

The Eighteenth-Century Emigrant, Crossing Literary Borders

Melissa Wittmeier
Northwestern University

Few today would argue that France is not a good example of a nation-state with a culturally homogenous group sharing a common language, common institutions, and a common historical experience under laws established by the body politic for the whole of the territory. Nor would many argue that the French Revolution and its aftermath did not play an instrumental role in the formation of the nation-state that exists today. The transition from the Old Regime to the French Republic required a redefinition of the *patrie*. This task was necessarily facilitated by literature and the written word both during and after the Revolution. As other studies have demonstrated, contemporary works by and about French *émigrés* contributed to the formation of a new national identity.¹ The contributions that these works made, however, were a function of the authors' own identities and experiences. Works about *émigrés* simultaneously intellectualize and romanticize the exile experience, whereas works written by *émigrés* sanction and lament it without attempting to rationalize it (Weiner). Although authors tend to disappear behind the text of many literary genres, they tend to remain visible in the context of the *émigré*.

Studies on the eighteenth-century French *émigrés*—those citizens who felt inclined or compelled to leave their homeland to reach foreign soil during the Revolution and its aftermath—have at once highlighted the diverse nature of the texts featuring them and underscored their similarities. *Émigrés* may appear in one work to be stereotypes and in another to be very real and, above all, very human figures. One work might target the political while another the pathetic. Despite these differences, the context of many works is nearly identical in that the scenes and details they describe resemble each other closely. Whether a critic focuses on similarities or differences and addresses fiction or non-fiction, the author's lived experience of the revolutionary period tends to influence the work more significantly than studies on emigrants in literature have successfully revealed. This paper looks at four works involving emigrants—two fiction and two non-fiction; two written by emigrated authors and two written by non-emigrated authors—in order to demonstrate that the works written by *émigrés* are much more powerful in their exposition of the exile experienced by the characters and much more critical in their assessment of the new *patrie* than those by non-emigrated authors.

¹ See Sylvie Aprile; Donald Greer (*Incidence of the Emigration* 29); and *L'idée de nation*.

The four books in question are *L'émigré* by Gabriel Sénac de Meilhan, published in 1797; *Lettres trouvées dans des portefeuilles d'émigrés* (hereafter *Lettres*) by Isabelle de Charrière, published in 1793; the unpublished memoirs of Esprit IV Bernard de Bovis, written during his exiles from 1791 to 1800 and compiled sometime between 1808 and 1816;² and the unpublished biography of René Louis Dominique de Gras-Préville, written by his descendent, the marquis Roger d'Arlot de Cumond, in the second half of the nineteenth century. All four works certainly share a number of common points, but the works that resemble each other most profoundly are *L'émigré* and the memoirs on the one hand, and *Lettres* and the biography on the other. *L'émigré* and the memoirs are unforgiving in their assessment of the new France.

It has often been noted that the events of the French Revolution surpassed in drama and import any event that the most skilled novelist could imagine.³ Whereas fiction is meant to resemble life, life had come to resemble fiction during the Revolution. However one chooses to view this transposition, the line between the scripted and the authentic undeniably shifted during this period. That is, the fact of the event itself takes a backseat to the narration of it. While this hierarchy might be true to some degree in all aspects of writing, it is especially remarkable in literature on the *émigré* or literature from any other poignant historical time, when the event is romanesque and the romanesque is the event.⁴ How the event was lived by the person communicating the story seems to matter a great deal to the execution of literature.

In the arena of fiction, Sénac de Meilhan's *L'émigré* often serves as the model for the romanesque genre born of revolutionary proscriptions. Though published in 1797, *L'émigré* was undoubtedly written in 1793 when Sénac de Meilhan found himself quite comfortable in the home of Prince Henry of Prussia. Sénac de Meilhan was then fifty-seven years old. Born at Versailles in 1736, he entered service to King Louis XV in 1762. Following the outbreak of the Revolution, he left France and went to England in 1790. From there, he ventured to Aachen in 1791 and to Russia one year after that. In 1793, he began his residence with Prince Henry and remained on the banks of the Rhine for several years before moving to Vienna.

An epistolary novel, *L'émigré* is often mentioned in the same breath as Charrière's *Lettres*, perhaps because it is a novel of a similar structure (though very different length). Isabelle van Zuylen was born in the Netherlands in 1740. Well-endowed financially and intellectually, she enjoyed travel and developed a preference for the French language in her youth. In 1771, she settled on an estate near Neuchâtel in Switzerland with her husband, Charles-Emmanuel de Charrière. This remained her adopted home, where she penned the majority of her works, until her death in 1805.

When Bovis was born in Lorgues, France in 1750, his family had no desire for him to become an author. He descended from a long line of nobles who originated in Italy and

² According to indications taken from the text of the memoirs, Bovis must have written after the death of his wife in 1807 and before the marriage of his son in 1817.

³ Sénac de Meilhan noted as much himself in the preface to *L'émigré*: "Les rencontres les plus extraordinaires, les plus étonnantes circonstances, les plus déplorables situations deviennent des événements communs, et surpassent ce que les auteurs de roman peuvent imaginer" (33).

