INTRODUCTION

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Oaths, Odes and Orations: our titular triplet is meant to echo our preceding *Exiles, Émigrés and Expatriates in Romantic-Era Paris and London*, also published with *Litteraria Pragensia*.[1] Remotely oulipian, the assonantic constraint comes with a subtext of its own: that of orality, the factor common to oaths, odes and orations; while the triple repetition – a staple device of rhetoric (if one whose effectiveness has never been fully explained) points to our core subject matter, the power of public speech and the literature associated with it. In the historical period we explore here, 1789-1830, that discursive association acquires a special significance and public utterance itself is pressed into new service. The Tennis Court Oath of 20 June 1789 was the first overtly revolutionary act of the French Revolution and marked the beginning of an epoch in which public speech acts took on unprecedented political significance. The ceremonial odes and hymns of the *Fête de la Fédération* were another manifestation of this renascence of orality, restoring the ancient Pindaric tradition of poetry as public performance and giving new meaning to odic conventions such as invocation, exhortation and apostrophe. In the work of André Chénier and others, this new lyric function produced major poetry. Meanwhile, in the halls of the political clubs, in the National Convention and revolutionary Committees, and from lecterns, pulpits and courtroom benches across France, oratory of all kinds shaped the course of history and decided the fate of individuals. Even on the executioner's scaffold, rhetorical amplification became the preferred mode of address, a grim illustration of Baudelaire's subsequent observation about "the grandiloquent truth of gestures on life's great occasions."[2]

1 David Duff and Marc Porée, eds., *Exiles, Émigrés and Expatriates in Romantic-Era Paris and London, Litteraria Pragensia* 29, no. 57 (2019).

2 "La vérité emphatique du geste dans les grandes circonstances de la vie." Roland Barthes makes this connection in his discussion of the "revolutionary mode of writing" in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Seuil, 1953), 22. The remark of Baudelaire's that he quotes

The revitalization of performative language was not confined to the 1789 Revolution, nor to France. Britain experienced what many still consider a golden age of political eloquence, as orators of the calibre of Pitt, Burke, Fox and Sheridan jousted in parliament and extended their orations through the medium of print. Outside parliament, the growth of the corresponding societies, of other political clubs and associations, and of political lecturing created numerous opportunities for public address, the communicative practices and clandestine rituals of certain organizations attracting repressive measures such as the Unlawful Oaths Act of 1797. Radical writers mimicked French revolutionary styles in odes to Liberty and on the Bastille, while conservative satirists parodied their efforts in mock-odes to the guillotine and pseudo-songs travestying revolutionary enthusiasm. Sermons were another front in the oral war of ideas, fusing religion and politics in provocative ways. Educational lecturing also underwent a remarkable boom, in the new Royal Institution and other fashionable lecturing institutions. The new orality, shaped by political exigency but with wider cultural ramifications, left its mark on the writing not only of the revolutionary decade and war years but also the post-war period and beyond. It was, as Hazlitt said, "an age of talkers,"[3] and Romantic literature bears everywhere the imprint of this.

This special issue, based on an international symposium held in Paris in December 2022, assesses the literary significance of this mobilization of orality and public utterance, and explores links between the speech acts of politicians, polemicists and educators and the writings of poets and other authors. How is the Romantic revaluation of the ode which produced the famous lyrics of Keats, Shelley, Hugo and Hölderlin – and the powerful odes of less canonical figures such as John Thelwall, Robert Merry and Mary Robinson – connected with the revival of ceremonial ode-writing and public ritual? How are the speech genres of everyday life integrated into the more complex genres of imaginative literature? Can speech-writing, sermonizing or toast-making be themselves a form of literary activity? What happens when legally, morally binding oaths and commitments are broken, forcing the swearer to recant, in public again – are such disavowals part of the culture of apostasy and disenchantment posited by literary historians of Romanticism? And to what extent do these purposive deployments of public speech enter the literary and rhetorical theory of the period?

was made à propos Delacroix and elaborates upon the notion of "emphase" (over-emphasis, bombast, grandiloquence): the gesture in question is one seized upon or mediated by art. See Charles Baudelaire, "L'Exposition universelle de 1855," *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 2:592.

