

Romantic Memory? Forgetting, Remembering and Feeling in the Chartist

Pantheon of Heroes, c.1790–1840

Matthew Roberts

ABSTRACT This paper explores the politics of remembrance through a case study of Chartism, the British mass movement for democratic and social rights in the 1830s and 1840s. It focuses on the 'paper pantheon' of radical greats constructed by the Chartists from the perspectives of Romanticism, the powerful cultural and literary effects of which were still being felt in the 1840s. The paper highlights two linked aspects of romantic memory in Chartist heritage politics. First, the question, not of remembering, but forgetting and erasure; that is, which individuals and episodes in the radical tradition were either forgotten or consciously excluded by the Chartists. Second, particular attention is paid to recent scholarship in Romantic Studies which has explored the relationship between memory and posthumous reputation, and in doing so explores the posthumous potential of John Thelwall, Thomas Paine and William Cobbett. While the impact of Romanticism can be hardly denied and was part of the cultural inheritance of the Chartists, including the intense outpouring of feeling for heroes in the pantheon, it is important not to exaggerate its impact. Some Chartists rejected the unchecked appeals to the passions and introspection associated with Romanticism. Chartist aversion to this pull was a legacy in part of the enduring impact of radical Enlightenment and its associated affective politics. The final section explores some of the tensions between Romanticism and Enlightenment in Chartist heritage politics via a case-study of the French revolutionary C.F. Volney, and draws on recent work on the history of emotions to sketch out the affective

politics of Chartist memory, and in doing so suggests that political historians pay more attention to the politics of the passions.

Chartism, the British mass movement for democratic and social rights in the 1830s and 1840s, was profoundly shaped by the radical tradition from which it emerged. While the constituent parts of that tradition were inherited – the French Revolution, Thomas Paine, William Cobbett, for example – the processes by which these were transformed into a radical tradition were at the hands of the Chartists themselves. They eagerly appropriated and subverted many of the ritualized forms of commemoration used by elites, including the construction of an imagined pantheon of heroes, though for reasons of cost and access to the public sphere the Chartist heritage project tended to be a paper pantheon rather than one set in stone. The paper pantheon and this broader heritage project was constituted and reconstituted through ‘mnemonic practices’ and the performance of cultural remembrance: commemorative dinners and soirees which revolved around a rollcall of toasts to the memory of radical greats, pre-eminently Paine and Cobbett but supported by a much wider cast of other figures, most of whom had died in the fifty years preceding Chartism; portraiture; publishing and reading practices; the naming of Chartist children after radical greats; the regular quoting of words from the radical canon in speeches, extracts in the Chartist press and on banners – indeed the re-use of banners from earlier radical campaigns.¹ Far from being a nostalgic culture of

¹ Gordon Pentland coined the concept of ‘paper pantheon’ in ‘The Posthumous Lives of Thomas Muir’, in *Liberty, Property and Popular Politics: England and Scotland, 1688–1815*, ed. Gordon Pentland and Michael T. Davis (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 211. For loyalist, tory and whig cults, see J.J. Sack, ‘The Memory of Burke and the Memory of Pitt: English Conservatism Confronts its Past, 1806–1829’, *Historical Journal*, 30 (1987), 623–40; Alison Yarrington, *The Commemoration of the Hero 1800–1864: Monuments to the British Victors of the Napoleonic Wars* (New York: Garland, 1988); Belinda Beaton, ‘Materializing the Duke’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 10 (2005), 100–107; T.E. Orme, ‘Toasting Fox: The Fox Dinners in Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1801–25’, *History*, 99 (2014), 588–606; Emily Jones, *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). On the shift away from static sites of memory to the performance of a more dynamic concept of memory, see Ann Rigney, ‘The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between Monumentality and Morphing’, in *Cultural*

consolation, radical groups such as Chartists drew strength, legitimacy and tenacity from the traditions and heritage politics that they practiced. The amount of time and resources that Chartists devoted to their heritage is testament to the importance of memory in political and social movements.

This chapter focuses on two linked aspects of the Chartist heritage project from the perspectives of Romanticism, the literary and cultural force of which was still being felt at mid-century, with popular politics no exception.² First, it shows how the form and composition of the Chartist pantheon was shaped by a romantic aesthetic by exploring the question, not of remembering, but forgetting and erasure; that is, which individuals and episodes in the radical tradition were either forgotten or consciously excluded? As Guy Beiner has recently observed, 'While it is commonly acknowledged that memory involves both remembering and forgetting, studies of social and cultural memory have mostly focused on remembering and overlooked forgetting'.³ This theme of forgetting – or what might be more accurately described as excluding – is explored here through a case-study of the 'radical Romantic' John Thelwall (1764–1834), a hugely popular radical associated with the London Corresponding Society (LCS) in the 1790s.⁴ A number of scholars have attributed to Thelwall an enduring legacy bequeathed to

Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 345–53.

² Miles Taylor, *Ernest Jones, Chartism and the Romance of Politics, 1819–1869* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 10. See also G.S.R. Kitson Clark, 'The Romantic Element – 1830 to 1850', in *Studies in Social History: A Tribute to G. M. Trevelyan*, ed. J.H. Plumb (London, 1955), 209–39; Rohan McWilliam, 'Sweeney Todd and the Chartist Gothic: Politics and Print Culture in Early Victorian Britain', in *Edward Lloyd and His World: Popular Fiction, Politics and the Press in Victorian Britain*, ed. Sarah Susan Lill and Rohan McWilliam (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 198–215.

³ Guy Beiner, *Forgetful Remembrance: Social Forgetting and Vernacular Historiography of a Rebellion in Ulster* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 17.

⁴ A number of recent works have positioned Thelwall as a Romantic radical, e.g., Judith Thompson, 'Citizen Juan Thelwall: In the Footsteps of a Free-Range Radical', *Studies in Romanticism*, 48 (2009): 67–100; *Romantic Radical and Acquitted Felon*, ed. Steve Poole (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009); *John Thelwall: Critical Reassessments*, ed. Yasmin Solomonescu (Romantic-Circles, 2011); 'John Thelwall Special Issue', *Romanticism*, 16:2 (2010).

subsequent radical movements, including Chartism and socialism.⁵ And yet the fact remains that he was not a prominent figure in the Chartist pantheon. It may seem slightly strange to devote part of an essay to a radical who hardly featured in Chartist heritage, but forgetting and excluding can be just as revealing as remembering and including. Thus, a case-study of Thelwall is used to explore what might be termed posthumous potential in cultures of remembrance.⁶ In the 1790s Thelwall was seen by the government as one of the most dangerous radicals in the country. In the last decade or so, his historical and literary reputation has been transformed: from being a relatively obscure radical and poet known only to specialists, he has been restored to his rightful place as a major radical and literary figure in the 1790s and beyond.⁷ An exploration of why Thelwall was largely forgotten by the Chartists sheds new light on the broader question of why he was a neglected figure for so long, and, broader still, why fame does not always outlast the life of the famous.

Building on the theme of Thelwall's radical Romanticism, the second area of focus is the contested legacy and memory of Romanticism. By making use of a range of neglected manuscript material and Chartist newspapers/periodicals, this section draws on recent scholarship in Romantic Studies which has explored the problematic relationship between memory and posthumous reputation by showing how coteries, conviviality, publishing circles and print culture made authors and radical greats serve

⁵ Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes: Popular Movements in France and Britain* (London: Libris, 1989), 66; Judith Thompson, 'Introduction', in *The Peripatetic*, ed. Judith Thompson (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 15, 18.

⁶ In a recent essay Steve Poole has taken me to task for providing an insufficient explanation for Thelwall's absence in the Chartist pantheon, which I largely attributed to Chartist preference for gentleman leaders in the past as well as the present, and Thelwall's ambiguous social status did not qualify him for admission to the pantheon. While I maintain that the Chartist pantheon was mostly populated by gentleman radicals, I accept Poole's criticism that there was more to Thelwall's absence than his class status. Steve Poole, 'The Politics of "Protest Heritage", 1790–1850', in *Remembering Protest in Britain since 1500*, ed. Carl J. Griffin and Briony McDonagh (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018), 187–213.

⁷ On the rediscovery of Thelwall, see Nicholas Roe, 'The Lives of John Thelwall: Another View of the "Jacobin Fox"', in *John Thelwall: Romantic Radical*, 13–24.

the radical cause of the people beyond their own lifetimes.⁸ While the impact of Romanticism can be hardly denied and was part of the cultural inheritance of the Chartists, it is important not to exaggerate its impact: not all Chartists were keen to dress their heroes in romantic clothing. Some Chartists rejected the unchecked appeals to the passions and introversion associated with Romanticism. Romantic literature, it has been argued, was ‘the most powerful register of the period’s gravitational pull toward feeling’.⁹ Chartist aversion to this pull was a legacy, in part, of the enduring impact of the radical Enlightenment, which suggests that the ‘emotional culture of Enlightenment Britain’ did not totally collapse in the 1790s but endured.¹⁰ The cluster of ideas, attitudes and assumptions associated with the radical wing of the Enlightenment was also part of Chartism’s intellectual and cultural heritage: some of the individuals in the Chartist pantheon were prominent figures of the Enlightenment.¹¹ The final section explores some of the tensions between Romanticism and Enlightenment in Chartist heritage politics, taking as a case-study the French philosopher and revolutionary Constantin Francois Volney (1757–1820), who featured regularly in the Chartist pantheon. It draws on recent work on the history of emotions – in particular, the recasting of the Enlightenment as an affective construction – to sketch out the politics of feeling in Chartist memory.

⁸ For this characterisation of the evolution of Romantic Studies, see Joseph Rezek, ‘Romanticism in the Atlantic World’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 55 (2016), 313.

⁹ See Joel Faflak and Richard C. Sha, ‘Feeling Romanticism’, in *Romanticism and the Emotions*, ed. Joel Faflak and Richard C. Sha (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 2. The relationship between Romanticism and emotion was, of course, much more complex than this. As well as the above collection, see the special issue ‘Romanticism and Affect Studies’, *Romantic Circles Praxis Volume* (2018).

¹⁰ For the argument that the 1790s saw the collapse of ‘the emotional culture of Enlightenment Britain’ and was ‘replaced by a new approach to feeling and desire’, see Rachel Hewitt, *A Revolution of Feeling: The Decade that Forged the Modern Mind* (London: Granta, 2017), 2.

¹¹ It is worth noting that Jonathan Israel has argued that the radical Enlightenment – that wing which was committed to universal rights such as manhood suffrage – endured down to the 1848, at which point it was displaced by socialism: *The Enlightenment that Failed: Ideas, Revolution, and Democratic Defeat, 1748–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 28.

