

“RELINQUISH(ING) ALL FORMER CONNECTIONS”: BRITISH RADICAL EMIGRATION TO EARLY REPUBLICAN PARIS

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This article investigates British emigrant experience in early republican Paris by examining the associational culture forged in expatriate gatherings at White’s Hotel over the course of late 1792 and early 1793 and perpetuated during the collective persecution and incarceration that followed the outbreak of war. It argues that departures to Paris were prompted by the climate of repression in Britain, yet were also the result of other factors such as the commercial and editorial opportunities afforded British emigrants in the French capital, deep sympathy with French revolutionary politics and a broad sense of estrangement from British political culture. The article considers the centrality of first-hand witnessing and local political activism in shaping emigrants’ opinions of the Revolution and focuses on the crucial importance of collective action and solidarity between fellow emigrants once their continued presence in Paris began to be questioned. To regard the British emigrants as moderates, the article argues, is to drastically underestimate the degree of support they showed for radical initiatives in France, notably the drive towards greater popular involvement in law-making. Despite the diversity of political attitudes towards the ongoing Revolution harboured by British onlookers, many emigrants showed sustained commitment to the republican experiment during the years of emergency rule and shared a determination to correct the errors they believed were being disseminated by a hostile British press.

Migration from Britain to Paris was by no means a phenomenon which began with the French Revolution.¹ Yet the Revolution, and in particular the republican direction it took after August 1792, did stimulate a number of concentrated visits

¹ For the continuities between *ancien régime* migration and early revolutionary cross-Channel movement, see Michael Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship in Revolutionary France: The Treatment of Foreigners 1789-1799* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

to the French capital by British nationals of radical hue and played a part in the creation of a pro-revolutionary club called the Société des Amis des Droits de l'Homme by "English, Scots and Irish" residents of Paris at the turn of that year.² This emigrant association, whose beginnings can be traced back to gatherings in late November 1792 at White's Hotel, located in the passage des Petits Pères, near the Palais Royal, attracted between fifty and a hundred sympathisers.³ Its creation was both a celebratory gesture by foreign observers towards the establishment of the Republic and recent French military victories and an attempt to consolidate looser international ties already forged on French soil.⁴ The hotel where the society met was owned by the English entrepreneur Christopher White. His relatively new business venture thrived with the influx of English-speaking emigrants who met and dined together at White's on a weekly basis.⁵ It was from this location that many residents coordinated philanthropic initiatives, penned reactions to the events they witnessed, met to thrash out their views on the goings-on in Paris and wrote collective addresses to the French authorities. This article seeks to paint a broad picture of this associational culture in Paris, formalised in the wake of the republican turn, by first considering the reasons which prompted British men and women to take up residence in the French capital and gather at White's at this particular juncture.

² *Le Moniteur Universel*, 7 January 1793: "France. Commune de Paris. [...] Du 5 [janvier]. Des étrangers, pour la plupart Anglais, Ecossois 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, n° 7, passage des Petits-Pères."

³ The congratulatory address (AN C11/278/40) presented by the society in late November had fifty signatories, yet the number of affiliates was probably significantly larger. For further details, see Rachel Rogers, "White's Hotel: A Junction of British Radical Culture in Early 1790s Paris," *Caliban: French Journal of English Studies*, 33 (2013): 153-72.

⁴ A rationale for the society's creation was included in the announcement made in *Le Moniteur Universel*, 26 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 transportait 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."

⁵ In his deposition to the French authorities in August 1794, White suggested that he had initially set up a brasserie in Le Havre in 1786 before moving to Paris in 1790 to open a hotel and wine outlet which was frequented in the main by foreigners until mid-1793 (F7 4775 52 70-81).

It will go on to consider the experience of affiliates to the society with a particular emphasis on their involvement in a vibrant international political scene in Paris, the transformative power of first-hand witnessing and the primacy of collective endeavour and mutual aid in emigrant experience. It will also discuss the anxieties that emigrants’ presence in Paris provoked in their home country.

