This article analyzes British narratives of voyages made to Paris during three periods: the Peace of Amiens (March 1802 to May 1803), the first Restoration (April 1814 to May 1815), and in the first few years of the second Restoration (June 1815 to ca. 1820). These accounts reveal a consistent use of strong and distressing expressions of emotion when describing locations in the city associated with the events of the French Revolution. An analysis of these "emotional landmarks" allows us to understand the role of trauma in unsettling distinctions between the British and French in the aftermath of the Revolution. It also demonstrates that travel writers participated in an emotional community consistent with the nation, one that used these emotional landmarks to establish a new distinction between the two national characters based on emotion.
An Alarming Lack of Feeling: Urban Travel, Emotions, and British National Character in Post-Revolutionary Paris

Victoria E. Thompson

This article analyzes British narratives of voyages made to Paris during three periods: the Peace of Amiens (March 1802 to May 1803), the first Restoration (April 1814 to May 1815), and in the first few years of the second Restoration (June 1815 to ca. 1820). These accounts reveal a consistent use of strong and distressing expressions of emotion when describing locations in the city associated with the events of the French Revolution. An analysis of these "emotional landmarks" allows us to understand the role of trauma in unsettling distinctions between the British and French in the aftermath of the Revolution. It also demonstrates that travel writers participated in an emotional community consistent with the nation, one that used these emotional landmarks to establish a new distinction between the two national characters based on emotion.

In the autumn of 1814 John Scott, radical journalist and son of an Aberdeen upholsterer, boarded a boat to France, eager to see the effects of the Revolution. As his ship approached Dieppe, he saw a large crucifix on the pier. This crucifix, Scott wrote in the account of his visit, "caused me to feel that I was about to land on foreign ground... This feeling, when experienced for the first time, is a strong and a touching one." Scott was not alone in his emotional reaction to visiting France. Another traveller, gazing at moonlit Paris from the Pont Neuf, wrote, "How numerous and how various are the feelings which rush to the mind on such an occasion—there is a swelling of the soul which defies expression, and which can no more be communicated by description than we could convey an idea of sight to a blind man by a lecture on optics." This traveller, like many other British tourists who flocked to Paris in the aftermath of the French Revolution, repeatedly described emotions felt while in the city. Travellers most frequently described emotions, particularly sadness and fear, when describing locations where important revolutionary events had occurred. These negative emotions were important in redefining national difference after the Revolution. The physical locations at which negative emotions were expressed were crucial in this process, and an analysis of these locations reveal patterns that help us understand how specific locations, or emotional landmarks, worked to define national difference. Expressing negative emotions in relation to these landmarks allowed travel writers to mark their membership in a community defined by trauma. At the same time, the contrast between the emotions of travellers and those of Parisians provided a means of differentiating between British and French national character on the basis of sentiment.

While the French had long played the role of other in the formation of English and British identity, the characteristics that defined the distinction between national self and other changed over time. In the second half of the eighteenth century, Britons argued that French absolutism and Catholicism had produced a servile population, more interested in fashion and gallantry than in political liberty. At the outset of the Revolution, observers such as Arthur Young celebrated France's adoption of what he considered to be British political practices and values. As the Revolution moved in a more radical direction, however, the conviction that Britons were superior to the French because they were more committed to liberty was shaken by the British government's crackdown on radical political movements at home. British opinion split over the events in France throughout the Revolution, as some argued for French superiority. In undermining a shared belief in the fundamental difference between the two countries, the Revolution rendered British national identity unstable. While France still served as the other against...
An Alarming Lack of Feeling

which Great Britain was compared, the rules of the game had changed. What was meant by the category “the French” in relation to “the British” was no longer clear. Indeed, it was precisely because France was such a consistent and significant other in the articulation of British national identity that the Revolution undermined certainty in British superiority. In order to re-establish a strong and clear sense of British identity, it was necessary to determine how the Revolution had changed the French. Travel writers played an important role in this process.

Post-revolutionary British travellers arrived in Paris during three periods: during the Peace of Amiens (March 1802 to May 1803), during the first Restoration (April 1814 to May 1815), and in the first few years of the second Restoration (June 1815 to ca. 1820). While travel to Paris was common before 1789 and during the early years of the Revolution, shortly after France declared war on Great Britain in 1792 Britons in France were subject to arrest. Travel came to a halt until the Peace of Amiens. Within ten days after the preliminary treaty was signed in October 1801, nearly 800 Britons arrived in France. Once warfare recommenced in May 1803, Britons were once again subject to arrest. The first defeat of Napoleon in the spring of 1814 encouraged some to visit France; after Waterloo, British visitors flocked to the Continent, eager to see the changes that the Revolution and empire had brought about. In the second half of 1815, 8,500 Britons arrived on the French coast. The influx of tourists resulted in a less dramatic but equally substantial number of published travel accounts. As a contributor to the Critical Review wrote, “All the world must go to France; and half the world will write their travels.” The travellers discussed in this article came from England, Scotland, and Ireland; they included men from modest and wealthy backgrounds, with political positions ranging from radical to Tory. Yet all were engaged in the effort to define how the French had changed, and, by extension, how such changes shaped the contours of British national identity.

