lamartine's instinct for poetry emerged. He was attracted by the feeling of melancholy and the images of the natural world to

⁶⁰ Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres*, quoted in *Ossian en France*, Volume II, p.221

⁶¹ *Ossian en France*, Volume II, p.223

be found in Ossian's Gaelic verse. One can easily feel the influence of Ossian especially in the first period of Lamartine's poetry. *Correspondance* reveals the evidence of Lamartine's enthusiasm for Ossian; he sent a friend the beginning of a little poem which shows the style and genre he had adopted:

"Toi qui chantaïs l'amour et les héros
 Toi d'Ossian la compagne assidue,
 Harpe plaintive, en ce triste repos
 Ne reste pas plus longtemps suspendue!
 Du vent du soir j'entends les sifflements;
 L'obscur brouillard se promènera à pas lents;
 Porté vers nous sur des nuages sombres,
 J'entends venir le peuple heureux des ombres..."⁶²

His adolescent admiration for the Scottish poet is visible here; Ossian's influence is already evident in the work of the young French poet, whose fluidity of expression, melancholy philosophy and immense imaginative power reveal his debt to the Scottish poet.

The French writer compares the Scottish poet to Dante and Homer. In his *Confidences* he writes: "... Ossian surtout, ce poète du vague, ce brouillard de l'imagination, cette plainte inarticulée des mers du Nord, cette écume des grèves, ce gémissement des ombres, ce roulis des nuages autour des pins tempêteux de l'Ecosse, ce Dante septentrional, aussi majestueux, aussi surnaturel que le Dante de Florence, plus sensible que lui, et qui arrache souvent à ses fantômes des cris plus humains et plus déchirants que ceux des héros d'Homère."⁶³ Lamartine sees in Ossian a poet who can lay claim to an important place in French literature, a poet for whom admiration lingers on in the memory of great men.

It is clear that Lamartine was not only impressed by the love and sorrow in the Gaelic poetry but that he was also familiar with the commonplaces of Ossian's work. However, he did not imitate the Scottish poet in the long term, in spite of the Ossianic flavour of much of his early work.

⁶² Lamartine, *Correspondance*, Volume I, quoted in *Ossian en France*, Volume II, p.310

⁶³ Lamartine, *Confidences*, quoted in *Ossian en France*, Volume II, p.306

Chapter IV

Stendhal: *Racine et Shakespeare*

The period from 1820 to 1830 was dominated by the Romantic quarrel, the most important issue in French literary milieux. Stendhal, who had returned from Italy after a long absence, was quick to become involved. The principal question in the debate was simply this: should the "errements" of Racine be followed, or those of Shakespeare, if one is to succeed in writing interesting tragedies? In a sense, Stendhal was continuing the debate begun by Madame de Staël twenty years before.

It was as a consequence of his work *Racine et Shakespeare* that Stendhal became an important figure in the literary circles of Paris. The work appeared in two versions. The first appeared in 1823 when the dispute between Romantic and Classical had scarcely begun, although several theoretical works had already appeared. The current edition is not the same as that of 1823; the appendices were added posthumously in 1854. It is an artificial compilation: seven more chapters taken from manuscripts were added to the posthumous edition. The slim volume of 1823 focuses on the question of what makes tragedy interesting and offers definitions of Romanticism and Classicism. The main elements of the pamphlet were the criticism of the two unities of time and place (not, however, forgetting unity of action), and Stendhal's disdain for verse form.

The second version was published at the beginning of 1825. It owed its success to favourable circumstances: the Romantic dispute had become a live issue. This version was quite different from the first; it was longer and a little more precise than that of 1823. However, it dealt essentially with the same ideas.

The struggle of the Romantic versus the Classical had long been in existence and Stendhal's predecessors, including Chateaubriand and Madame de Staël among others, had done a great deal of work on the same subject but without explicitly using the terms Romanticism and Classicism.

Stendhal, who belonged to the liberal group in the French Romantic movement, did all he could to win the cause which obsessed him. In his correspondence he wrote: "Je suis un romantique furieux, c'est-à-dire que je suis pour Shakespeare contre Racine et pour Lord Byron contre Boileau."⁶⁴

But what is the difference between the Romantic and the Classical? In *Racine et Shakespeare* Stendhal gave an answer, since become famous, which defined the new school in these words: "Le Romantisme est l'art de présenter aux peuples les oeuvres littéraires qui, dans l'état actuel de leurs habitudes et de leurs croyances, sont susceptibles de leur donner le plus de plaisir possible. Alors que le Classicisme, au contraire, leur présente la littérature qui donnait le plus grand plaisir possible à leurs arrière-grands pères."⁶⁵

Note that when writing of Romanticism, Stendhal used the Italian form of the word, "Romanticisme", proving that the word had not yet become completely naturalised in France in 1823, and showing the degree to which Stendhal's ideas on Romanticism had been influenced by Romantic writers in Milan.

Stendhal's definition shows that for the author of *Racine et Shakespeare* all those who write in the idiom of their own time are Romantic, which means that Racine himself was Romantic: "Je n'hésite pas à avancer que Racine a été romantique; il a donné aux marquis de la cour de Louis XIV une peinture des passions, tempérée par l'extrême dignité qui alors était de mode."⁶⁶ Romanticism for Stendhal was therefore the equivalent of modernism in literature. Paradoxically, the argument was supported by the example of a Renaissance writer.

The development of Stendhal's thinking and his continual study of the theatre gave rise to new ideas, which became his contribution to the formulation of the doctrine of the new Romantic literature. He emphasises the importance of new ideas in step with the author's own time, rejecting the idea of copying the centuries which have gone before. The writer must be faithful to the period in which he is writing and express the manners of his time, manners which differ from those of the past. In addition, the writer, who has an important position in literary

⁶⁴ *Correspondance*, quoted by K.G. McWatters and C.W. Thompson in *Stendhal et l'Angleterre*, Liverpool University Press, 1983, p. 15

⁶⁵ Stendhal, *Racine et Shakespeare*, Le Divan, Paris, 1928, p. 43

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 44

and social life, must contribute to the society of his own time. These ideas were the fruit of Stendhal's meditations.

Before looking at Stendhal's claims more closely, let us examine his attitude to Racine. Stendhal admired Racine only in later life; he found in him a truthfulness, elegantly expressed. In *Racine et Shakespeare* things were different; Racine was criticised along with the poetic principles of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His tragedies, according to Stendhal, were boring because they could no longer express life in all its fullness and variety. The dispute between Racine and Shakespeare, as the author explains it to us, focuses on the unities of time and place. "Toute la dispute entre Racine et Shakespeare se réduit à savoir si, en observant les deux unités de lieu et de temps, on peut faire des pièces qui intéressent vivement des spectateurs du dix-neuvième siècle, des pièces qui les fassent pleurer et frémir."⁶⁷

Stendhal's demands can be summarised in the form of three principles: the first was the rejection of the unities of time and place, which in his view had become simply a habit in French theatre and were in no way essential. Unity of time created obstacles which prevented tragedy from depicting action which goes beyond a twenty-four hour period, the result of which was that tragedy could not show on stage passions which take time to reveal themselves. Stendhal believed that sometimes this unity could be extended to as much as a year; beyond that time, characters could no longer remain the same.

The second of Stendhal's demands was for subjects of national importance, on the grounds that the role of the writer is to show life from all points of view, in order to reveal to the audience the flaws and deficiencies which they cannot see clearly for themselves. National subjects are of great interest to a people seeking to understand the tragedy of their own history. One can see that this point of view, while rejecting subjects taken from antiquity, has clearly been influenced by the Revolution and the Napoleonic period.

In a letter of March 2nd 1823, Stendhal wrote: "Les Français ont envie de voir sur leur théâtre les tragédies historiques de *La mort de Henri III*, de *L'assassinat du duc de Bourgogne*

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.10

au pont Montereau. Ce qu'on goûte le plus dans Shakespeare, en France, ce sont les tragédies historiques de *Henri IV* et de *Richard III*."⁶⁸

In Stendhal's view, it was essential to get closer to the methods Shakespeare used to portray great national events on stage: this was the only means of reforming French theatre. He hoped to see an English theatre established in Paris. Something which had failed miserably in 1822 could succeed in 1826 because public feeling had changed and was completely different from the frivolous attitude of the Ancien Régime. "Les choses sont en 1826 sur un autre pied. Le public français lit des traductions des meilleures pièces anglaises. Les élèves les plus distingués de nos Grandes Ecoles adorent le genre romantique."⁶⁹ The author of *Racine et Shakespeare*, in his turn, invited French writers to copy the idioms of the North and to transmute the phraseology of the English language into French. He found something "gonflé et d'élastique jusqu'à l'infini" in the ideas coming from the North.

His third claim was that writers should use prose; he did not conceal his disdain for writing in verse, which he described as a "cache-sottise". He did not deny that verse is more delightful to the ear, and confers a higher artistic value. Nevertheless he believed prose tragedy to be very strongly connected to the real world since it offers a greater degree of truthfulness.

Stendhal felt a strong antipathy towards poetry, revealed in *De l'amour*, where he states that the principal function of poetry was to make the lines easy to remember, but that to keep the verse form in dramatic art was "un reste de barbarie". Prose writers are lovers of truth, and must always be on their guard against "la duperie du sentiment et des mots". For Stendhal, the only acceptable form would be prose tragedy which did not observe the unities of time and place, written in a simple style and representing interesting events in French national history. In 1826, collaborating with a group of young writers, he developed the idea of "la scène historique", which offered him a good opportunity to take the lead in discussions on Romantic tragedy, and to reclaim it for prose. The action of this tragic genre took place over months and in different locations, and its subject matter was taken from the history of France. It was thanks

⁶⁸ Quoted in Jules Marsan, *La bataille romantique*, Hachette, Paris, 1912, p.130. One can see from this how fascinated the Romantic generation were by History, not only in the form of the historical novel à la Walter Scott, but also in the form of historical theatre.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Christian A.E. Jensen, *L'évolution romantique*, Librairie Minard, Paris, 1959, p.139

to Stendhal that new plays broke free from the unities of time and place. It is noteworthy that this new genre of historical scenes was dictated by the spirit of political opposition, because, as Stendhal says, it was impossible to discuss literature or the Restoration without touching on politics.

Stendhal's demands destroyed conventions which had resisted any kind of innovation, however moderate. Many gave Stendhal the credit for originating new ideas which helped bring about a revival in French theatre.

Subsequently, the dramas and comedies of Victor Hugo and Musset which were inspired by Shakespeare showed that Classical tragedy had run its course, and had to give way to Romantic tragedy or, more often, Romantic drama.

It is not always easy to persuade people to accept a new artistic development over a short period. Moreover, changes in ideas always need time to become accepted by other people. Is it easy to replace tragedy with drama? Should plays be written in verse or in prose? Should one follow the Classical or the Romantic? These and other questions gave rise to lengthy arguments. Writers, in spite of their understanding of their art, are not always able to convince the nation among whom they seek recognition, and the debate was to continue in one form or another throughout the entire period of our study.

Let us examine some aspects of Stendhal's response to Walter Scott. It was through the *Bibliothèque britannique* that Stendhal was first introduced to Scott's novels, written in a style which he found flowing and natural. He reproached Scott with having sacrificed the portrayal of love⁷⁰; this disappointment did not last – he greeted other novels such as *Waverley* and *Ivanhoe* with enthusiasm. However, in 1825 Stendhal began once again to deplore certain novels which describe "les mœurs d'autrefois plutôt que les passions".

Nevertheless, Stendhal saw Scott as an important ally in the confrontation between the Classical and the Romantic. In order to weaken Classical resistance, he offered a definition of Romantic tragedy linked to Walter Scott. In *Racine et Shakespeare* he posed the question:

⁷⁰ This is a reproach which Pichot makes, and later Balzac. One could ask oneself why. Could it reflect the idea that the severity of Protestantism is supposed to stifle passions, whereas Catholicism provides fertile ground for the passions? Is this a version of the stereotypical "coldness" of northerners as opposed to the "warmth" of the people of the South?

what has been the most successful work in France during the previous ten years?, and replied "the novels of Walter Scott", then went on to note that the Scottish writer's novels were essentially "de la tragédie romantique, entremêlée de longues descriptions. On nous objectera le succès des *Vêpres siciliennes*, du *Paria*, des *Macchabées*, de *Regulus*. Ces pièces font beaucoup de plaisir; mais elles ne font pas un plaisir dramatique. Le public, qui ne jouit pas d'ailleurs d'une extrême liberté, aime à entendre réciter des sentiments généreux exprimés en beaux vers."⁷¹ He advised writers to take themes for their dramas from Scott's novels if they wished to renew the subject matter of French theatre.

The merit which Stendhal attributes to Scott does not just lie within the field of Romantic solidarity; he goes beyond that in crediting Scott with changing the sensibility of the cultivated reader. In *Les Mélanges d'art* Stendhal finds that it is thanks to Scott that the people are beginning to appreciate a style which is "doux, tranquille, ossianique."

Let us look more closely at Stendhal's borrowings from Scott. First of all, it is clear that it is at least in part to Scott that Stendhal owes his famous definition of the novel: "Le roman est un miroir qui se promène sur la grand'route." "Scott, dans *Waverley*, avait déjà parlé de romans qui seraient des miroirs où se reflèteraient des scènes qui se passent chaque jour sous nos yeux."⁷²

The author of *Racine et Shakespeare* often alluded to the novels of Scott, which he considered an essential point of reference. One cannot deny that there is a similarity between *Le Rouge et le Noir* on the one hand and Scott's novels on the other, whether in the treatment of politics or of history. This is evidence of the influence Scott had on Stendhal and of the substantial debt Stendhal owed him.

But why were Scott's novels a reference point for Stendhal? In the ninth chapter of *Stendhal et l'Angleterre* we find the following answer: "... en ce qui concerne le problème de la création romanesque, l'Angleterre fut pour lui (Stendhal) un champ inépuisable d'exemples et d'expériences. C'est là qu'il reçut les leçons et trouva les modèles les mieux adaptés à son génie. Car Stendhal avait besoin de modèles. Le roman n'était pas sa véritable destination...

⁷¹ *Racine et Shakespeare*, p.8

⁷² K.G. McWatters, *Stendhal lecteur des romanciers anglais*, Grand Chêne, Lausanne, 1963, p.86

Mais il serait par trop injuste d'oublier qu'il tira le plus grand profit de la lecture de Scott, comme l'attestent, tout au long de son oeuvre, les allusions qu'il fit à l'auteur de *Waverley*."⁷³

It is interesting to note that Stendhal read Scott's works in English, and is on occasion closer in his versions to the English text than Scott's translators were. The following comparison provides evidence of this:

The Bride of Lammermoor, chapter 5: "It is, perhaps, at all times dangerous for a young man to suffer recollection to dwell repeatedly, and with too much complaisance, on the same individual."

Translation: "Dans tous les temps, peut-être, il est dangereux pour une jeune personne de permettre à son imagination de s'occuper trop souvent, et avec plaisir et complaisance, du même individu."

