RHETORIC, RADICAL POLITICS AND RAINFALL: JOHN THELWALL IN BRECONSHIRE, 1797-1800 [1]

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The wildness and wetness of Wales was always more proverbial than literal. Nonetheless, these traits combined together made an impressive myth. As the land of dragons, druids, mountains, rain, and yet more rainfall, the Principality had an exotic mystique in the eyes of the outsider like the East Anglian-born George Borrow. His picaresque tour, published in 1862, made the alliterative name of *Wild Wales* widely renowned.[2]

Yet he had hardly invented the concept. With her impeccable southern confidence, Jane Austen had already commented mischievously in a private letter that: 'Wales is not really somewhere to live; it is somewhere to have sublime feelings about, like a Gothic ruin or a mountain crag'.[3] The romantic Principality might be a cut above the workaday Birmingham, which was dismissed by the snobbish Mrs Elton in *Emma* as having 'something direful' in its sound. Jane Austen, however, found it undeniable that the mystique of Wales was to be savoured at a distance, rather than experienced directly.

John Thelwall (1764-1834), on the other hand, was a person who was ready to challenge convention on this point, as on many others.[4] Without any immediate background in the Principality[5] or any prior experience of

agriculture, he resolved in 1797 to 'return to the land' and raise his family as a small farmer in mid-Wales on the banks of the 'sylvan Wye'.

Before saying anything further about what he found there, it should be noted that one aspect of the Welsh myth became only too depressingly true for him. Thelwall's stay lasted for three years, which included two of the wettest years on record at any time throughout the eighteenth century. Not only were the winters of 1799 and 1800 exceptionally long and hard, but both years saw heavy and persistent rainfall in August and September, rotting the crops in the field. There was near famine in many parts of the country.[6] Food prices rocketed, which put money into the pockets of big dealers with stockpiles of grain, but devastated small producers who had no buffer against misfortune. The tone of a letter from Thelwall, written in September 1799, made his anguish apparent: 'I am almost harassed & tormented to death by the perverseness of the season; & likely to suffer incalculable injury from the Torrents of rain that are deluging our fields & destroying the most valuable part of our crops'.[7] After another year of miserable weather, he quit the farm and quit Wales for good.

Navigating between such individual aspirations and obdurate outcomes, this essay has three linked objectives. The first is to analyse what John Thelwall

was trying to achieve in his tryst with wild Wales; the second is to reassess why his venture failed; and the third is to consider the diachronic significance,[8] some 200 years later, of the cultural encounter between a man who was a Londoner by birth - a classic townee who was born in Covent Garden, as the sickly son of a silk mercer– and his new neighbours in Breconshire.

The quest for simplification:

On the first theme, there is no doubt that Thelwall arrived in Wales deliberately. In late 1797, he arrived with his family in the small village of Llyswen, situated on a looping hairpin bend in the River Wye, some seven miles north of Brecon, on the route to the small spa-town of Builth Wells. He had found the place after searching for four months. It is not clear if he had any advice in his quest; but eventually he decided to lease an 'ornamental cottage' 'Ty Mawr' and a small farm from a local landowner-cum-industrialist.[9]

At once, Thelwall lauded Llyswen as 'obscure and romantic', signifying that he had chosen it because it was far from the metropolitan hothouse and because it was sylvan, hilly and picturesque, far from the manicured checker-board styles of classic English farmland. His aim, moreover, was not just to admire the scenery but also to live on the land. In 1797, his attitude was thus the complete reverse of that of Jane Austen. The romantic isolation of his Welsh village would aid his quest for personal and political 'simplification'.

Ty Mawr, Llyswen.

Over 200 years later, it is hard to recapture just how well known or notorious this young man, still aged only 34 in 1797, had become. To his fellow radicals, who sought constitutional reform and the extension of the franchise to all adult males, John Thelwall was famed as a volcanic open-air orator, an indefatigable lecturer, and the author of a thoughtful work of political theory entitled *The Rights of Nature* (1796).[10] He was also a published poet and man of letters. What's more, he had been put in the Tower in 1794, tried for High Treason, and, sensationally, acquitted.[11] On the other hand, to the conservative government of William Pitt the Younger, Thelwall remained a public threat. He was followed by spies and his post regularly intercepted. For Pitt, the priority was winning the war against revolutionary France. Plans for far-reaching

constitutional changes, like those promulgated by Thelwall, were held by traditionalists to be destabilising and unpatriotic. The term ‘radical’, newly coined in its political meaning in 1802,[12] could be used either to praise a root-and-branch removal of corruption or to warn against uprooting the venerable foundations of the state.

Caught between his personal notoriety and the collapse of the reform cause after Pitt’s clamp-down in 1795, Thelwall in effect retired himself from political activism and devoted himself to a simple life on the land. He stated that decision explicitly in two surviving letters to his old friend and political ally, Thomas Hardy, the Secretary of the London Corresponding Society. The first, dated from Derby on 25 October 1797, announced in jubilant capitals: ‘I HAVE TAKEN A LITTLE FARM IN SOUTH WALES’. The lease began on 1 November next, and Thelwall waxed eloquent about his retirement from politics and his pleasure at his new residence: ‘The house (a handsome & roomy cottage) is most deliciously situated on the banks of the River [Wye]; [and] is embowered by a capital Orchard, & is altogether as desirable a literary retreat as Fancy could have suggested, or poetry has ever described’.[13]

His second surviving missive from this decisive moment, dated 16 January 1798 and written in a Hereford alehouse, was still as cheerful:[14]

> Our habits are, I assure you, very simple & frugal. We drink no wines, no spirits, no suggar.[15] The small ale brewed for use of the farm satisfies us - & frequently I drink nothing but water Cyder or Small beer. – We eat as our servants eat - & (as far as the differences of strength produced by different habits will permit) work as they work. I dig – I cart dung & Ashes – I thresh in the Barn – I trench the meadows when the fertilizing rains are falling, & the waters rush from the mountains, to convey the stream over the grass – In short the political lecturer of Beaufort Buildings [his London residence] is a mere peasant in Llyswen; & you would smile to see me in an old thread-bare jacket – a pair of cloth pantaloons rudely patched, & a silk handkerchief with my spade & my mattock trudging thro' the village or toiling on my farm; & to this I am not only reconciled – but I am even more enamoured of it than is wise – For Literature (barring a little reading of an evening) is as much neglected as Politics – I have no appetite for writing …

In fact, it was characteristic of Thelwall that he had sought company in Hereford and was writing his missive amidst the clamour of 'alehouse conversation – politics & the devil knows what', so that 'I must catch my idea harum scarum as I can'. Nonetheless, his retirement from politics, without a Thelwallite following to keep his name before the public, succeeded so well that he became forgotten in his own lifetime, and has subsequently remained lost to history, other than to specialists.

