From Chester to Quimper via Sydney: Watkin Tench in Revolutionary France

Gavin Edwards University of Glamorgan

About a year and a half after her own return from France in spring 1795, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote that

> the strange mixture of wisdom and folly, of generous actions and atrocities, and of sufferings and success, which a neighbouring country has exhibited during the last six years, the wonderful changes it has undergone, and the immense multitude of important events which it has compressed within so narrow a circle, have naturally attracted our attention strongly towards it; but our means of information have of late been very inadequate to our curiosity. Our *regular* tour writers, shut out by the war, and the jealousy of both governments, have been unable, like Mr Burke, to find France on the map; and have been forced to leave the rich mine to be partially explored by interlopers, whom the fortune of war, or some other casualty, has cast upon the coast. Of this number is the author of the present work.[1]

'The present work' to which Wollstonecraft refers is '*Letters written in France to a friend in London between the month of November 1794 and the month of May 1795*, by Major Tench of the Marines'. It was published in 1796 by Wollstonecraft's own publisher, Joseph Johnson, and she is reviewing it here in the September 1796 issue of his journal, the *Analytical Review*.

The war opened an information gap between Britain and France which Wollstonecraft describes here by means of an analogy: France has been pushed to the distance of an unmapped coast in the Americas or the Pacific. It's an analogy which may have come into her mind from Major Tench's book itself with its allusions to the author's own global career as a marine, its

references to America, the West Indies and New Holland. But what she does not tell us – and what only Australian readers are now likely to realise – is that 'Major Tench of the Marines' is the same man who, as Captain Tench, had a few years previously published *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay* (1789) and *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson* (1793).[2]

Wollstonecraft does not make the connection between *Letters Written in France* and the two New South Wales books even though the latter had received favourable notices in the British reviews – including the *Analytical* – just a few years previously.[3] And that separation has continued: from the start, there have been two Watkin Tenches. His New South Wales books are recognised as central texts in Australian literature and history, but Australian scholars have displayed little interest in what happened to Tench – either as a marine or a writer – after he left Australia.[4] In Britain, no version of the literary canon has until very recently included the non-fictional literature of exploration and empire, and Tench has been only slightly more visible to historians than to literary critics. Four excerpts from the *Letters Written in France* appeared in JM Thompson's 1938 anthology *English Witnesses of the French Revolution* – under the heading 'the Revolution in Brittany' – but their author's name is mis-spelt throughout as 'Major Trench'.[5] In the recent – and excellent – *Oxford History of the French Revolution* Tench becomes completely anonymous, quoted twice – from the Thompson anthology – as 'an English prisoner'.[6]

Letters Written in France, though praised by Wollstonecraft in 1796 for its wit, style and intelligence, has fallen into the gap produced by the complementary insularities of British and Australian scholarship. By putting the French and New South Wales writing side by side we can, for the first time, bring Tench's work into proper focus and draw out its significance for readers in both hemispheres. We can bring to light, in a unique way, links between the French Revolution and the founding of New South Wales as ambitious and problematic attempts to found completely new societies on the terrain of ancient ones. Furthermore, *Letters Written in France* significantly enlarges our understanding of the relationship between culture and politics in Britain in the 1790s, altering the context in which we read the work of more familiar figures such as Wollstonecraft herself. It does so because, uniquely among significant writers in this period of war and revolution, Tench writes as both a military man and an intellectual. A constitutional monarchist and liberal whig, he is self-consciously neo-classical in his political and cultural allegiances, threatened and fascinated by the revolutionary neo-classicism of the French Republic.

The coincidence in time between the French Revolution and the founding of New South Wales meant that participants in these events were for some time ignorant of each other's activities. But the French Revolutionaries knew about Tench and New South Wales before Tench and New South Wales

knew about the French Revolution. Tench sent the manuscript of his *Narrative* on the first fleet to sail back from NSW to London, where it was published in 1789. Two translations appeared in Paris later the same year, one with a preface linking the Revolution and the founding of the penal colony as comparable acts of enlightened social reform.[7]

At that stage – late 1789 – no ship from London had yet reached the New South Wales colonists. Writing in his *Account*, and referring to 1790, Tench reports: 'our impatience of news from Europe strongly marked the commencement of the year. We have now been two years in the country and thirty-two months from England … . Famine … was approaching with gigantic strides' and 'no communication whatever had passed with out native country since 13th May 1787, the day of our departure from Portsmouth' (162). The first ship from London arrived six months later, Tench describing the event as follows:

> 'Letters! Letters!' was the cry. They were produced and torn open in trembling agitation. News burst upon us like meridian splendor on a blind man. We were overwhelmed with it; public, private, general and particular. Nor was it until some days had elapsed, that we were able to methodize it, or reduce it into form. We now heard for the first time of our sovereign's illness, and his happy restoration to health. The French revolution of 1789, with all the attendant circumstances of that wonderful and unexpected event, succeeded to amaze us. (170)

This passage raises interesting questions about the compositional history of the *Account* itself. The book is written up from Tench's journal, which is quoted in the text but does not itself survive. The body of the text consists of a narrative of events up to December 1791 when Tench left New South Wales (the voyage home is not described), followed by three chapters which survey various aspects – ethnographic, economic, natural historical – of the New South Wales experiment. These final chapters are explicitly written, or at least written up, when Tench is back in London; by contrast the narrative section seems careful to avoid any reference to a retrospective British point of vantage on the events it describes.

