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Juliette Reboul, *French Emigration to Great Britain in response to the French Revolution*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 268 pp. Illustrations, tables, bibliography, and index. \$79.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 978-3-3195-7996-2; \$99.99 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-3-3195-7995-5.

Review by Kirsty Carpenter, Massey University.

New scholarly work on the Emigration during the French Revolution is very welcome. This exciting new book evolved from Juliette Reboul's thesis submitted at the University of Leeds, and it is an invaluable work of skillful historical scholarship in two languages connecting up the British and French threads of Emigration. It is a comprehensive re-examination of the *émigrés* who came to Britain, and it cements the picture of the cultural shift that took place—showing how, not only in the urban areas where the greatest concentrations of *émigrés* settled, but even in the provincial areas of the British Isles, *émigrés* penetrated the British society and left lasting impressions on their hosts. Véronique Church Duplessis in her recent thesis “Aristocrats into Modernity: French *Émigrés* and the Refashioning Noble Identity” has also shown that this temporary but, while it lasted, intimate contact, extended to the British dominions.[1] The other important finding of this study is to further disabuse the persistent myth that all *émigrés* shared the same political and social make-up. Reboul concludes, “There is no emigrant-type. The emigrant figure is the fictional creation of strong ideological discourses” (p. 216). And in so finding, this book adds to the weight of scholarly opinion that counters the historical approach (still very common) that attributes great social diversity to the Counter-revolution, but none at all to the Emigration.

The book is tightly organized and comprehensively footnoted. It follows a pattern that privileges issues of print culture and digital humanities offering uses of advertising that are insightful and innovative. It also asserts a methodology of discursive analysis based on work by Karine Rance, a former supervisor of Reboul, who researched the *émigrés* residing in German-speaking territories. This strong dependence on textual analysis further reinforces the French documentarist approach of the author, and the marriage of that meticulous French heritage and the independent research culture associated with the Anglo-British tradition is a very attractive ingredient in the style of this book. It is a given that without the Revolution, the French would not have come to Britain in this period nearly as numerous as they did when escaping the turmoil and death penalties issued by the Republic. In literary parlance this created a classic triangular situation between the *émigrés*, the British and the Republican or Jacobin revolutionaries. So, it is logical to pose questions about the literature produced under circumstances of stress and war before delving into the terms and phrases to ascertain just how the concept of cultural transfer under forced migration conditions might differ from cultural transfer under non-forced circumstances.

Chapter one examines the variations in terminology used by the British and by historians to label the French arrivals. From a discussion of semantics, Reboul turns to historiography and maps the two hundred years since the Revolution in the production of memoirs and historical studies of Emigration. She tracks the evolution of the subject beyond a personal ambition to record the details of lived

experiences on the part of the *émigré* memoir writers, to a topic of mature historical scholarship in the late twentieth century. She tracks also the slow dis-entanglement of the Emigration from the military Counter-revolution that was particularly influential in Britain, and which, she argues, often made approaches to the *émigrés* “biased and anachronistic and partly based on political affiliation” (p. xxiii). Breaking down the pre-existing blunt categories of the Revolution versus its enemies, lumping all *émigrés* into a single political category is an important step, and one that still has ground to cover due to the convenience that this has afforded revolutionary historians.[2] Reboul returns to sources and deconstructs the language of the *émigré* in the light of the context, not only of the writing, but of publishing and market demands operating on those narratives. She shows that even in the last decade of the eighteenth-century publishers were driven by market concerns rather than truth or a particular commitment to maintaining manuscript integrity, and that with editions and the passage of time the degree of faithfulness to the original manuscript was often significantly compromised.

