John Sullivan: Linguistic Servant of the French Revolution

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to illuminate the life and work of John Sullivan (1765–1801), an Irish translator whose career straddled the tumultuous years of the French Revolution. A
narrative reconstruction of his life is based on research conducted *in situ* in the French Diplomatic, Military and National Archives. Extensive archival research permits an analysis of his translation practice, and a broader review of the various bilingual roles he assumed. The wider historical and political context of the French Revolution is kept in focus.

Sullivan’s translation practice while employed by the French government is characterised by a functionalist approach, exemplified by a strategy of additions and adjustments. The translator was keenly aware of the ideological bias of the regime he served and assumed a number of interrelated roles due to his written and oral competence in French as teacher, political activist, military volunteer, translator, military recruiter, counterintelligence analyst and military officer. The power of rhetoric is explored as a dynamic force linking many of these roles. The translator moved his audience to action, but he was also moved himself to engage in military action in support of the principles of the French Revolution and the United Irishmen. Sullivan abided by the spirit of his translation in word and in deed.

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List of Abbreviations

AAE Archives des Affaires Étrangères (La Courneuve). The personal files of John Sullivan
and Nicholas Madgett in the Diplomatic Archives are referenced using the abbreviated codes applied by the Archives themselves. PERS abbreviates ‘Personnel’ [Personal]. For example, document 58 from Sullivan’s personal file (1/65) is abbreviated to AAE/PERS/1/65/58. Document 83 from Nicholas Madgett’s personal file (1/47) is abbreviated to AAE/PERS/1/47/83.

AN Archives Nationales de France (Pierrefitte and Paris). The French National Archives use the abbreviation AN and also AF. Thus, document 228 from file III/58 is abbreviated to AF/III/58/228.

CPA Correspondance politique Angleterre (La Courneuve). The abbreviation CPA is followed by the file number and document number. For example, document 236 from file 589 is abbreviated to CPA/589/236.

CP E-U Correspondance politique États-Unis (La Courneuve).

SHA Service historique de l’Armée de Terre (Vincennes). John Sullivan’s personal file in the Military Archives has the abbreviation SHA/GR/2YE applied to it and the letters GR and YE appear to be internal reference codes. Furthermore, the documents in this important file are not numbered, so I have endeavoured to identify them wherever possible by date.

SHM Service historique de la Marine (Vincennes).

MC/ET This is a reference code applied by the National Archives in Paris to notarial documents.

NLI National Library of Ireland (Dublin). Two microfilms consulted on parish registers are cited in the text by the abbreviation mf followed by the microfilm number.

HO Home Office.

Introduction

John Sullivan (1765–1802) was a gifted Irish translator who worked in France during one of the most turbulent periods of modern European history. He was a man of many talents:
teacher, political activist, government translator, political lobbyist and French army officer. His life was marked by opportunity, achievement and danger but also by disappointment—it ended prematurely when he died of a fever in Santa Domingo in 1802.

Sullivan was an ardent supporter of the principles of the French Revolution both in word and in deed. As a sworn enemy of the English government, he promoted a French invasion of Ireland as a means to Irish independence. Whilst a government translator, he provided indispensable linguistic support to leading United Irishmen, including Hamilton Rowan and Wolfe Tone. He was not afraid to fight in battle for the causes he espoused, both against the Royalists in the campaign known as ‘La Vendée’ in 1793, and most graphically, as General Humbert’s aide de camp in the French expedition that landed in County Mayo in 1798.


This dissertation attempts to retrieve John Sullivan’s life, so that his contribution to the history of translation is more fully illuminated. The methodology for the narrative reconstruction is principally based on primary archival sources which I consulted in situ at the French Diplomatic Archives at La Courneuve, the French Military Archives at Vincennes and the French National Archives at Pierrefitte. Fortunately, both the Diplomatic and Military Archives contain a separate file on John Sullivan, though these files are slim, and the

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documents therein are not in any particular temporal or thematic order. Nor is there any clear logic as to how the different categories of source documents came to be filed in different archives. For example, Sullivan’s translations of Wolfe Tone’s memoranda is to be found in the Diplomatic Archives, whereas his translations of extracts from the English press of the same period are stored in the National Archives. Unsurprisingly, there is no file headed ‘translation’ in any archive. The work of excavation and narrative reconstruction is not straightforward, and there are gaps in the narrative which cannot be filled in from primary sources, especially in relation to his early life. However, there is sufficient material to paint a picture of what Munday refers to as the ‘micro-history’ of the translator, which in turn sheds light on the history of translation in a specific socio-historical and cultural context (Munday 2014: 64–65).

Sullivan’s status as a marginalised figure in the history of Ireland and France in the late eighteenth century is no different to how translators have been generally perceived. DeLisle and Woodsworth in Translators Through History argue strongly for a history of translation that enables these discreet labourers to emerge from the shadows of history (Delisle and Woodsworth 2012: xx). It would be impossible to situate John Sullivan’s contribution to translation history in isolation from the powerful political and ideological currents sweeping through late eighteenth-century France. His career straddled the extraordinary years of the French Revolution which saw the abolition of feudalism and the monarchy, and their replacement by modern principles of freedom, equality and secular government. These achievements were accompanied by physical violence and political radicalism and, as Gough observes, neither France nor the rest of the world would ever be the same again (Gough 1998: 1).

The French Revolution also led to prolonged wars between France and other European powers keen to reverse the effect of the Revolution. France ended up at war with Prussia, Spain, Holland and Russia during the 1790s and indeed continuously with Britain from 1793 until 1802 (Gough 1990: 8, 11; Tone II 2001: xv). Internally, the Revolution itself went through a number of different phrases, from the repression of the Terror from 1793 to 1974, to more moderate versions of Republicanism before and after. It was during this cataclysmic period of history that John Sullivan made his way in life, working for a time in close proximity to the centre of power.
Whereas Kleinman has shed significant light on the translation activity of Sullivan and his uncle Nicholas Madgett, this study provides a detailed profile of his life and career, gleaned from archival sources. Such a profile provides the foundations for an analysis of his work as a translator and an assessment of his contribution to translation history. The majority of translations I will examine have not been previously considered.

Chapter one traces John Sullivan’s early role as a teacher in a prestigious school in La Flèche, his political and military apprenticeship, and his first translation position in the Ministry of the Marine. Chapter two takes the story forward to his position as translator in the Department of Foreign Affairs under Delacroix, followed by a period of insecurity as a non-commissioned officer in the French Army, including the extraordinary saga of his contribution to the 1798 Mayo invasion force under Humbert.

Chapter three then considers in more detail what it meant to be a translator in the service of the French government during the Revolution, and it examines Sullivan’s own translation practice. Chapter four is comprised of a broader review of his professional life and explores the interaction between the bilingual roles he assumed and the political and military action he engaged in. The central question in this dissertation is: how did translation influence the multiple roles assumed by the translator and what was the interaction between those roles?

Chapter One
From Teaching to Translation: 1785–1795
This chapter will trace John Sullivan’s remarkable journey through France from 1785–1795. Where necessary, it will provide historical information on the evolving social and political context of the French Revolution that had an impact on Sullivan. I will commence with a brief account of his likely family origins. Records show that he arrived in La Flèche, near Angers, at age eighteen to teach in a well-known school, the Collège de la Flèche. He also found time to engage in political discussion in the local Jacobin club and was granted French citizenship. In 1793, the year the school closed, he took up arms as a volunteer in the Republican cause against the Royalist uprising known as ‘La Vendée,’ [The Vendée]. The final two years of that decade saw him gain bilingual employment in the Ministry of the Marine, where his fieldwork as a translator included the conversion of English prisoners of war to the French Republican cause and the composition of anti-English propaganda.

A. Origins

Very little is known of John Sullivan’s life before he took up a position as an English teacher in the Collège de La Flèche in September 1785 (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26). In much later correspondence between Sullivan and the Directory in April 1801, he states that he had been brought up in France and had then been residing in France for sixteen years continuously (Ibid.). This suggests that he had also spent some time in France during his earlier years, and indeed it is difficult to imagine how he could have arrived aged eighteen at a prestigious French school to teach English without having previously spent some time in France in order to acquire at least a working knowledge of French.

The only documentary reference to his age is in the Department of Foreign Affairs in Paris, where it lists him as one of its translators in December 1795, aged twenty-eight (AF/III/52-55/213). He was the nephew of Nicholas Madgett who became Head of the ‘Bureau des Traductions’ [Translation Division] within the Department of Foreign Affairs. Madgett refers to Sullivan as his nephew in his will dated 5 February 1812 (MC/ET/1/733).

Discovering any hard facts about Sullivan’s birth has proved extremely difficult. Although his uncle Nicholas Madgett the translator was, according to Hayes, born in Kinsale, County Cork in 1740 (Hayes 1949: 192–193), Bartlett refers to him as the ‘Kerry born French government official’ (Bartlett 1998: xxxii). A cousin of Madgett’s, also named Nicholas Madgett, who went on to become an English spy in Paris, was born in Tralee, County Kerry in 1758 (Hayes
An uncle of both of these Nicholas Madgetts, also confusingly named Nicholas Madgett, was the French educated Bishop of Kerry in the mid-eighteenth century who was born in Ardfert, County Kerry (Brockliss and Ferté 1987: 571; Hayes 1949: 196–197). Baptismal and marriage records from the Roman Catholic Parish of Tralee, County Kerry in the 1770s disclose a number of ceremonies involving and witnessed by members of the Madgett and Sullivan families, from which it seems likely that John Sullivan was from Tralee, County Kerry (NLI : mf 04270/05). The baptismal registers begin in 1772, whereas John Sullivan was born in 1765. However, given the Madgett connections, it seems very possible that his parents were Patrick Sullivan and Ellen Madgett, two of whose children named Catherine Sullivan and Patrick Sullivan were baptised on 18 April 1773 and 22 August 1774 respectively (NLI: mf 04269/01).

B. La Flèche

Concrete, documented proof of Sullivan’s existence begins with his employment in La Flèche in the west of France in 1785. The Collège de La Flèche was a school run by the ‘Doctrinaires,’ [the Doctrinaires], a teaching order whose full title was ‘les pères de la doctrine chrétienne’ [the Christian Doctrine Fathers]. They had taken over the college from the Jesuits after the latter were expelled in 1762 for alleged Jansenism (Compère and Julia 1988: 380). The Doctrinaires sent their best teachers to the Collège de La Flèche and, as the government education inspector Reynaud reported in 1787, it was an excellent school with high academic standards (Compère and Julia 1988: 386).

In 1789, at the beginning of the Revolution, the school had a teaching staff of six ‘professeurs’ [teachers], Sullivan being the only teacher of mathematics (Compère and Julia 1988: 380). The Doctrinaires themselves all took the oath to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy introduced by the Revolutionary government in July 1790 as part of a series of measures to subordinate the Catholic Church to the civilian government (Compère and Julia 1988: 387). In general, schools operated by religious orders outwardly proclaimed Republican values and arranged for their pupils to take part in Republican festivals (Frijhoff & Julia 1981: 159). Thus, Sullivan spent the formative years between the age of eighteen and twenty-six in a school run by an enlightened Catholic teaching order which had adapted to the secularisation of French society.
A reference signed by the principal and some of the teachers of the Collège de La Flèche dated 7 September 1795 gives a short synopsis of his teaching career at that institution (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26). He began as a teacher of English in September 1785, aged eighteen, and continued in that role until November 1788. From November 1788 to November 1792 he taught mathematics. There are no records to explain how or why he became a mathematics teacher at the age of twenty-one, having taught English for the previous three years in the school, but it can be assumed that he must have been completely fluent in oral and written French by this point. A much later reference dated 6 April 1801 contains supportive comments about his having taught mathematics to several officers in the French army, who went on to serve with distinction (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26). Indeed, the reference from the principal of the school dated 7 September 1795 states ‘...il a montré constamment le zele et les talens qui lui ont mérité la confiance publique.’ [He consistently demonstrated the zeal and ability which justified public confidence in him] (Ibid.).

