

RENÉ-MARTIN PILLET: A FRENCH REPUBLICAN'S JAUNDICED VIEW OF BRITAIN?

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*René-Martin Pillet (1762-1815) found fame (and notoriety) with his description of the plight of the anonymous many on board English prison ships. His account of his captivity (and indirectly of previous stays in Britain) was published at the end of an eventful life: a trained lawyer, a follower of La Fayette, which eventually branded him an émigré to French authorities, he travelled to America where he became a citizen of the new republic; an officer in the armies of the Consulate and Empire, he fought from Guadeloupe to Portugal where he became a prisoner of the English. His social and geographical mobility highlights the problematic status of émigré and prisoner in the context of social and political upheavals in France and Britain brought about by the French Revolution and the turmoil of the Napoleonic wars. His book *L'Angleterre vue à Londres et dans ses provinces pendant un séjour de dix années, dont six comme prisonnier de guerre* (1815), a powerful indictment of French Anglomania, nevertheless provides perceptive observations on British institutions and manners. At the same time his Anglophobic remarks contribute pieces to the puzzle Pierre Reboul called "le mythe anglaise," pieces Byron helped fit together.*

When it comes to examining French writing of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, *emprisonnés* should be added to the triad *exilés*, *émigrés* and *expatriés*. Indeed, Sylvain Venayre has made the point that it was armies on the move across Europe that gave rise to the medical concept of nostalgia,¹ a concept more typically associated, for students of literature, with the many Romantic writers who explored themes of exile and imprisonment, the ultimate symbol

¹ Sylvain Venayre, *Panorama du voyage 1780-1920* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2012) 306.

being Napoleon on St Helena.² A second justification for this addition is historical fairness: the numbers of French émigrés and prisoners are approximately the same. French émigrés who left the country for varying periods between 1792 and 1815 are estimated at between 100,000 and 150,000.³ By comparison, recent research has put the figure for prisoners of war in Britain from 1803 to 1814 at around 130,000.⁴

In this context, René-Martin Pillet's *L'Angleterre vue à Londres et dans ses provinces pendant un séjour de dix années, dont six comme prisonnier de guerre* (1815) is of particular interest as he experienced the status both of émigré and of prisoner of war, and his account spans the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. His controversial book highlights the difficulty of assessing geographical, social and ideological mobility. Like most exiles, Pillet does not write only about himself but also offers information on the country he finds himself in, and on other prisoners of war. His biting denunciation of things British is one reason for the success of *L'Angleterre* among contemporary readers and it remained a landmark in French representations of Britain long after it was published. But there are other strands to his narrative, and other reasons why it had the impact it did. Only with historical hindsight can we arrive at a balanced view of Pillet's book, and an appreciation of both its insights and blind spots. This essay will attempt such a critical appraisal, starting with a consideration of Pillet's biography, insofar as we can reconstruct this from the partial and sometimes contradictory records that survive.⁵

² Venayre 304.

³ François Bédarida et al., *De Guillaume le conquérant au Marché commun. Dix siècles d'histoire franco-britannique* (Paris: A. Michel, 1971) 135-37. Only 20,000 to 30,000 actually emigrated to Britain, half of them clergy (see Dominic Bellenger's essay in the present issue). Most émigrés returned to France in 1799-1800 while most prisoners of war arrived in Britain from 1803 onwards, thus ushering in the toing and froing of French political enemies across the Channel during the nineteenth century.

⁴ Patrick Le Carvèse, "Les prisonniers français en Grande-Bretagne de 1803 à 1814. Étude statistique à partir des archives centrales de la Marine," *Napoleonica. La Revue*, 8 (2010/12): 40-51; Paul Chamberlain, *The Napoleonic Prison of Norman Cross* (Stroud: History Press, 2018) 122-24.

