LA VOIX DE LA GIROUETTE: THE FRENCH CONNECTIONS OF JOHN THELWALL'S ELOCUTIONARY THEORY

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Abstract: This article is drawn from the first full biography (in progress) of John Thelwall, the foremost radical orator and leading theorist, teacher and therapist of speech in the British Romantic period. Focusing on his little-known travels in France in 1814-1818, it explores his relationship with two *philosophes* he met there: the Abbé Sicard, who ran the famous *École des Sourds-Muets* (School for the Deaf and Dumb), and Amaury Duval, a founder of the groundbreaking journal *La Décade Philosophique*. Revaluing and adapting to Thelwall a derogatory term often applied to these men (*girouette*, or weathercock), it compares their strategic uses of the language of action to navigate political change from the revolutionary to the post-revolutionary periods. It relates Thelwall's oral theory and practice to French materialist theories of body and mind, to *orthophonie* (or logopaedia) and to prosody (modern "therapoetics") and highlights three defining features of orality he shares with Sicard and Duval – materialism, mobility and multivalence – which unite Thelwall's political and elocutionary careers.

Keywords: John Thelwall, Abbé Sicard, Amaury Duval, *orthophonie*, body politic, therapoetics

> It is better to be immur'd in a Bastille, than to have the Bastille in one's mouth, to lock up the tongue from all communication with the heart.
>
> John Thelwall, lecture on Spies and Informers, 1795

John Thelwall is a key figure in the mobilization of speech and public performance in the British Romantic period, as its foremost popular orator and leading theorist and teacher of the art, act and science of utterance. His highly original elocutionary theory and practice were founded in the debating societies of the 1780s, sharpened during his medical studies in 1791-1793 and incarceration in 1794, and

instrumentalized in his famous lectures. His political lectures of 1793-1795 were followed by lectures on classical history (1796-1797) and elocution, poetry and drama, first itinerant (1801-1806) and then in his celebrated elocutionary Institution in London, from which he continued to venture on lecture tours, far and wide, until his death in 1834. In a career of over forty years, he delivered upwards of 2 500 orations, all punctuated by recitations of verse (from witty seditious ballads that lightened his political lectures to ambitious public odes that heightened his celebrity), in at least sixty urban centres in England, Scotland, Ireland and even France.

This article focuses on the contribution of Thelwall's little-known French connections to his oral theory and practice. He made at least three trips to France: a family pleasure excursion in 1814 (recorded in a serial diary published in the *Courier* newspaper and then as a book), a lecture tour in 1818 (primarily in Paris), and a pedestrian sketching tour of the Seine in 1819 (with a fellow artist). Two members of Thelwall's French networks were particularly important for his work: the Abbé Sicard, who ran the famous *École des Sourds-Muets* (school for the deaf-mute) in Paris between 1789 and 1822; and Amaury Duval, a leading intellectual and participant in a series of encyclopedic ventures, including *La Décade Philosophique*, a groundbreaking journal of republican art and culture founded in 1794. Together they introduce my title concept of the *girouette*, or weathercock, an image of down-to-earth materialism, multi-directional mobility and ideological multivalence that illuminates the work of all three men. During the French Revolution, weathercocks associated with the *ancien régime* were levelled and turned upside down;[1] the word then gathered the negative connotations of turncoat opportunism and apostasy that it retains in French politics. According to Pierre Serna, a *girouette* was a radical centrist civil servant, whose chameleon adaptability enabled him to navigate changes and contingencies of opinion and ideology, rejecting extremes and thereby allowing government to operate.[2] The term first appeared in the *Décade Philosophique* in a 1799 article recognizing the need for "thinkers allied to active men, attached to those noble principles, which can no longer be obscured by the abuses of royalism or the crimes of anarchy."[3] Both Sicard and Duval were such men: philosophical activists, intellectuals and

1 Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 235-41.

2 Pierre Serna, *La République des Girouettes: 1789-1815 et au-delà* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2005), 11-28.

3 *La Décade Philosophique* 10 (10 nivôse VIII [31 December 1799]); quoted in English by James Livesey, "The Political Culture of the Directory," in *A Companion to the French Revolution*, ed. Peter McPhee (Oxford: Blackwell, 2015), 330.

pragmatists whose strategic adaptability allowed them to survive the Revolution and fill crucial roles in public culture.

