ABSTRACT. Originally published in London in 1774 and subsequently republished in French in 1793 and 1833, Marat’s The chains of slavery offers an interesting case study on the exchange of ideas between Britain and France during the late eighteenth century. It is suggested that the key to understanding this hitherto neglected work lies in reading it alongside other publications by Marat from the 1770s and in setting it firmly in the context in which it was published and disseminated in both Britain and France. Prompted by debates surrounding the election of 1774, the work embodies Marat’s own particular version of the British commonwealth tradition, and can be linked to the Wilkite movement in both Newcastle and London. Despite its British origins, Marat and his followers were able to utilize the work after 1789 in order to engage in a number of French debates. It thus constitutes one of the means by which English republican ideas made their way across the Channel.

I

In March 1793, whilst at the height of his fame and power, Jean-Paul Marat published a work entitled Les Chaînes de l’esclavage. As both the advertisement in his newspaper and the preface indicated, the work was not new. An English version had originally been published in London in 1774.
Marat lived in Britain for about ten years during the 1760s and 1770s. Towards the end of his life rumours emerged about his exploits during his stay. It was claimed that he had been employed as French master at the famous Dissenting Academy at Warrington, that he had taught tambouring in Edinburgh (where he had been arrested and imprisoned for debt), and even that he had stolen coins and medals from the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (a crime for which he was convicted and sentenced to several years’ hard labour on the hulks at Woolwich). These stories circulated throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Not everyone believed them, however, and the last story in particular was rendered questionable by a letter published in Charles Vellay’s *La Correspondance de Marat* in 1908. In the letter, which was addressed to a tradesman in England, Marat explained that he was going to the Continent on business and would settle his account on his return in October. It was dated Dover, 11 April 1776 – exactly the time when Marat was supposed to have been in prison in Dublin having been apprehended for the Ashmolean robbery. While a number of commentators remained sceptical about this letter and its supposed disproval of the Ashmolean story, in the 1960s further evidence appeared. In the archives of the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel, Robert Darnton discovered a second letter from Marat – dated Geneva, 14 May 1776, and addressed to Frédéric-Samuel Ostervald of the Société Typographique. As Darnton himself concluded, the letter proves ‘that Marat was with his family in Geneva at the time of the imprisonment of the true robber of the Ashmolean Museum’.

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4 The original source for all of these stories was an article in the *Star* newspaper for 4 Mar. 1793. The article was republished in *Notes and Queries*, 2nd ser., 8, p. 236. See also *The Warrington Academy* (Warrington, 1957), pp. ii–iii and 43 – the book is a reprint of articles originally published in the *Monthly Repository* in 1813–15. There was a further story that Marat had spent some time in Bristol – where he had also been arrested and imprisoned for debt.


8 See in particular Phipson, *Jean Paul Marat*, pp. 29–34, and Thompson, ‘Le Maitre, alias Mara’, pp. 72–3. For the other side of the argument and a direct attack on Phipson’s claims see Gottschalk, ‘Marat a-t-il été en Angleterre un criminel de droit commun?’.

There has been little interest in Marat’s stay in Britain since Darnton’s important discovery put an end to the more colourful speculations about that period of his life. In part this reflects the widely accepted view that it was the Revolution that made Marat, but it is also symptomatic of the more general tendency on the part of historians of the French Revolution to focus on the French dimensions of that event to the exclusion of other aspects and influences. Intellectual historians are particularly guilty of this charge, and yet it is becoming increasingly clear that despite their rhetoric of originality the revolutionaries drew a great deal from the writings of earlier thinkers, not least British thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this context it seems worth re-examining Marat’s stay across the Channel in order to investigate the British origins of his revolutionary radicalism.

Just as the details of Marat’s stay in Britain have received relatively little attention, so the works he wrote during his stay – which included two medical tracts, several versions of a work of moral philosophy, and a novel, as well as The chains of slavery – have been largely neglected. There is an additional reason for

10 This period of Marat’s life is discussed by two of his most recent biographers. O. Coquard, Jean-Paul Marat (Paris, 1993), pp. 48–88, and C. Goetz, Marat en Famille: La Saga des Marats (2 vols., Brussels, 2001), II, pp. 11–32, but their accounts are largely based on Marat’s own claims and on earlier works.
12 The intention here is not to suggest that the British influences upon Marat’s thought were the only ones, or even the most significant, but rather to highlight and foreground one set of influences that have, hitherto, been neglected by historians.
this. Though recognized as an important revolutionary, Marat is not regarded as one of the great thinkers of late eighteenth-century France. He was certainly no rival for Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Emmanuel Sieyès and consequently his works have not been given the attention that has been paid to theirs. Though historians of political thought have long insisted on the need to look beyond the traditional canon of political thinkers, this has rarely been done in practice. And yet there are reasons for believing that a close examination of *The chains of slavery* will add to our understanding of the political thought of the late eighteenth century. Given the fact that the work appeared in both Britain and France it can perhaps tell us something not only about the gestation of Marat’s political ideas, but also about the intellectual connections between these two nations during this period.

II

*The chains of slavery* is a warning of the threat of despotism. Marat demonstrated the means by which princes gradually establish despotic regimes, and he painted a picture of the horrors of despotism. He claimed that he had composed the work some time before 1774. His decision to publish it that year was prompted by the prospect of the forthcoming general election. His ‘Address to the electors of Great Britain’, which prefaced the work, emphasized the importance of the role to be played by the electors and offered detailed advice on the kinds of men they should choose and those they should reject. In this context, the main body of the work illustrated the consequences of not adhering to the advice of the ‘Address’.

