

LITERARY TRANSMISSION, EXILE, AND OBLIVION: GUSTAV VON SCHLABRENDORF MEETS HENRY CRABB ROBINSON

Philipp Hunnekuhl

*Gustav von Schlabrendorf (1750-1824) grew up in Silesia and spent the second half of his life in Paris, where he became a hub in a far-reaching network of foreigners as well as French people. He witnessed and initially embraced the French Revolution, was imprisoned during the Terror and narrowly escaped the guillotine. Disillusioned with the course of the Revolution and disappointed in Napoleon, Schlabrendorf, still in Paris, published anonymously during the first decade of the nineteenth century a number of books and pamphlets against the Emperor-General. One of these, his *Napoleon Buonaparte wie er leibt und lebt, und das französische Volk unter ihm* (1806), was translated anonymously into English by Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867). Robinson was another hub in the same pan-European network to which Schlabrendorf belonged. Their shared network eventually enabled Schlabrendorf and Robinson to meet in person, in 1817. A closer look at the circumstances of this meeting reveals not only that Schlabrendorf and Robinson shared political and philosophical convictions, but also that Robinson undertook his transmission of Schlabrendorf's work according to a set of criteria that place him at the vanguard of literary criticism at the time.*

On 3 September 1817, the Polish-German expatriate Gustav von Schlabrendorf (1750-1824) welcomed the Englishman Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867) into his room in the Hôtel des Deux-Siciles, Rue de Richelieu, Paris. The two men had never before met in person. The lively conversation that ensued prompted Robinson to record the meeting in his "Travel Diary" later the same day, thus creating a first-hand account that has so far been overlooked by Schlabrendorf's

biographers and editors of Robinson's writings.¹ Robinson's account is not only a further source of information concerning Schlabrendorf's life. When read in the context of both men's activities as writers, it also serves to illustrate the dynamics of a pan-European network of literary transmission existing during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Unbeknownst to Schlabrendorf, Robinson had been the anonymous translator of, and critical commentator on, Schlabrendorf's work, which had also been published anonymously. The twofold quality of this anonymity meant that, bizarrely, it could not be lifted by either party, unless by accident or outward interference. Hence, when Robinson and Schlabrendorf parted after two hours of "highly interesting conversation" about the French Revolution, philosophy and politics, they were still oblivious to the fact that their literary paths had crossed before – and they were to remain so for the rest of their lives.

Schlabrendorf in Robinson's "Travel Diary" (1817)

Robinson's "Travel Diary" entry in itself may function as a general introduction to the life and character of Schlabrendorf, who is now a neglected figure, especially outside of Germany and France. Robinson begins as follows:

Prof[esso]r Froriep called on me – He then took me to see a very remarkable character with whom I spent abo[u]t 2 hours in a highly interesting conversation He is by birth a Pole aged nearly 70, his name & title Count Schlubbendorf –

Schlabrendorf, the son of a Prussian government official, was born in Szczecin and grew up in Silesia. The intermediary mentioned here is Ludwig Friedrich

¹ Henry Crabb Robinson, "Travel Diary," 29 vols., vol. 5 (1817 and 1843), 3 September 1817, Dr Williams's Library, London, manuscript. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent quotations refer to this unpublished diary entry (cited as TD). I wish to thank the Trustees of Dr Williams's Trust for their permission to quote from Robinson's manuscripts, as well as the library's Director, Dr David L. Wykes, and Conservator, Ms Jane Giscombe, for their support in making these materials available to me. I am also grateful to the German Research Foundation (DFG) and Queen Mary University of London for the fellowships that enabled me to carry out the research for this essay, and to James Vigus and Timothy Whelan for sharing their transcriptions with me. The on-going Robinson editorial project aims to make his writings accessible in full; see www.crabbrobinson.co.uk for further information. I shall hereafter refer to Dr Williams's Library as DWL.

von Froriep, at that point a high-ranking healthcare official at Weimar.² When Froriep was first made professor of medicine at Jena in 1802, Robinson, a Dissenter and thus excluded from the English universities, was about to become a student there. They eventually met in 1804, after Froriep had returned from a sabbatical to Paris, during which he may well have made the acquaintance of Schlabrendorf.³ The most significant conclusion that the above passage grants, however, is that Robinson was then completely unfamiliar with the name Schlabrendorf. Robinson's five-year stay in Germany (1800-1805) and related manuscripts leave no doubt that his command of German, the language of conversation between him and Schlabrendorf, was second to none. Even the slightest familiarity with the distinctive name Schlabrendorf would have prevented the substantial misspelling, seemingly based on an off-handed transcription of sound, in the "Travel Diary." Nor does Froriep appear to have made the spelling of the name explicit.