Repression, in differing forms, was a catalyst for British emigration to Paris in 1792. Sampson Perry and Thomas Paine were both indicted for libel under the provisions of the Royal Proclamation Against Seditious Writings, issued in May, and both faced prison terms if convicted. Perry had already spent time in jail over the course of 1791 and 1792 for his sustained criticism of the ruling authorities in his journalistic work. For both Perry and Paine – who was tried for libel *in absentia* in December 1792 – their flight to Paris was certainly voluntary, yet prompted by imminent trial, likely incarceration and, in Perry’s case, the censorship of his radical journal *The Argus*, the source of his livelihood and mouthpiece of his uncompromising political views.⁶ The prevailing climate of restriction on expression was foregrounded in radicals’ accounts of their departure and reiterated in publication projects on their return from France. John Oswald, for example, wrote of the “terror of the Pillory, the dread of vexatious prosecutions for libel” that were prevalent sentiments among reform-minded individuals in 1792 and may have induced some reformers to consider emigration.⁷ Paine, writing to the Home Secretary, Henry Dundas, during a short absence from his Paris residence in June 1793, used the success of American representative government to further indict the British government for its suppression of rational enquiry. Rather than presenting Britain’s lauded and historic mixed monarchy as the traditional beacon of parliamentary stability, he juxtaposed the mature American system with its “boyish” British equivalent:

This [the American administration] is a government that has nothing to fear. It needs no proclamation to deter the people from writing and reading. It needs no political superstition to support it; it was by encouraging discussion and rendering the press free upon all subjects of

⁶ For further discussion of Perry, see Rachel Rogers, “Self and Community in Radical Defence in the French Revolutionary Era: The Example of *Oppression!!! The Appeal of Captain Perry to the People of England (1795)*,” *Writing and Constructing the Self in Great Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. John Baker, Marion Leclair and Allan Ingram (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018) 228-47.

⁷ Quoted in David V. Erdman, *Commerce Des Lumières: John Oswald and the British in Paris in 1790-93* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986) 299.

government, that the principles of government became understood in America, and the people are now enjoying the present blessings under it.⁸

In a climate in which the written and published word were increasingly monitored and policed, pressure could be exerted on editors and polemicists to expatriate rather than to stand trial for seditious libel. Perry was “advised to withdraw” in order to raise funds for bail and avoid immediate incarceration.⁹ In *The Times* the following appeal was published: “It is earnestly recommended to Mad Tom that he should embark for France, and there be naturalised into the regular confusion of democracy.”¹⁰ Flight from British shores could however appear to indicate guilt or at least an absence of courage on the part of those who fled. As *The World* reported, in covering Perry’s emigration on 10 December 1792: “the Sampson of the Argus was found too weak to carry off the pillars of the Constitutional Fabric, although he made several ineffectual attempts.”¹¹ Emigration could therefore be held up as proof of the apparent weakness of the reform movement at a time when official anxiety at the circulation of radical ideas was at its height.

Yet the vast majority of British visitors to Paris in the post-1792 period were motivated less by the need to escape persecution than the desire to exploit political, journalistic or commercial opportunities in France, a country whose political experiments tallied with the reforming ideals of many. Although Perry’s emigration was an ostensible flight from trial, he had carefully crafted the terms of his residence in Paris in exploratory visits throughout October and November 1792. The spy Charles Ross informed his Home Office source in early October that “Captain Perry of the Argus is gone to France in order to establish Correspondents for his Paper,” and he was absent from Society for Constitutional Information meetings the following month.¹²

One element in John Oswald’s choice of French residence, as David Erdman notes, was the opportunity to establish an English-language newspaper in Paris

⁸ Thomas Paine, “To Mr Secretary Dundas,” 6 June 1793, *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: Citadel Press, 1945) 449, 451.

⁹ Sampson Perry, *Oppression!!! The Appeal of Captain Perry (Late Editor of the Argus,) to the People of England; Containing a Justification of His Principles and Conduct [...]. To which is Added, a Development of Some of the Mysteries of the Spy Trade [...]* (London: Citizen Lee, 1795) 8.

¹⁰ *The Times*, 12 July 1792, quoted in John Keane, *Tom Paine: A Political Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009) 337.

¹¹ *The World*, 10 December 1792.

¹² Charles Ross to Evan Nepean, 9 October 1792, TNA TS 11/965/3510/A2.

called *The Universal Patriot*.¹³ While neither of these publication projects reached fruition – *The Argus* being publicised but not circulated, *The Universal Patriot* never passing the prospectus stage – the outlets promised across the Channel were a crucial factor in prompting reformist members of the British lettered class to countenance emigration or at least a period of temporary residence. Perry remarked that “[i]t 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.”¹⁴ Such possibilities of relocation suggest that emigration could perpetuate and reinforce specific reforming initiatives begun prior to departure rather than lead to their interruption or dismantlement. It also hints at the connections maintained by emigrants who saw their residence in Paris as part of a continuum rather than a desperate flight from judicial pursuit.

