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Henry Crabb Robinson, Ernst Moritz Arndt, and William Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra*

Abstract

The various merits of Henry Crabb Robinson (1775–1867) have begun to emerge more fully in recent years. After studying at the University of Jena (1802–1805) and becoming a pioneering philosophical and literary disseminator between Britain and Germany, Robinson had two spells as a war correspondent for *The Times* – in Danish Altona in 1807 and Corunna in 1808–1809. This article discusses, for the first time, his long-neglected review of William Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra* (both published in 1809) against the backdrop of Robinson's profound understanding of German philosophy and first-hand experience of the Napoleonic Wars. I argue that the ethical and cosmopolitan elements that Robinson found in the work of Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769–1860), whom he had met in Stockholm in 1807, match the critical principles underpinning Robinson's activity as a cross-cultural literary disseminator, and that he applied these principles in his review of Wordsworth's pamphlet. These principles gain significance in the light of the present 'ethical turn' in romantic studies.

Keywords

English romanticism, German philosophy, Napoleonic Wars, Spain, Scandinavia

On 1 November 1809, Richard Cumberland's *The London Review* published a long article entitled 'The Spanish Revolution'. After comparing the French Revolution to the Spanish uprising during the spring of 1808, the article's anonymous author quotes a substantial passage from Ernst Moritz Arndt's *Geist der Zeit* [Spirit of the age] surveying the history and national character of the Spanish people, before moving on to review William Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra*. The following is the final paragraph of the passage from Arndt:

[The Spanish] are the genuine champions of Europe ... Europe cannot dispense with her champions, we cannot forego the hope that from the chaos in which we are, there may still arise a world of order and joy; till this hope be renounced, Europe cannot dispense with her champions. From the North came her redeemers and deliverers, from the South her cultivators. Northern greatness borders on Spanish elevation. May the loveliness and tenderness of the South form an invisible bond between them and draw them together; and may the scales of justice, beauty, and humanity, be raised by them;

Postdoctoral Fellow Philipp Hunnekuhl, Universität Hamburg, Romantik 07|2018, 97–114

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and may Europe, which has so foolishly stained herself with blood, cultivate in common, the virtues and energies of humanity.¹

The author of the article was Henry Crabb Robinson (1775–1867). Born in Bury St Edmunds into a family of Protestant Dissenters, he was ruled out from attending the English universities, which at the time still exacted subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. Robinson, therefore, educated himself thoroughly during his apprenticeship and work as a legal clerk, before an inheritance enabled him to spend the years 1800–1805 in Germany.² Already during the first half of this stay, he became the most lucid and accurate transmitter to date of Kant's philosophy to England, as well as a prescient critical admirer of Goethe and Schiller as epigrammatic poets.³ Subsequently, during his time as a student at the University of Jena (1802–1805), Robinson studied under Schelling and tutored Germaine de Staël in Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy.⁴ After his return to England in September 1805, Robinson settled in London, and, for some five years, worked as a professional man of letters, undertaking a wide range of literary ventures. One such venture is the above-cited article, while earlier ones include prolonged spells as a war correspondent for *The Times* at Danish Altona (1807) and Corunna (1808–1809). This article aims to unearth the nexus linking Robinson's Kantian convictions, his stays in Denmark and Spain, and his invocation of Arndt (whom he had met in Stockholm, after Robinson's narrow escape from Altona) in defence of Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra*. I argue that the 'scales of justice, beauty, and humanity', or the 'virtues and energies of humanity', addressed in the translation from Arndt, represent the key elements at the heart of Robinson's unique critical approach to

1 Henry Crabb Robinson [anon.], 'The Spanish Revolution', *The London Review* IV (1 November 1809): 231–275, 245. For the original passage, see Ernst Moritz Arndt, *Geist der Zeit*, I (1806): 230–251, 250–251. The work was published in five parts, between 1806 and 1854. Robinson's copy of the second part (1809), signed by the author, still survives in the Robinson collection at Dr Williams's Library, London (hereafter DWL). I wish to thank the Trustees of the Dr Williams's Trust for their permission to quote from Robinson's manuscripts in their keeping, as well as the library's Director, Dr David L. Wykes, and the Conservator, Ms Jane Giscombe, for their continued support in making these manuscripts available to me. I would also like to thank the German Research Foundation (DFG) for the generous three-year postdoctoral fellowship that enabled me to carry out the research at the heart of this essay. See www.crabbrobinson.co.uk for the on-going Robinson editorial project. I shall hereafter refer to Robinson as HCR.

2 See Jane Giscombe, 'Henry Crabb Robinson's Reading Experiences in Colchester, 1790–96', unpublished M.A. dissertation (School of Advanced Studies, University of London, 2013), for a persuasive account of Robinson's autodidacticism during his legal apprenticeship.

3 For a scholarly edition of Robinson's articles on Kant, see *Henry Crabb Robinson: Essays on Kant, Schelling, and German Aesthetics*, ed. James Vigus (London: MHRA, 2010). A reassessment of Robinson's transmission of Goethe has recently been published: Gregory Maertz, *Literature and the Cult of Personality: Essays on Goethe and His Influence* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2017), especially 71–75.