Thelwall did the same in Britain. Although he was a lifelong enemy to apostasy, perpetually proclaiming his integrity, he could not escape the taint of the turncoat, censured by not only his anti-Jacobin enemies but his erstwhile allies, even in recent times.[4] Nevertheless he too, like Sicard and Duval, was a political survivor who cultivated a principled and many-minded intellectual mobility that allowed him to resist tyranny and maintain ideals while theorizing and practicing a socially-useful republican art and science. In what follows I triangulate Thelwall and his work between these two Frenchmen and theirs, highlighting the language of philosophical action that they share, and its continuities from the revolutionary to the post-revolutionary period. In so doing I focus on three definitive features of Thelwall's theory and practice of oral language that unite his political and elocutionary careers: its strategic materialism, mobility and multivalence.

I begin with Roch-Ambroise Cucurron, the Abbé Sicard (1742-1822), a distinguished teacher and theorist of the deaf-mute, who had taken over the groundbreaking *Institut des Sourds-Muets* from its founder the Abbé L'Epée upon the latter's death in 1789. Sicard is a fascinating figure in that despite being a priest who never took the revolutionary Oath and was imprisoned during the September massacres, he narrowly escaped execution and safely navigated the factionalism that followed; indeed his school was given preeminent status and respect as an *Institut National* at the very height of the Reign of Terror. One reason for this is that its egalitarian pedagogy was so consistent with fundamental republican principles: Sicard regarded and showcased the disabled as intellectually capable patriots, whose innate abilities and rigorous training alike epitomized the value of universal reason, giving them the tools to become self-sufficient citizens; the school's curriculum included mathematics, grammar, mechanics and philosophy as well as practical instruction in a trade. Devoted as he was to sign language as a mode of both advanced thinking and public speaking, a means of intellectual enquiry and development rather than simply rote repetition or animal instinct, Sicard's theory and practice were consistent with enlightenment ideals of universal reason in action.[5] His aim was to allow all citizens, including the disabled, to participate in the republic of eloquence he championed in an essay of 1793:

4 Ironically, Thelwall's greatest twentieth-century champion E.P. Thompson regarded elocution as a betrayal of his radical principles, pronouncing the "political fox […] dead" by 1804. E.P. Thompson, "Hunting the Jacobin Fox," in *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 190.

5 Emmet Kennedy, *Abbé Sicard's Deaf Education: Empowering the Mute, 1785-1820* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1-21.

> In these days of liberty and equality, a kind of general vocation calls every citizen to defend his country, and […] uphold its rights. […] To cultivate eloquence will be […] to pay one's debt to one's country […]. In the middle of these great assemblies, talent will develop […] in republican mouths. We too will have our Demosthenes and our Ciceros.[6]

Beloved by his pupils, the *girouette* Sicard rose in reputation through the ideological twists and turns of Revolution, Republic, Empire and Restoration, attracting national and international acclaim as he offered public exhibitions and performances in front of intellectual celebrities and tourists from all over the continent, as well as England, where Sicard himself travelled in 1815 and was particularly impressed with its "numerous institutions of public health and instruction."[7]

One of those was Thelwall's idiosyncratic but highly successful "Institution for the Cure of Impediments, Instruction of Foreigners, Improvement of Oratory, and Preparation of Youth for the Higher Departments of Active Life" in London. According to the journals of Henry Crabb Robinson, on 4 July 1815 Sicard and several of his pupils were there to witness one of the public performances by Thelwall and his pupils that, like those of Sicard, regularly attracted an audience of celebrities and intellectuals.[8] This was a return visit, for Thelwall had already met and had extensive conversation with Sicard on his first trip to France in 1814, which was in part motivated by his desire to visit Sicard's school and study its methods.[9] Their correspondence continued at least until 1818, when a rare surviving Thelwall letter mentions his having sent Sicard information about "the Scientific part of my system."[10] Thelwall probably encountered Sicard's widely publicized work as part of his research into disabled education in conjunction with the founding of his Institution in Liverpool in 1805, when he visited the "School for the Indigent Blind" established there by his friend, the radical (and visually impaired) poet Edward Rushton.

6 Abbé Sicard, *Journal Encyclopédique* (July 1793), quoted by Kennedy, *Abbé Sicard's Deaf Education*, 29.

7 Kennedy, *Abbé Sicard's Deaf Education*, 101-15, quoting an 1873 biography of Sicard.

8 Thomas Sadler, ed., *Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, 3 vols. (London: MacMillan, 1869), 2:492.

9 France was renowned for its enlightened institutions founded during the revolutionary period, and Thelwall's anonymously published *Diary of an Excursion to France in the Months of August and September, 1814, in a Series of Letters* (Edinburgh: Peter Hill, Manners and Miller, 1814), 86 and *passim*, indicates that he visited many of them, almost every day.

