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Introduction

'Nature has placed England and France in a geographical location which must necessarily set up an eternal rivalry between them.'[1] In 1803, as war started again between France and Britain after a brief intermission, Jean-Louis Dubroca, a propagandist in the pay of Napoleon, described the conflict as fated. The discourse on the two national models and the ancestral hostility between the two countries was a topos of travel narratives, economic literature and political propaganda alike in eighteenth-century France and England. The continuing appeal of the notion of the eighteenth century as a 'Second Hundred Years War', which pitted France and England/Britain against each other between the 1688 Revolution and the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, reflects the same tradition. Coined in the nineteenth century, the expression treats this period as a continuum in Anglo-French relations. The historian J.R. Seeley (1834–1895) was probably the first to use it in 1884: 'The truth is these wars group themselves very symmetrically, and the whole period stands out as an age of gigantic rivalry between England and France, a kind of second Hundred Years' War.'[2] In the twentieth century, many historians have taken up the same argument[3] or, while rejecting the expression as

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[1] 'La nature a placé l'Angleterre et la France dans une situation respective, qui doit nécessairement établir entre elles une éternelle rivalité': [Jean-Louis] Dubroca, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des attentats du gouvernement anglais, contre toutes les puissances de l'Europe et particulièrement contre la France, depuis le commencement de la Révolution jusqu'à ce jour* (Paris: Chez Dubroca and Rondonneau, Year 11 – 1802–1803), pp. vi–vii.

[2] J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1883), p. 24. Seeley writes about 'a new Hundred Years' War of France and England' which opens with the eighteenth century in his *Growth of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge University Press, 1903) (1st edn: 1895), vol. II, p. 343. See also A.H. Buffington, *The Second Hundred Years War* (London: Greenwood Press, 1976) (1st edn: 1929).

[3] J. Meyer and J.S. Bromley, 'La seconde guerre de Cent Ans (1689–1815)', in F. Bédarida, F. Crouzet and D. Johnson (eds.), *Dix siècles d'histoire franco-britannique: de Guillaume le Conquérant au Marché Commun* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979), pp. 153–90. Hamish Scott's review article is more nuanced than its title might indicate: H.M. Scott, 'The second "hundred years war", 1689–1815', *HJ*, 35 (1992), pp. 433–69. A striking example being

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inaccurate, describe the relations between the two states in similar terms. Few historians have found fault with the expression.[4] To sum up the relation between the two states as a quasi-permanent conflict is to neglect the fact that during half of the period the two countries were at peace. It privileges conflict over exchange, war over commerce, and draws far too neat a dividing line between war and peace. Although economic, cultural or scientific exchanges between the two countries, which kept going in wartime, have received attention,[5] the stereotype lives on: France and England are still described, in an echo of contemporary propaganda, as 'natural and necessary enemies'.[6] Such an essentialist rhetoric reproduces an eighteenth-century belief in the naturalness of the competition between states and, by extension, nations. The long-standing opposition is often crystallised in geographical determinism. The two countries are divided by a physical barrier, constituting a political and cultural frontier: the Channel epitomises a variety of Anglo-French antagonisms. In other words, the mainstream historiographical model of Anglo-French relations, centred on hostility and hatred, revolves around the idea of the Channel as a barrier. This idea itself, however, is the product of history.

The Channel has attracted the attention of many historians, both in France and in Britain, but rarely has it been studied for its own sake. Instead, reference to the sea has served other purposes, intellectual, ideological or simply rhetorical. It is the aim of this introduction to expound and explain the differences, but also the striking similarities, in

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Linda Colley's *Britons*: 'Prime powers on sea and on land respectively, . . . [Britain and France] were at war between 1689 and 1697, . . . between 1702 and 1713, 1743 and 1748, 1756 and 1763, 1778 and 1783, 1793 and 1802, and, finally, between 1803 and the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. . . . The British and the French . . . could neither live together peacefully, nor ignore each other and live neutrally apart. The result was . . . one peculiarly pervasive and long-drawn out conflict': *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (London: Vintage, 1996) (1st edn: 1992), pp. 1–2.

