A Nation of Foreigners: Chateaubriand and Repatriation

On Chateaubriand's maps, we might suppose, the roads that lead away from home stand out more clearly than those leading back. To be sure, the expansive, foreign climes in which his fictional protagonists find themselves entertain a tortured yet vital symbolic relationship with spaces both inward and domestic: thus for Jean-Claude Berchet, to travel in Chateaubriand is to "faire reculer les limites du connu pour étendre [...] la sphère de notre moi" (*Aléas*, 336); while for Tom Conley, Chateaubriand's American tableaux create "a geography of exile in which the memory of one country"—that is, of course, France—"is cartographically embedded in another" (124). Yet in the American fictions, in *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage*, and frequently in the memoirs, travel to new lands is synonymous with exile from a homeland, and much of the literary poignancy of exile—as Chateaubriand was well aware—lies in the unstated assumption that it is, at least from the point of view of the one exiled, forever. For René, there can be no return home, and the enduring appeal of the novella that bears his name no doubt owes something to our intuitive understanding that *nostos* in the true sense is always impossible, requiring as it would a movement not in space, but in time. Indeed, as Jean-Marie Roulin argues, the Romantic idea of exile ultimately expresses the Rousseauian ontological conviction that "the individual is exiled in the world" ("Ontology," p. 138). Chateaubriand's skillful and self-conscious exploitation of these realizations has established his reputation as one of the great Romantic writers of exile.[1]

This article does not set out to contest that reputation, but seeks instead to explore those moments in Chateaubriand's work when exile turns out *not* to be forever, shifting the focus from exile, to the moment of homecoming. Even in Chateaubriand's American fictions, as

[1] Among the rich critical literature on exile in Chateaubriand, see in particular Roulin; Conley; Kadish; and Conner.

Roulin has noted, "le voyage est un retour vers la patrie du père" (90). The very first sentence of *René*—in which the hero, freshly arrived in the New World, immediately succumbs to the power of law and custom and is forced into matrimony—encapsulates the insight that if what we wish to leave behind is patriarchy, then all roads decidedly lead to home. Roulin's observation rings even truer, however, if we shift our attention away from Chateaubriand's fictional voyages, to the real-life voyages that inspired them: both his travels in the United States in 1791, and his exile in England from 1793. Chateaubriand may well have gone, like René, to the New World; but unlike his fictional creation, he came back. He soon found himself in exile, but once again, he returned—and was followed, indeed, if rather later, by none other than the king himself, Louis XVIII. For the Restorations of 1814 and 1815 were of course also homecomings, though homecomings so delicate, so fraught with perils both physical and political, that René's permanent exile—indeed, his death in the colonial wars itself—seems in comparison a convenient literary solution to a much thornier real-life problem.

These awkward homecomings will concern me here. My approach in thinking about them is twofold. On the one hand, I consider how Chateaubriand figures his own post-exile return to Napoleon's France, retrospectively in his memoirs, as a moment of national identity-crisis, and how his depiction of that crisis prepares his subsequent treatment of the fall of Napoleon, the return of Louis XVIII, and the beginning of the first Restoration in 1814. On the other, I broaden the focus from Chateaubriand alone, to consider how questions of nationality and foreignness figure in the political contentions of the period (as exemplified by a number of satirical prints), and in a collaborative work to which Chateaubriand was a major contributor: *Le Conservateur*, founded in 1818, the same year as the foreign occupation of France following Waterloo finally ended. The crucial concept in my analysis will be the idea of "repatriation," meaning not only the return of an exiled individual (or an occupying force) to his homeland, but also the reconstruction of a *patrie*—that is, of a symbolically coherent national

community—after enormous social upheaval and amid intense political animosity. That Chateaubriand felt himself uniquely summoned to participate in that process of "repatriation" is well known, and emerges clearly from his interventions of 1814 and in *Le Conservateur*, with their constant appeals to an underlying, as it were geographical "Frenchness," and their wariness of the foreign (and, equally pressingly, of *appearing* "foreign"). That those appeals were ultimately doomed emerges equally clearly, however, in the broader political discourse of the early Restoration—and not least in the writings of Chateaubriand's fellow contributors to *Le Conservateur*, who constantly underscore the irremediably fractured state of the fatherland, the division of its occupants into so many mutually hostile peoples, grudgingly inhabiting the same geographical space. In post-revolutionary France, it seems, and Chateaubriand's best intentions notwithstanding, the *patrie* could only ever be a cartographic projection, a figure of rhetoric—or an object of nostalgia.

1800, 1814: "Heureux qui, comme Ulysse..."

Chateaubriand's youthful voyages, as recounted in his memoirs, are subject to what Philippe Berthier perceptively calls "le mécanisme du rapatriement" (324), a sort of compulsion to return home that is at once an internal, psychic urge and the result of external circumstances. Books IX and X of the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* describe a Chateaubriand ricocheting across the borders of the new French Republic with a momentum not entirely his own. Summoned back to France by news—of course very belated—of the king's attempted flight to Varennes, Chateaubriand dutifully returns to his homeland and his family where he also dutifully marries; he then swiftly and dutifully quits France, emigrating to join the royal armies at Coblentz; with these armies, he next returns to France to do his duty under arms at Thionville; when the campaign ends in a rout, duty gives way to necessity, and he must flee France once more via Belgium, taking refuge first in Jersey, then in England. In recounting these displacements,

