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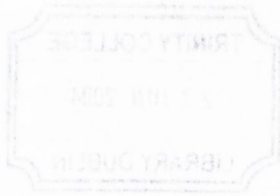
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**THE REVOLUTION IN ACTION: SERVANTS
IN BRITISH FICTIONS OF THE 1790s.**

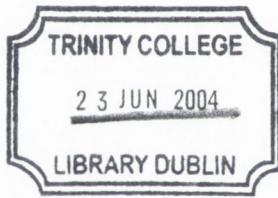
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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor in Philosophy of the University of Dublin, Trinity College,
May 2004.



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SUMMARY

Taking its title from Napoleon's famous description of Figaro as "the Revolution in action", the following thesis explores the depiction of servants in British fictions of the 1790s, and argues that both radical and conservative authors self-consciously foregrounded provocative servant characters as symbols of revolutionary energy. In a decade in which prose fiction was intensely politicised, servants in British prose fictions assume obvious ideological significance in a way which distinguishes them from earlier eighteenth-century servants, as well as from the servants that follow in the nineteenth century. Such a reading differs substantially from the only other study of servants in British prose fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Bruce Robbins' *The Servant's Hand*, which argues that literary servants are both always marginalised, and always independent of their particular socio-political contexts.

This thesis engages extensively with Edmund Burke's early counter-revolutionary works, his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), and demonstrates how his model of what the Revolution did to the domestic servant is appropriated by novelists throughout the 1790s, revealing the nature and extent of Burke's influence on fiction, as well as on politics.

Literacy and sensibility are two of the dissertation's most important themes, both objects of intense contention in the 1790s, especially in relation to the poor. Each chapter illustrates how the relation of the literary servants(s) in question to education and to feeling changes according to the position of authors within the Revolution Debate. Literacy in servants is commonly depicted as disrupting the existing social order, either for good, or for ill; the uses to which servants put sensibility is steadily radicalised as the 1790s progress, and is testament to the immense distrust of the cult of feeling in Britain in the post-revolutionary years.

There has already been a substantial amount of critical attention paid to the position of women in the 1790s. Following on from this, I explore how the questioning of patriarchal authority implicit in the French Revolution affected servants, as well as women, and how a fracture in the relation between master and servant was more broadly appropriated as a metaphor for the passing of the *Ancien Régime* itself.

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Let us only suffer any person to tell us his story, morning and evening, but for one twelvemonth, and he will become our master.

— Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on French Affairs* (1791).

Not your humble Servant, but the Contrary.

— Thomas Paine, *Letter Addressed to the Addressers* (1792).

INTRODUCTION.

The eighteenth-century servant with whom we in the twenty-first century are most familiar is unquestionably Figaro. Beaumarchais's play, *Le Mariage de Figaro*, in which the servant-protagonist outwits his sexually predatory master and prevents him from sleeping with his fellow servant and bride-to-be, was an instant and dramatic success. After its first public performance in 1784, fashion-conscious French women sported fans decorated with verses from the play and wore bonnets *à la Suzanne*.¹ The character of Figaro also captured the imagination of Mozart, whose opera of the play, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, premiered in Vienna just two years later in 1786. Still enjoying a vigorous existence in opera houses all over the world, Figaro has survived as the most famous fictional servant from the time of the beginning of the end of the European *Ancien Régime*.

Our fascination with Figaro is intimately bound up with his revolutionary implications. Just five years after Beaumarchais's servant first questions the *droit de seigneur* of his despotic aristocratic master, revolution erupted across France. Now war was waged openly, in the name of the people, against *all* manifestations of aristocratic privilege. With the benefit of hindsight, it is naturally difficult to disassociate Figaro's seditious activities within his master's household from the socio-political cataclysm about to occur on a national level. And readings of Figaro from the end of the eighteenth century until today have indeed tended to designate him "the revolutionary before the Revolution".² Napoleon famously remarked of Figaro that he embodied "the Revolution in action";³ while as recently as 2001, a BBC series entitled *Art that Shook the World* began by treating Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* as an incendiary opera that, in its depiction of master/servant relations in crisis, predicted, and possibly even contributed to, the Revolution that would lead directly to the decapitation of the French king.⁴

However, not all post-revolutionary critics of both the play and the opera⁵ concur in seeing this tale of the servant triumphant as "the first stone flung in the French

¹ Antonia Fraser, *Marie-Antoinette: The Journey* (2001; London: Phoenix, 2002), 255.

² Tim Carter, *W. A. Mozart: Le Nozze di Figaro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 37.

³ Cited in *ibid*, 38.

⁴ A summary of this programme is available on the BBC web site: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/artthatshook1/figaro/index.shtml>. The *Figaro* episode was first broadcast on 21st April 2001.

⁵ Mozart's opera has sometimes been viewed as a dilution of Beaumarchais's radicalism. In the play, Figaro compares himself advantageously to his master: "What have *you* done to deserve such advantages? Put yourself to the trouble of being born—nothing more. ... Whereas I, lost among the obscure crowd, have had to deploy more knowledge, more calculation and skill

Revolution”.⁶ Nicholas Till, for example, asserts categorically that the association of Figaro with revolutionary agency has more to do with the coincidence—and it is only that—of the play’s and the opera’s first performances with the imminent outbreak of the Revolution. Based on the evidence of the texts themselves, “Beaumarchais’s play and Mozart’s ... opera are unrevolutionary, even conservative works”. Till rebuffs claims for *Figaro*’s radicalism by stressing the inherently conservative nature of domestic service. Servants, he argues, are “symbiotically wedded to their masters, and valets rarely lead revolutions”.⁷ Instead, Till prefers to see Figaro as an isolated figure, disassociated from the stirrings of proletariat consciousness, battling an aristocratic right which was already anachronistic by the 1780s⁸ and hardly to be taken seriously as a political assault.

The key question in determining the extent to which Figaro is a political subversive, or not, then, is that of representation, and this is an issue at the heart of the following dissertation. Was Figaro merely a sheltered domestic, whose actions bear little relation to the conflict that was brewing within France between its aristocratic masters and their subordinated subjects? Or does the master/servant relationship rather encapsulate the nature of existence under the old order so adroitly that any fracture between its parties can automatically be understood to symbolise a crisis in *Ancien-Régime* mechanisms of power? One way to answer the question of Figaro’s radicalism, without recourse to post-revolutionary hindsight, is to investigate his initial reception. And Louis XVI, for one, was so appalled by what he was hearing during a private production of *Le Mariage de Figaro* at Versailles, that he successfully banned the play from being publicly performed for over a year. He declared the play “detestable”, adding prophetically: “It will never be played; the Bastille would have to be destroyed if the performance of the play is not to have dangerous consequences”.⁹ Once popular demand for the play finally forced him to allow it to be staged in Paris, the king countered by sending its author to prison.¹⁰ Under the old order, servants, who were as children, had no rights which conflicted with their master’s superior position. The French king saw in Figaro’s questioning of his master’s authority, and in the assertion of his own and his fiancé’s personal rights, despite being servants, a flagrant attack on his own position.

merely to survive than has sufficed to rule all the provinces of Spain for a century!” This anti-aristocratic invective is cut from the opera. Nevertheless, Mozart makes his servants adopt courtly dances as they challenge the count, while their dialogue is equally as sophisticated as the dialogue in the play. For a discussion of the political differences between play and opera, see Tim Carter, *W. A. Mozart. Le Nozze di Figaro*, 37-8.

⁶ Nicholas Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment: Truth, Virtue and Beauty in Mozart’s Operas* (1992; London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 145.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁹ Cited in Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Viking, 1989), 142.

Figaro, then, must have represented a great deal, even before the Revolution got underway. And the king was not alone in his outrage. The enthusiastic reception of the play among elevated circles, (Marie-Antoinette was ardent in her admiration), was seen by certain aristocratic contemporaries as both naïve and dangerous. The Baronne d'Oberkirch likened nobility who laughed at Figaro ridiculing his master to people who were “slapping their own cheeks”.¹¹ She was amazed that the play was not being seen for what it was: an attack on the existing socio-political order from the point of view of the disenfranchised through the mouthpiece of an insubordinate servant. The corollary between fictional servants in defiance of their masters, and political agitation in defiance of old-order systems of representation and wealth distribution, is my starting point for the chapters that follow.

The king's apprehensions for the Bastille should *Figaro* be publicly performed were of course dramatically realised when the prison was looted and burned in 1789, the first target of revolutionary fervour. The fall of the Bastille, *the* event of the early Revolution, was rendered instantly emblematic of an old-order despotism that was no more. Louis XVI's disturbed reaction to Figaro upsets Till's comfortable assertion that servants fail to signify beyond themselves, or the individual houses in which they labour. Instead, servants resonate with risky and potentially explosive political agency. Till is correct in his assertion that servants are not proletarians. Servants are sheltered within their masters' houses from the hardships of rent bills and food shortages; servants are not the most obvious members of revolutionary crowds.¹² Yet Till ignores the capacity for the servant in the household to ‘stand in’ for the voiceless, labouring masses outside its doors, and by so doing underestimates Figaro's revolutionary significance.

In the dissertation that follows I will be employing the perspective of Louis XVI over that of literary critics who initially discredit the potential of the servant to signal class conflict and social unrest. I shall be examining servants in British fictions of the 1790s and discovering in them Napoleon's “Revolution in action”. The 1790s, a decade in which politics was deemed, for better or worse, to have invaded every aspect of life, ushered in an intensely politicised period in British fiction. Authors on both sides of the radical/reactionary divide turned to novel production as a means of disseminating their political opinions, while the nation as a whole prepared either to welcome or to contest a revolution deemed imminent on home soil. My reading of the many foregrounded and

¹⁰ Ibid, 144.

¹¹ Antonia Fraser, *Marie Antoinette*, 256.

¹² There are three references under “Domestic Servants” in the index of E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*. None of them refer to politicised activity. See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 950, 231, 259, 344.

controversial servants of these fictions as conduits of revolutionary energy, in texts by both radicals and reactionaries, uncovers a self-consciously ideological deployment of literary servants on behalf of British authors in the 1790s which has so far been ignored by literary criticism.

When Napoleon called Figaro “the Revolution in action”, he was referring to a revolution that was yet to happen at the time of Figaro’s first appearance in the world, but a revolution that was somehow perfectly embodied, and therefore anticipated, in this particular tale of servant revolt. When I refer to servants in British fictions of the 1790s as “the Revolution in action”, I am describing a revolution that was never to happen outside the pages of the novels in question, but one which was generally deemed likely to erupt for most of the decade. However close Britain may have come to a violent revolution of its own during the 1790s, the conservative establishment demonstrated an intimidating capacity for quashing dissent, allowing the existing power structures to survive the transition to the next century ostensibly unscathed.¹³ In a British context, then, “in action” means in *literary* action exclusively, and this raises the thorny issue of the interplay between literary texts and the socio-political contexts in which they are produced. To what, if anything, do the subversive actions of servants in British fictions of the 1790s actually refer?

Stealing a disclaimer from William B. Warner, I must assert at this juncture that “[a]ny systematic effort to deal with the many theoretical and historical horizons of realism is beyond the scope of this study”.¹⁴ There is no room here to embark on a detailed discussion of the nature of literary mimesis (if it can even be said to exist). Nevertheless, the following thesis presumes a connection, and an intimate connection at that, between what was happening socially and politically in 1790s Britain, and the

¹³ For further commentary on the likelihood of a British revolution in the 1790s, see E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*; Gregory Claeys, *Thomas Paine: Social and Political Thought* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Mark Philp, “Revolution”, in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17-26; and M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001). Both Thompson and Claeys concur in their assessment that working-class agitation for reform, sharply focused in terms of both organisation and intent, posed a considerable threat to the British establishment, though neither makes the case for the possibility of a British revolution along French lines. To the right of these, Grenby emphasises the natural conservatism of most British subjects and goes on to designate conservative fears of a revolution on home soil as a sort of “communal psychosis” (7). Even though parliamentary restructuring did not begin until 1832, with the passage of the limited Reform Bill, and the monarchy remained unchanged, Philp argues that the engagement of the British establishment in counter-revolution necessarily induced a British revolution of sorts, not entirely dissimilar from that of the French. This last assessment is perhaps the most insightful, in that it highlights the way in which opposing discourses of the 1790s frequently bled into one another—a phenomenon to which I refer in the course of the thesis.

depiction of servant characters in the decade's novels, and this presumption needs to be addressed. Chapters follow one another sequentially in terms of the novels' dates of publication, and most chapters begin by tracing the political state of play at the time the novel or novels in question appeared. Alongside the changing face of the 1790s literary servant, this thesis traces the changing political contours of the 1790s more generally, beginning with Burke's alarm over the implications of the Revolution in France for British property owners, and ending with the Act of Union between Ireland and Britain at the end of the decade. Interrelating the literary and the political in this way, in order to throw light on the significance of servants in British novels of the 1790s, leaves me strikingly at odds with the only other critical study of servants in English prose fiction: Bruce Robbins' *The Servant's Hand*.

Domestic servants are ubiquitous throughout the vast span of Western literature, and yet few studies of the literary servant have been undertaken.¹⁵ *The Servant's Hand* begins by apparently dismissing the centrality of its own subject before embarking on a delineation of servant function. "[T]he literary servant is too repetitive for treatment by author, just as it is too minor, fragmentary, and marginal to any given text to be treated by work", writes Robbins, almost apologetically, in the preface.¹⁶ Servants, he argues, do such depressingly similar things in all literature, that attempts to analyse their importance to either individual novels, or individual authors, will prove fruitless. Historical periods also fail to produce literary servants who are distinctive enough to merit being discussed within their own particular socio-historical contexts. He asserts: "the 'background' ... of a single period was also incapable of providing the required focus",¹⁷ and this in spite of seismic shifts in the nature of actual domestic service over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, (the time frame of most of Robbins' discussion).

Having been forced to abandon his initial project of rescuing servants from their doomed marginality, Robbins nevertheless discovers that servants in literature exercise surprising power. In spite of being introduced merely as "expository prologues, oracular messengers, and authorial mouthpieces, rhetorical 'doublings' of the protagonist,

¹⁴ William B. Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain 1684-1750* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 32.

¹⁵ David Bain, *Masters, Servants and Orders in Greek Tragedy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981); Mark Burnett, *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience* (London: Macmillan, 1997); Trudier Harris, *From Mammies to Militants: Domesticity in Black American Literature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Bruce Robbins, *The Servant's Hand: English Fiction From Below* (1986; Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993).

¹⁶ Bruce Robbins, *The Servant's Hand*, xii.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, xi.

accessories used to complicate or resolve the action”,¹⁸ servants, regardless of text, author or period, gesture towards the dissolution of social division. They provide a perspective that encourages “whims of social rearrangement and redistribution”.¹⁹ Though firmly divorcing this anarchic tendency of literary servants from their socio-historical backgrounds, Robbins is still keen to stress the political nature of servant function, which he terms “utopianism”.²⁰

Obviously indebted to Robbins for what turns out to be a brilliant discussion of the subversive tendency of literary servants, no matter how insignificant they may initially appear, this thesis takes issue with my predecessor in several key respects. Robbins’ severance of the literary servant from his or her historical context is a case in point. Whereas I rely heavily on the events of the 1790s to inform my readings of the decade’s literary servants, Robbins, surprisingly for a Marxist critic, disputes the possibility of any meaningful connection between literary servant and social background in the first place. The “annoying sameness of ... formal manifestations of literary service”, the “disturbing fact of [servant] continuity”, through many centuries and across various political systems, forces Robbins to accept, alongside Northrop Frye, that “the essential forms of literature are independent of their social context”.²¹

What Robbins imaginatively tries to do next is to prove that even if the literary servant is pure discourse, failing pointedly to reflect the actual nature of domestic service, or the actual nature of, say, London in 1815, this discourse nevertheless remains laden with the potential for political sedition. For language, all by itself, remains political; discourse is “alive with the turbulent significance of moves and countermoves”,²² while the very dislocation of literary figures from their immediate socio-political context facilitates utopianism—the conjuring of a visionary realm in which class division is suddenly dissolved altogether. For if you dispense with the need or desire to reflect history,²³ you simultaneously dispense with process, conflict, even with the journey forward. You simply arrive, without having to explain how you got there. According to Robbins, the behaviour of a literary servant could never reflect an actual socio-historical event, like the French Revolution, or the British Treason Trials of 1794. Nevertheless, servants in fiction frequently either articulate, or force other characters to articulate, a sudden and inexplicable suspension of social norms, often in

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, x.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17-19.

²¹ *Ibid.*, x.

²² *Ibid.*, 8.

²³ “In breaking off the ‘history’ in whose name I had begun working from the ‘politics’ for which it is so often synonymous, my argument makes room for the sort of political effect I have called ‘utopian’”, *ibid.*, xii.

spite of their authors' intention, and it is in this, writes Robbins, that the remarkably subversive political agency of literary servants inheres.

Not only does Robbins ignore the particular socio-historical background of the dozens of servants who feature in his discussion, he also cautions any other would-be analysts of the literary servant to steer clear of an historical approach. "It is when the critic stakes everything on claims for what is specific to one 'historical moment' that the reader's conviction is liable to falter." Writing with the transition from feudal-style domestic relations to modern contract in mind, located by many social historians in many different historical timeframes, Robbins goes on: "the vast, gradual, repetitive nature of the social process in question should be conceded, and conclusions about it should be generalised accordingly or reformulated".²⁴

To stake "everything" on claims for what is specific to the "historical moment" of the 1790s, may be to fall headlong into the history trap against which Robbins warns. And yet the French Revolution, and the decade of profound unrest it instigated in Britain, as well as in France, does not qualify as a "vast, gradual, repetitive ... social process" in the same way as the demise of domestic paternalism does, (though I would still argue that it is the French Revolution which seals the death of the paternalist model). The French Revolution was explosive, immediately and irrevocably transformative, and its beginning, in contrast to broader social developments, such as the amorphous rise of the middle classes, can be pinpointed precisely in time: 1789. In Britain, the decade that followed the outbreak of the Revolution was distinctive in many respects. These were incendiary years. Unprecedented lower-order agitation for political reform included the organisation of a radical convention in Edinburgh at the end of 1793 designed to supplant the authority of Parliament. Such measures in turn galvanised the ruling authorities into exceptional counter-initiatives of their own, including the suspension of Habeas Corpus and the attempted prosecution of anyone caught passing a copy of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791-2) to a friend.²⁵

The 1790s was also a decade in which discourse both reflected socio-political upheaval and directly contributed to it; indeed the entire controversy over the French Revolution and the questions to which it gave rise in Britain was a curiously *literary* controversy from the beginning. More so even than the Revolution itself, it was Burke's passionate denunciation of it in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) which established the drawing of enemy lines. The many antagonistic responses his

²⁴ *Ibid*, 40.

²⁵ "Good God! that a man should be sent to Botany Bay for advising another to read Paine's book, or for reading the Irish address at a public meeting!" Charles James Fox, letter to Lord Holland, December 1793, cited in *The Debate on the French Revolution 1789-1800*, ed. Alfred Cobban (London: Nicholas Kaye, 1950), 305.

treatise drew included Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*. And the phenomenal circulation of part one, but particularly of part two of the *Rights of Man*, subsequently alerted the conservative establishment to the presence of a literate working population prepared to countenance, or indeed to agitate for, political reform. This in turn caused reactionaries, most notably Hannah More, to flood lower-order readers with cheap or free reading material, inculcating hard work, respect for one's social superiors, and a knee-jerk British patriotism directed against all things French.

In the 1790s, politics and literature became inseparable: the greatest political controversies of the day raged over the issue of what one *read*, while what one wrote, including the novels one wrote, was also uniquely politicised. As a contributor to *The Critical Review* noted in 1796: "The French revolution has not only afforded an ample field for the historian, the politician, and the moralist, but has supplied abundance of matter to the novel-weavers of the present times".²⁶ I interrelate the political and the literary as closely as I do in the course of this thesis because the authors of the fictions discussed themselves interrelate them. So the issue is not so much whether a servant in a book can ever really represent something outside that book, (such as real servants, or the lower-orders more generally), or whether they never can, because literature could be said to operate as an enclosed autonomous system.²⁷ The point is that in the 1790s, authors self-consciously use servant characters as a means of commenting directly on the Revolution Debate. Fiction was unapologetically partisan, and servants were appropriated into this partisan fiction as a means of persuading readers either to engage in the reform of British society, or to forestall revolution. Terry Eagleton has written of the fiction of Samuel Richardson produced mid-century: "I am interested less in what that fiction 'mirrors' than in what it *does*. For Richardson's novels are not mere images of conflicts fought out on another terrain, representations of a history which happens elsewhere; they are themselves a material part of those struggles, pitched standards around which battle is joined, instruments which help to constitute social interests rather than lenses which reflect them".²⁸ And this is equally, if not more true, of 1790s prose fiction. To exclude the immediate socio-political context from my discussion of the servants in these texts, as Robbins would have me do, would mean missing the point.

Servants were such important ingredients in this overtly ideological fiction of the 1790s because a breach in the relation between master and servant quickly became a

²⁶ *The Critical Review*, April 1796, cited in *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Biographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, ed. Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1:650.

²⁷ "[A]ny claim that the novel re-presents the real runs up against a systematic obstacle arising from its linguistic medium", William B. Warner, *Licensing Entertainment*, 32.

convenient metaphor for describing what the French Revolution had done to the *Ancien Régime*. Old-order society operated by enshrining ideas of servility and social reverence at its heart: service linked everyone to everyone else in a vertical chain of belonging, all the way up to the king, who was the servant of God. This comprehensive idea of service, against which the revolutionaries of 1789 quite literally waged war,²⁹ allowed the disparate, sporadic and chaotic nature of the unfolding Revolution to be encapsulated in the single idea of a household in crisis. Commentating on the violence of post-revolutionary France in 1792, Arthur Young writes: “when such evils happen, they surely are more imputable to the tyranny of the master, than to the cruelty of the servant”.³⁰ Furthermore, novels had frequently concerned themselves with the private and the domestic. A discourse of mastership and servitude in crisis was therefore not only an appropriate device for encapsulating an attack on old-order society, given the centrality of the service ethic to feudalism; it was also an ideal way in which to incorporate the effects of the French Revolution into a work of prose fiction. Describing servants out of control within the household in a 1790s novel was an obvious means of expressing revulsion at the revolutionary ethos. Conversely, depicting a suffering, enlightened, and courageous individual, forced into mind-numbing service to a despotic master, signalled authorial support for political reform.

As stated above, however, 1790s prose fiction did not seek merely to reflect the nature of the political controversy sparked in Britain by the French Revolution. It also sought to influence that controversy, and servants were deemed tremendously useful in furthering this aim. By the 1790s, the number of domestic servants employed in British households had expanded dramatically, especially in London, and this trend was to continue long into the nineteenth century, making servants the second largest working group of the Industrial Revolution.³¹ Many readers of these novels would have employed domestic staff; a few readers would even have been servants themselves.³²

²⁸ Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 4.

²⁹ The National Assembly criminalized domestic service in 1793. I return to this point in Chapter One.

³⁰ Arthur Young, *Travels Through France* (1792), cited in Antje Blank and Janet Todd, introduction to Charlotte Smith’s *Desmond* (1792; Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Literary Texts, 2001), 31.

³¹ In 1796, the magistrate Patrick Colquhoun estimated servant figures for London at 200,000, and five years later, in 1801, the first census of Greater London revealed that 900,000 people had designated themselves a servant. By the end of the eighteenth century, one person out of every four Londoners belonged to the servant class. J. Jean Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956) 12, 34; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 231.

³² A contributor to *Sylph* in October 1795 complained: “I have seen a scullion-wench with a dish-clout in one hand, and a novel in the other, sobbing o’er the sorrows of a *Julia* or a

Conservative authors were particularly keen to link renegade servant behaviour within their fictions to the potential for renegade servant behaviour within the actual houses of their readerships. By so doing they developed a scare tactic, at once easily accessible and disturbingly intimate, to frighten readers away from the tinderbox of political reform.

Given all that servants could be made to mean in a 1790s context, authors accordingly place the symbolically resonant figure of the servant at the heart of many of their fictions. At the same time, they allow servants displays of highly controversial behaviour: stealing ownership of entire estates, for example, or taking masters to court for murder and, against daunting odds, winning the case. The conspicuous centrality of servants in these fictions is again in contrast to Robbins' formulation of perpetually sidelined servant character. Through "centuries of literary tradition", writes Robbins, the serving maid only manages to appear at all "by the grace of a hierarchical parallelism that brings her out of invisibility only within a frame that excludes most of her subjectivity, routine, plans, destiny".³³ And yet radical novels of the 1790s are determined to explore the damage wrought by servitude on the very "subjectivity, routine, plans, destiny" of talented individuals who also happen to be servants.

In Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman*, published posthumously in 1798, the interpolated biography of Jemima, erstwhile servant and now jailor to the heroine, is arresting in its frank exposition of the sexual and financial hazards of servant existence. Born illegitimate, to a mother so worn out by her work as a house-maid that she dies in labour, Jemima enters a life of penury and abuse which is only mitigated when she accepts the position of keeper in a lunatic asylum. "I never had a taste of human kindness to soften the rigour of perpetual labour",³⁴ she laments, and goes on to speak of the horrors engendered by her poverty and menial station: homelessness; rape; enforced prostitution; being used as material for scientific experimentation; her total exclusion from civilised society. More, Jemima's shocking confessions are related to us in her own words and with her own commentary on such experiences: "I was, in fact, born a slave, and chained by infamy to slavery during the whole of existence, without having any companions to alleviate it by sympathy, or teach me how to rise above it by their example".³⁵ It could easily be argued that the radical effect of Jemima's tale is diluted because its primary function in the novel is to amplify

Jemima", cited in Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace 1670-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 277.

³³ Bruce Robbins, *The Servant's Hand*, 3.

³⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft *Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman*, ed. Janet Todd (1798; London: Penguin, 1992), 82.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

the middle-class heroine's afflictions: in spite of the vast class differences separating Maria and Jemima, both suffer persecution because of their sex, illustrating how women of all backgrounds can be similarly victimized. Even so, the presence of Jemima's biography within the novel still forces us to focus on servant suffering, belying Robbins' emphasis on both the marginalisation of servants and the repression of their subjectivity within fiction.

Robbins defines the literary servant (and there is only ever one literary servant) as a "thin and functional figure", recurring without amendment in the novels of "Richardson and Fielding, Forster and Woolf, Austen and Scott, even Dickens and Gaskell".³⁶ He goes on to complain how "servants reveal so little worth investigating. Criticism on the subject is like a stroll down an endless gallery of look-alikes: each portrait is the same all-too-loyal retainer, sharing his master's conviction of natural hierarchy and aiming complaints only at his own somewhat ambiguous place in it".³⁷ And yet, of all the servants discussed in this thesis, only one fits the description above: Edmund Burke's Versailles Guard, who was slaughtered by revolutionaries in 1789, and whom Burke quickly replaces with an infinitely more sinister family domestic. The rest of the servants discussed in this thesis are not only radically different from the servant Robbins places at the centre of his analysis; they are also radically different from each other. From Burke's aristocratic-born royal bodyguard of the *Reflections*, who sacrifices himself to save the queen, to Edgeworth's illiterate peasant narrator, living out a humble existence in the secluded Irish countryside, a perusal of British fictions of the 1790s reveals a surprising variety in the class position and social function of servant characters which further contradicts the never-changing "thin and functional figure" outlined above.

To argue that servants function in more obviously ideological roles in fictions of the 1790s than elsewhere, is by no means to assert their uniformity. Authors employ servants self-consciously in the 1790s as a form of direct commentary on the Revolution Debate, and as a means of declaring one's political position in relation to that debate. Our understanding of the 1790s as a period distinguished by a draconian radical/reactionary divide, however, diminishes the differences in political thinking within each camp, particularly on the radical side, (even rather conservative radicals, such as Godwin, who opposed increasing opportunities for working-class literacy,³⁸ were denounced as bloodthirsty revolutionaries by the opposition). It also disguises the

³⁶ Bruce Robbins, *The Servant's Hand*, 6, xi.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 34-5.

³⁸ Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 59-61.

extent to which authors changed their minds as the decade progressed.³⁹ And because the political positions of these authors are by nature diverse, the servants in their various textual productions are also differentiated from each other in terms of class background, character, and ideological significance. The choices authors make in selecting the kinds of servants they do, and the social classes from which they spring, are crucial in determining the political resonance of their texts.

A final difference between Robbins' analysis and my own is signalled at this point. So far, I have discussed authors making a series of informed choices in their depiction of servants in order to convey a particular politics. Yet the core of Robbins' argument is that literary servants express a subversive political agency entirely beyond the remit of their creators. Despite Robbins' concentration on the severe restrictions placed on servant character throughout Western literature, his conception of the literary servant as an *inherent* revolutionary is a far more radical delineation than my own. For even though I afford the novelistic servants of the 1790s all the centrality and variety denied them by Robbins, and even though I concur with Robbins that their usual effect is to dislocate social norms, I still see them as intentional authorial devices, doing more or less what their authors intend them to. The exception is Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800), a text that spins rapidly out of control as a result of her use of servant narrative, which I discuss in my final chapter. Elsewhere, I see the bold, unconventional, and extraordinarily influential nature of servant behaviour in the 1790s novel as a self-conscious appropriation by authors of the naturally maverick tendencies of the literary servant for their own purposes.

An important proviso follows on from this. Even if servants in the 1790s are under the thumb of their authors, as Robbins never concedes them to be, they remain distinctively unsettling. For the literary servant in the 1790s is a different kind of creation to the eighteenth-century servant who precedes her, and to the nineteenth-century servant that follows. It is indeed testament to what authors in the 1790s were prepared to dare that they unleashed such a figure within the pages of their fictions in the first place.

There is a curious glitch in Robbins' argument halfway through *The Servant's Hand*, which can be used as a window to help elaborate exactly what was unique about

³⁹ Radicals were inclined to lose their initial enthusiasm for the French revolutionary project early on. Famous converts to the conservative side include William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The most dramatic shift in political conviction by a British novelist was arguably by Charlotte Smith, who moved from the pro-revolutionary *Desmond*, to the anti-revolutionary *The Banished Man* in just two years, between 1792 and 1794. Events in France as the Revolution degenerated into the Terror of 1793 and 1794 appalled many of its initial supporters in Britain. Repressive legislation at home also succeeded in breaking the spirit of the majority of British radicals.

the literary servant in the 1790s. Robbins quotes Virginia Woolf commentating on the differences between actual eighteenth- and nineteenth-century domestic service:

In life one can see the change, if I may use a homely illustration, in the character of one's cook. The Victorian cook lived like a leviathan in the lower depths, formidable, silent, obscure, inscrutable; the Georgian cook is a creature of sunshine and fresh air; in and out of the drawing room, now to borrow the *Daily Herald*, now to ask advice about a hat. Do you ask for more solemn instances of the power of the human race to change than that?⁴⁰

Domestic service was indeed a changed institution, in both France and Britain, after the French Revolution: as Woolf describes, the degree of intimacy between masters and servants that had existed in the eighteenth century was foregone by the nineteenth. In the Victorian age, masters and servants no longer conversed with one another. "We never speak a word to the servant who waits on us for twenty years", wrote William Thackeray in *Punch*.⁴¹ But why bother to note a change in the nature of real servitude if it bears no relation to the literary servant one is discussing? Robbins uses the Thackeray quotation above to introduce the differences between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century servants, in novels, as well as in life:

The literary evidence substantiates these impressions. In the Victorian novel, servants tend to be less central, less distinct, more engulfed in their masters' characters and interests, in the plot machinery, in 'symbolic background.' Titular servant protagonists like Pamela disappear or are gentrified into governesses. Verbal confrontation diminishes in length, frequency, animation, and centrality.⁴²

His study therefore concedes three points. First, servants in literature are in some way connected to the dominant model of domestic service in the society that produces them. Second, servants are not always the same: indeed the differences between the literary servant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are considerable. Third, literary servants exist in the eighteenth-century novel who are neither marginal, nor silent, nor even seemingly acquiescent. Something happened, in other words, between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, which changed the nature of both domestic service, and the depiction of servants in literature, (and the two are obviously connected), resulting in the Victorian ideal of a silent, invisible domestic workforce,

⁴⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown*, cited in Bruce Robbins, *The Servant's Hand*, 48.

⁴¹ Cited in *ibid*, 78.

⁴² *Ibid*, 79.

coupled with the parallel silencing of servants within fiction. And that something was the French Revolution.

In order to show what the French Revolution did, first of all to the literary servant of the 1790s, and then by extension, and as a form of a reaction to this, to the servants that followed in the fictions of the nineteenth century, I wish to turn now to an earlier eighteenth-century servant, the servant who, by many accounts, instigated the modern novel itself. When Samuel Richardson published *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* in 1740, he described his work as “a new species of writing, that might possibly turn young people into a course of reading different from the pomp and parade of romance-writing, and dismissing the improbable and marvellous, with which novels generally abound, might tend to promote the cause of religion and virtue”.⁴³ What is taken by many to be the instigating text of the British novel⁴⁴ is the extraordinary story of a young serving maid who, by resisting her master’s sexual advances, eventually persuades him to marry her. At least ostensibly, the reversal of Pamela’s fortune is dramatic enough to carry politically radical implications. And yet *Pamela* has consistently been read as an allegory, not of lower-order emancipation, but of the more limited struggles of the bourgeoisie against the aristocracy. Bruce Robbins has argued that *Pamela* exclusively represents a “heroic” portrait of the middle classes in their own comparative servitude to their social superiors, a view endorsed by Judith Frank in her study of the poor in eighteenth-century prose fiction.⁴⁵ Such a reading only becomes possible because the revolutionary implications of this novel are successfully thwarted within the text itself—a containment of radicalism which is much less easily achieved, or even desired, by the 1790s.

One of the most striking aspects of Richardson’s servant protagonist is that she consistently appropriates the terms of the political contract theory of John Locke to justify her resistance to Mr. B. In *Two Treatises on Government* (1690), Locke declares: “it is lawful, for the people, in some Cases, to resist their King”, should the king, by his actions, shatter the contract between him and his people by ceasing to be kingly.⁴⁶ Locke’s text was written in answer to Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha: or the Natural Power of Kings*, a treatise composed during the Civil War but only published in 1680, justifying Divine Right monarchy, which knits the familial and the monarchical models of power together, and by so doing establishes a parallel between servants and subjects,

⁴³ *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 41.

⁴⁴ “1740 is when the novel in Britain begins to be a cultural icon worth fighting to define”, William B. Warner, *Licensing Entertainment*, 176.

⁴⁵ Bruce Robbins, *The Servant’s Hand*, 80; Judith Frank, *Common Ground: Eighteenth-Century English Satiric Fiction and the Poor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 3.

masters and kings.⁴⁷ Pamela both utilises Filmer's parallel, and then appropriates Locke's attack on deviant kingship, when she declares herself the social equal of Mr. B. as the result of his attempts on her chastity. "Well may I forget that I am your servant, when you forget what belongs to a master. ... You have taught me to forget myself, and what belongs to me; and have lessened the distance that fortune has made between us, by demeaning yourself, to be so free to a poor servant".⁴⁸ The outrageous freedom of her behaviour towards her master, which is the direct result of his own transgressions against *her*, links *Pamela* to the contained Revolution of 1688 and the solidification of middle-class power it enshrined. Yet the radicalism of *Pamela* goes potentially further than even this association would suggest: after all, Pamela's poverty-stricken origins are constantly stressed, and never refuted. The disturbing extent of Pamela's social ascension, from indigent servant to the wife of Mr. B., accounts for subsequent re-writings of Richardson's novel in which the heroine is better born than in the original.⁴⁹ So is Robbins correct in refusing to see in *Pamela* nothing more than an allegory of middle-class emergence?

The nature of Pamela's transgression against her master is specifically linguistic. Not only does she say what she likes, a rare privilege for any servant, but she also writes what she likes, and it is the issue of her untrammelled literacy which disturbs Mr. B. the most. When he catches her writing the first letter of the novel, he warns her to "*be wary what tales you send out of a family*" (Richardson's italics, 44). Literacy and private letter writing bring with them the capacity to invert the social order in an alternative world. And as private letters are also physical objects, there is not only the danger that such radical articulation will be transmitted to the receiver of the letter, but that it will also be passed on to a wider circle of readers, perhaps even be rendered in print. The letters of a servant girl denigrating her betters: "But, for my part, I cannot forbear smiling at the absurdity of persons even of the first quality, who value

⁴⁶ John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (1690; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 419.

⁴⁷ "Adam was the Father, King, and Lord over his Family; a Son, a Subject, and a Servant or Slave, were one and the same thing", Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha: or the Natural Power of Kings*, cited in *ibid*, 147.

⁴⁸ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, ed. Peter Sabor (1740; London: Penguin, 1985), 55. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be noted parenthetically above.

⁴⁹ "The Continent found *Pamela* too radical in its social implications; both Voltaire and Goldoni raise the heroine's status in life and make her more decorous", T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1971), 126. Nine editions of *Pamela* were published between 1740 and 1801, and there is evidence to suggest that Richardson was also uncomfortable with Pamela in her incarnation as raw servant-girl, and that he spent a great deal of energy gentrifying her language and manners with every subsequent journey of the novel to the press. In *From Writer to Reader: Studies in Editorial Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), Philip Gaskell has concluded that Richardson's changes to the

themselves upon their *ancestors* merits, rather than *their own*. For is it not as much as to say, they are conscious they have *no other?*” (84), as they travel into a potentially amorphous public sphere, manifest themselves as a dangerous kind of property, and so it is fitting that the linguistic battle between Pamela and Mr. B. manifests itself as a battle for access and ultimately ownership of the letters themselves.

