The Spirit of Despotism

INVASIONS OF PRIVACY IN THE 1790S

John Barrell

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To David Simpson

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I have dedicated this book to David Simpson, but without for a moment believing that he will enjoy it.

J. B.

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List of Abbreviations

GM	*Gentleman's Magazine*
JHC	*Journal of the House of Commons*
MC	*Morning Chronicle*
MP	*Morning Post*
PH	*The Parliamentary History of England*
PR	*Parliamentary Register*
RT	*Register of the Times*
ST	*A Complete Collection of State Trials*
TB	*True Briton*

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Introduction

I

There is a moment in Stendhal's *Charterhouse of Parma* when the hero Fabrice, no longer the naïve teenager who had chased off to support Napoleon at Waterloo, but polished by four years spent at Naples, is introduced for the first time at the court of Ranuce Ernest IV, the Prince and absolute ruler of the state of Parma. 'The people of Naples,' the Prince asks him, 'are they happy? Is the king beloved?' Fabrice replies confidently, 'without a moment's hesitation'. 'I used to admire', he says, 'the excellent bearing of the troops of the various regiments of His Majesty the King. The better classes are respectful towards their masters, as they ought to be; but I must confess that never in my life have I allowed the lower classes to speak to me about anything except the work for which I am paying them.'

There are not many dates in the novel, but Stendhal has specified the year of this meeting as 1821. The previous year a revolution, led by the *carbonari*, had established in Naples a liberal and semi-democratic constitution, based on the short-lived Spanish constitution of 1812. In 1821 this constitution had been crushed by an agreement among the Great Powers which had invited the king of Naples to seek the aid of Austria in restoring his absolute rule. In March, King Ferdinand had returned to the city at the head of an Austrian army which had just defeated a vastly outnumbered Neapolitan force at Rieti. Fabrice, it seems, has returned a model answer: no hint that the well-drilled soldiers of the Austrian army are foreign invaders; their nationality is of no importance, for they are the regiments the king has chosen to employ. Not the slightest praise for the loyalty of the 'better classes' to their king, to whom, Fabrice later adds, 'blind obedience' is no more than their duty. As for the rest, the *canaille*, how on earth is a gentleman meant to know (or care) what *they* think?

It was indeed, as the Prince recognizes, an 'unassailable rejoinder', and for that very reason it would not do. The Prince immediately believes that he perceives in it a combination of ingenuity and caution which brands Fabrice as that most untrustworthy of men in an absolute monarchy, a clever man. 'I don't like that *breed*,' he announces to the company at large: a clever man, though 'he may try to follow the best principles and even apply them in good faith, all the same on one side or another he is always first cousin to Rousseau and Voltaire'. After a few more

exchanges, the Prince has become convinced that he knows which side Fabrice is on: he is a dangerous liberal.

In fact, the narrator tells us, the Prince was quite wrong about Fabrice. He may have been clever enough to register and avoid various traps concealed in the Prince's question, but he was no longer a liberal, no longer believed in '*the greatest good of the greatest number*'; indeed, was no longer much interested in politics at all. Though certainly 'stimulated by the danger' of discussing with the Prince the recent politics of Naples, he had answered frankly, believing 'practically everything that we have heard him say'. But even had the Prince been perceptive enough to understand this, it would not have improved his opinion of Fabrice; for those 'born to sit on a throne, or beside it, proscribe … all frankness of speech'. The Prince was driven by fears and suspicions which could lead him to interpret any utterance whatsoever, at least any 'clever' utterance, as insidious, even seditious, either because it was frank or because it was not. The one trap that Fabrice had not seen in the Prince's question was that there was no possible way that he could answer it without incriminating himself as a liberal, even as a democrat, if the Prince imagined him so.[1]

What I find so intriguing about this brilliantly imagined conversation, which is rather longer than there is space to describe, is the sense it gives of the mist of suspicion that permeated the monarchies of Europe which felt themselves threatened to any degree by the liberalism of enlightenment thought or, worse still, by the democratic movements that developed out of it and the new kind of threat they posed to *anciens régimes*: not mere regime-change, one 'royal' family forcing out another, but total revolution in the name of human rights and republican government. Indeed, the whole action of the novel is enveloped in this mist, which insinuates itself into every space, private as well as public, and obliges all those who inhabit it to feel their way through the action, warily guessing at dangers, deceiving themselves while hoping to deceive others, striking out blindly, groping for forms of words that might possibly protect or reassure them.

A similar atmosphere had settled over Britain in the 1790s. In 1791–2 the movement for parliamentary reform, dormant since the early 1780s, reawoke, through the efforts of a number of provincial, often plebeian reform societies in the major cities, of the polite, London-based Society for Constitutional Information, and of the much more moderate Whig, patrician Friends of the People. The arguments for reform were circulated widely, by cheap pamphlets and by radical newspapers and periodicals, many founded for that purpose. In response, the government of William Pitt issued in May 1792 a proclamation in the name of George III, warning against an apparent epidemic of 'wicked and seditious writings' which sought 'to excite tumult and disorder by endeavouring to raise groundless jealousies and suspicions' in the king's subjects 'respecting the Laws

[1] Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, trans. Margaret R. B. Shaw (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), ch. 7, 139–44.

and Happy Constitution' of the kingdom. For the same purpose, it averred, 'correspondences have been entered into with sundry persons in Foreign Parts', meaning in France. The king therefore instructed all his subjects 'to avoid and discourage all proceedings, tending to produce Riots and Tumults'. Magistrates were commanded to suppress all such riots, to discover the authors and publishers of all seditious writings, and regularly to report the names of offenders to the Home Office.[2]

The proclamation led directly to the prosecution of Thomas Paine for seditious libel. Barracks housing small detachments of cavalry and infantry were speedily built in many provincial towns to overawe their inhabitants into revering the 'Happy Constitution'. The reform movement grew nevertheless, and, following the declaration of the French Republic in September, John Reeves, a London magistrate and civil servant, established, at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand, the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers, aimed at furthering and extending the purposes of the May proclamation.[3] It was dedicated to preventing the reform societies, as far as possible, from meeting, by threatening the landlords of taverns with the loss of their licences if they allowed the societies to use their premises, or made available to their customers allegedly seditious newspapers; to discovering seditious publications and encouraging the prosecution of those who published them; and to encouraging the prosecution, on the charge of uttering 'seditious words', of those who were reported as having spoken disrespectfully of the king or the constitution or in favour of the revolution in France. The 'Crown and Anchor Society', as it came to be known, quickly reproduced itself in affiliated provincial societies throughout the country, and was immensely influential in spreading alarm about the activities of the reformers, to whom it quickly came to seem as if an unofficial network of spies and informers had been set up almost overnight. At the same time the government began infiltrating spies into the reform movement itself. Loyalists investigated the private activities of radicals, and because the surveillance was largely invisible and therefore unquantifiable, radicals believed they saw evidence of surveillance almost everywhere, and, if they did not see it, were apt to regard its invisibility as proof of its existence.

The intimidation of radicals was accompanied by a long series of prosecutions for seditious libel and seditious words, and on occasion for high treason, to be continued, unevenly, for the rest of the decade. In 1794 Habeas Corpus was in part suspended, to permit the lengthy detention without bail or trial of those imprisoned by a warrant alleging high treason, suspicion of high treason, or the

[2] *By the King. A Proclamation*, dated 21 May 1792; reprinted in Gregory Claeys (ed.), *Political Writings of the 1790s*, 8 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1995), vii. 121–2.

[3] For the association and its branches, see Eugene Charlton Black, *The Association: British Extraparliamentary Political Organisation 1769–1793* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 233–74; D. E. Ginter, 'The Loyalist Association Movement of 1792–3', *Historical Journal*, 11 (1966), 179–90.

indeterminate offence of 'treasonable practices'; it remained suspended for over a year and was suspended again from 1798 to 1801. In 1795 the government succeeded in passing, against widespread opposition, the 'two bills', which enlarged the definition of high treason, increased the penalty for seditious libel, and deprived the London Corresponding Society of what had become its most potent weapon, the open air mass-meeting. In 1799 the London Corresponding Society, together with a number of other radical societies, was proscribed by Act of Parliament.[4] All this is what has come to be known, not uncontroversially, as 'Pitt's Terror'.[5] The subject of this book is not so much the repression of the reform movement or of the arguments for democratic government as the cultural effects of that repression, the atmosphere of suspicion it created on both sides of the conflict, in particular the invasion of private space it appeared to promote and the sense that everything had suddenly been or could suddenly become politicized.[6] The conflict between the *ancien régime* and the democratic movement was so fundamental that it could not be contained within what had previously been thought of as the 'normal' arena of politics. Activities and spaces which had previously been thought to be private, in the sense not just that they were 'outside' politics but were, by general agreement, positively insulated from it, suddenly no longer enjoyed that protection.

II

The book borrows its title, and many of its preoccupations, from an analysis of the social and political culture of Britain in the mid-1790s written by the Rev. Vicesimus Knox in 1795, and it will help to indicate what I have tried to do if I

[4] The best narrative of the developments described in this and the two previous paragraphs remains Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

[5] Clive Emsley, in a long and influential article, 'An Aspect of Pitt's "Terror": Prosecutions for Sedition during the 1790s,' *Social History* (May 1981), 155–84, identified under 200 prosecutions of radicals in the 1790s, a number he believed was too small to justify the term 'Pitt's Terror'. More recently Steve Poole, in a study of legal proceedings in 'the relatively quiet counties' of Somerset and Wiltshire, found nine prosecutions where Emsley had found four; more significantly, he found an additional twenty-five cases where radicals had been arrested but were not prosecuted or are not known to have been prosecuted. Though wary of the notion that the extent of the repression can be calculated by numbers, he points out that, in any attempt to do so, arrests accompanied by threats of prosecution cannot easily be distinguished from actual prosecutions: see Poole, 'Pitt's Terror Reconsidered: Jacobinism and the Law in Two South-Western Counties, 1791–1803', *Southern History*, 17 (1995), 65–87.

[6] The miasma of political suspicion as it crept into private space is treated in some British novels of the 1790s as it is by Stendhal: see for example Ian Ousby, *Bloodhounds of Heaven: The Detective in English Fiction from Godwin to Doyle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976); Ousby, ' "My Servant Caleb": Godwin's Caleb Williams and the Political Trials of the 1790's', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 44 (Fall 1974), 47–55; James Thompson, 'Surveillance in William Godwin's Caleb Williams', in Kenneth Graham (ed.), *Gothic Fictions: Prohibitions/Transgressions* (New York: AMS Press, 1989), 173–98; Harriet Guest, 'Suspicious Minds: Spies and Surveillance in Charlotte Smith's Novels of the 1790s', in Peter de Bolla Nigel Leask, and David Simpson, (eds.), *Land, Nation and Culture, 1740–1840: Thinking the Republic of Taste* (London: Palgrave, 2005).

describe what Knox had done. Knox was Headmaster of Tonbridge School, and, though he is largely forgotten today, was one of the most widely read and respected men of letters in late eighteenth-century Britain, well known for his collections of polite essays on education, literature, and religion. Since Britain had entered the war against the French republic early in 1793, Knox had increasingly spoken out in opposition to that war and in favour of a reform of parliament. *The Spirit of Despotism* was so outspoken in its attack on aristocratic corruption and on the government of William Pitt that it appeared anonymously, with no publisher's name on the title-page, and was circulated privately, if at all: had it been published, it is likely that Knox, even if he had escaped prosecution, would have been forced to resign his headmastership. A copy somehow reached Philadelphia and was published there in 1795, and over the next few years it was reprinted by other publishers in America. The book appeared in Britain only in February 1821, when William Hone produced an anonymous edition, and then, following Knox's death later in the year, a series of editions that acknowledged his authorship.[7] It was included in the edition of his complete works published in 1824.

In many respects, the attack launched by *The Spirit of Despotism* against the social and political culture of late eighteenth-century Britain was familiar enough. The book was a spirited critique of luxury, corruption, and effeminacy, arguing that corruption is endemic in the modern commercial culture of which Britain provided the most advanced and therefore the most degenerate example. Its target, however, was not the commercial middle class but the aristocracy: Knox is exercised by the insolence of the rich and aristocratic towards their economic and social inferiors, the result partly of the spread of 'oriental' manners, imported into Britain by returning planters and nabobs, partly by a system of education and upbringing which teaches the higher classes to despise learning and public virtue and to separate themselves as far as possible, as Fabrice claimed to have done, from the middle and lower classes. Such people have an excessive love of power, and judge their own and others' success entirely in terms of the acquisition of money and titles and the ability to outshine each other in the display of their wealth. The institutions that should defend the public good against the self-interest of the rich have become part of the corruption they exist to oppose: membership of the House of Commons is gained by influence and bribery, and (as Knox had written in 1793) 'the best emoluments in the church, in the law, in the army, in the navy, are reserved to secure implicit votes in favour of corruption'.[8]

In addition, however, to this list of charges, which were familiar from the writings of 'honest Whigs' over the last decades of the century, Knox argued that the influence of the spirit of despotism had greatly increased in the three or four

[7] See Frederick William Hackwood, *William Hone: His Life and Times* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912), 366; [Vicesimus Knox], *The Spirit of Despotism*, 9th edn. (London: William Hone, n.d.), 4.

[8] From *Personal Nobility* (1793) in *The Works of Vicesimus Knox, D.D.*, 7 vols. (London: J. Mawman, 1824), v. 10.

years prior to the writing of his book, as a direct result of the war with France and loyalist hostility to the rise of the popular movement for the reform of parliament. His examples were many: the growing government interference in the conduct of newspapers, 'propagating principles unfavourable to the people's rights, by palliating public abuses, varnishing ministerial misconduct, and concealing facts in which the people are most deeply interested', so that the press had became 'a powerful engine of oppression' to serve 'the purposes of slavery';[9] the dissemination of suspicions and 'false alarms' about imaginary conspiracies against the constitution; the increasing influence of the crown, an increase Knox argued had been greatly accelerated since the French revolution;[10] the revival of jacobitism among Tories and high churchmen, attempting to defend the monarchy by proposing a definition of loyalty as loyalty to the king only, or even to the government for the time being, not to the whole constitution or to the public interest;[11] an increasing contempt among the supporters of government for philosophy, and especially for abstract political theory, associated with those dangerously 'clever men', as the Prince of Parma regarded them, the *philosophes* of France;[12] and the growing influence of lawyers in parliament, an influence which was invariably exercised in favour of the government, and which threatened the integrity of both the legislature and the judiciary.[13]

The war itself, Knox argued, was favourable to the spirit of despotism. It imposed, inevitably, 'a thousand little restraints on liberty', and one reason for its continuance was the aristocratic belief that 'peace . . . is productive of plenty, and plenty makes the people saucy', more disposed to claim their rights.[14] The huge increase in the standing army, and the embodiment of thousands of men in the militia, had 'a direct tendency to familiarize the mind to civil despotism',[15] by obliging them to exhibit the unthinking obedience of trained animals. Nothing was more efficient than war in persuading the people to accept the morality of despotism, the belief that any act of cruelty or revenge was justifiable when undertaken against those supposed to be the enemies of the nation.[16] Wars were waged or avoided on a calculation of the likely expense of money, not of lives, as if the lives of ordinary people were worthless.[17] The spirit of despotism, indeed, was 'totally destitute of feeling for others: It scarcely acknowledges the common tie of humanity';[18] and since the French revolution the contempt of the higher orders for the middle ranks and the poor had become greater than ever. The rich had more and more persuaded themselves that any extension of the franchise would lead to anarchy, a belief that was expressed more stridently the more unfounded it became. For in recent years, and partly through the efforts of Paine,[19] the poor had become increasingly literate, increasingly politically competent, increasingly

[9] Vicesimus Knox, *The Spirit of Despotism* ('London: printed in the Year 1795'), 42–4.
[10] Ibid. 68, 278–9. [11] Ibid. 278–9. [12] Ibid. 48–54, 199, 231.
[13] Ibid. 283–9, 297–301. [14] Ibid. 248. [15] Ibid. 142.
[16] Ibid. 225–6. [17] Ibid. 75. [18] Ibid. 196. [19] Ibid. 138.

capable of understanding both their own rights and the interest of the public and of seeing through the arguments of those who resisted reform. Some degree of reform (and Knox was far from advocating universal suffrage, even universal manhood suffrage) was now inevitable; and the more inevitable it was seen to be, the more shameless and violent the spirit of despotism had become.

So great had the fear of reform become, Knox claimed, that the government, and supporters of the unreformed constitution acting on the government's behalf, had since 1792 made 'a virtual declaration of hostilities against the people',[20] by employing an undercover army of spies, *agents provocateurs*, and false witnesses to seek out and inform upon the advocates of reform, even to invent evidence against them. This army had been recruited partly by the Home Office, partly by the Crown and Anchor Association with its nationwide system of reporting on the publications, even the conversations, of suspected reformers. Immediately after the foundation of the associations, Knox had argued, in *Personal Nobility*, that the association movement would be, paradoxically, 'favourable to the cause of liberty', because

> It calls thousands and tens of thousands, in all ranks, from their indolent repose, to the investigation of political subjects. It awakens them to political life, and prompts them to read forbidden books of which they had scarcely heard the names before. It makes them feel their own weight, and will teach them to throw it into the opposite scale, when they find themselves deluded by their artful leaders; or when their artful leaders, disappointed in the hopes of reward for their present exertions, shall excite them on some future panic, to associate in opposition.[21]

Knox's mind had been changed by the succession of political trials through 1793 and 1794. He had seen the most private expressions of opposition to the government, the smallest criticism of the constitution, reported to the authorities; even 'the sequestered walks of private life' invaded by profligate and venal men who 'destroy at once the confidential comforts, and the most valuable virtues of private life'.[22] So severe were the punishments for expressions of discontent that the poor and the middle ranks alike 'are terrified into a tame and silent acquiescence: They learn to consider politics as a dangerous subject, not to be touched without danger to liberty or life: They shrink therefore from the subject: They will neither read nor converse upon it.'[23]

The regime of political surveillance, he now believed, allied with the increasingly despotic behaviour of the higher orders in their transactions with their inferiors in 'common life', and the long process by which the commercial culture of Britain had more and more elevated the pursuit of private interest at the expense of the public good, was developing a new and alarming relation between public and private. On the one hand it seemed increasingly that there was 'NO PUBLIC': a society was being created in which 'every one is immersed in

[20] Ibid. 113. [21] Knox, *Personal Nobility*, *Works*, v, pp. vii–viii.
[22] Knox, *Spirit*, 116. [23] Ibid. 82.

private concerns—private pleasures, and private interest, acknowledging no public care—no general concern—nothing out of the sphere of domestic or personal affairs, worthy of anxious regard'.[24] On the other, those in the middle and lower classes who, managing to retain a concern for public affairs, expressed any degree of anxiety about the propriety of interfering in the politics of France or the corruption of the constitution and the attenuation of liberty, were treated as disloyal subjects, and were denied the right or privilege to give voice to their anxiety even in private. The fence which had once divided private from public space had been removed, and space traditionally regarded as private was redefined as public as soon as it was used for the discussion of public affairs. At the same time, the attitude of the 'higher orders' towards their supposed inferiors was increasingly governed by the mixture of contempt for their intellectual capacity and fear of their numbers that had found such violent expression in Burke's 'never to be forgotten' phrase, the '*swinish multitude*'.[25] This attitude found expression in 'the most haughty overbearing manners in the transactions of common life',[26] designed to keep the vulgar as far as possible at a distance, and in a posture of servility, and poisoning every private encounter between high and low. The combination of these factors had produced a situation in which every social space, 'every part of domestic life ... from the palace at St. James's and the levee in Downing Street, to the rural mansion in the distant province, to the convivial table, to the fire-side, to the stable, and to the dog-kennel',[27] had been invaded, infected, by the spirit of despotism. Every cultural practice had become politicized: was understood, or was liable to be represented, in terms of the division between those who regarded themselves as 'polite' and those they regarded as vulgar, and between 'aristocrats' and 'democrats', supposed loyalists and alleged radicals.

If Knox was exaggerating, it was not by much: anyone who studies British culture in the eighteenth century will recognize that however involved in political conflict it had been in earlier decades, it became strikingly more so, and to a much sharper degree, in the period between 1792—the year of the royal proclamation and the foundation of the associations, and the year in which France became a republic—and 1798, when a new temporary political consensus began to form under the direct threat of a French invasion. This is the situation, especially as it involved a new degree of the politicization of private space, that my own version of *The Spirit of Despotism* sets out to examine. But because the evidence of that conflict, and the atmosphere of suspicion it gave rise to, is so ubiquitous, it is impossible to imagine any attempt to give a sense of its range and depth without sacrificing one to the other. This book attempts to give an idea of the wide-ranging nature of that cultural conflict by focusing in detail on a few topics only. They run from the etiquette of coffee-house conversation to the use of hair powder, from representations of the country cottage to the private behaviour of the king on

[24] Ibid. 151. [25] Ibid. 135. [26] Ibid. 101–2. [27] Ibid. 24.

holiday; they are offered as examples of the almost infinite number of issues such a book might have engaged. To explain what this diverse collection of instances is attempting to achieve, it will help to give a more detailed account of them.

III

Among the events of the early 1790s that convinced Knox that the spirit of despotism was invading hitherto inviolate private space was the trial of the physician William Hodgson, whose drunken conversation with the radical pamphleteer Charles Pigott, as they sat reading the newspapers in a London coffee house, was reported to the authorities by the loyalists who overheard them. Hodgson was charged with uttering seditious words, and his trial, together with the trial of the attorney John Frost on a similar charge, is the subject of my second chapter. Both prosecutions developed into arguments about the shifting frontier between public and private space, and the new limitations on freedom of speech following the foundation of the associations. Those defending Frost and Hodgson argued that by long tradition coffee houses were 'private' spaces, where conversation of all kinds, including political conversation, was privileged. The prosecution refused to acknowledge any such notion of privacy: the seditious remarks, they insisted, had been made in 'public coffee houses', places of 'general resort', open to all. Knox was appalled by what he persisted in seeing as a violation of privacy by members and supporters of the association—'spies' who 'mix with the guests, that in the moment of convivial exhilaration, when prudence sleeps, some incautious comment on the news-paper may be seized, and carried to the agent of despotism, who, like the tiger thirsting for human blood, lies watching for his prey in the covert of obscurity'.[28] Like Thomas Erskine, counsel for Frost, he believed that unless the idea of privacy embodied in the coffee house was protected against the activities of the associationists, civilized society could not survive.

Among the issues which emerge from my discussion of these trials was the relation between public and private character. Was a man in public life, who held or hoped to hold public office, to be trusted only if he was virtuous in his private as well as in his public life? It was becoming more difficult for public men to argue that, so long as their public virtue was unimpeachable, their private life was their own private concern: that essentially aristocratic attitude towards public office was withering away as the terms of the culture of politics were increasingly set by an increasingly middle-class public sphere. However convinced Knox was that the preservation of the distinction between public and private space was essential to the survival of political dissent and public virtue, he had no time for the notion that the private conduct of public men was a matter of no account. 'Public virtue

[28] Ibid. 43.

must arise from private,' he insisted; the 'profligate', who conducted their private lives on corrupt principles, or on no principles at all, were 'inimical to all public virtue, and favourable to the spirit of despotism'.[29] There was a more libertine version of radicalism, however, that claimed that William Pitt, in particular, was attempting to conceal a want of public principle behind the apparent purity of his private life; a purity for which in any case he should take no credit, for his inhumanly frigid constitution made him immune to temptation.[30]

My third chapter examines this claim as it was applied, more controversially, to George III himself. During the 1780s the king began to represent himself in the character of an ordinary yet exemplary private gentleman, moving freely among his people, conversing with them on familiar terms, more a devoted and loving family man than a participant in political life. It was on his annual holiday at Weymouth that the political possibilities of this new character were most fully exploited. His first such holiday, in 1789, coincided with the Fall of the Bastille, and by the end of that year the supposed perfection of the king's private character was widely seen as inimical to the spirit of despotism, evidence of the benign nature of the British monarchy by contrast with that of pre-revolutionary France. As attitudes towards the revolution in France became increasingly polarized, the private character and virtues of the king were represented by the loyalist press as the key to his popularity, a popularity that would protect Britain from infection by French republicanism. By 1795, however, George was altogether less popular: following the defeat of the allied armies in northern Europe in the winter of 1794–5, he was increasingly seen as responsible for conducting an increasingly unpopular war with France, a war blamed for the scarcity of provisions and the sharp rise in the cost of food. To the satirical poet Peter Pindar, especially, George's reinvention of himself as a private man involved a deliberate blurring of the distinction between public and private. It was a mere performance, which, by attempting to conceal his responsibility for the mistakes of his government, the defects of his character, and his contempt for his subjects, was a part of the spirit of despotism it had once seemed to guard against.

In 1795 the propaganda war between loyalists and radicals was at its most active and most bitter. As we shall see in the course of this book, there were many reasons for this, but one of the most important was the government's apparent loss of nerve when it came to controlling the radical press by mounting or threatening prosecutions for seditious libel. The effect of this new (and very short-lived) freedom of the press, and to some degree its cause, was a proliferation of radical pamphlets, many of them satirical, most of them published by the rapidly growing

[29] Ibid. 148, 152.

[30] For 'libertine' radicalism, see especially Jon Mee, 'Libertines and Radicals in the 1790s: The Strange Case of Charles Pigott', in Peter Cryle and Lisa O'Connell (eds.), *Libertine Enlightenment: Sex, Liberty and Licence in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 183–203, and Iain McCalman's now classic study *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

number of plebeian booksellers in London. From 1792 until 1798 the number of publications issued annually by London booksellers as a whole remained fairly constant. The number of publications by radical booksellers, however, increased by about a quarter from 1793 to 1794, and by about a third again from 1794 to 1795; in 1796, following new government legislation against seditious publications, it fell by nearly a half, and the following year it fell again. Many plebeian booksellers went out of business. While the wind was in their favour, however, these booksellers had shown themselves skilled and enterprising at operating in the special political circumstances of 1795, responding to and inventing political controversies quickly and ingeniously, nowhere more so than in the voluminous debate stirred up in response to Pitt's introduction of a new tax on the wearing of hair powder. The government had expected this measure, which it represented as a tax on the rich, to be highly popular; even John Thelwall, the leading radical pamphleteer of 1795, described it, not entirely ironically, as 'the most democratic thing that has been thought of for a long time', quite uncharacteristic of Pitt's usual policy.[31] My chapter on the hair powder tax is offered as an example of how, in the polarized political culture of the mid-1790s, even so personal and private a matter as the decision about whether or not to wear hair powder could become a matter of controversy, and the tax itself represented as an instance of the politicization of private life by the ubiquitous spirit of despotism.

My final chapter examines what before the 1790s had arguably been perhaps the most reassuring of all images of privacy, of private social space: the sequestered country cottage. A poor but contented family gathered outside the door of their simple cottage had been a favourite topos of the poetry of rural life from early in the eighteenth century, and was developed in rural subject painting most influentially by Gainsborough in the 1770s and 1780s. I have argued elsewhere that such images carried an uncomfortable ideological charge: insofar as they were taken to refer directly to the rural poor themselves, they were more prescriptive than descriptive, depictions of a quiet contentment that the poor should aspire to, when their actual behaviour was often supposed to be characterized by vice, tumult, and indiscipline. But for the polite public they addressed, they offered also a fantasy of a private retirement from the 'world', from the routines and conflicts of public and social life. In the mid-1790s, however, the cottage itself became an object of partisan political conflict. In loyalist propaganda, the cottage was pressed into service as an image of the instinctive patriotism and loyalty to the king that the poor should exhibit, and that should lead them to face their poverty, even in the terrible scarcity of 1795, with resignation, or to feel gratitude for the plenty they were sometimes represented as enjoying. It was a space too in which the polite inhabitants of the countryside could do their bit in the campaign against the reform societies, by policing the behaviour and opinions of the rural poor and steering them towards an attitude of deference to their superiors and of reverence

[31] See below, p. 203.

for the king and constitution. Among radical writers, however, and especially to radical poets, the cottage became an emblem not of British liberty or loyalty but of the spirit of despotism, the place where families were pauperized by the avarice of their employers, by taxation, by scarcity, and by the sacrifice of their main breadwinners, and where the true cost of the war with France could be understood.

For Knox too, and it is a point he repeats and repeats, the cottage is where the spirit of despotism finds its most abject victims, impoverished by the greed of the landlord and 'wholesale farmer', and living 'in hovels with *windows stopt up*, hardly enjoying God's freest gifts, light and air. A murmur will exclude them even from the HUT, compared with which the neighbouring dog-kennel is a palace.' Their poverty is not the inevitable result of an impersonal economic system, but a direct result of the contempt felt by the rich for the poor: 'the proud grandee views the horses in his stable and the dogs in his kennel with affection, pampers them with food, lodges them in habitations, not only commodious, but luxurious; and, at the same time, despises his fellow-creatures, scarcely fed, wretchedly cloathed, and barely sheltered in the neighbouring cottage.'[32] As we have seen, Knox everywhere represents the political conflict of the 1790s as the effect of class conflict between the rich and 'the poor and middle classes'. He cannot acknowledge that the majority of those in the miscellaneous 'middle classes', whose interests and grievances are tendentiously identified with those of the poor, no doubt enthusiastically supported measures and policies that he regarded as despotic. He also ignores the 'vulgar conservatism'[33] which was so effective in frustrating the ends of the popular reform movement, or rather he can explain it only as the result of class intimidation or government repression. At least as far as the poor are concerned, however, his belief that radicalism was widespread among them was shared by many 'aristocrats' as well as by 'democrats': as we shall see in my first chapter, for example, the government's suspicion of the popular reformers was largely based on a fear of the sheer weight of numbers of the poor, the 'swinish multitude'.

With whatever reservations, therefore, and however unfashionably, I have found myself, like Knox, preoccupied in this book with the relationship between political division and class division. In Chapter 3, the most Knox-like of the book, Peter Pindar's attack on George III is based on the belief that it is his careless and contemptuous treatment of the poor that exposes the true nature of the king's private character and the political bad faith involved in his pose as a private gentleman. Elsewhere, however, the relation between class and politics does not

[32] Knox, *Spirit*, 292, 35, and see for example 118, 201, 316.

[33] See Mark Philp, 'Vulgar Conservatism 1792–1793', *English Historical Review*, 110 (Feb. 1995), 42–69, H. T. Dickinson, 'Popular Loyalism in Britain in the 1790s', in Eckhart Hellmuth (ed.), *The Transformation of Political Culture* (London and Oxford: German Historical Institute and Oxford University Press, 1990), 503–33; David Eastwood, 'Patriotism and the English State in the 1790s', in Mark Philp (ed.), *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 146–68.

seem so straightforward. In Chapter 2 we encounter 'polite' democrats barely less contemptuous of their social inferiors than George himself, and, faced with prosecution for sedition, claiming freedom of speech as the privilege of gentlemen rather than as a basic constitutional or human right. In Chapter 4 we find radicals writing for a popular audience divided on the issue of how the situation of the poor should be understood and described in a modern commercial society. Chapter 1 asks why the radical London Corresponding Society, the largest and most influential of the popular reform societies, had a very different degree of success in recruiting members, chiefly from among artisans and shopkeepers, in different areas of London. The relation of class and politics is the main subject of this chapter, which is a kind of additional introduction to the rest of the book. It begins with an attempt to describe the division between the polite West End and the rest of London, focusing on Charing Cross as the point of division and collision between rich and poor, polite and vulgar. It describes the riots there in 1794 and 1795 in protest against 'crimping', the forcible enlistment of poor men in the army, the widespread condonement of which by loyalist opinion had persuaded Knox that the nation 'had lost the spirit of freedom, and was preparing to submit its neck to the yoke of despotism'.[34] The chapter contrasts the relative success of the reform movement at recruiting members in London north of the Strand with its relative failure in the City, and discusses the different ways in which polite loyalist and radical intellectuals appear to have experienced and inhabited the metropolis. Its aim is to represent different versions of the political and social geography of London, as the place where, for various reasons (the capital as the seat of government, the concentration there of the print trades, the sheer size of the city, and so on) political conflict was at its most visible and the politicization of culture at its most intense.

IV

I can begin to describe what, taken together, these chapters are intended to achieve by giving some idea of the very diverse range of the textual resources they draw upon: parliamentary debates and government publications; handbills, newspapers, and periodicals; polite essays, plays, and novels; poems, songs, and satires in prose and verse; maps, trade directories, tours, guidebooks, and urban 'rambles'; writings on the picturesque and on architecture; diaries, letters, and autobiographies; reports of trials; pamphlets economic, religious, and legal; religious and moral tracts; the publications of the London Corresponding Society and the reports of those who spied upon it; writings on hair and hairdressing; writings on the poor and on taxation; images of cottages and coffee houses; medals, caricatures, topographical images, popular prints, and so on. The most

[34] Knox, *Spirit*, 77.

obvious effect of listing my sources is to emphasize, first of all, a diversity among the topics I discuss, a diversity that it may seem difficult to distinguish from randomness: as I suggested at the end of the first section of this introduction, many books could be written which seek to make the same point as this one, each of which would make an entirely different selection of topics. But diversity, perhaps even apparent randomness, are inseparable from what I am trying to do, and I hope that my approach will not therefore be mistaken for old new historicism, and that the stories I am telling will not seem exercises in the kind of critical ingenuity which links together disparate anecdotal details and hitches them to an overriding historical debate ushered in quite unexpectedly from nowhere. I have thought of the subjects of my chapters as 'instances', as complex manifolds of events, discourses, and narratives which allow us to see historical change in all its messy and material confusion; as knots which as we disentangle them are discovered to be made up of threads leading backwards and forwards in time. In short I have tried (and have succeeded in some places better than in others) to see each of these instances as what Lessing described as the 'central point' of a process of change, one which contains within itself the traces of what led up to it and intimations of what will follow. In these terms of course any of the moments in a process can be seen as its 'central point'; but some seem to allow us to see and to describe the evidences of change more clearly than others. The 1790s seem to me just such a point, and my chapters aspire to show why.

I hope too that the book is sufficiently attentive to the texture of political debate and conflict in the 1790s to establish that the process of politicization I have tried to exemplify was never contained within the polarized discourses by which the politics of the period is often represented. That process cannot be described except through the oppositions that the period itself thought of as constitutive of its politics: polite and vulgar, loyalist and radical, Tory and Whig, aristocrat and democrat, public and private. My own language in this book is full of such terms, but more often than not the stories it tells are about how inadequately they characterize the interplay of political debates, suspicions, and quarrels. And these are stories in which women as well as men of different social stations and political camps were often involved, either through their participation in activity or debate or because they were caught up in the processes of politicization. Women figure here not as distinguished by their gender, but as defined and differentiated through their participation or representation in more complex ways in which gender may not always have priority over social aspiration, class, or political allegiance.

The book has been conceived as occupying a space somewhere between political and cultural history. It is based on the perception that the liveliness and urgency of political debate in the 1790s, in which members of all classes and of different occupations, with varied interests and preoccupations, are engaged, produced a situation in which, as I suggested earlier, almost any space or topic could become the subject of political conflict, even those that might seem too

trivial, too quotidian, too far removed from politics to be susceptible to being politicized. The coffee house, by long convention a space where conversation even about politics was protected from political surveillance; the dressing of hair, too unimportant to be thought of as a political issue; the cottage, imagined as a space removed from public and political conflict; even the king's private character, represented with whatever bad faith as quarantining him from infection by his own political character: all suddenly became part of the arena of politics. Such a situation, understood by Knox as evidence of the spirit of despotism extending itself into every corner of social life, produced in him and in many other commentators, most notably perhaps Charlotte Smith and John Thelwall,[35] a more extended understanding of what politics was, and obliges us to think in broader terms about the relation between politics and culture in the period and between the disciplines in which we describe them.

Historians of this period, with a few striking exceptions, have characteristically tended to describe its political history without much reference to the ramifications of political conflict beyond the area that can be thought of as 'directly' political, in the wider culture or in daily life. Historians of literature and art, on the other hand, have increasingly focused their attention on the politics of culture in the period, but where this has required them to engage with a 'directly' political history, as defined for example by proceedings in parliament or extra-parliamentary political activism or political trials, they have frequently been content to rely on each other's ready-made and very broad-brush accounts. This book is an attempt to bridge this divide, and to discuss the 'directly' political alongside other more indirect forms of political intervention without privileging either. As my oddly diverse list of sources suggests, it tries to be a multidisciplinary approach to writing the history of the period, in the belief that this—at least for a writer without the gifts of Stendhal—is the only approach which can attempt to suggest the extent to which the whole life of a nation was believed to have been penetrated by political suspicions and restructured by political conflict.

[35] For Smith in this context, see Guest, 'Suspicious Minds: Spies and Surveillance in Charlotte Smith's Novels of the 1790s', in de Bolla, Leask, and Simpson (eds.), *Land, Nation and Culture, 1740–1840: Thinking the Republic of Taste*, 169–87. For Thelwall, see especially Gregory Claeys, introduction to his edition *The Politics of English Jacobinism: Writings of John Thelwall* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp. xiii–lviii; Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), esp. ch. 2, 82–128; Michael Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall and Jacobin Writing* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); and Judith Thompson's introduction to her edition of Thelwall's *The Peripatetic* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 11–50.

1

Charing Cross and the City

I

On the afternoon of 18 April 1795, according to the *Morning Chronicle*, the radical novelist and philosopher William Godwin met with a nasty accident in Oxford Street. He was 'rode over by a man on horseback' and 'received a violent contusion in his face, which was also much cut', though 'no dangerous consequences are apprehended'.[1] An essay by Godwin published two years later may incline us to believe that the collision was not the fault of the horse or its rider. It offers to distinguish between 'the man of talent and the man without', by describing how each of them might pass the time during a walk from Temple Bar to Hyde Park Corner at the western end of Oxford Street. The point is to show the generalizing, the abstracting, the imaginative power of men such as himself, as compared with the impoverished intellect of ordinary men. 'The dull man,' he suggests,

> goes straight forward; he has so many furlongs to traverse. He observes if he meets any of his acquaintance; he enquires respecting their health and their family. He glances perhaps [at] the shops as he passes; he admires the fashion of a buckle, and the metal of a tea-urn. If he experience any flights of fancy, they are of short extent; of the same nature as the flights of a forest-bird, clipped of his wings, and condemned to spend the rest of his life in a farm-yard.

This man is not to be taken as showing an admirably lively interest in the health and well-being of his friends and in the window-displays of the shops. As far as Godwin is concerned, all that is mere distraction from the inner life of the intellect. If the heavy imagination of this dullard ever leaves the ground, it soon bumps to earth as he becomes distracted once again by some glittering object for sale or by some equally trivial social encounter. It is imprisoned in the London streets; the thick-and-fast sense impressions of the man without talent are the walls of its cell.

The man of talent, on the other hand, is entirely indifferent to the contents of shop windows and apparently meets no acquaintances. If any of the passers-by on the streets do briefly catch his attention, he 'reads their countenances, conjectures their past history, and forms a superficial notion of their wisdom or folly, their vice or virtue, their satisfaction or misery'. If he does observe the shifting scenery

[1] *MC* 21 Apr. 1795; my thanks to Corinna Wagner for finding this snippet.

of the walk, it is in order to reconstruct it aesthetically, 'with the eye of a connoisseur or an artist'. For the most part, however, he is quite 'unindebted to the suggestions of surrounding objects', for 'his whole soul is employed' with his own thoughts.

> He laughs and cries. . . . He enters into nice calculations; he digests sagacious reasonings. In imagination he declaims or describes, impressed with the deepest sympathy, or elevated to the loftiest rapture. He makes a thousand new and admirable combinations. He passes through a thousand imaginary scenes, tries his courage, tasks his ingenuity, and thus becomes gradually prepared to meet almost any of the many-coloured events of human life. He consults by the aid of memory the books he has read, and projects others for the future instruction and delight of mankind.

How well the man of talent improves the hour! 'The time of these two persons in one respect resembles; it has brought them both to Hyde-Park-Corner. In almost every other respect it is dissimilar.'[2] Nowhere can be a prison for the man of talent, for *his* imagination, at one bound, escapes all confinement—just as Caleb Williams's imagination, in Godwin's novel of 1794, allowed him to escape all sense of confinement in his prison cell.[3]

But however admirable Godwin intends his man of talent to appear, it seems evident that he might as well have been walking, or jay-walking, from Temple Bar to anywhere, for all the difference it made to him. Indeed he might have done better to remain in the safety of his study. T. J. Mathias, a well-connected Tory satirist, Treasurer to the Queen, quoted Godwin's comparison in full in his anonymous *Pursuits of Literature*, garnishing it throughout with incredulous italics. It was, he sneered, '*very instructive*. No man can ever again be at a loss to know a man of talents, from a man without, *in the streets*. I had often been puzzled, till I met with this instructive volume.'[4] Judging by what he italicized—'*if*' he observes the passers-by, for example, or '*if*' he notices the scenery—what Mathias found most extraordinary about the passage was not the willingness of the man of talent 'to meet almost any of the many-coloured events of human life' but his determination to avoid noticing almost everything outside himself. The sneer is calculatedly a Tory sneer to a radical: everyone, from time to time, walks abstractedly, oblivious of their surroundings; but by apparently walking that way on principle, by thinking it necessary to have an abstract theory of walking, Godwin marked himself, in Mathias's eyes, as a Frenchified enlightenment radical with no grip on the realities and practicalities of everyday life. The very phrase, 'the man of

[2] William Godwin, *The Enquirer. Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature* (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1797), 31–2.

[3] This passage is closely related to the chapter in which Caleb describes how he employed his mind when imprisoned; see Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, ed. David McCracken (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 185–7.

[4] T. J. Mathias, *The Pursuits of Literature, A Satirical Poem in Four Dialogues*, 8th edn. (London: T. Becket, 1798), 374–6.

talent', no doubt reminded him of Burke's attack on 'men of talents' and the danger they posed to the stability of states: how convenient of Godwin to do the work of the secret service, by explaining how to recognize such men without troubling to read their writings or to listen to what they had to say.[5]

By Godwin's account, we would have to judge Wordsworth as a very dull man indeed. In the accounts he gave in the *Prelude* of his endless walks in London, Wordsworth represents himself as so distracted by everything he saw in the streets that the metropolis became for him an unintelligible chaos of meaningless stimuli which deprived him of the power of consecutive thought. This chapter will no doubt suggest that I too belong on the dull side of Godwin's comparison. It is an attempt to sketch a political geography of London in the mid-1790s, or three related such geographies. And it will certainly be sketchy: the topic, like London itself in Wordsworth's account of it, is without obvious limits, and my treatment of it, which starts with a general view of London, focuses on Charing Cross, makes its way, by an indirect route, to the City, and finally doubles back to Godwin's London, will risk taking on the inconsequential character, if not the raffishness, of an eighteenth-century London 'ramble'.[6]

II

Caleb Williams, fleeing from Fernando Falkland and his creature, his all-seeing spy Gines, repeatedly determines to conceal himself in London, which, by reason of its huge population and 'the magnitude of its dimensions', he believed would offer him 'an inexhaustible reservoir of concealment'. In the event, of course, when at last he manages to reach the metropolis, he discovers something else which he, a country boy, had not anticipated: that within the limits of that apparently limitless space, news travelled faster than he had ever imagined. When Gines causes his description to be circulated by means of a halfpenny handbill sold in the streets, Caleb suddenly finds himself trapped in 'the gaze of indiscriminate

[5] See *Three Letters addressed to a Member of the present Parliament, on the proposals for peace with the regicide Directory of France*, in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, new edn., 14 vols. (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1815–22), viii. 170. The best account of the ideological struggles of the 1790s as fought out between British common sense and French theory is David Simpson, *Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt against Theory* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press 1993), esp. ch. 2 ands 3.

[6] Among examples of this genre in the last twenty years of the century, see *The Complete Modern London Spy, for the present Year, 1781* (London: Alex. Hogg, [1781(?)]); *London Unmask'd: or the New Town Spy . . . in a Ramble through . . . London and Westminster* (London: William Adlard, [1784?]); *A Modern Sabbath, or, A Sunday Ramble . . . in and about the Cities of London and Westminster, and the Borough of Southwark* (London: B. Crosby, 1794); *A Fortnight's Ramble through London, or a complete Display of all the Cheats and Frauds practized in that Great Metropolis* (London: J. Roach, [1795]); *Roach's London Pocket Pilot, or Stranger's Guide through the Metropolis* (London: J. Roach, 1796); Sir John Fielding, jnr, and Richard King, *The New London Spy; or, a Modern Twenty-Four Hours Ramble through the Great British Metropolis* (London: Alex. Hogg, [1800?]).

curiosity'; his pursuer had multiplied himself until 'a million of men', in every quarter, every house of the vast city, would now be looking with a 'suspicious eye' on 'every solitary stranger'.[7]

There is nothing especially new, nothing specific to the 1790s, about the hyperbole by which London is prefigured in Caleb's imagination before his arrival. We can read this language of vastness, of limitlessness, of inexhaustibility, so reminiscent of Burke's definitions of the sublime, as evidence of a kind of late eighteenth-century metropolitan sublime. It is as if a visual aesthetic developed primarily to describe wild landscape that resisted the taming, the domesticating power of civilization, has suddenly collided with a new kind or degree of civilization itself, in the form of a city, as Wordsworth described it, of 'streets without end', thronged with 'face after face' in an endless parade of anonymity.[8] But to see it in these terms, or simply in these terms, is to ignore the fact that throughout the century, and well before 1700, London had been repeatedly described as a place indescribable except by hyperbole.

If this is true of how the size and extent of London had been represented, it was equally true of another of the defining characteristics attributed to eighteenth-century London, though not as it happens by Caleb, that it was a place of endless change. The character of its various districts, the extent of its trade, the social status of its individual inhabitants, their appearance and that of the streets they walked through, were all apparently subject to alteration, year by year, month by month. But as Alison O'Byrne has pointed out, there is a paradox in literary representations of London in the eighteenth century—she has in mind especially topographical descriptions of the capital and guidebooks of various kinds—that while they describe London in terms of a modernity characterized by ceaseless change, by novelty ever renewed, they remain themselves relatively unchanged throughout the period. She explains this partly in terms of what seems to us (as it did to Caleb Williams) one of the most salient features of eighteenth-century metropolitan modernity, the extraordinary proliferation of commercial print culture. Commercial publishers satisfied an ever-increasing demand for descriptive accounts of London as cheaply and conveniently as possible, by repeatedly recycling earlier texts, often with very little adaptation, and passing them off as so new as to render out of date every publication that preceded them. But partly too, she argues, the idea of London as a place above all of endless novelty and ceaseless change was so deeply imprinted on contemporary ideas of the city that change became reified, became a simple fact so often repeated as to become too inert to exert much pressure on the genre, form, discourse, style, even the content of the stream of publications by which it was handed down.[9] The gasps of awe and wonder at

[7] Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 262, 254, 270.

[8] *The Prelude* (1805 version), vii. 133, 173.

[9] Alison O'Byrne, 'Walking, Rambling, and Promenading in Eighteenth-Century London: A Literary and Cultural History' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of York, 2003), 19–20, 47–8.

the population, the size, the novelty of London were thoroughly familiar, with none of the power to intimidate or excite that the first encounter with London itself still exerted over newcomers like Caleb or Wordsworth, who could describe that encounter, however, only by struggling to re-enthuse a jaded choir of superlatives.

The sense of London as a limitless expanse was no doubt partly a result of the fact that its limits were indeed uncertain: 'London' was a term still more elastic in the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century than it is now, and it is not at all clear where Londoners imagined that London was, where it began and ended. There were two more or less official answers, both of them unsatisfactory. One of these defined the metropolis in terms of its twin cities, the city of Westminster and the 'City' of London proper, with its adjunct, south of the Thames, the Borough of Southwark. But this definition, as well as ignoring the existence of large areas on its edge—Clerkenwell, for example, Marylebone, Lambeth—which were now to all intents and purposes parts of the capital, also excluded a large area of the inner city, including the parishes of St Giles-in-the-Fields and St George's Bloomsbury, which almost divided Westminster from the City and was still part of the County of Middlesex. For various statistical purposes, London was also defined, more capaciously, to include the 140 or so parishes included in the 'Bills of Mortality'—the records of births and deaths kept by the Company of Parish Clerks. The area contained within the bills, however, had been defined in the sixteenth century, and had not grown as London had grown. It included that inner-city wedge of Middlesex, and Clerkenwell, and Lambeth; it included a number of villages to the east, most notably Hackney and Bethnal Green and Limehouse, which were cut off from, or barely joined to, the continuously built-up area. To the west, however, it excluded the Middlesex parishes collectively known as 'the parishes beyond the bills': St Pancras and St Marylebone, which in the eighteenth century had attached their huge developments of genteel housing to the built-up area, as well as Chelsea, Kensington, and Paddington.

Perhaps most people would have *visualized* London as the space within that continuously built-up area that was depicted in the maps of the capital which were published in huge numbers in the last decades of the eighteenth century, especially in directories and guidebooks.[10] On the north bank of the Thames, this reached no further, at the western edge of town, than Horseferry Road, which fed into

[10] This and the following paragraphs are based on various maps including William Faden's *A New Pocket Map of the Cities of London and Westminster; with the Borough of Southwark, comprehending the new Buildings and other Alterations* [1787], 3rd edn. (London: for William Faden, 1790), Ida Darlington and James Howgego, *Printed Maps of London c. 1553–1860* (London: George Philip, 1964), no. 186 (3); *Horwood's Plan of London, Westminster, Southwark & Parts Adjoining 1792–1799* (London: London Topographical Society publication no. 106, 1966), Darlington and Howgego, *Printed Maps*, no. 200 (1); and (for 1800) *Facsimile of the Ordnance Surveyor's Drawings of the London Area 1799–1808*, ed. Yolande Hodson (London: London Topographical Society publication no. 144, 1991).

the river crossings where Lambeth Bridge is now, a few hundred yards south of the Houses of Parliament (Pl. 1.1). Its boundary curved west and north up St James's Park, then as now a large tongue of green reaching eastward almost to Charing Cross. It skirted the eastern edges of Green Park and Hyde Park up to Tyburn at the western end of Oxford Street, and reached a few hundred yards up Edgware Road, ending well short of Paddington, which for a few years more would keep the character of a separate suburban village. From the Edgware Road it turned north-east towards the junction of Tottenham Court Road and what is now the Marylebone Road, and then turned south where fields ran all the way to the rear of the British Museum. Thus from the museum end of the newly built Store Street, where in 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft was writing her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, you could look north across a miscellaneous foreground—gravel pits, the field under the present Malet Street where the members of the Toxophilite Society practised archery,[11] pastureland criss-crossed with paths made by Sunday walkers in search of country air—up to the suburban construction site, two-thirds of a mile away, that was Somers Town, where in 1797 Wollstonecraft would live and die.

From the museum the boundary ran east to the Foundling Hospital, to Gray's Inn Road and to the higher fields, watered by the River Fleet and pierced by chalybeate springs, which still formed a green belt between Clerkenwell and the small town of Islington. North of the City itself, the City with a large 'C', the boundary of the continuously built-up area reached barely further than Old Street. On the eastern side of town, it ran from Hoxton, still just about a separate village, along a zigzag line dividing the streets from pastures and market gardens, to the Whitechapel Road, where ribbon development reached as far as the village of Mile End. East of Whitechapel and Wapping, more ribbon development followed the line of the Thames to Poplar at the virtually unpopulated Isle of Dogs. This eastward riverside development was matched across the river, the built-up area bulging southward to include Southwark, but from there westward to the river at Vauxhall Gardens the streets lay among a patchwork of pasture, market-garden, and marshland, which gave Lambeth, where Blake lived throughout the 1790s, if not quite a rural, at least a grubbily verdant look. It was in Lambeth, and in the fields to the north-west of the city bounded by the Edgware and Marylebone Roads, that the continuously built-up area would grow most during the 1790s—elsewhere, it would hardly grow at all. And for all the hyperbolic accounts of the extent of London, 'the illimitable walk', as Wordsworth put it, through those 'streets without end',[12] it was not larger in area in the 1790s than

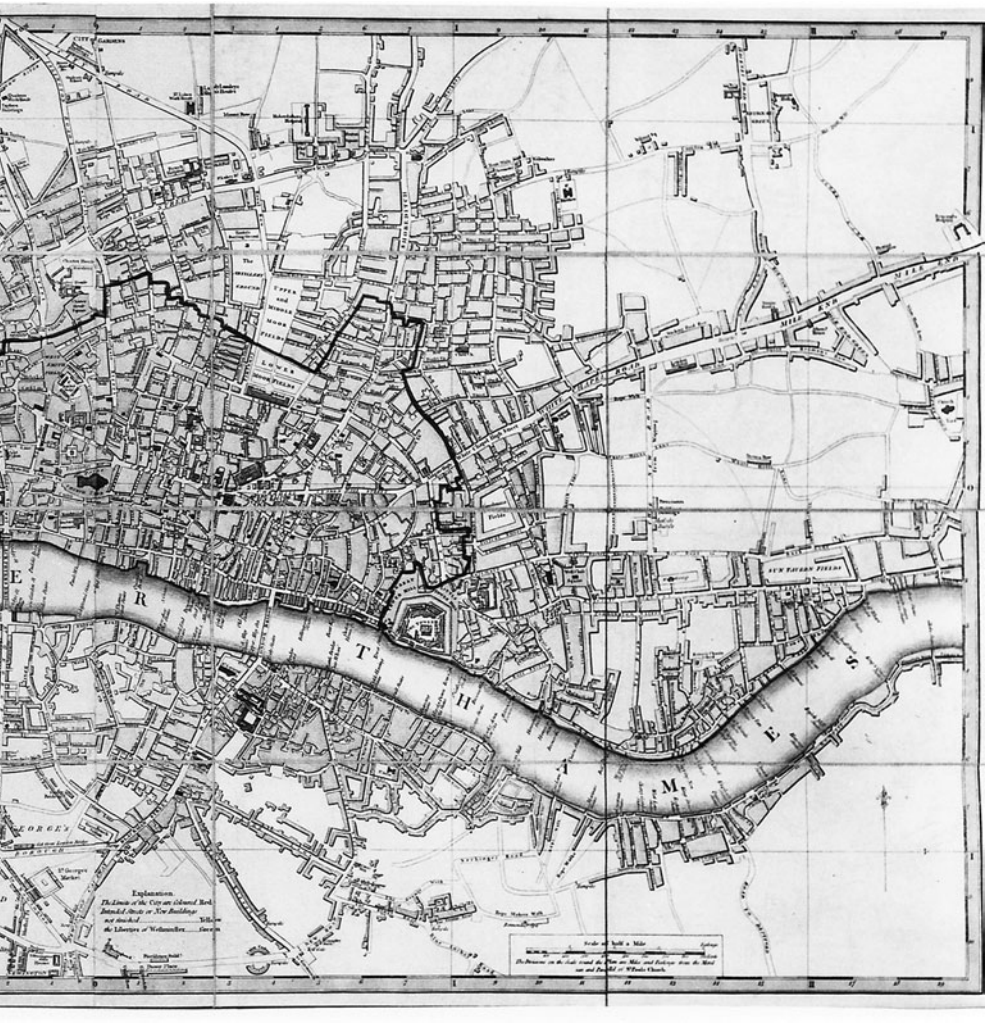
[11] See Richard Tames, *Bloomsbury Past: A Visual History* (London: Historical Publications, 1993), 17.

[12] *The Prelude* (1805 version), vii. 133, 159. There is a superb account of Wordsworth's walks through the long arterial streets of London in Kenneth R. Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1998), 235–63.

Pl. 1.1. *A New Pocket Map of the Cities of London and Westminster; with the Borough of Southwark, comprehending the new Buildings and other Alterations*, 3rd edn. (London: William Faden, 1790).

many middle-sized English towns, like York, are now. From east to west the continuously built-up area was in most places no more than four miles wide; from south to north it was rarely more than two.

The image of London offered by these maps, however, was not without its problems. The customary rectangular shape and landscape-format of printed



maps was a convenient match with the shape of the built-up area itself, a recumbent rectangle following the eastward flow of the river; but it prevented map-makers from following the development of the London suburbs to the north and south; and the tradition of giving the City of London a more or less central place on the map meant that the empty fields to the east of the City were depicted at the expense of the developing western suburbs. In the last fifty years of the century the area covered by street maps increased on average very little, and its southern boundary remained entirely

static.[13] By 1800 the improvement of the roads out of the inner city had, more firmly than before, fastened to London, considered as a cultural space rather than as a continuously built area, a range of small towns and villages which did not fit on to maps of London intended to be street maps. 'Off the stones', in the contemporary Cockney expression,[14] beyond the limit of the paved roads, the continuously built-up area was fringed by what had now become suburbs and dormitories, most still physically separate from London, some joined by a ribbon of houses along the major roads. Even by 1800, as well as Paddington, Islington, Hoxton, Mile End, these suburbs included Chelsea, Kensington, Knightsbridge, Hampstead, the developing Camden Town—to where in 1801 John Wolcot, famous as the satirical poet 'Peter Pindar', would move in the hope that the rural air would improve his asthma[15]—Stoke Newington, Hackney, Bethnal Green, Stepney, Deptford, Peckham, Newington Butts, Camberwell, Clapham—places which, like many places beyond them, have since come to be regarded as belonging to the 'inner city'.

Along with the difficulty of determining the geographical extent of London was the problem of estimating its population. According to the first decennial census in 1801 the population of London within the Bills of Mortality was a little less than 800,000, or, including the five parishes beyond the bills, 900,000. There are reasons to be suspicious of these figures, but they are now widely thought to be only about 5 per cent too low; and they are no doubt immeasurably more reliable than the widely divergent estimates produced by statisticians over the preceding decades. In 1795, the magistrate and statistician Patrick Colquhoun estimated the population at one and a quarter million; Richard Price, just fifteen years earlier, calculated it at barely over half a million, including the whole of Middlesex.[16] Such estimates were saturated in controversy, not only about the numbers and the

[13] From 1746, when John Rocque's great map of Hanoverian London was published, through to the end of the century, the western boundary of street maps was extended only by an average of about a quarter of a mile. To the north, street maps grew by an average of three-quarters of a mile, so that by the end of the century many of them took in more of Islington than this map does; but this expansion was at the cost of ignoring developments in the south. These calculations are made from the street maps described in Ida Darlington and James Howgego, taking the average extent of maps in 1746–60 as a base and comparing them with the average extent in 1791–1800. For Rocque, see Ralph Hyde (ed.), *The A to Z of Georgian London*, ed. Ralph Hyde (London: London Topographical Society, 1982).

[14] *Metropolitan Grievances; or, A Serio-Comic Glance at Minor Mischiefs in London and its Vicinity . . . By One who thinks for Himself* (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1812), 75; Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, ch. 54.

[15] See Tom Girtin, *Doctor with Two Aunts: A Biography of Peter Pindar* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 218.

[16] See Patrick Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 3rd edn. (London: C. Dilly, 1796), 375; for Price, see his *Essay on the Population of England*, 2nd edn. (London: T. Cadell, 1780), 5. For an earlier, and (slightly) higher estimate, see Price's letter to Benjamin Franklin of 3 Apr. 1769, in D. O. Thomas and W. Bernard Peach *The Correspondence of Richard Price*, ed. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, and Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1983), i. 58–79.

means by which they were arrived at, but because they were produced in support of conflicting theses about the tendency of commercial, urbanized societies to flourish or to degenerate. Was the population of London increasing or diminishing? Through most of the century, it was recognized that more people died in London than were born, but was the deficit replenished by inward migration? To engage these questions, population estimates were produced with the aim of comparing them with earlier estimates, and so were obliged to confine themselves to the same area, the Bills of Mortality, and to omit from their calculations the greatest area of population increase.

It is probable that the population of the City of London remained static or even declined in the last fifty years of the century; that in Westminster and the Borough it increased only slightly; and that the main increase within the bills occurred at the suburban edge. But the greatest increase between 1750 and 1801 occurred elsewhere, south of the river, and in the 'five parishes beyond the bills' where the population may have increased by 600 per cent in that time, in suburbs that were mainly excluded from most maps of London. In short, though it was clear in the 1790s that London was many times larger than any other city in Britain, it was thoroughly unclear how much larger it was. When in early 1793 Britain found itself yet again at war with France, this uncertainty was fed by the continuing British anxiety about the size, the wealth, the military potential of its oldest, its 'natural' enemy. Was London more or less populous than Paris?[17] It is now believed that at the end of the century London was eleven times more populous than Liverpool, the second largest city in England, and twice as populous as Paris; but in the 1790s there was no way to tell.

Throughout the eighteenth century, London had become an increasingly divided city, as those who could afford to do so moved into the squares and wide streets of the West End, most of them bearing the names of royalty or of great aristocratic families, that continued to be built throughout the century. For relatively impoverished 'jacobin' novelists, such as Charlotte Smith, perhaps especially in *Desmond* (1792) and *The Young Philosopher* (1798), or Elizabeth Inchbald, whose novel of west-end life, *A Simple Story* (1791), was written in a dingy second-floor flat in Frith Street, Soho, this fashionable ghetto seemed a place of frivolity and corruption, contemptible, enviable. The threshold of the West End moved, during the century, from Temple Bar to Charing Cross; further north and west it came to be marked by Swallow Street, which early in the next century would be redeveloped as Regent Street with the express intention of marking a grand symbolic boundary between east and west, or drawing, as John Nash put it, a 'Line of Separation between the inhabitants of the first classes of society' ('the Streets and Squares occupied by the Nobility and Gentry') 'and those of the inferior classes' ('the narrow Streets and meaner houses occupied by

[17] See for example John Aikin, quoted in *Ambulator: or, a Pocket Companion in a Tour round London* (London: J. Scratcherd, 1796), 24.

mechanics and the trading part of the community').[18] In the 1790s pockets of London remained, for example in the fading grandeur of Soho Square, where the polite still lived in neighbourhood with tradesmen. There were places too where the dwellings of the abject poor were all but next door to those of the very rich. In what would come to be called in the next century the St Giles 'rookery'—centred on Dyott Street, south of Great Russell Street and north of St Giles's church—some houses in the tangled network of tiny courts and narrow alleys were let twelve to a room. This area was within 200 yards of Bloomsbury Square, where until 1800 the great house of the Dukes of Bedford still stood, and only 100 yards from the iron gates that protected Bedford Square, which according to the 'young philosopher' of Smith's novel was the address of choice for city merchants who had become immensely rich.[19]

On the rookeries of London the fiction of the 1790s is virtually silent. An exception is one of Hannah More's 'Cheap Repository Tracts' (1795–8), *Betty Brown; or, the St. Giles's Orange Girl*, in which Betty lodges with Mrs Sponge, 'not far from the Seven-Dials', just over 100 yards south of the 'rookery' near Bedford Square and known, for obvious reasons, as 'Little Dublin'. Here she lives in a tiny windowless garret-room, one of nine people sharing three beds. There were small pockets of poverty and squalor even in the West End, at least in its oldest quarter, St James's.[20] By contrast, however, with the rest of London, and especially as you moved further west and north-west towards Mayfair and Marylebone, the West End was overwhelmingly inhabited by the aristocracy and gentry, along with the servants and shopkeepers who took care of their needs. The *Universal British Directory* of 1791 lists the London addresses of 231 members of the House of Lords who divided their year between residence in the country during summer and in town during the season. Of these, 218, nearly 95 per cent, lived west of Charing Cross: in St James's, Mayfair, Whitehall, or in the grand squares and streets of Marylebone, north of Oxford Street, still being developed at the end of the century. No fewer than fourteen lived in the grandest square of all, Grosvenor Square, where in *A Simple Story*, Inchbald placed the house of Lord Elmwood, and where Camilla, in the novel of that name by Fanny Burney (1796), stayed in a 'mansion the most splendid' belonging to the posh faroholic Mrs Berlinton, the

[18] Quoted in Rodney Mace, *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), 33.

[19] Charlotte Smith, *The Young Philosopher*, ed. Elizabeth Kraft (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 67. Smith had married into a city family, and in the first years of her disastrous marriage had hated living over her father-in-law's warehouse in Cheapside—see Lorraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith, a Critical Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1998), ch. 1. Smith attributes her own contempt for the City and its businessmen, as well as for the west-end aristocracy, to a number of characters in her novels, the young philosopher Delmont included.

[20] For example the 'rookery' in Duke's Court, St James's, in the interior of the block formed by Bury, Jermyn, Duke, and Great Ryder Streets, inhabited by Rynwick Williams, the supposed London 'monster', in the late 1780s, and described by Jan Bondeson in *The London Monster: A Sanguinary Tale* (London: Free Association Books, 2000), 207–9.

very spellin' of whose name is intended to suggest pure Mayfair.[21] The addresses of the 456 members of the House of Commons listed in the 1791 directory followed a similar pattern: 414, over 90 per cent, lived in the West End, nine of these in Grosvenor Square. Eight lived in semi-fashionable Bloomsbury, and six in the luxurious riverside Adelphi development south of the Strand.[22]

To most members of both Houses of Parliament, and to many members of the politest classes residing in the West End, London east of Charing Cross must have been, if not exactly a *terra incognita*, yet largely unexplored except for the routes along the Strand, Oxford Street and Holborn to the shops, the City, the courts, the theatres, the Royal Academy. To such people the 'knowledge' (I am using the taxi-driver's term) of the labyrinth of streets of the inner city—linked, as Caleb describes them, 'by narrow lanes and alleys, with intricate insertions and sudden turnings'[23]—must have seemed impossible to acquire; the geography must have seemed, by contrast with the broad streets and squares of St James's, St George's, Marylebone, almost designed to frustrate the acquisition of that knowledge. If they came across them at all, the poorest inhabitants of 'the lanes and back streets of the metropolis' may have struck them as members of another species altogether, as they did Maria in Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs of Woman* (1798), who found herself 'mortified at being compelled to consider them as my fellow-creatures, as if an ape had claimed kindred with me'.[24]

The size, the shape, the mass, the mystery of London had, throughout the eighteenth century and even earlier, found expression in the repeated figure of London as a monster, probably most familiar to us from Defoe's *Tour*, from *Humphry Clinker*, from *Jerusalem* and *The Prelude*. And of all monsters London, by the size, the density of its population; by the fact that, though apparently more people died in London than were born, its numbers, most people believed, continued to grow; by association, of perhaps most importance from the period of the Wilkes affair to the Gordon Riots in 1780, between the inhabitants of inner

[21] Fanny Burney, *Camilla: or, A Picture of Youth*, ed. Edward A. and Lillian D. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 793. Of the remainder, five lived in fashionable parts of Bloomsbury and six were bishops or lawyers with professional reasons for living further east. One lived in King Street off Covent Garden, the only member of the aristocracy and gentry still living in a once-fashionable area now abandoned by people of fashion. See *Directory to the Nobility, Gentry, and Families of Distinction in London, Westminster, &c. . . . for 1793* (London: J. Wilkes, n.d.), 25. For women in high life addicted to gambling at faro tables, see Gillian Russell, ' "Faro's Daughters": Female Gamesters, Politics, and the Discourse of Finance in 1790s' Britain', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33: 4 (2000), 481–504.

[22] Based on *The Universal British Directory of Trade, Commerce, and Manufacture* (London: Champante and Whitrow, 1791), pp. lxxi–lxxxvi. Fifteen, for professional reasons, lived in legal precincts, and fourteen in the City. Of the remaining MPs listed, two lived in Holborn, one off the Strand, and one at an address I cannot identify. Henry Dundas, a member of the cabinet in different capacities throughout the 1790s, gives his address as Somerset House, where he may sometimes have stayed when he could not get back to his suburban home at Wimbledon.

[23] Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 265.

[24] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary and The Wrongs of Woman*, ed. Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 168.

London and the London mob—of all monsters, London appeared most to resemble the Hydra. No wonder, then, that on occasions when the 'mob' invaded the West End, the shock could be tremendous.

III

By the end of 1792, France, now declared a republic, was at war with Austria and Prussia, and in Britain the movement for parliamentary reform had revived, no longer, as it had been in the early 1780s, a concern mainly of the polite classes, but now chiefly of artisans and tradesmen. The government began suppressing publications it considered seditious. The following year Louis XVI was executed, and Britain entered the war with France. In 1794 the Whig party split, with the majority, led by the Duke of Portland, going into coalition with Pitt, leaving a handful of Whigs led by Charles James Fox to oppose the war with France and the government's attacks on freedom of speech. These and other developments opened new fissures throughout British society, and especially in some of the largest cities: Edinburgh, Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, and London.

Late in 1792, the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers was founded, and with impressive rapidity affiliated loyalist associations sprang up across the country. A miasma of suspicion enveloped London especially. The largest and most influential popular reform group, the London Corresponding Society, campaigning for universal manhood suffrage, was heavily infiltrated by spies and informers, and the surviving reports of its meetings, themselves written by government spies, are full of anxieties about who might be spying on them.[25] In many places the owners and tenants of taverns and coffee houses found themselves threatened with the loss of their licences and so of their livelihoods if they allowed popular reform societies to meet on their premises. In Blake's Lambeth, as Michael Phillips has discovered, the local loyalist association required every householder to sign a pledge of loyalty, declaring their attachment to the constitution of Great Britain and their abhorrence of all attempts to subvert it. This abhorrence was to be shown by refusing to subscribe to newspapers, 'manifestly . . . in the pay of France', which supported any degree of parliamentary reform, and by reporting the names of all foreigners residing in the parish, so that, to repeat Caleb's words, a 'suspicious eye' was now to be cast on 'every solitary stranger'. Those who refused to sign this pledge were to be reported to the association, along with their reasons for refusing. As Phillips points out, it would have taken great courage for Blake to have withheld his signature; it is likely that, however great his reluctance, he signed.[26]

[25] Mary Thale (ed.), *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society 1792–1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), *passim*.

[26] Michael Phillips, 'Blake and the Terror 1792–93', *The Library*, 6th series, 26: 4 (Dec. 1994), 263–97, and especially 274–8 and plate 1.

Thus for most of the 1790s London was a city divided politically, but the division was as unequal as were the economic, cultural, and geographic divisions: by far the majority of all classes supported the war with republican France and opposed the reform of parliament which was represented by loyalists as certain to lead to the establishment of a republic in Britain. This political fissure, however, ran vertically rather than horizontally, and it divided public space in a new way. Of the two patent theatres, for example, Covent Garden came to be represented by the newspapers as much more loyalist than Drury Lane, managed by Fox's closest ally, the Irish dramatist and politician Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who was reluctant to stage the patriotic dramas more favoured at Covent Garden, who twice in the decade recommended that Pitt should be hanged,[27] and who was known to be sympathetic to those demanding political freedom for Ireland. To many London theatregoers, Sheridan's political views, however shocking to them, were not so evident in the productions of Drury Lane as to keep them away, but the king himself attempted to encourage them to do so, by refusing to visit the theatre from 1794 until, in 1798, when these divisions began to close, he attended a performance of Sheridan's new, ambiguously patriotic tragedy *Pizarro*.[28]

In the highest levels of the political world, the breakdown of cordiality between the supporters of Pitt's government and the Foxite Whigs was confirmed and symbolized in the clubs of St James's Street: White's became the favoured drinking and gambling joint of the one group, Brooks's, across the street, of the other.[29] The split is depicted in James Gillray's brilliant caricature of late 1796, *Promis'd Horrors of the French Invasion,—or—Forcible Reasons for negotiating a Regicide Peace* (Pl. 1.2). It imagines a peace negotiated with the French republic as tantamount to a surrender to be followed by an invasion. A regiment of French soldiers has just set fire to St James's Palace, the official residence of the king in London. Now it is marching up St James's Street towards Piccadilly, leaving a detachment to break into White's and purge its members. Several cabinet members and supporters of Pitt have already been killed; the Prince of Wales is being hurled from the balcony. But the effects of the invasion are represented in the favourite haunts not only of those with most to lose by it, but of others, so Gillray pretends, with the most to gain. The hostility of the Foxite Whigs to the war with France leads Gillray to pretend, as did much of the government-funded press, that they were jacobins and virtually agents of the republic. Accordingly Pitt, tied to a hastily erected liberty tree, is being scourged by the eager and determined Fox. Sheridan, his money-troubles at last over, has plundered the treasury and sneaks into Brooks's with his swag. The radical political activist John Thelwall is goading

[27] See John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793–1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 415, 593.

[28] See George Taylor, *The French Revolution and the London Stage 1789–1805* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 172–7.

[29] For more on this, see Ralph Nevill, *London Clubs: Their History and Treasures* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1911), chs. 3 (White's) and 4 (Brooks's).

Pl. 1.2. James Gillray, *Promis'd Horrors of the French Invasion,—or—Forcible Reasons for negotiating a Regicide Peace* (London: H. Humphrey, 20 October 1796; BM 8826).

a huge bull—who stands in for the agriculturally minded Duke of Bedford—to toss Edmund Burke, the greatest enemy of the revolution in France. On Brooks's balcony, the liberal barrister Thomas Erskine announces a new code of laws, the nature of which is made clear by the guillotine behind him, which has already been used on the Lord Chancellor and other government notables.

Gillray's *Promis'd Horrors* is so powerful an image not simply because of what it fantasizes, with his characteristic mixture of revulsion and carnivalesque gusto, as an imminent possible future, but because of memories it conjures up of the very recent past: memories of invasions by the alien London poor of the purlieus of the civilized rich. The most recent such invasion had taken place eleven months before the caricature was published, and featured some of those who appear in it. On 16 November 1795, in Old Palace Yard Westminster, Fox and a number of his closest associates, including Sheridan and the Duke of Bedford, addressed a huge public meeting to protest and petition against the passing of the 'two bills', two repressive pieces of legislation intended to break the popular radical

movement once and for all, in part indeed by making it almost impossible to organize petitioning meetings to protest against the government. Following the meeting Fox, Sheridan, and the Duke walked with the crowd up Whitehall and engaged a hackney-coach at the stand in Charing Cross. Their supporters, however, were not content to let them be driven away. In a scene reminiscent of the inversion rituals that had mocked state power and ceremonial in the days of Wilkes and Liberty, they unloosed the horses, and dragged the coach in triumph up Cockspur Street to Pall Mall and St James's Street to Brooks's, 'the properest place', snarled the Tory *True Briton*, 'for such demagogues to rest after their degrading labours'. The newspaper chose to lose sight of them there, but in fact the procession continued along Piccadilly, through Berkeley Square, down Hill Street to Fox's house in South Street off Park Lane.