Chateaubriand's apparent concern is to deglamorize and de-glorify them, stripping the journeys of the melancholic charisma of René's European and American wanderings and emphasizing instead the hardship and hopelessness of emigration. In a curious moment, describing the dire straits in which he found himself following the dissolution of the Royalist army, Chateaubriand engages in some cunning rhetorical sleight-of-hand to this end:

> À Bruxelles, aucun hôtelier ne me voulut recevoir. Le Juif errant, Oreste populaire que la complainte conduit dans cette ville [...] y fut mieux accueilli que moi. [....] Le mendiant de l'Odyssée était plus insolent, mais n'était pas si pauvre que moi. (1: 497)

"The émigré," notes Jean-Marie Roulin, "inscribes himself in the long line of exiles and travelers, who have peopled literature since [...] Odysseus" ("The Return," p. 20), and sure enough, Chateaubriand both solicits yet—rhetorically at least—refuses that lineage here. In these cock-eyed classical references, the young émigré is compared not with Orestes, but with the Wandering Jew, that is, a low-culture reworking of the Oresteian archetype; nor is he contrasted with Odysseus—not even Odysseus disguised as a beggar—but rather with the insolent, genuine beggar slain by Odysseus in Book 18 of the *Odyssey*. In both cases, moreover, he presents himself as inferior even to these figures of inferiority, less welcome than the Wandering Jew, more impecunious than the ill-fated beggar. On the one hand, the high status of these allusions playfully undermines the apparent humility of the claim they articulate; at the very least, our impecunious hero will never be found wanting for *cultural* capital. More importantly however, both allusions may be said to point in the opposite direction from the one the passage appears to be taking. For while Chateaubriand is leaving France and alludes to the two Greek heroes as figures of *travel*, they are just as obviously figures of *return*, and their inclusion here thus makes the "mécanisme du rapatriement" seem as much a rhetorical as a

psychological necessity.[2] We might go further, however, and note that these two allusions evoke not simply homecomings, but homecomings driven by an urge for revenge (in the case of Orestes) and restoration (in the case of Odysseus). Yet in 1822, when these passages are dated, the extent to which the returning émigrés brought with them a desire for vengeance remained a political sore spot, both in general and for Chateaubriand in particular. No wonder, then, that those associations can appear here only under this strange rhetorical cover—like Odysseus, disguised in beggar's garb.

The symbolic circuit opened by these allusions will be closed by Chateaubriand's return from exile, at the end of Book XII and the beginning of Book XIII: Chateaubriand not only comes home, but like Odysseus and Orestes before him, he does so incognito. In some famous passages, Chateaubriand recounts his surreptitious return to Paris in 1800, along with the earliest wave of returning *proscrits* encouraged by Bonaparte's apparent willingness to turn a blind eye to their presence. The dominant note of these passages is, we might say, "picturesque," as Chateaubriand evokes almost whimsically the strange effect of the returnees' disguise:

> Le pêle-mêle était bizarre: par un travestissement convenu, une foule de gens devenaient des personnages qu'ils n'étaient pas: chacun portait son nom de guerre ou d'emprunt suspendu à son cou, comme les Vénitiens, au carnaval, portent à la main un petit masque pour avertir qu'ils sont masqués. (1: 619)

This scene of carnivalesque travesty at once recalls and disrupts the Homeric pattern alluded to in Book X. For if the recognition of Odysseus's scar—which Terence Cave and before him Erich Auerbach take as paradigmatic of the sense- and order-making power of literary recognitions—depends on some stable figure of a spatial and temporal "home" (the nurse) who

[2] On the Orestes paradigm in Chateaubriand, see Roulin, pp. 85-95; on classical myth in the *Mémoires*, see Cavallin.

has remained unchanged during the king's wanderings, the "pêle-mêle" of assumed identities, the multiplicity of false relationships evoked in these passages makes that reassuring literary pattern impossible to complete. No single act of recognition will suffice to restore this jumble of social statuses and family identities to their previous order, and in any case, the order no longer exists: Paris, like France, is in the grip of yet another "transformation sociale." In the preceding chapter, indeed, the freshly returned Chateaubriand sets out to "faire de divers côtés des reconnaissances" (1: 617), but goes on to list only what has changed or disappeared since his last spell in the capital. In post-revolutionary France, *reconnaissance* can no longer describe what transpires between Odysseus and his nurse, but only the attempt to get one's bearings in foreign—if not, in fact, hostile—terrain.

These passages thus share an important preoccupation with the later chapters in Book XXII in which Chateaubriand describes the first Restoration of 1814: namely, the question of foreignness. First, the "pêle-mêle bizarre" of Paris in 1800 involves, at least in part, a host of assumed *national* identities: "L'un était réputé Italien ou Espagnol, l'autre Prussien ou Hollandais: j'étais Suisse" (1: 619). The émigrés return disguised as foreigners; yet their false papers mask not some unproblematic, unchanged Frenchness, but names and identities that are precisely no longer tolerated or even recognized by the state that now calls itself "France." At the very least, Chateaubriand suggests, they will need to reinvent themselves as Frenchmen—yet even that presupposes that their assumed, foreign identities go no deeper than their forged papers. Only pages earlier, however, Chateaubriand has told us that upon his arrival in France, he did rather miss England: "j'avais vécu si longtemps dans ce pays que j'en avais pris les habitudes: [...] j'étais Anglais de manière, de goût et, jusqu'à un certain point, de pensées" (1: 616). As Guy Berger notes, Chateaubriand was slow to adjust to life in France, and found himself lastingly marked by his English experience—and this despite his longstanding ambivalence about the English (224, 226-7). Chateaubriand's precise formulation of this