Crucially, and initially rather bizarrely, the force that dissolves the rigidity of the class structure to allow Pamela through to her natural realm of the genteel is her own writing. By making Pamela’s letters, as they are stolen, read, copied, commandeered and marvelled over, the key that opens the door to the world of privilege, Richardson is literalising the link between literacy and social mobility. Yet a puzzling question remains unanswered. If Pamela’s literary freedoms constitute her most serious social transgression as the servant of Mr. B., how can the selfsame writings be responsible for her meteoric rise to the position of wife? Part of the answer lies in the association of her writing with her sexuality throughout the text. By sexualising her letters, by making them function as extensions, often, of her own body—“But I begin to be afraid my writings may be discovered; for they grow bulky: I stitch them hitherto in my undercoat, next my linen” (168)⁵⁰—Richardson ensures that the threat of uncensored servant narrative is contained by marriage. Like her body itself, the letters revert to being the exclusive property of her husband when Pamela agrees to become Mrs. B, and so the servant is silenced, both in speech, and in writing, by sex.⁵¹

Pamela’s dramatic compliance to the silencing inherent in marriage helps to seal off the radical implications of her narrative. The emphasis placed on her singular self also prevents her from representing the labouring classes in general, and so even though the class fabric must be adjusted to allow her social elevation, no one else is implicated in her rise.⁵² All along, Pamela has been presented as the servant who isn’t

second edition—at the very beginning of the re-writing process—aimed “mainly to refine Pamela’s language. ... Richardson sought to make her speak more like a lady” (65).

⁵⁰ Rather than emphasising that Pamela has discovered a “method of signifying her value that is far more immediate, efficient, and inalienably ‘authentic’ than those to which women customarily are limited”, as Michael McKeon has argued, (*The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* [Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1987], 374), Pamela’s letters, stitched “next her linen” and onto her hips, function instead as signposts back to the body, enticing Mr. B. on to further exploration.

⁵¹ “[A]t crucial points in its history, the novel used a thematics of gender to appropriate political resistance”, Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 25. If sexuality was used in the novels, as Armstrong argues here, to diffuse tensions of class, *Pamela* is a milestone in this process.

⁵² At the end of the novel, Pamela is furious with Lady Davers’ waiting maid for daring to speak to her more freely than she ought to: “Mrs Worden ... do you attend your *lady’s* commands, and lay not *yours* upon *me*”, *Pamela*, 413. Pamela’s use of unfettered language has brought her love, riches, and control over others, and so the language of another waiting-maid must, in turn, be jealously controlled. In spite of her own extraordinary transformation in social position, the class order surrounding Pamela remains unaffected.

really a servant, but the spokeswoman of middle-class ideology. For someone described as “the first important heroine in English fiction who works for a living”,⁵³ Pamela is astonishingly unproductive in any sense other than the literary. She is unfamiliar with the kitchen: “I seldom go down into the kitchen” (75); is involved temporarily in making a waistcoat for Mr. B. *as a gift*; has her own apartment, “I keep my own little apartment still for my clothes; and nobody goes thither but myself” (77); and laments the fact that as her skills are singing, dancing and writing (all accomplishments of the gentry and middle classes) she has been “brought up wrong” by Mrs. B. She tries out a mock-scrub of some pewter plates to see if she can manage the typical tasks of serving life, but her imagery of violence and self-damage, of her hands becoming “red as a blood-pudding, and as hard as a beechen trencher” (109), bespeak the nightmarish prospect of her return to labour. This initiatory tale of master/servant relations in crisis, and of the servant in triumph, is less revolutionary than one would initially expect because Pamela’s own servitude is invested, not with the struggles of the labouring classes, but “with the energies of the emergent bourgeoisie”.⁵⁴ Literary servants of the 1790s are so much more contentious because they no longer embody the “heroic” struggle of the middle classes against the aristocracy. Instead they are made to represent the stirrings of working-class consciousness which defined the decade.

In spite of Marx’s influential account of the events of 1789-1800 as an essentially bourgeois appropriation of aristocratic power,⁵⁵ the real terror which the French Revolution inspired lay in its ideology of universal equality and its implied inclusion of the lowest orders in the project of national regeneration. In Britain, a peaceful middle-class revolution, initiated by the bloodless coup of 1688, had already been consolidated by the end of the eighteenth century. Consequently, the core apprehensions of British conservatives after 1789 revolved around the possible diffusion of their own successful bourgeois revolution beyond the safety of middle-class boundaries. For the bourgeois revolution contained the seeds that would destroy it if they were to be appropriated by the lower orders in their turn. In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) Marx writes: “The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself”.⁵⁶ And it is for this reason that we see the great engines of eighteenth-century middle-class ascension:

⁵³ Margaret A. Doody in her introduction to *Pamela*, 13.

⁵⁴ Bruce Robbins, *The Servant’s Hand*, 80.

⁵⁵ “Would the revolution of 1789 have taken place without the wretched isolation of the French bourgeois from their common essence?” Karl Marx, *Critical Remarks on the Article: ‘The King of Prussia and Social Reform’*, in *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (1977; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 136.

⁵⁶ Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), in *ibid*, 250.

literacy, the operations of a literate public sphere as delineated by Jürgen Habermas,⁵⁷ even the fashionable discourse of sensibility, all degenerating into arenas of furious contention in 1790s Britain.

Even if there was no outright revolution during these years, developments in response to the French Revolution changed British class relations irrevocably. Lynchpins of bourgeois ‘publicity’, such as the coffee house, the debating society, and the newspaper, were deliberately rendered more accessible to broader sections of the community, with an instantly radicalising effect. The London Corresponding Society, founded by the shoemaker Thomas Hardy in 1792, boasted 2,000 members within the first six months of its existence and operated under the doctrine of “members unlimited”. This, in itself:

signified the end to any notion of exclusiveness, of politics as the preserve of any hereditary élite or property group. Assent to this rule meant that the L.C.S. was turning its back upon the century-old identification of political with property-rights. ... To throw open the doors to propaganda and agitation in this ‘unlimited’ way implied a new notion of democracy, which cast aside ancient inhibitions and trusted to self-activating and self-organizing processes among the common people. Such a revolutionary challenge was bound to lead on to the charge of high treason.⁵⁸

1792 also witnessed the publication of part two of Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*, which had sold an unparalleled 200,000 copies (in a population of ten million) by the end of 1793.⁵⁹ Copies were passed to neighbours, read aloud during political rallies, or dropped free of charge into “mines and coal pits”;⁶⁰ a single copy could potentially reach hundreds, multiplying the book’s actual circulation exponentially.⁶¹ E. P. Thompson speaks of a “sea change” in the “structure of feeling of the poor”, in these years, of “some subterranean alteration in mood ... such as disposed it to harbour and tolerate the seditious”.⁶² When one reads of a sign left hanging for many months by Westminster Bridge declaring “Rubbish may be shot by the direction of Thomas Paine”,⁶³ it is difficult not to take such a claim seriously, even if effigies of Paine were

⁵⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (1962; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

⁵⁸ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 24.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 117.

⁶⁰ Hannah More, *Memoirs of ... Mrs. Hannah More* (1834), cited in *ibid*, 117.

⁶¹ One person bought 3,000 copies of part one for free distribution. Gregory Claeys: *Thomas Paine*, 112.

⁶² E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 127.

⁶³ Gregory Claeys, *Thomas Paine*, 119-120.

also burned during ferocious Church and King riots in an attempt to curb his phenomenal popularity.

These were the years, according to E. P. Thompson, in which the British working class “was present at its own making”.⁶⁴ Eighteenth-century society differed from the nineteenth in both its profusion of social categories,⁶⁵ and the lack of any clearly defined idea of conflicting class interests between the lower orders and their governors. Though it remains premature to speak of a consolidated working class in the 1790s, it is also true that the French Revolution precipitated the dawning of a new and antagonistic lower-order consciousness, forged through the kinds of reading and political organisation outlined above, which fractured “the ideology of reciprocity that governed relations between patricians and plebs”.⁶⁶ Commentators of the 1790s were undoubtedly overstating the case when they saw in contemporary lower-order agitation evidence of an out-and-out class war. The *Anti-Jacobin Review*, inclined to hyperbolic denunciations of the Jacobin monster, spoke of “the warfare of the POOR and the RICH” as the averred aim of British radicals,⁶⁷ while Frances, Lady Shelley noted in her diary how “the awakening of the labouring classes, after the first shocks of the French Revolution, made the upper classes tremble”.⁶⁸ The brutal suppression of radicalism from 1794 onwards, incorporating the appropriation of the charge for High Treason against any form of perceived radical activity, the deployment of an extensive government spy network, and the suspension of Habeas Corpus, was clearly histrionic in terms of the threat actually posed to the British establishment by readers of the *Rights of Man*. Nevertheless, the possibility of the British working classes exercising an organised, political class consciousness of their own had reared its head—an unprecedented and evidently terrifying development for the ruling order. Accordingly, the most draconian components of the British juridical state apparatus had to be deployed to quash it.

In the literature of the 1790s, this dawning of a new kind of lower-order consciousness finds expression in the more radical signifying function of the literary servant. For it can no longer be assumed, as it is of *Pamela*, that the servant is the embodiment of the bourgeois struggle. Instead the servant is now to be equated with the

⁶⁴ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 8.

⁶⁵ Nancy Armstrong discusses the useful role eighteenth-century conduct literature played in helping to define and consolidate a middle-class ideology for people who in fact hailed from a diverse range of social groups. “Conduct books imply the presence of a unified middle class at a time when other representatives of the social world suggest that no such class yet existed”, Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 63.

⁶⁶ Eileen Janes Yeo, “Class”, in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, 143.

⁶⁷ *The Anti-Jacobin, or: Weekly Examiner*, 2 vols. (London, 1799), 1:69.

⁶⁸ Cited in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 60.

‘people’ beginning to demand their own stake in the British body politic. My thesis illustrates two altered aspects of post-revolutionary depictions of servant character. Behaviour of servants in fictions of the 1790s tends to be more excessive than before, with servants perpetrating more serious crimes on the private family. Also in fiction of the 1790s, servant agency becomes, for the first time, a viable threat to the social order. This is the core of the menace represented by Burke’s tutor in his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791); by Mrs. Lennard in Charlotte Smith’s *The Old Manor House* (1793); by Caleb in William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794); by William in Hannah More’s *The History of The History of Mr. Fantom, the New-Fashioned Philosopher, and His Man William*, (1795); and possibly also by Thady Quirk in Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent*. If servants in these texts shake free the bonds of deference which have traditionally kept them in subjugation, and realise, instead, the “Revolution in action” by becoming free personal agents, for good or for ill, this still confers upon them an enormous power. It is the power to which Marx was later to refer when he declared that it was the proletariat, and not the middle- or upper classes, which constituted the “revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands”.⁶⁹

Earlier in the eighteenth century, Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) appears to apprehend the vast power inherent in the labouring classes, although he suggests that such power is only ever realised in rebellion. For Burke, the sublime is an overpowering force, greater than the self, exterior to it, and associated with pain, danger and terror.⁷⁰ Burke acknowledges the sublimity of strength, and he acknowledges that those who labour possess strength. Under pre-revolutionary conditions, however, a labouring people cannot aspire to the sublime because they are in a condition of servitude. And whatever acts in conformity to our will “is never sublime”.⁷¹ Nevertheless, once the people rebel against their masters’ will, they come to embody the sublime at its most terrifying. All the power is suddenly the former servant’s, to exercise as s/he sees fit. Burke draws extensively from the Book of Job in order to illustrate the shift from strength-in-

⁶⁹ Karl Marx, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), in *Selected Writings*, 253.

⁷⁰ “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling”, Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Volume 1: The Early Writings*, ed T. O. McLoughlin and James T. Boulton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 216.

⁷¹ “Look at a man, or at any other animal of prodigious strength, and what is your idea before reflection? Is it that this strength will be subservient to you, to your ease, to your pleasure, to your interest in any sense? No; the emotion you feel is, lest this enormous strength should be employed to the purposes of rapine and destruction”; “Whenever strength is only useful, and employed for our benefit or our pleasure, then it is never sublime”, *ibid*, 236, 237.

subjugation, which is merely “useful” to us,⁷² to strength-in-revolution, which is obliterating:

The description of the wild ass, in Job, is worked up into no small sublimity, merely by insisting on his freedom, and his setting mankind at defiance; otherwise the description of such an animal could have had nothing noble in it. *Who hath loosed, says he, the bands of the wild ass? ...He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the voice of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture.* The magnificent description of the unicorn and of leviathan in the same book, is full of the same heightening circumstance. *Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee? canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? wilt thou trust him because his strength is great?—Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook? will he make a covenant with thee? wilt thou take him for a servant for ever? Shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him?*⁷³

In the *Enquiry*, both sovereigns and the people are sublime, but the people are only sublime when they become involved in violent revolution. In the section “Sounds and Loudness”, it is the noise of vast crowds, the mob cry, which is the most sublime sound to Burke’s ear.⁷⁴ Elsewhere the sublime consists in the “ruin of monarchs, and the revolution of kingdoms”.⁷⁵ This fore-figuring of the sublimity of popular revolution, by which Burke is both fascinated and petrified, leads naturally to his excessive response to the outbreak of the French Revolution in the *Reflections*. If liberation from servitude is a sublime occurrence for Burke, upon which he can ponder theoretically in the relative safety of 1757, by 1789, with the prospect of an entire people insisting on their freedom and “setting mankind at defiance”, this liberation is his worst nightmare come true.

In 1790, Burke accordingly sets the terms for the way in which servant character is to be depicted after the Revolution. An analogy implicit in his *Reflections* connects the servant in the house with the ‘people’ in the body politic: in times of revolution, in order to prevent the murder of the master/king, both must be forcefully expelled. The corollary thus drawn between servants in the house and the ‘people’ in the state informs the intensity of concentration on servant character in many of the fictions that follow. In this way, Godwin’s Caleb, as he attempts to escape his master’s clutches and learn

⁷² Ibid, 237.

⁷³ Ibid, 237-238.

⁷⁴ “The shouting of multitudes has a similar effect; and by the sole strength of the sound, so amazes and confounds the imagination, that in this staggering, and hurry of the mind, the best established tempers can scarcely forbear being bore down, and joining in the common cry, and common resolution of the croud”, *ibid*, 250.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 234.

“manhood”,⁷⁶ deliberately evokes the French revolutionary rhetoric of national maturation (if subjects are children, citizens are men)⁷⁷ in the wake of the collapse of the *Ancien Régime*. Similarly, in *The Old Manor House*, when the sympathetic servant girl Monimia marries the quasi-aristocratic hero, Orlando, and inherits Rayland Hall, Smith is in effect rewriting Burke’s *Reflections* in order to advocate the inclusion of exceptionally virtuous members of the lower orders in national public life.

The political equivalence of servants with the ‘people’ used prominently by authors of the 1790s, with radically different effects, was by no means the only aspect of their appeal. In her socio-historical study of servants in eighteenth-century France, Sarah Maza has noted how writers’ criticisms of domestics “often crystallised around themes that had nothing to do with the complaints of angry employers”.⁷⁸ Actual servants were not so contentious, or so interesting, because of their menial drudgery within the home. Other issues, revolving around the threatening nature of their borderline status within the family, marked servants out as people to be watched, and to be wary of.⁷⁹ The changed nature of the servant in the 1790s is additionally signalled by the fact that customary anxieties concerning *all* servants in *all* times are now depicted as critical. In fictions of the 1790s, one discovers deeply embedded *psychological* anxieties about the position of servants in relation to the private family, now heightened by the French Revolution to fever pitch.

One traditional source of anxiety concerning servants and their ambiguous position within the household was their relation to the children they were paid to look after. The growth in affective bonding between husbands, wives and children over the course of the early modern period has been well documented by social historians such as Laurence Stone and Randolph Trumbach.⁸⁰ For the purposes of my dissertation, the most important aspect of this transformation in the family is the fact that servants disrupted the bonding process of immediate kin. Consequently the rise in domesticity

⁷⁶ William Godwin, *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, ed. David McCracken (1794; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 154.

⁷⁷ “It is, properly, from the elevated mind of France that the folly of titles has been abolished. It has outgrown the baby-clothes of *count* and *duke*, and breeched itself in manhood”, Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (1791-1792; Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1987), 56.

⁷⁸ Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 109.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 109-154.

⁸⁰ Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 187-235; Laurence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977). Stone’s work has subsequently been attacked as crudely schematic. For a convincing critique, see Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 86-97.

was coterminous with their expulsion from intimate domestic space.⁸¹ In John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), servants are already at the root of most childhood evils, including the fostering of superstitious terror.⁸² Indeed, one could argue that Locke's central dilemma in this text is how to enable the functioning of an exclusively nuclear family before the invention of modern household appliances rendered domestic servants unnecessary. In Maria Edgeworth's *Practical Education* (1798), published over a century later, her concern is still to limit the intimacy between servants and the middle- to upper-class children in their care, lest the former end up by damaging the latter irrevocably.⁸³

The damage that might be inflicted by class aliens on these most vulnerable members of bourgeois and aristocratic families clearly haunted educational philosophers throughout the eighteenth century. After the Revolution, and the politicisation of servants it was thought to have facilitated, servant behaviour towards children in texts of the 1790s takes on ever more macabre overtones. While Burke's revolutionary tutor is busy debauching the virgins under his tutelage, the diabolical servant Sophia in *Dorothea, or, A Ray of the New Light*, published at the end of the century, is secretly poisoning the baby she has been hired to look after with "spirituous liquors".⁸⁴ Locke's idea that servants 'poison' young children with the nasty habits of the poor becomes literalised here.

Another disturbing aspect of servants' relation to the family was their access to private information. Conduct-book literature throughout the century emphasises servant secrecy as a sacred responsibility.⁸⁵ Servants were not only the eyes and ears of households; they were also employed to perform tasks that violated their employers' intimate physical space. Sexual information in particular could not be concealed from

⁸¹ "Among the eighteenth-century English aristocracy there did appear, however, a limited degree of equality between men and their wives and children that resulted in a new pattern of household interaction—from which servants were excluded", Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family*, 120.

⁸² John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. John W. and Jean S. Yolton (1693; Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989), 196.

⁸³ Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, 3 vols. (1798; Poole, New York: Woodstock Books, 1996), 1:183-206.

⁸⁴ Anon, *Dorothea; or, A Ray of the New Light*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1801), 2:47-48.

⁸⁵ Daniel Defoe commanded maidservants: "add to your other Virtues Piety, which will teach you the Prudence of *Keeping Family Secrets*, the want of which is a great Complaint", *The Maid-Servant's Modest Defence*, cited in J. Jean Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth-Century England*, 81. Anthony Heasel in *The Servant's Book of Knowledge* emphasized the same connection between disclosure and religious transgression: "When your family visits at any other house, never tell the servants there what is done in your master's family ... for when a servant keeps tattling up and down every occurrence in the family, it often brings dishonour on his master. ... It is also a very great sin, and one of the breaches of the fifth commandment; for as we are commanded to honour our parents, so it is necessarily implied that

them. Laurence Stone's study of divorce trials in Britain between 1650 and 1857 reveals that servants were the main body of witnesses in every separation or divorce trial, often with bitter consequences for their masters.⁸⁶ Exactly what servants saw and knew was always impossible to ascertain or to control, and as the desire for privacy increased, the presence of servants who could never be banished altogether became increasingly disquieting.

We are familiar with servants who double as spies in eighteenth-century prose fiction before the Revolution. In Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-8), for example, Lovelace, Clarissa, Miss Howe, Arabella and James all employ servants as spies on their enemies, even when they overtly condemn such practice as a serious violation of the sanctity of the private family.⁸⁷ Yet the many snoops and letter stealers of this novel only ever act in the pay of their social superiors, failing quite pointedly to demonstrate initiative, or personal malice.⁸⁸ After the Revolution, with the shocking prospect of servants willingly denouncing their masters before revolutionary tribunals in France,⁸⁹ servant spying in British prose fiction is a distinctly more sinister affair. In *Caleb Williams*, the eponymous hero sets himself up as a spy upon his master entirely of his own volition, and without the incentive of being paid for any acquired information. In order to satisfy his own insatiable curiosity, Caleb is compelled to study Falkland intimately, to "watch him without remission", to "trace all the mazes of his thought".⁹⁰ If the behaviour of servant-spies unnerves the heroine of *Clarissa*, she can nevertheless have recourse to blaming their directors. Here the socially unsanctioned behaviour of Caleb is infinitely more disturbing because it is wholly self-generated.

The most threatening characteristic of servants, from the perspective of the employers who hired and shared their homes with them, was their ambiguous relation to

we also honour and respect all those who have authority over us", cited in *ibid*, 75. See also *Advice to Servants* (London, 1800).

⁸⁶ Laurence Stone, *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England 1660-1857* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁸⁷ "This is not an honourable way of proceeding in Mr. Lovelace—Did he learn this infamous practice of corrupting the servants of other families in the French Court?" asks Clarissa, in spite of sending a servant to spy on Mr. Lovelace in a neighbouring inn and to report back to her. Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (1747-8; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 261, 269.

⁸⁸ Betty Barnes is the most fully realised servant in *Clarissa*, and the servant whose behaviour towards the heroine comes closest to class revolt. Yet her intimidating presence is weakened by being rendered entirely subject to Arabella's control. To emphasise her lack of essential selfhood, our attention is also drawn to Betty's talent for mimicry. *Ibid*, 302, 346.

⁸⁹ "Even in his own habitation, and in the bosom of his family, no man dared to utter a complaint but in anxious whispers, lest a servant should overhear the forbidden expostulations of humanity, and denounce him as a counter-revolutionist", Helen Maria Williams, *An Eye-Witness Account of the French Revolution: Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France*, ed. Jack Fruchtman, Jr. (1790-1796; New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 161.

⁹⁰ William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 126.

property. For a nation either beset with lawlessness, or obsessed with its possibility, there was a surprising degree of resistance in eighteenth-century Britain to the establishment of a national police force. Accounting for this peculiarity, Douglas Hay posits the resistance of the servant-employing classes to policing:

Yet the argument had little weight with the gentry and aristocracy. In the first place they had large numbers of personal servants to guard their plate and their wives. Their problem was not attack from without but disloyalty within their houses. No code of laws or police force would protect them there. Their own judgement of character and the fair treatment of servants within the family were the only real guarantees they could have.⁹¹

Here we have a useful summary of the ambivalence inherent in servants' primary responsibility as property protectors. For whilst the gentry and the aristocracy deem a national police force unnecessary because of the "large numbers of personal servants" ready to "guard their plate and their wives", they were simultaneously aware that servants were ideally positioned to turn thieves themselves. With such easy access to property, the temptation for servants to steal must have been staggering. Bloody reminders of what was in store for servant-thieves were used by the legal establishment as a kind of desperate deterrent. In Scotland in 1751, Norman Ross, a servant who robbed his master and then murdered him, was sentenced "to have his right hand chopped off, then to be hanged, and afterwards have his body hung up in chains. In addition, his right hand was to be affixed at the top of the gibbet together with the murder weapon (a knife)".⁹²

This pre-association of servants with theft, and with execution for theft, is a commonplace in eighteenth-century literature. In Jonathan Swift's satirical *Directions to Servants*, eventually published in 1745, Swift's direct address to footmen assumes that their execution for robbery is inevitable: "The last Advice I shall give you, relates to your Behaviour when you are going to be hanged; which, either for robbing your Master, for House-breaking, or going upon the High-way ... may very probably be your lot".⁹³ In the heightened atmosphere of the 1790s, however, concern over the relation of servants to familial property is dramatically increased. For Burke, property in the wake of the French Revolution has become a sleepy entity, in need of the most diligent defence. In the black episode of the confiscation of Church wealth by the

⁹¹ Douglas Hay, "Property, Authority and the Criminal Law", in *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Douglas Hay (London: Allen Lane, 1975), 59.

⁹² Frank McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989), 122.

revolutionaries, he sees the subversion of the property principle generally, and so warns British gentlemen throughout his anti-revolutionary writings that any amendments to the existing political order will result in their own literal dispossession. In the fictions of the 1790s, servants not only rob more, but also rob for ideological as well as personal reasons. In *The Old Manor House*, the housekeeper Mrs. Lennard manages to steal ownership of the entire Rayland estate by hiding a will, extorting £10,000 in ready cash in the process: a striking amplification of the petty thefts of tea, port and silverware by servants in the novels that have preceded her. In Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria*, Jemima starts out by stealing from "absolute necessity". Having realised, however, that "the rich and poor [are] natural enemies", she soon becomes "a thief from principle".⁹⁴

In addition to key areas of servant concern being amplified in this way after the Revolution, literary servants are also made to represent the embryonic character of the 1790s working classes more directly. Literacy was deemed a crucial weapon in the hands of the lower orders who campaigned for political representation, and the literary servants in the prose fictions of the decade reflect this association between lower-class education and political agitation. Now a figure reminiscent of the Burkean revolutionary sublime, the servant rises from these fictions as a dangerous ideologue who overtly politicises customary servant behaviours and then takes them to graphic extremes. But the new literary servant is also, by and large, the servant who can read and write. By the 1790s, anxiety over the inherent radicalism of working-class literacy, which pervades the first half of *Pamela*, but which is ultimately contained by this text, explodes into the most fiercely contested issue of the decade. Accordingly, the literacy, or illiteracy, of servants in prose fiction of the 1790s becomes a crucial indication of their author's response to the link deemed inherent between working classes who can read and/or write, and the destabilising of the existing socio-political order.

The 'literacy crisis' sparked by the unprecedented circulation of the *Rights of Man* in the early 1790s was complex. For certain conservatives, such as the Bishop of Rochester, educating the poor at all was simply a catalyst for "Jacobinical rebellion", for which the Charity and Sunday School movements were duly attacked.⁹⁵ Conversely, for other activists on the right, ensuring that the poor were thoroughly conscious of their static position within the social order, and of their duty to their superiors, was to be facilitated by guaranteeing their ability to read the bible, and other approved texts from the conservative propaganda machine. The 'literacy crisis' was further characterised by

⁹³ Jonathan Swift, *Directions to Servants* (1745), in *Directions to Servants and other Miscellaneous Pieces*, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959), 44.

⁹⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria*, 82, 90.

⁹⁵ Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 46, 65.

a division between reading and writing: workers who could write were viewed as far more dangerous than workers who could only read. Hannah More, a passionate exponent of teaching reading to the poor, taught none of her pupils how to write. “My plan of instruction”, she wrote of herself in justification, “is extremely simple and limited. [My pupils] learn, on week days, such coarse works as may fit them for servants. I allow of no writing for the poor. My object is not to make fanatics, but to train up the lower classes in habits of industry and piety”.⁹⁶ By contrast, Richard Lovell Edgeworth was one of only a handful of supporters of lower-class education in the 1790s who also endorsed teaching the poor how to write. In the Irish House of Commons he asserted that it was “in countries where the people at large were best instructed, that they were best affected to constituted authority and regular Government”.⁹⁷ Accordingly, in the plans for a school at Edgeworthstown for local children, he insisted on writing as part of the curriculum, although he was still careful that social distinctions would be maintained by teaching a hand that would reveal lower-class authorship at a glance.⁹⁸

In all of the novels under discussion, the ability of servants to read and/or write determines both their own destiny, as well as the destiny of their families—families which function as various microcosms of the British (or Irish) state. The massive concern in the 1790s over lower-order literacy is mirrored in the emphasis which authors in the 1790s place on the reading and/or writing skills of their servant protagonists. If the literacy crisis was complex and divided, however, such divisions are not mirrored in the decade’s prose fiction. With the exception, unsurprisingly, of Hannah More in *Fantom*, all of the authors under discussion, even Edgeworth, attest as one to the radically destabilising effect of lower-order education on the socio-political order. This destabilising effect is, in turn, either advocated by radicals such as Godwin and Smith,

⁹⁶ Cited in *ibid*, 85. It has since been argued that conservative fears over working-class writing were essentially misplaced, and that both reading *and* writing worked ultimately to reinforce class distinctions and reduce social mobility. *Ibid*, 85-89.

⁹⁷ Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, 2:246, cited in Aileen Douglas, “Maria Edgeworth’s Writing Classes”, in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 14:3-4, April-July (2002), 378.

⁹⁸ Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, 2:451, cited in *ibid*, 378. The Edgeworths appeared particularly concerned that servants should be educated. In *Practical Education*, they announce that servants are not, in spite of the impediments they impose on proper child rearing, “a separate cast in society doomed to ignorance, or degraded by inherent vice. ... Let them be well educated, and the difference in their conduct and understanding will repay society for the trouble of the undertaking. This education must begin as early as possible” (1:191). But even this radical battle cry is undermined by the admission, a few lines later, that educating servants “partially” only weakens the “habits” of “proud subordination” and “dignified submission” (1:193). The logical prospect that educating them ‘fully’ would only shatter such habits irrevocably, by eliminating any remaining distinctions between master and servant, is then conveniently ignored, and the rest of the chapter on servants is devoted to the more comfortable territory of excluding them from family management (1:192-206).

or decried by conservatives, such as Burke and the creators of anti-Jacobin fictions. That lower-order education wrecks havoc on the status quo, however, remains a shared assumption across the bi-partisan prose fiction divide.

Perhaps the most contentious engine of the middle-class drive for cultural and political dominance in the eighteenth century was sensibility. Sensibility was rooted in establishing the moral authority of the bourgeoisie.⁹⁹ Always double-pronged in its effect, sensibility worked both to distinguish the middle ranks from their unfeeling aristocratic superiors, and to designate the poor as passive objects of middle-class, self-aggrandising benevolence. Here again, as with literacy, post-revolutionary conservative anxieties focused on the alarming possibility that the lower orders had discovered the social power inherent in the eighteenth-century cult of feeling for themselves, and were subsequently manipulating sensibility for their own radical political purposes. And just as depictions of servant literacy turn critical after the Revolution, depictions of servants and their relation to sensibility in novels of the 1790s also reveal an unprecedented anxiety about the consequences of sensibility in the wrong hands, as exercised by—and on—the wrong bodies.

Following the trajectory of sensibility as an evolving socio-historical phenomenon over the course of the 1700s, we see it originate in the idealism of the moral sense school of philosophy, and end mired in suspicion at the end of the century, held responsible for the most shocking excesses of revolutionary fervour.¹⁰⁰ Shaftesbury, the “Father of Sentimental Ethics”, who wrote his most important works between 1705 and 1711, set out to prove “the natural sociability of man”, and that if one individual followed his innate instincts of sympathy and benevolence, he would “live happily and harmoniously with his own physical, psychological, and spiritual nature, with his society, and with the natural universe”.¹⁰¹ Hume also understood the workings of sympathy between individuals as a ‘natural’ passion, by which people occupying different positions and representing different interests could be brought together.¹⁰² Sensibility, in this initial formulation, was profoundly positive, conducive to social harmony, unifying where the exclusive employment of reason would only divide. Even

⁹⁹ “‘Sensibility’ ... would seem unequivocally on the side of the progressive middle class, as the aesthetic foundation of a new form of polity”, Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 26.

¹⁰⁰ Nicola J. Watson speaks of the “intimate relation between sentimental fiction and radical politics that took on an unprecedented intensity in the imagination of the British reading public during the years of the French Revolution”, in *Revolution and the Form of the English Novel 1790-1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 1.

¹⁰¹ John K. Sheriff, *The Good-Natured Man: The Evolution of a Moral Ideal 1600-1800* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1982), x.

in these initially optimistic formulations of sentimental philosophy, however, an anxiety is already present over the question of exactly who is being united with whom in a blaze of sympathetic passion.

Shaftesbury maintained he argued only for sympathetic exchange as restricted to the “Liberty of the Club, and that sort of Freedom which is taken amongst Gentlemen and Friends, who know one another perfectly well”.¹⁰³ Sympathy could bring people together, facilitating the sociability of highly refined societies, but as John Mullan points out, there was always the coterminous danger that it would bring people together “in the wrong way”.¹⁰⁴ Passionate communion with a fellow being could quickly lose the refined aspects of benevolence and degenerate into sexual arousal. Members of separate classes could also unite in ways which were destructive of, rather than conducive to, social order.

The potential for social and political licence inherent in sensibility, which Shaftesbury attempted to police by limiting its operation to the ‘Club’, is, according to Burke, both unleashed and conflated by the French Revolution. The “fence” of “decent pride, and salutary domestic prejudice” is smashed as social distinctions evaporate under the hazardous force of an aristocratic “sensibility” engaged by lower-order servants.¹⁰⁵ Burke responds to the dangerous, cross-class sensibility unleashed by the Revolution with a sentimentalised, familial milieu of his own, designed to keep members of the lower orders out of a body politic domesticated by love, in which gentlemen love their gentleman-king, as they would love their own father. According to his language, all virtues were domestic virtues, all relations, and especially political relations, aspired to the condition of family relations.¹⁰⁶ And yet attempts to harness the power of sensibility for an averred social or political aim had a tendency to unravel into a series of converse effects. Just as sensibility intended as a vehicle for refined sociability easily slipped into carnal sensuality, sentimentalised domestic relations, presented as a model of national unity in order to counter the class antagonisms exposed and fuelled by the Revolution, degenerated, disturbingly and uncontrollably, into violent antagonisms. John Barrell has referred to this process as “the extraordinary power of the language of sentiment, its

¹⁰² I am indebted to John Mullan for his discussion of sensibility’s transformation through the works of Shaftesbury, Hume and Smith in *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 18-56.

¹⁰³ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, cited in Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993), 59.

¹⁰⁴ John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 27.

¹⁰⁵ Edmund Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Volume 8: The French Revolution 1790-1794*, ed. L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 317.

¹⁰⁶ John Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 51.

tendency to exceed its apparent brief to describe the depth of family love, and to call up as well the guilt and hatred of family life, or of social life conceived in familial terms". We need only refer to Burke's imagined rape of the French queen, or his defence of paternal authority ending in the grotesque image of the father figure dismembered in a cauldron, to see this curious unravelling at work.¹⁰⁷ And where Burke appropriates the sensibility he so disapproves of in Rousseau in order to seal the nation together under a familial model of loyalty to the existing constitution, (with ambiguous consequences), other appropriators of sensibility in the 1790s, such as Godwin, use it deliberately in order to blow the family, and by implication the existing nation state, apart.

After the French Revolution, sensibility's inherently problematic nature is amplified. The perceived emotional self-indulgence of sensibility came under strident attack, but by now the focus of its detractors was firmly set on its ability to unify people across class boundaries and to rupture social stratification. Sensibility is increasingly depicted as having escaped its legitimising middle-class confines, with catastrophic consequences for the social order. Back in a novel of the 1740s, a servant girl is allowed to legitimise her struggle against despotism via her sensibility, which is taken as the touchstone of her virtue when even her own language is disbelieved.¹⁰⁸ In the novels of the 1790s, we witness a steady radicalisation in the deployment of servant sensibility as the decade progresses. Monimia in Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House* destabilises prevalent notions of class by daring to experience sensibility, rather than merely eliciting it within a privileged middle-class onlooker. Caleb revolutionises dominant models of sensibility yet further by taking a cruel, scientific variant of sensibility and then by inflicting it on his master. In the anti-Jacobin fictions that follow *Caleb Williams*, we are far from seeing sensibility exercised by servants as an index of true feeling: by now it is a mechanism by which dreadful deceits can be perpetrated on the unwitting master classes. Here, the servant who uses the discourse of sensibility is depicted as both fraudulent and dangerous; mistresses who continue to countenance sensibility in their servants risk their own literal extermination.

The servant in British fictions of the 1790s, then, is a unique creation. As both mirror and instrument of the socio-political unrest which characterised the decade, servants not only risk more than before, and are more overtly ideological in their reasoning than before. They also come armed with the twin weapons of literacy and sensibility, at the very time such weapons were perceived as being wrested from the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 86.

¹⁰⁸ Consistently, and at the most critical moments whenever rape is impending, Pamela's language fails her completely and her body is left to assert its own defence. Fainting is just one testament to her body's elevated and inherent sensibility, making her the natural partner of the gentle Mr. B.

exclusive control of the upper- and middle classes by an awakening labouring class. That authors of 1790s fictions simultaneously understood the nature and degree of post-revolutionary servant radicalism, and deployed it accordingly, is substantiated by the degree to which these texts are in conscious conversation with each other.

Burke's servant/people analogy is taken up by Smith, who uses the virtuous, but illegitimate servant, Monimia, in order to invert Burke's tactic of retrenchment in the face of clamours for reform, and to posit an alternative politics. Like Smith, Godwin takes a servant orphan adopted into service by an aristocratic family, and proceeds to demonstrate the havoc such servants can cause when they have learned both to read and to feel. Anti-Jacobin authors declared openly that their reason for turning to prose fiction in the first place was to counter the dislocation of social norms countenanced by *Caleb Williams*, and accordingly invent servants who are the opposite of Caleb in several key respects. Again, in terms of intertextuality, Edgeworth's *Thady* is the exception here, for he seems less a conscious amendment of a previous model than those servants discussed above, even though broad themes concerning servants in 1790s prose fiction, most particularly literacy, are crucial to his narrative. As stated earlier, my discussion of *Castle Rackrent* is the only section of the thesis in which Robbins' delineation of servant radicalism at odds with authorial intention seems appropriate. If authors knew what they were doing in these heavily politicised years of prose fiction production, subsequent authors were uncomfortable with such an overtly didactic approach, and with the volatile domestics who were an integral component of that approach. After 1800, we see servants re-banished back to the margins of texts, and re-silenced.

Subsequent authors were also uncomfortable with the enormous generic range of 1790s prose fiction, with the sheer oddness of the immediate post-revolutionary novel, which has been termed "a literary badlands, marked by strangely-shaped formations, a desert area generally to be avoided for the sake of the manicured gardens of Enlightenment literature or the well-marked peaks of Romanticism".¹⁰⁹ And yet selecting a genre was also a political choice, and so in the generic clashes of the 1790s novel we come to witness an interconnected debate about the nature of social truth, and the manner in which such truth can best be represented to the reading public,¹¹⁰ which is crucial to the impassioned tenor of the decade.

