

**‘Le Néant de ce qu’on appelle gloire’:
Post-Revolutionary Cultural Memory and the *Dialogue des Morts*,
the Case of François Pagès**

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ABSTRACT: As France was struggling to find ways to shape its national history and cultural heritage following the Revolution, an unknown author in a minor genre was reflecting on what the recent social and political upheaval meant for the celebrated protagonists of France’s past and present. François de Pagès, in his 1800 *dialogues des morts*, brings together the illustrious dead to comment on the world they have left behind, and on their own lives and legacies. A particular concern, articulated by Mirabeau, Marat, Voltaire, Rousseau and others, is what it takes to be remembered, and conversely, to be forgotten.

This article explores this question first as it appeared in the reality of 1790s France – from the ‘impossible’ Panthéon, to the reimagining of pre-revolutionary cultural icons – then as it is set out in Pagès’ text, which brings together pre- and post-revolutionary greats, and examines their relative ‘gloire’. I underline the contentious nature of the ‘grand homme’ in the revolutionary decade, and suggest that the capacity of literary creation to provide a durable but flexible form of cultural memory is one of the reasons for the renewed popularity of the *dialogue des morts* in this period.

KEYWORDS: posterity, Panthéon, eighteenth-century France, memory, commemoration, dialogue of the dead

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In 1791, the church of St Geneviève in Paris became the Panthéon: a monument devoted to remembering the great men of France’s past. Above the door ran a dedication that wrote the secular temple into the tradition of the ‘culte des grands hommes’: a movement that developed across the course of the eighteenth century and involved the celebration of individuals seen as constituting moral exemplars for the citizens of France (Bonnet, 1998: *passim*). This vast construction and its inscription, ‘Aux grands hommes, la patrie reconnaissante’, were conceived literally to set in stone and commemorate those men through whom the burgeoning Republican nation defined itself: an officially sanctioned form of national cultural memory, the ‘Temple de la Patrie [...] [et] Autel de la Liberté’ (*Journal*, 4 April 1791: 379).

However this monument, apparently the pinnacle of a century of hero-worship, was built upon the shaky ground of a country in the midst of great social and political upheaval; a country that was seeking to break links with a monarchical, elitist past, and in which the question of what to remember and how to do so was the subject of vehement debate. This paradox, of an attempt to create and fix a version of the past by a regime that simultaneously wanted to deny large swathes of history, has long been recognised. From Edgar Quinet’s essay on the Panthéon in the mid-nineteenth century (1868: 670) to the modern historian Mona Ozouf’s analysis towards the end of the twentieth (1984: 155), the word that continually occurs is ‘impossible’. This article first examines the late eighteenth century’s fraught and problematic relationship with commemorating its ‘great

men', then analyses a literary genre that to some extent reflects the Panthéon, to consider whether alternative forms of memory creation were able to overcome this impossibility.

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The practice of recognising great individuals and using them to define what it means to belong to a country is by no means specific to eighteenth-century France. Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey was inaugurated with the burial of Chaucer in 1400, the Walhalla, which honours notable Germans in a monument above the Danube, was conceived of in 1807, and Paraguay's Panteón Nacional de los Héroes received its name in 1936. However, the form that this process took in a country struggling to define its national identity is worthy of note (Bell, 2001). The great men celebrated in France as the eighteenth century progressed were increasingly not kings and military heroes, but figures from other areas of life that could act as moral exemplars. The definition of 'grand homme' was set out by Voltaire and the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, among others, as referring to an individual who had made a useful, usually moral contribution to his country, irrespective of birth or societal status. Whilst a military man could be a hero, it took a more sustained, interior greatness to be deemed 'grand' (Voltaire, 1735: 174-75; Saint-Pierre, 1739: 36); moreover, since this quality was potentially accessible to anyone, the concept had a democratic, republican tone.

