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'What is This Strange Language?' Reflections on The Barbaric in Jean-Jacques Rousseau and François-René De Chateaubriand

There is not a book here, not a man to lend ear to me,
to know what my words mean.
All places are filled with barbarism and cries of wild animals,
all are filled with the fear of hostile sound. (Ovid, *Tristia* 5, 12: 53–56)

Abstract
Examining the ideas of the barbarian and barbarism, this article considers and compares the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and François-René de Chateaubriand in both historical and poetical terms. I argue that both Rousseau and Chateaubriand present and identify with the figure of the barbarian as a means to make poignant questions regarding Enlightenment optimism and rationalism, and that both exploit it as part of their media theory of writing. While Rousseau primarily highlights being an outsider and chastiser of modern society, Chateaubriand stands mournful before the scene of history, a witness to an increasing array of ruins. Their approaches illustrate two diverging views: an eighteenth-century politics highlighting the necessity of action and emancipation, and a romantic nostalgia aware of irredeemable historical discontinuity.

Keywords
Incomprehensibility, 'Barbaric primordial situation', Medium, 'Prosopopée de Fabricius', Antimodernism

It is sometimes said that romantic literature explores the disorderly, wild, and unknown. Not only did writers set their stories in new and exotic places, as we see in texts like Bernardin de Saint Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788) or Chateaubriand's *Atala* (1801). They also started to experiment with a language emphasizing, as Michel Foucault has put it, 'l'être sauvage et impérieux des mots' [the savage and unruly being of words].[1] Just as the places became more exotic, so the words and the structure of the literary composition became ever more unusual and experimental. Verbal landscapes were created which gave the im-

1 Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 313. My own translation. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

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pression of poets 'battling with language' and disrupting the fluidity of the written medium in order to heighten the expressive effects.[2] Unsurprisingly, the authors also became increasingly fascinated by the barbarian and the barbaric, etymologically pointing to language that is incomprehensible.[3] 'La poésie veut quelque chose d'énorme, de barbare et de sauvage' [Poetry must have something in it that is barbaric, vast and wild], Denis Diderot wrote in 'De la poésie dramatique' in 1761, linking poetry with the barbaric, unregulated, and sublime.[4] Not only did the barbaric involve verbal expression, however, but it also raised questions about individuality and authenticity: to a world steeped in conventions and burdened with what Freud would later call 'das Unbehagen in der Kultur' [the uneasiness in civilization], the barbarian appeared the only one in possession of natural and genuine feelings. From Rousseau's *bon sauvage* to Schiller's concept of the naïve, the late eighteenth-century toyed with the thought that barbaric impulses and forces would have a beneficial effect on society and culture at large. Few years before the 1789 revolution and the ensuing Terror, Diderot had seen the barbaric as a necessary ingredient in the regeneration of societies: 'une nation ne se régénère que dans un bain de sang' [A nation does not regenerate itself except through a bloodbath].[5]

This article sets out to document two stages in the era's attraction to the barbaric, one coming before and the other after the 1789 revolution. I begin with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the self-proclaimed barbarian in the second part of the eighteenth-century, and end with François-René de Chateaubriand, the early nineteenth-century nostalgic whose *oeuvre* is astonishingly rich in barbaric imaginations. As will be shown, both these critics see the barbaric as a fruitful metaphor for thinking about history and historical developments, and their own role in it. Moreover, both wrote influential autobiographies where the barbaric is important to their literary *persona:* Identifying as barbarians, they draw attention to their own social status as outsiders and exiles. As we will see, crucial to this idea is also the poetics of defamiliarization, with the barbarian speaking and acting differently to others. Major differences in worldview separate the two, however, mostly in terms of their views on history. Rousseau, often seen as the first modern writer because he pioneered the cult of authenticity and genuine feelings, always presents himself as an outsider at odds with the civilized world. His vast autobiographical work demonstrates his pervading sense of confusion

2 In 1812, Adam Müller diagnosed, in the contemporary German context, the writers battling with language: 'ein Ringen mit der Sprache'. Adam Müller, *Zwölf Reden über die Beredsamkeit und deren Verfall in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1967), 41.

3 In Greek, the word 'barbaros' means someone who does not speak Greek and does not follow classical Greek customs.

4 Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques* (Paris Gallimard, 1997), 261.

5 Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres politiques* (Paris: Laffont, 1995), 635.

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and alienation as a Swiss foreigner in the cultured Parisian society, and he repeatedly insists that he speaks the language of nature, a *barbarian* language, which Parisians have become too 'refined' to understand. His attitude in this regard reflects what Reinhart Koselleck has termed Rousseau's discovery of the 'aporia of progress', namely that the process of 'enlightening' and the striving for civilizational perfection inexorably lead to inequality, decline of morals, and loss of man's natural innocence. 'Progress produces decadence'.[6] Given his damning diagnosis, Rousseau deems the barbaric a necessary exit route to the reclaiming of individual freedom, and he makes it a governing principle of his own work.

While Rousseau exploits the barbaric in terms of his complex view on historical progress, Chateaubriand, who, according to Pierre Michel was throughout his life 'obsessed by the barbarians', connects barbarity to his poetics of death and doom, his embracement of *vanitas* and lost causes.[7] Claiming that 'life is a successive death', the barbaric, meaning the destructive, is for Chateaubriand the driving force of history.[8] More precisely, the modern era, which Chateaubriand dismissively coined 'la modernité', is infested by barbaric disfigurement: it has grown decadent and vulgar, with moral and aesthetic standards mercilessly sacrificed.[9] Thus, while Rousseau's barbaric imaginations reflect an eighteenth-century politics based on the belief in the individual's capacity for emancipation, Chateaubriand presents early nineteenth-century nostalgia and what Antoine Compagnon has called 'antimodernism', meaning a worldview where skepticism of progress and hatred of democracy conjoin with a rehashing of Christian dogma including hereditary sin.[10] Chateaubriand, who, due to his aristocratic background had to temporarily leave France during the Terror, felt that the revolution had created a tragic rupture between the old and the new, and that the new world lacked a clear point of orientation founded on respect for historical traditions and customs.[11] To him, the 'new' was synonymous with rudderless freedom and chaos exploited by opportunists, talentless upstarts, or blind fanatics. For Cha-

6 Reinhart Koselleck, '"Fortschritt" und "Niedergang"', in *Begriffsgeschichten* (F.a.M.: Suhrkamp 2006), 159–181, 177.

7 Pierre Michel, *Les barbares: 1789–1848. Un mythe romantique* (Paris: P.U.F., 1981), 83.

8 'La vie est une mort successive'. Chateaubriand, *Voyages en Italie* (Lausanne: Bibliothèque des Arts, 2003), 80.