In 1790s prose fiction, social instability is registered in the controversial behaviour of prominent servant characters, but the link between social instability and generic instability also means that the manner in which such servants are represented

¹⁰⁹ Linda Lang-Peralta (ed.), in *Women, Revolution and the Novels of the 1790s* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1999), ix-x.

¹¹⁰ Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel*, 20.

reflects the decade's formalistic diversity. Our attention has already been drawn to the peculiarly fractured nature of the 1790s novel.¹¹¹ Both between texts, and within texts, vying fictional modes such as the romance, its more violent variant, the Gothic romance, the historical novel, the novel as crude political propaganda and the novel as a realistic rendition of contemporary Britain, do battle. And as with the formulation of post-revolutionary literary servants, it is once again Burke's *Reflections* which sets the terms for the generic clashes of the decade.

In his study of Edmund Burke's pre- and post-revolutionary writings, Tom Furniss argues the following: "The *Reflections* ... emerges as representation of the Revolution which abandons the 'reflection' theory of representation, relinquishing any direct relation between representation and 'object' or 'event' represented".¹¹² For Burke got many of his facts about the Revolution wrong. L. G. Mitchell describes the bemusement of Burke's contemporaries, who were "intrigued to discover why a man who was universally recognised as one of the foremost intellectuals of the day should have been tempted into writing a terrible caricature of the greatest event in politics of his lifetime".¹¹³ And yet a non-realistic depiction of the Revolution, concentrating not on facts, but on the symbolism of those facts, and on their deeper tendencies, relayed in language thick with archetypal imagery, was precisely Burke's point. Instead of realism, the *Reflections* presents us, essentially, with a romance—a direction in political analysis in 1790 which his readers found baffling. Furthermore, Burke's decision to use romance instead of a system of representation which established a "direct relation" between the language used and the "object" or "event" represented, was politically motivated.

If one were to draw a correlation between modes of prose fiction and modes of political representation, one would align realism with a radically extended franchise, and romance with the highly exclusive form of political representation in existence in France until the Revolution, and in Britain until the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832. When Burke was elected MP for Bristol in 1774, his speech to the electors of that city demolished any "direct relation" between himself, (like language, the medium of representation), and those who voted for him, the "object" to be represented. "Your representative", he warns any idealistic democrats in his audience, "owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices

¹¹¹ Miranda Burgess, *British Fiction and the Production of Social Order 1740-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 115.

¹¹² Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender and Political Economy in Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 150.

¹¹³ L. G. Mitchell, in his introduction to *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) ix.

it to your opinion".¹¹⁴ Burke's view of Britain's governing politics was one in which the relationship between the electorate and their representatives was essentially symbolic. Great propertied gentlemen, independent of the people in their constituencies who propelled them into office, would legislate according to the needs of Britain's entire imagined community, and not suffer the breadth of their judgement to be curtailed by elevating local concerns into issues of national consequence. An MP serves the nation in its most generalised form, ignoring the particulars of regional, or factional, interest. The theory of an extended franchise, by which the correlation between voters and their representatives is brought into stricter alignment, accords with the equivalence between object and sign attempted by realistic language. Burke's deployment of romance in the *Reflections* can be read, therefore, as a vindication of a highly limited franchise and an attack on democracy.

The French Revolution, with its amended voting system, simultaneously destroyed symbolic relations in society and robbed language of metaphor. The elevation of parliament over the people, master over servant, king over subject, was maintained by ideological structures which weighted the wielders of power with sacral significance, rendering them inviolable. Burke and Paine explain this strengthening of power via ideology as a sartorial process: both the *Reflections* and the *Rights of Man* are suffused with imagery of coats, veils, cloaks and curtains which hide the essential equivalence between master and servant, subject and king, under blindingly magnificent appearances. For Paine, stripping authority of its ideological garb embodied liberation from despotism. And because such ideological garb is, essentially, an inflated language, heavy with symbolism, the debunking of authority also involves the purging of language itself from the clutter of metaphor. Paine argues that "the right" of waging war, or negotiating peace, resides, in England, in "a *metaphor*, shown at the tower for sixpence or a shilling apiece".¹¹⁵ And again, he asks: "But, after all, what is this metaphor, called a crown, or rather, what is monarchy?"¹¹⁶ It is a despicably small thing, hiding behind the curtain of ideological language, and pretending to be glorious. In contrast to Burke's densely-wrought romance of the *Reflections*, the *Rights of Man* is electrifying in its linguistic directness, and between the two texts we see the political connotations of the battle between romance and a more straightforward, less symbolically rich form of discourse, such as the realistic novel, emerge more clearly.

Miranda Burgess has described romance in the 1790s novel as both the register most at home with the discourse of conservative nationalism, and as "the

¹¹⁴ Cited in Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology*, 224.

¹¹⁵ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, 52.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 99.

eighteenth-century genre most likely to go head to head with questions of social organisation".¹¹⁷ Because it is inherently more flexible than realistic prose fiction, romance can incorporate a wider range of political positions, sometimes at one and the same time. Burgess speaks of the "political roominess"¹¹⁸ of romance, and this confusion over its political connotations in the 1790s is evidenced by Helen Maria Williams' enthusiastic endorsement of the French Revolution as a new age of romantic chivalry.¹¹⁹ While radicals such as Smith, Godwin and Wollstonecraft¹²⁰ have a tendency to emphasise servants trapped within the genre of Gothic romance as they are trapped into menial social positions, conservatives favour servants who unleash Gothic Horror on unwitting private families. For Burke, the slaughter of the last loyal servant at Versailles transforms the domestic sanctuary of the French royal family into an arena "polluted by massacre, and strewed with scattered limbs and mutilated carcasses".¹²¹ After the Revolution, it is the servants, he argues, who will do the mob's dirty work for them by hanging their masters from the nearest lantern. The remit of the anti-Jacobin authors who followed him was to be as explicit as possible in their depiction of contemporary 1790s Britain, in order to demonstrate what would happen to the current socio-political context if reform were to be tolerated.¹²² Burke's rich, archetypal-filled and meandering prose style finds no echo in the hard-nosed, dismissive practicalities of Hannah More's *Village Politics* (1793), for example.¹²³ But where these authors depict the outrageous behaviour of servants, the terrors of Gothic romance are once again

¹¹⁷ Miranda Burgess, *British Fiction and the Production of Social Order*, 5, 10.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 5.

¹¹⁹ "Living in France at present, appears to me like living in a region of romance. ... For my part, while I contemplate these things, I sometimes think that the age of chivalry, instead of being past for ever, is just returned; not indeed in its erroneous notions of loyalty, honour, and gallantry, which are as little 'à l'ordre du jour,' as its dwarfs, giants and imprisoned damsels; but in its noble contempt of sordid cares, its spirit of unsullied generosity, and its heroic zeal for the happiness of others", Helen Maria Williams, *Letters from France*, cited in Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 60.

¹²⁰ For a discussion of the ways in which middle-class women and servants are shown to occupy different fictional modes, as well as different social positions, in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria* see Miranda Burgess, *British Fiction and the Production of Social Order*, 144-145.

¹²¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 8:122.

¹²² The tendency of anti-Jacobin novelists to set their fictions within the immediately recognisable context of 1790s Britain, with the inclusion of specific contemporary events, is typical of propagandist fictions more generally. In *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (1983; Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), Susan Suleiman argues that the highly specific referentiality of ideological fictions is one of the reasons why they fall out of date so quickly, and usually remain unread once their own historical moment has passed (147).

¹²³ Hannah More, *Village Politics*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (1793; Oxford, New York: Woodstock Books, 1995).

appropriated in order to scare their readerships away from political radicalism by any exaggerated means possible.

Chapter Two of this thesis is devoted to examining the uneasy co-existence between realism and romance in 1790s prose fiction, and the relation of servants to romance, more closely. I read Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House* as an attempt to chart an alternative politics between the conservatism of Burke on the one hand, and the radical polemics of Paine on the other, through her deployment of both fictional modes. Against a dominant background of realistic prose fiction, set precisely between 1776 and 1779, in which the novel's immanence is heightened by the incorporation of actual events from the American Revolution, romance elements, seemingly wrenched from an alternative tradition, emerge and persist. Monimia herself is the site for this generic incongruence: while the unlikely name "Monimia" has been bestowed upon her as a "romantic whim" by her aunt, her employer, Mrs. Rayland, insists instead on calling her plain Mary, a name more suitable for her "under housekeeper". Monimia embodies the clash between the novel's realistic and romance registers in the schizophrenic dislocation between her social position and her personal aspiration. *The Old Manor House* deliberately echoes Paine's *Rights of Man* by depicting the lower orders as literally imprisoned by romance, although it then proceeds to turn back on itself by harnessing the power of romance in order to secure Orlando and Monimia's inheritance at the novel's close. In no other novel of the decade are the political implications of romance as forcefully explored, or as paradoxically presented.

Chapter Three examines the decade's most revolutionary novel, William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, as an amplification, and radicalisation, of the exploration of suffering servitude in *The Old Manor House*. In defiance of peasant origins, and his position as servant to the aristocratic Falkland, Caleb persists in seeing himself as equal to, or better than, his social superiors. He prides himself on his intelligence, his extensive reading, (Caleb is self-taught), and his acutely developed moral sense, and yet is persistently persecuted throughout the novel for behaviour deemed grossly inappropriate for a servant. The most contentious aspect of Caleb's behaviour lies in his deployment of sensibility against his master. Sentimental tableaux, in which the body is read and sympathetic communion achieved, tends to operate in novels either between social equals, such as Harley and Mr. Atkins in Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), or Fanny and Joseph in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742); or between a social superior and a social inferior, with the social superior in the more powerful position of spectator, as in the numerous encounters between Yorick and beggars in *A Sentimental Journey* (1768). The interpreter of Falkland's peculiarly transparent countenance is indeed empowered by his position, and Caleb stands alone in sentimental fiction as the

privileged reader of a social superior who manages to resist being read in turn.¹²⁴ The servant who dares to set himself up as an interpreter of socially superior bodies represents a far more contentious development in prose fiction than those servants who simply manufacture the signs of virtue within their own bodies, and who are subsequently misread. The appropriation of an investigative gaze by a servant against his master is the defining moment of revolutionary displacement within this text, and the most controversial manifestation of sensibility in any novel of the 1790s.

The anti-Jacobin novelists, who sprang into action mid-decade, and whose crudely formulaic approach to prose fiction was popular until the end of the century, were appalled at the damage wrought upon the master/servant relationship in *Caleb Williams*, and were determined to return the servant to his/her subordinate social position. The creators of anti-Jacobin fictions use their servant characters more shamelessly as crude ideological exempla than any other authors of the decade. Attendant upon the servant's return to passive subservience within the household is the reassuring idea that the stirrings of working-class agitation on a national scale would thereby also be quelled. Dismissing the possibility that such curious, dynamic, intellectually brilliant and courageous characters as Caleb could spring from the servant classes in the first place, the anti-Jacobins instead depict servants who are lower-class innocents, corrupted by their erroneous masters into the "specious path of the new Philosophy".¹²⁵ The encounter of these servants with the poison of political radicalism is usually unwitting. They overhear radical ideology from their employers speaking carelessly at table, or, in moments of idleness, peruse copies of the *Rights of Man* that have been thoughtlessly left lying around. Child-like in their lack of political sophistication, these misguided servants set about equalising property by stealing from their betters, and usually end on the gibbet. The message of the plight of servants in these highly conservative fictions is clear: the lower orders may have the most to gain from political radicalism, as they possess the least under the existing system of wealth distribution, but they also stand to suffer more under its implementation than any other class. These authors designate servants as working-class children of the middle classes,

¹²⁴ Judith Frank's reading of *A Sentimental Journey* locates an anxiety already present in this text over the illegibility of a servant's countenance, and the ways in which this illegibility of a social inferior problematifies Yorick's deployment of sensibility, which is predicated on control of the lower orders. See "'A Man who Laughs is Never Dangerous': The Gentleman's Disposition in *A Sentimental Journey*", in *Common Ground*, 63-89. In *Caleb Williams*, we are not only presented with the troubling phenomenon of an opaque servant, but with a servant who appropriates the interpretation of physiognomy, upon which sensibility is predicated, in order to disempower his own master. Here, sensibility has quite clearly slipped beyond its acceptable remit of constructing the "bourgeois subject" (64), and has metamorphosed into a weapon of radical social dislocation.

¹²⁵ George Walker, *The Vagabond, a Novel* (1799, Boston, 1801), iii.

and expect the middle-class readers of their fictions to regulate servant behaviour within their own households as a means of forestalling revolution.

My final chapter moves to Ireland. A study of the servant in a text by an Irish author, on the eve of that nation's union with Britain, after a revolution which has actually broken out in the form of the Rising of 1798, instead of a revolution that is merely anticipated, is additionally instructive. It reveals how the discourses of mastership and servitude are additionally weighted in a colonial context with the resonances of nationalism as well as with the resonances of class. In spite of the assurances in the preface to *Castle Rackrent* that understanding Thady's idiom should be relatively unproblematic, his language quickly assumes a disconcerting lower-class consciousness at odds with the loyalty to the Rackrents he ostensibly professes. One of the most unsettling implications of Thady's narrative is that it destabilises the solidity of the family to whom he 'belongs' and ends by exposing the Burkean familial ideal to be little more than a convenient construct. *Caleb Williams* and *Castle Rackrent* are the only two texts considered here with servant narrators, as well as servant protagonists. And whereas Godwin is deliberately employing the anarchic tendencies of untrammelled servant narrative to his own political ends, the more conservative Edgeworth is much more uncomfortable with the implications of her own text. Edgeworth's act of literary ventriloquism in taking on the 'comic' voice of a lower-class Irish servant was to bring her politically out of her depth: she never risked extensive servant narration again. And because, more broadly, the literary servant loses the centrality accorded to it in the 1790s in the fictions that follow the turn of the century, Edgeworth's own silencing of servants after 1800 is emblematic of the wider trend.

And yet before I turn to novels at all, I begin with Burke. Indeed, Burke is so central to the entire thesis that he appears *passim*, a development I could not have foreseen when I began my research. Burke has ended as my key player because it has proved impossible to discuss the politics of representations of servants in prose fictions of the 1790s without continuously referring back to him: it soon became obvious that writers on both sides of the political divide wrote with Burke constantly in mind. It is an established fact, of course, that Burke's influence on the 1790s generally was monumental. What has not been acknowledged, however, is the *degree* to which novelists of the 1790s engaged with the finer points of Burke's *Reflections* in order to articulate a politics of their own. Whether they were appropriating Burke's castle/state metaphor exactly, and then standing it on its head, as Smith does, or whether they chose to follow him by delineating what would happen to the private family, should the servant of that family, as the corollary to the 'people' in revolutionary times, become

politicised, writers consistently re-enacted and re-invented Burke's fantasies, rhetoric, choice of prose mode, even imagery. By so doing, they shared the assumption that every aspect of Burke's *Reflections* was famous; more, that any political implication afforded by re-inscribing the *Reflections*' literary devices would instantly be recognised as such.

Considerable critical attention has already been paid to the position of women in the 1790s, both as characters in, and authors of, prose fiction.¹²⁶ In 1793, Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins wrote: "she who ... will easily be persuaded to consider her husband as an unauthorised tyrant" is likely to be a woman who has "early imbibed an aversion towards the kingly character".¹²⁷ The equivalence between polity and family inscribed here rendered any questioning of patriarchal authority treasonable, and forced women, as both the dependants of their husbands, and as the upholders of a domestic privacy which the Revolution only sought to violate, into a critical position. If we return to the horrified reaction of Louis VI to Figaro, with which this introduction began, we can see how the equivalence between polity and family also placed domestic servants in a critical position—those other disenfranchised dependants within the patriarchal domestic sphere—and how events in France, followed by the stirrings of working-class mobilisation at home, accentuated the potential threat to the political establishment which insubordination in servants represented. Literary servants of the 1790s undercut many of the assumptions behind the only study of servants in British prose fiction to date; their deployment by novelists was equally as ideologically motivated as the decade's depiction of women; they shed new light on the nature and extent of Burke's influence on prose fiction. For these reasons servant characters merit a place in the study of British novels in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution, and Burke's post-revolutionary writings of 1790 and 1791 are the logical place to begin.

¹²⁶ April Alliston, *Virtue's Faults: Correspondences in Eighteenth-Century British and French Women's Fiction* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996); Eve Taylor Bennet, *The Domestic Revolution: Enlightenment Feminisms and the Novel* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000); Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s*; Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Linda Lang-Peralta, *Women, Revolution and the Novels of the 1790s*; Nicola J. Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the English Novel*.

¹²⁷ Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins, *Letters on the Female Mind* (1793), cited in Nicola J. Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the English Novel*, 2.

CHAPTER ONE.

NO HOUSE IS SAFE FROM ITS SERVANTS: EDMUND BURKE'S DEFINITION OF POST-REVOLUTIONARY SERVANT CHARACTER.

In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), published just one year after the outbreak of the French Revolution, Edmund Burke successfully predicts the violent direction the Revolution will later take under the Terror of Robespierre. “In the groves of *their* academy”, he writes, “at the end of every visto, you see nothing but the gallows”.¹ Pondering the changes made to the French army, Burke then forecasts the rise of Napoleon:

In the weakness of one kind of authority, and in the fluctuation of all, the officers of an army will remain for some time mutinous and full of faction, until some popular general, who understands the art of conciliating the soldiery, and who possesses the true spirit of command, shall draw the eyes of all men upon himself. Armies will obey him on his personal account. There is no other way of securing military obedience in this state of things. But the moment in which that event shall happen, the person who really commands the army is your master; the master (that is little) of your king, the master of your assembly, the master of your whole republic. (266)

Above, we can see how the *Reflections* foretells the trajectory of the French Revolution in certain respects. Nevertheless, many contemporaries were surprised at the intensity of Burke's initial reaction. Thomas Jefferson famously remarked: “The Revolution in France does not astonish me so much as the revolution of Mr. Burke”.² The *Reflections* was commonly seen as a “bewildering reversal of principle” and the “product of a disordered mind”.³ In the disjunction between its immediate reception, and the later vindication of some of its central tenets, we can begin to see how the *Reflections*' status as text changes over the course of the decade, as Burke himself is transformed from fantasist into prophet.⁴

¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Volume 8: The French Revolution 1790-1794*, ed. L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 128. All subsequent references to the *Reflections* are to this edition, and will be marked parenthetically in the main body of the chapter.

² Jefferson to B. Vaughan, 11 May 1791, cited in L. G. Mitchell's introduction to *Writings and Speeches*, 8:13.

³ *Ibid*, 13, 15.

⁴ Immediately after the *Reflections*' publication, cartoonists depicted Burke tilting at imaginary windmills, or wearing the fool's cap (*ibid*, 17). The apotheosis of Edmund Burke as one of the founding fathers of British conservatism can be said to have begun in 1800, with the publication of Robert Bisset's *The Life of Edmund Burke*, though anti-Jacobin authors were quick to valorise him from the mid-90s on.

The *Reflections* is problematic in other ways. Its status as text is further complicated by the diverse functions it takes upon itself to fulfil. The work is at once commentary on events in France up to 1790, a forecast of horrors to come, and a rhetorical plea to British propertied gentlemen to avoid similar “confusion” on home soil. In mode, the *Reflections* divides itself yet again: what is ostensibly a piece of political reportage assumes incongruous Gothic overtones, and the French were predictably appalled at Burke’s license with the facts. A school friend of Robespierre and fellow revolutionary, Camille Desmoulins, described the *Reflections* as “vraiment gothique d’un but à l’autre”,⁵ dismissing it as disordered whimsy.

For a work which, in 1790, few claimed to have taken seriously (Mary Wollstonecraft asserted she read it rather for “amusement than information”⁶), an additional paradox lies in the fact that the *Reflections* was instantly, and monumentally, influential. Published on the 1st November 1790, it was an immediate best seller, and within six months had sold 19,000 copies.⁷ Wollstonecraft may have found it ridiculous, but she was simultaneously incensed enough by its assertions to pen her own response in the form of her *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790). And she was followed by scores of others, as the *Reflections* unleashed a British pamphlet war of unprecedented proportions,⁸ setting the terms for the subsequent Revolution Debate.

Burke was the first writer in Britain after the French Revolution to use a tactical depiction of servants for political effect, and the complexities indicated above bear influence on his delineation of post-revolutionary servant character. The two most important servants of his *Reflections* and *A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791) are the Versailles guard and the Rousseau-indoctrinated private tutor. In the contrast between these two figures, Burke establishes such an instructive, and politically useful, antithesis between the pre- and post-revolutionary models of domestic service that it was deployed by novelists in many of the prose fictions that followed. This thesis demonstrates how the Burkean model was consciously taken up and amended by novelists throughout the 1790s in order to make political points of their own.

But Burke’s antithesis between the guard and the tutor, though compelling, and even in some ways prophetic, is also curiously self-defeating. I will be exploring how the *Reflections*’ confused textual status informs and complicates Burke’s depiction of servants, most particularly in relation to paternalism. For although Burke laments the

⁵ Cited in L. G. Mitchell’s introduction to *Writings and Speeches*, 8:14.

⁶ Cited in *ibid*, 18.

⁷ L. G. Mitchell’s introduction to Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), vii.

⁸ L. G. Mitchell’s introduction to *Writings and Speeches*, 8:16.

demise of domestic paternalism at the hands of the French Revolutionaries, he does not wholeheartedly endorse its rejuvenation. Rather he responds to the threat of political radicalism in Britain by drawing an analogy between the servant in the house, and the people in the state, suggesting thereby that servants and the people should be excluded from the family and from government respectively. Finally this chapter will also briefly investigate Burke's deployment of the discourse of servitude in an Irish context, (as opposed to a British or French one), examining how this parallel formulation actually inverts the model of renegade servitude central to his counter-revolutionary oeuvre.

In 1793, the year of the French king's public execution, legislators inside the National Assembly passed an extraordinary resolution. They declared that the institution of domestic service no longer existed: "The law does not recognise the existence of domestic service: there can only exist an exchange of services between the man who works and the person employing him".⁹ With a single juridical flourish, these men struck at a relationship as fundamental to their society as the marriage contract, and declared it irrevocably changed. This move had already been prefigured as early as June 19th 1790, however, when, in a sweeping tripartite declaration, the wearing of livery was made illegal during the same session in which a statue of Louis XIV was voted to be removed from the Places des Victoires in Paris, and hereditary nobility was abolished together with titles, aristocratic surnames and coats of arms.¹⁰ All three of these decisions were intimately linked. While the law killed off "domestic service", it had a particular kind of domestic service in mind: a feudally-derived model, dominated by men, by which servants were bound to their masters, as subjects to kings, by formidable paternalistic ties, and by which servants represented the status of their masters to a public world orientated around display. The livery, brightly coloured and worn by handsome, frequently inactive footmen, was the symbol *par excellence* of this model of service. Its abolition was a natural extension of the same anti-aristocratic fervour which annulled titles, coats of arms and which was eventually to culminate in regicide.

As "one of the most striking reminders of the feudal system and the spirit of chivalry",¹¹ the abolition of livery was easily justified in revolutionary France. Indeed the events of the early Revolution rendered the discourse of mastership and servitude instantly emblematic of a collapsed socio-political order. The people, by revolting, had cast off their fetters of servility and demanded equality with their former aristocratic

⁹ *Les Constitutions et les principales lois politiques de la France depuis 1798* (Paris, 1952), cited in Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France*, 309-310.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 311.

¹¹ Duc de Montmorency, *Réimpression de l'Ancien Moniteur*, cited in *ibid*, 311.

and kingly masters.¹² Servitude was equated by the French revolutionaries with the subjugation of the majority of the French populace to outmoded despotism; domestic service was subsequently criminalized as the result of this politically symbolic connotation.

Three years earlier, Burke had pre-empted the National Assembly legislators who were both to execute their sovereign, and to wage war on the institution of domestic service, by graphically enacting within the *Reflections* the death of the paternalist model of domestic relations in the slaughter of the Royal Guard at Versailles. Burke depicts revolutionaries, bearing “regicide and sacrilegious slaughter” in their hearts (123), confronting the queen’s loyal bodyguard, who is made to epitomise the old-order model of service, in a final battle, whereby the guard loses his life.¹³ For Burke too saw in domestic service a powerful reminder of “the feudal system and the spirit of chivalry”, though he celebrated and lamented what the National Assembly legislators chose to deplore. His *Reflections* foregrounds the link between the European *Ancien Régime* and servants, and predicts, in the destruction of the aristocratic model of service, the unravelling of the social fabric into barbarism and chaos.

In the Versailles passage of the *Reflections*, posited by several critics as the central episode of the text,¹⁴ the apocalyptic train of events is instigated by the murder of the queen’s guard, whose final action is to alert Marie-Antoinette to her imminent danger before he is killed:

From this sleep the queen was first startled by the voice of the centinel at her door, who cried out to her, to save herself by flight—that this was the last proof of fidelity he could give—that they were upon him, and he was dead. Instantly he was cut down. (121)

The loyalties of this guard are unwaveringly bound to the royal family whom he serves. As a noble himself, the identity of this servant is exclusively forged within the confines of the aristocratic family unit, and is not compromised by external sympathies with the

¹² In a letter to William Windham in September 1789, Burke laments that when the French people cast off their “political servitude”, they simultaneously threw off the “Yoke of Laws and morals”, cited in L. G. Mitchell’s introduction to *Writings and Speeches*, 8:13.

¹³ Opinion seems split over whether Marie-Antoinette’s bodyguard was successfully murdered by revolutionaries or not. In his introduction to the World’s Classics edition of the *Reflections*, L. G. Mitchell asserts: “The sentinel on duty outside Marie Antoinette’s bedroom had not been murdered, but was regaling English visitors in Paris with tales of his adventures” (introduction to *Reflections* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993], ix). Simon Schama, however, substantiates many aspects of Burke’s description. The guard, an aristocrat known as Miomandre de Sainte-Marie, was indeed killed and had his head paraded on a spike during the march to Paris (*Citizens*, 467).

¹⁴ Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke’s Aesthetic Ideology*, 139.

lower orders. He has no desire to join forces with the revolutionary crowd. Posted outside the door of the queen's bedroom, on the threshold of the most sacred of private familial spaces, he gives up his life for his mistress and dies in defence of the aristocratic family. The old-order model of service dies with him. Contrasting the fidelity of the guard with the violations of the mob, who rush over his bleeding corpse in order to desecrate the royal bedchamber, Burke laments that:

the age of chivalry is gone.—That of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. (127)

As the most famous section of the *Reflections*, this impassioned declaration has received its due amount of critical attention.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the correlation between its driving concern, which is deference, and the body of the slaughtered servant, has been ignored. The death of the royal guard foreshadows the passing of “loyalty”, “submission”, “obedience”, and “subordination” in the wider world. The relation between the dead sentinel and the end of civilisation is obvious to Burke, and he nostalgically draws the reader's attention to servitude as the position rendered most beautiful by chivalric principles. More, by emphasising “servitude” over all other social positions in this critical passage, he posits it as the single dynamic capable of representing most broadly the nature of existence under the old order. Against the brave new world of heartless “sophisters”, “oeconomists” and “calculators”, who would kill kings, rape queens and murder fathers, Burke chooses the body of the dead servant as the repository for pre-revolutionary social cohesion.

And so the revolutionary leaders inside the National Assembly and Edmund Burke were at one when they saw the servant of aristocracy as the lynchpin of the *Ancien Régime*: if you removed him (and he was invariably male in their joint formulation), by killing him, or by legislation, the recognized categories of social segregation disintegrated. But whereas Burke envisioned a sanctuary “polluted by

¹⁵ Tom Furniss has argued that this passage, and the Versailles section in general, constitute an appeal for the aristocratic regime to be used as a cover for transforming the body politic into a bourgeois order. *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology*, 164-189. Mary Jean Corbett reads the passage in sexual terms, as an appeal for both men and women to control their sexual appetites: “[this] celebrated passage in the *Reflections* ... reads not as an anachronistic defence of chivalry, but as a very contemporary plea for a requisite discipline in sexual and familial relations, conceived of as central to the maintenance of order”, *Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing 1790-1870: Politics, History and the Family from Edgeworth to Arnold* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 28.

massacre, and strewed with scattered limbs and mutilated carcasses” (122) to be among the consequences of the guard’s death, the legislators hoped that a simpler, more modern exchange of work for wages would take his place.

Burke noticeably conflates the royal and the domestic throughout the Versailles sequence. The evil perpetrated against Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette is unprecedented because it is directed against both the highest political power in the land, and against the family in general. To intensify the crime, Burke stresses the rightful supremacy of royalty: the palace, for example, is “the most splendid palace in the world” (122). But the attendant suggestion that this royal family is simultaneously typical of the generic bourgeois family is the source of a great deal of the passage’s power. The understatement “[t]his king, to say no more of him” (122) is later developed as Burke strips the king of his royal accoutrements and considers him in the light of a generic propertied gentleman: “As a man, it became him to feel for his wife and his children, and the faithful guards of his person, that were massacred in cold blood about him” (125). The massacre of the royal guard marks the death of the loyal subject and the faithful family servant simultaneously. A political parallel, which had informed master/servant relations for centuries, is thus neatly encapsulated by Burke in the one servant body.

The most famous articulation of the master/king, subject/servant analogy is to be found in Sir Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha: or The Natural Power of Kings* (1680). Positing Adam as the first king and the first father, Filmer argues that both kingdoms and private families are structured around the divinely sanctioned principle of omnipotent patriarchy: “*Adam* was the Father, King and Lord over his Family; a Son, a Subject, and a Servant or Slave, were one and the same thing at first”.¹⁶ The body politic of the English kingdom is thus composed of the macro-family of the king and his loyal subjects on the one hand, and the combined micro-families of the nation on the other. All families are mirror kingdoms of absolutist monarchy, with the father in the household exercising the same untrammelled power over his wife, children and servants as the divinely appointed king exercises over his subjects. In this way, families become the social order’s organising principle, and servants and subjects are rendered interchangeable.

John Locke composed his revolutionary *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) as a direct refutation of Filmer’s iron analogy. Locke describes the impetus behind his *Second Treatise* as the separation of the domestic and the political, of familial patriarchy and royal right: “To this purpose, I think it may not be amiss, to set down what I take to be Political Power. That the Power of a *Magistrate* over a Subject, may be distinguished

from that of a *Father* over his Children, a *Master* over his Servant, a *Husband* over his Wife, and a *Lord* over his Slave".¹⁷ Here Locke splits the perfect symmetry between the family and the absolutist state into two distinct systems of authority. By so doing, he refutes the patriarchal basis for master-servant relations, an intrinsic component of the servant/subject parallel. Locke further confounds domestic paternalism by asserting that servants have the right to sell the property which inheres in the labour of their own bodies to a master, for a set fee, and for a limited time, in a free decision which in no way confers the rights of ownership on that master:

Master and Servant are Names as old as History, but given to those of far different condition; for a Free-man makes himself a Servant to another, by selling him for a certain time, the Service he undertakes to do, in exchange for Wages he is to receive: And though this commonly puts him into the Family of his Master, and under the ordinary Discipline thereof; yet it gives the Master but a Temporary Power over him, and no greater, than what is contained in the *Contract* between 'em.¹⁸

In this, as elsewhere in the *Treatises*, Locke appears a century ahead of his time. His rejection, in 1690, of the correlation between the family and the state, and by extension of paternalism as the regulating force for domestic servants, was eccentric. In her analysis of the family during the French Revolution, Lynn Hunt shows the extent to which the family/state analogy remained dominant in pre-revolutionary Europe: "...most Europeans in the eighteenth century thought of their rulers as fathers and of their nations as families writ large. This familial grid operated on both the conscious and the unconscious level of experience".¹⁹ English eighteenth-century law confirms her assertion. Throughout the period, in both Britain and France, servants were subject to the decrees of petty treason, which viewed crimes against a master by a servant as identical to crimes against a sovereign by a subject.²⁰ Locke's *Treatises* had no impact on juridical systems that enshrined Filmer's hard-line position right up until the 1790s.

¹⁶ Cited in John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, 147.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 268.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 322.

¹⁹ Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), xiv. "The ideology of absolutism explicitly tied royal government to the patriarchal family, and the use of the term *fraternity* during the French Revolution implied a break with this prior model", *ibid*, xiv.

²⁰ In the eighteenth century, the association of servants with political subjects throughout Europe always ensured that punishment for servant crime was particularly ferocious. In France, the only burning at the stake during the century was of a servant who had broken open his mistress's desk. Nicholas Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment*, 144.

Servant crime was identified with high treason because it “violated the implicit contract between ruler and ruled”.²¹ Eighteenth-century Britain had one of the harshest systems of criminal law in Europe, referred to even by contemporaries as the Bloody Code. Over the course of the long eighteenth century, the number of capital offences rose from 50 in 1688, to 225 in 1815; most of these were applicable in instances of property crime.²² Servants were the sector of society who suffered most under the Bloody Code:²³ they were punished more harshly than thieves exterior to the household if they stole from their masters,²⁴ while the enforcement of the petty treason law ensured that any murder by a servant, of masters or others, was usually punishable by death. Even though so many crimes on the statute books merited the death penalty, there were frequent pardons, with death sentences either transmuted into transportation abroad or hard labour at home. Servants, by contrast, were unlikely to be pardoned. The ferocity of the punishments meted out to servants had its basis in the servant/subject analogy, which meant that servants were punished according to their symbolic capacity.

And yet in spite of the viciousness of petty treason punishments, the paternalist model of domestic relations certainly bore advantages for servants. If the household was held together by the authority of the father, as the nation was held together by the authority of the king, the servant was included in the family unit as a sort of surrogate child. In 1705, William Fleetwood warned gentlemen that: “Care must not stop at your children, let it reach to your menial servants; though you are their master, you are also their father”.²⁵ Servants belonged to the *pater familias* as his children belonged to him, and while this granted the father the right to beat servants, though not excessively,²⁶ or to control their marriage prospects, it also conferred on him the duty to care for servants in illness and, in certain cases, to educate them. This paternalist dynamic resulted in a

²¹ “The most ferocious and bloodthirsty provisions of the [Bloody] Code were those that were designed to inculcate obedience, of discontented subjects towards the elite, servants towards tyrannical masters, wives towards oafish husbands. ... For this reason there was no slackening of the rate of petty treason throughout the century”, Frank McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England*, 121.

²² *Ibid*, xi.

²³ *Ibid*, 45.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 91.

²⁵ Cited in Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family*, 129.

²⁶ “[T]he law allows a master to correct his servant in reasonable and proper manner. ... And the correction of a master must be in all respects moderate and reasonable, for if the master design an immoderate chastisement, either in respect of the measure, the manner, or the instrument, he will be answerable, and if the servant die, it will, if done with deliberation and forethought, be murder, and if passionately and without deliberation, manslaughter”, James Bird, *The Laws Respecting Masters and Servants, Articled Clerks, Apprentices, Manufacturers, Labourers and Journeymen* (London, 1799), 5-6. In light of this legal summary, Frank McLynn appears to be mistaken when he claims: “Beating servants or children was not regarded as dangerous or unlawful. If you killed a child or servant during a thrashing, you would not be found guilty of either murder or manslaughter unless you used an ‘unusual implement’, for example a club”, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England*, 37.

hazy division between members of the Great Family (husband, wife, children and servants), and members of the Little Family, (husband, wife and children exclusively), with servants eating at the same table and even sleeping in the same beds as their employers.²⁷

Most crucially of all, however, the view of the nation as a composite of families, structured along identical lines as the royal family state, removed the servant from his or her own kin and class associations. The servant was left isolated within what must have been an initially unfamiliar family unit, as his or her identity became determined afresh by their position under their new master/father. It was even a commonplace throughout the eighteenth century, in both France and England, to re-name the servant once he or she arrived in a household. Many families, if they could only afford one servant, maintained the same name and applied it to the various servants who filled the position over the years.²⁸

The French Revolution rendered the boundaries of the family profoundly unstable. For the first time, an embryonic class-consciousness threatened to ally servants with the lower orders, seething with revolutionary fervour beyond the domestic threshold. Any strengthened alliance between servants and the people would compromise, perhaps even fatally compromise, the integrity of the family unit. In 1789 a pamphlet appeared in Paris, written by a man who defined himself as “one who wears livery”, addressed to his fellow servants. He declared: “You are the victims [your masters] will sacrifice to the people’s vengeance”. “Therefore, my friends, when our masters sound us out we must tell them frankly that we are of the people and will not abandon the people for them.”²⁹ After the initial waves of aristocratic and genteel emigration, French servants and wig-makers in particular were politicised by the economic hardships they faced:

The wig-makers and domestic servants, as might be supposed, were suffering severely from the decline in the luxury trades and the growing volume of emigration. ...The servants’ demands were, in the main, political: they requested full citizen rights, the right to

²⁷ Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family*, 129-134. Richardson’s heroines frequently sleep in the same beds as their servants.

²⁸ Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France*, 176. Bridget Hill, *Servants: English Domesticity in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 112: “For many employers servants had no identity. Frequently employers forgot the names of their servants, called them by their surnames or by names of their own invention. ...The personal belongings of a servant were often subject to the close scrutiny of their mistresses. Some forbade them ‘to display pictures or personal belongings in their room.’” Note the frequency of maidservants called “Betty” throughout eighteenth-century English plays and novels. This appears to have been a generic term.

