

THE KNIGHT OF THE WOEDL. COUNTENANCE  
GOING TO EXTIRPATE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.



*It is undeniably true, though it may seem paradoxical; but in general, those who are habitually employed in finding and displaying faults, are unqualified for the work of reformation; because their minds are not only unfurnished with patterns of the fair and good, but by nature they come to take no delight in the contemplation of those things. By having eyes too much, they come to love more too little. It is therefore not wonderful, that they should be unacquainted and unable to serve them. From hence arises the complexional disposition of some, if you guide to pull every thing in pieces. — Burke on the French Revolution. Page 220.*

*In Holland's Exhibition Rooms may be seen the largest collection in Europe of caricatures of the French Revolution.*

# Romanticism and Revolution

A READER | EDITED BY JON MEE AND DAVID FALLON

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

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## A READER

*Edited by*  
Jon Mee and David Fallon



 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2011  
© 2011 Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

*Registered Office*

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ,  
United Kingdom

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Romanticism and revolution : a reader / edited by Jon Mee and David Fallon.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4443-3043-4 (hardcover : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-1-4443-3044-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. English literature--18th century. 2. Romanticism--Great Britain. 3. France--History--Revolution, 1789--1799--Literature and the revolution. I. Mee, Jon. II. Fallon, David James, 1977–  
PR1139.R663 2011  
820.8'0145--dc22

2010038181

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Set in 11/13pt DanteMT by Spi Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India  
Printed in Malaysia by Ho Printing (M) Sdn Bhd

## Praise for *Romanticism and Revolution*

'*Romanticism and Revolution* offers a representative anthology of immediate British reactions to the epoch-making events taking place in late eighteenth-century France. Reflections on the Revolution meant debate over the Rights of Man – and Woman – as well as on the nature of Government, patriotism, social and political justice. This careful selection of passages from the most important texts allows modern readers to see the intense contemporary debate unfold, to consider the arguments and to trace the dialogues between different writers. Key players in the great Revolutionary Debate come alive for a modern readership through these memorable passages of highly distinctive prose and are set in context by the other extracts as well as through judicious editorial introductions and notes. Anyone keen to develop a real understanding of the political climate of the early 1790s will find this volume indispensable.'

Fiona Stafford, Somerville College, University of Oxford

'An indispensable volume – in every way a worthy successor to Marilyn Butler's *Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy*. In *Romanticism and Revolution*, Mee and Fallon provide intelligent, representative, wide-ranging selections from Price, Burke, Wollstonecraft, Paine, and Godwin for a new generation of students and scholars. Due not least to the generosity of their selections, Mee and Fallon revitalize our understanding of – to name but a few contexts – Price's politics of Rational Dissent, Burke's affective rhetoric of the sentiments, both Wollstonecraft's attack on Burkean theatricality and her arguments for female education, Paine's levelling of political language, and Godwin's ideals of political utility and disinterestedness. As Mee and Fallon note, the Revolution controversy was a political battle fought with literary weapons: *Romanticism and Revolution* illuminates this vital affiliation throughout, emphasizing as it does the indissoluble links between the rhetoric of political argument and the politics of literary forms and strategies. *Romanticism and Revolution* forcefully reminds us of the centrality of the Revolution controversy both for the writers of the 1790s, writing as they were under the pressure of events at home and abroad, and for critics of Romanticism ever since, trying to make sense of the incontestable though often unwieldy connections between Romanticism and Revolution. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the heady mix of politics and literature that continues to constitute Romanticism.'

Charles W. Mahoney, University of Connecticut

'This anthology is perfectly pitched to help students understand the ideas and debates that underpin literary Romanticism. The introduction is excellent and the headnotes and footnotes make the texts themselves far more accessible. This is a hugely useful text for any Romantic Period module.'

Sharon Ruston, University of Salford

'Jon Mee and David Fallon's *Romanticism and Revolution: A Reader* is destined to become the first choice for those seeking to analyze the most important context for the emergence of English Romanticism. This work – given the care of its preparation, the concision of its informative introductions, and the greater depth of its entries – will delight students and teachers frustrated by past anthologies and should supplant past anthologies in classrooms at every level of instruction.'

Mark Lussier, Arizona State University

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# Preface and Acknowledgements

‘Everything rung, and was connected, with the Revolution in France; which for above 20 years, was, or was made, the all in all. Everything, not this or that thing, but literally everything, was soaked in this one event’.<sup>1</sup> So Henry Cockburn recalled the French Revolution’s enormous cultural impact throughout Britain. The deluge of pamphlets from the press upon the fall of the *ancien régime* in France was to have a crucial and lasting effect upon British culture, especially among the writers commonly identified with British Romanticism.