difficulty, “j’étais Anglais de manière, de goût, et [...] de pensées,” is striking, however, especially when considered alongside the phrase “j’étais Suisse” in the following chapter—as if, in returning to his native land, Chateaubriand found himself anything *but* French. He was doubtless not alone in these feelings, nor in this articulation of them; Mme de Genlis, for instance, recounts in her memoirs of 1825 some very similar experiences: “tout paroissoit nouveau; j’étais comme une étrangère que la curiosité force à chaque pas de s’arrêter. J’avois peine à me reconnoître dans les rues” (5: 85; see also Zanone, 36). In depicting himself as a foreigner visiting an unfamiliar land, Chateaubriand thus inscribes his own experience within an established tradition of post-emigration *dépaysement*, while simultaneously preparing the episodes of his memoirs dealing with the Restoration of 1814.

Chateaubriand’s treatment of the Restoration in the *Mémoires d’outre-tombe* is marked by an oscillation between justification—especially self-justification—and condemnation; above all, his evocation of the regime is shot through with the foreknowledge of its downfall in 1830. These complex attitudes are legible from the very earliest pages on the events of April 1814, and in the almost contradictory role played there by notions of Frenchness. The first significant passage in this respect recounts the arrival of the comte d’Artois, the future Charles X, as lieutenant general in his brother Louis XVIII’s absence. On the face of it, Chateaubriand writes here as an apologist, offering a rose-tinted account of Charles’s reception of the sort that would not be out of place in the royalist press of the time. If, moreover, the passage is also marked by the tragic foreknowledge that characterizes all of Chateaubriand’s discussions of the Restoration, what is foreshadowed is Charles X’s subsequent personal tragedies, rather than his profound unpopularity as king:

> [Le comte d’Artois] charmait par sa bonne grâce, différente des manières de l’Empire. Les Français reconnaissaient avec plaisir dans sa personne leurs anciennes mœurs, leur ancienne politesse et leur ancien langage; la foule l’entourait et le pressait; consolante

> apparition du passé, double abri qu'il était contre l'étranger vainqueur et contre Bonaparte encore menaçant. Hélas! ce prince ne remettait le pied sur le sol français que pour y voir assassiner son fils et pour retourner mourir sur cette terre d'exil dont il revenait. (1: 1082)

No doubt Chateaubriand remembered well that, by pure historical serendipity, Pierre Lebrun's *Ulysse* had opened at the Comédie-Française on 28 April 1814, between the return of the comte d'Artois narrated here, and that of his brother the king; the play's tale of triumphant royal homecoming had seemed auspicious, and royalists soon took to calling it *Le Retour d'Ulysse* (punning on "le retour du lys"; Rosset, 24). It is as if this passage from the *Mémoires* longs for that heroic narrative parallel to have been borne out by history; for here, it might seem, the Homeric scene of recognition deferred from the moment of Chateaubriand's own return in 1800 is finally played out. The French people spontaneously recognize in the returning comte d'Artois a font of true, cultural Frenchness, the embodiment of some stable national identity which they now recall at last.

Yet of course, this fantasy is troubled by the passage's peculiar temporality. Michael Sheringham notes that Chateaubriand's memoirs are constructed as a sort of temporal palimpsest in which "l'acte d'écrire est associé à une rupture dans l'ordre temporel" (120), and this passage is no exception: thus the comte d'Artois is presented pathetically as a sort of once-and-future king in reverse, as yet uncrowned in the moment narrated, but already deposed by the time of writing. Yet the "rupture dans l'ordre temporel" in this passage is not limited to its composition, but is rather explicitly thematized as a characteristic of the event described: Charles appears as a representation not so much of Frenchness as of a *bygone form* of Frenchness, an "apparition du passé" whose return "sur le sol français" brings about a sort of palimpsest where an old and a new "langage" inhabit the same physical space. "Returning," as Roulin puts it, "means becoming aware of the relativity of customs and of their *historicity*"

("Ontology," p. 142); and though it avoids saying so, this passage similarly reveals the contingency and impermanence of specific ideas of national identity, at least as much as their resilience. At the very least, we might say, the passage's melancholy tone yokes together Charles's "past-ness" in 1814—that is, his old-fashioned speech and manners—with his "past-ness" in 1835—following his fall and exile. Conspicuously elided in the passage, meanwhile, is Charles's reign—as if the restoration of "order" brought about by this allegedly successful moment of recognition were so temporary and aberrant as to be hardly worth acknowledging.

The meaning of Charles's old-fashioned ways is shifted even further, however, by a passage occurring a couple of chapters later, in which Chateaubriand describes another repatriation, this time of the remaining émigrés from foreign or internal exile, still in April 1814. This, as Chateaubriand well knows, is in a sense where the trouble started. After all, while the happy coincidence of Lebrun's play had invited the comparison of Louis XVIII to Ulysses, an anti-Bourbon print of 1815, "Les Compagnons d'Ulysse" [fig. 1], had adopted precisely this allusion in order to depict the émigrés who accompanied the king's return as a herd of greedy pigs, the swine of Circe's island. Of course, Chateaubriand does not go so far, but his evocation of this mass return in the memoirs, while paralleling the passage about the comte d'Artois, clearly points towards the political strain that would follow. Already in 1814, in the pamphlet entitled "Réflexions politiques," Chateaubriand had defended the returnees who accompanied Louis XVIII, against those who mocked them for "leur air étranger" (*Grands écrits politiques*, 1: 170). Now in his memoirs, Chateaubriand indulges—at least superficially—in a little mockery of his own:

> Dans les rues, on voyait des émigrés caducs avec des airs et des habits d'autrefois, hommes les plus respectables sans doute, mais [...] étrangers parmi la foule moderne [...]. Les dames de la cour impériale introduisaient au château les douairières du faubourg Saint-Germain et leur enseignaient les *détours* du palais. Arrivaient des

> députations de Bordeaux, ornées de brassards; des capitaines de paroisse de la Vendée, surmontés de chapeaux à la Rochejacquelein. Ces personnages divers gardaient l'expression des sentiments, des pensées, des habitudes, des mœurs qui leur étaient familières. (1: 1100-01).