⁵ There is no biography of Pillet, but I have drawn on the following sources for information about his life: Service historique de la Défense at Vincennes; *Léonore (Légion d'honneur)* database, <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/Espace-documentation/Bases-de-donnees/Leonore>, Archives Nationales; J.-L. Chalme, *Histoire de Touraine, depuis la conquête des Gaules par les romains, jusqu'en l'année 1790; Suivie du Dictionnaire géographique de tous les hommes célèbres nés dans cette province* (Tours: A. Aigre, 1841) 4:384-85; Chamberlain 149-50; F.-X. de Feller, *Biographie universelle, ou dictionnaire géographique des hommes qui se sont*

From Tours to Chatham

“What a novel my life has been!” Napoleon is said to have exclaimed to Las Cases, his biographer, at Longwood House. Pillet, too, could be said to be a character à la Walter Scott involved in historical events of which he takes advantage or to which he falls victim. Born in Tours in 1761, he went to Paris to pursue his career as a lawyer after having been a volunteer in the American army in 1781-82. In 1789 he became the leader of the body of clerks attached to the courts of justice (*la basoche*), the first organized group to take up arms for the Revolution in Paris. He became aide-de-camp to La Fayette, who was then commander of the National Guard. After La Fayette’s resignation from his post, Pillet accompanied him to the army of the North. When La Fayette fell from Jacobin grace for his moderate pro-constitutional monarchy views, Pillet shared in his mentor’s proscription in 1792. He was captured by the Prussians and refused to serve in the counter-revolutionary *armée des Princes*. Jailed in Antwerp, he escaped from the fortress before crossing from Holland to Britain in 1793. After staying some time there, he sailed to the USA where his connection with La Fayette led to him being granted American citizenship in 1796.

Returning to Europe the same year, Pillet travelled between Holland, Hamburg and Paris, sometimes with passports signed by French officials, until a warrant for his arrest was issued in 1798. When jailed, he was supported by his former friends from *la basoche* while the five *députés* from *Indre-et-Loire* tabled a motion for him to be struck off the fatal list of émigrés two days before Bonaparte’s coup of 9 November 1799 and an opportune amnesty. Pillet rejoined the army in 1800 and was later sent to Guadeloupe, where he took part in the suppression of a slave rebellion.⁶ After helping with preparations for the aborted invasion of England in 1804 and serving in various Continental campaigns, Pillet was promoted to lieutenant-colonel in 1807, then to the higher rank of *adjudant-général* (a rank between colonel and general) and directed to Portugal. Seriously wounded at the battle of Vimeiro in 1808, Pillet was made a prisoner of Wellington’s

fait un nom par leur génie, leurs talents, leurs erreurs ou leurs crimes (Paris: J. Leroux, 1849) 6:560; *Grand Larousse Universel* 12:1014; M. Michaud (ed.), “Pillet, R-M,” *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne* (Paris: A.Thoisnier, 1843) 33:335; Albert Philippon, “Le maréchal de camp René-Martin Pillet,” *Bulletin de la société archéologique de Touraine*, 33 (1963): 266-69; “Les inconnus de l’histoire: René-Martin Pillet,” radio broadcast by Jean Montalbetti, *Après-midi de France Culture*, 21, 28 May and 4 June 1982 (contributors included F. Braudel, J. Tulard, F. Bédarida and F. Crouzet).

⁶ Henri Bangou, *La Révolution et l’esclavage à la Guadeloupe, 1789-1802* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002).

troops. Having twice failed to escape, first from a parole town, Bishop's Waltham, then from an inland prison, Norman Cross (near Peterborough), he was punished with harsher imprisonment on one of the prison ships at Chatham, in the Medway estuary, in 1812.