Forgetting John Thelwall

One of the most important aspects of any form of commemoration is inclusion and exclusion. Who is remembered, who is forgotten, who is absent, and who is excluded are not only generative of the pantheon but also key dynamics in the politics of commemoration. While absence, forgetting and excluding appear to be similar in some respects, in others they are quite different. It is not always clear to the historian whether absences denote forgetting or a conscious attempt to exclude which, by definition, entails a form of remembering, at least for those policing inclusion and exclusion in the pantheon. In a related way, and a further problem for the historian, ‘silences usually become visible in historical records only when they are broken’.¹² How, then, do we account for Thelwall’s absence from the Chartist pantheon? Had Chartists simply forgotten him? This seems unlikely given that as late as October 1832, Thelwall had delivered a eulogy at the graveside of his LCS colleague Thomas Hardy, at which a number of future Chartists were present.¹³ Clearly, his absence did not reflect a wider lack of interest by Chartists in the 1790s and in some of the radical leaders associated with that decade, the foremost of whom was Paine. But for preliminary purposes, it may be instructive to note some of the other absences or those who seldom made it into the pantheon from the 1790s. Neither Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Richard Price or Joseph Priestley were accorded anything more than a marginal place in the pantheon, though extracts from Wollstonecraft and Godwin did appear occasionally in the Chartist press. This appears less surprising when we recall that none of these influential radicals participated in any significant way in popular, grassroots politics, whether for reasons

¹² Matthijs M. Lok, “‘Un oubli total du passé’? The Political and Social Construction of Silence in Restoration Europe (1813–1830)”, *History and Memory*, 26 (2014), 43. On the complex relationship between remembering and forgetting, see Beiner, *Forgetful Remembrance*, 17–30.

¹³ The National Archives (TNA), Home Office (HO) 64/12, Secret service reports, 19 Oct. 1832, f. 157v.

prudential or elitist.¹⁴ Thelwall put this very clearly when he complained of Godwin's aversion to popular politics; the public mind, Thelwall sardonically retorted, was not going to be transformed 'by writing quarto volumes and conversing with a few speculative philosophers by the fire side'.¹⁵

Ironically, there may be a clue here why Thelwall was not raised to the Chartist pantheon. True, he certainly *was* a figure of grassroots popular radicalism, culminating in his impassioned speeches on the public platform at Copenhagen Fields in 1795. But the clamp-down on radicalism in the mid-1790s, which resulted in Thelwall's arrest and trial for treason (acquitted though he was) and then the 'Gagging Acts' forced him to abandon overt Jacobinism, the name given to the advocates of ultra-radicalism in imitation of the French Jacobins. Even lecturing under the guise of an historian of classical antiquity to camouflage his radicalism did not save Citizen Thelwall from the vigilante anti-radical mob. Although his radicalism was little dented, there can be no doubt that Thelwall's abandonment of platform politics and his reinvention, following his peripatetic tour of the west country, first as a recluse farmer-poet in rural Wales and then as a well-to-do elocution lecturer, did little to ensure his posthumous potential.¹⁶ None of the main radical newspapers or periodicals marked his death in 1834, much

¹⁴ Roberts, *Chartism, Commemoration and the Cult of the Radical Hero* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 21–2. Godwin enjoyed greater posthumous fame with the Owenite socialists on account, no doubt, that he had been a mentor of Owen while his philosophical anarchism and necessitarianism lent itself much more readily to the communitarian ethos of Owenism. This was also consistent with the anti-political thrust of Owenism as Godwin, like Owen, was dismissive of the potential of democratic politics to redress popular grievances. See Gregory Claeys, *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-Politics in Early British Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 33–35.

¹⁵ E. P. Thompson, *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age* (Rendlesham: Merlin, 1997), 99.

¹⁶ Penelope J. Corfield, 'Rhetoric, Radical Politics and Rainfall: John Thelwall in Breconshire', typescript of an essay published in *Brycheiniog*, 40 (2008), http://www.penelopejcorfield.co.uk/PDF%27s/CorfieldPdf14_Thelwall.pdf [accessed 16 Aug. 2019].

less contained lengthy obituaries. More revealing, though, several fashionable titles *did* note Thelwall's passing.¹⁷

Ultimately, Thelwall reinvented himself too many times and too successfully to ensure posthumous fame. Although his personal commitment to radicalism endured – hence his re-emergence as a radical journalist in the 1810s and 1820s – he did not re-establish himself as a leader of popular radicalism in the post-war years. Rather, he was a literary radical, akin to Hazlitt and the brothers Hunt of the *Examiner*, but his literary and radical output paled in comparison. And just at the very moment when he appeared to be reconnecting with metropolitan popular radicalism in the aftermath of Peterloo and the Cato Street Conspiracy, a threatened charge of conspiracy in 1822, allied to the commercial failure of his newspaper, the *Champion*, saw Thelwall distance himself once again.¹⁸ Too radical for his middle-class readers and too removed from any potential working-class radical constituency, he fell between these two stools. Thelwall ended his career as he had begun it: a figure in the world of letters, with the episode as the foremost orator of the London Corresponding Society appearing precisely as such – an episode, and an atypical one at that. In contrast to Thelwall, neither Paine nor Cobbett appeared to have abandoned radicalism, despite imprisonment, while persecution, banishment, and exile – Paine in 1792, Cobbett in 1817 – did wonders for their posthumous careers as radical heroes.¹⁹

¹⁷ *York Herald*, 8 Feb. 1834; *London Courier*, 19 Feb. 1834; *Morning Chronicle* 19 Feb. 1834.

¹⁸ Michael Scrivener, 'John Thelwall's Political Ambivalence: Reform and Revolution', in *Radicalism and Revolution in Britain, 1775–1848*, ed. in Michael T. Davis (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 70.

¹⁹ At the time of his fleeing to the USA in 1817, Cobbett was accused of cowardice by some radicals though this charge was either conveniently airbrushed out of Cobbett's posthumous career or else it was justified as Cobbett did at the time: had he remained in Britain he would almost certainly have been imprisoned (if not for sedition then possibly insolvency), a fate he had already endured in 1811 for sedition, a fate which would not have enabled him to continue serving the radical cause. George Spater, *William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 357–58. For an example of a Chartist homage to Cobbett which excused his failings, see William Lovett's appreciation in *Advocate & Merthyr Free Press*, 1 Apr. 1841.

Ironically, what also helped with Paine and Cobbett's posthumous career was the sustained vitriol of their enemies, during their lives and even after they had died. It was the loyalists on both sides of the Atlantic who did more than most to keep memories of Paine alive in the decade following his death (1809).²⁰ Thelwall lacked Paine and Cobbett's notoriety, at least by the time he died: the 'acquitted felon' label of the 1790s had long been buried beneath his reclusiveness and reinventions. What also aided Paine's posthumous life was the persecution and thousands of symbolic deaths that he had suffered in the 1790s: Paine died not once, but many times when effigies of him were fired in the spate of burnings which spread across England.²¹ In the years after Paine's death, a number of his devotees mounted defences of him – most notably Cobbett, who went from being one of Paine's arch-enemies to his greatest defender – which again did wonders for Paine's posthumous reputation.²²

A further factor in Thelwall's absence from the Chartist pantheon was that, unlike Paine or Cobbett, he was not a great writer, at least when it came to radical pamphleteering and journalism. His pungent and highly effective style on the radical platform (he was known colloquially as John 'Tellwell'), which, by definition, was more transient, did not translate effectively onto the printed page. As Hazlitt observed, possibly with Thelwall in mind, 'The most dashing orator I ever heard is the flattest writer I ever read'.²³ Here we begin to see the relative importance of print over the spoken word in securing posthumous fame: Paine and to a much lesser extent Cobbett

²⁰ Matthew Roberts, 'Posthumous Paine in the United Kingdom, 1809–1832: Jacobin or Loyalist Cult?', in *The Legacy of Thomas Paine in the Transatlantic World*, ed. Sam Edwards and Marcus Morris (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 107–132.

²¹ Frank O'Gorman, 'The Paine Burnings of 1792–93', *Past and Present*, 193 (2006): 111–55.

²² Corinna Wagner, 'Loyalist Propaganda and the Scandalous Life of Tom Paine: "Hypocritical Monster!"', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 28 (2005): 97–115.

²³ Thompson, *Romantics*, 158. For Thelwall's lecturing and the democratic culture he sought to create through it, see Jon Mee, *Print, Publicity, and Popular Radicalism in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), ch. 6.

were not great orators like Thelwall, but that mattered little for their posthumous careers as they achieved political immortality through their pens in a way that Thelwall was unable.²⁴ Unfortunately for the latter, the depths of his radicalism as expressed in his poetry, and the heights of his literary ability, did not match that of Byron and Shelley, both of whom were firm favourites with many Chartists. It may be telling that the closest Thelwall came to having a group of followers was in rural Wales where, if hostile reports and legend are to be believed, during his time there he kept the radical embers burning by participating in secret readings of Paine and other radical writers in the mountains of South Wales. Reports from spies and informers allege that Thelwall had been present at Merthyr in September 1800, and at Hereford where he was a member of a Jacobin group who used to meet at the Crown and Sceptre.²⁵ Thus, it was oral tradition and the memories of these secret mountain gatherings, which were retold in the nineteenth century and gained with the telling, that may have kept memories of Thelwall alive amongst Welsh radicals.²⁶

It is revealing that those who were commemorated the most by Chartists tended to be gentlemen, broadly defined.²⁷ The only notable exceptions appear to have been Paine and Cobbett. Chartists sometimes emphasized the humble origins of Paine and Cobbett, but this was rare – perhaps because the enemies of the two men had often

²⁴ Hazlitt, for one, judged that ‘Mr Cobbett speaks almost as well as he writes’. William Hazlitt, *The Character of William Cobbett* (London, 1835), 12.

²⁵ TNA, HO 42/51, Home Office papers, disturbance correspondence, Samuel Homfrey to Home Office, 23 Sept. 1800; HO 42/43, Edward Edwards to Home Office, 30 Apr. 1798.

²⁶ Williams, *Artisans and Sans Culottes*, 66.