In each period and across the periods, travellers’ descriptions of revolutionary Paris were highly emotional. Expressions of emotion are common in travel accounts, and scholars of nineteenth-century British travel writing have addressed the role of emotions in forging both collective and individual identity. James Buzard has demonstrated the importance of the pleasuring emotions of the picturesque to British travellers on the Continent in their quest for “alterity,” or an escape from modern, industrializing society. From the 1820s to the end of the century, he argues, elite British travellers sought out experiences designed to produce these emotions as a way to differentiate themselves from the hordes of supposedly indifferent and less-cultured tourists they encountered while abroad. More recently, Carl Thompson has examined expressions of suffering among Romantic British travellers through the lens of self-fashioning, arguing that travellers sought out these negative emotions in an effort to transcend the everyday self. In British accounts of post-revolutionary Paris, travellers did not necessarily seek out situations that would bring them suffering; nonetheless, the negative emotions they experienced became the basis for differentiating between the French and the British at a time when British identity was in flux.

The built environment of the city of Paris was central in this process. Travellers experienced their strongest emotions in Paris when contemplating structures and monuments that reminded them of the Revolution. These sites, or emotional landmarks, were the concrete markers around which writers articulated the sentimental character of British identity. Scholarship on British nationalism, invented traditions, and commemoration has shown that specific sites become important markers of national identity through their association with memories (invented or not) that have meaning for the collective. While we often assume such sites exist within national or imperial boundaries, this investigation of post-revolutionary travel accounts demonstrates that sites outside the national boundaries could also serve as anchors for identity. Drawing on the insights of Maurice Halbwachs to analyze these sites, this article explores how emotions evoked by specific urban locales provided travellers a means to define themselves as British. It thus adds to our understanding of the relationship between emotions and the city by focusing on the interplay between emotion and the urban landscape in crafting national identity.

British travellers to Paris were steeped in the highly emotional culture of sensibility, which deemed strong emotions, including sadness or fear, pleasurable. From the 1770s through the early nineteenth century, British travellers set out in pursuit of the picturesque and framed their travel narratives using this aesthetic approach. A scene was said to be picturesque when it was deemed worthy of being painted, and when it evoked strong but pleasant emotions in the spectator. The picturesque encompassed the aesthetic notion of the sublime, by which even emotions such as terror were pleasing; the pleasure lay in viewing a terrifying scene while knowing one was safe. A good example of this technique in a narrative of travel to post-revolutionary Paris is Francis William Blagdon’s Paris as It Was and as It Is. While describing the Place du Carrousel, the Tory journalist wrote about the attempt by revolutionary leader François Hanriot to mobilize the crowds in defence of Robespierre in the summer of 1794. When the hoped-for insurrection failed to materialize, Blagdon wrote, Hanriot fled to the Hôtel de Ville, or city hall, where he was thrown out a window and then recognized by a group of soldiers: “He then crawled into a sewer, close to the spot where he had fallen; when a soldier, thrusting his bayonet into the sewer, put out one of his eyes, and forced him to surrender.” Explicit details meant to frighten or disgust and a suspenseful narrative relayed to the reader some of the excitement of revolutionary events at a safe distance. Blagdon’s style fits well within a tradition of travel writing shaped by the picturesque; his narrative evoked a pleasurable, because safe, sense of fear by keeping events firmly in the revolutionary past.

In other instances, the separation between past and present was not as clear. Reminders of the Revolution were to be found
An Alarming Lack of Feeling

throughout Paris into the early 1820s. All of the public buildings in the capital, “and not a few of the private ones,” according to John Scott, still bore traces of the Revolution and the Empire. “N’s, bees and eagles—Napoleon’s symbols—were carved in the walls of public buildings, while over the rue Saint Honoré entrance to the Palais Royal, the great commercial center of Paris, one could still read ‘Liberté ou la mort.’”17 William Fellowes, a Scottish lawyer, was shocked that such slogans were still visible, noting that while the Parisian police might be able to ignore them, “I cannot view them with the same indifference.”18 These accounts challenge Peter Fritzsche’s argument that in the aftermath of the Revolution, the past was “disconnected from the present.”19 In Paris, the all-too-present traces of the Revolution produced emotional distress.20 Thus the Unitarian minister William Shepherd wrote of being stopped at the entrance to the capital, where two guards examined the passports of all the passengers in his carriage. While waiting, he remembered how the city walls were sealed during the Terror so that no enemies of the Revolution could escape. “How many countenances have turned pale—how many hearts have ached at the sight of these horrid portals! So much was I impressed with these considerations, that though I was well assured that our passports were strictly regular, I felt a slight degree of uneasiness, till we received them from the examiners, with permission to enter the city.”21 With this example, Shepherd erased any comforting distance between the Revolution and the present, putting himself, and by extension his readers, into Paris during its most radical and violent phase.