3 William Hazlitt, "Mr Coleridge," *The Spirit of the Age or Contemporary Portraits*, ed. E.D. Mackerness, 2nd ed. (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1991), 54.

The articles gathered here address these and other questions, ranging widely across different genres and media. Francesco Buscemi opens the collection with an analysis of the paradigmatic speech genre and verbal ritual of the French Revolution: oath-taking. Widely acknowledged by historians as central to the revolutionary process, the oath has rarely been studied in its two modalities, as both a linguistic act and an affective phenomenon. Buscemi shows how oath-taking played a key role in the forging of revolutionary identity and marked the emergence of a new conception of political loyalty. The swearing of an oath is an individual commitment, but it is witnessed publicly and often performed collectively, as in the mass oath-taking of the *Fête de la Fédération.* Rather than simply imposing an ideology, oath-taking enabled swearers to feel on their pulses the deep sense of change, of regenerative possibility and of unshackling from the past that were at the heart of the revolutionary experience. The action induced the mentality it expressed, and was thus, like other symbolic practices of the French Revolution, a way of "becoming a revolutionary," in Timothy Tackett's phrase.[4] This is true both of oaths themselves and of the theatrical or artistic representation of oath-taking, also discussed by Buscemi. It is in their affective and performative aspect that the grandiloquent words of revolutionary oaths gain their meaning, a point Buscemi brings home by invoking and extending Austin's concept of the speech act, echoed in his title: "how to do things with oaths."[5]

The affective agency that Buscemi attributes to oath-taking is extended in other articles to other speech acts and to written forms that derive from, mimic, or, in some cases, parody them. Rémy Duthille examines the practice of toasting, a social ritual with a long history but one that acquires new significance and visibility in 1790s Britain, where it serves as a vehicle of political communication in both radical and conservative circles. Like the oath, a speech act it closely resembles but with the additional performative element of glass-raising and drinking, the toast is intended to generate collective allegiance, whether to a person, institution or cause. The clearest example of the latter was at radical political banquets, where toasting "was a central tool in the manufacturing of radical unanimity." Duthille has written elsewhere about the radical culture of toasting; he concentrates here on a literary byproduct of this vibrant oral culture, namely loyalist parodies of radical toasts. The publication of political toast lists was a well-established practice

4 Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture, 1789-1790* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

5 Cf. J.L Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

from the mid-eighteenth century but in the 1790s this fashionable newspaper genre spawned an equally popular variant: the parodic toast list. Duthille analyzes several examples of this malleable subgenre, highlighting the blurring of oral and written forms and the promiscuous intertextuality that could see an oath performed at the *Fête de la Fédération* in Paris become a toast at a radical banquet in London and then an object of parody in the conservative literary press. Odes, too, were part of this transnational intertextual circuit, as Duthille illustrates with a satirical ode from the *Anti-Jacobin* which combines a parody of the Duke of York's notorious toast in a speech of 1798 to "Our sovereign's health – the majesty of the people" with an allusion to the 1793 decree of the French National Convention making "TERROR the *Order of the Day*."

Other examples of the convergence of oratorical and odic discourse can be found in the work of John Thelwall, the subject of Judith Thompson's article. Thelwall, for Thompson, was the foremost theorist of the ode in this period because he explored most fully the declamatory quality of odes, taking his analysis right down to the physiological level: the ode's mobilization of the organs of speech and its use of rhythmic patterns that are directly tied to our anatomy.[6] Thelwall's theories draw on his extensive experience of public speaking, first as a firebrand political lecturer of the 1790s and latterly as a teacher of elocution and speech therapy. The recitation and prosodic analysis of odes, his own and other people's, was a staple feature of his educational lectures, delivered over many years at venues across the United Kingdom. Drawing on new research for her forthcoming biography of Thelwall, Thompson's essay also examines another line of influence on Thelwall's elocutionary theories and practices: that of two French *philosophes* he met during his travels in France in 1814 to 1818. Like Thelwall, both men – one a prominent journal editor, the other the director of a famous School for the Deaf and Dumb – were political survivors who had navigated a shifting political situation, a shared experience (captured in Thompson's title by the metaphor of the *girouette*, or weathercock) that made him even more receptive to their philosophical, medical and literary ideas. Once again, advances in the theory and practice of orality emerge from Anglo-French engagement.