The eighteenth century commemorated its great men in a public, official fashion, from the sculptures of artists, authors and scientists commissioned in 1776 for the grand gallery of the Louvre to the spectacular funerals organised for political and cultural figures (Bonnet, 1998: 127-32; Glover Lindsay, 2012: 76-82). The most prominent public monument was of course the Panthéon, which was both the natural end point of this process, and a new, post-1789 beginning; an official version of national history told not

through kings, but through this new form of hero. The church had originally been constructed as an *ex-voto* to St Geneviève: a national offering in thanks for Louis XV's restoration to health in 1744.ⁱ The decision to appropriate it for a new, secular, proto-republican national cause was deeply symbolic (Deming, 1989: 100-01). Moreover, the location of the building accorded with the theatrical sensibilities of the time (Maslan, 2005): situated at the high point of Paris, it was a suitably visible end point for processions full of the pageantry of revolutionary festivals. And this prominence also underlined the exemplary, pedagogical function it was intended to fulfil, as a physical focal point for a population's shaping of its own identity with respect to the past.

Yet even as the Pantheon was being inaugurated, its ability to represent a new consensus on cultural memory was being questioned. The most contentious issue was who exactly should receive the honour of pantheonisation. The Marquis de Pastoret, head of the deputation that had originally proposed the project, had been very specific about his vision: aside from a handful of representatives of the old regime (Voltaire, Rousseau and Descartes), the Panthéon's inhabitants would 'dater de l'époque de notre liberté' (Madival & Laurent, 1862: 24, 536-37). Quatremère de Quincy, the architect and administrator charged with overseeing the project, similarly focused on more modern heroes when he pronounced that 'on doit enfin renoncer à se voir tributaire des anciens', rejecting Greek and Roman models in favour of the 'Français devenus libres', with seemingly little thought as to what came in between (1793: 72). However, Quatremère also expressed unease about the inclusion of his contemporaries, for not only did making such a selection necessitate engagement with a history that was far too raw and recent (1793: 73), but it also required pre-empting 'jusqu'à quel degré la reconnaissance rétroactive de la nation voudrait étendre ses obligations envers les grands

hommes qui auroient précédé l'époque de la révolution' (1791: 31; see also Deming, 1989: 140-41).

The speed of the political changes that moved revolutionary heroes in and out of favour validated this concern even in the earliest years of the Panthéon's existence. Honoré de Mirabeau, the writer and revolutionary politician whose death had been the catalyst for creating this secular temple, was the first, prominent victim of these political shifts. Just three years after his spectacular funeral, which inaugurated the Panthéon, his body was removed and buried in an anonymous grave when it was discovered that he had been secretly collaborating with the King. Jean-Paul Marat, the revolutionary hero who replaced Mirabeau, his body arriving by one door as the disgraced politician was removed by another, was himself in turn removed just a few months later.

Even those un-problematically selected for inclusion could not be sure of actually arriving in the monument, but were equally subject to chance and political whim: Montesquieu was due to be pantheonised, but his remains were lost during the Terror (Habert, 1989), whilst Descartes' pantheonisation was ordered in 1792, but has yet to take place. On Mirabeau's removal, Jacques-Louis David had proclaimed: 'Que le vice, que l'imposture fuient du Panthéon; le peuple y appelle celui qui ne le trompa jamais' (Madival & Laurent, 1862: 70, 211-12). But the seeds of doubt had been sown, and the idea of finding anyone 'qui ne le trompa jamais' appeared more and more remote. By the mid-1790s, 'on avait appris à douter des plus grands' (Quinet, 1868: 665), and this insidious doubt had a deep impact on how the Panthéon figured in public consciousness. Mercier wrote in 1797: 'l'immortalité n'est point en sûreté au Panthéon!' (1994: 679); and indeed, from December 1792 onwards, every proposal received for a pantheonisation was matched by another proposal to exclude or remove someone else (Ozouf, 1984: 157). From 1795 until 1806, only Voltaire and Rousseau occupied the vast space.ⁱⁱ

