

Anglo-French attitudes

Comparisons and transfers
between English and French intellectuals
since the eighteenth century

Edited by

CHRISTOPHE CHARLE,
JULIEN VINCENT AND JAY WINTER

Manchester University Press
Manchester and New York

distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave

This book is dedicated to the memory of
Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002)

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Published by Manchester University Press
Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9NR, UK
and Room 400, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA
www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk

Distributed exclusively in the USA by
Palgrave, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York,
NY 10010, USA

Distributed exclusively in Canada by
UBC Press, University of British Columbia, 2029 West Mall,
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z2

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data applied for

ISBN 978 0 7190 7537 7 *hardback*

First published 2007

16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Typeset in Sabon by
Koinonia, Manchester
Printed in Great Britain
by Bell & Bain Ltd, Glasgow

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Reading revolution: towards a history of the Volney vogue in England

ALEXANDER COOK

This chapter traces the reception of a French book in England. More broadly, it examines a process in which aspects of French revolutionary political thought and language were appropriated for use in English reform campaigns during the first half of the nineteenth century. The book is entitled *Les Ruines, ou Méditation sur les révolutions des empires*. First published in 1791, it was dedicated to the revolutionary National Assembly of France, of which its author was a member. The author, Constantin Volney (1757–1820), was a political theorist, historian and travel writer. Now a largely forgotten figure, in his day Volney was one of the most notorious writers in Europe. He was unquestionably the most popular revolutionary author in the Anglophone world, and he remained one of the most widely read French writers in Britain through the first half of the nineteenth century.

For fifty years following the revolution, *Les Ruines* served as a key text in British campaigns for political and religious reform. Eleven books were published specifically to refute Volney during this period in England. Numerous pamphlets and articles were written on the subject of his supposedly destructive influence. The consequence, for historians, is an unusually detailed record of the process by which a French philosopher was received and *used* across the Channel. In this chapter I want to discuss why *Les Ruines* was so successful in England in comparison with other literature of the French Revolution and to examine how the book functioned within the field of English radical politics. As a case study it offers a fascinating perspective on the complex history of intellectual opposition and exchange between the two countries. It also highlights the importance of understanding changing contexts of consumption and utilisation if we wish to study what reception theorists like to call the 'effective history' of literature – its productive potential in the social world.

Les Ruines: form and content

Les Ruines seems a curious book to modern readers. It blends large passages of straight political and moral philosophy with a poetic style, a first person narrator and a fictional structure that includes dream sequences, genies and revelations. The narrative is set in 1784. The narrator is a traveller in the Orient, as Volney had been at the time. While wandering in the desert, he stumbles across the ruins of the ancient city of Palmyra. This spectacle of decay inspires a prolonged meditation on the rise and decline of civilisations, the art of government, the ethics of social life and the prospects of progress. The narrator falls asleep before the city. In his dreams he receives a revelation from a spirit guide, a 'genie' who emerges from the ruins to explain the dynamics of human history and to offer a vision of a better future. The mood of the text varies radically from an initial sense of tragic pathos at the cycles of empires and the frustration of human ambition, through a phase of anger at human folly and corruption, to a final vision of hope that the errors and failures of the past might finally be overcome through the gradual enlightenment of the species.

Within this structural framework, we can trace several philosophical propositions that seem to have been important for early readers. First, Volney set out a theory of history in which the rise and decline of states was related to the justice of their internal organisation. The ruin of ancient civilisations was related not to divine decree or to the corrosive hand of time, but to the failure of legislators and peoples to understand their true interests and the means to pursue them within the logic of social life. The claim was that, in the long term, a society is only as strong as the number of individuals with a personal interest in maintaining it. The lesson for legislators was that injustice is an act of imprudence.

For Volney, it was an immutable fact of human psychology that individuals are ultimately driven by the desire to procure personal advantage. At the most basic level, this was the desire to procure pleasure and avoid pain. Morally speaking, this was a neutral fact. The pursuit of self-interest was not inherently positive or negative, because it was not a question of choice. It could be socially useful or destructive depending upon how it was managed. The key, for legislators, was to align public and private interest through a combination of social reorganisation and education. Only then could the fatal conflicts that had undermined the vitality and strength of all civilisations be overcome.

Les Ruines depicts the history of social conflict as the perpetual battle of two classes – the 'classes oisives', parasites who wish to live off the labour of others, and the 'people', consisting of those who contribute

by their labour to the national prosperity.¹ Volney claimed that 'tous les vices, tous les désordres politiques se réduisent là: des hommes qui ne *font rien*, et qui *dévoient* la substance des autres'.² The origin of this conflict was unenlightened *amour-propre* – an imprudent desire to accumulate luxuries and leisure at the expense of others, stimulated in the ignorant by the first hints of material prosperity. Thus '*Cupidité*, fille et compagne de *l'Ignorance*, est devenue la *cause* de tous les maux qui ont désolé la terre'.³ The short-term consequence was that the strong united to dominate the weak, who were kept in subjection by their disunity and naivety. The long-term consequence had been an endless series of societies degenerating towards instability and ruin.

Only in the modern age did the opportunity arise to break the cycle of history. The prerequisite for this achievement was the enlightenment of the People concerning its true strength and interests, and the enlightenment of legislators concerning the principles of good government. With the progress of science and, crucially, the invention of the printing press, this development was finally conceivable. By providing a means of communicating 'en un même instant une même idée à des millions d'hommes', printing rendered obsolete all attempts to suppress the Republic of Letters or to halt the global march of mind. There had developed a 'masse progressive d'instruction'. Enlightenment of the species would lead by an ineluctable logic to its moral elevation: 'à force d'expérience, il s'éclairera; à force d'erreurs, il se redressera; il deviendra sage et bon, *parce qu'il est de son intérêt de l'être*'. In the end, all would recognise that 'le bonheur individuel est lié au bonheur de la société'.⁴

The main obstacle to the perfectibility of society was the division of humanity into mutually hostile religious camps – each committed to its own prejudices and unwilling to tolerate free debate. This hindered both the international development of philosophy and the security of any free state.⁵ For this reason, almost half the book is devoted to an analysis of the genesis and history of religion, designed to reveal the common origins of religious belief while undermining the truth claims of *all* organised cults. Volney suggested that all religions had their genesis in the worship of the 'physical forces of nature'. The proof of this could be seen half-buried in their mythological systems. These were allegories of natural processes filtered through a symbolic language derived, in large part, from the astrological astronomy of ancient Egypt. The numerous stories of death and resurrection related to the natural cycles of the seasons and, in particular, to the passage of the sun through the heavens. In Christianity, for example, the story of Jesus was merely one variant of an ancient myth that referred originally to the 'birth' of the sun at the winter solstice, and to its death and resurrection at the spring equinox.

