

Tone, William Theobald Wolfe

by C. J. Woods

Tone, William Theobald Wolfe (1791–1828), officer in the French and American armies, was born 29 April 1791 in Dublin, a son of Theobald Wolfe Tone (qv) and his wife Matilda Tone (qv). At the age of four he left Ireland for America with his parents, sister Maria, and younger brother, Frank (June 1795), but just over a year later he returned to Europe with his mother and siblings in order to rejoin his father, who had gone ahead. After spending the winter of 1796–7 in Hamburg, Matilda Tone and the three children settled in Paris (May 1797). Bereft of his father (November 1798), William Tone was educated by his mother before entering (1799 or 1800) the famous college in the Latin quarter, the Prytanée (renamed the Lycée Impérial, and afterwards reverting to its old name, Collège Louis-le-Grand). In 1807, as he was showing symptoms of tuberculosis (from which his sister had died in 1803 and his brother in 1806) and a sea voyage was considered a remedy, he was taken by his mother to America, where the pair made an attempt to sort out the affairs of his father, which had been entrusted previously to James Reynolds (qv).

At the age of seventeen Tone left the Lycée Impérial (where, according to Matilda Tone, he ‘obtained every premium the college could bestow’) and entered the École de Cavalerie at Saint-Germain-en-Laye as a cadet (3 November 1810). While still at the Lycée Impérial he composed an essay that received an honourable mention from the Institut de France, *Essai sur la composition de la force armée aux différentes époques de l'histoire* (1810; 2nd ed. 1813; 3rd ed. 1814). Another essay by William Tone published at this time was *État civil et politique de l'Italie sous la domination des Goths* (1810). A direct approach by his mother to Napoleon, who remembered his father and who formed a good opinion of the essay (apparently the first mentioned), secured for Tone the privileged status of *élève du gouvernement* and French citizenship.

On leaving cavalry school he was commissioned *cornet* (sub lieutenant) in the 8th regiment of *chasseurs* (light horse; 30 January 1813) and joined the Grand Army (20 April). He saw action in Germany and received lance wounds at the battle of Leipzig (16 October), where his beloved horse, Solyman, fell dead on top of him. Still known by the nickname ‘Petit Loup’ (‘Little Wolf’), he was soon promoted lieutenant and made a member of the *Légion d'honneur* (1 November). He was with the French garrison besieged at Erfurt until Napoleon's abdication (April 1814), when he was despatched to Paris to pledge the garrison's adherence to Louis XVIII. He served the restored monarchy by evacuating Erfurt and by writing a memorial on a proposed reorganisation of the army; he was formally presented to the king and the comte d'Artois (the future Charles XII). But on learning, in Flanders, of the return of Napoleon from Elba and the flight of the royal family (March 1815), Tone transferred his allegiance again, as did other officers, and served Napoleon by

going on missions to Landau on the Rhine and Bayonne in the Pyrenees (May–June 1815). Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo forced him to resign (21 July) and, both disgusted and threatened by the behaviour of the restored royalist regime, he resolved to leave France.

Tone was refused permission to settle in Britain owing to objections from Dublin castle, so he decided reluctantly to go again to America. He arrived at New York in September or October 1816 and began studying law in the office of an émigré Irish radical, William Sampson (qv). A book he wrote while in Sampson's office, *Essay on the necessity of improving our national forces* (1819), came to the attention of John Calhoun, secretary of war in the cabinet of James Monroe, president of the USA from 1817, who had known Tone's father in France. Shortly before he was due to be admitted to the bar, Tone was offered a clerkship in the war department by Calhoun, followed by the offer of a commission. His career in the American army (1819–26) was unfulfilling. He was employed by the board of fortifications and internal improvements. A respite from routine occurred in the winter of 1821–2, when he carried despatches to Europe and took the opportunity to visit England and Scotland with his mother and her second husband, a Scot, Thomas Wilson. Eventually he fell out with a senior officer and resigned his commission (31 December 1826), having told the new secretary of war, James Barbour: 'the rank of second lieutenant in the . . . artillery . . . is no longer suitable to my age, former service and standing in the army' (St Mark).

Meanwhile William Tone continued to write. A pamphlet written for the army, *School of cavalry, or, System of organisation, instruction and manoeuvres proposed for the cavalry of the United States* (1824), was republished after his death. Undoubtedly his *magnum opus* was his edition of the writings of his father, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, published in two large volumes at Washington in May 1826. His editorial skills are impressive, though it is safe to assume that he was advised and supervised by his mother. Very little relating to Ireland was suppressed, which, given the elder Tone's engaging personality, literary talent, extreme political views and (sensationally) his residence and military service in France during the French revolutionary war, made the book a bestseller in Ireland. Within two years the first of many new editions appeared.

William Tone died 10 October 1828 (or 11 October, 'of an intestinal disorder', according to Katherine Anne Tone-Maxwell) at Georgetown, District of Columbia, presumably at the house in First Street where he lived with his mother, wife, and child. A Dublin newspaper, the *Freeman's Journal*, reported the death on 26 November. He was buried at Marbury burying ground, Georgetown, but on 31 October 1891 his and his mother's remains were removed to Greenwood cemetery, Brooklyn, New York. He had married, in New York on 17 September 1825, William Sampson's only daughter, Catherine Anne (1796–1864), whose mother, Grace, was a daughter of John Clarke, a Belfast physician. The only child of the marriage, Grace Georgiana, afterwards Mrs Maxwell (1827–1900), became, after her mother's death,

custodian of the Tone and Sampson family papers. William Tone's 'Narrative of my services and campaigns in the French army', published as an appendix in *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone* (1826), valuable for its detail, moving for its depiction of hard fighting, and admirable for the literary talent it shows, was translated into French as *Récit de mes souvenirs et campagnes dans l'armée française* (1899; new trans., 1997). William Tone took after his father in academic distinction, futile pursuit of a legal career, preference for the military life, and flair for the written word, but his chief distinction was as editor of his father's literary remains. A portrait, by his wife, is reproduced in Madden.

Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone . . . edited by his son (1826), esp. ii, appx; R. R. Madden, *United Irishmen*, 3rd ser. (1846), i, 168–78 (with portrait); Alice Milligan, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone* (1898), 120–21; H. F. Reynolds, 'Tone of Bodenstown, Co. Kildare', *N & Q*, 12th ser., vi (1920), 288–90; Katherine Anne Tone-Maxwell, 'Tone of Bodenstown, Co. Kildare', *N & Q*, 12th ser., vii (1920), 432–3; J. J. St Mark, 'Matilda and William Tone in New York and Washington after 1815', *Éire-Ireland*, xxii, no. 4 (1987), 4–10; Tone, *Writings* (3 vols, 1998–2007)