Chapter three moves the focus to the arrivals in Britain, and the reception of the *émigrés* as “aliens” as they were defined in British legislation. Reboul shows that this legislation reveals as much perhaps more about the British legislators than it does about the French. She concludes that by and large assessments have been a little too kind to the British host nation, and that many *émigrés* felt they were treated less than generously. She shows the differing reactions at the highest political level of government in Britain to be self-centered rather than virtuous, and only Christian in so far as they bolstered the British image of themselves as forgiving, charitable and superior nation (compared to the French). Any attempt to measure the charitableness of the British invariably founders on a lack of any real scale by which to measure. While the grants from the British government were not exhaustive—and not adequate in some cases—they were nevertheless regular and more consistent than any financial support *émigrés* received from any other European nation. *Émigrés* too were aware of that fact, as well as of the difficulty that the charitable groups had to collect monies for Catholic *émigrés* many of them former aristocrats even if some of the French chafed against the limitations of their own failing means. This also begs the hypothetical question: how much financial support in time of high taxes and war against France would have been enough? Some of the relief payments’ inefficiency also stemmed from the leaders of Emigration like the Bishop of Saint Pol de Léon asking for modest sums of money from the British government. Reboul tries to establish new angles, but this is one of the difficulties of analyzing legislation destined for a group as a collective according to individual needs and responses. By and large there were cases of hardship and need, and the historian must ask: would one expect enduring gratitude in every *émigré* case? This is the very essence of what makes the fact that there was a significant outpouring of gratitude despite the harshness of the circumstances, noteworthy. Without statistical analysis showing the raw figures of the grateful versus the discontented, it is not really possible to reach a definitive conclusion on the issue—and to see the British as merely self-serving only paints the French as the innocent victims of both the Jacobins and the British alike. No matter where one stands on the issue of victimhood, that is going too far in one direction or the other. There is also a problem in talking about individual politicians as representative of “the government,” and individual Anglican clergy as representative of “the Church.” This is a common issue with analyses that have a strong linguistic dependence, and that are based on small numbers of testimonials not necessarily representative of the wider group. What Reboul does do very well is to present the arguments playing devil’s advocate and suggesting there are other conclusions to be reached than that the refugee population was singularly grateful—and she is quite right to do so.

Chapter four moves to the issue of British charities and the British motives behind the relief policies towards the *émigrés*. This is a look at the sources and attitudes to giving relief to the *émigrés* adding to former work on the relief’s impact and the reaction of the French. This chapter demonstrates rather well the weakness of an argument that falsely separates what was essentially inseparable at the time. For example, she argues for separating links of friendship and those of inter-aristocratic solidarity revealing the danger in a focus on the process versus the sentiments of the individual when the two are in practice inextricably entwined. Minor errors occur in this chapter around details of the building for the Penn School that was already leased by the British government, and not, as Reboul claims, a private property

belonging to Edmund Burke. And if anyone wanted a reason to argue for self-centeredness and vanity on the part of the British, the Penn School is surely an example—Burke even promised that the boys would serve in the British forces if the war was not over when they finished their schooling in order to get funding for the project. Reboul however does not do this and rather contrarily, in a chapter focused on the British response, puts the spotlight on the French distinctions and conflicts around hierarchy and orders that undoubtedly also existed.

Chapter five shifts into the *émigrés* finding work and the commercial context of newspapers and classified advertising and looks at the way newspapers can be used to gauge the *émigré* impact on the British public. Here Reboul is at her strongest, and this chapter and its statistics generated from the advertising columns are excellent showing the range of skills/professions advertised, and the use of different sign-offs (named, anonymous, or initialed) in the advertisements. The depth of analysis gives this chapter an elegance of the Annales School genre, offering the weight of the statistics and the qualitative analysis side by side. It sheds light on the individual *émigré* experience mapped through the national newspapers. But while the material is exciting, when she strays away from the *émigré* newspapers, questions have to be raised around the comprehensiveness of the coverage

Chapter six flips the perspective and focuses on the circulation of *émigré* writings in Britain and on the track of publishers, libraries, and booksellers and their part in the creation of the *émigré* narrative. This chapter inadvertently highlights the problems of defining what was and was not “*émigré*” literature, and just how grey the areas around *émigré* intent where writing was concerned. Translating is slightly easier to categorize as works were definitely translated to inform a non-French public. But it is difficult to disentangle counter-revolutionary literature from literature that had poetic or romantic literary purpose, and there is a danger in amalgamating that literature into a single body that is, “clearly linked to a strategy of public victimization.” Literature in French was circulating in Britain long before the Revolution written by both French and British writers. This makes it all the harder to find connected spaces “where pre-revolutionary habits and the experience of otherness would gradually and subtly redefine cultures in French and British communities” (p. 147). But Reboul rightly asks, “Did an established and loyalist reader of francophone books replace the enlightened and cosmopolitan British reader of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries?” (p. 156). She also flags the difficulty of using advertising literature as not all *émigré* books were advertised, and many were published using subscriptions.

