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VOLUME XXXII • 1997

- Ivan Meštrović in Syracuse, 1947–1955
By David Tatham, Professor of Fine Arts 5
Syracuse University
In 1947 Chancellor William P. Tolley brought the great Croatian sculptor to Syracuse University as artist-in-residence and professor of sculpture. Tatham discusses the historical antecedents and the significance, for Meštrović and the University, of that eight-and-a-half-year association.
- Declaration of Independence: Mary Colum as Autobiographer
By Sanford Sternlicht, Professor of English 25
Syracuse University
Sternlicht describes the struggles of Mary Colum, as a woman and a writer, to achieve equality in the male-dominated literary worlds of Ireland and America.
- A Charles Jackson Diptych
By John W. Crowley, Professor of English 35
Syracuse University
In writings about homosexuality and alcoholism, Charles Jackson, author of *The Lost Weekend*, seems to have drawn on an experience he had as a freshman at Syracuse University. After discussing Jackson's troubled life, Crowley introduces Marty Mann, founder of the National Council on Alcoholism. Among her papers Crowley found a Charles Jackson teleplay, about an alcoholic woman, that is here published for the first time.
- Of Medusae and Men: On the Life and Observations of
Alfred G. Mayor
By Lester D. Stephens, Professor of History 65
University of Georgia
Stephens traces the life of the distinguished marine biologist Alfred G. Mayor, who, between 1896 and 1922, conducted scientific expeditions to the South Pacific Islands. He was fascinated not only by the marine invertebrates he found there, but also by the human inhabitants.

The Wonderful Wizards Behind the Oz Wizard
By Susan Wolstenholme, Associate Professor of English 89
Cayuga Community College

The only biography of L. Frank Baum was coauthored by Frank Joslyn Baum and Russell P. MacFall. Having studied their papers, Wolstenholme explains how the biography was created and, at the same time, presents a case study in collaborative writing.

Dreams and Expectations: The Paris Diary of
Albert Brisbane, American Fourierist
By Abigail Mellen, Adjunct Assistant Professor, 105
Lehman College
City University of New York

Mellen draws on Albert Brisbane's diary to show how his experiences with European utopian thinkers influenced his efforts to recast their ideas in an American idiom.

The Punctator's World: A Discursion, Part X
By Gwen G. Robinson, Former Editor 123
Syracuse University Library Associates Courier

Robinson observes that "the old art of word structuring is dying away, as is the habit of intellectual application required to appreciate it." In her final essay in the series she examines the manifestations and implications of this development.

News of Syracuse University Library and of
Library Associates 153

Post-Standard Award Citation, 1997, for George R. Iocolano

Recent Acquisitions:

The Lewis Carroll Collection

Addition to the Joyce Carol Oates Papers

African Americans in the Performing Arts: Ephemera Collected by
Carl Van Vechten

Thomas Bewick Illustrations

Library Associates Program for 1997-98

Dreams and Expectations: The Paris Diary of Albert Brisbane, American Fourierist

BY ABIGAIL MELLEN

IN 1828 Albert Brisbane (1809–1890) persuaded his wealthy father to send him to Europe in order to find out “what is the work of man on this earth? What was he put here for and what has he to do?”¹ In Europe Brisbane became interested in French utopianism, especially the ideas of Claude-Henri de Rouvroy (Comte de Saint-Simon, 1760–1825) and Charles Fourier (1772–1837). Brisbane returned to the United States in 1834 and, until his death in 1890, devoted his wealth and energies to establishing an American Fourierist movement.²

Beginning with the publication of Arthur Bestor’s study *Backwoods Utopias* in 1950,³ there has been a resurgence of interest in the antebellum

1. Redelia Brisbane, *Albert Brisbane, Mental Biography* (Boston: Arena Publishing, 1893), 56. The book consists of biographical data that Brisbane dictated to his second wife, Redelia. She arranged and edited it, adding her own commentary. Subsequent references to this publication will be noted in the text as *MB*.

2. Between 1843 and 1857 twenty-eight Fourierist communities (called phalanxes) were established in the United States, including the famous Brook Farm. According to Carl Guarneri, Fourierism was “the most popular sectarian communitarian movement of the nineteenth century” (*The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991], 60). Brisbane thought that the most important role he could play was as a publicist for Fourier’s ideas. Brisbane therefore wrote a weekly *New York Tribune* column. He also contributed funds to encourage Fourier societies and was a participant in the North American Phalanx in New Jersey.

3. Arthur Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950). Of the many titles that could be listed, see Frank and Fritzie Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Michael Barkun, *Crucible of the Millennium: The Burned-Over District of New York in the 1840s* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986); Christopher Clark, *The Communitarian Movement; The Radical Challenge of the Northampton Association* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); and Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

Abigail Mellen is an adjunct assistant professor at Lehman College of the City University of New York. While researching her dissertation on Adolphe Thiers, a nineteenth-century French politician, she encountered the name of Albert Brisbane, her great grandfather, and decided to find out more about him. Currently, she is preparing Brisbane’s Paris diaries for publication by the Edwin Mellen Press Ltd.

utopias and other experimental communities in the United States. Brisbane's role in introducing and promoting Fourierist communities, or phalanxes, in the United States has been rigorously examined, particularly by Carl Guarneri.⁴ But there has been no systematic analysis of how Brisbane's experiences with European utopian thinkers influenced his efforts to recast their ideas in an American idiom.