De l'amour: "Il est toujours périlleux, pour une jeune personne, de souffrir que ses souvenirs s'attachent d'une manière répétée, et avec trop de complaisance, au même individu."⁷⁴

One would never guess that these three lines from *De l'amour* were translated from English; they are arguably a more faithful rendering than the translator's version. But we must add here that the comparison between the two translations is unjust, as one should not compare a writer such as the author of *Racine et Shakespeare*, with a mere translator; the former is often better able to penetrate to the essence of what the original was aiming at.⁷⁵

Stendhal was among those who knew Lord Byron; in one of his letters, written in the autumn of 1816, he writes of his first meeting with the English poet: "J'ai dîné hier avec un joli et charmant jeune homme, figure de dix-huit ans ... C'est le plus grand poète vivant, Lord Byron."⁷⁶

⁷³ *Stendhal et l'Angleterre*, p.159

⁷⁴ *Stendhal lecteur des romanciers anglais*, p.137

⁷⁵ This raises the question of plagiarism on the part of Stendhal, but the idea of plagiarism at that time was very different from that of today, and is besides not a useful angle to develop in this context.

⁷⁶ *Souvenir d'égotisme*, quoted by Edmond Estève in *Byron et le romantisme français*, Hachette, Paris, 1907, p.57

As we have already noted, Stendhal was openly enthusiastic about the English writer; he spoke of him in the same breath as Shakespeare "Je suis pour Shakespeare contre Racine et pour Lord Byron contre Boileau."⁷⁷

Was this loyalty short-lasting? It seems that in spite of the criticisms he levelled at Byron, such as "Lord Byron, auteur de quelques héroïdes sublimes, mais toujours les mêmes, et de beaucoup de tragédies mortellement ennuyeuses, n'est point du tout le chef des Romantiques"⁷⁸, and his description of *Cain* as a "plate amplification de collège", Stendhal remained loyal to his initial enthusiasm (although one cannot deny that this enthusiasm had declined somewhat over time, especially after he received a letter from Byron in which he defended Walter Scott against some criticisms Stendhal had made).

According to the author of *Racine et Shakespeare*, Byron, in all that he wrote, was only able to portray one man: himself. The hatred, misfortune and pessimism which dominated Byron's work were in his opinion the result of the accident which had made him lame. Byron's philosophy is very clearly presented in *Cain*. One can see in this work the writer's rebellion against society and even against God. This feeling of melancholy appealed to Stendhal, who saw in it the expression of painful wonderment felt by the oppressed. Here one can see Stendhal's sympathy for Byron's ideas (or his conception of freedom). It seems that Byron's influence on Stendhal was not as strong as that of Scott, and that in spite of the admiration he felt for the English poet, he was not influenced by him. The different aspects of Byron's thought could scarcely be adapted to suit Stendhal's ideas, but it was perhaps his rejection of poetry or lack of poetic sensibility which prevented Stendhal from being fully in sympathy with Byron.

⁷⁷ *Stendhal et l'Angleterre*, p.15

⁷⁸ *Racine et Shakespeare*, p.45

Chapter V

An animated discussion between the Romantic poets of France and England

The effect that Lord Byron had on the greatest poets and writers of the French Romantic movement was enormous. The generation of Romantic writers was attracted by Byron's attitude towards morality and by his spiritual condition rather than by his innovations in versification.

The existence of a strong personal element in English Romantic poetry is evident, and Byron portrayed his own tastes and feelings in his narrative poetry. The grandeur of nature appears everywhere in his work. On the other hand, passionate and bitter emotions and the sense of the soul in despair are made more poignant by the personal tone adopted by the English poet.

Lord Byron remained an important figure for French writers and poets. The greatest among them did not forget him in their writings. In his *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Ecosse*, Amédée Pichot devoted two chapters to Byron, whom he considered the premier poet of England, one without equal. We shall consider Pichot and his *Voyage...* in a later chapter, but that does not prevent us from quoting these lines on Lord Byron: "J'ai plus d'une fois pensé quelle bonne fortune ce serait pour mon ouvrage d'avoir à révéler à la France la poésie énergique de Byron et les fécondes improvisations de Walter Scott. Si nous étions en 1819, ces deux génies fourniraient la moitié de ce volume: aujourd'hui, je suis tourmenté du soin d'éviter les redites, tant on s'est déjà occupé de Byron et de Scott parmi nous, tant de fois moi-même j'en ai entretenu le public."⁷⁹

According to the author of *Byron et le Romantisme français*, Byron's invasion of France dates from 1818. As for Lamartine, it was about 1819 when chance put into his hands a publication from Geneva which contained some translated fragments of *The Corsair*, *Manfred*, and *Lara*. These poems made an immense impression on him: "Je me retourne moi-même en

⁷⁹ Amédée Pichot, *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Ecosse*, Paris, 1825, Volume III, p.68

lui avant que le grain de Sénevé eût levé en moi: même férocité de passions et d'esprit, moins le génie... je plains l'homme tout en l'admirant."⁸⁰ It was thanks to these poems that he came to discover the troubles which "were gnawing at his soul".

To demonstrate the sympathy Lamartine felt for Byron, it is sufficient to quote some lines from his poetry:

"Toi dont le monde ignore le vrai nom
Esprit mystérieux, mortel, Ange ou Démon,
Qui que tu sois Byron
Bon ou fatal génie
J'aime de tes concerts
La sauvage harmonie."⁸¹

Lamartine was greatly interested in the melancholy quality of Byron's poetry; he read it frequently, borrowing its tone and reflecting its imagery. In his *Méditations* one can see how much he is enchanted by the charm of the English poet and dazzled by his prestige. In the last part of the second edition of *Méditations* Lamartine included *L'homme*, quoted above, which he dedicated to the English poet. In it he expressed his opposition to the rebellion, doubt and Byronic philosophy which Lamartine found too pessimistic:

C'est pour la vérité que Dieu fit le génie.
Jette un cri vers le ciel, ô chantre des enfers!
.....
Courage! Enfant déchu d'une race divine!
Tu portes sur ton front ta superbe origine!
.....
Laisse aux fils de la nuit le doute et le blasphème!⁸²

⁸⁰ Lamartine, *Méditations*, quoted by Malka Locker in *Les romantiques*, Presse du temps présent, Paris, 1964, p.186

⁸¹ Lamartine, *Méditations*, excerpt from the poem *L'homme*

⁸² Lamartine, *Méditations*, excerpt from the poem *L'homme*

Lamartine, in spite of the admiration he felt for the English poet, could not feel in sympathy with the spirit of Byron's poetry because he was optimistic, a believer and worshipper, while Byron was a pessimist, a rebel and a denier. He saw in Byron's poetry a danger which was infiltrating French society through the public's enthusiasm for the poet. One could go so far as to believe that the meditation entitled *L'homme* was his creative response to Byron's rebellion, a response which was essentially opposed to Byron's ideas. The following example reveals to what extent Lamartine rejected "satanisme byronien":

Et toi, Byron, semblable à ce brigand des airs
 Les cris du désespoir sont tes plus doux concerts;
 Le mal est ton spectacle et l'homme est ta victime;
 Ton oeil, comme Satan, a mesuré l'abîme,
 Et ton âme, y plongeant loin du jour et de Dieu,
 A dit à l'espérance un éternel adieu...

.....
 Ton génie invincible éclate en chants funèbres
 Il triomphe, et ta voix sur un mode infernal
 Chante l'hymne de gloire au sombre dieu du mal.⁸³

An analysis of the vocabulary (*désespoir*, *Satan*, *infernal* and *dieu du mal*) shows to what degree Lamartine rejected the idea of rebelling against Providence. For Lamartine there was only one way to respond to the suffering one must endure in life: one must turn one's back on despair and submit to the will of God. He counsels Byron to turn to God in order to overcome the worst of life's disappointments.

In spite of this contradiction Lamartine admits: "Je devins ivre de cette poésie... ce fut un second Ossian pour moi... Cette poésie me charmait, mais elle ne corrompait pas mon bon sens naturel. J'en compris une autre, celle de la vérité, de l'adoration, et du courage."⁸⁴

Lamartine's attitude to Byron did not change, and he summed up his assessment of the great English poet in his *Vie de Byron*, published in *Le Constitutionnel* on 15th November

⁸³ H. Mario Metz, *La critique littéraire de Lamartine*, Moulon, Paris, 1974, p.107

⁸⁴ Lamartine, *Oeuvres choisies*, A. Hatier, Paris, 1925, p.116

1865: "En résumé, Lord Byron restera dans l'esprit des hommes comme l'un de ces êtres fantastiques qui semblent créer par la magie plutôt que par la nature, qui éblouissent l'imagination, qui passionnent le coeur, mais qui ne satisfont ni la raison ni la conscience."⁸⁵

Before going on to consider the influence certain English writers had on the work of Victor Hugo, it is important to state that the French writer knew the English works only in translation as he did not understand the English language. In one of his letters to Madame Hugo, he wrote: "A Jersey, on parle français, ce qui est précieux, aucun de nous ne sachant l'anglais."⁸⁶ But that does not mean that he did not know a few words of English, evidence for which is to be found in *Les travailleurs de la mer*: "...Il fait rimer *I love you* avec voyou, dans *La forêt mouillée*: '... si je n'étais voyou/ je voudrais être rose et dire: *I love you*.'⁸⁷ It is important to note here that Victor Hugo lived for a very long time, from 1802 to 1885, and during his lifetime his ideas changed: certain writers had a greater reputation in some periods than they did in others, as we can see in the case of Milton and Byron.

Milton, Shakespeare, Byron and Walter Scott all had their influence on Hugo, a Romantic poet who found an important source of inspiration in their work.

Milton, the author of that great English epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, came to Hugo's attention when he read his work in the translation of Chateaubriand or Delille. It is to the Romantic generation that Milton owes his reputation in France; French writers were drawn to *Paradise Lost*, which was a powerful source of inspiration to lyric poets.

At the start of his literary career, Hugo did not conceal his admiration for Milton. In *Cromwell*, Milton's presence is greatly in evidence. In *Littérature et philosophie mêlées*, Victor Hugo sets forth his views on the subject of *Paradise Lost* and its author: "Si jamais composition littéraire a profondément porté l'empreinte ineffaçable de la méditation et de l'inspiration, c'est le *Paradis Perdu*. Une idée morale, qui touche à la fois aux deux natures de l'homme; ... une action qui commence par Jésus et se termine par Satan; Eve entraînée par la curiosité, la compassion et l'imprudence, jusqu'à la perdition; la première femme en contact avec le premier démon; drame simple et immense..., tableau magique qui fait graduellement

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.108

⁸⁶ *Byron et le Romantisme français*, p.299

⁸⁷ Jean Bertrand, *Victor Hugo à l'oeuvre*, C. Klincksieck, Paris, 1965, p.86

succéder à toutes les teintes de lumière toutes les nuances de ténèbres; poème singulier, qui charme et qui effraie."⁸⁸

Another reason for the admiration Hugo felt for Milton lies in the fact that Hugo also had an epic imagination, something we can see clearly in works such as *La légende des siècles*, among others.

The new Romantic generation took a great interest in Milton and *Paradise Lost*; they found in it a fruitful source of "satanism", which symbolised the rebellion against everything which could limit freedom. This is one of the reasons why we so often find demonic poetry in the work of Romantic writers; the influence of the Gothic novel provided other satanic settings. It is interesting to note here that Milton wished to glorify God in *Paradise Lost*, but what we find is quite the opposite: in the eyes of the Romantics he glorified Satan who became the true hero of the epic.

His reading of Milton no doubt had an influence on Victor Hugo, whose style is close to that of the English poet: "Dans les *Odes et Ballades* les épithètes portent l'empreinte des croyances traditionnelles, beaucoup d'entre elles sont empruntées au langage biblique, directement ou par la voie de Milton."⁸⁹

Paradise Lost had a considerable influence on Victor Hugo, who wished to give precise definitions of nature, religion, truth and poetry. He found in Milton the idea that religion is only human nature in a state of purity, and that led him to reject those rules which limit freedom and inspiration, as, for example, when he observed in the *Préface de Cromwell* that the unities of place and time were only artificial conventions.

The admiration which Hugo felt for Milton is no longer evident in his work *William Shakespeare*, in which he reproaches Milton for his puritanical gloom, but that does not mean that the English poet was no longer important in Hugo's thinking. Hugo found in Shakespeare an immense source of inspiration, to which he owed his conception of lyricism and of theatre in general. He admired those ideas of Shakespeare which brought freedom to the stage, and at the

⁸⁸ Quoted in *Victor Hugo à l'œuvre*, by J.B. Barrère, Paris, 1965, p.75

⁸⁹ Mysie E.I. Robertson, *L'épithète dans les œuvres lyriques de Victor Hugo*, Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, Paris, 1927, p.483

same time he declared war on the rules and the unities of place and time which were denying literature the possibility of change. It was under the influence of Shakespeare that the author of the *Préface de Cromwell* demanded, as did other French writers, the rejection of these unities. He wished to give more freedom to writers who were fettered by the ancient rules. Shakespeare's enormous imagination fascinated Hugo, who found there the portrayal of life in all its variety, unimpeded by restrictive rules. It was the true nature of life that he celebrated. He also owes to Shakespeare the idea of "une peinture plus individuelle des caractères, le remplacement du récit par l'action, un style plus coloré d'images, le mélange du trivial et du sublime, la nature toujours présente dans le drame."⁸⁰

Hugo's poetry which evolved towards the study of nature found in the different works of Shakespeare the face of that truth which constitutes the Shakespearian universe. In Hugo's opinion, the English writer is the true creator of modern theatre and modern style. It was thanks to the author of the *Préface de Cromwell* and other French writers that society finally became receptive to Shakespeare's masterpieces, which they had earlier rejected. Victor Hugo wanted to see the emergence of an ideal theatre in which the mind and imagination of the poet could be given free rein. Revealingly, his choice of name was the *Théâtre en liberté*: the influence of Shakespeare was decisive, freedom of thought was no longer constrained, and imagination took on a more important role in plays which no longer respected the Classical rules. It is interesting to note that his ignorance of the English language did not prevent the author of the *Préface de Cromwell* from being exposed to the intellectual and imaginative influence of English literature through the medium of translation. This point is important when one considers Hugo's diction, where the influence of Shakespeare is less important than that of Dante: "... en raison de l'origine commune de l'italien et du français: l'épithète italienne passe facilement, avec quelques modifications phonétiques, en français, tandis qu'en traduisant l'épithète anglaise on risque de lui substituer non seulement d'autres valeurs phonétiques, mais le réseau d'associations latines qui entoure le verbe français."⁸¹ We should emphasise,

⁸⁰ Edmond Wahl, *La Préface de Cromwell de Victor Hugo*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1909, p.XXVI

⁸¹ Mysie E.I. Robertson, *L'épithète dans les oeuvres lyriques de Victor Hugo*, Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, Paris, 1927, p.103

therefore, that Shakespeare's influence is not so much on Hugo's poetic language as on his general ideas.

