

## **“PARIS TO A STRANGER IS A DESERT FULL OF KNAVES & WHORES – LIKE LONDON:” THOMAS MANNING’S EUROPEAN ENCOUNTER, 1802-1805**

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*Thomas Manning (1772-1840), like many of his countrymen, took advantage of the Peace of Amiens to cross the Channel and visit France in 1802. In his thirtieth year, this Norfolk-born son of an affluent Anglican Rector arrived in France with good connections and broad horizons. A friend of Charles Lamb, and acquaintance of Coleridge, Manning was well-placed to enjoy Paris’s famous salon culture; and its allure is apparent in the letters he sent to his father and to Lamb. These social circles served as a stimulus to creativity, but were also a vital means of knowledge-sharing, networking and introduction. Manning arrived in Paris with several ambitious (if somewhat nebulous) cultural objectives, chief among which was to begin the study of the Chinese language – the first step towards a broader study of Chinese history and society. But Paris, a major centre for European mathematics, was also somewhere Manning hoped he could find new inspiration for the mathematical research he had continued after leaving Cambridge in 1795. It further served as the base for a typically idiosyncratic “Grand Tour,” which provided an opportunity for Manning to record his sociological and anthropological observations on rural locales. After eighteen months on the Continent, and on the cusp of returning to England, he was interned at Angers due to the resumption of war with Britain. Not until the end of his third year in France did he receive special permission to leave the country. Making original use of archival sources, this article contextualizes Manning’s Chinese project amid his myriad intellectual pursuits – mathematical, linguistic, sociological and anthropological – and suggests that it be understood as part of the wider zeitgeist of cultural reform.*

Thomas Manning (1772-1840) was one of Britain’s first scholars of Chinese. He is known for his travels in Asia, particularly his journey through Tibet in 1811-12,

where he was the first Englishman to visit Lhasa and meet the Dalai Lama.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere I have shown how Manning's youthful experiences of travel helped inform his later interpretation of Asiatic cultures.<sup>2</sup> This article considers the range of Manning's pursuits while living in Europe, chiefly Paris, in the early 1800s, and their significance to his wider project. Its main sources are Manning's letters to his friend Charles Lamb, first published in the 1920s, and the letters to his father that were acquired by the Royal Asiatic Society in 2015 and have now been published online in digital facsimiles.<sup>3</sup>

In 1792, George III had sent an Embassy to China under Lord Macartney, but until that time British knowledge about China had come almost entirely via the Continent, chiefly from the reports of Jesuits who had spent time in China as missionaries. Their writings on Chinese history and culture had helped foster the image in Enlightenment Europe of a prosperous empire governed by reason and virtue, which inspired admiration from Voltaire and Leibniz. When Manning decided to devote himself to the study of China it was therefore natural that he should look first to France for sources of information. Ten years earlier, the organizers of the Macartney Embassy had tried the same thing: unable to find anyone within the British Empire who could speak Chinese, they had scoured Paris (unsuccessfully) for someone to act as an interpreter.<sup>4</sup>

Manning's intention to travel to China is first mentioned in correspondence with Lamb in 1801,<sup>5</sup> and in January 1802 he took advantage of the Peace of Amiens to travel to France. Studying Chinese was only one of Manning's objectives

<sup>1</sup> See Lawrence Wang-chi Wong, "'We are as babies under nurses': Thomas Manning (1772-1840) and Sino-British Relations in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Translation Studies*, 1.1 (2017): 85-136. Other recent discussions of Manning's connection with China can be found in Stephen Platt, *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China's Last Golden Age* (London: Atlantic, 2018); and Jürgen Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Edward Weech, "'All the beauties of the road': Thomas Manning's Romantic Visions, from the Lakes to Tibet, 1799-1812," *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 167 (Spring 2018): 7-17.

<sup>3</sup> Available at <https://royalasiaticcollections.org/thomas-manning-archive>. References below marked "RAS TM" are to items from this archive. Manning's letters to Lamb are quoted from Gertrude Anderson (ed.), *The Letters of Thomas Manning to Charles Lamb* (London: Secker, 1925), cited below as Anderson, *Letters*; digital facsimiles are available via the University of Kentucky's Explore UK portal at <https://exploreuk.uky.edu/>.