Alongside the question of who to include was the equally problematic issue of how to represent them. Quatremère's earliest reports detail the architectural tension that existed between the building's former use as a church and its new incarnation (1791: 24), and the physical disposition of the monument continued to be a point of contention (Guillerme, 1989: 151-73). Both the fixed artwork – bas-reliefs, engravings, inscriptions – and the individual commemorative sculptures were the subject of vehement debate.ⁱⁱⁱ In the end, the new Panthéon's interior was decorated not with images of the great men it celebrated, but with allegorical representations of virtue: timeless, un-contentious cherubs and muses. More broadly, the building sat uncomfortably with the period it was supposed to celebrate. The Revolution was famously iconoclastic, delighting in destroying physical symbols of the elitist and religious values of the old regime (Montégut, 1871; Clay, 2012), whilst revolutionary festivals traditionally took place outdoors (Ozouf, 1976: 150-58). The Panthéon as physical monument, an indoor space of symbolism that raised selected figures from the past to god-like status, risked looking a little too much like an *ancien régime* institution: a formalisation of what had until then been a natural process of model selection (Ozouf, 1984: 149). Quatremère was aware of the sterility of a static site dedicated solely to the dead. He suggested the building should become a centre for national celebrations (1791: 34), and the failure to find such a living use for the space only contributed to its problematic status. Moreover, as the Revolution progressed, this hallowed edifice formed a stark contrast to the anonymous burials in a vast common pit that faced the victims of the guillotine under the Terror (Huet, 1997: 5).

The troubled place of the Panthéon in French life has endured. Ozouf's analysis returns again and again to the central paradox: that the society that chose to define itself through its heroes was unable to do so, instead leaving the Panthéon to be filled by future generations, who have proven themselves equally incapable of reaching consensus (1984:

140-62). The dedication to the ‘grands hommes’ was removed and replaced three times in the century following its creation (Ozouf: 158), and as recently as 2013 the French President commissioned Philippe Belaval of the Centre des monuments nationaux to produce a report considering ‘le rôle du Panthéon dans la promotion des principes de la République’ (Elysée.fr, 2013), proposing not only potential new occupants, but also how the space could be used for national ceremonies – precisely what Quatremère had struggled with 222 years before.^{iv}

Beyond the problematic nature of the Panthéon itself as a vehicle for commemoration, and the ever-shifting status of the Revolution’s heroes, the changing regime also required the French public to form new relationships to the ‘grands hommes’ of the more distant past. At the height of the *ancien régime*, the social status of cultural producers, including authors, had largely been defined by their relationship to royal power: the King and court were mediators whose stamp of approval defined a select group of great, national artists (Jouhaud & Merlin, 1993; Viala, 1985: 51-84). By the late eighteenth century this system had in practice been in flux for many years (Brown, 2002); then, in the 1790s, both the Académie Française and the Comédie-Française – the only cultural institutions still remaining as markers of authorial greatness – were respectively suppressed and reconfigured. This move complicated how the French public was able to view those previously accorded royal favour. The ‘immortels’ of the Académie could no longer lay claim to this privileged title, and the contentious Panthéon was left as one of the few sites for official recognition.

Certain authors were subjected to more specific revisionist tactics. In 1793, a law was passed forbidding the performance of any play that recalled ‘la honteuse superstition de la royauté’ (Madival & Laurent, 1862: 70, 135). As a result, when Racine’s plays were permitted on the revolutionary stage, his heroes were stripped of their royal titles. At the

same time, the Committee of Public Safety agreed to subsidise plays perceived to have a republican theme. One of the three plays chosen was Voltaire's *Brutus*, which had been revived in 1790, and which, read by revolutionaries, recast its author and his famous support for enlightened monarchy as republican (Kennedy, 1996: 51-58). Molière, in another form of revision, was disinterred by revolutionaries keen to redress the slight he was perceived to have suffered at the hands of the court when he was denied the traditional funerary rites and buried in un-consecrated ground. The leader of the King's troupe and a court favourite in life was repainted as a victim of royal despotism and elitist caprice (Leon, 2009). Yet in the event, grand plans to enact posthumous revenge through a glorious reburial in the Panthéon never came to fruition.