The affair had apparently passed off with great tranquillity and good order, but the sight and sound of hundreds or thousands of what the *True Briton* described as 'dirty ruffians' huzzaing and parading through the heart of the West End may indeed have looked to the polite inhabitants like a foretaste of 'the promis'd horrors' Gillray would depict. The day had been remarkable for the involvement of one more member of Gillray's cast, Thelwall. This meeting in Old Palace Yard signalled the beginning of a short-lived alliance between the gentlemanly Foxite Whigs and the London Corresponding Society in protest against the 'two bills', and Thelwall, representing the LCS, was allowed to stand silently on the hustings, a little behind the big Whigs and probably ignored by them. Only when Fox and his friends had left was he permitted to address the crowd—he asked them simply to depart in peace—and he had his own loyal escort of ruffians on his return home. The *True Briton* had been pretending for over a year that the Foxite Whigs and the London Corresponding Society were in a secret alliance probably funded by France, and that pretended horror was now apparently coming true. However unconvincing the show of unity at Old Palace Yard, between the liberal aristocracy and the popular reformers, it too may have seemed to foreshadow, along with the subsequent invasion of the West End, future horrors like those Gillray was imagining.[30]

That invasion was by no means the first, however, but the fifth or sixth in the previous two years. The first of the sequence had taken place in December 1793. Earlier that year, John Frost, a polite, fairly prosperous London attorney and a veteran of the movement for parliamentary reform, had been tried for uttering seditious words in favour of a republic in a coffee house off Oxford Street. He was found guilty, and sentenced to six months imprisonment and an hour in the pillory. On 5 December the pillory was erected in Charing Cross, at the mouth of Cockspur Street, and just a few yards from Frost's home in Spring Gardens. In an attempt to hijack the occasion in the cause of liberty, and to intimidate any loyalists

[30] My description of this incident is based on the reports published in *TB*, the *Oracle*, *MC*, the *Courier*, and *MP* on 17 Nov. 1795. See also *Account of the Proceedings of a Meeting of the Inhabitants of Westminster, in Palace-Yard, Monday, Nov. 26, 1795* (London: Citizen Lee, [1795]) (which mistakes the date of the meeting).

in the mob who might have been disposed to pelt Frost, an anonymous handbill was handed out in the streets, announcing that 'THIS DAY at TWELVE o'Clock, JOHN FROST is to STAND on the PILLORY at CHARING CROSS, for Supporting the RIGHTS of the PEOPLE!!!' On the appearance of this bill, the punishment was suspended, but a fortnight later the pillory was re-erected in the same place. Before Frost could be brought from Newgate to Charing Cross, however, it was decided that he was too ill to suffer the punishment without danger to his life. The following day, wrapped in blankets, he was taken to a judge's house in Bloomsbury Square, where he entered into a recognizance to keep the peace. He was then released. A great crowd had assembled, who took the horses from his carriage, and pulled it in triumph along Holborn; but instead of taking him directly home to Spring Gardens, they took a circuit along Piccadilly; down past the fine shops and magnificent clubs of St James's Street, as if in a jovial rehearsal for Gillray's caricature, to St James's Palace, where they stopped and gave the king three perhaps ironic cheers; along Pall Mall to where the Prince of Wales was lavishing public money on the magnificent Carlton House which, as soon as it was completed, he would demolish—three cheers again—and thence down Cockspur Street to the spot in Charing Cross where the pillory had stood. Here the crowd gave three loud and expressive huzzas, before delivering him to Spring Gardens, where Thelwall addressed the crowd and asked them to disperse peaceably.[31]

A song written to celebrate the occasion, to the tune of 'O dear! What can the matter be?', and imagined as sung at Charing Cross, makes the nature of this triumph, and the point of the itinerary, clear enough. The plan of the authorities had been that Frost would be pelted 'with rats, With eggs and with dripping, with turnips and cats'; instead, a radical crowd seized control of the occasion and turned it into a triumph of liberty over Pitt and the judges:

> To St. James's they speed him,
> To Charing-cross lead him,
> O see, see how they tug him,
> Spring gardens is full as a fair.
> O dear, O dear, this *is* a strange story
> Dear, dear! Is this, is this the great glory
> Of sages in *huge* wigs, and Billy the tory?
> Poor Johnny comes blithe from the square.[32]

But in case the symbolism of this route remained opaque to the polite inhabitants of the West End, it was recapitulated by two similar invasions late in the following year, when the treason trials, by which the government had hoped to break the influence of the London Corresponding Society, ended in the triumphant acquittals of the defendants.

[31] See *MP* 11, 19, and 20 Dec. 1793; *Oracle* 19 and 20 Dec.; *MC* 20 Dec. 1793.

[32] *Johnny Frost. To the tune of O dear! What can the matter be* (no publication details [London, 1793 or 1794]).

Throughout the long trial of Thomas Hardy, the secretary of the LCS, in October and November 1794, large crowds had gathered in the City outside the Old Bailey. When Hardy was finally acquitted, the crowd followed him as far as Somerset House where, as had been done with Frost, they unhitched the horses from his coach and pulled it themselves at the head of a triumphal procession, thousands strong, along the Strand to Charing Cross. Here, like the crowd that had greeted Frost's release, they chose to take the scenic route through the aristocratic heartlands of the West End: up Cockspur Street to Pall Mall and Carlton House, on to St James's Palace, up St James's Street; then back along Piccadilly, down the Haymarket to Cockspur Street again and back through Charing Cross to Lancaster Gate where Hardy alighted. According to Hardy the triumphal procession 'frequently stopped, and shouted at different places, such as Charing Cross, Carleton House, and St. James's Palace'.[33] The meaning of this route was unmistakeable: to the crowd, the acquittal was a victory for those living north and east of Charing Cross over the inhabitants of the West End, especially the king and the members of both houses of the corrupt parliament which Hardy had been tried for attempting to reform. When Thelwall, his alleged co-conspirator, was acquitted a month later, the crowd chose a route no less circuitous and provocative for his triumph: at Charing Cross they turned south down Whitehall, dragging the coach up Downing Street and down again to show it to Pitt, then back to Charing Cross and along Piccadilly before setting Thelwall down in Bloomsbury.[34]

These triumphal processions were more or less orderly invasions of the West End, apparently spontaneous but probably organized by members of the LCS, and aimed at showing the physical strength of the radical movement and at appropriating, temporarily but as it were in *terrorem*, 'the court end of the town'. They can be read as an attempt to constitute the social and economic division between east and west as a fully political division; to demonstrate that the politics of reform was (whatever else it was) a politics of class. But there were other, more violent intrusions into the West End in the 1790s, or skirmishes on its border, which though certainly political in nature seem to have had little to do with organized politics, whether the parliamentary politics of Whig and Tory or the extra-parliamentary politics of the reform movement. Like the radical triumphs, these less peaceful encounters all start in or pass through Charing Cross, a wide open space, easy to occupy and easy to disappear from, the best place in London to gather a crowd. Charing Cross was the true centre of London, the threshhold of the West End, the great crossing-place where met the territory of the government, of the court, of the polite commerce of the Strand, of the

[33] Thomas Hardy, *Memoir of Thomas Hardy* (1832), reprinted in David Vincent (ed.), *Testaments of Radicalism: Memoirs of Working Class Politicians 1790–1885* (London: Europa, 1977), 72.

[34] *Oracle* and *MC* 6 Nov. 1794; *MP* 6 Dec. 1794; *State Trials for High Treason, embellished with Portraits. Part Third* (London: B. Crosby, [1795?]), 108.

disorderly populace, and of the military. It became the focus of the social and geographical divisions between rich and poor, aristocratic and vulgar, government and governed, and the magnet for the conflicts they generated. It was here, appropriately enough, that in Isaac Disraeli's novel of 1797 *Vaurien*, the blood-thirsty revolutionary Dragon planned to collect his Jacobin army to assassinate George III, confident that he would soon be joined by half the young men of London.[35]

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Charing Cross was increasingly coming to be seen as the centre of London, and so as the epicentre of the cultural and commercial influence that radiated from the metropolis throughout the nation and the empire. It held more or less the same position in imaginings of London as would be held by Piccadilly Circus in the early twentieth century. 'The full tide of human existence,' Johnson famously told Boswell in 1775, 'is at Charing-cross'; Charing Cross, wrote Nash in 1812, is the space where 'the greatest part of the population of the Metropolis meet and diverge'. The radical tailor and social reformer Francis Place, looking down on the Cross from the oriel window above his shop in 1827, declared that a scene of such colour and animation 'cannot be witnessed in any other country in the whole world, and perhaps at no other place in the world than Charing Cross'.[36] In the 1790s Charing Cross combined the politeness of St James's with the squalor of the alleys of St Giles's or St Martin's. It was formed by the junction of Whitehall, Cockspur Street, and the Strand. Whitehall, leading south to its junction with Downing Street, then as now the residence of the Prime Minister, was lined by great state buildings: the Treasury, the Admiralty, Horse Guards, the Banqueting Hall. Cockspur Street was 'the principal communication', as Thomas Malton described it, 'to the court end of the town':[37] 300 yards up and at its junction with Pall Mall was Carlton House. The Strand was at this period the most opulent shopping street in London, and was almost if not quite as fashionable as Oxford Street: a parade of some 230 shops, becoming more fashionable the nearer they approached Charing Cross, and mainly selling luxury or 'fancy' goods or the products of the polite culture industry.[38] A few yards up Cockspur Street, however, was the opening to Whitcomb Street, formerly Hedge Lane and still generally known as that, one of the main centres of prostitution in London; and a few yards up the Strand, St Martin's Lane ran up to Seven Dials, Little Dublin, though not until the building of Trafalgar Square in the 1830s did it

[35] Isaac Disraeli, *Vaurien; or Sketches of the Times, exhibiting Views of the Philosophies, Religions, Politics, Literature, and Manners of the Age*, 2 vols. (London: T. Cadell, junior, and W. Davies *et al.*, 1797), ii. 259, 263.

[36] James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 608; John Nash, quoted in Mace, *Trafalgar Sequence*, 31; the Francis Place Papers (BL Add. MS 27,828, vol. lv, part iv, fos. 7–8).

[37] Thomas Malton, *A Picturesque Tour through the Cities of London and Westminster*, 2 vols. (London: Thomas Malton, 1792[–1801]), i. 32.

[38] Calculated from *The General London Guide; or, a Tradesman's Directory for the Year 1794* (London: P. Boyle, n.d.), 1–132.

form part of the great road junction with the Strand itself, Whitehall, and Cockspur Street.

The wide open space of Charing Cross itself was centred on the high plinth supporting Hubert Le Sueur's equestrian statue of Charles I, the royal martyr to republican ferocity, which stands triumphantly on the site where eight regicides were executed after the restoration of Charles II. The north-eastern end of Charing Cross was overshadowed by the high cliff face of the jacobean palace of the Duke of Northumberland which stood on the south side of the junction with the Strand. Opposite, on the site of the present Trafalgar Square, and tucked away behind some unremarkable façades, was the King's Mews, where the king's horses and the state coach were kept in the grand stables designed by William Kent, now buried under the National Gallery. On the third corner of the Cross was New Street and Spring Gardens where Frost lived, short rows of elegant houses backing on to St James's Park. Many of the shops and businesses in Charing Cross had the same character as those in the Strand: three goldsmiths and jewellers, two perfumers and perruquiers, a sword-cutler, the fashionable Drummond's Bank, the equally fashionable Cannon Coffee House, and so on.

Something like this polite version of Charing Cross appears in the first volume of Thomas Malton's sumptuously illustrated *Picturesque Tour through the Cities of London and Westminster*, published in parts between 1792 and 1801. The direction of Malton's imaginary tour invited his readers to approach Charing Cross from Westminster, past the Abbey and the state and government buildings of Whitehall; and when the tour reaches the Cross, it concentrates mainly on the great buildings there, the King's Mews, Northumberland House, St Martin's-in-the-Fields: Malton's tour is all about representing London as a capital city fit to vie with Paris in beauty as well as in size. His first aquatint of Charing Cross (Pl. 1.3), published in 1795, was taken from the entrance to Spring Gardens, looking through the Cross into the Strand, with Northumberland House to the right. It is, like everything in Malton's tour, and as architectural drawing always is, a remarkably sanitized and orderly image. The Cross is shown uncharacteristically empty of people, without any of the liveliness and animation Place would later attribute to it. The tradespeople in the neighbourhood of the statue are reassuring presences, especially perhaps the young woman sitting on the stone curb being addressed by the gentleman on horseback—her dress, her demeanour, the whole transaction between the two figures are reassuringly reminiscent of rustic encounters in the manner of Gainsborough's Bath period or Morland in his more pastoral mode. The apron worn by the seated man enjoying the afternoon sun does not suggest that he was one of the unemployed who, according to Rodney Mace, were in the habit of gathering beneath the king's statue.[39] Later in 1795 Malton published a summer-evening view back down the Strand, past Northumberland

[39] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 26.

Pl. 1.3. Thomas Malton, 'Charing Cross', from *A Picturesque Tour through the Cities of London and Westminster*, 2 vols. (London: Thomas Malton, 1792 [–1801]).

House, through the Cross to the quietly polite modern architecture of Spring Gardens (Pl. 1. 4). Here too the few figures in the nearly empty Strand are more a gesture at the bustling street life of the area than an attempt to represent it: a few genteel horsemen, two fashionable sightseers pausing to inspect the façade of the ducal palace, a well-dressed mother, buying perhaps a sweetmeat for her daughter from a young woman street-trader, and, loosely sketched, another pair of street-traders, chair-menders perhaps, who have set up a workbench outside the palace on what will be, for a little longer, the sunny side of the Strand. But the sanitizing effect of Malton's style is perhaps clearest in his prospect of Cockspur Street from the Cross (Pl. 1.5). This view, published in 1797, looks past the giant doric porch of the Phoenix Fire-Engine House, the ionic portico of the Cannon Coffee House next to it, the northern opening to Spring Gardens on the left, and, further back on the right, the entrance to Hedge Lane, and on up to the unfinished Opera House in the Haymarket. It is an early summer evening, and the Hedge Lane streetwalkers, as I take some of these women to be—in the extreme right foreground, and by the entrance to the lane—have come out in search of business. They look hardly less prosperous or polite than the polite couple outside the Phoenix building, or the other fashionably dressed pedestrians with their young children. We can get a sense of how far Malton chose to depict Charing Cross as on

its best behaviour by comparing these views with a scene from Pugin and Rowlandson's *Microcosm of London*, published in 1809, of the Charing Cross pillory, erected exactly where it was set up to receive Frost, at the mouth to Cockspur Street (Pl. 1.6). The occasion of course requires informality, unruly crowds, disorder, but still the print gives us much more sense of why Charing Cross had come to be regarded as the bustling centre of London than do Malton's tidy streets. Even the buildings in the 1809 print seem to share the casual, well-heeled loucheness and conviviality that was one of the many sides of the character of the Cross.

The representation and reputation of Charing Cross was as much subject to conflict and division as everything else in London in the 1790s, and Francis Place, who opened his first menswear shop at 29 Charing Cross in 1799, gave an account of the area as it had been in the middle 1790s which could not be more different from Malton's. His autobiography, written from the point of view of a successful businessman, by now retired and become a full-time social reformer, may be in its way quite as partial as Malton's images; and if it is perhaps the most highly coloured account we have of London in the 1790s, this is partly because it is written by a man to whom respectable living was always of the first importance, and who looks back in amazement at the period of his early youth from a vantage point in the nineteenth century when, he believes, social morality had undergone a remarkable change for the better. If in 1827, as we have seen, he found the view at Charing Cross 'exceedingly lively, and delightfully animating', a part of his delight was in reflecting on how much the place had changed in the previous quarter of a century.

As a child Place had lived at the less polite, City end of the Strand, so that he should be imagined as approaching the Cross from the opposite direction from Malton, and with opposite expectations. In the 1790s, he writes, Charing Cross was

> an infamous neighbourhood. There were some highly respectable people living there, but there was also a much larger number of very disreputable people. There were Five notorious houses of ill-fame—three of which were in the main street. Seven public Houses, three of which were gin shops, all of them frequented by common soldiers and common women of the lowest description, and other vagabonds.

The soldiers—'excessively gross' in their 'language and manners', and barracked in a wooden building at the narrow mouth of Middle Scotland Yard—were the main problem. In front of the Treasury and the Horse Guards, those going on guard in the morning 'were shaved, weather permitting—had their heads well greased and flowered—and their pigtails tied'. Across the road, the low wall of the Privy Garden (where lived a duke, two earls, and sundry other aristocrats) was hung all day with obscene ballads and pornographic paintings for sale, 'miserable daubs' and 'subjects of the grossest nature'. At night it was patrolled by prostitutes, 'horridly ragged, dirty and disgusting', who for twopence would climb over the wall with their military clients. From noon each day the Cross was filled with the aroma of 'bow-wow' pie, made of highly seasoned (and so probably rotten) meat

Pl. 1.4 (*right*). Thomas Malton, 'Northumberland House', from *A Picturesque Tour through the Cities of London and Westminster*.

Pl. 1.5 (*below*). Thomas Malton, 'Cockspur Street', from *A Picturesque Tour through the Cities of London and Westminster*.

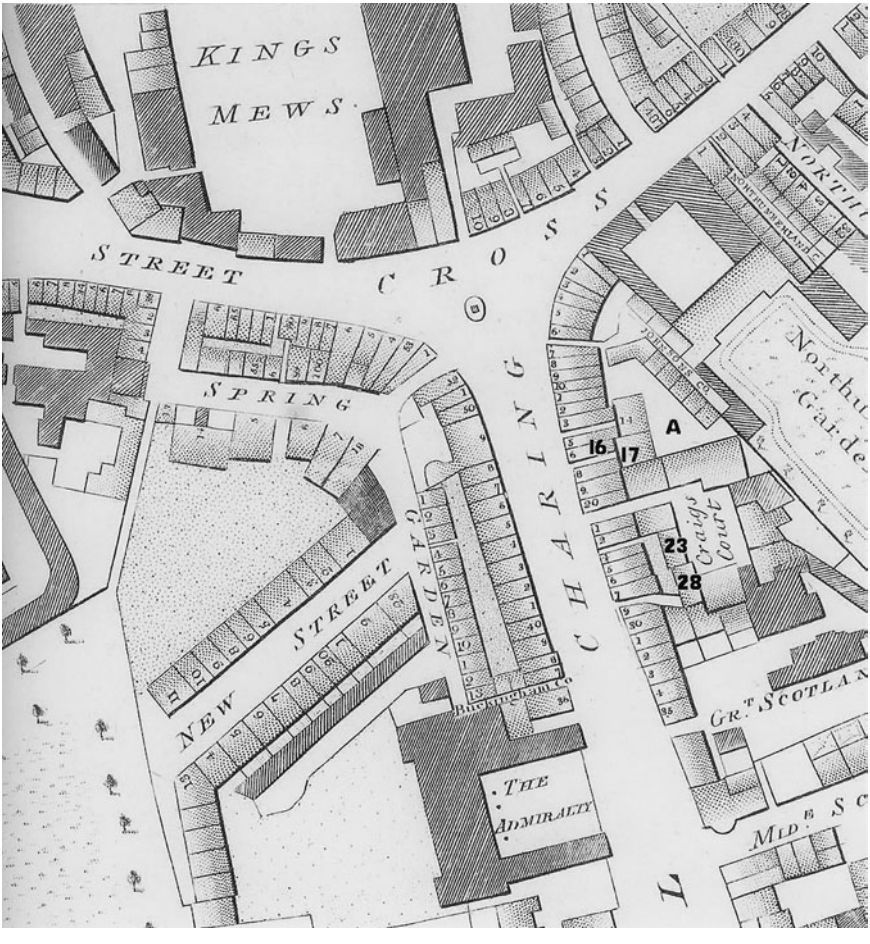
Pl. 1.6. A. C. Pugin and Thomas Rowlandson, with J. Bluck, 'Pillory, Charing Cross', from vol. ii (1809) of W. H. Pyne and William Combe, *The Microcosm of London*, 3 vols. (London: Rudolph Ackermann, 1808–11).

under a thick pastry lid, and served to the soldiers by street-vendors at three-halfpence a plate.

Among and behind the luxury shops on the eastern side of Charing Cross itself were a number of brothels which functioned as 'crimping-houses', into which young men were decoyed, usually by prostitutes. Once inside they were then plied with drink, locked up when insensible, robbed, and enlisted into the army. Immediately behind the shops on the far right of Malton's view of the Cross was a place 'which could not be outdone in infamy and indecency by any other place in London': the bifurcated alley-cum-courtyard made by Johnson's Court and Angel Court (Pl. 1.7), where once elegant old houses now crumbled in the shadow of Northumberland House. 'There were 13 houses in this court,' writes Place,

> all in a state of great dilapidation, in every room in every house excepting only one lived one or more common prostitutes of the most wretched discription. … The house excepted was a kind of public house and a Crimping house of the very worst sort. The place could not be outdone in infamy and indecency by any place in London. The manner in which many of the drunken filthy young prostitutes behaved is not describable nor would it be beleived were it described.

This house was no. 17 Charing Cross, and together with no. 16, which connected with it and fronted on to the main street, had until recently made up the Turk's



Pl. 1.7. Detail (Charing Cross) from sheet 23 of Richard Horwood, *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster, the Borough of Southwark, and Parts Adjoining, shewing Every House* (London: Horwood, 1792–9). Marked in bold are the Turk's Head or Rummer (nos. 16 and 17) rented from 1799 by Francis Place; the King's Arms (23 and 28), and Angel Court (A).

Head, alias the Rummer, alias the New or Royal Bagnio, alias 'No. 16', a brothel fitted up with hot and cold baths and formerly attracting, if not a respectable, at least an aristocratic clientele.[40] It appears in Hogarth's painting and print of *Night*, from the *Four Times of Day* (Pl. 1.8), with its sign, 'an immense wooden Rummer',

[40] Including the Duke of Hamilton, who sought out the painter George Morland there in order to challenge him to a boxing match; see George Dawe, *The Life of George Morland, with Remarks on his Works* (London: Vernor, Hood & Sharpe, 1807), 112–13.

Pl. 1.8. William Hogarth, *Night*, from the *Four Times of Day* (London, May 1738). We are looking northwards, from the Whitehall end of Charing Cross towards the statue of Charles I. The engraving is a reverse image, however, of the original painting, which shows the Rummer in its correct position on the east side of the street; see n. 41.

which was still to be seen in Place's day, though by then fixed to the next-door house.[41] The Rummer had become a 'crimping house' probably in 1793 at the start of the war with France; but in 1801 Place took out a lease on nos. 16 and 17, and he and his family moved into no. 16. He sublet the rear house as furnished rooms—in 1802 the impoverished geologist William Smith had a room there—and, by his own account, turned it into one of the most elegant and fashionable menswear shops in London, with huge plate-glass windows lit by brilliant oil-lamps.[42]

Seven years earlier, in July 1794, a young journeyman baker had been dragged into the Turk's Head where he apparently disappeared into thin air. Believing that he had been forcibly enlisted, a crowd gathered and a minor riot ensued.[43] Over the next weeks, cries for assistance, cries of 'murder', emanating from Johnson's Court, had been heard out in Charing Cross itself. On Friday, 15 August, a young man named George Howe appeared on the roof of another crimping house, one of a row of six which all but divided Johnson's Court from Angel Court, all owned by a Mrs Hanna, all connected with each other by 'secret avenues'. He stood there, frozen in fear as the crimps approached him, then 'threw himself from the tiles, and was dashed to pieces on the flags of the court'. His dying sigh must have run in blood down the walls of the Duke of Northumberland's palace. Once again a crowd gathered, and attempted to break down the locked door of the house; when Sheridan appeared, in his capacity as a local magistrate, another suspected crimping house in the court was searched; and there, in a locked room, a young man was discovered dying of smallpox. At Sheridan's request, the crowd departed; it collected again at evening but was dispersed by horse guards summoned from Whitehall.[44]

Early on Saturday morning a crowd gathered for the third time, some of them at least intent on performing some act of informal popular justice. They broke into several of Mrs Hanna's houses, and threw all the bedding out of the windows,

[41] Hogarth's engraving has caused some confusion about the position of the Rummer that Place occupied. It appears to show the establishment as on the west side of Charing Cross, i.e. the left side as you approach from Whitehall, and this caused J. Holden MacMichael, the leading historian of the area, to identify it as *another* Rummer, the large inn and coffee house at 45 Charing Cross, shown on Rocque's map as opposite Craig's Court. In the mid-century this Rummer opened into Rummer Court and thence gave the tavern a rear exit into Spring Gardens—see MacMichael, *The Story of Charing Cross and its Immediate Neighbourhood* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1906), 43, 47–9. By Place's time this Rummer, perhaps following its destruction by fire, had become the Ship, and Rummer Court had been demolished in the redevelopment of Spring Gardens.

[42] *The Autobiography of Francis Place*, ed. Mary Thale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 213–15, 227–9. As a young man Place struggled hard to establish himself as one of the highly respectable, and his autobiography is largely devoted to showing how well he succeeded, but (as we shall see) there is no reason to doubt the basic truth of his account of Charing Cross. For the Royal Bagnio/Rummer/Turk's Head see Bryant Lillywhite, *London Coffee Houses: A Reference Book of Coffee Houses of the Seventeenth Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), 611; for Smith in Charing Cross, see Simon Winchester, *The Map that Changed the World* (London: Penguin, 2002), 206–7, who reports that the former brothel was burned to the ground shortly after Smith moved in.

[43] *MC* 18 Aug. 1794.

[44] *MC* 18 Aug. 1794.

making a summer snowstorm of flock and feathers in Charing Cross. All that day and the next, the angry crowd hung around the Cross under the eye of patrolling horse guards and footguards. On both days a group of rioters, estimated at between 40 and 100, attacked another suspected crimping house, the King's Arms, at 23 and 28 Charing Cross.[45] They smashed the door to pieces and hurled the fragments, along with stones and half-bricks, through the windows. The crowd and the horse guards gathered again and angrily faced each other down. At some point the windows of the sword-cutler's shop at the entrance to Johnson's Court were broken, prompting fears that the crowd intended to arm themselves. For a long summer weekend Charing Cross was under siege.[46]

On Tuesday, 19 August, a crimping house in Hedge Lane was attacked, and in the next few days the trouble moved east and north. There were attacks on crimping houses and recruiting offices in Drury Lane, Fleet Street, Holborn, Shoe Lane, Bride-Lane near St Paul's Cathedral, Long Lane, Smithfield, Barbican, Golden Lane, Moorfields, Whitechapel Green, Gray's Inn Lane and Clerkenwell.[47] Driven from one district by the military, the crowd reassembled elsewhere and rioted again. Here and there fires were started; in some places, as in the Gordon Riots or the Sacheverell riots of 1710, whole buildings were pulled down. One contemporary described the rioters as 'the most alarming mob since [the Gordon Riots in] 1780'.[48] Less damage was done at Charing Cross than in and around the City, but because the riots began there, because there they lasted a long four days, and because of its strategic position at the threshold of the West End, it was the riots at Charing Cross that received the bulk of the coverage and caused most outrage in the newspapers. In September Joseph Strutt, the alleged leader of those who attacked the King's Arms, and apparently a notorious pickpocket and former member of 'the famous Golden Lane Gang', was sentenced to death; in October Mrs Hanna, who had eventually been charged with keeping a disorderly house, was acquitted.[49]

Protests and riots against crimping houses continued sporadically through the early months of 1795, their bitterness sharpened by the food shortages caused by the

[45] *MC* 22 Sept. 1795 gives the address of the King's Arms as no. 23. Place (*Autobiography*, 228) gives it as 28. In fact 23 and 28 were contiguous, both reached by a short narrow alley off Charing Cross itself, and the King's Arms may have comprised both buildings.

[46] *MC* 18, 19, 20, 22 Aug. 1794. For the attack on the sword-cutler's shop, see John Stevenson's invaluable essay 'The London "Crimp" Riots of 1794', *International Review of Social History*, 16 (1971), 40–58. To this, and to Stevenson's *Popular Disturbances in England 1700–1780* (London and New York: Longman, 1979), esp. ch. 8, this section of this chapter is much indebted. See also Francis Plowden, *A Short History of the British Empire during the Year 1794* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795), 255–62.

[47] *MC* 20, 21, 22 Aug. 1794; Stevenson, 'London "Crimp" Riots', 45–50.

[48] Diary of William Goodwin, a Suffolk surgeon, transcribed by Mrs J. Rothery, at http://www.earl-soham.suffolk.gov.uk/history/Goodwin1794.htm

[49] *MC* 22 Sept., 25 Oct. 1794; William Jackson, *The New and Complete Newgate Calendar; or Villany Displayed in all its Branches*, 6 vols. (London: Alex. Hogg, n.d.), vi. 364–6. Mrs Hanna had been first interviewed by the magistrates on 18 Aug., but discharged: most contemporary magistrates appear to have maintained either that the practice of crimping had long ago died out, or that it was an essential method of recruitment and not to be interfered with.

failure of two successive harvests. Then, on 12 July, the King's Arms in Charing Cross was attacked again. John Lewis, a drummer[50] in the Guards, entered the house accompanied by a young boy called Hollis, and demanded a pot of porter. He was told there was no liquor sold there, as the house had lost its licence. Lewis, who had been drinking all afternoon, began to behave so obstreporously that a burly soldier showed him into the street. He started to shout to a gathering crowd that Hollis had been seized and chained to the floor in the back kitchen, and that there was a trapdoor in the cellar which connected to the Thames through which unwilling recruits could be spirited away. A constable searched the house and reported to the crowd that he could find one willing recruit, but no men in irons and no trapdoor. The crowd, however, were not listening or were not convinced, and, once again, the door and windows of the King's Arms were shattered; then, while Lewis himself sat drinking in the Ship on the other side of Charing Cross,[51] twenty men poured into the King's Arms, led by two small boys in long blue coats, the distinctive school uniform of Christ's Hospital. Every stick of furniture was destroyed; clothes and bedding were thrown into the street, and another feathery blizzard hit the Cross. Some 200 people were estimated as joining in the riot, which lasted for five hours until, at dusk, the horse and foot guards were called out.[52]

Next evening the rioters gathered again, now according to one (probably exaggerated) report 12,000 strong, and marched down Whitehall. In Downing Street they threw stones through the windows of the Prime Minister's house, where the Earl of Mornington was a dinner-guest. Mornington, a member of cabinet and elder brother of the future Duke of Wellington, was hit a violent blow on the shoulder. Driven off by the military, the crowd streamed over Westminster Bridge to St George's Fields, where, to chants of 'Pitt's Head and a Quartern Loaf for Six-pence', they attacked a suspected crimping house and a butcher's shop, nearly demolishing both and burning furniture in the street. Some of the rioters were trampled by the cavalry, and two died.[53] The Della Cruscan poet William Parsons was held up by the rioters on his way to dinner with Hester Piozzi in Streatham. He found time to write a poem as he waited to proceed:

> In Times like these, when Widows, Orphans—weep,
> And Gallia's hapless sons—sad Exiles! Roam,
> Wide spreads the Civil Flame with threat'ning Sweep,
> And ev'ry Briton trembles for his home.
> . . . . . .

[50] A drummer according to the *TB* 14 July 1794, and Place, *Autobiography*, 228; in some other reports he is described as a fifer.

[51] The Ship, at 45 Charing Cross, was formerly the 'other' Rummer mentioned in n. 41 above.

[52] See *MC* 13, 22 July 1795; *TB* 14, 16, 20 July 1795; note that the radical newspapers the *Courier*, 13, July and the *Telegraph*, 14, July both insist that chained men were found within the King's Arms. The report of Lewis's trial, however, in the *MC*, 22, July and the on-line proceedings of the Old Bailey, ref. T17950916–50, make this seem unlikely.

[53] *Telegraph*, 14, 16 July 1795.

Mark how the blazing Flames to heav'n aspire!
For Bread & Peace what Throngs exclaim aloud!
How plunder'd Dwellings feed the raging Fire,
How armed Horsemen trample on the Croud![54]

In Whitehall, another witness to these events, the Irish gentleman-soldier Colonel Edward Despard, had stood watching the riot. A constable demanded his name, which he gave as 'Citizen' Despard. The constable promptly arrested him, but he was discharged by the magistrate with a telling-off for using such an 'improper' name.[55] In 1803 Despard would be hanged for high treason. Lewis's appointment with the executioner came more swiftly, on 11 November 1795: Place remembered him being hanged in Charing Cross, at the entrance to the alley leading to the King's Arms. By the same evening he had been memorialized—eulogized indeed—in a brief pamphlet printed a few yards away from the gallows.[56]

But what seemed to many—and in particular the king and his government—the most horrific plebeian invasion of the West End occurred at the end of October 1795, when, after months of near-famine and a year of defeats by France, the king travelled in the state coach from St James's Palace to Westminster for the opening of Parliament. His route, along the Mall in St James's Park, through the Horse Guards, and down Whitehall and Parliament Street to the House of Lords, was lined by what contemporaries estimated to be as many as 200,000 spectators, many of whom, however, had not come simply to stare and wonder. The coach was mobbed, greeted with hisses, groans, and demands for bread and peace; in Whitehall a stone broke one of the windows; in Old Palace Yard another window was broken by what the king insisted was a bullet, though it was probably another stone. On the return journey the crowds were still waiting, and as the coach arrived at the palace gate, a stone and an oyster shell were thrown, and one of the horses, frightened by the mob, reared up and knocked down a groom; the coach ran him over and he later died. The king got safely inside the palace, and, when the coast seemed clear, left in a private coach to see the queen at Buckingham House, now Buckingham Palace. His route lay again through the park, but here remnants of the crowd grabbed at the wheels of the coach to bring it to a halt, and (in the words of a radical pamphleteer) they 'were proceeding to lay their Harpy hands on *The Representative of the King of Heaven*, when a party of life-guards came trotting up, . . . and rescued (without any bloodshed) their royal Master from the hands of the hungry Rabble'.[57] Meanwhile the state coach had started up Pall Mall to be returned to the Mews in Charing Cross. From Carlton House to the mews it was

[54] Transcribed in *Thraliana. The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale Katherine C. Balderston (Later Mrs. Piozzi), 1776–1809*, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942), ii. 935–6.

[55] *TB* 15 July 1795.

[56] Place, *Autobiography*, 228–9.

[57] *Truth and Treason! Or a Narrative of the Royal Procession to the House of Peers, October the 29th, 1795* (no imprint, 1795), 4.

pelted with stones again, until every window and door-panel was smashed. Like hauling heroes in triumph or pulling down the houses of villains, destroying the coaches of the aristocracy was a crowd activity with a long provenance; during the Gordon Riots the vehicles of four lords, two bishops, and one baronet—Sir George Savile himself, proponent of the Catholic Relief Act—had been demolished or badly damaged.[58] To tear the king's coach to pieces, however, was different: it went beyond the mockery of official power and ceremony in the inversion rituals we looked at earlier; it was a direct attack on the ceremonial by which the sovereign power performed its sovereignty, and amounted almost to a metonymic dismembering of the king himself. The broken fragments changed hands in the street for threepence and sixpence, according to size.[59] It was this riot that led to the introduction of the two bills, which led in turn to the meeting at Old Palace Yard.

The government joined with loyalist opinion in blaming the LCS for planning and provoking the outrages of 29 October, even though it could find no evidence of the active participation of the society. Three days earlier the LCS had held a huge general meeting at the Copenhagen tea house north of Islington where it issued a stern warning to the king about the need for famine-relief, peace with France, and a reform of parliament. A handbill, entitled *King Killing*, had been sold at the meeting by the radical bookseller, and occasional LCS member 'Citizen' Richard Lee, who claimed to be the society's official publisher.[60] In the absence of any clear information on the composition of the crowds involved in the crimping riots,[61] many loyalists, including the influential magistrate Patrick Colquhoun, had blamed the LCS for them too. In August 1794 two members of the society, including the lifelong radical Dr Robert Watson, had been found in a London coffee house with handbills urging the rioters to continue their efforts. The ultra-loyalist Lord Mayor, Paul Le Mesurier, believed these bills had been published by another LCS member, the bookseller Daniel Isaac Eaton. In 1795 Thelwall had been reported to the Home Office as leader

[58] Thomas Holcroft, *A Plain and Succinct Narrative of the Gordon Riots* (1780), ed. Garland Garvey Smith (Atlanta, Ga.: Emory University Library, 1944).

[59] This account of the events of 29 Oct. 1795 is based on the *TB*, the *Times*, the *Oracle, MP*, and *MC* 30 Oct. 1795; [John Reeves?], *A Narrative of the Insults offered to the King, on his Way to the House of Lords, on Thursday last* (London: J. Owen, 1795); *Truth and Treason!*; and Francis Place's essay on the two bills in BL Add. MS 27,808.

[60] *Account of the Proceedings of a Meeting of the London Corresponding Society, held in a Field near Copenhagen House, Monday, Oct. 26, 1795* (London: Citizen Lee, [1795]). For Lee and *King Killing* (London: Citizen Lee, [1795]), see Jon Mee, 'The Strange Career of Richard "Citizen" Lee: Poetry, Popular Radicalism and Enthusiasm in the 1790s', in Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith (eds.), *Radicalism in British Literary Culture, 1659–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 151–66; John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, ch. 17; Barrell (ed.), *Exhibition Extraordinary!! Radical Broadsides of the mid 1790s* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2001), 74–5.

[61] See Stevenson, 'London "Crimp" Riots', 57–8.

of the rioters at St George's Fields, though he had been on the Isle of Wight at the time.[62]

In fact, conversations at LCS committee meetings in August 1794, reported to the government by the spy William Metcalfe, make it clear that though individual members of the LCS were thoroughly sympathetic to the rioters, and though perhaps a few had been rioters themselves, the LCS itself had had no organizing role in the riots. Early in September 1794 the society published a pamphlet, *Reformers no Rioters*, the title of which adequately sums up its general attitude towards informal insurrectionary politics.[63] In a speech in the House of Commons of 23 November 1795, the MP for Bridport, Charles Sturt, attempted to establish once and for all that the society had consistently opposed violence and insurrection, and quoted at length from the speech Thelwall had delivered at Copenhagen House in which he had deplored the crimping riots.[64]

IV

The London Corresponding Society had been founded early in 1792 by a group of tradesmen of various descriptions who met in a pub off the Strand.[65] They were devoted to two main goals: annual parliaments and universal manhood suffrage in elections to the House of Commons. They planned a society that would educate its members, expected to be tradesmen, artisans, mechanics, shopkeepers, about the need for electoral reform, and would function as a pressure group to persuade parliament and the public to accept the reform they proposed. The LCS grew rapidly: in bad times its membership dwindled away to a few hundred, and although, at its most successful, it may never have contained much more than

[62] See John Thelwall, *The Tribune, A Periodical Publication, consisting chiefly of the Political Lectures of John Thelwall*, 3 vols. (London: D. I. Eaton, J. Smith, J. Burks, 1795), ii. 183–4, and for the poem 'A Patriot's Feeling; or the Call of Duty. On Quitting the Isle of Wight', see *Tribune*, ii. 297–300. The poem is attributed to Thelwall by Michael Scrivener (ed.), *Poetry and Reform: Periodical Verse from the English Democratic Press 1792–1824* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 121.

[63] *Reformers no Rioters* (London: London Corresponding Society, [1794]); for Metcalfe and the riots, see Thale (ed.), *Selections*, 211–13. Eaton's teenage son claimed to have participated in the 1794 riots (ibid. 211–12), and for evidence of Eaton senior's sympathy with the riots, see 'Henry Martin Saunders', *The Crimps, or the Death of poor Howe: A Tragedy in One Act* (London: D. I. Eaton, 1794). For Colquhoun, Watson, and the handbills, see Stevenson, 'London "Crimp" Riots', 50; for more on Watson, see Iain McCalman, 'Controlling the Riots: Dickens and Romantic Revolution', *History*, 84 (July 1999), 458–74.

[64] William Woodfall (ed.), *An Impartial Report of the Debates in the Two Houses of Parliament, in the Year 1796* (London: T. Chapman, 1796), 411–13; and see *The Speech of John Thelwall at the General Meeting of the Friends of Parliamentary Reform, called by the London Corresponding Society . . . October 26, 1795*, 3rd edn. (London: J. Thelwall, [1795]), 10. For another attack on the crimping riots by an LCS member, see Citizen Bailey, *The White Devils Un-Cased*, 2nd edn. (London: J. Burks *et al.*, [1795]), 24.

[65] The best short account of the LCS is to be found in Thale (ed.), *Selections*, pp. xv–xxix.

3,000 or so active, paid-up members,[66] many more thousands must have attended a few meetings, even joined it briefly, then hastily left or slowly drifted away.

Especially in its first four years, the LCS was exceptionally busy and visible, holding large open-air general meetings and producing a considerable number of publications, and it came to be the co-ordinator of other popular reform societies throughout Britain. When in the spring of 1794 the LCS proposed a national convention of reformers, its leaders—notably its founder and secretary, the shoemaker Thomas Hardy—were arrested and charged with high treason. But by the end of the year they had been acquitted, and in 1795 the society was at is strongest and most numerous. By the autumn of 1795 it again felt able to issue a direct challenge to government on the question of reform. The Seditious Meetings Act, one of the two bills with which the government responded to the increased militancy of 1795, placed severe limits on how the society could meet and act. The history of the LCS thereafter is of dwindling membership, reorganization, increasing chaos and financial embarrassment, and an increasing commitment among some of its members to insurrectionary politics. The society was eventually proscribed in 1799.

One possible reason why the government believed that the LCS participated in, and even instigated the crimping riots, may have been the simple fact that they started in Charing Cross. They represented a sudden escalation of what Rodney Mace has described as 'the continuing sparring match between the State and the people'[67] which had been intermittently staged there for 300 years, an escalation which had coincided with the growth of the society. The irregular quadrilateral north of the Cross and the Strand, east of Swallow Street, south of Broad Street and High Holborn, was for successive governments a focus of anxiety about the maintenance of public order, an anxiety which led early in the next century to the erection of barracks on the site of the Green Mews, directly behind the King's Mews, and which was arguably one motive in the construction, in the 1830s and 1840s, of Trafalgar Square itself.[68] The same quadrilateral was the part of London where the LCS appears to have recruited most heavily. The political geography of London as we have encountered it so far, in the form of a division between west and east, rich and poor, polite and vulgar, has emerged as a relatively tidy business, and not simply because any brief description is bound to simplify. By comparison, the geography of the LCS was an untidy patchwork, much like that of London itself east of the West End. The membership of the society, as we shall see, was scattered unevenly across London, and much of the rest of this chapter will be a discussion of why this was so.

[66] This is Mary Thale's estimate: see Thale (ed.), *Selections*, pp. xxiii–xxiv.

[67] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 23; a page later Mace puts some prudent scare-quotes around the word 'people'.

[68] See Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 29, and Dana Arnold, 'Rationality, Safety and Power: The Street Planning of later Georgian London', in Arnold (ed.), *The Georgian Group Journal 1995*, 37–50.

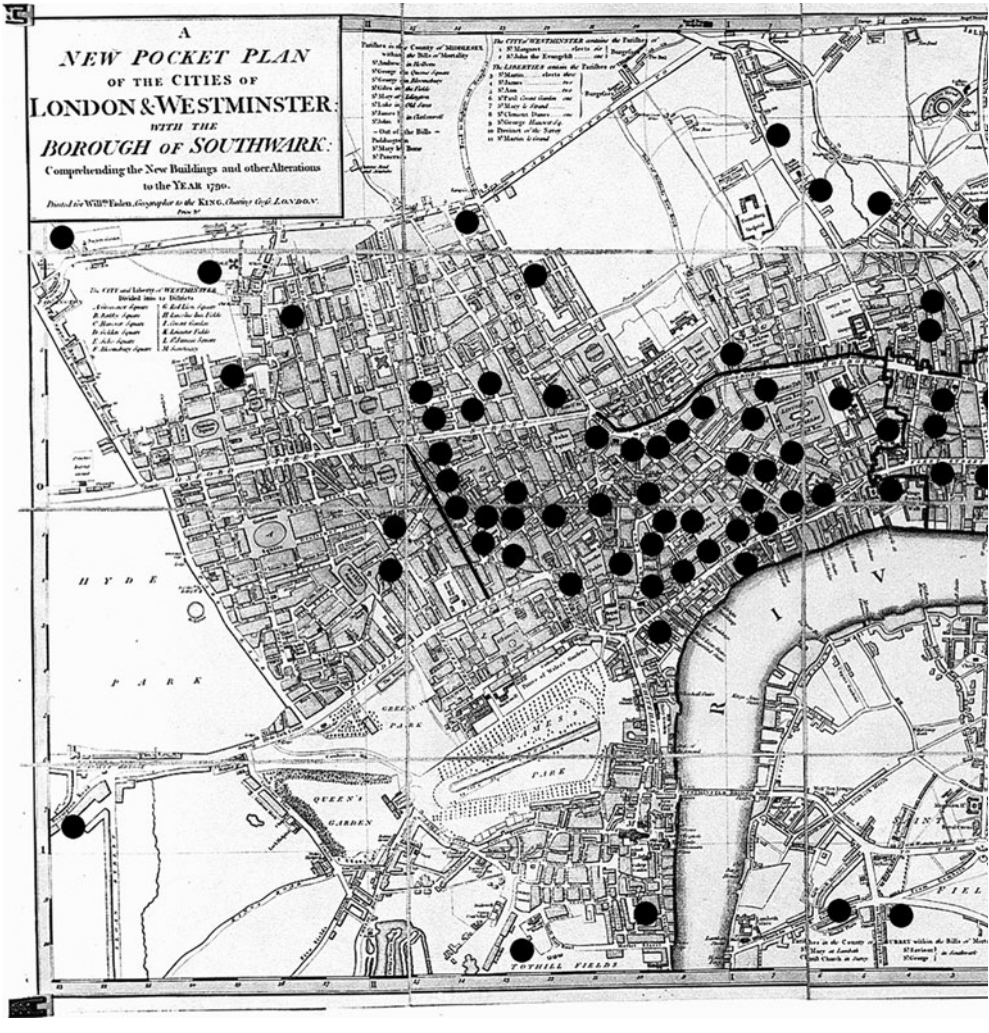
The internal organization of the LCS was managed mainly by splitting it into divisions, ideally of thirty members each. These divisions—at one point the LCS claimed there were ninety[69]—were represented at a general committee of the society by delegates, who were to carry down to their divisions the proposals of the general committee, and to carry up to the general committee the motions and resolutions of the division. This system worked well except when decisions needed to be made too promptly for general discussion, or when the increasing persecution of the reform movement, and the increasing infiltration of the society by government spies, made necessary a much greater secrecy in its actions, and the LCS came to be governed by a secret committee which kept even the general committee starved of knowledge. The divisions were still consulted, however, on many questions, and as far as possible fought to retain the structure of democratic consultation that had characterized the early years of the society. Many of the divisions met twice a week, once to transact business and once as a study group at which political and historical texts were read and discussed.

The map reproduced as Pl. 1.9 is Faden's map of inner London again, slightly truncated at its eastern end. I have marked on it all the meeting-places of LCS divisions and of the General Committee of the Society, from 1792 to 1795, that I have come across in various printed and manuscript sources and that fall within the limits of the map. I have not shown meeting-places recorded after December 1795, when, following the passage of the Seditious Meetings Bill, the society was reorganized and its numbers declined. The next map (Pl. 1.10) shows the meeting-places of the LCS, also in 1792–5, that I have come across in outer London; in Islington and Kentish Town to the north, in Greenwich and Charlton to the south-east, in Mitcham and Sydenham to the south, in Knightsbridge, Hammersmith, Turnham Green to the west. Then, further out, and beyond the limit of the penny-post, which formed the unofficial boundary of a developing notion of greater London, are the meeting-places of a division at Waltham Abbey, and of a society in Hemel Hempstead which Mary Thale, the principal historian of the LCS, treats as a division of the LCS, though I am not sure it was.[70] Off the map to the west, and marked by dots on the circular frame, are the meeting-places of a society at High Wycombe and Great Marlow, in Buckinghamshire, which applied to become a division of the LCS, and which corresponded with the London society for a while, though it is not clear to me whether it was ever received as a division.[71]

The point of this second map is simply that there is so little on it: the LCS was an inner-city phenomenon, and did not have much success in recruiting in the suburbs outside the area covered by most contemporary street maps of

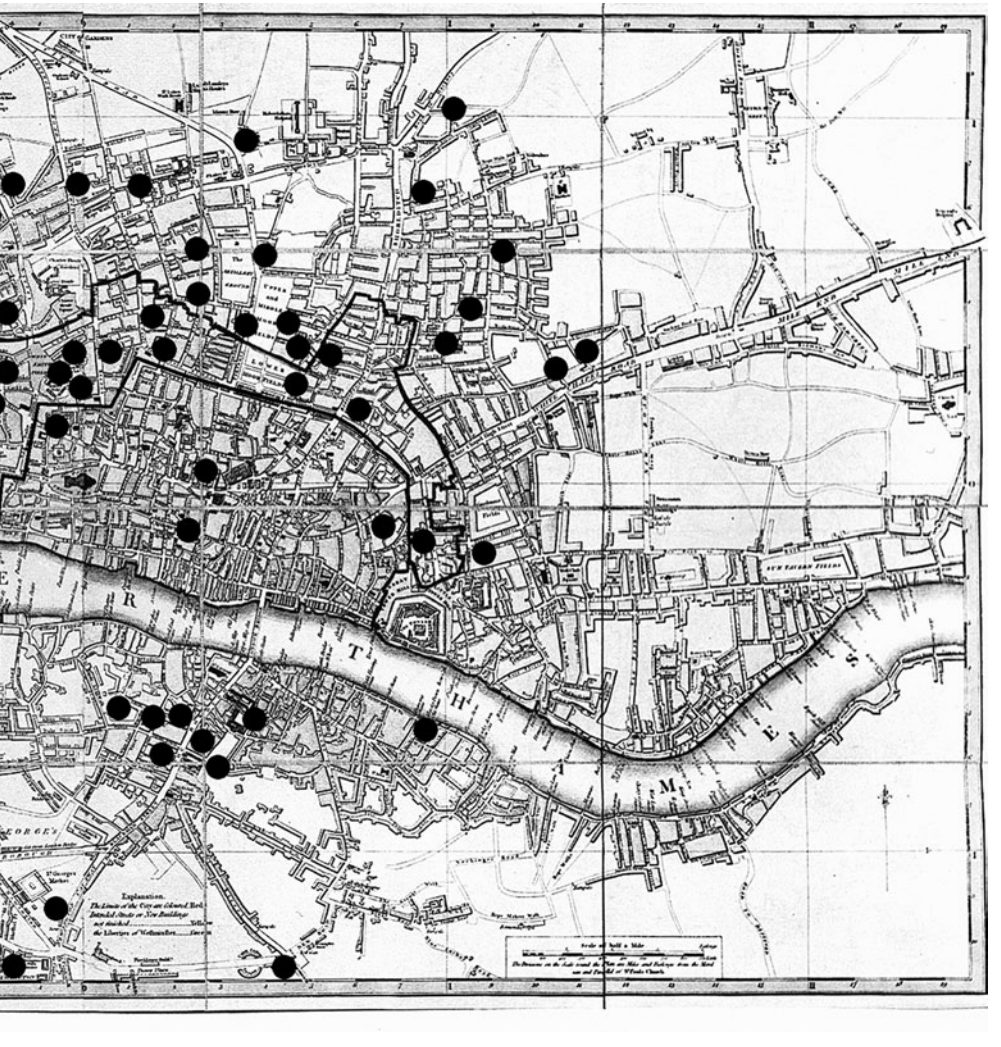
[69] In Jan. 1796 the LCS gave the number 90 to a branch from division 13 which was to meet at the Falcon in Fetter Lane. Thale *Selections*, (p. xviii) records 73 divisions at the end of 1795, and it may be that the number 90 was allocated to give the impression that the society was greater than it actually was.

[70] Thale (ed.), *Selections*, 83. [71] Ibid. 304, 306–7, 311, 333, 340.

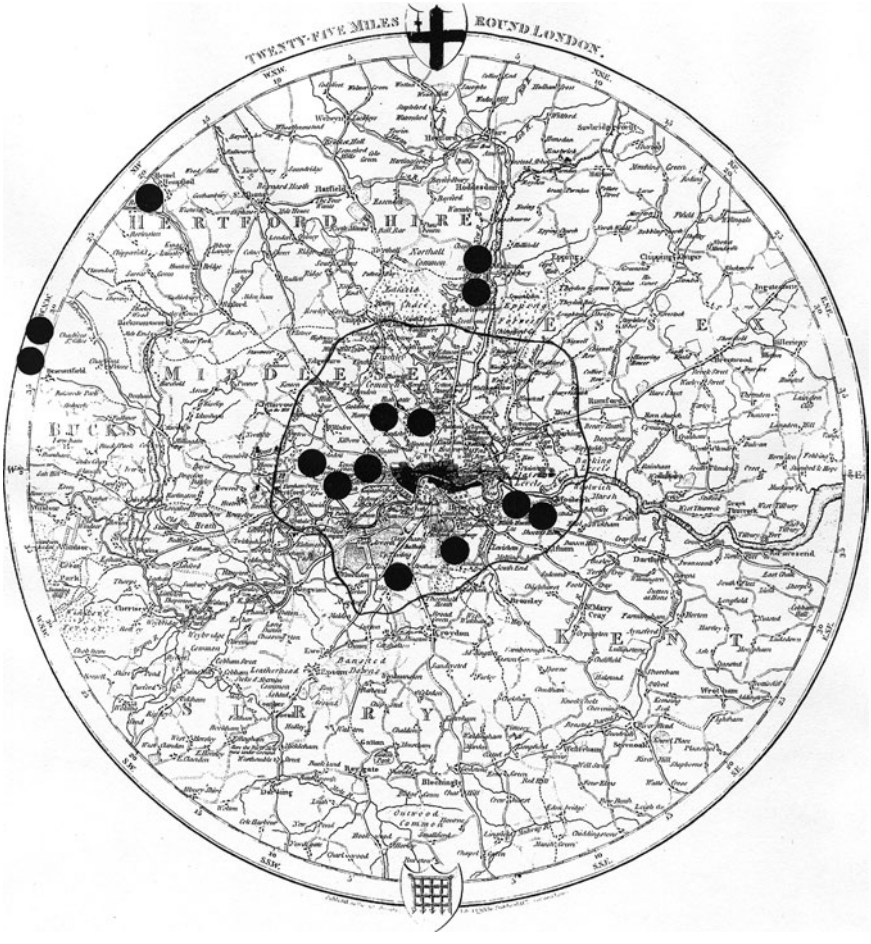


Pl. 1.9. Meeting-places of LCS divisions and of the General Committee of the Society, from 1792 to 1795. In the eastern half of the map solid black lines have been added to mark the boundaries of the City within the Walls and the City Without. In the centre, the line running east–west marks the course of Holborn and its westward continuations. Further west, a similar black line marks the course of Swallow Street, the unofficial eastern limit of the West End. Dots at the extreme edges of the map mark meeting-places just beyond the limits of the map.

London, which typically depict more or less the same area as Plate 1.9; and it is this map I want to concentrate on. But I must begin by issuing some warnings about exactly what it claims to show.



First, the dots do not each of them mark the meeting-place of a different division, and it would be very hard to produce a map which did. Individual divisions are often very hard to trace: as one faded way, its division number was reallocated, and some numbers crop up all over London as they are allocated and reallocated over again. Some sympathetic or acquisitive landlords were allowing up to five divisions to meet on their premises at any time. Many divisions, and probably all of them that survived for any length of time, changed their venue several times, often as a result of the anxiety of the landlords in the public houses which were their usual meeting-places in



Pl. 1.10. Map of the environs of London, from *Ambulator: or, a Pocket Companion in a Tour round London*, 8th edn. (London: J. Scratcherd, 1796), marked up with the meeting-places of LCS divisions (1792–5) which lie beyond the area shown in Pl. 1.9.

the face of intimidation from local officials of one kind or another or from the loyalist associations. Increasingly the divisions were forced to meet not in taverns and coffee houses but in private houses. Indeed, to some degree the density of the dots on this map may reflect the degree of local opposition to LCS meetings rather than the density of its membership; but for various reasons I do not think the general impression the map gives of the local strength and weakness of the society is much affected by that consideration. This is partly because the evidence of that opposition seems to come from all parts of the city; partly because (as we shall see) the

Table 1.1. Meeting-places of the divisions and general committee of the LCS, 1792–1795, compared with the estimated population of adult males in various areas of London (adult males calculated as 25 per cent of total population as returned in 1801 census)

	Number of meeting-places	Estimate of adult male population to nearest 500	Adult males per meeting place
City within the walls	4	19,500	4,875
City without the walls	16	14,000	875
East London: Shoreditch, St Botolph Aldgate, Spitalfields, Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, Mile End Old Town, St Katherine's	8	28,900	3,612
North London: St George's Bloomsbury, St George the Martyr, St Pancras, Clerkenwell, St Luke's Old Street, and the part of St Andrew's Holborn lying outside the City	20	28,000	1,400
Central London (East Westminster): St Anne's, St Clement Dane, St Paul, St Mary le Strand, St Giles, St Martin's, St James, Savoy, Liberty of the Rolls	42	29,500	702
Southwark	8	14,000	1,750
Lambeth, Christchurch, Bermondsey, Newington	5	17,500	3,500

map suggests that the LCS was often successful in recruiting in areas where local officials may have been most unwelcoming to it.

Second, when I was annotating the papers relating to the society in the Public Record Office it was not with the idea of writing such a chapter as this, and though I tried to write down all the names of meeting-places I came across I no doubt missed many. There are no doubt also many meeting-places whose names have not survived in the historical record, especially for December 1792 and early 1793, when, following the foundation of the Crown and Anchor Society, many divisions found public houses unwilling to accommodate them, and were forced to meet in private houses.[72] Third, the most important source for these meeting-places are the reports of government spies who had infiltrated the various divisions of the society, and this fact will have skewed the record for various reasons. Until the end of 1793 only one spy, George Lynam, was regularly reporting to the government. The spies no doubt concentrated on what they believed to be the most dangerous divisions; though this is in fact probably less of a problem than might appear, for Lynam and a number of other spies succeeded in infiltrating the general committee, where they assiduously made records of the reports of new divisions being formed and new meeting-places being chosen, right across London. Most of these spies, however, were revealed at the end of 1794, when they gave evidence in the treason trials;

[72] Thale (ed.), *Selections*, 34; *ST* xxiv. 1102.

thereafter the LCS was much less infiltrated, the records are fewer, and no doubt many meeting-places were left unrecorded, especially in late 1795, when the society was at its largest. In short, this map is a *very* broad-brush representation of the geography of the LCS in its first four years; but it still probably gives a reasonably fair impression of where the society was strong and where it was weak. Later in the decade, with its numbers much depleted, the centre of gravity of the society may have shifted from Central London to the East End.

The accompanying table shows the density of LCS meeting-places in relation to the population of different areas of the metropolis. Within the limits of their accuracy, the map and table together suggest that the LCS was strongest in the densely populated central section of London, more or less contained within the open box made by the river, the western edge of the City, the line of Holborn and its westward continuation, and Swallow Street. Outside this area, the LCS was also relatively successful in recruiting in the City Without, and only slightly less so north of the City, in Clerkenwell and the area around Old Street. It may well have been relatively successful in the East End, especially in Shoreditch and Spitalfields, where, however, the meeting-places were few because, for contested reasons that I shall not go into now, its members were grouped in two very large divisions.[73] It was reasonably successful in the Borough of Southwark, but much less so in other areas south of the river, notably in Lambeth, where in 1792 and 1793, as we have already seen, the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers was particularly aggressive, and one innkeeper lost his licence for allowing a division to meet on his premises.[74] The LCS was unsuccessful too, unsurprisingly enough, in the West End, where a few brave shopkeepers and domestic servants, probably, occasionally set up short-lived divisions in the mews behind the great squares.

Most of all, relative to its population, there seem to have been strikingly few meeting-places of the society in the City within the walls, where we would certainly expect to find them recorded if they had existed. For by far the most informative spy to infiltrate the LCS was Lynam, member of the Ironmongers' Company, who lived in Walbrook in the heart of the City, and whose particular expertise was the divisional organization of the society. I have found only four meeting-places within the walls; and of these, the Mansion House public house had barely opened its doors to division 12 of the society when the landlord got cold feet and, on Lynam's advice, closed them again; the division moved to Newgate Street for a few months before it was obliged to move again, and this time it went outside the city limits altogether, where it gave birth to another division, number 23, which began meeting outside the walls, in Moorfields.[75] In the east of the City,

[73] *A Complete Collection of State Trials*, 30 vols., ed. William Cobbett and T. B. Howells (London: Longman *et al.*, 1816–22), xxiv. 766, 780–1 (hereafter *ST*), and see Thale (ed.), *Selections*, 48–9 and 48 n.

[74] Thale (ed.), *Selections*, 318.

[75] *ST* xxiv. 763, and Thale (ed.), *Selections* 52.

division 10 of the society found a probably short-lived meeting-place at the Queen's Arms in Crutched Friars after moving from Rosemary Lane, outside the city limits; the fourth venue, at the White Horse in Cloak Lane, near Cheapside, was probably only used for a few months in 1795.

It is this discrepancy, between the strikingly low number of meeting-places within the city walls, and the large numbers that cluster to the west and north, that I want to think about. Was the government of the City more hostile than local government elsewhere to the LCS? It is true that in 1792–3 Sir James Sanderson, the Lord Mayor, was working hard to prevent supposedly seditious meetings of all kinds: debating societies and no doubt divisional meetings of the society as well; at the end of his year in office a general meeting of the society was forced to move from Fleet Street to Oxford Street.[76] But in the City Without, where Sanderson's writ ran as much it did in the City Within, the LCS appears to have thrived. And for most of 1795, the year of the LCS's greatest expansion, when new divisions were continually being established, the Lord Mayor was Thomas Skinner, who had publicly demonstrated his disapprobation of the treason trials, had been thanked for doing so by the LCS,[77] and was probably the most sympathetic public official the society could have hoped to deal with. The period of his mayoralty does not show, however, any marked increase of LCS activity within the city walls.

On the face of it then, the low profile of the society in the City Within is thoroughly surprising: in the agitation for constituency reform in the early 1780s the corporation of the City of London had been exceptionally active; and though this was in part a matter of self-interest—a determination to strengthen the representation of the City by abolishing or reducing the right of representation of tiny or virtually uninhabited boroughs elsewhere—it was also much more than that: by 1783 nearly a quarter of the twenty six aldermen of the City were members of the SCI, largely committed to universal manhood suffrage and annual parliaments, which would become the programme of the LCS itself.[78]

The failure of the LCS to recruit in the City Within was no doubt the result of a host of factors, but I will particularly concentrate on one. I shall be skating on very thin ice here, and I want to be understood to be proceeding with extreme tentativeness—with an increasing tentativeness as my argument proceeds. Much more research would be needed, on the composition of the LCS and on reform politics in the City of London in the 1790s, to make my argument good; but it is an argument which has the merit, at least, of correlating rather well with the relative distribution of the society's meeting-places across London.

[76] Thale (ed.), *Selections*, 81.

[77] Ibid. 235.

[78] On the city corporation and reform, see in particular the petitions of the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Livery of London, 6 May, and of the freeholders of the County and City of London, complaining that the parliamentary franchise was restricted to liverymen, 7 May 1783, in *Journal of the House of Commons*, xlviii. 407–8 (hereafter *JHC*). On city aldermen as members of the Society for Constitutional Information, see Eugene Charlton Black, *The Association* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 188.

What then are we to make of the contrast? There is an embarrassment of possible explanations, and I will need to spend a little time considering the most obvious of them. If we make the assumption that the programme of the LCS was more likely to attract the disfranchised than the enfranchised, the first place to look for an explanation would be in the distribution of the franchise, of the right to vote in parliamentary elections. In fact, however, in Westminster, the largest urban constituency in Britain and the area where the LCS was strongest, the right to vote was open to all householders, to anyone who paid the church and poor rate; and according to Thomas Oldfield, whose *History of the Boroughs* was in the early 1790s the most authoritative account of the state of representation, there were some 17,000 Westminster electors, between a half and a third of the entire adult male population. In the City, the electors were the 7,000 or 8,000 liverymen of the city companies, probably between a fifth and a quarter of all adult males.[79] In the City, therefore, as in Westminster, there were thousands of disfranchised men whom we might regard as likely candidates for membership of the LCS. But the very openness of the Westminster franchise means that many who did join the society, tradesmen in one sense or another, must have been voters, and there may be no reason to assume that in London universal manhood suffrage was a programme disproportionately attractive to the disfranchised.

The different success of the LCS in different parts of London must be attributable to a range of other factors, of which one of the most persuasive may be that throughout the 1780s and 1790s the corporation of the City of London was supporting the ministry of William Pitt, who during the life of the LCS was implacably hostile to parliamentary reform, whereas the city of Westminster had returned, as one of its MPs, 'the man of the people', Charles James Fox, for most of the 1790s the most prominent member of the opposition. The City's loyalty to Pitt, must certainly have been influential on the failure of the LCS to recruit there, but it is easy to mistake its nature and to overestimate its degree. To begin with, it had originated when Pitt appeared to be in favour of a limited reform and determined to push it through, and when Fox appeared altogether more dilatory and untrustworthy on the issue. And though the City's loyalty was evident no doubt in the almost entire failure of the City to participate in the renewed campaign of petitions for reform in 1793, two years later the Lord Mayor,

[79] [T. H. B. Oldfield], *An Entire and Complete History, Political and Personal, of the Boroughs of Great Britain*, 3 vols. (London: J. Debrett, 1792), ii. 261, 245, 253. Oldfield notes (281) that of the 17,000 electors of Westminster, no more than 13,000 had ever voted in parliamentary elections. His figures for electors are much more accurate than his figures of freemen and householders in the City; he estimates that there were three times as many freemen who were not members of the livery as there were liverymen, and 80,000 householders, which, by the 1801 census which I have used in calculating the proportion of electors to adult males, would mean that there were thousands more householders in the City than the total male population. In my own rough calculations, I have assumed (as demographers studying the period appear to do) that adult males composed one-quarter of total population. The franchise in the City was restricted to liverymen by an Act of Parliament, 11 George II c. 18.

aldermen, and livery delivered to the Commons a thoroughly outspoken petition for peace with the French republic, and the corporation openly opposed Pitt's policies on the food shortage, the most pressing domestic issue of that year.[80] Throughout the 1790s, and alongside the loyalist supporters of the ministry, opposition Whigs, bitter opponents of Pitt and by no means unfriendly to the LCS, continued to serve as popular aldermen. Their popularity was probably neither because or in spite of their politics but on account of their commitment to maintaining city institutions and their authority, and to a common city ideology of fair dealing. There may be no reason to assume within the institutions of the City a markedly greater hostility to the LCS than elsewhere in London. When in 1797 Thomas Hardy, who many loyalists regarded, despite his acquittal in 1794, as a traitor, set up in business in Fleet Street, he had no apparent difficulty in being made a freeman of one city company and a liveryman in another.[81]

To the various possible factors that in one way or another may help explain the dramatic differences in the success of the LCS in recruiting members in the different areas of London, I want to suggest one more, which, as I have said, correlates interestingly with the relative densities of meeting-places marked on the map, and which suggests, indeed, that we may need to think of the London of the LCS in rather more local terms than we are used to doing. The first resolution of the very first address of the LCS announced 'that every individual has a Right to Share in the Government of that Society of which he is a Member'.[82] It was from this commitment to active citizenship and universal manhood participation in government that the society derived its demand for universal manhood suffrage in national elections. But the LCS did not offer only jam tomorrow; a large part of its appeal was that it offered a sense of immediate, present participation, to whoever would join it and engage in its activities and debates. By its programme of political education it offered its members the opportunity of 'improving' themselves; by the structure of its internal democracy it gave them the opportunity to stand for office, to be elected to a series of positions of increasing responsibility; and for many members of the LCS the prospect of participating in the society's democratic structures may have been as powerful in persuading them to join as the prospect of eventual parliamentary reform.

I want to suggest that one way of understanding the society's relative failure to recruit in the City, at least in the City Within, and its relative success outside, may

[80] Only 'sundry inhabitants' of the parish of Aldgate petitioned in 1793 (*JHC* xlviii. 735–6). For the City petition for peace, see *JHC* 1. 95, and the ensuing counter-petition from 'some liverymen', 1.110. For the City corporation and the food shortage, see below, Chapter 4, and Susan E. Brown, '"A Just and Profitable Commerce": Moral Economy and the Middle Classes in Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of British Studies*, 32 (Oct. 1993), 305–22. I am indebted to Brown's article, too, in my account of the support enjoyed in the City by its internal government.

[81] *Memoir of Thomas Hardy ... written by himself* (1832), reprinted in David Vincent (ed.), *Testaments of Radicalism: Memoirs of Working-Class Politicians 1790–1885* (London: Europa, 1977), 96.

[82] *London Corresponding Society, held at the Bell, Exeter-Street, Strand*, single sheet, dated 2 Apr. 1792.

have been to do with the relative opportunity for participation in political activity enjoyed by those residing in different parts of London. If we think that what needs explaining is the relative failure of the LCS to recruit in the City Within, this may in part be an effect of the fact that in the City, and especially within the walls, the opportunities for acting as a citizen, for participating in political debate, for sharing in government, were very considerable indeed. If we think what needs explaining is the relatively high level of recruitment in central and north London or in Southwark, this in turn may partly be an effect of the fact that in those areas such opportunities, for all but the very considerably well-off, were far harder to come by than they were, not only in the City, but in many of the suburban areas of London. Either way, my hypothesis also needs to be able to explain why there appears to have been much greater LCS activity in the City Without than in the City Within.

The government of London was the first great example of what scholars of local government have come to describe as the 'metropolitan problem', the problem of devising a system of local government which, while sensitive to local differences, succeeds nevertheless in instituting some form of overarching authority for the city as a whole.[83] London, in Roy Porter's memorable phrase, was presided over by 'a crazy-paving' of jurisdictions, 'whose rationale lay in historical accident rather than efficiency'.[84] I shall not attempt to describe all the cracks and slabs of this crazy-paving, but I will need to describe as briefly as possible the main differences between the City and the rest of inner London.

The City was governed by an elaborate structure of institutions.[85] Though only the seriously rich were likely to become members of the highest tier, the court of aldermen, by the 1790s virtually every tradesman living and working in the City was a freeman, and virtually every freeman householder, at least in the City Within, was paying £10 rent per year, and was thus entitled to participate in electing representatives of his ward to the court of common council and to the court of aldermen. All liverymen of the city companies were entitled to be members of the Court of Common Hall, which elected the sheriff and the Lord Mayor as well as the four city MPs. Increasingly through the eighteenth century the Common Council, composed largely of men in a comparatively small way of business, retailers and old-fashioned master-craftsmen, took over all the main functions of local government: the paving, lighting, cleansing, rating, and policing of the City, and passed what were in effect acts of a city parliament. In addition, both the Common Council and the Common Hall claimed the

[83] For a summary of this problem, see John Davis, *Reforming London: The London Government Problem 1855–1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), esp. 1–9.

[84] Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (London: Penguin, 1994), 150.

[85] My brief account of the government of the City of London derives, like so much else in this chapter, from Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *English Local Government*, 10 vols. (1906– ; reprinted London: Frank Cass, 1963). For the City, see iii. 569–692. Here and elsewhere in what follows I have also drawn on *The Laws and Customs, Rights, Liberties and Privileges of the City of London* (London: R. Withy and W. Griffin, 1765); George Rudé, *Hanoverian London 1714–1808* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), and Porter, *London*.

right to debate and to issue statements about national political questions. There was a degree of corruption endemic in the Common Council, but it was small-scale stuff, and Oldfield, a supporter of universal manhood suffrage, who regarded the restricted *parliamentary* franchise of the City as a scandal, described the government of the City as 'the first and best in this country', and as offering 'an example ... of the pure and disinterested administration of justice, arising from the people's discrimination in the choice of their magistrates'.[86]

There is no doubt that the inhabitants of the City were overwhelmingly supportive and protective of the kind of rate-payers' democracy in which they could participate so fully, whether as Common Council-men, as minor functionaries and office-holders, or simply as electors. It was an extraordinarily sustaining set of institutions, which must have fulfilled the civic aspirations of very many of the male inhabitants. Whatever the opinions among city tradesmen about the need for parliamentary reform of however limited or thoroughgoing a kind, they may have felt less need to attempt to achieve a political identity by joining the LCS. Equally to the point, it offered its participants a kind of *collective* civic identity, in which the importance of maintaining the City as a united political force may have outweighed, for those in favour of radical reform, the risk of weakening the authority of the City by the divisions which membership of the LCS would have provoked.

The unified silence of the City in the face of Pitt's terror and the reform movement in the 1790s was eventually broken in November 1795, when the government introduced the 'two bills' intended among other things to prevent the LCS from conducting large public meetings. Many radicals and liberals saw the provision in the Seditious Meetings Bill, to impose severe restrictions on meetings of fifty or more persons, as an attack on the right to petition guaranteed in the Bill of Rights; for how could the people petition in sufficiently large numbers to impress parliament if they could not meet to discuss their grievances? A week after the bills were introduced, the loyalist Alderman Lushington, appeared at the bar of the Commons with a petition approving the two bills from the Corporation of London.[87] This petition provoked the members of several companies, and even a meeting of the merchants and bankers of the City, to draw up petitions against the bills. The inhabitants of four of the city wards also petitioned against them, and thereby provoked counter-petitions from loyalist inhabitants of three of the same wards.[88] The hostile petitions seem

[86] [Oldfield], *Entire and Complete History*, ii. 245–6.

[87] *JHC* li. 92 (19 Nov. 1795).

[88] *JHC* li. 111–12 (various tradesmen, including apparently freemen of City companies); 105–6 (merchants and bankers); 106–8 (electors and other inhabitants of Southwark, and see counter-petition from 'certain Electors', 152); 109 (inhabitants of Faringdon Without); 138 (inhabitants of Castle Baynard ward, and see counter-petition from 'several persons' of the ward, 150); 139 (inhabitants of Aldersgate Ward, and see counter-petition, 177). For other petitions against the bills originating in London, see 99–100 (LCS), 105, 106, 112, 134, 137–8, 139, 151, 153, 168; for other London petitions supportive of the bills, see 116, 173–4.

suddenly to reveal a possible but hitherto invisible constituency for the LCS within the City, but at the very moment when the two bills, once passed, squeezed the society into irreversible decline.

If one reason why the LCS made small headway in the City Within was that the inhabitants already thought of themselves as active citizens capable of exerting considerable collective influence on the government of London and even of the nation, it may also be true that the striking lack of the opportunity to participate in local government outside the City, in Westminster and in most of the metropolitan parishes of Middlesex, made the LCS there all the more attractive. As the topographer and antiquarian Henry Chamberlain remarked in 1770, 'the government of Westminster has but little resemblance to that of an opulent and noble city; it being much more like that of a little country borough'.[89] Westminster had no freemen, no livery companies, no common council. Nominally the government of Westminster was entrusted to sixteen burgesses, appointed for life, whose functions however by the late eighteenth century were largely ceremonial. In so far as Westminster had any central form of government, this was provided, as it was in Middlesex, by its magistrates.[90] But most of the functions of local government, which in the City were performed by the relatively democratic Common Council, were exercised in both Westminster and Middlesex by the vestries of the several parishes.[91]

In about three-quarters of the 200 or so parishes in London and its suburbs, membership of the vestry was general, was open to all ratepayers. In the heartland of the LCS, however, the vast majority of vestries were 'closed' or 'select'. The City was surrounded by a ring of parishes with select vestries, from St Clement Dane and St Giles-in-the-Fields eastward across Holborn and the southern division of Clerkenwell, through Cripplegate, Shoreditch, Spitalfields, Stepney, and Bishopsgate down to the river at Wapping. In the nine parishes of Westminster in the 1790s only St Anne's Soho had an open vestry, which it had achieved following a parish revolution in the 1740s. In the most populated parishes of Southwark, where LCS membership was much stronger than elsewhere in South London, vestries were select, and the possibility of civic participation was further curtailed by the fact that, though Southwark was for many of the purposes of government treated as part of the City, it did not form part of the ratepayers' democracy enjoyed in the city wards north of the river. The eight select vestries in Westmin-

[89] [Henry Chamberlain], *A New and Compleat History and Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster . . . revised, corrected, and improved by Henry Chamberlain* (London: J. Cooke, 1770), 581.

[90] For the government of Westminster, see S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government*, ii. 212–31.