Robinson goes on to describe the "small & very dirty room" in which Schlabrendorf had lived for the past thirty years, with the exception only of the period of his imprisonment during the Terror. While Schlabrendorf's unkempt appearance blended in with the setting, his personality stood out:

I beheld a venerable man, dressed in a sort of bedgown of dark colour'd satin – With [light] shoes on & no stockings, And I suspect too that he was

- ² There are a number of other mutual contacts in Schlabrendorf and Robinson's pan-European network, for instance Caroline von Wolzogen, Schiller's sister-in-law and an author in her own right. Robinson had known her well during his Jena years and she is mentioned repeatedly in his "Memorandum-Book for 1804-05," DWL, a manuscript diary to be published for the first time as part of my forthcoming edition: *The Early Diaries of Henry Crabb Robinson*, ed. Philipp Hunnekuhl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
- ³ Hertha Marquardt, *Henry Crabb Robinson und seine deutschen Freunde: Brücke zwischen England und Deutschland im Zeitalter der Romantik*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1964-67) 2:54. Marquardt here also mentions Robinson's meeting with Schlabrendorf. Uncharacteristically, however, she appears unaware of the "Travel Diary" entry, as she cites from the first edition of Robinson's writings, entitled *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, ed. Thomas Sadler (London: Macmillan, 1869). The relevant passage in Sadler is loosely based on a passage from Robinson's autobiography, written in 1851, which somewhat skews the original "Travel Diary" account of 1817: Henry Crabb Robinson, "Reminiscences," 4 vols. (1817) 2:212-13, DWL, manuscript. The passage from the *Reminiscences* now spells the name, almost correctly, as "Schlabendorf," yet still does not link him to Robinson's 1806 translation of Schlabrendorf's work, discussed below.

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literally a Sans culotte – Tho' his dress was dirty And his perfectly grey beard whiskers & [bushy] hair had a slovenly appearance yet his face & hands were clean – And his whole air & tone of voice were those of a Gentleman – He has piercing yet mild eyes And his nose is straight small & handsome – His lips were so bewhiskerd that I could not ascertain their shape

(TD).

This characteristic combination of asceticism bordering on self-neglect and warm hospitality is well documented, but it is also symbolic of Schlabrendorf's republican cosmopolitanism, as he went on to explain to Robinson. Robinson, by this point, must have told Schlabrendorf of the years he had spent at Frankfurt and Jena, and perhaps also his subsequent spells as a war correspondent for the London *Times* in Danish Altona (1807) and Coruña (1808-09). Schlabrendorf hence asserted that

As a man [...] who has lived in the world And in different countries you will take no offence [Anstoss] at the singularity of my appearance – beard &c – Where there is independ[en]ce of character & honour, the exterior is of no importance –

(TD).

The diary entry does not reveal whether Robinson agreed. (He probably did not.) Yet he evidently found Schlabrendorf's claim as to his "independ[en]ce of character & honour" amply confirmed, for

the convers[atio]n assumed a very interest[in]g char[acte]r And the Count jumping into the midst of things – talked philosophical on points of morals & politics – His style was very good And his vivacity quite youthful – His language & thoughts very unusual & bespeaking originality of char[acte]r –

(TD).