4 *Robinson: Essays*, 6–15, 28–55, 120–138.

literature. This approach, based on an unrivalled inter-cultural awareness and philosophical erudition, informed his activity as a critical disseminator of literature. It was his intention to enhance ethical discourse across cultural and political borders in a similar way to the 'bond' proposed by Arndt.⁵

Robinson's critical approach is unique and pioneering because it centres on literature's non-didactic appeal to morals. I label it 'free moral discourse' since it encompasses an astute adaptation of Kantian aesthetic autonomy according to which an author provides only the discursive framework for morals and art to merge in the mind of the reader. In this, Robinson prefigures Walter Benjamin's observations that the critical approaches of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, through extended models of Kantian aesthetic autonomy, attempted to 'uphold' and 'approximate' an ideal of humanity – models according to which the 'true reader must be the extended author' for he or she 'is the higher authority that receives its subject matter precast from the lower authority'.⁶ But Robinson's critical approach also offers an original contribution to the present 'ethical turn' in Romantic and literary studies, characterized by its concern with 'notions of agency and responsibility' and opposition to concepts of artistic indifference.⁷ Where scholars such as Thomas Pfau, Timothy Michael, and Paul Hamilton explore different ways of collapsing the conceptual binarism of knowledge and action, Robinson, making the subtle Kantian analogy of art and morals the basis of his critical approach, represents an ingenious Romantic precursor. In other words, to read, for Robinson, was always to negotiate responsible action, and not a detached exercise of the mind.⁸ He thus consciously wrested disinterestedness away from art, and handed it, in a moral sense, over to the reader.

5 For a comprehensive discussion of this approach, see Philipp Hunnekuhl, *Henry Crabb Robinson: Romantic Comparatist* (forthcoming).

6 Walter Benjamin, *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), 40.

7 Uttara Natarajan, review of *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge* by Thomas Pfau and *British Romanticism and the Critique of Political Reason* by Timothy Michael, *European Romantic Review* 28.1 (2017): 111–115, 111.

8 For Robinson's acute observation of an analogous relationship between Kant's concepts of art and morals, see James Vigus, introduction to *Robinson: Essays*, 21–22. Paul Hamilton, *Realpoetik: European Romanticism and Literary Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). For Pfau's and Michael's titles, see preceding footnote.

Robinson's Philosophical Convictions and Political Engagement, 1795–1807

The passage immediately succeeding the initial quotation alludes to the uprisings against Napoleon's troops across Spain which the spring of 1808 had seen. But the passage also gives an indication of the philosophy underlying Robinson's appreciation of Arndt:

The majority of men, belonging to the class of those 'Who think that nothing is but what is seen', would certainly before the spring of last year have considered this eloquent and beautiful eulogy of the Spaniards, as the rhapsody of a man who had formed his notions of their national character from tales of the Moorish wars, and the ballads of the *Cid*, the *Campeador*; the reader into whose hands it might subsequently have fallen, without a testimony of its existence before that period, would have believed it to be designedly adapted to known events, rather than an anticipation of them.⁹

The criticism of that 'class' of men 'who think that nothing is but what is seen' reiterates Robinson's very own trajectory, from Anglo-French empiricism and the philosophical necessitarianism of William Godwin and Joseph Priestley to Immanuel Kant and German idealism. When an apprentice clerk at Colchester between 1790 and 1795, the teenage Robinson, with the support of his environment of Dissenters, had developed a strong philosophical reading habit with a particular focus on the radical polymath Joseph Priestley.¹⁰ Priestley's philosophy, in line with the Unitarian emphasis on rational enquiry, experimentation, and observation, elaborates a system of strict necessity – of purposes in nature and motives in the mind – that explicitly precludes free will. Such a pursuit of rational religion often – as it did in Robinson's case – resulted in religious scepticism, since it subjected God, and in particular the biblical miracles, to strict empirical enquiry.¹¹ Robinson's necessitarianism was thereafter consolidated through his study of William Godwin's proto-anarchic *Political Justice*, resulting in his veneration of the philosopher, from 1795 onwards.¹² Godwin too, coming from the

⁹ Robinson, 'The Spanish Revolution', 245.

¹⁰ Giscombe, 'Henry Crabb Robinson's Reading Experiences', 19.

¹¹ See James Vigus, introduction to *Robinson: Essays*, 2, for a subtle differentiation between Priestley's and Robinson's approach to the biblical miracles and divine revelation. See Isabel Rivers and David L. Wykes, eds., *Joseph Priestley: Scientist, Philosopher, and Theologian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), for an authoritative, multi-faceted assessment of Priestley. For Priestley's radical rhetoric, see Stephen Bygrave, '“I Predict a Riot”: Joseph Priestley and Languages of Enlightenment in Birmingham in 1791', *Romanticism* 18:1 (2012): 70–88, doi.org/10.3366/rom.2012.0065.

¹² William Godwin, *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (London: Robinson, 1793). Robinson's second publication is a defence of *Political Justice*: Henry Crabb Robinson ['Philo Godwin'], 'Godwin', *Cambridge Intelligencer* 107 (1 August 1795): 4. The article is reprinted, placed in its wider context, and discussed in

same Unitarian tradition as Priestley, places his key moral principle of disinterested benevolence – an ‘enlarged morality’ insofar as it uncompromisingly places the benefit of society at large over personal obligations such as gratitude – on a necessitarian footing.¹³