This is not to say that every Briton felt these emotions, or felt them in relation to the locations discussed in this article.22 However, that a considerable number did so suggests that the picturesque is an inadequate framework for fully understanding the role played by emotions in the narratives of British travellers to post-revolutionary Paris. These travellers lacked the distance in either space or time that would make emotions such as fear pleasurable. While picturesque ruins typically evoked a pleasing melancholy, revolutionary ruins were displeasing to British eyes. As early as 1798, C. L. Moody stated, “The ruins of the castles built during the feudal system never affected me like these modern ones: I considered them as picturesque objects, and, without advertizing to what reduced them to neglected and mouldering ruins, I was pleased with their effect in the landscape. But not so the ruins that now come daily before our eyes: these are not ivy-mantled, but bearing all the naked marks of violence;—these do not relate to ‘tales of other times,’ but are produced by the shocks and convulsions of yesterday.”23 The presence of revolutionary “ruins” made the French capital a city in which “nothing is secure, or can afford security. This is the most horrible of feelings; and Paris inspires it more than any other habitable spot on the Globe.”24 As Moody’s remarks indicate, the emotional impact of revolutionary ruins fell outside the parameters of the picturesque.

These distressing emotions appear to modern readers as signs of trauma, and the work of Jeffrey Alexander provides a framework for interpreting them in this way. According to Alexander, cultural trauma occurs when “members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.”25 While the Revolution occurred in France, it had a significant impact on how the British saw themselves. In Britain, radicals seeking to expand political liberties as well as political leaders who restricted such liberties challenged the belief that the British had a greater attachment to political liberty than did the French. Stuart Semmel has noted that even those who “celebrated British character as an ideal, and as a historical reality . . . were consumed with worries about its present status.”26 Among British elites, fears of an attack on privilege and property were widespread, leading to a crisis of confidence manifested in suicide, mental illness, and high-risk behaviours.27 These feelings of anxiety and what Linda Colley characterized as “disorientation” are to be expected, Alexander argued, following an event or series of events “believed to have abruptly, and harmfully, affected collective identity.”28 Most Britons experienced the Revolution indirectly, but that did not make revolutionary events any less distressing or more difficult to envision. Before 1789, Paris was a popular destination for the elite and educated, and numerous published accounts of the city made it familiar even to those who could not journey abroad.29 Once the Revolution began, reports from France allowed readers to envision where events took place. In 1793, the London Observer described the execution of Louis XVI, specifying exactly where the guillotine was located, in the current Place de la Concorde. Readers could envision the route taken from the Temple prison to the site of execution, and the subsequent transportation of the body, all related in detail by the paper.30 Such accounts also set the emotional tone that would be evoked by later visitors to Paris. The article in the Observer recounted that the “trotting and neighing of horses, the shrill sound of the trumpet, and the continual beating of drums, pierced the ears of every body, and heightened the terrors of the awful scene.” Through such reporting, even those who had not previously travelled to Paris would likely possess a mental image of significant locales to which the details of particular events could be attached.

Familiarity with the locations in which revolutionary events played out contributed to the strong emotions felt by post-revolutionary travellers. Furthermore, research shows that trauma has a significant spatial aspect. While victims of trauma are often unable to access cognitively the originating event, they still experience strong emotions associated with the event. A reminder that the victim cannot always identify, such as a place that calls to mind the location where the event occurred, triggers these emotions.31 Even when details about the event are remembered, emotions do not disappear. In fact, research suggests that those aspects of the event that caused the greatest emotional distress are the most likely to be remembered.32 Furthermore, memories of a traumatic event tend to be more
focused spatially than memories of an event that did not produce strong emotions. In other words, the memory of events that produce trauma is both highly emotional and associated with a very specific and delimited locale. Travellers to post-revolutionary Paris had formed memories of events that were imbued with strong emotion and linked to specific urban locations. These locations served as what Dominick LaCapra has called sites of trauma. For La Capra, lieux de mémoire, or sites of memory are “generally . . . invested with trauma.” These sites can include texts, museums, and commemorative monuments. For British travellers to post-revolutionary Paris, trauma sites were locations that elicited painful memories of the Revolution.

The sites of trauma described in travel accounts also served as what I am calling emotional landmarks in order to highlight their role as nodes within a system of collective meaning. I am inspired here by Maurice Halbwachs, who argued that individual memories exist only within collective frameworks of understanding. In writing about the impact of events that have a strong emotional effect on an individual, Halbwachs argued that the memory of both the event and the emotion “only becomes a landmark [point de repère] for us to the extent that we align it with periods or places that are landmarks for the group.” Travel narratives brought together a virtual community of authors, critics, and readers who could relive the Revolution in the locations where it actually occurred. In this sense, travel narratives functioned as more than an aggregate of individual reminiscences. Writing about the events of the Revolution both depended upon and reinforced the existence of a community of Britons for whom France served as a persistent other. The use of similar emotions in describing events further reinforced communal ties.

Travellers did not make random choices when deciding which revolutionary sites to describe using expressions of emotion. Travel accounts in all three periods (1802–3, 1814–15, and 1815–1820) include a wide variety of sites associated with the Revolution, but the Tuileries palace and garden were the most frequently and consistently described, with the Place de la Concorde a close second, suggesting that travellers found these locations the most significant. In addition, the historical references made by authors in relation to these sites narrowed over time, eventually resulting in one specific meaning for each locale. In accounts of visits made during the first period, the Tuileries palace and garden were described in relation to the residence of the royal family, the meeting halls of the Convention and National Assembly, the 11 July 1789 charge of troops led by the Prince de Lambesc into the garden, and the events of 10 August 1792, when crowds invaded the palace, forcing the royal family to seek refuge in the meeting hall of the National Assembly, from where they were taken to the Temple prison.