Permutations in historical reputations over time are matters of great fascination. A very few individuals, who were unknown in their own day, have subsequently become famous to later generations. These include prophets, artists, and (sometimes) authors, whose works or teachings live on after them, for subsequent adoption and often reinterpretation. In Thelwall's own lifetime, his near-contemporary and fellow-Londoner William Blake (1757-1827), the poet and artist, went almost entirely unrecognised by his contemporaries. Only a small handful of enthusiasts, in his later years, collected his works and

perpetuated his memory. Yet over time, Blake's reputation has flourished remarkably; and in 1957, two hundred years after his birth, he was honoured with a memorial in Westminster Abbey.[16] Another example, from later in Thelwall's lifetime, was Karl Marx (1818-83). He was unknown to all but a small conclave of fellow-communists and some police surveillance while he lived. Yet he is even more famous or notorious, as a world-wide 'name', identified whether in appreciation (now by fewer than at the height of his posthumous fame) or at least in historical acknowledgement of his massive influence upon twentieth-century politics.[17] And an even more striking case of posthumous fame is that of Dick Turpin, a minor highwayman of the mid-eighteenth century who was fictionalised so well, if ahistorically, in the nineteenth century that many people believe the romantic fictional version to be true and know nothing of the much less pleasant reality.[18]

Much more numerous, meanwhile, are the people who have some elements of fame in their own day – people of fashion, money, power, notoriety – who have subsequently been forgotten by all but specialists. Thus most if not all of the media 'darlings' of today, who appear in all the gossip magazines, will be forgotten long before their death. John Thelwall had that experience, perceived as galling or liberating according to temperament. His fame or notoriety came in his thirties, followed by a sudden eclipse and a long forgetting. In 1812 he was summarily dismissed, in a typical response from his contemporaries, as 'once fear'd, now scorn'd; once dreaded, now abhorr'd'.[19]

Furthermore, his literary and political output, unlike that of William Blake and Karl Marx, did not transcend his own time to leave a diachronic legacy. As already noted, there were no loyal Thelwallites to transmit his message to later generations. And Thelwall's older son, Algernon Sidney Thelwall, who did later write about his father, did so anonymously and very scantly,[20] lauding Thelwall senior as a master of elocution (his subsequent career) but remaining silent about his role as a political reformer.

Such a dramatic switch to working on an isolated farm in mid-Wales, for a man accustomed to living in the eye of the storm, might have been psychologically challenging. Thelwall, however, began his adventure with characteristic verve and resilience. He had been notably staunch when cross-examined by William Pitt at 10 Downing Street, after being arrested for High Treason. Having survived that ordeal and the subsequent public attacks by those opposed to his political agenda, he had proved himself to be personally indomitable.

So now his optimism turned to the prospects for farming. The impulsion was to make a living rather than to make money. Small farms in the long eighteenth century were facing a prolonged squeeze by large landowners and small yeomen farmers, long the fabled 'backbone' of the country, were finding themselves increasingly marginalised.[21] For Thelwall, however, the aim by this stage was not to reform society as a whole but rather to find a safe haven where he could live a 'good life', in simple personal circumstances of which he could approve. The m ove would distance him from political corruption and from economic luxury – both things against which he had for long inveighed. In formulating this project, Thelwall was particularly influenced by two brilliant young poets, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who were then radicals, though not particularly active ones. Their encounter in 1797, when the three met at Nether Stowey, near the Quantock Hills in Somerset, remains celebrated, especially among literary scholars.[22] The visionary Coleridge in particular had dreamed of founding a small commune, a 'Pantisocracy', meaning an equal rule by all, among a group of like-minded colleagues. For a while, the three men, talking intensely, explored the possibility of settling together, as an embryonic 'alternative' society.

However, the youthful poets were not as battle-hardened as was Thelwall. Warned on all sides against associating with such a notorious character, they went their separate ways in 1798 – William and Dorothy Wordsworth to Goslar

in Germany; and Coleridge to Hamburg and Göttingen.[23] Meanwhile, it was Thelwall who settled in Llyswen. This decision, it should be stressed, was taken well before the other two poets settled in the Lakes. And, unlike either Wordsworth or Coleridge, Thelwall applied himself to living the rural dream by actually farming the land.

The simple life in practice:

By no means was the enterprise doomed from the start. Aware that he had no prior knowledge of agriculture, Thelwall invited his youthful but more experienced brother-in-law, Jack Vellum,[24] to come from Rutland to work with him.[25] He also employed some local farm labourers, the 'servants' mentioned in his letter to Hardy. And he did not shirk from hard work himself. The farm leased by Thelwall amounted to some 36-40 acres, with a mixed economy of grain (barley), root-crops, some livestock, and an orchard abutting the house. To Hardy, he indicated that he was following good farming practices, marling the land with dung and ashes, and using the technique of 'floating the water meadows', putting land under water for winter fertilisation.[26]

Being a man of conspicuous energy, Thelwall also enjoyed himself remodelling the wooded land around his 'ornamental cottage', building an arbour with a small waterfall on the riverbank, where his children played.[27] He also continued with his literary output, writing in the Llyswen years a considerable amount of poetry, essays, letters, a novel, elements of his autobiography, and the start of a verse epic. Today he would be a multi-media campaigner, albeit never a predictable one.

Dramatically, he dubbed himself 'the Recluse' – a name echoed in the later poetic attack upon 'the Solitary' in Wordsworth's *Excursion* (1814), which was part of his never-completed mega-poem.[28] The hostility of the Lakeland poet's caricature indicated the force of his desire to distance himself from the Llyswen farmer. In 1797, however, Thelwall's pose was somewhat exaggerated.