How and where to keep prisoners of war was a major issue in Britain at this time. Before, but especially after, the break-up of the Peace of Amiens in 1803, British victories on land and at sea posed a daunting challenge to British authorities: how to clothe, feed and house a supply of prisoners frequently outstripping available accommodation. The prisoners included soldiers, sailors and civilians, the bulk of whom were French. The greater part were kept in existing prisons throughout Britain or specially built ones, such as Norman Cross, opened in 1797, or Dartmoor, built by French prisoners between 1806 and 1809.⁷ Other prisoners were confined on prison ships ("hulks") which had been used since 1776 and whose numbers increased with the French, Spanish or Dutch men-of-war captured during Britain's victorious naval battles.⁸ Some of these were "receiving ships" where prisoners, especially senior officers,⁹ were registered before being moved inland to depots or placed on parole (conditional release). Others were permanent prisons, often located near ports.¹⁰ Released in 1814 at the Restoration, Pillet, in his words, dragged out "a weak and languishing life"¹¹

⁷ See Chamberlain; Elisabeth Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison and Church 1805-1817* (Tavistock: Quay Publications, 2002).

⁸ Prison ships remained in use until 1857. Coincidentally, the fictional Magwitch escapes, in Chapter 1 of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, from a civilian hulk at Chatham the same year, 1812, that Pillet was imprisoned on a military one.

⁹ Pierre Cambronne, for example, who was paroled at Ashburton, a small town on the edge of Dartmoor. See Gill Crispin, "French Prisoners of War on Parole in Devon 1750-1815," *The Devon Historian*, 34 (April 1987): 5.

¹⁰ "Other prisons were located at important civil ports, such as Dover, Deal, Harwich, Yarmouth, Hull, North Shields, Edinburgh, Greenock, Liverpool, Pembroke, Bristol, Dartmouth, Weymouth and Southampton, Kinsale and Cork in Ireland. Holding prisoners in ports reduced transport costs – a major concern of the administration – and was convenient for receiving and repatriating them." Patricia K. Crimmin, "Prisoners of War and British Port Communities, 1793-1815," *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord*, 6.4 (October 1996): 18.

¹¹ Pillet writes: "The British press asserts that men surviving six years on a prison ship meant they would drag out a weak and languishing life" – which was to be his own fate. M. Le Maréchal-de-camp [sic] Pillet, *L'Angleterre vue à Londres et dans ses provinces, pendant un séjour de dix années, dont six comme prisonnier de guerre* (Paris: A. Eymery, 1815) 378. All translations from Pillet are my own; subsequent page references in parentheses in the text are to the original French edition.

as a result of his imprisonment. He died in 1816 after the publication of the book that made him famous (or infamous).

As is the case for many French émigrés,¹² the beginning of Pillet's life is more easily told than the end, while the many blanks in his wanderings raise a number of questions: when exactly did he spend four years as a free man in Britain, as he claimed? More importantly, what was his status there, as he consistently refused, like La Fayette, to be considered an émigré or a deserter?¹³ Was he able to conduct his activities unchallenged in a French-dominated Europe because his American passport ensured him the support of the US consul in Hamburg who coordinated the American networks still active in Paris? Was he arrested in 1798 because La Fayette, now freed, wanted to return to France, a move the Directory had forbidden? The title page of his book raises another question as it claims he was a *maréchal de camp*, a holder of the *Croix de Saint-Louis* and an officer of the Legion of Honour.¹⁴ Had he gone over to Restoration values and become a citizen of la "*république des girouettes*," a straw in the political wind bending to each development?¹⁵ Indeed the rank of *maréchal de camp* (brigadier general) had been abolished by the Revolution and re-introduced by Louis XVIII. Not only was Pillet probably one of the first to be distinguished with this rank by the restored king but he was also awarded the *Croix de Saint-Louis* by the monarch. One explanation is that Louis XVIII agreed to compromise with the France born of the turmoil of the Revolution and Empire, and followed a policy of reconciliation and forgiveness of revolutionary violence. Why Pillet definitely cannot be considered as throwing in his lot with the new regime is that no sooner was the book published than royalists, either ultras or constitutional monarchists, tore it to shreds as an insult to the king and to Britain, which had helped restore the monarch to the throne of France.¹⁶ A provisional conclusion is that he was a

¹² For other examples between 1789 and 1815, see Sylvie Aprile, *Le siècle des exilés. Bannis et proscrits, de 1789 à la Commune* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2010) 17-55.