Robinson thus anticipates the verdict of Theodor Heuss (the historian-turned-first-President-of-the-Federal-Republic-of-Germany) that Schlabrendorf, amidst all his eccentricities, manifested the "judicious wisdom of a free spirit and the essence of a moral force."⁴ Talking "philosophical on points of morals & politics"

⁴ Theodor Heuss, *Schattenbeschwörung: Randfiguren der Geschichte*, ed. Friedemann Schmoll (Tübingen: Klöpfer & Meyer, 2009) 108. All translations are mine.

with Robinson would have involved, sooner rather than later, Immanuel Kant, since Robinson had been the leading disseminator of Kant in England still during Kant's lifetime. He rectified, for instance, Thomas Beddoes's misconception that Kant's notion of the *a priori* constituted a revival of the concept of innate ideas, and with equal correctness explained that Kant's moral philosophy was based on the inevitable incompleteness of knowledge.⁵ Robinson's informal efforts to spread Kant's philosophy – involving debates with Hazlitt, Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Thomas Holcroft, among others – are also beginning to emerge.⁶

Schlabrendorf proceeded to tell Robinson of "his first arrival in France, at the commencem[en]t of the revolution," adding that "He had been in England before the revolution for a few years." After studying law, governance and philosophy at Frankfurt (Oder) and Halle, Schlabrendorf had inherited the family fortune on the death of his father. This enabled Schlabrendorf to live in France, Switzerland and then England, pursuing his intellectual curiosity and cosmopolitanism, with a particular interest in political constitutions.⁷ In England, he forged friendships with the radical John Horne Tooke, the philosopher Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and the future Prussian reformer Karl vom Stein, among others.⁸ After settling in Paris in late 1787, Schlabrendorf became a hub within a network of foreigners, including Mary Wollstonecraft and Georg Forster (both discussed elsewhere in this volume).⁹ But Schlabrendorf quickly extended his network to include French contacts, especially Girondins such as Brissot, Condorcet and Mercier, but also Sieyès.¹⁰ This allegiance eventually led to Schlabrendorf's denunciation and arrest, as Robinson's account explains, quoting Schlabrendorf's own words:

⁵ For Robinson's groundbreaking letters on the philosophy of Kant, see his *Essays on Kant, Schelling, and German Aesthetics*, ed. James Vigus (London: MHRA, 2010) 28-55. For Robinson and Beddoes, see Vigus's "Introduction" 4, 9.

⁶ See Philipp Hunnekuhl, "Hazlitt, Kant, and Crabb Robinson: 1806 and Beyond," *Hazlitt Review*, 10 (2017): 45-62.

⁷ Heuss 107.

⁸ Karl August Varnhagen von Ense attributes an anonymous article on Tooke in the *Biographie universelle* to Schlabrendorf; see Varnhagen von Ense, "Graf Schlabrendorf, amtlos Staatsmann, heimathfremd Bürger, begütert arm. Züge zu seinem Bilde," *Historisches Taschenbuch. Mit Beiträgen von Lorentz, Raumer, Varnhagen von Ense*, ed. Friedrich von Raumer (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1832) 265. For the article on Tooke, see *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne*, vol. 20 (Paris: Michaud, 1817) 572-76.

⁹ Heuss 105.

¹⁰ Heuss 109.

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He was in prison during the reign of terror and he considers the preserv[atio]n of his life an accident When I first was arrested I made applic[atio]ns to friends but find[in]g they co[ul]d do nothing for me I retired as much as possible from notice – [...] The best thing for a man was to be forgotten – I was transf[erre]d to a prison where were 2 classes of persons – Men of rank & foreigners – I shunned the former & associated wholly with the latter –

(TD).

This comment suggests that Schlabrendorf identified himself as a cosmopolitan *sans-culotte* rather than expediently dissociating himself from fellow nobility in order to improve his chances of survival. Schlabrendorf spent over a year in prison, between his arrest in 1793 and the fall of Robespierre. Different legends concerning the “accident” of his escape exist. The most colourful of them has it that, on the morning when his name was called out for execution, his boots had disappeared, and that the jailor decided that Schlabrendorf’s wish to be executed with his boots *on* was a perfectly reasonable demand.¹¹ So they agreed to try again the next day. By then, the boots had reappeared, but Schlabrendorf’s name was not called out – either on that day, or on any of the following. He had “lost his head on paper,” Heuss writes, but no one seems to have checked that the sentence was carried out.¹²

It is of course conceivable that someone was turning a blind eye here, and also that this favour may have been purchased; Varnhagen von Ense reports that Schlabrendorf had funds available in prison which he used in order to support the causes of some of his fellow inmates.¹³ So perhaps he also used his funds to buy himself time, or, in his own words, to buy “be[ing] forgotten.” The overall rather lenient conditions of his incarceration would support such a conjecture.¹⁴ In any case, the importance of “be[ing] forgotten” by the authorities while playing an active role in the support of his community was the lesson in practical philosophy that Schlabrendorf had learned – “aux écosais” – in prison.¹⁵ In due course, this lesson would inform his anti-Napoleonic invectives.

