

GOVERNMENT, GODWIN, AND COLERIDGE:
THREE PERSPECTIVES ON REACTION AND REFORM

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Government, Godwin, and Coleridge: Three Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Romanticism and Radicalism became quite opposite ideologies after 1800. They were, however, intrinsically intertwined on the issues of politics and reform in 1792. The reactionary legislation enacted by the British government from 1792 to 1795 formed a crucible for ideas, and a point of departure for the split between these ideologies. To this extent, the English Romantic movement may be placed in a historical context, and viewed as one response to the failure of radical politics in 1795.

The government of William Pitt used anti-jacobin alarm as a weapon against parliamentary reform, as a means to prosecute the war with France, and most significantly, as a tool to consolidate the cabinet and split the opposition. The intentions of the government as perceived by its members, by the prominent radical intellectual William Godwin, and by the most politically critical of the romantic poets, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, will provide three perspectives on the same sequence of events.

There is considerable indication that the government's actions were ordered by the political opportunism of William Pitt. He was not sincerely concerned with the radical

associations in 1792. Yet he used public alarm over the possibility of a Jacobin insurrection as a tool for political cohesion and cabinet unity. The abuse of process, and the apparent duplicity which these actions indicated, was noted and criticized by both Godwin and Coleridge. The futility of this criticism, given the escalating pace of suppressive legislation in 1795, would drive both thinkers away from "conventional politics" after 1796. Godwin would turn to fiction, and Coleridge would move towards "world-building" in poetics and a systemic philosophy in prose.

An examination of the political debates, the Treason Trials of 1793-1794, and the criticisms by Godwin and Coleridge of the "Two Acts" of 1795, will indicate the degree to which the material and political events of these years influenced the ideas of both Godwin and Coleridge. The final synthesis of these three perspectives should place the intellectual movement in a historical context, and demonstrate the connection between the politics and the ideas of this age of reaction and reform.

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INTRODUCTION

The continuing division of criticism as to the nature of English political ideology during the 1790's suggests the need for a closer historical context for its examination. Prefacing his work on Politics in English Romantic Poetry, Carl Woodring remarks of the rift between literary critics and social scientists with respect to the ideology of romanticism. The former, he contends, persistently equate romanticism with revolt, while the latter assert its power as a form of conservative reaction.¹ The context for English romanticism at the close of the eighteenth century must be as a radical movement for political reform against a counter-revolutionary aristocracy. However, this same movement must justify its cause in the wake of the Revolution in France, and an ensuing wave of anti-Jacobin legislation in England. The impact of such legislation would be to force "romantic-radicals" underground. Barred from the public arenas of meeting house, press, and parliament, the reformers undertook a quiet revolution.

Romanticism and radicalism are terms which have been interpreted as diverse ideologies. Bertrand Russell identifies

the rift between these perspectives as constituting the ground of nineteenth century thought. In his History of Western Philosophy he writes,

A profound revolt, both philosophical and political, against traditional systems of thought, in politics, and in economics gave rise to attacks upon many beliefs which had hitherto been regarded as unassailable. This revolt had two very different forms, one romantic the other rationalistic. The romantic revolt passes from Byron, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, to Mussolini and Hitler; the rationalist revolt begins with the French Philosophes of the Revolution passes on somewhat softened to the philosophical radicals of England, then acquires a deeper form in Marx and issues in Soviet Russia.²

Despite Russell's need to extend the implications of these trends to the extremities of political turmoil during the 1930's, his recognition of the antithetical nature of this movement is essentially sound. However, they are, in the context of Georgian England, two aspects of the same revolutionary movement. The divergence between them is a result of differing perspectives as to the mechanism of change. John Stuart Mill has also noted the divergence of perspective between radical and romantic thought. In his essay On Bentham and Coleridge, he

places this polarization firmly in the context of England and the French Revolution. Like Russell, he sees these traditions as the basis of nineteenth century thought, but unlike Russell he suggests a necessary interplay between them. "Dialecticism" he writes, "although not recognized, is just as present in English thought."³ The course of political criticism from the Wilkesite demonstrations of the 1780's to the suppression of the corresponding societies in 1796 would tend to support the thesis that romanticism was a response to the failure of radicalism as a force for political change at the end of the 1790's.

The material crucible for radical ideology during this period was the political crisis of 1793-1795. As early as the King's Proclamation on Seditious Writings in May of 1792, William Pitt had used the fear of a Jacobin uprising as a device to split the Whigs and achieve a coalition government. Although there is a persistent historical debate as to whether Pitt was acting out of a sincere concern for the security of the realm or as an opportunist attempting to obtain personal political ambitions, the radical critics of the day were convinced that he was out to destroy the constitution. Against such backroom machination, honest criticism and appeals to "men of reason and conscience" availed nothing. The actions of the administration during these years gave some justification to the belief, held

by radicals and Whigs alike, that Pitt ordered policy for no other reason than to advance his own prerogatives.

Efforts at criticism and influence by relatively moderate groups such as the Friends of the People were frustrated. The continued attempts by such disparate individuals as William Godwin and Samuel Taylor Coleridge proved equally unsuccessful. However, this very frustration was to be of formative consequence for the political philosophy of each of these thinkers. Godwin and Coleridge's most active period of political dissent corresponds exactly with the height of Tory repression. Although Coleridge believed his attitudes on reform opposed Godwin's, there were in fact many convergences of opinion. The impact which the government's policy had upon the ideas of these two critics can be seen in the course of their rhetoric up to 1795. Both would be driven away from editorial criticism and pamphleteering by the failure of political agitation during these years. This retreat would form the crucial point of departure for romantic politics from its radical roots.

William Godwin has been called the architect of political radicalism by some critics. In keeping with the tenets of British radicalism, Godwin was searching for a return to first principles, the resurrection of basic Anglo-Saxon liberties as they were perceived to exist in the Bill of Rights.

The rhetoric of radical reformers in the early 1790's suggests their perception of an increasingly irrational vigilant movement on the part of the landed to undermine the principles of 1688 and to restore the prerogative powers of birth and title. Parliament, or at least the "parliamentary party", had lost ground. The Radicals wanted restoration more than reform. Questions of franchise were secondary to the need to purge the process of abuse.

William Godwin was in many respects an avid constitutionalist. He held a great admiration for Edmund Burke, and for Burke's notions of political organicism and continuity. Even after Burke's defection to the Tories in response to the war with France, Godwin developed an increasingly Burkeian rhetoric. There is great philosophical consistency in the course of Godwin's writings. His earliest studies comprised a history of English constitutional law. His greatest philosophical work, An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, was an abstraction of those principles which Godwin had perceived to be the foundations of British common law into a more comprehensive system of jurisprudence and social justice. It is, therefore, not surprising that his editorial attacks on the judicial abuses of 1793 and 1794 should turn on a careful analysis of the law and a criticism of process in the courts. Godwin's great hope, in Political Justice, lay in the sagacity of individual reason and conscience. To this end his great

faith for the just practice of the law was the English jury system and the law of precedent. Judges and statutes he viewed as unnatural intrusions.

Godwin based his philosophy on the principles of necessity and general benevolence. He saw the central evil in the world as subsisting in the rights of property. Political Justice sought to abolish property and the dual hierarchies of crown and mitre. These same principles would be defended by Coleridge, and romantic poets from Blake to Shelley. But romanticism conceived the need to attack the problem at the very roots of meaning. The world must change from the inside out. It is the subjective experience which alters external truth. To this end Coleridge would set his thoughts to revolutionizing the mind of the age.

England during the 1790's was undergoing a profound ideological crisis, a quiet revolution. At the heart of this transformation was the rejection of modern dualism, the rationalistic analysis which Descartes had formulated. Romanticism, according to A.E.Hancock, can only be described in negative terms, as a reaction to what it is not.⁴ The first generation romantics rejected not only the imposition of a determined social order, but the determinism of rationalism itself. This is not to say that romanticism is fundamentally

irrational, but that it denies the limitations of analytic reason. That is, romanticism postulated an intuitive conception of the universe which transcends time and space. The mechanical structure of the Newtonian World with its linear sequential ordination of matter and form could not provide such a leap. The positivism which begins with Cartesian dualism represented a denial of will, a sundering of mind and body. The romantic renunciation of dualism postulated its alternative, the recognition of the dialectic. Dialecticism is at the core of the ideological, social and political conflict of the age. It is an age haunted by metaphors of marriage, in search of resolution, moving towards synthesis. It explains the ongoing revision of Godwin and Coleridge. It is consistent with the apparent dichotomy between radicalism and romanticism. It carries with it a paradoxical commitment, to preserve continuity and to reform the counter-revolution.

Dialecticism is the basis of Coleridge's art. As such, however, it may not be regarded as some metaphysical abstraction. Integration is the principal goal of this process. The problem which Coleridge was challenged by was the increasing alienation of the individual from the community, in the most complete sense. Political, religious and social forms existed as barricades to social integration. The romantic mind sought to synthesize individual action with the structure of society.

David Aers⁵ has argued that Coleridge's work, specifically the poetry, attempts to develop a language which denies history, particulars, and personality, in order to assert

the ascendancy and truth of general principles and universals. Aers argues that Coleridge had no specific interest in politics or society and favors an almost neo-platonic mysticism. This argument runs contrary to accounts by John Colmer⁶, Marilyn Butler⁷, and others, who describe Coleridge as an astute critic of society. The collected letters compiled by Earl Lesley Griggs⁸ would tend to confirm this latter assessment. Coleridge did indeed assert principle over personality; however, it was the principle of individual liberty and the will which he averred.

The individual and nature are involved in a processive and ongoing dialectic. The resolution between the active and the passive, agency and ideology comprises a necessary union between particulars and universals. Contrary to Aers' assertion, this is an essentially historical process. Coleridge's dialectic must integrate substance and form, society and politics. To this end Coleridge's later career will lead him to journalism, tracts on education, and a series of lay sermons aimed at a reconstitution of the ruling classes. He becomes increasingly convinced that the restructuring of government is insufficient. With the repressive legislation of 1795, he recognizes the futility of any efforts to do so. The basis of power must change first; political will must change before political structure can be altered. Reform must generate from the personal to the public and back.

It was the insistence on an individualistic, ethical basis for government that was the chief bone of contention between Coleridge and Godwin. While Coleridge agreed with Godwin's rejection of property, he could not accept Godwin's atheism. The religious principle is central to Coleridge's conception of politics and society. The way in which the politics of the English Romantics was to resolve itself in a religious synthesis was at the core of English "romantic radicalism". The very political need for Coleridge to find some universal ethical premise for his philosophy has been argued by Lawrence Lockridge in Coleridge the Moralist. His chapter on "Coleridge and the British Moral Tradition"⁹, focuses on "Hedonists, Egoists, and Utilitarians", all forms of false consciousness in Coleridge's view. Lockridge describes a tradition in romantic radicalism which ran from sensualist to samaritan; from the tangible essence and mystery of Blake, Byron, and Keats, to the organized materialist crusades of slum worker and missionary reformer. As for himself, Coleridge was not in favor of a theocratic state, but he was convinced that without some universal ethical principle underlining it, all revolution risked the Terror. This distinction comprised the essential break in direction and scope between romantic and radical ideology. Radicalism would extend its secular libertarian pragmatism to culminate in the philosophic radicalism of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill. The romantic

principle would be explored through the metaphor of the grail quest; the search for God in Nature, the search for God in Man. It will take the poets farther and farther away from public life and the specifics of political reform. However, in order to understand this divergence of ideologies one must return to the political catalyst behind it.

It is unlikely that the actions of the Tory Government against the radical members of corresponding societies during the period of repression has much to do with the substance of English radicalism. It is more likely that any group, radical, Leveller, or Jacobin, would have produced the same response from government at this time. The concern was security, the fear was of seditious practices, the substance of those practices, an irrelevance.

The genuine motive for the administration's policies of repression was the political cohesion of Pitt's cabinet, while conservative reaction and alarm were used as a tool to achieve that end. There is no doubt that alarm at the so-called "seditious activities" of radical associations was, at one level, genuine. Fear could not have been used as an effective political tool if it did not exist. The substance of and foundation for that fear must, however, be distinguished from the fear itself. Contemporary accounts indicate that the cause of the fear was unfocused, some unknown threat to King and

constitution. This fear was not only utilized by Pitt, it was also maintained and even escalated by him. Radical groups were targeted for prosecutions. They were, in turn, increasingly convinced that Pitt was persecuting them for his own ambitious ends and not through any genuine concern for security. From the prime minister's perspective, if the legislation he sought to enact required smoke, who better than these radicals to provide the fire?

As the repressive policies, which culminated in 1795, were predicated on alarm and not the substance of that alarm, the substance of English radicalism could do nothing to alter the pace of the legislation. Attempts at clarification, denunciation of Jacobin ties, arguments which supported the constitution and parliament, none of these could shift the course of the government reaction. It could even be argued that the more effective a tool alarmism became, the less radical critics might do to influence these events (if indeed they ever could). Those members of parliament who recognized the true nature of Pitt's ambition attempted to illuminate the House from the outset. Sheridan, Fox, and even Lauderdale would in turn argue against the tide of Pitt's repression.

The result of the futility and frustration which political critics experienced during these years was that many began to split away from the political mainstream. There were some, such as Joseph Thelwell, who continued to agitate directly

for parliamentary reform. However, the ideological underpinnings of the movement became increasingly removed from public activity and the issue of legislative reform. This departure would take two increasingly diverse directions. William Godwin would pursue a rationalist solution to social problems; while Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who would become a long standing friend, would see the problem as transcending rationality, requiring a solution which penetrated to the roots of rationality, namely, intuition.

The early writings of Coleridge comprise the most overtly political works of his career. Yet his increasing concern with philosophical systems and poetics is not, as some critics would have it, a departure from social and political issues. Rather, this new direction in Coleridge's work marks the investigation of new methodology rather than new substance. Coleridge has not abandoned his interest in politics and particulars, he has simply recognized the inadequacy of existing political devices to achieve legitimate social reform. Power as it existed in England, as it had existed in France, could not prevent abuse. Without a revolution of spirit and mind, reform was tyrannical and arbitrary. The investigation of the process and substance of this revolution would lie at the heart of the poet's imagination. Coleridge would devote a lifetime's creative power to the resolution of a system which could integrate action

and understanding.

Dialecticism, and the refusion of man with nature, constituted a quintessentially political objective. Writings from the period between 1794 and 1796 should indicate the course of Coleridge's frustration with radical politics, these constitute the basis of his new romantic radicalism. However, it will be as a rejection of Godwin's alternatives that the fundamental divergence of romanticism will become clear, a divergence which would spring from the material events of reaction and reform.

Notes to Introduction

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2. Bertrand Russell, The History of Western Philosophy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946) p.497
3. John Stuart Mill, On Bentham and Coleridge (New York: Harper & Row, 1950) p.104
4. A.E.Hancock, The French Revolution and the English Poets (New York: The Kennikat Press, 1967) p.46
5. David Aers, "Coleridge: Individual, Community, and Social Agency" in David Aers, J.Cook, & D.Punter, Romanticism and Ideology (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) pp.82-102, p.83
6. John Colmer, Coleridge, Critic of Society (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959) passim
7. Marilyn Butler, Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760 - 1830 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) pp. 90-91
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9. Laurence Lockridge, Coleridge the Moralist (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977)

CHAPTER ONE

The suppression of the radical press' and of those associations which were identified with parliamentary reform, from the King's Proclamation against Seditious Practices of 1792 to the so-called "Gagging Acts" of 1795¹, was a practical move for political consolidation by the government of William Pitt and George III. It was the government's intention to ensure the security of the realm against any insurgency, foreign or domestic; it was William Pitt's intention to ensure the cohesion and unity of his ministry against any opposition. To this end, reform politics, particularly reforming politicians, were targeted by the government as a recognizable danger and that danger as a rallying point for public support. Whether this policy was a reasonable response to the dangers and alarms of these years or not, radical critics perceived the government's actions as the result of political opportunism. The increased frustration with politics which resulted from such perceptions would cause radicalism's eventual breach with mainstream politics after 1795.

It must be understood that the political climate of England during these years was one of tension and paranoia². Undoubtedly, these fears were felt to be quite reasonable, both at the individual and the public levels. After the loss of confidence which resulted from the conclusion of the American

war, the Wilkesite demonstrations³ and the Gordon Riots⁴ of the 1780's took on a particularly bitter, anti-government tone. By the early 1790's, many loyalists associated "Reform" with the erosion of the State's prestige, as a threat to both King and parliament. Ireland became a testing ground for so-called "rebellious associations" and was becoming an increasing problem. A pro-Irish and pro-French revolutionary press was gaining momentum, with the support of such "respectable" radical organizations as the "Society for Promoting Constitutional Information". These included such establishment luminaries as Sir Cecil Wray and Major John Cartwright. Perhaps the most tangible manifestations of unrest occurred with the increasing incidence of mutiny and insubordination which culminated in the Mutiny Act of 1784⁵. The increasing incidence of courts martial in the Navy and the Army were viewed as signs of the breakdown of institutional discipline and the precursor to rebellion.

The event which would crystallize public fear more than any other was the Revolution in France. From 1789 to 1792, most English radicals perceived the Revolution as the great experiment for liberty and political justice. There were, on the other hand, those conservative reformers like Edmund Burke who believed tyranny to be inherent in the new French politics. However, most advocates of reform would not break with the

French cause until after the prison massacres of September 1792; the most radical of these would not recant until after the execution of Louis XVI. Regicide was still an impossible thorn in the side of most English constitutional consciences. Yet, regardless of revisionism on the part of English radicals after 1792⁶, the government and to a large extent the public continued to associate the politics of reform with Jacobinism. Marilyn Butler has pointed out that "England experienced the same levee en masse which occurred on the continent, but polarized in defense of John Bull"⁷.

The intentions of government as the representative of the public will is one matter, the intentions of individual politicians is another. The years between 1789 and 1792 were a critical time for the internal cabinet politics of William Pitt. He had to contend with George III 's personal policies of intervention and patronage⁸, and at the same time manoeuvre around his opposition - the Portland Whigs. Pitt, to a large extent, shelved any personal sympathies for parliamentary reform during this time in order to outflank both crown and opposition. The King came to see Pitt's apparent avoidance of reform as the triumph of his own influence. While Pitt continued to identify certain Whig members with reform politics, he supported measures to single out radical activities as seditious practices. At the same time he employed a policy of patronage himself; he brought

as many of the conservative Whigs on side as he could, and through his increased influence with the King, discredited many of the "King's Men". Such negotiation is evidenced by Pitt's own discussion of his bid for the Duke of Portland, in a letter to Lord Grenville of July 22, 1792:

I imagine out of delicacy to Lord Guilford there should be some caution in giving opinions about his successor; but I think it will clearly be best to give a decided support to the Duke of Portland when the vacancy happens...The King gave me full authority to offer the Duke of Portland the blue ribbon, and expressed great readiness to show any marks of distinction to the respectable parts of the party [the conservative Whigs] provided it was not accompanied with too much power.⁹

By offering Portland the office of chancellor, Pitt split the opposition and consolidated his own cabinet.

Although negotiations with the Portland Whigs seriously divided that party, an obstacle to Pitt's bid for consolidation persisted in the form of Charles James Fox. Lord Portland did not withdraw his patronage of Fox despite Pitt's attempts to isolate him. The belief that Fox was associated with the Society for the Friends of the People may have formed part of Pitt's motivation in targeting the Society for investigation in May of 1792. Perhaps an active prosecution of the radical press at this time would have been less essential if those members whom Pitt had identified with the reform associations had lost Portland's protection. Without the Duke's patronage, Fox in particular

might have been only a voice in the political wilderness. The political necessity of Pitt's campaign would have been greatly reduced. With these considerations in mind, the King's Proclamation against Seditious Practices of 1792 must be seen as the result of a real fear in the mind of the King which had been focused and sharpened by his prime minister¹⁰.