Some British visitors arrived in Paris having accepted missions on behalf of friends or acquaintances in the revolutionary administration. This was the case with Mary Wollstonecraft, who worked on a report for the education committee under the new republican administration. Paine, though indicted for libel, also shrewdly calculated the timing of his flight, having already been elected as a deputy to the National Convention and selected to sit on the constitutional committee convened in October. He reiterated the importance of this appointment in prompting his decision to leave Britain in a letter to the Convention while imprisoned in the Luxembourg prison. In a thinly veiled attempt to reassure deputies of his loyalty to the Revolution and seek his own release, he reminded his readers that it was “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” that determined his continued residence (and therefore should exonerate him from suspicion and afford him his freedom).¹⁵ David Williams’s temporary sojourn in Paris was prompted by the offer extended to him by Jean-Marie Rolland and Jacques Pierre Brissot de Warville to provide advice on the

¹³ Erdman (113-15) details the circumstances surrounding the project to establish an English-language newspaper called the *Universal Patriot* in May 1790 and its intended role as a “cross-Channel companion to Brissot’s *Le Patriote français*” (114).

¹⁴ “To the Friends to Truth” [a quotation from a letter of Sampson Perry to his persecuted friends in London], *La Chronique du mois, ou les Cahiers patriotiques*, 7 January 1793, 80.

¹⁵ “To the French National Convention,” August 1794, AN F7/4774/61 Thomas Paine file. See also the transcription of this original letter in *Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 2:1339-41.

form of a new republican constitution. Other British observers arrived in France as part of delegations from British reforming societies mandated to deliver donations or congratulatory addresses. John Frost was a spokesman for the Society for Constitutional Information (SCI) who after accompanying Paine to France in mid-September, returned again in November with Joel Barlow to deliver an address to the Convention on the SCI's behalf, later remaining in Paris and signing up to the collective address penned by the members of the Société des Amis des Droits de l'Homme the same month.

The promise of productive outlets in France was an antidote to frustrated professional ambitions in Britain. Perry had been denied military advancement after service in the American revolutionary war – a snub he termed his “*military proscription*”¹⁶ – and Robert Merry had encountered difficulties in securing backing for his theatrical productions, which engaged with pro-revolutionary themes. For many emigrants – broadly aged between twenty and forty – one of the factors inducing them to leave British shores was the impossibility of social or professional ascension in Britain, where openings for those without landed wealth or standing, or from a Non-conformist background, were significantly curtailed. Some British residents of Paris – John Hurford Stone and Helen Maria Williams, for example – were Dissenting Unitarians who could not hope to achieve fulfillment within the Anglican establishment.

While some British emigrants had been faced with professional or social obstruction, most emigrating and non-emigrating reformers also shared a sense of estrangement from British political culture and a firm belief that the country has betrayed its revered reforming heritage. In a sonnet written while he was imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1794 awaiting trial for treason, John Thelwall expressed both nostalgia for imagined and idealised ancient freedom and dejection at the refusal of British people to struggle to throw off the shackles of their oppression:

AH! why, forgetful of her ancient fame,
Does Britain in lethargic fetters lie?¹⁷

Thomas Spence, who, like Thelwall, also remained in Britain, denounced the willingness of Bow-Street runners to meekly follow orders when arresting him

¹⁶ 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* (London: H.D. Symonds, 1796) 1:28.

¹⁷ John Thelwall, “Sonnet V: The Source of Slavery,” *Poems Written in Close Confinement in the Tower and Newgate, Under a Charge of High Treason* (London: Ridgway, 1795) 5.

for selling radical texts. He fumed, “What country am I in! Nature shudders at such instances of the depravity in the human race; and those despicable characters scarcely deserve the epithet of *human*, much less the animating title of Britons!”¹⁸ Partisans of reform, whether in Britain or France, railed against British collective amnesia of the radical heritage of Sidney and Hampden and denounced the widespread deference to the legacy of the settlement of 1688, which Charles Pigott, following Paine’s lead, described as “the despicable patchwork of a few addle-pated, whig noblemen.”¹⁹ John Oswald, a member of the Paris set and soldier in the French republican army, allied his criticism of British deference to 1688 with the perceived civic apathy of the British people:

Have you no better warrant for your liberty, than the gracious pleasure of an alien Prince, who granted your petition, and subscribed your BILL of RIGHTS? – Alas! these are puny pretensions to liberty; pretensions by which you can never merit the name of a Free People; an appellation which henceforward those only can claim who scorn to ground their constitution on any other basis but the natural and indefeasible RIGHTS of MAN.²⁰

For those arriving in Paris in 1792 it was the profound sense of alienation felt on the domestic front and the opportunities afforded them on French soil which held primacy in their decision to seek emigration. They also sought to embody in their emigration the civic energy that they believed citizens needed to display in order to prompt an overhaul of tired and oligarchic regimes. At the end of 1792 and the start of 1793, departures to France could be temporary and explorative and physical connections with Britain could be easily maintained. Helen Maria Williams, Robert Merry, John Frost, Sampson Perry and others continued to attend associational gatherings in Britain while resident in France, or visited family during their period abroad. Many, such as Thomas Christie, made frequent business trips back and forth. As Perry emphasised in his later account of his brief residence in Paris, circumstances drove him to “seek a temporary asylum in another country.”²¹ Such short-term stays were a specific feature of

¹⁸ Thomas Spence, *The Case of Thomas Spence, Bookseller* (London: T. Spence, 1792) 7.

