

**LITERARY REPORTER OR DISSENTING AUTOBIOGRAPHER? EDITING HENRY
CRABB ROBINSON'S *REMINISCENCES***

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« [Plato] affirmed that all our Knowledge is Reminiscence »¹

Introduction

This paper introduces the largest of the research projects run by the Centre for Dissenting Studies: the Henry Crabb Robinson Project. This is a project to edit Robinson's (1775-1867) still relatively little-known manuscript *Diary*, *Reminiscences*, and other writings. The primary editors are Timothy Whelan (Georgia Southern University) and James Vigus (Queen Mary University of London). We have assembled a team of nine special editors, each of whom will contribute an essay to an introductory collection on their area of expertise, and will provide some annotations, biographies, and consultations. This project is necessarily team-based, owing to the vast extent of the material and its thematic complexity, and for the same reason we have also appointed an advisory board; the editors and advisors convened at a workshop last summer at Dr Williams's Library to launch the Project. The nineteenth-century edition of Robinson's writings, a highly selective and often inaccurate work by the Unitarian minister Thomas Sadler first published in 1867, describes Robinson as « barrister-at-law ». He did indeed become so in 1813, but he practised as a barrister for only fifteen years before retiring with reasonably comfortable gentleman's means, and much of the rest of his 92-year life was dedicated to writing on a great range of topics. Although Robinson destroyed many of his papers before his death, what remains is an extensive manuscript legacy, most of it held at Dr Williams's Library, London. As I briefly outline the publications that our project aims to produce, the nature of the texts and the task should become clear to you. I should note that I am primarily discussing nineteenth-century manuscripts, but I hope that its relevance to the eighteenth century and so to the concerns of this seminar will gradually appear.

The projected publications may be summarised in two sections, print and online²:

A Publications under contract to Oxford University Press:

Phase One:

1. Henry Crabb Robinson, *Reminiscences* (composed 1843-1859), 4 vols, 2018.
2. Henry Crabb Robinson, *Early Miscellaneous Diaries* (composed 1790-1810), 2018. This volume, consisting of pocket books, memorandum

¹ Henry Crabb Robinson, « Letters on the Philosophy of Kant No. 4. » (1803), in *Essays on Kant, Schelling, and German Aesthetics*, ed. James Vigus (London: MHRA, 2010), p. 47.

² See also <http://www.english.qmul.ac.uk/drwilliams/research/crabb.html>, the Project webpage. I thank the Director (David Wykes) and Trustees of Dr Williams's Library for their kind permission to quote from manuscript material in the Henry Crabb Robinson collection. Thanks also go to Timothy Whelan for his comments on a draft of this paper.

books, a travel diary, and diaries kept partially in German, may be postponed to Phase Two.

3. *Introductory Essays on Henry Crabb Robinson*, ed. by Whelan and Vigus, 2018.

Chapter topics: Politics (Mark Philp); Law (Michael Lobban); The Victorians (Joanne Shattock); Autobiography (Eugene Stelzig); The Romantics (Stephen Burley); Theatre (David O'Shaughnessy); Spain (Karen Racine); Travel (Karen Junod); Books and their Writers (Philipp Hunnekuhl); Germany (James Vigus); Religion and Dissenting Culture (Timothy Whelan).

Phases Two and Three:

Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary*, including the Travel Diaries, c. 30 vols.

At present the first half of the Diary (1811-38) is scheduled for publication in 2023, the second half (1839-1867) in 2028.

B Supporting the print publications, and dependent upon funding, will be electronic resources on the website of the Centre for Dissenting Studies maintained by Queen Mary, University of London, with the following contents:

- Introduction to and information about the Project
- Raw, i.e. unedited transcriptions of the Reminiscences, Diary, and Early Diaries
- Images and transcriptions of Robinson's published articles and other writings
- Images and transcriptions of Robinson's correspondence (largely held at Dr Williams's Library)
- Biographical database eventually containing c. 5,000 names
- Further features to include bibliographies, indexes of places and events, search function, forum.

Various aspects of the Robinson archive, such as the correspondence and the travel diaries, could become editorial projects in their own right. We envisage that around 60,000 images in total, owned by Dr Williams's Library, will appear on the site.

It is clear that the full publication of this material will provide extensive new resources to scholars working in many different fields. What I want to discuss now, however, is how the new edition will transform our understanding of Robinson himself, considered as an autobiographer rather than simply as a source of information about others. This is an especially important topic with regard to the *Reminiscences*, the centrepiece of Phase One of the Project. Eugene Stelzig, in his recent book *Henry Crabb Robinson in Germany*, has emphasised the value of Robinson's life writing, which stands in need of recovery from his own self-effacement, abetted by previous editors. The selections from his *Diary* made by Edith Morley in the 1920s and 30s established Robinson's reputation as principally an anecdotal commentator on the great writers of his time. In the 1960s, Hertha Marquardt's work *Henry Crabb Robinson und seine deutschen Freunde* revealed another aspect of Robinson's sociability; but just as Morley was uninterested in Robinson's dissenting background and his relationship to spiritual autobiography, so Marquardt neglected the philosophical studies that informed Robinson's

pioneering engagement with German culture³. Our edition will remove such filters, so to speak, and thus in addition to bringing to light in full his commentaries on many aspects of his times, will establish Robinson as one of the major nineteenth-century autobiographers. Not least, our edition will enable a fuller reconstruction of intellectual dissenting networks than has been possible before. Hence the revolution in critical perspective summarised in the title of my paper: Robinson was not merely a reporter on literary texts and personalities, but rather that was only one of the many roles that one could subsume under the heading of dissenting autobiographer.