In its aims, content, and language, Marat’s *The chains of slavery* clearly falls within the tradition of republicanism as developed by the eighteenth-century British commonwealthmen. In her groundbreaking study, Caroline Robbins demonstrated how three generations of commonwealthmen kept alive the republican ideas that had developed and flourished during the English revolution (1640–60). Though never an organized party, and while the ideas evolved and

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14 Keith Baker has described Marat as a classical republican, however my approach is somewhat different from his. Where Baker focuses on Marat’s transformation of the language of classical republicanism in France after 1789, I am more interested in the development of his ideas whilst in Britain. Baker, ‘Transformations of classical republicanism’, pp. 43–7.
changed over time, these commonwealthmen shared a certain dissatisfaction with
the British constitution, and a desire for reforms such as shorter parliaments,
fewer placemen, a national militia, and greater religious liberty. J. G. A. Pocock
subsequently set these British commonwealthmen in a broader republican
tradition stretching from ancient Greece and Rome, via Renaissance Italy and
The defining feature of this tradition for Pocock was the use of a civic-humanist
language. The key concepts of this were virtue – which was contrasted with
fortune, and later with corruption – and liberty, as opposed to slavery.

As was typical of British commonwealth works, *The chains of slavery* placed
particular emphasis on the events of mid-seventeenth-century England. At the
end of the opening ‘Address’ Marat warned the people of Britain not to betray
the memory of their ancestors. Moreover, he used examples drawn from the
period of the English Revolution and republic to illustrate some of the claims he
was making. For example, in a footnote to a section in which he criticized the
tendency of historians to ‘declaim against’ popular government, to ‘extol the
monarchical’ and to brand those who had thrown off the shackles of tyranny as
‘rebels’ or ‘revolted slaves’, he referred specifically to the English case, ‘and
almost all the writers who have mentioned the punishment of Charles I have
represented as barbarous parricides those spirited patriots who sentenced that
tyrant to death’. One of the few historians Marat excused from his criticisms
was Catharine Macaulay, who was herself closely connected to a number of
commonwealthmen. Her republican history of seventeenth-century England
was based, in part, on primary sources provided by the commonwealthman
Thomas Hollis. It was one of the key sources for Marat’s work.

Echoes of the commonwealth tradition are also evident in Marat’s somewhat
ambiguous attitude towards the British constitution:

> We never cease boasting of the excellencies of our constitution, and by continually extoll-
> ing it we are not sensible of its defects, and neglect to reform them.

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19 Ibid., p. 4406n. Like the commonwealth writers, Marat did not unambiguously advocate anti-monarchical republicanism. The precise form of government appears to have been less relevant to him
than other issues.
21 There is even some evidence to suggest that Marat drew, albeit less explicitly and perhaps even
less directly, on the works of seventeenth-century figures themselves. His ‘Address to the electors of
Great Britain’ is strikingly similar to a work published in 1644 by the poet and political commentator
The constitution of England is, no doubt, a monument of political wisdom, if compared to others; yet it is not so perfect as we are pleased to affirm, nor can it be so, considering its origin and its revolutions.22

Marat then went on to examine the defects of the constitution. The features that he emphasized were the encroachment of royal (executive) power on the legislature, the general corruption and dependence on the crown (through places and pensions) of the representatives of the nation, and the use of a standing army to enforce the will of the monarch.

The vocabulary employed by Marat was also typical of the commonwealth tradition.23 The liberty–slavery dichotomy, which lies at the heart of the title of the work, reappears time and again throughout; indeed, the whole book is concerned with the process by which freedom gives way to servitude. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that Marat also drew the links between slavery and dependence and between liberty and independence that were, as Quentin Skinner has shown, typical of this tradition.24 Similarly, Marat repeatedly referred to virtue, presenting it as necessary to the maintenance of liberty and in the ‘Address’ he emphasized the need to elect virtuous representatives.25 Moreover, he drew an explicit contrast between virtue and corruption: ‘Are the alluring baits of corruption to triumph over your virtue? … Are the baits of corruption so attractive as not to be overbalanced by the solid advantages tendered by virtue?’26

Despite his call for the election of virtuous men, however, Marat did not share the belief of many republicans that virtue was the key to the problem. Rather, he remained pessimistic, believing that even if virtuous candidates were elected, corruption would ultimately triumph. In part he attributed this to the corrupting influence of time. This notion, which as Pocock has shown was central to the republican tradition, is reflected in the final sentence of Marat’s work: ‘Such are commonly the steps by which Princes advance to despotism. Thus liberty has the fate of all other human things: It yields to Time which destroys every thing, to Vice which corrupts every thing, to Ignorance which confounds every thing, and to Force which crushes every thing.’27 Marat also pointed to the tendency of rulers to act in their own self-interest. He was clear that government ought to be conducted in the public interest and aimed at securing the happiness of the

23 While the ‘spirited’ nature of Marat’s rhetoric in The chains of slavery perhaps went beyond what was typical of the commonwealth tradition, and was commented upon at the time (see Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal, 1 (1773–4), p. 491, and London Magazine or Gentleman’s Monthly Intelligencer, 43 (1774), p. 286), it was certainly not as vitriolic as some of his journalism of the early 1790s. However, this is not entirely surprising given the different contexts within which he was writing and publishing.
27 Ibid., p. 4610. Interestingly, a similar statement appears in an earlier work. [J.-P. Marat], A philosophical essay on man: being an attempt to investigate the principles and laws of the reciprocal influence of the soul on the body (2 vols., London, 1773), 1, p. 242.
people. He acknowledged however that, once in power, even the most virtuous of princes would gradually begin to act in his own, rather than in the public, interest. Nor was the prince alone in this tendency. Even carefully chosen representatives could only be trusted to act on the basis of their own interests and passions: ‘When deputies exercise acts of legislation, they seldom make any law which restrains themselves; and often make such as they may turn to their own advantage.’