The secret of this natural code had been lost in the mists of time – the allegorical had been taken for the literal, and modern religion had degenerated into a cynical exercise in social control.⁶

The key to creating a stable and prosperous society, in Volney's view, was to develop a political and moral science that would provide a renovated system of ethics as a substitute for conventional religious morality. This system would overcome the social divisions engendered by religious prejudice. It would also provide a more solid basis for morality than any system based on vain appeals to self-sacrifice in the interests of the higher good – whether religious or secular. To be successful, the new system would need to overcome the historical opposition between private and public interest. For Volney (this is the most ambitious and controversial part of his philosophy) reason could teach people that the path to virtue was also the path to happiness.

The text culminates in a vision of the French Revolution, presented as a future event, in which it serves as a sign for the peoples of the world to rise up against their oppressors and declare themselves free. A general assembly of peoples is summoned to determine the path to the future. It is here that religious hostility manifests itself most forcefully, and it is in this forum that the demonstration of the history and failures of positive religion is given. *Les Ruines* concludes with an appeal from the peoples of the world to the legislators of the regenerated French nation: 'enseignez-nous, après tant de religions d'illusions et d'erreurs, la religion de l'évidence et de la vérité!' This code, was to be based on 'l'examen des attributs physiques et constitutifs de l'homme, des mouvemens et des affections, qui le régissent dans l'état *individuel* et *social*'. The result, for man, would be a knowledge of 'les lois sur lesquelles la Nature elle-même a fondé son bonheur'.⁷

In 1793, Volney published a small additional tract entitled the *Loi Naturelle: ou catéchisme du citoyen français*. This tract was an attempt to set out systematically the ethical system derived from 'natural laws' described above. It claimed to show how all the virtues, both private and social, could be rationally justified to individuals as the behaviour recommended by an enlightened knowledge of private interest. Moderation of physical appetite was dictated by the desire to preserve the body. Sociable behaviour was dictated by the psychological and physical benefits derived from communal life. The text culminated in the motto

Conserve-toi;
Instruis-toi;
Modère-toi;
Vis pour tes semblables, afin qu'ils vivent pour toi.⁸

By the end of the 1790s, the *Loi naturelle* had been appended to *Les Ruines*, in both France and England – appearing as the fulfilment of the promise of the final chapter of the main work. Its title was altered to read *Loi naturelle, ou principes physiques de la morale déduits de l'organisation de l'homme et de l'univers*.⁹

The most distinctive feature of the text, perhaps, was not the contents of its philosophy but the form in which it was presented. Volney's approach to psychology and ethics could be traced to a long French tradition, associated particularly with Helvétius, but also with the Baron d'Holbach and many of his associates.¹⁰ Volney's anti-clerical polemic was hardly novel, and a great number of his mythographic theories were derived from prior scholarship.¹¹ Yet *Les Ruines* offered its readers a series of political, ethical and religious doctrines presented with the artfulness of an Oriental tale or a Gothic novel. As the literary critic Sainte-Beuve presented it in 1853, Volney had written, 'dans le genre sec, un livre fastueux, quelque chose comme du Raynal plus jeune, en turban et au clair de lune'.¹²

Another striking feature of *Les Ruines* is that, despite Volney's hostility to revealed religion, much of the book develops along para-religious lines. The text is saturated in biblical language, and it seems clear that Volney deliberately adapted religious metaphors to his story as part of a rhetorical strategy. The vision at its centre is presented as a secular revelation, and it is possible to read the entire text as a meditation on the theological problem of the origin of evil – an attempt to explain the sources of human misery. For Volney, however, the fall came not with the growth of a desire for knowledge, but with the growth of desire unchecked by knowledge.¹³

In their attempts to describe the book, a number of historians have suggested it can be seen as a fusion between Enlightenment and Romantic cultural modes.¹⁴ It is easy to see the appeal of that description. While much of the content can be considered an adaptation of elements of *philosophe* thought to a revolutionary problematic, the fictional framework has many features that we posthumously tend to associate with Romanticism. With its solitary wanderer, Gothic ruin motif and Orientalist chic, *Les Ruines* anticipated a wide body of subsequent literature – from Byron's early narrative poems to the travel accounts of Chateaubriand.¹⁵ With its Manichaean depiction of social division and its dream of an international golden age, *Les Ruines* also captured something of the melodramatic sensibility and millenarian energy stimulated by the Revolution – both of which are often claimed to be significant elements in the early matrix of Romanticism.¹⁶

Yet the attempt to position Volney relative to a binary system divided

between 'Enlightenment' and 'Romanticism' may be to miss the point. It certainly runs the risk of presenting *Les Ruines* as a more eccentric book than it was. The very notion of an opposition between reason and sentiment, or philosophy and poetry, is in many ways a nineteenth-century development, and one interesting feature of Volney's work is the way it refuses those dichotomies. We should not forget, either, that Oriental settings and 'Orientalist' styles were far from new in the late eighteenth century. The rise of the Oriental tale in eighteenth-century Europe has been well documented, as has the fact that it could serve the purpose of philosophical parable as easily as that of salacious fantasy.¹⁷ The systematic use of ruins as a stimulus to meditation also had a strong pedigree – from the architectural fashion for follies, to the art of Piranesi and Hubert Robert – and the theme of decline and fall was one of the staples of eighteenth-century political thought.¹⁸ Moreover, the fictional structure in which a naive but worthy young man receives his political education from a semi-divine guide, had an obvious predecessor in the relationship between Mentor and his pupil in Fénelon's *Télémaque* – the most popular book in eighteenth-century France after the bible.¹⁹ In all these ways, Volney's book tapped into a pre-existing literary vogue as much as it foreshadowed a new one.

However its character is defined, contemporary debates attest that the religious and literary resonance of *Les Ruines* were crucial to its popularity. For this reason, the *poetics* of the work are as important as its politics if we wish to understand the nature of its original appeal and its perceived political utility. If that is our goal, we also need to think about the way the text made the transition from French to English culture, and the creative re-reading and misreadings to which it was subjected in the process.