In some respects, the passage recalls the "pêle-mêle" of Chateaubriand's own return in 1800; here again, at least on the surface, the picturesque tone prevails. But its meaning is plainly more serious. In a departure from the wishful thinking of the passage describing the comte d'Artois' arrival, the returning émigrés' equally antiquated manners make them not embodiments of true Frenchness, but precisely foreigners, "étrangers parmi la foule moderne." The venerable ladies of the faubourg Saint-Germain must ask for directions like tourists; those "députations" from the far-flung redoubts of French royalism seem like the envoys of foreign sovereigns, sporting their outlandish national costume to the bemusement of Parisian onlookers. Their visible adherence to a bygone model of French society makes their triumphant homecoming an illusion and an impossibility. In modern France, they will always be—as Roulin puts it of Chateaubriand's fictional heroes—"des exilés dans leur époque" (*Chateaubriand*, 94).

1814: The "Foreigner Problem"

Once again, then, Chateaubriand's representation of the homecoming of 1814 reflects his general tendency in the *Mémoires* to recount the Restoration through a fatalistic lens, in passages saturated with the foreknowledge of the regime's demise in 1830. The re-emerging royalists—who, as Chateaubriand makes clear, are now "appelés à une haute et publique existence" (1: 1099), that is, in power—are so hopelessly out of alignment with the rest of the nation that "their" regime cannot possible endure; Chateaubriand thus inaugurates a long historiographical tendency to depict the Bourbon Restoration as an atavistic parenthesis in the French national narrative. In doing so, as I shall now attempt to show, he estheticizes and

partially depoliticizes a number of anxieties that occupied a significant place in the public discourse of the early years of the Restoration. More specifically, in depicting the émigrés and the Restoration as metaphorically foreign, he concedes in 1835 a point that his polemicist self, from 1814-18, vigorously disputed; while in aligning that foreignness with a hopeless allegiance to the French past, he conflates two concepts whose opposition formed the backbone of those same polemical interventions.[3]

On 10 April 1814, the newly re-founded *Journal des Débats* published a letter from the vicomte de Chateaubriand on the recent invasions of France. The letter notes that the "transports de [...] reconnaissance" expressed by the newspaper on behalf of its readers have largely been directed towards the nations most visible among the forces active in northern France, namely Russia and Austria; this, Chateaubriand points out, is to overlook the debt owed by all good Frenchmen to the English:

> Pas un Français sans doute n'a oublié ce qu'il doit au prince Régent d'Angleterre et au noble peuple qui a tant contribué à nous affranchir. Les drapeaux d'Élisabeth flottaient dans les armées de Henri IV; ils reparaissent dans les bataillons qui nous rendent Louis XVIII. (*Correspondance*, 2: 203-04; letter dated 9 April 1814)

In a sense, this letter is a curious misstep; in particular, its subsequent reference to Jean II—who, repatriated to France from captivity in England, voluntarily returned and died there in 1364—seems bizarrely inappropriate under the circumstances. We might contrast this letter with another, written six months later in October 1814, to the notable Englishman William Wilberforce. Wilberforce had written to Chateaubriand to express his disappointment that in negotiating the first Treaty of Paris in May that year, Louis XVIII—or more precisely his consigliere Talleyrand—had promised to abolish the slave trade only in five years' time, rather than immediately. In 1814, of course, abolitionism was the preserve only of an enlightened

[3] For a broad overview of Chateaubriand's career as a polemicist, see Lelièvre and Reboul.

few, while the majority of Frenchmen were pleased to view it merely as a cynical English stratagem to ruin French mercantile and colonial power (Daget, 18-20). Chateaubriand's response was thus decidedly frosty:

> Un roi qui rentre après vingt-cinq ans de malheurs et de calamités dans son empire [...] peut-il encore soulever tout à coup les puissants intérêts du commerce, se faire autant de nouveaux ennemis qu'il y a de colons en Amérique et de négociants en France? Ce roi arrive d'Angleterre. S'il eût consenti à l'abolition immédiate de la traite, les Jacobins et les Buonapartistes se seraient écriés que ce roi était un *roi anglais*, vendu aux rivaux et aux ennemis de la France. (*Correspondance*, 2: 220; letter of October 1814)

The shift is striking: in April, ostentatious public praise for the English from a man whom one has little trouble believing, as he himself would later put it, "Anglais de manières, de goût, et [...] de pensées"; in October, a defensive repudiation of Englishness as a politically compromising association whose risks far outweigh mere humanitarian considerations. In the eye-catching phrase—underscored in the text—"un *roi anglais*," Chateaubriand eloquently captures Louis XVIII's and the Restoration's biggest political vulnerability in 1814, as he has evidently come to grasp it in the intervening months: what I am calling the "foreigner problem."