What the King and government saw as implicit in the act becomes clear in a consideration of the debates, first in the Commons on May 25th, 1792, then in the Lords on May 31st. The Master of the Rolls described the publications which would be dealt with in extremely general terms. He admitted the difficulty of prosecution given current laws; "Some [pamphlets alleged seditious] were speciously worded, but they covertly aimed at the destruction of our form of government"¹¹. The government would, therefore, set about to amend the "current laws" as it felt necessary to the purposes of political cohesion and national security. The radicals, on the other hand, would construe this policy as a deliberate attack on the constitution and the freedoms of speech, press, and assembly.

There are two principal interpretations of the attitudes which prompted the Proclamation on Seditious Writings. G.S. Veitch, in his 1913 classic, The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform, asserted that the Proclamation reflected the government's response to the reform manifestoes and Jacobin addresses which had gained momentum by the spring of 1792¹². Veitch argued that the concern over "seditious writings" was essentially a domestic concern over the increasing appeal of certain corresponding societies associated with the Painite radicals. He does not believe that there was any direct causal connection between these events and the Revolution in France, not, at least, as early as May 1792. He points out that neither nation nor ministry was yet decidedly hostile to France. In fact, he argued, Talleyrand was in London that very month negotiating for some degree of goodwill and accomodation between France and the British government. The French diplomat wrote in January of that year, "believe me, an understanding with England is not a Chimera"¹³. Veitch contends that at the time "it was the general belief that the Proclamation was directed at the Friends of the People."¹⁴ More recently, Clive Emsley has drawn a similar distinction between security concerns associated with the war with France and earlier motives which prompted the Proclamation of 1792. Referring to the course of legislation from 1792 to 1795, Emsley points out that although it might

...therefore be seen as a reflection of the lurch by Pitt and his ministers toward the kind of comprehensive legislation limiting individual freedoms which was introduced at the outset of the two great wars of the twentieth century...it is also clear that some of this legislation was in embryo in Pitt's mind some months before the outbreak of the war.¹⁵

Combining both the political and the security aspects of the legislation in his explanation, Emsley remarks that Pitt's use of repression was the "reflection of fear and the recognition of good propaganda".¹⁶

Albert Goodwin's account of the government's position during the years of repression also attempts to balance the suggestion that the radicals were being used as a political tool with a recognition that the government was legitimately alarmed by the events in France and their implications for England. His 1979 publication, The Friends of Liberty, places a larger emphasis on the "Gallican Menace" as the source of debate and ensuing legislation against seditious writings. He stresses the French dimension in English radicalism, rather than its Painite overtones, as the source of conservative alarm. His suggestion that Robespierre's introduction of the "Manchester Men" Watt and Cooper to the Jacobin club in Paris was bound to be regarded by the British government with genuine alarm and suspicion is convincing. However, there is some suggestion in Goodwin's argument that this French dimension was used as a

rationalization rather than as a central motivation in the passing of legislation. It became useful to the Tory government to "brand those who were willing to fraternize with the French with the evocative label English Jacobins".¹⁷ Philip Anthony Brown provides a measured account of these events. Also acknowledging the political dimension behind the legislation, he suggests "they mixed precautions against a danger genuinely feared with an attempt to use panic as an instrument of state."¹⁸ More recently, both Erich Eyck and Robin Reilly have produced accounts of the life of Pitt which emphasize the political motivation behind the policies of repression. Returning to the question of the priority behind such legislation and undercutting the French factor, Eyck considers the Proclamation of 1792.

When in the spring of 1792 Pitt shivered the Whig party into fragments with his proclamation against seditious writings, he had never even toyed with the idea of making war on the French Revolution.¹⁹

Eyck points out that this perspective changed radically after the French declaration of war in 1793; nonetheless, the political motive behind Pitt's legislation persisted. Referring to Pitt's ongoing bids for cabinet solidarity, Eyck remarks

After each setback, with untiring zeal and unflinching patience, he [Pitt] always rebuilt the coalitions with which he hoped to bend fate to his will and conquer the French Revolution.²⁰

For Eyck, the objectives of foreign policy were one with the need for an unchallenged prerogative in cabinet and the House. Only through coalition and the destruction of the opposition could Pitt maintain the autonomy he required to defeat the French. National security was one issue he could use to bring the Whigs into a coalition. For those who came under the influence of the new legislation, only the political motive would seem clear.

Robin Reilly gives a very persuasive account of the pattern which Pitt's attempts at coalition and his policies of repression would take. Reilly argues that Pitt consistently used the legislation enacted against radical activities as a tool to achieve his coalition.²¹ He focuses in particular on the suspension of Habeas Corpus in May of 1794.

The use of the law for the purposes of political advantage has been argued from several perspectives. Douglas Hay has suggested that the criminal law of the eighteenth century was utilized by the ruling class as a "buttress to defend property".²² This argument is also made by E.P. Thompson with specific regard to the actions of the Pitt administration during the years of suppression 1792-1796.²³ However, Hay's argument has been countered by John Styles, who points out that "there was no systematic attempt to plug every loop-hole in the defense of property...capital statutes were

sloppily drafted, rarely debated, and often afterthoughts to other pieces of legislation."²⁴

It is unlikely that anything as comprehensive in scope as a systematic attack on reformers was either executed or contemplated. Had the government been capable of anything so effective as the conspiracy theories imply, it would have had a good deal less difficulty in carrying out its policies, both foreign and domestic. However, the continued need to prosecute radical activities, haphazardly or not, was regarded by radical critics as part of a larger scheme; one which did not directly connect with the substance of particular "offenses". The events which influenced the popular reaction and the government policy during the period which followed the September Massacres would polarize the rift between an increasingly national party on the right and an increasingly isolated reform contingent to the left. An apparent discrepancy between the periods of high alarm and action against radical activity intensified the belief of radical Whigs that the nature of politics was intrinsic. Power is an end not a means. There were indications in the course of events from 1792 to 1795 which strengthened this perception.

The issue of national security had brought the Portland Whigs into a degree of accord with Pitt's ministry. It is possible that the increased support which the conservative Whigs brought to the government made the legislation to suppress radical activity favoured policy. With the September Massacres

in France a few months later, this position solidified. The slaughter at Paris and Versailles served to crystallize conservative reaction and rally a popular anti-Jacobin zeal. Yet it must be remembered that the retreat from the French Revolution was not confined to the Tories. Even the most radical of the parliamentary Whigs, Charles Fox himself, could not countenance the carnage and mayhem across the Channel. In a letter of that September he writes " There is not in my opinion a shadow of excuse for this horrid massacre, not even the possibility of extenuating it in the smallest degree", and in a cooler but more bitter moment,

You will understand that I only mean to defend the Jacobins as far as the 10th of August inclusively; for if they have had any hand in the massacre of the 2nd of September and the killing of the prisoners at Versailles, there is no excuse, no palliation²⁵ for such cruelty and extreme baseness.

The great legist Romilly writes of these events with an uncharacteristic passion, expressing his disappointment in a letter to M.Dumont.

[H]ow could we ever have been so deceived in the chapter of the French nation as to think them capable of Liberty! wretches who after all their professions and boasts about Liberty and patriotism, and courage and dying, and after taking oath after oath, at the very moment when their country is invaded and an enemy is marching through it unresisted employ whole days in murdering women and priests and prisoners.²⁶

By the following February reaction had set in; the government held the cause of every true Englishman to be the prosecution of the war with France.

The war with France strengthened the resolve of both a conservative general public and the government to "deal" with the radical societies. More than ever, Radicalism was identified with Jacobinism. In this context, it was viewed as the intrusion of a danger from without rather than the persistence of a pressure from within.²⁷ It is necessary throughout this period to distinguish the reality of alarm from its value and utility for the purposes of ministerial policy. It became difficult for those critics of government policy who were sympathetic to reform to maintain any confidence in the intentions and actions of the ministry as the war progressed.

Historians continue to debate whether Pitt had intended to go to war with France. Certainly, his budget speech of February 1792 stands as evidence to the contrary.²⁸ Yet the question may be one of when rather than if. Donald Groves Barnes believes that Pitt's ambition had always been to complete and consolidate the legacy of Chatham: to destroy the diplomatic and commercial power of France.²⁹ With this in mind, Pitt's policy of conciliation with the revolutionary government during the spring of 1792 is less enigmatic than it may seem. Pitt had hoped to give the new regime enough rope to hang itself. He

expected that France would fail quite quickly after the revolution through internal fiscal collapse. Auckland wrote to Grenville on February 14, 1792, that even French sources considered such a collapse a serious possibility:

Perregaux's despondency as to French affairs is a very serious symptom. He is well informed, of a cool judgement, and hitherto has been disposed to disbelieve ~~our~~ prophecies of bankruptcy and further confusions.³⁰

This position would seem consistent with Pitt's domestic policies during 1792. But even if his intentions toward France had been peaceful prior to November of that year, the invasion of the Low Countries made an expensive military engagement unavoidable; Pitt was resigned to war. The French declaration in the spring of 1793 presented his government with a fait accompli. The dispute would continue, however, as to whether this war was one of defense or of intervention. Elie Heckscher has argued the interventionist line in his analysis of The Continental System; he asserts the necessary connection between Anglo-French trade war, domestic politics, economics, and finally, the armed confrontations after 1793³¹. Certainly the Whig critics of Pitt's administration saw the war as interventionist and opportunist, both in terms of foreign policy and the current raft of reactionary legislation. They became increasingly convinced that the attack on the radical societies was simply a tool to neutralize the opposition. This position

becomes increasingly evident in the course of parliamentary debate after the declaration of war.

Sheridan's speech in the Commons of February 28, 1793, expresses the view that Pitt was once again employing alarmism as an instrument of political consolidation. He remarked that,

He should not attempt to prove that there never existed any sufficient reason for apprehending the danger of the sedition, or that there had not been any act of insurrection in any part of the kingdom to warrant the propagation of such reports; it was well known that there never was anything of that sort of consequence enough to merit the description which had been given of it, or to create the alarm which followed.³⁰

Therefore, he believed that,

This [rumors of sedition] was a fraud upon the public, and the House ought to feel it so, for he in his conscience believed that the alarm was spread for the express purpose of diverting the attention of the public for a while, and afterwards leading them the more easily into war.³¹

Sheridan overtly implies that Pitt had involved the country in a war of intervention; "led them" into it, in fact. His speech also sustains the charge that the legislation on seditious words and the Proclamation on Seditious Writings were and always had been used to consolidate ministerial power;

When ministers called upon that House to strengthen the hands of government, they were always bound to explain the real motives they had for asking that assistance.³²

He continues,

To strengthen the hands of government in carrying on a foreign war, without informing the

people of the real state of the country, was making mere machines of them, was conspiring against the constitution, and was laying down a plan by which their liberty may be lost forever.³⁵

Finally, to underline the discrepancy between the convenient alarm of the public at large, and that which he deemed the real intention and concern of the ministry, Sheridan directs the attention of the House to the issue of patronage, and the new offices being bestowed upon certain members of the cabinet. He remarks, with tangible sarcasm, that,

He was not sure that ministers felt any alarm at the time that they were endeavouring to alarm the country; for how did the chancellor of the exchequer act? In the course of the summer he proceeded with due solemnity to take the weight on himself of Warden of the Cinque Ports, and he conducted himself in that situation, in a manner equally pleasing to his hosts and to his guests and returned to town without any great apprehension of danger.³⁶

Returning to the reality of the so-called seditious words, which had been bandied about so freely in radical associations - specifically the Jockey Club and Painite groups³⁷ - Sheridan points out that "nothing that is being said, has not been said, and more forcefully, in the House." Finally, he remarks,

neither of these [societies], nor any other books could launch out more freely on the necessity of parliamentary reform, than the speeches of Mr. Chancellor Pitt and the duke of Richmond; or more grossly against kings than the right honorable

gentleman [Mr. Burke] upon former occasions.³⁷

Windham attempted to counter Sheridan's assertion with a rather specious clarification.

[N]o one is questioning that insurrections and riots are occurring. It is the "state of the country" rather, which might lead to insurrection and riots.³⁸

Although not intended, Windham's reference to some amorphous "state of the country" suggests some non specific non-event for which preventative but highly questionable legislation might be enacted. This was precisely the essence of Sheridan's criticism. Burke provides a more eloquently turned parry. With specific reference to the war, which was defensive in his mind, he remarks:

The right honorable gentleman [Sheridan] has said, in substance, that if domestic faction was combined with a foreign enemy, we must not declare war against the foreign enemy for fear of strengthening the domestic faction.³⁹

Burke has made a clever twist on Sheridan's contention that, if anything, government legislation against the radical societies was in itself creating alarm. Noting the sidestep by both Burke and Windham, however, Sheridan closed his speech with the declaration that such evasions merely supported the charges which he had laid at the feet of government.

As the substance of the debate in no way addressed the core of the issue raised, this was in itself something of an admission that [he] was correct.⁴⁰

The debate most closely tied to the government's attempt to revise the existing legislation on treason to suit its needs during this period occurred March 15th, 1793 on the Traitorous Correspondence Bill. The ancient statute of 25 Edward III was the basis of all definitions of treason. Indeed, this very statute would form the critical point of law in the state treason trials of 1794. The debate on traitorous correspondence indicated that almost eighteen months prior to the charge delivered by Chief Justice Eyre, the government had been fully aware that the law, as it existed in England, was inadequate to the tasks of the suppression and prosecution of the radical associations.

The Act 25 Edward III defines treason specifically as "compassing or imagining the death of the king". Although the wording afforded great latitude, judges had always been of the opinion that in order to constitute the highest degree of treason, there must be some overt act. The revised statute, as proposed by the Traitorous Correspondence Bill, was aimed at the correspondence and the exchange of arms, supplies, and monies with France. In an attempt to make this law more enforcable should it be passed, the government wanted to see some softening of the penalty attached to the existing statute, namely, death.

Fox criticized the bill as being unclear. He agreed there were doubts to be removed from the law of treason as it

stood, but, he argued, the proposed codicil only muddled the waters further. The definition of correspondence in the new bill was specious. Did it mean correspondence for demonstrably seditious purposes, or simply letters to friends living abroad, or in Sheffield for that matter? Would such an act interfere with normal commerce? Erskine⁴¹ provided a less sarcastic, and more precise legal objection, one which criticized the bill's own distinction between acts and intentions:

By the ancient statute of Edward III no man could be guilty of high treason unless his mind could be proved to be traitorous; whereas this bill, the very foundation of which was unjust suspicion of the people, declared specific acts to be traitorous without regard to the intentions specified in the original act of King Edward.⁴²

In the spring of 1793 there seemed considerable evidence that the government was acting arbitrarily and against the constitution. Thomas Paine had been tried and convicted for high treason, only a few months earlier, in absentia⁴³. Surely this was a matter of example, or propaganda. Daniel Crichton, an innocuous Scots merchant, was arrested and tried for "seditious words" which he had muttered when drunk, hardly a matter of national security. That Pitt was using these proceedings to

strengthen his own power seemed more and more the only explanation which credited the pattern of action and debate.

Arguments have been produced which accept a genuine concern over the possibility of domestic insurrection after 1793, as the government's primary motivation⁴⁴. Most modern critics, however, trace the pattern of suppressive legislation back to its origins. The royal proclamation of 1792 was not a response to the French, but a direct result of the domestic events of that same spring. Recollecting Pitt's interest in isolating the Foxite Whigs, Albert Goodwin also considers the domestic motivations behind the Proclamation. Suggesting that the chief concern of the government was the parliamentary support which characterized the Friends of the People, he points out that,

by a curious irony, both the conservative Whigs and the government seemed to have felt more anxiety at the fresh impetus given to parliamentary reform by the Friends of the People than by working class radicalism.⁴⁵

Lesley Mitchell echoes Goodwin in his citation of a letter from Lord Spencer to the Dowager Lady Spencer of the 22nd May 1792,

The proclamation [against Seditious Writings] would probably never have appeared if not that the late association of many members of parliament and others had not made these other publications more talked about and more alarming.⁴⁶

Goodwin, again, uses Lord FitzWilliam's analysis of the political motivations behind the Proclamations and the

societies. He asserts that Pitt's principal concern was the legitimizing influence which the membership of prominent Whigs lent to these associations:

But they took a very different aspect, when they were to be headed by some of the first men in the kingdom in point of rank, ability, and activity.⁴⁷

And setting 1792 apart from the reforming spirit of the 1780's he writes of the earlier trend being of a more legitimate spirit:

country gentlemen, men of property and of great stake in the general tranquility, and application had been made to parliament - in 1792 the agitation had been made with members of parliament in parliament, and the appeal is made from parliament to the people and to the very lowest order of the people.⁴⁸

None the less, Goodwin balances FitzWilliam's assessment by paraphrasing the earl's own qualifier; "...while recognizing that Pitt had ulterior party motives in seeking to divide the old from the new Whigs"⁴⁹.

The argument that Pitt had "ulterior party motives" is one which may be strengthened by a recognition of the weakness of the Proclamation itself. The Proclamation was essentially issued as a warning and as a policy statement by the King and Pitt. It depended on existing legislation for prosecution and simply requested the gathering of information; in this sense it was more a royal commission. Had either the Paineite reform societies or French Jacobinism been the real target of the

government in May 1792, stronger measures would have been adopted at that time. As it was, the Proclamation did little to stem the tide of radicalism; but it came close on the heels of Thurlow's dismissal and rumors of Pitt's own insecurity after the Oczakov fiasco⁵⁰. Portland himself helped to draft it, and talk of coalition raged all summer long. When real fear of Jacobinism was felt, decisive action was taken, and it was directed at the French; first with Paine's conviction in absentia, then with the Aliens' Act⁵¹. Both these measures occurred in December 1792. They followed the French invasion of the Low Countries, which was in turn followed in the new year by the French declaration of war.

There is no doubt that the political motive for legislation against the radicals by the government must be set beside an equally political impulse to criticize the government's policy by the opposition. Yet, the greatest rewards in patronage were to be achieved through acquiescence, not obstruction. Beyond a purely cynical political interest, the alignment of loyalties and personalities must be considered. Finally, there is the question of trust. Bias can be detected in the speeches of Burke and Sheridan respectively. Those conservatives who believed the accounts of the government spies would shout "panic"; those radicals who suspected all of Pitt's

dealings and believed themselves the objects of persecution would shout "abuse of process". Still it remains, for whatever reason, sincere or venal abuse of process occurred. Just as it remains that whether to confront a state emergency or to consolidate an arbitrary cabinet prerogative - a Pitt prerogative - legislation was attempted and political manoeuvres pursued which would undercut the representative nature of the House and override the impartiality of the Courts. This was the only reality which the radicals would acknowledge. And it was this very real impression which would direct the development of their ideas and actions until 1796.