A French text in an English context

Les Ruines was translated and published in London within a year of its first appearance.²⁰ Within ten years, it had run through multiple editions in Britain and America and there were three competing translations.²¹ Excerpts and summaries were reproduced in numerous pamphlets and penny-subscription journals for distribution to a mass public. By the end of the 1790s the book had become a canonical text in an emergent corpus of literature combining political and religious criticism with appeals for mass action in pursuit of social reform. Its influence on English radical culture during this period was second only to the writings of Tom Paine.²² This popularity continued well into the 1830s. Waves of publication and promotion rose and fell with the general level

of political agitation. There was a burst of initial enthusiasm during the mid-1790s, when *Les Ruines* was widely reviewed and quoted in the radical press. During these years it was distributed through interlinked networks of 'corresponding societies' and 'infidel societies' that sprang up in London and the provinces. After the suppression of the radical movement during the later 1790s, publication rates declined significantly until the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Thereafter, they rose again. By 1820, a single bookseller was claimed to have sold 10,000 copies of *The Ruins*.²³ The publication rate did not substantially decline until the end of the 1830s, and it continued at a more measured pace until towards the end of the century.²⁴

A catalogue of figures and groups who made use of Volney's work during this period would list a substantial proportion of English ultra-radical activists. To name only the most prominent, we can find regular favourable reference to Volney amongst the London Corresponding Society, the Johnson circle and the followers of the agrarian socialist Thomas Spence during the 1790s. In the postwar era, Volney was embraced by Richard Carlile and his Zetetic movement, T. J. Wooler, John Wade, Thomas Davison, James Watson and Robert Taylor. We could take this influence right through to Chartist groups associated with both Feargus O'Connor and George Julian Harney during the 1830s and 1840s. Indeed, by the middle of the century *Les Ruines* was as much a part of the cultural heritage of English radicalism as any domestic production.

There has been growing awareness of Volney's importance in British cultural history for some years now. Amongst historians of English 'radical' politics, the sheer density of references to Volney in the sources has slowly begun to make an impact.²⁵ Students of English literature have also shown increasing awareness of Volney's significance in their field. From William Blake, to the Shelleys, Lord Byron, Thomas Moore and Thomas Love Peacock, scholars have found numerous connections between English writers and the themes and philosophy of the French 'infidel' author.²⁶ Although the seriousness of these authors' engagement with Volney varied from Shelley, who could almost be termed a disciple in his youth, to the more ephemeral stylistic and thematic borrowings of Byron and Moore, the cumulative picture increasingly suggests an extraordinarily rich and diverse cultural legacy. Indeed, so extensive is the Volney vogue in Britain now considered to be that the literary historian Marilyn Butler has gone so far as to dub Volney 'the Foucault of his day'.²⁷

Despite this growing awareness of Volney's importance in Britain there has never been a study focused on the reception of his writing. There has been no attempt to trace the real extent of his readership, or to explain

the diverse ideological and cultural milieus in which he seems to have been embraced. Moreover, the extensive pro- and anti-Volneyan literature has never been examined.

A major factor discouraging focused study of Volney's role in English history has been the disciplinary division between intellectual historians, historians of political culture and literary scholars. While members of each group have found Volney important within their area of specialisation, few have felt comfortable enough straying beyond their territory to examine the whole field. Literary historians usually discuss Volney as a source for a particular brand of poetics in which the ruin motif stands as a warning against the decline and fall of corrupt civilisations, or the Orient is appropriated as a symbol of a decadent West.²⁸ Scholars of religion and irreligion in the early nineteenth century list Volney, together with Charles Dupuis, Richard Paine Knight and William Drummond, as the source for allegorical readings of religion based upon astral and solar worship.²⁹ Scholars of radical political culture cite Volney as a conduit for an ill-defined 'Jacobin' influence on various groups of English activists. Yet no British scholars have seriously attempted to explain how contemporaries read Volney, or what the possible links between these various themes might be.

To explain the extensive dissemination of Volney's writings in Britain, we need to consider the role of his texts, his ideas and his literary strategies both as *tools* in domestic British political struggles and as *resources* for domestic literary production.³⁰ To do this seriously, it is important to know what aspects of Volney's work contemporary readers regarded as important, and how they adapted his themes to their own situations. There are many occasions when these questions are unanswerable for historians. Yet the richness of the historical record regarding Volney permits at least a partial understanding of this process.

The proliferating references to Volney as a major conduit for the influence of French revolutionary thought in England have thrown up some interesting questions. In particular, when we compare the interpretation of Volney in the two countries, it is striking that the political characterisation of the author was markedly different. In post-revolutionary France Volney was, and indeed remains, usually associated with a moderate, 'bourgeois' and proto-liberal strand of revolutionary thought.³¹ In England, in contrast, Volney was frequently identified by contemporaries with an extreme, populist, quasi-Jacobin position.³² In part this distinction no doubt derives from a difference in the spectrum of available political positions in the two countries. In France, the experience of revolution quickly fractured many allegiances within the Third Estate. Issues that were of minor concern in 1789 (with regard to the practical application

of popular sovereignty or the property question, for example) quickly became the source of major divisions in revolutionary ranks and led to a corresponding reclassification of political theorists. In England, in the absence of a revolution, the 'popular front' of late eighteenth-century radicalism survived for longer. Its emphasis on the issue of representation and its tendency to direct grievances at the abuse of political power continued as primary characteristics of plebeian politics into the 1840s at least. Another factor is that in England, at a distance from the revolution, the personal biography of an author – his social connections, his political alliances, his positions on critical issues such as the royal veto, the constitution of 1793 or the Brumaire coup – were less immediately present to the minds of readers. In this context (or this relative absence of context), Volney's generalised parable of liberation through enlightenment, a depiction that is more concerned with the process of liberation than with the shape of post-revolutionary society, may have been open to more free-ranging interpretations.