He had indeed settled in a sparsely populated part of Britain; but, as will be seen, he still kept in touch with many friends and welcomed visitors. Wordsworth was one of them. It was true, however, that the move to Llyswen was more of a psychological retreat on Thelwall's part; and his writings did become increasingly self-referential, without friendly critics to act as a counter-weight to his self-absorption. And it was also true that the move was a double challenge in that Thelwall had no prior knowledge of farming and no prior links to the locality in which he had chosen to settle.

At first, all seemed to go well. Thelwall was busy and happy. He began to write again, including a cheery poem on the merits of Welsh ale.[29] His library was transported from London to his farmhouse. He corresponded regularly with his old friend Thomas Hardy, asking for news about politics and the metropolitan radicals who were his cultural and political allies. And he received a stream of books, journals and letters (said with some exaggeration to amount to 12-20 letters a day).[30]

Some important friends also came to visit. As already noted, Wordsworth arrived on an impromptu trip, accompanied by Dorothy Wordsworth, their child protégé Basil Montagu, and S.T. Coleridge.[31] That was in early August 1798, when the friendship was still intact. Wordsworth mused upon the event in his *Anecdote for Fathers,* published later in 1798 amongst his epoch-making *Lyrical Ballads*. Llyswen was praised as 'sweet Liswyn'. But there were signs of ambivalence, even jealousy. So within the poem (given in full in the Appendix) an unnamed child, representing innocence, is asked to choose between Llyswen and Kilve, close to Wordsworth's home. Eventually, the narrator is delighted and relieved ('my dearest, dearest boy!') when the verdict goes against Llyswen. The poem is customarily read as an adult learning to discard abstract reasoning in favour of the spontaneous intuition of the child.[32] Yet there is a deeper level of meaning. The choice, after all, was very specific and the issue was not presented as a casual one. It seems to smack of jealousy,

or at least competitive anxiety, about 'sweet Liswyn'. And the outcome delivered a firm snub to its volatile weather-cock, Thelwall, who was then not the broken man of whom some Wordsworth scholars write, but an energetic activist who had switched his energies into a new track. Meanwhile, the poem's first sub-title (*Shewing How the Art of Lying may be Taught*), which was later eliminated, seems to be a blind rather than a fundamental explanation of the poem's message – unless it meant simply that children should not be pressed to make such decisions by anxious adults.

Any emerging differences between the quondam poetic allies was, however, minimal compared with the problems that began to beset Thelwall in his new locality. He did not want to mingle with the English-speaking social leaders of Brecon and the surrounding countryside, as a matter of policy rather than of personal animosity. Their balls, concerts, dinners, theatrical performances, and other social gatherings held no interest for him.[33] Having shunned liberal cultural networks in Brecon, Thelwall simultaneously found himself to be a target of suspicion from conservative opinion, especially among the local clergy and rural landowners. Watchers continued, with government authorisation, to monitor his movements and his correspondence;[34] and, since his letters were customarily left for collection in local inns, these materials were easily open to surveillance. In sum, Thelwall remained a restless metropolitan exile, without assimilating into a local role. His eventual denunciations of the farming failures of his neighbours – and the wicked ways of their sheep which ate his cabbages – were not calculated to win friends.[35] Moreover, his reputation in conservative circles was not helped by his maintaining contacts with Welsh radicals and visionary poets such as the irrepressible Iolo Morganwg.[36]

A difficult encounter in April 1798, soon after his arrival in Llyswen, indicated the potential for trouble. A disgruntled local named Rees Davies attacked Thelwall with a pick-axe. The motive remains unknown. John Thelwall, 'gentleman', responded by prosecuting his assailant at Quarter

Sessions and, having won the case, pleaded for leniency. Davies was let off with a fine and bound over to keep the peace.[37] The episode suggested an environment of suspicion at the 'Saxon' intruder, which Thelwall noted among some neighbours – even though on this occasion the law sided with the assaulted newcomer rather than the local assailant.

Culturally and socially, Thelwall the Londoner was isolated in Llyswen. He was neither a member of the Breconshire elite, though ready to use the help of local magistrates when he needed it, nor was he on terms of companionship with the labourers and workers of Llyswen and the surrounding villages, especially in the purely Welsh-speaking localities. It was personally fortunate for Thelwall that he had a happy marriage, producing four young children with his devoted first wife Susan, whom he renamed poetically as Stella. She, however, must have been rather lonely when he was out on the farm or away from home, though no record survives to indicate her viewpoint.

Certainly, the energetic Thelwall was often on the move. In April 1798 a hostile report to the central government confided: 'What does not a little add to my Suspicions about him is this, that he goes once a Fortnight to a Society of Jacobins at the Crown & Sceptre in the City of Hereford'[38] – that city being 25 miles from Llyswen. It was unlikely that the gathering was as politically organised and met as regularly as the report implied, since by the later 1790s radicals across the country were generally disheartened and disorganised. Nonetheless, it showed Thelwall's peripatetic proclivities, as well as conservative fears of his 'democratic' influence. Another report, this time in September 1800, detailed the presence of restive crowds, complaining at high food prices in Merthyr, over twenty miles distant from Llyswen. The industrialist Samuel Homfray sent a panicky report to the government, alleging that: 'Mr Thelwall has lately been at times in our Neighbourhood in different Characters & no doubt doing that which he ought not to'.[39] Perhaps he did go there to witness events; or perhaps his ubiquitous presence was widely feared by

the authorities as emblematic of a 'trouble-maker' with potential mass appeal.

Overwhelmingly, however, it was not such hostility and suspicions that doomed Thelwall's farming venture, whatever the rhetoric directed at him or by him. It was indeed the hardship of the weather – specifically, the two worst years of torrential rainfall in the entire eighteenth century. Already in September 1799 he had confessed: 'I see nothing before & around me, but ruin to the little farmer [ie. himself] whose capital does not enable him to struggle with these disadvantages, & famine to the people at large'.[40] But while he was aware of the popular clamour for food, his own farm could not help with the needed supply.