²⁷ Roberts, *Chartism*, 19, 75, 171. Manon Nouvian has recently challenged this argument, but the fact remains that most of those in the pantheon were gentlemen, the only notable exception being Samuel Holberry who, despite the understandable anger and grief which greeted his death, never came close to rivalling the place of the longer established gentlemen figures in the pantheon. The other working-class figures that Manon cites as member of the Chartist pantheon were only admitted after the movement had largely ceased to exist as a mass movement. Manon Nouvian, ‘Defiant Mourning: Public Funerals as Funeral Demonstrations in the Chartist Movement’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 24 (2019), 208–26.

drawn attention to their plebeian backgrounds as a way of discrediting them.²⁸ Even the prickly artisan William Lovett, who worked tirelessly to keep Chartism in the hands of his fellow working men, in a eulogistic article on Cobbett only mentioned his humble origins in passing.²⁹ This is not that surprising as neither Paine nor Cobbett could, in truth, be described as working class, certainly not by the time of their deaths. The working-class class identity of those in the pantheon was also further obscured by the tendency to label luminaries as ‘nobles of nature’.³⁰ The visual culture of Chartism also reflects this obscuring. Portraits of Paine and Cobbett issued by Chartists invariably depicted their subjects as gentlemanly, in part to underline the movement’s respectability via its patrimony.³¹ In short, there was nothing explicitly comparable to the American posthumous cult of Benjamin Franklin as the ‘working man’s symbol’, traced by Gordon S. Wood, in which artisans and middling sorts read into his humble birth and self-made status a validation of productive labour and upward social mobility.³² Franklin himself, we might note, was invoked by Chartists much less often than George Washington, whose life lent itself much more readily to Romantic brushstrokes than Franklin’s did. Indeed, it was painted in these terms by and for the Chartists: ‘that illustrious soldier of freedom, and emancipator of America’ began a series of biographical articles on Washington, commenced in the first issue, no less, of

²⁸ See, for example, the satirical *Life of William Cobbett* by James Gillray (1809) which lampooned Cobbett’s humble background and his upstart pretensions. The way in which the loyalist press and satirists parodied Paine’s occupation as a stay-maker is well known.

²⁹ *English Chartist Circular*, No. 8, 1841.

³⁰ E.g. *Northern Star*, 5 Feb. 1842 (Paine birthday commemoration at Merthyr Tydfil), 7 Feb. 1846 (Paine commemoration at Ashton-under-Lyne), 4 Jan. 1845 (Cartwright, Hunt and Cobbett described as ‘nobles of nature’ at Rotherham).

³¹ Malcolm Chase, ‘Building Identity, Building Circulation: Engraved Portraiture and the *Northern Star*’, in *Papers for the People: A Study of the Chartist Press*, ed. Joan Allen and Owen R. Ashton (London: Merlin, 2005), 26.

³² Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

the *English Chartist Circular*.³³ Paine, and to a lesser extent Cobbett, had died as scourges of the establishment, and their careers illustrated not so much the triumph of the working-class man but the frustrated, talented man who, despite having risen to the status of gentleman, was still persecuted by the establishment. By the time that Thelwall died, he was no such scourge. Ironically, it was only after his career as a radical leader was over that he truly achieved gentlemanly status as an elocution lecturer.

The rarity of Chartist celebration of Paine and Cobbett's working-class origins is also consistent with the composition and emphases within the wider pantheon. In this respect, Chartist heritage politics was hardly congruent with the Romantic pastoral rediscovery of the people. On the other hand, it was congruent in the sense that gentleman radicals, in the present as well as the past, like lyric poets spoke for the people and drew attention to their plight. This was most evident with Cobbett whose sympathy for the poor was grounded in his knowledge and politicisation of popular culture, and in *Rural Rides* at least addressed to readers who were not of the people.³⁴ Even those Chartists like Thomas Cooper and Ernest Jones, who went to great lengths to sketch out a 'people's history' for the Chartists, which certainly included working-class groups such as medieval peasants, still tended to place most emphasis on gentleman radicals and reformers. In an amended version of Charles Cole's poem *The Spirit of Wat Tyler*, the Carmarthen Chartist leader Hugh Williams situated Tyler (a blacksmith by trade) mainly in the tradition of gentleman leaders: Thomas Muir and the 'Scotch Martyrs' of the 1790s, the United Irishmen Lord Edward Fitzgerald and Robert Emmet,

³³ *English Chartist Circular*, No. 1 & 2. The main articles on Washington were by Charles Phillips, and extracts from Guizot's life, translated by Paul Parnell. A little under a year later, this newspaper began a much fuller, serialized life of Washington, which commenced in issue 48.

³⁴ Ian Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For these sorts of tensions in Romanticism's relationship to the people and popular culture, see Philip Connell and Nigel Leask, 'What is the People?', in *Romanticism and Popular Culture in Britain and Ireland*, ed. Philip Connell and Nigel Leask (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3–48.

while the lowly origins of Tyler, John Archamber (one of the leaders of an insurrection against Henry VII), Jack Cade and Robert Kett (eponymous leaders of rebellions in, respectively, 1450 and 1549) are mentioned either in passing or not at all.³⁵ To take another example, in his periodical *The Midland Counties' Illuminator*, Thomas Cooper serialized the 'Lives of the Commonwealthsmen' John Hampden, Sir John Elliot and John Pym.³⁶ Chartists rarely explicitly invoked the Levellers, though no doubt this had less to do with their social composition (the most prominent leaders were, in any case, gentlemen) and rather more with the dangerous levelling connotations that the name could still excite amongst the upper classes, reactivated during the 1790s when Jacobin and leveller were synonymized.³⁷

There were few toasts to the plebeian radicals of the LCS; indeed, the LCS itself does not feature as prominently as one might expect for this obvious progenitor of Chartism, but then its closest descendant, the LWMA, for reasons which will become clearer later on, were reluctant commemorators. Thelwall, along with Thomas Hardy and the other radicals who were acquitted of treason in the 1790s, *were* commemorated each year by a group of gentleman radicals into the 1850s (the 'friends of trial by jury' and 'friends of parliamentary reform, led by the ex-Unitarian radical W. J. Fox), for upholding the principle of trial by jury, the reports of which duly appeared in the Chartist *Northern Star*. But these were commemorative events organized by groups largely extraneous to Chartism.³⁸ The trial of the Newport rebels – the leaders of the South Wales Chartist rising in November 1839 – for treason and the return of a guilty verdict in January 1840 led some Chartists to make comparisons with the treason trials

³⁵ Hugh Williams, *National Songs and Poetical Pieces* (London: Henry Hetherington, 1839), 13–21.

³⁶ *Midland Counties Illuminator*, 20 Mar., 3 and 17 Apr. 1841.

³⁷ As Fred Donnelly has argued, when radicals – including Thelwall – did invoke the Levellers they locked them 'carefully within a Whiggish view of the seventeenth century conflict'. F.K. Donnelly, 'Levelling in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Albion*, 20 (1988), 268.

³⁸ *Operative*, 11 Nov. 1838; *Northern Star*, 12 Nov. 1842, 11 Nov. 1843, 8 Nov. 1851.

in the 1790s, but no biographical details of Thelwall or a rediscovery of his writings ensued.³⁹ In death, Thelwall was the property of bourgeois radicalism, a direction in which he had been moving since the 1790s as demonstrated by his connections with the anti-war networks in the first decade of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ Thelwall was never the subject of a Chartist toast; Hardy only once; and no extracts from Thelwall's writings appeared in the Chartist press.⁴¹ Far more attention was paid to the 'Martyrs of Liberty' – the victims of the Scottish sedition trials of 1793 and 1794 – perhaps because they were found guilty and transported rather than acquitted. But once again none of the Scottish Martyrs – Muir, Gerald, Skirving, Palmer, Margarot or Watt – could be described as working class.⁴²

The most popular figure from this period was the Irish nationalist Robert Emmet who, in the words of Chartism's first historian, R. G. Gammage, 'was a young gentleman with good promise of success in life', until, that is, his failed rebellion of 1803 led to his execution at the young age of twenty five.⁴³ The portrait of Emmet issued by the *Northern Star* was by far the most sought after of all its portraits.⁴⁴ Chartists seem to have been no less fascinated by gentlemen leaders in the past than they were in the present; few working-class heroes were raised to the pantheon. Emmet was a Romantic radical *par excellence*: young, idealistic, foolhardy (some Chartists were fully alive to the flaws in his Romantic character) and a tragic death at the hands of the English state and,

³⁹ *Northern Liberator*, 23 Nov. 1839 ('Insurrection in Wales'), 18 Jan. 1840 ('Mr Frost').

⁴⁰ E. P. Thompson, 'Hunting the Jacobin Fox', *Past & Present*, 142 (1994), 114–5.

⁴¹ *Northern Star*, 16 Nov. 1839 (toast to Hardy at Ashton).

⁴² The memoirs of Thomas Hardy were, however, serialized in the *English Chartist Circular*. For Chartist commemoration of the Scottish Martyrs, see Roberts, *Chartism*, 12–13; Pentland, 'The Posthumous Lives of Thomas Muir'.

⁴³ *Robert Gammage: Reminiscences of a Chartist*, ed. W.H. Maehl (Manchester: Society for the Study of Labour History, 1983), 38.

⁴⁴ Chase, 'Building Identity', 38.

as we shall see in the next section, an exemplar of posthumous life-writing.⁴⁵ As William Farish, a Scottish Chartist weaver, recalled of Emmet in his autobiography: ‘the fervour of his youthful patriotism and the poetic passion of his sweetheart Miss Curran ... throw a halo around a memory which is always attractive to sentimental and sympathetic natures’. Farish framed his copy of the *Northern Star* engraving of Emmet and hung it in his bedroom.⁴⁶

Romancing the Pantheon

The absence of Thelwall from the Chartist pantheon was certainly not symptomatic of a wider rejection of Romanticism, at least not for some Chartists. Three key aspects of Chartist pantheonism clearly registered its enduring cultural impact. First, building a paper pantheon around a set of flawed radical individual leaders who were accorded heroic status, amongst whom numbered some of history’s most Romantic heroes, and were commemorated as such by the Chartists, was quintessentially, if rather stereotypically Romantic. For example, in addition to Emmet, also in the pantheon were the United Irishman Lord Edward Fitzgerald who died during the 1798 Irish rebellion, Wat Tyler, William Tell and Andreas Hofer, ‘The Tell of the Tyrol’. Second, the invoking, publishing, and reading of Romantic authors, notably Byron and Shelley. The short-lived Chartist *Sheffield Working Man’s Advocate* published extracts from Shelley’s *Queen Mab*, interestingly opening with the stanza from book III: ‘Nature rejects the monarch, not the man’, which may have reflected the less than subtle republicanism of the periodical. But it was not just Byron and Shelley who were invoked, but also occasionally William

⁴⁵ For Emmet’s life retold as a cautionary tale against physical force Chartism, see *Chartist Circular* (Scotland), 10 Jul. 1841.

⁴⁶ William Farish, *The Autobiography of William Farish: The Struggles of a Handloom Weaver* (London: Caliban, 1996 [1889]), 50.

