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# Vectors of Revolution: The British Radical Community in Early Republican Paris, 1792-1794

Rachel Rogers

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# THÈSE

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**VECTORS OF REVOLUTION: THE BRITISH  
RADICAL COMMUNITY IN EARLY  
REPUBLICAN PARIS 1792-1794**

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Toulouse, 2012.

## A NOTE ON TRANSLATION

I have chosen to cite French sources using English translations for reasons of discursive coherence and accessibility to the English-speaking reader. For the majority of primary printed documents and manuscript sources written in French and used in this study, I have translated the works myself and indicated this in the notes, providing the original French text where I judged it may be of comparative interest to both French- and English-speaking readers. For the names of committees and institutions which are not easily recognisable in English, except to the specialist of the period, I have chosen to keep the French titles. It is for this reason that I have employed the terms *Comité de Salut Public*, *Comité de Sûreté Générale*, and *comités de surveillance révolutionnaire*, rather than giving their sometimes rather awkward English equivalents. However, for groups or structures that are frequently referred to in the English language, such as the Jacobin Club, the Cordeliers Club, the Constituent Assembly or the National Convention, I have chosen to use the translation. Although the term “Mountain” is sometimes used in English academic work on the French Revolution, I have decided to retain the easily-recognisable French versions of “Montagne” and “Montagnards”.

To make the text accessible to a non-specialist reader, I have used the Gregorian rather than French revolutionary calendar for all dates from October 1793 onwards, when the revolutionary calendar came into use. When I mention events which have become significant because of their associations with dates from the revolutionary calendar, such as 9 Thermidor, An II, I have used these appellations. In these cases, I have considered that the use of the calendar conveys more than a coordinate in time but conjures up a host of symbolic associations which are important to retain. Where old French spelling has been used I have kept the original, and any anomalies or linguistic mistakes made by British residents of Paris in their French writings have not been corrected. Where I felt it necessary, to avoid the impression of faulty transcription, I have highlighted the error in the text.

## ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in the notes:

AN	Archives Nationales, Paris
BM	British Museum, London
CPL	Cardiff Public Library, Cardiff, Wales
HL	Houghton Library, Harvard University
PRO	Public Record Office, The National Archive, London
TS	Treasury Solicitors Papers
FO	Foreign Office Papers

For all files in the Archives Nationales, see the bibliography for precise details of the collection.

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# INTRODUCTION

One of the British activists who took up residence in Paris at the end of 1792 wrote of the conjunction of old and new regimes he had witnessed in some of the makeshift prisons in the capital the following year. Writing while incarcerated under the measures taken against foreigners whose governments were at war with France, he noted:

This is a lively, but shocking picture of the commencement and progress of a revolution, where the newly created authority meets the worn out and dying power with nearly equal force, as two contrary currents of water form a swell and throw up or swallow in turn whatever is found to float between them.<sup>1</sup>

British radicals formed an official club in Paris at a critical junction, when not only the old and new orders in France were colliding to produce a republican outcome, but when Britain and France were on the brink of a war which would have an indelible human and diplomatic impact on both countries as well as contribute to the consolidation of understandings of national identity. Supporting the Revolution and living in Paris from mid to late 1792 onwards was a radical gesture from British nationals whose government had cast even mildly enthusiastic onlookers as potential traitors. The men and women of the British radical community in Paris witnessed these “contrary currents” in the Revolution’s course and formed a club at a crossroads in British radical culture and attitudes towards France.<sup>2</sup>

While in 1789 there was space for a range of opinions to be expressed in Britain, by the time of the events of August and September 1792 in France, little scope remained for even

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<sup>1</sup> Sampson Perry, *An Historical Sketch of the French Revolution; Commencing with its Predisposing Causes, and Carried on to the Acceptation of the Constitution, in 1795*, vol. II (London: Symonds, 1796) 391-92.

<sup>2</sup> I have chosen to employ the term “radicalism” and “radical” to describe the movement and people I have studied. There has been some criticism of the use of this term, due to the fact that it only began to be employed in the English language in the early nineteenth century. In the same way as many scholars, I do not subscribe to the view that using the word “radical” to refer to reformers in the 1790s is anachronistic, and believe that the term conveys a range of subtle meanings that other words do not adequately cover. I see the radical as a questioning, politically-conscious, dissenting individual whose belief in some degree of reform of the status quo led him or her to get involved in associational or public initiatives to bring about far-reaching change. This was true of any age of human society. I have not however used the term exclusively and have frequently chosen other names, including “activist”, “militant”, or “reformer”.

the mildest support. The invasion of the royal residence at the Tuileries on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792, forcing the submission of the king to popular authority, his refuge in the National Assembly and eventual arrest shocked the British public. Yet what followed, namely the massacres in the prisons of Paris in early September 1792, the establishment of a republic later the same month and decision to try and subsequently execute the king, put pay to whatever leeway remained for open backing of the Revolution in Britain. The republican turn, accompanied as it was by popular reprisals against the seats and symbols of privilege, was interpreted by British critics as the epitome of the arbitrary violence and anarchic mob rule that the Revolution had come to symbolise. It seemed to confirm the charges that Edmund Burke had levelled in 1790 that the French Revolution would not bring about the same benefits for humanity as that of America and that its premises were antithetical to the British conception of constitutional order. It also helped to reconcile the initially sceptical British public to the war with France. From mid 1792, no advocacy of changes based on a French model could be expressed without courting charges of sedition and, by 1793-94, high treason. For this reason, most reformers on British soil stepped back from overt associations with France or behaviour that could be seen as imitating its Revolution from the time of the establishment of the republic. They also began to couch their demands for reform even more firmly in the language of the British constitutional heritage.

It was in this context, however, that British radical expatriates decided to form an official pro-revolutionary society in Paris. The group publicised the club just over two months after the events of 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1792, which had sealed the more widespread British counter-reaction to the Revolution and which prompted many observers to return home. As Paul Gerbod has noted, “[British observers], rarely at the scene of the massacres, only heard echoes from the circulation of rumour among the public. For a large number of them, it was a breaking point. There was an increase in departures for Calais and Boulogne. Curiosity was

replaced by apprehension and even fear.”<sup>3</sup> Considering their decision to remain in or set out for Paris after this date, the individuals who affiliated to the British Club were unquestionably on the radical fringe of the reform movement, whatever their later attempts to revise and rewrite their involvement.<sup>4</sup> It is the nature and complexity of this pro-revolutionary stance and its development throughout the years of the early republic which form the basis of this study.<sup>5</sup>

The British Club, or the Society of the Friends of the Rights of Man, was officially established in Paris in late 1792.<sup>6</sup> Its members, deriving primarily from the British, but also Irish and American expatriate communities in the French capital, met on Thursdays and Sundays, at a hotel in the passage des Petits Pères, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> arrondissement of Paris, known under different names, including the Hôtel d’Angleterre, the Hôtel de Grande-Bretagne and later the Hôtel Philadelphia, but most frequently White’s Hotel, after its English owner, Christopher White, a wine merchant, entrepreneur, and hotelier.<sup>7</sup> White had initially set up at a business in the port town of Le Havre but moved to Paris in 1790, the same year that expatriate radicals launched an English newspaper project in the French capital. The hotel

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Gerbod, *Voyages au pays des mangeurs de grenouilles: la France vue par les Britanniques du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours* (Paris: A. Michel, 1991) 47. My translation.

<sup>4</sup> A notable example of later revisionism is the case of David Williams who, in his autobiographical account *Incidents in My Own Life Which Have Been Thought of Some Importance*, ed. Peter France (Brighton: U of Sussex Library, 1980) gave a different slant on his involvement in the French Revolution to that which can be perceived through his actions and writings of the time. He would later criticise the decision to dismantle the constitutional monarchy, yet in December 1792 he agreed to travel to France for the purpose of giving his thoughts on a republican constitution for his friend Jean-Pierre Brissot. Williams was never a member of the British Club however, and would not have counted himself among the ultra-radical contingent resident in Paris.

<sup>5</sup> The time period covered by this study is comparatively short as my particular interest has been in the way in which the British Club engaged with the republican turn in France and negotiated the Terror.

<sup>6</sup> I have chosen to use the term “British Club” to define the loose gathering of British and Irish residents of Paris who met regularly at White’s Hotel during the late months of 1792 and early 1793. The address to the National Convention of November 1792 does not refer specifically to a club, but to a gathering of residents, and the official registering of the club, reported in *Le Moniteur Universel* of 7<sup>th</sup> January 1793, gives the title of “Society of the Friends of the Rights of Man”. The term British Club is unsatisfactory in many ways. Just as the community was not made up of “Englishmen” as Alger’s works would have us believe, neither was the club populated uniquely by British members. There were at least four Irish adherents and a number of American and other international “patriots”. Within the Club, or at least among its associates, were men of English, Scottish and Welsh origin. Even the term “club” is problematic. The group at White’s Hotel, because of the need for absolute secrecy, did not keep minutes or make a regular record of meetings and members. Yet other evidence – their registration with the Paris municipal authorities, their signed address to the Convention, letters and spy reports – indicates that there was a clear associational, organised character to their activities. Though there may never have been an official name, the term British Club has been used by later historians such as John Goldworth Alger, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, and later historians who have built upon his work.

<sup>7</sup> Contemporary sources in French also refer to the “hôtel de White”, or the “hôtel de Withe’s”.

may therefore have housed pro-revolutionary visitors prior to the official establishment of the club two years later. White's served as a meeting place and residence for the radical-leaning foreign community in Paris until its proprietor was forced to close down with the incarceration and departure of foreigners during the course of 1793. Expatriates conferred on the latest events in Paris and elsewhere, were served dinner once a week and used the hotel as their principal address in the capital, using it to sign off their private correspondence and political pamphlets. It is likely that the political interests of guests at the hotel were from the outset intertwined with sociable encounters, the exchange of news and private, sometimes illicit, business. Other hotels may also have formed part of the network. David Williams and Thomas Paine took up brief residence at the Hôtel Richelieu, a few streets away from White's, and a pamphlet by a British observer of the 10<sup>th</sup> August uprising, probably authored by Robert Merry, was written from the "Hôtel d'York", just across the river from the main centre of British radical activism.<sup>8</sup>

The club seems to have had some of the characteristics that Peter Clark associates with the making of the associational world from the late sixteenth through to the turn of the nineteenth century. Clark suggests, "By the late eighteenth century there are indications of the emergence of modern-style voluntary societies with stronger administrative structures and a detailed public agenda."<sup>9</sup> Meetings would occur on a regular basis, mostly in public drinking houses, with an overwhelmingly male clientele and often combining recreation with an educational, political or philanthropic purpose. Clubs were an important part of social life often gathering together men of a wide range of ages and backgrounds, while also serving as "vectors for new ideas, new values, new kinds of social alignment, and forms of national,

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<sup>8</sup> This may have been the same hotel from where the American revolutionary Henry Laurens wrote on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1782. He told his correspondent, James Bourdieu, "I have apartments at Hotel d'York Rue Jacob where I shall be very glad to see or hear from you." (*The Papers of Henry Laurens: September 1, 1782-December 17, 1792*, ed. David R. Chesnutt [Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2003] 107).

<sup>9</sup> Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2000) ix.

regional, and local identity.”<sup>10</sup> At least thirteen members of the British Club were on the registers of the Society for Constitutional Information of 1792 and many had prior connections with revolutionary leaders and were involved with the Cercle Social, Cordeliers Club or Jacobin Club. There was a strong tradition of mutual solidarity and improvement within reforming circles and this was a significant feature of British Club culture. This trait was particularly pronounced during the years of hardship from 1793-94, when measures against foreigners led to the freezing of assets, the inability to access bank accounts, the confiscation of property, and wholesale imprisonment exacerbated by ill health and moral dejection. Such mutual cooperation was part of the tradition of enlightened philanthropic fraternity which also manifested itself in initiatives such as the Literary Fund for struggling writers, a project which a number of British Club members had championed during the course of 1792. It was also inspired by the particular experience of British radicals, incarcerated together in makeshift jails or suffering from financial distress, which prompted collective efforts at relief.

Yet while Clark identifies associational culture as being predominantly male, the influence of women, at least in the more informal gatherings which occurred in parallel to British Club assemblies, was significant in Paris. Helen Maria Williams’ salon played host to British radicals but also some leading revolutionaries and international patriots, while Mary Wollstonecraft, Ruth Barlow and Rachel Coope are all regularly mentioned in accounts of sociable encounters amongst the expatriate community. Wollstonecraft and Williams contributed written accounts of the Revolution to the output of eyewitness testimonies sent back to Britain. The society therefore had different levels of association, in which both male and female members, primarily from the middling, lettered class, had an active role.

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<sup>10</sup> Clark, *British Clubs and Societies* ix.

Despite the overwhelmingly bourgeois identity of the British Club, some of its more privileged members had egalitarian pretensions which matched the radical innovations of the French Revolution. Members, such as Lord Edward Fitzgerald and Sir Robert Smith, cast off their aristocratic titles and took the status of ordinary *citoyens* in line with the abolition of titles by the French government in 1790. Bourgeois members also belied sympathy with more democratic forms of association, courting not only the theoretical principles of popular involvement in government, but also widening their network of sociability while resident in Paris to include men and women from different ranks of society. Several, however, were less enthusiastic about such potential disruption to the social order. This question, of the role of the people in constitutional matters and the extent of practical democratic change in social affairs, preoccupied radicals' political thinking. It also struck at the heart of British activists' conception of a community characterised by open and free-flowing discussion, a principle put in practice to a certain extent within the British Club but dependent on a certain degree of social exclusivity. The legitimacy of this elitism began to be questioned by some members of the Club, in line with their championing of popular intervention in politics.<sup>11</sup>

British expatriate radicals in Paris formed what was an itinerant, fleeting and eclectic community at White's Hotel. This ephemeral character was typical of eighteenth century associational culture where many forms of society existed as a response to a particular cause and folded as quickly as they emerged. In the case of the British Club, the particular cause inspiring its creation was the establishment of a republic, free of monarchical interference,

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the Godwinian notion of "unlimited enquiry" see Jon Mee, "'The Use of Conversation': William Godwin's Conversable World and Romantic Sociability," *Studies in Romanticism* 50.4 (2011): 567-90. See also Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2011), in particular "Critical Conversations in the 1790s: Godwin, Hayes and Wollstonecraft" 137-67. Mee contests the view that the world of Rational Dissent, in elevating the intellect and theological debate, had no place for the working out of ideas in a group setting: "Rational Dissent as a cultural formation tended to give at least as much emphasis to social discourse as private reflection or disembodied intellectuality." (Mee, *Conversable Worlds* 147). This issue also relates to the notion of the public sphere and who and where has the right to participate in public debate. As Lucia Sagradini notes, the Habermasian notion of the public sphere is insufficient as a way of conceiving of the different possibilities of democratic expression. She discusses Oskar Negt's notion of "wild" or "savage" democracy, where contestation takes place outside established forums and locations. See Sagradini, "La plèbe entre dans la surface de jeu," *Multitudes*. 39.4 (2009): 205-10.



and the drafting of a new constitution to sustain the nascent French state. The club numbered between eighty and a hundred members by November 1792, with fifty active adherents and around fifteen driving figures with a rotating presidency. Key members included the radical printer John Hurford Stone, newspaper editor Sampson Perry, poet and playwright Robert Merry, lawyer John Frost as well as the Scottish pamphleteer John Oswald, financier Robert Rayment, former MP Sir Robert Smith, SCI member and chemist William Choppin, Irish radical Robert O'Reilly, and the aristocratic Irish revolutionary, Lord Edward Fitzgerald. Thomas Paine, who had achieved fame during the American Revolution for his pamphlet *Common Sense*, and notoriety in Britain after the publication of *Rights of Man*, was also loosely linked to the club, though not its principal convenor.<sup>12</sup> A host of other notable radical men and women associated with the club, including poet and writer Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft. Joel Barlow was also considered an honorary member and David Williams, though suspicious of organised societies, took part in the debates on several key themes animating the group. He had also worked alongside core British Club members Robert Merry, John Hurford Stone and George Edwards on the Literary Fund project over the course of 1790-1792.

A number of the British radicals who gathered at White's Hotel had been legally outlawed or felt estranged from the conventions of the British state and many had begun to renounce former connections with respectable Whig reforming initiatives which reached their height with the establishment of the Society of the Friends of the People in April 1792. Expatriate radicals sought refuge and freedom to express their opinions in republican France and were receptive to the democratic influences they confronted in the French capital, influences which would prompt their detractors to accuse them of encouraging the

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<sup>12</sup> As a member of the National Convention, Paine had a different status to his fellow countrymen and this difference was translated into more reticent involvement with British Club initiatives. His pamphlet *Common Sense* had first been published in 1775 just before the Declaration of Independence. *Rights of Man* Part One appeared in print in 1791.

disintegration of British constitutional order. Thomas Paine and Sampson Perry had been indicted for sedition, John Frost had been charged with uttering regicidal opinions in a coffee house and Robert Merry may have had his pro-revolutionary play taken off stage.<sup>13</sup> Many exiles considered themselves as outcasts or refugees, their conception of political justice being at odds with that of the British state.

Yet, while a number of those who frequented the hotel were known for their sympathy with radical agendas and had engaged in the movement for political reform in Britain, America or elsewhere, White's was also a vibrant hub of commercial exchange, a way of sharing news and a space where individual interests and business pursuits mingled with politics. Although not in itself surprising – most expatriates derived from a dissenting, manufacturing or professional background – these findings contest the view that visiting Paris during the Revolution was uniquely inspired by political and ideological fervour. Politics and commerce could be combined relatively smoothly. The club's openness to discord and dissension, relatively organised structure, philanthropic, commercial and political concerns as well as commitment to the dissemination of news and opinion and its ties with other reforming circles, show that it was part of a much wider network of Enlightenment culture than has readily been acknowledged. Though rarely important in the events of the Revolution in their own right, the individuals who affiliated to the British Club "acted as an interface between figures of much greater historical significance" at a decisive stage in the French Revolution.<sup>14</sup> The club was at its height at a critical juncture in the development of British and French national politics when opinions for and against the type of changes the Revolution

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<sup>13</sup> As Jon Mee has pointed out, there is no clear evidence that the play was officially removed or legally censored, but Merry's allusions to Pitt in his play *The Magician No Conjuror* may have been seen as a satirical take on the British Prime Minister. See Jon Mee, "The Magician No Conjuror: Robert Merry and the Political Alchemy of the 1790s," *Unrespectable Radicals?: Popular Politics in the Age of Reform*, ed. Paul A. Pickering and Michael T. Davis, (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008) 41-55.

<sup>14</sup> I have quoted Wil Verhoeven's description of American resident in Paris, Gilbert Imlay, which aptly summarises the place of expatriate radicals in the revolutionary arena. Though having a limited impact in absolute terms, they often acted as intermediaries or go-betweens, reflecting cosmopolitan influences in their dealings with different institutions and leaders. See Wil Verhoeven, *Gilbert Imlay: Citizen of the World* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008) 1.

epitomised began to polarise on the British side of the Channel and at a moment when the place of the foreigner in French thinking on nationhood was increasingly ambivalent. British radicals in Paris were operating in the interstice of these two frameworks, between the narrowing toleration of revolutionary sympathy in their home country and the unpredictable future of international brotherhood in their adopted one.

John Goldworth Alger was the first scholar to devote particular attention to the activities of the Club in his work on *Englishmen in the French Revolution*, published in 1889. He also wrote a number of other studies in both monograph and essay form on the British contingent in Paris which appeared in the late nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> The title of Alger's keynote work is revealing of the way in which the club's make-up has prompted ambiguity among historians. His study of "Englishmen" actually includes a number of Scottish, Welsh, Irish and American radicals who were also affiliated to the club, yet this eclecticism is negated in the title. Alger's aim was to recover British residents and visitors to France during the revolutionary era from historical obscurity. He highlights how:

French historians have not taken, and could not be expected to take, much notice of aliens, even of those more or less actors in the Revolution. In their eyes they are but imperceptible specks in the great eddy. Their attention is absorbed by their own countrymen; they have none to spare for interlopers, none of whom appreciably influenced the course of events.<sup>16</sup>

Alger notes the relative eccentricity of this group, which was seen as having little impact on the momentous occurrences they witnessed and the lack of interest devoted to expatriates in French historiography of the Revolution. In his preamble to the chapter on the British Club in *Englishmen* he also highlights the idealistic and conspiratorial nature of the group, asserting

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<sup>15</sup> The main works by Alger dealing with the British expatriate community are *Paris in 1789-94: Farewell Letters of Victims of the Guillotine* (London: Allen, 1902), *Napoleon's British Visitors and Captives, 1801-1815* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), *Englishmen in the French Revolution* (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1889), *Glimpses of the French Revolution: Myths, Ideals, and Realities* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co., 1894) and "The British Colony in Paris, 1792-93," *The English Historical Review* 13.52 (1898): 672-94.

<sup>16</sup> Alger, *Englishmen* vi.

that, “The French Revolution, like a new religion, effaced the feeling of nationality, and led men, partly from a sense of duty to the world, partly from inordinate vanity, to expatriate themselves, or even to plot their country’s downfall.”<sup>17</sup> He concludes on a jubilant note, triumphing in the fall of Napoleon and rounding off his portrait with a comparison of the fate of British expatriates to that of fictional heroes: “If, indeed, we can fuse into one picture these hundreds of our countrymen, we are reminded of a biography or novel in which the hero sets out under the happiest auspices, encounters all sorts of vicissitudes and dangers, and finally emerges into tranquillity and comfort.”<sup>18</sup>

Alger's portrait of the British set the tone for later representations of British radicals as both fervent idealists and subversive plotters. His account, which includes chapters entitled “Enthusiasts” and “Outlaws and Conspirators”, reflects his reading of British secret agent Captain George Monro’s despatches to the Pitt ministry. Monro followed radicals Thomas Paine and John Frost to Paris in mid-September 1792 and sent regular reports back to the British government until he was singled out as a spy and suspected by the expatriate community as well as the French revolutionary authorities in mid 1793.<sup>19</sup> Monro depicted a set of violent and subversive conspirators seeking to overthrow the British constitution in collusion with international patriots and French revolutionaries. Yet in somewhat of a paradox, he also emphasised the insignificance of the group in the eyes of the French government as well as their internal disputes and inability to reach consensus. Monro’s portrait of the British Club is ambivalent, combining alarmism over the intentions of its members to disrupt the settled constitutional arrangement in Britain with nonchalant dismissal

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<sup>17</sup> Alger, *Englishmen* 83.

<sup>18</sup> Alger, *Englishmen* 287.

<sup>19</sup> Captain Monro’s despatches are contained in the Treasury Solicitors Papers and Foreign Office deposits at the National Archives in Kew. The Foreign Office papers have also been published under the title of “Despatches of Earl Gower”. Monro sent an initial report to the Home Office shortly after his arrival in Paris in which he tried to identify the principal figures in the British Club. He also sent regular reports to the British Government until early 1793, tracing the activities of the Club from his lodgings at White's Hotel. In early 1793 he was singled out as a potential spy and suspected by fellow British guests. By May 1793 he had also come to the notice of the French authorities who sent a warrant for his arrest.

of its effectiveness as a radical force. Yet his is one of the few accounts recorded at the time and has therefore understandably guided subsequent studies.

Alger, influenced by Monro, also emphasises the progressive disillusionment of British witnesses of the Revolution and their embracing of loyalist idiom: “It must be presumed that many of them altered their opinion of their own country’s stability and institutions, and learned to prefer even an unreformed Parliament to the French Convention.”<sup>20</sup> Such conclusions drew to some extent on the representations of contemporary biographers who wrote in the immediate aftermath of the dissolution of the club, with the intention of restoring the reputations of friends or acquaintances that had been tarnished through their continued involvement with France under the early republic. Thomas Clio Rickman wrote of his friend Thomas Paine as “incorrupt, strait forward [*sic*], and sincere, he pursued his political course in France, as every where [*sic*] else, let the government or clamor or faction of the day be what it might, with firmness, with clearness, and without a “shadow of turning.””<sup>21</sup> Many of the early accounts of the British in the French Revolution were noteworthy for their attempts to write out the initial fervent support of radicals and replace this troublesome episode with a more balanced portrait of their political inclinations. Focus was also given to the dual persecution suffered by men such as Sampson Perry, who was incarcerated both in Britain and France, and Thomas Paine, whose estrangement from Britain precluded a return to his home country, even after his eventual release from the Luxembourg prison. A contemporary of Alger, Thomas Paine’s editor Moncure Conway, categorised British experience in Paris during the Revolution as being that of “the man without a country”, and drew attention to the innumerable “griefs” British expatriates endured as a

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<sup>20</sup> Alger, *Englishmen* x.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Clio Rickman, *The Life of Thomas Paine: Author of Common Sense, Rights of Man, Age of Reason, Letter to the Addressers, &c. &c.* (London: Rickman, 1819) 136.

result of their ostracism from both regimes.<sup>22</sup> From these late nineteenth-century accounts, a trend was instituted which considered British participants in the Revolution as outcasts, victims of Pittite repression on the one hand and Terror-driven persecution on the other.

Early twentieth-century accounts did little to attenuate the focus on the idealism of British expatriates, their penchant for insidious plotting and their ultimate ostracism from both national communities. A commentator of British Club member Henry Redhead Yorke's letters, writing in 1906, states, "Redhead threw himself heart and soul with the enthusiasm of youth into a popular movement which he believed was to liberate humanity from every sort of bondage, and bring about a period of quite utopian peace and prosperity."<sup>23</sup> The author highlighted the conspiratorial strain in British activity, defining the British Club as "an association at which were discussed such subjects as the advantage of liberating England by the assassination of that harmless monarch George III."<sup>24</sup> The emphasis on the dramatic, the treasonable, the naive and the anecdotal endured well into the twentieth century. Expatriate radicals were described in 1965 as "romantic young Englishmen," who "were plentifully supplied with what Bacon calls "the virtues of the will and the affections," if not with the power of understanding [the Revolution]."<sup>25</sup> Such scholars have subscribed to some extent to the language of the time, when there was a political pretext in both countries for casting radicals as marginal and disaffected figures whose decision to go to Paris was inspired by ardour tinged with incurable naivety.

In France, allusions to the British Club are scarce. Representations have tended on the whole to highlight the enduring loyalty of British witnesses to the institution of monarchy, their outcry at regicide and the Terror, and withdrawal into nationalist idiom under

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Paine's nineteenth-century editor, Moncure Conway, suggested that "nearly all of these men suffered griefs known only to the 'man without a country.'" Moncure D. Conway ed., *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol 3 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1899) xiii.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Redhead Yorke, *France in 1802, Described in a Series of Contemporary Letters* (1804), ed. J. A. C. Sykes, with an introduction by Richard Davey (London: Heineman, 1906) 2.

<sup>24</sup> Yorke, *France in 1802* 2.

<sup>25</sup> M. Ray Adams, "Robert Merry, Political Romanticist," *Studies in Romanticism* 2 (New York, 1965) 27. Adams also mentions Merry's self-induced "ostracism" from the fashionable world he inhabited.

Napoleonic rule. Interest has been shown in the travel writings of Arthur Young, who was deeply unsettled by his observations of the early Revolution, and in British caricatures of the French Revolution by James Gillray and his contemporaries who depicted the Revolution as a plunge into depravity and horror, threatening to contaminate British liberty.<sup>26</sup> The focus on British conservatism in the face of revolutionary tumult is evident in even the most recent and popular sketches as much as in academic scholarship. In 2001, Eric Rohmer's film *L'Anglaise et le Duc* dramatised the tale told by Grace Dalrymple Elliott, onetime mistress of the Duc d'Orléans, of her life in France during the Revolution.<sup>27</sup> The film, selecting key episodes from Elliott's account, confirms her autobiographical self-representation as a selfless and stoical heroine standing firm amid insurrectionary mayhem. Intransigent in her loyalty to the king and abhorrence of popular justice, Grace is a Scottish woman (although depicted in the film as English), an uninhibited royalist, in favour of moderation, obedience to established authority and unswerving in her loathing of what she considers the absurd rites of Revolution. Furthermore, in 2009, the Musée Carnavalet in Paris put on an exhibition of British caricatures during the French Revolution.<sup>28</sup> What stood out from the selection was the fervent Francophobe tone running through all the exhibits which illustrated the representations of France under the Revolution and Empire.

Historians of the Revolution Jacques Godechot and Michel Vovelle have both insisted on the importance of the events in France to the wider world, but have largely considered this impact from a diplomatic or military perspective rather than in terms of the way in which it

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<sup>26</sup> Albert Mathiez mentions *Dr. Rigby's Letters from France &c in 1789 edited by his daughter Lady Eastlake* (London: Longmans, Green, 1880) in his *La Révolution et les étrangers: cosmopolitisme et défense nationale* (Paris: Renaissance du livre, 1918). On British caricature during the Revolution and Empire, see the work of Pascal Dupuy, particularly *Face à la Révolution et l'Empire: caricatures anglaises 1789-1815* (Paris: Paris Musées, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Grace Dalrymple Elliott, *Journal of my Life during the French Revolution* (London: Rodale Press, 1859). Eric Rohmer's adaptation, *L'Anglaise et le Duc*, released in 2001, starred Lucy Russell and Jean-Claude Dreyfus in the leading roles.

<sup>28</sup> The exhibition, "France-Angleterre à Carnavalet: caricatures anglaises au temps de la Révolution et de l'Empire" ran at the Musée Carnavalet from 30<sup>th</sup> September 2009 to 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2010. Around forty exhibits were on display from among the Museum's collection of 200 caricatures. Associate Professor of the University of Rouen, Pascal Dupuy curated the exhibition.

affected foreign men and women at the scene or those who travelled to France in its wake.<sup>29</sup> The figure of the foreigner in revolutionary ideology has been explored by scholars of Marxist persuasion, such as Albert Mathiez and Georges Soboul, and more recently in the works of François Furet, Sophie Wahnich and Lynn Hunt.<sup>30</sup> As Michael Rapport has highlighted, though Alexis de Tocqueville insisted on the transcendental power of the Revolution to unite men through their common humanity and negate national frontiers, later commentators have acknowledged the complex place of the outsider in revolutionary thinking.<sup>31</sup> Soboul's research, centred on the popular sans-culotte movement, demonstrated how xenophobia and anti-foreign rhetoric intensified with the demands of the Anglo-French war. Cosmopolitanism could thus no longer be reconciled with the defence of the nation. While Albert Mathiez contended that this shift in the perception of the foreigner was due to political imperatives, other commentators, notably Hannah Arendt, argued that cosmopolitanism was ideologically incompatible with the mounting focus on national sovereignty and the xenophobic turn did

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<sup>29</sup> Jacques Godechot, *La Grande Nation: L'expansion révolutionnaire de la France dans le monde de 1789 à 1799* (Paris: Aubier, 1956). Godechot devotes several pages to the foreigners based in Paris during the Revolution. Michel Vovelle, *La Révolution française: 1789-1799* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1992). Vovelle considers the role of the Revolution in the wider world, with a significant emphasis on the military conflicts that the revolutionary authorities entered into during the ten-year period of his study.

<sup>30</sup> See Michael Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship in Revolutionary France: The Treatment of Foreigners 1789-1799* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000). Rapport gives a very instructive overview of the way in which foreigners have been seen in historical studies of the French Revolution. In particular he discusses the contributions of Marxist historians such as Albert Mathiez and Albert Soboul. See Mathiez, *La Révolution et les étrangers* and Albert Soboul, *Les sans-culottes parisiens en l'an II: histoire politique et sociale des sections de Paris, 2 juin 1793 au 9 Thermidor an II* (Paris: Clavreuil, 1958). Rapport also gives a brief summary of more recent work inspired by the François Furet school of thought. In particular, see François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, tr. E. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1981), Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (1984; Berkeley: U of California P, 2004) and Joan Landes, *Women in the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1988).

<sup>31</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville's evaluation of the Revolution can be found in *L'Ancien régime et la Révolution* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1887). François Furet and Mona Ozouf provide an assessment of Tocqueville's position in *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française*. The authors explain how he saw the Ancien Régime as having a causal relationship with the Revolution; the events of 1789 rather than being the beginning of a new order were simply the continuation of a centralising dynamic begun by an absolutist monarchy after the decline of feudal power and intensified by Bonaparte. Tocqueville identified a brief upsurge of liberty in the period up to October 1789, which was quickly dampened and replaced by hatred and class conflict up to 1799. He sees the era as characterised by continuity and a search for equality, with a brief hiatus of liberty, which was short-lived and fragile and ended by the Terror. Left-wing historian, Eric Hobsbawm, has criticised François Furet's approach, accusing him of attempting to "bury the founding event and formative tradition the Republic, the French Revolution" through his Tocquevillian approach and emphasis on discourse analysis rather than the socio-economic foundations of the Revolution. See "After the Cold War: Eric Hobsbawm Remembers Tony Judt," *London Review of Books* 34.8 (2012) 14.



not have purely pragmatic roots.<sup>32</sup> Recent scholarship has reiterated this perception. Sophie Wahnich and Marc Belissa have demonstrated how, through accusing the British populace of “liberticide” – the refusal of a people to rise up against a tyrannical ruler – the French authorities could justify the decision to fight the British enemy to the death.<sup>33</sup>

There have been some biographical studies which have devoted attention to the British in Paris. Thomas Paine, Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft have been the focus of major works which deal with their involvement in French politics on an individual and, more rarely, comparative level.<sup>34</sup> Equally Edward Fitzgerald, Samuel Rogers, Thomas Cooper and others have been the subject of romanticised revolutionary narratives<sup>35</sup>. Thomas Paine’s narrow escape from the Luxembourg jail has also captured the literary imagination, as has Thomas Muir’s extraordinary fate following his transportation to the penal colonies.<sup>36</sup> British Club members have also been alluded to in thematic works. Sampson Perry, John Frost and Robert Merry have featured in studies of newspaper histories and libel cases such as the

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<sup>32</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966).

<sup>33</sup> See Sophie Wahnich and Marc Bélissa, “Les crimes des Anglais: trahir le droit,” *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 300.1 (1995): 233-248.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Paine’s French experience has been detailed by only a select number of biographers. His friend and fellow Paris resident, Thomas Clio Rickman gave a detailed account of Paine’s life in Paris (see Rickman, *The Life of Thomas Paine*). Alfred Aldridge’s account of Paine’s life gives perhaps the most comprehensive account of his time in France (see A. O. Aldridge, *Man of Reason: The Life of Thomas Paine* [London: Cresset Press, 1959]). More recent biographies provide insights into Paine’s political philosophy and engagement with American and French politics as well as the British reform movement. Gregory Claeys, *Thomas Paine: Social and Political thought* (Boston; London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) tends to emphasise the consistency in Paine’s thought while Mark Philp, *Paine* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1989) sees Paine’s political ideas as developing according to events and circumstances. John Keane’s *Tom Paine: A Political Life* (1995; London: Bloomsbury, 2009) is a more classical biography, seeking to show the different events of Paine’s life, though keeping a political angle. Janet Todd’s *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Columbia U P, 2000) interweaves political activism with Wollstonecraft’s private experience under the Terror while exiled in the suburbs of Paris. Deborah Kennedy has written a recent biography of Helen Maria Williams (see *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution* [Lewisburg, [PA]: Bucknell U P, 2002]).

<sup>35</sup> See P. W. Clayden, *The Early Life of Samuel Rogers* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1887), Thomas Moore, *The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* (Paris: Baudry’s European Library, 1835), and Dumas Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper, 1783-1839* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1961).

<sup>36</sup> See Peter Mackenzie, *The Life of Thomas Muir, Esq. Advocate, Younger of Huntershill, Near Glasgow; Member of the Convention of Delegates for Reform in Scotland etc. etc. Who was Tried for Sedition Before The High Court of Justiciary in Scotland, and Sentenced to Transportation for Fourteen Years with a Full Report of his Trial* (Glasgow: McPhun’s, 1831) and Christina Bewley, *Muir of Huntershill* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1981).

comprehensive works of Lucyle Werkmeister or the recent study of Jeremy Black.<sup>37</sup> Madeleine Stern, a specialist in the history of the book trade, has carried out an investigation into John Hurford Stone's contribution to the international transfer of knowledge through his publication business and printing house, and Robert Merry, Helen Maria Williams and William Wordsworth have received attention through their place within the literary circles of the time.<sup>38</sup> Janet Todd, Deborah Kennedy and others have assessed the role of Helen Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft from a gendered perspective, while work has also been carried out on issues of sensibility, poetics and sociability.<sup>39</sup> Finally, there have been some studies of the contribution of British radical thinkers in Paris, notably Thomas Paine, to the evolution of revolutionary ideas and political theory. Yet the actual nature of Paine's engagement with his fellow British radicals in France and the intersection of his views with those of his countrymen have provoked less interest. There has been scarcely any attention given to the complex political and social lives of those who took up residence in Paris, their networks, wider influences, collaborative writing projects, residential arrangements and their collective attempts to contribute to and disseminate commentary on the Revolution. Attention to these associational traits of British activism allows for insights into the continuance of Enlightenment traditions of rational exchange in the late eighteenth century but also to the ways in which such traditions were questioned, disrupted or consolidated in revolutionary

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<sup>37</sup> See Lucyle Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press, 1772-1792* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1963) and *A Newspaper History of England, 1792-1793* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1967); see also Jeremy Black, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1987).

<sup>38</sup> Madeleine B. Stern, "The English Press in Paris and Its Successors, 1793-1852," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 74 (1980): 307-59 and "The Franco-American Book Trade in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 10:1 (March 1994): 47-54; Matthew Bray, "Helen Maria Williams and Edmund Burke: Radical Critique and Complicity," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 16 (May 1992): 1-24; Steven Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams and the Rewriting of the French Revolution* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson U P, 1997); Deborah Kennedy, "Responding to the French Revolution: Williams' *Julia* and Burney's *The Wanderer*," *Jane Austen and Mary Shelley and Their Sisters*, ed. Laura Dabundo (Lanham, New York, Oxford: U P of America, 2000) 3-17.

<sup>39</sup> Steven Blakemore, "Revolution and the French Disease: Laetitia Mathilda Hawkins's *Letters* to Helen Maria Williams," *Studies in English Literature* 336 (1996): 637-91; Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993) and "Helen Maria Williams and Radical Sensibility," *Prose Studies* 12 (1989): 3-24.

Paris. It also allows us to consider the British Club as a much more complex and eclectic community, both politically and ideologically, than has previously been suggested.

There have been a small number of studies dedicated to the Irish in the French Revolution due to the more explicit affiliation which developed between the French authorities and leaders of the Irish Rebellion in the closing years of the 1790s. Marianne Elliott has examined the partnership between the United Irishmen and the French authorities and the way in which it gave impetus to the planning and execution of the Irish Rebellion in 1798, and Liam Swords has carried out a study of Irish involvement in the French Revolution during the period spanning 1789 to 1815, in particular from the point of view of Irish ecclesiastical institutions which progressively lost out in the Revolution's drive towards secularisation.<sup>40</sup> Swords focuses on the two Irish colleges in Paris rather than the wider Irish community and therefore pays less attention to the handful of activists who, despite their ecclesiastical training and affiliations to the Ancien Regime, were attracted to the British Club in 1792. Mary-Ann Constantine has also recently drawn attention to the Welsh experience in revolutionary Paris. She has shown that, despite the fact that the Welsh were overlooked in the declarations and addresses of the British Club itself as well as in historical study, a small number of Welsh observers of the Revolution left traces of their views and experiences of the revolutionary arena, sometimes, as in the case of David Williams, playing more official diplomatic roles.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, some scholars have explored the transatlantic wave of migration which occurred at the turn of the nineteenth century. Early work was carried out by Arthur Sheps, yet the recent study by Michael Durey is the most comprehensive exploration of the British

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<sup>40</sup> Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (New Haven: Yale U P, 1982) and Liam Swords, *The Green Cockade: The Irish in the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Dublin: Glendale, 1989).

<sup>41</sup> See Mary-Ann Constantine, "The Welsh in Revolutionary Paris," *"Footsteps of Liberty and Revolt": Essays on Wales and the French Revolution*, ed. Mary-Ann Constantine and Dafydd Johnston (Cardiff: U of Wales P, forthcoming 2013). The study focuses on a handful of Welsh travellers who recorded their experience in revolutionary France.

radicals who emigrated to the early American republic.<sup>42</sup> Durey gives significant weight to the particular reasons driving emigration from Ireland, Scotland and England and to the political activism of expatriates in Thomas Jefferson's Republican Party leading up to his presidential victory in 1800. Recent interest has also been devoted to American emigrants in Paris such as Gilbert Imlay and Joel Barlow.<sup>43</sup> Wil Verhoeven's study of Imlay brings the American entrepreneur out of Mary Wollstonecraft's shadow and gives an interesting portrayal of a marginal expatriate figure who concocted a number of business deals during the most tumultuous years of the Revolution. Philipp Ziesche and Yvon Bizardel have also carried out research into the American expatriate community in Paris.<sup>44</sup> Ziesche has examined the perception of nation-building among American residents in the French capital, looking at how universalism and nationalism intersected in their views. Focusing on the cross-breeding of ideas and political theory among figures such as Gouverneur Morris, James Monroe and Joel Barlow, he argues, "It is precisely their doubly marginal position – at a remove from the American political scene and on the fringes of the French Revolution – that caused Americans in Paris to reflect on the similarities and differences between nation-building in the United States and France."<sup>45</sup> Equally, there has been interest in other foreign radicals which established themselves in Paris in the revolutionary years. Georges Avenel wrote a biography of the Prussian-born member of the National Convention, Anacharsis Cloots, in 1865 and Marita Gilli has recently translated and edited a work in French on the German expatriate revolutionary, Georg Forster.<sup>46</sup> Despite all this interest, the attention paid to the establishment

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<sup>42</sup> Arthur Sheps, "Ideological Immigrants in Revolutionary America," *City and Society in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. Fritz and D. Williams (Toronto: Hakkert, 1973) 231-46; Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic*, (Lawrence: U P of Kansas, 1997).

<sup>43</sup> Richard Buel, *Joel Barlow: American Citizen in a Revolutionary World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 2011); Wil Verhoeven, *Gilbert Imlay*.

<sup>44</sup> See Philipp Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots: Americans in Paris in the Age of Revolution* (Charlottesville and London: U of Virginia P, 2010) and Yvon Bizardel, *Les Américains à Paris sous Louis XVI et pendant la Révolution: notices biographiques* (Paris: Y. Bizardel, 1978).

<sup>45</sup> Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots* 5-6.

<sup>46</sup> Georges Avenel, *Anacharsis Cloots: L'orateur du genre humain* (Paris: Lacroix, Verboeckhoven and Co., 1865); Marita Gilli, *Un révolutionnaire allemand: Georg Forster 1754-1794* (Paris: CTHS, 2005).

of radical communities and circles of improvement and their collective interventions with the early republic, particularly from a British point of view, has been negligible.

The fact that the British shared experience during the early years of the French Revolution has been relatively sidelined is not in itself surprising. In the political heritage of the post-revolutionary era, there has been a clear and unquestionable conjunction between the Revolution and the French nation. If the early message after the fall of the Bastille was that the Revolution represented a victory for humanity at large and was anchored in a pan-European and pan-Atlantic dynamic, 1789 soon became the founding symbol of a particular national form of republicanism. Foreigners have been considered in terms of how they reflected the increasing particularism of revolutionary ideology and exclusivity of citizenship, but few studies have investigated their actual experience and perceptions in the early revolutionary era. Equally, the loose divides which hardened into factional disputes in the 1792 Convention, pitting Girondins against Jacobins, a dichotomy which is still contested by many historians, laid the foundations for nineteenth and twentieth-century political alignments and later historiographical categories. Differing paradigms of political economy, ranging from moderate liberalism to authoritarian socialism were rooted in the different traditions emerging in the revolutionary era. The Revolution therefore dictated thinking on statehood and the nation and became inextricably linked to successive upheavals and experiments, moulding French collective memory and identity.<sup>47</sup> The place of foreign onlookers, many of whom remained on the fringes of official diplomacy, has occupied a marginal place in scholarship.

The material difficulty of accessing manuscript sources on British activism in the French Revolution is a factor in the neglect of expatriate radicals' place in the Revolution. The tracking of British activism in early revolutionary France is fraught with obscurities and practical obstacles and any findings must be gleaned from a patchwork of inchoate, scattered

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<sup>47</sup> I am grateful to Colin Jones of Queen Mary, University of London, for sharing his views on the instability of a Jacobin-Girondin dichotomy and suggesting essential reading on the French constitutional heritage.

sources. Traces of British presence can be found in the letters the archives of the *Comité de Salut Public* or *Comité de Sûreté Générale*, in records of foreign correspondence and in the recorded reports from state trials. Many of these sources have already been noted by historians such as John Goldworth Alger, Lionel D. Woodward and David V. Erdman and many more remain unearthed.<sup>48</sup> The charting of British Club activities was often the prerogative of spies recruited by the British government to monitor expatriate activities, or of the French revolutionary authorities whose stance towards British sympathisers shifted with the outbreak of war. Their experience is therefore filtered through the lens of suspicion. As Erdman says of the British Club, “Its activities, indeed, were kept so secret that even the surface evidence has been ignored by most historians.”<sup>49</sup> Such evidential dilemmas continue to thwart attempts to gain a better understanding of the British Club.

Three twentieth-century accounts stand out, however, for their attempts to chart the experiences of the British in Paris. Michael Rapport’s recent study looks at the treatment of British radicals as part of a wider investigation of the question of nationality in both pre-revolutionary and revolutionary France. Furthermore, Lionel Woodward’s study of Helen

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<sup>48</sup> See Lionel D. Woodward, *Une Anglaise amie de la Révolution française: Hélène-Maria Williams et ses amis* (Paris: Champion, 1930) and David V. Erdman, *Commerce Des Lumières: John Oswald and the British in Paris in 1790-93* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1986). Most of the archival sources I have studied are those referred to by Lionel Woodward and David Erdman. Unfortunately John Alger did not cite the location of his sources in his major monograph, though it seems that many of the manuscripts that he used, from subsequent matching, were found in the Archives Nationales in Paris. I was also helped immensely by Michael Rapport’s detailed footnotes and recording of sources he used in his study of nationality and citizenship. Occasionally while leafing through papers in the files mentioned by the above authors I came across documents which were either overlooked or left unexploited by these authors. The prison records for British Club members such as Robert Rayment, Robert Smith, and Christopher White receive little attention in previous studies yet sometimes add qualitatively to the perspective of British experience during the Terror. Equally, some of the pamphlets written by British residents during the constitution debate have never been properly exploited. The tracts of Robert Merry and George Edwards, apart from the mention of their existence in Alger, have not been analysed, while John Oswald’s pamphlet was not given detailed attention by Erdman. Mary Wollstonecraft’s *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794) is one of her least-studied tracts and Helen Maria William’s *Letters Written in France* from 1793-94 have attracted much less attention than her first volume, written in 1790, and her later commentaries on the reign of Robespierre. Finally, Sampson Perry’s monumental *An Historical Sketch of the French Revolution* (1796) has gone relatively unnoticed, apart from a cursory mention in Jacques Godechot’s *La Grande Nation*. Ian McCalman, in his portrait of Perry in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, called for more detailed study of Perry’s historical account. As yet, it has not been subject to any substantial enquiry from historians. See Iain McCalman, “Sampson Perry, Jacobin Doctor and Journalist”, *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 158, *British Reform Writers, 1789-1832* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1995). McCalman’s entry on Perry is, to my knowledge, the only scholarly piece that has so far been published on the radical editor.

<sup>49</sup> Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières* 3.

Maria Williams and her relationship to the French Revolution is noteworthy for its attempt to explore a wider perspective of British involvement in the French Revolution. While Woodward devotes a considerable section of his account to Williams' early experiences and her membership of the dissenting community in London and concludes with her final days in the French capital, the chapter focusing on "Miss Williams and the foreign colony in Paris", and two subsequent sections on John Hurford Stone and British imprisonment under the Terror, give a much broader vision of British experience in Paris. The author retraces much of the archival material first brought to light by Alger, but also explores in detail the British correspondence files held in the vaults of the Archives Diplomatiques.

The most recent biographical study of a British radical in Paris during the revolutionary period to take into consideration the wider picture of British activism is David Erdman's *Commerce des Lumières: John Oswald and the British in Paris 1790-1793*. In a very entertaining account, which mixes historical investigation with a streak of literary flair, Erdman places greater emphasis than previous scholars on the routes of transmission opened up between Britain and France through the existence of the British Club. He sees the Channel as a passageway of information and propaganda and John Oswald himself as an intermediary, deeply involved in communication and deliberation between the two countries. While insisting on the international dimension of British activities in the French capital, Erdman also highlights the intense secrecy which surrounded the Club which has made, and continues to make, reconstituting British activities in Paris problematic. He points to the lack of evidence, the ambiguity which characterises the group, the misinformation which circulated and the necessity of basing conclusions partly on conjecture, legend and hearsay. He claims that those historians who have continued to cling to the belief that British radicals turned against the Revolution after the September massacres are mistaken. While several did reject the republican departure and radical phase of the Revolution in France, others confronted the

growing violence with an open-minded pragmatism which filled many of their contemporaries with horror and which later commentators have sometimes filtered out.

Erdman provides insights into the aims of the British Club, the idealism at its heart, the republican ambitions of some of its core members, and their gradual divergence from reforming Whig politics throughout the course of their residence in Paris. He places particular stress on the willingness of activists to encourage a French landing on British soil and insists on the diversity of political beliefs which coexisted within the Club. In focusing on John Oswald, Erdman understandably understates the role of those Oswald associated with. He acknowledges this in the earliest pages of his book, readily accepting that there remains considerable scope for further study of the other members of the British Club. He wrote, “A full historical account of British participation in the Revolution has yet to be assembled, but the present undertaking should help prepare the way.”<sup>50</sup> It is inevitable therefore that Oswald, in Erdman’s study, becomes the pioneering figurehead of the Club, one of the first foreigners to welcome the French Revolution, achieving fame for his ideas, influential among revolutionary leaders including Nicholas de Bonneville and Jacques Pierre Brissot de Warville, and a prominent secretary of the society. Although Erdman contests earlier views expressed by Captain Monro and John Goldworth Alger that the British Club had virtually dissolved by the beginning of 1793, his own work only extends the British Club’s existence to Oswald’s death in the Vendée in September 1793 and does not provide any substantial insights into the experience of members of the British Club during the Terror in the period leading up to Thermidor. Erdman verges on the sort of hagiography that biographers sometimes flirt with, and his portrayal of Oswald as a “would-be Wolfe Tone for England” does have some shortcomings despite its meritorious attempt to revitalise the debate on the British in Paris and give a vivid portrait of the atmosphere in revolutionary Paris at the time. It

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<sup>50</sup> Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières* 2.



is undeniable that Oswald did have a central role and was one of the members of the group known for his ultra-radical leanings, going further than many in articulating a desire for a British revolution and establishment of a republic. Yet, if we rely solely on Erdman's account, there is a danger of exaggerating Oswald's role and influence. The British Club was a relatively egalitarian organisation with no fixed leaders and where reputations were forged and undone with relative ease. Part of the aim in making this study a collective exploration of British Club members and their associates is to emphasise the relatively democratic structure of the grouping and the range of views and interests embraced by its core members.

This recognition of the multitude of views within the British Club coincides with a particular strain of scholarship which has focused on the diversity of popular radicalism and instability of ideologies in the era of the French Revolution. Terms such as "bricolage", "fragmentation", and "eclecticism" have been employed to demonstrate the heterogeneity of radical trajectories and idioms in Britain in the 1790s, guarding against the construction of stable portraits and static truths and the evacuation of context in the construction of history.<sup>51</sup>

Michael Sonescher has also highlighted the value of taking into account new information

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<sup>51</sup> See for example the work of Jon Mee, Mark Philp and James Epstein on British popular radicalism in the revolutionary era. Jon Mee has insisted on the complexity of the reform movement in Britain through the study of more eclectic members of the popular radical movement. He looks at the case of LCS member, Richard "Citizen" Lee, who showed an enduring commitment to free-grace evangelicalism and used the reform movement as a way of achieving social ascension. See "The Strange Career of Richard 'Citizen' Lee: Poetry, Popular Radicalism and Enthusiasm in the 1790s," *Radicalism in British Literary Culture, 1650-1830: From Revolution to Revolution*, ed. Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2002) 151-66. He has also shown how Charles Pigott fused Whig rhetoric with a language more readily associated with the abstraction of French republicanism, making what Mee has termed "part of an unstable but dynamic bricolage." (Mee, "A Bold and Free-Spoken Man: The Strange Case of Charles Pigott," *Cultures of Whiggism: New Essays on English Literature and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. David Womersley, Paddy Bullard and Abigail Williams [Newark: U of Delaware P, 2005] 346). Epstein's work has also tended to inspire scholars to refuse over-simplification and categorisation in the definition of popular radical politics in Britain and emphasise radicalism's "eclectic" nature, a term employed in his article, "'Our Real Constitution': Trial Defence and Radical Memory in the Age of Revolution," ed. James Vernon, *Re-reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England's Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1996) 31. Mark Philp does not reject the notion of ideology but he contests its purported coherence in the age of revolution. In particular, he brings into question the theses of Ian Christie and H. T. Dickinson among others, who tend to claim the victory of conservative, loyalist ideology over its radical opponent as a way of explaining the decline of the popular reform movement in the post-1795 years. In contending that "the radical agenda was as much the outcome of the political struggles of the 1790s as it was their cause," Philp draws on Judith Butler's work on constructivism and subjective agency, suggesting that reforming philosophy was forged in the act of *doing* popular politics. See Mark Philp, "The Fragmented Ideology of Reform," ed. Mark Philp, *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1991) 51.

which disrupts received ideas on the revolutionary era. He suggests, “By bringing the subject matter of larger tracts of eighteenth-century intellectual life more fully into the historiographical picture, it may become easier to understand arguments whose purposes have sometimes been forgotten in the broad sweep of retrospective analysis.”<sup>52</sup> In doing so, meta-narratives are tempered by the presence of marginal figures and unusual texts. Critics of such approaches in the context of the reform movement argue that by denying a coherent “identity”, or “ideology”, the very existence of a popular radical agenda is brought into question, frustrating attempts to bring some sort of historical conclusiveness to this period. Those historians who have continued to develop more unified theories of a French “debate”, or “ideological war”, would probably adhere to the view of Roger Brubaker and Frederick Cooper who have criticised the “soft constructivism” of the type practised by Judith Butler as unhelpful, suggesting, “If identity is everywhere, it is nowhere.”<sup>53</sup> Yet acknowledging complexities in historical discourse is part of a much longer tradition and, as James Vernon has noted, fluidity, fragility and discordance are not unique to the postmodern era but permeated constitutional narratives of the nineteenth century.<sup>54</sup> In approaching the history of the British Club of radicals in Paris, I intend to show sensitivity to this approach.

This study seeks therefore to revisit the history of a community that has been overlooked in the scholarship of the British radical movement of the early 1790s and the history of the French Revolution more widely.<sup>55</sup> The British expatriates who took up

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<sup>52</sup> Michael Sonescher, “Review Article: Enlightenment and Revolution,” *The Journal of Modern History* 70 (1998) 372.

<sup>53</sup> William Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond Identity,” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000) 1. The authors are critical of theorists such as Judith Butler whose work tends to demonstrate that identities are not self-evident or fixed, but emerge in discourse, through the institutions that generate and construct them. There is no pre-linguistic “inner core” to a person for Butler, and identities are formed in the act of doing. See Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997). Butler’s work also draws upon the theories of the “French philosophers”, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.

<sup>54</sup> James Vernon, “Notes Towards an Introduction,” *Re-reading the Constitution*, ed. James Vernon, 1-21.

<sup>55</sup> Much historical enquiry into the revolutionary era in British academic circles has centred on the French Revolution per se or the influence of the French Revolution on popular politics on home soil rather than on the

residence in Paris during the early 1790s, and who set up a pro-revolutionary society, have attracted limited attention from historians. Those who have sought to bring their activities and ideas to light have sometimes fallen prey to simplification, generalisation, or even hagiography. Often based on the early reports of Captain Monro, White's Hotel has, with some justification, been considered a hub of political intrigue where British dissidents met to debate ideas linked to the French Revolution and discuss ways of effectuating wholesale constitutional change in Britain. Monro's despatches also lent weight to arguments which insist both on the conspiratorial nature of the community as well as their relative political naivety. For some scholars, White's was a hotbed of sedition where disaffected radicals met to devise ways of overturning the foundations of the British state.

I have reassessed Monro's despatches in the light of other sources, most of which are no less problematic, in an attempt to gain a clearer insight into the nature of interchange that took place among these radical expatriates. Political pamphlets, statements taken down by the French revolutionary authorities, accounts of state trials or letters, autobiographies and memoirs give different insights and perspectives. I have also attended to the subtexts in Monro's reports, exploring what he alludes to in regard to the dynamics between members, patterns of sociability and private, commercial interests, in order to put their politics activities

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cross-fertilisation generated by the movement of British radicals between Britain and Paris. In the field of popular politics, E. P. Thompson's groundbreaking study *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963) clearly has a legacy on British historical research today. Thompson provided a provocative interpretation of the emergence of a self-conscious working class over the period spanning the end of the eighteenth through to the mid-nineteenth century. His identification of a continuous strain of Jacobin thought through the 1790s, re-emerging in later periods of reform agitation, has been contested by some scholars. John Belchem has stressed that the literal meaning of radicalism is "to go back to the roots" in his *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996). Belchem's suggestion is that "radicals sought almost without exception to extend and redefine, not to challenge and subvert, the proud political heritage of constitutional rights and parliamentary government." (Belchem, *Popular Radicalism* 1). Radicals were renovators, not innovators, committed to appeals to history and precedent, rather than natural rights. Paineites were exceptions rather than the rule and adherents of reform were more firmly concerned with establishing themselves as the true defenders of the British constitution than denying its very existence. Such dualism, pitting rationalism against constitutionalism, has been contested by James Epstein whose work tends to demonstrate that radical discourse conjugated both emerging theoretical claims of natural equality, not necessarily themselves indicative of more radical intentions, and constitutional language inherited from 1688 and earlier. See, for example, James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1994).

into perspective and give a fuller, more rounded picture of the nature of radical networks in Paris. Rather than perpetuating the portraits of British radicals as deluded enthusiasts who later turned their backs on the Revolution, or as outsiders and outlaws, conveyors of revolutionary contagion to Britain and agents of counterrevolution in France – although there were undoubtedly elements of all these aspects among the members of the Club – this analysis leads us to see them rather as vectors between countries, participants in a displaced radical community in Paris and actors in an associational world which stretched across the Channel. A vector in its figurative sense is something which conveys or transmits, deriving from the latin *vehere*, which means ‘to carry’. In biological terms, it is an organism capable of carrying an infectious agent from one subject to another, either directly or through its own multiplication. British radicals was invariably seen from the vantage point of the Government and the loyalist press as contagious agents, capable of transmitting the French “disease” to the British mainland. Yet their role as conveyors also invested them with a significant degree of unofficial agency. They were involved in distributing first-hand reports of revolutionary developments to an audience at home, countering official reports of French barbarity in the British press and they contributed to the flow of ideas through their political writings and activities within the British Club.

In chapter one, I establish the conceptual and representational framework of the study, examining the way in which British radicals was seen from the vantage point of their own government, the loyalist press and critics as well as by the French revolutionary authorities. I seek to put the expatriation of the British community into the wider context of public life in the 1790s and explain the political and diplomatic circumstances which led to Moncure Conway’s depiction of the British expatriate as the “man without a country”. In chapter two I consider the place of British radicals in revolutionary Paris with a particular focus on the establishment of the British Club and the associational rules governing the society. Attention

is given to the way in which collective and individual initiatives in Paris were pursued within the framework of Club life. British radicals carved out creative and commercial opportunities for themselves between Paris and London, establishing a hub of activity at White's Hotel which combined radical politics with leisure, commerce and innovation. They also drew on this network, forged at White's, for mutual support and subsistence during the troubled months of 1793 and 1794. Chapter three focuses on the public agenda of members of the British Club who intervened in French politics at the close of 1792 and in early 1793, offering their views as part of the debate over the creation of a new republican constitution. It seeks to establish the reasons for British engagement at this stage of the Revolution and analyse the different arguments, influences and political positions of those who sent tracts to the constitutional committee. Using this debate as a starting point, I also investigate the political allegiances of Club members more generally, debating the validity of the commonly-held view that they were almost uniformly affiliated to the Girondin party. Finally, in chapter four I extend the analysis of British written production to include the way in which Club members and associates conveyed the Revolution textually back to Britain. British radicals contributed to the flow of ideas and knowledge on the events taking place in France, sometimes through complete histories but more often through fragmented and hastily written accounts or letters. Through their presence at the scene, author-spectators like Helen Maria Williams claimed to be providing authentic, eye-witness accounts of the Revolution which would correct the commentaries that circulated in Britain.

More globally, this study highlights the importance of "situatedness" – a term coined by historian James Epstein – in historical scholarship, reinforcing the view that actions and ideas cannot be divorced from the space in which they are produced and voiced. As Epstein has noted, "Meanings, constructions of subjective identities, the very possibilities for representation cannot be understood outside historically specific practices and imaginings

attached to spaces.”<sup>56</sup> The language and forms that British activism assumed in revolutionary Paris were closely linked to the particular arena in which they emerged and were thus different from those of their radical countrymen who had remained in Britain where the conditions of writing, acting and conversing were initially more restrictive. Social scientists are increasingly attentive to the fact that geography is “implicated *in* social processes rather than being a ‘backdrop’ or a ‘board’ *upon* which social processes are inscribed.” This observation from John Agnew consolidates his view that “place is not just locale, as setting for activity and social interaction, but also location. The reproduction and transformation of social relations must take *place* somewhere.”<sup>57</sup> The different perspective of expatriate radical reformers compared to reformers based in Britain is important to take into consideration. Radicals did not simply carry ideas from Britain to France but their thoughts and actions were shaped by the very context in which they found themselves. This investigation also concurs with Roger Wells’ view that the study of short spans of history can provide new insights, disrupting settled views of long-term continuity or stability.

Why did British radicals choose Paris over Philadelphia at this particular junction?<sup>58</sup> How did they associate with each other once in the French capital? What was their relationship with the revolutionary authorities? What was the contribution of radicals to political thought and debates on the shape of a new constitution? How far did their previous political and reforming baggage impact on their experience and outlook in France? Which traditions did they tap into? How did activists negotiate during the Terror? How did they portray the Revolution to a British audience and how was their presence in France perceived by both the British and French authorities? How did their outlook change with the unfolding Anglo-French war and the spectre and reality of persecution? What can the British Club’s

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<sup>56</sup> James Epstein, “Spatial Practices, Democratic Vistas,” *Social History* 24:3 (Oct 1999) 310.

<sup>57</sup> John Agnew, “Representing Space: Space, Scale and Culture in Social Science,” *Place, Culture, Representation*, ed. James Duncan and David Ley (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 264, 262.

<sup>58</sup> Some, such as Robert Merry and Thomas Cooper, did go to America after having witnessed the Revolution in France.

brief hiatus of activity tell us about the complexity of the reform movement in Britain and thinking on Revolution? How does the Club fit into a wider network of Enlightenment exchange and tradition of improvement? These are all questions that I begin to address in the course of this study.

# CHAPTER I

## **MEN WITHOUT COUNTRIES? CROSS-CHANNEL VIEWS OF BRITISH RADICAL EXPATRIATES IN THE EARLY 1790S<sup>59</sup>**

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<sup>59</sup> The title of this chapter makes reference to Moncure Conway's assessment of the experience of British radical Sampson Perry as being that of the "man without a country". See above, pp. 19-20.



## I. Introduction

The French Revolution of 1789 inspired a range of reactions in Britain and these early responses whether articulated from a distance or based on first-hand viewing were relatively individual intellectual offerings unhindered by the pressure of conformity with national agendas and international diplomacy. During the course of 1792 and 1793, with the more radical political developments in France and the outbreak of the Anglo-French war, circumstances altered to such an extent that all views expressed on the Revolution or which evoked events across the Channel were subject to heightened scrutiny and deep suspicion. From this period onwards, the multiplicity of viewpoints within the British reform movement would be pared down by the British political establishment to the simple dichotomy of “Jacobin” or “loyalist”, whatever their underlying subtleties.<sup>60</sup>

Commentators themselves were writing with an awareness of the potential reprisals which could be provoked by their words. As Jon Mee has recently reminded students of the Revolution debate, “The spectres of surveillance, incarceration, bankruptcy...and even execution loomed over popular radicalism, conditioning its sense of the range of political possibilities open to participants, including what and how they might write and publish.”<sup>61</sup> What was said during this period was thus profoundly altered and shaped by the conditions governing expression. By 1793, writer Anna Seward saw the spirit of “loyalty” permeating all ranks. She claimed, “Never do I remember such an universal glow of loyalty, such a grateful and fervent sense of the blessings of our balanced government, as seem now to pervade all the

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<sup>60</sup> Michael Scrivener has noted the complexity of the term from the dual perspectives of France and Britain. He states, “In France where there were Jacobin clubs the term “Jacobin” signified a political affiliation, but in Britain, “Jacobin” is both an imprecise label by which reactionaries tagged the proponents of even the mildest reform, and a useful analytical term to describe a certain kind of radical politics.” Michael Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall & Jacobin Writing* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State U P, 2001) 20.

<sup>61</sup> Jon Mee, “Popular Radical Culture,” *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s*, ed. Pamela Clemit (Cambridge: U of Cambridge P, 2011) 117-18.

orders of British society.”<sup>62</sup> Seward hoped a pervasive spirit of allegiance to a perceived British constitutional heritage would seep through all social strata and feared the alternative of a model based on French innovation. Sir James Bland Burges, writing from Whitehall in early September 1792, only days after the massacres in the prisons of Paris, noted, “The French excesses, I fancy, have made a great impression here. Everything with us is quieter than ever, and a general indignation seems to prevail amidst all descriptions of men, whenever the conversation turns on the recent transactions at Paris.”<sup>63</sup> The prison massacres consolidated British abhorrence of revolutionary excess and gave the ruling authorities justification in distancing 1789 from the idealised British heritage of moderate reform. By November 1792, the same month as the Society for Constitutional Information and British Club delegations to the French Convention, the Association for preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers convened their first meeting at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in London to devise means of halting the reform drive to “overthrow...the present system of government.”<sup>64</sup> The reform agenda was increasingly equated with sedition and popular loyalist groups attempted to curtail radical activities across the country with official sanction from the Pitt ministry.

In tandem with this tendency to celebrate and promote the moderation and loyalty of the British people was an emerging rejection within the establishment of all expressions of even the mildest forms of criticism of the existing political and constitutional apparatus. The term “Jacobin”, used to characterise reformers of all hues, became synonymous with treasonable

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<sup>62</sup> Letter LXII, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1793, Anna Seward and Archibald Constable, *Letters of Anna Seward: Written between the Years 1784 and 1807*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: A. Constable and Co., 1811) 209. Seen as part of the “blue stocking” set, Seward was a poet and writer whose works were later edited by her protégé Walter Scott. See the recent biography of Seward, Teresa Barnard, *Anna Seward: A Constructed Life: A Critical Biography* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009).

<sup>63</sup> Bland Burges to Lord Auckland, Whitehall, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1792, *The Journal and Correspondence of William, Lord Auckland*, vol. 2 (London: Bentley, 1861-1862) 378. Sir James Bland Burges was writing in the wake of the September massacres, an event which helped to alienate the bulk of the British population from the Revolution and its violent excesses. The papers of Bland Burges, who was under-secretary of state for Foreign Affairs between 1789 and 1795 and who went on to work with David Williams on the Literary Fund, are held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

<sup>64</sup> *Annual Register* 34 (1792): 92, also quoted in Buel, *Joel Barlow: American Citizen* 157.

intent and any form of open opposition to the status quo could be equated with national disloyalty.<sup>65</sup> Michael Scrivener has emphasised the potency of the term for those seeking to accuse reformers of foreign contamination:

“Jacobin” was not an inevitable word for the radicals and democrats – words themselves considered abusive enough. There also were “republican”, “leveller,” and “anarchist.” What made the word “Jacobin” so appealing in British political discourse? First, the word emphasised the foreign, non-British, especially Gallic qualities of the democratic movement. Among loyalists Burke was hardly alone in suggesting the British proponents of democratic reform were acting as foreign agents.

James Epstein and David Karr see “Jacobinism” as a dialogic construction rather than a definable political posture. They suggest that it “was produced in the dense interchange between plebeian radicals and government authority.”<sup>66</sup> It was a discursive tool, the fruit of confrontation between different modes of political expression, between dissidents and the authorities that condemned them. By extension, the term could be applied to those residing in France with relative ease. As scholars such as Gerald Newman and Linda Colley have argued, throughout the eighteenth century and into the revolutionary era, British nationalism or identity was being forged in opposition to all that was French.<sup>67</sup> Jacobinism was also seen as a creed threatening the social hierarchy. Lord Auckland in a letter to Prime Minister William Pitt in late 1794 defined it as “the love of insurrection for the purpose of reducing all mankind to an equality,” while spy Captain Monro noted the “levelling principles of this sett” in his monitoring of the British Club in Paris.<sup>68</sup> Support for, or mere interest in, the French

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<sup>65</sup> “Jacobin” was employed as a derisive weapon against reformers of all temperaments to undermine the reform movement. Michael Scrivener has argued that “by 1792 British radicals start to be called “Jacobins” and thereafter the word “Jacobin” is applied to British supporters of the French Revolution and British parliamentary reform.” Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories* 25.

<sup>66</sup> James Epstein and David Karr, “Playing at Revolution: British “Jacobin” Performance,” *The Journal of Modern History* 79 (September 2007) 507.

<sup>67</sup> See Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* (1987; London: Macmillan, 1997). Newman also suggests that it was not just the Revolution that precipitated this trend, but was a progressive process throughout the mid to late eighteenth century. See also Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (1992; New Haven: Yale U P, 2009).

<sup>68</sup> Lord Auckland to Mr. Pitt, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1794, *Journal and Correspondence of William, Lord Auckland*, vol. 2 (London: Bentley, 1861-1862) 271. In France also, the term was malleable. While it came to describe the more radical phase of the Revolution and those of Montagnard sympathy who supported the convergence of emergency rule with terrorising to ensure the safety of the Revolution, it also referred to the club which was an

Revolution by the middle of the 1790s was considered as tantamount to open rebellion against British constitutional liberty. Rebellion was also closely linked with egalitarianism – the erasure of hierarchy, and therefore order, in both its social and policing senses. Mark Philp associates this polarisation of opinions and portrayals with a movement away from the expression of individual thought towards an era where expression took on highly-charged political symbolism. He states that by 1793 and the outbreak of war with France, “[propaganda] was increasingly displacing the intellectual confrontation from the centre of political activity.”<sup>69</sup>

In their absence from Britain and against a backdrop of propaganda, the actions of British expatriates were judged as much through perception and projection as by proof. It is difficult therefore to assess the intentions, affinities and aims of radicals caught between two warring countries. The way behaviour and attitudes were represented is more easily accessible than what might be considered the “true” or “actual” condition of radical men and women. In this sense, this first chapter is an attempt to provide a conceptual framework, locating the place of the British Club in the historical landscape of the early 1790s as well as assessing its place in both contemporary and historical discourse.<sup>70</sup> The second of these aims is part of what Clifford Geertz has identified as the modern interest in the way in which the world is talked about and represented rather than the way it intrinsically is.<sup>71</sup> It is for this reason that the notions of outlawry, persecution, alienation or estrangement – terms of subjective perception – feature prominently in this initial discussion. To a certain extent they reflect the

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early hub of Parisian revolutionary debate and which, at the outset, and for a number of years after 1789, brought together men of a vast array of political persuasions in support of the Revolution. See also Captain Monro’s first explanatory letter to the Home Office of 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792 in which he tries to identify the principal members of the British Club (PRO TS 11/959).

<sup>69</sup> Philp, “The Fragmented Ideology of Reform” 57.

<sup>70</sup> As Amanda Goodrich has noted in her study of the aristocracy in the political debates of the 1790s, J. G. A. Pocock gave shape to this interpretative stance as the study of “discourse rather than behaviour.” J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1985) 14, quoted in Amanda Goodrich, *Debating England’s Aristocracy in the 1790s: Pamphlets, Polemics and Political Ideas* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2005) 2.

<sup>71</sup> See Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983) 4.

veritable position of British radicals caught in the middle of a military and ideological conflict, a conflict which accentuated their disaffection from the political culture of Britain. Yet they also highlight the way in which these figures were caught in a discursive propaganda war which emphasised, exploited and exaggerated their ostracism for political ends. I will attempt to demonstrate the ways in which British radicals became estranged, not only from the mainstream of political debate in Britain, but also, as the Revolution unfolded, from conceptions of international brotherhood in revolutionary France. I will highlight the different legal assaults on radical writers and activists orchestrated by representatives of the British state before exploring the way in which radicals were discursively targeted by officialdom, the press and “respectable” writers. The relative neglect of radical activists domiciled in Paris in the historiography of the French Revolution and also within the realm of British popular radicalism in the 1790s would seem to have its roots in the representations which emerged during this period. This exploration will anticipate the following chapters which seek to emphasise the different active roles played by British radicals in Paris.

### **I.1 The French Revolution and British Liberty**

During the early months following the fall of the Bastille, supportive responses to the Revolution were tolerated by the British government. French emancipation from tyranny was seen as a manifestation of the kind of civic and political liberty Englishmen had already secured, without bloodshed, in 1688. *The Times*, a far from radical newspaper, published a report on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1789, suggesting, “Had the Queen of France made the conduct of the Queen of England her model – the Revolution of France would have slept perhaps for another century.”<sup>72</sup> John Oswald, editor of the soon-to-be launched English newspaper in Paris, the *Universal Patriot*, and later member of the British Club, believed that “by the study of English Authors, by conversing with Englishmen, by discoursing on English affairs have the

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<sup>72</sup> *The Times*, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1789.

French imbibed those principles of Liberty.”<sup>73</sup> It was the flawed nature of monarchical rule rather than monarchical rule in itself which was believed to be at the root of the revolutionary dynamic in France, and this lent weight to the belief that the French Revolution was inspired by the British heritage. Such interpretations invited all of mildly progressive opinion as well as those of more radical persuasion to converge in praising the advent of the Revolution.

This broad embracing of the changes occurring across the Channel was partly due to the fact that few French revolutionaries in 1789 articulated a desire to bring about the complete downfall of the monarchy. The Revolution was seen as sounding a warning to a profligate ruler, or more particularly to his queen and reckless ministers, not the first step on the path to a classical form of democratic republicanism. Only a handful of revolutionary thinkers and activists in France at this time were openly calling for a constitutional arrangement which eradicated the monarchy.<sup>74</sup> Most members of the Jacobin Club, where the leading revolutionaries congregated, continued to support Louis XVI and voice a preference for a mixed constitution with the king at its head, at least until the royal family’s attempted flight from France in June 1791.<sup>75</sup> It was this event, almost two years after the fall of the Bastille, which gradually generated a more vibrant strain of anti-monarchical feeling among those propelling the Revolution forward in France.<sup>76</sup> Even Thomas Paine, vilified in Britain

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<sup>73</sup> “PROSPECTUS OF AN English Newspaper, PRINTED AT PARIS,” quoted in full in Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières* 299.

<sup>74</sup> Expressions of preference for a republican solution free of monarchy were initially restricted to radical members of the Cordeliers Club. Camille Desmoulins’ pamphlet of July 1789 was unequivocal in its opposition to monarchy. Louis de la Vicomterie and Pierre-François Robert also wrote against monarchy, yet they did not constitute a republican “faction”; rather, such sentiment took a literary form. Rachel Hammersley states, “Robert’s pamphlet *Républicanisme adapté à la France* is a prime example of republican propaganda designed to help its readers overcome the psychological barriers to imagining a French republic.” (Hammersley, *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans: The Cordeliers Club 1790-1794* [Rochester, NY: Boydell Press: 2005] 41). Monarchy was seen as incompatible with liberty by such writers who began to advance ideas for the establishment of a system of republican government.

<sup>75</sup> Most revolutionaries concurred with the widely-held belief promulgated since Montesquieu that republicanism was not suited to complex or expansive societies which were already based on an existing network of historic institutions. In *L’esprit des lois* (1748), Montesquieu expressed his preference for constitutional monarchy as opposed to monarchical despotism, considering republics to be too vulnerable to the flaws of men.

<sup>76</sup> Other factors which generated sympathy for a republic without monarchical interference were the king’s decision to expel the recently appointed Girondin ministers from his cabinet in mid 1792 and his increasing reluctance to abide by the restrictive terms of the constitution signed in late 1791. In March 1792 the king was

after the publication of Part Two of *Rights of Man* in February 1792, did not envisage the outright abolition of monarchy in France until mid 1791. He, like Condorcet with whom he collaborated on the editorship of *Le Républicain*, believed the fundamental problem lay in the exercise of arbitrary power by the French aristocracy and not in the institution of the Crown itself.<sup>77</sup>

Edmund Burke saw in the early progress of the Revolution signs which marked out the French interpretation of change as different from the British, however. Liberty based on the innate natural rights of all beings rather than the accumulated logic of historical evidence was not part of the Whig worldview passed down after 1688 by men such as William Blackstone and Viscount Bolingbroke. Bolingbroke wrote of “that noble fabric, the pride of Britain, the envy of her neighbours, raised by the Labour of so many centuries.”<sup>78</sup> What alerted Burke’s attention was the apparent reliance on theory as justification for change in France. His reservations convinced him to publish a denunciation in November 1790 of the French Revolution not long after he had offered his unreserved support to the revolutionary changes occurring across the Atlantic. According to Burke, the Glorious Revolution “was made to preserve our *antient* indisputable laws and liberties, and that *antient* constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty.”<sup>79</sup> Burke justified the revolution of 1688 on the grounds that it reclaimed “rights of Englishmen” rather than proclaimed the

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coerced into accepting the admission of Girondin counselors into his elite advisory circle, replacing his constitutional monarchist ministry. The new advisors included Jean-Marie Roland and Étienne Clavière. This decision was interpreted as revealing the king's growing awareness that he had to placate republican leaders whose views were beginning to gain acceptance among the political elites and the country at large.

<sup>77</sup> Amanda Goodrich has suggested that the halfway solution which endured in France from 1789 to late 1792 precipitated a more searching critique of the institution of the aristocracy, seen henceforth as the group responsible for the abuses and corruption in political power (see Goodrich, *Debating England's Aristocracy in the 1790s*).

<sup>78</sup> William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769) was a celebration of the English balanced constitution. Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke's *A Dissertation Upon Parties* (1733-1734) eulogised the British constitution with patriotic fervour. Jean Louis de L'Olme, a Swiss lawyer, also admired the British mixed monarchy, writing a tract on the constitution entitled *Constitution D'Angleterre* (1771), which was reprinted many times in the late eighteenth century.

<sup>79</sup> Edmund Burke and L. G. Mitchell ed. *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2003) 31.

“rights of man”.<sup>80</sup> Equally, the American drive for independence was simply the assertion of long-standing rights to representation rather than the application of a new and untested theoretical blueprint. Burke considered the philosophical foundations of French revolutionary action negated man’s inherent complexity and abnegated religion. He wrote, “The pretended rights of these theorists are all extremes; and in proportion as they are metaphysically true, they are morally and politically false.”<sup>81</sup>

Yet despite the intellectual impact of Burke’s opposition to the Revolution and his association of 1789 with abstract theorising and a political model antithetical to that hailed in Britain, those who visited France in the aftermath of the fall of the Bastille were not all ideological adherents of the Revolution. Many embarked on a form of revolutionary sight-seeing, curious to see the changes occurring at first-hand, rather than affirm their philosophical affinity with the Revolution. The future Earl of Liverpool witnessed the fall of the Bastille “but merely as an onlooker.” He wrote, “The whole sight has been such that nothing would have tempted me to miss it.”<sup>82</sup> The erasure of the Ancien Régime was a spectacle to be witnessed because it defied belief and description. In the months immediately following the fall of the Bastille, British visitors to France circulated with relative freedom and being a foreign spectator did not imply the type of unwavering alignment that presence in Paris from late 1792 would signify.

Often curiosity and the desire to gaze upon such a momentous event were coupled with genuine support for radical change however, and there is no doubt that many visitors to France after 1789 came from a reformist background. John Oswald went to Paris in the same year as the fall of the Bastille. David Erdman suggests, “He must have spent part of the winter and much of the spring in France establishing the network of political and organisational connections that enabled him to launch the *Universal Patriot* as a newspaper for two cities by

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<sup>80</sup> Burke, *Reflections* 32.

<sup>81</sup> Burke, *Reflections* 62.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Alger, *Englishmen* 15.



the first week in May 1790.”<sup>83</sup> Helen Maria Williams went to Paris to witness the *Fête de la Fédération* in July 1790, the first anniversary celebrations of the fall of the Bastille, and her letters written during her stay give a passionate portrait of the events she saw at first hand. Individuals such as Oswald, Robert Merry and Williams either stayed on in Paris or returned during the era of rapid change from 1792 onwards, a decision which now conveyed a clear political message. From this moment onwards, residence in the French capital could not be dismissed as tourism, curiosity or passing through; it implied ideological kinship with the aims of the Revolution and, by extension, opposition to the stance taken by the British state.

While travelling to France in the years 1789 to 1791 could certainly imply interest in and even enthusiasm for political renovation therefore, those who engaged in such revolutionary sightseeing were in no way courting exile as they would do from 1792, and more earnestly from 1793. The Revolution was not yet considered as the antithesis of all the British constitution stood for. Support was considered in some parts as evidence of a certain overflowing of sensibility, but not as proof of treasonable intent. Anna Seward described Helen Maria Williams’ first published volume as a “charming little pamphlet, that shews [*sic*] me the sunny-side of the French Revolution.”<sup>84</sup> She went on to express her hope that “time will prove the predictions of this statesman [Burke] groundless.” By January 1793, Seward’s optimism had dissolved and she wrote to Williams to criticise the latter’s decision to stay in France, where the “venom of ungrateful and rebellious sedition” had poisoned the country.<sup>85</sup> By 1803, Williams’ reputation had been established as a “refugee authoress”.<sup>86</sup> This transformation of perception took place gradually, over the course of 1792 and 1793, resulting in a broad change in the way British visitors were seen by commentators back in Britain.

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<sup>83</sup> Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières* 113.

<sup>84</sup> Letter XVI, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1790, *Letters of Anna Seward* 3: 44.

<sup>85</sup> Letter LXII, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1793, *Letters of Anna Seward* 3: 209.

<sup>86</sup> See *The Monthly Magazine or, British Register*, vol. 16, part 2 (1803) 616.

The reasons for this shift in perception were linked to developments in France. There was an awakening realisation of the realignment of attitudes to the Revolution within the French nation. Demands for a republican solution began to gain ground in late 1791, and this alerted the concern of the British authorities. The French Revolution, in both method and theory, was being steered towards a much more radical type of arrangement than that inscribed in the British constitutional heritage. Despite the drafting of the mixed constitution, obediently signed by the king in late 1791, the French Revolution no longer resembled the revolution of 1688. There were a number of violent *journées* in which the people of Paris asserted their newfound authority, and the engagement in conflict with Austria and Prussia showed that the French revolutionary government was prepared to go to great lengths to legitimise the Revolution and rally the nation around the defence of the new regime.

The events of 1792 therefore crystallised the view that the Revolution had taken a more radical turn and might begin to threaten the prevailing vision of the British model as a beacon of liberty. In August, the Tuileries were invaded by the militias of Paris and the king and his family put under house arrest. After the convocation of the National Convention later the same month, the royal family was placed in confinement and massacres occurred in the prisons of Paris in early September. By 21<sup>st</sup> September 1792 royalty had been abolished and a republic declared, which would lead to the opening of the king's trial two months later and his eventual execution. These developments in France created profound anxiety within the British state, both among those in power and those who tacitly aspired to it. Radicals who supported these changes and who took up residence in Paris were seen as potential seditious agents who had adhered to a French model of liberty.

Anxiety began to impinge on those within the British elite whose admiration for the Revolution and espousal of reforming ideas applicable on the British mainland had led them to lend early support to the reforming agendas of popular societies. 1789 had prompted

collective expressions of enthusiasm for change among Whig political circles and reforming societies as well as inspiring the founding of radical societies with a more popular support base. Richard Price addressed the Revolution Society on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1789. The speech, a celebration of the values of civic and religious liberty inscribed in the Glorious Revolution, also sent a more general message of support to both the American and French Revolutions which he saw as expressions of a more universal brand of enfranchisement rooted in natural right. Price declared, “I see the ardor for liberty catching and spreading; a general amendment beginning in human affairs; the dominion of kings changed for the dominion of laws, and the dominion of priests giving way to the dominion of reason and conscience.”<sup>87</sup> Price closed his speech with a crescendo of warning to all tyrants and oppressors who hoped to hold back the progress of liberty.

Established reforming societies such as the Revolution Society drew their membership from among the ranks of the Whig-leaning middle to upper class. The society was a respectable association set up on the centenary anniversary of the Glorious Revolution to celebrate Britain’s reforming heritage and provide impetus for the gradual improvement of the parliamentary system. Some of those who attended the Revolution Society gatherings lent their support to the founding of the Society of the Friends of the People, in April 1792, a Whig reforming initiative which found some common ground with popular reform at certain moments in the 1790s. At their founding meeting, the Friends of the People published a declaration demanding a reform of the parliamentary system, including more equal representation of the people in parliament and reform of the electing of representatives, two issues which formed part of the campaign of the London Corresponding Society.<sup>88</sup> Thomas

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<sup>87</sup> Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country, Delivered on Nov. 4 1789 at the meeting-house in the Old Jewry, to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain*, (2nd ed; London, Cadell: 1789). This printed version was published in the wake of Price’s oratory which was seen as having instigated the “pamphlet war” on the French Revolution.

<sup>88</sup> The official title was *Declaration Agreed to on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 1792, by the SOCIETY entitled The Friends of the People associated for the purpose of obtaining a Parliamentary Reform*. The later address of the following

Hardy had contributed to the founding of the London Corresponding Society in January 1792. The LCS was a reforming group whose aim was to bring about parliamentary and electoral reform, but which attracted a popular following due in part to its low membership fee. In early 1792, there appeared to be some conjunction between popular and respectable reforming agendas.

Some members of the Friends of the People were also active within the Society for Constitutional Information.<sup>89</sup> The SCI was initially guided by men such as John Horne Tooke and the Whig politicians Capel Loffe and John Cartwright after its creation in 1780. It struggled to promote the cause of political reform and campaigned for the introduction of the secret ballot and annual general elections. Yet the society began to embrace more radical reforming ideas from early 1792. The decision to endorse the publication and distribution of Thomas Paine's Part Two of *Rights of Man* in February 1792 was the most visible sign of its movement towards a platform which was more far-reaching in its calls for constitutional change, but also economic redistribution. The decision led to the gradual departure of some of its Whig membership during the course of 1792. Such men saw the priorities and principles of the society diverging from their own.<sup>90</sup> The support given to Paine's pamphlet also encouraged men from the middling classes to join the society. As a result, the social composition of the SCI changed considerably from 1792 to 1794 and it began to find more common ground with the London Corresponding Society.

The relative consensus that had existed between Whig and popular reformers began to falter therefore during the course of 1792 as reactions to Part Two of *Rights of Man* differed

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year would see many original signatories from within the reforming societies abandon their support for the initiative.

<sup>89</sup> At least one member of the Revolution Society, John Hurford Stone, also signed up to the Society of the Friends of the People address of April 1792. For a more comprehensive discussion of the Friends of the People, see below pp. 51-53.

<sup>90</sup> The minutes of the SCI meetings from 1792 show a clear shift in membership around mid March, when Thomas Paine began to attend the gatherings. Also, in May 1792, meetings began to be held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand rather than at John Horne Tooke's court at Chancery Lane. This decision perhaps indicates that the society had pretensions to open its doors to a wider population.

and as news of the September massacres and the decision to bring Louis XVI to trial filtered through to Britain. These acts, which struck at the heart of the old order in France, forced those in the political elite in Britain, albeit in opposition, to reassess their sympathy with the cause of popular reform. Love of liberty was an enduring Whig tenet, yet the type of liberty emerging in France was more democratic and socially transgressive than many members of the Whig establishment were prepared to accept, or at least to openly espouse. Those who did maintain their support for the Revolution at this stage courted social and political alienation.<sup>91</sup>

Anna Seward wrote:

See what it is to destroy the chain of subordination, which binds the various orders of national society in one common form of polity; that gradatory junction, which can alone give vigour and effect to the laws, extent and circulation to commerce, and create mutual love, and mutual dependence, amid the various ranks of men.<sup>92</sup>

Such anxiety about the effects of sudden and brutal restructuring of the social and political order were common among respectable reformers and served to reinforce the perception of a deep distinction between the changes in occurring in revolutionary France and the gradual, unitary form of political organisation which sustained British stability.

By late 1792, most core members of the Friends of the People had begun to tacitly withdraw their support for reform, now associated both with the type of popular vengeance witnessed in Paris and nascent anti-monarchical republicanism, fearing that such a stance would result in their political isolation. They maintained their overt support for the LCS, sending a declaration of support for the latter's address to the National Convention of France in October 1792, yet many were beginning to sever their ties with popular radicalism.<sup>93</sup> Not all of the founding signatories withdrew their support however. John Hurford Stone, by 1792

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<sup>91</sup> British Club members, John Hurford Stone, Robert Merry and Sampson Perry had all previously shown sympathy with the Whig reform movement before taking up more radical positions. Their expatriation in Paris was one manifestation of this changing political outlook.

<sup>92</sup> Letter LXII, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1793, *Letters of Anna Seward* 3: 202.

<sup>93</sup> See the declaration of the Constitutional Whigs and Friends of the People to the delegates of the London Corresponding Society of 16<sup>th</sup> October 1792 (PRO TS 11/965/3508/A2).

a semi-permanent resident of Paris and member of the British Club, continued to openly express his affinity with the Revolution well after the outbreak of war with France, securing his reputation as a violent incendiary among the British authorities. Thomas Christie, a one-time business associate of Stone and also a temporary resident in Paris also continued to pursue various commercial interests in Paris where he was eventually imprisoned at the start of 1793 for eight months.<sup>94</sup> It was around this time too that the SCI began to shed its semi-elitist reputation and renew its membership, allowing less respectable men to join and altering its political priorities. Its links with the LCS also grew stronger and many of its members played a central role in the founding of the British Club. Only staunch radical reformers and expatriate radicals would continue to openly espouse the cause of political change along French lines.

The waning of Whig sympathy for radical reform by late 1792 prompted the satirical jibes of radical writers such as Charles Pigott, a gentleman who distanced himself from his social class through his associations with the cause of popular radicalism. Pigott attacked the Friends of the People in Part Three of his *Jockey Club*, a pamphlet in three volumes which became increasingly radical with the developments in France.<sup>95</sup> Sampson Perry's newspaper *The Argus* also discredited the reforming credentials of the Friends of the People in a column in November 1792. A few months earlier, the newspaper had reported that "the ASSOCIATION, called The Friends Of The People, will probably give rise to a greater number of similar societies throughout the country... and the result will be a FAIR AND EQUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE." By November however, the early promise of the society had given way to doubts and Perry had lost all faith in its reforming agenda:

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<sup>94</sup> Thomas Christie's business interests in Paris are detailed in his prison file from 1793 (AN F7/4648/3).

<sup>95</sup> See Charles Pigott, *The Jockey Club, Or, a Sketch of the Manners of the Age* (London: Symonds, 1792). For a discussion of Pigott's radicalism see Jon Mee, "A Bold and Free-Spoken Man": The Strange Case of Charles Pigott," *Cultures of Whiggism": New Essays on English Literature and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. David Womersley, Paddy Bullard, and Abigail Williams (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2005) 330-50.

We at first observed of this Society, that it appeared to us to be designed as a conductor to turn away the lightening accompanying the thunder of the Public for a reform of abuses in Government... we hope they will [now] lay aside their violent fears, at least those expressed for the several classes of men whose interest they profess to have at heart. There is no occasion for apprehensions from Mr. PAINE's advice on the score of Economy and Reform.<sup>96</sup>

By the time of his major project to sketch the history of the French Revolution, completed during a stay in Newgate jail, Perry was accusing the reformers of “patriotic band” of “leading the zealous and intrepid into snares and ambush.”<sup>97</sup> A number of the members of the British Club had been involved in the early meetings of the Friends of the People. John Hurford Stone, D.E. MacDonnell, Sampson Perry, Robert Merry and Lord Edward Fitzgerald were all either among the society's members or had initially expressed support for its objectives. Merry, Fitzgerald, Stone and MacDonnell all signed the Friends of the People declaration of 11<sup>th</sup> April 1792 but all were absent at the signing of the address printed on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1793. By late 1792, these central figures of the British Club no longer held out any hope for elite Whig assistance in the cause of political reform and were disappointed by the society's refusal to support the SCI's collaboration with Paine. They had begun to explore other associational channels in Paris and London and this is reflected in their cessation of their association with Whig reforming politics. In many ways the British Club can be seen as part of the reaction to the elite withdrawal from the reform scene in Britain.

While respectable reformers began to distance themselves from the French Revolution, the British government also began a more explicit campaign against radical activists. Prompted by the progressively radical turn of events in France and the apparent impact that French liberty was having, or feared to have, on popular politics at home, the British ruling authorities, under Prime Minister William Pitt, began to take a much more stringent approach to expressions of opposition, forcing many to either withdraw their support for such views, risk a prison term, or face exile. Thomas Paine had published Part One of *Rights of Man* in

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<sup>96</sup> *The Argus*, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1792, quoted in Mee, “*The Magician No Conjuror*” 49.

<sup>97</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 9.

1791. In this he called for the foundation of government on principles of natural rather than hereditary right. Although Paine's tract drew concern and criticism from within the elite, it was not subject to the kind of concerted denunciations that Part Two would undergo after its publication in February 1792. Toleration of reformist literature had narrowed by early 1792, particularly literature which evoked admiration for the type of solutions being found across the Channel. Publishers, booksellers, newspaper editors and writers began to be pursued, sometimes relentlessly, by the Government for having produced, published or circulated "seditious words", ostensibly threatening the very existence of the British constitution and its revered combination of Commons, Lords and Crown. Militias were stationed in key areas thought to be more vulnerable to attacks from without, particularly French-backed invasion attempts and local loyalist activists gathered under the pretext of preserving liberty and property. Lord Auckland, writing to Sir Morton Eden on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1792, surveyed the scene with measured optimism:

I think that we can maintain our interior, unless some successful attack should take place from without. We have had various alarms in that respect, and many measures of precaution and defence have been taken. It is beyond a doubt that it was meant to give us trouble both within and from without; it is also known that immense sums have been distributed in England by order of the Conseil Executif, to make an insurrection in different parts of the kingdom, in the last week of November or in the first week of this month. And the villains were so confident of success that they anticipated it in Paris, and I have accordingly seen Paris bulletins and letters, with all the details of a revolt in Westminster, similar to many of the horrid scenes in Paris.<sup>98</sup>

Whether or not there was a real threat of these subversive challenges to the British mixed constitution prompting a revolution, the authorities used this threat in an attempt to disable the popular radical movement, crush the Opposition press and silence expressions of dissent. The result, in the words of one British Club member, was a culture of fear which "encouraged the *alarmists* to make what use they pleased of the *alarmed*."<sup>99</sup> Radicals such as Sampson Perry were quick to identify the strategies and mechanisms used by the government

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<sup>98</sup> Lord Auckland to Sir Morton Eden, Hague, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1792, *Journal and Correspondence of William, Lord Auckland* 2: 472-73.

<sup>99</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 4.



to generate a sense of loyalty to the ruling authorities and the status quo. The editor of the *Universal Patriot*, an English-language newspaper to be published in Paris, had already begun to identify the renewed vigour of ministerial repression towards radical thought as early as 1790:

The Debates in the British Parliament and the political events of England, will also be narrated in the UNIVERSAL PATRIOT, from the best information and with a veracity not the less accurate for that the Editor will not have before his eyes the terror of the Pillory, nor the dread of those vexatious prosecutions for libels, engines which the British Ministry have ever ready in their hands to crush whoever shall be hardy enough to expose to light the *pious mysteries* of a Government corrupt and systematically hostile to the cause of Freedom.<sup>100</sup>

The author, probably John Oswald, felt all the advantage of commenting from outside the British state. He would not be vulnerable to accusations of libel and the threat of the pillory for expressing views critical of the government.

It was not only the ideas themselves – assertions of the rights of man, universal liberty and the need for fundamental reform of political institutions – that were considered dangerous, but their circulation among and appeal to a more popular reading public. Thomas Paine revealed that he had been aware of this when he sanctioned the cheap publication of Part Two of *Rights of Man* by corresponding and constitutional societies all over the country. He noted in his *Letter Addressed to the Addressers* of September 1792 that, “the cheap edition of the first part was begun about the first of last April, and from that moment, and not before, I expected a prosecution, and the event has proved that I was not mistaken.”<sup>101</sup> The repressive context did not deter many radical writers from seeking to publish their tracts but it did impinge on how they constructed their strategies of defence and presented their work.

The Royal Proclamation of 21st May 1792, delivered by the Pitt ministry on behalf of George III, targeted seditious writings considered as fomenting discontent among the king’s subjects. A number of prosecutions, including that of Thomas Paine, announced on the same

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<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières* 299.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Paine, “Letter Addressed to the Addressers on the Late Proclamation,” *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: Citadel Press, 1945) 486.

day, were directly linked to the proclamation. Yet behind the highly visible weapon of libel charges, there were other, less explicit, tactics employed to hound radicals either underground or out of the country, often through the willing media of loyalist or “Church and King” bands who policed the activities of taverns and debating clubs. Financial tools were used to intensify the pressure on Opposition publishing houses and journals.<sup>102</sup> The Pitt ministry also exerted pressure on those indicted for sedition to seek expatriation rather than standing trial in public. Although sedition trials were *ex officio* proceedings, entirely controlled by the authorities and left little scope for the indicted to mount a meaningful defence, there was always a danger that such events could be transformed into scenes of unanticipated popular protest.<sup>103</sup> Rather than risk outpourings of public sympathy for radical reformers around an official and highly visible public trial, or even the slim possibility of a jury finding the defendants not guilty, the authorities preferred to encourage radicals to leave the country. Exiled writers were politically marginalised and their absence allowed the government press to point not only to their guilt, but also to their lack of courage in evading justice.

## **I.2 From Revolutionary Tourists to Political Exiles: British Departures to Paris, 1792-93**

While early departures to France in the wake of the Revolution did not necessarily have an overtly ideological portent, arriving in France from mid 1792 onwards could not fail to carry a much more potent political message. Although most radicals set off in relatively commonplace circumstances, without the imminent threat of imprisonment, transportation or even death, in contrast to the Irish rebels who immigrated to America at the close of the 1790s, some degree of pressure had been exerted on most of the expatriate visitors to France from mid to late 1792.<sup>104</sup> Many had been threatened with public prosecution. Thomas Paine and Sampson Perry left for France pursued by charges of sedition which would have led to

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<sup>102</sup> For a detailed assessment of the “Proclamation Against Seditious Writings” and its impact on Opposition newspapers, see Lucyle Werkmeister, *A Newspaper History of England, 1792-1793*, pp. 79-85.

<sup>103</sup> This meant that members of the jury were selected rather than chosen at random.

<sup>104</sup> For a comprehensive account of British departures to America, see Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals*.

imprisonment had they remained in Britain. Others had been impeded in their attempts to pursue public or private activities by a British ruling administration hostile to expressions of reforming sympathy. Robert Merry's theatrical career had been interrupted after successive uses of French themes in his stage productions had begun to alert the authorities, and John Frost went to France pursued by accusations of sedition after he was accused of openly avowing his anti-monarchical convictions outside a London coffee house.<sup>105</sup> Doctor William Maxwell was, according to the spy Captain Monro, "disrespected for his precipitate flight from London" among British radicals congregating in Paris, but was still admitted into their ranks.<sup>106</sup> The Scottish radical Thomas Muir resolved to visit France for a short spell after being charged with sedition in January 1793 having delivered an inflammatory speech at a gathering in Edinburgh in December 1792. Friends in the law profession began to shun his company after his charges became known, and his ostracism was exacerbated after his visit to France.<sup>107</sup> Those who left for the French capital from mid 1792 had, on the whole, been subject to a certain degree of ministerial repression and were considered by their own government as outsiders to be held in suspicion and surveyed with caution.

Expatriate radicals were also those for whom the political scene in Britain held little hope for the sort of change they desired to witness, despite concerted efforts to bring about those changes through political engagement or satirical writing. Disillusionment with efforts to seek redress of political grievances and overturn the prevailing authorities in Britain was one factor in decisions to remove to Paris. There was a pervasive feeling among British radicals domiciled in Paris that their political views, sense of justice and conception of social

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<sup>105</sup> For a detailed appraisal of John Frost's sedition case, see John Barrell, "Coffee-House Politicians" in *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2006) 75-102, and James Epstein, "'Equality and No King': Sociability and Sedition: The case of John Frost," *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain 1770-1840*, ed. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2002) 43-61.

<sup>106</sup> These individual portraits are contained in Captain Monro's account sent on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792 (Kew, The National Archives, Public Record Office, TS 11/959). This report was sent from London, suggesting that the spy had returned from Paris briefly during his mission.

<sup>107</sup> See Peter Mackenzie, *The Life of Thomas Muir*.

rank were at odds with those in mainstream opinion or exercising political power. As well as formal and overt alienation, a deeper form of disaffection was taking hold, which included philosophical and moral estrangement. Perry, Mary Wollstonecraft and others expressed their dissatisfaction with the lethargy of civil society in Britain.

Not all radicals pursued by the British authorities went into exile however. Leading members of the LCS and key figures in the SCI remained in Britain, eventually, in the case of Thomas Hardy, John Thelwall and John Horne Tooke among others, to be brought to trial for treason in 1794. These figures faced ostracism within the boundaries of their own country, whatever the verdict, and death if found guilty. This internal estrangement could be just as onerous, if not more so, than the exile of their compatriots in Paris. The strategies of dissension of those who remained in Britain thus began to differ from those who, newly settled in Paris, could openly avow anti-monarchical or proto-republican ideals. Joseph Gerrald stood trial in March 1794, accused of sedition after having acted as a LCS delegate to the British Convention in December 1793. Gerrald drew upon the language of ancient constitutionalism rather than natural rights in his defence speech.<sup>108</sup> Gregory Claeys has argued that reformers in Britain called for “a purification of the ancient constitution,” while James Epstein notes how “democratic writers and speakers freely mixed historical and natural concepts of rights, moving with little sense of incompatibility between the twin poles of natural reason and the constitutional past.”<sup>109</sup> Radicals in Britain tended increasingly to couch their views in the language of the British constitution, or attempted to fit natural rights theory into a recognised heritage of Anglo-Saxon freedom. Radical expatriates in Paris however could more easily invoke natural rights theory, anti-monarchical views and abstract justifications for reform which were free of national reference, than their compatriots in

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<sup>108</sup> For a discussion of Gerrald’s case, see Epstein, “Our Real Constitution”.

<sup>109</sup> See Gregory Claeys, *The French Revolution Debate in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 6 and Epstein, “Our Real Constitution” 31.

Britain. They were able to espouse a degree of democratic renewal and national regeneration that could not have been countenanced by their counterparts in British reforming societies.

The place where radicals were writing was as important as when, what or how, therefore. As Mark Philp has pointed out, ideas often emerged organically in the specific context in which they were being voiced. Philp asserts, “There is a temptation when looking at controversies to see writing and speaking as expressing already existing ideas, but there is much to be said for recognising a more complex relationship. It is frequently in the act of writing and speaking that we form ideas and make them choate.”<sup>110</sup> Here Philp draws on Judith Butler’s notion of identity construction as a dynamic process. Ideas were expressed differently according to the context in which they emerged. What a radical said in Britain was not the same as what he or she felt able to express in France. This is not to say that all activists were simply pragmatic opportunists, but the circumstances of writing did change the nature of what was written. There is thus a case for considering the radicals who had some physical contact with revolutionary Paris separately from those who looked on from Britain. The reality of their expatriation meant that they had more scope for expressing ideas and giving voice to criticism which would not have been authorised in the British public arena.

### **I.3 Expatriate Radicals Viewed by their British Critics**

Those who went to France or who remained there after 1792 had often been the targets of repression or at least some form of overt or tacit political pressure. They had been coaxed into self-enforced exile and some were represented as national outcasts. The experience of marginalisation, albeit to differing degrees, was a unifying factor, linking members of the British Club in Paris and providing them with common ground and grievance. Expatriate residents of Paris after 1792 were also people for whom the Revolution continued to epitomise the type of changes required to correct the flaws which dogged Old Europe and had

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<sup>110</sup> Philp, “The Fragmented Ideology of Reform” 72.

some sort of ideological resonance as a an antidote to British “corruption”.<sup>111</sup> Visiting France could no longer be interpreted as mere curiosity by late 1792 and setting foot on French soil was a political act which demanded deep commitment and entailed heightened risk. Their presence in Paris would henceforth be seized upon by the British authorities in the ensuing propaganda battle. Those who established and were active within the British Club became the targets of scrutiny as the diplomatic circumstances between the two countries altered. On the whole they were considered not simply as interested observers or mild supporters of the Revolution but as active adherents who, through their presence in France, had internalised the values of the Revolution and shown their disloyalty to the British state.

Portraits of British residents in Paris during the course of 1792 tended to highlight their alienation from rational, enlightened British society. Even if many had positive reasons for taking up residence in France and were not simply victims of the British government’s repressive agenda, they were nevertheless represented in ways which served the political purposes of the ruling ministry. They were frequently depicted as conspiratorial and as carriers of infection, capable of spreading French anarchic contagion to undermine the foundations of the British constitution. They were also subject to deeply personal character assassinations. Critics described them as intoxicated, delusional, irrational, childlike, naïve, inconstant and occasionally as inhuman and pathologically violent. Sampson Perry, writing retrospectively of his experience of persecution in Britain, felt he was treated like “a monster in human shape.”<sup>112</sup> Even Joel Barlow, an American citizen who had been in close contact with British radical groups before taking up long-term residence in Paris, was not spared. After delivering the SCI congratulatory address to the National Convention with John Frost in November 1792, his wife Ruth wrote, “Everything evil is said of you, & I am obliged to avoid

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<sup>111</sup> Amanda Goodrich argues in *Debating England's Aristocracy in the 1790s* that the notion of British oligarchic corruption developed partly in response to the prolonged period of mixed monarchical rule in France after the fall of the Bastille. By keeping a mixed constitution and not getting rid of the king immediately, the revolutionaries prompted the questioning of the role and power of aristocratic elites within government.

<sup>112</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 8.

company not to hear you abused.”<sup>113</sup> Expatriates in France were frequently accused of seeking to undermine the fabric of Britain’s constitutional stability.

In many ways, the representations of British radicals mirrored those which related to the French nation at large and there are striking similarities between descriptions of British exiles and Burke's depiction of revolutionary France, a portrait which inspired a conservative reaction to French “anarchy” in Britain. Through their presence on French soil, activists were seen as having compromised their independence, sacrificed their Britishness and internalised the values of the Revolution. Edmund Burke had denounced the “delusive plausibilities”, “specious pretences”, and “excess of zeal” of revolutionaries in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, believing that theoretical declarations of natural rights had prompted authority to “rashly to engage in perilous adventures.” He called the plans “abstract”, “unnatural”, and “absurd”, the revolutionaries themselves “intoxicated with their unprepared greatness” and incapable of having a “comprehensive connected view of the various complicated external and internal interests which go to the formation of that multifarious thing called a state.”<sup>114</sup> The revolutionaries were ill-equipped for the onerous task of nation-building therefore and, as Burke emphasised, nation-building itself was not something theoretical, but was the work of empirical and gradual change.

Burke’s denunciations did not recede as the Revolution continued and he published a heavily critical account of the events of 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792 in the *Annual Register* (1792), which he edited.<sup>115</sup> In the account he emphasised the summary justice of the “multitude” towards those whose protection had previously been assured by the court. Priests were “cut in pieces with sabres”, and the “vigorous resistance” of one of the king’s bodyguards “only rendered his death more cruel.” Another guard, a Monsieur Suleau, was “butchered without mercy.” These acts of aggression and cruelty are contrasted with the clemency of the Swiss

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<sup>113</sup> Ruth Barlow to Joel Barlow, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1793, quoted in Buel, *Joel Barlow: American Citizen* 158.

<sup>114</sup> Burke, *Reflections* 38-43.

<sup>115</sup> Although the account covered events from 1792, it was published six years later, in 1798.

Guard who valiantly respected the instructions given by the king not to fire on the people, even though they were far outnumbered by the plundering “insurgents” invading the Tuileries. Burke focused on the uncompromising nature of popular vengeance (“no quarter was given them”) and the lack of empathy shown by the militias for their victims who were “put to death in the most unfeeling manner” and, even when on their knees begging for mercy, were “seized in that attitude, and instantly thrown out of the windows into the court below.”<sup>116</sup> Events such as the August days therefore crystallised the conflict of perception that the French Revolution provoked among British commentators.

In a similar vein to Burke, Anna Seward, who was writing a year later in 1793, denounced the “brutal indecency” of the National Convention and the “narrow-hearted and cruel policy” instituted there.<sup>117</sup> She remembered the people “butchered” in their defence of Louis XVI and noted the “murderous stroke” which eventually brought an end to the monarchical dynasty in France. Cruelty, rashness and heartlessness characterised popular justice, while the monarchy and their protectors were portrayed as demonstrating all the restraint necessary for enlightened leadership. The degeneration of the French Revolution was also caricatured by artists such as Thomas Rowlandson, whose *The Contrast – Which is Best?* drew a Manichean distinction between British civility and French barbarity (see Appendix G, Figure 1). Rowlandson pitted British “loyalty”, “morality”, “obedience to the laws”, “justice”, and “happiness” against French “liberty” epitomised by “atheism, perjury, rebellion, treason, anarchy, murder, equality, madness, cruelty, injustice, treachery, ingratitude, idleness, famine, national and private ruin, misery.”<sup>118</sup> A correspondent of Lord Auckland’s described his observations of the state of Paris and its inhabitants at the end of 1790. He wrote:

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<sup>116</sup> See *The Annual Register or a View of the History, Politics and Literature For the Year 1792. Part I: History of Europe* (London: Rivington, 1798) 519-20.

<sup>117</sup> Letter LXII, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1793, *Letters of Anna Seward* 3: 209.

<sup>118</sup> Thomas Rowlandson, *The Contrast 1792: Which is Best?* (1793).