Robinson concludes his “Travel Diary” entry thus:

¹¹ Varnhagen von Ense in particular corroborates this version: “Graf Schlabrendorf” 254-56.

¹² Heuss 109-10.

¹³ Varnhagen von Ense 253. See also Heuss 110.

¹⁴ Hartmut Scheible, “*Civis Civitatem Quaerens*. Gustav von Schlabrendorf und die Sprache der Republik,” *Napoleons langer Schatten über Europa*, ed. Marion George and Andrea Rudolph (Dettelbach: Röhl, 2008) 222.

¹⁵ Quoted by Heuss 110.

On leaving him Prof[essor] Froriep expressed a wish that he would return to Germany – [Schlabrendorf] said – No, it is a matter of conscience with me – This is the country where I can live with the most ease & in retirem[en]t – Were I in Prussia people wo[ul]d collect round me & make me the centre of intrigues – for my integrity is known & that I am a man who never in his life asked for any thing for himself – And I am a bad intriguer – I am a reformer – but a bad revolutionist I am the bitterest enemy to revolutions

(TD).

So although Schlabrendorf was technically an expatriate, he saw himself more in terms of an exile. As such, he had few, if any, restraints on putting his reformist vigour and convictions into practice, and acting as a philanthropist from his Paris hotel room, materially supporting the causes that his conscience sanctioned. This is how he ran through his vast inheritance; an abundance of petitions survive that testify to his long-standing activity as a benefactor.¹⁶ His Silesian relations and the Prussian government disapproved of this practice to the extent that they threatened the confiscation of his estates, should he not stop and return home.¹⁷ But Schlabrendorf, having substituted (as had Robinson) his erstwhile Jacobinism for notions of gradual reform, continued to choose conscience, exile, the forfeiture of his privileges – and authorship.

Robinson's Critical Transmission of Schlabrendorf's *Napoleon* (1806)

Schlabrendorf was nicknamed the "Diogenes of Paris," and he endorsed his sobriquet.¹⁸ Diogenes's asceticism – he is said to have often slept in a barrel – is one ground for such a parallel. But Diogenes is also alleged to have confronted Alexander the Great in public, and in this characteristic challenge to authority lies another parallel with Schlabrendorf, who published a series of attacks on Napoleon with increasing vehemence after the Corsican general was made Consul in 1802 and Emperor in 1804.¹⁹ The most famous and influential of Schlabrendorf's invectives was his *Napoleon Bonaparte und das französische Volk*

¹⁶ Heuss 111.

¹⁷ Heuss 111.

¹⁸ Heuss 115.

¹⁹ Robinson calls Schlabrendorf a "cynic in his habits," alluding to Diogenes, but then likens him to Socrates: "Reminiscences" 2 (1817) 213.

unter seinem Consulate, published anonymously in 1804.²⁰ Schlabrendorf's friend, the composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt had smuggled the manuscript out of France and arranged for its publication, which resulted in his initially being mistaken for the author.²¹ The book for the first time presented Napoleon as a threat to democratic progress rather than its harbinger. Talleyrand, at Berlin, unsuccessfully tried to halt its publication.²² The book subsequently found a wide circulation in and beyond Germany, and quickly ran through several editions in both German and English. Goethe reviewed it in the *Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*.²³ Yet whereas Goethe criticizes a certain tendentiousness in the book, Hartmut Scheible emphasizes Schlabrendorf's growing reputation as an "impartial and incorruptible observer of world-historical events," a reputation that further consolidated Schlabrendorf's central position in his network and made him the first port of call for many a distinguished foreigner visiting Paris.²⁴ Napoleon's authorities eventually got wind of the alien adversary writing right under their noses, spied on him, but ultimately deemed him "more mysterious than alarming" and decided not to intervene.²⁵ Schlabrendorf remained, if not forgotten, at least consigned to a form of relative oblivion.