In this context, the reference to 'the French revolution of 1789' is particularly intriguing. Why does Tench feel the need to mention the date? If we understand Tench's narrative to be written in New South Wales – as news sent back, in effect, from New South Wales to London – he might mention the date so as to draw the attention of his British readers to how far in space and time the news of the Revolution has had to travel before it reached New South Wales. However, another reason for naming the date may occur to us when we read this passage from the *Letters Written in France*:

> My political principles are … unchanged since we parted; and I still think a limited monarchy the best of governments. Had I been born a Frenchman,

> I should have struggled as hard for the revolution of 1789, as I should have resisted with all my might that of 1792. Much as I hate despotism, I am scarcely less a foe to democracy.[8]

But the republican revolution of 1792 – the overthrow of the monarchy, the September Massacres, the Terror – were events which Tench only heard about, and some of which only took place, after his arrival back in England in June 1792. Consequently it is possible that the phrase 'the French revolution of 1789' is a late revision, written in England in 1793. It is possible too that the placing of news of the King's good health first is also a late revision, tailored to a situation in which there was increasing pressure to declare loyalist and royalist sentiment.

Furthermore, this evidence of rewriting appears in a paragraph which is already about the process of composition, about the way in which the 'news' from England took time to 'methodize' and 'reduce into form'. Tench is referring to the process of composing ones mind: but it is a process which goes on, under the pressure of changing political events, in the activities of writing and rewriting.

Tench was a man of firm and very serious principles – liberal whiggish and Anglican – whose writing life spanned a period – 1788 to 1796 – when all principles (perhaps particularly liberal whiggish ones) were subject to intense and confusing pressure from continuous social and political transformation, notably from the Revolution in France. The poets of the period – notably Wordsworth and Coleridge – are continually revising their work in the light of altering circumstances and opinions, so that intricate scholarly work on the compositional strata of their texts is an essential part of analysis. This is just as true for Tench. We need to work out how much of the *Account* – which is together with Tench's *Narrative*, the most influential record of the founding of NSW – was written in Britain in 1793 under the impact of the political upheaval in France and Britain.

Tench – like other officers on the NSW expedition – had made arrangements with a London publisher before he left. These men were going out as reporters as well as soldiers and sailors. They were self-conscious makers of 'history' in both senses of the word. Tench's vivid description of how 'news' of the 'revolution of 1789' arrived in New South Wales from Britain may itself be thought of as an item of news for a British readership. Tench is always news-hungry in this way, in the manner of an investigative journalist, a foreign correspondent. Landing in France in 1794 as a prisoner of war, he is torn between mortal fear and intense excitement at being allowed 'an inlet into this extraordinary country at such a period as the present' (23). Tench is very conscious of living in 'the present' as a period, of living through events that are historic in the sense of being both unprecedented and possibly decisive.

In Tench's writing, as in other travel writings of this period such as Wollstonecraft's *Letters from Sweden* (also published in 1796 by Joseph Johnson),

a familiar Enlightenment genre – the description of foreign manners and institutions – is transformed by the sense of living in a world undergoing radical and unpredictable transformation, of long durational social and cultural conditions becoming unpredictably vulnerable to day to day events.

Tench returned from New South Wales in 1792. War between Britain and Revolutionary France broke out the following year and he was drafted into the Channel Fleet whose principal task was to blockade the French naval port of Brest. Captured in a sea battle off the coast of Brittany, Tench and fellow officers were held for two months on the prison-ships *Marat* and *Normandie* in Brest harbour. They were then sent to Quimper, a Breton town recently designated the capital of the new 'department' of Finistere where they were lodged, in effect on parole, in the house of a Mademoiselle Brimaudière. *Letters Written in France* describes the progress of the Revolution as Tench witnessed it in the drawing rooms and public places of Quimper and in the Breton-speaking hinterland, during the period between the fall of Robespierre in July 1794 (Thermindor of Year 2) and the massacre of invading émigrés at Quiberon just south of Quimper in July 1795. Tench returned to Britain as part of a prisoner exchange in May 1795 and published his book the following year.