9 On the cultural and historical context of Chateaubriand's coining of the term 'modernité', and his linking it to 'vulgarité', see, among others, Peter Svare Valeur, *Romantic Figures of Old Age. Readings of Chateaubriand, Eichendorff andn Wordsworth,* diss. (Oslo: University of Oslo Press 2012), 65–82.

10 Antoine Compagnon, *Les antimodernes, de Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2016).

11 This acute sense of historic discontinuity makes Chateaubriand more aware of the historical process than many of his contemporaries. See for instance François Hartog *Régimes d'historicité* (Paris: Seuil 2003), 85.

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teaubriand unlike Rousseau, barbarism was not to heroically oppose the rules of the world and the establishment; rather, barbarism *is* the rule of a world grown anarchic and recalcitrant to true communal understanding. But Chateaubriand distinguishes between barbarians who know they are barbarians, and those who do not. A conscious barbarian is someone who knows that he is misunderstood or ignored, and that his words will meet deaf ears. As we will see, this is exactly how Chateaubriand goes about distinguishing himself in his writing: he glorifies himself as the martyr of incomprehension, as prophet of doom, and [‘inutile Cassandre’[useless Cassandra].[12]

In this article, I will principally address barbarism in terms of these writers’ autobiographic self-representations. Their concept of barbarism I see as primarily aesthetic and exhibitionist: They are artists and performers of barbarism, fashioning a heroic self-image of themselves as exiled, alienated, and misunderstood. The status as self-acclaimed barbarians enable them to present ideas and visions of the historical development at odds with Enlightenment optimism. Primarily, however, I will show that their aesthetics of barbarism conjoin with a media theory of writing. It is when confronted with the white page, the hardly legible epitaph, or a sentence from Bossuet quoted by a bird that the barbaric imaginations of these writers are at their most palpable and intense.[13]

12 With this term, Chateaubriand characterized himself after having held a speech on 7. August 1830 at the French Assembly where he forcefully criticized the in his view illegitimate new regime of Louis Philippe. *Mémoires d’outre-tombe,* vol.3, edition J.-C. Berchet (Paris: Livre de Poche 2007), 551.

13 There has been some texts on barbarism in Rousseau. Among the most recent, see Dieter Thomä, *Puer robustus. Eine Philosophie des Störenfrieds* (F.a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2016), 75–121. On the connection between Rousseau and Ovid, see Jean Starobinski, *La transparence et l’obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), 137–159. On the concept of barbarism in French and notably German writers in the 18th century with some remarks on Rousseau, see Gérard Laudin, ‘L’integration de la barbarie à la civilization: brutes, barbares, sauvages, despotes, et doctrinaires d’Iselin à Hölderlin’, in *Le barbare. Images phobiques et réflexions sur l’altérité dans la culture européenne,* ed. Jen Schillinger and Philipp Alexandre (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 179–199. On barbarism in French writers after the revolution, including Chateaubriand, see the well-researched study by Pierre Michel, *Les barbares.* On barbarism in Chateaubriand, with particular emphasis on his historical essays, see Michel (ibid), Arlette Michel: ‘Images des Barbares dans l’oeuvre de Chateaubriand’, in *Bulletin de l’Association Guillaume Budé*, 1992, vol.2, 174–192, and some valuable remarks in Manfred Schneider, *Der Barbar. Endzeitstimmung und Kulturrecycling* (München: Hanser, 1997). Most of these studies tend to highlight philosophical or historical aspects, while they unfortunately downplay the barbaric as a means of autobiographical self-representation. – It should be noted that the crucial passages analyzed in my article have, to my knowledge, not previously been seen in the context of barbarism.

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'Barbarus hic ego': Rousseau and the scene of writing

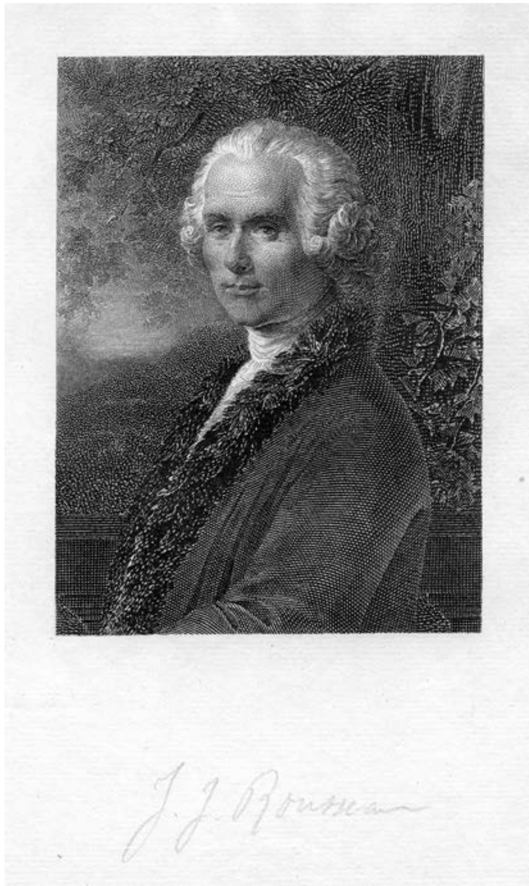

Fig. 1: Angélique Allais (née Briceau), *Portrait of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 1791, 24.5 x 21.5 cm, Bibliothèque de Genève.

A key episode in the life of Rousseau take place when, in the summer of 1749, he is on his way from Paris to Vincennes, hoping to see his then friend Denis Diderot. Under trees that, according to Rousseau, gave little shelter against the hot sun, and walking while reading a gazette, his eyes suddenly fall upon the advertisement of a writing contest with the following question: *Has progress of the arts and sciences strengthened or undermined the morals?* Rousseau comments: 'Si jamais quelque chose a ressemblé à une inspiration subite, c'est le mouvement qui se fit en moi à cette lecture; tout à coup je me sens l'esprit ébloui de mille lumières. (…) À l'instant de cette lecture je vis un autre univers, et je devins un autre homme" [If ever anything resembled a sudden inspiration, it is what that

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advertisement stimulated in me: all at once I felt my mind dazzled by a thousand lights. (…) At that moment I saw another universe, and I became a different person.][14]

It is a scene of sudden insight, of momentous illumination, among others recalling – and this is certainly intended by Rousseau – the famous scene of conversion in Augustine's *Confessions* (8: 12, 29–30). In his autobiographical works, Rousseau dwells obsessively on this moment of epiphany. This was the moment, he tells, which sparked his career as a public intellectual, which formed the seed of what would later be his most prominent quality, namely that of a political writer who tells the truth about the flaws, injustices and mendacities that dominate the western societies. Highly agitated by what he had read, Rousseau states that he needed to sit down 'under an oak'. It is there that he starts to write down his response to the contest, calling it 'La prosopopée de Fabricius', a short text which would form the nucleus of his first major text, the prize winning essay *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750).[15]