Did this great admiration for Shakespeare and his masterpieces lead Hugo to imitate him? Before replying to this question, we should note that there is a difference between imitation and inspiration. Victor Hugo did not allow himself to imitate Shakespeare. However that does not prevent him from drawing inspiration from Shakespeare at times, as he does in *Le fou du roi Lear*. There is no contradiction in this; the difference between imitation and inspiration requires no explanation. Victor Hugo kept his word: "Aucune imitation véritable ne se trouve dans son théâtre. Ses fous ont plus d'esprit, moins d'humour et de fantaisie... Après peut-être *Les fous de Cromwell* et encore *Le Gracieux de Marion*, ils semblent moins avoir été oubliés comme chez Shakespeare, en marge d'un drame sur lequel, bon gré, mal gré, ils ouvrent un oeil, qu'avoir été conçus en fonction du rôle que l'auteur leur donnait à y jouer."⁹²

Like many writers and poets of the Romantic generation, Hugo could not avoid the influence of Lord Byron. In one of his verse anthologies entitled *Les Orientales*, Hugo's ideas are directly inspired by Byron's *Mazeppa* and *The Giaour*, which had been translated by Amédée Pichot. "*Les Orientales* ont placé Victor Hugo près de Byron; on y retrouve plusieurs sujets traités par le poète anglais, mais traités autrement, avec d'autres idées et d'autres vues d'art. Nous voulons parler de *Mazeppa* et du *Clair de lune*. C'est Byron qui, le premier, a pris l'Orient pour matière poétique."⁹³

Hugo's thinking gained much from the Byronic epigraphs which he borrowed from the poet. For a short time he fell into a period of melancholy which encouraged him to draw inspiration from Byron's pessimism, which he found, for example, expressed in *Stanzas Written on the Road between Florence and Pisa*:

Oh! talk not to me of a name great in story!
The days of our youth are the days of our glory;
And the myrtle and ivy of sweet two-and-twenty

⁹² Jean-Bertrand Barrère, *La fantaisie de Victor Hugo*, José Corti, Tours, France, 1949, Volume I, p.79

⁹³ *Mercur du XIXe siècle*, quoted by Edmond Estève in *Byron et le Romantisme français*, Hachette, Paris, 1907, p.303

Are worth all your laurels, though ever so plenty!⁹⁴

In the *Feuilles d'automne*, Hugo's lines entitled *Soleil couchant* are sad and reflect some of the Byronic emotion:

Et la face des eaux, et le front des montagnes,
 Ridés et non vieillis, et les bois toujours verts,
 S'iront rajeunissant; le fleuve des campagnes
 Prendre sans cesse au mot le flot qu'il donne aux mers.
 Mais moi, sous chaque jour courbant plus bas ma tête,
 Je passe, et refroidis sous ce soleil joyeux
 Je m'en irai bientôt au milieu de la fête
 Sans que rien manque au monde immense et radieux.⁹⁵

However, Byron's melancholy⁹⁶, doubt, despair and pessimism are summer clouds which cannot long resist the brilliant sun of Hugo, who, in the opinion of the author of *Byron et le Romantisme français*, ultimately owes little to Byron, as was the case with Lamartine. It is significant, though, that both poets went through a Byronic phase.

It would seem that Hugo made his choice between Chateaubriand and Byron: that is to say, the choice between the angelic school and the satanic school. His decision was to renounce the "genre noir" and distance himself from the satanic school. He wrote about Byron in two different articles published in *La Muse française*; in the first article he was quick to declare his choice: "Cette littérature..., comme toutes les choses de l'humanité, présente, dans son unité même, son côté sombre et son côté consolant. Deux écoles se sont formées dans son sein... l'une voit tout du haut du ciel, l'autre du fond de l'enfer. La première place au berceau de l'homme un ange qu'il retrouve encore assis au chevet de son lit de mort; l'autre environne ses

⁹⁴ *Byron et le Romantisme français*, p.307

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p.308

⁹⁶ Melancholy is to be found in Hugo's poetry because it is part of human nature. *Demain dès l'aube* expresses a kind of sadness which bears no relation to Byron's melancholy.

pas de démons, de fantômes et d'apparitions sinistres... Toutes deux possèdent également l'art d'esquisser des scènes gracieuses et de crayonner des figures terribles; mais la première, attentive à ne jamais briser le coeur, donne encore aux plus sombres tableaux je ne sais quel reflet divin; la seconde, toujours soigneuse d'attrister, répand sur les images les plus riantes, comme une lueur infernale."⁹⁷

It should also be noted that the author of the *Préface de Cromwell* finally chose the more optimistic route and abandoned his imitation of Byron.

Two months after Byron's death, Hugo devoted another article to him in *La Muse française*, in which he discussed the role the English poet might have played if he had been allowed a longer life, saying that the future of literature might have been very different, if death had not decided otherwise. "Quand on nous a annoncé la mort de ce poète, il nous a semblé qu'on nous enlevait une part de notre avenir."⁹⁸

According to Estève, for Hugo Byron was no more than a name "qui lui servira, comme tant d'autres, à fabriquer au besoin des formules sonores. A peine a-t-il été effleuré par le byronisme, et les *Orientales* et son théâtre exceptés, il n'y a aucun compte à tenir de cette influence dans la formation et l'évolution de son génie poétique."⁹⁹

Victor Hugo began to read Scott very early on, and admired his work. He found in Scott a fruitful source of inspiration. In *Le Conservateur littéraire* Victor Hugo revealed his admiration for Scott's first novel *Waverley*, which appeared in July 1814. As for the other volumes in the series entitled *Waverley Novels*, they aroused almost the same degree of admiration.

But how were Scott's works received in France generally? The following quotation answers this question most effectively: "Du Walter Scott! Du Walter Scott! Hâtez-vous, Messieurs, et vous surtout Mesdames; c'est du merveilleux, c'est du nouveau; hâtez-vous! La première édition est épuisée, la seconde est retenue d'avance, la troisième disparaîtra, à peine sortie de la

⁹⁷ Quoted in *La fantaisie de Victor Hugo*, p.56. Note that this quotation reveals an attitude which was typical of Hugo: he swings between two extremes, for he loves contrasts (and likes to exaggerate the opposition between black and white). I have the impression that, in this quotation, he admires both aspects.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.119

⁹⁹ *Byron et le Romantisme français*, p.310

presse. Accourez, achetez; mauvais ou bon, n'importe! Sir Walter Scott y a mis son nom, cela suffit... et vivent l'Angleterre et les Anglais!"¹⁰⁰ This shows how much Scott was loved in France; he became the French public's favourite writer and they looked forward to his latest work with eager impatience.

The characters in Scott's works awakened in Hugo a significant liking for picturesque figures. It is evident that Hugo's works such as *Notre-Dame de Paris* and *Les travailleurs de la mer*, among others, contained fine images which were inspired by Scott's work. "Nous avons entendu critiquer," he wrote in an article on *Quentin Durward*, "comme hideuse et révoltante la peinture de l'orgie. C'est à notre avis, un des plus beaux chapitres de ce livre. Walter Scott, ayant entrepris de peindre ce fameux brigand surnommé Le Sanglier des Ardennes, aurait manqué son tableau s'il n'eût excité l'horreur. Il faut toujours entrer franchement dans une donnée dramatique, et chercher en tout le fond des choses. L'émotion et l'intérêt ne se trouvent que là. Il n'appartient qu'aux esprits timides de capituler avec une conception forte et de reculer dans la voie qu'ils se sont tracée."¹⁰¹

It was partly to Scott that the French writer owed his success in the historical novel. One cannot deny that the Scottish writer and poet blazed the trail for him and introduced him to the past, helping him to establish the historical novel in France. Hugo, in turn, did not deny his indebtedness to Scott; in one of his letters to his fiancée he wrote: "Dans *Hans d'Islande*, tous les personnages se peignent par eux-mêmes; c'est une idée que les compositions de Scott m'avaient inspirée."¹⁰²

In *Influences étrangères sur la littérature française*, P. Van Tieghem tells us that in spite of the absence of drama in Scott's work, French theatre was greatly indebted to him since the historical novel is the source of the historical play. "Quand Hugo écrit ses premiers drames, *Cromwell* (1827) et *Amy Robsart* (1828), il s'inspire abondamment de Walter Scott, empruntant le sujet de ce dernier drame au roman *Kenilworth*, et utilisant dans *Cromwell* maint

¹⁰⁰ *Ancienne Minerve littéraire*, quoted by Louis Maigron in *Roman historique à l'époque romantique*, Paris, Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1912, p.52

¹⁰¹ *La Muse française*, quoted in *Roman historique à l'époque romantique*, p.53

¹⁰² *Préface de Cromwell*, p.XXVII

procédé du romancier pour créer la couleur locale et historique, intérieure et extérieure, sans parler de certains détails très précis puisés dans *Woodstock*.¹⁰³

Walter Scott made a real contribution to the revolution in literature. There were many writers who admired him, and who praised him sometimes for mixing beauty with ugliness, as we find in nature. For some time he reigned unchallenged. Little by little his "history lessons" were absorbed, particularly by Balzac, whose career began with historical novels closely modelled on those of Scott. At first he imitated only the picturesque, external elements, but later - and already in *Les Chouans* (1829) - a deeper influence is apparent in the fact that, following in Scott's footsteps, he describes how a society develops, and reveals the historic processes which are at work. In spite of this profound influence, Balzac later went on to criticise Scott in the foreword to *La comédie humaine* for being unable to portray passion or female characters.

¹⁰³ P. Van Tieghem, *Influences étrangères sur la littérature française*, PUF, Paris, 1961, p.202

Chapter VI

Pichot and his journey

With regard to Pichot and his *Voyage historique...*, we can say that he rendered a great service to the French, especially those for whom the English language was a closed book.¹⁰⁴ It was as a result of his work, as we have already noted, that knowledge of English writers and poets spread throughout France. However this does not mean that he was the first person to introduce English literature to France in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century.

Many authors before Pichot had discussed English literature, but it was thanks to his untiring efforts, in such works as his *Voyage historique...* and also the *Revue britannique*, that the vogue for English literature, and its influence, became more widespread. We shall take only the *Voyage historique...* among his many writings on England as an illustration of his knowledge and the breadth of his taste.

The work whose full title is *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Ecosse* was the fruit of three years' observation, research and analysis of English and Scottish literature conducted by Pichot in England. He found that English literature deserved to become more widely known. In spite of the love he felt for the old traditions, he was also attracted to the liberal ideas he found in English thought: "Je m'enthousiasme pour les vieilles traditions, les prouesses des âges chevaleresques, les ruines des tours féodales; mais c'est parce que je ne les vois qu'à travers le prisme de la poésie, et je n'en demeure pas moins attaché aux résultats de la Révolution... J'aime enfin la liberté, sans en adopter toutes les doctrines. Je l'aime comme j'aime Shakespeare, dans tout ce qu'elle a de grand et de beau."¹⁰⁵

On the subject of Shakespeare, Pichot acknowledges his love for Shakespeare in the above quotation: "Je l'aime comme j'aime Shakespeare." Nevertheless, he took up the Voltairian position already noted in a preceding chapter. The French and the English, in his opinion, were right in their criticisms of Shakespeare. "Voltaire n'a exagéré aucune de ses absurdités, et il

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix II

¹⁰⁵ Amédée Pichot, *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Ecosse*, D.M. Ladvocat et Charles Gosselin, Paris, 1825, Foreword, pp.XI-XV

aurait eu deux fois raison s'il avait mesuré ses termes. Il est facile de prouver, au nom du bon sens, que Shakespeare n'a pas fait une seule bonne tragédie; mais il faut convenir que l'art lui doit les plus belles scènes du théâtre, si on les considère isolément."¹⁰⁶ Then he notes that everything has been said already on the subject of the English poet, the greatest literary genius the world has known. In comparing him with Racine, he finds that the French writer is "parfait selon son système, mais malheureusement il a donné à la Melpomène française une démarche trop solennelle et trop mesurée, une dignité trop uniforme, un langage trop argumentatif et trop pompeux."¹⁰⁷ Shakespeare, in spite of his genius, has committed such errors that there exists not one single tragedy worthy of his name. "Les fautes les plus grossières de Shakespeare seraient facilement corrigées par un écolier."¹⁰⁸ In other words, in spite of his admiration, the French canons of good taste and good sense still retain their validity.

English dramatic art, in Pichot's view, does not reach the level of French dramatic art. He does not agree with the English critics who claim that "l'art et le jugement ont étouffé le génie" in the tragedies of Corneille, Racine and Voltaire.

According to the author of *Voyage historique...*, the English are decidedly inferior to the French with regard to comedy; one finds very little in the way of irony or observation in the entire range of English comedy. Among English writers one cannot find the equal of Molière, whose scenes give so much enjoyment. "Molière seul vaut tous les comiques anglais, Molière moins varié, mais aussi profond et aussi vrai que Shakespeare."¹⁰⁹ Here we can see the extent to which Pichot adopts the point of view expressed by Madame de Staël in *De la littérature...* on the comparison between English and French comedy and the position of Molière. Molière is a writer who, according to the English, belongs not only to France but to the whole of Europe.

It was at the age of twenty that Amédée Pichot first heard Lord Byron mentioned and he began to read his work straight away. "En 1815, pour la première fois, j'ouïs prononcer le nom de Byron; pour la première fois, je lus quelques-unes de ces brillantes descriptions de la Grèce moderne et de ces énergiques appels aux Hellènes, alors sourds en apparence à cette éloquente

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p.311

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.326

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.327

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.328

voix.”¹¹⁰ From 1819 onwards he began to translate some of the works of Byron, Scott and Moore; the translation, with notes, was not the only piece of work he did on the English poets; in 1821 he published *Notice sur Walter Scott* and in 1823 his *Essai sur le génie de Lord Byron*. In the *Essai* he tried to examine everything Byron had written and to assess the extent to which he respected the rules of literature: “Si nous n’avons à juger la poésie de Lord Byron que d’après les simples règles littéraires, notre tâche nous paraîtrait moins délicate. La critique, par qui la cause de goût ne doit jamais être désertée, sans s’effrayer du grand nom soumis à son examen, ferait la part des défauts qui appartiennent à la jeunesse de l’auteur, à ses négligences, aux écarts d’une imagination sans frein, aux contradictions et aux vices de ses systèmes; avec la même franchise elle louerait cette profonde énergie qui anime tout ce qu’elle touche, ce pouvoir de créer des combinaisons nouvelles et d’éveiller des émotions jusqu’alors inconnues; ce style rapide et brûlant, riche d’images, plus riche de pensée, enfin cette audace d’un génie indépendant qui, sûr de lui-même, dédaigne de rien emprunter aux autres, et réunit tous les caractères de la véritable inspiration.”¹¹¹ In spite of his admiration, one can again see in this his respect for the criterion of good taste, so dear to the French.

Let us look at the way the author of *Voyage historique...* reveals Lord Byron to the reader: he devotes thirty pages of the third volume to Byron (*Letters LXX and LXXI*), using them to reinforce his positive view. His admiration for the English poet appears at every opportunity: “Byron n’est pas seulement le premier poète de son pays, mais je ne saurais où trouver son égal.”¹¹² In Pichot’s opinion, it is in *Don Juan* that Byron expresses his deepest feelings, proving that his nights are not always dark, as others think; the stars and moon give them a completely different aspect which charms the soul. In *Don Juan* we find proof of the author’s ability to write and to portray the virtues thanks to his profound knowledge of the world. However we must not forget to say that Byron remains unable to do more than “varier par de simples nuances le même caractère”. The capacity for doubt which is so characteristic of Byron leads him to ridicule English society. In his view this society is full of vices. “Avant son exil

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, Volume III, p.69

¹¹¹ *L’Essai*, quoted by L.A. Bisson in *Amédée Pichot: a romantic Prometheus*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford [no date], p.203

¹¹² *Voyage historique...*, Volume III, p.74

Byron était l'idole de tous les cercles: il faudrait convenir enfin que la *haute société* n'est pas la *bonne compagnie*... Ce qui serait pire que d'avouer qu'elle n'est pas exempte des vices que Byron lui reproche."¹¹³

Amédée Pichot imitated one of Byron's *Messéniennes* which he sees as an encouragement to the Greeks to lay down their lives for the freedom of their country. This imitation is almost a translation of the third canto of *Don Juan*. Before looking at some of the stanzas, we should note again that the admiration Byron aroused was for his politics as well as for his writing. The independence of Greece was not only a literary subject but also a liberal cause.