Wordsworth, Robert Southey and Robert Burns. Occasionally, Chartists even partook of the 'literary tourism' and pilgrimages by visiting the birthplaces or the former residences of romantic writers that was such a marked feature of literary commemoration in the Victorian period.⁴⁷ The neo-Jacobin, ultra-Chartist London Democratic Association placed at the head of its constitution and rules not a quotation from Paine or a French revolutionary, but an extract from Robert Southey's dramatic play *Wat Tyler*.⁴⁸ When Thomas Cooper tried to encourage the Leicester Chartist William Jones to compose a long poem, he entreated him to 'Read - think', and he asked: 'What books have you? - a Shakespeare, a Milton, a Byron, a Keats, a Shelley? Do you get Scott's novels from any of the circulating libraries?'⁴⁹

The third register of Romanticism was the literary formation and cultural productions of a number of Chartist imaginative writers such as Ernest Jones, Thomas Cooper and G.W.M. Reynolds.⁵⁰ The cultural stylistics of several Chartist leaders, notably Feargus O'Connor, Drs John Taylor and Peter Murray McDouall along with the young George Julian Harney, also hinted strongly at the influence of Romanticism with their

⁴⁷ For literary tourism, see *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Nation-Building and Centenary Fever*, ed. Ann Rigney and Joep Leerssen (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014). *Sheffield Working Man's Advocate*, 3 Apr. 1841; *Advocate and Merthyr Free Press*, Aug. 1840; R. J. Richardson, *Political Almanac* (London, 1840), copy in TNA, HO 45/55; Taylor, *Ernest Jones*, 79; Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8–9, 47; *Robert Lowery: Radical and Chartist*, ed. Brian Harrison and Patricia Hollis (London: Europa, 1979), 116. For the contested legacies and invoking of Burns by Chartists, see Christopher A. Whatley, "It is said that Burns was a Radical": Contest, Concession and the Political Legacy of Robert Burns, ca. 1795–1859', *Journal of British Studies*, 50 (2011): 653–54; Ann Rigney, 'Embodied Communities: Commemorating Robert Burn, 1859', *Representations*, 115 (2011), 71–101.

⁴⁸ *The Constitution of the London Democratic Association* (London, 1838), copy in TNA, HO 44/52, f. 221.

⁴⁹ Leicestershire Record Office (LRO), DE 2964/22, Papers of William Jones, Thomas Cooper to William Jones, 30 Sept. 1845. See also Ian Haywood, 'The Literature of Chartism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*, ed. Juliet John (Oxford, 2016), 87–8.

⁵⁰ Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chs 5–6; *G. W. M. Reynolds: Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Politics and the Press*, ed. Anne Humpherys (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Taylor, *Ernest Jones*; Simon Rennie, *The Poetry of Ernest Jones: Myth, Song and the 'Mighty Mind'* (Oxford: Legenda, 2016).

flare for the melodramatic or exotic appearances and eccentricities of dress and style.⁵¹ The Romantic facets of these national leaders is well known to historians and literary scholars, less well known are the ways in which Romanticism was registered by local figures in the movement through poetry and song, figures such as Hugh Williams or William Jones – cited above, the framework knitter-cum-poet and hymn writer whose outputs, which included pastoral and lyrical poems, were frequently published in Cooper's Chartist periodicals. One of Jones's 'Ode's' was printed alongside Shelley's defence of poetry in an issue of the *Chartist Pilot*, which, *inter alia*, emphasized the important role played by poetry in activating feelings – key to successful political mobilization in Shelley's view.⁵² Cooper, unsurprisingly, took the view that poetry and song were crucial to the movement. As he informed William Jones in 1845: 'You may guess that I am bent on resurrecting Chartism in earnest, in London, - and, therefore, intend to introduce singing.'⁵³ In an earlier letter, Cooper elaborated a little more fully that he valued songs, and in particular the radical verses that Jones had composed and sent him 'as a means of restoring, if possible, the spirit that seems nearly too extinct' amongst Chartism's followers.⁵⁴ But it was not just amongst the 'labour laureates' that the influence of Romanticism was registered. Even the down-to-earth Salford Chartist R.J. Richardson composed a monody to the memory of his infant son, Harry, who

⁵¹ *McDouall's Chartist Journal and Trades Advocate*, 7 Aug. and 4 Sept. 1841 (Byron), 28 Aug. 1841 (Shelley), 18 Sept. 1841 (Southey); P. Pickering and S. Roberts, 'Pills, Pamphlets and Politics: The Career of Peter Murray McDouall (1814–54)', *Manchester Region History Review*, 11 (1997): 35. I explore the Romantic and Gothic facets of O'Connor (and the 'Tory-Radical' Richard Oastler) in my book, *Democratic Passions: The Politics of Feeling in British Radicalism, 1809–1848* (forthcoming, Manchester: Manchester University Press). For Taylor, see W. Hamish Fraser, *Dr John Taylor, Chartist: Ayrshire Revolutionary* (Trowbridge: Ayrshire Archaeological & Natural History Society, 2006), 16, 25.

⁵² *Chartist Pilot*, 22 Dec. 1843. Jones' poetry deserves more extended treatment. For a selection of his poems, see *The Anthology of Leicester Chartist Song, Poetry & Verse*, ed. Ned Newitt (Leicester: Leicester Pioneer Press, 2006).

⁵³ LRO, DE 2964/20, Papers of William Jones, Thomas Cooper to Jones, 30 Jun. 1845.

⁵⁴ LRO, DE 2964/17, Cooper to Jones, 4 Mar. 1845.

tragically died aged seven months in July 1844.⁵⁵ The monody, a poem which laments another's death, had classical origins but had been revived by the Romantics, notably in Coleridge's monody on the death of Thomas Chatterton.⁵⁶

The invention of tradition and myths of (re)creation 'were central to the Romantic imagination'.⁵⁷ Legitimizing appeals to the glorious democratic past of the English Constitution, of benevolent monarchs like Alfred the Great and the recovery of Saxon liberties from the foul imposition of the Norman Yoke were each incarnations of the Romantic creation of historical myths by the Chartists.⁵⁸ It would be inaccurate, however, to assume that Chartist heritage productions necessarily viewed the past through rose-tinted spectacles. Remembering traumatic episodes, often reactivated by events in the present, such as the Peterloo Massacre or the exile, execution and tragic death of radical martyrs could be just as Romantic.⁵⁹ When news arrived that the Sheffield Chartist Samuel Holberry had died – one of the few working men to be admitted to the Chartist pantheon – as a result of the deplorable conditions he had suffered in prison, the affective response of Chartists was similar to that which a previous generation of radicals had experienced in the aftermath of Peterloo: shock, anger, betrayal and grief. Writing to his friend Thomas Cooper, the Chartist lecturer

⁵⁵ Archives+, Manchester Central Library, R. J. Richardson Papers, 'Monody on the Death of Harry Richardson', July 1844, f. 195.

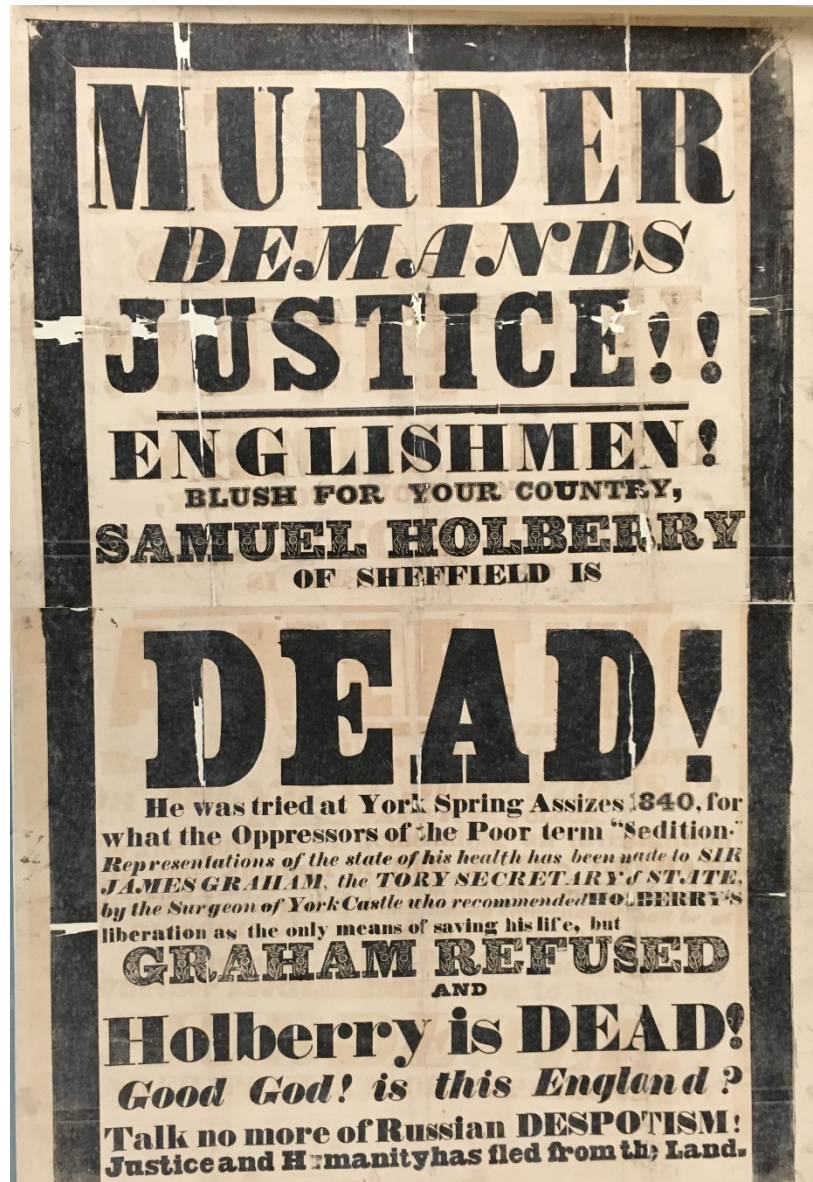
⁵⁶ The generic shift from satire to melodrama in popular radical imaginative literature, traced by Sally Ledger and Mike Sanders in the transition from regency radicalism to Chartism, was also, arguably, indicative of the aesthetic purchase of Romanticism: Mike Sanders, 'No Laughing Matter: Chartism and the Limits of Satire', in *Nineteenth-Century Radical Traditions*, ed. J. Bristow and J. McDonagh (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016), 21–35.

⁵⁷ Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, 'Introduction', in *Romanticism in National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 3.

⁵⁸ *Charter*, 17 Mar. 1839. See also Christopher Hill, 'The Norman Yoke', in *Puritanism and Revolution* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1969), 119–25; James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790–1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), ch. 1; Peter Spence, *The Birth of Romantic Radicalism: War, Popular Politics and English Radical Reformism, 1800–1815* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996).

⁵⁹ Joseph Cozens, 'The Making of the Peterloo Martyrs, 1819 to the Present', in *Secular Martyrdom in Britain and Ireland: From Peterloo to the Present*, ed. Keith Laybourn and Quentin Outram (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018), 31–58.

