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Jeremy Bentham at Bowood

Lord Shelburne (after 1785, Lord Lansdowne) has often been presented as Bentham's "mentor",¹ or "patron", while Derek Jarrett, with a note of irony, called the utilitarian philosopher "another of [Lord Shelburne's] tame intellectuals"². In the later part of his life, Bentham was keen to repeat a flattering comparison Shelburne had made between their relationship and that of Bacon and Buckingham.³ These comparisons and simplifications do not do justice, however, to the relationship between Jeremy Bentham and Lord Shelburne.

By focusing on the links between Bentham and Shelburne, this chapter will clarify the meaning of the phrase "the Bowood circle", when used in connection with Bentham. As first used by Charles Milner Atkinson in 1905, it referred in a generic way to the people Bentham had met during his stays at Bowood, Shelburne's Wiltshire residence in the 1780s.⁴ It was taken up by Jarrett in his 1955 thesis entitled "The Bowood Circle, 1780-1793. Its ideas and its influence."⁵ Jarrett narrowed down the definition of that circle to Bentham, Etienne Dumont and Samuel Romilly, who were all close to Lord Lansdowne in the years 1788 to 1793. More recently, the phrase has been used by scholars to refer in a broader sense to Shelburne's entourage at the time of the French Revolution, ranging from Price and Priestley to Fox and Sheridan, and also including Dumont and Romilly.⁶ Leaving politicians and aristocrats such as Fox and Sheridan aside, this chapter focuses on the relationships between Lansdowne and some of his protégés during the 1780s in order to put Bentham's relationship with the aristocrat in context. It then presents Bentham's relationship with Lansdowne in more detail and explains the philosopher's ambiguous feelings towards aristocratic patronage. Lastly, it casts light on the reasons why contacts between Lansdowne and Bentham all but stopped after 1793.

I. Patron-client relationships at Bowood and Berkeley Square

Shelburne's support of numerous writers and scientists was a well-known public fact. The forms it took bear witness to the number of avenues open for patronage in eighteenth-century Britain, and must be looked at in detail in order to assess the specificity of Shelburne's relationship with Bentham. It is not possible to draw up a list of the writers and

¹ Mary Mack, *Jeremy Bentham: an Odyssey of Ideas 1748-1792* (London, 1962), pp. 370ff.

I would like to thank James H. Burns, Catherine Fuller, Catherine Pease-Watkin and Clarissa Campbell-Orr for their helpful comments at various stages of the writing of this text.

² Derek Jarrett, *The Begetters of Revolution. England's involvement with France, 1759-1789* (London, 1973), p. 131.

³ See *The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham, vol. 4, 1788-1793*, ed. A. T. Milne (London, 1981), p. 182, and for a later reminiscence, *The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham, vol. 12, 1824-1828*, ed. Catherine Fuller and Luke O'Sullivan (Oxford, 2006), pp.432-433. Shelburne himself also presented their friendship in this light, jestingly referring to Rousseau and the Maréchal de Luxembourg see *Correspondence of J. Bentham, vol. 4*, pp. 116, 242.

⁴ Charles Milner Atkinson, *Jeremy Bentham, his Life and Work* (London, 1905), p. 77

⁵ Derek Jarrett, "The Bowood Circle, 1780-1793. Its ideas and its influence." D. Phil. (or Unpublished B. Litt.) Oxford, 1955.

⁶ For a different interpretation of the phrases "Bowood writers" or "the Bowood circle" as referring to Dumont, Sheridan, Fox, Romilly and Bentham, see Richard Whatmore, "Etienne Dumont, the British Constitution and the French Revolution", *The Historical Journal*, 50 (2007), pp. 23-47. As R. Whatmore points out in this volume, the phrase "the Bowood circle" best refers to the people "belonging to Lord Shelburne", "without reference to a party programme". See p. 000.

scientists patronised by Shelburne here,⁷ but a few examples may illustrate the various forms it took and the subtle economy of duties and services entailed, in which the private and the political were closely intertwined. The notion of “friendship” – a word used by patrons and dependents alike – inscribed patronage within the social codes of eighteenth-century polite society.⁸ This assertion went together with claims of “independence” on the part of the client, or protégé.⁹ The notions of “friendship” and “independence” must, however, be set against the highly hierarchical structure of British society and the true financial dependency of many clients. First-hand experience of patronage also had a direct impact on the ways in which the thinkers studied here understood political and social relationships at a more theoretical level.

In practice, “patronage” had a variety of meanings. It could not mean the same thing for men of independent means or expectations, such as Richard Price and Jeremy Bentham, and for those who were directly dependent on the financial support of the aristocrat, like Joseph Priestley and Etienne Dumont. The attitudes of these intellectuals – to use an anachronistic notion for lack of a better word – towards the social subordination implied by the patron-protégé relationship show the complexity of this relation. This casts light on the range of possibilities that were open to each of them, and on the extent of their “independence”.