It is in the nature of a large and ambitious edition that scholarly conventions and decisions about presentation take on considerable importance. We aim to produce a text that accurately reflects the informal nature of Robinson's manuscripts, with variant spellings and colloquial style of punctuation – consisting primarily of dashes – generally retained, but superscripts and some abbreviations removed to enable unhindered reading of the printed volumes, in just the same way that a reader might peruse (say) the diary of Samuel Pepys. Explanatory notes must be brief, but the essay collection and online resources will provide scope for more detailed scholarly apparatus and argument. The editorial introductions will guide the reader through the text, and identify key moments in Robinson's self-representation, to ensure that this emerges alongside and through the stories he tells about other writers, friends and acquaintances.

Self-fashioning and self-effacement in the early *Reminiscences*

Robinson's *Reminiscences*, written in four large manuscript volumes that will be approximately mirrored in our edition, is a monumental achievement in several respects. Despite its author's complaints about the weakness of his memory, the *Reminiscences* represents a sustained feat of recollection – about which I will offer a further comment below. It is also an impressive synthesis of and selection from an almost unmanageable collection of manuscripts: it thus provides not only a self-contained life story, but also an apt introduction to the long *Diary* (which Robinson commenced in 1811), and this is one main reason we have chosen to publish the *Reminiscences* first in the series. Further, Robinson's sharp observation of character and his sense of humour emerge throughout the text, which makes the reading a pleasure. Since Robinson is scrupulously accurate, much of the annotation will be complementary to his text, adding dates, identifications of names, places and books, and so on.

³ Eugene Stelzig, *Henry Crabb Robinson in Germany: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Life Writing* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2010). Thomas Sadler (ed.), *Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson, Barrister-at-Law, F.S.A.*, 3 vols (London: Macmillan, 1869). Edith J. Morley (ed.), *Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Lamb, etc. Being Selections from the Remains of Henry Crabb Robinson* (London: Longman, and Manchester University Press, 1922). Edith J. Morley (ed.), *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, 3 vols (London: J.M. Dent, 1938). Hertha Marquardt (ed.), *Henry Crabb Robinson und seine deutschen Freunde. Brücke zwischen England und Deutschland im Zeitalter der Romantik*, 2 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964, 1967).

Editors can also look beneath the surface of a text, however. Especially given the long tradition of editing Robinson selectively, as though he were a perennial spectator, it would be all too easy to follow the lead suggested by his own modesty, and regard the narrative as proceeding from name to name rather than as narrating a life⁴. Yet the life story is a remarkable one that calls for more explanation than the text itself provides. In the early, formative part of Robinson's life, the reader gets to know (through very critical adult eyes) a boy who apparently suffered a disastrously limited provincial, dissenting education. It may then come as a surprise that Robinson, after such a start in life, moved to Germany in 1800, enrolled at the University of Jena in 1802, and became the principal pioneer in mediating German philosophy and literature to England. I will briefly discuss below the moment, in 1804, at which he joins a socially and intellectually elite circle, providing successful private lectures to Madame de Staël in preparation for what would be her bestselling work *On Germany*. At this point, provisionally setting aside Robinson's persistent avowals that his intellectual achievements were of little value, I want to explore this question: how did Robinson reach the gloomy view of his own development that the *Reminiscences* enshrine?

If you were to open the *Reminiscences* and read the first sentence, you might be surprised that I use the word « gloomy ». It begins as follows:

It is one of the evidences, or shall I say, consequences? of a happy frame of mind, that I am capable of deriving pleasure from things, the absence or even loss of which does not give me pain – I should have rejoiced, had I been well born, could I have reckoned historical characters among my ancestors – But it has never occasioned me any serious uneasiness, that my family are of as insignificant a class as can be imagined⁵.

It is significant that Robinson opens with a term – *frame* of mind – which had a religious connotation and is especially prominent in dissenting spiritual autobiographies. Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* comes to mind, and in fact Robinson mentions later that the first book he remembered reading, thanks to his mother's pious sensibility, was *The Pilgrim's Progress*⁶. Robinson's profession of happiness makes clear at once that his will not be a Calvinist narrative of sin and salvation. Nevertheless, his initial profession of a carefree personality masks a psychological complexity in the narrative that follows. While Robinson takes care to create the impression throughout of an evenness of temper persisting through his various self-criticisms, we know from some of his correspondence that he experienced periods of melancholy, which tended to alternate abruptly with intellectual exhilaration⁷.

⁴ The term is that of C. F. Harrold, in « A Spectator of Life: Henry Crabb Robinson », *The Sewanee Review*, 36: 1 (January 1928), 46-61. This article is a valuable early appreciation of Robinson, despite its premise regarding spectatorship, which is based, as Harrold acknowledges, on the « lamentably meager » edition of Sadler (p. 46).

⁵ Robinson, *Reminiscences*, MS, 4 vols, Dr Williams's Library, Vol. I (1790-1801), p. 1.

⁶ Along with Elizabeth Rowe's *Friendship in Death: Twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living*.