Allowing that the significant perspective which influenced radical opinion was a per^sistent belief in the opportunistic and corrupt nature of Pitt's policies, it is useful to return to Robin Reilly's account of these events. Reilly believes that Pitt learned the lessons of political intrigue in the aftermath of the Gordon Riots. The difference in gamesmanship and timing between Pitt and Fox was complete. Reilly summarizes the essence of this rift and the nature of politics and power:

Fox who had spoken against the government, declared himself hurt, mortified, and filled with indignant resentment. He had not yet learned the

ways of the House and was, indeed, never to understand them. The "independent" members, mostly representatives of county constituencies and less interested in faction than what they conceived at any time to be their duty to their country might vote for reform in abstraction; but measures overtly impinging on the prerogative of the Crown smelt to them of treason and would never have their votes. This lesson obscure to Fox was not lost on Pitt...He learnt that a defeated government might remain in office and recover its majority in the House; that intemperate speech and behavior seldom achieved their aims; and for all his apparent inattention, Lord North knew more about survival than any of his contemporaries.⁵²

Two other facts needed to be counted during this crisis: that public opinion had swung back to the government, and the recognition by the opposition that public agitation could no longer be considered a safe or acceptable method to bring on reform. The intriguing question which must have occurred to Pitt, however, was whether public opinion could be effectively used by the government to preserve the status quo. Could this discarded opposition foil be picked up by the cabinet to consolidate reaction? Reilly emphasizes the impact which the Gordon Riots had on Pitt:

As a student of History, Pitt must have been already aware that when the people believed the constitution to be threatened, whether by the sovereign, by parliament, or by a disaffected minority, they united to defend the established order.⁵³

and finally,

Though they had helped to maintain a government which he chose to oppose, the riots held for [Pitt] lessons which he was later to find valuable.⁵⁴

The core of Reilly's argument is his chapter on "the dissection of the Whigs". He states his thesis clearly, and begins with the Proclamation on Seditious Writings:

In May 1792 Pitt embarked upon a series of intricate negotiations that illustrate his mastery of political manoeuvre. His aim was nothing less than the destruction of the opposition. His pretext for talks was the threat to national security⁵⁵

Reilly continues to describe the precise mechanism of this political gambit:

By holding out to the Whigs the invitation to discuss national policies, Pitt was also admitting the possibility of a coalition. If his offer was accepted, a wedge would be driven between the conservative Whigs and the reformers that might divide the party into irreconcilable halves; if it was rejected, he would have demonstrated once again, the intransigence and factional interest of the opposition.⁵⁶

Some critics have taken the absence of the coalition in 1792 as evidence that Pitt never had any real interest in forming one⁵⁷. The point is particularly moot, as coalition was not strictly necessary to Pitt's strategy; the negotiations were enough in themselves. Fox was suspicious of Pitt's intentions, but as Reilly points out, although "he was convinced that Pitt's approaches were insincere... he failed to understand that the weapon of negotiation was double edged"⁵⁸. Malmesbury remarked of Fox's concern after a dinner with him and Loughborough on June 16th 1792:

[Fox] doubted Pitt's sincerity and suspected he had no other view than to weaken their party and... that to divide the opposition was his great object.⁵⁹

The plan, as Reilly remarks, "had all the virtues of simplicity and lack of risk combined with the certainty of political advantage".⁶⁰

The war with France ultimately consolidated Pitt's political victory. But in as much as the war intensified the level of alarm and the general state of emergency, it had to be utilized in conjunction with a vigorous prosecution of Radicalism and "dissenting groups".⁶¹ If fear was to be a successful political tool to consolidate reaction, then it must be maintained and directed. To this end the affair of Daniel Crichton,⁶² and the Scottish Treason Trials, coincide with the first six months of the war; the suspension of Habeas Corpus and the indictment of the twelve English Radicals correspond to the summer of 1794 and the coalition with the Portland Whigs that July. As Reilly surmizes;

When the French declaration of war was received in London on February 8th [1793], Pitt's political victory was complete... It was clear that if Pitt were to be defeated it must be because he chose to reject victory. No one but the king could bring him down now. No one but Pitt could provide the occasion.⁶³

With his cabinet consolidated and his opposition neutralized, Pitt retained the King's confidence and support.

George III interpreted these events as a rejection of the reform movement by his chief minister and a personal victory for himself and his prerogative. Such constitutional overrides as the suspension of Habeas Corpus in 1794 and the course of abuses in the law were attributed to the cohesion and loyalty of his cabinet and first ministry. Through these manoeuvres, Pitt could ingratiate himself with the only remaining check on his political autonomy, the crown. The opposition, however, sensed the danger and attempted to retrench, their increased agitation and decreased prudence was a mark of lost ground. Their project of a convention in Edinburgh would draw considerable reaction from the government benches.

It was with respect to the Scottish Treason Trials that the greatest outrages of abuse of process were committed. The significance of this episode in the minds of the radicals and the new Whigs was immense. The proceedings, they considered, were little more than a witch hunt, orchestrated by Braxfield, Dundas, and Pitt respectively. Braxfield presided over the trials of those members of the Edinburgh Convention: Skirving, Margarrot, and Gerrald from England, Muir and Palmer from Scotland. Objections in the House of Commons were raised, not only to the misconduct of Braxfield and the jury during the trials, but more particularly to the severity of the sentencing. The sentences were not only extreme in hardship, but they were

in no way appropriate to the charge; they were inconsistent with both statute and precedent in Scottish Law. Thomas Muir, a brilliant young Edinburgh lawyer, was sentenced to fourteen years transportation and detention at Botany Bay, partly for recommending Thomas Paine's book and reproducing certain passages of it for circulation. It should be pointed out that Muir chose to defend himself, and effectively admitted his intention to change the existing government, if not overthrow it. Nonetheless, the punishment did not fit the crime.

Lord Lauderdale decried the sentences in the Lords. The crux of his argument was the nature of the charge, which he pointed out was not High Treason, but leasing making or seditious libel. Lauderdale held that "not one case in the whole history of Scotch criminal law stood upon record either to justify, or even to countenance the proceedings"⁶⁴. Muir and Palmer were charged with leasing making - uttering words or publishing matter tending to bring discord between the King and his people - the indictments charged no other crime. He continued to point out that the punishment of transportation could not, by the laws of Scotland, be inflicted for the said crime of leasing making. The discussion was expanded by Lauderdale to include the possibility of High Treason. Under Scots law, not even Treason carried the sentence of transportation; banishment may be sentenced, but not

transportation. The difference between the two sentences is critical. The former entails only ejection from the Realm, while the latter finalizes destination and custody to a court ordered place of detainment. Even had the court proceeded against Muir, Palmer, et al, for the crime of high treason, they should not have been liable to transportation. As they were in fact charged with leasing making, the sentence was doubly odious.

Lauderdale continued his speech by intimating that the Scottish Trials had been the result of political calculation, that they were not sincerely and justly executed in defense of the Realm. If the Government had expected these trials to result in the dissolution of the reform movement, it would be disappointed. Instead, he contended, Braxfield's decision would strengthen the resolve of the reform associations:

[he considered] the present cases as of a nature calculated to strike at the very foundation of all obedience, and consequently, to engender discontent, intemperance, and disorder.⁶⁵

Braxfield's duty, as Lauderdale saw it, was to avoid such disruption. He remarked:

If the sentence of a judge shall be likely to do more injury than the animadversions which he might make upon it might produce, he should consider it his duty to bring the subject forward and to prevent the greater evil by the less.⁶⁶

There is almost the suggestion, in Lauderdale's speech, that he believed that the government's purpose was, more than focusing alarm, the creation of alarm. Through the very prosecutions which purported to stabilize the situation and assuage public fears, the courts had successfully escalated the level of panic to that most suitable for the purposes of political control, i.e., "as calculated to engender discontent, intemperance, and disorder".⁶⁷ What other purpose could a wilful abuse of process - followed by a deaf ear on appeal - possibly serve? He closes with a summary of these inequities:

That they [Muir, Palmer, et al] were tried by a court not competent for that purpose, by jurors to whom there were lawful objections, upon charges not specified by the law, where evidence was admitted of facts not in those charges, where witnesses not incompetent were rejected, condemned to a sentence inapplicable to those charges and that sentence executed in a way inconsistent with the wishes of the court.⁶⁸

Whether intended or not, the general reaction to the Scottish trials and sentencings was to view them as more provocative than anything the individual societies had been capable of themselves. J. Holland Rose accounts for just such sentiments in his definitive study of Pitt and the Great War. He writes:

A spy, "J.B.", who regularly supplied Robert Dundas with reports about the Edinburgh club, wrote on the 14th of September 1793, that the sentence on

Palmer had given new life to the association; for after a time of decline in the early summer, more than 200 now attended at the meetings. On the 28th of October, he stated that nearly all the Scottish clubs had revived.⁶⁹

This report by "J.B.", also strengthens the argument for the political utility of the trials as a "calculation to engender discontent". If the intelligence reports which Dundas had received from his informers suggested that the associations had been declining at the time of the indictments, what was the real purpose of the prosecutions? Holland Rose implicates Pitt. Although he will not go so far as to attribute any back room machination to the conduct of the trials, he acknowledges that Pitt was clearly aware of the abuse of process, and that he condoned it; "In short, he acted as an alarmist and not as a dispenser of Justice."⁷⁰ He continues by pointing out that Burke felt that "Pitt and Grenville [had] not the slightest fear of the spread of French Principles in England...Surely if British and French Principles were so different, we were in no more danger of infection from the Jacobins than of catching Swine Fever".⁷¹

There were considerations which the radicals chose to ignore on the question of reform. Bad harvests through 1794 and 1795 created inflation and starvation. In conjunction with the war these events were bound to have a destabilizing effect. Pitt must have viewed the clamp down on the "visible symptoms" of

unrest as a justifiable precaution to balance the danger which food shortages and high prices would necessarily create. Radical critics would, however, regard such cures as a means of extending the disease. The critics of Pitt's policy felt that Pitt's continuence of the war was expensive, diverting food and finances desperately needed at home into a wasteful and immoral intervention abroad.

The result of the Edinburgh Convention and its subsequent persecution by the courts was the escalation of radical demonstrations. The London Corresponding Society agreed to form a British Convention in response to the ill-treatment of the Edinburgh delegates. Hardy circulated a letter to similar associations in early April 1794 calling for such a convention:

Notwithstanding the unparalleled audacity of a corrupt and overbearing faction which at present tramples on the rights and liberties of our people, our meetings cannot, in England, be interrupted without the previous adoption of a Convention Bill--a measure it is our duty to anticipate...Let us then form another British Convention. We have a central situation in our view, which we believe would be most convenient for the whole island, but which we forbear to mention...till we have the answers of the Societies with which we are in correspondance. Let us have your answer then by the 20th at the farthest, earlier if possible, whether you approve the measure and how many delegates you can send, with numbers also, if possible, of your societies.

P.S. We have appointed a secret committee on this will you do the same.⁷²

The London Corresponding Society met at Chalk Farm on April 14th to further these plans.

The Chalk Farm meeting, and the secret plans to hold a British Convention, greatly fuelled the concerns which Pitt had fostered in the House. During the summer of 1794 Pitt would achieve his coalition and shatter the Whigs. Holland Rose details the proceedings which ended in the suspension of Habeas Corpus on the 16th of May:

Despite the warning of Fox that the remedy now proposed was worse than the evil it sought to avert; despite the pleas of Grey and Sheridan against indecent haste in hurrying on this arbitrary measure, it was forced through every stage of the Commons at that single sitting; finally at half past three in the morning, the numbers of Whig protesters sank to 13, while the ministerialists still mustered 108 strong...This collapse of the opposition was due to a sharp cleavage in its ranks on the vital issues now at stake.⁷³

The cabinet changes which resulted from these manoeuvres, combined with the effective elimination of any opposition to government policy in the Commons, would critically alter the position of the radical associations. Holland Rose continues his account:

The duke of Portland took over from Dundas the Home Office, which was thenceforth limited to British and Irish affairs, Dundas becoming Secretary of State for War, and Windham Secretary at War. The changes were most opportune; for they strengthened the administrative machine and seemed to build up a national party strong enough to cope with the growing difficulties of the time.

Thenceforth there was no danger of the overthrow of the ministry.⁷⁴

Having used the Chalk Farm episode to suspend Habeas Corpus and obtain his coalition, Pitt had to justify his actions. The indictment and trial of twelve radicals in the Fall of 1794 demonstrated the severity of the crisis which had precipitated the legislation. Holland Rose contends that Pitt honestly miscalculated in his move for prosecutions. Yet he also suggests that the public temper that summer was greatly relaxed by events at sea and in France:

The panic pervading parts of England in May of 1794 was soon allayed by the news of Howe's victory, termed "the glorious First of June"; while in July the fall of Robespierre caused a general sense of relief. In view of these events Pitt would have done well to relax his efforts against the British Jacobins.⁷⁵

The acquittals of November 1794 certainly bear out the contention that Pitt miscalculated. The question, however, remains; did he miscalculate as to cause, or as to effect? Reilly would support the line that Pitt's move for indictment was a means of justifying the suspension of Habeas Corpus. With the diminution of public fears after July, it was still necessary to produce the proverbial body. The only error that Pitt made was in going for High Treason. The jury was

unwilling to convict, on such scanty evidence, in a crime which carried the death sentence.

Another consideration which emerges as a suggestive explanation for the November acquittals may be the Scots trials of 1793. There may have been a real need, in the wake of Braxfield's judicial atrocities, to vindicate English Justice at home. After the persistent rumours (circulated by reforming Whigs) of political cabaling in the courts it was essential, for the credibility both of the courts and the cabinet, that no abuse of process should attend the 1794 trials. In respect of both Scots and English trials, as Eych notes, "Pitt had overplayed his hand."⁷⁶

One response to the acquittals was a considerable boost of confidence for the corresponding societies. The London Corresponding Society swelled its ranks. This increase in the visibility of the societies was accompanied by a further concerns. The war did not go well in 1795 and there was a serious shortage of food. Both war and famine became central topics of conversation at public meetings and of debate in the press. Or so the government perceived. Pitt may have been losing his grasp by the fall of 1795. But opportunity was, as always for this brilliant tactician, just around the corner.

In October 1795, the King's carriage was stoned on the way to the opening of parliament. As a result, reference to the current state of emergency was incorporated into a proclamation against seditious meetings. On the strength of the incident, and the King's pledge of confidence in any measures adopted by his ministry, Grenville and Pitt moved two acts against treasonable practices and seditious meetings. Grenville's bill in the Lord's was presented November 6th, and Pitt moved the companion bill in Commons four days later. The radical suspicion that these bills constituted the final phase of Pitt's "plot" against the constitution is likely unfounded. Wilberforce, who had been an enthusiast for reform before the war and never an alarmist during it, helped draft the two acts and spoke in favor of Pitt's bill in the Commons. Pitt's genuine concern over the state of emergency, as he perceived it, is expressed in his remark to Wilberforce on the way to the session. Wilberforce's account was as follows:

Pitt's language, "My head would be off in six months were I to resign." I see he expects a civil broil. Never was a time when so loudly called upon to prepare for the worst."

The radical Whigs were not convinced. However, the parliamentary opposition to Pitt's measures was insufficient. The duke of Bedford wanted substantially more information before

he would endorse such an act. He distinguishes Pitt and Grenville's high handedness in this instance from past instances of reaction:

When the same ministers thought it proper to suspend the Habeas Corpus Act they did not dare to propose it without previously appointing a select committee, who reported to the House a mass of evidence which gave their proceedings at least the appearance of deliberation...It was not enough that the noble lord [Grenville] should declare that he was satisfied on the point. Parliament ought to know of the necessity of the measure before they adopt it.⁷⁸

Bedford wished to know in what respect the existing law was "defective, or wherein this bill was likely to amend it"⁷⁹.

His concern was shared by all the members who spoke against the bill. Lauderdale, in particular, was unconvinced by the alleged need and efficacy of this new law, and by the pretext for its introduction. The administration had been very quick to point to the London Corresponding Society as the instigator of the attack on the King. Lauderdale considered the government's accusations against the society to be groundless;

[he] did not believe there was the smallest connection between the London Corresponding Society and the mob who committed the outrage in Westminster.⁸⁰

In fact, it was Lauderdale's belief that the government itself was chiefly to blame for the incident.

The London Corresponding Society had no more to do with it than his Majesty's cabinet. The cabinet were ten times more involved because, by their commencement of the war, and their mad continuance of it, they had reduced the lower order of people to the most abject distress.⁸¹

Lauderdale's use of the cabinet as example is essentially a rhetorical device, a means by which to underline the innocence of the London Corresponding Society. Even so, behind his rhetoric remains a suspicion which he had held since the Scots trials of 1793- that Pitt was arranging the law to suit his own end. The two "gagging acts" which, despite protest, passed within the week, would suit Pitt's needs very well. Grenville's bill passed on second reading (contents 41, proxies 25, - 66: not contents 5, proxies 2, - 7). The high number of proxy votes for the government is telling. It would seem there were many who objected in principle but would not cross on this issue. The sway of patronage and influence was strong. A steadfast but failed minority consisted of Bedford, Lauderdale, Derby, Abinger, Chedworth, and by proxy, Guilford and Thanet. Needless to say, Pitt's bill in the Commons also passed, 266 to 51.⁸²

The two acts of 1795 were the capstone of Pitt's policies of repression. The theoretical became as treacherous as the actual, in the eyes of the law. The war would continue, the cabinet would fall in line, the agitation outside the House fall silent. A deep frustration, combined with the practical necessity of retreat, would drive most radical thinkers away from the arena of "active politics". Criticism would continue, however, through a new and subtler genre, through a new medium

of dissent. An underground revolution in the arts would replace the active vigilance of the societies. Thelwell and the London Corresponding Society would hold on for a few years, but Holcroft and Godwin left them behind. Godwin would revise Political Justice and Caleb Williams during 1796. Revision, and a turn towards fiction, would characterize his future works. Coleridge would also move on, with a journalism aimed at broader social issues in The Watchman in 1796, and the Friend in 1798. 1796 was also to be the beginning of his growth as a poet. The Eolian Harp would mark his first experiments with world-building. Only through a reconstruction of language could the world be changed, reintegrated. This was to be the ultimate political reform. The policies of Pitt and the failure of radical politics had set both Godwin and Coleridge on the road to achieving a medium of expression and dissent which would allow for a more intimate and effective communication of social criticism through fiction and drama. This would create a less didactic and discursive, more emotional and intuitive message for reform. Its impact would be far more powerful. This shift in genre is itself significant. In the case of Coleridge, the shift would be complete. As a poet he would transcend the limits of analytic reason and create a new perspective of matter and form through language.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. These were the Treasonable Practices Bill, introduced by Grenville in the Lords November 4, 1795; and the Seditious Meetings Bill, introduced by Pitt in the Commons November 10, 1795. These bills greatly restricted the freedom of the press, and meetings of more than fifty people.
2. George Rude, Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Viking Press, 1970) p.28
3. Asa Briggs, The Making of Modern England (New York: Harper & Row Inc., 1959) p. 95
4. Robin Reilly, Pitt the Younger 1759 - 1806 (London: Cassell Hd., 1978) p.71
5. J. Holland Rose, William Pitt and the Great War (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1911) p.114
6. Albert Goodwin, The Friends of Liberty (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1979) p.242
7. Marilyn Butler, Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) p.39
8. Richard Pares, King George III and the Politicians (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1953) p.161
9. H.M.C., Dropmore Mss., vol.ii(1791-1794), William Pitt to Lord Grenville, The Grainge, July 22,1792
10. Lucille Werkmeister, A Newspaper History of Great Britain 1792-1793 (Lincoln Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1967) p.80.
11. T.C. Hansard, A Parliamentary History of Great Britain Vol. 29 (New York: A.M.S. Press, 1966) p.1476
12. G.S. Veitch, The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1965) p.209
13. Ibid., p. 209
14. Ibid., p.211
15. Clive Emsley, "Repression, Terror, and the Rule of Law In England During the Decade of the French Revolution"

The English Historical Review, vol.90(1985) p.805

16. Ibid., p.802
17. Goodwin, p.209
18. Philip Anthony Brown, The French Revolution in English History (London: Frank Cass & Co.,1918) p.43
19. Erich Eyck, Pitt vs. Fox: Father and Son (London: G.Bell & Sons Ltd.,1950) p.244
20. Ibid., p.309
21. Reilly, p. 82
22. Douglas Hay, "Property, Authority, and the Criminal Law" in Douglas Hay, P.Linebough, & E.P.Thompson, Albion's Fatal Tree (London: Oxford University Press, 1975)p.215
23. E.P.Thompson, Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act (London: Oxford University Press,1975) p.269
24. John Styles, "Criminal Records" The Historical Journal, vol.xx(1977) pp.977-981
25. Charles James Fox, Memorials and Correspondence of Charles Fox (New York: A.M.S.Press, 1970) p.371 & 371.
26. Sir Samuel Romilly, Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, (London: John Murray Inc., 1960) Vol ii p. 4
27. Butler, p.8
28. Veitch, p.197
29. Donald Groves Barnes, George III and William Pitt 1783-1806 (New York: Octagon Books, 1965) p. 255
30. H.M.C., Dropmore Mss., vol.ii(1791-1794) Auckland to Grenville, Beckenham, February 14, 1792.
31. Elie P. Heckscher, The Continental System, An Economic Interpretation, (Oxford:The Clarendon Press,1922)see pt.I
32. Hansard, Vol 30, p. 523
33. Ibid., p.524
34. Ibid.