During his years abroad, Brisbane kept a journal of his thoughts and impressions, of which two volumes remain.⁵ The first, which covers the period from 14 October 1830 to 5 January 1831, describes his travels through Greece, Turkey, the Middle East, and Italy. The second, written in Paris and Berlin and dated 26 September 1831 to 29 January 1832, includes Brisbane's first encounters with the Saint-Simonian movement. His entries in the second diary also reveal the concerns that would lead him to the Fourierists later in 1832. In this essay I will discuss primarily the second diary, which reflects the merging of American and European influences in Brisbane's thinking during this transitional period in his life.

Before discussing Brisbane's European adventures I want to describe his American upbringing. Born in 1809, Brisbane grew up in the wilderness settlement of Batavia in northwestern New York, a community that had been founded in 1801 by his father, James Brisbane, and several other agents of the Holland Land Company. These men had been hired to survey and begin settling the company's four-hundred-million-acre site on the shores of lakes Erie and Ontario. James Brisbane was postmaster and storekeeper in the company's first settlement—an influential post which he used in order to make a considerable fortune in land speculation.⁶

4. Guarneri, in *The Utopian Alternative* (see note 2) examines the development of the Fourierist movement in the United States and its contributions to American associationist and cooperative theories and programs. Within this context he studied Brisbane's life. I am indebted to Guarneri for advice on this paper.

5. There are two holograph diaries among the Brisbane Family Papers in the Department of Special Collections, Syracuse University Library. All subsequent references to Albert Brisbane's diary refer to these manuscripts. In *Mental Biography*, 22, Redelia Brisbane writes of discovering sometime in 1877 (after her marriage) a journal of Brisbane's first six years in Europe, 1828 to 1834. Presumably, the two remaining volumes were part of a larger set of five or six diaries. The other diaries have never been located.

6. By the mid-1820s, James was a wealthy man and had built a substantial house in Batavia (presently the town hall). See William Wyckoff, *The Developer's Frontier: The Making of the Western New York Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). James Brisbane's obituary in Batavia's *Spirit of the Times* (3 June 1851) indicates that he left a large fortune to Albert and his brother, George Brisbane.

Rapidly completing the program of the settlement school, Brisbane spent his youth within a few miles of a Seneca Indian village. He often went “fishing and hunting . . . in the neighboring forests, in intimate contact with nature. . . . At the age of 10 [he] possessed three guns and had free use of the horses in [his] father’s stable. . . . Discovering that [his] inventive efforts required mechanical aid, [Brisbane soon found that] the carpenter, the saddler, and even the blacksmith were important person-ages” as they helped him to devise traps and other tools for his various adventures (*MB*, 53–4). Brisbane developed a technological and scientific bent. “I was deeply interested in ‘thunder powder’ [gun powder] and I wanted to learn chemistry. . . . So I got all the encyclopedias I could find and studied and compounded alone” (*MB*, 55). Thus Brisbane grew up quite independently, in an open, rural community, surrounded by hard-working individuals,⁷ in a setting that encouraged contemporary Jeffersonian republican ideals of self-sufficiency and egalitarian individualism.⁸ From Brisbane’s perspective, the world offered boundless opportunities for anyone willing to make an effort.

Because of the “liberal views” of its founders, the Batavian settlement had no church, and Brisbane was not exposed to religious orthodoxy—a fact that would influence his later observations and reflections (*MB*, 49). However, the Brisbane household was highly literate: his father, the son of a Scottish physician, was a trained surveyor and his mother, an English-woman, “was a student of all the sciences, particularly astronomy” (*MB*, 51). Aside from his limited community schooling, Brisbane received instruction at home, especially from his mother with whom he would talk for hours about “the mysteries of astronomy and the planetary system . . . and the threads of history—the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians and Romans” (*MB*, 51–2).

When Brisbane was fifteen his father took him to New York City to attend a preparatory school. Two years later Brisbane was put in the

7. See Wyckoff, *The Developer’s Frontier*. His account of the development of the Holland Land Purchase and the role of the Brisbanes confirms Albert Brisbane’s descriptions of the importance of the village artisans and of the individualistic nature of the commercial development that was responsible for the growth of Batavia.