The date of that reference suggests Sullivan may have required it for a post as translator in the Department of Foreign Affairs in the autumn of 1795, although he had already been recruited into the Ministry of the Marine for bilingual work in 1793 (AAE/PERS/1/65/58). Sullivan might well have stayed on in the Collège de La Flèche; it was a prestigious school and, as we shall see, he had bought property in the locality. However, that institution was closed down as a consequence of two government decrees, the first in August 1792 abolishing secular religious congregations including the Doctrinaires (Frijhoff and Julia 1981: 158) and the second on 9 September 1793 ordering the immediate closure of all military colleges (Beaupère 1985: 17). Sullivan successfully applied for French citizenship in February 1793.

Despite the closure of the school in 1793, Sullivan had acquired valuable professional competence as a teacher between 1785 and 1793, skills which he complemented with a political apprenticeship. A glowing testimonial from the local political club he attended, La Société Populaire de La Flèche [The Popular Society of La Flèche] dated 19 April 1794, states Sullivan had taken part in political discussions at the club, and praises his Revolutionary and patriotic fervour: ‘...dans tous les discours qu’il a prononcé dans la Société il a cherché à éclairer ses concitoyens et à alimenter le feu du patriotisme.’ (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26) [In all
the speeches he made to the Society, he endeavoured to enlighten his fellow citizens and to promote a spirit of patriotism.]

There may well be relevant ‘procès-verbaux’ [minutes] of the proceedings of this local Jacobin club in the Archives of the Département of La Sarthe in Le Mans, but the retrieval of any such archives is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The testimonial from the political club further records that Sullivan had, in 1793, enlisted in the Republican military effort against the Royalists in a conflict known as ‘La Vendée’ on account of its geographical origin. He was, for reasons not disclosed, exempt from the conscription into the Republican ranks to fight the Royalists. He is said to have acquitted himself well during that campaign as a gunner, according to a separate French army reference (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26). His decision to volunteer came at a time when the central government had ordered a ‘levée en masse’ [general conscription] in August 1793 in the context of the wars with England, Prussia and Austria (Gough 1990: 8–9). Indeed, his commitment to the Republican cause in fighting the counter-revolution was also noted in much later correspondence between the War Ministry and the Directory in January 1799 (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26).

1793 was indeed a turbulent year in the French Revolution and how events unfolded in the west of France near La Flèche would have had a direct impact on Sullivan. The counter-revolutionary movement which originated in the Vendée had spread north to the Loire valley to reach La Flèche by the summer of 1793, when the Royalists occupied the town briefly in June of that year and used the Collège as a military hospital (Frijhoff & Julia 1981: 159). Royalists massacred Republicans in Nantes, Angers, and Saumur (Sutherland 1985: 167). However, the counter-revolution was eventually crushed later in 1793. In the autumn of that year, the Royalists were defeated in Angers and Le Mans (Sutherland 1985: 219). The experience of the counter-revolution led to repression and the Terror of 1793–1794. Power became centralised in the Committee of Public Safety and dissent eliminated with the aid of the Revolutionary Tribunal (Gough 1990: 8–9). Foreigners became increasingly subject to surveillance and restrictive government measures (Rapport 2000: 187). The earlier cosmopolitanism of the French government towards foreigners in 1791 and 1792 was now replaced by the more exclusive patriotism of the Terror (Rapport 2000: 186, 206). By the
end of that year, the Convention had passed decrees ordering the arrest of all enemy subjects and the seizure of their property (Rapport 2000: 200, 203).

Sullivan was still teaching at the Collège de La Flèche when he had the foresight to apply to become a French citizen. The decision of the Municipal Council of La Flèche dated 7 February 1793 granting French citizenship to John Sullivan is an important milestone in his odyssey through the different phases of the Revolution (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26). It records that Sullivan had signed a contract to acquire property in Nyoiseau, some seventy kilometres from La Flèche, for the sum of six hundred livres, equivalent to approximately twenty-six English pounds (Teague 2016: 63). It also refers to a certificate from the Doctrinaires at the Collège that he had been a teacher from 1785 until 1793. In addition, the Council notes that Sullivan had sworn an oath of loyalty to the Constitution. The Procureur de la Commune [The Municipal Prosecutor], an elected official of the Municipal Council obliged to enforce all national legislation, certified that Sullivan had complied with all legal formalities required for French citizenship. Consequently the Council declared him a French citizen.

Sullivan could now face the challenges of survival through the next phase of the Revolution involving repression, Terror and increased controls on the freedom of foreigners with not just a glowing reference from the school, but with proof of his French citizenship. Together with the political experience of the local Jacobin club and his military service in the campaign against the Royalists, he was now well equipped to pursue an alternative career in the service of the French government, notwithstanding the fact that it was never more dangerous for foreigners to be involved in revolutionary politics (Rapport 2000: 235).

C. Ministry of the Marine

Although Sullivan’s personal file in the Military Archives in Vincennes is slim and contains little or no details of his employment by the Ministry of the Marine from 1793–1795, fortunately his own, albeit summary, account of that period appears in a letter he wrote to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Delacroix, in October 1796 (AAE/PERS/1/65/58). Sullivan asserts that he joined the ‘Bureau de Traduction’ [Translation Division] of the Ministry of the Marine in 1793, where his uncle Nicholas Madgett was already installed.
The establishment of that Translation Division is not documented in Military Archives, unlike the later organisation of translation in the Department of Foreign Affairs in late 1795. In particular, it is not known how Sullivan was recruited. However, it is likely that his uncle Nicholas Madgett was involved in the process and it seems inconceivable that his linguistic competence was not assessed in some way, though this is not disclosed in archival records.

It is worth briefly recalling the linguistic policy of the Revolutionary government on the French language. The translation of all Revolutionary laws into certain neighbouring European languages (German, Dutch, Spanish and Italian) was a political priority and seen as a way of enhancing the influence of the Revolution (Chappey & Martin 2017: 1; Delisle & Woodsworth 2012: 203). By 1793, the government also decided to impose a single, unifying French as the institutionalised national language so as to eradicate local patois and jargon (Delisle & Woodsworth 2012: 203–204; Kleinman 2017: 8; Ostler 2010: 192). Sullivan’s testimonials from the Collège de la Flèche and the local Société Populaire might well have made an elaborate linguistic scrutiny unnecessary, but either way he had established competence in the language of centralised power.

Sullivan describes a very specific mission he was sent on to Brittany, not long after joining the Translation Division. He managed to persuade more than 200 prisoners of war held in Dinan to defect from the British navy and join the forces of the French Republic; his advocacy of the principles of the French Revolution was persuasive (SHA/GR/2YE/1/65/58). Sullivan regarded this as one of his major accomplishments and it undoubtedly was a testament to his much proclaimed devotion to Republican principles and his ability to advocate them (Ibid.). The success of this mission may also have been assisted by the large numbers of Irishmen in the English Navy, which Madgett puts at three quarters of the total number in an internal memorandum in May 1797 (AF/III/52-55/213). Moody and McDowell contend that Sullivan had been appointed as ‘an inspector of prisoners-of-war,’ though archival records do not confirm such an appointment (Tone 2001: 143). This was also a successful bilingual engagement as it undoubtedly involved taking instructions from and reporting back to French army officers.

A further official function involved Sullivan in the analysis of documents seized from prisoners at the Brittany ports and their translation into French (AAE/PERS/1/65/58). Sullivan himself was aware that his activities were known to the English authorities, who
had many spies in France, and that he would never be able to safely return to Ireland (AAE/PERS/1/65/59).

One may question how intelligence gathering and the recruitment of ‘enemy’ prisoners could ever come under the rubric of the ‘Bureau de Traduction’ [Translation Division] of the Ministry of the Marine. However, this was a time of war between France and England from February 1793, and bilingual agents were expected to assume a broad range of duties. This in turn directly impacts on the meaning and value of translation in context, which will be considered later in this dissertation.

The intelligence activities Sullivan undertook are consistent with the role of Madgett, his uncle, in the Marine Ministry. Elliot states that Madgett organised all intelligence operations in the British Isles between 1793 and 1795 (Elliot 1982: 62). Contemporaneous documents disclose that Madgett was keen to set up a network of English spies in Paris who were sympathetic to the Revolution, to counteract intelligence gathering by spies sent from England by the British authorities (CPA/587/42). Indeed in June 1793 the Foreign Minister, Le Brun, was receiving reports from a secret agent sent to Ireland to report on the political situation there, which Madgett probably also received (CPA/587/167). Madgett confirmed later that he was in charge of correspondence with secret agents (AAE/PERS/1/65/53).

Madgett was an influential figure who had personal access to two successive Foreign Ministers, Le Brun and Delacroix, and headed up translation in the Marine Ministry which became subsumed in the Department of Foreign Affairs. The historiographical footprint left by Madgett is significantly greater than Sullivan’s; for example, he merits a two-page entry in Hayes’s *Biographical Dictionary of Irishmen in France* (Hayes 1947: 194–196).² A detailed study of Madgett’s career would be a fruitful endeavour for further scholarship on Sullivan, however it is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Later in 1794, Sullivan rescued a leading United Irishman who had been forced to flee Ireland because of his political views, one Archibald Hamilton Rowan (CPA/588/262). This incident became so well known that Wolfe Tone records it in his journal some two years later:

Rowan had been seized and thrown into prison immediately on his landing near Brest, from whence he was rescued by the interference of a young man named Sullivan, an Irishman in the service of the Republic, and sent on to Paris to the Committee of Public Safety by Prieur de la Marne, the deputy on mission (Tone 2001: II, 336).

Sullivan not only rescued him from prison but composed memoranda on his behalf in French, which were addressed to the Committee of Public Safety. He exhorts the Committee to provide assistance to Hamilton Rowan who was now destitute, but who had important United Irishmen connections in Ireland. Sullivan’s guiding hand in the composition of one of these memoranda can be seen by the frequent invocation of the principles of equality and freedom and Hamilton’s description of himself as ‘un admirateur sincère de la Révolution française’ [a sincere admirer of the French Revolution] (CPA/588/268).

Sullivan also describes another related role during his period with the Marine Ministry, namely the composition of anti-English propaganda which he claims was smuggled into and distributed in England and which he had, in part, composed himself (AAE/PERS/1/65/58). One such propaganda document which dates from the spring of 1794, though not confirmed as having been penned by Sullivan, is representative of the genre. It was clearly intended for distribution in England as the French title “Adresse des français aux Peuple anglais” [“Address by the French people to the English People”] indicates (CPA/588/226). It was translated more fulsomely in a printed English version entitled: ‘A CANDID AND FRIENDLY ADDRESS FROM THE PEOPLE OF FRANCE TO THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND.’ (CPA/588/225).