While Godwin’s notion of disinterested benevolence was amplified for Robinson through his first-hand study of Immanuel Kant’s philosophy from mid-1801 onwards, Kant’s concept of pure reason as the foundation of the active mind irreversibly undid Robinson’s underlying necessitarian logic. The ‘conversion’ to Kant that Robinson underwent in the process found its immediate expression in his three ‘Letters on the Philosophy of Kant’ published in the Eurocentric *Monthly Register and Encyclopaedian Magazine* between August 1802 and April 1803. A fourth letter, intended for the same journal, however, remained unpublished at the time.¹⁴ By frequently referring to key thinkers from the Anglo-French empiricist tradition for his English home audience, these letters lucidly and accurately cover the cornerstones of Kant’s philosophy. They encompass the *a priori* as the independent principle of the active, synthesizing mind (not innate ideas, as Thomas Beddoes had previously claimed); the inevitable incompleteness of all knowledge thus generated which, notably, does not lead to religious scepticism but instead to an awareness of the existence of God that finds its felt expression in the moral sense, or the Kantian categorical imperative, and is compatible with Godwin’s moral philosophy; as well as the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgement which, contrary to Priestley and Godwin, points towards the freedom of the will.¹⁵ From here onwards, Robinson has taken a crucial, permanent step away from ‘those “Who think that nothing is but what is seen”’, which he illustrates in a December 1804 letter from Jena to his childhood friend and philosophical correspondent Catherine Clarkson (née Buck, 1772–1856; from 1796, she was the wife of the anti-slave-trade campaigner Thomas Clarkson). Robinson here writes that

[formerly,] high & lofty Sentim[en]t & generous ffeeling were held to be airy nothings because they could not be laid on the Anatomist’s bench or put under the mikroscope of the optician – hence no Wonder that in the School of Locke & ~~Harley~~ the french – It sho[ul]d be the fashion to laugh at the idea of a moral sense.¹⁶

Timothy Whelan, ‘Henry Crabb Robinson and Godwinism’, *The Wordsworth Circle* 33 (2, Spring 2002): 58–69.

13 Mark Philp, *Godwin’s Political Justice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 5.

14 The letters are reprinted in *Robinson: Essays*, 28–49. A fifth letter, aiming to merge Robinson’s series on Kant with his parallel series ‘on German Literature’ in the *Monthly Register*, treats ‘Kant’s Analysis of Beauty’, and is also reprinted in *Robinson: Essays*, 50–55.

15 *Robinson: Essays*, 4, 8, 12, 20–23, 29, and 36–38, especially 37n.50.

16 HCR to Catherine Clarkson, December 1804, Correspondence 1804, Letter 75, DWL. For the relevance of this letter with respect to the relationship between Robinson and Coleridge, see Philipp Hunnekuhl, ‘Constituting Knowledge: German Literature and Philosophy between

This was Robinson's newfound philosophical explanation of any 'rhapsody' (such as Arndt's conjecture of a successful Spanish uprising against Napoleon) that had previously, in the empiricist tradition, all too easily been discarded or ridiculed. The 'high & lofty Sentim[en]t', then, amounts to precisely Kant's elaboration of the 'moral sense', a sense not founded on empirical observation but instead on the inner workings of the mind that are the central subject of Kant's critical philosophy.

These Kantian convictions lie at the heart of Robinson's activity as a cultural, philosophical, and literary disseminator between several European countries after his return to England in September 1805. For instance, in the 1806 preface to his translation of Gustav von Schlabrendorf's *Napoleon Buonaparte wie er leibt und lebt, und das französische Volk unter ihm* [Napoleon Bonaparte as he is to a tee, and the French people under him], he praises the author in a quasi-Kantian manner for having assembled and 'embodie[d]' – synthesized and made intelligible – a new image of Napoleon.¹⁷ Robinson, thereafter, claims that Napoleon has 'confounded' the 'moral sense' of the French, and unduly 'raised to the rank of paramount principles of absolute worth' the lesser virtues of loyalty and patriotism.¹⁸ Hence, according to Robinson, Napoleon's subversion of universal yet transcendental Kantian morals in favour of worldly particulars 'may threaten the ruin of the world', which is why the war against France, unjustified as it had been during the inception of the French Revolution, now needs to be fought and won, so that the true ideals of the Revolution may at last, gradually, be put into practice.¹⁹

Robinson had witnessed Napoleon's troops occupy the Rhineland in 1801, during his first stay in Germany, but later, too, repeatedly and more directly, became embroiled in the intensifying war. In January 1807, he was commissioned by John Walter Jr (1776–1847), editor of the London *Times*, as a foreign and war correspondent to Altona, which today is a borough of Hamburg, but was then an independent town on Danish territory, thus neutral and beyond Napoleon's direct reach. Here, Robinson's 'mission was to send information from the

Coleridge and Crabb Robinson', *European Romantic Review* 28:1 (2017): 51–63, doi.org/10.1080/10509585.2016.1272844.

17 HCR [anon.], preface to Gustav von Schlabrendorf [anon.], *Napoleon, and the French People under his Empire* (London: Tipper and Richards, 1806), iv. Schlabrendorf (1750–1824), a Prussian count, had spent six years in England, and then settled in Paris shortly before the outbreak of the Revolution. He narrowly escaped execution during the Reign of Terror, and after Napoleon had become Consul (1799/1802) and Emperor (1804) attacked him in a series of anonymous publications. Schlabrendorf never left Paris. See Theodor Heuss, *Schattenbeschwörung: Randfiguren der Geschichte*, ed. Friedemann Schmoll (Tübingen: Klöpfer & Meyer, 2009), 105–116.