Much of Priestley’s hesitation before accepting Shelburne’s offer of a position as a librarian and companion hinged precisely on the issue of independence. Shelburne’s biographer, his descendant Edmond Fitzmaurice, describes his hesitation as “rhetorical” and suggests it was a way to improve the financial terms on which he was hired.¹⁰ However, Priestley’s friends feared “that the state [he] should be brought into would be too dependent and humiliating, and not leave [him] sufficiently master of [his] own conduct.”¹¹ In his *Memoirs*, Priestley insisted that Shelburne did not interfere with any of his philosophical, scientific or political pursuits. Referring to the controversial publication of his *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* in 1777 – following which he was widely branded as an atheist – he wrote that some of Shelburne’s friends had tried to dissuade him from publishing the book, in order not to “brin[g] odium on [his] patron”, but he was careful to stress that Shelburne had made no such demands in person.¹² Though Priestley stressed that the disgrace into which he fell the following year was not related to Shelburne’s opinion on his religious stand, the controversy probably played a part in their separation in 1780, which was widely noted in literary and polite circles.¹³ Priestley’s unease towards his position as a paid

⁷ Shelburne has recently been described as “the patron of what might be called the radical Enlightenment in England” by Edward G. Andrew, *Patrons of Enlightenment* (Toronto, 2006), p. 9. For an overview of the artists and philosophers patronised by Shelburne, see p. 170.

⁸ On the numerous uses of “friendship” in eighteenth-century England, see Naomi Tadmor, *Family and friends in eighteenth-century England: household, kinship, and patronage* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 167-236.

⁹ On the value contemporaries set to “independence” and the implications of the word, see Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man. Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 1-11 and 104-39.

¹⁰ The terms of the contract were far from insignificant: Priestley received a salary of £250 per annum, lodgings, and the promise of a life-long pension should the engagement be broken off. Edmond Fitzmaurice, *Life of William, Earl of Shelburne, First Marquess of Lansdowne, with extracts from his papers and correspondence* (London, 1875-76), II, p. 243.

¹¹ Priestley to Price, Sept. 27, 1772, in W. Bernard Peach and D. O. Thomas eds., *The Correspondence of Richard Price*, (Durham, N. C.) 1983, I, pp. 136-37.

¹² Priestley later recalled: “It being probable that this publication would be unpopular, and might be a means of bringing odium on my patron, several attempts were made by his friends, though none by himself, to dissuade me from persisting in it. But being, as I thought, engaged in the cause of important truth, I proceeded without regard to any consequences, assuring them that this publication should not be injurious to his lordship.” *Memoirs of Dr. Joseph Priestley to the year 1795*, in *Autobiography of Joseph Priestley*, ed. Jack Lindsay (Bath, 1970), p. 114.

¹³ See J. Lindsay’s introduction to *Autobiography of J. Priestley*, p. 24.

companion to an aristocrat can be felt in his disparaging comments on the aristocratic character, and his praise of the middling ranks of life, as embodiments of moral and political independence.¹⁴ However, in his *Memoirs*, Priestley was eager to exempt Shelburne from the flaws of other aristocrats, and to stress his exemplary moral character.¹⁵

In the same way, a few years later, the Genevan Etienne Dumont felt the economic and emotional dependency in which his situation placed him, as the following episode illustrates. He had been employed in 1786 to supervise the studies of Shelburne's younger sons by his second marriage. He remained lodged, and certainly paid, by Lansdowne until he was awarded a sinecure (also through Lansdowne) in 1791.¹⁶ Even afterwards, he remained closely dependent on the aristocrat's support, as a letter to Romilly in November 1793 testifies. He recalled a long conversation with Lansdowne, and reported the latter's encouragements for the translation of Bentham he had undertaken. He wrote that Lansdowne had promised him a position if he ever came back into office, and recalled the marquis's "interest and benevolence" towards him. But a few hours later, probably after a discussion with Lansdowne, he picked up his pen to add a very different postscript, writing that he understood he was not welcome in the house any longer, was considered as a stranger and had been made to feel "like a useless weight in the household."¹⁷ The tone of the letter reveals Dumont's sensitivity, but also the sense of purpose that Lansdowne's patronage had given him. Despite this episode, their relations remained good, and Dumont's attitude to the Lansdowne family, even after the death of the first marquis, remained markedly deferential.

The situations of Richard Price and Jeremy Bentham were different. Price, Priestley's contemporary and close friend, was, like him, a well-known dissenting minister, but he had been made rich by marriage. He was a frequent guest of Shelburne from the 1770s until his death in 1791. There is no evidence that he received from him more than customary gifts and occasional hospitality. He self-consciously used his connection with the politician to put forward his views on the economy, and domestic and colonial policy.¹⁸ His letters to Shelburne reveal the friendly terms on which they remained, despite occasional disagreements on the question of American independence or political reform. From 1782, during Shelburne's ministry, his letters became more frequent. Price forwarded pleas addressed through him to Shelburne, and acted as an advisor on economic matters.¹⁹ Within the deferential framework of eighteenth-century conventions, there was space for such direct contact, though Price had no illusions about the concrete influence his more daring opinions might have on the minister's decisions. For instance, on the formation of the new ministry in 1782, he repeated to Shelburne the necessity of "the acknowledgement of the independence of America" and that "something should by all means be done to purify the fountain of legislation among us, and to reform the representation of the kingdom." He then apologised in these words: "On reviewing [this letter] I feel pain lest I should be thought to act impertinently, but the attention and friendship by which your Lordship has always done me great honour encourages me to

¹⁴ See for instance: "Persons who are born to a moderate fortune, are, indeed, generally better educated, have, consequently, more enlarged minds, and are, in all respects, truly *independent*, than those who are born to a great opulence." J. Priestley, *Essay on the First Principles of Government*, ed. Peter Miller (Cambridge, 1993), p. 15.