[91] My discussion of vestries, and my identification of the character as select or general, derives mainly from S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government*, i. 9–276, partly from Chamberlain's *New and Compleat History*; where the Webbs and Chamberlain disagree, I have followed the Webbs. References to individual parishes may be traced through the Webbs' index. I have also found particularly useful F. H. W. Sheppard, *Local Government in St. Marylebone 1688–1835: A Study of the Vestry and the Turnpike Trust* (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1958).

ster werecomposed of self-perpetuating oligarchies of the rich and usually polite. In Middlesex and the City, such vestries were more complicated affairs; some were select for some purposes, general for others; some were select by virtue of imposing a property qualification of some level or another as a condition for membership. But in the urban parishes of Middlesex to the west and north of the City, only two, Islington and northern Clerkenwell, had fully 'general' vestries; in the east only Bethnal Green, Shadwell, and Limehouse.[92]

In the City within the walls, the tiny size of most parishes—some no larger than a football pitch—made them unviable and insignificant as units of local government, and most of what was done at parish level in the rest of London was done in the City at ward level or by the Court of Common Council. Four-fifths of the ninety-odd tiny intra-mural parishes had open vestries. In the City without the walls, all but two of the eleven vestries were either select or were select for most purposes; but this can have had no real effect on the sense their inhabitants had of themselves as active citizens, for the functions of city vestries were limited to transacting the immediate affairs of the parish church. The much higher apparent membership of the LCS in the City Without may be an effect of the fact that the extra-mural parishes were relatively less prosperous, that there were fewer freemen, that rents were lower, and that more freemen who were householders may not have qualified for the local franchise. It may largely be an effect of the fact that the divisions which met in the City Without migrated back and forth between venues in the parishes there and in the adjacent Middlesex parishes; many of the divisions that met in the City Without would have been attended, in part, or even largely, by outsiders.

Outside the City there were parishes like St James's Piccadilly, St George's Hanover Square, or St Marylebone, where vestries were select but where the generally polite, even aristocratic character of the population, and the extreme dependence of tradesmen and servants on the patronage of the polite classes, made it virtually impossible for the LCS to recruit. There were parishes with open vestries, like St Anne's, whose social composition was more like that of the other parishes with select vestries in Westminster, and which supported several meeting-places of the society at one time or another. In general, however, whether by coincidence or not, almost wherever the LCS was strong, local government was oligarchic; and the lack of opportunity, relative or absolute, for the inhabitants in those areas to participate in the government of London was thrown into higher relief by the relative democracy enjoyed by the City, especially within the walls, and by the open vestries in the suburbs surrounding the inner London shown on street maps.

There is evidence of the antagonism between popular politicians and the members of select vestries in the record of the meetings of one popular debating society in 1797. The Seditious Meetings Act, one of the 'two bills', had effectively prohibited such societies from debating political questions. For eight months

[92] Perhaps also Whitechapel: see S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government*, i. 150 n. and 193 n.

following its passing none of them seem to have met; when, in the autumn of 1796, they emerged again, it was on the understanding that they would discuss only non-political questions. By 1797 the most active of the societies was the Westminster Forum, which, probably under the influence of John Gale Jones, surgeon, man-midwife, and LCS activist, cautiously began to insert occasional political debates into its programme of light-hearted discussions of 'moral' questions on the best way to secure a husband or the existence of ghosts. When the select vestry of St James's threatened the Forum with closure under the Seditious Meetings Act, the society replied by staging a debate on the question:

> Ought not the interference of the Select Vestry of St James Parish with the Moral, Literary, and Philosophical Discussions of the Westminster Forum (which are in no case restricted by the late Acts of Parliament) together with the general Conduct of Select Vestries, to operate as a warning to all open parishes how they permit Select Vestries to be established among them?

This debate was announced to the press with an urgent request to the inhabitants of St James's to attend, and to express in public 'their abhorrence and contempt of the Petty Tyrants of a Parish'.[93] The early 1790s had seen the beginning of a revival of the campaign to end the select vestries in London; and in 1794 a bill had been drafted, but not brought before parliament, to abolish them.[94] I am not claiming, however, that local government reform, or parochial reform in particular, was an important part of the political programme of the LCS, though it was of one important member, Place himself, who was eventually influential on the legislation which abolished select vestries.[95] It was treated by the LCS rather as it treated the abolition of the slave-trade: as a problem which would have to await redress until universal manhood suffrage had been achieved, but which would then be redressed automatically.[96]

Caricatures of select vestries give a good idea of the chief complaint against them, depicting the vestrymen as shameless freeloaders who spend the rates levied from their parishioners on sumptuous feasts while turning away the hungry parish poor (Pl 1.11). The point is made most explicitly by a satire of 1828 by Thomas Jones (Pl. 1.12), a shot in the eventually successful struggle to open the autocratic closed vestry of St Paul's Covent Garden which suggests that not much had changed in the perception of such vestries in the previous thirty years.[97] On the wall behind the diners are the 'Select Resolutions' they have passed: signed by the secretary, 'Anthony Absolute', these declare that 'the "Select" shall have absolute

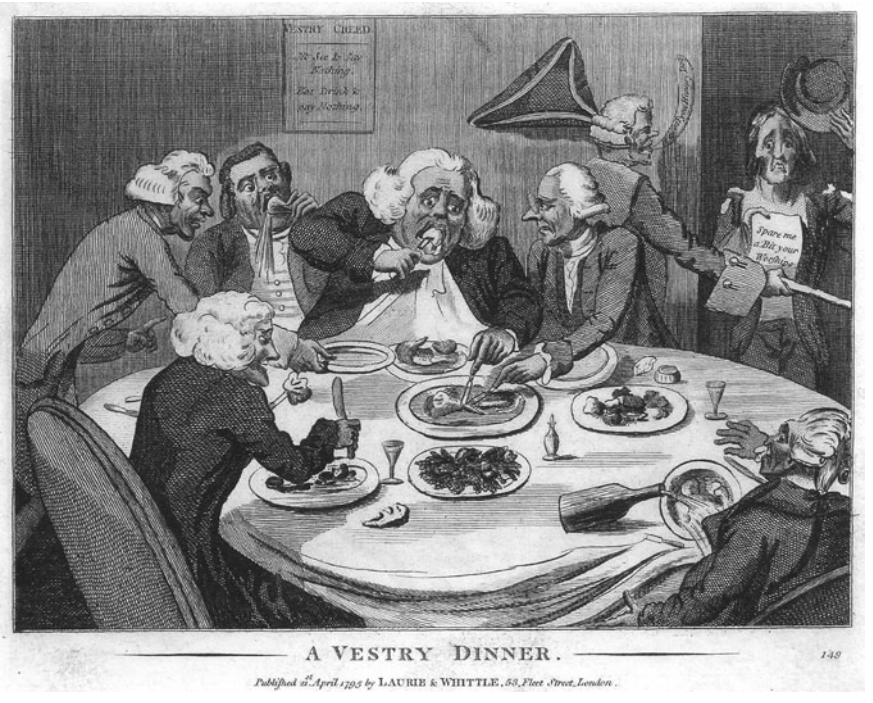
[93] Donna T. Andrew, *London Debating Societies, 1776–1799* (London: London Record Society, 1994), 358.

[94] See S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government*, i. 260, 261 n.

[95] See ibid. esp. i. 269.

[96] See *The Report of the Committee of Constitution of the London Corresponding Society* (London: Thomas Spence for the LCS, [1794]), 3; and *Report of the Committee appointed to revise and abridge a former Report of the Constitution of the London Corresponding Society* ([London]: LCS, [1794]), 3.

[97] See also S. Callahan, *To Commemorate the Opening of the Vestry of St. Paul Covent Garden to the Parishioners January 17. 1828* ([London]: S. Callahan, [Jan. 1828]; BM 15506).



A VESTRY DINNER. 148

Published 21st April 1795 by LAURIE & WHITTLE, 53 Fleet Street, London.

Pl. 1.11. Artist unknown, *A Vestry Dinner* (London: Laurie and Whittle, 21 April 1795; BM 8770).

SELECT VESTRY COMFORTS.

Pl. 1.12. Thomas Jones, *Select Vestry Comforts* (London: S. W. Fores, 1 April 1828; BM 15527).

power over their fellow parishioners to impose any rate or tax upon them', and that they 'shall not submit their books to the inspection of the parishioners, nor render any account in any manner for the waste or expenditure of the aforesaid parishioners Money'. The account in the bottom left of the print, detailing the cost of the present feast and including such items as four bottles of champagne for £2. 8*s*., and five bottles of Sauternes for £2, must therefore have been drawn up for the vestrymen's private purposes, though its enormous cost has been prudently laundered by describing it as an account of expenses incurred in 'visiting the pauper Children'. The complaints in these and other caricatures of select vestries[98] were later repeated by Sidney and Beatrice Webb: 'the "self-elected" Vestries of the London parishes were wielding large and apparently unlimited powers of government; they came at every turn in contact with the daily life of each household; and they levied, without limit or control, a constantly increasing taxation.'[99] For Londoners outside the City, they represented, perhaps more pressingly and more irremissively, their chief practical experience of the effects of Old Corruption and of oligarchic power; and the distribution of LCS membership in the metropolis may well suggest that these local oligarchies had some real effect in politicizing those who joined the society. It would be surprising if they did not.

V

When, following the arrests of the leaders of the LCS in London in May and June 1794, the government, the crown lawyers, the judges, the loyalist press, attempted to describe the London Corresponding Society, they did so in such a way as to impress upon it the same monstrous character, the same image of the Hydra, as had been attributed to London itself, especially the London between St James's and the City. This was partly an effect of what polite loyalists believed or chose to believe about the membership of the society: they represented it as a society less of tradesmen, attorneys, shopkeepers, and artisans, as of thieves and pickpockets, or coal-heavers, hodmen, and other casual labourers, men who, and this was the point, shared the supposed characteristic of the London 'mob', that they had no property to protect, had therefore nothing to lose by political upheaval.[100] More

[98] See for example the anonymous, *A Good Thing or Select Vestry Repast. Keep it up my Lads, Johnny Bull pays for all* (London: J. Cole, 1 Aug. 1795; Lewis Walpole Library 795.8.1.1); G. M. Woodward, *Pigmy Revels*, plate 5 (London: S. W. Fores, 15 Dec. 1800; BM 9639); and Rowlandson, *A Select Vestry* (no place or bookseller, 1806, Lewis Walpole Library 806.0.49).

[99] S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government*, i. 268–9.

[100] Of many examples of the idea that the LCS was packed with criminals, see *The Decline and Fall, Death, Dissection, and Funeral Procession of His Most Contemptible Lowness the London Corresponding Society* (London: George Cawthorn, 1796). For a breakdown by occupation of the membership of the LCS (based on the small number whose occupations are known), see Thale (ed.), *Selections*, p. xix n.

important, however, to the formation of the image of the LCS as a political monster, was its structure of organization. Among the many causes of the anxiety which the LCS inspired in loyalist ministers and their supporters, the idea that it was split into divisions, and, as we shall see, subdivided still further, is especially prominent, and is continually returned to in the parliamentary debates and reports, in the judicial proceedings, and in loyalist pamphlets which discuss the society and its intentions during 1794 and 1795. The Secret Committees of the House of Commons and of the Lords, appointed to examine the evidence of the activities of the reform societies, both commented on the danger that supposedly lurked in this divisional structure.[101] The primary reason for the organization into divisions—to ensure that the numbers at meetings were small enough to enable everyone to participate in discussion—was ignored; the House of Lords Committee believed it was done in order to give the society 'an Appearance of Consequence, and of Increasing Numbers'; Sir John Mitford, the Solicitor-General, announced at Hardy's trial that this form of organization was adopted primarily 'for the purpose of diffusing their meetings more generally over the whole town'.[102] And because the LCS became, especially from early 1794, the co-ordinator of the popular reform societies throughout the country, it was possible for loyalist alarmists to see each provincial society as one more cell of the LCS itself. In his prosecution of Hardy, Sir John Scott, the Attorney-General, imagined this cellular structure as spreading not only within London but throughout the kingdom: the plan, he explained, was 'to unite, first, small bodies of men—as soon as they came to a greater number, to divide them into smaller parties, and so to spread themselves by degrees'.[103] Or as one pamphleteer put it, the LCS, by 'separating themselves into numberless divisions, academies were opened in every part of the kingdom, for instructing grown gentlemen in the *polite* and FASHIONABLE accomplishment of political disputation'.[104]

But the particular characteristic of this form of organization that seems most to have alarmed loyalist opinion was the fact that, when the numbers of any particular division of the LCS reached a certain point, the division divided in two. This scheme was not—though the government and its lawyers believed it to be so—a characteristic of the jacobin clubs in France; it seems to have been originated by the Society for Constitutional Information in Sheffield, which, however, soon abandoned it—considerable as its numbers sometimes were, they

[101] *The Second Report of the Committee of Secrecy appointed by the House of Lords* (London: J. Debrett, 1794), 9; *The First Report from the Committee of Secrecy* [of the Commons] (London: J. Debrett, 1794), 13.

[102] *Second Report . . . Lords*, 9; *ST* xxiv. 1233.

[103] *ST* xxiv. 296.

[104] *An Account of the Treason and Sedition committed by the London Corresponding Society, [and] the Society for Constitutional Information . . . and the whole of the Two Reports, presented to the Hon. House of Commons, by the Secret Committee* (London: J. Downes, [1794]), 12.

were too small to run such a structure.[105] It is not clear that anywhere in Britain, outside London, the popular movement for reform followed the original logic of the Sheffield scheme of organization. Elsewhere, in Edinburgh for example, or Norwich, separate units of separate societies might each send delegates to a united general committee, but the units themselves were apparently organized as local branches, as large or as small as local membership dictated. It was only the LCS that had the power, like the Hydra, to grow two heads where one had been.

This capacity of the divisions of the LCS to subdivide, and sometimes to subdivide again, appeared to loyalists to give the society the potential for infinite growth. The fissiparous character of organic cells, their ability to reproduce themselves by binary fission, was not to be discovered until the 1830s or 1840s; the organism that lies behind this account of the LCS is no doubt that of the polype, or polypus, the name for the group of worm-like organisms which included the freshwater hydra described by Linnaeus, a favourite example among eighteenth-century naturalists of solitary reproduction.[106] This polype reproduced by extruding a bud which eventually individualized and detached itself. But a polype could also be a cancerous tumour; and the notion of the LCS as a cancerous, self-replicating, uncontrollable growth is everywhere in the speeches of ministers and crown lawyers in 1794. One loyalist pamphleteer, erroneously believing that this form of organization characterized the popular reform movement throughout Britain, announced that, by having been endlessly 'divided and subdivided' into 'new factions', 'their numbers, at length, exceed the powers of probable computation'.[107] But it was as a practice adopted by the LCS that the business of subdivision alarmed those who were better informed. In mid-May 1794 William Pitt told the House of Commons that the 'characteristic' of the society was that by virtue of this practice 'it had within it the means of unbounded extension, and concealed in itself the seeds of rapid increase'.[108] In the trial of Horne Tooke, a member of the Society for Constitutional Information, charged with High Treason along with Hardy and like him acquitted, Lord Chief Justice Eyre described the LCS as:

so composed, as to be spreading itself every hour from division to division, and each division producing its sub-divisions, those sub-divisions becoming divisions, and so on *ad*

[105] See the letter on organization from the Constitutional Society to the London Corresponding Society, reprinted at the start of (the unpaginated) Appendix D of *The Second Report from the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons* (London: J. Debrett, 1794), and the evidence of William Broomhead, of Sheffield, at Hardy's trial, *ST* xxiv. 611–12.

[106] See Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopaedia or an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences, . . . with the Supplement by Abraham Rees*, 4 vols. (London: W. Strahan *et al.*, 1778–89), art. 'polype'; and Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature; or, the Origin of Society* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1803), 8, Additional Note 1.

[107] *An Account of the Treason and Sedition*, 11.

[108] *The Parliamentary History of England*, 36 vols. (London: R. Bagshaw, T. Longman, 1806–20), xxxi. 501 (hereafter *PH*).

infinitum … it is indeed a political monster, … it is of that nature which certainly does present a very alarming aspect to all those who have regard to the peace, the happiness, and tranquillity of the country.[109]

There are two things about this language that particularly fascinate me. The first is the kind of reverse logic which seems so characteristic of the alarmist imagination of the 1790s. The LCS adopted its scheme of subdivision primarily in order to keep the numbers at divisional meetings conveniently small. The society divided because it grew. But to the alarmist imagination it grew because it divided. This reverse logic attributes to the LCS an indwelling organic principle which is mysterious, inexplicable, terrifying; it becomes a principle of infinite growth; 'unbounded extension', in Pitt's phrase; subdivision '*ad infinitum*', according to Eyre. The logic attributes to the society the most mysterious and powerful characteristics of a lower form of life, which to loyalists of course it was: the polype had the power not only of solitary reproduction but, like the little monster it was, like the Hydra of the Peloponese, of self-regeneration. Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, writing in 1759, described it like this:

> 'tis a reptile of so strange a sort,
> That if 'tis cut in two, it is not dead;
> Its head shoots out a tail, its tail a head.[110]

Among the highest forms of life—Louis XVI, say, or even George III—to cut them in two is a way to kill them; to divide the LCS in two is to stimulate its growth. It comes to seem immortal; and, like the Hydra, it will take a Hercules to destroy it.

But alongside this representation of the society as unbounded, as infinite, there is another language, contrasting yet complementary, which attributes the danger of subdivision precisely to the discipline, the control, of which the practice of subdivision appears as both evidence and origin. This political monster is alarming, is 'portentous', Eyre tells the jury, not simply because it is subdividing and 'spreading itself every hour', but because 'it is calculated to produce' thereby 'the most powerful combination that I think the world ever saw'. This structure, Pitt told the Commons, was 'the result of deep design, matured, moulded into shape, and fit for mischievous effect when opportunity should offer'.[111] Collectively, the ignorant low-lifes who composed the LCS had somehow formed what appeared to be a supremely intelligent structure, growing by a regular principle, and capable of immediate communication between its senior committees and the divisions, from the brain to the extremities of the body and back again.

Early in 1794 the LCS published the report of a special committee designed to reform its constitution; this report engendered, after discussions within the various divisions, a new committee and a new report that particularly fuelled

[109] *ST* xxv. 731. [110] *OED* art. 'polypus', 1.b. [111] *ST* xxv. 731; *PH* xxxi. 502.

loyalist anxiety about the political effectiveness as well as the monstrous form of the society. It proposed, in addition to a new and more efficient system for subdividing large divisions, a new form of organization also borrowed from the Sheffield society: an intensely local structure, below the level of the division—what the LCS, following the language of the Anglo-Saxon constitution which drove so much of the society's thinking about political organization, called tithings. These were groups of ten members living in contiguous streets, among whom news of the arrangements for meetings could quickly be passed, and whose intimacy would help ensure attendance at divisional meetings and the collection of dues, and would make it harder for spies to infiltrate the divisions.[112] Loyalists, however, saw them—so perhaps did the more insurrectionary members of the society itself—as troops who could be quickly assembled to protect any divisional meeting threatened by attempts to disrupt their proceedings by the official or unofficial forces of loyalism; even as little platoons of shock troops to be deployed in the event of an uprising or an invasion.[113] This is how they appear, for example, in the most alarmist report, probably by John Reeves, of the riot in London in October 1795 in which the king's coach had been attacked and, so loyalists believed, an attempt had been made to assassinate the king. In spite of the most exhaustive attempts by the government, no evidence could be found to pin this insurrection to the LCS; but Reeves, if it is he, claimed that on the day of the attack

> Small parties, consisting of ten or twelve persons each, mean and dirty in their habits, with gloomy countenances, which threatened mischief, were seen coming from all parts of the town towards St. James's and Westminster. Silent and solemn they marched along, their heads, perhaps, full of the instructions they had received, or perhaps pondering on the rewards they had been promised.[114]

These are the tithings of the LCS, the smallest, and supposedly the most tightly organized, most manoeuvrable units of the society, separately infiltrating the crowd, ready to make the first bloody strike of an intended republican revolution.

I am trying to suggest that the forms of organization adopted by the LCS were alarming for loyalism for two apparently contradictory reasons. On the one hand the society appeared to replicate the monstrous, dropsical, formless, numberless

[112] See *Second Report . . . Commons*, postscript to a letter from the Sheffield society to the Society for Constitutional Information, 14 May 1792, in (the unpaginated) Appendix D. For the proposals to introduce tithings into the LCS, see Thale (ed.), *Selections*, pp. xxv, 197, 230. For an account of tithings in Anglo-Saxon England by a Sheffield radical, see Henry Yorke, *Thoughts on Civil Government: addressed to the disfranchised Citizens of Sheffield* (London: D. I. Eaton, 1794), 22 n.–23 n.

[113] *Second Report . . . Lords*, 11.

[114] *A Narrative of the Insults*, 13–14. My tentative suggestion that this is by Reeves is based partly on the evidence of style and argument, partly on the fact that Owen, who published this narrative, was Reeves's regular publisher.

character of London, its divisions replicating the numberless neighbourhoods and localities which made the surveillance of London, as Colquhoun in particular was insisting in the 1790s, so impossible, and with the same uncontrollable potential for uncontrolled growth. On the other, it appeared as something like the opposite of that, the opposite of the patchwork, the crazy-paving of jurisdictions; a powerfully and dangerously uniform structure which, by its democratic organization of division and delegation, combined the possibility of local participation and collective action. To some degree the organizational structure of the LCS could be seen as a more fully democratic version of the government of the City, with the divisions replacing ward and company; it was an extension of the privileged organization of the City to those areas, Westminster in particular and also metropolitan Middlesex, which were not thought capable of being governed by a corporation. To many, the subdivided government of the City seemed the ideal model of metropolitan government: in 1812 a report of a Commons committee argued that the City, 'from the nature of its magistracy, the description of its various public officers, the *division and sub-division* of its local limits, affords an example of that unity and of that dependence of parts on each other, without which no well-constructed and efficient system of police can ever be expected'.[115] To the degree to which the division and subdivision of the LCS replicated the wards and precincts of the City, it could appear at once as a solution to the metropolitan problem and as a ready-made alternative to the disorganized and oligarchic government of the rest of the metropolis.

In the trial of Hardy, the Solicitor-General developed the notion that the LCS was a corporate body not merely in so far as its members were collectively responsible for its actions, but in the sense that it represented a government in waiting, a provisional government of London. And when, he told the jury,

> a society is established, and that society puts itself under particular regulations, that society, to a certain extent, though not bound in the same manner as a Corporation created by the lawful Government, is in effect a Corporation; ... but such Corporations as these, cannot exist in any Government, with safety to that Government.[116]

The LCS was an '*imperium in imperio*', 'a litte state within a state;'[117] and the loyalist habit of seeing the organization of the national reform movement in terms of the polype-like structure of the LCS made that whole movement appear to be so many alternative local corporations composing, collectively, an entire national government in waiting, in the form, as Mitford put it, of 'a union of distinct Corporations'. A large part of the alarm created by the LCS was that it could appear at once as a replica of the monstrous character of London, and as a democratic criticism of, and challenge to it.

[115] S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government*, iii. 579; my emphasis.
[116] *ST* xxiv. 1245–6, and see 1291.
[117] *ST* xxiv. 1175, 1246.

VI

The reform movement of the 1790s was an effect, among other things, of the rapid growth of print culture in London especially, where the volume of publication was huge compared with anywhere else in the English-speaking world; among the other effects of that growth was the emergence of monthly periodicals or 'reviews', which sifted the vast pile of books and pamphlets published every month, and summarized and judged them (or some of them) for the convenience of their subscribers. The circulation figures of the most successful of these reviews, the *Monthly*, the *Critical*, the *Analytical*, and the *British Critic*, were impressive—between 1,500 and 5,000; they sold well to circulating libraries outside the capital and were widely influential.[118] All this activity led to increasing possibilities of all kinds: for publishers to make fortunes and occasionally to lose them, for new small publishers to emerge and often fail, for professionals such as clerics and physicians to supplement their incomes by writing, and for some writers to risk living entirely on the fees they received from publishers. The divisions between the various groups of writers feeding and trying to feed off the publishing industry were as marked as any other in the divided London of the 1790s. Leaving aside the output of the plebeian booksellers, the most salient division for most of the decade was probably that between the group of writers contributing to the *British Critic*, and those more or less closely affiliated to the overlapping 'circles' surrounding Godwin and Joseph Johnson, the publisher of the *Analytical Review*. In this last section I want, briefly, to sketch a third version of the political geography of London, based not on the divisions of place and space but on how these different groups of intellectuals, Tory and liberal, inhabited the city. It will return us to some of the issues raised by Godwin's account of how to walk from Temple Bar to Hyde Park Corner.

The *British Critic* was conceived under the auspices of the Society for the Reformation of Principles by Appropriate Literature, founded by the arch-Tory Suffolk clergyman William Jones of Nayland. Its mission was to expose the supposed international conspiracy which had brought about the French Revolution, and to counteract the '*monopoly of the press*' by those Whig, or radical, or dissenting writers and booksellers who had been responsible for circulating Paine's *Rights of Man* and whose 'jacobin' principles found expression every month in the *Analytical Review*, and, to a lesser extent, in the *Critical Review*.[119] It was first published in 1793, probably with a small secret float from the Treasury,[120] and was co-owned by Rivingtons, the Tory booksellers, and by two youngish Tory clergymen of the Church of England who co-edited its early numbers. One of these was

[118] See Derek Roper, *Reviewing before the Edinburgh* (London: Methuen, 1978), 24–5.

[119] See Roper, *Reviewing*, 23; Emily Lorraine de Montluzin, *The Anti-Jacobins, 1798–1800: The Early Contributors to the Anti-Jacobin Review* (New York: St Martin's, 1988), 1–2, 21, 111.

[120] See Roper, *Reviewing*, 265 n. 50.

the philologist Robert Nares, the Oxford-educated and well-connected son of the composer and organist to the king, the nephew of an anti-Wilkesite MP who later became a judge, and a close friend of T. J. Mathias, whose attack on Godwin's theory of pedestrianism we glanced at in the opening pages of this chapter. The other was the classical scholar and miscellaneous writer William Beloe, the son of a Norwich tradesman, educated (unhappily) under the Whig Samuel Parr at Stanmore and later at Cambridge. Many of the contributors were in holy orders, and many, like Beloe, of relatively unprivileged birth, though mostly Oxbridge educated. John Brand, the economist, was the son of a tanner, also from Norwich; the astronomer John Hellins was the son of a Devonshire labourer, and had been apprenticed to a cooper before being taken on as an assistant at the Royal Observatory Greenwich and entering the Church. John Whitaker, an antiquarian, was the son of a Manchester innkeeper; the father of William Vincent, educationalist, was a packer and Portugal merchant; the poet and orientalist Thomas Maurice, a probable contributor[121] and certainly part of the social circle around the review, was the son of a headmaster in Hertford.

It was by no means unusual in the eighteenth century for men of fairly humble origins to become clergymen of the established Church, or for clergymen to supplement their incomes by writing or even to work entirely as professional writers. What is striking, however, about this group is how many of them, by virtue of their strict orthodoxy and of their work for the *British Critic* and the connections it enabled them to form, were very well rewarded by the Church itself and by patrons who had the right of presentation to ecclesiastical livings. Preferments in the Church were showered on Nares and Vincent especially, pluralists whose numerous ecclesiastical sources of income it would take a long paragraph to list. Beloe, who had given up schoolteaching to become a writer in London, was made rector of Allhallows, London Wall, in 1796, a living which at his death in 1817 passed, inevitably, to Nares; he became a prebendary of Lincoln and of St Paul's, where, inevitably, Nares was already installed. Brand was rewarded with the rectory of St George's Southwark; Maurice with a number of livings all of which he kept until he died. Maurice, Beloe, and Nares were all found valuable employment at the British Museum, Nares eventually as keeper of manuscripts, Beloe as keeper of printed books until his inability to prevent their being stolen in large numbers led to his resignation. Only Whitaker of those I have mentioned seemed have made nothing out of his connection with the review. From 1777 until his death he lived on the income from his Cornish rectory and his other writings, and asked no fee for his contributions, wishing, as he put it, 'merely to support it as an orthodox and constitutional journal of literature'.[122]

The group formed around the *British Critic* was far from a closed one. Along with its connections to the established Church, it had, through Nares, who was chaplain to the Duke of York, and William Vincent, chaplain-in-ordinary and

[121] Ibid. 23 and 265 n. 60. [122] Ibid. 25.

sub-almoner to the king, connections with the court; through Brand with the government economists at the Board of Trade; through Hellins with the Royal Society; through Nares again (he was assistant preacher at Lincoln's Inn) with the legal profession. These Tory intellectuals were enmeshed in, supported, and sustained by some of the most powerful and influential institutions in Britain. By contrast, the 'circles' of Godwin and Johnson were both composed largely of dissenters of one kind or another (Godwin himself, Mary Hays, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, and her brother John Aikin), many of them unitarians or with strong unitarian connections (Johnson himself, William Frend, Thomas Christie, Gilbert Wakefield, Amelia Alderson), some of them members of fringe sects (Blake, William Sharp). They included liberal catholics (Elizabeth Inchbald, Alexander Geddes, James Barry), and they welcomed women writers (Hays, Alderson, Barbauld, Wollstonecraft, Inchbald, Eliza Fenwick), though some on more nearly equal terms than others.

Such connections as they had with professional faculties and institutions were often short-lived or precarious. Among them are an academic banished from his university (Frend); physicians who have given up medicine (Aikin, John Wolcot); dissenting, catholic, and Church of England clergy who have abandoned the ministry (Godwin, Geddes, Gilbert Wakefield, John Horne Tooke, Wolcot again). Though the painters among them (Barry, Henry Fuseli, John Opie) were all Royal Academicians, in 1799 Barry would be expelled from the Academy, partly on account of his declared admiration for Wollstonecraft, partly no doubt, following the Irish rebellion of 1798, because of his suspected sympathy for the United Irishmen. Through Inchbald and Holcroft in particular, the Godwin circle had connections with the theatre, but it took years for Holcroft to re-establish himself as a dramatist following his arrest and acquittal on a charge of high treason in 1794. Otherwise they were excluded from the formal and informal institutions of the state and the polite national culture, by virtue of their political beliefs, their gender, and the 'disabilities' (the legal abridgement of civil rights) imposed on catholics and dissenters. Many adhered instead to institutions—dissenting chapels and academies—which emphasized their exclusion. We have come to regard the Godwin and Johnson circles as constituting a radical critical public sphere; but loyalists would have seen them as precisely the kind of unpropertied, disaffiliated, extra-institutional intellectuals whom Burke held in large part responsible for initiating the revolution in France.[123]

Though some members of the Johnson and Godwin circles, Inchbald, for example, and Wolcot, and to a lesser degree Holcroft, were able to remain on good terms in the 1790s with a wide and politically diverse group of friends, others—partly by choice, partly by necessity—seem to have associated almost

[123] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *Works*, v. 207 ff; see also Burke's attack on men of 'talents' in *Three Letters addressed to a Member of the present Parliament, on the proposals for peace with the regicide Directory of France*, in *Works*, viii. 170.

exclusively with other members of those circles; when the *British Critic* reviewed Hays's *Emma Courtney* (1796), it advised her to widen her acquaintance.[124] It is difficult to imagine Godwin and Wollstonecraft in particular forming friendships of the kind that develop simply as a result of living in a particular neighbourhood; one is reminded by them of what Wordsworth had been expecting to find in London prior to his first visit there in 1791:

> Above all, one thought
> Baffled my understanding, how men lived
> Even next-door neighbours, as we say, yet still
> Strangers, and knowing not each other's names.[125]

Godwin, in the last two decades of the century during which he was almost continuously in London, lived at fourteen different addresses—in the City, off Long Acre, in the Strand, in Covent Garden, in Soho, off Oxford Street, in fashionable and less fashionable parts of Marylebone, and in Somers Town. In 1807 he moved back to the City. In the last ten years of her life, of which she spent about seven in London, Mary Wollstonecraft had eight different addresses there, in Southwark, in Bloomsbury, off Oxford Street, in Finsbury Square and Finsbury Place just north of the City, in Pentonville, and in Somers Town. These moves are not simply signs of a metropolitan restlessness. Both writers sometimes leave London and, on their return, take new lodgings. Godwin's few months' sojourn in the West End were made possible by sudden literary success, and his subsequent eastward retreat enforced by his inability to sustain it. Wollstonecraft's move from Southwark to Store Street was also partly the result of relative success; her stay in Finsbury Square was immediately after her attempted suicide, when the Christies offered her shelter; her later moves may have been motivated by the desire to be nearer Godwin, but may possibly have been prompted also by a predictable hostility in her lodging-keepers to a woman of advanced views, with a baby, claiming to be married but with no visible husband. But the effect of this constant mobility may have been that, though they lived *in* London they were not *of* it, except in so far as London meant to them the circles, with their very specific character, in which they socialized.

It is to the members of the Johnson and Godwin circles, and to others like Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith who briefly adhered to them or shared many of their political attitudes, that we owe most of the sense we derive from contemporary literature of what London was like in the 1790s. The experiences that constitute Caleb's brief stay in the capital—the constant moving, the sense of exclusion, the attempt to survive by writing in an expanding but overstocked literary market, being vilified in print, being watched by an authority removed and difficult to confront—these experiences were Godwin's also, but many of them characterize the London that appears in the poems of Blake and

[124] *British Critic*, 9 (Mar. 1797), 315.

[125] *The Prelude* (1805 version), vii. 117–20.

Wordsworth and in the novels of Wollstonecraft, Hays, Inchbald, Holcroft, and Smith. Above all, however, is the sense of exclusion, the sense of being not a participant in the busy life of the city unless as victim, or of observing its corruption at a distance, baffled and angry, or of inhabiting a city of ideas superimposed upon and occluding the city of brick and stone and its strange inhabitants. Some like Wordsworth may represent themselves or their characters as submerged and struggling in the sheer superabundant detail on the city; other writers or their characters may seem, like Godwin's man of talent, to pass from place to place entirely oblivious to the people and objects that surround them. Either way, London in the 1790s seems to produce, and be produced by, a new kind of metropolitan intellectual, marginalized by its economic and political divisions, alienated from its commercial values, wandering its chartered streets with an appalled sense of estrangement. Had the settled and successful authors of the *British Critic* written fiction, or poems of more interest than those of Thomas Maurice, or had Mathias offered us his own version of the route from Temple Bar to Hyde Park Corner, London in the 1790s might look to us a very different place.

2

Coffee-House Politicians

I

John Frost, a London attorney and Solicitor to the Lottery in the Stamp Office, had been a founder member of the Society for Constitutional Information and one of the most active campaigners for parliamentary reform in the early 1780s. When the reform campaign reawoke in 1792, he was active again—accompanying Tom Paine in his dramatic escape to France in September, and at the end of November presenting, with Joel Barlow, the SCI's address to the National Convention of the newly declared French republic.[1] Between those two events, however, he had returned to London and committed an indiscretion which would result, the following year, in his trial and imprisonment. On 6 November 1792, Frost attended the annual dinner of an agricultural society in a room above the Percy Coffee House, at the corner of Rathbone Place and Percy Street, just north of Oxford Street. At the end of a bibulous evening he went downstairs, intending to walk through the public coffee room to reach the street.

Before he could leave the Percy, however, he was engaged in conversation by an old acquaintance, Matthew Yateman. Yateman was a Percy Street apothecary, successful enough to be listed as a gentleman in London directories,[2] and a man with a developed sense of public duty. In 1790 he and his son had been among the fifteen members of a vigilante patrol formed at the Percy to protect St Pancras

[1] *A Collection of Addresses transmitted by certain English Clubs and Societies to the National Convention of France*, 2nd edn. (London: J. Debrett, 1793), 23–32. For a very thoughtful account of how Frost placed himself within the socially highly stratified reform movement of the early and mid-1790s, see James Epstein, ' "Equality and No King": Sociability and Sedition: The Case of John Frost', in Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (eds.), *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain 1770–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 43–61, esp. 49–50. Epstein and I were working on the Frost case independently of each other and had each completed our own essays before we first saw the other's: the points of similarity between the two therefore, though here and there quite striking, are coincidental. Epstein's excellent essay is mainly concerned to use Frost's case to map the various social spaces in which radicalism was lived and performed in the 1790s. Though the argument of my piece, as will appear, is rather different, there is much in Epstein's which adds to it, and which I wish I had thought of. See also Epstein, 'Spatial Practices/Democratic Vistas', *Social History*, 24: 3 (Oct. 1999), 294–310.

[2] *Directory to the Nobility, Gentry, and Families of Distinction, in London, Westminster*, &c. (London: J. Wilkes *et al.*, [1793?]), 32; *The New Patent London Directory* (London: J. Wilkes *et al.*, [1793?]), 51.

parish from the 'London Monster', who was insulting and assaulting women in the streets from 1788 to 1790.[3] He and Frost had been fellow Street Commissioners for Percy Street, where Frost had lived before moving to the much more fashionable Spring Gardens. There are, unsurprisingly, some differences between the accounts of what happened when Yateman addressed Frost in the aisle of the coffee room. According to Yateman's version, he asked Frost 'Well, how do they go on in France?', to which Frost rather oddly replied 'I am for equality and no king'. 'What!' returned Yateman, 'no king in this country?'. 'No king!' repeated Frost, shouting, so Yateman claimed, 'as loud as he could holla'. According to Frost's defence, Yateman addressed him with a question evidently designed to provoke him, if not to entrap him: 'Well Mr. Equality, when did you arrive?—I suppose you are for equality, and no kings?'[4] Frost's version has the merit of making more sense of the exchange, but he did not deny making an open declaration of his desire for a republic in Britain.

Public coffee houses contained, as well as a number of bookable private rooms, a public coffee room; and most public coffee rooms—these details will turn out to be important—contained a common table for those seeking the company of friends or strangers, and one or more rows of 'boxes' arranged along the wall. These boxes, which were a feature also of many taverns and pleasure-gardens, might be like box-pews in church, divided by low wooden walls and entered through a gate-like door, or like booths made of rows of tables between facing low-backed benches or high-backed settles, as in Rowlandson's *Slap-bang Shop* (Pl. 2.1); or they might consist simply of a range of tables and chairs divided by curtains.[5] Frost's words, spoken as he stood in the centre aisle of the Percy, were overheard by a number of men sitting in the boxes near where he stood. One of them, Colonel John Bullock, claimed to have written down Frost's words as he spoke them, with the aim of having this memorandum signed by other witnesses, though in the excitement of the occasion he apparently forgot to collect the signatures. Among the speeches he attributed to Frost was one to the effect that 'he wished to see equality prevail in this country', which no one else had heard or remembered. When another witness, Paul Savignac, probably the son of a hosier,[6]

[3] See Ian Bondeson, *The London Monster* (London: Free Association Books, 2000), 46, 48.

[4] *ST* xxii. 486, 500.

[5] The layout of coffee houses is well illustrated in various caricatures in the BM collection. For the open table, see for example *A Meeting of City Politicians* (BM 5613) and *Apothecaries, Taylors &c. conquering France and Spain* (BM 5614); for boxes like box-pews, see *Full and Half-Pay Officers* (BM 7082); for boxes made of facing settles as in *Slap-bang Shop*, see *The Coffee-House Patriots* (BM 5923). Boxes divided by curtains are illustrated in Rowlandson's *Rainbow Tavern Fleet Street in 1800* (no publication details, Lewis Walpole Collection, Farmington, CT, call no. 800.0.29) and in his *The Coffee House*, illustrated in John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 37.

[6] There cannot have been many Savignacs in London. Paul was probably related to the hosier Charles Savignac who kept a shop at 147 Strand; see *The General London Guide* (London: ?. Boyle, n.d.), 51.

Pl. 2.1. Thomas Rowlandson, *Slap-bang Shop* (London: no printseller credited, 1815). Diners seated in boxes at this early nineteenth-century fast-food outlet; in the rear, behind the waitress, is a public table.

overheard Frost say 'No king; there ought to be no king', he stepped out from his box and asked him, 'How dare you hold a doctrine of that kind in a public coffee-room?' Frost repeated yet again that he was for equality and no king. 'If you were not under the protection of the very king you are reviling,' said Savignac, 'I would kick you out of the coffee-room.' 'Do you doubt my courage?', asked Frost, daring him to try. Savignac did not: without courage, he said, Frost would not have spoken as he did, for it was a dangerous thing to use such radical expressions in a 'public coffee-house'.[7]

Now other customers began to intervene. John Taitt, an Oxford Street upholsterer, had been sitting two or three boxes from where Frost was talking to

[7] *ST* xxii. 487, 485.

Yateman. He had not attended to the whole conversation, but the account he gave of it was more plausible than anyone else's. Yateman, he said, had asked Frost how long he had been back from France; Frost replied that he was just returned. How were they doing there? asked Yateman; very well, said Frost, adding that he would be making the crossing again shortly. Taitt's attention now drifted, until he heard Frost suddenly speaking more loudly: 'I am for equality.' At this Taitt left his box. 'Who are you, Sir?' he demanded. 'This is Mr. Frost,' said Yateman. 'How dare you utter such words?' asked Taitt. 'I am for equality and no kings,' replied Frost. 'You should be turned out of the coffee-room,' said Taitt. Frost walked up the room, and turned his back to the fire like a cornered animal— 'baited on all sides like a bull'. Taitt had the impression that Frost was sorry for what he had said, and wished to retract, but he did not do so, and soon 'quitted the room ... after a general hiss from all the company'.[8]

One or more of those outraged by Frost's language made a formal complaint about it in the next day or so, but no move was made to arrest him. On 15 November he attended a meeting of the 3rd division of the London Corresponding Society at the Green Dragon near Golden Square, and gave what the spy Captain Munro called 'a long inflammatory speech' to over 200 people.[9] By 22 November he was in Paris again, in time to sign the famous Address of the British Club, presented to the National Convention on the same day as the address of the SCI. He was followed to Paris by Munro, who continued to report Frost's activities to London, and described him as one of 'the party of conspirators' that included Paine, Robert Merry, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Dr William Maxwell, John Oswald, and John Hurford Stone. In January Frost tarnished his revolutionary credentials a little by successfully leading the opposition in the club to a motion by Paine and Merry for a second address to the Convention, recommending the invasion and liberation of Britain.[10]

When Frost left England he was unaware that he would be required to answer for his behaviour at the Percy. No indictment was brought before the Grand Jury until early December, when he was known to be in France; but when he failed to appear to this indictment, a warrant was issued for his arrest, and he was proclaimed an outlaw, with a price of £100 on his head.[11] By 19 December Frost had heard of this proclamation, and wrote an angry letter to the Prime Minister William Pitt, copying it to the *Morning Chronicle*, which published it on 1 January 1793. He denied that he had gone to Paris to escape prosecution, and promised that he would soon return and would stand his trial with a bundle of letters in his hand, written to him by Pitt in the early 1780s when the two men had

[8] *ST* xxii. 482–4.

[9] May Thale (ed.), *Selections from The Paper of the London Corresponding Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 27.

[10] David V. Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières: John Oswald and the British in Paris, 1790–1793* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 242–3.

[11] *MC* 1 Jan. 1793.

been fellow labourers in the cause, as Pitt had described it to Frost, of '*the independence of Parliament, and the Liberty of the People*'.[12] It seems probable that Pitt did not want the public to be reminded of how close he and Frost had once been, and wanted therefore to dissuade Frost from returning. The ministerial newspapers began suggesting that he had left London to escape his creditors, and on 8 January the official government publication the *London Gazette* declared Frost a bankrupt. In fact, as his wife Eliza insisted in a long letter published in the *Morning Chronicle* the next day, and as Frost himself demonstrated when on 9 February he appeared again in London, he was solvent and perfectly able to satisfy his creditors. A few days later he voluntarily surrendered and was granted bail;[13] but by early March no progress had been made in the case and Charles James Fox, Richard Sheridan, and their allies in the Commons were suggesting that the government still wanted the matter forgotten.[14] Eventually, at the end of May, Frost was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to six months imprisonment and an hour in the pillory. After the trial a club began meeting at the Percy which, according to the *Morning Post*, called itself, 'in defiance of decency, "*The Society of Informers*" '.[15] Its members presumably included veterans of the victorious engagement between the Percy and the French republic the previous year. They must have felt cheated when, after six months in Newgate, Frost was patently too ill with jail-fever to be pilloried, and that part of his sentence was remitted.[16] In the event, the illness passed: Frost died in 1842, at the age of 92.

What intrigues me most about this incident, and the other that I shall recount later, is its relation to what we have been told about coffee houses by Jurgen Habermas and Richard Sennett. For both of them (this is all familiar stuff, so I will be brief), the coffee house was the place of a new form of sociability characterized by a new form of freedom of speech. In late Stuart London, the freedom with which politics was discussed in coffee houses, and by men with, as it were, no title to discuss public affairs, led to coffee houses being seen by the government as the breeding-grounds of sedition and treason. But sometime in the first decade of the eighteenth century, we are told, they became places where men could freely exchange their views, first on literary topics, later in the century on politics, supposedly without giving or taking offence. This was, however, a regulated freedom, at once the product of the new social space and constitutive of its development, and it involved a new relation of the concepts of public and private.

[12] The letter is quoted also in *ST* xxii. 494 n., and see 492 n.–493 n.

[13] See *MP* 14 Feb. 1793.

[14] Lucyle Werkmeister, *A Newspaper History of England, 1792–3* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 236.

[15] *MP* 30 July 1793, which refers simply to a 'Coffee-house in Mary-le-bone', but I am aware of no other coffee house in the parish that might have housed such a society—presuming the society existed at all.

[16] See *MP*, *Oracle*, etc., 19 Dec. 1793. The story of Frost's indiscretion, trial, and punishment may be followed in Lucyle Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press 1772–1792* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), 365, 372–4, and her *Newspaper History of England*, 135, 142–3, etc.

Coffee houses were public places, in the sense that 'anyone'—any man, at least, above a certain station in life—could enter them. But precisely because they were public, in this new sense of generally accessible, they were also places, as Habermas and Sennett point out, regulated by a particular notion of the private. The customers met as 'private men': they 'left their Quality and Degrees of Distance at Home',[17] and between them, within the walls of the house, social distinctions were supposedly suspended. As Habermas puts it, coffee houses 'preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether'; had they not, conversation, argument, would have been continually inhibited by the authority of rank, wealth, or office and by the deference they commanded. According to Sennett, the 'cardinal rule' of coffee-house conversation was that, 'in order for information to be as full as possible, distinctions of rank were temporarily suspended; anyone sitting in the coffeehouse had a right to talk to anyone else, to enter into any conversation, whether he knew the other people or not, whether he was bidden to speak or not'. And Habermas again: 'the parity on whose basis alone the authority of the better argument could assert itself against that of social hierarchy and in the end carry the day meant, in the thought of the day, the parity of "common humanity" '. This parity could only be assumed on condition that the participants in coffee-house conversation agreed that the space of conversation was a private space, even though, once out of the coffee room and on the street, wealth and rank would reassume their usual authority, and the bowing and scraping would start again. It is for this reason that though for Habermas the public sphere, first of literature, then politics, develops primarily within the space of the public coffee house, it is, as he puts it, 'included in the private realm ... for it was a public sphere constituted by private people'—by men who (even if they held public office, or performed in some other sense on the public stage) were 'private men' in coffee-house conversation.[18]

'The coffeehouse is a romanticized and overidealized institution', Sennett tells us, though his account does little to bring it down to earth. The idea of a public of private men was not 'actually realized in earnest in the coffee-houses', Habermas acknowledges, though rather in the tone of an afterthought; 'but as an idea it had become institutionalized and thereby stated as an objective claim.'[19] By the second quarter of the century 'coffee-house politicians' as they came to be called had become objects of satire—as men unnaturally preoccupied with public affairs at the expense of the private and domestic, as too concerned with the figure they cut in coffee-house conversation; most often as men in too low a sphere of life to

[17] John Macky, *A Journey through England. In Familiar Letters from a Gentleman here, to his Friend abroad*, 2nd edn., 2 vols. (London: J. Hooke, 1722); quoted in Antony Clayton, *London's Coffee Houses: A Stimulating Story* (London: Historical Publications, 2003).

[18] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (n.p.: Polity Press, 1989), 36, 30; Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 81.

[19] Sennett, *Fall of Public Man*, 81; Habermas, *Structured Transformation*, 36.

take a legitimate interest in politics. By the third quarter of the century, and as it were as the logical fulfilment of such satire, the coffee house declined, so the story goes, both in numbers and importance, in favour of more socially exclusive arenas for more polite conversation, the *salon* and the private club, the latter often meeting by appointment in the private rooms of taverns and coffee houses.

'Provided a man has a clean shirt and three-pence in his pocket, he may talk as loud in the coffee-house as the "squire of ten thousands pounds a-year" ', wrote the celebrated late eighteenth-century antiquary Francis Grose. Well, perhaps; but this kind of patriotic egalitarian ideology seldom meant quite what it said, and anyone who has been brought up within the English class-system, even as it is 250 or 300 years after the heyday of the coffee house, is likely to have doubts about how far distinctions of rank could possibly have been suspended in public coffee rooms. In his novel, *Chrysal: or, the Adventures of a Guinea*, Charles Johnstone sketched a scene of coffee-house conversation which suggests how quickly a conversation, once developed into an argument, might come to turn on which speaker had the better claim to be regarded as a gentleman.[20] I am doubtful, too, about the supposed demise of the coffee house in the second half of the century. There were, famously, thousands of coffee houses in London around 1700, but the vast majority of these must have been little local caffs, often in basement rooms, open only for a few hours a day, and patronized by tradesmen on their way to work, who no more expected to be drawn into a discussion of Shakespeare's neglect of the unities than to be offered a latte when they ordered a milky coffee. No more than a handful of early eighteenth-century coffee houses can have come close to Habermas's or Sennett's ideal.[21] And though there were far fewer coffee houses in 1750 than in 1700, for example, the establishments of the mid-century were often far larger, more profitable establishments that their predecessors.

There was no question, of course, but that élite groups progressively established themselves into private clubs which controlled access with deliberate care. But that did not necessarily mean that members of those élites (like Boswell, for example) did not also make frequent use of the public facilities of coffee houses (as Boswell did). And the houses must have been sustained too by the developing interest in politics among tradesmen and artisans. When Burke, writing of post-revolutionary France, sneers at 'the leaders of the legislative clubs and coffee-houses ... intoxicated with admiration of their own wisdom and ability', he no doubt has in mind a kind of politician to be found in London as well as in Paris. Writing from Paris just prior to his trial for publishing the second part of *Rights of Man*, and five days after Frost's indiscretion at the Percy, Paine tells Sir

[20] Francis Grose, *The Olio* (London: M. Hooper, 1793), 207; Johnstone, *Chrysal: or, the Adventures of a Guinea*, 5th edn., 2 vols. (London, 1766), i. 111–16.

[21] This ideal is most effectively challenged by Markman Ellis, *The Coffee House: A Cultural History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004), which appeared too late to be discussed here.

Archibald Macdonald the Attorney General, 'I have gone into coffee-houses, and places where I was unknown, on purpose to learn the currency of opinion, and I never yet saw any company of twelve men that condemned the book; but I have often found a greater number than twelve approving it, and I think this is *a fair way of collecting the natural currency of opinion*.' In 1792 in England, Paine is saying, political conversation happens pre-eminently in coffee houses, wherever else it may also happen. Even after the events described in this paper and during the persecution of radicals in the mid-1790s, we find the 'institutionalized' idea of coffee-house conversation, as Habermas put it, still surviving. When in 1796 the radical Thomas Spence published *The Reign of Felicity*, a discussion between a clergyman, a courtier, an 'esquire', and a radical farmer, he gave it the subtitle 'a coffee-house dialogue'. As we shall see, it was by then almost impossible to imagine such a dialogue taking place anywhere, but Spence's subtitle suggests that if it could still be imagined, it would have to be set in a coffee house.[22]

So what might all this tell us about the unpleasantness in the Percy Coffee House? And what might that unpleasantness tells us about coffee houses in the early 1790s? What happened at the Percy was of course an effect of the widespread alarm that the newly declared republic in France was attracting a dangerous degree of support in Britain. Suddenly, to those participating in that alarm, the duty to divulge what was spoken in coffee houses must have seemed greater than the duty to respect the private terms of conversation. But that sudden change would not itself have been possible had it not been prepared for by much more gradual

[22] Edmund Burke, *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, New edn., 14 vols. (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1815–22), 245–6; *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, Philip S. Foner, 2 vols. (New York: Citadel Press, 1945), ii. 513; [Thomas Spence], *The Reign of Felicity, being a Plan for Civilizing the Indians of North America . . . in a Coffee-house Dialogue* (London: T. Spence, 1796). There has been much excellent recent work on the coffee house, often focused on questions of gender, though mostly concerned with the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries: see Emma Clery, 'Women, Publicity, and the Coffee-House Myth', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 2: 2 (1991), 168–77; Stephen Pincus, ' "Coffee Politicians Does Create", Coffee Houses and Restoration Political Culture', *Journal of Modern History*, 67 (Dec. 1995), 807–34; Lawrence Klein, 'Coffeehouse Civility, 1660–1714: An Aspect of Post-Courtly Culture in England', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 59: 1 (1997), 30–51; Helen Berry, ' "Nice and Curious Questions": Coffee Houses and the Representation of Women in John Dunton's *Athenian Mercury*', *The Seventeenth Century*, 12: 2 (Autumn 1997), 257–76; Berry, ' "All Englands Rarityes are gathered here": The World of the *Athenian Mercury* (1691–97)', *Biblion: The Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 8: 2 (Spring 2000), 23–44; Berry, 'Rethinking Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Moll King's Coffee House and the Significance of "Flash Talk" ', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 11 (2001), 65–8; Brian Cowan, 'What Was Masculine about the Public Sphere? Gender and the Coffeehouse Milieu in Post-Restoration England', *History Workshop Journal*, 51 (Spring 2001), 127–57; and Markman Ellis, 'Coffee-women, "The Spectator" and the Public Sphere in the Early Eighteenth Century', in Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona o Gallachoir, and Penny Warburton, *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 27–52, and Ellis's *The Coffee House: A Cultural History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004). Much of this work is summarized and developed in Antony Clayton's excellent book, see above n. 17. There are useful glances at the later history of coffee houses in Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 33–40, and Paul Langford, 'British Politeness and the Progress of Western Manners: An Eighteenth-Century Enigma', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 7 (1997), 53–72.

changes; by the fact that the delicate negotiation between public and private on which coffee-house conversation was based had become increasingly precarious throughout the eighteenth century as the meaning of the terms 'public' and 'private', and the relations between them, changed. Those changes had been so slow as to have been often unnoticed; hence the shock when they were suddenly illuminated at the Percy on the evening of 6 November 1792, and in the London Coffee House (as we shall see) a few months later.

Frost had engaged the great liberal advocate Thomas Erskine, the youngest brother of the Earl of Buchan, to defend him, and by doing so ensured that he would have the benefit of Erskine's trademark defence. The indictment stated that Frost had spoken 'maliciously, turbulently, and seditiously', with intent to 'disquiet, molest and disturb' the peace, and 'to bring the king into great hatred and contempt'.[23] Erskine argued, as he always did on such occasions, that before it could find Frost guilty the jury would have to be convinced that he had acted deliberately, with exactly the intentions attributed to him, and that he had not spoken (as he obviously had) inadvisedly, off his guard, on the spur of the moment, when '*to say the least*, [he] had drunk very freely'.[24] But Erskine advanced another argument, too: that words spoken in a public coffee house were words spoken in a private space; that they were, so to speak, privileged; that they should not have been heard by those to whom they were not addressed; that, if inadvertently overheard, they should not have been reported. Whatever else it was, the trial became a debate between Erskine and Sir John Scott, the new Attorney General, on exactly what kind of a space a coffee house was.

In their cross-examinations of witnesses, the defence team were keen to establish who spoke first, Yateman or Frost. In part, they were attempting to show that Yateman had deliberately provoked Frost into making his unguarded remarks. They were also concerned, however, to show how the decencies of coffee-house conversation had been violated. They had been violated, first of all, by interruption. In 1780 the *London Magazine* had published a list of 'RULES OF BEHAVIOUR, OF GENERAL USE, THOUGH MUCH DISREGARDED IN THIS POPULOUS CITY'.[25] Rule 9 was, 'At eating-houses, &c. not to be officiously forward in our discourse or ceremonies to strangers who, perhaps, desire to be unobserved, or incog.' Customers in the public coffee room who were willing to engage in promiscuous conversation with men unknown to them signalled as much by sitting not in a box but at the main table. Frost, however, had merely been passing through the coffee room from the stairs to the street. Yateman was acquainted with Frost and so perhaps had the right to 'interrupt' him, as Erskine put it, 'as he passed in silence towards the street'; but Savignac and Taitt, the defence insisted, had 'interfered', in an 'insulting manner', in a conversation which, however loud it had become, they should not have permitted themselves even to *hear*.[26]

[23] *ST* xxii. 471–3.
[24] Ibid. 499.
[25] *London Magazine, or Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer*, 49 (1780), 197.
[26] *ST* xxii. 484, 499.

Second, the decencies of the coffee house had been violated by the reporting of Frost's words to the authorities. 'It is easy,' Erskine insisted, 'to distinguish where the public duty calls for the violation of the private one; criminal intention, but not undecent levities—not even grave opinions unconnected with conduct—are to be exposed to the magistrate.' No society can survive, Erskine insisted, unless it acknowledges the necessity of a private sphere, an area where 'the most common and private intercourses of life' can be subject to a minimum of restraint, and freedom of speech is protected. Without such a sphere, the members of a society can enjoy no security or tranquillity; and the 'security of free governments, and the unsuspecting confidence of every man who lives under them, are not only compatible but inseparable'.[27] Remembering, perhaps, Seneca's description of the reign of Tiberius, a time when 'the conversation of drunkards, and the frank words of men speaking in jest' were made the basis of criminal charges,[28] Erskine asked the jury:

> Does any man put such constraint upon himself in the most private moment of his life, that he would be contented to have his loosest and lightest words recorded, and set in array against him in a court of justice? ... There are moments when jarring opinions may be given without inconsistency, when truth herself may be sported with without the breach of veracity, and where well-imagined nonsense is not only superior to, but is the very index to wit and wisdom. ... Many things are indeed wrong and reprehensible, that neither do nor can become the objects of criminal justice, because the happiness and security of social life, which are the very end and object of all law and justice, forbid the communication of them; because the spirit of a gentleman, which is the most refined morality, either shuts men's ears against what should not be heard, or closes their lips with the sacred seal of honour.[29]

'The spirit of a gentleman'—it was that, not the law, which protected the private sphere. Erskine is not addressing the jury on behalf of some pettifogging attorney: the Winchester-educated Frost is always styled 'Esquire' in official documents; the indictment itself describes him not as 'John Frost, attorney-at-law' but as 'John Frost ... gentleman'. This prosecution has arisen, Erskine is suggesting, because a group of low 'coffee-house politicians', as he describes them—a hosier's son, an upholsterer, even an apothecary passing for a gentleman—do not have 'the honour or the sense to make the due distinctions'—do not understand the codes, of coffee-house etiquette in particular, of polite life in general. When such riffraff 'dog men into taverns and coffee-houses' to make 'evesdropping attacks upon loose conversations', the government cannot approve their conduct, but neither can it ignore the information they offer. It is then 'the office of juries,' says Erskine, 'as it is yours to-day, to draw the true line'.[30] He was addressing a 'special jury' made up entirely of freeholders, all of them too styled 'Esquire' at

[27] Ibid. 501–2.

[28] Seneca, *De Beneficiis*, in *Seneca: Moral Essays*, trans. John W. Basore, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, and London: William Heinemann, 1958), iii, book III, sec. 26.

[29] *ST* xxii. 501–2.

[30] Ibid. 506, 502–3.

least for the duration of the trial; temporary gentlemen, no doubt, and some of them no doubt professional jurymen, happy to collect the fee of a guinea for each trial to which they were summoned. The government chose to use special juries in political trials in order to minimize the possibility of acquittals, but there was no advantage to Erskine in behaving as if they were anything other than the independent gentlemen they purported to be, capable (or so he pretends) of responding on this occasion to the gentleman's calling.

Scott had probably anticipated that Erskine would mount some such defence. The indictment paraphrased the terms in which Savignac had challenged Frost in the Percy like this: 'how he … dared to hold such language in any public *or private* company' (my emphasis); and both Scott and the judge, Lord Kenyon, quoted this as if Savignac had actually said it. In fact, however, when he came to give evidence, Savignac repeatedly insisted on the entirely public character of the space where Frost had spoken: it was a 'public coffee-room' in a 'public coffee-house'. And Scott himself was at pains to confirm the point.[31] The jury's task was not, as Erskine would describe it, to draw the line between public and private; it was to decide whether Frost was to be 'publicly permitted' to hold the views he did. In his reply to Erskine, Scott ridiculed the notion that Frost had spoken in a privileged private space. The prosecution, he declared, could not possibly be seen as 'a breach of the sweet confidences of private life': the incident happened in a 'public coffee-house'. 'Will any man tell me,' he asks, 'that if he goes into a public coffee-house, whether he comes into it from up-stairs, or whether he goes into it from the street, that he is entitled to the protection that belongs to the confidences of private life?'[32]

It is evident that Scott had no truck with the kind of distinction that Erskine was making. He was exclusively committed to a pragmatic map of social life which defined all spaces to which open access was permitted as 'public' and as wholly public, and which—as his adjective 'sweet' almost certainly implies—understood the 'private' as virtually interchangeable with the 'domestic'; or at least as a sphere of life much more intimate than coffee-house conversation. It may be that for Scott the necessary if not the sufficient condition for a space or an occasion to be 'private' was the presence of women, who, though they evidently *were* admitted (even polite women) to some coffee houses, at least during the day, are unlikely to have been invited to participate in what appears to have been the exclusively masculine practice, even homosocial rite, of coffee-house conversation.[33] But whether that was how Scott saw things or not, he willingly conceded (at least for the sake of this argument) that he could hardly imagine a case 'in which the public necessity and expediency of a prosecution should be so strong as to break in

[31] Ibid. 473, 476, 516–17, 485.

[32] Ibid. 481, 510, 511.

[33] That this was the situation also in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is suggested in Cowan, 'What Was Masculine about the Public Sphere?', the best recent discussion of the women-in-coffee-houses question, and see Clayton, *London's Coffee-Houses*, 98–9. According to the journalist John Taylor, the comic actress Mrs Lessingham used 'to assume man's attire and

upon the relations of private life', in the clear sense here of 'domestic'.[34] Private houses were private, public houses were public, and that, for Scott, was the whole story. And for Erskine—the Honourable Thomas Erskine, as he was styled—this must have been enough to mark Scott, the son of a Tyneside coal-barge-owner, as a man as ignorant of 'the spirit of a gentleman' as were Frost's accusers.

II

Eleven months after the unpleasantness in the Percy Coffee House, in the early evening of 30 September 1793, three men met for dinner at the King's Head Tavern in the Poultry. They were the Reverend William Pigott and his youngest brother Charles, a member of the 25th division of the London Corresponding Society, a gambler, political pamphleteer, perhaps a blackmailer, and Dr William Hodgson, a physician with a declining practice, a strong advocate of the political rights of women, and a member of the 2nd division of the LCS. After they had eaten, Hodgson and Charles Pigott went to the London Coffee House on Ludgate Hill, intending to read the newspapers over a few glasses of punch.[35]

In the 1770s the London Coffee House had become home to the pro-American Whig Club (the 'Honest Whigs') whose members included James Burgh, Benjamin Franklin, Andrew Kippis, Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, and probably Hodgson himself, who was closely associated with many of these republican Whigs through the equally pro-American Deistic Society and the Club of 13.[36] In the early 1790s, however, the coffee house was given a make-over, following which it became, according to one London directory, 'the most elegant and extensive of any that come under the denomination of a coffee-house, in the three kingdoms'. It was the regular meeting-place of polite freemasons, the Grand

frequent the coffee-houses' (this probably in the 1770s), which does not suggest that women found it easy to visit such places at least in the evening: Taylor, *Records of My Life* (London: Edward Bull, 1832), i. 5–6. See also Rev. James Miller, *The Coffee-House. A Dramatick Piece* (London: Harrison and Co., J.Wenman, 1781), 13, where Kitty, the daughter of a coffee-house keeper, says 'tis an unreasonable thing that women should not come to the coffee-house; I'm sure if they did, there would be more news stirring there in a week, than there is now in six months.'

[34] *ST* xxii. 510.

[35] William Hodgson, *The Commonwealth of Reason* (London: H. D. Symonds *et al.*, 1795), p. viii. For Hodgson see *DNB*; for Pigott see Nicholas Rogers, 'Pigott's Private Eye: Radicalism and Sexual Scandal in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association/Revue de la Société Historique Canadienne* (1993), 247–63; and more especially two essays by Jon Mee: 'Libertines and Radicals in the 1790s', and ' "A bold and free-spoken man": The Strange Case of Charles Pigott', in David Womersley (ed.), *Cultures of Whiggism* (forthcoming from Newark: University of Delaware Press, and London: Associated University Presses). The case and trial of William Hodgson are briefly but perceptively glanced at by James Epstein in ' "Equality and no King" ', 45–7, and in 'From Ritual Practice to Cultural Text', *Memoria y Civilizacion*, 3 (2000), 127–60.

[36] Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harward University Press, 1979), 54–5; Nicholas Hans, 'Franklin, Jefferson, and the English Radicals at the End of the Eighteenth Century', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 98: 6 (Dec. 1954), 406–26.

Master's Lodge, and the Knights Templars.[37] It boasted 'first rate cooks, the best of waiters, the smartest chambermaids, hair dressers, porters and shoe blacks'. It was now the 'New London Coffee House', and like New Labour was trying to change its clientele along with its name and decor. According to another directory, it had become the resort of 'country gentlemen, manufacturers, foreign merchants, [and] clergy'.[38] It still retained, however, the most characteristic feature of eighteenth-century coffee houses: there were still two rows of boxes ranged on either side of a central aisle.

Hodgson and Pigott sat down in one of these boxes, called for drinks and newspapers, and began discussing the news. Hodgson, probably the worse for drink, spoke loudly and incautiously.[39] Of the Duke of York, Commander-in-Chief of the British army in the first Flanders campaign, who had just been defeated at Dunkirk, he remarked that 'he respected no man, however exalted by rank, unless dignified by virtue'. Pigott, who had vilified the Duke in the first part of the anonymous, and scandalous pamphlet *The Jockey Club*, prudently replied that whatever the Duke's private character, 'still he had a claim to respect, as the son of his king'.[40] Another paragraph gave rise to a discussion about the treaty George III had made, as Elector of Hanover, with himself as King of England, guaranteeing to supply soldiers for the allied cause on condition of being paid £30 for each soldier who died. Hodgson, remembering Burke's 'swinish multitude', called the king a 'German hog-butcher, a dealer in human flesh by the carcass'. According to the newspapers, on the previous day the king had been stag-hunting near Windsor; Pigott expressed surprise that he should occupy his time in such 'nonsensical amusements, while the mournful accounts of havoc and slaughter, in which his *own subjects* are so fatally involved, were almost daily arriving'. This last remark must have struck William Fielding, who led the prosecution at the subsequent trial, with a sense of déjà lu; in the comedy *The Coffee-House Politician* by William's more famous father Henry, the character Dabble reads to his table companions a passage from a newspaper which begins: 'Fontainbleau, January 23. Yesterday his majesty went a hunting . . . ' In the play, of course, the humour lies in

[37] Library and Museum of Freemasonry: refs. AR/460; HC 8/A/50 (7 June 1793).

[38] *The New Patent London Directory, 1795* (London: J. Wilkes, 1794[?]), 'List of Coffee-Houses'; *Roach's London Pocket Pilot* (1793), quoted in Bryant Lillywhite, *London Coffee Houses* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), 339.

[39] Except where noted, my account of the events in the London Coffee House is taken from the transcription of the testimony of the prosecution witnesses on Hodgson's trial and his cross-examination in *ST* xxii. 1021–32, itself taken from Manoah Sibley's shorthand notes of the trial in *The Whole Proceedings on the King's Commission of the Peace, Oyer and Terminer, and Gaol Delivery for the City of London; and also the Gaol Delivery for the County of Middlesex* (London: Henry Fenwick, 1793–4), 138–47.

[40] [Charles Pigott], *The Jockey Club, or a Sketch of the Manners of the Age*, 3rd edn. (London: H.D. Symonds, 1792), 13–16; Pigott, *Persecution. The Case of Charles Pigott: contained in the Defence he had prepared, and which would have been delivered by him on his Trial, if the Grand Jury had not thrown out the Bill prepared against him* (London: D. I. Eaton, 1793), 29.

the fact that Dabble thinks such a trivial item of news could conceivably be worth reading aloud.[41]

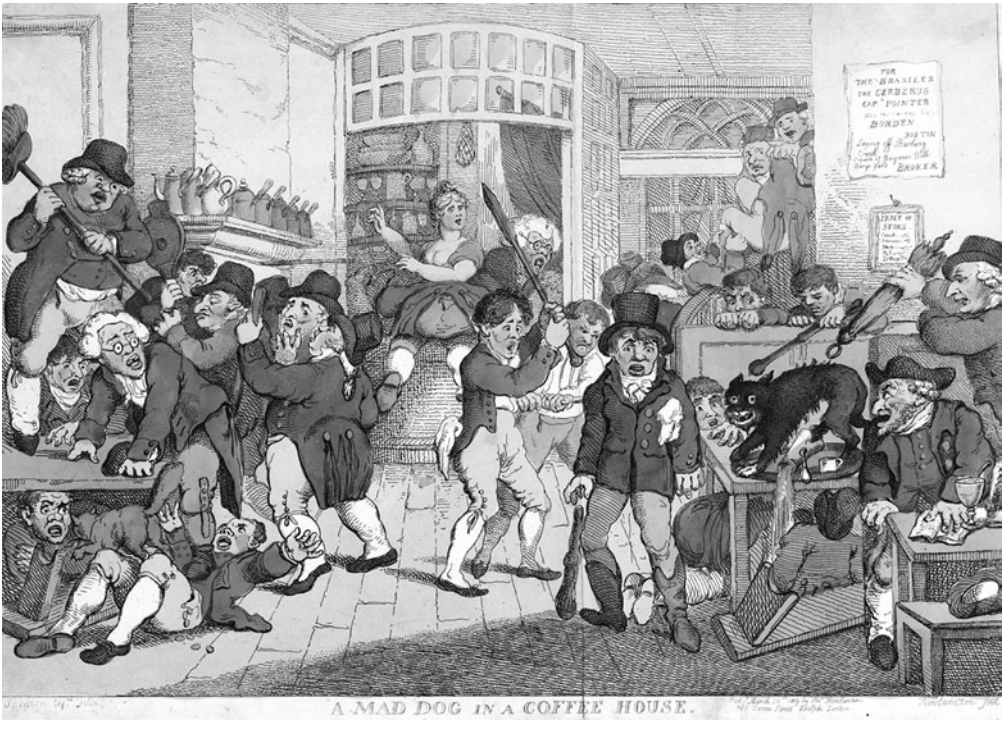
By and large, however, Pigott seems to have been much more guarded in his remarks than Hodgson. At one point it seems that Pigott noticed Thomas Griffith Vaughan, a Bristol linen-trader, sitting in the next box, listening to their conversation, and the two radicals began conversing in French, Pigott probably warning that they were overheard, Hodgson, who seemed bent on making some open demonstration of his jacobin virtue, probably saying that he did not care if they were. Suddenly Hodgson began proposing toasts; first to 'Equality', then to the 'French Republic'. John Buchanan, a Glasgow manufacturer in town on business and sitting in the same box as Vaughan, claimed that Pigott replied to the second toast, 'I will join you in that, with all my heart', but no other witness heard him say so, and according to Pigott himself, he refused the toast, commenting that he would rather live under 'the actual government of England, with its manifold abuses' than under 'the present anarchy of France'.[42]

White Newman, the son of a prosperous oilman in Newgate Street, was sitting in the opposite box across the aisle. Outraged by Hodgson's toast, he rushed to the bar, ordered a glass of punch, and repeatedly proposed 'The King! The King! The King!'. Everyone drank except Pigott and Hodgson. Newman rushed up to them, leaned into the box, threatened Hodgson with his stick, called him 'Rascal!', and demanded he drink to the king. Hodgson replied by getting to his feet, proposing the French Republic a second time, and adding 'and may it triumph over all the governments in Europe!'. Reaching for his own stick, he said that Newman was the rascal; that as a medical man he was acquainted with Lavater's work, and could see his rascally character written in his physiognomy. The loyalists appealed to the proprietor of the coffee house, John Leech, grandfather of the famous comic artist, to throw the jacobins out, but Leech, a member of the Association for the Defence of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers, locked the front door and sent for a constable. The scene by now must have resembled Rowlandson's wonderful image of chaos, *A Mad Dog in a Coffee House* (Pl. 2.2), with Hodgson in the title role.[43] The radicals were arrested and driven to the New Compter in Giltspur Street, with Hodgson allegedly shouting through the coach windows 'Liberty!' 'The French Republic!'. Next morning they appeared before the magistrate, Alderman John Anderson, at Guildhall, who, no doubt uninfluenced by the fact that Pigott had charged him with corruption in a pamphlet published only a few weeks earlier, set bail at the

[41] Pigott, *Persecution*, 30–1; *The Coffee-House Politician; or, the Justice caught in his own Trap*, in *The Works of Henry Fielding, Esq., with an Essay on his Life and Genius*, by Arthur Murphy, Esq., 10 vols. (London: F. C. and J. Rivington *et al.*, 1821), i. 421.

[42] Pigott, *Persecution*, 26.

[43] Thomas Rowlandson, *A Mad Dog in a Coffee House* (London: Rowlandson, 28 Mar. 1809, Lewis Walpole Collection, Farmington, Conn., call no. 809. 3. 20.1).



Pl. 2.2. Thomas Rowlandson, *A Mad Dog in a Coffee House* (London: no printseller credited, 1809).

impossible sum of £1,000.[44] They were ordered to be held in Newgate, and a month later were indicted on a charge of uttering seditious words.

The Grand Jury rejected the bill against Pigott, but found a true bill against Hodgson, who was tried in early December and sentenced to two years imprisonment, fined £200, and required to find sureties amounting to £400 for his good behaviour over the next two years. Unable to provide these, he remained in prison until 1796, when his debt to justice was paid by a public subscription.[45] Like Frost, Hodgson became a living example of the preservative powers of radical beliefs: he died at the age of 106. Pigott proved to be the exception to this apparent rule: in June 1794 he died of an infection he believed he had picked up in Newgate.

Hodgson's trial took place at the Old Bailey on 9 December before Sir John William Rose, the ultra-loyalist Recorder of the City of London: the big guns who had

[44] *Oracle*, 3 Oct. 1793; for the bail see *MP* 5 Oct.; for the charge of corruption see Mee, ' "A bold and free-spoken man" '.

[45] See Hodgson's letter in *MC* 28 Mar. 1796; for Hodgson's description of his plight in jail, see his *The Case of William Hodgson, now confined in Newgate*, etc. (London: Daniel Isaac Eaton and John Smith, for the author, dated 9 Feb. 1796).

contested the Frost case—Scott, Erskine, Kenyon—were all at the court of King's Bench, engaged in the trial of the proprietors of the *Morning Chronicle*, charged with seditious libel for reprinting the address of the Derby Constitutional Society.[46] The newspapers would not have space to carry reports of both trials, and so no full shorthand account of the speeches in Hodgson's trial seems to have been made, though the examinations of the witnesses have survived in an apparently full transcription. Hodgson chose to defend himself, and as far as we can piece together his speech from the newspaper reports he based his defence on three main points: the illegality of his original arrest; the unqualified right of free discussion, which he claimed was guaranteed by the Bill of Rights; and the intention with which he had spoken.[47] The third point was probably the strongest, though Hodgson did himself no favours by arguing at the same time that to say that George III was 'selling his Hanoverian subjects to the British government' was no more than the truth.