<sup>4</sup> The Embassy eventually recruited two Chinese men from a Catholic College in Naples. See Platt 20-22.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Lamb's letter of 31 August 1801, *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E.V. Lucas, 7 vols. (London: Methuen, 1905) 6:223.

in visiting Paris, however, and I will argue that it formed part of a wider – albeit vaguely defined – cultural project that also drew upon mathematics, literature and sociology. The development of his project was shaped, too, by a series of personal encounters which are vividly documented in his letters and are illustrative of the workings of Romantic sociability. With its primarily intellectual and cultural, rather than political or entrepreneurial, motivations, the case of Manning forms an interesting contrast to the other examples of transnational mobility and expatriate experience examined in this volume.

### **Romantic Sociability**

Manning initially seems to have hoped to stay on the Continent for a year or eighteen months, but with the likely length of the Peace uncertain, his plans had an indefinite quality. After arriving in Paris, Manning was, he writes, “mortified” by the failure of his first introduction, to the botanist Étienne Pierre Ventenat.<sup>6</sup> When Manning called upon him, Ventenat was “very civil,” but that was all: his letter of introduction from a contact in London “did not produce the effects which so warm & recommendatory a letter of introduction naturally ought.”<sup>7</sup> Feeling insecure, Manning described to his father his nervousness and irritation as he sought to find his feet amid new surroundings, and in the meantime he looked to more familiar faces such as the physician George Leman Tuthill, who was visiting Paris with his wife, and the radical playwright Thomas Holcroft.<sup>8</sup> Manning also met two young Whigs who were soon to be returned to the House of Commons, Lord Henry Petty and Henry Parnell.<sup>9</sup> Yet he was determined to persevere with his “plans for acquaintance,” and not to spend too much time among English company: “I avoid it carefully – I know that in spite of my care I shall at last have too much of it.”<sup>10</sup>

Manning’s attempts to make inroads into French society began with an introduction to François-René de Chateaubriand, who was immersed in finishing

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 66. The introduction was provided by a man named Martinet, who had an address on the Strand in London (RAS TM 3/2/1).

<sup>7</sup> RAS TM 1/1/12.

<sup>8</sup> RAS TM 1/1/12.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess of Lansdowne, and Henry Parnell, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Congleton, great-uncle of Charles Stewart Parnell. “Yesterday Ld H. Petty brought with him Mr Parnell (of the Irish family) who, I find is desirous of being acquainted with me. I just knew him at Cambridge, he is a very amiable & sensible man, & I expect great pleasure in associating with him.” RAS TM 1/1/12.

<sup>10</sup> RAS TM 1/1/12.

his *Génie du christianisme*: to meet him was “the same as to be introduced to all the persons of belles lettres in Paris.” Chateaubriand had already introduced Tuthill to Madame de Staël, and Manning noted that she “is considered here as a very great woman, & receives all the literati at her house”: “all the known world goes there, & some besides.”<sup>11</sup> Manning was later offered an introduction to Volney, the Orientalist scholar and philosopher, which he reluctantly declined after falling out with his intermediary.<sup>12</sup>

An early highlight of Manning’s time in Paris was a sighting, at Holcroft’s, of Thomas Paine. While the Peace of Amiens allowed Manning to visit France, it also enabled Paine to leave, and he was about to return to the United States.

The only great man I have seen in private at least that I consider as at all great, is Tom Paine! Him I consider as by no means occupying so high a situation in the Temple of Fame as he deserves, & will, I think attain.<sup>13</sup>

Manning’s enthusiasm for Paine suggests his liberal sympathies. Though Manning himself did not get the opportunity to talk with Paine, Holcroft described his conversation as “impregnated with the same masculine sense that so eminently distinguishes his writings.” Manning observes that Paine’s “manner & appearance is that of a gentleman of the old school, which I did not expect,” but his report discreetly omits to mention the well-documented impact Paine’s notorious drinking had had on his complexion: “It was towards evening, & I could scarcely distinguish his face.”<sup>14</sup>

At Holcroft’s, Manning met the literary critic and linguist William Taylor of Norwich, a prominent translator and commentator on German literature, well known for his political radicalism. Manning describes Taylor as “a pleasant man, of considerable talents, & a very cultivated mind.”<sup>15</sup> For his part, Taylor wrote to his cousin:

I dined at Holcroft’s with Tom Paine, and met there a Mr. Manning, a friend of Robert Woodhouse, with whom I soon became – I may now say, I think – intimate. In power of mind and amiableness of temper he has few

<sup>11</sup> RAS TM 1/1/12-13.