L'Ode du poète grec

Grèce, berceau des arts, que ta gloire est flétrie,
L'étranger ne peut plus louer que ta beauté.
Ta beauté, don fatal! Malheureuse patrie!
Qu'as-tu fait de ta liberté ?
La muse qui peupla de nymphes tes bocages
La lyre qui chantait les dieux et les héros,
Charmant de leurs accords de plus heureux rivages,
Ne réveille plus tes échos.

III

J'aime sur Marathon à voir lever l'aurore;
Là le Perse connut quels étaient nos aïeux.
J'ai rêvé quelquefois à l'aspect de ces lieux.

IV

Que la Grèce était libre encore
Où sont-ils ces guerriers, la terreur des tyrans ?
Un barbare a brisé leur urne funéraire!
O Grèce! Le tombeau de tes nobles enfants

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p.78

N'a pas conservé leur poussière.

V

Et nous ? D'indignes fers déshonorent nos bras:

"Esclaves!" Ce nom seul est un cruel outrage!

Suffit-il de rougir; et n'oserons-nous pas

Briser enfin notre esclavage ?

VI

Terre, entr'ouvre ton sein! De tes héros vengeurs,

Qu'un seul vienne aujourd'hui nous guider à la gloire;

Qu'il fasse retentir ces mots chers à leurs cœurs,

Liberté, patrie et victoire.¹¹⁴

One can see how strongly these verses made the Greek people feel the weight of the degradation and suffering imposed on them by Turkish colonisation. In Pichot's view, these verses were the flag under which Byron sacrificed his life and shed his blood to nourish the tree of liberty.

To make the pilgrimage to Edinburgh and meet Sir Walter Scott was a very important event for Pichot. Before his journey to the land of mist he had translated some of Scott's poems. The French author was fascinated by the works of the Scottish poet, to which he made references, often linking him to Lord Byron, and acknowledging their influence in France: "Lord Byron et Sir Walter Scott sont aujourd'hui aussi connus et non moins admirés en France qu'en Angleterre. Jamais poètes étrangers n'avaient exercé tant d'ascendant sur nos doctrines littéraires et sur les inspirations de nos jeunes talents."¹¹⁵ This is how Pichot begins *Letter LXX*. The style of the Scottish writer and poet is characterised by purity and simplicity. Pichot was greatly interested in translating his work and presenting it to the French. He was in the habit of sending a copy of each translation to Scott. Here is one of his letters to the Scottish poet enclosing some French verses he had written on the occasion of a royal visit to

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp.80-81

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.67

Edinburgh. It shows the extent, in spite of his obvious errors, of his command of the English language:

" Sir,

I take the liberty of sending to you some french verses which perhaps, you will read with indulgence, in a leasure hour. They were inspired to me by happiness which glows in every face for the next arrival of the King in your beautifull city. Poetry is with me but a transient recreation from more serious study, but who knows and admires Sir Walter Scott as I do, and is not sometimes regretting not to be able of exclaiming, like the italian painter: anch'io pittore? O! Tis, coming back from Melrose yesterday, that I did wrote these irregular stanzas, a weak expression of my warm admiration for you. If I did not see your fellow-citizens so happy, I should regret more to have come to Edinburgh, upon an occasion so unfavourable to ask you more frequent interviews.

I am, sir, your devoted and obedient servant,

A.Pichot, M.D."¹¹⁶

This letter, written on the 10th August 1822, some weeks after his arrival in Scotland, shows the place he accorded Scott and the admiration he felt for him.

In Pichot's view, Scott was the foreign author most easily assimilated in France, and also the one who had most triumphed over "toutes les préventions nationales, en même temps que de la transmutation périlleuse des traductions."¹¹⁷ According to the author of *Amédée Pichot: a Romantic Prometheus*, Scott himself had a great admiration for French literature: it is enough to say that he thought Molière the best writer of comedy, not only in France but in the entire world.

According to Pichot, it was thanks to the genius of the Scottish writer that the modern epic came into being. As for his poems, their tone was in marked contrast to the poetry of the heart:

"elle est toute extérieure, facile, brillante, pittoresque, rarement profonde."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Letter quoted in *Amédée Pichot: a romantic Prometheus*, p.339

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.344

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.345

On the 9th August 1822, while making his respectful pilgrimage along the banks of the river Esk, Pichot composed the *Stances adressées à Sir Walter Scott*, from which the following is an extract:

De l'Homère calédonien
 Ces lieux, ont plaint la sublime tristesse
 De l'ancien Barde dernier bien,
 La harpe ici charma sa fille et sa vieillesse....
 Elle retrouve enfin ses magiques accents,
 Cette harpe à Morven si chère... ¹¹⁹

Note the implicit reference to Ossian in the last line. Here the author of *Voyage historique...* makes an association between Ossian and Scott, in which we can see the reinforcement of a particular vision of Scottish literature and society transmitted to the French.

The foregoing study of Pichot's attitude to Scott shows that Pichot tended to love the poet in Scott as much as, if not more than, the novelist. During the time he spent in Edinburgh, Pichot had the opportunity to see Scott and during their meetings he found Scott's poetry the most interesting subject they discussed. In addition, Pichot began all the letters he devoted to the Scottish poet with some lines of his verse.

Wordsworth was considered by Pichot (as he was by Sainte-Beuve) to be the leader of the Lake school of poetry. According to the author of *Voyage historique...*, he was the first to create a new poetic genre out of the familiar and commonplace realities of life. The simplicity of his life in the country revealed a new poetic value to him; nature made of him a poet who claimed that poetry should be natural; for him all that was natural was poetic. Pichot realised that Wordsworth had succeeded in bringing poetry back to its origins; poetry was for him a religion: "il a longtemps médité dans la solitude et obtenu des révélations nouvelles sur la destinée de l'homme... Inventeur d'une sorte de platonisme chrétien fondé sur l'harmonie morale de l'univers, il nous montre l'empreinte du doigt de Dieu sur l'objet le plus humble de la création, et cherche à ramener l'homme au sentiment de sa dignité en l'associant à la pensée

¹¹⁹ *Voyage historique...*, Volume III, p.421

du Très-Haut. S'il ne vous transporte pas toujours avec lui dans la sphère élevée de ses abstractions... les émotions de l'homme ne sont pas anéanties par les hautes spéculations du philosophe."¹²⁰ These remarks become clearer after Pichot's analysis of *The Excursion*. In his view, an understanding of Wordsworth's *Excursion* requires religious feeling and acceptance, feelings which lead to an appreciation of "tout ce qu'a de sublime le silence d'une forêt, ou plutôt la solitude un peu monotone d'une immense cathédrale gothique éclairée du demi-jour mystérieux de ses vitraux."¹²¹ The author of *Voyage historique...* sees that *The Excursion* "n'est qu'une partie détachée d'un vaste ouvrage sur l'homme, la nature et la société, qui occupe toute la vie de l'auteur."¹²²

The *Lyrical Ballads*, according to Pichot's analysis, are simple and their style is uneven: sometimes one finds long commentaries on events of small importance, but there are many compensations. This is how Pichot presents them: "La grâce et la fraîcheur d'une poésie qui se rapproche de celle des peuples primitifs, la profondeur et l'originalité des réflexions et des sentiments, la vérité des images empruntées à la nature, une sensibilité vive et une imagination qui anoblit souvent le sujet le plus prosaïque. Le grand charme de ces poésies de Wordsworth, c'est qu'elles régénèrent en quelque sorte le coeur, en lui rendant la fraîcheur de ses premières sensations et l'indépendance de cet âge où chaque idée nouvelle était une conquête qui le faisait bondir de joie, alors que le monde ne nous avait pas imposé encore la loi de ses lieux communs en morale et en poésie."¹²³

As with other poets, Pichot takes every opportunity to express his admiration for the leader of the Lake school, explaining what attracts him to his poetry: "Je me contenterai d'admirer dans la poésie de Wordsworth son talent de saisir et de rendre les divers mouvements de l'âme quand elle est agitée, comme il le dit, par les grandes et simples affections de notre nature. Ainsi il a analysé l'amour maternel dans plusieurs de ses nuances les plus délicates, la dernière lutte de l'instinct contre la mort, et tout ce qu'il y a de moral dans l'amitié fraternelle."¹²⁴

¹²⁰ *Voyage historique...*, Volume II, pp.371-2

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p.372

¹²² *Ibid*, p.372

¹²³ *Ibid*, pp.381-383

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p.386

Pichot gives a French translation of some stanzas from *Indian Woman* and *Poor Susan*. He also translated the sonnet *On the extinction of the Venetian Republic*. He mentions *Peter Bell*, *The Waggoner*, and *Michael*, among others. In Wordsworth's work one finds new subjects, ignored by the majority of poets. This is what Pichot has to say about this: "La sublime révélation de Dieu ou de la nature personnifiée se manifeste poétiquement dans mille sujets oubliés jusqu'ici des poètes."¹²⁵ It is, therefore, the widening of the domain of poetry which interests him. Implicitly, he was saying that French poetry remained too attached to themes which had become worn out through too much repetition.

Amédée Pichot continued his survey of English poetry with a discussion of Shelley. He begins *Letter LXXII* with the following quotation from Shelley's *Queen Mab*, which he followed with a French translation:

"I was an infant when my mother went
 To see an atheist burned. She took me there:
 The dark-robed priests were met round the pile,
 The multitude was gazing silently;
 And as the culprit passed with dauntless mien,
 Tempered disdain in his unaltering eye
 Mixed with a quiet smile, shone calmly forth:
 The thirsty fire crept round his manly limbs;
 His resolute eyes were scorched to blindness soon;
 His death-pang rent my heart; the insensate mob
 Uttered a cry of triumph, and I wept.
 - Weep not, child, cried my mother, for that man
 Has said there is no God..."

"J'étais un enfant lorsque ma mère alla voir brûler un athée. Elle me mena avec elle: les prêtres, vêtus de noir, étaient réunis autour du bûcher; la multitude regardait en silence. Quand le

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p.187

condamné passa fièrement, un froid dédain était l'expression de son regard, et il sourit avec calme: le feu avide se déploya autour de ses membres; ses yeux impassibles furent bientôt consumés; l'angoisse de sa mort déchira le coeur: la foule insensée poussa un cri de triomphe, et moi je pleurai: "Ne pleure pas, enfant, me cria ma mère, car cet homme a dit: il n'y a pas de Dieu."¹²⁶

This is how Pichot begins his presentation of Shelley: a gloomy picture dominated by death, tears and horror, which emphasises Shelley's atheism. What significance can one attach to the image of the weeping child? Can one say that it is a symbol of rebellion against the fate of an atheist? Note here that Shelley distances himself, on reflection, from any positive idea of religion. And the term "God" appears in his works only because he uses it as the personification of nature.

Pichot reveals the pitiable circumstances of Shelley's life from childhood onwards, which he saw as an important element which influenced almost everything the poet wrote. The melancholy expressed in his work is the fruit of his eventful life. However, it is different in character from the melancholy we find in the work of other writers: "Shelley, mélancolique mais non boudeur, âme tendre s'il en fût jamais, sévère pour lui-même, sobre comme un bramine, mais qui, la plume à la main, est un jeune Titan par son audace, menaçant dans ses vers comme dans sa prose le ciel et toutes les institutions humaines."¹²⁷

The pain which English society caused him was unbearable; it drove him to leave England for good to live in exile in Italy. Pichot was surprised to find that, in spite of the misfortunes which surrounded him, Shelley's poetry did not lose its tender charm and contained "des sentiments les plus purs."

But to what school does he belong? Pichot replies to this question as follows, and justifies his answer: "Si par sa haine pour toutes les barrières que la religion et les institutions sociales imposent à l'impatiente indépendance de l'homme, Shelley appartient à l'école satanique, son ancienne admiration pour les poètes des Lacs qu'il avait fréquentés et étudiés a exercé une influence sur son style et même sur ses idées: les simples beautés d'un paysage et la naïveté de

¹²⁶ *Voyage historique et littéraire...*, p. 100

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-6

l'enfance, excitent en lui le même enthousiasme que les songes étrangers de son génie aventureux."¹²⁸ We should note here that Shelley had made the acquaintance of the leader of the satanic school, none other than Lord Byron, in Switzerland. For the French, the terms "satanic school" and "Romantic school" had become almost synonymous. It was Byron who provided the notes to *Queen Mab*, whose "brilliant colours" he was quick to praise. According to Pichot, *Queen Mab* "prouve que Shelley fut de bonne heure un poète et mérite les éloges de Byron. Heureusement elle ne prouve rien contre aucune religion."¹²⁹

Shelley's poetry was to a great extent animated by humanitarian feeling and a hatred for religious and political tyranny. He often says that the sweetest songs are those which express the most melancholy thoughts.

Love for humanity, political and social freedom and moral progress are for the poet the ultimate goals which must be reached at all costs. His poems such as *Queen Mab*, *Alastor*, *Laon and Cythna*, and his drama *Prometheus Unbound* embody the most profound poetic legacy left by philosophical and Romantic poetry.

Before going on to consider what the author of *Voyage historique...* writes on the subject of Keats, it is interesting to note that the work of Keats was relatively unknown to the French Romantics. Even the extensive works of Sainte-Beuve, which we shall discuss in a subsequent chapter, make little reference to Keats. The fact that he appears in Pichot's work reveals the breadth of his knowledge of English literature.

Nevertheless, in discussing Keats one notes that Pichot devotes few lines to him compared to other English authors and poets. However, he shows us that Keats's style has a sumptuous quality unequalled in European literature of that period.

At the age of twenty Keats made fun of Classical imitations, written by versifiers who "se dandinaient sur un cheval à bascule, et pensaient que ce fût Pégase." In Pichot's opinion, Keats succeeded in inventing marvellous subjects which his imagination clothed in mystery. He wrote dream poetry, more sensuous and less nebulous, for example *La belle dame sans merci*.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p.108

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p.117

The limits of this study make it necessary to omit any consideration of the other writers discussed in *Voyage historique...* including Thomas Campbell, William Cowper, Robert Burns, Alexander Pope, Thomas Moore, Robert Southey, and many others.

It is important to note at this point that many writers such as Byron, Shelley, and other Romantics, revived the art of portraying nature. A profound and powerful imagination and the gift of imbuing inanimate objects with a soul were also new elements characteristic of the Romantic movement.

Before bringing this chapter to a close, let us consider what Pichot had to say about English literature in general: "Ce que j'aime dans la poésie anglaise, c'est le mélange d'une pompe orientale (naturelle chez un peuple qui lit constamment la Bible littéralement traduite) avec une familiarité bourgeoise, qui n'a rien de choquant dans une littérature où le peuple, proprement dit, a sa représentation comme la société des salons. Cette pompe et cette familiarité s'allient également bien avec une certaine métaphysique de pensées que nous traiterions volontiers de mysticisme romantique, mais qui ne déplaît pas aux âmes un peu rêveuses... En général, les poètes anglais affectionnent plus une expression pittoresque ou franche, et la variété des contrastes, que les formes académiques du style. Leur muse peut créer des mots, en emprunter à toutes les langues du monde, ce qui lui donne un air d'étrangeté qui ne va pas mal à son allure indépendante."¹³⁰

This sums up Pichot's ideas on the subject of English literature; it would be wrong to say that his journey to the lands of the North was motivated only by his love for the country of Shakespeare – there was also an element of personal ambition in it. He dreamed of bringing something new to pass, something he would be the first to achieve. Did this dream become reality? We can reply in the affirmative, knowing that it was largely thanks to Pichot that French readers became familiar with the new English school and some of the Lake poets.