One moment of comparative light relief came in the following month. Henry Crabb Robinson, the embryonic 'tuft hunter' who loved to meet literary giants, visited Llyswen. The acquaintance was slight but he was greeted warmly by the famous 'Recluse' and by Susan Thelwall, 'an amiable and interesting woman'. Robinson was then taken on a seven-mile walk to view a waterfall. He got separated from his host in the murky weather and lost a shoe in a mountain peat-bog. Thelwall, ever the civil host, was left to undertake a fifty-mile round trip into Hereford to buy a replacement pair.[41]

Problems, meanwhile, continued to multiply. The experienced brother-in-law Thomas Vellum left in 1799, presumably because the farm could no longer sustain three adults and four young children. And later in the same year, Thelwall's treasured older daughter Maria died suddenly, at the age of six. The loss of this 'charming creature', as the normally cool Wordsworth remembered her,[42] was a personal disaster. Thelwall's family circle, which was his refuge from the world, had been broken. For him, Wales was no longer romantic but benighted. He departed abruptly, negotiating a small financial compensation for surrendering the lease, from which his landlord was trying to evict him.[43]

Just as state repression had aborted his first career as a reformer, so the weather and unfriendly company ended his second career. 'Having once lauded the 'peaceful shades of Llyswen!'[44] he now penned a sour farewell:[45]

> [The move] from 'Theatres and Halls of Assembly' to a little Village of only twenty miserable cottages – from the friendly, the enlightened, the animated circles of Norwich – from the elegant and highly intellectual society of Derby - to the sordid ignorance of a neighbourhood whose boorish inhabitants hash up a jargon of corrupted Welch [sic] with still more corrupted English, utterly indigestible to unaccustomed organs, [had proved to be stupefying].

'Thus terminated this ill-starred experiment for uniting together the characters of the Farmer and the Poet', he concluded with fine disgust.[46]

The Llyswen experience over time:

From John Thelwall's point of view, the rupture was final. He did not pause long for lamentations. Nor did he ever return to Wales. Instead, he launched upon a third career as a teacher of elocution, turning his expertise as a political orator into a commercial opportunity.[47] He would give a voice to the voiceless, as he had once tried to give votes to the powerless. Among those whom he aided was Dudley Ryder, later second Earl of Harrowby. His debilitating stammer was mitigated with the help of John Thelwall, whom Ryder recalled, unkindly, as 'a pompous man' but also a stimulating tutor of a Whiggish British history.[48]

If it was another 'broken pathway' for Thelwall, then he launched himself into the new role with his customary brio. After all, people do sometimes change careers abruptly and flourish in a new role. It is relatively rare, however to do so with great success in mid-life. The French painter Paul Gauguin is perhaps the most remarkable example. Having worked for many years as an accountant at the Paris *Bourse,* he abandoned his wife and five children to take up painting full-time at the age of 37; and subsequently achieved artistic fulfilment, if not financial success.[49] John Thelwall was also 37 years of age in 1801. In his case he was trying to move from obscurity to respectability, in the reverse of the shift later made by Gauguin. Writing to an old friend, Joseph Strutt of Derby, Thelwall was once more boldly confident in his aims:[50]

> You would smile to see me in my metamorphose – for I am really quite transformed. Nothing of the plain out-of-fashion singularity of the old republican remains, but in my heart – and there it is smothered in silence, except when, with a chosen few, I can indulge my native energies. ... In short, as persecution would not suffer me to crawl upon the earth, I am trying what can be done by soaring into the clouds. ... To aspire is my natural motion; & I will indulge it. I will live in the world alike a man who has energies & intellect, or I will not live at all. It is cheering to see how the world has mended upon me ever since I took this resolution.

Gradually, his time in Wales became a non-period in Thelwall's life. And, from the point of view of the inhabitants of Llyswen and nearby Brecon, the episode of the restless English settler also faded from communal memory. The fact that Thelwall had chosen to live in Wales, the wild mythologies notwithstanding, was not enough to endear him to his neighbours. He did not join the local scene during his three years' stay; nor did he seek to do so. The double challenge of living in a new environment *and* taking up a new line of specialist business for which he had no training left Thelwall as doubly an outsider. One of his early plans had been to invite pupils to board at Llyswen to educate them 'on a liberal and enlarged plan'. Both he and his wife would be tutors, with assistants for classics and mathematics.[51] Nothing ever came of that idea. Yet, in retrospect, Thelwall might have done better to live in a distinctive urban centre – Brecon in Wales, or Norwich in East Anglia, for example, where he had active contacts. In such a context, he might have run his own academy (as he did later as an elocutionist) and revived his literary output, within an ambience that was closer and more stimulating to his personal interests. But in 1797 he was seeking lifestyle renewal, not safety.

Small-scale rural alternatives, meanwhile, did not have much prospect of challenging the advancement of urban, commercial and industrial development. At Llyswen, Thelwall was torn between his self-declared role as a psychological and intellectual loner and his personal conversability and conviviality. There was

always a certain grandeur or even grandiosity in his aims. His opponents called it vanity. A later reminiscence by John Britton, the topographer, confirmed the characteristic Thelwall style. In 1798, the two men met by chance in a Hereford book-shop (a natural venue for them both); and talked for an hour. Thelwall, whose rustic appearance startled Britton, told his new acquaintance that he was 'studying for future proceedings and a new course of life'.[52] Similarly, Crabb Robinson was regaled with optimistic hopes. At Llyswen in 1799, he was informed by Thelwall that he intended to establish his name among the epic poets of England.[53] If the world could not be changed by politics, then cultural renewal would have an impact instead. But, in Thelwall's case, not so.

Of course, it was and is no crime to fall outside the top flight of poetic achievement. It could well be that, as Coleridge shrewdly noted, Thelwall was too intellectually hasty to burnish his heart-felt material into gold.[54] Nonetheless, all of his output is interesting to the historian; and some of his poems had their admirers – and have so today among some literary scholars. For Thelwall, however, the galling truth was that he failed – and in a very public manner. In 1803, his Welsh output, published as *Poems Written Chiefly in Retirement*, was savaged in the *Edinburgh Review* for its 'presumptuous vanity and precarious principle'.[55] He was chided for venturing beyond his proper place as a 'good tradesman' to offer thoughts upon the British constitution and his personal sentiments. This harsh rejection, moreover, came from a liberal Whig publication from which Thelwall might have hoped for greater sympathy. And he was not compensated, either, by a flood of sales. Meanwhile, the reputations of the younger Wordsworth and Coleridge were beginning to soar on the strength of their innovatory *Lyrical Ballads*, gradually overcoming their early critics. The intense moment of cultural interchange that the three men had shared in 1797, just before Thelwall settled in Wales, had yielded original fruit in their case, but not in his.