This presented problems, especially where the representatives were selected from among a particular class:

Be it again said, as long as the members that compose the legislature are selected from among one particular class of people, it must never be expected to see them applying themselves to promote common welfare: and like the parliament under Mary, having secured their own possessions, they will be unconcerned for all the rest.

Nor was this trait simply the result of power. Marat believed ordinary people to be just as guilty of acting according to their own interests, and particularly according to their own immediate interests: ‘Far from being ready to protect the rights of others, every one must have seen his own rights many times flagrantly attacked, before he resolves to defend them.’ Thus, for those at all levels of society, self-interest and base passions were the source of all motivation and action: ‘All human institutions are grounded on human passions and supported by them only.’

The role of self-interest and the passions within human behaviour was a much-debated topic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Bernard Mandeville’s highly controversial *Fable of the bees* was only a more extreme form of a relatively common theory. In a recent book Pierre Force has sought to delineate the various positions in the debate. He sees the key division as being between a neo-Epicurean/neo-Augustinian attitude and a neo-Stoic one. The former – advocated and developed by such thinkers as La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, and Mandeville – posited self-interest as the key motivating force behind human nature. The latter – which Force associates with Shaftesbury and Hutcheson as well as Rousseau and Smith – rejected the suggestion that self-love is the only engine of human behaviour, acknowledging a role for some form of natural benevolence or virtue. Force’s argument builds heavily on (and also challenges) the work of Albert Hirschman. In his important book *The passions and the interests*, Hirschman explained that by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was much discussion as to what should be done to temper and control the destructive passions of human beings. Hirschman identified three possible solutions that were advocated at the time: coercion and repression, which he associated with religious figures such as St Augustine and Calvin; harnessing the passions to

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31 Ibid., p. 4420.
produce positive effects, an idea that he linked to Jansenist thinkers such as Pascal as well as to Mandeville and Smith; and what he called the doctrine of counterveiling passions, as found in the works of Bacon, Spinoza, and Hume. Marat appears to have been familiar with these ideas and in both The chains of slavery and several earlier works he engaged directly in the contemporary debates. In 1772 Marat had published a work of moral philosophy entitled An essay on the human soul. The following year he published a second, longer work, entitled A philosophical essay on man. In the second part of that work, which comprised a revised version of the original Essay, Marat set out his belief that self-love is the primary motivating force in human beings: ‘self-love, that powerful principle, which irresistibly directs mankind in all their actions, often without being perceived, the source of every passion, and the end to which all our desires are directed’. He went on to dismiss the idea that some kind of natural sociability was innate and sought to demonstrate that even pity is motivated by self-interest:

A person may zealously assist in dressing another’s wounds, easing his aching limbs, and alleviating his misfortunes, merely from the hope of being relieved in his turn; another, from a motive of being upon good terms with heaven; and a third, wholly from the pleasure attendant on the exercise of virtue.

In presenting pity in this way Marat was responding directly to Rousseau, who had used it as the basis of his moral system, but he was also echoing earlier thinkers such as La Rochefoucauld and Mandeville.

Marat went on to challenge conventional assumptions about the relationship between reason and passion – and in doing so embraced the idea of counterveiling passions: ‘Let us leave these philosophers to make passions and reason two contrary principles, and suppose them as opposite in their natures as they please, they will never be able to make calm reason a counterpoise to impetuous desire and strong sentiment. The only means of restraining the passions was to set them against each other: ‘For reason can never counterbalance one sentiment but by its opposite, nor restrain one passion but by a stronger: that is, it must free the soul from one kind of servitude, by subjecting it to another yet more severe.’ Among the ancients passions had been controlled in this way; with a desire for glory making people behave heroically or virtuously:

It was the love of glory, which produced those ancient heroes, whose actions so greatly astonish us, Alexander, Caesar, Gengiscan. It was the love of glory that made those yet more wonderful men, Thales, Zeno, Socrates, sacrifice all the pleasures of life, and pass their days in

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36 [Marat], Philosophical essay, i, p. 138. Like The chains of slavery this work was also subsequently published in French. J.-P. Marat, De l’Homme, ou des principes et des lois de l’influence de l’âme sur le corps, et du corps sur l’âme (3 vols., Amsterdam, 1775).

37 [Marat], Philosophical essay, i, p. 143.

38 Force, Self-interest before Adam Smith, pp. 24–8.

39 [Marat], Philosophical essay, i, p. 261.

40 Ibid., i, p. 271. See also Hirschman, The passions and the interests, pp. 20–32.
the painful exercise of the most austere duties … To the same love is to be attributed the incorruptible virtue of Cato.41

The problem in modern times was that the love of glory was no longer a key motivating force. Marat set out his concern about this most forcefully in his ‘Discours adressé aux Anglais’ dated 1 August 1774, which appeared at the end of the French edition of Les Chaıˆnes de l’esclavage:

[O]ur manners have been poisoned at their source; we no longer have any enthusiasm for heroism, any admiration for virtue, any love for liberty … Today the art of pleasure is preferred to merit, vain pleasures to useful knowledge. For us a dancer is worth more than a wise man and a joker more than a hero.42