I spent nearly a month at Paris, and it was there only I could form an adequate idea of the state of the people's mind, of the violence of party, of the confusion, anarchy, effervescence produced by so sudden and so great a change as had been that of the Revolution...I am now neither aristocrat nor democrat...The violence, injustice, ignorance of both, are equally disgusting. It is impossible to converse rationally with the partisans of either. Passion takes the place of argument, and abuse of discussion...Men of both parties seem equally averse to calm discussion.<sup>119</sup>

In this passage we get an insight into the crude national stereotyping that was commonly used among the British elite. For the author of this passage, it was not ideological or social prejudice that guided his reaction to what he observed in France but rather a sense of narrowing national bias. He was “neither aristocrat nor democrat” as both were seen equally averse to reasoned debate, preventing the writer from feeling any affinity with one or the other. French citizens of all social ranks were considered as lacking in the refinement of manners and self-discipline that characterised the British rational public sphere. British sympathisers resident in France were reduced to the same type of caricature. In loyalist verdicts they had literally become French and could be assimilated into the portrait of revolutionary France provided by Burke, Seward and Rowlandson. In exile, they were empty vessels which the authorities could fill with an array of images of imagined horrors.<sup>120</sup>

### **I.3.1 The British Club: A “party of conspirators”**

British residents in Paris were the potential dangerous carriers of the so-called “French disease”, as Burke had famously dubbed it, capable of conveying revolutionary lawlessness to Britain and spreading it among the loyal British populace. They were also suspected of concerting with French revolutionary leaders on the likelihood of the success of an invasion on British soil. There may have been some truth in this accusation and the French diplomatic archives reveal that British and Irish visitors may have incited the French to aid with a foreign landing. The French foreign minister considered Lord Edward Fitzgerald's visit to be “solely

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<sup>119</sup> Mr. Stanley to Lord Auckland, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1790, *Journal and Correspondence of William, Lord Auckland* 2: 379.

<sup>120</sup> James Gillray portrayed the expected horrors of life if the French successfully invaded the British Isles in his *Promis'd Horrors of the French Invasion, -or- Forcible Reasons for Negotiating a Regicide Peace* (London, 1796). Trauma and horror were also typical gothic motifs.

to see Payne and to tell him that if he could give the 40,000 volunteers, who would usually only gather for a day, enough to survive for three months, a revolution would be inevitable.”<sup>121</sup> Communication between Britain and France was shrouded in secrecy and suspicion, particularly after the outbreak of war in February 1793. Radicals based in Paris either avoided political commentary in their correspondence or veiled their opinions in coded language, which did little to assuage the British authorities of the innocence of their intentions. They were particularly vulnerable to accusations of involvement in French-backed invasion plots by virtue of their continued enthusiasm for the Revolution and presence in France. These accusations were often made by British spies, sent by the Pitt government, whose concerns about foreign contamination guided them in the way they documented the activities of British radical residents.

Captain Monro had been sent to follow John Frost and Thomas Paine to Paris and identified a conspiratorial vein within the ranks of the British expatriate community. On 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792 he reported:

I here beg leave to remark that the people concern'd in these addresses extend their views in the most culpable degree far beyond simply a mere reform in the [more?] equal representation in Parliament; they extend their damnable ideas to the total [*sic*] subversion of Royalty, and the entire overthrow of the present British Constitution on which they mean to form a Republic. There are people in power in France now backing them in their diabolical schemes, and I dare say will gladly give them every assistance in their power to carry them into execution.<sup>122</sup>

Monro considered that the British contingent were firmly anti-monarchical in their views and willing to solicit the aid of France in carrying out a campaign to undermine the British constitution. On 21<sup>st</sup> December 1792 Monro wrote to Lord Grenville at the Foreign Office. He disclosed, “Their dispositions are such that I am however sure they would, with the assistance

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<sup>121</sup> La Courneuve, Archives Diplomatiques, Affaires Étrangères, Correspondance Anglaise, vol. 587 folio 101, quoted in Woodward, “Les projets de descente en Irlande sous la Convention, et les réfugiés irlandais et anglais en France: d’après des documents inédits.” *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 8 (1931) 4.

<sup>122</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959.

of France, put anything in execution that could injure their country.”<sup>123</sup> The British agent identified the potential for revolutionary plotting among those resident in Paris. He advised, “England ought to be on their guard against such parties.”<sup>124</sup> Monro described Sir Robert Smith as “exerting every nerve to ruin his country” and Robert Rayment as “not only an enemy to the Minister, but to his country.”<sup>125</sup> While dismissing the talent of Nicholas Joyce, another member of the British Club, Monro signalled his “strong propensity to ruin his country.”<sup>126</sup> Radicals were portrayed as being primarily involved in French politics with the aim of undermining the British state, and as traitors who were capable of carrying out acts of desperate vengeance against their home country.

Monro concluded his report for the 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792 by reassuring ministers of the fact that the British Club members were “contemptible for their numbers as consequence” yet warning that “such people have in general been the beginners of Revolutions on republican principles, and when their Doctrine becomes popular then people of greater consequence step forward.” While there were relatively few committed conspirators, their lack of numbers and marginality could be made up for by the zeal of their views, the violence of their characters but also by the wide circulation of their ideas. It was not necessarily the members of the British Club who were considered dangerous, but the way in which ideas expressed in such a restricted circle might escape the narrow confines of marginal politics and be absorbed into mainstream opposition culture. Monro recommended that the government keep “a watchful eye” on the group who he considered would “stand at nothing” in the pursuit of their “diabolical plans.”<sup>127</sup> At the end of the month, Monro sent a further despatch to Lord Grenville, reiterating the violent nature of the group’s intentions, despite their diminishing

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<sup>123</sup> George Granville Leveson-Gower, Duke of Sutherland, *The Despatches of Earl Gower, English Ambassador at Paris from June 1790 to August 1792* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1885) 263.

<sup>124</sup> *The Despatches of Earl Gower* 263.

<sup>125</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959.

<sup>126</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959.

<sup>127</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959.

numbers and impact. He wrote, “We have however still many enemies here, who would stand at nothing to ruin their country.”<sup>128</sup> Monro’s reports from December therefore accentuate the conspiratorial streak in British radical politics in France and depict the group as an ultra-violent fringe in the radical underworld whose members had little sense of loyalty to their country. For Munro, the British Club had little weight in French politics and the incessant disputes and petty quarrelling of its members had led many to abandon the gatherings by early 1793.<sup>129</sup> Monro suggested that the French National Convention was “tired of such nonsense sensing the insignificance of the people that presents them.” Members of the British Club were “now really much beneath the notice of anyone; struggling for consequence among themselves, jealous of one another, differing in opinion, and insignificant in a body.”<sup>130</sup> Yet despite their marginality and insignificance at the turn of 1793, radicals were still to be treated with vigilance because of the extremity of their views but more significantly as a result of the danger posed by the potential transmission and circulation of their doctrines.

The continued surveillance of radicals by spies working on behalf of the Home Office and Foreign Office was due to the nervousness of the Pitt ministry about the possibility of a French landing on British soil backed by intelligence supplied by British sympathisers many of whom were still in two-way communication between both countries. Monro himself had noted the British Club’s efforts to maintain communication with England.<sup>131</sup> The intermixing of British and Irish radicals in the French capital also caused concern to the authorities as it was feared that the culture of more organised Irish resistance to British rule could influence the British radical movement.<sup>132</sup> Lord Auckland, who monitored British activities on a

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<sup>128</sup> George Monro, 27<sup>th</sup> December 1792, *The Despatches of Earl Gower* 268.

<sup>129</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, Paris, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1792. Monro suggests that Robert Rayment had stopped attending British Club meetings and had taken up employment in the finance department. He describes the members of the Club as “constantly quarrelling among themselves.” (PRO FO 27/40 Part 1).

<sup>130</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, Paris, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1792, PRO FO 27/40 Part 1.

<sup>131</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959.

<sup>132</sup> The British Club address of November 1792 was a joint declaration by both the English, Scottish and Irish residents of Paris. Henry Redhead Yorke suggests that there might have been a separate Irish Club in Paris, but at the end of 1792 this distinction had not yet been formalised. (AN C 11/278/40).

mission to Paris, suggested that “eight or ten other English and Scotch” were actively aiding the Jacobins and even “in great measure conduct their present manoeuvres.”<sup>133</sup> The belief that British residents were not simply party to, but dictating revolutionary decision-making, highlights the extent to which such expatriate figures unsettled the authorities. They were frequently credited with disproportionate influence in the revolutionary administration.

Writing a decade after the heyday of the British Club, during a later visit to Napoleonic France in 1802, Henry Redhead Yorke described meeting a fellow former Club member, Robert O’Reilly, who he described as “one of the rankest conspirators against our country.” He wrote:

He ran away from England on account of the debts which he had incurred as one of the proprietors or managers of the Opera House, and set up in Paris as a persecuted Irish patriot. From the year 1792 to the present hour he has been ceaselessly engaged in plots against England, and his hatred increases daily against our country to whose genial soil he knows he can never return. He has fought against England in the French armies, and glories in the fact.<sup>134</sup>

Even former associates of British radical reformers insisted on the treasonable undercurrent characterising the expatriate community in Paris. For Yorke, who had renounced his radical affinities while serving a prison sentence under the terms of the Two Acts, O’Reilly’s behaviour in Paris was driven by hatred of England. He was seen as harbouring an all-consuming animosity towards the British nation which fuelled his willingness to plot in compact with the French. Yorke did not miss the opportunity however of suggesting that O’Reilly’s radicalism was more an artificially constructed cover than a genuine ideological stance. For Yorke, O’Reilly’s commitment to the French Revolution was a pragmatic way of avoiding persecution for debt.

Accounts of the flagrant betrayal of all national feeling abounded amongst critics of expatriate radicals. The *Monthly Review* noted in 1798 that John Hurford Stone had shown in

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<sup>133</sup> Bland Burges to Lord Auckland, Whitehall, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1792, *The Journal and Correspondence of William, Lord Auckland* 2: 378.

<sup>134</sup> Yorke, *France in 1802* 228.

his letters to Joseph Priestley that he could “co-operate in every plan of her enemies to subjugate and ruin her; to rejoice in the success of those plans, or to grieve at their overthrow!”<sup>135</sup> Hurford Stone, though once noted for his membership of the respectable Society of the Friends of the People and the Revolution Society, was now perceived as a violent and insurrectionary ultra-radical in Paris.<sup>136</sup> As was common among anti-Jacobin reports from the later 1790s, Stone was considered an outright traitor who would have happily contributed to the invasion of Britain by the French revolutionary armies. One Home Office informant wrote of Stone’s cooperation with French leaders in a “project, idea or plan” to orchestrate a French-based invasion of the British mainland. The account of the plan detailed the precise location of the intended landing and the way in which the French forces would enter the country: “The plan stated, and the statement was supported by a Drawing, that at, or near the Spits, there is a passage where the water is shallow, or from some other local cause which I know not, but the sinking one or two hulks of seventy four gunships, would prevent the British fleet, when in the harbour, from coming out.” The author admits that the “practicability” of the plan had not been discovered, but he suggests that Thomas Paine’s translator, Achille Audibert, was to set out the plans before the *Comité de Salut Public*. The report also gave details of how boats would be sunk and troops landed at the Isle of Wight before heading for the mainland at Southampton. Men from the Northern port towns of Calais, Boulogne, Dunkirk and Dieppe, who could converse in English, would be called upon to take part in the invasion. The author concluded, “This is the only thing like a systematic plan of home attack on England, that I ever heard, nor do I believe that any other was

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<sup>135</sup> *The Monthly Review* vol. 27 (1798) 351.

<sup>136</sup> Hurford Stone was not the only “respectable” radical to become alienated from his former associates and class. Charles Pigott and Sampson Perry also strayed from their traditional place in the social order through their continued commitment to radical change.

seriously entertained.”<sup>137</sup> The informant suggested that Stone was using his knowledge of the English coast to coordinate a successful line of attack and was in close concert with the French government and advisors such as Achille Audibert in devising the plans. Although the account detailed the precise strategy which was to be adopted in the invasion plan, the author conceded that this was the only known example of an organised assault being planned.

### **I.3.2 The “real situation” of John Hurford Stone and Conspiracy Anxiety**

John Hurford Stone’s reputation for secrecy and conspiracy and his support for a French landing in Britain were key themes during the trial of his brother William for high treason in 1796. The trial of William Stone brought to light the anxiety within the ruling elite about the potential of British radicals in Paris cooperating with French invasion plots. Hurford Stone is a shadowy, protean figure in the landscape of British radicalism. He was a regular at the Revolution Society and a follower of Richard Price at his Unitarian congregation in Hackney. While in London he also attended the inaugural meeting of the Society of the Friends of the People and signed up as a subscriber to the Literary Fund in May 1792 to help struggling writers and their families. Yet despite Stone’s early involvement in respectable radical initiatives in Britain, he also gained a reputation as a fierce ultra-radical after his emigration to Paris. Hurford Stone’s rightful place in the radical movement and his “real situation in France,” have bewildered both contemporary observers and modern-day historians alike.<sup>138</sup>

For much of the 1790s, Stone was in Paris, where he was a member and sometime president of the British Club during the few months of its existence. His involvement in

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<sup>137</sup> See PRO TS 11/965/3510/A3. Although the account details the precise strategy which was to be adopted in the invasion plan, the author does concede that this was the only known example of an organised assault being planned.

<sup>138</sup> These were the precise words used by one of the defence attorneys during William Stone’s trial and revealed the difficulty contemporary commentators faced in determining the “real” position of radicals who had left the country, despite the accounts sent by spies such as Captain Monro.

radical circles on both sides of the Channel is sparsely-documented and seen from the opposing perspectives of the British legal establishment and the French revolutionary committees. Stone had a far from favourable reputation on the British mainland. For Hester Piozzi:

Helena Williams should mind who she keeps company with – so indeed should Hester Piozzi: that fine Man She brought to our house lives in *no* Emigrant’s Hotel at Paris but a common Lodging, in a place where Numbers lodge: he carried *no* wife over with him, nor *no* Children, they are left at Hackney I am told.<sup>139</sup>

Henry Yorke, one of his fellow associates at the British Club, noted, “It is singular so spiritual a damsel should harbour and entertain a man of whom no one, not even in Paris, speaks a good word.”<sup>140</sup> An obituary of Helen Williams published in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1828 spoke of Stone as “one of those singularly black sheep, which even the liberal politics of modern ecclesiastical government cannot tolerate.”<sup>141</sup> Captain Monro, who was usually so categorical, struggled to define Stone’s status. He highlighted his relative anonymity in the eyes of the authorities in contrast to his comparatively substantial influence in Paris circles: “Mr Stone, I don’t know who this man is, but I have some idea he is concern’d in the *Courier d’Europe*, he is a very violent man indeed and also in high esteem with this sett [*sic*].”<sup>142</sup> Citizen Arthur, a regular at White’s Hotel, denounced Stone as a counterrevolutionary to the French authorities in 1794.<sup>143</sup> As Samuel Rogers put it during the trial of William Stone, in a climate of suspicion and surveillance, “the most innocent intentions were liable to misconstruction.”<sup>144</sup> Yet it is doubtful that Hurford Stone had entirely innocent purposes,

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<sup>139</sup> Hester Thrale Piozzi to Penelope Weston, 15<sup>th</sup> September [1792], *The Piozzi Letters: Correspondence of Hester Lynch Piozzi, 1784-1821 (formerly Mrs. Thrale)*, ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1989) 2: 68.

<sup>140</sup> Yorke, *France in 1802* 248.

<sup>141</sup> *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol. 98, part 1 (1828) 373.

<sup>142</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959.

<sup>143</sup> See Citizen Arthur’s declaration which led to Hurford Stone’s arrest by the revolutionary authorities, AN F7/4775/23.

<sup>144</sup> T. B. Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanours from the Earliest Period to the Year 1783, with Notes and Other Illustrations...and Continued from the Year 1793 to the Present Time*, vol. 25 (London: 1818) 1257.



from whichever perspective, British or French, they are judged. He certainly did show interest in a regime change in Britain and despite his reputation as a revolutionary conspirator back in London, his status within France was far from clear. He may have had the ear of key revolutionaries, even informing the *Comité de Salut Public* of the recently published Traitorous Correspondence Bill in Britain, yet he was also arrested twice under the measures taken against foreigners at the close of 1793 and early 1794.<sup>145</sup> What is beyond doubt is that his words and expressed intentions were interpreted and dissected by his judges to suit particular political agendas.

The trial of his brother, William Stone for high treason led to the exposure in minute detail of John Hurford Stone's private correspondence from Paris. William Stone stood trial for "compassing and imagining the king's death" and "adherence to his enemies". "Imagining the king's death" made plotting, whether anticipated rather than actualised, a "real" or "overt act" of treason in the mid-1790s.<sup>146</sup> The prosecution levelled that William "did conspire, consult, consent and agree with one John Hurford Stone and one William Jackson to encourage a hostile invasion from France, aid insurrection, rebellion and war, invite the king's enemies and procure intelligence to aid those enemies."<sup>147</sup> Though not indicted himself, it was Hurford Stone who became one of the prime actors in the proceedings and who shouldered the brunt of the accusations of conspiracy. For both the prosecution and defence it was John who had led his brother into error. William was at worst an accessory to his brother's plotting and at best, a loyal sibling desperately attempting to protect his brother from ministerial reprisals. Both sides agreed on the fact that the intelligence William had collected served to *dissuade* the French from invading and assured them of the lack of grassroots support for a

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<sup>145</sup> Paris, Archives Diplomatiques, Affaires Étrangères, Correspondance Anglaise, vol. 587, folio 46, quoted in Woodward, *Les projets de descente*. Woodward mentions the letter, translated into French for the *Comité de Salut Public*, in which Stone gave details of the Traitorous Correspondence Bill in March 1793. Conveying political news or opinion would have been easily equated with espionage and treason in the climate of 1793.

<sup>146</sup> For an enlightening discussion of the battle over meaning and language in 1790s political culture, see John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2000).

<sup>147</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1165.

regime change. The case, rather absurdly therefore, revolved around the question of whether it was treason or not to send information to the French discouraging them from attempting an invasion of the British mainland. William Stone, his trial coming in the wake of the celebrated acquittals of Thomas Hardy and John Thelwall, major players in the LCS, and much more prominent than Stone, was rather inevitably found not guilty.

Yet the subtext of the trial was to bring to light the ambiguous circumstances of British radicals who had immigrated to France in the wake of Revolution. It also provides an interesting insight into the mentality of the era and the battleground that language became in a climate dominated by the fear of revolutionary contagion. What stands out from Stone's trial is the murkiness as to the "real" threat posed by British radicals accused of allying with revolutionary France by virtue of their presence in Paris. From the point of view of the British state, the spectre of conspiracy served to bolster the symbolic defence of the status quo, the constitution as it stood, untainted by the novel and experimental notions of natural rights, inspired by regime change in France. That people believed invasion plots and foreign conspiracy to be real, whether or not they were, was surely important in justifying the measures taken against radical activists, the continued pursuit of war and the persistent resistance to the type of upheaval and political change taking place in France.

Sergeant Adair, the officer for William Stone's defence, attempted to narrow down what he termed "the real situation of John Hurford Stone in Paris." The prosecution had based their case on the fact that Stone had concealed his political views and knowledge of French invasion plans in commercial discourse. The Solicitor General picked up on the so-called "enigmatical" language used by Stone in his letters and the "mystery" that surrounded the topics of his letters to suggest that he was a party to French plotting.<sup>148</sup> He noted "rather dark

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<sup>148</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1412.

intimations that he has a knowledge of something.”<sup>149</sup> The manner in which Stone phrased his letters rather than the words themselves were examined. The prosecution concluded:

Each of these letters...is calculated to describe England and Ireland under the character of commercial houses, dealing in lien drapery goods and manufactures, and under other phrases and expressions, the purposes of using which character and expressions was to give a colour in each letter to this business, which might make each unintelligible in case it fell into hands, into which it was not meant that it should come.<sup>150</sup>

The ambiguous style of the letters was examined in particular detail with the prosecuting officers deducing “that there was something mysterious in these letters – that they were, as has been so often repeated, something enigmatical, beyond all controversy appears from the letters themselves.”<sup>151</sup> The words themselves were seen as providing a cover for the darker intentions of their author lurking beneath.

While the prosecution insisted that Stone’s discussion of commercial projects was a ruse designed to cover up his subversive political interests, the defence took a different take, insisting that his commercial projects should be taken at face value, attempts by Stone to establish ambitious, though probably underhand, business ventures. Sergeant Adair and Thomas Erskine did accept that Stone’s ventures were “illicit”, in that he was trying to make a profit from the wartime stand-off between Britain and France, yet his activities were not part of a veiled and elaborate conspiracy. It was important to acknowledge that “from the actual situation of the parties, the correspondence that has been read, and all the evidence in the cause, you find that there are subjects abundantly sufficient, to which these expressions may relate, without torturing them to a sense to support the charge against the prisoner.”<sup>152</sup> In this sentence, Adair summed up the position of many who came to the defence of radical activists.

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<sup>149</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1174-75.

<sup>150</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1179.

<sup>151</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1426.

<sup>152</sup> The image of words and actions being “tortured to a sense” was one which a number of radical observers of the Revolution used to describe the behaviour of the authorities towards those who articulated their opposition to the British political system. (Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1339).

Recognising the powerful role of language in the government's battle with the reform movement, Adair pointed out that words were often manipulated or "tortured" to produce the meaning that suited the ministry's particular agenda.

The ambiguity at the heart of the trial serves as an indicator of the difficulty in pinning down stable identities in the revolutionary era. Rather than revealing accurate evidence on the significance of British intelligence to French invasion plans, Stone's case sharply highlights the difficulty of determining authenticity and intent within the British radical movement. Whether Stone was a British informer, a French agent or simply a ruthless, perhaps deluded, commercial speculator is virtually impossible to determine. The likelihood is that he manipulated the possibility of each of these positions to his own advantage, acting, like the American speculator Gilbert Imlay in the words of Wil Verhoeven on the "murky margins" of events.<sup>153</sup> The confusion as to Stone's "real situation" continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The *Biographie Universelle* of 1853 suggested that William Stone had been sentenced to death for his part in the republican conspiracy and that Hurford Stone himself was banished from England and took refuge in France in the aftermath of the trial.<sup>154</sup> William was not given a capital sentence, he was eventually found not guilty, and John, though certainly unwelcome in Britain, was not banished and had already chosen exile of his own volition well before the trial of his brother. Equally, in 1991, French historian Olivier Blanc described Stone as one of Pitt's most trusted emissaries, sent to spy on and ultimately undermine the Revolution. While the evidence seems to show that Stone was a resolute and defiant enemy of the British state and suspected by Pitt of treason, Blanc came to the entirely different conclusion that Stone was sent directly by the British government, hiding behind a veil of "patriotism" and outward enthusiasm, to collate information for the British state.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Verhoeven, *Gilbert Imlay* 1.

<sup>154</sup> *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne (supplément)*, vol. 83 (1853): 59-60.

<sup>155</sup> Olivier Blanc, *Les hommes de Londres: histoire secrète de la Terreur* (Paris: A. Michel, 1989).

The ambiguity surrounding Stone's case did not end therefore with the outcome of the trial and has been deepened and perpetuated by recent studies.

In the trial of William Stone, the prosecution based much of its argument on conclusions drawn from reading into acts and words and focusing on how things were phrased. The threat of conspiracy was an effective way of engendering a spirit of national defence and fomenting hostility towards the French. Yet anxiety about an actual physical landing was also coupled with a deeper concern about the possible cultural effects of such alignment with French revolutionary acts and ideals, a more insidious form of invasion. The discursive alienation of British activists can also be seen as an attempt to repel the invasion of French ideals and cultural innovations, epitomised by the Revolution, into British society. Stone's case illustrates how commercial speculation and enthusiasm for enticing new and uncertain business ventures – often among men who had little chance of social mobility within the more codified British hierarchy – could be quickly associated with conspiracy and sedition. The British government stigmatised behaviour which epitomised the experimental spirit of the French Revolution and feared its disruptive effect on British political culture.<sup>156</sup>

### **I.3.3 “Intoxicated with liberty”: The Danger of Excess**

Critics and chroniclers of the expatriate movement suggested that those who went to France in the wake of the Revolution were gripped by a sort of blind and intoxicating fervour, causing them to brush aside reason, relinquish all previous attachments and succumb to the ardour and romance of an imagined territory of revolutionary transformation. Thomas Paine's biographer, Moncure Conway wrote, “The men gathered around Paine, as the exponent of republican principles, were animated by a passion for liberty which withheld no sacrifice.

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<sup>156</sup> For a discussion of the link between conspiracy anxiety and the cultural implications of British support for the French Revolution see below pp. 83-86.

Some of them threw away wealth and rank as trifles.”<sup>157</sup> Radicals themselves evoked their excitement and enthusiasm at being physically present at the scene. Helen Maria Williams described her delight at being able to witness the one-year celebration of the fall of the Bastille. Ardour and enthusiasm drove men of letters, poets and writers to remove to France to draw inspiration from the Revolution in France, where it was the thought the values and advances of the Enlightenment were being put into practice.

Yet the boundary between curiosity and interest on the one hand and intoxication, a wilder, untamed form of endorsement, on the other was thin. Henry Redhead Yorke described Helen Maria Williams as a “fanatical female” who “at the instant of inspiration...becomes convulsed like the Delphic Priestess.”<sup>158</sup> Her zeal was portrayed as excessive, unreasoning and quasi-religious. *The Gentleman’s Magazine* of January 1791 suggested that Williams was “intoxicated with liberty.”<sup>159</sup> To be intoxicated was to display signs of euphoria, immoderate excitement and elation which were the antithesis of rational, temperate behaviour. Intoxication was also tied up with the notion of “enthusiasm”, the intervention of God-sanctioned passions and feeling in the formation of judgments, which harked back to the religious fanaticism of the English Revolution of 1649. Despite eighteenth-century attempts to regulate and control enthusiasm and bring it within accepted cultural norms, Jon Mee has argued that it “remained haunted by the fear of the combustible matter within both the individual and the body politic.”<sup>160</sup> The presence of British observers at the Revolution was a potent reminder to the custodians of British liberty that desire for change could easily unleash unanticipated subversive impulses.

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<sup>157</sup> See Moncure D. Conway ed., *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, vols. 3 and 4 (1893; New York, AMS Press, 1967) xii.

<sup>158</sup> Yorke, *France in 1802* 251.

<sup>159</sup> *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol. 61, part 1 (1791) 62.

<sup>160</sup> Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2003) 5.

### I.3.4 “Prey to unhappy delusions”: Exile and Insanity

Such apparently excessive demonstrations of feeling in the face of the Revolution prompted questions to be asked of the mental sanity of British observers. Their zeal was evidence of psychological instability and therefore more easily dismissed without the requirement of a re-examination of the principles they put forward. Newspapers referred to Thomas Paine as “Mad Tom”. Support for extensive change in the political or social fabric was equated with lunacy and thus outside the limits of rational conduct.<sup>161</sup> In the trial of his brother, John Hurford Stone was presented as a man whose commitment to the French cause was the result of delusional behaviour. He had literally lost touch with reality:

The temper of mind that I have described to you, which appears to me from the result of this evidence to be the characteristic of that gentleman, had also made him an easy prey to those unhappy delusions, under which guilty men have introduced the greatest calamities that have desolated the earth, and by which many innocent and virtuous men have been deluded.<sup>162</sup>

In their emphasis on calamitous events having been sparked by mental instability, such reports echoed the way in which the French revolutionaries themselves were presented in the press and official discourse. According to one of Lord Auckland’s correspondents, “I scarce can think the French nation so lost to all sense as not to undo what their mad deputies have been doing.”<sup>163</sup> While faith was maintained in the good sense of the French nation, those leading the Revolution, the wayward representatives of the nation, were considered as outside the bounds of rational judgment by virtue of their attempts to overhaul the political fabric.

Caricature artist James Gillray seized on Thomas Paine’s support for French ideals through his service on the constitutional committee to portray his position as lacking any possible rational grounding. In his *Fashion before Ease – or – a good constitution sacrificed for a fantastick form* (1793), a satirical play on the 1770s painting *Tight-Lacing, or Fashion*

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<sup>161</sup> For the full citation, see below p. 123.

<sup>162</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1329.

<sup>163</sup> Mr. Stanley to Lord Auckland, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1790, *Journal and Correspondence of William Lord Auckland* 2: 380.

*before Ease*, Gillray portrayed Paine, dressed in French garb, as a stay-maker, trying to force the earthy and natural Britannica into a fashionable but painful corset. Paine was shown, not simply as having bowed to the “fashion” of transient political ideas, but also as having lost all good sense. Gillray thus established a dichotomy between both the artifice and irrationality of French theorising and the naturalness and reason of British stability and moderation. Though “natural” rights were embedded in Rousseauian language and served as the ideological bedrock of the French Revolution, Gillray reclaimed “nature” and “ease” for the British constitutional heritage.<sup>164</sup> Radicals such as Paine who saw merit in the French overhauling of the old regime saw their ideas cast aside as the groundless imaginings of deluded visionaries.

### **I.3.5 The Excessive Sensibility of British Eyewitnesses**

British radicals were also frequently classified as naïve and inconstant. A reviewer of *The General Magazine, and Impartial Review* described Helen Williams as showing “the childish admiration of a confined mind.”<sup>165</sup> Support for the French Revolution was proof not only of youthful naivety but inexperience and a lack of worldliness. A reviewer of Williams’ first volume of letters spoke of how she would “tell her *own* story with *naïveté*.”<sup>166</sup> Not only was her portrait narrow and confined (“her *own* story”) but she told it with a lack of wider political consciousness and could not be expected to understand the more complex political stakes of what she was writing about. British residents were also considered fickle and inconstant, lacking the steadfastness needed to evaluate political structures with clarity. Inconstancy was also synonymous with infidelity, and radicals’ embracing of new and innovative notions of natural rights resulted in their patriotic loyalty being cast into doubt. Captain Monro, writing to Lord Grenville at the Foreign Office on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1792, noted

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<sup>164</sup> Bowles and Carver, after John Collet, *Tight Lacing, or Fashion before Ease* (1770-75); James Gillray, *Fashion before Ease;—or,—A good Constitution sacrificed for a Fantastick Form* (1793).

<sup>165</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790, to a Friend in England; Containing Various Anecdotes Relative to the French Revolution*, ed. Neil Fraistat and Susan S. Lanser (Mississauga: Broadview Literary Texts, 2002) 214.

<sup>166</sup> *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol. 61, part 1 (1791) 63.



how British Club members would “change their sentiments” without warning.<sup>167</sup> They were portrayed as lacking the measured judgment needed to provide an accurate and consistent reading of events. Helen Williams, whose opinion on the Revolution altered over the course of her written accounts, was described in an obituary as having “showed that her democratic consistency equalled the republican morality she had previously exhibited.”<sup>168</sup> Anna Seward described how Williams had “rashly committed herself” to the French Revolution and Captain Monro noted the precipitation of radicals’ flights from London.<sup>169</sup> Rashness was proof of the hotheadedness and lack of judgment at the heart of the British Club, the antithesis of all that was celebrated in British political and constitutional culture. Attacks were directed at the flaws perceived in radicals’ characters. Activists were deemed excessively emotional, sensitive or susceptible to the effects of violence. One portrait of the British radical Robert Merry suggested that sympathy with the Revolution had led him to become prey to excesses of feeling which had compromised his mental capacities:

He had one of those susceptible minds, to which the genius of liberty instantly communicated all its enthusiasm, all its fire. He gazed with rapture on the sudden and promisingly beneficial change of condition in so many millions of his fellow creatures...Revolution upon revolution greatly affected his sensibility; for though he was robust of frame, his nerves did not correspond with his muscular strength.<sup>170</sup>

Persistent confrontation with violence did have an impact on radicals and not all portrayals had mere representational capital. William Johnson was a signatory of the British Club address and shared lodgings with William Choppin and Thomas Paine at their address at 63 rue du faubourg Saint-Denis during the turbulent months of 1793. Sampson Perry testified during the trial of Jean-Paul Marat in May 1793 that Johnson had been so heavily traumatised by the threat posed not only to the life of Thomas Paine following his vote to exile rather than

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<sup>167</sup> 27<sup>th</sup> December 1792, *The Despatches of Earl Gower* 268.

<sup>168</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 98 part 1 (1828) 373.

<sup>169</sup> Anna Seward to Helen Williams, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1793, *Letters of Anna Seward* 3: 204. For Captain Monro's verdict on the rash behaviour of British radicals, see above p. 57.

<sup>170</sup> “Biographical notice of Mr. Robert Merry,” *The Monthly Magazine*, vol. 7 (April 1799) 255-56.

execute the king, but at the assault on all British residents of Paris that he had attempted to take his own life. Johnson himself confirmed the account, insisting that the probability of Paine being censured for his role in the king's trial had led him to attempt suicide. In the trial transcript and related letters, Johnson is depicted as a highly sensitive man driven to make an attempt on his life by the all-pervasive terror that reigned after the death of the king.<sup>171</sup>

### **I.3.6 “Unappalled by the dismal scenes”: Cruelty and Violence**

Yet despite many contemporary portraits insisting on the emotional fragility of British observers and the psychological disturbance engendered by exposure to the violence of the Revolution, some observers took the opposite viewpoint, insisting on the contrary that British alignment with French ideas was evidence of their capacity for pathological cruelty and their immunity to bloodshed. Helen Williams' justification of the overthrow of the monarchy prompted Laetitia Hawkins to wonder, “Is it for the *female* heart to harden at the contemplation of any woe?”<sup>172</sup> Williams was also chastised for her “cold alienation” by Anna Seward who, three years earlier had praised her for her portrait of the Revolution.<sup>173</sup> A reviewer writing later in 1820 suggested that she had been “unappalled by the dismal scenes of which she was a frequent witness.”<sup>174</sup> It appears therefore that female observers of the Revolution were particularly vulnerable to accusations of immunity to cruelty. Sanctioning revolutionary actions was synonymous with the relinquishing of female virtues of compassion and sympathy.

Captain Monro, sending reports back to the Home Office on British Club activities from his lodgings in White's Hotel, suggested that the speeches of the sections containing “violent

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<sup>171</sup> At the trial, Johnson accepted the fact that he had been ill at the time of his act and therefore could not certify to the exactitude of his words. He suggested that his esteem for his friend Thomas Paine had led him to make an attempt on his own life. See *Le Moniteur Universel* vol.16, Friday 3rd May 1793, “Affaire de Jean-Paul Marat, né à Baudry, comté de Neuchâtel en Suisse, député de la Convention nationale”.

<sup>172</sup> Hawkins, *Letters on the Female Mind* 110.

<sup>173</sup> For Seward's opinion, see above pp. 47 and 51. Anna Seward to Helen Williams, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1790 & 17<sup>th</sup> January 1793, *Letters of Anna Seward* 3: 44, 209.

<sup>174</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 90, part 1 (1820) 336.

language” were “*cheerfully* received by the friends of the constitution here.”<sup>175</sup> Members of the Club were prone to reacting inappropriately and inhumanly with misplaced joy at violent French oratory. The term “violent” was itself consistently used as an epithet to describe British sympathisers in Paris. In 1868, over thirty years after her death, Helen Williams was still known as a figure “who was pre-eminent amongst the violent female partisans of the French revolution.”<sup>176</sup> In this review, the term is synonymous with excess and fervour, but also suggests a capacity for committing or rather tolerating brutal acts. Captain Monro described Hurford Stone as “a very violent man indeed” and Robert O’Reilly was considered “a pronounced and violent Jacobin.”<sup>177</sup> Violence, often in a detached and calculated form, was seen as inhabiting the core of the revolutionary creed and it was cruelty which was seen as distinguishing French behaviour from the regulated norms of civilised society. Lord Auckland wrote to Bland Burges that “the levity and gaiety of the French in the midst of the calamities and the disgrace of their country...are beyond belief.”<sup>178</sup> It was this capacity to tolerate and commit acts of violence which allowed hostile commentators in Britain to distance the changes carried out in the name of the Revolution from the debate on political reform at home.

Some modern analysts have concurred with the views of contemporary commentators that British expatriates stood out by their willingness to accept cruelty. Matthew Bray contends that Williams’ letters betray an almost pathological inclination for violence: “There is a troubling sense in *Letters Written in France* that the act of revolution itself – the actual process of opposing the ancient regime through necessary, yet also sublime violence – is much more satisfying than the calm, beautiful order that emerges from this violence.”<sup>179</sup> The

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<sup>175</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, Paris, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1792, *The Despatches of Earl Gower* 262.

<sup>176</sup> *Notes and Queries: A Medium of Inter-Communication for Literary Men, General Readers, etc.*, vol. 2 (1868) 534.

<sup>177</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959 and Yorke, *France in 1802* 228.

<sup>178</sup> Lord Auckland to Mr. Burges, Hague, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1792, *Correspondence of William Lord Auckland* 2: 424.

<sup>179</sup> Bray, “Helen Maria Williams and Edmund Burke: Radical Critique and Complicity” 12.

fact that Bray considers this preference for the process rather than the result of revolution as “troubling” demonstrates the extent to which British residents have and continue to inspire moral ambivalence among those commentating on their involvement with the French Revolution.

The language of brutality but also of treachery, cowardice and betrayal was employed to define British radicals who had taken up residence in Paris. An account of British journalism reported in the nineteenth century that “In France [Perry] got into the congenial company of Tom Paine, Danton, and the revolutionists and riff-raff of all nations, who had come to fraternise with their hands in each other’s pockets and their knives at each other’s throats.”<sup>180</sup> It is quite likely that this account was based on reports from the time. Through their associations with French revolutionaries and other foreign radicals, British residents were portrayed as having a penchant for violence and a tendency for deception. Treachery went hand in hand with brutality and could be easily interwoven with the notion of disloyalty. Through their involvement in French revolutionary circles, British militant residents courted the risk of being seen as traitorous subjects of the British state.

Perceived immunity to and even celebration of brutality were proof of radicals’ having internalised the barbarity that had been unleashed by the Revolution. Reports of the September massacres gave a different impression of the Revolution to people back in Britain to that which had prevailed shortly after the fall of the Bastille and during the course of 1790. British officials in Paris writing back to the government wrote of those who were “amused by shedding blood” during the August Days and of the butchery occurring in Paris prisons in early September 1792.<sup>181</sup> Calculated violence was associated with the Paris mobs. One of Lord Auckland’s informers wrote of “new massacres; of 160 priests being butchered in a

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<sup>180</sup> Alexander Andrews, *The History of British Journalism from the Foundation of the Newspaper Press in England to the Repeal of the Stamp Act in 1855*, vol. 1 (London: Bentley, 1859). Printed earlier in *The New Monthly Magazine*, vol. 110 (1857) 251.

<sup>181</sup> *Correspondence of William Lord Auckland* 2: 438.

church; of all the prisoners confined in all the prisons having been *deliberately* and in *orderly succession* put to death.”<sup>182</sup> Such cruelty was not the spontaneous unleashing of popular energy but the premeditated actions of a group of thinking men.

### **I.3.7 “Extensive views to projecting minds”: The Boundaries of Civility**

Leaving British territory and seeking asylum in revolutionary France was thus tantamount to stepping beyond the tacit limits of civility. Just as France, as a nation, had abandoned its place among enlightened states, so British expatriates had, by virtue of their support for the Revolution, given up their claim to a place in the civilised world. Adherents of the Revolution were considered inconstant, naïve, cruel, intoxicated, excessively dominated by feeling and deeply delusional. Yet over and beyond these attempts to denigrate British radicals’ characters, in keeping with derogatory portraits of revolutionary France, there was a sense that their conduct verged on the indefinable and unimaginable and therefore left scope for interpretation. Their openness to novelty, their capacity to transgress the boundaries of social rank, political expression or even accepted social and moral behaviour and the unpredictability of their actions all unsettled the loyalist establishment. The anxiety of such observers belied concern about the potential of British militants, their radical politics in incubation in revolutionary France, to become conveyors of a more comprehensive cultural shift. Often, as in the deposition of the Home Office informant for the Committee of Secrecy, these fears were articulated through the language of “projects”, “ideas”, or “plans” and related to the spectre of anticipated future action rather than the knowledge of actual intentions.<sup>183</sup>

*The Times* noted that Sampson Perry was intending to publish his banned journal in the French capital. It reported that “the Conductor may there give unlimited scope to his treasonable abuse of our Government.”<sup>184</sup> The use of the term “unlimited” suggests that there

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<sup>182</sup> *Correspondence of William Lord Auckland* 2: 440. My italics.

<sup>183</sup> See above pp. 68-69.

<sup>184</sup> *The Times*, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1793, quoted in Werkmeister, *A Newspaper History of England* 197.

was a deep concern that radicals were capable of transgressing accepted behaviour. The space provided for expression in revolutionary Paris was boundless and therefore difficult to anticipate or control. Captain Monro, attempting to capture the characters of the British radicals he monitored during his stay in Paris, suggested that, “their dispositions are such that I am however sure they would, with the assistance of France, put *anything* in execution that could injure their country.”<sup>185</sup> Monro pointed to the unmanageable nature of British activity in other letters. In his report from 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, he noted how the radical members of the British Club “*extend* their views in the most culpable degree *far beyond* simple a mere reform” and that they would “stand at nothing” to achieve their aims.<sup>186</sup> Again, the use of terms such as “anything”, “extend”, “far beyond”, and “stand at nothing” emphasises the intangibility of the prospective actions of British radicals, despite Monro’s attempts to keep a careful watch. Just as the French revolutionaries had taken France outside the boundaries of civilised statehood into a form of moral exile, the plotting and planning of British radicals was indescribable and threatening. Ironically, Sampson Perry also used the same type of language in his description of the relentlessness of the authorities in pursuing him for libel. He recounts how he was to be “imprisoned time without end, and perhaps fined without bounds.”<sup>187</sup> While the authorities considered the subversive potential of radicals as unlimited, radicals perceived the repressive actions of the government as unrestrained by the rule of law.

John Hurford Stone’s character was the subject of intense scrutiny during his brother’s trial. Summing up for the defence, Sergeant Adair contended that, “In short, he seems to be going into that general system of theoretical projects, into which a man of the character I have described, is likely to fall, at a time when *circumstances open extensive views to projecting minds.*”<sup>188</sup>. Through the use of the terms, “projects”, “projecting minds”, and “extensive

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<sup>185</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1792, *The Despatches of Earl Gower* 263. My emphasis.

<sup>186</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959. My emphasis.

<sup>187</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 7.

<sup>188</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1338. My emphasis.

views” what emerges is a sense that exiled radicals had the potential for infringing boundaries, not only of loyal citizenship, but of accepted behaviour and cultural norms. Adair also observed:

He appears to be a man of a fervid imagination, and a restless mind, rather with a turn inclined to speculation and theory, ready to enter into any projects, and to have no great objection to innovation; this most unquestionably appears, from the course of the correspondence, to be the outline of the character of that gentleman.<sup>189</sup>

A number of key terms resonate in the description of Stone. “Speculation”, “theory”, “fervid imagination”, “projects”, “innovation”, and “novelty” all invoked the threat posed by the questioning of the status quo and the evocation of new ideas and arrangements. The term “projecting” also conjures up the “Academy of Projectors” in the eighteenth-century novel *Gulliver’s Travels*. In Swift’s satire, the Academy develops theories to improve society and puts them into practice without testing them beforehand which results in failure. “Projecting” was therefore associated with the rejection of practice in favour of abstraction.<sup>190</sup>

The change in mindset that the French Revolution threatened to effectuate was the more potent threat to the British status quo. Interest in new forms of government, enthusiasm, abstraction, utopianism, having a “restless mind”, and openness to “propositions” or “projects” were all suggestive of a more general cultural shift. As Lord Auckland confessed to William Pitt in November 1794, despite believing that there was a general antipathy towards “Jacobinism” among the people:

Still, however, there prevails among us a growing disposition to innovation; and we must not conceal from ourselves (what we certainly shall experience most sensibly) that this attachment of the country at large to Government is naturally weakened by the long course of calamities which has baffled and disappointed all the measures of Government.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1328.

<sup>190</sup> Unlike the Projectors, Lord Munodi, ruler of Lagado in Balnibarbi, applies tried and tested methods and as a result the community he governs thrives. I am grateful to Andrew McKenzie McHarg of the University of Erfurt, Germany for pointing me in the direction of Swift’s text as an example of early eighteenth century satire on the notion of projection at the *Conspiracies Real and Imagined Conference* in York in September 2011.

<sup>191</sup> *Correspondence of William Lord Auckland* 2: 272.

“Innovation” was also synonymous with the experiments being carried out in France in terms of popular governance and republicanism. Although it was primarily British critics of the French Revolution that condemned “innovation” and novelty, some radicals, embittered by their experience of the Terror, gradually came to sympathise with this position. In her *An Historical and Moral View*, Mary Wollstonecraft, lamented the fact that in the early Revolution innovation was preferred to prudence in matters of public policy. She observed that “the most daring innovators became the greatest favourites with the public,” and such desire for public honour had displaced the necessary caution needed in establishing a new regime.<sup>192</sup>

### **I.3.8 “Relinquishing all former connections”: Identity Anxiety**

This tendency to innovate, to embrace an unknown future without an anchor in the past was threatening in both a political and cultural sense but may also have generated a sense of social unease among commentators back in Britain. As J. G. A. Pocock has noted, “Eighteenth-century fears of revolution regularly took a Catilinarian form; some member of the inner circle might betray his class.”<sup>193</sup> It was not only the Pitt government, but members of the Whig elite who looked on with astonishment as men from their own class gave up their titles and condemned distinctions of property in the fervour of the Revolution. Such acts of class disloyalty gave rise to concern among those who sought to preserve the gradations of hierarchy in British society. Expatriates in Paris were sometimes presented as having betrayed the social class they derived from. They had severed all former ties of acquaintance in acts of ungrateful and misguided euphoria. Both Sir Robert Smith and Lord Edward Fitzgerald were

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<sup>192</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origins and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has Produced in Europe* (1794), *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft: An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution. Letters to Joseph Johnson. Letters Written in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, ed. Janet M. Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering, 1989) 142. Wollstonecraft’s history of the Revolution will be given greater attention in chapter four.

<sup>193</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1985) 245. Catiline had opposed Cicero in his bid to become Consul under the late Roman Republic. He had renounced his aristocratic background to champion the cause of reform for the poor, promote debt relief and orchestrate attacks on property and wealth.



reported as having renounced their titles at a British Club meeting in November 1792. Monro reported, “After a dinner a variety of toasts were given, and Lord Edward Fitzgerald, and Sir Rob’t Smith propos’d laying down their titles, and are now actually call’d by this sett Citoyen Fitzgerald, and Citoyen Smith.”<sup>194</sup> Their actions may have been inspired by the decision taken by the National Convention at its inception to replace the title “monsieur” with that of “citizen”.<sup>195</sup> Robert Merry praised the conduct of members of the *noblesse* who “cordially acquiesced in the new order of things, and by a glorious effort of enlightened benevolence, cheerfully [*sic*] sacrificed the empty gewgaws of aristocracy to merit the most substantial and only noble distinctions of a *patriot* and a *philanthropist*.”<sup>196</sup> No title had any merit other than those which emphasised a person’s membership of the universal community of humanity.

Linked to the concern among the elite about the willingness of radicals to rid themselves of their social titles was also a sense of unease at the social mixing and disregard for hierarchy that the British Club epitomised. Monro insisted that the Club comprised men of “various ranks, and descriptions” and did not limit its membership to a particular social background. This heterogeneity would undoubtedly have provoked concern among men like Lord Auckland who feared the joining of the lower and middle ranks.<sup>197</sup> Sampson Perry was described as having associated with the “riff-raff of all nations” who had come to celebrate the revolution in France. The term “riff-raff” is reminiscent of Burke’s “swinish multitude” and indicates the contempt in which revolutionary activists were held by the governing class and the anxiety engendered by their tendency to associate with men who may have belonged to a different social rank.

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<sup>194</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959.

<sup>195</sup> Sampson Perry noted the change in his second volume to *An Historical Sketch*. He wrote, “It ought not to be omitted in mention, that this convention, still more strongly imbued with the principle of equality than either of its predecessors, resolved the same day to disuse the title of *monsieur*, and take the plain one of *citizen*.” (*An Historical Sketch* II: 265).

<sup>196</sup> Robert Merry [?], *A Circumstantial History of the Transactions at Paris on the Tenth of August Plainly Shewing the Perfidy of Louis XVI, and the General Unanimity of the People, in Defence of their Rights* (London: Symonds, 1792) vii-viii. For a more comprehensive discussion of both the tract and its dubious authorship see below pp. 349-59.

<sup>197</sup> For Lord Auckland’s fears of class alliance, see below p. 91.

This concern with the readiness of radicals in Paris to cast off fixed and stable identities and find a new sense of belonging within an eclectic community of international reformers crystallised around the issue of national identity. For many commentators in Britain, expatriate radicals had literally betrayed their country in taking up residence in Paris and supporting the Revolution. John Hurford Stone's letters to Joseph Priestley inspired *The Monthly Review* to conclude that he had not only "cast off his allegiance to his sovereign" but that the letters "were necessary to convince us that any Englishman could so totally eradicate from his mind all feelings of attachment and love for the country in which he had been born and educated, and had received the high advantages of her protecting government."<sup>198</sup> *The Evening Mail* reported during the trial of William Stone that "he [the Attorney General] said that the prisoner's brother had become a domiciled Frenchman, from long residence in that country, and was more attached to the interests of that country than those of England."<sup>199</sup> Stone was judged as having renounced all claims of allegiance to his king and country. Associating with revolutionary France was seen as the ultimate unnatural act.

Robert Merry was depicted in *The Annual Register* as having fallen victim to a sort of dreary depression following his decision to abandon former connections and beliefs and support the Revolution:

Before the lamentable disorders of France, he was highly esteemed by numerous and respectable friends, who admired him for his knowledge, humour, and companionable qualities; but the change in his political opinions gave a sullen gloom to his character, which made him relinquish all his former connections, and unite with people far beneath his talents, and quite unsuitable to his habits.<sup>200</sup>

Associating with the Revolution and supporting its course implied ostracism on a number of fundamental levels therefore, including social, national and cultural. Not only did characters change and become "sullen", marred by perpetual violence and upheaval, but such adherence

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<sup>198</sup> *The Monthly Review; or Literary Journal Enlarged*, vol. 25 (1798) 350-51.

<sup>199</sup> *The Evening Mail*, 27-29<sup>th</sup> January 1796.

<sup>200</sup> *The Annual Register* (1799) 350.

resulted in the loss of friendship and acquaintance as well as humour, esteem and sociability. It could also imply the rejection of one's sovereign and the loss of a sense of national belonging. It was literally the erasure of all the solid assumptions that were associated with a sense of identity, precisely the sort of pervasive and nihilistic destruction that detractors of the Revolution accused its leaders of carrying out in their abstract innovations in constitutional arrangements.

### **I.3.9 Exile and Britishness**

Such portraits of British expatriates formed part of the closing off of Britishness to those who refused to rein in their criticism of the political system of their home country and who had taken up residence in revolutionary Paris. Whether because they cast off their titles, despised the social order or appeared to have renounced their allegiance to Britain, these men and women were excluded from the popular conception of what being British was. The treatment of radical exiles did not differ markedly from that of radicals who remained in Britain. Yet those who had taken up residence in Paris could be more easily accused of disloyalty through their physical proximity with revolutionary action, a closeness which came to imply ideological consensus from 1792 onwards. Stripped of the means of safe communication and expression, they were also more effectively silenced. Once outside Britain, however, radicals were less easily monitored and had more space in which to experiment with ideas and political remedies to the problems they had identified in Britain. Members of the British Club therefore represented a potential threat to the security of the British constitution through their capacity to concert with the French revolutionary authorities, develop ideas free from the constraints imposed in Britain, and convey these ideas back to Britain. William Pitt's administration pointed to radical expatriation in Paris as an indication of the quasi-symbiotic relationship cultivated by radicals with their adopted country.

Radicals often did little to persuade the ruling authorities that their intentions were innocent or that they still retained an underlying commitment to the values inherent in the British unwritten constitution. There were advantages to be gleaned in maintaining a certain level of ambivalence about one's place between the two countries. John Hurford Stone appears to have referred to the French as "we" and the British as "you" in one letter to his brother, a reversing of pronouns which was cited in William Stone's trial and seized upon by the press in the wake of the verdict. The *European Magazine* reported, "Stone had a brother, J.H. Stone, settled at Paris, who considered himself, in fact, as a Frenchman; which appeared particularly from one of his letters, in which he said, "*We* have declared war against *you*." The magazine went on to conclude that "his conduct clearly shewed [*sic*] he had been for France."<sup>201</sup> Radicals themselves did not systematically attempt to dissuade the authorities that they had renounced all ties with their home country, even though some did renew their efforts to highlight their Britishness in their communication and writings:

With regard to the language in which this Work will be written, the Author, without a pompous declaration on that head, promises to make its *parity* a matter of especial solicitude, no affectation will appear in it, no foreign idiom to disfigure – no pedantry to disgust – or puerility to attenuate its force – it is intended to be what the Author would prove himself – *English*.

Sampson Perry ironically shunned the "disfiguring" effects of "foreign idioms" in his republished *Argus*, aware that association with foreign language or style would be seized upon by his critics.<sup>202</sup>

The encouragement of general antipathy to the Revolution and its expatriate supporters served a propaganda purpose for the British authorities. The language used to describe British expatriates was symptomatic not only of the government's genuine fear of a concerted assault

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<sup>201</sup> *The European Magazine and London Review*, vol. 29 (1796) 118.

<sup>202</sup> See Perry, *Prospectus of a new and interesting work, The Argus, or General Observer of the Moral, Political and Commercial World, To be published on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1795, by Sampson Perry, editor and proprietor of the late newspaper called The Argus* (London: Symonds, 1795) 2.

on the physical boundaries of the nation, but also of a more subtle sense of anxiety about the way in which the cultural and societal changes characterising the French Revolution might impinge on domestic life in Britain. Expatriate sympathisers in Paris were considered as potential carriers of ideas which could subvert the British conception of constitutional order. There was concern about innovation in politics but also about the potential of a trans-class reaction against British “liberty” and “property”. Such anxiety emerges in the correspondence of Lord Auckland. Writing to William Pitt in November 1794 Lord Auckland expressed fear that the bravery of the revolutionary armies would begin to inspire a widespread “change of sentiment” towards the Revolution, not only among the poorer people of Britain, but also in the middling ranks:

It is also true that the horror which justly belongs to the wickedness and atrocities of the French Convention insensibly loses itself in an admiration of the French successes, and in a forced acknowledgement of the perseverance, courage, and conduct of the French armies. Nor will this important change of sentiment be confined to the lower class of the people; it will soon be found that it pervades the middle class; that it exists even in the most enlightened descriptions of men, and that it affects, more or less, many individuals in both Houses of Parliament.<sup>203</sup>

The concerns of Lord Auckland anticipate to some degree the issues that would be at stake in the debate and struggles which led up to the Reform Act of 1832 when the solution found to solve the crisis of representation was to offer a compromise which placated the middle class and guarded against the potentially troubling cohesion between the middle and lower classes.

#### **1.4 The British in France: The Uncertain Future of Universal Brotherhood**

Representation and “real” experience are closely intertwined in this period and British expatriate radicals occupied an intersecting place in the interstice of larger diplomatic and propaganda struggles. The perception of their place in history is inevitably coloured by the way in which they were manipulated in a confrontation which pitted stable, monarchical Britain against incendiary, republican France. It has been shown how portraits in Britain

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<sup>203</sup> Lord Auckland to Mr. Pitt, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1794, *Journal and Correspondence of William, Lord Auckland 2*: 272.

tended to deviate towards a more open discourse of exclusion as tension amplified between the two countries. This was combined with an increasing sense of anxiety at the potential inherent in British expatriates for conveying revolutionary contagion across the Channel.

In France, the pattern was similar, although the alienation of British radicals occurred later, during the course of 1793, in conjunction with political developments which began to align citizenship and belonging more firmly with nationality. The Law of Suspects, promulgated on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1793 and demanding strict ideological conformity with the Revolution's tenets, was particularly unsettling for foreigners. Maximilian Robespierre defended the arrest of all foreign nationals whose governments were at war with France, declaring:

I distrust without exception all those foreigners whose face is covered with a mask of patriotism and who endeavour to appear more republican and energetic than us. It is these ardent patriots who are the most perfidious creators of our problems. They are the agents of foreign powers, for I am well aware that our enemies cannot have failed to say: Our emissaries must affect the warmest and most exaggerated patriotism to be able to insinuate themselves more easily into our Committees and into our assemblies.<sup>204</sup>

Some scholars have suggested this xenophobic reaction was inherent in revolutionary ideology from the outset, while others have argued that assaults on foreigners were a pragmatic reaction to the transformation in the revolutionary agenda and the perceived threat of subversion.<sup>205</sup> Some have even accepted the Jacobin representation of British radicals as double agents sent by William Pitt to destabilise the Revolution. Oliver Blanc suggests that “These individuals...sought to take on the guise of persecuted patriots in their native country, an excellent way of attracting sympathy and gaining the confidence of the brave French sans-culottes.”<sup>206</sup> He goes on to report that they even managed to infiltrate many of the core revolutionary committees.

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<sup>204</sup> “Séance du 16 octobre 1793” in Robespierre, *Oeuvres* quoted in Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots* 83.

<sup>205</sup> See the earlier discussion on approaches to the foreigner in revolutionary ideology, above pp. 21-23.

<sup>206</sup> Blanc, *Hommes de Londres* 28. My translation.

The schisms which opened up after the trial and execution of Louis XVI led to deepening and more acrimonious factional in-fighting among French revolutionaries. Such animosity also had an impact on their way in which British expatriates were treated. Initially welcomed as universal brothers in the struggle for the ascendancy of liberty, British partisans gradually became the target of suspicion as anxiety spread about counter-revolution inspired from both within and without. Radicals became the objects of greater surveillance from March 1793 onwards when the National Convention recognised the popular justice of the *comités de surveillance*, charged with militating against sedition. Foreign residents now had to justify their adherence to the Revolution or risk expulsion. Nicholas Madgett, a member of the British Club of Irish origin and translator for the revolutionary administration, put forward the names of those he considered to be loyal followers of the Revolution among the British contingent. This move was considered necessary to protect British radicals from arrest in the measures taken against foreigners. Yet further decrees were promulgated which targeted foreign residents who had arrived in France after 1789.

Prompted by events such as the capture of Toulon by the British fleet and recurrent rumours of espionage activities, a general wave of arrests and imprisonment of British residents was thus instituted from August to December 1793, the month of Paine's expulsion from the Convention. British residents had their property seized and assets frozen. According to Alger, "All British merchandise in stock was to be given up, an indemnity being promised, and ultimately even English placards and shop-signs were forbidden. A teacher of languages had even to announce lessons in *American*."<sup>207</sup> Further action followed in May and June 1794 with the laws of 19 Floréal and 22 Prairial which formed the closing chapters of the Terror.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Alger, *Englishmen* 144.

<sup>208</sup> The law of 8<sup>th</sup> May 1794, or 19 Floréal, made the Revolutionary Tribunal the only organ of justice and eradicated all alternative courts. The following month, on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1794, Georges Couthon declared that all methods would be used to accelerate the process of cleansing France of its enemies. All ordinary safeguards in the justice system were removed, including the right of the accused to name witnesses to testify to their innocence.

Foreigners were also faced with expulsion in the ostensibly more open era of Thermidor and had to plead their case if they wanted to remain in residence in Paris. The institutionalisation of suspicion and xenophobia also led to the closing off of political channels of action to foreign activists. They ultimately became victims of the Terror whatever their background in reformist politics in Britain or France. Despite the fact that British residents in Paris did suffer from the gradual transition from universal brotherhood to national patriotism, such sweeping views of their exclusion can negate the ways in which they became actors in their own right, exploiting the international diplomatic conflict and codified propaganda war for their own ends. This interpretation corroborates to some extent what Michael Rapport has found in relation to revolutionary practice. Rapport insists on the pragmatism at the heart of French revolutionary justice and administration and concedes some reluctance on the part of the authorities to punish visibly loyal foreigners, even after the fall of Toulon.

#### **I.4.1 The French Revolution and “Cosmopolitanism”**

Until early 1793, British radicals sensed a certain degree of openness at the heart of the revolutionary government in welcoming contributors from other nations. Robert Merry, sharing his thoughts on the new constitution in late 1792, made reference to the invitation that had been extended to all those who had a stake in the furtherance of liberty to contribute to the architecture of a new republican constitution that would impinge on humanity at large:

The French nation, concerned to give the world a government founded on liberty and equality, has attempted to surround itself with all the enlightened ideas capable of shedding light on this vast and glorious undertaking. In consequence, it has stated its intention to receive and carefully examine all the ideas put forward on the subject, wherever or whoever they are from. It is the sincerity and openness of this invitation which has given me the courage to hazard a few thoughts on the subject, which, even if they be found false and erroneous, can be not completely devoid of all utility; as sometimes a known error can lead to the discovery of truth.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Robert Merry, *Réflexions politiques sur la nouvelle constitution qui se prépare en France adressées à la république* (Paris: J. Reyner, 1792) 3. “La Nation Française, occupée de soin de donner au monde un gouvernement fondé sur la liberté et l’égalité, a cherché à s’entourer de toutes les lumières capables de l’éclairer dans cette vaste et glorieuse entreprise. En conséquence, elle a déclaré son intention d’accueillir et d’examiner avec soin toutes les idées qui lui seront offertes sur cette matière, de quelques pays et de quelque personne qu’elles lui viennent. C’est la franchise et la loyauté de cette invitation qui m’enhardit à hasarder sur ce sujet quelques réflexions, qui, lors même qu’elles se trouveroient fausses et erronées, peuvent encore n’être pas



Merry understood that the French authorities were seeking the views of international patriots and philosophers around the world. This was confirmed by the offers sent out to radicals such as David Williams to take up temporary residence in France and share their thoughts and experience on the making of a new constitution. The contributions of British radicals to the debate on the republican constitution formed one of the principal, and little acknowledged, channels through which foreigners engaged with revolutionary politics in the first months of the republic.<sup>210</sup>

Prior to the invitations extended to men such as Williams and Paine, a number of British citizens had been conferred with French citizenship on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1792, while Thomas Paine and Joseph Priestley had been elected to the National Assembly, although Priestley chose not to take up his seat.<sup>211</sup> The Assembly declared, “Considering that those men who, through their writings and courage have served the cause of liberty and paved the way for the emancipation of peoples, cannot be considered foreigners by a nation that their knowledge and courage has made free” they were to be made citizens of France.<sup>212</sup> Following the Convention's promise of November 1792 to “grant fraternity and assistance to all people who wish to recover their liberty” and print and translate the decree in all languages, the French ambassador the marquis de Chauvelin promulgated the Edict of Fraternity which declared France's willingness to aid sovereign nations in securing their freedom from tyranny.<sup>213</sup>

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destituées de toute utilité: car il n'arrive quelquefois qu'une erreur conduit à la découverte de la vérité.” My translation.

<sup>210</sup> This issue, the contributions to the debate on the republican constitution, will form a major part of chapter three.

<sup>211</sup> Those granted honorary citizenship included a number of British, American and European supporters of the Revolution, namely Jeremy Bentham, Joseph Priestley, William Wilberforce, Thomas Paine, James Macintosh, David Williams George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and Anacharsis Cloots.

<sup>212</sup> 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1792, *Le Moniteur Universel*, vol. 13, 540-41. My translation.

<sup>213</sup> See the transcription of the declaration of the National Convention of 20<sup>th</sup> November 1792 in PRO TS 11/965/3510/A2. For a discussion of the Edict of Fraternity, see Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?: England, 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2006) 66.

In her memoirs, written before her execution in November 1793, Madame Roland welcomed the contribution of David Williams to the practical task of establishing new parameters of governance after the Revolution, considering him an able legislator whose political prowess would aid the French in establishing a new constitution. She was more reticent about the abilities of Thomas Paine, considering him less competent when it came to dealing with the practical implementation of new legislative and constitutional arrangements than with sparking revolutionary fervour among the people and highlighting their grievances:

The boldness of his conceptions, the originality of his style, and the striking truths which he throws with defiance into the midst of those whom they offend, have necessarily attracted great attention; but I think him better fitted to sow the seeds of popular commotion, than to lay the foundation or prepare the form of a government. Paine throws light upon a revolution better than he concurs in the making of a constitution. He takes up, and establishes those great principles, of which the exposition strikes every eye, gains the applause of a club, or excites the enthusiasm of a tavern; but for cool discussion in a committee, or the regular labours of a legislator, I conceive David Williams infinitely more proper than he. Williams, made a French citizen also, was not chosen a member of the Convention, in which he would have been more use... A deep thinker, and a real friend to mankind, he appeared to me to combine their means of happiness, as well as Paine feels and describes the abuses which constitute their misery.<sup>214</sup>

British contributors were held in esteem by core members of the revolutionary vanguard. Although it is unlikely that they were directing revolutionary practice, as Lord Auckland feared, they did have a legitimate and respected voice in the political sphere.<sup>215</sup> The welcome extended to British radical residents was not restricted to politics. Mary Wollstonecraft noted the ease with which she fitted into French society in a letter to her sister Everina of 24<sup>th</sup> December 1792. She wrote, “Of the French I will not speak till I know more of them. They seem the people of all others for a stranger to come amongst.”<sup>216</sup> Yet by March 1794 Wollstonecraft was writing of the change in official attitudes towards foreign residents after the onset of the Terror: “The French are, at present, so full of suspicion that had a letter of James’s, improvidently sent to me, been opened, I would not have answered for the

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<sup>214</sup> Manon Roland, *An Appeal to Impartial Posterity*, part 1 (London: Johnson, 1795) 41-42.

<sup>215</sup> For Lord Auckland’s view, see above pp. 66-67.

<sup>216</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Everina Wollstonecraft, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1792, *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Columbia U P, 2003) 215.

consequence.”<sup>217</sup> The gradual transformation in the treatment of foreigners is evident not only in what was written in letters but also in what was omitted.

#### **I.4.2 The Transformation in the Treatment of Foreigners**

British residents sometimes signalled dubious correspondence received from Britain to the revolutionary authorities, fearing that if they did not, the onus would be on them to prove their innocence if their papers were ever scrutinised. The wife of Christopher White, the landlord of White's Hotel, reacted quickly when, on encountering her former postman in the street shortly after the family had quitted their hotel for a new residence at rue des Filles-St-Thomas, he handed her an unexpected letter, without neither stamp, date, nor signature, in exchange for the payment of twelve *sols*. The short text, written in “bad English”, expressed thanks for the information provided, asked for further news to be sent and hoped that British forces would soon be at Paris. White’s wife wasted no time in showing the letter to her husband, who denounced it immediately to the members of the Mail section in a formal deposition. He assured the section that it was a fraudulent letter from an enemy of the Revolution. At the head of the original letter is annotated, “This is a snare to entrap C. White rec’d by Mrs White July 31 and shall be sent to the Committee of Publick Safety by me. C White.” The testimony to the section provides the details of Mrs White’s whereabouts and movements before and after receiving the letter, showing just how meticulous British residents had to be in order to avoid suspicion. White’s haste in rushing to rue Montmartre to deliver his statement to the justice of the peace of the section showed, in his words, “once again his civic spirit and total devotion to the French republic that he has adopted as his country.”<sup>218</sup> The episode reveals the extent to which British residents, even those associated

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<sup>217</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Everina Wollstonecraft, Le Havre, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1794, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 248.

<sup>218</sup> See the prison file of Christopher White, AN F7/4775/52.

with radical activity such as Christopher White, had to go to ensure their unblemished reputation in the French capital.<sup>219</sup>

As has been emphasised, those who went to France or remained in residence after 1792 were individuals whose political beliefs and intellectual goals most complemented revolutionary philosophy, yet they were ironically those for whom the repercussions of the Terror would be particularly acute. Once suspicion of foreigners had become one of the leading strands of revolutionary practice by 1793, it was those who had arrived after, not before, 1789 who were considered most likely to be agents of counter-revolution sponsored by foreign tyrants. For defenders of the Revolution, those who had come to France in the wake of the fall of the Bastille were more susceptible to having been sent by the Revolution's detractors than those who had taken up residence before the overhaul of the Ancien Regime. This was one of the many ambiguities which characterised the treatment of foreigners, particularly those of countries at war with France, in the radicalised phase of the Revolution.<sup>220</sup> Philipp Ziesche summarises the paradox:

Because they invested so much power in emotional honesty, which signified political integrity, French republicans and their foreign supporters harbored a profound, phobic suspicion that the most virtuous-looking exterior could mask a festering core of evil. The longing for transparency fed political paranoia.<sup>221</sup>

Ziesche points out, "It was precisely the efforts of some foreigners to build a cosmopolitan community by making a spectacle of their sensibility and universal benevolence that raised

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<sup>219</sup> David Williams also received a compromising letter in late 1792 while residing at Paris, requesting his assistance on behalf of an émigré family at St. Omer. The letter, which celebrated the English constitution and advocated the reprieve of Louis XVI, would have provoked further suspicion had it been made public. It is quoted in Whitney R. D. Jones, *David Williams: The Anvil and the Hammer* (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1986) 124.

<sup>220</sup> The importance of 1789 as a watershed, dictating responses to foreigner activities in France, is patent in the incarceration records of the *Comité de Salut Public*. Detainees such as British Club member Robert Rayment had to account for their revenues and profession "before and after the Revolution." The distinction would seemingly highlight any inconsistencies in behaviour which might betray counter-revolutionary intent hidden behind support for the Revolution.

<sup>221</sup> Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots* 85.

suspicion among the Montagnards.”<sup>222</sup> Authentic and vocal support for the Revolution was therefore more likely to generate the suspicion of duplicity than silence.

By the time of the Girondin expulsion from the National Assembly in late May 1793, a significant core of British Club members were attempting to secure passports out of the country. Those who stayed had to reconcile themselves to the fact that their situation exposed them to heightened danger and they would have to adapt their discourse and behaviour accordingly. Many had formerly associated with members of the Girondin party. Such political affinities, as well as their nationality, increased the suspicion British activists provoked among members of the ascendant revolutionary committees. Appeals to universal benevolence and common humanity, widespread at the height of revolutionary cosmopolitanism, were now perceived as sham attempts to secure individual liberation and probably proof that those uttering such oaths of loyalty were actually insidious enemies of the Revolution. British residents in Paris, despite their sympathy or active engagement with the Revolution, and whatever the radical pedigree and extent of involvement in the British Club, suffered with the acceleration of the radical phase of the Revolution during the course of 1793-94. They became victims of the Terror and their experience of imprisonment and persecution, illness, financial ruin and death, has lent weight to the argument that they suffered from dual persecution, both in Britain and France.

William Rogers Brubaker notes that under the Ancien Regime, cosmopolitanism was “undemonstrative”. Foreigners were welcomed but this was not an outspoken ideological stance and was simply part of national practice. Many expatriates had already established themselves in Paris long before the fall of the Bastille. Christopher White had already set up his first hotel business before the Revolution, the Irish, Scottish and English religious colleges were well-anchored institutions in Parisian society. Numerous foreigners had also served in

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<sup>222</sup> Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots* 86.

the French military under the Ancien Regime and traders and merchants had routinely benefited from the practical relaxation of what were in theory strict financial and inheritance constraints on foreign nationals, notably in the form of the notorious *droit d'aubaine*.<sup>223</sup> The abolition of the *droit d'aubaine* in 1790 may have had symbolic weight in spurring commercial, money-making ventures among foreign residents, yet in practice foreigners already benefited from significant loopholes in the former system.<sup>224</sup> According to Brubaker, under the Revolution, cosmopolitanism, rather than being organic, with notable pragmatic though discreet advantages, was “recast...in ideological terms,” and foreigners were actively encouraged to seek refuge in France in a spirit of universal brotherhood.<sup>225</sup> Inscribing cosmopolitanism in revolutionary ideology made the message of universality clearer in the early stages of the Revolution, but also paved the way for a deeper rift once this ideology began to change.

Sophie Wahnich and Marc Belissa suggest that there was a departure in the early stage of the war with Britain whereby the British people themselves, rather than their government, became the legitimate target of the war effort.<sup>226</sup> While the liberticidal crimes of the British had hitherto been attributed to the corrupt Pitt ministry, and war declared on the apparatus of power rather than the people themselves, from late 1793 the British populace itself was seen as an accomplice in the crimes of its government. For the Jacobin leadership, the sovereign British people, in failing to rise up against their tyrannical rulers, had themselves sullied the name of liberty. Failure to resist in the face of oppression was considered an outright betrayal

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<sup>223</sup> For a comprehensive study of the expatriate groups in Paris under the Ancien Régime see Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship*. Rapport also explains the practical implications of the *droit d'aubaine*, a law which stipulated that all goods belonging to foreigners would pass to the king on their death.

<sup>224</sup> Rapport suggests that even if the *droit d'aubaine* was viewed as a symbol of feudal tyranny and revolutionaries condemned it using the language of the rights of man, the pragmatic reality meant that its abolition was probably due more to financial than ideological reasons, spurred by the fear of foreigners withdrawing their entrepreneurial activities from France.

<sup>225</sup> William Rogers Brubaker, “The French Revolution and the Invention of Citizenship,” *French Politics and Society*, 7.3 (1989) 41.

<sup>226</sup> See Sophie Wahnich and Marc Belissa, “Les crimes des Anglais: trahir le droit,” *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 47 (1995): 233-48. See also Sophie Wahnich, *L’Impossible citoyen: l’étranger dans le discours de la Révolution française* (Paris: A. Michel, 1997).

of universal natural law. It was seen as justifying the collective death sentence imposed on the British, epitomised by the decision of the French authorities to no longer take prisoners of war but to fight each man to the death.<sup>227</sup> Not to punish a guilty population would be to make the French guilty themselves and tarnish their claim to be the guardians of universal liberty. This was a departure from the language used in the invitation to foreigners to become French citizens in August 1792 and in the Edict of Fraternity which drew a distinction between a tyrannical government and its suppressed, but ultimately righteous, people.

Notions of liberticide were not new. Etienne de la Boétie had explored the idea of voluntary servitude in the XVI<sup>th</sup> century in his *Discours de la servitude volontaire, ou le contre-un* (1549). In his view, the condition of slavery demanded not only an exploitative master but a willing slave. A century later, John Milton, Secretary for Foreign Languages in Cromwell's Commonwealth administration, was meditating on the conditions for a successful republic in his tracts on royal tyranny, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1650) and *The Readie and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660). He believed that for a republic to flourish, a virtuous, liberty-loving citizenry was a prerequisite. Popular disaffection with the regime in the 1650s deeply troubled Milton and much of his thinking in the 1650s focused on how to transform a servile populace, repressed by monarchical culture, into a republican citizenry through the election of worthy leaders and popular education. The French Jacobin leadership used these notions to cast a collective shadow over a British population refusing to rise up against monarchical despotism.

Some British radicals in Paris actively fuelled this view, themselves chastising the British public for renouncing the title of “freeborn Englishmen” and failing to assume a civic role in their national community. Disaffection with the apathetic and consensual spirit of the

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<sup>227</sup> In her notes to the *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Janet Todd provides an alternative explanation for the decision to no longer take prisoners of war. For Todd, this was due to French anxiety at the capacity of French jails to cope with the influx of foreign captives rather than an ideological decision to fight the British to the death. She argues, “anxieties about the increasing number of war prisoners contributed to the decision of 7 Prairial (26 May) that no British prisoners be taken.” See Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 255.

British people united both home-based and expatriate radicals.<sup>228</sup> There was a strong belief in the notion of regeneration and many British residents of Paris believed a sea change in moral sense and civic virtue was needed as well as political reform to ensure the end of oligarchy, corruption and tyranny. As Margaret Jacob has argued, “in the last decades of the century, one theme seemed to dominate the international conversation in sociable circles: the meaning and nature of democratic republics, and after 1789, the kind of personal transformation needed to create the democratic subject.”<sup>229</sup>

Yet despite their willingness to chastise their countrymen who failed to act against what was seen as a corrupt ruling elite, and their admiration for the achievements of the Revolution, British residents in Paris, no matter their own grievances towards their government and fellow subjects, were not immune to the sweeping anti-British nationalism which reigned after February 1793. Michael Rapport’s work differentiates between the xenophobic rhetoric of the French government and the actual handling of foreigners by the revolutionary authorities. In looking at the pragmatic implications of the presence of alien nationals in revolutionary France, he identifies a significant discrepancy between principle, which was increasingly exclusive in the definition of citizenship, and practice, whereby foreigners retained some of their positions and privileges. He suggests that although the nation came to be a vital factor in the definition of civic belonging, foreigners were not simply excluded on the grounds of their origin. A cosmopolitan vein still ran through revolutionary politics, and if foreign nationals were persecuted it was more often because of their suspected political affiliations than their country of birth. The scope for political dissent narrowed and orthodoxy was increasingly the only legitimate mode of political expression.<sup>230</sup> Rapport, though interested in the practical

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<sup>228</sup> See for example John Thelwall’s collection, *Poems Written in Close Confinement in the Tower and Newgate, under a Charge of High Treason* (London: Ridgeway, 1795) and Sampson Perry’s *An Historical Sketch*.

<sup>229</sup> Margaret Jacob, “Sociability and the International Republican Conversation,” *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840*, ed. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 25.

<sup>230</sup> See Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship*.



response of the revolutionary authorities to foreign residents, focuses his analysis on politics from the perspective of the administration and the divergences between policy and practice, rather than on the experience and viewpoint of foreigners themselves.

## **I. Conclusion**

In the early 1790s, the open acceptance of some form of critical commentary on the British state and constitution, inspired by the changes taking place in France gave way to more widespread hostility to all expressions of radical opposition. Reforming opinion, whether couched in the language of moderate change or fully supportive of the upheavals taking place in France, could be deemed “Jacobin” and portrayed as threatening the fabric of the British political and social order. Radicals who sought exile in France in 1792-93, when developments in France had engendered a more pervasive spirit of national loyalty in Britain and antipathy to the spectre of Revolution, were portrayed as enemies of the British state, capable of conveying French calamities to the British mainland. They could no longer claim the status of revolutionary tourists, but their presence in Paris sent a clear political message to observers at home. Radical expatriation created anxiety within the ruling elite, not only about the possibility of an invasion but also about the potential cultural and social impact their exile might have in Britain. In France, while foreigners were initially welcomed in a spirit of universal brotherhood, the climate engendered by war and the threat of counter-revolution meant that radicals became victims of the increasing exclusivity of French citizenship during the course of 1793. Many took the decision to return to Britain in the summer of 1793, while those who stayed faced the prospect of incarceration after the passage of the Law of Suspects in September of the same year.

Historical studies of British radicals in Paris have tended to rely on this over-arching portrait of their status as exiles caught in a wider diplomatic contest. Interpretations have been influenced by the accounts of spies such as Captain Monro who portrayed radicals as

incendiary Jacobin rebels who had foregone their claim to Britishness or informants such as Citizen Arthur who denounced radical John Hurford Stone to the French authorities, depicting him as a duplicitous counterrevolutionary agent secretly employed in the service of William Pitt. Although useful in providing an impression of the way in which British expatriate supporters of the Revolution became pawns in a battle for national identity, ideological coherence and international legitimacy, they are less helpful when we come to consider the complexity of British radical experience in France. As William St Clair put it in his biography of William Godwin and his extended family, “writers who have relied on the nineteenth-century biographies as sources for documents have tended to slip into their assumptions and interpretations.”<sup>231</sup>

In a similar way, the accounts of those writing of British expatriates in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tend to be steeped in the anti-Revolution rhetoric which characterised the writing of history in an era where the collective memory, in Britain, was saturated with images of Napoleon’s imperial reclaiming of the Revolution and successive restorations and upheavals. They are therefore often heavily loaded with judgmental bias at the decision of radicals to lend their support to a Revolution which had become the epitome of violence and civil anarchy. The author of the foreword to the 1906 edition of Henry Yorke’s *France in 1802* considered “the prevalent idea, that the prosperity of modern France is due to the great Revolution, is a fallacy,” and dismissed the Revolution as “an orgy of brute force, a destroyer producing nothing great neither in art, literature or science.”<sup>232</sup> Historical coverage of the British Club has, by and large, perpetuated these representations, forged during the propaganda conflict between Britain and France and consolidated during the nineteenth century when Whig versions of history smoothed over problematic episodes in the British past and overlooked unusual figures. Scholars have also emphasised the way in which British

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<sup>231</sup> William St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: A Biography of a Family* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) xii.

<sup>232</sup> Richard Davey in the foreword to Yorke, *France in 1802* 5.

expatriates lost out in the drive towards a more nationally-coherent vision of citizenship within republican France. While British radicals did suffer under the Terror, often enduring financial ruin and imprisonment, some also managed to negotiate with the French authorities and continued their political engagement in the more troubled era of Montagnard rule. The next chapter will examine the way in which British activists established a thriving associational world in revolutionary Paris. This community, though forged during a period when the contributions of foreigners were welcomed in the revolutionary debate, did not disintegrate during the months of the Terror. The culture established within the British Club at White's Hotel was also part of a wider network of enquiry and improvement which emerged in Britain during the later eighteenth century.

## CHAPTER II

# AN ASSOCIATIONAL WORLD AT WHITE'S HOTEL<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> The title of this chapter makes reference to the work done by Peter Clark on the “making of an associational world”. See Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*.

## **II. Introduction**

The French Revolution was a catalyst for a wave of revolutionary tourism emanating from the British Isles and elsewhere. Visiting France was not a new phenomenon to coincide with the advent of Revolution, but the events of 1789 did provide novel reasons for travellers to throng to the French capital. Early visitors to Paris included poets, ambassadors and businessmen, all harbouring a curiosity to see the events at first hand. Visits were not uniformly connected to political sympathy, nor were they systematically linked to persecution or judicial pursuit, although by 1792, visiting France carried deeper political and diplomatic implications than it had done in 1789. For some, the Revolution provided new openings for speculative or creative activity which, if never entirely independent of politics, did involve them in diverse, intersecting, and sometimes contradictory networks. Their relationship to France, the Revolution, its leaders, and the ideas it conveyed was more complex than traditional portraits have admitted.

Short visits to the French capital sometimes led to repeated Channel-hopping, extended seasonal stays or in some cases permanent settling. This was true of Robert Merry and Thomas Paine among others. There was a conjunction between political curiosity and individual enterprise for most British residents in early 1790s Paris. Many had interconnecting schemes and projects, sometimes involving fellow compatriots or new acquaintances, which the revolutionary context served to further. Far from being ungrounded idealists, their heads filled with contemplations of the rights of man and liberty, they were some of the most hard-headed pragmatists of the era, often acutely skilled in handling competing pressures and carving out a place for themselves in an extremely intricate diplomatic arena. These negotiating talents were tested to the limit from 1792-93 when this subtle conjunction of the pragmatic and the political began to be more thoroughly challenged by respective ruling regimes armed with competing propaganda agendas. Amid the Anglo-French conflict, visits

took on an increasingly symbolic value and observation of the Revolution could not be divorced from interest in and approval of its aims. Presence in Paris, whether profoundly or only superficially linked to support for the French Revolution, had deep political implications which narrowed, though in no way eradicated, the scope for individual agency. This chapter aims to look both beyond this propaganda war and between the lines of official discourse, to discover the ways in which British radicals succeeded in finding outlets and opportunities in revolutionary Paris. Particular emphasis will be placed on their collective endeavours, commitment to mutual assistance and involvement in networks linking them back to Britain. Members of the British Club carved out opportunities for business advancement, facilitated the plans and schemes of their fellow countrymen, took responsibility for each others' orphaned children, and eased each others' financial hardships. During the Montagnard ascendancy from June 1793 to July 1794, they also drew attention to their previous political activism in appeals to secure their freedom. This chapter will consider therefore the way in which an associational, reciprocal culture developed among British expatriate radicals in Paris, many of whom had already had sustained involvement with other circles of improvement either abroad or in Britain. It is concerned with how the British Club functioned as a community and the way in which this community allowed for individual interests and differences within the Club as part of a wider tradition of Enlightenment culture and enquiry.

## **II.1 Broad Trends in British Club Membership**

### **II.1.1 Age and Experience**

Those of radical sympathy who went to Paris to investigate the Revolution at close hand had certain traits in common, although there was no strict uniformity in their trajectories or their characters and many had private reasons for departure. One of the youngest to briefly take up residence in the French capital was Henry Redhead Yorke who was seventeen at the

time of the fall of the Bastille and who went to Paris, joining the British Club at the end of 1792.<sup>234</sup> Francis Tweddell, a signatory of the 1792 British Club address to the National Convention, was “a lad of about eighteen” when he arrived in Paris with Joel Barlow and John Frost in November 1792.<sup>235</sup> The main contingent of the club, however, seem to have been aged between their mid-twenties and mid-forties at the time of the Revolution. Leading members such as John Hurford Stone and Lord Edward Fitzgerald were twenty-six in 1789 while other key figures, such as Robert Merry, John Oswald, Sampson Perry and John Frost were in their mid- to late-thirties or early forties when they arrived in Paris. As Peter Clark has noted in his study of the English-speaking associational world, such wide age spans were relatively common in voluntary societies of the era.

This age spread suggests that many of the British who took up short-term residence in Paris were youthful, yet with not inconsiderable professional and political experience. They had invariably reached adulthood by the outbreak of the American Revolution and some had already registered significant achievements in fields such as the law, commerce, poetry, theatre, medicine, the military or journalism. Their decision to go to France was in all likelihood a carefully conceived one, often not made out of blind desperation or political fantasy. It would undoubtedly have been tinged with idealism, probably prompted by membership of dissenting or reformist circles and heavily inspired by an adventurous temperament which had swelled with the French Revolution, coming on the heel of the American war of independence. Yet it was less naïve than maturing and worldly individuals who formed the core nucleus of the British Club. Many had already acquired a significant degree of political experience, pedigree or notoriety in London radical circles and some had been thwarted from advancing their professional pursuits and social status further under the Pitt ministry, which had become increasingly hostile to proponents of reform. These

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<sup>234</sup> Yorke, *France in 1802* 2.

<sup>235</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959.

constraints ultimately galvanised radicals' courage both in seeking exile and exploiting the opportunities it afforded.

### **II.1.2 Family Status**

While a number of radicals went to Paris unaccompanied, others set off with, or were later joined by, family and domestic staff, while several also departed with colleagues and acquaintances. Collective departures may have been spurred by a number of considerations. Visits had the potential to be extended indefinitely and kin may have been dependent on the departing member for material survival. This was not the case for Joel Barlow, who left his wife Ruth in London after she had made the initial transatlantic crossing to join him. She was later reunited with him in Paris however, once his tarnished reputation as a sympathiser of the French Revolution had begun to compromise her comfort in Britain. Robert Merry set off for the French capital again in the summer of 1792, with his wife Anne Brunton, having already visited Paris in 1788-89 – probably witnessing the fall of the Bastille – and again in July and August 1791, while Robert Smith and Robert Rayment both settled in Paris with their wives and children.<sup>236</sup> John Oswald may have had two wives in Paris and his two sons joined him in the French volunteer forces in the Vendée. John Hurford Stone's wife, Rachel Coope, accompanied him to Paris, though after the settling of their divorce in June 1794, Hurford Stone's relationship with Helen Maria Williams was openly acknowledged, and he probably moved into her lodgings later that year. Williams herself departed for Paris for the first time in her late twenties with her mother and sisters. Mary Wollstonecraft met her American partner, Gilbert Imlay soon after arriving in Paris and as Mrs Imlay, claiming American nationality, was able to ward off some of the effects of the Terror. Robert Merry and Charlotte Smith both employed chambermaids and servants during their stay in France and showed concern for

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<sup>236</sup> The *Monthly Magazine* biographical notice of Merry reads, "They both returned from the continent in the summer of 1793 (for Mrs. Merry had accompanied him to France)." *The Monthly Magazine*, vol. 7 (April 1799) 257. Robert Smith had three children, aged ten, eleven and twelve. (See AN F7/4775/20/3).



their well-being when applying for passports to leave France in spring and summer of 1793.<sup>237</sup> Robert Smith also troubled himself about the safety of a number of elderly French men and women in his charge when he was imprisoned from late 1793 onwards.<sup>238</sup> Thomas Christie went to France with his wife Rebecca, as well as his sister, and employed a French servant while based there.<sup>239</sup> Evidence for the employment of domestic staff corroborates the view that many expatriate radicals hailed from a bourgeois background and, at least initially, could finance the outlay of maintaining servants.

### II.1.3 Professional Background

With the exception of titled men such as Lord Edward Fitzgerald and Sir Robert Smith, most of the radical emigrants to Paris were men of letters and of the professions or from an entrepreneurial background. They were often, to differing degrees, highly cultured, reputed within international philosophical circles and well-connected both in London and Paris. They were also a primarily urban set. Many had already met figures from the French and American Revolutions before arriving in Paris and a large number were members of different radical societies in London. The British Club was also given impetus by men and women who had achieved some celebrity in the field of publishing, journalism, authorship or editing. Some of them had already played roles within the European intellectual Enlightenment and their legitimacy had frequently been challenged by agents of the Pitt government operating an increasingly intolerant policy towards determined radicals who continued to look to the French precedent. Sampson Perry had taken up the editorship of the radical journal *The Argus* in 1789, remaining at its head until its disbandment in early 1793, soon after his flight to Paris. Thomas Christie was a writer for, and some-time editor of, the *Analytical Review*, and,

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<sup>237</sup> In their petitions for passports, both Merry and Smith included their serving staff in their bid for passage back to Britain. See AN F7/4412.

<sup>238</sup> AN F7/4775/20/3. See Smith's petition to the committee of his Le Pelletier section, written on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1793.

<sup>239</sup> See AN F7/4648, in particular the file on Thomas Christie.

though not an acknowledged signatory of the British Club address to the National Convention, mixed with a number of its members. John Hurford Stone, Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, Robert Merry, Robert O'Reilly, Henry Redhead Yorke, David Williams, Thomas Cooper and John Oswald were among those associates or members of the Club whose primary activities centred on the publishing world, journalism or pamphleteering.

Others had established themselves in more overtly commercial lines of activity or in the field of medicine. Before turning to journalism, Perry had been a surgeon, writing a tract on bladder and kidney disease, and William Choppin, who shared lodgings with Thomas Paine in Paris, had worked as a chemist in London prior to his departure.<sup>240</sup> The third resident in the triumvirate living in rue du faubourg Saint-Denis was William Johnson, a doctor.<sup>241</sup> George Edwards had also practised in medicine in both Barnard Castle and London and had written a treatise based on the work of Benjamin Franklin while Robert O'Reilly was known in the scientific world. His inventions and experiments came to light in Paris under his editorship of the *Annales des Arts et Manufactures* in the Napoleonic era.<sup>242</sup> Interest in industry and knowledge prompted equivocal reactions during the early Revolution yet proliferated under the Thermidorian Directoire and Empire.<sup>243</sup>

#### **II.1.4 Previous Travelling**

Some British exiles in Paris had had previous experience of expatriation and had been involved in European radical circles, although for the majority their residence in Paris appears to have been one of their first expeditions abroad. Robert Merry had played a key role in the

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<sup>240</sup> Sampson Perry, *A Disquisition of the Stone and Gravel; with Strictures on the Gout, When combined with those Disorders, The Seventh Edition improved and enlarged*. (London: Reynell, 1785). See also Iain McCalman's portrait of the radical editor in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 158.

<sup>241</sup> See PRO TS 11/965/3510/A2: Memorandum from Ross to Nepean, Friday 13<sup>th</sup> November 1792: "Since my last Clío received a letter from a Mr Choppin late a chymist of London."

<sup>242</sup> For a discussion of O'Reilly's editing career in Paris, see below, pp. 141-43.

<sup>243</sup> See Jean Tulard, *Les Thermidoriens* (Paris: Fayard, 2005). Tulard's study shows, among other things, that the Thermidorian years saw an exponential growth in industry, the arts and intellectual pursuits, leading to the establishment of many enduring institutions which are not conventionally associated with this period of French history, such as the *Arts et Métiers*.

founding of the Della Cruscan poetic circle in Florence in the late 1780s and, while in Italy, “became deeply involved in plots for the independence of Florence, joining the literary and political malcontents who secretly hated Leopold.”<sup>244</sup> He also witnessed the fall of the Bastille before returning to Paris in both 1791 and 1792-93. Lord Edward Fitzgerald went to France having already witnessed the new American republic at first sight.<sup>245</sup> On returning to London from his visit across the Atlantic, Fitzgerald met Thomas Paine in the summer of 1791 through their mutual acquaintance Thomas Clio Rickman. Paine had been a guiding figure in the American Revolution, his pamphlet *Common Sense* providing an irrefutable justification for independence, based on arguments of natural law, which legislators and leaders had failed to adequately articulate. Paine hoped the events of 1776 would inspire and inflect what he saw as its French equivalent. However, few members of the British Club were as internationally celebrated as Paine. For many, France was the first direct contact they had had with an alternative regime and their first experience of radical activity outside Britain.

Some would later go on to experiment with trans-Atlantic travel. Thomas Cooper went to America after a brief stay in France. He would later compare the French Revolution unfavourably with the American, despite his earlier optimism. Sampson Perry arrived in France with an initial plan of making his way via the continent to American shores. Yet his plan never came to fruition, probably thwarted by his prolonged incarceration in French jails from 1793 to 1794 and the financial hardship he suffered. Robert Merry did eventually emigrate to America, after returning to England from France in the summer of 1793. He made the transatlantic crossing with his wife in 1796. Helen Maria Williams and John Hurford Stone were forced into a protracted stay in Switzerland after being marked out as suspects by

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<sup>244</sup> M. Ray Adams, “Robert Merry, Political Romanticist” 25.

<sup>245</sup> A number of works have examined the Della Cruscan poetic circle in Florence. See in particular Jon Mee, ““Reciprocal expressions of kindness”: Robert Merry, Della Cruscanism and the Limits of Sociability,” *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840*, ed. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2002) 104-22; M. Ray Adams, “Della Cruscanism in America,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 79:3 (June 1964): 259-65; by the same author, “Robert Merry, Political Romanticist.” See also W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *The English Della Cruscan and their Time, 1783-1828* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967).

the French authorities in April 1794, and Mary Wollstonecraft undertook a mission to Sweden, Denmark and Norway on behalf of Gilbert Imlay, before returning to London in 1795. While some members of the Club were seasoned international travellers who had occasionally been involved in earlier revolutionary struggles, the experience of the majority of British visitors to Paris was restricted to the British reform scene.

### **II.1.5 Duration of Stays in Paris**

Stays varied from a few months to decades with some visitors making numerous trips backwards and forwards. Others embarked on one visit which would never be repeated, while several made Paris their permanent residence, enduring and sometimes exploiting the uncertainties of the revolutionary and imperial regimes. John Hurford Stone travelled between London and Paris until 1793, when he set up his English printing press. From this moment onwards he remained in France, leaving only as a temporary condition of liberation in 1794 and hereafter disqualified from returning to Britain after the trial of his brother William. Helen Maria Williams first went to Paris in July 1790, returning to London in September of the same year to publish her first volume of *Letters Written in France*. She and her mother and sisters returned in 1792, which would be the beginning of permanent residence in the French capital for Williams. Stone and Helen Maria Williams lived out the rest of their lives in the French capital, under the changing revolutionary and imperial regimes. Stone was buried in Père Lachaise cemetery on his death in 1818 and Williams lived until 1827, finishing off a final account of her memories of the revolutionary age during her final months, which was translated by her nephew and published in 1828 in a French edition under the title of *Souvenirs de la Révolution française*.<sup>246</sup>

Thomas Christie made three visits to Paris, first in May 1791, when he translated the monarchical constitution into English, then later in 1792, and finally the spring of 1793.

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<sup>246</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *Souvenirs de la Révolution française* (Paris: Dondey-Dupré, 1828).

Sampson Perry visited France twice, once for a short visit in October 1792, when he tried to generate interest in a republication project for his newspaper *The Argus* before leaving London more permanently at the end of the year. Perry would stay in Paris until November 1794, when he was released from prison, yet for fourteen months of this stay he was lodged in Paris jails. After a few months in Paris, Robert O'Reilly went to Britain briefly in 1793 to attend a trial before returning to Paris and establishing himself as editor and inventor, while John Frost made two short visits to Paris, firstly accompanying Thomas Paine in mid-September 1792 and again in November 1792 as part of the SCI delegation.<sup>247</sup> He returned to London in February 1793. Robert Merry had visited France on at least two occasions, in 1788-89 and 1791, before making a longer visit spanning mid-1792 to May 1793. Even during this stay, he returned to Britain between the end of September and October, attending an SCI meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> September and sitting on the committee chosen to consult the LCS on the addresses to the National Convention.<sup>248</sup> Such behaviour confirms the fluid nature of expatriation in Paris and the way in which radicals continued their activities in both countries. Equally, John Oswald continued to write for the *Gazetteer* in Britain until June 1791, despite also founding the *Universal Patriot* in Paris in 1790, although he would make Paris his permanent residence from then on. He died in the Vendée uprising, fighting for the republic, in September 1793.

Identifying a pattern to stays in Paris is therefore problematic as the length, nature and motivation of visits were invariably determined by individual circumstances. Yet what seems undeniable is that British activists visiting Paris initially engaged in short, exploratory trips

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<sup>247</sup> See AN F7/4412. O'Reilly suggests that his return to Britain was to attend the trial of Richard Sheridan, the famous Whig theatre proprietor. Sheridan, though heavily involved in campaigns for the liberty of the press and a campaigner against the war with France, was not brought to trial. There is a possibility that O'Reilly wanted to attend a trial where Sheridan was to be called as a witness, or that he simply used the excuse of a trial as a pretext to temporarily leave the country while tensions mounted against foreigners.

<sup>248</sup> See James Clifford, "Robert Merry, A Pre-Byronic Hero," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 27.1 (December 1942): 74-96. Merry was in Paris from May to October 1788 and visited again after the fall of the Bastille in summer 1789 when he attended debates at the National Assembly. See also Jon Mee, "*The Magician No Conjuror*."

before making any attempt to firmly settle in the French capital and their stays could vary from a few weeks to several years, depending on imperatives at home and opportunities abroad. They continued to be involved in both British and French networks as they travelled and took part in a two-way transfer of knowledge and ideas that the short distance across the Channel encouraged. Residence in Paris was sometimes followed by subsequent foreign travel, often to Switzerland, Hamburg or the United States and departures were invariably linked to the perception of the risk to one's life or livelihood. Many British residents took the decision to leave Paris permanently in the spring of 1793 after the judgement meted out to Louis XVI and the subsequent realignment of interests between opposing political forces in the National Convention. Several had already begun to suffer from financial distress and were reassessing their decision to remain at the turn of the year. Robert Merry left Paris in May 1793 after hastily negotiating a passport from Jacques-Louis David, while Charlotte Smith and Robert O'Reilly secured temporary passports to leave, both promising to return at a later date. George Edwards took the opportunity to flee Paris in July 1793, having offered his views on the new constitution and political affairs of France in published essays.<sup>249</sup> For those who remained after mid 1793, most would go on to have some experience of incarceration under the Terror, and the next opportunity afforded them to leave was after their liberation in the months following Thermidor.<sup>250</sup> After July 1794 most foreign residents, apart from those whose case was put forward for special residence permission, returned to their home country. Many went back to Paris during the brief cessation of hostilities between Britain and France that began in 1802 with the Treaty of Amiens.

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<sup>249</sup> See AN F7/4412. Edwards asked for a passport out of France, stating that he had all the required documents. He also insisted that if necessary he could prove his loyalty to the French Revolution and the "spotlessness" of his political principles by reference to his tracts previously presented to the Convention.

<sup>250</sup> The fall of Robespierre on 9 Thermidor An II is often seen as a pivotal moment, signalling not only the end of the Terror, with public opinion resolutely rejecting the continued pursuit of radical revolutionary justice and emergency governance, but also the beginning of the end of the Revolution. However there were many extremists among the Thermidorians and little concern was paid initially to the fate of British residents in French jails. Some, such as Robert Rayment and Thomas Paine, remained behind bars for months before their petitions were recognised and their freedom secured.

## II.2 Choice of Destination: France or America?

Michael Durey has carried out a comprehensive investigation of the reasons for British expatriation to America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century which is useful as a starting point in a discussion on British motives for removing to France. Among the different groups who chose American metropolises as destinations for exile, Durey identified those who withdrew from Britain or Ireland to gain tactical advantage and renew their forces for the next move, fully intending to return once the time was right. This group included Irish rebels such as Archibald Hamilton Rowan who were planning for an Irish uprising with French backing. A significant number chose exile as the only alternative to the scaffold or transportation to Botany Bay, particularly after the failed Irish Rebellion of 1798. Others, such as Joseph Priestley, chose exile to America because of persistent intimidation by loyalist gangs in Britain. Priestley's home had been attacked by Church and King rioters in Birmingham in July 1791 and Priestley was conjured up as a national outcast in the subsequent months. Finally, those who turned informers and spies often sought refuge in America once their identity and safety had been compromised.

America boasted a host of attractions for British and Irish exiles. It was seen as a neutral country amid the conflicts of European war which had broken out in 1792. It conjured up visions of prosperity and liberty and was considered the most promising asylum for those fleeing persecution. Many had trade or family connections already established and therefore drew on those networks in seeking refuge outside the British Isles. The American political system was also considered a model of democracy and moderate republicanism, and was brought into sharp contrast with France once Robespierre and other radical Jacobins had assumed control of the *Comité de Salut Public*.

America may therefore have proved attractive to those of more temperate radical hue. Durey suggests that "John Thelwall, probably the most erudite of the LCS political thinkers,

noted that more advanced radicals were impressed by France, the moderate by America.”<sup>251</sup> By mid 1791 the French Revolution had started to take a more radical direction after the king’s abortive flight to Varennes and republican voices had begun to be heard with greater urgency. Yet it was only after August 1792, the September massacres, and the trial of the king in January 1793 that it became strikingly clear that France was heading down a much more strident revolutionary road than America. Most British Club activists arrived in Paris at this crossroads. They settled before the fracture in the National Convention leading to the exclusion of Girondin members, who had cultivated close links with British and American reformers in the 1780s and early 1790s, but they arrived after the August Days and the September massacres which had shown the violence that the Revolution was capable of generating. The vast majority were already present in the French capital by the time of the signing of the British Club address of November and those who came later, Sampson Perry or Mary Wollstonecraft for example, arrived within a month or two.

While in 1792 and early 1793 it was still conceivable to try one’s fortunes in France as an alternative to facing prosecution at home, by 1794, the narrowing conception of international brotherhood in France and the prevailing suspicion of foreigners, whatever their revolutionary credentials, meant that the French channel had been more or less cut off or at least the reception expected was much less easy to predict. The Whig politician Benjamin Vaughan gambled on exile to France in 1794, though he had mixed fortunes after his arrival. Yet John Thelwall, Thomas Hardy, Horne Tooke and their fellow detainees could not have opted for the same departure as Paine, Frost and Perry in 1792 as the circumstances of international politics had radically shifted and the offering of universal fraternity was no longer extended to British nationals.

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<sup>251</sup> Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals* 166.



One reason why France was so attractive in 1790-92 was that it conjured up the hope of radical transformation on Old World soil. By the early 1790s, the idealised American republican model had been somewhat tainted by the Federalist quarrels and establishment of what were seen by some as a quasi-monarchical form of republicanism. Some radicals, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, also doubted the capacity of the American republic to offer the same potential for literary, cultural and intellectual betterment as Europe. France in the early years of the 1790s still inspired idealism as to the political and cultural progress it might encourage, hopes which had slowly dissipated across the Atlantic. Another attraction of France was its proximity. Travelling to the French capital still demanded planning and organisation, but it was considerably more convenient than a trans-Atlantic crossing. Visits to France could therefore be impromptu and temporary, without necessitating the sort of forward-thinking and family uprooting that was unavoidable in an American journey. In contrast to American expatriates, those who took up residence in France could envisage making shorter exploratory visits before opting for a longer stay. Expatriates, such as John Oswald, John Hurford Stone, Robert Merry, John Frost, and Sampson Perry often managed to travel consistently between London and Paris, continuing ventures in both cities and considering neither as their permanent residence. This nomadic behaviour was particularly characteristic of those for whom France was a destination in the early 1790s. Such crossovers made such individuals difficult to define and provoked suspicion as to their motives on either side of the Channel.

Yet the reservations that radicals felt about going to America were not only a matter of political preference or practicality. Men and women who spent time in Paris, such as Robert Merry and Mary Wollstonecraft, were sceptical about whether the cultural and social life developing on American soil would be able to rival that of Europe. Their unease at the cultural repercussions of an advanced, predominantly commercial society, which relied on trade and speculation for its riches, dampened enthusiasm for American expatriation. Mary

Wollstonecraft certainly gave up all pretensions of crossing the Atlantic, having already chastised her American lover Gilbert Imlay in successive letters for his blind pursuit of wealth to the detriment of personal fulfilment and simpler pleasures. She reiterated this contempt for commerce in her *Letters Written in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796) where she seems to dismiss all ideas she may have had of emigrating to America. While it is possible that Wollstonecraft's distaste for commerce was tied up with her disapproval of Imlay's repeated absences (and the different view given in her *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* that "the friction of arts and commerce have given to society the transcendently pleasing polish of urbanity" would support this argument) she may also have had deeper cultural reservations about the potential for the progress of knowledge and manners across the Atlantic.<sup>252</sup>

### **II.3 Activities of British Radicals in Paris and Reasons for Departure**

The activities of British radical residents of Paris were as diverse as their reasons for taking up residence and, for many, the motives and pursuits that prompted their departure sustained their lives and livelihoods in Paris. Expatriates were involved in a range of ventures, from printing and publishing to entrepreneurship, military service, journalism and political activism. Chapter three will address the particular place of British radical thought in the context of French revolutionary ideology and examine some of the ideas and theories put forward by members of the British Club at certain key moments in the debate on the creation of a republican constitution. The focus here however is on the intersecting pursuits of British residents and the establishment of a community centred on White's Hotel.

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<sup>252</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 16.

### **II.3.1 Political Missions**

Radicals had varied reasons for taking up residence in Paris, often combining weariness with the repressive conditions of political expression in Britain with hopes for the pursuit of personal ambitions in France. Many still held France up as a model of enlightened society and saw French culture as the epitome of European advancement. Some had gone to France hoping to contribute to the Revolution and engage in the political process of defining a new constitution and drawing up a blueprint for political reform. This was the case for Thomas Paine, David Williams, Thomas Christie and Joel Barlow. Williams had been personally invited over to France by the Girondin representative, Jean-Marie Roland in August 1792 after a recommendation from his acquaintance Brissot. He was soon nominated for naturalisation by the National Convention, which paved the way for a subsequent diplomatic venture to London undertaken on behalf of Roland. Joel Barlow was also made a French citizen and soon after his arrival in France as a delegate of the SCI in November 1792 he was posted to the Savoy, where he was charged with overseeing the institution of French governance of the former principality.

### **II.3.2 Thomas Paine's Exile and Politics in Paris**

Thomas Paine arrived in France having already been nominated as a deputy to the National Convention for the Nord Pas de Calais area and soon took up his place on the committee set up on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1792, whose members included Jacques-Pierre Brissot, the Marquis de Condorcet, Bertrand Barère and the Abbé Sieyès. The committee had been instituted to design a new constitution for post-monarchical France. Mark Philp suggests that “surprisingly, Paine seems to have had no qualms about returning to France. His inability to speak the language, his past association with Lafayette, and his ignorance of the complex

social and political forces unleashed by events in his year's absence did not daunt him."<sup>253</sup> Part One of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* had been published in 1791, shortly after the appearance of Edmund Burke's criticism of the French Revolution in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.<sup>254</sup> In *Rights of Man*, Paine had denied the very existence of a British constitution, claiming that "no such thing exists, or ever did exist, and consequently that the people have yet a constitution to form."<sup>255</sup> Part Two of the tract, which appeared in February 1792, began to outline the "ways and means" of establishing British constitutional arrangements founded on reason and natural rights. Paine's plan contained a combination of representative government based on the American model and an integral overthrow of the current taxation arrangements, which benefited only the government's "placemen and pensioners." Ministerial interest in the pamphlet, however, was awakened less by the principles it contained than by the wide audience it had begun to reach through Paine's decision to allow the cheap publication and widespread distribution of the tract across the country by regional corresponding societies. Paine highlights the irony of this transformation in the Government's stance in his *Letter Addressed to the Addressers* (1792), where he recounts how "this once harmless, insignificant book, without undergoing the alteration of a single letter, became a most wicked and dangerous libel."<sup>256</sup> As well as summoning Paine to appear in court, the Pitt administration orchestrated meetings around the country in which addresses were to be drawn up and signed in opposition to the tract.

Paine was issued with a court summons on the same day as the Royal Proclamation Against Seditious Writings of 21<sup>st</sup> May 1792, an indication that his fate was linked to the government's wider agenda. The trial was initially due to be held in midsummer, but in June

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<sup>253</sup> Philp, *Paine* 17-18.

<sup>254</sup> The full title of Burke's work was *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the proceedings in certain societies in London relative to that event in a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Paris, by the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: J. Dodsley, 1790). Paine's tract is often considered as a response to Burke's criticism of the Revolution, but Mark Philp sees *Rights of Man* as a self-standing piece whose logic was already well-developed before the publication of Burke's *Reflections*.

<sup>255</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man* 72.

<sup>256</sup> Paine, "Letter Addressed to the Addressers," Foner ed. *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 477.

1792 it was postponed and rescheduled for November. John Keane suggests that this decision “was designed to force Paine into exile.”<sup>257</sup> By threatening Paine with prosecution and following his every move through their network of spies, the government hoped to drive Paine into voluntary expatriation. Mark Philp nuances the picture, arguing that “the delay left Paine in his element.”<sup>258</sup> He was free to defend his writings, publish letters and continue to expose government corruption and inconsistencies. Government newspapers unambiguously called for Paine’s departure. *The Times* announced, “It is earnestly recommended to Mad Tom that he should embark for France, and there be naturalised into the regular confusion of democracy.”<sup>259</sup> As we have seen, bringing into doubt the sanity of supporters of the Revolution and associating the Revolution with anarchy, were common tactics within the Government press.

Accompanied by John Frost and Achille Audibert, the French representative who had brought him news of his election as a representative in the Convention, Paine set off for Dover. After a brief confrontation with Customs officials, during which all of his papers were scrutinised and catalogued, all three were given free passage to France. Audibert described his mission to inform Paine of his election to the Convention in a statement to Jacques-Alexis Thuriot on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1794, eight months after Paine had first been incarcerated in the Luxembourg. He recounts how Paine had “nearly been a victim of the English Government with which he was openly at war.”<sup>260</sup> Once in France, the assaults on Paine proliferated in the press and amongst loyalist associations. *Le Courier de l’Europe* reported on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1792 that Paine’s books had been burned along with those of Joseph Priestley and a man in Manchester was about to be killed because someone had mistaken him for Paine.<sup>261</sup> Paine’s

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<sup>257</sup> Keane, *Tom Paine* 336.

<sup>258</sup> Philp, *Paine* 16.

<sup>259</sup> *The Times*, July 12<sup>th</sup> 1792, quoted in Keane, *Tom Paine* 337.