The document eulogises the Republican government, the principle of liberty and the rights of man. It was intended to undermine support for the English monarchy, corresponding squarely with Sullivan’s professed political views as an ‘ennemi juré du gouvernement anglais’ [a sworn enemy of the English government], which are elaborated in a letter to Delacroix in October 1796 (AAE/PERS/1/65/58). Sullivan goes on to express in that letter ‘mon mépris et mon horreur pour le roi Georges et pour ses ministres’ [my contempt and hatred of King George and his ministers] (Ibid.). Sullivan’s choice words, along with his participation in the campaign to defeat the Royalists, and the emphatic endorsement from his local Jacobin club in La Flèche make his Republican credentials clear.
Sullivan’s political views reflected the anti-English stance of the government he was serving: the ideological battle reflected the actual military conflict between France and England, and as we shall see, Sullivan was to become active in both spheres. His views are further illustrated in another document in Sullivan’s hand and signed by him. In a virulent attack on The Times newspaper and on Pitt’s government dated 7 June 1794, Sullivan summarises the editorial position of The Times as portraying France in a state of impoverishment where the guillotine is used to reduce the number of mouths the country has to feed. The analysis was for the benefit of his political masters in the Committee of Public Safety because Sullivan begins the piece by referring to the opinions expressed in The Times as ‘les absurdités monstrueuses’ [monstrous absurdities]. Sullivan’s solid Republican rhetoric underlines a problematic extract from the article, which he sarcastically introduces as an example of the impartiality of its author. The highlighted passage describes the French system of government as more cruel and tyrannical than any absolute monarchy. Kleinman has tracked one part of Sullivan’s analysis to the edition of The Times of 21 March 1794 (Kleinman 2017: 11). This explicit intervention by the translator presages the extensive monitoring of the English press which Sullivan was to undertake for Minister Delacroix, when he was attached to the ‘Bureau Intime’ [Private Office] in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 1795–1796.

The febrile political context of the spring and summer of 1794 in Paris can hardly be overestimated. The Committee of Public Safety saw itself surrounded by enemies, as conspiracy theories flourished and it responded with more centralisation, terror and reform. More people were decapitated by the guillotine in June and July 1794 than in the whole of the previous fifteen months (Gough 1998: 54). To that effect, it was perhaps monstrous, as Sullivan characterises, for The Times to suggest that the French government had a policy of mass executions in order to reduce the number of citizens to be fed, though perhaps not so monstrous to suggest that official executions had reached an alarming level. These were dark days indeed for the French Revolution, but Sullivan not only survived but, the following year, progressed to a prestigious position in the French Department of Foreign Affairs which will be addressed shortly.

Sullivan undertook some bilingual work in Paris during that period. A document in his clear hand dated 15 April 1794—although bearing Madgett’s name—sheds significant light on the
translator’s role during the reign of the Committee of Public Safety. In a memorandum submitted to that Committee by Madgett, he describes himself as the ‘Chargé du Bureau des traductions’ [Head of the Translation Division] and requests the Committee of Public Safety to authorise the printing of three English translations (AAE/PERS/1/47/85). The first document on the list is Robespierre’s famous speech on democracy and terror delivered to the Convention on 5 February 1794, entitled ‘Sur les principes de la morale politique qui doivent guider la Convention nationale dans l’administration intérieure de la République’ [‘On the principles of political morality to be observed by the national Convention in the internal administration of the Republic’] (Robespierre 1866: 294-308). The Terror, of which this speech was a philosophical milestone, has been viewed by some historians as the ideological antecedent of twentieth century totalitarianism (Gough 1998: 4).

A subsequent unsigned note establishes the printing of English translations of these documents (AAE/PERS/1/47/89). What is significant about Madgett’s request is that a) it discloses his influence in determining what documents should be prioritised in terms of printed translations, and b) it includes his personal appraisal of the political importance of particular documents. Insofar as the expected impact of the translation of Robespierre’s speech is concerned, Madgett states as follows:

...le discours de Robespierre est ce qu’il y a de plus capable de faire sur le peuple anglais, une profonde impression et de lui faire sentir l'imposture des feuilles ministérielles qui ont cherché jusqu’ici à lui faire croire que les français étaient des cannibales (AAE/PERS/1/47/85).

[Robespierre’s speech is the best possible way of making a strong impression on the English people and of making them grasp the dishonesty of official news which up to now has tried to make them believe that the French were cannibals.]

Madgett, as the author of this document, and Sullivan, Madgett’s protégé and its transcriber, were fully attuned to the effect which a translation might have on its target audience and indeed the anticipated consequence of this translation being available in England is a classical formulation of a functionalist approach to translation. This episode also demonstrates just how precarious it was for a translator to express political opinions. Both Robespierre and Saint-Just, two of the authors recommended thus for printed translation in April 1794, were guillotined on 28 July 1794, as divisions within the Committee of Public Safety came to a head (Gough 1998: 70).
Not all documents composed by Sullivan were signed by him, but his clear, recognisable handwriting makes it possible to attribute many unsigned documents to him. The Appendix to this dissertation provides two documents for comparison, one that he has signed and one that he has not.

It is difficult to ascertain how much time Sullivan spent during this period doing actual translation work under Madgett; he himself states that in October 1795 he was recalled to Paris to work within the Translation Division (AAE/PERS/1/65/58). It seems likely, from Sullivan’s synopsis of his career in the October 1796 letter to Delacroix that by this he meant being recalled from the fieldwork he had been doing in the ports of Brittany.

Madgett states in a letter to Delacroix in the summer of 1797 that the Translation Division had been transferred to the Department of Foreign Affairs on the dissolution of the Committee of Public Safety on 24 August 1795, though there is a dearth of archival material on how exactly the transfer of translation work from the Marine Ministry took effect (AAE/PERS/1/65/83).

Chapter Two:
From Translator to Army Officer: 1795–1802

In this chapter I will continue to follow the trajectory of Sullivan’s career which will be the springboard for the discussion of his contribution to translation history in chapters three
and four. He was appointed to the Translation Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs in late 1795 at the age of twenty-eight. In addition to the translation of texts, he assumed other roles going well beyond translation. These included composing propaganda, monitoring the English press and political lobbying on behalf of Wolfe Tone. His time at the Department marked the zenith of his influence as a translator. His subsequent career involving a series of ad hoc commissions in the French army is characterised by insecurity and disappointment. The extraordinary adventure of his involvement in the expedition to Mayo in 1798 led by General Humbert will also be highlighted as an example of a translator putting his life on the line for the causes he espoused, particularly the United Irishmen.

On the specific issue of his support for Irish Republicanism, he reminds Delacroix in October 1796 of: ‘les efforts que j’ai fait pour faire réussir le projet d’une descente en Irlande présenté au Comité de Salut public par Hamilton Rowan dont j’ai rédigé en français les premiers mémoires’ [the efforts I made to promote the plan for an invasion of Ireland submitted to the Committee of Public Safety by Hamilton Rowan whose early memoranda I translated into French] (AAE/PERS/1/65/58). One senses the influence of Sullivan in Hamilton Rowan’s memorandum dated 9 October 1794, which refers to English administration in Ireland as ‘le joug d’un gouvernement oppressur’ [the yoke of an oppressive government] and to Ireland as a country ‘avili par l’esclavage’ [demeaned by slavery] (CPA/588/268). Sullivan’s active military participation in the Humbert invasion force demonstrates that he was not just loyal to the French Revolution but was a committed supporter of the United Irishmen. McDowell and Moody record that Sullivan was apparently sworn as a United Irishman in Paris in 1796 (Tone 2007: 475–476).

The 1790s witnessed the rise and fall of the United Irishmen, which comprised a temporary coalition of Catholics and Dissenters seeking Irish independence. The movement was in part inspired by the French Revolution (Foster 1988: 264) and by 1794, it had become radicalized and had established links with the French government through Hamilton Rowan and more notably, Wolfe Tone (Foster 1988: 271). The objective was, ultimately, to promote a French invasion of Ireland. A repressive reaction from the English government was followed by the failure of a short-lived, poorly armed rebellion in June 1798 (Foster 1988: 279). The Act of Union passed in 1800, which abolished the Irish parliament and ended the prospect of even
limited autonomy, was the ‘logical consequence of the 1798 rebellion’ as it heralded the reassertion of direct English rule over Ireland (Foster 1988: 282).

A. The Translation Division

In late 1795 Charles Delacroix, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, set about reorganizing his Department. He divided it into two administrative units: ‘Le secrétariat intime’ [the Private Secretariat] and ‘Le secrétariat général pour les affaires courantes’ [the General Secretariat for Current Affairs], according to an undated document entitled ‘Organisation des Bureaux des Relations Extérieures’ [Organisation of Offices of Foreign relations] (AF/III/52-55/213).

John Sullivan was attached to the Private Secretariat, where all secret documents were to be sent, where the foreign press was analysed and from where surveillance on foreigners was to be organised (Ibid.). Delacroix explains the qualities expected of employees working in this environment, in particular, discretion, because of the secrecy of the work. This would involve recruiting ‘personnes éclairées pour la discussion des affaires qui demande un travail suivi’ [enlightened individuals for the purpose of discussing work which requires assiduous commitment] (Ibid.). Masson, in his comprehensive history of the Department of Foreign Affairs, refers to the functions of the Private Secretariat as including translation, decoding and analysis (Masson 1877: 363).

A list of the translators attached to the Private Office appears in a contemporaneous document in tabular form that records the ages of each translator (AF/III/52-55/213). Sullivan was the youngest at twenty-eight years of age and Madgett, the ‘sous chef’ [the Assistant Head] was fifty-seven. The translators were listed first, ahead of the decoders and the analysts, all of whom were attached to the Private Office. Delacroix explains in that document why the private secretariat received higher pay:

Ce bureau est traité plus favorablement que les autres 1. parce qu’il est tenu à une assiduité sans interruption ; il vient tous les jours et travaille les jours de décade. 2. Parce qu’on lui confie des pièces importantes tant à déchiffrer qu’à traduire et à analyser et extraire pour la célérité du service.

[This Office benefits from higher wages than the other offices 1) because it is required to work continuously; the employees come in each day and work the entire ten-day period and 2) because this office is given important documents which it must then decode, translate, analyse and summarise as part of a rapid service.]
These administrative documents set out the institutional power structure within which translators were expected to operate.

Although the division of the Department into a Private Office and a General Office did not last very long (Masson 1877: 364), the nature of the work and the attributes expected of those carrying out that work place the translator close to the centre of power. Indeed, Sullivan was to claim in a later letter to Delacroix that the Minister’s private secretary Ysabeu had appointed him as acting head of the Translation Division during Madgett’s illness (AAE/PERS/1/65/58). This gives some indication of how his linguistic competence was recognised by his superiors.

All of the translators, along with the other employees of the Department of Foreign Affairs, were convened by Delacroix in January 1796 as they were required by government decree to swear an oath of loyalty to the Republic. The following oath was sworn aloud by all employees in the presence of Delacroix: ‘Je jure d’être sincèrement attaché à la République et je voue une haine éternelle à la Royauté’ [I swear my sincere allegiance to the Republic and my eternal hatred of royalty] (AF/III/52-55/213).