Here too Marat’s moral philosophy can be read as a response to Rousseau. Marat shared Rousseau’s assessment that inequality of fortunes, made worse by the recent rise of commerce and luxury, was one of the main reasons for the corruption of contemporary manners: ‘But since commerce has enriched us, opulence has chased away this kind of behaviour, soon disorders and the whole connection of vices attached to extreme inequality in wealth were born that had been unknown to our fathers.’43 Unlike Rousseau, however, Marat did not believe in the original goodness of human beings in a primitive golden age before corruption had set in. Moreover, where Rousseau can be associated with the neo-Stoic position, Marat shared the view of neo-Epicurians and neo-Augustinians. Though it is neo-Stoicism that has tended to be associated with republicanism, Marat was not the first republican to adopt this position. The seventeenth-century English republican James Harrington had shared Thomas Hobbes’s pessimistic view of human nature and had sought to develop a political system that took it into account. In his great work The Commonwealth of Oceana he drew on a number of constitutional mechanisms – many of which were borrowed from the Venetian constitution – that were designed to ensure that people would behave virtuously simply by acting in their own self-interest.44

While Marat endorsed Harrington’s views on human nature, he did not adopt his constitutional approach. Marat’s less sophisticated solution involved two key elements. First, the moderns needed to return to the practice of the ancients in constructing a system of manners that would encourage people to behave virtuously and reward them for doing so. Secondly, the inevitable progress of

43 Ibid., p. 4663. For Rousseau’s take on these ideas see his second discourse. J.-J. Rousseau, The discourses and other early political writings, ed. V. Gourevitch (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 113–222. Marat also believed that despotic princes furthered this natural process by ‘rooting out’ the love of glory from among their citizens. Marat, Chaıˆnes, ed. Goëtz and de Cock, p. 4280.
corruption could be slowed, and its worst excesses tempered, if the people con-
stantly watched over their own interests: ‘The subjects, in order to maintain their
liberty, ought to watch the motions of the ministry with a jealous eye. Men are
never so easily undone, as when they suspect no danger; and too great security in
a nation is almost always the forerunner of slavery.’ As soon as the interests of
any one of their number were violated, the people should take action. It was also
crucial that the representatives were forced to act according to the interests of the
people (who had elected them) rather than according to their own interests or
those of the prince:

The representatives of the people ought ever to act according to the instructions of their
cosm: but our deputies exercise their delegated power without ever consulting us.
When once elected, they take not any more notice of us. We have therefore no hand in the
laws enacted by them; and how many times have the resolves of the house been directly
opposite to the sentiments of the people they represent? What are then our representatives,
but our masters?

The underlying purpose of the The chains of slavery was grounded in Marat’s moral
philosophy. His aim, as the ‘Address’ made abundantly clear, was to demonstrate
to his readers that it was ultimately (if not immediately) in their own interests to
curb the advance of despotism: ‘Gentlemen, the whole nation cast their eyes
upon you for redress; but if your heart be shut to generous feelings, and justice to
your fellow subjects cannot move you, let your own interest at least animate
you.’

Reading The chains of slavery as a work within the British commonwealth tra-
dition, and in the light of Marat’s moral philosophy, helps to make some sense of
its content and language. But questions still remain. In particular, why did a
French-speaking, Swiss doctor take up his pen to instruct the British people on
their patriotic duties? The answer lies in details surrounding the work’s publi-
cation and distribution.

III

In the ‘Notice’ that prefaced Les Chaı̈nes de l’esclavage, Marat offered a dramatic
account of the writing and publication of the original English version of the work.
He claimed that his love of liberty had led him to England: ‘an island which
appeared to be its last asylum’. The general election was approaching and, with
this in mind, he decided to revive a work he had written some time earlier. To
render the work more appropriate he added examples drawn from history – and
especially from the history of England. Having completed the work, he set about
trying to advertise it, but those he approached seemed reluctant to assist him.
Marat traced the source of the problem back to Lord North: ‘I realised too late

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48 Ibid., p. 4182. 49 Ibid., p. 4167.
that the minister, fearing that this work would affect his attempts to secure a major-ity in Parliament, had bribed the printer, publicists and journalists.\footnote{Ibid., p. 4669. In fact, several advertisements of the work did appear. See \textit{London Magazine}, 43 (Apr. 1774), p. 200; \textit{Public Advertiser}, 3 May 1774; \textit{Gentleman’s Magazine}, May 1774; and \textit{Scot’s Magazine}, May 1774, p. 253. It was also reviewed in the \textit{Monthly Review}, 30 (June 1774), p. 491, and, much more favourably, in \textit{London Magazine}, 43 (June 1774), pp. 286–8.}

Indignant at the constraints placed on the publication of his work, Marat had then adopted a different tack. He sent almost all the copies to patriotic societies in the north of England that were ‘reputedly the most pure in the realm’.\footnote{Marat, \textit{Chaînes}, ed. Goetz and de Cock, p. 4171.} On discovering what Marat had done, Lord North allegedly surrounded him with spies who even intercepted letters to his family. Disturbed, Marat fled to Holland, returning to London via the north of England, where he supposedly visited some of the societies to which he had sent copies of the work. There he learnt that letters of affiliation (and in at least one case even the cost of the edition) sent by the societies to him, had also been intercepted and confiscated by the authorities.