<sup>260</sup> AN F7/4774/61 Thomas Paine file. Letter from Achille Audibert to the *Comité de Salut Public*, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1794.

<sup>261</sup> *Le Courier de l’Europe*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1792.

reputation in Britain was tarnished by those spearheading the loyalist backlash against radical activism.

Paine went to France in optimistic spirit however, and his hero's welcome would have drawn a sharp contrast with his departure from Britain where he was hounded by loyalist gangs and where local assemblies drew up disparaging addresses in protest at his most recent political tract. Alger draws a portrait of Paine's arrival in Calais where he was "greeted with military honours, cheered by the crowd, and harangued by the mayor."<sup>262</sup> Thomas Clio Rickman described Paine's early activities in France where "his time was almost wholly occupied as a deputy of the convention and as a member of the committee of constitution."<sup>263</sup> Paine's high-profile nomination to the constitutional committee did not go unnoticed back in Britain. James Bland Burges informed Lord Auckland, "Tom Paine is at Paris, and has just been appointed to some post in the executive government."<sup>264</sup> Although Paine's role as a national representative in the Convention has often been noted by biographers, very little consideration has been given to the fact that he was one of the delegates on the constitutional committee. It was this committee that members of the British Club petitioned in their tracts written after the inauguration of the new republic.

Paine, though prompted to leave Britain partly to avoid his impending special trial before a packed jury, saw a new opportunity opening up as an official representative of the French people. As he reminded his French audience eight months into his detention at the Luxembourg prison, "the hope of seeing a Revolution happily established in France, that might serve as a model to the rest of Europe, and the earnest and disinterested desire of rendering every service in my power to promote it" prolonged his stay.<sup>265</sup> He had been made a

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<sup>262</sup> Alger, *Englishmen* 84-85.

<sup>263</sup> Rickman, *The Life of Thomas Paine* 128.

<sup>264</sup> Bland Burges to Lord Auckland, Whitehall, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1792, *Journal and Correspondence of William, Lord Auckland* 2: 438.

<sup>265</sup> To the French National Convention, Luxembourg, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1793. AN F7/4774/61 Thomas Paine file. See also the transcription of this original letter in Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2:1339-40.

French citizen by the Convention in a general diplomatic gesture designed to consolidate the legitimacy of the newly declared republic in the eyes of the world. He had also been nominated as a political representative for four departments of France, a huge honour and one that only two foreigners, Paine and Prussian-born radical, Anacharsis Cloots, took up.<sup>266</sup> In a letter to the Attorney-General Archibald Macdonald, of November 1792, Paine confirmed that he had left Britain to assume his position in France, dismissing the Crown's action against him for sedition and asserting, "The duty I am now engaged in is of too much importance to permit me to trouble myself about your prosecution."<sup>267</sup> Paine had been presented with the opportunity to contribute to the drawing up of a republican constitution founded on the rights of man, a subject which had begun to dominate his political thinking. Paine devoted a large section of Part Two of *Rights of Man* to a detailed analysis of the drafting of the American constitution. In bemoaning the British aristocratic attachment to a mysterious constitution whose origins and existence were nebulous, Paine lauded the establishment of an open and tangible constitutional arrangement in America.

He went to France to engage in a political experiment which he had meditated on since he began his career as a revolutionary. As he explained in his letter to the French people from the Luxembourg prison at the height of the Terror, "parties and factions, various and numerous as they have been, I have always avoided. My heart was devoted to all France, and the object to which I applied myself was the Constitution."<sup>268</sup> Paine believed that the British constitution was designed to protect the vested interests of a corrupt elite and to exclude ninety-nine per cent of the people. In Part One of *Rights of Man*, Paine had stated that "the constitution of a country is not the act of its government, but of the people constituting a

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<sup>266</sup> Joseph Priestley had also been nominated as a deputy but did not accept the position.

<sup>267</sup> Paine, "To the English Attorney-General, on the Prosecution Against the Second Part of *Rights of Man*," Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 511.

<sup>268</sup> AN F7/4774/61, Thomas Paine file.

government.”<sup>269</sup> He reiterated the principle in Part Two, arguing that “a constitution is the property of a nation, and not of those who exercise the government.”<sup>270</sup> John Keane suggests that “Paine claimed, with some disingenuity, that were it not for more important business in France, he would have stayed to defend himself, even at the price of prosecution.”<sup>271</sup> Scepticism about Paine’s motives is understandable, and Paine’s professions of his willingness to stay in Britain to face what would have been certain imprisonment seem somewhat implausible. Yet, while we should not uncritically accept Paine’s own reading of his departure from Britain and his claim that he intended to stand trial, Paine’s declaration that he was called by duty to France must not be entirely dismissed. Paine saw the French Revolution as the next example of liberty bursting forth. If an opportunity to take an active role in the latest manifestation of human freedom had not existed, there is a significant possibility that Paine may have stayed in Britain, used his trial as a public platform to disseminate his radical ideas, and accepted brief imprisonment, affirming his status as a champion of freedom in the face of government repression. What attracted Paine also prompted men such as David Williams and Robert Merry to depart for Paris. The chance to have a hand in framing a republican constitution was seen as a unique opportunity on European soil.

### **II.3.3 Delegations on behalf of Reform Societies**

While some radicals went to Paris on individual political missions, often emboldened by the regular information received from countrymen already stationed in Paris, or by encouragement from French associates, others were nominated by reforming societies in the wake of the declaration of the republic to act as official travelling delegates to the French Convention, bearing gifts, financial donations, petitions and addresses of solidarity. These

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<sup>269</sup> Paine, *The Rights of Man* 71.

<sup>270</sup> Paine, *The Rights of Man* 191.

<sup>271</sup> Keane, *Tom Paine* 343.



honorary visits were often the occasion for extended temporary stays in the French capital which afforded the opportunity of attending debates in the Convention, seeking out fellow members of the radical clubs gathered in Paris, and gauging the mood of the French nation. Thomas Cooper, Thomas Walker, John Frost and Joel Barlow all accepted nominations as delegates to the French capital and Henry Redhead Yorke brought an address from Derby.<sup>272</sup> Barlow acted as a representative of the SCI after having spent a number of the preceding months in London among radical reformers. An “honorary member” and “adopted brother” of the SCI in his own words, he had impressed the society with his *Letter to the National Convention* in which he outlined a republican framework for France after carefully suggesting a number of ways in which the mixed monarchical plan of 1791 could be improved.<sup>273</sup> Barlow, along with Charles Sinclair and John Tuffen drew up the SCI address to the Convention. In the treason trials of November 1794, anyone associated with Barlow’s pamphlet, *Advice to the Privileged Orders* was imputed with republican ideas, drastically reinforcing the case against them. By 1794, mere knowledge of Barlow’s tract had become a veritable litmus test for treason.

John Frost had been attending SCI gatherings since 1785, well before the society began to widen its membership in mid 1792, but he was also one of the few longstanding members to approve of the more radical turn taken by the society. He was regularly present at the society’s gatherings from December 1791 to July 1792. In September 1792 Frost accompanied Thomas Paine to France, also delivering a message to the mayor of Paris that the sum of £1000 had been raised as a patriotic gift, and gaining a cursory opinion of the

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<sup>272</sup> Monro mentions the Derby address in his Foreign Office correspondence. See the letter dated 17<sup>th</sup> December 1792 in PRO FO 27/40 Part 2.

<sup>273</sup> Barlow addressed a letter to the SCI on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1792, thanking the society for his honorary membership and presenting the members with a copy of his letter addressed to the Convention. (See PRO TS 11/962/3508). Barlow’s tract was published by Joseph Johnson in 1792 under the title *A letter to the National Convention of France: on the defects in the constitution of 1791, and the extent of the amendments which ought to be applied*. It was translated into French by Wilhelm Ludger and published as *Lettre à la Convention nationale de France sur les vices de la Constitution de 1791 et sur l’étendue des amendements à y porter* (1792).

temper of France. He returned to chair SCI meetings on 26<sup>th</sup> October and 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1792.<sup>274</sup> His last attendance at the SCI was on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1792, before he left for France again, accompanying Barlow as the SCI's co-delegate to Paris and delivering the society's address to the Convention.<sup>275</sup> Cooper combined business and political interests in his visit to Paris on behalf of the Manchester Constitutional Society in the spring of 1792. He and James Watt Junior visited the Jacobin Club and brought greetings from the Manchester members to mayor of Paris Jérôme Pétion and delivered a letter on behalf of Thomas Walker. The stinging attack that this visit provoked from Edmund Burke in a speech to the House of Commons on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1792 prompted Cooper to pen his *A Reply to Mr. Burke's Invective*, defending his decision to visit the Jacobin Club in Paris.<sup>276</sup>

### **II.3.4 Publishing and Commercial Projects**

In addition to the undertaking of weighty political missions on behalf of leading members of the revolutionary administration, serving as representatives of the French people or leading delegations from British reform societies, there were other pursuits which prompted temporary emigration to Paris and allowed British radicals to find a place for themselves in the French capital. Such interests included publishing, bookselling and other commercial ventures. While on occasions these pursuits failed to reach fruition, sometimes they could bring financial rewards, career openings and the possibility of social advancement.

#### **II.3.4.1 Sampson, Perry, *The Argus* and Personal Reinvention in Paris**

Although he was pushed into exile after successive threats of prosecution for libel, Sampson Perry saw emigration to France as a way of exploiting opportunities he had been

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<sup>274</sup> See PRO TS 11/962/3508 for the record of SCI meetings in London from Friday 9<sup>th</sup> December 1791 to Friday 9<sup>th</sup> May 1794.

<sup>275</sup> For details of John Frost's case see "Coffee-House Politicians," Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism*, pp. 75-102, and Epstein, "Equality and No King".

<sup>276</sup> *A Reply to Mr. Burke's Invective Against Mr. Cooper, and Mr. Watt, in the House of Commons, on the 30th of April, 1792* (Manchester: Falkner and Co., 1792).

denied in Britain. Having specialised in surgery before serving in the army during the American Revolution, Perry had failed to secure the military promotion he believed he deserved and harboured an all-consuming rancour towards those who had impeded his social ascension. He elaborated on his misfortune in the introduction to his sketch of the French Revolution: “I have detailed the particulars of my *civil persecution*; I shall therefore finally wind up the whole, by painting, in few words, my *military proscription*.”<sup>277</sup> Perry had a history of acrimonious encounters with the Pitt administration. Less well-known than his radical associate Thomas Paine, he also earned the status of outlaw through his activities as an editor in London. In *An Historical Sketch of the French Revolution* he highlighted how “I was found *guilty*; and, by the activity of the law (it not being an *equity* case), the proceedings were carried on to writs of outlawry, being thereby excluded from all protection either of the courts, or of the law.”<sup>278</sup> As Mary Bunch has noted, in medieval Europe and later, outlawry “operated as a kind of social and civic death through banishment from the community.” Bunch defines outlawry as “a legal mechanism deployed to enforce subjection to hegemonic rule...It literally enforces the law by withdrawing the law; it ensures the law’s presence by proclaiming its absence.”<sup>279</sup> Perry recognised his own outlawry as the withdrawal of the entire protection of the British state. His subsequent activism in France was informed and driven by this legal exclusion.

Perry had taken up the editorship of *The Argus* in March 1789 at a critical juncture of the reform movement in Britain. At this time, the newspaper was officially considered as under the umbrella of the Whig opposition along with four other publications, the *Gazetteer*, the *General Advertiser*, the *Morning Chronicle*, and the *Morning Post*. The paper, under

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<sup>277</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 28.

<sup>278</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 8.

<sup>279</sup> Mary Bunch, *Outlawry And The Experience Of The (Im)Possible: Deconstructing Biopolitics*, Unpublished Phd thesis (University of Western Ontario, Canada, 2010) 1. Outlawry was officially eradicated as a legal category in England in 1879. Early pronouncements of outlawry were accompanied by the Latin phrase, *caput gerat lupinum* (“may he bear a wolf’s head”). Not only was the recipient of the writ of outlawry formally proscribed by law, but he was also considered inhuman, literally an animal who could be hounded to death.

Perry's editorship, adopted a conventionally reformist posture and was generally supportive of liberal reform initiatives. Yet, his journal became increasingly irreverent as events in France unfolded. Adopting a more radical platform, the newspaper published the opening address of the LCS in full and noted the appearance of Part Two of Paine's *Rights of Man*, a gesture which did not endear him to the ruling authorities. Distancing itself increasingly from the Whig establishment, *The Argus* became the mouthpiece of more radical reforming ideas. Concerns for the freedom of the press gave way to more militant calls for universal suffrage and *The Argus* was also one of the regular sources of news for the Anglo-French publication, *Le Courier de l'Europe*. The latter newspaper published an extract from *The Argus* from 17<sup>th</sup> January 1792 in which the writer predicted and approved of the strengthening of the international revolutionary spirit and the assertion of the authority of free governments over empires.<sup>280</sup> It was Perry's mixing with the radical reform scene and his open admiration for the changes occurring in France which earned his publication a reputation as "a scandalous paper...which, at the commencement of the French revolution, was distinguished for its virulence and industry in the dissemination of republican doctrines."<sup>281</sup>

*The Argus* was not only becoming an official mouthpiece of radical reform by mid 1792, but it was circulating increasingly widely. Thomas Paine, writing to Lord Onslow in June 1792, referred to his letter which "has since appeared in the "Argus" and probably in other papers."<sup>282</sup> At a meeting of the SCI on November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1792 it was "ordered that the advertisement relative to the submission for assisting the efforts of the Friends in the Cause of Freedom be published every day during the next week in *The Argus*."<sup>283</sup> A month earlier, on

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<sup>280</sup> "Les évènements de chaque jour tendent à justifier ce que nous avons souvent dit, que les révolutions se propageront, & que les gouvernements se multiplieront; & y a-t-il un vrai philosophie, un ami du genre humain "qui ne désire l'accomplissement de cette prophétie?" (*Le Courier de l'Europe*, Friday 20<sup>th</sup> January 1792).

<sup>281</sup> *A Biographical Dictionary of the Living Authors of Great Britain and Ireland; comprising literary memoirs and anecdotes of their lives; and a chronological register of their publications* (London, 1816) 270. This report was also printed as part of Perry's obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* vol. 134 (1823) 280.

<sup>282</sup> Paine, Letter to Onslow Cranley, London, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1792, *Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 460.

<sup>283</sup> PRO TS 11/965/3510. This document was part of the informant reports sent to under-secretary of state at the Home Office, Evan Nepean.

12<sup>th</sup> October 1792, it was “ordered that the secretary be directed to transmit a copy of the *Argus* of tomorrow to each of the members of this society.”<sup>284</sup> (See Appendix I, Figure 12). *The Argus* was being used by the SCI to publish its motions for reform and its circulation among a larger reading public was being encouraged by its leading members. Lord Edward Fitzgerald, writing to his mother the Duchess of Leinster in October 1792, just before his departure to France, remarked that “the joke, in *The Argus*, of the *invincible cavalry* of Prussia being totally *eat up* by their infantry, is not a bad one.”<sup>285</sup> *The Argus* was revelling in French victories in the revolutionary wars, a stance which earned Perry the reputation among ministerial representatives as a seditious editor. The paper was targeted for libel at the height of its popularity among leading radicals, at a moment when it was being diffused among an increasingly large audience and when it was regularly publishing pro-French articles.

Commentators, in an attempt to cast a slur on the reputation of radical editors, suggested that Perry, along with the editor of *The Morning Chronicle*, was already subsidised by the French government before his departure to Paris in late 1792.<sup>286</sup> In response, *The Morning Chronicle* published a comment which read:

A morning paper says, that there are two daily Journals of London actually bribed by the Jacobins of France, to spread sedition in England – and that one of them, in particular, has 10,000 livres per month for its treason. It would have been a faithful service to their country to have named the particular Journals, so infamously corrupted by foreign gold...that the Crown officers may bring the abandoned writers to legal punishment.<sup>287</sup>

The paper chided those responsible for spreading ministerial rumours about the French bias of the Opposition press for failing to openly accuse newspapers of disloyalty and therefore bring them to justice. Whether Perry was in the service of the French authorities is difficult to

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<sup>284</sup> PRO TS 11/962/3508.

<sup>285</sup> quoted in T. Moore, *The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* 73-74.

<sup>286</sup> Werkmeister quotes a letter from William Augustus Miles to Charles Long Writing on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1792 in which he claims to have had “several hints ...from Frenchmen in constant relation and intimacy with M. de Chauvelin [the French Minister Plenipotentiary] and his family, that the editors of the ‘Morning Chronicle’ and of the ‘Argus’ have received considerable sums of money, and that they have each of them a large monthly allowance,” Werkmeister, *A Newspaper History of England* 113.

<sup>287</sup> Werkmeister, *A Newspaper History of England* 113.

determine as the counterpropaganda campaigns waged by the ruling administration were overtly aimed at destroying the patriotic credibility of Opposition editors and therefore must be viewed with caution.

Perry was first indicted in November 1790 for “a scandalous libel, charging Administration and particularly Mr Pitt with falsehood, corruption, and fraud.”<sup>288</sup> He was convicted in February 1791. He was tried for a second libel in June 1791 and in July was brought again before the King’s Bench on three different counts. On the first charge of libel against the editor of *The Times*, Perry refused to make a public apology thereby avoiding prison, claiming that everything he had said in *The Argus* was true. He was sentenced to six months in the King’s Bench prison. He pleaded guilty to a second charge of libel on an aristocratic lady and also faced a third charge of libel, this time on the Government. Perry acted on his own counsel, despite the recommendations from the judge to seek legal advice. On 12<sup>th</sup> July 1791 he was sentenced to another six months in prison and fined £200. The *Evening Mail* reported Perry’s 1791 conviction, summing up that “the Court – the Bar – the Jury and the Auditors all coincided in one opinion – that the whole of the publications were the most scandalous and atrocious libels that ever made their appearance in Print.”<sup>289</sup> In a decision taken in November 1791 on the third count of libel, he was only fined £100, possibly because the court had reason to believe the paper would tone down its criticism of the administration. Yet *The Argus* continued while Perry was in prison, renamed *The Argus of the Constitution* and still defiantly critical of the Government. One day after his release on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1792, Perry was again indicted for libel for stating that the Commons was not composed of the people’s representatives and that the people were to be condemned for their docility in submitting to its laws. He suggested, in an echo of Paine, that a Convention was necessary because the people had played no part in electing their representatives. He was warned that he

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<sup>288</sup> Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press* 336.

<sup>289</sup> *The Evening Mail* 15-17<sup>th</sup> June 1791.

would be arrested, deprived of writing materials and held without bail. Faced with the probability of total isolation from the world of print journalism and harsher conditions compared to his earlier periods of incarceration, Perry agreed to leave the country after two years of open hostility with the ruling administration. Shortly after his departure to France in late 1792, his newspaper was brought to a close by Government officials. In its place, an official pro-governmental publication, *The True Briton*, was set up in January 1793.

Perry's decision to leave the country was inseparable from the sustained pressure he suffered at the hands of the Pitt government over the course of 1791-92. Following his exile, his detractors at *The World* rejoiced that "The Sampson of the Argus was found too weak to carry off the pillars of the Constitutional Fabric, although he made several ineffectual attempts."<sup>290</sup> Perry recalled his fugitive existence as he set off from Britain in his later account of the French Revolution:

I put a shirt and a pair of stockings in my pocket, and with only eleven guineas in my purse, I set off to Brighthelmstone; at which place I had not arrived an hour, before I was told that a boat was just sailing to Dieppe, with half a dozen French gentlemen; and that, if I chose, I might be one of the party.<sup>291</sup>

In France the editors of *La Chronique du Mois* described Perry as "having only escaped the executioner by flight," and a letter written and used as evidence in the trial of Jean-Paul Marat described Perry as "a gallant man, a victim of his love for the French Revolution, he fled his country where there was a price on his head for having defended republican principles in a paper he wrote under the name of the argus of the people."<sup>292</sup> Perry's case was so notorious that it has even been used as a benchmark for libel prosecutions against radical writers in the eighteenth century: "The stringent measures adopted towards Sampson Perry, the editor of the

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<sup>290</sup> *The World*, Monday 10<sup>th</sup> December 1792.

<sup>291</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 7.

<sup>292</sup> *La Chronique Du Mois; ou, Cahiers Patriotiques* (January 1793) 80; see also the letter from Citoyenne Moreau, *Affaire Marat*, AN W 269/16 /30: "un galant homme victime de son amour pour la révolution française il a fui son pays où sa tête est mise à prix pour avoir défendu les principes républicains dans une feuille qu'il rédigeait sous le nom de l'argus du peuple." My translation.

“Argus”, sufficiently betrayed the disposition of the reigning powers to punish such free-writers as publicly avowed their works.”<sup>293</sup> Perry’s arrival in Paris was closely linked therefore to the ministerial pressure he had been subject to. Although the governmental assault on radical writers, publishers and editors was not as intense in 1792 as it had become by 1793-94, when sympathy with France no longer simply alerted suspicion but was considered treasonable behaviour, for a number of activists the process of alienation had already firmly begun by 1792. Many of those who took up residence in Paris, Perry being the most notable example, were now considered as national outlaws.<sup>294</sup>

Perry appears to have been planning his exile for some time, despite the impression given by newspaper reports of the time and subsequent scholarly works that he was forced into fleeing out of the imminence of further libel action. His plan had been progressively emerging at least from the moment of his release from prison on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1792, when he had again been charged with libel. Perry was nominated for membership of the SCI on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1792 by a future compatriot and British Club member in Paris, Robert Merry, and Perry’s SCI affiliation was secured the following week. He attended his first meeting at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in London only ten days after his release from prison. During the summer months, Perry was in close contact with Thomas Paine, who would depart for France in September. One informant for the Home Office reported, “On Friday last Capt’n Perry (Editor

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<sup>293</sup> *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction*, vol. 2, part 2 (1844).

<sup>294</sup> The convening of the British Convention of the Delegates of the Friends of the People in Edinburgh in November 1793 alerted the ruling authorities to the potential for seditious behaviour on the part of reformers. Delegates at the Convention were sent by reforming societies including the London Corresponding Society. In the immediate wake of the Convention, a number of leading reformers, including Thomas Palmer, William Skirving, Joseph Gerrald and Maurice Margarot, were arrested and put on trial for sedition, a crime punishable under Scottish law by transportation, which was the sentence they ultimately received. The defendants were charged with sedition based on the character of the Convention, which was seen as an illegitimate body inspired by the French model of a National Convention and with the explicit aim of overturning the existing governmental arrangements. James Epstein has shown how the debate at Joseph Gerrald’s trial centred on the inherent seditiousness of words, symbols and gestures, deemed to be French in character. Although Gerrald disassociated himself from the insertion of French words in the records of the Convention’s proceedings, he appeared in court dressed in contemporary French style. As Epstein put it, “He might not defend the revolution and its symbols, but his costume signalled a refusal to abandon his allegiance to the egalitarianism encoded in the revolution.” (Epstein, “Our Real Constitution” 41).



of the *Argus*) was with P\_ in his room for a considerable time.”<sup>295</sup> (See Appendix I, figure 13). Although it is possible that the “P\_” in question was not the author of *Rights of Man*, Perry was known to Paine and they subsequently reignited their acquaintance in Paris, appearing together at the trial of Jean-Paul Marat and sharing a cell in prison. There is thus a strong case to suggest that it was Paine with whom, in 1792, Perry was in communication.

Perry attended another SCI gathering at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1792. He was not present throughout the entire month of October, but resumed attendance on three successive occasions in November, just before his departure to Paris.<sup>296</sup> Perry was actually in France in October 1792, attempting to secure an agreement for the publication of his newspaper in Paris. Government spy Charles Ross informed Evan Nepean, under-secretary at the Home Office, that, “Captain Perry of the *Argus* is gone to France in order to establish Correspondents for his Paper, which in his absence is conducted by Mr. Oldfield.”<sup>297</sup> (See Appendix I, figure 14). Perry’s departure later that year does not seem to have been simply a desperate attempt to seek refuge from imminent prosecution therefore, but the culmination of a carefully devised plan which would combine the prospect of political exile with creative promise, in a nation which was favourable to the ideas Perry was espousing and his own distinctively irreverent way of voicing them.

Perry had carefully sounded out acquaintances in Paris about the publication of his banned newspaper before he embraced expatriation. He seems to have had some success, judging by an entry in *La Chronique du Mois* in January 1793, which vowed to publish his “persecuted journal” with the help of the English Society of the Rights of Man (probably the British Club) and Thomas Paine, who would “zealously participate”.<sup>298</sup> The announcement

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<sup>295</sup> Charles Ross to Evan Nepean, Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> August 1792. PRO TS 11/965/3510/A2.

<sup>296</sup> Perry’s attendance is detailed in the minutes of the SCI meetings from 9<sup>th</sup> December 1791 to 9<sup>th</sup> May 1794. PRO TS/11/962/3508.

<sup>297</sup> Charles Ross to Evan Nepean, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1792. PRO TS 11/965/3510/A2.

<sup>298</sup> *La Chronique du Mois* (January 1793) 80. “To the Friends of Truth. Sampson Perry, auteur d’un journal républicain, en Angleterre, The argus of the People (La Sentinelle du Peuple) pour avoir défendu avec énergie

was followed by an appeal from Perry himself who announced the imminent appearance of his journal in Paris (See Appendix J, figure 16):

It must however give some satisfaction to the advocates for European freedom, and to the friends of the human race in general, should they find that their Argus is not banished from the world, but that it has only been transplanted from the region of tyranny, injustice and oppression to his happy soil of Liberty, Equality.<sup>299</sup>

If the physical apparatus of his printing venture had been colonised by an organ of the Government press in London, Perry believed the spirit of his journal could survive and his enterprise be relocated to Paris. Captain George Monro wrote in early January 1793:

The society of our friends here presented an address to the Jacobin Club last night and mean to present a similar one to the Convention Nationale today. The nature of these addresses I have not been able as yet to learn, but hope by next post to give you some account of them. I think I told you that Mr Frost and a number of our other friends have withdrawn from this society, but they have been reinforced by Capt. Perry who means to publish his Argus here.<sup>300</sup>

Whether Perry was successful in establishing his newspaper in Paris is difficult to judge, as no copies of *The Argus* are traceable in Paris, only rumours and statements of intended publication. He clearly hoped to secure the publication of *The Argus* at the printing house of the Cercle Social. One of Perry's fellow British radicals in Paris had suggested in October 1792 that it was difficult to get hold of a copy: "Mr Choppin mentioned in his letter that he would not get at a perusal of an *Argus* in all Paris, that he had read a proof copy of Paine's *Address to the Addressers* and which is very severe upon Mr Burke."<sup>301</sup> Despite the elusiveness of *The Argus*, it seems there was an expectation of being able to locate copies of

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les droits de l'homme, la révolution française, Horne-Tooke et Thomas Payne, son ami, n'a échappé que par sa fuite à des bourreaux. Perry et un autre écrivain anglais, Merry, célèbre par une pièce de théâtre, des vers républicains, et autres écrits philosophiques que nous ferons connaître, sont venus trouver de francs amis, chez les Directeurs de l'Imprimerie du Cercle Social, qui vont publier en France, le journal persécuté, *The Argus of the People*, la société anglaise des Droits de l'Homme, et Thomas Payne et autres y contribueront avec zèle. Amis de la liberté vous leur devez secours, alliance et fraternité. Voilà la lettre de Sampson Perry, à ses amis persécutés à Londres."

<sup>299</sup> *La Chronique du Mois* (January 1793) 80.

<sup>300</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, Paris, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1793. PRO FO 27/41. Monro provides details on the proceedings in the National Convention and the king's trial.

<sup>301</sup> Charles Ross to Evan Nepean, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1792. PRO TS 11/965/3510/A2.

the paper in Paris. This was before Perry begun his concerted campaign to secure a French publisher. Some British newspapers did find their way to France therefore, despite the repressive measures in place to restrict the circulation of radical literature.

Although the Pitt administration and Government press tried to portray exile as fearful flight from the workings of justice, the reasons behind radicals' decisions to leave their home country were often more complex and did contain elements of positive choice. In Perry's case, France provided a timely opportunity for him to cast off the stranglehold of the narrow hierarchical system of social ascension in Britain and attempt to gain advantage based on merit alone. He joined fellow reformers from the SCI in the British Club and worked hard to try to publish his banned journal in Paris. Despite his sufferings during the Terror and ultimately unsuccessful newspaper project, Perry never lost sight of a belief in the egalitarian quality of French society under revolutionary government.

#### **II.3.4.2 John Hurford Stone and the “English Press in Paris”**

John Hurford Stone, one of the rotating presidents of the British Club, and former member of the Society of the Friends of the People and the Revolution Society, had a number of skills which proved of use to the new French administration and which facilitated his establishment as a printer in revolutionary Paris. With a secure knowledge of European languages, he had already expressed his readiness to serve the French administration on one of the French diplomat, Talleyrand's trips to London in February 1792. His Unitarian background may also have been a catalyst for his departure. He was a member of Dr. Price's congregation at Hackney and, like other British Dissenters, would not have had access to the same privileges and benefits of social ascension as those of Anglican faith.<sup>302</sup> He described in a letter to Jérôme Pétion, mayor of Paris, on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1792, how he had also been singled

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<sup>302</sup> Attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts had once again failed in 1791 leaving those of Non-Conformist background disillusioned and with little hope of being able to accede to positions in politics, public administration and the universities.

out for suspicion after papers had been found at Joseph Priestley's house following its sacking by Church and King rioters in July 1791:

In the Birmingham affair, when the house of Dr. Priestly was sacked, my letters were found and given to the Secretary of State, and were found to contain material of a criminal nature such as perhaps, as I don't remember, that we always [?] think tyrants when those who are persecuted or abused speak the truth. I was threatened, but I [?] am not concerned], it interferes however with my ability to serve in this negotiation, besides, I would be extremely flattered to pay all the compliments that we are, me and my patriotic friends, able to give.<sup>303</sup>

Stone also went to Paris with the intention of setting up in sal ammoniac production. This was only the first of many business ventures he embarked on.<sup>304</sup> His talent for languages, his non-conformist heritage and finally his penchant for business speculation were all factors leading him to try his luck across the Channel.

Stone was one of a number of British residents in the French capital who became involved in the book and publishing trade, setting up a venture which would endure through the revolutionary years and into the era of the Directoire and Consulat. Stone is listed in the *Biographie Universelle* as a "learned printer" (*imprimeur savant*) who, in 1806, became the official printer of the *Administration des Droits Réunis*, a branch of the finance department under Napoleon which drew together major legal texts relating to taxation in order to tackle the public debt. Yet Stone had established his "English Press in Paris" over a decade earlier, in 1793, just as other commercial projects he had embarked on were encountering difficulties.<sup>305</sup> The printing press would change name and address a number of times. Initially located on rue de Vaugirard, where it remained there until 1804, its location later changed to

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<sup>303</sup> AN F7/4774/70/459: "Dans l'affaire de Birmingham, quand la maison de Dr Priestley était pillée, on a trouvé mes lettres, qu'on a remises au secrétaire d'état et qu'on a trouvées contenant de matière criminelle telle peut-être, car je ne m'en souviens, que [on penseront?] toujours les tyrans quand ceux qui sont persécutés et injuriés parlent la vérité. J'ai été menacé, mais c'est ce que je ne [regarde?], il empêche pourtant ma capacité de service dans cette négociation [*sic*], d'ailleurs, je serai fort flatté de rendre à M. Talleyrand toutes les civilités, dont nous sommes, moi et mes amis patriotiques, capables." My translation.

<sup>304</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1329.

<sup>305</sup> Although one of Stone's first publications was Joel Barlow's *Vision of Columbus*, John Oswald's tract sent to the constitutional committee was also published by English Press in 1793.

rue de l’Echiquier and then by 1810 rue de Bondi.<sup>306</sup> Joel Barlow may have bought the *hôtel particulier* on rue de Vaugirard, where the printing press had previously located, in 1805.

Stone, despite having grand designs for his printing outlet, only published a small and select group of texts and authors. Joel Barlow’s *Vision of Columbus* came out in July 1793, and this was followed in September of the same year by Barlow’s second part of *Advice to the Privileged Orders*. Sonnets by Helen Maria Williams were also published at the press.<sup>307</sup> Madeleine Stern suggests that Stone may have printed part one of Paine’s *Age of Reason*, the manuscript for which had been given to Barlow on Paine’s arrest.<sup>308</sup> He also published Paine’s *Dissertation on First Principles of Government* and its French translation, in 1795. After a second period in prison in 1794, prompted by the accusatory statement filed by a citizen named Arthur who had socialised with the group at White’s Hotel, Stone was released and subsequently gained recognition as a printer-bookseller in the Mucius-Scaevola section.<sup>309</sup> In 1795 he printed a work by his friend General Francisco de Miranda and also produced a translation of Helen Maria Williams’ *Letters Written in France*.<sup>310</sup> In 1796 Stone printed a letter from himself to Joseph Priestley and in 1801 he organised for the reproduction of Thomas Jefferson’s Inaugural Address.

The first years of the press were particularly frenetic ones and Stone devoted considerable energy to finding buyers, researching possible texts to be translated into French, and sending samples via Le Havre and his brother William to Britain. In late 1793 he contacted his brother requesting information on the likelihood of his printed books being well received in Britain and may have sent across some samples as illustrations. William Stone

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<sup>306</sup> Stern, “The English Press in Paris and its Successors, 1793-1852” 316.

<sup>307</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1225.

<sup>308</sup> Stern, “The English Press in Paris and Its Successors, 1793-1852” 325.

<sup>309</sup> AN F7/4773/23. This information is included in Stone’s arrest file.

<sup>310</sup> General Miranda was a Venezuelan revolutionary whose commitment to universal liberty led him to fight in both the American revolutionary war and in the struggles of the French revolutionary army. He was considered a sympathiser of the Girondins and was brought to trial in 1794. John Hurford Stone and Joel Barlow both testified at his trial, where he was acquitted. See Pérez C. Parra, *Miranda et la Révolution française* (Paris: Dumoulin, 1925).

was acting on his brother's behalf in the quest for information on the prospective British market. Hurford Stone wrote, "I have received your letter, which gives me accurate information respecting my literary enquiries."<sup>311</sup> As Stern notes, his plans for conquering the European market seem to have been "grandiose".<sup>312</sup> In one letter to his brother, Hurford Stone wrote, "as this place will be the emporium of literature, as well as of everything else, it is impossible to say what may not be done, especially with the assistance of men, as well instructed as Mr. Gillet appears to me to be, to help forward the machinery of it."<sup>313</sup> Mr. Gillet, also an acquaintance and business associate of John Oswald, seems to have been Stone's principal contact and advisor on the book trade market. Stone may also have engaged in a venture with Helen Maria Williams to publish a magazine for national circulation:

Miss H. M. Williams will be the conductor in chief. As it will be a national work, you may be sure it will be most magnificent. This (short-hand characters) of safety, will intrust [*sic*] its regulation to her; and she will choose the proper assistants. You may therefore hint this to Gillet, if you can make out my writing, which no one else will.<sup>314</sup>

Stone's intimate acquaintance with Helen Maria Williams may also have prompted his growing interest in the translation market as a source of business for the printing press. He asked his brother to inquire of Mr. Gillet "whether the plan he prepared for literary translation from French into English cannot be inverted with respect to this country – whether he cannot furnish us with the means of getting books of merit which may come out, to translate from the English into French." Stone had been in touch with "a bookseller and a printer of eminence" who had shown interest in such a translation project and who could guarantee "a speedy sale." The buyer was primarily interested in travel literature and Stone pressed on his brother to persuade Mr. Gillet that the investment would be profitable and that the press "can now make a catalogue of twenty or thirty different articles, one of which 4 vols. of 500 pages each." He

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<sup>311</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1215.

<sup>312</sup> Stern, "The English Press in Paris and Its Successors, 1793-1852" 319.

<sup>313</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1215.

<sup>314</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1218.

informs his brother that trade had been busy, “as ours is the most complete press here for certain books.”<sup>315</sup> Stone’s editing and printing venture exploited the demand for travel literature as well as French translations of works written in English, a market which he seems to have successfully tapped into by calling on the translation skills of Helen Maria Williams. Stone had an astute business mind and only invested in projects which would secure a profit for himself and his intermediaries. Yet he also seems to have restricted his printing ventures to works which reflected his own radical opinions.

#### II.3.4.3 Robert O’Reilly and Scientific Publishing

Stone, also involved in the final editions of the *Courier de l’Europe* – a paper which drew on Perry’s *Argus* for many of its news columns in early 1792 – was not the only member of the British Club to take an active part in editing and printing in Paris.<sup>316</sup> Robert O’Reilly, dismissed by Monro as an inconsequential member of the British Club, seems to have also established himself in the publishing trade, co-editing the *Annales des Arts et Manufactures* with J. N. Barbier de Vémars from the turn of the nineteenth century. Julien Pierre suggests that O’Reilly was actually the founding editor, running the operation from 1801 to 1806 before being joined by Barbier de Vémars who had nevertheless helped guide the publication in its early stages.<sup>317</sup> According to the editors themselves, the *Annales* aimed to spread “knowledge of those discoveries which have made our neighbours rich and their commerce flourish and which have given England the remarkable influence she has

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<sup>315</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1223-24.

<sup>316</sup> Captain Monro states, “Mr Stone, I don’t know who this man is, but I have some idea he is concern’d in the [Courier] d’Europe.” (See PRO TS 11/959). The *Courier de l’Europe* drew on *The Argus* in its edition of the 10<sup>th</sup> January 1792: “Grande-Bretagne Bulletin de Londres: Ceux qui disent, dit l’*Argus*, qu’une contre-révolution s’effectue en France, prétendent que les princes ont avec eux *la fleur* de l’armée. Cela peut être, continue le rédacteur de cette feuille, mais dans ce cas, il n’y a rien de plus aisé à faucher qu’une *fleur*.” Perry’s satirical stance and radical tendencies are once again in evidence.

<sup>317</sup> Julien Pierre, “Notes Autour De Parmentier,” *Revue d’histoire de la pharmacie*, 275 (1987): 307-18.

established across Europe.”<sup>318</sup> Each monthly edition contained numerous engravings and explanations of different inventions, discoveries and industrial practices many of which seem to have been inspired by cross-Channel innovations. Areas of interest included the arts, manufacturing, agriculture, commerce and navigation. In the contents table provided in the volume published in 1810, the editors provide an alphabetical list of all inventions and discoveries contained in the magazine in the first thirty-six volumes. O’Reilly not only edited but provided a substantial number of entries for the magazine. He is noted as having either “invented, perfected or described the procedure” of just under one hundred manufacturing techniques.<sup>319</sup> The range of subjects is eclectic, including English stationary, how to whiten straw, the making of portable kitchens, a machine for crushing oats, English cast iron, a water purifying machine and worms which eat into ships’ hulls. There is even an entry entitled “on sorrow”, though this seems to have been one of the rarer metaphysical reflections. O’Reilly also published in 1801 an essay on whitening, “with a description of a new way of whitening using steam, based on the technique of citizen Chaptal, and its application to the arts” which was run off the press at the *Annales* printing house.<sup>320</sup>

O’Reilly was therefore not only active in the editing and publishing business but was clearly an amateur, if not more established, inventor and speculator. Henry Redhead Yorke saw O’Reilly on his return to Paris in 1802. Yorke describes the *Annales* as “a periodical publication, accompanied by a number of engravings. The editor is one O’Reilly, an Irishman, once a pronounced and violent Jacobin.”<sup>321</sup> O’Reilly’s editing and inventing pursuits may have begun during his membership of the British Club, but it is more likely that he established

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<sup>318</sup> Quoted in Pierre, “Notes autour de Parmentier.” Taken from the prospectus attached to the first volume of the collection held in the Bibliothèque Nationale and repeated in the foreword of the first edition (22<sup>nd</sup> March 1800). My translation.

<sup>319</sup> *Annales des arts et manufactures* vol. 36 (Paris: Imprimerie de Chaigneau Ainé, 1810) 106-08.

<sup>320</sup> Robert O’Reilly, *Essai sur le blanchiment avec la description de la nouvelle méthode de blanchir par la vapeur, d’après le procédé du citoyen Chaptal: et son application aux arts* (Paris: Imprimerie des Annales des Arts et Manufactures, 1801).

<sup>321</sup> Yorke, *France in 1802* 228.



an official line of business in the publishing trade later, under the Directoire, or at the time of the Treaty of Amiens which allowed British travellers to return to France.

#### **II.3.4.4 John Oswald, the *Universal Patriot* and other British Journalism**

Other associates and members of the British Club were active throughout the intense period of activity from 1789 through to 1793, contributing to British journals, setting up newspapers in the French capital or contributing articles to already established publications. John Oswald was, according to David Erdman, one of an unnamed “set of Gentlemen, Britons, by birth” who launched a twice-weekly English-language newspaper in May 1790, to be distributed in both capitals, under the title of the *Universal Patriot*. The newspaper was quickly suppressed by the British government, with only the prospectus still featuring in library holdings. Oswald soon got involved in a further project as one of the fourteen editors of *La Chronique du Mois*, a publication orchestrated by the members of the *Cercle Social*. According to Gary Kates, the *Cercle Social* was an intellectual grouping whose members, though in favour of liberating the voice of the people, did not go as far as advocating a role for the people in law-making. As Kates notes, “the function of the Cercle Social was precisely to decipher the will of the people through the study of their writings; the group acted as a kind of enlightened window through which the desire of the people could be more clearly seen.”<sup>322</sup> Yet after the king’s flight to Varennes the Cercle Social consolidated a nascent pact with the more radical Cordeliers club activists, proponents of greater decision-making emanating from the districts and critical of representative democracy. It was at this transitional phase in the evolution of the club that both John Oswald and Thomas Paine took up positions on the editorial committee of *La Chronique du Mois*, the group’s new publication which replaced the previous journal *La Bouche de Fer*. Paine was already collaborating with some members of the editorial committee, including Bonneville, on *Le Républicain*. Paine and Oswald, though

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<sup>322</sup> Gary Kates, *The Cercle Social, the Girondins and the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1985) 56.

joint editors of *La Chronique du Mois*, diverged in their political views. While Oswald followed the popular democratic ideals of the Cordeliers, Paine, who would be heavily involved in the conception of the Girondin plan for a constitution in 1792-93, promoted the case for the establishment of reformed representative government.

Mary Wollstonecraft intended to continue her writing for the *Analytical Review* whilst in Paris, having agreed to provide reports on the state of French affairs to Joseph Johnson. Yet she devoted most of her time in Paris to writing her history of the Revolution and in penning an educational plan commissioned by the National Convention. Wollstonecraft as well as Thomas Paine, Sampson Perry, Joel Barlow and Helen Maria Williams, sometimes in collaboration with John Hurford Stone and Thomas Christie, all devoted considerable time and energy to more long-term publication projects, attempting to assemble sketches, histories and views of the Revolution. These writing and publication projects were often the fruit of collective encounters and initiatives, although members of the British Club seemed to have fiercely resisted any requirement of consensus in their written production, editorial decisions or printing contracts. This embracing of difference was one of the key characteristics of the British contributions to the debate on the French constitution as well as the nature of British Club activity more generally.<sup>323</sup>

### **II.3.5 Combining Private Interests with Political Activism**

The political endeavours of members of the British Club cannot be divorced from the commercial, literary and private pursuits with which they were intertwined. The club, while having some specific political goals and objectives, was also a place of sociability, a way of discovering and disseminating news and a means by which British expatriates reunited, conversed. Gatherings at White's Hotel sometimes sustained longstanding friendships or triggered bitter feuds. The club's active members conjugated political, publishing or literary

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<sup>323</sup> These histories of the Revolution will be the major focus of chapter 4.

interests with private entrepreneurial pursuits, sometimes to the disapproval of fellow members. Richard Buel has suggested that Joel Barlow “seems to have been more preoccupied with exploring economic opportunities than observing the revolutionary drama playing out in Paris.”<sup>324</sup> Stephen Sayre, an American member of the Club, renowned republican and signatory of the British address to the Convention, ran a snuff and tobacco shop from White's Hotel, combining political activism with lucrative commercial practice.<sup>325</sup> Sayre had already set up a snuff manufacturing enterprise in 1790 or 1791 with an associate, yet the partnership came to an end in 1792.<sup>326</sup> Sayre probably established his own business in May 1792, using White's as an outlet.<sup>327</sup> He advertised his activity in the *Journal de Paris* on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1792, emphasising the excellent quality of the tobacco on offer.<sup>328</sup> Sayre wrote to Lord Stanhope in October 1792 informing him, “I have a part of White's Hotel, his first floor is as yet unoccupied.”<sup>329</sup> Buel argues that Sayre and Gilbert Imlay “used the clichés of revolutionary republicanism to promote their own interests,” portraying their behaviour as the cynical exploitation of economic opportunities under a veneer of activism.<sup>330</sup> Yet most British Club members hailed from the urban bourgeoisie and could envisage conjugating commercial enterprise and republicanism without any perceived ideological contradiction. Stephen Sayre's biographer emphasises the complex nature of the American's engagement with France, arguing that “his troubles in English society and his failure to secure recognition and employment from the republic across the Atlantic enhanced the fascination that the continuing

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<sup>324</sup> Buel, *Joel Barlow: American Citizen* 139.

<sup>325</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959.

<sup>326</sup> Stephen Sayre to George Washington, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1791, Department of State, Miscellaneous Letters quoted in Alden, *Stephen Sayre* 162. Sayre mentions his snuff manufacturing in his letter to the American president.

<sup>327</sup> Alger, “The British Colony in Paris, 1792-1793.” Alden also suggests that Sayre set up a factory at 7 passage des Petits Pères. As this is the address of White's Hotel it is perhaps more likely that he ran his distribution activity from the hotel, but perhaps carried out the manufacturing elsewhere. There is also the possibility that other activities were carried out at the same address.

<sup>328</sup> See Alger, *Paris in 1789-1794* 352.

<sup>329</sup> Letter from October 28<sup>th</sup> 1792, quoted in Alden, *Stephen Sayre* 173. Sayre also tried to persuade Stanhope to visit Paris to see for himself events taking place in the capital: “You will be well received here by all the leading characters, you will return with accurate information, may meet Parliament with advantage and confidence, and render service to the world.”

<sup>330</sup> Buel, *Joel Barlow: American Citizen* 164.

French Revolution exerted on him, but he was also seeking economic opportunity.”<sup>331</sup> Expatriates in Paris often conformed to this loose model of the entrepreneur-activist whose hopes of private personal advancement had been frustrated in Britain, leading them to embrace a public reform agenda for ideological reasons but also because it allowed them to pursue economic gain.

British Club member, James Gamble, who also put his name to the residents’ address to the National Convention, set up a paper manufactory in Paris, also combining political and commercial endeavour, and may have assumed co-ownership of White's Hotel after the landlord, Christopher White, who had called on Gamble to be his guarantor, got into financial difficulties in 1793.<sup>332</sup> Gamble was also recognised as an inventor of coloured engravings, adding to the list of British expatriates who dabbled in invention and innovation while also pursuing political interests.<sup>333</sup> According to Alger, Gamble had been licensed to publish a collection of engravings in May 1789 and with a partner he had subsequently portrayed revolutionary scenes and allegories. On 18<sup>th</sup> January 1795 the two engravers presented an allegorical scene of Brutus condemning his son to death. Gamble was clearly one of the British contingent whose interests in politics (he presented a collection from the British residents to the widows and children of the victims of the 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792) intersected with his commercial activities in Paris.

John Hurford Stone, as well as pursuing a printing venture in Paris, was also a speculator, pursuing different business interests in the French capital. He established a cotton manufacturing industry in Paris and became “tolerably rich” through his business pursuits.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Alden, *Stephen Sayre* 161.

<sup>332</sup> John Goldworth Alger, “The British Colony in Paris, 1792-1793.” See also Citizen Arthur’s declaration, AN F7/4775/23: “Gamble, anglais imprimeur en taille, douze rue des piques, au coin du boulevard est copropriétaire de la maison With...il n’a pris intérêt dans cette maison que depuis With, dont il était la caution, a fait la Banqueroute.”

<sup>333</sup> See Alger, “The British Colony in Paris” 682-83.

<sup>334</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1218.

He also became involved at various times in the banking, chemical and wine sectors.<sup>335</sup> Hurford Stone and Joel Barlow exploited openings in the real estate field following the flight of French émigrés to British shores. Barlow purchased his Paris house at a price far below its value, after it had been confiscated by the revolutionary authorities and turned into national property.<sup>336</sup> Hurford Stone mentioned his own intention to purchase an abandoned property at low cost in a district close to his latest manufacturing interest: “I have some thought, of buying one of those Emigrants houses on the side of the city, where our business will be carried on, as there is no doubt of these houses being sold very cheap, and as national property, not to be paid for under 12 years.”<sup>337</sup> Stone, though closely involved in the political initiatives of the British Club, aimed at exploiting the economic opportunities presented by the Revolution in a series of experimental business plans.

Thomas Christie, a business associate of Stone, combined political journalism with mercantile pursuits. In Paris, he represented Turnbull, Forbes and Co., a company which sent grain and wheat to France during periods of severe dearth after 1789, despite the uncertainty which reigned in Britain as to the outcome of events across the Channel.<sup>338</sup> Christie, in a letter to Jérôme Pétion of February 1792, suggested that it was faith in the justice of the French nation that had fuelled the risky business venture. The company had sent supplies to Dieppe, Rouen and Paris to help alleviate the food shortages afflicting the country. Business investment was therefore directly linked to political sympathy. Christie made numerous trips to France in the ensuing years, partly out of interest in the Revolution, partly as an ambassador for his employer, charged with recovering outstanding sums of money owed by the different French districts in exchange for the good supplied. Christie was even imprisoned for a few days in late 1793 under the measures adopted against British subjects, yet his release

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<sup>335</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1337.

<sup>336</sup> Yorke, *France in 1802*. See chapter entitled “Thomas Paine, Jack Barlow. The Abbé Costi. Dr. Sudaeur.”

<sup>337</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1301. Letter dated 24<sup>th</sup> October 1792.

<sup>338</sup> Correspondence of Thomas Christie in AN F7/4648/3.

was secured when his mission to claim outstanding debt from the municipal government was acknowledged. In a similar vein, James Watt was to promote Thomas Walker's commercial interests in France while also leading a delegation to the Jacobin Club. Watt, after his stay in Paris, intended to "visit different parts of France, for the purpose of extending the commercial connexions of my Brother and myself with a Nation for which we have the highest esteem."<sup>339</sup> Political missions could be used as pretexts for consolidating or establishing business connections. Political sympathy with the Revolution was closely tied up with the desire for personal and financial advancement.

Robert Rayment, one of the least well-documented of the British radicals in Paris, described his profession as a merchant and agriculturalist to his captors during his incarceration from late 1793. Rayment went to France to present an economic proposal relating to the fabrication of copper currency to the revolutionaries and publicise his ideas on agrarian improvement. While he was in France he was recruited as a representative of a French banking establishment, the *Caisse d'Escompte*, to gather information about the organisation and running of the Bank of England. Yet Rayment also seems to have combined economic endeavour with political activism, being one of the principal figures behind a plan to provide relief for the widows and orphans of those who died at the Tuileries on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792 and signing the British Club petition of support to the National Convention in November 1792. Rayment, along with Thomas Marshall, another signatory of the British Club address, devised a plan to increase the value of *assignats* and to lower the price of foodstuffs in an attempt to relieve the financial distress of the less well-off among the French population. Copies of the plan were filtered down to the departments of France.<sup>340</sup> Rayment was not

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<sup>339</sup> AN F7/4774/70/464. The file contains an undated letter from Thomas Walker to Jérôme Pétion.

<sup>340</sup> The material held on Robert Rayment in the National Archives in Paris is extensive. See AN F7/4774/88. Rayment distinguished himself by successive petitions for his release, supported by testimonies from members of his section who seemed to consider him a loyal citizen and adherent of the Revolution. The Thomas Marshall mentioned in the British Club data does not seem to be the same Marshall who was a close friend of William Godwin and who translated the works of Volney.

unique among his British Club associates to be active in searching for practical ways of alleviating the distress of the poor or vocal in calling for the end of the oppression of the destitute by the rich. Mary Wollstonecraft bewailed the persistence of poverty as a barrier to the moral improvement of French society, asking, “How, in fact, can we expect to see men live together like brothers, when we only see master and servant in society? For till men learn mutually to assist without governing each other, little can be done by political associations towards perfecting the condition of mankind.”<sup>341</sup> If British Club members were interested in commerce and speculation, not all believed that economic activity should be unlimited. For Wollstonecraft, commercial activity was a way of securing the general improvement of society and should not be conducted to perpetuate economic inequality between the wealthy and the poor.

Christopher White, the proprietor of the hotel which became the meeting ground for British activists in Paris, was first and foremost a businessman, setting up a hotel and brasserie in Le Havre in 1786 with his wife and two children after receiving inviting offers from several tradesmen and negotiators to establish himself in the northern French port town. He transferred his livelihood to Paris in 1790, renting a house for ten thousand francs per year and furnishing it at great expense. Though essentially spurred to set up his hotel for economic gain, White exploited the Revolution’s attractiveness to foreigners to populate his hotel. He encouraged members of the British Club to hold their twice-weekly meetings on his premises and did not object to Paine, Fitzgerald and others making the hotel their temporary residence. Nevertheless, White also had a number of less enthusiastic observers of the Revolution on his guest register. Foreign-Office spy, Captain Monro, also stayed at the hotel during his mission on behalf of the British government.

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<sup>341</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 46.

Despite White's concessions to the radical core of British expatriates, his primary interests remained in entrepreneurship. After the flight of most foreigners from Paris in mid to late 1793, which precipitated the collapse of his hotel venture, despite British Club member James Gamble's attempts to rescue the operation by taking a part share in the hotel, White set up in business with another compatriot and British Club member, Nicholas Joyce, renting the Carmelites convent and establishing a cotton factory.<sup>342</sup> White's share in the venture was the equivalent of the sum already owed to him by his partner Joyce. The factory was about to be opened when the Convention declared the wholesale arrest of British citizens in October 1793. White's arrest and imprisonment seem to have ended his commercial aspirations in France, though little is yet known of his fate after the Luxembourg.<sup>343</sup> John Hurford Stone mentions in a letter of December 1793 that "we have engaged in a manufactory of English fashion cotton hose".<sup>344</sup> Considering Stone was a speculator in Paris and attended meetings at White's Hotel on a regular basis, he may have also been involved in White and Joyce's cotton venture. It is also likely that a trade in English clothing items was taking place a couple of doors down from White's Hotel, at 9 passage des Petits Pères, as the sale of second-hand English ties and flannel at a price thirty per cent lower than the retail price was announced in *Le Moniteur Universel* in late November.<sup>345</sup>

There were some contemporary critics, however, of this enthusiasm for combining entrepreneurship and revolutionary adherence. One of the perennial themes in Mary

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<sup>342</sup> Nicholas Joyce was probably a signatory to the British Club address of 24<sup>th</sup> November 1792. Although David Erdman reads the first name on the address as "Rich" for Richard, the first four letters given could equally be "Nich" for Nicholas. This would make sense, considering that Nicholas Joyce was White's business partner and that I have found no records under the name of Richard Joyce.

<sup>343</sup> Christopher White's career in France is outlined in some detail in the submissions he made to the *Comité de Sûreté Générale* while imprisoned in the Luxembourg prison. See AN F7/4775/52 70-81. White's depositions are made largely in support of an application for the freedom of Nicholas Joyce's orphaned children, one of whom, the eldest, was held in detention with the White family. Joyce had died in the Benedictine prison on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1794.

<sup>344</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1214.

<sup>345</sup> 27<sup>th</sup> November 1792, *Le Moniteur Universel*, vol. 14. "Au grand balcon, rue et passage des petits pères, no.9, au premier. La société qui tient l'entrepôt de marchandises d'occasion, à 30 pour cent au dessous du prix de fabrique, prévient ses concitoyens qu'elle a reçu un grand assortiment de marchandise de tout genre, et particulièrement pour l'hiver...Idem vrai anglais... cravates anglaises... flanelle vraie anglaise."



Wollstonecraft's letters to Gilbert Imlay was her disapproval of his penchant for commerce which she considered as both antithetical to a fulfilling life in the present moment and morally reprehensible. After Imlay's extended stay in Le Havre she wrote to him with that expectation that he would "make a *power* of money to indemnify me for your absence."<sup>346</sup> Joel Barlow and Imlay were involved in a risky project to evade the British blockade of Toulon and import grain, soap and iron. Wollstonecraft repeatedly reproached Imlay for his attachment to speculation, conveying her concern that he was excessively consumed by monetary accumulation. On 29<sup>th</sup> December 1793 she wrote, "Be not too anxious to get money! – for nothing worth having is to be purchased."<sup>347</sup> Three days later she reiterated her view on his business ventures stating, "I hate commerce."<sup>348</sup> As her frustration with their protracted separation continued, Wollstonecraft began to accuse Imlay of having been "embruted by trade and the vulgar enjoyments of life," and a day later articulated her lack of admiration for his "commercial face."<sup>349</sup> The theme is persistent in her letters and, although her frustration was evidently motivated by the spectre of her estrangement from Imlay, the tension that emerges between the coveting of present time and immaterial joys and the pursuit of commercial gain also had a philosophical slant. As Wollstonecraft notes in her *An Historical and Moral View*, the German model of moral and cultural advancement was laudable not only because it was pursued with "simplicity of manners, and honesty of heart," two virtues crucial to her vision of moral improvement, but the situation of the country "prevents that inundation of riches by commercial sources, that destroys the morals of a nation before it's [*sic*] reason arrives at maturity."<sup>350</sup> Commerce was not a curse in itself, but it was unhelpful in the early stages of cultivating a polished society. She did not criticise commerce per se in her history of the Revolution, in fact she suggested the liberating of trade was a necessary step in the

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<sup>346</sup> To Gilbert Imlay, 29<sup>th</sup> December 1793, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 235.

<sup>347</sup> To Gilbert Imlay, 29<sup>th</sup> December 1793, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 235.

<sup>348</sup> To Gilbert Imlay, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1794, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 238.

<sup>349</sup> To Gilbert Imlay, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1794, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 264, 265.

<sup>350</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 116.

advancement of civilisation. Yet she criticised “the destructive influence of commerce” on men whose state of moral infancy led them to partake in an “aristocracy of wealth” and “exchange savageness for tame servility” rather than cultivating “the urbanity of improved reason.” It was the slavishness that commerce engendered in degenerate European man, and the way it displaced honest husbandry, which she objected to rather than commerce as an ideal form of rational human exchange. The debate over the virtue of commerce belied divisions over the interpretation of republicanism that continued to have relevance during the 1790s. While commerce and republicanism had hitherto been seen as antithetical, their conjunction began to be accepted and justified.<sup>351</sup> For many British radicals however, the pursuit of private wealth and political activism was not an ideological stance, but showed the pragmatic need of a certain class of visitors to make a living as they continued to engage in politics.

What stands out from these cases is that from the outset radical sympathy was combined with economic activity. Adherence to the goals of the Revolution was not seen as incompatible with financial speculation or industrial and manufacturing innovation. On the contrary, there was much to justify their fusion. Speculation, experimentation and the embracing of novelty were key features of revolutionary thinking, distinguishing adherents of the Revolution from more sceptical observers. As Roger Chartier has shown, the “certainty of inauguration” and the “illusion of a new departure” were essential aspects of the Revolution’s cultural heritage.<sup>352</sup> The latitude accorded to foreign patriots would change radically once the more open cosmopolitanism of the first three years of the Revolution began to disintegrate and when experimentation began to be associated with deviance and counter-revolution rather than commercial innovation. Yet the combining of economic interest with support for the

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<sup>351</sup> See Mark Philp, “English Republicanism in the 1790s,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 6:3 (1998): 235-262. Philp suggests, “In many ways, one of the most shocking of eighteenth century innovations was to find in the conduct of commerce and the accumulation of wealth symptoms of civic health and strength, rather than of corrupt self-seeking.” 242.

<sup>352</sup> Roger Chartier, *Les origines culturelles de la Révolution française* 28-29. My translation.

Revolution was not in itself contradictory. Although some radicals, in particular Mary Wollstonecraft, were sceptical about the moral implications of commerce in rational, enlightened human society, others saw no friction between the two and their residence in Paris was characterised by private profit-making as well as public political activism.

### **II.3.6 Military Service in the French Revolution**

A number of British Club members played an active role in the French revolutionary armies. Henry Redhead Yorke suggests that Robert O'Reilly "fought against England in the French armies, and glories in the fact."<sup>353</sup> In 1792 John Oswald became a commander of a battalion in the Paris Volunteers and tried to persuade the Jacobins to descend on London to aid a British rising. He died in the Vendée in September 1793. Captain Monro reported that another member of the British Club, Doctor Maxwell, "has at last obtained a company in the French Service, and I understand is soon to have this to join the army."<sup>354</sup> Maxwell had also tried to raise subscriptions for the French before departing for Paris, but his house was mobbed by loyalist opponents, an event which precipitated his hasty departure. William Newton joined the French dragoons on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1793 but was denounced to the *Comité de Sûreté Générale*, whose members ordered his dismissal from the army. Newton was eventually executed under the Terror. William Ricketts of the British Club also petitioned the Convention to allow him to join the French navy in November 1792.<sup>355</sup>

## **II.4 Daily Life in Paris**

### **II.4.1 Language and Interpreting**

Some British residents of Paris had practical difficulties in learning and understanding the French language and deciphering the cultural habits and norms of their adopted country. Some, such as John Hurford Stone, were proficient in French and would have assisted those

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<sup>353</sup> Yorke, *France in 1802* 228.

<sup>354</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> December 1792, George Monro to Lord Grenville. PRO FO 27/40 Part 2.

<sup>355</sup> See Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières* 217.

who encountered problems. Stone may have had some input in the translation of key addresses and letters, and his wife, Rachel Coope, acted as an interpreter for Joel Barlow and Samuel Blackden.<sup>356</sup> Robert Smith also mastered the French language. His friend and collaborator, Thomas Paine, described him as “a man of letters and of leisure” who “understands several languages.” Smith helped Paine to read the texts in French that the latter was using as source material for his writing. Paine wrote, “[Smith] assists me in examining sundry authors, as well ancient as modern, in the National Library, which I could not accomplish without that assistance.”<sup>357</sup> Smith’s prowess in French, as well as being an essential aid to Thomas Paine, may also have proved useful in negotiations with the ruling authorities during Smith’s imprisonment under the Terror. Another member of the British Club and Irish radical, Nicholas Madgett, translated Robert Merry’s tract on republican government which was presented to the National Convention in late 1792.<sup>358</sup> He also served as an intermediary between British petitioners and the revolutionary administration, explaining, excusing and occasionally denouncing appeals from his British and Irish colleagues. John Oswald, also proficient in French, translated texts during his service on the editorial committee of *La Chronique du Mois*, notably Jean-Marie Collot d’Herbois’s *Almanach du Père Girard*.<sup>359</sup> Sampson Perry was adept enough in French to find employment in translation after his release from Newgate jail, and gave evidence in French public trials

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<sup>356</sup> Woodward, *Une Anglaise* 77. According to Woodward, Coope acted as a translator for Barlow and Blackden while they lodged together at a hotel on rue Jacob.

<sup>357</sup> AN AF III 1808/369/79. The file contains a plea from Thomas Paine on behalf of Robert Smith to extend his residence in Paris.

<sup>358</sup> *The Monthly Magazine* printed a biographical notice of Robert Merry in the April 1799 edition following his death in December 1798 in Baltimore, USA. Reporting on his activities in Paris, the magazine reported that “while in that city, and under the invitation given by the French legislature to all foreigners, to favour them with their sentiments on the erecting of a free constitution; he wrote a short treatise in English, on the nature of free government. It was translated into French by Mr Madget, and presented in the same manner as the Laurel of Liberty to the Convention Nationale: “honorable mention” being made of it in their journals.” (*Monthly Magazine* vol. 25 [1799] 257).

<sup>359</sup> See Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières* 125-28.

without the aid of an interpreter.<sup>360</sup> Finally, James Watt, representing the Manchester Constitutional Society at the Jacobin Club in April 1792, showed his proficiency in French to the audience of revolutionaries:

Watt, whom three years' schooling at Geneva had made fluent in French was equal to the occasion. Springing on the platform, he pushed Robespierre aside, and "in a short but vehement speech completely silenced his formidable antagonist, carrying with him the feelings of the rest of the audience, who expressed their sense of his honest British spirit in a loud burst of applause."<sup>361</sup>

Such eloquence, in the French language, often inspired confidence, respect and attentiveness among members of the revolutionary leadership.

Other expatriates had much greater difficulties in conversing, exchanging and making themselves understood. This could sometimes lead to diplomatic incidents that severely compromised practical relations between the British and French. David Williams' poor grasp of the French language led the future mayor of Paris, Jérôme Pétion, to describe his meeting with the Welsh radical before the latter's trip to Paris in late 1792 as having "lacked the vivacity and interest which it could have had if we could have spoken the same language."<sup>362</sup> According to Captain Monro, Thomas Paine, himself inhibited by his poor command of French, helped the SCI delegates, Joel Barlow and John Frost, to get the society's address translated, yet even this did not prevent a series of misunderstandings from occurring at the moment of the presentation of the address to the Convention on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1792. The intention of the delegates had been to present the congratulatory address and inform the French assembly of the offer of a gift of a thousand pairs of shoes from the London SCI, a gift to be renewed and repeated over the following six weeks to help the efforts of the revolutionary armies. However, the War Secretary (perhaps disingenuously) mistook Frost for

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<sup>360</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine* obituary of Perry notes that "During this period he maintained his wonted spirit, and employed himself translating from the French, and in a variety of literary works." (*The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 134 [1823] 281).

<sup>361</sup> Quoted in Alger, *Englishmen* 47. Alger doesn't mention the source of his quote but it is probably from the records of the Jacobin Club.

<sup>362</sup> This episode is recounted in Jones, *The Anvil and the Hammer* 119.

a shoemaker who had come to request a contract, another told him he had come to the wrong department, while a third told him to apply to the Convention. Monro attributes the misunderstanding to the “confused state of the different departments of the present French Government and the bad French all these gentlemen spoke.”<sup>363</sup> Thomas Paine and others “encouraged him in his enterprize; and after some little arrangement had taken place, he...presented his address on the 28<sup>th</sup>, and at the same time his shoes.”<sup>364</sup> Monro noted that Frost was unable to either read or converse in French.

The desire to communicate did not therefore necessarily translate into smooth, unstilted dialogue. Mary Wollstonecraft complained bitterly in her letters to her sisters of her frustration at her inability to speak the French language, confiding to Everina that she felt uncomfortable amongst the “flying sounds.”<sup>365</sup> She reiterated her irritation in a letter to Ruth Barlow, dated February 1793:

I am endeavouring to acquire the language, I mean that I should not be content to speak as many of the English speak, who talk away with an unblushing face, and I am exceedingly fatigued by my constant attention to words, particularly as I cannot yet get rid of a foolish bashfulness which stops my mouth when I am most desirous to make myself understood, besides when my heart sinks or flies to England to hover round those I most love all the fine French phrases, ready cut and dry for use, fly away the Lord know where.<sup>366</sup>

Wollstonecraft wanted to acquire more than just the bare rudiments of the language that she believed so many English people settled for and expressed her desire to find a place within French society at the same time as harbouring nostalgia for England. However, by October 1794, she was writing to Gilbert Imlay, informing him of her progress in the French language

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<sup>363</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959.

<sup>364</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959.

<sup>365</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Everina Wollstonecraft, Paris, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1792, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 214.

<sup>366</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Ruth Barlow, 1-14<sup>th</sup> February 1793, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 220.

which had allowed her to make new acquaintances and even charm a judge on the Revolutionary Tribunal.<sup>367</sup>

Welsh visitor, Morgan John Rhys, an acquaintance of British Club member James Gamble, found out about travelling in France from the experience of fellow expatriates congregating in one of the hotels open to foreign residents. Yet as soon as he began to seek private accommodation, he recognised the need for a better command of the French language: “Next morning I deliver’d my letter & was recommended to private lodgings – I was now under the obligation of learning a little French.”<sup>368</sup> Proficiency, or at least rudimentary ability in the French language, was a necessary asset for residents and travellers hoping to remain in Paris for a considerable length of time.

Thomas Paine, although he helped to find translators for fellow radicals in the British Club, had a notoriously poor command of French which inhibited his communication both in the National Convention and in private with members of the revolutionary government. It was also a lacuna that Paine never reconciled himself to and frequently brought up in letters and conversations. Paine’s flawed French was seized upon by Jacques Thuriot and Jean-Paul Marat during the tense final stages of the trial of Louis XVI. The French representatives challenged the accuracy of the translation of Paine’s speech after it had been delivered to the Convention, a pretext for discounting the value of his political opinion. Paine’s view that the king should not be executed but rather imprisoned for the duration of the war, and then exiled once peace had been established, was unacceptable to the Montagnard members of the Convention. Thuriot asserted that the language used in the speech was not that of Thomas Paine, while Marat contested the exactitude of Paine’s point of view, claiming that it had been

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<sup>367</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Gilbert Imlay, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1794, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 270: “I have therefore employed and amused myself since I got rid of – and am making a progress in the language amongst other things.”

<sup>368</sup> BM Add. Ms 25388.399-404. 402. Letter from Morgan John Rhys to the Reverend John Rippon, from France, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1791. I am grateful to Mary-Ann Constantine for providing me with her transcripts of these letters.

inaccurately translated: “I denounce the intermediary, and I maintain that this is not the opinion of Thomas Paine. It is a vicious and unfaithful translation.”<sup>369</sup> Paine’s opponents in the Convention were able to exploit his linguistic failings to political advantage and Paine, unable to reply to his detractors swiftly and eloquently, laboured to respond through interpreters.

Paine regularly prefaced his letters to French revolutionary leaders with an acknowledgement of his inability to speak the French language, a handicap that clearly inhibited his communication on a number of levels. Writing to Condorcet, Bonneville and his own translator François Lanthenas in June 1791, he offered his assistance in the drafting of a republican manifesto: “Unfortunately all my productions have been composed in English, and can be of slight advantage to the cause, except through the medium of translation, so that, I suppose, the services I would render can never be commensurate with my desires.”<sup>370</sup> He admitted that his contributions would be of lesser value because of the obstacle posed by language. Paine’s faltering French often led him to request face-to-face meetings with the aid of an interpreter rather than proceed by written exchange. He wrote to Foreign minister Lebrun on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1792 on the question of Irish affairs. In his request for a meeting he wrote, “I wish to confer with you on that subject, but as I do not speak French, and as the matter requires confidence, General Duschastelet has desired me to say, that if you can make it convenient to name a day, to dine with him and me at Auteuil, he will, with pleasure, do the office of interpreter.”<sup>371</sup> Paine also wrote to Bertrand Barère in September 1793, after an accidental meeting in the street, stating he was “sorry that we cannot converse together.”<sup>372</sup> Paine felt deep frustration at having to operate in politics at the highest level without the

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<sup>369</sup> *Le Moniteur Universel*, vol. 15, Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1793. My translation.

<sup>370</sup> Paine, “To Messieurs Condorcet, Nicolas de Bonneville and Lanthenas”, Paris, June 1791, Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 1315.

<sup>371</sup> Archives Diplomatiques, Affaires, Étrangères, Correspondance Anglaise, vol. 584 folio 150 quoted in Woodward, “Les Projets de Descente.”

<sup>372</sup> Paine, “To Citizen Barère”, 5<sup>th</sup> September 1793, Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 1333.



necessary tools to flourish in oratory, skills that most British observers deemed necessary in the French debating arena.

Paine wrote to Louis-Guillaume Otto at the foreign affairs division on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1793 to request reimbursement for the costs incurred during Colonel Eleazer Oswald's mission to Britain. Oswald had been sent to judge the readiness of the British people for revolution. The sensitivity of the subject prompted Paine to request the services of a government mediator who was above suspicion: "As it is not proper that any interpreter should act in this business but a confidential person, and as you are the most proper person to communicate between him and the Minister. I wish you would undertake to forward the settlement of his accounts, I will call you on Monday, in company with Col. Oswald."<sup>373</sup> The atmosphere of war and political in-fighting meant that language took on heightened sensitivity. The accuracy of translation was crucial, as was the need for personal trust when the likelihood of incomprehension was high. Paine found great relief in being able to communicate in English. In a letter to Georges Danton from early May 1793 he expressed his concern at the disputes in the National Convention. Paine began his letter with "As you read English, I write this letter to you without passing it through the hands of a translator."<sup>374</sup> The events he mentioned would eventually lead to the expulsion of the Girondin members at the end of the month and the consolidation of Montagnard control.

Paine's political role in France cannot be judged without some consideration being given therefore to his persistent struggle to communicate, to achieve the relevant flair and fluency demanded by the French Convention, and to reassure himself of the confidence and understanding of his interlocutors. These obstacles severely impeded his political

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<sup>373</sup> Archives Diplomatiques, Correspondance Anglaise, vol. 588, folio 8. Quoted in Woodward, "Les Projets de Descente." Woodward converts the republican calendar date to 28<sup>th</sup> June 1793, which seems erroneous. I have gone by the republican date to find the corresponding date in October 1793, two months before Paine's imprisonment.

<sup>374</sup> Paine, "To George Jacques Danton," Paris, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1793, Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 1335.

effectiveness, particularly in the months leading up to the Terror. Rudimentary French was not enough to convey a firm impression of loyalty to the republic, and those who were adept at speaking the language tended to prove more able at negotiating their status and liberty than those who had very little working knowledge. John Hurford Stone, though briefly imprisoned twice during the Terror, faced little real danger. Partly through his capacity to defend his position and communicate effectively, he was exempted from many of the more stringent conditions faced by his fellow expatriates.

#### **II.4.2 Residence and Lodging: Mapping the British in Paris**

British presence in Paris gave rise to intersecting networks of sociability, sometimes in public spaces where leisure, dining or conversation were the principal pursuits, sometimes in more restricted spheres, such as private premises, salons, lodgings and residences or even within the prison network. Many evenings were spent at White's Hotel, in the heart of the second arrondissement, an area of flux and interchange. The hotel was just off the Places des Victoires and a few minutes' walk from the Palais Royal, the residence of the Duc d'Orléans and hub of café and literary culture in Paris. According to Richard Buel, the area was the site of "incessant carnival."<sup>375</sup> This proximity of a thriving centre of social life as well as the Duke's early sympathy for the radical direction of the Revolution, may have contributed to the frequency of British visits to the gardens and streets around the palace, as well as to the palace itself. Yet the living quarters around the Palais Royal were not desirable. The American couple Joel and Ruth Barlow took up lodgings on the top floor where they were visited by Samuel Breck in February 1791. Breck described how "in order to reach the apartment of Mr. Barlow, I was obliged to pass through the door of a great gambling establishment that occupied the floor immediately below his." He also judged that "the poet's

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<sup>375</sup> Buel, *Joel Barlow: American Citizen* 140.

poverty consented [to such quarters] rather than his will.”<sup>376</sup> If the residential arrangements were insalubrious, the site offered the best view of the Revolutionary action.

Residents of White's Hotel would have been in constant contact with the bustle and animation of the gardens where Camille Desmoulins had exhorted crowds to insurgency after the expulsion of Necker from Louis XVI's counsel, just before the taking of the Bastille, and where commerce was pursued amid political addresses, prostitution and gambling in an environment which was free of literary censorship. Arthur Young described the scene with astonishment and concern in June 1789, on the eve of Revolution:

Is it not wonderful, that while the press teems with the most levelling and even seditious principles, that if put in execution would overturn the monarchy, nothing in reply appears, and not the least step is taken by the court to restrain this extreme licentiousness of publication. It is easy to conceive the spirit that must thus be raised among the people. But the coffee-houses in the Palais Royal present yet more singular and astonishing spectacles; they are not only crowded [*sic*] within, but other expectant crowds [*sic*] are at the doors and windows, listening *a gorge déployé* to certain orators, who from chairs or tables harangue each his little audience: the eagerness with which they are heard, and the thunder of applause they receive for every sentiment of more than common hardiness or violence against the present government, cannot easily be imagined. I am all amazement at the ministry permitting such nests and hotbeds of sedition and revolt, which disseminate amongst the people, every hour, principles that by and by must be opposed with vigour, and therefore it seems little short of madness to allow the propagation at present.<sup>377</sup>

The Palais, formerly a seat of the monarchy until Louis XIV gave it to the house of Orléans, had been reinvested under the Revolution. Its grounds became known as the “jardins de la Révolution” after 1791 and its name changed to Palais Egalité in 1792. Mary Wollstonecraft gave a rather different portrait of the atmosphere around the Palais to that of Young in her *An Historical and Moral View*:

At this juncture also, a spacious square, equally devoted to business and pleasures, called the *Palais Royale*, became the rendezvous of the citizens. There the most spirited gave lectures, whilst more modest men read the popular papers and pamphlets, on the benefits of liberty, and the crying oppression of absolute governments. This was the centre of information; and the whole city flocking thither, to talk or to listen, returned home warmed with the love of freedom, and determined to oppose, and the risk of life, the power that should still labour to enslave them.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Buel, *Joel Barlow: American Citizen* 134.

<sup>377</sup> Arthur Young, *Arthur Young's Travels in France during the years 1787, 1788, 1789*, ed. Miss Betham-Edwards (London: George Bell and Sons, 1906) 153-54.

<sup>378</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 76.

For Wollstonecraft, this hub of literary and political life was a microcosm of the spirit of liberty which was transforming the French nation. Kevin Hetherington describes the Palais as a site of “heterotopia,” understood as “spaces of alternate ordering,” sites of convergence where marginal groups could meet and mingle with the highest orders of society. For Hetherington, the Palais was “a site of openness, tolerance and civility as well as a space for rational and enlightened debate that played a significant part in the emerging civil society of the bourgeoisie.”<sup>379</sup> Yet he also sees the site as “carnavalesque; a space of playful cultural inversions, with the highest and lowest strata of society able to mingle, which offered a moment of freedom from some of the hierarchical constraints of French society.”<sup>380</sup> It was a space that encouraged social mixing and vibrant exchange and contributed to the emergence of a self-conscious bourgeois public culture. Yet by 1793, the gardens were generally associated with secrecy, plotting and assassination. Jules Michelet summed up this vision of the 1793 Palais as a place of “life, death, quick pleasures, rude, violent, fatal pleasure.”<sup>381</sup> There can be little doubt that British residents, frequent visitors or guests at White's Hotel, just round the corner from the Palais would have been influenced by the spirit of the surroundings. Their view of the culture of the Revolution would have been forged to a certain extent through their experience of the encounters witnessed in the arcades and gardens in the area near White's Hotel.

Private enterprise could also provide occasions for British residents to come into direct contact with each other. The Carmelites convent on rue d'Enfer brought Nicholas Joyce and Christopher White into frequent proximity and they may have been occasionally joined by

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<sup>379</sup> Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997) 2.

<sup>380</sup> Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity* 3.

<sup>381</sup> “Ce n'étaient plus ces premiers temps du Palais Royal, où ses cafés furent les églises de la Révolution naissante, où Camille, au café de Foy, prêcha la croisade. Ce n'était plus cet âge d'innocence révolutionnaire où le bon Fauchet professait au Cirque la doctrine des *Amis*, et l'association philanthropique du *Cercle de la Vérité*. Les cafés, les restaurateurs, étaient très-fréquentés, mais sombres. Telles de ces boutiques fameuses allaient devenir funèbres. Le restaurateur Février vit tuer chez lui Saint-Fargeau. Tout près, au café Corraza, fut tramée la mort de la Gironde. La vie, la mort, le plaisir rapide, grossier, violent, le plaisir exterminateur, voilà le Palais Royal de 93.” Jules Michelet, *Les femmes de la Révolution* (Paris: Chamerot, 1863) 245. My translation.

John Hurford Stone, who had an interest in cotton manufacturing, and James Gamble who was attempting to save White's Hotel business from collapse by an emergency injection of capital. Hurford Stone's printing press was located from the years 1793 through to 1804 on rue de Vaugirard, one of the major arteries running through central Paris. It is likely that the printing press would have been one of the locations where British Club members, keenly involved in writing, editing and publishing, would meet.<sup>382</sup>

British residents took up lodgings in different parts of town, although many former guests of White's who went on to take up semi-permanent residence in Paris found lodgings in neighbouring streets, not far either from the Tuileries and the Palais du Louvre, once home to the royal court but, from 1793 to 1795, the seat of the *Comité de Salut Public* and *Comité de Sûreté Générale*. Because of their physical proximity to these centres of political exchange, some British residents were witnesses to the storming of the Tuileries on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792 and other public actions in the same district. What they saw therefore impacted on what they wrote about and many British observers took the August Days as one of their themes in their writings back to Britain.

Thomas Paine, after a brief spell at White's, moved to a hotel near rue Richelieu and finally to 63 rue du faubourg Saint-Denis in 1793, where he occupied shared apartments with British Club members William Choppin and William Johnson, far from the hub of political activity. In his lodgings at the Hôtel Richelieu, Paine had been "so plagued and interrupted by numerous visitors, and sometimes by adventurers, that in order to have some time to himself he appropriated two mornings in a week for his levee days."<sup>383</sup> David Williams also took up

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<sup>382</sup> Perry's lodgings were located at no. 225 rue du petit Vaugirard, faubourg Saint-Germain. This street became the rue du Cherche-Midi in 1823. Perry's address is specified in the testimony about his role in the Marat affair, see AN W 269/16/29.

<sup>383</sup> Rickman, *The Life of Thomas Paine* 129.

residence at a hotel on rue Richelieu, probably the same as Paine, where he was not far from Madame Roland's salon, located on rue Neuve des Petits Champs.<sup>384</sup>

White's Hotel provided accommodation for visitors arriving in the capital and guests may have invited friends to dine while they rented quarters there. George Edwards and Lord Edward Fitzgerald both had rooms at 7 passage des Petits Pères and Stephen Sayre stayed at the hotel for a number of months.<sup>385</sup> Robert O'Reilly found accommodation at rue de Buffaut at the house of a citizen known as Aimée. Charles and Elizabeth Churchill and their children, a family well-acquainted with Christopher White, took up a tenancy agreement with citizen Jacquin at 63 rue de la Roquette. The Churchills, like White, had been in Paris since before the Revolution, settling there in 1783, probably for commercial reasons.<sup>386</sup> It is unlikely that Charles Churchill was a member of the British Club, although he may have had some contact with the group, since he had donated shoes and guns to the revolutionary armies. Robert Rayment took lodgings at 3 rue Neuve St Augustin and Helen Williams' salon was located at 105 rue Hevetius, where she had a view overlooking the Tuileries gardens. Mary Wollstonecraft, after a period in central Paris moved to Neuilly-sur-Seine during the most intense months of the Terror before returning to central Paris during one of Imlay's prolonged absences to take up residence with a German woman whose tariffs were cheap. Robert Smith lived on rue de Choiseul, at the corner of one of the major Parisian boulevards and James Gamble set up his residence at 12 rue des Piques. Here Gamble played host to the Welsh Baptist preacher, Morgan John Rhys who had come to France on a mission to preach to the

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<sup>384</sup> See Jones, *The Anvil and the Hammer* 122.

<sup>385</sup> See Alden, *Stephen Sayre* 164.

<sup>386</sup> Elizabeth Mayne Churchill was originally from Boston, America, though the nationality of her husband Charles is not mentioned in the official record. She had two young children and was arrested during the last months of 1793. Her husband, though having no clear involvement with radicalism, was considered a loyal partisan of the Revolution and had provided shoes and guns for the revolutionary armies. They had a good relationship with their local section and no reason had been identified for doubting their loyalty to the republic. See AN F7/4648/3.

unconverted.<sup>387</sup> John Hurford Stone moved into Helen Maria Williams' household in 1794 after his divorce from his wife Rachel Coope had been finalised. The cartographical representation of the British in Paris therefore shows a high concentration of activity and lodgings around the Palais Royal and the Tuileries, sites of political importance during the years in which the British Club was active. Not all members resided close to this centre of public activity however. Some lived much further out, perhaps for financial reasons or hoping to find some respite from the political turmoil to write or simply to shield themselves from suspicion.

## II.5 Expatriation and National Belonging

Apart from David Williams' travel companion, James Tilly Matthews, who explicitly linked his expatriation in Paris and support for the French Revolution to his sense of a strong Welsh heritage, few members or associates of the British Club highlighted their sense of national belonging and specific cultural background in their writings. Matthews, not specifically linked to the Club and his opinions often discredited because of his later residence in Bedlam asylum and developing schizophrenia, wrote from prison to the *Comité de Salut Public*. His views were translated by Nicholas Madgett, himself already convinced of Matthews' insanity:

I am Welch; tho English by being a Subject of Great Britain; from the time of Caesar to this Moment, we have preserved our Liberty and Laws, and History cannot furnish an Hundred instances in this period of a man having forsaken the Cause for w. you are now fighting. I say if obstinacy of Principle is of any weight, the Welch have the Preference over all mankind.<sup>388</sup>

This is a unique reference to national identity from among expatriate residents of Paris in the first half of the 1790s. I have already alluded to Alger's sweeping description of

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<sup>387</sup> For an account of Morgan John Rhys's mission to France, see Mary-Ann Constantine, "The Welsh in Revolutionary Paris." I am grateful to Mary-Ann Constantine for allowing me to mention the example of Tilly Matthews in this study.

<sup>388</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> May 1795, Archives Diplomatiques, Affaires Étrangères, Correspondance Anglaise, vol. 588, folio 158, pp. 371-72, quoted in Mary-Ann Constantine, "The Welsh in Revolutionary Paris."

“Englishmen” in the Revolution which covers a wide range of national backgrounds, and David Erdman, writing in 1986, glosses over Oswald’s Scottish heritage. He introduces Oswald as a “highly articulate British member of the Jacobin Club of Paris.”<sup>389</sup> His study of Oswald’s career is an attempt to “become familiar with the intentions and views of those among the British visitors in France who were more than idle watchers of passing tourists” rather than an investigation of a particularly Scottish brand of radicalism in Paris<sup>390</sup> The diversity of national backgrounds within the British Club is one of the most intriguing aspects of the group. From among the signatories to the 1792 address, there were Irishmen, Americans, Englishmen and Scotsmen. A handful of Welsh expatriates were also connected to the Club, though they did not necessarily play leading roles.

This begs the question as to whether expatriation had the effect of reinforcing ties of particular national allegiance or engendering a more universal sense of trans-national brotherhood. Both mechanisms may have been at play at different stages of the Revolution. There was clearly an awareness of national distinctions among British radical expatriates. Both the November 1792 and the September 1793 address from the foreign residents of Paris to the National Convention cite the different nationalities within their ranks, which include the English, Scots and Irish. Revealingly, the Irishmen are a late addition in the November address, added with a small but significant arrow, as if as in an afterthought. John Oswald himself did not accentuate his Scottish identity in communication with the French authorities, describing himself as an “Anglo-franc” in his tract on the republican constitution George Edwards, probably of Welsh origin, did not attempt to signal his heritage in his petition for a passport and all of his publications concerned British issues in the widest sense. Michael Durey has shown how national belonging and the different political and legal context of the nations of Britain had a bearing on reasons for immigrating to America. These considerations

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<sup>389</sup> Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières* 1.

<sup>390</sup> Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières* 3.



may also have influenced those travelling to revolutionary France. Yet it appears that in the years before the Terror, national differences were smoothed over rather than highlighted by expatriates, in line with the claims of universal fraternity that incited many visitors to go to Paris in the first place. It is quite likely that national feeling became more important when the Anglo-French war broke out. Tilly Matthews' letter is dated 1795 when there was perhaps a greater incentive for a Welsh resident in Paris to attempt to sever ties with the British government and Britishness more broadly. As the French administration placed more emphasis on nationality as a criterion for citizenship, British expatriates may have begun to develop a greater consciousness of their own particular national heritage.

The Irish in Paris had a different experience of the Revolution and their relationship to their home country and Britain was distinct from that of their British counterparts. In the early years of the Revolution there seems to have been a significant degree of conjunction between British and Irish radicals. A reading of the British Club address of November 1792 highlights at least nine signatories of Irish descent, some of whom would become leading players in the Rebellion orchestrated by the United Irishmen in 1798. Alongside these notable revolutionaries were dissident members of the Irish ecclesiastical establishments in Paris, the "gang of four" identified by Liam Swords who formed a breakaway faction and joined the British Club gatherings. Bernard MacSheehy, William Duckett and Jeremie Curtayn had been members of the Irish College, initially seen as a hotbed of counterrevolutionary intrigue and a target of the Parisian mobs intent on ridding Paris of reactionary priests.<sup>391</sup> These three men attended meetings of the Society of the Friends of the Rights of Man at White's Hotel and relinquished their former connections with the ecclesiastical institutions. The Irishman Robert O'Reilly was a significant member of the British Club, becoming secretary under Hurford Stone's presidency. Yet from the mid-1790s onwards, as the war with Britain continued and

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<sup>391</sup> See Elliott, *Partners in Revolution* and Swords, *The Green Cockade*.

plans were made for an attempted French invasion of Ireland with the backing of exiled Irish nationals, the Irish experience diverged from that of the English, Scottish and Welsh. Irish radicals, rallied by men such as Wolfe Tone and Sir Edward Fitzgerald, formed a more cohesive unit and became heavily involved in the external politics of the Directoire.

## **II.6 Associational Culture and Networks**

### **II.6.1 The British Club at White's Hotel**

The British Club drew together a variety of individuals therefore, from a wide range of backgrounds, who had arrived in Paris for different reasons and who pursued a number of contrasting activities in the French capital. The club had political pretensions in France and was also inextricably linked to the movement for parliamentary reform and constitutional change in Britain. The British Club was also a locus of news and information and an occasion for sociable gatherings and exchanges, virulent arguments and disputes and the reinforcement or forging of friendships and acquaintances. In this section, the intention is to broadly draw out some of the more private and cultural implications of the club as well as explain its internal workings and role as a federative core and source of solidarity for the British expatriate community.

The first recorded gathering of the British Club took place on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1792, at a dinner organised at White's Hotel. However, in view of the main business of the evening, which consisted in celebrating the victories of the French revolutionary armies and selecting a committee to frame an address of support to be presented to the National Convention, it is likely that unrecorded meetings occurred before that date, probably rooted in more informal sociable gatherings and compatriot dinners. James Gamble and Robert Rayment, signatories of the British Club address, had presented a monetary gift to the National Assembly in August

1792, in aid of the families suffering after the Tuileries revolt.<sup>392</sup> Captain Monro described the meeting of the 18<sup>th</sup> November in a letter to the Home Office, though he admitted in his introductory remarks that he only arrived in Paris on the 20<sup>th</sup>, two days after the event took place. We might question therefore his ability to recount the events accurately, or at least wonder where he got his evidence from. He probably based his account on what he overheard during his ensuing stay at White's, where he initially blended in to the radical community to avoid suspicion.

Monro attempts to sketch the composition of the club of British residents in his letter to the Home Office in early December. He suggests that the initial gathering was attended by nearly eighty people “of various ranks and descriptions.”<sup>393</sup> He singles out Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Sir Robert Smith, John Hurford Stone and “a few others” as the principal actors and suggests that the committee set up to frame the address consisted of fifteen members, led by a “Mr. McDonald who is concern'd in the Morning Post.”<sup>394</sup> Monro probably made an error here, as it was more likely D. E. MacDonnell, the editor of the Opposition newspaper, *The Morning Post*, who signed and drew up the address to the Convention.<sup>395</sup> He states that Sir Robert Smith had “a great share in all their committees and accompanied the address to the bar” and, like Hurford Stone, was notable for his violent views towards his home country. Other figures esteemed within the party in Monro's view were Robert Rayment, Nicholas Joyce, the American Stephen Sayre, James Gamble and John Oswald. He also includes Henry Yorke and the Irish Sheares brothers in the central core, and adds the name of Sampson Perry,

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<sup>392</sup> The offering to the families suffering after the August days is mentioned in Alger, *Englishmen*, and also in Rayment's prison file, AN F7/4774/88.

<sup>393</sup> PRO TS 11/959.

<sup>394</sup> PRO TS 11/959.

<sup>395</sup> AN C11/278/40. The British Club address is not signed by a McDonald, but by a D.E. MacDonnell. Erdman mistakes a D for a J and misspells his surname. Werkmeister suggests in *A Newspaper History of England* that MacDonnell was probably editing the *Morning Post* in 1792. MacDonnell also edited *The Gazetteer* and *The Telegraph* over the course of 1791-96. See Robert Haig, *The Gazetteer 1735-1797: A Study in the Eighteenth-Century English Newspaper* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U P, 1960) 232-39 and 250-53. He was also a journalistic acquaintance of Robert Merry and may have acted as a go-between in a dispute between the poet and John Taylor of the Drury Lane theatre. See John Taylor, *Records of My Life*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper, 1833) 272-78.

whose addition to the ranks reinforced the club in early 1793.<sup>396</sup> Lesser respected members included Irishman Robert O'Reilly, who was "of little consequence either one way or the other," William Newton, whose abilities "neither do much harm nor good," and Dr. William Maxwell. The verdict on O'Reilly seems inconsistent with the latter's position as secretary under John Hurford Stone's presidency and orator of the address at the bar of the Convention on 24<sup>th</sup> November. Yet as the club was relatively short-lived and affinities were transient, it is possible that members could be rapidly and unexpectedly discredited from one week to the next. The November address, which was drafted the same evening but only translated and ready for presentation the following Monday, was signed by fifty members and expressed solidarity with the republican direction the nation was taking and celebrated the ideal of universal liberty it embodied.

It is tempting to believe that the fifty members who signed the address were the more active radicals within the community, although Monro suggests that many of those who put their names to the declaration were not allowed to join the main core in official meetings. The address itself identifies the fifty members as those who had been nominated to the committee for the purpose of drafting a declaration to the Convention. (See Appendix I, figures 16). The core nucleus of radical activists was probably much smaller in reality and changed as visitors came and went. It is also worth noting that the club initially welcomed members from across national frontiers, including Irish and American expatriates. A group of twenty signatories, including Sir Robert Smith and Robert O'Reilly, presented the British Club address at the bar of the Convention on 24<sup>th</sup> November and "they were all afterwards admitted to the honour of France."<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> PRO FO 27/40 Part 2. See the letter from George Monro, written from Paris on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1792. See also the letter from George Monro to Lord Grenville, written at Paris on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1793, which mentions Perry. PRO FO 27/41.

<sup>397</sup> PRO TS 11/959.

The British Club had begun to attract attention in Paris and London, and an entry in *Le Moniteur Universel* on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1792 announced that a meeting of British sympathisers had taken place in the preceding days:

Those English residents of Paris gathered a few days ago at White's Hotel, passage des Petits Pères, to celebrate the victories of the French republican armies and the triumph of liberty. Foreigners from different European countries were invited to this celebration and shared the joy which moved the Assembly. Thus are strengthened each day the bonds of universal fraternity which the French have extended to all peoples and on which they stake their lives.<sup>398</sup>

Further meetings took place throughout November and December. Robert Merry presided at a meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1792, in which he and Paine, to the consternation of members such as Frost, Yorke and MacDonnell, suggested presenting a second congratulatory address to the Convention. A number of British residents, aware of the notoriety their actions were provoking in Britain, were beginning to question the ties cultivated by the club with the republican regime at a time when the king was on trial. Despite the differing views, Erdman believes an address was eventually presented on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1793. Captain Monro suggests that the main event at the gathering on the 16<sup>th</sup> December was the delivery of an address from the president of the *section de la place des Fédérés* to the gathering of English, Scots and Irish. While it is unclear what the subject of the speech was, the very presence of a section leader at a British Club gathering provides evidence that the British were mixing not only with leading figures of the Revolution but also with local representatives, seen as the voice of the *sans-culottes*.

These early gatherings in the last months of 1792 were followed by an official announcement on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1793, again in *Le Moniteur Universel*, that a club would meet twice weekly at White's Hotel:

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<sup>398</sup> *Le Moniteur Universel*, vol. 14, Monday 26<sup>th</sup> November 1792. “*De Paris – Les Anglais demeurant à Paris se sont assemblés, il y a quelques jours, à l’hôtel de Withes, passage des Petits-Pères, pour célébrer les victoires des armées de la république française et le triomphe de la liberté. Des étrangers de différentes contrées de l’Europe ont été invités à cette fête, et ont pris part à la joie qui transportaient l’assemblée. Ainsi s’étendent chaque jour les liens de la fraternité universelle à laquelle les Français ont invité tous les peuples, et qu’ils veulent établir au prix de leur sang.*”

Foreigners, for the most part English, Scots and Irish, resident in Paris, have addressed themselves to the city council, and declared that, in accordance with the law, they will meet every Sunday and Thursday, under the name of the Society of the Friends of the Rights of Man, at White's English hotel, 7 passage des Petits Pères.<sup>399</sup>

The society presented an address to the Jacobin Club on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1793 and intended to present a second to the National Convention the day after. This second address was probably the one which had provoked contention within the group's ranks in mid December.<sup>400</sup>

The British Club, or Society of the Friends of the Rights of Man, received some attention therefore in the closing months of 1792 and early 1793, yet it is unlikely that it ever achieved any significant political leverage within the revolutionary administration, though some of its members would play individual roles. Monro portrays the club as being an insignificant entity which attracted few committed members: "The party of Conspirators have now formed themselves into a Society, the principles of which I have the honor of inclosing, they have however as yet met with but few subscribers, many of them that signed the late address heartily refuse it."<sup>401</sup> By early 1793, many British Club members were withdrawing from the society, concerned about the outbreak of war and their ability to return to Britain. John Frost was one of the earliest club members to leave Paris, arriving back in Britain in February 1793.<sup>402</sup> Monro also suggests that the French National Convention was beginning to consider the grouping insignificant and their addresses tiresome: "I have every reason to believe the Convention are tired of such nonsense sensing the insignificancy of the people that present them. Should I however see anything worth mentioning in the proceedings of such a [wretched] society I shall lose no time in giving you my oppinions [*sic*] of them."<sup>403</sup> For

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<sup>399</sup> Monday 7<sup>th</sup> January 1793, "France Commune de Paris, du 5 janvier : Des étrangers, pour la plupart Anglais, Eccosais et Irlandais, résidant à Paris, se sont présentés au secrétariat de la municipalité, et ont déclaré, suivant la loi, qu'ils se réuniront tous les dimanches et jeudis, sous le nom de Société des Amis des Droits de l'Homme, à l'hôtel anglais de White, no. 7, passage des Petits-Pères."

<sup>400</sup> Captain Monro to Lord Grenville Paris, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO FO 27/41.

<sup>401</sup> Captain Monro to Lord Grenville, Paris, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO FO 27/40 Part 2.

<sup>402</sup> Captain Monro to Lord Grenville, Paris 13<sup>th</sup> January 1793, PRO FO 27/41.

<sup>403</sup> Captain Monro to Lord Grenville, Paris, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1792, PRO FO 27/40 Part 2.

Monro therefore, the energy of the British Club had dissipated by the time of the entry into war, leading to the rapid dissolution of the society.

Yet in March 1793, many members were still recognised by the ruling administration as among the loyal residents of Paris and they received some degree of protection from the revolutionary authorities, despite the fact that their government was at war with France. Some acted as trial witnesses during the course of April and May 1793 and even as late as September 1793, after the introduction of the Law of Suspects, which equalised treatment for all foreigners, the “residents of Paris” continued to petition the authorities for special consideration in “an address presented to the National Convention, by the English, Irish, and Scottish residents of Paris and its environs, 23 September 1793, Year II of the Republic.”<sup>404</sup> In the address, they reiterate their support for the Revolution and express understanding of the need to defeat its enemies, yet they also argue the case for “justice” and “hospitality” in the light of the severe laws applicable to foreigners that had been introduced in September 1793. They remind the Convention that, as foreign radicals, they had come to Paris to seek “asylum” as “friends of universal liberty” and requested that their plight be reconsidered. The fact that residents were now based in Paris and its “environs” hints at the decision taken by men and women such as Wollstonecraft and Paine to seek a calmer environment away from the hub of events at this turbulent time. However, the presentation of such an address also suggests that the associational culture that had been fuelled by gatherings at White’s Hotel did not dissolve with the departure of some foreigners in the summer of 1793 and in spite of the increasing suspicion that foreign residents were held in.

For those who came from more respectable or even aristocratic stock, the British Club would have been a refreshing opportunity to temporarily shake off the shackles of social status and hierarchy, in line with the decision of a minority of French aristocrats who shed

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<sup>404</sup> The address is held at the Archives des Affaires Étrangères at La Courneuve Paris. I am grateful to Mary-Ann Constantine for drawing my attention to this document and sharing its contents. Archives Diplomatiques, Affaires Étrangères, Correspondance Anglaise, vol. 588, folio 1.

their titles and renounced émigré status in order to take on a role in the Revolution. Both Sir Robert Smith, former Member of Parliament for Colchester, and Lord Edward Fitzgerald unburdened themselves of their social distinctions at the gathering at White's Hotel on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1792.<sup>405</sup> This is corroborated in a letter from Fitzgerald himself to his mother from Paris, which he signs off “Le citoyen Edouard Fitzgerald.”<sup>406</sup> Fitzgerald took to dressing more informally in France, following the revolutionary custom, wearing his collar high, his hair short and unpowdered and donning a simple jacket.<sup>407</sup> Fitzgerald and Smith were the only two titled members of the club, as the majority hailed from the gentry or manufacturing classes.

Robert Merry also found in the spirit of revolution a refreshing opportunity to associate with those outside his traditional Whig gentry circles. John Taylor contended that he had “imbibed all the levelling principles of the most furious democrat,” and had become an outright enemy of the British government.<sup>408</sup> One opposition newspaper also lamented his “associating with the last dregs of human nature.”<sup>409</sup> *The European Magazine*'s portrait of Merry from December 1793 suggested, “Having passed the greater part of his life in what is called high company, and in the *beau monde*, he became disgusted with the follies and vices of the Noblesse, and is now a most strenuous friend to general liberty, and the common rights of mankind.”<sup>410</sup> Residing in Paris provided radicals with the opportunity to embrace new ideas, modes of behaviour and dress that would have been proscribed in Britain. They also conveyed the impression to British observers that they had renounced their social status and embraced a more democratic culture.

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<sup>405</sup> For details of the relinquishing of titles at the British Club gathering see above p. 86-87.

<sup>406</sup> Moore, *The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* 73-74.

<sup>407</sup> See Tillyard, *Citizen Lord Edward Fitzgerald*.

<sup>408</sup> John Taylor, *Records of my Life* 2: 274, quoted in Mee, “*The Magician No Conjuror*” 43.

<sup>409</sup> Quoted in Werkmeister, *A Newspaper History of England* 94-95.

<sup>410</sup> “Some Account of Robert Merry, Esq.,” *The European Magazine* 24 (December 1793) 411.



## II.6.2 A Hub of Sociability and Connections with Salon Culture

The British Club provided a meeting place in Paris for men and women from different horizons to congregate and dine together while discussing both the Revolution and the state of affairs in Britain. Although the club officially met twice a week, there were occasions when gatherings would have been even more frequent and Helen Williams suggests that her fellow compatriots would congregate informally on a nightly basis to discuss political affairs. Some of these gatherings would have taken place at Williams' salon on rue Helvétius which served as a location for sociable encounters which were not restricted by the same codes as British Club assemblies and would frequently involve women. M. Ray Adams argues that "few Englishmen of importance came to Paris in the years after the beginning of the Revolution without calling on Helen Maria Williams. Her home was a sort of political and literary clearing-house for her countrymen on the continent."<sup>411</sup> Williams' salon welcomed French and foreign guests, including Mary Wollstonecraft and Thomas Paine. Charles Fox also visited Williams' salon in one of his visits to Paris. Henry Redhead Yorke described Williams' salon at the time of his later visit in 1802:

This priestess of the Revolution has a nightly synod at her apartments, to which the political dramatists and literati of the capital resort. Here she is in her glory. Perched like the bird of wisdom on her shrine, she snuffs up the mounting incense of adulation offered up by homicides and plunderers of the public. At the instant of inspiration she becomes convulsed like the Delphic Priestess.<sup>412</sup>

Yorke, writing in 1802, well after his conversion to loyalism, depicts Williams' salon as an orgiastic nest of intrigue rather than a site of rational and enlightened exchange.

One frequent visitor to Williams' salon was Mary Wollstonecraft who arrived in Paris in December 1792. Shortly after her arrival she met Gilbert Imlay with whom she would be intimately linked until 1796. Imlay had a close business relationship with Joel Barlow and

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<sup>411</sup> M. Ray Adams, "Helen Maria Williams and the French Revolution," *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Studies in Honour of George McLean Harper*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1939) 89.

<sup>412</sup> Yorke, *France in 1802* 251.

Wollstonecraft frequently wrote to Barlow's wife while she was still in London. She found herself spending evenings with members of the American expatriate community during her days in Paris and later at Neuilly-sur-Seine. She would also breakfast with John Hurford Stone's wife Rachel Coope and Helen Maria Williams would call from time to time at Neuilly after her release from prison. Hurford Stone himself mentioned evenings spent with fellow countrymen and women during which the national papers would be read and toasts made to the success of the cause of liberty.<sup>413</sup> Helen Williams claimed her fellow compatriots spent evenings gathered at a club (possibly White's) to read the daily newspapers and discuss politics.<sup>414</sup> It is difficult to assess how these nightly informal gatherings intersected with more official associational meetings. Both men and women were admitted to the informal reading and dinner gatherings, and these meetings many have taken place in the wings of political deliberations. At the British Club meeting of 18<sup>th</sup> November 1792, for example, a core group of drafters left the main meeting to draw up the address to the Convention. There were very likely different levels of formality, responsibility and access within the Club and its wider orbit.

Dinners at White's would often be the occasion for socialising and the broadening of networks, a typical feature of club life. An informant for the French authorities, Citizen Arthur, who denounced John Hurford Stone as a British spy on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1794, detailed some of the more prosaic habits of expatriate residents in Paris. Though we must doubt the veracity of his submission on some accounts, there may be some credence in the details he gives of British dining arrangements at White's Hotel.<sup>415</sup> Arthur suggests that a man named Milne provided dinner at the hotel almost every week for British guests in what he describes as a

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<sup>413</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1215.

<sup>414</sup> Woodward, *Une Anglaise* 56: "Ce qui l'étonnait, c'était de n'y trouver fort peu de ses compatriotes, qui, selon elle, perdaient beaucoup en n'y assistant pas, puisque les hommes forment un club tous les soirs, quand on lit les journaux du jour et qu'on discute la politique."

<sup>415</sup> It is possible that the Arthur who informed on Hurford Stone was the same Arthur mentioned by Albert Mathiez as a close friend of Robespierre. Mathiez notes that Arthur was a wallpaper manufacturer whose father had emigrated from England. See Mathiez, *La Révolution et les étrangers* 8.

sort of English tavern.<sup>416</sup> Edward Fitzgerald, writing from the hotel on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1792, described his own sociable routine: “I lodge with my friend Paine, – we breakfast, dine, and sup together.”<sup>417</sup> Sampson Perry recounted how he “breakfasted with Paine about this time, at the Philadelphia Hotel.” Perry was seeking Paine’s advice on how to establish oneself in America without any means of subsistence.<sup>418</sup> Paine also ate with members of the American radical circle at White’s Hotel on the evening of his arrest. In Britain, during the late eighteenth century, tavern culture developed alongside inn and alehouse culture with different codes and clientele. Ian Newman has shown how the different sites of conviviality were governed by specific rules and behaviour.<sup>419</sup> Rather than being the equivalent of a *hôtel particulier*, in French a private lodging for aristocratic families, White’s Hotel may have been a sort of English tavern implanted in the centre of Paris, displaying some of the conventions of tavern culture, which included the housing of radical associations with a clear public agenda. The London SCI and the loyalist Reeves Association both held their official meetings at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on the Strand in London. Taverns tended to host associational gathering but could also provide venues for more frivolous social occasions and private lodgings.<sup>420</sup>

Sociable gatherings would also take place outside the walls of White’s Hotel. John Hurford Stone went to the theatre “when we saw the representation of Brutus, just after the tenth of August.” At the performance, he heard a version of the Marseillaise sung “with so much accompaniment.”<sup>421</sup> Stone also went on at least one occasion to the opera, an activity

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<sup>416</sup> See AN F7/4775/23.

<sup>417</sup> Moore, *The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* 73-74.

<sup>418</sup> See Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 9-10.

<sup>419</sup> Ian Newman is currently finishing his doctoral thesis entitled *Tavern Talk: Literature, Politics, Conviviality* at the University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>420</sup> I am grateful in particular to Ian Newman for his views on tavern culture in London. I would also like to thank Nigel Leask, John Barrell, Mary-Ann Constantine, Oskar Cox Jensen and Rémy Duthille for their contributions to this discussion in the wings of the *Locating Revolution: Place, Voice, Community 1780-1820* conference organised in Aberystwyth by the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, 9-12 July 2012.

<sup>421</sup> This recollection is included in Stone’s letter written from Verdun on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1792 while he was travelling with the revolutionary armies and following the progress of hostilities with the Prussian and Austrian

disliked by Helen Maria Williams. Accompanied by Lord Edward Fitzgerald in November 1792 after the latter's recent arrival in Paris, Stone went to see a performance of *Lodoïska*, a heroic comedy by Luigi Cherubini. It was first performed at the Théâtre Feydeau in Paris on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1791 and ran for two hundred shows. It is likely Stone and Fitzgerald attended one of these first inaugural performances. Fitzgerald described his activities in Paris a letter to his mother: "I pass my time very pleasantly, read, walk, and go quietly to the play."<sup>422</sup> Fitzgerald would also breakfast and dine with fellow radicals at White's Hotel although, according to Captain Monro, his principal interests were less lofty and he "passes most of his time with women."<sup>423</sup> Helen Maria Williams, Stone's later partner, could not understand why her fellow countrymen preferred to visit the opera rather than attend lectures on subjects such as philosophy, the arts, science, history and poetry:

I am surprised to meet there with so few of my countrymen. Such of them as come to Paris in order to acquire the French language, would find at the Lycée not only the advantages of instruction, but of conversation; since the gentlemen form a sort of club every evening, when the journals of the day are read, and its politics discussed.<sup>424</sup>

Williams explained that the Lycée was initially founded by the Comte d'Artois in 1785 in order to allow celebrated professors to give lectures on different topics. Although initially abandoned during the early Revolution, the lectures had been revived and allowed both men and women to have access to instruction. Williams admired how "learning seems stripped of its thorns, and decorated with flowers," and was a place where "the gay and social Parisians cultivate science and the belles lettres, amidst the pleasures and attractions of society."<sup>425</sup>

Such enjoyment through education contrasted with the English tradition where learning had to

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forces. The letter was included in Helen Maria Williams' third volume of letters, under the title of *Letters from France: containing A Great Variety of Interesting and Original Information concerning the most important events that have lately been occurring in that country, and particularly respecting the campaign of 1792*, vol. III (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1793) 147.

<sup>422</sup> Moore, *The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* 73-74.

<sup>423</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959.