After completing the work which made the literature of the North and its writers known to the French public, Pichot continued to write articles for publications such as the *Globe* and the *Revue britannique*, of which he was editor from 1839 to 1867. This position ensured that his

¹³⁰ *Voyage historique...*, pp.261-2

influence, which was very considerable, continued to be felt. In the eighth chapter we shall look more closely at what he wrote.

Chapter VII

Sainte-Beuve, writer and critic

Sainte-Beuve has for long been considered the doyen of the art of criticism; admiring the Romantic generation and its new ideas and attached to the doctrines of the *Globe*, he was, at least at the start of his career, the incarnation of the literary criticism the fruit of which was opposed to the Classical spirit.

He followed the line that Madame de Staël had already taken in her work *De la littérature*. The research he undertook showed the value of literature's relationship to the contemporary world and is considered one of the important victories of Romanticism.

Sainte-Beuve wrote so much on so many authors and subjects that one has the impression that he could understand and analyse everything without ever making an error of judgment, but in fact he misunderstood many of his literary contemporaries and underestimated the importance of many of the French Romantics. Note that there are many who do not share this opinion, tending to see him as an ideal. He is "l'homme qui a fait de la critique une création sans presque de précédent, c'est de lui qu'il faut dater le complexe du critique... Ecrire les *Causeries du lundi*, c'est simplement écrire une *Comédie humaine* dont les héros sont les plus indociles, plus difficiles à conduire, que ceux de Balzac."¹³¹

The new literature coming from England to take an important place in the literary life of France appealed to Sainte-Beuve. In it he found an expression of freedom and the superiority of nature over the state of civilisation. He admired England and English writers.

Why was this so? In *Sainte-Beuve, son esprit, ses idées*, Léon Séché answers this question as follows: "Il y a longtemps que ce pays l'attirait. D'abord, c'était le pays d'origine de sa mère; plus d'une fois quand il était à Boulogne, il avait eu envie de monter sur un bateau et d'aller voir, outre-Manche, l'île fameuse dont il entendait parler depuis son enfance; ensuite il avait lu tout récemment les oeuvres de Wordsworth, Keats, Southey, Coleridge, Kirke White,

¹³¹ Claude Roy, *Les soleils du Romantisme*, Editions Gallimard, 1974, p.313

poètes charmants qui étaient à peine connus chez nous, et comme il avait pris à cette lecture un plaisir infini, comme il s'était découvert une âme à leur image, l'idée lui était venue de s'inspirer d'eux, de les imiter, pour enrichir à sa manière l'anthologie de l'école romantique. De là son excursion en Angleterre. Il n'y fait d'ailleurs qu'un séjour de quelques semaines, le temps de visiter Oxford, Cambridge, et de faire le tour des beaux lacs dont l'eau et le ciel si particuliers forment l'atmosphère unique de la poésie Lakiste."¹³²

The Lake poets provided one of the new sources of inspiration already developed in English poetry. Why did Sainte-Beuve imitate the Lake poets? Is it true that this school of poetry did not exist in French literature before the 1820s as some French writers claim? The history of French literature shows that Rousseau had evoked the Swiss lakes in the eighteenth century. Also Lamartine had written *Le lac* in 1817, which was already in part inspired by English poetry.

It seems that Sainte-Beuve was influenced by the Lake School and tried to imitate it, but without great success. *La Revue poétique du XIXe siècle* confirms this: "L'école lakiste anglaise, si fraîche, si naturelle... est mal connue en France, et mal imitée, même par Sainte-Beuve dans ses *Pensées d'août*."¹³³

In Sainte-Beuve's opinion the Lake Poets were the representatives of English Romanticism. He regarded Wordsworth as the greatest of them; his only love was for the countryside and the simple life, in which he found the inexhaustible source of pure and ineffable joy. He did not conceal his moral being, his appreciation of rural life and his intimate rapport with nature. Or rather this is how he was understood at the time and how he was represented to the French public.

For the author of *Nouveaux lundis* Wordsworth's poetic vocabulary was simply a state of the soul and not an artificial language. True feeling alone is what gives poetry its beauty; the dignity of words loses its importance. Wordsworth wished to suppress everything which is pleasing to human reason; in his view, the heart alone can express true feeling. His long life spent among the lakes of Westmoreland and Cumberland brought him the peace he was

¹³² Léon Séché, *Sainte-Beuve, son esprit, ses idées*, Mercure de France, Paris, 1904, Volume I, p.86

¹³³ Pierre Trahard, *La Revue poétique du XIXe siècle (1835)*, Paris, Librairie Ancienne Edouard Champion, 1925, p.97

searching for. His intense contemplation of the natural world strengthened his taste. In the *Lyrical Ballads* he wrote:

To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often move too deep for tears.

Sainte-Beuve's admiration for Wordsworth is reflected not only in his critical writing but also in his poetry. In his *Consolations* he does not forget to mention the English poet:

C'est Wordsworth peu connu, qui, des lacs solitaires,
Sait tous les bleus reflets, les bruits et les mystères,
Et qui depuis trente ans vivait au même lieu,
En contemplation devant le même Dieu,
A travers les soupirs de la mousse et de l'onde,
Distingue, au soir, des chants venus d'un meilleur monde.¹³⁴

Wordsworth is a contemplative and descriptive poet, and that led Sainte-Beuve to compare him with Lamartine; in his work *Portraits contemporains*, he wrote: "Wordsworth pense avec Akenside, dont il prend le mot pour devise, que le poète est sur terre pour revêtir par le langage et par le monde tout ce que l'âme aime et admire. Dans son *Voyage en Orient*, Lamartine dit: "Je ne veux voir que ce que Dieu et l'homme ont fait beau, la beauté présente, réelle, palpable, parlant à l'oeil et à l'âme, et non à la beauté de lieu et d'époque. Aux savants la beauté historique et critique, à nous, poètes, la beauté évidente et sensible."¹³⁵

Sainte-Beuve felt close to Wordsworth in spirit and owed him a great deal; he borrowed from the English poet both his style and his source of inspiration. Wordsworth represents for Sainte-Beuve the source he was searching for in order to oppose Classicism with a new kind of poetry which is intimate, domestic and familiar. He imitates three of Wordsworth's sonnets, of which one, *Le château de Bothwell*, is quoted here:

¹³⁴ *Consolations*, in G.S. Thomas, *Sainte-Beuve et les poètes anglais*, Bordeaux, Delmas, 1937, p.91

¹³⁵ Sainte-Beuve, *Portraits contemporains*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1891, Volume I, p.340

Dans les tours de Bothwell, prisonnier autrefois,
 Plus d'un brave oubliait (tant cette Clyde est belle!)
 De pleurer son malheur et sa cause fidèle.
 Moi-même, en d'autres temps, je vins là; je vous vois

Dans ma pensée encore, flots courants, sous vos bois!
 Mais quoique revenu près des bords que j'appelle,
 Je ne puis rendre aux lieux de visite nouvelle.
 - Regrets! - Passé léger, n'allez-vous être un poids ?...

Mieux vaut remercier une ancienne journée
 Pour la joie au soleil librement couronnée
 Que d'aigrir son désir contre un présent jaloux;

Le Sommeil t'a donné son pouvoir sur les songes,
 Mémoire: tu les fais vivants et les prolonges;
 Ce que tu sais aimer est-il donc loin de nous ?¹³⁶

Here is the original sonnet:

Bothwell Castle
 (Passed unseen, on account of stormy weather)
 Immured in Bothwell's towers, at times the Brave
 (So beautiful is Clyde) forgot to mourn
 The liberty they lost at Bannockburn.
 Once on those steeps I roamed at large, and have
 In mind the landscape, as if still in sight;
 The river glides, the woods before me wave;

¹³⁶ *Pensées d'août*, quoted in *Sainte-Beuve poète et les poètes anglais*, p.96

Then why repine that now in vain I crave
 Needless renewal of an old delight ?
 Better to thank a dear and long-past day
 For joy its sunny hours were free to give
 Than blame the present, that our wish hath crost.
 Memory, like sleep, hath powers which dreams obey,
 Dreams, vivid dreams, that are not fugitive;
 How little that she cherishes is lost ?¹³⁷

Here Sainte-Beuve uses almost the same ideas but makes some modifications necessary to make it sympathetic in a French context. In his imitation he replaces "Bannockburn", the name of an important battle which ended the domination of the English, with "de pleurer son malheur et sa cause fidèle". "The woods before me" becomes "sous vos bois" and "a dear and long-past day" is replaced by "une ancienne journée".

But what is really strange is that Sainte-Beuve, in spite of his admiration for the English poet and the imitations he wrote, makes no mention anywhere in his writings of Wordsworth's great poem *The Excursion*. Is it because Pichot does not mention it in his work *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Ecosse*? It was through this work that Sainte-Beuve first came to know many English poets, as his knowledge of the English language was not perfect. He does not deny this, declaring in a letter: "Je lis l'anglais, mais je ne sais pas le parler, et même en m'appliquant beaucoup il me serait impossible de m'exprimer publiquement en cette langue."¹³⁸

Pichot played the role of an important guide for Sainte-Beuve, who in October 1825 wrote in the *Globe*: "Nos connaissances sont assez bornées pour qu'on ne se montre pas dédaigneux de les accroître... Le voyageur qui nous rapportera quelque découverte en ce genre sera donc le bienvenu à son retour."¹³⁹

¹³⁷ W. Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, Oxford, 1928, p.213

¹³⁸ Sainte-Beuve *poète et les poètes anglais*, p.24

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p.28

The influence of Wordsworth on French literature can be clearly seen in the earliest works of Sainte-Beuve who found in Wordsworth the true form and subject matter he had been seeking and which corresponded so well with his own character. He found the English poet "fidèle à la beauté naturelle, d'une âme aussi largement ouverte à la réflexion, se distingue dans la matière dont il s'élève et par laquelle il arrive à l'embrasser, à la dominer."¹⁴⁰

The admiration which the author of *Portraits contemporains* felt for Wordsworth led him to accord the Lake Poet a position of comparable importance to that of Byron.

As for Keats, he is mentioned only three times in Sainte-Beuve's critical works. His longest reference to Keats does not exceed two lines: "Il exprime le sentiment d'idéal, de vie intérieure et d'amitié, charme et honneur de la muse anglaise."¹⁴¹ One can hardly call this a detailed critical appreciation.

Does Keats have any discernible influence on French literature? It would seem that he is of little importance in the ideas and writings of Sainte-Beuve and the French in general, but that does not prevent Sainte-Beuve from imitating the English poet on occasion. Here are some stanzas written in imitation of Keats, followed by the original:

Piquante est la bouffée à travers la nuit claire;
 Dans les buissons séchés la bise va sifflant;
 Les étoiles au ciel font froides en scintillant,
 Et j'ai, pour arriver, bien du chemin à faire.

Pourtant, je n'ai souci ni de la bise amère,
 Ni des lampes d'argent dans le blanc firmament,
 Ni de la feuille morte à l'affreux sifflement,
 Ni même du bon gîte où tu m'attends, mon frère!

Car je suis tout rempli de l'accueil de ce soir,

¹⁴⁰ *Portraits contemporains*, I, p.340

¹⁴¹ Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*, Garnier Frères, Paris, 1852, Volume XI, p.197

Sous un modeste toit où je viens de m'asseoir,
Devisant de Milton, l'aveugle au beau visage,

De son doux Lycidas par l'orage entraîné,
De Laure en robe verte, en l'avril de son âge,
Et du féal Pétrarque en pompe couronné.¹⁴²

This is the original:

Keen fitful gusts are whispering here and there,
Among the bushes, half leafless and dry;
The stars look very cold about the sky
And I have many miles on foot to fare;
Yet feel I little of the cold bleak air,
Or of the dead leaves rustling drearily,
Or of those silver lamps that burn on high,
Or of the distance from home's pleasant lair:
For I am brimfull of the friendliness
That in a little cottage I have found;
Of fair-haired Milton's eloquent distress,
And all his love for gentle Lycid drown'd,
Of lovely Laura in her light green dress,
And faithful Petrarch gloriously crown'd.¹⁴³

A faithful imitation no doubt; Sainte-Beuve succeeds in translating the tender emotion which the young Keats expresses here.

¹⁴² *Sainte-Beuve poète et les poètes anglais*, p. 191

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 208

Henry Kirke White¹⁴⁴ did not, in Sainte-Beuve's opinion, belong to the Lake School. Nevertheless, his melancholy style was admired by the author of *Lundis* who was indebted to him for *Ma muse*, *Le creux de la vallée*, *Dévouement*, *Le dernier vœu*. "Voilà des poésies que Sainte-Beuve n'aurait pas faites s'il n'avait pas connu Kirke White. Elles résultent d'une adaptation consciente de certains aspects distinctifs de l'oeuvre du poète anglais."¹⁴⁵

In *Poésies de Joseph Delorme* we find an imitation of a poem by Kirke White. Sainte-Beuve made every effort to make it perfect. Did he achieve his goal? A comparison between the French version and the original answers this question:

Puisque, sourde à mon vœu, la fortune jalouse
Me refuse un toit chaste ombragé d'un noyer
Quelques êtres qu'on aime et qu'on pleure, une épouse
Et des amis le soir, en cercle à mon foyer.

O nobles facultés, ô puissances de l'âme,
Levez-vous, et venez à ce coeur qui s'en va
L'huile sainte du fort, et ranimez sa flamme!
Qu'il oublie aujourd'hui ce qu'hier il rêva!

Lorsque la nuit est froide, et que seul, dans ma chambre,
Près de mon poêle éteint j'entends siffler le vent,
Pensant aux longs baisers qu'en ces nuits de décembre
Se donnent les époux, mon coeur saigne, et souvent

Bien souvent, je soupire, et je pleure, et j'écoute
Alors, ô saints élaus, ô prières, arrivez;
Vite, emportez-moi haut sous la céleste voûte

¹⁴⁴ See Appendix I

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.62

A la troisième enceinte, aux parvis réservés!
 Qu'aux dômes étoilés je lise, triomphant,
 Ces mots du doigt divin, ces mystiques symboles,
 Grands secrets qu'autrefois connut le monde enfant,
 Que lisaient les vicillards des premières années,
 Qu'à ses fils en Chaldée enseignait chaque aïeul,
 Sans plus songer alors à mes saisons fanées,
 Peut-être oublierai-je qu'ici-bas je suis seul.¹⁴⁶

This is Henry Kirke White's original:

If far from me the fates remove
 Domestic peace, connubial love,
 The prattling ring, the social cheer,
 Affection's voice, affection's tear,
 Ye sterner powers that bind the heart,
 To me your iron aid impart!
 O teach me when the nights are chill,
 When to the blaze that crackles near,
 I turn a tired and pensive ear,
 And Nature conquering bids me sigh
 For love's soft accents whispering nigh,
 O teach me on that heavenly road,
 That leads to Truth's occult abode
 To wrap my soul in dreams divine,
 Till earth and care no more be mine.
 Let blest philosophy impart
 Her soothing pleasures to my heart

¹⁴⁶ *Poésies de Joseph Delorme*, quoted in *Sainte-Beuve poète et les poètes anglais*, pp.54-55

And while with Pluto's ravished ears
 I list the music of the spheres,
 Or on the mystic symbols pore,
 That hide the Chald's sublimer lore,
 I shall not brood on Summer gone,
 Nor think that I am all alone.¹⁴⁷

A detailed examination of the poem by the author of *Lundis* reveals how far he is from an exact copy of the words written by the English poet; one cannot deny that there is a resemblance, but Sainte-Beuve maintains his independence from Kirke White. The French critic succeeds in expressing his own taste and personal feelings. Also he departs from the relative abstraction of the English poet, preferring to use concrete terms, as he does in the first stanza. To illustrate the changes, it is sufficient to pick out a few examples, such as "The blaze that crackles near" which becomes "poêle éteint", "Love's soft accents" which becomes "longs baisers", while the two last lines have an uncertain tone compared with the original, "I shall not..." becoming "peut-être".