⁴ In February 1799, the *Journal littéraire et bibliographique* of Hamburg printed the following: "Presque tout le monde . . . regarde l'émigration comme une source inépuisable de romans."

established themselves in France by the fourteenth century. Bovis became mayor of the city of Lorgues but resigned his public functions in 1790 in an effort to live a life of retirement with his wife and young children. Being unable to persuade his family to emigrate to the newly established United States of America and not wishing to expose himself to the risks of a voluntary emigration in Europe, Bovis took his small entourage first to Lyon and then to the Provençal countryside. Despite his efforts to fade from public light, he saw his name inscribed on the lists of proscription several times. In 1791, a warrant was issued for his arrest. He fled to Switzerland, where he remained until 1794. He returned to France, but was forced to leave again in 1797. This time, he went to Italy where he spent three years.

The second non-fiction text recounts the life of René Louis Dominique Gras-Préville. As the second son of a noble family in Languedoc, he was destined from youth to become a knight of Malta. When Louis XVI was executed in 1793, Gras-Préville immediately joined the *armée des princes*. He returned to Malta, where he participated in the ill-fated expedition to Quiberon in 1795⁵ as well as several other counter-revolutionary campaigns from 1795 to 1798, the year that Malta fell to General Bonaparte. When Bonaparte ordered the knights to evacuate, Gras-Préville went to Italy and took up service in the navy of Ferdinand IV de Bourbon, King of Naples. In 1803, Gras-Préville married the daughter of another emigrant who found herself, with her mother and sister, in Naples that year. Gras-Préville never returned to France and died in Naples in 1829, leaving behind him personal correspondence and various military logbooks by means of which posterity would reconstruct the story of his romanesque life.

In the introduction to *Destins romanesques de l'émigration*, edited by Claire Jaquier, Florence Lotterie, and Catriona Seth, one reads the following assessment:

S'il paraît difficile de dessiner des lignes de partage dans une production romanesque aussi diverse et foisonnante, on peut toutefois distinguer quelques œuvres exemplaires dans leur capacité à répercuter le choc et la complexité des événements en conjuguant pathétique et réalisme. *L'émigré* de Sénac de Meilhan, les *Lettres trouvées dans des portefeuilles d'émigrés...* de M^{me} de Charrière, assurément sont de celles-ci. Saisis par l'Histoire en marche, ouverts sur une fin problématique, ces romans articulent une intrigue fictive aux événements historiques, et soumettent les relations sentimentales à l'épreuve des divisions idéologiques, des déplacements spatiaux et sociaux que l'émigration génère. Au sein de matrices romanesques héritées, ces œuvres renouvellent le genre en y inscrivant la parole déprise de toute certitude des *émigrés*, leur expérience d'instabilité identitaire ou de désancrage historique. Elles proposent des tableaux frappants de l'exil; elles illustrent le bouleversement des conditions, la dépossession matérielle et morale, les épreuves déshumanisantes. (12)

That *L'émigré* and *Lettres* should be likened to one another is not surprising. Indeed, one cannot deny the numerous similarities the works share. The subject matter and form of each is identical. The primary themes of each work do not contrast and their authors convey similar empathy for the plight of emigrants. What differs strikingly is the tone each author employs. The minutiae each chose to invent and describe also differ tremendously, not only in tone but also in substance, as shall be outlined in this paper. The claim that the

⁵ Of the 3,600 *émigrés* that comprised the five regiments transported to Quiberon by an English fleet, some 750 were executed following the defeat of the counter-revolutionary forces (Hutt 322).

works are similar wholesale is accurate, but their retail differences ultimately had a fundamentally different impact on the formation of France's national identity.

Just as Charrière's novel resembles *L'émigré* to a superficial tee, so too does it mirror the words of Bovis with an apparently flawless reflection:

Londres, ce 21 mai 1793

Mon Dieu, que je suis inquiète et malheureuse !
D'après mes calculs faits & refaits mille fois, je devais recevoir, il y a déjà quelques jours, une réponse à ma première lettre, & à l'heure qu'il est, je pourrais aussi en avoir une à la seconde ; cependant il n'arrive pas un mot de vous. . . . (Charrière 441)

Aux Combes, 20 septembre 1793

J'ignore quand et comment je te ferai parvenir cette lettre, mais je t'écris par le besoin que je sens de soulager mon cœur. . . . (Bovis, beginning a letter to his wife, 33)

Stylistically and thematically, citations such as those above demonstrate that the qualities of literature on emigrants are independent of genre. Themes of hope and hopelessness, fortune and misfortune, justice and injustice, the questions of lost heritage, name and identity, the (often difficult) voyage, life and death, money and wealth, love, war, politics, and family appear in works of fictional texts on the topic of emigrants just as they do in their non-fictional counterparts. Like any individual, an author often finds it difficult to discern imagination from memory, yet the subject of the emigrant was both lived and living, so a novelist had to arm him or herself with prudent sensitivity and exact verisimilitude. For these reasons, the line between a novel and an autobiographical or biographical work can appear fluid and, at times, can serve more readily to connect rather than to separate the two genres. Inversely, it is likewise true that many of the similarities that appear in different works of fiction on emigrants lack the strength to bond the works. What matters most is a text's depth of the reflection rather than the exactness of its two-dimensional representation.