Tench and the French Revolution are made for each other. He vividly conveys the effect of what Wollstonecraft calls 'the immense number of important events ... compressed within so narrow a circle'. In the Revolution, historical processes are speeded up, systems of government and value supersede one another almost week by week. Truly world-shaking events are almost daily occurrences (the shaking included the 'black jacobin' slave revolt in St. Domingue at one end of the scale, the minor tremor recorded by Tench in New South Wales at the other). Tench's talents as a reporter are evident in the way he has one eye on events going on around him in Quimper and the other glued to the Paris daily newspapers. 'There are two coffee-houses in the town', he says, to one of which 'I go daily to read the Paris newspapers', without problems apparently, 'notwithstanding an inscription placed over the door ... forbidding any but good patriots to enter (81).' And he keeps a third eye available for checking the back numbers so as to compare what people are saying now with what those same people may have been saying on the same topic the previous month:

> However outrageous the execrations of the French now are on hearing [Robespierre's] name, they do not surpass the adulation with which they once approached the idol of his power. I wish I could send you the *Gazette Nationale* of the 30th of *Pluviôse*, which belongs to a collection of newspapers that I have access to, and contains a report of the 16th of *Nivôse*, made to the convention by Courtois, in the name of the committee appointed to examine the papers of Robespierre. Never before was flattery so gross and servile used as some of these productions ... He is called in

> them the glorious, incorruptible Robespierre…who joins to the self-denial of a Spartan, or a Roman of early date, the eloquence of an Athenian … He is compared, not by an individual but by a body of people, to the Messiah … On some occasion a *Te Deum* was performed for him … (117–18)

When history is speeded up the process of rewriting it becomes particularly visible. Or as Tench puts it, the 'unceasing desire of change' goes with a 'versatile levity of sentiment'. Tench has a sharp eye for news-making in the Orwellian sense, the Committee of Public Safety as the Ministry of Truth (the '*Montagne*' in the following passage refers to the recently eclipsed ruling faction in the National Assembly):

> In the centre of [the market-place] stands, on a square pedestal, a statue of Liberty, with inscriptions on each side, some parts of which have been recently white-washed, to obliterate them. Among these I could decypher the word '*Montagne*' and a few others of analogous signification, which a change of opinion has suddenly expunged from the vocabulary of French patriotism. (81)

Good as Tench is, however, at seeing through a whitewashing job, the process of revision he uncovers here is not wholly unlike the one we may have identified in his own reference to 'the revolution of 1789' in *An Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson*. Very few people, revolutionary or counter revolutionary or – especially – those in transit from one to the other, escaped this process of anxious rewriting.

If Tench is an early version of the foreign correspondent, he also combines the man of action and the man of letters according to an older formula. It is not simply that he is a soldier writing about soldiering in a formally self-conscious allusive prose. It is a more explicit self-image than that, notably evident in the substance of the book's first two allusions. To his correspondent in London he writes:

> The wayward fortune of your friend has again exposed him to be taken by 'the insolent foe'. (5)

Tench would be referring to the fact that he had been a prisoner of war of the French before, in Maryland during the War of Independence when he was 17 years old. For Tench, the war with Revolutionary France was the latest episode in a long history of inter-imperial global encounters which had shaped his own working life: from Maryland to Brest harbour via the West Indies and Botany Bay

So 'the insolent foe' is specifically France. But the phrase is also a Shakesperian quotation, from Othello's speech to the Venetian senators in which Othello defends himself against the charge of having seduced Desdemona with magic arts by telling them – as he had previously told Desdemona – the story

of his life, of 'moving accidents by flood and field'. By this means he persuades the senators that his skill as a storyteller could have seduced Desdemona just as it is – figuratively – seducing them.

It was a very well known speech at the time, widely anthologised, and a highly significant speech in British literary Romanticism. Between 1796 and 1800 Wordsworth alludes to it repeatedly as he attempts to distance himself from the world of heroic action in which Othello's seductive storytelling trades.[9]

Tench's second allusion occurs in a retrospective footnote reference to the sea-battle in which he was captured. Like the *Othello* allusion, it glorifies the combination of soldier and storyteller:

> All the circumstances of the action, and of the causes which led to it, have been detailed by him, who like Caesar, knew not only how to execute, but to narrate deeds of glory. I…beg leave to refer the reader to the official letter of Captain, now Rear Admiral Bligh, which appeared in the *Gazette*, either about the latter end of January or the beginning of February, 1795. (5)

Othello, Caesar, Admiral Bligh, and implicitly therefore Tench himself, are being linked as soldier-storytellers in whom the force of narrating and the force of arms are closely linked.

That link – between soldiering and storytelling, history as event and as narrative – is as important in Tench's thinking about his country as in his thinking about himself. He is struck by the success of Republican cultural forms – songs and dances such as the *Marseillaise* and the *Carmagnole* for instance – in generating an anti-aristocratic but otherwise inter-class patriotism and *esprit-de-corps*. This strikes him by contrast with the situation on his own side where shipboard discipline collapses at the point of military defeat. Officers' belongings – including Tench's own – are instantly looted by British as well as French sailors, Tench 'knowing from sad experience, that in such a situation all distinction of property is confounded' (6). It is in the context of this sense of a class chasm – what E. P. Thompson, writing about England in this period, called 'social apartheid' – that Tench commends the Republic's more equitable system for distributing prize-money and their more equitable game-laws. And it is this same sense of division which leads him to lament the British failure to

> re-animate the ardent energy of our seamen, by public recitals of the victories of a Russel, a Hawke, a Rodney, and a Howe. (12)

The British are 'culpably indifferent' to such 'exhibitions'. There should be collective commemoration of figures such as the naval heroes he lists, and of events such as – and the language is pointedly whiggish – 'when John was compelled to sign Magna Charta; and when the declaration of the rights of

the people was made the foundation of William's throne … No people ever rose to superlative dominion who did not employ [such exhibitions]' (13, 12). The British ruling class may share a national story – Tench's commanding officer is called William *Rodney* Bligh – but Tench sees the absence of a common culture, a shared national story, as a threat to British imperial power.

