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"The definition of a virtuous man": British Radicals' Views of Citizens and Citizenship in the French Revolutionary Era

*"La définition d'un homme vertueux" : l'opinion des radicaux britanniques sur
les citoyens et la citoyenneté lors de la Révolution française*

Rachel Rogers

Introduction

- 1 At the start of the 1790s, both the American and French Revolutions put the relationship between the state and its citizens at the forefront of international political debate. Both revolutions, while opposed by the governing authorities in Britain, gained some currency among moderate and radical reformers in Britain, many of whom made clear their desire to emulate these models. Yet by the outbreak of the Anglo-French war in February 1793, discussions in reforming circles seem to have shifted away from the relationship between the individual and the state, to the moral advances needed to become a citizen in the first place. Margaret Jacob has suggested that *"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."*¹ In this article, I would like to put this morality turn into the very specific context of the mid-1790s when a complex set of circumstances, tied up with the French Revolution, guided the terms of debate over citizenship. Radical reformers were ambivalent about the continued relevance of the French model for the British reform movement and this equivocalness came across in discussions taking place on citizenship. Firstly, radicals recognised that the political and diplomatic circumstances no longer allowed for a debate over rights and institutional reform to take place without infringement. They consequently tempered the tenor of their calls for an overhaul of

Parliament and began to focus more keenly on individual moral regeneration. Radicals were also faced with the widespread transformation in attitudes towards the French Revolution in society at large and the dominance of the loyalist or "*Church and King*" movements, whose members often brought the moral rectitude of pro-reform activists into question. Radicals were compelled not only to rein in their calls for reform, but also to defend themselves against charges of moral degeneracy. Yet, these pragmatic considerations aside, there may have been some disillusionment, in the wake of the Terror in France and what was widely seen as both the radicalisation and the deterioration of the Revolution, about the capacity of citizens groomed under monarchical rule to live up to the standards of virtue needed in reformed states. Although not all radical reformers renounced the gains of the French Revolution, for a significant number it had shown that civil and political change did not necessarily engender virtuous citizenship. Finally, it is important to recognise that calling for moral regeneration had itself an ambiguous heritage which radicals were aware of. For some, it could still echo the French Revolution, which was, as Michael Rapport has put it, "*a moral as well as a political transformation which would affect all humanity*," while for others it harked back to the patriot martyrs of the British republican tradition.² Moral reform did not have a clear lineage and this ambiguity may well have been understood and actively exploited by radical reformers trying to negotiate their own place in the political landscape of the 1790s.³

- 2 In the 1789 version of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, drafted in the aftermath of the fall of the Bastille in France, natural and citizenship rights were intertwined, and allegiance to the nation was less important than adherence to natural law. This universal definition of civic engagement inspired many British reformers to see in the French Revolution the establishment of a type of citizenship applicable more widely in the European context which transcended national frontiers. The French National Assembly's decision to grant citizenship status to such foreigners as Thomas Paine, William Wilberforce and Jeremy Bentham was seen as proof that the Revolution had defined membership of a community according to the dictates of natural right rather than nationality.⁴ 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.⁵ British reformer Henry Yorke wrote in 1793:

When the rights of human nature are not respected, those of the citizen are gradually disregarded. Yet the love of our country is subordinate to that of humanity [...]. Benevolence is of no country, but embraces within the wide circle of her arms, from lake Huron to the wall of China, the brotherhood of the human race.

- 3 "*Universal benevolence*", compassion towards one's fellow men, was seen as one way of engendering public responsibility and virtue. Radicals could refer to themselves as "*citizens of the world*" or "*international patriots*", both titles hinting at the importance they placed on membership of a community based on values and rights rather than birth place. The discussion following 1789 was largely about recovering or obtaining rights – rights to stand for public office, rights to take part in electing representatives, rights to have a say in approving or disapproving laws. Parliament, seen as corrupt, unrepresentative and dominated by a closed, oligarchic elite, was the chief body in need of reform.⁷ Yet by 1793, there seems to have been, if not an abandonment of calls for

political and constitutional change, at least the emergence of a powerful strain of argument which insisted on the individual strides needed to become a citizen in the first place, something which British people needed to be reminded of and educated in. This was profoundly linked to the context of and reactions to the French Revolution.