10 John Thelwall to M. Maury Duval, 5-6 July 1818, *Wellcome Institute Autographs*, MS 7734/1-30.

Thelwall's longstanding interest in French ideas and institutions preceded the Revolution;[11] he was well read in French philosophy and literature, and by 1820 the 6 000-volume library of his Institution included at least 200 French-language works in poetry, drama, history, law, philosophy and science, including more than sixty volumes of Voltaire.[12] Like Sicard, Thelwall was dedicated to enabling the communication that facilitated full citizenship in those who had been muted by impediments "mental, moral and organic," and his published case studies reveal his interest in a range of disabilities, including hearing and visual impairment, and what we would now call autism.[13] Although he put a premium on speech, and did not teach the deaf per se, as a scientific elocutionist he was well-versed in the body language of signs and gestures used in their education. His *Letter to Henry Cline* champions public health and democratic education in terms very similar to those that Sicard had articulated in his 1793 essay, talking about "enfranchis[ing] the tongue" and "vindicat[ing] the right of diffusing those principles, that were to give to the Mute, and the convulsive Stammerer, the free exercise and enjoyment of a faculty, which constitutes the essential attribute of our species" for "even from among the pupils of this description, might start forth some new Demosthenes, to enlighten and energize the rising generation."[14] Thelwall's exchange with Sicard highlights an intriguing connection between revolutionary politics, philology and the practical, medical, materialist science of language known as *logopaedia* or *orthophonie*, which has been overlooked in discussions of Romantic language theory, focusing as they do almost exclusively on the German idealist tradition, largely influenced by Thelwall's erstwhile friend and rival Samuel Taylor Coleridge.[15]

The art and science of language shared by Thelwall and Sicard went back to English empiricists, especially Locke, channeled through French encyclopedists

11 French affairs figure prominently in Thelwall's first anonymously published miscellany *The Biographical and Imperial Magazine* (London, 1789-91).

12 *A Catalogue of the Genuine Library of Valuable Books &c of John Thelwall, Esq.* (London: Armstrong, 1820).

13 Emily Stanback, "Disability and Dissent: Thelwall's Elocutionary Project," in *John Thelwall: Critical Reassessments*, ed. Yasmin Solomonescu (*Romantic Circles Praxis* 2011), accessed 12 November 2024, https://romantic-circles.org/praxis.

14 John Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline* (1810), in *Selected Political Writings of John Thelwall*, ed. Robert Lamb and Corinna Wagner, 4 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), 4:10-13, 106.

15 Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791-1818* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) is an exception to this. More recently and directly relevant are Yasmin Solomonescu, *The Materialist Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), especially 95-119 and 153 n18; and Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 154-60.

including Diderot, Rousseau, Condorcet and Condillac, who theorized a "natural language" of action, composed of cries and gestures, common between animals and humans, which then evolved into spoken and finally written language, but was still fundamental to all thought (which Condillac defined as "transformed sensation") and all art: as he put it, "the language of action has produced every art proper to express our thoughts; such as gesture, dancing, speech, declamation […] pantomimes, music, poetry, eloquence, writing, and the different characters of language."[16] The same materialist ideas influenced cutting-edge theories of mind that Thelwall had absorbed at prestigious Guy's Hospital, where he attended lectures on anatomy, chemistry and physiology, subjects that were at the centre of the materialist turn in brain science.[17] These studies issued in two groundbreaking lectures that Thelwall presented at the Guy's Hospital Physical Society at the same time that Sicard published his essay on republican eloquence. Early in 1793 he spoke on Animal Vitality, and later that year delivered an essay on "Mental Action explained on the system of Materialism." The first paper was vigorously applauded; the second led to his expulsion from the Society, owing to intensifying hysteria over associations between atheist materialism and revolutionary politics in England. Thelwall's two medical lectures coincided with, and directly influenced, his politically notorious Chaunticlere lecture (with its fabled, cocky French hero), delivered in fall 1793. All three lectures show the influence of another French materialist, the overtly atheist Julien Offray de La Mettrie, who founded his theories of mind on examples from natural history, including a decapitated rooster whose ability to continue running and flapping its wings without its head proves "that every fibre, that the minutest parts of organized bodies, are put into motion by a principle inherent in themselves."[18]

While none of Thelwall's materialist lectures focused explicitly on language, they may be considered as a form of applied language theory, as Solomonescu points out, in that they draw an analogy between the way the vital principle operates in the body and the way language operates in the body politic.[19] This in

16 Lorne Falkenstein and Giovanni Grandi, "Étienne Bonnot de Condillac," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Zalta, accessed 12 November 2024, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/condillac/; Olav Gundersen, "Condillac between Locke and Herder," in *Language and Praxis*, accessed 12 November 2024, https://web.abo.fi/fak/hf/filosofi/Research/Spraxis/. Kennedy, *Abbé Sicard's Deaf Education*, 7-11 compares the sign language of Épée, Sicard and Condillac, who reportedly visited the Ecole des Sourds-Muets.