There is some evidence to suggest there were sociological differences in Volney's audience in the two countries. I do not have space in this chapter to explore Volney's French readership in detail, but the journals that most frequently made favourable reference to Volney in France during the revolutionary decade tended to be moderate republican instruments such as the *Journal de Paris*, the *Moniteur* and *La Décade*.³³ In later years, this discussion was most frequently conducted in liberal organs such as the *Minerve Française*.³⁴ In England, in contrast, we find comparatively little sustained attention to Volney within the 'respectable' reformist press – in the *Edinburgh Review*, for example, or the *Westminster Review*.³⁵ Where we do find repeated references is at the 'popular' end of the political market – or, to be more precise (since 'popular' does not necessarily mean more widely read in this context), amongst journals aimed largely at those excluded from the political nation: artisans, labourers and dissenters in religion.³⁶

Many critics in England felt that the book's destructiveness was intimately related to the character of its readership. Critics frequently lamented the circulation of his writings amongst the 'ignorant', the 'young', the 'impressionable', or the 'lower orders'. By the turn of the century, Volney was being listed as a key influence in the free-thinking 'infidel societies' which had supposedly reached plague proportions in London during the preceding decade – societies that, according to an exposé published in 1800, signalled 'the first period in which the doctrines of Infidelity have been extensively circulated amongst the lower orders'.³⁷ The fusion of political and religious criticism within these societies was deemed particularly dangerous, and the author lamented that 'the

idea of a Deist and a good democrat seemed to have been universally compounded'.³⁸ Twenty years later, a satire against Volney's followers sneered at a faith that 'anticipated, under British journeymen and mechanicks, the triumphs of a project, which lamentably failed under French statesmen and philosophers'.³⁹

Xenophobia is another recurrent feature of this literature. The same author declared Volney to be 'one of the most shallow and impudent of empiricks, that ever figured in a nation, as little famed for their depth as their diffidence'.⁴⁰ The Reverend Thomas Broughton emphasised the alien nature of the whole 'school of political naturalists', declaring Tom Paine and his followers to have been 'mere illiterate pupils of the French', while the latter had been infiltrating English culture with their tracts 'published and sold in twopenny numbers, to undermine Christianity and the British constitution'. Volney, he declared, was 'the champion of the class'.⁴¹

We can find hostility to Volney *within* the radical community as well. A significant number of reformers, perhaps even a majority, developed a real ambivalence about the French Revolution and about the applicability of French philosophy to the British situation. Associated with figures like Cobbett, Cartwright and Burdett in the early nineteenth century, or with Henry Hunt after the wars, this group retained an ongoing hostility to foreign influence on the culture of British politics, and it remained relatively suspicious of the 'French' discourse of natural law. Its adherents preferred to place their faith in notions of the 'free Englishman', of protestant particularity, and of an inheritance of constitutional liberty that must be reclaimed.⁴² Cobbett, for example, launched an open attack on Volney while the two men were in America in the late 1790s. His attack was based in large part on appealing to an instinctive antipathy towards the French, 'a merciless horde of infidels and cannibals' who had 'done more toward the destruction of Europe by their political emissaries, preaching their vile doctrine of infidelity ... than by the combined strength of their armies'.⁴³

While the very Frenchness of the text was clearly an obstacle for some readers, there were others for whom it may have added a certain frisson. Particularly after the patriotic frenzy of the war years had passed, there are signs of an increasing relish in parading knowledge of French texts in English radical circles. Activists grown impatient with the appeal to patriotism as a strategy to silence political dissent revelled in the opportunity to demonstrate their cosmopolitan sympathies and education. In addition to Volney, we find much use of D'Holbach's *Système de la nature* during this period, as well as texts by other French philosophers such as Helvétius, Diderot and Raynal.⁴⁴ The prominence of these

figures, in the iconography of cosmopolitan radicalism is testified in the numerous records of radical toasts from this era.⁴⁵ An increasing number of radical journals used the word 'republican' in their title, and the cap of liberty also gathered strength as a symbol of radical commitment.⁴⁶ Throughout this period, the middle-class wing of the English reform movement revealed a distinct ambivalence about mass political action. In many cases, the more philosophically ambitious reformers, such as the Benthamites and the Owenites, felt the same and revealed a palpable distaste for more plebeian organisations. The sense of disaffection this provoked amongst the latter no doubt contributed to the seemingly widespread preference for French literature, or for the Paineite texts of the previous generation.⁴⁷ As both Blaise Wilfert and Pascale Casanova highlight in their contributions to this volume (see chapters 9 and 11), using literary importation to provide an alternative fund of intellectual capital has often been a favoured strategy amongst groups wishing to express dissent from the established terms of national debate.

Beyond the generalised allure of forbidden foreign literature, however, Volney's book offered a perspective on French politics that gave it a genuine international significance. The vast bulk of political writing produced in France during the revolutionary period was very obviously addressed to a French audience, and dealt with the pressing issues of the day in Paris. Amongst French literary productions of the era, perhaps only Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* and the writings of Anarcharsis Cloots on a *république universelle* showed the same degree of ecumenical concern in presenting the revolutionary juncture as an opportunity for a general liberation of humanity. Yet both lacked the literary resources of Volney's text, its rhetorical force, and its heady blend of religious and political critique. Although both these men were known in England, and selectively admired for their revolutionary commitments, neither reached a genuine popular audience in the Anglophone world.⁴⁸

A common accusation amongst critics was that *Les Ruines* was a deliberate attempt to dupe the young, ignorant and vulnerable through a sinister abuse of literary artifice. The Reverend William Hails complained:

It is calculated to seduce the young and inexperienced. To them it is particularly dangerous, because it is written in the manner best adapted to their habits of thinking – it is a work of the imagination: a romance rather than a sober and patient investigation ... decked out in all the flowery magnificence of oriental poetic imagery.⁴⁹

Another anxious cleric suggested that 'a visionary being does not offer a fair and simple view of the subject' and accused Volney of 'catching the imagination by a fabulous imagery'.⁵⁰

The claim that Volney's writing had insinuated itself into public consciousness through its poetic resonance was largely endorsed by Volney enthusiasts. In an article devoted to the strategies of infidel propaganda, Richard Carlile claimed that 'Volney's *Ruins*, as a metaphorical work, is certainly useful; it made the first impressions on my mind; and I believe it has led thousands beside myself to search after truth.'⁵¹ He would later declare it was a work that had 'made more deists and atheists than all the other anti-Christian writings that have been circulated in this country'.⁵² With its sonorous language and biblical imagery, *Les Ruines* was perfect for reading in public meetings. In the 1830s, Carlile's business partner Robert Taylor (known popularly as 'the devil's chaplain') used it frequently to open proceedings at his infidel sermons at Blackfriar's rotunda – sermons which, at their peak, attracted thousands of people every night.⁵³