Citizenship, virtue and community

- 4 Joseph Gerrald was a British reformer who had been involved in reform societies, finally ending up as a member of the working men's London Corresponding Society, where he got involved in the organisation of the British Conventions in Edinburgh, in late 1793.⁸ The Conventions were the culmination of efforts by members of the London Corresponding Society to gather together a democratically-elected body which could advise the country on how to reform Parliament from the outside. The aims – subversive or peaceful, revolutionary or advisory – were debated at length in the trials for sedition which followed the breaking up of the meeting and arrest of its organisers, among whom was Gerrald. Gerrald wrote a manifesto entitled *A Convention the Only Means of Saving Us From Ruin in a Letter addressed to the People of England* in 1793. One aspect of his work, alluded to in the second part of the title, is his call for greater activism on the part of his fellow countrymen. He chastises the apathetic citizen who had not come out forcefully enough against the war between France and England, and he saw individual lethargy and withdrawal from public engagement as at the root of the problems afflicting the country. He wrote:

It is surely our duty, as good men and useful citizens, seriously to consider, what is the object for which we are fighting, and on what principle of justice we can engage in the conflict [...] What have I to do with politics? Nothing. From this important question, my countrymen, so weakly and wickedly answered, have arisen all the evils which have afflicted England through a long succession of ages. This is the fountain, from which not only waters of bitterness, but rivers of blood have flowed. – Did you ever doubt what connection you had with morals and virtue? And yet, what are politics, but that wide system of duties which nation owes to nation? Politics are to nations, what morals are to individuals.⁹

- 5 The problems blighting the country, rather than being the consequence of an unrepresentative parliament and a flawed or non-existent constitution, stemmed from individual political disengagement. The tract can in itself be seen as a model of useful citizenship, challenging and analysing actions that had been imposed without consultation or consent. The very act of writing and producing a critical text was an example of what Gerrald and others saw as the duties of a citizen. In the tract, Gerrald performs these duties and guides his "*fellow citizens*" in their thinking on the entry into war with France. He questions his readers, asks them to think and reflect on the actions of their government: "*Of what nature, I would ask you, Fellow Citizens, do you think is the government proposed? [...] Now mark, with attention, the contradictions which have taken place.*"¹⁰ The author is at once a virtuous citizen, actively engaging in public scrutiny of political decisions, and a guide, encouraging his countrymen to adopt behaviour appropriate for an enlightened citizenry.
- 6 Henry Yorke, fellow reformer and member of the London Corresponding Society, called for greater public activism in his *These are the times that try men's souls! A letter to John Frost a prisoner in Newgate*, also written in 1793, just after his return from France. Yorke, borrowing from Thomas Paine's famous turn of phrase in *The American Crisis* (1776), was

addressing his fellow radical, John Frost, who, like Yorke, had recently returned to Britain after a period within the British radical community in Paris, only to be jailed following his indictment for previous charges of seditious libel.¹¹ Although his "*letter*" is ostensibly directed at his fellow reformer, Yorke also takes the opportunity to chastise his countrymen for failing to challenge and scrutinise their own government:

Tame as priests and tyrants have made mankind, they will not be long seduced into a belief that harsh and violent measures are indispensably necessary to the support of a legitimate and honest government [...] when the people discover what may be done and reason by what has been done during hard and jealous times under this pretence, they will arouse from the torpid slumber of servility.¹²