Opening for the prosecution, William Fielding is reported as having told the jury that the worst thing about Hodgson's behaviour was that he had spoken as he did 'in a Coffee-room where men of the first respectability assemble, where, if sedition could make its way, he declared he knew of no place in which it might be productive of more mischief'.[48] This was a novel argument: the usual cause of the prosecution's anxiety in cases of seditious libel and seditious words was that they might be read or heard by the much less than respectable, and it was usually assumed that the kind of men Fielding had in mind were too intelligent, or had too much to lose, to be led astray by sedition. Accordingly, Hodgson argued that even supposing he had spoken all the words attributed to him by the prosecution witnesses, the fact that he had spoken them where he had was decisive evidence that he did not harbour any seditious intent. For if he had indeed had 'a wish of exciting his Majesty's subjects to rebellion by seditious discourses, the London Coffee-house, which was known to be frequented by gentlemen violently opposed to such doctrines, would hardly be the place he should have pitched upon for that purpose; but should rather have gone where large bodies of persons were assembled'.[49]

Though many of those involved in the trial must have been conscious of the similarity between the incident that had given rise to it and the case of John Frost, there seems to have been little argument in the Old Bailey about the public or private nature of space in coffee houses. Like Savignac in Frost's trial, Newman twice makes the point in his evidence that he had told Hodgson that he had no right to speak as he did 'in a public coffee-room'.[50] Like Erskine the previous May,

[46] *ST* xxii. 953–1023. [47] *Oracle*, 10 Dec. 1793. [48] *World*, 10 Dec. 1793.

[49] *Times*, 10 Dec. 1793. Interestingly, however, the London did not entirely lose its liberal character in the 1790s. According to the *Oracle* (24 Oct. 1794), when the jury which had just acquitted John Horne Tooke on a charge of high treason retired to the London, it 'was received by a great number of Gentlemen with shouts of joy. One of them obtaining an audience, addressed them in this laconic speech: "GENTLEMEN, | YOU HAVE SAVED YOUR COUNTRY." | *Huzza! Huzza! Huzza!*'

[50] *ST* xxii. 1028.

Hodgson repeatedly tries to establish in cross-examination that the prosecution witnesses in the coffee house had spoken to him before he spoke to them: he had not sought their conversation, and far from attempting to seduce them from their loyalty to the king, he had spoken to them only when they interrupted his private conversation with Pigott.[51] There is no sign, however, that the division between public and private space received anything like the attention Erskine had paid to it in the former trial; nor does Hodgson make anything of it in the two accounts he subsequently gave of the affair—he seems more concerned, as he had been at his trial, with the illegality of his arrest and the infringement of his unqualified right to free speech.[52]

Pigott, however, as Erskine had done, understood the right to free speech in relation to the nature of the place of speaking, as he explained in *Persecution*, his pamphlet on the affair, which was published on 4 December, just five days before Hodgson's trial, a forlorn attempt, no doubt, to influence the trial jury. Pigott fully acknowledges the public nature of the coffee house—in the sense in which Scott or Savignac or Newman understood it—as a place of open access. He had not drunk the toasts proposed by Hodgson, he explains, because 'there was no occasion for rendering myself so very conspicuous in a public coffee house by so doing'. Rebutting the charge that he had said what he was accused of saying seditiously, with an intent to bring the king and his government into dislike and disrespect, he points out that no one 'harbouring such wicked designs' would 'repair to a public coffee-house' to discuss them. Still less would he choose the London, a coffee house 'notorious for being frequented by spies and informers, by clerks of arraigns, attornies, gaolers, and person of that description'. 'Is it not preposterous to imagine, that a rational being, possessed of such schemes, … should fix on a place of all others the most likely, were those schemes there promulgated, to ensure their defeat?'[53] Acknowledging, however, the virtual certainty that an expression of radical opinion in the London would be overheard and reported, Pigott still protests against the modern inability or refusal to grasp the private aspects of public spaces. In a sentence that loses itself in its own sense of outrage, he pleads that the code of privacy regulating conduct in public places is now more than ever needed—which is of course why it is now more than ever violated:

> In these eventful days, the human mind is eternally on the stretch of curiosity and speculation, and in all rooms of public resort, politics almost exclusively engross conversation; surely then, in the warmth of argument between two friends, if they should talk aloud;—if an unguarded expression should fall from either of them, and that expression is to be seized with venal officiousness, or malignant inveteracy, by persons to whom it was not addressed, and allowed to be brought forward as matter of criminal prosecution

[51] Ibid. 1023–4, 1026–31.

[52] These two accounts are *The Case of William Hodgson* and *The Commonwealth of Reason*.

[53] Pigott, *Persecution*, 14, 45. The pamphlet is advertised in *MC* 4 Dec. 1794 as published on that date.

against him. A man on such terms would be far better in a desert, than in the meridian of all those *crocodile* enjoyments which this luxurious city apparently offers to his choice.[54]

For Pigott as for Erskine, the pleasures of society cannot survive the continued infringement of the code of privacy; the sincerity of social life, and of the individual, depend entirely on the continued protection of the space of the private within public spaces.

Comparing the case of Frost with his own—and he had visited Frost in Newgate only a month or so before his own arrest—Pigott points out that, 'oppressive' as Frost's prosecution certainly was, he had at least been charged for words spoken '*directly to the wretches who informed against him*'; whereas 'Mr. Hodgson's conversation was addressed *only to myself*'.[55] What is more—and this, for Pigott, is the crucial point—their conversation had taken place in a space which is, or which used to be, universally acknowledged to be privileged, to be private: 'Can you really,' Pigott asks his imaginary jury, 'on your oaths, in your consciences, believe

> that toasts, or words, passing aloud between two friends in a public coffee-house, at a table where they were seated by themselves, are capable of the horrid construction imputed to them in the indictment; or that they ought to be cognizable by the other persons in the room, to not one of whom were they addressed in any sense whatsoever? Till now, it had been supposed, that the table or box in a coffee room, was as sacred and inviolable as a private room, nay, even as our own house.[56]

This is Erskine's point again, that the true coffee-house code does not allow words spoken there to be 'cognizable', to be taken notice of, by those to whom they are not addressed. Pigott goes so far as to argue that the code of privacy would forbid their being repeated elsewhere even by one to whom they were addressed, sitting at the 'table', the most public space in the public coffee room. But how much more sacrosanct are words overheard from a box? What is it for, the flimsy partition that defines the box, if it is not reminder and a reassurance that the privacy of those who occupy it is to be regarded as inviolable? The partitions are only tokens:[57] it is inevitable that those in one box will be overheard by those in the next—indeed, listening to such private conversations was probably a common pastime, and, as one newspaper editor acknowledged, an invaluable source of news, both political and scandalous.[58] But even though overheard, they must not be *heard*. What space, Pigott asks, could be more private than a public coffee house? If the code of

[54] Pigott, *Persecution*, 44.

[55] For the visit, see Mee, '"A bold and free-spoken man"'; Pigott, *Persecution*, 47–8.

[56] Pigott, *Persecution*, 17.

[57] The point was made most clearly at the Jew's Harp House and tea gardens in Marylebone Fields, where the privacy of the boxes was 'guarded by painted deal-board soldiers'; see Warwick Wroth, *The London Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1896), 113.

[58] *Advice to the Editors of Newspapers* (London: Alexander MacPherson, 1799), 5. Boswell's various London journals are full of such overheard conversations; see also the letter of 1793 by 'Mr. A.B.' reprinted in Tom Girtin, *Doctor with Two Aunts* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 135.

privacy is properly applied, as it would be, Erskine had argued, by those who are truly gentlemen, the private rooms in a coffee house could offer no more protection than the flimsy partitions of the box; even the inviolable privacy of the private house, every Englishman's castle, is, properly understood, no more private than is a table between two curtains in a public coffee room; no more, indeed, than the public table in a public coffee room.

An intriguing exception proves the rule. According to James Boaden, the comic actor Richard Wilson was in the habit of conducting loud, hilarious conversations with his friend Jack Bannister in coffee-house boxes, 'to entertain sundry parties *around* them, who did not apologise for listening, and loudly joined in the laugh'.[59] Wilson's audience understood that on these occasions they were intended to overhear, *and on no other*; a point dramatized, melodramatized indeed, in a scene in Amelia Alderson's first novel, *Dangers of Coquetry*, published in 1790. Mr Mortimer, an untitled aristocrat, enters a box in the St James's Coffee House to read the newspapers. Lord Bertie and a friend enter and occupy the box behind him. They begin to discuss Mortimer's wife, whom Bertie describes as a 'most artful, despicable coquette', an adultress in mind if not in fact. Enraged, Mortimer stands up in his box and, turning to Bertie, calls him a villain and a liar. Equally enraged, Bertie calls Mortimer a 'dupe' for believing his wife, and a 'listener' for the apparently unpardonable crime of eavesdropping on, and intervening in, a conversation conducted within the privacy of a box—a crime which to Bertie is in no degree palliated by the fact that he himself had been making serious charges against Mortimer's wife or that he and Mortimer were close acquaintances if not actually friends. A duel is arranged and Mortimer pays with his life not only for trusting his wife but for departing from the code of a gentleman so far as to permit himself to hear what he cannot avoid overhearing, even where his wife's honour and his own are at stake.[60]

Pigott does not actually say so, but he evidently regards himself, as Erskine had regarded Frost, as a gentleman fallen among newly affluent men, 'scoundrels', with no grasp of how gentlemen should behave.[61] Pigott was a member of an old landed-gentry family, prominent in Shropshire affairs, and his sense of the dignity of his status may have been made the more acute by its increasing fragility. He was a youngest son, and his eldest brother Robert, a fervent supporter of the French

[59] James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald: including her familiar correspondence with the most distinguished persons of her time*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), i. 68–9.

[60] Amelia Alderson (Amelia Opie), *The Father and Daughter with Dangers of Coquetry*, ed. Shelley King and John B. Pierce (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2003), 250–1. The scene anticipates one in *Nicholas Nickleby*, where a group of men in a coffee-room box, including Sir Mulberry Hawk, are overheard by Nicholas traducing his sister's reputation. Here, however (1839), the issue of privacy is not raised: Nicholas is outraged at 'the careless mention of his sister's name in a public place', and when he confronts Sir Mulberry, the latter does not attempt to claim that his remarks were made in a privileged private space.

[61] Charles Pigott, *A Political Dictionary explaining the True Meaning of Words* (London: D. I. Eaton, 1795), 127 (art. '*Scoundrels*').

Revolution, had sold the family estates and gone to live first in Geneva, then in France. He was an old Etonian, claiming friendship with Fox and other aristocratic Whigs, but his ability to mix in such circles was threatened by his lack of funds and by an appearance so unprepossessing, and hygiene so rudimentary, that he was known in polite circles as 'Louse'.[62] He had done as much as he possibly could—by his anti-aristocratic writings, and by his membership of the LCS, which was largely composed of artisans and craftsmen—to sink his own social status. Of all gentlemen-born, indeed, in the 1790s, he had arguably the smallest claim to be possessed even of the 'spirit' of a gentleman as Erskine had defined it. In the three volumes of his *Jockey Club* he had made public every private secret he could dredge up about the lives of the aristocratic enemies of France and reform; then in *The Female Jockey Club* he had turned his attention to their mothers and their wives.[63]

But still he regarded himself as a gentleman.[64] According to the *Oracle*, though the story may be merely malicious, when Hodgson and Pigott were asked to provide securities amounting to £1,000 each against their non-appearance in court, both objected (for neither had access to such an enormous sum) on the grounds that they were gentlemen and that their word was security enough; to which the magistrate replied that it was because they were gentleman that he was setting their bail so high.[65] Pigott's attack on the witnesses of the events at the London is full of invective *de haut en bas*. White Newman, heir to a prosperous city business, is repeatedly dismissed as a 'Pickle-man', a 'pickle-merchant'; Vaughan, who had particularly disgusted Pigott by acknowledging, at the Grand Jury, that he had sat in the next box to the radicals 'for the express purpose of *particularly* attending to our conversation', is described as 'formerly I believe in the linen trade at Bristol', and the phrase 'I believe' is in a tone which suggests that it would be beneath Pigott to have any more certain knowledge of Vaughan's business.[66] Leech, the proprietor of the coffee house, is derided as having previously been its cook; he becomes 'this loyal chief justice of the kitchen', whose 'former culinary fire rose on his promotion from the kitchen … into a violent flame of attachment to royalty and rage against Levellers'.[67] Pigott's gentle status may have felt to him fragile enough to need defending by taking this kind of tone with social inferiors. It was probably also real enough to account for the fact that the indictment against him was thrown out by the Grand Jury. No doubt he had

[62] See for example the sketch of Pigott's character in *An Answer to Three Scurrilous Pamphlets, entitled The Jockey Club* (London: J. S. Jordan, n.d. [1792]), 11–12; *Oracle*, 11 Nov. 1793.

[63] Charles Pigott, *The Jockey Club, or a Sketch of the Manners of the Age*, 3 parts in 3 vols. (London: H. D. Symonds, 1792); Pigott, *The Female Jockey Club, or a Sketch of the Manners of the Age. … By the Author of the Former Jockey Club* (London: D. I. Eaton, 1794).

[64] Mee, in '"A bold and free-spoken man"', is particularly acute on Pigott's gentlemanly attitudes and on his attitude to his gentlemanly status.

[65] *Oracle*, 8 Oct. 1793, and see *MP*, 5 Oct. 1793.

[66] Pigott, *Persecution*, 15, 17, 19.

[67] Hodgson, apparently quoting Pigott (but from a text I have not discovered) in *The Commonwealth of Reason*, pp. xiii–xvi.

been, as he claims, less outspoken than Hodgson; but it is hard to imagine a Grand Jury bothering to discriminate between the two men had both been impoverished physicians.

III

To understand what is at stake in these two cases, I want to suggest that we need to start by recalling a code of behaviour that emerges in the very late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, or rather re-emerges then, in the specific form of a distinction between 'public' and 'private', for something like it had certainly existed in earlier centuries and in other countries. It is a code addressed to the conduct of 'public men'—men who participate in public life, who hold office under the crown or who are qualified by birth, fortune, education, connections, to do so. It is less concerned to regulate the conduct of such men as to control how their conduct will be judged by others, and it does so, in the first instance, by drawing a very firm line between public and private. Everything men do above the line, in their public life, is supposed to be subject to judgement according to a strict notion of public virtue. They must (though they rarely do) display a passionate concern for the public interest, an unimpeachable integrity, a determined independence of judgement. If their public virtue is supposed not to be in question, then everything they do below the line, in private life, was nobody's business but their own. As John Dennis had put it early in the eighteenth century, 'publick Virtue makes Compensation for all Faults but Crimes, and he who has this publick Virtue is not capable of Crimes'.[68]

The notion that men were to be judged by their public, not their private conduct, and that their private conduct was 'cognizable' only when it disabled them from performing their duty to the public, was put under increasing pressure throughout the eighteenth century, as part of the process whereby the moral values of the middle classes became increasingly hegemonic even in the sphere of high politics.[69] Increasingly through the century, public men were coming to govern their behaviour by a more modern, more middle-class expectation that their private life would be understood as reflecting upon their public virtue, so that by 1792 we find one loyalist writer urging electors 'to inquire into the private character and circumstances' of those who aspire to represent them:

> Is he married? And is he a constant husband or tender father? Or is he known for debauchery? ... Does he pay his tradesmen regularly? Does he keep race horses? Or is

[68] *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1939, 1943), ii. 113.

[69] This issue, in relation to the career of the 4th Earl of Sandwich, is a running theme of John Brewer's *Sentimental Murder: Love and Madness in the Eighteenth Century* (London: HarperCollins, 2004).

throwing dice a part of his serious business? Has he a mistress? And does she ride in her own carriage? Or is she talked of for fashionable extravagance?[70]

This change of course is one reason for the great popularity, at least by the 1790s, of the chaste and temperate George III, and of Pitt, who was free of all private vices except one. He did not chase women, he did not gamble, he did not talk nonsense or sport with the truth in private except when he was drunk, which he was, to be sure, much of the time. But if to many at the end of the eighteenth century, the moral system described by Dennis seemed a grand and a disgraceful anachronism, it was still tenaciously preserved among those Foxite Whigs who were to remain the parliamentary opposition when, in 1794, the majority Portland Whigs went into coalition with Pitt. Here, for example, is the pseudonymous 'Hampden', taking issue with the Duke of Portland for splitting the party, but reassuring him at the same time that his criticism will be based on matters of principle, not on 'personalities'. 'Our ministers,' he writes,

> may constantly be carried to bed in a state of complete intoxication without being reproved by me, while they do not reel or stutter in the Senate; they may every night drown their intellects in a sea of spirits and water at White's, if they attend to the national business in the morning; they may ruin themselves at play, if they faithfully administer the laws; they may be mean and parsimonious, if they do not defraud the public, and seize on pensions and sinecures beyond all bounds of decency and justice; or they may betray and calumniate private friends, if they do not renounce and vilify public principles.[71]

Hampden's sympathies remain, of course, with the minority of Whigs whom Portland had abandoned, led by Fox, a gambler, a drunkard, living openly with his mistress, yet constant in his attendance at parliament and indefatigable in performing the duties of a patriotic opposition. Fox was the most conspicuous 'public man' at the period described by this paper still taking extensive advantage of the freedoms this code of conduct offered.[72]

The coffee-house code of privacy is a different thing with different purposes from the aristocratic code I have been discussing; but in part no doubt it owed its origins to the notion that coffee houses were among the places where the privacy of public men was lived out; places where they could unbend, could be 'themselves', as we put it, or could be other than themselves, and could enjoy, however guardedly, what Habermas calls 'the parity of "common humanity" ' without

[70] *An Address to the People of Great Britain; Containing a Comparison between the Republican and Reforming Parties* (Edinburgh: Silvester Doig, 1793), in Gregory Claeys (ed.), *Political Writings of the 1790s*, 8 vols. (London: Pickening and Chatto, 1995), vii. 344–5.

[71] 'Hampden', *Letters to the Duke of Portland, on his Dereliction of the Cause of the People* (London: J. Ridgway, 1794), 30.

[72] Joanna Innes points out that the Proclamation Society, an association formed in the 1780s to promote the reformation of manners primarily of the lower classes, was unwilling to recruit Fox and his circle on account of their 'notoriously lax morals'; see 'Politics and Morals: The Reformation of Manners in Later Eighteenth-Century England', in Eckhart Hellmuth (ed.), *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the late Eighteenth Century* (London and Oxford: German Historical Institute and Oxford University Press, 1990), 57–118.

that reflecting on their public reputation. For that reason the code of the public coffee room also demarcated a notion of the private at once visible but not to be inspected, audible but not to be overheard, and that notion too must have been put under increasing pressure in the course of the century, as first the aristocracy, and then the polite classes in general, began to use public coffee rooms as places of refreshment merely, not of conversation. If it is true that during the century the coffee room, considered as a place of conversation, was progressively abandoned to tradesmen, shopmen, artisans, then it may have been increasingly difficult to safeguard a notion of privacy which, originally instituted, in part at least, for the benefit of public men, now had to survive among men whose entire lives were lived in private, and who had nothing but private virtues on which to found a reputation.

One way then of understanding the incidents leading to these trials would be that Frost and Hodgson have fallen victim to a century-long change in manners, as notions of polite behaviour have been slowly transformed as they percolated down from the aristocracy, through the prosperous, aspiring upper middle class, down to the shopman, commercial travellers, and artisans whom Frost and Hodgson met in the Percy and the London. I am not suggesting that their behaviour would at any moment in the history of the coffee house have been thought appropriate: an often quoted seventeenth-century broadside, *The Rules and Orders of the Coffee House*, had warned customers to avoid the 'Noise of loud disputes', and not to speak of 'Affairs of State' with 'an irreverent tongue'.[73] But it is clear that Erskine and Hodgson believe that to infringe these rules, by speaking so loudly and irreverently about politics as to oblige others to hear what they are obliged not to hear, would have been treated in the early or mid-eighteenth century as no more than a breach of good manners, not as a crime worthy of a long period of imprisonment. Perhaps the incidents at the Percy and the London are a further stage in the same process as had earlier led to the formation of conversation-clubs, as the more polite customers withdrew from the 'public', 'open' coffee rooms to meet in private rooms to which access could be restricted. One reason for that withdrawal was probably that the more polite did not trust the less polite to know or to observe the conventions of privacy that had formerly been supposed to apply at the public table. Now Frost, Hodgson, and Pigott seemed to have reason to believe that nowhere in the public room was the notional privacy of conversation still respected, and that now men who normally had no opportunity to act as men of public virtue—upholsterers, apothecaries, drapers—might seize the chance to do so on the most inappropriate occasions.

What may have been part of a century-long revolution in manners seems to have been understood, however, by Erskine and Pigott, as something so sudden as to be unforeseeable; as though Frost and Hodgson had fallen foul not of the slow

[73] Quoted for example in Edward Forbes Robinson, *The Early English Coffee House* (1893) (Christchurch: The Dolphin Press, 1972), 110.

march of social change but of an overnight tranformation of the rules governing social behaviour. And of course it was that too. It does not seem that Frost's behaviour was reported to the authorities until late November or early December; until after, that is, the inaugural meeting on 20 November at the Crown and Anchor in the Strand of the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers. The Association, as we have seen, was dedicated to discouraging and suppressing seditious publications that tended to disturb the peace of the kingdom, but it was equally, if not more concerned with punishing those who uttered seditious words. Indeed, it was only after the foundation of the Association had prompted or focused the anxieties of loyalists that outspoken radicals and reformers found themselves subject to prosecutions for seditious words, and, or so the popular radical John Thelwall claimed, every coffee house came to be 'filled with party hirelings and venal associators' listening out for sedition, and 'one-half the boxes' in any place of public refreshment came to conceal the spies of government.[74] The Earl of Lauderdale told the Lords that by the spring of 1794 a regular 'system of coffee-house spies and informers' was 'encouraged and protected' by government; and according to the radical dissenter Joseph Towers, who regarded the foundation of the Crown and Anchor Society, as it came to be known, as 'most admirably adapted to increase the national lunacy' that followed the revolution in France, it was a 'great object' of the associations 'to prevent freedom of speech from being enjoyed in inns, in taverns, in coffee-houses, in ale-houses, in public-houses of any kind'.[75] There is a fascinating loyalist poem of 1795, *The Coffee House*, attributed to Philip Smyth, in which one of the central incidents involves the narrator eavesdropping on the conversation of a bunch of scowling LCS members, cautiously murmuring 'disloyal and unmanly' speeches to each other in their not-so-private box.[76] The extraordinary success of the Crown and Anchor Society and its associated provincial societies in late 1792 and 1793 must have been inextricably linked to the developing sense that private behaviour and conversation enjoyed at most a very qualified privilege, that private character could be a legitimate object of public concern, and that 'public' places, places of general resort, concealed no abstract, notionally private refuge.

This is not the place to attempt to describe the activities of the loyal associations, or, with any degree of detail, the various arguments of those who opposed them. But in guise of a conclusion, I want to suggest that the defence we have seen made by Erskine on Frost's behalf, and by Pigott of himself, allows us to reflect on an important aspect of the division between the popular reform societies and the

[74] John Thelwall, *Political Lectures. Volume the First-Part the First: containing the Lecture of Spies and Informers, and the first Lecture on Prosecutions for Political Opinion* (London: Thelwall, Eaton and Smith, 1795), 6, and John Binns, *Recollections of the Life of John Binns: Twenty-Nine Years in Europe and Fifty-Three in the United States* (Philadelphia: Parry and M'Millan, 1854), 44.

[75] PR xxxix. 346 (26 May 1794); [Joseph Towers, junior], *Thoughts on National Insanity* (London: J. Johnson, J. Debrett, J. Hamilton, 1797), 23–4.

[76] [Philip Smyth], *The Coffee House. A Characteristic Poem* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795), 13–14. The poem is attributed to Smith by the *British Critic*, 5 (Jan.–June 1795), 422.

polite opposition Whigs, unpersuaded of the desirability of universal manhood suffrage but certainly determined in their defence of the civil rights which they saw as being so determinedly eroded under Pitt. When in 1793 the future Prime Minister Spencer Perceval, under the auspices of the Association, published, for the benefit of magistrates and associators, an account of the various violations of the public peace and how to deal with them, he defined 'seditious words' with reference only to their content, and without regard to the circumstances in which they were uttered.[77] This appears to have been the policy on the matter of freedom of speech taken by the law officers of the crown in their prosecutions of those charged with uttering 'seditious words'. In contrast, William Hodgson, as we have seen, maintained the unqualified right of free speech and discussion, and this seems to have been the general view among the leaders of the LCS, although in practice, of course, prudence dictated what they were and were not prepared to say in public. The most moderate view among the leaders of the society was probably that of Thelwall, who maintains that speech should never be the object of prosecution by virtue of its content, though it might legitimately become so if the manner of its utterance amounted to an incitement to violence.[78]

This is not at all the view of opposition Whigs like Fox or like Erskine himself. For Fox, for example, the freedom of what he regards as public speech consists, like the freedom of the press, in the right to say whatever one likes, subject to no prior licence from the authorities; but if speeches, like publications, can be shown to have been seditious, to have been delivered, at least, with seditious intent, the speakers must take the legal consequences of their words. The most audible if not the most vocal opponents of the associations, the liberal Whigs, led by Erskine, who formed the Friends of the Liberty of the Press, did not insist on an unqualified right to freedom of speech. For such Whigs, the notion of freedom of speech has more the feel of 'you may speak freely'—of the 'undisguised' expression of opinion appropriate to private life. The Friends opposed the founding of the associations on two main grounds: first, that they constituted a usurpation of the powers of government, undertaken with the government's full consent, even connivance; and second, that they constituted an intolerable intrusion into areas of life previously understood as private. In his address as chairman to the Friends, Thomas Erskine announced himself shocked by the associations' plan to offer rewards to informers so as 'to punish opinions delivered even in the private intercourses of domestic life; unmixed with any act or manifested intention against the authority of our Laws'. The evils of the associations, he declared, 'become ... absolutely intolerable, when extended to the stimulation of Spies to

[77] [Spencer Perceval], *The Duties and Powers of Public Officers and Private Persons with Respect to Violations of the Public Peace* (no publication details, [1793]), 8.

[78] See especially John Thelwall's *Peaceful Discussion, and not Tumultuary Violence, the Means of redressing National Grievances. The Speech of John Thelwall, at the General Meeting of the Friends of Parliamentary Reform, called by the London Corresponding Society, and held in the Neighbourhood of Copenhagen-House; on Monday, October 26, 1795* (London: J. Thelwall, 1795).

stab domestic peace, to watch for the innocent in the hours devoted to convivial happiness, and to disturb the sweet repose of private life upon the bosom of friendship and truth'.[79] The anonymous author of a parody of this speech makes it clear how those who argued for this aristocratic desire to preserve the sphere of private life from the intrusions of the law were regarded by the associationists. It was no more than a concern to prevent the surveillance of private lives that could not bear such scrutiny. He quoted Erskine's sentence unchanged except for its final phrase: the Friends were seeking to preserve inviolate their right to enjoy 'the sweet repose of private life' not 'upon the bosom of friendship and truth' but 'upon the bosom of our DOXIES'.[80]

Aristocratic and genteel opposition MPs, of course, enjoyed the virtually unlimited freedom of public utterance guaranteed to them by parliamentary privilege, and on occasion took advantage of it to its fullest extent, saying in the Commons what members of the popular reform societies would certainly have been prosecuted for saying in public meetings or even in what they would have regarded as entirely private conversations. Their concern is almost entirely with the prospect of losing the protection hitherto guaranteed to them by the code of a gentleman; or their private conversations becoming the object of public notice. In his speech at Bristol previous to the election of 1780, Burke had warned of a regime of surveillance whereby 'the very servant who waits behind your chair' is made 'the arbiter of your life and fortune'. This warning, repeated by Erskine in his defence of Frost, is repeated again, in letter or spirit, in speech after speech in parliament, and in pamphlet after pamphlet by relatively polite reformers and by gentlemanly and aristocratic opponents of the government and the associations, and it is, precisely, the free speech of gentlemen with servants that it is primarily concerned to protect. Whatever servants Godwin employed, they are unlikely to have included a footman, but in an attack on the loyal associations written under the pseudonym 'Mucius' (Roman, republican, aristocratic) he expressed the fear that even 'my very footman from behind my chair may be enticed by the ten guineas, so liberally proffered by the new Associations, to betray me, and thus to procure to himself the accursed wages of despotism'. Even Thelwall imagines the new threat to freedom of speech will come from servants reporting to the associations on the conversation of their masters: 'even our own houses and our own tables furnish no longer a sanctuary and an altar where it is safe to offer the free incense of friendly communication; and the very domestic who eats our bread stands open-mouthed behind our chairs to catch and betray the conversation of our unguarded moments.'[81]

[79] *Proceedings of the Friends to the Liberty of the Press* ([London]: 'By order of the Committee', 1793), 8, 16.

[80] *An Address to the Public from the friends of Freedom assembled at their Club, at the Goose and Gridiron, St. Giles's* (London: T. Wilkins and J. Parsons, 1793), 11.

[81] Burke, *Works*, iii. 390–1; for Erskine, see *ST* xxii. 502; Godwin, Letter to Sir Archibald Macdonald, then still Attorney General, on the prosecution of Crichton, signed 'Mucius', *MC* 26 Mar. 1793; Thelwall, *Political Lectures*, 6.

When the moderate Scots reformer, as he then was, Thomas Muir, was confronted at his trial in 1793 by the evidence of his alleged seditious words given by his servant Ann Fisher, he was as appalled as was Pigott at the notion that the words of a gentleman, spoken in private, in his case 'in an unguarded moment within the sacred walls of a family', should become the object of a prosecution when reported by the less than genteel—by 'the meanest and the lowest', by 'domestics, who could hardly approach your presence even in their menial duties, who, (if the expression may be used) to the members of a family are almost unknown'.[82] The evidence of this 'domestic spy', exclaimed Fox, in the debate on this trial, 'respecting the private and unguarded conversation of her master', was such that in 'no civilized country ought to be permitted'.[83] Returning to reflect on the Muir trial during the debates on the 'two bills' in late 1795, Fox warned:

> If the detestable spirit of the Scotch law respecting sedition were established in this country, then farewell to all liberty of speech! farewell to the familiarities of conversation! The servant who stood behind his chair [i.e. Fox's chair: this is speech reported in the free indirect style], if wicked enough, might betray him, and, seduced by those in power, might give information which would endanger both his liberty and his life. The abandoned maid-servant of Mr. Muir had acted in a similar manner: violating the confidence reposed in every servant by a master, she communicated to the friends of government the honest, undisguised expressions of Mr. Muir's mind.[84]

The same point had been made by George Harrison a little earlier in the debate: 'A private letter dropped out of the pocket, the malice of a servant, the repetition of a conversation at table, with a thousand other circumstances, frivolous and innocent in their natures, might be magnified to dangerous portents.'[85] The tone of these opposition defences of free speech, especially one of the longest, in a speech by Fox at an earlier stage in the passage of the 'two bills', is that of former citizens of the Roman republic unlucky enough to have survived into the period of the empire, a period such as Seneca or Tacitus describe, when 'slaves were suborned to speak against their masters, freedmen against their patrons'.[86] It is the language of a self-consciously virtuous classical republican élite, too elevated in rank and virtue to 'know' their social inferiors, whose dependent status and character make them ever ready to be bribed into reporting on the private lives of their masters.

In short, then: at a time when the freedom of speech, along with the freedom of the press and freedom of association were under serious threat, and seriously curtailed, there was an unquestionable value in this defence of the freedom of private utterance, in the notion that private speech, of words spoken in private which are independent of any criminal intention, should not be the object of

[82] *An Account of the Trial of Thomas Muir, Esq., Younger, of Huntershill* (Edinburgh: J. Robertson, n.d.), 112–13.

[83] *PH* xxx. 1566. [84] *PH* xxxii. 517. [85] Ibid. 505–6.

[86] Fox, ibid. 409–21, but esp. col. 420; Tacitus, *The Histories*, trans. Kenneth Wellesley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 16; for Seneca, see above n. 28.

surveillance and prosecution. It is an intriguing index, however, of the difficulty with which the discourse of rights became established, that Fox, Erskine, and others, especially Pigott, who seem to have regarded this as a civil right essential to the survival of civilized society, found it so hard to express, except in terms of class difference, the right of an élite not to be overheard by their social inferiors and dependants. The spirit of despotism was not the exclusive property of loyalists.

3

Weymouth Amusements

I

At the end of February 1789 George III recovered from the most serious episode so far of the porphyria that was understood by his contemporaries as madness. The Regency Bill, which had produced deep divisions within parliament, the nation, and the king's own family, was abandoned, and his recovery was greeted with effusive demonstrations of loyalty, 'the most brilliant, as well as the most universal exhibition of national loyalty and joy, ever witnessed in England'. London was illuminated from Hampstead to Tooting, from Kensington to Greenwich. In April the king was driven in procession through cheering crowds to attend a three-hour service of thanksgiving in St Paul's.[1]

Dr Warren, one of the doctors who had attended George during his illness, believed that the king was in much better health following his recovery than he had been even prior to the attack, or at least less prone to conducting the one-sided staccato conversations that satirists loved to imitate. Warren 'thought He spoke slower, & that he waited longer for answers without interrupting'.[2] The illness, however, had left George thin, shaken, and short of energy. He felt the need of 'relaxation, and a change of scene', such as he had enjoyed at Cheltenham the previous summer, where taking the waters had helped him recover from a severe bout of colic, now recognized as an early symptom of his porphyria episode. In May Dr Francis Willis, who credited himself with having restored the king to health, recommended to the king a course of sea-bathing, and in late June the king and the royal family set off to stay at the house of his brother the Duke of Gloucester at Melcombe Regis, the fashionable part of Weymouth.[3]

James Cecil, 1st Marquess of Salisbury and Lord Chamberlain, raced from Hatfield to Weymouth to join the king, and described his journey in a few hundred lines of perplexingly insipid verse. He did not think much of the resort:

> Weymouth, I think, of nought can boast,
> But a fine sand and bathing coast,

[1] Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business* (London: Allen Lane, 1969), 90, 93. For an exhaustive description of the illuminations and the procession to St Paul's, see *GM* 59 (1789, Part 1), 270–1, 366–70.

[2] Macalpine and Hunter, *George III*, 88.

[3] Ibid. 93, 95.

The environs that share the breeze,
Are totally devoid of trees . . .[4]

The antiquarian and mineralogist Edward Daniel Clarke, who toured England in the 1790s, thought much the same: Weymouth, he wrote, was 'a little, narrow, dirty place, ill-paved, and irregularly built'.[5] But by 1789 it was becoming a fashionable and select resort for sea-bathing, its success due partly to the fact that the Duke of Gloucester had built a house there, partly to what was seen as its greatest natural asset: a firm sandy beach gradually sloping into a sheltered bay that made bathing safe and practicable in all weathers—'the finest shore for bathing in the whole world', according to Clarke, who had not travelled widely.[6] It may have added to Weymouth's attractions, as far as the king was concerned, that the town had a reputation for great loyalty to the constitution, perhaps a result of its being notoriously overrepresented in the House of Commons: the electors, themselves chosen at the discretion of William Pulteney, the millionaire property developer who 'owned' the conjoint boroughs of Weymouth and Melcombe Regis, returned no less than four members to Westminster.[7] The king went back to Windsor in late September, apparently very much revived, and so much had he enjoyed the rural and seaside life of Weymouth that until 1805 he returned

[4] The Marquess's poem, 'Return from Weymouth' (of which I quote the first four lines), and its companion piece, 'Excursion to Weymouth', were published in *An Asylum for Fugitive Pieces, in Prose and Verse*, 4 vols (London: J. Debrett, 1785–93), iv. 57–70. For the authorship of the poem, see John Wolcot. (Peter Pindar), *The Royal Tour, and Weymouth Amusements* (London: J. Walker *et al*., 1795), 14 and n. According to Dr J. Crane of Weymouth, Weymouth's treelessness was one of its great advantages as a health resort. 'Trees not only evidently prove a considerable Obstruction to the free Circulation of the Air, but contribute also very much to generate a moist putrid State of the Atmosphere, by the insalutary Steam proceeding from their Perspiration, particularly during the Summer Heats': J. C[rane]., *Cursory Observations on Sea-Bathing; . . . to which is added, a Concise History of Weymouth* (Weymouth: Delamotte, [1795?]), 81, 86.

[5] [Edward Daniel Clarke], *A Tour through the South of England, Wales, and Part of Ireland, made during the Summer of 1791* (London: Minerva Press, 1793), 39.

[6] Ibid. 40; see also *The Weymouth Guide*, 2nd edn. (Weymouth: [Delamotte], n.d.), 45–6; *Harvey's Improved Weymouth Guide* (Dorchester: Virtue [for Harvey], [1800?]), 16–17, 49–50; and *The Universal British Directory of Trade, Commerce, and Manufacture* (London: for the Patentees at the British Directory Office, 1798), iv. 723–4. For the transformation of Weymouth into a fashionable resort even before the king's successive visits, see Maureen Boddy and Jack West, *Weymouth: An Illustrated History* (Wimborne, Dorset: Dovecote Press, 1983), 61–6.

[7] See [T. H. B. Oldfield], *An Entire and Complete History . . . as The Boroughs as Great Britain*, 3 vols. (London: J. Debrett, 1792), i. 265–8. The particular notoriety attaching to Weymouth and Melcombe's status as a pocket borough dated from the publication of the diary of its former patron, Bubb Doddington, in which, while shamelessly attacking the corruption of his political opponents, he gave an entirely unembarrassed account of how he profited from his ownership of the boroughs. When the movement for reform reawoke in the 1790s, this account was frequently alluded to or quoted by reformers such as [Oldfield] *Entire and Complete History* 265–6; Vicesimus Knox, *The Spirit of Despotism* ('London: printed in the Year 1795'), 165–72; [J. T. Callender], *The Political Progress of Britain; or, an Impartial History of Abuses in the Government of the British Empire* (Philadelphia: J. T. Callender, 1795), 16; Benjamin Flower, *National Sins Considered, in Two Letters to the Rev. Thomas Robinson* (Cambridge: the author, 1796), 53 n.

there almost every year.[8] For the next twenty years or so, Weymouth became almost as fashionable a resort as Brighton, and an increasingly popular destination for the characters of novels in search of a sentimental adventure, the literary ancestors of Eustacia Vye longing for the sunny afternoons she had once enjoyed in the resort that Thomas Hardy would rename 'Budmouth'.[9] A single quotation from a novel by Mary Robinson will give the flavour: 'The season for drinking the Bath waters being over, lady Pen proposed a trip to Weymouth. "All the world will be there," said she; "and it will be ten to one that Julia returns at least with a title." '[10]

During the 1780s the king had begun to experiment with a new character, that of an ordinary private gentleman never happier than with his family, or when the forms and trappings of state were laid aside and he could move freely among his people. This was partly a matter of the king and queen making a public display of their private virtues, of their 'conjugal felicity and domestick enjoyment',[11] at a time when, as we saw in the last chapter, those in public life were increasingly expected to lead exemplary private lives. It was also a matter of the king adopting a less stately and aloof, a more 'familiar' personality, accosting his subjects and engaging them in conversation, no doubt for the sheer pleasure of it but also in an attempt to humanize his royal authority. The experiment began in Windsor, where the royal family regularly went shopping in the town or exchanged greetings with the townsfolk on the terrace. It was in Cheltenham, however, and still more in Weymouth, that what Linda Colley has called this 'myth of ordinariness'[12] became fully established. Before 1788 the king had seen almost nothing of Britain: 'the Nore, Cox Heath, Portsmouth, and Oxford, formed

[8] For the king's visits to Weymouth, see especially the three following items in Weymouth Public Library: A. M. Broadley's magnificent four-volume compilation of source material 'Royal Weymouth in Prose and Verse', L.942.331.BA.3–6; and the unpublished essay by Victor J. Adams, 'Georgian Weymouth', L.942.073.AD. 1; and the same author's compilation of sources for the history of Weymouth, L.942.331.AD. 1. See also Boddy and West, *Weymouth*, 66–80. There are interesting short articles in *Notes and Queries for Somerset and Dorset*, esp. 9 (1905), art. 122; 10 (1906), art. 9 and art. 214; and 17 (1913), art. 26. Also two articles in the *Dorset Year Book*: 'King George at Weymouth' (1943–4), 27, and John T. Graham, 'Weymouth Amusements' (1951–2), 45–50.

[9] See Maureen Boddy and Jack West, 'Royal Weymouth—the Aftermath', *Dorset Year Book* (1980), 58–62; and for sentimental novels that feature visits to Weymouth, see (of many examples) Charlotte Smith, *Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake*, 5 vols. (London: T. Cadell, 1789); Elizabeth Hervey, *Louisa*, 3 vols. (London: T. Hookham, 1790); A. Gomersall, *The Disappointed Heir: or, Memoirs of the Ormond Family,* 2 vols. (Exeter, J. McKenzie, 1796); Frances Jacson, *Plain Sense* (Dublin: Charles Brown, 1796), and *Disobedience*, 4 vols. (London: Minerva Press, 1797). For Eustacia Vye and 'Budmouth', see Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, ed. Derwent May (London: Macmillan, 1974), esp. 95.

[10] Mary Robinson, *The Natural Daughter. With portraits of the Leadenhead Family* (1799), reprinted in Mary Robinson, *A Letter to the Women of England and The Natural Daughter*, ed. Sharon M. Setzer (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2003), 124.

[11] *A Tour to the Royal Spa at Cheltenham . . . to which is prefixed an Account of the Royal Visit to Cheltenham in 1788*, 7th edn. (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1793), 7–8.

[12] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 233.

almost the extent of his travels'. Encouraged no doubt by the wild enthusiasm with which he was received as he travelled to Cheltenham in an unguarded coach, he took to strolling round the town 'like a citizen', as he could not possibly have done in London, accompanied only by the queen and their daughters. He would 'walk out alone in the fields, and ... enter into conversation with persons who accidentally fell in his way'. The newspapers were filled with astonished admiration for his sheer ordinariness: it was even reported that the king 'eats cherries, ... like other men'.[13] The remark was ironic, but at the expense of many remarks about the king's pose of 'ordinariness' that would be made in all seriousness, and that serve to point out how quickly a monarch demystified into ordinariness could be remystified *as* ordinary, as if the most extraordinary and mysterious thing about him was that he could sometimes behave like an ordinary man.

This chapter is about the 'myth of royal ordinariness' mainly as it was displayed in Weymouth, where it was more fully developed than it could be in Windsor and London. It examines how the king's pose as an ordinary man was first described, how it was cultivated by the king and the press, no doubt partly in the belief that ordinariness was the key to popularity, and popularity the best prophylactic against the infection of the people by French attitudes to monarchy. It examines also the confusions and embarrassments generated by the pose, and the opportunities it provided for satire—especially in 1795, when the popularity of the king and his government was at its lowest, and especially at the hands of John Wolcot, 'Peter Pindar', the laureate of the king's ordinariness and eventually a martyr to it.

II

Two diaries of the 1789 tour have survived. One was written by Fanny Burney who as the second keeper of the queen's robes accompanied the royal family on their tour; the other by 'an Observer of the Times', who if not himself present on the tour may have known somebody who had been, for his *Diary* contains much more information than was available in the newspapers or even in the extended chronicle of the tour published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.[14] Though both texts are rhapsodic about the outpourings of loyalty and affection which greet the king as he sets out to show himself to his subjects, they take strikingly different attitudes to the relationship that develops on the tour between the royal family and the people, partly no doubt because Burney's diary was not intended for publication at least in her lifetime, while the Observer's *Diary* is a commercial publication; partly because, for Burney, the king's proximity, and her own, to the

[13] Macalpine and Hunter, *George III*, 7–8.

[14] *GM* 59 (1789, Part 2), 855, 951–2, 1046–7, 1142–4, 1202–4. There are passages in this chronicle which resemble the Observer's *Diary* (see below, n. 24), but it is not clear which account has priority.

crowds that greet the king's entourage in Weymouth and elsewhere, awakens the ochlophobia that so repeatedly finds expression in her novels.

Burney had been delighted by the visit to Cheltenham in 1788. Though she remarks on the king's willingness to move around with few or no attendants, she gives no sign of thinking that the king might be attempting to display himself as an 'ordinary' person, and is pleased to note that the king and queen, when they appeared on the public walks, made their promenade 'in the same state as on the terrace at Windsor'.[15] She takes even greater pleasure in the vast crowds that everywhere turn out to see the king: her heart is warmed not just by their obvious enthusiasm, but more particularly by the respect they show in keeping a proper distance between themselves and the royal party. As the king and queen drove from Oxford to Cheltenham the roads were full of spectators, but 'so quiet were they, and so new to the practices of a hackneyed mob, that their curiosity never induced them to venture within some yards of the royal carriage, and their satisfaction never broke forth into tumult and acclamation'.[16] Though the public walks in Cheltenham were 'very much crowded', it was by a 'respectful multitude, who never came forward, but gazed and admired at the most humble distance'.[17] Even in Worcester, a much larger town with a population less accustomed to the presence of the polite and aristocratic, the crowds that greeted the king and queen were 'respectful' as well as 'perfectly civil and loyal', even when they 'pressed so hard upon the Royal Family' that they had to retreat to their carriages.[18]

By contrast, Burney's diary of the tour of 1789 is preoccupied by a sense that proper distinctions are being confounded, including no doubt her own fragile distinction as an untitled member of the royal entourage. She is everywhere concerned to erect barriers, actual or metaphorical, between the royal party and the people, whose expressions of loyalty she finds to be 'in a truly primitive style'.[19] On the king's arrival at Weymouth she is dismayed by the ignorance of protocol on the part of the dignitaries of the borough. She was willing to excuse the mayor for failing to kneel to kiss the queen's hand; he had, after all, a wooden leg. 'But the absurdity of the matter followed—all the rest did the same; taking the same privilege, by the example, without the same or any cause!'[20] This year the crowds were noisier, and though she is delighted by the huzzas, the cries of 'Long Live the King', as long as she remains in the safety of her coach, once the royal party is on the ground the sounds of the populace become 'stunning', 'violent'.[21]

At the Duke of Gloucester's house at Lyndhurst, where the royal family stayed on the way to Weymouth, the king 'permitted the people to come to the window' to watch him eat dinner. It may have been as much the chance of staring at a sumptuous meal as the prospect of discovering whether the king could still eat

[15] *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay*, ed. Constance Barrett, 4 vols. (London: Bickers, n.d.), ii. 574.
[16] Ibid. ii. 558, and see 577. [17] Ibid. ii. 578. [18] Ibid. iii. 5, 15.
[19] Ibid. iii. 199. [20] Ibid. iii. 194. [21] Ibid. iii. 192, 200.

fruit 'like other men' that attracted them to this strange ritual, for at first Burney was vastly entertained by the 'truly comic' contrast, visible in their faces, between 'admiration and deprivation'. 'They crowded, however, so excessively'—damaging the fences and hedges in their eager loyalty—'that this can be permitted no more.' The people, she allows, were 'perfectly civil and well-behaved', but in a few lines of her anxious narrative they are transformed, as they seem to press closer and closer, from the 'people' to a 'crowd', to a 'multitude', to a 'mob'.[22] A similar transformation occurs in Exeter, which the royal party visited on an excursion from Weymouth to Plymouth to attend a naval review in honour of the king: 'The excessive and intemperate eagerness of the people to see the Royal Family here made them crowd so immoderately that ... they feared going out' amongst what Burney describes as 'one constant mob'. Elsewhere she encounters 'a crowd of starers the most tremendous'. She is much more reassured by the assembly rooms at Weymouth, where, among the relatively polite, the staring ritual is much better managed: the royal family 'retire to take tea in an inner apartment with their own party, but leave the door open, both to see and be seen'.[23]

Throughout her account of the tour it is clear that Burney would have been happier to be involved in a modern version of an Elizabethan royal progress, a journey from one great house to another through cheering crowds, than in what the tour quickly became, one in which the king permitted himself to be seen by his people in close-up, not in long shot, and in which each appearance seems to have further stimulated his own and his subjects' appetite for ever more, ever closer contact. But the accounts in the *Diary* of 'an Observer of the Times' of the incidents I have selected from Burney exhibit no comparable anxiety: no concern to police the space between the royal family and the people, no mobs, no damage, no fear, no separate rooms at the Sunday evening assembly. The difference may have been due in part, as I have suggested, to the fact that the *Diary* was written with an eye on publication, and seeks to present the tour as one continued scene of exultation in which the king and his people are entirely at one. But there is more to it than that; for the *Diary* is interested in presenting the tour as an occasion on which the distinctions that Burney is anxious to preserve are, however tentatively, dispensed with. The point of the tour, as the Observer sees it, is that it should be 'as little interrupted by the appendages of state as possible', and that no artificial barriers should be erected to prevent the king from 'familiarizing himself to his subjects', or to occlude the people's view of the king and the royal family.[24] On their first arrival at Gloucester Lodge in Weymouth, they spend the evening showing themselves 'as conspicuously as possible, at the windows, to satisfy the eager, anxious eyes of the populace'.[25] When they attend at the rooms, they

[22] Ibid. iii. 189. [23] Ibid. iii. 202–4.

[24] *A Diary of the Royal Tour in June, July, August, and September, 1789. By an Observer of the Times* (London: J. Southern *et al.*, 1789), 62, 23–4.

[25] Ibid. 14.

condescend to 'walk up and down ... very handsomely receiving, and graciously returning the compliments of the company'. They are as much as possible in public, in church, in the theatre, in the rooms, riding to outlying villages, even bathing, and all this apparently less for the benefit of their own health and relaxation than to provide the people with opportunities to see them. Every fine day the king walks on the esplanade, sometimes for hours, amid a crowd of hundreds, even thousands.[26] And on such occasions 'there is on the part of the Royal pair, no assumption of painful pre-eminence, or imposing superiority. The awe of state is removed by the ease of the Gentleman.'[27] The Observer may be borrowing here from the address presented to the king on his arrival in Weymouth by the Mayor and Corporation: 'The sight of their Monarch', it claimed, 'is always grateful to a loyal people, but it is never more so, than, when laying aside the awful splendour of a throne, he condescends to appear amongst them, clothed in the more pleasing, because better known, character of domestic life.'[28]

This version of the royal tour was taken still further in what I find the most intriguing of all the texts which describe it, the anonymous novel *A Trip to Weymouth*, which appeared in 1790, after the publication of the Observer's *Diary* from which it occasionally borrows. At the opening of the novel the narrator Joseph Treadlight, something between hero and anti-hero, is suffering from a nervous disorder of almost inconceivable triviality. But on hearing that the king is about to travel to Weymouth for a period of convalescence, Treadlight becomes convinced that if he goes there too, his delicate nerves will become robust and healthy. He expects no benefit from the sea-bathing prescribed for the king and has no intention of trying it. What will cure him is the simple presence of the 'royal visitors'.[29] Sure enough, no sooner does he breathe the 'first particles of the atmosphere of Weymouth' than his cure begins. It was not, he explains, the sea air itself that effected this change, but the fact that the air was 'impregnated with the influence of royal virtue', as if with the king's healing touch.[30] Just as the king, Treadlight believes, is apparently cured in the summer of 1789 by being made aware of the love and loyalty of his subjects, so Treadlight himself is cured of his imaginary disorder, and the nation as a whole recovers from the melancholia induced by the king's illness, by their new awareness of the king's virtues.

That new awareness is a result of the 'engaging plan' by which the king has chosen to represent himself to his subjects, as a private man enjoying the pleasures of private men.[31] As Treadlight puts it:

> retiring from the splendours of a court [he] amiably condescends to the enjoyment of private ease and rural pleasures; or, in other words, to quit for a while the character of Majesty to taste the happiness of a man: But I check myself in the expression—Quit, did I say? No. 'Tis to dignify and adorn it—to reflect a lustre on royalty, which the superiority

[26] Ibid. 37. [27] Ibid. 51, 35. [28] Quoted by Boddy and West, *Weymouth*, 67–8.
[29] *A Trip to Weymouth*, 2 vols. (London: William Lane, 1790), i. 7.
[30] Ibid. i. 161–2. [31] Ibid. i. 164.

of a diadem cannot bestow . . . the veiling the lustre of a diadem serves but more distinctly to display its glory.[32]

'Mere regality', Treadlight later explains, is 'an object too remote for common ambition; we contemplate it as we do the sun, with admiring and enjoying its beams, without desiring a nearer access to its resplendency.'[33] For 'What are the splendours of a court,' he asks, 'the pomp of crowded levees? 'Tis here in rational enjoyment—in the beneficence and suavity of manners, in the bright display of every virtue that the royal family of England truly keep their court.'[34] The more the king behaves as a mere man, the more truly majestic he becomes, and by this means 'the middle and lower orders of society, who having long reverenced the character of their Monarchs on the throne, are, by an amiable condescension, enabled more familiarly to contemplate and admire the bright assemblage of every moral perfection which beam conspicuously in the royal family'.[35] The 'groundwork' of that perfection, so Treadlight tells us, is the king's 'private virtue', which consists primarily in his supposed avoidance of luxury and in the 'example of moderation' he sets, simply by appearing among his subjects as a man like other men.[36] Treadlight buys entirely the myth of the king's ordinariness in its most extreme form: that by attempting to impersonate, however implausibly, an 'ordinary' man, the king becomes a paragon of the virtues to which ordinary men must aspire.

For the most part, *A Trip to Weymouth* is a sentimental novel in which, in the manner of Sterne, the narrator's repeated displays of sentiment are both corroded and excused by his own irony. His warm patriotism, however, is always rust-proof. On his journey to Weymouth, which occupies most of the first volume, he visits various spots which are imbued with the history of all that makes Britain, for Treadlight, the most favoured nation on earth. Stonehenge in particular is represented, improbably enough, as a monument to British liberty, and one which, because it antedates the Roman invasion and has, or so it is claimed, outlasted the proud edifices of both Greece and Rome, is an emblem of the superiority of British over classical civilization.[37] Modern Britain is now the most refined nation on earth, and if it is therefore especially in danger of the decline into ease and apathy that threatens all refined civilizations,[38] it is equally better protected than any other nation by the nature of its monarchy, which is the result of its constitution but far more of the particular character of its patriot king.

George III is compared with various monarchs of European history, but trumps them all by his public and, especially, his private virtues as displayed at Weymouth, and by the love they inspire.[39] Other rulers are obliged to protect themselves from their own people by 'the guarded walls of their palaces': the

[32] Ibid. i. 164–5. [33] Ibid. ii. 57. [34] Ibid. i. 16.
[35] Ibid. i. 166–7; this passage owes something to the Observer's *Diary*, 35.
[36] *Trip to Weymouth*, ii. 64–5. [37] Ibid. i. 23–30. [38] Ibid. ii. 108–15.
[39] Ibid. ii. 59–65.

'sacred person' of George is guarded only by 'a faithful nation'. The crucial contrast, of course, is between George and Louis XVI. Writing in late 1789 or early 1790, the author is ready to 'drop a tear' for the anxieties which beset the king of France, but is full of enthusiasm for 'the struggles of a people for the natural rights of mankind'.[40] 'The blissful period is approaching,' he prophesies, in a rhapsody the spirit of which is easier to understand than its literal meaning:

> when the rays of intellectual light, diffusing wide o'er civilized mankind, will inspire with their radiance the generous thirst of civil liberty: that period, when thrones established on the sublime principle of christian equity, princes shall become the shepherds, not the arbitrary rulers of their people. Be you, Oh Prince! that shepherd; and if, to the liberal maxims, you derive from letters a living ensample, still be wanting, Oh, hither turn your eyes! you need no more than turn them to this happy isle.[41]

George the shepherd, Farmer George: as we shall see, when the euphoria raised by the king's recovery died away, it would be possible to read his supposed pastoral virtues in a different light.

A Trip to Weymouth differs from earlier accounts of the king's visit in two important ways. It claims, first, that the success of the visit depends not simply on the fact that the king is allowing himself to be seen, is displaying himself to his people, but that in doing so he is revealing himself in his private character; and, secondly, that it is as a private man, only as a private man, that the king can expect to be loved. In her writings on George III Colley has argued persuasively that the success of George III in reawakening respect for the monarchy and representing himself as a proper object of the people's love was achieved by a 'formula' which combined 'ritual splendour, an appearance of domesticity, and ubiquity'.[42] The king needed to be both sublime and beautiful, to rule by fear and to rule by love. Elaborate processions, magnificent stage-managed state occasions, were essential if the monarch was to inspire the awe appropriate to his position as primary symbol of authority and sovereignty in the state. Being seen, and especially being seen as the father of a family, at once typical and exemplary, was equally essential if he was to win not simply the formal 'love' which it is a subject's duty to profess, but something more like the tender, sentimental affection we are supposed to feel for our own fathers.

A Trip to Weymouth, in its enthusiasm for the novel sight of a king 'retiring from the splendours of a court', disturbs the balance of this formula. Splendour and domesticity are not seen as coadjutators but as antagonists: the true majesty of the king, the true 'lustre' of the crown, even true respect for the throne, are to be secured by turning away from whatever shines or glitters and so reminds us of luxury. Colley points out that the 'formula' invented in the reign of George III made him and his successors 'captives after a fashion, at the same time as it captivated large numbers of Britons'.[43] The counter-formula proposed in *A Trip to*

[40] Ibid. i. 165–7. [41] Ibid. i. 167–8. [42] Colley, *Britons*, 236. [43] Ibid. 236.

Weymouth can equally be read as a benign attempt to capture the king, but on different terms, such as are imagined appropriate to captivate 'the middle and lower orders of society', whose 'reverence' is not in question, but who are discomfited by splendour and whose deeper loyalty is awakened only when it can find expression as love.

The king, and some, at least, of the other members of the royal family, were not unwilling prisoners. Abigail Gawthern, a middle-class Nottingham woman who stayed in Weymouth during the king's last visit in 1805, was delighted to record that 'the royal family ... all dress remarkably plain, seem extremely affable and lively, and do not appear in any pride or state'.[44] The queen, with her unprepossessing appearance and thick German accent, clearly found it harder than the rest of the family to court the popularity that being 'ordinary' appeared to promise.[45] In January 1797, bruised by the publicity surrounding the Prince of Wales's disastrous marriage and his continuing affair with Lady Jersey, she wrote to the king of her 'dislike to everything public', which had led her to appear only three times on the esplanade at Weymouth the previous year, and of her determination henceforth to lead her private life *in* private.[46] Princess Elizabeth, however, generally regarded as the most beautiful and most popular of the queen's daughters, embraced the opportunities offered by Weymouth with particular eagerness. 'You may easily believe', she wrote to the Duchess of Ancaster in 1791, 'that the time we spent there was extremely pleasant, as we had no forms nor nothing that was formal.'[47] On her very first visit her willingness to show herself to the people without a protective screen of splendour encouraged the 'Observer of the Times' to observe her with particular keenness: describing her first experiences of sea-bathing his *Diary* twice breaks out into rhapsodic snatches of verse, one borrowed from Thomson's *Seasons*, one apparently written for the occasion, which invited its readers to imagine the raptures of the sea as it caressed her naked body.[48]

The king himself, on his successive visits to Weymouth, seems increasingly to have cultivated his image as a private man. True, no one apart from other members of the royal family and his bathing-machine attendants was allowed in the bay when he was bathing,[49] except on his very first dip, when a band was ordered to surround his bathing-machine playing the national anthem, an

[44] *The Diary of Abigail Gawthern of Nottingham 1751–1810*, ed. Adrian Henstock (Nottingham: Thoroton Society, 1980), 118.

[45] For a satirical endorsement of this view, put into the mouth of the king himself, see [David Williams], *Royal Recollections on a Tour to Cheltenham, in the Year 1788* (London: James Ridgway, 1788) 28.

[46] *The Later Correspondence of George III*, ed. A. Aspinall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), ii (1963), 536.

[47] Letter transcribed in V. J. Adams's compilation of materials relating to the history of Weymouth (see above, n. 8).

[48] Observer's *Diary*, 24 (adapting Thomson's 'Summer', ll. 1300–3, 1321–2), and 43; and see the anonymous 'Lines on the Princess Elizabeth bathing in the Sea at Weymouth', in *An Asylum for Fugitive Pieces, in Prose and Verse*, 2nd edn, 3 vols. (London: J. Debrett, 1795), iii. 276.

[49] Boddy and West, *Weymouth*, 68.

occasion celebrated in caricature by John Nixon (Pl. 3.1). Otherwise George showed himself more and more to the locals and the numerous holidaymakers attracted by the chance of seeing, even conversing with, the king, many of whom were willing to adjust their daily timetable to increase their chances of an encounter with royalty. The royal party rose every morning at five, and were out and about an hour later, and so the shops opened at half past five, and 'by six the streets were as thronged with all the fashionables at court, and also by those who were anxious to be thought so, as Regent Street'. The king dined at three, so everyone dined at three; he appeared on the esplanade at six, and so did everyone else.[50] In 1797 Gillray published a caricature of the king on his daily stroll along the esplanade (Pl. 3.2), the ostensible occasion of which was the forgotten rivalry between General Lord Cathcart, whose wife was lady of the bedchamber to the younger princesses, and General David Dundas. But the Latin motto, borrowed from Ovid, advises the king to steer a careful middle course between the two men, which will lead him into the crowd of eager fashionable ladies in the centre background; and the king's posture suggests that the generals on either side of him are delaying that much more important encounter between George and his adoring subjects, in which he takes quite as much pleasure as they do.[51] There are anecdotes of the king riding round the country to the north of the town, striking up conversations with people in the fields, sometimes tipping them a guinea if they seemed to him especially deserving. On one such occasion we hear of a poor fieldworker wheeling her children home in a barrow after a day's work:

> She was overtaken by a fellow workwoman who told her the king was in such a field. Would the neighbour take the barrow for her whilst she just ran up to take a peep? But unfortunately for the poor woman, the Royal Cortege had taken a different way from the one she went, and overtook her neighbour who had crammed her own child into the barrow. His Majesty was struck by the sight, and ordered that a guinea should be given to the woman, who clutched her palm upon the prize and refused even to share it with the owner of the wheel-barrow and three-fourths of the children.[52]

Ordinariness, however, had its limits. George was clearly pleased that many of his subjects loved him, as a 'Baker Woman' in Sidmouth told Fanny Burney, ' "not so much for being he was a King, but because they said a was such a worthy Gentleman" '.[53] He was delighted if those he spoke to did not recognize him as the king, and yet was unable to resist revealing his true identity, or, sometimes, making it clear how honoured ordinary people were by his attentions. In Cheltenham one farmer had taken the king for a gentleman, and asked George if he had seen the king; 'being answered in the affirmative, the farmer said "Our

[50] Jo Draper, *The Georgians* (Wimborne: Dovecote Press, 1998), 22.
[51] *Metamorphoses*, 2. 137.
[52] *Elizabeth Ham by Herself 1783–1820*, ed. Eric Gillett (London: Faber & Faber, 1945), 35–6.
[53] *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame D'Arblay)*, i. *1791–1792*, ed. Joyce Hemlow, with Curtis D. Cecil and Althea Douglas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 27.

Pl. 3.1. John Nixon, *Royal Dipping* (London, 15 July 1789; BM 7544). Nixon appears to have been unaware of the ban on other people bathing while the king was in the water.

Pl. 3.2. [James Gillray], *The Esplanade* (London, 1 June 1797; BM 9019).

neighbours say, he's a good sort of man, but dresses very plain". "Aye, said his Majesty, as *plain* as you see me know," and rode on.'[54] In another of the Weymouth anecdotes—though it may be a variant of the story of the woman and the wheelbarrow—the king came across a woman making hay in an otherwise empty meadow. He asked her where her workmates were. They are all fools, she told him—they had all lost a day's wages by going to Weymouth to see the king. George gave her a guinea and said, 'When your friends return, you may tell them that the King called to see *you*.'[55]

Elizabeth Ham, who in the 1790s lived in Upwey, a village two miles north of Weymouth, and then in Weymouth itself, gives us an interesting glimpse both of how familiar the king may have become with some of the local inhabitants, and also of the difficulties of dealing with a man who demanded to be recognized as at once ordinary and royal. The king and her father, a brewer, became, she tells us, 'quite gossiping acquaintances', though the king having by now recovered his old habits of speech the gossip appears to have been very one-sided. 'The King was scarcely ever a day in Weymouth before he took my father by the button to learn all the news, and he must have been possessed of unusual powers could he have answered the Royal questions consecutively as they were asked.'[56] Ham gives us a good idea of how the king's impromptu encounters with ordinary people may sometimes have been received. One day the king rode up with his attendants to the Hams' brewery expecting to be shown round. The visit threatened a repeat of one he had paid, shortly before his illness, to the huge Whitbread brewery in London, which had been the subject of a hilarious poem by Peter Pindar satirizing the king's surreal ignorance of everyday matters, his incessant habit of asking pointless questions, and the grotesque triviality of the occasion.[57] Elizabeth's father was out, and she and her mother hid behind the curtains hoping that George would go away. Her sister Anne, however, was playing outside. ' "Is this Mr. Ham's little girl?" said his Majesty. "Yes, Sir," said Anne. "Is he at home?" "No, Sir, but he is coming soon to take Mamma and me to the play to see the King." "Well—you must tell him the King has called to see *him*," and off they rode.' The pose of ordinariness, of interest in the small lives of ordinary people, is undercut by the determination that the Hams should be duly conscious of the honour he has done them, so that it is no surprise when Ham remarks wryly that her father 'was quite delighted to have escaped the Royal visit'.[58]

Affability, Gillray's brilliant caricature of 1795 (Pl. 3.3), imagines exactly the kind of embarrassing encounter that the Hams had been anxious to avoid. George III,

[54] *GM* 58 (1788, Part 2), 758.

[55] I have not come across the original source of this anecdote, which I found in a caption to a nineteenth-century engraving of the incident in Weymouth Library, call-mark L.942.073.GE.41.

[56] *Elizabeth Ham*, 35.

[57] 'Instructions to a Celebrated Laureate' in John Wolcot (Peter Pindar), *The Works of Peter Pindar*, 5 vols. (London: J. Walker *et al.*, 1812), i. 480–96.

[58] *Elizabeth Ham*, 39.

Pl. 3.3. James Gillray, *Affability* (London, 10 February 1795; BM 8616).

dressed in his off-duty farmer's uniform, and Charlotte, dressed down to meet the people, have wandered into a farmyard where George has accosted a farmworker and, in the mistaken belief that he is being jovially familiar, is interrogating his terrified victim like an officious Bow Street Runner, his face with its staring eyes thrust forward, his left boot with its threatening spur aggressively planted in the farmworker's space. In his *Royal Recollections on a Tour of Cheltenham*, the veteran radical David Williams suggested that the king might have had some idea of how his attempts at familiarity were received by some of those he selected as his targets, but could not in the end admit, even to himself, how unwelcome they were. The recollections pretend to be written by the king himself, and at one moment, after calling, uninvited, on various citizens of Cheltenham, he admonishes himself thus:

> I must be a little more on my guard than at Windsor, where, if I had continued my familiarities, I should have depopulated the neighbourhood. The doors were shut up and barricaded the instant I appeared; or perhaps a single servant would peep out at the window, and declare earnestly, 'there is no body at home.' I have hunted families out of closets, cellars, and coal-holes, when they were not disposed to a little chat with me . . . [59]

In spite of these rebuffs, however, Williams's George cannot persuade himself that his pose of ordinariness is anything but well received, and manages to remain convinced that he excels in 'the arts of familiarity'. 'I have nodded and capered to the band at Windsor, until the whole terrace has roared out a boisterous laugh, in which I heartily joined. . . . if we make the people laugh, their hearts are always with us. They shall laugh heartily whenever I appear.'[60] John Wolcot (Peter Pindar), certainly did, and the enormous popularity of his 'royal' poems, from the mid-1780s to the mid-1790s, suggests the king's pose made many of his subjects shake with laughter.

III

Where the holiday in Cheltenham had attracted satirical commentary, this came from supporters of the Prince of Wales in his unending war with the king over the Prince's extravagance and his clandestine marriage with the Catholic Mrs Fitzherbert. But it was directed chiefly at the supposed motives and supposed uncertainties of the king in adopting his new pose, and at his apparently naive belief, persisted in in spite of all evidence to the contrary, that he excelled in 'the arts of familiarity'. The general delight with which his recovery was greeted in 1789 made it difficult to satirize the king directly, and royal satires, all produced from the perspective of the Prince of Wales, tended either to apologize for and explain

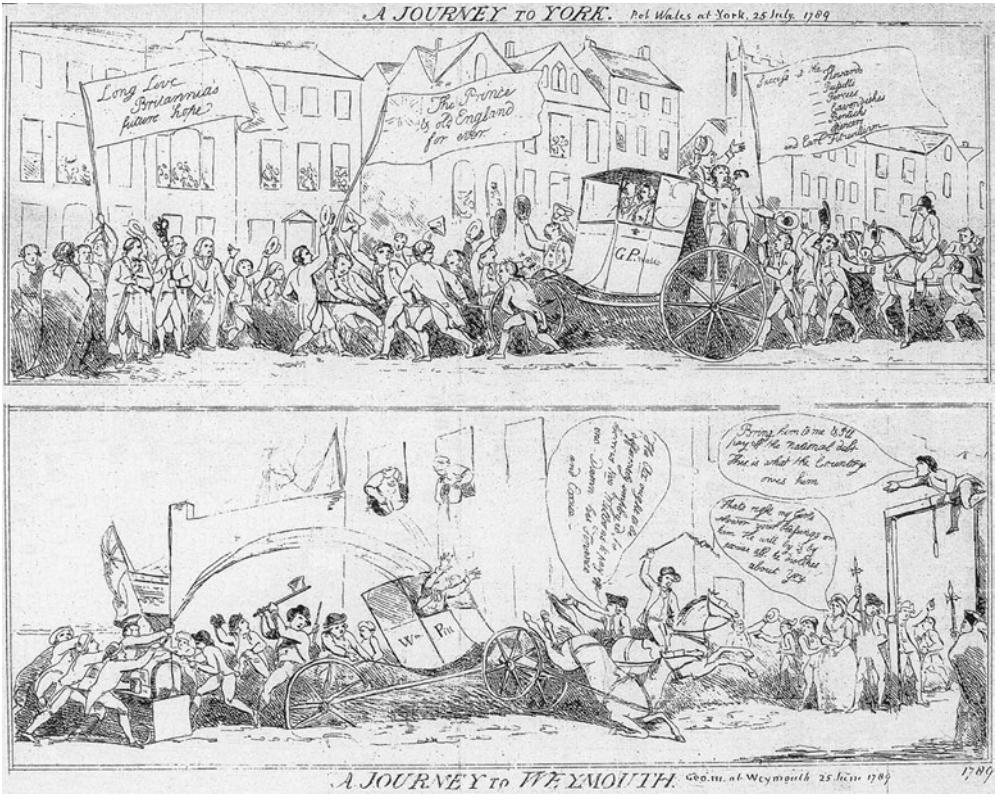
[59] [Williams], *Royal Recollections*, 66–7. For a useful discussion of this pamphlet, see Whitney R. D. Jones, *David Williams: The Anvil and the Hammer* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1986), 96–100; and see also Vincent Carretta, *George III and the Satirists from Hogarth to Byron* (Athens, Ga., and London: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 277–80.

[60] [Williams], *Royal Recollections*, 27–8.

the Prince's errors, now compounded by his evident eagerness during the king's illness to become Prince Regent, or to praise the Prince without attacking the king, or to attack the king's ministers where the king himself may also have been the indirect target. Thus *The Royal Tour to Weymouth and Places Adjacent*, probably also by David Williams but supposedly written by the brace of greyhounds that had been presented to the king as he travelled through the New Forest, was an apology for the Prince's behaviour that managed to suggest, but with a very light touch, that his errors were entirely the result of his upbringing. The anonymous, and anonymously published caricature, *A Journey to York. A Journey to Weymouth*, commemorated the Prince's visit to York in August 1789 (Pl. 3.4). He was there for the races, but the local Whig magnates managed to turn the occasion into something approaching a state visit, and organized a demonstration, in form resembling some of those we examined in Chapter 1, designed to boost the Prince's waning popularity. The print contrasts the supposed enthusiasm of the citizens of York for 'Britannia's future Hope' with an imaginary riot against Pitt as he travelled to Weymouth to see the king on Privy Council business. Pitt is attacked chiefly for his fiscal policies, but his recent success in protecting the king from Whig demands that the Prince should become regent certainly made it possible to read the print as an indirect attack on the king as well.[61] The exception to this rule of indirection is Pindar's *The Royal Tour to Exeter*, written shortly after the king's holiday of 1789; and it is the exeption that proves the rule, for its attack on the king's behaviour was so very direct that for prudential reasons it was not published in full until 1795.

There appears to be a general agreement among those who have discussed the satirical representations of the king's ordinariness that far from damaging the king they may actually have been helpful to his attempt to project himself as a king familiar with his people: that the king's idiosyncrasies—his frugality, his apparent ignorance of commonplace details of everyday life, his coercive attempts to engage his overawed subjects in one-sided conversations, his oddly repetitive and staccato manner of speaking—all this, so repeatedly exposed in caricatures or satirical writings, gave his subjects the illusion of knowing him and so made it easier for them to love him. Furthermore, the argument goes, the fact that royal satires were tolerated, were not prosecuted as seditious libels, was a result of the fact that they concentrated so exclusively on the ordinariness of the king's private character and so distracted attention from his political role. In his perceptive book *George III and the Satirists*, Vincent Carretta has argued that Pindar's royal satires were tolerated because their unintentional effect was to confirm and even to raise public esteem for the king, for however much they represent the king as funny and foolish, 'they

[61] *The Royal Tour to Weymouth, and Places adjacent, in the Year 1789* (London: James Ridgway, 1789); for the greyhounds, see *GM* 59 (Part 2 1789,) 855, and Observer's *Diary* 2–3; for the Prince's visit to York, see [Frederick Atkinson], *The Tour to York. A Circumstantial Account of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales's Visit to that City* (York: Wilson, Spence, and Mawman, London: G. G. and J. Robinson *et al.*, 1789).



Pl. 3.4. Artist unknown, *A Journey to York. A Journey to Weymouth* (no publication details [1789]; BM 7551). The horses have been unhitched from the Prince of Wales's coach, and he is led in triumph through York, followed by a banner listing the names of leading Whig politicians. By contrast one of the horses drawing Pitt's coach, terrified by the hoots of an angry crowd, has lost its footing, and the coach is attacked by a man with an axe, in a scene which anticipates the attack on the king's coach in late 1795 (see Chapter 1). Pitt himself is threatened with the gallows, and drenched by a fire-hose and the contents of chamber-pots.

find so little of real substance with which to find fault'.[62] This argument may work for the poems of the late 1780s, the period of Pindar's work that Carretta concentrates on. At the end of the best of his royal satires of the late 1780s, Pindar had playfully suggested that such a hilarious and bathetic occasion as George's visit to Whitbread's brewery was worth celebrating in verse precisely because it was so trivial and therefore so harmless: a king with a more regal sense of his power and position might be more admirable, but might do much more damage, as George

[62] Carretta, *George III and the Satirists*, 280.

himself had proved in the first two decades of his reign. But as we shall see, the argument is much less persuasive for the crisis year of 1795, when George's popularity was at a low point and satire, Pindar's especially, was more bitter than before.