Accounts published in 1814 and later referred only to the events of 10 August. In descriptions of the Place de la Concorde a similar process occurred; while all descriptions included a reference to the death of Louis XVI at this site, accounts of visits made before 1815 also referred to other events, such as the death of spectators in the plaza during the 1770 celebration of the marriage of Louis to Marie-Antoinette. There was no mention of these other events in later accounts. In addition, while earlier accounts typically took note of other victims of the guillotine in their description of the plaza, later accounts often mentioned only the execution of Louis XVI. Over time, the narrowing of the number of sites and the historical references associated with them resulted in a single narrative that organized these sites: the arrest and execution of the king. By gradually leaving important revolutionary sites, like the location of the demolished Bastille prison, out of this narrative, authors were able to focus on sites around which there was a consensus in Britain, while ignoring those more likely to provoke political debate at home. This narrowing may be evidence that the repeated recounting of revolutionary events in travel narratives allowed for a collective healing or working through. Over time, a focus on the execution of Louis XVI—which was widely condemned in Great Britain—would likely have encouraged similar emotional reactions in diverse readers, and thus may have both contributed to and reflected the production of a consensus regarding the meaning of the Revolution for Britons.

In this way, travel writers demonstrated their membership in an emotional community. Barbara Rosenwein defined emotional communities as equivalent to social communities such as neighbourhoods or guilds. They are bound, she argues, by “systems of feeling: what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations they make about others’ emotions; . . . and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.” William Reddy implicitly enlarges this notion of emotional community when he argues that “emotional regimes,” which dictated what emotions were acceptable, applied to entire societies at a given time. Travel writers and readers most likely constituted a community equivalent in size to a neighbourhood or a guild, yet because they did not necessarily personally know each other, they were an imagined community in the sense articulated by Benedict Anderson. They also functioned as part of an imagined community in that their expressions of emotion were made with the assumption that all Britons would experience similar feelings in the same situations, while all French men and women would not. This emotional community was assumed to be equivalent to the national community.

The description of sites associated with the Revolution thus not only included an account of the emotions of the traveller but also used this emotional reaction as a means to assert membership in an emotional community. When William Fellowes visited the Hôtel de Ville, or City Hall, his coachman pointed out to him the lanterns in the plaza outside the building, “on which thousands were hanged by the mob.” He finished his description of the site by stating, “It is impossible not to view this spot without sensations of horror and disgust.” Fellowes not only showed that he was capable of true feeling but also implied that anyone with true feeling would have the same reaction. James Carr made a similar point more forcefully, upon his visit to the ruins of the Bastille prison: “Every lover of pure liberty...
must leap with delight upon the disencumbered earth, where once stood that gloomy abode.44 Expressions of emotion not only demonstrated the author’s character, they also reinforced the bond between author and reader on the basis of shared emotions. Reviewers of travel accounts also participated in this emotional community through their appreciation of authors’ use of emotion. In an 1803 review of John Carr’s Stranger in France, a contributor to the Critical Review wrote, “The usual objects of curiosity at Paris are described; but the author’s manner is not a hackneyed one. He gives the zest of novelty to common scenes, by copying from his own feelings.”45 An 1814 review of Shepherd’s travel narrative in the Whig Edinburgh Review praised the work on the grounds that “it contains everywhere the traces of a vigorous mind, at once shrewd and bold, and of feelings and principles equally candid and pure.”46 In assuming that writers, critics, and readers would have the same emotional reactions to significant sites of revolutionary Paris, these authors also assumed the existence of a community.

This community was further identified as a national community vis-à-vis the French. James Simpson was able to view the guillotine, which was locked up not far from the Hôtel de Ville. “I certainly saw,” he wrote, “the murderous instrument lying on the ground—the same instrument that had struck off the heads of the King and Queen, and of the multitudes who followed them.” While gazing upon the guillotine, “so fruitful in dreadful associations,” Simpson almost forgot the group of French men and women around him, which he described as his “merry friends.” Climbing down from his perch, Simpson found that he “was not just in their mood.” Thomas Jessop had a similar experience while visiting the Place Louis XV. He noted that while it was currently “the promenade of gaity,” it must be a source of pain to the royal family, “when from the Thulleries [sic] they see the spot once watered with the blood of a father, an uncle, a brother, a lawful king.”47 Blagdon, in his reflections on the Place Louis XV, imagined that the pleasures of the Parisians he saw around him had gone uninterrupted during the Revolution:

> What cannot fail to excite your astonishment and that of every thinking person, is, that, in the midst of these executions, in the midst of these convulsions of the state, in the midst of these struggles for power, in the midst of these outrages against the despots of the day, in the midst of famine even, not artificial, but real; in short, in the midst of an accumulation of horrors almost unexampled, the fiddle and the tambourin never ceased. Galas, concerts, and balls were given daily in incredible numbers; and no less than from fifteen to twenty theatres, besides several other places of public entertainment, were constantly open, and almost as constantly filled.48