- 7 For Yorke, the people had accepted the "*subversion of their civil liberties*" and were held "*in awe*" by governments. Yorke rebuked his fellow citizens for failing to challenge the "*humble dependence*" in which they were held, which had allowed an oppressive government to remain in place.¹³ Yorke gave his own definition of the citizen who would be "*a virtuous man suffering and struggling with afflictions*" who would not "hesitate to sacrifice all personal considerations to the common good".¹⁴ Self-sacrifice and the capacity to relegate personal interests to those of the general good were seen as key qualities of the citizen, virtues which, as I will suggest later, had an ambiguous lineage, invoking a very British tradition of protest but also implicitly echoing the changes underway in the French Revolution.
- 8 Virtue was also central to citizenship in Charles Pigott's *A Political Dictionary: explaining the true meaning of words*, published in 1795. Pigott, a reformer from the gentry, was seen as having abandoned his social class in associating with the LCS and the radical reform movement. He defined the term as follows: "*Citizen - the most honorable of titles; the definition of a virtuous man.*"¹⁵ Virtue and citizenship were therefore inextricably linked, the former being the very epitome of what a citizen should be and characterized by the ability to put the community and the common good before the interests of the self.
- 9 For radicals, writing in the first years of the war with France, citizenship was about the connections that existed between people. Gerrald, in the dock on a charge of sedition, suggested that "*the word citizen is a term of peace, and denotes that relationship in which we stand to each other, as members of the same community, for the performance of our civil duties.*"¹⁶ Sampson Perry, writing his self-defensive tract *Oppression!!!* In 1795 from Newgate, also meditated on the notion of community and an individual's commitment to the public interest, regretting his own exclusion from the body of his fellow citizens through his penalty of outlawry.¹⁷ Citizenship was therefore about private virtue, but also about the responsibilities private individuals had in relation to one another, in particular in the carrying out of public functions. This is something that William Godwin touched upon in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). Godwin, despite being skeptical about the radical reform movement and not concerned with the structures of public office, also saw virtue as on a par with selflessness:

The system of disinterested benevolence proves to us, that it is possible to be virtuous, and not merely to talk of virtue; that all which has been said by philosophers and moralists respecting impartial justice is not an unmeaning rant; and that, when we call upon mankind to divest themselves of selfish and personal considerations, we call upon them for something which they are able to practise.¹⁸
- 10 Godwin does not directly engage with the issue of the duties of or definition of citizenship, but his view of virtue includes the requirement of selflessness and self-

sacrifice, here in Godwin's terms an essential facet of life in a community, but also seen as crucial to radical reformers in the exercise of citizenship.

- 11 John Thelwall, another LCS activist and prominent reformer in the 1790s, lamented the servility of his countrymen in a poem written from Newgate jail, while he was awaiting trial for high treason:

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".¹⁹

- 12 As in the cases cited earlier, it is not entirely clear whether Thelwall was critical of his fellow countrymen for refusing to rise up against their servile station, or whether such lethargy and degeneracy were seen as the result of an unreformed constitutional and political framework, in other words the fault of the regime rather than the individuals who lived under its flawed rules. Yet what is common to these texts, all published between 1793 and 1795, the first, very contested, years of the war with France, is the association of citizenship with virtue, and the ensuing definition of virtue as being less about private conduct, acting in a manner beyond moral reproof, than about brotherhood. To be a citizen was to demonstrate benevolence, to refuse public lethargy and to sacrifice individual interest to the common good.

The citizenship debate in the context of the French revolution

- 13 Margaret Jacob has argued that *"by the 1790s radicals were asking themselves: if the democratic republic had become the ideal, how would men and women conduct themselves in such an imagined place? [...] The language of morality and the language of political reform became inextricably united."*²⁰ What I would like to add to Jacob's idea is that this readjustment occurred in a very precise and rapidly changing context which had a considerable impact on what was said and how. Repression at home, a strong spirit of loyalism in British society at large, changing reactions to the French Revolution and the increasingly nationally-specific definition of French citizenship all inflected British radical thinking in the mid 1790s.
- 14 The above-cited texts were penned during a period of state repression against reform activism. Henry Yorke was writing after having been indicted for sedition, Gerrald spoke from the dock, on trial for sedition, Pigott was writing from Newgate jail, behind bars for seditious libel and John Thelwall's sonnets were written from the Tower of London, where he was awaiting trial for high treason. During these years therefore, radical activists began to draw back from calling for precise political and constitutional reform, as such demands could smack of sympathy with the French Revolution. William Pitt's government had intensified measures against the reform movement from late 1792, bringing writers, editors, publishers and booksellers to trial for seditious libel. The Royal Proclamation of May 1792 specifically targeted radical activists, famously used to bring Thomas Paine and many of his publishers and booksellers to trial. By 1793, calls for constitutional change, parliamentary reform or the establishment of voting rights could

lead to an individual's arrest and, if in Scotland, trial for sedition, punishable by transportation, in England high treason, punishable by death. The use of the term "citizen", in this context, became increasingly politically loaded. At Joseph Gerrald's trial for sedition in Edinburgh in March 1794, the prosecution argued that the British Convention had been modelled on the forms of political organisation enacted during the French Revolution. The leaders were accused of attempting to create a government in waiting, which was intent on challenging the legitimate authority of the Crown and Parliament. Proof was to be found in the employment of words such as "Convention", "Citizen" and "Section" by members of the London Corresponding Society. Spies, working on behalf of the government, testified in court to members' using the word "citizen" to address each other. Such language was drawn on by the prosecution to confirm the convenors' treasonable intent.²¹