8. Jefferson’s ideal of an independent citizenry required an economic self-sufficiency only possible in a place of boundless opportunity and implicit perfectibility such as America. Here society could reinvent itself in a practical way; technologies and innovations could be introduced and developed without producing the harsh divisions and cruel poverty of European capitalism. By the time Jefferson left the presidency in 1809, the year of Albert’s birth, this vision had become part of mainstream American ideology.

charge of a tutor, Jean Manesca, a French-Haitian former plantation owner, educated in the Enlightenment tradition of prerevolutionary France. Manesca's "inclinations [Brisbane stated] led him toward psychological research. He based his views on the popular philosophy of the eighteenth century and one of his favorite authorities was Helvétius."⁹ Through Manesca's influence, Brisbane "inclined to accept the same doctrine" (*MB*, 63). Helvétius thought that all human effort was driven by the concern to seek pleasure—the ultimate source of all good—and to avoid pain—the source of all evil. From this premise, Helvétius developed a theory for social engineering, arguing that governments could act to improve the quality of society and humanity by encouraging good and productive human endeavors with satisfaction and discouraging evil and foolish efforts with pain and dissatisfaction. Such a theory of social manipulation fit well with Brisbane's sense of human potential.

After two years of study with Manesca, Brisbane concluded that European thinkers offered humanity the best prospects for realizing its potential. So in 1828 he asked his father to allow him to study in Europe in order to "solve the mystery of man's destiny, to penetrate the why and the wherefore of his advent on this planet" (*MB*, 63). After a few months of consideration, James Brisbane allowed his son to go. Thus Albert Brisbane set sail for Europe with the idea that he was capable of learning and doing whatever he wanted in a world in which answers did exist to even the most complex problems—if one searched hard enough. As with his early scientific efforts, Brisbane anticipated tangible results.

Brisbane spent his first year in France "at the Sorbonne following *les cours* of Guizot, Cousin, Villemain, the popular lecturers on philosophy, history and literature" (*MB*, 72).¹⁰ The agitation that would lead to the

9. Claude Adrien Helvétius (1715–1771), a French Enlightenment thinker and sensationist, argued that all human understanding was based on what people learned through their senses. For a good elaboration on his theories see Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment, an Interpretation* (New York: Knopf, 1996).

10. Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny, in *The Bourbon Restoration* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), 341–2, calls these three the "greats of liberal arts." François-Pierre-Guillaume Guizot (1787–1874), Victor Cousin (1792–1867) and Abel François Villemain (1790–1870) were all important liberal thinkers who had opposed the republican and Napoleonic governments and supported the restoration of monarchy as the return to a government of reason and law. However, Charles X's fears of any opposition and subsequent efforts to constrain the deputies prompted Guizot and others in the Chamber of Deputies to begin to formulate a position that emphasized the Charter of 1815 and the responsibility of the monarchy to rule in cooperation with the representa-



Self-portrait of Albert Brisbane at eighteen.

upheaval of 1830 was already beginning to develop in 1828, particularly in the intellectual circles of Paris. Guizot, who had been banned from the podium in 1826 for raising questions about the “sacred” origins of the monarchy, had just been allowed to resume lecturing in history when Brisbane arrived. At the university, Brisbane would have been exposed to much political discussion.

Initially, Brisbane had not been concerned with utopian solutions to societal problems. His concern had been with the political process, “with the [French] liberal party and . . . the later realization of a [French] republic. I thought it would take place and I had confidence in its success.¹¹ But Brisbane’s hopes for the ability of political theory to explain society began to wane. He soon became impressed by Cousin’s eclectic utopian philosophy which (in Brisbane’s view) “selected from the systems of the past what might be considered truths [which could then] . . . be put together to form a new perfect system” (*MB*, 74). Brisbane’s studies with Cousin constituted his first contact with utopian ideas. Cousin’s frequent references to German philosophy, especially to Hegel, inspired Brisbane to study German; then in the spring of 1829 he traveled to Berlin in order to attend courses taught by Hegel and others at the University of Berlin.

As an American student and traveler in Berlin, Brisbane found himself a “subject of some social curiosity” (*MB*, 80).¹² He quickly became established in a wide social set that included the intellectual salonière Rahel Varnhagen von Ense and her husband,¹³ the Mendelssohn family, and

tives of a responsible (that is wealthy, property-owning) electorate. Known as the Doctrinaires, this group aroused the concern and eventually the displeasure of Charles X and his ministers, and in 1826 Guizot was removed from his chair at the Sorbonne as professor of medieval history. The Doctrinaires had become the leaders of the opposition in the Chamber, supporting a popular protest, when Charles X suspended the Charter in 1830. Their followers convinced Charles X’s cousin, Louis-Philippe d’Orléans, to claim the throne with a pledge to reaffirm the Charter. Subsequently many Doctrinaires, and most prominently Guizot, served in the cabinets of the July Monarchy.

11. Brisbane diary, 1–8 January, Berlin.

12. Arthur Bestor, in “Albert Brisbane, Propagandist for Socialism in the 1840’s” (*New York History* [April 1947], 128–58), indicates that Brisbane was one of the first Americans to enroll in a German university.

