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“Gefühl ist alles”: Romanticism, *Kindertransport* and Legacies of Grief

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In 2017, I met Christoph Houswitschka at a conference he had co-organized at the University of Bamberg on *The Politics of Romanticism*. It was my first European conference in a research career devoted to the English Romantic radical and polymath John Thelwall, the first full biography of whom I am writing. Knowing Christoph’s work on Thelwall, I looked forward to meeting him, but I had no idea that we also shared an interest in the Holocaust and especially the *Kindertransport*. In my case this was less scholarly than personal: my mother escaped Berlin on the *Kindertransport* in 1939, my grandmother was murdered at Auschwitz in 1943, and after the conference I had planned a pilgrimage, to map my late mother’s memories, ‘find’ the grandmother I never knew, and reunite them on the grave of my grandfather (who had died before the war) in Berlin. A passing reference to this quest in my conference paper on “John Thelwall and the Hope of Future Time” prompted several heartfelt conversations with Christoph, culminating in his very generous offer to show me around Berlin. As we sought out addresses my family had lived before the war, it was he who found the *Stolperstein* commemorating my grandmother Asta Jacob at Uhlandstrasse 123. Thus began an avid friendship and collaboration in which I took great joy. I rapidly came to depend upon Christoph’s energetic, warm-hearted, “all-inspir’d / And all-inspiring, comprehensive mind,” to quote our common hero Thelwall (*Poetry and Poetics* 130). We were in the middle of an eager online conversation about Thelwall Studies and conference planning at the time of his sudden death, which hit me hard. He had earlier sent me a paper he had published on translating *Kindertransport* poetry, and encouraged me to explore intersections between my scholarly work to revive Thelwall’s “voice for the voiceless,”¹ and my personal efforts to gather and reanimate my late mother’s archive. That is what this paper sets out to complete, in a creative-critical reflection that brings together two sides of my being and doing, maternal and paternal, German and English legacies, as an act of grief, gratitude, tribute, continuity, and hope. In this essay, Asta Jacob and John Thelwall meet through Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whose masterpiece *Faust* my grandmother quoted in her last letter to her daughter, advising her to “live[] somehow in the sense of his work”(Jacob). I take her words as both channel and catharsis, as I attempt to realize the mission I shared with Christoph, to bring Thelwall and his hope of future time back to life.

¹ The title of my biography in progress.

I begin with the poem I addressed to my grandmother, whose name I share, in the dark night before, during and after my long walks along the train platforms, from Berlin-Moabit to the ovens at Birkenau.

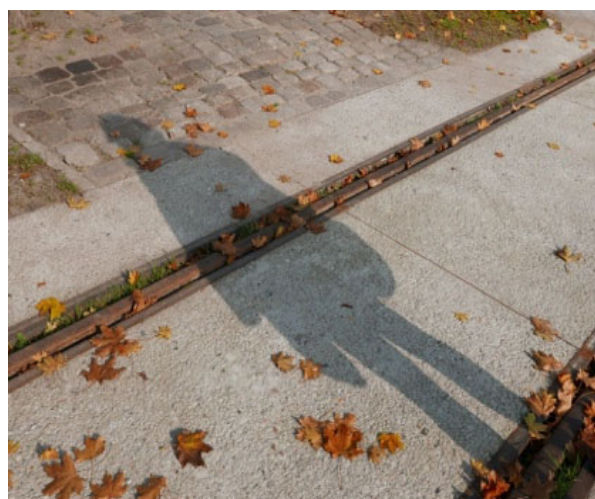


Fig. 1: "Kindertransport Farewell." Fig. 2: "Asta's Stolperstein." Fig. 3: "Shadow at Moabit."
All collection of Judith Asta Thompson, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Judith Asta Thompson

Stolperstein

Dear Grandmother, geliebte Asta Jacob
I have come at last to bring you home.