¹⁵ Priestley stressed Shelburne's steadiness of character in opposition to the inflammatory aristocratic temper. *Autobiography of J. Priestley*, p. 115.

¹⁶ Richard Whatmore, "Etienne Dumont, the British Constitution and the French Revolution", p. 35n. This episode, as Jarrett has noted, was in direct opposition to Shelburne's public stance against sinecures during his ministry. See Derek Jarrett, *Three Faces of Revolution: Paris, London and New York in 1789* (London, 1989) p.76 and John Norris, *Shelburne and Reform* (London, 1963) pp. 199-215.

¹⁷ Etienne Dumont to Samuel Romilly, 29 Nov. 1793, Dumont MS, Bibliothèque Universitaire de Genève, box 17.

¹⁸ See D. O. Thomas, *The Honest Mind. The Thought and Work of Richard Price* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 145-48.

¹⁹ For letters to Shelburne during his ministry, see *The Correspondence of Richard Price*, II, p. 115-83.

resolve to send it.”²⁰ He was aware of limitation of his “influence” and did not conceal it to his hopeful radical friends. Despite his advocacy of true republican independence of character, he cultivated his friendship with the aristocrat and self-consciously made use of their friendship for political purposes.

Common dependency, varied as it might be, on Lord Shelburne did not necessarily imply close personal links or political agreement between these thinkers. Priestley and Price had been acquainted long before Price recommended him to Shelburne. Dumont and Bentham met in February 1788 at Lansdowne’s, and though their friendship was first very much linked to the marquis, it soon took on its own pace, culminating in Dumont’s editorship of Bentham’s manuscripts. Chronologically, Bentham’s relationship with Shelburne did not allow him to develop close personal contacts with Priestley or Price. Priestley had left Shelburne’s employment in 1780 and never met Bentham through him (though they corresponded on scientific issues in the 1770s). By the start of the French Revolution, Price – though still close to Lansdowne – was a respected patriarch, and though he and Bentham did meet twice at Lansdowne House, there is no further evidence for their connection during that period.

II. Bentham and Shelburne: the ambiguities of patronage

These selected examples cast an indirect light on the relationship between Bentham and Shelburne, which has so far been mostly documented by Bentham’s own testimonies. Towards the end of his life, the philosopher wrote about the relationship three times: first in a draft preface to the second edition of the *Fragment on Government*, written in 1822;²¹ secondly in a letter written in 1828 containing a “History of the intercourse, of Jeremy Bentham with the Lansdowne family: addressed by himself to the [third] Marquess of Lansdowne”,²² and lastly in the recollections published as the “Memoirs of J. Bentham” by John Bowring in the last volume of the *Complete Works*.²³ Their friendship from 1788 to 1792 is confirmed by Lansdowne’s letters to Morellet,²⁴ but otherwise the sources are mostly from Bentham’s side.

The philosopher recalled that Shelburne knocked at his door at Lincoln’s Inn in the summer of 1781, having discovered that he was the author of the *Fragment on Government* which had been published anonymously in 1776, an anecdote taken up by Shelburne’s biographer, but disproved by subsequent research.²⁵ The conditions in which they met must be clarified. They reveal much about the philosopher’s and the politician’s mutual

²⁰ *The Correspondence of Richard Price*, II, p. 117. Except in economic matters, where he was confident his views could be adopted, he represented to his correspondents the uncertainty that Shelburne would respond favourably to their demands. See letter his letter to Cartwright, *ibid.*, I, p. 245.

²¹ Jeremy Bentham, “Preface intended for the second edition of the *Fragment on Government*”, *A Comment on the Commentaries and A Fragment on Government*, eds. J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (London, 1977), pp. 502-51.

²² *The Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 12, pp. 436-43.

²³ *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. John Bowring, 11 vols. (Edinburgh, 1843) X pp. 88-123. The chronology of events is faulty, and the correspondence provides a much more reliable source.

²⁴ “[Y]ou already know the high Esteem I have for Mr. Bentham and the affection which our whole Family, Men women and Children bear him.” *Lettres d’André Morellet*, ed. Dorothy Medlin, Jean-Claude David and Paul Leclerc (Oxford, 1991-1996), II, p. 125 For other testimonies, see letters between Jeremiah Bentham and Lord Shelburne, BL Add Mss, 33540, f. 256, 303, 306; 33541, f. 85-86, 286, 289.