<sup>424</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France: Containing Many New Anecdotes Relative to the French Revolution, and the Present State of French Manners*, vol. II (3<sup>rd</sup> edition; London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1796) 133. Hereafter referred to as *Letters from France II*.

<sup>425</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France II*: 129-30.

be in “sober meditation, and serious solitude.”<sup>426</sup> Williams suggested that such an initiative would make a welcome change in London from fashionable but vapid conversation and endless card assemblies.

Thomas Rickman described how Thomas Paine withdrew from the hub of sociability at White’s as conditions became more stringent during 1793. With “a good garden well laid out” in rue du faubourg Saint-Denis, he would rise at seven in the morning and breakfast with Johnson, Choppin and “two or three other Englishmen” before spending some time in the grounds.<sup>427</sup> He also received a number of friends, a “chosen few”, with whom he “unbent himself.” These callers included Brissot, the Marquis de Châtelet le Roi, Jean-Henri Bancal des Issarts, General Miranda as well as some English acquaintances such as Thomas Christie and his family, Mary Wollstonecraft, the “Stones” (by which he probably meant Hurford Stone and his wife Rachel Coope), Gilbert Imlay and Joel Barlow. In a letter to the Irish revolutionary, James O’Fallon, written from “Passy, near Paris”, Paine describes being “at my little retreat, a few miles from Paris, where I expect some American friends to dinner.”<sup>428</sup> Rickman paints a rather improbably idyllic portrait of Paine in his final days of liberty before he was arrested and incarcerated in the Luxembourg:

The little happy circle who lived with him here will ever remember these days with delight: with these select friends he would talk of his boyish days, play at chess, whist, piquet, or cribbage, and enliven the moments by many interesting anecdotes: with these he would play at marbles, scotch hops, battledores, &c. on the broad and fine gravel walk at the upper end of the garden, and then retire to his boudoir, where he was up to his knees in letters and papers of various descriptions. Here he remained till dinner time; and unless he visited Brissot’s family, or some particular friend in the evening, which was his frequent custom, he joined again the society of his favourites and fellow-boarders, with whom his conversation was often witty and cheerful, always acute and improving, but never frivolous.<sup>429</sup>

Rickman, writing after Paine’s death and aware of the profound effect produced on his former friend by the conditions of imprisonment under the Terror, depicted a scene of quiet and

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<sup>426</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* II: 130.

<sup>427</sup> Rickman, *The Life of Thomas Paine* 130.

<sup>428</sup> Thomas Paine to Doctor James O’Fallon, 17<sup>th</sup> February 1793, Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 1330.

<sup>429</sup> Rickman, *The Life of Thomas Paine* 135-36.

restrained sociability, free of the diversions of Paris and the clamour of the crowds, where revolutionaries and British expatriates would gather to hear Paine's playful anecdotes and "witty" but undemonstrative conversation. Yet if we turn to other accounts, it would seem that British Club sociability was not simply restricted to card games and anodyne discussion, but could display some of the vigour and irreverent contention that came to characterise the Revolution at its most radical.

### **II.6.3 Dispute and Violence in Club Culture**

Rickman's portrait of a suburban idyll comes into contrast with other representations of British gatherings as occurrences where tension, dispute and even violence were commonplace. Both Citizen Arthur and Captain Monro suggested that the discussions and meetings at White's Hotel were fraught with brimming animosity. Although both men were undercover agents and therefore may have had a private interest in portraying the club as populated by unruly scoundrels lacking in self-restraint, we might not want to entirely dismiss the possibility that the club was not simply a site of respectable gentlemanly discussion. Citizen Arthur recounts one evening when during one of the "orgies" of political debate, an argument broke out between Thomas Paine and another British resident. The latter punched Paine in the face and fled before later returning to bury the hatchet. Monro also depicted a group riven by dissension, contending that the members were "jealous of one another, differing in opinions." The proposal made by Paine and seconded by Robert Merry in mid January 1793 to present a further address to the National Convention created such tension that "the debate nearly ended in blows."<sup>430</sup> Once again physical violence, or the spectre of it, was in the foreground of club proceedings. Tensions were running high and, with life and death often depending on issues of personal reputation and fidelity to the Revolution, such disputes

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<sup>430</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, 27<sup>th</sup> December 1792, *The Despatches of Earl Gower* 268. See also Captain Monro's letters in PRO FO 27/40 Part 2.

became more and more frequent and divisive. Yet these physical confrontations may also provide further evidence of the Club's diverse make-up. While some members might have seen the Club as a place of enlightened conversation and enquiry, others might have entertained the possibility of allowing for more rowdy and unrestrained altercations which reflected the growing place of the ordinary people and democratic freedom in politics.

In his report from 27<sup>th</sup> December 1792, Captain Monro added that "Mr F\_\_t and Tom Payne are not on such good terms as they were; the Député treats his friends with much *hauteur*."<sup>431</sup> The compatriot in question was almost certainly John Frost, who opposed the proposal tabled by Paine and Merry to address the Convention a second time. It is revealing that Monro judges Paine to have treated his fellow countrymen with disdain. Paine's place in the British Club seems to have been central in that he provided a web of contacts for other members and direct access to key figures within the regime. Yet he also remained aloof from the club by virtue of his status as a national representative to the Convention and member of the constitutional committee.

Other members seem to have begun to attend less frequently, perhaps due to the high tension within the community or because they had secured more lucrative individual positions within the administration. Monro suggests, "Mr Raymond [*sic*] [Rayment] scarcely attends any of their meetings, I have an idea he has got employed in the finance department, many others have left them, and those that remain are constantly quarrelling among themselves."<sup>432</sup> Monro recalls how the support of certain members for the more violent turn of events in France had "occasioned Sir Rt. Smith to quit their party as well as many others."<sup>433</sup> Smith was a close acquaintance of Paine and worked in tandem with him on some of his later publication ventures. Like Paine, he may have had reservations about the suitability of a democratic political model in the new republic. Tensions also arose between American and British

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<sup>431</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, 27<sup>th</sup> December 1792, *The Despatches of Earl Gower* 268.

<sup>432</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1792, *The Despatches of Earl Gower* 269.

<sup>433</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1792, *The Despatches of Earl Gower* 263.

members with a motion being passed to expel members from America as subjects of another state, a gesture which went contrary to earlier celebrations of universal fraternity in the ranks of the club.<sup>434</sup> Spies began to be suspected within the British Club community, and by mid to late January, Captain Monro had felt it prudent to withdraw, being “noticed and observed by his rascals of countrymen.”<sup>435</sup> Mr Somers, one of Monro’s fellow informants in Paris who disguised his role by declaring his trade as “negotiator”, wrote on 20<sup>th</sup> January: “I shall wait your further orders – I hope I have nothing to fear and the private and obscure retreat I have chosen put me above or below suspicion – I am glad Mr Monro set off for England – he was not only suspected but marked here.”<sup>436</sup> Yet by 5<sup>th</sup> June 1793, Somers had also been granted a passport to return to Britain by the French government, negotiating his passage out of France by describing himself as a “merchant.”<sup>437</sup> Henry Redhead Yorke apparently left the club after a “violent quarrel” with the Irish Sheares brothers over his objection to an assault on the British monarch and would later be denounced to the Nationale Convention by fellow member, Robert Rayment.<sup>438</sup> Yorke himself, writing as a converted loyalist in 1802, describes how Robert O’Reilly quarrelled with two members of the club leading to their expulsion: “As citizen O’Reilly, in the year 1792, he succeeded in expelling two Englishmen from White’s in the Rue des Petits Pères, because they opposed the manic Irish propositions of Citizen Lord Edward Fitzgerald and the two unhappy Sheares, all of whom met a tragic fate in Ireland.”<sup>439</sup>

There may have been differences between the British and Irish members as to the extent of revolutionary change they were prepared to sanction. Sub-groups seemed to have formed

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<sup>434</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1792, *The Despatches of Earl Gower* 269.

<sup>435</sup> “My Lord...La situation de cette malheureuse ville est bien critique. Tellement que Mr Monro le juge prudent de se retirer...il est déjà remarqué et observé par des scélérats ses compatriotes...s’il se retire...j’aurai soin de vous instruire de tout, peut-être mieux que lui.” PRO FO 27/41 folio 82.

<sup>436</sup> Letter from Mr. Somers, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1793, PRO FO 27/41.

<sup>437</sup> See AN F7/4412.

<sup>438</sup> Yorke, *France in 1802* 2. This portrait of Yorke, a virulent democrat turned defender of royalty, denounced by a fellow British resident in Paris, seems exaggerated and there is little evidence to suggest that the club was planning any sort of coherent assault on George III, despite their reconnaissance missions to gather evidence of the readiness of the British people for a revolution. Amanda Goodrich has an article awaiting publication entitled “Politicisation and Identity, 1792-1813: Henry Redhead Yorke, a Case Study.”

<sup>439</sup> Yorke, *France in 1802* 228.



within the society, although it is difficult to determine on which subjects members diverged, or the extent of these differences, particularly when the principal sources are reports from those inherently hostile to the activities of the British Club and intent on portraying them as violent conspirators and enemies of the British kingdom. Activists may have differed on the degree of intervention in French affairs, with some favouring greater activism and engagement with the Convention and others preferring a more moderate approach.<sup>440</sup> Equally, members might have feared the repercussions of further visible interaction with French politics if they decided to return to Britain in a climate which was becoming increasingly problematic for foreign residents. John Frost was certainly conscious of the outstanding warrant for his apprehension in Britain. Monro conceded that “Mr Frost has left this house and seldom makes his appearance. He is however one of the Society. He appears however a good deal alarmed at his situation, as he told me a reward was offered for apprehending him.”<sup>441</sup> Yet despite Frost’s apparent reticence about further engaging with the Revolution, he still attended the trial of Louis XVI during the month of January 1793. Personal issues also clouded relationships. Thomas Christie, an early business partner of John Hurford Stone, with whom he worked in close cooperation, became a sworn enemy after financial disputes between them turned their relationship sour.<sup>442</sup>

Such confrontations, though perceived by Monro as revealing the Club’s inherent fragility, the violent pathologies of its members, and its openness to international “riff-raff”, rather show that the British Club conformed to some of the conventions governing

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<sup>440</sup> Monro suggests that MacDonnell “is look’d up to by the party but is more moderate than many.” PRO TS 11/959.

<sup>441</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO FO 27/40 Part 2.

<sup>442</sup> Hurford Stone also wrote to the then mayor of Paris, Jérôme Pétion, in February 1792, highlighting Christie’s case and presenting his friend in the best possible light. Their friendship later disintegrated because of business quarrels. See AN F7/4774/70: “Je prends la liberté, Monsieur, et en considérant la variété et la multiplicité des vos engagements, c’est, en vérité, un grande [?] de recommander à vos attentions la mémoire qui accompagne ma lettre. C’est une affaire de mon digne et patriotique ami M. Christy qui par ses écrits a rendu dans ce pays-ci le plus grand service à votre révolution. Il me semble que l’affaire qu’il sollicite est très juste et qu’il sera fort injurié si ce n’est pas bientôt achevé. Il me dit que l’interposition de votre autorité seule sera suffisante et il est très empressé de profiter de mon amitié pour lui et de la connaissance dont, vous m’avez donné, pour vous prier de lui donner l’assistance qui vous trouve nécessaire.”

Enlightenment networks of improvement in a broad sense. Clubs were seen by their members, many of whom derived from the emerging middling classes – participants in what Jürgen Habermas has called the bourgeois public sphere – as places where minds and ideas could collide. Such groups were arenas where a whole spectrum of diverging opinions could be expressed, characterised by William Godwin in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* of 1793 as “unlimited speculation.”<sup>443</sup> Clubs, although encouraging free expression, were restricted in membership and operated with strict codes of behaviour. Not all minds could meet. Latent in these circles was the fear of popular disruption of the codes of polite, refined society. Even if some members of the British Club, such as John Oswald and Robert Merry, advocated a greater degree of popular involvement in politics, and were willing to accept the potential disruption of received codes of conduct that such democratic departures would entail, some members and associates of the club, including David Williams, feared the descent of enlightened discussion into popular anarchy. Godwin himself warned in *Political Justice*, “We must therefore carefully distinguish between informing the people and inflaming them. Indignation, resentment and fury are to be deprecated; and all we should ask is sober thought, clear discernment and intrepid discussion.”<sup>444</sup> At the heart of the club there might have been discord over the prevailing question of the early republic: how far the involvement of the people in government could be sanctioned and to what extent the Revolution could caution the disruption of elite codes of association and decision-making that such democratic initiatives threatened to provoke.

## **II.6.4 Links with the Society for Constitutional Information**

An indirect but undoubtedly influential factor prompting British radicals to risk decamping to Paris was the existence of a pre-existing network of associations familiar from

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<sup>443</sup> William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its influence on general virtue and happiness* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1793) 21.

<sup>444</sup> Godwin, *Political Justice* 203.

the British reforming scene. An examination of the minute book of the London SCI from the years 1792 to 1794 shows that at least thirteen individuals who were either members or close associates of the British Club were also adherents of the SCI and would have met regularly at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in London before reuniting at White's Hotel in Paris. They were Robert Merry, Thomas Paine, William Maxwell, George Edwards, John Frost, Henry Yorke, William Choppin, Francis Tweddell, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Sampson Perry, Joel Barlow, William Watts and Thomas Cooper. The "Rev Mr. Joyce" listed in the minutes on of the meetings of 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> June 1792 is more likely to be the Unitarian preacher and radical Jeremiah Joyce than the Nicholas Joyce listed in the British Club petition, though a question mark remains for the "Mr Joyce" listed on 5<sup>th</sup> October of the same year.<sup>445</sup> John Hurford Stone had been a member of the Friends of the People, along with Robert Merry. Yet like Merry, Stone probably distanced himself from the group as his involvement in popular reform increased. Sampson Perry attended meetings of the LCS and was present on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1792, a little less than a month before he was nominated by Robert Merry to membership of the SCI. Although the British Club was not simply an offshoot of the SCI, the overlap in membership with this particular association suggests that there was a significant degree of concordance between both societies and that the SCI might have been the British Club's closest associational ally in London. Like the SCI, the British Club was not a popular radical society, although it did show latitude in welcoming new members from different backgrounds that mirrored changes that had begun to occur within the SCI over the course of 1792. The SCI was a reforming club, based at a drinking venue and with a primarily urban, male and bourgeois membership, characteristics which were matched to some extent within the British Club.

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<sup>445</sup> PRO TS 11/962/3508. The SCI minute book details the men who attended SCI gatherings but also gives vital information on the intimacy of certain acquaintances through records of membership nomination. We also gain an insight into those figures who held some sway within the association through the details given on those who chaired the weekly meetings. John Frost was a regular chair, and William Choppin assumed the chairmanship very soon after being nominated as a member.

## II.6.5 Membership of the Literary Fund

A number of British Club members had also been involved in the Literary Fund, an initiative begun by David Williams in 1790 at the Prince of Wales Coffee House after a long period of gestation during the 1770s and 1780s during which he attempted to secure backing for the venture. The Fund was set up “to support authors in distress; and to afford temporary relief to the widows and children of those who have any claim on public gratitude or humanity, from literary merit or industry.”<sup>446</sup> It aimed to “withdraw the dreadful apprehensions and prospects which warp integrity and pervert genius, and to produce candor and harmony in the provinces of literature.”<sup>447</sup> The Fund would provide assistance to “properly recommended” authors, while subscribers would have to contribute a minimum of one guinea per annum and more to the Fund if their means allowed it. Those who donated more than ten guineas were considered subscribers for life.

The Society carefully drew up its constitutions and gave a list of its different echelons of responsibility including the president, vice-presidents, committee members, treasurers, registers and subscribers. Of those who would go on to join the British Club, seven had some involvement with the early Literary Fund, either as associate members or as recipients of aid. Robert Merry and David Williams served on the committee from 1790, while Thomas Christie, George Edwards, and John Hurford Stone were all subscribers, contributing one pound and one shilling to the Fund. John Oswald was a beneficiary, receiving ten pounds in the vote of 4<sup>th</sup> May 1792. Sampson Perry’s widow would later receive a sum to relieve her want, years after her husband’s death. Both Williams and Merry were actively engaged in drawing up the constitutions of the Fund and Merry was charged with both approaching the Duke of Leeds for his support in the enterprise and contacting Drury Lane theatre with the aim of putting on a play for the benefit of the society. John Hurford Stone seems to have

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<sup>446</sup> *Literary Fund, The Constitutions of the Society; Alterable only at the Desire of a General Meeting* (London, John Nichols, 1795) 1.

<sup>447</sup> *Literary Fund* 2.

attended for the first time in April 1791, while Edwards went to the meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1792 when Oswald received relief. Of those who departed for Paris in mid to late 1792, few would go on to be active in the Literary Fund again on their return. By mid 1794 the Fund had shed its radical reputation and begun to be conducted by a David Williams whose support for the Revolution had severely flagged after his return from Paris in February 1793. John Reeves and Bland Burges, one a leader of the loyalist backlash against radical activism, the other a member of the Pitt government, would also take on roles in the society in the later 1790s, ensuring its transformation from organ of radical reform to pro-loyalist institution. Thomas Morris, a biographer of David Williams and member of the Fund, wrote that Williams had to “work with jarring materials” on the Fund, probably alluding to the diversity of its membership. Morris insisted on the harmonious union that was produced through the convergence of men from different backgrounds and the exclusion of partisan political affiliation: “But contriving to exclude all private views, and the cabals of political and religious parties, persons of all opinions, professions, and ranks zealously unite.”<sup>448</sup> Many British Club members were veterans of the associational world the Literary Fund was a part of, conjugating philanthropic and political interests and using the opportunities such activities provided for social advancement and self-improvement. Peter Clark contends, “By 1800, clubs and other forms of association had become a vital component of the social life of the educated English-speaking classes, whether at home or abroad.”<sup>449</sup>

### **II.6.6 Associational Crossovers between Paris and London**

The British Club provided for the collision of international radicals and a variety of political agendas. Its members were drawn from the London reform scene, but also from the Irish radical movement, the American contingent in Paris and internationally-minded French

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<sup>448</sup> Thomas Morris, *A General View of the Life and Writings of the Rev. David Williams Drawn up for the Chronique du Mois, A French Periodical Publication, at the Request of Messrs. Condorcet, Clavière, Mercier, Auger, Brissot, &c. Editors of that Work* (London: Ridgway, 1792) 19.

<sup>449</sup> Clark, *British Clubs and Societies* 3.

revolutionaries. Henry Redhead Yorke may have been induced to join the British Club by the Sheares brothers, who would later be involved in the Irish Rebellion.<sup>450</sup> International patriots from other countries also joined the gatherings at White's Hotel. Yet due to the proximity of the two capitals, Paris could provide a propitious arena of activity for British radicals struggling to achieve advances in their home country and attracted by the flourishing of French liberty across the Channel. The appeal was all the stronger when friends and acquaintances from Britain were established and willing to provide letters of introduction, temporary accommodation or company for the journey. Captain Monro describes the arrival of John Frost and the SCI delegation at the end of November 1792: "This Gentleman did not arrive in Paris till three days after me, he was attended by a Mr. Joel Barlow, the author of some inflammatory pamphlets and an American by birth, and a Mr. Twedall, of the County of Cumberland, a lad of about eighteen and a diligent pupil of Frosts."<sup>451</sup> The "Mr. Twedall" of Monro's report is probably the Francis Tweddell noted in the SCI minute book. What Monro's account adds is the details of an apparently pre-existing relationship between Tweddell and Frost who, if we can trust the government spy's observations, was the former's mentor and in all likelihood encouraged and facilitated his visit to France in late 1792. Robert Merry had already formed a close working relationship with the editor Sampson Perry before they reunited in Paris after Perry's arrival in late 1792. Merry contributed satirical columns to *The Argus* in 1791-92 and nominated Perry for SCI membership on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1792.<sup>452</sup> Both Perry and Merry were well-acquainted with Thomas Paine from the London radical reform sphere. William Johnson, the young surgeon from Derby with whom Thomas Paine would later share lodgings, also accompanied Henry Redhead Yorke to Paris.

In departing for France, British radicals knew that they would be welcomed by friends and acquaintances and would find a well-established circle of individuals with whom to

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<sup>450</sup> See Yorke, *France in 1802* 2.

<sup>451</sup> George Monro, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/959.

<sup>452</sup> PRO TS 11/962/3508.

exchange news, seek professional and personal assistance and engage in debate about the political developments occurring in Europe. Those members remaining in London were provided with regular updates from their colleagues across the Channel. At a meeting of the SCI on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> December 1792, a letter was read from Joel Barlow and John Frost “with the address to the National Convention of France and the answer of the president.”<sup>453</sup> William Choppin forwarded a rough sketch of the diplomatic situation of the French armies to Thomas Rickman, to whom he sent regular reports of events in France from the perspective of the British contingent.<sup>454</sup> The sketch was taken from a plan originally sent to Thomas Paine who himself had received it from a French member of the Convention. (See Appendix I, figure 15) Spy Charles Ross, who intercepted the letter, wrote, “This was copied from a rough sketch sent from Mr Choppin in France to Mr. R \_ and which he mentions was copied from a Plan sent to Mr Paine with whom he is very intimate. Received in London Monday Oct 8<sup>th</sup> 1792.”<sup>455</sup> Choppin’s drawing, initially intended for Paine’s friend and publisher Rickman, found its way into the hands of Ross, a British informant who was in close contact with Rickman and monitoring his movements, sending regular updates to Evan Nepean, under-secretary of State for the Home Office. Ross refers to further letters from Choppin to Rickman, one of which was sent on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1792 in which Choppin “mentioned he was in company with Paine in Paris the preceding day.”<sup>456</sup> There is little evidence to suggest that Choppin had become acquainted with Paine before their meeting in Paris and it appears that their expatriation in Paris forged a friendship between the two men which would culminate in their taking shared private lodgings in 1793.

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<sup>453</sup> Charles Ross to Evan Nepean, Friday 7<sup>th</sup> December 1792, PRO TS 11/962/3508.

<sup>454</sup> William Choppin’s strategic map of the dividing line between France and the Lowlands and details of French military preparations was copied by Charles Ross and sent with his despatch of 9<sup>th</sup> October 1792 to Evan Nepean. PRO TS 11/965/3510/A2.

<sup>455</sup> Charles Ross to Evan Nepean, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1792, PRO TS 11/965/3510/A2.

<sup>456</sup> Charles Ross to Evan Nepean, 13<sup>th</sup> November 1792, PRO TS 11/965/3510/A2.

There are a number of interesting points to draw from Ross's correspondence with Nepean. The first confirms a prevalent trend of espionage and informing within British radical reforming societies and their foreign tributaries during this period.<sup>457</sup> Rickman, whether or not he was aware, was the subject of a sustained surveillance operation, much of which was aimed at discovering the activities of reformers, not only in Britain but also of those who had departed for Paris, and of the continued links cultivated between the two. Unsurprisingly reformers' opinions on Thomas Paine were meticulously recorded as were their views on the French Revolution and the success of the French armies.<sup>458</sup> Ross's memoranda are equally concerned about gatherings in London taverns as well as the network of radical associations flourishing across the Channel. They also reveal the extent to which radicals corresponded with their acquaintances back in London, corresponding to the unofficial flow of information between radical societies. Rickman would eventually follow Paine, Choppin, and others to Paris, but while he remained in Britain, he received the latest information about British activities directly from expatriate SCI members. Ross notes that Rickman would attend SCI meetings and this would have been the occasion for him to share the details of his correspondence with his fellow members.<sup>459</sup> British radicals departing for Paris did so therefore, with a clear view provided by first-hand witnesses of what they were to expect on arrival. Those who remained in Britain were kept in touch with precise and often personal news relating to those who had gone into exile. Expatriates also set up similar associational rules in the British Club to those practised in societies back in Britain.

John Frost and Henry Redhead Yorke are the only British Club members who returned to the SCI after their stay in Paris. The SCI itself would soon be threatened by governmental

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<sup>457</sup> A study of the papers of the LCS shows that espionage was deep-rooted in London debating societies. For a comprehensive survey of this aspect of the reform movement, see Mary Thale ed. *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society 1792-1799* (1983; Cambridge: Cambridge U P 2008).

<sup>458</sup> Ross recalls a society gathering in the Old Jewry where "liberty sentiments were given and Paine's health drank with cheers." See Charles Ross to Evan Nepean, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1792, PRO TS 11/965/3510/A2.

<sup>459</sup> Charles Ross to Evan Nepean, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1792, PRO TS 11/965/3510/A2. Ross notes Rickman's attendance at a meeting of the Constitutional Society on "Friday evening last."



repression and former expatriates may have lost much of their initial faith in the society as a vehicle of radical reform. Frost was present at the meeting at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1793, not long after he and Yorke apparently clashed with some remaining members of the British Club over the latter's involvement with the work of the National Convention. Frost attended SCI meetings regularly until May 1793, when he was tried sentenced to six months in prison and one hour on the pillory for uttering seditious words. He seems to have returned immediately to the SCI the following January, when he made two last appearances before giving up attendance altogether.

## **II.7 Hardship, Mutual Assistance and Reciprocity in the British Community**

Many expatriate residents relied on their fellow countrymen for financial assistance once the harsher measures adopted against foreigners began to take their toll. Hurford Stone, from his own testimony, was one of the main sources of financial assistance for struggling British expatriates. noted in April 1794, “We have advanced to some of them, but can do no more.”<sup>460</sup> Writing to his brother, he claimed, “I have shared with my imprisoned countrymen my own money, till I have none left.”<sup>461</sup> He went on to reiterate his role in the relief operations in later correspondence: “I am indeed the chief support of my unfortunate countrymen; and my time is employed in relieving and alleviating their wants. I am also happy to inform you, that my own affairs go very prosperously.”<sup>462</sup> Alger suggests that Stone also aided forty fellow countrymen to escape to Dover in February 1793. Yet Stone’s financial situation was increasingly precarious, despite his earlier reassurances to his brother. He relied on sums deposited into his bank account from his brother and funds in Switzerland. He also finished his life in abject poverty after his printing enterprise collapsed in 1816, not long before his death.

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<sup>460</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1265.

<sup>461</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1225.

<sup>462</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1226.

British visitors to Paris often took the opportunity to deliver letters or transfer money to their compatriots who were dependent on such channels for survival. In April 1792, David Williams sent ten pounds to John Oswald in Paris via John Hurford Stone's publishing partners, Mr. Gillet and George Mead. The sum had been allocated by the Literary Fund as a relief grant for Oswald and his family.<sup>463</sup> Robert Merry had been on the committee which voted the grant while Thomas Christie, John Hurford Stone and George Edwards were subscribers. Mary Wollstonecraft relied on Thomas Christie's visits for financial support, describing in a letter to Johnson of May 1793 how Christie had provided her with thirty pounds. In July of the same year she recorded a further personal financial transaction with Christie, presumably advancing her for contributions to the *Analytical Review*. On 12<sup>th</sup> January 1794, she wrote to Gilbert Imlay, who was still away on business, revealing how money was increasingly in short supply. She attempted to romanticise the onset of anticipated hardship: "I do not think a little money inconvenient; but, should they fail, we will struggle cheerfully together – drawn closer by the pinching blasts of poverty."<sup>464</sup>

Robert Merry, driven to distress by his inability to access funds or feed his family, noted the extreme financial insecurity of fellow British residents in Paris during the early months of 1793. In his petition for a passport out of France, and writing from Calais, Merry attempted to secure relief for other Britons stranded at the French port and for whom the passage back to Britain would prove costly: "If you could acquire a decree to ensure that the passage from Dover will be open for people to leave without any charge at all, you will do a great service to a large number of unfortunate Englishmen who are here without any means and in absolute destitution."<sup>465</sup> Writing from the Luxembourg jail, Thomas Paine told James Monroe, "I am

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<sup>463</sup> See Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières* 160-61.

<sup>464</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Gilbert Imlay, 12<sup>th</sup> January 1794, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 245.

<sup>465</sup> AN F7/4412 contains Robert Merry's petition for a passport to Jacques-Louis David: "Si vous pourrez procurer un décret que la [*sic*] passage ici à Douvres soit ouverte pour les gens de sortir sans que personne paie [*sic*] entier, vous rendrai [*sic*] une très grande [*sic*] service à un grand nombre des malheureuses [*sic*] Anglois qui sont ici sans ressource et absolument dans la misère."

now entirely without money. The Convention owes me 1800 livres salary which I know not how to get while I am here, nor do I know how to draw for money on the rent of my farm in America. It is under the care of my good friend General Lewis Morris. I have received no rent since I have been in Europe.”<sup>466</sup> Paine’s appeal to Monroe showed the extent of his financial ruin in Paris.

In his appeal to the *Comité de Salut Public* for his release from prison, Christopher White mentioned the economic situation of the orphans of his business partner Nicholas Joyce, who were in a dire financial predicament, worsened by the fact that Joyce’s debtors were pursuing outstanding sums, despite his having recently passed away in prison. White made a concerted appeal on behalf of his former associate’s children to secure their financial security. Forty years after Joyce’s death at the Benedictines however, one of his daughters, Sarah, petitioned representatives of the republic for an investigation of the archival records of the police. She wanted to locate documents relating to her father’s death and loss of fortune, none of which she had been able to unearth. The request was linked to an outstanding case for compensation she was pursuing with the British government. Financial distress encountered in Paris could lead to family hardship and protracted and often lifelong insecurity. Robert Merry was pursued for debt before his departure to America, and on the day of his death, Sampson Perry had just been released from jail after serving a prison term for debt.

The expatriate community provided mutual emotional, financial and professional assistance to each other during their residence in Paris. Those who had more leverage within the revolutionary administration or influential acquaintances, such as John Hurford Stone, Robert Merry or Thomas Paine, actively petitioned members of the government on behalf of fellow Britons who were either in distress, in prison, or awaiting repatriation. For those who were more intimately connected with members of the revolutionary leadership, such contacts

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<sup>466</sup> Paine, “To James Monroe”, Luxembourg, 25<sup>th</sup> August 1794, Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 1344.

with the French revolutionary elite could prove invaluable, both on arriving in Paris, in finding outlets for creative projects and in negotiating leniency during the Terror.

### **II.7.1 Diplomatic Assistance and Negotiating Passports**

Radical residents of Paris were not exempt from the measures taken against British citizens by the French authorities, despite their visible adherence to the changes occurring in France. Those members of the British Club who remained in Paris after August 1793 were invariably imprisoned, some, such as William Newton, even being executed under the measures adopted towards suspected agents of foreign enemies. Yet, as Michael Rapport has argued, despite the revolutionary rhetoric and apparent blanket repression of foreign citizens, scope remained for pragmatism and leniency within the draconian terms of the decrees against foreigners. The Irish radical Nicholas Madgett attempted to protect those British and Irish citizens who were considered genuinely loyal to the Revolution by drawing up a list of known British residents to form part of a committee to help purge Paris of Pitt's spies. On 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1793, James Gamble, William Jackson, Sampson Perry, Joel Barlow, Robert Smith, MacSheehy, William Choppin, Robert Rayment, William Johnson, Robert Merry, John Frost, John Oswald, George Edwards and a handful of other figures known within British Club circles were nominated for special recognition by the revolutionary government, having been recognised as having proven their civic virtue. The list also included Citizen Arthur, the informant who later denounced John Hurford Stone to the Convention.<sup>467</sup>

A study of the passport and prison petitions presented by some key members of the British radical group in Paris shows that, although sympathisers of the Revolution did not escape unscathed, despite the efforts of men such as Madgett to protect them, radicals could be released from prison earlier, spared more extreme fates or given some leeway within the revolutionary regime if their loyalty was considered above suspicion. In some cases, and not

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<sup>467</sup> Archives Diplomatiques, Affaires Étrangères, Correspondance Anglaise, vol. 587, folio 28, quoted in Woodward, *Une Anglaise* 102.

simply because of leniency on behalf of the authorities, British residents incarcerated under the Terror emerged from jail even more convinced of the merits of the Revolution than before.

With Robespierre's declaration against the British after the outbreak of war in February 1793, many British residents attempted to return to their home country, fearing the repercussions of the conflict on foreigners domiciled in Paris. George Edwards, not a signatory of the British Club address but a temporary guest at White's Hotel, the author of a pamphlet in French on the establishment of a new constitution in 1793 and one of the names on Madgett's list of loyal and patriotic Britons, used his previous political engagement to argue his case for a passport to return home in July 1793. He outlined his unequivocal support for the Revolution and reminded the committee that he had been the author of a number of political essays presented to the National Convention. He concluded by reiterating the unblemished nature of his principles and zeal for the Revolution, portraying himself as a partisan of true republicanism. His request, sent on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1793, was granted.

Robert O'Reilly petitioned the Convention on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1793 for a temporary passport to return to Britain in order to testify as a witness in a trial. In his plea, O'Reilly emphasised his status as a "fellow citizen." It was noted in the granting of his request that he had also served in the National Guard under the revolutionary authorities. O'Reilly did return to France after the trial as he was later discovered editing the *Annales des Arts et Manufactures* with Barbier de Vémars.<sup>468</sup> Robert Merry's appeal to his friend and former Florence acquaintance David was made on the grounds of his persistent loyalty to the regime. He expressed his ardent wish for the "good cause" to prevail over treachery and claimed to be a "true sans-culotte," saluting the Montagne in his conclusion.<sup>469</sup> He maintained that he would be more useful to the cause of liberty in England than in France. In Paris he could not serve

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<sup>468</sup> For details of O'Reilly's later publishing projects, see above pp. 141-43.

<sup>469</sup> AN F7/4412 contains Robert Merry's passport petition to Jacques-Louis David.

the Revolution, but in England he could pursue activities and focus on the exporting of universal liberty.

It is difficult to determine whether service to and professed loyalty to the regime had any significant bearing on decisions to grant passports for British residents to return to Britain. Other foreign subjects who had no evident involvement with the British Club were also granted free passage, possibly, but not systematically, with slightly more difficulty and without the intervention of influential individuals known to them personally. O'Brien and Maghery, two Irish medical students, were granted passage by the Convention after a first request had been turned down on account of their being "English". O'Connell, a doctor from the faculty of Edinburgh, appealed for a passport to return home for urgent matters on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1793. His request was also accepted. William Kirby, a resident of Dunkirk for two years, who described himself as a negotiator, was granted a passport in response to his request of 28<sup>th</sup> June 1793 asking to return home to deal with family affairs in London. A collective petition was sent by a group of British inhabitants of Boulogne-sur-Mer on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1793 who, no longer able to access their income and without any financial means, were seeking passports to return to Britain.<sup>470</sup> What is clear is that British residents who had been involved in revolutionary politics in France used this background as an argument to support their requests to the respective committees and it is likely that, for some, these allusions to revolutionary partisanship has some impact on decision-making.

In November 1793, Thomas Paine helped to secure passports out of France for his fellow lodgers at rue du faubourg Saint-Denis, Choppin and Johnson, who made their way to Basel in Switzerland.<sup>471</sup> Paine also petitioned the post-Thermidor regime on behalf of Sir Robert Smith and Robert Rayment to obtain permission for them to reside in Paris after their release from prison. Liberated foreigners were expected to leave the country, yet Paine

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<sup>470</sup> AN F7/4412. Petitioners included Elizabeth O'Neill, Richard Bowater, Jane Price Wilson, Margaret Wilson and Charlotte Youd.

<sup>471</sup> See Alger, *Englishmen*.

pleaded Smith's case, citing his invaluable services rendered in aiding Paine with his writing activities.<sup>472</sup> John Hurford Stone visited Thomas Paine in prison and Joel Barlow endeavoured to secure Paine's early release through the deposition of a petition from the American residents of Paris to the Convention. The examples of such mutual assistance among countrymen who had gathered at White's Hotel together in the late months of 1792 show the extent to which this associational culture survived during the more trying period from late 1793 onwards.

### **II.7.2 In Prison during the Terror**

Ian McCalman has explored the circles of sociability which formed in Newgate prison in London during the period when notable radicals were incarcerated under the draconian measures instituted to counter treason and sedition in the latter half of the 1790s.<sup>473</sup> A similar pattern may have emerged in the detention institutions of Paris as British residents, often close acquaintances, radical associates or business partners, were rounded up and imprisoned during the radicalised phase of the French Revolution. Paine and Perry may have been cellmates in the Madelonnettes prison while Thomas Paine, Helen Maria Williams, Nicholas Hickson, William Newton and Christopher White were all inmates of the Luxembourg. Newton and Nicholas Joyce endured periods of incarceration in the English Benedictines convent on rue du faubourg Saint-Jacques, while Churchill, Hickson and Rayment were detained in the Scotch College on rue des Fossés Victor. Charles Churchill's wife Elizabeth was an inmate of the English convent in rue des Courcines, while other British detainees found themselves in

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<sup>472</sup> AN AFIII/1808/369 folios 114 and 28. Paine argued that Rayment was an excellent patriot, having established the best cotton stocking factory in France, which even rivalled English cotton manufacturing. He suggested the republic should consider him a friend. Paine's appeal on behalf of Smith was supported by his translator Lanthenas. Lanthenas claimed to know Smith personally and guaranteed that he was a friend to the republic. He went on to ask the Directoire to accord Paine's request to allow Smith's continued residence in Paris.

<sup>473</sup> Ian McCalman, "Newgate in Revolution: Radical Enthusiasm and Romantic Counterculture," *Eighteenth Century Life* 22 (February 1998): 95-110.

prisons on cul-de-sac de Vigne, rue des Costes, rue des Champs Fleury and the English Conceptionist college.

Many British Club members and associates spent time in different prisons, crossing paths with fellow countrymen before moving on to different locations or securing release. Some were involved in conspiracies or attempts at escape. Detention conditions were relatively relaxed in most prisons with detainees being able to move around, hold conversations and confer on their situations. Christopher White and his wife assumed responsibility for the care of Nicholas Joyce's daughters, after they had initially been separated. Their responsibility was made permanent once Joyce had died. Those British residents who managed to procure their freedom, or who avoided prison, visited compatriots or French acquaintances behind bars. Helen Maria Williams visited Manon Roland in the Saint-Pélagie prison, before Williams herself was incarcerated, and Mary Wollstonecraft, exempted from the general arrest of British subjects by virtue of her relationship with Gilbert Imlay, visited a German prisoner in detention.

Helen Maria Williams drew a portrait of the prison conditions of British detainees in her *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France, from the thirty-first of May 1793, till the twenty-eighth of July 1794, and of the scenes which have passed in the prisons of Paris.*<sup>474</sup> She revealed that prison chambers were organised according to links of both rank and sociability, thanks to the attentions of the prison guard "Benoit", who attended to prisoners' comforts by "placing those persons together who were most likely to find satisfaction in each other's company."<sup>475</sup> Despite the terror inspired by the visits of police staff such as the notorious "Henriot", the chief of the Parisian military, prisoners endured detention with relative serenity and good humour. The walls of the makeshift prisons were decorated with tapestries, and those incarcerated had access to newspapers where they read the latest stories

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<sup>474</sup> The volume of letters was published in 1795 in Dublin and London.

<sup>475</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France* 14.



of horror and conspiracy. For Williams, it was the female prisoners who demonstrated the greatest courage and constancy behind bars, making efforts to ease the suffering of fellow prisoners despite the risks such overtures might incur:

Those prisons from which men shrunk back with terror, and where they often left their friends abandoned lest they should be involved in their fate – women, in whom the force of sensibility overcame the fears of female weakness, demanded and sometimes obtained permission to visit, in defiance of all the dangers that surrounded their gloomy walls.<sup>476</sup>

Old acquaintances were reunited in prison and inmates passed their time drawing and reading. They must therefore have had access to both reading material and the equipment needed to sketch and draw. Many wrote prison journals or accounts of their incarceration which would be published on their release or posthumously.

Authorisation was given for the arrest of Thomas Paine and Anacharsis Cloots on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1793 after a denunciation in the National Convention. Their papers were also seized and examined and Paine was incarcerated the Luxembourg the following day.<sup>477</sup> Paine's friend Sampson Perry wrote later that the author of *Rights of Man* had been imprisoned quite simply because he had been born in a country at war with France. John Hurford Stone was arrested in October 1793, and again in April 1794, after the decree of 27 Germinal An II which signalled the second, more intensive phase of the Terror.<sup>478</sup> Perry was imprisoned in the Madelonnettes jail until 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1794, having been arrested under the terms of the laws against foreigners in late 1793, while Henry Redhead Yorke also spent time in French jails before returning to Britain.<sup>479</sup> Thomas Christie was briefly detained from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> August 1793 under the measures taken against foreigners arriving after 14<sup>th</sup> July 1789, though was quickly granted free passage to Switzerland with his daughter before

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<sup>476</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France* 21.

<sup>477</sup> AN F7/4774/61 Thomas Paine file.

<sup>478</sup> AN F7/4775/23. This file includes documents relating to the arrest of John Hurford Stone. Stone's arrest had been provoked by the deposition of Citizen Arthur who denounced him as a British spy.

<sup>479</sup> AN F7/4774/69 and F7/4775/13 provide details of the liberation of Sampson Perry.

continuing his pursuit of outstanding debts owed to him by the city of Paris.<sup>480</sup> The archives of the *Comité de Salut Public* suggest that Sir Robert Smith was detained a first time in August 1793 before being released by special order. He was taken into custody again however under the terms of the law of 9<sup>th</sup> October 1793, having been “born in England,” this time to be held in the *Maison des Ecosais* until 16<sup>th</sup> October 1794. Two weeks before Smith’s release was granted, he wrote to the members of his Le Pelletier section to request access to his private papers which had been locked away since his apprehension a year earlier.<sup>481</sup> Smith, who had come to France in 1791 partly to try to restore his own failing health (he was plagued by chronic asthma), suffered physically while in detention. He had a severe bout of gout and his asthma worsened, prompting the authorities to take the unusual step of granting permission for his own private doctor to visit him and treat his condition. Smith’s wife also raised the issue of his deteriorating health in her plea to the authorities for his release in December 1793.

Robert Rayment was arrested on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1793 in the same section as Robert Smith before also being transferred to the *Maison des Ecosais* on 18<sup>th</sup> November of the same year.<sup>482</sup> In his plea for liberation in August 1794, following the fall of Robespierre, he stated that he had been arrested “by virtue of the law against the English in France.” The account goes on, “Or if there is another reason other than that of fortune and his birth in England, he is perfectly ignorant.”<sup>483</sup> Thomas Paine, who also suffered from illness while in the Luxembourg prison, wrote to James Monroe: “Eight months I have been imprisoned, and I know not for what, except that the order says that I am a Foreigner.”<sup>484</sup> British residents more readily linked

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<sup>480</sup> AN F7/4648. Thomas Christie’s prison file.

<sup>481</sup> AN F7/4775/20/3. Sir Robert Smith’s prison file.

<sup>482</sup> AN F7/4774/88. Robert Rayment’s prison file.

<sup>483</sup> AN F7/4774/88. My translation.

<sup>484</sup> Paine, “To James Monroe”, Luxembourg, 17<sup>th</sup> August 1794, Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 1341.

their detention with laws passed against foreigners than with what might have been viewed as their dubious political affiliations.

Two days after Rayment's petition for liberty, Christopher White drafted a plea for his own release. White had been the target of suspicion since May 1793 when the *Comité de Sûreté Générale* ordered the *comité de surveillance* of the Mail section to make a visit to his hotel and arrest both White and two captains named Fraser and Monro, as well as to seize their papers and belongings.<sup>485</sup> The latter captain was probably the British spy who had taken up temporary residence at the hotel. White described how, since the law of October 1793 authorising the arrest of all foreigners, his imprisonment and the confiscation of his possessions had led to his descent into poverty, exacerbated by his poor health. He suffered from hydropsy and his physical fitness had been much depleted during his period of incarceration. He also complained of the extreme sorrow which his condition had plunged him into. In petitioning the authorities for his freedom, he requested that his belongings be restored and demanded either a return on the money invested in the Carmelite mill project or for his property to be returned to him. He highlighted that in his present condition he was deprived of all means of providing for his family.<sup>486</sup>

While in prison, White also attempted to secure financial reparations for the orphaned children of his former business partner, Nicholas Joyce, who had died in detention on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1794.<sup>487</sup> According to his daughter, Joyce had been detained "following one of the three laws of the National Convention of the 1<sup>st</sup> August, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> September 1793 in relation to foreigners, he was, as an Englishman, arrested and put behind bars in the English Benedictines prison or rue du faubourg Saint-Jacques."<sup>488</sup> Joyce's daughter was unable to discover the exact date of her father's arrest but had managed to learn that his belongings had

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<sup>485</sup> AN F7/4775/52. The file contains an order of arrest and requisition at White's Hotel.

<sup>486</sup> AN F7/4775/52 folio 78. Account of Christopher White, an Englishman, to the *Comité de Sûreté Générale*.

<sup>487</sup> It is not clear whether Nicholas Joyce was related to Jeremiah Joyce, a member of the SCI, although Alger suggests that there may have been some connection. See Alger, "The British Colony in Paris" 683.

<sup>488</sup> AN F7/4775/52 folio 73.

been confiscated by the republican authorities following his incarceration. White, Joyce's business associate, provided more substantial details as to the circumstances surrounding his partner's imprisonment and death in a testimony of 8<sup>th</sup> December 1794 which Joyce's daughter eventually managed to track down through tireless appeals to French archivists in the 1830s. It stated that he was detained sometime after the decree of October 1793, an event which had "reduced us to a deplorable state by depriving us of all industrial means of providing for our families."<sup>489</sup> Joyce's incarceration and death had exposed his orphaned children to severe want and White informs the members of the revolutionary committee that the three girls were "in absolute need and his creditors are waiting to be paid."<sup>490</sup>

John Hurford Stone noted in April 1794, "The laws renewed against the foreigners, without distinction, will drive most if not all the English, who resided at Paris, to the extremest distress; there are no exceptions it seems."<sup>491</sup> Foreigners were barred from accessing their belongings, had their accounts frozen, were obstructed from withdrawing funds from bank accounts and were pursued for outstanding debts. Their political loyalty, despite unblemished records of supporting the Revolution was cast in doubt. Robert Smith even provided financial receipts of donations offered to the cause of freedom as proof of his fidelity to the Revolution. Such repressive actions, along with prolonged incarceration, had severe financial repercussions on British residents of Paris and many never recovered from the losses they incurred. Robert Rayment revealed his perilous financial situation in the information sheet filled out on his arrest on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1793. In the section reserved for details of his profession before and during the Revolution, the information given read, "his income, being dependent on his trade as a negotiator and cultivator, has suffered severely by

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<sup>489</sup> AN F7/4775/52 folio 71. Prison file for Christopher White and Nicholas Joyce.

<sup>490</sup> AN F7/4775/52 folio 71. Prison file for Christopher White and Nicholas Joyce.

<sup>491</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1265.

the events of the moment and are as of today reduced to nothing.”<sup>492</sup> John Frost, according to spy reports, also encountered financial hardship at the end of his visit to France. According to Monro, “Frost’s remittances I suppose are not large from his employers, for he has left this hotel and gone to one which he pays extremely cheap.”<sup>493</sup>

Robert Merry was driven to distress by his inability to access funds and thus feed his family. Writing to Jacques-Louis David on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1793, he requested a passport to leave the port of Calais and return to England, claiming material want as the primary reason for his and his family’s departure. His request was granted by the *Comité de Sûreté Générale* on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1793. The letter conveys the acute desperation in which he and his family found themselves. It is abrupt and lacking the usual modes of politeness. Merry explained how his business affairs were calling him home and how he and his wife were in an unbearable financial predicament rendering their continued residence in France untenable. The recurrent spelling mistakes and one slip into English emphasise the desperate circumstances surrounding his appeal. A second letter a day later provided further arguments to support his request. He stated that his family would soon die of hunger if they were not permitted to leave the country.<sup>494</sup>

Those British expatriates who did not seek or secure passage out of France as suspicion of foreigners grew were often detained in improvised French jails such as the Luxembourg, the Madelonnettes and the Benedictine convent, where their material distress and deprivation was only accentuated. Even spies employed by the British government faced financial peril and had difficulty accessing money owed to them by their employers. George Monro had to solicit a friend of Lord Grenville’s for the fifty pounds outstanding on his hotel bill at

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<sup>492</sup> AN F7/4774/88. In the file on Robert Rayment details are included of his situation during the Revolution: “Son revenu dépendant de son industrie comme Négociant et Cultivateur, a beaucoup souffert par les événements du tems, et se trouve aujourd’hui réduit à rien.”

<sup>493</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, Paris, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1792. PRO FO 27/40 Part 2. The transcription of this letter in *Despatches to Earl Gower* reads “he lives extremely cheap.” 269.

<sup>494</sup> AN F7/4412.

White's, and Monro's successor, Somers, ended his report of 20<sup>th</sup> January 1793 with a request for twenty to thirty pounds, having "been at some expenses to get at information here."<sup>495</sup> As late as 1802, British residents were still suffering from financial adversity. Yorke, visiting Paine at his lodgings in the rue du Théâtre Français commented on Paine's "wretched" condition, and John Hurford Stone, relatively well-off in 1793 by his own account, would fall on hard times with the failure of his printing enterprise in later years.<sup>496</sup>

Previous involvement with radical activities had some bearing on the terms and conditions of imprisonment and responses to requests for release from prison during the later months of 1793 and into 1794. In August 1793 the Minister of the Interior tried to exempt William Newton, a British Club member and former serviceman in the French dragoons, from the general arrest of British residents, presumably in view of his engagement on behalf of the Revolution. However the attempt was unsuccessful, Newton being confined to the Luxembourg and Benedictine monastery from October 1793 to June 1794 before being executed on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1794.<sup>497</sup> John Hurford Stone, despite being arrested in October 1793 and against in April 1794, secured relatively rapid release and boasted to his brother in January 1794 of being well-treated by the authorities. He confided, "A man who has established three different manufactories in a country, has a right to some consideration; thank god I enjoy more than my share."<sup>498</sup> It is revealing that Stone considered his privileged treatment to be linked to his business exploits rather than his fidelity to the Revolution. Financial and entrepreneurial success in France could have had more weight in convincing leading members of the revolutionary committees to act leniently towards foreigners than political activism.

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<sup>495</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1792, *The Despatches of Earl Gower*; letter from Mr. Somers, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1793, PRO FO 27/41.

<sup>496</sup> Yorke, *France in 1802* 230.

<sup>497</sup> Alger, *Englishmen* 179.

<sup>498</sup> John Hurford Stone to William Stone, 24<sup>th</sup> January 1794, Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1221.

When British residents were imprisoned they were invariably subject to a range of probing questions aimed at revealing their loyalty to the republic or otherwise. The following were typical categories guiding the interrogation of British subjects incarcerated in French jails and the answers would be systematically recorded in a table for each individual prisoner:

Name of the prisoner, residence before imprisonment, age, number of children, their age, where they are, if he is a widower or married; place of detention, since when, during which period, by which order, why?; profession before and since the Revolution; income before and since the Revolution; relationships and associations; nature of political opinions shown in the months of May, July and October 1789, the 10th August, the flight and death of the tyrant, the 31<sup>st</sup> May and the crises of the war; if he has signed petitions or decree against liberty.<sup>499</sup>

Those interrogating British prisoners distinguished between their pre- and post-revolutionary activities in an attempt to discover whether their allegiance to the Revolution was sincere or superficial. They focused on the individual circumstances of each detainee and their known associations and sympathies. What was particularly important was the way in which suspects had responded to fall of the Bastille, the removal of the king and his family to Paris, the storming of the Tuileries, the flight and death of the king, the exclusion of the Girondin members from the Convention and foreign war. They were therefore asked about the key events of the French Revolution and required to give their opinions which would be kept on file and possibly influence future decisions made in regard to their case.

For British subjects who had not had any significant involvement with political or pro-revolutionary activities, many of these sections were left blank. Elizabeth Mayne Churchill, the American wife of Charles Churchill, was imprisoned in the English convent, faubourg Marceaux, rue de Courcine. Under the headings “relationships” and “political opinions” no details were given. Her plea for release was based primarily on her need to provide for her

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<sup>499</sup> “Nom du détenu, son domicile avant sa détention, son âge, le nombre de ses enfans, leur âge, ou ils sont, s’il est veuf, garçon ou marié : le lieu où il est détenu ; depuis quand, à quelle époque ; par quel ordre, pourquoi : la profession avant et depuis la Révolution ; son revenu avant et depuis la Révolution ; ses relations, ses liaisons ; le caractère et les opinions politiques qu’il a montrés dans les mois de mai, juillet et octobre 1789 ; au 10 août à la fuite et à la mort du tyran ; au 31 mai, et dans les crises de la guerre ; s’il a signé des pétitions ou des décrets liberticides.” Taken from the table of personal information filled out for Robert Rayment. AN F7/4774/88.

young children, the youngest of whom was not yet weaned. Also cited in her favour was the fact that her husband had given shoes and weapons to the republic. Christopher White also spoke out in defence of the Churchills.<sup>500</sup> This contrasts with the cases of Robert Rayment and Sir Robert Smith whose files give a number of indications of the importance of their political activities to the way in which their characters and loyalty to the Revolution were assessed by the committees considering appeals for release. In papers relating to Rayment, a witness from his section testified to his being an “excellent patriot with good principles.” The citizen confirmed that there would be no risk in according him his liberty and explained he had been introduced to Rayment by another “excellent Republican, Stephen Sayre, an American.” Sayre was one of the signatories of the British Club address and, due to his nationality, would have been a good character witness for a British patriot incarcerated under the Terror. It is quite likely that Sayre and Rayment had collaborated on banking initiatives in the French capital and Sayre, like Rayment, had tried to devise a solution whereby American national debt, owed to France, could be refinanced to the benefit of both nations by redirecting funds through London and Amsterdam to obtain lower interest rates.<sup>501</sup> In his own petition to the authorities, Rayment assured the Convention that he had always behaved as an “honest republican” and offered by way of proof his conduct towards the widows and orphans of the Tuileries victims, “the heroes of the *journée* of the 10<sup>th</sup> August.” He asked for freedom either to remain in France or to join friends in Philadelphia. There was no question of his returning to Britain, at least not for the purposes of the diplomatic presentation of his case to the French authorities. Unlike the case of the Churchills, Rayment’s table is entirely filled with his pro-revolutionary gestures, tracts and activities.<sup>502</sup> Rayment cited his different actions as a radical

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<sup>500</sup> AN F7/4648/3, file on Charles and Elizabeth Churchill.

<sup>501</sup> See Alden, *Stephen Sayre* 166.

<sup>502</sup> “La Révolution française lui parût l’évènement le plus glorieux, le plus nécessaire pour amener le bonheur de l’Europe, et le désir d’y contribuer autant qu’il étoit en lui, l’amena en France. Mais en offrant ses faibles lumières par les différens plans et mémoires mis sous les yeux de la Nation et de ses Magistrats, il n’a jamais prétendu s’immiscer sans vocation dans les affaires publiques, ou régler à sa fantaisie la marche révolutionnaire.



resident of Paris, which he hoped would act in his favour. Nevertheless, Rayment was not released from the Scotch College until 18<sup>th</sup> January 1795, well after Thermidor, having been first incarcerated on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1793.

Sir Robert Smith also drew attention to his sustained commitment to the Revolution in his various petitions for release. Like Rayment, he too mobilised the support of a number of acquaintances from his local section, including his grocer, a citizen named Billet, to testify to his civic loyalty and dedication to the Revolution. Smith seems to be one of the few British radical activists imprisoned under the Terror whose previous political involvement materially influenced the decision of the French authorities to order his release. Smith was imprisoned twice under the different measures instituted after August 1793. His first detention was brought to a swift end after five of the most hard-line members of the *Comité de Salut Public* accepted petitions in favour of his unblemished character and concluded that his continued imprisonment was unnecessary. He was freed by a “special order” of the committee on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1793. Barère, Couthon, Thuriot, Saint-Just and Héroult, signed the order stating, “in view of the good accounts offered on behalf of Citizen Smith, Englishman, residing at rue du Choiseul, the committee declares that he will be freed.”<sup>503</sup> This document was reproduced systematically both by Smith, in defence of his character, and by his wife, in her petition on his behalf, after his second arrest in September 1793. It constituted precious evidence that Smith had the backing of the partisans of the Revolution.<sup>504</sup> After his second arrest, Smith remained in captivity for over a year, eventually being released in October 1794. During this further period of incarceration, Smith once again highlighted his various contributions to the

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Jamais il n’a signé contribué ou adhéré à des pétitions ou arrêtés libéricides. Le quatrième jour après la mémorable victoire des Thuilleries, il parut avec d’autres Anglois républicains de cœur, à la barre de l’assemblée nationale, pour y présenter leur dons fraternels aux veuves et orphelins des hommes libre morts pour leur patrie le 10 août. Tous ses ouvrages, et la haine constante des aristocrates de toutes les nations, et de toutes les nuances, prouvent mieux en faveur de ses principes politiques, que ne pourroit faire une longue exposition.” AN F7/4774/88.

<sup>503</sup> AN F7 4775/20/3, the file is recorded under the name of Smyth.

<sup>504</sup> Smith’s petition for his release is dated 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1793 and was received by the committee two days later. Yet Smith also states that he was imprisoned under the law of 8<sup>th</sup> October 1793. This discrepancy in dates is perhaps explained by a prior arrest that pre-empted the decree of October.

advancement of liberty and the Revolution in petitions dated 22<sup>th</sup> September 1793 and 27<sup>th</sup> December 1793. In the first, addressed to the *Comité de Sûreté Générale*, he explained how he arrived in France in November 1791 “to free myself from a despotic government,” recover his health and educate his children in the spirit of freedom. He celebrated the end of slavery, the triumph of liberty and the precedence given to justice and equality, attaching an account from his section testifying to his principles and loyalty. He also included other documents in support of his appeal, notably a list of his patriotic donations amounting to 1,910 *livres*. This sum was used for providing clothes for the National Guard, assisting troops quelling the royalist uprising in the Vendée and for the widows of those who died on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792. A second petition from Smith, written in December, reiterated the injustice of his captivity. He reminded the *comité* that he had lived in Le Pelletier district for two years and that no doubt had ever been cast on his principles. He stated that, after rigorous examination of his papers, nothing had shown that he had any other motive than the public good. He went on to urge the committee to allow him to return to his family, particularly as his health was rapidly deteriorating. On his release in October 1794, the authorities recorded that his petition had been considered and taken into account in their decision to free him.

Like other spouses, Smith’s wife also lobbied the *Comité de Sûreté Générale* for the release of her husband. Her plea was sent in mid December 1793 and, like her husband, she claimed that their arrival in France was prompted by a desire to educate their children and live under a government which accorded with their principles. She confirmed that her husband had followed the Revolution unfailingly and had celebrated France’s triumphs over her enemies. His principles were firm and his arrest would not alter his view on the Revolution. Smith’s wife also attached an extract from the local section register, which testified to Smith’s being favourable to the constitution and national liberty and offered him special protection. She also enclosed the August judgement from the *Comité de Salut Public*. Smith’s wife stated that,

while her husband would have willingly remained in prison, hoping that his arrest would further the progress of the Revolution, his ill health necessitated his urgent release. Unable to see his regular doctor and deprived of the means of exercise and of treatment, his health was rapidly deteriorating. Smith managed to mobilise an artillery of statements in support of his case. On 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1794, members of the Le Pelletier section which Smith belonged to declared they had had no other reason for arresting Smith other than his nationality. There was nothing to make them question his loyalty, principles or civic responsibility. He had lived from his own income before and since the Revolution with a substantial revenue of 30,000 *livres* and was considered a friend of liberty. On 7<sup>th</sup> October 1794 the decision to free Smith was taken by his local revolutionary committee, after consent had been given by the *Comité de Sûreté Générale*.

Smith's case demonstrates a number of things. Firstly, it highlights the energy with which radicals could defend themselves from any association with counter-revolution and argue their case for release, drawing on the precise details of their involvement in support of the Revolution. Secondly, it shows how some British residents were able to command a high level of backing from within both the central revolutionary committees but also among representatives of their section and even local tradesmen and acquaintances. These networks of solidarity would not necessarily secure the immediate release of British radicals, but they certainly proved crucial when the circumstances proved more propitious for liberation. They provided more weight to the case for release than mere familial, medical or financial reasons. As Smith's case shows, petitions were not always individual or family-led attempts to secure prisoners' freedom but could occasionally be drafted by friends, countrymen or Parisian acquaintances. In the case of Smith and Rayment, local members of their respective sections testified on their behalf, probably at significant personal risk. For their more well-known fellow radical, Thomas Paine, other petitions, often signed by numerous supporters, were

provided with the aim of facilitating his liberation. Ultimately these petitions had little impact, largely because Paine, unlike his lesser-known countrymen, had symbolic value within the revolutionary regime. His former political role in the National Convention, his diplomatic significance as well as his nationality, combined to ensure that he would remain the longest in prison compared to most of his compatriots.

The imprisonment of Thomas Paine prompted a number of American citizens to plead the case for his freedom to the *Comité de Sûreté Générale* a few days after his seizure by the authorities.<sup>505</sup> Probably orchestrated by Joel Barlow, the petition requested that Paine be released so he could return to his adopted country of America where he would be welcomed with “open arms” into the republic. His service to the American Revolution was cited, as was the purity of his intentions in France, despite the fact that he was not exempt from “human error.” The signatories of the petition were drawn primarily from New England states and cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, New York, Connecticut and Baltimore. Apart from Joel Barlow, the men did not have any visible links with the British Club. Yet Paine, by virtue of his role in the American Revolution and acquaintance with Jeffersonian Republicans and other luminaries of the New England political elite, was able to command support from the influential group which included Barlow’s associate Mark Leavenworth. Despite the insistence in the petition on Paine’s membership of the American nation however, the petition was not acted upon, largely down to Gouverneur Morris’s inertia on behalf of the American revolutionary. Paine remained in jail until well after the fall of Robespierre, eventually being released in November 1794. Paine himself confided to Morris’s successor, James Monroe, that, “about three weeks after my imprisonment the Americans that were in Paris went to the bar of the Convention to reclaim me, but contrary to my advice, they made their address into a

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<sup>505</sup> AN F7/4774/61 Thomas Paine file.

Petition, and it was miscarried.”<sup>506</sup> Paine preferred to keep a low profile while in prison, conscious that his case threatened to create tension between the American and French republics.

The American delegation was not the only group to draft a plea in support of Paine’s release. In the wake of Robespierre’s fall from power, Paine’s interpreter and friend, Achille Audibert, sent a letter to Jacques Thuriot, member of the *Comité de Salut Public* and president during the events surrounding 9 Thermidor, excusing Paine for his lack of political tact in denouncing Robespierre as a “monster who should be crossed off the list of human beings.”<sup>507</sup> Thuriot himself, along with Marat, had objected to the authenticity of Paine’s plea for the respite of Louis XVI during the debates of January 1793.<sup>508</sup> Like the American petitioners, Audibert cited Paine’s involvement in the American Revolution as well as the disapproval of his incarceration in the eyes of America and his estrangement from the British government as reasons for ordering his release. Paine’s translator Lanthenas also sent an appeal for Paine’s detention to be reconsidered in the aftermath of Thermidor. Knowing Paine personally, he volunteered his time to explain in more detail his friend’s unblemished record.

Paine did not address the National Convention nor its committees until August 1794, when he wrote a letter to the Convention detailing the ignominy he had suffered until the reign of Terror. He had addressed a brief appeal to Gouverneur Morris, the American representative in Paris, in February 1794, yet apart from this, had remained almost silent during his time in prison. In his first petition to the Convention he described himself as “the unceasing defender of Liberty for twenty years,” and considered his incarceration in the Luxembourg as “the work of that hypocrite and the partisans he had in the place.” Due to his particular quarrel with Robespierre, who had mobilised a denunciation of Paine amongst a

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<sup>506</sup> Paine, “To James Monroe”, Luxembourg, 18<sup>th</sup> August 1794, Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 1343.

<sup>507</sup> AN F7/4774/61. See the letter from Achille Audibert, Paine's interpreter in Paris.

<sup>508</sup> For details of the opposition to Paine’s speech see above, pp. 157-58.

section of his constituency at Nord Pas de Calais, he had “submitted with patience to the hardness of my fate and waited the event of brighter days.”<sup>509</sup> He wrote on numerous occasions to James Monroe between August and November 1794. Monroe had replaced Morris as US ambassador in 1794 and was more receptive to Paine’s pleas, allowing him to lodge in his quarters for eighteen months after his release from prison.

What seems clear from these examples, which do not represent the entirety of British experience in detention, is that those residents who were involved in pro-revolutionary authorship or activity, with the exception of Thomas Paine, who kept a studied silence throughout his incarceration, sought to promote and publicise their deeds, thinking that it would secure their passage out of jail or passport out of the country. They willingly incurred the risk of ostracism and suspicion to plead on behalf of acquaintances, associates or countrymen. Those who were members of the British Club, who had written tracts, given patriot gifts or addressed the National Convention, did not fail to raise this in their petitions and particular emphasis was given to character references provided by others who were considered loyal to the regime. Robert Merry addressed his petition directly to Jacques-Louis David, a colleague and acquaintance, and Robert O’Reilly, in all likelihood because of his familiarity with revolutionary processes and leaders, was able to sift through depositions made to the *Comité de Salut Public* to receive confirmation that his petition had been lost without trace. This enabled him to return to his desk and present a new petition shortly after and salvage some of the time lost through administrative oversight.

Those who could not call upon previous political engagement, or had no direct links with revolutionary leaders, would rely more on personal argument to try to secure their liberty or departure. Private commitments, business engagements, ill health or economic distress were regularly reasons cited in support of release requests or passage out of the country.

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<sup>509</sup> Paine, “Letter to the National Convention”, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1794, Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 1339-40.

Although pro-revolutionary residents believed their former actions would guarantee them special treatment, in reality it is far from sure that this had any significant bearing on the attitude of the authorities towards their cases. Such men and women may have had more backing from acquaintances in their sections, or may have been able to benefit from certain familiarity with key members of the regime, yet, apart from in the obvious case of Sir Robert Smith, few were able to reap substantial benefits from prior political activism.

## **II. Conclusion**

This chapter attempts to provide a more extensive view of the characteristics of British radical expatriation and define some broad patterns to British stays in Paris, by considering British activists as a community centred on the associational world forged at White's Hotel. It also seeks to place greater emphasis on creative and affirmative reasons for departures of British pro-revolutionary figures to Paris, particularly in the transformative year of 1792. Finally it aims at illuminating some of the many ways in which British radicals gained agency in exile, whether by engaging in politics, pursuing private commercial initiatives, acting on behalf of the revolutionary administration, providing relief for fellow countrymen or negotiating in the complex era of the Terror. Though to a certain degree common heritage and language drew British radicals together, their diverging beliefs on the nature and extent of intervention in French affairs, the complex range of pressures they acted under and their differing loyalties and acquaintances meant that there was a significant degree of discord within their ranks, particularly and understandably as foreigners as a category were recast as potential counter-insurgents rather than as fraternal associates in the struggle for universal liberty.

A particular area of interest in this chapter has been the way in which British radicals supported and assisted each other during their stays in the French capital, particularly during the hardship of incarceration. Such adversity gave rise to collective efforts to improve

conditions of compatriots, access financial resources on behalf of detainees, secure departure out of France for those in a position to leave, or negotiate their release from prison. After the fall of Robespierre, petitions also arrived to request renewed residence in the capital. Conditions of detention also gave rise to imaginative attempts by British captives to convince the revolutionary authorities of their genuine loyalty to the Revolution. While many gave very practical reasons in petitioning for their own release, others continued to appeal to the fellow humanity of their jailors and demonstrated sustained belief in the principles evoked in the early stages of the Revolution. I have assessed how far those of known and acknowledged radical persuasion were treated differently to those who had been in Paris for commercial, military or religious pretexts. A study of the key members of the British Club reveals that very few radicals immigrated to Paris for purely ideological reasons. While the language of the rights of man and universal liberty was widely employed, particularly in written addresses and petitions to the National Convention and in later prison appeals, the likelihood is that many of those involved in some sort of activist politics in Paris, particularly the core nucleus of the British Club, had other parallel lines of interest including business ventures, bookselling, publishing or journalistic projects. Those who succeeded in negotiating early release, or who continued to occupy positions within the revolutionary administration, were often those who had an excellent working knowledge of the French language combined with a sustained though not dogmatic or outspoken affiliation to revolutionary politics. Acquaintance with influential players in the administration could often be of service to British residents struggling to justify their presence in the capital.

This assessment of some of the activities of British radicals and the events and experiences that shaped their stays in Paris casts doubt on prevailing representations of their characters based on portraits sketched during the intense propaganda battle which accompanied the Anglo-French war. The argument that British residents in Paris were



hounded into exile must be qualified. While many did deem themselves estranged from the moral and political temperament of British society and culture, their decision to go to Paris was not taken strictly or uniquely out of desperation or necessity. Until early 1793 there was still a degree of positive choice, creative possibility and international spirit shaping decisions to remove to Paris. Equally, this reading brings into question their status as “men without countries.” The different examples and cases shown in this chapter give weight to the argument that British expatriates were not mere victims of persecution in both Britain and France. As the next two chapters will seek to further demonstrate, through their interventions in the most pressing political debates of the time and through their role as conveyors of news of the Revolution back to Britain, British residents did achieve a measure of influence in the interstice of these two countries. Alger’s thesis was that British expatriates did not appreciably alter the course of events in France and that “the British Club, after lasting only a few weeks, was broken up by dissensions, one party loving their native land and regarding it as a model for France, the other viewing the French revolution as a kind of new religion, to be imitated by, and if necessary enforced upon, England.”<sup>510</sup> My aim is to show that British Club members were nevertheless unsettling figures whose marginality was often as much a source of power as of exclusion.

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<sup>510</sup> Alger, “The British Colony in Paris” 694.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **ON CONSTITUTIONS AND THE PEOPLE: BRITISH POLITICAL INTERVENTIONS IN THE EARLY FRENCH REPUBLIC**

### III. Introduction

British presence in Paris was not uniquely a matter of blind fervour, despite the undoubted magnetic pull of the Revolution on visitors from across the Channel. Nor was it systematically a knee-jerk reaction to repression or a desperate flight from persecution. Many British residents of Paris had coherent and sometimes well-planned strategies arriving in the French capital and some exploited the opportunity offered by the refuge of revolutionary France to pursue innovative projects which may otherwise have gone unrealised. The activities of British radicals in Paris did not gravitate exclusively around political themes and many British expatriates conjugated political interests with business ventures or private publishing ambitions, interests which often interlinked and nourished each other, but which also threw up contradictions. Gilbert Imlay and Joel Barlow both voiced ideological support for the new republic yet also made a living out of exploiting the opportunities presented by naval blockades of French ports and the flight of *émigrés* to territories opposed to the Revolution.<sup>511</sup>

While White's Hotel was a meeting ground of ideas and vibrant junction for international patriots, a site of ephemeral radical emergence, militant dynamics also intersected with an associational culture that drew on and nourished connections with an array of reforming and revolutionary circles. There was a considerable degree of collective solidarity and mutual assistance between British radicals centred around the grouping at White's, as presence in Paris, particularly during the years from late 1792 to 1794, was also about dealing with immediate material distress, helping fellow countrymen, trying to recover seized property and mobilising arguments to negotiate an early release from prison for oneself

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<sup>511</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft was sceptical about Gilbert Imlay's commercial ambitions and made this clear in numerous letters. Disagreements also took place between those revolutionaries who admired the American style of government and embraced of modern commercial republicanism and those activists from the Cordeliers section of Paris who looked to more classical forms of republicanism for inspiration.

or one's friends, family or associates.<sup>512</sup> The Club was a short-lived community, where British expatriates temporarily sought a sense of belonging and common purpose. The group had a public agenda which they combined with private pursuits and philanthropic initiatives.

Such observations do not diminish the fact that those British residents who remained in Paris after 1792 showed a firm commitment to revolutionary politics. Indeed there was a necessity for taking a political stance in a country where public duty was increasingly seen as inseparable from the private sphere. Sympathy with and fascination for the Revolution, particularly the way in which its outcomes could impinge upon sought-after changes to the British system, were undoubtedly key factors in the decisions made by Britons to prolong or renew their stays in the French capital. Political engagement and the mounting need to accurately define an unequivocal stance on key debates in revolutionary affairs also shaped lives in Paris. Put simply, it was impossible to be an apolitical observer of events as a British resident after August 1792. Continued residence implied, often quite justifiably, that British observers had not denied the Revolution as it manifested itself in increasingly violent terms and departed from both the British and American precedents. Presence itself was a political statement from this point on, a subversive one in the eyes of loyalist observers on the British mainland and an increasingly ambivalent one for French revolutionaries faced with the complex status of foreigners on French soil. While the impetus driving the Revolution and its rupture with royalty could include international patriots, once the king had been deposed and the nation had replaced the monarchy as the seat of sovereignty, the notion of citizenship began to change. Radical members of the Convention saw in the presence of foreigners the potent risk of counterinsurgency, foreign infection and the undermining of the Revolution.

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<sup>512</sup> This time frame is significant to a study of the British Club. The club sought official recognition in late 1792 at a time when the general trend among reformers who remained in Britain was to distance themselves from association with France and the Revolution. The experience of radicals during the Terror was formative. Their testimonies for liberation often relied on former political engagement and invoked activities in support of the Revolution. By late 1794 and early 1795, most members of the British Club had either left Paris or their relationship with the Revolution had adapted to the new political context.

Robespierre complained, “All our miseries are the work of Pitt and his associates...Do you know Thomas Paine and David Williams?...They are both traitors and hypocrites.”<sup>513</sup> In the space between these differing perspectives, British residents were obliged to establish an opinion on crucial issues dominating public debate, often trying to juggle political sincerity with pragmatism within a regime whose bearings were perpetually shifting. Against this backdrop, they regularly ran the risk of suspicion and misinterpretation.

This chapter seeks to dissect this public political engagement, exploring the ways in which British radicals took part in key political debates after the foundation of the republic in late 1792. The main focus will be on the way in which they contributed to the discussion on the establishment of a republican constitution. It was this particular topic that most animated British residents in Paris and which resonated most clearly with those who still hoped for change in Britain. Intervening in the French constitutional debate during the course of late 1792 and early 1793 was also about rebutting Burke’s contention in *Reflections* that constitutions could not be devised in a short space of time out of abstract ideas but emerged organically through experience, with an awareness of history over the slow passage of time. I will examine the ideas British contributors expressed, their relationship with revolutionaries, how they forged their viewpoints, the different influences they acted under and the way in which their stances and positions were perceived by the revolutionary authorities.

### **III.1 Background to the First French Republic of September 1792**

It is true to some extent that, with the founding of the first French republic on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1792 “a whole new political and moral frame of reference had come into existence.”<sup>514</sup> The experiment with constitutional monarchy, epitomised by the signing of the new monarchical constitution in September 1791, had ended and the nation and its citizens were recast as the sole and ultimate sovereign. The 1791 constitution had been founded on a

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<sup>513</sup> Quoted in Jones, *The Anvil and the Hammer* 124.

<sup>514</sup> Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue* 171.

compromise with a reluctant king, who had demonstrated on a number of occasions his fundamental opposition to the principles inscribed in the document he had been persuaded to sign. His placating of refractory priests who had not sworn the Civil Oath and attempted escape from France were overlooked by the members of the Constituent Assembly, who desperately wanted to finalise a constitutional plan that had been in the making since the fall of the Bastille, hoping it would bring some stability to the new regime. The plan included the controversial adoption of a suspensive royal veto for the monarch, which satisfied neither royalists nor republicans. While many monarchists in the Assembly, including Lafayette, advocated the adoption of an absolute veto, republican activists objected to the very notion of a veto at all.

The 1791 constitution was framed therefore under the shadow of its probable collapse. The British ambassador in Paris predicted, “The present constitution has no friends and cannot last,”<sup>515</sup> while David Williams, accepting his nomination for French citizenship on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1792, wrote, “It is not wonderful the first attempt [at a Constitution in 1791] should not have fully succeeded.”<sup>516</sup> Throughout 1792 threats to the fragile constitutional solution emerged from within and without. In June, the people marched to the Tuileries in a spontaneous act of defiance, but were pacified by the king and his ministers. Yet the dismissal of the king’s Girondin counsellors, as well as external events such as the Duke of Brunswick’s declaration to restore absolute monarchy and punish rebellious citizens, contributed to creating a climate of unrest. This, along with the shortage of food and the onset of war with Austria and Prussia in April 1792, generated significant anti-monarchical feeling.

Yet it was the pivotal events of 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792 which ultimately signalled the end of the monarchy. What became known as the “August days” was a popular uprising, the expression of mounting frustration at the behaviour of the king towards the people. Louis XVI

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<sup>515</sup> Quoted in Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* 158.

<sup>516</sup> Jones, *The Anvil and the Hammer* 119.

had lost what confidence remained after his attempted flight out of France in June of the previous year and, despite the Assembly proclaiming him inviolable and therefore exempt from prosecution for his actions, many revolutionaries had begun to seriously consider the merits of a republican government free of monarchy. The ultimate outcome of the confrontation which took place between the Paris militias and the king's Swiss Guard forced the king to take shelter in the National Assembly. Following the events of that day, members of the Assembly decided to detain the king and his family in the prison of the Temple. These occurrences led to the downfall of Louis XVI but also the abolition of the institution of monarchy. It is for this reason that 10th August 1792 is widely considered a second Revolution. Following a general purge of the Paris prisons at the start of the month, in late September 1792, Year One was declared, representing a "radical break" with past political forms and evoking what Benedict Anderson has termed the "sublime confidence of novelty."<sup>517</sup>

Linked to this shift, the deposition of the king had a lasting and profound impact on the way in which foreign residents were perceived within the new regime. William Rogers Brubaker states, "The Revolutionary invention of the nation-state and national citizenship thus engendered the modern figure of the foreigner – not only as a legal category but as a political epithet, invested with a psychopolitical charge it formerly lacked, and condensing around itself pure outsiderhood."<sup>518</sup> Yet despite the renovation in the status of the foreigner within the new French state, some foreign residents still commanded respect for their adherence to the Revolution. Michael Rapport suggests, "Foreigners could still find outlets for their political energies and could therefore exercise influence in revolutionary politics. The revolutionaries accepted these efforts provided they coincided with French interests and for as

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<sup>517</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 193.

<sup>518</sup> Brubaker, "The Invention of Citizenship" 44.

long as the foreigners concerned were ideologically committed to the Revolution.”<sup>519</sup> Despite the apparent exclusivity of citizenship, therefore, British residents were sometimes able to question these boundaries and achieve a measure of leverage in the regime.

Yet broad conclusions, such as those of Blum and Brubaker, on the moral grounding of the Revolution and civic shifts in treatment and perception of foreigners should not overshadow the fact that the situation was in flux over 1792-93. Although later historians have identified key moments in the Revolution’s course as transformative, these events were not necessarily seen in the same terms by those who experienced them directly. As Jean Tulard has pointed out, for those who orchestrated the overthrow of Robespierre, his downfall was not initially seen as a coup d’état, the end of the Revolution or the beginning of a new era of republican stability and moderation. The Thermidorians, as they later became known, were simply a mixed coalition of differing interests in the National Convention, made up of wavering Montagnards, such as Fouché, who had gone out of favour during their missions to the regions, and members of the *Marais*.<sup>520</sup> Their actions were driven by a range of motives including personal survival, exasperation at the cult instituted by Robespierre, rivalries within the *Comité de Salut Public*, desire to perpetuate the Terror or, conversely, to end it.<sup>521</sup> In a similar way, the declaration of the Republic on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1792 and the abolition of the monarchy did not immediately change the way foreigners were seen and was not interpreted from the outset as founding a new political and moral order. Benedict Anderson has noted:

The overwhelming and bewildering concatenation of events experienced by its makers and its victims became a ‘thing’ – and with its own name: The French Revolution. Like a vast shapeless rock worn to a rounded boulder by countless drops of water, the experience was shaped by millions of printed words into a ‘concept’ on the printed page, and, in due course, into a model.<sup>522</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship in Revolutionary France* 142.

<sup>520</sup> For a definition of the *Marais*, see the glossary at Appendix E.

<sup>521</sup> See Jean Tulard, *Les Thermidoriens* (Paris: Fayard, 2005). Tulard’s performative portrait of the events surrounding the end of the Terror and beginning of the Directoire downplays the Marxist reading of Georges Lefebvre whose 1927 study of the same title saw the Thermidor era as a bourgeois betrayal of the Revolution.

<sup>522</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 80.



The “concept” or “model” that the Revolution rapidly became was less concrete in the immediate aftermath of the declaration of the republic, even if there was certainly euphoric expectation as to its potential for effectuating historic and far-reaching change.<sup>523</sup> This observation is crucial to the discussion that follows in that the debate on the constitution has sometimes been eclipsed by the knowledge of its failure to produce a lasting settlement. The fact that the 1793 constitution was quickly suspended has tended to deter scholars from considering addresses and depositions on the subject, while the outbreak of the Anglo-French war and questions of its relationship to the construction of national identities has attracted much greater attention. Neither Condorcet’s February 1793 proposal nor the Jacobin constitutional draft later in the same year culminated in an official and durable arrangement, and the next constitution to replace the moderate settlement of 1791 was the Thermidorian version of 1795.<sup>524</sup> Historical discussions of the 1793 constitution are therefore conducted against the backdrop of its immateriality. For this reason, it is often the process rather than the content, the divisions, justifications and principles it provoked rather than the suggestions of constitutional remedies it generated, which constitute the mainstay of the debate.

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<sup>523</sup> While those looking on in retrospect have fitted revolutionaries into categories and have seen in the Revolution itself the ideological or political roots of later modern consolidation, those present at the scene found certainty difficult to grasp. While they recognised the enormity of the convulsions they lived through and sometimes contributed to, they were far from able to provide a coherent reading of the times. For some, this temporary mist was necessary in the passage to greater certainty. Lynn Hunt notes the veil of obscurity that struck contemporary witnesses. There was a sense of being swept up in events, of time being compressed and of being in a dream-like state. See Lynn Hunt, “The World We Have Gained.”

<sup>524</sup> For an account of the Thermidorian regime, see Biancamaria Fontana, “The Thermidorian republic and its principles,” *The Invention of the Modern Republic*, ed. Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2004) 118-138. Fontana sees the Thermidorian regime instituted after the fall of Robespierre as having an essential legacy for modern republicanism as it defined and reworked itself in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It would lay the basis for future European democracies characterised by large territorial states, advanced commercial development, a wide popular electorate and constitutional guarantees inscribed in law. Pragmatism was an essential characteristic of the modern political formation therefore. Germaine de Staël supported republicanism in 1795 not out of principle, but because it was the form of government already in existence and would therefore encourage stability and longevity and provoke the least disruption. She also believed that citizens of a modern state would be less inclined to sacrifice their independence and way of life for the sake of a collective purpose. In the modern era therefore, the classical ideal of a virtuous citizenry steeped in glory, heroism and sacrifice was substituted by an awareness of the place of the individual, the ascendancy of delegated, representative modes of government and the primacy of economic independence over collective public spirit.

### III.2 Drafting a Republican Constitution, 1792-93

A committee was established in late September 1792 to make recommendations on the form of a new, republican constitution. The result, largely due to the committee's composition – Condorcet, Brissot, Sièyes, Barère and Paine were among the nine members –, would later become known as the “Girondin Constitution”, in opposition to the more radical alternative first outlined in the Convention on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1793 by Saint-Just and fleshed out during the months of May and June, and finally presented by Héault de Séchelles. The “Girondin” draft of February opted for universal suffrage but drew back from giving any direct power to the electorate and was seen as less democratic than the later Jacobin version. Barère and Paine would both go on to criticise the draft that they had a role in penning.<sup>525</sup> John Keane considers it a “flop”. He suggests, “It much more resembled a philosophical tract than a constitution. The draft also proved unpopular because it took so long to produce that others grew impatient and began to draft their own versions.”<sup>526</sup> Whitney Jones argues, “It is hard to quarrel with a modern judgement that, while representing much that was best in eighteenth-century thinking, it was utterly inappropriate to the revolutionary situation. Indeed its text was so long that Condorcet's voice failed in its reading.”<sup>527</sup> Verdicts on the Girondin draft have generally been shaped by an awareness of its ultimate defeat.

The Girondin draft was studied for two months, but by April 1793 members of the Jacobin Club had set to work on writing an alternative and the Convention itself had decided to set up another committee to review the proposal. The resulting “Jacobin” version of June 1793 was much more wide-reaching in its democratic intentions yet narrowed the possibilities for more open citizenship qualifications articulated by the first constitutional committee, in

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<sup>525</sup> In his *Memoirs*, Barère “describes how it was condemned as too lengthy and diffuse, containing proposals too clever and too difficult to implement.” (Jones, *The Anvil and the Hammer* 132). Thomas Paine's letter to Georges Danton lamented that “the late constitution sacrificed too much to ceremony, and to the impolitic apprehension of giving umbrage to foreign counts.” AN AFII/380/49/5.

<sup>526</sup> Keane, *Tom Paine* 356.

<sup>527</sup> Jones, *The Anvil and the Hammer* 132.

concordance with the increasing suspicion of foreign enemies of the nation. Saint-Just articulated his vision in a speech to the Convention in late April. At the heart of his address was a mistrust of power and permanence in governmental structures and a faith in the natural goodness and virtue of the people in a state of nature. For Saint-Just, laws had to be the expression of the “general will” of the people and the interest of citizens in decision-making should be “active,” not “passive.”<sup>528</sup> He criticised the constitutional committee’s version, calling it “Athens voting near its end, without democracy, and decreeing the loss of its liberty.”<sup>529</sup> In Carol Blum’s view, the Jacobins set out with the intention of rooting out all monarchical social structures and engendering a more far-reaching change in the social fabric of the country.<sup>530</sup> Vigour and starkness was preferred to intellectualism and the celebration of the values of the European Enlightenment. Saint-Just certainly denounced the way the committee had “considered the general will in terms of its intellectual relationship.” As a result “laws were the expression of taste rather than the general will.”<sup>531</sup> Condorcet, the principal author of the February version, criticised the rival Jacobin draft. Maurice Cranston summarises Condorcet’s view on both constitutions: “Whereas the former could be relied on to ensure the accurate expression of the public reason, the latter, he argued, would maximise the probability of erroneous decisions and provoke an endless conflict of wills.”<sup>532</sup> The principal battlegrounds in the constitution debate for the French revolutionaries were thus the method of discovering the “general will” of the people, the role of citizens in decision-making, and the place of “enlightened leadership” in governmental structures.

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<sup>528</sup> Saint-Just, “Discours sur la constitution et essai,” *Saint-Just: théorie politique*, ed. Alain Liénard (Paris: Seuil, 1976) 193.

<sup>529</sup> Saint-Just, “Discours sur la constitution et essai” 192: “C’est Athènes votant vers sa fin, sans démocratie, & décrétant la perte de sa liberté.” My translation.

<sup>530</sup> Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue* 182-83.

<sup>531</sup> “Il m’a paru que le comité avoit considéré la volonté générale sous son rapport intellectuel ; ensorte que la volonté générale, purement spéculative, résultant plutôt des vues de l’esprit que de l’intérêt du corps social, les lois étoient l’expression du goût plutôt que de la volonté générale.” Saint-Just, “Discours sur la constitution et essai” 192. My translation.

<sup>532</sup> Cranston, *Philosophers and Pamphleteers* 151. Condorcet went into hiding after publishing the pamphlet in which he makes this claim. Although the pamphlet, *Aux citoyens français sur la nouvelle constitution*, was anonymous, he realised that his authorship would be recognised.

### III.3 The British in French Public Life during the Early Republic

Five members or associates of the British Club – Robert Merry, John Oswald, Joel Barlow, George Edwards and David Williams – wrote tracts to be presented to the first constitutional committee charged with establishing a new framework for the republic. All except Barlow had been involved in the Literary Fund, either as committee members, subscribers or recipients of aid. Mary Wollstonecraft was commissioned to draw up a plan of education for the same committee and both John Hurford Stone and Nicholas Madgett worked for the French authorities in translation or advisory roles.<sup>533</sup> Wollstonecraft informed her friend Ruth Barlow, “I am, besides, writing a plan of education for the Committee appointed to consider that subject.” As well as being engaged on behalf of the republic to offer her thoughts on education, she was also following “public news” for which the main event was “that the new constitution will soon makes its appearance.”<sup>534</sup> Thomas Paine was a member of the constitutional committee and had been elected to the Convention in August 1792. Like Condorcet, he showed hostility to active popular involvement in government and appears to have preferred a representative system, with trusted lawmakers making sense of the preferences of the people, based on the American precedent. Gary Kates has argued that Paine, in his early thinking on the French Revolution, was fearful of the impact of mob violence on the potential for reform in Britain. In his speech during the trial of Louis XVI, he explained why he has voted against a popular referendum (*un appel au peuple*) on the fate of the king and reiterated his mistrust of primary assemblies, preferred by the drafters of the “Jacobin” constitution and called for by the Parisian sections. He saw the representatives in

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<sup>533</sup> Hurford Stone suggested that he had played an advisory role to the figures deciding on which international patriots to confer citizenship on.

<sup>534</sup> Mary Wolstonecraft to Ruth Barlow, 1-14<sup>th</sup> February 1793, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 221.

the Convention as having been elected in order to make decisions on behalf of the people.<sup>535</sup> There is little doubt that Thomas Paine's political engagement with France, particularly after his election to the National Convention in 1792, was motivated by his desire to see the institution of a constitution which would safeguard his preferred system of representative government. Paine explained his reasons for his extended stay in France to the French Convention from within the Luxembourg prison in August 1794: "My heart was devoted to all France, and the object to which I applied myself was the Constitution. The Plan which I proposed to the Committee, of which I was a member, is now in the hands of Barère, and it will speak for itself."<sup>536</sup> Yet Paine seems to have been more reticent than his fellow compatriots in courting the possibility of greater law-making powers among ordinary people.

This investigation of the contributions of British radicals to French revolutionary politics will seek in part to determine whether the commonly held view that they were "Girondists" holds up to scrutiny. The categories of "Girondin" and "Jacobin" have been seen as the foundation of later political definition in France but are perhaps less valuable in describing early republican politics in 1792-93, the period during which the British Club was active. The term "Girondin" defines a group of representatives in the National Convention who were abruptly ousted from the seat of national debate and decision-making at the end of May 1793. They have also been alternatively portrayed as moderates, ideologues, elitists, federalists and idealists. Scholars such as William Doyle have been drawn to questioning the accuracy of the traditional distinction between the "moderate" Girondins, committed to the advance of capitalism and commercial society, and the "radical" Montagnards, drawing on classical models, pursuing a pure ideal of revolution, opposed to commercialism and committed to popular governance and austerity. He suggests that it was the Girondins, among whom he includes Thomas Paine, who were the more ideologically tenacious, refusing

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<sup>535</sup> *Le Moniteur Universel*, vol. 15, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1793.

<sup>536</sup> Paine, "To the French National Convention", Luxembourg, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1794, Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 1340.

pragmatic acquiescence with the Parisian sections.<sup>537</sup> It was the Girondins too who followed an idealistic, principled course, while the Jacobins, the true “party”, were committed to block-voting, were older and more experienced, and bowed to the practical necessity of embracing the sections, who had committed the September massacres and deposed the monarchy. The purging of the Convention at the end of May 1793 was a response to this pragmatic realisation.

Alison Patrick has also carried out a painstaking exploration of affinities in the first French republican Convention.<sup>538</sup> Patrick’s quantitative study of voting patterns in the *appels nominaux* during the course of 1793 demonstrates the behaviour of representatives and re-examines traditional perceptions of party allegiance. Her study contributes to undermining the thesis that there was a consistent and clearly identifiable “Girondin” block in the Convention during the course of 1793.<sup>539</sup> Patrick shows that Girondins may have been a rough grouping broadly opposed to the influence of the Parisian sections and with certain values in common, but they were also men who were classed together because of their ties of friendship. This was the case for Roland, Brissot and Pierre Vergniaud. Patrick points out that while Vergniaud was seen as a member of the Girondin grouping, he also voted in favour of the death of the king. Voting for execution in the trial was generally interpreted as a sign of sympathy with the Montagne.<sup>540</sup> Michael Sydenham has also argued that the divisions between Girondins and Montagnards were more pragmatic than ideological. Historians have expressed doubt

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<sup>537</sup> William Doyle, *Officers, Nobles and Revolutionaries, Essays on Eighteenth-Century France* (London: Hambledon, 1995).

<sup>538</sup> Alison Patrick, *The Men of the First French Republic: Political Alignments in the National Convention of 1792* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins U P, 1972). Patrick’s study, as she readily admits, cannot pretend to account for behaviour before January 1793 as there were no *appels nominaux* before this date. The period immediately after the declaration of the republic is therefore immensely difficult to qualify in terms of party allegiance and behaviour.

<sup>539</sup> See in particular the chapter entitled “The Problem of Political Divisions in the Convention,” *The Men of the First French Republic* 3-36.

<sup>540</sup> See Vergniaud's speech during the trial of Louis XVI: “Quant à moi, mon choix est fait. Que Louis périsse, que le peuple soit sauvé, et que tous les maux dont on nous menace retombent ensuite sur ma tête, s’il le faut. Je les brave ; on n’est jamais malheureux quand on s’est sacrifié pour son pays.” *Le Moniteur Universel*, vol. 14, Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1793.

therefore concerning the usefulness of political categorisation. Some have suggested that such terms were propaganda tools serving immediate political purposes than true determinants of principle or affiliation. We may wonder how relevant it is therefore to talk about British “Girondins.”

Not only have British radicals been associated with a perceived political faction, but they have also been considered as ideologues, idealists and enthusiasts, overwhelmed by revolutionary fervour, their initial support for the Revolution gradually wearing off, to be replaced by a more general sense of disillusionment as Terror became widespread. For Whitney Jones, David Williams’ case “is surely the embodiment of that pattern of transition from euphoric approval to disillusioned discomfiture which typified so much of British reaction to events in France.”<sup>541</sup> Commentators from the time noted this trend towards dejected withdrawal from the Revolution among British eye-witnesses. Thomas Rickman wrote of Thomas Paine:

It is well known that Mr. Paine always lamented the turn affairs took in France, and grieved at the period we are now adverting to, when corrupt influence was rapidly infecting every department of the state. He saw the jealousies and animosities that were breeding, and that a turbulent faction was forming among the people that would first enslave and ultimately overwhelm even the convention itself.<sup>542</sup>

In later biographies and the autobiographical writings of radicals themselves, enthusiasm for the republican turn was sometimes revised and written out of personal histories.<sup>543</sup> Not all British radicals traded fervour for resignation however, and some, though admittedly a small minority, even found ways of rationalising the Terror through taking a long historical perspective or blaming the descent into violence on the decadent social and political structures of the Ancien Regime.

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<sup>541</sup> Jones, *The Anvil and the Hammer* 113.

<sup>542</sup> Rickman, *The Life of Thomas Paine* 137-38.

<sup>543</sup> The emergence of the first wave of Romanticism is seen as having been initially inspired by the Revolution in France before the movement turned to more internal, national emblems.

Members of the British Club have also been seen as Paineites, followers of the ideas and writings of the author of *Rights of Man*. Moncure Conway christened the British Club a “Paine Club”, seeing Paine as the principal convenor whom the other members “gathered around.”<sup>544</sup> Wil Verhoeven, describing the context in which Gilbert Imlay arrived in Paris in February 1793, has recently suggested that “a constant stream of Revolution tourists, as well as British spies, would come to get a hearing with the notorious guru of British radicalism.”<sup>545</sup> There is some credence in the argument that members of the British Club were influenced by Paine. Sampson Perry and Robert Merry, among others, seem to have maintained strong affinities with the veteran radical. British Club members had also supported the widespread circulation of Part Two of *Rights of Man* as members of the SCI. Activist residents of Paris, embroiled in daily debate on theories of citizenship and the place of the people in government, would surely have been receptive to Paine’s tenets.

Yet the very notion of “Paineite” loses much of its resonance when transplanted to the French context. In Britain, the term was synonymous with a certain degree of democratic thought, sympathy for natural rights theory, the denial of the existence of a British constitution, a cult of the present over precedent and the elevation of France as a model of liberty, deriving from Paine’s influential work, *Rights of Man*. Yet in France Paine’s influence and reception were very different. By 1793, his views were considered less subversive and part of the mainstream of revolutionary and republican thinking. He was perceived as on the radical republican wing after June 1791, when he became involved in the drafting of a republican manifesto, but was discredited and derided after his contribution to the trial of the king in January 1793, when he voted for the banishment of Louis XVI rather than death. Paine’s official duties in the Convention meant that he became associated with decisions which could be held against him in the vengeful climate of 1793-94. He also showed a firm

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<sup>544</sup> Moncure D. Conway ed., *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, vols. 3 and 4 (1893; New York, AMS Press, 1967) xii.

<sup>545</sup> Verhoeven, *Gilbert Imlay* 150.



preference for representative government at a time when his fellow British Club members were discussing the possibility of direct democratic models of government in line with the open debate occurring on the subject in France. While Paine developed his theory of representative government, in line with his Girondin allies, other British activists bluntly rejected the term “representation”. Equally, Paine, though a key ally of the British Club who facilitated appeals to the central revolutionary bodies and who regularly dined and debated at White's Hotel, was not the chief figure in the Club. While he did arrange meetings between countrymen and the administration, he was careful not to get too closely involved in expatriate politics, considering his responsibilities as a representative of the French nation and member of the constitutional committee as precluding his active involvement in a grassroots associational culture.

Finally, the views and petitions of radicals involved in French politics have been seen as lacking political weight, their place on the margins of political activity signalling their insignificance in the wider revolutionary debate. While British radicals may have had a peripheral impact on events and decisions taken by the French authorities, from their own point of view they were taking part in debates which had international leverage and which they could influence materially. British observers of Revolution did not see their role as a minor one. In the months of 1792 and 1793, radicals saw their decision to go to Paris as one which was in keeping with their ideological positions and part of a universal momentum. They had already well-established contacts with radical-leaning clubs and individuals in France and considered themselves as legitimate actors in a movement of European importance.

What will be emphasised in the discussion of British contributions to the constitutional debate is the heterogeneity of the political viewpoints of members and associates of the British Club. This will consolidate the argument put forward in chapter two that while there

were clear associational rules governing the British Club, the Club's culture allowed for dissension, discord and free thinking on most aspects relating to the Revolution and its impact on Britain. This diversity will be illustrated in particular through a close examination of a selection of tracts written during the discussions on the republican constitution and published between September 1792 and early 1793. The texts penned by British residents represent a wide spectrum of opinions and approaches and demonstrate an openness to influences and traditions which went beyond factional interest, friendship or national bias. In late 1792 and early 1793 there was still scope for disagreement in political opinion and over the ideal form of a new constitution. Such discord, as emphasised in the previous chapter, was considered an essential facet of a healthy, enlightened culture in the late eighteenth century. The tolerance of dissension however proved problematic once foreigners became themselves the target of accusations of counter-revolution.

### **III.3.1 British Involvement in the Constitution Debate**

Events in France continued to dominate political exchange in Britain during 1792. Two months after the establishment of the republic in France, a Revolution Society gathering of 16<sup>th</sup> November 1792 proposed a series of toasts, the thirty-first of which included “that the new constitution of France be the most perfect that the human mind can create, that it serve as a model for all nations!”<sup>546</sup> Much was expected of the new republican constitution among radical reformers in Britain, particularly since the compromises that had been accepted in the framing of the American constitution had disappointed some. The institution of a presidential office in the American republic was perceived by some as a quasi-monarchical departure from the early promise of the Continental Conventions, despite John Adams' justification of the federal arrangement in his *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*

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<sup>546</sup> *Le Moniteur Universel*, vol. 14, Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1792.

*of America*.<sup>547</sup> Blum suggests, “It was as if the fall of Louis XVI released great surges of authorial energy that had remained in check as long as the dynasty was still, however marginally, on the throne.”<sup>548</sup> This was certainly the case for British expatriates, who were prompted to publish their thoughts in the wake of the creation of the republic.

Yet despite the hopes both among European intellectual circles and within the French nation, the constitution’s vulnerability was acknowledged from the outset, for different reasons than 1791. The 1792 constitution was being drafted against a backdrop not only of internecine conflict within the Convention and the country at large, but also European conflict and prospective war with Britain. Captain Monro wrote in early January 1793:

The prospect of a war with England of course creates a good deal of conversation here, the people speak for and against it according to the party they are of. The King’s friends of course wish it, in hopes of creating a counter-revolution; and the Republicans sensible how materially it may affect their strange Constitution wish by every means to avoid it...It is the opinion of most people here that [war] will effectually ruin France and their new Constitution.<sup>549</sup>

The trial of the king and its symbolic resonance across monarchical Europe quickly displaced the constitutional question on the national political agenda. Thus the constitution remained in the spotlight for only a brief period, roughly from late September 1792 through to early January 1793. The task of devising a constitution for a novel republic provoked controversy and, when coupled with the outcome of the king’s trial and the persistent fear of foreign threat and a kingly conspiracy, deepened political rifts. Yet, those who addressed the Convention in late 1792 and early 1793, including British spectators, formulated their views on the future constitution with a legitimate belief in its eventual realisation. They trusted in its capacity to lay the foundations of a republic which would not only provide stability for the new French nation, but also serve as a beacon for republican initiatives throughout the enlightened

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<sup>547</sup> Adams was on a diplomatic mission to London when he wrote his defence of the American constitution. The three-volume work was published in New York and Philadelphia in 1787 and defended the constitutional settlement from European criticism, asserting in the process the primacy of representation.

<sup>548</sup> Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue* 182.

<sup>549</sup> Captain Monro, Paris 7<sup>th</sup> January 1793, *The Despatches of Earl Gower* 273.

world.<sup>550</sup> It is this intersection of the desire to provide a workable and inspirational settlement for France and at the same time encourage the spread of those influences to Britain and the rest of Europe which filter through the writings of British observers.

The creation of a constitution and the clean slate of the republic provoked a series of collective delegations, petitions and donations as well as individual interventions. According to Alger, “One of the most striking features of the Revolutionary Assemblies was the stream of deputations, donors and suppliants, who formed interludes in the debates...and Englishmen, like other foreigners, caught the infection.”<sup>551</sup> Money, guns, shoes and buckles were sent by British donors and, in return, the Convention debated whether or not to confer citizenship on them. More often than not they decided simply to offer thanks. William Beckett sent 200 francs “in token of universal brotherhood having effaced the frontiers traced by despots.”<sup>552</sup> Robert Rayment, along with two others, donated a sum of money to the families of those who fell in the attack on the Tuileries.<sup>553</sup> Major Cartwright sent a collection of political pamphlets to the committee drafting the constitution and Jeremy Bentham offered his book on the prison system. There was a sense that wholesale renovation was possible. The majority of British corresponding societies voiced general ideological affinity with the republican turn of the Revolution and articulated the hope it inspired for other nations

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<sup>550</sup> “Modern” republics were defined in opposition to “ancient” republics or city-states such as Athens. While in ancient republicanism, monarchy as an institution was inextricably bound up with tyranny and despotism, in “modern” republicanism, contained monarchical rule was acceptable as a way of ensuring stability and continuity. Whereas democracy in ancient terms was translated as popular participation in the making of laws, democracy under modern republican rule was representative. This was the form of government chosen by the nascent American republic and also the form preferred by the drafters of the French constitution of 1791, the Girondin constitution of 1793 and the longer-lasting Thermidorian constitution of 1795. Only some members of the Cordeliers Club espoused a more classical form of republicanism in the early 1790s, entirely free of a monarchical element and reliant on direct democracy. The republics of the modern era were thus, apart from the short-lived period of Jacobin ascendancy in France, characterised by realism, pragmatism and pessimism rather than idealism. Man’s complex and flawed nature prompted revolutionary thinkers to favour compromise, limited public intervention and the delegation of sovereignty. For Antoine Compagnon, modern republics were inspired more by pragmatic counter-revolutionary compromise than the idealism at the heart of the Revolution itself. See Compagnon, *Les Antimodernes: de Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

<sup>551</sup> Alger, *Englishmen* 49.

<sup>552</sup> Alger, *Englishmen* 52.

<sup>553</sup> Rayment makes reference to his support for the widows and children of the Tuileries in his prison declaration. See AN F7/4774/88.

struggling under the yoke of tyranny and servitude. The SCI, the Society of the Friends of the People, the Revolution Society, and the LCS all sent men or addresses of support to the National Convention. Joel Barlow and John Frost were nominated as delegates for the London SCI, and the British Club also sent a congratulatory address to the Convention on 28<sup>th</sup> November.<sup>554</sup> The fact that the club's address was delivered alongside the SCI declaration once again highlights the close cooperation between the two societies.

This continued enthusiasm for the Revolution unsettled those in power. Bland Burges warned that members of the English and Scottish contingent in Paris were “at present employed in writing a justification of democracy and an invective against monarchy in the abstract which is to be printed at Paris, and dispersed throughout England and Ireland. The names of some of them are Watts and Wilson, of Manchester, Oswald, a Scotsman; Stone, an Englishman, and Macintosh, who wrote against Burke.”<sup>555</sup> It is not clear which tract is being referred to, if indeed it existed. Oswald did write a justification of direct democracy printed by John Hurford Stone, but it is far from certain that such a collective text was published, excepting the British Club address, which was drawn up and read to the Convention two months later.<sup>556</sup>

For Alger, foreign activists' willingness to offer their thoughts on the French constitution debate of 1792-93 was as a sign of the tenacious cosmopolitan openness which accompanied the early idealism of the Revolution. In the enduring spirit of international brotherhood “all the world was invited to offer suggestions for the constitution, and two Englishmen – George Edward[s] and Robert Merry – accordingly did so.”<sup>557</sup> Thomas Paine,

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<sup>554</sup> See AN C11/278/40.

<sup>555</sup> Mr. Burges to Lord Auckland, Whitehall, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1792, *Journal and Correspondence of Lord Auckland* 2: 438.

<sup>556</sup> What is worthy of note, however, is Burges's choice of the term “abstract”. British expatriate residents were seen as adhering to the French penchant for theorising, something that appalled members of the British elite.

<sup>557</sup> Alger, *Glimpses of the French Revolution* 61-62. George Edwards wrote a tract entitled, *Idées pour former une nouvelle constitution et pour assurer la prospérité et le bonheur de la France et d'autres nations* (1793), published by L'imprimerie de H. J. Jansen, Cloître Saint-Honoré. Edwards also addressed an accompanying letter to the legislators of the Convention, entitled, *Adresse au Corps Législatif contenant l'exposé d'un nouveau*

addressing the people of France for the first time as member of the Convention in September 1792, likewise saw no narrowing of the internationalist spirit: “I feel my felicity increased by seeing the barrier broken down that divided patriotism by spots of earth, and limited citizenship to the soil, like vegetation.”<sup>558</sup> Joel Barlow petitioned the Convention in September 1792 with his advice on the new constitutional settlement. He asserted, “I not only consider all mankind as forming but one great family, and therefore bound by a natural sympathy to regard each others’ happiness as making part of their own; but I contemplate the French nation at this moment as standing in the place of the whole.”<sup>559</sup> For foreign patriots the declaration of the republic was the proof that the Revolution continued to have resonance for nations outside France.

Yet the motivations behind the National Convention's invitation to foreigners to contribute to the discussion on the new constitution were not entirely disinterested. Like the foreign nominations for French citizenship brought before the Convention and ratified in August and September 1792, the apparent cosmopolitanism of the deliberations also masked the underlying expedient concerns of the revolutionary authorities. At the time the Convention was loosely dominated by deputies from the Gironde who were seeking to legitimise the deposition of the king, the establishment of a republic and the decision to declare war on Austria and Prussia in the face of mounting domestic and international unrest.<sup>560</sup> Armand de Kersaint drew on the examples of Priestley, Paine, Cooper and Watt during his speech in the

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*système politique* which was written from the Hôtel Anglais, passage des petits-pères. Edwards is less well-known than the other British petitioners as, though a resident of White's Hotel until July 1793, when he applied successfully for a passport out of France, he did not sign the British Club address nor was his name mentioned by Monro in his observations.

<sup>558</sup> Paine, “Address to the People of France”, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1792, Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2:538.

<sup>559</sup> Barlow, *A Letter to the National Convention of France, on the defects in the constitution of 1791 and the extent of the amendments which ought to be applied* (London: Johnson, 1792) 4-5.

<sup>560</sup> As Michael Rapport points out, the decree of 26<sup>th</sup> August 1792, naturalising eighteen prominent foreign sympathisers of the Revolution, was both an expression of internationalist cosmopolitanism and a declaration of France’s leadership in promoting the rights of man. On 25<sup>th</sup> September 1792 others were added, including Thomas Cooper, John Horne Tooke, John Oswald, Thomas Christie, Joseph Warner and Joel Barlow. Priestley was described by the revolutionary Chabot as “cosmopolitan *and therefore* French.” (Quoted in Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship* 138).

Convention in advance of war with Britain, using their persecution in their home country as a diplomatic weapon to justify the outbreak of hostilities.<sup>561</sup> Internationalism had pragmatic uses therefore, yet this international openness was beginning to come into conflict with the evolving category of the “outsider”. For in order for war to be waged successfully, the Revolution and the French nation had to be defined in opposition to the British state and its people.

British residents were aware of their symbolic value. They were conscious that, while international cosmopolitanism and the universality of the rights of man may still have been the order of the day in late 1792, the early euphoria and relative consensus engendered by the fall of the Bastille and the commemorative *Fête de la Fédération* the following July were giving way to a more complex set of political alliances which would demand greater subtlety from foreign patriots in the way they engaged with the Revolution. Thomas Paine acknowledged that he was beginning his term of office in the Convention in September 1792 “in the stormy hour of difficulties,” while an informant for the British government had learnt of mixed views among the British patriots in Paris on the progress of the Revolution.<sup>562</sup> Charles Ross pointed out to his Whitehall contacts how William Choppin had “mentioned he was in company with Paine in Paris the preceding day. Paine was then going to dine with Lord Lauderdale, he exults in the success of the French arms, but laments at the instability of the Convention.”<sup>563</sup> David Williams, writing his *Observations sur la dernière constitution de la France, avec des vues pour la formation de la nouvelle constitution* at the behest of Brissot

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<sup>561</sup> See the speech by Kersaint in the National Convention: “Qui peut voir la liberté de la presse et la liberté des opinions bannies de cette terre où ces deux palladium de la liberté publique ont été forgés par le génie tutélaire des droits de l’homme, le philosophe Priestley persécuté, Thomas Payne proscrit, Cooper et Walker assiégés dans leurs maisons pour avoir cru que les hommes sont égaux et libres ?” *Le Moniteur Universel*, vol. 14, Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1793.

<sup>562</sup> Paine, “Address to the People of France”, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1792, Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 538.

<sup>563</sup> The information from Choppin is contained in a report from Ross to Evan Nepean, Friday 13<sup>th</sup> November 1792, PRO TS 11/965/3510/A2.

and Roland in December and January 1793, was conscious of the delicate balance of power in the Convention and in the country at large.