⁷ Philipp Hunnekuhl has commented that this tendency, « in today's terms, implies bipolar disorder » : « Reconstructing the Voice of the Mediator: Henry Crabb Robinson's Literary

And linked to his struggle to maintain emotional equanimity (« does not give me pain » is a phrase that must give us pause), Robinson's attempt to convince himself that he has always remained untroubled by the obscure origins of his family belies a constantly expressed unease about precisely this matter. We learn from the opening pages of the *Reminiscences* that Robinson was born in 1775 into a family of Suffolk tanners (on his father's side; his brother, Thomas Robinson, would maintain that trade). In Robinson's childhood the family mainly attended the Presbyterian meeting in Churchgate Street, Bury St Edmund, where the minister was William Lincolne, a moderate Calvinist⁸. Robinson immediately shows his concern with the social status of his dissenting family, just as did many of the spiritual autobiographers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He records that his grandfather Crabb, that is to say on his mother's side,

[...] appears to have been a very respectable person. His MS *Experience* which I possess is written in a formal religious Style – He did not belong to the gentry, altogether And yet he approached that Class, for he used to be summoned to the county grand jury – which gives distinction in the country.⁹

In this way, Robinson at once reveals his concern with class. He mentions destroying letters from his mother, whom he loved and respected, because her spelling was poor and they « would not agreeably impress a stranger »¹⁰. He did, though, preserve her « *Experience* », of which he writes:

It is worth mentioning that I have found my mothers Experience – That is the paper she delivered in before she was admitted a member of the Church at Wattisfield anno: [1759] when she was [23]¹¹ – The paper is in one respect curious that it shews that at that time even among the Independents doctrinal faith was not the subject of a formal profession; tho' of course inferred – In this paper there is no allusion to the Trinity or to any other doctrine disputed about – Indeed the word belief scarcely, if ever occurs, The one Sentiment which runs throughout is a consciousness of personal unworthiness, With

Criticism », in James Vigus (ed.), *Informal Romanticism* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2012), pp. 61-76 (p. 64).

On Robinson's melancholy, see further John Milton Baker, *Henry Crabb Robinson of Bury, Jena, The Times, and Russell Square* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937), pp. 25-30.

⁸ Timothy Whelan, « The Religion of Crabb Robinson », *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* 24: 2 (2008), 112-134 (p. 112).

⁹ *Reminiscences*, I, 6.

¹⁰ *Reminiscences*, I, 34.

¹¹ As frequently, Robinson left the dates blank in the manuscript, intending to insert them at a subsequent time. The year of Jemima Crabb's « experience » has been inserted from the document itself, which Robinson preserved. Robinson also kept a fragment in his mother's hand that gives her date of birth as 4 November 1736 (MS *Anecdotes and Memoranda*, Dr Williams's Library).

which are combined a desire to be united to the Church And a reliance only upon the merits of Christ Therefore her orthodoxy was indisputable – But when in after life, her brother became heretical – either Arian or Socinian – I mean the Minister M^r Habakkuk Crabb Another Son professed liberal opinions she was not disturbed by these things of which she had a very slight knowledge¹²[.]

This minister at the Wattisfield meeting, uncle Habakkuk Crabb (1750-1795), had a significant impact on Robinson's early life. Robinson, « brought up with Calvinistic feelings¹³ » by his mother, was to follow the drift of Uncle Crabb's religious opinions, the movement broadly characteristic of late eighteenth-century dissent from Independent or Presbyterian orthodoxy to Arianism and then Socinianism. Having begun « to interest my self in religious controversy » in 1790, Robinson writes of the years 1791-92 that « I seem to have very quietly given up my Orthodox[y] »¹⁴. Thomas Robinson, Henry's older brother, followed this route first (as mentioned in the quotation above), directly influenced by Uncle Crabb. In an early publication, probably Robinson's second, an obituary of Habakkuk Crabb for the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1795, Robinson praises in partisan terms his uncle's struggle against orthodoxy: « He had been educated in the strict principles of Calvin, from which he could not but considerably deviate, for his intellect was strong, his judgement cool, and his mind free from early impressions. » Robinson further asserts uncle Crabb's « extraordinary merit », which encompasses the « purity of his morals, the suavity of his manners, the benevolence of his feelings, and the rectitude of his principles »¹⁵. In the light of this encomium it is striking that in the *Reminiscences* Robinson discusses his uncle coolly, describing him as « not a man of superior abilities », and as distinguished only by comparison with his co-schoolmaster John Ludd Fenner (1751-1833)¹⁶.

This critical view of his origins in the *Reminiscences* is even more striking with regard to his apprenticeship. In 1790, Uncle Crabb found Robinson a placement as an articled clerk to William Francis (1759-1816), an attorney in Colchester. Since Francis was a Baptist, the connection was a dissenting one. In the *Reminiscences*, Robinson deplores this clerkship with Francis, just as he dismisses as worthless his previous education at Mr Fenner's school in Devizes. « Mr F was a man of very inferior capacity », he asserts, and it is telling that one of Robinson's

¹² *Reminiscences*, I, 34^v.

¹³ *Reminiscences*, I, 15.

¹⁴ *Reminiscences*, I, 35,

¹⁵ [Henry Crabb Robinson,] Obituary of Habakkuk Crabb, *Gentleman's Magazine* 65 (February 1795), p. 167. See Appendix One for a full transcription.