Figure 1



'Murders demands Justice', broadside, n.d. [1842]

Source: The National Archives, MFQ1/265

Figure 2

**WORKING MEN
OF BARNESLEY!**
Stop!--Hold one Moment!!

It being understood that **THIS DAY (Tuesday), the 6th Instant, is the Day appointed by the Authorities of the Town to enact the Bloody**

Drama of Peterloo!

And sacrificing the lives and liberties of the People to their diabolical Tyranny; **WE, the Committee, desirous of frustrating their base, bloody, and brutal Designs, request your cooperation by abstaining from any Public Demonstration of your moral Force, at the present at least, but that you will**

**Meet on SUNDAY MORNING next,
AT ST. MARY'S CHURCH,**

To assert your RIGHTS to those Places of Divine Worship, which have been built FOR YOUR USE.

BARNESLEY, August 6th, 1839.

JOHN ELLIOTT, PRINTER, MAY-DAY GREEN, BARNESLEY.

Public Record Office
Reference: HO. 40/51
Copyright Information: Not to be reproduced without the permission of the Public Record Office, London.

'Working Men of Barnsley!', 6 Aug. 1839.

Source: The National Archives, HO 40/51, f. 361.

Jonathan Bairstow conveyed his affective state on learning of Holberry's death (during the middle of a lecture at Sheffield): 'I was struck dumb, I staggered, my head reeled to and fro like a drunken man's – I felt mad.'⁶⁰ A funeral hymn for Holberry composed by the Leicester Chartist J.H. Bramwich, while expressing the movement's sadness, struck a more defiant note: 'Tho' Freedom mourns her murder'd son, / And weeping friends surround his bier; / Tho' tears like mountain torrents run, / Our cause is water'd by each tear.'⁶¹ One Chartist broadside implicitly linked Holberry's death with Peterloo by exclaiming 'Murder demands Justice', a refrain that was repeatedly heard in the aftermath of Peterloo. The genre of the broadside is distinctly melodramatic (see Figure 1). Another broadside – addressed to 'Working Men of Barnsley!' warned Chartists not to attend a mass meeting lest the authorities repeat the 'Drama of Peterloo' (Figure 2).

Like all Romantic heroes, the members of the pantheon were flawed characters and Chartists occasionally dwelt on this as seen previously with Emmet, invariably excusing the less savoury aspects of their characters as products of the vilification and persecution they endured or the exceptional circumstances in which they found themselves.⁶² The idealism – a key Romantic characteristic – that Chartists read into their heroes had less to do with the personalities of individual figures and rather more with a transcendent timelessness that they were part of an ongoing struggle for liberty that would never die. William Jones, whom we have already encountered, captured this in his hymn 'Immortality', which is a paean to the radical patriots of bygone days, not one of whom is named; all are subsumed under the identity of patriot, 'spirits of the dead'. Jones also captured how the heritage politics of Chartism was no mere exercise in

⁶⁰ TNA, TS 11/602, Treasury Solicitor's Papers, confiscated letters of Thomas Cooper, Jonathan Bairstow to Thomas Cooper, 22 Jun. 1842.

⁶¹ Sheffield Local Studies Library, MP 1216 S, J. H. Bramwich, 'Funeral Hymn, Samuel Holberry', Jun. 1842. For the choreographing of Holberry's funeral, see Novian, 'Defiant Mourning'.

⁶² W. J. Linton, *The Life of Thomas Paine* (London: James Watson, 1842), 43

consolation, of turning inwards and backwards; akin to what some have read into Romanticism's 'transmutation of radical political idealism into purely imaginative revolution and redemption'.⁶³ Even in death, and by extension in defeat, Jones sounds the note of eventual, inexorable triumph: 'Oh how gloriously they fought, how triumphantly they fell!' The reward of the fallen patriots was 'immortality of fame'.⁶⁴ Thus, the radical tradition invented by the Chartists was empowering: they stood on the shoulders of giants; were part of a movement that was bigger than its participants and which had history on its side. Speaking at a joint meeting of Chartists and Irish Repealers at Manchester in 1848, O'Connor relayed to the crowd how his uncle, the United Irishman Arthur O'Connor, had told him as a young boy not to mourn the deaths of Lord Edward Fitzgerald and Robert Emmet for 'every drop of blood spilled of theirs, ten thousands patriots would arise'.⁶⁵ Far from being individualizing, the radical tradition invented by the Chartists was a collaborative and social practice: commemorative dinners, communal readings of radical greats, and by engaging in critical dialogue over the composition of the pantheon and with the ideas of those in the pantheon with fellow Chartists in classes and through the medium of the press. While the pantheon may have been populated with individual radical greats, they were symbolically made the communal property of the people.⁶⁶

The round of dinners, teas and soirees complete with rollcalls of toasts to departed heroes, which punctuated the Chartist calendar, could be intensely sentimental and melodramatic occasions, as could the poems and songs composed for

⁶³ Aidan Day, *Romanticism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 90.

⁶⁴ LRO, DE 2964/7, Papers of William Jones, 'Immortality', by William Jones, n.d.

⁶⁵ *Northern Star*, 25 Mar. 1848.

⁶⁶ I develop these points at a greater length in Roberts, *Chartism*, 68–71, 207–8.

these occasions.⁶⁷ R. Beith's song 'Spirits of the Mighty Dead' (a variation on an American song of that name from the war of 1812) invoked radical greats as protectors and tonics: 'Shield my devoted head / From the ills that wound me, / Milton, Shelley, Byron, Burns, / The weary heart-delighting...Franklin, Washington and Paine banish woe from every land! Ye set all hearts in motion'.⁶⁸ Expressions of sorrow and mourning at the passing of heroes, whose 'like will never be seen again', could form part of Chartist commemorative rituals, and were accompanied by songs and poems such as the 'Death of Henry Hunt', often tellingly called 'laments'. A dinner held at Ashton-under-Lyne in November 1838 to commemorate the birthday of the regency radical Henry Hunt concluded with a line from Thomas More's poem about Robert Emmet, recited by the local Chartist leader William Aitken: 'The tear that we shed, tho' in secret it rolls, / Shall long keep his memory dear in our souls'. Other Romantic notes on these occasions could also include enduring feelings of anger and outrage over the loss of life at Peterloo and the unrepentant authorities who inflicted death and injury on the defenceless crowd, feelings that were heightened by the presence of Peterloo veterans and paintings of the Massacre. Some of the toasts were 'drunk to in solemn silence', while the toasts themselves could be melodramatic.⁶⁹ When the juvenile members of the Ashton-under-Lyne National Charter Association performed Robert Emmet's trial, the report in the *Northern Star* observed that 'everyone concerned acquitted himself so well, that the hearers could not but be struck with the reflections of reality – indeed,

⁶⁷ On the relationship between melodrama and popular politics, see Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1994), ch. 14; Rohan McWilliam, 'Melodrama and the Historians', *Radical History Review*, 78 (2000), 57–84.

⁶⁸ *Chartist Circular* (Scotland), 13 Mar. 1841. For the original American rendition, see Jennifer Clark, *The American Idea of England, 1776–1840: Transatlantic Writing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 107.

⁶⁹ *Northern Star*, 17 Nov. 1838.

while the character of Emmet was being performed, tears were seen trickling down many cheeks'.⁷⁰

The ritualized commemoration of radical heroes, the mourning at their passing and the repeated invoking of their names by Chartists hints at the collaborative relationship between the dead and the living that has been the subject of recent work in Romantic Studies on posthumous life writing. Several Romantic authors were extremely anxious about their posthumous reputations. As Mark Sandy has shown, this is a theme that some Romantic authors explored in their own writing.⁷¹ It is hardly surprising that radical greats who were most anxious in their own lifetimes about immortality were more likely to gain admission to the future Chartist pantheon. Few radical leaders were more concerned with their legacy than Paine and Cobbett, a facet, it could be argued, of their more general and widely acknowledged arrogance. In fairness to both Paine and Cobbett it was the power of their prose and the way in which they directly addressed posterity that began their posthumous careers, as we saw in the comparison with Thelwall. 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest', Paine wrote in *Common Sense*.⁷² Even though Paine spent the last decade of his life living in obscurity, so well had he laid the groundwork for his posthumous life, in part by trumpeting his self-importance, that this did little to dent his immortality. Cobbett was just as, if not more, concerned in his last years with his legacy, even calling some of his final works *Legacies*. As he explained in the dedication (to Sir Robert Peel) appended to his *Legacies to Labourers*, which was an attack on the New Poor Law:

⁷⁰ *Northern Star*, 31 Oct. 1840.

⁷¹ Mark Sandy, *Romanticism, Memory and Mourning* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013). See also H.J. Jackson, *Those Who Write for Immortality: Romantic Reputations and the Dream of Lasting Fame* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015).

⁷² *The Thomas Paine Reader*, ed. Michael Foot and Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin), 80.

I call it a LEGACY, because I am sure, that, not only long after I shall be laid under the turf; but after you shall be laid there also, this little book shall be an inmate of the cottages of England, and will remind the working people, whenever they shall read it, or see it, or hear it, that they once had a friend, whom neither the love of gain on the one hand, nor the fear of loss on the other, could seduce from his duty towards God, towards his country, and towards them.⁷³

The archetypal posthumous radical was, of course, Robert Emmet. We have already seen something of the affective intensity with which Chartists remembered him. This intensity was heightened not just by the tragic circumstances of Emmet's death, but also by the way he directly engaged posterity in his defiant court-room speech:

Let no man write my epitaph ... let no man dare to calumniate me. Let my character and my motives repose in obscurity and peace, till other times and other men can do them justice; Then shall my character be vindicated. Then may my epitaph be written.⁷⁴

As Emmet's huge popularity with the Chartists implies, this injunction was not just taken up by subsequent generations of Irish nationalists, but also by British radicals. By contrast, those radicals who were less preoccupied with their own immortality – John

⁷³ *Cobbett's Legacy to Labourers* (London: Charles Griffin, 1870 [1835]), 31. See also *Cobbett's Legacy to Parsons* (London: Charles Griffin 1870 [1835]).

⁷⁴ On the making of the 'Emmet Legend' see *Reinterpreting Emmet: Essays on the Life and Legacy of Robert Emmet*, ed. Anne Dolan, Patrick M. Geoghegan, Darryl Jones (Dublin: UCD Press, 2007).

Thelwall, at least in political terms – were less assured of a place in the pantheon.

Thelwall clearly wrote poetry with posterity in mind.⁷⁵ But this was clearly not the case when it came to his role as a radical leader. When it comes to pantheons, there is no room for modesty.