Rousseau, then, highlights the scene of writing; it was there, under that oak, that he 'became another man', and where his career as a writer of ardent, politically radical and sometimes scandalous texts, was inaugurated. *And:* it was there that Rousseau also became, at least in his autobiographical self-representations, a barbarian. How so? As a motto to *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (as well as to his later *Dialogues: Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques,* 1776), Rousseau chose a line from the Roman poet Ovid: *barbarus hic ego sum, qui non intelligor ulli* [Here it is I that am a barbarian, because the others do not understand me] (*Tristia* V, 10: 37). The line is from *Tristia*, the collection of poems Ovid wrote after having been banished from Rome and living in exile in Tomis, on the Black Sea. What Ovid refers to as 'the others', are the inhabitants of Tomis incapable of appreciating his Latin.[16] Ovid's claim offers a perfect illustration of

14 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions. Autres textes autobiographiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 1135, 351.

15 Rousseau uses a similar setting in *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, where he discusses the scene where language was invented, namely close to running water, where young people meet 'sous de vieux chênes'. Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 106. Of course, the topos of sudden illuminations while sitting under trees goes back, at least, to Augustine's conversion under a fig tree.

16 In context, the Ovidian line is: *Barbarus hic ego sum quia non intelligor illis / Et rident stolidi verba Latina Getae* (V.10, l.37–38) [Here it is I that am a barbarian because the others do not understand me. Stupid as they are, the Getae laugh at my Latin.]. Ovid's *Tristia* tells of his experiences in Tomis, where he was forced to live after being expelled from Rome in 8 AD for unclear reasons. Ovid was 50 years old at the time. As we see, he complains about not being understood: 'the others do not understand me'. However, the second line – which symptomatically is not quoted by Rousseau – makes it clear that Ovid sees the Getae, the people living in Tomis, as the real barbarians, because they do not understand or appreciate his Latin. In this way, Ovid confirms the cultural hegemony of Rome.

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Rousseau's moment of epiphany on the way to Vincennes. To see this, we must take a closer look at the short text which Rousseau managed to write down under that tree, 'La prosopopée de Fabricius'. The 'prosopopée de Fabricius' is, in fact, a powerful enactment of Ovid's statement, and stunning example of Rousseau's barbaric imagination.

It consists of Rousseau giving the word to Gaius Fabricius Luscinus, a Roman statesman of Republican era who is perhaps most known for having negotiated peace terms with Pyrrhus after the Roman defeat at Heraclea in 280 BC. Later Romans tended to praise Fabricius for his virtue and austere incorruptibility. In his text, Rousseau uses this historical figure to illustrate his main argument in his treatise, namely that the sciences and arts are in fact not beneficial, as usually held, but morally detrimental. Through his prosopopoeia, Fabricius rises from the grave, addressing Romans of a later period about how they have since been misled and corrupted. Here is the passage from *Discours sur les sciences et les arts:*

> Ô Fabricius! qu'eût pensé votre grand âme, si pour votre malheur rappelé à la vie, vous eussiez vu la face pompeuse de cette Rome sauvée par votre bras et que votre nom respectable avait plus illustrée que toutes ses conquêtes? 'Dieu! eussiez-vous dit, que sont devenus ces toits de chaume et ces foyers rustiques qu'habitaient jadis la modération et la vertu? Quelle splendeur funeste a succédé à la simplicité romaine? Quel est ce langage étranger? Quelle sont ces mœurs efféminées? Que signifient ces statues, ces tableaux, ces édifices? Insensés, qu'avez-vous fait? Vous les maîtres des nations, vous vous êtes rendus les esclaves des hommes frivoles que vous avez vaincus? Ce sont des rhéteurs qui vous gouvernent? C'est pour enrichir des architectes, des peintres, des statuaires, et des histrions, que vous avez arrosé de votre sang la Grèce et l'Asie? (…) Romains, hâtez-vous de renverser ces amphithéâtres; brisez ces marbres; brûlez ces tableaux; chassez ces esclaves qui vous subjuguent, et dont les funestes arts vous corrompent.

> [O Fabricius! What would your great soul have thought, if to your own misfortune you had been called back to life and had seen the pompous face of this Rome saved by your efforts and which your honourable name had distinguished more than all its conquests? 'Gods,' you would have said, 'what has happened to those thatched roofs and those rustic dwelling places where, back then, moderation and virtue lived? What fatal splendour has succeeded Roman simplicity? What is this strange language? What are these effeminate customs? What do these statues signify, these paintings, these buildings? You mad people, what have you done? You, masters of nations, have you turned yourself into the slaves of the frivolous men you conquered? Are you now governed by rhetoricians? Was it to enrich architects, painters, sculptors, and comic actors that you soaked Greece and Asia with your blood? (…) Romans, hurry up and tear down these amphitheatres, break up these marbles, burn these paintings, chase out these slaves who are subjugating you, whose fatal arts are corrupting you.][17]

17 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social. Écrits politiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 14f.

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With Fabricius as his mouthpiece, Rousseau paints a Roman civilization characterized by urban decadence, empty magnificence, love of arts, and moral decline. Claiming that the Romans are enslaved by those they had at first conquered, the passage addresses something Edward Gibbon in his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1789) would explore in more depth, namely that Roman society was gradually undermined and destroyed because of its inability to politically and culturally integrate all its foreigners, or 'barbarians'.[18] However, although the text points to Rome, it should not be forgotten that Rousseau also has Paris in mind, and that the complaint and indignation which Fabricius vent before the 'splendeur funeste' is equally fitting when it comes to the estimation of the modern world. Jean Starobinski has noted that Rousseau 'wants to be seen as the true barbarian, the "peasant from Danube", who, having arrived in Paris speaks the language of nature, a language which the Parisians have unlearnt'.[19] Rousseau is thus on the one hand an outsider, but, taking the role and voice of Fabricius, he on the other invests himself with the authority to tell the Parisians the truth of their own moral decline. Although alienated and at the outside of the society he criticizes, Rousseau/Fabricius presents himself as the only one in possession of true knowledge of its moral and historical source.