In early 1806, a book entitled *Napoleon Buonaparte wie er leibt und lebt, und das französische Volk unter ihm* was published, again anonymously.²⁶ The book explicitly professes to be a sequel to Schlabrendorf's 1804 *Napoleon*. The "u" added to the name Buonaparte now highlights his Corsican origins (discussed in much detail early on in the book) and thus aims to typographically undermine Napoleon's identification with the French people. Hertha Marquardt, in one place, identifies Schlabrendorf as the author of this sequel, but in another passage

²⁰ [Gustav von Schlabrendorf,] *Napoleon Bonaparte und das französische Volk unter seinem Consulate* (Germanien, im Jahre 1804). Behind the publisher's guise was the house of Hoffmann & Campe, Hamburg; see Johann Gottfried Seume, *Mein Leben*, ed. Dirk Sangmeister (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018) 293. In the same year, Schlabrendorf published his *Sendschreiben an Bonaparte* (1804), probably also with Hoffmann & Campe.

²¹ Heuss 112.

²² Heuss 112.

²³ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Germanien: *Napoleon Bonaparte und das französische Volk unter seinem Consulate*. 1804. 447 S. gr. 8," *Goethes Werke*, 144 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1901) 40:260-62.

²⁴ Scheible 222. My translation.

²⁵ Heuss 112.

²⁶ [Gustav von Schlabrendorf,] *Napoleon Buonaparte wie er leibt und lebt, und das französische Volk unter ihm* (Petersburg: Peter Hammer, 1806). The place of publication and publisher are fabrications.

concedes that this identification is not fully verifiable.²⁷ In any case, though, the link between the two *Napoleons* – their overt association and parallel messages – is so strong that even if Schlabrendorf were not the author of the 1806 sequel, Robinson's subsequent translation of the work placed him firmly within Schlabrendorf's ambit.

Perhaps the intensifying war and governmental prying had forced Schlabrendorf to conceal his authorship more effectively than before in an attempt at remaining, or once again becoming, "forgotten." The subtler obscuring of the second *Napoleon's* place of publication, and the book's claim that it was a translation of an English work, would back such a conjecture. Yet *Napoleon Buonaparte wie er leibt und lebt*, too, was translated into English, and entered the same channels of transmission through which its predecessor had travelled. In London, the publishers Tipper and Richards had brought out, also in 1804, a translation of Schlabrendorf's first *Napoleon*.²⁸ Two years later, the same publishers took on the sequel. But Frederic Shoberl, Samuel Tipper's translator, was overstretched with work, so he passed the job on to his contact Henry Crabb Robinson.²⁹

Once Robinson had completed his translation of Schlabrendorf's 1806 *Napoleon*, he composed and added a preface.³⁰ What Robinson says in this preface echoes Schlabrendorf's convictions: the war against France was unjust during the Revolution, but now that the Emperor Napoleon has begun to conquer Europe that war has to be fought and won, so as to enable republican ideals to be gradually implemented. But that alone is not enough: the book's central concern, its author writes, is that Napoleon be "morally slain in the eyes of the great European public," and not precipitately on the battlefield.³¹ This objective ties in with the critical principles according to which Robinson

²⁷ Cf. Marquardt 1:324 and 2:54 n. 147. The Leipzig philosopher Johann Adam Bergk, who shared Schlabrendorf's reformist but anti-revolutionary vigour, is another possible author; see Helge Buttkereit, *Zensur und Öffentlichkeit in Leipzig 1806 bis 1813* (Münster: Lit, 2009), 91 n. 389.

²⁸ [Gustav von Schlabrendorf,] *Bonaparte, and the French People under His Consulate* (London: Tipper and Richards, 1804).

²⁹ Henry Crabb Robinson, "Notebook for 1805-06," 24-25 October 1806, Bundle 6.VIII, DWL, manuscript. This notebook and entry are included in Hunnekuhl, *Early Diaries*. See also Marquardt 1:324.

³⁰ For Robinson identifying himself as the author of the preface, see Henry Crabb Robinson, "Notebook for 1805-06," 28 October 1806.

³¹ [Gustav von Schlabrendorf,] *Napoleon, and the French People under His Empire*, [trans. Henry Crabb Robinson] (London: Tipper and Richards, 1806) 4.