- 15 Government agents identified the same tendency to employ the term "citizen" within parallel radical clubs and networks. Government spy Captain Munro, monitoring a gathering of British radicals exiled in Paris who had formed a pro-revolutionary club, wrote to the British Home Office: "*After 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.*"²² What was at stake was the very stability of the social hierarchy itself, under threat from the socially equalising initiatives of certain reformers. Members of the British radical club in Paris, many of whom had been active members of the Society for Constitutional Information in London before their departure, openly used the title of "citizen" in their private correspondence, provoking the ire of the ruling authorities despite the fact that such labels were not necessarily considered subversive. Radicals may have seen themselves as simply emulating what had become widespread standard procedure in naming practice in France. Lord Edward Fitzgerald signed off a letter to his mother written during his stay in Paris with "*Le citoyen Edouard Fitzgerald.*"²³ The spectre of titled men casting off the markers of social rank and adopting the levelling label of "citizen" was alarming, however, for a British elite whose authority was sustained by a strict division of power between those with and those without property qualifications. Such anxiety emerged in the correspondence of Lord Auckland a government emissary in Paris. Writing to William Pitt in November 1794 Auckland worried that the courage of the French revolutionary armies would encourage the lower and middle classes to join ranks: "*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.*"²⁴ There was concern about the potential of a cross-class convergence in reaction to the increasing place of the people in French political and civil life and the way in which the newly democratised definition of citizenship in France could impact on the nature of the social community in Britain.
- 16 The repressive context of 1790s Britain therefore shaped what could be said about citizenship and the lengths that British activists were willing to go in demanding calls for citizenship rights. The employment of the term "citizen" by radicals, seen as emulation of the new norms of address across the Channel, or expression of admiration for their revolutionary actions, became synonymous with subversive intent and proof of treason. Reformers, if they wanted to avoid harassment, arrest or worse, had to alter the terms in which they called for reform. This may be one reason why reformers seem to have begun to associate citizenship less with individual rights, conferred by governments, than with a certain type of moral conduct and a way of describing social relations between different

members of a community. Reformers interested in these issues also had to take into account the prevailing mood of the nation which was, by 1793, as Anna Seward wrote, one of loyalty to the king and the existing constitution. Seward observed: "*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 orders of British society.*"²⁵ Though Seward's consensual vision, attesting to unity across the country, was exaggerated, it was perhaps relatively representative of the mood of the nation at the outbreak of war. Loyalist associations encountered success, burning effigies of Thomas Paine in front of large crowds and recapturing the term "citizen" for their own ends. At a meeting of the Loyal Britons association in Lambeth in December 1793, the term "Brother Citizens" was employed in the minutes to describe the society's own followers, the vast majority of whom would have vigorously opposed the aims of radical activism.²⁶ Concurrent with this backlash, there was also ridicule. As William Playfair, recounting the events of the French Revolution from a loyalist position, wrote in 1796: "*Doctors were now called officers of health; Sir and You were changed for citizen.*"²⁷ Playfair went on, "*The miserable French slave, who thinks himself a free citizen, does not know who his masters are. He dares not complain, because everyone around him considers that their miseries are the effects of freedom and philosophy.*"²⁸ New names had been invented to mislead the ordinary people but also symbolised the irrationality and absurdity of revolutionary innovation.