¹⁹ Charles Pigott, *A Political Dictionary, Explaining the True Meaning of Words* (London: D.I. Eaton, 1795) 117-18.

²⁰ John Oswald, *Review of the Constitution of Great-Britain*, 3rd edn. (s.l.: s.n., 1793) 31-32.

²¹ Sampson Perry, *Prospectus of a New and Interesting Work, The Argus, or General Observer of the Moral, Political and Commercial World, To be Published on 27th October 1795* (London: H.D. Symonds, 1795) 3.

British departures to France in these years, one which attracted the attention of loyalist commentators and the government-aligned press.

Sympathy harboured by British reformers towards the republican direction of the Revolution, particularly after the outbreak of war between Britain and France in February 1793, did not fail to draw criticism. The terms used to describe British radical reformers in critical accounts – ‘Jacobin,’ ‘Republican,’ ‘Leveller’ – exaggerated radicals’ unity, and, as Michael Scrivener has noted in regard to depictions of British reformers more generally, endowed them with “foreign, non-British, especially Gallic qualities.”²² Taking up residence in the French capital only served to exacerbate such negative portrayals. In journalistic accounts, spy reports, court proceedings and letters, emphasis was placed on British emigrants’ propensity to cruelty, their “cold alienation,” conspiratorial nature and innate naivety. They were accused of having been “intoxicated” with liberty, and, by falling “prey to unhappy delusions” in the theatre of revolution, of having lost all claims to being arbiters of rational enquiry.²³ Contemporary accounts such as those of spy George Munro (Monro), who monitored the emigrant grouping at White’s Hotel and cast its members as a “party of conspirators,”²⁴ influenced views of British actors in the French Revolution until at least the late nineteenth century.²⁵

British emigrants’ residence in Paris and their apparently Catilinian disregard for rank generated alarm over the stability and immutability of the social structure itself. Some British visitors to Paris were in the process of repudiating a solidly Whig background and tentatively, or in some cases more forthrightly, considering the merits of a greater degree of popular involvement in law-making. Some were questioning or even rejecting the privileges of their

²² Michael Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall and Jacobin Writing* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001) 25.

²³ Anna Seward, Letter LXII, 17 January 1793, *Letters of Anna Seward: Written between the Years 1784 and 1807*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Constable, 1811) 209; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 61.1 (1791) 62; 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 ... and Continued from the Year 1793 to the Present Time*, vol. 25 (London, 1818) 1329.

²⁴ George Granville Leveson-Gower, Duke of Sutherland, *The Despatches of Earl Gower, English Ambassador at Paris from June 1790 to August 1792, to which are added The Despatches of Mr Lindsay and Mr Monro and The Diary of Viscount Palmerston [...]*, ed. Oscar Browning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1885) 260.

²⁵ For example, the chapter devoted to the emigrant society in John G. Alger’s *Englishmen in the French Revolution* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1889) 81-102, is entitled “Outlaws and Conspirators.”

social station. Robert Merry, the probable author of an account of the August Days written in Paris and published in London, 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 sacrificed the empty gewgaws of aristocracy to merit the most substantial and only noble distinctions of a *patriot* and a *philanthropist*.”²⁶ He added a commentary on popular intervention in government to his discussion of the levelling of social stations in his advice to the French constitutional committee, arguing the case for frequent deliberative primary assemblies as forums which could “familiarise the people with the ease of debating and make them more conscious of the extent of their duties and their own significance.”²⁷ Such views earned him a mention in the *Annual Register*, which noted that “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.”²⁸

Merry was not the only former Whig sympathiser whose period of residence in Paris heightened their support for more transformative social and political initiatives and thus drew the attention of observers at home. The spy Captain George Munro reported that at a meeting at White’s Hotel in November 1792, “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.”²⁹ Their actions may have been inspired by the decision taken by the National Convention at its inception to abolish titles, a move that fellow British resident Sampson Perry acknowledged in his account of the Revolution as proof that the Convention was “still more

²⁶ Anon. [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: H.D. Symonds, 1792) vii-viii.