13. Brisbane was probably first introduced to Rahel by Henriette Solmar, a Berlin salonière who took a particular interest in foreigners (Terry Pickett and Françoise de Rocher, *Letters of the American Socialist Albert Brisbane to K. A. Varnhagen von Ense* [Heidelberg, 1986], 6). Varnhagen established one of the first and most influential salons in Berlin, so Brisbane’s connection with her provided access to a wide circle of influential people and the means of spreading his ideas. He remained in close contact with Varnhagen’s cir-

several university professors associated with Hegel, among them the philosophers Eduard Gans and Karl Ludvig Michelet. The latter directed Brisbane through a winter lecture series by Hegel (*MB*, 80–9).¹⁴

Among the people Brisbane met in Berlin was a Frenchman, Jules Lechevalier, who was also studying Hegel's philosophy. When they met again in Paris in 1831, Lechevalier encouraged Brisbane to attend the Saint-Simonian assemblies. Later, when Lechevalier joined Fourier's circle in the fall of 1832, he encouraged Brisbane to join the new group. Lechevalier became Brisbane's link to the thinkers who would influence him the most.

Still in Berlin in the spring of 1830, Brisbane was becoming dissatisfied with his German studies. Although he remained impressed by the importance "assigned to thought and mind in general . . . by German philosophy and German literature, [nevertheless, he] . . . considered that they produce but little effect in pushing society and mankind ahead. Their speculations are cold and without life."¹⁵ In this frame of mind he decided to travel, and in the spring of 1830 he began an extended trip through Greece, Turkey, the Middle East, and Italy.

Sometime during Brisbane's travels he bought some Saint-Simonian writings describing the movement and the concerns of its founder. Claude-Henri de Rouvroy (Comte de Saint-Simon 1760–1825) believed that people of substance must work to benefit the poorest classes of society or else disaster and collapse would follow. In his system a technological elite, using their knowledge and skills to increase productivity, would

cle, discussing Saint-Simonian and Fourierist doctrines with them when he returned to Berlin in 1831 and corresponding with them after he left.

14. In this section of *Mental Biography*, Brisbane offers a wonderful description of Hegel's lectures: "At the sound of the gong which brought to a close preceding lectures, the students rushed pell-mell into this hall and took their seats. Presently Hegel walked in, in a business-like manner and without salutation or preliminary of any sort took his place at the desk, opened a roll of manuscript and began to read. His eyes were constantly fixed on the manuscript while his head moved slowly from side to side of the page. His delivery was uniform and monotonous, his whole manner expressing a simple desire to present the subject matter without the slightest vanity of mannerism or any attempt at elocution. When the moment came to close the lecture, again indicated by the sound of the gong, it mattered not if it came in the midst of a phrase, all was stopped and snapped off with mechanical abruptness. The lecturer arose and in the same unconcerned manner passed out of the hall."

15. Brisbane diary, 22 January 1832, Berlin. Brisbane had returned to Berlin for a second winter. By the time of this entry he had already encountered Saint-Simonianism with which, from his perspective, German philosophy compared unfavorably.

lead society to material prosperity, thus ending human misery. This elite would create a “new Christianity,” embodying principles for the better management of society, and would work in harmonious communities.¹⁶

Brisbane was sharply affected by the poverty and hardship he had witnessed on his travels. He writes of the “forlorn spectacle of wretchedness” (*MB*, 102) that the countryside offered, the “industrial stagnation and inertia of the wretchedly built and neglected houses” of Constantinople (*MB*, 111). In the first volume of his diary, in a passage written in Nauplia, Greece (30 October 1830), he writes that “the living of the peasants is very poor. . . . You never find beds in their houses, they sleep on the floor. Their state is much inferior to that of our farmers both mentally and materially. . . . There are no internal improvements whatsoever. They have the worst possible agricultural machines, and the worst system of agriculture. How completely everything must be done in the most difficult manner. Consequently the country must be very poor. The capital of Greece is not equal to Batavia.”

Brisbane was struck by what he read of Saint-Simonian intentions to solve human distress on an immense scale through social reorganization. “The object . . . of immense social change . . . [that the Saint-Simonians proposed] was so universal that all the other smaller aims and undertakings of the world around me seemed insignificant and lost in the comparison.”¹⁷

Returning to Paris in the summer of 1831, Brisbane contacted his old friend Lechevalier, now a Saint-Simonian, and asked him to elaborate on the doctrine. Brisbane began attending the Saint-Simonian’s public and “family” meetings at their rooms on the rue Taitbout.¹⁸ His second diary, which begins in Paris in the fall of 1831, describes his strong feeling for the movement:

They offer an unbounded circle of action to the activity of the individual; a new world spreads out before his efforts and certainly there is a plenty to be done. . . . [Charles] Duveyrier¹⁹ in

16. For an excellent and detailed study of the Saint-Simonian movement see Robert Carlisle, *The Proffered Crown* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

17. Brisbane diary, 1–8 January 1832, Berlin.

18. By the time of Saint-Simon’s death in 1825, he and his disciples had established an organization to elaborate his doctrine and spread the good word through conversations, publications, and public lectures offered in cities throughout France. The lectures attracted growing crowds, especially in Paris. By 1831 the organization was well known and prosperous enough to move into larger rented quarters on the rue Taitbout.