- 17 Reformers therefore were bound to adapt their own calls for change, in the light of the very critical and aggressive responses of loyalist groupings to reform agendas, in particular the various branches of the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers.²⁹ They were also perhaps attempting to revise the widely disseminated portrait of radical reformers as deviants whose moral adequacy had been severely called into question by their admiration for the French Revolution. Caricature artists, pamphleteers and loyalist propagandists depicted radicals in various visual and written media as murderous, degenerate, cowardly and idle, borrowing much of the imagery that had been used to denounce the French revolutionaries themselves in contemporary accounts. Focusing on moral regeneration therefore, highlighting the rectitude and irreproachability of reformers and calling for virtue as a prerequisite for citizenship may have been one way of countering the accusations of debauchery levelled at radicals by critics of the reform movement.³⁰ What is important to stress however, is that radicals did not simply reproduce the imagery of loyalism, with its emphasis on hierarchy, stability and property, but placed much greater emphasis on an alternative moral code, one which brought to the fore virtues of self-sacrifice, community and public activism, virtues much closer to both classical definitions of citizenship but also with significant crossovers with some of the principles at the heart of the French Revolution.
- 18 It was not only developments in the political landscape in Britain which may have encouraged British radicals to adapt the terms in which they couched their definitions of citizenship. The notion of universal rights whereby all men, whatever their nationality, could claim to be part of the French experiment, had been shaken by the increasingly narrow definition of citizenship in France. On 26th August 1792, a long list of foreigners had been made French citizens by the National Assembly in a cleverly conceived diplomatic gesture timed as war raged with Austria and Prussia and with France in desperate need of international sympathy. Yet by mid to late 1793, this wide definition of citizenship had considerably narrowed. The war with Britain and other monarchical

states led the revolutionaries to redefine citizenship along national rather than moral lines. The Jacobin constitution, put forward in June 1793, had much greater democratic reach but narrowed the scope for the measure of open citizenship favoured by the Marquis de Condorcet and foreign revolutionaries such as Joel Barlow.³¹ The Law of Suspects of September 1793 was the crowning legislation which allowed foreign nationals resident in France to be rounded up and put in jail, no matter their allegiance to the tenets of the Revolution. The citizen was henceforth a French national and as William Brubaker has put it:

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.³²

- 19 British radicals, resident in Paris at the time of the legislation, wrote of their incarceration and identified the cause as being their nationality, as citizens of countries at war with France. Their experience of captivity however did not automatically lead to their renunciation of the terms on which the Revolution had been carried out in its earlier stages or the future potential of the Revolution to provide an example to other nations. Although Sampson Perry did not deny the excesses that took place during the radical phase of the Revolution, he still considered the events of France as having the potential to create a new source of happiness through the establishment of freedom:

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.³³

- 20 Perry's dismissal of the Terror as mere "*passing clouds*" is admittedly one of the rare phlegmatic accounts of the Revolution's more radical departures from among British commentators, yet the example of Perry is not isolated and many British residents, some eyewitnesses of the Revolution, others distant observers, did continue to harbour admiration for the underlying goals of the Revolution.

- 21 The diplomatic circumstances of the Anglo-French war, which had broken out on 1st February 1793, meant that calls for political reform, which could be perceived as drawing on and condoning the experiments taking place in France, had to be tempered. Yet there may be reason to suggest that the prevalence of the discourse of "virtue" over political rights may not have been simply a pragmatic reaction to the changing political context. Gerrald and Pigott's definitions might actually say something about the genuine disillusionment felt by some reformers at the failure of the French Revolution to bring about a fundamental shift in the individual's relationship to his fellow citizens and the state and the lack of optimism inspired by a view of the state of the British citizenry. Mary Wollstonecraft published her *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* during the Terror in 1794 in which she denounced the failure of the Revolution to bring about a change in the moral fabric of the country and engender virtuous conduct among both the ordinary people and their political leaders:

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! ³⁴

- 22 For Wollstonecraft, who, though analysing the early Revolution in her account, was writing as an eye-witness observer of the radical phase of the Revolution and the Terror, the failings of the Revolution were due to the haste with which changes had been brought about 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, demanding active and responsible citizenship when the country as a whole was not equipped. Not all radical reformers shared Wollstonecraft's pessimistic view of the French people, Sampson Perry believed the ordinary citizens to be "*conciliating and kind*", the Terror having "*purified*" the French populace.³⁵ Yet for many British analysts of the French Revolution, moral improvement still needed to be achieved and was a prerequisite for the conferral of rights and any form of political reform.