In an important sense, of course, participation in a national story was precisely what the French Revolutionaries rejected. They looked back to no local precursors as models, as the British of most persuasions usually did. The essence of their Revolution was the absolute contrast it instituted between old and new. The past was defined and rejected by the blanket expression '*ancien regime*'. A radically new society started precisely on day one Year One of the Republic, according to the new Calendar. A new secular religion was celebrated in Festivals of Reason and Festivals of the Supreme Being. If there is a national story in terms of which *citoyens* and *citoyennes* were to define themselves it was the new story they themselves were now starting, as its authors and protagonists. And if there were models, they were not indigenous French ones but classical ones: as in those references to Robespierre as a Roman or a Spartan.

Those references are ones which Tench, with his classical education, recognizes very well, and which he assumes his readers will recognize too (thereby defining them, in a British context, as a readership of gentlemen). The shared classical reference is one of the reasons why he has a rapport with elements of polite society in Quimper – as he did with the French officers at Botany Bay – which he cannot have with the lower ranks on his own side. Whether he can have this sort of rapport with French republicans, officers or otherwise, is an important moot point for Tench. The French republicans who compare Robespierre to a Roman or Spartan are probably not gentlemen in any sense that Tench would accept. They cannot, as we shall see, understand the language of the Roman republic, Latin.

When we put Tench's French and New South Wales writing side by side we see a man preoccupied with situations in which people do not speak the same language, taking the expression in both its literal and its figurative senses. His strength is in the evocation of inter-cultural and inter-lingual relationships as they develop in the context of actual or threatened violence. He is fascinated by the volatile border where different languages (here English, French, Latin, Breton, Provencal) and different codes (republican and monarchist, Catholic and anti-clerical, *sans cullotte*, bourgeois, aristocratic) mingle, communicate and collide.

When the British officers arrive in Quimper, by boat from Brest, they see peasants dancing in circles on the quay. It is carnival week. This co-existence of revolution and Carnival occasions some of the most remarkable episodes in Tench's book, a sequence of parties – starting with one at Madamoiselle Brimaudière's house the night he arrives – in which bitter political enemies meet for evenings of hectic gambling. As for the peasants dancing on

the quay, Tench tries to talk to them (Tench always tries to talk to people) but

> except from one lady, who told us, in broken French, she did not like the English ... These people conversed entirely in the Breton language, the sound of which, had I not forcibly felt from other circumstances where I was, would have made me swear I was in Wales. I found, upon trial, that not one in ten of the peasants could speak French, or even understood it when spoken to them. (59)

The sound of the Breton language represents a familiar strangeness for Tench: 'I much lament that I cannot speak Welch', he writes, 'although so many of my happier days have been passed in Wales' (87). He goes into some detail on the language situation. French is dominant in the towns, monoglot Breton in the countryside, with a thin stratum of bilingual rural gentry. Much of this, as well as the sound of the language, might remind him of Wales, at that time about 80 per cent monoglot Welsh speaking.[10]

Tench was brought up in Chester, close to the Welsh border, where his father and mother ran a boarding school. Tench is a Cheshire name, while Watkin is probably borrowed from Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, North Wales magnate and mayor of Chester, to whose eldest son (also Sir Watkin) *An Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson* is dedicated, in 'deep gratitude' to the family. The Williams Wynns were energetic cultural patrons on both sides of the border and in both language-cultures, supporting the great Welsh scholar Evan Evans and linked to an English network that included Garrick, Reynolds, Thomas Percy and Robert Nares, founder of the conservative *British Critic* and tutor to young Watkin and his bother Charles. Charles Williams Wynn was Southey's patron and the dedicatee of Southey's Welsh epic *Madoc*.

Emyr Humphreys has written briefly but trenchantly, from a rare cross-cultural perspective, on the Williams Wynns, but the extent and effects of Tench's involvement in their connection, the nature of their patronage of him (his education? a commission in the marines? acting Shakespeare in their theatre at Wynnstay?), have yet to be properly investigated.[11] Two points are reasonably clear however. One is that the echoes of Tench's New South Wales writing in Southey's 'Botany Bay Eclogues' derive, very probably, from the two men's involvement with the Williams Wynn network. The more general point is that the *Letters Written in France*, with their frequent references to Tench's Welsh experience, draw our attention – in a way the New South Wales writing itself does not – to the fact that when Tench arrived in New Holland in 1788 he came from a society in which different cultures, sustained by very distinct languages, overlapped on the same terrain.