[4] See, however, F. Crouzet, 'The second hundred years war: some reflections', *FH*, 10 (1996), pp. 432–50.

[5] M. Cohen and C. Dever, *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel* (Princeton University Press, 2002); S. Conway, *Britain, Ireland and Continental Europe in the Eighteenth Century: Similarities, Connections, Identities* (Oxford University Press, 2011); J. Falvey and W. Brooks (eds.), *The Channel in the Eighteenth Century: Bridge, Barrier, and Gateway* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1991); J. Grieder, *Anglomania in France, 1740–1789: Fact, Fiction, and Political Discourse* (Genève: Droz, 1985); J.-Ph. Genet and F.-J. Ruggiu (eds.), *Les idées passent-elles la Manche? Savoirs, représentations, pratiques (France-Angleterre, Xe–XXe siècles)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires Paris-Sorbonne, 2007); A. Thomson, S. Burrows and E. Dziembowski (eds.), *Cultural Transfers: France and Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010).

[6] J. Black, *Natural and Necessary Enemies: Anglo-French Relations in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1986). Jeremy Black actually shows the ambivalence of Anglo-French relations. See also his *Convergence or Divergence? Britain and the Continent* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994).

the ways in which French and Anglophone historians have written about the Channel across the centuries. Generations of scholars have agreed that the sea played a central role in the history of Anglo-French relations, but in their narratives, the role assigned to the Channel is ultimately to consolidate the notion of an essential difference between England (or Britain), and France, Europe or 'the Continent'. For instance, the long-standing idea that Britain has always been spatially and intellectually segregated, and economically and culturally independent from its continental neighbours is part of its special 'Island story'.[7] As we will see, a similar picture of national exceptionalism is to be found in the writings of French historians who describe 'La Manche' as a separation rooted in nature.

The purpose, methodology and conclusions of this book substantially differ from those of these works. The central theme is, on the contrary, that the maritime frontier of England and France was not built by nature alone, but was the result of a historical process, which crystallised between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries. The sea is seen here as a common place as well as a metaphorical commonplace. By focusing on the period usually described as the apogee of national rivalry, this book paints a new and very different picture from previous works: the Channel was a maritime frontier, true; but it was also a border and a contact zone between the two countries and populations. The interactions that took place within this contact zone, as much as ideas about it, are integral to my argument. First then, it is necessary to rid ourselves of a number of assumptions about the relations between England and France in the eighteenth century, many of which are inherited from the nineteenth century.

A long-standing historiographical myth: the Channel as a natural border

Strikingly, the motif of the Channel as a historical and civilisational frontier, which distinguishes England from Europe, has survived the numerous 'turns' which the historical discipline has taken in the twentieth century. In Britain, despite the diversity of their aims, methods and approaches, historiographies as distinct as the 'Whig' history of the nineteenth century and the 'New' British history of the twentieth share the same view of the historical importance of Britain's insularity: the sea simultaneously marks it out from and connects it with the rest of the world.

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[7] H.E. Marshall, *Our Island Story: A Child's History of England* (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1905).

The so-called 'Whig' historians combined historical, cultural, religious, linguistic, 'racial' or environmental traits to tell the story of the making of the English national character. Following the impact of the 1848 revolutions in Europe, these historians tried to account for England's distinctiveness and superiority from the Continent, and specifically France, without relinquishing the idea of a civilisational ladder that every nation could aspire to climb.[8] Francophobia and Germanophilia were at their peak in Britain during Napoleon III's Second Empire (1851–1870), and the celebration of the Anglo-Saxon past reached its climax in the same period.[9] Edward Augustus Freeman (1823–1892), Regius professor of modern history in Oxford, was one of the proponents of this Teutonic interpretation of English history. For Freeman, one question raised by the Norman Conquest of 1066 was how a unified and 'cohesive English nation'[10] had emerged out of two waves of invasion of Britain, by the Saxons and the Normans. English thinkers going back at least to the seventeenth century had worried about the relationship between 1066 and the axiomatic continuity of the English polity.[11] Freeman argued for continuity: the Norman Conquest was a mere episode in a grand national story – that of the emergence of an English identity which had been there since the Saxons had invaded England in the sixth century.[12] British insularity played a double function in this reasoning: in the first phase it allowed the Saxons, a seafaring race, to export their institutions, language and moral qualities to England; in a second phase the sea acted like a shield against other foreign influences while Teutonism percolated through England. However, while a racist and a Francophobe, Freeman also retained some elements of an older universalist perspective, allowing for comparison and hierarchy between European states and institutions.[13] He explained the blend of the Normans and the Saxons in terms of the shared Teutonic nature of the two races.[14] In appearance, the same phenomenon happened on both sides of the Channel: 'as the Danes who settled in England became Englishmen, so the Danes who settled in Gaul equally became Frenchmen'. But the assimilation which took place in England did not work in quite the same way in France, where the mixing was incomplete due to the essential racial differences between Scandinavians and Celts: in Gaul the Normans 'became Frenchmen on a far nobler and grander scale than other Frenchmen'.[15]