18 HCR, preface to Schlabrendorf, vii.

19 HCR, preface to Schlabrendorf, vii.

banks of the Elbe about the movements which resulted finally in the fall of Danzig and the Treaty of Tilsit'.²⁰ Robinson's manuscript 'Memoranda for 1807' reveals that this 'mission' usually encompassed the collecting, translating, and passing on of newspapers not available in Britain, but also the composition of articles, or letters, expressing his personal experiences and observations.²¹ These letters, accordingly entitled 'Private Correspondence from the Banks of the Elbe', were published in *The Times* between 26 February and 26 August 1807. After his escape from Altona, Robinson submitted three more letters, from Stockholm and Gothenburg.²²

Robinson's informal correspondence from around this time (mainly with his brother Thomas back in Bury St Edmunds) shows that he actively tried to resist the deceptive calm that his routine of reading, writing, socializing, and learning Italian at Altona had soon established:

I have been in danger of forgetting that the continuance of this most agreeable life is very precarious indeed. I am of the opinion that it cannot possibly last long. ~~Should~~ In all probability we shall soon hear of a peace with Russia or of a general engagem[en]t which, it is 10 to 1, will end in the defeat of the allies. In either event I have no doubt the French will take possession of Holstein.²³

Robinson afterwards reassures his brother that, in case of his arrest, 'the worst would be imprisonment'.²⁴ However, Morley is certainly right in her observation that, compared to other foreigners residing at Altona, 'Robinson himself was in more danger, for he was really "wanted"' by the French because of his activity as a political informant.²⁵ What exact dangers such being 'wanted' entailed can be gauged by the fact that, in the previous year, the Nuremberg bookseller Johann Philipp Palm had been executed for publishing the anti-Napoleonic pamphlet *Deutschland in seiner tiefen Erniedrigung* [Germany in her deep humiliation].²⁶ Arndt was widely assumed to be the author of this pamphlet, which is why he had since fled to Sweden where Robinson was soon to meet him.

On 16 August 1807, then, British forces launched their bombardment of Copenhagen in order to prevent Napoleon from capturing the Danish fleet. Rob-

20 Edith Morley, *The Life and Times of Henry Crabb Robinson* (London: Dent & Sons, 1935), 41–42.

21 HCR, 'Memoranda for 1807', DWL. This pocket diary, as well as Robinson's 'Notebook for 1806' and 'Memoranda: 19 July 1808–18 January 1809', cited below, are due to be published as part of *The Early Diaries of Henry Crabb Robinson*, ed. Philipp Hunnekuhl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

22 Morley, *Life and Times*, 42.

23 HCR to Thomas Robinson, 7 June 1807, Correspondence 1805–1808, Letter 89, DWL.

24 HCR to Thomas Robinson, 7 June 1807.

25 Morley, *Life and Times*, 44.

26 For Robinson's discussion of Palm's trial and execution, see HCR, Preface to Schlabrendorf, xxiii–xxx.

inson's escape from Altona on that very day is owed (along with his life, quite possibly) to the connections and friendships he had forged up to that point. A certain Major von Spät, 'second in command' at Altona, had repeatedly assured Robinson that he 'had noth[in]g to fear even sho[ul]d a war break out bet[ween] Eng[land] & Denmark'.²⁷ When British troops landed on Zealand to prepare the bombardment, and the mayor of Altona was ordered 'to retaliate by arresting every Englishman', von Spät kept his word and tipped off Robinson 'that he must depart forthwith'.²⁸ So Robinson crossed over into Hamburg on the same night. Once arrived, he stayed with Isaak Aldebert, a merchant with whom Robinson had first travelled to Germany in 1800 and whose contacts in the Frankfurt area had then introduced him to the literary circles around the Brentano family. Though Robinson's first impression was that, at Hamburg, 'there is no wish to seize us [the British] on either side', here, too, he turned out to be an object of particular interest to Napoleon.²⁹ He thus notes in his 'Memoranda', immediately after the incident described below, that it was once more von Spät who had sent a warning:

This notice perhaps saved me by mak[ing] me attentive to what was taking place before me. I was return[ing] to my lodg[ings] when I observed a fellow runn[ing] on the other side of the way & beckoning with vehemence tow[ard]s some persons whom I at once perceived to be Gens d'Armes & who were stationed not far from my lodgings – The fellow looked back upon me so that I co[ul]d have no doubt as to his object. I instantly took to my heels & did not stay till I had reached M^r Spaldings. Here I dined & relat[ing] my story & my determin[atio]n not to sleep again in my old lodgings I was invited by M^r Sp[alding] to stay with him And it was further agreed that we sho[ul]d go tog[ethe]r to Dobberan ...

27 At ½ past five M^r Sp[alding] & I left the walls of Hamb[urg] behind us And as I afterw[ard]s learned abo[ut] 6 hours afterw[ard]s Gens d'Armes came to my old lodgings & instantly mounted to my garret they expressed great rage at hav[ing] missed me & vowed vengeance ag[ain]st the people of the house if they dared to conceal me.³⁰

Such was Robinson's second narrow escape within less than a fortnight. He decided not to push his luck for a third time just yet, so instead of choosing the direct but much more dangerous way home to England, he travelled eastwards –

27 Morley, *Life and Times*, 43; HCR, 'Memoranda for 1807', 16 August.

28 Morley, *Life and Times*, 44.

29 HCR to John Dyer Collier, 22 August 1807, Correspondence 1805–1808, Letter 94, DWL. Collier was a long-standing friend, previous editor of the *Monthly Register* (where Robinson's letters on Kant and German literature had appeared between 1802–1803), and a key influence behind John Walter Jr appointing Robinson as a foreign correspondent.