²⁹ Cited in Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France*, 305, 306.

attend District Assemblies, [and] to enrol in the National Guard
(from which as servile dependents they were debarred) ...³⁰

In his *Observations on the Conduct of the Minority* of 1793, Burke attributes the great danger of the Revolution to the fact that it has shattered the cross-class harmony of the family under paternalism and introduced the spectre of a class-based war. Acquiescing in the Revolution by refusing to wage war on France threatens to make “separate parties of the higher and lower orders”, forcing them to “put their interests on a different bottom”.³¹ Burke perceived the Revolution as facilitating the invasion of class politics into the family sphere. He noted contemptuously of the revolutionaries: “They think every thing unworthy of the name of publick virtue, unless it indicates violence on the private”.³² Where Burke saw violence, the revolutionaries saw innovations designed to limit the domestic despotism which the equivalence between family and state under the *Ancien Régime* encouraged. “The Revolution opened the way to a reconsideration not only of state authority but also of authority within the family. The rights of every family member and all family relationships were now to be regulated in the interests of liberty and happiness”.³³ New laws that popularised divorce, abolished restrictions excluding bastards from inheritance, and criminalized the wearing of livery, were all part of this process.³⁴

And yet Burke does not merely lament the demise of domestic paternalism—he also engages with new, insidious models of service in the form of the Rousseauian private tutor who first appears in his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* of 1791. In the interplay between the guard and the tutor, Burke takes up the rival figures of the servant pre- and post- the storming of Versailles, and pits one against the other as part of a finely tuned rhetorical strategy designed to panic British propertied gentlemen into active counter-revolution.

For Burke, property is a sleepy entity, in need of the most diligent defence (89, 102). As he witnesses radical support for the Revolution publicly gaining momentum, as a pro-revolutionary ethos appears to sweep through the ranks of both Tories and Whigs within the House of Commons, Burke believes he must awaken the nation to the danger of revolutionary principles before it is too late to do so. For France, all along, is not the

³⁰ George F. E. Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 65.

³¹ Edmund Burke, *Observations on the Conduct of the Minority* (1793), in *Writings and Speeches*, 8:435.

³² Edmund Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1796), in *Writings and Speeches, Volume 9: The Revolutionary War 1794-1797 and Ireland*, ed. R. B. McDowell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 243.

³³ Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 17.

true focus of Burke's concern. The motive behind his post-revolutionary writings was always "to counteract the machinations of one of the most desperate and most malignant factions that ever existed in any age or country", by which he means the growth of radical "clubs" and the circulation of radical "pamphlets" in Britain, not France.³⁵ He sees conditions in Britain as ripe for a similar climacteric to occur, and he sees British gentlemen, the inevitable victims of radicalism, complacently congratulating France on her freedom as though congratulating their own executioners. From his speech on the Army Estates in 1790, to his private letters before his death, Burke capitalises on his considerable gifts as a writer and speaker in order to instil in British gentlemen fear for their lives, their incomes, their properties and their families, all in the hope that they will be roused to quell radicalism at home and revolution abroad. Burke's alarmist strategy is to take the equalising principles of political radicalism and to implement their logic inside the family, rendering servants key players in his rhetoric of terror.

In a letter to the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, written in 1793, Burke summarises the nature of the French revolutionary threat: it subverts national boundaries. He states: "We are at war with a principle, and an example, which there is no shutting out by Fortresses or excluding by Territorial limits. No lines of demarcation can bound the Jacobin Empire".³⁶ A revolution-in-principles is uniquely dangerous because, divorced from historical and national circumstance, it is universally applicable. The quarantine of national boundaries fails to hold back the fever of revolutionary France.

But the power of the French Revolution does not stop at rupturing the borders of other countries. Burke deliberately confuses 'home territory', as in England, with 'home', as in inside the domestic family, in order to personalise, in a shockingly intimate way, the nature of the revolutionary threat to his propertied audience. Upon the publication of Dr. Price's sermon, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789), the Revolution for Burke, which has hitherto been a neighbouring but external phenomenon,³⁷ now moves indoors:

³⁴ For Edmund's Burke's predictably horrified reaction to such domestic legislation see *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 9:243-244.

³⁵ Cited in L. G. Mitchell's introduction to *Writings and Speeches*, 8:33.

³⁶ Letter to Florimond-Claude, Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, written circa 6 August 1793, in *Selected Letters of Edmund Burke*, ed. Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 330.

³⁷ Tom Furniss has shown how Burke shifts after reading Price's sermon from seeing the revolution as a spectacle occurring abroad to a domestic crisis: "[F]rom treating the Revolution as a distraction from thoughts at home, he now attempts to make his audience precisely aware of the dangers the Revolution presents to the Englishman's 'home'", *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology*, 127-8

The beginnings of confusion with us in England are at present feeble enough; but with you, we have seen an infancy still more feeble, growing by moments into a strength to heap mountains upon mountains, and to wage war with Heaven itself. Whenever our neighbour's house is on fire, it cannot be amiss for the engines to play a little on our own. (59-60)

This is the first employment in the *Reflections* of an analogy that suffuses the text. Here 'house' is simultaneously one's country and one's private domestic space; for such a revolution-in-principles penetrates not only national boundaries, but like a fire raging out of control, also penetrates the walls of the family home. Comparing the political climate of the 1760s with post-revolutionary chaos, Burke writes: "Then the greatest changes which could be apprehended, could very little affect the domestick happiness of the greater part of mankind—now no man's Fireside is safe from the Effects of a political revolution".³⁸ The revolutionary Rights of Man strike at the heart of families and render them dysfunctional because families, like armies, like the macrocosm of the state, depend on institutionalised inequality. To Earl Fitzwilliam in November 1791 Burke elaborates upon his premonition of universal disorder:

The Leaders have ever since gone on, and are with all their might going on, to propagate the principles of French Levelling and confusion, by which no house is safe from its Servants, and no Officer from his Soldiers, and no State or constitution from conspiracy and insurrection.³⁹

And in case the implications of this revolution-in-principles remain vague, in case they have not yet been brought 'home' to his audience with sufficient urgency, Burke has recourse to imagery of brutal dispossession. His fondness for eviction scenarios comes into play as early as his speech during the Army Estates debate of 1790, in which he first paints the consequences of a British revolution in distressingly personal terms for his propertied audience within the House of Commons:

He wished the House to consider, how the members would like to have their mansions pulled down and pillaged, their persons abused, insulted, and destroyed; their title deeds brought out and burned before their faces, and themselves and their families driven to seek refuge in every nation throughout Europe, for no other reason than this; that without any fault of theirs, they were born gentlemen, and

³⁸ Letter to Lord Loughborough, 19 October 1794, in *Selected Letters*, 344.

³⁹ Letter to Earl Fitzwilliam, 21 November 1791, in *ibid*, 468.

men of property, and were suspected of a desire to preserve their consideration and their estates.⁴⁰

To galvanise hostility to France, Burke imagines his audience dispossessed of their family homes. Burke's lists of renegades, whether brought to national prominence in France by the perverted spirit of revolution, or lurking in the wings of the British body politic, frequently include housebreakers. In 1793, he writes: "The truth is, that France is out of itself—The moral France is separated from the geographical. The master of the house is expelled, and the robbers are in possession".⁴¹ Eviction imagery haunts the *Reflections*: "What have they since done that they were to be driven into exile, that their persons should be hunted about, mangled, and tortured, their families dispersed, their houses laid in ashes ..." (184). With furious energy, Burke counters the fatal tendency to see the Revolution as primarily France's affair. The consequences of a misguided toleration of radicals at home will be the loss of British national identity and the dispossession of gentlemen. The French Revolution is clearly a domestic crisis, then, in both senses of the term.

It would be hard to imagine a more persuasive rhetorical strategy to alert Burke's audience to the threat of the French Revolution. Parliamentary MPs were all propertied gentlemen, propertied gentlemen alone had the power to pass the legislation for which Burke was later to campaign, including the declaration of an Anglo-French war and an extension of the legal definition of treason.⁴² His desire to awaken property is not only testament to his conviction that the property principle is the mainstay of social cohesion. It is also politically judicious. The power to unleash counter-revolution rested with government representatives. As the world of representative government was still an exclusively propertied world—Burke makes much of this very point in the *Reflections*—propertied gentlemen must feel the revolutionary threat more acutely than anyone else. And so Burke unleashes on them a series of worst-case scenarios. He burns their title deeds, evicts them, burns down their houses and bankrupts them.

But Burke goes even further: sex-hungry and bloodthirsty domestic servants are a particularly effective weapon in his arsenal of alarmist rhetoric. The Revolution has damaged the paternalist model of master-servant relations in France irrevocably. Now

⁴⁰ *Substance of the Speech of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, in the Debate on the Army Estates, in the House of Commons, on Tuesday 9th February, 1790. Comprehending a Discussion of the Present Situation of Affairs in France*, in *Edmund Burke: Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, ed. Ian Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 315.

⁴¹ Edmund Burke, *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies* (1793), in *Writings and Speeches*, 8:465.

⁴² Letter to Henry Dundas, September 1791: "Our laws, which are so vigorous and effective in the punishment of Treason, when it is got under, and even during the conflict, are feeble indeed in preventing Treasonable machinations", *Selected Letters*, 308.

Burke's servant-employing audience in Britain must be shocked into action in order to prevent the same destruction of deference on home soil. The royal guard is dead, and an alarming vision of treacherous male service, Burke's Rousseau-indoctrinated private tutor of his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, ominously takes his place.

The blistering invective of Burke's *Letter* is primarily directed at Rousseau, as philosophical father of the Revolution and hero of the revolutionary legislators. In two of Rousseau's most notorious publications, *Julie, or the New Eloise* (1761), and *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1781), lower-born private tutors either seduce, or are seduced by, the aristocratic female pupils in their care.⁴³ Burke is not slow to appropriate Rousseau's errant tutors as a weapon in his attack on the revolutionary project. Now Burke introduces us to a new breed of servant, a servant as inimical to the innocent servant-employing classes as the palace guard was defensive of them. The servant on the threshold, who faced outwards on the 6th October 1789 to confront the enemies of the family, now revolves inwards to destroy the family. Whereas the guard defended female chastity, the revolutionary tutor re-enacts, but this time successfully, the mob's attempted rape of the queen. The Revolution, Burke warns us, has created a new breed of tutor, pedagogues who:

betray the most awful family trusts, and vitiate their female pupils. They teach the people, that the debauchers of virgins, almost in the arms of their parents, may be safe inmates in their house, and even fit guardians of the honour of those husbands who succeed legally to the office which the young literators had pre-occupied, without asking leave of law or conscience.

Thus they dispose of all the family relations of parents and children, husbands and wives.⁴⁴

Such novel male domestics create their own revolution-in-principles within the minds of their female pupils, indoctrinating daughters with the conviction that all are born equal. By so doing, they open the floodgates to a series of lower-order male servants, who complete the despoliation of the aristocratic family with their own renegade sexual activities:

When the fence from the gallantry of preceptors is broken down, and your families are no longer protected by decent pride, and salutary

⁴³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or The New Eloise*, trans. Judith H. McDowell (1761; University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987); *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. J. M. Cohen (1781; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953), 132: "Besides, seamstresses, chambermaids and shop girls hardly tempted me; I needed young ladies".

⁴⁴ Edmund Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), in *Writings and Speeches*, 8:316. All subsequent references to the *Letter* are to this edition and will be marked parenthetically above.

domestic prejudice, there is but one step to a frightful corruption. The rulers in the National Assembly are in good hopes that the females of the first families in France may become an easy prey to dancing-masters, fiddlers [sic], pattern-drawers, friseurs, and valets de chambre, and other active citizens of that description, who having the entry into your houses, and being half-domesticated by their situation, may be blended with you by regular and irregular relations. By a law, they have made these people your equals. By adopting the sentiments of Rousseau, they have made them your rivals. In this manner, these great legislators complete their plan of levelling, and establish their rights of men on a sure foundation. (317)

As soon as revolutionary politics infect the home, servants become tremendously powerful in their capacity for desecration. Sexual equality between servant and mistress paves the way for the eradication of class distinctions hitherto enshrined in noble bloodlines. Servants have the power to seduce wives and to bastardise children. They have the capacity, therefore, to doubly disinherit the next generation of gentlemen: to rob them of their lineage and consequently of their property. The post-revolutionary male servant is positioned by Burke as the most effective carrier of the contagion that will eradicate the gentleman class. And because loyalty is now forged along class lines, rather than within individual families, “every servant may think it, if not his duty, at least his privilege, to betray his master” (319). Subsequently, masters of private families may find themselves menacingly under siege within their own homes:

By these principles, every considerable father of a family loses the sanctuary of his house. ... They destroy all the tranquility [sic] and security of domestic life; turning the asylum of the house into a gloomy prison, where the father of the family must drag out a miserable existence, endangered in proportion to the apparent means of his safety; where he is worse than solitary in a croud of domestics, and more apprehensive from his servants and inmates, than from the hired, bloodthirsty mob without doors, who are ready to pull him to the lanterne. (319)

For Burke, the revolution results in the pollution of the bourgeois family by political radicalism, and it is servants, released by the death of paternalism from the ties of inter-familial loyalty, and infected with revolutionary zeal, who are the first perpetrators of this insidious form of social levelling.

In Burke’s post-revolutionary writings of 1790 and 1791, then, the loyal guard of the *Reflections*, and the Rousseauian tutor of the *Letter*, establish a forceful contrast between the nature of service in the pre- and post-revolutionary worlds. In the unsavoury figure of the tutor, we see Burke foregrounding the male domestic who has been politicised by the forces of revolution as an unprecedented threat to the master

classes. Unscrupulous, devoid of old-order loyalty, and determined to level social distinctions, either by sex or by murder, this new breed of servant is already under one's roof and therefore perfectly positioned to inflict harm.

But in the contrast between the guard and the tutor we also see Burke caught in the central dilemma of the counter-revolutionary: how to undo something which has already occurred. Unsurprisingly, Burke's desire to turn the clock back to before 6th October 1789 involves him in a degree of temporal confusion. Burke's counter to the mutilated carcass of old-order servitude, and the defilement of the private family that ensues at the hands of the guard's replacement, is an idealised tableau of the French royal family, particularly the queen, whom he depicts "just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in, —glittering like the morning-star, full of life, and splendor, and joy. Oh! what a revolution!" (126). Yet the palace of this glittering vision of a queen has already been "polluted by massacre". The counter-revolution is thus instigated in order to protect what has already, in Burke's formulation, been irrevocably destroyed. As Seamus Deane has explained, placing a self-consciously anachronistic familial vision at the core of his counter-revolutionary rallying cry is part of Burke's strategy: "It is a lament for an idea of the traditional in which nostalgia is a constitutive element. This is a social and political vision that has potency precisely because it is a lost cause; lostness is central to its meaning, not just an emotive aspect of its appeal".⁴⁵

In a similarly hopeless fashion, Burke posits paternalism as the cure for the Revolution in France. In *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, published in 1793, after the French king has already been executed, Burke calls for the reinstatement of the nation's exiled gentlemen to their patrimonial estates in order to bring about the regeneration of their country:

This will be compassed, when every gentleman, every where being restored to his landed estate, each on his patrimonial ground, may join the Clergy in reanimating the loyalty, fidelity and religion of the people; that these gentlemen proprietors of land, may sort that people according to the trust they severally merit, that they may arm the honest and well affected, and disarm and disable the factious and ill disposed.⁴⁶

Here, Burke appears to place limitless faith in the paternalistic relation between landed gentlemen and the "people" they oversee, even though the Revolution has shattered the trust between these two groups irreversibly. And yet elsewhere, and contrary to our

⁴⁵ Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 3.

expectations, Burke doesn't seem to want paternalism back at all. He gives the old-order model of deference its most famous swan song when he laments that the age of chivalry, with its attendant spirit of exalted servitude, is gone forever; and he appears to cling to the possibility that its return may be somehow forced. But he also believes that the French Revolution has damaged the subordination of the lower orders irrevocably, in both France and at home, and that allowing the people back into the patriarchal family is therefore no longer wise.

With the execution of Louis XVI, the family/state analogy at the heart of the pre-revolutionary European social order suffered a fatal blow. Nevertheless, just as Burke appears to yearn for the reinstatement of pre-revolutionary power structures centred around Versailles, his post-revolutionary writings also breathe life into the equivalence between the family and the state, but with significant amendments to Filmer's model. Whereas previously the king had been described as the national father, unifying *all* British families under omnipotent patriarchy, Burke now shifts the paternal *gravitas* of kingly authority onto the British constitution. Divine Right monarchy, unrestrained in France until its death at the hands of the Revolution, was defeated as a principle in Britain a hundred years earlier with the deposition of James II. Burke is at pains to stress his own distance from any justification of absolute monarchy.⁴⁷ Still, by personifying the constitution itself as the national father, he appropriates the emotive valence of the king as universal patriarch and uses it as a political tool in order to thwart constitutional reform. But Burke is also at pains to describe the new national father of the British constitution as a generic landed gentleman, bequeathing liberty to his progeny as he would bequeath his estate. By so doing, Burke manages to undermine the French revolutionary ethos of universal human rights by confining liberty to the propertied exclusively.

If Filmer's model unified the family, composed of kin and servants alike, under the patriarchal model of absolute monarchy, Burke amends this model further by insisting that servants no longer form a constitutive part of the private family, and, by implication, that the lower orders are to be expelled from the body politic. Burke is no longer prepared to countenance intimacy between classes—a prerequisite of paternalism—because the lower orders have been politicised by the Revolution, leaving the master classes worryingly vulnerable. If the death of the royal guard signals the end of the servant's symbolic associations with the feudal subject under his master/king,

⁴⁶ Edmund Burke, *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies* (1793), in *Writings and Speeches*, 8:470.

⁴⁷ "It is common with them [radicals] to dispute as if they were in a conflict with some of those exploded fanatics of slavery, who formerly maintained, what I believe no creature now maintains, 'that the crown is held by divine, hereditary, and indefeasible right'", *Reflections*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 8:76.

Burke also realigns servant symbolism after the Revolution in a new direction so as to limit the inclusion of servants in the family unit under paternalism, and, by extension, to deny the people any active role in national political life.

In the *Reflections*, the family is no longer a mirror of the royal family, but of the British constitution, with its double house, and a key consequence of this is that the servant is now associated more directly with the call of the British people for political representation. Burke decries Dr. Price's assertion in his *Discourse on the Love of our Country* that a highly restricted franchise invalidates the British constitution. He writes: "You see they consider our house of commons as only 'a semblance,' 'a form,' a theory,' 'a shadow', 'a mockery,' perhaps 'a nuisance'" (107), and goes on to assert that widening the franchise would only facilitate popular tyranny. To invalidate still further the demands of radicals for an extension of voting rights, Burke develops a metaphorical depiction of the state as a private household in such a way as to sanctify the propertied. At crucial points in Burke's argument, his configurations of the state and of the family in the *Reflections* are laid on top of one another and rendered indistinguishable. The 'people' and the servants become the two elements in this double configuration of state and family Burke is at most pains to exclude.

Ridiculing the radical political theory that all men are born equal, with the inherent right to be free, Burke instead asserts that to be born outside of property is to be born "naked" and "shivering" (128). Only the property principle, with familial inheritance as its regulator and protector, can confer liberty on individuals. Throughout the *Reflections* Burke posits property and inheritance as the double foundation for political freedom. He thereby paradoxically confines liberty at one stroke to those who exist within the sanctified houses of gentlemen, and within the two houses of Britain's exclusively propertied government, and cuts out the non-propertied from political life. Burke confounds the transmission of property within families with the transmission of liberties within the British state:

You will observe, that from Magna Charta to the Declaration of Right, it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties, as an *entailed inheritance* derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity; as an estate specially belonging to the people of this kingdom without any reference whatever to any other more general or prior right. By this means our constitution preserves an unity in so great a diversity of its parts. We have an inheritable crown; an inheritable peerage; and an house of commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors. (83)

“[W]e are guided”, Burke tells us, “by the spirit of philosophic analogy” (84). Building on his established correlation between the British constitution and a landed estate, Burke develops this correspondence by personifying British liberty itself as a propertied gentleman. He invites us to peer down a long corridor in the house of liberty, hung with treasures that have passed down through the male family line for generations:

By this means our liberty becomes a noble freedom. It carries an imposing and majestic aspect. It has a pedigree and illustrating ancestors. It has its bearings and its ensigns armorial. It has its gallery of portraits; its monumental inscriptions; its records, evidences, and titles. (85)

Here, the demarcation between the familial and state models is deliberately confused. Burke turns the British constitution into a blood relative, binding the people to the state as sons are bound to their fathers, and binding families, Church, and government together as institutions animated by identical, natural, even divine principles:

In this choice of inheritance we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood; binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties; adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections; keeping inseparable, and cherishing with the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities, our state, our hearths, our sepulchres, and our altars. (84)

His personification of this state-relation as male, as the national father, is a canny weapon in his attack on radicalism within the British body politic. For if the institutions of state and family are infused with the same principles, they are also policed by the same taboos. Burke accuses those who would seek to alter the constitution, (members of the Revolution Society, members of the Society for Constitutional Information), of killing the national father. Campaigning for an extended franchise equates to patricide. British nationals are under a moral obligation to:

approach to the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling sollicitude. By this wise prejudice we are taught to look with horror on those children of their country who are prompt rashly to hack that aged parent in pieces, and put him into the kettle of magicians, in hopes that by their poisonous weeds, and wild incantations, they may regenerate the paternal constitution, and renovate their father’s life. (146)

Just as the “paternal constitution”, the body of the father, is interchangeable with the British constitution in the quotation above, Burke applies the idea of illegitimacy to both

families and governments. So while renegade male servants inside the home bastardise future generations of gentlemen “by regular and irregular relations” with their mistresses, popular representation in parliament bastardises government. “[I]f popular representation, or choice, is necessary to the *legitimacy* of all government, the house of lords is, at one stroke, bastardised and corrupted in blood” (107). Servants, traditionally associated with illegitimacy, either as illegitimates themselves, or as the producers of illegitimate children,⁴⁸ have the power to destroy the line of father-to-son blood inheritance within the family, while the people possess precisely the same power to destroy the legitimacy of an exclusively propertied government. Burke overlays the familial and state models in the literalised body politic of the father. Because of their capacity to disrupt blood inheritance, both the people and servants must be relegated to the extremities of the household/state.

In 1770 Burke likened the operation of public opinion on government to the control of masters by servants, in that both are achieved by informed manipulation:

Nations are governed by the same methods, and on the same principles, by which an individual without authority is often able to govern those who are his equals or his superiors; by a knowledge of their temper, and by a judicious management of it ...⁴⁹

A “judicious management” of the “temper” of one’s direct superior is a socially unsanctioned pathway to power, which, in the upheaval of the French revolutionary period, threatens the socio-political status quo. Public opinion, as the only means by which the people can hope to govern, however tenuously, is consequently rendered contemptible and ineffective in the belligerently anti-populist climate of the *Reflections*.⁵⁰ Servants who share the intimate lives of the master class, and who can

⁴⁸ Before plans for a London Foundling Hospital became earnest in 1739, the two avenues open to a servant with an illegitimate child, and lacking familial or financial help, were to place the infant in the care of the parish, or to commit infanticide. In the case of the former, in “urinous, pest-ridden buildings”, “babies under two years old died at a rate of almost 99 per cent”. Workhouses were “Britain’s dying rooms”, Jenny Uglow, *Hogarth, A Life and a World* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), 327. Because parish care was so murderous, and because registering a child resulted in the loss of anonymity essential to continued employability, many women were forced to simply abandon their offspring on the streets of London—at an estimated rate of a thousand babies a year by the late seventeenth century. That many of the women committing infanticide were servants can be deduced from the petitions the Foundling Hospital received after opening its doors to illegitimate infants in 1741. Nearly all the petitions were written by servants, unable to survive without work, unable to feed an extra mouth on their wages, and unemployable in households with a baby now in tow. R.B. Outhwaite, “‘Objects of Charity’: Petitions to the London Foundling Hospital, 1768-72”, in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 32:4 (1999), 498, 502.

⁴⁹ Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), in *Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, 117.

⁵⁰ “[T]he King of Great Britain ... holds his crown in contempt of the choice of the Revolution Society, who have not a single vote for a king amongst them, either individually or collectively.

wield enormous power in the domestic realm, (they are perfectly positioned, for example, to blackmail), must also be excluded from the family as resolutely as the people are to be excluded from government.

At the heart of the *Reflections*, then, is a redefinition of the British body politic which has been rendered problematic by the French Revolution. The introduction of a new political order based on the rights of man and a radical extension of the French franchise has thrown the relation between the British government across the Channel, and the people it claims to represent, into crisis. The urgent political issue becomes the question of who is 'in' and who is 'out' of the British body politic, and so Burke redraws the body of the nation, defining it as our gentleman father and thus limiting it exclusively to propertied gentlemen. But the French Revolution has similarly begged the question of who is 'in' and who is 'out' of the private family. The Revolution threatens to infiltrate the houses of private British families, just as it threatens to penetrate the Houses of Parliament, confirming servants in their long-suspected roles of enemy within. Any means, and any location, which enables the disenfranchised to rule, whether this means the people, politically, by public opinion, or servants in the household, by the very intimacy of their position, must consequently be eliminated.

Countering the suggestion by British radicals that the monarch be referred to as the "Servant of the People", Burke argues that, unlike kings, servants can be dismissed at will and without justification. "The essence" of the "situation" of servants, he informs us, "is to obey the commands of some other, and to be removeable at pleasure" (79). The emphasis on the colossus of the national father, straddling both the state and the family, to whom all propertied gentlemen are bound, works on the political level to exclude the non-propertied from the franchise. On the familial level, this exclusive model forces servants out from under the shelter of inclusive paternalism and into the cold of contract relations. For while patriarchy is enshrined as a principle by Burke, in contrast to Filmer's it is a blood-bonded patriarchy, a patriarchy that strengthens the demarcation between nuclear family members and servants, decisively relegating the latter to the boundary of the family, from whence they are to be casually banished by their masters whenever it suits them.

... His majesty's heirs and successors, each in his time and order, will come to the crown with the same contempt of their choice with which his majesty has succeeded to that he wears", *Reflections*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 8:65-66. Contrast this with Burke's pre-revolutionary definition of public opinion. Throughout his *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770) Burke is as eager to invite the people into the national body politic, as he is later to banish them. Even though the people have no vote, he defines their opinion of their political representatives as decisive. "I have nothing to do here with the abstract value of the voice of the people. But as long as reputation, the most precious possession of every individual, and as long as opinion, the great support of the state, depend entirely upon that voice, it can never be

After the 6th October 1798, a new system of domestic relations must be put in place in order to prevent the havoc that the revolutionary tutor is ready to inflict on the private family. One of the defining characteristics of pre-revolutionary service was familiarity between masters and servants. Intimacy is the Rousseauian private tutor's greatest weapon, and his attacks are all the more successful because his employers are entirely unaware of the change wrought on their domestic situation by revolution. Intimacy is power in the hands of subordinates, and whether this means barring the threshold of government to populist influences, or barring the threshold of the family to domestic servants, Burke is determined to keep power in the hands of the propertied and the shrine of his house(s) pure.

Burke's distrust of domestic servants after the Revolution is emblematic of a wider trend in both Britain and France. Revolutionary France may have waged war on the paternalist model of service as the embodiment of aristocratic power. However, the initial demands of the French servant class to be allowed to vote and to join the ranks of the revolutionary army—to participate, in other words, in the fledgling citizens' republic—were consistently denied by the Assembly. Several groups were systematically excluded from the franchise in post-revolutionary France, but the only occupational category barred from the right to vote or be elected in every constitution drafted or actually implemented between 1791 and 1817 was domestic service.⁵¹ The Assembly legislators justified their position by claiming that the idea of servants exercising autonomous political judgement independently of their masters was impossible. Assembly member d'André felt passionately that servants be excluded from the franchise: "I ask whether it is not possible for the wealthy to form a coalition in order to fill the legislature with their men. ... I ask therefore that all salaried dependents be ineligible".⁵² Later, the Napoleonic Code also refused to recognise the politically independent status of servants.⁵³

considered as a thing of little consequence either to individuals or to government", *Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, 117.

⁵¹ Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France*, 312.

⁵² *Ancien Moniteur*, cited in *ibid*, 313.

⁵³ Theresa McBride, *The Domestic Revolution: The Modernisation of Household Service in England and France 1820-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 15. Such prejudice was to continue. Domestic servants became the last occupational group to receive the vote in both France and England. In England, an extension of voting rights to servants was unthinkable, even to certain radicals, who instead posited the employment of servants as criteria for the vote, successfully limiting any proposed extension of the franchise to the middle classes. "[The voter] is necessarily the master, and probably the father of a family. In the first character, he has a personal credit and respect to maintain. ... He is the natural guardian and virtual Representative, not only of his family and servants, but of all those who depend upon him for support, protection or employment", *The Friends of the People: Declaration of the Principles and Plan of Parliamentary Reform, Recommended by the Society 30th May, 1795*, cited in *The Debate on the French Revolution*, 145.

If the French revolutionaries were keen to abolish livery and to introduce “an exchange of services between the man who works and the person employing him”, they were equally keen to exclude newly liberated servants from the political processes of revolutionary France. French legislators were concerned that their attacks on aristocratic masters would leave bourgeois masters vulnerable to servant revolt in their turn, and so whilst they were outlawing aristocratic paternalism on the one hand, they still attempted to maintain the servant as “a useful part of the family” on the other.⁵⁴ Lower-order class loyalty was as unwelcome to these legislators as it signalled apocalypse to Burke. Work permits for servants, or *livrets*, designed to restrict the ease of servant movement between families, were introduced in post-revolutionary France.⁵⁵ And, in spite of the continued absence of revolution across the Channel, legislation was passed in England in the early 1790s that was also designed to limit servant mobility, testifying to a heightened anxiety in Britain after the Revolution concerning the damage servants could potentially inflict on respectable families.

In Britain, the free movement of the lower orders was considered inherently suspicious in the critical climate of the 1790s. In 1795, an act encouraging the impressment of vagrants, paupers, and potential criminals was passed as an emergency measure, which remained on the statute books until 1871.⁵⁶ “[I]dle, and disorderly persons”⁵⁷ were deemed a threat to national security, especially those who were alone and extraneous to the family structure, such as wandering beggars. Servants, who wandered in and out of families with alarming frequency, became the focus in Britain, as in France, of hostile legislation, and similar systems to restrict servant mobility as the French *livrets* were accordingly put in place.

British reformers were keen throughout the eighteenth century to criminalize those businesses, (centred in London), which provided ex-domestics with forged characters for a fee. They were also keen to reverse the tendency of employers to be overly flattering, a practice thought to facilitate servants’ ability to join and leave households at will.⁵⁸ In 1727 Daniel Defoe recommended a thorough overhauling of servant hiring practices, by which no servant could leave his or her position except in instances of extreme mistreatment. Commenting on his proposed measure he declared “[i]f this be not worthy of the Consideration of the Legislature, I would fain know what

⁵⁴ Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France*, 310.

⁵⁵ Theresa McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, 22.

⁵⁶ This act is described as “yet another statute, passed at the end of the eighteenth century, when the threat of revolutionary France had increased both the need of sailors for defence and the fear of the ‘dangerous classes’ at home”, in Leon Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law*, 5 vols. (London: Stevens & Sons, 1948-1986), 4:89-90.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 4:90.

⁵⁸ J. Jean Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth-Century England*, 85.

is”.⁵⁹ Such pleas for reform were ignored, however, until after the outbreak of the French Revolution. In 1791 a bill was finally passed in Britain which placed a £20 fine on anyone found impersonating an employer, and another £20 on anyone, previous employer or forger, who falsified a testimonial of previous employment for a servant.⁶⁰

If the French Revolution sealed the death of the old paternalist model of service, and was understood as infecting the family unit with radical political consciousness, (to which the servant, as the most disenfranchised, subsidiary member of the family was particularly vulnerable), the master classes on both sides of the Channel responded with a series of legal attempts to limit the damage which the servant could potentially inflict. The old paternalistic rights of servants to be cared for by their masters in a capacity that exceeded the confines of wages for work were systematically eroded. In post-revolutionary Britain, a series of important legal precedents undermined core ingredients of the paternalist model of master-servant relations. In the case of *Carol v. Bird* of 1800, it was ruled that a master was under no obligation to give his servant a character. Two years later, in the case of *Wenall v. Adney*, masters were legally relieved of any obligation to provide medical care for their servants. And in 1817, the right to dismiss servants without notice was legally enshrined as the master’s prerogative.⁶¹ Other measures followed throughout the nineteenth century that were similarly in favour of masters’ and inimical to servants’ rights, but already in the early 1800s we see the beginnings of this distinctive trend. Throughout the eighteenth century and earlier, servants were of course dismissed without characters, dismissed when ill and dismissed without notice, but such betrayals of the paternalist model ran the risk of social condemnation. As the nineteenth century dawned we see the master classes deliberately shedding the vestiges of paternalism and turning to the law to vindicate their withdrawal from core responsibilities of the old model of master-servant relations.

Simultaneously, similar attempts by servants to escape the restrictions of the paternalist model by selling their skills in the labour market to the highest bidder, and moving accordingly from one position to another, were legally curtailed. The servant-employing classes were therefore caught between two opposing desires in the wake of the French Revolution: to grasp the opportunity which the passing of the *Ancien Régime*

⁵⁹ Daniel Defoe, *Augusta Triumphans*, cited in *ibid*, 90. Daniel Defoe was concerned to restrict servant access to private families throughout his literary career. He decried the tendency of employers in the early eighteenth century to refuse to write a critical testimonial of a servant, even after a negative experience. In *Religious Courtship*, a series of dialogues concerning the folly of marrying Roman Catholics, a niece sums up the root of the servant problem to her Aunt: “Indeed, Madam, that is the foundation of all the grievances we are under about servants, that we make no conscience of doing one another justice when we make inquiries after the character of another’s servants”, *Religious Courtship* (1722; London, 1867), 293.

⁶⁰ J. Jean Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth-Century England*, 101.

presented to rid themselves of the burden of paternalistic obligations to servants, and to protect themselves from the phenomenon of the politicised domestic servant which the Revolution facilitated. Such protection paradoxically took the form of reasserting the servant's obligations to the family under paternalism: lifelong loyalty and an identity forged exclusively on the margins of the bourgeois family, even though the benefits of this model to the servant were already undermined.

This paradox extends to the emphasis that came to be placed after the Revolution on the servant of the private family who loves his master so excessively he is prepared to die in his stead. Like Burke's hopeless call for the gentlemen of France to be returned to their patrimonial estates, it is as though, on some deep emotional level, it was assumed that the damage of the Revolution could somehow be undone by a continued emphasis on pre-revolutionary social expectations. Paintings of the final interview between members of the French royal family, just before the king is executed, strategically include loyal domestics in the tearful scene, even though no servants were actually present. An engraving of Tison, Marie-Antoinette's personal attendant, fictitiously presents him as a desolate onlooker, while the caption underneath informs us that "through excessive grief for the Royal Sufferers", he is "become a lunatic".⁶² John Barrell writes "[Servants'] inclusion in the scene can have no other purpose than to provide a further channel of identification and sympathy, and one which at the same time reinforced the value of the ties between those of different social rank which the French had so rashly severed: ties of obedience, of deference, and of that grateful affection of servant for master still regularly described as 'love'".⁶³

Of course, servants were always supposed to love their mistresses: if sensibility operated between classes under the old order at all its purpose was to bind subordinates to their masters in a fiercely devotional bond, even though such 'love' was never to be returned in kind. After the Revolution, lower-order adoration of social superiors becomes infused with the "lostness" of Burke's counter-revolutionary political vision. The Versailles guard conveniently re-enacts a highly valued old-order social expectation when he sacrifices his life for the queen's, and Burke's emphasis on that sacrifice is both helplessly nostalgic and ideologically motivated.

Burke applauds the guard's impeccable self-sacrifice, and derides the tutor's predatory sexual behaviour, and by so doing highlights the lethal transformation in servant sensibility facilitated by the Revolution. In Burke's writings on Ireland of the 1790s, however, we witness a striking reversal of his position. Complaining, in his

⁶¹ A. S. Diamond, *The Law of Master and Servant* (1932; London: Stevens and Sons, 1946), 118, 117, vii.

⁶² John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, 73.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 73.

Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe (1792), of the despotism of the Protestant Ascendancy, he writes:

Admiration, that first source of obedience, can be only the claim or the imposture of the few. I hold it to be absolutely impossible for two millions of plebeians, composing certainly, a very clear and decided majority in that class, to become so far in love with six or seven hundred thousand of their fellow-citizens ... as to see with satisfaction, or even with patience, an exclusive power vested in them, by which *constitutionally* they become the absolute masters ...

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If we were to translate these comments to France on the eve of the Revolution, they would form a rallying cry against the French government. They would constitute a denunciation of the kind of cross-class sensibility under the European *Ancien Régime* which ensured the deference and “admiration” of the lower orders for “masters” who did not love them in their turn.

Consistently throughout Burke’s writings on Ireland, we find him supporting the principles of his enemies in the pamphlet war on the French Revolution. The servant/house, people/state analogy, used throughout his counter-revolutionary works, is as much in evidence here, but if the servant and the people are to be removed to the extremities of the domestic polity in their Franco-British context, in Ireland they are to be listened to and enfranchised. Where he has lamented the exile of French aristocrats and the end of an “exalted” “servitude” as a consequence of the Revolution, for Ireland he appears to abhor the division of society into masters and servants in the first place. The English in Ireland, he complains:

divided the nation into two distinct bodies, without common interest, sympathy or connexion; one of which bodies was to possess *all* the franchises, *all* the property, *all* the education: The other was to be composed of drawers of water and cutters of turf for them.⁶⁵

In his counter-revolutionary writings, Burke’s emphasis is on the figure of the king as master. In Ireland, his emphasis switches to the people as servants in a cruel and unlawful household. Burke equates penal legislation with “the most shocking kind of servitude”;⁶⁶ in a letter to his son, he writes: “[t]he word Protestant is the charm that

⁶⁴ Edmund Burke, *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe* (1792), in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Volume 9: The Revolutionary War 1794-1797 and Ireland*, ed. R. B. McDowell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 600.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 597.