²⁵ Bentham’s account is to be found in his reminiscences to J. Bowring in *Works of J. Bentham* X, p. 88. See also E. Fitzmaurice, *Life of Shelburne*, III, p. 449. Fitzmaurice also erroneously claimed that “Bentham became an almost constant inmate of Bowwood” from July 1780 (III, p. 449) and that the *Theory of Morals and Legislation* [presumably the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*] was written there. For a refutation of these assertions see Elie Halévy, *La formation du radicalisme philosophique* [1904] (Paris, 1995), I, p. 275n.

expectations. In his later years, Bentham recalled that Shelburne had “raised [him] from the bottomless pit of humiliation” and “made [him] feel [he] was something”.²⁶ Scholars have stressed the philosopher’s search for recognition in the 1770s.²⁷ During that decade Bentham self-consciously tried to find a place for himself in the ‘Republic of letters’ at a time when the “*métier d’homme de lettres*” became structured around intellectual and social pursuits.²⁸ Bentham used most of the existing channels available to a hopeful philosopher willing to contribute to public debate at home and abroad: he tried to enter into correspondence with leading French *philosophes* of the time and thought of submitting an essay for an international competition on penal law organised by the Berne Academy.²⁹ In a pattern he pursued throughout his life, he worked simultaneously on a large-scale plan of legal reform and on more topical issues, hoping to trigger political change.

Unlike the grim picture of that decade given in the later *Memoirs*, in which Bentham described to John Bowring his dejection at the lack of recognition he experienced, his correspondence of the late 1770s reveals his enthusiasm for forming new connections and securing introductions. He hoped to make a name in public life by his publications, but he also tried more personal channels to recognition by sending his works to selected influential writers and politicians. Bentham’s eagerness is not to be explained only in psychological terms, but as the search for status in the complex social networks of the Enlightenment. Together with the esteem of established philosophers, the tribute of the aristocracy was an indispensable requirement for a literary career. In France, the salons offered a space for public recognition and opened up various means of financial support on the part of the aristocracy.³⁰ In England, aristocratic patronage took different forms, as we have seen, but was a central feature of intellectual life.³¹

The Bentham family was of independent means. Jeremy received an education which was typical of the aspiring urban bourgeoisie, attending Westminster School and Oxford University – following in the footsteps of many young aristocrats, including Shelburne himself. As an elder son, he had significant financial expectations, but they were not realised until his father’s death in 1792. He studied law at Lincoln’s Inn, but after his refusal to take cases, his father was reluctant to provide him with more than a basic allowance, which put him in what he much later described “a state of penury”, while he “kept up the appearance of a gentleman”.³² To supplement his income, he chose a path open to many of the Enlightenment literati, that of translation.³³

Bentham’s approach to Lord Shelburne must be understood in this broader social context. In 1778, he made several attempts to be noticed by influential politicians or aristocrats. He volunteered to replace Adam Ferguson, the Scottish moralist, as a companion to Governor Johnstone – then a Commissioner to the American Congress – “for the sake of

²⁶ *Works of J. Bentham* X, p. 115.

²⁷ Mack, *Odyssey of Ideas*, pp. 335ff. See also *Works of J. Bentham* X, pp. 78, 84.

²⁸ Michel Delon, “Les secondes Lumières en France”, in W. Schneiders, *The Enlightenment in Europe. Unity and Diversity*, Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts Verlag, 2003, pp. 13-19.

²⁹ For this period of Bentham’s life and his contacts with the French Enlightenment, see J. H. Burns, “Bentham, Brissot et la science du bonheur”, and S. Audidière, “La correspondance sans suite de Bentham et Chastellux: la these de la félicité publique, du ‘revenu net’ au calcul ‘félicitaire’” in E. de Champs and J.-P. Cléro, *Bentham et la France*, Studies on Voltaire and the Enlightenment (Oxford, 2009), pp. 3-19 and 21-34.

³⁰ Antoine Lilti, *Le monde des salons. Sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 2005), esp. pp. 168-216.

³¹ Edward Andrew, “The Senecan Moment: Patronage and Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, (2004), pp. 277-99.

³² *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 12, p. 436. He received about £100 a year throughout the 1770s, which was insufficient to cover his London expenses, see John R. Dinwiddy, *Bentham* (Oxford, 1989), p. 4.

³³ *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 2, p. 185. He translated Voltaire’s *Le taureau blanc* and embarked on a translation of Marmontel’s *Les Incas* which seems to have remained unpublished. *Ibid.* p. 370.

company and advice”.³⁴ In the same year, he approached the fourth Earl of Sandwich, first Lord of the Admiralty, with intelligence from his brother, Samuel, a naval engineer.³⁵ Early in 1779, Samuel suggested asking Shelburne for introductions.³⁶ Though Bentham’s interest in Lord Shelburne as a patron of the arts and sciences and a powerful politician can be easily explained,³⁷ it remains surprising from a political point of view. Since 1773, Bentham had been close to John Lind, one of Lord North’s protégés, whereas Shelburne had been one of the leaders of the Opposition throughout his ministry. However, Shelburne was not a party-man and Bentham consistently rejected all political allegiance, which might have made it easier to make contact with him.

