Radical Contra-Diction

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Coleridge, Revolution, Apostasy

By

Björn Bosserhoff

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To my daughter and my mother

It was a misfortune to any man of talent to be born in the latter end of the last century. Genius stopped the way of Legitimacy; and therefore it was to be abated, crushed, or set aside as a nuisance. The spirit of the monarchy was at variance with the spirit of the age. The flame of liberty, the light of intellect, was to be extinguished with the sword—or with slander, whose edge is sharper than the sword. The war between power and reason was carried on by the first of these abroad—by the last, at home. No quarter was given (then or now) by the Government-critics, the authorized censors of the press, to those who followed the dictates of independence, who listened to the voice of the tempter, Fancy. Instead of gathering fruits and flowers, immortal fruits and amaranthine flowers, they soon found themselves beset not only by a host of prejudices, but assailed with all the engines of power, by nicknames, by lies, by all the arts of malice, interest and hypocrisy, without the possibility of their defending themselves from the "pelting of the pitiless storm," that poured down upon them from the strong-holds of corruption and authority.

The philosophers, the dry abstract reasoners, submitted to this reverse pretty well, and armed themselves with patience "as with triple steel," to bear discomfiture, persecution, and disgrace. But the poets, the creatures of sympathy, could not stand the frowns both of king and people. They did not like to be shut out when places and pensions, when the critic's praises, and the laurel-wreath were about to be distributed. They did not stomach being *sent to Coventry*, and Mr. Coleridge sounded a retreat for them by the help of casuistry, and a musical voice—"His words were hollow, but they pleased the ear" of his friends of the Lake School, who turned back disgusted and panic-struck from the dry desert of unpopularity, like Hassan the camel-driver,

> "And curs'd the hour, and curs'd the luckless day,
> When first from Shiraz' walls they bent their way."

They are safely inclosed there, but Mr. Coleridge did not enter with them; pitching his tent upon the barren-waste without, and having no abiding place nor city of refuge!

—William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*, 1825 (78-80)

One character in which Mr. Coleridge most often came before the public, was that of politician. In this age of fervent partisanship it will, therefore, naturally occur as a first question, to inquire after his party and political connections: was he Whig, Tory, or Radical? Or, under a new classification, were his propensities Conservative or Reforming? I answer that, in any exclusive or emphatic sense, he was none of these; because, as a philosopher, he was, according to circumstances, and according to the object concerned, all of these by turns.

—Thomas De Quincey, *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, 1834 (339-40)

It is very unpleasant to me to be often asked if Coleridge has changed his political sentiments, for I know not how to reply. Pray furnish me.

—Sarah Coleridge, Letter to Thomas Poole, 1799 (Sandford I 301)

Εστησε signifies—*He hath stood*—which, in these times of apostacy from the principles of Freedom, or of Religion in this country, & from both by the same persons in France, is no unmeaning Signature […] However, it is in truth no more than S.T.C. written in Greek. *Es tee see*—

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Letter to William Sotheby, 1802 (CL II 867)

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ABBREVIATIONS

For the sake of readability, I make generous use of abbreviations throughout this study. The most frequently quoted works by Coleridge and his contemporaries are cited by the initials provided below. All quotations were transcribed as found and I abstain from using "[sic]," except in a few cases in which I consider the misspelling relevant. Square brackets signal alterations to the original content, i.e., mostly omissions. To distinguish different works by the same author(s), I give publication years instead of short titles. Otherwise I adhere to the MLA style.

All quotations from Coleridge himself—except those from his letters and notebooks, which were published in separate sets of volumes (see "CL" and "CN" below)—are taken from the standard edition of his works, the "Collected Coleridge" (CC):

The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn. Bollingen Series 75. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton University Press.

BL *Biographia Literaria; Or: Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*. 1817. Ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate. 2 vols. (= CC 7, 1983)

CH *Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. J. R. de J. Jackson. 2 vols. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970.

CL *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. Earl Leslie Griggs. 6 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–1971.

CN *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. Kathleen Coburn, Merton Christensen, and Anthony John Harding. 5 vols. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957–2002.

EOT *Essays on His Times in* The Morning Post *and* The Courier. Ed. David V. Erdman. 3 vols. (= CC 3, 1978)

F *The Friend*. 1809–10, 1818. Ed. Barbara Rooke. 2 vols. (= CC 4, 1969)

HSW *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*. Ed. Duncan Wu. 9 vols. London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998.