- 35. Ibid.
- 36. Ibid.
- 37. The government's greatest alarm was directed at the more extreme groups, like the Manchester Men. Representatives Watt and Cooper were presented to the Jacobin Club in Paris by Robespierre. See Goodwin, p.202 or Carl Cone's The English Jacobins, p.125
- 38. Hansard, Vol 30 p.535
- 39. Ibid.
- 40. Ibid., p.536
- 41. Thomas Erskine was the most famous barrister of the day; he had drawn considerable attention in the trial Thomas Paine. He would also conduct the defence in the trial of the twelve Radicals of 1794 on the charge of high treason.
- 42. Hansard, Vol 30, p.589
- 43. There was considerable speculation by opposition critics over the government's prosecution of Paine after he left England. Godwin asks "who is this monster Thomas Paine?", Markin & Pollin, Mucius Letters p.74
- 44. Goodwin, p.207
- 45. Ibid., p. 213
- 46. Mitchell, p. 179
- 47. Goodwin, p. 214
- 48. Ibid.
- 49. Ibid.
- 50. Barnes, pp. 230-242
- 51. This act, of December 1792, restricted immigration from France. See Goodwin p.266

52. Reilly, p. 49
53. Ibid., p. 54.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., p. 206
56. Ibid.
57. Dismissed as an argument in F. O'Gorman's The Whig Party and the French Revolution (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967) p. 91.
58. Reilly, p. 208.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. This would also include any of the anti-test associations.
62. Daniel Crichton was a tallow-chandler from Scotland who was arrested and tried for uttering "seditious words" while drunk and touring the Tower of London. His trial and sentencing drove William Godwin to write a second series of Mucius Letters in February of 1793
63. Reilly, p.209.
64. Hansard, Vol.31, p.263 for Lauderdale's speech. For a further account of the Scots Treason Trials see J.G.Fyfe, Scottish Diaries and Memoirs 1746-1843 (Stirling: Eneas Mackay, 1942) passim., or Henry Cockburn Memorials of his Time (Edinburgh:A&C Black,1861) Ch.ii
65. Ibid., p.264.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., p.275.
69. Holland Rose, p.178.
70. Ibid., p.180.
71. Ibid.

- 72. Ibid., p.188.
- 73. Ibid., p.191.
- 74. Ibid.
- 75. Ibid., p.192
- 76. Eyck, p.317
- 77. William Wilberforce, The Life of William Wilberforce
vol.ii (London: 1867) p.114
- 78. Hansard, Vol. 32, p.249
- 79. Ibid.
- 80. Ibid., p.250.
- 81. Ibid.
- 82. Ibid., p.253

CHAPTER TWO

The actions of the British government during the panic years of 1792-1796 encountered significant criticism from many exponents of radical parliamentary reform. One of the most prominent and articulate of these was William Godwin. Godwin has been called the architect of radical ideology by some;¹ he was certainly the most extreme in his conceptions of social reform. Godwin has been variously described as an anarchist,² a republican, a utopian and an atheist. All of these ascriptions are to some extent true. Yet despite the contradictions between the theoretical and the practical, Godwin was essentially a man of his age and its issues. His ideas must therefore be placed in the context of the events and the personalities which shaped them. His capacity for revision and growth make him an excellent barometer by which to assess the impact of government and politics on the intellectual climate of the age. The extent to which material events directed and were directed by the ideology of the day may be seen in the course of Godwin's writings for these years, particularly those essays which directly criticised the government's actions with respect to the Treason Trials of 1794 and its prosecution of Radical societies through 1795-1796.

William Godwin's own account of his early life is fragmentary. He attempted an autobiography, but lost interest. In a manuscript notation for 1805 he writes, " I shall probably never complete it. My feelings on the subject

are not what they were. I sat down with the intention of being nearly as explicit as Rousseau in the composition of his Confessions"³. Of his education under the influence of Mr. Samuel Newton, an Independent minister of Norwich, Godwin suggests more. "Ductility is a leading feature of my mind. I was his single pupil, and his sentiments speedily became mine. He was rather an intemperate Wilkite, but first and principally he was a disciple of the supra-Calvinist opinions of Robert Sandeman"⁴. Godwin's own break with faith came some years later. He began his career as a Dissenting minister at Stowmarket in Suffolk, but in 1781 he came in contact with a Mr. Frederic Norman who was "deeply read in the French Philosophers, and a man of great reflection and acuteness"⁵. Godwin writes of this period "My faith in Christianity had been shaken by the books which Mr. Norman put into my hands"⁶, and finally,

I found myself troubled in my mind on the score of the infidel principles which I had recently imbibed, but reading at Beaconsfield the Institutes of Dr. Priestley, Socinianism (with its denial of Christ's divinity) appeared to relieve so many of the difficulties I had hitherto sustained from the Calvinistic theology, that my mind rested in that theory, to which I remained a sincere adherent till the year 1788.⁷

It was in 1788 that Godwin turned his attention from literary works to political thought. This also began the period of work and thought for which the most detailed account may be

sustained. Godwin began a diary on the 6th of April 1788, which he continued until his death. It is filled with neat concise entries accounting for meetings, moments and moods. Of 1789 he writes with mixed emotion;

This was the year of the French Revolution. My heart beat high with great swelling sentiments of Liberty. I had been for nine years in principle a republican. I had read with great satisfaction the writings of Rousseau, Helvetius, and others the most popular authors of France. I observed in them a system more general and simply philosophical than in the majority of English writers on political subjects; and I could not refrain from conceiving sanguine hopes of a revolution of which such writings had been the precursors. Yet I was far from approving all that I saw even in the commencement of the revolution...I never for a moment ceased to disapprove of mob government and violence, and the impulse which men collected together in multitudes produce on each other. I desired such political changes only as should flow purely from the clear light of the understanding, and the erect and generous feelings of the heart.⁸

Godwin's introspective analysis provides the best summary of the attitude of mind with which he came to English politics in 1788. Political Justice⁹ was a manifesto for the liberty of reason. Godwin's tome rejects all external arbiters of authority; he attacks the church and all contrived governments of men. To Heaven itself Godwin addresses his "Sermons", "God himself has no right to be a tyrant"¹⁰. Godwin was particularly concerned with the course of English legislation from the period of the French Revolution on. The earliest and most vociferous of his critiques are the Letters of Mucius which appeared in the English Herald and Review. These are addressed to Grenville, Burke, Pitt, Dundas, and the

people of Ireland respectively. Reform and "the Irish question", formed the central focus for Godwin's criticism. In the years to follow, his position on these issues would be refined by a conflict between his fear of an increase in royal prerogative and the Tory cabinet's arbitratio, and his rejection of the course of events in France. Godwin was in effect a practical man committed to ideal principles. His Political Justice argued for an anarchy predicated on right reason and the duty of individuals to act justly, yet he witnessed the great French experiment disintegrating into the mob violence of a "collective will"¹¹ directed by a fanatic political elite. Godwin was no Jacobin, nor was he a Painite; he was a rational reformer of the constitutional status quo. He would have argued his own position as that of a restorer of ancient Anglo-Saxon liberties, or perhaps only as a defender of the Revolution of 1688 and the Bill of Rights.¹²

The Mucius Letters began to appear in the English Herald and Review before 1788. The first, addressed to Lord Grenville, appeared in the October 3rd issue of 1785. The letter to Edmund Burke followed on December 1st of that same year. The first letter to William Pitt came out on April 3rd, 1786; it was followed on the first of May with another. The letters are intended to show the wisdom and probity of the Whigs, particularly Burke. Jack Marken, who has published most of the material from the pamphlets and papers written by

Godwin for this period remarks that Godwin's attitude toward Burke in these letters is "very flattering"¹³. Marken has found no record of Godwin and Burke actually having met but suggests its possibility in a meeting at Beaconsfield, where Burke had purchased an estate and Godwin preached for several months during 1783. Marken also suggests that in addition to Burke's basic politics, Godwin was particularly pleased by the control in his rhetoric.

The essential tension between Godwin's rejection of Jacobin politics and his growing concern over the increase in repressive and arbitrary policy in English government finally moved him to intervene in active politics. His initial inclination was to consider the world in terms of abstract principles. In the tradition of French and English positivism of the eighteenth century, Godwin conceived of the history of mankind as a history of continual improvement. This improvement, if not precisely guided by natural law, was certainly malleable under the aegis of increasing knowledge and the principles of Political Justice. He writes;

There is no science that is not capable of additions; there is no art that may not be carried to a still higher perfection. If this be true of all other sciences, why not morals? If this be true of all other arts, why not of social institutions?¹⁴

As Donald Locke has suggested in A Fantasy of Reason, Godwin's adherence to abstract principles was precisely his strength.

More than any other thinker of his time more than Burke or Bentham, Godwin was a political philosopher, concerned not with practical problems but with the universal principles that lie behind them, with the whole system of moral and political truth and prepared to draw the necessary conclusions with a logical coolness that often takes the breath away.¹⁵

For this reason, Godwin's entrance into the arena of practical politics in 1793 becomes all the more remarkable and all the more significant. What he could not tolerate in Jacobinism was its excessive and terrible pragmatism, the waste and debris of its practice and error, its absolute institutions. In its defense of the established estates Godwin perceived the same inclination to arbitration and terror as in English government. There is no ideological inconsistency between Godwin's rejection of Jacobinism and his criticism of the Tory cabinet. It was to be a matter of some practical confusion however, for as the political contest broke into two distinct camps by 1794, Godwin would be viewed as the champion of the radical cause and the enemy of those Church and King associations which tended to sympathize with Pitt's administration. Through his writings he risked the same prosecution as more overt agitators would incur. This period was something of a test of political faith for Godwin; it would draw him into a consideration of the

political abstract, force him to confront the political reality, and finally drive him to a rejection of political solutions in favor of moral and, ultimately, artistic revolution. The catalyst behind this transformation was the abuse of power and repressive excess of the Pitt government of 1793-1794.

From the inception of the revolution in France until 1792, Godwin could be considered a Whig apologist. With Paine's Rights of Man¹⁶, and the working through of his own philosophy in Political Justice, he became more singular in his politics. He was against the whole philosophy of "rights", believing instead in a society predicated on "duty". He also denied both the efficacy and the validity of political associations. He had brief contact with the Society of the Friends of the People, formed in February of 1792, and with the London Corresponding Society. As a scholar and historian of English law Godwin, not an anarchist, was a constitutionalist in the Burkeian sense; he therefore viewed corresponding societies as being coercive. He believed in the common law and the stability and continuity of history. Like Burke, he rejected sudden upheaval and change as being arbitrary and tyrannical by nature, as an imposition and not the directive of a voluntaristic progress. Certainly Godwin's early critiques, the Letters of Mucius, reflect a great admiration of Burke. He also had a great suspicion and disapproval of Pitt and his cabinet.

The first of the Mucius Letters derides Grenville for "the callous, malignant, and foolish caviling at Edmund Burke"¹⁷ in the Commons. The second, dated December of 1785, is a tribute to Burke and what Godwin calls his "Path of Honor". Godwin ranks Burke above those he considers "the most distinguished" writers of prose in the English language, namely, Swift, Hume, Shaftesbury, and Bolingbroke¹⁸. He makes a distinction between Burke and Rousseau, "your good sense and intellectual superiority have defended you from the visionary valetudinarianism of Rousseau"¹⁹. The letter is in essence a statement of devotion. There is little in the way of substantive political critique. The next Mucius letter follows this pattern in as much as provides a character sketch but, significantly, of Pitt.

There is a certain prescience in Godwin's letter to Pitt, and it betrays much of the philosopher's growing uneasiness about the fate of English liberty. It also suggests a recognition of what Godwin would always view as the motive force behind the repression of 1794, Pitt's ambition. He charges him directly in this early letter:

You have an invisible divinity, an auspicious genius, that watches the progress of your story, and produces, not merely what the ear has not heard, but what the heart of man was inadequate to conceive. After having wielded empires and constituted the fate of millions, after having exercised every executive and every legislative function, you appear at last in that character, which, as Montesquieu has informed us, fills the

circle of political power, the character of a judge as being in reality, though not in name, the Lord High Steward for the king of Great Britain upon a trial of which the universe are spectators.²⁰

Considering Pitt's deft use of patronage during the years 1792-1794, and Godwin's later belief that the popular support for Pitt's repression was also a function of backroom manipulation, his assessment of Pitt in this letter is prophetic:

One kind of ingenuity I am willing to ascribe to you. You believed that few men would venture to incur the indignation and enmity of a powerful individual for the sake of a good to be divided among thousands, and the gratitude of which was little likely to prove the advantage of its author²¹.

On a final note Godwin makes reference to Pitt's attempt to subvert his opposition, in this case Burke.

If you could not awe him into flight, or bribe him into surrender, you still believed you still could traverse him so completely, and deny him so much, as to make it impractical for him to proceed.²²

These tactics Godwin saw as the essence of Pitt's success and the definitive explanation of his character and motivation. Godwin would find nothing surprising in the suggestion that Pitt had used the King's Proclamation on Seditious Practices of 1792 to isolate Fox, split the Whigs, and achieve his coalition; nor would he doubt that Pitt used

alarmism to prosecute the war with France. To solidify these aims, the Scottish Treason Trials under Robert Dundas, and the indictment against the Twelve in the fall of 1794, would be reckoned a small political price for cabinet rule. The alternative suggestion would be that Pitt was sincere in his concern for domestic security, and that those who stood accused posed a genuine threat. Godwin the radical, the anti-Jacobin, the anti-Painite Burkeian, could see little evidence of that.

Godwin's first direct criticisms of government policy, as opposed to government politicians, came in 1793. He had been writing Political Justice in 1791-92, as a refinement and improvement on Montesquieu. One month before its publication in February of 1793, Daniel Crichton was tried in London for seditious and treasonable words. Godwin responded with a second series of Mucius letters, this time in the Morning Chronicle. The first of these which appeared February 1, 1793, dealt with the denial of freedom of speech. Godwin details the incident as follows:

This man it seems, a tallow chandler by trade, had come from Scotland to London in pursuit of that trade, and the day after his arrival had got intoxicated with his friends. In this condition he went to the Tower of London; and while observing the armory, and other things there exhibited said "Damn the King; we have no King in Scotland, and we will soon have no King in England" the story of his intoxication is told, not by his friends, but by the witnesses for the Crown.²³

Crichton was arrested, "thrown in prison, thrust among felons, loaded with irons"²⁴; Godwin describes the "justice" of the sentence with great sarcasm:

after having thus suffered for several weeks, he is convicted by a British jury, and sentenced by his judges, in their clemency, and in consideration of these previous hardships, to imprisonment for three months, and to give a security for his peaceable behaviour for one year, himself in one hundred pounds, and two sureties in fifty pounds each.²⁵

Godwin proceeds to decry the entire enterprise as a gross abuse of law, practice, government, and justice. He continues to castigate the trial as a violation of the most basic English liberties. He laments that Englishmen are "asleep though not dead"²⁶ and that they must awaken to face these tyrannies. Moreover, Godwin's letter continues with a thinly veiled dig at the "information gathering" which the Pitt government had commissioned with the Proclamation in 1792,

The most crying evil of a despotic government is spies and informers. How miserable is the state of those men, who are surrounded with smiling fawning enemies; who dare trust to no appearances; from whose intercourse confidence and kindness are forever banished; who must set a guard upon the door of their lips; who must look round, and anxiously watch every countenance, before they begin to speak.²⁷

Godwin quite overtly draws a comparison between the current government in England and the abuses of the Committee in France:

Mr. Editor, till lately we heard of such things from a distance, and some of us lent an incredulous

ear to their possibility. They are now brought home to us.²⁸

He continues by dating this tyranny and naming it specifically:

The reign of despotism began on the 30th of November 1792. On that day an association at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand, under pretence of protecting liberty and property, formed a plan for overturning the constitution. They did not begin with its outposts; they attacked it at once in its vitals. From that day we have been surrounded with spies; spies of the worst sort; not merely the spies of government who might be marked, but every timid observer, and every rancorous disputant we may happen to encounter.²⁹

The association to which Godwin refers was founded by a Mr. John Reeves, its chairman, and was called the Society for Protecting Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers. Godwin's letter on Crichton was followed by a second, which appeared in the Morning Chronicle on February 8th 1793. It was addressed specifically to Reeves and focused on the suppression of freedom of speech, the trial of Thomas Paine, and "Reeves, the assassin of the liberties of Englishmen"³⁰. Godwin attempts to assert his own neutrality in this matter, and assures Reeves "I am no friend to force either on the part of the populace or of the government"³¹. He charges that Reeves' association, not content with depriving the rebels of the tools of revolt, use them itself. Godwin contends that the

very devices of coercion used by the reformers are in turn being used by the defenders of constitutionalism.

...having wrested these weapons from his antagonists, instead of dashing them indignantly to the earth, to employ them himself for the purpose of wounding those he had already disarmed³²

As an anarchist, Godwin rejected all associations of coercion, public or private. To this end, he rejected the corresponding societies and the collective principles espoused by Horne Tooke and John Thelwell, as well as Reeves. The essence of Political Justice is freedom, conscience, and duty. Duty, not Right as Paine had forseen it. Godwin could not be sure that the Crown and Anchor association was sponsored by the government, but he suspected as much. He considered such groups to be as vicious as the State in the abstract, or the Pitt cabinet in the particular. He counted Reeves such a danger; "Sir, you may boldly challenge all the annals of despotism and injustice to match this iniquity."³³

Godwin followed the letter to Reeves with two more letters aimed directly at the judiciary. It was the increasingly arbitrary power of judges, and the increasingly ambiguous role of juries, which the Crichton affair had demonstrated to Godwin. The letter to Sir Archibald MacDonald, Attorney General, accuses

MacDonald of the worst despotism in the pursuit of his office.