In Tench's writing, the possibility of constituting New South Wales as a society (and in his writing, it is never more than a possibility) depends on the

establishment of reasonably harmonious hierarchical relationships between the military authorities and the convicts and between – to use some of his own expressions – the 'new masters of the land' and the 'natives' or 'Indians'. A principal barrier in both contexts is the language. In the first case it is an internal British barrier made newly visible and critical by abstraction from its more diffuse British context:

> A leading distinction, which marked the convicts on their outset in the colony, was an use of what is called the *flash* or *kiddy* language. In some of our early courts of justice, an interpreter was frequently necessary to translate the deposition of the witness, and the defence of the prisoner … I have ever been of opinion, that an abolition of this unnatural jargon would open the path to reformation … I recollect hardly one instance of a return to honest pursuits, and habits of industry, where this miserable perversion of our noblest and peculiar faculty was not previously conquered. (297)

As between the colonists and the local indigenous people the problem of mutual intelligibility was more radical if only because, neither side knowing anything of the other's language, there could be no interpreters. It was precisely to bring such interpreters into being that Governor Phillip embarked on his policy of kidnapping a sequence of local men, the first of whom was Nanbaree.[12] Tench fascinatingly evokes a process of reciprocal learning and teaching of language; but although there is no policy of 'conquering' the Sydney language as a means to 'reformation' as Tench believes there should be with convict jargon, the reciprocity is not symmetrical: it is the indigenous people who are to learn English and be the interpreters and who, eventually, lost their language.

Referring to a moment early on the same day that Governor Phillip was speared at Manly Cove, Tench writes: 'Nanbaree … though he continued to interrogate his countrymen, and to interpret on both sides, shewed little desire to return to their society, and stuck very close to his new friends' (177). The spearing, if it arises in part – as Tench suggests – from a misunderstood combination of words and gestures (gestures used, it seems, as if there is a universal language of gesture) – indicates what was involved in Nanbaree's work as he 'interpreted on both sides'. Clearly, an 'interpreter' in this context is an elucidator of actions and assumptions as well as a translator of languages.

I have focused briefly on the question of language and 'interpreting' in the New South Wales writing because a comparison with the French writing is so vivid and instructive in this respect. One thing we notice, as we move from *An Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson* to *Letters Written in France*, is the historical closeness between English and French culture and how well Tench embodies that closeness. Whereas he starts out ignorant of Aboriginal languages and convict jargon, he arrives in France a fluent French speaker

sharing important cultural reference points – Christian as well as classical – with his captors. Soon after HMS *Alexander* is captured, Tench is himself appointed his commander-in-chief's '*aide de camp* and interpreter', and that phrase itself illustrates the intimacy of the cultures between which he is to interpret: '*aide de camp*' needs no interpretation, being a loan phrase which translates directly back into French as itself. On the other hand, Tench makes us continually aware that it is not only cultural distance – of the kind we associate with early New South Wales – which can aggravate misunderstanding and conflict: cultural closeness can do that too, as the language-teaching expression 'false friends' suggests.

Tench is fascinated, in all his writing, by those moments when words, phrases and their speakers cross the border between one language and another, and aware of how tricky that passage can be, as it was for Nanbaree 'interpreting on both sides'. '*Aide de camp*' is printed in italics, and the pages of Tench's book are full of quotation marks and italics. Sometimes this is to indicate a literary allusion; equally often it is to highlight a particular word or phrase that is intriguing or problematic because it's in French or because it's in English or in Latin. By this means (and with the help of a printer sometimes perhaps puzzled about how to interpret the author's meaning typographically) words from one language are made to stand out against the background of another.

Tench has fun with these effects. He represents the Frenchification of Prime Minister William Pitt by spelling his name with two e's and putting it in italics, as '*Ministre Peet*'. More seriously, Captain Le Franq defends his men against complaints that they have looted the British officers' private property by insisting that 'his officers were all *gentlemen* (he spoke in English) and his men in a state of the most exemplary discipline' (8).

Focusing on the word – '*gentlemen*' in italics, then 'he spoke in English' – draws attention to one of Tench's principal concerns: will the French officers be, or behave like, gentlemen? But the question is not simply whether Captain Le Franq can be trusted when he makes this claim about his officers; it is whether his *English* can be trusted. Since the Captain himself has just been described as a 'gentleman [who] speaks very good English', Tench probably means us to see that he took the Captain's words ('my officers are all gentlemen') to mean what they would mean when spoken by an Englishman rather than what they might mean if spoken by a French speaker who was simply translating '*gentilhommes*', a more exclusively pedigree-based term.[13]

The entanglement of social differences and linguistic ones is equally interesting with the word '*bourgeois*', which Tench uses in italics. 'Bourgeois' is a kind of loan-word in English but not a fully naturalised one. The British have never been at ease with the word, using it as an adjective to describe a life-style and seldom – except when we are talking about France – as a noun to name a class. Tench's use of the word exemplifies a pervasive discomfort and a significant Franco-British dissonance.