<sup>12</sup> RAS TM 1/1/20.

<sup>13</sup> RAS TM 1/1/12.

<sup>14</sup> RAS TM 1/1/12.

<sup>15</sup> RAS TM 1/1/15.

equals; he is a superior mathematician and Grecian, and is learning Chinese.<sup>16</sup>

While Manning's knowledge of mathematics and Greek marked him as an educated man, it was his interest in Chinese that set him apart. It would certainly have provided a ready topic for conversation in the *salons* of Paris.

Taylor continued: "We have found out that we both know every tree on Diss Common, and consider the water-lilies of the Waveney as 'redolent of joy and youth.'"<sup>17</sup> This was no mere coincidence, as both men had spent their youth in that vicinity. Taylor had studied under Rochemont and Anna Letitia Barbauld at Palgrave Academy, a stone's throw away from the town of Diss. This was where Manning grew up, having been born in nearby Broome, situated on the north bank of the River Waveney. Manning's father, the Rector of Diss, was a prominent, liberal-minded clergyman friendly with local Dissenters like the Barbaulds and Taylors. Indeed, seventeen years earlier Manning's father had read one of his precocious son's letters to Rochemont, who generously praised it in a "handsome manner."<sup>18</sup>

As well as meeting Whigs like Petty and Parnell, and radicals like Holcroft and Taylor, Manning spent time in Paris with Dissenters and abolitionists such as Helen Maria Williams and Amelia Opie.<sup>19</sup> Opie, like Taylor, was from Norwich, while Paine himself was originally from Thetford, near Diss. As David Chandler has noted, the idea of Norwich as a literary centre "still tends to provoke surprise," but between 1780 and 1800 the city had "experienced an extraordinary cultural efflorescence," becoming one of the main literary centres in Great Britain outside London.<sup>20</sup> Manning's Norfolk Whig background eased his way amid such company, and helped shape the sociable circles and sources of information he could access. It is worth noting, for example, that Manning's introduction to Dr Joseph Hager, Keeper of Oriental manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale, was facilitated by William Taylor. Manning was not, by temperament, a political animal, and he did not share the political emphasis of some of his friends and acquaintances. But the wider context within which his project began to take shape was one characterized by a desire for cultural renewal and social reform.

<sup>16</sup> J.W. Robberds (ed.), *A Memoir of the Life and Writings of William Taylor of Norwich*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1843) 1:409.

<sup>17</sup> Robberds (ed.) 1:409.

<sup>18</sup> RAS TM 1/1/1.

<sup>19</sup> RAS TM 1/1/14, 1/1/22.

<sup>20</sup> David Chandler, "'The Athens of England': Norwich as a Literary Centre in the Late Eighteenth Century," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 43.2 (2010): 173-74.

## The Context of Manning's Chinese studies

When Manning met him, Joseph Hager was working on a Chinese dictionary under the patronage of Napoleon. Hager was an experienced linguist, but his claims as a Sinologist were modest at best, and his work would later be roundly dismissed by Orientalists such as Antonio Montucci and Julius Klaproth.<sup>21</sup> Manning, however, had no yardstick by which to gauge Hager's Chinese erudition. Innocent of the controversies of European Sinology, he predicted that "the Dr & I shall probably become intimate, as I am learning the Chinese tongue, & so curious a language is a greater bond of union among men, than even freemasonry."<sup>22</sup> Manning had previously been offered an introduction (which did not take place) to "a man who has travelled in the interior of China, & who is acquainted with Chinese manners – a subject that much interests me."<sup>23</sup> Manning's intermediary in this case was an Englishman named Mr Gillet, who apparently ran a workhouse near Brussels.<sup>24</sup> Gillet introduced Manning to Maria Cosway, but had to leave Paris shortly after. It seems most likely that Gillet intended to introduce Manning to Hager, and simply had his wires crossed about Hager having travelled in China. It is possible that Gillet knew of another individual with China-related expertise, perhaps a returned missionary. But Manning would surely have sought out such an individual after Gillet left, and he makes no mention of doing so.