Godwin considers the position to be crucial. He states,

Your situation is singularly important. It is probably in your power, either inextricably to plunge your country into those evils which you loudly deprecate, or by an easy, yet honorable exertion of fortitude, to acquire to yourself immortal renown, and be hailed the savior of Britain.³⁴

and,

You are determined that no one shall say anything but what you say...Such was the temper of the barbarous ages respecting the only subject which at that time engaged the curiosity of mind, religion. But experience at length taught the world the absurdity of persecution. You it seems are willing to revise the experiment with a small variety in the application. Sir, this is not an age for the experiments of despotism to be tried with impunity.³⁵

He cautions those persons who "may be appointed to serve on juries for the trial of seditious and treasonable words"³⁶, as to their responsibility and power; "one upright jurymen might put a close to that scene of persecution which is the disgrace of Britain"³⁷. He asks them to resurrect the power of the jury, the power of independent conscience and reason; only this will halt the increasingly arbitrary power of the magistracy and the cabinet. He writes,

Oh for a man like this, to suspend the torrent of absolute power, and prove that I am not fallen upon an age of savage barbarism and ignorance!³⁸

Godwin viewed the power of juries as constituting the critical foundation of the common law. Set apart from the immediate political content, and sometime corruption, which impacted on the formation of the positive law of statute, the law of precedent was the last safeguard of the constitution. As juries abrogated their responsibility in favor of the directives of attornies general and the biased charges of magistrates, there would be no justice. Godwin warns,

What constitution shall we have left, when the trial of Crichton has passed into a precedent, and been confirmed by two hundred other verdicts obtained upon the same principle? ³⁹

Godwin's concern over the Crichton affair foreshadows his reaction to the abuse of process which would characterize the Scottish trials of the following summer. His insistence on the rule of law, and strict interpretation of the charge, would finally form the basis of Erskine's defense of the twelve "rebels" indicted and tried in November of 1794. Juries, he argued, must be stronger than parliaments, and more especially, cabinets and prime ministers. His letter of Mucius for February of 1793 emphasizes to jurymen that,

The importance of your situation is so great as to impress me with considerable awe when I undertake to address you. It is out of all comparison superior to that which you would be called on to fill if you were individually members of the British House of Commons. There with the

best of intentions and the most constant resolutions, you might be overpowered by influence or by numbers.⁴⁰

The concern which preoccupied Godwin, in his criticisms of English government, was the pervasiveness of "backroom" manipulation. Not only was the vote in the House being orchestrated by patronage and political gamesmanship, but the courts were now within the scope of ministerial influence. Godwin believed that a web of corruption was emanating from Westminster. It pressured British justice at home, and suborned it entirely under Braxfield in the north.

The outcome of the Scottish trials outraged Godwin. The verdict aside, the sentence inflicted on Muir, Palmer and the others was in no way within the realm of rule or precedent, let alone civilized proportion. Godwin wrote to the Morning Chronicle regarding the sentences of Muir and Palmer. As Lauderale's speech in the Lords had more than covered the legal abuses of the trials, Godwin turned his attention specifically to the sentencing. This he considered yet another mark of the vindictive and manipulative nature of the current administration. He further suggested that there was, inherent in the decision to transport the accused, a deliberate move to cover up these injustices. He writes, "I will not be the partaker of their secrets of State.

What they dare to perpetrate, I dare to tell"⁴¹. He is willing to waive, for the moment, any question of guilt or innocence in the case,

by an ill-directed zeal for what they thought a good cause...I think they did wrong. Let us suppose that for that wrong, that well meant but improper zeal, they ought to be punished.⁴²

It is the nature of the punishment which he criticizes; "not Sir, as if they were felons". Godwin intimates in this letter, that there is a more significant twist to the severity of the punishment. It is, he writes, a token of "imagination and genius overwhelmed by the iron hand of a barbarous usurpation".⁴³

More than punishment, which ought to have deterrent cautionary value, Godwin believes the sentences to constitute a form of censorship. Transportation was chosen not to punish so much as to muzzle:

Let me have this satisfaction, that my countrymen may look on and observe my disgrace. Let them learn a great lesson from my suffering. It is for them to decide whether it shall be a lesson of aversion to my guilt, or abhorrence against my punisher. On that condition I will stand on their pillories, and sweep their streets with satisfaction and content. But to shut me up in dungeons and darkness, or to transport me to the other side of the globe, that they may wreak their vengeance on me unobserved, is base, coward-like, and infamous.⁴⁴

And, emphasizing the possibility that the verdict was unjust, and the sentencing such as to obscure the decision by removing the accused from the public eye, he wrote:

Do they not every day assure us that the great use of punishment is example, to deter others from incurring like offense? And yet they delight to inflict severities upon these men in a corner, which they tremble to have exposed in the eye of the world. I join issue with administration on this point. I too, would have the punishment of messrs. Muir and Palmer serve for an example. Sir, there are examples to imitate, and examples to avoid.⁴⁵

Godwin concludes his letter by issuing a warning to the government with respect to the case of Muir and Palmer in particular, but likely concerning the Pitt cabinet in general:

But a punishment that exceeds all measure and mocks at all Justice, that listens to no sentiment but revenge, and plays the volunteer in insolence and cruelty - a punishment the purpose of which is to inflict on such men slavery, degradation of soul, a lingering decay and final imbecility - can do nothing but exasperate men's minds, and wind up their nerves to decisive action.⁴⁶

It was the English Treason Trials which would move Godwin to one of his most actively political and most personally dangerous phases of pamphleteering. As was the case with both the Crichton affair and the Scottish Trials, the essence of Godwin's critique and concern was that the law should not be suborned or overridden by politics and the exigencies of the moment. In a journal entry for 1794, he writes,

The year 1794 was remarkable for the trial of twelve persons under one indictment for the charge

of High Treason. Some of these persons were my particular friends; more than half of them were known to me. This trial is certainly one of the most memorable epochs in the history of English Liberty. The accusations combined with the evidence adduced to support it, is not to be exceeded in vagueness and incoherence by anything in the annals of tyranny. It was an attempt to take away the lives of men by a constructive treason, and out of many facts, no one of which was capital, to compose a capital crime. The name of the man in whose mind the scheme of this trial was engendered was Pitt.⁴⁷

Once again, Godwin seems under no illusion as to the source and, by extension, purpose of these proceedings. The tone of the trial was set by the charge which was delivered by Chief Justice James Eyre, and completed by the histrionics of the attorney-general in his summation:

Among the many atrocities witnessed on that occasion perhaps the most flatigeous was the speech by the attorney-general, now Lord Eldon, at the close of the trial of that extraordinary man [Horne Tooke]. In his peroration, he burst into tears, and entreated the jury to vindicate by their verdict his character and fame; he urged them by the consideration of his family to cooperate with him in leaving such a name behind to his children as they should not look upon as their disgrace.⁴⁸

Godwin asserts that:

the real charge against the prisoners when divested of amplifications and technicalities, was that they had endeavored to change the form of government established, by publishing or causing to be published, diverse books or pamphlets, and by belonging to political societies having the same object.⁴⁹

Certainly, the trial caused Godwin to publish a series of pamphlets; the first entitled Cursory Strictures on the Charge Delivered by Lord Chief Justice Eyre to the Grand Jury, appeared in the Morning Chronicle on October 2, 1794. Godwin's "Cursory Strictures" analyzed the charge and criticized it so effectively that many critics, notably Horne Tooke who also stood accused, believed it to form the basis of Erskine's defense. Asserting that the essence of treason was the statute 25 Edward III, Godwin held the law to confine all Treason to "levying war against the King within the realm" or, "compassing or imagining the death of the king". So as to admit no further confusion, the architects of this law had included the clause, "if in any future time it might be necessary to declare any new treason, that should only be done by a direct proceeding of parliament for that special purpose".

Eyre claimed that beyond "compassing the death" any design to overthrow the whole government, "to pull down the British Monarchy...to design such a horrible ruin and devastation which no king could survive",⁵⁰ would fall within the act. Godwin asks quite directly, "is this a matter of high treason"? It certainly did not come within the letter of 25 Edward III, nor within the remoter clause "upon which there have been adjudged cases".⁵¹ Turning the focus quickly to the political question at hand, Godwin asks "Are we reasoning

respecting law, or respecting a state of society which having no fixed rules of law, is obliged to consult the dictates of its own direction?".⁵² Clearly, he argued, the latter was the case. Taking a very carefully drawn shot at the alarmist's preoccupation with Jacobinism and the cold French reasonings of the Terror, Godwin proceeded to underline the implications of Eyre's charge:

Are we to understand that under Chief Justice Eyre, and the other judges of the special commission, reasonings are to be adduced from the axioms and dictums of moralists and metaphysicians and that men are to be convicted, sentenced, and executed upon these? Are we to understand that henceforth, the man most deeply read in the laws of this country and most assiduously conforming his actions to them, shall be liable to be arraigned and capitally punished for a crime that no law describes, that no precedent or adjudged case ascertains, and at the arbitrary pleasure of the administration of the time being?⁵³

Even Justice Eyre conceded that he was setting precedent. He stated in his charge that the statute 25 Edward III had not declared the subversion of the monarchy to be a specific treason; "no lawgiver had ever ventured to consider it in its whole extent".⁵⁴

Godwin's criticisms of Eyre are incisive. They are essentially twofold:

Chief Justice Eyre implicitly confesses himself unable by direct deductions of law, to show us what it is we ought to avoid and is reduced to the necessity of reasoning, not forward from general rules of action to the guilt or innocence of particular men, but backward from actions already performed to the question, whether or no they

should fall under the provision of such and such provisions of law. By this perverted mode of proceeding he completely prejudices the case of the prisoners. He does not proceed as a judge ought to proceed, by explaining the law and leaving the Grand Jury to fix its application upon individuals, but leads them to the selection of the individuals themselves, and centres in his own person the provinces of judge and accuser.⁵⁵

Eyre's conjectures, Godwin continues, fall under two heads: one, "an association the professed purpose of which has been a change in the constitution of the Commons, House of Parliament, and the obtaining of annual parliaments",⁵⁶ and two, "the project of a convention to be assembled under the advice and direction of these associations".⁵⁷ The whole discourse, Godwin points out, "hangs by one tender thread - a new and portentous treason of his own creation, a conspiracy to subvert the monarchy! one which no lawgiver in this country has ever ventured to contemplate".⁵⁸ Godwin's own summation is a masterpiece of

rhetoric: An association for Parliamentary Reform may desert its object and be guilty of high treason, true: so may a card club, a bench of justices, or even a cabinet council. Does Chief Justice Eyre mean to insinuate that there is something in the purpose of parliamentary reform so unhallowed, ambiguous and unjust, as to render its well wishers objects of suspicion, rather than their brethren and fellow subjects?⁵⁹

The acquittals which followed and proceeded largely as a result of Godwin's exchanges on the charge, were received with great public enthusiasm. It took the jury only eight minutes to return a verdict of not guilty in the trial of Horne Tooke. However, these events constituted a very transitory victory for the radical cause. The government did not accept the verdicts of 1794; they soon sought more effective measures with which to

reverse this setback. William Hazlitt later recalled the nature of the crisis and the influence which Godwin's "Cursory Strictures" had upon its resolution:

This temporary effusion...gave a turn to the trials for High Treason in 1794, and possibly saved the lives of twelve innocent individuals marked out as political victims to the moloch of legitimacy which then skulked behind the British Throne, and had not yet dared to set forth (as it has done since) from its lurking place, in the face of day, to brave the opinion of the world. If it had then glutted its maw (the sharpness of Mr. Godwin's pen cut the legal chords with which it attempted to bind them) it might have done so sooner, and with more lasting effect.⁶⁰

Donald Locke expands Hazlitt's assessment of the trials, and their subsequent effect on the societies:

The failure of the 1794 Treason Trials might mean that democrats were no longer in fear for their lives, but the policy of repression continued unabated. The constitutional society had broken up almost at once, destroyed by the loss of its papers and the king's evidence against Adams, its secretary. The Friends of the People lingered on for a year before voting to withdraw from political activities.⁶¹

The event which finished off the Friends of the People also drew William Godwin back to "active politics" one last time. The two "gagging acts" proposed by Pitt and Grenville in November of 1795, constituted the administration's attempt to reverse the decisions of 1794 for they put into ministerial hands the final solution to the problem of radical dissidence and political opposition. Locke continues,

On 6 October 1795 Pitt proposed to the Commons a ban on seditious meetings, while Grenville in the Lords introduced a companion bill to achieve by law what Eyre had failed to do by jury, and to extend the crime of treason to cover not just overt

acts which threatened the monarch's life, but any incitement to his hatred or contempt.⁶²

Godwin's response to the proposed two acts was to write a pamphlet entitled Considerations On Lord Grenville's and Mr. Pitt's Bills Concerning Treasonable and Seditious Practices, and Unlawful Assemblies. It was signed, "by a lover of order". The pamphlet was published by J. Johnson and quite favorably reviewed. The Analytical Review for November 22, 1795, said the Considerations were written with great ability. The Monthly Review for December 1795, said the pamphlet was written by "a keen, acute, and formidable pen".⁶³ The Monthly Mirror for December 1795 disagreed with its ideas, but praised the "manly manner".⁶⁴ A further, more considered response, both to Godwin's pamphlet and the the acts themselves, came in a late review of July 4, 1796. It said that "unpopular attempts to restrain the freedom of speech and writing [were] solidly and temperately examined."⁶⁵ Clearly, the general response to the pamphlet and its author was that the position expressed was cool and measured, and not the rantings of some Jacobin extremist. The Considerations were received as a reasonable response to the possible overreaction of the government.

Godwin's ideas had undergone as much of a change as his rhetoric during the crisis of 1793-1795. The acceleration of

government repression after the 1794 trials was of particular significance to the philosopher. More than ever his writings resembled Burke's, in tone if not in substance. He begins the Considerations with something of an apologia, a conservative preamble with which to assuage his reader's fear. He divides the political climate in general, and the constitution of the House in particular, into two distinct camps:

In the present irritated and unnatural state of affairs...one party will not endure to hear of any cautionary restraints upon freedom, and another party impressed with apprehensions of anarchy, conceives that scarcely any restraint can be too vigilant or severe.⁶⁶

Godwin advises that some rational compromise must be sought - "Liberty without licentiousness...the prize of political wisdom."⁶⁷ In a revision of his own early purist abstractions, he writes "great is the error, or sinister and alarming the policy, of those who tell us that politics is simple science."⁶⁸ "Godwinian" pronouncements on individual reason and duty are overturned in the face of practical necessity. He states that "public interest and security require from men, to a certain degree, a uniformity of action, and a uniformity of submission."⁶⁹ The great theoretical anarchist of Political Justice writes, "reason and expostulation here are not sufficient: there must be an arm to repress; a coercion, strict, but forbearing and mild."⁷⁰

These changes in perspective were the result of the intrusion of reality into Godwin's political utopia. With the crisis of liberty which began with the trial of Daniel Crichton early in 1793 and continued, first with the Scottish trials and then with British treason trials of 1794, it became increasingly clear that the government made policy for political expediency, that even the courts were not immune to the influence of King and cabinet, and that the personal ambition of the men in power was to play an increasing role in the actions of state and, in turn, the decisions of the courts. And where the courts would not comply, the positive law of statute and parliament would intrude. To this extent, the two acts of 1795 must have been a particularly bitter disappointment to Godwin, a man who had put his political faith in the balance and reason of jurisprudence. He had remarked to Holcroft after the acquittals of 1794, that "the law in England [was] not entirely what the breath of judges and prosecutors would make it."⁷¹ By November of 1795, he could not be sure as the law in England became increasingly what the breath of politicians would make it.

Considerations of personality, of individual character and advantage, surfaced in Godwin's critique. His Considerations attempt to calculate the human equation, and its effect on the larger mass of society:

If offense be discountenanced by the sober and judicious, there will always be turbulent spirits who will pursue a contrary conduct; they will confirm the offender in his error, instead of recalling him to reason; they will harden him in his deviation, and encourage him to hold inoffensive remonstrance in contempt.⁷²

This tendency towards a coercive "hardening" Godwin considers the worst evil of the associations. He believes that such associations rally the discontented to mob action. With such support and encouragement behind them, the temptation for the desperate is irresistible:

How powerful is the incitement held out for the poor man, to commit hostility on the property of the rich, to commit it in detail, each man for himself, or by one great and irresistible effort to reduce everything to universal chaos.⁷³

Godwin continues the apologia of the Considerations to include a discussion of the complexities of society. He advises that speculative inquiries (such as his own, perhaps) have their utility. But, "it is with soberness and caution that the practical politician will alone venture to consult them".⁷⁴

The "politic" conservative introduction of the Considerations soon gives way to the more formidable criticisms in the work. Godwin returns to his basic premise, the sanctity

of the common law and its organic reflexiveness. He rejects the intrusion, the tampering violation, which the positive law necessarily introduces into the system. The practice and process of the common law is an integral component of society. Social action, case law, and practice, mesh: action, judgement, and precedent comprise a delicate web. The bills introduced by Grenville and Pitt would seriously hamper this relationship. Godwin conceived of laws which met immediate and short term exigencies as political and intrusive, destructive to the jurisprudential balance of the common law and, by extension, destructive of the constitution. The constitution was itself an organic compilation of statute and case law. This was England's prize. Godwin turns to this delicate web:

But these abuses are woven into the very web and substance of society; and he that touches them with a sacreligious hand will run the risk of producing the widest and most tremendous ruin.⁷⁵

By "these abuses" Godwin refers to those acts which would seem to undermine law and order; they are part of society and must be dealt with through the principles upon which the law is founded. Far worse to bring about some violation of those principles to deal with the "abuses" than to suffer the abuses. Just as it is better that ten guilty men be set free than an innocent man be hanged, the temporary hazard of security to the King is nothing by comparison to the damage which the acts in question will undoubtably bring to the very web and substance of

society - the constitution. As to the existing threat to security, Godwin was convinced that it could be handled, "with judgement and deliberation". The duty of the government did not include the creation of these so-called gagging acts. Rather, it was the government's duty to "preserve the blessings we already possess from the rashness of presumptuous experiment". The acts proposed by Grenville and Pitt constituted "presumptuous experiment".

The Considerations continues to detail the duties of politicians. Politics is clearly distinguished from the Law. The responsibilities of statesmen and lawyer are quite distinct. Godwin asserts, "the concern of the politician is with caution not with punishment".⁷⁶ He allows that the present political crisis calls for political attention, but he regards the government's response as draconian. Like Draco's legislation, these new measures will only create a new and more terrible backlash of discontent. Thelwell and the London Corresponding Society are wrong, but Pitt and Grenville are worse than wrong. Pitt and Grenville attacked the essence of English Liberty, the freedom of the press, of which Godwin writes "if anything human be approached with awe it is this".⁷⁷

Grenville's bill against "treasonable practices" was the most dangerous of the two acts proposed. Godwin conceived of

this act as being of two parts: "one enacting new treasons or definitions of treason" and "the other providing against seditious practices under the denomination of misdemeanors".⁷⁸ The intention of the government as Godwin saw it was clearly twofold; first, to expand the parameter of 25 Edward III to accomodate more effectively the prosecution of political dissidence. This had been attempted in 1793 with the Traitorous Correspondence Bill, but that bill had not been useful to the purposes of controlling pamphleteering and public meetings. The new act of 1795 was pointed more directly at the spectre of domestic insurgency. Second, the categorization of seditious practises under the heading of misdemeanors facilitated conviction by jury. As the 1794 trials had demonstrated, British juries did not convict as readily where the death sentence applied.

Godwin viewed the implications of Grenville's bill as far reaching indeed. He supposed that "the very nature and wording of the bill would see [his] Considerations as seditious." He detailed this objection at length:

Who does not see that if I write a pamphlet or a book in which any political question is treated, or incidentally mentioned, I may suffer the penalties of this act? Who does not see that if the King's minister [Pitt] do not like my pamphlet, or do not like my face, if he have an old grudge against me for past proceedings, if I have not proved a fortunate candidate for his general good-will, or if by any distortion of understanding, or

excessiveness of alarm, he be led to see in my pamphlet things it does not contain, I may suffer the penalties of this act?⁷⁹

Godwin continues his critique by referring to the great works of political philosophy. He conjectures as to the reception such works would receive under Pitt's administration, "Hume for publishing his Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth, guilty of high treason".⁸⁰ Recalling the substance of the Act, Godwin underlines this point:

And [if such person or persons] such compassings or imaginings, inventions, desires, or intentions, or any of them shall express, utter, or declare, by any printing, writing, preaching, or malicious and advised speaking, then every such person or persons shall be adjudged guilty of high treason.⁸¹

Turning directly to Grenville and Pitt, Godwin queries the motivations behind such acts:

What sort of hearts are these men imbued with? What sorts of understandings? They scatter about punishments on every occasion, and the punishment for the slightest offense is death...[they] trample upon all the barriers by which civil society alone can be preserved.⁸²

The Considerations is substantively consistent with Godwin's earlier pamphlets and editorials. He maintains his suspicion of the cabinet and the prime minister; he has, however, tempered his rhetoric. Aware of the increasing rate of public reaction, Godwin attempts a more conciliatory move against the government's policy. He acknowledges the gravity of the present crisis, but suggests more constitutional remedies.