²⁷ Robert Merry, *Réflexions politiques sur la nouvelle Constitution qui se prépare en France, adressées à la République* (Paris: Reyner, 1792) 8 (my translation): “D’ailleurs la fréquence des assemblées primaires habitue le peuple à une plus grande facilité dans ses délibérations, et lui fera mieux sentir l’étendue de ses obligations et sa propre importance.” For an account of Merry’s role in London radical politics, see Jon Mee, *Print, Publicity, and Popular Radicalism in the 1790s: The Laurel of Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) 113-30.

²⁸ Anon., “Memoirs of Robert Merry, Esq.; from the same,” *The Annual Register, or a View of History, Politics, and Literature, For the Year 1799* (London: Proprietors of *Dodley’s Annual Register*, 1801) 350.

²⁹ George Munro, 6 December 1792, TNA TS 11/959.

strongly imbued with the principle of equality than either of its predecessors.”³⁰ Viewed through the frame of loyalism in Britain, however, gestures such as those of Smith and Fitzgerald could easily be interpreted as attempts at “destroying the chain of subordination.”³¹ Detractors saw such readjustments as a threat to order, but also as a severing of bonds between the individual and their country, an ungrateful betrayal of birthright, particularly at a time of war. *The Monthly Review* reported that John Hurford Stone had managed to “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” in declaring his support for the French revolutionary armies.³²

Philipp Ziesche has posited that the Revolution was an opportunity for American resident Joel Barlow to radically redefine his political outlook, going from “defender of American class privilege to the spokesman of the illiterate European masses.”³³ The same can be said of a number of British emigrants whose experience of the Revolution triggered a progressive shift in their beliefs and loyalties, sometimes influenced by the opportunities afforded them in Paris to witness local political and civic activism at close quarters. Some historical scholarship has tended to emphasise the relative moderation of British spectators of the Revolution, citing as evidence their opposition to the execution of the king, tendency to rally to the Girondin faction and progressive abandonment of enthusiasm for the Revolution.³⁴ This account, however, dramatically understates

³⁰ Perry, *An Historical Sketch* 2: 265.

³¹ Seward 3:44 (Letter XVI, 12 December 1790).

³² Anon., “Art. 49. Copies of Original Letters recently written by Persons in Paris to Dr. Priestley in America [...]” *The Monthly Review*, 25 (1798): 350-51.

³³ Philipp Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots: Americans in Paris in the Age of Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010) 68.

³⁴ John Hurford Stone “totally identified himself with France and the Girondins,” according to Christina Bewley and David K. Bewley, *Gentleman Radical: A Life of John Horne Tooke, 1736-1812* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1998) 143-44. His partner Helen Maria Williams has been similarly characterised as “a warm adherent of the Girondist party” (P.W. Clayden, *The Early Life of Samuel Rogers* [London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1887] 77), and British and American admirers of the Revolution in general are described by Steven Blakemore as having adopted “a quasi-Girondist perspective” (*Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, and the Rewriting of the French Revolution* [London and Cranbury, NJ: Associate University Presses, 1997] 17). Such a view of British visitors to Paris is not restricted to the work of Anglo-American scholars. The French historians Albert Mathiez, Paul Gerbod and

the degree of support shown for the radical republican turn at the end of 1792, the acquiescence conceded towards an increased popular deliberative element in law-making in British depositions to the constitutional committee and even a certain willingness to rationalise and forgive the excesses of the Terror.

Many British residents retained a lasting faith in the grounding principles they saw as guiding the Revolution, even as they suffered under decrees against foreign nationals from countries at war with France.³⁵ A delegation of English, Irish and Scottish residents petitioned the French administration in September 1793 to prolong their “hospitality” and reiterated their support for the Revolution.³⁶ A number of British visitors expressed continued sympathy with the revolutionary cause, even after periods of incarceration in French jails. In some cases, such as that of Sampson Perry, British residents were willing to tolerate and accept the necessity of their own persecution in France, and saw it as a lesser evil than the judicial pursuits and informal harassment at the hands of loyalist associations they had been subjected to in Britain. For Perry, the persecutions he suffered in France were “passing clouds” in the larger process of revolutionary overhaul, which he saw as a necessary purge to engender democratic renewal.³⁷ He claimed “if the flame, the terrible flame which has raged with so much violence, has consumed much, it has not failed to purify that which it has left behind.”³⁸ The ingrained memory of oppression in Britain and the awe in which the revolutionary endeavour was held led some to rationalise the measures adopted against foreigners in France.

Jacques Godechot have all suggested that most members of the Anglo-American colony in Paris were affiliated to the Girondin party.