Posthumous life-writing often takes on a collaborative relationship between the dead author and those in the present who perpetuate that life through a ‘web of reception’ in the form of biographies, especially the genre of lives and letters, elegies, epitaphs, tombstones, monuments, and sculptures.⁷⁶ Tim Chiou has persuasively shown in a study of Romantic posthumous life-writing that ‘the posthumous endurance of the artist is contingent not on his works alone, but also on a large community of friends, family, colleagues and readers committed to the ethics of remembrance.’⁷⁷ There is an obvious parallel here with Chartist commemorative practices. A recurring refrain, and one that goes all the way back to the Roman poet Horace, is the notion that a writer’s oeuvre represents a monument in itself, and one far more lasting, interactive and dynamic than a flat, inert monument. Chartists made this very point when recommending the works of radical greats.⁷⁸ The advertisement columns by radical booksellers in the Chartist press are littered with editions, old and new, of works by radical greats (often interspersed with Romantic prose and poetry). Paine and Cobbett were fortunate that they had devoted followers, some of whom became Chartists, who went to great lengths to keep their names before the public, not least by ensuring that

⁷⁵ Jon Mee, ‘The Dungeon and the Cell: The Prison Verse of Coleridge and Thelwall’, in *John Thelwall: Romantic Radical*, 107.

⁷⁶ For ‘webs of receptions’, see Tom Mole, *What the Victorians Made of Romanticism: Material Artefacts, Cultural Practices, and Reception History* (Princeton, 2017).

⁷⁷ Tim Yi-Chang Chiou, ‘Romantic Posthumous Life Writing: Inter-stitching Genres and Forms of Mourning and Commemoration’, (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2012), 14. Chiou defines posthumous life writing as ‘anticipatory death writings, works of mourning, commemorative life writings, memorial aids, and belated defences’, 20.

⁷⁸ *The Political Works of Thomas Paine* (London: T. M. Wheeler, 1846), n.p., copy held by the Working Class Movement’s Library, Salford.

their works continued to be published well into the nineteenth century.⁷⁹ Cobbett left behind a veritable mini-family publishing business dedicated to editing, publishing and selling his works. Thelwall was poorly served in respect of this 'assisted authorship'; his second wife managed to publish the first volume of his biography, but the second volume detailing his life from 1795 never appeared.⁸⁰

Feeling for Volney

As the preceding discussion suggests, Chartism clearly registered the long reach of Romanticism. But it did so critically. For example, some of those Chartists who used Shelley's poetry did so with discrimination. Casie LeGette reaches similar conclusions by showing how radical publishers and editors in the early nineteenth century used extracts from Romantic era texts for their own political ends, effectively remaking those texts in the process.⁸¹ There were also some Chartists who were deeply uneasy, if not resistant, to what we would now recognize as some of the key characteristics of Romanticism: the unchecked expression of feeling (or passions in the language of the period); nostalgia and a romantic attachment to the past; cultural nationalism; and last, but by no means least, the cult of the individual-hero.⁸² This aversion is hardly surprising given the close association between certain strands within Romanticism and conservatism, reaction and counter-revolution.⁸³ The linking thread in much of this

⁷⁹ Malcolm Chase, 'Cobbett, his Children and Chartism', in *William Cobbett, Romanticism and the Enlightenment*, ed. James Grande and John Stevenson (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2015), 123–36.

⁸⁰ Corfield, 'John Thelwall in Breconshire', 17. For 'assisted authorship', see Jackson, *Those Who Write for Immortality*, 23.

⁸¹ Jen Morgan, 'The Transmission and Reception of P. B. Shelley in Owenite and Chartist Newspapers and Periodicals', (PhD thesis, University of Salford, 2014); Casie LeGette, *Remaking Romanticism: The Radical Politics of the Excerpt* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017), 1.

⁸² For Chartist resistance to cultural nationalism, see Matthew Roberts, 'Daniel O'Connell, Repeal and Chartism in the Age of Atlantic Revolutions', *Journal of Modern History*, 90 (2018): 9–10.

⁸³ Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background, 1760–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 180–1.

anti-Romantic current concerned the destructive potential of inflaming the passions. Those Chartists who were exercised by this followed those Enlightenment thinkers who posited a fundamental separation between reason and feeling, which led them to create and practice what might be termed an ascetic radicalism. This ascetic radicalism owed a great debt to luminaries of the radical Enlightenment, in particular Godwin and Wollstonecraft, notwithstanding their relative absence from the pantheon.⁸⁴

Godwin and Wollstonecraft had been particularly anxious about the passions and their destructive potential in the public sphere, perhaps because both were acutely aware of how dangerous passions could be from their own private lives.⁸⁵ Reacting against the sentimentalism of the late eighteenth century, they had rejected the deterministic view that humans were entirely or largely helpless victims of their passions; such a view, they held, was dangerous as it reinforced passivity. The rejection of obfuscating, effeminate and enervating sentimentalism had formed the basis of Wollstonecraft's rebuttal of Edmund Burke's *Reflections* in her *Vindication of the Rights of Men*. In Wollstonecraft's view, Burke had elevated passions to a nauseating and saccharine level in his attack on the rationalism of Richard Price's effusive support of the French Revolution. For Wollstonecraft and other 'rational' radicals, this base appeal to feelings was dangerous as it threatened to undermine the radical cause. Humans needed to control their passions through the exercise of individual rational will, which would lead to the acquisition of disciplined habits (like temperance). For Wollstonecraft

⁸⁴ Brian Harrison, 'Teetotal Chartism', in *The People's Charter: Democratic Agitation in Early Victorian Britain*, ed. Stephen Roberts (Merlin, 2003), 45.

⁸⁵ Rob Boddice, *A History of Feelings* (London: Reaktion, 2019), 118. Godwin would later reject the excessive rationalism of his puritan inheritance and assert the primacy of feeling over reason as the most useful and proper determinant of human behaviour. Rowland Weston, 'Politics, Passion and the "Puritan Temper": Godwin's Critique of Enlightened Modernity', *Studies in Romanticism* 41 (2002), 448.

in particular, men and women had the same basic capacity for thinking and feeling.⁸⁶ There is some evidence that Chartists were aware of these aspects of Wollstonecraft's thinking. The *Midland Counties Illuminator* printed an extract from the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in which Wollstonecraft emphasized the political evils and social miseries which flowed from baser passions: 'The desire of dazzling by riches, the pleasure of commanding sycophants, and many other complicated low calculations of self-love, have all contributed to overwhelm the mass of mankind'.⁸⁷ Such evils, Wollstonecraft inveighed, were an affront to reason. In another extract from the *Vindication*, reprinted in the Scottish *Chartist Circular*, Wollstonecraft complained of how 'mere Gothic grandeur' exhibited by aristocracy with 'stupid pomp before a gaping crowd' had dulled reason.⁸⁸

All this was grist to the mill for self-improving, respectable moral-force Chartists, such as William Lovett, who dismissed in Paineite tones the irrationality of 'gothic ignorance' (in Lovett's words), with its romantic preoccupation with historical precedents, baubles, pageants and 'military spirit' which 'tends to Gothicize a nation...the bane of all happiness'.⁸⁹ In place of this gothic irrationality, moral-force Chartists sought to re-establish an age of reason: 'We felt anxious to redeem by reason what had been lost by madness and folly', in the words of the Address of the National Association, set up by Lovett as a successor organization to the London Working Men's Association (LWMA).⁹⁰ This ascetic radicalism was increasingly accented within Chartism following the early setbacks it suffered in 1838-9, and was conceived as an

⁸⁶ Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), 56-7. See also Hewitt, *A Revolution of Feeling*, 41-2, 54, 63-9.

⁸⁷ *Midland Counties Illuminator*, 13 Feb. 1841.

⁸⁸ *Chartist Circular* (Scotland), 2 Jan. 1841.

⁸⁹ *London Dispatch*, 1 Oct. 1837; *Chartist Circular*, 3 Oct. 1840.

⁹⁰ William Lovett, *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett in his Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge and Freedom* (1876; London: Kegan Paul, 1976), 209.

antidote to the unchecked passions of the masses, whipped up by demagogues such as Feargus O'Connor who made 'furious appeals to their passions' and 'spurn[ed] with Gothic ferocity all knowledge, truth of justice'.⁹¹ In January 1839, the LWMA moved a resolution declaring that 'all appeals to the passions of the multitude tending to excite to violence and disorder can only be productive of evil'.⁹² The moderate voices in the first Chartist Convention similarly rebuked neo-Jacobins such as Harney and Dr Taylor who were, in glorying in the names of Marat and Robespierre, dangerously inflaming the passions of the people.⁹³ The *National Association Gazette*, implied what their model of the ideal leader was in a biographical article on George Washington: 'if he had strong passions, he had learned to subdue them, and to be moderate and mild.'⁹⁴ This also explains why temperance, self-improvement and respectability were central to this ascetic radicalism. One of the guiding principles of the moral-force Chartism of the LWMA was of the need for the working classes to exercise restraint and master their passions to demonstrate their fitness for the franchise.

In whipping up the masses into frenzied advocates of physical force, demagogues like the Reverend Joseph Rayner Stephens, Richard Oastler and O'Connor were no friends of the working class, at least in the view of the LWMA. The latter body was averse to the movement's reliance on gentleman leaders like O'Connor, which they denigrated as irrational and immature 'man-worship'.⁹⁵ This charge could also extend to the pantheon. Bronterre O'Brien, Chartism's greatest theoretician, believed that man-

⁹¹ *London Dispatch*, 25 Feb. 1838; *Northern Star*, 25 Sept. 1841.

⁹² British Library, Add MS 37,773, Working Men's Association Minutes, 2 Jan. 1839, f. 135.

⁹³ *Northern Star*, 27 Apr. 1839.

⁹⁴ *National Association Gazette*, 16 Jul. 1842. For a similar appreciation of Washington, see the poem in the *Scottish Patriot*, 19 Oct. 1839.