¹⁶ *Reminiscences*, I, 32. For sources on Habbakuk Crabb and John Ludd Fenner, see Christopher J. Wright, « Crabb Robinson's Schooldays: Daily Life in a Late Eighteenth-Century Unitarian School », *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, 16: 1 (October 1975), 1-12, esp. p. 11 n. 6. The Rev. Hugh Worthington Jnr.'s « Brief Memoirs of the Author » in Crabb's *Sermons on Practical Subjects* (Cambridge, 1796) relates that Crabb damaged his health through excessive study (p. vii). « Henry Robinson » appears on the subscribers' list along with Thomas Robinson and Habakkuk Robinson (p. xxx).

objections is that « He was of low birth »¹⁷. Indeed, such was Robinson's conviction as to the poverty of his own memory as well as of the education he received, that he feels obliged to justify the inclusion of recollections on these topics. The principle upon which he does include details of his early youth is repeatedly expressed in a quotation from Wordsworth's poem « The Rainbow »: « the child is father of the man ». Robinson makes sharp observations on this theme. For instance, recalling a nursery rhyme against Catholics he heard as a child, he notes, « Could & would men closely examine, they would probably find that their most inveterate religious ^prejudices^ which they think their most valuable religious convictions are of such origin¹⁸. » But whereas for Wordsworth, the realisation that « the child is father of the man » is a joyful one, for Robinson it is burdensome. « if the child – (in this instance, the youth) – be the father of the Man, I must plead guilty to the impiety of despising my parent – ».¹⁹

From a detailed comparison of the early part of the *Reminiscences* with the pocket books that survive from the early 1790s, Jane Giscombe has convincingly concluded that in his later writings Robinson belittles his dissenting origins. The reading that Robinson was able to do during his clerkship was in fact formative, and, as Giscombe has argued, it established the habit of omnivorous scholarship that persisted for the rest of his life²⁰. That this was possible was due not least to the despised Mr Francis, who put his library at the young man's disposal. In the *Reminiscences* Robinson does not mention this fact, and writes in purely negative terms about his reading at this time. For instance, the section on 1794 concludes as follows:

I find from my journal that ^I had already contracted^ the sad habit of lengthened Castle Building which has attended me thro life & which more than any other habit – Or at least conjointly with the constant loss of time in the perusal of worthless & insignificant books – has had the result of leaving me what I am now in my 70th Year after passing a life of nearly uninterrupted idleness – without the power of continuous thought, or labour of any kind²¹.

The *Reminiscences* itself testifies, on the contrary, that Robinson's life was far from idle. It is important to realise, however, that the turn against his dissenting upbringing did not occur in the 1840s when he was composing this text: it already appears in his correspondence during his first stay in Germany. Indeed, in the *Reminiscences* Robinson expresses his dissatisfaction with his dissenting education

¹⁷ *Reminiscences*, I, 26.

¹⁸ *Reminiscences*, I, 18.

¹⁹ *Reminiscences*, I, 86.

²⁰ Jane Giscombe, « Henry Crabb Robinson and the Dissenters: His Reading in Colchester 1790-95 », unpublished paper given at the Seminar for Dissenting Studies, Dr Williams's Library, 8 January 2014. Stelzig, *Henry Crabb Robinson in Germany*, describes the account in the *Reminiscences* of Robinson's early period in London as « rather harsh » (p. 29).

²¹ *Reminiscences*, I, 57. *OED* defines a castle-builder as a « day-dreamer, a visionary schemer », appositely citing William Hamilton (1856): « Reverie or Castle-building, is a kind of waking dream ».

most strongly by inserting an unusually lengthy excerpt from one of the letters he wrote to his brother, Thomas.

In the parallel passages from the *Reminiscences* for 1803 and the letter of that year in Appendix Two, I have marked in bold sections where Robinson's « copy » departs significantly from the original. Again, we can note Robinson's textual scrupulosity: although he could not have anticipated that any reader would actually compare the two texts in this way, he announces (at the end of the passage) that he has made some alterations. He also points out where these are greatest, namely at the end of the passage, where (as the parallel passages indicate at a glance) he has cancelled his earlier remarks about his aspiration to become a « literator ». Robinson's editors took no interest in confessional sections of this kind: Morley, in her highly selective edition of the letters from Germany, prints only a couple of sentences from it (the third column in Appendix Two), while Sadler and Marquardt omit it altogether. Yet it is an important feature of Robinson's autobiographical persona that in 1848 he retains the vehemence of 1803, and that he even intensifies it in various ways. First, he expresses an increased certainty as to the uselessness of his education: « It only consoles me, the being assured that I am what I am under circumstances the most adverse possible for my improvement ». Second, he now attaches blame to particular individuals: the reader of the *Reminiscences* recognises that when he says « my Master could not teach me any thing » and complains of being « Bound to a very inferior man », he means Mr Fenner the schoolmaster and Mr Francis the attorney. Third, he omits the final section about the aspirations that his study of German philosophy gave him. In the strategic rewriting of this letter in the *Reminiscences*, Robinson also attributes more agency to himself in the process of his emergence from a disadvantaged situation: whereas in 1803 he had confessed that « I came to Germany because I did not know what to do with myself in England », in 1848 he changes this to the more purposeful declaration, « I came to Germany merely because I understood it to be a country in which there was a rising literature ». (Similarly, the « lucky hour » at which Robinson enrolled at Jena becomes, with more emphasis on his own will, « a fortunate determination ».) The two explanations are not, of course, mutually exclusive; but the change indicates the desire on the part of the author of the *Reminiscences* to tell a story of early difficulties partly – and not quite successfully – remedied by his own efforts.