Marat is known for having exaggerated his importance, and there are grounds for scepticism of his claims regarding the expense and energy devoted by Lord North to trying to prevent the circulation of the work prior to the election.\footnote{See, for example, R. C. H. Catterall, ‘The credibility of Marat’, \textit{American Historical Review}, 16 (1910–11), pp. 24–35. This kind of self-important paranoia is of course typical of Marat. It resurfaced repeatedly during his life, for example in his dealings with scientific establishments during the 1780s and in his attitude towards the authorities in the early 1790s.} But one aspect of Marat’s story at least can be shown to be correct. He did, as he claimed, send copies of the work to certain societies in the north of England. The \textit{Newcastle Chronicle} for Saturday 28 May 1774 included the following advertisement:

Yesterday the company of bricklayers, the company of goldsmiths, and the lumber-troop, in this town, received each, by the fly, two large 4to volumes, from an unknown person in London, entitled ‘The Chains of Slavery, with a prefatory address to the electors of Great-Britain, in order to draw their timely attention to the choice of proper representatives in the next parliament’ – The work is spirited, and appears thro’ the whole a masterly execution.\footnote{The \textit{Newcastle Chronicle}, 534 (28 May 1774), p. 2. The ‘lumber-troop’ was a political club – see T. R. Knox, ‘Wilkism and the Newcastle election of 1774’, \textit{Durham University Journal}, 72 (1979), p. 27. On Marat’s connections with Newcastle see J. Clephan, ‘Jean-Paul Marat in Newcastle’, \textit{Monthly Chronicle of North-Country Lore and Legend}, 1, 2 (1887), pp. 1–53, and H. Lonsdale, \textit{The worthies of Cumberland} (London, 1872), pp. 187–9.}

Moreover, some of those copies survive to this day. Included among the archives of the Company of Cordwainers; those of the Company of Bricklayers, Wallers, and Plasterers; and those of the Company of Butchers of Newcastle upon Tyne are copies of \textit{The chains of slavery}.\footnote{Tyne and Wear Archives Service (TWAS): GU/CW/61, GU/BR/15 and GU/BU/28. While the adverts are mentioned in several works on Marat, no one, as far as I can tell, has examined these copies of his work. I am grateful to the staff at the Tyne and Wear Archives Service for their assistance.} Each copy is inscribed on the front with the
name of the company to which it belongs and the year 1774. On the inside cover
of the Bricklayers’ copy someone has reproduced a letter from the author – dated
20 May 1774 – in which he explained why he was sending the work to them.
Referring to the actions of the ministry he said:

Not daring to suppress my book by force, they have employed artifice to prevent its being
divulged. A strange method of apprehension this, a thousand times worse than open acts of
authority and attended with the silent but intire destruction of the liberty of the press unless
their clandestine measures be baffled by the influence of true patriots.

To make these oppressive dealings miscarry, I know no other means but the dispersing
my work among the real Sons of Liberty. I beg therefore you would acquaint me with the
names of Companies as sincerely addicted to its cause as you are.\footnote{55}

We do not know how many copies of the work were sent to Newcastle. In
addition to those already mentioned, the Company of House Carpenters appears
to have received a copy. An entry in their Order Book for 26 December 1774 sets
out the conditions under which members of the company could borrow ‘the Book
intitled The Chains of Slavery given as a present to this company’.\footnote{56} An article
in \textit{The Monthly Chronicle of North-Country Lore and Legend} for April 1887 referred to
another copy that met a rather sticky end:

A TOWNSMAN of Newcastle, going to and fro in his daily rounds, saw lying on the ground
four pages of what seemed to him familiar print, and picked them up. His conjecture was
verified. He held in his hand a fragment of ‘The Chains of Slavery’ of Jean Paul Marat,
slain by Charlotte Corday in the summer of 1793. Printed in England in 1774, presentation
copies of the book were sent to incorporated companies and others in Newcastle. Of these
last-century gifts, some few are yet in existence; and to one of the number, passing away as
waste paper, the stray leaves had probably belonged – a crumpled waif, in which, appar-
ently, butter or bacon, or other commodity, had been handed over the counter to a
customer, with no consciousness on either side of the rarity of the wrapper.\footnote{57}

This article also referred to two further copies that were still extant at the time.
One was said to belong to the Skinners and Glovers’ Company of Newcastle and
the other was among the collection of Mr Thomas Bell and was bought by the
Literary and Philosophical Society. That society, which is still in existence, admits
to having had a copy, but claims it has been missing for some years.\footnote{58}

As Marat was no doubt aware, for the freemen of Newcastle in 1774 the
message of \textit{The chains of slavery} was particularly relevant. The election of that year
was the first to be contested for some time.\footnote{59} Since 1747 the choice of the town’s

\footnote{55} TWAS: GU/BR/15. \footnote{56} ‘House Carpenter’s Order Book’, TWAS: GU/HMT/3, p. 18.
\footnote{57} Clephan, ‘Marat in Newcastle’, p. 49. According to Clephan it was pages 33 to 38 of the work
that met this fate.
\footnote{58} Two further copies of the work are held in the Robinson Library of the University of Newcastle
(Bradshaw 321.6MAR and W321.6.MAR). I am grateful to the staff in the Special Collections
department of the Robinson Library and at the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society for their
assistance.
\footnote{59} For a more detailed account of Newcastle politics in this period see K. Wilson, \textit{The sense of the
MPs had been a compromise, with the tory Sir Walter Calverley Blackett and the whig Matthew Ridley sharing office. Blackett stood again at the election of 1774 alongside Ridley’s son, Sir Matthew White Ridley, and two other candidates, Constantine John Phipps and Thomas Delaval. Though Phipps and Delaval were ultimately unsuccessful, they did receive considerable support from some of the town guilds. The Bricklayers, for example, are said to have admitted both of them to the freedom of their incorporation and to have presented them with silver trowels and mahogany hods. When the election took place in October, the Bricklayers, along with the Joiners and the Butchers, gave a majority of votes to the opposition candidates.