There was, it appears, no longer any straightforward form of commemoration or hero-worship: revolutionaries were heroes one minute, and villains the next; the cultural gods of the past could be re-evaluated as products and proponents of elitist monarchy; there were no clear signs to guide the public's cultural consumption, and even attempts to honour individuals in a new mould were tentative and subject to failure. Following Marat's removal from the Panthéon, the National Assembly decreed that no one could be declared a 'grand homme' until ten years after his death (Madival & Laurent, 1862: 79, 212). The implication was clear: the nation was no longer sure of its ability to identify and celebrate its great men.

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A little less than a decade after the Panthéon was created, as the century and the Terror were drawing to a close, a minor writer named François Xavier Pagès de Vixouze wrote a collection of dialogues that showed famous revolutionaries in the afterlife in conversation with celebrated figures of the French past.^v These dialogues of the dead

were part of a longstanding tradition of textual otherworldly meetings. The form was originally employed by Lucian in the second century AD (1961), and had a revival in seventeenth-century France with Boileau (1966), Fontenelle (1989-2001) and Fénelon (1983). The dialogues might be viewed as a form of textual Panthéon: bringing together members of the illustrious dead and celebrating their exemplary wisdom as they comment on the follies of the modern world. This parallel is even more striking given the explosion in the production of these dialogues around the Revolution, just as France was attempting to redefine its national identity and its heroes.

The eighteenth-century incarnation of this genre has rarely been paid sustained attention. A single monographic publication in the early twentieth century is the only detailed analysis to date (Egilsrud, 1934), and when the major examples of such dialogues are examined they are generally read as belonging to a critical, satirical, or didactic genre (Pujol, 2005: 231-47; Bernier, 2006: 49-61; Cazanave, 2007: 124-26; Andries, 2013: 131-46). Little heed has been paid to their potentially commemorative features, or to the extent to which these texts might fit into the literary tradition of collections of great men represented by Plutarch's *Lives* (translated into French in 1559) or Charles Perrault's *Hommes illustres* (published 1696 and 1701).^{vi} The only direct reference to the genre in this context is Bonnet's brief discussion of Fénelon and Fontenelle's collections (1998: 44-45; 142-45). However, he views these dialogues and their eighteenth-century successors as largely anti-celebratory, actively questioning mythologised presentations of great men. In the remainder of this article I aim to challenge this reading, at least in part, using the Pagès collection to ask whether the dialogue of the dead, as a literary form of memory, may have provided the revolutionary period with an alternative to the problematic monumental commemoration described above.

Michel Delon has characterised Pagès himself as particularly sensitive to and buffeted by the winds of change, both in his own identity – dropping the aristocratic ‘de Vixouze’ under the Revolution, as so many did – and in terms of his literary choices – writing different genres across his career as circumstances made them more beneficial (Delon, 2001: 91-99). The stated aim of the dialogues, published in 1800, is to use examples from the past to provide moral exemplars for his contemporaries, and in this they follow their explicitly referenced classical model (Pagès, 1800: v). Immediately notable in the context of the debates outlined above is that here, in the largest collection of the period, ‘established’ great men like those venerated earlier in the century rub shoulders with the revolutionaries who had been lost in anonymous mass graves: Voltaire, Rousseau, Racine and many earlier figures appear alongside Mirabeau, Marat, Danton and Robespierre, and they are frequently paired together in a manner reminiscent of the Greek and Roman pairings in Plutarch’s *Lives*.