⁹⁵ On the problems of 'man worship', see the series of articles under that name which appeared in the *Northern Star*, the first of which was published on 7 Jan. 1843. Tellingly, even the author of this article reached for great men – Washington and Tell – when warning against the dangers of 'man worship'. These leaders were acceptable because they 'check[ed] every disposition of the people to God [them]'. *Northern Star*, 21 Jan. 1843.

worship of Paine was a barrier to critically engaging with his ideas, which, in his view, were outdated by the 1830s.⁹⁶ But even the LWMA struggled to rid itself entirely of ‘man-worship’, though their ideal type of radical leader was somewhat different. On occasion, Lovett delivered, recited, and possibly composed, poetry which commemorated radical greats.⁹⁷ In his autobiography, Lovett recalled how he ‘cherished’ the memory of both Hunt and Cobbett ‘for, without seeking to extenuate the failings of either, I regard them as two noble champions of the rights of the millions who...stamped the necessity *for reform* so deeply into the heart and mind of England’.⁹⁸ O’Brien, in effect, had his own pantheon, though in his case it was populated largely by one radical great: Robespierre. To O’Brien at least, he was not engaged in a romanticized worship of the French Revolutionaries; rather he was trying to rescue their reputations from lies told by their enemies, past and present. ‘The day will come’, O’Brien told the readers of his newspaper, the *Operative*, ‘when the injured shades of Marat and Robespierre will be avenged of the outrages inflicted on their memories by lying romances, dubbed historians’.⁹⁹ Yet, there is a sense in which the LWMA and O’Brien, in denigrating ‘man worship’ were not giving Chartists their due. Sentimental they may have been when the occasion demanded, but this did not necessarily act as a barrier to critical engagement with the ideas of those in the pantheon. For example, many Chartist admirers of Paine were quick to distance themselves from the latter’s views on religion. There were also many Chartists who followed Paine in dismissing the irrationality of Romantic attachments to the past.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ *Poor Man’s Guardian*, 8 and 15 Dec. 1832; *Northern Star*, 27 Mar. 1841.

⁹⁷ *London Dispatch*, 11 Dec. 1836.

⁹⁸ Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, 44–5.

⁹⁹ *Operative*, 21 Apr. 1839.

¹⁰⁰ Roberts, *Chartism*, 112–116.

There was, then, an anti-Romantic current within Chartist heritage politics. True, it was hardly dominant, but it does suggest that the tension, highlighted in Romantic Studies, between Enlightenment and Romanticism, was still being played out in the 1840s at the level of popular politics. As revisionist work has underlined, these two cultural movements were never fixed, stable and antithetical; rather, they were heterogeneous and to some extent interlocking and chronologically overlapping. The Enlightenment was not about unbridled reason and cold rationality at the expense of feeling, just as Romanticism was not an expression of unbridled feeling. As historians of emotion have reminded us, the ‘age of reason’ was itself an affective construction: Paine, the apostle of the ‘age of reason’ appealed to sentiments repeatedly in his works, and he ‘denied that there was any conflict between the rational and the emotional’.¹⁰¹ The notion of a fundamental separation between reason and feeling was also a construction that concealed the passions, and was, in some respects, a retrospective construction invented by those like Godwin and Wollstonecraft who were anxious about the sentimentalism of their era.¹⁰² Romanticism was, it has been argued, born from *within* the Enlightenment, and can more accurately be seen as a reaction to a particular kind of Enlightenment – one that was associated with an over-refined Neo-classicism. Several Romantics fused Enlightenment thinking with what we have come to identify as Romantic currents.¹⁰³

The inability of those ‘rational’ Chartists like Lovett to fully liberate themselves from the romantic memory that played such an important generative role in Chartist

¹⁰¹ Boddice, *History of Feelings*, 112–3; Nicola Eustace, *Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 445.

¹⁰² William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 142; Hewitt, *Revolution of Feeling*, 188.

¹⁰³ Day, *Romanticism*, ch. 3; Alexander Regier, *Fracture and Fragmentation in British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); idem, *Exorbitant Enlightenment: Blake, Hamann and Anglo-German Constellations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

heritage politics can be interpreted as evidence of the complexities, interactions and tensions between Enlightenment and Romanticism. The pursuit of reason itself could be an affective experience: after all, a fundamental component of asceticism is suffering and pain as hundreds of incarcerated Chartists, including Lovett, knew only too well. Hence, the coining of the concept of affective asceticism by historians of emotion.¹⁰⁴ We should also be wary of the binary posited between reason and passion in the ascetic radicalism of those like Lovett when much that was passed off as reason could, in fact, be seen as disgust – at the adulation of the masses for Feargus O’Connor, for example. This hybridity was also reflected, and in part created, by working-class reading practices, which were far from uniform: ‘as a group and as individuals they consumed the racy and the religious, the lyrical and the sensational’.¹⁰⁵

We can observe some of these tensions and hybrids in the popularity of the French philosopher and revolutionary Constantin Francois Volney, a second-tier figure in the Chartist pantheon, another figure of the radical Enlightenment. Reading Volney’s *Ruins; or a Survey of Revolutions of Empire* (1791) was a formative experience for a number of future Chartists, especially those who had trodden the path of freethought into the movement. Volney had been ‘no agitator among the sans culottes’,¹⁰⁶ but his memory and his *Ruins*, unlike Thelwall, had been kept alive since the 1790s by ultra-radical freethinkers, an inheritance claimed subsequently by Chartists who occasionally displayed Volney’s portrait at commemorative events.¹⁰⁷ The ubiquity of references to Volney’s *Ruins* in metropolitan radicalism in the early 1830s, along with the

¹⁰⁴ Barbara H. Rosenwein and Riccardo Cristiani, *What is the History of Emotions?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), 76.

¹⁰⁵ Rob Breton, ‘Genre in the Chartist Periodical’, in *The Working-Class Intellectual in Eighteenth and Nineteenth century Britain*, ed. Aruna Krishnamurphy (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 112.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 197.

¹⁰⁷ Epstein, *Radical Expression*, 195; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 98–9; *Sheffield Iris*, 22 Oct. 1839.

freethinking lectures and discussions surrounding it, suggest that historians have seriously underestimated the centrality of an infidel current in popular radicalism at this time – even at the height of Reform bill agitations.¹⁰⁸ The government were certainly alive to this current and saw it as one of the manifestations of declining piety and virtue, hence the recourse to royal proclamation for the encouragement of piety and virtue in 1830 which included the issuing of a table of penalties for profanes, sabbath-breaking and immorality.¹⁰⁹

In the early 1830s, the French socialist Pierre Baume, then residing in London, printed an extract from the *Ruins* (chapter 15, on which more below), as part of a tract advertising his ‘French Optimist Chapel’ in Windmill Street, Finsbury, a radical school of free discussion, which found its way into the Home Office files as a seditious publication. Baume also appended an English translation of the French *La Marseillaise* hoping no doubt to capitalise on the recent French revolution.¹¹⁰ Thomas Cooper later recalled how, as a young man, ‘he fell in love’ with Volney’s *Ruins*.¹¹¹ The radical infidel Richard Carlile and the mercurial defrocked Robert Taylor began their Sunday lectures at the Rotunda, the premier venue of London radicalism in the early 1830s, by reciting chapters from Volney’s *Ruins* much as a religious service began with readings from the Bible.¹¹² The future leaders of the LWMA were regular attenders and speakers at the Rotunda and Optimist Chapel, as the secret service files attest. Volney’s *Ruins* gained

¹⁰⁸ The best treatment of metropolitan working-class radicalism in the early 1830s is Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and His Times* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1979), ch. 14.

¹⁰⁹ For a copy of the proclamation and the table of penalties, and evidence of its circulation, see Nottingham Archives, CT 12/55/20, *A Proclamation by the King*, 28 June 1830, and accompanying *A Table of Penalties*.

¹¹⁰ TNA, HO 64/17, Seditious publications, 1830–31, ‘A Revolution in England’, f. 77. Extracts from Volney were also serialised in the radical press, e.g. *Cosmopolite*, 21 Apr. 1832.

¹¹¹ *Address to the Jury by Thomas Cooper* (Leicester: T. Warwick, 1842), 13. Henry Vincent also listed Volney as a formative influence: *Nottingham Review*, 9 Apr. 1841, as did Linton: W. J. Linton, *Memories* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1895), 26.

¹¹² TNA, HO 64/11, Secret Service reports of seditious meetings, 1830, fos 147, 170.

renewed notoriety in the mid-1830s as it was a formative influence on Alibaud, the Frenchman who had tried to assassinate Louis Philippe in 1836, whose actions won plaudits from some Chartists.¹¹³ Volney's *Ruins*, along with his *Lectures on History*, and *Law of Nature* were frequently advertised in the Chartist press. The metropolitan trio of John Cleave, James Watson and Henry Hetherington, along with Abel Heywood of Manchester, were selling Volney's *Ruins* in cheap instalments for as little as 2d.¹¹⁴ Watson also included several extracts from Volney in his encyclopaedic periodical *The National: A Library for the People*.¹¹⁵

Based on Volney's tour of Ottoman Egypt and Greater Syria between 1782 and 1785, *Ruins* was, in part, a study in comparative religion, which highlighted irreconcilable contradictions between belief systems. To Volney this was evidence that all religions were man-made, the product of history and culture, and could be traced back to 'human needs or natural experiences...objectified in deities, thence abstracted from their original impulse, and exploited as serviceable mysteries by priestcraft and by privileged orders'.¹¹⁶ Thus, revealed religion was bogus, divisive and served no other purpose than to enslave mankind. *Ruins* is essentially a plea for deism and freethought, and an attack on priestcraft, political exclusion, unproductive labour, and personal greed. Further, *Ruins* can also be read as an extended essay on the destructive potential of the passions. Volney singles out 'unbridled desires', 'the perpetual play of passions', 'the inordinate desire of accumulation' as evils responsible for the decline of empires. More specifically, 'under the name of *aristocracy* the state has been tormented by the passions of the wealthy and the great'. Monarchy and aristocracy survive by appealing

¹¹³ *London Dispatch*, 25 Dec. 1836; *Champion*, 1 Jan. 1837.

¹¹⁴ *Cleave's London Satirist and Gazette of Variety*, 9 Dec. 1837.

¹¹⁵ *The National: A Library for the People*, ed. W.J. Linton (London: James Watson 1839), 95, 142, 157, 187, 245.

¹¹⁶ E. P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 199–200.

to the 'egotism that divide[s] mankind ... he flattered the vanity of one, excited the jealousy of another, favoured the avarice of a third, inflamed the resentment of a fourth, irritated the passions of all'. So important were the passions in Volney's estimation that they furnish the motor of history: the rise and fall of empires 'have sprung from an eternal circle of passions'.¹¹⁷

The popularity of *Ruins* with Chartists has been attributed to the persistence of, *inter alia*, 'enlightenment moral philosophy'.¹¹⁸ While this was clearly a factor, another was that *Ruins* was 'drenched in the new Romanticism'.¹¹⁹ Some of this drenching may have derived from the exuberance and embellishment brought to the original text by the early English translations before Volney, seeing how garbled the translations were, superintended a new translation. But it is possible that the original translation was the one read by some Chartists.¹²⁰ Either way, there is no denying that there are Romantic themes. The protagonist is a lonely and depressed wanderer amongst the ruins of former eastern empires whose 'heart was oppressed with sorrow and indignation' not just at the decay he witnesses but by the prospect of his own civilization withering which 'brought tears into my eyes'. He wishes the ruins could speak and tell of why former glorious empires decayed. And so it proves: the protagonist is confronted by an apparition who enables him to transcend his earth-bound form, by literally transporting him into outer space where, ranging backwards and forwards in time, he is versed in the eternal, transcendent natural laws of the creator-God. If the content of Volney's *Ruins* was Romantic, so, too, was the form with its ruins motif, lyrical mode, and hybrid genre – part philosophical treatise, part poem and part novel. This stylistic ambivalence is

¹¹⁷ Constantin Francois Volney, *The Ruins, or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empire* (Otley: Woodstock Books, 1791 [2000]), 25, 29, 34, 36–7.