You've grown inside me now for sixty years,
Until I learned to see myself in you,
Until I knew that in your courage, will
And wisdom, I had all I need to meet
A future newly shadowed once again
With nightmares of the past that bore you down.

I've borne your name through streets of memory
In the city where it all began;
Concrete and cobblestone, so many steps
Past monuments to shame and suffering,
Guilt and expiation, all awry;
So many words, in languages that break
Against my ears, until I stumble backwards
Up the ramp you shuffled down towards the train
Towards the East. Where I must journey too.

I cannot know the horror of the way,
I cannot ease the pain of black despair,
Or share the stink of frozen sweat and tears
In cattle cars transporting lives to death;

But I can walk with you that longest road,
In crowds where I like you am so alone,
Measuring life to the end of the line, to find
The steps down into darkness now laid bare
Where last you saw the sky.

I've sung for you the lullaby you sang
To her, and she to me and me to mine,
A blessing in the faith that we all share;
I've said for you the litany of names,
Children you freed to be by sending yours
Away, freed from the fate that swallowed you
And millions more. Your only consolation
Was to hope you'd live again in them.

I've knelt and dug my fingers in the earth
And gathered you in prayer against my skin,
Mingling ashes, dirt and dust, the stuff of life
To bring with me, to bring you home at last,

To Weißensee, another long Allee,
But softened and enriched with trees and time,
Unto the place where autumn covers all
And vines reach out their ever-living arms
Around the shoulder stones, to share the weight,
And draw you in, beloved, where you belong.

This is my *Stolperstein* – a literal stumbling block between Asta's felt experience and the insubstantial words with which I, her namesake, attempt to embrace it, while always haunted by the inadequacy of such endeavour, even as I watch history repeat itself yet again, with the shadow of fascism still looming on all sides. I suppose this is my version of the "rupture in ordinary life" that scholars like Christoph theorize in the writing of the Holocaust, the "failures and deficiencies of language to represent this catastrophe of civilization." In *Kindertransport* poetry, he suggests, experiences of "traumatization and alienation . . . are turned into words that can never properly signify the experiences themselves, but rather translate them into poetic images reflecting the failure to do so" (Houswitschka, "Vicarious" 183). Not that mine is really an example of that genre, being at several removes from it in space, time, nationality and consciousness.

When I wrote my poem, however, scholarly analysis was the farthest thing from my mind. I should say when I spoke it, for all that night and day I simply talked to Asta, quietly, under my breath, alone or in crowds. Of course I spoke in English, my mother tongue that she didn't know (although her recognition of it saved my mother's life). But I sang the Brahms lullaby in German, having long ago memorized it from my mother singing to me, so I could sing it to my children. Seeking a language to solace my stumbling between the dead and the living, I found it in voice and in music, where my German Jewish mother and English atheist father met. The *lingua franca* and religion of my family home, music came naturally as the language of the heart spoken from and in the body to the soul. Thus sound, rhythm and the spoken word replace Christoph's "poetic images" in my *Kind des Kindes des Kindertransports* poem. Perhaps that is why, long before I knew anything about Thelwall, I instinctively understood his maxim that speech is alive, even as print is fixed and dead, and thus, through speech, words can be forever revived. On that autumn journey Thelwall's example also sustained me,

as it still does, under the burden of history, and I understood, as Christoph reinforces in his essay, that translating the Holocaust is also political, “part of the ongoing struggle for human rights” (Houswitschka, “Vicarious” 184).