¹³ Jean-Pierre Bois, *La Fayette. La liberté entre révolutions et modération* (Paris: Perrin, 2015) 227-29, 249.

¹⁴ *Léonore*: biography no. L2161061. Pillet's portrait by an unknown artist (Musée de l'armée-Invalides, Ea 202) shows him in the uniform of adjudant-général, a rank abolished at the Restoration. The decoration he sports (*officier de la Légion d'honneur*) must have been added onto an earlier painting, as he was promoted on 24 August 1814, i.e. during the first Restoration.

¹⁵ Pierre Serna, *La république des girouettes. 1789-1815 et au-delà. Une anomalie politique: la France de l'extrême centre* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2005).

¹⁶ Paul François de Quelende de Stuer de Caussade, duc de La Vauguyon, *The Truth Respecting England, or An Impartial Examination of the Work of M. Pillet and Various Other*

moderate who kept most of his Republican convictions, as can be inferred from his book.

A Reliable Narrator?

In his introduction, Pillet declares: "I write without bias as a Frenchman, without recrimination as a former prisoner of war" (x).¹⁷ Presented by himself as a condemnation of Anglomania so as to give back her pride to France, the book is likely to be read as a blanket indictment of things British, but, as a matter of fact, with hindsight, Pillet's acknowledgement of Britain's achievements outweighs the numerous spiteful animadversions it contains. The most striking of his acknowledgements is that of Britain's commercial supremacy, due to her merchant navy, her men-of-war and her road network (460-67),¹⁸ the latter making access to ports easy. Was this an unconscious admission that Britain had become a world power by the first decade of the nineteenth century while France was playing second fiddle to her on the Continent? Following in the footsteps of admiring eighteenth-century French physiocrats, he also sets great store by agricultural improvements in the English countryside (471-78).

Above all, he confesses grudging admiration for the "public spirit" of the British: the government pays the wages of imprisoned officers in France and the propertied classes contribute to the settlement of the Poor Tax and the huge national debt incurred by Britain's involvement in the wars against France. England's wealth, he notes, matches its vast expenditure, an impression borne out by the sartorial homogeneity and generally decent appearance of the population, of which he approves (419, 120-30, 28, 484).

Of British political life he admits: "in all fairness, I cannot fail to give credit to the quality of liberal institutions Britain enjoys" (x).¹⁹ He goes on to mention the

Writers on the Same Subject (London: Longman, 1817); J. Done, *Les Calomnies de M. le général Pillet, contre l'Angleterre, réfutées dans des extraits de ses propres écrits* (s.l.: s.n., 1817); J. Marsan, *Les Révolutionnaires tels qu'ils sont, et la vérité vengée* (Bordeaux: Baume, 1816); Jean Sarrazin, *Tableau de la Grande Bretagne, ou Observations sur l'Angleterre vue à Londres et dans ses provinces de M. le maréchal de camp Pillet* (Paris: P. Didot, 1816); Paul-Auguste Taschereau de Fargues, *La Vérité sur l'Angleterre ou Examen impartial de l'ouvrage publié en 1815 par M. le Maréchal de Camp Pillet* (Paris: A. Egron, 1816).

¹⁷ "J'écris sans partialité comme Français, sans récrimination comme prisonnier de guerre."

¹⁸ The superiority of British roads was probably the only unanimous compliment of the French until the advent of the railway.

¹⁹ "Personne ne rend avec plus de plaisir que moi justice aux institutions libérales dont elle jouit."

high calibre of British politicians, with their Oxbridge education, Grand Tour experience, proficiency in law and collaboration in newspapers (79-85). Like other French proponents of Enlightenment, he eulogizes the British presumption of innocence until guilt is proven, the right to a fair trial, as well as liberty of the press (60-66).