30 HCR, 'Memoranda for 1807', 25–27 August.

first to Bad Doberan and then to Wismar, where, on 8 September, he embarked a packet-boat that landed at Dalarö, south-east of Stockholm, six days later.³¹

On 15 September, Robinson entered Stockholm – and with that, made contact with another network of old friends and acquaintances. The closest of these was Amalia von Helvig (née Imhoff, 1776–1831), who used to be the lady-in-waiting to the Duchess of Weimar when Robinson was a student at Jena, and whom he had known since then.³² It was during a dinner at Mrs Helvig's three days later that Robinson met Arndt for the first time. Robinson had read Arndt's *Geist der Zeit* in August 1806, and was, therefore, well prepared for the following critical observations and comparisons, made in his 'Memoranda':

Prof: Arndt dined with us he is a lively, agreeable man – & his convers[atio]n is interest[ing] he had none of that affectation of mystery & profund[it]y which is too often apparent in his books – Yet he has the modern philosophical tone with[ou]t being desirous of belong[ing] appearing to belong to the school – Spent the whole day most agreeable came home late with Prof: A[rndt].³³

Both men returned to Mrs Helvig's the next morning to continue their conversation over breakfast, before Robinson, on the following day, departed for Gothenburg. Robinson reiterates his encounter with Arndt in a letter to his brother, written 'On board the King George Packet' during the final leg of his escape, between Gothenburg and Harwich:

I p[ai]d Mad de Helwick a morn[ing] visit & did not leave her till late in the Even[ing] She had invited Professor Arndt a German writer who has distinguished himself by one or two very eloquent political works ag[ain]st Bonaparte, a man of great powers a[n] eloquent writer & a very profound thinker – as a companion gay & even boy like I became almost intimate in a day & sho[ul]d accident throw us near each other, our future further acquaintance is certain.³⁴

It was this lively, philosophical, anti-Napoleonic 'falling in' with Arndt that 'occasioned', as Robinson would recall much later in his 'Reminiscences', the 'translat[ing] entire his prophecy in the year [1806] of the insurrection of the Spaniards which actually took place within less than a year after our re[n]contre in Sweden'.³⁵ And this is precisely what we must bear in mind when it comes to Arndt's influence on Robinson, as it is tangible in the latter's review of Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra* in the *London Review*: as enthusiastic as all of these

31 HCR, 'Memoranda for 1807', 8 and 14 September. He had never been received with greater hospitality than at Dalarö, Robinson notes in his diary entry under the latter date.

32 Morley, *Life and Times*, 45.

33 HCR, 'Memoranda 1807', 18 September. For Robinson reading Arndt's *Geist der Zeit*, see HCR, 'Notebook for 1806', Bundle 6.VIII, DWL, inside of front cover.

34 HCR to Thomas Robinson, 4 October 1807, Correspondence 1805–1808, Letter 100, DWL.

35 HCR, 'Reminiscences' I (1807), DWL, 381.

accounts of Arndt are (strictures as to the occasional ‘affectation’ of his style aside), their traceable impact on Robinson’s writing is highly selective, indicating Robinson’s preference of certain elements in Arndt’s work over others. To be clear: what attracted Robinson, the opponent of patriotism as a ‘principle of absolute worth’, were not the ethno-nationalistic and anti-Semitic elements that can be found elsewhere in Arndt. (These elements were appropriated and abused during the Nazi period; they make Arndt the controversial figure that he is in present-day Germany). Robinson treasured Arndt’s emphasis on the ‘scales of justice, beauty, and humanity’ ‘raised’ by the Spanish precisely insofar as they ought to forge a ‘bond’ between the nations of Europe and thereby help to conquer the conqueror, as it were – to overcome the current crisis and create a shared outlook along the lines of Kantian universal morals.

‘The Spanish Revolution’ and Transcendental Morality

After his disembarkation at Harwich, Robinson returned to London without delay, where he continued to work for *The Times*. In November 1807, Napoleon’s invasion of Portugal and the tightening of his grip on Spain marked the beginning of what was to become the Peninsular War. Momentarily, however, a quick end to the conflict seemed in sight when the aforementioned Spanish revolt of 1808, predicted by Arndt, severely weakened Napoleon’s rule on the Iberian Peninsula. The British subsequently carried out their own invasion of Portugal in order to take advantage of the situation and put an end to the French occupation. It was in this optimistic atmosphere that Robinson received his second commission as a war correspondent, this time to Corunna. The task was very similar to the one he had had at Altona: collect information from local newspapers, relay it to Britain, and comment on it.³⁶ Through a fairly short, but determined, effort he rose to the challenge of mastering Spanish.³⁷ Robinson’s articles were again published in *The Times*, between 9 August 1808 and 26 January 1809, now under the title ‘Private Correspondence from the Banks of the Bay of Biscay’.³⁸ These pub-

³⁶ Morley, *Life and Times*, 51.

³⁷ Robinson’s ‘Memoranda: 19 July 1808–18 January 1809’, DWL, vividly testifies to the consistency with which Robinson read an unspecified Spanish grammar as well as a number of literary works, and also decidedly conversed in Spanish, from his arrival in Corunna onwards.