L'émigré and *Lettres* are both epistolary novels in which the authors paint scenes of the revolution and its consequences through a variety of voices. Both stories take place in foreign countries and on French soil; both accuse the revolutionaries and the nobles alike; both deplore the violence of the period; and both depict stories of forbidden love. In *L'émigré*, a young aristocratic *émigré*, the marquis de Saint Alban, is found, injured, by Commander de Lowenstein; Saint Alban falls in love with the commander's niece, Victorine, who is married to a much older German gentleman. Out of duty, the two resist their amorous feeling. The sudden death of the husband seems to render the couple's happiness possible, but History intervenes. Called once again by duty to fight the Revolution, Saint Alban is taken prisoner and commits suicide rather than allowing himself to be executed. As a result, Victorine dies of grief. In Charrière's *Lettres*, two couples are involved in the drama. Germaine and Alphonse are both noble, but Alphonse refuses to participate in the counter-Revolution; this has provoked the animosity of his beloved's father, the marquis de ***. Pauline, another of the marquis' daughters, loves and is loved by Laurent, a republican and very close friend of Alphonse. The two couples resist not love but the

obstacles that hamper love's fruition. In the end, all four end up together in Holland, having received the marquis de ***'s blessing.

The epistolary format and the multiplicity of voices (Bochenek-Franczakowa), opinions, and tones that *Lettres* conveys is not a negligible asset to the literary depiction of emigrants given that there were some 190,000 French citizens who found it expeditious to take refuge on foreign soil between 1789 and 1815.⁶ Most of these emigrants were nobles, having left their homes during one of the heavy exoduses that took place between 1789 and 1794.⁷ Often, however, these nobles were accompanied by valets or other servants who, though not on the lists of proscription themselves, nonetheless took up residence abroad and were therefore emigrants. A good number of wealthy members of the bourgeoisie likewise chose or found it necessary to leave France. Though men dominated the list of emigrants, women and children also found themselves on foreign soil during the revolutionary period. Therefore, any one portrayal of the emigrant must necessarily be incomplete.

Beyond allowing for a richer representation of the various groups of emigrants, the epistolary format carries with it an empathetic force that is less restricted than traditional narration due to the personal nature of letters. Personal correspondence is, furthermore, entirely authentic to the period.⁸ Much of the historical information regarding the phenomenon of emigration during the revolution has come to us by way of the letters written to loved ones, business partners, lawyers, or other acquaintances. Family letters appear in both Bovis' memoirs and Gras-Préville's biography. Personal correspondence renders a text more poignant via the intimacy of the medium, since such letters presuppose the existence of sentiment and seek to touch the emotions of the reader, whoever the reader might be.

The ability of letters to move the reader depends on the intentions and designs of their author. The two emigrant authors, Bovis and Sénac de Meilhan, explicitly announced the motivation that led to their work. By way of a foreword, they invested themselves personally in the text. A desire to justify the materialization of their words translates into a preference to guide and prepare the reader to receive their stories in a way that the writers dictate. According to Bovis' foreword, he undertook the project of writing his memoirs for the benefit of his children: "J'ai conçu pour mes ancêtres des sentiments de respect et de vénération que je désire faire passer dans le cœur de mes enfants . . . je leur dois compte de hasards qui en changeant mon existence ont si fort influé sur leur destinée" (1). Sénac de

⁶ The precise number of emigrants is unknown. The *Liste générale*, which tallied the names of emigrants, was inexact. The *Liste*, moreover, was closed out in the year IX (1801) with 145,000 names on it. Those who emigrated after 1801 are estimated to total 46,000 (Baldensperger iii). Other historians, such as Norman Hampson and Greer (*Incidence of the Emigration*), have calculated a much smaller number of emigrants.

⁷ Following the fall of the Bastille in 1789, many nobles loyal to the king followed the Prince de Condé and the two brothers of the king, the Count de Provence and the Count d'Artois, to form a counter-revolutionary army. In 1792, the Convention decreed that all goods of emigrants were to be confiscated by the state and emigrants were to be banished in perpetuity from French soil. From September 1793 until July 1794, somewhere between 20,000 and 40,000 French citizens were executed and thousands of others were imprisoned. These events contributed to successive waves of emigration (Greer, *Incidence of Terror*; Baker; Doyle).

⁸ Because letter writers were perfectly well aware that their words would be read in public—indeed, they most often intended them to be—personal correspondence in the eighteenth century had a different meaning and function than it does today.

Meilhan seems to have wanted to interest the public in the lot of the emigrants: "Je n'en dirai pas davantage sur cet ouvrage ; s'il intéresse, je n'aurai pas eu tort de le publier" (33). Because neither Charrière nor Cumond offers the reader an explanation regarding the text's intent, the readers must discern it while reading their pieces. Perhaps Cumond hoped to bring the memory of his ancestor back to life by positioning him within the history of France. Did he write to justify or to correct the historical record such as it had been transmitted until then? One can pose similar questions regarding Charrière's work. Did the author use the subject of emigration primarily as a vehicle to transmit her political and philosophical ideas? In the absence of any authorial explanation, the reader's intellect must come into play to answer such questions. In contrast, the two emigrant authors remove this necessity and appeal directly to the emotions of the reader.