As is well known, Louis XVIII returned to France on the wave of a full-scale invasion by hostile foreign forces—not once, but twice, in April 1814 and again in June 1815 after the Hundred Days. The circumstances of his return(s) were politically very delicate—in short, he risked appearing less as the rightful king and more as a foreign-imposed puppet. In recalling in the memoirs the king's first return in 1814, Chateaubriand makes clear the extent to which the scene was carefully stage-managed with an eye to just this problem. In a detail at once poignant and laughable, Chateaubriand claims that it was out of concern for the *king's* sensibility—"on avait voulu épargner au Roi l'aspect des troupes étrangères" (1: 1096)—that a French regiment was pressed into providing the honor guard for his entry into Paris. Yet this was not the only

misrepresentation of the moment, it seems; in fact, this passage is one of those striking instances when Chateaubriand, more often engaged in self-mythologization *in* the memoirs, admits instead to having spoken falsely outside them. In describing (in a pamphlet of 1814 entitled "Compiègne, avril 1814") the hearty military welcome the king supposedly received from the French troops upon his arrival, the Chateaubriand of 1814 was, we learn, practicing the very modern art of political spin: "Ce que je disais là des guerriers, dans le but que je me proposais d'atteindre, était vrai quant aux chefs; mais je mentais à l'égard des soldats." The rank-and-file, he now admits, heartbroken at the loss of their *petit caporal*, projected a very different attitude: "Je ne crois pas que figures humaines aient jamais exprimé quelque chose d'aussi menaçant et d'aussi terrible" (1: 1096). The lie of 1814, Chateaubriand implies, was partly justified by "le but que je me proposais d'atteindre." This "goal" is fairly obviously a political one, yet Chateaubriand's sense that it excused mendacious means suggests he conceived of it—and continues to conceive of it—not as a narrowly *party*-political, but as a broadly *patriotic* objective. Chateaubriand, Michel Lelièvre suggests (37-9), was perhaps sincerer than most in claiming, as he often did in those tumultuous years, to shun factionalism and treasure only the national good. The early pamphlets, in Jean-Paul Clément's words, were "efforts pour civiliser la vie publique en lui donnant des règles et des mœurs admises par tous" ("Fascination," 277). In erasing the resentment of the French troops in his 1814 account of the king's entry into Paris, Chateaubriand no doubt told himself, he was not silencing dissent, but writing in the aspiration that a national consensus around the restored monarchy might produce an environment where politics—including, precisely, meaningful political disagreement—could be conducted rationally and fruitfully, and above all, patriotically. For Chateaubriand believed, as Clément continues, that "la politique s'enracine aussi dans une patrie" ("Fascination," 278); it depends, that is, on some universally agreed-upon national entity and some shared national identity that define its borders and give it its meaning.

Chateaubriand's first task, then, at least as he saw it, was to dispel the superficial taint of foreignness attaching to the Restoration and its supporters in the wake of the invasion of 1814. This he attempted especially in his polemical pamphlets *De Buonaparte et des Bourbons* and *Réflexions politiques*, in which he argued vociferously against the notion that the returning émigrés were somehow less French than anyone else; most, he insisted, had returned from exile long before 1814, and in any case, Louis XVIII "ne sépare point *ceux qui ont servi le Roi de ceux qui ont servi la patrie*" (*Grands écrits politiques*, 1: 173). More broadly however, he thought himself called to remind the French of the nature of their *patrie*, to invite them to join with Louis XVIII in a shared moment of repatriation—a national homecoming after two decades of political wandering. His approach in this regard, as critics have noted, presupposes a "France" at once cartographic and historical, existing in space and time; thus for instance, in a passage of *Réflexions politiques* highlighted by Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny, Chateaubriand insists that France must accept a return to its 1792 borders, relinquishing the ill-gotten Napoleonic territories, and bluntly asserts that: "Nous aimerions mieux la France resserrée dans les murs de Bourges, mais libre sous un roi légitime, qu'étendue jusqu'à Moscou, mais esclave sous un tyran" (*Grands écrits politiques*, 1: 188; see Berchet, 19-20). Such a contraction was not, his readers were to understand, so much a capitulation to foreign powers (though it happened to coincide with the Allies' demands), as precisely a return to a more authentic version of the French homeland.

The historical dimension of his approach, meanwhile, is obvious. Even the letter to the *Débats*, tin-eared as it was in its Panglossian portrayal of a longstanding cross-Channel affinity, is utterly characteristic in its use of historical parallels and antecedents to give sense to events (thus Louis XVIII's return to France is to be understood through reference to those of Henri IV and Jean II). The central figure of this historical nation-building was, as Clément argues elsewhere, that of Saint Louis (Louis IX), whom Chateaubriand imagines as a sort of allegory

of the French nation and its historical destiny ("Saint-Louis," 1062-3). For Chateaubriand, clearly, France may only be apprehended in the *longue durée*—"Relevons," he wrote in *De Buonaparte*, "la monarchie de Clovis, l'héritage de saint Louis, le patrimoine de Henri IV"—and her history, as this quotation shows, is fundamentally inseparable from that of the French monarchy: he thus wrote to teach all true Frenchmen that the Bourbon monarchy was precisely their shared inheritance. This pedagogical self-conception, even before 1814, is suggested by the 1828 preface to the *Génie du christianisme*, where the author notes that in reading it, "les Français apprirent à porter avec regret leur regard sur le passé" (460), and that this nostalgic education had prepared the ground for the Restoration.