IR *S. T. Coleridge: Interviews & Recollections*. Ed. Seamus Perry. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000.

JC Joseph Cottle. *Reminiscences of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey*. 2nd ed. 1848. Westmead: Gregg, 1970.

JG James Gillman. *The Life of Samuel Taylor* Coleridge. 1838. Folcroft: Folcroft Library Editions, 1972.

LL *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*. Ed. Edwin W. Marrs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.

LPR *Lectures 1795: On Politics and Religion*. Ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann. (= CC 1, 1971)

NL *New Letters of Robert Southey*. Ed. Kenneth Curry. 2 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965.

P William Wordsworth. *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*. Ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, Meyer Howard Abrams, and Stephen Gill. New York: Norton, 1979.

PW *Poetical Works*. Ed. J. C. C. Mays. 6 vols. (= CC 16, 2001)

RRF Edmund Burke. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. 1790. Ed. L. G. Mitchell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

SCH *Robert Southey: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Lionel Madden. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972.

SCL *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey*. Ed. Lynda Pratt, Tim Fulford, and Ian Packer. Romantic Circles Electronic Editions. 2009–. Web.

W *The Watchman*. 1796. Ed. Lewis Patton. (= CC 2, 1970)

WPW *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*. Ed. Ernest de Selincourt. 5 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952–1967.

WT Robert Southey. *Wat Tyler: A Dramatic Poem.* 1794. Ed. Matt Hill. Romantic Circles Electronic Editions. 2004. Web.

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INTRODUCTION

Coleridge was merely sixteen when the Rights of Man and of the Citizen were declared, and when the French Republic was proclaimed he had just finished his first year at Cambridge. His political coming-of-age, as I shall demonstrate, did not occur until some two years later—and by then the situation had changed dramatically: during the massacres of September 1792, the *sans-culottes* had killed aristocrats and clergymen *en masse*; Louis XVI, the Girondists and thousands of others had been guillotined; finally, when the mood within the Committee against Public Safety had turned against them, Danton and Robespierre had themselves fallen victim to the infamous "national razor." In short, the Revolution had begun to devour its own children. The *terreur* had left France—and everyone who followed what was going on there—devastated. By the time Coleridge was delivering his political lectures in Bristol in 1795, Britain and France were officially at war.

* * *

For any in the least reform-minded European, there were very good reasons to be enthusiastic about the French Revolution when it began. One of the continent's greatest nations got rid of its absolute monarchy, put an end to the ancient privileges of nobility and clergy, and adopted liberty, equality and fraternity as its guiding principles. Numerous testimonies survive that show the immense hope many who witnessed these events harboured—and the immense significance they were immediately recognised to have: Charles James Fox characterised the Revolution as the "greatest" and "best" event "that ever happened in the world"; Wordsworth and Hegel were happy to see a new age "dawning"; Richard Price celebrated the "general amendment beginning in human affairs"; and even Matthew Arnold grudgingly admitted that his predecessors had witnessed a "spiritual event" of "powerful and worldwide interest."[1]

To give an idea of the mood among Britons right after the Fall of the Bastille: Samuel Romilly reported to a correspondent in Paris that the Revolution had

> produced a very sincere and very general joy here. It is the subject of all conversations; and even all the newspapers, without one exception, though they are not conducted by the most liberal or most philosophical of men, join in sounding forth the praises of the Parisians, and in rejoicing at an event so important for mankind. (qtd. in Doyle 161)[2]

The appeal of the Revolution was particularly strong for the young and impressionable. "[T]hat the revolution did occur," Thomas McFarland writes, "was the overwhelming fact of the era, and that it should occur was the almost equally overwhelming hope of the finest and most ardent sensibilities among those who were young" (1989: 200). It was a powerful sign of "man's infinite Sehnsucht" for a better life and a juster society (Abrams 1984: 65)—a longing that had already found expression in the seventeenth-century egalitarianism of the Levellers and Diggers or, for that matter, in the American Revolution which had only just ended with the Treaty of Paris.