Directly or less directly, all four authors do indeed appeal to the reader's emotions. The works of fiction present the misfortune of the emigrants without the least camouflage, just as the works of non-fiction do. "Que suis-je maintenant ? Grand Dieu, vous le savez. Rien qu'un infortuné digne de votre pitié" (Bovis 31). "Ayez pitié de moi, . . . vous allez voir que je le mérite" (Charrière 423). In Charrière's text, the emigrated heroine, Germaine, is worthy of pity because of, as she expresses it, "la contrainte qu'on m'impose sur mille niaiseries, de manière que je ne fais pas un pas, que je ne dis pas un mot, que je ne noue pas un ruban comme je le voudrais" (423). Pity thus elicited (that is, by inanities) pales in comparison to that solicited by Bovis who had just lost everything. A fugitive in his own country, he was living alone in a small hovel far from everything and in hiding from the world; he had barely enough to eat as he prepared for his first emigration to Switzerland:

Mais misérable ! tous ces objets si chers sont bien loin de moi et je pleure tout seul de la douleur de les avoir perdus. Oh ! que les larmes de la douleur sont amères quand personne ne les recueille. Quelle étrange destinée est la mienne ! En vain, ai-je voulu tenir à la terre par les liens les plus forts : époux, père, citoyen, je n'ai plus ni femme, ni enfants, ni patrie. Tout me repousse et le coin du monde où le destin m'a relégué ne m'offre même pas un asile hospitalier. (80)

Yet Charrière's character, Germaine, does not feel her unhappiness any less than Bovis feels his; the two individuals are, after all, incomparable. The former is a young lady who has barely left adolescence, and the latter is a father of a family who will no longer live a given situation in the same way. Personal experience, whether such experience is authentic or a creation of the imagination of an author, determines the character of a person and must necessarily enter into our interpretation of the text. For the same reason, the literary work reflects the personal experience of the author in relation to the events he or she recounts. This is not a new question, and one must categorically reject the idea that biographical elements of the writer determine the significance of a text. But the significance of a text is different from its meaning, which a reader might elucidate by considering the biographical elements of the writer. A text, once written, possesses its own identity that should not be confused with that of the author (Eco 1-23); however, the author does not disappear from the piece entirely. When the significance of a text varies according to the reader's interpretation, the meaning of a text must be constant and, at the moment of its writing, it is genetically tied to the author since the text is his or her procreation.

It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that Sénac de Meilhan wrote on emigrants during the French Revolution from a point of view that resembles more that found in Bovis'

memoirs than that found in Charrière's or Cumond's works. The events that Sénac de Meilhan experienced had predisposed him to relate closely to the emotive life of an emigrant, being one himself. In his memoirs, Bovis states that he could not consider himself guilty of the charge of nobility because he bore no responsibility in the matter. He further noted that his position as an aristocrat had, in the past, placed great consideration upon him. In *L'émigré*, the marquis de Saint Alban wrote to the président de Longueil, "Hélas ! . . . Quelle affreuse époque pour l'humanité que celle où les avantages qui distinguent les hommes, sont devenus des principes de ruine, et marquent du sceau de la réprobation ceux qui les possèdent" (Sénac de Meilhan 55). In the *Lettres*, such a sentiment of pre-condemnation is not absent: Alphonse wrote to Laurent, "quelle est donc cette horreur des riches, cette persécution des riches, à laquelle le peuple se livre aujourd'hui ?" (Charrière 439). However, this predetermined horror is rationalized in Charrière's work: in the same letter, Alphonse continues, "Ô peuple Français, trop longtemps opprimé, ne rougis-tu pas de surpasser tes oppresseurs en féroce despotisme. . . ?" (439). That the oppressed should become the oppressor is a common theme taken up by many philosophers of the eighteenth century and,⁹ if it does not excuse it, it does explain the behavior of the people, at long last delivered from the hands of their tyrants. Gras-Préville's biography offers above all else a consideration of the consequences of a political policy that systematically targets the wealthy: "Enlever à des hommes leur situation, leurs charges et leurs grades, les jeter dans la misère, leur imposer la fuite et profiter de leur absence pour leur enlever ce qu'après Dieu et le Roi ils avaient de plus cher au monde, le patrimoine de leurs ancêtres, ce n'était pas le moyen de se les attacher" (Cumond 45). In the works of Cumond and Charrière, an intellectual reflection imposes itself on emotion. The two texts reason that which is only felt in the two others. In doing so, the texts by non-emigrants soften the criticism, allowing for the new *patrie* to appear in a more positive light.