There were also those in the Convention itself who were beginning to temper their internationalist fervour. Alger contended that its membership “was tired of the nonsense of British addresses, perceiving the insignificance of the persons who presented them.”<sup>564</sup> Robespierre offered a derisive assessment of petitions of support for the republic in the wake of the judgment meted out to Louis XVI: “The punishment of the tyrant made the principles of equality real. Since then a great number of those who used to blaspheme against the republic have been reduced to rendering homage to it, as hypocrisy renders homage to virtue, by adopting its forms and stammering its language.”<sup>565</sup> International cosmopolitanism was still central to republican discourse and useful in helping the republic to legitimise its existence. Yet there was increasing wariness of the motivations of foreigners who remained within the French nation. Protestations of international solidarity began to be interpreted as hollow attempts at articulating support. Foreign patriots had to negotiate with these pressures when voicing their views on the new constitutional settlement.

Alger identified two British contributions to the discussion on the creation of a republican constitution in France. Robert Merry’s *Réflexions politiques sur la nouvelle constitution qui se prépare en France, adressées à la république* was penned in October 1792, and the tract by George Edwards, entitled *Idées pour former une nouvelle constitution*, was published in early 1793. Yet Merry and Edwards were not the only British activists to take an interest in the constitution and write tracts to be offered to the drafting committee. John Oswald, a militant member of the British Club, also presented his views in a short pamphlet entitled *Government of the People, or a Sketch of a Constitution for the Universal Commonwealth*, printed at John Hurford Stone’s English Press in 1793. The Welsh Dissenting

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<sup>564</sup> Alger, *Englishmen* 99.

<sup>565</sup> Quoted in Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue* 195.



reformer David Williams, invited over to France by Brissot, also expressed his opinion in *Observations sur la dernière constitution de la France, avec des vues pour la formation de la nouvelle constitution*. Finally, although Joel Barlow was an American citizen, there is a case for considering his *Letter to the National Convention on the Defects in the Constitution of 1791, and the Extent of the Amendments which Ought to be Applied* in the context of British radical representations in view of his close involvement prior to arriving in Paris with the London reforming clubs, and his role as a delegate for the SCI.<sup>566</sup> Richard Price's nephew, George Cadogan Morgan, a witness at the fall of the Bastille, also published an anonymous account of the fall of the French monarchy and urged the French to institute a republican form of government. Entitled, *An address to the Jacobine and other patriotic societies of the French urging the establishment of a republican form of government*, his account argued for the abolition of monarchy but stepped back from calling for the execution of the king.<sup>567</sup> The Whig politician, Capel Loffe, who was a member of the Revolution Society and a follower of Rousseau, also offered his views on the constitution. The spy Charles Ross suggested that "Clio has received a letter from Mr Capel Loffe who informed him he had written (twenty five sheets) to the Convention, his sentiments respecting their form of Government."<sup>568</sup> British activists may also have had some unofficial involvement with the work of the constitutional committee. Sampson Perry recalled how he dined with a number of the members of the committee during his stay in Paris: "This party was formed, not from convivial consideration, but to call together the committee for drawing up the plan of a

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<sup>566</sup> David Williams' tract, *Observations sur la dernière constitution de la France, avec des vues pour la formation de la nouvelle constitution* was translated by Citizen Maudru and printed at the Imprimerie du Cercle Social in 1793. The original manuscript is conserved at Cardiff Public Library. Joel Barlow's tract was translated into French and published as *Lettre à la Convention nationale de France sur les vices de la Constitution de 1791 et sur l'étendue des amendements à y porter, traduite de l'anglais*.

<sup>567</sup> Cadogan Morgan's letters have recently been edited and published. See Mary-Ann Constantine & Paul Framed eds. *Travels in Revolutionary France and A Journey Across America*. (Cardiff: U of Wales P, forthcoming 2012). Morgan's experience is also discussed in Mary-Ann Constantine, "The Welsh in Revolutionary Paris".

<sup>568</sup> Although the Whig politician seems to have provided the Convention with his views, I have not found any surviving copies. See Ross to Nepean, Friday November 13<sup>th</sup> 1792, TS 11/965/3510/A2.

constitution, of which, four of the persons I have mentioned were members, the other two came in as we rose from the table, and, after taking coffee, the whole six retired into a closet to their work.”<sup>569</sup> The work of the committee may have been carried out in the wings of sociable gatherings. Such occasions provided opportunities for those who were not members of the committee, including visiting radicals, to converse with the leaders responsible for drawing up the plan.

### III.3.1.1 Representative Democracy or Popular Democracy?

The extent of popular involvement in law-making was a key issue in the debates on the different French constitutions. While the February 1793 version limited the direct involvement of the people in the legislative process, the Jacobin draft of spring of the same year made some provision for popular assent. Yet by the time of the institution of the Thermidorian constitution in 1795, the debate had ended and “the republic which the Directory tried to create was built precisely upon the exclusion of this ‘people.’”<sup>570</sup> Cordeliers writer Théodore Le Sueur presented a tract entitled *Idées sur l'espèce de gouvernement populaire qui pourrait convenir à un pays de l'étendue et de la population présumée de la France* to Jérôme Pétion in the autumn of 1792. Rachel Hammersley suggests that “the work was concerned with refuting the pessimistic views of Montesquieu, Rousseau and many revolutionaries by demonstrating how a democratic republic could be built in late eighteenth-century France.”<sup>571</sup> Le Sueur, like other Cordeliers activists whose political opinions had been cultivated in the midst of popular politics, favoured some form of direct democracy over the representative model preferred by members of the Cercle Social.<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 11.

<sup>570</sup> Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes: Popular Movements in France and Britain During the French Revolution*. London: Libris, 1988) xviii.

<sup>571</sup> Rachel Hammersley, *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans: The Cordeliers Club 1790-1794* (Rochester: Boydell, 2005) 124.

<sup>572</sup> For a study of the relatively unknown Le Sueur, see Hammersley, *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans* pp. 116-35.

Those who petitioned the French constitutional committee in 1792-93 drew on different intellectual traditions and experiences and were heavily influenced by what they heard and saw in Paris. No consensus emerged among the members of the British Club, though it does seem that the petitioners fell into two broad groups. There were those who were generally in favour of representative government, modelled on the American example rather than what they saw as the decadent British version, and those who preferred a system of direct democracy and greater active participation by the people in political decision-making. The former group was more closely associated with the thinking of individuals who later became known as the Girondins – men such as Brissot and Condorcet – while the latter took inspiration from activists in the Cordeliers Club – such as Le Sueur, Robert and Desmoulin – who adhered to more classical definitions of government of the people and popular citizenship. Some Cordeliers activists would later go on to take part in the Jacobin ascendancy of 1793-94.

The place of the people in government, law-making and the constitutional process was a question which generated a significant amount of written production among the British residents of Paris at the turn of 1792–93. As Sampson Perry wrote in 1796, “the arguments for and against the proposed articles of the [monarchical] constitution, as offered at various times by the committee, though containing a considerable portion of reason and eloquence, are become less important to the reader, from the total supersession of that constitution by the republican one which succeeded it too [*sic*] years after.”<sup>573</sup> Among all the issues on the agenda in the constitution debates, the question of the role of the people and the adequacy or not of representative government was the one which most animated British writing. Coming from a country which was hailed as a beacon of liberty and freedom by its ruling elites, radicals showed their opposition to this discourse, arguing that the British system of

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<sup>573</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 153.

representation was riddled with corruption and decadence and at odds with the rights of man. Günther Lottes has suggested that “while English radicals could and had to refer to an existing representative system, French radicals breathed the purer air of theoretical discourse.”<sup>574</sup> British radicals had to reconcile the reality of their own experience of representative government with the largely theoretical landscape of constitutional discourse in France after the fall of the Ancien Regime and the deposition of the monarchy. Many of British expatriates’ contemporaries back in Britain had vehemently criticised the inadequacy of the pretended representation provided by the House of Commons. In France, British reformers had greater latitude to evoke the possibility of a radically different form of government. Not only were they writing and publishing in France, but they could package their thoughts on reform in Britain as reflections on the French system, thereby avoiding accusations of sedition. The perceived corruption of British representation, with its roots in the era of the short-lived English republic, also arose in the debate in the Convention during the trial of Louis XVI. During the debate, Barère stood up to differentiate between the popular origins of the French Revolution and the elite revolution in 1640s England, dismissing the “shapeless shadow of representation” that was established under the Protector Oliver Cromwell.<sup>575</sup> The heritage of British representation was therefore influential in the discussion on the French constitution.

By the mid-to-late eighteenth century, the revolutionary Whig discourse of the 1690s had been absorbed into the mainstream political language of Britain’s ruling elite, and was integral to the way in which the political classes defined the British system of government.

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<sup>574</sup> Günther Lottes, “Revolution and Political Culture: An Anglo-French Comparison,” Mark Philp ed., *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* 81.

<sup>575</sup> “L’événement actuel ne ressemble en rien à l’événement de l’Angleterre. A Paris, le peuple a lui-même détrôné le roi et l’a fait prisonnier en l’accusant. A Londres, ce fut le parti de Cromwell, et il fallut empêcher que le peuple ne s’élevât contre cette faction, qui avait contre elle une grande partie de la nation anglaise. Ici c’est une grande représentation nationale qui doit prononcer: en Angleterre, c’était une ombre informe de représentation, ou plutôt une commission nommée par l’infâme et ambitieux protecteur!” Speech by Barère, published in *Le Moniteur Universel*, vol. 14, Monday 7<sup>th</sup> January 1793.

Britain was the pinnacle of freedom and liberty. Tyranny had been suppressed peacefully and moderately through the 1688 settlement, and the rights of freeborn Englishmen had been secured. Englishmen benefited from a parliamentary system which restrained the monarch, had the right to expect trial by jury and could claim freedom of expression. Whigs continued to insist on the need to watch over the constitutional settlement to guard against abuse, yet any change was restorative rather than innovative. In the 1690s and the early eighteenth century, revolutionary thinkers of the 1640s had been shoehorned into a secular tradition which eschewed all violent change in constitutional matters. England's revolutionary past was conveniently dismissed and those authors who were not entirely tainted with regicide blood, could be moulded to fit more moderate ends. The British constitution was seen as the most perfect constitution in the modern world. Montesquieu had come to prefer the British mixed constitution after failing to find a working example of good republican government during his European travels, and he was not alone among Enlightenment thinkers to hold up Britain's system of government as a model to other states.<sup>576</sup>

This carefully cultivated and widely accepted vision of British liberty was increasingly brought into question from the 1760s onwards, particularly with the advent of the American Revolution. It was the French Revolution, however, which proved the catalyst for a significant challenge to the established British order, a challenge which brought into question Whiggism's status as the party of dissent and renewal. Charles Fox argued during the 1790s that although Whigs did not favour radical or revolutionary action, they held up their prerogative to protect the British constitution from incursions and to improve it in order to safeguard liberty. Edmund Burke's outspoken criticism of the events of 1789 provoked a crisis at the heart of the party. Foxite Whigs opposed Burke's apparent defence of royal despotism in France though they refrained from openly advocating French remedies in

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<sup>576</sup> See also above p. 44 for a short discussion of Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois*.

Britain, while the pejoratively labelled “New Whigs”, under the leadership of Charles Grey, founded the Society of the Friends of the People and tabled a more radical reform agenda. Charles Fox argued that support for the French did not necessarily entail support for changing the British government apparatus, in the way that Paine advocated. Yet Fox’s tacit support for Grey and the more reformist fringe of the Whig party provoked accusations of Jacobinism from within the Pitt ministry. For a brief period, animated by the success of the French Revolution, Grey and other Whig members of the Friends of the People began to advocate reform of the British constitution, and found themselves on common ground with emerging popular radical societies who were arguing for more far-reaching root-and-branch reform. Yet the Society of the Friends of the People, was, in fundamentals, less about attempting to secure real reform than trying to preclude more deep-seated institutional change of the type supported by the popular reforming societies. Paine spotted this and wasted no time in levelling such accusations at his Whig adversaries.<sup>577</sup>

Yet despite Thomas Paine’s preference for representative democracy over hereditary rule, Paine's fellow British residents of Paris did not uniformly accept the representative model in their articulation of the most suitable form of government for the new French republic. Robert Merry and John Oswald, both of whom were closely associated with Paine in Paris, drew on more democratic notions of government and voiced scepticism about the merits of representation as a way of conveying the will of the people. This raises the possibility that Paine’s adherence to representative modes of government, at a time when his close British associates were questioning them, was not only a matter of pure principle. Paine may also have shown faith in the friends he had courted in his first years in Paris in the late 1780s and in an American model of government he was reluctant to criticise. It also hints that

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<sup>577</sup> On the way in which the Society of the Friends of the People gradually diverged from popular reform, see above pp. 49-53.

Paine held popular involvement in government with greater suspicion than some of his countrymen.

Disillusionment with the British apparatus of government was a binding force which united British radicals in Paris. It was perhaps the most powerful motor driving their political engagement in the French constitution debate. The British system provided a concrete example of representative arrangements gone awry. Yet, on the matter of which type of system would best suit the French situation, British radicals did not agree. While in Britain calls for reform had to be contained within the existing constitutional framework, for those British radicals in France, the republican turn of the Revolution allowed many of these constraints to be lifted, and open republican sentiments could be voiced without fear of reprisals.

### **III.3.2 Robert Merry, *Réflexions politiques sur la nouvelle constitution qui se prépare en France, adressées à la république* (1792)**

An enthusiast of the French Revolution, Robert Merry went to France to witness the events of 1789 before returning again in 1791 and settling for a longer spell in 1792. He was briefly involved in the activities of the British Club, attending weekly meetings at White's Hotel and presiding over a gathering of the Club on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1792. David Erdman considers Merry a member of the central revolutionary committee of the British Club and this would be confirmed by his place on the list of loyal British citizens drawn up in March 1793 by Merry's own translator, Nicholas Madgett.<sup>578</sup> Opposition press editors at *The World* newspaper reported, "Mr MERRY is reported to have enlisted into a little Corps of JACOBINS at PARIS to support the CONSTITUTION of FRANCE – *As it was in the beginning, but never will be*

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<sup>578</sup> David Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières* 234. Erdman refers to an announcement in *The Manchester Heralld* of 1<sup>st</sup> December 1792 which named Merry, Hurford Stone, Fitzgerald and Paine as among the individuals worthy of attention.

again.”<sup>579</sup> According to Alger, Merry’s tract on the constitutional question juxtaposes France’s emerging status as a beacon of liberty with England’s inexorable moral decline.<sup>580</sup> Alger evoked the tract’s final crescendo, celebrating the emergence of a new Eden of republican plenty in France: “In Paris he wrote odes on the Revolution, [and] also in 1793 a pamphlet in which he spoke of England as rushing towards an ignominious fall, while France was rapidly rising to a pinnacle of glory and splendour, unmatched even by Athens at the meridian of its greatness.”<sup>581</sup> In the copy held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the printed date of 1792 is crossed out and replaced with 1793. This is possibly why Alger gave the latter date. Yet it is more likely that Merry wrote the tract in October 1792. In the final paragraphs of the text, the author refers to the considerable advances in the “two months” since the storming of the Tuileries on 10<sup>th</sup> August.<sup>582</sup> It was therefore a relatively early contribution to the constitution debate, following that of Barlow, whose *Letter to the National Convention* was published in September 1792. David Williams’ tract was in print from January 1793, George Edwards’ offering also came out the same year and John Oswald’s pamphlet was published by John Hurford Stone in early 1793. Although Alger’s Manichean evaluation is an over-simplification of Merry’s treatise, the historian is right to highlight the comparison made between the decline of Britain and the progress of France. Latent in the tract is a deep anxiety over the unreformed British political system. The treatise was also mentioned in *The Monthly Magazine* obituary of Merry of April 1799, though it seems to have attracted little attention in Britain:

While in the city, and under the invitation given by the French legislature to all foreigners, to favour them with their sentiments on the erecting a free constitution; he wrote a short treatise in English on the nature of free government. It was translated into French by Mr. Madget

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<sup>579</sup> *The World*, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1792, quoted in Werkmeister, *A Newspaper History of England* 93.

<sup>580</sup> I have not found any surviving copies of Merry’s original English manuscript version. In the absence of this document, I have worked exclusively from the published version in French.

<sup>581</sup> Alger, *Englishmen* 101.

<sup>582</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques sur la nouvelle constitution* 18.



[sic], and presented in the same manner as the *Laurel of Liberty* to the National Convention: “honourable mention” being made of it on their journals.<sup>583</sup>

As a poet, playwright and journalist, turned international patriot, Merry played no official role in the French administration and was able to adopt a position of relative independence on the issues he addressed in *Réflexions politiques*. Not adhering to a particular political or philosophical current, he provides a series of ideas drawing on Enlightenment and proto-democratic traditions as well as an empirical assessment of the British system. He offers a reading of the French constitution debate which excludes all reference to the previous arrangement of 1791. Although Merry’s purpose is to aid French legislators in drawing up a constitutional settlement based on principles of pacifism, liberty and direct democracy, free from historical antecedents, he also aims to illuminate the frailties of the British arrangement and bolster the case for constitutional reform in his home country.

Though his text is directed at the members of the constitutional committee, Merry refrains from explicitly addressing his observations to the representative body in the title. His thoughts are for the republic in its widest, and perhaps most democratic, sense, and potentially for republican sympathisers outside France. Neither does he make specific reference to the constitution of 1791, unlike David Williams and Joel Barlow. Williams dissected the 1791 text article by article, making it the organisational template of his pamphlet, while Barlow’s point of departure was the recent history of France and the 1791 solution suggested by the National Assembly. Barlow wrote, “Though while searching out the defective parts of their work, without losing sight of the difficulties under which it was formed, we may find more occasion to admire its wisdom.”<sup>584</sup> In contrast, Merry’s text is entirely removed from the immediate political landscape. It embraces the novelty sweeping France and sees the

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<sup>583</sup> “Biographical notice of Mr. Robert Merry,” *The Monthly Magazine*, vol. 7 (April 1799) 255-56. The “Mr. Madget” mentioned in the notice is Nicholas Madgett, a member of the British Club of Jacobins in Paris and translator for the revolutionary government during the Terror. Madgett suggested drawing up a list of loyal and trustworthy British citizens in Paris in March 1793, a list on which Merry’s name figured.

<sup>584</sup> Barlow, *A Letter to the National Constitution of France* 6.

republican turn as a real opportunity for fundamental change, unencumbered by the piecemeal compromises of the past. While Merry presents his views as “reflections” or “thoughts,” alluding to the realm of ideas and philosophical abstraction, Barlow’s address was in the form of an official “letter” and Williams offered his “observations”, conclusions drawn from scrutiny of the existing arrangement and close adherence to its discursive structure. For Barlow, “it is a perpetual conflict between principle and precedent, – between the manly truths of nature, which we all must feel, and the learned subtilities of statesmen, about which we have been taught to reason.”<sup>585</sup> Merry envisions the new French constitution as anchored in ideas alone and therefore applicable to other nations intent on reform.

Merry’s influences are varied and he draws on different traditions depending on the issue he is addressing. On questions such as capital punishment, the arts and sciences and the perfectibility of human society, his proposals fuse with those of French philosophers such as Condorcet, whom he knew personally, and he appears as the heir of an Enlightenment tradition with an essentially optimistic view of the potential for human regeneration. Yet, on the preferred mode of government, the question of representation and the people’s role in law-making, which are the principal foci of the pamphlet, his views diverge from Girondin views of enlightened commercialism and the superiority of representative government. Unlike Condorcet, Merry was wary of the rule of educated elites, identifying considerable scope for corruption and abuse in such a system. In his articulation of an ideal form of government, he reiterates some of the arguments being put forward by core members of the Cordeliers Club, who were committed to devising a far-reaching democratic form of political programme.<sup>586</sup> Similarly, in his use of classical texts and examples of the virtue of the republics of Antiquity, Merry echoes Cordeliers activists and gestures towards the more hard-line Jacobin proponents

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<sup>585</sup> Barlow, *A Letter to the National Constitution of France* 8

<sup>586</sup> For an account of the way in which Cordeliers thinkers drew on the English republican tradition for inspiration and to justify their democratic theories, see Hammersley, *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans*.

of the “Republic of Virtue” who would assume control of the National Convention in June 1793.<sup>587</sup> The text rarely meditates on practical implementation, except in the outline of the executive branch. The question of citizenship, a major preoccupation of Barlow's, is not tackled and the place of foreigners within the republic is given no attention. Merry's interest is in the regeneration of Britain through the example of French republicanism, something George Edwards would also attend to in his constitutional tract. Edwards offered to work on behalf of the revolutionary government in the implementation of his model of human betterment.<sup>588</sup> Merry, however, resists involvement in the practical mechanics of constitution-building.

In calling for the abolition of the death penalty, Merry appeals to the humanity of the French people but also to justice and reason. The death penalty was established by despots and perpetuated fear rather than corrected vice. In condemning the moral decadence of state-induced violence, Merry aligns himself with Enlightenment thinkers from Montesquieu and Voltaire through to Condorcet, distancing himself in the process from the Rousseauian view later adopted by Robespierre and Saint-Just and the leaders of the *Comité de Salut Public* on the interdependence of virtue and terror.<sup>589</sup> Condorcet was a vehement adversary of capital punishment and maintained this ideological opposition to the death penalty during the vote on the fate of Louis XVI. Merry sees no utilitarian argument for preserving capital punishment as it has no benefit to society and lends itself to vice rather than utility. He highlights the

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<sup>587</sup> It is not known whether Merry actually met Camille Desmoulins, although Sampson Perry, a close acquaintance of Merry, certainly did. Perry had close contact with both Desmoulins and Georges Danton, founding members of the Cordeliers Club.

<sup>588</sup> George Edwards, *Adresse au Corps Législatif* 12. “Je sais que je puis me reposer entièrement sur votre philanthropie et sur votre justice; d’autant plus que la carrière a été ouverte à tous les étrangers; ce qui me permet par conséquent de me livrer à la plénitude de mes sentimens, dans une cause qui m’est aussi précieuse qu’à vous-mêmes, et que je regarde comme commune à tous les hommes en général. Admis en votre présence, Législateurs, et après avoir, avec une présomption respectueuse, traité une matière aussi étendue et aussi intéressante, vous me verrez sans étonnement, vous offrir mes services avec un zèle véritablement philanthropique. Je désire particulièrement d’employer ce zèle dans quelque branche de l’administration qui a pour objet les avantages qui résultent de ces trois sciences; savoir de l’agriculture, de l’exercice des facultés mentales et de la médecine.”

<sup>589</sup> Robespierre stated that “virtue without terror is impotent, terror without virtue is malignant.” Quoted in Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue* 30.

example of the Emperor Leopold of Tuscany who, after abolishing the death penalty, saw a reduction of the crime rate throughout his territory.<sup>590</sup> All crimes are the result of ignorance, in Merry's view, and error should be corrected by instruction rather than punishment. Merry evokes the need for clemency, belying pacifist tendencies which would make him stop short of condoning terror and violence in the pursuit of revolutionary goals.

He shared the essentially optimistic view of human progress of Condorcet and it is likely that Merry and Condorcet met at the latter's residence on one of his visits before 1792. While Rousseau believed man was capable of improvement, Condorcet thought he could be led to perfection.<sup>591</sup> Merry lends weight to this position, arguing that attempts to reverse French liberty are futile. Despots, aristocrats and corruptive impulses would never overcome the founding tenets of the Revolution:

The rights of man will always triumph, their reign will only become brighter and longer-lasting the principles of liberty and equality will be spread to all corners of the globe; all efforts made to stop its progress will fall back on their instigators; truth, for so long suppressed by cruelty and superstition, will not rather have broken down these walls, but will spread over the earth like a river of abundance, carrying with it the life-giving seeds of fertility and plenty; however much tyrants oppose the flood, however much they try, in their overbearing pride, to imitate Canute, who, sat on the beach, forbidding the waves to approach his sacred person; the wave will always rise and, in one deluge, cover them, their flatterers and their pretensions.<sup>592</sup>

Merry expresses joy at the triumph of the rights of man and the prospect of worldwide freedom engendered by Revolution. The Revolution even has the capacity to displace entrenched kingly pride, and he gives the example of King Canute, who went down in

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<sup>590</sup> The use of the Florentine example was no coincidence as Merry had spent time in the Italian city in the mid-to-late 1780s and was familiar with the reforms that the Grand Duke Leopold of Tuscany had implemented in Florence before becoming Holy Roman Emperor.

<sup>591</sup> For an account of Condorcet's political theory see Maurice Cranston, *Philosophers and Pamphleteers: Political Theorists of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1986). See also Frank Alengry, *Condorcet: guide de la Révolution française* (Paris: Giard et Brière, 1904).

<sup>592</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques* 18. My translation. "Les droits de l'homme triompheront toujours, leur règne n'en deviendra que plus brillant et plus durable, les principes de la liberté et de l'égalité se propageront dans toutes les parties du globe; tous les efforts employés pour en arrêter les progrès retomberont sur leurs auteurs; la vérité, si long-tems continue par la cruauté et par la superstition, n'aura pas plutôt vaincu ces digues, que se répandant sur la terre comme un fleuve bienfaisant, portera par-tout les germes vivifiants de la fertilité et de l'abondance; les tyrans auront beau s'opposer à l'inondation, ils auront beau, dans le délire de leur orgueil, imiter cet extravagant Canut\* qui, assis sur la plage de la mer, défendit aux ondes d'approcher de sa personne sacrée: l'onde montera toujours et enveloppera dans un déluge commun, eux, leurs flatteurs et leurs folles prétentions."

national history as the monarch who attempted to master the tides in vain.<sup>593</sup> The image of a British king resisting the advances of the waves was far from neutral in late 1792 and would have given weight to loyalist accusations that British expatriates were fomenting insurrection against their native state and countenancing the idea of a foreign landing.

The aristocracy had predicted the decline of the arts and sciences with the Revolution, but Merry defends the pretensions of the republic to refined manners, morals and the progress of human knowledge. In this sense, he was closer to the Brissotin position than later Jacobin enthusiasts, who punished membership of the academies, considering such loyalties as rivalling those of the state for a citizen's attention. The artist Jacques-Louis David, Merry's acquaintance from his Della Cruscan days in Florence, saw membership of the academy as revealing a lack of patriotic vigour.<sup>594</sup> Merry, a recognised though struggling poet as well as foreign patriot, laments the obscurity of men of letters and philosophers under royal despotism. This denigration of the arts was not unique to France and undoubtedly stirred thoughts of his own experience as a playwright on the London stage.<sup>595</sup>

There are clear Rousseauian echoes to Merry's view on the nature of primitive society and the origin of kingship. His views are aligned with a more radical revolutionary script, which insisted on the need for man's realisation that personal interest is the same as the general interest. Merry expresses a vision of civilisation as a destructive force, oppressing the noble indigenous peoples ignorant of European progress. This moral turbulence created the "strange cure" of kingship. Monarchy was not a logical response, but an aberrant solution to civil strife. He goes on to explain the rationale behind the appointing of one man over all, namely that this man would rule with only the general good in mind. However, despotism and

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<sup>593</sup> Mary Beard has recently suggested that the legend surrounding King Canute is deeply flawed. She argues, "King Canute has had a raw deal from history. He took his throne down to the beach in order to show his servile courtiers that not even a king could control the waves (that was in God's power alone). But, ironically, he is now most often remembered as the silly old duffer who got soaked on the seashore because he thought he could master the tides." (Mary Beard, "It was Satire," *London Review of Books* 35.8 (2012) 15).

<sup>594</sup> See Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue* 8.

<sup>595</sup> As mentioned in chapter one, Merry had been a committee member of the Literary Fund for struggling artists and their families.

abuse had quickly followed and the human race soon realised its error. Under royalty, civil society was in a state of slavery and it was tyrannical kings who were the catalysts of conflict between nations. He denies Hobbesian tenets of man's natural belligerency, arguing that violence was inherent in kingly rule, not in the human species. Merry refers to monarchs as "crowned monsters" and the complicity between the clergy and kingship, "odious fraudsters" is seen as a vicious and despotic pact designed to suppress the people. For Merry, the union of tyrants and priesthood had perpetuated the absurd notion that the suffering of man was willed by heaven. Enlightened man, though oppressing the ignorant, had managed to recoil from kingship, recognising the errors embedded in the monarchical organisation of civil society. Merry praises "the tree of science," which, unlike the perilous fruit of the Garden of Eden, was not full of forbidden pleasures, but ones which brought happiness to men. The belief in man's natural wickedness is rejected and Merry holds up the awaited constitution as the new Word, declaring that "the new constitution that France is preparing will become the cherished and revered gospel of nations."<sup>596</sup>

If Merry echoes Condorcet and earlier Enlightenment thinkers in opposing violence, promoting the arts and sciences and sustaining a belief in human perfectibility, his vision of government is aligned much closer with that of prominent democratic thinkers of the era, who went further than theorists of the American Revolution in promoting direct, participatory democracy. Members of the Cordeliers Club provided a theoretical framework for the application of democratic principles in revolutionary France. They sketched out an alternative paradigm to rival the models put forward by Brissot and Condorcet, who considered representative government combined with an educated elite to be the foundation of a stable republic. It is problematic trying to situate Merry within this range of opinions and "representative government" had very different meanings according to the model drawn upon,

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<sup>596</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques* 6. "La nouvelle constitution, que la France prépare, va devenir l'évangile chéri et révééré des nations."

the author and the time of writing. British “representation” was associated with corrupt oligarchy. By the late eighteenth century, many reformers considered the British political system a perversion of the principle of representation and a travesty of the precepts contained in the Bill of Rights of 1688. Some even saw the Glorious Revolution as having precluded the realisation of genuine reform. American representative government was seen as a purer, more transparent version, though still with an elite decision-making element. Merry seems to err on the democratic side:

It appears that people today agree, on the whole, that a purely representative government is a masterpiece of perfection. However, if we carefully examine the principles with strict impartiality, I suspect we will find some great evils, evils which will necessarily destroy that particular effect that was envisaged by its adoption, and what’s more, that if it is not restricted to simple agency, it will deliver a fatal blow, sooner or later, to equality, liberty and the rights of man.<sup>597</sup>

It was not simply the practical degeneration of representation in real government that prompted concern, but the principles of the political system itself which were at fault.

Merry also addresses a question that Enlightenment philosophers had consistently grappled with, that of the practicability of instituting republican government in a sprawling state the size of France. Montesquieu and Rousseau had concluded pessimistically that such nations were incompatible with effective republican government and Brissot and Condorcet were convinced that an elite bureaucracy would be needed to stabilise a republic of such vast proportions. In his tract, Merry refutes the claim that a nation could only be managed through representation rather than direct or semi-direct democratic means. Even in an extensive republic all individuals could be invested with legislative power. He adheres to views that had been expressed by Pierre-François Robert and René Girardin, namely that the districts should

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<sup>597</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques* 6. “Il paroît qu’on s’accorde assez généralement aujourd’hui, à regarder un gouvernement *représentatif* comme un chef-d’œuvre de perfection. Cependant, si on veut examiner les principes de près et avec une stricte impartialité, je ne doute pas qu’on n’y découvre de grands vices; des vices tels que nécessairement ils détruiraient le seul effet que l’on se serait proposé en l’adoptant; tels encore, que s’il n’étoit pas restreint à une simple agence, il porteroit, tôt ou tard, un coup mortel à l’égalité, à la liberté et aux droits de l’homme.”

veto or approve laws before they came into effect.<sup>598</sup> All rejected laws and articles could be rewritten and sent again for approval by the districts. Even the most detailed articles of new laws should be subject to the assent of the people:

It should be the case therefore that each law which goes through the representative assembly be immediately printed, published and sent to the primary assemblies to be taken into consideration; and that at the end of each year, or at the moment set for the election of members, all the citizens of the districts should individually veto or approve each of the laws. And, in truth, this method of ratifying or rejecting laws is as easy as that of electing members.<sup>599</sup>

This was a radical proposal in favour of a democratic form of government which delved into the detail of how to achieve its application, an issue which John Oswald also addressed in his tract on the constitution. Neither Barlow nor Williams substantially dealt with the issue of representation. Barlow was more concerned with morality, public instruction and the exercise of active citizenship and David Williams' overriding concern was with the importance of ancestral practices in the conception of new constitutional forms. Merry is quite explicit: citizens should not only be active and virtuous, they should also be intimately and directly involved in the legislative process. Yet, despite this radical suggestion, he does take into account issues of practicability. He concedes the need for government efficiency and despatch, issues which had been at the heart of constitutional debates in America. Laws should take immediate effect until accepted or rejected by primary assemblies.

Merry's view of the corrosive effect of representative government cannot be divorced from his pessimistic reading of the British constitution. He refutes the Montesquieuan view of the superiority of the British mixed combination of Commons, Lords and Monarchy and highlights the decadence of British aristocratic government. Parliament, for Merry, was an

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<sup>598</sup> Girardin's *Discours sur la nécessité de la ratification de la loi, par la volonté générale* (1791) put forward the view that citizens should approve all legislation.

<sup>599</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques* 7. "Il convient donc que tout décret passé par l'assemblée représentative soit immédiatement imprimé, publié, et envoyé aux assemblées primaires, pour y être pris en considération ; et qu'à la fin de chaque année, ou au tems fixé pour l'élection des députés, tous les citoyens des districts émettent individuellement leur veto ou leur approbation sur chacun de ces décrets. Et dans le fait cette manière de ratifier ou d'annuler [*sic*] des décrets est tout aussi simple que celle d'élire les députés." My translation.



organ of oppressive oligarchy rather than an instrument of just governance. In evoking the English civil war, it is the Long Parliament rather than the personal rule of Charles I that he denounces. Elected bodies could be just as despotic as absolute monarchy if the conditions were not in place to restrain them. This was a theme that Thomas Paine would address in his plea for clemency towards the king. For Merry, there was no likelihood that monarchy would be reinstated in France. He moves rapidly from arguing on the defects of kingship to warning his readers of the malignancy of parliamentary abuse, which he sees as the more insidious source of danger to free government and general liberty.

In Merry's judgment, elected representatives are delegates of the people. The people must constantly watch over their elected representatives, thereby taking an active and regular part in government, in order to prevent factionalism and intrigue. Elected representatives cannot simply be left to rule for the general good. The people must be active agents – citizens – zealous in the protection of their own sovereignty:

Then, therefore, absolute power associated with representation is destined to degenerate gradually into tyranny, unless the general will is constantly active in order to contain and rule it. It follows that a state of permanent popular deliberation is indispensable in order to oppose all the decrees that partiality and injustice could offer to the representative assembly with an efficient veto.<sup>600</sup>

Citizens would be mobilised on a permanent basis, never allowed to sink into apathy or disinterest. In the same vein as Cordeliers thinkers, Merry also advocates the regular rotation of assembly members, not only for democratic vigour, but also to instil a sense of citizenship in the people:

The re-election of national assemblies should take place every year, the reason being that the more often a whole nation is mobilised, the more public liberty is safeguarded. Incidentally,

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<sup>600</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques* 7. "Puis donc que le pouvoir absolu annexé à la représentation ne peut que dégénérer graduellement en tyrannie, à moins que la volonté générale ne soit dans une activité constante pour contenir et pour commander, il s'ensuit qu'un état permanent de délibération populaire devient absolument indispensable pour opposer un veto efficace à tous les décrets que la partialité ou l'injustice pourroient suggérer à l'assemblée représentative."

frequent primary assemblies familiarise the people with the ease of debating and make them more conscious of the extent of their duties and their own significance.<sup>601</sup>

For a nation to be free, all the individuals that comprise it must have the right to think for themselves. A year later, radical members of the Montagne would deny individualism in a philosophical and social worldview in which private desires were subordinated to the general will of the single entity of “the people.” Merry demonstrates a radical vision of the “general will” while retaining a place for freethinking minds.

Belief in the apathy of the British citizenry and the need for regeneration of the national spirit was not unique to Merry. It was a defining characteristic of the British radical movement, particularly for those activists for whom the French revolutionary model remained a constant measure of ideal patriotic virtue. John Thelwall dwelled on moral renewal in his sonnets written from the Tower and Newgate prison. He sought to educate British citizens in their collective history:

AH! Why, forgetful of her ancient fame,  
Does Britain in lethargic fetters lie?  
Britons are united in collective subjugation which is chosen, deferential but fatal to the cause of liberty. ‘To her the pliant soul  
We bend degenerate!’ He continues, ‘Hence to the base controul  
Of Tyranny we bow, nor once complain;  
But hug with servile fear the gilded chain.’<sup>602</sup>

Thelwall bemoaned the “lethargic fetters” which repressed British civic energy and the “servile fear” which kept the population from rebelling against their state of subservience. Merry’s associates in Paris also wrote lengthy treatises on the nature of republican virtue and

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<sup>601</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques* 8. “La réélection des assemblées nationales devrait avoir lieu tous les ans, par la raison que plus souvent une nation entière est mise en action, plus la liberté publique est en sureté. D’ailleurs la fréquence des assemblées primaires habitue le peuple à une plus grande facilité dans ses délibérations, et lui fera mieux sentie l’étendue de ses obligations et sa propre importance.” Rachel Hammersley has shown how Jean-Jacques Rutledge and Theophile Mandar drew on theories of rotation of office developed by Marchamont Nedham and Rousseau. See Hammersley, *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans*.

<sup>602</sup> John Thelwall, *Sonnet V: The Source of Slavery* (17<sup>th</sup> July 1794, Tower), *Poems Written in Close Confinement in the Tower and Newgate, Under a Charge of High Treason* (London: Ridgway, 1795).

the need for regeneration of the moral fabric of the British nation.<sup>603</sup> It was a concern which bridged the Channel and united those patriots who were seeking root-and-branch social and moral reform as well as political advancement. As Michael Rapport has argued, “the Revolution was a moral as well as a political transformation which would affect all humanity.”<sup>604</sup>

On executive government, Merry outlines a more extensive practical strategy. He warns against the permanence of the emergency solutions that had been put in place provisionally. The National Assembly and executive council as they stood had energy but would tend towards oligarchy if retained permanently. He counsels against the constant degeneration of government into corruption, intrigue and partiality and makes a direct appeal to the French people to guard against incursions against their natural sovereignty: “Reject therefore, French people! Reject for ever a form of government which would put the mass of people at the mercy of a handful of individuals.”<sup>605</sup> The executive branch should obey and serve the people; it did not have the power to legislate outside the bounds of the national will. It should, according to Merry, consist of thirty-six members from the representative assembly. This general council would be subdivided into six special councils headed by six ministers. At the end of each month six new members would be elected to the councils by ballot of the six councils. In that way the entire committee would be renewed every six months without any interruption in the conduct of public affairs. In the course of one legislature, no member

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<sup>603</sup> Sampson Perry’s *An Historical Sketch of the French Revolution* lauded the patriotic spirit which gripped France, even at the height of the Terror. Perry gave a definition of patriotism: “Patriots have fewer infirmities than other men: those to whom I particularly allude, boast of the name, and exult in the achievements of patriotism, but they are many of them *mutable patriots*, and worn-out patriots, part too have been untried, have scarcely been exercised; they have not yet conquered their own passions, their own ill habits; they are, above all, not sufficiently indifferent to their personal enjoyments and safety, they have not courage to make a great sacrifice in a great cause. Such are *the patriots I know*.” See “The Particulars of S. Perry’s Case”, *An Historical Sketch* I: 5. See also Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s prose text, “Modern Patriotism” in *The Watchman* (Bristol, 1796) 73. In the text, Coleridge scathingly denounced the international “patriotism” of radicals such as Thelwall as the love of a “Tavern” over one’s own “fire-side” and the rejection of filial affection and the love of one’s country in favour of abstract principles and the coveting of power.

<sup>604</sup> Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship* 112-13.

<sup>605</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques* 9. “Rejetez donc, François! Rejetez pour toujours une forme de gouvernement qui mettroient la masse entière du peuple à la merci d’un petit nombre d’individus.” My translation.

would be elected twice to the council. They would be held to account by the public will and obliged to execute their orders without prevarication. Merry insists on the obligation of the committee to publish a list of the available civilian and military vacancies every fifteen days.

The most virtuous and meritorious citizens would play the most important roles:

It is a sure mark of the purity and perfection of a government to see within it men of proven virtue, of true merit, and of incorruptible patriotism: instead of deceitful governments, which resemble a fermenting liquor, only bringing to the surface the bubbles of madness, the froth of ignorance and the dregs of vice.<sup>606</sup>

Merry's blueprint for the executive branch is perhaps the most pragmatic and detailed section of his treatise and, once again, he stresses the need for an active citizenry to ensure the application of laws and for representative roles to be open to people on the basis of merit and virtue alone.

Merry joined Barlow in denying the need for a standing army, which would engender slavishness and obedience, states of mind that should be avoided by active citizens of a republic seeking to attain heights of virtue to emulate the classical city states of Athens and Sparta. A nation which creates laws can execute them herself in a spirit of openness and transparency. Even the most virtuous men are fatally transformed under a system which tends towards oligarchy. Here Merry betrayed his latent scepticism about the capacity of men to achieve virtue. Man's natural tendency towards vice should be circumvented by political mechanisms, as there was no greater threat to liberty than the power exercised by virtuous and patriotic men. It was the form of government rather than the extent of virtue of the incumbents which was the prime factor, and this reiterated republican arguments brought forward in the Commonwealth era. Milton had seen virtuous kingship as even more insidious than despotic kingship, as it blinded the people to the nature of tyranny inherent in the institution of

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<sup>606</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques* 14. "C'est une marque de la pureté et de la perfection d'un gouvernement que d'y voir furnager les hommes d'une vertu éprouvée, d'un mérite non factice, et d'un patriotisme incorruptible: au lieu que les gouvernements vicieux, semblables à une liqueur en fermentation, ne font monter à la surface que les bulles de la folie, l'écume de l'ignorance et la lie de tous les vices." My translation.

monarchy. Merry does not suggest that the people could be led towards virtue, but argues for protecting them from the inevitable vices of human nature. He adopts a practical approach, insisting on making government immune to the vicissitudes of human weakness.<sup>607</sup>

In the epigraph to his treatise, Merry quotes a line from Sallust's *The War Against Jugurtha*. It reads, *quos neque armis cogere neque auro parare queas: officio et fide pariuntur*. ("These you can neither acquire by force of arms nor buy with gold; it is by devotion and loyalty that they are won.") He was writing in the immediate aftermath of the French army's entry into war against Austria and Prussia, a decision supported by the Girondin grouping in the Convention but criticised by many of the Parisian sections and the more radical members who would go on to form the Montagne grouping. The epigraph seems to denounce war and commerce and elevate the virtues of loyalty and devotion. Devotion and loyalty were seen as virtues on which the classical republics stood and therefore came to be more easily associated with the Jacobin leadership. Rather than adhering to modern principles of commercialism and education, espoused by Brissot and Condorcet, Merry sides with those of democratic affiliations. He lauds "the simplicity of the austere principles of republicanism," a vision which would have jarred with Girondin views of a flourishing commercial republican society.

Merry also celebrates the printing press as the vehicle of liberty in a free republic and associated the liberty of the press with the groundswell of ideas which precipitated the Revolution:

Freedom of expression by way of the press is the true palladium of freedom; it is the surest channel by which philosophy can penetrate the minds of men: we could date the French Revolution back to the glorious invention of the printing press and that spirit of reform which is generally gripping Europe.<sup>608</sup>

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<sup>607</sup> Rachel Hammersley gives the example of Rutledge who adopted a Harringtonian view of the desirability of a political system which would preclude the need for self-regulated civic virtue. According to Carol Blum, Robespierre and Saint-Just saw the people as one unique entity capable of forming one virtuous city, with egotism and impurity banished outside. See Hammersley, *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans* and Blum, *The Republic of Virtue*.

<sup>608</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques* 14. "La libre communication des pensées par les moyens de la presse, est le vrai palladium de la liberté; elle est le plus sûr canal par où la philosophie puisse s'insinuer dans l'esprit de l'homme: on peut faire remonter à l'invention de l'imprimerie la glorieuse révolution de la France, et cet esprit de réforme qui s'empare généralement de l'Europe." My translation.

Some restrictions on freedom were needed, however, to avoid defamation and the destruction of a man's reputation. He also denounces the pretensions of the English nation to uphold the free circulation of ideas and the repressive policy of the British government, which punished those who expressed simple opposition to the norms established by the ruling ministry:

The jurisprudence currently established in England on the liberty of the press is what has led me to the thoughts that I have just presented. Posterity would have difficulty believing that in a century of enlightenment, and in a nation which boasts so much of its freedom, that there we have had the shamelessness, in contempt of the eternal principles of reason and equality, to institute the maxim that a piece of writing which contains only truth, is nonetheless a libellous text: yet, to add insult to injury, the most horrible deceptions, the most shameless lies, provided that they are in favour of the government, can be published, and are published daily with the greatest impunity.<sup>609</sup>

This was a similar position to that adopted by Merry's fellow expatriates, Perry, Wollstonecraft and Paine, all of whom denounced this perversion and punishment of the truth in the British justice system.<sup>610</sup>

The most vehement passage of Merry's text occurs in a long discussion of the state of affairs in England. Although *Réflexions politiques* is ostensibly a contribution to the debate on the republican constitution in France, the tract is general enough to embrace matters which mobilised the radical movement in Britain – parliamentary corruption, press censorship and moral regeneration – and it is likely that Merry's tract was in part penned as a reflection on British political culture. Unlike Barlow, who concerned himself with the position of foreigners in France, their right to a say in the ongoing debate and their ability to access rights of citizenship, Merry emphasises the potency of the constitution debate as a catalyst of renewal in Britain. He refers to “the French nation, concerned to give the world a government

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<sup>609</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques* 15. “La jurisprudence actuellement établie en Angleterre, sur la liberté de la presse, est ce qui m'a conduit aux réflexions que je viens de présenter. La postérité aura peine à croire que dans un siècle de lumières, et chez une nation qui se targue tant de sa liberté, on ait eu l'impudeur, au mépris des principes éternels de la raison et de l'équité, d'ériger en maxime qu'un écrit pour ne contenir que la vérité n'en est pas moins un libelle: et cependant, pour comble d'infamie, les impostures les plus odieuses, les mensonges les plus impudens, pourvu qu'ils soient en faveur du gouvernement, peuvent être publiés, et se publient tous les jours avec la plus grande impunité.”

<sup>610</sup> See below, pp. 354-55. As mentioned below, this type of reflection is part of what John Barrell has considered the battleground of language in the 1790s.

founded on liberty and equality,” and celebrates how “the new constitution that France is preparing will become the cherished and revered gospel of nations.”<sup>611</sup> On occasions, this connection to British political affairs is explicit and France is put forward as a blueprint for reform in Britain:

Let’s suppose that the French constitution had established an executive power independent of the nation, let’s suppose even that this power, instead of being entrusted to pure hands, had fallen into the possession of false patriots, the most undesirable consequences would result, not only for the French republic itself, but also for all the countries of Europe that aspire to become free. England, for example, will no longer have any hope of recovering its rights: the two factions which divide this nation will, acting separately, or uniting perhaps in a formidable coalition, seek, by secret emissaries, and by all possible means of corruption and intrigue, to form a treaty with the executive council of France whose principal objective will be the mutual guarantee of the English constitution and in consequence, the loss of British liberty.<sup>612</sup>

Merry feared the degeneration of French liberty if it was not harnessed by those who were truly patriotic and saw in the loss of French freedom the subsequent loss of the promise of reform in Britain. In his tract, he warns against the influence of pretended patriots who did not have liberty at heart. This concern about false patriotism was shared by fellow British Club members such as Sampson Perry, who considered many of the reforming politicians in Britain to have sacrificed the opportunity for political change in striving to retain their own positions in power. Merry incites the French constitution-makers to finalise the constitution as it was the only way to provide certitude for their “brothers in England”. He emphasises the urgency, as “the dangers are gathering all around us” and the enemies of the constitution were actively seeking to undermine the advances.<sup>613</sup> Merry draws on the British case to provide examples of bad practice. The parliamentary system and “oppressive aristocracy” is portrayed

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<sup>611</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques* 3, 6.

<sup>612</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques* 11. “Supposons que la constitution française eût établi un pouvoir exécutif indépendant de la nation, supposons encore que ce pouvoir au lieu d’être confié à des mains pures, fût devenu le partage de gens qui n’eussent que le masque du patriotisme, il en résulterait les conséquences les plus facheuses, non-seulement pour la république française elle-même, mais encore pour toutes les contrées de l’Europe qui aspireroient à devenir libres. L’Angleterre, par exemple, n’auroit plus d’espoir de recouvrir ses droits: il arriveroit que les deux factions qui divisent cette nation, agitent séparément, ou se réunissant peut-être en une formidable condition, chercheroient, par des émissaires secrets, et par tous les moyens de la corruption et de l’intrigue, à former avec le conseil exécutif de France un traité dont l’objet principal seroit la garantie mutuelle de la constitution angloise et par conséquent la perte de la liberté britannique.” My translation.

<sup>613</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques* 12. “Les dangers se multiplient autour de nous.” My translation.

as the embodiment of corrupt elitism. The British press is a living testimony to a system which punishes dissent and stifles truth. He concludes the tract with a concern for the eventual enfranchisement of the people of England. Royalty and aristocracy had kept his compatriots in servitude and oppression and silenced the constitutional vigour which Britain prided itself on. It is the passage which most struck Alger, the depiction of the soaring human potential of France, in the image of the classical Greek republic of Athens, and the endemic and inexorable decline of Britain, wallowing in shame and self-pity. Merry had already replaced the tree of Eden by the tree of science, he had rewritten the gospel as a republican text and he concludes by defining France as the new Promised Land, the epitome of plenty and a haven of freedom:

England is hurtling towards a shameful decline, while France is soaring to a degree of glory and splendour, that even Athens at the height of its greatness, never enjoyed. This happy country will become from now on a promised land; its inhabitants, surrounded by plenty, will enjoy the gentle fruits of liberty and equality: we will see only men distinguished by their talents and virtue taking their place in the academies; the pleasing sincerity of free men will triumph over all the smallmindedness of trivial and ridiculous etiquette, the temples of liberty and peace will be decorated by the hands of nature: a pure joy and unlimited goodwill will be the gentle fruits of general prosperity.<sup>614</sup>

In his model of free government, Merry accentuates France's role as a precursor, a beacon of liberty in Europe. The French experiment in republican government was a necessary step to liberating all the enslaved peoples of the continent, not least the subjugated people of Britain, dependent on the French constitutional settlement to establish their own rights and constitution. He calls on the French to recognise their international duty to other European states, notably Britain, and in doing so reiterated the message voiced in the repeated declaration and edicts circulated internationally by the National Convention.

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<sup>614</sup> Merry, *Réflexions politiques* 19. "C'est ainsi que l'Angleterre se précipite vers une honteuse décadence, tandis que la France s'élève avec rapidité à un degré de gloire et de splendeur dont Athènes, au méridien de sa grandeur, n'a jamais pu jouir. Cette heureuse contrée deviendra désormais une terre de promesse; ses habitants, dans le sein de l'abondance, jouiront des doux fruits de la liberté et de l'égalité: on ne verra siéger dans ses académies que des hommes distingués par leurs talents et par leurs vertus: la franchise engageante des hommes libres triomphera de toutes les petitessees d'une étiquette frivole et ridicule; les temples de la liberté et de la paix seront ornés par les mains de la nature; une joie pure et une bienveillance sans bornes seront les doux fruits de la prospérité générale." My translation.



In his tract on the constitution, Merry evaded the type of political alignments which ultimately proved fatal for some of his compatriots or which stifled the conceptual audacity of others, and drew on intellectual and political traditions without being consumed by them. His primary concern was not to forge political friendships with leading revolutionaries in France or to carve out a role for himself in the French regime, as Edwards attempted to do. Merry conjugated a watchful interest in French affairs with a clear desire for root-and-branch political change at home. Although he was one of the more radical British activists in Paris, Merry departed in May 1793, claiming that France would benefit from having fewer mouths to feed and pleading financial ruin. Camped at Calais with his wife, the actress Anne Brunton, and a servant, along with other British expatriates waiting to be evacuated, he succeeded in obtaining a passport. He may have anticipated that foreign patriots would begin to suffer materially in the French state, even those whose revolutionary credentials were faultless, although on returning to Britain, Merry found no respite to the troubles that had afflicted him prior to his departure. Bankrupt, ostracised and subject to repression of all kinds, he embarked for America in 1796, where he died two years later. Robert Merry had already taken significant steps towards embracing civilisation in its widest and most democratic sense before taking up residence in Paris. Yet his courting of British Club activism, his radical reading of constitutional justice and his increasingly bitter perception of representative government in Britain were all products of a radicalising experience in France which shaped his political outlook.

### **III.3.3 John Oswald, *The Government of the People, or a Sketch of a Constitution for the Universal Commonwealth* (1793)**

Explicit in the title of Oswald's tract is the guiding principle that permeates the entire work, that government should be dictated uniquely by the will of the people. What marks the pamphlet out is, firstly, an attachment to popular involvement in both law-making and

elections, secondly the irreverent style in which the tract is written and, thirdly, the relatively meagre historical anchoring, giving the tract a universality which the texts of both Williams and Barlow lack. Oswald's use of the term "commonwealth" in the title was surely no coincidence and alluded to the period of republican rule under Cromwell in the 1650s as well as invoking the later republican writings of men such as Sydney, Harrington and Hampden. Oswald was sceptical of claims that the people needed moral education in order to participate in government and should be guided in their decisions by an enlightened elite, views expressed by revolutionaries such as Condorcet. The latter favoured the political intervention of only the most knowledgeable of men and, like Paine, mistrusted the multitude in decision-making. Any decision made by a majority was likely to be faulty, while elite representation would be accountable and less easily deluded. Oswald's plan also had a universal reach. It was designed to stretch wider than France and his ideas were anchored in natural rights principles. Like the vast majority of his fellow British nationals in Paris, Oswald was an internationalist whose faith lay in the potential for a universal brotherhood of men whose binding principles would transcend the frontiers of nationality.

The tract was printed by John Hurford Stone's English Press in Paris, which contributed extensively to the distribution of English-language material in France and according to Madeline Stern was one of the "instruments of international understanding" in the Anglo-French publishing world.<sup>615</sup> As Jack Censer has argued, "Since the newspaperman was proprietor, he saw little reason to produce what was not of personal interest, and in revolutionary situations, what could concern one more than one's own opinions."<sup>616</sup> Stone was probably sympathetic to Oswald's views on popular sovereignty and the role of the people in government. For Oswald, man should be governed by his will and a government's sole role was to ascertain and execute the will of the people. In *Government of the People*,

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<sup>615</sup> Stern, "The Franco-American Book Trade" 47.

<sup>616</sup> Censer, *Prelude to Power* 6.

law-making is conceived as a threefold process in which the people first assemble, then deliberate and finally decide. While deliberating should be carried out in primary assemblies, the act of deciding, or legislating, an act of power, should occur within smaller units, or “townships.” Here the people gather and shout their approval or groan their disapproval. The act of law-making is conceived as a vociferous, vocal and visual occasion, far from the restrained and practised eloquence of national institutions. For Oswald, human understanding stemmed from discussion, and he contends that when discussion begins, revolution follows, for when men begin to understand their wretched condition, they are compelled to overturn it. Oswald’s language is irreverent, designed to reveal the inherent foolishness of instituting a form of government in which man acts by proxy. If man cannot urinate by proxy, he cannot vote or deliberate by proxy, as natural man and intellectual man are inseparable. If we allow others to think for us, we stop thinking altogether and citizenship is a habit to be learned and needs practice and constant attention, otherwise “we insensibly unlearn to think altogether.”<sup>617</sup> In his vernacular mode, Oswald aped the style of Thomas Paine who, particularly in his tract on the American condition, *Common Sense*, had used examples drawing on human physicality to highlight the absurdity of the colonies’ remaining under Britain’s tutelage.<sup>618</sup>

Yet diverging from Paine’s views, Oswald questions the merits of representation as a mode of government: “I confess I have never been able to consider this representative system, without wondering at the easy credulity with which the human mind swallows the most palpable absurdities.” Representation is denounced as imposture and artifice, “a specious veil under which every kind of despotism has been introduced, and all political frauds are

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<sup>617</sup> Oswald, *The Government of the People* 5.

<sup>618</sup> In particular Paine used the metaphor of the mother and the suckled child to put forward a case for American independence: “I have heard it asserted by some, that as America hath flourished under her former connexion with Great-Britain, that the same connexion is necessary towards her future happiness, and will always have the same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious than this kind of argument. We may as well assert, that because a child has thrived on milk, that it is never to have meat; or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty.” (Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* [1776; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976] 83).

enacted.”<sup>619</sup> Oswald suggests that so-called representatives were guilty of blinding the people in the same way as kings and priests under monarchical government. Under such a system, the people are “moon-struck”, “dazzled”, and “blinded.”<sup>620</sup> They are the “audience” who, instead of taking an active, thinking role, assume the place of “wonder-struck spectator”, who are entertained and discouraged from thinking for themselves.<sup>621</sup> For Oswald, “the representation supplanted the reality, the shadow swallowed up the substance.”<sup>622</sup> Representative government was not an ideal to be sought-after but a form of “fiction”, a way of seducing and tricking the people into thinking they had a grasp on power. He directs his criticism against the “political mountbacks” in Britain who maintained their power through the use of “a jargon peculiar to themselves.”<sup>623</sup> The people’s attention was thus deflected from the reality of the political landscape and power was channelled into the hands of an unscrupulous elite. Representation is equated with falsehood, theatre and the art of conjuring rather than the rational and just manifestation of the voice of the people. While representatives elevated the sovereignty of the people in their discourse, they acted differently, like the drunken sailor in *The Tempest* who announced “I shall be vice-roy over you.”<sup>624</sup>

The metaphor of the theatre was a particularly potent one in late eighteenth-century British political culture. Gillian Russell has argued that “political debate in Britain after 1789 was focused around the competing claims of two forms of theatre – Burke’s theatre of order and tradition which clothed the state in the ‘decent drapery’ of respect, veneration, and awe, and Paine’s ‘open theatre of the world’ in which the mechanisms of power were completely open to the scrutiny of the people.”<sup>625</sup> Paine's theatre would remove the artifice and mystery of the stage, thereby making it less an instrument of dissembling and hidden meaning than an

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<sup>619</sup> Oswald, *The Government of the People* 5.

<sup>620</sup> Oswald, *The Government of the People* 6.

<sup>621</sup> Oswald, *The Government of the People* 6.

<sup>622</sup> Oswald, *The Government of the People* 7.

<sup>623</sup> Oswald, *The Government of the People* 8.

<sup>624</sup> Oswald, *The Government of the People* 9.

<sup>625</sup> Gillian Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society, 1793-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 85.

activity in line with the Revolution's concern for integrity, openness and equity. As Russell observes, in line with Rousseau's mistrust of theatre, the revolutionaries believed the theatre was "an unreliable medium for political expression."<sup>626</sup> So while Oswald criticised the representative mode of government as being akin to the falsehood of theatrical play, he concurred with Paine on the importance of broadening political culture to include the dispossessed, who had been prevented from occupying a civic role through the conjuring tricks of the elite.

Oswald sought to show how the people would not have any agency under a system of representative government. He does not make the distinction between ideal representative government (understood by Thomas Paine and others as the type of representation practised in America) and the species of debased representation in Britain, though he denounces the English mode based on a so-called "balance of powers" between the monarchy, Lords and Commons as a farce. While Thomas Paine understood republicanism as "nothing more than representative government conducted in the public good," Oswald evokes the need for a mode of popular government based on the loud and noisy participation of the people in the act of legislating.<sup>627</sup>

Though Oswald makes little reference to the French Revolution in his tract, he does criticise the mixed monarchical settlement reached between the king and the National Assembly in 1791, arguing that if the people had been asked to deliberate on whether the king should have a suspensive veto or not, they would never have assented to such a constitutional remedy. With the king overthrown and those who negotiated with the king discredited, Oswald was free to criticise a settlement which had attempted to reconcile monarchy and popular sovereignty. Oswald suggests that "the jugglers of the Constituent Assembly borrowed the jargon of their elder brethren of England. They declared, that the government of

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<sup>626</sup> Russell, *The Theatres of War* 85.

<sup>627</sup> Philp, "English Republicanism in the 1790s," 245-46.

France was representative, that is to say, that the government should not in reality belong to the people, but only in representation or shew; – in short, it was to be a sham government of the people.”<sup>628</sup> Oswald shows no reverence towards the former deputies of the National Assembly, unlike fellow British Club members Joel Barlow and Sampson Perry. Barlow expressed his veneration for the work undertaken by the Assembly in his tract to the Convention and Perry praised the members for their statesmanship and virtue in his *Historical Sketch*.

For Oswald, the 1791 solution had only been possible because the nation was “reeling” from Revolution. Such ideas of representative government could no longer be accepted now that stability had been restored:

I will venture to predict, that if the second Constituent Assembly should form a constitution, founded on what is called the principles of representation, that it will not last so long as the first. In a short while, the true principles of legislation will be clearly understood, and the people will be satisfied with nothing short of a real and actual exercise of the Sovereignty established on the Will of the People, unequivocally collected and indubitably ascertained.<sup>629</sup>

Oswald provides a democratic alternative to representation. Under such a system, the people would assemble in primary assemblies to deliberate and decide. The National Assembly would be entirely dependent on the will of the people. Simultaneous deliberation across the nation would be possible through what he terms the “neighbourhood” system: “The neighbourhoods would instantly take into deliberation the question agitated by the National Assembly, and the whole understanding of the nation, would, at the same moment, be exercised upon the same point.”<sup>630</sup> There would be simultaneous study of the different proposals in widespread local assemblies: “To deliberate is an operation of the understanding, performed in small assemblies, to decide, on the other hand, is an *Act of Power*, a Declaration of the Public Will, a Demonstration of the *Common Sense* of the Nation, which requires the

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<sup>628</sup> Oswald *The Government of the People* 8-9.

<sup>629</sup> Oswald *The Government of the People* 9.

<sup>630</sup> Oswald *The Government of the People* 10.

enforcement of the many, and the support of the mass.”<sup>631</sup> Oswald describes in detail the system of popular deliberation and decision-making he envisaged through the network of townships filled with active and armed citizens. Questions discussed in primary assemblies would be presented by National Assembly for the endorsement of the people: “A shout of approbation shall sanction, or a groan of disapprobation reject the decrees.” Oral assent is primordial. The verdicts of the townships would be transmitted to the National Executive Council and they would each send an armed deputation to the capital, swearing to uphold the “Will of the People.”

Visual modes of approbation are preferred and decisions should be physically seen and heard: “The decrees shall then, in the midst of the most profound silence be read over, or rather, they shall be lifted up, inscribed upon standards, and displayed to the sight.”<sup>632</sup> This visual manner of decision-making would be the only way to avoid pretence and artifice and Oswald recommends constant communication between the National Assembly and the townships, and between the townships and the primary assemblies. Voices must be heard, known and circulated, not restricted to the corridors of secret assemblies. He favours the dissemination of decision-making and knowledge amongst the widest possible audience, echoing George Edwards’ proposal in his tract to the constitutional committee in which he put forward the need for the wide circulation of both knowledge and legal texts.<sup>633</sup>

For Oswald, executive had to be “*actually and immediately* chosen by the people.”<sup>634</sup> To be a member of the National Assembly, a delegate had to be chosen three times at three different levels, the primary, the township and the nation. Elections would be frequent, taking place every three months in the primary assemblies, every six months in the townships and every twelve months at national level. Oswald concentrates on the layers of government and

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<sup>631</sup> Oswald *The Government of the People* 10.

<sup>632</sup> Oswald *The Government of the People* 11.

<sup>633</sup> For a discussion of Edwards’ proposals, see below, pp. 293-302.

<sup>634</sup> Oswald *The Government of the People* 12.

the importance of communication between them. Representatives would have to undergo “the trial of public opinion.”<sup>635</sup> Through a system of multi-layered election and decision-making, the people would be able to exercise their sovereignty in the establishment of laws and their free choice in the election of “public agents”, a term he preferred to “representatives.”

Oswald anticipates three possible objections to his form of government. Detractors might suggest that the process of decision-making would be too long, that there would be too much discordance and conflict, or that the people would have no time to attend to private concerns if they were constantly involved in public duties. In answer to the first objection, he suggests that the process would not be long if it “proceeds with the rapidity of thought, unshackled, unimpeded, and shaped towards one object.”<sup>636</sup> If the people were free and uninhibited in their debate, the process would be short and private responsibilities would not be neglected. As for the fear of discord, he argues that at least the system he had articulated would crush aristocratic conspiracies “under the great mass of the National Common Sense.” Finally, as regards the question of public service deflecting men from the individuals concerns, Oswald states:

I have remarked, that this objection is commonly found in the mouths of men, who yet think it no waste of time that the people should dance attendance at the heels of the Priest for six months in the year. They think it perfectly fit, that the people should pass their time in the performance of barbarous ceremonies, too ridiculous for the practice of a dancing dog; but they cannot bear that they should assemble for any purpose that comes home to the business and the bosoms of men. They will not permit them to meet together to exercise their reason; but they encourage them to assemble, in order to profess their submission to a religion, which demands an absolute surrender of the human understanding!<sup>637</sup>

For Oswald, it was only those who believed that the people were not ready to take an active role in law-making, elections and government who put forward the argument that men would no longer have time for their private lives. He denounces the influence of Church ceremony

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<sup>635</sup> Oswald *The Government of the People* 14.

<sup>636</sup> Oswald *The Government of the People* 15.

<sup>637</sup> Oswald *The Government of the People* 15-16.



over the public mind. On this question he differed from David Williams and George Edwards, both of whom believed that religious rites could have a role in conveying republican values.

Oswald relied on the ideas of those on the democratic fringe of the British and French reform movements, dismissing representative government as a sham and favouring a longer, yet more participative system of direct democracy, involving the people in the process of law-making. Oswald had, like Paine, been on the editorial board of the Cercle Social's magazine, *La Chronique du Mois*. The editors of the publication, while progressively radicalised over the course of 1791-92, still favoured some enlightened steering of the popular voice. Yet from Oswald's tract, it appears that he did not see any incompatibility between his editorial role on the board of *La Chronique du Mois* and his own private views, which took inspiration from other sources. Like Merry, Oswald developed an individual position within the different political currents and debates that surrounded him. What united these two activists was their respective mistrust of the corrupt practices of representation, epitomised by the British oligarchic system, and their lack of reverence for precedent, particularly the work of the Constituent Assembly which had been discredited and replaced by the National Convention. Oswald went further, both in the impertinent style of writing he adopted, but also in the degree of popular involvement in government he advocated. Merry was more reticent, his proposal conjugating elements of a more energetic form of representation with measured openness to democratic involvement. Whereas Paine celebrated representation as the most perfect form of government, Oswald warned against its perversion by place-holders in established political systems such as that of Britain. The approaches of Joel Barlow and David Williams differed markedly from Oswald and Merry, both in the degree of deference they showed to the Constituent Assembly and in the way in which their proposals were anchored in the reality of public administration. Despite these differences of ideas, tone and theoretical models, Williams and Barlow both offered very individual visions of political improvement

and harboured radical tendencies, going beyond what could have been articulated in Britain at the same period of time.

### **III.3.4 Joel Barlow, *Letter to the National Convention of France on the defects in the Constitution of 1791 and the extent of the amendments which ought to be applied* (1792)**

Joel Barlow was an American entrepreneur and speculator whose activities on behalf of the Sciotto Company led him to Europe to attempt the ill-fated sale of American lands in Ohio to French men and women seeking exit out of revolutionary France. Yet Barlow also acquired a reputation in politics and was honoured by the National Convention with French citizenship in 1793. Prior to his nomination, he had been posted to the Savoy in November 1792, where he had been charged with overseeing the institution of French administration in the former principality of the kingdom of Sardinia. Barlow supported the early republican drive in France and became acquainted with Brissot, whose *Nouveau Voyage dans les Etats-Unis* (1788) he began the translation of in spring 1791. In 1791 and for some of 1792 Barlow had been in London, mixing in British radical circles and making a reputation for himself through the publication of his *Advice to the Privileged Orders* and the poem, *Conspiracy of Kings*. These works “brought Barlow the official recognition from English radicals that until then had been only informally his.”<sup>638</sup> He was nominated for SCI membership by John Horne Tooke on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1792 and was toasted by an SCI gathering on 13<sup>th</sup> April of the same year. Philipp Ziesche suggests that Barlow was a man for whom the Revolution provided an opportunity for radical self re-definition which included the transformation of his political outlook from “a defender of American class privilege to the spokesman of the illiterate European masses.”<sup>639</sup> M. Ray Adams identifies a similar transformative process in the political outlook of Robert Merry, who “was still until the actual outbreak of the Revolution apparently satisfied with the

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<sup>638</sup> Buel, *Joel Barlow: American Citizen* 148.

<sup>639</sup> Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots* 68.

British brand of liberty.”<sup>640</sup> Presence in Paris during the Revolution could be a politicising experience and motor of personal regeneration.

At a meeting of the SCI on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1792, Barlow’s *Letter to the National Convention of France on the defects in the Constitution of 1791 and the extent of the amendments which ought to be applied* was read to those gathered. A week later, Barlow was present at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, where the SCI held its weekly meetings. At the occasion, Barlow was appointed to the committee which would consider an address to the National Convention. The following week, on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1792, it was decided that Barlow and John Frost would be charged with delivering the address on behalf of the SCI. Richard Buel suggests that Barlow was seen as an ideal candidate because he was being considered for French citizenship and was in the process of translating his *Letter to the National Convention* into French. Equally, allying Frost with Barlow “underscored the fraternal connection between peoples of different nations.”<sup>641</sup> They set off on their mission in early November and presented the SCI address to the Convention on the 28<sup>th</sup> of the same month, at the same sitting as the British Club address. A letter read at the SCI gathering of 7<sup>th</sup> December 1792 confirmed the deposition of the address at the bar of the Convention. Barlow therefore, though an American citizen, was closely involved in London-based radicalism and also played a role in the British Club in Paris. He was the confidante to whom Thomas Paine trusted his manuscripts on the night of his arrest and his views were widely considered among the British ruling authorities to be as insidious as those of Thomas Paine.<sup>642</sup>

Barlow’s *Letter to the National Convention* demonstrates that the invocation of precedent and gradual reform based on existing arrangements was not uniquely a Burkean position and could also be the preserve of democratic reformers. In what is a radical text

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<sup>640</sup> M. Ray Adams, “Robert Merry, Political Romanticist” 26-27.

<sup>641</sup> Buel, *Joel Barlow: American Citizen* 156.

<sup>642</sup> As mentioned earlier, Barlow’s pamphlet, *Advice to the Privileged Orders* was considered a seditious work. Those reformers who had read the work were readily associated with treason during the treason trials of radical reformers in London in 1794. See above p. 127.

draped in pragmatic and diplomatic language, Barlow examines the constitutional settlement already in place in France and suggests ways in which they must be revised. He uses the constitution of 1791 as a starting point, one which had value, but which contained defects incompatible with free, republican government. This is one of the major differences compared to the tracts of John Oswald and Robert Merry. While the latter writers tackled the different constitutional questions in isolation from their political context, not associating them with the arrangements in place in France since 1791, Barlow anchors his text in the political landscape of the constitutional monarchy which preceded the announcement of the republic. His tract is an attempt to aid France with the establishment of its constitution and not provide a blueprint for reform in Britain.

In *Letter to the National Convention*, Barlow states his “veneration” for the Constituent Assembly that had framed the constitution of 1791. For Barlow, the republican constitution should be “revised” rather than begun on fresh ground. The 1791 settlement had been a step in the right direction and the skill of the drafters had been negated by subsequent commentators: “Perhaps the merits of that body of men will never be properly appreciated.”<sup>643</sup> These men had done the essential groundwork on which the foundations of the new republic would be laid. They had overturned “abuses” and “prejudices”, “open opposition of interests”, “corruption”, “faction”, and all the things “which escape our common observation.”<sup>644</sup> Barlow, writing in autumn 1792, recognised that the status and contribution of the early revolutionaries would eventually be overlooked or blackened by history. The “legacy” of their “deliberative capacity” would remain “a lasting monument to their praise.”<sup>645</sup>

Yet despite Barlow’s high opinion of the members of the Constituent Assembly, his vision was far from conservative in scope. Certainly more subtle in his treatment of the constitutional antecedents that preceded the republic than Oswald, Barlow nevertheless puts

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<sup>643</sup> Barlow, *Letter to the National Convention* 5.

<sup>644</sup> Barlow, *Letter to the National Convention* 6.

<sup>645</sup> Barlow, *Letter to the National Convention* 6.

forward a model for the root-and-branch overhaul of the existing system of government and lays much greater emphasis on the role of the people, on true representation and the need to eradicate all vestiges of monarchical rule. Barlow insists on the incompatibility between monarchy and free government, marvelling at the fact that this was not recognised sooner. He associates republicanism with simplicity, monarchy with complexity, asserting, in the same way as Paine, that kingship was wrong in principle. If there had been any good done by retaining monarchy longer than necessary in France, “it has taught them a new doctrine, which no experience can shake, and which reason must confirm, *that kings can do no good.*”<sup>646</sup>

After coming down unequivocally on the side of republicanism and criticising the continued adherence to monarchy after the king’s flight to Varennes, Barlow then addresses the issue of representation. He denies the idea that the wise and virtuous should make laws for the rest. It is “the people at large, ignorant and vitious as they are” who are the real lawmakers, through their representatives. For Barlow, laws originated in the people through representation. He does not advocate direct democracy, in which the people would decide the formulation of laws for themselves, but suggests that the act of electing representatives was a means for the people to make their voice heard. Representatives were chosen by the people and were therefore “organs” of the general will. He states, “I am confident that any people, whether virtuous or vitious, wise or ignorant, numerous or few, rich or poor, are the best judges of their own wants relative to the restraint of laws, and would always supply those wants better than they could be supplied by others.”<sup>647</sup> It did not matter that the people were not virtuous, educated or ready for liberty, they were still the best-qualified to decide on the public good. Barlow falls short of recommending direct intervention by the people in law-making, but he does elevate “true” representation over its corrupt form in Britain. Like Merry

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<sup>646</sup> Barlow, *Letter to the National Convention* 12.

<sup>647</sup> Barlow, *Letter to the National Convention* 19.

and Oswald, he also borrowed from different traditions. With echoes of Rousseau, he emphasises the centrality of the “general will” of the people and suggests that “the sure and only characteristic of a good law is, *that it be the perfect expression of the will of the nation*; its excellence is precisely in proportion to the universality and freedom of consent.”<sup>648</sup> Therefore if Barlow reiterated the importance of delegation and highlighted the role of war in provoking national revitalisation, issues that reflected his role in the American Revolution, it seems clear that his ideas were nonetheless coloured by the particular circumstances in which he was writing.

Barlow also concurred with Paine on the importance of present generations being able to legislate for themselves. In a section on the difference between framing constitutions and laws he writes:

To suppose that our predecessors were wiser than ourselves is not an extraordinary thing, though the opinion may be ill-founded; but to suppose that they can have left us a better system of political regulations than we can make for ourselves, is to ascribe to them a degree of discernment to which our own bears no comparison; it suppose them to have known our condition by prophecy better than we can know it by experience.<sup>649</sup>

Like Paine in *Rights of Man*, Barlow insists that constitutions should be open to change and not the instruments of forebears bent on ruling from the grave over succeeding generations. Constitutions should be subject to amendments and people should be able to exercise their “irresistible right of innovation, whenever experience should discover the defects of the system.”<sup>650</sup> “Innovation” was a bone of contention between radicals and their detractors, seen as essential to the flourishing of liberty in France but condemned in Britain as proof of the reckless conduct of those who would do away with history and all pretensions to stable government in the pursuit of political reform.

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<sup>648</sup> Barlow, *Letter to the National Convention* 21.

<sup>649</sup> Barlow, *Letter to the National Convention* 28-29.

<sup>650</sup> Barlow, *Letter to the National Convention* 29.

Barlow's text differs from those of Oswald and Merry, both in its rhetorical diplomacy and in the arguments propounded. It also echoes the principles expressed by Thomas Paine in *Rights of Man*. Barlow showed much greater deference to the previous governing body, the Constituent Assembly, and its members, than John Oswald. He was also much more reticent on the role of the people in law-making than the author of *The Government of the People*, though he still expressed some radical ideas on the dangers of kingship and the readiness of the people for citizenship. He showed the influence of Paine and the Jeffersonians in his views on constitution-making, and his approach to political representation was inspired by the American example. His proposal was above all anchored in the practical reality of the mission facing the new Convention and its constitution-makers and took its lead from the 1791 settlement.

In the text he sets out fourteen essential points to be guaranteed in the constitutional code and shows a shrewd awareness of the diplomatic dilemmas facing those charged with drafting a new constitution. He also defends his right as a foreigner to engage in the debate on the French constitution:

But my intentions require no apology; I demand to be heard, as a right. Your cause is that of human nature at large; you are the representatives of mankind; and though I am not literally one of your constituents, yet I must be bound by your decrees. My happiness will be seriously affected by your deliberations; and in them I have an interest, which nothing can destroy. I not only consider all mankind as forming but one great family, and therefore bound by a natural sympathy to regard each other's happiness as making part of their own; but I contemplate the French nation at this moment as standing in the place of the whole. You have stepped forward with a gigantic stride to an enterprise which involves the interests of every surrounding nation; and what you began as justice to yourselves, you are called upon to finish as a duty to the human race.<sup>651</sup>

Barlow went on to publish again while he was a resident of Paris. His Part II of the *Advice to the Privileged Orders* was "a universalistic program for the regeneration of mankind through fiscal reform of the European states" and much more utopian and wide-ranging than his *Letter*

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<sup>651</sup> Barlow, *Letter to the National Convention* 4-5.

to the National Convention.<sup>652</sup> Barlow was clearly taking advantage of his growing reputation in Paris. In the later months of 1793 he managed to weather the storm of the Terror through prudent publication decisions and astute political behaviour. He signed an address to the radical Réunion section of Paris in December 1793 along with fellow Americans Mark Leavenworth, James Swan and Colonel Blackden. This address tacitly excused the excesses of the Terror in the larger struggle for freedom from tyranny and recommended the drafting of a lasting republican constitution to secure the longevity of the Revolution. Despite his preference for representation over popular democracy and his pragmatic way of dealing with the debate on the republican constitution, Barlow was on the politically radical wing of the expatriate community. His status as an American citizen protected him from accusations of counter-revolution while his British colleagues found themselves increasingly the object of suspicion during the Terror.<sup>653</sup>

### **III.3.5 David Williams, *Observations sur la dernière constitution de la France, avec des vues pour la formation de la nouvelle constitution* (1793)**

David Williams' tract on the constitution was written at the behest of key members of the constitutional committee following his nomination for French citizenship in August 1792 and invitation to France by Roland and Brissot in November 1792 as an advisor to the drafting committee. Like Paine, Williams was an associate of the Girondin members of the Convention and had been in close correspondence with Brissot in the years preceding the Revolution. Madame Roland recounted how "he was invited by the government to repair to Paris, where he passed several months, and frequently conferred with the most active

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<sup>652</sup> Buel, *Joel Barlow: American Citizen* 172.

<sup>653</sup> Nevertheless, the situation of American expatriates in France was increasingly problematic. America's tardiness in paying back debts amassed during the War of Independence and equivocal support for the Revolution meant that, despite the shared revolutionary and republican heritage, Americans were not above suspicion or reproach.



representatives of the nation.”<sup>654</sup> Despite Williams’ contribution to the debates in France and his growing reputation as a revered political thinker amongst French statesmen, his constitutional analysis has been largely sidelined in favour of studies of his diplomatic role across the British-French divide once war had broken out. As his namesake, historian David Williams wrote in 1938:

He did not take part in the deliberations of the constitutional committee, but was requested to write out a criticism of the Constitution of 1791, which he was to discuss with Condorcet, Gensonne and Brissot. This he did under the title of 'Observations on the Last Constitution of France' which was translated by Maudru and published in French. But the labours of the committee were overshadowed by the trial of the king and by the imminence of war with England, and it was in the latter connection that Williams's presence in France became of some diplomatic importance, and that his autobiography has some value in indicating the attitude of the Girondist leaders towards the war.<sup>655</sup>

Despite the overshadowing of Williams’ role in the constitutional debate by his status as a diplomat, there have been some studies of Williams’ involvement as an advisor to the constitutional committee. Franck Alengry has assessed the importance of Williams’ work to Condorcet’s constitutional thought and Whitney Jones discusses *Observations* at some length in his biography of the Welsh reformer.<sup>656</sup> Jones suggests that “much of Condorcet’s thought runs parallel with that of David Williams,” and places him in the Girondin camp. For the historian, “both the general orientation and specific features of this abortive Constitution at least attest to a major conjunction of minds” between Condorcet and Williams.<sup>657</sup> James Dybikowski has analysed Williams’ political thought and engagement in a recent biographical account, laying emphasis on the recurrence and development of particular philosophical themes in the educationalist’s work. Although *Observations* was the only text that Williams published in Paris, while at the heart of revolutionary debate, Dybikowski prefers to consider this work in the context of other writings on themes such as representation, government and

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<sup>654</sup> Manon Roland, *An Appeal to Impartial Posterity*, part 1. Translated from the French. (London: Johnson, 1795) 42.

<sup>655</sup> D. Williams, “The Missions of David Williams and James Tilly Matthews to England (1793),” *The English Historical Review* 53.212 (1938) 655.

<sup>656</sup> See Alengry, *Condorcet: guide de la Révolution française* and Jones *The Anvil and the Hammer*.

<sup>657</sup> Jones, *The Anvil and the Hammer* 131.

liberty rather than in the context of writings on the French constitution debate. Yet he does pay particular attention to the relationship between Brissot and Williams in the run-up to and during the French Revolution, noting their lengthy correspondence and Williams' view that he had played the role of mentor to the revolutionary. Dybikowski considers Williams a "wary radical."<sup>658</sup> Although he was as scathing of the English constitution as many a hardened reformer, criticising Montesquieu's reverence for British mixed monarchy, Williams kept his distance from "organised reform."<sup>659</sup> This is mirrored in his lack of direct engagement with the British Club, which was at its most dynamic during Williams' brief stay in Paris.

Williams went to republican France in December 1792 for a month as the particular guest of Brissot and Roland, both of whom sent him invitations and guaranteed his subsistence costs while in Paris. Brissot had met him in London before the Revolution both in 1783-84 and in 1788 on his return from America. They had corresponded regularly before and during the early stages of the Revolution when Williams expressed his thoughts on the hostility to the Revolution in Britain but also on his ideas about constitutions. Williams believed his own ideas had materially influenced the first French constitution drafters. Dybikowski argues that "from the outset Williams provided Brissot with advice on improving the political and constitutional position of France."<sup>660</sup> He had already published a number of works on constitutions and government, in particular his *Letters on Political Liberty* (1782) and *Lessons to a Young Prince* (1790), in which he gave an account of the French Revolution. He expanded his views on constitutional issues in the second edition of *Lessons to a Young Prince*. He deplored the federation of disparate interests under the new American constitution and believed the emerging constitution of France could correct some of the errors committed across the Atlantic. One of his objections to the representative systems in both America and

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<sup>658</sup> James Dybikowski, *On Burning Ground: An Examination of the Ideas, Projects, and Life of David Williams* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1993) 160.

<sup>659</sup> Dybikowski *On Burning Ground* 161.

<sup>660</sup> Dybikowski *On Burning Ground* 202.

England was the fact that constituency boundaries were decided at random rather than being based on some rule of principle. Yet though the American model of commercial republicanism, where individuals were interested and involved in but not preoccupied or submerged by political concerns, may have been an influence on Williams, he did not go as far as to suggest that France should apply the American precedent to the letter. In previous writings he had criticised American federalism. Both the American and English modes of representation could be perfected and Williams saw the first French constitution as being a reworking of and improvement upon the settlement across the Atlantic which, in its turn had erased some of the more pernicious elements of the unreformed British system.

In *Observations* Williams emphasises the importance of preserving the right to liberty, property and security as well as equality before the law, but sees no justification for equality in social affairs:

In England, the opinion of equality is on this account generally resisted or despised. In France, it is dreadfully misunderstood; no declaration having oftener met my ear, than the following, that the people should be equal in fact as well as in words, & that agitations and tumult would never cease until all usurping intriguers be reduced to a level with their fellow citizens.<sup>661</sup>

On the issue of equality, Williams errs on the side of British scepticism, considering that the French desire to overturn hierarchy and create one level of citizens was misguided and would lead to social disorder.

*Observations* was translated into French by Citoyen Maudru and published in January 1793 by the Imprimerie du Cercle Social, the printing press of the Girondin grouping. Williams was dissatisfied with his finished text, claiming that he had not been allowed to compose his thoughts at leisure, but was hampered by endless visits from acquaintances. He had been constrained by the shortness of his visit and regretted the absence of his books from

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<sup>661</sup> MS.2.192, Williams, *Observations on the Late Constitution of France* 2-3. For all quotes from Williams' tract I have used his original manuscript text, conserved at Cardiff Public Library. All page numbers therefore relate to this manuscript rather than the printed translation. In the translated version "word" is replaced by the French for "law" i.e. "droit".

his own study. He also considered that his work, once written, would probably have been rendered superfluous by the writings of others. These admissions appeared in the manuscript of the tract but were omitted from the final published version. He later recounted his experience as an advisor to the committee in his autobiographical text. Williams was frustrated by the apparent descent of French politics into faction and his inability to access the records of the constitutional committee:

The general spirit of Faction, so completely pervaded the pretended Statesmen, that my Invitation and Business were known only to a Part of the Executive Council, by whose order my expences were to be defrayed – I had therefore no access to the Minutes of the Committee of Constitution; & was requested only to write down my Objections, Condorcet, Gensonné, & Brissot were to converse with me. In a few days I delivered to Brissot the annexed “Observations”<sup>662</sup>

In the foreword to *Observations*, Williams explained the task he set out to achieve:

I came to France with the idea, that the little assistance I might afford, would be applied to the labours of the Committee of Constitution, which I supposed to have made considerable progress in their work – & unprepared by previous reading & meditation for the formation of a plan, - the task that has been assigned me. I have therefore re-perused the late constitution, & introduced my ideas of a new structure, among my remarks on the foundation of the old.<sup>663</sup>

His own interpretation of the mandate he received from Brissot and Roland changed over time. He initially wrote that he had been asked to analyse the defects in the existing constitution before providing an outline of a new draft. Yet by the time he published his autobiographical account, he was contending that his mission had been simply to comment on the old constitution.<sup>664</sup>

Williams’ approach to the task in hand was dictated by the mandate set out by his French commissioners. Thus he grounded his analysis in a detailed consideration of the existing arrangements conceived by the Constituent Assembly before providing his own views on the requirements of a new blueprint. Williams began by criticising the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, not solely for its content, but because its rigid form

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<sup>662</sup> D. Williams, *Incidents in My Own Life* 28, also quoted in Jones, *The Anvil and the Hammer* 122.

<sup>663</sup> MS.2.192, Williams, *Observations on the Late Constitution of France*.

<sup>664</sup> Dybikowski, *On Burning Ground* 203. See footnote 56.

precluded the elaboration of reasoned arguments.<sup>665</sup> In his view, a declaration resists the type of rational demonstration needed in a constitutional text. He goes on to dissect the declaration and constitution article by article, basing his advice and observations less on abstract principles than on a careful reading of the political circumstances in which he was writing and a blunt refusal, despite it being the “fashion”, to criticise the work of those who had gone before.

Williams’ chief concern is the issue of representation and the role of the people in law-making yet he expresses views which were very different to those of John Oswald. While the Scottish radical had lauded the noisy, vociferous place of the people in ratifying laws in vocal neighbourhood assemblies, Williams draws back from such direct involvement of individuals in the legislative process, believing the “general will” of the people could not be gauged by an aggregate of loud voices but was distilled from a rational process of delegation and consultation. The people were too influenced by local concerns, their views therefore needed arbitration and had to be rationalised through delegation. Oswald’s shouting, groaning citizens, voicing their opinion and giving credence to laws through physically gesturing their assent or disapproval, have no place in Williams’ vision of government. Not only would such a settlement preclude the efficient delivery of laws and therefore be detrimental to the running of state affairs, but it would also distract individuals from their own private industry and endeavour, activities at the heart of the Dissenting philosophy that Williams espoused. Williams therefore was one of a number of British observers that drew on Protestant notions of virtue and productivity in politics but also in the private life of citizens. Although he

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<sup>665</sup> The Declaration was approved by the National Assembly on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1789 and contained seventeen articles. The preamble read, “The representatives of the French people, organised as a National Assembly, believing that the ignorance, neglect, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole cause of public calamities and of the corruption of governments, have determined to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of man, in order that this declaration, being constantly before all the members of the Social body, shall remind them continually of their rights and duties; in order that the acts of the legislative power, as well as those of the executive power, may be compared at any moment with the objects and purposes of all political institutions and may thus be more respected, and, lastly, in order that the grievances of the citizens, based hereafter upon simple and incontestable principles, shall tend to the maintenance of the constitution and resound to the happiness of all.”

favoured representative government, like William Godwin he was also an advocate of private self-improvement and education.

While Oswald, influenced by classical tenets, held that popular participation in law-making was the mark of an engaged citizenry, for Williams, influenced by Brissot and Roland, a representative model founded on the principle of “delegation” – a term also used by Paine – was preferable. Not only would this make for an organised, clearly visible decision-making procedure and banish the threat of intrigue, which festered in the British oligarchic system, but it would allow individuals to have a say in the running of government through restricted primary assemblies while not removing them from their private – commercial – activities. If for Oswald the duty to take part in votes on each proposed law was the mark of a newly mobilised population, for Williams it was an unnecessary distraction from industrious personal pursuits. While Williams criticises the veering of representation into impenetrable cabals and cliques, its fate in Britain, he sees the American remedy as providing the necessary model for revolutionary France. Williams shared a preference with Robert Merry for primary assemblies but did not retain the latter’s scepticism as to the very term of “representation”.<sup>666</sup>

Williams was influenced by Rousseau and his views on the general will, morality and the inalienability of sovereignty, referring to the philosopher’s “brilliant imagination” in *Observations*.<sup>667</sup> Yet Williams was wary about the impact of a heightened role for the people in discussion and decision-making, and this reticence about democratic forms of government comes across in his notes. Williams thought large gatherings inspired tumult and disorder. Thomas Morris, who had collaborated with Williams on the Literary Fund, noted, “He is fond of company and conviviality, but he hates boisterous noise, ill-natured disputes, and the

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<sup>666</sup> It is worth remembering that Williams and Merry had collaborated on the Literary Fund project in 1792 but their experience in France shows their views were different. This might go some way to explaining Merry’s lack of involvement in the Fund on his return in 1793.

<sup>667</sup> Jones *The Anvil and the Hammer* 164-65. MS.2.192, D. Williams, *Observations on the Late Constitution of France* 5.

affectation of knowledge in long speeches.”<sup>668</sup> In *Observations*, Williams contends that large assemblies were “always tumultuous” and “express only some prevailing passions, never a general judgment.”<sup>669</sup> He considers the people of France to be accustomed to “larger assemblies”, “the love of talking”, and “the ambition of oratory” but believed such spontaneous oral forms led to cunning and intrigue.<sup>670</sup> It was this type of distaste for loud and lengthy verbal exchange that Madame Roland would later note as his major criticism of the debates taking place in the Convention:

I saw him, from the very first time he was present at the sittings of the assembly, uneasy at the disorder of the debates, afflicted at the influence exercised by the galleries, and in doubt whether it were possible for such men, in such circumstances, ever to decree a rational constitution. I think that the knowledge which he then acquired of what we were already, attached him more strongly to his country, to which he was impatient to return. How is it possible, said he, for men to debate a question, who are incapable of listening to each other? Your nation does not even take pains to preserve that external decency, which is of so much consequence in public assemblies: a giddy manner, carelessness, and a slovenly person, are no recommendations to a legislator; nor is any thing indifferent which passes in public, and of which the effect is repeated every day. —Good heaven! what would he say now, if he were to see our senators drest, since the 31st of May, like watermen, in long trowsers, a jacket and a cap, with the bosom of their shirts open, and swearing and gesticulating like drunken *sans-culottes*?<sup>671</sup>

There are two strands to this repulsion for large, noisy gatherings. The first is a cultural objection. Williams considered French debate to be characterised by disorganised and riotous talking which could not lead to any rational or considered outcome. Yet, behind this disapproval of large assemblies, lay ambivalence about the readiness of the people for engagement in political decision-making. While he argues forcefully that all men and all unmarried women, even servants, should be citizens and able to exercise their right to vote for the constitutional and legislative delegations, he does not provide for a role for the people in the law-making process. He insists that “reason, judgement, and the public virtues require a minute and capillary organisation, by which they can regularly and silently influence the

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<sup>668</sup> Morris, *A General View of the Life and Writings of the Rev. David Williams* 20.

<sup>669</sup> MS.2.192, D. Williams, *Observations on the Late Constitution of France* 14.

<sup>670</sup> MS.2.192, D. Williams, *Observations on the Late Constitution of France* 16.

<sup>671</sup> Manon Roland, *An Appeal to Impartial Posterity* 41-42.

whole community.”<sup>672</sup> Popular involvement in decision-making assemblies would be a distraction: “The general industry, sobriety and morals of the people can never be preserved, if they are frequently induced to quit their employments, & to mingle in distant and tumultuous assemblies.”<sup>673</sup> While the people should be “assiduously instructed” in all aspects of government and should “comprehend” everything in order to be able to take reasoned decisions, the general will would be enacted through a system of delegation or deputation rather than through direct involvement in decisions.<sup>674</sup>

Williams envisages a role for the clergy in instructing the people, not solely in religious matters but in the civil and moral responsibilities needed in a republican citizenry. Sunday would be the ideal day of the week for such an educational mission as it was already designated as a day of worship. Under the new republican system, people would combine their private religious duties with learning about issues of state and citizenship. This suggestion was included in the manuscript version but not actually printed in the published tract. It is likely that Williams began to doubt the wisdom of providing for a significant role for the clergy in the new republic while the general trend was towards the replacement of religious orders by civil institutions. He may therefore have judged it prudent to omit this recommendation. The question of religion was a perpetual problem in the relationship of dissenting reformers in France to the Revolution. As Brian Rigby has argued, “despite the progressive, unorthodox views of some dissenters, and despite the way in which anti-Jacobins branded them as infidels, most Unitarians were still very much part of a pious and strict non-conformist culture which considered that fundamental religious and moral principles should be widespread in the population at large.”<sup>675</sup> British radicals in Paris struggled to find compatibility between their religious views and the trend towards secularisation in the

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<sup>672</sup> MS.2.192, D. Williams, *Observations on the Late Constitution of France* 15.

<sup>673</sup> MS.2.192, D. Williams, *Observations on the Late Constitution of France* 14.

<sup>674</sup> MS.2.192, D. Williams, *Observations on the Late Constitution of France* 24, 18.

<sup>675</sup> Brian Rigby, “Radical Spectators of the Revolution: The Case of the *Analytical Review*,” *The French Revolution and British Culture*, ed. Ceri Crossley and Ian Small (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1989) 69.



Revolution and Williams' last-minute decision to erase the provision for a role for the clergy from his advice on the constitution is a clear example.

In his writings prior to *Observations*, Williams had, like Paine, denied the existence of a British constitution. Equally, like the author of *Rights of Man* he believed that the settlement of 1688 was far from being the apotheosis of liberty but had eclipsed the people in an arrangement which had consolidated the power of the propertied class. Like Paine, he was sceptical of the true reforming pretensions of the Whigs. In *Observations*, he develops his notion of conventions more fully, suggesting, again as Paine had done, that governments could not effectuate reform from within but needed an overseeing body – a national convention – to establish or modify a constitution. He suggests that the principle of delegation should be applied both to the constitutional and legislative bodies. While the legislature would make laws and the convention would determine constitutional issues, there would equally be a constitutional council charged with conveying the results of deliberations to the people in their primary assemblies. People would assemble in small primary divisions to elect their delegates. A maximum of three delegates would be sent per department, meaning that the national decision-making assembly would be manageable and not prone to the type of disorder that characterised national debate thus far. Each delegate would be “merely messengers” of the people.<sup>676</sup> A convention would be elected every four years by the departments to review the constitution and laws of the legislature. Deputies should be citizens but also free of “imputations of infamous vices,” they should be acquainted with the arts, agriculture and manufacturing and “without obstinate entanglements from particular interests.”<sup>677</sup> Delegates would have salaries and all ties of patronage would be removed, again ensuring that politics would not descend into cabal and intrigue. Such a system, in contrast to large gatherings which led to oligarchy, would ensure the “will of the majority of all the

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<sup>676</sup> MS.2.192, D. Williams, *Observations on the Late Constitution of France* 18.

<sup>677</sup> MS.2.192, D. Williams, *Observations on the Late Constitution of France* 21.

people” was distilled.<sup>678</sup> The move away from the term “general will” is interesting. Williams now considered it impossible to form a whole out of the plethora of individual desires. They were fundamentally irreconcilable; hence the need for arbitration and the discovery of the will of the “majority” of the people rather than one single will.

Unlike Oswald, and to a certain extent Merry, who criticised British representative democracy as being the epitome of artifice and deception, Williams considers that some good could be derived from careful observation of Britain. Of course oligarchic corruption was to be avoided, yet certain aspects of British custom were to be celebrated. Williams suggests that in practice a local manufacturer or tradesman would rarely represent his county in a political capacity ensuring that parochial interests rarely interfered with wider politics. Equally, he argues that the example of British reticence about the use of the term “equality” should be heeded in France. While equality before the law was surely to be welcomed, real equality – the dissolving or levelling of social status – was illusory and courted the danger of subversive turbulence within the social fabric and the destruction of property. For Williams, like Mary Wollstonecraft, the maintenance of property was essential to achieving reform without the destruction of order.

These allusions to existing forms of government, whether reformed or unreformed, highlight the importance Williams attached to history, experience and precedent. In this he returned to a theme he had pursued in earlier work, in which he celebrated the essential justice of the system of government created under Alfred the Great before the Norman Conquest and the subjugation of British freeborn rights in post-1688 society. For many reformers in Britain, the myth of the Norman yoke and a halcyon age of pre-conquest liberty and justice were powerful rhetorical weapons used to justify their support for reform and distance their ideas from French influence. Although appeals to Britain’s ancient constitution were rare among

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<sup>678</sup> MS.2.192, D. Williams, *Observations on the Late Constitution of France* 27.

expatriate radicals, who tended to reject the British constitutional paradigm outright, Williams was one of the few who cited Britain as a model for the French constitution.

In *Observations*, Williams does not, however, restrict his appeal to history to Britain, but draws on pan-European affairs, citing Saxon, German and French historical practice to provide examples of good governance. He suggests that the new French constitution could not simply be anchored in theory but must take account of “custom.” The new constitution would have to take inspiration from history and it was folly to argue that the different proposals put forward for reforming the constitution were anything other than “ancient materials variously adjusted.” He denies the “pretences of originality” and criticises the “projecting dogmatists” who simply remoulded the thought of classical, Saxon and French writings and “formed them into various & fanciful systems.” Tacitus, Cesar, Selden, the Saxon Chronicle, Hottman’s *Franco-Gallia* and Wilkins’ collection of *Anglo-Saxon Laws* are held up as the traditions on which all new experiments should rely. This confirms the expedient streak identified by Dybikowski in Williams’ *Philosopher*, where Williams had called upon English political history in search of solutions to the question of governance. In this work, the fictional philosopher states “that in religion, as well as in politics, I am not imagining the best that may be conceived, but the most expedient and practicable in our circumstances.”<sup>679</sup> Williams, in contrast to many British radicals on French soil, who preferred to consider the issue of constitutions in the abstract and who sought to pursue novel ideas of constitutional form, denied the very possibility of originality in the drafting of a new constitution. All settlements were simply reconfigurations of previous orders and therefore had to be rooted in what went before.<sup>680</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> Dybikowski, *On Burning Ground* 150.

<sup>680</sup> Although the writings of Burke on the French Revolution are sometimes seen as heralding an era of British conservatism and appeals to ancient rights, Gerald Newman has suggested that many of Burke’s arguments hail from earlier British radical culture. He notes “The truth is that Burke, defending the upper classes against a much exaggerated ‘French’ radical threat, in fact borrowed his organicist ideas from the English radical writings of the pre-1789 period. The idea of a native social compact, enshrined in history and passed down as an inalienable

While tracts such as that of Williams, overtly republican and critical of the vein of corruption associated with British parliamentarianism and the propertied elite, would have been considered radical on the British mainland, in the context of the nascent French republic, such hesitancy about the application of theoretical models, refusal of direct popular participation and attachment to custom would have courted accusations of conservatism and even counter-revolution, at least for those revolutionary figures influenced by the Parisian sections and with increasing political sway after January 1793. Although France had the opportunity to develop a more progressive, improved form of representation, Williams harboured a deep scepticism for some of the mechanisms and developments at work in the Revolution and, like Mary Wollstonecraft who wrote her *An Historical and Moral View* in 1794, was cautious about the merits of “innovation” and “projecting.” Projects were dangerous as they were the fruit of theoretical inquiry detached from empirical observation.

Madame Roland sang his praises, Brissot was his personal friend and correspondent, Roland sent him an official invitation and his views were published by the Imprimerie du Cercle Social; if any British figure was distinctly associated with a particular political grouping it was Williams. He was also commissioned to take part in a diplomatic mission on behalf of his Girondin associates to try and forestall the advent of war with Britain. The failure of this mission and Williams’ disengagement with the Revolution is recorded in his autobiographical text. Williams certainly felt the same kind of mistrust of popular intervention in politics that united the Girondins. It was also the kind of social exclusiveness and refusal to entertain truly popular radical reform for which John Thelwall would upbraid William Godwin.<sup>681</sup> British reformers in Paris disagreed about the extent of popular involvement in politics. John Hurford Stone criticised Williams’ nomination for citizenship, noting scathingly

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inheritance through the generations, was scarcely original with him.” G. Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* (London: Macmillan, 1997) 228.

<sup>681</sup> Michael Scrivener suggests that Thelwall occupied “an especially dangerous place between the polite world of Godwin and the popular world of Spence.” See Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories* 260.

that “They are wretchedly informed respecting characters in England; and from this sample they will get themselves laughed at.”<sup>682</sup> Ironically, Hurford Stone had collaborated with Williams on the Literary Fund in 1792, yet he clearly did not hold the same political views as the Welsh reformer and had little esteem for him. Williams’ views erred on the conservative side when seen from a radical French perspective and from the point of view of more radical British expatriates in Paris. This earned him an ambiguous reputation among fellow reformers. He certainly avoided contact with members of the British Club, wary of their pretensions at organised politics. Yet viewed from the vantage point of the British authorities, Williams’ stance was still revolutionary. He was a staunch republican who had written to Pétion in March 1792 after the death of Leopold of Austria and as opposition to the continued office of kingship was mounting, to defend the severe punishment of treacherous monarchs:

I congratulate you on the death of the Emperor and on the impeachment of the King’s Ministers. Let them be punished legally but exemplarily:- and if the king be a traitor, notwithstanding his numerous Perjuries now is the moment to decide on his fate, by a truly national judgement.<sup>683</sup>

This extract seems to anticipate the later events of January 1793, which Williams would stay in Paris to witness. The execution of Louis XVI would be seen by many as a “national judgement” meted out to a treacherous king.

Williams left France before the Girondin constitutional proposal was officially tabled, his residence in France being curtailed by the original terms of his mission but also by his awareness of the narrowing scope for action amid a Revolution that had taken a more radical direction. He would later criticise the Girondins for their “involuntary” error of seeking “a perfect political constitution” rather than heeding his advice on practicability.<sup>684</sup> Just over a month prior to his mission to France and two weeks before the French republic was officially

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<sup>682</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1298.

<sup>683</sup> David Williams to Jérôme Pétion, March 1792, AN F7/4774/70/463.

<sup>684</sup> Quoted in Dybikowski, *On Burning Ground* 216.

declared, Williams had joined Joel Barlow and William Godwin for tea.<sup>685</sup> Barlow would shortly write his *Letter to the National Convention*, and the events in France would surely have occupied the conversation. According to Dybikowski, Williams was held in high esteem by John Oswald, whom he met on a number of occasions in England before they both headed for revolutionary France and whom he aided with a relief grant from the Literary Fund. It is interesting to note this prior, mutually respectful acquaintance, considering the different ideological paths taken by the two men once in France.<sup>686</sup> This also lends weight to the view that joint residence in France did not necessarily lead British radicals to concur in their political opinions.

Back in Britain after leaving Paris in February 1793, Williams disengaged with the Revolution, losing much of his early enthusiasm. His later political writings embraced the balance of the British constitution and celebrated its pragmatic and empirical foundations, a position which Madame Roland had anticipated in early 1793. He would go on to criticise the lack of expediency of the French leaders he had encountered and regret the overthrow of the 1791 constitution, whose dissolution he had openly approved of and agreed to comment on in late 1792. Dybikowski points to the disparity between Williams' actual behaviour during the Revolution and his opinion in his later autobiography. Jones, however, suggests that Williams did retain a certain degree of coherence in his political thought despite his reorientation towards an establishment bias in his post-revolutionary career. Yet there can be little doubt that Williams, who worked with the loyalist leader John Reeves on the Literary Fund from the mid 1790s and accepted commissions to write government press articles, rebuked his earlier support for the Revolution and conformed to the vision of the disillusioned returning eye-

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<sup>685</sup> The entry in Godwin's diary for 9<sup>th</sup> September 1792 reads "Su. Write 6 pages. D r Lister calls. Dine at Mr Holcroft's: tea major Jardine's, with Holcroft, D. Williams, Barlow & major Derham." See *The Diary of William Godwin*, ed. Victoria Myers, David O'Shaughnessy, and Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford Digital Library, 2010). <http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>.

<sup>686</sup> See Dybikowski, *On Burning Ground* 161. The author quotes a letter from Williams to Brissot, dated 29<sup>th</sup> November 1791, in which the former describes Oswald as "a man of Talents & with whom in England I have had some acquaintance."

witness observer. Yet this later position should not blind us to the fact that Williams was an enthusiastic supporter of the Revolution at the turn of 1792, when the republic had already been announced and violent acts been accepted as part of the drive towards ridding France of monarchy. It was in this context that he had accepted a mission to advise the constitutional committee on a settlement for the new republic.

### **III.3.6 George Edwards, *Idées pour former une nouvelle constitution et pour assurer la prospérité et le bonheur de la France et d'autres nations* (1793)**

Dr George Edwards is the least known of the contributors to the constitution debate and one of the more obscure members of the British Club. As the contributor to the *Dictionary of National Biography* put it in the late nineteenth century, “it does not appear that Edwards attracted any attention.”<sup>687</sup> David Erdman fleetingly refers to him, but gives him no substantial treatment in his study of Oswald’s compatriots. Yet, over the course of his lifetime, Edwards was probably the most prolific writer of all the expatriates affiliated to the British Club, covering a wide range of interests and topics in his written output. The British Museum counts forty-two separate publications by Edwards among its collection.<sup>688</sup> Later esoteric offerings however, such as *Effectual Means of Relieving the Exigencies and Grievances of the Times, or of Introducing the New and Happy Era of Mankind* and *A Certain Way to Save our Country, and make us a more Happy and Flourishing People, than at any Former Period of our History* led commentators to posthumously doubt his sanity.<sup>689</sup> Prior to his visit to France at the end of 1792, he had already written tracts on agricultural and farming

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<sup>687</sup> See *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 17 (1885-1900) 118.

<sup>688</sup> For a brief summary of Edwards’ many publications, see the entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* 1885-1900.

<sup>689</sup> *Effectual Means of Relieving the Exigencies and Grievances of the Times, or of Introducing the New and Happy Era of Mankind* (London: [publisher unknown], 1814) and *A Certain Way to Save our Country, and make us a more Happy and Flourishing People, than at any Former Period of our History* (London: Printed for the Author, 1807).

improvement and one on the constitutional regeneration of Great Britain.<sup>690</sup> He had also published work on how to perfect national finance, an important discovery of the eighteenth century, the art of improving land, how to perfect medical practice in line with the ideas of Benjamin Franklin, a way to allow a declining town and its surroundings to flourish and a plan for a universal patriotic society.<sup>691</sup> He would present all of these works to the National Convention in early 1793, along with his tract written for the constitution-makers. In the latter, he synthesised all his previous thought on the general improvement of humanity and suggested his ideas could be applied without difficulty to France.

Little is known about Edwards apart from sparse biographical accounts and one or two appearances at London associational gatherings in 1792. Born in 1752, possibly of Welsh origin, he studied at Edinburgh University and practised medicine both in County Durham and London.<sup>692</sup> Like Robert Merry, he had attended SCI gatherings before his visit to Paris and was registered as present at a meeting at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1792. The only other future British Club member present at the meeting was John Frost, whom he would have come into contact with again in the French capital. Two months later, on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1792, Edwards was again active on the London associational scene, this time taking part in a meeting of the Literary Fund at Wood's Hotel in Covent Garden, where he

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<sup>690</sup> *Some Observations for Assisting Farmers and Others to Acquire the Knowledge of their Business...as delivered January 18, 1779, at the anniversary meeting of the Medical Society of London* (London: [publisher unknown], 1779); *A Plan of an Undertaking Intended for the Improvement of Husbandry, and for Other Purposes* (Newcastle: Saint, 1783); *The Royal and Constitutional Regeneration of Great Britain: or, properly speaking, the effectual advancement of all the different national interests of the kingdom...being the discovery of the practical means of advancing and completing the political economy, the national improvements and civilization; the church, medicine, and law; the government, politics, and finances of the kingdom* (London: Debrett, 1790).

<sup>691</sup> In his tract to the constitutional committee, Edwards drew attention to his previous publications and enclosed them with his address. Although I have been unable to locate all of these treatises, the pamphlet discussing the creation of a universal society was published in 1792 under the title of *Form and Foundation, Views and Laws Proposed for the Consideration of the Members of an Universal Society, or of a Society to be Established by some Similar Name, for the Purposes of Advancing and Completing Public Welfare, Private Happiness and Universal Peace* (London: [publisher unknown], 1792).

<sup>692</sup> The conclusion that he was Welsh is suggested by an entry under “?George Edwards, M.D., 1752-1823; physician and writer on social economics” contained in *The Welsh Book-Plates in the collection of Sir Evan Davies Jones, bart., M. P. of Pentower, Fishguard; A Catalogue, with Biographical and Descriptive Notes* ed. Sir Evan Davies Jones and Herbert M. Vaughan (London: Humphreys, 1920) 21.



would have encountered David Williams and Robert Merry, future contributors to the constitution debate, who were also in attendance that day.<sup>693</sup> Edwards was listed as one of the subscribers to the Fund in the constitutions of the society. Despite his relative anonymity in the history of British radicalism, Edwards seems to have been closely involved in the activist network in the early 1790s and was keenly interested in the way in which collective efforts could generate momentum for social change.