While Britons expressed the sadness and fear that they associated with revolutionary landmarks, Parisians appeared worse than indifferent to them: they made merry in these locales. Like all broad generalizations, this contrast was not entirely true. As early as 1795, Parisians openly expressed remorse for the death of Louis XVI, and Louis XVIII initiated a number of commemorative projects.49 Yet most travel writers made no mention of this, and indeed felt that even if such atonement were to be manifested in public, it would be no more than a spectacle to the French. James Simpson wrote, “It is always sufficient for the French that there is spectacle,” and this love of spectacle was for some authors evidence that French hearts were hardened to the suffering of others.50 Thus Simpson noted that, even before the Revolution, executions were frequently a festive occasion, commenting, “No spectacles were more popular among all ranks and sexes than executions, in the times of the highest French Polish—a kind of polish which, like that on marble, does not soften the heart.”51 The French love of spectacle was for Britons proof of a “defect in the moral constitution,” which rendered the French incapable of feeling empathy for the suffering of others.52 This supposed lack of empathy explained why middle-class Parisians, whom many visitors saw as their peers, did not do more to stop the violence of the Revolution. Lady Morgan extended this critique to aristocratic royalists as well when describing her experience at a lunch party whose attendees “consisted exclusively of ultras and royalists.” Following a visit to the chapel dedicated to the Duke d’Enghien, the group “withdrew from the chapelle expiative [expiatory chapel] in sadness and in silence, and the eyes of more than one brave and devoted champion of the Bourbons swam in tears.” Yet, as she noted, it was still a beautiful day; “it was a French sun; and we were a French party: we ascended our carriages, and bidding adieu to the gloomy towers of the Château de Vincennes, the coachmen . . . soon brought us to Paris, and set us down at the doors of one of its gayest spectacles, the Comic Opera.”53 For Morgan, even those most directly affected by the violence of the Revolution could not long sustain emotions of sadness and regret when faced with the prospect of entertainment.

While travel writers asserted that the middle and upper classes lacked empathy, they portrayed the working classes as unable to control their emotions. William Blagdon thus commented, “In France, the revolution covered the country with ruins, tears, and blood, because means were not to be found to moderate in the people that revolutionary spirit which parches, in the bud, the promised fruits of liberty, when its violence is not repressed.”54 The Reverend Eustace similarly explained the “revolutionary madness” as the work of a people “untutored, undisciplined, without any guide but passion.”55 The assumption that Parisians possessed a propensity for violence driven by excessive passion explained the unease many travellers felt in a city where the threat of another revolution seemed very present. As hated as he was by many Britons, Napoleon was also praised for his ability to restrain French passions. The return of the Bourbons raised new concerns: Louis XVIII did not appear to be as forceful a leader in a city where the “passions of parties have now been kindled with increased violence.”56 What British travellers perceived as a dangerous combination of indifference and passion rendered the future of France uncertain. At the same time, comparisons between French feelings, or the lack of them, and British sentiments provided a means by which Britons could establish a set of contrasts that were used to define their identity vis-à-vis the French.57
An Alarming Lack of Feeling

In comparing British and French emotions, authors drew upon several sources. Some recycled old stereotypes. When in Tory journalist William Jerdan’s *Six Weeks in Paris; or, a Cure for the Gallomania* a fictional traveller complained that in Paris “everything seems veiled in an impenetrable mystery,” his fictional French counterpart replied that, as in the past, the French were “the same fickle people they ever were . . . As the weathercock obeys the prevailing wind, they follow the fashion of the day.”59 Pre-revolutionary travel accounts had regularly stressed the Frenchian love of spectacle and magnificence, yet comparisons based on emotions were rare. Those examples that do exist appeared in the wake of Tobias Smollett’s 1763 account of his visit to France, which was a tapestry of complaints concerning French accommodations, food, and customs.60 Both Laurence Sterne, in his *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, and Frances Garden evoked emotions in their account as a way to poke fun at Smollett.61 In a rare comparison of emotional outlooks, Francis Garden described the French as “joyous and happy in all ranks, down to the lowest poverty . . . My ragged driver this morning enjoyed his pipe, and sung a merry song by turns;—whilst, with some British thousands of income, I could not divert a fit of British melancholy.”62 Neither he nor Sterne, however, systematically compared the British and French on the basis of emotion.

A more likely influence on post-revolutionary travel writers who emphasized emotion was Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. First published in 1759, the last edition revised by Smith appeared in 1790. At least nine editions were published in Great Britain between 1792 and 1813, and in 1811 Dugald Stewart published a short and accessible summary of the work, along with a biographical sketch of the author.63 If interested, travellers visiting Paris in the post-revolutionary period would have had ample access to *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The book was a great success upon its original publication and garnered significant attention until the 1830s.64 In this work, Smith argued that what he called sympathy—the ability to feel what we believe others are feeling in a specific situation—was a natural ability possessed by “every attentive spectator.” If the emotions felt by the spectator, or what he called the “impartial observer,” corresponded with those felt by the person experiencing a given situation, and if the observer deemed those emotions to be appropriate to the situation, the observer then concluded that the emotions and actions of the observed met the rules of propriety. “To approve of the passions of another, therefore, as suitable to their objects, is the same thing as to observe that we entirely sympathize with them; and not to approve of them as such, is the same thing as to observe that we do not entirely sympathize with them.”65 As individuals internalized the objective observer, they were able to judge not only the actions and reactions of others, but also their own. To act in a manner of which others would approve was to act with propriety; to act with benevolence was to go beyond propriety to virtue.