‘The revolution controversy’, as it has become known, is now widely taught in the early weeks of courses on Romantic literature in the United Kingdom, the United States, and other parts of the English-speaking world. In this regard, Marilyn Butler’s *Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy* (1984) was a groundbreaking collection, familiarizing literary students and scholars alike with the idea that the prose of the 1790s not only played a vital part in the formation of Romanticism, but also had important literary qualities of its own. Our anthology offers substantial extracts from the key contributions to the ‘debate’ on the French Revolution, so readers and students can engage closely with these texts. The chronological arrangement and use of the earliest editions will allow readers to experience the debate as it unfolded and to explore how the different writers responded to each other’s arguments and rhetoric. The selections have been chosen mindful of scholarly debate since Butler first published her anthology, but also in order to display the striking rhetorical ingenuity of their authors and the complex inter-relationships between their texts. Finally, the passages, head-notes, and annotations are designed to fuel thinking about these relationships, their broader cultural contexts, and their influence on the literature of the Romantic period in general.

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<sup>1</sup> Lord Henry Cockburn, *Memorials of his Time*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1856), I, 79.



The editors would like to dedicate the volume to Marilyn Butler, in acknowledgement of her defining influence on thinking about the relationship between Romanticism and the politics of the 1790s, and also for the great encouragement she has always given new workers in the field. They would also like to thank Emma Bennett at Blackwell for commissioning the anthology, the University of Warwick and St Anne's College, Oxford, for institutional support, and Jane Huyg and Felicia Gottmann for their help and patience.

## A Note on the Texts

Our texts are taken from the first editions, with the exception of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, where the second edition emended by Wollstonecraft has been preferred. Footnotes in curly brackets are the author's own original annotation; all other footnotes are ours. Non-standard spellings have been retained, but obvious errors in the original texts have been silently corrected. The peculiarities of the writers' grammar and punctuation also remain; later editions regularize some of these idiosyncrasies, but in the earliest editions these features give the texts a striking rhetorical immediacy. References to texts in the footnotes are to first editions and the place of publication for texts in English is London, unless otherwise stated.



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# Introduction

Writing to Byron on 6 September 1816, Percy Shelley referred to 'the master theme of the epoch in which we live – the French Revolution'.<sup>1</sup> British literature and culture of the Romantic period are steeped in the discourse generated by the Revolution. This anthology focuses on the first wave of writing in the Revolution controversy, up to and including Godwin's *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793). These texts were crucial to the development and democratization of political debate, not only in terms of their arguments as such, but also in that they released into the culture of politics more generally a series of metaphors and phrases – like Burke's image of revolutionary Don Quixotes (p. 22 below), which would be turned so memorably against him (see front cover and pp. 75, 98). Such tropes were endlessly revisited, argued over, and recast in subsequent texts, opening up political discourse to a much wider audience. Even Godwin's book, despite its elevated manner and price, was widely debated in radical meetings, and its principles were disseminated at popular lectures by radical leaders such as John Thelwall.<sup>2</sup> Paradoxically, radicals themselves recognized the importance of Burke's attack on the Revolution in stimulating public debate. A wave of popular conservatism could even be said to have had the unintended consequence of transforming the political culture which it meant to preserve from innovation.<sup>3</sup>

All the texts represented here bear the mark of the powerful jolt given to European political consciousness by the French Revolution of 1789 – not just the iconic event of the fall of the Bastille, but also the rush of developments that increasingly radicalized

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<sup>1</sup> *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), I, 504.

<sup>2</sup> *The Politics of English Jacobinism: Writings of John Thelwall*, ed. by Gregory Claeys (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp. xxvii–xxx.

<sup>3</sup> See Kevin Gilmartin, *Writing against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).