Unsurprisingly, the historical authority Rousseau here flaunts builds on certain rhetorical tricks. For it is symptomatic that Rousseau/Fabricius fights with the same weapons he says have corrupted the Romans. Intriguingly, he blames the rhetoricians: 'Are you now governed by rhetoricians?' This is rather startling and not a little bold, given that Rousseau's passage is itself highly rhetorical. In particular, he makes use of the figures that Quintillian calls *indignatio* (Greek *deinôsis*) and *evidentia* (*enargeia*). The first consists in the speaker's ire, his indignation and 'strong exaggerations' faced with what is morally repulsive. Fabricius' words indicate what Starobinski has called Rousseau's 'extrémisme vertueux', his insistence on purity and simplicity as the sole compass of true morality. The other figure, *evidentia*, consists in presenting a clear visual impression of something, creating the illusion that it takes place before the speaker's very eyes. In the passage in question, the repetition of the deictic 'this/these' gives the impression that Fabricius positions himself immediately before this late Roman world: 'What is *this* strange language? What are *these* effeminate customs? What do *these* statues signify, *these* paintings, *these* buildings?' Clearly, confronted with this over- or perhaps pseudo-civilized world, Fabricius tends to appear as a barbarian, unable to understand his surroundings. But the effect of *evidentia* is to convince the hearers or readers that they share the same

18 On Gibbon and the barbarians, see J.G.A. Pocock's many-volumed work *Barbarism and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999f).
19 Jean Starobinski, *La transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), 138.

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position and moral perspective as the speaker. Like Fabricius, we, too, see and despair over this decadent world arising before us. It is a rhetorical manoeuvre to trick us into seeing the world with the eyes of its outsider and chastiser.

The 'prosopopée de Fabricius' encapsulates the historical tensions we found adumbrated by Koselleck: with a civilization seeking ever greater perfection primarily in aesthetics and science, the innocence of its inhabitants will inevitably be lost, and moral decline and alienation set in. For 'nos âmes se sont corrompues à mesure que nos sciences et nos arts se sont avancés à la perfection' [our souls have been ever more corrupted the more the arts and sciences have gained in perfection].[20] The 'aporia of progress' (Koselleck) – and this is Rousseau's point – leads ultimately to a fundamental clash, a cultural collision unleashing barbaric impulses. In the face of a society in thrall to scientific and aesthetic perfection, Fabricius calls for reckless iconoclastic *tabula rasa*-fantasies: 'brisez ces marbres; brûlez ces tableaux; chassez ces esclaves'! Rousseau's point seems to be that unbridled aesthetic and scientific progress will unleash destructive energies in the name of moral rejuvenation. In fact, Rousseau/Fabricius manifests not only a barbaric will to destruction, but also the urgency of extremism and fanaticism. Yet this is not something to be dismissive about; Rousseau wants to grasp the role of passion in politics, not as something negative, but as a source for change and potential emancipation. Indeed, approvals of a politics founded on strong passions and unbending wills – and which finds its source in religious enthusiasm – are frequently on show in *Discours sur les sciences et les arts.*[21] For instance, Rousseau refers to Omar, the caliph responsible for the destruction of the library in Alexandria:

> On dit que le calife Omar, consulté sur ce qu'il fallait faire de la bibliothèque d'Alexandria, répondit en ces termes: Si les livres de cette bibliothèque d'Alexandrie contiennent des choses opposés à l'Alcoran, ils sont mauvais et il faut les brûler. S'ils ne contiennent que la doctrine de l'Alcoran, brûlez-les encore: ils sont superflus.
>
> [They say that Caliph Omar, when consulted about what had to be done with the library of Alexandria, answered as follows: 'If the books of this library contain matters opposed to the Koran, they are bad and must be burned. If they contain only the doctrine of the Koran, burn them anyway, for they are superfluous.][22]

20 Ibid., 5.

21 Contrary to a host of eighteenth-century thinkers (including Voltaire) who tended to dismiss passion in politics, Rousseau hails what he calls the 'great passion' of 'civic fanaticism', seeing it as something that, at best, could unleash a politics of equality and emancipation. For a valuable discussion of Enlightenment views on fanaticism, see Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism. On the Uses of an Idea* (London: Verso 2017), in particular, for the contrast between Voltaire and Rousseau 106–112.

22 Ibid., 28.

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Again, we see Rousseau parroting the imperative of destruction. And again this imperative derives from an extremism of virtue, or political fanaticism.

Yet it is a crucial factor in this tableau of riotous energy and cultural clashes over historical developments that Rousseau situates these tensions within the medium of language. Indeed, this is where the barbaric impulses are most palpable. For Fabricius' question 'Quel est ce language étranger?' [What is this strange language?] creates an agonistic tension inside French itself, as if this very language is torn between elegance and barbarity, plagued by an internal difference which makes it impossible for Fabricius to understand it. On his way to Vincennes, Rousseau had felt the problems of language, or more precisely writing; during his moment of epiphany, it had been impossible to write down everything he had 'felt', he claims. 'Si j'avais jamais pu écrire le quart de ce que j'ai vu et senti sous cet arbre, avec quelle clarté j'aurais fait voir toutes les contradictions du système social, avec quelle force j'aurais exposé tous les abus de nos institutions (…)'. [If ever I could have written the quarter of what I saw and felt under that tree, with what clarity would I have revealed all the contradictions of the social system, with what force would I have exposed all the abuses of our institutions].[23] This is a language of insinuation, typical of Rousseau: all those injustices, contradictions and institutional flaws exist, but he was not able to write about them, as if there is a resistance within the medium of writing itself, setting up an obstacle between his ideas and their materialization. Rousseau uses *praeteritio*, writing about his failure to write. The spot on the road to Vincennes is thus not only the scene of inspiration, but also the scene of failure and *occasion manquée.* Perhaps that is why Rousseau then says that he only became a writer 'malgré moi': 'I became a writer almost despite myself'.[24]

This failure to connect the language of his mind with the language on paper is a frequent theme in Rousseau, and it points to a basic inner tension within language itself, a tension that raises the question of barbarism. In his autobiographical works, Rousseau often writes about his troubles regarding this medium. To take but one example:

> Mes manuscrits raturés, barbouillés, mêlés, indéchiffrables attestent la peine qu'ils m'ont coûtée. Il n'y en a pas un qu'il ne m'ait fallu transcrire quatre ou cinq fois avant de le donner à la presse. Je n'ai jamais pu rien faire la plume à la main vis-à-vis d'une table et de mon papier. C'est à la promenade au milieu des rochers et des bois, c'est la nuit dans mon lit et durant mes insomnies que j'écris dans mon cerveau, l'on peut juger avec quelle lenteur, surtout pour un homme absolument dépourvu de mémoire verbale, et qui de la vie n'a pu retenir six vers par cœur.[25]

23 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions. Autres textes autobiographiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 1135f.

24 ibid., 1136.