Contemporaries viewed *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* as a treatise on ethics that was both theoretical and practical.66 Stewart observed, “With the theoretical doctrines of this book, there are everywhere interwoven, with singular taste and address, the purest and most elevated maxims concerning the practical conduct of life.”67 Smith drew on examples that readers would be familiar with, as well as on Christian tenets.68 Some of the situations that he described were highly applicable to travellers to post-revolutionary Paris. “Our sympathy with deep distress,” he wrote, “is very strong and very sincere. It is unnecessary to give an instance. We weep even at the feigned representation of a tragedy.” Stating that harming another, particularly by taking his life, cannot be condoned and must necessarily lead to the perpetrator feeling deep remorse, Smith commented, “The violator of the more sacred laws of justice can never reflect on the sentiments which mankind must entertain with regard to him, without feeling all the agonies of shame, and horror, and consternation. When his passion is gratified, and he begins coolly to reflect on his past conduct, . . . [h]e is grieved by the thought of it; regrets the unhappy effects of his own conduct, and feels at the same time that [these effects] have rendered him the proper object of the resentment and indignation of mankind.”69 In addressing topics that seemed newly relevant in the aftermath of the French Revolution, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* instructed readers on what feelings were acceptable in relation to its violence. Smith’s work provided a framework for making emotional sense of the Revolution. In this sense, it was similar to the sentimental novel, which, as Gesa Stedman argues, “can demonstrate ‘feeling rules’ explicitly, and their possible effects [could] be shown, thus providing contemporary readers with guidelines.”70

It is impossible to know if Smith influenced travellers directly in the writing of their accounts, since none of them refer to him directly. However, although Stedman does not mention Smith in her discussion of emotion in British novels, her focus on both sympathy and self-control (another important quality for Smith) suggests that his ideas had permeated British literature by the early nineteenth century. Smith was, after all, writing at a time when there was substantial interest in the emotions, as part of the culture of sensibility. The culture of sensibility valued the expression of strong emotions when faced with the suffering of others, an element we see clearly in Smith.

Among post-revolutionary travel writers, John Scott appears to have been most directly influenced by *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Scott’s narrative demonstrates how Smith’s work provided both a means and a justification for establishing distinctions between the French and the British on the basis of the emotions. Scott wrote, “It has usually been thought that the state of sentiment affords a pretty good assurance of the tenor of conduct,—that habits have a vein of consistency running through them, and that certain circumstances are incompatible with certain feelings. But the history of the capital of France totally defies any such deductions.”71 Scott developed this theme throughout his travel narrative, with anecdotes designed to “shew how cold and languid public sympathy is in the breast of the French, compared with its state in England.”72 This point was
most strongly made at emotional landmarks, where memories of the revolutionary events that had taken place there evoked in the author (and by extension the reader) emotions consistent with British notions of propriety. Thus Scott made his statement, cited above, that "certain circumstances are incompatible with certain feelings," while describing the Place de la Concorde. When walking through the Louvre, he commented, “Through this gallery, a French King and his family flew, pursued by murderers, never more to return to a royal residence.—These multitudes, that are now pressing round pictures and chattering criticisms on the works of taste, were formerly equally occupied and amused with an exhibition of dancing dogs under the guillotine!” Scott’s work, published in 1814 and reissued several times, may have inspired other writers to use emotion as a means to draw distinctions between the British and the French.

Scott, and other travellers along with him, expected to see on the faces of the French signs of the remorse that Adam Smith had described, a remorse that makes it difficult to look another person in the eye. Instead they saw lively crowds, expressions of pride in the magnificence of Paris, and a seeming indifference to what Scott and others considered the nation’s great crime. Thomas Jessop remarked, “To a reflecting mind every part of Paris furnishes a subject of painful thought: the Palaces have been degraded into prisons or defiled with murder; the gardens have been watered by the blood of the Assassinated; and every panorama of pleasure was once a scene of horror, agony, and death: still the giddy Parisian wanders in search of the gratification of an hour thro’ these places without one serious thought of past transactions.” While describing the Place de la Concorde, Thomas Raffles wrote of the French, “No stranger to their history, to what Scott and others considered the nation’s great crime. Its present as an emotional landmark that both asserted the French King and his family flew, pursued by murderers, never more to return to a royal residence.—These multitudes, that are now pressing round pictures and chattering criticisms on the works of taste, were formerly equally occupied and amused with an exhibition of dancing dogs under the guillotine!”