He also tars the government with innovation, rashness, extremity of action; words calculated to alert conservative critics to the danger in parliament. The cold dispassionate abstraction of Political Justice, and the hard focused criticism of Cursory Strictures, had given way to more "politic" rhetoric.

Reasonableness was replacing strict rationalism, as Godwin was drawn into practical revision through the realities of power and politics. But this retrenchment did not succeed either. Three days after the publication of his Considerations, Godwin with Holcroft sat in the parliamentary gallery and watched Pitt's bill pass. His opposition would be remembered by the Tories, and dismissed by the radicals.

George Woodcock has discussed the impact of Godwin's Considerations in the aftermath of the two acts. Although it did nothing to halt the pace of repressive legislation, it had a considerable effect amongst the radicals. Thelwell, in particular, felt that Godwin had "betrayed the cause". He denounced him publicly, and many former Godwinites, such as Southey, fell in line. Woodcock looks back:

It is ironical and a disgraceful fact that the greatest English radical philosopher should have been deserted and attacked by the left-wing politicians even before the reactionaries began to vilify him, and there is no doubt that the peculiar venom with which the anti-liberal attacks were directed against Godwin in particular was due more than anything to the fact that the radical demagogues had turned against him already and thus

made him more vulnerable to the Government hacks. By this shameful desertion of a man who had defended them when his actions might very well have been a "hanging matter", the radicals caused a breach in the whole liberal movement which made it easy for its enemies to immobilize it for many decades.⁸³

Godwin's criticism of the societies can not be overlooked. His direct denunciation of Thelwell was received by the orator as a personal affront. Finally, Godwin's own plans for a quiet non-violent revolution through education and the arts was to be incomprehensible to most of the remaining radicals. The moderate liberals faded away after the Treason Trials of 1794. Only the most avid republicans remained. Woodcock cites this rejection of Godwin by the left-wing radicals as the source of division in the London Corresponding Society:

Among the result of the incident was a split in the L.C.S. between a section led by Thelwell, and one led by Francis Place which supported the Godwinian idea of changing society by means of education. The Thelwell faction was the more considerable, and the society became for the remainder of its brief life, one of the strongest centres of feeling against Godwin.⁸⁴

In the wake of the tempest which Godwin's Considerations created in radical circles, Coleridge remained oddly silent. He continued to admire Thelwell long after Godwin broke with him but, unlike Southey, rejected Thelwell's stand on Godwin and his pamphlet. Perhaps it was because, in December of 1795, Coleridge was nursing his own criticisms of the two acts

through publication. He differed with Godwin on many principles of philosophy during 1794, but he understood well the implications of the bills and criticisms of them by 1795. Coleridge, too, was drifting towards Burke. Like Godwin, he would leave politics behind after 1795. He would forsake partisan politics and look for his own solutions to the problem of reform. Like Godwin, he would turn to education. More than Godwin, he would turn to art.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. George Woodcock, William Godwin: A Biographical Study (London: The Porcupine Press Ltd., 1946) pp.100-102
2. Isaac Kramnick, "On Anarchism and the Real World: William Godwin and Radical England", American Political Science Review, 66, March 1972, p. 114-128 ;
3. Charles Kegan Paul, William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries (New York: A.M.S. Press, 1970) vol.I, p.13
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p.19
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid. Socinianism was the doctrine which rejected the divinity of Christ. Priestley was one of its main proponents.
8. Ibid., p.61.
9. William Godwin, An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice was first published in May of 1793; it was revised in 1796 as Godwin's ideas on practical experience were altered by politics.
10. Kegan Paul, p. 112.
11. As in Rousseau's The Social Contract, chapter vii
12. Carl Cone, The English Jacobins, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons Ltd. 1968) pp. 19-39.
13. Jack W. Marken and Burton R. Pollin, Uncollected Writings (1785-1822) Articles in Periodicals and Six Pamphlets by William Godwin (Gainesville, Florida: Scholar's Facsimiles & Reprints, 1968) p. xii.
14. Donald Locke, A Fantasy of Reason, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) p.2
15. Ibid.

16. Godwin set about to deny Paine's thesis that rights were the basis for social justice. Godwin favored a society predicated on duty.
17. Marken & Pollin, "Letters of Mucius" p. 2.
18. Ibid., p.11.
19. Ibid., p.15.
20. Ibid., p.19.
21. Ibid., p.22.
22. Ibid., p.23.
23. Marken & Pollin, "On Daniel Crichton", p. 112.
24. Ibid., p.113.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., p.114.
29. Ibid.
30. Marken & Pollin, "Reeves: Assassin of Liberty", p. 116.
31. Ibid., p.115.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p.116.
34. Marken & Pollin, "To Sir Archibald MacDonald", p. 120.
35. Ibid.
36. Marken & Pollin, "To such Persons as may be appointed to serve upon juries for the trial of seditious and treasonable words", p. 123.
37. Ibid. p.124.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., p.126.

40. Ibid., p.123.
41. Kegan Paul, p. 122
42. Ibid., p.123.
43. Ibid., p.122.
44. Ibid., p.121.
45. Ibid., p.122.
46. Ibid., p.123.
47. Kegan Paul, p. 117.
48. Rosalie Grylls, William Godwin and his World,
(London: Odhams Press Ltd., 1953) p. 16.
49. Kegan Paul, p.124.
50. Marken & Pollin, "The Charge" by Sir James Eyre p. 6-7
51. Marken & Pollin, "Cursory Strictures" by William Godwin
p. 151.
52. Ibid., p.151.
53. Ibid., p.152.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., p.155.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid., p.157.
60. Woodcock, p.136
61. Locke, p. 100
62. Ibid. p. 105
63. Marken & Pollin, p. xviii.

- 64. Marken & Pollin, p.xviii
- 65. Ibid.
- 66. Ibid., p.195
- 67. Ibid., p.196
- 68. Ibid.
- 69. Ibid., p.197
- 70. Ibid.
- 71. Kegan Paul, p. 169
- 72. Marken & Pollin, p.198
- 73. Ibid.
- 74. Ibid., p.199
- 75. Ibid.
- 76. Ibid., p.212
- 77. Ibid., p.219
- 78. Ibid., p.220
- 79. Ibid., p.221
- 80. Ibid., p.230
- 81. Ibid., p.238
- 82. Ibid., p.240
- 83. Woodcock, p.113
- 84. Woodcock, p.115.

CHAPTER THREE

A perspective which was as detached from partisan politics as Godwin's was to come from a very different quarter. Samuel Taylor Coleridge embarked on the most actively political phase of his career at the height of Tory repression. His lectures at Bristol and his essays on politics demonstrate the effects which the crucible of legislated reaction was to have on the intelligentsia of the period. Coleridge may have been something of a political dilettante during his "maiden" forays. However, the futility of any direct criticism of the cabinet or its policies demonstrated quickly and effectively to him that the problems of government and society required a deeper solution, one which found its roots in the meaning of language. To this end, Coleridge effectively abandoned direct assaults on government after 1795. Leaving behind pamphleteering for journalism, he would now write on the broader topics of education, the family, and religion which had always formed the intuitive basis of his aesthetic and philosophical perspectives. Finally, he would attempt to unify these component themes in a comprehensive system of individual, social, and cosmological proportions. This system would be developed through Coleridge's poetry. For poetry, which constructs a language of symbolism, mysticism and intuition, could provide a new understanding of the world; one which a linear discursive analytic could not create. Coleridge's rejection of conventional political criticism led to his most productive period of poetic

imagination between 1796 and 1802. This shift in direction represents a genuine attempt to create a social revolution through the emotional power of art and language.

Two early and seminal influences on Coleridge's political thought he experienced as an undergraduate at Cambridge. The first of these were the Unitarian teachings of William Frend. A persistent search for an integrating ethical principle in what became for Coleridge a political aesthetic can be traced to this early association with Frend. The second influence would come from the active vision of politics, ethics, and art which he would dream with Southey. During the summer of 1794, Coleridge went to Oxford and formed his acquaintance with Robert Southey. Much discussion of French philosophy, of poetics, of current social and political vice ensued. Southey was an ardent Godwinist and communicated his enthusiasms for Political Justice to Coleridge in these early conversations and the correspondence which is associated with them. However, Coleridge, unlike Southey, took the trouble to read Political Justice. It was Coleridge's opinion that Southey had never bothered and simply mouthed Godwinisms which he had contracted through hearsay. His reticence about Godwin's ideas, and his suspicions of Southey's interpretations, are communicated in a letter to Southey of October 21st, 1794:

In a book of Pantisocracy I hope to have comprised all that is good in Godwin - of whom and whose book I will write more fully in my next letter (I think not so highly of him as you do - and I have read him with considerable attention)¹

Coleridge's reference to the Pantisocracy was to an ideal community which he and Southey planned to create in the New World. This plan called for the emigration of twelve couples to the banks of the Susquehanna in America. His marriage to Sara Fricker, conveniently the sister of Southey's fiancée, Mary, allowed Coleridge to qualify as one of the twelve. It stands as an indication of the degree to which he was practically committed to this utopian scheme. The details of the proposal are unnecessary as the plan foundered due to a lack of capital. However, the very idea of emigration does suggest a rejection of English society, and more significantly English politics. In what can only be described as a utopian phase, Coleridge and Southey were escaping any direct confrontation with and ultimately solution to, the English crisis. Instead, they favored a tabula rasa, and a reconstruction on first principles. As it is wont to do, reality intervened; with impecuniosity in Bristol², and on a more public level, due to the war with France. The same letter continues;

What have been your feelings concerning the war with America, which is now inevitable? To go from Hamburg will not only be a heavy additional expense - but dangerous and uncertain - as nations at war

are in the habit of examining neutral vessels to prevent the importation of arms...and seize subjects of the hostile government - It is said that one cause of the ministers being so cool on this business is that it will prevent emigration, which it seems would be treasonable, to a hostile country.³

Coleridge was not actively aware in 1794 of the political crisis which surrounded him. His desire to find something better, something else, during this year is suggestive of several factors: youthful enthusiasm for high principles and the perfectibility of human society, a general but as yet unfocused disturbance over European society as it existed, and an increasing uneasiness as to the stability of political freedom in England. The absence of any direct discussion in his letters of either the suspension of Habeas Corpus, or the indictment and trial of the twelve radicals, suggests a certain indifference or inattention to what he might have then regarded as "high politics". Coleridge was preoccupied both with the Pantisocracy and with a drama, The Fall of Robespierre, which he co-authored with Southey. There is the possibility that the treason trials were not considered significant outside the circles of immediate interest - the capital, the government, and the radical associations themselves. Perhaps also, and this would strengthen the contention that alarm was being manufactured by the government, the Jacobin threat was not perceived as grave in the counties. Certainly the atmosphere in

the rural areas was cheerful and complacent, not fraught with the paranoia which might be associated with isolation and the lack of news. Of his own politics and the reception which he received during his walking tour of Wales, he writes:

The parson said in a low voice - (Republicans!)
- after which the medical man said - damn toasts!
I gives a sentiment - May all Republicans be
gulloteen'd! Welch politics could not prevail over
Welch hospitality - they all except the Parson
shook me by the hand and said I was an
open-hearted, honest-speaking fellow, tho' I was a
bit of a Democrat.⁴

Coleridge certainly did not consider himself a democrat. He abjured labels of any kind. Not a Jacobin either, yet he still saw the French Revolution as having been a great stage for human passions and the human will, as a failed experiment, but one which had begun with the noblest of intentions. To the romantic mind the Revolution would be viewed as comprising a great and fatal combination; it was at once heroic and tragic. The Fall of Robespierre would, however, be viewed in a more prosaic light. In a letter of November 6th, 1794, Coleridge communicated his disappointment over the criticism which the poem received:

It is an anti-pacific one - I should have classed it among the anti-polemics - Again - Are all who entertain and express this opinion Democrats? God forbid! They would be a formidable party indeed! I know many violent anti-reformists, who are as violent against the war on the ground

that it may introduce that reform, which they (perhaps not unwisely) imagine would chant the dirge of our Constitution.- Solemnly my brother! I tell you - I am not a Democrat. I see evidently that the present is not the highest state of society of which we are capable - And after a diligent, I may say, an intense study of Locke, Hartley and others who have written most wisely on the nature of Man.⁵

The general association of all shades of political opinion into two tones was galling to Coleridge. With the naivety of youth and idealism, he believed that his work was the mark of his individual conscience and would be read as such. By the Fall of 1794 the intrusion of politics into his life and work brought him to regret his early indifference. The only reference to the Treason Trials from this period occurred by way of a sonnet in the Morning Chronicle. In this poem he refers to the constitution and the common law:

When Jealousy with feverish fancies pale
Jarr'd thy fine fibres with a maniac's hand
Faint was that hope and rayless: yet twas fair
And sooth'd with many a dream the hour of rest!
Thou should'st have loved it most when most
oppressed.⁶

"Jealousy" is no doubt a reference to ministerial ambition, either the cabinet's as a collective or Pitt's alone, which had used anti-Jacobinism and the spectre of Robespierre, the Maniac's hand, to jar the "fine fibres" of English Law. Coleridge regrets that while these events transpired, he had been absorbed by his Pantisocratic ideals. These had nurtured

his hope for a just society. They were, however, "many a dream", and rather than enjoying this "hour of rest", he should have loved it (the constitution) most when most oppressed. Coleridge followed this passage with the confession that "when a man is unhappy he writes damn bad poetry". He is more specific, yet just as metaphoric, in a letter to Francis Wrangham that same month:

If there be any whom I deem worthy of remembrance - I am their brother. I call even my cat, sister, in the fraternity of universal nature. Owls I respect and Jack-asses I love: for Aldermen, Hogs, Bishops and Royster Crows I have not particular partiality - they are my cousins however, at least by courtesy. But Kings, Wolves, Tygers, Generals, Ministers, and Hyenas, I renounce them all.⁷

By December of 1794, Coleridge was being drawn into a more actively political company. He met Godwin and Holcroft, fresh from the London acquittals. Of Holcroft, whom he instantly disliked, he wrote:

There is a fierceness and a dogmatism of conversation in Holcroft, for which you receive little compensation either from the variety of his information, the closeness of his reasoning, or the splendor of his language. He talks incessantly of Metaphysics of which he appears to me to know nothing - to have read nothing - / he is ignorant as a Scholar - and neglectful of the smaller humanities, as a Man - / Compare him with Porson! My God to hear Porson crush Godwin, Holcroft, & c. - They absolutely tremble before him! I had the honor of working it a little - and by my great coolness and command of impressive language certainly did him over.⁸

Coleridge's objections to Godwin were twofold. He could not countenance Godwin's atheism. Even of the meeting with Holcroft, he wrote, "He absolutely infests you with Atheism"⁹. Of Godwin's own atheism, his criticisms were more detailed;

Godwin thinks himself inclined to Atheism - acknowledges there are arguments for Deity he cannot answer - but not so many as against his existence - He is writing a book about it. I set him at defiance tho' if he convinces me I will acknowledge it in a letter to the newspapers.¹⁰

Godwin and Coleridge would form a close friendship by 1800. Godwin would, subsequent to the exchanges of 1794-1795, acknowledge that it was Coleridge who was chiefly responsible for his conversion to Theism¹¹. It was the social and political implications of Godwin's atheism, however, which Coleridge found the most repugnant. It has been suggested that Godwin was the real opponent in Coleridge's mind during his Bristol lectures¹². These lectures were to form a considered Christian alternative to Godwin's atheistic radicalism. The essence of this criticism Coleridge states in his third lecture; he remarked that "Godwinism builds without a foundation", that is, it "proposes an end without establishing a means."¹³

Coleridge's own system for political reform is elusive, but essentially, he proposed a moral state; one which he to a large degree culled from Hartley,¹⁴ Priestley, and the New Testament. Although not advocating any set Theocracy, Coleridge was convinced that without some ethical foundation, all revolution risked the Terror. To this extent, Coleridge's second objection to Godwin is an extension of the first. Coleridge could not accept Godwin's views on benevolence and disinterest. Duty, predicated on a general benevolence detached from all personal affiliations, seemed an absurd abstraction. He had once remarked to Southey that Godwin was jejune; no doubt with respect to this very abstracted view of emotion and personality. Coleridge had seen this flaw in Political Justice as early as July of 1794. He believed that benevolence and the impulse toward philanthropy sprang from quite the opposite inclination; from private affections and the loyalties and associations generated thereby. He wrote to Southey of this in a letter of July 13th, 1794.

The Ardor of Private attachments makes
Philanthropy a necessary habit of the soul. I love
my Friend - such as he is, all mankind are, or
might be! The deduction is evident -
Philanthropy (and indeed every other virtue) is a
thing of concretion - Some home-born feeling is the
centre of the Ball, that rolling on thro' Life
collects and assimilates every congenial
affection.¹⁵

In this regard the impulse to reform will be developmental;
Godwin ignores the fact of individual growth as explained by

Hartley. Disinterest is not a human foundation for action. Godwin's naivete stems from his distance from human affection. Politics, Reality, and Mary Wollstonecraft would soften this stand after 1795.

What Coleridge did salvage from Godwinism was its optimistic accounts of property and of bloodless anarchy. His account of the effects of property as detailed in Political Justice, Book viii, is as follows;

Vice is the product of circumstances, government the source of more evil than good, and that the necessary revolution will be bloodless, non-violent, and the consequence of the progressive intellectual and moral conversion of the bulk of the people including the oppressors themselves.¹⁶

This passage is also suggestive of the independent and self-critical premise Coleridge held for politics. He was, as he stated, not a democrat. Although interpreting his earlier life through the perspective of a new but later language, in the Biographia Literaria he would assert that his early politics were "almost equi-distant from all three prominent parties, the Pittites, the Foxites, and the democrats."¹⁷

The emphasis which Coleridge placed on his non-affiliation is likely an atonement for the enthusiastic and inflammatory rhetoric which characterized the lectures at Bristol. Early in February of 1795, Coleridge gave three

lectures,¹⁸ the first two in the Corn Market and the third in a vacant house somewhere in the area of Castle Green. It has been suggested that the vacant house stands as an indication that after the notoriety of the first two lectures, it became difficult to rent a room for the third. Cottle is more specific, and notes that the first two lectures were held at the Plume of Feathers in Wine Street. It seems clear that Coleridge had some reservations as to the efficacy of the lectures from the outset. He remarked of the reaction at Bristol, "But the opposition of the Aristocrats is so furious and determined that the good I do is not proportionate with the evil I occasion."¹⁹ The folly of these lectures, and the irony of their effect given his avowed non-partisanism, he detailed some years later in a letter to Sir George and Lady Beaumont.