The relationship between spoken and written forms comes under further scrutiny in two articles about the French Revolution debate in Britain. Pierre Lurbe analyzes a classic text of the pamphlet war, Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791-1792),

[6] Not cited by Thompson or other contributors, but of relevance to our topic is the brilliant analysis of odic declamation (and, more generally, the "orientation" of literary genres to specific modes of speech) by the Russian Formalist critic Yuri Tynianov, "The Ode as an Oratorical Genre" (1927), trans. Ann Shukman, *New Literary History* 34, no. 3 (2003): 565-96.

drawing attention to a neglected aspect of Paine's polemic against Edmund Burke: his deliberate distortion of Burke's punctuation in order to exaggerate the histrionic quality of Burke's prose and thereby undermine his intellectual and political authority. To make his case, Lurbe offers a detailed survey of late eighteenth-century language theory and shows how highly developed contemporary awareness of the performative aspect of reading was, in particular "reading aloud." The role of punctuation marks such as the comma, semi-colon and exclamation mark was an important strand in this theory. By artfully modifying Burke's punctuation to make his writing seem even more melodramatic and untrustworthy, Paine was thus weaponizing well-established theories and conventions. His polemic against Burke is not simply a critique but an "oral/aural performance of Burke's text," whose distortive method is analogous to visual caricature.

Robert Jones offers a similarly intricate textual analysis of another key figure of the French Revolution debate, Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Jones's focus is the distortions that occur when a powerful parliamentary speech is committed to print, the speech in question being the one Sheridan gave on 20 April 1798 to rouse the nation against the threat of French invasion. The speech is known to Romantic scholars as one of the prompts for Coleridge's poem "Fears in Solitude" (1798), which carries the date of the speech in its subscript and appears to echo some of its patriotic rhetoric. Jones sets aside the question of Sheridan's literary influence to examine the minutiae of the transmission process, studying the subtle variations between different printed versions of his speech. Comparing multiple versions which appeared in newspapers in the days after the speech, Jones notes the political bias which shaped the transcriptions, particularly in passages where Sheridan weighs up the relative importance, at a time of national crisis, of Parliament, the people and the King. As with the Duke of Norfolk's toast, Sheridan's precise choice of words on such sensitive topics is politically significant, and the variations which enter into the public record of his speech demonstrate that the politics of transcription is an integral part of our topic. In broaching this subject, Jones reflects on the methodological challenges of his forthcoming critical edition of Sheridan, a figure whose oratorical skills were widely recognized in his lifetime but whose political works (most of which were oral in origin) have never received the critical attention accorded to his plays.

A third perspective on the political controversy of the 1790s – and the place of oratory within it – is offered by Dafydd Moore's article on the clergyman-poet and rhetorical theorist Richard Polwhele. Remembered today by Romantic scholars mostly for his reactionary, misogynist polemic *The Unsex'd Females* (1798), Polwhele was in fact a more complex figure than first appears. Moore focuses on his engagement with the long-running and increasingly fraught debate within the

Anglican Church about the proper form for pulpit oratory, a subject Polwhele takes up in his verse treatise *The English Orator* (1785-1791). Like the elocution manuals cited by Lurbe and Thompson, Polwhele's handbook, which ranges across many types of oratory, touches on linguistic questions which had become inescapably political. Based in rural Cornwall, Polwhele had to negotiate the conflicting demands of a conservative Anglican establishment vehemently opposed to the populist methods of Enthusiast preachers and a provincial congregation that lacked the sophistication of the metropolitan elite and needed the emotional stimulus that Methodist and Evangelical preachers provided. In articulating this tension and developing his distinctive position, Polwhele can be seen both as an important player in the contemporary debate on oratory and a significant contributor to Loyalist Romanticism.