³⁸ For recent Spanish takes on these articles, see Elías Durán de Porras, *La prensa británica en los comienzos de la guerra de la independencia: Henry Crabb Robinson y la corresponsalia del The Times en España* (Valencia: Universidad CEU Cardenal Herrera, 2006) and Elías Durán de Porras, *Venturas y desventuras de un periodista inglés en La Coruña: Henry Crabb Robinson y la corresponsalia del Times en España, 1808–1809* (Madrid: Universidad San Pablo, CEU, 2003). See also John Milton Baker, *Henry Crabb Robinson of Bury, Jena, The Times, and Russell Square* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1937), 170–181, for further details of

lications, as a matter of necessity, reflect the trajectory of the British peninsular campaign – from the exuberance after the initial victories in Portugal, to the disbelief at the Convention of Cintra (signed on 30 August 1808) that permitted the French to evacuate their troops with little loss and no further engagement, to Napoleon taking military affairs in Spain into his own hands and invading the country afresh in November 1808, to the dejection at the British being pushed back towards Corunna and their final, ill-fated battle there on 16 January 1809. Robinson once again recorded his personal experiences, impressions, and feelings amidst these events in a pocket diary, which concludes with the French cannon firing at the departing British ships, one of which, bound for Falmouth, was carrying Robinson and several of his Spanish friends.³⁹

This close personal and professional involvement in Spanish affairs underpins Robinson's review of Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra* that follows the lengthy invocation of Arndt in the *London Review* article 'The Spanish Revolution'.⁴⁰ And as is the case with Arndt, Wordsworth's pamphlet evinces a 'fascination' with Spanish matters – a fascination which, as Alicia Laspra-Rodríguez de Coletes has recently argued, grew out of 'anger'.⁴¹ Robinson's review is very much concerned with this 'fascination'. It may be riddled with rhetorical concessions to a more conservative or right-leaning readership, and does not overtly mention Kant – a circumstance explained by the widespread likening of Kantianism to Jacobinism during the first decade of the nineteenth century that Monika Class has emphasized.⁴² Yet Robinson's Kantian morality prevails in his review, establishing, in a further development of Arndt's passage on Spain and Portugal, a

Robinson's deployment in Spain. Baker mentions the review of Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra*, but does not discuss it.

39 HCR, 'Memoranda: 19 July 1808–18 January 1809', 17 January 1809.

40 William Wordsworth, *Concerning the Relations of Great Britain, Spain, and Portugal to Each Other, and to the Common Enemy at this Crisis; and Specifically as Affected by the Convention of Cintra: The Whole Brought to the Test of those Principles, by which Alone the Independence and Freedom of Nations can be Preserved or Recovered* (London: Longman et al., 1809). The three further titles mentioned at the outset of Robinson's review are discussed on the final pages only (pp. 273–275), but give an idea as to the topicality of the subject matter: Adam Neale, *Letters from Portugal and Spain: Comprising an Account of the Operations of the Armies under Their Excellencies Sir Arthur Wellesley and Sir John Moore* (London: Phillips, 1809); James Wilmot Ormsby, *An Account of the British Army, and of the State of the Sentiments of the People of Portugal and Spain, during the Campaign of the Years 1808 and 1809* (London: Carpenter, 1809); and the anonymous *Letters from Portugal and Spain; Written during the March of the British Troops under Sir John Moore* (London: Longman, 1809).

41 Alicia Laspra-Rodríguez de Coletes, 'Wordsworth's Spain, 1808–1811', in *Spain in British Romanticism 1800–1840*, ed. Diego Saglia and Ian Haywood (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 75–94, 76.

42 Monika Class, *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England, 1796–1817: Coleridge's Responses to German Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 27.

liberal undercurrent to his argument that effectively undermines any jingoistic connotations that may have been conjured up by the aforementioned concessions.

All the while, Robinson stands firm in his opposition to Napoleon – for instance when he addresses the long-standing (and current) oppositional viewpoints between the Corsican as the newfound tyrant of Europe or the bearer of hard-won liberties. One specific focus here is the claim that Napoleon was bringing religious tolerance to the lands conquered. Robinson was a lifelong Unitarian, religious reformer, and active participant in the foundation of University College London as a secular alternative to Oxbridge that would allow students irrespective of their religious allegiance to gain a university education. He is, therefore, at pains to refute such a notion as that of Napoleon's. He writes:

And what lessons of religion can be promulgated by an hierarchy of cardinals and bishops, who have prostituted themselves by blasphemously sanctioning his atrocities? By the triumph of such monstrous guilt, and chiefly by the assent of those to whom the world at large look up for instruction, all moral relations and ideas are destroyed. ... But it is this constant reference to contingent effects, and to the physical comfort or misery promoted or occasioned by the conduct of courts and governments, which is one of the most lamentable corollaries from a degrading philosophy. It is not by an enumeration of the murders perpetrated, or the cities sacked in Spain, that the most painful and disgusting impressions are raised, but the desolation of all moral principle which we witness. The sieges of Gerona, Valencia, and Saragossa, &c. are the consolatory incidents of the revolution; for they shew how great crimes have produced great virtues.⁴³

Robinson makes explicit his Kantian subordination of empirical principles – the latter labelled here 'a degrading philosophy' and represented by the 'enumeration of the murders perpetrated' – to the transcendental and universal 'moral principle' that pervades his entire line of argument. His embracing of the Spanish regardless of their overwhelmingly Catholic allegiance, then, as well as the many friendships with Catholics that he made throughout his life, as well as his character as an enduring proponent of religious tolerance, rule out the assumption that the phrase 'prostitut[ing]' and 'blasphem[ing]' cardinals and bishops amounts to crude anti-Catholicism. If not rhetorical concessions for his home audience, such a phrase echoes the laicism of Robinson's erstwhile radical – at its earliest stage even Jacobinic – adherence. Or, as is the case with patriotism; adherence to a particular religion must never be a '*paramount principle of absolute worth*' but subject to the obliquely felt but universal 'moral sense'.