I know nothing of my grandparents’ political opinions or sympathies. Like most second-generation survivors, I have only such fragments as my mother preserved and passed on in photographs, anecdotes and a few documents. There I glimpsed Asta as an adventurous, imaginative, capable, outgoing, independent, resilient, and forward-looking woman, a First World War-widow and self-consciously modern ‘typewriter girl’ who took climbing holidays with her office mate and second husband, my grandfather Georg. Middle-class, urbane and open-minded, they created a warm and loving home in which German and Jewish traditions mixed easily and a rich intellectual and cultural life joined with an enthusiastic love of nature. But as the long-term trauma of his First World War service slowly claimed Georg, who died in 1937, Asta’s burden grew heavier, even as the next war loomed. Passionately pragmatic, naturally warm but forced by circumstances to be a bit stern, she is remembered in the family for her ‘Kopf durch die Wand’ – the fierce willpower with which she worked tirelessly to get her teenaged children safe out of the country, using every spare moment to walk the streets, knocking on any door that bore a word of English. Eventually one marked “Society of Friends” opened on a sympathetic Quaker from Manchester who was in Berlin to evacuate the children of Christian political prisoners, but agreed to sponsor a Jew.

When my mother Ilse arrived in England at the age of 15, she kept journals, intending to share her experiences with her mother, talking to her, as Asta did in her letters, which came intermittently and by roundabout routes, and by the end were often coded, using different names and referring to herself in the third person, under the pressure of censorship, surveillance and the creeping knowledge of her inevitable fate. Having inherited her mother’s resolute pragmatism, Ilse neither hid nor dwelt on her Holocaust experience but channelled her grief into music and embraced a new language and country as opportunities. After moving to Canada and marrying, she decided that speaking German at home would be impractical but when I was a teenager she translated both her journals and her mother’s letters into English so that I could read and she could share her story in local schools and churches. Asta’s letters are in some ways typical, a mother offering advice to a teenager away from home, to watch her health and money, to choose friends with caution and above all to compensate for her truncated education through “reading, reading, reading” (Jacob, August 1941). But Asta also shared her “Sehnsucht, Sehnsucht, Sehnsucht” (Jacob, September 1941), opening up emotionally to her daughter, as “my very best friend, to whom I can confide all my thoughts, good and bad” (Jacob, November 1941). Her deepening lessons of living and giving, faith and self-confidence, idealism and realism lead up to her

heart-rending final letter (undated but likely not long before she was picked up in January 1943), written while she cleared out her apartment:

Just imagine how hard-shelled I have become; without batting an eyelash I have burnt all those things I cherished from Pappi and you two . . . I repeat: in these times, which are so very hard and merciless, I must be hard too and cannot waste time on uncalled-for piety. It is much more important that you, who are young, should live fully, and that I stay in touch with life as at present, rather than as it was in the past . . . Now I must make an end, I must still clear out the bookcase, because the books have been sold—and again I have done this without batting an eyelash. One must have Goethe not only on the shelf and have read him, one has to UNDERSTAND some of his greatness, must have lived somehow in the sense of his work. “Gefühl ist alles, Name Schall und Rauch” or “Wenn Ihr’s nicht fühlt und nicht erfasst, Ihr werdet’s nicht begreifen.” (Jacob, undated)²

My mother annotated this as “exceedingly depressed and depressing” and it is, but it is also deeply moving and wise. It speaks powerfully to me at this time of my life and the world.

As a scholar of English Romanticism, I have always found something poignant in Asta’s search for English words, her passion for literature, her choice of Goethe (often called the German Shakespeare), and his *Faust* in particular, the classic tragedy of the vain mortal quest for knowledge. I know some second-generation Holocaust survivors quite legitimately recoil even at the sound of the German language, and for others, Romanticism itself is tainted by association with Nazism. But I never felt this; I suppose I am enough of a romantic humanist to believe that great writing transcends the narrow prejudices of its era and nationality, even though I have also inherited an atheistic, modern skepticism along with the radicalism that I share with Thelwall. I accept my grandmother’s belief in the greatness of Goethe, but I am pragmatically aware of how many layers of time and translation stand between us. Even if I were fluent in German (which I most definitely am not), I could read Asta’s letters only in English because my ever-frugal mother seems to have disposed of the originals after translating them (at which the archivist in me grits her teeth in frustration). She left the quotations, *Gott sei Dank*, with an admittedly “untrained translation” in a footnote: “Feeling is everything, name just noise and smoke” and “If you cannot feel it and understand it, then you cannot comprehend it.” More frustration, for not only does the extra phrase in her translation make it strangely circular, but the German quotation too is incorrect: in my edition of *Faust* (the classic facing-page English translation by Walter Kaufmann), the phrase “und nicht erfasst” does not appear at all and the verb “begreifen” is actually “erjagen” (Goethe 104). I cannot say whether