Sadly for him, he fell between all worlds. He had no local identification,

unlike Wordsworth and 'the Lakes'. Social conservatives, whether of liberal or die-hard persuasion, first feared and then ignored him. Radicals also in time moved on from the 1790s, which remained a difficult era to assimilate. When Thelwall announced that he was returning to activism in 1818, he was not welcomed.[56] Nor were his polymathic interests admired. When Thelwall later proposed to write the history of the London Corresponding Society, Francis Place, his fellow reformer, sniffed privately: 'He [Thelwall] would make himself the hero of the tale and would stuff it with his nonsensical poetry'.[57] Furthermore, subsequent reform movements such as Chartism did not look back nostalgically to the 1790s. Thelwall was no martyr to be revered. Nor was he a theorist to be studied. His political tract *The Rights of Nature* (1796) did not outlive its own day, here unlike the continuing fame of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* (1792) or, less notably, of William Godwin's *Political Justice* (1793) – both being enduring works of men who were, like Thelwall, political loners.

And even many of the liberal intelligentsia turned against the self-styled 'Recluse'. Thelwall was lampooned as ranter, a crackpot, and a failed firebrand. Even former friends like Coleridge added his mite of rejection, condescending to the good intentions of 'honest John' but denouncing his ignorance that fuelled 'the restless bubble and squeak of his Vanity and Discontent'.[58]

Two poets in the following generation did achieve a supplementary fame in gossip history on the strength of their unconventional sex lives. Thelwall, however, was no Shelley or Lord Byron. Their sexual eclecticism was not for him. There was some comment in 1819, when, as a widower of 55, Thelwall took as his second wife a young girl of 20.[59] But the couple lived blamelessly, with John Thelwall engaging her attention in compiling materials for his life-story. She duly published a memoir in 1837, after his death. From internal evidence, the volume, which covers his life to December 1795, bears all the hall-marks of Thelwall's own hand.[60] Certainly, the projected second volume never appeared. Worse still, for the historian, Thelwall's letters and papers were

scattered, leaving him not only without a completed autobiography but also without an archive of memorabilia from his remarkable life.[61]

Wordsworth, finally, was another former acquaintance – never a close friend – who added to the subsequent deep chill of forgetting. He was stately and off-putting when Thelwall's widow wrote to him requesting information in 1837 and offered nothing but moderate praise for Thelwall's verse.[62] And in public print Wordsworth was scornful. He added a later explanatory rubric to his poem about Llyswen, the *Anecdote for Fathers*, to explain that: 'he [Thelwall] really was a man of extraordinary talent, an affectionate husband, and a good father'. But his abilities had not been well used. Hence, Wordsworth summarised Thelwall's farm in Wales as being 'as unfortunate a speculation as that he had fled from [politics]'.[63] So much for any past sympathy of poetic and life-style hopes between the poets of the Lakes and the Wye Valley.

The case for a memory-marker:

No assessment of John Thelwall at Llyswen can turn him into an honorary Welshman. It did not happen then, and cannot happen, retrospectively, more than two hundred years later. While Iolo Morganwg was dreaming of bardic renewal and Druidic ritual, Thelwall's temperament and intellect were alike unsympathetic to such a project of regenerated Welshness. Nor was he fired creatively by returning to 'nature' and the land.

Thelwall's own verse epic 'The Hope of Albion', which he began at Llyswen and worked on for many years, took as its hero a seventh-century king, Edwin of Northumbria, who remained faithful, despite persecution and exile, to his dream of uniting the fragmented and warring British tribes.[64] Such a saga had personal meaning for Thelwall, the perpetual 'outsider' who faced trials with undaunted optimism.

Yet he could not turn 'Edwin' into a myth of universal resonance for English readers, let alone for those in Wales. Thelwall's poetry was most

moving when his strong emotions were engaged, as at the death of his daughter. So ‘The Hope of Albion’ remained unfinished. Its surviving sections make esoteric reading. And among them, there was no Thelwallian equivalent of William Blake’s ‘Jerusalem’, which shines as the prelude to Blake’s owns ultra-esoteric *Milton* (1804-8) – also written as visionaries were seeking alternative visions of hope.

Nonetheless, John Thelwall deserves to be remembered and studied – just as he was. He was genuinely ‘a man of extraordinary talent’, in the words of the unbending Wordsworth. Moreover, Thelwall applied his efforts throughout his lifetime, trying to link political reform with alternative lifestyles and cultural renewal. It was symptomatic of the man that, just before his death, he was lecturing to a mechanics’ institute. Today, he would be a cultural guru, working in many media while seeking to link left-wing causes with expressions of popular culture.

Accordingly, there should be a memorial in Llyswen to its extraordinary visitor in the years between 1798 and 1800: the man who, in Coleridge’s words ‘believes and disbelieves with impassioned confidence’.[65] It is true that Thelwall’s stay changed him far more than it could ever have changed Wales. But his Llyswen experiment is part of history. It has diachronic meanings for radicalism, for romanticism, and for Wales, as one of many complex moments in the long processes of Anglo-Welsh cultural encounters. John Thelwall knew at first hand what it was to work in the Llyswen fields in the driving rain. More than many a visitor, he literally dug himself in. So his dream of green renewal should be acknowledged with a memory-marker in the right place - in Llyswen.

Tree-lined philosopher's walk within perimeter of Ty Mawr garden, 2009

APPENDIX

William Wordsworth,
Anecdote for Fathers:
Shewing How the Art of Lying may be Taught [sub-title later eliminated],
first published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798),
from J. Morley (ed.),
The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth (1888), pp. 75-6:

I have a boy of five years old;
His face is fair and fresh to see;
His thoughts are cast in beauty's mould,
And dearly he loves me.

One morn we strolled on our dry walk,
Our quiet home all full in view,
And held such intermitted talk
As we are wont to do.

My thoughts on former pleasures ran;
I thought of Kilve's[66] delightful shore,
Our pleasant home when spring began,
A long, long year before.

A day it was that I could bear
Some fond regrets to entertain;
With so much happiness to spare,
I could not feel a pain.

The green earth echoed to the feet
Of lambs that bounded through the glade,
From shade to sunshine, and as fleet
From sunshine back to shade.

Birds warbled round me – and each trace
Of inward sadness had its charm;
Kilve, thought I, was a favoured place,
And so is Liswyn farm.

My boy beside me tripped, so slim
And graceful in his rustic dress!
And, as we talked, I questioned him,
In very idleness.