'Bourgeois' is, of course, a particularly important word in the context of the French Revolution, which has been called, from early on, a bourgeois revolution. Tench's observations of the Revolution support this description of it. The Revolution's main support in Brittany, he tells us, is in the towns, among 'the little housekeepers [who] find their importance increased, and their vanity flattered, by becoming members of clubs and political societies, and being admitted into municipal posts and honours' (101). His list of the members of the Quimper 'committee of *surveillance*' includes a majority of such people: retail shopkeeper, butcher, musician, two tailors, two barbers, merchant's clerk, hog-butcher, gardener, brazier, printer's devil (115). In what follows we will be reminded of the tailors and the barbers. The two tailors first, in a passage describing the English officers' overland return to Brest under escort:

> We had … but just passed one of the barriers of the dock-yard, when we were stopped by a municipality patrol, who, notwithstanding our conductor's explanations and remonstrances, carried us all forthwith to their guard-house, and gave us to understand, that we must pass the night there as well as we could. This treatment enraged us; and I bade them recollect that they were offering an unnecessary indignity to a '*General Anglais*', who had not entered Brest without ample and sufficient authority, and who would certainly represent their interference and impertinence, on the next morning, to his friend Admiral Villaret, and the members of the convention on mission here. This resolute tone, to which the Admiral desired me to give full force, had quickly its effect, and this *bourgeois* collection of tinkers and taylors thought proper to send us under an escort to a neighbouring inn. (129)

What does '*bourgeois*' mean here? Tailors were pre-eminent among the 'little housekeepers', bourgeois enthusiasts for the Revolution. To this extent Tench is offering us a social analysis. But he couldn't actually know the occupations of these men, and it's hard to think of 'tinkers' as bourgeois: they are surely associated with tailors not from Tench's observations of French realities but from the English ditty 'tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor'. And what is a marine but a soldier-sailor? It's as if, a bourgeois himself, but a British one who has been able and eager to thrive within patrician culture, under the patronage of a Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, he needs to push away from himself as far as possible these revolutionary bourgeois who have felt they could only thrive by getting together to overthrown the *noblesse*.

What principally fascinates Tench is 'the vocabulary of French patriotism'. This vocabulary greets him as soon as the French soldiers board the defeated HMS *Alexander*:

> By this time the French boats had boarded us, and taken possession of the ship. When I attempted to ascend to the deck, I found every hatchway

> guarded by French sentinels, who refused to let me pass. In vain did I expostulate with them; all the answer I could obtain was, '*Citoyen, tels sont mes ordres. Je suis républicain!*' (7)

The *frisson* of this moment comes from the way it combines Tench's fear and his fascination. The fascination is in the sentinel's words: what do they mean, what do they portend? Tench the interpreter could readily translate them from French into English; but what do they mean in Republican French, in 'the vocabulary of French patriotism'? In this situation, to be an effective interpreter is to do nothing less than interpret the revolution.

This Republican French is made up of two kinds of word: new ones – like *Thermindor, Pluviôse* and so on – and old words used in new ways – *montaigne, citoyen/citoyenne, sans culottes, ancien regime*. Some of these words – *citoyen, la patrie* – are repeated as revolutionary incantations, substituting for the discredited charismas of Kingship and Christianity: Republican 'idolatry', Tench calls it.

Each part of the sentence uttered by the sentinel is fascinatingly problematic. '*Citoyen*', the word for citizen used as a greeting, is uttered here not to a French citizen but to an enemy of *la patrie* . The utterance of it in this situation embodies a fundamental tension in Revolutionary Republicanism, between nationalism and universalism, most acute at the point where the Republic is invading other countries in order to liberate them. Is it a gesture of inclusion or exclusion, a promise or a threat? Furthermore, although it is assertively egalitarian – everybody is *citoyen* or *citoyenne* – it is immediately followed by 'those are my orders' and Tench is keen throughout to discover if Revolutionary egalitarianism is compatible with military discipline: he finds that, at least on board ship, it is. Tench believes that 'subordination' (one of his favourite words) is necessary to social order: and in a military context – as in the militarised society of early New South Wales – subordination, social order, is directly a matter of giving and receiving orders.

Finally, what does '*républicain*' mean here? Like many eighteenth-century British whigs, Tench is imbued with the values and rhetoric of classical republicanism as those had been adapted to the interests of propertied Britain and its constitutional monarchy.[14] The *Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson* begins and ends with tokens of this allegiance. The Dedication to the young Sir Watkin Williams Wynn expresses the hope that Sir Watkin, like his 'revered Father', will 'shine incorrupt and independent in the senate'. And the book ends with a lengthy quotation from Adam Ferguson's 1767 *Essay on the History of Civil Society*.

Ferguson's book is without doubt the principal Enlightenment influence on Tench's thinking, providing what there is of an intellectual framework for the classifications and assessment of the societies he visits. For instance, in Tench's writing, the natives of New Holland and the French republicans have in common a masculinist egalitarianism ('masculinist' of course our

word, 'egalitarian' his) which echoes Ferguson's sense of the similarities between 'savage' and 'republican' societies as such.[15] Indeed, it is possible that the overall survey of New South Wales that concludes the *Account* was written in Britain in early 1793 under the combined impact of Ferguson's book and news from France.