The three final articles turn to better-known Romantic authors whose writing reveals in other ways the orientation to the spoken word that is a feature of so much of the period's literature. Catherine Bois investigates the performative power of words in the "French" books of *The Prelude* (1805/1850). Noting Wordsworth's ambivalent comments on eloquence that appear throughout the poem, Bois traces the many influences on his conception of public speech. These include his attendance at revolutionary debates in the National Assembly and Jacobin Club in Paris in 1791, which appear to have convinced him he was unsuited to public speaking but which nonetheless instilled a desire to influence the course of the Revolution through the power of words. The main focus of Bois's article, though, is the philosophical influences – direct and indirect – that shape Wordsworth's conception of oratory, and she situates his theory and practice within a broader Romantic reappraisal of classical rhetoric. It is, Bois argues, the first term in the Aristotelian triad of *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos* – the three modes of persuasion which define classical rhetoric – that undergoes the fullest reworking in Romantic poetics. Wordsworth's adoption of a newly defined *ethos* is central both to his poetic persona and to his creative practice. The French books of *The Prelude* are a focal point of his investigation of the power of public speech and of individual words, and Bois shows how this section of the poem also contains some his most striking examples of rhetorical *ethos* harnessed for poetic effect.

David Duff discusses another author who, as far as we know, never delivered a public lecture but who produced various kinds of written public address. These include his printed prospectus of 1793 announcing his new method of "illuminated printing" and listing for sale his "illuminated books;" his prefatory note "To the Public" (dated 1804) attached to Book 1 of *Jerusalem*; and his unpublished "Public Address" (c.1810), which expands his "Canterbury Pilgrims" prospectus into a detailed statement of his artistic ambitions and a vehement

critique of the artistic establishment. Duff's article shows how Blake's transformation of the now largely forgotten genre of the prospectus mirrors that of other Romantic authors, and how the prospectus as a form of public announcement acquired new scope and significance in the wake of the French Revolution, when large numbers of new books, journals, newspapers and lecture series launched themselves with pamphlet-like prospectuses. Blake's development of the "public address" element of the prospectus is another example of the revaluation of public utterance in this period, connected in important ways with the foregrounding of speech acts in his literary works (as "The Voice of the Ancient Bard," "The Voice of the Devil," or some other strongly vocal persona).

Our special issue concludes with a wide-ranging article by Paul Hamilton on the European Romantic ode. Using examples from English, German and Italian, Hamilton explains why the ode as a genre – in its Pindaric, Horatian and Anacreontic variants and in new hybrid forms which emerged in this period – assumed such importance in Romantic poetics. It is, Hamilton argues, a "fundamentally aspirational" genre, particularly the Pindaric ode, which specializes in the art of brinkmanship, as the poet-theorist Edward Young had spotted a century earlier. As such, it offered infinite opportunities to the aspirant poet to test the limits of imagination and poetic expression. Yet the ode was also, for the Romantics, a self-reflexive form which enabled poets to analyze their own rhetorical performance. Once condemned as licentious and chaotic (the charge Young had answered with his theory of brinkmanship and poetic "logic"), odes were now about their own licence. This proved an even greater temptation to the Romantic poet, who could simultaneously push poetic language and emotion to their limits while engaging in the "self-watching" and "subtilizing" (Coleridge's terms, from "Frost at Midnight") that were equally congenial to the Romantic mind. Hamilton shows how the self-reflexive odes of Wordsworth, Hölderlin, Leopardi and others bring to a philosophical focus the preoccupations that shaped the contemporary debate on public utterance, doing so in a medium that exemplified the phenomenon they described.