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[8] P. Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 59–64.

[9] Since the 1820s, the thesis of the 'reverse conquest', i.e. the idea that the defeated 'race', the Anglo-Saxons, had successfully passed its free institutions and its main character to the English people despite being conquered, had been a scholarly preoccupation. C.A. Simmons, *Reversing the Conquest: History and Myth in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990); R. Horsman, 'Origins of racial anglo-saxonism in Great Britain before 1850', *JHI*, 37 (1976), pp. 387–410; Mandler, *English National Character*, pp. 59–105.

[10] Mandler, *ibid.*, p. 241.

[11] J.G.A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1957).

[12] M. Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism, 1870–1970* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 28–9; Mandler, *English National Character*, pp. 89–93.

For all these thinkers, in the past as in the present, and unlike England and Germany, France and England remained divided by unbridgeable national, racial, cultural and linguistic differences. And the natural environment played a central part in this. In the 1870s, after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the project of building a tunnel under the Channel became concrete and digging even began in 1881 on both sides, but the fear of a French invasion killed the initiative.[16] In this context, Freeman depicted in 1892 the British Isles as 'another world', an *alter orbis*, whose distinctive character would dissolve if the proposal went through:

> We dwell in an island great enough to have always had interests of its own, thoughts of its own – great enough to impress upon its people a distinct character directly as islanders, irrespective of any other features of character which belong to them through other causes, either of original descent or of later history. It is the

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[13] On Whig historians' Francophobia and Freeman in particular, see J. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 140–2, 182; on Freeman's racism, see the divergent accounts of C.J.W. Parker, 'The failure of liberal racialism: the racial ideas of E.A. Freeman', *HJ*, 24 (1981), pp. 825–46; V.L. Morrisroe, '"Sanguinary amusement": E.A. Freeman, the comparative method and Victorian theories of race', *MIH*, 10 (2013), pp. 27–56; Mandler, '"Race"'; T. Koditschek, 'Past politics and present history: E. A. Freeman's invention of racial tradition', in G.A. Bremner and J. Conlin (eds.), *Making History: Edward Augustus Freeman and Victorian Cultural Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

[14] Until the mid-nineteenth century, the term 'race' did not have a biological meaning, and was used in a non-systematic way, as a synonym for people, nation, or to denote a moral type: C. Blanckaert, 'Le système des races', in *Le XIX^e^ siècle: Science, politique et tradition* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1996), pp. 21–41; P. Mandler, '"Race" and "nation" in mid-Victorian thought', in S. Collini, R. Whatmore and B. Young (eds.), *History, Religion and Culture: British Intellectual History 1750–1950* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 227–8.

[15] E.A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest of England, Its Causes and Its Results*, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1867–1879) (2nd edn revised: 1870), vol. I, p. 149. On this, Burrow, *Liberal Descent*, p. 188 and chap. 8.

[16] Invasion scares revived in the aftermath of the Boer War (1899–1902) and persisted well into the twentieth century: K.M. Wilson, *Channel Tunnel Visions, 1850–1945: Dreams and Nightmares* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 1994), pp. 22–90.