The formal report by Delacroix dated 17 January 1796 on the oath swearing ceremony underlines the ideology all translators employed by the State were bound to observe, and conveys something of the intense political atmosphere of the occasion:

Après les avoir adressé quelques mots sur la solennité qui nous réunit et essayé de faire pousser dans leur âme l’énergie républicaine qui anime et soutient la mienne, je leur ai fait lecture de l’arrêté du Directoire en dessus cité ; j’ai prononcé à haute voix le serment d’être sincèrement attaché à la République et de vouer une haine éternelle à la royauté. Ce serment a été prêté d’une voix unanime et terminé par des cris répétés de vive la République, vivent les hommes libres de tous les pays, haine aux tyrans (Ibid.).

[After explaining to them the solemn occasion which brings us together, and trying to instil in them the Republican energy which motivates and sustains me, I read out to them the abovementioned decree passed by the Directory; I swore out loud the oath to be truly loyal to the Republic and I vowed eternal hatred of royalty. This oath was sworn unanimously by all present and concluded with repeated shouts of long live the Republic, long live free men everywhere, down with tyrants.]

It is hard to imagine that Sullivan needed any time to adapt to his new working environment, in the light of his political apprenticeship in the local Jacobin club, his military
experience in La Vendée and the intelligence-related work he had undertaken in the Ministry of the Marine.

B. Relationship with Wolfe Tone

Sullivan was more than just a linguistic mediator and had some influence on the shaping of Tone’s opinion of a leading French military figure, General Clarke (Tone II 2001: 221). Tone had frequent dealings with General Clarke whom he was trying to persuade to expedite the organization of a French invasion force to be sent to Ireland. It is clear that Sullivan was actively discussing that question, and perhaps other political issues with Tone (Tone II 2001: 143), who appeared to dislike Clarke. Tone records in his autobiography that in April 1796, he even suspected Clarke of disloyalty to the cause of an French invasion force, as he wished to save his noble connections in Ireland and that ‘Ahern and Sullivan, who know the pavé [situation on the ground] better than I do, are satisfied he is betraying us’ (Tone II 2001: 155–156). Tone was thus taking advice from Sullivan about a leading French military figure.

Sullivan’s and Tone’s shared dislike of General Clarke reached the point where Tone records in his autobiography that ‘Sullivan will set Prieur and Laignelot on his back’ (Tone II 2001: 155). Prieur de la Marne and Laignelot were both members of the Convention and Tone’s comment suggests that Sullivan was acquainted enough with them to turn them against Clarke. Sullivan may well have come across Prieur de la Marne in 1794, as he had arranged for Hamilton Rowan—whom Sullivan had rescued from a Breton jail—to be sent on to Paris (Tone II 2001: 336). Tone’s observation gives some insight into how Sullivan may have used his position within the Department of Foreign Affairs to establish a network of political contacts. He was familiar with the interaction between military and political figures. By July 1796, Ahern and Sullivan had ‘turned’ Tone against Clarke (Tone 2001: 221).

Sullivan informed Tone that D’Albarade, the former Minister of the Marine, would be leading the Irish expedition. Though in fact it was general Hoche who ended up leading the expedition, Tone viewed Sullivan as a source of valuable ‘secondary intelligence’ (Tone II 2001: 534). Sullivan was politically useful to Tone, in addition to acting as his preferred linguistic mediator. He also passed English newspapers to Tone, including The Morning Chronicle (Tone II 2001: 202–203). Tone got Sullivan to translate a newspaper article for
Carnot, a leading French military figure (Tone II 2001: 150) and also arranged for Sullivan to translate Tone’s comments on the instructions given to the United Irishman Eugene Ahern by the French military command in relation to a secret reconnaissance mission (Tone II 2001: 162). Sullivan translated Tone’s memorandum on troop movements in Ireland, which was based on a newspaper which Tone had been given by Sullivan and will be considered in more detail in chapter three (Tone II 2001: 163).

C. Monitoring the English Press

The Department of Foreign Affairs maintained a significant archive of English newspapers, the analysis of which was part of the explicit mandate of those attached to the Bureau Intime [Private Office]. The archival material in the Diplomatic Archives indicates that in 1796, Sullivan was engaged in an extensive trawl of the English press. This involved making a selection of certain newspapers of interest to the government, extracting and then translating key passages of their reporting of political events, both in England and in France, but also in Ireland. To complete this task competently required an insight into English politics, and particularly the identification of developments which would be important for digestion by the French political elite.

It is notable that the archives do not appear to feature any reference to left-wing English newspapers of the period, i.e., The Weekly Observer, The Recorder or The General Evening Post (Harris 1996: 45). At that time, partisan political views were becoming increasingly common in the daily press in England (Harris 1996: 41–42). Not all newspapers to which the French government subscribed for the purposes of its political intelligence were pro-government. The Morning Chronicle features extensively in Sullivan’s press summaries, and it supported Fox and the opposition Whig Party (Harris 1996: 45, 47). We also find translations of articles from The Courier, a newspaper which maintained criticism of the English government position (Pendleton 1976: 52).

Sullivan translates a report of a debate in the Irish House of Commons in 1796 in which Henry Grattan denounced the English government’s treatment of Ireland under William Pitt. The summary extracted from The Courier states ‘Son système à l’égard de notre pays, dit-il, est abominable, radicalement et essentiellement vicieux et corrompu’ [His approach to our
country, he said, is atrocious, and is deeply and fundamentally vicious and corrupt](AF/III/58/228).

It is not difficult to imagine Sullivan, himself a ‘sworn enemy of the English government,’ readily translating such a vitriolic attack on Pitt’s government by an Irish parliamentarian (AAE/PERS/1/65/58). Unsurprisingly, there are frequent references to the English press coverage of events in Ireland. A particularly virulent attack on government policy in Ireland, again from The Courier, is set out in some detail in a press extract translated by Sullivan. The extract begins with a dispatch from Dublin dated 4 August 1796 and recounts the incessant persecution of Catholics in County Armagh. Although the original newspaper article is not accessible, Sullivan’s translation captures the graphic tenor of the article:

L’expulsion des Maurs de l’Espagne, celle des Huguenots de la France ne présentent point des scènes d’un fanatisme plus farouche et depuis les jours du Roi Herode, l’horizon du monde chrétien n’a jamais été obscurci par des nuages plus sombres (AF/III/58/228).

[ Neither the expulsion of the Moors from Spain nor of the Huguenots from France demonstrates a wilder fanaticism and the Christian world has not been cast in the shadow of such dark clouds since the days of King Herod. ]

With anti-Catholic sentiment being reported in this way, it is perhaps not surprising that Sullivan volunteered himself to be part of the French invasion force under General Hoche later that year. Sullivan’s offer was declined, and the invasion ended up as a miserable failure in Bantry Bay (Swords 1989: 128).

Much of Sullivan’s translation centred on the pro-government press. Two newspapers loyal to the English government and established with its assistance at the end of 1792 feature in the French National Archives: The Star and The True Briton (Harris 1996: 45). Typical of the political news reported in translation by Sullivan is the tirade in The True Briton dated 25 August 1796 against the opposition leader Fox, who was accused of making the most extravagant and unreasonable requests of the government as a price for his support (AF/III/58/229). An extract from the original English publication of that date is in the following terms:

The man who, in the hour of danger, withholds his service from his Country, or makes that service the grounds of a Stipulation, the subject of a Bargain may be deemed a Patriot in degenerate France,
but, in England, he will be designated by an appellation of a very different tendency (1796, True Briton, 25 August).

Sullivan translates the English extract as follows:

L’homme qui, dans le moment de danger, refuse ses services à sa patrie pour en faire un trafic, peut bien passer pour Patriote dans la France dégénérée, mais en Angleterre, on le désignera par une épithète d’une nature tout à fait différente. (AF/III/58/22)

[The man who, in the hour of danger withholds his service from his country in order to strike a bargain, may well be regarded as a patriot in degenerate France, but in England, he will be called something quite different].

There are also translations from The Sun newspaper, founded by Pitt’s ministers and at Edmund Burke’s suggestion. This was an evening paper which supported the government and its specific objective was to counteract the French Revolution (Davis 2004: 776). The English newspaper, which reported troop movements in Ireland, and which gave rise to Tone’s memorial on the subject may well have been The Sun dated 14 April 1796, the French equivalent of which appears written in Sullivan’s hand (CPA/589/236).

Sullivan kept a close eye on political developments in London and produced translations of debates in the House of Commons. For example, an anti-French speech made by William Pitt on 29 August 1795 in the House of Commons was translated by Sullivan (CPA/589/29).

D. Army Rank

Neither the clarity of his translation nor his strong Republican political views were able to spare John Sullivan from a departmental cull in October 1796, barely a year after he had been installed in the Department of Foreign Affairs. It is unfortunate to record that the best documented phase of John Sullivan’s career relates to his attempts to be reinstated in his job as translator and, laterally, to have his rank as Captain in the French army officially confirmed. He did not succeed in either endeavour. The outcome reminds us of how Delisle and Woodsworth characterise the vulnerable position of translators across history—as individuals with limited authority, who ‘were excluded from the power relationships that really mattered’ (Delisle and Woodsworth 2012: 127).

The correspondence does, however, show Sullivan’s significant resilience in the face of bureaucratic indifference. A letter in the Foreign Affairs Archives dated 31 October 1796
Sullivan sought a temporary post within the Department of Foreign Affairs while Minister Delacroix fulfilled his promise of getting him a job outside of the Department (AAE/PERS/1/65/58). Sullivan takes the trouble of furnishing a full summary of his career and he also reminds the Department Minister of the sacrifices he had made during the course of his work as a government translator. He complains about the low salary, which required great personal sacrifice to enable him to survive, giving the example of his return journey to Paris from Brest, which had to be part-funded by the sale of some of his personal effects. Sullivan was not exaggerating when complaining about low wages. These were paid in ‘assignats’ [government bonds] which were not metallic currency but treasury bonds that had to be cashed in for value. However, the market value of these bonds fluctuated wildly, and generally their value decreased. Between the end of 1794 and the summer of 1795, the assignat fell from 34% of its 1790 value to just 4% and meanwhile the cost of living rose by 900% between 1790 and 1795—wages lagged far behind (Sutherland 1985: 254).

Sullivan’s fulsome summary of his achievements in the field for the Ministry of the Marine did not yield any return, and the best that Delacroix appears to have done for Sullivan is to recommend him to General Clarke as a translator who might be useful on an expedition. By the end of November 1796, Sullivan became increasingly desperate after the request made to General Clarke was rejected. By this stage he signs a letter to Delacroix as: ‘Sullivan, ancien employé du bureau de traduction’ [Sullivan, ex-employee of the Translation Division] (AAE/PERRS/1/65/61). This letter seeks reinstatement in his old job, or a new job, or some form of compensation. Despite a further renewed appeal to Delacroix on 4 May 1797, Delacroix ended his period as Minister for Foreign Affairs on 15 July 1797 without having acceded to any of Sullivan’s requests. Sullivan must have been frustrated that he had been close to the levers of power when he was attached to the Bureau Intime [Private Office], but his subsistence now depended entirely on the whims of the military hierarchy. Indeed, were it not for the loyalty of General Humbert, one wonders how or even if he would have survived.