Note that it is partly thanks to Southey's *L'oeuvre poétique et les fragments de H. Kirke White* (1826) that Sainte-Beuve produced the works published in 1829 under the title *La vie, les poésies et les pensées de Joseph Delorme*.

Byron has a very important place in the works of Sainte-Beuve, who believed him to be one of the great inspirational figures of the nineteenth century. According to the author of *Nouveaux lundis*, Byronic passions are focused on the great problems of human destiny. Byron sees poetry as an eminently subjective art-form, in which sensibility plays the most important role. He writes in *Don Juan*: "Poetry is only passion." Moral poetry, in Byron's view, is the noblest kind of poetry.

In the *Nouveaux lundis*, Sainte-Beuve does not hesitate to quote Byron's ideas word for word as he proclaims the power of literature: "Les mots," Byron says in Sainte-Beuve's version of the original, "sont des choses, et une petite goutte d'encre tombant, comme une

¹⁴⁷ *Remains II*, quoted in *Sainte-Beuve poète et les poètes anglais*, p.205

rosée sur une pensée, la féconde et produit ce qui fait penser ensuite des milliers, peut-être des millions, d'hommes."¹⁴⁸

In the opinion of the French critic, Byron had a powerful impact on the greatest Romantic poets; he had for a long time had a major influence on French writers such as Lamartine and Musset, among others. The grand sights of the natural world, so characteristic of Byron's work, aroused the interest of many French writers. It was as a result of his knowledge of foreign literature and his reading that Sainte-Beuve was able to analyse and assess the new ideas from abroad and the value of the borrowings made by certain French writers. It is clear by now that the influence of Byron's work on French and European writers was considerable and that he exercised a strong attraction over the new generations of Romantic writers. However, in Sainte-Beuve's view, the English poet was praised for the wrong reasons. In the *Globe* of 30th December 1824, Sainte-Beuve wrote: "Byron est mal loué. De tous les poètes, nul ne l'a compris parce que nul n'a songé à l'étudier." The French critic would have us believe that he was the only person to study the author of *Childe Harold* in depth. As for the others, it is the general inspiration provided by Byron's work which is of importance to them rather than the detail.

We have examined the influence of Byron on certain French writers more extensively in a preceding chapter. It is to be noted here that the admiration the French felt for Lord Byron increased after his death; they saw in him a national hero who had not hesitated to sacrifice his life on the altar of liberty.

As for Shelley, the mere fact of proximity linked him to Byron when they both lived in Switzerland and Italy. Sympathy of outlook led to a friendship which brought them closer and forged a strong link between them. This could largely explain the reason why some French writers link the name of Shelley to that of Byron in their works.

In the writings of Sainte-Beuve appear some lines in which he also links Shelley to Byron: "Shelley, Byron, suffiraient pour parcourir une triple vérité frappante d'incrédulité, de

¹⁴⁸ Sainte-Beuve, *Nouveaux lundis*, Paris, Librairie Nouvelle, 1864, Volume XII, p.349

scepticisme et de spinosisme. Shelley abonde plutôt en ce dernier sens qu'il embellit, qu'il orne et revêt des plus riches couleurs. On a volontiers chez lui l'hymne triomphal de la nature."¹⁴⁹

Thanks to his powerfully evocative style, Shelley is considered to be one of the greatest nature poets. His poems are adorned with wonderful images: the air, the wind, the night, the morning light and other images make his short poems very moving. The author of *Nouveaux lundis* perceives that Shelley, and Byron also, considers nature as the concrete expression of the divine, and the adoration nature inspires often becomes pantheistic in their poetry.

Shelley, like his friend Byron, uses dramatic action to present his personal ideas on the most solemn questions of human destiny. He emphasises the importance of the poet's role, which in his view should be to guide, help and save mankind; the poet's mission is sacred in the life of the people. Shelley himself preached an ideal of enlightened emancipation for humanity.

As for English prose, Walter Scott is, in the opinion of the French critic: "Le maître et le vrai fondateur du roman historique... Il a pu, grâce au génie des vieux temps qu'il avait si bien écouté et deviné, remonter une ou deux fois avec succès jusqu'aux siècles reculés du Moyen âge. *Ivanhoé* est le roman historique confinant à l'époque, et un roman qui est presque de plain-pied avec nous encore."¹⁵⁰ He is the most exact of historical novelists, dreaming always of bringing the traditions of Scotland back to life in poetry and prose.

Sainte-Beuve had a great admiration for Scott. He discusses his book *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of the French*, but does not conceal the fact it contains many errors owing to the fact that Scott made judgments about different events without understanding their underlying causes. Later Sainte-Beuve devoted a long chapter to Scott's death, a chapter full of grief and sorrow in which he writes: "Ce n'est pas seulement un deuil pour l'Angleterre; c'en doit être un pour la France et pour le monde civilisé, dont Walter Scott, plus qu'aucun autre des écrivains du temps, a été comme l'enchanteur prodigue et l'aimable bienfaiteur."¹⁵¹ He sees in the death of writers, philosophers, politicians and others a religious warning to future generations that they should follow the path mapped out by Providence.

¹⁴⁹ *Portraits contemporains* IV, p.397

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, IX, p.80

¹⁵¹ Sainte-Beuve, *Portraits littéraires*, Paris, Garnier Frères, Libraires éditeurs, 1862, Volume II, p.108

It is true that in his view Scott had neither the philosophical range nor the stylistic genius of Shakespeare or Molière, but in Sainte-Beuve's opinion he had a better feeling for the things of life than they had. The life he depicts is simple, but eventful and rich in recollections. Here one can see that Sainte-Beuve's appreciation of Scott relates to a certain generalised image he has of him, rather than the detail of his work.

Scott published a series of poems including *Sir Tristan*, *Rokeby*, *The Lady of the Lake*, and *The Lord of the Isles*. These works assured him an important place in the new school, although Sainte-Beuve recognises that there is an element of passing fashion in the general admiration of Scott, a view which has tended to be confirmed by posterity. "La postérité retranchera sans doute quelque chose à notre admiration de ses oeuvres; mais il lui en restera toujours assez pour demeurer un grand créateur, un homme immense, un peintre immortel de l'homme."¹⁵²

Sainte-Beuve, like many French writers of the period, was enthusiastic about Shakespeare, whom he saw as a kind of spontaneous poet without models or rules, whose dramatic art was not fettered by Classicism. He believed Shakespeare would always keep his position at the head of English literature's powerful dramatic tradition. Shakespeare's genius could change everything.

It is interesting to note Sainte-Beuve's critical method, in which he examines the work through the biography of the writer. Here is what Sainte-Beuve writes on this subject: "Dans sa vie commune Shakespeare, le poète des pleurs et de l'effroi, développait volontiers une nature plus riante et plus heureuse."¹⁵³ In fact, we know almost nothing about the life of Shakespeare. It would seem that Sainte-Beuve is imagining Shakespeare's biography, in order to attribute to him characteristics which he had already identified in his work. He considers Shakespeare to be the greatest literary figure of modern times, not only in England but in all other countries. "Shakespeare dont le drame a parfois égalé ou ressuscité l'histoire, a paru à la limite des âges modernes et des âges nébuleux."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 115

¹⁵³ Sainte-Beuve, *Premiers lundis*, Paris, Librairie Nouvelle, 1874, Volume II, p. 50

¹⁵⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, p. 306

Shakespeare's central role in the Romantic debate leads the French critic to refer more often to him than he does to other English writers. Shakespeare's plays and particularly his tragedies were seen as a literary revolution in France, which had for so long revered the work of Racine.

New ideas always find supporters to promote them, supporters who finally succeed in putting them in a framework which will render them acceptable to society. And Sainte-Beuve, through the medium of his critical studies, succeeded in introducing these ideas to the literary world.

At the beginning of his career Sainte-Beuve owed a great deal to Pichot, who, as we have already noted, introduced him to Shakespeare and other English writers through articles in the *Revue britannique* and other periodicals.

We can say without hesitation that English writers were admired in France in spite of the criticisms to which they were subject in both countries. Shakespeare was always subject to critical judgment, on the part of many writers. We shall leave Sainte-Beuve for the moment to give two quotations which show how Shakespeare was perceived in the eighteenth century. Let us take Pope as an example from England. He sums up his opinion of Shakespeare in the following words: "The poetry of Shakespeare was inspiration indeed: he is not so much an Imitation, as an instrument of Nature; and it is not so just to say that he speaks from her, as that she speaks thro' him."¹⁵⁵

However, Pope did not hesitate to say that Shakespeare's faults were almost the equal of his good qualities: "It must be own'd that with all these great excellencies, he has almost as great defects; and that as he has written better, so he has written worse, than any other."¹⁵⁶

As for Voltaire, it was he who brought Shakespeare to the notice of the French. In his *Lettres philosophiques, ou Lettres sur les Anglais*, Voltaire was struck by the greatness of Shakespeare, praising him while secretly astonished that "des sauvages puissent mériter son approbation." In reading Shakespeare, whom Voltaire had introduced to them, the French public admired his work, and "cette admiration devient si forte que Voltaire désespéré, maudit sa propre influence. Il essaie de refermer l'écluse ouverte par lui-même; la violence du courant

¹⁵⁵ *18th Century Essays on Shakespeare*, quoted by Edouard Sonet in *Voltaire et l'influence anglaise*, Slatkine reprints, Geneva, 1970, p.49

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.49

ne le lui permet pas. Les bonnes idées sont plus puissantes que leurs promulgateurs; dès qu'elles ont vu le jour, elles marchent toutes seules, et passent au besoin sur le coeur de leur père."¹⁵⁷

It is possible that the criticism Voltaire made of Shakespeare echoed the opinions expressed by English writers whom he had met during the time he had spent in England. The opinion of Pope, whose genius Voltaire appreciated, influenced much of what he wrote about Shakespeare.

In spite of this ambivalent eighteenth-century view of Shakespeare which, as we have seen, continued into the nineteenth century in France, Sainte-Beuve did not change his point of view. For him Shakespeare remained the greatest of poets, one whose genius was vigorous and fruitful.

In almost everything he wrote about the English Romantic movement and its poets, Sainte-Beuve revealed his great admiration for the literature it produced. We have seen how clearly the English influence was revealed in his poetry; Sainte-Beuve's imitations of Kirke White and Wordsworth show us how he used their work to find his own voice as a poet.

It is partly thanks to Sainte-Beuve and his critical writings that many French people acquired a deeper knowledge of English literature. It is true that the name of Sainte-Beuve is associated with literary criticism, but his role as a poet cannot be ignored. In his *Poésies Complètes*, Sainte-Beuve emphasised his importance as a poet: "Aujourd'hui on me croit seulement un critique; mais je n'ai pas quitté la poésie sans y avoir laissé tout mon aiguillon."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Alfred Michiels, *Histoire des idées littéraires en France*, W. Coquiebert, Paris, 1842, Volume I, p.167

¹⁵⁸ *Poésies complètes*, II, p.424

Chapter VIII

The role of some periodical reviews in the Romantic struggle

The *Globe* was a publication of immense importance in the intellectual life of France. It appeared from 1824 to 1831. During that time, great events were unfolding, not only in the world of literature but in the realm of society and politics, events such as the clashes between royalists and liberals, and the *Globe*, as a philosophical and literary journal (and later a political one also) was quick to play a part in them. The struggle between Classicists and Romantics became the literary topic of most importance, dominating the journal's agenda. Among those who wrote for the *Globe* were writers such as Sainte-Beuve, Damiron, Vitet and Jouffroy. This new generation of writers and the new school called for open imitation of foreign writers.

Before considering how the *Globe* presented English literature to the French, we should look at what was said by its supporters on the subject of French literature and its doctrines, which were limited to two principles: "Liberté et respect du goût national."

The *Globe* writers were almost all disciples of Madame de Staël, and therefore heirs to a kind of liberalism. They believed that social change should be followed by changes in the arts in general and literary doctrines in particular. For the *Globe*, freedom and Romanticism were two sides of a single coin, and Romanticism meant freedom. This new meaning was very important, because it was in stark contrast to the attitudes of the first French Romantics who were, on the whole, royalists and conservatives. This is how the *Globe* expressed this idea¹⁵⁹: "Combien de jeunes talents, éveillés par les besoins nouveaux, attendent que vous ayez levé le séquestre sur leur domaine ? Car, n'en doutez pas, quoiqu'on rejette encore le nom de romantisme, il s'est déjà emparé de tous les bons esprits. Lisez les feuilletons des journaux politiques et littéraires: vous y trouverez nos doctrines rendues souvent dans les mêmes termes. C'est à la fois un

¹⁵⁹ It has not been possible to get access to copies of the *Globe*; quotations have therefore had to be taken from critical works.

succès et un encouragement. Nous ne nous en félicitons que par amour de l'art et pour la vérité."¹⁶⁰

As we have already seen from the discussion of Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare*, in 1826 one could see how great were the demands for a national literature, in which "modern society" could find expression, encompassing things which were of interest to the people. But if a literature were to be created in harmony with the changes society had undergone, that new form of literature could not be bound by the ancient rules which had restricted literature in France for so long. The relationship between literature and the new society should be one of perfect harmony. Times had changed and the fortress in which Classicism had entrenched itself could no longer withstand the attack of Romanticism. This is how the *Globe* portrays the Classical position: "On a renoncé dans les sciences aux problèmes insolubles, à celui de la quadrature du cercle, par exemple. Ne serait-il pas temps de faire de même en littérature et de cesser par la même raison de s'obstiner à vouloir reproduire le moyen-âge sans s'écarter des formes grecques ? Il est résulté de cette prétention une foule de monstruosité historiques et poétiques vraiment étranges."¹⁶¹

If one examines French theatre and the enormous change it was undergoing, one can clearly see the important role played by the *Globe* in that change, and in the development of French Romanticism. The theatre, as a cultural and educational medium, had for long influenced people in favour of Classical taste, which required that the rules of the unities be respected. These rules were the target of a continuous attack which was in large part the result of the influence of English literature on French writers. A great number of articles were written on the pointlessness of the unities, condemning the limitations which the Classical rules imposed on the choice of subject-matter. "Avec les unités, point de ces passions qui prennent un peu de temps pour se manifester, point de ces nuances de caractère, qui ne se laissent apprécier que par la succession de découvertes toujours diverses et toujours liées. Dans ce système, le *Macbeth* de Shakespeare eût été impossible. La dernière période du remords, voilà tout ce que nous aurions vu; mais l'histoire de cette passion terrible qui, longtemps combattue, finit par

¹⁶⁰ The *Globe*, quoted by Christian A.E. Jensen in *L'évolution du romantisme*, Librairie Minard, Paris, 1959, p.92

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.210

dominer tout autre sentiment; qui d'un héros et d'un sujet fidèle, fait par degrés un assassin et le plus atroce des tyrans, à peine la soupçonnerions-nous, à moins pourtant que tout cela ne s'accomplit en un jour et dans l'enceinte d'un palais. Mais pour atteindre le but, il faut exagérer, dénaturer les passions, et ainsi disparaît tout ce qu'il y a dans l'homme de naïf et d'individuel."¹⁶²

Critics of the Classical theatre felt that it could not present real characters in all their complexity. The playwright sometimes found himself obliged to present the audience with what amounted to a revolution in characters' feelings, occurring in a very short time and in a place which was similarly restricted.