Ferguson would have appealed to Tench for a number of connected reasons. He was the most self-consciously Roman of the Scottish Enlightenment social theorists and – in line with that Roman allegiance – he was a soldier as well as a writer. He emphasised soldiering as a particularly noble form that an active public life could take. 'The most celebrated soldiers', writes Ferguson, 'were also citizens'. Furthermore, for Tench as for Ferguson, Britain's constitutional monarchy was 'a spectacle new in the history of mankind, monarchy mixed with republic.'[16]

We can now return to the French sentinel, barring Tench's access to the deck of the *Alexander*, and see why the sentinel's words might fill Tench with curiosity as well as apprehension. In the right circumstances, we can now see, there might be nothing Tench would like more than to be addressed as a fellow citizen by a disciplined republican soldier. But what he is of course also facing is the challenge of a strictly anti-monarchist republicanism and, as he soon discovers, of a classicism unlinked to gentility or to knowledge of classical languages. It is the encounter with Revolutionary classicism and republicanism that gives a special force, in this book, to Tench's habitual allusiveness, his display of learning.

When Tench compares his commanding officer, Admiral Bligh, to Caesar, this is an analogy which Bligh would have instantly understood. Like Tench, he would have read Caesar's *Gallic Wars* at school. Indeed, he might have himself had Caesar in mind as a model, both military and literary. And his opposite numbers, the Republican officers: would they recognise such analogies? Yes and no:

> [The French] openly boast of being able, in a short time, to penetrate to Madrid; to force the German powers to peace; and to totally subdue the Dutch., – And then '*Delenda est Carthago*' [Carthage must be destroyed]. I accuse not those with whom I converse of using this, or any other Latin phrase; but you will smile on being told that they habitually call us Carthaginians, and themselves Romans. (26)

Cultural proximity makes Tench anxious to assert here, as social proximity did in his use of the word '*bourgeois*', what we may appropriately call a patrician superiority: he can quote Latin, they can't. But Tench is obviously worried by the thought that, though their classicism may be of a debased kind, they may have the classical allusions on their side. They may be right about who is playing the Romans in this game of Romans and Carthaginians. Giving

a pessimistic inflection to the maritime metaphors and patriotic Shakespearean tags that come easily to him, he muses:

> What then shall we say? 'There is', my friend, 'a tide in the affairs' of nations, as well as of men: the page of history everywhere records it. Hannibal, after the battle of Cannae, instead of marching to Rome, turned aside to Capua; – and from that moment the Carthaginian fortune ebbed, never to flow again … The allies, after the surrender of Valenciennes, divided their forces; – and since that fatal separation how has their career of conquest been turned into retreat, marked only by overthrow, consternation and despair! (48)

The classic analysis of French Revolutionary neo-classicism is Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

> In the classically austere traditions of the Roman republic … the gladiators [of bourgeois society] found the ideals and the art forms, the self-deceptions that they needed in order to conceal from themselves the bourgeois limitations of the content of their struggles.

Tench is not a historicist, and he's not making Marx's point about the necessary self-deception of a class. Nevertheless, for him as for Marx, classical allusion runs through the public life of the Revolution – festivals, statues of liberty, gestures, clothes, and words – and for both of them there is an ironic gap between high-flown pretension and bourgeois reality. Tench writes:

> This people possesses not the stability of character, or the austere self-denying virtues, of the ancient republicans. (121)

> I dare say you have often read, in extracts taken from the Paris newspapers, of a noisy speaker in one of the sections, distinguished by his ridiculous assumption of the name of BRUTUS. This man is now a private sentinel, although but a few months since he was a general officer, and commanded the troops here. He was … originally a barber. (98)

Barbers can call themselves Brutus – and serve on committees of surveillance – but they can't speak Latin. Latin, by a curious logic which is certainly present at certain points in this book, is a *sine qua non* both of being a gentleman and of being a republican worthy of the name. But if the yardstick of an idealised ancient republic usually finds the French republicans wanting and produces a habitual anti-democratic irony, it does not always do so. Part of Tench really does wish to find, and occasionally, perhaps despite himself, does find, the classical republican qualities whose absence he frequently records. Sometimes what at first seems to be anti-democratic irony finds itself deflated by the people it is supposed to deflate, as it does, I believe, in this

passage describing a public meeting called to discuss the latest violent crisis in Paris:

> From these orators, a blacksmith was universally allowed to bear away the palm, haranguing with great fluency against the terrorists, and surprising his auditors by the keenness of his sarcasms, and the justness of his observations. (112)

The classical references, to orators and bearing away the palm – references possibly used by the audience themselves – seem to start out anti-democratic, like the remarks on Brutus the jumped-up barber. But 'the justness' of the blacksmith's 'observations' alter the tone of the whole passage, allowing the blacksmith to take the palm Tench seemed only ironically to be offering him and thereby to make a powerful case for the citizenship of blacksmiths.