As they did with revolutionary politics, the emigrant authors presented the atrocities of the period with more passion than did the non-emigrant authors. The latter did include descriptions of revolutionary barbarianism, but they did so in a general manner rather than a specific one. In the *Lettres*, the character who speaks about barbarianism the most is the young Jacobin, Fontbrune (letter IV), which modifies the presentation of the violence. Fontbrune writes to Alphonse, "Non, je te le jure, je n'ai jamais applaudi à ces horreurs qui ont souillé la France. . . ô France ô honte que ne puis-je me délivrer de certains affreux souvenirs ! souvent ils me rendent mon existence insupportable" (Charrière 430). Charrière's book represents the Revolutionary not as part of the destruction of the period but as a victim of it. The atrocities are attached to everyone in general and therefore to no one in particular. In a similar way, the death of the uncle of Gras-Préville, to whom he was exceptionally close, is described from a distance, in the context of something larger: "Il prit sa retraite en 1786 et périt, en 1793, à Lyon, dans les massacres qui ensanglantèrent cette ville" (Cumond 25). Bovis, on the other hand, relates in detail a vision of the revolutionary massacres that he had witnessed:

⁹ One need only think of the Troglodytes in Montesquieu's *Persian's Letters*, the revolt in Paraguay in Voltaire's *Candide*, the episode of Madame de la Pommeraye in Diderot's *Jacques the Fatalist*, and Rousseau's *Second Discourse* to see the pattern emerge.

Des officiers détenus et enfermés sans cause et sans motifs au château de Pierre . . . , et quelques prêtres surpris à l'improviste, furent tout-à-coup saisis, massacrés et leurs têtes plantées au bout de piques furent promenées en triomphe dans les rues de la ville. Ce sanglant trophée de la fureur des Jacobins imprima dans le cœur de tout le monde, une terreur sans égale. (23).

L'émigré also describes detailed and specific images of the *Terreur*, such as the death of Madame de Granville: "elle fut inhumainement traînée dans un cachot, après avoir vu brûler son château ; . . . elle y expira dans des convulsions affreuses excitées par la terreur" (Sénac de Meilhan 81).¹⁰ Both of the texts by emigrants prey on the reader's emotions by giving an account of the circumstances that are tragic and particular and belong to someone with a name and who is present in the text.

Sénac de Meilhan also attempts to appeal to the reader's emotions by narrating the death of the marquis de Saint Alban's father in *L'émigré* and, to an even greater extent, the death of Saint Alban himself, which appears in all of its dramatic and painful detail. Equally as tragic, though a great deal less dramatic, are the death of Bovis' wife and the fear that gripped his soul during his passage over the mountains leaving France:

Depuis quelques jours, de la cime de ces monts orageux, d'où parfois je vois partir la foudre, j'entends à chaque instant gronder le canon. Contre qui sont dirigés ces instruments de mort et de destruction ? . . . Je frémis involontairement à chaque coup, et il me semble voir les membres épars de mes parents, de mes amis, palpitants devant moi ; alors une sueur froide glace mes sens, mon cœur se serre et se brise de douleurs. (Bovis 36)

Death and the fear of death haunt the two works by emigrants. The biography, on the other hand, recounts the death of Gras-Préville with a different tone: "L'amiral de Préville mourut à Naples le 18 mars 1829, à l'âge de 71 ans, estimé et regretté de tous ceux qui l'avaient connu . . ." (Cumond 14). Moreover, not a single character dies in Charrière's *Lettres*.¹¹ No one ceases to live. On the contrary, the *Lettres* end with a sort of rebirth in that the conclusion amounts to a new beginning. The presence or absence of death, of which the effect is permanent, helps readers to define the register of a text. The exclusion of death softens the sinister aspect of the circumstances and makes a space for hope; it incites reflection on the possibilities yet to come and promotes optimism for the establishment of a new France.

What distinguishes works about emigrants from works by emigrants is not simply a question of life and death; nor is it necessarily a question of the political tendencies of the author. One cannot deny Sénac de Meilhan's royalist inclination and Charrière's opinions

¹⁰ See also the "enfants innocents immolés au berceau" (369).

¹¹ It does not seem reasonable to suggest that the treatment of death (or its presence in or absence from a text) is dependent on the author's gender (Allison 106) except insofar as the author's experience of emigration might have depended on his or her gender. Indeed, it seems entirely unreasonable to suggest that human biology is in any way related to one's interpretation and performance of death in literature. One needs only to think of *La dot de Suzette*, by Joseph Fiévée, to find an example of a male author who excluded great suffering and death from his emigration story. Far more important than gender to this analysis is the authors' physical proximity to the emigrants themselves. Though Charrière and Fiévée were near to them in their own lives, they were not emigrants themselves and were, therefore, removed by an important degree of separation that is reflected in their work.

are doubtless more liberal and feminist (Allison 66).¹² However, as Catherine II remarked, Sénac de Meilhan “ne sait pas s’il est comme tous ses amis démagogue ou royaliste selon ses anciennes charges” (qtd. in Sénac de Meilhan 7). In the same vein, Charrière’s letters are not those “d’un républicain enragé” (411), as the editor Fauche contended when he refused to print them. The Jacobins would not have seen an accurate reflection of their doctrine in the *Lettres* any more than the aristocrats would have, as Fontbrune’s letter to Alphonse demonstrates:

J’ai pris du goût & du respect pour la noblesse. Je ne sais quoi d’un peu plus grave, plus délicat, plus romanesque, plus antique, plus simple, que ce que j’ai vu dans nos familles bourgeoises. . . . Un vieux domestique disait quelquefois en parlant à Mme **, Madame la Marquise. . . ; on lui faisait signe & il se reprenait. Un jour je dis, pourquoi se tourmenter à changer de vieilles habitudes qui sont au fond très indifférentes ? . . . Il faut l’avouer : être brave, s’exposer à toutes sortes de dangers, se battre en vrai héros, était la profession héréditaire de nos nobles. . . . (Charrière 463)

Such is hardly a typical Jacobin opinion. The independent and free mind of Charrière refused categorization. Similarly, her characters prove themselves difficult to sort, as they state themselves: “Entre Laurent jacobin & Alphonse aristocrate, que je vois de simpatie [*sic*], de vrais rapports” (438). Alphonse, for his part, is the moderate voice of the emigrant: “N’importe de la République ou de la Monarchie, il faut accepter l’ordre” (439). Opposed to this moderate voice is the voice of Germaine’s father, who writes, “qu’on fasse un grand feu de tous les livres modernes . . . & que rien de ce qui sentira la damnable philosophie de ce siècle ne soit épargné” (436). The autodafé of books recalls the intolerance, lack of freedom of expression, and royal censor that were only too well known during the century. Burning books was a reactionary gesture that was hardly judicious and marginally effective at best.¹³ Somewhere between the voice of the marquis and that of Alphonse lies those of Bovis and of the marquis de Saint Alban’s friend, the président de Longueil. As far as books are concerned, the président, who witnesses his library confiscated and sold, writes, “je n’aurais guère profité de mes livres, si je ne savais pas les perdre” (Sénac de Meilhan 255). Of enlightenment philosophy, Bovis wrote, “Spectateur insensé de cette aveugle philosophie, j’osai méconnaître autrefois ton pouvoir. . . . Combien tu m’en punis ! Quand toute la nature n’aurait pas démenti les sophismes d’une vaine et insensée philosophie, mon cœur aujourd’hui les repousserait avec effroi . . .” (letter to his wife 33).¹⁴ Bovis, like the président, recognizes the power of ideas and does not pretend in the least that such power can be altered or diminished by burning its written expression.

Because of this recognition, the main characters of emigrated authors find much to mourn: the preponderance of philosophical ideas in circulation implied the imminent

¹² See, in particular, letter LXXXVI from the président de Longueil to the marquis de Saint Alban and the letter CXXIV from the count de Saint Alban to the marquis de Saint Alban.

¹³ From a revolutionary perspective, Fontbrune also proposes to burn books, that is, “ces romans libertins, malhonnêtes tissus d’erreurs séductrices” (Charrière 468).

¹⁴ See also Bovis page 13: “Les écrits de J.J. Rousseau, de Voltaire étaient devenus l’évangile du beau monde ; aussi, dans ce dégagement des anciens préjugés, les mœurs achevèrent de se corrompre et le libertinage de l’esprit entraîna celui du cœur qui porta dans toutes les familles l’amour du plaisir, le besoin des dissipations et l’oubli de toutes les convenances. . . . Affranchi du joug de la religion, on commença à trouver celui des lois trop pesant ; on commença à raisonner sur les droits des princes et sur celui du peuple.”

extinction of traditional ideas and ideals. To them, virtue, honor, and dignity, which characterized the noble France of yesterday, had become degraded; the people, so gentle and pure of yore, had become unrecognizable. The antique glory of France was giving way to a furious degradation that exceeded the individual, who could only become incensed and persecuted by a sad nostalgia. Bovis lamented, "On ne comprend pas en vérité, comment les Français, qui étaient naguère le peuple le plus doux et le plus civilisé de la terre, avait pu devenir tout à coup le plus féroce et le plus sauvage" (23). The marquis de Saint Alban shared this sentiment: "[J]e ne puis croire que ce soit le même peuple ; je ne puis concevoir comment dans un si court espace, des souvenirs gravés par la main des temps, pendant douze siècles, ont été effacés" (Sénac de Meilan 65). In relation to the perceived degradation of the present, the reconstructed grandeur of the lost past appeared in magnified clarity to those who saw the future with a defiant eye.