The Royal Tour to Exeter had probably been completed by 1791, when a version of about a dozen of its stanzas appeared as a footnote to the third canto of Pindar's royal epic the *Lousiad*.[63] In so far as it is based on fact, it probably uses information Pindar picked up on a visit to Exeter in 1790, and with one major exception it accurately follows the order of events described in the account of the visit in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and the much longer account, published at the beginning of the next century, by Shirley Woolmer, an Exeter bookseller—though both these texts represent as a triumph what Pindar describes as a disaster. The poem is in the form of a letter to his sister by a Devonshire farmer, 'John Ploughshare', imagined as one of thousands of Devonians who had crammed into Exeter to see the king, and it is written in a south Devonshire dialect—Wolcot was born in Devon—the point of which is of course to present Ploughshare's own credentials as an ordinary man, and thus his right to pass judgement on the supposed ordinariness of the king. The dialect may look inhospitably thick at first, but, read aloud, it was probably comprehensible (a few items of vocabulary aside) to Pindar's polite readers, for west country rustics were familiar characters in comedy and ballad opera, and their parts were probably more convincingly spoken on stage than they were spelled on the page. Pindar's version of south Devonshire certainly made more concessions to a metropolitan audience than, for example, Peter Lock's much-reprinted *An Exmoor Scolding*, a north Devonshire satire first published in 1746, which by the end of the century came supplied with a large glossary or a parallel translation.[64]

Ploughshare was thoroughly disappointed by the visit, partly because the repeated, hyperbolic, and sentimental panegyrics on the king published in the newspapers since his recovery had provoked an aching hunger in the king's subjects in Devon that could not possibly have been satisfied by the mere sight of a mere mortal. But his disappointment was compounded by the unedifying scramble for the king's attention by the local dignitaries, by the king's own unfathomable combination of aloofness and banality, which resulted in an occasion that managed to be neither formal nor familiar, and by the pathetic optimism

[63] John Wolcot (Peter Pindar), *The Lousiad, an Heroi-Comic Poem. Canto the Third* (Dublin: P. Byrne *et al.*, 1791), 19–20.

[64] First published in *GM* 16 (1746), 352–5, and reprinted in fifteen editions by 1795. See [Peter Lock], *An Exmoor Scolding, in the Propriety and Decency of Exmoor Language, … the Eighth Edition: Wherein are now added, Such Notes in the Margin, and a Vocabulary at the End, as seem necessary for explaining Uncouth Expressions, and interpreting barbarous Words and Phrases* (Exeter: B. Thorn, 1775); [Peter Lock], *An Exmoor Scolding, between Two Sisters … to which is perfixed* [*sic*] *a Translation of the Same, into Plain English* (Exeter: J. McKenzie, 1795). Lock was a blind itinerant fiddler; at various times the satire has been attributed to Andrew Brice, Benjamin Bowring, and William Hole.

of the crowd, who, however much excluded and insulted by their betters, persist in the mad hope of being vouchsafed some epiphanic vision of majesty.

I need to give a fairly detailed and sequential account of the poem, for the devil of Pindar's royal satires was in their detail: it was the fact, among other things, that they were cast in the form of circumstantial narratives that made them, by 1795, so much more corrosive of the king's majesty than, for example, Gillray's caricatures. Ploughshare begins by describing the wild enthusiasm and desire of the townsfolk, 'just like vokes bewitched!'

> Lord! how they lang'd to zee the KING;
> To hear un zay zom *marv'lous thing!*
> Leek mangy dogs they itch'd![65]

They are overcome by a collective mania, an uncontrollable restlessness, as they charge this way and that, desperate to find the best vantage point from which to appease their hunger:

> Leek bullocks sting'd by appledranes, [wasps]
> Currantin about the lanes, [careering]
> Vokes theese way dreav'd and that;
> Zom hootin, heavin, soalin, hawlin; [pulling about, vb. tr.]
> Zom in the mucks, and pellum sprawlin; [dung, dust]
> Leek pancakes all zo flat.[66]

Meanwhile the country people are racing into the city as if taking part in a steeplechase or stag-hunt:

> Hosses and mares, assnegers, moyles, [asses, mules]
> Leaping the hedges, ditches, stiles,
> Hundreds comm'd in at least;
> Gallopin, trattin, spurrin, vallin,
> Halloin, laughin, cryin, squawlin,
> Vour mounted 'pon one beast.[67]

At last the king arrives, not in state as the crowds seem to have expected but in banal ordinariness, hot, travel-stained, and weary, 'With doust and zweat az netmeg brown'.[68] The informality of his appearance encouraged one, at least, of the local dignitaries to treat him with equal if inappropriate familiarity. During the debates on the king's illness, John Rolle, Tory MP for Devon, had shocked many members of the Commons by referring to the notorious but unmentionable secret of the Prince of Wales's illegal and unconstitutional marriage to the Catholic

[65] John Wolcot (Peter Pindar), *The Royal Visit to Exeter; A Poetical Epistle by John Ploughshare* (London: J. Walker *et al.*, 1795), 2.
[66] Ibid. 2. [67] Ibid. 2–3. [68] Ibid. 5.

Mrs Fitzherbert. He had gone so far as to propose, unsuccessfully, an amendment to the Regency Bill itself which would have debarred the Prince from becoming regent if he was 'proved to be married, either in law, or in fact, to a Papist, or one of the Roman Catholic persuasion'.[69] This conduct had no doubt pleased the king on his recovery, and now, himself damp with sweat and powdered with dust, Rolle was seen trotting alongside the royal party, eager to show that he was on the easiest terms with the monarch:

> Now shovin in the coach his head,
> Meanin, we giss'd, it might be zed,
> "The 'SQUIRE and KING be chattin."[70]

According to the *Gentleman's Magazine* and Shirley Woolmer's guidebook to Exeter, the king was now greeted by the mayor and corporation, who presented him with the keys and sword of the city, which he graciously returned, saying 'They are already in very good hands'.[71] Ploughshare's version, as he watched from the distant viewpoint of the excluded, describes a meaningless and undignified ceremonial in which the mayor clumsily 'Pok'd to the KING a gert long sword, | Which he pok'd back agen'.[72]

The royal family might have been expected to stay with the bishop, but according to Ploughshare the matter of his lodging was too important not to become infected by the greed and ambition of the local churchmen. The bishop, John Ross, a tremendous pluralist, immensely rich, and, so the *DNB* tells us, 'very hospitable', refused to receive the royal party in his palace, partly, according to Ploughshare, out of miserliness, partly because, now 80, and having blotted his copybook with the king by advocating an extension of toleration to dissenters, he had nothing to expect from the king in the way of further preferment.[73] So

> . . . to the DEAN's, bounce in they went
> And all the day in munchin spent
> And guzlin too, no doubt[.][74]

Perhaps as a reward for his hospitality, Dean William Buller was the recipient of all the patronage Ross could no longer hope for: immediate translation to the more

[69] See *An Impartial Report of all the Proceedings in Parliament on the late Important Subject of a Regency* (London: J. Bew, 1789), 100–1, 336, 490–504, 513–14.

[70] Pindar, *Exeter*, 6.

[71] *GM* 59 (1789, Part 2), 1047; Shirley Woolmer, *A Concise Account of the City of Exeter*, 2nd edn. (Exeter: S. Woolmer, 1811), 18. Woolmer's is the fullest account I have discovered of the royal visit. Unlike Pindar's it is a warmly loyal account, but ends, perhaps surprisingly, with a long excerpt from Pindar's poem (28–32).

[72] Pindar, *Exeter*, 6.

[73] Compare *GM* 58 (1788, Part 2), on the king's visit to Worcester in 1788, where the bishop, Richard Hurd, gave up his palace for the king's use. Ross had spoken against the Test Acts in a 30 Jan. sermon addressed to the House of Lords in 1779.

[74] Pindar, *Exeter*, 10.

valuable deanery of Canterbury, and promotion to be Bishop of Exeter when Ross died in 1792.[75]

Again according to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the royal family, on first entering the deanery, shewed themselves at the windows as they had on arriving at Weymouth, 'to gratify the eager curiosity of the populace', but for Ploughshare the visit seemed by now to have settled into a pattern designed to frustrate the people, still 'mad az hares in March', in their desire for the closest possible sight of the king.[76] Thus the following morning the mayor, the corporation, the crowd, all gathered outside the cathedral expecting George to enter in procession through the large west door. Instead, the dean slipped him into the cathedral through the small, private door to the choir.[77] Inside the church, the mania to *see* is as desperate as it was outside. 'It was dam quare', writes Ploughshare, in a cathedral,

> To zee ould Dames wey leathern cheeks,
> Hoisted upon the fellows' backs—
> A penny for a stare.[78]

The king, seated on the bishop's throne and as if unconscious of the hubbub, directs his own stares towards the roof, and, remarking how very neat and clean it was, asks the dean one of his characteristically loopy questions: ' "D'ye mop it, mop it, Measter DEAN—Mop, mop it every week?" ' The dean politely replies that in Exeter at least mops long enough to reach the cathedral roof were not to be had.[79]

After the service a royal levee, the first since the king's illness, was held, apparently impromptu, in the Bishop's Palace,[80] at which everyone who wishes is invited to be presented to the king. The levee is organized as officiously as possible by Rolle, who instructs the people on how to 'bow down, and drap the knee', and warns them that:

> . . . when KING GEORGE's hand they kiss'd,
> Leek vish they must be *dum*;
> And backwards crawl leek crabs away:
> Good sound advice—much as to zay,
> "KINGS must not zee your b-m."[81]

The levee develops into a farce, and exposes, more than anything else in the visit, the irreconcilable desires of the king and crowd alike for a monarchy both

[75] See Woolmer, *City as Exeter*, 56–7.

[76] *GM* 59 (1789, Part 2), 1047; Pindar, *Exeter*, 12.

[77] Some sense of this can be gathered by reading between the lines of Woolmer's account (19), which, without suggesting any confusion about the visit, describes the odd manoeuvres of the welcoming party from the cloister gate to the west door to the door of the choir.

[78] Pindar, *Exeter*, 12.

[79] Ibid. 13. Pindar claims in a footnote that George had asked exactly the same question in Salisbury Cathedral, and received much the same answer. He describes the incident at Salisbury in *Works*, ii. 480–2.

[80] Woolmer, *City of Exeter*, 20.

[81] Pindar, *Exeter*, 15–16.

majestic and familiar. Ploughshare is bewildered by the absurdity of the ceremony, its surreal undignified formality. The king stands, for four hours,

> Receiving bows and scrapes and kisses
> Vor all the world leek handsome MISSES,
> Expecting to be woo'd.[82]

The people, 'Tag rag and bobtail', 'Wey derty sharts and grizly beards, | Much lek a greazy pack o' keards',[83] shuffle up to him and plant smackingly loyal kisses on his wearily extended hand. Rolle fusses about, pulling terrified tradesmen down on to their knees or dragging them forwards to keep the interminable line moving as fast as possible.[84]

But before the ceremony is finished, it is brought abruptly to an end by a moment of familiarity far beyond what the king was prepared to put up with. One loyal farmer, shaking with awe, actually *spoke*.

> "I'm glad your MEDJESTY to zee,
> "And hope your MEDJESTY (quoth he)
> "Wull nere be *maz'd* again."

Throughout the tour of the summer of 1789, good wishes for the king's recovery and future health abounded; he was welcomed to Weymouth by the Reverend William Tasker with an appalling poem that invited Hygeia to rise from the sea and waft healing breezes in the king's direction.[85] But to refer to the king's illness as anything more than a mild 'indisposition', still more to suggest it had been an episode of madness, was an impossible breach of decorum. The king is puzzled, but evidently suspicious of the farmer's meaning. '"*Maz'd! maz'd!* What's *maz'd*"' he demands. One of his attendants hesitates for a moment before tactfully suggesting that it is 'an old Dev'nshire word' whose meaning he will try to discover. But his hesitation is all the confirmation the king needs: he turns his back on the queue, and manages again to disappoint his loyal subjects.[86]

The king was now in a sulk. The next item on the punishing programme dreamed up by the mayor and corporation seems to have been a tour of the city's chief sights, 'Guildhall, Circus, Castle', but the exhausted and insulted king was having none of it, and according to Ploughshare another undignified scene ensued, in which Earl Fortesque, the Lord Lieutenant of the county, tried and failed to start the king into motion:

> . . . LORD FOSKY gid'n a shove;
> But virm's a rock, nort mad'n move,
> Zo 'twas in vain to wrastle.[87]

[82] Ibid. 18. [83] Ibid. 19–20.

[84] For a hilarious prose account of this incident, see Pindar, *Works*, ii. 356 n.

[85] For versions of this poem see Observer's *Diary*, 17–19; *The Weekly Entertainer*, 14 Sept. 1789; *The Monthly Register of Literature*, 2 vols. (London: J. Owen *et al.*, 1792), ii. 68; and, for an amusing but not inaccurate summary of the poem, *MC* 1 Sept. 1794.

[86] Pindar, *Exeter*, 21–2. [87] Ibid. 23.

Perhaps, as Burney suggests, because the 'intemperate eagerness of the people to see the king' had frightened the royal family, they returned to the palace. But this was not quite the last sight the crowds had of the king: he made one more unfortunate attempt to be seen by the crowd, or, more likely, to see *them*. Ploughshare describes the moment with scornful irony:

> But this a did—now this was kind—
> Knowin the people's longing mind,
> And being pretty tall,
> A stude 'pon's tiptoes, it is zed;
> And, condescending, pok'd his head
> Over the BISHOP'S wall.[88]

The crowd, still determined to be pleased by a king they had been taught to believe could do no wrong, make what they can of the sight and decorate it with all the loyal hyperbole they can manage:

> Zum of the Exter voke suppose
> They plainly zeed his royal nose,
> And zum his royal eyes;
> And, Lord! whatever peart they zeed,
> In this, they one and all agreed,
> 'Twas glorious, gert, and wise.[89]

According to Ploughshare, the king did subsequently make a quick tour of the Devon and Exeter hospital, to which he promised to make a charitable contribution the *next* time he passed through Exeter. This offer, '*cruel* kind | Towards the zick, and lame, and blind', confirms Ploughshare's disgust with the whole occasion, and he explodes in anger at this display of the king's much-vaunted moderation: the promise was 'a pack o' trosh; | Wind, faith! Net one crume better'.[90] He contrasts the meanness of the king with the 'mad' generosity of the people, who, 'to please the Royal chops', had showered the king with presents of the produce of the country, 'Vish, vlesh, and vowl, and vruit'.[91]

But the greatest insult was still to come. The mayor had organized a vast banquet for 250 people, in rooms elaborately and expensively decorated for the occasion, and had even gone to the vast expense of having a 'gert gold chair' made for the king.[92] The feast spoiled while the mayor, corporation, and 250 guests waited for the king; a message was sent reminding him that his attendance was expected, but

[88] Ibid. 23–4. [89] Ibid. 24.

[90] Ibid. 25–6. This visit to the hospital, introduced by Plougshare as something he has heard not witnessed ('I believe 'tis true'), is probably a fiction intended to give Pindar an opportunity to accuse the king of being uncharitable. There is no mention of it either in the *GM* (which omits much else) or in Woolmer.

[91] Pindar, *Exeter*, 26. [92] Ibid. 29.

The KING no notice tuke, 'tis said,
But, leek a pisky, laugh'd and play'd [pixie]
To push-pin wey the QUEEN.[93]

It was this final insult that probably explains the fact that though small medals or conders were struck to commemorate almost every town George visited in his trips of 1788 and 1789—Cheltenham, Worcester, Lyndhurst, Lymington, Southampton, Weymouth, Plymouth, and Bath (Pl. 3.5)—no medal appears to have been ordered at Exeter.[94] Next morning the king left the city, delighted, so Ploughshare maliciously suggests, by the gloomy and disappointed faces of the mayor and aldermen lined up in front of the Guildhall. When the royal coach was out of sight, they dispersed to their homes, with 'tails between their legs, leek curs, | Because they war so zlighted'.[95] Ploughshare himself, who has learned a bitter lesson about 'What zort of vokes GERT PEOPLE be', is left feeling as much of a fool as he accuses everyone else of being who had expected so much from the royal visit. He has lost all desire, he tells his sister, 'For zeeing ROYAL THINGS':

And whan my Bible next I rede,
Zo leet I worship all the breed,
I'll *skep* the *book* of KINGS.[96]

At his very first entrance the king's appearance had set up the disenchantment that later entirely overwhelms Ploughshare. However much George himself, or the 'Observer of the Times' or Joseph Treadlight, had convinced themselves that the affectation of ordinariness was calculated to endear the king to 'the middle and lower orders of society', the Execestrians, or some of them, had different ideas. They wanted a familiar monarchy, if that meant they could get to see George up close and personal; but they wanted a sight worth seeing, a king, not an ordinary man. They had expected magnificence and felt swindled and insulted by the plainness of the royal party. The milliners of the city, Pindar claims, were disgusted by the outfits worn by the queen and her daughters, which

Was shellings net worth thirty;
That, Lord! they wear'd but little laces,
Their zilks mert blish to show their faces,
Ould-fashion'd, stripd, and dirty.[97]

[93] Ibid. 29. Woolmer, *City of Exeter*, 21, describes the banquet without suggesting that the king's presence was expected. But see *GM* 58 (1788, Part 2), 649, which describes another banquet held in honour of the king on his trip to Cheltenham, which the king did not attend.

[94] Michael Mitchiner, *Jetons, Medalets and Tokens: British Isles circa 1558 to 1830*, iii (Sanderstead: Hawkins, 1988), 2021–2, 2031–2; R. Dalton and S. H. Hamer, *The Provincial Token-Coinage of the 18th Century* (1910; London: Seaby, 1967), Devon, no. 8; Dorset, no. 12; Gloucestershire, nos. 66–77; Hampshire, no. 45; Worcester, nos. 33–46.

[95] Pindar, *Exeter*, 30–1. [96] Ibid. 31–2. [97] Ibid. 28.

Perhaps they were out of touch with the understated style of metropolitan fashion, but they had expected the royal family to dress up for what to the city was a great occasion, not dress down for the road.[98]

For the most part, however, as we have seen, Ploughshare seems to be contrasting his own reactions to the visit with that of most of those who had gathered to see the king. But he continually represents them as being loyally determined to make the best of a visit in which they were repeatedly insulted and denied the sight for which they craved, in which their yearning for majesty obliges them to attempt to re-mystify the king's ordinariness as extraordinary, even though, according to Ploughshare, the king's pose as an ordinary man had revealed not the perfection of his private character, as Treadlight believed, but his ordinary imperfections—petulance, meanness, a contempt for his inferiors—which a more formal bearing would have concealed. In his other royal poem on 1795, Pindar would represent the king in Weymouth itself, the place above all where his supposed ordinariness was on display to his subjects, and where it provided them, for good or ill, with the opportunity for a genuinely close-up view of his private character.

Pl. 3.5. Conder commemorating George III's visits in 1789 to Lyndhurst, Lymington, Southampton, and Weymouth, 1789.

[98] Something of the queen's attitude to the excursion to Exeter and Plymouth may be surmised from her account of it in a letter to Prince Augustus in Sept. 1789. For the vast majority of the king's subjects, the point of the excursion, apart from the naval review, must have been that it took in some of the larger towns in Devon—Honiton and Axminster as well as Exeter and Plymouth—and thus afforded a large number of people an opportunity to see the royal family. Charlotte, however, described it as an excursion to Plymouth and 'Mount Edgecumbe, Cotte Hill [Cotoe Castle], Merystow [Marstow], Saltram, and Mr Bastard's', as though the point was for the royal family to see the great houses and parks of the aristocracy: see *Later Correspondence*, ed. Aspinall, i. (1962), 443.

IV

On 3 October 1795 the royal family left Weymouth, after a seven-week holiday, and returned to Windsor; just over a fortnight later Pindar published his account of their trip, a poem of nearly 400 lines. *The Royal Tour, and Weymouth Amusements* revisits a joke that Pindar had first made in the 1780s: he represents the holiday as a momentous occasion, at least by the mundane standards of George's reign, and as one which his loyalty to the king had obliged him to celebrate because the official poet laureate was too idle to fulfil the duties of his post. In 1795, however, the joke had a rather different impact: in the late 1780s the poet laureate had been Thomas Warton, a serious poet for whom Pindar had some respect—indeed, his *Ode upon Ode* of 1787 includes an intriguing imaginary debate with Warton on the nature of kingship in the context of late eighteenth-century modernity.[99] The office of laureate, however, was now held by Henry James Pye, a much more lightweight writer, for whom Pindar feels nothing but jocular contempt.

In 1789 the royal family, wary of exhausting the convalescent king and anxious that as many people as possible should have the opportunity of seeing him, had taken five days to reach Weymouth. In later trips they became used to covering the 113 miles from Windsor to Weymouth in a single day.[100] Pindar's account of the 1795 trip opens with a description of this furious drive which by the end of its second line has already burdened the king with two mocking comparisons: George as Caesar, George as the sun.

> SEE! CAESAR'S off! the dust around him hovers,
> And, gathering, lo, the KING of GLORY covers![101]

The clouds of dust thrown up by the royal party mutate into thunder-bearing storm clouds, probably in reference to the disasters of the year—the defeat of the British army in Flanders, the failure of the attempt to open a new front in north-western France, the near-collapse of the anti-French coalition, the scarcity of food and rising food prices. George, Britain's sun-king, does not exactly ride the storm; 'He rolls amid the elemental roar'.[102] That the sun 'rolls' among the clouds may be a grand conception of elemental force; to say that the king 'rolls' in the midst of buffetting political troubles seems to compare him with something out of control, like a ship 'rolling' in a storm.

The paragraph that follows, beginning

> Heav'ns! with what ardour through the lanes he drives,
> The country trembling for its tenants lives![103]

[99] Pindar, *Works*, i. 434 ff.
[100] See *Weymouth Guide*, 2nd edn., 112.
[101] Pindar, *Royal Tour*, ll. 33–4.
[102] Ibid. ll. 40–1.
[103] Ibid. ll. 41–2.

describes the mad dash of the king's carriage in a language ambivalently solemn and trivializing. It is as if the king's reign, his 'wild career', threatens the safety of the state, though it soon emerges that the 'tenants' the king terrifies out of his path are frogs, hares, birds, dogs, and so on, together with a few old women who are forced into an irreverent and unintentionally satirical riposte, committing the great breach of etiquette against which Sir John Rolle had warned the burghers of Exeter:

> Old women (call'd "a pack of blinking b——s,")
> Dash'd by the THUNDERING LIGHTHORSE into *ditches*,
> Scrambling and howling, with post——rs pointed,
> Sad picture! plump against the LORD'S ANOINTED.[104]

Pindar's own imagery struggles to keep up with the rushing king, who now becomes 'great AEOL', causing a chaotic disturbance in nature 'With all his winds, EAST, WEST, and SOUTH, and NORTH'[105] blowing together:

> Straws from the lanes dispers'd, and whirl'd in air,
> The blustering wonders of his mouth declare.
> Heav'd from their deep foundations, with dread sound,
> Barns and old houses thunder to the ground.[106]

Even when the royal party takes its usual brief rest at the inn at Hartford Bridge the king's hyperactivity continues:

> He breakfasts on the road, gulps tea, bolts toast;
> Jokes with the waiter, witty with the host;
> Runs to the garden, with his morning dues;
> Makes mouths at CLOACINA'S; reads the news.
> Now mad for fruit, he scours the garden round;
> Knocks every apple that he spies, to ground;
> Loads ev'ry royal pocket, seeks his chaise;
> Plumps in, and fills the village with amaze.[107]

The wasteful and careless theft, as if by royal prerogative, of others' goods, no doubt in the belief that his victims are honoured by his attentions; the thoughtless elbowing aside of his subjects when he thinks he is 'meeting' them; the endless juvenile fidgeting; the relentless exercise of his 'blustering mouth' (compared above with his arsehole), in brief, staccato 'chats' in which he is usually the only speaker—this description of the king's dash to Weymouth figures and foreshadows his attempts to relax at Weymouth itself, as if the weeks he spends there are simply a continuation of his headlong, destructive journey. The character and point of Pindar's poem is perfectly suggested by his instructions to the poet laureate as the king embarks on the final stage of his gallop:

[104] Ibid. ll. 49–52. [105] Ibid. ll. 57–8. [106] Ibid. ll. 61–4.
[107] Ibid. ll. 67–4.

> He's off again—he smokes along the road!
> Pursue him, PYE—pursue him with an *ode*.[108]

Pye, even if he could bestir himself to celebrate the royal tour, would always be scrambling behind the king, desparately trying to hit a jerkily moving target, when the duty of a poet laureate requires him to display the king as the still centre of the nation. For Pindar, on the other hand, George's undignified and irresponsible restlessness is itself the target, and Pindar hits it best when his poem seems most to be floundering in the king's wake.

When the king finally arrives in Weymouth and 'treads the Esplanade', he is greeted by the peals of church bells, a *feu de joie* by the troops stationed there to protect him, the rough music of drums and hurdigurdies, 'the roaring welcome of a thousand jaws!'.[109] As in the Exeter poem, Pindar does not dispute the king's popularity: his satire is directed not only at George but against those who are so willing to humiliate themselves by paying such generous respect and making obeisance—'Dipping, like ducks, their noddles in a pond'[110]—to a king who adores their adoration yet treats them with casual contempt. The presence in Weymouth of 'crown'd heads' is good for the local economy, as George points out to John Stacie, the keeper of the Royal Hotel and Assembly Rooms,—' "Good sign, good sign, to have no empty beds!" '[111]—but he feels no obligation to contribute to it other than by acting as a magnet for visitors. He negotiates a special low price for excursions on the water, a sign of royal grandeur that Pye is expressly rebuked for not celebrating; and when he is forced to purchase anything locally, he ensures that he buys cheaper than anyone else, in exchange for the honour he confers on the Weymouth shopkeepers by patronizing them.[112] The great majority of his needs, however, are sent down furtively, each night, by two London tradesmen, and by the mail-coach from Windsor. 'GREAT CAESAR' demonstrates his greatness by lovingly handling each petty article as it is unloaded—'Turnips and cabbages, and soap and candles'—and by congratulating himself on his own frugality: ' "For WEYMOUTH is a d-mn'd expensive place." '[113]

Most of the poem is taken up by pretended transcripts of the king's bullying conversations and brief breathless narratives of his holiday activities:

> And now to DELAMOT's the M——H speeds:
> He catches up a score of books, and reads—
> Learns nothing—sudden quits the book abode—
> Orders his horse, and scours the Dorset road.
> He's in again! he boards the barge—sets sail—[114]

and so on. Such passages represent the king, now in his mid-fifties, as a fidgety child, lacking the intellect or the concentration to know how to pass his idle hours.

[108] Ibid. ll. 75–6. [109] Ibid. l. 86. [110] Ibid. l. 294. [111] Ibid. ll. 165–6.
[112] Ibid. ll. 101–4. [113] Ibid. ll. 99–100, 167–74.
[114] Ibid. ll. 333–7; Peter Delamotte kept a bookshop and library at Weymouth: see *Universal British Directory*, iv. 749.

His sea-bathing, Pindar scoffs, is a mere childish paddle, up to his knees only.[115] He was fond of chatting with children on the Esplanade, the *Morning Chronicle* tells us, and so much like childish prattle was his own idiosyncratic way of speaking, according to Pindar, that the polite 'mob' that gathered around him would '*marle* that *children* talk as well as *Kings*'.[116] This charge of childishness eventually develops to provide the poem with its conclusion: George, claims Pindar, has as bathetically low an idea of kingship as did the 'rustic boy'

> Who only wish'd to be a mighty king;
> (So meanly modest was his pray'r to Fate)
> To *eat fat pork*, and *ride upon a gate!*[117]

The poem purports to record many of the king's conversations in Weymouth, the first two with Pitt and with Frost, his bailiff at Windsor. In both of these he discusses—or rather refuses to discuss—the grim political situation. He is warned about the great crises of the year, the collapse of Britain's efforts to oppose the French in northern Europe, and the scarcity of food which we shall examine in the next chapter and which was causing much suffering and some rioting. By refusing any discussion he manages to conclude both conversations without for a moment questioning his own purposes and prejudices. When Pitt arrives for the meeting of the Privy Council which took place every year that the king took an extended holiday in Weymouth, he brings bad news of the disaster at Quiberon Bay. The news does nothing to blunt the king's determination to prosecute the war, apparently with the sole aim of restoring the Bourbon monarchy whether the French want it or not:

> "FRANCE must wear a crown:
> "If FRANCE won't swallow, *ram a monarch down*."[118]

Pitt has barely had time to make his report—'"Vendee undone, and all the CHOUANS beat!"'[119]—when he is overwhelmed with instructions to raise more taxes and more men, and to invent good news to bury the bad:

> "Hae, hae—what, what? beat, beat? what, beat agen?
> "Well, well, more money—raise more men, more men.
> "But mind, Pitt, hae—mind, huddle up the news;
> "*Coin* something, and the growling land amuse.
> . . . . . .
> "Keep LONDON still—no matter how they carp—"[120]

All this and much more ensures that the king does not have to listen to any opinion or advice his Prime Minister might have to offer. This is a rare moment in Pindar's works of something approaching sympathy for Pitt, at a time when his

[115] Pindar, *Royal Tour*, ll. 343–4.
[116] *MC* 12 Sept. 1795; Pindar, *Royal Tour*, ll. 331–2.
[117] Ibid. ll. 388–90.
[118] Ibid. ll. 135–6.
[119] Ibid. l. 120.
[120] Ibid. ll. 121–4, 133.

popularity had never been lower: the *Morning Chronicle*'s account of his trip to Weymouth maliciously informs us that he travelled there and back 'in the *night*, to prevent any *huzzaing* or *tumultuous expressions of joy* taking place in the towns and villages he had to pass through'.[121]

Pitt is dismissed in favour of Frost, from whom George expects, and at first receives, much more welcome news, the soaring price of food:

> "Well, FROST, well, FROST, pray,"
> "How, how went sheep a score?—how corn and hay?"
> "An't please your Majesty, a charming price:
> "Corn very soon will be as dear as spice."[122]

The king manages to overcome his delight at this news for long enough to ask briefly about the effect of high prices on the poor; a question which Frost, like Fabrice in conversation with the Prince of Parma, mistakes as one requiring a frank answer:

> "Thank God! but say, say, do the poor complain?
> "Hae, hae, will wheat be sixpence, FROST, *a grain*?"
> "I hope not, Sire; for great were then my fears,
> "That WINDSOR would be pull'd about our ears."[123]

He is immediately promptly rebuked for talking out of turn:

> "FROST, FROST, no politics—no, no, FROST, no:
> "You, you talk politics! oho! oho!
> . . . . . .
> "Pull WINDSOR down? hae, what?—a pretty job!
> "WINDSOR be pull'd to pieces by the mob!
> "Talk, talk of farming—that's your *sort*, d'ye see;
> "And mind, mind, *politics* belong to *me*."[124]

Frost is dismissed as brusquely as was Pitt, with instructions to set the mantraps that protect the royal farm.

The scarcity of 1795 threatened a key part of George III's attempt to pass himself off as an ordinary man. Much of that pose had been staked on representing himself as a farmer, at a time when farmers, or at least comfortably off yeomen, were repeatedly figured—most recently and most prominently in anti-jacobin caricature—as the heart and soul of old England, as the symbol of the virtues that the French wished to destroy and that would instead ensure their defeat. The scarcity, however, was widely blamed on profiteering farmers as well as on warmongering politicians and bad weather, and the identity George had chosen for himself now risked embodying not the stout heart, jovial bluffness, and paternal generosity of the English yeoman but his selfish meanness. The point had already been made in

[121] *MC* 9 Aug. 1795.
[122] Pindar, *Royal Tour*, ll. 139–42.
[123] Ibid. ll. 143–6.
[124] Ibid. ll. 145–56.

a short clandestine pamphlet published earlier in the summer, *Rare News for Old England! Beef a Shilling a Pound!*, which set out to attack Farmer George's supposed delight at the hugely increased cost of food, and his indifference to the suffering this was causing his people. It describes the king ('the *Farmer* General') attending a country fair with one of his farmworkers who is attempting to sell two of the king's oxen to a butcher. When he reports the price he has been offered to the king, George haughtily rejects it: ' "Aye, boy! aye,—take that—take that trifle!—No, no!—Beef a shilling a pound, by and by!—Shilling a pound!—Shilling a pound! boy.—Fetch money, then!—Good price—good price, then, boy!" ' 'What a proof', comments the anonymous author, 'of paternal affection and loving-kindness ... Suffice it to say, that the above anecdote agrees so well with the uniform conduct of the person it alludes to, that any evidence of its authenticity would be superfluous.'[125]

This attack on the king's yeomanlike rapacity is further developed in Pindar's poem in three meetings with fellow agriculturists in which the king's determination to do them down is defeated only by his vanity or his ignorance of rural matters. Catching sight of 'a batch of bullocks', 'Great CAESAR' (as the poem persists in calling him when his behaviour is most ignoble) runs after the drover to bargain with him. He employs, or tries to employ, all the arts of a cunning, tight-fisted farmer at a cattle market:

> He feels their ribs and rumps—he shakes his head—
> "Poor, Drover, poor—poor, very poor indeed."[126]

George and the drover eventually agree to split the difference, and the king buys the bullocks for a shilling a pound, the inflated price he had hoped for in *Rare News for Old England*. He is delighted by this 'royal hit!', apparently without taking account either of the cost of driving them to Windsor or of the fact that he must now find a butcher who will pay more than a shilling if he is to make a profit. When a load of hay passes, George tries the same trick—' "Bad hay—sour hay" '—but having bought it swears to his accompanying courtiers that ' "sweeter hay was never mow'd" '.[127] And the trick is tried out still more unconvincingly on a farmer with a herd of swine: ' "Poor, Farmer, poor—lean, lousy, very poor" ', says George, and then immediately ' "Sell, sell, hae, sell?" ' The farmer realizes that this is his lucky day, tells George he ' "can't be cort" ', and forces the king to pay well over the odds. The purchase agreed, George again boasts to his courtiers that it is he who has 'caught' the farmer, whom he describes as an ignorant fool.[128] Whether the king has no idea of current agricultural prices or is simply willing to pay highly for the pleasure of showing off to his courtiers as a canny yeoman is not

[125] *Rare News for Old England! Beef a Shilling a Pound!* (no publication details, [1795]), 3–4. Compare Charles Pigott, *The Jockey Club. Part the Third*, (London: H. D. Symonds, 1792) 69 n.: 'The *R-y-l* Grazier, ever true to the main chance, sends his cattle to the best market.'

[126] Pindar, *Royal Tour*, ll. 181–2. [127] Ibid. ll. 186, 188. [128] Ibid. ll. 191–9.

clear; either way, what appals Pindar is that he should *wish* to be seen in such a character.

Charles Pigott, an outspoken but not entirely credible witness, has a similar story about George's unkingly delight in driving what he believed was a hard bargain:

> It is well known, that while at Cheltenham, during one of his rural promenades, he met a fruit girl, with whom he bargained for a pound of cherries, of which, after much altercation, the price was settled at five farthings, and his M-j—ty presented Pomona with three-half-pence; who not being provided with the odd farthing due to her customer, he obliged her to go and procure it at a cottage not far distant, while he patiently waited her return.[129]

As well as eating cherries like other men, he also apparently paid for them like other men. His meanness—the other side of the quality Treadlight had admired as 'moderation'—is the only quality on display in all George's various transactions at Weymouth as an 'ordinary' man with ordinary people. When he makes an excursion in a naval barge, he jokes heartily with the sailors who come to expect a decent tip from the jolly monarch; but believing that the '*honour*' of his company is sufficient reward, he gives them 'just *nothing* for their *pains*!'[130] The highlight of the evening promenade at Weymouth, which the polite visitors gathered to enjoy along with the local inhabitants, was 'hawling the Seyne'[131]—hauling in the long seine net which each day was stretched out into the bay. The king finds this moment irresistibly exciting: he jumps into the water, 'capers—laughs aloud', making himself the soul of popularity with 'the gaping crowd'; he plunges at the fish, catching one by the head, another by the tail, and finally steals the entire catch with as little thought as he had scrumped the apples at Hartford Bridge. He orders the fish to be carted off to Gloucester Lodge, where most will no doubt rot before it can be eaten. 'But are the fishermen rewarded?—NO!!!'[132] The longest such anecdote takes the form of a conversation between the king and a sailor who has lost a leg fighting for his country, and who, unable to afford a wooden leg, is hobbling on crutches; he has, he tells the king, a wife and nine children to support. George, supported by Charlotte, refuses to help: forgetting that he too had fathered numerous children, notably his extravagant heir, maintained at the expense of the public, he deplores the sailor's improvidence in raising ' "brats for *others* to maintain" ', and advises him to beg the money to buy a leg and to pay the fare back to the distant parish of his birth, where he can expect to receive poor relief. That of course is exactly what the sailor is doing, but, he is told, he must beg of others: George's regal position does not permit him to encourage vagrancy, and anyway he says, slipping chummily into the vernacular, he has ' "no brass" '.[133]

[129] Pigott, *The Jockey Club ... Part the Third*, 62 n.
[130] Pindar, *Royal Tour*, ll. 337–42.
[131] *Weymouth Guide*, 2nd edn., 58.
[132] Pindar, *Royal Tour*, ll. 213–24.
[133] Ibid. ll. 233–286.

What are we to make of Pindar's stories? That George was, to put it no higher, careful with his money was a frequent theme of caricaturists and satirists, though in the years around 1790 this was associated less with his unwillingness to relieve the poor than with his reluctance to pay the Prince of Wales's huge debts. The Prince was undergoing another financial crisis in 1795, and though by then he had lost much of the sympathy he had earlier elicited among his Whig supporters, the king's refusal to bail him out was much criticized in that he was clearly determined to oblige the government to pay the Prince's debts from general taxation. *The Royal Tour* briefly refers to the king's attitude to the problem when George tells Pitt

> "I shan't refund a guinea, PITT, to WALES:
> "I can't afford it, no—I can't afford."[134]

On the king's attitude to tipping and to private alms-giving, however, it seems likely that it was much as Pindar suggests, as we can infer not only from the general silence on the matter in loyalist accounts of his tours, always keen to show the king in as warm a light as possible, as well as from the fuss made on one particular occasion when he did relieve a pauper.[135] This was on a visit in 1792 to Dorchester Gaol, which ran a system of correction that obliged the prisoners to maintain themselves by their own labour, and where the king and queen were 'highly pleased with the industry and orderly behaviour' of the prisoners.[136] Giving way to an uncharacteristic impulse, George paid £220 to settle the debts of a poor stonemason who seems to have appealed to the king for relief not only on his own account but on that of his suffering wife and four children, though in fact he was a bachelor. The incident became the subject of a painting by Thomas Stothard entitled *Royal Beneficence*, as well as of a private letter by Charlotte in which she writes of shedding tears of delight at the king's generosity.[137] Apart from this occasion, and one in Worcester during the Cheltenham holiday, I can find no other account of the king himself giving alms during his summer trips, though his wife and daughters did so on various occasions.[138] The same meanness may have characterized his conduct as a farmer. Elizabeth Ham tells a story of one of the king's visits to Weymouth in the mid-1790s which is intriguingly similar in spirit to the anecdotes told by Pindar in *The Royal Tour*:

[134] Ibid. ll. 128–9.

[135] Pigott remarks that George's 'shining qualities' included 'soberness, temperance, and chastity, (not charity, as panegyric is dumb on that article) … [and] a regular, undeviating oeconomy, that resists all the vulgar claims of humanity' (Pigott, *The Jockey-Club . . . Part the Third*, 59–60).

[136] David Davies, *The Case of Labourers in Husbandry stated and considered* (Bath: R. Cruttwell, and London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795), 93.

[137] Stothard's painting was engraved by C. H. Hodges and published on 20 Apr. 1793; for a transcript of the publisher's description of the event, and the discovery that the stonemason was a bachelor (though he may of course have had a common-law wife unrecognized by the gaol authorities) see *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries*, 17 (1913), art. 26. The queen's letter is preserved in Broadley, 'Royal Weymouth', ii (tour of 1792).

[138] For the alms-giving at Worcester, see *GM* 57 (1789, Part 2), 757; for examples of alms-giving in 1795 by women members of the family, see *Sherborne Mercury*, 7, Sept. and *MC* 1 Oct.

The King admired some sheep of my uncle's, and commissioned him to procure a flock of the same sort for his Farm at Windsor. This was accordingly done through a Cousin who resided in Somersetshire, who sent his own shepherds with the Flock to Windsor. Neither the sheep nor the expenses attending them were ever paid for.[139]

But I am not trying to argue that the king *really was* as Pindar described him. In the summer of 1795, for example, George certainly tried to relieve the poor around Windsor by selling them flour at a third of the inflated market-price, at least until he decided that too many people were taking advantage of his generosity.[140] My point is that Pindar's account of George's meanness may well have appeared to confirm what may have been a widespread belief about his reluctance to part with his money, whatever virtues he was otherwise credited with. The account may have needed, in the words of *Rare News for Old England*, no further 'evidence of its authenticity' than what was supposed to be the 'uniform conduct' of the king. Pindar himself was probably regarded by some as a well-informed, if not therefore an entirely reliable recorder of the king's character and actions. His long poem the *Lousiad*, the first canto of which had appeared in 1785, finally reached its fifth, concluding canto late in 1795. It described in appropriately mock-heroic verse a mutually humiliating struggle between the king and his cooks: the king's consternation at finding a hair-louse on his plate, his demand that all his kitchen-workers should be shaved, and the resistance, nearly amounting to a strike, which this demand provoked. It was known to have been based on inside information obtained by Pindar from the kitchen staff themselves,[141] and it is probable that *The Royal Tour* was believed to be based, whether it was or not, on similar inside information. Thus, whether the account it offered of George in Weymouth, the most circumstantially irreverent portrait of the king Pindar had ever written, was reasonably accurate or a complete fabrication, the court, and the government on its behalf, appear to have decided that it was time to silence Pindar.

V

Pindar was no democrat, as his various attacks on Tom Paine make clear,[142] and certainly no republican. Grzegorz Sinko writes, 'he hated monarchy as embodied by George III and his ministers, but nowhere does it appear that he would like to replace it by a Jacobin republic at home'.[143] Indeed not; I see no reason to disbelieve Pindar's claim, made in the late 1780s, that 'Far from despising Kings,

[139] *Elizabeth Ham*, 36.

[140] See *GM* 65 (1795, Part 2), 699, and Pindar's 'Ode to the Mill erected in Windsor Park, for grinding Corn at a cheap Rate, for the Poor', in *Royal Tour*, 53–7.

[141] Tom Girtin, *Doctor with Two Aunts*, (London: Hutchinson, 1959) 110–11.

[142] See especially his two 'Odes to Mr Paine', *Works* ii. 439–42.

[143] Grzegorz Sinko, *John Wolcot and his School: A Chapter from the History of English Satire* (Wroclaw: Place Wroclawskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego, 1962), 61.

I like the breed' but only 'provided *king-like* they behave'.[144] He made no secret of his contempt for George's failure to be king-like, but cheerfully acknowledged that the hereditary principle, which he believed in, was bound to throw up, now and then, a dunce, forced to act the ordinary man, however badly, because he *was* so irredeemably ordinary. George IV, he was certain, would be different: not only smarter but more magnificent, for as we have seen one of his main objections to George III was that he insisted on saving, as if from his personal income, money raised by taxation that was designed to keep him in splendour.[145] Pindar had no truck with Paine's comparison of the British monarchy with the much more economical American presidency: 'Let's have no WASHINGTONS', he prayed, for then he would lose his best subject and would starve.[146] The temperature of his criticisms of the king, however, as well as his anti-Toryism, certainly rose during the summer of 1795, partly by reason of the appalling contrast between the abject poverty of the poor and the great wealth of the royal family, 'Who, whilst their plunder'd subjects starve, Are, 'midst their hoarded millions seen'.[147]

The *Royal Tour* volume contains a couple of teasing regicidal jokes. In the dedication, to Pye, Pindar disingenuously represents himself as a conservationist where kings were concerned: he loved them as sportsmen loved wild boars or wolves—if they became entirely extinct the pleasure of killing them would be at an end.[148] In an 'Ode to the French', rather more unwisely, he writes that

> Kings are mere tallow-candles, nine in ten,
> Wanting a little snuffing now and then.[149]

The poem, however, though it sympathizes with the French dislike of kings and acknowledges that Pindar's attitude to them has become more jaundiced in recent years, ends by arguing that a monarchy in France would be preferable to the near-'madness' of the French republic.[150] In short, there is nothing in the volume to suggest that his views on the monarchy had undergone a fundamental change.[151]

To the court and the government, however, it may well have seemed that a self-confessedly if half-heartedly monarchist Pindar was still more dangerous than a republican Pindar would have been. His poems, which always appeared in elegant and expensive quartos (3*s*. for *The Royal Tour*), were beyond the reach of any but the comfortably off, but were far more popular and had a far greater sale among

144 Pindar, *Works*, i. 460.
145 See for example ibid. i. 519–20.
146 Pindar, *Royal Tour*, p. viii.
147 'Pitt's Flight to Wimbledon', ibid. 38.
148 Pindar, *Royal Tour*, pp. vii–viii.
149 Ibid. 51.
150 Ibid. 52.
151 For a further discussion of Pindar's politics, mainly based on the poems of the late 1780s and early 1790s, see Gary Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style 1789–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 35–7. Dyer tentatively suggests that despite Pindar's disclaimers, the target of his poems, because they show the cataclysmic effects that foolish kings may have on the lives of others, 'must be monarchy itself'. This certainly became government's view in late 1795, as I shall shortly show, but I see no 'must' about it: the argument seems to depend on a claim that we can isolate the 'real' point of poems by discovering in them an inexorable logic of implication.

the middle classes than they would have done had his views been more radical.[152] In the troubled year of 1795, when disaffection from the war and sympathy for the poor were both running high, his increasing contempt for George may well have been read as likely to bring both court and government into disrespect, even among those whom they regarded as their natural supporters.

Less than a fortnight after the publication of *The Royal Tour*, three days after the attack on the king's coach which would provide the occasion for a new assault on the freedom of the press, and on the day that the final canto of the *Lousiad* was published, the government acted. On 2 November a long article in its most loyalist newspaper, the *True Briton*, funded by the Treasury and managed by the venal George Rose, Secretary to the Treasury, reviewed the developments which had ended, so it claimed, in a 'formal attempt' on the king's life. Among them were the writings of Pindar, who was, according to the newspaper, in the pay of the supposedly republican and regicidal Foxite minority:

> A man, to whom impudence alone gave the sanction of popularity, who, by a base dereliction of every principle which actuates the good and virtuous mind, stooped to subsist on the wages of calumny—became the venal Advocate of a desperate cause, and prostituted the little talents he possessed to the defamation of his Sovereign. From the impunity with which this contemptible miscreant was suffered to proceed, the idea became general, that the loss of honour was the only punishment annexed to the infamous endeavour of rendering the sacred person of Majesty an object of contempt and derision.

A footnote to these remarks was more explicit and still more menacing:

> This man has lately published an infamous work, in which the occasional decapitation of Sovereigns is represented as absolutely necessary; he says 'that Kings like candles should be frequently *snuffed*.' This poetical exhibition [*sic*] to *Regicide*, is perfectly consistent with the former *patriotic* labours of this wretched *Rhymester*, who certainly ought to be the first to undergo the very operation he recommends. If the ATTORNEY GENERAL suffer this to pass with impunity, what crime will not pass unpunished?[153]

In another paper this might have been taken as an attempt to force the Attorney General's hand; in the *True Briton* it was at the very least an official warning, perhaps even an announcement of the government's intention to prosecute Pindar for seditious libel. At other times Pindar might have had a satisfactory defence. He might have pointed out that the whole tenor of the 'Ode to the French', which the jury would have been required to take into account, was, if reluctantly, pro-monarchist; that to snuff a tallow-candle 'now and then' was to extinguish and

[152] Dyer, correcting Sinko's claim that Pindar's verse was published in the form of 'cheap broadsides', argues that although his works were relatively expensive his audience was 'by no means … limited to people who could afford to buy his works, since texts of broad appeal usually had more readers than purchasers, and thereby filtered down through the social classes' (*British Satire*, 32). Dyer's premiss is no doubt true, but I am not sure that without further evidence we can use it to argue that any particular work, or the works of any particular author, were read by those who could not afford to buy them.

[153] *TB* 2 Nov. 1795; 'exhortation' was no doubt misread as 'exhibition' by the typesetter.

re-light it in order to make it burn more effectively, and should not be read as a figure for decapitation. He could even have professed himself shocked, as Daniel Isaac Eaton had done a few years earlier, at an interpretation of his work as seditious: how could the Attorney General for a moment have imagined that our glorious sovereign was not intended as the one king in ten who should escape snuffing? surely therefore it was the Attorney General, not Pindar, who was libelling the king? This defence had worked for Eaton; but would it work for Pindar in the aftermath of what the government was claiming had been an attempt to 'snuff' the king once and for all?[154]

John Taylor, a Pittite loyalist, oculist to George III, and the painting and drama critic for the *True Briton*, had for ten years been one of Pindar's two closest friends. According to his autobiography, Taylor, who knew Pindar well enough to know that he was no republican, had in the past frequently advised him to abandon, at least to moderate, his attacks on the king, and had once even read him a paragraph from Blackstone's *Commentaries*, about the punishment for 'doing anything that may tend to lessen him [the king] in the esteem of his subjects', a paragraph quoted also in the *True Briton*'s remarks on Pindar.[155] A meeting was arranged between Pindar, Taylor, and the editor of the paper, John Heriot, which must have been intended to find a way of staving off the impending prosecution. In the course of the conversation Pindar 'expressed himself with so much vehemence against the French revolution, which was raging at the time, and the principles on which it was founded, that I jocularly said to our host, "The doctor seems to show symptoms of *bribability*."' Heriot 'encouraged the joke'; '"Come, doctor," said he, "with these opinions you can have no objection to support the government—shall I open a negotiation?"' Pindar gave a 'doubtful, but not a discouraging answer', and next morning called on Heriot to see if things could be taken further.[156]

The details of the inglorious 'negotiation' that followed, between an editor who having accused Pindar of corruption was attempting to corrupt him further, and a poet desperate to avoid prison and the pillory, are complicated and need not detain us.[157] In short, Pindar was expecting to receive the proposed pension of

[154] See John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 104–16; Jon Mee, '"Examples of Safe Printing": Censorship and Popular Radical Literature in the 1790s', in Nigel Smith (ed.), *Literature and Censorship* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer for the English Association, 1993), 81–95.

[155] John Taylor, *Records of My Life*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Bull, 1832), ii. 231.

[156] Ibid. 231–2.

[157] They are set out ibid. 231–4 and in Girtin, *Doctor with Two Aunts*, 172–8; Girtin's account includes a letter from Pindar explaining the confusion about whether he was to be 'mute' or to write on the government's behalf. Taylor's account should perhaps be treated with some suspicion: he was defending not only his now deceased friend, but also his own friendship with Pindar. There is, however, no reason to question the main lines of his account of his relations with the poet, except that he does not mention the *True Briton* article, or that Pindar, therefore, was negotiating under the immediate threat of prosecution. Girtin did not seem to know of the article either, and was perhaps harsher than he should have been in his judgement of Pindar's behaviour.

£300 a year in exchange for his silence; the government was demanding that he change sides and write propaganda in favour of the king and the ministry. Probably to put pressure upon him to accept the government's terms, on 6 November the *True Briton* published a squib claiming that Pindar had 'offered his services to *Government*, but, being rejected, has returned to the ranks of Opposition', and threatening to disclose the full story in the near future. By late December Pindar was still undecided, and on Christmas Day the *True Briton* alleged that he had been telling friends that he had been 'offered a Pension from Government, *which he refused*'. In fact, the newspaper affirmed, 'he was not only *pensioned*, upon certain conditions, but RECEIVED from the EDITOR of THIS PAPER, a part of his *Pension*, as *he* calls it, *in advance*'. Once again it threatened to publish 'a detail of the whole transaction, which he knows would expose himself to the world in his *native colours*'.

By New Year's Day, Pindar had apparently caved in, for on that day the newspaper announced an end to hostilities by publishing, under a moderately friendly editorial note, an ode to the prophet Richard Brothers that Pindar had written but not published the previous year. The poem was perfectly chosen: Brothers had prophesied the king's death, and the poem reminded him, rather in the spirit of the *True Briton*'s original warning to Pindar himself, about the penalties for seditious libel and treason. Pindar then contributed a few miserable epigrams to the paper, the first of which, published above his initials, joked about the cropped unpowdered hair of radicals (Pindar always wore a wig) and the scarcity which, the previous year, had so distressed him:

> Of *scarcity*, adzooks! complain,
> When we've such *crops*—of fools *in grain*.
> A *threshing*, sure, some friend will grant,
> And give that *dusting* which they want.[158]

These poems he seems later to have repudiated, for they were never collected. The government had expected more for its money, however, and Pindar seemed unable to supply it. After more hesitation, and much impatience on the part of his new handlers, Pindar brokered a prudent but unsatisfactory compromise between his conscience and his safety: he renounced the pension but also put a stop to his attacks on the king.

In the same issue as the first of these attacks on Pindar, the *True Briton* called also for new legislation, following the mobbing of the king's coach, to suppress seditious meetings, to redefine the law of treason, and to punish seditious libel with transportation. This too was an advance warning of the government's intentions, and four days later, on 6 November, the Treasonable Practices Bill

[158] *TB* 6 Jan. 1796; this epigram is expanded in some verses published on 10 Jan., over the initials X.Y. but possibly by Pindar. It is hard to identify Pindar's other contributions, though he may well be the author of the verses 'To Simkin Redivivus' on 7 Mar. by 'Detector'.

was introduced, one of the notorious 'two bills' designed to suppress the reform movement and radical publications. Among other things this bill announced that a second offence of speaking or writing any words inciting the people 'to hatred or dislike of the person of his Majesty' would be punished by transportation for seven years.[159] Pindar was thus negotiating with the government not only under the threat of imminent prosecution, but in the likelihood that if he continued with his royal satires he would find himself celebrating his sixtieth birthday (he was now 57) in Botany Bay. On 16 November he attended the petitioning meeting against the bills in Old Palace Yard that led, as we saw in Chapter 1, to the last plebeian invasion of the West End in 1795.[160] He also continued publishing: between the appearance of the *True Briton* article and 18 December, when the two bills received the royal assent, and while his negotiations with the government were stopping and starting, he produced no less than three volumes. Two were protests against the bills, *The Convention Bill* which came out on 16 November, and the valedictory *Liberty's Last Squeak*, published on 11 December. Then, at the last possible moment when it could be published, the day before the two bills became law, he finally issued, as a last show of independence and bravado, *The Royal Visit to Exeter*.

The two poems against the bills make it clear that Pindar understood that the threat of prosecution had been made on account of his attacks on the king, and that (contrary to what Carretta argues) these royal satires were indeed regarded as seditious. It is possible that the government may have been equally concerned at his attacks on Pitt and his fellow ministers, but for a prosecution to succeed it would have had to be based on an indictment alleging that his writings tended to bring the king into disrespect. *The Convention Bill*, as well as including a spirited, last-ditch attack on Rose and the *True Briton* and two dismissive stanzas on the claim that the attack on the king's coach had amounted to an attempted assassination,[161] also instructs Pitt to advise the mayor of Weymouth on the new duties laid down for him in the second of the two bills, against 'seditious meetings':

> And, when our King to *Weymouth* shall repair,
> Forget not thou an order to the MAY'R,
> When in the tub the ROYAL LIFE embarks,
> To read the Riot-act to *shrimps* and *sharks!*[162]

The much more outspoken *Liberty's Last Squeak* is Pindar's farewell to royal satire, an elegiac ballad whose stanzas repeatedly open with the trademark phrase of the genre, 'no more':

[159] By the time the bill became law the word 'contempt' replaced the appallingly vague 'dislike'. For an extended discussion of the two bills, see Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, 551–603.

[160] Girtin, *Doctor with Two Aunts*, 171.

[161] John Wolcot (Peter Pindar), *The Convention Bill*, An Ode (London: John Walker *et al.*, 1795), 6, 8–9.

[162] Ibid. 10–11.

The meanness no more of high *folk*
In the rope of your satire shall swing;
For, behold, there is death in the joke
That squinteth at Queen or at King.
. . . . . .
But wherefore not laugh at a——?
And wherefore not laugh at a——?
A laugh is a laudable thing,
When people are silly and mean.

When we paid Civil List without strife,
When we paid the old QUACK for his cure,
When we pray'd at PEG NICHOLSON'S knife,
The K——laugh'd at Us, to be sure.[163]

The first poem Pindar published under his own name after the renunciation of his pension[164] was *One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-Six*, a discussion of the new conditions in which satirists found themselves following the passing of the Treasonable Practices Act. It is in the form of two dialogues between the new, gloomy, chastened Pindar and an enthusiastic, young, university-educated, radical satirist named Tom. In the course of warning Tom of the dangers he faces, Pindar reviews the bathetic topics of his satire against the king: George's puzzlement about how apples got inside apple-dumplings, his visit to Whitbread's, his attempt to sell carrion from his farm at Windsor as butcher's meat, the epic of the louse, the mouse-trap, the tour to Weymouth, and many more.[165] The poem was a last reminder to his readers of how he had made the king pay for his pose of ordinariness by which, loyalists believed, he would endear himself to his subjects and secure his throne. It was a reminder too, of course, of how much the king's ministers had made Pindar pay for doing so.

VI

In constitutional theory the king's public character and actions were beyond reproach: according to the constitutional maxim that the king could do no

[163] John Wolcot (Peter Pindar), *Liberty's Last Squeak* (London: John Walker *et al.*, 1795), 2–3. The references are to the paying of the Prince of Wales's debts, the huge financial reward paid to Dr Willis for curing the king's supposed madness, and the prayers ordained to be read in churches for the king's deliverance from his would-be assassin Margaret Nicholson, who had attempted to stab him with a blunt dessert-knife: a '*most tremendous* Knife', as Pindar put it, 'that had been taught, by toil and art, | To pierce the Bowels of a Pie or Tart' (*Works*, i. 438).

[164] I am unable to put a date on this. My guess is that it was not before the end of Mar. 1796, when the ultra-loyalist *British Critic*, which would certainly have known of his pension, published (7 (Jan.–June 1796), 314) a cordial review of the Exeter poem ('one of the happiest sallies of Peter's comic Muse') and in its review of *The Convention Bill* offered Pindar the assurance that 'he may still write, and write, and write, without any great fear of molestation'.

[165] Pindar, *Works*, iii. 404. For the apple dumplings, see ibid. i. 458–60; for the carrion, ibid. ii. 25–30; for the mouse-trap, ibid. ii. 182–8.

wrong, he was never to be blamed for his public conduct: his ministers were there to deflect and take the blame. Yet throughout the first three decades of his reign George had been criticized and satirized for his public actions, indeed for his choice of ministers. In Chapter 2 we encountered what looked like the death throes of the argument that the private conduct of public men should not be subject to criticism unless it impinged upon their public conduct. But how did this affect the king? He had set out to ensure that his private conduct was beyond criticism, and he was widely admired for his lack of personal extravagance, his chastity, his sobriety. And to this he had attempted to add a *personality*, genial, approachable, loveable both because and in spite of his eccentricities. Before 1788 all this had not wholly protected his private character from criticism by the supporters of the Prince of Wales, to the effect that his alleged failings as a father, especially as the father of the future George IV, had enormous public significance. Following his illness and recovery, however, the current coin of writing about the king in the 1790s was that the king could do no wrong as a *private* man: his private character was above reproach, and his jovial private personality, precisely because it was imagined as transcending mere political divisions, was even regarded as a prophylactic against the threat of republicanism, as if the enemies of monarchy could not possibly be the enemies of the virtuous and jolly gentleman George.

In his trial in June 1793 for publishing the second part of Paine's *Rights of Man*, Daniel Isaac Eaton was accused of intending to 'traduce, and vilify' the king, and to encourage his subjects to withdraw from him their 'obedience, fidelity, and allegiance'.[166] One of the passages selected in the indictment to prove this charge ran as follows:

> What is called monarchy always appears to me a silly, contemptible thing. I compare it to something kept behind a curtain, about which there is a great deal of bustle and fuss, and a wonderful air of seeming solemnity; but when, by any accident, the curtain happens to be open, and the company sees what it is, they burst into laughter.[167]

Pindar's great crime in 1795 was to criticize and ridicule the doctrine of the perfection of the king's private behaviour; and if the prosecution threatened in the *True Briton* had gone ahead, there can be no doubt that chief among the 'scandalous, malicious, and seditious matters'[168] laid against him would have been his habit of drawing back the curtain of the king's supposedly irreproachable private character, to reveal what he saw as the 'silly, contemptible' behaviour that the king indulged in when posing as an ordinary man. It would probably not have bothered Pindar had the king been dissolute, if dissoluteness did not impinge on his behaviour as monarch; the dissolute behaviour of the Prince of Wales caused him no anxiety, and may indeed have been part of what attracted him to the Prince. In fact Pindar only rarely criticized the king because what he saw as the

[166] *ST* xxii. 755–6.
[167] Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, ed. Henry Collins (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 204.
[168] *ST* xxii. 755.

faults in the king's private character affected his public conduct. His main charge against George was that he had chosen to stake his popularity on the invention of a genial private personality which, by being displayed in public, was intended to be understood as evidence of, even as a guarantee of, a public character also beyond reproach. The king, Pindar seems to be saying, has developed for himself a new kind of relation between private and public, one which sought to blur the distinction between the two by making a public spectacle of his private life to serve a political purpose. Charles Pigott seems to have thought the same: in the article '*Ostentation*' in his *Political Dictionary*, he included both 'journeys to St. Paul's, and Weymouth excursions': both equally intended by the king to show himself off, whether as public monarch or private gentleman.[169]

It was George's public presentation of his private behaviour that Pindar found unbecoming, and disingenuous, in that even as it was designed to solicit the delight and approval of his subjects it indicated a casual contempt for them. And in Pindar's eyes it achieved the very opposite of what George intended: if the private character George exhibited was intended to soften the hard edges of the spirit of despotism that is inseparable from the idea of monarchy, it succeeded only in revealing that, in the petty transactions of private life, he could act much more despotically towards his subjects than he was permitted to do in his public character, arbitrarily silencing them when he did not choose to hear what they had to say and taking advantage of their subordinate position to cheat and steal from them. It was Pindar's exposure of this strategy, and perhaps still more of its failure, in poems addressed to a middle-class public, and intended to qualify, if not to seduce them from, their instinctive loyalism, that was his downfall. In an anonymous pamphlet we shall examine at greater length in the next chapter, and which uses the theatre as a metaphor for political life, a critic of William Pitt wrote:

> It has been said that the private actions of a man in a publick line should have no weight to prejudice an audience against him; that on the stage he should be esteemed the character he represents, not the man himself, and according to the manner he supports his character be censured or applauded. But what audience can divest themselves of their *feelings?* It is well known, that many an Actor and Actress of slender abilities, have, on account of their *private worth*, made a considerable progress; and of course, *private failings* have been very detrimental to even great abilities.[170]

It is Pitt here who is the pre-eminent example of 'an Actor ... of slender abilities' who has risen high in public favour on the basis of his '*private worth*'. But isn't the king, Pindar was asking, attempting the same trick? And what if it should then turn out that his private behaviour is not worth as much as we have been led to believe?

[169] Charles Pigott, *A Political Dictionary explaining The True Theaning of Words* (London: D. I. Gaton, 1795), 94.

[170] *Letter to the Deputy Manager of a Theatre-Royal, London, on his lately acquired Notoriety, in contriving and arranging the Hair Powder Act* (London: Allen and West, and J. Owen, 1795), 32.

4

Hair Powder

I

Among the many thousands who died in the early years of the war with France as a result of William Pitt's determination to re-establish the monarchy in France, we should probably include the 'fine fat Russian bear' whose fresh carcase in December 1795 was on display at Alexander Ross's Ornamental Hair and Perfumery Warehouse in Bishopsgate Street. Bear's grease was valued as an ingredient of pomatum, but chiefly as a hair-restorative and hair-strengthener. It was, Ross claimed, 'the only thing possible to make the Hair grow long and thick, recover it after illness, prevent it falling off, or turning grey during life'.[1] A fortnight or so before announcing the death of his bear in the newspapers, Ross had published, at his own expense, a 71-page *Treatise on Bear's Grease, with Observations, to Prove how indispensible the Use of that Incomparable Substance, to preserve the Head of Hair, in that State of Perfection which can alone rendered it the Delight of all Beholders* (the grammar is Ross's own). In this he claimed that 'Indian' (native American) women would accept no substitute for bear's grease; and if they derived such advantage from it, 'what might not be expected', he asked, from its use by the 'daughters of Britain . . . those angels in human form'? He answered this question by recounting the cautionary tale of twin sisters, Matilda and Arabella, one amiable and obedient, the other stubborn. Matilda had the misfortune to fall ill, but agreed to try bear's grease, recovered her looks and married well. Arabella, though perfectly healthy, refused to use it; her hair languished and she died an old maid.[2] This treatise, also advertised in the newspapers, was especially eloquent in warning of the 'spurious compositions . . . imposed upon the credulous under the appellation of BEARS GREASE', and praised the practice of honest tradesmen who sold it 'upon Oath'.[3] To make assurance doubly sure, however, he promised potential customers at his warehouse that the fat of his own dead bear could 'be seen cut off the Animal in the presence of the Purchaser'.[4]

[1] *TB* 22 Dec. 1795.
[2] Alexander Ross, *A Treatise on Bear's Grease* (London: the author, 1795), 5–6, 40–4.
[3] Ibid. 11; *TB* 11 Nov. 1795.
[4] *TB* 25 Dec. 1795.

Ross's bear was not the first he had killed for its fat,[5] nor were his bears the first to die in defence of British hair: that honour apparently belonged to the animal slaughtered by or on behalf of a Mr Townsend, an apothecary in the Haymarket nearly a hundred years earlier. Since then, Ross claimed, 'millions of persons . . . have received conviction' of the 'salutary quality and renovating nature' of bear's grease, though as he himself sold it for no less than 16*s*. a pound this must have been a wild exaggeration even for a salesman. Bear's grease does seem to have become the restorative of choice, however, among those who could afford it.[6] Addressing the fashionable beaux of 1770 in his witty mock-georgic *The Art of Dressing the Hair*, Ellis Pratt had described how

> In *Zembla's* joyless Clime, where Frost severe,
> And Darkness, shares the mutilated Year,
> For You, thro' Desarts of eternal Snow,
> Intrepid Hunters track their shaggy Foe.[7]

In the ten years or so before Ross's bear was killed, William Vickery had advertised 'real bear's grease' for sale at his own warehouse in Tavistock Street, and a hairdresser and perfumer called Nix, trading both in St James's and the City, had offered 'the genuine grease of two full-grown bears' which had been 'just imported from Norway'.[8] Ross's bear was different, however, because of the circumstances in which it died—circumstances which led Ross to go to great lengths to advertise its grease.

This elaborate sales pitch appears to have been timed to appeal to the victims of a new tax Pitt had introduced in the 1795 budget. Following the defeat of the allied armies in the Low Countries, the alliance against the French republic was in tatters. It was anticipated that Prussia would conclude a separate peace with France, and it did so in the spring of 1795. Other allies were claiming to be too impoverished by the war effort to continue without financial aid from Britain. A loan of £200,000 was made to the King of Sardinia, and in early February the government announced that it was negotiating with Austria to provide it with a loan of anything between four and six million pounds to enable the Emperor to keep his army in the field; in the event the loan amounted to £4,600,000. Altogether, when Pitt presented his annual budget on 23 February, he was looking for what *True Briton* claimed was the largest sum in taxes ever raised in a single year, much of it to cover the Austrian loan and the cost of manning and equipping the British army and navy.[9] Among various measures designed to pay the interest on this loan, Pitt, ever inventive when it came to thinking up new sources of

[5] John Strachan has shown me an earlier advertisement by Ross for the fat of a bear 'just killed' in the *Times*, 7 Feb. 1793.

[6] Ross, *Treatise*, 7; TB 25 Dec. 1795.

[7] E.P. [Ellis Pratt], *The Art of Dressing the Hair. A Poem* (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1770), ll. 187–90.

[8] See the advertisements in the British Library volume 1881.b.6 [vol. 2(1)], 118 and 128.

[9] *TB* 26 Feb. 1795, and see Jennifer Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution 1785–1795* (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997), 214–18;

revenue, proposed to raise an estimated £210,000 a year by means of a tax on the wearing of hair powder. Many of those who opposed this measure claimed that for one reason or another this new tax would put an end to the fashion for powder, or at least severely curtail it. Men in particular would stop wearing wigs, would grow their hair and wear it unpowdered. Faced with the embarrassment of displaying their heads in public, bald or balding, or with hair shaved or cut close to the scalp, they would be in urgent need of a hair-restorer of apparently proven success. These prophets were right: though stocks of hair powder were high in London in 1795, very little was sold, and by the time Ross advertised his bear's grease the making of starch, the main ingredient of the powder, had for reasons we shall examine later become illegal. The death of Ross's bear, and his aggressive sales campaign of 1795, belong in this context. Apart from his anxiety to beat off the competition from 'Stiracia's Fine Italian Oils', regularly advertised as 'far superior to Bear's Grease, or any thing ever before made known', and also to compete with Alexander Rowland's future market leader, 'macassar', first marketed a year of so before the introduction of the powder tax,[10] Ross was no doubt hoping to make good some of the losses he had suffered from the collapse in sales of powder.

Before I go on to discuss the new tax and the controversy it generated, it may be helpful to say more about the powder itself. Hair powder was the most widely used cosmetic in late eighteenth-century Britain, and it was used, often in huge quantities, by both men and women. Hair powder could be made of worm-eaten or rotten wood, or dried bones, or bones 'calcined to whiteness',[11] but the best powder was a preparation of pure starch made from wheat—two pounds of grain would yield one pound of starch. It was scented with one or more of a host of perfumes—attar of roses, jasmine, orange-blossom, vanilla, heliotrope, and so on, and was often coloured. The colouring could be used sparingly, simply to take off the dead white of pure powder which, as one hairdresser explained, 'reflects a shade on the face, and seemingly gives it a livid cast'.[12] But though some hairdressers abhorred it, more highly coloured powder was used by those with grey or red hair (universally regarded as unattractive, especially in women) as a substitute for proprietary hair-dyes, which in the late eighteenth century were impermanent or harmful or both. The most hair conscious also used coloured powders to give the hair a richer tint in candlelight: orange powder, for example, would ensure that dark-brown hair preserved its 'true' colour at night, whereas grey powder gave it an undesirable blue tint. These coloured powders could be extremely costly, the more so because imported starch, perfume, and hair powder

[10] For Stiracia's Oil, see for example *TB* 5 Mar. 1795; for information about 'macassar' I am indebted to John Strachan.

[11] [Pierre Joseph Buc'hoz], *The Toilet of Flora . . . A New Edition, Improved* (London: J. Murray and W. Nicoll, 1784), 186; for other recipes, see *The New London Toilet* (London: Richardson and Urquhart, 1778), 32–3.

[12] Septimus Hodson, *An Address to the Different Classes of Persons in Great Britain, on the Present Scarcity and High Price of Provisions* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1795), 25; J. Mather, *A Treatise on the Nature and Preservation of the Hair* (London: A. Grant *et al.*, 1795), 58, 44.

attracted customs duties, and since 1786 hair powder also attracted a stamp duty set as a proportion of its retail price.[13] James Mather, the perfumier and hair dresser who in 1795 kept a shop off fashionable Portman Square, charged a shilling a pound for 'superfine French White Powder, scented with Violet, Rose', etc., but sold fragrant orange powder for 4*s*. a pound, and other coloured aromatic powders—flaxen, auburn, light and dark brown—for 6*s*.[14]

The most ornate hair styles required great quantities of powder, and though by law hair powder was to be made of pure starch, there was, according to Mather (in a 'treatise' written immediately before the powder tax was announced) a huge market for cheaper powders adulterated with flour, ground rice, chalk, or, more alarmingly with plaster of Paris or even with lime, which, mixed with water, was according to Sheridan a quick and effective depilatory.[15] In that dramatist's *The Camp*, produced at Drury Lane towards the end of 1795, the corrupt contractor Gage supplies an entire regiment with 'brick and mortar lime' instead of hair powder. At first this substitute powder 'answered the purpose very well':

> while the weather was fine it did charmingly; but one field-day they were all caught in a fine soaking shower . . . and by the time they returned to the camp, damme if all their heads were not as smooth as an old half-crown . . . but I excus'd myself by saying, they looked only like raw recruits before; but now they appeared like old veterans of service.[16]

Combing the hair, cutting and tapering, parting into divisions, curling with paper and hot irons, pinning, frizzing, placing the hair-cushion, adding false hair to the chignon and elsewhere, and 'finishing'—powder was used in almost every part of the long and elaborate ritual of dressing hair. In the 1770s and early 1780s, the days of big hair (very big hair), it had not been unusual to use a pound or more of hair powder at a single sitting.[17] Its use had given rise to an elaborate technology: powder-puffs made of knotted silk and of swan's down (see Pl. 4.9), the powder-knife to remove greasy powder from the forehead, the powder-gown or powder-bag to protect the clothes, the mask to prevent the powder from being

[13] Stamp duty was made payable on hair powder and pomatum by 26 George III c. 49. The duty was the same on both commodities, and was charged on each packet, jar, etc., at the following rates: where the retail price was 8*d*. or less: 1*d*.; 8*d*.–1*s*.: 1 1/2*d*.; 1*s*.–2*s*. 6*d*.: 3*d*.; 2*s*. 6*d*.–5*s*.: 6*d*.; 5*s*. or more: 1*s*.; but on hair powder that cost 2*s*. per pound or less, 1*d*. per pound weight or part of pound: see *Phillips's British Merlin and Provincial Calendar for the Year 1796* (Leicester: R. Phillips [1795]), unpaginated [p. 61]. For the effect of different coloured powders on different colours of hair, see Mather, *Treatise*, 45, William Barker, *A Treatise on the Principles of Hair-Dressing* (London: J. Rozea, n.d. [*c*.1780]), 32, and C. Willett Cunnington and Phyllis Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), 369–70.

[14] Mather, *Treatise*, 55.

[15] Ibid. 49–52; for an indication of the date of the treatise, see *TB* 3 Mar. 1795.

[16] [R. B. Sheridan], *The Camp, a Musical Entertainment* (London: np, 1795), 10–11, and see Robert W. Jones, 'Sheridan and the Theatre of Pantomime: Staging Dissent during the War for America', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 26: 1 (Winter 2002), 24–45.

[17] For the 'big hair' of the 1770s, see Margaret K. Powell and Joseph Roach, 'Big Hair', in Angela Rosenthal (ed.), *Hair*, a special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38: 1 (Fall 2004), 79–99.

inhaled, and most important of all the 'machine'.[18] This was a conical instrument, about a foot long, made of silk or soft leather and strong wires (Pl. 4.1): it was something between a concertina and a balloon-pump, but with a fine sieve at the business end to scatter the powder in 'a regular smoke'.[19] The machine in turn gave rise to the need for a dedicated 'powder closet', so that the powder would not cover the entire house and its furniture with a fine aromatic dust, which apart from being unsightly attracted mice and rats.[20] One such closet survives as an annexe to the guest room at Plas Newydd, the home of the Ladies of Llangollen: it is a tiny room about the size of a small water-closet but with a largeish circle cut out of the door, so that the hair dresser could stand outside and shoot the powder at the person seated within.