The final two chapters (seven and eight) deal with the return to France and the ironies of the emigration experience in light of the French return, and how returned *émigré* attitudes to Britain changed in light of contemporary attitudes in France and in French politics between 1818 and 1830. It was incompatible to maintain a fierce admiration for Britain and to aspire to political opportunities or upward social mobility in France (where despising Britain had long been a political pastime). Nor was it *politique* to show too much admiration for foreign nations in this age of nascent European nationalisms. Greg Burgess shows how established foreigners in France also faced similar prejudices confronting national approaches in legislation and policy, so this phenomenon did not only affect returned *émigrés* in this period.[3]

English newspapers between 1789 and 1800, for example, show that by far the vast number of *émigré* advertisements were put in national newspapers like the *Morning Chronicle*. This would seem to support the view that the concentration of *émigrés* in London dominated the *émigré* scene in Britain, and it would be interesting to know if there were local newspapers and broadsheets that carried *émigré* advertisements in very significant numbers. This part of the research seems to rather overturn her central thesis that the local was more important than that national. The same occurs when she maps classified adverts per year between 1789 and 1800; the selection process skews the data. There is a very useful table (p. 75) showing numeric usage of the words that is again based on a random selection of archival sources. A mild criticism has to be made about the fact that it would be of infinitely more use if

the selection process were not statistically random, and the process around the selection of documents had a robust quantitative rationale. These are hard issues when it comes to applying statistical methods to emigration history and particularly to history seen through a newspaper lens.

This study shows us what is most valuable going forward about the still emerging Franco-British tradition of historical scholarship. It brings the best of bilingual scholarship to bear on memoirs, records, and books in French and in English (and associated languages—for example of translation), and it combines traditional historical approaches with methods of contemporary linguistic analysis. There is a point where privileging the lived experience and privileging the written text clash, and sometimes that clash can be felt in this study. It has the distinction of being the first study of the Emigration in Britain written by a French woman, and while the thesis was defended at a British university, the perspective is refreshingly French. At times this appears in the turn of expression, “The exploration of emigration in Britain initially ambitioned to interrogate...” but that only serves to reinforce the need for more cross-cultural and connected scholarship at this level and to continue to *défricher le champ* of the connected British and French History at a time when belonging to one or both nations was at least an aspirational reality for French émigré writers like Adèle de Souza and Lucie de la Tour du Pin, to name just a couple.

For any reader interested in the phenomenon of Emigration this book is a must, and it is a necessary addition to any French Revolution course bibliography or library holdings. It leaves the reader asking questions about the makeup of nationhood and wondering: is it really possible to say with certainty that a person is indelibly French or British? The more these issues are researched and “connected,” the more fluid the traffic across boundaries of national order becomes, and the more nuances emerge. This book’s greatest contribution is to underscore just how different the situations of the many individual *émigrés* were in Britain, and how hard it is to make a study of them as a group without making gross generalizations on both sides of the politico-cultural Franco-British equation/divide. The Emigration was one of the first modern instances of a national group refusing to be redefined by the sheer force of majority-rule in a new era of democratic politics where, in stark contrast to the freedoms enshrined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1789, opinions and habits contrary to those of the Jacobins were violently suppressed.

NOTES

[1] See Véronique Church Duplessis, “Aristocrats into Modernity: French Émigrés and the Refashioning of Noble Identities,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 2016).

[2] How this came about can be read in William Doyle’s *Aristocracy and its Enemies in the Age of Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[3] See Greg Burgess, “The Foreign presence in the early-industrial Haut-Rhin, 1820-22. A short History from the ‘Pre-History of Immigration to France,’” *French History* 28.3 (2014): 366-384.

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