The tone of the words of Cumond and Charrière is different from the tone of Bovis and Sénac de Meilhan. According to Cumond, post-revolutionary France represented little to the count and countess de Gras-Préville, because they had succeeded in creating their lives elsewhere. Cumond described what seems nearly to be a sense of indifference to their previous homeland:

Il n'était plus permis à madame de Préville de songer raisonnablement à autre chose qu'à la carrière de son époux, d'écarter les circonstances favorables qui se présentaient pour elle s'il se fixait à Naples. Et c'est dans cette intention que l'amiral fit alors, l'acquisition d'une charmante villa. « Cela nous donne pour 10 ou 12 mille francs une petite habitation à la campagne, ce qui est indispensable dans un pays si chaud pour la santé de nos enfants. Naples devient notre patrie. Les événements qui peuvent me rappeler en France sont si loin de moi que je ne veux plus y penser tant que M. de Préville peut servir ici avec quelque agrément. Rien ne peut me rappeler dans un pays où je ne trouverais que des regrets. » (11)¹⁵

France, however, and above all Louis XVIII, did indeed call out to the Gras-Prévilles. In 1814, the king gave the count, *in absentia*, the cross of Saint Louis; in 1818, the count was named honorary admiral in the king's royal navy; in 1822, he was given the *cordons rouge* of the order of Saint Louis. Yet in 1814, when Louis XVIII ascended the throne, the monarch was accompanied by his two principle ministers, Talleyrand and Fouché. Both were ex-revolutionaries, Fouché having even favored the execution of Louis XVI. "Préville ne peut se résoudre à aller s'incliner devant les représentants d'un si odieux passé. Il se décide à demeurer au service du roi des Deux Siciles" (Cumond 11). Although Cumond identified the odious past of these two ministers, he did not expand upon it. Rather, the author chose to inform the reader that an "ordonnance royale du 25 mai 1814 n'admettait dans la marine de France les officiers qui avaient quitté le service de France, survivants de Quiberon, ou ayant navigué au service d'une puissance étrangère qu'au grade supérieur à celui qu'ils avaient au moment où ils avaient quitté la France, sans tenir compte de leur âge ni de la durée de leurs services" (Cumond 9). Practical considerations reduce the feeling of passion that might be associated with the question of principle. In the words of the countess, however, transcribed by Cumond, practicality is subordinated to passion: "Il doit servir comme capitaine de vaisseau après 42 ans de service et sous les ordres de gens incapables,

¹⁵ Citation from a letter à sa sœur.

qui étaient à peine gardes-marine quand il commandait déjà un bâtiment pendant la guerre d'Amérique. M. de Préville se révolte à l'idée de tous ce galimatias" (9). Gras-Préville's revulsion makes the idea of returning to France impossible. Still, according to Cumond, the complete transformation of the French society leaves no room for sentimental nostalgia. The emotional dimension of Cumond's story is thus subordinate to reason.

Reason similarly trumps emotion in Charrière's *Lettres*. For these characters, the transformation of the society does not destroy the beauty of the homeland. The action that takes place in France is as favorable in Charrière's *Lettres* as it is heinous in Sénac de Meilhan's *L'émigré*. In the *Lettres*, a young, injured Jacobin is cared for with devotion by French chatelaines, a young aristocrat falls in love with a revolutionary activist, and Pauline and Laurent become engaged in France. In effect, Charrière's France is where a republican learns to appreciate and esteem the nobility of his country, and where a noble is united to a revolutionary. In *L'émigré*, the marquis de Saint Alban and so many others find only death in France. Only on foreign soil can Saint Alban receive the devoted attentions that heal his wounds. Meanwhile, news coming from France announces disappearances and cruelty. For Bovis, too, modern France evokes death. The France of his youth is no more, for she perished with all of the martyrs of the Revolution:

À ce sujet, je rappelle que pendant la guerre de l'indépendance de l'Amérique, un officier de la marine, de ma connaissance, Monsieur de RAYMONDIS de DRAGUIGNAN, eut un bras emporté sur le vaisseau qu'il commandait. On lui offrit à son retour sa retraite avec 6 000 francs de pension : il répondit au Ministre que le bras d'un guerrier ne se payait pas avec de l'argent et il demanda le cordon rouge qui lui fut accordé. Dans le temps où nous vivons on ne trouverait plus d'exemple d'un pareil désintéressement : on veut à la fois les croix et les rubans et surtout l'argent. (5)

Try as they might to hold onto the bygone mores of an extinguished epoch, the principle characters of the emigrated authors recognize their helplessness in relation to the world and their *patrie*. The marquis de Saint Alban and Bovis are pawns: they are subjected to the action of the stories that others create. "Ils verront dans les efforts que j'ai faits pour lutter contre la rigueur du sort une preuve sensible qu'il n'a pas dépendu de moi" observed Bovis (1). Similarly, Saint Alban remarks explicitly on the degree to which his life has been determined by the events: "Mon destin était d'être ainsi frappé par la Révolution dans les endroits les plus sensibles" (Sénac de Meilhan 82). Bovis and Saint Alban try in vain to resist fate. Bovis attempts to hide in France but is discovered. Even the places of his emigration are dictated by circumstances. Likewise, during most of the novel, Saint Alban's actions are hampered by events and circumstances: he wishes to take up arms against the revolutionaries, but cannot because of his health; he wants to love, but cannot because of social conventions. Finally (after 400 pages of patience), just when destiny seems to acquiesce to his desires, when he is free to take up arms and to love, when he is "si près d'être heureux, quel coup de foudre!" (Sénac de Meilhan 417). Fortune, and especially misfortune, is stronger than the characters in *L'émigré*.