25 Ibid., 114. See also, for a related passage, ibid., 351f.

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> [My manuscripts – crossed out, scribbled on, muddled, indecipherable – bear witness to what they have cost me. There is not one of them that I have not had to copy out four or five times before giving it to the printer. Seated at my table, with my pen in my hand and my paper in front of me, I have never been able to achieve anything. It is when I am out walking among the rocks and the woods, it is at night, sleepless in my bed, that I write in my head, and with what slowness may be imagined, especially since I am totally bereft of verbal memory and have never in my life managed to learn six lines of verse by heart.][26]

Rousseau suggests that writing is an alienating process, where the writer feels the estrangement of his own thoughts: the manuscript, being 'indéchiffrable', is a palimpsest whose content he is not fully able to understand. The 'hic' in Ovid's line *Barbarus hic ego* is thus, in the case of Rousseau, the paper itself, with its chaos of inscriptions and erasures: it is where the author is no longer able to understand his own mind.[27] 'La littérature, c'est la rature', Roland Barthes is reported to have said, and we can indeed see something of this in Rousseau's writings, so often skeptical of the whole business of writing. 'Raturer' means to overwrite, to erase, while the other adjective Rousseau uses: 'manuscrits *barbouillés*', etymologically suggests soiling and stains: impurity. Rousseau, rewriting his texts, seems constantly to be battling against the written 'barbouillage'. For the barbarian, the paper is scene of battle, of destruction, of erasure, and a search for purity.

No wonder, then, that Rousseau says he wants to flee the medium of writing altogether. His remarks epitomize what would later become a prominent topic of modernist writing: the horror of the paper. The point, however, is that this horror feeds into his wish for destruction, for just as Fabricius with his *tabula rasa*-fantasies rages against Roman artworks, so Rousseau rages against his own writing. There is a quest for purity and a battle against the sign that lies at the heart of Rousseau's writing, something that is indeed typical of 18th century writing altogether.[28] Rousseau presents this as his abhorrence of a putatively normative sphere of writing: 'Seated at my table, with my pen in my hand and my paper in front of me, I have never been able to achieve anything.' In a fragment from 'Mon portrait', he qualifies this further: 'Je ne fais jamais rien qu'à la promenade, la campagne est mon cabinet; l'aspect d'une table, du papier et des livres me donne de l'ennui, l'appareil du travail me décourage'. [I never do anything except when walking; the countryside is my study; seeing a table with paper and books bores me, the material used for writing discourages me][29] Rousseau can only

26 Rousseau, *Confessions,* translated by Angela Scholar (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 111.
27 A famous study of Rousseau's relationship to writing is Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 1997.
28 According to Juri M. Lotman, 'the striving for de-semiotization, the battle against the sign, is the basis of the culture of the Enlightenment'. Quoted in David Wellbery, *Lessing's Laocoon. Semiotics and aesthetics in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 35.
29 Rousseau, *Confessions. Autres textes autobiographiques*, 1128.

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write by opposing the usual scene of writing, situating his writing in a sphere, the countryside, that of course does not facilitate it. This points to Rousseau's tendency, particularly in his old age, to write outdoors, what Claire Bustarret has called 'pratique d'écriture déambulatoire' [his ambulatory writing].[30] However, as we saw in his letter to Malesherbes, even this is difficult for Rousseau, given that on the road to Vincennes he was in fact incapable of writing down everything that was on his mind.

Barbarism, to Rousseau, thus involves awareness of a place, a 'hic', where language turns against itself, a place of internal opposition and *contra-diction*, accompanied by a dream of another place, a place ultimately free of language. The basic gesture of Rousseau is, as Starobinski has noted, to 'speak in order to escape the malediction of speech, to write about giving up writing'.[31] About his epiphany on the road to Vincennes, Rousseau had stated his wish to lay bare 'all the abuses of our institutions' and to show 'that man is naturally good and that it is through these institutions alone that men become bad.' The worst institution of society is, as Rousseau sees it, language. Ever again, Rousseau insists that language teaches men to become duplicitous and unnatural; the arbitrary nature of the signs gives them the opportunity to state falsehoods.[32] His self-proclaimed barbarism, which implies a fight against language, is thus also educative. For Rousseau, to educate men on the ills of society necessarily also involves demonstrating the ills of language.

A double perspective, highlighting both the aporia of progress and the barbaric regression to violence in the name of wounded morality but also individual freedom, makes out the drama of the 'prosopopée de Fabricius' and *Discours sur les sciences et les arts.* This clash is given a subtle expression by the frontispiece to the first edition. The engraving by the artist Jean-Baptiste Pierre shows Prometheus offering fire to man and to an ignorant satyr. This subject goes back (as Rousseau explains in *Lettre à M. Lecat*) to a story in Plutarch about a satyr

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30 Claire Bustarret, 'La carte à jouer, support d'écriture au 18e siècle', in *Socio-anthropologie* (vol. 30, 2014), 83–98. An interesting example of this practice is the playing cards, the 'cartes à jouer', which Rousseau, apparently at the time he wrote *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, brought with him on his walks, and on which he wrote down short reflections and ideas; 27 of these cards are preserved, and many of these jottings contain erasures. The cards are reprinted, recto et verso, in the edition of *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* by M. Eigeldinger, Geneva 1978.

31 Starobinski, *La transparence et l'obstacle*, 321.

32 An example of this is Rousseau's examination in *Lettre à d'Alembert* of the statement 'Je vous aime', which he sees as a trick used by libertines to fool women. And in *Émile*, Rousseau had warned against trying to feed the young pupil with too many words. The child is a little barbarian, and 'bon naturellement', and should not be misguided by the reign of words. See Schneider, *Der Barbar*, 160. In *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, he consequently celebrates the 'era of the barbarians' as a golden age when people did not write and hardly even spoke, each living on his own. Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, 93–96.

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who, seeing Prometheus bringing fire and not knowing what it is, wants to caress and kiss the flame. Prometheus had shouted back at him: 'Satyr, you'll mourn your beard, for it takes fire when you touch the flame'.[33] Rousseau might have identified with the satyr, the barbarian, who has problems with handling the fire – or language. Yet he is also Prometheus, who has stolen the fire from the Olympian establishment and who with his book sets out to educate the reader. In the image of Prometheus and the satyr, the crucial overall ambition of the text such as it was exemplified in the 'prosopopée de Fabricius', namely to demonstrate the problems of the civilizational process, is clearly manifest. The flame of knowledge and the fire of barbaric impulse come together in a highly telling way. Prometheus offers to the barbarian the gift that is also a weapon of self-destruction – and the barbarian wants to kiss the language that at the same time destroys.