17 Solomonescu, *The Materialist Imagination*, 1-33.

18 Solomonescu, *The Materialist Imagination*, 16-26. Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *Man a Machine*, trans. Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d'Argens (London: W. Owen, 1749), 58.

19 Solomonescu, *The Materialist Imagination*, 20-26, 99-104.

turn became the foundation of Thelwall's complex and well-developed theories of elocution, oral communication and language in general, which predated and provoked Coleridge's rival idealist theories in *Biographia Literaria*.[20] Essentially Thelwall maintained that language is produced by the body, through a sympathetic cooperation, or correspondence, among organs (which he defined as primary, secondary and enunciative, or perceptive, executive and recipient). Different organs are responsible for different aspects of language (for example power, modulation, articulation, tone, harmony, passion, character). Language being literally organic, it operates by the "universal principle of action and re-action" that governs all "progressive motion, organic or mechanical."[21]

According to Thelwall, the mind, though powerful, is still a bodily organ, which does not dominate but cooperates with others, such as the larynx, tongue or diaphragm. Since speech is a "musical science" and the human voice a "concert of many instruments […] exceedingly different from each other," the speaker's mind is like an orchestral conductor, who "direct[s]" and "command[s] the correspondent tones" to bring the organs into harmony.[22] Mind and body, cognition and expression, perception and execution are not hierarchical but collaborative. Adapting Shakespeare, Thelwall asserts that the mouth "is parcel of the mind" and, by analogy, so is the mouth of the ear, and the ear of the eye.[23] Just as oral and aural organs and elements of language correspond with one another, so too do oral, visual and visceral ones, including the gestures central to more "mechanical" schools of elocution, and the sign language (or, as Thelwall sometimes calls it, dactylology) used in deaf education.

According to Thelwall, its bodily orientation renders language egalitarian, active, pragmatic and social. Since in his view the body is also the body politic, each of these principles works for culture at large, which is also in a reciprocal correspondence with public organs of speech, or ought to be. This is the key connection between Thelwall's revolutionary and post-revolutionary, or early

20 Thelwall's theories were in place, and being widely publicized in lectures, articles and treatises, from 1804 onward; the four major treatises are "Introductory Discourse on the Nature and Objects of Elocutionary Science" (1806), *A Letter to Henry Cline* (1810), "Introductory Essay on the Study of English Rhythmus" (1812) and *Results of Experience in the Treatment of Cases of Defective Utterance* (1814). I summarize their conclusions in what follows.

21 Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 15.

22 Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 22.

23 John Thelwall, "Introductory Essay on the Study of English Rhythmus," in John Thelwall, *Illustrations of English Rhythmus* [*Selections for the Illustration of a Course of Instructions on the Rhythmus and Utterance of the English Language*] (London: J. M'Creery, 1812), xvi.

political and later elocutionary work. According to the "theory of sounds" outlined in his *Essay on Rhythmus,* the power of language, while originating in the primary organs, depends upon "modifications" of secondary and tertiary organs with which the primary impulse interacts; this includes the "sympathetic media, whose secondary vibrations co-operate with, and assist in the diffusion or promulgation of the primary vibrations" and the "sanity and susceptibility of the recipient organ[s]."[24] Though he does not explicitly follow up its sociological implications, Thelwall essentially lays the foundation for a science of public communication that applies equally well to print and oral culture, and to the role of media in society, and is as potentially useful as theories of dialogism, speech acts and mediology have been in the twentieth century.[25] Likewise, in the headnotes to the elocutionary *Selections* that accompany Thelwall's lectures, which offer detailed instructions for speakers' performances of particular texts, we glimpse print traces of what he offered more fully, orally, in his school: a complete theory and practice of vocal interpretation integrated with, and integral to the understanding of, literature; a form of elocutionary close reading that corresponds with, and deserves to be taught beside, the print formalism that has come down to us from Coleridge and his critical successors.

As important as Thelwall's organic materialism is the "progressive motion," or modulation, that results from his universal principle of "action and reaction": the rhythmic alternation of "thesis and arsis," or "pulsation and remission," common to heartbeat, footstep and poetic foot. It governs "all tribes of voice," human and non-human, and all elements of expression, including variations of sound in verse and prose.[26] This stands at the heart of Thelwall's ground-breaking physiological prosody, or *therapoetics*, as Julia Carlson calls it.[27] Leaving aside its anatomical technicalities, its literary principles are best seen in the classical Pindaric ode, which originated in active-reactive movement at once physical (of the chorus side to side and centre at the Olympic games), structural (strophe, antistrophe, epode) and conceptual (thesis, antithesis, synthesis). Thelwall regarded the Pindaric

24 Thelwall, "Essay on Rhythmus," xxviii.

25 J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982); Régis Debray, *Transmitting Culture*, trans. Eric Rauth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) and *Cours de médiologie générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991).