With this awareness of the way in which Robinson, like any good autobiographer, constructs his persona even while he strives for an accurate recital of the facts of his life, it is possible to turn to his surviving manuscripts from the 1790s to trace a somewhat different outline of the story. Even though he learned to deplore it once he found a more congenial situation in Germany, Robinson's clerkship with Mr Francis was formative. It laid the foundation of a successful study of philosophy that bore fruit at the very time when, ironically enough, Robinson's view of his dissenting background was hardening. In particular, a pocket book for 1791 reveals that just before he turned sixteen, Robinson began regularly reading John Locke, probably the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. A typical entry (there are at least seven) at this time reads: « Morn^g

in fields read Locke »²². Robinson's habit of reading Locke, the Enlightenment philosopher, outdoors, early in the morning, even suggests that the teenager is experiencing a process of enlightenment through his independent studies. Consistently with Robinson's process of self-revision, Locke's *Essay* goes unmentioned in the sporadic accounts of works that Robinson read in the early- to mid-1790s (whereas Rousseau recurs several times: it is significant, given the *Reminiscences*' preoccupation with education, that *Emile, or On Education* is mentioned repeatedly). Yet it appears that at least one aspect of Locke's philosophy left its mark on the text. Robinson declares that his *Reminiscences* should be such in the true sense of the word, a record of things that he remembers: so that if perusing one of his journals or letters does not recall an event to mind, « I shall consider it as not having been – Making an exception only of the names of persons »²³. This radical view, which amounts to the claim that forgetting is practically equivalent to complete erasure, lends importance to passages in which Robinson highlights the incompleteness of his memory. For instance, with respect to Habakkuk Crabb: « So entirely have I lost all recollection of the few months spent at Wattisfield that I cannot call to mind anything I studied or read I recollect only having a Sentiment of respect & regard towards Mr Crabb (which I did not feel towards Mr Fenner) ». (p. 23)

Robinson's principle in this respect is consistent with Locke's theory of consciousness. In Locke's view, memory is central to personal identity: the self is « that conscious thinking thing », which is « capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself as far as that consciousness extends ». Memory is this « extension » of consciousness back into the past, ensuring that we remain the same person over time²⁴. Expounding this proposition, Locke writes:

But yet possibly it will still be objected, suppose I wholly lose the memory of some parts of my life, beyond a possibility of retrieving them, so that perhaps I shall never be conscious of them again; yet am I not the same person that did those actions, had those thoughts that once I was conscious of, though I have now forgot them? to which I answer, that we must here take notice of what the word I is applied to; which, in this case, is the man only²⁵.

Locke implies in this passage that an appeal to forgotten sense-data will do nothing to change the constitution of the « I » who is now unable to reflect on them. It is

²² Robinson, Pocket Book for 1791 (Dr Williams's Library), Wednesday 25 May. I thank Jane Giscombe for directing my attention to the entries on Locke.

²³ This passage reads in full: « I have nothing to say of my first Sea-Voyage – Nor shall I when I mention any of my numerous journeys on foot, give any account of my travels unless I find by some rare accident, any thing significant – I mean too to let these memoranda be really reminiscences And if what I read of in MS: is not brought back to my mind I shall consider it as not having been – Making an exception only of the names of persons – ». *Reminiscences*, I, 142.

²⁴ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1825), Book II, chapter 27, paragraph 17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, paragraph 26.

unlikely that Robinson was still thinking directly about Locke in the 1840s, but his strict conception of the idea of « reminiscence » implicitly confirms Locke's theory: only mental states that can still be recalled to consciousness may qualify as forming a part of the self. No wonder, then, that despite the great range of recall it displays, the *Reminiscences* contains frequent exclamations of frustration at the supposed feebleness of Robinson's memory – weakened, he feared, by precisely the wide-ranging reading habits he developed as a clerk in the 1790s.

For this is another peculiarity of the *Reminiscences*, that although it provides valuable narratives and character sketches from his first period in Germany, it downplays Robinson's engagement with German thought. This is undoubtedly consistent: just as Robinson does not mention his experience of discovering Locke, so he makes only muted reference to a still more decisive phase in his philosophical *Bildungsreise*, his study of Kant and post-Kantian idealism (« utterly opposed », Robinson writes in the *Reminiscences* for 1803 extracted in Appendix Two, « to all I had ever heard of as philosophy »). In the *Reminiscences*, for instance, Robinson refers rather dismissively to his philosophical pursuits in Jena as « metaphysical puzzles », which « occupied too much of my time ». Yet we learn from his manuscript correspondence and his Travel Diary for 1801 that the study of Kant occupied many months and resulted in a « conversion » to an idealist form of thought, the polar opposite of that which Locke's empiricism represented for Robinson. This is not the occasion to discuss Robinson's conversion to Kantianism in detail²⁶. What I want to observe here is that Robinson's anecdotal approach in the *Reminiscences* initiates the view that became a critical orthodoxy in the twentieth century, that he was essentially a spectator or reporter rather than a substantial thinker or writer in his own right. This construction may be very faithful to the conscious memories that Robinson regarded as the component parts of his autobiographical self, but it is nevertheless selective and must be recognised as such. The example of Robinson's engagement with German philosophy also raises the question of another category of omission: events that Robinson might not have been fully aware of. Appendix Three provides a snapshot of Robinson at his best as a critical expositor of the revolution in German philosophy and aesthetics. This is a page from one of the private lectures that Robinson prepared for Madame de Staël, during her visit to Weimar with Benjamin Constant in 1804. In the *Reminiscences*, Robinson avers that this association with Staël « led to no permanent results of importance », but he probably did not know that Staël took the lecture scripts with her and wrote highly reflective annotations on them. In this case, Robinson is explaining the notion of aesthetic autonomy as writers such as Schiller had extrapolated from Kantian principles. He would probably not have known, for instance, that his account stimulated Staël to a self-critique of her practice as a novelist, and that she continued to echo Robinson's terms (that every definite purpose in a work of art « limits and chains » the imagination) in her subsequent work *On Germany*. Nor do we find out from the *Reminiscences* whether Robinson was aware that on the same evening after the evidently stimulating discussion of

²⁶ See my introduction to Robinson's *Essays on Kant, Schelling and German Aesthetics*, and James Vigus, « Henry Crabb Robinson's Initiation into the "Mysteries of the New School": A Romantic Journey », in Christoph Bode and Jacqueline Labbe (eds), *Romantic Localities* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), pp. 145-56.

his lecture, Constant entered a prescient coinage in a notebook: « l'art pour l'art »²⁷.