Even on its own terms, this vision of geographical and historical rootedness contains hidden ambiguities. As Clément perceptively notes, the appeal of Saint Louis, that "lointain souverain," to Chateaubriand had everything to do with his gloriously romantic death *in partibus infidelium*, as a crusader at Tunis in 1267 ("Saint-Louis," 1071). In an eerily apposite moment at the end of the *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*, indeed, "la mort de Louis, si touchante, si vertueuse," is the subject of a short paragraph that ends, precisely, with Chateaubriand informing his readers that "il est temps qu'ils rentrent avec moi dans notre commune patrie"—with almost a note of envy for the blessed king who gets to stay behind (*Œuvres romanesques*, 2: 1212). No doubt a similar ambivalence was at work in the oddly infelicitous allusion to Jean II, that willing hostage of the English, in the 1814 letter to the *Journal des Débats*. It is almost as if, for Chateaubriand, Frenchness is somehow inextricably intertwined with exile in foreign lands, just as, as Tom Conley notes, the geography of France is never more vividly recalled in his work than when it is projected onto that distant corner of North America to which colonial dominion—now lost—has given "le doux nom de Louisiane" (118; quoting *Atala*, in *Œuvres romanesques*, 1: 33). But what is most striking about this approach—at least if we accept, following Lelièvre, that Chateaubriand's interventions were

fundamentally sincere—is its naivety. In appealing to the monarchical past as the common ground upon which all Frenchmen might build a shared political project, Chateaubriand seemingly failed to appreciate the extent to which that past was, for many of his fellow citizens, another country, whose mores were incompatible with their own. A satirical engraving of the Hundred Days, "Le Retour en Angleterre" [fig. 2], nicely encapsulates the problem: a withered émigré returns to England, fleeing the returning Emperor, and carries as his only baggage feudal parchments, heraldic badges, and portraits of his ancestors; he leans on a symbolic lily—the Bourbon monarchy—that breaks under the weight of his retrograde political demands. For the artist and his audience, the émigré's attachment to the artefacts of the past is precisely what necessitates his departure; whether or not he belongs in England, he certainly no longer belongs in France.

The drawing exemplifies the temporalized politics of post-revolutionary France, where, as Pierre Rosanvallon notes, "le rapport au passé" was itself a primary object of political contention (84), and no shared national historical narrative could thus be taken for granted. Whether he realized it or not, Chateaubriand's 1814 appeals to French history could not but be taken up into these same temporalized politics and reduced to the status of partisan political interventions. His depiction, in his post-1830 account of the Restoration, of the comte d'Artois as an "apparition du passé," a manifestation of some lost French essence, appears in this sense as the uncanny specter of the failed consensus-building project of 1814; while the evocation of those "émigrés caducs" who seemed "étrangers parmi la foule moderne" virtually concedes the anti-royalist association of the old ways with foreign ways. Yet even before the great reversal of 1830, the lack of a national common ground would be demonstrated for Chateaubriand most eloquently not by his political opponents, but by his allies—in the pages of *Le Conservateur*.

1818: The Fatherland, Fractured

In the second half of 1818, repatriation was once again the order of the day: not, this time, of the French, but of the foreign occupying forces that had been present in France since the end of the Hundred Days. In October, the Richelieu government obtained the Allies' consent to end the occupation early; in the following months, the 150,000 mostly British, Russian, Austrian and Prussian troops began to withdraw. The timing coincided closely with the launch of *Le Conservateur*, the royalist newspaper of which Chateaubriand was a founder and to which he contributed regularly until it closed in 1820. The presence of foreign soldiers figured prominently in the early numbers, and the news of their imminent withdrawal was greeted triumphantly there by Chateaubriand himself, in a "Lettre sur Paris" dated 13 October 1818: "Enfin la France est libre; [...] la retraite des étrangers est décidée. Il n'y a point de vrai Français qui n'éprouve une sensible joie [...] de voir son pays rendu à sa dignité" (62).[4] The occupation, as this quotation acknowledges, had been experienced by many as a period of symbolic national humiliation (not to mention of material depredations and violence; see Haynes, 57-8), and its end was thus—Chateaubriand implies—self-evidently a cause for celebration.

The claim is not as politically anodyne as we might suppose. It is to be contrasted with an immediately contemporary satirical cartoon, "Le Départ des étrangers" [fig. 3], which simultaneously takes note of the allies' withdrawal and the foundation of *Le Conservateur*. In the distance, the English troops return to their vessels; on the shore, a gang of bewigged French aristocrats wails in despair. (Another print of the same year depicts a similarly old-fashioned royalist lovingly clasping the hands of a departing English officer, above the legend "Au revoir.") The aristocrats are doomed, the artist implies, because the occupying foreigners are all that has been propping up their political power; "voilà notre force qui s'en va," one of them laments; "ne nous abandonnez pas," begs another. In opposition to their despair, however,

[4] I cite Chateaubriand's contributions to *Le Conservateur* in Colin Smethurst's excellent critical edition, in the Champion *Œuvres complètes*. Other contributors' articles are cited as per the original newspaper.