Citizenship and the ambivalence of "virtue"

- 23 To sum up therefore, defining citizenship by reference to individual virtue rather than rights conferred by the state may have been one way of adapting to the narrowing scope for reform discussion in the wartime period. It may also have been an acknowledgement that the majority of the British population had rallied to the defence of the king and constitution and were therefore an unsympathetic audience. Calls for reform smacked of revolutionary plotting, sedition and treason. There may also have been some quite genuine disillusionment among reformers as to the capacity of their fellow countrymen to fulfil the duties of citizenship. The French Revolution had, for some, shown that the behavior required of citizens was not automatically acquired with the conferral of rights. Yet there is also something important to say about the ambiguous heritage of the notion of the virtuous citizen. While insisting on "moral improvement" placed the emphasis more on the personal transformation needed to be a citizen rather than the flaws inherent in the British constitutional and representative system, such calls were not necessarily politically-neutral. Not only was the radical definition of virtue, with its emphasis on collective effort, self-sacrifice and the pursuit of the common good, very different from the loyalist one as mentioned above, but by foregrounding virtue, radicals made explicit connections with Britain's own revolutionary heritage, a heritage that was much more politically acceptable in the climate of 1793-1795. Talk of "patriotism" and "virtue" could invoke a nationally-specific, and much less contested chapter of experience, that of the British patriot-martyrs of the late seventeenth century, national figures who, as the war continued, had much more resonance among reformers (and the audience they were attempting to reach) than the equivocal actors of the French Revolution. Gerrald celebrated the legacy of Algernon Sidney, who he described as the archetype of the self-sacrificing man and Yorke invoked the memory of "the virtuous Russell". Such allusions were much more acceptable to a British audience who saw in these figures heroes of the Glorious Revolution.³⁶
- 24 Yet, as both radicals and their opponents were keenly aware of, virtue had ambiguous connections and could conjure up, not only private moral improvement or the British republican heritage, but also the more contentious aspects of the French Revolution. In February 1794, Robespierre at the head of the *Comité de Salut Public*, had delivered his

famous "Republic of Virtue" speech in which he articulated the interdependence of terror and virtue, one being unrealisable without the other, essentially justifying the heightened attempts to rid France of its internal and external enemies.³⁷ The insistence on moral renewal also harked back to what the French revolutionaries had accused the British populace of after the entry into war in 1793: "liberticide", apathy and the inability to rise up against oppressors when the opportunity – in this case a foreign war – arose. The definition of the "citizen" as a term of moral value, representing the thinking, vocal, questioning individual rather than the servile follower was inherited in part from French revolutionaries who had, as Sophie Wahnich has shown, pitted civilized man (the citizen) against uncivilized man (the servile subject) rather than the national against the foreigner, at least in the early stages of the Revolution.³⁸ This idea had found echo at an annual dinner of the Revolution Society on 16th November 1792, when diners toasted the "armed citizen" to the detriment of the "armed slave".³⁹ Morality, whether acted out through the terrible virtue of Saint Just and Robespierre, the rectitude and courage of the members of the first National Assembly, or the stark justice and humanity of the Parisian people, could have a significantly French tone.

Conclusion

- 25 Both James Epstein and Mark Philp have shown how ambiguity in the intellectual lineage of words and ideas was used by reformers to test the boundaries of what could and could not be said in an era during which words were heavily policed. In their 2009 article, "Playing at Revolution: British 'Jacobin' Performance," David Karr and Epstein argued that:

[O]n one level, adopting the Jacobin label was, as Thelwall indicated, to accept the stigma foisted on radicals by their enemies. But on another level, the restrictions placed on the movement and ideological ambiguities within democratic political culture more generally encouraged radicals to explore, to gesture towards Jacobin allegiance, to ply outside the lines of safe formality.⁴⁰
- 26 Reformers therefore were aware of the problematic nature of the term Jacobin and may have appropriated it and employed it to enact their own defiance in the face of ministerial repression. Mark Philp has also argued that the use of the term "citizen" in LCS circles over the course of 1793 and 1794 was a form of active defiance among radicals towards the British government as war broke out with France. It was also testimony to the international character of radical reform in the era and the pervasive influence of France and the Revolution. Yet for Philp, the use of French language and symbolism was more rhetorical than a true gauge of political belief.⁴¹ In the same way as the use of words with French connotations, such as "citizen", "convention" or "section" could be a way of showing defiance in the face of the widespread clampdown on reform activity in Britain, so the wedding of citizenship with "virtue" could have been a way for reformers to hint at their continued admiration for some of the gains of the French Revolution without openly calling for reform based on the French model. Whether the "virtuous citizen" was the one groomed in the moral rigour and transparency of the French Revolution or the self-sacrificing but moderate hero of Britain's own revolutionary heritage was left open to interpretation.
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1. Margaret Jacob, "Sociability and the International Republican Conversation", p. 25 in Gilliam Russell & Clare Tuite (eds.), *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002).

2. Michael Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship in Revolutionary France: The Treatment of Foreigners 1789-1799* (Oxford, Clarendon, 2000), pp. 112-13.

3. This argument, on the ambivalence of radical discourse, draws on the work of James Epstein, David Karr and Mark Philp and will be discussed in more detail towards the end of this essay.

4. 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.

5. 23rd August 1792, *Le Moniteur Universel*, vol. 13, pp. 540-41. My translation.

6. Henry Yorke, *These are the times that try men's souls* (London, Ridgeway, 1793), p. 45.

7. Paine criticised the incumbents of parliamentary office in *Rights of Man* Part Two, which was published in February 1792.

8. Founded in 1792 by a group of tradesmen, including shoemaker Thomas Hardy, the London Corresponding Society campaigned for annual parliaments and universal manhood suffrage in elections to House of Commons. It was particularly active in the first four years of its existence (1792-1796), publishing radical works and coordinating the popular reform movement across Britain. Its leaders were charged with high treason when they suggested a national convention of reformers in 1794, but they were later acquitted. 1795 saw the height of the society's strength and numbers. However the LCS was severely affected by the Seditious Meetings Act in 1795 (one of the "Two Bills") and the society was officially proscribed in 1799.
9. Joseph Gerrald, *A Convention the only means of saving us from ruin* (London, Eaton, 1793), pp. 2-3.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
11. For a detailed appraisal of John Frost's sedition case, see John Barrell, "Coffee-House Politicians", pp. 75-102 in *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006) and James Epstein, "'Equality and No King': Sociability and s edition: The case of John Frost", pp.43-61 in Gillian Russell & Clare Tuite (eds.), *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain 1770-1840* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002).
12. Yorke, *op.cit.*, p. 3.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
15. Charles Pigott, *A Political Dictionary explaining the true meaning of words* (London, Eaton, 1795, p. 9). For more on Charles Pigott see Jon Mee, "A Bold and Free-Spoken Man": The Strange Case of Charles Pigott", in David Womersely, Paddy Bullard & Abigail Williams (eds.), "Cultures of Whiggism": *New Essays on English Literature and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2005), pp. 330-50.
16. *The Trial of Joseph Gerrald, Delegate from the London Corresponding Society to the British Convention Before the High Court of Justiciary at Edinburgh, on the 3rd, 10th, 13th, and 14th March, 1794 for Sedition. Taken in Shorthand by Mr. Ramsay* (Edinburgh, Robertson, 1794), p. 182.
17. 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, Lee, 1795).
18. William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its influence on general virtue and happiness* (London, G. G. and J. Robinson, 1793), p. 359.
19. John Thelwall, *Sonnet V: The Source of Slavery* (17th July 1794, Tower), *Poems Written in Close Confinement in the Tower and Newgate, Under a Charge of High Treason* (London, Ridgway, 1795), p. 5.
20. Margaret Jacob, "Sociability and the International Republican Conversation", pp. 25-7.
21. A brilliant analysis of the meaning and use of the charge of "constructive treason" is contained in John Barrell's, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-1796* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000). See also Thomas Pfau, "Paranoia historicized: Legal fantasy, social change, and satiric meta-commentary in the 1794 Treason Trials", in Stephen C. Behrendt (ed.), *Romanticism, Radicalism, and the Press* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1997), pp. 30-64.
22. George Monro, 6th December 1792, TNA TS 11/959.
23. Thomas Moore, *The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* (Paris, Baudry's European Library, 1835), pp. 73-74.
24. Lord Auckland to Mr. Pitt, 28th November 1794, *Journal and Correspondence of William, Lord Auckland* 2: 272.