There can be no doubt that the combined assault on the spiritual and temporal powers was a major aspect of Volney's appeal across Europe in an era when the dissociation of the two powers was much less explicit than today. It may have had an added appeal in England due to the prominent role that religious dissent, and particularly rationalist Socinianism, had played in the formation of demands for political reform in England during the eighteenth century. By rejecting the historical account of Jesus contained in the New Testament, and seemingly undermining the prospect of an afterlife, Volney's depiction of natural religion moved well past the bounds of the Socinian brand of Christianity, yet there was widespread contemporary belief that the two were competing for the same market. Volney's first publisher in Britain, Joseph Johnson, was the official bookseller for the Unitarian Society. The Unitarian Minister Joseph Priestley was one of Volney's most committed opponents during the 1790s, yet he openly admitted that there were many instances of the transition to 'French principles' from the Socinian community.⁵⁴ It is certainly clear that the social groups in which Volney made the greatest impact (skilled artisans, small businessmen and proprietors, workers in the printing trades) were those that had traditionally been the stronghold of 'rational dissent'.⁵⁵ This community was used to reading unconventional theological literature, and to encountering a fusion of theology with politics – the commitment to freedom of religious opinion was also deeply entrenched. As dissenting communities that had originally welcomed the French Revolution tended gradually to distance themselves from its more extreme manifestations, it is not surprising that there should have been some leakage into more radical forms of religious free thought from dissatisfied members.⁵⁶

Volney's book also circulated beyond the limits of infidel circles to a wide variety of subgroups within the radical community.⁵⁷ Indeed,

if contemporary evidence is anything to go by, the most moving and effective passage of *The Ruins* for English audiences had nothing to do with its critique of religion. Rather, it was the prophecy that once 'The People', enlightened as to its true strength and interests, stood up against its oppressors and declared itself independent, the forces of a despotic regime would collapse before it. From the first publication of *The Ruins* in English in 1792, it was this segment (the fifteenth chapter, called 'The New Age') more than any other that was reproduced in radical journals and circulated in pamphlet form. It even appeared under the independent heading 'A Revolution in England'.⁵⁸ It was still being read at radicals' ceremonial dinners as late as 1838.⁵⁹

The reason for the particular appeal of this chapter has been a subject of some curiosity to historians. Edward P. Thompson, anxious to explain the seeming incongruity of the popularity of a French bourgeois philosopher amongst English plebeian radicals, attributed it to 'a curious effect of translation' that made Volney's views appear 'more radical in English than in French'. His claim was that in English 'the notion of the parasitic aristocratic estate or order comes through as the more generalized "class" of the wealthy and idle' and that this matched 'the sociology of post-war radicalism'.⁶⁰ A comparative analysis of the two texts provides little evidence to support any direct endorsement of Thompson's claim in the sense of a modification of the literal meaning of the words in the two languages – Volney himself never reduced his analysis to the terms of the French estate system.⁶¹ If we extend the notion of translation to a more metaphorical level, however, Thompson may have had a point. Bracketing out the question of Volney's intentions, his formulation of 'The People' versus the '*classes privilégiées*' or the '*classes oisives*' was certainly capable of an easy adaptation to the language of nineteenth century popular reform. Both in Britain and France, a language that distinguished virtuous 'industriels' from parasitic 'oisifs' (or the 'productive' from the 'parasitic' classes) was embraced across a broad political spectrum. The difference between groups, in many cases, lay not in the choice of words but in the nuances of definition.⁶² In this situation, the Volneyan parable clearly offered a vision of the future that was capacious enough to support a wide variety of political typologies.

An important aspect of Volney's depiction of liberation for English audiences was his emphasis on the process of enlightenment as a means to procure reform. The culture of 'improvement' that saturated radical politics during this period, and the related movement for moral 'self-government', chimed perfectly with the Volneyan theory that education was the key to moral renovation. As the editorial introduction to an early edition of *The Ruins* put it:

Th
al

men should be taught, by the conviction of their
'source of their melioration and moral improve-
ment offered hope.⁶⁴

adacts who cherished their hard-won education as the
procuring social advancement and political reform – the
people that learns to effectively resist oppression through self-
ment offered hope.⁶⁴

When we attempt to explain the particular reasons for Volney's success in England, some consideration must no doubt be given to fortuitous factors. Volney was translated and put into circulation in England at a time when enthusiasm for the French Revolution was comparatively strong in reformist and dissenting circles and before the mechanisms of state suppression had been activated. Once that situation changed, the opportunities for translation and publication of new revolutionary literature declined. By that time, however, *The Ruins* was already an available text in the vernacular. Selling illicit literature has always been an opportunistic activity and republishing a pre-existing English text is easier than translating a new one. By the time radical publishing properly recommenced after the wars, Volney's book was already considered a classic text in the *English* radical canon. Just as with Paine, to refer to it conjured a whole series of heroic associations.

It is also clear from any examination of early English responses to *The Ruins* that different aspects of the book could appeal to different groups. If its infidel content was attractive to free-thinkers, others found inspiration in its powerful rhetoric of class struggle. Some readers admired its ambition to ground politics and morality in the study of human nature. Others embraced its utopian parable linking enlightenment, moral renovation and political reform. In painting this picture, *Les Ruines* offered a reading of revolution in the modern world that implied that reading itself was a key means of effecting social change. It enticed readers of all social backgrounds to join in the collective quest for knowledge and it implicitly presented itself as a key text for those commencing the journey.

The political diversity among Volney's admirers, between countries and even within them, suggests that *Les Ruines* exemplified a crucial characteristic of the French Revolution as a whole: its capacity to generate a terminology powerful enough to colonise the discursive field of reformist politics. The historical ambiguities inherent in concepts like 'Justice', 'Liberty', 'Progress' or 'the People' were key factors in that process. Yet *Les Ruines* was also particular within the field of revolutionary literature, both in its insistence on the global implications of

events in France and in its systematic appropriation of the devices of melodrama and mythology to make its case. As a tool for propaganda, this made it extraordinarily effective and ideal for further adaptation – whether by journalists, who dismembered and relabelled the text for pamphlet consumption; by poets, who stole its metaphors and reworked its themes; or by infidel preachers, who popularised the work for mass audiences with the aid of props and other theatrical devices.

There is a resilient tendency amongst English historians, particularly those sympathetic to English radical culture, to emphasise the indigenous elements of the ‘radical tradition’ in their country. To some extent, this tendency has been an extended polemical response to an accusation that can be traced back to Burke and to the period examined in this essay – a claim that the radical ideology of the 1790s was a fragile import from foreign soil.⁶⁵ While the local roots of English radicalism were indubitably strong, with origins stretching back to the commonwealth debates of the 1640s and beyond, the tendency to highlight these strands at the expense of more cosmopolitan influences runs the risk of making the movement seem more insular and provincial than it really was. It also obscures the intellectual diversity and eclecticism that were key features of this culture. The Volney vogue in England is just one example of the important intellectual links between France and Britain in the nineteenth century. If the anxiety it raised highlights the ambivalence that has often accompanied those connections, the fertility of the exchange shows their creative potential.