² Because this letter is undated, I don’t strictly know if these are Asta’s last words, but they were the last Ilse received, the letter having arrived by a very roundabout route via Amsterdam and New York. Also their situation and tone imply a finality.

this was mistranslation, mistranscription or misremembrance by my mother or my grandmother. Either way it widens the gap that I seek to bridge.

Yet the inadequacy of language is of course one of the key themes of the passages that Asta passed on to her daughter. Both of them are spoken by Faust in conversation, one with his teaching assistant, Wagner, in the first scene of the tragedy, the other with his beloved, Margaret/Gretchen, at the climax of the play. Both quotations assert the primacy of the heart or feeling (“Gefühl” means sensation, sympathy, among other connotations) above mind or language (“name” also signifies fame, reputation, social identity; “erjagen” means to hunt down, as with a synonym or definition). Both therefore speak to the folly and vanity of scholars like Faust (and like me) who engage in a search for meaning, countering it with an understanding of and from the heart that goes beyond mere words on a page. And it may be that this is the main thrust of my grandmother’s message, to be taken as a parental nostrum like “to thine own self be true,” the advice of Polonius to Hamlet in Shakespeare’s famous play. Certainly it reinforces the message of the letters as a whole, in which Asta advises her daughter to be skeptical of outward professions and social status and to trust her heart.

But for all my sympathy with this heartfelt message, I am aware (as I suspect Asta must also have been) of ironies in the scenes from which these passages are taken, which complicate both her and Faust’s message. Just as “to thine own self be true” is rendered ironic by the deviousness of its speaker Polonius, so Faust’s assertions cannot be taken straight; indeed as Kaufmann points out, Goethe realized the limitations of Romanticism, and, through the “uninhibited sarcasm” of Mephistopheles, questioned both feelings and conventions – “what feelings hide behind conventions, and how conventional most of our feelings are” (Kaufmann 22-24). This is certainly the case in the shorter and seemingly most straightforward of Asta’s two quotations, “Gefühl ist alles.” This is the most high-romantic passage in the play, as Faust, sidestepping Margaret’s conventional religious objections, asserts that names are insufficient to embrace the essence of the divine, the “timeless mystery, / Unseeable, yet seen” that infuses and shapes all things “Call it bliss! Heart! Love! God!” Thus, he says, “Feeling is all, / Names are just noise and smoke” (I.16, 3449-57). Yet as we know from earlier scenes, and is proven by what follows, Faust’s idealism is deeply compromised by his vanity and his lust for Margaret, which she cannot perceive although she shows some awareness of “other” meanings in his words and recognizes the duplicity “written on the very face” of Faust’s alter-ego companion-daemon, Mephistopheles, who “has no sympathy for anything” (I.16, 3488-89). Clearly Faust’s “feeling,” too, is not sympathy or feeling for others, but only for himself (Goethe 325-31).