19. Duveyrier was one of the principal Saint-Simonian leaders.

order to [measure] my interest in their efforts . . . suggested “supposing you were to hear that we had fallen through, that the thing was broken up with and we had all to disperse. What would be your feeling were you to come then to take leave of me?” It struck me most forcibly, I felt at the moment that in such a case I could sacrifice my life to support their understanding. . . . A strong feeling draws me towards them and still there is a doubt, a general feeling of skepticism. And then to change personality and modify your past feelings and interests, it is not the thing of a day.²⁰

From his first contacts with the Saint-Simonians Brisbane was fascinated by, yet skeptical of, their ideas—an ambivalence borne of his American-based assumptions about human capacities that were now colored by his European experiences. Brisbane was attracted to Saint-Simonianism on several levels. First, he shared their compassion, their concern “to ameliorate the conditions of the most numerous and poorest class of society.”²¹

Second, he was amazed and excited by the scope of the Saint-Simonians’ ideas. Brisbane had already encountered Cousin’s wide-ranging and eclectic thought, and the depth, albeit lack of compassion, of the Germans. But the Saint-Simonians went further, offering “an unbounded circle of action towards a universal objective of immense social change.”

Third, and on a more personal level, Brisbane found the Saint-Si-

20. Brisbane diary, 26 September 1831, Paris.

21. Brisbane diary, 4 October 1831, Paris. In the much later *Mental Biography*, Brisbane described his general distress at the rural poverty he saw in Ireland and the conditions of the urban poor he saw in Liverpool and Glasgow. In his diary, he described two episodes in detail, one from 30 September 1831, concerning a woman beggar he saw on his way home from the Paris opera: “I find despicable that feeling where one congratulates himself on finding an individual pleasure . . . [and could] amuse myself at the opera while so many had not even a little bread to eat.” The other entry, from 9 November 1831, concerns a woman and child who were begging in the cathedral at Strasbourg which he had stopped to see on his way to Berlin: “While I was inside of the church listening to the deep sounds of the organ and the chanting of the priests . . . a woman seated upon a stone step before an altar with a child in her arms beckoned to me and made a sign to give something to the child. . . . She said she had eaten nothing that day. Look, said she, and she took the child and laid bare its legs; they were skin and bone and on one was a large sore just healing up. A priest passed by, a deep wrinkle between his eyebrows. ‘Catholicism,’ I said, ‘Are you so dead, your head so weak that it cannot raise itself to help one poor being? And man, is all social feeling torn out of your heart?’ I gave the woman two sous and she thanked me with an extraordinary degree of earnestness.”

monians, especially the leaders Charles Duveyrier, Prosper Enfantine, Saint-Armand Bazard, and Michel Chevalier, attractive. He observed how much “at home” he felt with them, that “many of the young men who have rallied round the doctrine are of the first stamp—a superior society of young men could not be found in any nation at the present time.”²² Brisbane considered himself an appropriate member of this “superior society.”

About two weeks after making these observations, in a diary entry of 13 October discussing correspondence with his former tutor Manesca, Brisbane indicated that Saint-Simonianism also appealed to his need for an idea to be tangible and specific. “I see by [Manesca’s] letter, that he is a complete S[aint] S[imonian]. . . . [However, the Saint-Simonians] have added thoughts to their feelings and found a system for it, formulas by which they can realize [their thoughts] and apply them to society. Manesca has not undertaken that [formulation process] and without that, the feelings are nothing.”²³ Brisbane admired not only the ideals of the Saint-Simonians, but their hopes to realize their ideals by means of formulas, systems, and technology. Brisbane continues:

Manesca assures us the Saint-Simonian doctrines would be received and applauded in the United States. In that case I would not hesitate a moment, I should know what I had to do. I should at length have an object before my eyes; I should find something to which I could dedicate my life activity and body. . . . Could a commencement once be made in America . . . I should like to go and head it. . . . This letter has raised me up. It has opened the prospect of doing something [in the United States] and I would not give a farthing for my belief without action with it. . . . There is nothing offered now to the activity of the individual half as immense [as the program of the Saint-Simonians]. . . . The strongest minds are at present often engaged in trifling meager discussions which seem too trifling for babies’ work in comparison with the field the Saint-Simonians open—The idea of being able to do something in American has given me an impulse. It has raised me up and has left but a narrow space between me and the Saint-Simonians but it is still a difficult one to get over. I am near them but to enter within them will still require a very *decided* effort.²⁴

22. Brisbane diary, 26 September 1831, Paris.

23. Brisbane diary, 13 October 1831, Paris.

24. Brisbane diary, 13 October 1831, Paris.

20
I went in the evening to see
the Muette de Portici. It
was not well played, there
was a coldness in the actors,
& in the audience; I think it
is much superiorly performed
in Berlin, it produced scarcely
any effect upon me, —

Paris: Thursday 8th
to Oct.
Sunday 9th

I wrote the 8th a long letter to my
father, I undertook in it to give
him some idea of the actual
political state of France, and to
do it I went up to the first resolu-
tion. I made some observations
upon Mirabeau, Robespierre, &
said with regard to Napoleon,
that he had absorbed the revolution,

The above passage reflects Brisbane's brash and youthful enthusiasm. But it also indicates that, during his years abroad, Brisbane had clarified his American-grounded ideals and his expectations of what European thinkers could offer.