> insular character of Britain which has, beyond anything else, made the inhabitants of Britain what they are and the history of Britain what it has been. We are islanders: and I at least do not wish that we should become continentals.[17]

In this quotation, the mode of enunciation, with the repetitive use of the 'we', brings together the historian, his readers and the whole national community, while the descriptive present states an eternal truth: Englishmen have always been different from the 'Continent', because of their insularity. Nationalism and geographical essentialism go hand in hand.[18] There is no contradiction between emphasising the ethnic mix allowed by the proximity to the Continent and at the same time the evolution of the specific English national character, fostered by geographic isolation.

The physical frontier with Europe was thus a key element in the Victorian discourse of exceptionalism, especially after 1880, when renewed colonial and naval competition with France and Germany put into question the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon 'race'.[19] In the late nineteenth century, the place assigned to the Channel by historians was premised on the idea that imperialism and sea power were the sinews of Britain. Insularity explained why the English had become a nation of seafarers and conquered the oceans. Starting in the sixteenth century and increasingly from the eighteenth century onwards, the expansion of 'the English race' beyond the oceans, rather than relations with Continental Europe, became the prime historical fact.[20] This narrative was deeply ensconced in the new conceptions of time and space which emerged in British political thought in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the notion that oceanic distance could be overcome by modern means of communication.[21]

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[17] E.A. Freeman, 'Alter Orbis', in *Historical Essays*, 4th series (London: Macmillan, 1892), p. 221. See also E.A. Freeman, *Comparative Politics* (London, 1874), p. 352. See D. Bell, 'Alter Orbis: Freeman on empire and racial destiny', in Bremner and Conlin, *Making History*.

[18] P. Carrard, *Poetics of the New History: French Historical Discourse from Braudel to Chartier* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 14–15, 17.

[19] Mandler, *English National Character*, pp. 106–33.

[20] Despite their differences, this idea was widely shared by Victorian historians: J.R. Green, *History of the English People* (London: Macmillan, 1880), vol. IV, p. 270; E.A. Freeman, *Historical Geography of Europe* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1881), p. 547; J.A. Froude, *Oceana, or England and Her Colonies* (London: Longman's, 1886). See Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton University Press, 2007); T. Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Visions of a Greater Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[21] D. Bell, 'Dissolving distance: empire, space, and technology in British political thought, c. 1770–1900', *JMH*, 77 (2005), 523–62. See also S. Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

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The historian who most famously expounded this idea was John Seeley, Regius professor of modern history at Cambridge. Rather than focusing on Whig constitutionalism or racial predisposition, Seeley told the story of the formation of the English nation state and the expansion of English civilisation to the rest of the world. For him, England's superiority rested above all on its privileged geographical situation, which facilitated the fulfilment of imperial destiny and allowed, domestically, the building of an insular state by protecting England from continental disorders. These three scales of observation, British, imperial and European, were thus connected in a logical way. The first stage in this proud history was the loss of Calais to the French in 1558, which 'seemed finally to shut us up in our island'.[22] Maritime units occupied a special place in this narrative.[23] Seeley used oceanic metaphors to describe the reordering of England's relation to the world, which started with Elizabeth's reign and accelerated in the eighteenth century. 'Like a world-Venice' or a 'modern Carthage', 'Greater Britain' had stopped belonging to Europe.[24]

Well into the twentieth century, the same motifs were used by a professed Whig historian, George Macaulay Trevelyan (1876–1962), in his classic *History of England*).[25] The Norman Conquest, the Tudors and the eighteenth century were all linked in a teleological account in which the sea held the key to Britain's past and future glory:

> The mingling of the armed races poured into Britain from the earliest times until 1066, and the national temper and customs which they developed in the shelter of the island guarded by the Norman and Plantagenet Kings, alone rendered it possible for five millions of people, ruled by Elizabeth, to lay hold on the splendid future offered . . . by the maritime discoveries. . . . If the hour then came, the men, too, were ready.[26]