Due to his father’s wealth, Bentham’s position towards Shelburne did not hinge predominantly on financial issues. Before they met, the philosopher self-consciously intended to set the terms upon which he would be introduced. Being solicited by the Bentham brothers, Shelburne had asked Samuel to call at Shelburne House in May 1779, an invitation which was declined, and then repeated to Jeremy in July 1780 – and also declined.³⁸ Explaining to Samuel why he had refused Shelburne’s invitations twice, Bentham explained that they should “meet upon a much better footing in November than now”, hoping that by then Shelburne would have read the book which he was to publish as *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. He also remarked: “I did not want him to fancy that his acquaintance was a thing I <was> disposed to jump at.”³⁹ In April 1781, Bentham offered Shelburne a series of tracts,⁴⁰ which could be the reason why the politician visited him in Lincoln’s Inn in June or early July 1781. Shelburne immediately invited him to spend some time at Bowood, where the philosopher stayed in the late summer of that year.

Bentham had high hopes that Shelburne would launch his career as a legal reformer. In a manuscript fragment, probably written during, or shortly after his first stay at Bowood, he parodied the style of the Book of Revelation, and dreamt he was “the founder [...] of the sect of the *utilitarians*.” He then described how an angel “flew at [his] window” and gave him a book entitled “Principles of Legislation”. “One day as I was musing over this book there came unto me a great man named L[d S.].... and he said unto me what shall I do to [...] save the nation? I said unto him – take up my book, & follow me.” In the remaining part of the dream, they meet “a man named George,” whom they cure by making him swallow a page of the book by force, and a woman called Britannia, who is brought to life again in the same way.⁴¹

III. The French Revolution

Bentham and Shelburne had remained in touch when Bentham departed for Russia to visit his brother, who was in Prince Potemkin’s service, in August 1785. On his return in February 1788, Bentham was a frequent guest at Lansdowne House in London. The early years of the French Revolution were those during which Bentham and Lansdowne were the

³⁴ *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 2, pp. 94, 104.

³⁵ *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 2, pp. 259-63.

³⁶ “The scheme of Ld. Shelburne delights me of all things. [...] It is possible that by Blanquet’s means you might get mention made of the Fragment and the H. Lab. Bill to Ld. Shelburne.” *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 2, pp. 221-23.

³⁷ In March 1779, Bentham introduced Ingenhaus to his brother Samuel in these words: “He is on good terms with Banks, Priestl[e]y, Ld. Shelburne, etc. in short all the literati and amateurs.” *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 2, p. 246.

³⁸ *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 2, pp. 257-58, 470.

³⁹ *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 2, p. 471

⁴⁰ *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 3, pp. 16-17.

⁴¹ For a full transcript of the “dream”, see James E. Crimmins, *Secular Utilitarianism. Social Science and the Critique of Religion in the Thought of Jeremy Bentham* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 314.

closest. Through him, Bentham met Samuel Romilly and Etienne Dumont, who were to become close friends.⁴² In the summer of 1789, Bentham was one of the few people external to the family allowed in Lady Lansdowne's room during her illness. His second extensive stay at Bowood took place from late August to the end of October 1789. After Lady Lansdowne's death, he accompanied her former companions, Miss Fox and Miss Vernon, with Lord Lansdowne, on a tour to Warwick. Throughout 1790, he was a frequent guest of Lansdowne House and, though he led a solitary life in his Hendon house, he maintained an extensive correspondence with the family, but also with Dumont, Romilly and – to a lesser extent Benjamin Vaughan.

In those years, sociability was reinforced by heightened political and intellectual links between Lansdowne, Romilly, Bentham, and Dumont. Bentham's enthusiasm for the early days of the French revolution closely followed Lansdowne's optimistic stance towards French affairs. Though many people in his circle – including many of his aristocratic French correspondents – watched the state of the country with growing dismay, Lansdowne himself encouraged his son Lord Wycombe, as well as Dumont and Romilly, to travel to France and take an active part in the unfolding events. This atmosphere accounts for Bentham's attempts to contribute to intellectual debate in France: from the autumn of 1788, he drafted several pamphlets in French, which were corrected by Dumont, marking the start of a fruitful intellectual collaboration.⁴³ Through Lansdowne, Bentham had access to numerous sources on French institutions, history, and current affairs. Lansdowne's contacts in France opened up new channels for his writings to be sent to France, such as Morellet, and – via Dumont – Mirabeau.⁴⁴

That Lansdowne himself was informed of Bentham's work during that period, and that he encouraged him, is beyond doubt. In January 1789, answering a request from the philosopher to use his library, he wrote:

My Dear Bentham,

As long as you honour me with your Friendship, you may treat the House to which I belong with every Freedom you think proper. [...] I am very glad to hear that you intend taking up the cause of the people in France. Nothing can contribute so much to general Humanity and Civilization, as for the Individuals of one country to be interested for the prosperity of another; I have long thought that the people have but one cause throughout the World.⁴⁵

In retrospect, however, Bentham might have had a tendency to romanticise Lansdowne's personal role in his activities at the time. In an account written in 1831, the philosopher recalled the circumstances in which his *Draught of a Plan for the Judicial Establishment in France* was composed. The similarity of this episode to the “dream” written down fifty years before is striking and should warn us against taking it as a trustworthy description of the collaboration between Lansdowne and Bentham in those years:

⁴² For a detailed account of how Bentham and Dumont met, see Charles Blount, “Bentham, Dumont and Mirabeau, an Historical Revision”, *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, 3 (1952), pp. 53-167.

⁴³ Dumont went on to edit in French a significant part of Bentham's manuscripts: *Traité de législation civile et pénale* (Geneva, 1802), *Théorie des peines et des récompenses* (London, 1811), *Tactique des Assemblées législatives* (Geneva, 1816), *Traité des preuves judiciaires* (Paris, 1823), *De l'organisation judiciaire et de la codification* (Paris, 1828).

⁴⁴ *Lettres d'André Morellet*, p. 125. On the practical impetus provided by Lansdowne, see *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 3, p. 621.

⁴⁵ *The Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 4, p. 21. More generally, on Bentham's involvement with Lansdowne, Dumont and Romilly in 1789-1791, see James H. Burns, “Bentham and the French Revolution”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 16 (1966), pp. 95-114 and Philip Schofield, *Utility and Democracy. The Political Thought of J. Bentham* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 78-108. Bentham's relationship with Dumont is extensively covered in Cyprian Blamires, *The French Revolution and the Creation of Benthamism* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 181-99.

To the whole impression the last hand was put in the attic of Lansdowne House, in which residence & in that part of it I had taken up my abode for the facility of communication with my friend & subsequent translator & Editor Etienne Dumont whose chamber was contiguous to the one then occupied by me. Anxiously attentive to the work throughout its progress was my Noble Host. At length the glad tidings reached him that the impression in its several parts had reached his garret: up he came, put together a hundred copies & down he went with them on his shoulders. Barthélémy, the French Minister, was then sitting in one of the rooms of the ground floor. Into the room went Lord Lansdowne & threw down his burden at the feet of the Diplomatist. "Take charge of these books" said he, "& send them to the Duc de la Rochefoucauld[d]".⁴⁶

The collaboration between Lansdowne and Bentham also extended to British politics in at least one instance. From 15 June to 23 July 1789, the *Public Advertiser* carried four letters signed "Anti-Machiavel" and written by Bentham. They attacked Pitt's foreign policy regarding Russia and Sweden. As Bentham wrote to the marquis before the debate took place, "Your prisoner has broke ground, and now is the time for you to bring up your battering cannon."⁴⁷ Indeed, as Conway recalls, Lansdowne had asked Bentham to prepare public opinion for an attack against Pitt in Parliament, but Bentham's willingness to embrace the cause, and the way he did so, were not solely dictated by Lansdowne, but echoed his long-standing interest in political relations and his pro-Russian sentiments. This is, however, the only known instance in which Bentham agreed to contribute explicitly to Lansdowne's political aims.⁴⁸

Bentham's disillusionment with the turn taken by the French Revolution also followed that of his Bowood friends. Whereas Lord Lansdowne continued to welcome French *émigrés* in his houses, the September massacres and the subsequent events of 1793 led Dumont and Romilly to break with the democratic ideals they had once entertained.⁴⁹ Bentham's opinions followed a similar trend, leading him eventually to submit, on Romilly's urging, a refutation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man to the *Anti-Jacobin Review* in 1801.⁵⁰

IV. The break with Lansdowne

In the description of his "intercourse with the Lansdowne family" addressed to the second marquis, Bentham spelled out his disinterest: "To a man in a governing situation, not often does it happen, to have a more faithful or affectionate friend, than *your father* had in *me*: not the less so, for being a *so* disinterested one."⁵¹ However, issues of patronage and

⁴⁶ BL Add MSS, 33 550 ff. 397-98. François Barthélémy was a French diplomat, Louis Alexandre de la Rochefoucauld d'Enville was a member of the Assemblée constituante until his resignation in August 1792.

⁴⁷ *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 4, p. 73.

⁴⁸ For a detailed analysis of this episode, see Stephen Conway, "Bentham versus Pitt: Jeremy Bentham and British Foreign Policy, 1789", *Historical Journal*, 30, 4 (1987), pp. 791-809.

⁴⁹ In September 1792, Romilly wrote to Dumont: "je me promène la moitié du jour dans une agitation extrême, et par l'impossibilité de rester en place, en pensant à tous les événements malheureux qui découlent d'une source d'où nous nous sommes flattés de voir sortir le bonheur du genre humain." *Life of Samuel Romilly*, II, p. 6. In the following months, this feeling had left place to deep disillusionment. See C. Blamires, *The Creation of Benthamism*, pp. 219-21.