Certainly, Asta would have understood this ambiguity in the interpretation of “Gefühl,” and the distinction between Faust’s vain idealism and the sympathetic

feeling of Margaret. For her very first letter to her daughter, in August 1939, is about idealism, male ego and female sympathy. Here she distinguishes her husband, who “really was an idealist,” not a “fantast” because “he was always the GIVER, through his goodness and his work, without any egotism,” from her adolescent son, who thinks himself “all-knowing” and “superior” to others. By contrast, her daughter is willing to “listen and consider” others’ opinions. This is part of Asta’s observations on marriage in which, citing the example of the great composer Verdi, she generalizes that “every woman” wishes to inspire the man she loves, but he in turn must open himself to her inspiration. Despite maintaining conventional gender roles, she is egalitarian in this insistence on reciprocity. She sees it exemplified in her own marriage, in which her liveliness balanced Georg’s sensitivity, they supported one another and “were terribly happy” until his brain disease made him “no longer able to GIVE,” leaving her alone to support the family. Thus she puts herself in the position of Margaret (though less naively), who loves the idealist and makes herself vulnerable thereby. While Asta’s husband always repaid her trust, this seems not to have been the case after his death, for in another letter she warns her daughter, “don’t TRUST everyone as completely as your mother has done . . . with dire consequences” (Jacob, August 1941).

In this context, perhaps it is significant that Asta reversed the order of the two quotations from the play, so that the more “romantic” one is followed, and perhaps superseded, by one more oriented towards education and/in the real world. “Wenn ihr’s nicht fühlt” comes from the first scene of the play, when Faust has not yet seen Margaret or been tempted by Mephistopheles, but is annoyed when his assistant Wagner interrupts his search for ultimate truth, banishing a spirit he has just been talking to. Thinking his master is declaiming from Greek tragedy, Wagner asks for some instruction to help him advance his rhetorical vocation. In answer, Faust says “what you don’t feel, you will not grasp by art” (I.i, 534). This makes a distinction *not* between words and feeling so much as between two kinds of language. On the one hand, there is rhetoric, which Faust condemns as artificial, glittering trickery, “work[ed] up” (I.i, 564) for display only. On the other, there is language that “wells out” (I.i, 535) naturally from the soul and speaks directly to the heart of the listener. It is good advice, but there are several ironies here, too, starting with Faust’s choice of self-driven verbs of power and control (“dringt,” “zwingt” and “erjagen,” meaning penetrate, compel and hunt) at odds with reciprocal nouns of feeling, soul and heart (I.i, 534-37). This pursuit of power reveals Faust’s egocentricity, as does the fact that he does not address Wagner’s pedagogical aspirations but is outright dismissive of both him and those whom he would teach: still rapt in the spirit world, Faust regards Wagner as a lowly human creature, calling him a “dreary creeper” (I.i, 521), and condemns the public as a “common herd” (I.i, 592) incapable of understanding, who trample and persecute the few who try to communicate their finer feelings and spiritual

visions. This seriously undercuts his ideal of heart-to-heart communication, with an irony evident even in the word order of the line “from heart to heart you will never create” (I.i, 544), in which his own creative power is the endpoint. The irony is reinforced by the overwhelmingly negative syntax used here and for his language of the heart throughout (Goethe 105-11).

It is unlikely that all these nuances of meaning were on Asta’s mind when she quoted these lines: she was not, after all, a formalist scholar, only a common reader like those whom Faust derides. But in this and other letters she does offer sophisticated insight into, and practical application of, Goethe’s key themes of speech and education. The ideal of speaking from the heart suffuses her letters, from the very first one, in which she has just come back from “talking” to Georg in the cemetery and now wishes to “chat” with her daughter. That letter ends with her urging Ilse to “gain an education, even if only through reading for the time being.” It is in this letter, too, that she contrasts her son’s ego with her daughter’s ability to “listen and consider” the opinions of others (Jacob, August 1939). This highlights something missing from *Faust*, as neither scholar nor teacher is interested in listening to ordinary people, though Wagner at least seems more other-oriented, as he wishes that “everybody knew part of the same” knowledge of “the world” (I.i, 587). However he also shares his mentor’s self-centred ambition to “know all” (I.i, 601), and he abhors and inveighs against the conversation of the “uncouth . . . throng” of “citizens” (i.ii, 945-47, 1011) outside the gates, valuing only those who look up to Faust as a great man (Goethe 109-11, 133-39).