25. Letter LXII, 17th 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), p. 209.
26. Minutes of 'Loyal Britons' meeting, Lambeth, December 1793, PRO HO 42/27, no. 625.
27. William Playfair, *A History of Jacobinism, its crimes, cruelties and perfidies [...]* (London, Stockdale, 1796), p. 778.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 174.
29. After the declaration of the French Republic in September, the magistrate John Reeves established the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers, aimed at preventing reform societies from meeting by threatening pub landlords with loss of licence if allowed meetings to go ahead. Known as the 'Crown and Anchor Society' because of the tavern they met at on the Strand, members of the society spread alarm about the activities of reformers. The popularity of the Association movement was immense and attracted a large number of followers. Burke is often seen as the figurehead of the anti-Jacobin reaction but men such as John Bowles John Reeves were also influential at a more popular level. The Reeves Association was established without the knowledge of William Pitt, but the Government latched on to the movement, seeing in its establishment a way of securing the stability of the country.
30. I am grateful for the exchange with Edward Vallance on this issue in the 2014 conference on citizenship organised at the University of Toulouse 2-Jean Jaurès which allowed me to refine this part of my argument.
31. Joel Barlow called for citizenship to be extended to foreign patriots in his *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).
32. William Brubaker, "The French Revolution and the Invention of Citizenship", *French Politics and Society* 7:3 (1989), p. 44.
33. 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. 2 (London, Symonds, 1796), pp. Bottom of Form Top of Form iii-iv.
34. Mary Wollstonecraft, Janet M. Todd & Marilyn Butler, *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* (London, Pickering, 1989), p. 162.
35. Sampson Perry, *Oppression!!!*, p. 10.
36. The involvement of figures such as Algernon Sidney in the revolution of 1649 was conveniently erased from collective memory. What was retained was the contribution of such "patriots" to the settlement of 1688-1689.
37. For a comprehensive study of the reliance of the Jacobin leadership on the notion of virtue, see Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1986).
38. See Sophie Wahnich and Marc Belissa, "Les crimes des Anglais: trahir le droit", *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 300:1 (1995), pp. 233-48, and Sophie WAHNICH, *L'impossible citoyen: l'étranger dans le discours de la Révolution française* (Paris, Albin Michel, 1997).
39. Toast number thirteen was 'Au gouvernement qui préfère des citoyens armés à des esclaves armés', *Le Moniteur Universel*, vol. 14, Friday 23th November 1792.
40. James Epstein & Karr, David, "Playing at Revolution: British 'Jacobin' Performance", *The Journal of Modern History* 79:3 (2007), p. 530.

41. See Mark Philp, "The fragmented ideology of reform", p. 69 in Mark Philp (ed.), *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999).

ABSTRACTS

This article seeks to explore the impact of the radicalization of the French Revolution on the way in which the debate within the British reform movement shifted from the relationship between the individual and the state to the moral advances needed to become a citizen in the first place. This transition will be placed in the context of the government clampdown on radical expression and the perceived need for reformers to defend themselves against charges of moral degeneracy. It will also be shown that the Terror led British onlookers to question the capacity of citizens groomed under monarchical rule to live up to the standards of virtue needed in reformed states.

Cet article cherche à interroger la façon dont la radicalisation de la Révolution française fit évoluer le débat au sein des sociétés de réforme britannique, c'est-à-dire, en partant d'un débat sur le rapport entre l'individu et l'État, pour aboutir à une discussion sur les avancées morales nécessaires pour devenir citoyen. Cette évolution sera replacée dans le contexte de la réaction du gouvernement britannique face au mouvement pour la réforme parlementaire, et le besoin perçu par les radicaux de se défendre face aux accusations à leur encontre de déchéance morale. Nous chercherons également à démontrer que la Terreur en France a engendré des interrogations au sein de la population britannique quant à la capacité des citoyens ayant vécu sous un régime monarchique à atteindre le niveau de vertu requis dans un État régénéré.

INDEX

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