However, unqualified praise of aspects of British economic achievements and political life is quickly followed by less positive but nevertheless historically relevant remarks. Pillet notes the triangular interplay of political forces ("royal despotism, aristocracy and popular democracy"; 93-97), an interplay that was to play an important part in domestic politics from 1816 onwards, the checks and balances this time being between labouring classes, middle classes and landed aristocracy.²⁰ The latter class, most of them Tories, were then at the top of the hierarchy. He exposes the means by which the propertied classes maintained a majority in Parliament: elections were rigged by the centuries-old rotten boroughs and systematic corruption of voters. The cost of lawyers, the intricacy of civil law and the war-time libel laws on journalists (who would be called "whistle-blowers" today) were, he says, blots on Britain's escutcheon. So were the shortcomings of the Speenhamland System to relieve rural poverty, the plight of people imprisoned for debt, and use of press gangs to recruit sailors (86-92, 56-78, 145-50, 131-32, 151-53, 354-55).

Pillet shows at times pre-sociological acumen when he mentions wife-selling in England: he rightly mentions it was a way for the poorer classes to end an unsatisfactory marriage by mutual agreement, rather than an instance of moral failure (299-301), an exception to his generally negative observations about the manners and customs of the English: "I shall speak with equal frankness about the corruption which marks nearly every class of this kingdom" (x).²¹ Eighteen of his sixty chapters deal with the violence endemic in British society: crime, murder, gambling, drink and prostitution. For Pillet, the idleness and debauchery of the upper classes is matched by the brutalization of the lower ones.

His outbursts against English cruelty (men, women, children all hurt one another and animals as well) find a particular outlet when he highlights the inhuman treatment meted out to him and his compatriots on the hulks. In the dedication to what could be called his *Mémorial*, he addresses his former fellow captives, denouncing the "barbaric treatment and homicidal avarice" (vi)²² of the

²⁰ François Bédarida, *La société anglaise (1851-1975)* (Paris: Arthaud, 1976) 93.

²¹ "Je parlerai avec la même franchise de la corruption qui signale presque toutes les classes de ce royaume."

²² "leur barbarie, et les exactions de leur avarice homicide."

English: the sentries who guard the inmates were riff-raff with no qualms about injuring or killing. Prisoners were crammed on board ships. Men slept, ate and passed time in the same space below deck. Poor sanitation, cramped sleeping conditions and bad air quality provided ideal conditions for the spread of diseases.²³ Clothing for prisoners was basic and a change of clothes issued only once every four years. The diet was monotonous, inadequate and insufficient: when a prisoner died, his body was concealed for a few days so his mates could “live off their dead,” that is, eat the dead man’s rations unbeknownst to the jailers (388). Pillet mentions that his reports to the authorities, whenever he denounced corrupt overseers or practices or the frauds of contractors, were always turned down or resulted in retaliatory measures against him even when he was backed up by sympathetic British officers. He emphasises the misappropriation or late remittance of the money sent by relatives or friends to prisoners (372-403, 394-401).

Through shocking details such as these, Pillet, like Ambroise-Louis Garneray, another prisoner who wrote about his experience,²⁴ helped to create the black legend of the maltreatment of prisoners on board the dreaded hulks. Napoleon himself alluded to this legend in his address to the Army before the battle of Waterloo: “Soldiers, let those among you who have been prisoners of the English describe to you the hulks, and detail the frightful miseries which they have endured.”²⁵

²³ He probably means typhoid, typhus and tuberculosis: see Chamberlain 179.