‘Now tell me, had you rather be,’
I said, and took him by the arm,
‘On Kilve’s smooth shore, by the green sea,
Or here at Liswyn farm?’

In careless mood he looked at me,
While I still held him by the arm,
And said, ‘At Kilve I’d rather be
Than here at Liswyn farm’.

‘Now, little Edward, say why so:
My little Edward, tell me why.’
‘I cannot tell, I do not know.’ –
‘Why this is strange’, said I;

‘For here are woods, hills smooth and warm:
There surely must some reason be
Why you would change sweet Liswyn farm
For Kilve by the green sea.’

At this, my boy hung down his head,
He blushed with shame, nor made reply.
And three times to the child I said,
‘Why Edward, tell me why?’

His head he raised – there was in sight,
It caught his sight, he saw it plain –
Upon the house-top, glittering bright,
A broad and gilded vane.

Then did the boy his tongue unlock,
And eased his mind with this reply,
‘At Kilve, there was no weather-cock;
And that’s the reason why.’

O dearest, dearest boy! My heart
For better lore would seldom yearn,
Could I but teach the hundredth part
Of what from thee I learn.

ENDNOTES

[1] This essay began as a public lecture, given from notes, as the 11TH Sir John Lloyd Memorial Lecture at Brecon Guildhall on 14 March 2008. Warmest thanks are due to Ken Jones, for the initial invitation to lecture, as well as for sharing his hospitality and deep knowledge of Brecon history; to Sheila Leitch for invaluable information about Llyswen; to Tony Belton for fieldwork, photographs, and a critical reading of the text; to Steve Poole, Judith Thompson, John Barrell and all participants in the Thelwall research network; and to the sizeable audience in Brecon for their stimulating questions.

[2] G.H. Borrow (1803-81), *Wild Wales: Its People, Language and Scenery* (1862; in Everyman, 1906 edn). He admired 'scenery of the wildest and most picturesque description' (p. 421) but also had plenty of more prosaic encounters with the local inhabitants.

[3] See D. Nokes, *Jane Austen: A Life* (Fourth Estate, 1998), p. [to be supplied]; and J. Austen (1775-1817), *Emma* (1816; in Penguin, Harmondsworth 1969 edn), p. 310.

[4] For outlines of his life, see variously *ODNB* and the *locus classicus* C. Cestre, *John Thelwall: A Pioneer of Democracy and Social Reform in England during the French Revolution* (1906).

[5] It is possible that Thelwall had an indirect family link to the seventeenth-century Thelwall family of Plas-y-Ward in Denbighshire, on which see R. Bidgood, 'Families of Llanddewi Hall, Radnorshire', *Transactions of the Radnorshire Society,* 44 (1974), pp. 11-12. But if there was a connection, it was entirely unknown or at least unmentioned by the London-born John Thelwall in the 1790s..

[6] T.S. Ashton, *Economic Fluctuations in England, 1700-1800* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1959), pp. 47-8, 172-3, and R.A.E. Wells, *Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England, 1793-1801* (Sutton, Gloucester, 1988).

[7] J. Thelwall to T. Hardy, Llyswen 20 Sept. 1799, as transcribed in E. Rickword, *Literature and Society: Essays and Opinions II, 1931-78* (Carcanet New Press, Manchester, 1978), p. 219 [original now lost].

[8] On historians and long-term perspectives, see P.J. Corfield, *Time and the Shape of History* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2007).

[9] The house, sited next to the village church, was rebuilt and enlarged in 1895, incorporating some of the old stone walls in new red brick facing, and becoming the impressive 'Great House', later renamed in Welsh as Ty Mawr, as it remains today. For the landowner, Charles Lawrence, gentleman and later Esq. (d. 1840), a farmer and local industrialist, who had inherited the Llyswen property and other local estates from his father in 1794, see R. Bidgood, 'Lawrence Families of the Builth and Llanelwedd Area in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Transactions of the Radnorshire Society,* 61 (1991), pp. 46-50, esp. p. 49; and idem, 'Lawrence Families: Conclusion', in ibid., 62 (1992), pp. 46-7. See also short notice in S. Williams, *Llyswen and Boughrood* (1993), p. 8.

[10] For a sympathetic reassessment of this work, see G. Claeys, *The French Revolution Debate in England: The Origin of Modern Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007).

[11] Recounted with suitably dramatic effect in E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966 edn), pp. 20-1 (Thelwall constituting one of the heroes of Thompson's account). For context, see also A.P. Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (Hutchison, 1979); J. Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-6* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000); and J. Barrell and J. Mee (eds), *Trials for Treason and Sedition, 1792-4* (Pickering & Chatto, 2006/7).

[12] *Oxford English Dictionary*, sub 'radical' 5th meaning. 'Radicalism' followed in 1820.

[13] J. Thelwall to T. Hardy, Derby, 25 Oct. 1797, Rickword, *Literature and Society*, p. 217