Another important question appeared in the pages of the *Globe*: it concerned the mingling of comedy and tragedy. Here one can see the English influence on French theatre: the *Globe* writers used Shakespeare's plays as examples to promote their cause. The Classicists saw the mixing of comic and tragic as a fault in style in that it destroyed the unity of impression. The *Globe* writers were not at all convinced by the Classicists' claims: in their view, this intermingling existed in real life. Also, comedy sometimes strengthens the power of tragedy, as we find in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, where the feeling of tragedy is heightened by "les plaisanteries des musiciens auprès du lit de la mort de Juliette."

In an article published on May 6th, 1826, the *Globe* examined the question of the mingling of comic and tragic elements, using all its powers to convince the reader of the validity of its analysis: "... Encore une fois, ne confondons point l'unité de ton et l'unité d'impression. Celle-ci sera, si on le veut, désirable dans le drame comme dans les autres arts, mais en ce sens, qu'en sortant de la représentation de ce drame, j'en rapporterai une impression une et complète. Or c'est ce que n'empêchent ni la familiarité de quelques scènes, ni même la gaieté de quelques autres; car le drame doit être considéré dans son ensemble et non par parties détachées. *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Richard III*, offrent, comme la nature, la réunion de tous les tons; et pourtant qui oserait dire que ces chefs-d'oeuvre ne laissent pas dans l'esprit une idée nette, précise et d'une admirable unité? Ce n'est point l'unité factice, l'unité plate du

¹⁶² The *Globe*, quoted by Pierre Trahard in *Le romantisme défini par Le Globe*, Presses françaises, Paris, 1924, p.113

marronnier ébranché du Palais Bourbon; c'est celle du chêne libre et vigoureux de la forêt de Saint-Germain. Un jardinier seul peut préférer la première."¹⁶³

Before discussing the role of the *Globe* in the presentation of English writers, we should note that in 1826 England was playing a very important part in the literary, social and political life of France: the best English works were already being read in translation and the public, motivated by an interest in things English, took a great deal of interest in everything coming from England. This was one of the reasons why some French people, Pichot among them, left for England to study different aspects of English life.

The *Globe*, having sent some of its writers to England, began to publish interesting articles expressing their enthusiasm for English literature. It must be remembered that it was thanks to the *Globe* that lesser-known English poets, such as Henry Kirke White, began to find a readership in France. These readers were impressed by what they read in the *Globe* about the literature of the North.

In 1827 English actors were applauded in Paris; this was a very important event, as it heralded the triumph of Shakespeare which the *Globe* had been awaiting with such impatience. It was only a few years before that an English company playing Shakespeare had been very badly received by the public, no doubt partly for patriotic reasons.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, one should not oversimplify. On October 23rd, 1827 the *Globe* published an article by Dubois in praise of Racine, containing these qualified judgments on the new fashion in the theatre:

"... l'enthousiasme du public français pour les pièces de Shakespeare pourrait bien mener à une autre superstition de formes... On rencontre partout des gens disposés à croire que jamais il ne faut s'enfermer dans les trois unités, que le comique et le tragique doivent de toute nécessité être mêlés dans la même pièce, que les sujets doivent être seulement nationaux ou modernes, que la réalité historique calquée en prose est la seule source des beautés dramatiques: en un mot, toutes les propositions contradictoires aux dogmes des copistes de l'école classique sont à leur tour posées comme des dogmes par une admiration irréfléchie."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Quoted in *Le romantisme défini par Le Globe*, p.137

¹⁶⁴ See W.D. Howarth, *Sublime et grotesque*, Harrap, London, 1975

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Jean-Jacques Goblot, *La jeune France libérale, Le Globe et son groupe littéraire 1824-1830*, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1995, p.436

In spite of the criticisms that several contributors made against Shakespeare, which were evidence of continuing reservations about his work, the *Globe* published three studies of Shakespeare of which the first two were limited to an analysis of *Hamlet*. Here are some lines from the article of August 19th, 1826: "On n'a peut-être pas remarqué jusqu'ici que le caractère d'Hamlet, si mal apprécié par les critiques anglais, est celui que Shakespeare affectionne davantage, celui auquel il a prêté le plus de ses passions, de ses idées. Nous pensons que dans *Hamlet* se trouve l'histoire intellectuelle de Shakespeare, et c'est là que peuvent se puiser le plus de renseignements sur son esprit et sur son cœur."¹⁶⁶

As for the article of October 19th, 1826, here the author discussed the question of the mingling of comic and tragic, and praised Shakespeare very highly. The author of the article does not accept that the English poet should be ridiculed for failing to conform to French taste: "Nous pouvons nous tromper, mais, plus nous avons réfléchi sur ces deux opinions contraires, plus nous avons cru les trouver fausses toutes les deux. Nous pensons en effet qu'interdire à Shakespeare le mélange du comique et du tragique, ce serait ôter à ses drames vie et originalité; et qu'introduire ce mélange dans nos compositions classiques ce serait les éloigner de leur principe, et remplacer une beauté par une bizarrerie."¹⁶⁷

The *Globe* represented differing points of view but, generally speaking, it accepted the new Shakespearian ideas, which were preferred by some Romantic writers; they found the *Globe* gave them the freedom to express their opinions whether in favour of or against particular English writers. But one can be certain that the majority of those who wrote for the *Globe* were in favour of almost all of Shakespeare's theatrical practice. Their ambition to revolutionise literature had led them to change their allegiance and choose the English poet as their ideal model.

We already know that the reputation of Sir Walter Scott was immense; he was known in every part of France. His reputation was in some respects enhanced by the *Globe* which attributed great importance to him in some of its articles. Speaking of the relationship between literature and society, the *Globe* took advantage of the opportunity to present the role of

¹⁶⁶ *La révolution du Romantisme*, p. 143

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 143

Walter Scott, who was "un homme qui, par la force de son génie, a découvert la forme poétique, pittoresque et musicale la plus propre à émouvoir ses contemporains; c'est-à-dire la plus profondément empreinte de leur esprit et de leurs passions."¹⁶⁸

Note that at the time of the *Globe*, Scott's reputation in France was already solidly established, but its writers, whose enthusiasm for the Scottish writer was still intense, continued to devote important articles to his work. Some saw him as a writer who had brought about an important revolution in many literary forms. "C'est par ce genre," wrote Rémusat "que tous les autres genres doivent être modifiés, et comme retrempés; c'est à l'école de Walter Scott que le poème épique, la tragédie, la comédie, le conte, la romance, doivent prendre leçon pour se mettre en harmonie avec les besoins des esprits."¹⁶⁹

Would it be true to say that the articles in the *Globe* always expressed admiration for the great Scottish novelist? It seems that the first flowering of his reputation was over, in that some writers produced articles attacking him. Here are some lines from an article published on November 2nd, 1826, which marked the beginning of Scott's fall from power: "On peut dire qu'entre l'auteur de *Waverley* et nous, la lune de miel est passée, et qu'avec elle le bandeau de l'amour est tombé de nos yeux. A force de lire et de relire *Les Puritains* et *Ivanhoë*, la possession nous a calmés, comme elle fait toujours: pouvant compter par nos doigts les endroits excellents, nous sommes forcés d'en remarquer d'autres qui nous ont moins touchés et d'autres encore dont nous ne savons que dire. Quand l'admiration en vient à ces distinctions, c'est un signe qu'elle passe du coeur à la tête, et, il en est de l'admiration comme de la conviction; lorsqu'elle n'est plus dans l'âme et qu'elle habite l'esprit, elle est fort modérée: témoin celle que le temps et les analyses de La Harpe nous ont laissée pour les tragédies de Racine. Bientôt même elle devient si froide qu'elle est obligée de se traduire en formules pour ne pas s'oublier... Il est vrai que nous sommes loin de cette extrémité à l'égard de Sir Walter Scott; quoique menacé du malheur de devenir classique, il ne l'est pas encore: toutefois nous

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in *L'Evolution du Romantisme*, p.134

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in *La jeune France libérale*, p.454

sommes assez reposés des vives sensations qu'il nous a données, pour revenir avec calme sur nos impressions, et les analyser avec discernement."¹⁷⁰

The development of the historical novel largely owed its success to the great Scottish writer. The *Globe* praises Scott for not allowing important historical figures to dominate the scene. "L'esprit de l'époque ne peut être représenté en un vaste tableau que si la vie quotidienne du peuple, les joies, les peines et les embarras des hommes ordinaires s'y trouvent figurés au premier plan. D'où le rôle majeur que jouent dans les *Waverley Novels* ces personnages de condition moyenne, si propres à nous introduire dans l'intimité d'une société et dont le romancier se sert si habilement pour donner de la vie à ses drames."¹⁷¹

Byron's influence on the French Romantic movement and on some individual French writers has been examined in previous chapters, but without mentioning the *Globe's* attitude towards the author of *Childe Harold*. We know that many men of letters were interested in the despair and atheism of Lord Byron, some admiring him while others accused him. The French considered him in the light of their own personal point of view, and the poet's position alternated between angel and devil. It is interesting to refer here to two completely different points of view, the first of which held that Byron's pessimism and atheism had been misjudged.

*Le Temps présent*¹⁷² published an article by Cyprien Desmarais on 25th February, 1826: "Qu'est-ce donc que l'athéisme de Lord Byron ? Le désespoir de l'athéisme. Vous n'y avez pas songé, peut-être; croyez-en le poète du *Dernier chant du pèlerinage de Childe Harold*! Lord Byron peut être considéré comme un des poètes les plus religieux de l'époque. Les romantiques libéraux vont crier à l'absurde! Encore un mot, puis je me sauve. Lord Byron, dans ses ouvrages, n'a renié ni Dieu ni la religion: il les a cherchés; et son génie ne se montre jamais plus sublime que lorsqu'il exprime les regrets de ne pouvoir trouver ni l'un ni l'autre: au moment où la lumière de la foi va briller pour lui de tout son éclat, un bandeau, le bandeau de l'orgueil, tombe sur les yeux du poète; et il se trouve de nouveau plongé dans la nuit du doute et de l'incertitude. En matière de religion, il y a deux sortes de doute: il y a un doute qui

¹⁷⁰ The *Globe*, 2nd November 1826, quoted in *L'Évolution du Romantisme*, p.151

¹⁷¹ Quoted in *La jeune France libérale*, p.457

¹⁷² We have not been able to have access to original copies of the *Globe*, nor indeed of other newspapers. We are obliged, therefore, to continue to quote from secondary sources.

cherche à se réfugier dans l'incrédulité, c'était le doute des encyclopédistes; il y a un doute qui cherche à se réfugier dans la foi; c'est le doute de Lord Byron."¹⁷³ It seems that the author of this article wishes at all costs to show us that the poet is religious and optimistic. But in spite of the ingenious argument he presents, he cannot convince us. As for the second article, here the author tries to describe the attitude of the French people towards Lord Byron. This article was published in *La Pandore* on June 10th 1826: "A ce nom seul, que de pensées viennent assaillir l'esprit! Quel vaste champ d'études, quel abîme de méditations, que les livres, la vie ou la mort de ce grand homme! Vit-on jamais une existence plus agitée, plus orageuse que la sienne ? Dans ces contrastes perpétuels que nous offrent les actions et les paroles des enfants de la terre, est-il des contradictions pareilles à celles dont furent semés les jours de Lord Byron?"

Comment, en effet, concilier l'accusation de matérialisme et d'athéisme qui le poursuivent, et l'ardente soif de gloire et les mouvements désintéressés qui l'entraînent sans cesse ? Faut-il croire les témoignages de tant de personnes respectables attaquant à regret le caractère de celui dont ils admirent le génie ? Faut-il admettre l'évidence de mille actions prêtes à déposer des généreux sentiments de cet illustre Lord ? La raison ne peut rejeter ce double témoignage: mais il n'est pas dans le cœur humain de se partager entre le mépris et la vénération."¹⁷⁴

Note that the two preceding quotations reveal two contrasting attitudes to Byron, but we should also note that they omit any reference to the detail of his writings, confining themselves to certain general attitudes. In this sense Byron served as a pretext for a quarrel of the French among themselves, which had its origin in the debates during the Restoration period on the position and role of religion in the State.

During the early years of the Romantic period, Romanticism was very often supported by Royalists and even by ultra-Royalists (with the exception of Madame de Staël), but the 1820s saw a great change in this equation. From about 1824 onwards Romanticism became synonymous with freedom. This could explain why Byron's death did Romanticism a great service; the French, as did other European peoples, saw Lord Byron as a hero who had

¹⁷³ *Le Temps présent*, quoted in *L'Evolution du Romantisme*, p.51

¹⁷⁴ Quoted in *L'Evolution du Romantisme*, p.144

sacrificed his life on the altar of liberty. Was this the case? My personal opinion is that this was a banal pretext used by those who were responsible for the idea of Byron as hero to make us forget that English society had rejected Byron on account of his shameful conduct towards his sister on the one hand, and his rebellion against English society on the other.

Let us examine some other periodicals and the role they played in the presentation of English literature and English writers to French readers. In one of the May 1829 editions of the *Revue britannique*, an article by Hazlitt appeared in translation under the title of *Les drames historiques de Shakespeare*, in which the author, in an analysis of the state of French theatre, claims that the tragedies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries should be abandoned as they no longer met the needs of the time. According to the author of the article, who came quite late to the debate over Shakespeare, Shakespeare is the model who should be copied: "Shakespeare nous montre chacun de ses personnages façonnant, pour ainsi dire, sa propre destinée. Voilà la vraie philosophie. Ceux qui ont imité sur le théâtre moderne le système fataliste des anciens ont pu créer des ouvrages beaux en eux-mêmes; jamais des ouvrages en rapport avec la civilisation moderne. Phèdre obéissant à l'influence qui la poursuit; Oreste guidé par les Furies et puni par elles, sont des symboles du paganisme. Les peuples modernes qui ajoutent foi à la liberté relative des actions, devaient-ils conserver un système dramatique en opposition directe avec leur croyances?" This was the same argument Chateaubriand used in 1802 in *Le Génie du Christianisme*. "Et Shakespeare, créateur du véritable drame philosophique, drame fondé sur l'analyse, l'expérience et l'observation, n'a-t-il pas mieux compris l'art qu'il cultivait que ces critiques idolâtres nés dix-huit siècles trop tard et attachés à la tragédie hellénique par d'invincibles préjugés!"¹⁷⁵

This was an important article, the effect of which was to strengthen the Romantic cause and at the same time invite men of letters to continue their study of Shakespeare and all branches of English literature, on the grounds that one can study the customs and life of a people only by analysing the portraits made by that people.