Manning's interest in Chinese studies was complemented by a zeal for absorbing new knowledge across the arts and sciences, and he attended public lectures on chemistry, literature and zoology by Fourcroy, Jean-François de La Harpe and Georges Cuvier. But one lecturer in particular caught his interest: Joseph de Maimieux, a French nobleman "who has invented a new language, which he calls Pasigraphie."<sup>25</sup> De Maimieux's pasigraphy was an attempt to develop a universal writing system, using symbols to represent concepts, instead of an alphabet; the idea being to help people communicate without knowing

<sup>21</sup> "Of Dr Hager's learning and talents few will entertain a doubt, but the propriety of his first deciding on the publication of a Chinese dictionary, and then commencing the study of the language, will be doubted by many." William Huttman, "A Notice of Several Chinese-European Dictionaries," *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register*, 12 (July-December 1821): 242.

<sup>22</sup> RAS TM 1/1/15.

<sup>23</sup> RAS TM 1/1/13. In this and other quotations from Manning's letters, I reproduce his use of non-standard spelling.

<sup>24</sup> RAS TM 1/1/14.

<sup>25</sup> RAS TM 1/1/13.

each other's language. Manning found this intriguing, perhaps struck by ostensible similarities between pasigraphy and Chinese logographs. Manning undertook a brief study of pasigraphy, even lodging with De Maimieux for a time.<sup>26</sup>

As well as pursuing the study of Chinese, and keeping up with the latest developments in literature and the natural sciences, Manning sought to make new connections with French mathematicians. Manning had a strong background in mathematics: enrolled at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, between 1790 and 1795, he was expected to graduate as Second Wrangler<sup>27</sup> before his refusal to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England meant he could not take his degree.<sup>28</sup> Manning published a mathematical textbook in two volumes between 1796 and 1798,<sup>29</sup> and after leaving University he continued to reside in Cambridge, tutoring students. Manning made the acquaintance of Francis Maseres and was friendly with Robert Woodhouse, the young Cambridge mathematician who would later play a major role in bringing British mathematics up-to-date with Continental systems.<sup>30</sup>

One of Manning's priorities upon arriving in Paris was to write to Joseph-Louis Lagrange concerning a mathematical theorem, and he was disgruntled not to receive a reply. Manning wanted to know:

whence I might find the demonstration of a certain theorem, to which [Lagrange] has never sent any answer – & the question is important to me – as, I believe, no one has ever demonstrated the theorem satisfactorily, & I possess in my mind a genuine demonstration.<sup>31</sup>

Manning does not specify what theorem he had in mind. However, an undated letter to Francis Maseres – probably sent around 1800 – contains a demonstration of a theorem on curves ("not one of the moderns can I find, that treats the subject of curve lines in a logical manner").<sup>32</sup> It is possible that Manning wrote to Lagrange

<sup>26</sup> RAS TM 1/1/14.

<sup>27</sup> The second-highest scoring student in his year.

<sup>28</sup> Sir Clements Markham, "Biographical Sketch of Thomas Manning," *Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet, and of the Journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa* (London: Trübner, 1876) clv.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Manning, *An Introduction to Arithmetic and Algebra* (Cambridge: B. Flower, 1796-98).

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Phillips, "Robert Woodhouse and the Evolution of Cambridge Mathematics," *History of Science*, 44 (2006): 69-93.

<sup>31</sup> RAS TM 1/1/12.

<sup>32</sup> Cambridge University Library, MS Add. 7886/177.

to solicit further feedback regarding this demonstration. Manning also wrote to Lamb that “I have formed a *little* acquaintance with the *great* Carnot, whom I find very pleasant.”<sup>33</sup> Manning paints an affectionate and respectful portrait of Lazare Carnot, “one of the 1st rate mathematicians both in reality & by estimation,”<sup>34</sup> which is a far cry from the “sanguinary tyrant” described by Edmund Burke in 1796.<sup>35</sup> Manning was trying to finish “a little mathematical work which I intend to send to Carnot in manuscript.”<sup>36</sup> Carnot had published a work on geometry in 1801,<sup>37</sup> and Manning may have been pursuing the same problem to which he alluded in his earlier approach to Lagrange. Manning visited Carnot on at least two occasions, in May and June 1802, observing that he was unique in his readiness to vote against Napoleon: a “very disinterested man, he is much looked up to here.”<sup>38</sup>

## Napoleon

Napoleon was a recurring figure in Manning’s correspondence during early 1802. Catching a glimpse of “Bonaparte” was one of Manning’s chief objects in Paris, as it was for so many other curious British tourists. In early February, when Manning saw Napoleon reviewing the troops at the Tuileries Palace it “brought such a flood of sensations & reflections into my mind as almost overpowered me.”<sup>39</sup> A month later, he had a closer view:

I had a ticket for the last review to be admitted into the antichambers, where Bonaparte passes. I had an excellent view of him both in his going out & his returning – what a God like countenance he has! His demeanour to the spectators was very affable & unaffected – I have so exalted an idea of him as a great man, that when he passed & turned his face to the party where I stood, I had a violent emotion even to tears. Much is said against him here – somethings perhaps justly – others certainly not – & this in justice works such a counteraction in my mind, as breeds in me a most violent attachment to him.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 77.