²⁴ Ambroise-Louis Garneray, *Captivité de Louis Garneray. Neuf années en Angleterre. Mes pontons* (Paris: G. Barba, 1851). Garneray’s book, however, was published much later and invents many details. The conditions of detention of French prisoners of war is still a matter for debate. Recent accounts that have questioned the black legend include: Philippe Masson, *Les sépulcres flottants. Prisonniers français en Angleterre sous l’Empire* (Rennes: Ouest-France, 1987) 135-79; Chamberlain (*passim*); and Le Carvèse (*passim*). See also Hugues Marquis, “Les récits de captivité des prisonniers des guerres de la Révolution et de l’Empire. Un regard sur la guerre et sur l’étranger,” *Lendemain de Guerre ... De l’Antiquité au monde contemporain: les hommes, l’espace et le récit, l’économie et le politique*, ed. Pernot François and Valérie Toureille (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010) 173-83; and Paul Denizot, “L’image des autres: Anglais et continentaux au siècle des Lumières,” *La Grande-Bretagne et l’Europe des Lumières*, ed. Serge Soupel (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1996) 15-23.

²⁵ Napoléon Bonaparte, “Proclamation d’Avesnes” (14 May 1815), Napoléon Bonaparte, *Oeuvres littéraires et écrits militaires*, ed. Jean Tulard, vol. 3 (Paris: Tchou, 2001).

Perfidious Albion Revisited

Pillet's book acquired immediate fame in France partly because of a police ban and the date of its publication: September 1815, when Wellington ordered his soldiers to remove works of art in the Louvre seized by French armies in the Netherlands, thus causing general Parisian indignation against the English.²⁶ Soon, the book was translated into English for American readers still smarting from the second war of American independence (June 1812 – February 1815).²⁷ An added attraction was that the short chapters were easy to read. Pillet's tone is forthright and he presents himself as an authority on his subject: he had probably acquired fluency in the language, which enables him to quote directly from the British press.

That the book can be placed in the long line of French Anglophobic tradition is undeniable. Pierre Reboul in *Le Mythe anglais dans la littérature française sous la Restauration* has discerned two phases in the development of the *mythe*, which he defines as "a whole body of disjointed knowledge, independent from truth, unified and driven by feelings and designs," national myths functioning "less as a way to know foreigners better than as a way or test to morally unify a country."²⁸ Pillet's sixty chapters are indeed disjointed, except for the eight chapters which deal with the prison ships, which are sandwiched between one on "English clergy" and another on "Designs of England on Europe." In terms of Reboul's scheme, Pillet is typical of the first group of writers who resumed contact with Britain and tended to present a negative view of a country whose army occupied France until 1818.²⁹ From the dedication onwards, Pillet gives grounds for his Royalist critics to run his book down: he is accused first of exaggeration. How can he put forward the figure of 150,000 dead? And claim that 30,000 disabled soldiers and sailors were sent to France only when they were on the brink of death? (vi) We know today that the number of deaths amounted to 13,000 and

²⁶ G. De Berthier de Sauvigny, *Nouvelle Histoire de Paris – La Restauration* (Paris: Hachette, 1977) 428; François Crouzet, *De la Supériorité de l'Angleterre sur la France* (Paris: Perrin, 1985) 435; Philippe Mansel, *Paris between Empires 1814-1852* (New York: St Martin's, 2003) 94-96; Pierre Reboul, *Le Mythe anglais dans la littérature française sous la Restauration* (Lille: Bibliothèque Universitaire, 1962) 15.

²⁷ René-Martin Pillet, *Views of England, During a Residence of Ten years; Six of Them as a Prisoner of War* (Boston: Parmenter and Norton, 1818). For a recent English comment on Pillet's book, see Rachel Schulkins, *Keats, Modesty and Masturbation* (London: Routledge, 2014) 28.

²⁸ Reboul 2. My translation.