Rousseau, who was routinely acknowledged as the ideological father of the French Revolution in the year of his Tercentenary, had correctly prophesied in *Émile* (1762) that the world was "approaching a state of crisis and the age of revolutions" (343). The earliest responses to "1789" were optimistic rather than anxious, though: in the manic climate of the early 1790s, Dissenters happily engaged in millennialist speculation (or "Religious Musings"), and many in Britain were reminded of their own earlier "Revolution" of 1688 which had, after all, given the country its Bill of Rights, granting more powers to parliament and restricting those of the monarch. The centenary of the Glorious Revolution had recently been celebrated on a grand scale, and in witnessing cross-Channel events the majority of Britons were thrilled to see their neighbours following in their footsteps.[3] In fact, the sympathy was mutual. On the occasion of the *Fête de la Fédération* in July 1790, Felix Vaughan wrote to his friend Wordsworth:

> the French speak of us with great respect, & wish much for an alliance with England & peace with all the world.—Every man seems to wear a face of content, & the king seems to be the idol of his people. I think they are an example for mankind in general & I trust such a one as will not remain without imitation. (qtd. in Roe 1988:22)[4]

Vaughan's continuing enthusiasm for the "country in romance", however, was not representative (P 396). In the wake of the "Great Fear," the nationalisation of church property and the ongoing mob riots, "hardly anybody outside France" was likely to think "the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille worth celebrating" (Doyle 166). And the suspicions of

this silent majority were ultimately confirmed. As predicted by Burke, French political life became "a grotesque carnival beyond the control of public authority" (Dart 173). Louis Capet did not remain "the idol of his people" for much longer, and instead of making "peace with all the world" the French declared war on most of their neighbours. Of Vaughan's hopes only one would come true: the Revolution was indeed exported with the establishment of French satellite states such as the Batavian and Helvetic Republics.

It is difficult to say in hindsight how large the share of Britons who initially supported the French Revolution, or even hoped for a(nother) *British* Revolution, actually was—as Mark Philp writes, there is still "controversy over […] how far radical and reformist views permeated down through the class structure, and to what extent they rendered uncertain the loyalties of the middling and lower orders of late eighteenth-century British society" (1991: 10). It seems safe to say, though, that our perceptions may be somewhat distorted by the prominence traditionally given in accounts of the period to the "radical" or reformist camp. The "friends of freedom" and the opposition Foxites *were* obviously inspired by French events; they were delighted to realise that "[w]holesale reform was not, after all, just for dreamers, or for Americans free to start again in virgin territory: it could take place in the heart of Europe, in the continent's very intellectual capital" (Doyle 160). However, it is important to note that Burke's was *not* "an isolated and outmoded voice of crumbling conservatism" (ibid. 123): his opponents in the pamphlet wars were but an "articulate radical minority" (Everest 1979: 122), and popular opinion was soon overwhelmingly leaning towards the counterrevolutionary stance of Hannah More and the Reevite propagandists.[5]

Though Burke's political rhetoric may read today like an instance of conspiracy theory, the immediate impact of his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* on British middle-class sentiment can hardly be overestimated. Burke became, as James Chandler has it, "a symbolic ideological presence and a figure larger than life" (1984: 31):

> It goes without saying that he was the acknowledged leader of the antirevolutionary movement in England; that he galvanized Englishmen already hostile to what they saw happening in France; that, by the apparent fulfilment of his dire forecasts for the Revolution, he won over many of its early sympathizers to his side, and that he was largely responsible for the wave of anti-French sentiment (ibid. 16-17)

Then again, Burke's "intemperate diatribe" (Doyle 169) also had the effect of "suppl[ying] his opponents with an agenda" and "awakening

groups hitherto dormant politically" (ibid. 170). Among these groups were the post-Wilkean movement for parliamentary reform, various factions of Dissenters who now again campaigned for a repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, as well as a large number of democratically-minded and often working-class associations—who all had in common an enthusiasm for the French Revolution. Poor Burke must have been dumbfounded in the face of these developments. After all, his concern had been not only with the "revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions" taking place in France (RRF 80) but, "perhaps primarily, with the running of a similar tide in England" (Williams 4).[6]

Burke's *Reflections* were published on 1 November 1790, and among the very first responses to them was Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, published only four weeks later. The first part of Paine's definitive "Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution," his *Rights of Man*, followed on 13 March 1791; Priestley's *Letters to Burke* and Mackintosh's *Vindiciae Galliciae* were published the same year. All in all, some seventy replies to Burke were printed—he thus contributed greatly to making the Revolution in France, in Shelley's words, the "master theme of the epoch."[7] And the controversy did not remain limited to the sphere of print. Britain became a deeply polarised country, not least so because the Pitt ministry was very successful in conducting a backlash against the "radical" activists. The Home Office under Dundas and the newly-established Alien Office under Wickham "employed spies, double agents, and *agents provocateurs*," "sponsored riots" and "formented uprisings"—just to subsequently "suppress them violently" (Hoagwood 34). People were *paid* for burning Paine in effigy or destroying Priestley's laboratory, and political cartoonists who were considered loose cannons were hired by loyalist societies (like Rowlandson; see **fig. 0-1**) or bribed by the government itself (like Gillray) to influence the public mood in desired ways (ibid. 83).[8]