It would seem unlikely, on the face of it, that the relationship between Tench and the indigenous people of New South Wales could produce moments of this sort, which seem to arise in part from a contest for the possession of a common cultural legacy. However, there is at least one passage in the *Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson* which suggests otherwise. During an expedition inland in May 1791, towards the river they had named the Hawkesbury, Tench and his party encounter a group of 'natives' who help them to cross the river. He comments on the 'patience' and the 'courtesy' of these people, concluding:

> Let the banks of those rivers 'known to song'; let him whose travels have lain among polished nations, produce me a brighter example of disinterested urbanity, than was shown by these denizens of a barbarous clime, to a set of destitute wanderers, on the side of the Hawkesbury. (236)

The word 'urbanity' is surely especially striking. Tench's use of it in this context both foregrounds and questions that link between cultivated courtesy and urban civilization which, used in its home environment, the English word, with its Latin root, takes for granted. This happens because he is applying the word to natives of a land without towns, without *urbs*. The actions of these Aboriginal men and the Quimper blacksmith discover faultlines in the language brought to bear upon them, a language which takes for granted a necessary link between human qualities or kinds of behaviour on the one hand and a particular form of society or particular social class on the other.[17]

Notes

1 J. Todd and M. Butler (eds), *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, 8 vols (London, 1989), vol. 2, pp. 467–8. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. Page numbers will follow in brackets. The present essay was originally given as a paper at the Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University.

2 Republished as L. F. Fitzhardinge (ed.), *Sydney's First Four Years* (Sydney, 1979). All subsequent quotations from Tench's *Narrative* and *Account* are taken from this edition. Page numbers will follow in brackets. For useful discussion of Tench's New South Wales writing, see Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: A Study in Spatial History* (London, 1986); Paul Dixon, *The Course of Empire; Neo-classical Culture in New South Wales, 1788–1860* (Melbourne, 1986); Adrian Mitchell, 'Watkin Tench's Sentimental Enclosures', *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada,* 11, June 1994, 23–33.

3 Other notices of *Letters Written in France* appeared in the *Monthly Review*, the *British Critic* and the *Gentleman's Magazine.* Only the last named pointed out that Tench was the same author 'who gave the first account of the new settlement at Botany-bay' (*Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1796, 506).

4 Fitzhardinge is an exception to this rule. See also John Dunmore, 'Utopie française, auteur anglais?', *Dix-Huitièmè siecle*, 26 (1994), 499–506.

5 J. M. Thompson, *English Witnesses of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1938).

6 William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 284–85, 288.

7 Charles Pougens, 'Introduction du traducteur', in *Watkin Tench, Relation d'un expédition a la baye botanique*, (Paris, 1789), pp. 1–4.

8 Gavin Edwards (ed.), *Watkin Tench, Letters from Revolutionary France* (Cardiff, 2001), p. 100. All subsequent quotations from Tench's *Letters written in France* are taken from this edition. Page numbers will follow in brackets.

9 The best discussion of the significance of Othello's speech for the development of Wordsworthian Romanticism can be found in James Averill, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering* (Ithaca, New York, 1980).

10 See John Aitchison and Harold Carter, *A Geography of the Welsh Language, 1961–91* (Cardiff, 1994), pp. 22–41.

11 Emyr Humphreys, *The Taliesin Tradition: A Quest for Welsh Identity* (London, 1983), pp. 79–89. On the Williams Wynns as patrons, see also Aneiren Lewis (ed.), *The Percy Letters*, 10 vols (Baton Rouge, 1957), vol. 5.

12 See Jakelin Troy's pioneering studies: 'The Sydney Language Notebooks and Responses to Language Contact in Early Colonial New South Wales,' *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, 12, 145–70; 'By slow degrees we begin…to understand each other…even in this the natives have the advantage', in Ross Gibson (ed.), *Exchanges: Cross-Cultural Encounters in Australia and the Pacific* (Sydney, 1996), pp. 23–57.

13 I am grateful to Mariana Saad for clarification of this point.

14 Philip Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 27–29.

15 'We may incline to believe, that mankind, in their simplest state, are on the eve of erecting republics. Their love of equality, their habit of assembling in public councils, and their zeal for the tribe to which they belong, are qualifications that fit them to act under that species of government; and they seem to have but few steps to make, in order to reach that establishment'. However, 'these steps are far from being so easily made, as they appear on a slight or a transient view'. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (New Brunswick and London, 1995), p. 9.

16 Ferguson, *Essay*, p. 132.

17 See Heather Williams's discussion of the way in which 'words achieve new potency when taken to new contexts': Heather Williams, 'Writing to Paris: Poets, Nobles and Savages in Nineteenth-century Brittany', *French Studies* (forthcoming, 2003). I am also indebted to the work of Bronwen Douglas of the Australian National University's Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies.

Address for correspondence

Gavin Edwards, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Glamorgan, Pontypridd CF37 1DL, UK. email: edwardsgavin@hotmail.com