As a result of his upbringing in Batavia, Brisbane assumed that all who had sufficient skills and independence of mind could improve their lives in tangible ways. Later, as a student in Europe, he grew impatient with the theorizing of such thinkers as Cousin and Hegel when he realized how little bearing it had on Europe's terrible urban poverty. A Saint-Simonian program of action appealed much more to Brisbane's American optimism and pragmatism. Further, while Brisbane continued to find Europe an important source of ideas, he was less impressed with other aspects of European society. "There was an absence of any deep sentiment of progress [in France]," he noted in a diary entry of 4 October 1831. "I begin to feel outside of Europe," he wrote six weeks later. "It seems to me an old, debauched being. . . . My feelings turn again toward America, the young land of realization and the people of practical and social progress."²⁵

Despite some of his negative impressions of Europe, Brisbane had, in fact, been impressed with the wide-ranging intellectual speculation he encountered, as well as the lifestyle, the manners, and the sociable attitude of many of the people he met. As a child of wealthy and educated parents, Brisbane had entrées to wealthy, established European and American expatriate circles. While he found the concerns of some Americans tedious,²⁶ generally he enjoyed the busy sophisticated European social life. He frequently attended the theater and opera in Paris and participated in an endless round of visits, dinners, and balls, especially in Berlin.

Whatever his pre-European sense of class and status had been, by 1831 the manners and habits of a young boy who had run in the woods, trapped squirrels, and caught fish were long gone. Brisbane viewed himself as part of a European-defined cosmopolitan, intellectual, and social elite, and he had begun to acquire the attitudes and expectations of this community. In discussing Manesca's letter, Brisbane spoke not just of having found an object to which he could dedicate his life but also that he would like to lead the American project—suggesting that he had developed a greater sense of his own importance as well.

25. Brisbane diary, 21–22 November 1831, Berlin.

26. Brisbane diary, 4 October 1831, Paris. Brisbane attended a dinner hosted by the U.S. ambassador, who was only interested in discussing American political developments, including the upcoming presidential race; he was not interested in Brisbane's ideas.

Alan Spitzer, in his study *The French Generation of 1820*,²⁷ has identified a cohort of bright young men, born in the last years of the French Revolution and shaped by the opportunities of the early empire, who were filled with a strong sense of social responsibility for the future direction of French society. They were frequently present at the Sorbonne lectures of Guizot and Cousin during the last years of the Restoration, and they were participants in various radical organizations—from the nationalistic Carbonari to the utopian Saint-Simonian society.²⁸ These young men, Spitzer has argued, pursued their high, often conflicting, ideals with an earnest self-satisfaction and intellectual arrogance, convinced of their generation's capacity to direct the transformation of society, and of their individual capacities to lead their generation.²⁹

A substantial segment of Spitzer's cohort were affiliated with the Saint-Simonian movement. Brisbane (aged twenty-two in 1831), was in their age group and, through his Saint-Simonian involvement, was friends with several of the individuals Spitzer has identified. In his diaries Brisbane made it clear that he admired and respected these earnest, often self-important young men and women.³⁰ So, I suggest, Brisbane may have begun to acquire something of the attitudes of those around him, mixing the ideas he drew from his American experience with a new attitude—a sense of his own importance as an intellectual leader.

Despite his identification with Europe's elite and with the elite character of the Saint-Simonians, Brisbane expressed doubts about the movement and his capacity to fully commit himself to it. I want to consider these doubts in the context of Brisbane's American expectations about people and how he had modified his views as a result of his European experiences. It is important to understand Brisbane's doubts because they explain his interest in and ultimate commitment to Fourier's social theories.

27. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

28. The Carbonari were a secret society that promoted Italian unity and social reform. Founded in Italy, the society spread to other countries where it was associated with movements for political and social reform.

29. Spitzer, *The French Generation of 1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). Spitzer examines membership roles in society and personal correspondence, as well as the opposition press and other publications of the late restoration, in constructing a list of some 180 young men aged between twenty and thirty in 1820 who would all leave an impression on their age.

30. Brisbane diary, 26 September 1831, Paris. In his first description of attending a Saint-Simonian meeting, Brisbane speaks of meeting the leaders Bazard, Enfantine, and Duveyrier, among others, having long conversations with them, and being impressed by them.