26 Thelwall, "Essay on Rhythmus," v.

27 Julia Carlson, "Thelwall's Therapoetics," in Julia Carlson, *Romantic Marks and Measures: Wordsworth's Poetry in Fields of Print* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 260-304.

as "by far the most perfect" form of ode, due to its range of "well-digested varieties," "regular responses" and "accordant quantities and accents," including intertwined and reciprocal patterns of rhythm, rhyme, syllable and syntax. Repeated patterns of sound, which speak to the ear (e.g., alliteration, internal and half-rhyme), create a more disciplined reader (always a speaker, for Thelwall). These patterns are more versatile, beneficial and meaningful than the "mere jingle […] of terminative elements" (that is, end-rhyme), or figurative language that speaks only to the eye.[28]

The best example of this theory in Thelwall's own work is his self-consciously "experimental" odes of 1803 (part of his militant response to the *Edinburgh Review*'s campaign against Jacobin poetics).[29] In "To Dr. Paley, of Halifax" and "Ode Inscribed on the Fan of Mrs. G." (along with the "Sonnet to Stella in the Style of Ossian," as Jerome McGann has suggested), he undertook the most radical experiment in English versification before its closest rival, the sprung rhythm of Gerard Manley Hopkins more than seventy-five years later.[30] He combined the structure of the Pindaric ode with a dazzling prosody that reflected both his materialist elocutionary theory and his exposure to bardic traditions through friendships with radical antiquarians, especially Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams). The "Welsh Bard" introduced him to the *cynghanedd*, a wickedly difficult yet down-to-earth verse form characterized by "intricate system of consonantal alliteration, internal rhyme and balanced stresses" that embodied and showcased the highest intelligence and craftsmanship of the *vox populi*.[31] Thelwall followed these experiments with a series of patriotic odes on the deaths of public figures – Admiral Nelson (1805), Charles James Fox (1806), Princess Charlotte (1817) – and the ongoing fight of Spanish republicans for independence from

[28] John Thelwall, "On Lyrical Poetry," in *Poetical Recreations of* The Champion (London, 1822), 154-59.

[29] Judith Thompson, *John Thelwall in the Wordsworth Circle: The Silenced Partner* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 161-71. The odes were part of a "series of Public experiments" he had announced in lectures in Manchester and Huddersfield in fall 1803: see John Thelwall, *Elocution and Oratory: General Plan and Outline of Mr. Thelwall's Course of Lectures* (Manchester: R. and W. Dean, 1803).

[30] Jerome McGann, "Romantic Subjects and Iambic Laws: Episodes in the Early History of Contract Negotiations," *New Literary History* 49, no. 4 (2018): 597-615. Thelwall's experimental odes and sonnet may be found in *John Thelwall: Selected Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Judith Thompson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 99, 137, 192.

[31] Geraint Jenkins, *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg* (Aberystwyth: University of Wales Press, 2005), 72. Morganwg founded the *Eisteddfod* competitions anchored by the performance of *cynghanedd*.

Napoleonic imperialism (1808, 1820, 1825).[32] These caught the public mood and brought him renewed celebrity in the first two decades of the nineteenth century.

As far as we know, Thelwall wrote no odes in or on France. However, he grappled with differences between French and English versification in translations, influenced by his interaction with Amaury Duval (1760-1838). Lawyer, diplomat, journalist, historian, literary critic and polymath, Duval was another *girouette*, who fused the "*esprit philosophique et l'esprit républicain.*"[33] Almost exactly Thelwall's contemporary, he was one of six thinkers who in 1794 founded the revolutionary journal *La Décade Philosophique*, one of the "intellectual powerhouses of the French Republic."[34] Devoted to encyclopedic ideals, it aimed to create the enlightened, cosmopolitan, dechristianized, humanitarian population it claimed was necessary to maintain a Republic, and it covered a wide range of scientific, philosophical, economic, literary, technical and pedagogical subjects, extending the *Science Humaine* of Ideologues and Encylopedists such as Condillac and Cabanis (another radical materialist doctor, whose groundbreaking theories were fundamental to Romantic sciences of mind, and who actually provided the definition of the *girouette* in the journal).[35] Duval contributed articles on politics (which made him familiar with Thelwall's name), as well as history, moral philosophy, theatre and visual arts (all interests of Thelwall), and miscellaneous poems, tales, letters, humorous and satiric sketches under the name Polyscope (recalling Thelwall's polymath Peripatetic). He salted them with an ambiguous disguised criticism not unlike Thelwall's seditious allegory. A typical *girouette,* Duval has been hard for later scholars to pin down, but Kitchin calls him "the most ardent apostle of the republicanization of art and literature." In 1807, *La Décade Philosophique* was suppressed by Napoleon, but Duval continued to publish on art, architecture,