Conclusion

This, however, is (literally) another story. What I have wished to suggest in this paper is that Robinson's first period in Germany laid the foundation for the negative view of his upbringing and apprenticeship offered in the *Reminiscences*; yet that we might alternatively see his dissenting background as providing the foundation for a successful study and critical mediation of German philosophy and literature. Robinson's work on the *Reminiscences* in the 1840s and 1850s parallels Wordsworth's constant reworking of the *Prelude*, but whereas the latter is a tale of nature's education of a genius, the former is ostensibly a narrative of a dilettante whose serious efforts were vitiated from the start by a mediocre dissenting schooling. Yet it is possible that the child was father of the man in a more positive sense than the author of the *Reminiscences* was prepared to acknowledge.

Appendix One

[Henry Crabb Robinson], Obituary of Habakkuk Crabb, *Gentleman's Magazine* (1795), p. 167

At Royston, in Cambridgeshire, the Rev. Habbakuk Crabb, who (to adopt his own modest language) 'conducted the devotions' of an independent congregation of Christians. The life and character of Mr. C. though unmarked by any of those striking incidents or impressive peculiarities which excite the attention of ordinary observers, were, nevertheless, those on which the Philosopher and Philanthropist love to dwell. They exhibited a model of exemplary conduct during a period of 45 years, spent in the exercise of moral and religious duties. He was the youngest son of the late Mr. Denny Crabb, of Wattisfield, co[unty] Suffolk, and imbibed his earliest principles from the late Rev. Thomas Harmer, well known to the learned world by his 'Observations on the Manners and Customs of the East.' He received his academical education at Daventry under Dr. Ashworth; and first officiated as a minister at Stowmarket, co. Suffolk. He thence removed to Cirencester, co. Gloucester; and afterwards united with his brother-in-law, the Rev. I. L. Fenner, at the Devizes, Wilts, in the education of youth. Whilst he was thus honourably and usefully employed, his ancient preceptor Mr Harmer died, and he with gladness accepted an invitation to succeed him in the ministry. He had ever wished to spend the latter portion of his life in his native village, that he might pour forth the abundance of his acquirements in the spot where he drew the first principles of his faith. But he had yet to learn, that the spirit of Christianity rests not always with its professors. He had been educated in the strict principles of Calvin, from which he could not but considerably deviate, for his intellect was strong, his judgement cool, and his mind free from early impressions. Although he avoided every species of controversy, and was assiduous in the practical duties of the ministry, his incapability of joining in the jargon of mystery was, in the opinion of some of his

²⁷ See *Essays on Kant, Schelling, and German Aesthetics*, pp. 20-25.

hearers, an unpardonable crime. The purity of his morals, the suavity of his manners, the benevolence of his feelings, and the rectitude of his principles, were as a grain in the balance, when opposed to the Shibboleth of the sect which he could not pronounce. The Dissenters of the present day affect a liberality of sentiment, and a love of religious liberty, in opposition to the Church of England; yet, at the instigation of a few individuals of his congregation, he was compelled to abandon the scene of his former happiness, and the spot in which his future welfare seemed to centre. He met with an asylum at Royston, where his extraordinary merit was justly appreciated. Here he experienced the satisfaction of associating with kindred minds: but it was ever his lot to have the cup of happiness dashed from his lips before he had well tasted it. He had remained there but two years, when he lost his wife. Her death affected him severely; which, with the sight of a numerous and young family, for whom there appeared no means of support except the precarious subsistence which his profession furnished him; and the cruel wound so recently inflicted upon him by his dismissal from Wattisfield, conspired to destroy his constitution. His regret for the past and apprehensions for the future brought on a nervous fever, and, about two years after the death of Mrs C. hurried him to an untimely tomb. His character has been already in part delineated. His domestic misfortunes created a pensive habit, but he was occasionally lively and jocose. He was neither a political nor a polemical preacher; and, though he was proud of his office as a Teacher of the Religion of Jesus, he was desirous to avoid the epithet of Priest. He has left a family of seven destitute orphans, for whose benefit his friends propose publishing by subscription two small volumes of his Sermons. (See, in our Poetry, p. 152, an Elegy to his Memory.)

Appendix Two

HCR to Thomas Robinson, 28 November 1803

But having rejected the common occupations & duties of life I must have a substitute & this can be no other than in the cultivation of my Mind – when I reflect on what I have done in this respect – or rather on what I have not done I could rave & curse; - if I ~~no~~ did not hold raving & cursing to be very silly And if I had not so much practical wisdom that I can ~~lik~~ look back on a wasted life not without regret but without violent emotions: perhaps too it is a secret consolation ^to me^, when I with unaffected humility reflected on my very moderate talents & ~~with~~ ^on my^ acquisitions ^which are^ less than moderate – to think & believe that I am *what* I am under Circumstances as unfavourable to mental improvem^t as any that can be conceived. It was the first misfortune of my life, that instead of being in due form flogged into latin & greek at our grammar school, I was sent to Devizes where I could learn nothing for nothing was to be learnt – I was equally unfortunate in my clerkship where I saw nothing of business but its stupid mechanical drudgery, where nothing was done which dunces could not do & where my ambition was not excited by difficulties but my patience worn out by tiresome dull employm^t I had when I left Colchester, acquired rather more law than common Attorney's clerks possess, but had studied no science or art, I had spend five years in reading newspapers, novels, & desultory moral & metaphysical disquisitions which are happily framed to lull the mind in a sort of indolent activity without calling forth its powers: The ^moral & political^ principles I had imbibed furtherd my indolence & added to my habits of integrity & good practical principles, disinclined to all active pursuits: but it was the