<sup>34</sup> RAS TM 1/1/14.

<sup>35</sup> Edmund Burke, *Two Letters Addressed to a Member of the Present Parliament, on the Proposals for Peace with the Regicide Directory of France* (London: Rivington, 1796) 33.

<sup>36</sup> RAS TM 1/1/15.

<sup>37</sup> Lazare Carnot, *De la corrélation des figures de géométrie* (Paris: Duprat, 1801).

<sup>38</sup> RAS TM 1/1/15.

<sup>39</sup> RAS TM 1/1/12.

<sup>40</sup> RAS TM 1/1/13.



Such effusions provoked ribbing from Lamb, who wanted to know, "What god does he most resemble? Mars, Bacchus, or Apollo?"<sup>41</sup> Lamb's joke, invoking the Roman pantheon, refers to a pre-Christian world where religion rested, not on the idea of moral equality, but on an assumption of natural inequality.<sup>42</sup> Did this imply a deeper criticism to complement his raillery of Manning's "violent attachment"? Clearly Manning was aware that some were dissatisfied with Napoleon's rule, and he rationalized the oppressions of his administration as "very far from being needless."<sup>43</sup> No doubt Wordsworth would have reckoned that such adulation placed Manning among those "men of prostrate mind,"<sup>44</sup> but his enthusiasm waned under the impact of the Napoleonic Wars of the later decade, and never reached a pitch of Hazlittian ardour. Nevertheless, returning from China in 1817, Manning was permitted an interview with the incarcerated Napoleon at St Helena, and the prisoner was reportedly moved by Manning's use of the forbidden form of address, "l'Empereur."<sup>45</sup>

### Literary Undertakings and Relations with Lamb

Manning's time in Paris was significant for the development of his friendship with Lamb. Besides his father, Lamb now emerged as Manning's chief interlocutor and correspondent. Manning and Lamb's correspondence has been fruitfully discussed with regard to ideas about "Romantic Englishness," and their contrasting efforts to integrate (or not) the idea of China into English identity.<sup>46</sup> While Manning sought a more sophisticated appreciation of Chinese

<sup>41</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 75.

<sup>42</sup> See the discussion of the difference between Christian morality and that of ancient rationalism in Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2014) 60-63.

<sup>43</sup> RAS TM 1/1/13.

<sup>44</sup> "Lords, lawyers, statesmen, squires of low degree, / Men known, and men unknown, sick, lame, and blind, / Post forward all, like creatures of one kind, / With first-fruit offerings crowd to bend the knee / In France, before the new-born Majesty." William Wordsworth, "Calais, August 1802," *Complete Poetical Works* (Philadelphia: Kay and Troutman, 1848) 211.

<sup>45</sup> A.J. Dunkin, "Thomas Manning, Esq.," *Gentleman's Magazine* (July 1840): 99.

<sup>46</sup> See David Higgins, *Romantic Englishness: Local, National, and Global Selves, 1780-1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 146-56. Manning's contribution to British Romanticism is also addressed in Felicity James, "Thomas Manning, Charles Lamb, and Oriental Encounters," *Poetica*, 76 (2011): 21-35; and Peter Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange 1760-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 169-78.

civilization which might enhance British culture, Lamb's self-satirizing parochialism encompassed not only China – which one might expect – but also France. When Manning arrived in France, Lamb wanted to know “have you seen a man guillotined yet? Is it as good as a hanging? Are the women *all* painted, and the men *all* monkeys?”<sup>47</sup> And when Manning asked Lamb to help distract him from thoughts of China and “Independent Tartary,” Lamb averred that “The Tatars, really, are a cold, insipid, smouchey set. You’ll be sadly moped (if you are not eaten) among them.”<sup>48</sup>