'New Place': Chateaubriand and the destruction of historical continuity

> Chateaubriand never looked for whatever is fruitful, traditional or eternal in the past or in death; the only thing that satisfied him was the past as past, and death as death. If required, he caused damage only to give himself all the more reason to cultivate his regret.[34]

In *Voyages en Italie*, a travel diary that together with his celebrated *Lettre à M. de Fontanes* records his experiences as a tourist in Italy in 1803, Chateaubriand frequently refers to barbarians. For instance, on 11th December 1803, he is in Tivoli outside Rome, studying some inscriptions on the graves. He concludes: 'Que peut-il y avoir de plus vain que tout ceci? Je lis sur une pierre les regrets qu'un vivant donnait à un mort; ce vivant est mort à son tour, et après deux mille ans je viens, moi, *barbare des Gaules,* parmi les ruines de Rome, étudier ces épitaphes'. [What could possibly prove more futile than this? I read upon a block of stone the expressions of regret that some living person bestowed on the dead; the survivor has perished in turn and I, *a barbarous Gaul,* arrive two thousand years later, and surrounded by the ruins of Rome pore over these epitaphs in their secluded retreat] (emphasis mine).[35] The utterance points to what might be termed Chateaubriand's poetics of epitaphs. Poring over the inscriptions of death, the author – a 'barbarous Gaul' – feels the futility of life and the insignificance of his own existence. Elsewhere he notes: 'La vie est une mort succes-

33 Rousseau, *Du contrat social. Écrits politiques*, 17.
34 Charles Maurras, quoted in Compagnon, *Les antimodernes,* 99. My translation.
35 Chateaubriand, *Voyages en Italie* (Lausanne: Bibliothèque des Arts, 2003), 56f.

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sive' [Life is a successive death], and even more directly: 'Ma vie détruit ma vie' [My life destroys my life].[36] All existence is doomed from its outset, a malign process of self-disfigurement. This fatalist cult of auto-destruction is perhaps the most prominent feature of his autobiographical writing such as it materialized in his vast and characteristically titled *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (1848–50), 'memories from beyond the grave'.

Chateaubriand's historical pessimism, which these remarks give witness of, offers the frame for his barbaric imaginations. Peter Fritzsche has lucidly zoomed in the historical background for the author's melancholy. 'In Chateaubriand's view, the revolution had shattered lines of social continuity, casting the present off from the past and thereby creating a "different race", exiles who had become estranged from their own time, that is, stranded in the present, and as a result came to read contemporary history as dispossession', Fritzsche points out.[37] A key word here is 'exile' and Chateaubriand's idea of himself as a cultural outcast in the aftermath of the 1789 revolution. In the following, I will give some examples of how this melancholy worldview creates the springboard for a poignant poetical *philology of barbarism.*[38] As we will see, Chateaubriand is the fatal archivist of barbarism, a merciless analyst of the leftovers of previous barbarian destruction. Unlike Rousseau, whose prosopopeia of Fabricius had a certain political and contemporary urgency, Chateaubriand views barbarism through the lenses of historical distance and with the acuity and vituperations of antimodernist nostalgia.[39] His sense of barbarism unfolds on the background of his poetics of inscriptions, as well as his ideas about posthumous survival.

A first example of this is a passage from his *Essai sur la littérature anglaise* (1836). This passage will tell us something about how Chateaubriand takes the Ovidian 'barbarus hic ego' in a completely different direction than Rousseau. The *Essai sur la littérature anglaise* itself is a long and well informed history of English literature from the Middle Ages to the present, also including Chateaubriand's translation into prose of Milton's *Paradise Lost.* Yet what is striking about the text is its pessimistic and even fatalistic conclusions. Sharing the conservative opinions of Edmund Burke who in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* had vehemently criticized the French revolutionaries for their *tabula rasa*-fantasies and hatred for inherited customs and institutions, and transporting Burke's pol-

36 Ibid., 80. And Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, 2 volumes (Paris: Gallimard 1964), 585.

37 Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present. Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2004), 55f.

38 Chateaubriand, *Essai sur la littérature anglaise*, ed. Sébastien Baudoin (Paris: Société des Textes Français Modernes, 2012), 95.

39 Compagnon finds that a rhetoric of vituperation is typical of anti-modern thinkers like Chateaubriand or de Maistre. See *Les antimodernes,* 169–181.

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itics into a literary and aesthetic context, Chateaubriand diagnoses a modern anarchy of taste where inherited standards and canons, the 'renommées universelles', have been lost.[40] There is moreover little reason to have any hope for the future: 'Il est à craindre que les talents supérieurs n'aient à l'avenir pour faire entendre leurs harmonies qu'un instrument discord ou fêlé'. [It is to be feared that the most talented writers in the future will only have a flawed instrument on which to play their harmonies].[41]

This diagnosis finds its most stunning illustration in the following passage, perfectly encapsulating Roland Barthes' claim that Chateaubriand had a predilection for 'linguistic Apocalypse'.[42] Here, Chateaubriand considers the death of languages:

> Des peuplades de l'Orénoque n'existent plus; il n'est resté de leur dialecte qu'une douzaine de mots prononcés dans la cime des arbres par des perroquets redevenus libres; la grive d'Agrippine qui gazouilloit des mots grecs sur les balustrades des palais de Rome. Tel sera tôt ou tard le sort de nos jargons modernes: quelque sansonnet de *New-Place* sifflera sur un pommier des vers de Shakespeare, inintelligibles au passant; quelque corbeau envolé de la cage du dernier curé franco-gaulois dira, du haut de la tour en ruine d'une cathédrale abandonnée, à des peuples étrangers, nos successeurs: "Agréez les accents d'une voix qui vous fut connue; vous mettrez fin à tous ces discours." Soyez donc Shakespeare ou Bossuet, pour qu'en dernier résultat votre chef-d'œuvre survive dans la mémoire d'un oiseau, à votre langage et à votre souvenir chez les hommes.
>
> [There are Orinoco tribes that no longer exist; all that remains of their dialect is a dozen words uttered in the treetops by a few parrots enjoying their new-found freedom; Agrippina's thrush warbling Greek words from the balustrades of the Roman palaces. Such will be, sooner or later, the fate of our modern jargons: some starling will whistle verses by Shakespeare from an appletree at *New-Place*, incomprehensible to those passing by; having flown out of its cage, some raven belonging to the last Franco-Gallic priest will address foreign peoples, our successors, from the heights of a ruined tower of an evacuated cathedral: 'Accept these last accents of a voice that you once knew well. You put all my orations to an end'.
> Be Shakespeare or Bossuet, then, so that in the final outcome your masterpiece shall outlive your language and man's remembrance of you in the memory of a bird.][43]

The passage offers a series of laconically stated anecdotal oddities: First we are in America among Indians, then in Rome with emperor Claudius's wife Agrippina who according to Pliny the Elder owned a thrush fluent in the human language.