Alger notes that by mid December 1792 Edwards was in Paris and had joined other members of the British Club, including Doctor Maxwell, who had enlisted in the French army. David Erdman wonders whether Edwards literally joined Maxwell in the French military corps. However, it is possible that this was rather a sign that Maxwell had co-opted Edwards into the British Club. This was a typical feature of associational recruitment techniques in reforming societies. Edwards probably took up immediate residence at White's Hotel, as his pamphlet on the constitution, published in early 1793 from Henrik Jansen's publishing house at the Cloître Saint-Honoré, was signed off from there. He was still in the French capital in March 1793, when his name featured on Nicholas Madgett's list of loyal foreign citizens. Although Erdman suggests that the mention of "Edwards" may in fact have been a reference to Lord Edward Fitzgerald, it seems more likely that it was George Edwards who had staked his claim to a place among the inner circle of international sympathisers.<sup>694</sup> Edwards, still residing at White's Hotel, filed for a passport on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1793, however. The Convention had clearly chosen not to take him up on his offer to work in the service of the Revolution on his agricultural, educational or public health schemes. In submitting his application for departure, he reminded President Jacques Thuriot and the other members of the *Comité de Salut Public* of his previous contribution to the debate over the new constitution

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<sup>693</sup> See the notes of attendance in the Royal Literay Fund Committee Minute Book, folio 22.

<sup>694</sup> David Erdman did not acknowledge the place of George Edwards in the British Club and it is probably for this reason that he suggests the name on the list may have been Lord Edward Fitzgerald.

and reiterated his belief in “true republicanism”.<sup>695</sup> The application was accepted by three members and Edwards probably left shortly after.

Following his return to Britain, Edwards continued to publish widely on topics ranging from the means of alleviating food scarcity and famine to how to negotiate peace and prosperity and British imperial interests.<sup>696</sup> These later publications, their titles revealing the grandiose hopes of their author to offer a complete system to regenerate humanity at large, prompted commentators to question his mental state. An obituary in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* suggested that “his publications savour more of visionary theory, than sound reasoning,” while a later commentator summed up: “It may be conjectured that his sanity was imperfect. He died in London on 17 Feb. 1823, in his seventy-second year.”<sup>697</sup>

The features of Edwards’ expansive vision of human regeneration are all present in his tract to the legislators of the National Convention entitled *Idées pour former une nouvelle constitution et pour assurer la prospérité et le bonheur de la France et d’autres nations*. He introduced his more substantial work in a short address in which he outlined his general argument. Concerned with “national regeneration”, “perfection”, and the means of creating a society which would ensure man’s happiness, he addressed both the structure of government and the means of securing social improvement. Believing that man’s natural destiny was perfect harmony in society, he showed faith in the potential for prosperity and happiness that the Revolution offered. He also offered his services to the Convention, presenting himself as a “soldier in your cause,” and hoping that a role could be found for him in either the pursuit of

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<sup>695</sup> See the passport request at AN F7/4412. Edwards’ application was signed off by three members of the committee.

<sup>696</sup> *Radical Means of Counteracting the Present Scarcity, and Preventing Famine in the Future :Including the Proposal of a Maximum Founded on a New Principle, to which is Prefixed, an Address to the Legislature, on a Plan for Meliorating the Condition of Society at Large* (London: Johnson, 1801); *A Plain Practical Plan, by which Great Britain may Extricate herself from her Present Difficulties, Procure the Blessings of Perfect Peace, Prosperity, and Happiness, and Dispense them to the Whole World* (London: [publisher unknown], 1808); *The true original scheme of human economy, applied to the completion of the different interests, and preservation, of the British empire; or, Heads, proposing the establishment of the third, the British dispensation* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: [publisher unknown], 1808).

<sup>697</sup> *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol. 134 (1823) 569. See also *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 17 (1885-1900) 118.

agriculture, medicine or public instruction. He explained that if the Convention were to pursue his plan of agricultural improvement, then monetary resources would be needed and he would be prepared to invest wisely in the plan.

In the same year as his departure to Paris, Edwards published a pamphlet entitled, *Form and Foundation, Views and Laws Proposed for the Consideration of the Members of an Universal Society, or of a Society to be Established by some Similar Name, for the Purposes of Advancing and Completing Public Welfare, Private Happiness and Universal Peace*. The copy held at Harvard University contains a signature from Edwards and notes his address as Coleman Street, the same as that which featured on the Literary Fund list of subscribers.<sup>698</sup> Edwards must have been deeply involved in associational culture in the early years of 1792, nurturing a hope that such reforming and improving initiatives would bring about social renewal and help to improve his own prospects. In his *Adresse aux citoyens législateurs*, Edwards makes reference to this hope of creating a far-reaching culture of universal benevolence. He extols the “universalists”, those French citizens and foreign patriots dedicated to the pursuit of man’s happiness and best-placed to realise the perfection of humanity that his integral system was designed to achieve. The appeal of universal benevolence was still powerful in early 1793, despite the imminence of war and ensuing realignment of national loyalties which tempered such discourse.

The main tract itself does show some of the signs of the “unconscious humour of the egotist deeply persuaded of his mission” referred to in the *Dictionary of National Biography* entry at the end of the nineteenth century. Edwards’ contribution to the constitution debate is a plan for the renovation of the entire social system which he believed would graft concern for “humanity” on to the core revolutionary values of liberty and equality. Although he does tackle the question of political reform, his major concern is about the need to overhaul society

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<sup>698</sup> I have not yet seen this copy of the pamphlet, but the details are from the Bodleian Library holding note.

on a wider scale. He divides his tract up into a series of thematic categories which included agriculture, education, medicine, national improvement, manufacturing and mechanics, the sciences and fine arts, the division of government, state administration, religion, laws, taxes, war and peace, the rights of man in society, the police and finally the cause of liberty and equality. There are some echoes in Edwards' tract of David Williams' ideal delegate, who must be well-versed in the arts, agriculture and manufacturing.

Edwards, unlike Williams however, takes little account of the precise context in which the constitution of France was to emerge, although he does laud republican government as being particularly effective at warding off public corruption. He sees his comprehensive social and economic vision as encompassing all countries, whether monarchical or not. Many of his ideas, as he acknowledges, were forged before the Revolution took place, but this did not make them any less applicable to the French context. His "plan" had been previously presented to the British government, yet the funds required for its application (four to five hundred pounds) had been withheld, evidently a source of rancor for the author. He insists that governments had to be prepared to invest in order to bring about the types of structural social changes needed for social progress. For Edwards, this implied investment in the plans and schemes of individual philosophers and improvers.

Edwards considers perfection in human development desirable and achievable as "men by nature are led towards greatness, and goodness."<sup>699</sup> Man had the capacity to eradicate misery and bring about far-reaching social change. He dwells on the idea of "regeneration" and democratisation, how to inculcate "ordinary minds" with taste, sentiments, passions, virtue and knowledge: "The art of initiating man to such a degree so as to render him intelligent, enlightened, sensitive, human, morally good, lively, capable of the greatness that is in his nature."<sup>700</sup> Yet while fundamental changes in the social fabric were needed any new

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<sup>699</sup> Edwards, *Idées pour former une nouvelle constitution* 20.

<sup>700</sup> Edwards, *Idées pour former une nouvelle constitution* 12.

system had to be based on both simplicity and a wide social reach. All aspects of society – the political system, taxes, elections, agricultural improvement, laws – should be grasped by the “ordinary man”. For this, he advocates the wide circulation of ideas, techniques and knowledge through the printing of books to be sold at low cost. New laws should be printed in language understandable to the average person and circulated in one bound volume. All new advances, whether in science or the arts, should be shared. This repeated insistence on the pooling of knowledge aimed at improvement was reminiscent of reforming societies more widely. The rules of many eighteenth century societies included the fact that no new technique of improvement or innovation was to be concealed from another member in the interests of the general advancement of knowledge.<sup>701</sup>

Linked to the notion of simplicity and with clear echoes of both the Jeffersonian vision of an ideal society and the theories of writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Edwards celebrates agriculture rather than commerce as the principal motor of human society and added to this pillar of human society both medicine and education. It was in these three areas that he felt most competent and willing to offer his expertise to the revolutionary government. His views on medicine were primarily based on the work of Benjamin Franklin. On education, Edwards believed that crime would be eradicated if all people had received the necessary public instruction. He also argues that the state should shoulder the burden of paying for both the relief and public education of the poor. While the rich were able to provide for their own families, they could not be expected to fund the improvement of the less well-off. As a result, he suggests the state should pay for the teaching of reading, writing, crafts and arithmetic to children from the lower echelons of society. Poor children with talent needed to be encouraged and supported, while science and art textbooks had to be written in a language which was easily understood. Edwards was the only British contributor to the

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<sup>701</sup> See Clark, *British Clubs and Societies* 1.

constitution debate to actively address the issue of economic redistribution and state funding of social reform. He had a utopian vision of the potential of medicine to remove the inequalities between the wealthy and the poor and eradicate destitution. Yet he laments the lack of doctors in England compared to the size of the population. He emphasises the need for everyone to benefit equally and for the system to be simple, widespread and explicit. His views pre-empt many of the actions begun in the early nineteenth century on poor relief and more equitable distribution of education and social care.<sup>702</sup>

Edwards' outline of local government organisation and the division of power is a universal system designed for application in England but equally relevant to France. He sees republican government as preventing the exercise of illegal power by public servants as all would be directed to the good of the nation. While popular or primary assemblies should choose members of the legislative government, those executing power should be from the highest ranks of men and nominated by the supreme authority. They should be those with spotless public reputations in virtue and talent. Even the simplest person could exercise the right to choose a representative and "in a republic, all men are equal."<sup>703</sup> Thus there should be no marks of authority or distinctions of rank in government: "It is time that we stopped looking at the people with disdain; as amongst all nations we are scathing of conditions we think beneath us; thus the people are everywhere demeaned."<sup>704</sup> In a passage reminiscent of the Jeffersonian celebration of the humble farmer, Edwards suggests that agriculture should replace etiquette, that people should supplant kings, and that the humble cottage should oust the palace. He extols the virtues of simplicity, equality, lack of hierarchy and a system based on agricultural production, while not neglecting improvement in the sciences and arts.

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<sup>702</sup> In the early nineteenth century, radical activists were engaged in a debate over whether parliamentary reform was the best means by which to achieve a fairer society or whether politics was incidental in the quest towards fairer economic distribution of riches. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Chartist movement was characterised by this tension between the language of economic and political reform. See Gregory Claeys, "Owenism and the emergence of social radicalism, 1820–35," *Politics and Anti-Politics in Early British Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 169-207.

<sup>703</sup> Edwards, *Idées pour former une nouvelle constitution* 58.

<sup>704</sup> Edwards, *Idées pour former une nouvelle constitution* 60.

On the finer details of the formation of government, Edwards, like David Williams, argues that the subdividing of authority was preferable as information could be spread more efficiently and communication between the people and their legislators would be facilitated. Overseeing the work of a legislative assembly would be a “revising assembly”, which would present suggestions, defend the rights of the people, and process petitions from the districts. While Williams’ constitutional council would simply inform the people of national decisions, Edwards’s assembly would have a more active role in communicating objections and suggestions. The assembly would be renewed every year at the same time as annual elections to the legislature and the elections to districts and departments. Its role would be to make sure no changes to the constitution were made unless they had been sanctioned by at least two successive administrations. This body was conceived of as a sort of constitutional guarantee or permanent convention of the people, with an overseeing capacity.

In his tract to the constitutional committee, Edwards put forward a wide-ranging vision of social and political reform which would be applicable in any country. He had already attempted to secure support for his agricultural plan in Britain, to little avail, as he revealed in his introduction to the pamphlet. It was possibly this refusal of the British government to entertain his ideas which led him to involvement in both the SCI and the British Club and which may have had some influence in his decision to support the Literary Fund initiative. He was convinced of the benefits of universal benevolence and the need for collective action to alleviate poverty, ignorance and ill-health. His views also anticipate some of the more particular social and economic ideas of the reform platform of early nineteenth-century activists. Yet, over and above the particular ideas on social and political improvement put forward by Edwards, it is his place at the heart of British Club culture which must also be fully acknowledged. Although he did not sign the British Club address of November 1792, the evidence points to his having had a relatively central role in the society. He was well-known

to several core members of the group, had been involved in both the SCI and Literary Fund in 1792, and spent several months as a resident of White's Hotel while in Paris. Cases such as those of Edwards corroborate the view that the club had a wide reach among expatriates in Paris and drew together both well-known radicals and those who had hitherto had a marginal place in reform politics. Its members negotiated their own terms of interaction with the club's public agenda and often drew little distinction between their reform initiatives in Britain and their interventions in France.

### **III.3.7 Conclusions on British Interventions in the Constitution Debate**

British expatriates found the debate on the new French constitution enthralling and this interest was inseparable from domestic politics and their hopes for a change in the British system. Not only were radicals concerned about how the republican constitution might provide a model for change in Britain, but they were actively reminding French delegates to the Convention of their duty towards the oppressed people of Britain to aid them in freeing themselves of their own unreformed government. British observers wrote tracts and addresses, gave toasts and followed news. Their written contributions to the constitution debate, despite the wide variety of views on offer, were all intrinsically subversive from a British perspective in that they all openly courted republicanism and countenanced the possibility of fundamental change in existing government. It was no coincidence that the constitutional issue, rather than the trial or deposition of the king, produced the largest printed output among British observers. There was a clear link between the intense criticism that had been levelled at the British constitution, led by Thomas Paine, and the interest that radicals showed in the emerging settlement in France. Equally, as Hugh Cunningham has pointed out, much of the loyalist reaction in late 1790s Britain was driven by the perceived danger posed by reformers to the British constitution, synonymous with order, tradition and ancient custom. The 1794 treason trials took place after reformers had been indicted for attempting to overthrow the



British constitution and replace it by a National Convention.<sup>705</sup> The five British writers studied here gave contrasting verdicts on the existing arrangements in France and on their vision of a republican constitution. John Oswald's tract was the most far-reaching in its demands for a democratic impetus to the negotiations. His insistence on greater popular sovereignty would have jarred with the view in Britain where, with knowledge of the progress of the French Revolution, many were arguing that monarchical authority was less perilous than popular government, which could lead to the worst forms of tyrannical excess. It would also have been perceived as more far-reaching than the system of representative democracy advocated by many revolutionaries from the Girondin group. Oswald's tract echoed the works of some thinkers and writers from the radical left, namely activists from the Cordeliers district, some of whom would later take their place with the Montagne. As Jack Censer has explained, "the guiding principle of these Cordeliers in their district, their section, and their club was that the populace itself was the rightful possessor of sovereignty...From the inception of the district, there were continuous efforts to safeguard popular sovereignty against the encroachments of any representative body."<sup>706</sup> Such focus on popular participation in government was timely as, despite the abbé Sieyès declaring that power was in the nation, revolutionary institutions since 1789 had worked to restrict the power and political activities of citizens under the pretext of restricting the potential for popular unrest.<sup>707</sup> For Cordeliers activists, while representative government signalled the confiscation of the people's rights through the pretence of popular verification of laws, democracy was the expression of the people's will through the direct law-making process.<sup>708</sup>

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<sup>705</sup> See Hugh Cunningham, "The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914," *History Workshop* 12 (1981): 8-33.

<sup>706</sup> Jack Censer, *Prelude to Power* 2.

<sup>707</sup> See Censer *Prelude to Power* 3-4.

<sup>708</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between the Cordeliers and the Girondins see Patrice Gueniffey, "Cordeliers and Girondins: The Prehistory of the Republic?," *The Invention of the Modern Republic*, ed. Biancamaria Fontana, 86-106. Gueniffey shows how the Brissotins in the National Convention of 1792 became associated with the movement for representative government, favouring limited public intervention and the delegation of sovereignty to national representatives. Brissot and Condorcet disagreed on the means by which a

Robert Merry's tract was also radical in its rejection of the commonly-celebrated notion of representation. While representative government had never been truly tested in France, its incarnation in Britain was deeply suspected there, and was seen less as the delegation of the power of the people as the usurpation of this power by a restricted elite intent on preserving its own privileges. It was perhaps this prior experience and disillusionment which led some British radicals to espouse radical views on democracy.<sup>709</sup> It is debateable however whether Merry was rejecting the principle of representation outright or was simply registering his disapproval of the perversion of the notion in its British form. What is certain is that both Merry and Oswald enjoyed relative independence in their expression of political ideas, having chosen not to restrict their associates to members of one particular party in the National Convention. In the posthumous *Monthly Magazine* feature on Merry, published in 1799, the British radical is said to have fled France as the bloodiness of the unfolding events began to trouble his sensibility. However, what is crucial is the conclusion on Merry's associates: "Thus alarmed he quitted the scene of sanguinary contention, although there were many of both parties and those of high consideration, willing to shew him every civility in their power."<sup>710</sup> Unlike Paine or Williams, neither Oswald nor Merry had been shoe-horned into a political grouping by early 1793.

While the connections of Paine, Barlow and Williams with the Brissotin contingent in the Convention are well-known, Merry and Oswald's political ties remain more obscure. It seems likely that they went to Paris of their own accord rather than following official or informal invitations from members of the revolutionary administration. Merry presided over a meeting of the British Club of Jacobins on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1792 and joined Paine in calling for a second address to be sent to the Convention in the following January, making him stand out

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government should collect the views of the population but both concurred on the need for the delegation of sovereignty.

<sup>709</sup> Jean-Pierre Brissot considered a free and vibrant press as being an adequate substitute for direct democracy. See Gueniffey, "Cordeliers and Girondins: The Prehistory of the Republic?" 102-03.

<sup>710</sup> "Biographical notice of Mr. Robert Merry," *The Monthly Magazine* vol. 7 (April 1799) 255-56.

on the more radical wing of the British Club.<sup>711</sup> It was also the radical member of the *Comité de Salut Public* and Jacobin partisan, Jacques-Louis David, whom he petitioned for a passport to leave France in early May 1793, claiming to be a true *sans-culotte* and eternal friend of the Montagne.<sup>712</sup> Merry's tract was published by J. Reyner's publishing house and not by the Girondin press, the Imprimerie du Cercle Social, which printed Williams' pamphlet. He was not nominated for naturalisation nor offered an ambassadorial role like Williams and Barlow, nor did he sit in the Convention or stand on a committee, like Paine. He was never employed by the revolutionary authorities, unlike his translator Nicholas Madgett, who headed the translation office for the revolutionary administration under the Terror.<sup>713</sup> As for Oswald, he had been made commander of the First Battalion of Pike-bearers in October 1792, following his political contribution to the Revolution with military service to the republic.<sup>714</sup> The reputations of Oswald and Merry were therefore edging towards the more overtly militant, yet their explicit ties with the revolutionary authorities remained loose.<sup>715</sup>

In their tracts, Joel Barlow and David Williams paid attention to the practical implications of the existing constitution before giving different versions of an outline of a new form. Barlow wrote his tract in September 1792 while Williams, an unofficial advisor to the committee, provided his view in January 1793, by which time the balance of power in the National Convention had begun to swing against the sponsors of his mission. Williams had

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<sup>711</sup> Merry's poetry had been celebrated by members of the National Assembly when he presented *The Laurel of Liberty* and, according to an announcement in *La Chronique du Mois*, he seems to have found common interest with the directors of the *Imprimerie du Cercle Social* which was broadly speaking a Girondin mouthpiece. *La Chronique du Mois*, January (1793) 80: "Perry et un autre écrivain anglois, Merry, célèbre par une pièce de théâtre, des vers républicains, et autres écrits philosophiques que nous ferons connoître, sont venus trouver de francs amis, chez les Directeurs de l'Imprimerie du Cercle Social." For more on the Cercle Social, see Gary Kates, *The Cercle Social, the Girondins and the French Revolution*.

<sup>712</sup> "Calais, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1793. Rest assured that I will remain a true sans-culotte until the end of my life. Long live the Montagne." Translation of Merry's petition to David, AN F7/4412. ("Soyez sur que je resterai jusqu'au dernier moment de ma vie un vrai sansculotte. Vive la Montagne.")

<sup>713</sup> The fact that Madgett, a translator for the Montagnard administration, translated Merry's tract indicates that Merry may have had links with the radical wing of the revolutionary administration.

<sup>714</sup> Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières* 183.

<sup>715</sup> Captain Monro suggests that Merry and Paine stood opposed to John Frost and Henry Redhead Yorke in January 1793 in wanting to promulgate a second address to the National Convention. This split apparently seems to have severely hampered the pursuit of the British Club initiative.

already been in contact with Edwards, Merry, Barlow and Oswald before arriving in France either at sociable gatherings at William Godwin's house or on the committee of the Literary Fund. Barlow was perhaps more opportunistic than Merry or Oswald, as much concerned with business interests and making his personal fortune as with radical reform. Williams had little time for organised political societies and was on the margins of the British Club. Edwards' place in the revolutionary arena is more nebulous. He lodged at White's Hotel and stayed on in Paris until mid 1793, yet he does not seem to have actively engaged with the precise events of the Revolution, preferring instead to perfect his universal vision of the general progress of humanity.

Although the British activists who actually put their thoughts to paper on the new constitution were relatively few, their different views, styles and methods can perhaps give us some insight into the multiplicity of positions contained within the expatriate reforming community in Paris at this time. Such a view would confirm what has been suggested earlier, that British activists formed part of a wider circle of associational activity, circles which welcomed divergences in inquiry and celebrated difference. This ideal vision of the "collision of mind with mind" began to encounter practical obstacles when independence came to be viewed with suspicion under the Montagnard ascendancy. The British Club was not the haven of an Enlightenment ideal of open, combative conversation, but became subject to a range of diplomatic and political pressures which restricted the scope for free discussion and the expression of individual views.

#### **III.4 British Radicals and the Trial of the King**

The depositions and addresses on the constitutional question took place at a crucial juncture in the Revolution, at a time when monarchy had been overthrown but uncertainty persisted over the fate of the king. Captain Monro expected Louis to be reprieved even as late as 7<sup>th</sup> January 1793, only two weeks before the king was sentenced to death:

There remains no doubt but the King has a great majority in his favour; when his trial will be finished is however uncertain, for there are a great number of deputies for and against him yet to speak. That with the different interruptions gives us every hope that things may take a favourable turn, and his life to a certainty be saved.<sup>716</sup>

Even the most ardent British supporters of the Revolution and its republican departure balked somewhat at the prospect of regicide. It is likely that this was not entirely out of political moderation or ideological opposition to the use of the death penalty, though repugnance at capital punishment was a moral stance for some protagonists in the National Convention, particularly Condorcet, who was known to members of the British Club and whose thought was influential among them. Such reluctance among British commentators was undoubtedly prompted by the collective memory of Charles I's martyrdom in the wake of the publication of *Eikon Basilike*, the subsequent difficulties encountered by the Commonwealth in establishing its own legitimacy, and the legacy for British republicanism.<sup>717</sup> These issues were raised by both Thomas Paine and some French deputies in the vigorous debates in the Convention during the month of January. Paine argued that "what might appear today as an act of justice will later appear only as an act of vengeance."<sup>718</sup> He also reminded the Convention of the role of Louis XVI in the American War of Independence. Paine's close friend Brissot voiced a similar point of view in the trial, arguing that all hostile foreign powers wanted to see the death of the king as they believed it was the surest way of achieving the restoration of royalty.<sup>719</sup> Other interventions, such as that of Pierre Guyomar, on 2<sup>nd</sup> January

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<sup>716</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1793. *Despatches of Earl Gower* 273.

<sup>717</sup> The full title of Charles I's confession was *Eikon Basilike, the Pourtracture of his Sacred Majestie, in his Solitudes and Sufferings. With a perfect Copy of Prayers used by his Majesty in the time of his sufferings. Delivered to Dr. Juxon Bishop of London, immediately before his Death* (London, 1649). The tract aimed at making a martyr of the deposed king who had been executed by the parliamentary tribunal.

<sup>718</sup> *Le Moniteur Universel*, vol. 15, Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1793. My translation.

<sup>719</sup> "Opinion de Jacques-Pierre Brissot, sur le jugement de Louis XVI, prononcée dans la Séance du Premier janvier 1793", Supplément au no. 107 du *Journal des débats et des décrets*, vol. 41 (1795-1814): "Toutes les puissances veulent la mort de Louis...Elles veulent sa mort, parce qu'elle leur semble un garant de la restauration de la royauté, comme la mort de Charles Ier pour l'Angleterre ; elles la veulent enfin, la mort de Louis, et c'est un fait dont on ne peut douter, puisque non-seulement aucune n'a réclamé avec sincérité en sa faveur ; puisque toutes au contraire ont fait des armements et des menaces qui ne pouvaient qu'accélérer son supplice. Oui,

1793, also showed concern that the people would suddenly be moved by the pathos of regicide to feel pity for the former ruler and insist on the restoration of monarchy in the form of an infant king.<sup>720</sup>

The death of the king was a crucial turning point in relations between British radical residents of Paris and the foreign republican regime they were temporarily living under. Some were visibly shocked by the outcome of the trial. Many recognised that the decision would more than likely precipitate war with their home country, a situation which would inevitably jeopardise their safety in Paris. While British observers had been relatively free to express their views on the constitutional issue in late 1792 and early 1793, by February war had broken out with Britain in the wake of the judgement on the king, and this shaped all foreign political engagement with the regime. Efforts had been made to engage in diplomatic ventures to avert the course of war. David Williams had embarked on an abortive mission to Britain on behalf of his Girondin associates, while Stephen Sayre, the American radical closely involved in the British Club, attempted to establish a treaty which would consolidate a close relationship between the American and French republics at the close of 1792 or in early 1793.<sup>721</sup> Yet by 1<sup>st</sup> February 1793, the conflict between Britain and France was no longer simply a war of political ideas or propaganda, but had transformed into open military confrontation.

By the end of 1793, measures had been taken to imprison all residents belonging to countries at war with the republic. During 1793 however, there were key moments when

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citoyens, la même comédie qui s'est jouée en Angleterre, lors de la mort de Charles Ier, elle s'est jouée de nos jours. Alors le cabinet de France avait l'air d'intercéder, et il payait les Cromwells qui le mirent à mort."

<sup>720</sup> Pierre Guyomar, "Suite de la discussion sur le jugement de Louis Capet," *Le Moniteur Universel*, vol. 15, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1793, 32: "Quant à moi, je craindrais bien plutôt que le peuple, égaré par les factieux qui l'agitent aujourd'hui, ne passât tout-à-coup de l'indignation à la pitié, et qu'il ne rendît à un enfant, ou à tout autre, les honneurs que les Anglais accordèrent à Charles II, et qu'il n'accusât ses représentants d'usurpation ou de tyrannie."

<sup>721</sup> In the draft, speaking of the French and American republics, Sayre wrote, "having emancipated our persons from the fangs of assumed power, and our minds from ignorance, we now resolve to unite as firmly in the bonds of mutual friendship & mutual interest, as we are united in the principles & the love of liberty." Quoted in Alden, *Stephen Sayre* 176.

British radicals were able to continue their public involvement in the regime. In March 1793, a handful of expatriates were named as staunch followers of the Revolution and loyal foreign citizens who could be counted on to form a committee to cleanse Paris of duplicitous British spies. Among those named were four of the five petitioners to the constitutional committee. Edwards, Merry, Barlow and Oswald were on Nicholas Madgett's list of twenty-two foreigners who could be counted on for their loyalty to the republic. Also featuring on the list were many of the members of the British Club who appear to have continued to support the Revolution even after the trial and execution of the king. The fidelity and civic commitment of these individuals would later be on display once more in the prison testimonies given to prove the injustice of their arrest. Robert Rayment, Sir Robert Smith and Sampson Perry were listed by Madgett, as were Thomas Paine's lodging partners William Johnson and William Choppin, whose names had been invoked during the trial of Marat. John Frost was also cited, even though it appears his enthusiasm had begun to wane after the outcome of the king's trial, as was James Gamble, an associate of Rayment, who had taken part in the relief operation after the siege of the Tuileries.

Although this list of loyal British residents may have been drawn up more as a protective gesture, a way of insulating expatriates from accusations of treachery or espionage by involving them in a mission to eradicate known spies, we may tentatively use it as a guide to those expatriates whose enthusiasm for the Revolution was not tempered by the events of August and September 1792, nor, with more hesitation, by the execution of the king. There was probably some rationale behind the names cited, and it makes sense to think that the individuals on the list were those whose loyalty to France was the most easily proven. This analysis is reinforced by the later behaviour of many of those cited by Madgett during the months of the Terror and later, which indicates that the Revolution continued to provide material and moral inspiration for some British expatriates.

### III.5 Defining the Politics of British Radicals in French Affairs

The political stance that British radical activists took in Paris has been by and large defined in retrospect, whether by later commentators judging their interventions over the long span of the revolutionary period, or by radicals themselves looking back on France in the aftermath of the Terror. Those radicals who wrote retrospective autobiographical accounts of their experience in France, such as Helen Maria Williams, David Williams or Henry Redhead Yorke often allowed categories of analysis and opinions constituted after the events to filter through into their versions of the early revolutionary period. Helen Williams' *Souvenirs de la Révolution française* (1828), not translated into English, is filled with sorrow at the loss of her Girondin friends, while David Williams and Henry Yorke both regretted the Revolution itself by the turn of the century and wrote their earlier enthusiasm out of their autobiographical accounts. As Michael Sonescher has contended, in relation to the causal relationship between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, there is a case for "proceeding prospectively rather than retrospectively."<sup>722</sup> Onlookers frequently revised their earlier positions on the French Revolution in line with their present opinions and therefore such later accounts sometimes veiled what were very different opinions at the time of the events they described.

Retrospective revisionism is equally identifiable in the accounts of French contemporaries who sought to transcribe the events they witnessed first-hand in later accounts. Paul Barras, who would eventually go on to lead the Thermidorian Directorate, described the political coup of 31<sup>st</sup> May 1793 as "having seen one of the two factions in the assembly, the right side, the Girondins, succumb in the struggle against the left side, the Montagnards."<sup>723</sup> Writing his memoirs, Barras, whose reputation would eventually be built on his involvement in the Thermidorian closure of the Revolution, had an interest in portraying

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<sup>722</sup> Sonescher, "Enlightenment and Revolution" 380.

<sup>723</sup> "La journée du 31 mai [1793] où la représentation nationale avait été violée, avait vu l'une des deux factions de l'assemblée, le côté droit, les Girondins, succomber dans la lutte contre le côté gauche, les Montagnards." Paul Barras, *Mémoires 1769-1793*, vol. 2 (Clermont-Ferrand: Paléo, 2004) 96.



the Convention of 1793 as wrought by binary factional infighting which would ultimately only be quelled by the more stable and moderate post-1795 regime.

While analytical distance can sometimes prove useful in judging historical events accurately, in the case of the British expatriate community in Paris, distance has tended to confer a dubious coherence not only on the social and political networks they belonged to but also on the ideas they were considered to have espoused. In the main, British activists in Paris have been aligned in historical memory with the Girondin grouping. John Hurford Stone has been described as having “totally identified himself with France and the Girondins,” despite his decision to publish John Oswald’s very un-Girondin text.<sup>724</sup> Steven Blakemore has suggested that on the whole British and American admirers of Revolution had “a quasi-Girondist perspective of the Revolution,” while Helen Maria Williams was described as being “a warm adherent of the Girondist party.”<sup>725</sup> Such a portrait of British visitors to Paris is not restricted to the work of Anglo-American historians. Writing in the immediate wake of the Russian Revolution, Albert Mathiez wrote of the key figures in the British circle as “true Girondins” and suggested that most of the Anglo-American colony in Paris had affiliated to the Girondin party. Lionel Woodward, largely relying on Mathiez’s Marxist view that the Girondins were part of a bourgeois betrayal of the popular masses, wrote in his biography of Helen Maria Williams that she saw events from a “Girondist” point of view, while Paul Gerbod reiterates Woodward’s conclusions in his work on British visitors to France. Jacques Godechot suggests that the British nourished links with the Girondins, sharing their cultivated spirit, taste for philosophical abstraction and respect for the law.<sup>726</sup> Notwithstanding the doubtful legitimacy of aggregating foreign residents with a group whose politics was shaped

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<sup>724</sup> Christina Bewley and David K. Bewley, *Gentleman Radical: A Life of John Horne Tooke, 1736-1812* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1998) 143-44.

<sup>725</sup> Steven Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, and the Rewriting of the French Revolution* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson U P, 1997) 17; Clayden, *The Early Life of Samuel Rogers* 77.

<sup>726</sup> Godechot, *La Grande Nation* 95-96.

by the fact that they were delegates of the French nation and responsible for voting decisions, elected to the Convention and with representative responsibilities, Jack Censer and William Doyle have both cast doubt on the very categories that this analysis rests on, those of Jacobin and Girondin.<sup>727</sup>

Historians who have categorised British radicals as Girondins have done so with sometimes conflicting intentions. Some have sought to situate these individuals politically, attempting to ally their ideas with those being expressed in the Convention, in political pamphleteering or in the wider international debate. This is often linked to an attempt to demonstrate the relative moderation of British spectators of the Revolution and their abhorrence of the violence associated with the Terror. Again, this repugnance at the Revolution has often been based on later revisionist autobiographical accounts. Yet for others, the term “Girondin” has been employed with the aim of describing the patterns of sociability created by British Club members and their French associates. Gary Kates argues that Thomas Paine was drawn to the members of the Cercle Social such as Bonneville, Condorcet and Lanthenas because they were among the few revolutionaries who could converse in and understand English. Kates has also suggested that the Cercle Social leaders themselves were connected more by friendship than intellectual affinity.<sup>728</sup> If British radicals socialised with certain individuals, political alignment with these same individuals was not a necessary corollary.

The pigeon-holing of radical activists in a political camp begins to unravel when we examine their activities more closely. The constitutional texts published at the turn of 1792 and 1793 show that some, though not all, had a significant interest in the merits of more popular participation in government, semi-direct or direct democracy, and held the representative system in mistrust, if not contempt; ideas that went counter to what has become

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<sup>727</sup> For a summary of this debate, see above pp. 227-29.

<sup>728</sup> See Kates, *The Cercle Social* pp. 120-75.

the commonly-held interpretation of Girondinism. Robert Merry put forward the merits of classical republican virtue over commercial republicanism and John Oswald believed that the people should have a boisterous role in politics. Oswald's view contrasts therefore with what William Doyle sees as a core element of the Girondin stance: the belief that the opportunity to create an enlightened republic would be squandered "if the ignorant were allowed to override with their prejudices the benevolent convictions of educated men."<sup>729</sup> Oswald was scathing of elite legislators or enlightened chaperons of the people. He agreed with the Cordeliers position that "representatives had confiscated the right of the people to express the general will." As Patrice Gueniffey has put it, "[The Cordeliers] did not mean giving *citizens* the right to *verify* the conformity of laws with their rights, but returning to the *people* the power to *make* the law, in order to establish, thanks to the immediate exercise of sovereignty, the absolute reign of the general will."<sup>730</sup> Robert Merry's pamphlet is much more reticent on the vocal presence of the people, but he was deeply sceptical about representation.

Some studies have highlighted how a number of members of the British colony did have more radical views which gave them some leeway in a regime which was increasingly dominated by revolutionary purists.<sup>731</sup> Such scholars have begun to deconstruct the portrait of British radicals as Girondins, putting forward the possibility that British observers had a range of opinions and these individual viewpoints were tolerated and maybe even welcomed in the spirit of the British Club. Such "Jacobin" elements cannot be swept over in providing a

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<sup>729</sup> William Doyle, "Thomas Paine and the Girondins," *Officers, Nobles and Revolutionaries: Essays on Eighteenth-Century France* (London: Hambledon Press, 1995) 216.

<sup>730</sup> Gueniffey, "Cordeliers and Girondins: The Prehistory of the Republic?" 106.

<sup>731</sup> Michael Rapport, though accepting that the majority of British radicals in Paris had "publicly supported the Girondins," argues that a radical minority, in which he includes John Oswald, were "true Jacobins." Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship* 180-81. Albert Mathiez also identified Scottish radicals John Oswald and Thomas Christie as being dedicated to the Montagne, despite the vast majority of foreigners being allied to the Girondins or under the influence of counter-revolutionary elites. See Mathiez, *La Révolution et les étrangers* 46-47. F. M. Todd acknowledged that Helen Maria Williams had "connexions with the Girondin party," but suggested that her lover, John Hurford Stone, was a Jacobin. See F. M. Todd, "Wordsworth, Helen Maria Williams and France," *Modern Language Review* 43.4 (1948) 458. Furthermore, Deborah Kennedy has argued that while the majority of British residents of Paris were disillusioned by the Revolution's course by the end of 1793, some, such as Sampson Perry, did not withdraw their support from the Jacobin leadership. See Deborah Kennedy, "Responding to the French Revolution: Williams' *Julia* and Burney's *The Wanderer*," *Jane Austen and Mary Shelley and Their Sisters*, ed. Laura Dabundo (Lanham: U P of America, 2000) 3-17.

general view of British Club, but must be acknowledged as part of the wide spectrum of stances that made up the membership. This diversity of views and affiliations is borne out by the behaviour of those radicals that remained after January 1793, though any evidence must be tempered by the fact that outspoken adherence to the regime in place was a condition guaranteeing personal liberty or the preservation of property, whatever private reticence may have existed. Robert Merry professed his loyalty to the Montagne to Jacques-Louis David and was not unsettled by the prospect of more popular involvement in government. Sampson Perry was held in high esteem by leading members of the revolutionary government even as late as April 1793, and his 1796 *Historical Sketch* of the Revolution is probably one of the most partisan, pro-revolutionary histories that appeared in Britain in the latter half of the decade. Merry's friend David signed Perry's certificate of civic duty and Perry, with the aid of Sir Robert Smith, agreed to take on a diplomatic mission on behalf of Hérault de Séchelles.<sup>732</sup> A member of the *Comité de Salut Public*, Hérault would go on to be executed with Danton in April 1793. Perry recalled the incident in his *Historical Sketch* of the Revolution:

He called upon me a few days afterwards, paid many compliments to my nation, and, after a preface, in which he was pleased to say he considered me as the friend to my fellow creatures, on which ever side the channel they might be situated, and that I must abhor war, and deplore its consequences, he made no hesitation to say, that it was the desire of the committee to open a communication with England again, if it could be done consistently with the honour of France, and the views of the people.<sup>733</sup>

Perry was to send a female relative, resident in France, with letters for Sheridan. The intention of the correspondence was to open negotiations with the British opposition in order to negotiate a possible peace treaty. Perry, imprisoned with Robert Smith, believed that his "intimacy" with Hérault would bring about a summons before the Revolutionary Tribunal. He learnt that he was to be reprieved due to the decision to forego the trial of the Dantonists and proceed directly to execution. Perry's close association with, and agreement to undertake a

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<sup>732</sup> For Perry's account of how he secured an extension on his liberty, see his *Historical Sketch* I: 15.

<sup>733</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 12-13.

mission on behalf of, one of the members of the *Comité de Salut Public* only confirms that British radicals had very eclectic associations in Paris. Although they admired the intellectual brilliance of the Girondins, and Perry was no exception, they were not uniform in affiliating politically with a group that saw value in enlightened leadership.

John Oswald's views on direct democracy would have chimed with those of leading members of the revolutionary committees, of Cordeliers heritage, and despite his earlier involvement with the Cercle Social, he was not averse to espousing more radical ideas on the issue of popular involvement in law-making. His early death in the Vendée in September 1793 means that we cannot judge his relationship to the Jacobin leadership with sufficient accuracy. We might hazard a guess however that he would have adopted a similar position to Perry. Both Robert Smith and Robert Rayment had generated enough confidence in the Parisian sections of their place of residence to prompt impassioned pleas by citizens and section leaders on their behalf once in prison. While Joel Barlow would later go on to state his repugnance for the violence of the Terror, he wrote to Jefferson in March 1793 bemoaning critical accounts of the Revolution by those who had not seen the events first-hand. He voiced his concern "lest some of the late transactions in France should be so far misrepresented to the Patriots in America as to lead them to draw conclusions unfavourable to the cause of liberty in this hemisphere."<sup>734</sup> Some expatriates therefore cannot be easily classed as Girondins, and even those who are more clearly linked to a particular group, such as Paine or Williams, sometimes showed inconsistencies. Paine for example, perhaps sensing the risk he had put himself at by withdrawing from the Convention after the purge of 31<sup>st</sup> May 1793, offered his services to the *Comité de Salut Public*. He was heavily dependent on the Girondin members for translation services, and indebted to them for publicising his earlier writings, but did not consider himself linked to them ideologically.

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<sup>734</sup> Joel Barlow to Thomas Jefferson, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1793, in Thomas Jefferson Papers 25: 336, quoted in Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots* 80.

### III. Conclusion

As Mark Philp has argued, “the historical evidence shows that most late eighteenth century writers drew freely on a wide range of intellectual traditions and mobilised rhetoric from a variety of political languages.”<sup>735</sup> This observation is clearly relevant to the political thought of the British expatriate radical movement in early 1790s Paris. There was a high degree of liberty in what members of the British Club chose to express and how they conveyed both their thoughts on French regeneration and their hopes for subsequent change in Britain. What’s more, the constraints imposed on British residents of Paris were neither as powerful nor as restrictive for on democratic reformers in Britain. Although new limits came to be imposed on foreign residents in the French capital after the outbreak of war with Britain and different counter-revolutionary upsurges in the Vendée, Marseille or Toulon, for a short time, those present in Paris could express their ideas relatively openly. This freedom did not completely disappear during the Terror, though it was severely proscribed. Before the trial of the king, and even in the months that followed, there was still some scope for speaking according to conscience. John Hurford Stone, writing to his brother during the Terror, contended that “I am not affected by it myself: on the contrary, having the full enjoyment of liberty as an artist, and also the confidence of my not being hostile to the cause of liberty, I am more than free. I am respected, tho’ I keep aloof from all political acquaintance.”<sup>736</sup> Freedom was therefore dependent on expatriates’ agreement not to enter into factional battles. British radicals were pragmatists who, while offering their views on political affairs or engaging with the regime, recognised the danger of party alignment and often managed to negotiate their autonomy within the regime. The behaviour of British residents lacks the constancy that historical analysis has tended to confer on them. Outsiderhood gave them the sort of leverage that no French deputies could claim. Independence from political attachment allowed for a

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<sup>735</sup> Philp, “English Republicanism in the 1790s” 249.

<sup>736</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1226.

wealth of contrasting experimental literature to be written on the constitutional debate and for acquaintances to be forged with an array of revolutionary figures, some of which would later be regretted, revoked and even written out of history.

While it would be misleading to suggest that British activists were pivotal in French politics, Alger's categorisation of them as "imperceptible specks in the great eddy" probably more accurately reflects historiographical tradition than historical reality. They were not silent observers and their relative marginality could sometimes be a source of leverage. Michael Rapport contends that "through their writings and influence, such foreigners had intellectual or political influence beyond their small numbers."<sup>737</sup> British depositions to the Convention can also be seen as prisms through which to understand expatriate perceptions of the state of affairs in their home country. British commentators could only openly advocate direct democracy, popular sovereignty and an active role for the people in law-making in a post-monarchical republic. To do so in Britain would have courted accusations of sedition or treason under the Royal Proclamation Against Seditious Writings or later legislation such as the Gagging Acts of 1795. If judged in relation to British affairs at the time, they were all outside the bounds of accepted thought. All were republicans and all approved of the Revolution and the deposition of the king, if not his execution.

Many scholars of British radicalism have insisted on the fact that British reformers were renovators rather than innovators.<sup>738</sup> Gerald Newman has also sought to demonstrate the essential fluid and continuous nature of British radicalism. He claims that "the fundamental continuity after 1789 of the pre-1789 [radical] movement" manifested itself in:

The stubborn persistence with which they clung to and year after year, reasserted (much to the dismay of some left-leaning historians today) their 'Saxon' ideology of the 'free-born Englishman' – essentially populist, monarchist, anti-aristocratic, anti-foreign, anti-republican, wedded to the myth of the Norman Yoke and of an egalitarian social compact in the halcyon pre-

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<sup>737</sup> Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship* 113.

<sup>738</sup> See Belchem, *Popular Radicalism*.

Norman days of King Alfred, framed on a dualistic social theory pitting ‘People’ against tyrannical usurpers.<sup>739</sup>

Although Newman may be right in insisting on the determination of many British reformers to restore a “mythical British political heritage,” at least in conjunction with natural rights discourse, the case of expatriate radicals in Paris disrupts this broad conclusion.<sup>740</sup> Radicals who took up residence in France did actively support and entertain some of the theories and ideas which emerged during the Revolution, some even expressing their unfailing affinity as late as 1796. They were less closely attached to the notion of the purity of the ancient pre-Norman constitution and found justification for their ideas in natural rights theory but also in the views expressed by democratic reformers in France. Their criticism of the British system of representation and constitutionalism often went further and was expressed more openly compared to their compatriots in Britain. The experimental writings of French reformers on the role of the people in politics were appealing to men and women who had lived under a system where all semblance of true representation seemed to have disappeared and whose experience in revolutionary Paris led them to embrace ideas from a wider range of heritages. Some, like David Williams, who did draw on the example of an Anglo-Saxon past and invoked British custom, did so within an inherently critical opinion of the British constitution as it stood and with scepticism as to the assumed perfection of pre-Norman rights. Mark Philp has noted that in Britain:

Late eighteenth century political debate contested in detail the interpretation of the constitution, and the customs and practices of the English state. But it did so while accepting those institutions as embodying the sovereignty of the state, which they had no wish to impugn. The result was a broadly shared, tacit agreement on the basic institutional structure of the British state, which grew out of the Restoration and subsequently the Revolution Settlement and was increasingly stable by the middle of the century.<sup>741</sup>

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<sup>739</sup> G. Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism* 229.

<sup>740</sup> G. Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism* 229. James Epstein has contested such theories of a purely constitutionalist tradition in British radical activism. He has suggested that even among reformers based in Britain, the language of natural rights and an Anglo-Saxon constitutional heritage could merge and intersect. Radicals adapted their behaviour as the law became more stringent and as sedition was identified not only in actions but in language and gesture. See Epstein, *Radical Expression*.

<sup>741</sup> Mark Philp, “English Republicanism in the 1790s” 239.



Philp's argument is that the theoretical language of republicanism was marginalised during the course of the late eighteenth century, while a commitment to the fundamental legitimacy of the institutions of the British state emerged. This may be true for those radicals who had to conform to the more restrictive context of political debate in the later 1790s. Yet British expatriate radicals were able to engage with models of political thought and language that had become estranged in Britain, a position which set them apart from radical reformers at home.

Roger Wells, in his study of insurrectionary activity in Britain during the last years of the eighteenth century has contended that the postulations of long spans of British stability sometimes fail to take into account punctuating periods of unrest. This type of analysis is relevant to the study of British political interventions in the early French republic. Considered with the time frame of 1792-1794 in view, British radical engagement with the Revolution reveals a high level of complexity. They did not all arrive in Paris with palpating enthusiasm and leave overwhelmingly disillusioned, neither were they almost exclusively linked to a particular political faction, holding uniform views on violence, representation, monarchy or popular politics. If the British involvement in the debate on the republican constitution can show us anything, it is that there were deep contradictions in the attitudes of British radicals to political reform, the role of the people in government and the extent to which France could provide a blueprint for further European transformation. These contradictions were partly accepted within the tradition of enlightened enquiry that British Club members subscribed to. However they also created deep rifts which, under the pressure of French policy on nationality and citizenship after 1793, ultimately precipitated the dissolution of the society which had housed such an eclectic circle of reformers.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **SKETCHERS OF HISTORY: WRITING THE REVOLUTION BACK TO BRITAIN**

#### IV. Introduction

In 1889 Alger noted that while “a multitude of French memoirs, authentic or spurious, are in existence, scarcely any English observers committed their recollections to writing.”<sup>742</sup> Even those who did write down what they witnessed were more willing to give “reflections” rather than “facts”, according to Alger, a trait which diminished their utility as historical testimony. Considering the number of British visitors to Paris during the early years of the Revolution, few complete histories of the Revolution emerged, particularly from among members and associates of the British Club. Mary Wollstonecraft completed her *An Historical and Moral View of the Origins and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794) during the Terror and Sampson Perry wrote his *An Historical Sketch of the French Revolution* (1796) covering the period 1789 to 1795 from Newgate jail after his return from a two-year stay in France. Other more hostile eyewitness accounts emerged, such as William Playfair’s *A History of Jacobinism* (1796), published in the same year as Perry’s *Historical Sketch* and Grace Dalrymple Elliott’s *Journal of My Life during the French Revolution*. Playfair had been a spectator at the fall of the Bastille and was involved in one of Joel Barlow’s speculative projects. By 1796, and probably a lot earlier, his initial enthusiasm for the Revolution had waned and he had become associated with anti-Jacobinism.

Although many spectators did not convert their recollections into formal published accounts, others conveyed their perceptions of the Revolution in alternative forms, including letters, historical fragments, precise readings of individual events, and later retrospective or biographical reflections. Helen Maria Williams wrote a series of epistolary observations and Joel Barlow sketched out a plan for a history of the Revolution intended to cover the years 1789 to 1796, which was never transcribed from scribbled notes. Robert Merry was probably the author of an account of the August Days based on the reports published in the radical

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<sup>742</sup> Alger, *Englishmen* xi.

newspaper *Révolutions de Paris*. David Williams and Henry Redhead Yorke both published later autobiographical accounts, rewriting their experience in France during the early Revolution in the light of their later scepticism. Equally letters remain which give us an insight into the perceptions that British radicals such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Hurford Stone conveyed back to friends and relatives in Britain. It is also important to consider what was not committed to paper in order to gain a clearer understanding of some of the conditions governing the expression of the written word. Manuscripts were sometimes destroyed or lost before they were published and communication was also severely inhibited after the outbreak of war in February 1793. As Alger observed, “these emigrants mostly broke off intercourse with their kinsmen, especially as after a certain date war rendered communication very uncertain and difficult.”<sup>743</sup> The necessity of silence or secrecy, the destruction of manuscripts, and the existence of unfinished projects all give important insights into the way in which channels of transmission could be obstructed.

This chapter will therefore look at the ways in which members of the British Club and their associates wrote the Revolution back to Britain, with particular attention to the conditions and aims of writing. The particular focus will be the ways in which British thinking developed during the transitional period from the August Days through to the Terror. It is for this reason that attention will not be given to those histories written by earlier travellers to Paris, such as Arthur Young, who had left before the republican turn or who had no visible involvement with the radical community. I will also briefly discuss the ways in which expatriate commentators perceived the disordering effect of the Revolution. For many writers, living through a revolution resulted in the breakdown of all sense of conventional time and prevented them from providing a clear analysis of the events they had witnessed. They chose to describe the Revolution in sketch-form, often openly acknowledging their

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<sup>743</sup> Alger, *Englishmen* xi.

inability to achieve the impartiality required of a more detached historian. After identifying the constraints on British writers and the way in which they determined whether publication projects came to fruition or not, I will examine the empowering effect of writing for British radicals. Eyewitness status conferred authority on exiled writers who could claim authenticity in their accounts in contrast to what they saw as the erroneous reports published by editors in Britain. Writers often used their presence in their writing techniques, focusing on observations which only the spectator could make and suggesting that authentic reporting was the preserve of the eye-witness.

Although they were all united by a pro-revolutionary stance, at least in the early stages of their contact with France, and by a consistent optimism about the regenerating effect of the Revolution all of the members or associates of the British Club who wrote accounts had different perspectives on the Revolution. While some wrote lively defences of the Revolution and justified some of the more controversial events such as the August Days or even the September massacres and the Terror, others became progressively more disillusioned as the Revolution wore on. Their aims were very different therefore. Some attempted to condone the Revolution, even in its most radical phases, seeing in it the prospect of the future regeneration of humanity. Others, concerned to convey an accurate reading of the Revolution to a misinformed public at home, tried to correct the errors they believed were circulating in the British public arena. Those radicals who had become more circumspect as to the benefits of the Revolution also tried to revise prevailing misconceptions in Britain, although they refused to justify some of the Revolution's excesses. Finally, some writers would later express their outspoken criticism of what the Revolution had become and how it had diverged from the principles which had animated the spirit of July 1789.

Jon Klancher makes a distinction which may be useful when considering the different ways in which British writers conveyed the Revolution back to Britain:

To circulate is to follow a path, however circuitous or labyrinthine its windings, along an ordered itinerary; in this motion a cultural profit accrues...But to “disseminate” is to flood through interstices of the social network, into the social cracks of the ancien régime. Dissemination takes place where there is no circulation, where there are no pre-formed patterns to guide the flow of language or ideas. What is disseminated “propagates” or reproduces itself without the orderly expansion of circulation.<sup>744</sup>

The Revolution disrupted the channels of transfer that had existed during the Ancien Régime era; channels which included official diplomacy, commercial exchange and the flow of aristocratic culture, Klancher’s “ordered itinerary”. Writing back to a British audience during the Revolution, British radicals had no official diplomatic role and they had, more often than not, been proscribed from engagement in public debate. Their contributions to the circulation of information were often inimical to the aims of the ruling authorities, existing in the “interstices of the social network” where there were no “pre-formed patterns”, to use Klancher’s paradigm. Equally, radicals were writing to an audience which had been subjected to a wave of official propaganda which conflicted with the news and accounts such pro-revolutionary writers were sending. Many accounts were written with the aim of contesting these loyalist portraits of the French Revolution. Yet most authors, many of whom had been in limited contact with friends and relatives in Britain since their departure to Paris, wrote with very little firm understanding of the exact temper of opinion in their home country.

#### **IV.1 Perceptions of Time and History in the Writing of the French Revolution**

The French Revolution is often seen as having founded some of the institutions and notions associated with modern Western political life such as equality, citizenship, democracy and nationhood. It is therefore granted a degree of stature and permanence which veils the uncertainty perceived by those living through the events. Yet the revolutionary period was a moment of profound flux. Roger Chartier has argued that, rather than forming the coherent intellectual origins of the French Revolution, the Enlightenment was itself perpetually defined

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<sup>744</sup> See Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences: 1790-1832* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1987) 34. Klancher’s analysis of “circulation” and “dissemination” is based on Arthur Young’s *Travels in France*.

and constructed by revolutionaries, searching for an intellectual paternity.<sup>745</sup> What emerges from a study of this event is a sense that certain societal or political developments, though interpreted in hindsight as building blocks of later orders and systems, were profoundly troubling for those living through them. While onlookers and actors in the French Revolution would have been conscious of the momentousness of the unfolding events, capturing them, understanding them and assessing their future portent remained problematic. The French Revolution's coherence and meaning has been provided by later ages seeking to retrospectively identify and locate within it hinges of historical change.

The cultural historian Lynn Hunt has contended that “a new relationship to time would turn out to be the single greatest innovation of the revolution.”<sup>746</sup> She suggests, “Revolution meant rejecting the past, introducing a sense of rupture in secular time, maximising and elongating the present in order to turn it into a moment of personal and collective transformation.”<sup>747</sup> Signs of preoccupation with time and the regenerative potential of the Revolution were discernable in the establishment of the new revolutionary calendar which invoked images of spring and the revolving life cycles. There was also an insistence on the potency of *journées*, such as the “October days” and the “August days.” Days in themselves could be transformative, effectuating rupture with the past and providing the Revolution with a new dynamic. Perceptions of the Revolution and the way in which observers wrote it down were heavily influenced by this sense of temporal readjustment. Those present at the scene, while undoubtedly aware of the enormity of the convulsions they lived through, were often aware of being unable to provide an immediate balanced assessment of the events. “From the very beginning,” notes Hunt, “observers rushed to publish their accounts, as if writing down

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<sup>745</sup> Roger Chartier, *Les origines culturelles de la Révolution française* (Paris : Seuil, 1991).

<sup>746</sup> Lynn Hunt, “The World We Have Gained: The Future of the French Revolution,” *American Historical Review* (2003) 6.

<sup>747</sup> Hunt, “The World We Have Gained” 6.



the events would give them a coherence they lacked intrinsically.”<sup>748</sup> This sense of the suspension of judgement and time echoes the state of human existence that French sociologist Emile Durkheim termed *anomie*. The term is seen to encompass moments in time when rules are suspended. Old values have come to an end but have not yet been replaced by new ones and time is in deferral often leading to social breakdown and violence.<sup>749</sup>

British observers noted the distortions of time that the Revolution appeared to effect. They often perceived living through the Revolution as akin to witnessing whole ages of human existence condensed into shorter periods of time. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote to Gilbert Imlay on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1794:

The ‘peace’ and clemency which seemed to be dawning a few days ago, disappear again. ‘I am fallen,’ as Milton said, ‘on evil days;’ for I really believe that Europe will be in a state of convulsion, during half a century at least. Life is but a labour of patience: it is always rolling a great stone up a hill; for, before a person can find a resting-place, imagining it is lodged, down it comes again, and all the world is to be done over anew!<sup>750</sup>

Wollstonecraft saw no end to the instability and lack of conclusiveness that the Revolution epitomised and saw the perpetual remaking and refashioning of the world as characterising the revolutionary condition. The events had “almost rendered observation breathless,” as she would put it in her account of the Revolution.<sup>751</sup>

Writing her final text, a retrospective autobiographical account of her time in France published in 1828, Helen Maria Williams suggested that the time was still not ripe for reflection. She also revealed her own perception of how time was constricted during the Revolution and how the work of lifetimes had been fitted into the space of a few days: “Today, the time for reflection has not yet come. Events sweep us up through their quick succession; we have seen enough things to fill centuries: that which could have taken up

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<sup>748</sup> Hunt, “The World We Have Gained” 4.

<sup>749</sup> Durkheim coined the term in relation to his research on the social and political origins of suicide. The sociologist discovered that in times of disorder and rapid change in the structure of society, individuals were more likely to endure periods of demoralisation leading to a heightened risk of suicide.

<sup>750</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Gilbert Imlay, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1794, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 238.

<sup>751</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 42.

entire ages hastily came to occupy a few days of our life.”<sup>752</sup> Joel Barlow noted a similar sense of temporal reordering in his fragmentary notes for a history of the Revolution. He wrote, “Each day of the revolution becomes an age; & he that has seen it all has lived a thousand years.”<sup>753</sup> Sampson Perry, writing in 1796, reiterated similar sensations, noting how “it would be difficult for an historian to follow and record the events of this surprising revolution, so rapidly did they roll on one after the other. One week presented the incidents of a century.”<sup>754</sup> The disruption of ordinary time was consistently conveyed in texts which attempted to make sense of the Revolution through writing it down.

John Hurford Stone alluded to the unpredictability of the revolutionary context in a series of letters to his brother William. The Revolution, which he considered an irresistible and “almost miraculous impulse,”<sup>755</sup> prompted him to write with circumspection when trying to predict the future. He wrote, “I speak to you hesitatingly about everything, nor can I speak with more assurance, till I see the event of the 21<sup>st</sup> instant...the events of the last month will have given totally a new turn, and it presents to my mind the most pleasing prospects, not only for my own interest, but for that of mankind.”<sup>756</sup> The times were so uncertain that Stone could not make any firm business plans or “speculate”.<sup>757</sup> No entrepreneurial decisions could be made as all that was certain was likely to be overhauled once again. British observers were therefore conscious of the difficult task of capturing the Revolution, understanding its direction and making firm decisions based on an assessment of the future. They were aware that what they were witnessing was an event which would have a significant impact on later

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<sup>752</sup> “Aujourd’hui on n’est pas encore arrivé à l’époque de la réflexion. Les événements nous entraînent par leur rapide succession ; nous avons été spectateurs de choses qui eussent suffi pour remplir des siècles: ce qui aurait pu occuper des époques entières est venu se presser dans quelques jours de notre vie.” Helen Maria Williams, *Souvenirs de la Révolution française* 11-12. My translation.

<sup>753</sup> “Notes for a hist. of the Fr. Rev.,” Joel Barlow Papers, 1775-1935. HL MS Am 1448 (18) folio 7.

<sup>754</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 506.

<sup>755</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> January 1794, Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1218.

<sup>756</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> January 1794, Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1175.

<sup>757</sup> Howell, *Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1176.

generations and which deformed the perception of the passage of time for those living through it, yet they regularly showed their incapacity to determine its future promise.

This specific relationship to time engendered by the Revolution meant that many observers chose unfinished, rough forms in which to convey their impressions. Albert Boime has noted how sketch and caricature were the primary modes of representation used by contemporary witnesses of the Revolution. Unlike a painting by an accomplished master, distinguished by its precision and polish, the sketch was a quickly-drawn attempt to render the contours of an event with a minimum of detail and calling on the imagination of the onlooker to complete it. It was characterised by energy in both choice of subject matter and style of creation and represented a condensed image with coarse outlines, allowing room for error. In addition, the sketch was a form open to amateurs. It provoked fire, dynamism, openness, improvisation and impulse rather than the consciousness of an artistic heritage required by recognised craftsmen.

In this sense, as Boime points out, sketching the Revolution in words had ideological import. In opting for more spontaneous strategies of portrayal, those commenting were elevating innovation and experimentation above precedence and history. “In such a state,” contends Boime, “the paradigm of the finished picture carries a conservative signification while only the crude approximations of the caricature and sketch maintain the integrity of the initiating impulse.”<sup>758</sup> Thus choosing to sketch events was a philosophical stance, encompassing the irreverent subversion of conservative views on political order, history and time, of social categories and literary endeavour. Burke had portrayed the Revolution in France as an anarchic aberration, a step outside the very bounds of civilised society. He denied the possibility of forming judgments from what he saw as the “first effervescence” and “frothy surface” of a revolution. Yet for sympathisers of the French Revolution, just as

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<sup>758</sup> Albert Boime, “The Sketch and Caricature as Metaphors for the French Revolution,” *Zeitschrift Fur Kunstgeschichte*. 55.2 (1992) 258.

written texts could be improvised, unfinished, and impressionistic, the present states of countries and their political structures could be open to innovation and need not rely on the pillars of tradition and precedent for legitimacy. Helen Maria Williams claimed that “in France it is not what is antient [*sic*], but what is modern that most powerfully engages attention.”<sup>759</sup> Eyewitnesses were not looking to the past for inspiration but were attentive to the changes taking place in the present.

Condorcet wrote *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progress de l'esprit humain*, a tract intended to be brought before the public in a moment of crisis and for immediate circulation. The title chosen by Sampson Perry for his 1200-page review of the Revolution was *An Historical Sketch*, while Helen Maria Williams referred to herself as a “sketcher of history”. Mary Wollstonecraft chose the term “sketch” to describe her outline of the French character in the first of her letters on the moral state of the French nation, written in February 1793. Yet by the time she had completed her *An Historical and Moral View*, she felt herself equipped to provide a more comprehensive philosophical accounts of the development of the French national character since the early Revolution. Yet even in this text, which aims at providing an objective and coherent history, Wollstonecraft recognised the impossibility of predicting the future outcome of the Revolution from its current state. Joel Barlow, although he wrote lengthy notes for a history of the French Revolution, never converted his hastily written ideas into finished prose. Barlow was perhaps too involved in business ventures to take time to write his planned history, or he may, like other writers, have sensed the difficulty of translating hasty impressions into a polished account for publication. British eyewitnesses of the French Revolution did not seek to provide monolithic versions of the type that would be seen in the following century therefore. Writers often drew attention to the flaws in their testimonies and demanded the active participation of the reader. Perry acknowledged the

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<sup>759</sup> Helen M. Williams, and Neil Fraistat, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790, to a Friend in England: Containing Various Anecdotes Relative to the French Revolution* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002) 108.

inadequacies of his sketch and the futility of attempts at providing a master narrative in the preface to his *An Historical Sketch*:

I have not presumed to call this a History of the French Revolution, but am contented in giving it the title of a Sketch...Many such sketches, under the denomination of Remarks, Observations, &c. will be required to the forming a perfect history; and, indeed, many partial histories of the different portions of the great whole, will doubtless be offered to the world ere the inquisitive, in search of the whole truth, will sit down contented.<sup>760</sup>

The “great whole” that Perry thought would one day emerge was inaccessible to those writing from their partial viewpoints. Commenting on the Revolution could only be done with subjective bias, in the form of personal “Remarks, Observations &c.” Joel Barlow wrote in his hastily composed notes:

A complete picture of the Fr. Rev. would be an epitome of the history of man. All his predominant passions are there developed and acted out without disguise; all the shades of his moral character exhibited in their full force, each occupying without mixture the different canton of the piece. There every one of his virtues, & his whole legion of vices, all the Sciences as far as they are yet advanced, all the ignorance that is natural to men, & all that they have hitherto acquired, the head-strong hurry of experiment, the over-cautious step of experience, wisdom, folly and unexampled valour fill their distinguished places, we there note the downfall of so many states, the formation of so many others, alliances broken, changed, renewed, Constitutions formed, sworn to, idolised, violated & proscribed, so many new opinions, new laws, new men, brought into view, driven out of fashion and laid aside.<sup>761</sup>

For Barlow, whose introductory remarks were the most complete section of his notes, the entirety of human existence was summarised by the changes occurring under the Revolution. While the history of the Revolution would be a microcosm of human record, he affirmed, “No one man can pretend to have seen it all. Some have been too near, others too far off, some blinded by their interest or prejudices, others rendered indifferent from their want of interest or sensibility; and no man can say he does not belong in some degree to one of these classes.”<sup>762</sup> Like Perry therefore, Barlow concluded on the impossibility of writing a comprehensive history of the Revolution, whether that be because of an author’s closeness of

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<sup>760</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 1-2.

<sup>761</sup> “Notes for a hist. of the Fr. Rev.,” Joel Barlow Papers, 1775-1935. HL MS Am 1448 (18) folio 3R

<sup>762</sup> “Notes for a hist. of the Fr. Rev.,” Joel Barlow Papers, 1775-1935. HL MS Am 1448 (18) folio 3V.

the event, his biased viewpoint, or the sheer scale of the events to be described. Yet the status of foreigner provided a different and valuable perspective:

I have been generally near the centre of action, perhaps sometimes too near, tho' I never have been an actor. But, being a foreigner my acquaintance with the leaders, their connexions and motives has not been so particular as I could wish; but it would be difficult even for a native to have an acquaintance more particular and at the same time more general than mine has been; especially with several successive [setts] of the early leaders who began the business & directed its first and most characteristic movements.<sup>763</sup>

In a similar way to Barlow, Perry signalled the inadequacies of both the inside and the outside perspective in writing the history of the Revolution. No vantage point could give a perfect view of the whole:

Who will be the qualified man which shall have accompanied it through its various stages? Of what country shall he be? If a native will he not be suspected of partiality, and a desire to conceal some of those sinister incidents, which tend to diminish the merit of the whole taken together? Against a foreigner there may be no fewer objections; such as his not having had access to persons and places from whence the choicest materials were to be gathered.<sup>764</sup>

Writers therefore constructed their histories having given considerable thought to their own perspective, status and partiality. They wrote with an awareness of the potential objections that would be levelled at their work. They also showed clear-sightedness as to the flaws that any history of the Revolution would display and the inability of first-hand observers, whether foreign or native, to access the complete picture. Authors nevertheless saw the potential uniqueness of the outsider viewpoint which could give their accounts particular value when read by a British audience.

#### **IV.2 “Do not touch on politics”: Writing, Surveillance and Silence**

Expatriation in Paris provided the occasion for British activists to express their views in a foreign arena and from an outsider’s perspective. Yet, there were nevertheless significant limits placed on correspondence and the circulation of ideas. Letters written back to Britain

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<sup>763</sup> “Notes for a hist. of the Fr. Rev.,” Joel Barlow Papers, 1775-1935. HL MS Am 1448 (18) folio 4R-4V.

<sup>764</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 1-2.

could be opened and scrutinised for signs of treasonable intent. Correspondence was also frequently intercepted by the French revolutionary authorities concerned about the threat of counter-revolutionary emissaries and their potential links with royalist émigrés. Radicals were aware of this prevailing culture of surveillance. They identified spies in their midst, noted the opening of letters and commented on the suspicion aroused by political references in their writings. They adapted their communication methods in response, sometimes choosing to write in language which, through its very conscious elimination of all political references, only served to heighten the suspicion of the British and French authorities.

Home Office informant Charles Ross noted that “Mr Frost mentions that all the letters he has received in France must have been broke open in England, Mr. Choppin says he wrote five letters to Mr. R \_ two of which were only received which will make them cautious what they write.”<sup>765</sup> John Frost and William Choppin changed their communication strategy in response to the discovery that their letters were being opened or going undelivered. Many expatriates would also have become more circumspect in what they said openly in meetings and with fellow radicals once it became clear that spies had infiltrated the Club. A loyalist informant wrote, “My Lord...the situation of this unfortunate city is critical. To the point that Mr Monro considers it wise to leave...He has already been noticed and observed by his villainous countrymen...If he leaves...I will make sure to inform you of everything, maybe better than he.”<sup>766</sup> This report of the heightened sensitivity of British radicals to the presence of spies was confirmed by another of Captain Monro’s successors in Paris, Mr. Somers.<sup>767</sup> British residents became increasingly reluctant to allude to politics and national and international affairs in their correspondence, aware that their letters would be scrupulously examined. John Hurford Stone thanked his brother for his caution in avoiding potentially

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<sup>765</sup> PRO TS 11/965/3510/A2. 9<sup>th</sup> October 1792.

<sup>766</sup> "My Lord... La situation de cette malheureuse ville est bien critique. Tellement que Mr Monro le juge prudent de se retirer... il est déjà remarqué et observé par des scéléérats ses compatriots... s'il se retire... j'aurai soin de vous instruire de tout, peut-être mieux que lui ..." My translation. See PRO FO 27/40, folio 82.

<sup>767</sup> For details of Mr. Sommers' report, see above p. 181-82.

dangerous topics in his letters: “I have received your various letters, which come to me safe and unopened. I thank you for the prudence you have observed in abstaining from everything that did not immediately refer to our own concerns, because this has inspired that confidence which leaves our correspondence unmolested.”<sup>768</sup> Omission of political references afforded foreign residents greater immunity from the reprisals sweeping the country and encouraged a degree of leniency on the part of those in power. Joel Barlow wrote to his wife in May 1793 reassuring her that “I meddle with no politics.”<sup>769</sup>

British radicals in Paris adjusted the terms of their debates and even the modes of communication they employed as a response to the awareness that they were being followed and scrutinised. David Worrall has suggested that one of the outcomes of increased repression on the British reform scene was a growing preference for orality. Speech became less dangerous than the written word.<sup>770</sup> This is surely one reason why documentary evidence on British radical activities in Paris remains so scarce. Captain Monro himself identified an inordinate level of secrecy in the activities of the British Club, pointing out that “they are ashamed of their proceedings they keep everything as secret as possible.”<sup>771</sup> It is unlikely that shame was the principal reason for radicals’ careful concealment of their discussions, yet what Monro’s observations show is the ways in which activists cautiously veiled their activities in response to the suspicion that clouded their associational gatherings, leaving very little written trace of their discussions.

In June 1793, writing to her sister Eliza, who still held out hopes of joining her in Paris, Mary Wollstonecraft expressed concern that letters were not arriving and those that did make it to their destination were being opened.<sup>772</sup> Wollstonecraft tried to communicate with

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<sup>768</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1219.

<sup>769</sup> Quoted in Buel, *Joel Barlow: American Citizen* 171.

<sup>770</sup> See David Worrall, *Theatrical Revolution: Drama, Censorship, and Romantic Period Subcultures, 1773-1832* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2006).

<sup>771</sup> George Monro to Lord Grenville, Paris, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1792, PRO FO 27/40 (Part 2).

<sup>772</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Eliza Bishop, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1793, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 226.



her sisters through Gilbert Imlay's American business associates, but the channels of communication appeared precarious. She advised Eliza, "Do not touch on politics."<sup>773</sup> At the height of the executions decreed by the *Comité de Salut Public*, Wollstonecraft wrote to Joel Barlow's wife Ruth, carefully avoiding giving her opinion on the decision of the revolutionary government to arrest all British residents, whatever the views they expressed on the Revolution: "Of the state of things here, and the decree against the English I will not speak."<sup>774</sup> What such correspondence reveals is both the self-censoring mechanisms that British observers put in place to avoid alerting the suspicion of the revolutionary authorities.

Surveillance made caution primordial and John Hurford Stone, who preserved his liberty during most of the Terror, followed Wollstonecraft's example, writing rarely and never mentioning politics. As he explained to his brother in England, "I am respected, tho' I keep aloof from all political acquaintance."<sup>775</sup> While personal correspondence seemed to reach its destination, Stone believed that any political discourse would be seized upon by the revolutionary authorities. If letters were restricted to business, however, they would not be obstructed. On 21<sup>st</sup> April 1794 he wrote to his brother, telling him that "the post is sometimes negligent, though letters of business are rarely interrupted."<sup>776</sup> Two weeks earlier he advised his brother to avoid political commentary in his correspondence.<sup>777</sup>

British residents were subject to indiscriminate arrest from August to October 1793 and prison terms had considerable implications for the success and survival of writing projects. Thomas Clio Rickman noted the difficulty faced by Thomas Paine in drafting a history of the Revolution:

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<sup>773</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Eliza Bishop, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1793, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 227. Wollstonecraft expressed her fear to Eliza that her letters were either being opened or "miscarried".

<sup>774</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Ruth Barlow, Le Havre, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1794, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 255. Wollstonecraft was probably referring to the laws of 27 Germinal (16<sup>th</sup> April 1794) and 7 Prairial (26<sup>th</sup> May 1794) which renewed measures against foreign residents and dictated that no British prisoners would be taken during the hostilities.

<sup>775</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1126.

<sup>776</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1264.

<sup>777</sup> John Hurford Stone to William Stone, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1794: "I shall write more frequent, but you need not answer but on business." Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1267.

It is unfortunate for mankind that Mr. Paine, by imprisonment and the loss of his invaluable papers, was prevented giving the best, most candid and philosophical account of these times. These papers contained the history of the French revolution, and were no doubt a most correct, discriminating, and enlightened detail of the events of that important era. For these papers the historian Gibbon sent to France, and made repeated application, upon a conviction that they would be impartial, profound, and philosophical documents.<sup>778</sup>

Rickman's recollections attest to the fact that Paine had made some headway in writing his version of the history of the French Revolution. The circumstances of his incarceration seem to have prevented these papers from being preserved or completed, despite later scholarly attempts to recover his reflections.

Yet it was not just arrest and imprisonment which put pay to writing projects. Once faced with the reality of the Revolution and both the change in perspective and cognitive disarray that surveillance sometimes provoked, radicals found it difficult to finish their histories as they had set out to do. Mary Wollstonecraft failed to realise her mission in going to Paris to provide regular reports of her observations of the Revolution for periodical publication in the *Analytical Review*. She went to France in December 1792, hoping to write a series of historical reflections on the Revolution, yet she only completed one such volume, which was published posthumously. Although in the preface to her account she revealed, "It is probable therefore, that this work will be extended to two or three more volumes, a considerable part of which is already written," the planned volumes never materialised and Wollstonecraft's history only covered the period from May to October 1789.<sup>779</sup> In a letter to Ruth Barlow in February 1794 Wollstonecraft mentioned the sources that she hoped would form the basis of later volumes of her history of the Revolution:

I should be much obliged to M<sup>r</sup>. Barlow, if he would get me the debates and decrees, from the commencement of that publication and order them to be sent to me here, in future, by post, – for I never see a paper. Tell him that I am now more seriously at *work* than I have ever been yet, and that I daily feel the want of my *poor Books*.<sup>780</sup>

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<sup>778</sup> Rickman, *The Life of Thomas Paine* 137.

<sup>779</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 5.

<sup>780</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Ruth Barlow, [?Le Havre] February 3<sup>d</sup> [1794], Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 247.

In a letter to her sister Everina the following month, she announced that she had posted part of her manuscript for her history of the Revolution, probably to be read by her publisher: “I have just sent off great part of my M.S. which Miss William would fain have had [m]e burn, following her example. – And to tell you the truth, – my life would not have been worth much, had it been found.”<sup>781</sup> Helen Maria Williams had apparently advised Wollstonecraft to destroy her manuscript in view of the climate of suspicion in the French capital. Despite the focus of Wollstonecraft’s history being on events prior to the republican turn, some of her criticism of the conduct of the revolutionary leaders would have alerted the attention of the governing authorities. The specific context of 1793-94 meant that writers could not plan sequels, count on publication or even expect their manuscripts to survive.

#### **IV.3 Eyewitness Authority: “One must have been present”**

As Bob Harris has noted, the French Revolution played a part in “stimulating the demand for news of the revolution, and...through its proximity, it encouraged papers to experiment with new ways of gathering more immediate and up-to-date information, including direct reporting.”<sup>782</sup> British observers who wrote historical accounts or personal letters invoked their physical intimacy with events as a marker of authority. They also emphasised the manner in which they gathered news to prove the worthiness of their accounts. Writers rejected calm distance from the event as a category for trustworthy coverage, stipulating that a genuinely true judgement could only be formed through observation and inside knowledge. As Mary Wollstonecraft put it in March 1794, “I certainly am glad I came to France, because I never could have had else a just opinion of the most extraordinary event that has ever been recorded.”<sup>783</sup> Immediacy and presence were held up by

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<sup>781</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Everina Wollstonecraft, [Le] Havre, March 10<sup>th</sup> [17]94, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 248.

<sup>782</sup> Bob Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press: Britain and France, 1620-1800* (London: Routledge, 1996) 46.

<sup>783</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Everina Wollstonecraft, [Le] Havre, March 10<sup>th</sup> [17]94, in Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 249.

radicals as key factors in accessing the true nature of the Revolution. As John Hurford Stone noted, “Of the spirit of this people you can have little idea at a distance.”<sup>784</sup> Presence in France during the revolutionary years conferred a degree of authority on British radicals commenting on the events they witnessed, and allowed them to claim the power to provide a counter-narrative to that diffused in the British press. British Club members, as well as being political activists, entrepreneurs, bookseller or printers, were first-hand observers, reporters, actors and participants. They did not consider themselves as detached and indifferent witnesses and made no claim to impartiality. Yet they did make recurrent claims to legitimacy, suggesting that their presence at the scene of the Revolution gave them a unique insight into the events they were living through.

This is perhaps why “participant observer,” in the ethnographic sense, might be useful in our thinking on British eyewitnesses in Paris. British observers of the Revolution were in many ways early ethnographers. The ethnographer lives among the people he studies for lengthy periods of time. He coexists with his subjects in a shared world, sometimes speaking their language, attempting to decipher their gestures, trying to gain access to non-verbal forms of shared understanding. He also attempts to translate such experience into words and suggest meanings. In portraying this shared experience, the ethnographer has “an unquestioned claim to appear as the purveyor of truth in the text.”<sup>785</sup> Constantly shifting between the dual posture of inside and outside observer, the knowledge that he gathers is almost mystical and closed off to external verification. As Steven Blakemore has contended, “most writers engaged in writing the Revolution believed, not surprisingly, that his or hers was the true French Revolution.”<sup>786</sup> Claims to truth were all the more vital when authenticity was constantly brought into question by the revolutionary authorities. There was a double impulse therefore

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<sup>784</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1300.

<sup>785</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard U P, 1996) 25.

<sup>786</sup> Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation* 15.

behind British eyewitness writings on the Revolution. While many claimed to be providing an unadulterated account, revising the reports written by those hostile to the Revolution, they also highlighted their inability to see everything. What may at first seem paradoxical – the assertion of one’s privileged position to write an authentic history combined with a ready acceptance of the flaws and particularity of that history – is perhaps better seen as part of the complexity generated by the dual status of eyewitness observer and foreign commentator.

Sampson Perry was conscious of the difficulty he faced in negotiating a route between objective history and personal testimony in his sketch of the Revolution. Piecing together his study from within Newgate prison, he claimed that the particular utility of his history was in the physical proximity he could claim to certain segments of the story he recounted rather than in its ability to provide a comprehensive view of events. Not only had he spent three years as an eyewitness and was acquainted with leading actors of the Revolution, but his friend John Hurford Stone, who remained in France, was supplying him with first-hand information to be included in his account, just as he had done in 1792 when Perry was editor of *The Argus*. The potential appeal of Perry’s version of history for a British reading audience was its immediacy and the purported accuracy of the events it detailed:

It is less in the first than in the succeeding volume, that the Sketcher of History pretends to build on materials exclusively his own. Driven by persecution from England, he was thrown into so peculiar a situation in France, that he may, without fear of contradiction, say, few had the same opportunity of investigating the causes of many of those incidents which the wondering world ascribed to chance or blind fatality.<sup>787</sup>

Perry acknowledged that his own particular insight was more clearly conveyed in the second of his two volumes, covering the years during which he was a resident of Paris. Aware of the rareness of his position as a British eye-witness in the months following the deposition of the king and the announcement of the republic, when many of non-republican bias had quickly negotiated a passage out of France, he presented his study as a considered investigation rather

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<sup>787</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: vii-viii.

than blind conjecture. Unlike those in the “wondering world”, reliant on speculation and imagination, Perry’s account was based on solid facts, careful reporting and accurate observation.

For British activists, their proximity to events gave them a privileged insight therefore, which allowed them to contest reports and versions of the Revolution which appeared inaccurate or inauthentic. Helen Maria Williams’ first volume of letters are a vindication of the early progress of the Revolution and she reacts with astonishment on arriving back in Britain and hearing what she considers to be deceptive and erroneous portraits of that Revolution circulating widely and spread by émigrés. She is taken aback when she hears the views of her associates in London:

Every visitor brings me intelligence from France full of dismay and horror. I hear of nothing but crimes, assassinations, torture and death. I am told that every day witnesses a conspiracy; that every town is the scene of a massacre; that every street is blackened with a gallows, and every highway deluged with blood. I hear these things, and repeat to myself, Is this the picture of France? Are these the images of that universal joy, which called tears into my eyes, and made my heart throb with sympathy?<sup>788</sup>

There was a profound dissonance between the sights she had seen with her own eyes and the portrait painted by British critics. In her first volume of letters written during the summer of 1790, Williams describes her return to England. Overhearing conversations on the boat back to Brighton, she explains how, “I could not help being diverted with the comments on French customs, and French politics, which passed in the cabin.”<sup>789</sup> Williams was not only surprised but *entertained* by the reports she heard. Such admissions of amusement undermined the validity of opposing views, which exaggerated and distorted the horrors of the Revolution. Gatherings of British residents in Paris, often drawing together individuals such as John Hurford Stone and Helen Williams, Mary Wollstonecraft, Joel and Ruth Barlow and Thomas Paine, would include discussions of the representations of the Revolution in the British

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<sup>788</sup> Helen M. Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790* 147.

<sup>789</sup> Helen M. Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790* 147.

papers. In a letter to his brother William, Hurford Stone wrote, “Nothing amuses us more than reading your news-papers, descriptive of the horrors of Paris.”<sup>790</sup> Humour and amusement had a subversive function. Not only were reports of French violence in the British press erroneous, but they were risible, containing descriptions of gothic horrors which were not even worthy of riposte.

As the Revolution progressed, reactions in Britain against developments in France became more virulent. British radicals attempted to provide real-time commentaries on happenings in France, with the aim of both correcting error in British press reports and elevating their own position as the providers of authentic accounts of the Revolution in the face of loyalist propaganda. They endeavoured to keep abreast of news both sides of the Channel even when communication was increasingly difficult and surveillance intensified. John Hurford Stone, writing to his brother in England, stated, “I have seen your papers to the 31<sup>st</sup> Dec. I receive them pretty constantly; am much amazed at your accounts of French politics. Heavens that you were wise and informed.”<sup>791</sup> Stone could claim the authority to undermine the false accounts published in British newspapers through his first-hand knowledge, superior to the propaganda circulated by the press. As early as October 1792, as the following letter to his brother shows, he was sending information to newspaper editor, Sampson Perry:

You will have received from Verdun an immense packet of information, which you will have distributed according to the addresses; that to Perry contains an epitome of the campaign, and our present situation...I shall continue to send you Perry’s letters, if I have time in future to write to him; but it is necessary that he should have them in the day, as a day of earlier intelligence is to him of some importance.<sup>792</sup>

Stone was providing Perry with information on the progress of the French armies to be included in his radical journal *The Argus*. He had spent a number of weeks in late 1792 travelling with a Prussian companion and following in the footsteps of Dumouriez’s troops,

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<sup>790</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1215.

<sup>791</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1217.

<sup>792</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1302.

stopping at Verdun, Rheims and other towns on the North-Eastern border. Stone's correspondence was included in Helen Maria Williams' third volume of published letters but may also have formed the basis of accounts published in *The Argus* in London. The emphasis on getting the news to Perry "in the day" highlights that one of the major preoccupations of British radicals was to provide immediate counter-readings of the events they witnessed. Joel Barlow, sketching his notes of the French Revolution, began his eighth chapter entitled "To the fall of Robespierre July 94" with his intended objective: "We are now to speak of the victory of the Republic. But that the deeds of this campagne [*sic*] many not appear to be the effect of enchantment [*sic*] & its history a romance, it is necessary to recapitulate the means that were employed by the Com ee of Sal. Pub. to collect the vigour that it was to display."<sup>793</sup> He aimed to correct the exaggerated reports of the Terror by giving the background to the measures taken by the *Comité de Salut Public*, collated during his time in Paris and necessary to understand the reasons for the outbreak of such violence. Much of the eyewitness reporting by foreign residents aimed at rationalising episodes in the Revolution which had been portrayed as spontaneous eruptions of senseless brutality by detractors.

Hurford Stone signalled his proximity to news sources in letters to his brother:

The letter I sent you of the retreat of the Prussians was, I am certain, the only information of the event to be met with in England, for the news arrived at the assembly at ½ past 12: I heard it from a deputy; a minute after I ran into the box and spoke with one of the secretaries; and at one the post went off to Calais; and my letter was put on board a boat that was then going to England. In any future affairs of this sort, you may depend on the authenticity of the intelligence, for I have access to the secretary's table.<sup>794</sup>

It was not only the content of the news that was significant, but the manner in which it was acquired and transferred. Stone insisted he heard the information with his own ears and conveyed it within the hour, from his privileged place at the heart of French affairs, literally at

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<sup>793</sup> Barlow, "Notes for a hist. of the Fr. Rev.," folio 10.

<sup>794</sup> Paris, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1792, Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1298.



the “secretary’s table”. Such efficient channelling of news allowed Stone to claim that his reports had particular value that could not be found in other testimonies.

In a similar way, Sampson Perry suggested that it was important for readers of *An Historical Sketch* to be aware of the manner in which he had gained access to the information contained in his account. It was for this reason that he had reluctantly highlighted his own experience in Paris in the preface:

The repugnance I feel in becoming the topic of my own discourse (short as I mean to make it), is greatly qualified by what I conceive an indispensable necessity of thereby enabling my readers of *The Sketch of the French Revolution*, to understand how I obtained a knowledge of many of those incidents and anecdotes, which, though abstractedly appearing to be unimportant to the grand work, had, nevertheless, very considerable, but remote influence upon some of its most striking parts.<sup>795</sup>

In a metaphor of the position of British radicals themselves in relation to the core of revolutionary activity, Perry suggested that, although the “incidents and anecdotes” he recounted might appear at first sight to be peripheral to the grand narrative, they nevertheless had an impact on events occupying the centre stage. British presence in Paris represented a potential threat to the stability of reports generated by the British government on the French descent into anarchy. In correcting the errors they perceived in British portraits of France, in expressing shock at the deceptive vision of the Revolution portrayed by commentators across the Channel, or in describing their amusement at the scenes portrayed in the British press, radicals undercut official loyalist versions of the Revolution and acquired a degree of leverage in determining which knowledge was to be deemed authentic and reliable.

To highlight their own presence at the scene, British commentators often emphasised the aural, sensory and visual aspects of the events they witnessed. Helen Maria Williams constructed her “authoritative voice”, to use Clifford’s terms, by translating what she felt, heard or saw into text, claiming an exclusive vantage point. In her depiction of a visit to the French National Assembly, it is not the content of speeches themselves, which were easily

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<sup>795</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 3.

transcribed, reprinted and accessible in Britain, which take precedence, but the behavioural aspects of oratory and debate. Williams makes references to manners and gestural style, the “haranguing” of the audience, or the posture of the president, who “stretches out his arms and endeavours to impose silence,” attempting to convey the sensorial dimensions of the scene.<sup>796</sup> As Matthew Bray has pointed out, Williams implied that it was “only those people, such as Edmund Burke, who have not witnessed the Revolution firsthand who do not understand its transformative effects.”<sup>797</sup> She systematically included precise detail, bolstering the text’s claim to realism. In her description of the *Fête de la Fédération*, the one-year anniversary celebration of the fall of the Bastille, Williams points out the quantity of seats for the spectators, the number of days’ preparation required, the exact route of the procession and the inscription written on the royal altar. Further into the text she provides a precise description of Madame de Sillery’s medallion, which could only be penned by someone who had been present. The accumulation of extraneous detail provides at once incontestable proof of the veracity of her representation while at the same time making her own presence in person the focal point of the reader’s attention.

Bray has suggested that Williams created a “sensocracy”, which he goes on to define as “a society predicated upon an equality of feeling among all people,” and therefore open to female commentators.<sup>798</sup> Williams portrayed the sounds, sights and spirit of events in her accounts. At the *Fête de la Fédération*, the music “had the power of electrifying the hearers,” and the “discords” of the composer produced “a melancholic emotion” on those present and the performance of the sacred drama “affected the audience in a very powerful manner.” The spirit of liberty is “displayed” in dancing, singing, performance, demonstration and decoration.<sup>799</sup> She focuses on sound and sight, detailing pauses in the procession, the

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<sup>796</sup> Helen M. Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790* 72, 82.

<sup>797</sup> Bray, “Helen Maria Williams and Edmund Burke: Radical Critique and Complicity” 9.

<sup>798</sup> Bray, “Helen Maria Williams and Edmund Burke: Radical Critique and Complicity” 18.

<sup>799</sup> Helen M. Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790* 63.

suspension of cries of joy, the “solemn silence”, and the cries of the people leaving a bodily imprint as they “still ring in my ear!”<sup>800</sup> Presence gave Williams the authority to read emotional meaning into signs, gestures and the tenor of shouts and cries, meaning that could never be discovered from distant observation. In suggesting that the crowd “called out with exultation rather than regret,” or explaining the instinctive reactions of onlookers as “the sudden impulse of feeling,” she was interpreting reactions which could not be objectively verified.<sup>801</sup> Helen Maria Williams allowed the multiple voices of the Revolution to resonate in her texts, inserting anecdotes recounted to her personally by individuals present at the scene and relaying the ephemeral shouts that only a listener could seize upon.

In a letter to her publisher and friend Joseph Johnson from Paris in December 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft described the scene from her window during the trial of Louis XVI. She was struck by the silence of the streets, where “not a voice could be heard” after the tumult of the preceding days. As an onlooker, Wollstonecraft had a privileged place as an eyewitness of the events. She identified the expressions on faces, the movement of the national guards, the sounds of drums, and the body postures of the crowd.<sup>802</sup> In a similar way to Williams, she invoked her presence at the scene and took advantage of her eyewitness position to convey a sensory view of the atmosphere during the trial. She would also call upon her role as an “observer of mankind” in the first of a series of commentaries on the “present character of the French nation”, written in February 1793. In her portrait of the French nation she claimed to have identified key elements of French culture:

The whole mode of life here tends to render the people frivolous, and, to borrow their favourite epithet, amiable. Ever on the wind, they are always sipping the sparkling joy on the brim of the cup, leaving satiety in the bottom for those who venture to drink deep. On all sides they trip along, buoyed up by animal spirits, and seemingly so void of care, that often, when I am walking on the Boulevards, it occurs to me, that they alone understand the full import of the term leisure;

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<sup>800</sup> Helen M. Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790 73*.

<sup>801</sup> Helen M. Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790 69, 66*.

<sup>802</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Joseph Johnson, Paris, 26<sup>th</sup> December 1792, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 216-17.

and they trifle their time away with such an air of contentment, I know not how to wish them wiser at the expense of their gaiety.<sup>803</sup>

The gaiety and levity of people's behaviour and "mode of life" resulted in a loss of wisdom and gravity. Although Wollstonecraft held back from reproaching the French people for this preference for superficial pleasure over deeper concerns at this particular time, she would later consider this national trait as incompatible with the rapid establishment of rational and enlightened society. While in letters and sketches she called upon her status as an eyewitness to describe the revolutionary scene, in her philosophical account of the "origins and progress" of the Revolution she judged the early Revolution based on the studied enquiry of official texts rather than the observations of the onlooker.

Presence at the scene conferred authority on spectator-writers, in that their descriptions were first-hand and authentic, yet writers also highlighted the impossibility of accurately conveying such lived experience in language. Words were seen as unable to adequately portray the events and writers acknowledged the partiality of their viewpoints. There was a complex interplay between writers' recognition of the authenticity – and authority – of their accounts and the simultaneous admission of their inadequacies. For Helen Maria Williams, the scenes depicted in her letters were perfectly drawn because they were the result of her own firsthand observation. However, they also proved insufficient, as words were unable to describe events which were first and foremost an emotional experience: "I am well aware how very imperfectly I shall be able to describe the images which press upon my mind. It is much easier to feel what is sublime than to paint it; and all I shall be able to give you will be a faint sketch, to which your own imagination must add colouring and spirit."<sup>804</sup> The sounds she had heard could not be recorded or repeated, thus her written text was a flawed imitation of what she had witnessed. Williams also called on the reader to embellish the text, using his or her

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<sup>803</sup> "Introductory to a series of letters on the present character of the French nation," Paris, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1793, *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering, 1989) 443.

<sup>804</sup> Helen M. Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790* 63.

own power of invention and imagination to complete the portrait. Writing about the celebrations at the *Fête de la Fédération* Williams exclaimed, “It is not to be described! One must have been present, to form any judgment of a scene, the sublimity of which depended much less on its external magnificence than on the effect it produced on the minds of the spectators.” She wondered, “How am I to give you an adequate idea of the behaviour of the spectators. How am I to paint the impetuous feelings of that immense, that exulting multitude?”<sup>805</sup> Writers therefore found themselves confronted with the ambiguity of being in a place which allowed them privileged access to the events which were captivating Europe but unable to put those events into words. Sampson Perry wrote of the near impossibility of successfully portraying the French Revolution through the written word, as “no language can come up to the grandeur of the object – no artificial eloquence can equal the natural sublimity of the scene.”<sup>806</sup> The Revolution was “one of those occurrences which cannot be magnified by the power of language.”<sup>807</sup> For Perry, the magnitude of the events was such that even “the pen of Tacitus” would not have been able to faithfully render the proceedings.<sup>808</sup> Such admissions were in part genuine expressions of bewilderment in the face of events which they felt ill-equipped to describe. Yet they also constituted attempts to shield their writings from criticism and deny the primacy of the perfect picture over the partial sketch. Hostile readers of Perry, Williams and Wollstonecraft frequently made reference to their flawed style and poor writing technique, suggesting they were not equal to the task of describing a spectacle as historic as the French Revolution. However, if the Revolution was primarily linked to the affect, then the brilliance and accomplished style of one’s writing was peripheral. In a letter to her sister Everina, Mary Wollstonecraft alluded to the elusiveness of understanding for those observing from a distance. She stated, “It is impossible for you to have any idea of the impression the

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<sup>805</sup> Helen M. Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790* 64.

<sup>806</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 489.

<sup>807</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: v.

<sup>808</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: vii.

sad scenes I have been a witness to, have left on my mind.”<sup>809</sup> Authentic eyewitness reporting was therefore not simply a question of conveying the facts, but it was also to attempt to sketch the emotional and mental effects that such a period of human history could have on its spectators.

#### **IV.4 Writing the French Revolution Home: British Accounts 1792-1796**

Adherents of the British Club, writing the Revolution back to Britain, thus invariably held up their presence as a marker of exceptional authority. Their eye-witness status gave them a privileged position, allowing them to see the events from the inside and assess its psychological and emotional impact. They emphasised the sensory experience of the Revolution in their letters and accounts, often portraying the sounds, smells and sights of the scenes they witnessed and emphasising the fact that being a spectator provided unique insights essential to deeper understanding. British radical observers also proclaimed the exclusivity of their knowledge, highlighting how the scenes witnessed defied description and how language failed faced with the sublime. Through this emphasis on the inexpressible, British radicals claimed to have access to an understanding which at the same time was impossible to convey to an outside reader. Not all eyewitness experience was valid however. Spectators hostile to the Revolution were portrayed by radicals as having been misled or having made errors of interpretation in their readings. Accounts based on unreliable source and corrupt witnesses had no value. Eyewitness reports had to be based on “truth;” yet which “truth” this was a matter of private conjecture and political bias. Despite the similarities evident in the writing techniques of British onlookers and in the conditions which governed what they produced, the aims of British authors and their verdicts on the Revolution were varied. This is partly due to the fact that they were writing at different times in the Revolution’s course, sometimes during the heat of the events and occasionally in retrospect,

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<sup>809</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft to Everina Wollstonecraft, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1794, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters* 248.

but it also reflects the heterogeneity of opinions within the British radical community at this time and the different ways in which they attempted to write out the contradictions and uncertainties they perceived in this phase of the Revolution.

If he was indeed the author of *A Circumstantial History*, Robert Merry published his account of the August Days in September 1792, before the height of the Terror and a few months before he left Paris in May 1793.<sup>810</sup> Sampson Perry wrote his *An Historical Sketch* in 1795-96 while in Newgate prison. He was looking back at what he had seen and heard while in Paris, but also using what he had been told by second-hand sources on arrival. His sketch was written in the wake of Thermidor but also at the height of the repressive measures taken towards radicals in Britain, of which he was a victim. Mary Wollstonecraft was writing in France during the Terror but with a focus on a period of the Revolution prior to her arrival, while Helen Maria Williams wrote her series of observations from an eyewitness perspective as the Revolution progressed. She was a long-term resident of Paris, apart from a brief return to Britain in 1790-91, and her views changed with the different phases she lived through. Some accounts and letters are not discussed here as, although begun with a view to publication as official histories of the Revolution, they did not make it into print.

#### **IV.4.1 *A Circumstantial History*: An Eyewitness Account of the August Days**

A number of British Club members had witnessed the events at the Tuileries on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792. Thomas Paine had looked on from amid the crowd, Robert Merry had been an eyewitness and Helen Williams had watched the happenings from her window at rue

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<sup>810</sup> The uncertainty over the authorship of *A Circumstantial History* is due to the fact that the account was published anonymously. At least three different newspapers announced the publication of “A particular account of the RISE and also the FALL of DESPOTISM IN PARIS, on the 10th of August, and the TREASONS OF ROYALTY, anterior an subsequent to that period, by Robert Merry Esq.” in the same week. *The Morning Chronicle* of 12<sup>th</sup> September 1792, *The Times* of 11<sup>th</sup> September 1792 and *Lloyd’s Evening Post* of 10<sup>th</sup> September 1792 all announced the imminent appearance of the account. While the title is different from that of *A Circumstantial History*, it is quite likely that the newspapers would have used a more general descriptive title in the announcement to readers without necessarily giving the published title. This was the case with Robert Merry’s tract from the constitution debate, entitled *Réflexions politiques* but advertised as “a treatise on the nature of free government”. See above pp. 246-47.

Hélvetius, only metres from the Palais Royal and within viewing distance of the confrontation which took place in the royal gardens and palace. The eradication of kingship was seen as constitutional heresy by the majority of observers back in Britain. The ascendancy of the people and the degree of popular strength manifested on the *journée* of 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792 also caused concern among respectable reformers who did not wish to see any irregular outbursts of unrestrained popular activism undermine civilised, enlightened debate at home. Reactions to the events are therefore a valuable gauge of the nature of political attitudes among British expatriates and in particular their views on the role and character of the people. In conveying these reactions back to Britain, they sought to correct what they saw as flagrant abuses of truth regarding the portrayal of the Revolution by members of the British establishment and even among enlightened members of the Whig opposition.

The British Club address of November 1792 was signed two months after the August Days and therefore is itself a useful indicator as to the willingness of its members to condone popular involvement, and even vengeance, in the course of the Revolution. Several gruesome accounts of the confrontation were published, although relatively few were written by British observers.<sup>811</sup> The ambassador of Genoa described how the Swiss guards were mutilated after their death, noting that, “it seems impossible to give a plausible explanation for the barbarity and insults their corpses were subject to.” He also portrayed the popular militias as ruthless and pitiless, decapitating those guards even after they had surrendered.<sup>812</sup> Many more accounts came out a few weeks later after the massacres in the Paris prisons. The trial and execution of the king in January 1793 fuelled further writing and encouraged outpourings of disapproval. Robert Nares published *A Short Account of the Character and Reign of Louis*

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<sup>811</sup> See for example *A genuine narrative of the proceedings at Paris from the 16th of December, 1791, to the 1st of February, 1793: containing, among other interesting anecdotes, a particular statement of the memorable tenth of August and third of September. To which is annexed the life, trial, and execution, of Louis XVI.* By Mr. Johnson, *Who was an Eye-Witness of the Whole of the Transactions* (London: Turner, 1793). I have not yet been able to verify if the account was written by William Johnson, a member of the British Club.

<sup>812</sup> Account by the ambassador of Genoa, Genoa archives, Correspondance de Spinola, 22-35, quoted in M. Reinhard, *La chute de la royauté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969) 602-03. Also, see Edmund Burke’s account of the confrontation in his *Annual Register* of 1792, above pp. 61-62.



XVI. *Shewing how Little he Deserved, from his Ungrateful People, the Name of Tyrant. To which is Subjoined, a Corrected Translation of his Last Will* (1793). Most accounts published in Britain emphasised the barbarity of the actions in Paris and the dishonourable treatment of the French aristocracy by a rampant and uncivilised mob. A notable example is the following account of the events of August 1792, published in Britain in 1794 whose title is worth citing in full: *M. de Viette's translation from the French of the life, portrait, character, and trial at large, of the late Queen of France containing particular detail of the execution and whole sufferings in prison, of that unhappy Princess; also the treatment of the Princess Lamballe, whose naked body, without head, was dragged through the streets of Paris in horrid procession. Likewise an authentic account of the first cause of the French Revolution, and of the manner in which it burst forth on the memorable tenth of August, 1792, on which day the blood of fifteen thousand persons deluged the streets of Paris, to which is added, the trial of the unfortunate Louis XVI, late King of France: giving an account of his parting with the Queen, his sister, and two children, the 21st of January, 1793. Also, of his noble behaviour when he ascended the scaffold. With a description of La Guillotine; or beheading machine: by which the King and Queen suffered. To which is prefixed, an exact copy of his will.* The account was an aggregate of all the unspeakable horrors of the Revolution, exemplified by the August Days, the trial of the king and queen and the guillotine. The legendary stories of the mutilation of the Princesse de Lamballe during the attacks on the French prisons in early September, and the saintliness of the king faced with his death, contributed to the discrediting of the current phase of the Revolution by the end of 1792 in Britain.

It is likely that Robert Merry was the author of *A Circumstantial History of the transactions at Paris on the tenth of August plainly shewing the perfidy of Louis XVI and the general unanimity of the people, in defence of their rights* (1792). The anonymous pamphlet was published by radical publishers H. D. Symonds, Robert Thomson and R. Lytlejohn in

early September 1792. It had initially been sent to a newspaper editor as a riposte to a report vilifying the people after the *journée* of 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792.<sup>813</sup> On 11<sup>th</sup> September 1792 *The Times* advertised the imminent appearance of “A PARTICULAR ACCOUNT of the Rise, and also of the Fall of Despotism in Paris, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, and the Treasons of Royalty, anterior and subsequent to that period. By ROBERT MERRY, Esq.”<sup>814</sup> *The Morning Chronicle* and *Lloyd’s Evening Post* also advertised the publication in the same week. Although the title is different, no other tract by Merry of the August Days has been located. In addition, the particular contents of *A Circumstantial History* suggest that it was published by a pro-revolutionary, radical-leaning British observer who had been a witness to the events. The fact that it was published by radical printer H. D. Symonds and Robert Thomson would also tend to suggest that the author was known to the radical community. According to Alger, Thomson had denounced Captain Monro as a spy in Paris in early 1793 and, if this was the case, would probably have met Merry at White’s Hotel. Such evidence gives weight to the suspicion that Merry was the anonymous author.<sup>815</sup>

The tract is an apology of the popular intervention in the Revolution and a condemnation of Louis XVI and his queen only weeks after they had been taken prisoner by the National Assembly. It is divided into two parts: a preface, or address “to the public”, in which the author explains his reasons for writing, followed by an account of the events themselves. The latter was taken almost *verbatim* from the edition of the *Révolutions de Paris*, covering 4<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> August 1792.<sup>816</sup> This source is given in the preface, in which the author states his intention to allow people in Britain to “hear the other side” after the

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<sup>813</sup> Symonds also published Sampson Perry’s *An Historical Sketch of the French Revolution* in 1796.

<sup>814</sup> *The Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1792.

<sup>815</sup> My thanks go to Jon Mee for drawing my attention to this tract, the newspaper announcements and the doubts surrounding Merry’s authorship.

<sup>816</sup> The account is faithful to the original report contained in *Révolutions de Paris, dédiées à la nation et au district des petits-augustins, quatrième année de la liberté française* 161, 4-11<sup>th</sup> August 1792, 229-39. The report in the French journal also goes on to discuss the days which followed the 10<sup>th</sup> August. These reports are not retranscribed in *A Circumstantial History*. The account is almost entirely faithful to the original apart from the omission of one or two paragraphs which does not alter the main message of the text.

“imperfect details” which had lately reached London. He admits that he wrote because of “my surprise and my sorrow at seeing the accounts given in papers in Wednesday and Thursday last, of the events which took place here in the 10<sup>th</sup> August.”<sup>817</sup> These accounts had “industriously suppressed every thing which might appear like a justification of the conduct of the people.”<sup>818</sup> His aim was to contrast the “perfidy” of the king with the “general unanimity of the people in defence of their rights,” something the newspapers in Britain had refused to do. He also advised that the standards of British political life should not be imposed on France because of the “widely different manner in which political parties are circumstanced in that country and our own.”<sup>819</sup> He intended to correct the errors circulating in Britain by those “venal prints with as little regard to decency and to truth.”<sup>820</sup> The French nation would be shielded from reproach and the people, struggling for their freedom, vindicated. Like many British writers based in Paris who wrote about what they witnessed, the author of *A Circumstantial History* attempted to provide a just account to counter the false reports widely available in Britain and correct the prevailing opinion of the public: “The least informed amongst us, if candour guides his judgment, must recant the unfavourable sentiments which from the first *exaggerated* view of the late melancholy events, he may have been led to entertain of the French people, or the present ruling party in that country.”<sup>821</sup> These faulty reports were propagated by a misguided reporter whose other interests in Paris “have prevented him from viewing this great event on all its sides, or on the side that he ought.”<sup>822</sup> This last reflection clearly corroborates the view widely expressed among British reformers at the scene, that not all eyewitness observation was deemed accurate. Those who did not have liberty as an object could not be relied upon to convey a true account of the events.

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<sup>817</sup> *A Circumstantial History* 17.

<sup>818</sup> *A Circumstantial History* v.

<sup>819</sup> *A Circumstantial History* iv.

<sup>820</sup> *A Circumstantial History* iv.

<sup>821</sup> *A Circumstantial History* vi.

<sup>822</sup> *A Circumstantial History* 18.

Although the report revises prevailing perceptions of the August Days, the author does not deny that “horrors” and “cruelties” were perpetrated. Yet he accepts these as “the effects of a just and *necessary* self-defence on the part of the people.”<sup>823</sup> The integrity and courage of the populace is contrasted with the behaviour of the king, a “weak, voluptuous man,” and the venality of the nobility. In a similar way to Sampson Perry, whose later *Historical Sketch* would retrace similar themes of a virtuous people in contrast to the hypocrisy of the privileged classes, the author considered that popular vengeance would not have been required had the enemies of the Revolution not plunged the country into civil war and had the privileged given up their titles willingly. The clergy and nobility were intriguers who had concerted with foreign powers and insidious monarchs to orchestrate the downfall of the Revolution.

The preface therefore outlines the author’s views, aimed at correcting the opinion of the Revolution in its latest radical manifestation, which had widely circulated through false reporting in Britain. The reader is warned not to be “deceived by empty sounds” and the widespread use of the term “faction” to describe the current French government is denounced as an insidious strategy to discredit legitimate opposition to established modes of government. This is an echo of the epigraph chosen for the account. The author quotes Harrington’s maxim that “Treason ne’er prospers – what’s the reason? If it prospers – none dare call it treason!” Although it is attributed to Jonathan Swift on the title page, the reflection on the justice of opposition to tyranny was also part of the English republican tradition. Radical writers would often note how simple opposition to established forms could be passed off as sedition or treason by the ruling authorities, intent on quelling all forms of dissent. Writers therefore took every opportunity to highlight the technical workings of this mechanism in their public addresses. Thomas Paine in his *Address to the Addressers* had argued that his suggestions for improvement in government had simply been dismissed as libel so that the ruling ministry

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<sup>823</sup> *A Circumstantial History* vii.

could avoid having to contend with the legitimate claims he had advanced. If all the reforms he argued for were libel, he claimed, “let the name of LIBELLER be engraved on my tomb.”<sup>824</sup> Equally, Mary Wollstonecraft in her historical account of the French Revolution described how Chief Justice Mansfield, responsible for sedition trial proceedings in Britain, “established it as a law precedent, that the greater the truth the greater the libel.”<sup>825</sup> Radicals exposed the language, terminology and discursive strategies of the British establishment as based on falsehood and trickery, designed to conceal the flaws and injustice in the constitution.<sup>826</sup>

The author of *A Circumstantial History* concludes with the optimistic view that “by the general diffusion of knowledge, the political mists are fast dissipating, which have hitherto obscured the minds of men in general.” In a statement typical of Enlightenment texts, the author confirms his belief that man’s knowledge was advancing. Such progress is attributed to the work being done in France but also to the uncovering of the myth of British freedom and rights which had blinded people to the need for reform in Britain.<sup>827</sup> The appeal “to the public” is itself an assertion of the importance of popular understanding of the Revolution, over and above the necessity of convincing foreign governments of the justice of the changes taking place in France. While the ruling ministry could conclude that the events of the 10<sup>th</sup> August were manifestations of popular insubordination and barbarity, it was important to educate the British people as to the true nature of the Revolution and disclose what was seen as an elite conspiracy to keep the people in ignorance.

The preface is followed by a detailed account of the August Days, based entirely on the version of events published in the *Révolutions de Paris* only days after the invasion of the Tuileries. The journal, founded in 1789, was a radical publication under the editorship of

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<sup>824</sup> Paine, “An Address to the Addressers,” Foner ed. *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 488.

<sup>825</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 117.

<sup>826</sup> John Barrell has also studied this trait of British radicalism, highlighting how “the notion that the political conflict of the period was to be regarded as a conflict, among other things, about the meaning of words, was a theme of numerous liberal or radical texts of the 1790s.” See Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death* 1.

<sup>827</sup> *A Circumstantial History* xv.