[32] Nelson is the hero of John Thelwall's following poems: *The Trident of Albion: an Epic Effusion*, in John Thelwall, *The Vestibule of Eloquence: Original Articles, Oratorical and Poetical* (London: J. M'Creery, 1810), 27-38; "Monody on the Death of the Princess Charlotte of Wales," in Thelwall, *Poetical Recreations*, 48-49; *Monody on the Right Honourable Charles James Fox* (London: J. M'Creery, 1806); *Mr. Thelwall's Ode. Addressed to the Energies of Britain in Behalf of the Spanish Patriots* (London: J. M'Creery, 1808); "The Champion's Address. To the Armed Patriots of Spain," Thelwall, *Political Recreations*, 128-31; "The Star that Shone when Other Stars were Dim. A Night Walk in the Vicinity of Whitehall," *Monthly Magazine* 59, supplement (1825): 661-63.

[33] Joanna Kitchin, *Un journal "philosophique": La Décade (1794-1807)* (Paris: Paillart, 1966) 3.

[34] Michael Sonenscher, "'The Moment of Social Science': The *Décade Philosophique* and Late Eighteenth-Century French Thought," *Modern Intellectual History* 6, no. 1 (April 2009): 121.

[35] Kitchin, *Un journal "philosophique*," 4-5; Sonenscher, "'The Moment of Social Science,'" 121-29; Richardson, *British Romanticism*, 16-19; Livesey, "The Political Culture of the Directory," 330.

literary history and criticism, and was involved in two other journals, the *Revue Encyclopédique* and the *Mercure Étranger*, both of which reflected the upsurge of interest in foreign and especially English literature in France at that time. Duval's theatre criticism in particular was no doubt influenced by his younger brother, Alexandre, a popular and prolific playwright, actor, poet, theatre manager, member of the Comédie Française and another *girouette*, who was forced into temporary exile when he got on the wrong side of Napoleon in 1803.[36]

In 1817, the year before Thelwall's second visit to France, Amaury Duval was involved in a new encyclopedic venture in Paris, the *Dépôt Bibliographique*, a literary emporium combining bookstore, publisher, exhibition space, museum, gallery and library containing almost 12 000 volumes.[37] It was to the *Dépôt* that Thelwall directed a letter to Duval in 1818 (this mentions his correspondence with Sicard, suggesting that all three were mutually acquainted, probably since 1814). The length and tone of this letter imply an already close friendship, as it begins with domestic arrangements for the visit of Thelwall's teenage second wife and daughters, who accompanied him to Paris (the eldest of whom was nineteen-year-old Manon Roland Thelwall, named after the French revolutionary martyr). There follows Thelwall's plan to offer lectures in Paris "on Shakespeare and Milton and the idiom, rhythmus and study of the English Language, enlivened by that Theatrical style of declamation with which I am in the habit of delivering my recitations." They were aimed, he said, not primarily at English residents, but at Parisians, to convince them of "the efficacy of my system of instruction both in teaching to foreigners […] our language and removing impediments of speech."[38]

The *Dépôt Bibliographique* embodies the predilection for miscellaneous, encyclopedic language, form and theme that drew Thelwall and Duval together, and points to the multivalence that is the third defining feature of Thelwall's oral theory and practice. It frames his life and work, from the *Biographical and Imperial Magazine*, which began in the revolutionary year 1789, to the *Panoramic Miscellany* of 1826, which included regular correspondence with the *Revue Encyclopédique*, and like the *Mercure Étranger* had substantial reviews of foreign literature and culture. Most of Thelwall's prolific publications, oral and print, were in some sense miscellanies, including *The Peripatetic* and *A Letter to Henry Cline*, but also the

36 Kitchin, *Un journal "philosophique*," 13-20. According to Paul Franssen, Alexandre got back in Napoleon's good books in part through his 1804 play *Shakespeare Amoureux*. Paul Franssen, "Shakespeare in Love 1804; or, Conquering the Continent with William," *Cahiers Charles V* 45, no. 1 (2008): 211-30.