⁶⁶ Edmund Burke, *Letter to Richard Burke* (1792), in *Writings and Speeches*, 9:642.

locks up in the dungeon of servitude three millions of your people”.⁶⁷ In speaking of Irish Catholics, Burke uses terms which could be equally applicable to domestic servants. He condemns as unnatural the process whereby the master classes, (or the English, or the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland): “lose all feeling for those who have grown up by our sides, in our eyes, of the benefit of whose cares and labours we have partaken from our birth”.⁶⁸ More, he conflates servitude with political disenfranchisement in order to advocate a relaxation of penal legislation in Ireland, and with that relaxation, an extension of voting rights:

[T]o be under the state, but not the state itself, *nor any part of it*, is a situation perfectly intelligible: but to those who fill that situation, not very pleasant, when it is understood. It is a state of *civil servitude* by the very force of the definition. ... This servitude, which makes men *subject* to a state without being *citizens*, may be more or less tolerable from many circumstances: but these circumstances, more or less favourable, do not alter the nature of the thing. The mildness by which absolute masters exercise their dominion, leaves them masters still.⁶⁹

Even the positive use of the term “citizens” here, formerly a term of abuse for the linguistic gimmicks of the Revolution, alerts the reader that Burke’s Irish political landscape is radically different from his English one. Whereas the *Reflections* reassures its readership that the “essence” of servitude is “to obey the commands of some other, and to be removable at pleasure”, here Burke dwells instead on the painful psychology of the servant-state, in order to emphasise the tyranny inflicted on Irish Catholics by unmediated English/Protestant rule.

By 1796 and the publication of his *Letter to a Noble Lord*, Burke’s contemporaries were used to his abrupt political u-turns. William Augustus Miles’ response to this latest publication characterised Burke as “an intoxicated dotard” who having been a deist in 1756, “a whig, bordering upon Jacobinism in 1770—a confirmed republican in 1789—*whip presto* a furious royalist in 1790—and in 1796 a no less furious jacobin”, was now, as to be expected from a former pupil of St. Omer, fighting on behalf of the tyrannical and superstitious faith of Roman Catholicism.⁷⁰ Burke was of course Irish, and had close family connections with Catholicism.⁷¹ It is perhaps unsurprising that where the landed gentleman of an English estate at Beaconsfield

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 647.

⁶⁸ Edmund Burke, *Tracts Relating to Popery Laws* (1765), in *Writings and Speeches*, 9:461.

⁶⁹ Edmund Burke, *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 9:598.

⁷⁰ Cited in R. B. McDowell’s introduction to *Writings and Speeches*, 9:12.

⁷¹ His father was a Catholic who had conformed to the Established Church, presumably to be allowed to practice at the Bar. His mother remained a Catholic for life and raised her daughter a

aligned himself with the dispossessed French master classes, the Irishman whose family had direct experience of the penal laws should instead demonstrate sympathy with servants. Burke had a personal horror of the servant state. At an early and vulnerable stage in his political career, he left his position as private secretary to William Gerard Hamilton because it too closely resembled a condition of servitude. He defended himself in a letter to his former employer, declaring: "I will not consent to bind myself to you for no less a term than my whole life: in a sort of domestic situation".⁷² When the concept of servitude struck too close to home for comfort, as with the general condition of Irish Catholics, Burke's sympathies could be engaged on behalf of the disenfranchised, in spite of the contradiction such sympathy engendered in his counter-revolutionary thinking.

The publication of Burke's *Reflections* in 1790 set the terms of the ensuing Revolution Debate to a greater degree than even the French Revolution itself. Burke was unusual in responding with such ferocity to the French Revolution before many of its atrocities, such as the September Massacres of 1792, and Robespierre's Terror of 1794, had even been dreamed of.⁷³ Supporters of events in France were more fired by Burke's counter-revolutionary invective, than by intrinsic enthusiasm for the Revolution, into a public defence of its principles. And yet L. G. Mitchell has characterised Burke's counter-revolutionary political career of the 1790s as a failure. He writes: "Rarely can a book have engendered such a debate and been so widely rejected".⁷⁴ Fox thought it "in very bad taste". While Pitt, who could be expected to show more sympathy for Burke's position than members of his own Whig party, dismissed the *Reflections* as "Rhapsodies in which there is much to admire, and nothing to agree with".⁷⁵ There were four strands to Burke's counter-revolutionary strategy throughout the 1790s: to allow the émigrés a central role in negotiations with France; to re-establish all old-régime mechanism of government; to force the European powers to engage in an interventionist war to restore the French monarchy; and to quell Jacobinism at home with repressive legislation. Only the last was wholeheartedly adopted as government policy, and Pitt was to remain "almost entirely unimpressed with the Burke programme".⁷⁶

Catholic. Burke's wife's father was also Catholic, though his daughter was not. R. B. McDowell's introduction to *Writings and Speeches*, 9:407.

⁷² Letter to William Gerard Hamilton, ante 12th February 1765, in *Selected Letters*, 44.

⁷³ Some contemporaries even accused him of giving the French revolutionaries tyrannical ideas. Helen Maria Williams in her *Letters from France*, wrote: "Mr. Burke predicted the death of Louis the sixteenth, at a time when not a human being in France had such an idea in his mind", cited in Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s*, 63.

⁷⁴ L.G. Mitchell, Introduction to *Writings and Speeches*, 8:20.

⁷⁵ All three cited in *ibid*, 18-20.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 47-48.

Nevertheless, the monumental nature of Burke's *literary* legacy to the 1790s is uncontested. In terms of pamphlets, political treatises and, most importantly for this thesis, prose fiction, it is impossible to study the literature of the 1790s without turning to Burke's *Reflections* as a touchstone for much of what followed. While Mary Wollstonecraft and Thomas Paine were busy battling Burke with political publications of their own, novelists were incorporating Burke's response to the French Revolution into their fictions, to be either discredited or vindicated by their plot-lines according to their own political positions.

The dividing line between political writing and prose fiction was frequently and self-consciously blurred in the 1790s. Novels became overtly ideological political weapons; political works became characterised by the high-flown sentiment and densely metaphorical writing of the contemporary novel. The *Reflections* itself is both political treatise and prose fiction: its double influence on pamphleteering and novel production can be understood within the politicised literary climate of the 1790s, for which it was partway responsible. By the time of the publication of Robert Bisset's *Modern Literature* in 1804, Burke's *Reflections* is legendary. In Bisset's novel (though there are such frequent and lengthy political digressions it is scarcely recognisable as such), the 'plot' of the *Reflections* is slickly rendered in a series of dramatic scene-shifts so that, completely unintentionally, the reader is left with the impression that Burke is a master of fiction who made the entire Revolution up.⁷⁷

And if it is impossible to discuss the novel of the 1790s without reference to the literary father of the decade, it is likewise impossible to discuss servants in novels of the 1790s without reference to Burke. Most obviously, the antithesis Burke establishes between the slain bodyguard and the Rousseau-indoctrinated private tutor alerts us to the critical position of servants after the French Revolution. The demise of domestic paternalism, and the radicalisation of servants which the Revolution was thought to have facilitated, rendered the servant body potentially more threatening to the employer classes than it had been deemed previously. There were more servants in

⁷⁷ "Like the magic pen of Shakespeare this performance, withersoever it expiated, carried with it his fancy and his passions. He saw English votaries of the French revolution, in one page terrible, the next contemptible, and in the third disgusting, now as tigers panting after slaughter and carnage, now as grasshoppers teasing with their importunate chink; then a loathsome object full of blotches and putrefied sores. Here he regarded chivalry as the great parent of social happiness, lamented its age as for ever gone; there he viewed Marie-Antoinette as in beauty beyond the lot of human excellence; and next as in pity beyond the lot of human suffering. ... The scene being changed he was carried into the National Assembly. There the dramatist exhibited peddlers and excisemen engaged in financial legislation; country curates as new modelling the church, and country attorneys as establishing a code of laws for the government of an empire; with a side prospect of fishwomen taking their seats in the senate, while a mob halloed behind the scenes", Robert Bisset, *Modern Literature*, 3 vols. (London, 1804), 3:139-144.

Britain at the time of the Revolution that there had ever been before,⁷⁸ and in both Britain and France, government and the legislature concerned themselves with domestics in an unparalleled way. Legal precedents and controlling bills on both sides of the Channel brought servants prominently into the national consciousness. It is unsurprising, therefore, that in British novels of the 1790s servant characters also move centre-stage.

Even more critically, however, Burke's family/state analogy, which aligns servants with the people now agitating for parliamentary representation, was an important legacy to novelists who wanted to comment on the Revolution Debate within their fictions. Novels had typically concerned themselves with the domestic and the familial. Now such material became charged with political significance, as the family, for both revolutionaries, such as the legislators of the National Assembly, and counter-revolutionaries, such as Burke, metamorphosed into an overtly political machine. Burke's analogy allowed him to comment on broad and impersonal events in an unsettlingly intimate way: his description of renegade servant behaviour within the household deliberately evoked national political disaster. The economy of such an emotive tactic was not lost on succeeding novelists with similar aspirations for political commentary.

Burke's writings on Ireland are also useful to our analysis of what follows, for they reveal the extent to which an engagement with the psychological condition of servitude can automatically involve the articulation of a radical politics. In the case of Burke, one must also question whether the implications of his deployment of the master-servant analogy in an Irish context surpassed, or even subverted, his own political intentions. Burke was concerned with the liberation of Irish Catholic *gentlemen*, not with the liberation of the Irish labouring classes *en masse*. Yet the danger inherent in evoking terms of servitude is that they are so extensively applicable. They extend effortlessly to encompass not just those who are disempowered by religion, or race, but those who are disempowered by class, or even gender, as well. Locate Burke's calls for enfranchising the most socially excluded in Britain, or France, instead of Ireland, and we suddenly seem in the company of a passionate Jacobin. To enter into the servant state is potentially to engage with a radicalism that may be at odds with the specific intention of one's political remit.

If the capacity for servants to signify beyond themselves was so feared by the Assembly legislators, who saw in the liveried servant the vitality of feudalism

⁷⁸ The early industrial revolution multiplied servant numbers exponentially, making domestics the second largest working group after agricultural workers. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 231.

proclaimed to the world, novelists welcomed the symbolic capabilities of the servant figure in the 1790s as a precious resource. The very symbolism with which the servant figure had been infused under the old order could be appropriated by novelists to render servants symbols of revolutionary transformation itself. In turn, this could either be countered by novelists who, in the defeat of malevolent servants, comfortingly defeated the principles of revolution. Or it could be celebrated. The apparently inherent capacity of servants to ‘stand in’ for other things—their master’s virility, the lower orders—could be transformed into a literary figure whose resonances were extensive enough, and profound enough, to suit a new, radical kind of fiction, produced in revolutionary times. In my next chapter on Charlotte Smith’s *The Old Manor House*, published three years after the *Reflections* and two years after Burke’s *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, I will be exploring the fractured attempt of one novelist to use a servant character in precisely this way.

CHAPTER TWO.

INHERITING THE STATE: THE CASTLE, THE SERVANT, AND GOTHIC ROMANCE IN CHARLOTTE SMITH'S *THE OLD MANOR HOUSE*.

It did not take long for Burke's political detractors to register their anger in print over his attack on the principles of the French Revolution. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) went to press shortly after the *Reflections*' publication. Scores of equally hostile responses followed, but when Thomas Paine published part one of his *Rights of Man, Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution* in 1791, it stated the radical case so forcefully that the Revolution Controversy split neatly into a Burke/Paine Controversy, with support of, or hostility towards, either of these authors signalling one's response to the Revolution itself. While radicals countered Burke's assault on the Revolution by publishing political treatises of their own, Charlotte Smith was the first author to register her disagreement with Burke, and her vindication of Paine, within the pages of a novel. *Desmond*, published in 1792, includes lengthy political discussions between its protagonists on the faults of the *Reflections* and the merits of the *Rights of Man*,¹ while the epistolary structure of the novel is, in itself, a considered offensive against Burke's own use of the epistolary convention in the *Reflections*. In *Desmond*, Smith appropriates Burke's political use of the intimate letter only to undermine its conservative tendencies.²

1792 also witnessed the publication of the second part of Paine's *Rights of Man*. The unprecedented distribution of this text galvanised a concerned conservative establishment into actively attempting to counter the revolutionary implications of radical publications, and the critical climate changed accordingly. Smith's publisher, Thomas Cadell, refused *Desmond* on political grounds, though George Robinson later

¹ *Desmond*, the eponymous hero of the novel and a keen supporter of the Revolution, writes of the *Reflections*: "I will not enter into a discussion of it, though the virulence, as well as the misrepresentation with which it abounds, lays it alike open to ridicule and contradiction. —Abusive declamation can influence only superficial or prepossessed understandings; those who cannot, or who will not see, that fine sounding periods are not arguments—that poetical imagery is not matter of fact. I foresee that a thousand pens will leap from their standishes ... to answer such a book". Of the *Rights of Man*, *Desmond* later writes: "I am forcibly struck with truths that either were not seen before, or were (by men who did not wish to acknowledge them) carefully repressed", Charlotte Smith, *Desmond*, 182-183, 203.

² Antje Blank and Janet Todd draw attention to the ways in which Smith subverts Burke's epistolary style. Epistolarity was useful "for polemicists wishing to stage themselves as driven by sincere exasperation", and Burke made full use of this when he spent nearly a year re-writing the *Reflections* in order to make it look spontaneous. Furthermore, although ostensibly a letter, Burke receives no reply from his young French addressee and so remains unchallenged. The names of Smith's two main protagonists, *Desmond* and Erasmus Bethel, deliberately echo De Pont and Edmund Burke, but in this case, Bethel hears back from his young addressee in France and even learns from him. Antje Blank and Janet Todd's introduction to *ibid*, 21,22.

accepted it.³ And on publication, *Desmond's* critical reception was shot through with accusations of radical extremism. At one point, Smith was accused of writing *Desmond* in the pay of "the democratic party, by whom they say she is now actually supported". Given Smith's straightened financial circumstances, her friend William Cowper could only respond that he wished such a rumour were true.⁴

Overt political commentary is mostly curtailed in Smith's next novel, *The Old Manor House*, published in 1793. Possibly as a response to *Desmond's* unsympathetic reception, Smith avoids any delineation of unfolding events in France or reference to the Revolution Controversy in Britain. A diluted radicalism, however, remains in evidence. *The Old Manor House* is set in England in the 1770s, during the American War of Independence, and is also infused with the history of the English Civil War. The implications of both of these prior revolutions for the current socio-political crisis are predominantly intended to align the reader's sympathies with the French revolutionary project. Burke no longer makes a direct appearance as a figure held up for derision, and yet *The Old Manor House* is equally as informed by the *Reflections* as its predecessor. Now, however, Smith incorporates the *Reflections'* imagery into the fabric of her own text in order to contest Burke's use of the landed gentleman's estate as an exclusive metaphor for government. She also takes issue with his relegation of the servant, and by implication the people, to the extremities of the British body politic, and inverts Burke's model by propelling an illegitimate servant into a position of national inheritance.

Nevertheless, by the time of writing of *The Old Manor House*, Smith's position in relation to the *Reflections* is no longer one of unmitigated hostility. Important aspects of Burkean reaction co-exist alongside the text's more democratic sympathies, and it is in relation to the novel's servants that we see these conflicting political tendencies manifest themselves most clearly. This chapter will explore Smith's ambiguous deployment of servant character in *The Old Manor House*, and the extent to which this contradictory depiction is the consequence of an attempt to chart a path between the polemics of Burke and Paine, at a time when wholesale support for either one or the other was the expected response. I will also be investigating the text's fissured attitude to romance in the light of Smith's precarious political accommodation of both sides of the revolutionary divide.

Smith's biographer, Loraine Fletcher, posits the political use of castle imagery as her subject's greatest literary achievement:

³ Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (London: MacMillan Press, 1998), 152.

⁴ Letter from William Cowper to William Hayley, 21st May 1793, cited in Antje Blank and Janet Todd's introduction to *Desmond*, 22.

She was the first novelist to take as her setting a castle or great house intended to be read as a precise emblem of England. Questions raised by her plots about who should own the great house and how it should be run are questions about England's ownership and government.⁵

This tendency of Smith's to organise novels around a castle, to be read as a corresponding microcosm of the state, is, according to Fletcher, developed most fully in *The Old Manor House*, in which the architectural structure of Rayland Hall "becomes unequivocally England".⁶

Although agreeing with Fletcher that the significance of Smith's fifth novel resides primarily in her symbolic deployment of the castle at its centre, it is untrue that she was the first, or the only, novelist of her time to use the great house as political allegory. Fletcher acknowledges Smith's debt to Burke, and to his use of the castle as a metaphor for England in his *Reflections*.⁷ But when she singles out Charlotte Smith as a pioneer who single-handedly appropriated Burke's image of the castle-as-constitution into the medium of the novel, Fletcher ignores the Gothic tradition of the 1790s, in particular the tradition of what critic James Watt refers to as the 'Loyalist Gothic' romance.⁸ *The Old Manor House* cannot be read without extensive reference to Burke's *Reflections*. Nor can it be read without reference to the explosion of Loyalist Gothic fiction in the 1790s,⁹ directly inspired by Burke's valorisation of Britain's splendid socio-political heritage as a defence against contamination from revolutionary France. One of the most striking metaphors in Burke's *Reflections* is his depiction of the British state itself as a landed estate: "You will observe, that from Magna Charta to the Declaration of Right, it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties, as an *entailed inheritance* derived to us from our forefathers, and to

⁵ Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, 1.

⁶ *Ibid*, 164.

⁷ *Ibid*, 133-135, 140, 164.

⁸ In *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre, and Cultural Conflict 1764-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), James Watt unearths a "critically neglected yet significant line of works" (7) which he terms 'Loyalist Gothic' romances. The list of 'Loyalist Gothic' fiction includes Clara Reeve's *Memoirs of Sir Roger Clarendon* (1793); Richard Warner's *Netley Abbey: A Gothic Story* (1795); Stephen Cullen's *The Castle of Inchvalley: A Tale—Alas! Too True* (1796); and Anon: *Mort Castle: A Gothic Story* (1798). All such novels "rely upon an English medieval setting, and locate their action in and around a real castle, identified primarily as a symbol of a stratified yet harmonious society. Loyalist Gothic romances refer to real historical figures from the pantheon of British patriotism, and depict the defeat of dubiously effeminate or foreign villains. Most importantly, such works privilege the didactic potential of romance, and allow the supernatural the benign role of punishing usurpers and restoring the property claims of rightful heirs", James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 7.

⁹ "I argue that the majority of works after *Otranto* which called themselves 'Gothic', along with numerous other 'historical' romances, served an unambiguous moral and patriotic agenda"; these "Loyalist Gothic Romances" were "particularly prominent in the 1790s", *ibid*, 7.

be transmitted to our posterity; as an estate specially belonging to the people of this kingdom without any reference whatever to any other more general or prior right".¹⁰ *The Old Manor House* positions itself in opposition to Burke and his Gothic devotees by appropriating the most resonant emblem of conservative counter-revolution, the castle-as-state, and by exploding its ability to withstand political reform. Smith's literary achievement is not limited to her effective mirroring of Burke's central analogy within the medium of the novel. Rather it extends to her complex negotiation of that analogy, and in her re-working of a popular, simplistic, and traditionalist mode of prose fiction into a multifaceted, and highly precarious, model of national regeneration.

Smith is not only indebted to Burke; she also amends his vision. For in her pivotal use of the servant-cum-persecuted-Gothic-heroine, Monimia, Smith advocates the inclusion of certain sectors of the working classes into the body politic as the only way in which Britain can be saved from revolution. In order to trace how she does this, I will now examine the ways in which Burke's ideological trope of the British constitution as venerable castle is subverted by Smith.

In his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769), William Blackstone likens the British constitution—that sum body of English laws and liberties, bequeathed from generation to generation, amended though never, in essence, transformed—to “an old Gothic castle”, a “noble pile” in need of only occasional repair.¹¹ In his *Reflections* two decades later, Burke builds relentlessly on Blackstone's conceit. By likening the British Constitution itself to a castle, and the rights that the constitution bestows on British subjects to a form of inheritance, Burke argues that only those who inhabit the spaces of landed estates are entitled to the protection of British law and a stake in the government of the kingdom. Throughout the *Reflections*, Burke insists that the bond between those propertied members of the body politic who occupy the national castle and their government is essentially familial. This effectively transfers the idea of legitimacy of birth within aristocratic families to the houses of parliament, and Burke is not slow to suggest that widening the franchise to allow the ‘people’ a voice in government equals political bastardisation. The image of the constitution as our national father, at the head of an entailed estate, also allows Burke to draw a parallel between the servant in the house and the people in the state, and to thrust both servants and the people to the extremities of the familial body politic as carriers of lower-class contamination. If Burke's castle-as-constitution finds novelistic expression in Smith's depiction of Rayland Hall, it is his equivalence between the servant in the house and the

¹⁰ Edmund Burke, *Reflections*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 8:83. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be marked parenthetically above.

¹¹ Cited in James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 46.

people in the state which is the starting point for her complex critique of the *Reflection*'s conservatism.

What kind of a castle, then, is Rayland Hall, and what is the nature of those who govern it? Timelessness—the quality of temporal stasis—is an essential characteristic of Burke's national house. Burke claims that “the stationary policy of this kingdom” lies “in considering [our] most sacred rights and franchises as an *inheritance*” (82), and contrasts the “temporary and transient praise of the vulgar” with “a solid, permanent existence”, a “permanent fame and glory” and the hopes for “immortality” of those who administer the sacred rites of government (143). Elsewhere, Burke cedes that gradual amendments are necessary to any constitution's continued efficacy: “Besides, the people of England well know, that the idea of inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation, and a sure principle of transmission; without at all excluding a principle of improvement” (83-84). Yet this nod in the direction of political reform is immediately invalidated by the stronger impulse to freeze the British constitution in time: “Whatever advantages are obtained by a state proceeding on these maxims, are locked fast as in a sort of family settlement; grasped as in a kind of mortmain for ever” (84). His emphasis on the British polity as an aristocratic family, intent on bequeathing itself to generation after generation, linking the dead, the living and those yet to be born, immortalises the British state in a condition of glorious stasis and immunises it from the ravages of the time continuum.

Paine's answer to Burke in the *Rights of Man* decries this enduring familial principle as political despotism. In opposition to the state as an aristocratic family writ large, Paine sets each generation free to act independently, in order that no one generation can permanently bind its successors to their own form of political accommodation between ruler and ruled. He writes:

Those who have quitted the world, and those who are not yet arrived in it, are as remote from each other as the utmost stretch of mortal imagination can conceive: what possible obligation then can exist between them, what rule or principle can be laid down, that two nonentities, the one out of existence, and the other not in, and who never can meet in this world, that the one should control the other to the end of time?¹²

It is this rupture between generations that shatters Burke's static model of familial inheritance and posits an ever-changing form of democracy in its place. Exploring the contrasting ideals of Burke and Paine reveals an opposition between a nation of aristocratic families, inheritance and immortality (or stagnation) on the one hand, and a

nation of extra-familial equals, democracy and temporal progression on the other. *The Old Manor House* opens by pitting Painite evolution against Burke's principle of national timelessness.

Smith introduces us to Burke's illustrious aristocratic family, presumed to be immortal, and yet places it immediately within time, so that when we encounter the Rayland line, it is not only on the verge of extinction, but has already been wiped out: "In an old Manor House in one of the most southern counties of England, resided some few years since the last of a family that had for a long series of years possessed it".¹³ As readers, we are returning to examine the conditions of the demise of the *Ancien Régime*. A precise family history follows, in which, in true Burkean fashion, all the "illustrating ancestors" of the Raylands are detailed back to the days of the reign of James I. This is not only rendered ironic, however, by our knowledge of the family's eventual disappearance, but is also accompanied by the disclosure of a rival, deviant family line, springing from the sister of Sir Hildebrand Rayland, which has been contaminated in succession by the blood of a yeoman, the blood of a female servant and the blood of a woman with a background in trade. While the three co-heiresses of Sir Hildebrand Rayland "had been educated with such very high ideas of their own importance, that they could never be prevailed upon to lessen, by sharing it with any of those numerous suitors, who for the first forty or fifty years of their lives surrounded them" (3), the folly of their aunt in marrying for love has produced the vibrant, populous family of the genteel Somerives, living on the edge of the estate, and scorned by its mistress as an "alloy" (4) to the unsullied aristocratic heritage of the Raylands. An "alloy" may be an "impairing alien element" in the production of metals, but it also increases "durability".¹⁴ The two family lines, that of the Raylands and that of the Somerives, embody the rival principles of endogamy and exogamy; and whereas adherence to aristocratic endogamy, advocated by Burke, has resulted in sterility and the failure of the existing power structure to reproduce itself, the exogamous Somerives ("Somerive"/"survive") survive to eventually inherit the estate. Britain's government should have been hitherto more inclusive of members of the non-propertied classes, it is implied, and the current crisis of the old order may have been averted.

Mrs. Rayland believes passionately in the power of unsullied nobility; and again, like Burke, she attributes an impossible immortality to the stature and customs of

¹² Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, 17-18.

¹³ Charlotte Smith, *The Old Manor House*, ed. Anne Henry Ehrenpreis (1793; Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3. All subsequent references are to this edition of the text and will appear parenthetically above.

¹⁴ *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster INC, 1986), 72.

her family. Mrs. Rayland lives in a bubble, unaware that the world she so proudly occupies is rapidly disappearing, and blind to the proximity of its extinction. She piques herself “on spelling as her father spelt” (73): her letter to Mr. Somerive is a perfect rendition of the spelling and tone of the late seventeenth century, and its ponderous formality and extra letters are deflated as unnecessarily, and unselfconsciously, anachronistic. She is constantly lost in a fantasy of the everlasting magnificence of her family estate, and of her own immortality. When a neighbouring Doctor launches into praise of the grounds, Smith drives home the irony of Rayland’s ignorance of the passage of time:

Mrs. Rayland, who loved to hear her place praised, could have listened to such eulogiums for ever; and seemed totally to have forgotten that, according to the course of nature, she should be mistress of these good things but a very little time longer, and that, when a little space in the chancel of the adjoining church would be all she could occupy, they must pass into the possession of another. (188)

The question of who is to inherit the estate after her death—of who is to take over the governance of England after the old aristocratic order has passed away—is the *raison d’être* of the novel.

From the opening pages of *The Old Manor House*, a particular threat lurks in the dark passageways and underground cellars of Rayland Hall. It is a threat that is realised during the course of the American Revolution, and a threat which is only successfully dispelled in the novel’s closing scenes. It is the threat that when old aristocratic families die, servants stand ready, by cunning usurpation, to appropriate wealth. This is the transference of power from the nobility to the people that the horrified Burke saw in the French Revolution. In the *Reflections* he sneers:

The occupation of an hair-dresser, or of a working tallow-chandler, cannot be a matter of honour to any person—to say nothing of a number of other more servile employments. Such descriptions of men ought not to suffer oppression from the state; but the state suffers depression, if such as they, either individually or collectively, are permitted to rule. In this you think you are combating prejudice, but you are at war with nature. (100-101)

And within Rayland Hall, the “cabals” (52) of servants, those “of a number of other more servile employments” who are plotting for vast personal legacies, are no less ominous. Orlando, the novel’s hero, son of Mr. Somerive and throughout the most likely candidate for inheritance, discovers that access to the Rayland sisters in the days

of his infancy is resisted by “the opposition of their favourite maid”, and “the tales of their old and confidential butler” (5). This maid develops into the formidable character of Mrs. Lennard, housekeeper and companion to Grace Rayland, whose plans for self-enrichment are extensive. The daughter of a merchant whose fortunes were blasted by the South Sea Bubble in 1720, Lennard is “so much superior” in intellect to her doddering mistress, that she ends by “govern[ing] her entirely” (10) in everything but form. She is the embodiment of enterprising talent against which Burke’s sleepy property principle ought to be protected. Her aim in service is unequivocal: “to make herself amends for the former injustice of fortune, by securing to her own use a considerable portion of the great wealth possessed by Mrs. Rayland” (11); and in this she is accompanied by the butler, Pattenson, and the coachman, Snelcraft, who between them know “how to get and how to keep money”, and who foresee great personal enrichment in the fact “that the time could not be far distant when Rayland Hall, and all the wealth that belonged to it, must change its possessor” (53). The old order is dying, and the people are waiting in the wings, ready to manipulate the subsequent realignment of the body politic to their own advantage.

At the heart of Burke’s national castle stands a picture gallery. The British constitution “carries an imposing and majestic aspect. It has a pedigree and illustrating ancestors. It has its bearings and its ensigns armorial. It has its gallery of portraits; its monumental inscriptions; its records, evidences, and titles” (85). Mrs. Rayland’s picture gallery at Rayland Hall is imbued with the same *gravitas*, and centrality to her house and history, as Burke’s “gallery of portraits”. Our first introduction to the gallery occurs early on in the novel, and the scene encapsulates both the fragility of the old order in its final hours, and the likelihood of a popular appropriation of power after its extinction. Mrs. Rayland and Mrs. Lennard are walking together through the gallery, and the mistress of Rayland Hall is holding forth on the integrity of her aristocratic bloodline, unsullied by trade or servitude, to her housekeeper, an impoverished serving woman of the merchant class:

Mrs. Rayland had peculiar satisfaction in relating the history of the heroes and dames of her family, who were represented by these portraits. ... [S]he boasted that not one of the Rayland family had ever condescended to degrade himself by trade; and that the marriage of Mrs. Somerive, her aunt, was the only instance in which a daughter of the Raylands had stooped to an inferior alliance.—The little withered figure, bent down with age and infirmity, and the last of a race which she was thus arrogantly boasting—a race, which in a few years, perhaps a few months, might be no more remembered—was a ridiculous instance of human folly and human vanity, at which Lennard had sense enough to smile internally, while she affected to

listen with interest to stories which she had heard repeated for near forty years. (15-16)

Lennard's smiling "internally" ruptures the Rayland family history, conclusively dismissed here as the endgame of endogamy, with an alternative consciousness. Paine's great generational shifts in government, facilitated by the natural passage of time, expose Rayland's static view of her ancestral heritage as a fiction. The passage associates Rayland's belief in this fiction, her delusion that her family is strengthened and immortalised by purity of blood, with physical debility. More, it invests the servant, who suffers no such ideological blindness, with the capability of wresting control of the national estate, and of taking it forward. Such an outcome is symbolically prefigured by the way in which Lennard and Pattenson relish the annual tenant's dance at the Hall, because Mrs. Rayland, forced by her decrepitude to retire from the festivities early, leaves the butler and the housekeeper "as the master and the mistress of the feast" (181).

The degeneration of the Rayland line suffuses every aspect of life at the Hall. A horse of the Rayland breed, for example, no longer capable of racing, is offered to Orlando as a present:

Mrs. Rayland had given him, under restrictions that he should use it only while he was at the Hall, a very fine colt, which was of a breed of racers, the property of the Raylands, and very eminent in the days of Sir Hildebrand. Out of respect to its ancient prowess, the breed was still kept up, though the descendants no longer emulated the honours of their progenitors on the turf: but the produce was generally sold by the coachman, who had the management of the stable, and who was supposed to have profited very considerably by his dealings. (29)

This conversion of an asset into cash by a servant character is important. The conjunction between servants and ready money, expropriated from the landed money of the aristocracy, becomes a lethal weapon against the *Ancien Régime*. In the neighbouring estate, in a mirror image of the Rayland demise, Lord Carloraine, having conducted his life with "all the massive dignity and magnificent dullness" of his "fathers and grandfathers" (35), dies issueless. The estate is bought over by Stockton, a millionaire war profiteer. Mrs. Rayland's own estate is soon invaded by five young "mushroom" men from Stockton's estate and two servants (37), who enrage her by ignoring the integrity of her boundaries and by poaching her pheasants. Control of England is passing from aristocratic hands, and a coalition between servants and new money stands ready to profit.

Money confounds class boundaries. It can propel charity girls like Betty Richards from an under-housemaid in clogs to one of the “finest ladies in the land” (83). As a dissolver of social distinction, non-landed money is the chief object of Mrs. Rayland’s invective: “Money does every thing—money destroys all distinctions!—Your Creoles and your East Indian people over-run every body—Money, money does every thing” (164). Her rage echoes Burke’s in the *Reflections* against the proliferation of paper money, (i.e. money disassociated from property), in revolutionary France: “All you have got for the present is a paper circulation, and a stock-jobbing constitution” (103); and she unwittingly pinpoints the characteristics of the regime that will succeed her, when she inveighs against the confusion between master and servant occasioned by new wealth. The “people who will always give one the notion of having got into the coaches they were designed to drive” (163-164), align themselves, dangerously, with the servants who are striving to ride in coaches themselves. On the death of her mistress, Mrs. Lennard and her unlikely young lover, Mr. Roker, a corrupt lawyer, extort £10,000 from the Rayland estate:

And not only so, but all her clothes—and ever so many pieces of fine plate; and a diamond ring—and the Hampshire farms. ... And then, all Madam’s fine laces, and sattin gowns, and her sister’s too, for none of them had ever been given away. ... [A]nd all the fine household linen—Such beautiful great damask tablecloths and napkins—And such great chests full of sheets (413).

Everything that can be turned into cash is here extracted from the estate, while the Hall itself falls into ruin and disrepair: “The wainscot had fallen down, and the boards were rotted away: the study, of which the door was open, had only half its books left; and the tapestry hung in fragments from the walls” (399). The “temporary possessors and life-renters” of the British commonwealth in the *Reflections*, who “act as if they were the entire masters”, do indeed “commit waste on the inheritance” and hazard “to leave to those who come after them, a ruin instead of an habitation” (145).

Thus far, Smith has mocked aristocratic complacency and exposed its belief in its own immortality as an illusion. Her apprehension of the new world order that will succeed, however, accords with Burke’s interpretation of events in France and his forecast of national devastation in Britain should any demands for constitutional reform be implemented. Her plotting servants, in league with new wealth, correspond to Burke’s coalition between “obnoxious wealth” and “restless and desperate poverty” (162), the driving force behind French radicalism. The marriage of Lennard and Roker, their vast personal enrichment and the ruination they inflict on Rayland Hall, aligns *The*

Old Manor House with Burke's conservative position. But where Burke retreats absolutely, and rather hopelessly, into a rigidly maintained old-order power structure as a defence against revolution, Smith's response is more flexible and open-ended. She acknowledges both the end of the aristocratic regime, and the terrible consequences of a radical extension of the franchise, and yet still manages to suggest a third direction poised between the two extremes of aristocratic despotism and popular tyranny. Returning to the idea of an "alloy", (one of Mrs. Rayland's favourite terms of abuse), Smith's depiction of the novel's servant-heroine, Monimia, is used to advocate the strengthening of the national body politic against the ravages of total revolution by admitting certain members of the virtuous working classes into the inheritance of government.

Back in the picture gallery, while Lennard smiles internally at aristocratic folly, plotting her own enrichment after her mistress's death, the long winding tale of Rayland munificence is coming to an end. Mrs. Rayland is ironically boasting of "a speech made by Queen Anne to the last Lady Rowland on her having no son", "an anecdote which generally closed the relation" (16), when a ball suddenly bounces into the room, thrown by Orlando and hidden by Monimia under her chair. The ball shatters the narrative before it ends, thereby shattering the illusion of permanence the Rayland family text is designed to generate. The ball bounces off "the picture of Sir Hildebrand himself; who in armour, and on a white horse whose flanks were overshadowed by his stupendous wig, pranced over the great gilt chimney-piece, just as he appeared at the head of a country association in 1707" (17), deflating the portrait's aura of historical prestige and attacking the pivotal icon in Rayland's sacred genealogy. But the ball also shatters the composure of the housekeeper, rupturing her inner narrative of imminent personal aggrandizement: "a sudden and violent bounce towards the middle of the gallery occasioned an interruption of the story, and equal amazement in the lady and her confidante" (16), hailing an alternative possibility for future governance. Rayland will die, but Lennard will not be her inheritor. Rather Orlando, of Rayland blood, 'alloyed' by three plebeian marriages, along with Monimia, the housekeeper's niece, an illegitimate orphan and a pseudo-servant, will succeed to Rayland Hall. A future alliance between the aristocracy, the gentry, and those exceptionally virtuous members of the lower classes is suggested as a new order for Britain by this plot line.

It is in Smith's treatment of Monimia that her radicalism emerges in opposition to Burke's conservatism. The politically subversive character of *The Old Manor House* inheres, as in *Pamela*, in the servitude of its female protagonist. For the same reasons *Pamela* was criticised in the 1740s, one reviewer of *The Old Manor House* warned that the danger of Smith's novel lay in inciting gentlemen to marry their servants:

A young man of family, education, and great expectations becomes violently enamoured of a young girl of low birth, illiterate, and poor, who acts as a kind of upper servant in the Old Manor House, and who is niece to Mrs. Lennard, housekeeper to the proprietor, Mrs. Rayland. ...

[W]e now pause to ask Mrs. Smith, or any novel writer or reader, what possible benefits can accrue to society, and to youth in particular, from a perusal of scenes so repugnant to decorum and virtue?