During the first years of the decade, the ministry spent "about £5,000 a year on press subsidies" and added two new "alarmist newspapers, the *Sun* and *True Briton*" to the "nine dailies including the *Morning Herald* and *The Times*" it had already controlled by 1790 (Hilton 65, 51). Over 2,000 local branches of Reeves' Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers were installed "with ministerial connivance," their function being "to disrupt radical meetings, beat up Painites, initiate prosecutions for sedition, and distribute loyalist tracts" (ibid. 69-70). Beginning in 1794, yeoman volunteer corps were established throughout the country, not only against potential French invaders but also "for the suppression of riots and tumults" (ibid. 70-71). Loyalist bullyboys

frequently acted "without any official sanction," and even colonels "involved themselves and their men in anti-Jacobin violence" (Emsley 1985: 803)—while local clergymen intensified their "warnings to the poor that if they did not behave themselves they would go to Hell" (Hilton 70). "Church and King" became the slogan of the day, and "God Save the King" at last became accepted as national anthem (Doyle 170).[9]

In short, the Pitt administration "unscrupulously manipulated English fears of imported revolutionary violence in order to discredit discussion of any reform whatsoever" (Hamilton 1994: 189). It succeeded in making "political opinions which had been approved of in the 1770s and 1780s" suddenly appear "scandalous or dangerous" (Edwards 20). This was the heyday of the "English Jacobin"—at least in terminology. Generously applied by Pitt and his allies, the epithet was clearly misleading: not even Paine was in favour, for example, of mass executions as instigated on a regular basis by the *French* Jacobins. "[T]he period 1789–1803," as Philp writes,

> is one in which the language of political debate undergoes a process of continual transformation. In this process, positions are polarised, terms become invested with value and meaning only to be subsequently abandoned, and the stakes of controversy become extraordinarily inflated. Faint-hearted reformers are denounced as Jacobin terrorists, well-meaning humanitarians become the enemy within, and the cautious critic of the status quo is accused of bringing the country to an inch of defeat. (1991: 13)

Anyone, that is, "who sought to change society in any way no matter how incremental" could now be "branded with Jacobinism" (Tee 20). The J-word became a "general term of abuse for the entire range of reformers, from those advocating the expansion of the franchise to rabid regicides" (Vardy 2010: 4). As John Thelwall complained, though nothing more than a "popular cant nick name ... a term of no definable signification," it was sure to conjure up "in the minds of alarmist & zealous royalists every emotion that belongs to the hatred of all crimes & enormities" (qtd. in Thompson 1964: 185). Pitt and his cronies were able to "galvanize a political reflex in a susceptible populace" by using "Jacobin" in the same way that "the popular assemblies could short circuit debate" by using a similarly "catchall term of abuse like aristocrat" (Christensen 2000: 5-6). Whether they were Christians or atheists, motivated by pacifism or by the desire for political and social subversion, Anti-Pittites were conveniently subsumed under the banner of a "monolithic Jacobinism, largely inseparable from the fortunes of the French revolution" (Leask 1988: 11).

In reality, at most a handful of the so-called "English Jacobins" actually were Jacobins in spirit, let alone fanatics *à la* Marat or Roux.[10]

But the 1790s had more substantial means of repression in store for the "friends of freedom" than mere linguistic stigmatisation. Shortly after Fox's warning (in a letter to Fitzwilliam) of "the total annihilation of all principles of liberty and resistance" (qtd. in Hilton 64) and simultaneously with Paine's indictment for libel, *in absentia*, for publishing an even more "seditious" second part of *Rights of Man*, a Royal Proclamation was issued on 21 May 1792 that prompted "all local magistrates to make diligent enquiries to discover the authors, printers and disseminators of seditious writings" (Goodwin 215). This was the first in a long line of legislative measures introduced by the ministry in its struggle with "radicalism" over the course of the decade—oftentimes followed by trials to set examples (see **table 1** on pp. 8-9).