Citing the political geographer Halford Mackinder, Trevelyan described the physical features of England as welcoming influences from Europe, in particular the mixing of 'races' which occurred during the early Middle Ages.[27] After the Norman Conquest, by contrast, once a strong state and unified people had started to cohere in England, the islands became safely insulated, thanks to 'the barrier of the sea'.[28] As in Freeman's *Conquest*, the insular environment determined the characteristics of the nation state under construction. The connection with France slowly loosened as the Normans 'became absorbed in the island atmosphere'.[29] Notwithstanding his harsh assessment of Seeley's *Expansion of England* ('merely a clever and timely essay'),[30] Trevelyan's own text, just like his predecessor's, is littered with geographic personifications, which underline the growing liberation of England from its continental attachments: until the Tudors, 'England was not yet fully conscious of her life apart, nor of the full value of her island position', but by becoming 'oceanic – and American as well', its 'insular peculiarities' could fulfil their potential.[31] Placing himself in the footsteps of the American naval historian Alfred Mahan, Trevelyan highlighted the historical importance of sea power in explaining Britain's rise to world domination.[32]

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[22] Seeley, *Growth*, p. 347.

[23] P. Burroughs, 'John Robert Seeley and British imperial history', *JICH*, 1 (1973), pp. 196–7.

[24] Seeley, *Expansion*, p. 227; *Growth*, p. 381.

[25] First published in 1926, the same year he became Regius professor in modern history at Cambridge, and republished twenty-four times until 1973.

[26] G.M. Trevelyan, *History of England*, 1st edn (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, 1926), p. xix.

[27] *Ibid.*, chap. 1. H.J. Mackinder's *Britain and the British Seas* (London: William Heinemann, 1902) was one of the books mentioned in the bibliography at the end of this chapter. See B.W. Blouet, *Halford Mackinder: A Biography* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1987); W.H. Parker, *Mackinder: Geography as an Aid to*

From the Hundred Years War 'a distinct English nationality' was starting to emerge, in which the Saxon roots were slowly enriched by external influences which took their distinctive character from 'the island climate'.[33] These wars were, Trevelyan argued, a crucial moment in the making of an 'insular patriotism', expressed in the 'racial hatred of the French' which 'unified all classes of the nation'.[34] By the time of the Tudors, the contrast between France and England could not be starker: the two civilisations 'became not only separate but mutually repellent'.[35] The two countries' physiognomies were antithetical and determined their divergent political histories thereafter: 'the square, unbroken mass of rural France, with its long land frontiers' naturally led her to favour feudalism, a strong monarchy and an aggressive foreign policy in Europe; England's 'narrow, irregular outline, almost surrounded by a

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Statecraft (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); G. Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

[28] G.M. Trevelyan, *History of England* (London: Longman, 1973), new illustrated edn, p. 3. The passages quoted from this edition are not in the first two editions.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

[30] G.M. Trevelyan, 'Autobiography of an historian', in *An Autobiography & Other Essays* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1949), p. 17.

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 163–4, 445.

[32] Trevelyan, *History of England*, 1973 edn, p. 579. Chapter 6, in an explicit debt to Mahan, was entitled 'The Growth of English Sea Power'. See A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660–1783* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1890); Id., *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire 1783–1812* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1892).

[33] Trevelyan, *History of England*, 1st edn, p. xix.

[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 225–6, 233.

[35] Trevelyan, *History of England*, 1973 edn, p. 320.

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well-indented coastline', predisposed her to turn away from continental involvement and pay heed to maritime and commercial interests.[36]

For a long time, the historiography of the British state has tended to take as a given that Britain naturally turned its back on Europe.[37] Tellingly, the few studies which apply the concept of frontier to British history are only interested in England's frontiers with Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and never mention the Channel.[38] 'Atlantic historians' also tend to favour the longitudinal approach and the links with North America. Reginald Hargreaves's history of the Channel published in 1959 – the same year as the first volume of R.R. Palmer's book on the Atlantic Revolutions[39] – illustrates this tendency to ignore Britain's persisting links with Europe in the eighteenth century: 'The majority of the early colonists of North America were of British stock; and thus the history of the English Channel is the common heritage of both the British and the American peoples.'[40] The very fact that France is not even mentioned is telling.[41] Ultimately, the Channel, for British historians, is rarely described for itself and in its materiality: what really matters is Britain's insularity. The Channel is a symbol of England's exceptionalism and separatedness, certainly not a shared space, at least after 1066.