stands Chateaubriand, whom the author depicts as Père Aubry, proselytizing from atop a pile of his earlier literary works that the royalist party still has "le nombre, les talens, l'esprit" in its favor. This harangue, we are to understand, translates the tenor of Chateaubriand's newest undertaking, *Le Conservateur*, an advertisement for which, complete with accurate price-list, appears on a billboard behind him. The image is useful for a number of reasons. First, it registers the extent to which the allegation of foreignness, or at least of foreign-dependency, remained a handy political weapon for the opponents of the royalist right (and, conceivably, for the opponents of the Restoration regime) until some time after Waterloo; we can thus understand Chateaubriand's insistence that all true Frenchmen must rejoice at the Allies' departure not as a mere platitude, but as an attempt to palliate his faction's most worrisome political vulnerability. Second, it reminds us once again of Chateaubriand's slightly odd positioning vis-a-vis his peers. To be sure, the artist does not mean to flatter Chateaubriand here: he is, if anything, depicted as a mountebank, a charlatan, a turncoat (note, in the pile of books on which he stands, the forgotten tricolor tones of the *Essai sur les révolutions*), a religious hypocrite and a clerical stooge. And yet he emerges from this image as somehow less beholden to foreign paymasters, and certainly less cowardly, than the bulk of his fellow royalists. Finally, however, the cartoon suggests how the creation of *Le Conservateur*—whose self-proclaimed aim was to reshape and revivify the royalist cause—might be depicted by those hostile to its aims as closely related, if not in fact a desperate response, to the end of the foreign occupation.

I want to suggest that this view, though obviously partisan, is to some extent borne out by close attention to the first numbers of *Le Conservateur* itself—for in those early *livraisons*, including in Chateaubriand's contributions to them, foreignness figures as a constant, anxious leitmotif. Indeed, in attempting to establish the patriotic *bona fides* of the royalist camp, while holding to account the centrist Richelieu and Dessolles governments for their failure to

establish a more robustly monarchical system with a greater share of power accorded to traditional landed interests—their failure, as Chateaubriand put it, to "rendre la légitimité politique moins étrangère" (263-4; 2 April 1819)[5]—Chateaubriand adopts a rhetoric that verges at times on jingoism. Most important in this respect was the question of the *correspondance privée*, those often scurrilous diatribes against the *ultras* published in the foreign (especially English) press, which tended to find their way back into the French press as "reportage"—all, it was widely supposed, with the blessing of Élie Decazes (then Minister of Police and subsequently of the Interior). This plainly underhand practice allowed Chateaubriand to suggest that it was the Ministry, and not the royalists, who were inviting foreign meddling in French affairs: "Il faut dénoncer au tribunal de l'opinion européenne ces certaines *correspondances privées* où l'on immole aux passions l'honneur des Français et la dignité de la patrie" (41; 13 October 1818). In what follows, Chateaubriand presents the *correspondance privée* as a sort of linguistic travesty, even—deliberately or not—a grotesque parody of the emigration: "ces *correspondances privées* sont écrites originairement en français, puis déguisées à l'anglaise dans les gazettes de Londres, puis r'habillées à la française dans les journaux de Paris." He ends with a humorous flourish, by proposing a sort of polemical nativism: "Il vaudrait mieux nous les donner, sans leur faire faire le voyage d'outre-mer: les bons ouvrages perdent toujours à la traduction."

Alongside the question of the *correspondance privée* runs the evacuation of the foreign troops. Here, as we have seen, Chateaubriand was keen to underline his party's patriotic relief that the *patrie* was now free of the occupier; the restoration of national dignity is apparently something any "vrai Français" owes it to himself to celebrate (62). And yet even Chateaubriand's account of that celebration is not so simple, for what the departure of the allies promises is more precisely that certain royalist demands, silenced for fear of provoking foreign

[5] For an exhaustive study of *Le Conservateur*, its desiderata, and its contexts, see Reboul.

anxieties about France's political stability and thus prolonging the occupation, can now be aired openly. Chateaubriand explains as much in a fascinatingly paradoxical sentence of the same article of 13 October 1818:

> Nous ne pourrons jouir de toutes nos franchises qu'après la retraite des troupes alliées; jusque-là les écrivains du *Conservateur* trouveront dans leurs sentiments français, la règle et le frein dont nos lois constitutionnelles les ont dégagés. (51)

The pun, one supposes, is deliberate: the French will only be truly themselves—that is, *francs*—when finally *left* to themselves. But the anticipated recovery of their native frankness does not mean, of course, that they will thereby also recover some lost national unity, but, to the contrary, that they will finally be able to express, frankly, the deep-seated *dis*unities that vex their polity. By contrast, those "sentiments français" that have so far acted as a brake on partisan hostility will implicitly cease to obtain once the foreigners have gone home: Frenchness now, frankness later.

The *libération du territoire national* of 1818, then, promised not some great repatriation, but rather the fragmentation of the *patrie* into a number of opposing camps. Strikingly, many contributors to *Le Conservateur* figure that fragmentation linguistically, as the breakdown of the supposed correlation between national and linguistic identity. This obsession, once again, re-emerges in a revised form in Chateaubriand's memoirs, where he recalls the early days of the Restoration as a period of challenging linguistic apprenticeship, speaking ruefully of the "fautes grossières" committed by all parties, including his own, in their early attempts to "parl[er] Charte" (1: 900). Yet in the tense atmosphere of 1818, in the vocationally polemical pages of *Le Conservateur*, the linguistic disorder of the early Restoration is a topic of party-political concern. Superficially, Chateaubriand's impartial recollection recalls an article of 13 October 1818, in which Anselme Crignon d'Auzouer (an ultraroyalist deputy) bleakly stated the problem: "tel est l'état déplorable dans lequel nos