Notes

- 1 C.-F. Volney, *Œuvres*, ed. A. Deneys and H. Deneys (Paris: Fayard, 1989), vol. 1, p. 254. The ‘peuple’ consisted of labourers, artisans, merchants and ‘toutes les professions utiles à la société’. Its enemy consisted largely of priests, courtiers and a rentier nobility, but it extended to include all the ‘agents civils, militaires ou religieux du gouvernement’.
- 2 See Volney’s accompanying footnote, in which he claims that this opposition ‘est l’analyse de toute société’; *Œuvres*, p. 391.
- 3 Volney, *Œuvres*, vol. 1, p. 203.
- 4 Volney, *Œuvres*, vol. 1, pp. 243–4.
- 5 Volney, *Œuvres*, vol. 1, chapter 14, pp. 247–51.
- 6 Volney, *Œuvres*, vol. 1, chapters 21–3 of *Les Ruines*.
- 7 Volney, *Œuvres*, vol. 1, p. 378.
- 8 Volney, *Œuvres*, vol. 1, p. 499.
- 9 The public had no doubt been prepared for this action by the fact that the original edition of *Les Ruines* ended with the declaration ‘fin de la première partie’.

- 10 Volney spent time at D'Holbach's salon during the early 1780s, and subsequently with the circle associated with Helvétius's widow at Auteuil. It is clear that both authors were key influences in his philosophical development, although politically Volney moved beyond them during the revolutionary period.
- 11 Aspects of Volney's theories on ancient nature worship and astrological allegory could be found prefigured in a number of books in D'Holbach's library, particularly *La Fable du Christ dévoilée* (undated, probably 1760s), attributed to Sylvain Marechal; and *La Vérité, ou Les Mystères du christianisme approfondis et reconnus physiquement vrais* (1771), attributed to Bébes-court. Volney was particularly influenced by the theories of Charles Dupuis, who set out a similar case in his subsequent *L'Origine de tous les cultes, ou Religion universelle*, (Paris, 1795). For more information on this tradition, see M. H. Cotoni, *L'Exégèse du Nouveau Testament dans la philosophie française* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1984), especially pp. 381–7.
- 12 C.A. Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*, (Paris: Garnier Frères, 14 February 1853), vol. 7, p. 410.
- 13 The resemblance between this aspect of Volney's work and the theory of the fall of man was noticed by contemporary critics, e.g. P. Roberts, *Christianity Vindicated in a Series of Letters Addressed to Mr Volney*, (London, 1800), p. 12.
- 14 For example, J. Domenech, 'Volney, voyageur, moraliste: l'interaction entre discours des lumières et récit de voyage', in S. Linon-Chipon *et al.* (eds), *Miroirs de Textes: récits de voyage et intertextualité* (Nice: Publications de la faculté des lettres, arts et sciences humaines, 1998), p. 251; or A. Viatte, *Les Sources occultes du romantisme: illuminisme, théosophie, 1770–1820* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la revue de littérature comparée, 1928), vol. 1, p. 85.
- 15 In many cases the line of influence was pretty direct – even in instances where the politics were radically different, as with Chateaubriand. On the relationship between Volney and Chateaubriand, see Jean Gaulmier's essay 'Chateaubriand et Volney', in J. Gaulmier (ed.), *Autour du romantisme: de Volney à J. P. Sartre* (Paris: Ophrys, 1977).
- 16 On the French Revolution and 'the melodramatic imagination' in European culture, see P. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 19.
- 17 The rise of the Oriental tale in Europe was stimulated especially by Antoine Galland's translation of a collection of Arabian folk stories as the *Mille et une nuits* in 1704. From then the vogue only grew, attracting writers of the stature of Voltaire, Diderot and Samuel Johnson, as well as a host of less well-known figures.
- 18 Through his drawings, Giovanni Battista Piranesi was perhaps the key figure in a process that would eventually make a personal witness of the ruins of Rome an essential part of the philosophical education of any young man of breeding. The decline and fall theme can obviously be found in Gibbon, but also in the work of Mably, Raynal or Adam Ferguson, to name but a few.
- 19 On the popularity of *Télémaque*, see Patrick Riley's introduction to Fenelon's

Telemachus, Son of Ulysses (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. xvi.

- 20 The translator was James Marshal, a friend of the political philosopher William Godwin. The publisher was Joseph Johnson, a revolutionary sympathiser, and printer for the Socinian dissenting community who published a high proportion of the literature sympathetic to the French Revolution in England during the 1790s – including Paine's *Rights of Man* and *Age of Reason*.
- 21 Both Joseph Johnson, and H. D. Symonds were on their third London editions by 1801, together with two by Seale and another one in Dublin by Stockdale. There had also been at least two American editions by 1802. The three translations were: the first by Marshal (published by Johnson); the second done anonymously and published in Philadelphia; a third done by Joel Barlow (and Thomas Jefferson), sponsored by the author and published in Paris.
- 22 This was certainly the view of many contemporaries, e.g. William Reid's *Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies of the Metropolis* (London: Hatchard, 1800), p. 6
- 23 The bookseller was Thomas Tegg, one of the major distributors of radical literature in London. See *Republican*, 15 December 1820, p. 562.
- 24 In England the text went through at least eight editions between 1819 and 1835, not counting reprints or the many excerpts and serialisations. It was still being produced in the 1880s and 1890s by the Freethought Publishing Company run by Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant.
- 25 Since E. P. Thompson drew attention to Volney's influence on plebeian radicalism in his paradigmatic study of *The Making of the English Working Class* in 1963 (reprint London: Penguin, 1980), pp. 107–8, 815, a number of more specialist studies have cited Volney as an ideological source or a literary model for various groups. Volney's central importance for Richard Carlile and his 'Zetetic' movement for useful knowledge during the 1820s has long been known – e.g. J. Weiner, *Radicalism and Freethought in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Life of Richard Carlile* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), especially pp. 63–4 – but the Frenchman has also been suggested as the probable source for William Benbow's 1832 proposal for a general strike – I. Prothero, 'William Benbow and the Concept of the "General Strike"', *Past and Present*, 63 (May 1974), 164 – and as a major source of inspiration for the important early socialist thinker Thomas Spence – I. McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) pp. 24, 244.
- 26 This process began in the 1890s, when Lawrence Kellner highlighted the intimate connections between *Les Ruines* and Shelley's first major poem, *Queen Mab* (1814). Recently, however, critics have found evidence of Volney's influence amongst a wide selection of poets and novelists writing from the 1790s until the 1830s and beyond. The single greatest influence in highlighting Volney's impact on English Romantic literature has been Marilyn Butler. She has set out various points of contact with all of these