In describing his uncertainties about the Saint-Simonians, Brisbane had difficulty with the idea of faith, the devotion that Saint-Simonian leaders expected.

I don't think I possess such a devotedness and could do what they [the Saint-Simonians] have done—I consider myself incapable of reaching the point [of faith] they have. . . . The question with me is, have I the stuff in me to join the SS with heart and soul? have I such a character that I could disregard every consideration of a familiar exterior nature and stand up and put forth with force and firmness a set of opinions or principles which the world would look at as ridiculous?³¹

Brisbane repeated his concerns about Saint-Simonian expectations of devotion throughout the diary.³² His unease with this issue of Saint-Simonian religiosity was tied to the circumstances of his upbringing. Not only was there no church in early Batavia, but Brisbane's household was not religious. Although his mother spoke of God, Brisbane's father, having as a young man experienced a "mental revolution, walked out of the old Scottish Presbyterian church [in Philadelphia where he grew up] with a sentiment of profound repugnance to all its doctrines . . . becoming a skeptic" (*MB*, 50). With this background Brisbane was unprepared for and uncomfortable with the ideas of complete devotion and orthodoxy that Saint-Simonian leaders espoused.

Religiosity had been a complicated issue for the Saint-Simonians from the beginning of the movement (*MB*, 50). In his concerns to advance society's technological capacity as the best means to help the most numerous and poorest classes, Saint-Simon had spoken of creating a new church whose leaders would be the experts of the new technology, who would preach a new religion of science and reason. They would establish projects and programs to demonstrate how cooperative use of technology could improve humanity.

In an effort to advance their ideals, in the fall of 1831 the Saint-Simonians at the Salle Taitbout, the "mother house," had begun a program of establishing ancillary cooperative dwellings intended for workers—a concrete effort to realize their ideals. The project ran into great difficulties, and in the ensuing debate in 1831 about what to do to improve the situation, a split developed between *Enfantine*, the "moral and spiritual

31. Brisbane diary, 16 October 1831, Paris.

32. See entries for 17–21 October 1831, 11 November 1831, and 8–11 January 1832.

chief,” and Bazard, the “industrial chief” (as Brisbane called them).³³ Each faction attempted to define itself as the orthodox wing of Saint-Simonianism, demanding rigorous observance from its followers.

This division was doubly distressing to Brisbane. The emphasis on religiosity was difficult, but the shift away from efforts to realize in a practical way the Saint-Simonian goals was also upsetting. “It must be that mechanical [administrative] parts of the hierarchy [of the Saint-Simonian organization] fill their minds and are their interests [Brisbane observed]. Where is the general feeling—the amelioration of the suffering part of mankind?”³⁴

As the dispute was intensifying in late October of 1831, Brisbane decided to leave Paris and spend a second winter in Berlin. “Is not the cause of suffering humanity immense enough to absorb them, their interests and attentions without quarreling about minor interests within themselves? The whole affair together enrages me,” Brisbane wrote in November.³⁵ Despite his doubts, he kept up his Saint-Simonian connections while he was in Berlin that winter, corresponding with Michel Chevalier, the secretary³⁶ distributing the newspaper of the Saint-Simonian organization, *The Globe*, and discussing its ideas with his German friends.³⁷

Among those to leave the Saint-Simonian fold in this dispute was Brisbane’s good friend Jules Lechevalier. He shortly joined the circle around Fourier, impressed that he “had *given* to the world what had only been *promised* in the name of Henri Saint-Simon.”³⁸

Charles Fourier (1772–1837) was born into a family of wealthy cloth merchants. In his youth he observed the desperate poverty of the peasantry and decided that the source of poverty was not a lack of goods but rather people’s inability to organize themselves effectively to provide all that they needed. Over many years Fourier constructed a complex system for describing different human characteristics relative to specific productive activities. He imagined ideal communities, or phalanxes, whose residents would reflect the perfect scientific balance of these different human

33. Brisbane diary, 23–28 November 1831, Berlin.

34. Brisbane diary, 28–29 December 1831, Berlin.

35. Brisbane diary, 23–28 November 1831, Berlin.

36. Brisbane to Michel Chevalier, 24 April 1832, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, Fonds Enfantine, MS 7601, p. 269.

37. Arthur Bestor, in “Albert Brisbane,” 137, discusses Brisbane’s role in introducing Saint-Simonian ideas in Germany.

38. Lechevalier to Fourier, 16 January 1832, quoted in Jonathan Beecher, *Charles Fourier, the Visionary and His World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 424.

characteristics. Because of this balancing, these communities would be able to produce most efficiently, industry would become attractive, and prosperity would increase.