... Orlando's conduct is, of course, held up as an example for all young gentlemen of family and fortune to marry any pretty servant maid they chuse.¹⁵

Pamela was of impeccable if humble birth. The eponymous hero of Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* (1771) ends by having gentle birth suddenly conferred on him at the novel's close by an improbably plot twist, as does the orphan protagonist of Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749). In contrast to these, Monimia remains an illegitimate orphan who does *not* have a rightful noble heritage bestowed on her by an unlikely revelation at the novel's close. Orlando elects her from childhood to be his wife in strident defiance of class. He defends his erratic choice to his father: "Poor Monimia! She is indeed the niece of Lennard; but, believe me, she does not in any instance resemble her—And what is her birth? does it render her less amiable, less lovely?" (265). Mrs. Rayland, by contrast, is unswayed Monimia's loveliness, and remains unequivocal about the nature of Monimia's destiny. She "repeatedly told her visitors, that she had taken the orphan niece of her old servant Lennard, not with any view of making her a gentlewoman, but to bring her up to get her bread honestly" (14), and believes it has "pleased Providence" to make Monimia "a dependant and a servant" (55) for the rest of her natural life. She is dressed "like a parish girl" (14), in permanent cap and apron; is employed in "making the household linen" (14), i.e. spinning and sewing which, unlike embroidery, was strictly servant's work; she is made to "work like a servant" (83) according to both the cook and Betty Richards; and is understood by Orlando's father to be "employed ... in the house as a kind of under housekeeper" (150). Smith consistently emphasises that "the only hope held out" to Monimia is that of "passing through life in an obscure service" (50). The novel's very impetus is derived from the passion the likeliest heir to an aristocratic estate has conceived for a woman of the servant classes: the couple suffer opposition, persecution and enforced separation as a means of thwarting their heterodox union.

¹⁵ *The Critical Review, or Annals of Literature*, (1793), 8:46, 8:51, 8:52.

The novel does not advocate a form of all-inclusive democracy, however. In spite of her radical decision to take a young and illegitimate servant, and to bequeath upon her a share in the national estate, Smith is still careful to disassociate her heroine from the generic servant classes. Like Pamela's before her, Monimia's servitude is carefully forced into question by her isolation from the other household domestics. Monimia sleeps in a turret in a wing of the house distant from the rest of the servant quarters; is never in the kitchen; and (a crucial means of status definition) never eats her meals in the servants' hall.¹⁶ And like Pamela's before her, Monimia's virtues are exceptional, rendering her uniquely qualified for social promotion. A parallel is deliberately drawn between Monimia and the under-housemaid, Betty Richards, only to emphasise the vast difference in morality, and consequently in worthiness, that separates the two girls. Monimia introduces Betty as a replica of her own class position: "Betty is, like myself, a very friendless orphan, a poor girl that my aunt has taken from the parish" (43); but the ethical disparity between the two is underscored by Orlando's concern about their association. He warns the object of his affection: "keep yourself then from much intimacy, Monimia; for the conversation of such a girl, to a mind pure and unsullied like yours, is to be dreaded. It is coarse at least, if not vicious; and, if it be not dangerous, is at all events improper" (63). Sentiment and literacy are the two most significant factors by which the division between Monimia and the other servants, equal to her in class but inferior to her in virtue, is maintained.

The "fine eyes of Monimia" are constantly "swimming in tears" (43). She is a conspicuously incapacitated protagonist. Perpetually crying, perpetually terrified and perpetually on the brink of being "overcome" by the intensity of her own feelings, she is the sentimental heroine *par excellence*, a character whose exceptional personal calibre is registered in a frail, yet violently reactive body. In *The Old Manor House*, the act of ascribing sensibility to a servant character destabilises prevalent notions of class. From its inception, philosophers of the moral sense school warned against presuming that the lower orders suffered as much as the result of their hardships, as the middle classes suffered vicariously when they observed them. Hume believed that "the skin, pores, muscles and nerves of a day labourer are different from those of a man of quality, so are his sentiments, actions, and manners".¹⁷ Hutcheson had advised his benevolent readers not to ascribe their own levels of sensibility to lower-order recipients of their charity. For the minds and bodies of the working classes are "soon

¹⁶ Orlando's father presumes that Monimia "takes her seat at the table allowed Snelcraft and Pattenson" (151); Orlando is not slow to disabuse him of his mistake.

¹⁷ Cited in G. J. Barker-Benfield, "Sensibility", in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, 104.

fitted to their state”, and this knowledge should “support a compassionate Heart, too deeply touched with apprehended Miseries, of which the *Sufferers* are themselves insensible”.¹⁸ Hume and Hutcheson’s model of sensibility, naturally restricted to the middle- and upper classes, is confounded by the figure of a servant who experiences sensibility instead of merely eliciting it. Monimia complains of her aunt:

I do believe she would not have me feel affection for any body; for she is always telling me, that it is the most disgraceful and odious thing imaginable, for a young woman, dependent as I am, to think about any person, man, woman, or child; and that, if I would not be an undone and disgraced creature, I must mind nothing but praying to God, which I hope I never neglected, and learning to earn my bread by my hands. (43-44)

According to Gary Kelly, the discourse of sensibility “validated the authenticity of the subjective self against competing models of identity, such as inherited rank and ascribed status, and it was often treated as aristocracy of soul, equal or superior to aristocracy of birth and designed to subvert it”.¹⁹ The privileged nuclear family inside Burke’s national castle, bonded to their father-king by love, is subverted here by ascribing sensibility to an illegitimate servant. For rather than ensuring her devoted deference to her superiors, sensibility marks Monimia out as worthy of Orlando’s love, and therefore qualifies her for dramatic social promotion.

Simultaneously, however, lest destabilisation be taken too far, sensibility is also used in *The Old Manor House* as a distinguishing technique between those (rare) members of the lower orders whose intrinsic merit transvalues class, and those whose natural degradation justifies their exclusion from national life. Intercepted by Stockton and his three friends on an excursion to a nearby village, Betty and Monimia are differentiated from each other by their emotional reactions to these men. Whereas Betty is talkative, flirtatious and amenable to sexual raillery, Monimia is silent, disapproving, and distressed to the point of practically losing consciousness. These are convincing enough signals of distress to guarantee Orlando’s love and eventual offer of marriage: “If there was any dependence to be placed on expression of countenance”, her hero muses, “the animation and intelligence that were visible in the soft features of Monimia promised an excellent understanding” (28).

During the revolutionary decade, notions of sensibility were troubling to conservatives, who distrusted the capacity of passionate feeling to unsettle social distinctions. Similarly, questions of education, especially for the working classes, were

¹⁸ Cited in Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, 67-8.

¹⁹ Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution*, 8.

enormously controversial throughout the 1790s. For it was assumed that imparting knowledge, over and above the remit of practical instruction, inspired the socially disenfranchised with ideas of social mobility and hence with political ambition. In *The Old Manor House*, Monimia's furtive attempts to acquire literacy are presented as both praiseworthy and courageous:

She had, however taught herself, with very little aid from her aunt, to read; and lately, since she had been so much alone, she had tried to write; but she had not always materials, and was frequently compelled to hide those she contrived to obtain: so that her progress in this was slow, and made only by snatches, as the ill humour of her aunt allowed or forbade her to make these laudable attempts at improvement. (26-27).

In opposition to Mrs. Rayland, who had "with the absurd prejudice of narrow minds, declared against her being taught anything but the plainest domestic duties, and the plainest work" (26), Monimia strives to rise above the servitude to which the conditions of her birth have condemned her. Literacy is her tool. Orlando seizes on the spark of her own initiative, and eagerly takes control of her education. Previous to this, "her poverty, her dependence, the necessity of her earning a subsistence by daily labour, had been the only lessons she had been taught" (50). By contrast, Orlando's reading programme steadily increases her self-esteem: "The reading he had directed her to pursue, had assisted in teaching her some degree of self-value. She found that to be poor was not disgraceful in the eye of Heaven, or in the eyes of the good upon earth" (50-51). And so the consequences of servant literacy for the stability of the class structure begin to crystallise. Orlando sees in Monimia's instruction not only a defence against future indigence: "instead of talking of what *was* to happen", (Orlando's imminent departure for the battlefields of the American Revolution), "he wished to fortify the mind of Monimia against whatever *might* happen, by giving her a taste for reading, and cultivating her excellent understanding" (166). But he also sees education as the means by which she can overcome her class position and take her place as co-inheritor of the (e)state. The intense concern of certain conservatives in the 1790s that the Sunday- and charity-school movements would end in agitation for political reform is justified here by the role played by education in Monimia's stunning trajectory from servant to mistress of Rayland Hall.

Monimia's sensibility not only endows her with the "aristocracy of soul" necessary for inheritance. More crucially, it separates her from the generic servant body and renders her uniquely fit for social advancement. Similarly, the novel does not advocate the mass education of Mrs. Rayland's domestics. Instead, it is careful to

restrict literacy's dangerously transformative effects to the one character who is already distinguished by her natural integrity. Importantly, it is Monimia's personal grace that enables her to be educated, rather than the other way round. Education does not work to engender nobility of nature in those upon whom it is indiscriminately bestowed. From the beginning, although "condemned to perpetual servitude", her "form and face" "would do honour to the highest rank of society" (26); and Orlando's passion to educate her emanates directly from her exceptional physical elegance: "What delight to be her preceptor, and, in despite of the malignity of fortune, to render her mind as lovely as her form!" (28). Education is merely an adjunct to the initial qualification, and not the primary catalyst for Monimia's rise to power.

The Old Manor House, then, adopts core ingredients of Burke's formulative response to the French Revolution—the castle as emblem of England, the equivalence between the servant in the house and the 'people' in the state—and undermines this model by investing the illegitimate servant of the house with sensibility, educating her, and then propelling her into a position of inheritance. Instead of casting the 'people' into the outer darkness that reigns beyond Burke's hallowed houses of government, Smith advocates their inclusion in national public life. The trajectory of Monimia from servant of Rayland Hall to its mistress facilitates such a reading. Lest we take Smith's subversive political position too far, however, it is well to remember that her critique of Burke is also heavily qualified. The two preconditions for Monimia's elevation, her natural sensibility and her education, are more directed at distinguishing the novel's heroine from the rest of the servants, (licentious, unprincipled and vicious), than at exposing the folly of class distinctions in general. And so we have in *The Old Manor House* a careful reworking of Burke's original paradigm: invalidating the ability of the aristocracy to resist constitutional reform, yet all the while insisting that lower-class access to a share in national institutions be extensively vetted, and only occasionally granted.

In addition, the radicalism of Smith's text in relation to Monimia is potentially undermined by the ambiguity surrounding her status as a household servant. For Monimia is, or is not a servant, depending on point of view. Orlando is at variance with other characters in the novel in failing to see her in the light of a degraded domestic. Orlando's refusal to judge Monimia according to her servile position can be seen to question the restrictions inflicted on the lower orders by the rigidity of the eighteenth-century class system. Conversely, it could be argued that it destabilises the grounds of the novel's own radicalism by clouding the issue of Monimia's exact social position. We are again reminded at this point of Pamela, the servant unfamiliar with the kitchen and whose finest talents, apart from letter writing, are singing and dancing.

From the beginning of Richardson's novel, Pamela's gentrification undermines the radical possibilities of his text. Similarly, Monimia's own ambiguous servitude potentially undermines the subversive implications of *The Old Manor House*.

Yet Monimia's status inconsistency is additionally amplified by Smith's use of romance in relation to her servant-heroine, for not only is Monimia the servant who is not a servant, she is also a romance heroine, rather than the heroine of realistic prose fiction, who ends by subverting the romance genre and overcoming it. Both the restrictions of Monimia's class position, and the restrictions of the romance ideology through which Smith chooses to depict her, are intimately connected. Furthermore, the way in which the two combine reveals a radical intention on Smith's part: Monimia's unstable social position and her disjunctive relation to romance can be read as an endorsement of Paine's critique of the *Ancien Régime* rather than as evidence of Smith's more conservative tendencies. In her radical use of romance in relation to Monimia, Smith subverts the 'Gothic Loyalist' romance tradition, which deploys romance exclusively in order to cement old-order social division.

The ambiguity of Monimia's character is embodied in her name. Completely out of character, Lennard bestows on her niece, as a "romantic whim" (12), the "dramatic and uncommon name" (12) of the doomed heroine from Thomas Otway's popular tragedy, *The Orphan* (1680), a choice that is a source of vexation to her employer:

But her name—Monimia—was an incessant occasion of reproach—'Why,' said Mrs. Rayland, 'why would you, Lennard, give the child such a name? As the girl will have nothing, why put such romantic notions in her head, as may perhaps prevent her getting her bread honestly?—Monimia!—I protest I don't love even to repeat the name. ... Monimia!—'tis so very unlike a Christian's name, that, if the child is much about me, I must insist upon having her called Mary.' (13)

And so Monimia splits in two: into the servant girl, Mary, employed about the person of Mrs. Rayland, silent in her cap and apron, ever destined to "getting her bread honestly"; and into Monimia, a character derived directly from romance fiction and, as ultimate co-inheritor of the estate, romantic heroine of the text. While Orlando's father, as blinded by class as Mrs. Rayland, refuses to accord her heroine status: "I must be allowed, since we are talking plainly of the matter, to call her Mary" (151), Orlando is, by contrast, "[a]mong those who fondly adhered to her original name" (13).

To Orlando, Monimia is defined by her personal qualities, her beauty, her physical grace, her innocence, her innate sense of duty and compassion, her intense

sensibility, rather than by her indigence, her non-status within the household or by her menial activities. Monimia is, in other words, a natural heroine, whose beauty shines forth from her parish-girl dress and confounds its function: "Monimia, though dressed like a parish girl ... was observed by the visitors who happened to see her ... to be so very pretty, that nothing could conceal or diminish her beauty" (14). A gap develops, therefore, in the reading of Monimia's character between the semiotics of class and the semiotics of inherent virtue. This fissure not only suggests that class is a question of seeing the world in just one of a number of possible ways. It also proposes that a class-orientated vision, such as that of Mrs. Rayland, is a species of blindness. Whereas the perceptive Lennard is aware from the novel's beginning of the likelihood of Orlando falling in love with her dazzling charge, Mrs. Rayland is untroubled by his proximity to her housekeeper's niece, "not only because Mrs. Lennard took such pains to lead her imagination from any such probability, but because she considered them both as mere children, and Monimia as a servant" (15).

This gap between the semiotics of class and the semiotics of inherent virtue is, according to Michael McKeon, an indication of the weakening of romance ideology as an appropriate narrative mode. For romance strives to unify inner and outer systems of signification by assuming that virtue inheres naturally in the aristocracy; that put "[m]ost succinctly, birth is a sign of worth".²⁰ McKeon details this unification process in his examination of romance narratives during the English Civil War. The romance model was employed extensively not only to chronicle the trials of the Royalist side, but even as a standard of behaviour for Royalist protagonists themselves.²¹ When Prince Charles went into hiding after his defeat by Cromwell at the Battle of Worcester, he disguised himself as a "Country-Fellow", and then as a "Serveing-Man" and "Woodcutter", disguising "the telltale whiteness of his skin" with "a distillation of walnut rind familiar to all romance readers as the preferred cosmetic of temporary downward mobility".²² But, so impossible is it to separate outer signification from interior virtue, such efforts inevitably failed to keep the noble Prince undetected for long. Several times his true identity was uncovered, "majestie being soe naturall unto him ... that even when he said nothing, did nothing, his very lookes ... were enough to betray him".²³

McKeon does not choose to read such self-conscious foregrounding of romance tropes by the Royalist side as a sign of their vitality. Rather he sees it as

²⁰ Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel*, 214.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 213.

²² *Ibid.*, 213.

²³ Cited in *ibid.*, 213.

evidence of romance's precariousness. Intimately connected with the aristocratic prerogative to exclusive rule, romance is equally as threatened by the onslaught of the New Model Army as the forces of Stuart monarchy.²⁴ Early in the eighteenth century, the desired separation of birth and virtue fuels Mandeville's attack on aristocratic complacency. Honour, he writes:

is only to be met with in People of the better sort, as some Oranges have kernels, and others not, tho' the outside be the same. In great Families it is like the Gout, generally counted Hereditary, and all Lords Children are born with it. In some that never felt any thing of it, it is acquired by Conversation and Reading, (especially of Romances) in others by Preferment; but there is nothing that encourages the Growth of it more than a Sword, and upon the first wearing of one, some People have felt considerable Shutes of it in Four and twenty Hours.²⁵

In *The Old Manor House*, Monimia's virtue, like the royalty of the young Prince in disguise, cannot be hidden under her coarse parish uniform, but rather announces itself in spite of her exterior trappings, and confirms her position as a protagonist of romance. And yet the crucial point here is that Monimia remains what she has been designated by the disgusted review in the *Critical Review*: "a young girl of low birth, illiterate and poor", to the end of the tale. The romance trope of inner and outer worth, which no disguise can conceal for long, is appropriated here, only to be confounded in an extraordinary way. Monimia deserves the fate of a young and beautiful princess, without being anything other than an illegitimate orphan of the servant class. The reviewer goes on to complain: "We were in expectation, that, as an apology for Orlando's misplaced affection, and as an explanation of Mrs. Lennard's unaccountable harshness to Monimia, the heroine of the piece would have tuned out a very different personage—but no; she still remains the obscure niece of Mrs. Lennard ..."²⁶ Smith's greatest crime lies in her confounding of the romance tradition by refusing to confer noble birth on her lowly heroine.

Elsewhere in the novel, romance is a burden to Monimia, which she must strive to overcome in order to qualify for the inheritance of Rayland Hall. The names of the two lovers, in contrast to the novel's other characters ('Betty', 'Martha', 'Philip', 'John') signal to the reader that the hero and heroine occupy a radically different textual milieu; whilst disparaging remarks, meted out to them by the rest of the novel's characters, suggest that the two have been suddenly and clumsily transplanted, at great

²⁴ *Ibid*, 214.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 155.

inconvenience to themselves, from a romance fairytale into contemporary Sussex. For Monimia, this turns out to be especially burdensome.

Mockery follows the couple throughout. “The fierce Sir Rowland”, “the name which Philip Somerive gave to his brother in derision” (148); “Sir Knight” (148, 199); “most valorous chevalier” (207); “O most fortunate and valorous Orlando of the enchanted castle!” (327) are some of the epithets used to ridicule this novel’s hero. Monimia’s name, so at odds with her servile position that Mrs. Rayland is forced to rechristen her, is similarly scorned as a romantic indulgence. She is termed by various characters a “seraphic damsel” (265); a “sweet nymph of the enchanted tower” (325); and a “fair maid of the hall” (268). When Sir John Belgrave terms her a “lovely little wood-nymph!” (370) he is keen to attribute to her the helplessness of a romance heroine in order to facilitate her sexual exploitation. When she is called a “dulcinea” (148), the term Don Quixote mistakenly bestows on a young peasant girl with whom he is infatuated, believing her a noble,²⁷ and when Orlando’s father accuses him of a “romantic quixotism” (152), two things are implied: that their infatuation in spite of class difference is delusional; and that the protagonists’ natural element is a romance zone, independent of the solid reality which constitutes the novel’s dominant environment. Their persistence within the pages of a realistic work of prose fiction is so essentially at variance with the rest of the novel’s context, it emerges as a talking piece within the novel itself. Just as the structure of Rayland Hall incorporates a turret from an earlier architectural style, Smith awkwardly yet self-consciously interrupts her realistic text with romance appendages that don’t quite fit.

My argument is two-fold. First, that Smith’s ragged juxtaposition of realism and romance establishes two mutually contradictory attitudes towards the political function of romance in revolutionary times. Second, that her confused relationship towards the register of romance can be understood as a manifestation of the difficulties she encounters in rejecting the extremism of Paine, and the conservatism of Burke, and in trying to posit a limited form of social inclusion as an alternative to both. Smith’s use of romance is both radical and reactionary, and, once again, it is in relation to servant characters that these contradictory characteristics of romance emerge most clearly. Intrinsic to the central trajectory of Monimia’s rise to power from servant to mistress, Smith’s use of Gothic romance identifies it as an ideological weapon in the machinery of the *Ancien Régime*, from which the lower orders must be liberated. But romance is

²⁶ *The Critical Review*, 52.

²⁷ Footnote to the novel: “*this dulcinea*: in English, sweetheart, derived from Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, where Dulcinea del Toboso is the name Don Quixote gives to Alonza Lorenzo when he falls in love with her, not realising that she is a peasant”, 537-538.

not forgone when Monimia and Orlando inherit the estate and usher in a new and reformed power structure. Rather it returns to enable their very inheritance, and as an antidote to the evils of the treacherous alliance between servitude and new wealth which has temporarily disabled the state.

Monimia's turret, into which she is locked nightly by her aunt, is part of an architectural structure designed literally as a stay against the armies of revolution. It was used during the Civil War, the period Michael McKeon has identified as a contesting site for romance ideology:

The window was equally well secured, for it was in effect only a loop; and of this, narrow as it was, the small square of the casement that opened was secured by iron bars. The Raylands had been eminent royalists in the civil wars, and Rayland Hall had held out against a party of Fairfax's army that had closely besieged it. Great part of the house retained the same appearance of defensive strength which had then been given it; and no knight of romance ever had so many real difficulties to encounter in achieving the deliverance of his princess, as Orlando had in finding the means merely to converse with the little imprisoned orphan. (28)

That which was intended as a military defence installation against revolutionary armies has been transformed into a Gothic prison, in which the servant Monimia, condemned to pass her days in isolation, sits waiting to be liberated. Prison imagery became particularly resonant in British fiction after the Fall of the Bastille: the synecdochic relation between the Bastille and the tyranny of the *Ancien Régime*, established by Paine in his *Rights of Man*, took on vigorous life.²⁸ Smith takes Burke's venerable castle of the British state and transforms it into a symbol of political despotism, illustrating how the most defenceless members of old-order society were also those treated most barbarously: here the servant is frozen in feudal compliance and literally locked up. But Smith takes her questioning of the *Reflections* further by suddenly introducing the comparison between Orlando and "a knight of romance" intent on "the deliverance of his princess". The most famous phrase of the *Reflections*, Burke's impassioned lament that "the age of chivalry is gone" (127), is structured around the

²⁸ "[S]ociety was often imagined as a prison. ...[T]he imprisonment motif had a sharper edge in English Jacobin fiction of the 1790s than hitherto, and a greater ambiguity, owing to the image of the Bastille, but also to the image of the Terror", Gary Kelly, cited in Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, 178. "The Bastille [sic] was to be either the prize or the prison of the assailants. The downfall of it included the idea of the downfall of despotism; and this compounded image was become as figuratively united, as Bunyan's Doubting Castle and Giant Despair", Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, 27.

failed deliverance of a princess, Marie-Antoinette, from the hands of the revolutionary mob. Burke's association between chivalry, distressed, aristocratic femininity and the "beauty" of Europe's dying order is realigned by Smith into a subversive political statement. It is rather Monimia, the servant, and the victim of that order, who is to be rescued from the Gothic romance of the *Ancien Régime* in which she has been unwillingly imprisoned.

The particular form of Gothic romance which dominated the 1790s, and which has been termed "Gothic Loyalist Romance" by the critic James Watt, was overtly concerned with re-establishing the rigidity of the master-servant relation under feudalism. Lots of faithful domestics populate the pages of these fictions. In her preface to *The Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon*, published the same year as *The Old Manor House*, Clara Reeve outlines the conservative impetus behind her Gothic text. It is:

to give a faithful picture of a well-governed kingdom, wherein a true subordination of ranks and degrees was observed, and of a great prince at the head of it.

The new philosophy of the present day avows a levelling principle, and declares that a state of anarchy is more beautiful than that of order and regularity. There is nothing more likely to convince mankind of the errors of these men, than to set before them examples of good government, and warnings of the mischievous consequences of their own principles.²⁹

As in all other Loyalist Gothic fiction, the castle around which Reeve's text is structured is designed to be read as a microcosm of the British state: harmonious, yet reassuringly stratified; an image which encapsulates distinctions of class whilst remaining rigidly hierarchical.³⁰ An idealised past is rejuvenated with the express purpose of instilling a contemporary readership with veneration for the power structures threatened by the French Revolution. Gothic Loyalist fiction has an urgent, and uncompromisingly reactionary, ideological agenda, by which servants are returned to their pre-revolutionary subservience, reinstating "a true subordination of ranks and degrees", and enabling in turn the re-stabilisation of old-order power structures.

²⁹ Cited in Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London: Routledge, 1995), 16.

³⁰ Linda Colley: "Only in Great Britain did it prove possible to float the idea that aristocratic property was in some magical and strictly intangible way the *people's property* also", *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 177.

Several mainstays of Gothic Loyalist romance are directly challenged by Smith in *The Old Manor House*. The required tone of vainglorious militarism³¹ is not only subverted by the unsavoury figure of General Tracy, but is also ironically undermined by Mrs. Rayland's pride in the military achievements of her ancestors, all of whom were doomed to fight for the losing side:

—[My] grandfather, I say, Sir Orlando Rayland, appeared with distinguished honour in the service of his master in 1685, against the rebel Monmouth, though not of the religion of King James. ... Of remoter ancestors, I could tell you of Raylands who bled in the civil wars; we were always Lancastrians, and lost very great property by our adherence to that unhappy family during the reigns of Edward the Fourth and Richard the Third. (222-223)

History here is against the aristocracy, an interpretation of Britain's past which is diametrically opposed to the political vision at the heart of the Loyalist Gothic romance.³² But it is in Smith's re-writing of the Gothic servant that her battle with the politics of the Loyalist romance authors emerges most distinctly.

What, then, are the common aspects of servant characters in Gothic fiction? The Gothic mode's instigating text, *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), ensures, with the sporadic help of supernatural activity, the restoration of a castle to its legitimate heir. In the course of the story it is revealed that Manfred's "literally poisonous" line originated in the murder of a master by his servant.³³ From this text on, the re-establishment of legitimate heirs to rightful property is the teleological concern of the Gothic. And even though servant characters are rarely as directly implicated in the act of original usurpation as here, (though they are in *The Old Manor House*), the return to harmony, facilitated by the accession of the rightful heir, is predicated upon the total submission of servants, or by what I term their "re-infantilisation".

At the end of Anne Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), the faithful servant Paulo, so loyal to his master he wishes to die in his stead, is offered his liberty. He refuses on the grounds that existence without the confines of the master-servant relation is simply unthinkable: "Why, Signor, of what use are the thousand sequins to me, if I am to be

³¹ "From around the time of the British defeat in America ... the category of Gothic was widely redefined so as to denote a proud heritage of military victory", James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 7.

³² When the novel shifts to a chronicle of Orlando's sufferings during the American Revolution, Smith's anti-war stance develops into Painite polemic: "Merciful God! Can it be thy will that mankind should thus tear each other to pieces with more ferocity than the beasts of the wilderness? Can it be thy dispensation that kings are entrusted with power only to deform thy works—and in learning politics to forget humanity?" (349).

³³ Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, 19.

independent! what use if I am not to stay with you?"³⁴ After its many horrors, the novel closes, comfortingly, on Paulo's ecstatic compliance with his marginalised position. His refusal to be liberated is simultaneously a refusal to grow up. He bounds around the closing pages like a child, unable to control his body, his emotions or his language, which pours in a confused torrent from his lips until the novel's final line. Similarly, the single joke of *Otranto*, irritatingly replayed throughout the text, is that servants, like children, or idiots, are incapable of concise speech at those precise moments when the furtherance of the plot depends upon their information:

—Scot! cried Manfred in a rage, is it only a ghost then that thou hast seen? Oh! Worse! Worse! my lord! cried Diego: I had rather seen ten whole ghosts.—Grant me patience! said Manfred; these blockheads distract me—³⁵

—a joke Radcliffe finds equally amusing. Servants incapable of controlling their own narratives fill her texts, with the effect that the reader is at one with the master in his frustration: ““You seem to like your first drubbing so well, that you want another, and unless you speak more to the purpose, you shall soon have one””, thunders La Motte to his incompetent messenger in *The Romance of the Forest*.³⁶ In *The Servant's Hand*, Bruce Robbins has analysed this tendency of literary servants to prove incapable of coming to the point, defining digressive message delivery as a tradition that goes back to Sophocles.³⁷ Paulo in *The Italian* is, like a child, excessively oral, “being both tediously loquacious and perpetually hungry”.³⁸ In its revisiting of an earlier, idealised age, Gothic Loyalist fiction³⁹ removes servants from the equality held out to them by the French Revolution, and returns them to their unambiguous subservience under feudalism. It implements a reversed trajectory from puberty back to infancy in the process.

The German poet Novalis described the French Revolution as the violent onset of sexual maturation:

³⁴ Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian, or, The Confessional of the Black Penitents*, ed. Frederick Garber (1797; London: Oxford University Press, 1981), 407.

³⁵ Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto, A Gothic Story* (1765; London, Oxford University Press, 1964), 31.

³⁶ Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, ed. Chloe Chard (1791; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 26.

³⁷ Bruce Robbins, *The Servant's Hand*, 70.

³⁸ Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, 181.

³⁹ Although Radcliffe's fiction does not fall within the exact remit of the Gothic Loyalist romance, (it is often set abroad, rather than in an idealised medieval England, for example), James Watt makes a case for her conservative tendencies. In contrast to Smith, Radcliffe was lauded by the conservative establishment. See *Contesting the Gothic*, 107-128.

Most observers of the Revolution, especially the clever and fashionable ones, have declared it to be a dangerous and contagious disease. They have gone no further than the symptoms, and have interpreted these as being in many ways haphazardly confused. Many have regarded it as a merely local evil, but the most inspired opponents have urged castration for they have noticed that this alleged illness is nothing other than the crisis of immanent puberty.⁴⁰

Paine also saw the French Revolution as the process of growing up on a national scale. Associating the aristocratic order with childhood, he declares: "France ... has outgrown the baby clothes of *count* and *duke*, and breeched itself in manhood".⁴¹ He then links this shedding of "childish things" with the sloughing off of romance, positing manhood and reason in their place. He terms aristocratic titles a "species of imaginary consequence" that has already:

visibly declined in every part of Europe, and it hastens to its exit as the world of reason continues to rise. There was a time when ... a man in armour riding through Christendom in search of adventures was more stared at than a modern duke. The world has seen this folly fall, and it has fallen by being laughed at, and the farce of titles will follow its fate.⁴²

As Burke did before him, Paine defines chivalric romance as an important ideological accessory to the functioning of aristocratic control. He writes: "The *romantic* and barbarous distinctions of men into kings and subjects, though it may suit the condition of courtiers, cannot that of citizens" (my italics).⁴³ Paine then invalidates romance ideology and the *Ancien Régime* by implicating them both with the cruelly enforced perpetuation of infancy in the people. As an antidote to Paine's assertion that revolution equalises by enabling the maturation of the lower orders, Gothic romance re-infantilises its servant characters. By contrast, *The Old Manor House* assumes Paine's radical position by tracing the development of Monimia from childhood, Gothic terror, and servitude, to sexual awakening, reason, and inheritance: the established arc of revolutionary philosophy.

⁴⁰ Cited in W. J. McCormack, *Ascendancy and Tradition in Anglo-Irish Literary History from 1789 to 1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 42.

⁴¹ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, 56.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 117.

In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, John Locke links servants, children and the supernatural, and denotes the supernatural as a hindrance to normal development. Of his exemplary genteel youth, he writes:

always whilst he is Young, be sure to preserve his tender Mind from all Impressions and notions of *Sprites* and *Goblins*, or any fearful Apprehensions in the dark. This he will be in danger of from indiscretion of Servants, whose usual Method it is to awe Children, and keep them in subjection, by telling them of *Raw-Head* and *Bloody Bones*, and such other Names, as carry with them the Idea's of something terrible and hurtful, which they have reason to be afraid of, when alone, especially in the dark. ... Such *Bug-bear* Thoughts once got into the tender Minds of Children ... sink deep, and fasten themselves so as not easily, if ever, to be got out again; and whilst they are there, frequently haunt them with strange Visions, making Children dastards when alone, and afraid of their Shadows and Darkness all their Lives after.⁴⁴

Locke's equation between servants and the superstitious stories they employ to keep children "in Subjection", is amplified into a radical political statement in *The Old Manor House*. Via the figure of Monimia, whose complex representative function encapsulates childhood, servitude and the lower orders, superstition is shown to operate as an ideological weapon on behalf of the *Ancien Régime* against all three groups. Mrs. Lennard, though a servant herself, is in the position of governor of Monimia, and thus assumes the despotic qualities of an old-order tyrant, or monarch, against whom Monimia's own liberation from superstition will be pitted.

The first direct speech by Mrs. Lennard in *The Old Manor House* is the following:

... really one does recollect hearing in this gallery very odd noises, which, if one were superstitious, might sometimes make one uneasy. —Many of the neighbours ... used to say to me, that they wondered I was not afraid of crossing it of a night by myself, when you, Ma'am, used to sleep in the worked bed-chamber, and I lay over the house-keeper's room. (16)

Here Lennard is attempting to divert Mrs. Rayland's attention from the ball that has bounced into the gallery, but the controlling function of her superstitious stories is soon made more explicit. In the *Reflections*, Burke defends superstition over reason as a means of asserting ideological control over the lower orders. He asks: "But is

superstition the greatest of all possible vices?" Superstition, for Burke, is "the religion of feeble minds" and is to be tolerated as a defence against the socially destabilising effects of Enlightenment philosophy. The prudent man, not believing in superstition himself, would nevertheless oppose its eradication on the grounds that superstition is "that which endows" rather than "that which plunders"; it is "that which disposes to mistaken beneficence" rather than "that which stimulates to [the] real injustice" threatened by the "pretended philosophers of the hour" (208). The supernatural is cynically used by Mrs. Lennard in *The Old Manor House* to keep Monimia in a state of terror and literally to hinder her mobility: a neat encapsulation of superstition's use as a means of controlling the political aspirations of the lower classes.

Monimia, unable to "conquer" her "terrors" (39), is reluctant to follow Orlando through the deserted chapel into his study because she believes it is haunted. Mrs Lennard has informed her that "[i]t is haunted, you know, every night by the spirit of one of the Lady Raylands ... whose ghost now sits every night in the chancel, and sometimes walks round the house, and particularly along the galleries, at midnight, groaning and lamenting her fate" (40). In consequence, Monimia is too frightened to wander at leisure around the building. She holds her aunt in "awe" (41), while her spirit is kept in terror, and in infancy, by her aunt's ghost stories. Servitude and terror combine: "Monimia, almost a prisoner in her little apartment, passed the day in servitude, and divided the night between uneasy expectation, hazardous conference, and fruitless tears" (128). The selective use of superstition against the lower orders, advocated above by Burke, is mirrored in the fragmented use of the Gothic in *The Old Manor House*. Only the two servant girls, Betty and Monimia, are frightened of wandering spirits, while Mrs. Lennard is entirely disbelieving. Sometimes the narrative splits conspicuously into a dual discourse. At one point Monimia, trembling in the darkness of the castle library, becomes the persecuted heroine of a Gothic tale, just as other characters in the novel seem caught up instead in a jocular comedy of manners. During the tenant's feast, while Orlando desperately tries to escape an engagement with Miss Hollybourn, and General Tracy pursues Isabella up and down the hall while she dances with other, younger men, Monimia is sitting alone and terrified in a deserted wing of the house:

The large old library, half furnished with books, and half hung with tapestry, and where the little light afforded by a waning moon gleamed faintly through the upper parts of the high casements which the window shutters did not reach, was perhaps the most gloomy apartment that fancy could imagine. Monimia looked round her and

⁴⁴ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 196.

shuddered—The affright she had undergone in the chapel, though it was explained, still dwelt upon a mind which had so early been rendered liable to the terrors of superstition; and she looked towards the door that opened to the passage of the chapel, fancying some hideous spectre would appear at it. ...

‘How happy,’ said she, ‘are the Miss Somerives, and this other young lady! They, under the sanction of their parents, are gaily enjoying an innocent and agreeable amusement; while I, a poor unprotected being, wander about in darkness and in dread, and, though I do nothing wrong, undergo the terrors and alarms of guilt.’ (202-203).

Monimia is literally denied light. The opposite yet parallel experiences of Monimia and the Miss Somerives, realised here in the two opposite yet parallel discourses of the realistic novel and the Gothic romance, emphasise that superstition is not a weapon to be wielded universally, but selectively against society’s most disenfranchised members.

Orlando’s aim in educating Monimia is to disabuse her of superstitious dread. He informs her that she has been duped by her aunt’s lies, which he links explicitly to the despotism of the *Ancien Régime*:

[L]ike all other usurped authority, the power of your aunt is maintained by unjust means, and supported by prejudices, which if once looked at by the eye of reason would fall. So slender is the hold of tyranny, my Monimia! (44)

Superstition “fetter[s]” (44) Monimia. The idea that tyranny disguises its usurpation of power, which ought naturally to reside with the people, by blinding its subjects with “prejudices”, is lifted wholesale from Thomas Paine’s radical philosophy. Orlando’s equation between reason and the fall of “usurped authority”, that “has brought in supernatural aid” (44), aligns the text once more with the *Rights of Man*, and with Paine’s debunking of monarchical rule. Monarchy, Paine argues, is incapable of functioning without the veil of prejudice, or superstition, which covers its manifest deficiencies:

[C]ertain it is that what is called monarchy always appears to me a silly, contemptible thing. I compare it to something kept behind a curtain, about which there is a great deal of bustle and fuss, and a wonderful air of seeming solemnity; but when, by any accident, the curtain happens to be open and the company see what it is, they burst into laughter.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, 150.

So slender is the hold of tyranny. Orlando echoes Paine's deflation of monarchy when he explains to Monimia that whereas she is petrified in(to) her subservient position by ghostly terrors, kings, whose usurpation of power is upheld by the superstition of the lower orders, are themselves immune from the horrors of supernatural discourse. Such "sanguinary monsters who are stained with crimes" as "kings or heroes" sleep peacefully in their beds (49).