Thick hair had to be combed through with powder before it was cut. Curling and frizzing required the use of pomatum— sometimes a preparation of vegetable oils, more usually of scented calf's or pig's or indeed bear's fat—and the powder was used both to stiffen the pomatum and to give the hair 'a light, clear, clean look'. False hair-attachments needed powder to blend them in with the natural hair; powder and comb were used to remove the excess pomatum—along with the brick-dust or pipe-ash the hairdresser applied to his fingers to improve his grip on greasy locks—and to prevent the hair looking fatty.[21] Finally the hair had to be dusted or 'frosted' with a fine mist of the very best powder. In the hours after it was put on, much of this final application fell off, descending on to the shoulders like fine dandruff, and the particles of grease adhering to it, unless removed with Price's patent detergent, could ruin clothes.[22] It was particularly vulnerable to sudden movements of the head. The novelist Henry Mackenzie tells of an occasion when Earl Stanhope, then Lord Mahon, was speaking in the House of Commons, from the row behind that on which his cousin William Pitt was sitting. '"Such a measure," said his Lordship, "would knock Corruption on the head," striking with the long wide sleeve of his great-coat the head of Pitt, from which rose a volume of hair-powder, to the great amusement of the House.'[23]

Hairstyles made by rubbing animal fat into starch (especially if adulterated with flour) were vulgarly described as 'dumplings';[24] a poet writing in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1768 described a lady whose hair was 'plaister'd' with 'lard and meal,

[18] See James Stewart, *Plocacosmos: or the Whole Art of Hair Dressing* (London: the author, 1782), 243–95.

[19] Ibid. 287.

[20] [John Donaldson], *A Letter to the Right Hon. William Pitt, on the Use of Hair-Powder* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1795), 16.

[21] Stewart, *Plocacosmos*, 265–6, 278, 259.

[22] *The Complaint: A Poem, on the Proposed Tax on Powdered Heads* (Edinburgh: 'the Booksellers', 1795), 4, 10; *The Powder'd Chimney-Sweeper* (no publication details, [1795]); *Star*, 25 Jan. 1794.

[23] *The Anecdotes and Egotisms of Henry Mackenzie 1745–1831*, Harold William Thompson ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 134.

[24] For 'dumplings' see *The Town Before You*, below, p. 167 and *A Fortnight's Ramble, through London* (London: J. Roach, [1795]) 64.

Pl. 4.1. Artist unknown, *The Boarding-School Hair-Dresser* (London, 24 September 1786; Lewis Walpole Library 786.9.24.1). In this variation on the popular theme in caricatures of woman as mantrap, here taken more literally than usual, the schoolgirl appears to be enjoying the invasion of her privacy by a young hairdresser. On the floor to the left is the 'machine' for blowing a fine mist of powder on the hair.

and clouted cream' as 'a walking kitchen'.[25] A number of those writing on the powder tax in 1795 found the mixture quite disgusting. According to the Quaker physician Dr John Coakley Lettsom—pioneer of sea bathing and life-saving, propagandist for tea-drinking and the mangel-wurzel, mineralogist and prison reformer—'the dirty fashion of starch and grease' made its users look less, not more attractive or respectable. The *Morning Chronicle* complained that 'hair-powder . . . *looks* extremely clean, and *is* extremely dirty . . . there is something hardly pardonable in a young girl concealing her chestnut tresses, and matting her naturally flowing locks, with a filthy compound of hog's lard and meal'.[26] The projector and one-man think-tank John Donaldson went further: the fashion was unhealthy, encouraged vermin, and drained the colour from hair, having 'the same effect on hair as the earthing up of cellery to make it white and tender'. By blocking the pores it 'frequently occasions the tooth-ach, and all the diseases of the head, which arise from obstructed perspiration'. Recycling a long-established urban myth, Donaldson claimed to know of a young lady who, 'when she was getting out of bed, found something heavy about her head, on putting up her hand . . . out ran a female rat who in the night had made a nest of the lady's hair, and brought forth her young. The lady was thrown into a violent fever by the fright.'[27]

The technology of powder and pomatum allowed the creation of elaborate 'full-dressed' hairstyles which were extremely labour intensive and time consuming to construct. It was just as well then, that, given careful daily maintenance, and a good frosting from the machine, they could last for two or three months before they became so clotted with grease and matted with powder as to need complete rebuilding.[28] Their durability was threatened, however, if they got wet. In *The Charterhouse of Parma*, the first quarter of which is much preoccupied by the symbolism and politics of hair powder, the hero Fabrice and his aunt the Comtesse de Pietranera amuse themselves by splashing water over the powdered hair of the malevolent and reactionary Marchesine Ascagne when he joins them boating on Lake Como.[29] The effect of heavy rain on hair powdered with a mixture of starch and plaster of Paris must have been spectacular, but it was a disaster for all who wore powder. In *The Art of Dressing the Hair*, Pratt had been especially careful to warn of the dangers of wind and rain:

> Hapless that Youth, who, when the Tempest flies,
> Unarm'd each rushing Hurricane defies!
> In vain on Barbers or on Gods he calls,

[25] 'Stanzas to the Ladies', *GM* 38 (1768), 343.

[26] [John Coakley Lettsom], *Hints respecting the Distresses of the Poor* (London: C. Dilly, 1795), 15; for an outraged reply, see John Hart, *An Address to the Public, on the Subject of the Starch and Hair-Powder Manufactories* (London: B. Corcoran *et al.*, [1795]), 92–4; *MC* 30 Mar. 1795.

[27] [Donaldson], *Letter*, 4, 9–10; see also the song *The Powder Tax; or Barber's Downfall* ([London: J. Evans, 1795]): 'It was the pomatum and powder | That caused all such vermin the breed'.

[28] Stewart, *Plocacosmos*, 294.

[29] Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, trans. Margaret R. B. Shaw (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), ch. 2.

> The Ringlets yield, the beauteous Structure falls.
> Nor less, when soft-descending Showers prevail,
> Dread the moist Influence of the Southern Gale:
> Oft will it's tepid Breath the Curls unbend,
> While dropping Dews from every Spire depend.[30]

The imperative to protect ornate hairstyles from the weather led Pratt to develop a new theory of the supposed increasing effeminacy of eighteenth-century men. Many late eighteenth-century commentators on the topic would have seen men's elaborately greased and powdered hairstyles as an instance of the effeminacy which was among the chief effects of the corruption of modern commercial society. On the contrary, suggests Pratt with cheerful sophistry, such hairstyles are the cause, not the effect, of the decline of masculinity, for how can men possibly engage in properly manly activities like hunting, especially on damp, foggy November mornings, when their first priority must be to ensure that 'every Curl in lasting Order stand, Unmov'd, and faithful to the Artist's Hand!'[31]

In the 1770s, when big wigs and big hair were fashionable for gentlemen, or at least for 'macaronis', they had used pomatum and hair powder 'in full as great a quantity as the ladies'. By the 1790s, those who wore their own hair still used powder and pomatum to control and often to colour it, and those who did not still needed them to freshen the colour of their wigs and to fluff them up and prevent them drooping. Their natural hair, if not shaved, was cut *en brosse*, about half an inch long, but if they wore their wigs only during the season and laid them aside in the country, only powder and pomatum would give their short hair as it grew back any shape or wave.[32] So much, then, for hair powder among the most fashionable; as we shall see, however, the use of powder or flour, its most common substitute, was by no means restricted to men and women of fashion.

II

Pitt introduced the issue of hair powder at the very end of his 1795 budget speech, and in a tone of diffident amusement, as if apologizing for bringing so mean a subject to the attention of the Commons while sharing in the mirth he expected it to provoke. He had, he said, one final proposal to make, and 'if the burden [of

[30] [Pratt], *The Art of Dressing the Hair*, ll. 235–42; see also *The Final Farewell, a Poem Written on Retiring from London* (London: J. Debrett, 1787), 13.

[31] [Pratt], *The Art of Dressing the Hair*, ll. 249–86.

[32] Stewart, *Plocacosmos*, 304–15; for macaronis see Shearer West, 'The Darly Macaroni Prints and the Politics of "Private Man" ', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 25 (Spring 2001), 170–82, and, most recently, Amelia Rauser, 'Hair, Authenticity, and the Self-Made Macaroni', in Angela Rosenthal (ed.), *Hair*, a special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38: 1 (Fall 2004), 101–17; for men and wigs generally, see Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 107–49.

taxation] his duty obliged him to lay upon the Public were not too serious, he should apprehend the House would hardly hear it with gravity'. Slipping out of the joyless character he normally assumed in parliament, he even ventured a modest play on words: his proposal was that every person who wore hair powder should be required to take out an annual licence 'at one guinea a head'. This tax, he was confident, would not put 'the least pressure' on those who chose to pay it: it was, after all, a tax on luxury—no one was obliged to wear hair powder. True, it would cause some inconvenience, Pitt admitted, to those who were 'prompted by vanity' to wear powder even though they could barely afford it and their social position did not require it, but in their case the new tax was a tax on vanity as well as on luxury, and 'vanity was at least as fair an object of taxation as luxury' (Pl. 4.2). Others, mainly servants, wore powder to gratify the vanity of their masters, and in such cases their masters would presumably choose whether to pay the tax on their servants' behalf or to cease to insist on their wearing it. There was only one group on whom the tax might 'fall heavy': 'those who, with small incomes, were placed in such situations as obliged them, to a certain degree, to comply with the fashion of the day'. But he proposed to allow no exemptions: the tax would not answer its purpose if it was not universal; and to ensure that it was not evaded, he intended that the names of everyone who bought a licence should be published.[33]

It must have seemed to Pitt an exemplary tax. Because it was to be levied on what he believed to be a luxury, though that would be disputed, it was an entirely 'voluntary' tax. Its yield would be, inevitably, subject to the unpredictability of all taxes on luxury, in that it would not bring in the return Pitt anticipated if many people decided to stop wearing powder;[34] but those who might be expected to do so would be those who could barely afford either the powder or the licence, so that the tax would have what Adam Smith had described as the only beneficial effect of the sumptuary legislation that he otherwise deplored, imposing a 'forced frugality' upon the poor and prompting them to spend their money on more useful and more necessary goods.[35] However, the tax would chiefly fall, Pitt suggested, upon those affluent enough to move in circles where powder was not really a luxury at all, but a necessary badge of respectability. Such people would not leave off wearing powder, for they would hardly miss a guinea a year, and might even welcome the opportunity to display, by continuing to wear it, that they were choosing to make an additional contribution to the costs of the 'just and necessary war' against the cropped republicans of France. Pitt may even have imagined that crowds of the previously unpowdered would be clamouring to buy licences; for

[33] *Parliamentary Register* (henceforth *PR*), xl. 488.

[34] For a discussion of eighteenth-century arguments on this point, see Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 206–10.

[35] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner, and W. B. Todd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 872; for sumptuary laws more generally, see 346.

Pl. **4.2**. [Richard Dighton], *A Guinea-Pig* (London, [1795]; BM 8769). A dandy, 'J. Whitehead', who wears his own hair with a long tail, whitened and fluffed with a lavish helping of powder, inspects and displays his hair powder licence issued by the Stamp Office in Lombard Street. He has purchased it out of vanity, for his address—he lodges in 'Queer St.'—makes it clear that he cannot really afford it.

'much reliance', he believed, 'was to be placed on the spirit of the people, determined to prosecute with vigour the present contest, and submit with alacrity to the necessary burdens'.[36] The *True Briton* expressed what was no doubt the view of the government, that the only likely objection to the licence fee was that it had not been set higher.[37]

Pitt's announcement of the hair powder tax caused no commotion in the Commons. For the opposition, Fox, who in his dandyish youth had tinted his unfashionably black hair with blue powder, and who was still using powder though with little effect on his swarthy and slovenly appearance, was much more concerned to attack the loan and the government's general management of the war economy.[38] His only objection to the tax, he said, was 'the uncertainty of its produce; for he who relied upon the fashion of the day built upon a slippery foundation'. Taxes on fashion, he suggested, were even more unpredictable in their produce than taxes on other kinds of luxuries: ten or twelve persons of rank, the leaders of taste, might decide to stop wearing powder, and the whole nation would follow them. Robert Buxton, a strong supporter of the war with France, thought like the *True Briton* that the tax was set much too low: such 'immense quantities of wheat were consumed in hair-powder, he wished that the licence might be made such as to amount to a prohibition of wearing it'.[39] No other MP who is recorded as having spoken in the budget debate seems to have mentioned the tax, and there was nothing to suggest that it would become one of the leading issues in the propaganda war of 1795.

When the bill was published, it turned out to be more capacious than had been expected. It proposed to tax the use not only of hair powder made of starch, but 'every sort of Composition of Powder which shall be used or worn by any Person as an Article of his or her Dress, by whatever Name the same shall be distinguished', including flour, the hair powder of the poor. The penalty for wearing any such powder without a licence was to be £20, and an elaborate procedure was proposed to produce a register of those who paid their guinea to the Stamp Office. Their names would be placed on printed lists affixed to the door of the parish church or to the market cross, to make it as hard as possible for unlicensed wearers of powder to escape detection. Those who informed on unlicensed users would be rewarded with half the amount of the fine following a successful prosecution.[40]

These provisions would all become thoroughly controversial, but in the debates on the bill their potential to cause trouble was rarely noticed. The *Register of the Times*, at this stage of its short life a moderately radical periodical, was especially severe on the inadequacy of the discussion in parliament. The bill was passed, it reported, 'by what the French term *acclamation*, no objection having been made

[36] *PR* xl. 488, 489.
[37] *TB* 26 Feb. 1795.
[38] For Fox and blue powder, see Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook*, 258; for Fox powdering in 1795, see *TB* 3 Apr. 1795.
[39] *PR* xl. 493–4, 499.
[40] See 35 George III c. 49.

to the substance or manner of it, . . . nothing has been said where most was expected'.[41] This may have been partly the result of some clever tactics by Pitt, who came to the committee stage in the Commons apparently willing to do something for those who were positively obliged to wear powder but would be hard put to find the cost of the licence, and managed to focus discussion of the bill on its detail, not its principle. He proposed that all soldiers from the rank of subaltern downwards, naval officers below the rank of master and commander, and Church of England clergy with an annual income of less than £100, should all be exempt from the tax, and on the same terms he later added dissenting and Catholic clergy; the king and members of the royal household were of course automatically exempt.[42] The near-radical Norman Macleod pleaded the case of the 'private gentleman of small fortune' with 'six or seven daughters', who could hardly expect to marry well if deprived of the most conspicuous mark of genteel status. He was supported by the Foxite John Courtenay, arguing the case of 'a gentleman of small fortune' with a wife and three daughters, who would be obliged to spend five guineas on five licences: it seemed unfair to him that the longer his daughters remained unmarried, the longer their father would have to pay for their licences. On this, Pitt conceded, and agreed to bring in a clause to the effect that fathers would be required to pay the tax on only two or three daughters (it ended up as two) and the remainder would be permitted to wear powder.[43]

Otherwise he did his best to frustrate the attempts by MPs to extend these exemptions in various directions. He refused a suggestion that the exemption for daughters should apply to sons as well, with the doubtful argument that such an exemption would mean that 'persons in the highest class of societies, on whom the tax was chiefly intended to fall', would be unfairly advantaged, as though the rich had sons and the shabby genteel had daughters. The baronet Sir Matthew Ridley attempted to obtain an exemption for an especially deserving class of persons, 'those who had the misfortune to have seven or eight servants', and he was supported by the rich and famous nabob, General Smith, who spoke movingly of 'the pleasure which a man feels in being attended at table by a spruce powdered footman'. It was hard, said the General, that gentlemen 'should be obliged to pay so severely for the gratification of so innocent a vanity'. Pitt rejected, Courtenay ridiculed, and Macleod was shocked by this attempt to engage the sympathy of the committee on behalf of the very rich, 'at a moment', Macleod added, 'when the poor were in want of bread, and obliged to pay nine pence half-penny for the loaf that they had formerly at six pence'. More controversially, and despite repeated requests in both Houses of Parliament, the government refused to grant an exemption to half-pay officers, who, said Courtenay, 'were accustomed to appear as gentlemen', and who would find it hard to find the cost of a licence out of 'their scanty income of thirty or forty pounds'. A proposal to exempt hairdressers themselves from the tax, on the

[41] *Register of the Times* (henceforth *RT*), 4 (11 Apr.–21 Apr. 1795), 302.
[42] *PR* xli. 68, 155–6.
[43] *PR* xli. 69–70.

grounds that their profession required them to be powdered, was similarly rejected.[44] In 1796 a poor London hairdresser with a wife and three children would be prosecuted for wearing powder without a licence. He pleaded that 'it was impossible for a person in his situation to be without powder in his hair', and was given a mitigated penalty of £10, with time to pay.[45]

As the bill progressed through parliament there were still very few contributors to the debates in the Lords and Commons who said anything to suggest that they foresaw the controversy the bill would provoke. Lord Grenville, the Foreign Secretary, insisted that he could not imagine 'a more just, or more popular bill'; it was an 'extremely popular' bill, said Lord Chancellor Loughborough.[46] In the Commons, however, John Dent insisted that the wearing of hair powder represented an 'immense waste' of corn at a time of great scarcity. There were, he said, 150,000 soldiers in the army, each of whom shook over their heads a pound of flour a week, two million pounds a year;[47] starch makers used another nine million pounds a year; 'servants stole for the use of their hair the flour intended for culinary purposes.' Dent wanted an entire prohibition on dressing the hair with powder or flour, as did the Foxite James Martin, who attracted howls of laughter when, on rising to speak, he was seen to be unpowdered. He had given up wearing powder, he said, partly because it took bread from the mouths of the poor in a time of economic distress, partly because he intended to take advantage of the voluntary nature of the tax to avoid further contributing to the support of a war which he thought 'neither just nor necessary'.[48]

The strongest opposition to the bill came from the Earl of Moira, an Irish soldier who had distinguished himself in the American war and, more recently, in the Netherlands, and a politician of strikingly independent views. He appears to have been the only contributor to the debates in parliament to point out that because the bill would tax the use of powder rather than the powder itself it was anything but just and certain not to be popular. A man who powdered his hair once a year, perhaps in an unsuccessful attempt to solicit employment, would pay as much for this supposed luxury as the members of the House of Lords who used it every day of the year. 'A servant maid, who might in the frolic of Christmas evening, take the dredging box, and flour her hair' would be liable to a fine of £20; unable to pay, she would be 'thrown into jail'. Furthermore, Moira argued, the bill 'tended to create invidious distinctions'. It would not affect the poor in 'the very lowest orders of society', who were not shy to make their wants known. But it would fall heavily upon those 'on whom poverty and distress bore with the greatest

[44] *PR* xli. 69–72. [45] *Times*, 9 Sept. 1796. [46] *PR* xlii. 450, 426.

[47] This estimate was supported in the summer by the anonymous author of a radical pamphlet who was 'credibly informed, that in Danbury Camp alone, which is by no means the largest, nearly thirty sacks are used in a week for this purpose. The average consumption is, I believe, one pound per man a week; nor will this appear over-rated, if it be divided into seven parts, which makes little more than two ounces per day.' See *The Reign of the English Robespierre. Addressed to the Nation* (London: T.G. Ballard, 1795), 7.

[48] *PR* xli. 70–2.

weight'—well-educated, polite people of very slender fortunes, used to keeping 'good company' but now, if they could not pay the tax, likely to be ostracized by their genteel neighbours. It would also emphasize political divisions in a nation already too much polarized. By establishing 'a certain mark which could not be mistaken', the bill gave the government a convenient but invidious test by which to distinguish its supporters from its opponents. Those who wore powder would be recognized as loyalists, those who did not would be suspected; the list on the church door would be a list of the Tory faithful.[49]

Read as a whole, the discussions of the bill in both Houses of Parliament are thoroughly puzzling. Pitt, when he originally proposed the measure, declared that the tax 'would not answer his purpose, if it did not apply to a very general description of persons in this country', and it was in this spirit that he rejected many of the pleas for additional exemptions made by MPs on behalf of those whom they claimed would be especially hard hit by the tax. In the course of rejecting the proposed exemption in favour of sons as well as daughters, however, he insisted that the tax was chiefly aimed at 'persons in the highest class', and this was repeated by Grenville in the Lords. The reason the tax would be so popular, he insisted, was that 'it fell entirely upon the higher ranks of society'; it 'operated solely against the rich'; for all others, including even mere gentlemen (if they were not rich), it was 'perfectly optional' whether they wore powder or not, and if the 'lower orders' wore powder, it was simply out of vanity, 'and their vanity formed a proper object of taxation'.[50]

The claim that the tax would fall chiefly on the rich, however, would have been true, as Moira pointed out, only if the proposal had been to raise the stamp duty on the powder itself, not to tax the wearing of powder, however infrequent. Even Moira, however, believed that those who would feel the tax most keenly were distressed gentlefolk, who were obliged to wear powder to maintain their precarious claim to gentle status. Courtenay and even Macleod, in pleading for exemptions for daughters and (in Courtenay's case) for half-pay officers, were motivated mainly by a concern to save impoverished gentility from the social disgrace of going unpowdered. Only Grenville was happy about leaving such people to face the burden of the tax, saying that it was not 'outward appearance that constituted the gentleman, but his conduct and behaviour'.[51] It was suggested by no one that the occasional use of powder even among the poor might serve a purpose inadequately described by the word 'vanity', and that they might suffer hardship by no longer being able to powder. And no member of either house mentioned what may have been the largest class of those who would suffer by the tax: the lower middling class of tradespeople with relatively small incomes and no claim to gentility, who nevertheless felt obliged to wear powder, whether in their shops or when calling on members of the polite classes, and who believed their businesses would suffer if they did not pay their customers the compliment of appearing

[49] *PR* xlii. 448–9. [50] *PR* xl. 488; xli. 69; xlii. 450. [51] *PR* xlii. 450.

before them properly dressed. It was this, especially, that persuaded many commentators on the bill outside parliament that it was a sumptuary law, primarily aimed at the less well-off, with the intention of making the distinction between rich and poor, polite and vulgar, as visible as possible; and that the exemptions on the clergy, for example, as well as on the lower ranks of officers in the army and navy, were a tacit acknowledgement that the wearing of hair powder conferred a prestige and authority which parliament was unwilling to allow those below the rank of the genteel to enjoy.

To those who understood the bill in this way, the debates were a striking example of how an unreformed and unrepresentative parliament was unable or unwilling to represent the interests of the majority. The bill had been treated, complained the *Register of the Times*, 'with that indolence and nonchalance, which denote the unfeeling contempt and narrow selfishness of men, who disdain to interest themselves in a matter which seems no material impediment to their own gratifications, however it may injure the rest of mankind'.[52] The bill passed its third reading in the Lords on 28 April, and received the royal assent two days later. Those intending to wear powder were allowed a month, starting on 6 May—'Hair Powder Day', as it became known in the press[53]—to buy their licences. This timetable turned out to be much too hurried, and in June the government rushed through a bill extending the registration period into late July.[54]

III

The uncharacteristic jocularity with which Pitt originally introduced his proposal was no doubt intended to acknowledge that there was an issue of decorum involved in bringing to the lofty attention of parliament so mean a subject as the dressing of hair. Pitt's tone, however, at first succeeded in persuading the *Morning Chronicle*, or so it pretended, that the proposal was no more than a tactical '*pleasantry*': 'it was received as a joke by the House, and accompanied by a burst of laughter. To talk of it seriously would therefore be ridiculous. It was meant to divert the public mind from contemplating the enormity of the sum to be imposed on them.'[55] In the event, however, the debates in parliament, inadequate as they may have been, were conducted with due solemnity: whether or not laughter had greeted the original proposal, the Lords and Commons had otherwise maintained their own dignity, their own decorum, by refusing to respond to Pitt's suggestion that there might be something indecorous about a discussion of

[52] *RT* 4 (11 Apr.–21 Apr. 1795), 303.

[53] See for example Isaac Cruikshank, *No Grumbling* (London: S. W. Fores, 6 May 'Alias Hair Powder Day' [1795]; BM 8646).

[54] 35 George III c. 112.

[55] *MC* 3 Mar. 1795; the paper persisted in this line until 19 Mar., when it reported the publication of the bill.

hair powder. Outside parliament, however, it proved much harder to separate the issue of hair powder from the satirical baggage which usually encumbered the mention of fashion and cosmetics. The tax was discussed in almost every medium of print—in popular songs sold by ballad-sellers, in poems and magazine verses, in caricatures, handbills, newspapers, periodicals, and in pamphlets whether economic, religious, or legal. Many of these texts, though they are far from unanimous in the nature of their opposition to the tax, are anti-Pittite, hostile to the war with France, and published by (to one degree or another) radical, sometimes plebeian booksellers such as J. S. Jordan, Benjamin Crosby, Daniel Isaac Eaton, Thomas Spence, and Richard Lee. But even in the case of writers with serious and angry reservations about the supposed fairness of the tax, their tone was often predominantly jocular. When Coleridge was delivering his fiery political lecture series at Bristol in the summer of 1795, he devoted one evening to a light-hearted discussion of the powder tax, 'in which his audience were kept in good feeling, by the happy union of wit, humour, and argument'. He later gave it again at Bath, as a sermon, and so without 'its humorous appendages'; the effect, according to his friend Joseph Cottle, was 'rather dull'.[56]

The difficulty involved in addressing the tax without sniggering was pointed out by the author of a long letter to the *Courier* in March, who complained that the tax had been 'altogether regarded with too much levity', as if it were 'too absurd to admit of serious consideration'.[57] The point was developed by the pseudonymous 'Brutus', author of *Cursory Remarks on Mr. Pitt's New Tax*, published by Eaton; Brutus had chosen his *nom de plume*, no doubt, after Lucius Junius Brutus, the first consul of the Roman republic, but with a glance also perhaps at the new hairstyle, cropped, dishevelled, and unpowdered, that had been named after Brutus in revolutionary France. 'The proposed tax of a guinea a head on every person who wears hair-powder', he wrote, 'is an imposition of that singular and absurd description, that I know not whether it has been received with the greater share of surprize or ridicule.' The joke, however, was on the public: we 'have been trifling with, or . . . have been imposing upon ourselves. We have contented and entertained ourselves with laughing at, and sporting our jokes at the ludicrousness of the subject; but we have not condescended to reflect on its impolicy, its absurdity, its injustice, and the oppression it must necessarily inflict.'[58] Brutus acknowledges that hair powder, and the tax upon it, are mean, are low topics; but insists that we must 'condescend', must lower ourselves to discuss them, if we are to avoid being imposed on by Pitt. If we merely laugh at the bill instead of reflecting seriously upon it, we will fall into the trap Pitt had set when he first suggested the tax as an object of mirth.

[56] Joseph Cottle, *Reminiscences of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey*, 2nd edn. (London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1848), 14, 96.

[57] Letter signed 'D.', *Courier*, 17 Mar. 1795.

[58] *Cursory Remarks on Mr. Pitt's New Tax imposing a Guinea per Head on every Person who wears Hair-Powder. By Brutus* (London: Daniel Isaac Eaton, 1795), 3. This pamphlet has been attributed to Henry Mackenzie, on the slender grounds that in 1790–1, Mackenzie contributed articles to the *Edinburgh Herald* under the name of 'Brutus'. Neither the style nor the politics of the pamphlet suggests Mackenzie, who would not have dreamed of publishing with the seditious Eaton.

Almost no one, however, could condescend so far when it came to considering the effects the tax might have on hairdressers themselves. Male hairdressers had a long history in satire, in which they were almost invariably represented as ridiculously fastidious and mincingly effeminate, as if they were somehow to blame for the embarrassment experienced by their male customers in submitting to the elaborate and supposedly unmanly process of having their hair styled with grease, powder, and perfume. They may not have been helped by those among them who, by the end of the century, were writing treatises on their art which attempted to elevate their profession and to attract polite custom by mingling instruction with amateur verse, powder-barrel philosophy, and sentimental narrative.[59] Writings and caricatures on the Hair Powder Bill were full of satires on, or denunciations of, hairdressers, who according to stereotype were often represented as French immigrants, and as responsible, therefore, for the corruption of British manhood by frivolous French luxury. Hair powder, it was reported, had originally been worn by French 'buffons and ballad-singers' in the previous century, who 'to render themselves ridiculous and conspicuous', appeared with white powder on their heads at the fair of St Germaine; 'unfortunately for Europe, the fickle Frenchmen took the hint, and by their example, deluged all the adjoining countries with buffoons, which have continued such to the present day.'[60] As we shall see, caricatures of hairdressers which comment on the Hair Powder Act represent them as dandified French emigrés infecting Britain with the irresponsible frivolity of the *ancien régime*. According to John Donaldson, such men—Catholics, the former subjects of an absolute monarchy—were 'no friends to our laws, religion, or constitution'. Because wearing powder was by now prohibited in France, he warned that, without an outright ban in Britain too, 'we may expect a great many more hair-dressers here, who will corrupt the people, and diffuse their bad principles over the country, to the prejudice of the free-born servants of this kingdom'.[61]

Donaldson was alone in expecting the number of hairdressers to grow; indeed, it was widely expected that the act would put many of them out of business. Joseph Moser, once a painter in enamel, now a journalist and Westminster magistrate, wrote a pamphlet on the tax in which he pretended to be a barber and imitated the alleged 'loquacity' of the trade. The bill, he claimed, would 'be the ruin of a profession which has been deemed of much use, and has been the source of much entertainment to the world'. Peter Pindar offered a vision of idle, melancholy groups of unemployed hairdressers breaking their curling-irons and snapping their combs; of barbers draping their striped poles with black crepe in mourning and protest, and 'doom'd to shut their mouths as well as

[59] See for example the treatises by Ross, Mather, and James Stewart; Alexander Stewart's pamphlet *The Natural Production of Hair, or its Growth and Decay* (London: the author [and sold at his 'Hair Dressing Academy'], 1795), is unusual in avoiding the flourishes of the other three writers.

[60] *Telegraph*, 24 July 1795; and see *MC* 28 Mar. 1795.

[61] [Donaldson], *Letter*, 25.

Pl. 4.3. Artist unknown, *Dressing the Minister alias Roasting the Guinea Pig* (London, 23 May 1795; BM 8650).

shops'.[62] An anonymous caricature (Pl. 4.3) of seven hairdressers, three of them French, shows how badly affected they have been by the act. Though they are still dandified—notice the elaborately figured jackets and gaudy stockings of two of the Frenchmen—their wigs are unpowdered as if they are too poor to take out licences themselves. They are outraged that Pitt, having put them out of business, has just agreed that the public should pay for a second time the enormous debts of the Prince of Wales, and they are hungry and vengeful enough to eat Pitt himself, who is roasting slowly before a roaring fire.

John Hart, a Fenchurch Street perfumer and hair powder-maker who wrote one of the most energetic and unusual pamphlets on the bill, claimed that Pitt, when told that the bill ' "would send five thousand *hair-dressers*, at least, to starvation," replied, with more wit than humanity, "that he would *provide* for every man of them in the *navy* and *army*" '.[63] This was presented by Hart as a callous throw-

[62] [Joseph Moser], *The Meal-Tub Plot; or, Remarks upon the Powder Tax. By a Barber* (Londen: Allen and West, and John Owen, 1795), 9. John Wolcot (Peter Pindar), *Hair Powder; a Plaintive Epistle to Mr. Pitt* (London: J. Walker *et al.*, 1795), 4–5.

[63] Hart, *Address*, 50; he may be alluding to the leaked (or invented) report of a Privy Council meeting in the *Courier*, 10 Feb. 1795, at which concern for the fate of barbers following the introduction of a powder tax was apparently met with the argument that 'they may all find immediate employment either in the Army or the Navy'.

away remark, but in fact it was good eighteenth-century economics. According to Hume, the reason why modern states were strengthened, not corrupted, by an abundance of workers in luxury trades, was that in time of peace, such trades were 'a kind of storehouse of labour', soldiers and sailors in waiting; 'the more labour . . . that is employed beyond mere necessaries, the more powerful is any state; since the persons engaged in that labour may easily be converted to the public service.'[64] In 1795 enlistment was the fate widely and very 'easily' predicted for barbers and hairdressers: 'The hair-dressers for soldiers may go', sang the author of *The Powder Tax*, and it would serve them right,

> For a deal of good flower they wasted
> By powdering curls and false hair.[65]

It would serve them right, agreed the Edinburgh author of a poem on the tax in the stanza of Burns:

> A skelp the *Barbers* weel deserve,
> For they did frae their duty swerve;
> An' tho' they *now* strain every nerve,
> They'll miss their mark:
> The maist o' them the King maun serve,
> For want o' wark.[66]

The prospect of this sudden boost to recruitment delighted many writers who were hostile to the war: fifty thousand 'Hair-dressers and Shavers', enthused 'Pasquin Shaveblock' in a satirical mock-sermon; 'they will prove a valuable acquisition to the army; especially as the smell of powder and the sight of blood are not likely to be so offensive to them as to young recruits in general.'[67] Others were unconvinced that a large draft of hairdressers would make the armed services much more effective: even Brutus, who as we have seen was disappointed by the failure of other writers to treat the tax seriously, permitted himself a sly effeminophobic laugh at the thought of hundreds of hairdressers becoming '*gentlemen soldiers,* or *honest jack tars*. What a change! To behold a troop of feminine frisseurs converted into a company of valiant guards—their tongs transformed into muskets, and their powder bags into cartridge boxes!' A few pages later, however,

[64] David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), 272, 262.

[65] *The Powder Tax; or, Barber's Downfall*, ll. 13, 15–16.

[66] *The Complaint*, 5. I am grateful to Nigel Leask for identifying this poem as written in the Edinburgh dialect, and rescuing me from the suspicion that it might be by Burns or Alexander Geddes, who wrote respectively in the south-western and Banffshire dialects.

[67] 'Pasquin Shaveblock', *The Shaver's New Sermon for the Fast Day*, 3rd edn. (London: J. Parsons and G. Riebau, 1795), 21. The origin of this joke seems to be a letter of 1780 to the *General Advertiser* by Ignatius Sancho, responding to a crisis in recruitment during the American war, and proposing 'to form ten companies at least, out of the very numerous body of hair-dressers', who would have the advantage of being already '*powder proof*': *Letters of the late Ignatius Sancho, an African*, ed. Vincent Carretta (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), 214. This quotation was supplied by Vincent Carretta.

Brutus had sufficiently recovered his gravity to urge unemployed hairdressers to retrain as farmworkers and so avoid 'the degrading and humiliating appellation of—SOLDIERS!'[68]

Equally unable to engage the sympathy of writers on the powder tax was anyone else whom the satirical tradition had represented as effeminate: 'fops', for example, like 'Jack Dandy', who had once 'strutted through the city' with hair so perfectly frizzed that

> No cauliflower e-er could boast
> A head so sweet and pretty

—or shopmen in retail trades which catered primarily to women, like the 'mantua makers and milliners' who before the introduction of the tax 'were wont to appear, so *lady-like* about the head'.[69] 'Grizzle Baldpate', the pseudonymous author of a satirical poem supposely provoked by his own inability to continue powdering his last grey hairs, cheerfully devoted these shopmen to the fate Pitt had marked out for hairdressers:

> But ye, MEN MILLINERS, ye pretty Boys,
> Place'd behind Counters, artful spruce Decoys,
> Tempting the Fair to spend *our* Cash with Grace;
> What will ye do? TO SOLDIERS take or SAILORS.

The inexhaustibly productive song-writer Charles Dibdin was still more anxious to clear the streets of the androgynous unemployed: each night throughout most of March 1795, at the Sans Souci in the Strand, he sang a song of his own composition, much admired by the Tory *True Briton*, in which he condemned the frizeur, the fop, the 'man millener', the discharged footman whose employer had refused to pay for his licence, to 'man the navy'.[70]

Of those who wrote against the tax a small number made some attempt to take seriously the plight of the hairdressers who were expected to be ruined by the tax, but the only one to do so without first subjecting them to the kind of mockery I have been describing was John Hart. Hart objected strongly to the notion that hairdressers were effeminate and therefore ridiculous, which was based simply on the fact that the nature of their employment required them to be more 'clean, sober, diligent, and punctual in their employ' than men in other trades, many of whom earned far more than hairdressers yet were permitted to 'appear at their work in any mean, or even dirty garment, leather apron, stocking sleeves, without the necessity of wearing a coat'. Journeymen hairdressers were a 'decent, orderly

[68] *Cursory Remarks*, 11, 15–16.

[69] 'Jack Dandy's Lamentations', in the *Philanthropist*, 10 (1 June 1795), 8; *The Minister's Head—dressed According to Law; or, a Word of Comfort to Hair-Dressers in General, respecting the Powder-Plot of 1795* (London: Glindon *et al.*, 1795), 13.

[70] *The Poll-Tax, an Ode. By Grizzle Baldpate* (London: Vaughan Griffiths, 1795), 17; Charles Dibdin, *Poor Old England* (London: J. Evans, [1795]); for Dibdin at the Sans Souci, see *TB* 3, 11, 18 Mar. 1795; for the *True Briton*'s approval, see 2 Mar. 1795.

set of men', not given, as other journeymen were, to bargaining over wages and refusing to work unless their demands were met.[71] According to Hart, Pitt had estimated in the Commons that there were no fewer than 50,000 hairdressers in Britain.[72] If to this figure was added their dependants, Hart reckoned that the act had put at risk the employment and support of between 200,000 and a quarter of a million people, a figure he rounded up to 'little short of *half a million*' by adding to it the families supported by the manufacture of hair powder. These figures are no doubt inflated by Hart's concern for his own future livelihood, but it is his partisanship on behalf of his own trade and of hairdressers that makes his pamphlet one of the most valuable contributions to the debate on the hair powder tax. As we shall see in the next section, a number of those who wrote in support of a total prohibition of the use of powder produced elaborate calculations of the number of additional families that would be fed if hair powder manufacture were to be forbidden in Britain. Hart would ridicule these figures, but he argues that, even if they were correct, they would not begin to equal the number of families that would be left without the means of sustenance whether as a result of the act itself or of a prohibition on the making of hair powder. He gasps in disbelief at the '*insensibility*' of those who, claiming to be humane spokesmen for the interests of the poor, would unthinkingly condemn so many families to 'actual starvation', as if because they earned their living in luxury or 'fancy' trades, they were unworthy to be considered 'as objects of pity'.[73]

The tone of Hart's remarks here is a reminder that the powder tax raised a wide range of issues which he and his contemporaries regarded as both serious and urgent, and the remainder of this chapter will be devoted to a discussion of those issues. This account of the tax would be misleading, however, if it paid insufficient attention to the comic aspect of the responses to it. It is no doubt because the tax provided so much opportunity for humour that it provoked as many responses as it did, in so many different print media. Indeed it is difficult to believe that many of those who had serious reservations about the tax would have bothered to put them into print if the tax had not seemed such a marketable subject, one which offered them a chance to entertain at the same time as to criticize government policy. The pamphlet by Moser, and another in the form of a letter to Pitt, imagined as the 'Deputy-Manager' of a government itself imagined as a 'Theatre-Royal', are perhaps the two clearest examples of texts which raise serious issues about the tax, everywhere infected, however, by the notion that there was something inescapably mean about hair powder and therefore something inescapably comic about being required to discuss it seriously. Both derive much of their humour from thinking up outrageously 'hard cases' which the powder act failed to address.

[71] Hart, *Address*, 49–50.

[72] Ibid. 61. I have not found this estimate in any reports of the proceedings in parliament, but Hart may be referring to the report in the *Courier*, 10 Feb. 1795, of a Privy Council meeting at which this estimate appears to have been made.

[73] Ibid. 48–52, 61, 89–90.

What was the position of actors under the act? asked Moser. Would a single licence cover them in every role, or would they be charged anew 'for every character they assume?' What about the situation, asked the author of the *Letter*, of a 'maiden lady of my acquaintance', whose favourite pug, while she was out, began playing with her powder-puff, and 'created no little diversion for the populace, to whom he exhibited himself at the window'. The lady was terrified that her dog would be informed against, for as he was her dependant she would be liable for a fine of £20 which she was unwilling to pay on behalf of a dog which she estimated was worth only half that amount. The solution proposed to her by the author was she should inform against him herself; she would still have to pay the £20, but would have the consolation of recouping £10 as her reward for informing.[74] In the rest of this section I want to give an idea of the playfulness of the discussion of the powder tax by weaving references to a range of different texts into the description of a large caricature, probably based on a drawing by George Woodward, which was published in mid-March, a few days before the Hair Powder Bill reached its committee stage in the Commons, and which anticipates the plight of a number of characters who, judging by their appearance, would probably have been able to afford to buy licences but have chosen not to do so.

The Town Before You, or Welch Wigs, or Whimsicalities, or how to Save the Tax on Hair Powder (Pl. 4.4), brings together a dozen assorted characters who are either proud, or pretend they are, to be 'no guinea pigs', as those who paid the licence fee were popularly known. The remarks attributed to these promenaders do not suggest that they are participating in the boycott of hair powder that would be inspired, as we shall see, by various political motives: what is being satirized is their parsimoniousness, the justifications they offer for it, and the humiliations it causes. Indeed, many, perhaps most of the caricatures on the subject of the tax represent themselves not as political but as social satires, as satires or comedies of private manners. This does not mean, however, that they do not participate in the politicization of the private that I am arguing is a defining characteristic of the culture of the 1790s. Two decades earlier, in what I have been calling the age of big hair, dozens of caricatures were being published which made fun of, and vastly exaggerated, the ornate, towering hairstyles of the period, sculpted with powder and pomatum. These satires were evidently regarded as non-political, in the sense of non-party political, non-partisan. When, however, the wearing of powder was made, by Pitt's tax, a political issue, the earliest caricatures on the tax mainly satirized the singularity of those who chose not to wear powder, no doubt in the belief that those likely to buy such images, which were relatively expensive and so directed at the reasonably well-off, would be in favour of the tax and would therefore be more amused by those who stepped out of fashion than by those who adhered to it.

[74] [Moser], *The Meal-Tub Plot*, 13; *Letter to the Deputy Manager of a Theatre-Royal, London, on his lately acquired Notoriety, in continuing and arranging the Hair Powder Act* (London: Allen and West, and John Owen, 1795), 16.

Pl. 4.4. Artist unknown [after G. M. Woodward?], *The Town Before You, or Welch Wigs, or Whimsicalities, or how to Save the Tax on Hair Powder* (London, 17 March 1795; BM 1991-7-20-55.cl). The print borrows the first part of its title from Hannah Cowley's most recent play, *The Town Before You, a Comedy*, first performed with no great success at Covent Garden on 6 December 1794. The print and play share little beyond the cast of hard-up and not very respectable gentlemen that both employ.

Two of the men in *The Town Before You*—an off-duty officer and a recently ordained but not very pious clergyman, obviously well connected because he has already obtained 'a Snug living'—have chosen to crop their hair. Both are making a show of their new hairstyles: the clergyman is promenading hat in hand, the officer, truculently refusing to make a 'dumpling' of his head with starch and grease, wears a huge hat at a fashionably jaunty angle that reveals half his new crop. Two other figures, an unhealthily slender young woman and a cheerful Irishman, have chosen to wear their hair long but uncurled and unpowdered—as Baldpate puts it,

> With Hair that dangles,
> Shining and straight as any Pound of Candles.[75]

The Irishman is the only one in the caricature to acknowledge how 'outlandish' the refusal to wear powder makes these twelve characters appear: normally an outsider in England, he seems delighted to be suddenly an insider, if only with the out-crowd.

A song in the *Morning Chronicle*, published a fortnight after Pitt announced his intention to tax the wearing of powder, remarked that he intended to 'compel Men and Women to wear *a brown Jazy!*'. A jazy or jasey was a 'frizzed worsted wig' which hung limply and would not 'take' powder; it was associated with ungenteel provincial poverty.[76] Four of the characters in *The Town Before You* have taken to wearing these 'Welch wigs', which give their heads the most unflattering shape imaginable. The three men, however, all call attention to their jaseys: two of them actively solicit admiration, clearly anxious to believe their appearance is improved by their decision to prefer 'light Welsh wool' to wigs made of real hair covered in 'Dumpling Dust'. The woman who affects a 'jazy' wears a revealing muslin dress, hitched up high at the back; she is apparently a prostitute, past her best years, and certainly not the 'maiden' she claims to be. Her jazy makes it unlikely that she will attract much custom, but she is refusing to wear wig and powder, as she explains with unconscious but appropriate indelicacy, in order to teach Pitt not 'to meddle with Maidens hair'—the very last thing that Pitt was believed to 'meddle' with. For throughout 1795 Pitt was lampooned in opposition and radical satires for his apparent lack of interest in women, his alleged prefence for masturbation, his supposed impotence, even his alleged lack of genitalia—in one of Richard Newton's caricatures on the tax he is described as 'a remarkable pretty Guinea Pig that has never a tail'.[77] Among satirists writing on the Hair Powder Bill, the notion that Pitt had an aversion to women provided a ready explanation for his introduction of the tax. That he 'should not hesitate', wrote the author of *The Minister's Head Dressed According to Law*,

> by his late extraordinary tax, to form his principal attack against the *heads* of the FAIR SEX (inasmuch as *dress* is more peculiarly *their* study and element) is not much to be

[75] *The Poll-Tax*, 19.

[76] *MC* 2 Mar. 1795; *The Complaint*, 8.

[77] [Richard Newton], *Buy my Pretty Guinea Pigs!* (London: Newton, 1 July 1795; BM 8663); for satires of Pitt's supposed sexual problems and preferences, see John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 653, and Barrell (ed.), *Exhibition Extraordinary!!* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2001), 12, 15, 21.

wondered at; since it is so notoriously known that he is equally unwilling and unable to assail them in a *less exposed quarter* . . .—Never, never will our mighty *financier* absent himself from parliament through the influence or attraction of a *honey-moon*—never, never open a *connubial budget*—never, never perform the duties . . . of the '*home department*.'[78]

He was, according to a song in the *Lady's Pocket Magazine*, '*No friend to the sex*', and so utterly deaf to 'female remonstrance' against his cruel tax. Grizzle Baldpate managed to relate Pitt's supposed aversion to women not only to the tax but to Pitt's alacrity in extending the power of the executive. The 'FAIR', explained Baldpate, had nothing to fear from Pitt, who was 'not fond of THINGS below', and 'most attach'd to what regards the CROWN'.[79]

One of the commonest jokes evoked by the powder act involved the widespread opprobrium that attached to red hair: by the tax, wrote Baldpate, with more irony than tact, 'Ringlets ting'd with pretty Carrot Hue' would be unkindly 'forc'd [in]to View'. Pitt, warned other writers, was incurring the implacable anger of 'Red heads', who 'would willingly set the Minister's head in a blaze' as fiery as their own; 'Red heads', wrote the author of *The Complaint*, 'will a' their beauty tine, | An' at P——t flyte'.[80] The threat the tax posed to impoverished redheads was described at length by Peter Pindar:

> Lo, the poor Girl, whom carrot-colour shocks,
> Pines pennyless, and blushes for her locks!
> Refus'd to fly to POWDER's friendly aid,
> She bids them seek in caps the secret shade;
> No ringlets now around her neck to wave,
> PHILLIS must hide the redd'ning shame, or shave!
> At *thee* she flings her curses, PITT, and cries—
> At *thee* she darts the lightnings of her eyes;
> And thinks that LOVE ne'er warm'd Him who could vex,
> With wanton strokes of *cruelty*, the SEX.[81]

Two such unfortunate women appear in *The Town Before You*. The elder claims to have resolved to wear her own 'Amber Tresses' unpowdered, however unfashionable the colour, but has in fact hidden them beneath the 'secret shade' of an elaborate turban; the younger woman, bolder and more attractive, looks confident that her other charms will overcome any prejudice against what she frankly describes as her 'Carrotty Locks'.

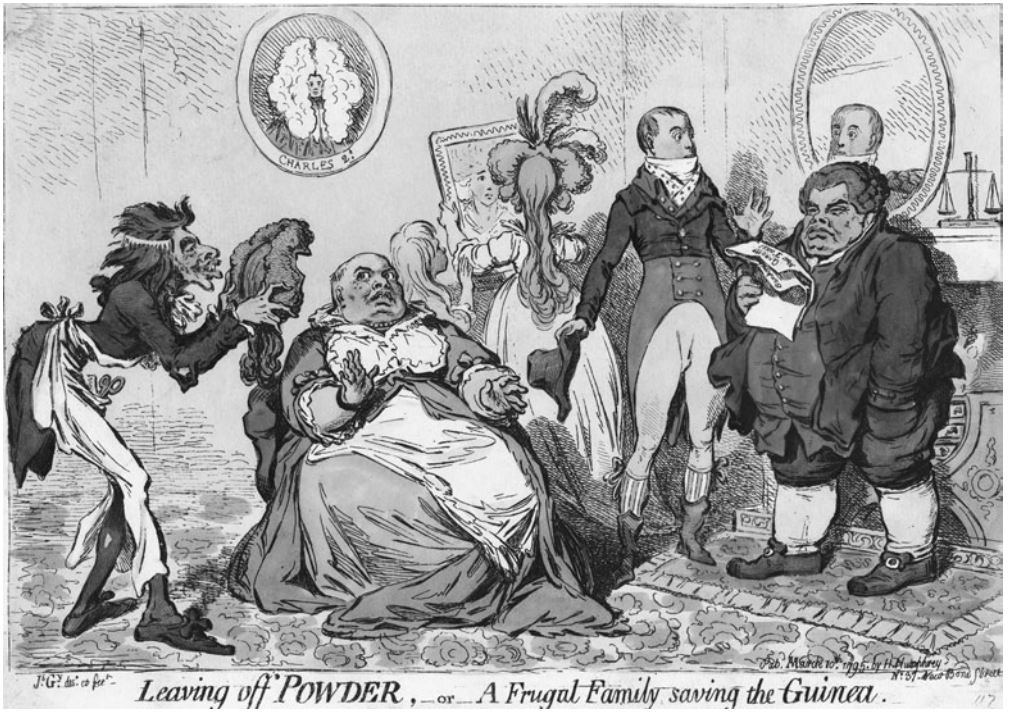
In James Gillray's caricature, *Leaving off Powder,—or,—A Frugal Family saving the Guinea* (Pl. 4.5), published a week before *The Town Before You*, another

[78] *Minister's Head*, 8.

[79] 'New Song, on the Hair-Powder Tax. By Dr. Perfect', *Lady's Pocket Magazine* (June 1795), 341; *The Poll-Tax*, 8.

[80] For the problem with red hair, see 'Rubrilla, *true beauty*', in *GM* 38 (1768), 534; *The Poll-Tax*, 19; *Minister's Head*, 13; *The Complaint*, 3.

[81] Pindar, *Hair Powder*, 2–3.



Pl. 4.5. James Gillray, *Leaving off Powder,—or,—A Frugal Family saving the Guinea* (London, 10 March 1795; BM 8629).

unpowdered redhead looks in dismay at the reflection of her pale ginger hair in the mirror. Her newly cropped brother inadvertently catches sight of his own reflection, and starts back in shock, while their father, his dark wig also unpowdered, stands planted before the fire, evidently resolute against rescuing his family from social disgrace by buying them licences. He has the air of a prosperous businessman who knows the value of a guinea: a pair of scales on the chimneypiece behind him is a symbol of his meanness. To the left sits his plump wife, her head shaved, waiting for her French hairdresser (who has the starved look of the Frenchmen in Hogarth's *Calais Gate*, or of sans-culottes in a number of post-revolution caricatures) to fit her with an offensively black wig ('a black wig, detestable!', wrote Joseph Moser: the uniform of 'stage murderers'[82]). She shares the discomfort of two plump women in *The Town Before You*, who have decided to give up their wigs altogether, and have concealed their shaved heads beneath tight turbans

[82] [Moser], *The Meal-Tub Plot*, 4, and for 'savage black' wigs among other colours as markers of character on stage, see Stewart, *Plocacosmos*, 21. They may also have been worn by Scottish Presbyterian ministers: according to Sir Walter Scott, Dr John Erskine, who officiated jointly with the historian William Robertson at Old Greyfriars in Edinburgh, wore 'a black wig without a grain of powder'; see *Guy Mannering*, ii, ed. P. D. Garside and Jane Millgate (London: Penguin, 2003), ch. 16.

or bandages. 'How I was admired in Hyde Park on Sunday!!' says the more genteel of the two, with another unconscious play on the contemporary meanings of 'admire': she has clearly chosen to interpret the wondering stares she attracted from the park promenaders as looks of approval.

IV

In so far as the hair powder tax did prove to be 'popular', as both the Foreign Secretary and the Lord Chancellor insisted it would be, it owed its popularity to an argument which the government did not choose to make and which, when it was made by others, it refused to endorse. Pitt proposed the tax at a time when the previous autumn's harvest had shrivelled under the intense heat of a freak summer, and when much of the projected spring harvest had been frozen to death by the coldest winter in memory. Even in the late winter it was clear to most people that 1795 would be a year of great scarcity; by early spring many were predicting a famine. For almost everyone who wrote about the tax, its only virtue, though it was an important one, was that it would discourage the wasteful conversion of wheat into starch, and so by increasing the supply of flour might be expected to lower the price of bread. In January the government began to come under pressure to introduce some measure to reduce the use of hair powder and its substitutes. The Lord Mayor of London had recommended to the Privy Council that hair powder manufacturers should reduce their purchases of grain, and had threatened hairdressers that he would start to enforce the law against those who mixed flour with powder; Sir John Sinclair, on behalf of the Board of Agriculture, had made a similar recommendation directly to Pitt himself; and in the Commons Sheridan and the Foxite MP Maurice Robinson had drawn attention to the 'astonishing quantity of flour which was used as a substitute for hair powder by the soldiers of this country', which, 'in a moment of apprehended scarcity of corn, deserved the most deliberate and attentive consideration of Parliament'.[83] In early February the Privy Council discussed the advantages and disadvantages of taking measures against the use of hair powder in order to increase the supply of food.[84] When Pitt proposed the tax, however, he justified it entirely as a tax on luxury, not as a measure designed to secure more abundant and cheaper provisions. He could not do anything else, for the logic of what appeared to be the strongest argument in favour of the tax was in the end an argument against it: if the manufacture and use of hair powder had a serious impact on the supply of food, surely it was not enough to tax the stuff—the plan to issue licences should be abandoned, and the use of powder should be banned outright.

It is not hard to imagine why Pitt refused to endorse the link between the use of powder and the supply of food. In early 1795 his government was becoming ever

[83] Roger Wells, *Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England 1793–1801* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1988), 184–7; Rev. Sir Adam Gordon Bt., *Discourses upon Several Subjects; being the Substance of some select Homilies of the Church of England*, 2 vols. (London: John Stockdale, 1795), i. 339; Mori, *William Pitt*, 248; *PR* xl. 362, and see 380–1.

[84] *Courier*, 10 Feb. 1795.

more unpopular. The winter campaign had been a disaster. The Netherlands had surrendered to the French, the Stadtholder had fled to England, the British army had withdrawn from northern Europe, and the German and Austrian armies had been pushed back beyond the Rhine. The alliance of monarchies against France was crumbling and, as we have seen, was being supported only by huge subsidies from Britain, to be financed by the loans which were the occasion of the introduction of the hair powder tax along with a range of other, less controversial measures. At home, the government had suffered 'a knock-down blow'[85] in its attempt to destroy the radical movement, when Thomas Hardy, John Horne Tooke, and John Thelwall were all acquitted on a charge of high treason which, when the evidence that purported to support it had been revealed in court, had seemed to many absurd and oppressive, a piece of cynical alarmism designed to terrify the public with the spectre of domestic jacobinism. At the time of the introduction of the powder tax, Pitt was determined not to add to his unpopularity, or to reduce the room for increased taxation, by acknowledging that there was any crisis at all in the supply of food, especially as to admit that the powder tax was a measure designed to save corn would have been to appear to be following a Foxite agenda. Accordingly, when John Dent proposed, as we saw earlier, a total prohibition on the wearing of hair powder, Pitt gave him an angry dressing-down: 'this sort of discussion,' he said, was

> very disorderly, and . . . calculated to do no good, while it might be attended with a deal of mischief. He lamented the present high price of corn, but he had no information which gave him reason to apprehend the threatened scarcity intimated by the honourable gentleman; nor if he had, would he state an evil to so great an extent, while he had only to propose so trivial and inadequate a remedy, as could be derived from a prohibition of hair powder.[86]

But it 'could not be controverted', Dent insisted, that the 'late severe weather' would severely reduce the harvest of winter corn! It could certainly be controverted, replied Lord Sheffield, MP for Bristol and a respected economist: he 'had taken the greatest pains to inform himself upon the subject; there was not the smallest danger of a scarcity'.[87]

In parliament the question of the effect of powdering the hair on the food supply was left there, engulfed by the tide of pleas for exemptions on behalf of the impoverished gentry and 'those with the misfortune to have seven or eight servants'. Pitt, however, must always have intended the Hair Powder Bill as a measure aimed at increasing the supply of food. It was in those terms that the powdering had been discussed in the Privy Council. Though he made no public acknowledgement of it, he was well aware of the extent of the shortage of grain; the Board of Trade was desperately searching Europe and Canada for grain to import; and the Home Office had already been receiving reports of food riots in the provinces.[88]

[85] *The Age of Prophecy! Or, Further Testimony to the Mission of Richard Brothers. By a Convert* (London: J. Parsons *et al.*, 1795), 28.

[86] *PR* xli. 70.

[87] *PR* xli. 70.

[88] Wells, *Wretched Faces*, 184–7; Mori, *William Pitt*, 248.

The nature of Pitt's proposal seems clearly to demonstrate that he saw the tax not as a simple tax on luxury but as a measure directly aimed at conserving food. In his budget speech, he explained the proposal simply as a tax on wearing expensive genuine hair powder. His calculation of how much revenue the tax would produce was based on the number of persons who had four-wheel carriages, or kept horses for pleasure rather than business, or who employed substantial numbers of domestic servants.[89] Such people wore only powder made from starch, and could easily afford to pay a guinea a year and more for the privilege of wearing it. But it is apparent that even then he must have been intending to levy the tax as well on the very much more extensive use of flour as a substitute for powder made of starch. If he had intended the measure merely as a conventional tax on luxury, he could simply have doubled the stamp duty on hair powder, a measure which would have produced at least as much as he hoped to derive from licences; for even if less powder was used, the cost of collecting the additional duty would have been nil, whereas he was obliged to set up some very expensive bureaucratic arrangements to collect the licence fees. Instead, he chose to establish an entirely new kind of tax, one which obliged the wearers of powder to pay for using a commodity the purchase price of which already included a heavy stamp duty. It was, as one commentator pointed out, the equivalent of increasing the revenue the government already derived from the duty on candles by charging people again for the right to burn them; or selling licences to drink tea and coffee as well as charging a customs duty on them.[90] The only plausible explanation for the invention of this new kind of tax was that Pitt always intended it to apply to the use of flour as hair powder as well as the powder itself. Since it would have been impossible to place a duty on flour used as powder without taxing its use as a foodstuff, a licence fee was his only option. When the bill was drafted, and it turned out to include the use of flour as well as powder, Pitt did not revise upwards his estimate of the proceeds of the tax, no doubt believing that a guinea a year would be easily afforded by most of those who used genuine hair powder, but would be largely unaffordable to those who used flour: the cost of a single licence was the equivalent of two weeks' wages for labourers in agriculture. In short, it is very hard to resist the conclusion that the measure had always been intended to increase the supply of flour, and that Pitt's reproof to Dent for scaremongering was a piece of ministerial deception.

Outside parliament the link between the hair powder tax and the supply of food was made immediately following Pitt's budget speech. On 25 February a handbill was circulated on the streets of London, signed by 'Philanthropos', which began:

> As a friend to human kind, without preface or Apology, I state, that
>
> HAIR POWDER
>
> Is made of the finest Wheat Flour, and that thousands of Sacks are consum'd Annually for this vain purpose. I state also that there is a scarcity of Wheat Flour, and that at this time, it is at the enormous Price of Ten Shillings per Bushel.

[89] *PR* xl. 488. [90] *Minister's Head*, 24–5.

QUESTIONS

If your Servant, or your Child, was to throw a Slice of good Bread into the Fire, or into the dirty Street, to be trampled under Foot, would you not think such conduct reprehensible?

Is there any real difference, between wasting a piece of Bread, and wasting the Flour that would make a piece of Bread?

—To the latter,—You must answer in the Negative.

Let us then act consistently, and equally discountenance the waste of Bread, and Hair Powder, which is, in fact, nothing but *the very finest* Wheat Flour.[91]

Philanthropos, whoever he was, was certainly a supporter of the ministry, as well as an opponent of the revolution in France. The main point of his handbill was to consider how to suppress popular discontent and popular radicalism. He commended Hannah More's scheme for the publication of the Cheap Repository Tracts, and recommended the loyalist writings of Job Nott, who had 'arrested the Attention of the lower orders of Men, while he has instill'd into their Minds, Religion, Morality, and Loyalty, without which, there cannot be Peace and Order in a state'.[92] The policy he recommended on hair powder—stopping the powder mills, indemnifying their proprietors with public money, and prohibiting the use of powder—was in effect a call to the higher orders to reform themselves, to set an example of self-restraint, and to demonstrate to the poor, at a time of scarcity, that the rich were not deaf to their suffering. The handbill should probably be read as an attempt to swing the evangelical wing of the Church of England behind a policy which Pitt could not afford to endorse.

The entire disuse of hair powder, whether by legal prohibition or voluntary abstention, in order to maximize the supply of food, would be advocated by many other writers, some from within the Church, others representing various dissenting denominations, and others still who did not represent themselves as writing from any particular religious perspective. The Unitarian Coleridge published an address to an imaginary liberal patriot whose professed 'patriotism and philanthropy' cost him 'very little': 'You harangue against the Slave-Trade; you attribute the present scarcity to the war—yet you wear powder, and eat pies and sugar!'[93] Michael Nash, 'the very chiefest of Sinners saved, And Servant of the Servants of his Lord', saw no virtue in the reluctant compliance with human law, and urged abstention: in a pamphlet the proceeds of which were to be distributed among those 'who hunger for the bread that powdered heads deprive them of', he attacked the purchase of licences as the 'Sinful Custom of subscribing to Starve

[91] Philanthropos, *As a friend to human kind*, etc. ([London: 25 Feb. 1795]), 1.

[92] Ibid. 2.

[93] S. T. Coleridge, *The Watchman*, 3 (17 Mar. 1796), in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ii. *The Watchman*, ed. Lewis Patton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 99.

the Poor'.[94] John Donaldson, whom we met earlier in this chapter, was convinced that 'the high price of bread is chiefly owing to the great and general use of hair-powder'. Like Coleridge, he advocated a boycott of powder and of shops where the use of powder was continued, on the lines of the boycott of sugar by those who were demanding the abolition of the slave-trade, but he also begged Pitt to prohibit the manufacture of both starch and powder: 'our heavenly Father', he reminded the Prime Minister, 'gives us the produce of the earth for food and for medicine, and we have no right to apply it to any other use.'[95] The persuasiveness of his plea on behalf of the poor was no doubt diminished by his attempt to patent the idea of prohibition as his own intellectual property; if the idea was adopted by the government, he calculated that the saving to the nation would amount to £1,146,420, of which he thought it not unreasonable that he should receive a tenth. Nor can his credibility have been helped by another outrageous scam he announced at the very end of his pamphlet. He had a secret, a means of preserving hair, preventing baldness, and returning grey hair to its original colour. He would disclose this secret to anyone willing to subscribe five guineas, but not before he had collected one thousand subscribers.[96]

Donaldson's calculations, however, of the effect of the consumption of powder, and of flour used instead of powder, on the supply of food, were widely quoted and treated with respect. The accounts of the excise office showed that, prior to the introduction of Pitt's tax, 8,170,019.5 pounds of starch were made in Britain every year. Making a small allowance for the use of starch in laundering clothes, Donaldson reckoned that the wheat expended in the manufacture of starch for hair powder (at a rate of two pounds of wheat to a pound of starch) would have made almost exactly 4 million quartern—four-pound—loaves (at a rate of three and a half pounds of flour per loaf). He added to this the amount of flour which hairdressers combed into the hair or puffed over it, which he estimated at 18,250,000 pounds, the equivalent of 5,314,284 loaves a year. Some four times this amount of flour, Donaldson estimated, must be used by those who dress their own hair, equivalent to 21,256,936 loaves. Altogether therefore the powdering of hair with flour or scented starch diverted from the food supply each year the equivalent of 30,571,266 quartern loaves, or over 122 million pounds of bread! At a time when the overseers of the poor were granting an allowance of one pound of bread per person per day, this amount would have fed a third of a million people for an entire year.[97]

Donaldson's figures were obviously out of date, in that they applied to the period before the passing of the Hair Powder Act, and as we shall see they are thoroughly suspect for other reasons. But they were endorsed by, among others, Lettsom, the Quaker physician, in a pamphlet on the scarcity. Following the

[94] Michael Nash, *A Serious Address to Believers Only, on the Prevailing Influence of Fashion, and the Sinful Custom of subscribing to Starve the Poor, by wearing Hair Powder* (London: J. S. Jordan *et al.*, 1795), title-page, 35–6.

[95] [Donaldson], *Letter*, 4–5, 9, 7. [96] Ibid. 6, 13, 18. [97] Ibid. 5–6.

passing of the Hair Powder Act, the popular, anti-Pittite Lord Mayor of London, Thomas Skinner, who as we have seen had made representations to government in January about the effect of the hair powder industry on the food supply, issued an order 'forbidding the barbers from using flour instead of hair-powder made of starch, under a penalty of ten pounds'. As an attempt to reduce the price of bread, this order, Lettsom argued, was worse than useless: since if two pounds of flour were destroyed in making a pound of hair powder, it would clearly make more sense to reverse the order and require barbers to use flour instead of powder. But the only policy that would have a serious impact on the price of bread would be to prohibit barbers using both powder and flour, together with a voluntary abstention on the part of the public as a whole from using either. The poor would benefit only if 'the great men and women of the land would allow their hair to be cherished by nature'. Lettsom was apparently following his own advice and was reported to have recently laid aside his anyway unquaker-like 'full dressed powdered' periwig 'with three or four tier of curls' and also no doubt the glass wool wig he sometimes chose to wear. He was now to be seen sporting 'a diminutive *brown coachman's bob*', a cheap unpowdered thing, favoured by coachmen for its aerodynamic qualities and its ability to stick to the head even in high winds.[98]

In mid-July, when it became possible to estimate the number of people who had taken out licences, the amount of bread wasted in powdering the hair was recalculated by the Rev. Septimus Hodson, a medical man as well as Chaplain of the Asylum for Female Orphans. Much of Hodson's pamphlet was devoted to a defence of Pitt's war by an attempt to prove that wars in general had no effect upon the price of wheat. He was certain, though, that the use of hair powder had contributed to the current scarcity. By the time he was writing, some 300,000 people were claimed to have taken out licences, and the practice of flouring the hair had almost entirely stopped, except in the army, where, as we shall see, with an exception for the King's Guard it would be suspended by an order dated two days after Hodson sent his book to press. With this in mind, Hodson reckoned that a prohibition of the use of hair powder would feed 700,000 persons for one day in seven throughout the year, or 13,500 people for a whole year. He was for voluntary abstention from the use of hair powder, if only because it would be impossible for the government, having just introduced the tax, to prohibit it by law.[99] Another proponent of voluntary abstention, however, a 'Liveryman of London', writing in the radical *Courier* two days before Hodson's pamphlet went to press, calculated that if the number of people enjoying exemption from the tax were added to the number who had taken out licences, the amount of grain wasted annually

[98] [Lettsom], *Hints*, 13–16; Hart, *Address*, 93, 105. For Lettsom's glass wool wig, see Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 121. Lettsom's bob was no doubt a 'scratch bob', which covered only part of the head, the natural hair being combed back over it 'and mingled with that of the wig by means of pomatum'. It was worn chiefly 'on horseback or by the common people', Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook*, 241–3.

[99] Hodson, *Address*, 24–6.

in whitening heads would be sufficient to fill no fewer than 44,000 mouths a year.[100]

Many of those who wrote on the tax were convinced that the use of hair powder greatly inflated the price of bread and greatly diminished the supply. Their favourite conceit was to represent whitened heads as decorated with the food of the poor—with 'some POOR MAN'S DINNER', as Grizzle Baldpate expressed it. The rich, wrote one song-writer, 'use on their heads what the poor want to bake'; can you bear, Thomas Spence demanded of the poor, 'to see your food lavish'd on vile scorners' hair?'[101] As we have seen, even supporters of the tax and the ministry seemed to accept the connection, which Pitt had refused to endorse, between the use of powder and the supply of food, and despite the fact that he had refused to accept any such link, some were even prepared to credit him with having introduced the tax to help the poor. 'Let our rulers go on then, of honour secure, | Each tax upon luxury—bread for the poor', sang Dibdin; 'The nation's best friend, when gaunt Famine appears, | Who will not applaud, then, our Minister wise?' sang 'Dr. Perfect'.[102] A correspondent of the loyalist *Times* acknowledged that it was too much to expect the 'antiquated virgin' to give up powder: her 'silvery locks', unpowdered, 'might prove too sure an index of that worldly experience, which for certain prudential reasons she might wish to conceal'. So too the '*hen-peck'd bald-pate*, whose lively wife nauseates and detests the careless *brown bob*'. 'But to every other character', he continues, developing as he does a list reminiscent of those who had figured in *The Town before you*:

> Whether the grave judge, or respectable grandmother, the buxom widow or the broad-shouldered Irish fortune-hunter, the flirting coquette or her coxcomb colleague, the hardy veteran or flashy militia captain, the pert lawyer or the young priggish parson; and lastly, the smart appresentive, who *beflours* his head to cut a dash at the Dog and Duck or Bagnigge Wells: all these, I say, and every other character that I have omitted to name, can surely have no possible excuse for thus insulting the feelings of the poor . . . at the moment when they are suffering the greatest of all worldly miseries—*want*.[103]

Most of those who wrote as opponents of the tax endorsed the calls for a voluntary boycott on the use of powder, or for a total prohibition on the manufacture of starch. In April, according to the *Times*, 'a numerous club' was formed in Lambeth 'called the Crop Club, every member of which, on his entrance, is obliged to have his head docked as close as the Duke of Bridgewater's old bay coach horses. This assemblage is instituted for the purpose of opposing, or rather evading, the tax on powdered heads.' In June the Duchess of Northumberland forbade everyone in her family, with the exception of herself, from wearing powder. This sacrifice won

[100] *Courier*, 16 July 1795.

[101] *The Poll-Tax*, 16; *The Hair-Powder Plot* (no publication details [1795]); Thomas Spence, *An Address to the insulted Swinish Multitude on Account of the Hair Powder Tax* (London: Spence, [1795]).

[102] Dibdin, *Poor Old England*; *The Lady's Pocket Magazine* (June 1795); 341.

[103] *Times*, 10 Aug. 1795.

the *Times*'s approval in that she had made it not from motives of 'disaffection' but from 'a scruple of contributing in any unnecessary way to the present scarcity'.[104] In July the Common Council of the City of London engaged themselves not to use hair powder made from wheat-starch, and petitioned the Privy Council to abolish the wearing of powder in the armed forces; at the end of the same month the Adjutant-General issued an order on behalf of the Duke of York instructing 'Troops in Great Britain . . . to discontinue the Use of Hair-Powder till further Orders'.[105] In August the Duke of Bedford cropped his hair and announced that he and his servants would leave off wearing powder until after the next harvest; in a satire of Bedford, the *True Briton* remarked that he was 'a tall good-looking man, and would have much the appearance of a gentleman if he did not wear his hair cropt, and without powder'.[106] His new style was named the 'Bedford Level', after the area of fenland drained by his ancestor the 4th Duke in the previous century, but with a hint, of course, as Hart pointed out, that the present duke was a '*leveller*'.[107] In September at a shooting party at Woburn, Bedford formed his own crop club; according to the *Morning Chronicle*:

> a general cropping and and combing out of Hair Powder took place, [by] Lord WILLIAM RUSSELL, Lord VILLIERS, Lord PAGET, Sir HARRY FEATHERSTONE, Mr. LAMBTON, Mr. ANTONIE LEE, Mr. ROBERT LEE, Mr. TREVERS, Mr. DUTTON, Mr. DAY, and Mr. VERNON. They entered into an engagement to forfeit a sum of money if any of them wore their hair tied or powdered within a certain period. Many Noblemen and Gentlemen in the county of Bedford have since followed the example: it has become general with the Gentry in Hampshire, and the Ladies have left off wearing powder.[108]

The cropping of the Duke of Bedford inspired a caricature by Woodward, *Whims of the Moment or the Bedford Level* (Pl. 4. 6);[109] in the spirit of Fox's prediction that if persons of fashion stopped using powder, others would quickly follow, it shows a pot-valiant gentleman, perhaps intended for Bedford, contemplating his severed locks, and a farmer who, just as Fox had predicted, had followed the example of that 'leader of taste', and whose hair now ends abruptly above his ears. 'What hast thou done with thy toil [tail]?' asks his horrified wife; 'Docked un, to be the go!' he replies. Patrician and plebeian, duke and farmer, are now on the same level.

According to John Hart, the hair powder manufacturer and probably the best informed of those who denied the link between the use of powder and the supply of food, if cropping and leaving off powder was becoming 'the go', this was as

[104] *Times*, 14 Apr. 12 June 1795.

[105] *Times*, 11, 16 July 1795; Wells, *Wretched Faces*, 204; *London Gazette*, 28 July–1 Aug. 1795 (for the order itself, see PRO, 19 W.O. 3/14, p. 72, 19 July 1795, and see *MC* 20 July 1795, *Times*, 3 Aug. 1795).

[106] A squib from the *True Briton*, presumably of 1797, apparently satirizing Bedford as if he were Richard Parker, one of the leaders of the naval mutinies of that year; republished in *The Spirit of the Public Journals for 1797* (London: Richard Phillips, 1797), 258. For Bedford's crop, see Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook*, 247; *MC* 27 Aug. 1795.

[107] Hart, *Address*, 93.

[108] *MC* 24 Sept. 1795.

[109] The first part of the title of Woodward's caricature refers to an entertainment by Charles Dibdin first presented in 1789.

Pl. **4.6**. G. M. Woodward, *Whims of the Moment or the Bedford Level* (London, 20 November 1795; BM 8763).

much out of fear as from a concern for the starving poor. In a long letter to the *Times*,[110] then in his much longer pamphlet, *Address to the Public*, he claimed that those who continued wearing powder, 'particularly Ladies', were 'insulted in the streets'. He himself had witnessed an 'outrage' committed on a hairdresser at Tower Hill, 'who had his powder bag taken from him, beat about the head, and otherwise ill treated' in an assault 'which very nearly cost him his life'. He pleaded with the Lord Mayor, who had applied to the Privy Council on behalf of the City for an order to prohibit the use of hair powder: the stand he had taken, complained Hart, apart from threatening to impoverish vast numbers of hairdressers, powder-manufacturers, and starch-makers, was doing nothing to help the poor while aiming 'a fatal blow at the produce of the . . . Licence Bill'.[111] Hart strenuously disagreed with the whole drift of the arguments we have been reviewing in this section, directing much of his attention to a vigorous attempt to refute Hodson and Lettsom; and though he was writing urgently in defence of his own livelihood, he clearly knew much more about the starch manufactory than any other contributor to the debate on the hair powder tax, and his arguments are almost as persuasive as they are unexpected.