³⁵ In March 1793, foreign residents were required to obtain proof of their *civisme* from their local section in order to leave Paris, and local section committees held foreigners in greater suspicion. Landlords were required to identify foreign tenants occupying their premises and residents from abroad increasingly had to provide proof of their civic utility and loyalty to the regime. By August 1793, subjects of nations at war with France could be targeted for imprisonment, and on 9 October 1793 all British national were arrested and their property confiscated. On 25 December 1793 Thomas Paine and Anacharsis Cloots were expelled from the Convention and Paine narrowly escaped execution for his suspected Girondin sympathies after having voted for the exile rather than the execution of the king. Under the laws of 26-27 Germinal Year II (15-16 April 1794), foreign participation in political societies was outlawed and foreigners had to leave Paris and all frontier towns and ports.

³⁶ Archives Diplomatiques, Affaires Étrangères, Correspondance Anglaise, vol. 588, folio 1.

³⁷ Perry, *An Historical Sketch* 2: iii-iv.

³⁸ Perry, *Oppression!!!* 10.

The significance of this bold position in relation to prevailing reform opinion in Britain was notable. Attitudes of this kind may have been fuelled by British residents' heterogeneous ties while in Paris, and refusal to be allied with a political faction. This is well illustrated by a letter written by John Hurford Stone to his brother during the Terror in which he contended: "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."³⁹ Such tenacity in upholding a revolutionary ideal may also have stemmed from observation of the workings of local authority with the Parisian sections – which increased after March 1793 when foreign residents were more closely monitored – and attendance at international meetings where local representatives were invited to speak.⁴⁰ This engagement with local political organisation emerges from the depositions of British men and women incarcerated during the course of 1793. In petitioning for her husband's release from confinement in December 1793, Robert Smith's wife claimed that their arrival in France had been prompted by a desire to educate their children and live under a government which accorded with their principles. Smith's wife 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.⁴¹ Smith was not the only British resident to call upon a solid bedrock of pro-revolutionary conduct and firm acquaintances in local and national authority to supplement calls for safe passage or release from imprisonment.

Our understanding of the political affiliations of men and women connected with the pro-revolutionary society at White's Hotel needs to be readjusted to take into account the evidence of both sustained commitment to the republican experiment during the years of emergency rule as well as progressive disillusionment and political disengagement. David Williams's early enthusiasm waned as he followed the debates at close hand, to such an extent as to prompt Madame Roland to note "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."⁴² Williams and Henry Redhead Yorke both went back on their earlier support for the Revolution as they returned to Britain, later

³⁹ Howell 25:1226.

⁴⁰ George Munro reported on 17 December 1792 that "the society met yesterday to receive a brotherly kiss from the Municipality of the different sections, but few either of the society or the sections attended." Leveson-Gower 260.

⁴¹ AN F7 4775/20/3; the file is recorded under the name of Smyth.

⁴² Manon Roland, *An Appeal to Impartial Posterity*, Part 1 (London: Johnson, 1795) 41-42.

rewriting their involvement in revolutionary politics as the poet William Wordsworth did.⁴³ The physical confrontations and strained atmosphere which characterised gatherings at White’s Hotel in early 1793 testify to these divergences. Munro depicted a group riven by dissension, observing that the members were “jealous of one another, differing in opinions.” The proposal made by Thomas 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.”⁴⁴

Despite the diverging political sympathies among British expatriates, there was relative consensus on the view that the Revolution had been falsely reported in the British press. The writings of a number of British observers of events in Paris displayed a desire to correct what they considered mistaken versions of events peddled by newspapers, generating what Helen Maria Williams called “erroneous opinions in England.”⁴⁵ Presence at the scene of the Revolution was held up as a mark of authority and British writers often gave details of the precise channels through which they acquired information to emphasise the veracity of their accounts and “the authenticity of the intelligence.”⁴⁶ Eyewitness accounts were presented as a sensory experience, inaccessible to distant commentators. A desire to correct misinformation and provide an authoritative version of the revolution often stemmed from political sympathy. Merry stated his aim in writing a history of the August Days as being to allow his readers to “hear the other side” of the events, after it had received negative coverage in the government papers and loyalist tracts.⁴⁷ He also claimed that his direct access to the sources of news and presence at the scene allowed him to be more discerning in his opinion. For Wollstonecraft, presence was the only way to form a “just opinion” of events in France.⁴⁸

⁴³ F.M. Todd, “Wordsworth, Helen Maria Williams and France,” *Modern Language Review*, 43.4 (1948): 464. For a fuller consideration of the case of Wordsworth, see the special issue of *Litteraria Pragensia*, 27.54 (2017), *Wordsworth and France*, ed. David Duff, Marc Porée and Martin Procházka.