But for all their differences in outlook, Manning and Lamb elicited the best from each other's literary style. Lamb appreciated his friend's ability to conjure dramatic insights from the minutiae of humdrum reality. In January 1802, Manning described his arrival in Boulogne:

Oh the delights of a blazing woodfire! A hot supper & generous Burgundy, after the chilling blasts of a winter sea! Oh the exquisite delight of the inside of an Inn, where every object, every utensil recalls to your mind the picture of former times! [...] rosy happy faces under antique caps, & all illuminated by the undulating blaze of a fire that laughs at Count Rumford & his God-damned Economy! Oh Lamb, I wished for you in my Journey, for you would have enjoyed the domestic scenery I was witness to & partaker in more than any man I know.<sup>49</sup>

Manning's criticism of the utilitarian “Economy” of Count Rumford was particularly well-calculated to receive Lamb's approbation.<sup>50</sup> Lamb was delighted by Manning's description, which “was exactly in that minute style which strong impressions *inspire*.”<sup>51</sup> But he was less enamoured of Manning's unflattering account of Paris. After his introduction to Ventenat failed, and feeling nervous about the quality of his French, Manning was diffident about exploring the city:

<sup>47</sup> Lamb, *Works* 6:234.

<sup>48</sup> Lamb, *Works* 6:259.

<sup>49</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 61-62.

<sup>50</sup> Sir Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford, founder of the Royal Institution, was a prolific inventor, but Manning is referring to his innovations in fireplace design, which (among other things) increased their efficiency. Rumford had also worked in Bavaria, where he established workhouses for the poor and designed “Rumford's Soup,” which was intended to provide maximal nutrition at minimal expense.

<sup>51</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 65. Lamb continues, “writing to a Frenchman, I write as a Frenchman would.”

"Paris to a stranger is a desert full of knaves & whores – like London."<sup>52</sup> Lamb – who suffered from a lifelong stutter in his speech – was unimpressed: "your damn'd philosophical indolence or indifference stung me. You cannot stir from your rooms till you know the language! What the devil! – are men nothing but word-trumpets? Are men all tongue and ear?"<sup>53</sup> But in the coming months Manning would overcome his shyness and attend fashionable *salons* and aristocratic *châteaux* quite different from the humbler haunts Lamb frequented in London. Manning would make the acquaintance of a Swiss noble family, staying with them at Liebegg Castle,<sup>54</sup> also befriending Louise Charlotte Rigaud of Vaudreuil and her husband Antoine Joseph Philippe Walsh, with whom he stayed in the Loire Valley at the Château de Serrant.<sup>55</sup>

Since the beginning of 1800, Manning had corresponded with Lamb about his play *John Woodvil*, and he continued to exert himself on its behalf while he was in Paris. He showed it to Thomas Holcroft, and reported that he "had taste enough to discover that tis full of poetry, but the plot he condemns *in toto*."<sup>56</sup> Robert Southey pronounced the same verdict, observing that *John Woodvil* "will please you by the exquisite beauty of its poetry, and provoke you by the exquisite silliness of its story."<sup>57</sup> It was perhaps with one eye on Lamb's literary career that Manning sought to study the Parisian stage, informing him that "I will give you some account of the French theatres & other interesting matters" and remarking that the French comic actors were superior to the English.<sup>58</sup> Manning also informed his father in February 1802 that a comparison of the French theatre with the English was one of his objects in Paris.<sup>59</sup> This objective seems to have fallen by the wayside, his already limited enthusiasm for the project perhaps waning once *John Woodvil* was actually published in 1802. Nevertheless, Manning continued to offer his services as a literary sounding-board for Lamb. In February 1802, Lamb requested feedback on his *Morning Post* epistle from "a Londoner," and Manning commented perspicaciously that "I like your Londoner

<sup>52</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 62.

<sup>53</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 64.

<sup>54</sup> Manning does not give the name of his host, but it seems likely to have been Katharina von Diesbach.

<sup>55</sup> RAS TM 1/1/21.

<sup>56</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 63.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Southey to Charles Danvers, 21 December 1801, *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey, Part 2: 1798-1803*, ed. Ian Packer and Lynda Pratt, Romantic Circles Electronic Edition, [www.rc.umd.edu/editions](http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions).

<sup>58</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 74.