E. The Mayo Expedition 1798

The remarkable story of Sullivan’s role in the August 1798 French expedition to Mayo under General Humbert requires context. The armed rebellion in Ireland by the United Irishmen in
June 1798 was crushed—horrific atrocities had occurred on both sides (Foster 1988: 279). News of the 1798 rebellion took the French authorities by surprise, as much of France’s military strength was distracted by Bonaparte’s campaign in Egypt (Elliott 1990: 211). Signs of a new European coalition against France meant that resources for an Irish invasion were limited: the two expeditions to Ireland in 1798, which landed in Mayo and Donegal respectively, were piecemeal (Elliott 1990: 211). The force that reached County Mayo under Humbert was poorly equipped and badly prepared (Elliott 1990: 214). The French were labouring under a ‘serious misconception about popular rebelliousness in Ireland’ (Elliott 1990: 214). In the event, Humbert recklessly led a contingent consisting of one thousand untrained Irish volunteers and nine hundred French soldiers into battle against some twenty thousand troops commanded by Cornwallis (Elliott 1990: 213). Irish volunteers were either slaughtered or executed (Elliott 1998: 228–229).

Why Sullivan was selected to go on that expedition is explained in Humbert’s letter of 19 December 1798 to the Directory by Humbert after the failed expedition. Humbert justifies the employment of Sullivan as he needed ‘Un officier connaissant la langue et les usages du pays’ [An officer who knew the language and the customs of the country] (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26). Linguistic competence was to prove crucial to Sullivan’s own survival. The letter is a fulsome eulogy of Sullivan’s performance during the unsuccessful invasion. Humbert recounts that Sullivan was not driven by any personal interest, exposing himself instead to real danger and states that he had appointed Sullivan to the rank of Captain. However, the departure was so hasty that the formal arrangements were not been put in place to confirm his rank.

Humbert also provides in this letter a personal account of Sullivan’s bravery at the Battle of Castlebar, which was the first French confrontation with English troops during the Mayo invasion. Sullivan was appointed as the commander of the Irish volunteers and merited a further promotion on the field of battle to ‘chef de bataillon’ [Batallion Commander]. Humbert goes on to state: ‘Il a constamment montré l’attachement le plus inviolable pour la République et la haine la plus invétérée pour les oppresseurs de sa première patrie’ [He consistently showed the most unbreakable loyalty to the Republic and the most deep-seated hatred of the oppressors of his original country]. Humbert’s observation denotes a
form of symbiosis between Sullivan’s support for the French Revolution and for the cause of the United Irishmen.

Humbert confirms Sullivan’s own version of his escape after defeat at the hands of the English army: it was a miracle that he did in fact escape, and this was down to the fact that he had adopted the name of ‘Laroche’ before his departure for Ireland (Ibid.). A number of documents emanating from both General Humbert and the War Ministry refer to him under the style of ‘Sullivan dit Laroche’ [Sullivan known as Laroche] in the immediate aftermath of the Mayo adventure. One such letter dated 29 December 1798 from Humbert to the War Minister, and written in Sullivan’s unmistakable hand, refers to him as ‘Le Capitaine Sullivan, connu sous le nom de Laroche dans l’expédition d’Irlande’ [Captain Sullivan, known by the name of Laroche on the Irish expedition](SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26).

However, his escape cannot be attributed simply to the adopted French surname. Another critical part of the story is disclosed in a letter from the Ministry of War to the Directory dated 19 December 1798 (Ibid.). It states that Sullivan was brought before a court martial after being captured by the English, but he was spared because it was not possible to prove that he had been born in Ireland.

This cryptic explanation is expanded in internal British army correspondence authored by Rupert George, dated 22 November 1798. This letter, located in The National Archives in London, has not previously been brought to light and explains that ‘La Roche, a French officer,’ left Dover with General Humbert on 26 October that year. In an attempt to explain how Sullivan had slipped through the net, the author states:

> We examined him very particularly previous to his departure and had no reason to doubt the account he gave of himself ‘that he was born in France of Irish parents.’ He certainly spoke the language of a Frenchman and was detained in Ireland some days in custody after General Humbert left that kingdom, but no proofs of his being an Irishman having appeared, he was allowed to join his General at Litchfield (HO/42/55/folios 475–476).

The letter strongly suggests that reservations about Sullivan’s nationality surfaced not long after his departure from Dover in October 1798. Elliot reminds us that the Irish who landed with Humbert in County Mayo were court martialled and executed almost immediately (Elliot 1998: 230). Given that there was also ‘wholesale slaughter of Irish collaborators,’ Sullivan owed his life to a clear command of spoken French, indistinguishable from that of a
The translator turned revolutionary had a perfect command of a prestigious language, which was the ‘de facto standard lingua-franca for European elites, even among France’s political adversaries’ (Ostler 2010: 221). Sullivan had literally translated himself out of captivity.

F. The Final Years

Back in France, while one could hardly imagine a stronger recommendation from a French general in furtherance of a request for promotion of a junior officer than Humbert’s letter dated 19 December 1798 to the War Ministry, the narrow, bureaucratic response is to the effect that because Sullivan was born in Ireland it would not be possible to promote him because: ‘le citoyen Laroche n’est pas légalement officier’ [Citizen Laroche is not a lawfully appointed officer] (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26).

Sullivan had to prove he was a French citizen in order to confirm his rank as Captain, while the British had thought he was a French citizen and had therefore released him back to France. The War Ministry eventually took account of his career as a teacher and his citizenship certificate from the Municipal Council of La Flèche to award him in January 1799 the rank of second-lieutenant only, two grades beneath the rank of Captain (Ibid.). Forest notes that a percentage of promotions to this rank were reserved for non-commissioned officers who had served the army well but who were, for various reasons, ineligible for promotion to any higher rank under the ancien régime (Forest 1990: 46–47). It also seems that Humbert was an officer with little enough influence within the French army, as many of his so-called appointments made during military campaigns were never subsequently approved (Elliott 1990: 213).

Sullivan’s persistence and sense of personal injustice caused him to take matters into his own hands. He writes to the Foreign Minister Talleyrand on 13 April 1799, describing himself as: ‘Le Citoyen Sullivan ci-devant employé au Département des Relations Extérieures, et depuis Capitaine aide de camp du Général Humbert’ [Aforementioned employee in the Department of Foreign Affairs, and since then Captain and aide de camp to General Humbert](SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26).

Talleyrand replies to the War Minister on 17 May 1799. Here is one of France’s great diplomats—who later negotiated European peace at the Congress of Vienna in 1815—
penning a notable, personal endorsement of Sullivan’s qualities: ‘... les services qu’il a
rendus, le dévouement qu’il a montré, les dangers particuliers qu’il a courus, les talens, son
patriotisme...’ [...]the services which he has given, the devotion which he has shown, the
particular dangers that he exposed himself to, his ability, his patriotism...]
(SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26).

Once again, the archives do not disclose any successful reaction to Talleyrand’s advocacy.
Humbert remained loyal, and a number of routine letters appear in Sullivan’s hand from
Humbert to the War Ministry seeking *ad hoc* appointments for Sullivan (for example,
AAE/PERS/1/65/61). In late 1800 Humbert sought to retain Sullivan as his ‘Capitaine aide de
camp’ [Captain, aide de camp] at a time when Sullivan had been posted to the headquarters
of the Army of the west, in Brest (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26). The final plea from Sullivan to be
confirmed as a Captain in the French army in 1801 failed (Ibid.). The last *ad hoc* commission
was for an expedition to Santa Domingo under General Humbert where Sullivan died the
following year of a fever (Masson 1877: 367).

The versatility that John Sullivan demonstrated in his career is evident from the multiple
roles he carried out, all of which involved difficult navigation through the dangerous political
landscape of the French Revolution. Translators and interpreters have always been subject
to political imperatives and were generally excluded from power (Delisle and Woodsworth
2012: 127, 279). The correspondence is replete with references to Sullivan’s patriotism and
bravery, even to the point where he emphasised that any return to his native country would
place him in mortal danger, but to no avail. Ultimately, John Sullivan was vulnerable to the
power structures within which he operated, resulting in insecurity during the final few years
before his premature death. He never regained the status of his position in the Department
of Foreign Affairs and never had his rank as a Captain in the French Army confirmed,
notwithstanding General Humbert’s informal promise of this rank prior to their departure
for Ireland and the later intervention by Talleyrand.
Chapter Three:

Sullivan’s Translation Practice

This chapter will examine John Sullivan’s practice as a translator in government service. The influence and the latitude enjoyed by translators under the French regime will be considered, followed by an analysis of some of Sullivan’s own translations. In particular, it will explore Sullivan’s strategy of adjustments and additions in memoranda he translated into French for Wolfe Tone. That analysis will also be informed by the political context of the Revolution. Calzada Perez observes, ‘translators translate according to the ideological settings in which they learn and perform their tasks’ (Perez 2003: 7). It will be evident from Sullivan’s translation practice that he was acutely aware of the ideological context.

A. A Functionalist Approach

John Sullivan swore two important oaths that helped to define his work as a translator and commitment to the broad ideological parameters of Revolutionary France. In December 1792 Sullivan swore a civic oath of loyalty to the Constitution, which would have been particularly important given that Sullivan was a teacher in a school run by a Catholic order, the Doctrinaires (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26). The later oath was sworn on 21 January 1796 by all translators working in the French Department of Foreign Affairs. It expressly bound Sullivan to the ideals of the Revolution, and in particular, opposition to monarchy (AF/III/52-55/213). As stated above, McDowell and Moody record that Sullivan was sworn as a United Irishman in Paris that same year (Tone 2007: 475–476). By that stage, the Revolution had gone through a number of phases, including a purge during the Terror that led to the execution of prominent Republican leaders, such as Danton and Robespierre. Given Sullivan’s previous political apprenticeship and the range of activities he had carried out at the Ministry of the Marine, he was fully committed to this particular oath, which lays down an institutional framework for his work as a translator.

In terms of the records of translated texts, we are fortunate to have a number of translations in Sullivan’s easily recognisable hand in the Diplomatic Archives and French National Archives. Sullivan’s range of translation was eclectic and included English (CPA/588/226) and American legislation (39 CP-EU 45–466/3), extensive extracts from the English press (AF/III/58/228), memoranda from foreign Republican sympathisers like
Hamilton Rowan (CPA/588/262) and James Tilly Mathews (CPA/589/88), in addition to speeches from the House of Commons by William Pitt (CPA/589/29). In the case of the memoranda composed by Wolfe Tone, which Sullivan translated, we are fortunate to also have the English source text of those translations. Although no formal protocol or guide has been found in archival records as to how translation work was expected to be produced within the Department of Foreign Affairs, two documents that have survived do enlighten us as to the discretion enjoyed by translators.

A translated extract from the English press signed by Nicholas Madgett but written by John Sullivan is revealing about what translation in the service of the French government entailed (CPA/590/61). Like a number of documents written by Sullivan but bearing Madgett’s name, it is impossible to know whether this really was Madgett’s own work, or was drafted by Sullivan and merely signed off by Madgett. It is indeed unfortunate that neither translator left any personal papers. The first part of the document is a synopsis of recent political events in London, as reported in the English press and is expressly stated to be a translation. It records how attempts were being made in London to side-line the influence of William Pitt, who was taking an intransigent position in relation to peace negotiations with France.