There is considerable disagreement among historians as to whether or not the phrase "Pitt's Reign of Terror," probably first used by London Corresponding Society leader Francis Place in 1798 (Emsley 1985: 816), is appropriate in the light of these developments. On the one hand, there are those critics who, in the tradition of E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), resolutely answer in the affirmative. Kenneth Johnston, for instance, in his essay "Whose History? My Place or Yours?," bewails "the ruined lives and careers of the 1790s reformers"—whom he calls "Britain's first "lost generation'" and "the Founding Fathers who weren't"—and compiles a "mourning list" of personal fates ranging from "death by execution or from the effects of imprisonment" to "government harassment" and "effective silencing" (2009: 88, 90).[11]

The other side, rather sceptical of the applicability of the term "terror" in talking about what Thelwall referred to as the 1790s' "system of massacre for opinion" (qtd. in Keane 228), is perhaps best represented by historian Clive Emsley who calls the comparison to revolutionary France and *its* Terror "ludicrous" (1985: 802), maintaining that "there were ways around the legislation" (ibid. 813) and that in historical perspective the degree of repression was no big deal: "Some 200 prosecutions for sedition have been counted for the 1790s, a number which pales into insignificance beside the number of prosecutions for sedition during the Jacobite emergencies of 1715 to 1716 and 1745 to 1746" (ibid. 822). What is more, of these 200 prosecutions during the 1790s only a tiny number can in fact be attributed to the *new* laws. Only one man, for example, was sentenced under the Seduction from Duty and Allegiance Act of 1797 (Emsley 1981: 159), and only one was ever found guilty for offending against the "Two Acts" introduced in 1795: London Corresponding Society orator John

Gale Jones—whose sentence, in the event, was suspended (1985: 813). Despite the Attorney General's nine-hour indictment speech against Hardy, the defendants in the Treason Trials of 1794 were all acquitted, and "all those arrested and held under the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act were released" (ibid. 810). Also, the legislation suspending Habeas Corpus was "cautiously framed" (ibid. 808): warrants "had to be signed by one of the Secretaries of State or by six members of the Privy Council" (ibid.), and provincial magistrates eager to prosecute "radicals" on the grounds of sedition—defined as denigration of the monarch or the constitution before the Treasonable Practices Act of 1795 also made "inciting hatred" of the government punishable (1985: 811-12)—generally had to consult legal experts at the Home Office. There were strict provisions to all these proceedings, and trials frequently failed due to technicalities (1981: 169).[12]

More "conservative" Englishmen like William Wilberforce (who, notwithstanding his commitment to the abolition of the slave trade, was a staunch Pittite when it came to domestic policy) saw the anti-sedition legislation of the 1790s as merely a small sacrifice to be made for the sake of defending "the bulwarks of British liberty" (qtd. in Emsley 1985: 804). In fact, though, the secrecy that came with the new policy clearly "offended against a long-held belief" that this "British liberty" was safe precisely "because there were no *lettres de cachet* or knocks on the door at night" (Hilton 74). Despite the *de facto* inefficiency of the new legislation, that is, the government's measures were a great success when it came to *intimidating* "radicals." For example, people were "quitting the popular societies" *en masse* after the suspension of Habeas Corpus (Emsley 1985: 807), and the trials against publishers and authors served as a deterrent for potential future offenders—after all, some of those prosecuted based on the Royal Proclamation against seditious writings (like Daniel Isaac Eaton, Joseph Johnson and Benjamin Flower) *did* go to jail. As Emsley himself admits, "the grim world of eighteenth-century gaols" was nothing to be messed with (1981: 173), and "the unofficial terror of beatings, inquisitions, sackings and ostracism" must be added to the official measures (1985: 802).

Table 0-1. Anti-sedition legislation of the 1790s[1]

1792	
May	Royal Proclamation (prohibiting seditious meetings and publications)
December	Royal Proclamation (urging greater action against seditious writings)
	Alien Office established
	Ostensible plot of a London insurrection uncovered
	Trial of Thomas Paine
1793	
January	Aliens Act (regulating immigration, especially from France)
February	France declares war on Britain
March	Traitorous Correspondence Act
May	Trial of John Frost
August	Trial of Thomas Muir (first of the "Scottish Martyrs")
1794	
February	Trial of Daniel Isaac Eaton
March	Volunteer Act
May	Suspension of Habeas Corpus (until 1 July 1795)
Oct.-Dec.	Treason Trials against Thomas Hardy, John Horne Tooke and John Thelwall
1795	
October	Attack on king's coach
November	Royal Proclamation (requesting "to discourage, prevent and suppress all seditious assemblies")

[1] Sources: Emsley 1985; Goodwin; Hilton 68-72.