One reason why the election of 1774 was contested had to do with the Town Moor affair, which had been going on since the early 1770s, and had come to a head the previous year. This affair, which pitted the magistrates and Common Council against the freemen and guilds, centred on the issue of who had control over common land in the town. The land comprising the Town Moor had customarily been used by the freemen for grazing cattle. Trouble initially emerged over an attempt by the magistrates to grant a local inhabitant the right to build a carriage road over part of the Moor. The problems intensified when the Common Council decided to let out part of the land for cultivation and improvement. While the idea had originally come from the freemen themselves, they were angered by the Common Council’s attempt to impose the scheme without their consent and without involving them in its management. This conflict resulted in a court case in August 1773 at which the freemen were defended by Serjeant John Glynn (famous for having defended John Wilkes and his supporters). Glynn continued to act on their behalf to secure favourable terms in the act of parliament that was eventually passed in 1774.

Significantly a copy of the Town Moor Act was bound in at the back of the Butchers’ copy of *The chains of slavery*, reinforcing the idea that the work was perceived by at least some Newcastle residents as speaking directly to local concerns. Moreover, all of the guilds that held copies of *The chains of slavery* in their

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64 [Murray], *The contest*, p. 22.

65 *Newcastle Town Moor Act, 1774*, TWAS: GU/HMT/1/1, and [Murray], *The contest*, p. 28.
archives appear to have been directly involved in the Town Moor affair. The Butchers were said to have been an interested party, and the Bricklayers voted their thanks to those who had handled the affair on behalf of the freemen and recorded their names in the Company book.\(^66\) Similarly, the Cordwainers contributed towards the expenses, and even commissioned an inscription over the mantelpiece in their Hall commemorating the court ruling of 10 August 1773 and recording, for posterity, the names of the committee members involved. Alongside that plaque they hung a portrait of Serjeant Glynn.\(^67\)

Throughout the affair Blackett, Ridley, and White Ridley supported the Common Council against the freemen and this was a key reason why many of the freemen wished to replace them with two new candidates in the election of 1774. However, the concerns of the freemen also stretched beyond their locality.\(^68\) In 1769, following the expulsion of Wilkes – the elected MP for Middlesex – from the House of Commons, the freemen of Newcastle had signed a petition calling for the dissolution of parliament.\(^69\) They invited Blackett and Ridley to sign and to present it to parliament on their behalf, but both refused.\(^70\) Subsequently, in the run-up to the election of 1774, the freemen drew up a series of test articles. These articles required the candidates to urge the Commons to acknowledge its mistake in expelling Wilkes from his seat, to call for a shortening of the duration of parliament, to insist on a reduction in the number of placemen and pensioners in the Commons, and to campaign for a more equal representation of the people.\(^71\) Blackett and Ridley refused to sign, or even to promise to try to achieve these demands. Consequently the freemen invited Phipps and Delaval to sign up to the articles – they agreed to do so. In the context of their attempts to encourage the electors of the town to vote for Phipps and Delaval rather than Blackett and White Ridley, and given their emphasis on popular control over magistrates and representatives alike, Marat’s *The chains of slavery* must have seemed to the Newcastle freemen to offer welcome support.\(^72\)

\(^{66}\) Namier and Brooke, eds., *History of parliament*, i, p. 350 (Butchers); ‘Manuscript extracts’, TWAS: GU/CW/15/2 (Bricklayers).

\(^{67}\) ‘Manuscript history’, TWAS GU/CW/16, and *Incorporated company of Cordwainers*, TWAS: GU/CW/49.

\(^{68}\) On local and national politics in Newcastle (and the connections between them) see H. T. Dickinson, *Radical politics in the north-east of England in the later eighteenth century* (Durham, 1979); Knox, *Popular politics*; Knox, ‘Wilksism’.

\(^{69}\) [Murray], *The contest*, pp. 23–4; Wilson, *The sense of the people*, pp. 340–1.

\(^{70}\) The petition was eventually delivered to parliament by Sir Francis Blake Delaval and his brother Thomas – the future candidate. In fact, Blackett had originally voted against Wilkes’s expulsion, but in 1770 he changed his mind and apologized to the House. [Murray], *The contest*, p. 20. See also Namier and Brooke, eds., *History of parliament*, ii, p. 95.


\(^{72}\) There is also some evidence to suggest that the work was republished (or at least reissued) in Newcastle in 1775. See *Newcastle Chronicle*, 604 (21 Oct. 1775), p. 2, 605 (8 Oct. 1775), p. 3, and 606 (4 Nov.
It was not only in Newcastle that the election of 1774 was significant. It was also at that election that Wilkes finally took up his seat as MP for Middlesex. The exploits of Wilkes coloured British politics throughout Marat’s stay in the country, and he demonstrated a keen interest in the Wilkes controversies. In The chains of slavery Marat praised not only Wilkes himself, but also the Society of the Bill of Rights – established by Wilkes’s supporters in 1769 – and Serjeant Glynn.

Moreover, there were close connections between Marat and the Wilkite movement. One of the printers and booksellers involved with The chains of slavery was John Almon, who was a close friend and defender of Wilkes. Of greater significance is a letter from the author of The chains of slavery to Wilkes himself, dated May 1774. The letter was written in French and opened with some discussion of its author’s identity. There is a hint that Wilkes might have been able to guess the name of his correspondent, but all that is actually said is that he was not of English birth – but had chosen England as his patrie. The author went on to explain that he had followed Wilkes’s conflict with the ministry with some interest, and expressed his respect and admiration for Wilkes himself. He then presented his own work as an attempt to ‘join my weak voice to those of some good patriots’. The main purpose of the letter was to ask for Wilkes’s advice and assistance:

I know you are busy … , but if love for the patrie fills your heart, please tell me what I should do to foil the cowardly measures of the Cabinet. To advise me would be to continue to serve the nation, whose respect you well merit. I am ready to receive your advice on whatever day and at whatever time would suit you.