Louis-Marie Prud'homme.<sup>828</sup> Its epigraph was *Les grands ne nous paraissent grands que parce que nous sommes à genoux. Levons-nous!* ("The great only appear great to us because we are on our knees. Let us stand up!"). Writers on the paper included Elisée Loustalot, Sylvain Maréchal, Pierre Gaspard Chaumette and Philippe Fabre d'Églantine. The latter was involved in the Revolutionary Tribunal and went on to be accused and executed with the Dantonists in April 1794. Loustalot was a radical editor of the paper but died from illness in 1790 and Maréchal, a journalist and spokesman of the disaffected masses and adherent of Babeuf after 1794, militated for the cause of atheism and agrarian reform to help the poor. The final contributor, Chaumette, had been involved in promoting the cause of social reform and was ultimately executed because of his democratic tendencies, associated indirectly with Hébert, who would also be guillotined in early 1794 for espousing even more extreme views than the *Comité de Salut Public*. He was a severe critic of the Girondin members and sympathised with the cause of the lower classes.

These preoccupations – the moral superiority of the people, the condemnation of the repression of the lower classes, the right to resist kingly oppression – are clearly discernable in the report contained in *A Circumstantial History*. The *Révolutions de Paris* version was translated and reprinted in English with some annotated comments by the British author. The engravings included in the edition, also strongly supportive of the popular seizure of power, did not feature in *A Circumstantial History*. (See Appendix G, figures 6-8). The account blames the insurrection on the cowardliness of the "insidious" Louis and the hypocrisy of his ministers.<sup>829</sup> It even suggests that the ministry was attempting to foment rebellion by detaining Pétion, the mayor of Paris, whose influence over the people was substantial. The

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<sup>828</sup> For an account of Prud'homme's later project to reconstruct and revise the history of the Revolution, see Joseph Zizek, "Plume de Fer": Louis-Marie Prudhomme Writes the Revolution," *French Historical Studies* 26.4 (2003): 619-60.

<sup>829</sup> *A Circumstantial History* 21.

author also highlights the lack of honour of the king's guards who targeted women and children when firing from their protected positions within the palace walls.

The subservience of the king's guards ("savages in black") is brought into sharp contrast with the bravery of the men who led the siege of the palace.<sup>830</sup> Their ardour and spirit contributed to the overwhelming of the royal force, despite the underhand tactics used such as "false patrols", who pretended to be at one with the people but whose actual aim was to assassinate Pétion. The report emphasises the orderliness of the people, their capacity for rational decision-making and prudent voting behaviour. Their violence and vengeance is not downplayed however, and the account describes how the militia members systematically pursued and put their enemies to death for their crimes. In their victory, the people showed restraint, "moderation", and "generosity", claiming some remnants of their victory but not looting.<sup>831</sup> They took the treasures found in the palace to the National Assembly rather than dividing them up as spoils.

The account is annotated with personal remarks from the British author in the form of footnotes, commenting on the details given in the official report from the French newspaper. In one such note, the author claims to have met with Pétion on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1792. It was quite likely that Merry would have met with the mayor of Paris on arriving in Paris or even earlier, on his visit to London in 1791, as Merry spent much of his time over the years 1791 to 1793 travelling back and forth between the two capitals. The British in the French capital were on good terms with the mayor of Paris and some had met him during his 1791 visit to Britain. Several, including John Hurford Stone, Thomas Christie and David Williams, wrote to him during the course of 1792 to praise his conduct in re-establishing order in the capital based on firm but just principles. The editorial notes also corroborate the assertion made in the report that it was the royal guards who had provoked the assault on the Tuileries rather than the

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<sup>830</sup> *A Circumstantial History* 34.

<sup>831</sup> *A Circumstantial History* 35.

people. The author describes walking through the streets near the Tuileries before the events, where he “saw not the least appearance of a tumult. The alarm-bell was sounding, and the drums beating, but every thing else was still as death. I could not help observing at the time, that the intention seemed rather to be to form a riot than to quell one.”<sup>832</sup> The footnotes also confirm the view put forward in the report that the guards lacked honour and rectitude. Far from meeting the standards of chivalry and bravery expected of an elite force, they ran away through the palace once they realised their positions have been overcome.<sup>833</sup> The editorial notes add to the portrait of the bravery of the people, who entered the palace and resisted fire: “I could not have conceived that it was possible, had I not witnessed it, that there could have been found men so prodigal of life, as those who first entered the garden.”<sup>834</sup>

The notes are a resounding validation of the version of events presented in the translated text from the *Révolutions de Paris*. The description of the scene at the end of the day “is perfectly exact”.<sup>835</sup> This scene, which closes the text, shows the emotion and anguish of those who had lost relatives during the siege and their determination to locate the corpses of loved ones. The author recalls the individual cases of women lifting up the heads of the dead, surveying the grounds for signs of members of their families, and taking away the wounded and those who had perished. This final focus on the devastation caused to the poor, who lost members of their intimate families, confirms the intention of the author to emphasise both the courage but also the humanity of the people compared to the regime under which they struggled. The contrast with the report provided by the ambassador of Genoa could not be more striking and the report from *A Circumstantial History* may have influenced Sampson Perry, whose account of the same event in *An Historical Sketch* is almost identical.

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<sup>832</sup> *A Circumstantial History* 21, note 2.

<sup>833</sup> *A Circumstantial History* 32, note 6. For a pro-royalty version of these events, see Grace Dalrymple Elliott, *Journal of my Life during the French Revolution*.

<sup>834</sup> *A Circumstantial History* 33, note 7.

<sup>835</sup> *A Circumstantial History* 36, note 9.



The tract attempted to undermine the accounts circulating in the British press of the events of 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792, in particular one published in “a morning paper” whose identity is not revealed. It was a defence of the people’s justice and a condemnation of the king, his guards and his ministers. By using a translated version of the *Révolutions de Paris* report, the author not only showed his approval of the radical reading of the day’s occurrences put forward by the newspaper, but revealed that he had direct access to the principal news sources of Paris and could discriminate between those of merit and those of little value. This role of editor and pundit is clearly visible in the footnote commentaries which corroborate the original report. British observers were anxious to prove the validity of their accounts in the face of widespread scepticism. The decision to use reports from the scene, which had been translated from the French, was a way of emphasising the reliability and accuracy of their writings.

If *A Circumstantial History* was indeed the account by Robert Merry advertised in the British press in early September 1792, it is a testimony to the willingness of British expatriates to support events which had been vilified by newspapers back home. In the column adjacent to the advertisement of the account of the August Days, published in *The Times* is included a strong denunciation of the prison massacres committed by a “sanguinary mob” only a week earlier. The displaying of heads on pikes to the Queen, the King and their children steals the headline and the editors add in square brackets, “We have noticed this remark, in order to shew the base calumnies that are propagated concerning these August Personages.”<sup>836</sup> Merry, if *A Circumstantial History* was the work advertised in the newspaper, would not have received the support of *The Times* editors, a newspaper so openly hostile to the Revolution at this stage, for his defence of the people in their assault on the seat of royal power.

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<sup>836</sup> *The Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1792.

#### IV.4.2 Sampson Perry's Prison Writings: *An Historical Sketch of the French Revolution* (1796)

Sampson Perry was one of the members of the British expatriate community who had been forced into exile after repeated prosecutions for seditious libel. He had failed to rein in his outspoken criticism of the government in his radical newspaper and had consequently become a target of ministerial repression.<sup>837</sup> A militia surgeon turned captain before taking on the editorship of *The Argus* in March 1789, Perry is one of the most defiant yet least known radicals of his time. Although his attempts to secure the republication of his newspaper in Paris seem to have fallen short, Perry's brief stay in France was transformative. He regularly met with Thomas Paine, whom he knew from London, and was one of the regular visitors to the latter's residence in rue du faubourg Saint-Denis, where he also became acquainted with William Choppin and William Johnson. He was involved in the hub of radicalism centred on White's Hotel and, though joining the British Club after the presentation of the November 1792 address to the National Convention, he revitalised the group through his arrival at the end of the year.

Perry was also respected by members of the Jacobin vanguard and was nominated for special civic recognition in March 1793 by the revolutionary administration, an honour reserved for only the most partisan foreign activists. He accepted a diplomatic mission on behalf of Hérault de Séchelles, a member of the *Comité de Salut Public*.<sup>838</sup> In May 1793 he appeared as a witness at the trial of Jean-Paul Marat, a man he greatly esteemed and would go on to celebrate in his *Historical Sketch*. At the hearing, Perry stated his continued admiration for the Revolution and deplored the publication of a supposed suicide note from William Johnson in Brissot's newspaper, *Le Patriote français*, which blamed Marat for the degeneration of the Revolution. In his testimony on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1793, Perry conceded, "I was

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<sup>837</sup> For details of the libel prosecutions against Perry and his work to spread radical ideas through his newspaper the *Argus*, see above pp. 128-37.

<sup>838</sup> For a short discussion of this mission see above pp. 314-15.

distressed to see [the note] in the *Patriote français*, because it gave the impression in England that, Marat, whom I consider a useful man, was setting France ablaze.”<sup>839</sup> A permanent member of the *Comité de Salut Public* and apologist of the September massacres, Jeanbon Saint-André tried to secure Perry’s exemption from the measures taken against foreigners. Despite special pleas on his behalf by members of the ruling Montagnard administration, Perry spent fourteen months in different French jails however, including the Luxembourg and the Madelonnettes, only narrowly escaping execution. He returned to Britain in the spring of 1795 to be taken up on previous sedition charges and sent to Newgate for seven years.

Perry was not the only radical to suffer from dual incarceration in both Britain and France, yet he was one of the few to emerge from the Luxembourg even more convinced of the merits of the ideals he considered the Revolution to stand for and was the only British radical to have publicly acclaimed Jean-Paul Marat, a man whom Helen Maria Williams, writing two years before Perry, accused of “villainy” and of being a “determined aristocrate [*sic*]” in league with the tyrannical heads of the European monarchies.<sup>840</sup> In Newgate, Perry began a major writing venture inspired by persecution in Britain and his first-hand experience of the Revolution in France. His previously banned newspaper, *The Argus*, reappeared in two bound volumes which drew on new material, he printed his own self-defence entitled *Oppression!!!: The Appeal of Captain Perry, Late Editor of the Argus, to the People of England: Containing a Justification of his Principles and Conduct* (1795) and wrote *An Historical Sketch of the French Revolution* (1796), for which he secured publication through one of his fellow inmates, H. D. Symonds, in 1796. In 1797 *The Origin of Government Compatible with and Founded on the Rights of Man* was published by J. S. Jordan. Perry also

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<sup>839</sup> See Sampson Perry’s testimony in the trial of Jean-Paul Marat: “J’ai été très affligé de la voir dans le *Patriote français*, parce qu’elle tendait à faire croire en Angleterre que Marat, que je regarde comme un homme utile, mettait toute la France en combustion.” *Le Moniteur Universel*, vol. 16, Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1793. My translation.

<sup>840</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France*, III: 70.

wrote for the *Monthly Magazine* while he was in prison in 1796, penning a series of portraits of the leading figures of the Revolution.<sup>841</sup>

Perry had left Britain in late November or early December 1792, when radicals were beginning to become the target of government repression.<sup>842</sup> Yet by the time of his return in 1795 the political context had changed significantly. In late 1793 the so-called Scottish Martyrs had been sentenced to transportation for their role in the convening of the British Convention, mirrored on the National Convention of France, while in May 1794 key members of the radical London Corresponding Society had been arrested and detained in Newgate prison or the Tower of London on charges of treason. Their acquittal in November and December 1794 of the same year had not substantially eased the pressure on radical activists, and the 1795 Two Acts, or “Gagging” Acts as they were dubbed by radicals, revised the terms of treason offences and banned large-scale public gatherings in an attempt to dissipate popular association.<sup>843</sup> From the mid 1790s therefore, despite the fact that very few prosecutions were actually brought against radicals under the terms of the Two Acts, perceptions of how dissent could be expressed and what form public protest could take had changed. Reformers refrained from expressing opposition in the same vociferous and public ways they had done in the early

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<sup>841</sup> See *The Monthly Magazine*, vol. 2 (1796) and vol. 3 (1797). The portraits are anonymous. What suggests that the author of the portraits was Perry, however, are a series of remarks on the importance of rewarding merit rather than social standing, the scourge of birth advantage and the regrettable way in which writers were persecuted, all perennial themes of the radical editor. The notice also ends with the statement that “the anecdotes will be regularly continued and the conductors request the assistance of all persons who, by a recent residence in France, are qualified to communicate original and interesting facts.” Perry had regularly claimed that his residence in Paris meant that he was knowledgeable enough to comment on the Revolution. This along with the reference to themes familiar in his work, hint that Perry had probably been commissioned to write the portraits.

<sup>842</sup> Perry, although in France throughout the month of October 1792, returned to SCI meetings for three weeks in a row in November 1792. His last recorded attendance was on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1792, and it is likely that he set off for Paris shortly after this date. The SCI ordered an advertisement to be published in *The Argus* for a week after the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1792 (see TS 11/965/3510/A1), so the date of Perry’s departure was more likely to have been early December. Captain Monro reported Perry’s arrival in Paris on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1793 and his arrival is also recorded in *La Chronique du Mois* of January 1793. The Times indicated on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1793 that Perry was already in Paris.

<sup>843</sup> The “Two Acts” banned political lecturing (Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act) and public meetings attended by more than fifty people, unless they had been authorised by a local magistrate (Seditious Meetings Act). Such legislation was effectively an attempt to repress the public and open nature of the radical reform movement in the 1790s yet in reality very few actual prosecutions were brought against radical leaders. For more on the impact of the Two Acts see Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death*.

years of the decade. Expressions of protest thus found outlets in either underground militant movements or through more codified defiance.

Not only had the terms of reference changed for radical activists, with dissent, now narrowly contained by the letter of the law, being manifested in more covert and ambiguous ways, but many now found themselves detainees in political wings of prisons, a circumstance which prompted opposition to be articulated in new ways. Although, on the one hand, the conditions of incarceration restricted the expression of dissent, in that behaviour and writing would have been heavily policed, publications vetted and associations closely monitored, on the other hand the prison experience could intensify grievances, foster alliances between fellow inmates and, in the case of Newgate jail, prompt the forging of a hub of radical exchange which fuelled rather than dissipated a culture of resistance. Ian McCalman has focused on the subculture located within the walls of Newgate jail during the last years of the 1790s. Civilian detainees, behind bars for political misdemeanours, were incarcerated together, often sharing living quarters and engaging in webs of sociability while they purged their sentences. Radical editors, publishers, writers and artists provided momentum for a number of collective publication projects which would emerge from Newgate, providing inspiration not only for contemporary radical activists but also for later writers, poets and authors of the post-war age. The radical engraver Richard Newton sketched the atmosphere within Newgate prison in two works entitled *Soulagement en Prison, or Comfort in Prison* (1793) and *Promenade on the State Side of Newgate* (1793). (See Appendix G, figure 4). Newton and those publishing from within Newgate set out to undermine the authorities' detrimental portrait of civil prisoners behind bars for political dissent. Newton implicitly contrasts the rectitude, civility and egalitarian spirit of those in Newgate with the repressive and strictly hierarchical system in mainstream Britain.<sup>844</sup>

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<sup>844</sup> John Barrell discusses the visual message conveyed by the representation of British radicals in prison in Newton's engravings in "Radicalism, Visual Culture, and Spectacle in the 1790s." There is also a discussion of

McCalman, who has called for more interest to be devoted to Perry's account of the French Revolution, argued that "[Perry] is one of the 1790s ultraradicals whose political extremism crystallised as a direct consequence of counterrevolutionary repression."<sup>845</sup> For Perry, repression and first-hand witnessing of the French Revolution were not only politicising but were paradoxically a form of public salvation, bringing him back from the brink of anonymity and providing his writing with a purpose. Having been disappointed in both his military and journalistic careers, the latter by "deceiving friends", he believed himself to be the victim of wilful persecution. His public existence after 1792 was forged around the reiteration of this perceived persecution, and through this he achieved a certain prestige that he may never have had access to otherwise. His status as "late editor of the *Argus*," appeared on the title pages of almost all his Newgate works and he prefaced his *Historical Sketch* with "The Particulars of S. PERRY.'s Case – of the Occasion of his leaving England." No longer known for his satirical jibes at ministers, he gained recognition as the "persecuted editor", and his reputation was forged through reference to his outlawry and alienation rather than the particular causes for which he had previously fought.

This focus on persecution would sometimes spill over into paranoia. Perry believed himself to have been "attacked at all points at once," during the early 1790s libel battles and considered his lengthy stay in Newgate to have been the result of a "prison-keeper's whisper" and "personal resentment" rather than "the most powerful logic and rhetoric."<sup>846</sup> Perry also used the collapse of his paper as a recurring epithet in Paris. References to him in French archives without mention of the "persecuted" *Argus* are scarce. In the Marat trial papers, one citizen described him as "a gallant man, a victim of his love for the French Revolution, he fled his country where he had a price on his head for having defended republican principles in a

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Newton in McCalman, "Newgate in Revolution: Radical Enthusiasm and Romantic Counterculture," *Eighteenth Century Life* 22 (1998): 95-110. See also David Alexander. *Richard Newton and English Caricature in the 1790s* (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1998).

<sup>845</sup> See McCalman, "Sampson Perry, Jacobin Doctor and Journalist," *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 158.

<sup>846</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 22.

paper he wrote under the name of the argus of the people.”<sup>847</sup> Similarly, *La Chronique du Mois*, announcing the imminent publication of his newspaper in Paris, recounted that Perry had “come to find true friends amongst the directors of the Cercle Social press, who are going to publish in France the persecuted newspaper, *The Argus of the People*.”<sup>848</sup> From 1792 onwards, it was his reputation as a target of ministerial persecution which cemented Perry’s reputation in the radical movement.

Perry saw this general misrepresentation of his own case as mirroring the way the French Revolution had been maligned by the British establishment. Equally, the virtues that Perry judged to be the bedrock of the changes occurring in France were those he coveted in his own character. He prided himself on his constancy, gravity, attachment to principle, sincerity and dignity, the antithesis of those “worn-out patriots” that he chastised in the preface to his *Historical Sketch* and blamed for the extinction of *The Argus*. In the prospectus to the republished *Argus*, Perry wrote:

The part which I had in establishing a literary work under this name, though of a different nature, justifies my pretensions, more especially as the same reverence for principle and truth which pervaded, which so peculiarly distinguished that work, is the great motive for my commencing this. In the conduct and prosecution of it, it will be seen whether my Political Principles, by which alone I desire to be known to, or estimated by, my Fellow-Citizens, have been shaken, or whether they are not rather confirmed.<sup>849</sup>

He went on “I declare myself beginning the world again” and introduced himself to his readers in “new dress”. It was against this backdrop of renewal and with the aim of vindicating the steadfastness of his principles that Perry wrote his *Historical Sketch*, an

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<sup>847</sup> Letter from Citoyenne Moreau, Affaire Marat (AN W 269/16 folio 30: “un galant homme victime de son amour pour la révolution française il a fui son pays où sa tête est mise à prix pour avoir défendu les principes républicains dans une feuille qu’il rédigeait sous le nom de l’argus du peuple.” My translation.

<sup>848</sup> *La Chronique du Mois*, January 1793, 80. “To the Friends of Truth. *Sampson Perry*, auteur d’un journal républicain, en Angleterre, *The argus of the People (La Sentinelle du Peuple)* pour avoir défendu avec énergie les droits de l’homme, la révolution françoise, Horne-Tooke et Thomas Payne, son ami, n’a échappé que par sa fuite à des bourreaux. Perry et un autre écrivain anglois, Merry...sont venus trouver de francs amis, chez les Directeurs de l’Imprimerie du Cercle Social, qui vont publier en France, le journal persécuté, *The Argus of the People*.”

<sup>849</sup> Perry, *Prospectus of a new and interesting work, The Argus* 3.

optimistic historical account of the French Revolution from 1789 to 1795 but also a veiled attack on the British government, constitution and apathetic populace.

Although Perry did not deny the excesses that took place during the later stages of the Revolution, he still considered the events of France as setting an example to other nations and having the potential to create a new source of happiness through the establishment of freedom. Despite its length, it is worth quoting the preface to volume two in full, which charts the events that he had witnessed in part:

Writing first volume was a more “pleasing task” than second. In that part of the Revolution REASON only presided; passion and vengeance by turns have since been seen to triumph. It is impossible however, without injustice, to condemn the design, on account of the errors of those who were appointed to carry it into execution.

The Author is aware of the unpopularity he may lie under at present, for not condemning the Revolution altogether, as other writers who have gone before him have done: he is, nevertheless, not afraid to appeal to impartial posterity, as to whose opinion of it is best founded. It is true, that in following up the progress of this Revolution, (as new in its nature, as wonderful in its effect) the eye will necessarily sometimes be arrested by scenes of horror and of pity, the painful instances of human ferocity arising out of the former debasement of the People; but if this event from first to last be seen only with a philosophic eye, and those humiliating evidences of the joint imperfection of man and of government be overlooked, what a delightful prospect will present itself to the view! For though the sun of freedom at its rising in France should have been obscured by passing clouds, and sometimes veiled with almost impenetrable darkness, yet is it expected henceforward to shine with meridian lustre, and to extend its beaming influence to the happy guidance of every politically bewildered country in the world.<sup>850</sup>

Although the “horrors” and “impenetrable darkness” of the gloomier phases of the Revolution are not omitted, he recommends that they be “overlooked” and that the events be seen with a broad, “philosophic eye.” Such a perspective would, he believed, help to convince those in doubt of the ultimate benefits of the Revolution. In the main body of the account, the flaws and machinations of the privileged class are set in sharp contrast to the justice and boldness of the people. While the violence of the Terror and the September massacres are not justified, they are explained on rational grounds, and if the King, his ministers, the Girondin members and Robespierre are heavily criticised, leading members of the Montagne, the members of the first Constituent Assembly and Jean-Paul Marat are given more sympathetic treatment.

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<sup>850</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: iii-iv.



Perry's criticism of Louis XVI is unreserved throughout the two volumes. From the outset he criticises the former king's want of character and resolution and his underhand strategies and shrewd, calculating manipulation of the Assembly.<sup>851</sup> Although he explains how some of the king's speeches in 1789-90 and his professions of loyalty to the Revolution had been well-received by the population, "the subsequent conduct of this monarch taught the people, at length, to set less and less value upon such declarations and professions."<sup>852</sup> As Perry pursues the history of the Revolution during the course of 1791, the verdict on Louis XVI is even more damning. Perry again denounces the character of the king after his interrupted journey to St Cloud, asserting that any glimpses of courage were "solitary efforts" and he had no "innate quality", all his best speeches having been written by others.<sup>853</sup> He concludes his first volume with an attack on the French monarch, whose "inglorious" conduct and "duplicity" cannot be overlooked:

The gross ignorance the king of France shewed in men, in things, in nature, by all his actions, is the best excuse to the French nation for depriving him of his power. It is a miserable reflection on the head of a king, that he knows nothing of the hearts of men. It is a phrenzy in a chief magistrate, whether king or emperor, to desire to reign longer than he is willing to consult the good of the people. Under any other tenure, the sceptre is always liable to be wrested from the hand that would wield it, and the life of him who disputes its relinquishment put into imminent hazard.<sup>854</sup>

Perry's denunciation of the hypocrisy and weakness of the king continues in volume two where the author lists Louis's crimes and presents him as "the restorer of French liberty, yet giving way to perfidy and perjury." Again the king's character comes under assault as Perry describes the "conduct of this unhappy man" as "at one time inflated with pride; at another peevish with ill humour; and lastly, condescending and even humble from fear." Louis is accused of having refused to listen to the concerns of the people at the *Fête de la Fédération* and cannot therefore be excused from acting against public opinion. Perry reminds his reader,

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<sup>851</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 19, 192-93.

<sup>852</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 374.

<sup>853</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 570.

<sup>854</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 623.

“Did not the people speak out and speak plainly to him?”<sup>855</sup> As a result of such blatant disregard for the views of the populace, the king could not be reprieved by blaming the corruption of his court.

The king’s ministers, guards, queen and faithful followers also come under attack as the representatives of privilege, “speculating on the miseries of the poor.” He exposes the profligacy of state pensions, that “despotic waste of national wealth,” and suggests that considerable sums of public money were given to pimps, prostitutes and opera performers. He highlights the “underhand and treasonable proceedings” of the aristocracy and the “self-interest” of the emigrants, “those ungrateful children of their country” who would only return to France once they knew their property was under threat.<sup>856</sup> The king’s ministers, “obnoxious to the nation,” are contrasted with the upstanding representatives of the National Assembly and strong criticism is reserved for the non-juring priests, as well as the king’s guards, who carried out an unrelenting attack on the people at the Tuileries on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792. Those who were still attached to royalty in October 1792 were “a coalition of bigoted priests and fanatic nobles.”<sup>857</sup>

Yet it is Perry’s verdict on the execution of the king which is one of the most notable examples of his radical stance and which illustrates how far he had diverged from those representing the events in Britain and even many of his compatriots in Paris, including Helen Maria Williams. Far from condemning the judgment reached by the Convention, he holds it up as a lesson to other “despots and tyrants.”<sup>858</sup> He reveals how the king showed no bravery, but only “repugnance” in the face of his imminent execution and justifies the decision not to allow three days’ respite to Louis before he went to the guillotine. Regicide is even blamed on the king’s allies rather than his enemies:

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<sup>855</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 40, II: 109, II: 194.

<sup>856</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 283, II: 292, I: 360, II: 42.

<sup>857</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 518, II: 267.

<sup>858</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 306, II: 307.

It was, however, not out of the limits of possibility that an issue, much less disastrous to Louis XVI. than the one we have witnessed, might have been obtained. But royalty, like a dazzling meteor, as long as it is not utterly extinguished in darkness, is followed by infatuation...If this unhappy monarch had gained the knowledge which he affirmed he had acquired by his journey to Varennes; then is there no doubt but that *his friends*, as they were willing to be thought, were the authors of his death, and of a major part of those evils, which were brought upon their country.<sup>859</sup>

The responsibility for the king's death lay therefore with the associates that had corrupted his judgment after his ignominious return from Varennes. After a very summary account of the king's execution, which is void of all pathos, Perry immediately goes on to contrast the king's behaviour with that of "this martyr of liberty", Le Pelletier, who was assassinated only days after the king's death.<sup>860</sup> The celebration of a hero of the Revolution in the immediate continuity of the passage dealing with regicide demonstrates Perry's refusal to show the least compassion for the former monarch and his determination to celebrate those he saw as the true heroes of the Revolution.

Not only does Perry direct severe criticism towards the king, his ministers and guards, and the non-juring clergy, but, in contrast to Helen Maria Williams, he also denounces the Girondin members of the Convention, who refused to countenance the execution of the king. He accuses the representatives of having wanted to spare the king's life "to remove as much as possible the responsibility from themselves." He charges Madame Roland, who had been eulogised by Williams, with having been "a very ambitious woman; she possessed considerable talents for either business or intrigue."<sup>861</sup> He considers the Girondins as elitist, having "studied books and man in the abstract, but they were unacquainted with man in the mass." For Perry they were out of touch with the people: "These men were silly enough to think nothing of the people; they were too much of *statesmen* to contemplate the actions and opinions of *common men*."<sup>862</sup> No friends to the poor, "they might wish to *level* downwards,

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<sup>859</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 156.

<sup>860</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 308.

<sup>861</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 303, II: 342.

<sup>862</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 347.

but it does not appear that they wished to raise upwards.”<sup>863</sup> In contrast to many of his fellow British Club members therefore, Perry was unreservedly critical of the Girondins, even with the knowledge of the Terror which followed. He provides rational reasons for the decision to oust the members from the Convention at the end of May 1793, referring to the ambition of the excluded men, their lack of understanding of the people, and their refusal to accept their rightful responsibility. He concludes, “That these men were republicans there can be no doubt...But they were republicans too much spoiled by diplomacy to love equality. A republic with inequalities which they might fill up, would have been more congenial to their dispositions. Their lives were useful to liberty; their deaths will not be less so.”<sup>864</sup> This final statement is rare in its bold and barely veiled justification of the execution of the Girondins and its admission of the utility of their deaths to the cause of the Revolution. This was a position that was almost unique among British accounts and came close to echoing the discourse offered by the leading members of the Jacobin authorities who saw the purging of the seats of power as essential to maintaining the purity of the Revolution. While very few British observers would have gone as far as to justify the Terror, Perry was one of the only members of the British Club who did so in a frank and unapologetic way.

While Perry criticises the Girondins’ lack of empathy for the poor, he celebrates the legacy of Jean-Paul Marat, whose trial he had testified at and whose journal *L’Ami du Peuple*, had claimed to represent the plight of the ordinary man. According to Perry, Marat was not a counter-revolutionary but an ultra-revolutionary. He was denounced in newspapers and pursued with “unavailing, endless persecution” which explained (if not justified) his vengeful behaviour.<sup>865</sup> Perry may have personally identified with Marat, whose persecution he saw as mirroring his own in Britain. He alludes to Marat’s speech of 26<sup>th</sup> May 1793 against luxury, in which the French revolutionary spoke of the necessity of “*republican manners*”:

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<sup>863</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 385.

<sup>864</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 426.

<sup>865</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 386, II: 384.

Thus it is obvious that this man, so generally execrated for his sanguinary disposition, did by his discourses most essentially serve the cause of the revolution. He was a bitter enemy to the idle and ostentatious aristocracy; and every one knows how much their bad example impedes the virtuous efforts of the sincere and good republican.<sup>866</sup>

Out of all the revolutionaries mentioned in Perry's account, it is Jean-Paul Marat who receives the most glowing praise and who is portrayed as the closest to understanding the will of the people.

While the Girondins are criticised and Marat celebrated, Perry is more reticent on the merits of the Montagne. He admits that of those who were executed as "Dantonists" in April 1794, there had been "two honest patriots" among them, although he does not specify which.<sup>867</sup> He evokes the wickedness of Robespierre, calling him a "tyrant" and portraying him as inimical to the freedom of the people. Yet he also suggests that Robespierre's downfall unfortunately allowed royalists to gain ground again: "With the fall of Robespierre, who was *bad*, much of that which the best friends of France thought *good* was destroyed, and the reaction of opinion had well nigh allowed *royalism* again to set up its standard in the month of December, of the same year":

It is hoped the reader will do the author the justice to believe, he does not mean to sully the lustre of the revolution of France, by perhaps too minutely detailing the enormities of one of its professors. The merits of that revolution stand distinct from those of any of its abettors or opposers. He is not of the opinion of some, who believe it to be the work of a few men's hands: on the contrary, he thinks these characters and personages the natural production of revolutions; and he is almost at a loss to guess how that in France could have been carried forward without them.<sup>868</sup>

Perry refuses to detail the crimes of Robespierre for fear of damaging the reputation, or "lustre", of the Revolution as a whole. Robespierre was uniformly portrayed as a monster in both Britain and France by 1796 and Perry's reluctance to name his deeds and preference for judging the whole indicates once again his intention to portray the Revolution as broadly beneficial despite its violent excesses.

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<sup>866</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 402.

<sup>867</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 518.

<sup>868</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 537, II: 539.

If Perry directs criticism at most of the principal actors of the Revolution, apart from a handful of patriotic leaders of the Montagne, including Jean-Paul Marat, throughout the account he celebrates the enlightened statesmen of the first National Assembly. He praises their conduct, despite their having had to face difficulties due to the popular ferment unleashed after the people recovered their liberty.<sup>869</sup> He celebrates the mental genius of the leaders of the first Assembly and recounts their contributions to human progress. The replacement of the king's loyal servants by national statesmen meant that the ministry had been filled with "men, promoted not by intrigue, but by supposed merit – whose honorary distinctions were not derived from their ancestors, but from the esteem of their fellow citizens."<sup>870</sup> He contends:

If ever a body of men, admired for their wisdom, had occasion to counsel with their understandings, it was now the case with the senators of France. To be *firm*, - to be *just* - to evince their *constituent* power – and yet display their *individual* tenderness, called up the best faculties of the human mind.<sup>871</sup>

The National Constituent Assembly was dissolved on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1791 and gave way to the Legislative Assembly. In retrospect the Constituent Assembly "appears uncommonly brilliant" to Perry. "It has given a new character or reputation to the country itself; and that eloquence, which before was only accounted bright and sparkling, has since acquired the qualities of *force* and *dignity*."<sup>872</sup>

Perry also rectifies errors concerning the guillotine and the Revolutionary Tribunal, set up to try suspected enemies of the Revolution. While the guillotine had been portrayed as the instrument of terror and bloodshed, an example of the incivility of the French Revolution, Perry reminds his readers that it had initially been devised to equalise punishment for all offenders. Rather than allowing the privileged classes to be executed by decapitation and the

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<sup>869</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 278.

<sup>870</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 530.

<sup>871</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 25.

<sup>872</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 106.

poor by the much more barbaric method of hanging, the guillotine was a means to lessen the torture associated with the death penalty. Its objective was to minimise rather than increase pain and provide balance between the punishment of rich and poor. Similarly, the Revolutionary Tribunal, a symbol of the cruelty of the Terror, was set up to provide fairer treatment for citizens under the law.

Perry reserves his greatest eulogy however for the “people,” – who he defines as the poor and those without power. He criticises Louis XVI for having refused to listen to their voices and chastises the Girondin ministers for wanting to direct power away from them. Throughout the sketch, the justice of the ordinary men and women of France is celebrated and the efforts made at different stages of the Revolution to equalise the fortunes of the wealthy and impoverished are praised. The celebration of the people is often achieved through direct, counterpointal contrasts with the unscrupulous behaviour of those who belonged to the privileged classes and the elite. Discussing the decision to reward those who took part in the capture and demolition of the Bastille, Perry states:

That part of society which is denominated the people, has been always regarded by the privileged few with contumely; when, however, we consider the eagerness with which the latter run after titles and distinctions, it must be insisted on that the following instance of forbearance in the crowd, is as deserving to be recorded as that of any sacrifice we have heard of.<sup>873</sup>

He praises the convergence of civil liberty with practical equality, contending, “Whatever ridicule may at different times have been thrown on the *levelling* principle, the true spirit of *liberty* is inseparable from a spirit of *equality*. But if distinctions of rank are supposed to be incompatible with a genuine freedom, the enjoyment of hereditary honours must have a still more dangerous tendency.”<sup>874</sup> The use of the term “levelling”, here employed to encourage the pursuit of equality, was seen by the majority of the British establishment as reminiscent of earlier attempts in the seventeenth century to undermine the social hierarchy and order of

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<sup>873</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 331.

<sup>874</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 482.

property. It was also used as a derogatory term by Captain Monro to describe the British Club. Perry would later consider “civil *equalization*” and the tendency of the people to propel the Revolution to “a perfect *democratic* station” as two of the driving forces of the Revolution. The principle of equality, “like the tendency of water to find its level, will rush forward, unless some unnatural obstacle intervene.”<sup>875</sup> Perry's praise of the desire to seek equality would have come into contrast with the views of members of the ruling administration, such as Lord Auckland, who had denounced the levelling tendencies of radical reformers and revolutionaries.<sup>876</sup>

The civility of the people is also emphasised in *An Historical Sketch*. Perry extols the boldness of ordinary men and women in demonstrating against the conduct of the king's ministers and demanding their dismissal, and celebrates the “pacific, confidential, and legal dispositions of the people, who shewed themselves highly worthy of defending their liberty.”<sup>877</sup> In his second volume, Perry dwells on the events of the 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792 and the September massacres, revising reports of the cold, brutal and bloodthirsty mob conveyed to Britain by hostile observers. Writing of the invasion of the Tuileries, he, like Robert Merry, reminds his readers that it was the king's Swiss guards who began firing first. In an allusion to the story of David and Goliath, Perry describes how the people riposted with “small arms and cannon.” Their spirit of vengeance was rooted in real cause, namely the “fury” they felt as “their comrades fell dead by their side.”<sup>878</sup> Again, he follows Merry in mentioning the restraint of the popular militias. One volunteer is described as having rescued a Swiss guard who was on the point of death. Rather than exacting his revenge, the volunteer brought him before the Assembly and demanded that he be given leave to take the guard home and provide

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<sup>875</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 344-45.

<sup>876</sup> For the view of Lord Auckland, see above p. 41.

<sup>877</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 530, I: 610.

<sup>878</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 207.



him with the necessary care and treatment for his wounds. For Perry, this was “proof that generosity and courage usually inhabit the same breast.”<sup>879</sup>

The September massacres however were even more difficult to defend than the second revolution of 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792, and many leading revolutionaries sought to distance themselves from the wave of summary justice that swept through the Paris prisons in early September 1792. Perry introduces his discussion of the event by referring to accounts of “the licentious and extravagant behaviour of the prisoners under accusations for high treason,” from the outset therefore refusing to consider the prisoners as innocent victims of popular barbarity.<sup>880</sup> He goes on to suggest that “in every crisis of the revolution the people have been pushed to some lamentable or fatal excess.” While he accepts the massacres as regrettable therefore, he insists that the people had been driven to their actions by external forces: “The French are a people naturally mild, though lively, and forgiving, though sensitive; but when goaded by danger, or stung by treachery, they are soon driven mad, and, in that furious paroxysm, are to be governed by no rule, nor are their actions to be scanned by any measure.”<sup>881</sup> By giving the reasons for the unleashing of madness – the danger of the approaching enemy, the betrayal of counter-revolutionary insurgency, the possible undoing of the Revolution by its enemies – Perry rationalises the actions in the prisons, if not going as far as justifying them.

Perry also revises the portrait of the specific proceedings that occurred within the prisons during the massacres. Those who had been wounded on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792 took brutal measures against the Swiss guards who had been detained in prison, yet showed clemency towards schoolteachers or those whose children pleaded for mercy towards their parents. There was no blind slaughter but a careful and humane calculation of those who deserved death. In each prison a kind of jury was set up. Perry insists on the legal pretensions of the

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<sup>879</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 208.

<sup>880</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 224.

<sup>881</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 228.

people, setting up makeshift courts to judge the accused, particularly those charged with firing on the people on 10<sup>th</sup> August. When a prisoner was “acquitted” by jury he was spared death. The trials were organised with modes of retribution or reprieve which had been well-defined in advance. Those exercising popular justice were revolted by acts of uncivilised behaviour and killed a member of their group who had been searching the pockets of a headless prisoner. Any money found was taken to the municipal authorities and bodies were buried and disposed of humanely.<sup>882</sup>

The account of the massacres is once again audacious in its defence, or at least comprehension, of the perpetrators of acts which most people, even in revolutionary France, had condemned. In Britain, the purge of the prisons gave rise to flamboyant and graphic accounts of bloodshed, particularly of notable aristocrats such as the Princesse de Lamballe, whose death is not even mentioned by Perry. Perry describes the restitution of order after the events, giving the impression that the massacres may even have had a cathartic effect. He also suggests that France was plagued by fewer foreign enemies afterwards. What emerges therefore from Perry’s report is a view that, if massacres did take place, they occurred not out of spontaneous popular madness but because of comprehensible grievances. Even when executions were carried out, victims were subject to a makeshift trial, some were reprieved and the killings were followed by civilised burials. He concludes by stating that those outside France must suspend judgment, considering that revolutions in general give rise to actions which would not be conceivable in times of peace. Those from the local *comités de surveillance* knew the guilty from the innocent better than anyone and should not be condemned based on outside judgement: “They would offer a number of those revolutionary excuses which a country not in a revolution, and a people not under the agony of multiplied dangers and sufferings, would consider no excuses at all.”<sup>883</sup> As eyewitnesses, radicals such

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<sup>882</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 228-34.

<sup>883</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 238.

as Perry could begin to understand the exceptional circumstances which had led people to acts considered as barbarous to the outside world.

Perry's view of the Revolution is remarkable for its defence of events that had contributed to the rejection of the Revolution in Britain. While for Perry the Terror was lamentable, it was the result of unrelenting pressure from external and internal enemies rather than the conscious design of a group of tyrannical revolutionary leaders directing a violent and unrestrained mob. Such excesses were only to be expected in "the tumultuary movements of a sensitive suffering people, driven almost mad by powerful foes without, and insidious enemies within."<sup>884</sup> As this extract clearly states, Perry concurred with the prevailing Jacobin discourse of 1793-94 which insisted that the Revolution was embattled and threatened by its detractors, the "conspiracy of kings" and their émigré followers. In such circumstances, Perry understood why men were prepared to violate laws in order to defend the brand of liberty they were striving to establish:

The French now began to be more sensible than ever of their newly acquired liberty. Its value was not depreciated by the danger of obtaining it, and the difficulty of preserving it. They saw it exposed to hazard as much by the insidious designs of professed but deceiving friends and apostates, as from the powerful attacks of inveterate enemies. It is no wonder their fears, their alarms, their jealousies should be carried to the greatest excess, or that their vigilance and caution should lead them to infringe those very rights, and that sacred freedom, which they wished to preserve and perpetuate.<sup>885</sup>

Perry's account dismissed the darker phases of the Revolution as "passing clouds". In similar phlegmatic fashion, he acknowledged that a period of tumult was necessary before order could be restored: "The revolution, like a ship that has to sail through a narrow strait, had to pass over a critical period."<sup>886</sup> Like the author of *A Circumstantial History*, Perry also insisted that those looking on from the outside had no right to judge, declaring, "Every independent

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<sup>884</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 15.

<sup>885</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 466.

<sup>886</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 267-68.

state has the right to be severe or clement, as best comports with its position or condition.”<sup>887</sup>

Later, he reaffirmed this view, insisting on the need for foreign observers to reserve their criticism:

It is easy for the lookers-on of other countries, unconcerned in the danger, and unacquainted with the provocations of the French, to point out the exceptional parts of their conduct in this trying period: but let us consult past history, and compare that which may offer in future, to what has just happened, and we shall be better qualified to judge, and better disposed to make allowances.<sup>888</sup>

Even the several months that Perry spent incarcerated under the Terror did not make him doubt that the Revolution would ultimately triumph. The author confirmed that great human sacrifices had to be made to ensure the success of a Revolution: “For my own part, were I one of ten millions of men, and the transition from slavery to freedom should cost the lives of all but ten, I would take my chance to survive – I would run at the prize!”<sup>889</sup> Perry, if faced with a similar choice between slavery and freedom, was prepared to run the risk of death to achieve a change of system.

In his major Newgate work therefore, Sampson Perry delivered a resounding defence of the French Revolution. This in itself was an extremely radical position in 1795-96. As Amanda Goodrich has noted, by 1795 “events in France had diluted enthusiasm for Paineite republicanism among many radicals.”<sup>890</sup> William Frend’s conclusion that “the assassinations, murders, massacres, burning of houses, plundering of property, open violations of justice, which have marked the progress of the French Revolution, must stagger the boldest republican in his wishes to overthrow any constitution” was perhaps the dominant position among radical reformers. Radicals, at least outwardly, began to link themselves more firmly to the stance adopted by their national government, or at least emphasise the idiom of a

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<sup>887</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 427. For a comparison with Merry's view on the illegitimacy of outside judgement, see above p. 353.

<sup>888</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 451.

<sup>889</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* II: 447.

<sup>890</sup> Amanda Goodrich, *Debating England's Aristocracy in the 1790s* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005) 125.

peculiarly British constitutional heritage.<sup>891</sup> Their language began to echo that of loyalists such as William Playfair, whose *The History of Jacobinism, Its Crimes, Perfidies and Cruelties* was published the same year as Perry's *An Historical Sketch*. Himself also a spectator of the Revolution, Playfair wrote:

I am a greater advocate for liberty than those who call themselves reformers and patriots... I appeal therefore to the history of the sect against which I have written, to shew that the most disorderly and cruel despotism was exercised under the appearance of liberty and justice; that far from being an enemy to liberty, I am its friend, though I do not chuse to join in the general deception that has been practised with regard to what has been called French liberty.<sup>892</sup>

Perry's prose ran counter not only to loyalist literature therefore, but also to the more moderate stance taken by British reformers who were repelled at the violence that had occurred in France. Perry saw deception less as a French disease but as the hallmark of so-called British liberty. He maintained his faith in the French version of liberty therefore, noting in his preface:

A people long distinguished for the refinement of their manners, and for the brilliancy of their wit and genius, setting to surrounding nations a glorious example, by vindicating the injured rights of man, against opposition the most formidable that can be conceived, is one of those occurrences which cannot be magnified by the power of language. To spurn under foot the idols of tyranny and superstition by the influence of reason, - to erect, on the ruins of arbitrary power, the glorious edifice of civil liberty, - is a spectacle worthy of earth and heaven.<sup>893</sup>

It took courage – or perhaps a deep sense of disaffection – to utter such praise for the Revolution in 1796, with the memory of the Terror still vivid, although of course Perry was

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<sup>891</sup> William Frend, *Peace and Union Recommended to the Associated Bodies of Republicans and Anti-Republicans* (1793), quoted in Goodrich, *Debating England's Aristocracy* 125. The very title of Frend's work shows how writers were beginning to direct their appeals to both reformers and loyalists alike, considering that the language of British constitutionalism could resonate with both.

<sup>892</sup> William Playfair, *The History of Jacobinism, Its Crimes, Cruelties and Perfidies: Comprising an Inquiry Into the Manner of Disseminating, under the Appearance of Philosophy and Virtue, Principles Which are Equally Subversive of Order, Virtue, Religion, Liberty and Happiness* (Philadelphia: Cobbett, 1796) 19-20. Playfair, identified by Alger as a spectator at the fall of the Bastille, had also been a far-from-trusted associate of Joel Barlow in Paris. See Buel, *Joel Barlow: American Citizen* 114-17. I am grateful to Jean-François Dunyach of Université Paris IV Sorbonne for sharing some of his views on Playfair and for arranging for me to have access to early drafts of Richard Buel's biography of Joel Barlow. See also "Les réseaux d'un excentrique: vies et parcours de William Playfair (1759-1823)," *Cultural Transfers: France and Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Ann Thomson, Simon Burrows, Edmond Dziembowski (Oxford: Oxford U P, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 4, 2010) 115-27.

<sup>893</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: v-vi.

already behind bars and therefore posed little tangible threat. He wanted to educate British citizens on the true nature of the Revolution now that the optimistic era of Thermidor had begun. Yet a key aim of his writing project was also to call into question the portrait of British liberty which had gained ascendancy, even among former supporters of the Revolution, under the republic, war and Terror. In his writing, Perry exposed implicitly through a historical account of a foreign revolution what, as editor of *The Argus*, he had denounced explicitly, namely the decadence of British political culture, the lack of transparency in decision-making, the moral vacuity of kings, the need for external reform of government and the unaccountability of ministers. His political agenda had not been shaken, neither had his faith in a French brand of liberty, but his methods had radically altered. Perry now adopted much more covert means of perpetuating a culture of opposition to the British status quo than before his departure to Paris.

While lauding the accountability of deputies in the National Convention, Perry asserts, “The members had not sat long enough to forget the limits of the authority given to them by their *diplomas*.”<sup>894</sup> The allusion to the unreformed British parliament is unmistakable, as British Members of Parliament had been consistently criticised for attending to their own interests instead of those of the public at large. Equally, Perry puts forward the protests of different deputations against the Cour Plenièrè after the establishment of the States General, seen as a body which would usurp the rights of Commoners:

The parliaments all cried out against this new institution; and that of Brittany sent up a deputation to protest against it as *illegal*, upon the principle that the nation was dissatisfied with the government; that it insisted upon a *reform*, but that the government had no right to reform itself; that it was unnatural to expect it would be done effectually, as it was presumptuous to attempt it at all.<sup>895</sup>

Here Perry reiterates what Paine had railed against in his *Letter Addressed to the Addressers* of September 1792, namely the self-reforming capacities of governments:

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<sup>894</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 261.

<sup>895</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 20.

I consider the reform of Parliament, by an application to Parliament, as proposed by the Society, to be a worn-out, hackneyed subject, about which the nation is tired, and the parties are deceiving each other. It is not a subject which is cognizable before Parliament, because no government has the right to alter itself, either in whole or in part. The right, and the exercise of that right, appertains to the nation only, and the proper means is by a national convention, elected for the purpose, by all the people.<sup>896</sup>

David Williams had also picked up this issue in his *Letters on Political Liberty* of 1782. Thomas Morris noted in his short biographical review of the Welsh reformer how Williams believed that “where the absurdity of petitioning an offending body to reform itself is strikingly represented; the necessity and practice of national conventions to regulate the legislative and executive powers is historically as well as logically proved.”<sup>897</sup> Perry therefore draws upon many of the themes that had animated radical reforming debate in the 1780s and 1790s in his account of the French Revolution.

In discussing how the nobility had taken up their place in the National Assembly, not because of their commitment to reform but primarily because they had been deprived of court favour, Perry appears to make a barely veiled attack on those Whigs who presented themselves as friends of the people: “Since now that a real opportunity offered of proving their disinterestedness, they not only kept aloof, but concerted in private how to wound their professed cause, and plunge the oppressed in greater, because more *confirmed* slavery.”<sup>898</sup> As we have seen, many radicals began to denounce the reforming Whigs, gathered as the Society of the Friends of the People, for abandoning the cause of reform and preferring to court the favour of the Pitt ministry, fearing their own indefinite exclusion from power.<sup>899</sup> Perry also revises prevailing assumptions about the French populace as a bloodthirsty and violent mob, alluding to their republican responsibility and political vitality: “Nothing less than calling a

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<sup>896</sup> Paine, “Letter Addressed to the Addressers” in Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2: 477.

<sup>897</sup> Morris, *A General View of the Life and Writings of the Rev. David Williams* 16.

<sup>898</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 50.

<sup>899</sup> For a discussion of Perry’s attack on the Friends of the People and their decision to renounce their support for Thomas Paine in mid-1792, see above p. 52.

national council seemed likely to satisfy the people.”<sup>900</sup> In his portrait of French civic duty, the author implicitly chastises both the British people for their want of robustness in campaigning for greater representation and the authorities for punishing attempts at establishing a National Convention.

Perry’s *Historical Sketch* was undoubtedly subversive on an explicit level through its alternative reading of the Revolution, rare for its time and radical in the extent of its defence of what had become a stigmatised event in Britain. Yet it seems undeniable that the text was also defiant in less overt ways. The echoes of core British reforming platforms permeate the text and, in allowing the voices of key figures of the Revolution to be included in unmediated fashion, Perry refrained from engaging in direct criticism of the British political structure, while at the same time actively selecting the arguments put forward to undermine the legitimacy of the status quo. Finally, the very medium he chose, the sketch, an immediate reading based on feeling rather than studied enquiry, subverted claims that true history could only be written with distance and reflection.

*The Critical Review* gave a scathing verdict on Perry’s *Historical Sketch* in February 1797. Calling it “a work, which neither for matter nor style possesses any considerable degree of merit,” the reviewer suggested that “the candid, even of those who agree in the republican sentiments of the author, will scarcely fail to notice its gross deficiencies on the score of historical impartiality.”<sup>901</sup> The work was seen as flawed on account of the author’s style but also in its flagrant subjectivity, something Perry himself had anticipated. The same periodical had reviewed Perry’s republished *Argus* the previous year, concluding that it “has very slender claims to merit, and many exceptionable articles included in it.”<sup>902</sup> The unfavourable reviews continued with *The Monthly Review* of 1797, which considered both the *Historical Sketch* and the republished *Argus* as poorly written and lacking in interest. The reviewer

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<sup>900</sup> Perry, *An Historical Sketch* I: 21.

<sup>901</sup> *The Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature*, vol. 19 (1797) 180.

<sup>902</sup> *The Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature*, vol. 18 (1796) 339.



suggested that these “bulky volumes will afford copious food for those politicians, who, having been warmly interested in the passing scenery of the eventful period commencing with the French Revolution, wish to recall to memory the principal transactions, and to view them in a connected form.” Yet after issuing such reserved views on the usefulness of Perry's work, the critic went on to censure his style of writing:

We must observe, however, that the narration is calculated for politicians on one side only; that it is for the most part mere compilation and transcription; and that it can boast of little merit of style or composition. The French Revolution is not a theme for a common mind or a dashing pen; still less for a professed party writer, except for the use of party readers.<sup>903</sup>

Perry was, put plainly, a bad writer whose explicit political bias and determination to show the favourable side of the Revolution deprived his account of any true value. His preference for including the texts of speeches, letters and declarations also provoked the scorn of the reviewer who saw such strategies as revealing his lack of skill as a writer. It is doubtful that Perry's account of the French Revolution was widely read, even among so-called “party readers”. Very few political leaders, even from among the Opposition, would have concurred with Perry's radical reading of French Revolution. His *Historical Sketch* may have been read by his fellow inmates within Newgate as they worked concurrently on publishing projects and joint ventures which attempted to perpetuate a culture of resistance to the prevailing national discourse of loyalism.

Perry was an expert in self-fashioning. From surgeon to lieutenant to editor he carved out an unexpected yet ultimately fruitless publication project for himself in revolutionary Paris only weeks after his newspaper has been closed down in London. He also generated a reputation for himself as an unswerving partisan of the French Revolution among the Parisian authorities and orchestrated a substantial publication enterprise from Newgate jail while imprisoned for libel. Perry combined criticism of an unreformed political system with an

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<sup>903</sup> *The Monthly Review, or Literary Journal*, vol. 22 (1797) 103.

attack on an apathetic British populace and faith in the underpinnings of the French Revolution, even during and following the Terror. It was the “seed of liberty” and the “philosophic light” of the French Revolution which galvanised his radicalism. Moral ignorance and political servitude, catalysts of the Revolution in his eyes, remained the scourge of British political life. He clung to a rationalist view of government and liberty and, with few acquaintances and resources, did not disguise his admiration for French justice, even seeing terror and violence, dramatised by Gillray and Rowlandson in harrowing satire, as “passing clouds”. Just like that of the Revolution, Perry’s reputation in Britain was beleaguered. He felt persecuted, leading him to dwell on his own case, something which could trick historians into exaggerating the threat he posed. He spent a large part of his later life in prison, either for libel or debt. Yet Perry is a breed of radical who defied categorisation. His independent commitment to protest, his place at the crossroads of British and French culture, his capacity for reinvention and the mobilisation of *The Argus* as a symbol of opposition were attempts both to resist and harness infringement on radical expression in late 1790s Britain. The Recorder of Birmingham, Matthew Davenport Hill, summed up Perry’s life in an 1817 letter:

While I was writing to you this morning I was interrupted by the entrance of an old patriot, Captain Sampson Perry, a friend of Tom Paine and author of an excellent history of the French revolution. He was imprisoned by our Government, during the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act [probably in 1794], for seven years on account of what they were pleased to call a libel in the *Argus*, a paper of which he was proprietor and conductor. He is a fine old man, possessing all the fire of youth. His face, which is furrowed with age and care, is every now and then lighted up with the enthusiasm of boyhood, and though his hopes are lowered by disappointment his heart is not shut against confidence.<sup>904</sup>

Writing two years before the Peterloo massacre, in an era when the model of the French Revolution had been sidelined among radical reformers, the Recorder of Birmingham

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<sup>904</sup> To Margaret Bucknall, Temple, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1817, Rosamond D. Hill and Florence D. Hill, *The Recorder of Birmingham: A Memoir of Matthew Davenport Hill; with Selections from his Correspondence* (London: Macmillan, 1878) 22-23.

nevertheless described the “old patriot” Perry with nostalgia, as a figure who embodied the idealism and resilience of the 1790s.<sup>905</sup>

#### **IV.4.3 Helen Maria Williams’ *Letters from France* (1792-93) and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *An Historical and Moral View* (1794): Eyewitness Reporting versus Philosophical History**

More has probably been written about Mary Wollstonecraft and Helen Maria Williams, two close associates of the British Club, than any of the other members of the society, with the exception of Thomas Paine. While neither signed the official declarations of the Club or were identified as taking part in its public initiatives, both were central figures in the informal gatherings that took place in tandem with official meetings. Williams and Charlotte Smith were both toasted at the signing of the British Club address in November 1792 while Wollstonecraft regularly read the English newspapers with Paine, Hurford Stone and the Barlows. Helen Williams facilitated conversation between expatriates through her nightly salon assemblies and both Williams and Wollstonecraft contributed to the conveying of impressions of the Revolution to Britain in written accounts. Helen Williams’ epistolary eye-witness reports of the Revolution extend to eight volumes published between 1790 and 1796, while Mary Wollstonecraft wrote a single volume of a history of the Revolution, covering the period from May to October 1789. The latter was written during her stay in Paris at the height of the Terror in 1793-94. While Williams went to Paris to witness the Revolution first-hand and revel in the cultural repercussions of the advent of liberty, Wollstonecraft went to Paris with the aim of discovering the inner workings of the Revolution which would enable her to give a philosophical interpretation of its progress. She also intended to publish a series of moral portraits of France for the *Analytical Review*, although only one reached publication, posthumously, in 1798. In her *Historical and Moral View*, Wollstonecraft wrote that the

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<sup>905</sup> The massacre at St. Peter’s Fields in Manchester occurred during a demonstration by people requesting the right to elect their own parliamentary representatives. The violent reaction of the local militia galvanised the British reform movement and was instrumental in paved the way for the founding of the Chartist movement.

object of the historian was to “trace the hidden springs and secret mechanism, which have put in motion a revolution, the most important that has ever been recorded in the annals of man.”<sup>906</sup> She was already aiming at uncovering some of the long historical causes and implications of the Revolution, despite the fact she was writing in the midst of emergency rule where predicting the future proved difficult. Williams, on the other hand, was conscious of the inadequacies and limitations that would plague her letters. While she wanted to draw a portrait of what she saw, she acknowledged her lack of “coolness” and “impartiality” and the “indistinct” nature of her account due to her closeness to the events she witnessed.<sup>907</sup> As she conceded in volume four of the first series:

Placed amid circumstances where the great events that are passing succeed each other so rapidly, that it is almost as difficult to consider them separately, with attention, as it is impossible to calculate their effects, you impose a task on me which I am incapable of fulfilling: for so new and unexpected are they, and so little relation do they bear to the past, that it would be rash to hazard any prediction of the future, from what we now behold.<sup>908</sup>

Williams’ letters abound with personal anecdotes and stories related by individuals she knew, met on the street or whose views had been relayed to her by acquaintances. Her perception of the ills of Ancien Régime France, the levelling spirit inspired by the Revolution, but also its abuses, are conveyed either through what she saw or what she was told. The reader follows her different visits – to Orléans, Rouen, former royal palaces, the National Assembly, the Jacobin Club and the Lycée – and is under no illusion that the view given is a subjective one. Her letters are also characterised by the breathless tone of immediate transcription, something which M. Ray Adams sees as a stylistic deficiency. Adams argues, “Her content varies as well as her style: detached memoranda, occasional reflections, anecdotes, and luxuriant descriptions are all thrown together. She is often flighty; so embarrassed is she by the multitude of things to be put down that she sometimes cannot follow an exposition

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<sup>906</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 42.

<sup>907</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 82.

<sup>908</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 74.

through.”<sup>909</sup> Wollstonecraft, unlike Williams, who preferred human testimony, draws on purely written sources for the core material informing her reflections on the progress and dissolution of the Revolution. She used accounts from Thomas Christie’s *Letters on the Revolution in France* (1791) and Helen Williams’ writings, but mainly drew on official French sources, which included *Le Moniteur Universel*, *Le journal des débats et des décrets* and *Les Archives parlementaires*.<sup>910</sup> She also used the *New Annual Register* and Mirabeau’s published letters. Her account, by Wollstonecraft’s own admission, is based on studied reflection and the perusal of rational accounts of the Revolution. Unlike Williams, she gives no indication of any failings or inadequacies in her reading of events, nor does she cite her aim as correcting the errors circulating in Britain. Wollstonecraft’s history is framed as a self-standing piece of rational and philosophical enquiry into the progress of the early Revolution, tinged with knowledge of its later degeneration.

Yet despite the very different aims of these two authors, we know that they were acquaintances in Paris and mixed in similar circles. Wollstonecraft was one of the first visitors to Williams’ salon when she arrived in Paris in December 1792 and Williams quoted Wollstonecraft’s editor at the *Analytical Review*, Thomas Christie, in her third volume of the first series of letters. Wollstonecraft was a frequent guest at gatherings attended by John Hurford Stone, Williams’ lover in Paris, and Stone wrote to his brother in late 1793, informing him that Wollstonecraft was writing a historical account of the Revolution. Stone would also contribute the vast majority of the material to Helen Williams’ third volume of letters. The influence of this lettered, radical community was felt by both writers and while I will attend to the many significant differences between the views and styles of Williams and Wollstonecraft, I will also, when relevant, show how their views reflect on the wider debate

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<sup>909</sup> M. Ray Adams, “Helen Maria Williams and the French Revolution,” *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Studies in honour of George Mclean Harper*, Ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (New York: Russell, 1967) 99.

<sup>910</sup> These texts gathered together all the debates carried out in the National Assembly and National Convention and also transcribed the texts from different laws voted on by the national representatives.

taking place within the expatriate British community. This will go some way to showing that, although British radicals socialised together and discussed views in the wings of official meetings, there was a great deal of diversity in their opinions of the Jacobin phase of the Revolution. This was largely because, unlike later writers considering the events with hindsight, British residents were providing immediate readings which were coloured by the uncertainty they felt about the future of the Revolution. Because of this emphasis on the convergence of radical writing at the junction of 1792-94, the focus will primarily be on Helen Williams' last three volumes of letters from the first series, written and published between 1792 and 1794.

#### **IV.4.3.1 Helen Maria Williams' *Letters from France* in the Early Republic**

It is widely accepted that Helen Maria Williams began her writing on the Revolution full of admiration and enthusiasm for the events she witnessed and that preceded her arrival in Paris just before the *Fête de la Fédération* of July 1790. It is also beyond doubt that her writings, seen from a long-term viewpoint and particularly from volume III onwards, show all the signs of steady disillusionment with the course of the Revolution. She has, with reason, been portrayed as an admirer of the Girondins, whose principal leaders she played host to at her salon and celebrated unreservedly in her writings. She saw men such as Roland, Brissot, Pétion and Condorcet as the philosophical lights of the Revolution, capable of great eloquence in the cause of liberty. Her abhorrence of Robespierre, the Paris Commune, and the band of "conspirators" that she blamed for the degeneration of the Revolution is also patent in her accounts. She dates the descent of the Revolution into "anarchy" from the period of August to September 1792, although it is the expulsion of the Girondin members from the Assembly after the armed assault on the National Convention on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1793 which she sees as the crucial turning point. It was this event which signalled the substitution of wise, enlightened leadership by the rule of the mob, sanctioned by imprudent and vain despots. Yet as Stephen

Blakemore has argued, while writers such as Williams, Wollstonecraft and Thomas Paine, all close associates of the Girondins, highlighted the flaws in the progress of the Revolution, they did not abandon their support in their accounts to a British audience. Such writers put pen to paper “not as a renunciation of their revolutionary faith, but as a way of reclaiming both their faith and the Revolution.”<sup>911</sup> Their accounts allowed them to adjust their views without concurring with the groundswell of popular loyalism that rejected the basis of revolutionary principles outright.

In this study of Williams, I want to focus on three of her volumes of letters, written between 1792 and 1794.<sup>912</sup> Rather than emphasising Williams’ progressive disillusionment as the Revolution wore on or even, as Blakemore does, the way in which writers very consciously rewrote the Revolution and their own stance in hindsight, I intend to highlight the complexities faced by writers who were trying to reconcile the changing nature of the Revolution with their fundamental and underlying approval of its reforming energy, often with very little analytical distance. Writers struggled to justify their continued faith in the Revolution and persistently denied the misinformed opinions espoused by British critics, but not necessarily in the consistent, coherent and conscious way suggested by Blakemore.

In her little-studied second volume of letters, Williams continues her relatively light-hearted celebration of the spirit of the Revolution, linking her observations stylistically with her much-read first volume. Yet volumes three and four are more problematic, revealing the deep contradictions that British eye-witnesses had to face during the course of 1793. In volume three Williams offers an often misshapen and chronologically disordered patchwork of views and sources, making no claim to organisational unity or ideological stability.

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<sup>911</sup> Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation* 20-21.

<sup>912</sup> These works are *Letters from France: Containing Many New Anecdotes relative to the French Revolution, and the present state of French Manners* (1792) and *Letters from France: Containing A Great Variety of Interesting and Original Information concerning the most important events that have lately occurred in that country, and particularly respecting the campaign of 1792*, vol. III and vol. IV (1793).

Williams' deep criticism of the Revolution's excesses and the tyranny of the Paris Commune, epitomised by the trial of the king, is followed by a jubilant account of the success of the French armies, written by John Hurford Stone, and a more reticent account of military successes by Thomas Christie. Volume three shows that Williams was not alone in her writing. Hurford Stone had a much greater influence on her than M. Ray Adams, who dated Stone's impact on Williams as beginning in 1794, has admitted. In fact volume three is a polyvocal work without logical or argumentative cohesion; in many ways a showcase of the diversity of opinions that would have circulated among members of the British Club. In volume four, while portraying the September massacres in the introduction as an event which had blackened the historical record, due to the nature of the atrocities committed, Williams goes on to give a rational explanation of the events, showing similarities with the account given by Sampson Perry in *An Historical Sketch*. The volume contains criticism of the way in which British newspapers purposefully manipulated reports of the Revolution. Williams even manages to lay the blame for Louis XVI's death on Edmund Burke. These two volumes show that, as well as being a resolute critic of the Jacobin "faction" and the tyranny of the municipality of Paris, Williams was also influenced by radical figures in the British circle, such as Stone and Perry, and struggled to reconcile these contradictions. She could admit the influence of the views of other British radicals in her work, despite her repugnance at the systematic violence and disorder of Montagnard rule. This was perhaps because she had a deep personal and intellectual commitment to the idea of liberty as epitomised by the Revolution. Her membership of the Dissenting community, dislike of hierarchy and abhorrence at institutional repression of any sort all led her, despite her many reservations, to continue her undertaking to correct error circulating in Britain, even though she was "prepared for censure" in adopting such a view.<sup>913</sup>

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<sup>913</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 265.



Volume II of *Letters from France* was dismissed by M. Ray Adams as “quite superficial.”<sup>914</sup> He judged that Williams “seems not yet to have sensed the extreme towards which some of the members of this famous revolutionary society were tending,” suggesting, as many subsequent critics have done, that radicals should have foreseen the events that were to follow and prospectively adjusted their arguments in accordance.<sup>915</sup> Volume II widely follows the general spirit of volume I, using anecdotal evidence and stories overheard on Williams’ travels through France to illustrate the benevolence and gaiety the Revolution had engendered amongst all ranks of people. The letters also serve to confirm the acquiescence of the majority of the French population with the changes that had taken place. Williams recounts the story of a couple who overcame the arbitrary restrictions on inter-rank marriage under the Ancien Regime to find union with the advent of the Revolution, and celebrates public instruction programs, expressing her admiration for the attempts to give a veritable education to deaf and dumb children. The author highlights the moderation and humanity of the soldiers of the Château-Vieux regiment, who refused to fire on ordinary citizens who had resisted foreign onslaught from invading armies. Their defiance was seen as a blow to arbitrary power. She also notes the saintly vocation of nuns, working to ease suffering in the Hôtel-Dieu. Their devotion contrasts with “that unfeeling indifference which prevails in the world.”<sup>916</sup> All of these instances show her aim of detailing sacrifices and transformations in the common revolutionary cause and holding up the virtues of benevolence and simplicity as being the markers of the new revolutionary mentality. Liberty is seen as infiltrating all ages, generations and ranks, bringing the French together in a common community of universal harmony where “every selfish interest is sacrificed with fond alacrity at the altar of the

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<sup>914</sup> M. Ray Adams, “Helen Maria Williams and the French Revolution” 103.

<sup>915</sup> M. Ray Adams, “Helen Maria Williams and the French Revolution” 102.

<sup>916</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France II*: 194.

country.”<sup>917</sup> Williams notes that even the games of young children generally had a reference to liberty.

Frequent comparisons are made with the cultural practices and social fabric of England. In these parallels, the advances of the French nation are generally seen as superior. Williams praises the system whereby French wives take an active part in the running of their merchant husbands’ business, allowing them to take over their affairs in the case of death, pass on their knowledge to their children, or anticipate eventual bankruptcy.<sup>918</sup> French theatres and audiences, with their “love of gaiety and pleasure”, surpass the London dramatic scene and “the English idea of finding ease, comfort, or festivity, in societies where women are excluded, never enters the imagination of a Frenchman.”<sup>919</sup> Yet Williams is nostalgic for the English custom of spending Sundays “in the bosom of your family, or consecrated to friends and connections you love most,” suggesting that Sunday in France was not distinguished from any other day.<sup>920</sup> On social custom, the French fare better in Williams’ portrait. While English guests are so afraid of censure and ridicule that they keep “their minds in complete armour,” the French are more good-natured and allow the expression of feeling. Similarly, in political debate, Williams suggests that in France “eloquence may have an impression on the vote” while in the House of Commons everything is decided in advance of the debate.<sup>921</sup>

The “minute deformities” which might be noticed in the overall form of the Revolution “are lost in the overwhelming majesty of the whole” and posterity will judge the Revolution in a sympathetic light with the “mellowed tint” provided by the passage of time.<sup>922</sup> Those who resist the Revolution are portrayed as unfeeling critics, excluded from the

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<sup>917</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France II*: 5.

<sup>918</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France II*: 63.

<sup>919</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France II*: 79-80.

<sup>920</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France II*: 94-95. Williams would go on to qualify this criticism in her later volumes, where she defended the French population from accusation of free-thinking atheism.

<sup>921</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France II*: 99, 110.

<sup>922</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France II*: 22-23.

community of universal benevolence. Williams notes the insensibility of the mistress of Louis XV, Madame de Pompadour, after learning that her horse and carriage had trampled an old woman to death:

Is it possible to hear this incident without rejoicing, that a system of government which led to such depravation of mind is laid in ruins? For my part, I confess myself so hardened a patriot, that I rejoice to see the lower order of people in this country have lost somewhat of that too obsequious politeness for which they were once distinguished; and that, whenever they find themselves in the slightest degree offended, they assume a tone of manly independence.<sup>923</sup>

The “manly independence” and refusal of “obsequious politeness” were virtues that the Revolution had succeeded in instilling in the lower orders so as to change the moral tenor of the nation. The case of France at this stage in Williams’ observations is therefore considered an example for mankind as a whole, something Williams would temper by 1793. She calls on England to follow the French example, but makes it clear that this should be by “wise and temperate means” and “with no other arms than reason.”<sup>924</sup> The “detestable crimes” committed by “fanatics” should not detract from the fact that liberty is preferable to “the gloomy tranquillity of despotism.”<sup>925</sup> The crimes, which she does not describe, are to be attributed to the fact the French liberty is in its infancy and the people are not yet accustomed to the advantages of benevolence, having been maintained in ignorance and slavery for so long. This tendency to blame the Revolution’s vices on former oppression is repeated in Williams’ later volumes, and also in the writings of her compatriots. Volume II therefore, despite sparse references to aristocratic attempts at defaming the Revolution and a few lines mentioning some unnamed crimes, sees the Revolution as sending a message to mankind in the spirit of universal fraternity which characterised the early foreign involvement with the Revolution. She notes how “the liberal opinions of philosophy, liberty, and truth, are

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<sup>923</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France II*: 54-55.

<sup>924</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France II*: 116.

<sup>925</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France II*: 204.

everywhere bursting forth like the fresh leaves of spring.”<sup>926</sup> In mid 1792, when the letters were published, the Revolution could still be held up as an example to the world. By 1793, portraits of the events in France required much greater subtlety both in the message they conveyed to Britain but also in the way in which they portrayed the French regime, whose censors would have been surveying the works of foreign residents for signs of counter-revolutionary design.

In her third and fourth volumes to the first series of *Letters from France* therefore, Helen Maria Williams was confronted with a much more complex diplomatic and political context in which to publish her writings than when working on the previous volumes. The result, in the third volume, is a collage of different views and authors, expressing opinions on the king’s trial, the Jacobin ascendancy but primarily the military campaigns of the revolutionary armies in late 1792. As Williams herself specifies in her advertisement, the letters were “not all the production of the same pen,” and provided a triple perspective on the events of late 1792 and early 1793. Williams tackles the question of Paris politics and the trial of the king, while Hurford Stone and Christie focus on military material, with some rare philosophical commentary. The letters are not published in chronological order. Williams’ letter is dated 25<sup>th</sup> January 1793, while Stone’s reports on the military campaigns are written between October and December 1792 and sent from locations such as Clermont, Verdun and Rheims, where he was pursuing the army’s progress in the company of a Prussian friend and “patriot”. Williams’ first letter, detailing the ignominy of the king’s trial is therefore a strange introduction to the letters that follow, which bask in the glory of Dumouriez’s army and the moral and physical defeat of the Duke of Brunswick. Writing in late January 1793, Williams would have been aware, if not of the certainty of war with Britain, at least of its likelihood and imminence; yet she does not interfere with or provide commentary on the accounts

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<sup>926</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* II: 155.

provided by Stone of the French military victories, leaving them intact and unedited in her volume.

In the introductory letter, Williams once again cites her presence at the scene as proof of authority: “I am placed near enough the scene to discern every look and every gesture of the actors, and every passion excited in the minds of the audience.”<sup>927</sup> She outlines the tyranny of the Commune of Paris, made up of three principal protagonists – Robespierre, Marat and Danton – and deplores the decline of the “golden age” of the 14<sup>th</sup> July 1789 compared with the vision of people “dragging forth those victims to modes of death at which nature shudders.”<sup>928</sup> Scenes of celebration had become “the desolation of the wilderness” and the triumvirate from the municipality of Paris were guilty of “baseness”, their crimes provoked by “some deep and extraordinary malignity.”<sup>929</sup> Williams attributes the crimes of 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1792 to the machinations of the Commune and only the mayor of Paris, Pétion, emerges unscathed for having attempted to prevent the atrocities. Liberty was threatened by the designs of profligate men who “endeavour to lead the people to the last degree of moral degradation” and instil a spirit of permanent insurrection.<sup>930</sup> Education and intellectual capacity had become synonymous with aristocracy and Williams sees the Commune as waging war on everything that “embellishes human life” or “softens and refines our nature.”<sup>931</sup> The portrait of the vulgar, Spartan and philistine Montagnard leaders was a common one at the time among supporters of the deposed Girondin members. Williams even accuses the “faction” of being in league with foreign courts and, in the case of Jean-Paul Marat, of being an aristocrat and ally of Austria, another common strand of Girondin propaganda. She reminds her readers that it was the Jacobins, dominated by the Commune and fuelled by the sections, who demanded the death of the king.

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<sup>927</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* III: 2.

<sup>928</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* III: 5.

<sup>929</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* III: 6-8.

<sup>930</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* III: 23.

<sup>931</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* III: 24.

This account is then followed without any form of transition or clarification by a series of five letters by John Hurford Stone from his station with the French army in the north-east of France. Stone begins his correspondence with the treasonable conduct of the court, which attempted to league with the Duke of Brunswick to bring about the invasion of Paris by the foreign alliance.<sup>932</sup> Stone suggests that the 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792 “disconcerted this well-arranged system” as did the superior strategic skills of Dumouriez, who made Brunswick, reputed as a “general and a negotiator”, appear as the simple “dupe” of the émigrés.<sup>933</sup> Providence and the “genius of Liberty” aided the French armies.<sup>934</sup> Stone outlines the Duke’s misconception that the people of France would welcome an invading force and “he felt the full force of their courage in the opposite direction,” while the republican army was so totally divested of monarchical elements that there was no threat of defection.<sup>935</sup> He celebrates the assertion of popular sovereignty and the decision to bring the king to justice: “See assembled those patriots, re-clothed with power by the people, declaring the kingdom a republic, about to establish a still more popular constitution, and ordering the immediate trial of him whom they were to have felt as a tyrant, but who is now sunk into contempt with them as a traitor.”<sup>936</sup> The enthusiasm felt by British observers at this republican outcome and the optimism aroused by the drafting of a new constitution is palpable in Stone's letter.

Where the author does contest the conduct of the revolutionaries is in the decision to secularise the Church. Stone, a Dissenter and member of Richard Price’s congregation at Newington Green, disapproved of the contempt for religion shown in the decision to make the Church dependent on the state rather than be at liberty to govern itself. On founding morality

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<sup>932</sup> The Duke of Brunswick was at the head of the Austrian army and delivered a proclamation which reached Paris in July 1792. The proclamation expressed determination to quell the anarchy reigning in France and restore the monarchy to its rightful place. The Duke also intimated that the people of France were, in the main, opposed to the upheavals that had occurred under the Revolution and would welcome the arrival of the royalist armies at the re-establishment of order.

<sup>933</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* III: 45, 105, 106.

<sup>934</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* III: 59.

<sup>935</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* III: 65.

<sup>936</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* III: 76.

purely on “public utility” rather than religious faith, the leaders of the Revolution had acted improvidently, as “they have taken away that which furnishes the strongest motives for its observance, the motives furnished by the prospects and assurances of revelation.”<sup>937</sup> Yet apart from the denunciation of the civil oath, Stone’s letters are a broad celebration of the cause of liberty as embodied in the French army and people. He dismisses the charge that “the lightness of the French character but ill accord with that sentiment which belongs peculiarly to free men” and suggests that, far from being frivolous, the French character had been transformed from “the effeminacy of the Sybarite” to “Roman firmness and Tartarean ferocity.” He argues for the readiness of the French for liberty, suggesting that “there is sufficient energy, and firm foundation to build up a people zealous of good works, worthy of the principles they have now adopted, and of the destiny to which they aspire.”<sup>938</sup> Even if there were some chapters of the Revolution that the friend of liberty would want to erase from history, he believed that liberty would emerge triumphant. Stone’s final letter from Rheims of 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1792, only two weeks before he would chair the British Club meeting which celebrated the advances of the revolutionary armies, suggested that liberty could be obtained without sacrifice:

The triumphs even of liberty appear glorious but at a distance. Those who have the highest relish for the blessing, and prize it most, must have the love of it deeply rooted in their hearts not to shudder at the measures by which it is obtained. Rousseau, in his declaration, that a revolution was too dear, if it cost but the life of one citizen, had never wandered over a field of battle, or his sensibility, too exquisite to advise its acquisition by means so ferocious, would have destroyed, in its embryo, that fine offspring of his genius, what has nerved the arm of the republic in its greenest infancy.<sup>939</sup>

Stone dismisses the idealistic maxim of Rousseau which denied the need for bloodshed in a revolution and suggests that for liberty to prosper some loss of life had to be anticipated. In

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<sup>937</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France III*: 141.

<sup>938</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France III*: 149-50.

<sup>939</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France III*: 182.

this viewpoint, he also pre-empts the view of Sampson Perry who concluded that violence was an inevitable stage in the passage towards freedom.<sup>940</sup>

The final letter of the volume was written by Stone's one-time business associate and fellow member of the Literary Fund, Thomas Christie, a Scottish radical who had written his own account of the Revolution in 1791 and who had translated the French constitution of that year into English. Stone and Christie later became estranged after financial disagreements soured their business relationship. Christie contributed the final letter to Williams' third volume, a letter from Lille on the progress of the spirit of Revolution in the north of France. Christie's opinions are slightly more conservative than Stone's. He discourages France from forcibly spreading its species of liberty to other countries and warns that the trial of the king, gripping Paris as he wrote and inspired by a "spirit of rancour and undue severity," would make the Convention "lose sight of the more important fate of the country, and spend those precious moments, in which they should prepare for the future, in unnecessary invectives against the abuses of the past."<sup>941</sup> Christie suggests that there were countless dangers to liberty in France, particularly due to the "ferocious anarchy" and internal strife that beleaguered the country.<sup>942</sup> Yet he concludes that France is too enlightened to suffer a similar fate to the Roman republic and that, with so many foes from without, the viciousness and suspicion of the revolutionaries is natural.

Volume III therefore shows differences in style and argument which confirm the triple authorship of the letters. Although the following volume, which bears the same title, appears to have been written mostly by Williams without other authorial input, the letter from 17<sup>th</sup> April 1793 does include an account by Stone of Dumouriez's defection. Volume IV is a testimony to the way in which British radicals struggled to reconcile the contradictions in the Revolution in their writing back to Britain. The first letter was written on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1793,

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<sup>940</sup> For Perry's view on the necessity of violence in a revolution see above p. 378.

<sup>941</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France III*: 233-34.

<sup>942</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France III*: 237.



only days after the entry into war with Britain and not long after the execution of the king. In this account, Williams is moved to pathos by the image of the fallen sovereign, recollecting his dignity in the face of the “faction of the anarchists” who showed to what extent they were “aloof from all the ordinary feelings of our nature.”<sup>943</sup> She reminds her reader of Louis’s religious temperament, his “devotion” and courage in the face of death. Williams rouses compassion for the dethroned monarch, recounting how the king’s children tried to prevent their deputies from decreeing their father’s death, describing the intimate family moments before his execution, and seeing “this unfortunate person as a man, a husband, a father!”<sup>944</sup> In a reversal of many of the views expressed on the culpability of Louis XVI, Williams suggests that the king should inspire greater compassion than ordinary men, not only because he had already endured enough humiliation, but because, being educated in the art of delusion, his faults required greater leniency. In focusing on the sentimental impact of the king’s death and the personal goodness of Louis XVI, Williams contributed to what Linda Colley sees as a trend towards privatising the relationship between the people and monarchy in the late eighteenth century, a trend which led to the strengthening of the authority of the Crown.<sup>945</sup>

Despite her compassionate apology for the king, Williams is more equivocal on the general progress of the Revolution. Like Stone in volume III and Perry in his *Historical Sketch*, she refers to the fact that “temporary evil” is necessary in the passage from tyranny to liberty, and while upbraiding Santerre for refusing to allow the king to utter his last words from the scaffold, she then paradoxically acknowledges that the decision may have been justified in the interests of order.<sup>946</sup> Had the pity of the crowd been incited, the repercussions

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<sup>943</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 1.

<sup>944</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 29.

<sup>945</sup> See in particular Linda Colley, “The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation 1760-1820,” *Past and Present* (1984): 94-129. John Barrell discusses the pathos inspired by the last interview between Louis XVI and his family and its impact on representations of George III in *Imagining the King’s Death* pp. 49-86.

<sup>946</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 12. Antoine Joseph Santerre had been appointed by the National Convention to preside over the king’s imprisonment and inform Louis XVI of any decisions emanating from the Convention. It was Santerre who told the king of the verdict of death and who, as the legend goes, brought a

could have led to massacre and civil war. Santerre's action, though only sentences earlier considered as a gesture of inhumanity, is now explained as being a legitimate desire to ensure the maintenance of peace. These internal dissonances in Williams' argument seem to reveal the deep contradictions that British observers felt in witnessing some of the events of 1793. Rather than being a sign of incoherence, such paradoxes and transformations show the problematic nature of determining a plain and unambiguous stance on some of the Revolution's defining events. This was particularly the case for those, like Williams, writing from immediate observation.

Three more letters followed, revealing similar reversals and admissions of indecision. In a letter from 17<sup>th</sup> April 1793, Williams suggests that the Montagne were in league with aristocrats to perpetuate disorder and conspired to murder the Girondin members. She also includes an account of Dumouriez's defection by Hurford Stone and laments the fact that Marat's reputation had increased with the knowledge of the renowned General's treason. At the end of the letter she admits to being unsure as to whether liberty would prosper or whether privileges would be renewed. A further letter from 10<sup>th</sup> April 1793, included after the one written on the 17<sup>th</sup> April, again not following chronological order, reiterates this inability to foretell the future. Williams suggests that she is "too near the events" to judge them with accuracy and finds it difficult to determine the causes of "such an inundation of distress" from her eyewitness vantage point.<sup>947</sup> A letter from 7<sup>th</sup> May 1793 provides an account of the rallying capacity of the French soldiery and the legal sanction given to allow the arming of citizens, a topic unconnected with the other themes in the collection. The correspondence of 7<sup>th</sup> May 1793 calls on foreign princes to retreat and seek peace with the republic and concludes with the ambivalent remark that "if freedom be a blessing, it must be known by its

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rapid end to the proceedings on the scaffold by preventing Louis from delivering a final speech with the call for a drum roll. This story was reiterated by Williams in her account.

<sup>947</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 82.

fruits.”<sup>948</sup> By mid-1793 Williams was no longer sure whether French freedom was something to celebrate.

The final epistolary account in this collection is dated March 1793. Once again Williams shuns strict time order in the reproduction of her correspondence and saves her earliest letter of the volume and most resounding indictment of the British press and middling classes for her conclusion. She begins by noting the “erroneous opinions in England” respecting the French Revolution, pointing out how ironic it was that a people who had struggled for their liberty had “looked with an evil eye on the efforts of another nation to obtain the same valuable blessing.” It was not only since the later events of 1792-93 that the Revolution had been “viewed in a dubious light,” but from the outset. Such criticism came not only from hostile politicians, uneducated men or a population in wartime, but from Williams’ own class, the middling orders, “the most disinterested and the most judicious class of society.”<sup>949</sup> Towards the end of the letter, Williams accuses the British population of collective amnesia in overlooking the fact that they had been “the first bold experimenters in the science of government in modern Europe – the first who carried into practical execution the calumniated principle of EQUALITY – the first people who formally brought a monarch to the scaffold – the first asserters of the neglected *rights of man*.”<sup>950</sup> She suggests that the Glorious Revolution had not been a bloodless insurrection, and reminds her countrymen of the execution of Charles I. For Williams, it was wrong to overlook the fact that the Jacobite rebellions and other related wars had had a devastating human toll. In France all the stages in the progress of liberty, which in Britain had been progressive, had been crowded into a shorter space of time. Williams asserts that “no people ever travelled to the temple of Liberty by a path strewn with roses,” and many of the “imprudences” of the Revolution were to be blamed on the antipathy of other nations who had impeded and denounced the pursuit of liberty in

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<sup>948</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 153.

<sup>949</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 155-57.

<sup>950</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 225.

France.<sup>951</sup> The Court is held responsible for many of the misfortunes that had blighted the country since 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792, particularly the monetary excesses of the civil list, the machinations of aristocrats, and the provocative behaviour of the king. The advent of the republic also signalled the end of simplicity and choices were no longer as clear as they had been in 1789. This complexity was recognised by British observers whose reactions to the events of 1792-93 clearly reflect this transition.

The greatest misrepresentation in the British press, however, concerned the events of 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1792. While introducing the massacres in her opening letter as the “sullen rapacity of the vulture”, in the letter of March 1793, Williams denies the portrait circulating in London of “a mere wanton and unprovoked effusion of the cruelty and ferociousness of the French populace,” and sets out the rational basis of the actions as well as their place in the annals of human history.<sup>952</sup> Rather than being proof of the unprecedented depravity of an entire population, the prison massacres were the explicable result of both the “wrath and fury” of the victims of 10<sup>th</sup> August and the machinations of the Paris Commune, who gave their tacit consent to the killings.<sup>953</sup> Those targeted in the attacks had not been imprisoned unjustly, but had been suspected of having aided the court in its negotiations with foreign princes. In a similar way to Perry, Williams emphasises the understandable impatience of the people, who had been kept waiting too long for justice after the August Days, when husbands, brothers and fathers had been killed. She also recalls how the impending arrival of the Duke of Brunswick had disseminated fear among the populace. Ordinary citizens believed that if the Duke was successful in taking Paris, he would release all prisoners, prompting a wave of vengeance against those whose victory had put them there. Williams prefers the term “savage justice” to “indiscriminate massacre” to describe the events, a significant change in terminology which was representative of the deep gulf of opinion separating her from British observers. She also

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<sup>951</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France IV*: 227-28.

<sup>952</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France IV*: 182.

<sup>953</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France IV*: 191.

gives examples of the fairness of some of the makeshift trials. One citizen-judge spared a royalist because his opinions were not considered to have harmed the people. He then escorted the royalist to his home and refused to take money in return for his benevolence. Silence was respected when death sentences were pronounced and even the most enthusiastic of the perpetrators had legitimate reasons for their ferocity. One eighteen-year old “had lost two brothers the tenth of August, and was resolved to revenge their death.”<sup>954</sup> Williams drew the conclusion that the prison massacres could not be blamed on the perpetrators themselves but on the chain of betrayals that preceded and prompted the actions: “I must believe that the treachery of the court made the tenth of August – the tenth of August laid the foundation of the second of September – and the Duke of Brunswick provoked the execution of it.”<sup>955</sup> A volume of letters which begins therefore with the expression of horror and repugnance at the unspeakable events of 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1792 ends with a rational and even sympathetic portrait of the perpetrators who had been wronged by the Court on 10<sup>th</sup> August and brutalised by the cruel apathy of the justice system.

For Williams, the misrepresentations of the French Revolution in British newspapers were the result of speculation and criticism based on flawed information. It was only the discerning foreign observer who could accurately convey the events:

It is easy to obtain a superficial knowledge of a foreign nation: but to delineate justly its history; to trace events to their sources in its character and habits, so as to appreciate their real nature, and fix the degree of approbation or censure which belong to them, requires such an intimate acquaintance with a people as cannot be obtained without living amongst them, and possessing opportunities of information and a capacity of profiting from them that do not fall to the share of many of the class of writers now alluded to.<sup>956</sup>

In a similar way to both Merry and Perry, Williams warns against the trap of cultural misunderstanding and counsels the importance of taking into account the particular circumstances of France and the specificities of the national character, reminding her reader

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<sup>954</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 206.

<sup>955</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 207.

<sup>956</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 209.

of the unreliability of first impressions. In her view, no newspaper in England had succeeded in providing an accurate depiction of the Revolution, even though *The Morning Chronicle*, reliant on French sources and helped by the impartiality of its editors, had almost succeeded. Even French journals were not entirely accurate, as they focused their reports on Paris, the centre of turbulence and disorder, rather than the much more peaceful provinces.

Williams also denounces Edmund Burke, whose much-celebrated prescience in anticipating the vices of the Revolution she contests. Burke's warnings in his *Reflections in the Revolution in France* of 1790 were widely seen as having been fulfilled when the Revolution became bloodier during the course of 1792. Yet Williams undoes this interpretation, suggesting that when people make bold guesses, they will always be partially right. She accuses him of error in identifying the causes of the Revolution's evils and condemns him for nonchalantly writing off the Revolution before it had even begun rather than taking the risk of faith: "It is easy to argue in this way, but generous minds hope the best, and see with pleasure the commencement of enterprises, that promise to improve the condition of humanity; rejoice in their progress, and mourn at their fall."<sup>957</sup> She also argues that Burke's predictions of evil may have produced the very deeds they describe. It was likely, she argues, that Burke's description of the probable death of the king and queen caused the French royalty concern, while until the publication of his text they had been satisfied with the progress of the Revolution. Burke was guilty of "painting to [the king] delusive pictures" of how monarchs should live and had sowed the seed of the idea that royalty was being ill-treated and should not comply with the demands of the revolutionaries. She advances the opinion that "but for Mr. Burke and his associates in France, it is highly probable Louis the sixteenth might now have been reigning peaceably on his throne."<sup>958</sup>

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<sup>957</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 216.

<sup>958</sup> H. M. Williams, *Letters from France* IV: 218.

In endeavouring to refute reports in British newspapers, Williams, though a defender of the need for order and severely critical of anarchy, found herself rationalising and humanising events in France that had been judged off the civil radar by loyalists and radicals alike in Britain. Despite her repugnance at the rule of the Jacobin “conspirators”, the loss of her enlightened friends and the disgrace of the king’s execution, Williams could not regret having supported the Revolution and still ventured to give a balanced portrait of its most radical phase. The ordinary weaknesses of men struggling for their freedom are taken into account and she brings out the benevolence, generosity and virtue of the French people as well as their vices. Williams was under no illusion that her views would shock the British public and was prepared for much of the intense criticism she received. In 1795, *The Gentleman’s Magazine* reported on how, in Williams’ eyes, “we are given to understand that liberty has been innocent of the horrible outrages committed in France under the sanction of her name.”<sup>959</sup> Even on the eve of her death in 1821, *The Anti-Jacobin Review* was exhorting its readers to “remember the day when Helen Maria Williams was held up as the model of female patriots, for striding over the mutilated carcasses of the murdered Swiss, and examining what ravages had been committed upon them!”<sup>960</sup>

Undoubtedly Williams did become disillusioned with the Revolution, although, as Steven Blakemore has contended, she rewrote and reclaimed it rather than renounced it entirely. Yet, through an emphasis on the patchwork and dissonant nature of her 1793 letters, what emerges is her willingness to combine her views with those of other members of the British contingent and her interweaving of the most severe denunciation of the Revolution with the starkest justifications. This shows just how problematic it was for writer-spectators, intent on giving immediate first-hand portrayals of the Revolution, to judge events with certainty and clarity at a time when the contradictions thrown up were increasingly difficult to

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<sup>959</sup> *The Gentleman’s Magazine: and Historical Chronicle*, vol. 65 (1795) 1030.

<sup>960</sup> *The Anti-Jacobin Review; and Protestant Advocate* (1821) 358.

assess. Williams was not just reclaiming the Revolution in 1793 from its uninformed detractors, but she was working out her own personal reaction as she wrote, drawn as it was from the many inconsistencies and obscurities the Revolution produced.

#### **IV.4.3.2 Mary Wollstonecraft's Retrospective Account of 1789**

Helen Williams' compatriot in Paris, Mary Wollstonecraft did not claim to be providing a first-hand report of the Revolution when she began writing her *An Historical and Moral View of the Origins and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has Produced in Europe* in mid 1793, but addressed the philosophical and moral grounding of the Revolution from a universal historical perspective.<sup>961</sup> Her first of a planned three-volume account was published in 1794 and covered the early Revolution from May to October 1789, a period which she had observed from afar while living in England. After one abortive attempt in the summer of 1792, Wollstonecraft eventually travelled to Paris in December 1792 and quickly found herself among the members of the British circle that she would have met with or heard of prior to her departure. She became involved in working on the constitutional committee's plan for education, guided by Condorcet, and began a liaison with the American speculator Gilbert Imlay, by whom she would have a child, Fanny, in May 1794. She wrote her *An Historical and Moral View* at the height of the Terror and, as Blakemore has pointed out, her account is a reflection of the period in which she was writing as much as of the time she was writing. The account is full of a sense of foreboding and frequent allusions are made to the Revolution's later descent into Terror. Yet, Wollstonecraft, like Williams, despite her reservations and criticisms, does not completely renounce her support for the Revolution. She explains the reasons for its vices and laments the lack of

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<sup>961</sup> Although there has been some interest in this text by Wollstonecraft, as Audrey Tauchert has pointed out in her abstract to the following article, it is "one of the most neglected of her mature writings." See Ashley Tauchert, "Maternity, Castration and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*," *Women's Writing* 4.2 (1997): 173-203.



moral readiness of the French people for liberty, a fact which had ultimately prevented a smooth transition from despotism to enlightenment.

Isabelle Bour has suggested that Wollstonecraft's reliance on two opposing literary models produce incompatible contradictions in her account of the Revolution. While following the arguments of the Scottish school of Enlightenment philosophers, who saw historical development as the progress of humanity from barbarity towards perfection, she was also influenced by notions of sensibility common to gothic literature. Bour sees the use of these competing paradigms as producing "irreconcilable readings of the French Revolution." Historical figures become dark intriguers and "such passages are more an efflorescence of gothic-romantic fantasies of the kind one found in the cheap novels of the Minerva Press than the balanced assessment of the historian."<sup>962</sup> For Bour, such "psychological" readings are fundamentally incompatible with the Scottish model of moral economy she purported to rely on. Bour is not the only scholar to have pointed out shortcomings in Wollstonecraft's history, mentioning Ralph Wardle's description of the *Historical and Moral View* as "her least original work."<sup>963</sup> The incessant paraphrasing of source material and rare interspersing of factual material with theoretical analysis have led critics to compare this work unfavourably with the author's other writings. Even John Hurford Stone, part of Wollstonecraft's inner circle in Paris and contributor to Williams' collections of letters, wrote disparagingly of Wollstonecraft's attempt at historical coverage. In a letter to his brother from December 1793 he noted that "Right of Women is writing a huge work; but it will be as dull as Dr. Moore's Chronicle, and probably as inaccurate."<sup>964</sup>

What interests me is not so much the quality or coherence of Wollstonecraft's account in terms of the philosophical or moral traditions on which she draws, but the status of her

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<sup>962</sup> Isabelle Bour, "Mary Wollstonecraft as Historian in *An Historical and Moral View of the Origins and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has Produced in Europe* (1794)," *Études Épistémè* 17 (2010) 121, 125.

<sup>963</sup> Quoted in Bour, "Mary Wollstonecraft as Historian" 120.

<sup>964</sup> Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* 25: 1216.

writing in the context of the wider British community in 1793-94 and the way in which her attempt at providing an objective, rational historical account jars with the inherent confusion the Revolution inspired among British observers during this transitional period. What I would like to suggest is that, in a similar way to Helen Maria Williams, Mary Wollstonecraft was writing at a time and in circumstances where contradictions were not only common, but an essential facet of all reporting on the Revolution. Commentators had not worked out the implications of its latest phase, even if they often agreed on its causes. Therefore, while Wollstonecraft claimed to be writing with the “cool eye of observation”, at a distance from the events she was relating, and without pretensions of eye-witness recording, her account nevertheless reflects the contradictions at the heart of the Revolution at this period. This was evident as much in Wollstonecraft’s arguments as her style of writing. While she celebrated the principles of the Revolution, she denounced their flawed implementation, while she showed faith in the general improvement of society, and the French nation, she lamented the descent into terror and the inadequacies of national leaders. Equally, as Bour has shown, while she used the language of Enlightenment progress to describe the progress of morals and general understanding among the French population, she described the intrigue of the court, the degeneracy of the king and queen and eventually the dissoluteness of popular despotism with all the excess of gothic story-telling. She confirmed the overall superiority of the virtues of liberty and justice that the Revolution embodied, yet she elevated, in Burkean language, the superiority of experience over ungrounded theory. These discordances, rather than revealing inherent stylistic or ideological contradictions in her writing, seem to reflect the ambiguities of the Revolution in 1793-94, which bewildered writer-observers and which precluded the writing of detached history.

Although Wollstonecraft was writing four to five years after the period which is the focus of her study, her account was produced in troubled times when conclusiveness,

intellectual coherence and historical distance were difficult to achieve. This may also explain Wollstonecraft's regular use of original sources. While she does give some insight into her own emerging views on the current state of the French Revolution, she also makes considerable use of material from other authors. This was a technique which was common to most writers of the time including her fellow British compatriots in Paris. Sampson Perry inserted whole passages of texts from speeches, letters and reports into his *Historical Sketch* and the author of *A Circumstantial History* relied entirely on the report from the *Révolutions de Paris* for his account of the August Days. Such techniques were not frowned upon by contemporaries and were widely employed by contemporary newspaper editors of the time. Accounts of the Revolution as it occurred were not revered for their originality, but rather for their authenticity, and as Williams suggested in her letters, authenticity was synonymous with proximity. Quoting French debates, newspapers, statesmen or eye-witnesses all revealed that the author was intimate with reliable sources rather than demonstrated the intellectual inadequacies of the writer.

Writing during the Terror, Mary Wollstonecraft's account of the early Revolution identifies the seeds of its later degeneration while nevertheless celebrating the gradual progress of human civilisation. Joy at the heroism of those who brought about the fall of the Bastille is constantly eclipsed by an awareness of how the failings of those who assumed power led to future calamities. On many occasions, she hints at the later Revolution and "the tumults that have since produced so many disastrous events."<sup>965</sup> Yet despite the pervasive influence of her experience of the Terror throughout the work, she remains wedded to a belief in the fundamental advance of human society, judging that "it is perhaps, difficult to bring ourselves to believe, that out of this chaotic mass a fairer government is rising than has ever shed the sweets of social life on the world. – But things must have time to find their level."<sup>966</sup>

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<sup>965</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 32.

<sup>966</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 47.

Despite the failings of the French character and the nation's lack of readiness for the moral rigours of liberty, a better order would ultimately prevail.

Unlike Helen Williams, whose sympathy for the fate of the king and queen are conveyed in sentimental pathos, Wollstonecraft shows no compassion towards the royal couple. Their passivity and "ruinous vices" were the reason for their downfall and this moral depravity, the principal flaw in Ancien Regime France, had infiltrated the population to such an extent that the just principles which led to the Revolution had faltered in their application.<sup>967</sup> Writing after the execution of the king and at the time of Marie-Antoinette's death on the scaffold, Wollstonecraft portrays the court as a dissolute hive of superficial pleasure, connivance, intrigue, and indolence. As Bour has noted, the description often resembles a gothic tale rather than a detached and objective historical testimony. Detailing the vices of the court, the author recalls the scheming and plundering conduct of royalist ministers such as Charles Alexandre de Calonne and the vanity of those who formed the king's inner circle. Étienne-Charles de Loménie de Brienne, the king's cardinal and minister, is portrayed as an "obsequious slave" of power and the king's advisors weak and vengeful, plotting in the "dens of their nefarious machinations."<sup>968</sup> Jacques Necker is also criticised for his "rhetorical flourishes", "trivial observations", and propensity to appease the king and conciliate with the priesthood while purporting to speak on behalf of the people.<sup>969</sup> Ancien Regime France had thus lacked true statesmen who were capable of wise and independent judgement, uninfluenced by the "general impulsion" and guided by their "own centre."<sup>970</sup> It is this lack of virtuous leadership, the legacy of pre-revolutionary France, which blighted the Revolution after 1789. While the country needed noble men, capable of sincerity, selflessness and enlightened guidance, the members of the National Assembly had fallen prey to the vices that

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<sup>967</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 30.

<sup>968</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 36, 39.

<sup>969</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 57.

<sup>970</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 43.

had characterised the rule of their predecessors. In protecting their self-interest, capitulating to fear and elevating showy eloquence over true magnanimity, the Assembly had sacrificed the gains brought about by the underlying principles of the Revolution. Most leaders were guided by “a vain desire for applause” rather than true patriotism and constancy.<sup>971</sup> In an echo of both David Williams and Helen Maria Williams, Wollstonecraft laments the fact that “good lungs” prevailed over “sound arguments” in national debate. Even as admirable a statesman as Mirabeau secured the attention of his audience more through the “thundering emphasis” of his rhetoric than the “striking and forcible association of ideas” he was reputed for.<sup>972</sup> Such men had been “educated and ossified” under the Ancien Regime and proved unequal to the demands of high public office.<sup>973</sup>

Part of the reason for the failings of the early Revolution was the haste with which it had been propelled forward at a time when social relations were still characterised by slavishness. Rather than concentrating on the gradual moral improvement of the nation, the revolutionaries had tried to bring about change immediately, when the country as a whole was not equipped and the people were straining under the weight of servitude. Leaders had attempted to implement a system suited to a nation in the highest stages of civilisation which was “improper for the degenerate society of France.”<sup>974</sup> The monarchy was transformed into a branch of government without any actual power and Wollstonecraft criticises the duplicity of retaining the Court while depriving it of all means of exerting its influence. Although she does not express a preference for monarchy, Wollstonecraft argues that “while crowns are a necessary bauble to please the multitude, it is also necessary, that their dignity should be supported, in order to prevent an overwhelming aristocracy from concentrating all authority in

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<sup>971</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 141.

<sup>972</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 156.

<sup>973</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 143.

<sup>974</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 162.

themselves.”<sup>975</sup> If a monarchy was to be retained, it should be more than a mere empty figurehead. Constitutions should be altered peaceably and gradually, in line with the slow improvement in the science of government and with the moral education of the people. In her demand for progressive adjustment in the political system, in her distinguishing between men “acting from a practical knowledge, and men who are governed entirely by theory, or no principle whatever,” and in her warning against the dangerous innovations of unwise theorists, Wollstonecraft began to sound strikingly like her adversary Edmund Burke, whose views she had criticised in *Vindication of the Rights of Man* (1790).<sup>976</sup> Yet Wollstonecraft does not deny the need for “absolute change” in a nation, or the establishment of a constitution according to principles, as Burke did, but she counsels against its hasty application.<sup>977</sup> Many British observers of the Revolution, including David Williams, came to defend the notion of gradual progress, having witnessed the sudden and violent changes brought about under the French Revolution. Williams himself began to withdraw his support for the Revolution on returning to Britain, condemning the members of the National Convention who had been “collected principally from the dregs of society” for attempting to overhaul the fundamental laws of the nation.<sup>978</sup> Wollstonecraft, on the other hand, employed the language of gradual and progressive reform while not renouncing the fundamental benefits of the changes in France for humanity at large.

Despite noting how the Revolution had diverged in practice from the principles which had precipitated it, Wollstonecraft’s assessment of the future state of France belies optimism about the eventual establishment of just and free government. She concludes positively on the general advancement of the people towards a state of higher moral awareness. As Bour has pointed out, this stadial vision of gradual human progress towards perfection drew on the

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<sup>975</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 164.

<sup>976</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 185.

<sup>977</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 62.

<sup>978</sup> See D. Williams, *Incidents in My Own Life Which Have Been Thought of Some Importance*, ed. Peter France (Brighton: University of Sussex Library, 1980) 27.

tradition of thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment. Wollstonecraft considered herself “confident of being able to prove that the people are essentially good, and that knowledge is rapidly advancing to that degree of perfectibility, when the proud distinctions of sophisticating fools will be eclipsed by the mild rays of philosophy, and man be considered as man, acting with the dignity of an intelligent being.”<sup>979</sup> This expression of optimism in regard to the potential for future perfection is often couched in terms that reflect the savagery of the natural world. Freedom is personified as “a lion roused from his lair” that “rose with dignity, and calmly shook herself.” The émigré armies are characterised as a “tiger, who thirsts for blood,” while government ministers are “the reptile who crawls under the shelter of the principles he violates.”<sup>980</sup> In the latter allusion, Wollstonecraft seems to make a reference to the Montagnard rule of the era in which she was writing and the way in which leaders such as Robespierre held themselves up as the embodiment of the people while exacting cruel punishments on them. She also uses sentimental language to exult in the glory of the fall of the Bastille and the heroes of the 14<sup>th</sup> July, calling for the triumph of human knowledge:

Down fell the temple of despotism; but – despotism has not been buried in it’s [*sic*] ruins!  
– Unhappy country! – when will thy children cease to tear thy bosom? – When will a change of opinion, producing a change of morals, render thee truly free? When will truth give life to real magnanimity, and justice place equality on a stable seat? – When will thy sons trust, because they deserve to be trusted; and private virtue become the guarantee of patriotism? Ah! – when will thy government become the most perfect, because thy citizens are the most virtuous!<sup>981</sup>

Wollstonecraft’s account, far from being a clear and unambiguous assessment of the early Revolution, is layered with complex discourses. While she bewailed how the “cavalcade of death moves along, shedding mildew over all the beauties of the scene, and blasting every joy,” she also contended that the alteration in the system of France “must ultimately lead to universal freedom and happiness.”<sup>982</sup> The national character of the French nation was

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<sup>979</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 46.

<sup>980</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 106, 216.

<sup>981</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 85.

<sup>982</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 212, 222.

depraved and “the french [*sic*] were in some respects the most unqualified of any people in Europe to undertake the important work in which they are embarked,” yet liberty would eventually be secured and the Declaration of Rights, because of its simplicity, was a resounding example to the whole world. While the mob was “barbarous beyond the tiger’s cruelty,” the people were fundamentally good, emboldened by liberty and had begun to think for themselves.<sup>983</sup> Wollstonecraft also refused to hold up England as a model of liberty and constitutional stability. In her view, 1688, rather than being a founding act of justice, had stifled discussion and given the false impression that perfection had already been achieved in constitutional matters. British freedom, once a model for other nations, had descended into corruption, arrogance and complacency. The British, repressed by the pretence and falsehood of power-seeking elites who had hijacked liberty, could not envisage further change and were thus unable to secure their true rights. Wollstonecraft did not explicitly set out to undermine the constructed image of Britain as a model of liberty, yet in her history of the Revolution, she, like other British radical writers, contributed to the general subversion of a view of British perfection which hailed 1688 and a constitutional heritage of moderate reform as the beacon of civilised society.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The concepts of foreignness, alienation or exile have intrigued historians and philosophers, artists and writers alike. Bernhard Waldenfels has suggested that foreignness is an experience of absence or strangeness, of not being completely in the place you are in, but on a frontier between the familiar and the unexpected, while Michel Onfray describes the immediate experience of travel as “blurred emotions, jumbled perceptions” which cannot be

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<sup>983</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 234.



rationalised or given meaning at the time.<sup>984</sup> Such views echo what Lynn Hunt has discovered in the writings of eyewitnesses of the French Revolution, where the events taking place were recognised as historic and epoch-making, yet resisted immediate interpretation and ordering.

Spectator-writers in a foreign country have often conceived their place as being that of the privileged observer, capable of conveying lived experience to readers at home with an integrity and immediacy which is inaccessible to those not present at the scene. Yet such first-hand eyewitnesses often recognise that translating their experience into language gives rise to a loss, veiling the scene in mystery, despite their attempts to provide clarity. George Orwell, writing his *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) after returning from the Spanish Civil War, admitted:

I suppose I have failed to convey more than a little of what those months in Spain mean to me. I have recorded some of the outward events, but I cannot record the feeling they have left me with. It is all mixed up with sights, smells, and sounds that cannot be conveyed in writing ... It is difficult to be certain about anything except what you have seen with your own eyes, and consciously or unconsciously everyone writes as a partisan.<sup>985</sup>

In a similar way, spectators of the French Revolution acknowledged their own partisanship as they wrote the Revolution back to Britain, highlighting their subjectivity and inability to see the whole picture, commenting, in Orwell's words, from "one corner of events." All of these spectators concurred with the view that being present at the scene allowed for unique insights and certainty which gave them a privileged position and degree of authority. This authority was considered a powerful weapon in countering what were seen as the erroneous reports circulating in the British press about the Revolution in France as it discarded monarchy and took a republican turn.

James Clifford has suggested that "participant observation obliges its practitioners to experience, at a bodily as well as an intellectual level, the vicissitudes of translation. It requires arduous language learning, some degree of direct involvement and conversation, and

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<sup>984</sup> See Bernhard Waldenfels, *Topographie de l'étranger: études pour une phénoménologie de l'étranger* (Paris: Van Dieren, 2009) and Michel Onfray, *Théorie du voyage: poésie de la géographie* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2007) 52. My translation.

<sup>985</sup> George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Penguin, 1989) 195.

often a derangement of personal and cultural expectations.”<sup>986</sup> As shown in this chapter, those writing the Revolution back to Britain often highlighted their bodily and sensory presence, suggesting that it was only through this direct, physical contact with the Revolution that they were able to understand its impact. They also named their sources, many of whom were drawn from among the eyewitness observers of the scene. The accounts of the Revolution by all of the British residents discussed here are notable too for the way in which they reveal the desire of the author to encourage their reader to suspend judgement based on their own cultural assumptions. Writers sensed the impossibility of understanding the Revolution without this ability to rid oneself of one’s own received ideas and prejudices.