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appreciated and transmitted works of literature. In an independent and groundbreaking intellectual move, Robinson had previously discerned that, in the words of James Vigus,

Kant's treatment of the relationship between art and morality was ambiguous enough to allow considerable room for developing and challenging. [...] On the one hand, Kant articulated more rigorously than any predecessor that the aesthetic judgment of the beautiful is disinterested, or autonomous, which suggests that a true work of art can have no distinct moral purpose. On the other, he insisted that beauty symbolises, in the sense of providing us with an analogy for, the morally good.³²

Robinson, the life-long critic, made this art-morals analogy the centre of his approach to literature as well as its transmission across political and cultural boundaries. Through his engagement with Kant, Robinson had deserted earlier notions of literary didacticism, and became convinced that the negotiation of any applicable moral – or “distinct moral purpose” – ought to be left to each individual reader.³³ In his preface, he praises Schlabrendorf's *Napoleon* along these lines:

The book professes to be (and it is what it professes) a portrait of Bonaparte. It *collects* the scattered tokens and marks of guilt, which he has stamped upon every act of his public life; it *unites* and embodies them, and presents to our view a full length figure, which we ought, in spite of its ugliness, intensely to contemplate; till the thought of him occupy the busy day, and the image of him, haunt our midnight dreams.³⁴

Schlabrendorf has not only collected the many incomplete appearances of his subject matter, but also synthesized them into an intelligible form – a “full length figure” – that stimulates moral deliberations. And this is, in a nutshell, also the main point in which Schlabrendorf's sequel deviates from its precursor: it deals to a much greater extent with Napoleon's character and actions than with the French people under his rule. Schlabrendorf's 1806 *Napoleon* is hence a kind of

³² James Vigus, “Introduction” to Henry Crabb Robinson, *Essays* 21.

³³ For the development of Robinson's critical voice, see Philipp Hunnekuhl, *Henry Crabb Robinson: Romantic Comparatist, 1790-1811* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, forthcoming).

³⁴ [Henry Crabb Robinson,] Preface to [Schlabrendorf,] *Napoleon, and the French People under His Empire* iv (emphasis added).

polemical anti-biography, which extends the 1804 *Napoleon's* concern with the question of whether the then Consul would use his powers to enforce republican principles, or whether the political idealism he was parading would evaporate and turn out to have been little more than opportunistic cunning.³⁵

One should note that the above passage has a remarkable verbal parallel in Robinson's first letter "on the Philosophy of Kant," published in the summer of 1802:

It is the characteristic of [Kant's] philosophy to be in every thing independent. He is the master workman who has *collected* the several productions of the inferior artists, and *united* them into one great work of art. [my emphases] He gives, on the one hand, the honor due to Plato, Spinoza, and Leibnitz, and on the other, to Bacon, Locke, and Hume, and forms a system not *composed* of their discordant materials, but different from all, and illustrated only by a comparison with the partial truths contained in their opposite systems.³⁶

With stunning originality and clarity Robinson here illustrates Kant's foundational principle of the active mind as that which synthesizes the distinct appearances of the objects of experience: Kant's philosophy itself comprises all such "partial truths" as his rationalist and empiricist precursors had advanced, but then – vitally – joins them into one new and "independent" unit, "one great work of art." In short, Robinson here elucidates Kant through Kant, whose philosophy has done to its partial constituents what the mind does to the incomplete representations perceived through the senses. Schlabrendorf hence "embodies" synthesis in his creation of Napoleon's image, making it tangible; Kant has delivered the conceptual framework for it. The final step of Schlabrendorf's synthesis, then – its moral analogy – takes place in the mind of the reader. Thus "pollut[ing] the fancy with loathsome images, and the mind with evil thoughts" would, according to Robinson, result in the sparking of the "active and energetic principles of our nature," namely the imagination and moral reason alike.³⁷ Agency would follow.

The reader's imagination would hence negotiate a moral response, rather than absorb a moral directive. Robinson elaborates this in more detail in the

³⁵ Scheible 224.

³⁶ [Henry Crabb Robinson,] "Letters on the Philosophy of Kant, from an Under-Graduate in the University of Jena. No. 1. INTRODUCTORY," *Monthly Register and Encyclopaedian Magazine*, 1 (August 1802): 412-13. Robinson, *Essays* 30.