Within a few years these strong emotions had begun to abate, and travel writers began to criticize the overly emotional tones of earlier accounts. Among them was William Playfair, whose *France as It Is*, published in two volumes in 1819 and 1820, sought to move the discussion of the impact of the Revolution away from the character of the French to an analysis of whether or not it had benefitted the people. This shift did not mean that he excluded discussions of emotion altogether, but unlike earlier writers, he admitted that in certain circumstances the French were capable of sympathy. Yet even in Playfair, descriptions of some sites were accompanied by reflections on emotional difference. “An Englishman,” he wrote, “after viewing the column in the Place Vandome, which is covered with bas relief representations of numerous victories [of Napoleon’s armies] estimated, that if all the human blood of Frenchmen slain in that campaign were collected, it would more than fill the hollow case of metal . . . If, then, there was subject for pride, what tears ought to flow for the loss of so many brave men?” For Playfair, the Vendôme column was an imperial rather than revolutionary landmark, but he used it just as earlier authors had used the Place de la Concorde. It was an emotional landmark that both asserted belonging in an emotional community consistent with the nation and posited a fundamental difference distinguishing the British from the French. Yet unlike earlier accounts, Playfair distanced himself from the strong emotions he evoked by attributing the anecdote to “an Englishman.” While less unsettling, emotions were no less important in distinguishing the British self from the French other. As the trauma of the French Revolution faded, it left as a legacy a new, “patterned meaning . . . of the collectivity,” or a distinction between British and French based on emotions.

An anonymous traveller who visited Paris in 1814 marvelled at the changes he had lived through in such a short period of time. “We seemed to have lived centuries within the last twenty years—the events—the mighty events which have taken place in that space of time, have crowded ages into years. Our grandchildren will ask us if we really went about the ordinary business and occupations of life, or if we did not sit down in astonishment and dismay.” It should not surprise us that the experience of the Revolution produced strong emotions and a general sense of insecurity. Recent authors have argued that Europeans attempted to escape these strong feelings by emphasizing the supremacy of reason, or by distancing themselves from the past. By contrast, this analysis of post-revolutionary descriptions of Paris demonstrates that for many, Britons emotions—including sadness, fear, and anxiety—played an important role in re-establishing distinctions that defined national identity that had been upset by the Revolution. Expressions of emotion in descriptions of locations in Paris that authors associated with the Revolution both revealed travellers’ anxiety and allowed them to affirm their belonging in an emotional community that they associated with the nation.

Scholars have recognized the importance of travel narratives in articulating distinctions fundamental to formulations of national identity. As this article demonstrates, definitions of the national self can be seriously challenged by events that upset long-held assumptions concerning the differences between the home country and that being visited. At such moments, expressions of emotional distress reveal the trauma caused when elements fundamental to a shared identity are called into question. As Dominick LaCapra has argued, collective trauma is manifested in memory sites, or what I have referred to as emotional landmarks. While these emotional landmarks elicited feelings of fear and discomfort, they also became the nodes around which a new formulation of national difference, one based on emotion, was articulated.

As a result of this process, Britons gazing upon revolutionary buildings, monuments, and spaces could be reassured that...
they possessed the all-important quality of sympathy. And even if they were often shocked that the French did not seem to share their emotion, they could take comfort that this very difference re-established a distinction between the two nations. Yet, as with all rivalries, constant vigilance was required. As John Scott wrote upon a second visit to the French capital, “If, as I firmly believe, France is now settling quietly into habits of order and security, there must be in a short time, a most decided amelioration in the state of moral feeling; and when that does take place, we shall be under the necessity of redoubling our own vigilance with respect to every thing which can influence national character, in order to preserve the pre-eminence we have hitherto maintained.”

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Nicholas Kenny and the anonymous referees for their helpful feedback on this essay, as well as Arizona State University for its contribution to funding the research for this project.

Notes


3 Scholars have identified this period as one in which both English and British national identity were under construction. See, for example, Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740–1830* (Houndmills, UK: MacMillan, 1997); and Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005). I have chosen to use the term British national identity throughout this article because, while the travel writers discussed here came from diverse parts of the British Isles, they all assume a common, shared identity that was distinct from, and defined in opposition to, the French. Marjorie Morgan notes the same tendency in *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2001), 5.


5 Arthur Young, *Travels during the Years 1787, 1788, and 1789. Undertaken more particularly with a View of ascertaining the Cultivation, Wealth, Resources, and National Prosperity, of the Kingdom of France* (London, Bury St. Edmund’s, 1792), 116, 125.


7 Ibid., 89.


13 Emotion enters into a great number of historical studies, but it is infrequently the object of analysis. When it is analyzed directly, it is usually to explore emotion in relation to events occurring within a city. An excellent example is Elodie Lecqurre-Desjardins and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene, *Emotions in the Heart of the City* (14th–16th Century) (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2005).


16 [Francis William Blagdon], *Paris As It Was and As It Is; or A Sketch of the French Capital, Illustrative of the Effects of the French Revolution with respect to Sciences, Literature, Arts, Religion, Education, Manners, and Amusements; comprising also A correct Account of the most remarkable National Establishments and Public Buildings*. In a *Series of Letters, Written by an English Traveller, during the years 1801–2*, To a Friend in London (London: C. and R. Baldwin, 1803), 1:94.

17 Scott, *Visit*, 113.


22 It is impossible to know if the authors actually felt the emotions they expressed in their accounts. Yet, as William Reddy has argued, this does not mean that the historian need ignore such expressions of emotions altogether. Drawing upon research in neuroscience, psychology, and anthropology, Reddy argues that whether spoken or written, expressions of emotion, or “emotives,” elicit in both the speaker/author and listener/reader the feeling expressed. Reddy writes that understanding the function of expressions of emotions allows the historian to “suppose that, more often than not, the emotives were effective, eliciting a confirming response and intensifying inclinations that were already there.” William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 169. In drawing on Reddy’s work, I have preferred to use expressions of emotion rather than his term emotives.