Interestingly, part of this letter constituted a direct translation of a section from the letter to the Bricklayers of Newcastle. It is possible that Wilkes knew, perhaps through Glynn, of recent events in Newcastle and had responded to Marat’s request by suggesting that he sent copies of his work to them.

Thus Marat drew on the language of the British commonwealth tradition in order to engage in British politics; and in doing so he saw himself as participating
in controversies associated with Wilkes and echoing the actions of that hero of liberty.\textsuperscript{80} Had \textit{The chains of slavery} disappeared into obscurity after the general election of 1774, this might have been the end of the story. But Marat returned to the work several times following the outbreak of the French Revolution.

\textbf{IV}

In a letter addressed to Camille Desmoulins Marat drew a direct connection between his activities in England and his recent actions in France: ‘Open the work that I published in London in 1774 under the title: \textit{The chains of slavery}; in reading the preface you will see that sixteen years ago in England I played the same role that I have played in France since the Revolution.’\textsuperscript{81} Given his own sense of this connection, it is not surprising that Marat made use of the work as part of his revolutionary campaign.

Marat first referred back to \textit{The chains of slavery} in the run-up to the election to the Estates-General. His \textit{Offrande à la Patrie} was written in this context and was aimed at urging the French to seize this opportunity to create a better system of government that would secure the happiness of the people. The language and sentiments of the work generally reflect those of \textit{The chains of slavery}, but there are also specific borrowings and references. For example, Marat offered a description of the kinds of men who should be chosen to represent the people of France in the forthcoming election, which was strikingly similar to that offered in his ‘Address’ of 1774.\textsuperscript{82} The following month Marat inserted into his \textit{Supplement de l’Offrande à la Patrie} a long quotation on the subject of war, claiming:

\begin{quote}
This account is drawn from an English work entitled \textit{The chains of slavery}, a work equally remarkable for its energy and its depth. It is said that a patriotic society is currently engaged in producing a translation, in order to allow the nation to profit from the great lessons that it contains.\textsuperscript{83}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[80] Of course, the themes of the work – and especially its opposition to despotism – can also be related to the writings of francophone thinkers and to events in France at this time. In \textit{De L’Esprit des lois}, Montesquieu had defined the terms in which the concept of despotism would be understood as well as exploring other ideas that appear in \textit{The chains of slavery}, such as the role of virtue in government and the problems posed by the rise of commercial society. Marat greatly admired Montesquieu and was familiar with his works, as is clear from the elegy he wrote in 1785. J.-P. Marat, \textit{Éloge de Montesquieu: présenté à l’Académie de Bordeaux, le 28 mars 1785}, ed. A. de Brézet (Libourne, 1883). Marat was no doubt also aware of recent events in France. Maupeou’s coup of 1771 was viewed both in France and abroad as revealing the despotic nature of the French regime. On this affair see J. Flammermont, \textit{Le Chancelier Maupeou et les parlements} (Paris, 1883), and D. Echeverria, \textit{The Maupeou revolution: a study in the history of libertarianism France, 1770–1774} (Baton Rouge, 1985).
\end{footnotes}
A full translation of the work did eventually appear, but before that happened Marat found another use for part of the work. On 6 July 1789 the National Assembly established a committee to draw up a new constitution for France. Among its members were several monarchiens who drew at least some of their ideas from the British constitutional model. On 23 August Marat wrote a letter to the president of the Estates-General, which he entitled ‘An account of the vices of the English constitution’. He began by pointing out that although that constitution was well regarded, it would not be a good model for the French to follow, since it was corrupted by various vices. He thus saw it as his duty to provide an analysis of the constitution and its problems, which was based on his own observations whilst in Britain. The main problem with the constitution, Marat insisted, was the direct influence exercised by the king over parliament. His explanatory letter was followed by a long extract taken from chapter lx of The chains of slavery. Nine months later, in another letter addressed to the president of the National Assembly, Marat again reiterated the point: ‘A stay of many years in London put me in a position to know and understand the vices of the English constitution, a constitution that certainly deserves to be admired, though an in-depth examination reduces it to its true value.’

Thus, in the context of the debates over the form that the French constitution should take, Marat was able to draw on his own contribution to the British commonwealth tradition in order to counter the arguments of those monarchiens who saw the British constitution as an appropriate model for the French. The overthrow of the monarchy on 10 August 1792 fundamentally changed the French political landscape. Yet, once again, Marat saw the relevance of The chains of slavery to events and revived the idea of publishing a French translation. In her Mémoires Madame Roland described how Marat had written to her husband, who was then minister of the interior, to ask for 15,000 livres to publish some of his works. Roland replied explaining that he could not give out that kind of sum without seeing the manuscripts themselves, and asked Marat to send them to him. Among those sent was The chains of slavery. The manuscripts were then submitted to a council that was to decide whether they should be published at the expense of the nation. In the meantime, Marat wrote to the duc d’Orléans. In a placard,

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84 On the debates surrounding the establishment of a constitution in the summer of 1789 see K. M. Baker, ‘Fixing the French constitution’, in his Inventing the French Revolution: essays on French political culture in the eighteenth century (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 252–305. On the monarchiens themselves see J. Egret, La Révolution des notables: Monnier et les monarchiens, 1789 (Paris, 1950); R. Griffiths, Le Centre perdu: Malouet et les ‘monarchiens’ dans la Révolution française (Grenoble, 1988); and F. Furet and M. Ozouf, eds., Terminer la Révolution: Monnier et Barnave dans la Révolution Française (Grenoble, 1990). Though recent scholarship has tended to play down the anglophilia of the monarchiens, Marat clearly recognized and was concerned by their borrowings from the English constitutional model.