²⁹ Reboul 11-115.

that British authorities were better off sending back invalids rather than feeding them to the end.³⁰

His attacks on sexual mores focus on every class, from the Royal Family downwards: adultery is said to be the norm among (unhappily) married couples, English women are second-class subjects, killing them is left unpunished, selling them is a barbaric custom (226).³¹ He deplores that contraception has spread “at an alarming rate in the lower class” (233-34);³² abortions likewise. Contraception is taught in young ladies’ academies; poor girls are raped in workhouses or made to declare bastard children so the parish would not have to take them in (256); incest is rife, girls shamelessly hunt husbands; the poorer ones copulate in churchyards: “There, many a girl, because of her promiscuity, has become a mother too, on the grave of the woman who gave birth to her” (236).³³

Critics find fault with his omissions: Manchester and cities of the industrial revolution are not mentioned; he failed to notice or acknowledge the efforts to restore morality to public life by Methodists in the eighteenth century and by Church of England Evangelicals at the beginning of the nineteenth. For instance, no sooner are John Howard and his efforts on behalf of prisoners mentioned than Pillet finds fault with him for having cast aspersions on the French prison system (372). He is also caught contradicting himself, on the one hand appreciative of English agriculture, on the other hand trotting out old chestnuts about the only ripe apples being cooked ones (470-71). And he draws invidious comparisons with France: unlike in sex-crazed Britain, Frenchmen are considerate (482-83), and it is better to be “a fickle French husband than a murderous English one” (231).³⁴ The Catholic clergy wisely does not encourage the reading of the Old Testament, where (supposedly) obscene passages might give ideas to wise French virgins (331).

More importantly, Pillet adumbrates the second phase of the myth outlined by Reboul, providing the key that was to give coherence to the myth when knowledge about Britain improved after 1818. In his prefaces and satirical poems,

³⁰ Chamberlain 179; Le Carvèse 67.

³¹ Cruelty to women and animals became woven into the works of later cartoonists, e.g. Cham, *Mœurs britanniques* (Paris: Aubert, 1850). Plate 1 “une femme bien attachée” (a well-tied woman, i.e., wife-selling); Plate 7 “philanthropie bien entendue” (well-understood philanthropy, i.e., wife-beating).

³² [Cette science] “se propage d’une manière effrayante dans la classe du peuple.”

³³ “C’est là que plus d’une fille, par suite de son libertinage, est devenue mère à son tour, sur la tombe de celle qui lui avait donné le jour.”

³⁴ “Les Français sont [...] inconstants dans leurs amours [...] mais ils commettent rarement des crimes dans leurs folies amoureuses.”

Byron explained away contradictory aspects of English political, social and cultural life by putting them down to cant or hypocrisy.³⁵ In *L'Angleterre*, similar contradictions abound. How, for instance, could English public spirit accord with the inhumanity to man, woman, French prisoners and animals denounced in most chapters of the book? How could Sunday worship be both a way of putting the lower classes on their best behaviour and a mask for atheists? Pillet had already prepared his fellow countrymen for Byron's explanation: philanthropy was really vanity; children were hypocrites, feigning obedience but torturing animals; camouflaging words referring to undergarments was a ridiculous attempt at preserving feminine modesty; prostitutes visiting ship-bound sailors had to declare they were their sisters (483-84, 131-32, 265-66, 329, 359).

Against a background of rising nationalistic prejudices kept alive by Napoleonic propaganda³⁶ as well as colonial and commercial rivalry, hypocrisy was coupled with selfishness, as England was accused of defending her propertied classes' interests whatever the cost for populations at home or abroad.

To take some other examples of myth-building, Pillet's only allusion to the industrial revolution is the Luddite riots of 1811-12, when workers tried to destroy labour-saving machinery held responsible for unemployment and low pay. Pillet ascribes the riots to governmental *agents provocateurs* setting out to exploit workers' dissatisfaction (138-43). Election of Parliamentary opposition is interpreted merely a ploy to gain time, thus forestalling rightful demands, like those of Irish Catholics (114-18). In British colonies, Pillet hints that the British government had planned setting up English manufactures to bypass Napoleon's blockade, thus ruining local trade initiatives. Elsewhere, he says the economies of the West Indies, Egypt, India and Portugal were threatened by Britain striving to keep access to raw materials and ply her own wares (434-53).