What is more interesting for present purposes however is the second, much longer, part of this document which is headed ‘Note du Traducteur’ [Translator’s Note]. The note considers the movement of public opinion in England against the hard line being taken by William Pitt and the efforts being made to distance Pitt from the King’s plan to send a plenipotentiary to France to discuss peace. Madgett, the translator who has signed this note, plainly suggests fomenting anti-Pitt sentiment in order to boost the opposition party led by Fox, who was himself a tepid supporter of some of the Revolution’s principles. For example, Madgett counsels:

Dans ce cas, ne serait-il pas à propos de fomenter cette opinion parmi les Anglais? Peut-être ne serait-il pas de la dignité du Directoire de manifester son mécontentement contre un individu; mais au moins les journaliste patriotes de Paris et dont les feuilles ont le plus de vogue en Angleterre produiraient les mêmes effets en publient contre Pitt des articles vigoureux, qui ne paraîtraient que l’écho de l’opinion publique en France sur le compte de ce ministre pervers (CPA/590/61).

[In that event, might it not be appropriate to incite this view among the English? It may perhaps be beneath the dignity of the Directory to show its discontent with one individual; however, the
patriotic journalists in Paris whose articles are most popular in England would generate the same
effect if strong anti-Pitt articles were published, as these would simply echo public opinion in France
on the subject of this perverse Minister.]

Thus, the translator’s mandate is indistinguishable from overt political comment and advice. Although Madgett was the Head of the Translation Division, such broad discretion cannot have escaped Sullivan’s attention. This is consistent with how translation was managed under the Ministry for the Marine.

The second document I shall examine is an earlier 1794 memorandum by Madgett which demonstrates his influence in terms of the selection of documents to be translated and printed (AAE/PERS/1/47/85). As already mentioned in chapter one, Madgett makes clear recommendations to the Committee on Public Safety on what material should be printed in English. He pointedly asserts that Robespierre’s speech would have a great effect on English public opinion and would counteract some of the anti-Revolutionary propaganda being generated in England. Madgett also extolls the virtues of Saint-Just, who had produced a report on a conspiracy to undermine the Revolution. He speculates on the proselytising effect which an English translation of the St Just report might have on English public opinion:

Car il paraît certain que le peuple anglais, s’il était éclairé sur son véritable intérêt et sur les principes de la révolution française qu’on a tant cherché à dénaturer à ses yeux, ne tarderait pas à se soulever…(Ibid.)

[As it appears certain that were the English people to be enlightened as to their real interests and the principles of the French Revolution which have to date been presented to them in such a distorted fashion, they would soon rise up…].

It is worth recalling the precise historical context of these recommendations signed by Madgett, but written by Sullivan. Within three months of this document being produced by Madgett, both Robespierre and Saint-Just had been executed as a result of growing divisions within the Committee of Public Safety (Gough 1998: 69–70). The streamlined procedures of the Revolutionary Tribunal had by June 1794 had turned it into ‘a high-speed conveyor belt to the guillotine’ (Gough 1998: 56).

The clear political purpose being served by these translations is highlighted by Madgett. Nord explains that every translation is produced for a specific purpose or Skopos and should
function in a target situation in the way that its addressees want it to function (Nord 1997: 29). In a later article on functional translation, Nord distinguishes technical and literary translation and as regards the former, states that the source text has to be adapted ‘to target-culture, pragmatics, norms and conventions or value systems’ (Nord 2003: 89). She argues that functionalism produces more communicative results than fidelity to the source text. The view thus articulated of technical translation well encapsulates the institutional translation regime in which Sullivan actively participated. Madgett’s explanation of the purpose and intended effect of the Robespierre and Saint-Just translations demonstrates how effect on the target audience was a most important factor in selecting translation material. An examination of some of Sullivan’s own, later translations points to a functionalist and politically assertive approach to translation, in line with Madgett’s strategy.

B. Translation Strategies

The first Sullivan translation I will consider relates to new legislation. In 1796 the English government passed an Insurrection Act aimed explicitly at weakening the power of secret organisations and gave extensive powers of detention to local magistrates. The legislation came as part of growing government coercion in Ireland (Palmer 1988: 140). It placed severe restrictions on the carrying of arms by civilians, on public meetings and enabled magistrates to convict persons of seditious behaviour without a trial by jury. Sullivan produced a clear and accurate translation of the principal terms of the legislation but chose to insert his own commentary in relation to certain key provisions. One section of the Act enabled local magistrates to declare a curfew—the penalty for breaching the curfew was compulsory naval service. Sullivan adds with considerable indignation: ‘et tout cela sans jugement par Jury!’ [And all of this without a verdict from a jury!] (CPA/588/226). A further stipulation was that any person administering an unlawful oath could be convicted and required to join the navy, and to this Sullivan adds: ‘et cela encore sans jugement par Jury’ [and yet again without a verdict from a jury].

Three further provisions of the Act warranted the same comment by Sullivan; namely, that judicial decisions were taken in the absence of a jury. Sullivan’s outrage at the encroachment of individual liberty under this legislation may, however, be contrasted with
measures taken by the government which he served. A law passed by the Convention on 19 March 1793 provided for the trial and execution of armed rebels within twenty-four hours without a jury or an appeal (Sutherland 1998: 171). Equally, on 10 June 1794, the Committee of Public Safety streamlined the procedures of the Revolutionary Tribunal so that the accused no longer had the right to a lawyer and could be convicted on the basis of moral rather than material evidence, while jurors could also use their conscience when the evidence was insufficient (Gough 1998: 55). Whatever inconsistency there may have been in Sullivan’s political views, this translation was a classic hybrid of linguistic mediation and political comment. Nor did the inclusion of such commentary preclude Sullivan from certifying the translation as accurate. The translator understood and served the needs of his target audience, the French Republic and was not afraid to express his own views.

Sullivan developed a strong working relationship with Wolfe Tone. Tone’s written French was inadequate for the purpose of translation when he first arrived in Paris. Sullivan provided an indispensable link between the United Irishmen and the French government by virtue of his translation of Tone’s early memoranda promoting an invasion force to go to Ireland. Not long after arriving in Paris, Wolfe Tone wrote a letter to Delacroix the Minister for Foreign Affairs on 26 February 1796, the translation of which appears in Sullivan’s recognisable handwriting (CPA/589/169).

In the course of the letter, Tone gives personal background to his political activities in Belfast as somebody who promoted a Nationalist movement that embraced both religious traditions. He stated that the first United Irishmen club in Belfast in 1792 was ‘...the first step to the reconciliation of the two great sects, the Catholics and the Dissenters...’ (Tone II 2001: 81). Sullivan translates this excerpt as: ‘...le premier pas vers la coalition qui a eu lieu entre les deux grandes sectes des Catholiques et des dissidents...’ (CPA/589/169) [...the first step towards the coalition which has taken place between the two great sects namely the Catholics and the Dissenters...].

Firstly, the translation misses the nuance of Tone’s use of the word ‘reconciliation’. A coalition doesn’t quite capture the notion of two religions which had historically become separate, but which could now be reconciled. More importantly for present purposes, Tone’s reference to reconciliation of the two religions was aspirational, whereas Sullivan’s translation states the coalition of the two religions as something that has already occurred.
It is hard to believe that such an important distinction was the result of mere inadvertence on part of the translator. Sullivan was perhaps anxious to present Wolfe Tone as a political figure who had managed to achieve a level of religious harmony in Ireland so that political support for a French invasion might appear even more attractive. The putative reconciliation of two previously antipathetic religions is an example of a politically driven gloss on the source text.

In the same vein, Tone refers to the fact that he had crossed the religious divide: ‘...I was tho’ a Protestant, appointed to the office of Agent to the Catholics of Ireland...’ (Tone II 2001: 82). Sullivan translates this as: ‘Je fus, quoique Protestant, nommé agent de cette classe de mes concitoyens’ [I was, although a Protestant, appointed as the Agent of that category of my fellow citizens] (CPA/589/169).

The use of the term ‘fellow citizens’ lends a distinctly French Revolutionary tenor to the passage, coming as it does immediately after the so-called coalition of Catholics and Dissenters. These two passages point to an interventionist strategy by the translator. Sullivan did appreciate the relevance of the source text in a specific political and institutional context and adjusted his translation accordingly. He was no mere linguistic conduit.

In other cases, the intervention by the translator may be more subtle, though just as significant. For example, Sullivan translated a Decree passed by the American Senate that is dated 6 January 1796 (39 CP-EU 45-466/3). The Decree was a formal declaration of solidarity with the French Republic. The text of the resolution adopted by the Senate included the following: ‘That the Senate unite with him in all the feelings expressed to the Minister of France on the presentation of the colours of his nation’ (Annals of Congress, January 1796: 36).

Sullivan, who certified his translation as accurate, rendered the foregoing extract as: ‘Arrêté que le Sénat s’unit à lui dans les sentiments qu’il a témoignés au ministre de France sur la présentation du Drapeau National’ [Resolved that the Senate unite with him in the feelings he expressed to the Minister of France on the presentation of the National Flag].

‘The colours of his nation’ in the Senate’s legislative text becomes ‘the National Flag’ in Sullivan’s hands. For the fledgling legislative assembly of the United States to refer to the
colours of a foreign state as the ‘National Flag’ seems incongruous and can only be understood as an example of the translator being acutely aware of his target audience and intervening in a way he deemed appropriate or necessary.

Much less subtle is Sullivan’s translation of part of a detailed memorandum composed by Tone on the number and position of troops in Ireland dated 26 April 1796 (Tone II 2001: 164). The source of Tone’s information appears to have been an article in an English newspaper which Sullivan had given him the previous day (Tone II 2001: 163). In the penultimate paragraph of his memorandum, in an apparent comment on troop numbers, Tone refers to the difficulty which the English army had in recruiting soldiers. In particular, it appears that the Irish Brigade, which was part of the English army, was composed in part of officers who had previously served in the French army but who then switched their allegiance to the English army, leading Tone to comment that the ‘difficulty the officers of these corps have found in raising recruits marks very strongly the sentiments of the peasantry of Ireland’ (Tone II 2001: 169).

Sullivan translates this sentence with a trenchant comment that does not appear in the source text:

...la difficulté qu’on eut les officiers à faire des recrues montre jusqu’à l’évidence l’esprit dont les paysans irlandais sont animés et combien ils sont indignes de la lâcheté que ces officiers ont montré en quittant le service de la République Française (CPA/589/233).

[...the difficulty the officers of these corps have found in raising recruits marks very strongly the sentiments of the peasantry of Ireland and to what extent they are outraged by the cowardice which these officers have shown by leaving the service of the French Republic.]

Tone’s memorandum implies that a shortage of recruits denoted opposition from the Irish peasantry, but the translator has made this explicit and has added that officers who have changed sides were cowards. Sullivan’s conspicuous intervention did not trouble Tone, who thought the translation was ‘very prettily done’ (Tone II 2001: 169–170). Nor did it trouble Sullivan, who certified the translation as accurate. Here the translator has firmly planted his discursive presence, again emphasizing the importance of the ideological context of the translation. Tymoczko argues that the ideology of a translation resides not just in the target text but also in the stance of the translator, which in turn is determined by the translator’s cultural and ideological affiliations (Tymoczko 2003: 183). The significant adjustment of the
message in translation can only be understood on the basis of Sullivan’s belief in and loyalty to Republican ideals, and his evident hatred of collaborators.