[original now lost].
[14] Reed Rare Books Library, m Dunedin Public Library, New Zealand: J. Thelwall to T. Hardy, Llyswen, 16 Jan. 1798; and see commentary by P.J. Corfield with C. Evans, 'John Thelwall in Wales: New Documentary Evidence', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 59 (1986), pp. 231-9.
[15] This was a reference to the sugar boycott undertaken by radicals in support of anti-slavery.
[16] See D. Dorfman, *William Blake in the Nineteenth Century: His Reputation as a Poet from Gilchrist to Yeats* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1969); and J.B. Beer, *William Blake: A Literary Life* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2005).
[17] Among a huge literature, see D. MacGregor, *Hegel and Marx after the Fall of Communism* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1998).
[18] The exploits of Dick Turpin (1706-39) were commemorated in Anon., *Life of Richard Turpin* (1739) and brilliantly mythologised in H. Ainsworth, *Rookwood* (1834). For the permutations of myth-making, see J.A. Sharpe, Dick *Turpin: The Myth of the English Highwayman* (Profile, 2004).
[19] G. Crabbe. 'The Dumb Orators' (1812), in his *Tales, 1812: And Other Selected Poems*, ed. H. Mills (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 131-2.
[20] A.S. Thelwall, *The Reading Desk and the Pulpit: On the Importance of Elocution in Connexion with Ministerial Usefulness* (1861), p. 12.
[21] A.H. Johnson, *The Disappearance of the Small Landowner* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1909; reprinted 1963).
[22] See variously E.P. Thompson, 'Hunting the Jacobin Fox', *Past and Present*, 142 (1994), pp. 94-140; reprinted in idem, *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age* (New York, 1997), pp. 156-217; N. Roe, 'Coleridge and John Thelwall: The Road to Nether Stowey', in R. Gravil and M. Lefebure (eds), *The Coleridge Connection* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1990), pp. 60-80; N. Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge, The Radical Years* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1990); and J. Thompson, 'An Autumnal Blast, a Killing Frost: Coleridge's Poetic Conversation with John Thelwall', *Studies in Romanticism*, 36 (1997), pp. 427-56.
[23] For a brisk summary of this decision, see *ODNB* sub S.T. Coleridge.
[24] Thomas 'Jack' Vellum (b. c.1775/6) was the younger brother of Susan Vellum (1774-1816), who had married John Thelwall in 1791. Information from family tree, lodged in author's possession, from the estate of Kenneth Thelwall, who had corresponded about the Thelwalls with the Rev. W. Vellam Pitts, a descendant of the Vellum family via Susan Vellam's sister Elizabeth (at some stage the family changed its surname from Vellum to Vellam). Kenneth Thelwall's own relationship to John Thelwall is unknown but he kept items from the Vellam Pitts correspondence until his death in 1986.
[25] 'My wife's brother, who has been a Farmer all his lifetime, & has been driven from his native home by persecution, will embark in this undertaking with me. He will conduct; and I shall be an apprentice upon my own farm': J. Thelwall to T. Hardy, Derby, 25 Oct. 1797, in Rickword, *Literature and Society*, p. 217 [original now lost]. See also comments in Thompson, 'Hunting the Jacobin Fox', p. 75.
[26]An enthusiastic account of the farming benefits of this technique was published long ago by E. Kerridge, *The Agricultural Revolution* (Allen & Unwin, 1967), pp. 251-67.
[27] The gardens of Ty Mawr today are exquisite. Obviously there has been considerable upkeep and upgrading since Thelwall's day; but the many mature trees must also have been known to him. With thanks to the Blackledge family for permission to view the property.
[28] On this, see esp. K.R. Johnston *Wordsworth and 'The Recluse'* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1984); idem, 'Wordsworth and *The Recluse*' in S. Gill (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003), pp. 70-89; and

Thompson, 'Hunting the Jacobin Fox', pp. 129-38.
[29] J. Thelwall, *The Fairy of the Lake: A Dramatic Romance*, in his *Poems, Chiefly Written in Retirement ... With as Memoir of the Life of the Author* (1801; Hereford, 1805 edn), pp. 40-1.
[30] The National Archive: PRO, HO424/43, Roderick Gwynne to D. of Portland, 25 Apr. 1798. Another letter in TNA: PRO, HO 42/43, from Edward Edwards of Hay, 30 Apr. 1798, also claimed that Thelwall 'writes and receives ... a vast Number of Letters by every Post'.
[31] Wordsworth explained in a letter dated 3 October 1798: 'Our going into Wales was quite an unpremeditated scheme. Mr Coleridge proposed it to us one evening [c.4 August] and we departed the next morning at six o'clock': see E. de Selincourt (ed.), *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, 1787-1805* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1935), p. 201. For context, see also M. Moorman, *William Wordsworth, A Biography: The Early Years, 1770-1803* (Oxford University Press, 1957), Vol. 1, p. 408.
[32] See, for example, J.L. Mahoney, *William Wordsworth: A Poetic Life* (Fordham University Press, New York, 1997), pp. 78-9..
[33] For Brecon's elite social life in this period, as well as informative detail about the composition of urban elites in various Welsh regional centres, see K. Jones, 'Captain John Lloyd and Breconshire, 1796-1818', *Brycheiniog,* 39 (2007), esp. pp. 66-70, 105.
[34] For an example, see The National Archives,: PRO, HO42/46, Duke of Portland to John Ruft (?), 14 Jan. 1799: 'These are in his Majesty's name to authorise and require you to make strict and diligent search for a Packet of Treasonable Papers transmitted on Sunday last the 12th inst. by the Hereford wagon and directed to Mr Thelwall at Llyswen; and when you have found the same you are to bring them before me.' No documents appear to have been found in this exercise; or at least none are deposited in this Home Office collection.
[35] *Monthly Magazine*, (Nov. 1798), pp. 323-4; and commentary in Thompson, 'Hunting the Jacobin Fox', pp. 118-19.
[36] For Iolo Morganwg [Edward Williams] (1747-1826), see *ODNB*; C.W. Lewis, *Iolo Morganwg* (Gwasg Pantycelyn, Caernarfon, 1995); and C. Charnell-White, *Bardic Circles: National, Regional and Personal Identity in the Bardic Vision of Iolo Morganwg* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2007). See also National Library of Wales, Ms 21283E, no. 471: John Thelwall to Iolo Morganwg (addressed as 'Dear Bard'), from Llyswen, 10 May 1798.
[37] For details, see Jones, 'Captain John Lloyd', pp. 82-3.
[38] The National Archives, PRO: HO 42/43, Edward Edwards of Hay, 30 April 1798.
[39] The National Archives: PRO, HO42/51, S. Homfray, Brecon, 6 o'clock Tuesday [23 Sept. 1800]. See also HO42/52, fos 76-7, S. Homfray to Duke of Portland, 1 Oct. 1800, with news that the prospective riot had been quelled but still with the warning comment: 'Mr Thelwall has of late been in these parts and on Saturday when the cryer proclaimed in the public Market a meeting of the Workmen of the four Works near Merthyr for taking into consideration the high price of Provision, Mr Thelwall was at no very great distance but People are afraid to speak out'.
[40] J. Thelwall to T. Hardy, Llyswen 20 Sept. 1799, as transcribed in E. Rickword, *Literature and Society: Essays and Opinions II, 1931-78* (Manchester, 1978), p. 219 [original now lost].
[41] Dr Williams Library, H. Crabb Robinson Letters, 1725-99, no. 138: HRC to Thomas Robinson, from Llyswen, 21 Oct. 1799. See also no. 140: HCR to J.T. Rutt, letter dated Monmouth 28 Oct. 2799, for another, very similar account of the visit.
[42] As later recalled by Wordsworth in a letter to B.R. Haydon, January 1817: see E. de Selincourt (ed.), *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1937), Vol. 3, p. 1368. See also Thompson, 'Hunting the Jacobin Fox', p. 113, citing a letter from Thelwall exulting in his daughter, dressed 'in her trowsers with all the romping vivacity of independence'.