85 La Correspondance de Marat, ed. Vellay, p. 100.

86 Ibid., pp. 141–2.

dated 2 September 1792, Marat explained that he wished to publish three works, ‘of the greatest utility in the current situation’, and asked d’Orléans for the 15,000 livres required to do so.  

Marat probably never received the money, but in October 1792 he produced a prospectus in which he stated his intention to publish three works. This time he was explicit about what those works were: the most recent incarnation of his newspaper, Journal de la République Française; L’Ecole du citoyen, his philosophical history of the revolution; and Les Chaînes de l’esclavage. All three works were concerned, in one way or another, with uncovering and thwarting the plots of those who threatened the liberty and happiness of the people, and the language used to describe them was similar. Indeed they can be seen as forming three parts of a single whole with Les Chaînes de l’esclavage offering a theoretical account of the progress and horrors of despotism; L’Ecole du citoyen depicting the struggle between liberty and despotism in France from the beginning of the Revolution up until the establishment of the Convention; and Journal de la République Française taking the story on to, one would suppose, the triumphant victory of liberty and its enshrinement in the new French constitution.

Though it did eventually appear, Les Chaînes de l’esclavage was not published in November 1792 as the prospectus predicted. From the notes and advertisements printed in his newspaper it is clear that, once again, the publication of the work proved more difficult than Marat had anticipated. At the end of the issue for 1 February 1793 he included the following notice: ‘The citizen to whom I gave a copy of The chains of slavery is asked to send it immediately to the author at No. 30 rue des Cordeliers. [The author] asks for permission to consult the work in order to make some essential observations.’ The issue for 7 February ended with a similar notice – which explained that it was the English version of the work that he was looking for. The same notice appeared nine more times between then and 20 February. Whether Marat ever received the copy of his work is unclear, but the issue of his newspaper for 24 February included an advertisement for Les Chaînes de l’esclavage, which promised that it would appear on 10/12 March. Again the prediction proved premature, but on 28 March Marat was finally able to announce that the work had ‘appeared today’. Though he made a number of minor alterations to the French version of the work, the overall shape and force of the argument remained the same.

Marat died, at the hands of Charlotte Corday, just months after the publication of Les Chaînes de l’esclavage, but that is not quite the end of the story. Exactly forty
In the aftermath of the revolution of 1830 Marat’s work again appeared relevant. In his ‘Discours préliminaire’ of 1833 Havard declared: ‘no book offers as deep a study of the causes of tyranny and the evils to which we are prey as this one’. Havard reinforced Marat’s own emphasis on the need for popular vigilance, but he also emphasized the anti-monarchical implications of the work much more strongly than Marat had ever done. This reflected the context in which the work was republished. The early 1830s witnessed the establishment of a number of underground republican clubs. These clubs laid claim to the legacy of 1789, a fact that was reflected in the titles they adopted. The Société des Droits de l’Homme appropriated the official name of the Cordeliers Club, whilst the Amis du Peuple appeared to pay homage to Marat himself. Both groups were founded at the end of July 1830, and both engaged in publicity and popular demonstrations in the months and years that followed. The immediate stimulus for the publication of the 1833 edition of Marat’s work was presumably the repression following the popular disturbance that took place in Paris in the summer of 1832. The Amis du Peuple was directly linked to this disturbance, and towards the end of the year the authorities tried (albeit unsuccessfully) to have the club convicted of having contravened the Civil Code.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this study of The chains of slavery. First, it is clear that Marat was profoundly influenced, during his stay in Britain, by the ideas of eighteenth-century commonwealthmen and that he was inspired by the Wilkes controversies. Though these were not the only influences upon him, English events and ideas do appear to have shaped his attitude to politics, and helped to form the basis of his revolutionary rhetoric and action. Secondly, it has been demonstrated that The chains of slavery – a work that was originally published to influence the electors of Britain in their choice of MPs in the election of 1774 – could be applied, with only minor alterations, in order to intervene in a number of key debates in revolutionary France and was deployed in 1833 to support the claims of insurrectionary republicans.

What makes this story even more interesting is that it was not an isolated case. Marat was not the only French speaker who spent time in Britain during the 1760s and 1770s, and who was influenced by the activities of Wilkes and works of the English republican tradition. In the year that The chains of slavery first appeared, the chevalier d’Eon de Beaumont, who was then living in exile in London and was also in contact with Wilkes, produced a translation of Marchamont Nedham’s The

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95 Havard’s republication of Marat’s work appears to have been part of a more general publishing campaign. In the same year he also republished a number of other revolutionary works.
excellence of a free state. Nor was Marat the only francophone writer to produce a work resembling those of the British commonwealth tradition. The abbé Mably’s *Des Droits et des devoirs du citoyen* is another well-known example. Finally, Marat was not the only French revolutionary who saw value in applying English republican and commonwealth ideas in the context of the French Revolution. Several members of the Cordeliers Club, including Jean-Jacques Rutledge and Camille Desmoulins – both acquaintances of Marat – made use of the works and ideas of Marchamont Nedham, James Harrington, Algernon Sidney, and Thomas Gordon, in order to further their own revolutionary claims and concerns. Thus it is clear that far from being a purely eighteenth-century anglophone phenomenon, the language of the British commonwealthmen proved capable of being applied across the Channel in France not only in the eighteenth century, but also during the French Revolution and beyond.

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100 Hammersley, *French revolutionaries and English republicans*. 