In dialogues of the dead across time, the protagonists inevitably and frequently discuss their own legacies: Achilles contests his ‘gloire’ in Fénelon’s text (1983: 1, 284-95), Boileau comments on the longevity of Voltaire’s influence in Lyttleton’s dialogues (1760: 134), and in a collection by the Marquis de Vauvenargues, Molière is assured that his reputation endures (1929: 47-50).^{vii} In Pagès’ work, in keeping with the unstable nature of memory in the period of his writing, the focus is frequently on a posthumous fall from grace, or the shifting status of an individual’s reputation under the Revolution. However, the manner in which this topic is treated in dialogues representing the two different groups – pre-revolutionary greats, and revolutionary heroes or martyrs – is strikingly different.

Among those dead before the Revolution, Pagès evokes a number of cultural producers, especially writers. These figures have a certainty in their own privileged

position in cultural history: for them, greatness is based on lasting influence. In a dialogue between Voltaire and Rousseau, the latter remarks that Voltaire's glory comes from the 'grande révolution' he brought about in human thinking (64), whilst elsewhere Racine, described as a 'divinité' by his interlocutor (100), sketches out a lineage of great authors whose legacy is to pass on their greatness to their successors: he claims to have acquired the secret of literary glory from Virgil, and in turn bestowed it upon Voltaire (101).

Yet despite this sense of the unassailable historical status of these figures, there is also an acknowledgement that the shifting political ground has altered the precise nature of their impact on future generations. Racine is informed by the late eighteenth-century poet Roucher that cultural production, including Racine's own work, and that of Montesquieu and Fénelon, is now judged along political lines and found wanting: 'Nos livres [...] semblaient [...] avoir été créés pour un autre peuple, et par des écrivains étrangers à nos mœurs' (104). Rousseau, in another dialogue, bewails how his *Contrat Social* has been used by the revolutionaries as an excuse for their terrible acts, and how even Voltaire has been recast as revolutionary by men who have never actually read his work (60-75). But this altered legacy is never figured as resulting from an inherent flaw in the way these writers obtained glory; nor does it affect their continuing definition as 'grands'. Rather, the focus on their modified image seems to be calculated to expose and condemn their successors' inability to deal with the past, evident in the fact, noted by Voltaire, that the Panthéon they have created fails to include many of the greatest figures of French history and culture (65-66).

If Voltaire and his ilk act as examples of unproblematic glory from which to draw moral guidance, the revolutionary figures Pagès evokes are clearly the targets of his corrective aims. Pagès' main concern appears to be their thirst for greatness at all costs.

In his preface he is overtly suspicious of modern glory obtained in a revolutionary context, noting that his contemporaries have forgotten their morals ‘par l’envie de briller et de dire ou de faire des choses extraordinaires’ (vij). The danger of fast-won revolutionary glory is most explicitly expressed in a dialogue between Mirabeau and Marat, successively expelled from the Panthéon for their political betrayals (131-42). Under Pagès’ pen, the fictional Marat bemoans ‘la vicissitude des renommées, le néant de ce qu’on appelle gloire, et [...] l’inconstance de la faveur populaire’ (131). Reputation is described as bizarre, capricious, uncertain, a chimera, inconstant, fleeting and, moreover, confined by geographical as well as temporal boundaries. This last point forms a striking contrast to the idea of ‘Gloire’ outlined by Marmontel in the *Encyclopédie* four decades earlier, defined as an individual having influence ‘où [on] n’[est] pas, où [on] ne ser[a] jamais’ (Diderot et al, 1754-72: 7, 716-21). Pagès’ representation of Mirabeau and Marat and their spectacular changes of fortune seems to imply that the far-reaching influence Marmontel describes is not possible under the Revolution. Pagès becomes a sort of anti-Perrault, not vaunting but rather decrying the ‘greatness’ of his century, and Mirabeau, once the archetypal ‘grand homme’, the *raison d’être* of the Panthéon itself, now represents this ‘néant’ of glory, this instability.