40 ibid., 495.
41 Chateaubriand, *Essai sur la littérature anglaise*, 489f.
42 Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, transl. by Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 290.
43 Ibid., 493f. Chateaubriand obviously liked this passage so well that he included it, with some minor changes, in *Mémoires d'outre-tombe.*

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Then we are at a place called 'New-Place' associated with Shakespeare, and finally we meet a raven quoting from Bossuet's famous funeral speech to the Prince of Condé (1687). The bravura of the passage is evident, yet also its pessimism. Our own French language will die out, Chateaubriand states. The conclusion is rather startling: the reader is exhorted to become a great writer, like Shakespeare or Bossuet, just in order to be remembered – not by man – but by a quoting bird.

There are a number of features in this text but the most telling in our context is its manifestation of what might be termed the *barbaric primordial situation.* When writing about the future death of French, Chateaubriand tacitly presupposes that his own work will eventually be just as incomprehensible and foreign as those of Shakespeare or Bossuet. Ovid's phrase about 'Barbarus hic ego' is thus transported into the future: 'you might understand me now, but not later'. The text is thus not only *about* apocalypse, but itself a prospective victim of it. Evidently, the downfall of common understanding and semantic chaos – the barbaric primordial situation – fascinated Chateaubriand, for whom the incommunicable, the ruinous and defective were the principal forces and dimensions of history.[44] Here, we see it in the example of the starling quoting Shakespeare, where the name for starling in French: 'sansonnet' contains both 'sans' and 'sonnet', so that the near-at-hand suggestion is that the 'sansonnet' quotes the sonnets of Shakespeare, but deprived of artful form. Equally, in the image of the raven quoting Bossuet, the suggestion is that the understanding of the speech is gone. Not for nothing, Bossuet is quoted as saying: 'Accept these last accents of a voice that you *once* knew well'. *Once,* but not anymore. In the apocalyptic landscape depicted by Chateaubriand, only birds remember the eloquence of Bossuet, the perhaps greatest orator of French Classicism.[45] Language, spoken by parrots having escaped from the cages of a civilization gone to pieces, has lost its human origin. Chateaubriand thus reverses the tradition among (Enlightenment) philosophers for seeing language as the mark of humanity and what sets man above animals. Bossuet's words have become what Rousseau termed 'ce langage étranger',

44 Denis Hollier has argued that Chateaubriand had a 'passion for utterances that have outlived their destination, that have survived the necessity and even the possibility of meaning, a passion for languages that a contextual mutation has released from the necessity of meaning anything at all, languages that exist without having to make[s] themselves heard'. See Hollier 1989, 'French Customs, Literary Borders', in *October* (vol. 49, 1989), 40–52, 50.

45 The specific authority and dignity of Bossuet's style has often been highlighted. According to the fine words of Paul Valéry, in his short sketch 'Sur Bossuet', the French bishop was the master of a rhetorical style centring less on thoughts than on architectonic form. Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres 1* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 499. This view was also held by Chateaubriand. In *Génie du Christianisme* (1802), he remarks that Bossuet spoke on behalf of 'le siècle de Louis', and that his orations represented the canonical expression of that great era. Chateaubriand, *Essai sur les révolutions. Génie du christianisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 866.

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even if the context is different. These words are incomprehensible to those who hear them, those Chateaubriand calls 'foreign peoples, our successors'.

In contra-distinction to the Enlightenment myth of progress, Chateaubriand thus presents history as a process towards increasing precariousness, destruction and disorientation. Nothing less than the downfall of Christian civilization is manifested, with the cathedral in ruins, and no one capable of understanding, let alone appreciating, the artworks of the past. Chateaubriand has in mind a landscape of Babelian confusion (suggested by the image of the "ruined tower"), of exile and *psittacism.*[46] It is fitting that he has chosen Bossuet's last funeral speech, the one devoted to the prince of Condé. There, Bossuet had ended with stating that this speech would be his last ('You put all my orations to an end').[47] In his own passage, Chateaubriand exploits the pathos of the 'last word', using Bossuet in order to proclaim the funeral speech to the French language.[48] It will only live on in the memory of birds.

Is there nothing in the passage that opposes the bleak historical prophecy? Is Chateaubriand exclusively the fatalistic prophet of cultural apocalypse? Here we must turn to what is perhaps the passage's most crucial feature, its reference to '*New-Place*' (written in English and in italics in the original). What is 'new' about this place? In fact, 'New-Place' was the name of Shakespeare's house in Stratford-upon-Avon where he spent his last years. However, in 1765, the then owner, a priest named Francis Gastrell, simply demolished both house and garden.[49] Thus, what once was 'new' had not only grown old but eradicated. Is not the fate of this house analogous with the state of literature in the modern age, Chateaubriand asks? The passage suggests that the future of literature will be one of homelessness where great literature will appear only as incomprehensible birdsong in a place whose link to the past is demolished.[50] Modern bar-

46 The word *psittacism* (after Latin *psittacus*, parrot) was coined by Leibniz, meaning a speech that is repetitive and mechanic. (The background for this neologism was Spinoza's ridicule, in *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, of people who say 'verba psittaci vel automati, quae sine mente et sensu loquuntur.' (13, 155/156) – 419: Spinoza had in mind people who uttered religious phrases not knowing what they meant).

47 'Agréez ces derniers efforts d'une voix qui vous fut connue: vous mettrez fin à tous ces discours'. Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 217f. Note that Chateaubriand writes 'accents' instead of Bossuet's 'efforts'. In his discussion of Bossuet's text in *Réflexions sur les éloges académiques* (1821), Jean le Rond d'Alembert had played on the difference between 'efforts' and 'accens', something which may have inspired Chateaubriand. See d'Alembert, *Ouevres completes*, vol. 2 (London: Belin, 1821), 267.

48 See René Pommier, 'Le vieux corbeau et l'aigle de Meaux', in *La pensée du paradoxe,* eds. F. Bercegol and D. Philippot (Paris: PUP, 2006), 435–442.

49 On Gastrell and 'New-Place', see Ian Ousby, *The Englishman's England. Taste, Travel, and the Rise of Tourism* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 31f.

50 Chateaubriand was not alone in surmising that Shakespeare would not be understood in the future. Already at the beginning of the great Shakespeare-cult in Germany in the late 18th

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barians like Gastrell will have destroyed the continuity between the past and the future.