A third ‘Tone’ translation to be considered arises in the following circumstances. The United Irishman Eugene Ahern had been requested by the French government to ascertain, on a secret mission, the nature and extent of support for political insurrection in Ireland. Wolfe Tone composed a commentary on the instructions which Ahern had received from the French government (Tone II 2001: 158). His commentary included the following remark on the English monarchy: ‘As to the Stuart family, they are held in contempt by the Catholics...’ (Tone II 2001: 159). Sullivan’s translation reads: ‘La famille des Stuarts est dans le plus grand mépris chez les Catholiques...’ [as to the Stuart family, they are held in the greatest contempt by the Catholics] (CPA/589/270).

Sullivan’s intervention in this case replaces ‘contempt’ with ‘the greatest contempt.’ The modification would be undetectable if the source and target texts were not compared. The added emphasis in the translation may be explained by either Sullivan playing to his target audience or allowing his own political views to intrude in the translation. Together with the other examples above, they demonstrate that Sullivan was firmly embedded in a functionalist translation regime and keenly aware of the historical and ideological setting that he was operating in and perhaps actively facilitating.

The French National Archives contain Sullivan’s numerous translations into French of extracts from the English press in 1796. An examination of two such translations as against the original editions of *The Morning Chronicle* and *The True Briton* dated 25 August 1796 show an accurate and careful translator at work (AF/III/58/229). A rare, but notable mixture of press translation and commentary is his presentation on the editorial stance of *The Times* and its support for the government of William Pitt, which has been previously detailed in chapter two (CPA/588/179). Sullivan provides a synopsis of that newspaper’s coverage of French affairs in antagonistic terms as a country plagued with misery and dead bodies. His introduction prefacing both the synopsis and the translation contains a biting political attack on the newspaper: ‘il n’y a rien de si bête et de si méchant que les absurdités monstrueuses dont est rempli le journal intitulé The Times’ [there can be nothing as stupid and malign as the monstrous absurdities which fill the columns of *The Times* newspaper] (Ibid.).
Kang has referred to the practice of re-perspectivisation when news is translated across a political context (Kang 2007: 220). In that case, a South Korean news agency translating a local version of the US magazine *Newsweek* tended to mitigate the extremism of the original political slant of *Newsweek* on the activities of North Korea. This was referred to as ‘re-perspectivising’ and re-contextualising news in an institutional translation setting. In his comments on *The Times*, Sullivan doubles as a translator and a press analyst, and he treats the target readership to political invective that makes no mystery of his ‘re-perspective’ in this context.

Apart from Sullivan’s wilful adjustments, additions and re-perspectives referred to above, there were occasional omissions. For example, Tone’s memorandum on troop movements explains that: ‘the great advantage of having the army composed of the different religious sects in order to remove all possibility of jealousies is too obvious to need further observation’ (Tone II 2001: 169).

Sullivan’s translation reads as follows: ‘les grands avantages qui resulteroient d’une pareille organisation de l’armée, où l’on recevroit indistinctement des individus de toutes les sectes religieuses, sont trop évidens pour exiger ici un plus grand développement’ (CPA/589/233) [the great advantages of organising the army in such a way that individuals from all religious sects are accepted are too obvious to require any further observation here]).

Sullivan entirely omits to translate the words ‘in order to remove all possibility of jealousies,’ perhaps because he was anxious to avoid any discordant note to Tone’s ambitious project. Occasional omissions should not however occlude his obvious linguistic skill and elegance. For example, Tone’s remark on the ‘wretched appearance’ (Tone II 2001: 164) of an English regiment stationed in Ireland is rendered by Sullivan as: ‘le triste spectacle...’ (CPA/589/233) [the sad spectacle].

Sullivan was also capable of great economy of expression. Where Tone writes ‘I do not speak on the subject of Irish affairs without having sufficient grounds from my situation in that country to form an opinion,’ (Tone 2001: 82) Sullivan greatly simplifies Tone’s rather long-winded sentence: ‘Je ne parle pas de la situation de l’Irlande sans une parfaite connaissance de cause’ (CPA/589/169) [I don’t speak about the situation in Ireland without a complete understanding of it].
John Sullivan worked in a translation regime in which political comment was well within the remit of the translator, provided it was consistent with the ideals of the Republic to which he had sworn allegiance. Madgett laid down a functionalist template for translation which Sullivan followed proactively. His strategy of additions in the translation of Tone’s memoranda, in particular, reveals the translator’s clear ideological voice. The potency of that voice is what moves Sullivan himself to action.

Chapter Four:

The Translator as Social Agent

Power can use translators in more ways than one, and translators are related to power by more than their translation.
Having examined John Sullivan’s translation practice, I will now take a broader view of his career, which saw him assume multiple roles to which his linguistic capital gave him access. The raw materials for this chapter are the details of Sullivan’s life, as gleaned from the micro-analysis of archival sources included in chapters one and two. How did translation affect the various roles Sullivan assumed and how did those roles interact with each other? The strong thread of orality and the importance of rhetoric will be an integral part of that discussion. Finally, the chapter posits that the translator became the physical embodiment of his translation through his actions in support of the Republican cause.

A. A Plurality of Roles

A starting point for considering Sullivan’s interaction with the power structures in which he operated is to delineate the roles he in fact assumed. Two letters written by Sullivan to his political masters seeking professional recognition, the first on October 1796 and the second in April 1801, disclose the translator’s vulnerability and disconnection from the centre of power. They map out the architecture of his professional activity as viewed from his own perspective.

In the first letter to Delacroix, written on 31 October 1796, Sullivan pleads with the Minister to reverse the cutbacks which saw him lose his position as translator in the Department. (AAE/PERS/1/65/58). The later letter on 6 April 1801 comes at the end of a long, Kafkaesque engagement with the military hierarchy (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26). Both letters highlight three of his professional achievements:

1. Teacher in the Collège de la Flèche;

2. Government translator in the ‘Bureau de traduction’ [Translation Division], initially in the Ministry of the Marine, and later in the Department of Foreign Affairs; and

3. Converting prisoners of war by preaching the principles of the Revolution to them.

In the April 1801 letter, Sullivan thought it necessary to remind the French government of the public service dimension of those three functions: ‘j’ai déjà rempli plusieurs fonctions qui supposent la confiance du gouvernement’ [I have already fulfilled several roles which assume that the government had confidence in me] (Ibid.).
A review of his career must also take the following into account:

4. Political activist in the Société Populaire in La Flèche;

5. Service in the military campaign in La Vendée on behalf of the Revolutionary government;

6. Smuggling Republican propaganda leaflets into England, some of which he authored himself;

7. Translating documents seized from enemy hands at the port of Brest;

8. Lobbying the Committee of Public Safety in 1794 on an Irish invasion, and in particular lobbying the government on behalf of the United Irishman Hamilton Rowan whom he rescued and brought to Paris;

9. Lobbying the Directory in 1796 on behalf of Wolfe Tone to promote a French invasion of Ireland; and

10. Ad hoc commissions in the French army under General Humbert, including distinguished service in the military campaign in County Mayo in 1798 against the English, having led the Irish contingent into the Battle of Castlebar, and by a miracle, escaped with his life.

What then can be said in a review of the multiple roles which Sullivan enthusiastically undertook? Most obviously, the functions outlined above demonstrate that Sullivan was extremely dedicated to the Republican cause; in addition, his linguistic capital was deployed well beyond the translation of texts. In considering the interconnectedness of these roles, it is notable that all required oral linguistic skills in varying degrees. He began as a teacher of English and his bilingualism enabled him to progress to the position of mathematics teacher. During the same period, he was engaging in political discussion in the local political club. As a teacher and debater, he was honing his expository and rhetorical skills in oral French.

B. Orality and Rhetoric

A number of related roles required the full gamut of his translation competence, both oral and written, and both from French to English and vice versa. The translation into French of documents seized from English prisoners would very likely have included discussion with his
superiors, and oral instructions. Sullivan’s composition of propaganda leaflets in English from, presumably, French drafts, would once again have involved discussion and instructions in French. His ‘conversion’ mission to Brittany would have meant taking instructions in French prior to persuading English prisoners of war to change sides before then reporting back to his French superiors. It has not been possible to do a comprehensive search of Military Archives, which might well uncover records of his activities in Brest and Dinan, but notwithstanding, those missions would have been unthinkable without oral fluency.

Even when carrying out the ostensibly written function of the translation of texts in the Department of Foreign Affairs under Delacroix, he was part of a team of translators working in proximity to French colleagues. The working language of the ‘Bureau Intime’ [Private Office] was French and there would doubtless have been frequent discussion about the nature and content of source texts requiring translation. Analysing the English press would also have involved discussion and probably oral instructions. Though such instructions may have come primarily from Madgett as his superior, the retrieval of the relevant newspapers from the Department’s stock of foreign publications, the selection of the appropriate extracts, and the delivery of the fruits of his analysis inevitably included oral as well as written communication in French.

The extraordinary part he played in the Mayo expedition under Humbert in 1798, where he commanded a regiment of Irish volunteers at the Battle of Castlebar, once again would have been impossible without oral competence. He was subject to orders from his French commanding officers and then mediated those instructions to manage and lead a group of Irish volunteers into battle. It was after all Humbert himself who had requested Sullivan’s appointment on the Ireland mission as someone who knew the language and the customs of the country.

The present emphasis on the orality of his professional activities is relevant not just because oral, as opposed to written, linguistic practice is often underestimated (Cronin 2006: 76; Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002: 48), but also because not one of these related roles would have been feasible without strong oral competence. Orality enabled him to operate with remarkable versatility, but this aspect of his professional arsenal would be incomplete without considering his rhetorical capabilities and thus the topic of rhetoric itself.
An early articulation of the connection between translation and rhetoric appears in Cicero’s *De optimo genere oratorum* [The Best Kind of Orator]. For Cicero, translation of the speeches of Greek orators, such as Demosthenes, into Latin was a means to an end, namely a repository of more powerful oratory. Commenting on his own method, Cicero states that

> And I did not translate them as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and the forms, or as one might say, the ‘figures of thought’, but in language which conforms to our usage. And in so doing I did not hold it necessary to render word for word, but I preserved the general style and force of the language (Cicero 1997: 9).

As Peter France points out, Cicero’s passage implies that an *interpres* follows the original source text slavishly, whereas the *orator* has freedom of force and emphasis (France 2005: 259–260). France compares the translator to the public speaker in the sense that both are in a rhetorical situation negotiating between subject and audience. Venuti takes the point a step further when he argues that rhetorical ability allowed the orator a level of dominion over the translation method of the *interpres*, because of a capacity (and indeed a strategy) to deploy various kinds of knowledge for desired social and political purposes (Venuti 2012: 13–14). Cicero makes this connection explicit when he states ‘The supreme orator, then, is one whose speech instructs, delights and moves the minds of his audience’ (Cicero 1997: 8).

It is the effect of rhetoric through translation that is interesting in this context, as it has clear relevance to Sullivan’s personal trajectory. Cronin explores the Classical notion of the capacity of eloquence to move an audience and emphasizes the abiding pre-eminence of oratory as a voice of Western authority (Cronin 2006: 95). Those who use the right word at the right time may unlock the persuasive force of rhetoric and harness it to their purpose.