Charrière's emigrants, on the other hand, dictate the action of the story. Rather than mere passengers, they are the motors driving the historic vehicle. Thanks to Germaine, her family will escape to live comfortably in her lands in Holland. Thanks to Laurent and Pauline, representatives of two adversarial factions, the revolutionaries and the royalists reconcile. This reconciliation is undoubtedly a wish; is it also a premonition? Is the family

analogous to society? If Pauline's father can accept a Jacobin for a son-in-law, could the country also accept the new order of things?

The count de Gras-Préville, according to Cumond's narration, accepted the new order resulting from the Revolution because he lives his life as a function of these circumstances. It is he who chooses his destiny. Promised since childhood to the order of the Knights of Malta, he uses the events of his day to alter the pre-established path of his life when he decides to marry. He waits only for the consent of his family, which he goes about obtaining in a conscious, calculated, and efficient manner:

Je vous ai souvent entendu dire, ma très [chère] tante, que vous vouliez me marier. Eh bien ! Le moment se présente de vous satisfaire et je vous en demande la permission, avec d'autant plus de confiance que l'affaire est très avantageuse pour moi, car par mon mariage, je suis certain de faire fortune ici, et que, d'ailleurs, la demoiselle me convient à tous égards. Elle est de bonne maison, d'un âge convenable, et d'une conduite parfaite. (46)

At the same time that he writes to his aunt, the count also writes to his elder brother, then head of the family. This letter is more pragmatic, more material:

Mlle de Germigney a, comme tu vois, 5 mille francs. Je viens d'être fait capitaine de frégate, ce qui me donne deux mille huit cents livres d'appointements, et je vais être nommé à un commandement, ce qui augmentera mon traitement de 5 mille francs ; mais comme on pourrait désarmer le bâtiment que je commanderais et qu'alors mon traitement cesserait, je n'ai pas manqué d'en faire la réflexion, et la Reine s'est engagée à me la continuer toutes les fois que je ne commanderais pas. . . .

Tous ces avantages, qui sont incalculables, me font espérer une réponse favorable. (48)

How little this letter resembles those included in Bovis' memoirs. He, too, had to write letters regarding his finances and other practical matters, and he refers to such correspondence in his memoirs. However, the letters that he wished to highlight for posterity relate only to matters of the heart. The letters cited by Cumond, on the other hand, primarily address the mind. The unique reference made to the emotive side of the Gras-Prévilles' marriage lies in a letter written by the hand of Lady Acton, an intimate friend of his fiancée, Victorine de Germigney: "Si vous saviez comme ce pauvre homme aime Victorine ? Je crois en vérité qu'il maigrit d'inquiétude de ne pas l'épouser !" (49). In his biography, Cumond insisted on the autonomy of Gras-Préville to guide his own life despite the Revolution. "L'époux avait quarante-cinq ans, l'épouse en avait vingt-huit. Les malheurs du temps, les épreuves, avaient accumulé les printemps sur ces nobles têtes, mais ni le temps ni l'adversité" could thwart the will of the Gras-Prévilles (49).

Since the capacity of the characters to influence their own destinies differs according to the circumstances of the author, it follows that the representation of the *dénouement* of the texts should differ also. The *Lettres* and the biography end on a positive note. The biography of Gras-Préville concludes with a résumé of the life of his wife, who succeeded him: "La comtesse de Préville avait accompli sa tâche de mère pieuse et dévouée. . . . Cette longue existence traversée par les épreuves les plus extraordinaires, bouleversée par les événements les plus cruels, était restée calme et sereine, toujours éclairée par cette haute raison qui avait dominé toute sa vie ; cette mâle et austère vertu qui avait guidé ses pas dans la bonne fortune comme dans l'adversité" (Cumond 18). In Charrière's *Lettres*, the two pairs of lovers will unite to live happily in the bosom of a family that has learned to adapt to

a modern vision of the period. Inversely, to close the story of *L'émigré*, the two lovers die tragically. The memoirs of Bovis end with a letter written to his wife in 1800, during his second emigration: "Ainsi encore deux mois de patience et tout sera oublié... En attendant, soigne ta santé, embrasse nos enfants et dis leur qu'ils me reverront bientôt, comme je l'ai toujours été, aussi bon père que tendre époux" (90, 92). Unfortunately, the first pages of the work frustrate the hope of the writer in these last lines. The mention of the fragile health of his wife reminds the reader that she did not long survive Bovis' return from exile and that the author considered his wife to be another victim of the Revolution.

The relationship between History, personal experience, and literature is indeed complex, particularly when one examines texts that are the result of extreme circumstances, such as those of the French emigration during the revolutionary period. The will of the author to insert personal memory into the context of the collective memory seems to depend on the proximity of the author to the events constituting the crisis. In short, the decisions an author makes while penning the text depend on his or her personal implication in History and on his or her intentions as to the influence that the text ought to have. The four texts studied here demonstrate that when History becomes romanesque, the contemporary writer will color the abstract and general world as an individual in the measure that general fate has influenced his or her specific destiny, independent of the genre chosen. Moreover, the color that an individual writer uses to sketch those events participates necessarily in the (trans)formation of a *patrie* in motion.

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