As a perfumer and maker of hair powder, Hart was not anxious to defend the use of flour as a substitute for hair powder, but he was no doubt largely right in claiming that since the imposition of the tax, and the War Office order in late July, that practice was 'now completely done away with': most of those prepared to pay for licences were probably also prepared to pay for genuine powder. He may have been less right in claiming that even before the tax the use of flour in the dressing of hair did not amount 'to a waste worthy of any consideration'. This claim, however, is a great deal more convincing than Donaldson's calculation of the amount of flour used instead of powder, which appears to be based on the entirely mistaken assumption that civilians who were content to use flour had their hair whitened every day—once a week was more usual, Hart claimed.[112] But it is the use of genuine, high quality hair powder, the kind he made himself, that Hart was mainly concerned to defend. He ridiculed Hodson's calculations, insisting that the fashion had radically changed 'from the period, a few years since, when *bucks, macaronies, &c.* used to increase the bulk of their *club*, by the lodgement within it of at least half a pound of powder'. Nowadays, less than half of the men who wear powder used more than a pound a month. Young people used it only during the London Season; the ladies' hairstyles, now that the big hair of the 1770s and early 1780s was no longer fashionable, consumed less than a pound a fortnight.[113] But the core of Hart's argument is that the production of hair powder, far from inflating the price of food, significantly reduced it; far from diminishing the supply, it significantly increased it.

[110] *Times*, 31 July 1795.
[111] Hart, *Address*, 12–15; see *MC* 16 July and *Courier*, 20 July 1795.
[112] Hart, *Address*, 12, 16.
[113] Ibid. 39–41.

'Hair Powder', Philanthropos had claimed, 'is made of the finest Wheat Flour'; the manufacture of hair powder, wrote the Rev. Sir Adam Gordon, was a 'wicked waste' of 'the very *choicest grain*'.[114] On the contrary, declared Hart: it is made from starch extracted from grain, whether wheat, barley, or oats, that was '*damaged*'—'*smutty, musty, bunty, over-heated* (from lying too long on shipboard, &c.) and *stinking*'. Such grain that was 'utterly unfit for the uses of bread' and of no use to brewers, as it gave an unpleasant taint to the flavour of beer. Starch certainly could be made from the best wheat, but as the starch made from inferior and damaged grain was every bit as good, no starch-manufacturer—except when there was a surplus—would dream of buying 'the finest wheat flour' if he could buy damaged grain at a fraction of the cost.[115] It was a great benefit of the manufacture of starch, therefore, that it provided a market for grain which farmers would otherwise be unable to sell; and

> by consuming only, in general, *that corn*, which would *not* be purchased by millers, mealfactors, or bakers, it directly serves to keep the superior and undamaged kinds of wheat, at a price far more reasonable than would obviously be the case, were there *no market* for the inferior and damaged grain.[116]

Hodson, probably the only other writer on the hair powder tax who knew or acknowledged that starch was made from inferior grain, had suggested that 'wheat of inferior quality may at this time be ground to great advantage with better wheat' to make flour; for 'in the present crisis we must not be very delicate with respect to *quality*, but thankful if we find a sufficient *quantity*'.[117] This was simply not so, Hart retorted: the wheat used in making starch was so damaged that it could not be made into even the coarsest bread when mixed with better grain; far from being fit to '*replenish the stomach*' it emptied the stomach, acting as an emetic. It was rejected even by pigs. Indeed, the only way to convert this most inferior grain into something palatable was to extract the starch from it. Once that was done, pigs would wolf it down, and for that reason all starch-manufacturers carried on a second business rearing pigs for market, to the number of some 20,000 a year in London alone, the equivalent of '4 millions of pounds of substantial meat'.[118] In short, the more damaged wheat was used by the starch industry, the greater the national food supply; whereas the only effect on the food supply of the opprobrium directed at starch-manufacturers following the announcement of the Hair Powder Bill was to reduce it further. Damaged corn was lying unsold in warehouses and aboard ships because starch-manufacturers had been forced to suspend their trade 'to guard against all possible risk of having their property attacked by

[114] Gordon, *Discourses*, i. 338 n.

[115] Hart, *Address*, 31–3, 99. 'Bunty' wheat is wheat attacked by the parasite fungoid *tilletia caries*, which fills the grain with a 'fetid black powder' (*OED*).

[116] Hart, *Address*, 18.

[117] Hodson, *Address*, 25.

[118] Hart, *Address*, 18, 103, 100, 25, 59.

the misled, and misinformed'; and were now obliged to feed their pigs on foodstuffs which might otherwise have fed the poor.[119]

Despite his conventional apologies for his shortcomings 'in a *literary* point of view',[120] Hart's *Address* is a remarkable piece of writing, robustly polemical and closely argued. It appeared in late September, however, much too late to influence the general belief that the use of hair powder was an important cause of the shortage of bread. By the end of the year this link was regarded as so unquestionable that Pitt himself was forced to acknowledge it. In early November he proposed a temporary bill to the effect that 'no Starch, Hair Powder, or Blue, shall be made or prepared from any Wheat, Barley, Rice, Potatoes, Flour, Meal, or any other Article or Thing used for the Food of Man'.[121] The bill also lowered the duty on imported starch and hair powder, no doubt with the idea of placating the wearers of powder while encouraging other nations to convert their own grain into cosmetics. The effect of this bill on the revenue would be serious: Pitt had estimated that the hair powder tax would raise over £200,000 per year, more or less exactly the sum produced, prior to the passing of the Powder Bill, by the customs and excise duties on home-produced and imported starch, most of which would now be lost. Pitt had been trapped into something approaching a zero-sum game, and against his own better judgement: he made it very clear, when announcing the bill, that he was not at all convinced it was necessary. He had reason to believe, he told the House, that starch was made from 'articles which were not applicable to the food of man'.[122] His doubts derived from information gathered from starch industry—as long ago as July, the Privy Council had taken evidence from a starch-maker who had shown that starch was made of wheat unfit for human consumption[123]—and perhaps even from Hart's own writings. So widespread, however, was the belief in the link that he had no choice but to introduce the bill in order to pacify popular opinion: it was only a few days earlier that the king's coach had been attacked by crowds demanding bread and peace.

V

In eighteenth-century Britain, by far the greater part of government tax revenue was raised on commodities—customs, excise, and stamp duties—and this remained the case for many years after the introduction of a version of income tax by Pitt in 1798. There was wide agreement among eighteenth-century political

[119] Ibid. 112, 36. [120] Ibid. 110.

[121] 36 George III c. vi. The bill, first announced on 2 Nov. 1795, received the royal assent on 1 Dec. It was repeatedly renewed in one form or another over the next twenty years.

[122] *PR* xliii. 67; in Nov. 1796, Pitt managed to pass an act (37 George III c. 7) which allowed British manufacturers to make starch from imported wheat which had been found unfit for making bread.

[123] Wells, *Wretched Faces*, 204.

economists that, in the words of Hume, 'the best taxes are such as are levied on consumptions, especially those of luxury'. As Hume explained, these were

> in some measure voluntary; since a man may chuse how far he will use the commodity which is taxed: They are paid gradually and insensibly: They naturally produce sobriety and frugality, if judiciously imposed: And being confounded with the natural price of the commodity, they are scarcely perceived by the customers. Their only disadvantage is, that they are expensive in the levying.[124]

This account of the superior character of taxes raised on the consumption of luxuries was broadly endorsed by Francis Hutcheson, Henry Home Lord Kames, Sir James Steuart, and Adam Smith, all of whom produced rules or maxims by which the eligibility of different forms of taxation should be judged.[125] Their rules differed in various respects, but all four agreed that a great advantage of taxes upon luxury was that they were equitable: the rich, who naturally consumed more luxuries, paid more than the poor, and roughly speaking all paid according to their means. They were convenient, in that they were paid, as Smith put it, 'by little and little'; and they were certain and not 'arbitrary', for though they might seem, as Hume put it, 'confounded with the natural price', it was in practice perfectly easy to calculate what proportion of the actual price of a commodity was made up of the duty. One of their disadvantages, as Hume points out, is that they were expensive to collect: a large part of the gross amount of revenue they yielded disappeared into the pockets of tax farmers or supported the bureaucracy charged with collecting them. Another, as Smith in particular argued, was that taxes on luxury 'necessarily occasion some obstruction or discouragement to certain branches of industry', reducing the amount of labour employed in producing the taxed commodity, and diverting 'the natural direction of national industry... into a channel always different from, and generally less advantageous than that in which it would have run of its own accord'.[126]

We have already come across, in the third section of this chapter, arguments relating to the second of these two disadvantages as it appeared to apply to the hair powder tax: Hart's plea on behalf of hairdressers and those involved in the production of starch and powder whom the tax threatened with unemployment; the amused pleasure taken by satirists in the plight of hairdressers whom they clearly did not believe formed any part of the 'natural' direction of industry. In the next section we will look at the tax in relation to another of these rules and maxims. For the present, I want to focus on Pitt's claims, first that the hair powder tax was indeed a tax on luxury, and second, that it was therefore a voluntary tax.

In the early decades of the century, it had been a good deal easier to defend the principle of taxes on luxury than it was by 1795. Though such taxes might always

[124] Hume, *Essays*, 345.

[125] See Smith, *Inquiry*, 825–7, and esp. 827 n. (citing Hutcheson, Kames, and Steuart), 825–7, 896–9. See also Berry, *Idea of Luxury*, 206–9.

[126] Smith, *Inquiry*, 897–8.

give rise to arguments about whether particular commodities proposed as the objects of taxation really were luxuries rather than necessities, still the notion of luxury came surrounded, earlier in the century, with negative moral and political connotations that had made the principle difficult to argue against, and suggested indeed that taxes on luxury were just not only because they were equitable, but because luxury itself should be controlled. Luxury involved the triumph of the sensual over the rational and of vanity over piety; luxury was what corrupted and effeminated states and empires and ensured their decline. Throughout the century, however, luxury was steadily losing the negative meanings attached to it in Christian and classical republican thought, and was being 'de-moralized'—perhaps the clearest annoucement of this process was Hume's decision to change the title of his essay 'Of Luxury' to 'Of Refinement in the Arts' and the distinction made in that essay between luxuries that were 'innocent' and those that were 'vicious' and 'blameable'.[127] Well before the end of the century, the desire to consume luxuries, if not entirely free of pejorative connotations, was seen as the main driver of economic development and the progress of civilization, closely associated with terms such as 'politeness', 'refinement', 'commerce', 'industry', and even 'liberty' in the lexicon of late eighteenth-century notions of modernity. This did not mean that the principle that it was better to tax luxuries than necessities was called into question; it did mean, however, that the notion that it was *proper* to tax them had lost much of its moral force, at the same time as the question of exactly what *was* a luxury became much more difficult to answer.

The hair powder tax, though proposed by the government as another tax on luxury, was widely accused of failing to promote equity, in that instead of prohibiting the use of a commodity that was believed to deprive the poor of food, it appeared to encourage it by permitting the unlimited use of hair powder under licence. This argument, however, rarely involved an attack on luxury *per se*, whether in Christian or in classical republican terms. The exception is the pamphlet by Michael Nash, 'the Chief of Sinners Saved'. Nash attempted to answer every argument he had come across in favour of the use of hair powder or flour, but the starting-point of all his objections was that the indulgence of vanity was the worship of a 'great idol', 'earthly, carnal, and sensual' and so contrary to our duty as Christians, to endeavour to transform the 'whole soul, body, and spirit . . . into the image of Christ, that nothing sensual might remain'.[128] This language is a world away from that of every other commentator on the tax. John Donaldson reports that he had come to see powdering the hair as 'sinful', but like others who seek total prohibition, including the Quaker Dr Lettsom, he understands the evil in terms not of simple vanity but of its supposed effects on the price of food: it is clear that for both men if hair powder was entirely made of chalk they would have felt no urgent need to denounce it.[129]

[127] Hume, *Essays*, 269, 279.
[128] Nash, *Serious Address*, 32, 21, 6.
[129] [Donaldson], *Letter*, 4, 10.

Much of the commentary on the bill was concerned to argue that powdering the hair was not a luxury at all; or that, if it was a luxury, that did not justify a law to prevent its use by those too poor to buy licences; or that, if it was a vain practice, its effects were largely benign and should be encouraged. Both Adam Ferguson[130] and Adam Smith had suggested that luxury was a relative term, and that the boundary between necessities and luxuries shifted as societies became more affluent. Smith's version on the argument needs quoting at length, for it became important to some commentators on the hair powder tax. 'By necessaries,' he explained,

> I understand, not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without. A linen shirt, for example, is, strictly speaking, not a necessary of life. The Greeks and Romans lived, I suppose, very comfortably, though they had no linen. But in the present times, through the greater part of Europe, a creditable day-labourer would be ashamed to appear in publick without a linen shirt, the want of which would be supposed to denote that disgraceful degree of poverty, which, it is presumed, no one can well fall into without extreme bad conduct. Custom, in the same manner, has made leather shoes a necessary of life in England. The poorest creditable person of either sex would be ashamed to appear in publick without them. . . . Under necessaries, therefore, I comprehend, not only those things which nature, but those which the established rules of decency have rendered necessary to the lowest rank of the people. All other things, I call luxuries; without meaning by this appellation to throw the smallest degree of reproach upon the temperate use of them.[131]

The memory of this argument seems to have inspired a number of writers to argue that hair powder was among the necessaries, not the luxuries of life in late eighteenth-century Britain. This was especially a matter of hygiene: it was widely believed that hair powder was the most efficacious way of keeping hair clean and free of sweat. How 'disgusting' our hair would be, exclaimed the author of *A Letter to the Deputy Manager*, 'if not occasionally dried with Powder'. 'Wearing *powder*', remarks the anonymous author of *The Minister's Head*, 'was stiled a *luxury* by the Minister's *majority-men*—so is washing the face and shaving the beard.' Wearing powder, insisted Joseph Moser, no more a luxury than '*shaving* and a *change of linen*'. And it was certainly not a simple matter of personal choice, complained Sir Adam Gordon: 'the generality of society' are 'compelled' to powder by the 'tyranny of custom'.[132] 'Custom', agreed Brutus, has rendered hair powder 'indispensible'; if it was a luxury,

> so is the use of a clean towel; so is the putting on of a clean shirt; . . . Every man who lives in society, must submit to the laws of society. I do not mean the laws of government, I mean

[130] Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), ed. Duncan Forbes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), 142.

[131] Smith, *Inquiry*, 869–70.

[132] *Letter to the Deputy Manager*, 8 and see 30; *Minister's Head*, 10; [Moser], *The Meal-Tub Plot*, 5; Gordon, *Discourses*, i. 338 n.

those laws of custom which are sanctioned by general adoption. . . . Am I not then in reality forced to submit to the caprices of this fashion? Certainly I am. A law of society imposes it upon me, and submission on my part becomes a duty.[133]

People who had been used to powdering their hair, however infrequently, but could no longer afford to do so, were thought to be threatened by the law of custom with a kind of double jeopardy: the loss of their reputation for cleanliness and respectability, and the accusation of being 'particular' or 'singular', words which denoted a perverse and ridiculous refusal to comply with the custom of the country.

The caricature *The Town Before You* is all about characters who have made themselves appear 'outlandish' by leaving off powder, and 'exposed' themselves 'to the sneers of every little powdered monkey they meet'.[134] Brutus invited his readers to imagine what would happen should he appear in public in a coat 'unlike that of my contemporaries': 'Should I not be laughed at! Would not the very boys in the street hoot at me! Should I not be treated with disrespect by strangers, and even ridiculed, and nicknamed a Quiz, by those who call themselves my friends!'. For the same reason, until the use of hair powder went entirely out of fashion, Brutus, 'like a good citizen who submits peaceably to the laws until they are repealed or ameliorated', would not expose himself to 'contempt and ridicule, by making myself singular, and setting example at defiance'.[135] 'Dr. Perfect', in a song which attempted to argue that custom and fashion had been changed by the Hair Powder Act, still acknowledged that those who chose to conform with the new fashion would not have an easy time of it:

> The Coquette, Affectation, thus Fashion address'd—
> Ill-Nature hard by, with insidious sneer—
> 'What, Madam, no powder! It must be confess'd,
> Without it, you look, Ma'am, most horridly queer!'[136]

Moral arguments against the wearing of hair powder, or those at least which suggested that it was evil in itself, independent of its wider social effects, had no chance of success against the fear of singularity, wrote a columnist in the radical *Telegraph*, for 'those who wear Hair Powder have no objection to being reputed men of vanity, provided it attaches also to their neighbours'.[137] Michael Nash argued that powder was worn by those 'infected' with 'that loathsome disease of a universal conformity to the world, in speech, manners, habits, and principles'; though those who went unpowdered would be 'esteemed by their brethren as fools and fanatics', they were acting in obedience to the postive command in Romans 12: 2, 'to be *Nonconformists* to the world'.[138] Nash's promise, that those who left off powder would win a glorious social martyrdom, was not likely to persuade those who would regard this prize with horror. Nor was it intended to: Nash's pamphlet

[133] *Cursory Remarks*, 5, 4, 7.
[134] *Letter to the Deputy Manager*, 10.
[135] *Cursory Remarks*, 7.
[136] *Lady's Pocket Magazine* (June 1795), 341.
[137] *Telegraph*, 24 July 1795.
[138] Nash, *Serious Address*, 6, 14.

was addressed to 'Believers Only', a category that for him excluded members of the Church of England and even those 'Non-conformists' who were seeking to integrate themselves, as far as their faith and the Test Acts allowed, with the social, political, and cultural mainstream. The fear of singularity in late eighteenth-century Britain was very widespread, and it must have taken a moderate degree of courage for the MP James Martin to speak in the Commons with his hair unpowdered, knowing that his appearance would provoke the mirth of nearly the whole House. Men like Martin, however, and the Duke of Bedford, could rely on their social position to ensure that though they might appear eccentric they would not risk social exclusion. And it was the fear of such exclusion that drove the argument that powdering the hair was a necessity, not a luxury, and that led some commentators to claim, in the spirit of Smith's definition, that it was a necessity even 'to the lowest rank of the people'.

Some but not many writers who discussed the tax echoed the anxiety of members of parliament whose main contribution to the debates was to seek exemption for the shabby genteel, the poor gentry. The author of one pamphlet, apparently a barrister, condemned Pitt's refusal to exempt the 'maimed and disabled officer, who has sacrificed the flower of his life in the service of his country and through necessity has retired upon half pay'. For such men, struggling to remain respectable without the means to do so, powder was no luxury. Moser wrote with sympathy of the plight of half-pay officers and gentlemen 'with scarce any pay at all', who had 'by long habit been taught to consider powder as necessary', and Brutus expressed concern for 'the Gentleman of slender income', particularly those 'who have large families, and from their situation cannot claim exemption from the fashion of the day'.[139] But perhaps in keeping with the social class of many of those who deplored the powder tax, far more sympathy was expended on 'middling' and 'common' metropolitan tradesmen, for whom, it was argued, wearing powder was not a luxury, and might mean the difference between success and failure.

Nash regarded this argument, that tradesmen were 'necessitated to powder . . . by our dependances and obligations in life' and that they would be abandoned by their employers and customers if they did not wear it, as simply one more verse in the litany of excuses for vanity. What of the Quakers? he asked:

> are they not almost universally a prosperous and flourishing people in business? And does any of their customers withdraw from them because of their nonconformity to the fashions of life? . . . But suppose the Quaker's customers should tell him, that unless he forsakes his puritanic habits, and powders his hair, they will withdraw their favours from him, will he do it? I think not. And why? Because no man, says he, is lord over my conscience. . . . We must either conform to the world, pointedly against the command of the gospel, . . . or we

[139] *An Exposition of the Hair Powder Act, setting forth its Legal Operation, with a Full Abstract of the Act. By a Barrister* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795), 19; [Moser], *The Meal-Tub Plot*, 6; *Cursory Remarks*, 5.

must make up our minds to lose our bread, be despised by the world, and forsaken of all that the flesh holds dear.[140]

For Nash, the choice was simple enough, but it was simple too for those unwilling to take the stony path to poverty and salvation. Tradesman wear powder, Moser claimed, not out of vanity, but so that 'they may become more acceptable to society, of more importance in the eyes of those whom they visit, or with whom they transact business'.[141] 'A tradesman', wrote Hart, is particularly obliged to live by his appearance; for such people, powdering, especially on Sunday, 'may be considered as a kind of work of *necessity*', and it was unfair therefore that they should be obliged to pay so dear simply to earn their living. Furthermore, powdering, and a decent concern for appearances, enabled them to get noticed and to get 'forward' in their trade, and usually went with 'proper behaviour': 'we seldom or never see a tradesman, who is inclined to be clean and neat in his person, that is either an idler or a drunkard.'[142]

The most extended defence of powder as, for tradesmen, a necessity and not a luxury, came from the *Register of the Times*, which almost certainly looked for its principal readership among metropolitan tradesmen of liberal, Foxite views. The author regarded the claim that the powder tax had been introduced to reduce the price of bread as 'a jesuitical untruth', and so was free to argue against any restraint in the use of powder by small tradesmen. The situation of such men, he claimed,

is so equivocal, being placed between their superiors and inferiors, obliged to maintain a constant access to and intercourse with the former, and, at the same time, mixing with, and by imperceptible gradations compounded among the latter, that it behoves them to be uncommonly tenacious of those appearances, by which the necessary distinctions are kept up, and by which their footing in the superior class of society is secured. . . . As these persons have most of them houses and families, it is a most intolerable severity that they should thus be galled by three, four, or even five payments of a tax, out of a small capital, and in consideration of a small consumption.[143]

It was a 'cruel insult' to claim that for small tradesmen the powder tax was voluntary, 'when the alternative is such as no man in his senses would chuse?'

For who would sacrifice the chance of promoting his interests, or give up his probabilities of advancement, by swerving from a point of etiquette, to which all his competitors adhere, and which the fact of not attending to might be the ruin of his prospects? For not to dwell on the caprices of the vain and frivolous, we entertain little doubt that his Grace of Norfolk, or Lord Thurlow, both men of strong minds and sound principles, would feel themselves slighted, and too little respect paid them by an applicant for their favour or patronage, who presented himself, without the customary passport, into the company of his superiors.[144]

[140] Nash, *Serious Address*, 16–17.
[141] [Moser], *The Meal-Tub Plot*, 6–7.
[142] Hart, *Address*, 41, 78–9.
[143] *RT* 4 (Apr. 1795), 303–4.
[144] *RT* 4 (11–21 Apr. 1795), 304.

Such arguments do not claim that hair powder was a necessity in Smith's terms—a commodity which custom has made indispensable even to the lowest in society; on the contrary, they claim that, for tradesmen, powdering was a necessity because it served to distinguish them from the lowest in society. They adopt a more qualified view of necessity, more akin to that of Sir James Steuart, who distinguished between the bare necessities of human life and those which marked 'what we call rank in society', determined by 'birth, education and habit'.[145] This second kind of necessity made sense only if what was a necessity for some people was seen as a needless luxury when enjoyed by their inferiors. It was one of the principles used to justify sumptuary legislation, and its shadow may be seen behind many texts in the hair powder debate which, while implying that it is unjust to place the wearing of powder beyond the means of the poor gentry, or it may be the tradesman (depending where the line is drawn), it is reprehensible or ridiculous for the 'lowest orders' to wear it, or that the powder tax is no concern of theirs, for, as the *True Briton* put it, it simply did not affect the 'industrious and labouring classes'.[146] This seems to be the point of Woodward's caricature *Licenc'd to Wear Hair Powder!!* (Pl. 4.7), in which a chimney-sweep who has managed to pay his guinea is shown as a ridiculous figure of pointless vanity—black all over with soot except for his immaculately powdered wig.

At the end of April a debate was held at the London Forum on the motion, 'Which ought to be considered the best friends of their Country, those who wear Hair Powder, or those who do not?' This occasion was probably the inspiration for a verse in the song *The Powder Tax* which ridiculed what it represented as the garrulous shopkeepers who devoted all their free time to such debates,

> bold city wits who orations can speak,
> When shop is shut up, ev'ry night in the week,
> Like Jove in a cloud they now flounder and bounce,
> Shake clouds from their heads and taxation denounce.

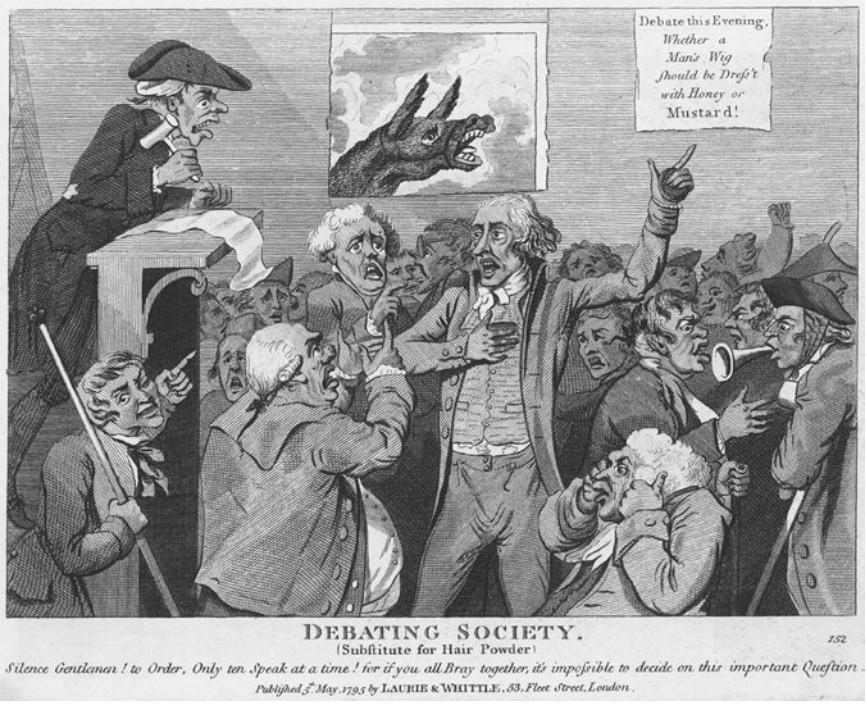
It must have been this debate too which provoked the anonymous caricature, *Debating Society. (Substitute for Hair Powder)* (Pl. 4.8) published early in May, in which a miscellaneous group of lower middle-class men, presumably tradesmen, a few powdered, more unpowdered, argue over 'Whether a Man's Wig should be Dress't with Honey or Mustard!'; behind them is a print of a donkey, braying.[147]

[145] Sir James Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, 2 vols. (London: A. Millar and T. Cadell, 1767), ii, p. xxi.

[146] *TB* 28 Feb. 1795.

[147] Donna T. Andrew (ed.), *London Debating Societies, 1776–1799* (London: London Record Society, 1994), 338, debate no. 1941; *The Powder Tax: a New Song* (no publication details, [1795]). On April 14 1795 another debate was announced by the Westminster Forum (see *TB* of that date), on the motion, 'Is the HAIR POWDER TAX, in these Times of National Exigency, to be considered as a necessary Impost on Luxury—or as a Measure hostile to the Male Sex, and peculiarly oppressive and injurious to the British Fair?'.

Pl. 4.7. Will Hanlon after G. M. Woodward, *Licenc'd to Wear Hair Powder!!* (London, 1 June 1795; BM 1948-2-14-413cl.). The caricature may refer to the May Day feasts for sweeps held by Elizabeth Montagu at her mansion in Portman Square: see *Telegraph*, 24 July 1795; and for an amusing suggestion that sweeps were 'free from the snare' of the hair powder tax because without purchasing a licence they were entitled to powder not their heads only but their whole bodies in soot, see the song *The Powder'd Chimney-Sweeper*.



Pl. 4.8. Artist unknown, *Debating Society. (Substitute for Hair Powder)* (London, 5 May 1795; BM 8771). The choice between honey or mustard appears to hint at the conflict within the reform movement generally, and the LCS in particular, about whether to proceed by the peaceful, constitutional means of submitting 'humble petitions' for reform, or to 'demand' universal manhood suffrage as a natural right.

The long argument I have quoted from the *Register of the Times* is prefaced by a more benign version of the claim that 'the lowest class' were quite unaffected by the tax: 'careless of appearances', they were no more than amused bystanders at a debate which was no concern of theirs—'and lend their hearty, unsuspicious horse-laugh, the honest effusion of thoughtless good nature, to every joke which attacks the feelings of those who are obliged, by this new regulation, to wave their accustomed appearance'.[148]

This attitude, however, to the question of whether the act had anything to do with the 'lowest orders', except in so far as it might reduce the price of bread, was by no means typical of the debate on the tax. The very poor, it was pointed out, were very sparing in their use of flour as powder: they might comb a little through their hair, to conceal its greasiness, and shake a little over their heads to 'frost' it, but only on Sundays, to look their best at church or when courting.[149] If flouring

[148] *RT* 4 (11–21 Apr. 1795), 303. [149] [Moser], *The Meal-Tub Plot*, 3–4.

the hair, once a week, by the 'industrious part of the community' was a luxury, it was a small one, unlikely to be regarded by 'Divine Providence' as a vanity: it was 'a respect DUE TO THE SABBATH'; could anyone suppose that God 'will be displeased with any person coming to his temples of a Sunday, neat, clean, and with his hair dressed[?]'.[150] It was unkind of Pitt to discontinue it by imposing a tax the poor could not possibly pay, and unwise of him to incur the anger of such a numerous class of people. 'From the *throne* to the *cottage*,' wrote the author of *The Minister's Head*, 'there is an universal rage .... among the female world for appearing in the *fashion* ... the obstructing nine tenths of women from indulging in a style of dress, which they conceive renders them more captivating, was equally cruel and malicious in the Minister'.[151] Briefly adopting the simple style of pastoral satirized by John Gay, Pindar wrote of how

> On Sundays trim, to give his head an air,
> Poor LUBIN shook the dredge-box o'er his hair;
> HODGE dipp'd his caxon 'mid the sack of flower:
> But now they execrate the arm of pow'r;
> LUBIN no longer dares the dredge-box take,
> Nor HODGE to dip his caxon in the sack.[152]

The fullest defence of Sunday flouring by the poor was made by Brutus. If it was a vanity, he argued, as Pitt had insisted, still 'it was one of those innocent vanities which ought not to be discountenanced, because it produces many a solid and real advantage to the country'. Flouring the hair kept alive among the poor 'a spirit of neatness', and whether it was motivated by pride or by respect for the Sabbath, it was 'highly laudable, and ought to be cherished and protected'. 'I beseech you,' wrote Brutus,

> look at a country village on a Sunday! How neat, how clean, how wholesome every thing appears! This neatness, this cleanness, this wholesome appearance seems to give an air of content and happiness to a large part of our fellow-creatures, who certainly can but ill afford to part with any of their comforts, and from whom most indisputably it is not very wise to take away any of those habits, which refine, perhaps, which soften, which improve their manners, and render them obedient subjects.

By the powder tax, 'neatly powdered heads' would be replaced by 'greasy locks'; the spirit of neatness, at present 'essential to the poor', would be 'stifled, till it is at length extinguished in the bosom', and the poor would truly become what Burke had prematurely called them, 'A SWINISH MULTITUDE!!!'[153]

These defences of the custom among the poor to dress their hair with flour on Sundays, and thus to claim their small share of the politeness which was believed to characterize late eighteenth-century England, may well have seemed more, not less urgent in a year of great scarcity: their frequency may suggest that, as the

[150] Hart, *Address*, 79–80; *Letter to the Deputy Manager*, 8.
[151] *Minister's Head*, 16.
[152] Pindar, *Hair Powder*, 3.
[153] *Cursory Remarks*, 13–14.

standard of living of the poor fell, so it seemed to them even more of a necessity to show themselves, once a week, as not yet having arrived at what Smith called that 'disgraceful degree of poverty which . . . no one can well fall into without extreme bad conduct'. The trifling cost of flouring was for them a moral expenditure, one they owed to their own sense of self-worth and self-respect. And the argument that it was unwise of Pitt to introduce a bill which effectively prevented the poor from flouring must have received an additional urgency from the fact that Britain was at war with France. For much of the century the rich had been invited to congratulate themselves on the condition of agricultural workers in England, as compared with that of the French peasantry, and there is little doubt that the English poor took what comfort they could from the same comparison. Remarking that in England wearing leather shoes had become for the poor a necessity, not a luxury, Smith had written that 'in France, they are necessaries neither to men nor to women; the lowest rank of both sexes appearing there publickly, without any discredit, sometimes in wooden shoes, and sometimes bare-footed.'[154] More recently, in his tours of France in the late 1780s, Arthur Young had been shocked by the condition of the peasants in France compared with that of the rural poor in Britain: in Souillac the women were 'walking dung-hills'; near Payrac 'all the country girls and women, are without shoes or stockings; and the ploughmen at their work have neither sabots nor feet to their stockings'; at Montauban 'shoes and stockings were luxuries'; near Toulouse 'the women generally without shoes even in the towns; and in the country, many men also'. This sight was so often repeated that eventually Young noticed only the exceptions to the rule—in Provence, for example, where wooden shoes, the emblems of French poverty, were never seen.[155] Since the revolution, English caricatures of French sans-culottes had represented them as starving and as barefoot or wearing at best clumsy sabots.[156] In the middle and late 1790s, however, in the face of the crisis generated by food shortages, low rates of agicultural pay, and high rates of rural unemployment, we find the poor being enjoined to save money by wearing wooden clogs, as well as by drinking small beer with their meals instead of weak tea, and by eating barley-bread instead of the white wheaten bread (the 'luxury' of the 'lower classes of people'[157]), which, for rural workers in the southern counties at least, was another mark of their being just above the degree of poverty they

[154] Smith, *Inquiry*, 870.

[155] Arthur Young, *Travels in France and Italy during the Years 1787, 1788 and 1789* (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent, and New York: E. P. Dutton, n.d.), 24–5, 102, 50, 205.

[156] See for example James Gillray, *Un petit Souper a la Parisienne* (London: H. Humphrey, 20 Sept. 1792; BM 8122), and *French Liberty. British Slavery* (London: H. Humphrey, 21 Dec. 1792; BM 8145); Isaac Cruikshank, *French Happiness/English Misery* (London: S. W. Fores, 3 Jan. 1793; BM 8288); *Citizen CoupeTete in his Misery*, discussed in Chapter 5.

[157] David Davies, *The Case of Labourers, in Husbandry stated and considered* (Bath: R. Cruttwell, and London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795), 49.

regarded as disgraceful.[158] It is in this context, and in the context of a war which, in 1795, had never been more unpopular, that the arguments about whether, for the poor, flouring was a luxury or a necessity, and about the wisdom of preventing it, should be read. If the English rural poor were to believe that the war was in their interests as well as in that of their employers and rulers, it might have been wiser to reassure them that they really did enjoy a standard of living and a degree of liberty greater than the poor in France, not to reduce both by preventing them from flouring on Sunday. The point must have been made sharper still by the fact that in France wearing powder had recently been prohibited to all. What better way to demonstrate the superiority of British over French liberty than to permit it to all in Britain?

VI

In the last two sections of this chapter we have seen the hair powder tax attacked from two sides. On the one hand were more or less 'respectable' figures like Hodson, Lettsom, and Donaldson, together with Nash and a miscellany of radical journalists and song-writers, including Thomas Spence, arguing that the government should have prohibited the wearing of powder or flour as an unnecessary waste of grain at a time of scarcity, and calling for a boycott of powder for this reason. On the other was a range of liberal and radical writers who were unimpressed by the claim that wearing either powder or flour had any serious effect on the supply of food. They insisted that to tax the wearing of powder or flour as a luxury was to misunderstand the enduring authority of custom in modern society, and that the tax caused real hardship among tradesmen and the labouring poor. But the inequitable nature of the tax, for this second group of writers, was not simply an effect of the fact the cost of licences was so high as to put them beyond the reach of the majority of the population. The greater problem was that the tax was levied not on hair powder itself but on the wearing of it.[159]

As we saw in the last section, one of the principal arguments in favour of taxes on luxury, made by Hume, Smith, Kames, and others, was that they were equitable, because 'voluntary', because progressive: they were paid more or less in proportion to income, because the more you chose to use of a particular dutiable commodity the more tax you paid. But the powder tax was not 'progressive' in that way, complained Moser, and suggested (with the vague, inscrutable irony that characterizes his pamphlet) that to make it so Pitt should have placed

[158] The longest series of such recommendations to the poor that I have found is in chapter 2 ('Of the Diet, Dress, and Habitation, of the Labouring Classes') in Sir Frederick Morton Eden, *The State of the Poor, or, An History of the Labouring Classes in England*, 3 vols. (London: B. and J. White, 1797); for clogs, see i. 553. Many of Eden's recommendations had been anticipated by Davies (*The Case of Labourers*, 31–40), who represented them as false economies founded in the ignorance of the rich.

[159] See (among many examples of this argument), *Letter to the Deputy Manager*, 11–12.

such and such a sum 'upon the head of his *Grace*, something less upon that of a *Marquis*, less upon that of an *Earl, Viscount, Baron, Bishop*, and so down to the lowest order of society'.[160] The whole principle of the tax, declared the *Morning Chronicle*, was 'gross beyond all measure. The poor Sempstress who is sedentary all the week, is to pay as much for the trifle of white dust thrown into the hair upon Sunday, as the most opulent Duchess who is powdered twice a day.' As this argument was circulated from text to text, the differential between occasional and frequent users of powder was multiplied and so was the anger it provoked. Was it fair, asked the author of *A Letter to the Deputy Manager*, that 'the poor man who dresses only on Sundays pays as much as the fine-scented Beau, who dresses four or five times a day'?[161] 'What can be more unjust and even cruel,' demanded the *Register of the Times*:

> than the regulation made by this tax, that a man who only once in a week, as is the case with many hundreds in this metropolis, in compliance with the requisitions of fashion, and to make himself capable of those societies from which he draws improvement and emolument, adorns his person with hair-powder, what can be more cruel than that he should pay, precisely the same tax, as the sweet-scented legislator or peer, who dresses three times a day, or one-and-twenty times as often?[162]

The hair powder tax came to be known as the 'poll-tax' barely a week after it was first proposed:[163] by the time Grizzle Baldpate published his poem *The Poll-Tax, an Ode* the phrase was in general circulation among opponents of Pitt's bill (Pl. 4.9). The phrase seems to have been adopted originally simply as a piece of word-play: the tax was a tax on 'polls', on heads. The fact that the cost of a licence was the same for all, however, led some commentators to claim, in Moser's words, that 'the appellation . . . has been aptly given', and to develop a comparison with the 'grievous, and invidious *poll-tax*' of Richard II.[164] Indeed, the anonymous barrister who published *An Exposition of the Hair Powder Act* argued that in some respects the powder tax was still more unjust than the original poll-tax. Richard's parliament had reduced by a third the amount that Richard had hoped to raise by his tax; it had granted exemptions to wives and all children under 15; and in particular it had exempted beggars from the tax, 'unlike to the exemptions contained in the Hair Powder Act, in favour of persons evidently of a different description from that of beggars'—he had in mind the royal family.[165] Richard's tax had of course provoked the Peasants' Revolt, an event which in the 1790s

[160] [Moser], *The Meal-Tub Plot*, 13; see especially *Cursory Remarks*, 15, for a call for a boycott on the grounds of the inequity of the tax.

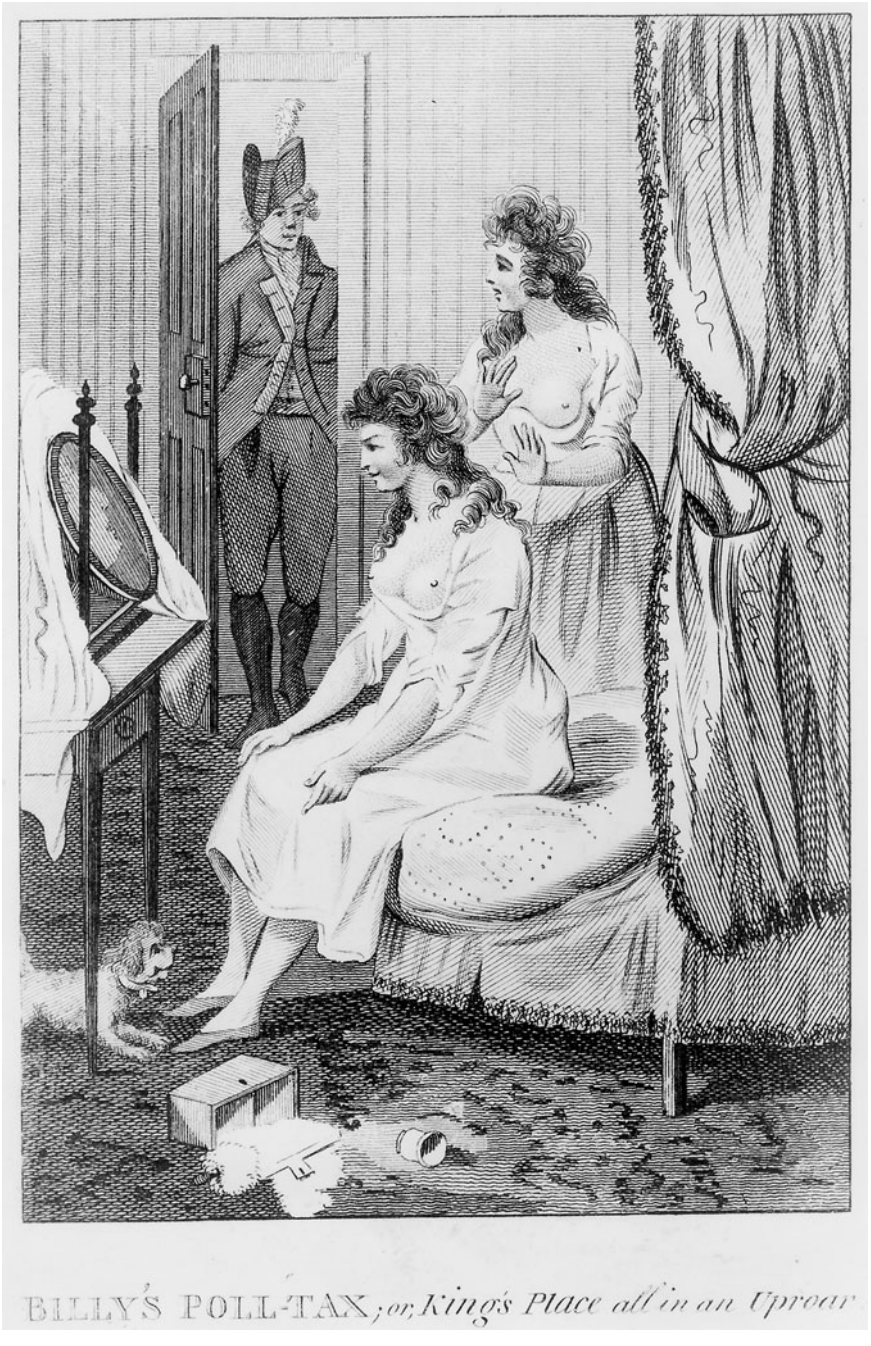
[161] *MC* 3 Mar. 1795; *Letter to the Deputy Manager*, 13.

[162] *RT* 4 (11–21 Apr. 1795), 302; see also for example *The Hair-Powder Plot* (no publication details [1795]); *The Poll-Tax, an Ode*, 16; *Cursory Remarks*, 9 n.

[163] The earliest printed reference I have found to the tax as the 'poll-tax' is in a poem published in *MC* 2 Mar. 1795; the newspaper repeated the phrase in an article on the tax the following day.

[164] [Moser], *The Meal-Tub Plot*, 4.

[165] *Exposition*, 34–5.



Pl. **4.9**. Artist unknown, *Billy's Poll-Tax* (no publication details, [1795?]). A puzzling scene, situated in one of the expensive brothels or 'nunneries' in King's Place off Pall Mall, just behind Almack's exclusive assembly rooms and nearly opposite the king's palace. Two expensive sex-workers are visited by an army officer who has interrupted their toilette. The upset powder-box may indicate that they are trying to make do without hair powder, or are trying to conceal their use of it, or have simply been surprised into spilling it. On the floor by the powder-box are a pomade-jar and a swan's-down powder-puff.

loyalists preferred should remain forgotten. In 1792 the theatrical censor had forced Richard Cumberland to excise all the political content, innocuous though it had been, from his play about the revolt; two years later Robert Southey had used the revolt as the focus for his own attack on (among other things) Pitt's wartime taxation, in his then unpublishable dramatic poem *Wat Tyler*.[166] The 'real cause' of the revolt, according to the author of *An Exposition*, had been 'the discontent of the people with the arrogance[,] extravagance and imperiousness of the Minister of that day', John Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. The revolt was thus 'an awful warning to future Financiers to consult the feelings of the people in imposing taxes, which their own wickedness and folly may have rendered necessary'.[167] Many other writers warned that this modern poll-tax would provoke a similar insurrection. 'It has generally been the policy of governments', wrote one anonymous journalist, 'to avoid every measure that could lead the Mass of the People to the discovery of their numbers and strength.—Mr. Pitt, however, seems to disregard this policy, and by imposing a Tax on the wearing of Hair Powder, to invite the people to the contemplation of their own irresistible energy.'[168] Peter Pindar warned that the tax would hurry forward the inevitable moment when Pitt would face the vengeance of the people:

> Believe me, PITT, not yet is thine the realm,
> Not thine the ship, because thou hold'st the helm.

In imposing more and more taxes to pay for his war, Pitt was placing too much reliance on the patience of the nation, and Pindar's 'Muse' saw 'sharp FATE amid the gathering gloom';

> A cloud of vengeance, black with mortal doom;
> But dares not name the MELANCHOLY FORM,
> Whom GUILT has mark'd the *victim* of the storm.[169]

Brutus was more explicit: 'be assured, thou guilty minister!' he warned; 'be assured thy day of retribution shall come![170]

The great increase in taxation necessary to support the war effort had been a cause of bitter complaint among opponents of what Pitt insisted was a 'just and necessary war' for at least a year before Pitt proposed the tax on hair powder. The argument that this particular tax might carry 'grumbling' about taxes into actual insurrection was based primarily on the claim that, because, like a poll-tax, it was not progressive, it would have the effect of making 'the distinctions in society more manifest' by means of 'a never-failing sign'. 'Those who suffer their hair to retain its natural hue', the *Chronicle* prophesied, 'will be called the *Swinish*

[166] For the censorship of Cumberland's *Richard II* see L. W. Conolly, *The Censorship of English Drama 1737–1824* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1976), 95–8; Southey's poem, written in 1794, was eventually published without Southey's permission by William Hone in 1817.
[167] *Exposition*, 34–5. [168] *Cabinet of Curiosities* (London: 'for the booksellers', 1795), v. 179.
[169] Pindar, *Hair Powder*, 24–6. [170] *Cursory Remarks*, 18.

Pl. 4.10. Richard Newton, *A Sister to the Guinea Pig. One of the Swinish Multitude. A Guinea Pig* (London, 6 March 1795; BM 8628).

Multitude, and those who take out Licences and wear Powder will be *guinea-pigs*.'[171] Whether or not the newspaper invented the term 'guinea-pig' in this sense, the notion that the tax would create a society visibly divided between rich and poor, imagined as two different species of swine, caught on very rapidly.

It was not universally regarded as a cause of alarm: two days after this article appeared in the *Chronicle*, Richard Newton produced his tripartite caricature *A Sister to the Guinea Pig. One of the Swinish Multitude. A Guinea Pig* (Pl. 4.10). In the right-hand panel, a man who has purchased a licence examines his powdered head in a hand-mirror; he is so pleased by what he sees that the tail of his wig has become indecently excited. In the left-hand panel his sister, pretty, powdered, and fashionably dressed but without powder, shows a more restrained pride in her more natural appearance. Between them sits a poor farmer or farmworker, unpowdered, fat, tipsy, smoking contentedly, snug in front of his cottage fire, and entirely unconcerned by his appearance.[172] Even radicals who could not forget Burke's offensive description of the vulgar as the 'swinish multitude' could take a degree of pleasure in claiming that the rich and polite were now pigs like them. An anonymous song *New Fashions; or, a Puff at the Guinea Pigs*, began by complaining of this new distinction between guinea-pigs and swine, but ended by proposing a truce between them on condition the rich acknowledged that they were now as porcine as the poor:

[171] *MC* 4 Mar. 1795, and 'Pitt's Pigs' in *MC* 10 Mar. 1795.

[172] For other caricatures that allude to the distinction between guinea-pigs and swine, see BM 8650, 8660, 8663, 8668; and see *Courier*, 1 July 1795.

Then let us always merry be, or hot and cold the weather,
And may we ever well agree like loving pigs together.[173]

A song in the radical periodical the *Philanthropist* affected to claim that the tax was almost a dangerously egalitarian measure, for in return for a relatively small subscription the vulgar could now be 'rank'd with the *rich* and *great*':

Once more—bear it with pleasure pray
This, this, rolls your reproach away;
Though SWINE call'd by a pension'd Jay,
  Swine you'll no longer appear:
For pay but this POLL-TAX—detested by ninny WHIGS,
SIGNIOR PITTACHIO while in his sleeve he snigs,
Turns you that moment from SWINE into GUINEA-PIGS!
  Laugh if you cannot forbear.[174]

For many, however, the visible division of the nation into two opposed classes was not simply an inevitable effect of Pitt's tax; the tax was 'contrived', as the *Morning Chronicle* claimed, with that intention. According to Thomas Spence,

The rich and the poor asunder to keep,
A tax is devis'd with malice most deep;

an epigram attributed to Robert Burns made the point equally explicit:

Pray Billy Pit explain thy rigs,
This new poll-tax of thine!
'I mean to mark the GUINEA PIGS,
'From other common SWINE.'[175]

The notion that the tax was positively designed to make social divisions as visible as possible led to its being labelled a new 'powder plot',[176] a government conspiracy to establish powdered wigs and hair as badges of the authority over their inferiors for those who could afford them or were exempt from the tax. It was

[173] *New Fashions; or, a Puff at the Guinea Pigs* (London: '34, Clerkenwell Green', [1795]); for Burke's 'swinish multitude', and the afterlife of the phrase in the 1790s, see Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791–1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 88.

[174] 'The Poll-Tax' in *Philanthropist*, 19 (3 Aug. 1795), 7–8; a version of the same joke is made in Dr Perfect's 'New Song on the Hair-Powder Tax':

Ye Fops, and ye Flirts, and ye sweet Little Things,
  Now hail the distinction,, and be of good cheer:
You may each be as fine as Queens, Bishops, and Kings,
  And all for that trifle—*One Guinea a Year.*

See also the letter signed 'D.' in the *Courier*, 17 Mar. 1795. For Pitt as 'Pittachio', see Barrell, *Exhibition Extraordinary!!*, p. x.

[175] Spence, *Address*; 'On Mr Pit's hair-powder tax', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), ii. 803.

[176] See for example the song *The Hair-Powder Plot*, the full title of *The Minister's Head*, which claims to be about '*the Powder-Plot of 1795*', and the title of Moser's pamphlet *The Meal-Tub Plot*.

supposed to be especially intended to aggrandize the clergy of the Church of England, 'the purple-faced bishop' wearing 'the snowy honours of his reverend, episcopal wig', and the parson, 'spruce' in a powdered wig which 'conveys to the mind of his hearers | His wonderful sense', but which preaches vanity while his sermon preaches against it.[177]

Worse still, the distinction between guinea-pigs and 'guinea-less pigs',[178] a number of commentators on the bill believed, would quickly become not simply a social but a political distinction, and a cause of everyday political conflict. Grizzle Baldpate dramatized an imagined meeting on the street between two guinea-pigs and an unpowdered radical:

> A glorious BUSTLE, will, no doubt, ensue
> Between the *Powder'd* and th' *unpowder'd* Crew.
> Dam'me, cries *White head* Bill to *White head* Bob,
> There goes a Scoundrel, DEMOCRATIC HOG,
> Down with the disaffected Black Hair'd Dog.
>
> Damn you! exclaims who Powder goes without;
> Ye make a cursed Stir about,
> The Nation's GENERAL GOOD.
> But by your conduct, SLY ARISTOCRAT,
> You give yourself the lie so pat,
> By wasting POOR MEN'S FOOD.[179]

Pitt should be beware, wrote Moser, 'how he excites the people to make party distinctions. The *powdered* and the *unpowdered* may . . . become the distinguishing marks of factions' that will 'distress the state',[180] precisely the situation that would develop in Milan and Parma as described in *The Charterhouse of Parma*. For, as Lord Moira pointed out in the debates in the Lords, the bill would be interpreted as having fixed 'a certain mark' by which those who wore powder would be presumed to be supporters of the government and the war and could be differentiated from those who, by going unpowdered, would be taken for radicals. It would give both sides 'a certain mode of distinguishing those of their own way of thinking, by act of Parliament', and would revive the conflict between cavalier and roundhead. When Lord Sydney, speaking in favour of the tax, suggested that it would be very productive 'from the number of persons wearing powder', Moira went further: on that principle, he said, Sydney should next year propose a tax upon breeches, 'which must prove a very productive tax, as they were in such general use'. This year, cavaliers and roundheads, next year aristocrats and

[177] *Cursory Remarks*, 9 n.; *The Rights of Priests* (London: Richard Lee, 1795), 2; *The Parson Powdered* (no publication details [1795]); Nash, *Serious Address*, 29; and see *Letter to the Deputy Manager*, 7, 14.

[178] See *A Political Dictionary for the Guinea-less Pigs, or, A Glossary of Emphatical Words made us of by that Jewel of a Man, Deep Will* (London: J. Burks *et al.*, 1795).

[179] *The Poll-Tax*, 18–19.

[180] [Moser], *The Meal-Tub Plot*, 9–10.

sans-culottes.[181] Moira's rejoinder may be among the imaginative origins of Woodward's caricature *Licensed to Wear the Breeches* (Pl. 4. 11), the pendant to *Licenc'd to Wear Hair Powder!!*

There were of course many members of the popular radical movement who were perfectly happy that not wearing powder should be regarded as a badge of democratic, even republican politics. At the moment of his greatest fame, in late 1794, Thomas Hardy was always depicted in a powdered wig, but he had a shop to run in the West End; Thelwall, however, who made his living mainly by lecturing to other radicals, thought 'the Roman or the Grecian head, superior . . . to the phantastical absurdities of modern dress',[182] and had worn his hair cropped since long before the powder bill was proposed. A number of the songs on the tax published in Daniel Isaac Eaton's *Philanthropist* celebrated the opportunity provided by the act for radicals to wear their principles on their head. A song by 'B.W.', also printed by Thomas Spence, represented a radical who had cut off his 'tail' and had offered it to Pitt,

> For since no *Powder* we can wear,
> Determin'd I've cut off my hair,
> And to your honour sent it.[183]

Another was imagined as written by a man who had been happy to wear a wig 'neatly powder'd' until the tax was introduced, but now, unwilling 'to support the *war* and court', come to a new resolution:

> I'll deck my knob, in a *brown bob*,
> And bid his *tax* defiance.[184]

A song by W. H. Green, 'The Republican Crop', exhorted 'every brave freeman' to 'shew to your foes a Republican crop'. The song traced this history of cropped hair from Athens to Rome, where

> Each Brutus, each Cato, were none of them fops,
> But all to a man wore republican crops

—and on to the English civil war and the French revolution. Crops were not only the badge of republicanism, at all times and all places; they hastened the success of the cause, 'For a crop strikes with terror, a slave with a tail'.[185] Indeed, the perfumier John Hart used it as an argument against the powder act, that it would promote republicanism by promoting the crop. It was, he claimed, Egalité, the Duke of Orleans, who had introduced the crop into France, before being

[181] *PR* xlii. 426–7, 449.
[182] John Thelwall, *The Tribune*, 3 vols. (London: D. I. Gaton, J. Smith, J. Burks, 1795), i. 80.
[183] B.W., 'Sonnet. Addressed to *Solomon's Second*: alias, Prime Minister', *Philanthropist*, 6 (4 May 1795), 8. The song was published by Spence under the title *An Address to Mr. Pitt, accompanied with a Crop of Human Hair* (London: Spence, [1795]).
[184] 'The Resolve; or Hair-Powder Rejected', *Philanthropist*, 21 (24 Aug. 1795), 6–8.
[185] W. H. Green, 'The Republican Crop', *Philanthropist*, 42 (18 Jan. 1796), 5–6.

Pl. **4.11**. Will Hanlon after G. M. Woodward, *Licensed to Wear the Breeches* (London, 1 June 1795; Derbyshire Record Office cat. 5459/2/5). A husband made the effeminate victim both of fashion and his wife, who not only prescribes his style of breeches but allows him to 'wear the breeches' only by her own permission. In the context of its pendant, however, *Licenc'd to Wear Hair Powder!!* (Pl. 4.7), the satire seems to recall Moira's ironic suggestion that if the wearing of hair powder was to be made subject to licence, why not the wearing of breeches?

'croped himself by the guillotine'; the Whig Duke of Bedford had now been constrained to copy him, and who could tell what his example might achieve?[186] Opponents of the war who did not choose to crop their hair had the option of boycotting the use of powder; not as others had suggested, to save grain, but to express their hostility, as the Foxite *Morning Post* put it, 'to a barbarous and sanguinary war'. 'Christopher Caxon', a pseudonymous contributor to the *Courier*, calculated that the cost of a licence would pay the wages of forty-two soldiers for one day, who, 'in the course of that day aforesaid, may chance to kill fifty of their fellow-creatures'. He was no longer willing to powder his wig with human blood, and had exchanged his 'well-powdered bob' for 'a plain brown jasey'.[187] Christians were bound to submit to 'such taxes as are laid on us by compulsion', Michael Nash conceded; but those who were prepared to pay this voluntary tax 'were strengthening the hands of the wicked, murderous, and oppressive sons of Belial: . . . it is in effect such a wilful putting of our hands to the destruction of our brethren, as actually defiles their consciences, who do it, with the blood of the slain.'[188] As we saw in the Introduction, the opportunity the tax offered for the visible performance of dissent led Thelwall to describe the tax, perhaps not wholly without irony, as 'the most democratic thing that has been thought of for a long time'—indeed, 'it almost leads one to think that there is some truth in the assertion, that the measures of the present minister are in reality intended to promote that spirit of democracy which he pretends to be so anxious to suppress'.[189]

In the tense atmosphere of early and mid-1795, however, a few months after the acquittals of Hardy, Thelwall, and other leaders of the reform societies, the idea that the tax would exacerbate political divisions became one of the most frequent and most urgent arguments against the bill, not so much because it would encourage radicals to make a display of their beliefs, but because it would force them to do so whether they wanted to or not, or would make many who were not radicals appear to be so in the eyes of loyalists. The bill would amount to a new Test Act, like those that discriminated dissenters from churchmen, argued the author of *The Complaint*, and would especially affect those who opposed Pitt's policies but 'fain their principles wad screen, For fear of skaith'. The bill would produce an 'invidious and dangerous discrimination', the *Register of the Times* declared, for it would enable 'the supporters of administration to insinuate, that those who do not pay this tax are enemies of the war', and are also therefore 'enemies to the well-being of their country, Jacobins, or by whatever other names they chuse to distinguish them'. 'Everyone who resists this tax', wrote Brutus, 'will

[186] Hart, *Address*, 66–7.

[187] *MP* 25 Feb. 1795; *Courier*, 3 Mar. 1795; reprinted in *Cabinet of Curiosities*, iv. 126.

[188] Nash, *Serious Address*, 15, 25; and see *The Poll-Tax*, 20, and Richard Lee's sham hair powder licence, *Licence for the Guinea Pigs to Wear Powder* (London: Lee, 1795) in Barrell (ed.), *Exhibition Extraordinary!!*, 58–60.

[189] Thelwall, *Tribune*, i. 80.

be liable to considered as an enemy of the constitution, and will become a marked man (indeed he marks himself); . . . it will be very natural for him rather than make himself obnoxious to a jealous and desperate administration, to submit to the imposition, though the discharge of it may be attended with distress, and with affliction.'[190]

Equally alarming, according to liberal and radical contributors to this debate, were the measures Pitt had designed for policing the tax: comissioners with 'inquisitorial powers', and an anticipated regiment of spies. Excise and stamp duties had always had to be policed by a regime of surveillance, a 'system of spies and informers,' as the LCS put it, 'repugnant to the professed principles of the constitution, and most extensive in their oppression'.[191] Hitherto, however, this system had affected tradesmen producing dutiable commodities only in their place of work: according to Adam Smith, the reason that beer brewed and spirits distilled at home had escaped duty was 'to save private families from the odious visit and examination of the tax-gatherer'.[192] One of the innovations of the powder tax, however, was that it would 'foster and encourage common informers' who would search for wrongdoers in their own homes. Indeed, as the author of *A Letter to the Deputy Manager* pointed out, the act made informers of all keepers of a lodging-house, because it made them responsible for returning to the local 'surveyors' of the tax a list of all lodgers who wore hair powder. These household lists were to be compared with the lists of those who had paid for licences, and landlords were liable to be fined for their omissions if they could be shown to be deliberate. Lodging-house keepers would therefore find themselves, 'in obedience to the Act', peeping through keyholes and inspecting the coats of their lodgers for the signs of powder.[193] The act would also encourage a new kind of professional informer—probably unemployed hairdressers, thought Baldpate—who in the hope of collecting rewards would accost those wearing powder and demand they produce their licences at any time and wherever they pleased.[194] Pindar imagined the confrontations that would result:

> I see th' INFORMER polls of powder chase!
> On this, on that, a Footman, Maid of mop,
> Fierce as a tiger from his ambush, pop;
> Now in his cruel clutches, sharp and strong,
> To Bow-street drag his powder'd prey along . . .[195]

[190] *The Complaint*, 9; *RT* 5 (11–21 June 1795), 342, and 4 (11–21 Apr. 1795), 304; *Cursory Remarks*, 6; and see the letter signed 'D.' in the *Courier*, 17 Mar. 1795.

[191] *The Report of the Committee of Constitution of the London Corresponding Society* (London: Thomas Spence, [1794]), 3.

[192] *RT* 5 (21–30 June 1795), 447; Smith, *Inquiry*, 888; and see John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 214–15.

[193] *Exposition*, 20; *Letter to the Deputy Manager*, 14, 21–2.

[194] *The Poll-Tax*, 17, and see [Moser], *The Meal-Tub Plot*, 10.

[195] Pindar, *Hair Powder*, 5, and see *Letter to the Deputy Manager*, 29.

'No gentleman or lady will be secure from insult as they walk in the streets,' complained Brutus, ' "Sir, your licence," "madam, your licence," will be sounded in the ears of all who shall be seen with powdered heads.' This anxiety too belongs in the context of the regime of surveillance established by the Crown and Anchor Society that we examined earlier in this book, and, more immediately, in the context of the treason trials, in which, to the disgust of liberal and radical opinion, much of the evidence for the prosecution had been offered by spies who had infiltrated the reform societies in order, as Brutus puts it, 'to watch the hours of unguarded conviviality, and to pervert the honest effusions of the honest heart into sedition, conspiracy, and treason, by perjury, and the blackest means'. At Thelwall's trial one such informer had certainly committed perjury, and in Hardy's, the evidence of some others had come to seem very untrustworthy under cross-examination. The tax could be enforced, claimed Brutus, only 'by establishing a system of information throughout the kingdom, and government's making use of that dangerous engine to public and private peace, the effects of which in the late trials . . . we all of us have so much deprecated and deplored'. When the *Morning Chronicle* warned that the act would engender a 'new swarm of *Informers*', it was comparing them with this old swarm whom the trials had dragged into the light.[196]

To say whether informers did indeed flourish on the back of the Hair Powder Act it would first be necessary to know how many prosecutions took place under the act, which would be a major research task. Through the *Times* index I have found eleven prosecutions in London between 1796 and 1800 and one in Lincolnshire. Those convicted include the poor hairdresser whose prosecution was mentioned earlier in this chapter; a minister of the Church of England, presumably too comfortably off to be exempt from the tax; a suspected French spy who was ordered to be kept in custody while the Home Secretary decided what to do with him; and the wife of a city tradesman.[197] In January 1797 the Duke of Dorset, once a distinguished cricketer, now an undistinguished courtier, was charged with wearing powder without a licence, but according to the *Morning Chronicle* he successfully argued that, as Steward of the Royal Household, he was 'a *menial servant* of HIS MAJESTY' and so exempt from the tax. By a delightful irony, according to the *Morning Herald* of the following day, when the king 'insisted upon all his *menial servants* either taking out a *licence for hair-powder*, or wearing a *brown bob*, this order, according to the rules of official etiquette, was whimsically conveyed through the medium of the Duke of DORSET!'[198] The story should perhaps be taken with a pinch of salt.[199]

[196] *Cursory Remarks*, 16–18; *MC* 3 Mar. 1795.

[197] *Times*, 27 Jan. 1796; 22 Jan. 1798; 29 June 1799.

[198] *MC* 1 Feb. 1797; *Morning Herald*, 2 Feb. 1797; and see the follow-up in *MC* 9 February, playfully claiming that the Duke had been considering legal action against such squibs, until his attorney had advised him that 'there would be some difficulty in recovering Damages from the authors, as unquestionably his Grace claimed as a matter of privilege *to receive a* DRESSING *for nothing*'.

[199] *MC* 1 Feb. 1797.

These various proceedings, however, appear to represent only a small selection of the total number: in August 1797 the *Times* remarks that prosecutions under the act had been 'numerous'.[200] They appear to have involved mainly the class of small businessmen and their employees (two shopman, a bookseller, a linen-draper, a clerk) whom the *Register of the Times* had predicted would be most affected by the tax, and foreigners newly arrived in London, many of them ships' captains arrested in the East End, probably ignorant of the law and so an easy mark for the informers who were witnesses in most prosecutions.[201] In 1800 Benjamin Cock was convicted on the evidence of '*Butterfield* the informer', but appealed to the Quarter Sessions where the conviction was quashed. 'If Gentlemen would more frequently appeal from convictions obtained by Common Informers,' the *Times* commented, 'they would not only redress themselves, but render an essential service to the Public.'[202]

VII

How successful was this propaganda against the tax? Anecdotal evidence from the 1790s is contradictory. Hart as we have seen suggests that in London at least it became positively dangerous to go powdered in the streets; James McPhail, revisiting London in 1795 from the country, was amazed to view so many 'powdered heads and shoulders in the streets' at a time of supposed scarcity.[203] Among historians of fashion the general opinion seems to be that in fashionable circles there was an immediate decline in the wearing of powder, led not by the Prince of Wales as Fox had no doubt hoped, or by Queen Charlotte and her daughters, as one satirist had mischievously suggested,[204] but by the liberal Duke of Bedford; and that this decline, once set in motion, could not be stopped, so that almost overnight wearing powder went out of style. In September 1795 the *Morning Post* was confidently predicting that 'a general Cropping Match' would take place 'the ensuring winter, among the bloods of Fashion. Bets are laid, that in two years the *Powder Tax* will not produce a *fourth* of what it does at present'. A more complicated story emerges from the evidence of government statistics, which tell a story of fairly dramatic decline, not in the first few years following the institution of the tax, but over the next quarter of a century. Despite an early optimistic report in June 1795 claiming that in its first month the tax had

[200] *Times*, 31 Aug. 1797.

[201] *Times*, 19 Sept. 1796; 9 June, 31 Aug. 1797. Most of the tradesmen fined under the act appear to have been fined the reduced penalty of £10.

[202] *Times*, 31 Oct. 1800.

[203] James McPhail, *Hints and Observations on the Improvement of Agriculture* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, and Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute, 1795), pp. cxi, 109.

[204] 'Job White-bread', *Scarcity of Bread. Difficultas Annonae; or, the Disease Examined, and the Cure Premised* (London: H. D. Symonds, 1795), 29.

raised £300,000,[205] the net produce from the sale of licences never reached Pitt's annual target of £210,000. In 1795–6, when the first figures were published, the tax had raised £155,000, which increased to £180,000 in the following year. In the third year of the tax, 1797–8, the net yield was £157,000. These figures do suggest that the anti-powdering campaign may have had some effect between the original announcement of the new tax and the deadline for the purchase of licences; the increase in 1796–7 also suggests that many of those who had chosen not to buy licences in 1795 had been persuaded by the argument that the use of powder reduced the supply of food, and that they were happy to resume powdering when harvests improved. The figures, however, do not mean that the anecdotal evidence of a sudden decline in the wearing of powder is wrong, for the nature of the tax was such that they may be perfectly compatible with such a decline. Perhaps the most likely scenario is that though there was no sharp and immediate reduction in the number of those who bought licences, they chose to wear powder far less frequently, only on the most formal occasions. Some may even have bought licences though with no intention of wearing powder, in order to support (or to be thought to support) the government in its war against France.

According to an account laid before the House of Commons in May 1801, the gross product of the tax in its first six years was £1,021,000. The cost of collection over this period was said to amount to £71,000, which gives an average annual net yield of £158,000.[206] This figure conceals, however, a fairly dramatic decline in 1799–1801, years of even greater scarcity than 1794–6, and in 1801–2 the tax raised only £75,000, a half of its original yield and a third of Pitt's original estimate. By the middle of the 1800s the yield was down to a quarter of Pitt's estimate; by 1810 it was down to a tenth; in 1814 the tax raised less than £700, net of the cost of its collection; by 1820, £12.[207] Throughout this period, the duties on starch, perfume, and powder were a tiny fraction of what they had been before 1795. The Hair Powder Act survived on the statute book until its repeal in 1867, by which time the cost of collecting the tax must for many decades have exceeded its produce, and powder had long been abandoned by all except a few members of the learned professions, mainly clergymen auditioning for parts in Trollope's novels.

VIII

Why did the hair powder tax, proposed by Pitt so casually and passed by the Commons with so little anxiety except on the part of Dent and Moira, become so urgent a topic for debate in 1795? The most obvious reason is of course that it appeared to impinge so directly on the two most important political questions of the year, the crisis in the food supply and the determination of Pitt's government

[205] *MP*, 28 Sept.; *Times*, 12 June 1795.

[206] *Times*, 12 May 1795.

[207] *JHC* lii (1796–7), 52, 59; liii (1797–8), 49; liv (1798–9), 109; lvii (1801–2), 849; lxv (1810), 683; lxx (1814–15): p. lxiv; lxxvi (1820–1), 877–8.

to continue the war against France following the defeat of the allies in northern Europe and to increase taxation in order to do so. The tax—and the manner of its proposal—clearly outraged many of those who felt that Pitt had acted with an unfeeling opportunism in treating the concerns raised in January by the liberal Lord Mayor and by Foxite Whigs, about the impact of powdering on the supply of grain, as an excuse to raise revenue rather than to prohibit the manufacture and use of hair powder, all the while insisting that no shortages were expected. As one critic of the tax put it, no sooner had the Lord Mayor, and Robinson and Sheridan, expressed their anxiety that powdering reduced the supply and raised the price of corn, than Pitt 'laid hold of the opportunity to increase, at the expense of the people, the already intolerable burdens of the present ruinous and much to be lamented war'.[208] The subsequent failure of the Foxite opposition to chase the hare they had started made it abundantly clear to many opponents of the tax outside parliament that only by attempting to mobilize public opinion against the tax would there be any chance of influencing the government to acknowledge the link between powdering and scarcity. The act, late in the year, prohibiting the manufacture of starch was a victory for one side in the campaign against the tax.

As we have seen, however, the powder tax provoked two very different forms of opposition, from those who demanded a total prohibition of powdering (or at least a temporary boycott) and from those who had no concern about the supposed effect of powdering on the supply of food and were incensed mainly by its unfairness and by its tendency to promote social and political distinctions. With the exception of the nature of any future reform of parliament, throughout 1795 the anti-Pittite opposition inside and outside parliament—Foxites, the members of radical societies, liberal anti-war public opinion—was united on all the other major issues of the year: the need for peace with France, for a reduction of the burden of taxation, for the maintenance of civil rights against Pitt's suspension of Habeas Corpus and the Two Acts. The debate may have owed much of its interest to the division among the opponents of the tax, and the number of publications it generated suggests that it was seen by radical booksellers in London as a marketing opportunity. That opportunity was further increased by the possibilities the tax provided for humour and satire. The potential in the tax for humour might not have been so obvious had not Pitt pointed it out to the House of Commons, but it is also true that the radical and plebeian publishers who set up in business in London in the 1790s, who were especially prominent in 1795, and who are usually treated as entirely motivated by ideological concerns, were also very keen to exploit the political conflicts of the early 1790s as an occasion to make money. With remarkable efficiency they responded to and helped create each new political controversy as one succeeded another throughout the year: the treason trials, the powder tax, the prophecies and arrest of Richard Brothers, the scandal of the Prince of Wales's debts, and so on, up to and including

[208] *Courier*, 17 Mar. 1795.

the 'two bills' which so radically altered and reduced their output. Their stock-in-trade, especially in 1795, was political satire, and no political topic of that year was as hospitable to satirical treatment as the hair powder tax. And it is partly in this context that we should regard the repeated complaints that one anticipated effect of the poll-tax, that it would make social and especially political divisions more visible, was the very purpose behind its introduction. The tax provided an opportunity for the radical and liberal imagination, sometimes playfully but sometimes in deadly earnest, to stretch the belief in an all-pervading spirit of despotism, especially as connected with spying and more informal surveillance, beyond activities that were directly political—agitation for reform, opposition to the war—and to discover it in dress and fashion, which should have been matters of private choice and which government had not previously attempted to police.

At the same time, however, the hair powder debate became so important partly because the tax offered a wider range of topics for discussion than any other issue in the mid-1790s: the inadequacy of parliament when it came to understanding the interests of the less than polite; the reasons for the scarcity of food; the huge wartime increase in taxes and the principles which should determine taxation; the nature of luxury especially in relation to the poor; the increasing political polarization of society; the spread of the regime of political surveillance, and so. The tax enabled, as few other topics did, the possibility of discussing the immediate issues of the day in relation to the more abiding social questions with which late eighteenth-century Britain preoccupied itself, pre-eminently the nature and character of modernity. This is especially apparent, in the near-famine year of 1795, in discussions of the competing claims of the poor on the one hand for cheaper and more plentiful food, and on the other for their right to a share of the politeness and respect that powdering and flouring the hair were seen to confer. This was an issue quite fundamental to how the industrious poor were to be thought of in a commercial society: whether primarily as the losers from the process of commercialization, whose poverty was the central fact about them, who were defined, and made the objects of public attention, by their lack of the necessities of life; or as eager if disadvantaged participants in commercial modernity, with the right to consume whatever they could fairly afford, luxuries as well as necessities, and with a sense of self-worth closely tied to their identity as consumers. And this division is related to, though it does not comfortably map on to, a more fundamental division within what Mark Philp has described as 'the fragmented ideology of reform'.[209] On the one side were those who, like Spence, looked forward to the establishment of an ideal republic based on an economic equality which could be achieved only when men and women understood that to be truly a citizen was to eschew acquisitiveness and the pursuit of luxury. On the other was a more liberal radicalism which looked forward to reform as the next stage of a progressive commercial society, and saw the Spartan ideology of renunciation as a step backwards.

[209] Mark Philp, 'The Fragmented Ideology of Reform', in Mark Philp (ed.), *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 50–77.

5

Cottage Politics

I

In the 1770s and 1780s, at Bath and then in London, Thomas Gainsborough painted a series of landscapes in which rustic women and their children gathered in front of cottage doors.[1] The cottages were not situated in villages but isolated, usually in woodland glades. The children were cherubic, and the women were well dressed, strikingly pretty, and apparently too young, one might think, to have borne so many children. These were evening scenes, and the family groups were usually waiting for the father of the household, seemingly imagined as the sole breadwinner, to return from work and complete the family circle. Often he is in view, bent and struggling towards the cottage under a burden of firewood, underwood perhaps collected from the forest floor. The light, however, falls not on him but on the women and children, so that his dark or dun-coloured figure accentuates the contrast between his labour and their relative leisure—though sometimes a woman is shown holding a broom or a baby to mark her role in the family economy. Only in the last and largest of these scenes, *Peasant smoking at a Cottage Door* (Pl. 5.1), is the burden of labour lifted from the shoulders of the father: young, powerful, handsome, though notably less refined in appearance than his beautiful wife, he has joined the rest of the family before his cottage, and shares some of the evening light which falls less generously, however, on his face than on hers (Pl. 5.2).