The contrast between these two representations of posthumous legacy merits closer analysis. In one sense, the very fact that both new and old heroes find their images altered by the revolutionary present reflects precisely that troubled relationship to the past outlined in the first section of this article. Perhaps the Revolution was simply unable to commemorate, struggling even to memorialise itself with an unstable, factionally motivated calendar of revolutionary festivals (Ozouf, 1976: 139-48).^{viii} On the other hand, perhaps Pagès is making a distinction between two different sorts of posthumous fame: an a-temporal glory obtained as a by-product of a virtuous and useful life, and a

sort of momentary self-interested infamy, produced by a single and sometimes immoral action.^{ix} This distinction fits into the established definition of the ‘grand homme’ in the period, by privileging morality and a contribution to the public good. But what Pagès evokes is something more specifically revolutionary.

First, his inclusion of revolutionary generals expands the definition of ‘great’ to include military prowess, provided that it benefits national rather than individual glory: France’s struggles to define itself as a nation in the revolutionary wars have rendered this facet more crucial than it had been in the relatively more peaceful mid-eighteenth century.^x But more importantly, Pagès also recasts the contrast between virtuous and self-interested greatness (found in earlier dialogues of the dead) for contemporary times. The specific implication here is that the Revolution only allows or encourages the latter, which can never last; that the present age has forgotten not only how to remember, but also how to create the sort of greatness that the Panthéon was originally intended to celebrate, even working actively against such greatness: ‘génie, vertu, talens, tout ce qu’il y a de plus intéressant, disparut sous le fer du bourreau’ (42). And a play written five years before the dialogues suggests that Pagès was drawing on a common contemporary theme. *Les Bustes, ou Arlequin sculpteur* depicts two shops that produce busts of famous figures (Viller & Armand-Gouffé, 1795). On one side of the stage is the shop carving figurines of Voltaire and Rousseau: it is labelled ‘L’Immortalité’. On the other side stands the shop churning out statues of Marat and other Jacobins. This second shop is named ‘La Circonstance’. Both the division of characters and the themes by which they are characterised are almost precisely mirrored in Pagès’ work.

The elements described thus far would alone be enough to nuance Bonnet’s rejection of *dialogues des morts* as commemorative, and write Pagès’ text, until now entirely unstudied, into the debate surrounding the definition of the ‘grand homme’ and

the problematic role of the past under the Revolution. But there is one further distinction at work here, which might alter the way we approach this text – and texts like it – even more dramatically. Almost all the pre-revolutionary figures evoked by Pagès engaged in some form of writing. Moreover, the rare moments at which figures who died under the Revolution hope that their ignominious deaths will one day be forgotten are also based on the textual evidence they have left of their political, scientific or literary endeavours: it is Bailly's 'grand monument de votre brillante histoire de l'astronomie' (99) that should, in the eyes of his interlocutor, console him for his violent death in disgrace. The contrast between those who are and are not remembered might, therefore, be broadly recast as a distinction between 'hommes de lettres' and 'hommes d'action', two classes of men who appear in opposition in the *Encyclopédie* definition of 'Immortalité', on the basis that men of action are unable to ensure their own legacy, but instead require men of words to record their great deeds (Diderot et al, 1754-72: 8, 576-77.).

In this context, Pagès' relationship to the revolutionary figures changes entirely: rather than censuring them, holding them up as examples of immorality, he is in fact reawakening them, acting as the 'homme de lettres' required to ensure their immortality. Because of course, paradoxically, for all that Mirabeau and Marat bemoan the fleeting nature of reputation, and for all the revolutionary figures have their actions subjected to moral scrutiny, here, in these dialogues, they are at least present in textual form: recognised as worthy of remembrance, part of the French past, even if their exploits are at times viewed as questionable, or as examples not to follow.