37 *Bibliographie de la France; ou journal général de l'imprimerie et de la Librairie. Année 1817* (Paris: Chez Pillet, 1817), 80, 105.

38 Thelwall to Duval, *Wellcome* MS 7734/1-30.

elocutionary anthologies that accompanied his lectures, bringing together all manner of poetry and prose to promote an inclusive education through active, co-responsive reading; that is, reading aloud. All of these selections, individually and collectively, may thus be seen as organs of cooperation within the body politic. As one critic says of Duval's work, its "very indeterminacy [what I would call its mobility and multivalence] may […] help to open up, both historically and analytically, rather more of the intellectual space once covered by the broad range of subjects and arguments that first helped to shape – and then came to be buried by – idealism and utilitarianism."[39]

It is likely that Thelwall gave his Paris lectures in the exhibition rooms of the *Dépôt*. Though no records of them have been found in French newspapers, we have a good idea of their content from the more detailed coverage of his English lectures on the same topics, which he had been giving since at least 1803. They show why these lectures might have appealed to a Parisian audience in 1818. For one thing, they were on the two writers who, at that time in France, vied for the title of the greatest genius of English literature, with Milton universally admired since the seventeenth century for his "sublimity, originality, vigour and diction," but Shakespeare, despite some lingering condescension from neoclassicists, beginning to take over by the early nineteenth century for "sa manière grande et aisée, simple, naturelle, forte, éloquente."[40] Coming from the playwright Louis-Sébastien Mercier, this appreciation of Shakespeare's style includes oral performance, which was Thelwall's great art and the appeal of his lectures: theatrical declamation was not only his own *manière* but the object and foundation of his method of education, therapy, and literary criticism. For him, the best dramatic *and* non-dramatic poets, above all Milton, were geniuses of oratory, whose work needed to be recited to unlock its meaning and value, therapeutic and intellectual, individual and social. Voice creates associations similar to those created by imagination, but more powerful because they actively reach out to an audience, creating bonds of sympathy across the gap of stage or page. The mouth being parcel of the mind, and the ear and tongue more powerful than the eye, the reciter enters into the spirit and body of the author, incorporating his or her ideas and passions, taking on his or her authority and bringing him or her alive for and in both speaker and listener.

This is Thelwall's version of emulation, a pedagogical principle that lay at the heart of the elocution movement, and made it popular among political reformers,

[39] Sonenscher, "'The Moment of Social Science,'" 122.

[40] Eric Partridge, *The French Romantic Knowledge of English Literature 1820-1848* (Geneva: Statkine Reprints, 1974), 25-35.

not simply social climbers.[41] Voice crosses gaps not only on page and stage, but also in time and space and between nations, bringing a dead text from one place in the past back to life at another in the present, giving it agency to address contemporary social problems. This was one of Thelwall's most effective and revolutionary strategies, central to his technique of seditious allegory, first seen when he notoriously interrupted a production of Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* in 1793, leading extended applause after a speech that had immediate political resonance, and forcing the production to be cancelled for fear of its Jacobinical tendencies.[42] Twenty-five years later, during the Queen Caroline affair, he performed a similarly subversive recontextualization in his newspaper reviews of the same play, as well as Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Richard III*.[43] In much the same way, French playwrights including Duval adapted Shakespeare to their own political ends, to convey messages for their own times, for example about French-English relations in their use of *Henry V*.[44] Thelwall may also have referred to that play in his 1818 Paris lectures, as it was one of his standard selections. But even more strategically allegorical was one of his signature plays, *Julius Caesar*, used regularly in his drama lectures of the 18-teens, as Roman history had been used in his political lectures twenty years before, to comment on contemporary politics. Here his selections are orations by Cassius and Antony, explicitly included as examples of the world-shaking power of popular oratory. Given the impact of such oratory in the recent history of France, this would surely have been well received in Paris.

Thelwall goes against the grain of the Romantic theatre criticism with which we are now familiar, exemplified by Coleridge and Hazlitt, by focusing not on the psychological singularity of a character like Hamlet or a great actor like Kean, but instead on multivalence both in the production as a whole and in individual characterization and voice. He states categorically that "in proportion as a tragedy approaches to monodrame it is bad […]. Shakespeare never appears to have been content with one hero, [though] Hamlet approaches nearest to this monodramatic effect."[45] But even when there is "one character super-eminent over the rest […]

41 Judith Thompson, "Elocutionary Rhetoric: Educating the *Vox Populi*, or Delivery as Deliverance," in *The Cambridge History of Rhetoric*, Vol. 4: *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. Adam Potkay and Dietmar Till (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2025).

42 Michael Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall and Jacobin Writing* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001) 205-207.