In Sullivan’s case, the transformative power of rhetoric is a matter of inference rather than explicit record, as there are no primary transcriptions of his speech. However, the character reference from the Société Populaire in La Flèche does allude to the rhetorical objective of his speechmaking as being to enlighten his fellow citizens on patriotism and Revolutionary values. More importantly, not long afterwards, his rhetorical powers were used to significant effect when he ‘converted’ some two hundred prisoners of war to the Republican cause at Dinan in Brittany. Sullivan attributes this success in part to ‘mon zèle à prêcher aux prisonniers de guerre les principes de notre révolution’ [the zeal with which I preached the principles of our Revolution to the prisoners of war] (AAE/PERS/1/65/58).
Sullivan forthrightly emphasizes his own rhetorical intensity in a professional task which demanded nothing less. Robespierre would no doubt have approved—this was the same year, 1794, that a famous public demonstration of rhetorical power was witnessed in the Convention when Robespierre delivered his oration on the symbiosis between democracy and terror. The subversive logic is encapsulated in the following extract:

Si le ressort du gouvernement populaire dans la paix est la vertu, le ressort du gouvernement populaire en révolution est à la fois la vertu et la terreur: la vertu, sans laquelle la terreur est funeste ; la terreur, sans laquelle la vertu est impuissante. La terreur n’est autre chose que la justice prompte, sévère, inflexible ; elle est donc une émanation de la vertu (Robespierre 2000 : 357).

[If popular government in peacetime is based on virtue, in a time of revolution it is based both on virtue and terror. Terror is catastrophic without virtue; virtue is toothless without terror. Terror is nothing more than prompt, strict and inflexible justice; and so, it derives from virtue.]

Sullivan’s role as *ad hoc* commander of the Irish volunteers in the Battle of Castlebar undoubtedly required both the full range of his linguistic skills along with his persuasive, rhetorical capabilities. Sullivan was closely interrogated by his English captors who put his oral command of French and his rhetorical powers to the ultimate test. He succeeded in convincing them that he had been born in France of Irish parents, a story that was believed because his English interrogators concluded ‘he certainly spoke the language of a Frenchman.’ (HO 42/45/55/folios 475-476). Sullivan was, however, born in Ireland and had been granted French citizenship in 1793. Quite literally, Sullivan was spared from certain execution by his linguistic fluency and the rhetorical eloquence of his speech in translation. It was through translation that he was able to perform a military role but also to survive its perils.

C. Confluent Roles

A closer analysis of the interaction between some of the various roles Sullivan carried out will help us to understand how translation constituted not just a linguistic thread but a dynamic link: its rhetoric moved others to action, but, remarkably, it also moved the translator himself. Three particular, interrelated episodes, looked at through the prism of the translator’s own activism, will demonstrate how the translator’s engagement can be physically identified with the underlying translational message. The power of rhetoric
carries the translator from text or speech seamlessly through to personal commitment and action.

Firstly, in his October 1796 letter to Delacroix, Sullivan claimed that as a teacher ‘J’ai été un des premiers à embrasser avec enthousiasme les principes de la liberté’ [I had been one of the first to embrace enthusiastically the principles of freedom] (AAE/PERS/1/65/58). He was contemporaneously contributing to political discussions in the local Jacobin club, the Société Populaire in La Flèche, no doubt with the same enthusiasm. Kennedy’s detailed study of Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution explains the importance of oratory in their deliberations:

Club audiences were easily swayed by oratory. Over and over again in minutes of the sessions we read of citizens being moved to tears, of discourses which are ‘masterpieces of human reason’ which ‘shine with the most beautiful erudition, the most lively patriotism’ (Kennedy 1982: 41).

When the opportunity arose while Sullivan was still in La Flèche, he took up arms in 1793 as a gunner in the Republican campaign against the counter-revolution in the west of France. Here was a political activist putting his life at risk in defence of the very principles of the Revolution that he was advocating with such zeal in debate. Action by way of speech was quickly followed by action on the field of battle.

The second interrelated episode arose when he was hired by the Ministry of the Marine in late 1793 to work in that Ministry’s Translation Division under his uncle, Nicholas Madgett. Shortly after being recruited, Sullivan was sent on a special mission to Brittany in order to proselytize English prisoners of war. What is particularly interesting about this mission is that Sullivan himself, in his letter to Delacroix in October 1796, appears to have regarded this kind of translational activism as an integral part of his post in the Translation Division of the Marine Ministry. It is almost as though interrogating, and effectively indoctrinating prisoners was an established part of the fieldwork of a translator:

En 1793 j’entrai au bureau de traduction qu’on organisait alors à la marine et dont je formai le premier noyau avec le Citoyen Madgett. Quelque temps après je partis pour la ci-devant Bretagne, chargé d’une mission particulière auprès des prisonniers de guerre. Pour prouver que j’ai rempli cette mission avec succès, il suffira de dire qu’à Dinan plus de 200 de ces prisonniers m’ont offert de s’enrôler (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26).
In 1793 I joined the Translation Division that was then being established in the Marine Ministry where I was the first to work with Citizen Madgett. Sometime later, I left for Brittany on a special mission relating to prisoners of war. As proof that I succeeded in this mission, suffice it to say that at Dinan more than 200 of those prisoners volunteered to enlist.

It is also pertinent to emphasize here that the other ‘fieldwork’ that engaged Sullivan in Brittany, while still nominally within the Translation Division of the Ministry of the Marine, included another form of translational activism, namely the composition of anti-Royalist leaflets, no doubt based on original drafts in French, which he translated and then arranged to be smuggled into England. Here was a translator who had made speeches in his local Jacobin Club, had taken up arms against the Royalists and was now embracing a role in counter-intelligence. Sullivan’s account of these interrelated activities is the most direct testimony of how a translator has been moved to action by his fierce commitment to the Republican and Revolutionary cause. He explains to Delacroix how he has broken all connections with England:

‘par mon zèle à prêcher aux prisonniers de guerre les principes de notre révolution, par l’énergie avec laquelle je leur témoignois mon mépris et mon horreur pour le roi Georges et ses ministres, par mon activité à faire passer en Angleterre divers écrits patriotiques, auxquels j’avais en partie travaillé moi-même…’ (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26).

The third episode where we can identify a close connection between translation and action arises out of Sullivan’s relationship with Wolfe Tone. As stated, in 1796 Sullivan translated a number of Tone’s significant, early memoranda to the French government, the primary purpose of which was to advance the cause of a French invasion force. Two years later, he took up arms in support of the French expedition that landed in County Mayo under General Humbert, culminating in his noted performance in the Battle of Castlebar and his extraordinary escape from the clutches of the English victors. As a translator, Sullivan had advocated a French invasion of Ireland and the translation had become a self-fulfilling prophecy. More pertinent to present purposes, the translator himself, as a military actor, was now the physical embodiment of the skopos of the translated text.
It might be argued that the correlation in this third episode is less obvious, as there was a gap of two years between the advocacy of a French invasion through translation and Sullivan’s participation in the French expedition to Ireland of 1798. However, his eagerness to engage in action had already been made abundantly clear in 1796. When he was no longer required as a translator in the Department of Foreign Affairs later that year, he almost immediately offered his services for the purposes of the ill-fated French expedition to Bantry Bay in November 1796 under the command of General Hoche. In a letter written by Minister Delacroix to General Clark dated the 11 November 1796, but in Sullivan’s clear hand, he volunteers to go on the imminent expedition to Ireland with General Hoche on the basis of Delacroix’s recommendation that: ‘Il peut être très utile dans l’expédition dont vous avez connaissance’ [He could be very useful on the expedition that you know about] (SHA/GR/2YE/3853/26).

In a slightly later letter on 29 November 1796, Sullivan writes directly to Delacroix, having been refused a position on the Hoche/Tone expedition. He informed Delacroix of his predicament and that he had been relying on his job in the Department of Foreign Affairs: ‘Si j’avais été supprimé quelques mois plutôt, j’aurais pu facilement obtenir une place dans quelque école centrale’ [If I had been let go a few months earlier, I could have got a position in a school in the city] (Ibid.).

He added that he had turned down all such offers. This sequence of correspondence in November 1796 demonstrates that there was, from Sullivan’s perspective, a natural confluence of the translator, the teacher and the soldier. This resonates strongly with the rapid succession of functions in 1793 that we have just described, namely, teacher, soldier and translator.

In the episodes outlined above, we can see how Sullivan the translator morphed, quite seamlessly, into a man of action. The ideological combat fought through translation was complemented by military combat, and also by fieldwork in Brittany involving translation in a broad sense. That John Sullivan was a social agent is demonstrated, not so much by virtue of Tyulenev’s definition of translation as an intrinsically social activity (Tyulenev 2014: 5), but more so by the analysis of Sullivan as a micro-historical figure who, through his concrete actions both in speech and in deed, assumed a composite identity and became the
embodiment of the message he was translating. Translation not just facilitated but became indistinguishable from the political and military purposes it served.

Conclusion

A portrayal of John Sullivan’s extraordinary life has been made possible by the retrieval of diverse archival sources. The result is necessarily incomplete in the absence of any source material on his early life. However, it has nonetheless been possible to paint a picture of his professional and political development as a teacher, activist, military volunteer, translator and supporter of the French Revolution and the United Irishmen both in word and in action.
Fortunately, his work as a translator can be examined in detail, given the availability of Wolfe Tone’s source texts in English. Sullivan was at all times aware of the political environment in which he operated, and his approach to translation can be defined as functionalist. His strategy of additions and adjustments to source texts must be understood in the context of a very personal commitment to the principles of the Revolution, which overlapped with his support for the cause of the United Irishmen.

The contents of this dissertation offer several possibilities for future scholarship. Nicholas Madgett translated and oversaw the translation regime of the Marine and Foreign Ministries from 1793 until 1797. He also directed intelligence gathering activities and had personal contact with two successive Foreign Ministers, Le Brun and Delacroix. The French archives contain many source documents written by Madgett, going well beyond the translation of documents. A micro-historical study of the life and work of Nicholas Madgett could well yield a greater understanding of John Sullivan, his nephew with whom he collaborated closely. Equally, a broader study of the analysis of the English press by the Translation Division from 1794 to 1796 would enhance our understanding of an important bilingual function and how a form of political expertise came to be synonymous with translation.

John Sullivan’s career was marked by an extraordinary mosaic of different roles, all of which demanded a high level of linguistic competence. If he is to be remembered only as a translator working in a turbulent period of history who adopted a functionalist approach to translation and was alert to the ideological currents that prevailed, he would perhaps be no more interesting than many other translators who have served their political masters through the centuries. But Sullivan’s translational activism placed him in a remarkable situation. Not only did he move others to act, as with the prisoners of war in Dinan, but he himself was moved by the rhetoric of translation to personal engagement, as in the campaign in La Vendée and the 1798 Humbert invasion force. His translation practice galvanised him into action, thereby enhancing our understanding of the history of translation.
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Appendix

Figure 1. Example of Sullivan’s handwriting in a letter signed by him (CPA/589/226).
Figure 2. Example of Sullivan’s handwriting in a translation that was not signed by him (AF/III/58/228).
Préambule de la Constitution de Dublin.

Le changement de la dynastie.

L'empereur que dans la Dominique.

Il ne fut pas agi.