In France, by contrast, the description of the symmetry of the two coasts is a stereotype which carries through the nineteenth century in the writings of historians and geographers alike. The genealogy of this theme can be traced back to one of the founding fathers of these two disciplines: Jules Michelet (1798–1874). In his *Tableau de la France* (1833), Book III of his *Histoire de France*, a section about the ancestral antagonism between France and England anthropomorphises the sea coasts:

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[36] *Ibid.*, 1973 edn, p. 401.

[37] See, however, from the perspective of the history of international relations, B. Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire, 1714–1783* (London: Basic Books, 2008); A.C. Thompson, *Britain, Hanover and the Protestant Interest* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006).

[38] D. Hay, 'England, Scotland and Europe: The problem of the frontier', *TRHS*, Fifth Series, 25 (1975), pp. 77–91; L. Colley, 'The significance of the frontier in British history', in W.R. Louis (ed.), *More Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain* (Austin: University of Texas Press and London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), pp. 13–30.

[39] R.R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America 1760–1800* (Princeton University Press, 1959), vol. I.

[40] R. Hargreaves, *The Narrow Seas: A History of the English Channel, Its Approaches, and Its Immediate Shores 400 BC-AD 1945* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson Limited, 1959), n.p.

[41] J.G.A. Pocock, the founding father of 'new British history', thus writes that 'a history that takes place in an insular situation can for more than merely verbal reasons be studied in a degree of isolation': 'The limits and divisions of British history: in search of the unknown subject', *AHR*, 87 (1982), p. 317. According to David Armitage, this is a reproduction of Seeley's views: D. Armitage, 'Greater Britain: a useful category of historical analysis?', *AHR*, 104 (1999), pp. 427–45. See also R. Bourke, 'Pocock and the presuppositions of the new British history', *HJ*, 53 (2010), pp. 747–70.

> The grand political struggle of modern times has been between France and England. These two nations are placed facing each other, as if to invite contest. On their most important sides the two countries slope towards each other, or you may say that they form but one valley, of which the Straits of Dover [in the French edition: *La Manche*] are the bottom. . . . But England presents to France that portion of her which is German – keeping behind her the Celts of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. France, on the contrary, . . . opposes her Celtic front to England. Each country views the other on its most hostile side.[42]

Such a depiction was underpinned by the 'new tragic vision of the coast' which had been emerging in France and Britain since the middle of the eighteenth century, and which Michelet popularised in his *Tableau*.[43] From the 1820s onwards, Michelet became deeply interested in natural history, geology, embryology and comparative anatomy.[44] Inspired by the work of his friend, the naturalist Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, and beyond him by the Chevalier de Lamarck, his descriptions of nature abolished distinctions between the organic and the mineral, uncovering the transformations and metamorphosis which slowly gave birth to the national territory.[45] Michelet's methodology was also modelled on the natural sciences, starting with observation, then drawing analogies and comparisons before making generalisations.[46] The comparison between France and England demonstrated the superiority of the French nation and territory: 'England explains France, but by opposition.'[47] Whereas France was a perfect and complex living organism, a 'person', England, like Germany or Italy, was presented as a monster.[48] Thus, in a perfect reversal of the views of E.A. Freeman, Michelet ascribed to Britain's insularity the persistence of distinct and antagonistic ethnic groups across the Channel. The German south-east of England and the western and northern regions (Ireland, Wales, Scotland), which remained Celtic,

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[42] J. Michelet, *History of France*, translation G.H. Smith (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1847), vol. I, part I, p. 149.

[43] A. Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750–1840*, translation J. Phelps (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) (French edn: 1988), p. 244.

[44] P. Petitier, *La géographie de Michelet: Territoire et modèles naturels dans les premières œuvres de Michelet* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), pp. 103–44.

[45] E.K. Kaplan, *Michelet's Poetic Vision: A Romantic Philosophy of Nature, Man, & Woman* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), pp. 13–57.

[46] Petitier, *La géographie de Michelet*, pp. 124–6.

[47] J. Michelet, 'Introduction to World History' (1831) (translation Flora Kimmich), in J. Michelet, *On History* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2013), p. 155.

[48] Petitier, *La géographie de Michelet*, pp. 145–8.