Fourier's dream was to establish such communities throughout the world. In 1822 he went to Paris to publicize his ideas and to find a patron to help him get a model phalanx started. There he attracted a small band of followers and met other social theorists. Although Saint-Simonian leaders (as well as public officials of all sorts) rejected Fourier's ideas, a number of followers of Saint-Simon were attracted by the concrete nature of the social organization that Fourier talked of and wrote about.³⁹

Like Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier saw the production of sufficient material goods as the solution to humanity's problems. However, rather than looking at technology, Fourier had focused on human nature. If human nature could be adequately understood, he argued, and productivity organized in cooperation with people's characters, then society would happily produce all the goods it needed and distribute them fairly, and there would be no more problems. Fourier had devoted his efforts to establishing what he considered to be a rational, scientific basis for describing human abilities; then he coordinated these abilities into scientific systems of production. Phalanxes were to be efficient and satisfying manufacturing centers, not temples devoted to the worship of Fourier's ideas.

In the early months of 1832 Lechevalier and another former Saint-Simonian, Abel Transon, began publishing brochures that promoted Fourier's ideas by contrasting them with the "ineffective" programs of the Saint-Simonians.⁴⁰ They pointed out that Fourier, like the Saint-Simonians, wanted to transform society, but Fourier offered a real course of action, based on scientific principles and not religious faith.

In the spring of 1832 Lechevalier sent Brisbane copies of his expositions of Fourier's work. Brisbane was very impressed with what he read⁴¹ and impressed with Lechevalier's vision of Fourier's practicum for social

39. For further information, see Beecher, *Charles Fourier*.

40. Lechevalier, *Cinq Leçons*, a series of lectures on Fourierism published as a book in 1832.

41. Much later, in *Mental Biography*, 171, Brisbane recalled his reaction: "I took up the first volume [of Fourier's treatise] and began running over the introduction; soon I came to the following phrase printed in large type: 'Attractive industry.' In the few lines of explanation that followed, I saw that the author conceived the idea of so organizing human labor as to dignify it and render it attractive. I sprang to my feet, threw down the book and began pacing the floor in a tumult of emotion; I was carried away into a world of new conceptions."

reconstruction. So when Brisbane returned to Paris in May 1832 he was “impatient to meet the great Fourier—this man who had given me a first glimpse into human destinies” (*MB*, 145).

Brisbane, I suggest, was drawn away from the Saint-Simonians and towards Fourier because the latter seemed much less abstract and avoided the philosophical and religious problems of Saint-Simonianism which had provoked Brisbane’s doubts. Certainly when Brisbane began writing about Fourier for American audiences what he stressed was the idea of a blueprint, backed by scientific theory, that could transform the United States into an ever more productive but uniformly prosperous society—as, for example in the work *Association; or, A Concise Exposition of the Practical Part of Fourier’s Social Science*.⁴²

There is a last aspect of Saint-Simonianism that was troubling to Brisbane but which does not emerge directly in the diaries. Rather, we find it when we consider the consistently rural contexts and artisan or small-scale manufacturing activities that Brisbane used in *Social Destiny of Man*,⁴³ his earliest work on Fourierism published in the United States. In this book he illustrates the application and operation of the theory of association, in which members of a community share work and sometimes property.

The America Brisbane had left in 1828 was essentially a preindustrial society, and his town of Batavia was a community of independent artisans. Though on his first travels in Europe Brisbane did not visit any of the mills or factory centers, he did see the terrible rural poverty in Ireland and concluded that it was “the industrial power of England that had paralyzed that of Ireland” (*MB*, 157). As a result of these experiences Brisbane did not seem to be interested in importing industry and technology as ends in themselves. Rather, he wanted to find a practicum that would apply to an essentially rural society and protect its egalitarian, individualist, even artisan character—as he imagined it.

Although the scope of Saint-Simon’s vision was appealing to Brisbane, there was something altogether urban about the movement, with its emphasis on a technological elite, when contrasted with Fourier’s programs. Further, while the Saint-Simonian cooperative plans were being tried in a large city and were not particularly effective, Fourier’s scheme, as Lechevalier and others presented it, was intended for rural, essentially preindustrial communities. Though ultimately Fourier’s plan might be

42. New York: Greeley and McElrath, 1843.

43. Philadelphia: C. F. Stollmeyer, 1840.

adaptable to industrializing conditions, Brisbane's initial concern was that it would work in rural American society.

Fourier wanted one patron to establish a model community. Its shining example, Fourier was sure, would quickly convert the world to his ideas. Brisbane, at the age of twenty-five in 1834, wanted to take up the job—in America. With all his study and travel, Brisbane had held on to his youthful expectations and ideas of America. Though more sophisticated and urbane as a result of his European travels, he remained determined to find a program that would work in America as he knew and understood the nation. European thinkers could formulate theories and programs—and Fourierism seemed the most suitable tool—but America with its energies and opportunities was where these plans would work. This was the new American-European synthesis Brisbane dreamed of building.

Brisbane's diary, while it speaks mainly about his involvement with the Saint-Simonians, shows us the extent of his American-grounded thinking and of the impact of his European experiences on that American framework. The diary is only a small part of a larger picture; however, it gives us a better sense of who the man was who so hoped to create in America the good society that had eluded European planners and dreamers.