It is no coincidence, then, that we find embedded and critically scrutinized in the Romantic ode so many of the speech genres that marked the new orality of the revolutionary age, whether it be the political oration, the toast, the conversation or the oath. Coleridge's "France: An Ode" (1798), not discussed in this issue but deserving of mention here, is a case in point. No poem better captures the symbolic impact of oaths in this period (as befits an author who went on to compose "lay sermons"). Coleridge opens his description of the French Revolution with a reference to its foundational speech act, recalling the moment "When France in wrath her giant limbs uprear'd, / And with that oath which smote earth, air, and sea, /

Stamp'd her strong foot and said, she would be free" (22-24).[7] The metaphor of the foot-stamping giant amplifies the Tennis Court Oath into the world-shaking event it truly was. By the end of the poem he has rejected the implications of that primal act, publicly reneging on the pro-French stance he had taken at the outset of the French Revolution (the poem was originally entitled "Recantation: An Ode"). Yet, like Wordsworth, he persists in the cult of Liberty, ardently reclaiming it from its misuse and misappropriation by the French after the invasion of Switzerland. What the odal mode of enunciation underlines here is that, whatever the dangers of political eloquence and the abuses of grand-sounding words like Freedom, high-flown parlance, together with literal and figurative brinkmanship ("on that sea-cliff's verge," 99), form an integral part of English identity, exposing, by way of contrast, "sensual" France, as blasphemous and dryly Voltairean in its faith in secular institutions and its mockery of Heaven ("adult'rous, blind, / And patriot only in pernicious toils!" 78-79)." The poem exults in the experience, not the institution, of Freedom, felt as a living force blowing in the air.

That such forces blew so strongly during this period is undoubtedly one reason for the special kind of orality explored in this issue. The energization of public speech created by the unprecedented opportunities and challenges of the revolutionary age had an intensifying effect on all forms of public utterance, including the "incantation" of odic verse, as Shelley termed it. Under the pressure of an exceptional history, speech and writing entered into a new, more dynamic relationship, literary and extra-literary forms mingled and merged, and intertextuality and intermediality accelerated. The writers able to harness those forces and energies – to capture the vibrancy of the spoken voice travelling with unaccustomed velocity and reaching zones of our sensibility never before reached – produced the "movement" (in the fullest sense of that word) we call Romanticism.

Inevitably, our attempt to document this explosion of orality is far from exhaustive. Among the issues not covered, for example, is the impact of an iconic figure such as "Orator" Hunt, a public speaker often stigmatized as a rabble-rouser. His reputation is made to rely largely on a speech never given, savagely cut short as it was on the infamous day of the Peterloo massacre.[8] The eyes (and ears) of historians have recently been opened to his importance as a libertarian

7 Quotations are from *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson and Raimonda Modiano (New York: Norton, 2004). Line numbers in parentheses.

8 The case of the non-speech raises further tantalizing questions, such as: was there a draft to the planned speech, or did Hunt mostly rely on his extraordinary faculties of improvisation? On the subject of scripted and unscripted speeches, and the broader relation between oral and written genres, see Gilles Philippe, ed., *Avant-Dire. Genèse écrite des genres oraux*, *Genesis* 39 (2014).

democrat pointing the way forward to the Chartist challenge.[9] As editors of the present journal issue, Hunt speaks to us, too, albeit for different reasons. His undelivered speech foregrounds, amongst other things, the centrality of the speech-act, generated by and conveyed in the spoken word, articulated by the human voice, and transmitted across a vast array of genres and sub-genres. May his conspicuous absence further our aim in this issue which is, precisely, to shed light on the rich, new and vibrant culture of orality.

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[9] John Belchem, "*Orator" Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working Class Radicalism* (1985; London: Breviary Stuff Publications, 2012), 9. See also Murray Pittock, "Henry Hunt's White Hat: The Long Tradition of Mute Sedition," in *Commemorating Peterloo: Violence, Resilience, and Claim-Making during the Romantic Era*, ed. Michael Demson and Regina Hewitt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 84-99.