<sup>59</sup> RAS TM 1/1/12.

very much, there is a deal of happy fancy in it, but it is not strong enough to be seen by the generality of readers. Yet if you would write a volume of Essays in the same stile you might be sure of its succeeding."<sup>60</sup>

### Manning's 'Grand' Tour

Manning's initial sojourn in Paris came to an end in July 1802. He informed Lamb that he would set off for China "next Spring," first conducting a trip to the Alps and the South of France before returning to England. Manning left Paris on Bastille Day, aware that people remarked on the oddness of his leaving at a time when so many came expressly to see the festivities. He was conflicted about his departure: "I am always entangling my affections in such a manner as to make it painful to me to quit a place."<sup>61</sup>

Manning's projected European itinerary was a sort of truncated, low-budget variation on the Grand Tour. He planned to take in some of the most important sights on what was a common tourist route for British travellers, including places that would inspire Byron, August Wilhelm Schlegel and Turner. In the end, Manning's verdict was that "The views in Switzerland are far inferior, I think, to those in the North of England."<sup>62</sup> He had visited Charles Lloyd during his honeymoon in the Lake District in the summer of 1799, and news that Charles and Mary Lamb had just visited Coleridge at Keswick invited a direct comparison:

So you have really visited the Lakes! Your Eye has reposed on the silent forms of the Mountains & on the limpid bosom of Derwentwater. You have done well – you have seen the choicest spot in Europe, compared with which the scenery in Switzerland is clumsy & graceless.<sup>63</sup>

Manning's tour took him to Milan and Geneva en route to Savoy and the south of France, ending in Toulouse by the end of September. He described to Lamb his "abundance of adventures [...] I have been a great deal on foot among the mountains – I have been lost & benighted – I have slept in outhouses & stables & beds of straw."<sup>64</sup> Manning was keen to see at first-hand how the Italian and

<sup>60</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 74.

<sup>61</sup> RAS TM 1/1/16.

<sup>62</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 80.

<sup>63</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 84.

<sup>64</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 79.

French peasantry lived, which he could compare with his observations of the British countryside in a tour of south England and Wales conducted with Tuthill the previous year. To his father, he explained that "I have travelled very quick, yet with great anxiety to make every possible observation on the manners of the country."<sup>65</sup>

Manning's experiences of casually observing the rural poor should be borne in mind when considering his stated desire to explore China. It seems likely that, oblivious to the obstacles that would stop him entering the interior of China, he envisaged repeating this sort of innocent ranging about amid ordinary people. Indeed, Manning summarized the purpose of his Chinese studies as being to provide:

[a] moral view of China; its manners; the actual degree of happiness the people enjoy; their sentiments and opinions, so far as they influence life; their literature; their history; the causes for their stability and vast population; their minor arts and contrivances; what there might be in China worthy to serve as a model for imitation, and what to serve as a beacon to avoid.<sup>66</sup>

Manning had decried the *Lyrical Ballads* to Lamb as comprising "uninteresting accounts of uninteresting things;"<sup>67</sup> but in 1802 he seems to have shared Wordsworth's egalitarian intuition that the ways of the great mass of the population were worth knowing about and documenting – though perhaps not in poetic form.

Considering his interest in "the manners of the country," it is natural that Manning was curious to observe the religious rites of the French peasantry. Napoleon's Concordat with the Vatican had recently passed, at which Manning was indignant: "My God, what a farce! In these times after the complete exposure that priestcraft has had – & in this country!"<sup>68</sup> Though more sympathetically inclined to the rights of Catholics than many of his countrymen, Manning still shared the familiar Whig suspicion of the Roman Church. While staying in Languedoc, near Toulouse, he had the opportunity to observe what, for him, were unfamiliar scenes:

<sup>65</sup> RAS TM 1/1/19.

<sup>66</sup> Manning, *Narratives* 280.

<sup>67</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 52. For a fuller discussion of Manning's reading of the *Lyrical Ballads*, see Edward Weech, "Thomas Manning and the Coleridge Circle," *Coleridge Bulletin*, 52 (Winter 2018): 27-34.

<sup>68</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 73-74.