However, this is perhaps not the whole picture, and there are signs that Chateaubriand was, at least partially, capable of unearthing something positive from what he viewed as the barbaric unfolding of history. This consists in his vision of the liberation of birds, his ornithological messianism. These birds, singing incomprehensibly from a 'pommier' [appletree] at 'New-Place', represents not only the downfall of human history, knowledge and tradition, of art and languages. Having escaped prior captivity, they also expose a 'new-found freedom'. Their new place is a place of freedom, where they live in post-apocalyptic bliss. Chateaubriand here proves himself a pioneer of romantic ecology, albeit an ecology that excludes and dismisses the continuing existence of Western civilized man as we know him. A poetics of survival in the wake of catastrophe surface in Chateaubriand's passage. While Ovid's place of barbarism was Tomis, and Rousseau's was Paris, Chateaubriand's 'New-Place' is the messianic ornithological future.

With his vision of the ruins of 'New-Place' as accommodation for the emancipated starlings of the future, Chateaubriand offers a succinct illustration of the historical *dynamics* of barbarism. This consists in how after destruction follows a complicated post-apocalyptic aftermath. In his *Lettre à M. de Fontanes,* Chateaubriand offers an illustration of this dynamics. As a tourist at the site of Villa Adriana, he reflects on the destruction of the house of the emperor Hadrian:

> Je rappelais les événements qui avaient renversé cette *villa* superbe; je la voyais dépouillée de ses plus beaux ornements par le successeur d'Adrian, je voyais les Barbares y passer comme un tourbillon, s'y cantonner quelquefois, et pour se défendre dans ses mêmes monuments qu'ils avaient à moitié détruits, couronner l'ordre grec et toscan du créneau gothique (…).
>
> [I thought of the events that had destroyed this superb *villa*; I saw it despoiled of its most beautiful ornaments by Hadrian's successor; I saw the barbarians passing by like a whirlwind, sometimes staying here; and, in order to defend themselves among these monuments which they had half destroyed, crowning the Greek and Tuscan orders with Gothic battlements.][51]

Hadrian's villa functions in the same way as Shakespeare's 'New-Place'. It offers habitation for past or future barbarians, be they Goths or birds. Chateaubriand, who as we remember had called himself 'a barbarous Gaul', sees himself as also

century, Herder had claimed in his highly influential essay on 'Shakespear' from 1773 that 'Shakspear immer mehr veralte!' (sic). Herder claimed that his own generation would be the last one capable of understanding his plays. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Schriften zur Ästhetik und Literatur* (F.a.M.: dkv, 1993), 520.

51 Ibid., 173.

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part of this law of history. With his own philological archeology, he is himself a temporary pensioner in the villa devoted to the leftovers of catastrophe.

In a passage from his *Mémoires d'outre tombe,* we get a clear sense of the way Chateaubriand sees his work and its fate. He speaks about his excavations in 1829 at Torre Vergata, just outside Rome, near the tomb of Nero:

> J'irai ce matin a ma fouille: hier nous avons trouvé le squelette d'un soldat goth et le bras d'une statue de femme. C'était rencontrer le destructeur avec la ruine qu'il avait faite; nous avons une grande espérance de retrouver ce matin la statue! Si les débris d'architecture que je découvre en valent la peine, je ne les renverserai pas pour vendre les briques comme on fait ordinairement; je les laisserai debout, et ils porteront mon nom: ils sont du temps de Domitien.
>
> [I shall go to my excavation this morning: yesterday we discovered the skeleton of a Gothic soldier and the arm of a female statue. It was as though one had come upon the destroyer together with the ruin he had made; we have great hopes of finding the statue this morning. If the architectural remains which I am uncovering are worth the trouble, I shall not break them up to sell the bricks, as is usually done: I shall leave them standing, and they will bear my name. They belong to the time of Domitian.][52]

Chateaubriand contemplates the statue and its destroyer, the 'Gothic soldier' who is himself dead. History is thus, as he puts it, continual destruction, 'ruins of ruins', yet these ruins will also, given Chateaubriand's unearthing of them, enjoy posthumous fame.[53] It is within this thematic context of destroyed artworks, dead barbarians and posthumous survival that Chateaubriand posits his own work. He pursues a poetic and philological archeology which gives witness to the inherently barbarian tendency of history with its continuously destructive energies, and he presents his own name as one extra addition to this work of history; his name will figure on the 'bricks'. With the title of his autobiography in mind, we could say that he is speaking 'outre-tombe', from beyond his own grave.

Conclusion

As we have seen, both Rousseau and Chateaubriand use the idea of barbarism as a fruitful metaphor for historical contextualization as well as for autobiographical self-representation. Both deploy the notion of barbarism to make critical questions of the project of Enlightenment optimism and rationalism, and both exploit it in terms of their own poetics and reflections about the medium of writing. Diderot's claim that modern literature needs to manifest something 'barbaric, vast and wild' rings true for both of them. Be it through Rousseau's battle against

52 Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, vol. 3, ed. Berchet, (Paris: Poche 2002), 334.
53 Chateaubriand, *Voyages en Italie*, 174.

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the sign, or Chateaubriand's poetics of epitaphs, they both demonstrate a modern sense of writing, i. e. the experience with 'the savage and unruly being of words', which Michel Foucault saw as key to the modern idea of literature (or 'écriture').

In historical-philosophical terms, however, there are major differences between them. Rousseau, building on his diagnosis of the aporia of progress and of civilization, saw the urge to violence and barbarism as ultimately inevitable and even positive for individual freedom. Barbarism becomes a signal for a politics embracing the possibility of emancipation. His prosopopeia of Fabricius had started with a subjunctive: 'O Fabricius! What would your great soul have thought, if to your own misfortune you had been called back to life'. George Steiner has said about grammatical forms such as subjunctives, optatives and counter-factual modes that because they allow us to alter the world, they offer 'a nucleus of potentiality' and are as such 'the passwords of hope'.[54] For Rousseau, the idea of barbarism is a means to imagine something else and perhaps *better* than the current situation. This contrasts with Chateaubriand, whose bleak evocations of a cultural apocalypse present a fatalist (with the words of Maurras) cult of 'the past as past, and death as death'. Chateaubriand's depiction of the barbaric ur-situation, i. e. mutual incomprehension, thoroughly informs his portrayals of the ruins of historical discontinuity. However, as we saw, there remains glimpses of hope, not least in his reference to 'New-Place' with the starling singing from an apple tree. It perhaps merits attention that Shakespeare allegedly had planted not an apple tree, but a mulberry tree in his garden. The apple tree thus only exists in and through this *new* place planted in Chateaubriand's own text. His 'New-Place' thus underscores not only his creativity in subtly manipulating the tradition. Chateaubriand's 'New-Place' is itself something positive to come out of the prior barbaric destruction.

54 George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation* (London: faber and faber, 2002), 5.

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