[1] These paintings include (I give them the descriptive but dourly utilitarian titles provided by John Hayes in *The Landscape Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough: A Critical Text and Catalogue Raisonne*, 2 vols. (London: Sotheby, 1982) *Wooded Landscape with Family grouped outside a Cottage, Woodcutter returning, and Flock of Sheep (The Woodcutter's Return)*, *c.* 1772–3, cat. 105; *Hilly Landscape with Peasant Family at a Cottage Door, Children playing and Woodcutter returning*, *c.* 1778, cat. 121; *Wooded Landscape with Peasant Family at a Cottage Door and Footbridge over a Stream* (*The Cottage Door*), 1780, cat. 123; *Wooded Landscape with Figures outside a Cottage, Woodcutter returning, a Mother with Two Children watching Cows beyond a Pool, and Sheep*, 1782, cat. 135; *Wooded Landscape with Mother and Child and Housemaid outside a Cottage, Girl with Three Pigs at the Foot of the Steps, Cows, Shepherd and Scattered Sheep near a Pool, and Distant Buildings*, 1786, cat. 174; *Wooded Landscape with Family grouped outside a Cottage, Mounted Peasant and Packhorses, and Distant Mountain* (*Peasant smoking at a Cottage Door*), 1788, cat. 185. There are also a number of drawings of cottage door scenes, some illustrated in Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, 2 vols. (London: Zwemmer, 1970).

Pl. 5.1. Thomas Gainsborough, *Peasant smoking at a Cottage Door* (1788).

Pl. **5.2.** Thomas Gainsborough, *Peasant smoking at a Cottage Door*, detail.

Because Gainsborough's landscape paintings were mostly painted for his own amusement and recreation, it seems appropriate to connect these cottage door scenes with his famous remark in a letter to the musician William Jackson: 'I'm sick of Portraits and wish very much to take my Viol de Gam and walk off to some sweet Village where I can paint Landskips and enjoy the fag End of Life in quietness & ease.' They seem to speak of a desire to escape from business—a life spent 'in Harness', as he put it, while others 'ride in the Waggon'—and from the whims and importunacies of his polite sitters, into an eroticized rustic idyll from which, however, except in *Peasant smoking*, the burden of providing for his family stubbornly refuses to be wished away, as if to prove the truth of Freud's remark that art 'constitutes a region half-way between a reality which frustrates wishes and the wish-fulfilling world of the imagination'.[2] And among their admirers, few in the 1770s but steadily growing in the last years of his life, these 'cottage-doors' may have been enjoyed similarly as the expressions of a fantasy of

[2] *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, ed. John Hayes (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 68, and see Ann Bermingham on Gainsborough's 'cottage-doors' as 'idealized autobiography' (among other things), in *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition 1740–1860* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 105–8, and her essay 'The Simple Life: Cottages and Gainsborough's Cottage Doors', in Peter de Bolla, Nigel Leask, and David Simpson (eds.), *Land, Nation and Culture, 1740–1840: Thinking the Republic of Taste* (London: Palgrave, 2005), 37–62; Sigmund Freud, 'The Claims of Psychoanalysis to Scientific Interest' (1913), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1954–73), 13. 188.

retirement from the 'world', from the rituals and routines of public and social life, into an unattainable privacy, imagined not inconveniently therefore in the form of an impossible, and not finally very desirable descent from gentility into rusticity.[3] The fantasy may be compared with the wish indulged by William Cowper, in *The Task* (1785), of retiring to the remote cottage, perched on a hill and ringed with elms, that he passed in his rural walks and named 'the *peasant's nest*'—and wish that lasted only so long as it took him to recall the many inconveniences of cottage life.[4]

This fantasy, and the inevitability of its rejection, are captured best, perhaps, by the reflections of the hero of Charlotte Smith's novel of 1976, *Marchmont*, on the life of a poor *vigneron* he stays with in a remote cottage in the Bourbonnais. This life, far from 'the folly of cultivated, of polished life,' is enormously attractive to Marchmont until he asks himself 'whether I would exchange my sensibility (I hate the word, it is so prostituted) though . . . I possess almost a morbid degree of it, for the calm stupor of ignorance, for the stagnating content of an animal who in the human form is, in intellectual rank, hardly superior to the cattle he drives a-field! Sensibility, though it deprives Marchmont of happiness, is also what makes him human; to trade places with the *vigneron* would be to become an animal. 'I decide, that I would not exchange my sense of existense for his; yet I think there can be no doubt but that he is the happier'.[5] By the time the fantasy is rejected, it has enabled Marchmont to reconcile him in some small degree to the miseries of polished life, to congratulate himself on the sensibility that is the mark of him humanity, and to reassure himself that the poor cottager, whose happiness derives form the dulling of sensibility by daily labour and isolation, would only be made less happy by an attempt to ameliorate his condition.

Although these 'cottage-doors' appear to speak of the pleasures of retirement from, among other things, the public and the political, the image they created of rural privacy was itself thoroughly embedded in a political notion of how the poor should behave. The fantasy they gave expression to had to be grounded in a degree of reality, if it was not to be dismissed too readily as *mere* fantasy, mere idyll; and this is achieved by the evidence of the labour by which these rustic families supported themselves, whether in the heavy bundles of firewood, the brooms, or simply, in *The Cottage Door* itself, the absence of a husband whose return from work is eagerly awaited by the rest of the family. This image of retired domesticity required the cottagers to be represented as remote from society, as entirely focused on the family and having nothing to do with the more collective forms of leisure that characterized village life, in the alehouse or on the green. If their way of life was to be passed off as desirable, it had to be represented not as affluent, of course,

[3] For an account of Gainsborough's landscapes as images of retirement (though of a more philosophical notion of retirement than I take them to be) see Marcia Pointon, 'Gainsborough and the Landscape of Retirement', *Art History*, 2: 4 (Dec. 1979), 441–55.

[4] William Cowper, *The Task*, (London: Joseph Johnson, 1785) book 1, ll. 220–51.

[5] Charlotte Smith, *Marchmont: A Novel*, 4 vols. (London: Sampson Low, 1796), 4: 51–2.

but as decent and comfortable—and consequently the women, at least, are strikingly well dressed and neat, and are evidently far above what in the last chapter we saw Adam Smith describe as that 'disgraceful degree of poverty which . . . no one can well fall into without extreme bad conduct'.[6] In the process, therefore, of imagining the life of the rural poor as capable of supporting a polite fantasy of rustic retirement, the poor themselves were imagined just as the polite classes wished they were: too industrious to be poor, with too much self-respect to be ragged, and too contented with the privacy of domestic life to need or seek the company of others of their class, and the quarrelling, the drunkenness, the gossip, the bawdy, the lechery that were widely supposed to characterize the poor who enjoyed their leisure collectively.[7]

The cottage-door scenes thus embody an idea of the 'good' poor, 'industrious, modest, quiet, neat' as Cowper described them, and in the process they define too, by their absence from the paintings, an account of the 'bad' poor supposed to be none of those things.[8] Indeed, the more Gainsborough's admirers recognized these paintings as idylls, as 'fancy-paintings', images of a fantasy, the more the reality of rural life may have been imagined as the opposite of the version they depicted. There is evidently, in short, a politics of class at work in the construction of these paintings; but no less evidently the paintings were not understood as political at all. The images of the poor they offered and excluded were too deeply grounded in the shared ideology of the polite classes to be recognized as the partial representations they now so evidently appear to be. The cottage door, however, or the cottage as the site of an idealized, private, domestic life, was far more widely invoked in the 1790s than in the 1770s or 1780s, and in that decade its meanings changed entirely.

II

In the first part of her cautionary tale of *Black Giles the Poacher*, a 'Cheap Repository Tract' published in December 1796, the evangelical poet and loyalist propagandist Hannah More described the 'Mud Cottage with the broken windows, stuffed with dirty rags', that housed the poacher and his idle family. 'You may know the house,' she continued, 'by the ragged tiles on the roof, and the loose stones which are ready to drop out from the chimney; though a short ladder, a hod of mortar, and an hour's leisure time would have prevented all this.' Giles,

[6] See above, p. 184.

[7] I offer a fuller version of my reading of these paintings in the second chapter of *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); see also (among many other discussions) Michael Rosenthal, *The Art of Thomas Gainsborough: 'a little business for the Eye'* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 204 ff.

[8] Cowper, *The Task*, book IV, l. 374.

she explained, had fallen 'into that common mistake, that a beggarly looking cottage, and filthy ragged children raised most compassion, and of course drew the most charity'. In fact, the reverse was the case: 'for it is neatness, housewifery, and a decent appearance, which draw the kindness of the rich and charitable, while they turn away disgusted from filth and laziness.'[9]

A few months later, two works appeared which allow us to put more colour on the distinction that More was making. In July 1797, the English-born but American-educated philanthropist Sir Thomas Bernard produced a short pamphlet entitled *An Account of a Cottage and Garden, near Tadcaster*. It was published by the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor, of which a year earlier Bernard himself had been a co-founder, and though it appears to be addressed primarily to landowners, with the aim of encouraging them to set aside land on which their employees could build cottages and establish small gardens, it was sold, like More's Cheap Repository Tracts, at a discount price for bulk purchasers, as if Bernard hoped that, distributed among agricultural workers themselves, it would persuade them to aspire to the virtues it taught. A few miles beyond Tadcaster, on the road to York, Bernard's eye had been caught by a cottage which had been built by its occupier in a rood of ground originally rented from Mr Fairfax the local squire. The cottage itself was evidently in perfect repair, its thatch beautifully trimmed, its chimney straight, its lattice windows supplied with drop-down shutters to keep out the cold (Pl. 5.3). The garden, enclosed within a quick-set hedge 'without a flaw or defect', contained 'three hives of bees', and was planted, on either side of a well-raked gravel path, with 'fifteen apple-trees, one green-gage, and three winsour plum-trees, two apricot-trees, several gooseberry and current bushes', and 'an abundance of common vegetables'. The occupier was Britton Abbot; he and his wife were both 67 years old, and had raised six children in the cottage, living partly on the sale of their surplus fruit, mainly on the produce of their labour—he hoeing turnips and hedging, she spinning at home and occasionally working in the fields. It seems to have been she, not her husband, who was responsible for the garden, though Abbot himself was happy to take the credit for its neatness.[10]

It was in the name of the 'spirit of neatness' that, as we saw in the last chapter, liberal pamphleteers defended the right of the poor to flour their hair, a practice that promoted self-respect, and reassured that they were not the 'swinish multitude' that Burke had imagined them as being. 'Neatness' was equally a quality much admired in the 'good' poor by More and Cowper, but in a sense that seemed to diminish and patronize them; and it is the highest word of praise throughout Bernard's pamphlet, apparently with the same connotations. He was captivated by

[9] Hannah More, *Tales for the Common People and other Cheap Repository Tracts*, ed. Clare MacDonald Shaw (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2002), 67.

[10] Sir Thomas Bernard, *An Account of a Cottage and Garden, near Tadcaster. With Observations upon Labourers having Freehold Cottages and Gardens*, etc. (London: T. Becket, for the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor, 1797), 3–5.

AN

ACCOUNT

OF A

COTTAGE AND GARDEN,

NEAR TADCASTER.

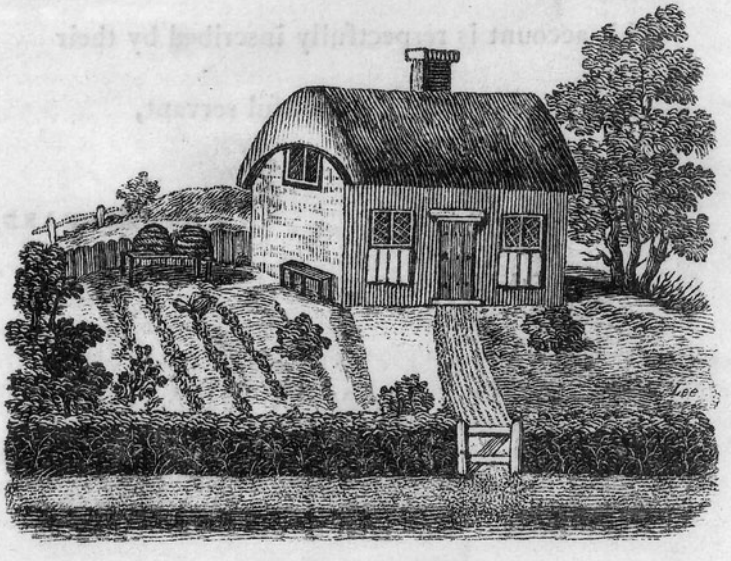
WITH

OBSERVATIONS

UPON LABOURERS HAVING FREEHOLD COTTAGES AND GARDENS,

AND UPON A PLAN FOR SUPPLYING COTTAGERS WITH COWS.

PRINTED AT THE DESIRE OF THE SOCIETY FOR BETTERING THE CONDITION, AND INCREASING THE COMFORTS OF THE POOR.



LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. BECKET, BOOKSELLER, PALL-MALL.

1797.

PRICE ONE SHILLING A DOZEN.

Pl. 5.3. Title-page of Sir Thomas Bernard, *An Account of a Cottage and Garden, near Tadcaster* (London, 1797).

the 'singular neatness and good order that marked every part of this little domain'; Mr Fairfax had been 'so much pleased with ... the extreme neatness of the place' that he now allowed Abbot to live there rent-free; Abbot himself, even whose working-clothes were 'neat and sufficiently clean', was in turn apparently delighted at the pleasure the Squire had taken 'in seeing my cottage and garden neat'; and together Abbot and Bernard discussed whether 'other poor persons', if willing to word as hard as Britton and his wife, and if landowners were willing to set aside enough land, 'might have cottages and gardens as neat as his'. As this neatness is illustrated in a small engraving on the title-page of the pamphlet, perhaps after a sketch by Bernard, though it could almost have been drawn by a neat child with a ruler.[11] It does not aspire to be a work of art, but that is precisely the point: 'artistic' representations of cottages were required to employ the vocabulary of the picturesque, and the picturesque was the enemy of 'neatness and good order'.

This point had been reiterated only a month before by the artist and antiquary John Thomas Smith in a short book of etchings of cottages he had discovered in the suburbs and environs of London. These cottages are all in the state of advanced 'decay' which, according to the picturesque theorist Uvedale Price, made almost all 'cottages, mills, outhouses, and hovels ... extremely picturesque':[12] thatches untrimmed and rotting; gates and fences broken; chimneys, where they exist, unlikely to survive a high wind; mud walls only approximately vertical and crumbling to dust, patched here and there with miscellaneous planks of wood originally rough-hewn for some other purpose; none seem even remotely watertight (Pl. 5.4). The architect James Malton, who designed cottages for 'Noblemen and Gentlemen of taste', would not have allowed them to be cottages at all, believing that anything covered with thatch, and 'sheltering only the wretched space enclosed within four mud walls', deserved no better name than 'hovel'.[13] Smith had announced himself as an etcher six years earlier in the illustrations to his *Antiquities of London*,[14] most of which are minutely and neatly detailed, and, like *The Gate of the Ancient Abbey of St. Saviours Bermondsey* (Pl. 5.5), invite us to notice—indeed almost to count—every tile on the roof, every brick in the wall, every cobble in the yard. By contrast, the cottages in Smith's *Remarks* seem to show him on a country holiday, with a looser, easier grip on his needle, confident, however, that the more negligently it appears to move the more it will capture the neglected state of these hovels, and the more certainly his images will be

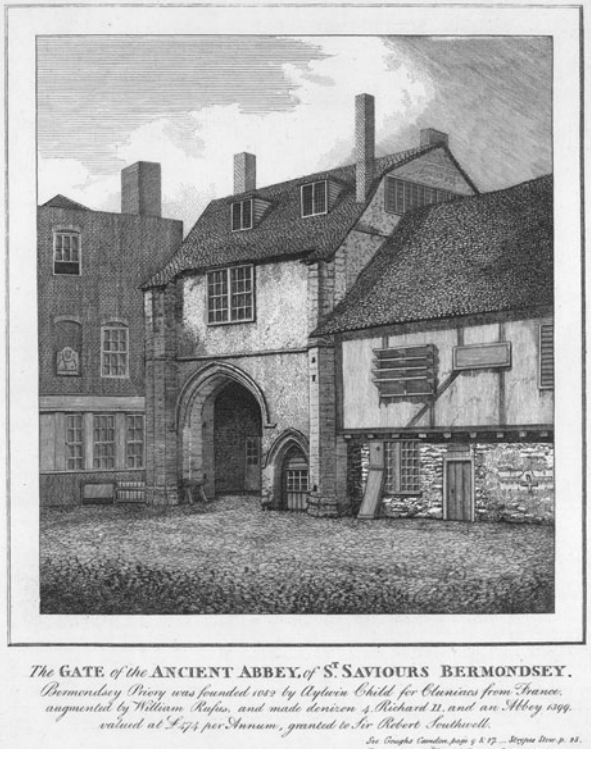
[11] Ibid. 3–5.

[12] Uvedale Price, *Essays on the Picturesque, as compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful*, 3 vols. (London: J. Mawman, 1810), ii. 265

[13] James Malton, *An Essay on British Cottage Architecture* (London: Hookham and Carpenter, 1798), 2, 4.

[14] *Antiquities of London and Environs, Engraved & Published by J. T. Smith* (London: J. Sewell and others, including Smith himself and his father Nathaniel, 1791).

Pl. 5.4. J. T. Smith, *On Merrow Common, Surrey. The Residence of Dame Battey, aged 102*, from Smith, *Remarks on Rural Scenery; with Twenty Etchings of Cottages from Nature* (1797).



Pl. 5.5. J. T. Smith, *The Gate of the Ancient Abbey of St. Saviours Bermondsey* (1794) from Smith, *Antiquities of London and Environs, Engraved & Published by J. T. Smith* (1791–1800).

recognized as aspiring to the liberal art of the picturesque as opposed to the mechanic craft of the mere topographer.[15]

These etchings were preceded by a brief essay in which Smith considers the subgenre of landscape he calls '*cottage scenery*'. Smith does not claim that the subgenre itself is new: it had been practised by a number of Dutch painters and, in Britain, pre-eminently by Gainsborough, whose 'profound and accurate observations of Nature' had enabled him 'to give distinct characteristics and original varieties to his cottagery'. Nor does he make great claims for it—he was content that 'rural and cottage-scenery' should be 'considered as no more than a sort of *low-comedy* landscape'. His main concern is to distinguish between two 'classes' of cottage-scenery, 'namely, the *neat*, and the *neglected*', and he seems to have produced his definitions of these with *Black Giles* open on his desk.

Smith freely acknowledges that 'in poverty, nothing will more easily, or more universally excite the attention of benevolence, than the appearance of neatness and cleanliness', and he goes on to describe in great detail the ideal of cottage neatness, all straight lines and right angles, that 'will be sure to call forth the praises of the good *housewife* and the thrifty *oeconomist*'. But, he continues, all this 'is nothing to the artist. *As* good *housewives*, or as thrifty *oeconomists*, we admit that it is all very well; but we then turn from this neatness and regularity, to what *we* must esteem a far more profitable subject—the neglected fast-ruinating cottage'. The rest of a long paragraph describes his picturesque ideal in terms which seem to borrow and expand upon those by which Giles's cottage had been described: 'here and there a wisp of straw stuffed through a broken pane'; a 'mutilated chimney-top'; 'the unrepaired accidents of wind and rain'; 'ragged children', and so on. All these 'offer far greater allurements to the painter's eye, than more neat, regular or formal arrangements could possibly have done'.[16]

The distinction Smith is making, between rural imagery seen in a moral, and in a picturesque light, was commonplace enough by the time he made it: it is a running theme in the writings on the picturesque by William Gilpin.[17] There are, however, a number of novel features in Smith's version of the distinction. There is his interpellation of the 'good housewife' alongside the economist, as if in conscious reference to the values which the Cheap Repository Tracts were attempting to impress upon the rural poor. There is the sheer length, which my summary cannot indicate, of his account of the disjunction, made visible in the two sorts of cottage, between, on the one hand, the discourses of political economy and its domestic equivalent, good housewifery, and on the other the discourse of the picturesque. Most of all, there is his provocative borrowing of that

[15] For some more examples of Smith's cottages, see his *Eighteen Etchings of Rural Scenery* (London: William Tegg, n.d.).

[16] John Smith, *Remarks on Rural Scenery; with Twenty Etchings of Cottages, from Nature* (London: Nathaniel and John Smith, 1797), 7–9.

[17] See John Barrell, *The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge* (London: Macmillan, and Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 96–8.

figure from Hannah More whereby we 'turn', we 'turn away from', one kind of cottage in order to admire the other. If, according to More, 'the rich and charitable' turn away from the neglected cottage in disgust, artists, according to Smith, do the very opposite: they turn from neatness in search of the visual stimulation that only neglect can offer.

There is no reason to believe that Smith is writing here in defence of the idle poor. He does not suggest they have a right to neglect their own property if they choose to do so, because their leisure time is their own; nor does it occur to him to point out that neglected cottages were as likely to be the sign of a parsimonious or irresponsible landlord as of an idle occupier. He may well have felt that the idle poor were every bit as much the authors of their own misfortune as More did, and that their idleness and neglect were not excused by the benefits they accidentally conferred upon the artist in the shape of picturesque ruins. His point is to defend the space of the artist, not of the undeserving poor, against the encroachment of More's increasingly pervasive and persuasive moral rhetoric, and to accomplish this he is perfectly willing to give that rhetoric its due. An artist, he may be taken as saying, can perfectly well inhabit two apparently contradictory discourses; just because he profits from the idleness of the poor he must not be presumed to condone it, or to approve all those vices which More connected with idleness: discontent, ingratitude, crime, and—worst of all—democracy.[18]

III

A collection of etchings of neglected cottages needed such an elaborate and careful defence in the mid-1790s. Like everything else in those years, the image of the cottage had become thoroughly politicized in the intense propaganda war between loyalists and radicals, involved with questions about the morality of the war with the French republic, popular radicalism and the movement for parliamentary reform, and the declining standard of living of the poor under the burden of wartime taxation. For loyalists, the rural cottage became an image of the peaceful life Britain was fighting to protect and restore, or of the contentment the poor supposedly enjoyed or should be taught to believe they enjoyed even in times of great hardship; or it might remain the image of privacy and retirement, of a space and a life away from political conflict, but with the implied suggestion, now, that the life of its inhabitants remained entirely undisturbed by shortages, high prices, recruitment, and the political agitation that was becoming a characteristic of large towns and cities. The cottage appears frequently in poems by a group of anti-jacobin churchmen, Luke Booker, Richard Polwhele, James Hurdis, and Thomas Gisborne; two of them (Gisborne and Hurdis), friends and followers of Cowper, two of them (Gisborne and Polwhele) associates of Hannah More. For Hurdis, the

[18] For more on Smith's cottages, see Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*, 105–8.

English landscape remains reassuringly one of villages of 'warm huts', inhabited by jovial and contented abstractions, 'pious Industry', 'sober Labour', for whom 'sport and toil Seem hand in hand'.[19] For Booker, the 'happy, inchanting' village of Malvern is 'the abode Of pastoral simplicity', of 'blythe swains and damsels'; it is safely removed from the 'infuriate deeds' of republican France, a place of 'rural cots, Whited and deck'd with woodbine, or with rose … all neat'; where the 'Cottage-poor' are briefly acknowledged to exist, it is merely as an opportunity for the generous rich to provide them with allotments on Bernard's plan.[20] In his aptly named *Poetic Trifles*, Polwhele has a poem entitled 'The Distrest Cottage', but the distress is visited on its well-fed and once smiling inhabitants not by war or poverty but by the disappointments of puppy-love.[21] In the anonymous poem *Innovation*, attributed to Gisborne, the cottage with its perfectly maintained garden becomes the image of 'Nature', 'Custom', 'Order' and justifiable 'prejudice', of everything in 'free and happy Britain' which is threatened by unnatural, rationalist, and francophile 'innovation' whether in poetry or politics.[22] One of the battle-cries of reformers and revolutionaries, according to Gisborne, is ' "War to thrones, but to the cottage peace" '; but if we examine the fruits of innovation in France, he declares, we find the 'cottager' enjoying anything but the 'Peace and Plenty' so evident in the English cottage garden: his tythes have been remitted, but his taxes have increased, and he waits in dread of being forcibly enlisted, to 'fight *for Freedom* in a distant field'.[23]

Liberal and radical writers concerned at the inequality between rich and poor and hostile to the war with France also focus intently on the cottage, as an ideal place of peace and safety no longer, now threatened by the oppression of the rich, unequal laws, or sudden invasion. Charlotte Smith, in her poem *The Emigrants*, denies that content inhabits the agricultural worker's 'low hut Of clay and thatch': his everlasting toil cannot earn him and his household more than 'scanty bread';[24] and according to Joseph Cottle, describing the same landscape as Booker and in the same year, 'Injustice, Selfishness' ensure that our 'fellow-men' reside in 'wretched huts', and toil ceaselessly but in vain 'to gain a scanty fare'.[25] Southey describes the 'death-dew-dropping tree' of Power as overshadowing the cottage, to 'blast evr'y herb beneath its baleful bowers', and in the early versions of Wordsworth's 'Salisbury Plain Poems', a cottager and his daughter are driven from their lakeside home by the 'oppression' of their landlord, who, enraged at

[19] James Hurdis, *The Favourite Village. A Poem* (Bishopstone, Sussex: the Author, 1800), 1, 7, 50.

[20] Luke Booker, *Malvern, a Descriptive and Historical Poem* (Dudley: J. Rann, 1798), 12, 6, 94, 52, 2–3, 97–8.

[21] [Richard Polwhele], 'The Distrest Cottage', in *Poetic Trifles* (London: G. Woodfall, and C. Dilly, 1796).

[22] [Thomas Gisborne?], *Innovation: a Poem* (London: T. Cadell jun. and W. Davies, 1799), 3–5, 14, 10.

[23] Ibid. 10, 6, 13–15.

[24] *The Emigrants*, book 2, ll. 179–87, in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, ed. Stuart Curran (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[25] Joseph Cottle, *Malvern Hills: a Poem* (London: T. N. Longman, 1798), ll. 574–95, and see p. xi n.)

their refusal to sell it to him, denies them access to the fishing-ground they depend upon to survive.[26]

Most often, however, the cottage is evoked by such poets to take issue with the justice of a war which inflicts its greatest, most terrible costs on the most vulnerable members of the nation. Cottle imagines the soldier seduced from his peaceful 'English cot' by a recruiting party, who, as he lies dying in the field, bitterly recalls those who will be left grieving for him at home.[27] 'The Wounded Soldier', in Robert Merry's poem of that name, limps home to the cottage where his wife and parents live, no longer their breadwinner but a burden the family economy cannot possibly afford to support.[28] In poem after poem the effects of war are focused on the deserted and ruined cottage: deserted, in Smith's poem 'The forest boy', when a mother died on hearing that her son, who had enlisted in the army, had been killed; or, in Mary Robinson's 'The Deserted Cottage', when a father went mad on hearing that his son had died in the war; or burnt to the ground 'by frantic glory's desolating trade', in 'Lines written by a Female Citizen!', a poem contributed by the republican 'F.A.C.' to Thelwall's periodical *The Tribune*.[29] In Coleridge's earlier conversation-poems—'The Aeolian Harp', 'Reflections on having left a Place of Retirement', 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison', the cottage Coleridge took with his wife Sara in Nether Stowey remains a sanctuary, but in 'Fears in Solitude' it is suddenly threatened by the invasion force gathering on the coast of France. William Amphlett too imagines the English cottage as destroyed by a sudden enemy invasion, the disastrous result of Pitt's unjust, unnecessary war.[30] 'The ruined cottage' was both title and subject of Wordsworth's first great poem, the tragedy of a wife left abandoned by her husband when, thrown out of work by economic depression and unable to support his family as the price of bread shoots upward following the two bad harvests of 1794–5, he finally slips away to enlist in the army. She never hears of him again, and the uncertainty about his fate drives her mad and finally kills her.[31]

[26] Robert Southey, *Joan of Arc, an Epic Poem* (Bristol: Joseph Cottle, and London: Cadell and Davies, G. G. and J. Robinson, 1796), book 5, ll. 95–8; *The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, and Hassocks: Harvester, 1975), 28–9, 131–4).

[27] Cottle, 'War, a Fragment', ll. 115–82, and see ll. 275–80, in *Poems, containing John the Baptist, Sir Malcolm and Alla . . . War, a Fragment* (Bristol: J. Cottle, and London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795).

[28] Robert Merry, *The Wounded Soldier, a Poem. By Mr. M——y* (London: T. G. Ballard, [1795?]).

[29] Charlotte Smith, 'The forest boy', in *Poems*, 111–16; Mary Robinson, 'The Deserted Cottage', in *Mary Robinson: Selected Poems*, ed. Judith Pascoe (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2000), 243–6; John Thelwall, *The Tribune*, 3 vols. (London: D. I. Eaton, J. Smith, J. Burks, 1795), iii. 105–6.

[30] W. Amphlett, *The Triumphs of War: and other Poems* (London: S. Bagster and J. Parsons, 1796), 23.

[31] William Wordsworth, *The Ruined Cottage and the Pedlar*, ed. James Butler (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, and Hassocks: Harvester, 1979). The narrative of this poem does map neatly on to the French wars, but like Butler (p. 5) I see a reference to the bad harvests of 1794–5 in the reference (pp. 52–3) to 'Two blighting seasons when the fields were left With half a tillage', even though the poem represents this period as 'some ten years gone'.

Mary Favret has argued that poems such as these amounted to a concentration on the domestic cost of the war which had the effect of concealing the horrors of the fighting in Europe from a public which was unwilling to acknowledge them.[32] But as we saw in the Introduction, Vicesimus Knox and other opponents of the war chose to focus especially on the cottage as the place where the effects of war, and of the spirit of despotism that had caused it, were most visible to their readers, in their most unvarnished form. And frequently the cottages evoked by poets hostile to the war are in the theatre of war itself. Southey describes the cottages of France abandoned by their inhabitants before the rage of the invading British, or tenanted only by weeping women ignorant of whether their menfolk, enlisted in the French army, are alive or dead.[33] Smith imagines the 'Lowly undistinguished cottages' abandoned by the impoverished recusant clergy who have fled to England; Cottle describes the 'tenant of the cottage', again presumably in France, left starving on his fruitful soil when an invading army has consumed all his crops.[34]

IV

This is the context in which J. T. Smith was trying to preserve the cottage as a space which might still be thought of, if only for the purposes of art, as removed from politics, but he knows how controversial this aim may seem, and his awkward references to *Black Giles* show the strain he is under, unsure how much to concede to More's rhetoric, and how far he should confront it. We can get an even sharper idea of the political issues involved in the representation of the cottage from Thelwall, who in 1793 published a short essay on cottages as part of his long, brilliant, unclassifiable book *The Peripatetic*. The eponymous central character of this work describes a range of 'decent' cottages, 'of neat but simple architecture', that he and the companion on his walk came across in the fields just outside Bermondsey, an industrial suburb in south-east London, the last place in which the lovers of rural scenery would look for the pleasures of pastoral. But however unpromising their situation, however overcrowded, and however uncomfortable they would be to those who are used to better, these cottages and their tiny gardens were not at all neglected, and Thelwall represents them as in their own way idyllic, for they are places where labouring families, impoverished as they are, can escape from the labours of the day, breathe pure air, and enjoy the pleasures of domestic life. They are, however, as vulnerable as they are peaceful. The ground they occupy belongs to the owner of a modern villa, and, Thelwall suggests, if he shares the general attitudes of men of his

[32] Mary A. Favret, 'Coming Home: The Public Spaces of Romantic War', *Studies in Romanticism*, 33 (Winter 1994), 539–48.

[33] Southey, *Joan of Arc*, book 5, ll. 179–88; book 4, ll. 365–87; book 7, ll. 325–31.

[34] Smith, *The Emigrants*, book 1, ll. 180–1; Cottle, 'War', ll. 281–8.

class, sooner or later he will no longer be able to endure having his view spoiled by the sight of wretchedness and poverty. Whether in the name of taste or of ridding the neighbourhood of a nuisance he will level the cottages to the ground, forcing their inhabitants to abandon the scenes they have lived in all their lives and to seek refuge in the unhealthy metropolis. Or else they will be driven away by poverty and famine.

The fate Thelwall foresees for these cottages and their inhabitants is familiar enough, most obviously from Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*. What is new, however, about these remarks on cottage scenery is the solution he proposes to the problem of rural poverty and the danger he apprehends in proposing it. 'The slavish maxims of the age', he writes, 'have forbidden a tongue to the attachments or the necessities of the poor.' But suppose, asks his companion, the labourers had a vote and voice; suppose elections to parliament were more frequent; suppose therefore members of parliament were dependent on their votes for re-election? Would the workers in agriculture, the '*most important* part of the community' then be 'neglected and despised'? ' "Hush! Hush! my friend!" ' exclaims Thelwall,

> suppress this freedom of speech, and remember
>
> THE ASSOCIATION!
>
> The fervors of patriotic humanity, and the confidence of friendship must no longer be indulged, since confederated placemen invite us to turn informers.[35]

The Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers—for this is the 'Association' Thelwall refers to—held its inaugural meeting on 20 November 1792, a few months before the publication of *The Peripatetic*. As we saw in Chapter 2, it was dedicated to discouraging and 'suppressing' the freedom of speech in which John Frost, William Hodgson and Thelwall's companion, so thoughtlessly or intrepidly indulged.

The Association also published loyalist, anti-radical pamphlets and tracts, and one of its earliest publications was a tract by the philosopher and influential churchman William Paley, entitled *Reasons for Contentment, addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public*. This short essay was an admonition to the poor not to make themselves unhappy by comparing their situation with that of the rich. The poor, it insisted, were at least as fortunate, in many ways more fortunate than the rich: they did not suffer from the boredom, the enforced idleness, or the dissatisfaction that supposedly followed the easy satisfaction of desire. The point of Paley's tract, like the point of the Association itself or of More's Cheap Repository Tracts, was to persuade the poor not 'to covet the

[35] John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic*, ed. Judith Thompson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 133–40; the passage is well discussed in an excellent chapter on Thelwall by Andrew McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s: Literature, Radicalism and the Public Sphere* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1999), 83–106.

stations and fortunes of the rich' or 'to wish to seize them by force, or through the medium of public uproar and confusion'; in short, to dissuade them from enlisting in the popular reform movement and from seeking to replicate in Britain the events in France. And against the spectre of French discontent and anarchy it offered an image of peace and of the greatest happiness attainable on earth, in the form of a cottage-door scene almost in the manner of Gainsborough—except that Paley does allow the cottagers to enjoy the company of their equally contented neighbours, at least so long as they do not congregate together but each remains in his own domestic space:

> the summer evening of a country village; where, after the hours of the day, each man at his door, with his children, amongst his neighbours, feels his frame and his heart at rest, every thing about him pleased and pleasing, and a delight and complacency in his sensations far beyond what either luxury or diversion can afford.

'The rich want this,' Paley insisted, 'and they want what they must never have';[36] and in saying so he reveals what was, as we shall see, the problematic double character of loyalist cottage scenery, that it is at least as much concerned to provide the rich with 'reasons for contentment' as the poor. On the face of it, it seems unlikely that Paley's tract could persuade many of the rural poor that they were happy; it was probably more successful in persuading the rich that the poor *ought* to be happy—happier indeed than they were themselves—and that there was no justification, therefore, for popular disaffection, 'grumbling', and radicalism.

Paley's vision of cottage evenings is in many ways reminiscent of a development of Gainsborough's cottage-door imagery by the Fleet Street printseller Robert Sayer, who in the early years of the decade issued a number of anonymous mezzotint cottage door scenes adapted for a vulgar urban audience, some in the very small and very cheap format known to printsellers as 'cottage-prints'. Sayer's images were pure rustic idyll, designed to evoke in the metropolitan artisan or shopkeeper a nostalgia for the simple, leisurely life of a countryside that they may barely have visited except on Sunday rambles in semi-rural suburbs. *The Happy Cottager* (Pl. 5.6), for example, is accompanied by verses that evoke the romantic love that was the foundation of its family idyll; in *Virtue in a Humble Cott* (Pl. 5.7), the doves on the roof symbolize both peace and conjugal fidelity, even the cat smiles, and the verses beneath speak of the lack of care that, as Paley had suggested, makes life in a cottage so much preferable to life in a palace. There was nothing in these images for lovers of landscape: they depicted cottages and cottage-gardens as private domestic spaces entirely cut off from the surrounding villages and fields by overhanging trees and fences of stout palings, and perhaps offered their urban audience an image of privacy beyond anything they could hope to enjoy in

[36] William Paley, *Reasons for Contentment, addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public*, in Greg Claeys (ed.), *Political Writings of the 1790s* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1995), vii. 224–6.

Pl. 5.6. Artist unknown, *The Happy Cottager* (1794).

London. Within those enclosed spaces all labour was forgotten, and happy young fathers, wearing the smocks of labourers or small yeoman, smoked, drank, and relaxed with their pretty wives and pretty children—isolated from their neighbours, to be sure, but also out of reach of the surveillance of employers, landlords, or busy polite visitors anxious to offer moral advice and small charities in exchange for deference. In short, these images of the domesticated poor, aimed directly at their vulgar audience, seem permissive; Paley's, which would reach the poor only through the hands of their superiors, were coercive.

There is a poem, signed 'Philanthropos', in Eaton's *Politics for the People*, which like these prints and like Thelwall's description of suburban Bermondsey, suggests that, if they could have it on their own terms, there was a plebeian audience more than happy to buy into a version of Paley's vision of rural domesticity. The poem describes an idealized cottage,

Pl. 5.7. Artist unknown, *Virtue in a Humble Cott* (1793).

> the seat
> Of Industry and Health, Content and Love:
> There the poor labourer, from his daily toil
> Releas'd at eve, enjoy'd his little home.
> With every sweet endearment, his fond wife
> Welcom'd his glad return; rejoic'd to share
> A father's smile, the little prattlers strove
> To climb his knee, and play'd their gambols round.
> Thoughtless of future ills, each parent smil'd,
> Gaz'd on the pledges of their mutual love
> With heart-felt joy, and thought them wealth enough!
> Blest was the cot with innocence and peace.

The past tense of this rhapsody, however, recalls a period now vanished, and not by the usual process by which such idylls always refer from a fallen present to a

golden past, but as the immediate result of the war. As in 'The Ruined Cottage', war has brought unemployment and 'famine'; the mother, starving herself to feed her children, is dead. The cottage is now a 'wretched hovel';

> each smiling joy is fled,
> Fled—to return no more!—while sickness, want,
> Famine, and all the complicated woes,
> That haunt the desolating steps of war,
> With dismal gloom, o'erspread the sadden'd scene.[37]

The poem raises the question of whether Sayer's prints too may have been received as images not so much of an ideal present or a possible future as of a recent but vanished past, or of a way of life such as Thelwall describes, over which hangs the dread that it will be snatched away by forces the poor have no power to arrest.

V

From time to time the Association itself commissioned propaganda in the form of popular prints, designed to be sold in bulk to its supporters for distribution among their dependants, tenants, and employees. It is more than likely that it was responsible, early in 1793, for the appearance of a pair of caricatures by T. Ovenden, *John Bull in his Glory* (Pl. 5.8) and *Citizen CoupeTete in his Misery* (Pl. 5.9), which contrasted the English cottage with the squalid habitation of a Parisian sans-culotte.[38] John Bull is seated at a table by a roaring fire with his son (or son-in-law) and his daughter-in-law (or daughter) who is suckling a baby. Other children lounge in the foreground. The two men hold large mugs of ale, and, having torn chunks from a substantial loaf, are about to turn their attention, as is the expectant dog, to the large joint of beef that Mrs Bull brings to the table. The green bough that decorates the ceiling tells us that it is Christmas,[39] but

[37] 'Philanthropos', 'Effects of War', *Politics for the People: or, A Salmagundy for Swine*, 2 vols. (London: D. I. Eaton, 1795), part II, 8: 11.

[38] The only examples I know of this pair of prints are separated now. Both are trimmed, with the result that *John Bull* has no details of artist, publisher, or date; *Citizen CoupeTete* bears the name T. Ovenden and the truncated imprint '[——]y 29 1793 by I. Downs, 240 Strand'. George suggests, in *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satines Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, vii (London: British Museum, 1942), that January was the month of publication, though it could possibly by May; February is out of the question, as 1793 was not a leap year. Both Diana Donald, writing of *John Bull in his Glory* in *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 235–6 n. 106, and George, in her entry on *Citizen CoupeTete*, point out that each image required a pendant, but this essay is I believe the first occasion in which they are identified as a pair. Ovenden produced, also in 1793, an engraving *The End of Pain* (depicting Paine hanged from a lamp-bracket), probably commissioned either by the Association or by the government.

[39] See Leigh Hunt, 'Christmas and Other Old National Merry-makings Considered', in *Leigh Hunt's Political and Occasional Essays*, ed. L. H. Houtchens and C. W. Houtchens (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1962), 160–81.

Pl. 5.8. [T. Ovenden], *John Bull in his Glory* ([London, January? 1793]; Library of Congress, PC 2—J [P&P]).

Pl. **5.9**. T. Ovenden, *Citizen CoupeTete in his Misery* (London, January? 1793; BM 8293).

though this feast may be untypical, therefore, of the Bulls' usual diet, the two hams that hang above the chimneypiece reassure us that they will not go hungry when the beef is gone. As the image and the verses beneath it make clear, this abundance is the reward of piety, contentment, patriotism, loyalty, and domestic virtue: the cottage is an emblem of all that makes England the happiest land on earth. On the wall is a double portrait of George III and Queen Charlotte; next to it is the patriotic song, beloved of Associationists, 'O the roast beef of old England', printed beneath a version of Hogarth's print of the same name.[40] The family, the verses beneath the image tell us, is in the habit of singing songs 'with merry glee', and the boy lolling on a chair in the foreground is about to lead them in a rendition of the national anthem. A large family bible sits, rather precariously, on a shelf; through the window appears the reassuring spire of a country church.

The pendant to this image portrays the 'sad Reverse' when religion and royalty no longer secure the comforts and blessings of domesticity and when Christmas has been abolished. The emaciated, near-naked, barefoot Citizen CoupeTete sits despairing in a ruinous hovel. A hook in the beam on the ceiling, which in John Bull's house would bear the weight of a fat ham or two, bears nothing. Apart from the rickety chair the citizen is perched upon, all the furniture has been sold or burnt. The walls are decorated with images of the leaders of the republic—Egalité; a group portrait of Marat, Paine, and Robespierre, the latter holding an axe. The skulls of royalist martyrs grin from the mantelshelf, and through the broken window we can make out another martyr about to be guillotined and a gibbet garlanded with corpses. The citizen's ragged, distracted wife bewails the death by starvation of her eldest daughter; two younger children, one nearly naked, struggle over a bone; other bones, already gnawed, litter the floor. CoupeTete himself cannot decide whether to cut his throat or to hang himself.

James Gillray borrowed from Ovenden's image of John Bull when, in 1794, he was commissioned by the Association to produce a print which was published in January the following year as *The Blessings of Peace . . . The Curses of War* (Pl. 5.10). It consisted of a pair of cottage scenes, an interior and a cottage door, enclosed in roundels like the two sides of a medal; and the shocking contrast between them was clearly intended to establish that the war with France could reach out and destroy what had been represented, and especially by Gainsborough, as the most privileged and protected haven of retirement and domestic peace. On the left, a countryman, perhaps a yeoman farmer, has returned home from the labours of the day to be greeted by his loving family and his dog. His wife and two youngest children cluster round him, while his older daughter serves up another generous rib-joint of beef. Once again there is a loaf of bread, or perhaps it is a meat pie on the table, and another ham hangs by the door; pigs grunt in their sties, the promise of more ham to come; chickens peck about on the floor.

[40] See John Keane, *Tom Paine: A Political Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), 337.

Pl. 5.10. James Gillray, *The Blessings of Peace . . . The Curses of War* (London, 12 January 1795; BM 8609).

This too is an image of the peace and plenty that summed up the Georgian ideal of the good life, an image of the cottage as quite unaffected by war or revolution, as the heart of all that Britain is supposed to stand for by contrast with the rest of the world. This is the Britain that those who received this print as a gift from their landlord or employer, or who saw it hung up in their place of work or the local alehouse, are invited to identify with; the Britain they are fighting the French to preserve. It is of course 'old' England, or an image of how Britain *once* was; but whatever awkward reminders of radical cottage poetry might have been raised by that past tense, it may have been expected to be read, in a print commissioned by the Association, as meaning that Britain had been like this only two years ago, before the war and the inevitable privations of a wartime economy began, and that it would be like this again when the French were finally defeated. And the right-hand roundel, though it might be taken to suggest that Britain would be best

Pl. 5.11. W. Whitley after Richard Newton, medal advertised as 'The Constitutional Medal', (London: issued by B. Laver and A. B Portal, 1795).

protected by making an immediate peace with France rather than by pursuing the war, was apparently intended to make it clear that the war was, as Pitt repeatedly insisted, 'just and necessary', and that if the French were not defeated, Britain would suffer as Flanders, Spain, and Holland had already suffered at their hands. Gainsborough's peaceful cottage door will become the scene of appalling atrocities occasioned by a French invasion: the cottage burned, the father bayoneted, the mother and eldest daughter raped (as their dishevelled and disordered appearance makes clear); the survivors left to starve as their livestock is driven off to feed the army of the republic.

Later in 1795 two London merchants or shopkeepers, one a goldsmith, one a cutler, issued another loyalist image of the cottage in the form of 'A Constitutional Medal' (Pl. 5.11), struck in white metal (a cheap substitute for silver), and advertised to be sold at a discount to those, as they put it,

> whose Rank and Circumstances enable, and whose Zeal inclines them to prove their Affection to Government; as by distributing them amongst their Friends, Dependents and Neighbours, they may act as an Antidote to those pernicious Principles too successfully attempted to be instilled in the Minds of the Weak, and of the less informed Orders of the People.[41]

On the obverse of this medal, a family is seated on the paved terrace of a rural cottage, enjoying the best part of the day as Paley had imagined it: a labourer has returned from his work to relax in the bosom of his family and to enjoy a well-earned drink, poured out for him by the eldest and chubbiest of his well-fed children. In contrast with Ovenden's and Gillray's images, it is here the housewife

[41] Lawrence Brown, *A Catalogue of British Historical Medals 1760–1960, iii. The Accession of Edward VII to 1960* (London: Spink, 1995), 275.

Pl. 5.12. Artist unknown, *The Woodman return'd to his Cott* (London, 1 October 1793).

and mother who is the centre of the family, as she is, for example, in Gainsborough's *Cottage Door with Peasant Smoking*, or in another of Sayer's cottage doors for the popular urban market, the small cottage print *The Woodman return'd to his Cott* (1793) (Pl. 5.12). To place her in the centre is of course to emphasize that it is the virtues of domesticity that characterize the goodness and happiness of the

labouring class, and to show her spinning, whether to clothe her family or to augment the family income, underlines the importance of industriousness among those virtues: it may be too dark for the labourer to go on with his work, but there is still light enough for his wife to do hers, and she will not stop spinning until she can no longer see to do so.

But the main point of the scene is of course that it too is an image not just of rural virtue but of Britain itself. On the advertisement for the medal, what is called its 'constitutional side'—its obverse—is described in verses which announce that this picture of rustic happiness is the result of a benevolently monarchist constitution: the property of this family, however small, the 'plenty' they supposedly enjoy, the 'freedom' of which they are actively 'conscious' (for it is not a piece of unmeaning ideology)—all are secured by Britain's 'equal laws' and by the crown that watches over this family and protects them. In the legend that encircles the image, this cottage scene is offered as an image of 'the land we live in', and in the spirit of Merle Haggard's refrain ('if you don't love it leave it') republicans are warned that 'those who don't like it' can 'leave it'.[42] What will happen to Britain if republicanism gains the ascendancy is shown on the reverse, in the contrasting image of anarchy, not explicitly represented or described as *French* anarchy, perhaps so that it can also function as a nightmare prediction of Britain's possible future, but obviously an evocation of the Terror that has been visited on Britain's 'natural enemy'.

In return, of course, the crown and the constitution are protected by the family. As the Shepherd of Salisbury Plain points out in Hannah More's tract of that name, also published in 1795, 'a poor man like me is seldom called out to do great things, so it is not by a few great deeds his character can be judged by his neighbours, but by the little round of daily customs he allows himself in'.[43] The parents of this family have no opportunity of displaying their patriotism by great deeds of public virtue; they display it instead by their neatness, their contentment, their industriousness, their deference, their gratitude for the blessings they enjoy, and by the sentimental affection which seems to guarantee that these private virtues are being handed down to their children. By their habitual perseverance in the daily practice of virtue, they support the constitution that supports them, and in doing so, the medal suggests, they become the embodiment of British freedom. Or at least the mother does: by a transparent but effective visual pun, we are invited to read her as an image of British Liberty herself—her spinning wheel as the shield bearing the union flag, her distaff with its bunch of carded wool or cotton as the staff and liberty cap. British Liberty had appeared on the very first propaganda caricature published with the encouragement and sponsorship of the Association, *The Contrast 1792*, by Thomas Rowlandson after a design by Lord George Murray (Pl. 5.13), which appeared in December 1792 in the month

[42] Ibid. [43] More, *Tales*, 46.

Pl. 5.13. Thomas Rowlandson after Lord George Murray, *The Contrast 1792* (London, December 1792; BM 8149).

following the Association's foundation. Rowlandson's image, however, asks its audience to identify in their Britishness with an abstract allegorical figure; the visual punning on the medal invites us to see British Liberty herself as residing in the humble cottage, and to recognize her in every virtuous mother in the land. It is the visual equivalent of the trick Keats would later play in his 'Autumn: an Ode', in which Autumn does not appear, as we expect her to, as an allegorical figure presiding over the harvest landscape, but instead is glimpsed, fleetingly, as embodied in the harvest-workers themselves, a winnower, a dozing reaper, a careful gleaner, a cider-maker.

The formula employed by both Gillray's print and the 'Constitutional Medal', as well as by Ovenden's paired images, the contrast between good and bad alternatives, was especially favoured by the Association, and appears in most if not all the visual propaganda it sponsored. The logic of such contrasts, the Association seems to have believed, was direct and inescapable: faced with the atrocities pictured on one side, who would not choose or identify with the wholesome images of Englishness or Britishness on the other? But as Diana Donald has pointed out, the formula may not have communicated its meanings quite so straightforwardly or univocally.[44] In this respect Gillray's image may have

[44] Donald, *The Age of Caricature*, 156.

been more problematic than Ovenden's vision of plenty in John Bull's cottage, for *The Blessings of Peace* appeared at a most unpropitious time.[45] In early 1795, as we have seen, Holland had just surrendered to the French, the Prussian and Austrian armies had been driven back across the Rhine, and the defeated British army had been forced to abandon Northern Europe and return to England. The war had become increasingly unpopular in Britain, and the demand that Pitt should enter negotiations with the French to end the war was becoming increasingly urgent, even in parliament itself. Worse still, by the time *The Blessings of Peace* appeared, the serious shortages of food that were the context of the hair powder controversy were already apparent; a famine was being forecast for later in the year; and Pitt's government, as we have seen, though in public it was denying that a food crisis was imminent, was desparately attempting to secure supplies of corn from overseas. For the poor to whom the print was addressed, the lavish plenty in the left-hand roundel may have seemed a cruel irony rather than an image of a life they could recognize as their own; at best it may have fuelled the belief that farmers themselves were suffering no shortages, and that the scarcity was caused in part by their own greedy consumption of the food that should have been available to the poor. Indeed, the cruel transition from an implausibly ideal past to a terrifying future makes the image far closer to radical poems on the effects of war than to the insistence in so many loyalist poems that the cottage was still a haven of peace.

There is an instructive comparison to be made here with More's *Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, written later in 1795 when the food shortages had become extreme. More wisely chose not to pretend that the rewards of domestic virtue still included unlimited beef and pudding, if they ever had done. The shepherd is represented as feeding his invalid wife and eight children on bread and potatoes; his clothes are so old that they consist mainly of patches, though the patching is laudably neat; he can afford a fire only once a day, for only so long as it takes to boil the potatoes; in the freezing winter just passed the family had had only a thin blue rug to cover them all. For all this the shepherd enjoys a contentment which derives from his pious willingness to thank God for whatever he provides, however scanty. The plight of the shepherd's family is exaggerated, no doubt, in an attempt to ensure that virtually all who read the tract will learn to be thankful for their own lot, however harsh; but More may have been right to calculate that the poor would be more likely to approve depictions of their life that acknowledged their hunger rather than pretending that each evening they tucked in to the roast beef of old England. Her example, however, was not one that Gillray could possibly have followed. The visual representation of abject poverty was regarded by loyalists as

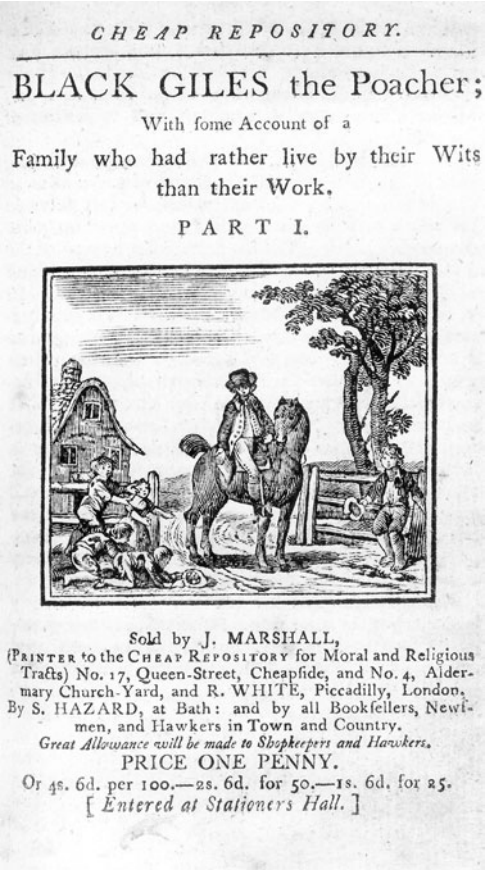
[45] See Harriet Guest, '"The Consequences of War" in the Winter of 1794–5', in Geoff Quilley and John Bonehill (eds.), *William Hodges, 1744–1797: The Art of Exploration* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press for the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, and the Yale Center for British Art, 2004), 61–70.


CHEAP REPOSITORY.

THE

Shepherd of Salisbury-Plain,

Sold by S. HAZARD,
PRINTER to the CHEAP REPOSITORY for Religious and Moral Tracts at BATH;
By J. MARSHALL, PRINTER to the CHEAP REPOSITORY No. 17, Queen-Street, Cheapside, and No. 4, Aldermary Church-Yard; and R. WHITE, Piccadilly, LONDON; and by all Bookfellers, Newsmen, and Hawkers, in Town and Country.
☞ Great allowance to Shopkeepers and Hawkers.
Price 1d. or 4s. 6d. per 100. 50 for 2s. 6d. 25 for 1s. 6d.
[Entered at Stationers Hall.]


CHEAP REPOSITORY.

BLACK GILES the Poacher;

With some Account of a Family who had rather live by their Wits than their Work.

PART I.

Sold by J. MARSHALL,
(PRINTER to the CHEAP REPOSITORY for Moral and Religious Tracts) No. 17, Queen-Street, Cheapside, and No. 4, Aldermary Church-Yard, and R. WHITE, Piccadilly, London.
By S. HAZARD, at Bath: and by all Bookfellers, Newsmen, and Hawkers in Town and Country.
Great Allowance will be made to Shopkeepers and Hawkers.
PRICE ONE PENNY.
Or 4s. 6d. per 100.—2s. 6d. for 50.—1s. 6d. for 25.
[*Entered at Stationers Hall.*]

Pl. 5.14. [J. Lee?], image on title-page of Hannah More, *Black Giles the Poacher; with some Account of a Family who had rather live by their Wits than their Work. Part I* (London, [1796]).

Pl. 5.15. [J. Lee?], image on title-page of Hannah More, *The Shepherd of Salisbury-Plain. Part I* (London, [1795]).

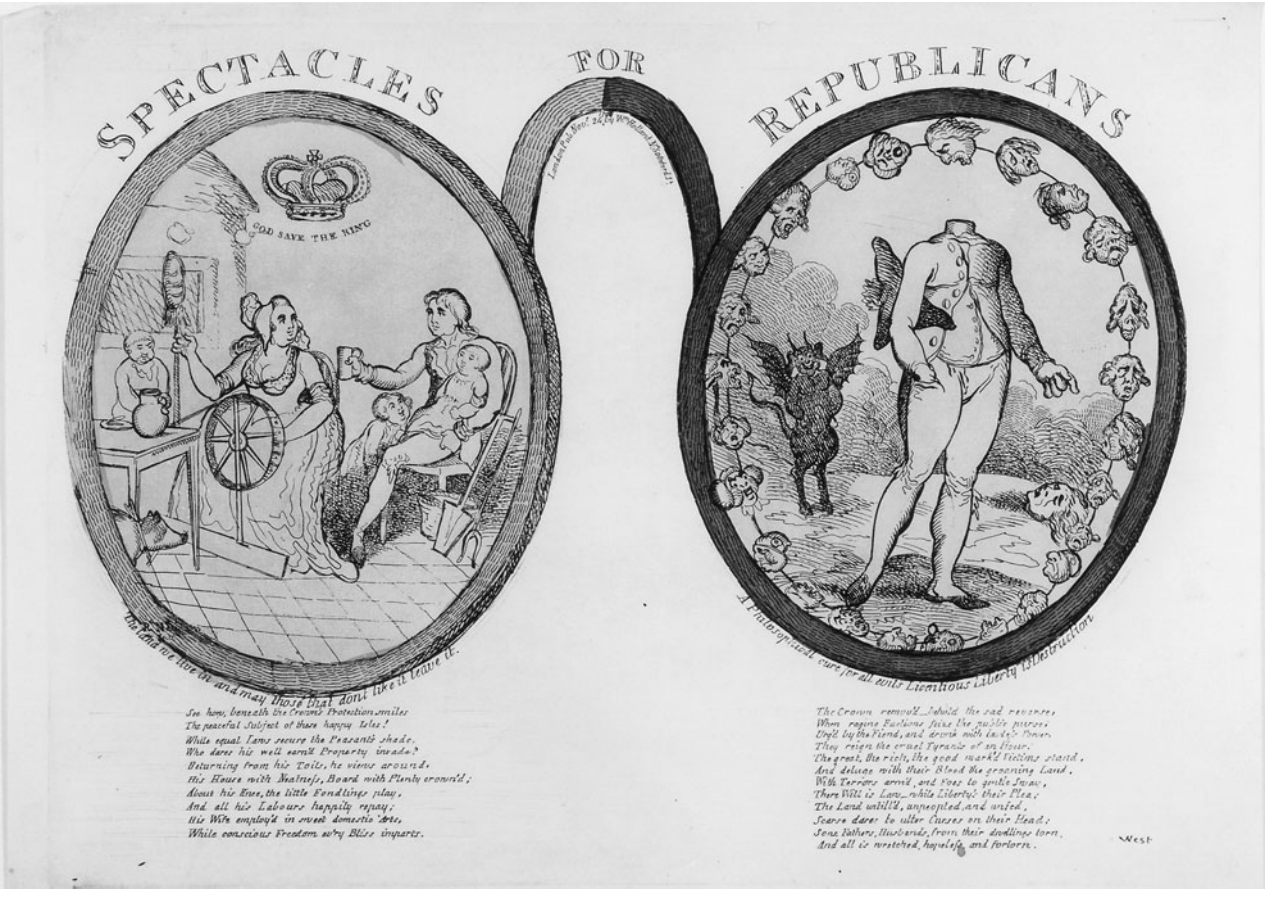
too disgusting to be capable of teaching a positive moral lesson; and whereas the woodcut on the title-page of *Black Giles* (Pl. 5.14) showed the poacher's idle children reprehensibly dressed in rags, the image that introduced *The Shepherd of Salisbury-Plain* gave no indication of how often and how neatly the shepherd's clothes had been repaired (Pl. 5.15). If Gillray's beef seems an insult to the poverty of the poor, he could not possibly have persuaded the Association to purchase from him an image which showed how frugal and deficient their diet had become.

As Donald also suggests, Gillray himself, who appears to have been too independent in his political attitudes to be comfortable in the role of hired gun

for the Association, may himself have been unpersuaded by his own image of peace and plenty. A proof version of this print bears the legend 'Of the truth of y^{e} representation an appeal is made and submitted to the feelings of ye internal Enemies of Gt Britain'. If this was taken to refer especially to the right-hand roundel, those internal enemies were presumably to be taken as the members of the reform societies, whose leaders, Thelwall among them, had just been acquitted of a charge of high treason which had alleged that they were conspiring to overthrow the government and constitute a republic on the model of France. If it was taken, however, to refer to the left-hand roundel, it might be read as suggesting that the plenty enjoyed by the yeoman farmer was obviously a misrepresentation of the true state of Britain, and that, as many believed, the real 'internal Enemies' were those who were attempting to pass it off as true, the members of the Association. In the final version of the print, and probably at the Association's insistence, these words were replaced by the anodyne dedication 'To the People & the Parliament of Great-Britain'.[46]

The 'Constitutional Medal' raised its own awkward question about the contrast formula, especially when we compare it with the print on which it was based, *Spectacles for Republicans* by Richard Newton (Pl. 5.16), presumably specifically commissioned as the design for the medal. Newton, who had been a brilliant teenage radical caricaturist until his publisher was prosecuted and imprisoned for selling Paine's *Letter Addressed to the Addressers*, appears to have been as uncomfortable as Gillray with his propaganda mission, or at any rate to have chosen to interpret it in his own way. Designing his left-hand roundel after many months of serious shortages, Newton leaves it to us to imagine the abundant food which had made his rural family so cheerfully plump: all that appears on the table, beside the jug of drink, is a provocatively empty plate. The housewife is provocative in a different way, offering to the spectator a full sight of her exposed and ample breast and even a glimpse of her nipple, as if to literalize the phrase 'the bosom of the family'. But if Newton found it difficult on the left-hand side of the print to discipline himself to the decencies of loyalist propaganda, he hardly seems to have tried on the right, where a jolly devil looks much too good-natured to be dangerous, the body of the aristocratic Frenchman seems entirely unconcerned that his head has been removed, and the heads that surround him, as if in a daisy-chain, look too outraged or disappointed by their fate to look quite as dead as they should. All this, together with Newton's playful conversion of his two roundels into a pair of spectacles, may suggest that he was deliberately subverting the loyalist aims of his employers, but it is just as likely that he was making the professional judgement that loyalist propaganda might need to lighten up a little if it were to reach beyond the poor who were already persuaded of their own contentment, and to engage those who might prefer to be amused rather than sermonized into loyalty.

[46] Donald, *The Age of Caricature*, 156.



Pl. **5.16**. [Richard Newton], *Spectacles for Republicans* (London, 24 November 1795; BM 8695).

The problem with such commissioned propaganda, intended to be bought by rich loyalists for distribution among the poor, is that if it is to sell it must embody an image of the poor which corresponds with what the rich wish to believe about them; but if it is to persuade the poor it must embody an image in which they can recognize themselves, or which at least represents them in a light they do not find offensive. It is possible that the cottage scene as it appears in Newton's caricature—with its hints both of scarcity and cheerful sensuality—would have fulfilled those last criteria, but it was hardly calculated to appeal to its intended purchasers. Accordingly, when it was reproduced on the Constitutional Medal, the engraver, as well as clearing up the confusion in Newton's design as to whether the scene was set indoors or outside, also adjusted the housewife's clothing and put something chunky and appetising on the plate, at the same time giving the labourer's legs a more classical tone and conformation. But short of rejecting Newton's design altogether, he could do nothing much to remove the element of caricature from the scene on the reverse, though he did his best by drastically reducing the size of the comic devil and adding some more admonitory text: 'Abhor Evil Cleave To That Which Is Good'. The result was an absurd mismatch between the two sides of the medal. The contrast formula, at least if it set out to sermonize rather than amuse, required its audience to be either strongly attracted to one side of the contrast or strongly repelled by the other, but there was nothing attractive or repellent about the Constitutional Medal, and it must have been difficult for those lucky enough to receive it at the hands of their superiors to identify very strongly with the family on the obverse, or to deplore with much conviction the scene on the 'sad reverse'.

In what may well have been his first attempt to fulfil the commission from the Association, the untitled, unfinished aquatint known as *Lawful Liberty/Liberty without Law* (Pl. 5.17), Gillray also chose to represent the British poor in the cheerful mode of 'low-comedy' that was the stock-in-trade of the caricaturist. The contrast here is between the liberty enjoyed by the rural poor in Britain at harvest home, as they dance and play outside a country pub, and an anarchic carnival of violence in France—a priest about to be beaten to death, others already hanged, babies bayoneted, an old aristocrat pleading with the sans-culottes, one of whom bears a teasing resemblance to Charles James Fox, who are dragging his daughter away to be raped. Had it been finished, it might well have been the most successful piece of visual propaganda issued by the Association, for it contrasted a genuinely horrific view of the new France with an image of old England, as a place of collective, jolly, but not disorderly alcoholic leisure; and Gillray as well as Newton may have been right in believing that there was a constituency among the poor who would prefer to recognize themselves in such an image rather than in a more sober and virtuous one. Festivals such as harvest home came rarely enough in the rural calendar, but they may well have been occasions when the labouring poor shared something of the 'peace and plenty' of Georgian ideology, and became, briefly, 'conscious' of the liberty they were continually told they enjoyed. But as Diana Donald has suggested, this image of the rural poor as, however

Pl. 5.17. James Gillray, unfinished, undated, unpublished aquatint known as *Lawful Liberty/Liberty without Law* (BM 8301).

briefly, released from labour and from the surveillance and discipline of their employers, and coming together in a community rather than divided into discrete families, was not calculated to win favour with the Association, and it seems likely that Gillray was required to substitute for it the relatively polite though disturbingly ambiguous aquatint he eventually produced.[47]

VI

The presumed rejection of *Lawful Liberty/Liberty without Law* by the Association suggests that the problem of using the cottage scene as a medium of loyalist propaganda may go further than I have so far suggested. For the Association clearly wanted cottage scenes to carry two different messages. On the one hand it seems to have wanted such scenes to depict an idealized loyalist version of the rural poor as thoroughly domesticated and in full enjoyment of the blessings of peace, the rewards of domestic virtue and the protection of 'equal laws'. Thus imagined,

[47] Ibid. 156–7.

they would share no grievances with other members of their class, and would have no interest in participating in collective political action—associating together for parliamentary reform, or engaging in Paley's 'public uproar and confusion'. On the other hand, the Association wanted the cottage scene to awaken the patriotism of the poor by representing the individual family as an image of a collective national identity. The logic of this doubling was clear enough in loyalist political theory, which represented the family as the nursery of patriotism, the place where we first learn that we share a collective identity with others that eventually reaches out to embrace the whole nation, and represented the nation, in turn, as a larger version of the family, with the king as father (so that the crown in *Spectacles for Republicans* fulfils precisely the same function as a portrait of the king might do). It was impossible, however, to represent this logic by means of the cottage-door motif, which so insistently valorized the domestic and the private at the expense of, and in opposition to, any notion of the community or collective life. Once again it is instructive to contrast these cottage scenes with the Cheap Repository Tracts, which were probably more successful as propaganda by being more narrowly concentrated in terms of ideology. They appeared much more concerned to teach industriousness, thrift, piety, and deference than patriotism; they showed the good poor as myopically focused on their families, as if an essential part of domestic virtue was to be entirely unconcerned with any larger collective identity whether in terms of class or nation—though with the sense, of course, that the less they concerned themselves with the nation, the more truly patriotic—or the more useful to the nation—they would become. The only sense of collectivity or community the tracts permitted the poor was as members of the congregation of their parish church or of their Sunday School, where they were imagined as interacting not primarily with others in their own station in life, but with the rich and charitable, supposed always to be on the lookout to reward or condemn them according to the degree of their domestic piety and their acquiescence in what they were told was the providential division of society into rich and poor.

We can read the relationship between More's tracts, and the cottage paintings by Gainsborough with which this chapter began, in various ways. On the one hand More implicitly attacks the aesthetic of the picturesque which for John Smith, for example, and Uvedale Price,[48] had found its most complete expression in Gainsborough's landscapes and in 'cottage scenery' where delapidation and unkempt nature were more highly prized than the neatness which for More was the sign of the good poor. This is precisely how Smith had read *Black Giles*. On the other hand, More can be seen as voicing the unspoken ideology of Gainsborough's paintings, his habit of imagining the 'peasantry' as entirely defined by their domestic identity, each family inhabiting its own sequestered paradise, quarantined from contamination by any notion of collective life, even of collective labour. In the process of voicing that ideology, however, More made it much more overtly

[48] Price, *Essays on the Picturesque*, ii. 366–8.

political; the adherence to the ideal of decollectivized domesticity appears, as it does in Paley's tract, to be an obligation imposed on the poor from above, not their own free choice as it may seem to be in Sayer's images or in the poem by 'Philanthropos'. As such it became a test not only of the dutiful industriousness of the poor but of the deference that would keep them, and hopefully the nation itself, uninfected by the influenza of liberty disseminated by the *Rights of Man* or the popular reform societies. In the process, More was politicizing also the ideal of private retirement from public life that the polite had been able to imagine through the lens of Gainsborough's cottage paintings. If the Cheap Repository Tracts told the poor that their duty was to fear God, honour the king, work hard, and stay at home, the duty of the rich, as the tracts always implied and often demonstrated, was to be active in the surveillance of their inferiors, visiting the poor in their cottages, invading their privacy, and making sure they did just as they were told.

VII

There is a passage in James Thomson's poem *The Seasons* which has fascinated me for many years and which first alerted me to the importance of the distinction between public and private in eighteenth-century Britain.[49] It asks about how men (it is only men that Thomson considers) can make the most profitable use of their leisure, imagined in terms of a period of retirement in the glooms of winter, and the answers it proposes differ according to whether it is the leisure of a private or a public man that is at issue. In the civic humanist vocabulary of Thomson, a 'public' man is one who has the education, the virtue, the means, and the social station to make a career in public life, in politics, or at least to aspire to such a career. Such a man will think of the task of the statesman as an attempt to secure the public interest by uniting or balancing the conflicting interests and desires of the various individuals or groups in society, and to do this he must himself be disinterested in his devotion to the public weal. Accordingly, he will spend his periods of leisure or retirement preparing himself to perform his public duties. He may contemplate the order of the universe, which he will understand, in Newtonian terms, as a system in which apparently discordant forces are perfectly harmonized by the divine will. This study will teach him to grasp that the 'moral' world, too, though apparently an arena of competing interests and desires, is impelled by the hand of Providence towards '*general Good*'. He will consider the

[49] James Thomson, 'Winter', ll. 572–616, from *The Seasons*, ed. James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). I have discussed this passage in 'The Private Comedy of Thomas Rowlandson', *Art History*, 6: 4 (1983), 423–41, reprinted in *The Birth of Pandora*, 1–24, and my discussion of it here borrows from my earlier remarks. Thomas Erskine, a great admirer of Thomson, may well have had this passage in mind when in defence of John Frost (see above, p. 84) he argued that 'There are moments ... when truth herself may be sported with without the breach of veracity, and where well-imagined nonsense is not only superior to, but is the very index to wit and wisdom.'

histories of states and the role of patriots and heroes, men of 'public Soul', in promoting the rise of empires and deferring their decline.

The private man, on the other hand, has no business with the public, with politics. He is 'doom'd' to 'powerless humble Fortune', one of those 'idle and helpless spectators of the commonweal', as Johnson described them, 'wholly unconcerned in the government of themselves'; one of the 'mass of the people' who, according to Samuel Horsley, Bishop of Rochester, speaking in 1795, had no political voice, and nothing to do with the laws 'but to obey them'.[50] He is to be understood as attached to one or other of the competing interests of society, and therefore without the disinterestedness that enables the public man to reconcile opposing forces or to understand them as reconciled by Providence. This private life, however, has its compensations for the private man, so long as he is willing to embrace it, and is content to be 'superior' to the ambition to perform a role for which his station does not qualify him. He has no arduous responsibility to cultivate public virtue, and may concentrate instead on contemplating the happiness that awaits him after death, and on developing the private virtues that will enable him to live as private, as quiet, as untroubled a life as possible, unvexed by public duties and anxieties. And most importantly for our purposes, the private man has a special licence to speak freely, though not apparently on political matters which he accepts are not his concern. His freedom of speech is in effect a function of his lack of political responsibility, a freedom to speak playfully, to indulge a 'frolic Fancy', more attentive to humour than to truth. In short, Thomson suggests, the private man, in exchange for accepting his powerless, disfranchised status, will enjoy, untroubled, the pleasures and freedoms of privacy which are unknown to the public man.

It is hard to say which is the more idealized, Thomson's account of the virtue of the powerful, or of the compensations of powerlessness, or of society itself, supposed to be divided absolutely between public and private men. But along with the arguments that the disfranchised were incapable of sharing power wisely and were anyway 'virtually' represented in parliament, the distinction he develops is one of the most frequently rehearsed justifications of the oligarchic, unreformed constitution of eighteenth-century Britain. When in the 1790s the unreformed constitution came under pressure, and societies not only of the disfranchised polite but of the vulgar began to demand the right to vote for their parliamentary representatives, it was as if they had broken the deal that Thomson imagines had been made with them. Unwilling to accept the powerless fortune assigned to private men, they forfeited the privacy that the deal had claimed they enjoyed.

The conversations, the correspondence, the private papers, of avowed and suspected radicals, became subject to various kinds of formal and informal

[50] Samuel Johnson, 'Taxation no Tyranny', in Donald J. Greene (ed.), *Political Writings*, vol. x of the *Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 112; for Horsley's remark and the argument it provoked, see *PH* xxxii. 258, 263–9.

surveillance. Not even their domestic conduct was free from inspection or malicious fabrication, first and most notably in the scandalous biography of Tom Paine written by the loyalist propagandist George Chalmers under the pseudonym 'Francis Oldys'.[51] Some radicals or radical sympathizers responded by violating the privacy of loyalists, most notably in the series of scandalous character-sketches published by Charles Pigott in *The Jockey Club* and *The Female Jockey Club*, or in Peter Pindar's attack on the king in response to what he seems to have seen as George's exploitation of his private character for political purposes. Popular radicalism was an urban phenomenon, but as we have seen the privacy even of the rural poor was recommended to be opened up for intrusive inspection, in the fear or belief that they might become radicalized by reading Paine or by the reform societies—as if the cottage was a private place when it was imagined as an ideal place of retirement but not when it was inhabited by the poor themselves.

These invasions of privacy bred the belief that all privacy was subject to invasion, evident in the claim that the very purpose of the Hair Powder Act was to force radicals to reveal themselves even by their choice of hairstyle. To borrow the terms of Habermas, though not quite his argument, if the oppositional public sphere, made up of the critical reasoning of private men, became increasingly oppositional and vocal in the 1790s, so the state and loyalist public opinion increasingly came to believe that it had a right to regard men's private beliefs as public issues and even to intervene in them as or on behalf of the state. The decade, I have been suggesting, represents a phase in the history of the public sphere when the idea of the public as constituted by men's private reasoning was caught in an equal and opposite reaction by which private opinions, and even private life itself, were represented as the proper object of the intrusive authority of the loyalist public and the state.

[51] [George Chalmers], *The Life of Thomas Pain, the Author of the Rights of Man. With a Defence of his Writings. By Francis Oldys* (1791), 5th edn. (London: John Stockdale, 1792).

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