A smidgen of this adherence as yet prevails, since Robinson feels the need to deny Napoleon the claim as its herald. He, therefore, explains what was referred

43 HCR, 'The Spanish Revolution', 257. Gerona, Valencia, and Zaragoza were strongholds of the Spanish revolt and soon came to stand as symbols for it.

to above as a 'moral principle' in considerable detail in his introduction to Wordsworth's pamphlet:

The anti-jacobin character of Buonaparte's invasion of Spain, is the most remarkable feature of that most outrageous and profligate transaction, which bears no resemblance to any of his preceding aggressions against the rights of independent nations. The *moral* qualities of this unparalleled act; the *moral* character of that resistance which so unexpectedly sprang up in the peninsula, notwithstanding the state of unexampled abandonment and disorganization, in which, through the arts of the oppressor, the people of Spain were sunk; and the *moral* relations which thence arose between that people and the British government, which with laudable promptitude came forward to their succour, form the *theme* of Mr. WORDSWORTH'S very striking and original performance.⁴⁴

The phrase 'arts of the oppressor' denotes Napoleon's dissimulations for his own political ends, of course – that is to say, his purposeful divergences from moral truth. But with the 'moral relations' between Spain and Britain, Arndt's hoped-for 'bond' has since begun to materialize, Robinson implies. That this bond is 'moral' in essence becomes crucial in the light of Robinson's Kantian convictions outlined above: Kant's morality, to reiterate, is founded on the inevitable incompleteness of knowledge produced by the synthesizing mind, thus not subject to empirical scrutiny, and elevated above worldly particulars and one's adherence to them (most notably, in the present context, in the forms of patriotism and individual religions).⁴⁵ The concept of the nation, then, is maintained with its erstwhile Jacobinic connotations as wresting the legitimisation for political rule out of the hands of the monarchy (including Napoleon, officially the Emperor of France since 1804), not as an exclusive demarcation from other nations. This is why Robinson clarifies that Wordsworth's publication

is not a political pamphlet, but an ethic essay on a political subject, in which the philosophy of human nature, and the principles of an high-toned and pure morality, are applied to the conduct and fate of nations: it depends so little upon temporal and local feelings, though the subject embraces the occurrences of the day, that the reader would do well to forget the last gazette, the fate of Sir John Moore, and the dispatches of Sir Arthur Wellesley.⁴⁶

This timeless 'ethic' truth lies at the core of Robinson's attack on the 'arts' of Napoleon whilst it also constitutes the key parallel between Wordsworth's pam-

44 HCR, 'The Spanish Revolution', 250.

45 Robinson explained the Kantian connection between the incompleteness of knowledge and universal morality to Madame de Staël in 1804; see *Robinson: Essays*, 9 and 123.

46 HCR, 'The Spanish Revolution', 250–251. Wellesley, the later Duke of Wellington, had led the British troops during the invasion of Portugal and the victory over the French there, and refused to sign the Convention of Cintra. He was overruled and replaced by Moore, who was killed during the Battle of Corunna.

phlet and Arndt's passage on Spain and Portugal. Both Wordsworth and Arndt have developed a morality which, at some point or other, may find its materialization in history, but whose essence is independent of that materialization and, in this transcendental characteristic, universally true. Against this backdrop, the conceptual binarism of knowing and acting collapses: these two categories do not necessitate one another through mutual exclusion, but instead permeate each other haphazardly. The timeless realm of morality provides the fabric, and thus opens up a third, all-embracing category, to this non-necessitarian interplay.⁴⁷

What precisely constitutes this timeless moral truth permeating Arndt's and Wordsworth's ethical historiography, so to speak, emerges from Robinson's subsequent discussion of select passages from Wordsworth's pamphlet. Robinson first denies his home audience the moral high ground – a greatly effective move amidst his rhetorical concessions which pave the way for his central argument – and asserts that 'the strong emotions which were raised in this country, by the unparalleled invasion of Spain, proceeded principally from the proof it afforded of the absolute and frightful power of France; and that it operated more upon our selfish than our moral feelings'.⁴⁸ In other words, the shock of Napoleon's successful re-taking of Spain that his home audience had previously felt was not due to that trans-national moral 'bond', but to the sheer force with which the previous strongholds of the revolt were overrun and Moore's troops pushed back, which boded very badly indeed for a much-apprehended invasion of Britain.

Robinson argues that this grievance will be remedied by Wordsworth's and Arndt's works. They restore a moral awareness, and forge an according 'invisible bond', that will improve the outlook of continental, as well as British affairs. At the basis of this bond, however, must lie the recognition of one another on equal and independent terms. This, Robinson claims, is Wordsworth's 'first striking and original point of view', before citing a key passage from the *Convention of Cintra*:

Spain had risen not merely to be delivered and saved; – deliverance and safety were but intermediate objects; – regeneration and liberty were the end, and the means by which this end was to be attained; had their own high value; were determined and precious; and could no more admit of being departed from, than the end of being forgotten. – She had risen – not merely to be free; but, in the act and process of acquiring that freedom, to recompense herself, as it were in a moment, for all which she had suffered through ages. ...