[43] Thelwall was glad to be free of the lease, even though indignant at the conduct of his landlord, whom he dubbed a 'petty tyrant' and 'oppressor': Thelwall, 'Prefatory Memoir', in his *Poems, Chiefly Written in Retirement,* pp. xlii-iii, xlv-vi.
[44] J. Thelwall to T. Hardy, from Llyswen, 24 May 1798, as cited in J.H. Rose, *Life of William Pitt* (1923), Vol. 2, p. 352, fn. 1.
[45] Thelwall, 'Prefatory Memoir', in his *Poems, Chiefly Written in Retirement*, p. xviii.
[46] Ibid., p. xlvi.
[47] See variously F.W. Habermann, 'John Thelwall: His Life, his School and his Theory of Elocution', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 33 (1947), pp. 292-8; also repr. in R.F. Hawes (ed.), Historical Studies of Rhetoric and Rhetoricians (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1961), pp. 189-9; D. Rockey, 'John Thelwall and the Origins of British Speech Therapy', *Medical History*, 23 (1979), pp. 156-75; and idem, *Speech Disorder in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The History of Stuttering* (Croom Helm, 1980), esp. pp. 46-7, 86-9, 174, 240.
[48] For the politician Dudley Ryder (1798-1882), see *ODNB*; and his *Reminiscences* (privately printed, 1891), pp. 6-8, esp. quotation p. 7. I am grateful to Anthony Howe for drawing the Ryder/Thelwall connection to my attention.
[49] D. Sweetman, *Paul Gauguin: A Complete Life* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), pp. 62-4, stressed that Gauguin was a humbler accountant rather than a stock-broker, contrary to common report.
[50] Birmingham Reference Library, Galton Ms 507/1: letter from J. Thelwall to J. Strutt, from Leeds, 20 Dec. 1801.
[51] J. Thelwall to T. Hardy, Derby, 25 Oct. 1797, Rickword, *Literature and Society*, p. 217 [original now lost].
[52] J. Britton, *Autobiography* (1850), Vol. 1, p. 185.
[53] T. Sadler (ed.), *Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson* (1869), Vol. 1, pp. 65-7.
[54] S.T. Coleridge to Joseph Cottle, Nether Stowey, 1797 [no further date], in J. Cottle, *Early Recollections, Chiefly Relating to the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ... (1837), Vol. 1, pp. 254-5.
[55] *Edinburgh Review*, 2 (April 1803), pp. 197-202. Thelwall responded with a hurt letter and then a further expostulation: see J. Thelwall, *Mr Thelwall's Reply to the Calumnies, Misrepresentations, and Literary Forgeries. Contained in the Anonymous Observations on his Letter to the Editor of the Edinburgh Review* (Glasgow, 1804). Interestingly, Wordsworth, who had himself been satirised by the *Review*, encouraged Thelwall to complain: see S. Gill, William Wordsworth: A Life (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990), p. 224; and W. Wordsworth to J. Thelwall, Grasmere, mid-Jan. 1804, in E. De Selincourt (ed), *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol. 1: The Early Years, 1787-1805* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1967), pp. 431-5.
[56] Thelwall burst into print with a new political journal, *The Champion* (1818) and attended various reform gatherings. However, his re-emergence prompted his old friend Thomas Hardy, after congratulating the self-aware Thelwall on his youthful appearance, to warn him that his oratorical style was too frenzied and 'unseemly': BL Add Mss 27818, Place Papers Vol. 30, f. 313, Thomas Hardy to John Thelwall, 10 Nov. 1818 (possibly a draft).
[57] J.A. Jaffe (ed.), *'The Affairs of Others': The Diaries of Francis Place, 1825-36*, Camden 5th ser. 30 (2007), p. 261.
[58] S.T. Coleridge to Hugh Rose, 19 Nov. 1819, in E.L. Griggs (ed.), *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1956-71), Vol. 4, p. 879.
[59] She was Henrietta Cecil Boyle, and in 1831 she bore Thelwall his fifth child, a son Weymouth Birkbeck Thelwall. The birth may have increased the financial pressures upon the

older Thelwall, who added to his lecturing commitments at this time. Nonetheless, the marriage seems to have been happy, triggering him to further poetry and the reordering of his unpublished poetic backlog: see Thelwall Mss Poems c. 1827 (3 vol) in Derby Local Studies Library. *Ex inf.* Judith Thompson, who is studying this significant material.

[60] C.B. Thelwall, *The Life of John Thelwall, by his Widow, in Two Volumes* (1837), Vol. 1. The text cites some documents written in the first person and signalled by quotation marks, but generally expounds the narrative referring to Thelwall in the third person – a format which he had already adopted in his Prefatory Memoir' in his *Poems, Written Chiefly in Retirement*). The style throughout is one of great assurance and close immediacy – making it unlikely to be the unassisted work of the much younger and inexperienced second Mrs Thelwall (b. c.1799), who had no direct knowledge of the stirring events which had taken place before she was born.

[61] A surprising number of Thelwall Mss letters survive, some now known only as transcribed by later scholars. Thelwall himself was an assiduous self-documenter; but unfortunately the bound Mss Volumes of his lectures and correspondence in the 1790s, purchased by his biographer Charles Cestre in the early twentieth century, have disappeared. For the search for these documents, see Thompson, 'Hunting the Jacobin Fox', pp. 139-40. It is hoped that the Thelwall research network will coordinate a complete listing of all known items.

[62] W. Wordsworth to C.B. Thelwall, 16 Nov. 1838, in E. de Selincourt (ed.), *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years, 1821-50* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1939), p. 959.

[63] W. Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth: Centenary Edition in Six Volumes* (1870), Vol. 1, p. 190.

[64] I am grateful to Judith Thompson for a preview of her analysis of the surviving fragments of Thelwall's epic.

[65] Coleridge to Cottle, as cited above n. 52.

[66] Kilve is a village on the Bristol Channel, about a mile from Alfoxden, Wordsworth's then residence, with a short name that is more amenable to verse than Alfoxden or Nether Stowey, the home of Coleridge in 1797.