Reminiscences for 1803 (composed 1848; bold JV)

Morley

But having rejected the common occupations & duties of life I must have a substitute And this can be no other than in the cultivation of my mind When I reflect on what I have done, or rather on what I have not done I could rave if I did not hold raving to be very silly And if I had not so much practical wisdom that I can look back on a wasted life not without regret, but without violent emotion And I have even a consolation in ~~es~~ estimating as I ~~don~~ do with unaffected humility my very moderate talents very lowly And still more lowly my actual attainments It only consoles me, **the being assured that** I am what I am under circumstances the most adverse possible for my improvement – My first misfortune was that instead of going through the discipline of the Bury Grammar School I was sent to Devizes where I staid three Years, Where I could learning nothing **for my Master could not teach me any thing** I was equally unfortunate in my Clerk<-->ship **Bound to a very inferior man**, in an office where I saw ~~where I saw~~ nothing of real business, was put to the mechanical drudgery of a writing clerk – No ambition was excited, but an intense disgust towards my profession ~~excited~~ During my clerkship of five years I studied no one art science or branch of learning, but spent my time – that being an ~~time~~ ^epoch^ of great polit^t excitement in the desultory reading of Newspapers, contraversial [sic] writings religious & political metaphysical & moral which with novels kept my mind in a perpetual state of excitement ~~which~~ ^but^ called forth no powers of the mind ~~From the death (on termination of my clerkship till the death of my Uncle I was kept~~ My dissenting education the political principles of our party And the notions I had imbibed from

<p>great evil of my then condition, that I was totally without all distinct views of human life – from habits of ^intellectual^ dissipation I was quite unable to think or reason on my self I was led by sentiment only & not by principle ^And^ the naturally enough <- -> ^I^ was quite unable to give an account <i>of myself to myself</i> – This unsettled state of mind lasted from the death of my Mother to the death of my uncle the uncertainty of my future fortune served to apologise for the indecision of my character ^pursuits^ - At the time I resolved to come to Germany, the disease was at its heights And was itself the result of disease; for why did I come to Germany? Did I anticipate the german Philosophy? Could I foresee in what connections I should fall? Had I any preacquaintance with the easy free animated life of a german University? Did I know the acqu Had I any th knowledge of the excellencies of the German Character of the at congenial habits & manners of its people? Nothing of the sort I came to Germany because I did not de know what to do with myself in England – I resolved to learn a language as an employm^t because I was too impatient of ennui to sleep away my days & had supped the cream of ^english^ literature which had surfeited without nourishing me: I came therefore to Germany And was at first not much wiser than before in my pursuits: But at any rate I learned at language, a knowledge that at any time will give me bread - <- -> But I suffered myself to be led by a childish love of rambling And lost a year in the society of a person in w with whom I was intangled into a connection I could not break & ^which I^ therefore tried persuaded myself it was useful & interesting to me At length I came at a lucky hour to an University & in a se seat of public education was for the first time awakened</p>	<p>Godwin favoured my indisposition to follow any profession or any active pursuit I had no knowledge of human life I could give no account of myself to myself And I was glad to be have an excuse for coming to no decision – And this lay in the uncertainty of my prospects – Dependent as we were in a great degree upon our Uncle On his death I resolved to come to Germany – The disease of my mind was then at its height The resolution itself was an act of disease For why did I come to Germany? Because I did not know what to do in England – Did I anticipate the German philosophy? It was utterly opposed to all I had ever heard of as philosophy – Could I foresee in what Connections I should fall? Had I any foreknowledge of the character of or the life in the German Universities? Had I any knowledge of the peculiar excellence of the German Character or of the habits of their literary people? – To all these questions I answer No. I came to Germany merely because I understood it to be a country in which there was a rising literature The learning of its language would supply me with an employment I was too impatient of Ennui to sleep away my time I had sup sipped the cream of English literature which had surfeited without nourishing me – On coming to Germany I was not at first much wiser than before in my pursuits But I at any rate learned a language the Knowledge of which will at any rate give me bread – But I suffered myself to be led by a childish love of rambling And lost a Year in the Society of a person with whom I was entangled into a connection I could not break – And which I therefore persuaded myself was useful to me At length I came to the fortunate determinⁿ of to visit ^to attend^ a university Where I first arrived at a distinct perceptⁿ how utterly uneducated I am ^was^ myself – My immediate ^first^ study was the German philosophy what</p>	<p>Why did I come to Germany? Did I anticipate the German Philosophy? Could I foresee in what connections I should fall? Had I any preacquaintance with the easy free animated life of a german University? Had I any knowledge of the excellencies of the German character of the congenial habits & manners of its people? Nothing of the sort I came to Germany because I did not know what to do with myself in England –</p> <p>Edith Morley (ed), <i>Crabb Robinson in Germany 1800-1805</i> (Oxford, 1929), p. 131.</p>
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<p>to the perception that I had had no education myself: My immediate study was the German Philosophy: How far I am to attribute the change in my habits & feelings to the immediate & direct effects of this Philos^y, I know not, but I know that since the study of it I am become happier & better therefore wiser & better than I was; but this Philosophy has hitherto done nothing for the towards giving me literary talents, It do has not qualified me, nor given me the ability of being an author, no tho' it has furnished me with materials for book making: But <- -> the most important coincidental results of this ^the study of this^ philosophy combined with a variety of observations & reflections which have been daily forced on me here, is the consciousness conviction that it is only in the acquisition of <i>Solid learning</i> & becoming in the honourable & high sense of the word a <i>Scholar</i> that I can appear with credit in the world. A Man of Genius may without learning rise to eminence for it is the essence of <i>Genius</i> to <i>generate</i> – but I have not a spark of genius. Original Thinkers too can supply by the productions of their own mind, the want of extensive knowledge: But Thinking is not my excellence. I can never be a great Man; but I may be a respectable author or literator; that is, when I have acquired after some metaphysical disquisition which without making an epoch in literature, may serve to promote the good cause of Science & Truth, And give me the satisfaction of having paid my debt to society. But the essential prerequisite is learning And I must renounce for years all thoughts of authorship. With this conviction I began this Michaelmas a new couse, having taken a very skil-able to my aid as my first & most essential auxiliary a very skilful & excellent <i>Greek Master</i> – And am now reading with him T in the original <i>The Republick of Plato</i>.</p>	<p>its immediate & directs effect have been I am unable to say It has not given me the faculties of which I have not the seeds in me – I want inventive power I want the power of original thinking – But I am sensible of the necessity of acquiring kno learning And for this purpose I have entered on the study of Latin & Greek” I ha</p> <p>I have found it necessary to depart from the words of my letter, which towards the end especially is no copy, but it faithfully represents my feelings & intentions ^purposes^ then I proceed to announce intentions ^plans^ which were not carried out</p>	
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We ascribe to our moral Judg^{mt}. a like Universality & expect that others will agree with us - but this Judg^{mt} is founded on general notions such as virtue & vice &c. but in the aesthetic I. there is no general notion - The individual object alone is presented and we require that the contemplation of it shall produce a similar Judg^{mt} in the mind of others without bringing this object under a general Idea. In this point our Judg^{mt} as to the agreeable, is the same - but here we do not expect a correspondence with others, & this Judg^{mt} is purely subjective & has no objectivity whatever. I expect that every one, who has a sense & feeling will admire Werther with me, but not that he should love Champagne.