⁵⁰ The pamphlet, "Nonsense Upon Stilts" had been written several years earlier. See *Rights, Representation and Reform*, pp. 317-75.

⁵¹ *The Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 12, p. 437. See also the following anecdote which Bentham repeated at least in three different places: "Lord Shelburne used frequently to say 'Tell me what is right and proper – tell me what a man of virtue would do in this matter'. I told him that Balaak, the son of Zippoi, wanted Balaam to prophesy, who answered 'that which the Lord puts into my mouth will I prophesy'; and that was the answer I

reciprocal services constantly underlay the relationship between Bentham and Shelburne. Towards the end of Bentham's first stay, Shelburne offered to provide for Samuel Bentham in some way or other, though in private Bentham expressed his "doubts as to the sincerity of [this proposal]."⁵² When Jeremy set out to join his brother in Russia, Lansdowne furnished him with introductions to circles in Paris, Lyons, Marseilles and Florence.⁵³ On his part, Bentham wrote with pieces of intelligence he could gather on his journey and sent a number of gifts (including two angora goats).⁵⁴ When both his sons were in Kritchev,⁵⁵ Jeremiah Bentham continued to forward their letters to Lansdowne and later presented him with the portrait of Bentham as a thirteen-year-old Oxford student. In 1788, when Bentham renewed his acquaintance with him in London, Lansdowne asked him for advice during the trial of Warren Hastings⁵⁶ and as their friendship grew, came to ask for more direct services from him. The issue of political patronage came up again at Lansdowne's initiative in 1788. He stressed that he would do something for Bentham if ever he came back into office.⁵⁷ A memorandum in Bentham's hand, dated 27 June 1789, indicates that Lansdowne might again have made more overt proposals, when he seemed to have prospects of returning to government.⁵⁸

In that context, one can understand Bentham's disappointment when he heard that one of Lansdowne's parliamentary seats for Chipping / High Wycombe, had been offered to Sir John Jervis. In a famously long letter, he appealed to the principles of "justice" and friendship, and accused the marquis of choosing "insignificant" men rather than independent and principled ones such as himself.⁵⁹ Lansdowne tactfully denied having made such an offer, but he did admit that he had always believed Bentham's character to be unsuited to a parliamentary career (which Bentham himself had recognised earlier). Lansdowne had in fact offered one of his seats to Samuel Romilly, who turned it down for political reasons, showing that this type of patronage was not unattainable for some of Bentham's close friends, even from less genteel background.⁶⁰ This episode illustrates the deep ambiguity at the heart of the patron-client relationship, while revealing Bentham's inadequate mastery of the codes of polite society.

made (*Fragment on Government*, p.524 and *Works X*, p.116, and slightly differently in *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 12, p. 437).

⁵² *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 3, p. 147 and intro p. xxii.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 407-08, 576.

⁵⁵ BL Add Mss. 33540, ff. 256, 306.

⁵⁶ *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 3, p. 617.

⁵⁷ "He has accused himself repeatedly, and *sans ménagement*, for not offering me a place when he was in; and commissioned me to consider what would suit me in the case of his coming in again. He supposes I should prefer a place at one of the Boards, to engaging in what is called politics, viz. coming into Parliament with a precarious place. Whether he meant all this, or whether the use of it was to make me contribute to make people think he was to come in, I cannot take upon me to say. Perhaps partly one and partly th'other, but my notion is, he will never come in, in any efficient place. As for me, my real thoughts being upon that, as upon all other occasions, as you know, the easiest for me to give, I gave him, viz. that I was not fit for a place, and that if I were, I should not wish to have one – that I hoped always to be happy enough to preserve his good opinion, and so forth, and that was enough for me." *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 3, p. 617.

⁵⁸ *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 4, p. 145n.

⁵⁹ *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 4, p. 145-70.

⁶⁰ "Lord Lansdowne did offer me a seat in Parliament, and strongly pressed me to accept it, with an assurance that I was to be at perfect liberty to vote and act as I should think proper. This was at a time when I had got a tolerable share of business at the bar, when I seemed certain of gaining a competence in my profession, and when, in point of fortune, I should have risked very little by going into Parliament. It was that which, above all things, I should have rejoiced in, if I could have gone into the House of Commons perfectly independent, and not with the consciousness that I was placed there by an individual whose opinions might, on some important subjects, be very different from my own. [...] I had the good sense and the honesty to decline it." *Life of Samuel Romilly*, pp. 87-88.

On a more personal level, too, Bentham seems to have been deluded as to the extent of his intimacy with the family. In his 1828 recollections, he asserted that “*Ladies* – more in *number* than there are fingers on the hand that writes this – Ladies, connected with him, most of them by the ties of consanguinity, were at different times offered by [Lord Lansdowne] to me in marriage.”⁶¹ He then named the widowed Lady Ashburton (Dunning’s widow), though no evidence for that proposal has survived. The “Ladies of Bowood”, that is to say Caroline and Elizabeth Vernon and the younger Caroline Fox, were the companions of the second Lady Lansdowne, and remained the guests of the marquis after her death in the summer of 1789. Bentham’s friendship with the family also extended to them, as Bowring stressed in his “Memoirs of Jeremy Bentham”. However, there seems to be evidence that Bowring left aside some aspects of this relationship, though the loss of many original letters makes it difficult to document.