I witnessed a burial service [...] where the superstitious peasants sung forth Latin in most doleful discordancy. But the number of mummerys during this service, the crossings, the genuflexions, the lighting of candles & distributing them to the spectators, the putting out the candles, the kissing the cross, the ringing of a little handbell, &c, was beyond anything I had an idea of.<sup>69</sup>

Manning, who came from a relatively prosperous, agrarian part of England, was accustomed to the rhythm of country life, and as such was well placed to debunk pastoral idealizations of the life of the rural poor. There is a georgic quality to his description of the Languedoc countryside: the peasants have a life of *labor*, with relatively little time for *otium*:

We talk much in England, you know, of the dances among the peasantry here – but to tell you the truth, that’s all a hum. Tis among the gentry you must look for mirth & ease. Tis the gentry that have got all the good wine (for the vin du pays that the poor people drink, is detestable) – tis they that have got all the choice fruit – tis they that have meat in abundance & every thing good to eat – tis they alone that can find a room to dance in or music to dance to. Where do you think the peasants dance? On the greens? There are very few greens or meadows in Languedoc, & what there are, they carefully preserve for the cattle. No, they dance on the naked brown soil. And at what time of day do you think? In the evening? Oh no, they are much too tired with their day’s work [...] Tis in the middle of the day, in the burning sunshine, but they very seldom dance at all (& never in winter) except on the day of their village feasts.<sup>70</sup>

After returning to Paris in late 1802, Manning – doubtless inspired by his recent travels and the opportunities they had provided for anthropological observation – became engrossed in Chinese studies for several months, further developing his plans to explore that country. From the end of October 1802 until early February 1803 he sent just one letter back to England, after which he explained to his father that his long silence was due to “a peculiar state of mind, & the circumstance that I have been so much at home engaged in reading.”<sup>71</sup> He was more candid with Lamb, explaining “I have been so occupied & am still

<sup>69</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 89.

<sup>70</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 87.

<sup>71</sup> RAS TM 1/1/23.

with plans of facilitating my entrance into China, that my ideas refuse any other channel."<sup>72</sup> Manning's letters demonstrate a familiar tension between, on the one hand, sociability and the appealing circulation of ideas, information, and people; and, on the other, the compulsion of the ambitious scholar to retreat and pursue private study in the service of his intellectual vocation. Yet that very sociability had provided access to new sources of information, and stimulated new lines of thinking.

Manning discussed a plan to embark on an overland trip to China from Russia, leaving from St Petersburg in the winter of 1803-4,<sup>73</sup> possibly as part of the mooted Russian Embassy that eventually took place under the leadership of Yuri Golovkin in 1805. His plans were upset, however, by renewed hostilities between Britain and France, which meant that he was detained in France as a "prisonnier de guerre"<sup>74</sup> through to the end of 1804. Manning was in Serrant when war broke out, and interned in the nearby town of Angers, from where he was allowed to visit his friends.<sup>75</sup> He soon began to petition the authorities for permission to return to England to pursue his voyage to China; and while waiting for these requests to bear fruit, he negotiated leave to reside in Paris to work on Chinese materials at the Bibliothèque nationale. Although his knowledge of Chinese was still rudimentary, Manning attributed the eventual granting of a passport to leave France to "the notoriety of my pursuits as a man who had destined himself to voyages of discovery."<sup>76</sup> Clearly, his time in the country had not hurt his self-esteem. The dispensation he received to leave the country was certainly exceptional, but it probably resulted from the efforts of influential friends like Carnot and Talleyrand (as one of Manning's obituaries later claimed) rather than from his fame *per se*.<sup>77</sup> Manning was finally free to leave France in December 1804, and he returned to England in January 1805; not until the end of April 1806 did he eventually leave for China.

An assessment of the significance of Manning's time in France has to allow that the intellectual projects he undertook were imperfectly realized. Whatever Chinese studies he could conduct with Joseph Hager must necessarily have been introductory and superficial, while his mathematical enterprises met with limited success. But to consider these in isolation would be mistaken. Manning was participating in a wider intellectual milieu that was dedicated to the invigoration

<sup>72</sup> Anderson, *Letters* 90.

<sup>73</sup> RAS TM 1/1/25.

<sup>74</sup> RAS TM 3/1/2.

<sup>75</sup> RAS TM 1/1/26.

<sup>76</sup> RAS TM 4/5.

<sup>77</sup> Dunkin 98.

of European cultures and the exploration of new ideas. His interest in observing peasant life may have been unsophisticated, but it spoke to the same concerns that motivated more famous contemporaries who were trying to develop a more democratic and inclusive conception of culture. If looked at together, the diverse ventures Manning pursued during his time on the Continent suggest that he was part of a broader project of intellectual and cultural reform, and that his European encounter was more than the sum of its parts.