By exposing her terrors as chimerical, Orlando incites Monimia to meet him clandestinely in his study in the middle of the night: her progress from superstition to reason is also the move away from childhood into sexual initiation. There is a crucial shift in Monimia's reading material during this period. While she is already accustomed to the "Arabian Knights" and other "Fairy Tales" (21), Orlando is now eager to supply Monimia with "proper books" (33): "The ignorance and prejudices in which Monimia had been brought up, now gave way to such instruction as she derived from Addison and other celebrated moralists" (166-167). As well as increasing her self-esteem, Orlando's carefully selected, anti-romantic texts enable Monimia to shed the chrysalis of crippling superstition and to embrace maturity by entering into a steady relation with her lover: "Another and another evening Orlando attended at the turret, and the apprehensions of Monimia decreased in proportion as her reason, aided by her confidence in him, taught her that there was in reality little to fear from the interposition of supernatural agency" (50).

In a deliberate echo of Burke's lament for the passing of old-order chivalry, Mrs. Rayland is described as a woman for whom "the age of chivalry did not seem to be passed" (249). Yet rather than appearing as the adornment of its age, chivalry is instead presented as a dangerous, anachronistic discourse, which sucks Orlando in to its dark heart, war, and which threatens to annihilate him. Mrs. Rayland appropriates Orlando into her "own antediluvian notions" of her family's military prestige, and sends him off to America to re-engage with "rebels and round heads" (329) without any apprehension of Orlando's personal danger. Old-order chivalry is survived and sloughed off, however, as Orlando returns from the American Revolution, shorn of patriotism, ready to negotiate his ownership of Rayland Hall. Similarly, Monimia's passage through the novel is from the dark Gothic library, in which she trembles as a young and ignorant servant, into the tenant's feast at the heart of the castle, over which she will preside as the Hall's future mistress: "He saw her the adored mistress of that house, where she had been brought up in indigence, in obscurity, almost in servitude" (309); from the prison of old-order Gothic ideology into the light of reason and political inheritance.

This, then, is the radical reading of romance which informs *The Old Manor House*, equating infancy, superstition and servitude with the despotism of the *Ancien Régime* on the one hand, and sexual maturation, reason and freedom with the philosophy of Thomas Paine on the other. And yet Smith's treatment of Gothic romance in *The Old Manor House* also establishes an alternative politics, a politics in sympathy with Burke's view of the French Revolution as a socio-political cataclysm. For superstition changes in the course of the novel: put simply, it moves from subverting Burke's position in the *Reflections* to endorsing that position. The ideological tool of the *Ancien Régime* that condemns its impoverished subjects to the unnatural condition of eternal childhood/servitude, is transformed, towards the novel's close, into the means by which the socio-political order is rescued from the devastation wreaked upon it by a popular appropriation of power.

"Out of the tomb of the murdered Monarchy in France", intones Burke in the first of his *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (1796), "has arisen a vast, tremendous, unformed spectre, in a far more terrific guise than any which ever yet have overpowered the imagination, and subdued the fortitude of man."⁴⁶ Popular revolution has unleashed terrors unknown in the days of the old political order. Similarly, however terrified Monimia was of Rayland Hall and its passageways filled with aristocratic ghosts, after it has been taken over by its housekeeper and her lover, absolute horror is unleashed.

Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* conjoins temporal progression and democracy, against the temporal stagnation of aristocratic regimes. Burke, however, has already anticipated this association between popular power and the entrance of Britain's governing institutions into the time continuum: he undercuts Paine's optimism about the democratic process by emphasising time's damage, ruination, as democracy's chief consequence. The *Reflections* is filled with the ruins of the national castle, and, as W. J. McCormack has already noted, "Jacobin individualism is identified with the process of architectural ruination".⁴⁷ McCormack goes on:

If the great house is the dominant metaphor of the *Reflections*, with the attendant imagery of gardens and grounds and picture-galleries, its recurrent citation is ironic and objective in that Burke uses it primarily as an image of ruination contrasted with a wholeness which historical community may afford ...⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Edmund Burke, *Two Letters Addressed to a Member of the Present Parliament, on the Proposals for Peace with the Regicide Directory of France* (1796), in *Writings and Speeches*, 9:190-191.

⁴⁷ W. J. McCormack, *Ascendancy and Tradition*, 32.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 33.

Put more simply, Burke shows how the great house enters modernity as a result of the French Revolution and is destroyed by time.

This is exactly what happens to Rayland Hall once the takeover by the housekeeper and her lawyer-husband has been achieved. Orlando returns from America to find Rayland Hall sinking rapidly into decay. And just as Burke speeds up post-revolutionary time in order to emphasise its rapacity, Rayland Hall has fallen into a state of disrepair at odds with the short number of months in which it has been left uninhabited. The Hall appears “more ruinous and neglected than it used to be” (398); on closer examination Orlando finds not only that “[a]ll was mournfully silent, and most of the windows were shut” (397) but that “[t]here was no person to be seen where formerly there had been four or five servants: there was no appearance of horses; no poultry pecking about; all was still as death, and the grass had grown up among the pavement” (397). Everything that can be sold has been stripped from the estate, draining its lifeblood, leaving the shell of a rotting building in place of the fountainhead of the local socio-political economy.

Supernatural activity returns to these closing scenes of *The Old Manor House*, and in far more menacing form than its earlier manifestation. Crucially, where Monimia’s fears of ghosts are quashed by the discovery of smugglers in the cellar in the first quarter of the novel, the haunting of Rayland Hall, after one of its servants has ruptured the line of rightful inheritance, is not explained away. Re-animation of the supernatural is given added power by its effect on Orlando, who has been scoffingly immune to its horrors until this time. When “a low, hollow gust of wind rushed through the deserted rooms”, he imagines it “loaded with the groans of all he had ever loved, or revered” (399). “[A]shamed” of his terrors, he sees “hideous spectres” in the picture gallery; and when he enters a bed-chamber, in which “the old high-testered green silk bed looked like a mausoleum”, he “fancied that the corpse of Mrs. Rayland lay on it” (399). As in Burke’s description of the French revolutionaries engaged in satanic acts, (“but the revolution in France is the grand ingredient in the cauldron” [61]), the kitchen of Rayland Hall, in which two servant caretakers keep house, becomes the place “where the peasantry suppose the infernal spirits hold their Sabbath” (399-400). While Roker and Lennard finalise their coup, Monimia is revisited by happenings she has trouble dismissing as fanciful:

It is true, that, as I lay listening of a night to the howling of the wind in the great melancholy room at the end of the north gallery, where I was locked up every night, I have frequently started at the visions my fancy raised; and as the dark green damask hangings swelled with the air behind them, I have been so much terrified as to be unable to move, or to summon to my recollection all the arguments you were

wont to use against superstitious fear—Then too I have been glad even to hear the rats as they raced round the skirting boards, because it convinced me there were some living creatures near me, and helped me to account for the strange noises I sometimes heard. (475-476).⁴⁹

Two aspects of this re-emergence of the supernatural towards the end of the novel are of note. First, it can be pinpointed to the precise moment when Rayland dies and the estate passes from aristocratic control. Second, its impetus shifts from a form of aristocratic control of the people, to a form of vengeance on those people who have usurped aristocratic control. While Orlando and Monimia are sensitive to an increased atmosphere of terror, they are not the targets of the ruined Hall's distressed spirits. Instead, supernatural agency is associated with the defeat of the evil Lennard-Roker regime and with Orlando and Monimia's eventual salvation of Rayland Hall. Gothic romance may have started off in *The Old Manor House* by locking Monimia into her turret, but it is also the force that enables her release and the subsequent regeneration of the national estate.

The return of the supernatural first occurs during Orlando's sojourn among the American Indians by the banks of the St. Lawrence River. "There is in America a night hawk" we are told, "whose cry is believed by the Indians always to portend some evil to those who hear it" (385). This hawk wakes Orlando from a significant dream:

From the most delicious dream of Rayland Hall, and of Monimia given to him by the united consent of Mrs. Rayland and his father, he was suddenly awakened by the loud shriek of this messenger of supposed ill tidings. ... [H]e went out of his tent. ... [He] looked perpendicularly down on a hollow, where the dark knots of cypresses seemed, by the dim light of early morning, which threatened storms, to represent groups of supernatural beings in funereal habits; and over them he saw ... two or three of the birds which had so disturbed him. (385)

⁴⁹ Cf. Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, 114: "The wind was high, and as it whistled through the desolate apartment, and shook the feeble doors, she often started, and sometimes even thought she heard sighs between the pauses of the gust; but she checked these illusions, which the hour of the night and her own melancholy imagination conspired to raise. As she sat musing, her eyes fixed on the opposite wall, she perceived the arras, with which the room was hung, wave backwards and forwards; she continued to observe it for some minutes, and then rose to examine it further. It was moved by the wind; and she blushed at the momentary fear it had excited: but she observed that the tapestry was more strongly agitated in one particular place than elsewhere, and a noise that seemed something more than that of the wind issued thence".

These nighthawks visit Orlando just as Mrs. Rayland is dying in England and the destruction of Rayland Hall is being plotted by her housekeeper and her husband. The “supernatural beings in funereal habits” conjure her death and the demise of the aristocratic line. The dream of “Monimia given to him by the united consent of Mrs. Rayland and his father” turns out to represent Mrs. Rayland’s altered personality before she dies, and her more probable acquiescence in his choice of marriage partner. For on his return to England he learns that his absence has occasioned a change of heart in the old lady, who “was never known to have done a voluntary kindness to any human being” (6). “It seemed as if towards the close of her life Mrs. Rayland had acquired, instead of losing, her sensibility” (250): she is stricken by the death of Orlando’s father, buys mourning for all the Somerives, and invites them to stay with her at the Hall permanently, forgetting for once the dilution of her family’s aristocratic blood which they represent. It is during this period that she both confirms Orlando as the inheritor of her estate, and becomes emotionally attached to Monimia. And so Orlando’s dream faithfully represents a window of opportunity which has opened in his absence: the possibility that a reformed Mrs. Rayland will agree to his marriage with Monimia; the possibility that a new order, in other words, between an aristocracy re-validated by sensibility, the gentility and those few exceptionally virtuous representatives of the lower orders, will succeed to the governance of the state.

The nighthawk has pierced Orlando’s dream, however, because this version of the future ownership of Rayland Hall has been thwarted by servant-intervention. Lennard manipulates her mistress to ensure that the Somerives are banished back to their farm; she intercepts all mail from Rayland to Orlando in America; and a few days after her mistress’s death, takes possession of the estate, refuses the Somerives entrance and puts forward an old will granting herself £10,000 in the place of the rightful will nominating Orlando as heir. The superstition of the Native Americans is therefore vindicated, in that the cry of the nighthawk does indeed portend evil to its listener; and from this point on, supernatural agency is used in the novel to decry the treachery of the Hall’s ruination at the hand of its servant, and to enable Orlando and Monimia to recover their lost inheritance.

The sudden production of the legitimate will in the novel’s final pages is intrinsically bound up with counter-revolution. Mrs. Lennard has hidden a copy of the will in those passages presumed haunted by the ghosts of cavaliers distinguished by their loyalty to Charles I during the English Civil War. A repentant Mrs. Lennard writes to Orlando of the will’s hiding place:

'If you have not forgot old times ... you know very well that Rayland Hall, which belonged to such famous cavaliers in the great rebellion, has a great many secret staircases, and old passages, and hiding-places in it; where, in those melancholy times, some of my late Lady's ancestors, who had been in arms for the blessed Martyr and King, Charles the Second,⁵⁰ were hid by others of the family after the fight at Edgehill, &c.—which I have heard my Lady oftentimes recount; but, nevertheless, I do not know that she herself knew all those places. (523)

These are the same secret passageways of Lennard's first speech—they indeed open and close her servant function in the novel—in which the rumbling ghosts of the losing side of the Civil War are used to scare Monimia into compliance to her aunt's will. Where the Civil War architecture of Rayland Hall has previously functioned as a Bastille for Monimia, the same architecture returns here to enable the liberation of the estate from popular tyranny. That which counters revolution, in other words, whilst criticised under the aristocratic rule of Mrs. Rayland, becomes an indispensable weapon against the Lennard-Roker alliance that has devastated the Hall, for it produces the document that invalidates their control. In these secret, haunted, Royalist passageways, Orlando, as if by magic, finds the box containing the will that names him as heir. He imagines himself the hero of a Gothic romance:

... and as silently they ascended the great stair-case, and traversed the long dark passages that led towards the apartment in question, Orlando could not, amid the anxiety of such a moment, help fancying, that the scene resembled one of those so often met with in old romances and fairy tales, where the hero is by some supernatural means directed to a golden key, which opens an invisible drawer, where a hand or an head is found swimming in blood, which it is his business to restore to the enchanted [sic] owner. (527)

Maggie Kilgour has defined the Gothic as a discourse "haunted by a reading of history as a dialectical process of alienation and restoration, dismembering and remembering, a version of the secularised myth of fall and return".⁵¹ In the dismembered head or hand of this passage, which Orlando must "restore" to its owner, we find the alienation wrought on the national estate by revolution overcome and healed by romance. Burke decried the zeal of the French Revolutionaries in their re-writing of a political constitution, when they already possessed the "walls, and in all the foundations of a

⁵⁰ This is Lennard's mistake: it should be Charles I.

⁵¹ Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, 15.

noble and venerable castle" (8:85). And just as, in accordance with Burke, the walls of Rayland Hall remain intact during the reign of Orlando and Monimia:

Orlando had conducted his lovely wife, his mother and his sisters, to Rayland-Hall; where, without spoiling that look of venerable antiquity for which it was so remarkable, he collected within it every comfort and every elegance of modern life (531),

romance must also persist. As the ideological weapon of the *Ancien Régime* used to keep the people in submission, it cannot be foregone once a new, and essentially bourgeois order has been established. Revolution can take ever more radical, ever more democratic forms. While one servant has been granted admittance to her inheritance, counter-revolutionary architecture must remain in place to prevent the "cabals" of servants, ("In a great house there are among the servants as many cabals, and as many schemes, as among the leaders of a great nation" [52]), who threaten to overrun and bankrupt the national property.

One servant's inheritance is predicated on another servant's return to subordination. In the novel's closing pages, Mrs. Lennard, currently Roker, is summoned back to Rayland Hall now that it has passed from her hands into the hands of the rightful heir, and reinstated as housekeeper. Orlando "himself immediately conducted Mrs. Roker to Rayland-Hall; where he put her in possession of the apartments she had formerly occupied; and employed her to superintend, as she was still active and alert, the workmen whom he directed to repair and re-furnish the house, and the servants whom he hired to prepare it for the reception of its lovely mistress" (530). Mrs. Lennard's ultimate fate is another source of vexation for the contributor to the *Critical Review*. He complains: "Mrs. Lennard, the grand instrument of evil to the Somerive family, and the tyrant of poor Monimia, is taken home and placed in her former station".⁵² But read within the context of the accentuated nature of servant subordination at the end of other Gothic fictions, this move seems rather designed to limit the implications of Monimia's rise, than as a kindness to her aunt. Lennard is quite literally put back in her place after her own unsanctioned inheritance, ensuring that the Gothic haunting of the Hall which accompanied her transgression will also now cease.

The Old Manor House was followed, in 1794, with the publication of Smith's most conservative novel, *The Banished Man*. The preface to this work includes a rescission of her earlier political radicalism:

⁵² *The Critical Review*, 52.

“When a man owns himself to have been in an error”, says Pope, “he does but tell you that he is wiser than he was”. Thus, if I had been convinced I was in error in regard to what I formerly wrote on the politics of France, I should without hesitation avow it. I still think, however, that no native of England could help *then* rejoicing at the probability there was that the French nation would obtain, with very little bloodshed, that degree of freedom which we have been taught to value so highly. But I think also, that Englishmen must execrate the abuse of the name of liberty which has followed; they must feel it to be injurious to the *real* existence of that first of blessings, and must contemplate with mingled horror and pity, a people driven by terror to commit enormities which in the course of a few months have been more destructive than the despotism of ages—⁵³

Whereas in *Desmond*, it is the forces of counter-revolution in France who terrorise local inhabitants, *The Banished Man* opens during a storm, as an aristocratic family awaits the coming of the revolutionary forces with dread.⁵⁴ With *The Banished Man*, Smith was accepted back by her publisher, Thomas Cadell.⁵⁵

The Old Manor House, by plotting a fragile course between Burke on one hand, and Thomas Paine on the other, also represents the centre ground in Smith’s own political trajectory from radical to conservative. She was engaged in the writing of *The Old Manor House* when news of the September Massacres of 1792 reached England,⁵⁶ the event that soured radical enthusiasm for the Revolution in Britain long before Robespierre’s reign of Terror killed it off almost entirely. This may account for the swing from radicalism to reaction evident within the span of the text itself.

In her study of romance in this period, Miranda Burgess describes it as both “the eighteenth-century genre most likely to go head to head with questions of social organisation”,⁵⁷ and a register at home with the discourse of conservative nationalism.⁵⁸ Because it is inherently more flexible than realistic prose fiction, romance can incorporate a wider range of political positions, sometimes at one and the same time. Burgess speaks of the “political roominess”⁵⁹ of the role undertaken by the discourse of romance in prose fiction. Ambiguity towards romance is certainly present in *The Old Manor House*, which attempts the double, self-contradictory task of both critiquing and upholding romance’s function as old-order ideology. By choosing to incorporate aspects of Gothic romance, in particular, Smith intensifies this ambiguity, as the Gothic

⁵³ Charlotte Smith, *The Banished Man*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1794), 1:vii-viii.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁵⁵ Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, 209.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁵⁷ Miranda Burgess, *British Fiction and the Production of Social Order*, 10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

has been defined as compounding “mingled transitional visions of aristocratic corruption and revolutionary tyranny”.⁶⁰ Smith attempts to negotiate an alternative to Burke’s exclusive conservatism, and to the radicalism of the French revolutionary project. A bold and provocative mingling of genres, and a profound engagement with the complex political issues of post-revolutionary British society, are the result. In *The Old Manor House*, we have the brief elucidation of a precariously poised alternative politics, unique in British fiction of the 1790s, followed by its partial eclipse.

Romance is not the only unstable characteristic of this novel. It could also be argued that Smith uses sensibility extensively, in different contexts, in order to foreground its conflicting claims. So on the one hand, Smith breaks the Burkean model by conferring sensibility on her upwardly mobile servant heroine, while on the other, sensibility is still used as it was traditionally used by the middle classes: as a distinguishing mechanism to define the bourgeois individual as separate from, and morally superior to, both the aristocracy above her and the labouring poor. Miranda Burgess has spoken of the “continuity between gothic oppression of women and sentimental admiration”.⁶¹ To a degree, Monimia must escape the oppression of her own dramatic feeling and learn rationality, just as she must escape the fetters of Gothic servitude, though her sensibility is only ever mitigated, and never completely foregone.

Smith’s window of light between the despotism of the *Ancien Régime* and the tyranny of popular revolution incorporates the *embourgeoisement* of both the lower orders and the aristocracy: the pseudo-servant Monimia shakes off superstition and reads *The Spectator*; Mrs. Rayland shakes off her aristocratic aloofness before death and learns love. One manifestation of the many functions of sensibility in the novel is as a form of gelling agent in the newly aligned bourgeois politic: a qualification for incorporation and an instigator of emotional harmony between those who were formerly related to each other by a power discrepancy. In the increased affection between Mrs. Rayland and Monimia, the dissolution of the master-servant relationship is conducive to the novel’s resolution, and to the peaceful establishment of a post-revolutionary middle-class order. In my next chapter, I will look at how the novelist William Godwin explores the more incendiary and destructive aspects of sensibility, within the context of a master-servant relationship, in a way which offers no such palliative to its revolutionary effect.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

CHAPTER THREE.

THE SERVANT, SURVEILLANCE AND SENSIBILITY IN WILLIAM GODWIN'S *CALEB WILLIAMS*.

By the time of writing *The Banished Man*, Charlotte Smith was obviously feeling the heat of conservative reaction against radical prose fiction. Yet in spite of mounting conservative hysteria, culminating in the state trials of radical authors of 1794, this year also witnessed the publication of the decade's most revolutionary novel. William Godwin's *Things as They Are, or; The Adventures of Caleb Williams* adopts core ingredients of Smith's critique of Burkean conservatism in *The Old Manor House*. In both *The Old Manor House* and *Caleb Williams*, indigent orphans, who are also protagonists, are taken into aristocratic households as servants. Both plots revolve around these two characters' attempted escape from the prison of servitude, and the disruption attendant upon each servant's rejection of their 'natural' subordination. But whereas Smith, by ultimately endorsing Burke's Gothic denunciation of an extended franchise as the catalyst for national ruination, tempers her support for the radical cause, Godwin's story of servant persecution is responsible for a far more explosive critique of Britain's existing socio-political constitution than was dared by his predecessor.

The Old Manor House, insofar as it concerns the marriage and inheritance of its virtuous female protagonist, observes established narrative conventions. Smith radicalises her novel by making its heroine an illegitimate servant, and by aligning its marriage plot with Burke's *Reflections* to politically subversive effect. In *Caleb Williams*, by contrast, the lack of a marriage plot—the work is, if anything, homoerotic—coupled with a lack of inheritance concerns, signals the novel's distance from established convention. In *The Old Manor House*, Monimia is overshadowed by the story's primary protagonist, Orlando, and virtually disappears from the closing scenes. *Caleb Williams*, on the other hand, in which there is only persecution without resolution, enlarges the theme of servitude into the novel's predominant subject. Here, for example, we have the first servant narrator in prose fiction of the 1790s, exclusively relating his own personal history. Even minor characters serve to amplify the themes of Caleb's anguish: the novel might be summarised as the tale of three different members of the servant classes, Emily, the younger Hawkins, and Caleb, all of whom resist servitude, and all of whom suffer brutally at the hands of the British legal establishment for their presumption. The liberties of the freeborn Englishman, which formed the basis

of conservative arguments against the necessity for reform throughout the 1790s,¹ are discredited as an ideological chimera; master-servant relations and, by extension, the private family, are depicted as unfailingly despotic. *Caleb Williams* is unparalleled among fictions of the 1790s for the scale and severity of its critique on the subordinating nature of “things as they are”.

William Godwin was already known as the author of *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) when *Caleb Williams* was published in 1794. *Political Justice* electrified radical circles in Britain and, like Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* before it, was popularised by being read aloud during political gatherings.² *Caleb Williams* was initially understood as Godwin’s translation of the tenets of his philosophical treatise into prose fiction in an attempt to reach a broader audience. A hostile critic, writing in *The Monthly Review*, charges Godwin with literary duplicity:

Between fiction and philosophy there seems to be no natural alliance: —yet philosophers, in order to obtain for their dogmata a more ready reception, have often judged it expedient to introduce them to the world in the captivating dress of fable. ... In writing *The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, this philosopher had doubtless some higher object in view ... and it is not difficult to perceive that this object has been to give an easy passport, and general circulation, to some of his favourite opinions.³

Godwin’s own preface to the novel privileges such a reading:

It is now known to philosophers that the spirit and character of the government intrudes itself into every rank of society. But this is a truth highly worthy to be communicated to persons whom books of

¹ The first issue of *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner* includes a radical poem on the plight of “Henry Martin, the Regicide” as he languishes in Chepstow Castle for thirty years. This is then followed by an imitation poem depicting “Mrs. Brownrigg, The ’Prentice-cide”, holed up in Newgate prior to her execution. The satirical response to the first poem is double-pronged: not only does it ridicule the plight of Henry Marten by replacing it with the socially inappropriate subject for poetic elegy, Mrs. Brownrigg. It also indicates the extent to which even apprentices’ rights are protected under British law: “For this act/Did Brownrigg swing. Harsh Laws! But time shall come/When France shall reign, and Laws be all repealed!” *The Anti-Jacobin*, 20th November 1797, 1:35-36. *Caleb Williams* expounds the opposite view by indicating the extent to which, in practice, members of the lower orders such as servants and apprentices were utterly unprotected by British law.

² Famously, Godwin is thought to have escaped legal prosecution for the simple reason that, at three guineas a copy, *Political Justice* was too expensive to be purchased by members of the working classes. Though by no means enjoying comparable circulation levels with the *Rights of Man*, *Political Justice* probably had more of a lower-order audience than might be suggested by the price. In Ireland and Scotland, “people of the lower class were the purchasers. In many places, perhaps some hundreds in England and Scotland, copies were bought by subscription, and read aloud in meetings of the subscribers”, “Mr. Godwin” (1800), cited in David Fleisher, *William Godwin: A Study in Liberalism* (1951; Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973), 23-24.

³ *The Monthly Review*, cited in David McCracken, “Godwin’s Literary Theory: The Alliance Between Fiction and Political Philosophy”, in *Philological Quarterly*, 48:1 (1970), 132-3.

philosophy and science are never likely to reach. Accordingly it was proposed in the invention of the following work, to comprehend, as far as the progressive nature of a single story would allow, a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the destroyer of man.⁴

Opposed, on principle, to violent revolutions, and even to political organisations, Godwin, as a gradualist, was convinced that the evil institutions of government would wither as more and more of the populace embraced the reasonable position that they could simply govern themselves. As David McCracken notes, according to Godwin's philosophical system, therefore, "[p]olitical improvement depended on the enlightenment of just such people as novel-readers".⁵ Novels, by the end of the eighteenth century, did indeed enjoy a considerable readership, and yet, unlike the dangerous political meeting, they addressed the individual, not the faction; they were consumed in private, immune from the pressures of communal decision-making; they offered an expanse of material upon which reason could be exercised, slowly and repeatedly if necessary, without being swayed by the force of demagogic rhetoric. Combining popularity with "extreme individualism",⁶ the novel was Godwin's ideal political tool.

Yet in spite of such straightforward claims for the political impetus and character of the text, *Caleb Williams* has managed to provoke a diverse range of critical responses. Three schools of reaction may be broadly discerned. Following on from where the critic of the *Monthly Review* left off, yet praising what has been previously condemned, P. N. Furbank and James T. Boulton both offer crudely reductive readings of the novel, by which Caleb becomes Godwin himself, the opening of the trunk, the writing of *Political Justice*, and Falkland the deluded Burke, clinging to outmoded, despotic chivalry.⁷ In opposition to this view of the novel as simplistic political allegory, critics such as Robert Kiely emphasise the psychological power of Godwin's story. In spite of its radical critique of legal institutions, and the prison system in particular, *Caleb Williams* (and this is its strength as literature) rapidly moves beyond the confines of its own overtly ideological intentions and ends by subverting the

⁴ William Godwin, *Things as They Are: or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, ed. David McCracken (1794; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1. All subsequent references to the novel are to this edition of the text and will appear parenthetically in the main body of the chapter.

⁵ David McCracken, "Godwin's Literary Theory", 119.

⁶ "The element of Godwin's view of human nature which creates the most difficulty ... is his extreme individualism. His concern for individual autonomy and rationality leads him to condemn all forms of cooperation", John P. Clark, *The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 88-9.

⁷ James T. Boulton, *The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 227, and P. N. Furbank, cited in *ibid.*, 226.

principles of *Political Justice* altogether.⁸ To underscore their reading of the text as an essentially psychological battlefield, such critics draw on the fact that Godwin himself de-emphasises the political tendencies of the novel by omitting the words “THINGS AS THEY ARE” from the title of the new edition of *Caleb Williams* in 1831.⁹

A third reading of the novel, whilst resisting rudimentary binary divisions, such as freedom/despotism, good servant/wicked master, implicit in the first reading, nevertheless attests to the broader political colouring of the text. Critics do this by focusing attention on aspects of *Caleb Williams* which position it, not only within the immediate context of the British Revolution Controversy, but primarily within the shifting mechanics of state power and populace control that characterised the 1790s and the early 1800s. In this vein, Andrew McCann applies Habermas’s theory of the emergence of a public sphere to detail the ways in which Caleb is caught within the new forms of public discourse as they were appropriated by the state at the turn of the century.¹⁰ Similarly, James Thompson studies surveillance in the novel, and sees in it a reflection of the enormous change in the enforcement of power relations between the old order and the industrial order of the nineteenth century, as outlined by Michel Foucault in his seminal study, *Discipline and Punish*.¹¹

Critical opinion is not only split, therefore, over whether *Caleb Williams* is primarily a psychological or a political novel; even those who agree in arguing for a political reading see different themes—prisons, the law, print, the panoptic gaze of Falkland—as the prime locus for Godwin’s most serious social critique. As James Thompson shows, however, an emphasis on the political character of the novel need not ignore its psychological power. Panopticism, for example, as it was developed by

⁸ “Though there are episodes of political and economic oppression ... the novel’s two major causes of oppression are curiously independent of the general rule they are apparently meant to exemplify. ... The deeper Godwin probes into the subject of human possessiveness and oppression, the more personal, irrational and complicated the problem becomes”, Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), 87-88.

⁹ Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 180.

¹⁰ Andrew McCann, “William Godwin and the Pathological Public Sphere: Theorizing Communicative Action in the 1790s”, in *Cultural Politics in the 1790s: Literature, Radicalism and the Public Sphere* (London: MacMillan, 1999), 59-82.

¹¹ James Thompson, “Surveillance in William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*”, in *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression*, ed. Kenneth W. Graham (New York: AMS Press, 1989), 173-198. Thompson usefully summarises the differences between exclusively psychological readings of the novel and his own: “Robert Uphaus writes: ‘It is true ... that *Caleb Williams* may be read to some extent as an analysis of the corrupting influences of social and political institutions, but such a reading is unable to account for the compelling psychological reverberations of the novel.’ On the contrary, we have seen that these compelling reverberations are in fact the consequence of Godwin’s insight into the corrupting influences of social and political institutions. ... The work of Michel Foucault enables us to see ‘the mechanisms of power that fame the everyday lives of individuals’. ... *Caleb Williams* dramatises the real source of terror in the industrial age of discipline and surveillance: the penetration of state apparatus into the everyday lives of individuals”, *ibid*, 192.

Jeremy Bentham in the late 1780s, was simultaneously a psychological and a political weapon of enormous force, a method of state power focused on the mind of the individual rather than on the body.¹² Interpreted as a reflection and commentary on panopticism, the psychological emphasis in *Caleb Williams* is automatically politicised.

This chapter draws on the fusion between psychology and politics in *Caleb Williams*, which attention to the theme of panoptic surveillance foregrounds, but takes the discussion in a new direction. The remarkable focus in the novel on the act of watching, and of being watched, in the specific context of imprisonment, accords quite clearly with the Foucauldian model of modern state control: the power of the overseer's gaze, initially exercised within institutions such as the prison, the hospital, the workhouse and the school. However the gaze as exercised in *Caleb Williams*, particularly the kind of gaze exercised by Williams upon his master, Falkland, is also a characteristic feature of the discourse of sensibility, that ambiguous, amorphous, and ultimately threatening eighteenth-century cultural phenomenon. The presence of sensibility in Godwin's novel has been largely overlooked, or even denied,¹³ by modern academic scholarship. And yet I would argue that it is through the appropriation of the discourse of sensibility, by a servant character, against his master, that Godwin makes his most radical political statement of all.

This chapter falls into two distinct, though interconnected, sections. The first positions Caleb's surveillance of his master within the immediate political context of 1793 and 1794. During this period, servant espionage within private families was being appropriated as a weapon of the state in both France and Britain, though for diametrically opposite ends: to salvage and to prevent revolution respectively. While servants in France were encouraged to pass on details of their employers' domestic behaviour to the revolutionary tribunal,¹⁴ servants in Britain played an active role in the prosecution of radicals during the infamous Treason Trials of 1794. The apparent

¹² Foucault's theory that power ceased being exercised on the body and turned instead to control of the mind or 'soul' at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, has gained wide currency. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991) for a full explication of this thesis; in particular pages 7-19 for a description of how the 'dismembered, amputated body, symbolically branded on face and shoulder' disappeared and was replaced with the prisoner constantly exposed instead to the psychological control of the 'gaze' of the prison overseer.

¹³ "The so-called jacobins, for all their doctrinal individualism, do not follow the sentimentalists' lead. ... For all their energy, their idealism, and, at least in Godwin's case, their imaginative power, in the novel the revolutionaries voluntarily limit themselves, with the result that their subversion—like their artistic achievement—goes only so far. The modern reader who wants to understand what a conservative like Jane Austen was reacting against had better read the sentimentalists", Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 32-33.

¹⁴ In post-revolutionary France, "in the bosom of his family, no man dared to utter a complaint but in anxious whispers, lest a servant should overhear the forbidden expostulations of

incongruity between Godwin's impassioned denunciation of servant spies in letters to newspapers, and his fictional servant's behaviour in *Caleb Williams*, will be explained with reference to Godwin's theory of the "ingenuous censor" as an antidote to government in *Political Justice*.

This will then lead directly to a discussion of the novel's use of radical sensibility. Godwin's "ingenuous censor" can be linked to Adam Smith's many references to an "impartial" or "indifferent" spectator in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), in that both act as mediators of moral action in others. Surveillance and sensibility both foreground an empowered observer, and the rest of this chapter will detail sensibility's explosive consequences within *Caleb Williams*. For Caleb not only destabilises prevalent notions of class as Monimia does, by experiencing sensibility, rather than merely provoking it in others. *Caleb Williams* represents a further stage in sensibility's radicalisation during the 1790s, in that the novel details how a servant character turns a strictly hierarchical model of sympathetic exchange on its head by correctly 'reading' his master's physiognomy, whilst failing to be read in turn.

Caleb Williams is primarily a novel about observation. The first section of the text details the scandalous attempt of a young servant to set himself "as a watch" (107) upon his master, to spy on him "without remission" (126); the second section concentrates on the servant's doomed efforts to escape his master's all-seeing "eye" (237, 281). This surveillance of a master by his servant, followed by that of a servant by his master, can be linked to the emphasis placed on the political uses of scrutiny in National Assembly debates of 1793 and 1794, while *Caleb Williams* was being composed. In his book *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism*, Gregory Dart makes a case for the interconnectedness of English radical writing of the 1790s and the intricacies of French revolutionary policy. He elaborates:

This is not merely a question of showing that figures such as Wordsworth, Godwin, Wollstonecraft and Hazlitt were well versed in the nice distinctions in French politics, but of arguing that the literary dynamics of their work can only be understood with reference to the complete patterns of plot and counter-plot, denunciation and confession that we find in French republicanism.¹⁵

humanity, and denounce him as a counter-revolutionist", Helen Maria Williams, *An Eye-Witness Account of the French Revolution*, 161.

¹⁵ Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 19.

Susan Maslan, in her study of French Revolutionary drama of 1793 and 1794,¹⁶ has amended Foucault's trajectory of changing state power in a way which bears particular resonance for *Caleb Williams*. By arguing that the idea of the gaze emerged initially in revolutionary France as a democratic resource in the hands of the people, Maslan's essay effectively places Godwin's novel within the context of an idea of scrutiny as a weapon of the Revolution against the state controls of the *Ancien Régime*, most notably developed by Maximilian Robespierre.

Maslan argues that the Revolution transformed France from "a society of spectacle into a society of surveillance".¹⁷ Here we see the familiar trajectory of changing state control delineated by Foucault: power changes from residing in the spectacle of aristocratic display, to residing in the gaze of "those who look, such as prison warders, psychiatrists, and factory overseers".¹⁸ Maslan goes on to argue that whilst the French Revolution facilitated this transformation, it itself engendered a radically democratic, albeit transitory, formulation of scrutiny which, though rapidly appropriated by the state for its own ideological purposes, nevertheless deserves attention as a hitherto overlooked revolutionary phenomenon.¹⁹

Robespierre's vision of the French Republic pitted surveillance against theatricality, aligning theatricality with the aristocracy and surveillance with the people respectively. The political project of the Enlightenment attempted to pierce the gloomy secrets of constitutional power, jealously guarded by a privileged elite, and to flood the hidden recesses of government with the transparent light of accountability. According to this project, the machinations of rule had to be made visible to as many people as possible. Democracy was thus made contingent on publicity, and Robespierre enthused about the possibility of maximum political exposure:

It would be necessary, if it were possible, for the assembly to deliberate in the presence of all the French people. A splendid and majestic edifice, open to twelve thousand spectators, should be the site of the meetings of the legislature. Under the eyes of such a great number of witnesses, neither corruption, nor intrigue, nor treachery would dare show themselves; the voice of reason and of the public interest would alone be heard.²⁰

¹⁶ Susan Maslan, "Susannah at her Bath: Surveillance and Revolutionary Drama", in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 34:3 (2001), 421-439.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 423.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 423.

¹⁹ "But, for the most part, Foucault overlooks the period during which this transformation was accomplished: the Revolution. He thus misses a crucial stage in the development of surveillance", *ibid*, 423.

²⁰ Robespierre, "Sur la constitution", cited in *ibid*, 425.

Burke saw “the comedians of a fair” acting “before a riotous audience” in the scandalous admittance of spectators to the proceedings of the National Assembly;²¹ yet for Robespierre, a gallery granting admittance to a handful of observers did not go nearly far enough. His speeches refer to such massive numbers of desirable witnesses to political procedure that the gaze becomes universal. In revolutionary France the gaze was developed as an instrument of control which, in contrast to Bentham’s formulation, was to reside in the hands of the people, to be exercised exclusively upon their social and political superiors, and not the other way round. Republican citizens viewed scrutiny of their current political and military leadership as an important political right, and one that epitomised the maturing of the relation between governors and governed facilitated by the Revolution. As Robespierre succinctly put it: “a people worthy of liberty does not idolize its representatives; it surveils them”.²²

With the fall of the French monarchy in 1793, attention switched from the prosecution of self-proclaimed Royalists, to the hunt for those traitors who supported the Republic only ostensibly, and who were plotting in secret to undermine the revolutionary project. Scrutiny was to be deployed as a tool amongst the populace. Robespierre’s paranoia about the ubiquitous presence of reactionaries in the heart of the French Republic catalysed the abolition of established legal procedure. From the summer of 1794, trembling before the revolutionary court was, of itself, to be taken as a sign of criminal guilt, and increasing numbers were dispatched to the guillotine on ludicrous charges.²³ Republicanism turned private subjects into political citizens, and with this transformation, family matters were similarly transformed into matters of state.²⁴ Scrutiny was to prevent the virtuous Republican family from being infiltrated by counter-revolutionary principles. And in the French revolutionary dramas of 1793 and 1794, it is servants who are encouraged to spy upon, and subsequently report, the counter-revolutionary activities of their masters directly to the revolutionary tribunal.²⁵

These plays acknowledge the difficulty servants encounter in attempting to break a centuries-old taboo against spying on their employers. They must be encouraged to do so with long, propaganda-laden speeches, simultaneously instructing them and the plays’ audiences in the new system of loyalties demanded by the Republic. Inter-familial fidelity must be superseded by fidelity to the nation state if the

²¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 8:119.