December	Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act + Seditious Meetings and Assemblies Act ("Two Acts")
1797	
April	Newspaper stamp duty raised by 75 %[2]
June	Seduction from Duty and Allegiance Act (to prevent mutinies among the armed forces)
July	Act against Administering Unlawful Oaths ("to engage in any mutinous or seditious Purpose; or to disturb the Public Peace")
1798	
April	Suspension of Habeas Corpus (until 1 February 1799)
May	First Newspaper Act ("for preventing the mischiefs arising from the printing and publishing newspapers")
	Trials of John Binns, Arthur O'Connor, Father John Coigly and their servants
July	Trials of Gilbert Wakefield and Joseph Johnson
1799	
January/May	Suspension of Habeas Corpus renewed (until 1 March 1800)
May	Trial of Benjamin Flower
July	Unlawful Societies Act (banning the London Corresponding Society and the United Societies)
	First Combination Act ("to prevent unlawful combinations of workmen")

[2] A "vital blow struck at the liberty of the press" according to Sheridan (*Parliamentary History of England* 441).

All things considered, Boyd Hilton's rather ambivalent estimate seems to the point:

> [C]ompared with what happened in France the forces of repression were obviously puny. [...] there were no tumbrils and no place de la Guillotine. [...] Then again, the scope of Pitt's Terror should perhaps be measured, not in terms of actual prosecutions but by the licence which his Acts gave to bully-boys. Exhortations to loyalists could easily turn into the intimidation of minorities and misfits. Thanks to the climate created by legislation, a radical, a Dissenter, or a publisher beaten up in the night had even less hope of redress than he might have expected in ordinary times. (72-73)

* * *

Such were the circumstances when the "apostasy" of the Romantics took place. I have briefly reiterated the story of Pitt's Britain to show that there were indeed "forces besides personal conviction" involved in what often appeared like a rather dramatic *volte-face* on the side of former "radicals" (Hoagwood 45). In other words, it would be naive to ignore "repression's constitutive role in Early Romantic writing": Wordsworth, Coleridge et al. "watched in horror as writers, printers, and booksellers were arrested, imprisoned, transported, and bankrupted, and they shaped their writing, thematically and formally, under these circumstances" (Bugg 14, 12). Who are we to blame them for wondering "what one should be willing to bear [...] for the sake of social transformation" (Colllings 2000: 58)?

In the end, Robespierre's *and* Pitt's "terror," the shock in view of cross-Channel events *and* the paranoid climate of 1790s Britain, were factors in the abandonment of "radicalism." Consider Charlotte Smith's take on the matter in her letter to Cowper that forms the preface to *The Emigrants* (1793). "[W]ith the body of the English," she writes,

> this national aversion [francophobia] has acquired new force by the dreadful scenes which have been acted in France during the last summer—even those who are the victims of the Revolution, have not escaped the odium, which the undistinguishing multitude annex to all the natives of a country where such horrors have been acted: nor is this the worst effect those events have had on the minds of the English; by confounding the original cause with the wretched catastrophes that have followed its ill management; the attempts of public virtue, with the outrages that guilt and folly have committed in its disguise, the very name of Liberty has not only lost the charm it used to have in British ears, but many, who have written, or spoken, in its defence, have been stigmatized as promoters of Anarchy, and enemies to the prosperity of their country. (vii-viii)

With respect to France, disillusionment was sometimes preceded by a short phase of rationalisation during which British champions of the Revolution adopted the arguments of the Jacobins. Thus, in defending their seizure of church property in his unpublished "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff" of 1793, Wordsworth opined: "[A] time of revolution is not the season of true Liberty. Alas! The obstinacy & perversion of men is such that she is too often obliged to borrow the very arms of despotism to overthrow him, and in order to reign in peace must establish herself by violence" (1974: I 33). In a similarly defensive tone, Paine, who would later himself escape the guillotine by only a whisker, announced in *Rights of Man* that the "outrages" to be witnessed on the streets of Paris were "not the effect of the principles of the Revolution, but of the degraded mind that existed before the Revolution, and which the Revolution is calculated to reform."[13]