Bowring stresses Bentham’s intimacy with “the Ladies” and insists on the playfulness of their correspondence. The surviving letters or draft letters clearly indicate that Bentham greatly enjoyed their company, and was particularly fond of Caroline Fox. Bentham might, however, have been more serious than Bowring allows, and might even have considered a marriage proposal, though only indirect evidence survives. In November 1790 he sent the three “ladies of Bowood” a pamphlet published in France (which he presented as his own) on the creation of “Marriage Houses” intended to remedy the “evils of celibacy”, by making details of young persons’ expectations available to suitable bachelors.⁶² The letter was written in the hand of Lansdowne’s personal secretary under Bentham’s dictation – whether the marquis endorsed the prank is not known. The ladies were shocked, and forwarded the letter and the pamphlet to Lansdowne immediately. There is evidence that, from then on, they insisted on seeing Bentham only when larger parties were assembled, and not privately as before.⁶³ This could substantiate Atkinson’s intriguing hint that “Bentham [...] had made advances to Caroline Fox such as proved unacceptable to that lady and rendered habits of close intimacy in some sort embarrassing”.⁶⁴ Bentham indeed proposed to Caroline Fox, but not before 1805, on the death of the first marquis, but his offer was kindly turned down.⁶⁵

In these two anecdotes, the political and the personal are blended. Despite the remaining shadow that hangs over these episodes, they reveal how much Bentham expected from his relationship with Lansdowne, on a political and social level and certainly account for the cooling of their relationship from 1791. After 1792, his name disappears from the Lansdowne House Dinner Books.⁶⁶ Bentham attributed their estrangement to the fact that his Panopticon schemes had brought him closer to Pitt, Lansdowne’s political enemy, but there

⁶¹ *Correspondence of J. Bentham*, vol. 12, p. 441. One should also remember that Samuel Romilly also met his wife, Ann Garbett, through Lansdowne – though the match between a successful lawyer, be he of low birth and the daughter of a businessman was certainly acceptable socially. Despite Bentham’s inherited wealth, his lack of a professional career made a marriage into the high aristocracy unlikely.

⁶² Unpublished letter from Elizabeth Vernon to Lord Lansdowne, November 11, 1790. Bowood Papers, British Library, Box 49, f. 146.

⁶³ See especially Bentham’s letter as reproduced from Bowring in *Correspondence*, vol. 4, pp. 355-59. The tone of the letter, in which Bentham laments that he has been banned from the ladies’ company for too long, is difficult to reconcile with Bowring’s claim that “[t]he letter which follows, in which a little disappointment and annoyance is obviously united with the pleasantry and irony of its style, was addressed to the ladies of the Bowood family, on occasion of their having denied themselves to Bentham when he called.” Bowring X, p. 271.

⁶⁴ C. M. Atkinson, *Jeremy Bentham*, p. 123. Atkinson suggests that this proposal might have occurred after Jeremiah Bentham’s death in 1791, which left Jeremy with a substantial income.

⁶⁵ See “Outline of Jeremy Bentham’s life, January 1802 to December 1805”, *The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, vol. 7, p. 23 and Caroline Fox’s reply, pp. 332-34.

⁶⁶ From January 1789 to December 1792, the Lansdowne House Dinner Books record 33 occurrences of Bentham’s name. The period also includes his extensive stay at Bowood in the summer of 1789. These figures are quoted with permission of The Trustees of the Bowood Collection.

are good reasons to believe that it was also partly due to his disappointment on these two counts.

There is no denying that Lansdowne was a formative influence in Bentham's life and played a key role in his political and personal development. As in all patron-*protégé* relationships, the private and the political were closely intertwined. This accounts for the number of avenues Lansdowne's patronage opened for the aspiring philosopher in the 1780s, but also for the later cooling of their relationship in later years. Having seen how Bentham – like Price, Priestley, Dumont, and Romilly – grappled with the issues of dependence and affiliation makes it difficult to endorse the idea that Lansdowne was at any point Bentham's "mentor", when the philosopher himself seems to have gone out of his way to prove that he was no "tame intellectual". At a broader level, their relationship also testifies to the changes which occurred in polite society from the 1790s onwards, and to the waning of the system of aristocratic patronage for intellectuals in Britain.

Lastly, the phrase "the **Bowood circle**", ought to be reserved – following Jarrett's insight, for the close network consisting of Romilly, Dumont, and Bentham, who shared ideals and expectations in the early years of the French Revolution, and remained close in the decades that followed. As we have seen, each entertained distinctive links with Lansdowne and benefited from the acquaintance in markedly different ways. For all three of them, however, their involvement with the marquis in the years 1789-1792 had long-lasting consequences.