3. As to its Relation.

The ~~aesthetic~~ beautiful object must have in itself form that intimates design, i.e. a harmony of parts propriety & fitness, a series of connections & dependencies, which being contemplated excite the sense of Beauty but it must not manifest in itself any precise & definite purpose - it must have no object out of itself. Every definite purpose limits & chains the aesthetic feeling which must be free.

N.B. This result, which I have stated very loosely (in Kant it is left very obscure) has also led to many favorite doctrines of the modern Critics that pure poetry & works of pure art must be judged of in this way is obvious - Art is like Jehovah a jealous God, or rather it may be said that the Muses in their Connection with the ~~man~~ Artist, resemble Corporal Trim whose wound was dressed by a Nun - & Trim was grateful & in truth in love with the pious doctrine - C'est tout pour

Appendix Three

Robinson, private lecture 'On the German Aesthetick or Philosophy of Taste' (Weimar, February 1804), with marginalia by Germaine de Stael.

Image from James Vigus (ed.), Henry Crabb Robinson: Essays on Kant, Schelling, and German Aesthetics (London: MHRA, 2010), p. 27.

Oeplaine montre trop son but
moral la vie humaine est
pas but c'est d'aut - sublime
poétique d'i Hegel grand homme
june il veut mieux que grand il
agit - figure la caricature de
l'activité

Transcription (from Vigus 2010, pp. 130-131)

The beautiful object must have in itself a form that intimates design, i.e. a harmony of parts propriety and fitness, a series of connections & dependencies, which being contemplated excite the Sense of Beauty, but it must not manifest in itself any precise & definite purpose – *it must have no object out of itself*. Every definite purpose limits & chains the aesthetical feeling which must be free.

**delphine montre trop son but moral la vie humaine est sans but evident – sublime
paresse dit Slegel quand l’homme joue il vaut mieux que quand il agit – figaro la
caricature de l’activité**

N.B. This Result, which I have stated very loosely (in Kant it is left very obscure) has also led to many favourite doctrines of the modern Critics. That *pure poetry* & works of pure art must be judged of in this way is obvious – Art is like Jehovah a jealous God, or rather it may be said, that the Muses in their connection with the Artist, resemble Corporal Trim whose wound was dressed by a Nun – Trim was grateful & in truth in Love with the pious doctress – ‘C’est tout pour l’amour de Jesus Christ’ said the Nun And that displeased the honest Corporal – ‘I would rather it was for the Love of me, said Trim.’ ’tis so in respect to the application of the Arts – The Artist must always have a subject & an interesting subject too, but he must contrive to render the *artistical* & *aesthetical* Interest predominate [sic] over the material – he must make no poem or painting which is obviously produced ‘par l’amour de Jesus Christ’ –

Later that day (11 February 1804), Constant coined the phrase ‘l’art pour l’art’ in his journal:

diner avec Robinson, ecolier de Schelling. Son travail sur l’Esthétique de Kant. Idées très ingénieuses. l’art pour l’art, et sans but; tout but denature l’art: mais l’art atteint au but qu’il n’a pas.

Benjamin Constant, 11 February 1804. From *Journaux Intimes (1804–1807)*, ed. by Paul Delbouille and Kurt Kloocke (Tübingen, 2002) : vol 6 of *Œuvres complètes*, pp. 68–69, quoted in Vigus (2010), p. 22