¹¹⁸ Tom Scriven, *Popular Virtue: Continuity and Change in Radical Moral Politics, 1820–70* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 15–18.

¹¹⁹ Gwyn A. Williams, 'Romanticism in Wales', in *Romanticism in National Context*, 15.

¹²⁰ For a comparison of the various translations, see Richard Carlile's *Lion*, 25 July 1828.

characteristic of the Romantic aesthetic.¹²¹ As with other exponents of radical Enlightenment, Volney's deployment of reason as an antidote to political corruption, religious authority and societal atrophy was not constructed in opposition to feeling. As Alexander Cook has argued, Volney transcends the dichotomies of reason and sentiment by showing how the pursuit of 'reason could teach people that the path to virtue was also the path to happiness'.¹²²

The Chartists themselves contributed to this splicing of Enlightenment with Romanticism by including readings of Volney's *Ruins* at commemorative events, which as we have seen could be very sentimental affairs. A dinner at Ashton-under-Lyne to commemorate Henry Hunt's birthday concluded with a reading of the infamous chapter 15 of *Ruins*, the 'New Age', the most politically radical chapter of the book in which the people confront the privileged.¹²³ Extracts were reprinted in the Chartist press. Henry Vincent's *Western Vindicator* even included a Welsh translation of chapter 15 for its Welsh readers, a practice continued by the Welsh-medium *Udgorn Cymru*, most likely using the Welsh translation undertaken in the 1790s.¹²⁴ Vincent had already, implicitly at least, signalled the importance of Volney by including an extract from chapter 15 as early as the second issue of the *Western Vindicator*. Printed on the front page, this extract was clearly no 'filler' of spare column inches; appearing next to a

¹²¹ For Volney, the *Ruins*, and its pre-Chartist reception in Britain, see: Alexander Cook, 'Reading Revolution: Towards a History of the Volney Vogue in England', in *Anglo-French Attitudes: Comparisons and Transfers between English and French Since the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Christophe Charl, Julien Vincent and Jay Winter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 125–46; Sanja Perovik, 'Lyrical in Britain; Empiricist in France: Volney's Divided Legacy', in *Historical Writing in Britain, 1688–1830*, ed. Ben Dew and Fiona Price (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), 127–44.

¹²² Cook, 'Reading Revolution', 128, 130.

¹²³ *Northern Star*, 17 Nov. 1838. For other recitals of Volney's *Ruins*, see *Northern Star*, 16 Oct. 1841 (City of London), 1 Jun. 1844 (Bethnal Green), 17 Oct. 1846 (Camberwell).

¹²⁴ *Chartist Circular* (Scotland), 28 Dec. 1839; *Western Vindicator*, 20 Apr. 1839; *Udgorn Cymru*, 1 Apr. 1841, copy in TNA, HO 45/54, f. 47; *London Democrat*, 13 Apr. 1839; *Chartist Pilot*, 7 Dec. 1844. The Chartist freethinker James Watson appended chapter 15 to *A Brief Sketch of the Life of C.F. Volney* (London: James Watson, 1840). For the Welsh translation in the 1790s, see Gwyn A. Williams, 'Morgan John Rhys and Volney's *Ruins of Empire*', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 20 (1964), 58–65.

letter from the Welsh Chartist leader John Frost, in which the central message was an attack on unproductive labour. Chapter 15 not only reinforces this critique but recasts Volney's work as a politically radical text, rather than a freethinking religious text. By only republishing or reciting chapter 15, the Chartists conveniently erased the geographical and temporal specificities of Volney's *Ruins*, including what some have regarded as its orientalism. In addition, focusing on the *Ruins* rather than the life of Volney also conveniently preserves the latter's radical credentials, dented somewhat by his subsequent association with Napoleon and French imperialism.¹²⁵

The popularity of chapter 15 is further evidence of how Chartist heritage politics was not merely backwards looking, but also directly concerned with linking the past, present and future in symbolically empowering ways. Having thoroughly depressed the protagonist with visions of why and how previous empires ended in ruins, he is then transported to the future in chapter 15 where the apparition shows him the beginnings of the people rising up against the privileged, casting them out and creating a new society based on productive labour. Chapter 15 is distinctly millenarian in tone, as is the thrust of the whole book which 'carries the reader forward on a wave of enthusiasm, not to a politic wisdom of the world, but to the vision of a "New Age" in which men will shed their warring religions and attain brotherhood in clear-eyed self-knowledge'.¹²⁶

The London radical freethinker and pornographer William Dugdale published a complete edition of Volney's works, complete with portrait, and advertised it in the *Northern Star* alongside some of the most popular romances and gothic fiction of the day which he stocked in his bookshop on Holywell Street. Few other radicals

¹²⁵ *Western Vindicator*, 2 Mar. 1839. For this approach to reprinting excerpts, see LeGette, *Remaking Romanticism*, 1–12; Matthew Roberts, 'Labouring in the Digital Archive', *Labour History Review*, 78 (2013): 113–26. For a useful overview and critique of Volney's orientalism, see Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Press, 2010), ch. 8.

¹²⁶ Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 200.

personified to the extent Dugdale did of the contested legacies and blurring of Enlightenment, Romanticism, philosophy and pornography.¹²⁷ It is unfortunate that the Chartists were silent on Volney's wider *oeuvre*, particularly his *Law of Nature*, included in Dugdale's complete edition, as Volney outlined a moral code of personal conduct that touched on the need to discipline the passions and appetites which would have resonated with moral-force Chartists. The Chartist freethinker James Watson also conjoined Enlightenment and Romanticism in his bookshop and in the advertisements he placed in the Chartist press, in which the works of Volney appeared next to Shelley's *Queen Mab*. This was fitting given that Shelley reproduced Volney's account of his visits to Syria and Egypt in *Queen Mab*.¹²⁸ It is quite conceivable that it was formative encounters with Shelley's *Queen Mab* that led Chartists to Volney, or possibly via Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as Volney's *Ruins* was one of the texts read by the creature: Chartists were certainly familiar with *Frankenstein* as it is referenced in numerous speeches and the press.¹²⁹ Volney's popularity with the Chartists, then, was a manifestation of that heady brew of rationalism, millenarianism and religious enthusiasm that was such a marked feature of the 'age of revolution'.¹³⁰

Conclusion

¹²⁷ *Northern Star*, 6 Apr. 1844. For Dugdale, see Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), ch. 10.

¹²⁸ *Cleave's Penny Gazette*, 7 Jul. 1838; *Northern Star*, 9 Sept. 1843.

¹²⁹ E.g., *Charter*, 27 Jan. 1839; *London Dispatch*, 13 Jan. 1839; *Northern Star*, 2 Jun. 1838, 17 Jul. 1841; Feargus O'Connor, *A Series of Letters from Feargus O'Connor, Esq., Barrister at Law, to Daniel O'Connell, Esq., M.P. containing a review of Mr. O'Connell's conduct during the agitation of the question of Catholic emancipation, together with an analysis of his motives and actions, since he became a member of Parliament* (London: Henry Hetherington, 1836), 29, 33, 43.

¹³⁰ McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, viii; Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3–8, 14; Philip Lockley, *Visionary Religion and Radicalism in Early Industrial England: From Southcott to Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 166–8.

Addressing the Hull Working Men's Association in September 1837, and reaching his peroration, the charismatic Chartist lecturer Henry Vincent asked his audience: 'For whom lived Volney, Voltaire, Mirabaud, Rousseau, Paine, Bentham, Cartwright, Byron, Shelley, Godwin, Cobbett?' '[T]hey loved, struggled, and died for universal man', Vincent responded. Vincent's cast and his style are further evidence of the blending of Enlightenment and Romanticism. At the same time, we have seen how the boundaries between Enlightenment and Romanticism were mapped onto an affective politics which pitted reason against feeling, illustrating the importance of feeling in popular politics and the illuminating potential of the history of emotions. Vincent's concluding injunction to his audience was just as revealing: 'we will build up upon their ruins the great temple of democratic freedom, beneath whose capacious arch shall be promoted and protected the universal happiness of the great family of man'.¹³¹

Vincent's pantheon, like that of the wider Chartist movement, was clearly a paper one, which had certain advantages such as portability and greater curatorial ownership and freedom for individuals to populate as they saw fit. Vincent even took part of his paper pantheon into prison in the form of Cobbett's works which he read in the early hours of each morning.¹³² The statues and monuments that were such a marked feature of elite culture in Britain and elsewhere, were conspicuous by their absence in Chartism, and in British radicalism more generally.¹³³ In addition to the significant barriers of cost and access to the public sphere, this absence may also have reflected, and indeed reinforced, the shifting and heterogeneous nature of the Chartist paper pantheon. There was no equivalent of an 'authorized heritage discourse' operating in Chartism, with the

¹³¹ *London Dispatch*, 17 Sept. 1837.

¹³² People's History Museum, Manchester, Henry Vincent Papers, VIN 1/1/16, Henry Vincent to John Minikin, 1 June 1839.

¹³³ Antony Taylor, 'Whatever happened to all the heroes? The monumental failure of British plebeian radicalism, c.1850-1920' (unpublished essay).

movement's leaders and organizations trying to determine the form and content of its heritage politics.¹³⁴ As befits a democratic movement, the heritage politics emerged just as much from below as it did from above. Inclusions and exclusions in the paper pantheon there certainly were, but as the case-study of Thelwall suggests, a whole raft of factors – some of them contemporary to the lives of the radical greats, some contemporary to those remembering and forgetting – account for presence and absence in the pantheon of political and social movements. By drawing on recent work in Romantic Studies on posthumous life-writing, we have seen how posthumous potential was dependent, in part, on the extent to which historical figures initiated a dialogue with posterity, but also on a dedicated group of followers who work collaboratively to further posthumous careers. Paine and Cobbett – and even Volney to some extent – had great posthumous potential; Thelwall did not. To return to Vincent one last time. His metaphorical allusion to a future temple of democratic freedom is a reminder that commemoration, the invention of tradition and heritage politics are often just as forward-looking as they are backwards. In this, and in so much else, the Chartists were heirs, custodians, creators and, on occasion, prisoners, of Romantic memory.

¹³⁴ Roberts, *Chartism*, ch. 4.