23 C. L. Moody, ed., *A Sketch of Modern France. In a Series of Letters to a Lady of Fashion. Written in the Years 1796 and 1797, during a Tour through France.*
An Alarming Lack of Feeling


24 Scott, *Vist*, 57. Emphasis in the original.


28 Ibid., 322; Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” 10. Alexander argues that it is not an event in itself that causes collective trauma, but rather the identification of the event as traumatic by a significant portion of the collectivity.

29 See, for example [William Jones], *Observations in a Journey to Paris by way of Flanders in the Month of August 1776*, 2 vols. (London: G. Robinson, in Pater-noster Row, 1777). Accounts of Continental travel included significant sections on Paris; one of the most read, and parodied, was Tobias Smollett’s *Travels through France and Italy, Containing Observations on Character, Customs, Religion, Government, Police, Commerce, Arts, and Antiquities. With a particular Description of the Town, Territory, and Climate of Nice: To which is added, A Register of the Weather, kept during a Residence of Eighteen Months in that City*, 2 vols. (London: R. Baldwin, 1766). The original date of publication was 1763. In addition, French histories and descriptions of Paris were translated into English, such as German Brice, *A New Description of Paris* (London: Printed for Henry Bonwicke, 1688).

30 “The Guillotine was erected in the middle of the Square, directly facing the Gate of the Garden of the Thelleries, between the Pedestal on which the Equestrian Statue of the Grandfather of Louis was standing, before the 10th of August, and the avenues which lead to the Groves called the Elysian Fields.” “Paris: The Death of Louis XV,” Observer (London), 27 January 1973. Emphasis in the original.


36 My focus in these accounts is on collective—rather than what Jeffrey Olick terms “collected”—memory. See Olick, “Collective Memory: The Two Cultures,” *Sociological Theory* 17, no. 3 (November 1999): 333–49.

37 This analysis of sites associated with the Revolution is inspired by Maurice Halbwachs’s discussion of the process by which Christian sacred sites were established in and around Jerusalem. See Halbwachs, *La topographie légendaire des églises en Terre sainte*.

38 Given this narrative, it is striking that an important site in this narrative was not described more frequently. The Temple tower, where the royal family was held as prisoners until the death of the king, is described only six times, with the last mention occurring in 1817. The relative neglect of the Temple site can be explained in part by the demolition of the tower in 1808, on Napoleon’s orders.

39 LaCapra provides a model for thinking about how texts that describe or analyze events after their occurrence serve as a means to work through collective trauma, in *History and Memory after Auschwitz*.


41 Reddy defines an emotional regime as “the set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices, and emotives that express and inculcate them; a necessary underpinning of any stable political regime.” See Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, 129.


43 Fellowes, *Paris during the Interesting Month of July 1815*, 53.


49 Blagdon, *Paris As It Was*, 1:129.

50 On these projects, see Emmanuelle Furiere, *La France des larmes: Deuxiès politiques à l’âge romantique (1814–1840)* (Paris: Champs Vallon, 2009).


52 Ibid., 171. Emphasis in the original.


55 Bladgon, *Paris As It Was*, 1:xii. Emphasis in the original.


58 Gesa Stedman has argued that the denunciation of the passions in the lower classes and the critique of aristocratic indifference was part of a process by which middle-class Britons participated in the “project of creating a stable middle class habitus.” Travel accounts show that this distinction based on emotion was used internationally as well as domestically. Gesa Stedman, *Stemming the Torrent: Expression and Control in the Victorian Discourses on Emotion*, 1830–1872 (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), 123.


60 Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy*.


An Alarming Lack of Feeling


66 Ann Firth, “Adam Smith’s Moral Philosophy as Ethical Self-Formation,” in New Perspectives on Adam Smith’s The Theory of Moral Sentiments, ed. Geoff Cockfield, Ann Firth, and John Laurent (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elger, 2007), 118.

67 Stewart, Biographical Memoirs, 45.

68 For example, in explaining sympathy, Smith evokes “our joy for the deliverance of those heroes of tragedy or romance,” as well as “the great law of Christianity,” “to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.” Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, 10, 22.

69 Ibid., 43, 84.

70 Stedman, Stemming the Torrent, 2–3.

71 Scott, Visit to Paris, 82.

72 Ibid., 11–12.

73 Ibid., 246–7.

74 For example, John Scott, Emigration; or England and Paris: A Poem (London: Baldwin, Craddock & Joy, 1816), quoted extensively from Scott’s Visit to Paris.

75 Jessop, Journal d’un voyage à Paris, 56.

76 Thomas Raffles, Letters During a Tour Through Some Parts of France, Savoy, Switzerland, Germany, and The Netherlands, in the Summer of 1817, 3rd ed. (Liverpool: Thomas Taylor, 1820), 38.

77 Scott, Visit to Paris, 83.

78 William Playfair, France as it is, Not Lady Morgan’s France (London: C. Chapple, 1819–20), 1:288.


81 For examples of the first, see Reddy, Navigation of Feeling; Jan Goldstein, The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750–1850 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); for an example of the second, see Fritzsche, Stranded in the Past.

82 Scott, Paris Revisited, 377.