The durability of the written word as a form of legacy creation is a longstanding topos: Horace had written in 23BC that 'I shall not wholly die' (2004: 216-17), whilst Diderot's *Encyclopédie* definition of 'Immortalité' merely echoes a young Ronsard's precocious assertion two centuries earlier that 'les doctes folies de poètes survivront les

innombrables siècles à venir, criant la gloire des princes consacrés par eux à l'immortalité' (1950: 2, 974). Nonetheless, the privileged status of the writer in creating his own image and recording that of others took on a new significance in a century where the public sphere was growing in influence through the power of print circulation (Turnovsky, 2010), where declining patronage meant individual reputation was increasingly important, and where authors like Rousseau were using the new genre of secular autobiography to attempt to take full control of the stories that would be told about them after their deaths.

This contemporary focus on text as legacy notwithstanding, it seems that what Pagès exploits and even celebrates in his collection is not so much the durability as the flexibility of text. Unlike the physical body, which in Mirabeau's case was forever lost in an anonymous grave, or the commemorative statue, which presents an unalterable image, to be outright accepted or rejected by future generations, the textual fictional self can live on, written into a new cultural output, reconfigured for a new present. Indeed, Pagès' preface explains his choice of the dialogic form with reference to the new life with which it can imbue his deceased protagonists (vi). Solid un-changeability, for all it might appear attractive to a nation rebuilding itself in the wake of vast physical destruction, is not always desirable: Pagès' choices in his career exemplify the benefits of a chameleon-like ability to fit into a continually changing context. On the title page of the *Dialogues* he defines himself vaguely only as 'auteur de différens Ouvrages', whilst his fictional version of Pope Pius VI states that 'la plus grande erreur en politique est de ne pas savoir distinguer les moments et les circonstances' (59). Reading the collection from this perspective, the specifically textual nature of Pagès' reawakening of the great men of the past is an act of commemoration that celebrates the power of words to provide his protagonists with such flexibility. The power to keep telling old stories in new ways, so

that whether or not one specific retelling is ‘right’ matters less than the continual presence of that story, and its protagonist, in national history.

This is not to suggest that this work is entirely an act of selfless commemoration. Indeed, Pagès’ dialogues exemplify the precarious nature of legacy, by employing and manipulating the image of his protagonists to suit his ends, and craft his position as moralising author.^{xi} What this text does seem to offer, however, is some indication of why dialogues of the dead became popular again in a revolutionary period that was struggling to find ways to remember. Such dialogues, as they always had, offered their authors the chance to fashion themselves with respect to the great men of the past, or to adopt an authoritative voice in order to speak to the contemporary public. But perhaps more importantly, they also offered the seductive idea that it might be possible, despite the fragility of cultural memory under the Revolution, and the shifting ground on which no lasting monument could be built, to avoid oblivion, and to form some sort of relationship with the past.

Pierre Nora, in his influential work on ‘lieux de mémoire’, makes a distinction between history and memory. The former is ossified, mere representation, whilst the latter lives and evolves (1984: 1, xviii-xix). We might make a similar distinction between the problematic material commemoration of the first half of this article, and the literary commemoration of its second half. Brittle marble monuments, representing a single image of an individual or a single vision of national history, are eroded and crumble; vast anonymous graves swallow up the men who days earlier were leading their people; attempts to fill a single temple to the nation result in paralysis and eternal emptiness. But the allusive words of the past can be endowed with new meanings; re-appropriated and used by each new generation to re-member – etymologically, give a new (textual) body to – their predecessors. They do not require a binary opposition of in or out, great or

nothing; they can be revisited and nuanced, interpreted differently rather than crystallised in official form, and thus allow new generations to record and come to terms with the past in a tempered, mediated sense, avoiding the fate predicted by Pius VI, who states: ‘Les exemples de nos prédécesseurs sont perdus pour nous, comme les notres le seront vraisemblablement pour ceux qui nous succéderont’ (59). And it is the unconventional, nuanced presentation of these individuals, which for Bonnet made the dialogues anti-celebratory, that makes this new type of commemoration possible.