But disillusionment did soon set in. By letting the terror run its course, France betrayed her own revolutionary ideals, and if there had been good reasons to celebrate the Revolution in its earliest stages, there were possibly even better reasons to "stand off" (*apostenai*) as history unfolded. In 1792–94, when news of ever more atrocious incidents reached Britain, it became clear that the "gloriously collective dream" had been but "a shared hallucination" (Levinson 1989b: 39):

> [T]he French Revolution, after simmering for three years, suddenly bubbled over with sickening violence. The invasion of the Tuileries took place in June, the massacre of the Swiss Guard in August, the prison massacres in September, the execution of Louis XVI in the following January, and then the Reign of Terror during 1793–94. French politics was now literally a matter of life and death! The events were reported in England in grisly detail, with rumours of cannibalism, as well as fully accredited accounts of aristocratic men, women, and children being wheeled through the streets to have their heads sliced off, and—what was almost worse—being mocked and spat at by a "carnivorous rabble howling around", faces distorted with hatred. Nor were these seen as merely local events. In April 1792 the French Legislative Assembly declared war on Austria, in May the rulers of Austria and Prussia declared war on France, and in November the Jacobin-dominated National Convention declared its mission to export the Revolution by promising "fraternity and assistance to all people who wish to recover their liberty." (Hilton 58)

I, for one, am inclined to sympathise with the "righteous anger" many felt when realising "that what had begun so promisingly had derailed and utterly demolished itself" (Edwards 84). As Hannah Arendt once stated, the French Revolution "ended in disaster" (qtd. in Hermassi 215). Or, to

counter the common tendency among anti-Jacobins as well as conservative historians to "collapse the differences between the various phases of the Revolution" (Dart 17): it proved a *series* of disasters, which followed after a series of hopeful developments. "[T]o this day," Johnston laments, "a large amount of discussion of the French Revolution, especially in the United Kingdom, starts and stops with this silently assumed equation: 'The French Revolution meant the Reign of Terror.' Q.E.D. End of discussion" (2009: 85). But the Revolution is not "something which can be endorsed or condemned once and for all" (Philp 1991: 11). Instead, it was a complex and evolving affair that comprised *both* the Declaration of the Rights of Man *and* the guillotine.[14]

Attitudes towards the Revolution changed as the Revolution itself changed. As McFarland puts it, during the 1790s "forces were [...] unleashed that tossed ordinary consistencies around like confetti" (1989: 201), and contemporary witnesses as well as later commentators were "baffled by the swirl of ideas and events, the collision of hopes and realities" (Fairer 2009: 33). It is easy in hindsight to accuse Coleridge and his generation of "apostasy," but such an accusation seems completely beside the point once one recognises the complexity of what then went on in France, in Britain and in the rest of Europe. There is no contradiction involved in cheering the bestowal of new rights to men and condemning people being butchered. In fact, the Revolution's erstwhile British sympathisers were only acting true to their values when they decided to no longer endorse it. Over the years—be it in view of the *terreur*, the invasion of Switzerland, or Napoleon's imperialism[15]—the vast majority of European intellectuals went through this process of recanting their solidarity with France. The first-generation Romantics are the classic British example: even Blake "refused to wear his revolutionary bonnet and white cockade after the September Massacres in 1792" (Prickett 1989: 110) and, not long after writing his great revolutionary allegories, fell almost completely silent for a number of years (Woodring 1970: 64-65).

Already Burke, who had once supported the American Revolution and was a spokesman for Catholic Emancipation, was called an "apostate" by his detractors. So was another prominent anti-Jacobin: the Prime Minister himself, a former Foxite, favourer of parliamentary reform and "liberal sympathizer with the early, constitutional phase" of the Revolution (Johnston 1999). Even a lifelong "radical" like John Thelwall confessed: "If it be of any importance to my enemies to know that the opinions of the boy of nineteen were not the same as those of the man of thirty, let them make what use they please of my apostacy" (qtd. in Bainbridge 2011: 201). And Thelwall was right: there is nothing *per se* wrong with

"apostasy." Consider William Cobbett's rather unusual trajectory from a "fierce young anti-Jacobin" to a "great Radical" who was "hunted to courtroom and prison, on charges of sedition" (Williams 3): the same people hostile to "apostasy" in Cobbett welcomed and positively sanctioned it in Southey and Wordsworth—whereas those who chastised Coleridge for his going over to the "*unclean side*" (Hazlitt 1825: 68) celebrated Cobbett's movement in the opposite direction. Accusations of political treason, that is, tend to be voiced from a strictly partisan perspective; the accusers are always those whose camp the culprit has left, never those whom he has joined.[16]