- authors in articles, including: 'Telling it Like a Story: The French Revolution as Narrative' in *Studies in Romanticism*, 28 (1989), 345-65; 'Byron and the Empire in the East', in A. Rutherford (ed.), *Byron: Augustan and Romantic* (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 63-81; and 'John Bull's Other Kingdom: Byron's Intellectual Comedy', *Studies in Romanticism*, 31 (1992), 281-94. Other authors to explore Volney's influence include J. Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 4-5, 13, 120-1, and S. Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 98-9.
- 27 Butler, 'Byron and the Empire in the East', p. 71.
 - 28 This is, together with the impulse to infidelity, the primary nature of Marilyn Butler's interest in the articles cited above.
 - 29 See, for example, J. Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 27-48.
 - 30 As Pascale Casanova highlights in chapter 11, it is important for any students of reception to recognise the *active* process by which any intellectual product is reconstructed in the process of transposition into a particular cultural milieu. It is for precisely this reason that the comparative study of reception has the potential to offer important insights into prevailing conditions of discursive exchange and inter-group struggle within specified cultural fields.
 - 31 This characterisation runs through the historiography focused on France, from Sainte-Beuve, who regarded Volney as a 'homme de 1789' to be distinguished from the 'homme de 1793', through more modern interpretations such as that of J. Gaulmier, *L'Idéologue Volney: Contribution à l'histoire de l'Orientalisme en France* (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1951), or, more recently, R. Barney, 'Les pamphlets de Volney', in J. Roussel (ed.), *L'Héritage des Lumières: Volney et les Idéologues* (Angers: Presses de l'université, 1987), pp. 23-4, or the Canadian Martin Staum, 'Volney et l'idée d'une science morale à l'Institut', in Roussel (ed.), *L'Héritage des Lumières*, pp. 136-8.
 - 32 Amongst critics, of course, the title 'Jacobin' was often a polemical strategy for marking all revolutionary thought with the stigma of the Terror, but even admirers of Volney during this period tend to show a much less precise conception of his biography or position in the French political spectrum than is apparent in the French literature.
 - 33 We find discussion of Volney in all of these journals during the 1790s, as well as contributions by him. The *Moniteur* was a moderate paper owned by Pankoucke. It became the official paper of the Napoleonic regime from 1800. The *Journal de Paris* was another moderate paper, with Garat then Condorcet involved early in the Revolution and under Roederer's direction from 1795. It also became pro-Bonaparte. *La Décade* was the journal run by the *Idéologues*, and edited in large part by Jean-Baptiste Say.
 - 34 See, for example, the favourable reviews in *Minerve Française*, 2, (1818), 353-61, 7 (1819), 394-401, and 6 (1820), 358-61.
 - 35 I have examined both of these journals, the *Edinburgh Review* from its

introduction in 1802 to 1808, and during the height of the Volney renaissance from 1820 to 1825. The *Westminster Review* I have checked from its inception in 1824 until 1829. Neither journal has any mention of Volney. The *Westminster Review*, in particular, had quite extensive discussion of French politics and of the Revolution, but its admiration tended largely to be reserved for figures like Necker and Mounier.

- 36 Examples from the 1790s include Daniel Isaac Eaton's *Politics for the People* (1795) and Thomas Spence's *Pennyworth of Pig's Meat*, 1 (1793). Examples from the era of the unstamped press after the Napoleonic Wars include Carlile's *Republican* (e.g. 18 February and 18 April 1820) and *Moralist*; T. J. Wooler's *Black Dwarf* (26 August and 7 October 1818, 10 February 1819, 11 October 1820); and Davison's *Medusa* (10 and 24 April 1820); see also Doherty's *Poor Man's Advocate*, 26 March 1832; and Harney's *London Democrat* 13 April 1839.
- 37 W. Reid, *Rise and Decline*, p. iii.
- 38 Reid, *Rise and Decline*, p. 8.
- 39 'A Reformer', *Fragments of a Civick Feast: Being a Key to M. Volney's 'Ruins'* (London, 1819), p. 5.
- 40 'A Reformer', p. 2.
- 41 Thomas Broughton, *The Age of Christian Reason: Being a Refutation of the Theological and Political Principles of Thomas Paine, M. Volney and the Whole Class of Political Naturalists* (London: Rivington, 1820), p. 24.
- 42 For a recent study of this culture, see P. Spence, *The Birth of Romantic Radicalism* (Hampshire: Scholar Press, 1996), chapters 1 and 2.
- 43 *Porcupine Gazette*, 22 June 1798. See G. Chinard, *Volney et l'Amérique: d'après sa correspondance avec Jefferson* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1923), p. 98. This outburst was made during Cobbett's most Francophobic phase, before he had really ascended to his eminence in the radical movement, but Cobbett always retained his little-England approach to radicalism.
- 44 Entire editions of D'Holbach's *Système de la nature* were issued in London in 1795, then in 1834 and 1839 (the latter two by Richard Carlile), but there were many other examples of pamphlet synopses and commentaries, such as the *True Meaning of the System of Nature*, published in Edinburgh in 1799. Helvétius's work was of substantial importance in England, not least through its influence on Bentham. His two major works were translated into English not long after their first appearance in France (*De l'esprit* was first released in English in 1759, and *De l'homme* in 1777), both were re-released by James Cundee in 1810. The abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* was one of the bestsellers of the eighteenth century across Europe. In England it had gone through more than ten English printings before the Revolution, starting in 1776, and they continued into the nineteenth century. None of these works, however, equalled the level of circulation of Volney's text in the period from the end of the Napoleonic Wars until the decline of Chartism.