The writings of British residents in Paris can also appear contradictory and dissonant, combining different styles, registers, contributors, sources, and objectives. Yet they provide a reading of the French Revolution which was ultimately entirely in keeping with the general trend among the reactions of the British community at this crucial period of the Revolution, whatever the literary or political traditions they subscribed to. As enthusiastic observers of the Revolution at both the time of the fall of the Bastille, but also during the more troubled months around the second Revolution and the declaration of the republic, by 1792-93, British radical residents were confronted with all the ambiguities and contradictions of a more complex political landscape where violence existed alongside heightened popular political participation, and where eloquence was considered both a mask of intrigue and a way of “impressing the results of thinking on minds alive only to emotion,” giving “wings to the slow foot of reason, and fire to the cold labours of investigation.”<sup>987</sup> This was also what Helen Williams was referring to when she noted the passage from the simplicity of 1789 to the complexity of the second Revolution. Expatriates were also writing to a British audience whose general approbation of the Revolution in 1789 had been replaced by more widespread

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<sup>986</sup> Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* 24.

<sup>987</sup> Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View* 61.

antipathy, fuelled by loyalist propaganda and a broadly hostile press. It is not surprising, therefore, that British eye-witness reports contained stylistic and ideological incongruity. Writings to Britain meshed original reflection with the insertion of second-hand material, they veiled their criticism of the British constitution in historical accounts of a foreign revolution, they allowed contingent writers to insert reflections which did not fit neatly with their own, and, as in the case of Mary Wollstonecraft, they merged optimistic readings of the progress of humanity with horror-stricken pessimism at the course the revolutionaries had pursued. The polyphony of the accounts produced by British eyewitnesses was testimony to the complex standpoint they adopted after the foundation of the republic, when dejected withdrawal, zealous tenacity or muted optimism about the Revolution's future could be grafted on to general enthusiasm at its founding principles. It is also a reflection of the different ways such writers chose to portray the Revolution to a British audience whose opinions they could only judge from afar and where the temper of public opinion often jarred with their open approval for the republican turn.

## CONCLUSION

British radicals lived in Paris where they gathered together, conversed and plotted, took part in politics and wrote their experience of Revolution back to Britain. Exiled to a certain extent from British political and social life, they also found themselves confronted with the French administration's increasingly exclusive view of citizenship. Many had been indicted for sedition or at least suspected of holding views at odds with the constitution of Britain, while those who remained in Paris after summer of 1793 faced temporary incarceration under the Terror. In some ways, their experience was that of the "man without a country". Yet the community that British radicals forged at White's Hotel was also a displaced hub of counter-culture and site of open and fierce exchange in line with many of the debating societies and circles of improvement that had emerged over the course of the eighteenth century in Britain. The founding of the British Club consolidated and reshaped pre-existing channels of communication between Britain and France and helped to forge a cross-Channel network of ideas, commerce and sociability which was both linked to and distinct from the respective reform scenes in Britain and France. The British Club was established in Paris at a time of rapid and mesmerising transformation in French political culture, when the king had been abruptly removed from the throne, the people had manifested their vital energy in a series of *journées*, and the country was threatened on all fronts by foreign armies. Though the events from August 1792 through to the late months of 1793 and early 1794 can now be slotted into a neat chronology, those observing the developments at the time felt deep contradictions and uncertainty. The difficulties British radicals encountered in trying to work out their individual positions are evident as much in the formal accounts of the Revolution sent back to Britain as in the divergent theories and ideas put forward in the republican constitution debate. The forms that these writings took – hastily-written sketches, spontaneous reflections, eyewitness letters or commissioned observations – also hint at the special

relationship that British residents in France cultivated with the notion of time and history. While they could conceive of their privileged place as outsiders and observers and while they understood that the changes they were witnessing were historic, they accepted their own incapacity to provide coherent and impartial readings of events and sometimes acknowledged that words were inadequate to convey the scene with accuracy.

Residing in France during the years 1792-94 was formative for British radicals, both in terms of how they absorbed the French Revolution into their own worldviews and conceptions of politics, but also in the way they were seen by others, particularly the British press. Temporary expatriation gave radicals a different perspective on both the Revolution and their own political culture, sometimes precipitating support for more democratic and wholesale constitutional change in line with the theories of French revolutionaries, at other times leading them to ultimately concur with the ideas of their former political adversaries. The characterisation of British radicals as “vectors of revolution” is a way of explaining the different transfers, crossovers and exchanges that the British Club inspired. Not only did expatriation in Paris prompt a number of broadly hostile writers and observers in Britain to portray such foreign spectators of Revolution as having sacrificed their national belonging, with all that this entailed in terms of ideas of the established social order, property distinctions, and political culture, but exile in Paris also conjured up wild and imaginative visions of how British expatriates might spread the contagion of revolution across the Channel. By their very presence in Paris, and their physical contact with the Revolution, members of the British Club were perceived as infectious agents. Some of them were imprisoned on their return to Britain, while most lived out the rest of their lives haunted by the spectre of their former enthusiasm for the changes they had witnessed in France.

Yet the term “vector” also allows for a reading of British expatriate radicalism as a fluid movement, making connections between culture, ideas and people over and above the

propaganda battle which prompted the appearance of an array of critical representations of expatriates. As shown in chapter two, the British radical club nourished and opened up networks between reform societies in Britain and the exiled branch of radicalism in Paris. These networks were not restricted to political activities and British expatriates were also involved in collective initiatives to establish publishing houses, set up commercially-successful business ventures and make headway in journalism and writing. Yet very few of radicals' private pursuits in Paris could be divorced from their support for the Revolution. Even cotton manufacturing, the supplying of grain or property development had a political angle in 1792-94. The associational culture and network of mutual reliance that emerged within the British Club provided a source of constant support and information for members of the community, both at the moment of arrival in the French capital as well as at times of hardship during the Terror. Although the British Club as an organised society seems to have dissolved at the time of the outbreak of war between Britain and France, the friendships and connections its existence helped to forge endured well after February 1793.

The tracts examined in the context of the republican constitution debate and written by British (or adopted British) observers of the Revolution have rarely been studied in terms of how they reflect the collective engagement of British expatriates with the Revolution. The writings of Robert Merry and George Edwards to the constitutional committee have attracted no scholarly attention while those of Barlow, Oswald and Williams have been considered in isolation within specialist biographies, often with a focus on the development of an individual's political thought rather than the interaction of those ideas with those of other expatriate writers in the particular context in which they were written. While these tracts contributed to a debate which was quickly overshadowed by the trial of Louis XVI and superseded by the tensions arising in the National Convention, as constitutional stability was sacrificed in the interests of the permanent revolution, they nevertheless provide some insight

into the political preoccupations of British residents in Paris at this critical junction in the French Revolution. The variety of opinions expressed, the different forms that these depositions took and the way in which they constructed a subtle interplay between French and British political culture are all aspects which add to the portrait of British radicalism in this period. British expatriates disagreed on the extent to which the people should be involved in constitutional questions and law-making. While most agreed that the ordinary citizen should be informed, educated and inspired by a spirit of civic energy and enquiry, there was much contention as to how far the people should be able to give their assent or disapproval on legislative issues. Such tensions were also evident in the struggles and disputes which characterised the British Club in the early months of 1793. The society brought together an eclectic range of individuals whose commitment to free speculation and enquiry had to be tempered when the repercussions of holding political opinions at odds with those accepted by the ruling party in the National Convention were recognised.

While there is little doubt that many British expatriates began their residence in Paris in the company of the men and women from the Girondin grouping, it is a step too far to consider them as Girondins themselves. Very few British radicals had clearly identifiable circles of sociability organised along lines of political opinion and many, including the core nucleus of the British Club, associated with a wide range of revolutionary leaders and thinkers from Brissot and Condorcet to Danton and Héroult de Séchelles. While any study of British political engagement in the years 1792-94 must come up against the dilemma of the reliability of written testimony in an era where ideological divergence from established norms could be punished by death, based on the disparate array of sources available to the historian, it appears that there was no uniform affiliation among British residents to a particular political party in republican France. While Helen Maria Williams celebrated the brilliance of the Girondins,

Sampson Perry hailed Jean-Paul Marat as the embodiment of revolutionary audacity and the voice of the people.

The desire to write the Revolution back to Britain was in a way a result of a perceived need to *rewrite* the Revolution, correcting the many errors and misjudgements, many of them voluntary, which expatriate writers believed had been published in the British press. Yet this process of revision was not as considered nor as conscious as has sometimes been suggested. Writers certainly set out to attempt to adjust the portrait of the Revolution being conveyed in their home country, but they did not necessarily feel equipped to provide an impartial or comprehensive history. Many used the term “sketch”, others wrote of their inability to predict the future and all recognised how the Revolution had interfered with how they perceived time and the slow progress of history. Accounts of the Revolution blended different influences, styles, contributors and messages, giving a strong impression that such writers, with perhaps the exception of Mary Wollstonecraft, felt more equipped to provide immediate eyewitness impressions than measured and clear historical analysis. How they wrote the Revolution was just as important as what they said about it, and it was their proximity to the events, their ability to call upon first-hand witnesses to corroborate their views, their bodily presence and their knowledge of the most reliable newspapers which bolstered their claims to having provided authentic accounts. British writers drafted their accounts with an awareness of the limitations of their viewpoints, their partiality and their privileged status as outsiders. The process of writing itself was a way of trying to understand the Revolution and its impact on posterity, a way of working out individual uncertainties during a period when trying to predict the future impact of events in France was almost impossible.

The period from 1792 when the first French republic was in the making, to the middle of 1794, was not only crucial in the history of the French Revolution, but also saw the forging of a displaced British radical movement in France. While the fall of the Bastille induced many



British visitors to travel to Paris to witness the progress of the Revolution, it was the fall of the Bourbon monarchy and the establishment of a republic which was perhaps the true catalyst for the making of a British associational culture in exile in France. If revolutionary sight-seeing was the principal mode of visiting France in the early years after July 1789, by the middle of 1792 taking up residence in revolutionary Paris was a political and ideological decision. It implied support for a Revolution which had fallen out of favour among the British elite – the government as well as press and opposition – and an awareness of the symbolic resonance exile could have in the wake of the Royal Proclamation Against Seditious Writings and the concerted actions taken against popular reform societies by the Pitt ministry. It was no coincidence that British radicals chose to establish a pro-revolutionary club at this crossroads in both the French Revolution and British political culture. The destitution of the king, the decision to open a debate on the constitutional settlement of the new republic and allow foreigners to have a stake in this discussion were aspects of French political culture which appealed to British radicals, many of whom were not wondering whether to leave Britain, but when, and to which destination. The willingness of French revolutionaries to entertain new theories of government and law-making in flagrant transgression of the weight of history was welcomed by British men and women who objected to the hierarchical and strictly delineated political culture of Britain. Many had felt the force of the government's decision to persecute the spread of radical thought, whether through the increased policing of the private sphere, the assault on newspaper editors or the clampdown on artistic forms which criticised the status quo.

The associational culture which emerged on French soil was closely connected with the movement for reform in Britain therefore. In addition to the fact that its core members had been involved in radical gatherings in Britain prior to their stay in Paris, the political discussions, writings and accounts of the Revolution which emerged during this period

highlight how interest in revolutionary France could never be divorced from hope for reform at home. Whether during the debate on the republican constitution, in accounts of the history of the Revolution, or in the culture and priorities of the society formed at White's Hotel, British Club members saw Britain through the prism of revolutionary France.

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## APPENDICES

### A: British Club Members

#### Signatories to the British Club Address of 24th November 1792 to the National Convention, presented on 28th November:

[Arranged in order of signature]

<b>Francis Tweddell</b>	<b>James Gamble</b>
<b>Matthew Bellews</b>	<b>Thomas MacDermott</b>
<b>John Frost</b>	<b>William Ricketts</b>
<b>Nicholas Joyce</b> [Erdman reads “Richard Joyce”]	<b>Robert Rayment</b>
<b>Joseph Green</b>	<b>William Francis Jackson</b>
<b>J. Skill</b>	<b>Robert Merry</b>
<b>J. Usher Quartermain</b>	<b>Robert May O’Reilly</b> (Secretary)
<b>David Gibson</b>	<b>D. E. MacDonnell</b> [Erdman reads J.E. MacDonnell)
<b>Thomas Armfield</b>	<b>William Watts</b>
<b>Edward Fitzgerald</b>	<b>Thomas Marshall</b>
<b>William Duckett</b>	<b>John Oswald</b>
<b>J. O’Neill</b>	<b>John Walker Snr</b>
<b>Edward Ferris</b>	<b>Thomas Potier</b>
<b>B. Murray</b>	<b>L. Masquerier</b>
<b>J. H. Stone</b> (President)	<b>R. Smyth</b>
<b>Joseph Webb</b>	<b>N. Hickson</b>
<b>William Newton</b>	<b>T. J. Gastineau</b>
<b>J. Tickell</b>	<b>Stephen Sayre</b>
<b>Harrold Mowatt</b>	<b>Henry Sheares</b>
<b>Pearce Lower</b>	<b>John Sheares</b>
<b>Bernard MacSheehy</b>	<b>Rose</b>
<b>Jeremie Curtayn</b>	<b>John Bradley</b>
<b>William Choppin</b>	<b>William Maxwell</b>
<b>William Wardell</b>	<b>B. Bulmer</b>
<b>N. Madgett</b>	<b>Caesar Colclough</b>

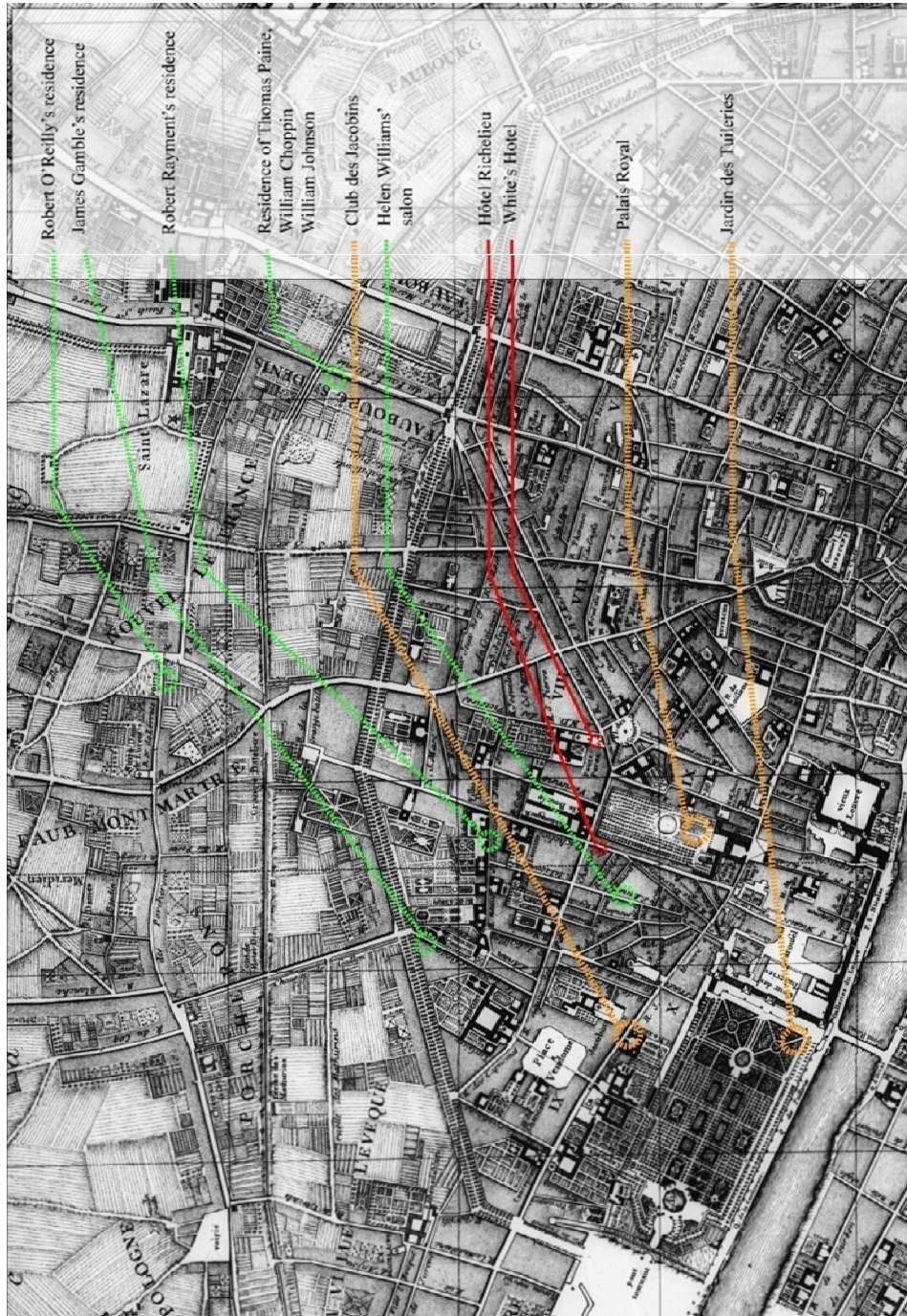
**Other Key Members and Associates of the British Club** [those who had not arrived in time to sign the address, were absent from the dinner on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1792, or who were involved with the Club on a more informal level]:

Helen Maria Williams	Henry Redhead Yorke
Charlotte Smith	Captain Sampson Perry
Mary Wollstonecraft	George Edwards
Thomas Paine	Joel Barlow

Erdman also includes William Wordsworth (“in spirit”), Eleazer Oswald and Thomas Muir. (See David Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières*, Appendix E, p. 305).



## B: Map of Paris Showing the Location of White's Hotel



Map of Paris showing the location of White's Hotel in relation to some of the key arenas of revolutionary activity and a selection of landmarks relating to British residents. Plan de Paris, dédié à Messieurs les échevins de la Ville par M. L'Abbé Delagrive, Géographe de la Ville de Paris de la société roiale [sic] de Londres 1741 (Bibliothèque Nationale de France).

## **C: Short Biographies of British Politicians**

**William Eden, Lord Auckland** (1744-1814), served under William Pitt in the diplomatic service from 1785, taking up a post as ambassador in The Hague from 1790-1794.

**James Bland Burges** (1752-1824) was under-secretary of state for Foreign Affairs from 1789-1795 and a close ally of William Pitt from the early 1780s.

**Henry Dundas** (1742-1811), a Scottish politician and close ally of William Pitt, acted as Home Secretary from 1791, becoming Secretary of War from 1794-1801. Dundas was known for his intransigence towards the radical reform movement during his time at the Home Office. Thomas Paine's correspondence with Dundas from 1792 gives a flavour of this animosity. (See Paine, "To Mr. Secretary Dundas", Foner ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 446-56).

**Charles James Fox** (1749-1806) was a Whig politician who was disliked by King George III and who, as a result, spent most of his career in opposition. George III dismissed the Fox-North coalition from government in 1783, precipitating the start of the Pitt ministry. Fox was an initial admirer of the French Revolution, though began to withdraw his support with the outbreak of war in 1793. He concentrated instead on arguing the case for the negotiation of peace with France.

**George Granville Leveson Gower, Earl Gower** (1758-1833) was the British ambassador in Paris from 1790-1792. He was recalled by the Pitt government from France with the destitution of the king in August 1792.

**Charles Grey** (1764-1845), a later leader of the Whig Party and British Prime Minister in the 1830s, he was at the head of a group called the "New Whigs" in the early 1790s who supported the cause of parliamentary reform in Britain.

**Lord William Wyndham Grenville** (1759-1834) entered parliament in 1782 and was considered a close ally of William Pitt. He served as Home Secretary, Leader of the House of Lords, and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. He was at the head of the Foreign Office during the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, resigning in 1801 with Pitt. Grenville received regular updates from George Monro at the end of 1792 and in early 1793 on the foreign radical community based in Paris.

**Evan Nepean** (1752-1822) was a British civil servant who served as under-secretary of state at the Home Office from 1782 to July 1794 and as under-secretary of state for War from 1794 to 1795. From 1791 onwards, he worked under the leadership of Henry Dundas and was considered an able ally of the Home Secretary. Nepean was the recipient of letters from British spy Charles Ross who had infiltrated the SCI and who sent regular reports to the Home Office during the course of 1792.

**William Pitt the Younger** (1759-1806) was Prime Minister from 1783 to 1801 and from 1804 to his death in 1806. He was at the head of the government when the French Revolution began and also led Britain during the revolutionary and first Napoleonic wars. Although known for his sympathy with the cause of parliamentary reform at the time of his appointment as Prime Minister in 1783 (consolidated by an election victory in 1784), he became the notorious adversary of both the reforming Whigs, under Charles Fox, and radical reformers during the course of his premiership.

## **D: Revolutionary Leaders with Links to British Radicals**

**Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville** (1754-1793) was considered one of the leaders of the Girondins (sometimes known as Brissotins) and cultivated links with American revolutionaries and abolitionists in the 1770s and 1780s. He was also well-known to British radicals such as Thomas Paine and David Williams. He edited a revolutionary newspaper, *Le Patriote français*, and adopted a republican stance after the king's flight to Varennes in June 1791. He was involved in launching the military campaigns of the early republic, in an attempt to rid France of its royal enemies and consolidate the Revolution. He was arrested along with other Girondins on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1793 and died on the scaffold in October 1793.

**Marie-Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet** (1743-1794), was a French philosopher and an exponent of Enlightenment ideas of progress, educational reform and human improvement. He was heavily involved in the republican movement after the king's attempt to leave France in 1791, editing *Le Républicain* with Thomas Paine. Condorcet also had a crucial role in drafting the "Girondin" constitution of February 1793 which was eclipsed by the Jacobin proposal of June 1793. He also worked on a proposal for education. When the Girondins were ousted from the National Convention, Condorcet was outlawed for his opposition. After a period in hiding he was discovered and imprisoned where he died in March 1794.

**Georges Danton** (1759-1794) was an early advocate of popular sovereignty as president of the Cordeliers district in 1789-90 and later as member of the Cordeliers Club. He gained national prestige after 1791 when, on returning from refuge in London following the massacre at the Champs de Mars in July, he was elected to the National Assembly and the Paris Commune. He credited himself with starting the insurrection which led to the overthrow of the king in August 1792 and was held responsible by many for provoking the popular rage vented during the September massacres. Initially prominent in the *Comité de Salut Public*, his increasing reticence about the merits of the Terror led to his indictment and death in April 1794.

**Jacques-Louis David** (1745-1825) was a French painter who became known for his sympathy with the Montagnards and his political art. He voted for the death of Louis XVI as a member of the National Convention in 1793 and was involved in bringing the arts in line with Montagnard standards of republican virtue.

**Marie-Jean Hérault de Séchelles** (1759-1794), a member of the *Comité de Salut Public* who had delivered the Jacobin draft of the republican constitution of June 1793 to the Convention. He fell out of favour because of his unconventional lifestyle which did not match up to the standards of republican virtue demanded by the Montagnards. He was imprisoned in March 1794 before being executed.

**François Xavier Lanthenas** (1754-1799) was considered part of the Girondin grouping in the Convention due to his close affinity with Jean-Marie Roland. However, he voted for the death of Louis XVI in January 1793 with certain conditions, eschewing association with a particular political faction. Lanthenas was also Thomas Paine's regular translator in Paris.

**Jean-Paul Marat** (1743-1793) was a politician and journalist whose newspaper *L'Ami du Peuple* gained fame as a mouthpiece of popular reform. Marat spoke out in favour of a more democratic political system and other measures to help the poor, fleeing to England in 1790 after his attacks on aristocracy. As a member of the National Convention from September

1792 he continued to argue for democratic reform and condemned counter-revolutionaries and émigrés. Helen Maria Williams held him responsible for inciting the people to commit the prison massacres. He survived an appearance before a tribunal in April 1793 and was instrumental in ousting the Girondins. Yet in July 1793 he was killed by Charlotte Corday in his bath.

**Jérôme Pétion de Villeneuve** (1756-1794) was an ally of Robespierre in 1789 but, after having served as Mayor of Paris in 1791-92 and associated with the Girondins as President of the Convention in September 1792, he was ousted from the National Convention in June 1793. His role in both the *journées* of 20<sup>th</sup> June 1792 and 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792 remain obscure. He did not attempt to quell the insurrection of June but neither did he wholly vindicate the popular seizure of power in August 1792. He committed suicide after escaping arrest in the purge of the National Convention of June 1793.

**Maximilien Robespierre** (1758-1794) is known principally for his orchestration of the Terror as a member of the *Comité de Salut Public* from 1793 to his death in July 1794. Given the name the Incorruptible, he was also famed for stating, “I am the People,” an illustration of his view that the “general will” could be understood by a devoted legislator without the need for consultation, voting or deliberation. In the first years of the Revolution he did not express anti-monarchical views, although he quickly became renowned as someone who spoke his mind, who lived an austere lifestyle and who demanded high standards of virtue from French representatives. He died on the scaffold after his adversaries in the *Comité de Salut Public* allied against him and his supporters.

**Jean-Marie Roland** (1734-1793), a member of the Girondin grouping in the National Convention. He had been appointed as an advisor to Louis XVI as part of the king's concessions to republican leaders in March 1792. He was dismissed from the king's counsel in June 1792. In the National Convention, he opposed Louis XVI's conviction for treason and resigned. He fled Paris during the purge of the National Convention in early June 1793, and committed suicide on learning of the death of his wife.

**Jeanne-Marie Roland** (1754-1793) was the wife of the French politician Jean-Marie Roland and was largely known for her role as a salon leader and as a strong influence on the political affairs of her husband. She was imprisoned and executed with the Girondin leaders in October 1793.

**Jean Bon Saint-André** (1749-1813) played a minor role in the Revolution until September 1792 when he was elected as one of the ten representatives from the department of the Lot to sit in the National Convention. During the trial of the king he voted for a guilty verdict and the death of the king without recourse to a popular referendum. He was a member of the *Comité de Salut Public* and was responsible for nominating Robespierre as a replacement for Gasparin. During the Terror he was sent on regional and military missions, only returning after 9 Thermidor. Although imprisoned temporarily for crimes committed at Brest, he was released under the general amnesty of October 1795. He died from typhus in 1813.

**Louis de Saint-Just** (1767-1794) was, along with Robespierre, considered one of the most fervent exponents of the Terror. He spoke out eloquently in the National Convention and was considered an ideologue of the “Republic of Virtue,” serving on the *Comité de Salut Public* during the course of 1793-94 in close consultation with Robespierre. He was arrested and executed after the events of 9 Thermidor.

## **E: Glossary of Revolutionary Terms**

- Montagne, Montagnards** Term given to the representatives in the National Convention by virtue of their preference for the highest seats in the chamber. The group gained ascendancy in the Convention during the trial of Louis XVI, when most Montagnards voted not only for the destitution of the king but also his execution. Historians have quarrelled over the definition of Montagnard politics, with some seeing them as the ideological proponents of a virtuous but austere republicanism (using the Terror as an instrument to achieve this) with others concluding that they were an eclectic group with no fixed principles, reliant on but also manipulating to their advantage the energy of the Parisian people. They are sometimes referred to as Jacobins.
- Gironde / Girondins** Term used to describe the politicians in the Convention who opposed the Montagne. Seen as mostly from the outer-lying regions of France (although some were from Paris), they have been considered as the moderate wing of the Convention, preferring enlightened, commercial republicanism to classical ideals of a virtuous citizenry and wary of an increase in popular involvement in government. Yet historian Michael Sydenham has argued that the Gironde was not a coherent block and William Doyle considers the Girondins to be the ideologues and the Montagne the pragmatists.
- Comité de Salut Public*** (Committee of Public Safety) The governing body set up by the National Convention in April 1793 to help France deal with the problems of foreign and civil conflict. Initially dominated by Georges Danton, it became quickly associated with the Reign of Terror (September 1793-July 1794) instituted when France resorted to emergency rule and suspended the constitution in mid 1793. During the years of the Terror, the make-up of the committee did not change and its members included Marie-Jean Héroult de Séchelles, Maximilien Robespierre, Louis de Saint-Just and Georges Couthon. Rivalries within the committee led to the downfall of Robespierre on 9 Thermidor An II and, although the committee survived after the Terror, its powers were drastically limited.
- Comité de Sûreté Générale*** (Committee of General Security) Set up in 1792, the committee ran the police force under the early republic and during the Terror. It also liaised with the revolutionary tribunal to exact revolutionary justice.
- Comité de surveillance*** Set up in March 1793 to monitor foreign residents in France and keep track of their movements and attitude towards the revolution, the committees were responsible for dispensing “certificates of loyalty” or *certificats de civisme* to those who could prove their continued adherence to the Revolution. The

committees were particularly active after the law of 17<sup>th</sup> September 1793 known as the *Loi des Suspects*.

*Tribunal Révolutionnaire*

Also set up in March 1793 to try political crimes against the Revolution at a time when foreign armies threatened the security of France and when the threat of civil war inspired by royalist émigrés and counter-revolutionaries was rife. The uprising in the Vendée in March 1793 was only one example of this general unrest. Antoine Fouquier-Tinville (1746-1795) was the most famous of the public prosecutors to direct the revolutionary tribunal.

National Convention

After the destitution of the king following the uprising of the 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792 a National Convention was instituted on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1792 with the aim of devising a new constitution. Monarchy had officially been brought to an end and a republic declared on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1792. Once the republican constitution had been drafted, the Convention would theoretically dissolve itself to be replaced by a legislative body. The first phase of the Convention was dominated by struggles between the Girondins and the Montagnards, the former being excluded from the Convention on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1793 and their key members sent to the guillotine in October of the same year. From June 1793 to July 1794, the Convention was dominated by the Montagne, who set up emergency rule under the *Comité de Salut Public*. The Convention was eventually superseded in October 1795.

National Assembly

The representative body which replaced the States-General and worked to establish a constitutional monarchy from July 1789 to September 1791. After the king signed the constitution of 1791, the National Constituent Assembly was superseded by the Legislative Assembly.

*Le Marais, La Plaine*

The main bulk of the members of the National Convention who did not conspicuously ally with one particular grouping in key votes (*les appels nominaux*) during the course of 1793. The term “marais,” meaning “swamp” or “marsh”, was a derogatory term used by those who scorned the representatives’ place in the middle ground.

Thermidor

Name given to the regime change which took place on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1794 (9 Thermidor An II) when Robespierre was removed from power and executed. The deposition of the leader of the *Comité de Salut Public* made way for a more moderate constitutional settlement in 1795 which tempered the radical reforms of the Montagne and protected more restricted property qualifications in voting rights.

## F: Timeline of Key Events in Britain and France, 1792-94

BRITAIN	DATE	FRANCE
	<b>1792</b>	
Foundation of the London Corresponding Society.	<b>January</b>	
Publication of Part Two of Thomas Paine's <i>Rights of Man</i> .	<b>February</b>	
The establishment of the Society of the Friends of the People.	<b>April</b>	Declaration of war against Austria.
SCI organises the cheap distribution of Paine's <i>Rights of Man</i> .	<b>May</b>	
Royal Proclamation Against Seditious Writing targeted radical authors and booksellers including Thomas Paine (21 <sup>st</sup> ).		
	<b>June</b>	King dismisses his Girondin ministers  <i>Journée</i> of 20 <sup>th</sup> June when the people of Paris converged on the royal residence at the Tuileries.
	<b>August</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> August revolution, or "August Days", which brought an end to monarchy.
Thomas Paine escapes to France.	<b>September</b>	Massacres in the prisons of Paris from 2-6 <sup>th</sup> September, seen as a wave of vengeance in a climate of war and paranoia.  Declaration of the Republic on 21 <sup>st</sup> September.
LCS declaration to the National Convention.		
Addresses of support from British reforming societies to the National Convention (including the SCI and the British Club).	<b>November</b>	Declaration of fraternity to foreign peoples struggling under the yoke of tyranny (19 <sup>th</sup> November).
Foundation of the Association for the Protection of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers at the Crown and Anchor Tavern.		

First general Convention of Scottish Reformers in Edinburgh. **December** Convention decides to try Louis XVI for treason.

Widespread fear of popular insurrection in Britain.

King's Proclamation calls out the British militia

### 1793

**January** Conclusion of Louis XVI's trial, judgement and execution (21<sup>st</sup> January).

Outbreak of war with France. **February** War declared on Britain (1<sup>st</sup>).

**March** Revolutionary Tribunal and committees created. Royalist uprising in the Vendée.

The second general Convention of reformers in Edinburgh. **April** Creation of the *Comité de Salut Public*. Defection of General Dumouriez.

**May** (31<sup>st</sup>) Demonstrations against the Girondin members of the Convention.

**June** Ousting of the Girondin members from the Convention (2<sup>nd</sup>). Hérault de Séchelles achieved the ratification of the Jacobin Constitution.

**July** Marat killed by Charlotte Corday. Danton resigns from *Comité de Salut Public*, Robespierre joins the committee.

**August** Capture of Toulon by British fleets.

**September** Law of Suspects (17<sup>th</sup>) and beginning of the Reign of Terror.

**October** Trial and execution of the Girondins. Execution of Marie-Antoinette. Revolutionary calendar adopted.

Third meeting of reformers in Edinburgh is designated as the British Convention. **November**



Arrest of members of the British Convention known as the “Scottish Martyrs” who would subsequently be sentenced to 14 years’ transportation.

**December** Revolt in the Vendée quelled.  
Thomas Paine imprisoned.

## 1794

**March** Arrest and execution of Hébertists.

**April** Arrest and execution of Dantonists.

Arrests of members of the SCI and LCS on charges of high treason, including Thomas Hardy, John Thelwall and John Horne Tooke.

**May**

Suspension of Habeas Corpus

Defection of Burke and the Portland Whigs to the Tories under William Pitt.

**June** Law of 22 Prairial, accelerates the executions under the Terror.

**July** Fall of Robespierre, 9 Thermidor.

**August** Law of 22 Prairial repealed, meaning that most British prisoners would shortly be released.

Treason trials begin, Thomas Erskine acts as defence for the reformers.

**October**

Trials of members of the LCS and SCI result in their acquittal.

**November**

G: Caricatures and Engravings



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 1: Thomas Rowlandson, *The Contrast: Which is Best?* (1793), published on behalf of the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers. London, 1793. Hand-coloured etching. The caricature was emblematic of the divide which characterised Anglo-French debate in the early 1790s.



Figure 2: Richard Newton's portrait of the polite society of political prisoners incarcerated in Newgate jail in the mid 1790s. Newton, Richard. *Promenade in the State Side of Newgate*. London, 1793. Etching. Some British residents of Paris, including Sampson Perry, John Frost and Henry Redhead Yorke spent time in British jails for political reasons on their return from Paris.



Figure 3: James Gillray's celebrated satire on the predicted consequences of a French landing on British soil *Promis'd Horrors of the French Revolution,- or - Forcible Reasons for Negotiating A Regicide Peace*. London, 1796. It may just be coincidence that the sign above the premises to the left of the picture bears the name White's.



Figure 4: Newton, Richard. *Soulagement en prison, or Comfort in Prison*. London, 1793. Etching from *Real Life*. The picture shows many of the political prisoners in Newgate enjoying quiet sociability while behind bars.



Figure 5: James Gillray, *Fashion before Ease – or – a good constitution sacrificed for a fantastick form* (1793), a satirical play on the 1770s painting *Tight-Lacing, or Fashion before Ease* by Bowles and Carver, after John Collet (c.1770–75).



Figure 6: Engraving from the edition of the *Révolutions de Paris*, No. 161, 4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792, The account from the newspaper was used by Robert Merry as his template for *A Circumstantial History* and Sampson Perry reiterates the same viewpoint in his *An Historical Sketch*. The plate is entitled “Gun Fire at the Château des Tuileries” and contrasts the “perfidious” Swiss Guards, with the confident citizens of Paris, many of whom fell when the king’s guards opened fire in the courtyard of the palace.

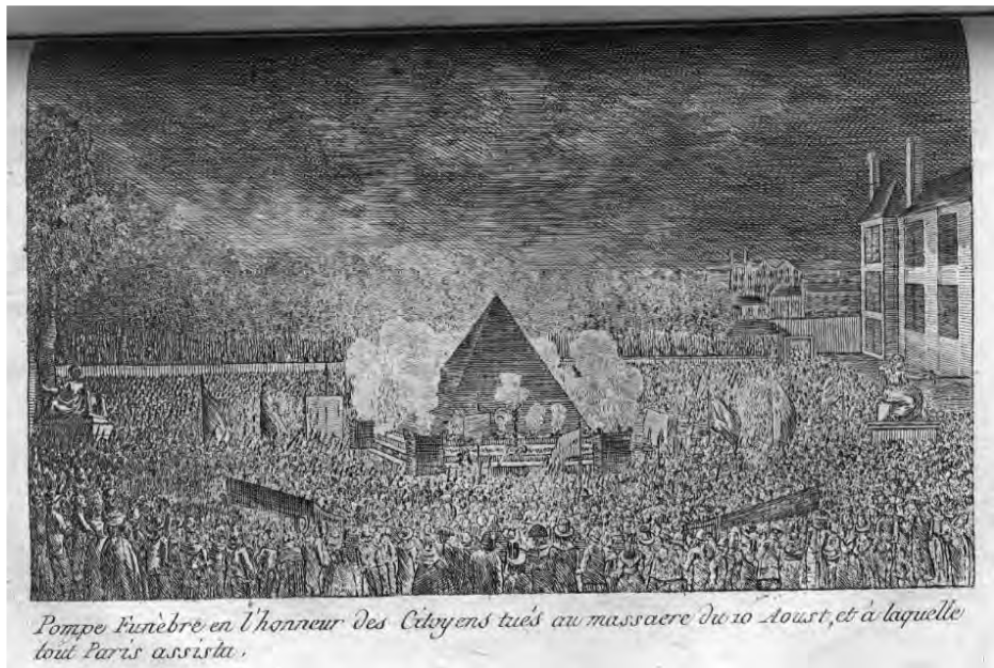


Figure 7: This engraving is taken from the *Révolutions de Paris* No.164, 25<sup>th</sup> August to 1<sup>st</sup> September 1792 and portrays the funeral held “in honour of the citizens killed in the massacre of the 10<sup>th</sup> August” and attended by all of Paris.

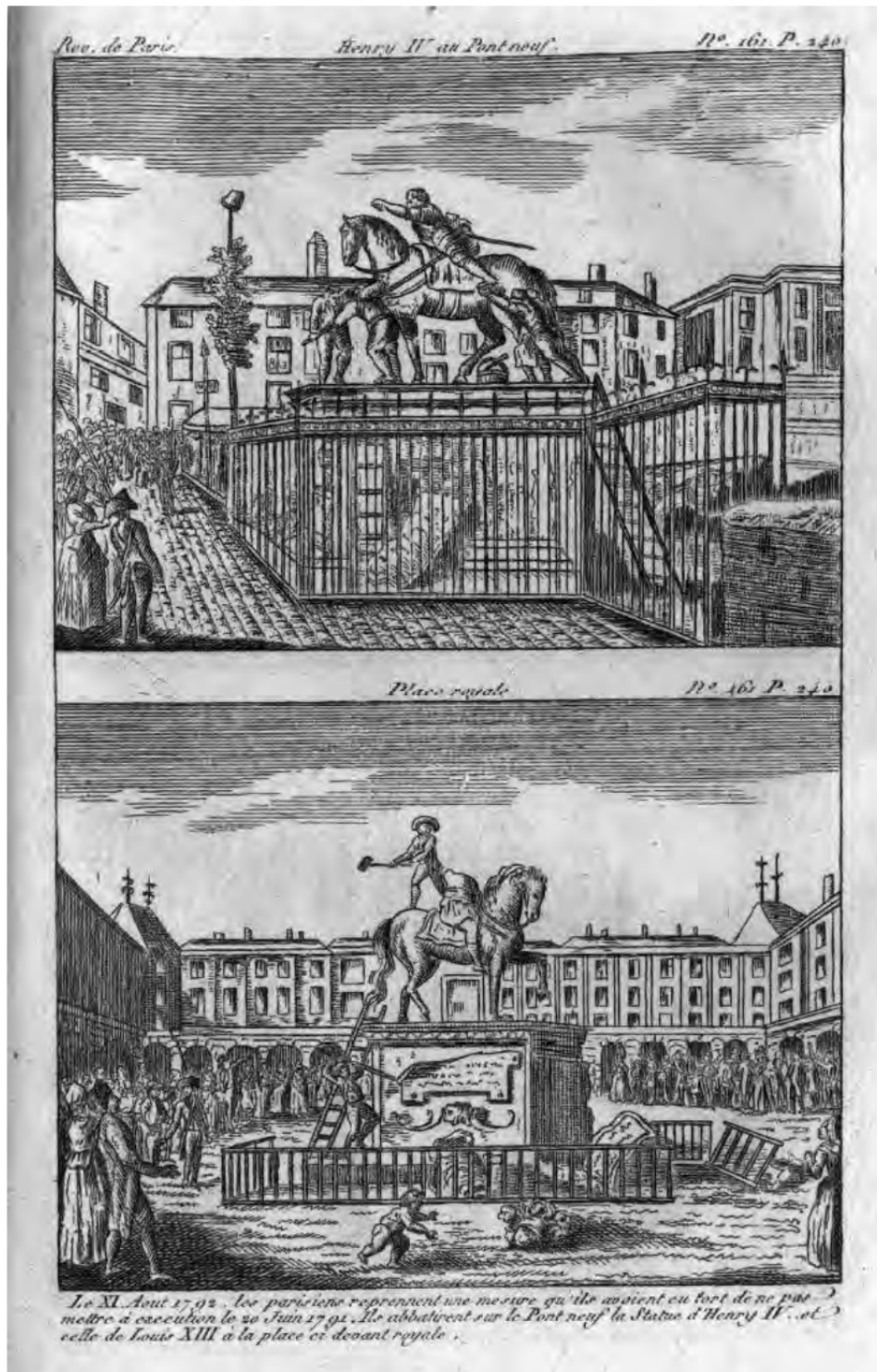


Figure 8: Another plate from the *Révolutions de Paris* edition of 4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> August 1792. This engraving shows the Parisians pulling down the statue of the reputed king Henry IV at the entrance to the Pont Neuf and that of Louis XIII at the Place Royale. The editors suggested they were “wrong not to have taken” such measures on the 20<sup>th</sup> June, when the citizens first marched to the Tuileries.

H: Title Pages of Lesser-known Tracts and Pamphlets by British Expatriates

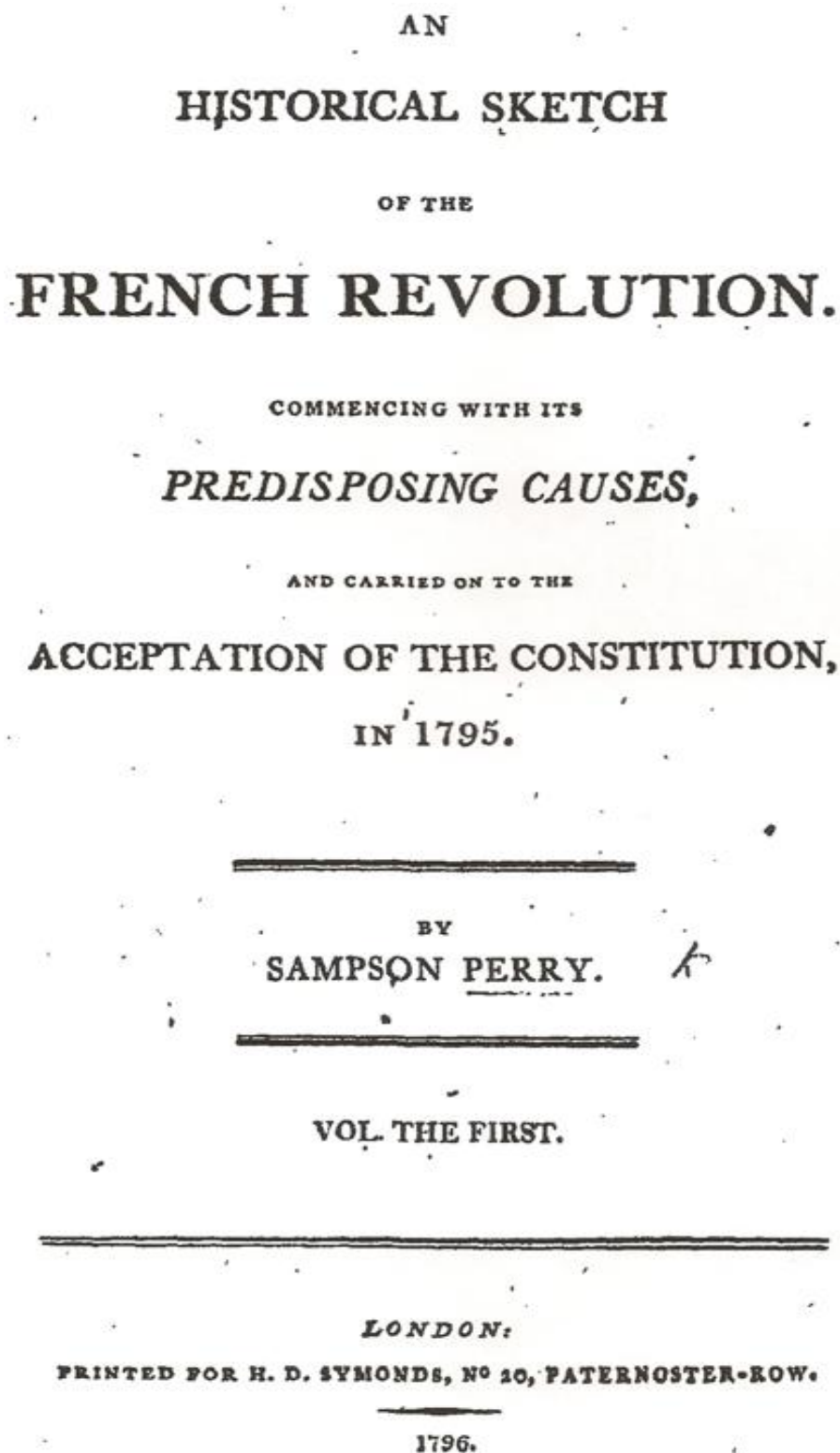


Figure 9: Title page to the first volume of Sampson Perry's pro-revolutionary *An Historical Sketch of the French Revolution*, published in 1796 in two volumes by Perry's fellow Newgate inmate H. D. Symonds.

# Oppression!!!

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THE  
APPEAL

OF  
*CAPTAIN PERRY,*

(LATE EDITOR OF THE ARGUS,)

TO THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND;

CONTAINING

A JUSTIFICATION OF HIS PRINCIPLES AND CONDUCT WHICH HAVE RENDERED HIM OBNOXIOUS TO MINISTERIAL TYRANNY; WITH A FEW REMARKS ON THE PEOPLE OF FRANCE, TO REFUTE THE BASE CALUMNIES OF THOSE INTERESTED IN THIS RUINOUS CRUSADE AGAINST THE LIBERTY AND HAPPINESS OF MAN.

TO WHICH IS ADDED

A DEVELOPEMENT

OF SOME OF THE

*MYSTERIES OF THE SPY TRADE,*

PROVING THE DETESTABLE INIQUITY OF THE PRACTICE,  
AND THE NECESSITY OF ITS IMMEDIATE ABOLITION.

---

LONDON :

PRINTED FOR CITIZEN LEE, AT THE BRITISH TREE OF LIBERTY, NO. 47, HAYMARKET: SOLD LIKEWISE BY J. SMITH, PORTSMOUTH-STREET, LINCOLN'S-INN FIELDS; J. S. JORDAN, FLEET-STREET, AND H. D. SYMONDS, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

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1795.

Figure 10: Title page of Sampson Perry's published self-defence *Oppression!* in which he details his persecution at the hands of the British government. The pamphlet was printed by radical publisher Richard "Citizen" Lee in 1795 while Perry was serving in Newgate prison. In the title is included the epithet of Perry's later career, "late editor of the Argus."





Figure 11: Title page of Robert Merry's tract, sent to the French constitutional committee in October 1792, in which he outlines his thoughts on the republican constitution being drawn up after the deposition of the king.

## I: Some Extracts from Manuscript Sources

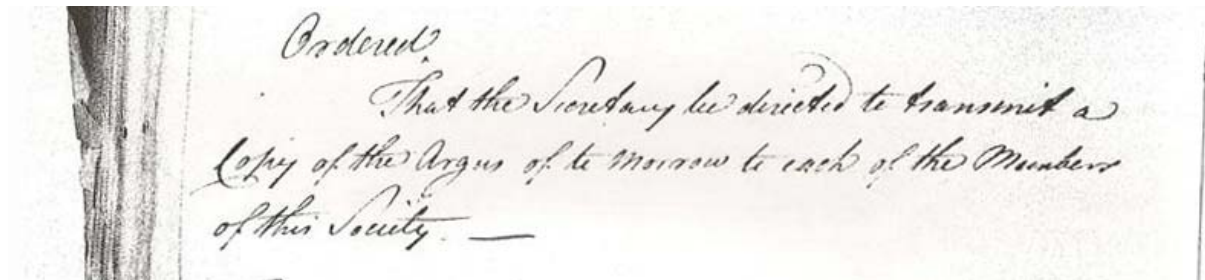


Figure 12: Order given by the chair of the SCI on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> October 1792 that copies of Perry's *Argus* were to be distributed widely throughout the Society. TS 11/962/3508, Record of the meetings of the SCI, Crown & Anchor Tavern, Friday 9<sup>th</sup> December 1791 - Friday 9<sup>th</sup> May 1794. This is evidence that the *Argus* was becoming increasingly influential among reformers at the time of Perry's departure to Paris.

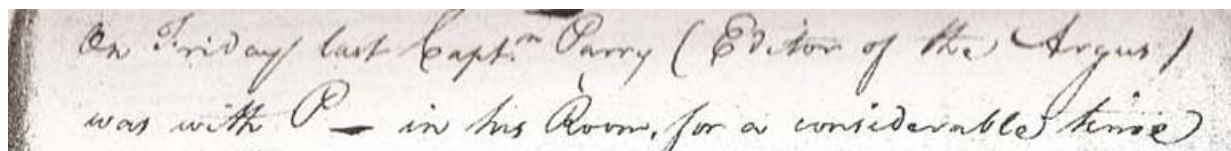


Figure 13: TS 11/965/3510/A2 Memorandum from spy Charles Ross to under-secretary of state, Evan Nepean, dated Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> August 1792, informing him of Perry's possible meetings with Paine during the summer of 1792. Both reformers would form part of the British radical community in Paris and Perry would frequently join Paine, Choppin and Johnson at faubourg Saint Denis in late 1793.

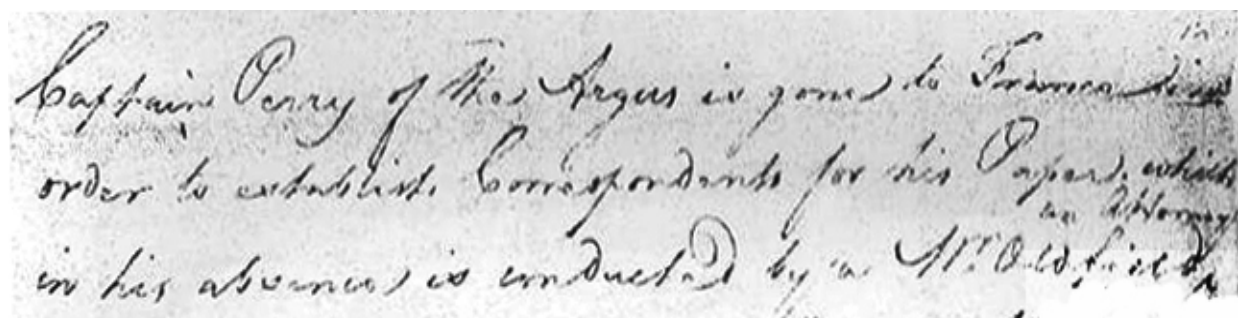


Figure 14: A report by Charles Ross to the Home Office, informing under-secretary of state Evan Nepean of Sampson Perry's departure to France in search of an outlet to publish his newspaper. TS 11/965/3510 A2, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1792. Perry would return briefly to SCI meetings in November before returning to Paris for a longer period at the end of 1792.

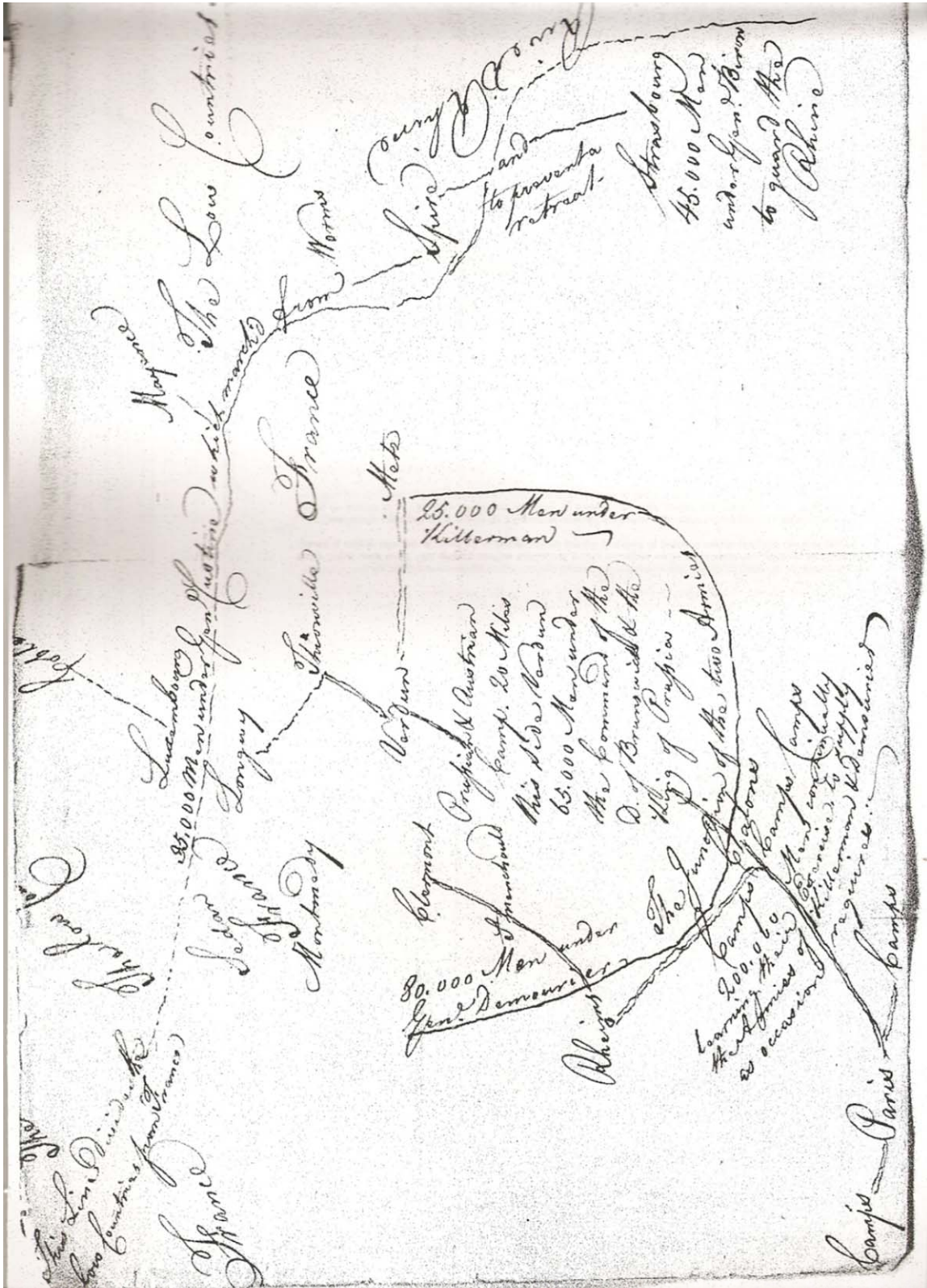


Figure 15: Map of the advance of the French revolutionary armies sent by British Club member William Choppin to Thomas Rickman, but intercepted by spy Charles Ross and shown to Evan Nepean at the Home Office. Ross wrote, "This was copied from a rough sketch sent from Mr Choppin in France to Mr. R\_ and which he mentions was copied from a Plan sent to Mr Paine with whom he is very intimate. Received in London Monday Oct 8<sup>th</sup> 1792." See TS 11/965/3510/A2, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1792.

no. 16

À la Convention Nationale de France

Adressé des Anglois, des Ecossois, et des Irlandois  
 Résidans et domiciliés à Paris.

~~Imprié par ordre de la Convention Nationale~~  
 Citoyens Législateurs

et Irlandois

Les Citoyens Britanniques, actuellement à Paris, animés du sentiment de la Liberté que vos principes ont communiqué à la République Française, se sont réunis dimanche 28 Novembre pour célébrer les brillants succès de vos Armes, et ils ont unanimement pensé qu'il étoit de leur devoir d'offrir aux Représentans d'une aussi grande Nation le tribut de leurs félicitations sur des évènements qui intéressent essentiellement tous les Peuples qui aspirent à être libres.

Recevez donc, Citoyens Législateurs, ces hommages purs et fraternels d'hommes qui ont toujours applaudi aux principes sacrés sur lesquels vous avez juré de fonder le nouveau Gouvernement que vous allez donner à votre patrie.

Jusqu'ici les guerres n'ont été entreprises que pour appuyer les passions les plus viles, aussi n'ont elles été conduites que par les moyens les plus iniques; vous n'avez pris les armes que pour faire triompher la raison, et la vérité.

C'étoit sans doute à la Nation française qu'il appartenoit d'affranchir l'Europe, et nous la voyons avec joie remplir ses grandes destinées, espérons que les troupes victorieuses de la liberté, ne porteront les armes, que lorsqu'il n'y aura plus ni de tyrans ni d'esclaves.

De tous ces prétendus gouvernemens, ouvrages de la fraude des prêtres et des tyrans coalisés, il ne restera bientôt, qu'un horrible souvenir. Les peuples éclairés par votre exemple rougiront d'avoir touché si long tems des fêtes serviles sous un joug avilissant pour la nature humaine.

Mes vœux, Citoyens Législateurs, nous rendent impatient de voir le moment heureux de ce grand changement, dans l'espoir qu'il ne sera pas plutôt arrivé, que nous verrons se former une Union étroite entre la République Française et les Nations Anglaise Ecossoise et Irlandoise, Union que ne pourroit manquer d'appuyer à l'Europe entière la jouissance des droits de l'homme, et d'établir sur les bases les plus solides la Paix Universelle.

10

Adelles

Figure 16: British Club address to the National Convention, signed on 24th November 1792 and presented to the Convention on 28th November 1792. AN C 11/278/40. Page 1/3.

Nous ne sommes pas les seuls animés de ces sentimens, nous ne doutons pas qu'ils ne se manifestent également, chez la grande majorité de nos compatriotes, si l'opinion publique y étoit consultée comme elle devoit l'être dans une Convention Nationale.

Quant à nous, qui faisons dans ce moment notre résidence à Paris, nous saisissons avec joie cette occasion pour déclarer que dans tout le cours de la Révolution, et non-obstant le brusque départ de notre Ambassadeur, ou plutôt de l'ambassadeur de la Cour de Londres, nous avons constamment éprouvé de la part de la Nation Française les sentimens de la cordialité la plus franche, et de l'amitié la plus sincère.

Paris. 24 Novembre 1792.

En premier de la République Française.  
Signé par nous membres du Comité dénommé à cet effet

Francis Sweddel  
 Natho Bellamy  
 M. S. G. D. P.  
 M. K. J. O. Y. A.  
 Joseph Green  
 J. Skell  
 David Gibson  
 Thos. Bromfield  
 Edw. Fitzgerald  
 Wm. Duckett  
 Edw. Ferris  
 P. Murray

J. A. Moore President  
 Joseph Webb Secy.  
 Wm. Newton  
 J. Triskell  
 Howard Mowatt  
 Peter Lowery  
 Bor. Mac. Keehy  
 James Cunningham  
 Wm. Chapman  
 Wm. Wardell  
 A. Madgett  
 Jas. Lambie  
 Thos. W. Burnett  
 Wm. Pichety  
 Rob. Raymond  
 W. D. S.

Figure 16: British Club address to the National Convention, signed on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1792 and presented to the Convention on 28<sup>th</sup> November. AN C 11/278/40. Page 2/3.

Wm Francis Jackson  
Robert Merry  
Wm Gray Neilly  
J. E. Macdonnell  
Wm Watts

The Bankhall.  
John Oswald.  
Mr. Walker Senr.  
The Doctor

L. Masquerier,  
Ricmyth  
S. Hickson

J. J. Gristine sen  
Stephen Jayre  
James Shearer  
John Shearer  
Rose

J. M. M. M.  
Wm. M. M.  
B. M. M.

J. H. Stone J.S.D.  
Robt. W. O'Reilly Sec.  
L'interet des Signes, au nombre de  
50, Commission nomme par la Societe,  
a cet effet

en No. 50

attendre la réponse du président.

Figure 16: British Club address to the National Convention, signed on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1792 and presented to the Convention on 28<sup>th</sup> November. AN C 11/278/40. Page 3/3.

*Robert Rayment*

Nom du detenu, son domicile avant sa detention, son age, le nombre de ses enfans, leur age, ou ils sont; s'il est veuf, garcon ou marié.	Le lieu où il est detenu; depuis quand; à quelle époque; par quel ordre; pourquoi.	La profession avant et depuis la Revolution
<p><i>Robert Rayment,</i> demeurant avant sa detention, chez le Citoyen Jacquin, Rue neuve, St Augustin N.º 3. Age de cinquante sept ans. Pere de trois enfans, mais, sans nouvelles de sa famille, depuis onze mois, de maniere qu'il a le malheur d'ignorer jusqu'à leur existence.</p>	<p>à la Maison des Ecossois rue fossés St Victor, depuis le 29 Brumaire ayant été detenu depuis le 19 Vendémiaire à la Section le Pelletier. Arrêté en vertu de loi contre les Anglois en France; Or s'il existe quelque autre raison que celle du hazard de sa naissance en Angleterre il l'ignore parfaitement.</p>	<p>Nagociant et depuis Cultivateur.</p>

*Maison des Ecossois, Rue  
L'an 2. me de l.*

Figure 17: Prison record of Robert Rayment, showing the table filled out when he entered the Maison des Ecossois on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1793, imprisoned as a foreigner. AN F7/4774/88. Page 1/2.

Son Réseu avant et  
depuis la Révolution

Les relations  
ses liaisons

Le caractère et les opinions politiques  
qu'il a montrés dans les mois de mai  
juillet et Octobre 1789; au 10 Août à  
la fuite et à la mort du tyran; au  
31 Mai, et dans les crises de la  
guerre; s'il a signé des pétitions  
ou arrêtés liberticides.

Son revenu dépendant  
de son industrie comme  
Négociant et Cultivateur,  
a beaucoup souffert  
par les événements du  
tems, et se trouve  
aujourd'hui réduit  
à rien.



Étant venu en France pour  
présenter un plan économique  
sur la fabrication de la Monnaie  
de Cuivre, et à la suite de celui-ci  
plusieurs autres sur l'amélioration  
de l'agriculture, la possibilité  
d'épargner une partie considérable  
de la semaille, et la meilleure  
méthode d'alléger les grains  
étrangers en France; il n'a  
vu que les personnes et les  
Magistrats auxquels il croyoit  
devoir soumettre le résultat de  
son expérience et de ses lumières.  
En 1791 sollicité par la direction  
de la Caisse d'Escompte, il alla à  
Londres, rassembler toutes les  
connoissances de détail sur  
l'administration de la Banque  
d'Angleterre; travail unique, que  
ni lui a procuré d'autre reconnaissance,  
que la satisfaction de servir la  
France libre.  
Quant aux étrangers vivant en  
France il n'a eu pour société  
intime; que des Américains Républicains.

La Révolution française lui parut  
bientôt le plus glorieux, le plus  
nécessaire pour amener le bonheur  
de l'Europe, et le desir d'y contribuer  
autant qu'il étoit en lui, l'amena  
en France. Mais en offrant ses  
faibles lumières par les différents  
plans et mémoires, mis sous les  
yeux de la Nation et de ses  
Magistrats, il n'a jamais prétendu  
s'immiscer sans vocation dans les  
affaires publiques, ou régler à sa  
fantaisie la marche révolutionnaire.  
Jamais il n'a signé, contribué  
ou adhéré à des pétitions ou  
arrêtés liberticides. Le quatrième  
jour après la mémorable victoire  
des Thermidor, il parut avec d'autres  
Anglais républicains de cœur, à  
la barre de l'Assemblée Nationale,  
pour y présenter leur donz fraternels  
Aux Veuves et Orphelins des hommes  
libres, morts pour leur patrie le  
10 Août. Tous ses ouvrages, et  
la haine constante des Aristoc-  
rates de toutes les Nations, et de  
toutes les nuances, procurent  
mieux en faveur de ses principes  
politiques, que ne pourroit faire  
une longue exposition.

Passé Saint Victor 7 germinal  
à la République une et indivisible  
Rob<sup>t</sup> Rayment

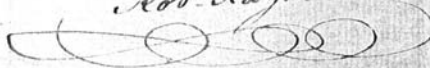


Figure 17: Prison record of Robert Rayment, showing the table filled out when he entered the Maison des Ecosais on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1793, imprisoned as a foreigner. AN F7/4774/88. Page 2/2.



Dons Patriotiques.

	Livres	
1°	500 : 0	
2° pour habiller six gardes Nationales	900 : 0	
3° deux hommes pour Compagnie allant à la Vendée	60 : 0	tr
4° pour les Veuves des Citoyens tués les 10 d'Aoust	1000 : 0	fr
5 Boute de marat & Le Pelletier	50 : 0	
Total	1910 : 0	

Extrait du Registre de la Section de 1792

Le C. Smith nous ayant requis de le mettre autant qu'il est en notre pouvoir. Lui, sa femme, & ses Enfants, sous la Sauvegarde de la Loy & de la Nation, & sous la protection Speciale de la Section de 1792, Ce que nous lui avons accordé plus volontiers que nous sommes instruit & convaincus de principes Politiques de C. Smith favorables à notre Constitution & à notre Liberté Nationale, en foi de quel nous avons signé le present pour lui servir & valoir en cas de besoin & suivant les Circonstances : fait au Comité

Je & —  
 Signe: Raffy Compagnaire  
 & plusieurs autres

Figure 18: A note from a representative of Sir Robert Smith's section, attesting to his revolutionary loyalty and detailing his patriotic gifts during the Revolution. AN F7/4775/20/3.

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*To the Friends to Truth.*

*Sampson Perry*, auteur d'un journal républicain, en Angleterre, *The Argus of the People* (*La Sentinelle du Peuple*) pour avoir défendu avec énergie les droits de l'homme; la révolution française, *Horne-Tooke* et *Thomas Payne*, son ami, n'a échappé que par la fuite à des bourreaux. *Perry* et un autre écrivain anglois, *Merry*, célèbre par une pièce de théâtre, des vers républicains, et autres écrits philosophiques que nous ferons connoître, sont venus trouver de francs amis, chez les Directeurs de l'imprimerie du Cercle Social, qui vont publier en France, le journal persécuté, *The Argus of the People*, La société angloise des Droits de l'Homme, et *Thomas Payne* et autres y contribueront avec zèle. Amis de la liberté, vous leur devez secours, alliance et fraternité. — Voilà la lettre de *Sampson Perry*, à ses amis persécutés à Londres.

„ It must however give some satisfaction to the advocates for European Freedom, and to the friends of the human race in general, should they find that *their Argus* is not banished from the world, but that it has been only transplanted from the region of tyranny, injustice and oppression to his happy soil of Liberty and Equality.

*Argus of the People.*”

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Les Directeurs de l'imprimerie du Cercle Social viennent de mettre en vente:

La grammaire de *Miège* et *Boyer*, nouvelle édition. Ils attendent incessamment une collection de classiques anglois.

Sous presse.

*Les Poésies de N. Bonneville.*

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A PARIS, de l'Imprimerie du CERCLE SOCIAL,  
rue du Théâtre-François, n<sup>o</sup>. 4.

Figure 16: Extract from *La Chronique du Mois; ou Cahiers Patriotiques* of January 1793, advertising the imminent publication of *Sampson Perry's Argus* in Paris and followed by an address from *Perry* to his readers.

## RESUME EN FRANÇAIS / SUMMARY IN FRENCH

Cette étude essaie d'éclaircir l'histoire d'un club qui a été, jusqu'à présent, peu étudié, que ce soit dans le cadre de l'historiographie de la Révolution française ou dans celle du radicalisme britannique des années 1790. La Société des Amis des Droits de l'Homme, ou « British Club », fut fondée à Paris en novembre 1792. Des rassemblements réguliers eurent lieu à l'hôtel de White, situé dans le deuxième arrondissement, non loin du Palais Royal et le jardin des Tuileries. Les membres du British Club étaient des expatriés militants qui avaient pris la fuite pour Paris au moment même où le gouvernement britannique, mené par William Pitt le Jeune, durcissait sa politique envers ceux qui s'étaient engagés dans des mouvements pour la réforme parlementaire et constitutionnelle en Grande-Bretagne. Au sein du British Club, se trouvaient aussi des représentants des sociétés de réforme, des entrepreneurs, des industriels, des journalistes et des militants d'autres nationalités. Le club, qui était un lieu de rassemblement convivial aussi bien qu'un forum politique, contribua à la circulation d'informations et d'idées à une époque de changements institutionnels et sociaux rapides. Il servit de réseau informel à la lisière de la diplomatie officielle, reliant des membres d'une communauté militante, résidant tantôt en Grande-Bretagne, tantôt en France.

Les membres de cette communauté expatriée peuvent être caractérisés de « vecteurs », tant pour leur rôle dans la transmission et la transformation d'idées que pour leur place au cœur d'une culture associative qui traversait les frontières nationales. Ils étaient également des pions dans une guerre de propagande à la fois en Grande-Bretagne et en France, guerre qui les instrumentalisa à des fins diplomatiques. Si dans leur pays d'origine ils étaient victimes d'une politique visant à supprimer toute opposition à la constitution établie, en France à partir de février 1793, ils furent souvent amenés à se défendre contre des accusations de contre-révolution. Les modes de représentation qui apparurent à cette époque ont influencé les

travaux historiques ultérieurs menés sur le British Club. Si l'espion George Monro qualifia les membres du club de « conspirateurs », l'historien John Goldworth Alger, œuvrant à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle, les considérait comme des « fanatiques » et « hors-la-loi ». Il en allait de même pour Moncure Conway, qui voyait en eux des « hommes sans pays ». L'histoire du club est souvent écrite sous une forme littéraire, voire épique, qui empêche de voir les similitudes entre ce dernier et une culture de réforme en Grande-Bretagne qui se développe depuis le milieu du dix-huitième siècle.

Dans cette étude, nous avons mis l'accent sur le caractère associatif du British Club, replaçant ce dernier dans le contexte d'une culture de réforme plus générale. Dans le premier chapitre, nous étudions le contexte politique et diplomatique dans lequel le British Club fut créé. Ensuite, dans le deuxième chapitre, nous nous intéressons plus particulièrement au réseau qui se créa autour de l'hôtel de White, la vie des étrangers radicaux à Paris et la culture d'entraide qui se noua au sein du club. Dans le troisième chapitre, nous essayons d'éclaircir l'engagement politique des membres du British Club au sein de la jeune république, avec une attention particulière pour les tracts écrits dans le cadre du débat sur la nouvelle constitution républicaine à la fin de l'année 1792 et au début de 1793. Nous essayons de voir en quoi cet engagement était libre de toute association étroite avec des « factions » politiques. Ensuite, dans le quatrième chapitre, nous nous penchons sur les récits publiés par les membres du British Club, récits tentant de réécrire la Révolution pour un public britannique qui a été, à leurs yeux, soumis à une campagne de propagande anti-révolutionnaire par le biais du gouvernement de William Pitt.

### **1. « Hommes sans pays » : Le paysage historique et conceptuel**

La Révolution de 1789 fut très largement approuvée à la fois par les hommes politiques Whig en Grande-Bretagne et par ceux qui étaient affiliés aux sociétés de réforme,

telles la Revolution Society et la Society for Constitutional Information. Richard Price, homme d'église et Non-conformiste célèbre, prononça un discours lors de la fête organisée par la Revolution Society en novembre 1789 pour commémorer la Révolution Glorieuse. A cette occasion, il félicita le peuple français d'avoir su se défaire du joug de la monarchie absolue et d'avoir frayé un chemin vers la liberté. Cependant, en novembre 1790, lors de la publication de son pamphlet, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, l'homme politique Whig, Edmund Burke, prit un point de vue opposé, dénonçant les révolutionnaires qui, selon lui, avaient tenté de nier l'histoire en s'attachant aux théories abstraites, notamment celle du droit naturel. Malgré le fait que Burke ait donné son soutien à l'indépendance américaine, il vit en la Révolution française une conception de la liberté en opposition avec sa propre vision d'une stabilité constitutionnelle et d'un certain respect pour ce qu'il considère comme la logique du progrès de l'histoire. Ces interventions déclenchèrent un débat pamphlétaire entre ceux qui adhéraient aux idées nouvelles conçues en France et ceux qui regrettaient l'avènement d'une révolution rapide et violente qui romprait avec une conception plus modérée d'une société perfectible à développement lent et constant. Ce débat, nommé le « French Debate » par un certain nombre d'historiens britanniques du vingtième siècle, anima la scène publique entre 1790 et 1792.

Cependant, les événements à la fin de l'année 1792 provoquèrent un véritable changement de politique au sein du gouvernement britannique, dès lors hostile à tout propos qui aurait semblé remettre en question la stabilité constitutionnelle du pays. L'invasion du jardin des Tuileries par les milices parisiennes, les massacres dans les prisons de Paris qui eurent lieu entre le 2 et le 6 septembre 1792, de même que la décision prise par la Convention Nationale du 20 septembre 1792 d'instaurer une république, dont la monarchie serait exclue, ou encore le procès du roi, choquèrent à la fois les autorités, des hommes politiques Whig et un public britannique qui suivait la Révolution de loin à travers le filtre de la presse. Toute

expression de soutien ouvert pour la Révolution fut proscrite. Le gouvernement britannique, avec William Pitt le Jeune en tant que Premier Ministre et soutenu par le roi George III, tenta d'éradiquer toute expression de désaccord avec le modèle britannique en poursuivant les auteurs d'écrits radicaux qui avaient essayé de faire connaître leurs idées par un public plus large et plus socialement diversifié. Le roi promulgua un décret en mai 1792, nommé la « Royal Proclamation Against Seditious Writings », visant à supprimer la publication des écrits jugés séditionnels. Ceux qui continuaient de prôner le changement basé sur le modèle français furent amenés en justice, accusés de sédition ou, plus tard, furent soupçonnés d'avoir « imaginé la mort du roi ». Ils furent dorénavant considérés comme des ennemis du royaume.

La deuxième partie du pamphlet *Rights of Man*, écrit par Thomas Paine, traita de la Révolution française et les réformes nécessaires, selon lui, pour retrouver la liberté en Grande-Bretagne. Le pamphlet fut proscrit, selon les termes de la « Royal Proclamation », et ceux parmi les éditeurs et les imprimeurs qui tentèrent de le faire imprimer ou de faciliter sa diffusion, furent aussi menés en justice. La diffusion très large de *Rights of Man* provoqua également le retrait progressif du parti Whig de la scène radicale. Si les « New Whigs » de la Society of the Friends of the People donnèrent leur soutien aux sociétés de réforme populaires en avril 1792, quelques mois après ils émirent des réserves quant aux idées exprimées par Paine sur la réorganisation politique et économique du pays. D'autres auteurs et éditeurs se retrouvèrent condamnés, suite à leur refus de renoncer à un discours de réforme pro-révolutionnaire. Sampson Perry, l'un des compatriotes de Thomas Paine à Paris, fut condamné pour diffamation à maintes reprises entre 1791 et 1792. Il resta ainsi en prison jusqu'en juillet 1792. Comme Thomas Paine, c'est à la fin de 1792 qu'il partit en France.

A ce tournant de la Révolution, au moment même où la politique intérieure de la Grande-Bretagne en matière de libre expression se durcissait, les Britanniques militants expatriés fondèrent une société pro-révolutionnaire à Paris. Cette décision était provocatrice,

en raison du climat politique qui s'était instauré dans leur propre pays. Le British Club rassembla des personnes à la fois connues dans le monde du radicalisme britannique et d'autres, membres plus marginaux des sociétés de réforme. Au moins treize membres de la British Club furent aussi affiliés à la Society for Constitutional Information de Londres et quatre ou cinq militants furent impliqués dans le projet du Literary Fund, une association créée par le penseur gallois David Williams afin d'aider des artistes sans ressources et leurs familles. La plupart des membres du British Club n'ont rarement fait l'objet de l'attention des historiens du radicalisme britannique, et encore moins des historiens de la Révolution française. Les tracts politiques qu'ils rédigèrent dans le contexte du débat sur la constitution républicaine et les témoignages directs qu'ils transmirent à un lectorat britannique ont rarement attiré l'attention des chercheurs, voire n'ont jamais été étudiés.

Si Thomas Paine est un des membres phares de la communauté britannique à Paris, l'un de ceux dont on se souvient le plus, il ne fut pas un des principaux organisateurs du British Club. Le noyau du club fut formé par l'imprimeur John Hurford Stone, l'éditeur et journaliste Sampson Perry, l'auteur et poète Robert Merry, le pharmacien William Choppin, le journaliste John Oswald, l'aristocrate et révolutionnaire Edward Fitzgerald, l'avocat John Frost et le médecin George Edwards. Autour de ce noyau central gravitèrent aussi des personnes telles que Robert O'Reilly, Robert Rayment, Sir Robert Smith et William Johnson. Si le club fut dirigé par des hommes, il tissa des liens avec le monde des salons. Des auteurs britanniques féminins tels Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Smith et Helen Maria Williams, si rarement présentes aux réunions officielles, demeurèrent néanmoins des influences importantes sur le cercle expatrié à Paris. Elles furent célébrées par des « toast » à l'occasion de dîners conviviaux. En outre, elles rédigèrent leurs propres témoignages de la Révolution, contribuant tout autant que les hommes aux échanges vifs et parfois féroces d'idées sur l'avenir de la Révolution et sur son impact sur le devenir de l'Europe.

La fondation du club et l'installation des expatriés radicaux à Paris ne passèrent pas inaperçues au sein du gouvernement britannique. Ceux qui adhérèrent au club furent souvent l'objet de critiques formulées par les conservateurs britanniques, des « loyalists » fidèles à la constitution britannique, à l'inverse de ceux qui essayaient, à leurs yeux, de la démanteler, en faisant appel à des modèles de constitution et de gouvernement théoriques nouveaux. Les termes « patriote » et « patriotiques » n'ont jamais été aussi âprement discutés qu'à cette époque. Nombreuses sont les représentations négatives des résidents étrangers à Paris. Ils furent tournés en ridicule, dépeints comme des personnes psychologiquement instables dont les revendications étaient de l'ordre de la folie et donc ne pouvaient pas être prises en compte lors d'un débat civilisé et rationnel, digne des Lumières. Ils furent considérés ainsi comme des enfants, pétulants et inconstants, influençables et jamais décidés dans leurs opinions. Bon nombre de journaux et de magazines fidèles au gouvernement mirent l'accent sur la violence pathologique des expatriés. Selon ces sources, les radicaux auraient pris plaisir à voir couler le sang des innocents et n'auraient ressenti aucune compassion face aux crimes de la Révolution. Au contraire, ils dansaient sur les cadavres des aristocrates assassinés et se réjouissaient à l'écoute des discours qui incitaient le peuple à la barbarie. En revanche, d'autres représentations dépeignirent ces militants comme des personnes d'une sensibilité extrême, voire efféminées, qui, face à la mort du roi, auraient sombré dans une mélancolie absolue.

En lien avec ces représentations, qui mirent en avant le caractère instable et imprévisible de ces personnes, les Britanniques à Paris furent considérés comme des conspirateurs extrémistes, visant la mort du roi et le renversement de la « happy constitution » de la Grande-Bretagne. Tout geste ou symbole évoquant la France fut soupçonné de cacher un désir de provoquer une révolution en Grande-Bretagne, aidée par une invasion française. Des lettres, envoyées par des expatriés et destinées aux membres de leurs familles ou à leurs amis, furent interceptées et ouvertes. Des propos commerciaux figurant dans cette correspondance furent



considérés comme un langage codifié qui cachait des velléités de trahison. C'est ainsi que, lors du procès de William Stone pour trahison en 1796, les lettres de son frère, John Hurford Stone, membre du British Club et expatrié en France, furent étudiées en détail, à la fois par le procureur et les avocats de défense, afin de déterminer la « situation réelle de John Hurford Stone à Paris ». Les activités des radicaux britanniques, obscures et impénétrables grâce au secret qu'ils cultivèrent au sein de leur club, provoquèrent de multiples peurs parmi des représentants des autorités britanniques. Ces peurs, légitimes et fondées sur une réelle possibilité d'invasion militaire, aidée par la France, étaient aussi une façon d'entretenir une certaine forme de nationalisme naissant, basé sur l'idée d'une constitution britannique parfaite et juste, et d'une hiérarchie sociale dont le moindre changement entraînerait le pays dans une révolution sanglante et destructrice de l'héritage protégé par des « libres Anglais » depuis 1688.

Telle était la perception du gouvernement britannique face à la décision des radicaux de s'exiler en France ou au moins de s'intéresser au monde associatif né à l'hôtel de White à la fin de cette année à la fois décisive et riche d'événements marquants qu'est l'année 1792. En revanche, les partisans étrangers de la Révolution furent accueillis en France dans un esprit de fraternité universelle. Certains, comme Thomas Paine, Joseph Priestley et David Williams, reçurent, eux, le titre de « citoyen » français en récompense de leur soutien pour la Révolution. Cet esprit international servait un but diplomatique. Si les Français déclarèrent la guerre contre l'Autriche monarchique, ils ne se protégèrent pas contre les critiques internationales et cherchèrent aussi à se concilier les bonnes grâces d'autres pays en Europe. L'accueil fut alors chaleureux pour ceux, étrangers radicaux, qui arrivèrent en France pendant l'année 1792. La fondation du British Club était reconnue et congratulée par les autorités françaises et grand nombre des radicaux expatriés nouèrent des relations étroites avec les membres du gouvernement révolutionnaire. Thomas Paine accepta un poste de conseiller au

comité de la constitution, Mary Wollstonecraft aida à rédiger un projet pour la réforme de l'éducation, et John Hurford Stone and Nicholas Madgett proposèrent leurs services en matière de traduction. D'autres tentèrent de mener à bien des projets de publication ou d'édition avec l'aide des révolutionnaires ou soumièrent leurs avis sur le projet d'une nouvelle constitution républicaine à la Convention Nationale.

Cependant au cours de l'année 1793, cette relation amicale et fructueuse entre les expatriés britanniques et des membres du gouvernement révolutionnaire se détériora en raison des changements politiques au sein de la Convention Nationale. La France fut menacée de tous côtés par l'avancée des armées royalistes, soutenues par les émigrés français et le frère du roi, le comte d'Artois. De plus, le jugement prononcé par la Convention à l'issue du procès de Louis XVI, qui mena à sa mort, sur la guillotine, le 21 janvier 1793, provoqua la colère des pays royalistes. Le 1er février 1793, la France déclara la guerre contre une Grande-Bretagne qui s'associa avec les pouvoirs contre-révolutionnaires, et cette décision devait avoir un impact important sur la vie des étrangers résidant à Paris. Si en novembre 1792, la Convention Nationale proposa l'aide de la France aux peuples qui luttèrent sous le joug de la tyrannie monarchique, y compris le peuple britannique, à la fin de l'année 1793, le peuple britannique devait être considéré comme complice dans les crimes liberticides de son gouvernement. Ce changement de perspective engendré par la guerre et par réaction à la politique intérieure en Grande-Bretagne, eut pour conséquence que les étrangers à Paris, malgré leur passé pro-révolutionnaire et leur adhérence continue aux principes de la Révolution, durent se justifier et se défendre contre des accusations de contre-révolution. Certains, comme Hurford Stone, furent accusés d'être les espions de William Pitt, et tous ceux qui restèrent après la prise de Toulon par les Britanniques en août 1793 furent soumis aux conditions strictes de la Loi des Suspects du 17 septembre 1793. Cette loi mena à l'arrestation de tous les Britanniques résidant à Paris, peu importe leurs convictions politiques ou leur fidélité à l'esprit

révolutionnaire. Malgré le fait qu'ils passèrent plusieurs mois dans des prisons improvisées, certains membres du club qui échappèrent à la Terreur, demeurèrent fidèles à l'esprit révolutionnaire. D'autres abandonnèrent l'enthousiasme de 1792, se retirant de la scène publique et se conciliant, si non avec le mouvement « loyaliste », au moins avec une tradition de réforme qui s'appuyait plus sur des symboles et un langage nationaux que sur une vision de liberté universelle fondée sur les droits de l'homme.

## **2. Un monde associatif à l'hôtel de White**

C'est dans ce cadre politique, diplomatique et idéologique que les Britanniques radicaux créèrent un club pro-révolutionnaire à la suite de la proclamation de la république en novembre 1792. Ce club fut loin d'être un simple forum politique. Comme le démontre le chapitre deux, le monde de l'hôtel de White est un monde où se brassèrent la politique mais aussi le commerce, l'édition, et la conspiration. Ce fut aussi un lieu où des traditions de libre-échange intellectuel au sein d'une communauté sociale relativement restreinte furent perpétuées et parfois remises en cause. Car, si en Grande-Bretagne, William Godwin prônait la discussion sans entraves dans la poursuite de la vérité, des étrangers à Paris, comme Robert Merry et John Oswald, furent de plus en plus conscients des limites d'un débat qui excluait la plupart des citoyens ordinaires. Les conflits qui eurent lieu au sein du club en début de 1793 furent, certes, liés aux pressions croissantes suite à l'issue du procès du roi et le début de la guerre avec la Grande-Bretagne, mais ils furent aussi révélateurs de la diversité même qui caractérisait le Club et des divergences idéologiques sur la question de la démocratisation du processus politique et du rôle du peuple dans la création des lois. Une tension réelle existait entre ceux qui s'ouvraient à la possibilité d'un fonctionnement plus démocratique du système politique et ceux qui préféraient garder une mesure d'élitisme ou « enlightened leadership ». Ces débats étaient le reflet d'une discussion menée au niveau national en France sur l'étendue

de la démocratie au sein de la nouvelle république. Si l'espion George Monro voyait en ces conflits parfois physiques, le caractère violent des expatriés, ils étaient aussi la preuve à la fois de la pression subie par les étrangers à ce tournant de la Révolution mais aussi du degré de désaccord parmi ces militants au sujet de leur intervention et soutien pour les différentes stratégies de la nouvelle république.

Les activités des membres du British Club étaient diverses, ne se restreignant pas seulement au domaine de la politique. Certains, comme John Frost et Joel Barlow, vinrent en France en tant que délégués des sociétés de réforme britanniques, alors que d'autres, tels Robert Rayment et James Gamble, récoltèrent des fonds pour aider les veuves et les enfants des hommes tués lors de la journée du 10 août 1792. D'autres encore, comme Sampson Perry, John Oswald, et John Hurford Stone menèrent à bien des projets d'édition et de journalisme dans la capitale. De plus, le propriétaire de l'hôtel de White, Christopher White, ainsi que Nicholas Joyce, Hurford Stone et Thomas Christie essayèrent de conjuguer à la fois un engagement politique et des activités de commerce privées, parfois à la limite de la légalité ou au moins exploitant amplement les possibilités offertes par le contexte révolutionnaire. Joel Barlow et John Hurford Stone, par exemple, acquirent des biens appartenant aux émigrés qui furent réquisitionnés par la république à un prix bien en-dessous du prix du marché. Enfin, certains membres du British Club intégrèrent l'armée française et se battirent contre les armées contre-révolutionnaires. William Maxwell, John Oswald et William Newton jouèrent ainsi un rôle militaire au sein de l'armée républicaine.

Le British Club fut donc un lieu d'échange, non seulement d'idées mais aussi de pratiques et de connaissances, dans l'esprit des clubs de réforme britanniques qui proliférèrent à partir du milieu du siècle. Comme l'a montré l'historien Peter Clark, des centaines de clubs naquirent à cette époque, parfois avec un but politique, parfois avec un projet pédagogique, philanthropique ou scientifique. L'un des éléments commun à toutes ces structures de réforme

radicale était le désir de diffuser des connaissances sur des innovations – éducatives, scientifiques, politiques ou autres – récentes, et de cultiver un esprit d'entraide permettant à toute personne membre d'une société de s'améliorer et de s'informer, un moyen de briser des contraintes liées au rang social. Ce principe fut un des principaux éléments du British Club car, au cœur de son fonctionnement se trouvait un esprit de partage et d'échange. Parmi ses membres on comptait des personnes qui avaient déjà participé à des projets de réforme sociale ou politique en Grande-Bretagne ou à l'étranger, que ce soit en tant qu'adhérents du Literary Fund, la Society of the Friends of the People, la Society for Constitutional Information ou la Revolution Society. Certains, comme Thomas Paine, Edward Fitzgerald et Robert Merry, s'engagèrent aussi à l'étranger. William Choppin continua à envoyer des rapports réguliers à son ami Thomas Rickman sur le progrès de la liberté en France et sur les activités des Britanniques à Paris. Ceux qui se rassemblaient à l'hôtel de White ne cessèrent point d'assister aux réunions à Londres et firent des allers-retours réguliers entre la capitale britannique et Paris. Le British Club était par conséquent un lieu où des relations antérieures à son existence se renouèrent, mais aussi un lieu dynamique qui, par son existence à ce tournant de la Révolution, cultiva un esprit associatif qui perdura pendant les mois de la Terreur, quand les Britanniques se retrouvèrent en prison en vertu de leur statut d'étrangers.

Cet esprit d'entraide fut un aspect important de la vie des Britanniques pendant la Terreur. Souvent en souffrance physique et psychologique, ceux qui se retrouvèrent en prison après le décret de septembre 1793 tentèrent de soulager les difficultés de leurs compatriotes en suppliant les autorités révolutionnaires de les libérer ou au moins de leur permettre d'accéder aux services médicaux. Christopher White, lui-même en prison, tenta de négocier la libération des enfants de Nicholas Joyce qui, suite au décès de leur père, se retrouvèrent orphelins et sans ressources. Robert Merry, écrivant à Jacques-Louis David depuis le port de Calais en mai 1793, mit en avant la misère dans laquelle se trouvaient ses compatriotes, qui ne

parvenaient plus à accéder à leurs comptes bancaires et qui avaient tout perdu suite à la réquisition de biens des étrangers. Sir Robert Smith, qui avait des domestiques à charge, se soucia de la sécurité de ces derniers le temps de son incarcération. De temps en temps, des prisonniers britanniques, considérés comme des fidèles de la Révolution par des membres de leurs Sections révolutionnaires, bénéficièrent des largesses des citoyens ordinaires qui témoignèrent de la bonne conduite des ces partisans sous la Révolution et de la nécessité de les libérer. Le British Club, au-delà d'un club politique, eut aussi un caractère associatif, reliant des personnes d'horizons différents, permettant, à l'intérieur du club, diverses activités privées et professionnelles. Le club fut la principale source de soutien pour les expatriés après l'entrée en guerre contre la Grande-Bretagne, quand la situation des étrangers à Paris devint précaire.

### **3. Interventions politiques au sein de la jeune république**

Néanmoins, le British Club avait un programme politique qui poussait certains de ses membres à participer aux débats animant la jeune république, à prendre en charge des missions diplomatiques ou à témoigner dans des procès politiques importants. Loin d'être un simple lieu de discussion et d'échange d'informations, le British Club facilita également l'intervention politique de ses membres dans des débats de la Révolution, tout en proposant des déclarations collectives, signées par tous les membres. C'est ainsi qu'un petit nombre d'individus liés au Club proposèrent des tracts dans le cadre du débat sur la nouvelle constitution républicaine à la fin de l'année 1792 et au début de l'année 1793. Robert Merry, John Oswald, George Edwards, Joel Barlow et David Williams rédigèrent tous des avis sur la forme idéale d'une constitution tant attendue par des radicaux d'autres pays européens. Si David Williams ne peut être compté parmi les membres du British Club, il est néanmoins connu de Merry, Edwards et Oswald à travers son rôle dans le Literary Fund et fréquenta

certaines des révolutionnaires connus de ses compatriotes à Paris. Esquivant toute implication dans des sociétés de réforme, il se montra tout de même concerné par les questions qui agitaient le British Club.

Le débat sur les fondements d'une constitution fut un des principaux sujets de préoccupation pour les radicaux britanniques. Non seulement refusèrent-ils la mise en avant de la constitution britannique comme la meilleure solution constitutionnelle de l'Europe, mais ils dénoncèrent ce qu'ils considéraient comme un mythe national largement répandu, celui de la perfection de la liberté britannique, mythe créé afin de proscrire toute tentative de réforme et de conserver le pouvoir d'une oligarchie corrompue. La révolution de 1688, loin d'être l'aboutissement rationnel et juste d'une confrontation opposant des Whigs progressistes à des conservateurs Anglicans, n'aurait été rien de plus qu'un pacte conclu entre membres de l'élite afin d'empêcher toute possibilité de réforme ultérieure ou prise de pouvoir par les citoyens. Si Thomas Paine, Robert Merry, Mary Wollstonecraft et Sampson Perry mirent en avant des modèles politiques très différents les uns des autres dans leurs écrits sur la Révolution, deux choses les réunissent: une hostilité envers le système représentatif britannique ainsi que la ferme certitude que toute opposition au système actuel serait interprétée par leur gouvernement comme sédition ou acte de trahison. Ils dénoncèrent la décision prise par les « New Whigs », la Society of the Friends of the People, menée par Charles Grey, de renoncer aux bienfaits de la Révolution française à la fin de 1792. Cette décision fut considérée comme un frein à la poursuite des réformes parlementaires.

Une hostilité envers ce qu'ils percevaient du modèle britannique, pourtant loué comme la perfection constitutionnelle par ses défenseurs, rassembla les Britanniques à Paris. Cependant, leurs idées et leurs propositions sur la nouvelle constitution française se distinguèrent par leur hétérogénéité. John Oswald préféra mettre en avant un modèle politique qui laisserait une place aux citoyens dans la création des lois. Robert Merry, quant à lui, se

montra sceptique face à tout système « représentatif ». Il considérait que le système représentatif avait été l'objet d'abus en Grande-Bretagne. Si Merry ne conçut pas une solution où le peuple serait l'unique souverain, il émit des réserves sur le type de solution que prônait Paine. Paine, à l'instar des révolutionnaire américains, qu'il côtoya pendant les années 1770 et 1780, chanta les louanges du gouvernement représentatif en opposition à ce qu'il appelait le gouvernement « héréditaire ». Même s'il se prononce en faveur de la réforme politique prenant en compte les droits naturels de l'homme, Paine n'en approuva pas moins la participation des citoyens ordinaires dans la création des lois. Les propositions de Joel Barlow et David Williams furent, quant à elles, moins théoriques, et ancrées dans le vif du débat sur la meilleure façon d'améliorer la constitution monarchique de 1791. Loin de vouloir proposer un modèle abstrait, ces deux radicaux tentèrent de modifier l'existant sans pour autant se priver de proposer de changements importants. Enfin, George Edwards, le moins connu des militants britanniques à contribuer au débat sur la constitution, mit en avant un système pour la régénération totale de la société, un système conçu pour la Grande-Bretagne mais applicable, à ses yeux, en France.

Si à la fin de l'année 1792 il restait une certaine liberté d'expression pour les étrangers dans les débats animant la France révolutionnaire, la situation changea entre janvier et mars 1793. En janvier 1793, la Convention vota la mort du roi, une décision qui consolida la réaction anti-révolutionnaire du gouvernement britannique et d'un public de plus en plus amené à adopter un point de vue « loyaliste ». En février, la guerre éclata entre une France qui défendait les gains de la Révolution et une Grande-Bretagne plus convaincue que jamais qu'il fallait arrêter l'élan révolutionnaire en Europe, inspiré par la France. En mars 1793 furent créés des comités révolutionnaires qui eurent comme but de surveiller les activités des étrangers à Paris, veillant surtout à la fidélité de ces derniers aux événements récents, tels l'exécution du roi et la déclaration d'une république, mais aussi faisant l'inventaire de leurs



situations et activités avant la Révolution. Néanmoins, malgré le contexte quelque peu paranoïaque, certains des expatriés britanniques continuèrent à intervenir sur la scène publique. Ainsi, Sampson Perry, William Choppin, William Johnson et Thomas Paine furent appelés à témoigner lors du procès du Jean-Paul Marat, mis en accusation par un tribunal girondin en avril 1793, alors que Joel Barlow et John Hurford Stone vinrent défendre le général Miranda, révolutionnaire vénézuélien accusé de contre-révolution en mai 1793. Perry, quant à lui, accepta une mission diplomatique proposée par un membre du Comité de Salut Public, Hérault de Séchelles. Enfin, en juin 1793, alors que les Girondins avaient été exclus de la Convention, Thomas Paine proposa son aide à une Convention Nationale dominée dès lors par les députés Montagnards.

Cet engagement pendant l'année 1793 tend à confirmer le caractère politiquement hétérogène du Club des expatriés. Loin de constituer une simple branche du parti girondin, les Britanniques radicaux à Paris entretenirent des relations désordonnées et parfois contradictoires avec le monde révolutionnaire. Nous tentons, dans cette étude, d'insister davantage sur la diversité des associations entretenues par les expatriés, en rejetant la théorie selon laquelle les radicaux britanniques se seraient regroupés derrière un seul parti politique. Nous remettons en cause la cohérence des points de vue à cette époque au sein du British Club. Le contexte politique dans lequel celui-ci émergea était instable et soumis à des changements permanents. Il en allait de même pour le club des expatriés. Souvent amenés à devoir prouver leur fidélité au mouvement révolutionnaire, ils restèrent cependant des étrangers, à la fois impliqués dans les débats qui animaient la Convention Nationale, mais aussi des indépendants, construisant leur propre rapport avec la Révolution sans se limiter à des alliances antérieures ni à des groupements politiques restreints.

Souvent, la cohérence même de ces « partis » ou « factions » politiques, tels les Girondins ou les Montagnards, a été construite rétrospectivement, une manière dont les

génération postérieures de commentateurs tentèrent de rationaliser des périodes de turbulence ou de danger dans les annales de l'histoire. C'est ainsi que les Girondins et les Montagnards sont devenus les aïeux des formes politiques dont l'existence se prolongea jusqu'au dix-neuvième siècle. En revanche, en 1792 et 1793, les frontières entre ces « factions » étaient beaucoup moins claires. Des historiens tels que Michael Sydenham, Alison Patrick et William Doyle ont, tous, à leur manière, mis en avant le caractère instable des catégories politiques à cette époque. Alors que Sydenham considère les Girondins comme un groupe fluide et hétérogène, Patrick, d'après des recherches sur les votes à la Convention Nationale en 1793, conclut que les membres de la Convention ne votèrent pas toujours en bloc et que l'expression de leurs votes à la Convention était indépendante des amitiés tissées entre les participants. Elle rappelle que jusqu'en 1792 il n'y avait pas d'appels nominaux à la Convention, d'où la difficulté pour l'historien de mettre au jour les alliances et positions politiques au sein de la Convention à cette époque. C'est justement ces premiers mois de la jeune république qui ont vu la plus grande activité sur la scène publique de la part des Britanniques.

La variété des points de vues mis en avant dans les tracts britanniques sur la constitution, ainsi que l'engagement politique continu et multiforme des auteurs de ces derniers pendant l'année 1793, tendent à montrer que les Britanniques ne peuvent être considérés comme de simples « Girondins ». Or, comme le rappelle Sydenham, Girondins et Montagnards sont en eux-mêmes un objet de débat dans l'historiographie de la révolution française. Il semblerait alors que nous ayons à prendre en compte cette instabilité des positions politiques des Britanniques radicaux. Soudés par la même animosité envers le système politique britannique, ils avaient pourtant chacun un avis propre sur le devenir de la France. Au-delà du cadre du débat en France, la Révolution française servit de modèle à l'Europe, et plus particulièrement à ceux qui prônaient une réforme constitutionnelle et

politique en Grande-Bretagne. Au sein du British Club, un rassemblement naquit à ce tournant de la Révolution et les débats politiques foisonnèrent dans une tradition de libre-échange. Malgré les mesures coercitives prises contre leurs libertés au cours de l'année 1793, nous avons essayé de montrer que les membres de ce club continuèrent d'être attachés à un esprit de liberté intellectuelle et politique, tout en prenant conscience des limites de cette dernière. Les conflits qui émergèrent de ces débats entraînèrent souvent le départ des membres, dont certains retournèrent en Angleterre au cours de l'année 1793. Certains restèrent toutefois en France pendant la Terreur, plus convaincus que jamais qu'il leur fallait dépasser les contradictions inhérentes à la mise en œuvre des principes de la Révolution, afin que l'esprit de cette dernière demeure un exemple pour l'humanité et soit le moteur du progrès de l'espèce humaine à l'avenir.

#### **4. Réécrire la Révolution pour le lectorat britannique**

La question de l'impact de la Révolution française en Europe prend de l'ampleur dans les textes écrits par les expatriés pour un public britannique. Comme le note John Goldworth dans son livre *Englishmen in the French Revolution*, très peu de témoins oculaires étrangers publièrent des réflexions sur la Révolution. Un manuscrit de Thomas Paine ne survécut pas au passage de son auteur en prison, même si, selon un biographe de Paine, l'historien Edward Gibbon tenta de le récupérer des années plus tard. Joel Barlow ne traduisit jamais ses notes fragmentaires pour une histoire de la Révolution en un texte achevé et Mary Wollstonecraft ne parvint pas à publier un deuxième et troisième volume de son histoire de la Révolution, alors qu'elle les avait annoncés dans la préface de *An Historical and Moral View of the Origins and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has Produced in Europe* (1794). De plus, les mesures prises contre les étrangers à Paris eurent un impact sur les récits des Britanniques à propos de la Révolution destinés à leurs proches en Grande-Bretagne.

Suite à la prise de la Bastille, il fut toujours possible d'envoyer outre-Manche des lettres contenant des témoignages sur les événements. Pourtant, le contexte de 1792 et le début de la guerre entre l'Angleterre et la France, restreignit considérablement toute possibilité de communication des expatriés avec leurs familles. Des membres du British Club finirent par ne transmettre plus que des informations liées à leur commerce ou leurs affaires familiales. Toutes les questions d'ordre politique brillent par leur absence, car les épistoliers savaient que leur correspondance serait surveillée.

Au-delà du contexte diplomatique, le peu de matériau écrit issu des annales du British Club peut s'expliquer par la paralysie que ces membres ressentirent face aux événements capitaux dont ils furent les témoins privilégiés. La Révolution était difficile à transposer en mots. Sampson Perry, Mary Wollstonecraft, Joel Barlow et Robert Merry décrivirent le bouleversement que provoqua la Révolution sur la perception du temps et sur l'idée d'un déroulement lent et progressif de l'histoire. Ils étaient conscients d'une rupture, temporelle, philosophique et morale, que la Révolution entraîna, mais ils ne trouvaient pas pour autant les mots pour la décrire. C'est pourquoi leurs écrits prennent souvent la forme d'esquisses (« sketches »), insistant non pas sur leur capacité de tout dire mais sur le caractère partiel, subjectif et immédiat de leurs commentaires. Refusant toute prétention à l'histoire totale ou omnisciente, ils préférèrent invoquer leur proximité spatiale aux événements comme preuve de l'utilité et de l'authenticité de leurs écrits, à défaut de leur exhaustivité. Pour eux, leur présence suffisait à légitimer leurs témoignages. Témoins directs de la Révolution, ils se refusaient pourtant à l'analyser. En effet, ces auteurs-spectateurs étaient conscients qu'il reviendrait aux générations futures de déchiffrer la Révolution et de lui donner son sens. C'est pourquoi ils décrivirent principalement les événements vécus au travers de leurs corps et de leurs sensations.

Ce choix du « sketch », de l'esquisse narrative, comme l'a montré l'historien Albert Boime, est loin d'être anodin. Le fait de proposer une esquisse, un texte non-fini plutôt qu'une œuvre complète avait aussi une dimension à la fois politique et idéologique à cette époque. A l'inverse du tableau peint par un grand maître, admiré pour son caractère achevé, pour sa perfection et pour la qualité picturale de l'œuvre, une esquisse, dans le domaine de l'art, est une façon improvisée et rapide de saisir un objet, utilisant très peu de détails et faisant appel à l'imagination de celui qui le regarde. Les erreurs sont acceptées, elles font même partie de l'œuvre, car, si la peinture concerne avant tout les grands maîtres, l'esquisse est une forme ouverte aux amateurs, pour laquelle aucune connaissance, aucune culture picturale préalables ne sont requises. En choisissant des modes de représentation davantage spontanés et bruts, ceux qui commentaient la Révolution mettaient en avant l'importance de l'expérimentation et de l'innovation tout en rejetant la nécessité de respecter l'histoire dans la fondation d'une société idéale. Si la grande histoire ne laissait pas place à l'erreur d'interprétation, ni à l'innovation ou au changement radical, l'esquisse, tout comme l'ébauche, était l'incarnation même de l'esprit révolutionnaire. Pour ceux et celles qui avaient soutenu la Révolution, la rédaction d'un texte fragmentaire et libre, libéré du carcan d'un plan, reflète à merveille la constitution d'un pays lui-même en plein changement. Selon eux, un nouvel ordre ne pouvait émerger que si l'on se débarrassait du poids de l'histoire, une histoire qui empêchait toute tentative de renouveau et perpétuait l'ordre existant. Helen Maria Williams résume ainsi cette idée : « en France ce n'est pas ce qui est ancien, mais ce qui est moderne, qui est l'objet d'attention ». Le paradoxe est là, dans ce va-et-vient qui caractérise tous les écrits des membres du British Club, entre d'un côté la reconnaissance de l'impossibilité de décrire la Révolution ni de prédire son issue, et de l'autre, l'affirmation d'une position privilégiée qui prétend à l'authenticité absolue au nom du « j'y suis / j'y étais ». Il s'agit là de deux postures qui étaient propres aux auteurs britanniques témoins de la Révolution et qui montrent toute la

complexité de leurs positions d'expatriés au cœur des événements au moment de la fondation de la jeune république.

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Les réactions des expatriés britanniques face à la Révolution française, entre 1792 et 1794, semblent parfois contradictoires et discordantes. Dans leurs écrits, ils conjugèrent différents styles, registres, auteurs, sources et objectifs. Cependant, ces écrits reflètent la multiplicité de points de vue qui se côtoyèrent au sein du British Club à ce tournant de la Révolution. En tant que témoins enthousiastes, tant au moment de la prise de la Bastille que pendant les mois de transition vers une forme républicaine de gouvernement, ils durent faire face à un paysage politique de plus en plus complexe, où la violence alla de pair avec une participation politique populaire croissante et où l'éloquence oratoire fut considérée tant comme un masque dissimulant des désirs contre-révolutionnaires que comme une façon de donner de favoriser le progrès de la raison. C'est ce que remarqua Helen Maria Williams quand elle mit en avant le passage de la « simplicité » de 1789 à la « complexité » de l'époque de la jeune république. Ce rapport à la Révolution fut d'autant plus complexe qu'il était intimement lié au mouvement pour la réforme en Grande-Bretagne. Outre le fait que, avant d'arriver à Paris, grand nombre des membres du British Club avaient été actifs au sein de la mouvance radicale outre-Manche, leurs discussions politiques, leurs écrits constitutionnels et leurs témoignages historiques de la Révolution se démarquèrent par la façon dont ils croisèrent à la fois une fascination pour la nouvelle république et l'espoir de voir des changements importants dans leur propre pays. Les radicaux britanniques regardèrent ainsi la Grande-Bretagne à travers le prisme de la France révolutionnaire.

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## **Vectors of Revolution: The British Radical Community in Early Republican Paris, 1792-1794**

British radicals established a pro-revolutionary society in Paris in the late months of 1792, at a time when their own government, under William Pitt the Younger, had proscribed all overt support for the French Revolution. The expatriate club was founded at a crossroads in British political and diplomatic culture therefore, and at a vital stage in the course of the French Revolution. Often the victims of judicial pursuit in both Britain and France, the members of the British Club have been deemed “men without countries” by one nineteenth-century commentator. Yet British radical activists in Paris were not simply pawns in a wider diplomatic struggle. In the early French republic, they founded a radical community at White’s Hotel, where political agendas intersected with private initiatives. This associational world was part of a broad network of reform stretching across the Channel. It was influenced by a tradition of enquiry and improvement which had developed in Britain during the latter half of the eighteenth century. This tradition led members of the radical community to engage with the Revolution on issues which dominated public debate in France but which also echoed their concern for the overhaul of British political culture. They intervened on the question of the foundation of a new republican constitution at the turn of 1793, providing a range of blueprints which reflected the varied nature of the club’s political character. Some also wrote eyewitness observations of the Revolution back to Britain, sketching their impressions for an audience who had, in their view, been misled by a hostile British press.

*Key words: British radicalism - British Club - Vectors - French Revolution - 1790s - White’s Hotel - Paris - Republicanism - Eyewitness reporting - Exile - Crossovers - Networks*

## **Vecteurs de la Révolution: la communauté radicale britannique à Paris au moment de la fondation de la république, 1792-1794**

Des militants britanniques fondèrent un club pro-révolutionnaire à Paris à la fin de l’année 1792, au moment où leur propre gouvernement, dirigé par William Pitt le Jeune, avait proscrié tout soutien ouvert pour la Révolution française. Le club des expatriés fut créé alors à un carrefour dans la culture politique et diplomatique de la Grande-Bretagne, ainsi qu’à un stade important dans l’évolution de la Révolution française. Souvent victimes de poursuites judiciaires à la fois en Grande-Bretagne et en France, les membres du club ont été considérés comme des « hommes sans pays » par un commentateur au dix-neuvième siècle. Cependant, ces militants ne furent pas simplement des pions dans un conflit diplomatique plus large. Au sein de la jeune république, ils créèrent une communauté radicale à l’hôtel de White, lieu où des programmes politiques croisèrent des projets privés. Ce monde associatif fit partie d’un réseau plus large de réforme qui traversa la Manche. L’impact d’une tradition de « enquiry » et de « improvement », qui se développa au cours de la deuxième moitié du dix-huitième siècle, fut grand. Cette tradition poussa des membres de la communauté radicale à intervenir dans les débats révolutionnaires sur le devant de la scène publique française. Ces interventions furent aussi l’expression d’une volonté de mener à bien une réforme de la culture politique en Grande-Bretagne. Les membres de la communauté expatriée intervinrent alors au sujet de la création d’une nouvelle constitution républicaine à la fin de l’année 1792, proposant des modèles divers qui reflétaient le caractère hétérogène du club. D’autres, en tant que spectateurs, esquissèrent des témoignages pour un public britannique qui avait été trompé, à leurs yeux, par une presse ennemie de la Révolution.

*Mots clefs: Radicalisme britannique - British Club - Vecteurs - Révolution française - Années 1790 - White’s Hotel - Paris - Républicanisme - Témoignages oculaires - Exil - Échanges - Réseaux*