This brings me to the wisest and most original part of Asta’s last words to her daughter: her statement that “One must have Goethe not only on the shelf and have read him, one . . . must have lived somehow in the sense of his work” (Jacob undated). There is nothing like this in the play. The closest is Wagner’s effusion about “entering into the spirit of the time” (I.i, 577) and the “joys the spirit brings from page to page, from book to book” (I.ii, 1104-05), which Faust dismisses as a mere projection of the “scholar’s spirit” which “often is pathetic . . . most suitable to come from puppets’ lips” (I.i, 577-85). But Asta highlights the value of reading to ordinary people, not as a hubristic pursuit of ultimate knowledge but as an expression of sympathy and a guide to living. It is an urgent lesson, deeply humane in a time of inhumanity, to connect with the great minds of the past, to “listen and consider” (Jacob, August 1939), to learn through sympathetic identification, to make their work and words part of your moral life. In giving this lesson, she speaks powerfully to our time and is most like John Thelwall, whose work of course she did not know, but who stood in a tradition that she inherited, of education through reading as elocutionary emulation, the translation and resuscitation of print into a living word-of-mouth.

“Citizen John Thelwall” was an English contemporary of Goethe. They had much in common, but Thelwall’s greatness is unrecognized, for reasons that have less to do with intellectual and aesthetic quality than long-term repercussions of political repression. He too straddled the Enlightenment and Romanticism and was a prolific, ambitious, cosmopolitan polymath: orator, poet, novelist, playwright, journalist, pedagogue, antiquarian, scientist, student of law and medicine and the world’s first speech therapist. His intellectual interests and contributions complemented, but have been overshadowed by, his notoriety as a radical political activist, one of the lost generation of “English Jacobin” reformers who were persecuted and silenced at the time of the French Revolution and whose legacy was consequently forgotten. He was a pioneering theorist and tireless champion of human rights and civil liberties, whose uncompromising defense of democratic citizenship and freedom as political participation, as Christoph suggests, anticipates theoretical and practical responses to the Holocaust, from Hannah Arendt’s philosophy of the *vita activa* to the European Convention of Human Rights (Houswitschka, “Citizenship” 36, “Civil Society” n. pag.). But Thelwall’s commitment to the preservation and restoration of democratic rights and civil society survived the suppression of his political voice, continuing in his broader work, which maintained his principles in a series of subversively strategic sidesteps and reinventions. Elocution was the chief of these. Freedom of speech was the keystone of his polymathic career, which he devoted to the removal of impediments to the exercise of the *vox populi* and the development of “practical fluency,” as a teacher, therapist and pioneer of disabled education (Thelwall, *Rights* 400).

Thelwall defined elocution as the art, science and act of speaking, “the whole theory and practice of the exterior demonstration of the inward workings of the mind” (Thelwall, “Rhythmus” xvi). This popular discipline, the fifth element of classical rhetoric, has been overlooked in the recent history of ideas, regarded much as Faust regards rhetoric, as at worst superficial and dishonest, at best a form of social climbing, propriety and regulation of free speech. But Thelwall stands in an alternative tradition of elocution, less polite than political, as the disciplined exercise of free speech and a movement of dissent and debate aimed at educating and enfranchising the *vox populi*. A linchpin of this was the concept of emulation, or learning by oral imitation, shaping one’s character through adopting the voice and emotions of a moral exemplar, usually a great author, in recitation. Elocutionary emulation was cultivated by dissenting pedagogues in eighteenth-century England as a form of civic education, self-determination and agency for those denied a political voice (Thompson n. pag.). Thelwall’s elocutionary theories grew out of their ideas, his own experience in debating societies and his medical research into “animal vitality,” as part of his lifelong political program for the formation and training of citizens. A committed democrat, he believed profoundly that “wisdom . . . ascend[s]” from below and that the “intelligence of

the many . . . promise[s] to be the redemption of the few” (Thelwall, “Connexion” 3). His faith in the spoken word and the intelligence of the many is diametrically opposed to the mockery of rhetoric and idolization of the solitary hero we find in Goethe and many of his romantic-era contemporaries, who feared the mob demagoguery of the French Revolution and regarded citizens as a “common herd.” By contrast, Thelwall acted in solidarity with the “swinish multitude,” respecting its intelligence and promoting egalitarian education for common citizens beyond distinctions of class, race, religion and gender.³