What wonder...If in the heat of grateful affection and unguarded Desire of sympathizing with those who sympathized with me, I too often deviated from my own principles? And tho' I detested Revolutions in my calmer moments, as attempts, that were very necessarily baffled and made blood horrible by the very causes which alone justify Revolutions (I mean the ignorance, superstition, profligacy, and vindictive passions which are the natural effects of Despotism and false religion)...Yet with an Ebullient Fancy, a flowing Utterance, a light and dancing Heart, and a disposition to catch fire by the very rapidity of my own motion and to speak vehemently from mere verbal associations....I aided the Jacobins, by witty sarcasms and subtle reasonings and declamations full of genuine feeling against all Rulers and against all established forms!²⁰

Recollecting this very tendency to high language and its attendant powers of "transportation", Coleridge cites what he believed to be one of the more notorious of these outbursts

Speaking in public at Bristol I adverted to a public supper which had been given by Lord---- I forget his name, In honor of a victory gained by the Austrians, and after a turbid stream of wild eloquence I said - "This is a true Lord's supper in the communion of Darkness! This is a Eucharist of Hell! A sacrament of Misery! over each morsel and each drop of which the spirit of some murdered innocent cries aloud to God, This is my Body! and This is my Blood! - " - These words form Alas! a faithful specimen of too many of my Declamations that time/ fortunately for me, the Government I suppose, knew that both Southey and I were utterly unconnected with any party or club or society.²¹

There is, beyond this, even the suggestion that Coleridge was simply rejecting authority or that he just could not refuse a taunt. He writes of the publication of "A Moral and Political Lecture"; "I was obliged to publish it, having been confidently assured that there was Treason in it"²².

Coleridge was one of those writers for whom government repression served as a catalyst and focus. He revised his attitudes towards Revolution with the continuing pace of Tory reaction. Reform - political, social, and moral - could be achieved in England through a progressive and bloodless revolution of ideas. Coleridge believed the only serious impediment to the progress of this organic revision would be the

particular legislative interventions of the current administration.

If a great people shall from hence become adequately illuminated for a revolution bloodless like Poland's, but not like Poland's assassinated by the foul Treason of Tyrants against Liberty.²³

Evidently, Coleridge had been much more specific in his accusations in the original draft. "Q", a gentleman of Bristol, and witness to much of the political scene there in 1795, recalls in The Monthly Magazine, for 1819, that the original was formed "foul hands of ----"²⁴. He concluded that the use of the blank carried with it the implication that Coleridge had libelously or slanderously inserted an actual name during the public lecture. The name, no doubt, was Pitt. Cottle described the lectures as "actively anti-Pittite"²⁵. "Q", who had known Coleridge during the Bristol days, agreed that he was anti-Pittite, but also anti-Foxite. Coleridge himself would offer another denial of the Jacobin label in The Friend, defying his "worst enemy to shew, in any of my few writings the least bias to irreligion, immorality, or Jacobinism."²⁶

A more mature and measured version of the Bristol Lectures was to follow that autumn with the publication of Conciones ad Popularem. Coleridge believed that the very nature of the current political crisis demanded the attention and industry of all thinking men. Almost in direct contrapost to

Windham's famous quip on Reform - "Why then, would you repair your house during the hurricane season?"²⁷ - Coleridge

begins these addresses with an appeal to the people;

When the wind is fair and the planks of the vessel sound, we may safely trust everything to the management of professional mariners: in a tempest and on board a crazy bark, all must contribute their quota of exertion.²⁸

The interests of security can only be served if all those in government, and without, try to maintain impartiality and a constructive effort towards non-partisan co-operation. However, lamenting the current divisive and self-interested nature of politics, Coleridge emphasizes the need for sincere reflection on the genuine principles and priorities of both government and its critics. He makes reference to the existing reform associations and societies in this regard;

Companies resembling the present will, from a variety of circumstances consist chiefly of jealous advocates for Freedom. It will therefore be our endeavor, not so much to excite the torpid, as to regulate the feelings of the ardent, and above all to evince the necessity of bottoming on fixed principles, that so we may not be the unstable Patriots of Passion or Accident, nor hurried away by names of which we have not sifted the meaning, and by tenets of which we have not examined the consequences.²⁹

This passage reflects a very different rhetorical tone from that which had characterized the lectures themselves not eight months earlier. The impact of both the government's policies and the course of the war with France was beginning to surface in the tone of his prose. The process of polarization between the factions of reaction and the extreme proponents of radical reform became increasingly pronounced during the summer of 1795. The additional strain of bread shortages escalated the pace and intensity of this process. For Coleridge, "The example of France is indeed a warning to Britain. A nation wading to their Rights through Blood, and marking the track of Freedom by Devastation".³⁰

Coleridge tried to warn both sides of the political contest, those pundits for the "science of government" and those whose office was the practice of government. Pitt was in the same danger from an exploding gun as those opposition practitioners who had used the weapon of popularism during the Gordon Riots. The "General Will" Coleridge considered a fickle and dangerous commodity.

Coleridge brings his reader's attention forcefully back to the supposed champions of liberty, the Jacobins, for his illustration of the worst excesses of the "General Will":

The annals of the French Revolution have recorded in letters of Blood, that the knowledge of the few cannot counteract the ignorance of the many; That the light of Philosophy, when it is confined to a small minority, points out the possessors as the Victims rather than illuminators of the multitude. The Patriots of France either hastened into the dangerous and gigantic error of making certain Evil the means of contingent Good, or were sacrificed by the Mob, with whose prejudices and ferocity their unbending Virtue forbade them to assimilate. Like Samson the people were strong - like Samson the people were blind: those two massy Pillars of Oppression's Temple, the Monarchy and the Aristocracy.³¹

Bringing his rhetoric to bear on England's own revolutionary past, he quotes from Milton's Samson Agonistes:

With horrible convulsion to and fro
They tugg'd they shook - till down they came and
drew
The whole roof after them with burst of thunder
Upon the heads of all who sat beneath,
Lords, Ladies, Captains, Counsellors and Priests,
Their Choice Nobility!³²

Taking another shot at Godwin and the Godwinists, Coleridge continues his warning of the dangers of violent popular uprisings, this time for the purposes of reform:

The process of revolution in France has been dreadful, and should incite us to examine with an anxious eye the motives and manners of those whose conduct and opinions seems calculated to forward a similar event in our own country. The oppositionists to "things as they are" are divided into many and different classes.³³

"Things as they are" was the subtitle of Godwin's Caleb Williams, which was published during the jurisprudential convulsions of 1794. Coleridge's criticism of Godwin continues

with reference to his own past assessment of the "theoretical weakness" in Political Justice. He does not, however, criticize Caleb Williams itself. The novel represents an important turn in Godwin's perspectives on change; a shift which Coleridge does not appear to have noted. What he does say is reminiscent of his earlier criticisms on "general benevolence" in Political Justice:

The majority of Democrats appear to me to have attained that portion of knowledge in politics, which infidels possess in religion...both contemplate truth and justice in the nakedness of abstraction.³⁴

It was the "nakedness of abstraction" which Coleridge had rejected in Godwin. He could not accept politics as a science of government, an iron law which took no notice of the erraticism, caprice, and spontaneity of human emotion and the exigencies of particular experience. To this extent he would have agreed with Volney , that "the science of government was the science of oppression".³⁵ Neither, could he believe that man could be calculated, in the positivist sense, to act in accord with a fixed conception of human nature. As man was not either good as Rousseau had conceived him, or vicious as Hobbes had surmized, some form of reflexive mediation must be achieved.

Moving increasingly in the direction of Burke, much as Godwin had, Coleridge continued to emphasize the practical necessity of established forms for order and stability:

Religion and Reason are but poor substitutes for "Church and Constitution", and the sable-vested instigators of the Birmingham Riots well knew that a syllogism could not disarm a drunken incendiary of his firebrand, or a Demonstration helmet a philosopher's head against a Brickbat.³⁶

There is moreover, the suggestion in the preceding passage that Reform must be achieved through the system. At least, Coleridge indicates that parliamentary reform must be achieved this way. Changes in the perspectives of society's constituent members must also take a gradual and non-violent course; it must be reflexive, organic. It must not disturb Godwin's "delicate web". Returning to political process, Coleridge would argue for the courts and juries, as Godwin had. If the reformer steps outside the system into lawless anarchy, he and his ideals will be destroyed by the mob.

Coleridge's argument for "legitimate" dissent continues to consider the representations that may be made of criticism, both inside and outside the system. Violent demonstration will be suppressed without investigation of cause; the record of it will be written by the oppressor's hand. Only in legitimate quarters will a legitimate record survive. Therefore, partisan associations and radical societies demonstrating outside the boundaries of the law are not the way to change government. He refers specifically to the Scottish Trials, as an example of the efficacy of legitimate resistance; "that small

but glorious band, whom we may truly distinguish by the name of thinking and distinguished Patriots"³⁷. He remarked that Joseph Gerrald had been such a man and he writes a sonnet To the Exiled Patriots:

Martyrs of Freedom - ye who firmly good
Stept forth the Champions in her glorious cause,
Ye who against Corruption nobly stood
For Justice, Liberty, and Equal Laws.
So shall your great examples fire each soul,
So in each free-born breast forever dwell,
Till man shall rise above the unjust control,
Stand where ye stood, and Triumph where ye
fell.³⁸

Not to put too literal a gloss on the last line, "stand where [Gerrald] stood [in the dock], triumph where [in the courts] ye fell." Coleridge's own road to this victory would be through the creation of a new political awareness, through journalism, education and the arts. First, the rulers must be reformed. He writes,

We certainly should never attempt to make
Proselytes by appeals to the selfish feelings - and
consequently should plead for the Oppressed and not
to them.³⁹

and

That general illumination should precede the
revolution is a truth as obvious as that the vessel
should be cleaned before we fill it with a clear
liquor.⁴⁰

He holds that the interests and the policies of those with power will change as the political will which sustains them changes. In clarification, Coleridge once again returns to the impracticability of Godwin and his Political Justice.

The author of an essay on Political Justice considers private societies as the sphere of real utility - that (each one illuminating those immediately beneath him). Truth by a gradual descent may at least reach the lowest order. But this is rather plausible than just or practical. Society as at present constituted does not resemble a chain that ascends in a continuity of links...the best as well as the most benevolent mode of diffusing Truth, who uniting the zeal of the methodist with the views of the philosopher, should be personally among the poor, and teach them their Duties in order that he may render them susceptible of their Rights.⁴¹

The notion of the interdependence of rights and duties would be further expanded in The Watchman, this was to be a central theme of Coleridge's political writings. With respect to the theory of general benevolence, Coleridge expands Godwin's conception to accommodate a balance and interdependence of forms and ideas with experience and feeling. This fusion of the abstract with the particular, of the eternal with the ephemeral, forms the basis of all social and political action. He writes "General benevolence is a necessary motive to constancy of pursuit; and this general benevolence is begotten and rendered permanent by social and domestic affections."⁴² Coleridge postulates an organicism in politics and society; one which emanates from the interaction of private affections and universal principles, caught in the "delicate web" of social and political forms. This conception was not only central to Coleridge's view of politics, but was the foundation of his

entire epistemology in both its creative and intellectual incarnations.

Conciones Ad Popularem organized the series of so-called "Moral and Political Lectures" which Coleridge had given at Bristol in February 1795. It attempted to account for the interaction of political and social forms with private conscience and personal affections. Its focus was at once practical and philosophical. The last of February's Bristol Lectures had been On the Present War. It was with this lecture that Coleridge turned most directly to the policies of the current administration.

Coleridge argued in the spring of 1795 that there was some confusion about the nature of criticism of the war with France. Was such criticism properly to be regarded as simple opposition to policy, or was it subversive and traitorous, an attempt to undermine the war effort, to betray the interests of the realm to the French? Coleridge begins his address by quoting from Phillip Francis May's speech in the Commons in May of 1794;

But in agreeing as I do to the substance of the address, let me not be compelled in the same breath to contradict myself, and to declare that the war is just and necessary...The question of the justice or necessity of the war is not at issue now.⁴³

Coleridge wished to clarify the issues, to separate criticism of the policy of the war from any attempt to undermine the success of the security of the realm. It may be possible to agree or to disagree with certain aspects of the government's policy without assenting wholesale to the expense and waste of the war. The danger has been the confusion of issues, the identification of any criticism with sedition:

Whatever may be the sentiments and language of the present address, the attempt to promote discussion will be regarded as dangerous, and from fools and from bigots I shall be honored with much complimentary reviling, and many panegyric abuses. But the conduct of the speaker is determined chiefly by the nature of his audience. He therefore, who shall proclaim me sedition because I speak "against wickedness in high places" must prove the majority of my hearers to be unenlightened, and therefore easily deluded - or men of desperate fortunes and therefore eager for the scramble of revolution."⁴⁴

Clearly Coleridge regarded his audience as neither. However, the increase in tension which the course of the war produced in the wake of the Treason Trials of 1794 was apparent to Coleridge in this February lecture of 1795. Pitt was gearing up for another retrenchment. Only three months after the acquittals, it seemed more urgent than ever to speak out. He writes;

The favorite phrases of the present day are - "it may be very well in Theory" - and the "effects of Jacobin Principles". Aided by the one and alarmed by the other, the shuddering Bigot flings the door of argument in your face, and excludes all Parly by gloomy anticipation of the consequences.⁴⁵

Coleridge utilizes Sheridan's speech in the Commons of January 5, 1795, to recall the spurious arguments employed by government to override the constitution in the past. He emphasizes with Sheridan the absurdity of the alarm;

This causeless Panic prepared us to endure the further suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act - endure it after three successive Verdicts of impartial Juries had proved that a conspiracy against the constitution existed only in the foul imagination of the accusers. "In the first of these trials (Mr. Sheridan observes) one pike was produced, which was afterward withdrawn from mere shame - a formidable instrument was talked of, to be employed against the cavalry: - it appeared upon evidence to be a te totem in a window in Sheffield. These desperate conspirators it appeared, had formed their encampment in a back garrett - their arsenal was provided with nine rusty muskets - and the formidable preparation which was to overturn the constitution was supported by an exchequer containing nine pounds and one bad shilling - All to be directed against the armed force and established Government of Great Britain.⁴⁶

Convinced that these actions constituted a ministerial conspiracy, Coleridge turned to the architects of the "plot":

Who is this minister to whom we have thus implicitly trusted every blessing? Are his qualities commensurate with the giant evils which he has occasioned? My mind may be jaundiced by the abhorrence of the man's actions - but whether Truth or Prejudice be the source of my failure I must acknowledge that having investigated attentively the speeches and measures of William Pitt, I am as little able to discover genius in the one as virtue in the other.⁴⁷

He continues by characterizing Pitt's policies as "mystery concealing meanness, as steam-clouds envelope a dung hill". He

recalls Pitt's own opposition to the American War some years earlier. He imbues them with a prophetic ring;

The fact was [Pitt had remarked] the war was an appendage to the first lord of the treasury, too dear to be parted with; it was the grand pillar raised on the ruins of the constitution, by which he held his situation.⁴⁸

Coleridge contrasts Pitt's own criticisms of Lord North with the prime minister's current actions:

This man William Pitt, did not then know that he should be a minister compared with whom Lord North might be canonized: and that with unheard of artifices and oppressions that might not be named, he should carry on a causeless war against a patriot people, more futile in horrors even than the American.⁴⁹

The essence of Coleridge's conjecture, then, is that all of the policies of repression - the abuses in the courts, the suspension of Habeas Corpus, and the new legislation before the House - have been orchestrated by Pitt to promote the war with France. Furthermore, Pitt maintains his own position through this war, which is a war of self aggrandizement for Pitt. By November of 1795, this suspicion was keener than ever.

Coleridge's response to the two acts proposed by Grenville and Pitt in November of 1795 was not quite as alacritous as Godwin's had been. Nor was it as cool a piece of criticism. The title proclaims the pamphlet's essence; The Plot Discovered: or an Address to the People Concerning Ministerial Treason. Coleridge's effort contains none of the rhetorical

caution which had characterized Godwin's Considerations. He is convinced that the legislation proposed by the government will finalize Pitt's prerogative authority. He warns his readers as to the gravity of the crisis, and reminds them of the real duties of politicians, "We have entrusted to parliament the guardianship of our liberties, not the power of surrendering them"⁵⁰. Coleridge recognized the overwhelming power of the positive law and the danger of its use as a political weapon. He points out that ordinary people are powerless in the system, and that thinking men must therefore be vigilant.

The mass of people have nothing to do with the laws but obey them! - Ere yet this foul treason against the majesty of man, ere yet this blasphemy against the goodness of God be registered amongst our statutes, I enter my protest.⁵¹

Reviewing the government's course of action over the preceding three years, Coleridge contends that the crisis of alarm has been generated, not by the societies nor by the pamphleteers, but by the administration itself. Returning to the first furors over Paine's book in 1792, Coleridge considers the relationship between "seditious activity" and government action:

At that time that Thomas Paine's books were dispersed "with an unremitting industry and a transcendent boldness" unexampled since that time, was not the same complaint made in a proclamation from the throne? The circumstances stated as causes in this bill, the same circumstances then existed; but did they produce a similar effect? Were not the higher classes infatuated, were not the multitude maddened with excessive loyalty? The dispersion

therefore of seditious pamphlets was not the cause:
that was the cause that gave to the sedition the
colouring of truth; and made disaffection the
dictate of hunger, the present unjust, unnecessary,
and calamitous war - a war that brought dearth and
threatens slavery!⁵²

Mirroring Lauderdale's speech in the Lord's, Coleridge turns to
the "incident of provocation" for these bills, the stoning of
the king's carriage.

I truly believe there is only one herd of
abandoned miscreants in his majesty's dominions
capable of committing so wicked and treasonable an
act on the first magistrate of the land...those
perjured conspirators against the lives and
liberties of the people, the disbanded troops of
spies and informers who, since the late state
trials have been out of employment.⁵³

The parallel to the debate in the Lords continues, as Coleridge
echoes Bedford's reservations regarding the need for further
legislation, given the efficacy (with respect to the King's
security) of the existing law. The courts had already responded
to the "attack" on the crown with more than sufficient zeal;

A man suspected from confused evidence of having
thrown a stone at his majesty had been committed
for high treason; and another who only exclaimed No
War! Bread! No War! has been committed for a high
misdemeanor: and yet it has been judged necessary
to provide further remedies!⁵⁴

Coleridge makes it clear that the attack on the King was not the
real cause of the two bills, but he does not deny the gravity of
such an attack. He makes a very interesting distinction between
the crown and the government. Like Godwin, he recognizes the
need to assure his audience of his sincerity and stability. He

must not be regarded as just another Jacobin fanatic in his criticisms of the government. As he had noted in his piece on The Current War, any criticism of government policy ran the risk of being held seditious. As Godwin had noted, the very wording of the present bill made any opposition of it seditious. Coleridge used the King as a rallying point of loyalty and patriotism, the King he defends. He acknowledged that the attack on the "first magistrate" was "wicked and treasonable". But the government was guilty of a greater act of treachery, one which undercut the security of the crown itself:

O that our beloved sovereign may never have
cause through his quaking ministers to adopt the
old epitaph, I was well, they would make me better
and so destroyed me.⁵⁵

By focusing on the danger of the two acts to the security of the crown (and by extension, the constitution), Coleridge appeals to a more familiar and emotional source of patriotism. By doing so, he granted his reader a degree of comfort which would make the contemplation of his message an acceptable possibility.

Godwin's Burkeian appeal for the sanctity of the common law would smack of intellectualism and suspect theory. Coleridge used a more evocative political tool in his rhetoric. With this tacit avowal of loyalty to King and country, he could more freely attempt to discredit the government. He could now turn to a deeper scrutiny of the conspiracy which he suspected in all of Pitt's dealings.