43 John Thelwall, *The Champion* (19 and 26 August 1820). In a column responding to the rise of the Bourbons, Thelwall also recalled peeking out from behind the curtain in a Paris theatre.

44 Paul Franssen, *Shakespeare's Literary Lives: The Author as Character in Fiction and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 39-41.

45 Thelwall, *The Champion* (22 March 1819), 189.

there are always others, of considerable prominence, to relieve, contrast and harmonize." There should be "good seconds, to maintain an emulous struggle with each other."[46] He uses the same principle in his reviews of Kean, with (or against) whom he had lectured, on alternate nights, in Dublin, during the actor's Irish run in *Richard III*, the year before his visit to Paris. Offering minutely detailed comments on all aspects of Kean's performance and elocution, he notes characteristic excellences but regrets that Kean lacks "flexure and variety," nuance and distinctness, relies too heavily on pantomime and passion, and is not sufficiently respectful of the author's language. The actor's prodigious powers are impeded by his ego, that "little jealousy that will not suffer rival merit to come in public contact with him."[47] Thelwall probably did not speak on Kean in Paris, since the actor did not perform there until 1828. But since Thelwall attended theatre several times a week, in Paris as in London, and was acquainted with Alexandre Duval, he would have known the current productions and leading French actors, such as the famous Francois-Joseph Talma and his stage-partner Catherine-Josephine Duchesnois, and no doubt commented on them.[48]

Voice would also have been the focus of Thelwall's lectures on Milton. His outlines and selections from *Paradise Lost* reflect this: they are dramatic addresses like the poet's apostrophe to light in Book 3, and especially Satan's address to the fallen angels, which Thelwall regarded as "the most difficult production upon which the organs of the reader or reciter can be employed," but for that reason also the most rewarding passage, as the author's genius and power elicit persevering and adventurous eloquence in the reader.[49] Furthermore, Milton is one of the twin pillars of his entire elocutionary system, which he says came to him in a hearthside epiphany during his internal exile in Wales, when he was reading Milton and Dryden ("sometimes resounding and sometimes silently analyzing"). As he compared and dissected their versification, he discovered in the "anatomical structure of the organs of speech, the sources of the melody of language and the sources and remedies of lingual defects." Exhaustively scanning *Paradise Lost*, which is "supereminent above any composition in the English language" for the strength, melody and variety of its rhythmus and numbers, he found that "the excellence of every line, is comprehensible according to physiological principles of human utterance." But this excellence, he says, is also

46 Thewall, *The Champion* (4 April 1819), 219.

47 Thelwall, *The Champion* (21 February 1819), 126.

48 Thelwall saw Duchesnois repeatedly during her engagement in Rouen in 1814, and his *Diary of an Excursion to France* contains detailed comments, especially on her voice.

49 Thelwall, *Selections &c. for Mr. Thelwall's Lectures* (York, 1802), British Library copy.

due in large part to the poet's disability – his blindness required him to compose his verses orally.[50]

It is possible, then, that among the pieces that Thelwall directed his students to recite for the Abbé Sicard in July 1815 were excerpts from Milton's *Comus*, which (though written before the onset of his blindness) highlights the effect of that same pre-eminent Miltonic melody and variety of speech, rhythmus and numbers upon the ear ("my best guide now," says Milton's protagonist).[51] Prosody has the power to release the tongue from the Bastille of constitutional impairment, whether that be understood physiologically, psychologically or politically, in much the way it had released Thelwall from his own prison, according to the epigraph from *Comus* that prefaced his 1795 *Poems Written in Close Confinement*. In those powerful odes, songs and sonnets, much of his poetic theory originated in practice. Despite its horrors and lifelong impact on his health, Thelwall's prison stay intensified his creative energy, which took new forms and fostered a new kind of bodily awareness that complemented his theories of mental materialism, and manifested itself in his tools and modes of expression. While he was deprived of writing utensils, he literally inscribed his mental freedom in the material of oppression by scratching "devices" on the walls with a nail.[52]

The same exertion of imagination against restraint then transferred itself to the oral production of language by bodily organs. As he composed (himself) by measuring his cell with his (and in poetic) feet, he discovered through experience the therapeutic physiology and psychology of prosody that he would later theorize and apply to the treatment of the speech-disabled: the power of voice and the capacity of musical, metrical language to channel and temper passion. Thereafter he never failed to keep his tongue and heart in communication with one another, and he taught generations of pupils to do the same.

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50 Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 8-9, 68-73.

51 *Comus* l.169, in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis, IN: Odyssey Press, 1957), 94.

52 Mrs. H.C. Thelwall, *The Life of John Thelwall* (London: Macrone, 1837), 187.

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