⁴⁴ George Munro to Lord Grenville, 27 December 1792, Leveson-Gower 268. See also Munro’s letters in TNA FO 27/40 Part 2.

⁴⁵ H.M. Williams, *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France, from the 31st of May 1793, Till the 28th of July 1794, and of the Scenes Which Have Passed in the Prisons of Paris* (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1796) 155-57.

⁴⁶ Paris, 24 October 1792, Howell 25:1298.

⁴⁷ *A Circumstantial History* 17.

⁴⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft to Everina Wollstonecraft, 10 March 1794, *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) 249.

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 a form open to amateurs and demanded 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. "The paradigm of the finished picture," contends Boime, "carries a conservative signification while only the crude approximations of the caricature and sketch maintain the integrity of the initiating impulse."⁴⁹ Choosing to sketch events was thus a way of subverting conservative views on political order and literary endeavour.

The title chosen by Sampson Perry for his lengthy review of the Revolution was *An Historical Sketch*, while Helen Maria Williams referred to herself as a "sketcher of history." 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 account of the development of the French national character since the early Revolution. Even in this text however, 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 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 produced in the following century. Writers often drew attention to the flaws in their testimonies and demanded the active participation of the reader. Perry acknowledged the 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,

⁴⁹ Albert Boime, "The Sketch and Caricature as Metaphors for the French Revolution," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 55.2 (1992): 258.

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.⁵⁰

The “great whole” that Perry thought would one day emerge was inaccessible to those writing from their partial viewpoints. As Wollstonecraft put it in her *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*, the Revolution had “almost rendered observation breathless.”⁵¹ British residents therefore provided eyewitness accounts of their time in Paris whose very form echoed their approbation of the experimental and dynamic nature of revolutionary change.

Roger Chartier has written that the Revolution offered the “illusion of a new departure,” and for many temporary British residents of Paris in the early Republic there was undoubtedly a sense of rebirth, both in the political experiments underway and in their manner of encountering them or rendering them in print.⁵² For many, the Revolution was synonymous with novelty. Wollstonecraft noted the departure from linear history that the Revolution appeared to be enacting, exclaiming that “the world is to be done over anew!”⁵³ George Edwards dwelled on the prospect of “regeneration” created by the republican experiment in France.⁵⁴ Innovation and experimentation in political design went concurrently with individual reawakening. For Sampson Perry, his experience in France signalled a conscious overturning of the past and an opportunity to define himself afresh: “I declare myself beginning the world again,” he wrote as he meditated on his experiences after his return to England.⁵⁵ It is this quality of the revolutionary experience – the opportunity of “working through” or “transcending” one’s past – that, according to Marshall Brown,

⁵⁰ Perry, *An Historical Sketch* 1:1.

⁵¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution and the Effect It Has Produced in Europe, The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet M. Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. (London: Pickering, 1989) 6:42.

⁵² Roger Chartier, *Les origines culturelles de la Révolution française* (Paris: Seuil, 1991) 28-29. My translation.

⁵³ Mary Wollstonecraft to Gilbert Imlay, 1 January 1794, *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* 238.

⁵⁴ George Edwards, *The Royal and Constitutional Regeneration of Great Britain* (London: Debrett, 1790).

⁵⁵ Perry, *Prospectus* 4.

connects the French Revolution with Romanticism, which he defines as a “great awakening” rather than a dreaming.⁵⁶

While residence in Paris could result in meditations on the self and one’s place in the world, it could also prompt re-engagement with the broader community, the reactivation of social ties and the nurturing of new partnerships. A number of British residents of Paris who joined the Société des Amis des Droits de l’Homme had been active in the Society for Constitutional Information in London and perpetuated this reforming culture abroad. In Paris, British reformers joined forces with other international groups, in particular cultivating links with American visitors and Irish radicals. Joint residence in Paris bred stronger ties between British and Irish reformers on French soil than those achieved domestically, in part as a result of the particular nature of foreign residence and the possibilities extended to foreign visitors to experiment with more abstract blueprints for reform. A commitment to universalism was perpetuated for longer, and common associational and commercial activities – as well as shared language and some common perceptions of domestic repression – heightened affinities between the different national groupings of Ireland and Britain.⁵⁷ In November 1792, the union between the French republic and “the English, Scottish and Irish nations” was celebrated in an address to the French Convention, and in September 1793 a deposition was placed “in the name of our English, Irish and Scottish brothers resident in Paris and its outskirts, who, like ourselves, hold the principles of liberty dear” and who were suffering under the decrees against foreigners.⁵⁸

Common experience of persecution in France fostered strong bonds and encouraged mutual aid between international residents. Under the decrees of late 1793 British nationals could have their property confiscated and be subject to incarceration. John Hurford Stone informed his brother that he had “shared with my imprisoned countrymen my own money, till I have none left” and complained in April 1794 that he was without resources having “advanced” money to struggling fellow Britons.⁵⁹ Robert Merry attempted to secure passports out of

⁵⁶ Marshall Brown, “Romanticism and Enlightenment,” *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 25-47.