divisions politiques nous ont placés, que les mêmes mots ne signifient plus la même chose pour des hommes qui parlent le même langage et ont la même patrie" (1: 49). Crignon refers specifically to the incompatible interpretations given by royalists and liberals to the word *honnête*, as featured in *Le Conservateur*'s own motto, *Le Roi, la Charte et les honnêtes gens*, and feigns to do so in the manner of an ethnographer (though naturally, it turns out that royalists are "plus difficile" in their definition of this quality). Yet other commentators take up the idea in more obviously partisan ways. Thus another *ultra* deputy, Marie-Barthélémy de Castelbajac, in an article tellingly entitled "De l'emploi de quelques mots" (14 December 1818): "dès le principe de la révolution [...] on ôta aux mots leur véritable sens, pour leur donner une acception qui fût propre aux idées qu'on vouloit propager" (1: 512). The Revolution, it was widely agreed, had perverted the French language irrevocably; Chateaubriand himself, indeed, in his acclaimed article "De la morale des intérêts" (3 December 1818), had made a similar claim about eighteenth-century philosophy. "Nous nous égarâmes dans de coupables nouveautés de paroles," he notes, using a first-person plural that context renders at least somewhat disingenuous. For it is clear throughout that the language of the royalists remains the true language of the French people—though the word *royaliste* itself, as a correspondent of 24 November 1818 pointed out, is itself an absurd neologism: "Il étoit réservé à l'époque où nous vivons de nous apprendre cette nouveauté remarquable, que le royalisme peut être un parti dans une monarchie. Ici on croiroit [...] se faire illusion sur la valeur des mots" (1: 347). As an anonymous writer of 9 February 1819 put it, this word, along with virtually all of the political nomenclature of the age, was one of "une foule d'autres mots dont notre langue s'est enrichie, ou dont l'acception a changé, pour le malheur de tous ceux qui tiennent encore aux gothiques définitions du bon sens" (2: 287).[6]

[6] Note that this line of argument did not belong exclusively to the royalist faction. Antoine Jay, in an article of 8 March 1819 in the liberal *La Minerve*, tellingly entitled "Entendons-nous sur les mots," complained of the *ultras*' "abus des mots" (p. 272) in strikingly similar terms. See Reboul, 198-99.

This last example, though ironic (the word “gothiques” is a wry re-appropriation of a pejorative term applied to the *ultras* by their enemies), is also telling; it calls to mind the memory, evoked by Chateaubriand in his memoirs, of the comte d’Artois returning to France and speaking to the people “leur ancien langage.” Once again, the post-1830 recollection is a distorted echo of the political quarrel of 1818: the comte d’Artois’s quaint language nostalgically translates *Le Conservateur*’s doomed attempts to “correct” the linguistic anarchy of post-revolutionary France through a return to some authentic common tongue. The fantasy of intelligibility at work in this episode is dispelled, indeed, by a moment of greater lucidity—and pessimism—some pages later in the memoirs, as Chateaubriand sorrowfully formulates what his colleagues of 1818 so often proclaimed, without fully understanding: “Nous sommes revenus au temps de Babel” (1: 1099).

Conclusion: *le ci-devant Télémaque*

Responding on 5 October 1819 to a particularly purple passage of Chateaubriand’s in *Le Conservateur* the previous month, the *Écho du nord* observed that: “Le noble pair se croit encore assis sous un platane de l’Arabie, ou rêveur sur les rives du Jourdain” (qtd in Reboul 199). The jibe usefully captures how Chateaubriand’s travels and travel writing might be used politically against him: his was a mind at once foreign, frivolous, and fanciful, unsuited to the serious business of domestic politics. While *Le Conservateur* might speak the language of *la patrie*, the *Écho* implied, its key contributor had never really come home from his youthful wanderings. The tone of the passages of Chateaubriand’s memoirs dealing with the Bourbon Restoration, meanwhile, often suggests a vague sense that he would have done better not to: that the author himself, like the Bourbons whom he so elegantly describes as “inutilement rentrés dans vos palais” (2: 158), might as well have stayed in whatever lands his exile had placed him. The *Bibliographie de la France* of 1819 records a print entitled “Le ci-devant

Télémaque." The print does not appear to have survived and we may thus never know what it depicted,[7] yet its tantalizing title seems applicable to Chateaubriand in a double sense: the former aristocrat (*ci-devant*) who wanders like Telemachus will—once he returns home—still only ever be a former Telemachus.

What, finally, is the "mécanisme du rapatriement," in Berthier's phrase, that drew Chateaubriand home? In an intriguing, off-hand moment in book IX of the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, as he weighs up the pros and cons of his marriage to Céleste, Chateaubriand wonders: "N'a-t-il pas eu des circonstances [...] où, me mariant hors de France"—that is, presumably, during his exile—"j'aurais cessé d'écrire et renoncé à ma patrie?" (1: 438). Could it be the conjugal law alone that has kept our memoirist tethered to his homeland, "retenu par un lien indissoluble"—just as that same law seizes his hero René, arriving at his adoptive home "chez les Natchez"? The private, affective dimension of Chateaubriand's homecomings is, no doubt, a parallel or palimpsestic story to the political homecomings I have considered here, one that will have to be written elsewhere. But it seems noteworthy that what has been averted by the "lien indissoluble" of marriage is not only permanent expatriation, but also the abandonment of writing ("j'aurais cessé d'écrire")—as if for Chateaubriand there can be no writerly vocation, and indeed no literature, that is not underpinned by a national identity. Whatever—and wherever—one writes, it seems, one is always writing home.

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[7] Though it may well have been a caricature against the duc de Berry; a print of 1815, "Le Télémaque moderne et son Mentor," depicts the allegedly alcoholic duke as the wandering hero, and a beer-glugging Silenus as his Mentor.

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