In the final dialogue of Pagès’ collection, the scientist Lavoisier praises the inventor who is concerned more with ‘l’extension de l’art’ than with ‘la gloire personnelle’ (156). It seems to be in a similar spirit of advancing understanding that Pagès commemorates both the heroes and villains of history, explicitly differentiating between celebrity-as-glory and celebrity-as-notoriety (58), but acknowledging their equally necessary place in cultural memory. And in an age of revolution, literary monuments might be more useful to this end than the stone constructions that the age finds so problematic.

There is an unexpected echo, here, of the *Encyclopédie*, a different monument of its age. The ‘Prospectus’ describes the vast text as ‘un sanctuaire où les connaissances des hommes soient à l’abri des temps et des révolutions’ (Diderot et. al, 1754-72: 1, i). This is to be a monument, but a flexible one that will be contributed to by future thinkers and writers. Pagès’ Mirabeau exclaims at one point that ‘la tombe ne nous met donc pas à l’abri des révolutions!’ (135). But perhaps, like the *Encyclopédie*, the text can ‘[les] met[tre] à l’abri’: even for the villains, the text provides a shelter, until such time as they might be readmitted to cultural memory. In this textual limbo, they await the judgement not only of Minos – who is evoked a handful of times – but also of history. And in the meantime, they talk. Because in the end, what they say is perhaps less relevant than the

fact that they continue to say it. Rather like Candide and Martin, ‘enfin ils parlaient, ils se communiquaient des idées, ils se consolait’ (Voltaire, 1968: 204).

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ⁱ A significant amount of existing work examines the original construction of the church; see, among others, Rabreau, 1989: 37-96 and Petzet, 1961.

ⁱⁱ Under the restoration, even Voltaire and Rousseau's remains were removed from their graves, leaving only the exterior monuments to represent their presence in the Panthéon (Quinet, 1868: 666).

ⁱⁱⁱ See for example Quatremère's defence of the proposed statue of 'Renomée' (1792: 16-18).

^{iv} In February 2014 it was announced that four new figures would enter the Panthéon: resistance fighters Germaine Tillion, Geneviève de Gaulle and Pierre Brossolette, and Jean Zay, former Minister of Education (*Le Monde*, 2014).

^v Pagès, 1800: all single page references in brackets refer to this text.

^{vi} The *Lives* contained fifty short biographies of illustrious Greeks and Romans, paired to illustrate their common virtues or shortcomings. Jacques Amyot's translation (1826) made the text widely accessible and very popular in mid-sixteenth century France. Among its admirers were Montaigne (who wrote a 'Défense de Seneque et de Plutarque') Corneille (who, like Shakespeare, drew on the *Lives* for his Roman characters) and Rousseau (who refers to Plutarch in the first pages of his *Confessions*). Perrault's *Les Hommes illustres* (2003) consisted of 100 pen portraits of seventeenth-century men, encapsulating the glory of his age. Bernier (2006: 57-58) does note that dialogues bringing together ancients and moderns follow the Plutarchan tradition of parallels, however he is more interested in their critical, rather than commemorative function.

^{vii} When characters' words are referenced here, they are understood to refer to the fictional versions of these individuals, rather than their own writings. It would be productive to explore the relationship between these two elements, and the extent to which 'real' words are reused in the fictional space of the dialogue.

^{viii} Terdiman (1993) has ascribed the nineteenth-century preoccupation with remembering to a 'memory crisis' brought about by vast social change in the early years of the century, not least the effects of the Revolution.

^{ix} See in particular the dialogue between Bailly and Malesherbes, the moral of which distinguishes between criminal immortality and the glory of a virtuous life (99).

^x In September 1792, Delauney told the Convention that: ‘Le plus beau des talents, c’est de server sa patrie et de mourir pour elle’ (Madival & Laurent, 1862: 49, 592).

^{xi} For an examination of how Gouges used the genre as a form of self-promotion, see the introduction to my edition of *Mirabeau aux Champs Elysées* and other texts, forthcoming with MHRA/Phoenix, 2017.