⁵⁷ See Rachel Rogers, “The Society of the Friends of the Rights of Man, 1792-94: British and Irish Radical Conjunctions in Republican Paris,” *La Révolution française: Cahiers de l’Institut d’histoire de la Révolution française*, 11 (2016), available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/Irf/1629>.

⁵⁸ The two addresses are held at AN C11/278/40 and Archives Diplomatiques, Affaires Étrangères, Correspondance Anglaise, vol. 588, folio 1 respectively.

⁵⁹ Howell 25: 1225.

the country for British nationals caught at Calais in mid-1793 and “without any means and in absolute destitution.”⁶⁰ Christopher White took on legal guardianship of fellow British resident Nicholas Joyce’s children after the latter died in prison and others helped to petition for the release of friends, provide character references or secure more lenient treatment by the authorities.⁶¹

Joint residence in Paris could also prompt entrepreneurial initiatives which tallied with a certain political stance. While British residents expediently exploited the opportunities which opened up under revolutionary government – by acquiring property available at low prices after the flight of émigrés for instance – they allied their commercial projects with political activism. John Hurford Stone made a point of selecting radical texts for publication from his printing press in Paris, while speculators Robert Rayment and James Gamble also devoted themselves to political causes, coordinating an initiative to raise funds for the widows and children of the victims of the Tuilleries assault.⁶² 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 organization and running of the Bank of England. Yet by late 1792, he was also actively involved in the Société des Amis des Droits de l’Homme and had established a network of acquaintances in the revolutionary administration and local sections. In raising funds after the August Days, Rayment and Gamble alerted their entourage to their support for the popular challenge to monarchical authority while at the same time sustaining their commercial and banking enterprises which had brought them to Paris in the first place. Yet undoubtedly the particular circumstances governing British residence in wartime Paris prompted anxiety and discord. Business deals went sour – Hurford Stone and

⁶⁰ AN F7/4412 contains Merry’s petition for a passport to Jacques-Louis David: “Si vous pourrez procurer un décret que la passage ici à Douvres soit ouverte pour les gens de sortir sans que personne paït entier, vous rendrai une très grande service à un grand nombre des malheureuses Anglois qui sont ici sans ressource et absolument dans la misère.”

⁶¹ Details of the plight of Joyce’s children are mentioned in documents related to “Christophe White, Nicholas Joyce et leurs familles” (F7 4775 52 70-81). In a testimony to the Comité de sûreté générale, White said that his friend Joyce had left three daughters and a son, of whom the oldest was only fourteen and who he had taken responsibility for in the absence of any other “friend” and despite having had all his financial resources confiscated.

⁶² The offering to suffering families is detailed in Rayment’s prison file, AN F7/4774/88.

Thomas Christie fell out over a failed speculative project – and British residents came to blows over political disputes, a far cry from the “happy circle” gathered around Paine that his friend Thomas Clio Rickman had documented.⁶³

What appears to have united many of those who ended up taking up their place in the international community in Paris was entrenched opposition to British political culture, sometimes resulting in accusations of seditious libel, broad ideological affinity with the reforming endeavours across the Channel and an impossibility of achieving social or professional standing within their home country. Sustained political opposition manifested in active membership of radical reform societies and openings for commercial speculation anchored in a Dissenting tradition also guided such choices. This sense of domestic estrangement had repercussions on reactions to life in revolutionary France and guided emigrants’ commentary on the Revolution. Moncure Conway summed up the fate of the British emigrant during the French Revolution as being that of the “man without a country.”⁶⁴ Yet while persecution on both sides of the Channel was a common factor in British radical experience, the British community in the French capital was also anchored in a network of rational exchange which transcended national borders and afforded men and women opportunities to redefine their careers and political views through the prism of the Revolution. While some returned from France to celebrate the political stability of Britain, others remained resident in France or returned home only to seek refuge on American shores or continue their critical commentary on British political life in more covert and private ways. Joint residence did not breed concurrence in politics but it did engender a certain liberty to entertain new possibilities of reform and allow residents to claim a unique authority for their portraits of the events they had witnessed at first hand.

⁶³ Thomas Clio Rickman, *The Life of Thomas Paine* (London: Rickman, 1819) 135.

⁶⁴ Moncure D. Conway (ed.), *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. 3 (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1899) xiii.