Revolutionary ideas of elocution extended into Germany, as seen in the similar communication theory of Josias Gosch (1765-1811), which sought to disseminate knowledge within “broader publics, beyond traditional institutional gatekeepers,” through oral reading, conversation and sympathetic emotional exchange between speaker and audience (Dupree 1-2). Elocution flourished through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, in theories, therapies and institutions of voice in performance and education throughout Europe. In England at least, the survival of a Thelwallian democratic tradition of “elocution from below” is seen in George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion* of 1912 (when Asta was almost 30). Too little is known about elocution in pre-war Germany, and I have too little evidence about Asta’s education, exposure to or opinions about elocution to speculate—though the existence in my mother’s archive of the script of a three-act “Lustspiel” titled *Die ewige Ruddlelei* (The Eternal Conversation),⁴ written and performed for a relative’s wedding, gives some idea of the vibrant oral cabaret culture in which she and her husband participated in the early twentieth century. But in trying to understand what Asta meant by “living in the sense” of Goethe’s work, I cannot help but be struck by its similarity to Thelwall’s radically performative elocutionary emulation, in which the “mouth . . . ‘is parcel of the mind,’ and of a mind that can identify with its author, or its subject” (“Rhythmus” xvi). Her “living” and “sense” both resonate with his theory of “animal vitality,” which defines life as an organized “correspondence” and “communication” among bodily organs and mental actions, sense, and sensation (Thelwall, “Vitality” 20-27, Solomonescu 13-33). Thelwall’s work heals Goethe’s schism between feeling and rhetoric with a literally organic, oral language of heart, circulating within the body (politic). This rhythmic language is based on the “universal principle of action and reaction which forms the paramount law of all reiterated or progressive motion,” from the

³ Radicals of the 1790s like Thelwall famously played, with great wit and at great length, on Burke’s derisive metaphor of the “swinish multitude,” to great effect.

⁴ In keeping with the ruptures and difficulties of language I thematize, this title has proven extremely difficult to translate. The word “Ruddlelei” is extremely rare, possibly a local or archaic idiom which does not appear in any standard dictionary. My translation comes from its inclusion in a *Sprachsatz* published in 1873, in a list of synonyms for *Unterhaltung* or conversation.

heartbeat and footstep to the operation of the material mind (Thelwall, *Cline* 15).⁵ Thelwall's language of the sense was therapeutic but also capable of reanimation, building on his early work with the Humane Society to promote new techniques of medical resuscitation. According to this theory, reading aloud, following the thesis-arsis rhythm of the heart, is literally a way of "living in the sense" of any book, endlessly renewing the words of the dead and the deadness of the word. In so doing, it could overcome impediments, liberate and empower the voice and restore hope for society.

The application of Thelwall's theories to both personal and sociopolitical restoration can be seen in two major literary works he published in 1801 in which he channelled and surmounted his grief over the death of a beloved child, the defeat of the reform movement and the loss of his hopes for the future at the turn of the nineteenth century. His elegiac sequence of *Paternal Tears* odes was written upon the sudden death of his six-year-old daughter, Maria, at the very end of 1799. It is not just a cathartic expression of grief but a personal case study for the elocutionary therapy he was developing at the same time, using his materialist poetics to give him back his heart, his hope and his tongue. These ten effusions channel trauma in the language of sense, "bodying forth" his grief in imagery, but even more in the sounds and rhythm of his "torn" and "throbbing heart," "jarred nerves," and "sentient tears," until Maria is brought back to "vital form" in the climactic Effusion Eight, in which she speaks to him in a vision. After this he still grieves but experiences renewal (a word repeated six times in Effusion Nine) and slowly moves out of solitude towards socially-oriented creativity and public speech (*Poetry and Poetics* 154-65).