47 Compare Hamilton's exploration of *Realpoetik* as a 'third position' through which an author may direct conflicting interests towards political innovation, rather than resolve them pragmatically in the zero-sum game of *Realpolitik*; Hamilton, *Realpoetik*, 4.

48 HCR, 'The Spanish Revolution', 251.

If an Angel from heaven had come with power to take the enemy from their grasp ... they would have been sad; they would have looked around them; their souls would have turned inward; and they would have stood like men defrauded and betrayed.⁴⁹

In other words, the Spanish Revolution was national myth creation in progress, obstructed by a British interference that placed the material outcome, insofar as it was in its own interest, over the cultural psychology and self-respect of its ally. This is one instance of the 'countervailing' that Spain 'reflected and refracted' about Britain as exemplified by Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra*.⁵⁰ The Spanish are not understood on their own terms, but appropriated, whether deliberately or not, for British purposes – a clear violation of Kant's categorical imperative. Robinson's observation on this is crucial:

The English ministry had a sincere desire to assist in the deliverance of the peninsula from the enemy; but they were able only to add an auxiliary force of a few thousand men and did not consider whether the physical aid they brought might not be more than outweighed by the moral energy they took away. Their generals too were utterly regardless of all that was characteristic and peculiar in the state of Portugal and Spain.⁵¹

This set the tone for the negotiations that culminated in the Convention of Cintra: the tangible objectives that the British negotiators deemed pertinent were prioritized, and those of the originators of the revolt and the disseminators of its spirit neglected. The lamentable result, then, was not so much the material aspect that is the unhindered evacuation of the French troops, but the maladroit crushing of the ally's morale. We are back with Robinson's invective against that 'class' of men ' "Who think that nothing is but what is seen" ', in his discussion of Arndt's *Geist der Zeit*.

What should have been done instead? The paramount truth that cannot 'be laid on the Anatomist's bench or put under the mikroscope of the optician' finds its expressions in the 'mild and humane delusions', as Robinson quotes Wordsworth, which should have been employed in support of the Spanish and Portuguese cause.⁵² These delusions 'spread such a genial grace over the intercourse, and add so much to the influence of love in the concerns of private life'.⁵³ Thus feigning to be at eye level in terms of actual power may constitute an untruthful act of condescension at the time of utterance, but crucially, through sustaining morale, entertains the prospect of the lesser ally ever rising up to that

49 Wordsworth, *Convention of Cintra*, 109–110. For Robinson's altered citation, see HCR, 'The Spanish Revolution', 254.

50 Diego Saglia and Ian Haywood, introduction to *Spain and British Romanticism*, 1–16, 6.

51 HCR, 'The Spanish Revolution', 253.

52 Wordsworth, *Convention of Cintra*, 71. For Robinson's quotation, see HCR, 'The Spanish Revolution', 255.

53 Wordsworth, *Convention of Cintra*, 71. HCR, 'The Spanish Revolution', 255.

level – and thereby attaining that very truth. This insight is behind Robinson's quotation of Wordsworth that the

true point of comparison does not lie between what the Spaniards have been under a government of their own, and what they may become under French domination; but between what the Spaniards may do (and in all likelihood will do) for themselves, and what Frenchmen would do for them.⁵⁴

Negotiating the Convention of Cintra along the unconcealed lines of power, as it did happen, however, impaired the very prospect of the British allies to elevate themselves to eye level – of 'what the Spaniards may do (and, in all likelihood, will do) for themselves'. The disintegration of this egalitarian prospect, Robinson finds in his review of Wordsworth's pamphlet, ultimately proved counter-productive to the British cause as well. This is not to say that the material support of the Spanish uprising was unjustified. It is, however, to say that any material support ought to have been subordinated, very much in the same manner as empirical principles are subordinate to the workings of the mind in the philosophy of Kant, to the universal moral 'bond' that requires each participant to be treated as an autonomous end in her- or himself.

Conclusion

Henry Crabb Robinson saw both Arndt's *Geist der Zeit* and Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra* as catalysts for a pan-European moral truth that had been elaborated by Kant but was in the process of being subverted by Napoleon's foreign campaigns. The independence and democratic self-governance of nations underpins Robinson's application of Kantian morality to politics, yet in this respect one must not forget two key elements: firstly, the historical context in which national autonomy evolves as a legitimising principle out of, and in opposition to, monarchy; and secondly, that Robinson, along the lines of Kant, unambiguously subjects any such geo-political particularities to the universal 'virtues and energies of humanity' that Europe needed (and still needs) to 'cultivate in common' in order to be able to deal with political crises. In short, morality beats nationality, anytime and unconditionally. In this, and despite any rhetorical concessions to a more conservative readership in 'The Spanish Revolution', there survives a radical element in Robinson that stems from the Unitarian tradition – especially Richard Price's sermon *On the Love of our Country*, which promulgated patriotism as the abiding by the principles of the French Revolution. Price had thus ignited the Revolution Controversy in Britain, in which Burke,

⁵⁴ Wordsworth, *Convention of Cintra*, 170; HCR, 'The Spanish Revolution', 257–258.

Wollstonecraft, Paine, and others would soon engage.⁵⁵ Between 1800 and 1805, Robinson had found a new metaphysical elaboration of Price's cosmopolitanism in Kant; Robinson conducted his invocation of Arndt in his review of Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra* against the backdrop of precisely this elaboration.

55 Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (London: Cadell, 1790). Robinson had read this pamphlet, as well as the responses to it, with great avidity during his years at Colchester.