the Revolution, taking France from the constitutional monarchy installed in 1789 to the declaration of a 'Republic' in late 1792, which was followed swiftly by the execution of Louis XVI and by the subsequent war with Britain in early 1793. Initially, the fall of the absolute monarchy and of the established Catholic Church in France were greeted in Britain with a wave of enthusiasm. Many regarded France as realizing a spirit of progress and enlightenment, which was perceived to have characterized the modernizing impulse of the eighteenth century. Nowhere was this idea more powerfully expressed than in the sermon which the dissenting minister Richard Price gave in November 1789. Price was coming to the end of a career as one of the leading voices of radical nonconformism, that is, of those Protestant groups outside the Church of England. Because they would not conform to the Anglican Church's Thirty-Nine Articles, Dissenters had been excluded from various aspects of public life by the Test and Corporation Acts passed after the Restoration (the return of the monarchy) in 1660. Although it has often been pointed out that the penalties and exclusions against Dissenters were not always enforced, men like Price and his close associate Joseph Priestley had been at the forefront of calls for reform for three decades. They were particularly active and visible presences in the expanding print culture of the later eighteenth century, representing the leading edge of the English Enlightenment and enlarging their concern for freedom of conscience in matters of religion into a validation of freedom of enquiry in all quarters. In more literary terms, theirs was an intellectual group that also boasted among its leading lights poets such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Helen Maria Williams, both of whom, to their own cost, were to be important supporters of the French Revolution and of reform in Britain. Dissenters had campaigned hard throughout the 1780s for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Motions for repeal were put before Parliament and defeated in 1787, 1788, and 1790. By the time of the last vote, events in France had raised the political temperature sufficiently to ensure the motion came with the largest margin of defeat among the three.

To associate dissent in religion with political revolution was a long-standing reflex of the establishment of Church and State in Britain, going back to the seventeenth century and to the English Civil War. It was an association confirmed for many by the fiery rhetoric of Price's sermon, with its vision of world liberty as the fulfilment of God's plan for mankind. *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* also directly addresses an issue that was to become central to the Revolution controversy and to its relationship with Romanticism thereafter. How far were ideas of benevolence defined by local relationships of family, home, and hearth, and how far could they transcend local attachments and sustain a politics that looked to the welfare of all mankind? Like many eighteenth-century philosophers, Price does not represent universal benevolence and love of one's locality as mutually exclusive, rather he sees sympathy naturally progressing from the one to the other.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Evan Radcliffe, 'Writing, Moral Philosophy, and Universal Benevolence in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 54 (1993), 221–40.

In 1794, being at the time very much influenced by Rational Dissent, the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge also represented 'Philanthropy' as 'a thing of *Concretion* – Some home-born Feeling is the *center* of the Ball, that, rolling on thro' Life collects and assimilates every congenial Affection'.<sup>5</sup> Local attachments teach individuals benevolence, which, properly cultivated, should develop into a concern for humanity as a whole. For Price, emphatically, to be trapped in self-interest and in national pride perverted the natural development of humanity. Burke and subsequent loyalists attacked such ideas of universal philanthropy as 'French' thinking that threatened to dissolve natural attachments. The *Anti-Jacobin* mocked ideas of the 'Universal Man' as absurd: 'No narrow bigot he; – his reason'd view / Thy interests, England, ranks with thine, Peru!'<sup>6</sup>

For all the fervour of his sermon's language, Price was not calling for the overthrow of the English system of government in favour of a republic, but for a return to the key principles of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 as he saw them, with their guarantee of the Protestant succession and with what was taken to be their protection of the rights of the subject. Like many others, he believed that recent decades had witnessed a growing manipulation of Parliament through the influence of the Crown and of the aristocracy, a process which culminated in the loss of the American colonies. British liberties had become corrupted and needed to be restored. Like many sermons of the period, Price's was quickly printed and sold by sympathetic booksellers such as Joseph Johnson, a major figure in the networks of dissenting intellectuals. For Edmund Burke, the sermon provided a key target for his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) (see pp. 21–50 below). Many contemporaries expected Burke to support the French reformers. He had championed the American colonists in the 1770s and campaigned for economic reforms in Britain in the 1780s. These associations had earned him the respect of Thomas Paine, who was even – briefly – his guest and corresponded with him amicably about the early events of the Revolution. Burke's antipathy for the Revolution was only clearly signalled in a speech on the army estimates, delivered in Parliament in February 1790. In response to praise of the Revolution from his former ally Charles James Fox, leader of the Whig opposition, and to a suggestion from the Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger, that military expenditure could be reduced, Burke exploded:

The French had shewn themselves the ablest architects of ruin that had hitherto existed in the world. In that very short space of time they had completely pulled down to the ground, their monarchy; their church; their nobility; their law; their revenue; their army; their navy; their commerce; their arts; and their manufactures.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> To Robert Southey, 13 July 1794, *The Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 6 vols, ed. by E. L. Griggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956–71), I, 86.

<sup>6</sup> 'The New Morality', *The Anti-Jacobin*; or, *Weekly Examiner*, 36, 9 July 1799.

<sup>7</sup> 'Substance of the Speech on the Army Estimates, 1790', in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 7 vols (London: Thomas McLean, 1828), V, 6.