As for France, Pillet considers that his country was vanquished not by the British army but by English subsidies to France's enemies. Britain flouted peace conventions, like that of Cintra: Pillet was taken prisoner when he believed he should have been freed (ix). The Cabinet of St James was behind the unconscionable conditions imposed on France at the Congress of Vienna (114).

³⁵ Reboul 149-53, 256-58, 328; Ben Wilson, *Decency and Disorder: The Age of Cant, 1789-1837* (London: Faber, 2007).

³⁶ Barère de Vieuzac, who is credited with popularizing the expression "perfidie Albion" (Crouzet 435), was the founding editor of *Le Mémorial antibritannique* (1803-1807), funded by Napoleon's government. See also Martin Cornick, "The Myth of 'Perfidious Albion' and French National Identity," *Statecraft and Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century: Essays Presented to P.M.H. Bell*, ed. David Dutton (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995) 7-33.

Pillet summarises Britain's relations to other countries as follows: "There is no nation in the world that knows better how to take advantage of its own assets, of the mistakes of its neighbours, of the good faith of its allies and of the errors of its enemies" (18).³⁷ He anticipates Palmerston's famous comment in his 1848 speech in the House of Commons: "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow."³⁸

The point he consistently insists on, however, is that eighteenth-century French Anglomania was a form of English "soft power," as we would say nowadays, an ideological strategy, with the more or less deliberate complicity of French cultural elites, for bringing instability to his country by undermining French self-esteem. Ironically, he had no way of knowing that the years 1815 to 1830 would witness the peak of Anglomania in French history, especially in the cultural domain.³⁹

When his book was published, Pillet could not have foreseen either that Waterloo would be the last battle between French and British armies. From then on, the two nations would be allies, for better or for worse. However, the myth of "perfidie Albion" persisted in many quarters of French public opinion, right through to the Fashoda incident and the Boer War, and the Vichy regime of the Second World War. And yet, today, there are many well-tended memorial sites relating to the French presence on British shores during the Napoleonic Wars. Chateaubriand has a blue plaque in London on the house where he lived as an émigré, and local historians and councils in other towns have marked out many more places where French prisoners suffered, whether on parole, in jail or on a prison ship.⁴⁰

Given the controversial legacy of Pillet's book, it is salutary to note, by way of conclusion, that on 17 November 2018, tribute was paid at Chatham Maritime

³⁷ "Il n'est pas de nation au monde qui sache profiter de tous ses avantages, des erreurs de ses voisins, de la bonne foi de ses alliés, des écarts de ses ennemis."

³⁸ Hansard HC Deb. vol. 97 cols. 66-123, 1 March 1848, available at <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/sittings/1848/mar/01>.

³⁹ See Gilles Soubigou, "La littérature britannique et les milieux artistiques français (1789-1830). Réception, traduction, création: l'invention d'un imaginaire romantique," doctoral dissertation, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2016.

⁴⁰ For example, Yelverton History Society; Portsmouth City Council; H.M. Prison Dartmoor Museum; Peterborough Museum (Norman Cross Gallery); Portchester Castle; Rochester Guildhall Museum (which has a full-size reconstruction of part of a Medway prison ship). For research purposes, the best resources are the National Archives at Kew and the Caird Library and Archive at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich.

in Kent to the French soldiers and sailors who died in captivity on board hulks during the Napoleonic wars. The inscription on the memorial reads as follows:

Here are gathered together the remains of many brave soldiers and sailors who having once been foes, afterwards the captives of England, now find rest in her soil, remembering no more the animosities of war or the sorrows of imprisonment. They were deprived of the consolation of closing their eyes amongst the countrymen they loved, but have been laid in an honourable grave by a nation which knows how to respect valour and to sympathise with misfortune.