The political witch-hunt against the first-generation Romantic "apostates" began during their own lives, and it was conducted with particular vigour, albeit with undertones of melancholy disappointment, by their second-generation successors. The prime instances are Byron's *The Vision of Judgment* and the swipes against the Lake Poets in parts of his *Don Juan*, Hunt's attacks on Southey's laureateship, Hazlitt's never-ceasing determination to scold Coleridge, and Shelley's short poem "To Wordsworth" which laments the older poet's "[d]eserting" the cause of "truth and liberty." I will examine some of these topics, namely the "*Wat Tyler* affair" and the Coleridge-Hazlitt relationship, in Chapter Seven of this book.[17] For now let us have a very brief look at the biographical experience of William Wordsworth, the "great and exemplary poet of the age" to M. H. Abrams (1971: 14) and his New Historicist adversaries alike, who otherwise plays a relatively minor role in this study.

As James Chandler reminds us, "alone among the great English Romantics Wordsworth had firsthand experience of the French Revolution" (1984: xxiii). On returning, late in 1792, from his second stay in revolutionary France—where he had befriended Michel Beaupuy, met Brissot and generally been "pretty hot in it" (qtd. in Bromwich 1998: 46)—Wordsworth was "overflowing with love for humanity, only to find the majority of his fellow countrymen suspicious or even belligerent" (Sisman 27). The September Massacres had not impaired his admiration for the Revolution, and neither did King Louis's decapitation. His "steadily burning passion for a new political order," as George Watson notes, "easily outdistance[d]" that of both Coleridge and Southey (54).

Wordsworth's famous crisis of doubt only came about when France declared war on Britain in February 1793, and it intensified when, following Marat's assassination by the hands of Charlotte Corday, the Girondists were guillotined in October. Notwithstanding these events and for all his deep love for England, though, Wordsworth's sympathies in the war lay with the young Republic—he even appears to have considered

joining the French army (Prickett 1989: 128). Despite obvious conflicts of loyalty, that is, or perhaps defiantly, he "stuck" even "More firmly to old tenets" (P 402). This is very clear from his activities in those years: the "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff" (which was friendly towards France, to say the least) dates from March 1793, and the plans for *The Philanthropist* from the summer of 1794. Early in 1795, Wordsworth met with Godwin, Holcroft, Frend, Dyer and other high-calibre "radicals" in what Johnston describes as "a tea party which [...] ha[d] all the marks of an organizational meeting" (ibid. 132).

It may be stretching the imagination a bit too far to claim that during *their* first short meeting in the summer of 1795, Wordsworth was talked into a more critical stance towards France by Coleridge—though it seems very likely that he was talked *out of* his Godwinism by the young lecturer. In any event, as Watson observes, "[t]he minds of both men, at that first Bristol meeting, may have been at or near a point of withdrawal. If so, their friendship is the easier to understand. They must have helped each other [...] to descend from the revolutionary heights into humbler moods of self-examination and self-doubt" (62). Wordsworth's new, rather pessimistic outlook comes to the fore in his play *The Borderers*, begun shortly after retiring to Racedown with Dorothy in the autumn of 1795. What followed, to cut a long matter short, was the "annus mirabilis" spent in Somerset, the trip to Germany and Coleridge's momentous request concerning the writing of a poem "addressed to those, who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind" (CL I 527).[18]

The most influential account of Romantic disillusionment, though sharply contested, is undoubtedly that of Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971). In the sixth chapter of that book, "Revelation, Revolution, Imagination, and Cognition," Abrams maintains that the "collapse" of hope after the Revolution had turned ugly was "cataclysmic" and that "many writers undertook to establish an alternative base" for that hope: the imagination (328-29). Like Milton after the failure of the Puritan Revolution they found "paradise within" (ibid. 334); instead of giving up hope altogether, they merely transferred it from the outside to the inside realm, aiming at a "total revolution *of consciousness*" (ibid.; my emphasis), a "mode of imaginative perception which accomplishes nothing less than the 'creation' of a new world" (ibid. 338). Successfully so, according to Abrams, who holds that "[t]he great Romantic works" resulted from exactly this mental scenario (ibid. 335).

The Abramsian paradigm of the internalisation of energy once spent on political activism—of a "psychic reintegration" (Kucich 69) via an