The application of Thelwall's elocutionary therapy to broader political ills is addressed more explicitly in his abolitionist, feminist, anti-imperialist novel, *The Daughter of Adoption*, written at the same time as *Paternal Tears*. It allies Maria with another Mary, Thelwall's friend, the feminist philosopher Wollstonecraft, who died at nearly the same time, and brings them both back to life in the novel's eponymous heroine Seraphina. She enacts his elocutionary therapy in collaboration with two father-teacher figures. The first of them, Parkinson, adopts Seraphina as an orphan child of the same age and name as his daughter, who had died when she was six. He gives her the lessons he had written for his child, teaching her "to repeat them with the same tone and gesture; in short, the Seraphina I had lost became a model to her whom I had found, till they were identified in my heart, and I felt as if I were again a father" (*Daughter* 155-56). Under his enlightened instruction, Seraphina grows up to adopt opinions similar

⁵ Shortly after delivering his lecture on Animal Vitality, Thelwall gave another, more controversial, one on "the origin of mental action, explained on the system of materialism," which has not survived. Solomonescu discusses this pp. 26-33.

to those of Mary Wollstonecraft and even lives at the same address in London, where she is instrumental in vindicating the rights and redeeming the wrongs not only of women but of slaves and all those oppressed by patriarchal imperialism. She does this in collaboration with the fatherly Dr. Pengarron, who enlists her in the program of talk therapy he uses to convince a tyrannical slaveowner (the father of her lover Henry Montfort) to make “reparation” for his acts of evil (*Daughter* 429). Seraphina is a Creole, whom we (and Henry) meet during the Haitian revolution, which Thelwall treats sympathetically in this, the first novel to recognize its “world-historical significance” (*Daughter* 21). After she travels to England to resist the evils of imperialism at their grasping selfish heart, she confronts and critiques human rights genocides of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in a manner that speaks directly to those of the twentieth century. Granted, she does so with considerable romantic melodrama, and the conflicts of the novel are resolved in a sleight-of-hand happy ending in which evil is overcome by “building up a family” based “in social equality and reciprocal love.” It is a radically inclusive family in which different races, nationalities and religions are brought together and even the dead come back to life, in a joyous chorus of resuscitation: “he lives!—he lives!—he lives!—he lives!—he lives!.” (*Daughter* 474-79).

It is fitting that the novel, and this paper, ends with family and teaching. For the *Daughter* is the last text I taught before my retirement, with Christoph Houswitschka, in a seminar for the University of Bamberg shortly before his death. Thelwall lectured on the day of his death and had repeatedly used teaching as a form of resuscitation, especially after he lost his wife and youngest son in 1816, when he gave elocutionary training to a young actress whom he called his daughter of adoption, falling in love and marrying her the following year. Through her letters, Asta too was a teacher, who fulfilled the role of Faust and Wagner as they should have been. She sought neither power nor glory and saved no-one’s life with her written words, but she saved her children by speaking to the Society of Friends and took comfort in living on through them.

Is it just my pathetic scholarly projection that hears the living voice of Thelwall’s hope of future time in my grandmother’s shattered letters? Perhaps it is, but I do so in the faith and reassurance of their reciprocal, correspondent powers of heart and mind, as teachers of/and in reading, to bring the words of the dead into the bodies of the living and to overcome the ruptures of time and place, in the face of oppression and genocide. Here, Christoph joins them, as an exemplar to emulate, not as a “great man,” scholar, hero or celebrity, but as a good, common citizen who offers lessons of wisdom and hope beyond the grave.

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