¹⁷⁵ Kathleen Jones, *La Revue britannique, son histoire et son action littéraire*, Paris, Librairie E. Droz, 1939, p.65

One must point out here that certain literary reviews and journals did not show the same enthusiasm for Romanticism and foreign literature. *Le Constitutionnel* tried to discredit English literature and its writers. This newspaper seemed to be the bitter enemy of the Romantics; this is how it expressed its opinion predicting the downfall of those whom it believed to be destroying the language of Racine: "L'influence de Walter Scott nous a inondé d'une foule de mauvais romans, tels que *Wat Tyler*, l'histoire d'*Urbain Grandier*, celle de *La Conjuración de Cinq-Mars*, où l'on ne trouve que les défauts du maître, et qui ne tiennent aucun rang dans notre littérature. Cette école est donc dans une décadence complète, et l'accueil fait à la traduction des *Deux cousines* est une preuve que la peinture réelle des mœurs, le développement naturel des caractères et des passions, suffisent pour nous inspirer un intérêt soutenu... Nous savons que la pureté du style et le choix heureux de l'expression trouvent difficilement grâce devant cette critique de fraîche date qui prétend nous faire oublier la langue de Racine et de Voltaire, écrivains sans profondeur, parce qu'ils manquent d'obscurité; mais le public n'est pas encore suffisamment endoctriné; il accorde malheureusement son estime aux écrivains qui joignent le mérite de la pensée à celui du langage. Jusqu'à la grande révolution qui doit nous délivrer des règles du bon sens et du joug de la raison. Abel Rémusat sera justement placé dans le petit nombre des savants qui ont de l'esprit et qui savent écrire."¹⁷⁶ The strange thing about this affair is that in less than a month (twenty-four days to be precise) the same journal, *Le Constitutionnel*, published on December 22nd 1826 another article full of admiration for Scott and his lively imagination. "En effet, quel poème est plus épique que *Ivanhoë* ? Que de belles pages d'histoire dans *Waverley*, dans *Les Puritains*, dans *Quentin Durward*, dans *Woodstock* même! Car nous avouons que, dans ses ouvrages de second ordre, Walter Scott est encore original. Aussi n'en est-il aucun de ceux-ci qui, lorsque vous possédez les autres ne vous manque bientôt, à cause de tel ou tel chapitre, à cause de tel ou tel personnage."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ *Le Constitutionnel*, 28th November 1826, pp.3-4, quoted in *L'Évolution du Romantisme*, p.137

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.149. *Le Constitutionnel* was a liberal journal and, perhaps, in 1826 was still hesitating between the attitude of the Liberals at the beginning of the 1820s (which supported philosophical and Classical "rationalism" against the Romanticism of the royalist Conservatives) and the more recent developments in Liberal thinking which was beginning to see Romanticism as literary freedom.

This article appeared in the press after the publication of Scott's *Oeuvres complètes*. Is it possible that these works succeeded in changing the opinion of the journal? Fine images had a strong appeal, even to those who were prejudiced against them.

It was in this climate of vigorous debate that periodicals played a part in the Romantic struggle which had begun some years previously. The new generation found in the different journals a fruitful source of ideas which the new writers needed if they were to follow the Romantic path.

Before leaving this chapter it would be of interest to make a final brief mention of Amédée Pichot and the important role he played in the presentation of English literature through the pages of the *Revue britannique*. He wrote for the *Revue* and from 1839 to 1867 was its editor.

We know that, ever since his journey to the land of mists, he dreamed of seeing the French periodicals become the equal of British publications like the *Edinburgh Review*. In the second volume of his celebrated work *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Ecosse*, he wrote: "Je serais fier que mon pays fût éclairé, dirigé même, par des ouvrages d'un mérite aussi élevé. Il pourrait l'être, si nos savants et nos poètes voulaient rallier leurs forces, et fonder une seule entreprise du même genre. Je ne désespère que de leur persévérance."¹⁷⁸

During his editorship, Pichot attempted to transform the *Revue britannique* by improving it in various ways which reveal the stamp of his personality. He gave greater importance to literature, reducing the space devoted to articles on other subjects in favour of literary articles. "Pichot reste assez fidèle à sa conception d'une revue anglicisante mise en oeuvre dans *L'Echo britannique*, et cette fois il disposait d'éléments plus favorables; *La Revue* jouissait d'un succès bien établi depuis quatorze ans, elle atteignait un public étendu, et elle avait une bonne équipe de collaborateurs. Il y apporte les mêmes nouveautés qu'il avait introduites à *L'Echo*: l'accroissement des extraits d'ouvrages non périodiques, l'expression d'opinions personnelles pour comparer les progrès, la littérature et les opinions des deux nations, et pour indiquer leur interaction réciproque, et enfin des bulletins d'informations à sujets d'actualité."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ *Voyage historique et littéraire...*, Volume II, p.253

¹⁷⁹ Kathleen Jones, *La Revue britannique*, p.157

Note that before becoming editor of the *Revue britannique*, Pichot was the editor of the *Revue de Paris* from 1831 to 1834, and then of the *Echo britannique* in 1835. He made use of the experience he had gained to bring a new spirit to the *Revue britannique*. The author of *Voyage historique et littéraire...* was considered one of the "vulgarisateurs de la littérature anglaise les plus connus de l'époque. Il avait traduit les oeuvres de Byron, de Moore et de Scott, et Defauconpret lui soumettait ses traductions avant de les faire imprimer."¹⁸⁰

It was largely thanks to the *Revue britannique* and to Pichot that knowledge of English literature became widespread and reinforced among the French, who took a renewed interest in British events and ideas.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.153. See Appendix II.

Conclusion

The French had shown an interest in all branches of English literature in the centuries before the Romantic period. We should note that from the seventeenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century English literature reached France through intermediaries who were, according to P. Van Tieghem, "des hommes de lettres qui n'ont pas fait oeuvre de création personnelle et qui n'ont pas de prétentions littéraires, mais à qui la connaissance des langues étrangères et les séjours à l'étranger ont permis de découvrir des domaines inexplorés de la littérature, que leur curiosité intellectuelle ou leur désir de prosélytisme ont incité à présenter à leurs compatriotes dans des ouvrages ou des articles."¹⁸¹ However, in making this statement P. Van Tieghem was presenting only part of the truth. In reality many of these intermediaries were themselves writers or had literary pretensions. Some of them, including Victor Hugo, did not even know the English language, but that did not prevent them from revealing an important part of English literature or from adapting many of its ideas in their own work. We have seen how Sainte-Beuve, for example, put English poets to the service of his personal inspiration.

According to the author of *Influences étrangères sur la littérature française*, the majority of French people, up until the 1730s or so, did not know the English language. The first French-English dictionary was published in 1727. "Seuls, en fait, connaissent la langue ceux que l'exil contraint à vivre en Angleterre ou ceux que pousse une curiosité spontanée pour le pays, sa littérature ou ses moeurs politiques."¹⁸² Voltaire was the exception to this rule; he took the trouble to study English before his exile. England's flourishing intellectual life later encouraged the French to take the trouble to go there in order to study these creative ideas on their own ground. In spite of their relative ignorance of the language, many writers and philosophers in eighteenth-century France took an interest in the politics and constitutional history of Britain, examining them in order to criticise the state of affairs in France. This

¹⁸¹ *Les Influences étrangères sur la littérature française*, p.61

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p.62

“anglomania”, as it was called at one stage, did not however diminish the prestige of literary Classicism.

In the nineteenth century, the Romantic cause freed itself from all that had confined and restricted it, thanks to the efforts of Madame de Staël, Chateaubriand and the subsequent generation, who were in general disciples of these two writers. The role of English literature and the influence of its writers on French writers was a very important element in the victory of Romanticism in its battle against Classicism. The great defences were unable to resist the successive waves of the Romantic attack. France was the promised land where foreign writers, and especially English ones, sowed their new ideas, so admired by many of the French. However, a stumbling block still existed in spite of the great success of the new school: nostalgia for the past retains its place in every era, and confrontation between new and old ideas is part of human nature. The different stages of development in French literature are linked not only to English literature but also to the spirit of the age. The French, who had founded the first Republic and who subsequently came to accept that change is part of human life, were not unreceptive to new developments in literature. It was thanks to these new conceptions that literature, after a period of struggle, came to represent the new society which was emerging.

The first French Romantic writers took note of this great change and found it inspirational. However, the only means of demanding such a change was through criticism, and to criticise the government was the way of the devil which led to perdition. An indirect method of criticism was to study English literature and call for its ideas to be adopted in French literature. We have seen how Madame de Staël attempted in her work *De la littérature...* to transplant new English ideas into France, and other French writers did the same.

The Romantic struggle in the 1820s changed many conceptions; the French began to accept things they had earlier rejected, such as Shakespeare's plays which were considered the main agents of a revolution in the theatre. The critical studies of Sainte-Beuve also played their part in spreading the influence of English literature, by means of articles on the subject of Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Scott and other writers of the Romantic generation. The

imitations made by the French critic showed how receptive the French were to the influence of English literature, which was strong enough to overcome all kinds of resistance.

During the period of the Romantic struggle, a new literature came into existence, but can one say that this literature was successful in meeting the needs of the French? It seems so; despite the objections of some, most men of letters were aware of the need for literary reform, recognising that literature had to be in harmony with the customs and events of the time.

English literature acted as a catalyst, providing the French with many themes and lending the forms, images and movements which played a part in the general evolution of French literature. The impact of English literature could be detected in almost all the branches of French literature, and exerted a powerful influence.

It is interesting to note that many French writers who were interested in English literature did not study the English works in any depth. We have seen how Byron's poems were read as statements on political freedom and used as pretexts in a conflict which was purely French.

One cannot deny that English literature was used as the means to an end in the socio-political revolution in France. Nevertheless, it also played a significant role in the development of French literature. The example of Madame de Staël's *De la Littérature...* shows the extent to which she focuses on "l'aspect politique" and the relationship between literature and society. Her pronouncement that "une société nouvelle doit s'exprimer dans une littérature nouvelle" influenced almost every writer of the Romantic generation, who adopted it as one of the principles on which Romantic literature was based.

Many French owed their knowledge of English writers to Pichot, who had done French literature a great service with his *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Ecosse*, a work considered to be the most important literary event of 1825.

The literary journals supported the debate about the Romantic movement by publishing articles reflecting different points of view. We have seen the important role played by the *Globe*, the *Revue britannique* and other periodicals in the Romantic struggle and the introduction of English literature to the French.

Critical studies in France continued to reveal different aspects of English literature, giving particular emphasis to the positive qualities of English Romantic writers. These studies played

an important role in the development of French literature, inviting writers who were attempting to express new feelings in their work to look for their inspiration to England, where the lighter yoke of an imported classicism had been shaken off, allowing the emergence of a literature which was less constrained and closer to the sensibilities of the times.

Appendix I

White, Henry Kirke (1786–1806), the son of a Nottingham butcher, was articled to a lawyer in Nottingham. In 1803 a volume of his poems attracted the favourable notice of Southey, who thereafter protected him, and wrote a memoir of him in 1807 after his death. White obtained a sizarship at St John's College, Cambridge, where overwork brought about his early death. He was praised by Byron, but little survives of his work except one or two hymns, the best known of which is 'Oft in danger, oft in woe'.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ For further information see Paul Harvey, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 4th edition, Clarendon, Oxford, 1967.

Appendix II

"Pichot, Amédée (1795–1877), French translator of Byron and an important intermediary between French and British cultures. He edited the influential *Revue britannique*,"¹⁸⁴

The following examples chosen from Pichot's translations and studies show the extent of his work on the subject of English literature.

Translations of Byron's work made by Amédée Pichot:¹⁸⁵

1. *Oeuvres de Lord Byron*, translated from the English (by Amédée Pichot and Eusèbe de Salle, without the translator's name), 10 vol.in-12, Paris, Ladvocat, 1819-1821
2. *Oeuvres complètes de Lord Byron*, translated from the English by A.E.de Chastopalli (A.Pichot and E.de Salle), second edition, revised, corrected and with the addition of several poems, with portrait, 5 vol.in-8, Paris, Ladvocat, 1820-1822
3. *Oeuvres complètes de Lord Byron*, translated from the English by A. Pichot and E. de Salle, third edition, completely revised and corrected, 10 vol.in-18, Paris, Ladvocat, 1821-1822, plus 5 additional volumes, in-18, 1824, with portrait.
4. *Oeuvres de Lord Byron*, 4th edition, entirely revised and corrected by A.Pichot, with a preface on Lord Byron by Charles Nodier; portrait by Dequevauvilliers, illustrations by Johannot, T.Johannot, Devéria, Westall, 8 vol.in-8, Paris, Ladvocat, 1822-1825
5. *Oeuvres de Lord Byron*, etc, fifth edition, 13 vol.in-12, Paris, Ladvocat, 1823
6. *Oeuvres complètes de Lord Byron*, etc, sixth edition, 18 vol.in-12, Paris, Ladvocat et Delangle, 1827
7. *Oeuvres complètes de Lord Byron*, etc, seventh edition, 6 vol.in-8, Paris, Furne, 1830
8. Eighth edition, 6 vol.in-8, *ibidem*, 1830-1835
9. Ninth edition, 6 vol.in-8, *ibidem*, 1836

¹⁸⁴ Peter France, *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 623

¹⁸⁵ See *Byron et le romantisme français* for more information.

10. Tenth edition, 1 vol.gr, in-8, *ibidem*, 1837
11. Eleventh edition, 1 vol.gr.in-8, *ibidem*, 1842

All these translations show the importance of Byron's influence in France and the important role played by Pichot in making Byron's work available to the French.

The following are a few of Pichot's translations of other British works which are relevant to this study:

1. *Lalla Roukh ou La princesse mogole, Histoire orientale par Thomas Moore*, translated from the English by Amédée Pichot, Ponthieu, 1820, 2 vol.
2. *Oeuvres complètes de Shakespeare*, translated from the English by Letourneur, new edition revised and corrected by F. Guizot and Amédée Pichot, Ladvocat, 1821, 13 vol.
3. *Chefs-d'oeuvres des théâtres étrangers: chefs-d'oeuvres du théâtre anglais*, Ladvocat, 1822-1823, 5 vol.
4. *Les beautés de Lord Byron, Galerie de 15 tableaux tirés de ses oeuvres*, accompanied by a text translated by Amédée Pichot, Aubert; Giraldon, 1839

Of the works he devoted to British writers, the following references relate to the period covered by this study:¹⁸⁶

1. *Notice sur Sir Walter Scott et ses écrits*, by A. Pichot, translator of *Romans poétiques* de Sir Walter Scott and *Oeuvres de Lord Byron*, Ladvocat, 1821
2. *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Ecosse*, by Amédée Pichot, Ladvocat, 1825, 3 vol.
3. *Vues pittoresques de l'Ecosse, avec un texte explicatif* by Amédée Pichot, Gosselin, 1826
4. *Le perroquet de Walter Scott- Légendes, romans, contes biographiques et littéraires*, by Amédée Pichot, Everat, 1834, 2 vol.

¹⁸⁶ For further information, see Amédée Pichot: a romantic Prometheus, pp.408-415

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