³⁷ [Robinson], Preface iv.

course of his preface, at the same time making an explicit point about not having abandoned his faith in the original ideals of the Revolution:

That strange and wonderful series of events, called the French revolution, has at length led to the seizure of all the physical energies of France by one man, who wields them in his arm, while the nation resigns to him her moral existence [...]. Bonaparte is not less the tyrant of France, than he is the oppressor of Europe; yet we fear he has been able to arm for him, the loyalty and the patriotism of Frenchmen. [...] *Loyalty* is surely a generous and amiable sentiment, and *patriotism* has in all ages been held the first of virtues: yet when suffered to take possession of the mind, and *raised to the rank of paramount principles of absolute worth*, they may threaten the ruin of the world. Bonaparte bears the titles, and wears the insignia of sovereignty; and all who sit in the civil tribunals of the country, or wield the sword of the nation, are *sworn* to fight his battles. These are powerful holds on the imagination, and even affections of every people.³⁸

The key phrase in this passage is “possession of the mind.” Robinson was exceptionally well-versed in Kant’s Copernican reversal of the mind-world relationship and the moral philosophy that Kant had developed on the basis of this reversal – namely that knowledge of the world is inevitably incomplete, but that the awareness of a moral law supplements this incompleteness and thereby points towards the existence of God. To Robinson, “moral existence” requires an autonomous mind unimpaired by allegiances to worldly particulars and their symbols of loyalty and patriotism. He here forgoes these allegiances through an effective rhetorical concession of half-praise: “*patriotism*” as “the first of virtues” must ultimately yield to a universal, unconditional Kantian morality. This universal moral sense that Napoleon has undone is precisely the “paramount [principle] of absolute worth.” Robinson seeing Schlabrendorf as advancing such a universal cosmopolitan system of morals hence also echoes Kant’s vision of a form of national disinterestedness manifest in international law, elaborated in his essay *Perpetual Peace* (1795).³⁹

³⁸ [Robinson], Preface v-vii.

³⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden: ein philosophischer Entwurf* (Königsberg: Nicolovius, 1795). My thanks to Christoph Bode and Gregory Dart for pointing this out to me. Robinson’s familiarity with Kant’s *Zum ewigen Frieden* substantially predates his ‘conversion’ to Kant in late 1801: see Henry Crabb Robinson to Thomas Robinson, 4 January 1801, Bundle 3.A, Letter 8, DWL, manuscript. Robinson here draws a parallel between Kant, Rousseau and Saint-Pierre as philosophers of peace.

Conclusion

The translation into English of Schlabrendorf's *Napoleon Buonaparte wie er leibt und lebt* may have come about in part for commercial reasons: a publisher eyeing the potential market for a controversial new book on Napoleon, and a translator relishing the prospect of making one-and-a-half Guineas per sheet.⁴⁰ Yet it was also an opportunity for Robinson the "literator" – in his own words, someone who "compile[s] some book of criticism or moral & metaphysical disquisition which [...] may serve to promote the good cause of Science & Truth"⁴¹ – to display his philosophical erudition and critical convictions. Robinson had now become part of a pan-European network of writers, publishers, translators and other middlemen that operated during the time of the Napoleonic Wars, a network to which Schlabrendorf also belonged. When the two men finally met on 3 September 1817, and despite conversing so passionately on the day, they each remained unaware of the role that the other had played in their shared network – and that their paths had already crossed. One cannot help but wonder how their conversation, and indeed acquaintance, might have developed had they become fully aware of each other's identity. So it is perhaps regrettable that these identities remained concealed. But that is not to question the validity of the philosophical lesson that Schlabrendorf had learned in prison. All the more enjoyable, therefore, is the moment when the veil of anonymity is lifted, *a posteriori*, allowing us to uncover the depth and integrity with which these two neglected figures forged connections beyond cultural and political boundaries.

⁴⁰ Robinson, "Notebook for 1805-06," 25 October 1806.

⁴¹ Henry Crabb Robinson to Thomas Robinson, 27 November 1803, Bundle 3.A, Letter 35, DWL, manuscript. Compare the *OED* definitions of the term "literator," which encompass lukewarm to dismissive connotations.