- 45 This is best typified by Carlile's Zetetic movement (see, for example, the toast to 'Helvétius, Voltaire, Mirabaud [Holbach], Condorcet, Volney, Elihu Palmer, Shelley, and all others whose writings may have contributed to the advancement of Civil and Religious Liberty' in *Republican*, 26 March 1824). We can find similar trends amongst the Spenceans, and later amongst Chartist groups (see, for example, the toast to the memory of 'Volney, Voltaire, Bronterre, Mirabaud, Robespierre, Condorcet and Diderot' in the *Northern Star*, 17 November 1838).
- 46 Examples are Carlile's *Republican* of the 1820s and Lorymer's *Republican* of the 1830s. On the proliferation of the word 'republican' in the unstamped press, see J. Dinwiddy, *Radicalism and Reform in Britain, 1780-1850*, (London: Hambledon Press, 1992), pp. 215-16; on the use of the cap of liberty as a symbol in radical circles, see J. Epstein, 'Understanding The Cap of Liberty: Symbolic Practice and Social Conflict in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, 122 (1989), 75-118.
- 47 In this context, Volney was perhaps particularly useful as a compact, cheap, accessible introduction to the materialist strand of French revolutionary thought. As the editorial introduction to an English edition of *The Ruins* put it, 'nothing, in general, is of more real utility than a good elementary treatise'. See H. D. Symond's publication of *The Ruins* (London, 1801), pp. ii-iii.
- 48 Cloots's writings were never translated into English, so he existed largely as a name in British radical circles, marked by his presence in toasts. Condorcet's *Esquisse* was published in translation by Joseph Johnson in 1795, but it never received a second edition. Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) stands out as the only significant response to it in England and even this was directed more substantially at the work of William Godwin.
- 49 W. A. Hails, *Remarks on Volney's Ruins of Empires*, (London, 1825), p. 2.
- 50 P. Roberts, *Christianity Vindicated*, pp. 2-3.
- 51 *Republican*, 18 February 1820, p. 148.
- 52 *Republican*, 15 December 1820, p. 562.
- 53 For a detailed account of Taylor's infidel services, see I. McCalman, 'Popular Irreligion in Early Victorian England', in R. W. Davis and R. J. Helmstadter (eds), *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society: Essays in Honour of R. K. Webb* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 51-67. The efficacy of the text's literary structure in conveying its political message was no doubt what attracted the ambitious and idealistic young Percy Shelley to Volney when he wrote *Queen Mab*, with its visions of 'Palmyra's ruined palaces' and its promise of redemption for an oppressed humanity. Volney's writings on the origins of religion proved congenial to a large number of authors in the early nineteenth century. His influence can be traced on a generation of mythographers, from the MP and diplomat William Drummond, author of the infamous free-thinking tract *Oedipus Judaicus* (1811) to the Norwich shoemaker Samson Arnold Mackey, who published *The Mythological Astronomy of the Ancients Demonstrated* in 1822. Mackey even quoted Volney on the title page of his book.
- 54 J. Priestley, *Observations on the Increase of Infidelity*, (London, 1793), p. 141.

Priestley returned again to the subject of Volney in his *Letters Addressed to the Philosophers and Politicians of France* (Philadelphia, 1795) and his *Letters to Mr Volney* (Philadelphia, 1797).

- 55 On the sociology of dissent, see, for example, Thompson, *Making*, pp. 29–58.
- 56 A version of this argument linking 'extreme radicalism' and free thought is presented in E. Royle and J. Walvin, *English Radicals and Reformers, 1760–1848* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 184. See also E. Royle, *Radical Politics 1790–1900: Religion and Unbelief* (London: Longman, 1971), preliminary chapters.
- 57 Thomas Spence, who publicised Volney extensively during the 1790s, was a millenarian Christian. Thomas Wooler was an open critic of infidel religious opinions, yet he nonetheless made frequent use of Volney in his influential journal *Black Dwarf* during the postwar era.
- 58 See, e.g., D. Isaac Eaton's *Politics for the People*, 1795; Thomas Spence, *Pig's Meat*, 1 (1793); T. J. Wooler's *Black Dwarf*, 10 February 1819; Richard Carlile, *Republican*, 18 April 1823; and James Watson's *Brief Sketch of the Life of C. F. Volney* (London, 1830). 'A Revolution in England' was Volney's fifteenth chapter published anonymously in London in 1830.
- 59 *Northern Star*, 17 November, 1838, p. 5. This was an anniversary of the birthday of Henry Hunt; cited in J. Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 149.
- 60 Thompson, *Making*, 1980, p. 108.
- 61 I have performed a detailed analysis which suggests that the rendering of 'classe' as 'class' and 'état' as 'estate' is pretty literal, as are the descriptions of the trades of the component members. Jean Dierickx has performed the same comparison and come to the same conclusions, see 'Réflexions sur la traduction anglaise des "Ruines" et son influence', *Etudes sur le XVIIIe siècle*, 7 (1980), 201–7. Moreover, if we read Volney's pre-revolutionary pamphlets, we can find a clear distinction between parasitic bourgeois rentiers and those who live by their labour, which belies Thompson's implicit suggestion that Volney's analysis was originally a straightforward description of the estate system. See Volney's *Lettres des Bourgeois aux gens de la campagne* (Angers, 1789), reproduced in *Volney: Oeuvres*, vol 1, p. 131.
- 62 On the English tradition of this language, see G. Stedman Jones, 'The Language of Chartism', in his *Languages of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 131, 168–9; for a related conceptualisation amongst the French Saint-Simonians or indeed amongst followers of Blanqui, see M.-F. Piguet, *Classe: histoire du mot et genèse du concept des physiocrates aux historiens de la Restauration* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1996), especially pp. 111–40.
- 63 H. D. Symond's, editorial introduction to *The Ruins* (London: Symonds, 1801), p. v.
- 64 The emphasis on self-education as the key aspect of radical political strategy was important for many groups – but nowhere was it stronger than amongst

Carlile's Zetetic movement (the term itself was derived from the Greek verb 'to seek'). It is no accident that it is here, more than amongst any other English groups, that Volney's appeal was most strongly felt. For an excellent analysis of the Zetetic culture, see J. Epstein, 'Reason's Republic: Richard Carlile, Zetetic Culture, and Infidel Stylistics', in his *Radical Expression*, pp. 100–46.

- 65 The impulse to emphasise the indigenous elements of radicalism remains very strong to this day in Britain. Recent examples include J. R. Dinwiddy, *Radicalism and Reform* (London: Hambledon, 1992), e.g. pp. 214–15, 227–8, and Spence, *Birth of Romantic Radicalism*, chapter 2. For earlier examples, see Royle and Walvin, *English Radicals and Reformers*, p. 47, and even H. T. Dickinson's *British Radicalism and the French Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 1–6.