In all ministerial measures there are two reasons, the real and the ostensible. The ostensible reason of the present bill we have heard; the real reason will not elude the search of common sagacity.⁵⁶

The treason trials of 1794 were the real reason for the two acts of 1795. Pitt could not accept the acquittal of those twelve radicals. The decision demonstrated to Pitt an influence which he might not calculate in the course of his strategies, the English jury. Coleridge conjectures,

The existing laws of treason were too clear, too unequivocal. Judges indeed (what will judges not do?) judges might endeavor to transfer to these laws their own flexibility; judges might make strange interpretations. But English juries could not, would not understand them.⁵⁷

English juries would ensure that judges would "find law" not "make law". Therefore, William Pitt found it necessary to change the law. Coleridge places a far greater value on the law of statute than does Godwin. The distinction between their positions on jurisprudence can be confusing. Clearly the continuing operation of the law of precedent includes its incorporation and accommodation of the positive law. Case law considers the application of the rule to the particulars of the incident; it is dynamic not static in concept. In this regard judges do "make law". However, Coleridge puts his faith in parliament to change the law, and juries to see that it applies.

Godwin has little faith in parliament, he would see as little political intrusion as possible. He rejects the supremacy of parliament in favor of the supremacy of the law. After 1800 Coleridge would replace his faith in statute with an increased understanding of the organicism of the law of precedent. He would come to Godwin's position after all and view the positive law as inherently Jacobinical in nature. In 1814, he would argue that "practical law exists in precedent far more than in statutes". His concern in 1795, however, was that the latitude of judges and prosecutors had overshadowed the exactitude of the rule. His criticism of the new acts as statutes stems from his belief that they constituted the government's attempt to legitimize "politic" intervention.

The old treason laws are superceded by the exploded commentaries of obsequious crown lawyers, the commentary has conspired against the text: a vile and useless slave has conspired to dethrone its venerable master.⁵⁸

Coleridge's assessment of the implication of Grenville's bill is effectively the same as Godwin's. The law 25 Edward III convicted on the basis of overt acts and not supposed intentions. It protected subjects from the charge of "constructive" treason. Grenville's bill destroyed this protection. Coleridge submits,

It is the privilege of an Englishman to entertain what speculative opinions he pleases, provided he stir up no present action. Let my

reasonings have been monarchial or republican,
whilst I act as a royalist I am free of guilt. Soon
I fear such an excuse will no longer
prevail.⁵⁹

This freedom had been the basis of England's political stability. A broad spectrum of popular dissent, religious and political, had long been tolerated, at least as far as it extended to "speculative opinion". Coleridge believed that through this toleration, England had averted the polarized tension which had cracked apart the ancien regime. Roy Porter has described this process of stability, as one of "social fluidity"⁶⁰. English society was "silting up", and with this movement the rigidity which leads to revolution was avoided. Coleridge does not bring any class analysis to bear, but he believes in the dynamic growth of ideas and institutions; these must be reflexive to the changing exigencies of a society. The forms of government must be self critical, capable of accomodation and revision. He believed that the "gagging acts" foreshadowed disaster. He refers to the stasis which the government's new legislation will instill:

All political controversy is at an end. Those sudden breezes and noisey gusts, which purified the atmosphere they disturbed, are hushed to death-like silence.⁶¹

Some might argue that the ministry had no intention of exercising the full limits of the new legislation's power. The government had no intention of prosecuting a Hume for his Idea

of a Perfect Commonwealth they would respond. Coleridge answers them:

But I hear it suggested that the two acts will not be administered in all their possible stretch of implication! Pale-hearted men who cannot approve, yet who dare not oppose a most foul ministry, it is come to this, that Britons should depend on clemency not justice, that Britons should whine to ministers to stand between them and the law?⁶²

Coleridge may very well have been considering the proxy votes which supported Grenville's bill through the Lords, when he referred to those "pale-hearted men who cannot approve, yet who dare not oppose". He has no doubts as to the intentions of the ministry, which will not be the protection of the people. The evidence of the preceeding three years stands to the contrary. Even using the law as it had existed, the abuses overshadowed due process and this was through the intervention of ministerial machination:

Read the trial of Gerrald, and then ask your own hearts, on what evidence a man might be condemned? and what are these bills but an edition of Scotch laws with large additions.⁶³

Magistrates being as available to the lure of patronage as ministers, Coleridge has little faith in their ability to stand firm, particularly as Pitt was the patron par excellence. He conjures up the image of the cabal with his warning:

Of these mysterious slave-masons know ye not who is the grand master? And from these he will find it possible to pack juries?...have we not then the authority of Christ for asserting that men, who have been made judges by a ministry and hope to be

made Lord Chancellors, may and sometimes will be creatures of that ministry?⁶⁴

Coleridge was, by the year's end, acutely conscious of what those "creatures of the ministry" might do. Unlike Godwin's pamphlet, which attempted to prevent the passing of the "two acts", The Plot Discovered followed the legislation by several weeks. Although the pamphlet was dated November 1795, it was not in fact written until late December. Coleridge did not want the pamphlet to come under the terms of Grenville's bill. He wanted to avoid any risk of prosecution himself. Frustration and caution made this his last attempt at active political criticism.

During the spring of 1796, Coleridge turned to private journalism in The Watchman. He expressed a more conservative view on the war and the French in An Essay On Modern Patriotism. He expressed the belief that England needed a truly national spirit to triumph, a position ironically in line with Pitt's. Suspicious of French intentions, he wrote "A Remonstrance of French Legislators" in the eighth edition of The Watchman. Such publications constituted a very different stand than that expressed in the prospectus in 1795. Coleridge had spoken on the reform side and lapsed at times into Jacobinical language. His intention for The Watchman had been "that all may know the TRUTH, and that the TRUTH may make us FREE!"⁶⁵ The editorial

slant of the ten issues which were actually published between February and May of 1796 supported the "gagging acts" which Coleridge had just denounced in the Plot Discovered. He now considered the legislation useful, "so that writers should be more cool and guarded, and that they should stick to first principles"⁶⁶.

Coleridge's apparent political realignment within six months of the two acts, demonstrates his rejection of active criticism. Pamphleteering availed nothing. The basis of power was patronage and corruption; until that basis changed, criticism from without would alter nothing. Coleridge's preference for "first principles" and his turn towards "cool and guarded" language, marks the beginning of his search for the deeper solution to the crisis of politics and society. With the publication of The Eolian Harp in the Fall of 1796, he strikes the first metaphor for a new dialectical organicism; a metaphor of unification and synthetic integration. The aeolian harp was an instrument fashioned by man which played and was played by the wind. It was a material conduit for cosmic forces, it was processive, its tone changing with the tension of the strings and the energy of the wind. Throughout the poem, Coleridge investigates an entire world of sense and particular experience as it is touched by the ideal and formal nature of universals. From the quiet joy of domestic comfort and his "pensive

Sara" ⁶⁷ to the heady scent of a bean field and the "stilly murmur of the distant Sea", ⁶⁸ Coleridge creates a world at once familiar and yet removed from the familiar. Conceiving of all experience, the sensual and the conceptual, as a macrocosm of particular forms and institutions, Coleridge fuses his aesthetic with a religious social and political interaction:

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the soul of each, and God of all?⁶⁹

After 1795, politics became, for Coleridge, an aesthetic problem. Its solution lay in art and language. To change the structure and form of government required a complete revolution of culture, meaning, and mind. This could only be achieved through a shift in the associative value of rhetoric, and for the poet, at a deeper level, metaphor and symbolism. His preoccupation with dialecticism and its transcendent dynamic of meaning and experience was the basis of this epistemology. His investigation of Kantian philosophy after 1798 was an attempt to fill out the conceptual framework for the greater creative endeavor of the poetry. Through these new mediums of expression Coleridge addressed the challenge which all the romantic poets faced, an attempt to educate and convert men to an understanding which would overcome the rigidity and stasis of dualism, mechanism, and the clock-makers' universe. Like Blake, he

attacked the "mind-forg'd manacles".⁷⁰ Searching for the spiritual foundation of all understanding he would move beyond "these shapings of the unregenerate mind"⁷¹ and try to regenerate perception and experience from the poverty and sterility of enlightenment philosophy, religion, and politics.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Earl Lesley Griggs, The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,
(Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956) Vol. 1 p. 89
2. Although Coleridge and Southey went to Bristol to arrange a ship and settlers for their Pantisocracy, they ran out of money. This combined with the problems which the war posed, kept them in Bristol throughout 1794-1795.
3. Griggs, p. 89.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p.126.
6. Ibid., p.116.
7. Ibid., p.121.
8. Ibid., p.133.
9. Ibid., p.143
10. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,
(London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971) Vol. 1:
Lectures on Politics and Religion p. xviii.
11. C. Kegan Paul William Godwin, his Friends and Contemporaries
(New York: A.M.S. Press 1970) Vol. II p. 320.
12. Patton & Mann, p.xvii.
13. Patton & Mann, p. 22.
14. David Hartley, Physician and Philosopher (1705-1757), Author of Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, his Expectations (2 vol.,1749). Coleridge named his son Hartley as a token of respect for Hartley's work.
15. Griggs, p. 86.

16. Griggs, p. 85.
17. J. Shawcross, Biographia Literaria by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (London: Oxford University Press, 1907) Ch. 10,I, p.121
18. Actually a series of six lectures on politics and religion.
19. Patton & Mann, p. 52.
20. Griggs II, pp. 1000-1
21. Ibid.
22. Griggs, p. 152.
23. Patton & Mann, p. 7
24. The Monthly Magazine Vol. XLVIII, p. 204.
25. Cottle published much of Coleridge and Southey's early , work; he was also a friend and critic. Joseph Cottle, Reminiscences of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey (London: Houlston & Stoneman Ltd., 1848) Vol I p. 20.
26. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Friend, 7 No. 2 (8 June, 1809).
27. Hansard, Vol. 30, p.
28. Patton & Mann, p.33.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., p.36.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p.37.
34. Ibid.
36. Ibid., p.38.
37. Ibid., p.41.
38. Patton & Mann, p. 42.

39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., p.43.
42. Ibid., p.46.
43. Hansard, Vol. 31, p. 95.
44. Patton & Mann, p. 52.
45. Ibid., p.53.
46. Ibid., p.61
47. Ibid., p.62
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., p.66
50. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Plot Discovered; or an Address to the People Concerning Ministerial Treason", Essays on His Own Times (New York: A.M.S. Press, 1971) vol. 1, p 56
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., p.58
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., p.59
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., p.60
59. Ibid., p.61
60. Roy Porter, England in the Eighteenth Century: A Social History (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971) p.15
61. "The Plot Discoveed", p.15

62. Ibid., p.63
63. Ibid., p.64
64. Ibid.
65. John Colmer, Coleridge a Critic of Society (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1977) p.65
66. Ibid.
67. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Eolian Harp (1795). The reference is to his wife, Sara Fricker Coleridge, whom he married in Bristol in 1794 for the Pantisocracy. The Norton Anthology of English Literature, vol.2 (1979) p. 478.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. William Blake, The Human Abstract, M. H. Abrams, The Norton Anthology of English Literature (New York W. W. North, 1979 forth edition) - p.412

CONCLUSION

The dichotomy in ideas and the aesthetic revolution which the failure of political radicalism would provoke has been discussed in various degrees from its inception. Critics of the day, like Francis Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review, regarded literature as the product of a particular society, as a social fact, and as a force for change¹. Jeffrey's rejection of "radical" poetry would cause him to associate Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads with Paine's Rights of Man. He decried the levelling tendencies of both. Marilyn Butler, although not necessarily accepting Jeffrey's assessment of Wordsworth, would certainly agree that a new social force was rising in the arts after 1795; its "corporate author was the urban sub-class which emerged through its opposition to Britain's National Policy"². For Coleridge and Godwin, this new social force would provide the solution to the crisis of politics and society.

By 1800, Coleridge would communicate his belief to Godwin that a coalition of artistic and intellectual energies could overcome the "mere Talents"³. He had moved to the right in his politics, but he did not endorse the Pitt administration anymore than he had in 1795. The collaboration and friendship with Wordsworth reinforced and stimulated Coleridge's thought on art and language. Ironically, the levelling impulse which was inherent in much of The Lyrical Ballads was far more revolutionary than anything the radical pamphlets had

expressed. Coleridge was still opposed to the methods of the current government. The very abuses which had caused his frustration with politics in 1795 still sustained the administration. Godwin had also come to the belief that there were alternatives to the futility of pamphleteering. As J.W.Marken observes,

Godwin and the Whig opposition in the House of Commons lost this battle for free enquiry and freedom of assembly when the bills [the "gagging acts" of 1795] passed...Godwin became a creature of abhorrence to most people as the conservatives strengthened their control. Though never silent publicly or privately, from this period on he wrote less frequently on current political subjects and turned increasingly to fiction and the literary essay for publishing his ideas.⁴

The shift to literary and philosophical forms such as fiction, the drama, and poetry, would be commensurate with an apparent turn towards conservatism in both Godwin and Coleridge. Coleridge, in particular, moved increasingly to the right after 1796⁵. Like Godwin and like Burke, he would favor organic evolutionary change rather than violent revolution.⁶ Nationalism would provide the emotional drive behind this movement. It would, in conjunction with religious belief, provide the organizing principle behind this change. Religion organized power through an aesthetic principle. It integrated intimate spiritual experience with absolutes of form and structure. It would provide the ethical basis for Coleridge's quiet revolution. In this sense, Coleridge's conservatism is not

a conversion to government policy, but individual reflection and revision. It is more consonant with the new German Idealism, which Coleridge would investigate in order more carefully to construct the conceptual framework for his new language of synthesis and organic unity. It is increasingly elitist, but

continues to be revolutionary in principle and not merely aristocratic reaction. Coleridge would describe this transformation himself, in the Biographia Literaria. Reflecting on the revision which he and many of the writers of the period experienced, he remarked;

The youthful enthusiasts who, flattered by the morning rainbow of the French Revolution, had made the boast of expatriating their hopes and fears, now disciplined by succeeding storms and sobered by increase of years, had been taught to prize and honour the spirit of nationality as the best safeguard of national independence, and this again as the absolute prerequisite and necessary basis of popular rights.⁷

Nationalism also provided an emotional dimension, a dynamic fervor and energy which could be tapped as a constructive force for change and growth. This again finds expression in German writers such as Gottfried von Herder⁸. But it was still the aesthetic dimension which Coleridge hoped would order and focus this experience, the aesthetic dimension which the radical tradition lacked, as it became increasingly rationalistic in its philosophy. The attempted synthesis of these dichotomous trends in ideas would provide the key. As one critic has noted, "none of the English made the transition from republican to royalist

with the metaphysical precision of Friedrich Schlegel".⁹

Coleridge at least, sought to bridge that gap.

Carl Woodring points to the rift between a developing Romanticism and the radical liberal tradition which persisted after the political criticisms of 1795 had failed to bear fruit. He believes that the persistence of this divergence of perspective would continue to confound the political ideas of the Romantic poets:

The discrepancies between the rationalist empirical and utilitarian basis of liberalism, and the romantic intrusions of organicism and unifying imagination created a crisis, and usually remained a dilemma in the political beliefs of each of the major romantic poets.¹⁰

Yet it was precisely this dilemma which the romantic movement in England sought to address through a process of aesthetic discovery and enlightenment. Idealism would be used to integrate the individual psyche with the social and political world. This was the alternative to the frustrating inadequacies of "active" political dissent. Turning to William Blake, Marilyn Butler underlines this point.

Recalling the two acts perhaps, Butler points out that Blake's work became "increasingly obscure and depoliticized after 1795"¹¹. Some critics, she suggests, favor this as the great world-building phase, seeing this as Blake's attempt to turn his work into a single comprehensive system. Others view it

as a reflection of a group experience which underwent profound transformations. Both explanations are to some extent correct.

As Butler remarks:

The later books, Vala, Milton and Jerusalem, are enormously powerful and deeply expressive of their age: "Romantic", perhaps, in the new German sense, like very few other English productions of the immediate period. But in their turning away from the material world of political action and the senses five there is also the shadow of a collective frustration and postponed, if not lost, hope.¹²

Blake provides a useful corroboration of the "group experience" which influenced Coleridge and Godwin. Both Blake and Coleridge would attempt to integrate religious reform into their visions of social and political change. Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell takes Priestley's part against Swedenborg, and criticizes the total realignment of the new church on the side of authority. Blake favored the old inspirational radical simplicity of the church. The concern with religion had always been present in Coleridge's criticism of the state. Having been instructed in Unitarianism by William Frend while at Cambridge, he carried these themes through his Moral and Political Lectures at Bristol, and with a more conservative revision to his Lay Sermons. Consistent with the search for some "ethical basis", religion also provided Coleridge's principle of dialectical organicism with a transcendental and aesthetic dimension.

While Coleridge moved towards mysticism and symbolism in his search for reintegration in society, Godwin remained essentially rationalistic in his perspective. Godwin does turn towards a more human and contingent understanding of the world, and the need to find a more forceful medium of expression. By 1800, he was working on a Drama, Antonio, which Coleridge proofed and criticized for him. Godwin's interest in the drama does suggest a foreshadowing of the political aesthetics which Wagner,¹³ Nietzsche,¹⁴ and later Luckacs¹⁵ would investigate. However, Godwin cannot be described as pursuing a romantic ethos in politics. He parallels Bentham as a rationalist, but not as a utilitarian, and certainly not with respect to jurisprudence. Some suggest Robert Owen as Godwin's ideological offspring.¹⁶ New Lanark certainly proposed a utopia of social justice. In Godwin's defense of Dr. Parr, there was also a real undercurrent of religious tolerance, if not belief. This too can be attributed to his relationship with Coleridge after 1798.

Godwin and Coleridge were both changed by the politics of 1795. They had been educated by the realities of power, and forced to consider its alternatives for revolution. Neither could they escape the influence of the intellectual movements which each represented, and which each exerted on the other. Coleridge maintained his faith in their power to reform society;

recalling these early trials, early enmities, and early beliefs, he thought of Godwin often, and "never without pleasure, never without making out of the past a little day-dream for the future."¹⁷ The romantic movement would produce a profound dynamic in ideas and institutions for the nineteenth century. In the wake of the Revolution in France and the reactionary retrenchment of English politics, this departure in art, language, and ideas, would provide a transvaluation of value, a revolution of social, cultural, and political consequence.

Notes to Conclusion

1. John Colmer, Coleridge, a Critic of Society,
(Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1977) p. 102
2. Marilyn Butler, Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries:
English Literature and its Background 1760-1830
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) p. 43
3. E.L.Griggs, The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor
Coleridge (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,
1966) Vol. 1 p.344
4. Jack W. Marken & Burton R. Pollin eds., Uncollected
Writings (1785-1822) by William Godwin (Gainesville
Fla.: Scholars Facsimiles and reprints, 1968)
5. Colmer, p.86
6. Ibid.
7. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria ed.
J.Shawcross, (London 1906) p.190
8. With specific reference to Herder's theories of
language, symbolism, and folkloric tradition, as opposed
to his theories of blood and race.
9. Friedrich Schlegel conceived of the universe as one
cohesive aesthetic. See Woodring p.16,
also see G.N.E. Orsini, Coleridge and German Idealism
(Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1969)
10. Woodring, p. 3
11. Butler, p. 51
12. Ibid.
13. Richard Wagner details a complete force for social
revolution based on the concept of Greek tragedy in his
"The Arts of Poetry and Tone in the Drama of the Future"
from Richard Wagner's Prose Works Broude Brothers, New
York, reprinted from the 1893 London edition with
Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. - U.S.A., 1966.
14. Friedrich Nietzsche expanded the philosophical framework
of Wagner's arguments in The Birth of Tragedy(1859).
Nietzsche details the dynamic between the two
antithetical forces of civilization, the Apollonian and
the Dionysian, the rational and the intuitive.

15. More recently the Frankfurt school has picked up the concept of the aesthetic force behind social revolution with Karl Lukacs' work on the drama, an attempt to integrate the emotive force behind culture into Western Marxism.
16. Rosalie Grylls, William Godwin and His World
p.176.
17. Griggs, p.344

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