²² Robespierre, *Ouvres Complètes*, cited in Susan Maslan, “Susannah at her Bath”, 425.

²³ Robespierre: “I say that whoever trembles at this moment is guilty; because innocence never fears public surveillance”, cited in Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism*, 68.

²⁴ Susan Maslan, “Susannah at her Bath”, 424.

²⁵ Charles-Louis Lesur, *The Widow of the Republican, or, The Slanderer* (1793-4), and Maurin de Pompigny, *The Republican Husband* (1794), both designate servant-spies as loyal citizens of the French Republic. These plays are discussed in detail in *ibid*, 426-430.

Revolution is to survive the clandestine conspiracies that threaten it. In 1794, Robespierre bitterly complained: "Under a monarchy it is permitted to love one's family but not the fatherland, it is honourable to defend one's friends, but not the oppressed".²⁶ These dramas of domestic surveillance attempt to ensure that such illogical priorities do not survive the execution of the French royal family. Servant loyalty to masters, privileged against their loyalty to the extra-familial political realm, must be defeated as an obvious remnant of monarchical perversion. In these plays, the sanctioning of servant espionage against their masters operates as a symbolic corollary to the broader sanctioning of scrutiny as a democratic weapon to be wielded by the people against their political leadership. But it also indicates the extent to which scrutiny was to be permitted at every level of society. Scrutiny was to be applied by apprentices against shopkeepers, and by footmen against their mistresses, in order to monitor the functioning of power generally and to safeguard the new, and highly vulnerable, spirit of egalitarianism to which the Revolution had given birth.

Maslan amends Foucault's trajectory of the shifting mechanics in state power. Control does not pass smoothly from residing in the physical body of the king, (to be exercised over the physical body of the criminal), to residing in the gaze of the institution overseer. The gaze is appropriated during the political experimentation of the French Revolution, however briefly, as a democratic resource in the hands of the people, as a means of guaranteeing the people's political right to truly representational government. This stage in the development of the gaze as a controlling mechanism constitutes scrutiny's revolutionary moment.

There are obvious parallels between this application of the gaze and *Caleb Williams*. Godwin's novel of 1794 mirrors the French dramas of domestic surveillance of the same year in its emphasis on scrutiny by a servant of a master as a revolutionary act. Initially silenced by the theatricality of the rich, by Falkland's studied reserve, Caleb finds the courage to overcome the distance between himself and his master when he decides to consciously break an engrained social taboo and set himself "a spy upon Mr. Falkland!" (107)²⁷ This decision to turn spy upon his master has a maturing influence on Caleb's character, which develops as his feelings of veneration for his social superiors diminish. He remarks contemptuously of Grimes that he "reverenced the inborn divinity that attends upon rank, as Indians worship the devil" (79); and is fond of noting how Falkland's other domestics consistently fail to notice those signs of physical disturbance in their master which are obvious to him. Whereas their eyes

²⁶ Cited in Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism*, 60.

²⁷ The primacy of the importance of spying to Caleb's character and function in the novel is highlighted by his name. In the bible, Caleb, the servant of Moses, is sent by his master to 'spy out' the promised land of Canaan. *Numbers*, 13.6,16.

remain averted from their superiors, “at the beam of whose eye[s] every countenance fell” (93), Caleb’s gaze, free from ideological submissiveness, pierces through the studied reserve of the master class and discovers both a significant moral flaw and a legal travesty: namely that his master Falkland is guilty of the murder of Tyrrel, and that he has escaped punishment. In the France of 1794, it was hoped that the gaze of servants could be galvanised to shatter the ideological constraints of the old-order family that sanctioned privacy, and by extension, such “domestic and unrecorded despotism” (1) as threatened the Revolution. In *Caleb Williams*, a servant’s gaze is successfully turned on his master, and his master’s past, with the result that the supposed impartiality and perfection of the law—the key component in the ruling elite’s socio-political hegemony in Britain—is exploded.

Even before writing *Caleb Williams*, however, Godwin vested enormous significance in scrutiny as a radical social and political ideal. In *Political Justice*, Godwin’s remedy against the insidiousness of government which “insinuate[s] itself in its effects into our most secret retirements”,²⁸ is an idealised neighbourhood watch. After each man has realised the possibility of governing himself, “without the intervention of any compulsory restraint”,²⁹ order is to be kept, essentially, by a system of surveillance rather than by law. In other words, people are to perform their civic duty by setting themselves up as “ingenuous censor[s]” on their neighbours. Meanwhile, consciousness of being constantly watched, (it is instructive how closely Godwin’s remedy mirrors the initial evil of omniscient government), will work to banish vice and cruelty. “How great would be the benefit”, enthuses Godwin, “if every man were sure of meeting in his neighbour the ingenuous censor, who would tell him in person, and publish to the world, his virtues, his good deeds, his meanness and his follies?”³⁰ He goes on confidently to assert that all “[m]en would act with clearness and decision if they had no hopes in concealment, if they saw, at every turn, that the eye of the world was upon them”.³¹

In Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, published posthumously in 1818 but composed during the 1790s, the hero Henry Tilney echoes Godwin’s positing of a parish-level network of voluntary censors as a mainstay of national order. Countering the suspicions of Catherine Morland that his father has murdered his mother, Henry declares:

²⁸ William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Modern Morals and Happiness*, ed. Isaak Kramnick (1793; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 82.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 253.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 313.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 598.

Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you—Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?³²

And yet the neighbourhoods of “voluntary spies” to which Henry is here referring relates to the extensive network of government informers employed throughout the 1790s to infiltrate radical societies.³³ This was a manifestation of the neighbourhood watch which Godwin irrevocably opposed. In a letter to the editors of the *Morning Chronicle*, published on the 1st February 1793, Godwin wrote: “The most crying evil of a despotic Government, is spies and informers”. He went on: “The reign of despotism began on the 30th of November, 1792. ... From that day we have been surrounded with spies; spies of the worse sort; not merely the spies of Government, who might be masked, but every timid observer, and every rancorous disputant we may happen to encounter”. In a second letter on the same subject, Godwin pronounces bitterly: “My very footman from behind my chair may be enticed by the ten guineas, so liberally proffered by the new Associations, to betray me”.³⁴ How are we to credit, then, Godwin’s idealised neighbourhood watch of *Political Justice*, if the universal atmosphere of spying and informing, encouraged by the establishment in the 1790s, is deemed by him to be so inimical to liberty and happiness? And how are we to read the

³² Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Anne Henry Ehrenpreis (1818; London: Penguin, 1985), 199-200.

³³ *Northanger Abbey* is set during the 1790s, when Ann Radcliffe was at the height of her popularity and when national hysteria imagined such scenarios as “a mob of three thousand men assembling in St. George’s Fields; the Bank attacked, the Tower threatened, the streets of London flowing with blood”. Miranda Burgess has argued that Tilney’s speech on neighbourhoods of “voluntary spies” refers, not to the informer system of the 1790s, but to an idealised reading public, engaged in the consumption of just such enlightened texts as Austen’s own. Miranda Burgess, *British Fiction and the Production of Social Order*, 175. A double reading of Tilney’s speech is of course possible, but I would choose to emphasise the speech as an obvious reference to the immediate political context of counter-revolutionary espionage.

³⁴ In addition to government-operated spy networks, conservative associations offered their own rewards for information on radical activity. See William Godwin, *Letter to the Editors of the Morning Chronicle*, 1st February 1793, cited in William Godwin, *Uncollected Writings* (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1968), 113, 114, 121. Cf. Edmund Burke argued that penal legislation in Ireland compromised paternal authority within the family and rendered “the very servant who waits behind your chair the arbiter of your life and fortune”, cited in Ian Harris’s introduction to Edmund Burke’s *Tracts Relating to the Popery Laws* (1765), in *Edmund Burke: Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, 93.

unsanctioned espionage of Godwin's literary servant, composed during the same period as his letters denouncing footmen spies?

Citizens who assume the right to watch, and to correct, the behaviour of their neighbours constitute Godwin's antidote to government. And yet he admits that such a system of national control would only ever function effectively once subservience to social superiors has been abolished. For Godwin, the presence, or lack, of obedience to higher authorities, external to the self, still functions as the instructive difference between his own "ingenuous censor" and the activities of Caleb on the one hand, and government informants on the other. In *Political Justice* he writes:

Inexperience and zeal would prompt me to restrain my neighbour whenever he is acting wrong, and, by penalties and inconveniences designedly interposed, to cure him of his errors. But reason evinces the folly of this proceeding, and teaches me that, if he be not accustomed to depend upon the energies of intellect, he will never rise to the dignity of a rational being. As long as man is held in the trammels of obedience, and habituated to look to some foreign guidance for the direction of his conduct, his understanding and the vigour of his mind will sleep. ... I must teach him ... to bow to no authority, to examine the principles he entertains, and render to his mind the reason for his conduct.³⁵

The problem with government informants is that they fail to act independently; they remain trapped in the "trammels of obedience", and so lack the sincerity of intention which ensures that the observations of the "ingenuous censor" remain free from political contamination. Within the pages of *Caleb Williams*, both kinds of spying, spying as an insidious evil and spying as a social ideal, are counterposed.

There are two kinds of servant gaze in the novel: the gaze of those servants who act as the instruments of their masters' vengeance; and the gaze of those servants who struggle against the binary relation which designates them as social subordinates. Those servants who watch young Hawkins break the lock on the barrier between his farm and the road, erected by Tyrrel, and who testify against him during his trial under the infamous Black Act, fail to question their own servitude. Consequently they are contaminated by the disease of obedience, which is ruinous to moral character. When Barnes unthinkingly comes to arrest Emily for debt on the orders of his master, we are told that he "had been for several years the instrument of Mr. Tyrrel's injustice. His mind was hardened by use, and he could without remorse officiate as the spectator, or even as the author and director of a scene of vulgar distress" (81). A gaze analogous to that employed by Godwin's idealised neighbourhood watch, by contrast, is only

³⁵ William Godwin, *Political Justice*, 692.

exercised in the novel by those servants who manage to question the authority of their social superiors. After the death of Emily, Tyrrel's servants are transformed into the small-scale, immediate, censoring moral co-operative of the philosophical treatise. Mrs. Hammond threatens her master with exposure: "I will proclaim you to the whole world, and you will be obliged to fly the very face of a human creature!" (91), while his remaining servants accord with her in their open detestation of their master's actions:

The idea irresistibly excited in every spectator of the scene was that of regarding Mr. Tyrrel as the most diabolical wretch that had ever dishonoured the human form. The very attendants upon this house of oppression, for the scene was acted upon too public a stage not to be generally understood, expressed their astonishment and disgust at his unparalleled cruelty. (89)

More than any other servant in the novel, of course, it is Caleb who refuses to conform to his inferior position as Falkland's secretary, and who transgresses against the dictates of his marginal class position to the extent of taking his master to court, and ultimately winning his case. Caleb's gaze is therefore guaranteed as a conduit to moral truth.

As Robespierre suggested when he posited surveillance as an activity worthy of the liberated, to "surveil" those who are positioned above us in the social hierarchy is a radically empowering act. In *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s*, Angela Keane links Robespierre's deployment of politicised surveillance with the discourse of sensibility when she writes: "From Robespierre's accession, the ideal of social transparency—both a sentimental and early revolutionary ideal—becomes synonymous with the scrutinising gaze of the faction".³⁶ Both surveillance and sensibility are realised in the act of watching others. The sympathetic exchange at the heart of sensibility's affect occurs between a suffering subject and an observer of that subject. Under the workings of an engaged sensibility, the observer is able to enter vicariously into the sufferer's psychological state, and to sympathise with him. This is not only intensely pleasurable: as Joanna Baillie reminds us: "To lift up the roof of his dungeon ... and to look upon a criminal the night before he suffers, in his still hours of privacy ... would present an object to the mind of every person ... more powerfully attractive than almost any other".³⁷ It also works to fix the observer and the observed in a power relation which is heavily weighted on the observer's side. In *Caleb Williams*, the empowerment attendant on surveillance, and the empowerment attendant upon exercising sensibility on a higher-class social 'other', are conflated.

³⁶ Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s*, 65.

³⁷ Joanna Baillie, *A Series of Plays* (1798; Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1990), 6-7.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith confounds pre-existing models of sensibility, (as delineated in the works of Shaftesbury and Hume), by emphasising the unbridgeable distance between the suffering subject and the observer. In contrast to sympathy operating as a “natural passion”, which bridges difference by unifying people uncontrollably, the natural emotional state of Smith’s observer is always one of cold detachment: he is by turns either “indifferent” or “impartial”.³⁸ Distance between the observer and the suffering observed is then reinforced by Smith’s assertion that: “[Our senses] never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are [the sufferer’s] sensations”.³⁹ Adam Smith re-formulates sympathy as a fixed and unequal exchange between ‘spectator’ and ‘agent’, replacing its earlier definition as a volatile, uncontainable natural impulse that could potentially overcome social difference. “Sympathy, for Smith, operates only in the space of this distinction [between ‘spectator’ and ‘agent’], only according to the stability of two positions which are, of course, neither equivalent nor opposite, for the ‘spectator’ must always ‘know’ more than the ‘agent’”.⁴⁰

Whilst the most likely candidates for the role of suffering subject in the sympathetic binary remain members of Britain’s impoverished classes, Smith suggests that the observer is far more likely to hail from the middle- or upper ranks. “The amiable virtue of humanity”, he insists, “requires, surely, a sensibility much beyond what is possessed by the rude vulgar of mankind.”⁴¹ As Andrew McCann puts it, “[t]he conduit of sympathetic identification ran one way”.⁴² The discourse of sensibility tended to assume that the lower orders themselves were immune from its elevated effects. (Thomas Monroe was not alone in parodying such an assumption when he wrote: “no man should be permitted to moisten a white handkerchief at the *ohs* and *ahs* of a modern tragedy, unless he possessed an estate of seven hundred a year”.⁴³) But sensibility could also be used to cement class division. G. J. Barker-Benfield sees in the kind of sensibility frequently described in sentimental fiction: “the fantasy of class harmony—even ‘a feast of love’—in which hierarchy is fixed and accepted by the lower classes with joy”.⁴⁴ Monika Fludernik concurs in this appraisal. She analyses how “the sympathetic mutuality of friendship is used in Adam Smith to uphold social norms.

³⁸ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759; New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), 52, 97.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁴⁰ John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 44.

⁴¹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 28.

⁴² Andrew McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s*, 44.

⁴³ Thomas Monroe, *Olla Podrida*, 15th June 1787, cited in Janet Todd, *Sensibility: an Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986), 13.

⁴⁴ G. J. Barker-Benfield, “Sensibility”, in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, 111.

The interanimate discourse of soul with soul in the dialectics of the gaze reflects ideological constraints and allows for the confirmation of social hierarchy rather than democratic equality between those linked in sympathetic exchange".⁴⁵

Caleb destabilises this prevalent model of conservative sensibility in three important ways. Like Monimia in *The Old Manor House*, Caleb is himself highly sensitive, confounding the common assertion that the bodies of the lower orders were not as well equipped for finer feeling as their middle- and upper-class counterparts. While Falkland is frequently described as a man of "excessive sensibility" (121), Caleb is also a character whose "passions" are "deeply engaged" (126) from the novel's opening lines. As Terry Eagleton has written in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, a new kind of human subject, "sensitive, passionate, individualist", poses "an ideological challenge to the ruling order";⁴⁶ and this is especially true of sensitive, passionate and individualistic lower-class subjects.

More catastrophically for the ruling order, however, Caleb also assumes Smith's position of the detached observer, presuming to interpret the signs of suffering in his aristocratic master as evidence of criminal guilt. Crucially, Caleb cannot be read in turn by Falkland. Judith Frank has explored the sense of anxiety present in Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) over the "potentially subversive physical illegibility of servants", which coexists at the same time as their disturbing ability to "parody sentimental affect".⁴⁷ In *Caleb Williams*, this "potentially subversive illegibility of servants" is developed into a crisis severe enough to threaten the hegemonic powers of the aristocracy. By aligning the physical illegibility of his servant with that servant's own assumption of interpretative authority, Godwin lays bare the revolutionary effects of sensibility, as present within, and exercised upon, the wrong bodies. Sterne merely hints at such displacement; Godwin develops it into the mainstay of his tale.

Even for contemporaries, sensibility was a notoriously amorphous discourse. A writer for the *Universal Magazine* in 1790 demanded: "Sensibility!—What is it?" reminding us, as Ann Van Jessie has pointed out, that the problem of definition is coextensive with the idea of sensibility itself, and not just a problem of modern criticism.⁴⁸ Chris Jones delineates the way in which, by the 1790s, when sensibility was intensively politicised by both camps, it had become an umbrella term for a broad range of social concerns, testifying to its protean character:

⁴⁵ Monika Fludernik, "Spectacle, Theatre, and Sympathy in *Caleb Williams*", in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 14:1 (2001), 28.

⁴⁶ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 27.

⁴⁷ Judith Frank, *Common Ground*, 77, 12.

⁴⁸ Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: the Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 2.

The debates of the 1790s were characterised by a politicising of issues raised within the school of sensibility to the extent that one's stand on matters such as the conduct of the private affections, charity, education, sympathy, genius, honour, and even the use of reason, became political statements, aligned with conservative or radical ideologies.⁴⁹

The third way in which Caleb destabilises the conservative model of sensibility is in the *variety* of sensibility which he chooses to deploy in his battle against Falkland. For Caleb appropriates a sensibility that is closely predicated on scientific investigation—a model of sympathetic exchange explicitly allied to social control. In reading his master's physiognomy for a betrayal of guilt, Caleb inverts the use of sensibility as a corollary to scientific experimentation on the socially disenfranchised, and in so doing explodes the master-servant relation at the heart of Falkland's household and at the heart of the existing socio-political regime.

According to Henry Home, “the eye is the best avenue to the heart”,⁵⁰ and we have already seen how surveillance and sympathy both privilege the powers of an “impartial spectator”. But for scientists also, observation is a crucial component in empirical experimentation. Francis Bacon admitted nothing “but on the faith of eyes”,⁵¹ and Ann Jessie Van Sant informs us how the discourses of science and sensibility were conflated by the emphasis placed on gazing-on-suffering common to both. “[B]ecause a suffering sensibility is an invitation to investigative observation”, she writes, “as well as to sympathetic engagement, it often creates a tension between curiosity and pity.”⁵² And because curiosity fuels experimentation, “pathetic and investigative modes of observation ... come together in the idea of sensibility”.⁵³ When, mid-century, Britain's great philanthropic hospitals were founded, this tension between curiosity and pity lay at the heart of middle- and upper-class responses to objects of charity such as prostitutes and foundlings. Van Sant argues how these lower-order recipients of philanthropy were simultaneously displayed in institutions as both pathetic objects, and as material for scientific experimentation.⁵⁴ By the 1790s, this socially conservative model of sensibility as a means to lower-order social control has been neatly inverted. For it is precisely a tension between “curiosity” and “pity” which informs Caleb's scrutiny of his master; and it is precisely as both pathetic subject, and as material for scientific experiment, that Falkland presents himself to Caleb's penetrating eye.

⁴⁹ Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, 13.

⁵⁰ Cited in Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel*, 29.

⁵¹ Cited in *ibid*, 29.

⁵² *Ibid*, xii.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 43.

Caleb's own passionate nature, his self-confident assumption of the role of Falkland's interpreter, and his scientific interest in his master's pain, all ensure that his appropriation and deployment of sentimental discourse constitutes the novel's revolutionary moment. There are three key phases to this revolutionary moment. Using central characteristics of the prisoner passage in Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) as my paradigm, I define these three key phases as the creation of a subject/text, the use of the gaze to penetrate the subject/text, and a sympathetic communion between onlooker and subject/text. All three are then turned against Caleb in the counter-revolutionary movement of the novel, in which Caleb is imprisoned and persecuted by Falkland for daring to investigate his master's past.

The spectacle of the imaginary prisoner is perhaps the most famous passage in Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*. Inspired by the plaintive cry of the caged starling, 'I can't get out', Yorick, giving "full scope" to his "imagination", begins to figure to himself "the miseries of confinement":

I was going to begin with the millions of my fellow-creatures born to no inheritance but slavery; but finding, however affecting the picture was, that I could not bring it near me, and that the multitude of sad groups in it did but distract me—

—I took a single captive, and having first shut him up in his dungeon, then looked through the twilight of his grated door to take his picture.

I beheld his body half wasted away with long expectation and confinement, and felt what kind of sickness of the heart it was which arises from hope deferred. Upon looking nearer I saw him pale and feverish: in thirty years the western breeze had not once fanned his blood—he had seen no sun, no moon in all that time—nor had the voice of friend or kinsman breathed through the lattice—his children —

—But here my heart began to bleed—and I was forced to go on with another part of the portrait.

... As I darkened the little light he had, he lifted up a hopeless eye towards the door, then cast it down, shook his head, and went on with his work of affliction. I heard his chains upon his legs, as he turned his body to lay his little stick upon the bundle—He gave a deep sigh—I saw the iron enter his soul—I burst into tears—⁵⁵

This stylised dumb show of grief by the prisoner, conducted in a series of feeble physical gestures, the lifting of a "hopeless eye", a "deep sigh", fixes his helplessness before the all-powerful gaze of the spectator, who even adds to the captive's misery by darkening "the little light he had". Sensibility has degenerated here into a sadistic,

⁵⁴ Ibid, 31-36.

⁵⁵ Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*, ed. Graham Petrie (1768; London: Penguin, 1986), 97-8.

eroticised, unequal exchange, with the eye of the observer seeking to penetrate the prisoner ever more deeply. Quickly passing over the paleness of the countenance, the insistent curiosity of the gaze is only assuaged when it witnesses the “iron enter his soul”. Sentimental communion occurs in this passage in three stages: the creation of the subject upon which sensibility is to be exercised, (“I took a single captive”); the penetration of that subject by the spectator’s gaze, (“I beheld his body half wasted away”, “upon looking nearer I saw him pale and feverish”, “I saw the iron enter his soul”); and a climax of sympathetic passion that is predicated on a strong disparity in the power relation between observer and observed, (“I saw the iron enter his soul —I burst into tears”.)

The applicability of this passage to Caleb’s treatment of Falkland might be disputed on the grounds that Yorick’s prisoner is essentially a fantasy, made to disappear as instantly as he is conjured up, whereas Caleb’s sympathetic communion with his actual master bears very real consequences for both. Nevertheless, if we return to Adam Smith’s formulation of sympathetic exchange based on imagination: “Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations”,⁵⁶ we can see the degree to which the imagination, or fantasy, plays a crucial role in *all* sympathetic exchange. Because the sufferings of others can never actually be known, we must invent them in order to experience them vicariously for ourselves; and in *Caleb Williams*, there is evidence to suggest that Falkland is, at times, as much a product of Caleb’s own imagination as Yorick’s prisoner is of his. Applying the three stages of sentimental communion, outlined above, to Caleb’s treatment of Falkland, we see sensibility at work in *Caleb Williams* as a similarly cruel and eroticised force, at once empowering those who apply it and disempowering those upon whom it is exercised.

Caleb is initially delighted when he enters the service of Falkland, as he sees in his master the ideal subject upon whom he can practice his ingenuity. Falkland represents for Caleb his first “practical acquaintance with men” (5), and Caleb contrasts the legibility of Falkland’s face with the illegibility, and therefore unimportance, of the tenants with whom he has been surrounded in his earlier life:

I found Mr. Falkland a man of small stature, with an extreme delicacy of form and appearance. In place of the hard-favoured and inflexible visages I had been accustomed to observe, every muscle

⁵⁶ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 3-4.

and petty line of his countenance seemed to be in an inconceivable degree pregnant with meaning. (5)

Legibility of countenance operates in the novel as an over-played authorial device, a privileging tactic intended to alert the reader to the merit of characters and the degree to which they are worthy of special attention. It is significant that whilst Emily has survived smallpox, the disease has not disfigured her face “enough to destroy its expression” (39), while the complexion of Grimes, Tyrrel’s instrument of vengeance, is “scarcely human, his features were coarse, and strangely discordant and disjointed from each other” (47). By contrast, Caleb’s worthiest fellow-inmate in prison (also innocent of the crime of which he has been accused) has “a most engaging physiognomy” (179). Falkland’s “inconceivable” legibility of countenance establishes him immediately as the primary body to be read, according to the mechanisms of sentimental discourse, by Caleb’s penetrating eye.

Caleb makes several references to the fact that, until he meets Falkland, his mind has been exercised almost exclusively by books. His self-introduction is dominated by the effect of reading on the development of his character: study has elevated him to a position of intellectual eminence which his “condition in life afforded [little] room to expect” (4). In the context of the 1790s debate over the subversive effects of increased working-class literacy, Caleb’s transgressive self-confidence, fostered by extensive reading, attests to literacy’s dangerously transformative effects. But Caleb is not only so threatening to the existing class structure because of the *amount* of literature he has consumed; the *manner* in which he has read is even more responsible for his spectacular disruption of social norms. In *The Old Manor House*, both literacy and sensibility exist in order to distinguish Monimia from the rest of the Hall’s domestics as uniquely worthy of inheritance. But they are interconnected in no other way. In *Caleb Williams*, literacy and sensibility conjoin.

If Caleb’s application of sensibility is conflated with scientific investigation, the spirit of empirical inquiry also informs his manner of reading texts. During his self-introduction, he informs his readers that his dominant trait of “curiosity” “gave me my mechanical turn; I was desirous of tracing the variety of effects which might be produced from given causes. It was this that made me a sort of natural philosopher” (4). Insatiable curiosity to acquaint himself “with the solutions that had been invented for the phenomena of the universe ... produced in me an invincible attachment to books of narrative and romance” (4). Caleb reads, in other words, as a self-confessed scientist, and it is this avid curiosity, coupled with objectivity, which equips him with the appropriate skills to discover the secret of his master’s past. Just as the servant’s appropriation of a scientific variant of sensibility radicalises sympathy, the same

servant's scientific manner of reading also helps to bring about the novel's cataclysm. In Godwin's novel, when Caleb switches his reading skills from books to his master's physiognomy, domestic chaos ensues. The skills of reading are easily transferable to an inter-personal context:

In early life my mind had been much engrossed by reading and reflection. My intercourse with my fellow mortals was occasional and short. But in my new residence I was excited by every motive of interest and novelty to study my master's character, and I found in it an ample field for speculation and conjecture. (6)

Reading books and reading the body are conflated, and this double application of reading emphasises Caleb's treatment of Falkland *as text*. Caleb's literacy qualifies him to work as Falkland's secretary, and we soon witness him appropriately sequestered in the library and surrounded by books, mirroring Falkland's investigation into the worthiness of authors with his own investigation into the worthiness of Falkland's mind. The letters Caleb is set to copy:

consisted of an analytical survey of the plans of different authors, and conjectural speculations upon hints they afforded, tending either to the detection of their errors or the carrying forward their discoveries. All of them bore powerful marks of a profound and elegant mind, well stored with literature, and possessed of an uncommon share of activity and discrimination. (6)

The texts of Falkland's letters on authors blur into the text of Falkland himself, as Caleb exercises his own "activity" and "discrimination" upon his favourite textual subject. Like the solitary captive of Yorick's imagination, however, there is also the attendant suggestion that the text that is Falkland, rather than pre-existing, ready for study, is actively moulded by Caleb into his own preferred form.

A curious authorial tension develops in the novel when we reach the flashback to Falkland's former life. Ostensibly, the flashback story is Mr. Collins' version of events, but Caleb soon asserts himself over the steward as Falkland's rightful historian:

I shall interweave with Mr. Collins's story various information which I afterwards received from other quarters, that I may give all perspicuity to the series of events. To avoid confusion in my narrative, I shall drop the person of Collins, and assume to be myself the historian of our patron. To the reader it may appear at first sight as if this detail of the preceding life of Mr. Falkland were foreign to my history. Alas, I know from bitter experience that it is otherwise. (9-10)

Here we see Caleb assuming textual control over Falkland. Not only does Caleb attempt to interpret the book that is Falkland, he also attempts to write it, and he attempts to write it in terms which accord precisely with his own awful downfall, as it is about to unfold in his memoirs. Caleb instructs his readers to ignore initial appearances, and be alert to possible correspondences between Falkland's ensuing history and Caleb's own tragic destiny. Falkland is appropriated here by Caleb as a textual device, designed to prepare the way for his own autobiography by introducing a series of key tragic associations to the reader's mind, such as the worship of reputation and the persecution of innocents who threaten it. The potentially fictive nature of Falkland's story, as related by his secretary, is underscored by Caleb's use of theatrical vocabulary: "I go on with my tale. I go on to relate those incidents in which my own fate was so mysteriously involved. I lift the curtain, and bring forward the last act of the tragedy" (79). Caleb lifts the curtain on Falkland as Yorick lifts the curtain on his solitary prisoner.

At the end of the flashback section, Caleb abruptly relinquishes textual control of Falkland's history and surprisingly praises Collins as an ideal narrator: "I shall endeavour to state the remainder of this narrative in the words of Mr. Collins. The reader has already had occasion to perceive that Mr. Collins was a man of no vulgar order; and his reflections on this subject were uncommonly judicious" (97). He even distinguishes the remainder of the history from his own version by enclosing Collins' words in speech marks. This surrender of authorial control distances Caleb from the conclusion of the story, which Collins and the rest of the world have accepted as true, namely that Falkland is innocent of the murder of which he has been accused. Before this conclusion, Caleb's domineering presence can be felt throughout, highlighting potential connections between this story and his own, and striving to make Falkland "completely understood" as his primary subject of inquiry:

Mr Falkland is the principal agent in my history; and Mr. Falkland, in the autumn and decay of his vigour such as I found him, cannot be completely understood without a knowledge of his previous character as it was in all the gloss of youth, yet unassailed by adversity, and unbroken in upon by anguish and remorse. (11)

Having "taken a single captive", in his creation of Falkland as subject/text, Caleb proceeds to shut him up in his cell by emphasising his intense isolation. Falkland's "mode of living", we are told, "was in the utmost degree recluse and solitary" (6). None of the other servants have access to Falkland, except during occasions specified for business: "With respect to the domestics in general, they saw but little of their master ... but at stated seasons and for a very short interval" (7). E. P.

Thompson has famously designated a certain theatricality of style as the means by which the genteel and the aristocratic maintained the distance between themselves and the people in the eighteenth century.⁵⁷ In *Caleb Williams*, we see this manner of studied detachment working to isolate Falkland from the rest of the household. The “stateliness of his carriage” and “the reserve of his temper” (6) are made “the inheritance of the great, and the instrument by which the distance between themselves and their inferiors was maintained” (5). Falkland’s isolation is also an important precondition for both sentimental scrutiny and for scientific experimentation. Yorick, unable to feel pity for the slaves in throngs whom he fails to “bring” “near” him, instead picks out a “single captive” and locks him up to study/sympathise with him. The isolated Falkland is now similarly positioned to enable Caleb to move in and “take his picture”.

Having heard Falkland’s history in full, and unprepared to accept the unanimous verdict of Falkland’s innocence, Caleb determines to spy on Falkland, to “watch him without remission”, to “trace the mazes of his thought” (126). This decision has an instant effect on Caleb’s body, for he is suddenly overwhelmed with ambiguous physical sensations that are indistinguishable from sexual arousal. Recalling Yorick’s accounts of supposedly ‘pure’ sensibility elicited by his amorous encounters with chambermaids and shop girls across France, Caleb describes an intense physiological reaction induced by his decision to flaunt an engrained social taboo:

The instant I had chosen this employment for myself, I found a strange sort of pleasure in it. To do what is forbidden always has its charms. ... To be a spy upon Mr. Falkland! That there was danger in the employment served to give an alluring pungency to the choice. I remembered the stern reprimand I had received, and his terrible looks; and the recollection gave a kind of tingling sensation, not altogether unallied to enjoyment (107-108).

His voyeurism provokes a thrilling physical sensation which also mirrors Yorick’s own pleasurable physical response to distressing visual stimuli. Caleb’s resolution violates Falkland’s desire that he should never be spied upon (8), and begins to unravel the bonds of deference that maintain Caleb in his inferior position.

His subject is pleasingly amenable to penetration. Mr Falkland’s “countenance was habitually animated and expressive much beyond that of any other man I have seen. The curiosity, which ... constituted my ruling passion, stimulated me to make it my perpetual study” (118). The section of the novel in which Caleb attempts

⁵⁷ “We have here a studied and elaborate hegemonic style, a theatrical role in which the rich were schooled in infancy and which they maintained until death. And if we speak of it as theatre, it is not to diminish its importance”, E. P. Thompson, “Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture”, in *Journal of Social History*, 7:4 (1974), 389.

to discover Falkland's guilt is filled with descriptions of the latter's facial expressions, the agitation of his muscles, the fluctuating colours of his skin: "the blood forsook at once the *transparent* complexion of Mr. Falkland" (112, my italics). Caleb quickly becomes an adept interpreter of his master's guilt-ridden state of mind: "Mr Falkland's complexion turned from red to pale, and from pale to red. I perfectly understood his feelings" (126).

Like a doctor of the soul, Caleb describes Falkland as suffering the symptoms of a moral disease: "The distemper which afflicted him with incessant gloom, had its paroxysms. ... He would strike his forehead, his brows became knit, his features distorted, and his teeth ground one against the other. When he felt the approach of these symptoms, he would suddenly rise, and ... hasten into a solitude upon which no person dared to intrude" (7). Ann Jessie Van Sant links invasive scientific experimentation with the provocation of symptoms of emotional sensibility, in that both rely on the application of pain to elicit the desired physical response. One of the central problems in the definition of sensibility is that it is simultaneously psychological and physiological. The physician Robert Whytt, for example, during the "almost numberless experiments"⁵⁸ which he conducted on animals in order to study their physiological sensibility, concluded that the physical heart is the most sensitive organ in the body, as subject to the vibrations of finer feeling as the emotional heart so frequently "wounded" in sentimental discourse.⁵⁹ Whytt's descriptions of his experiments— "The muscles of a live frog, when laid bare and pricked with a needle, are strongly convulsed. —A solution of white vitriol no sooner touches the internal surface of the stomach, than this bowel is brought into convulsive contractions"⁶⁰—horrified some of his more feeling contemporaries, including Tobias Smollett, who protested against the excessive cruelty attendant upon Whytt's provocation of physiological sensibility.⁶¹ Psychological sensibility is also subject to the provocation of telltale "symptoms" on the outer surface of the body, such as tears, blushes, paleness, and trembling; and this provocation may be equally as grounded in cruelty.⁶² As though applying a series of electric shocks to

⁵⁸ Robert Whytt, *An Essay on the Vital and Other Involuntary Motions of Animals* (Edinburgh, 1751), 8.

⁵⁹ Robert Whytt, "[A]lthough the outer surface of the heart ... has no great degree of sensibility, it will not follow, that the internal surface, where the natural *stimuli exciting* [its] motions upon [it] is not endowed with a more exquisite feeling", cited in Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel*, 51.

⁶⁰ Robert Whytt, *An Essay on the Vital and Other Involuntary Motions of Animals*, 16.

⁶¹ Aileen Douglas, *Uneasy Sensations: Smollett and the Body* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 24-25.

⁶² Adam Smith: "Some people faint and grow sick at the sight of a chirurgical operation; and that bodily pain which is occasioned by tearing the flesh, seems, in them, to excite the most excessive sympathy. We conceive in a much more lively and distinct manner the pain which proceeds from an external cause, than we do that which arises from an internal disorder", *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 37.

Falkland's "secret wound" (109), Caleb provokes his master into betraying himself by steering conversation deliberately into the twin themes of reputation and murder, as in their discussion of the moral stature of Alexander the Great. Caleb views his behaviour as inherently scientific. Alone, Caleb compares his "observations" and studies the "inferences" behind Falkland's reactions (109), invariably resolving to repeat "the experiment" (108).

If Falkland proves a suitably permeable subject for Caleb, Caleb ensures that he is not so easily legible in his turn. The innocence that is stressed prior to his decision to turn spy, now becomes a seeming innocence, his want of design an "apparent want of design" (108). Falkland is tricked into developing a degree of intimacy with Caleb he has forbidden to everyone else, and Caleb likens his master's relaxed situation to that of a fish, playing "with the bait employed to entrap him" (109). Proximity to Falkland is the pre-condition for Caleb's experimentation, allowing him to inflict the painful reminders of Falkland's history that he uses to provoke a guilty response. Whenever he does so, Falkland suspects, but can never establish, the true nature of Caleb's motivation. Falkland's gaze is generally wandering (5). When he fixes his eye on Caleb, his gaze cannot penetrate to Caleb's secret heart, as Caleb's gaze is penetrating to his. He regards Caleb "with wistful earnestness, as questioning what was the degree of information [he] possessed, and how it was obtained" (109); or throws him "a penetrating look as if he would see [his] very soul" (113). But Caleb remains a closed book. His "apparent want of design" works to deflect Falkland's eye. In this section of the novel, leading up to the trial scene for murder, at which Falkland is forced to officiate as Justice of the Peace, the battle between Caleb and Falkland to penetrate each other is sexualised on Caleb's side. Caleb remarks: "The farther I advanced, the more the sensation was irresistible. I seemed to myself perpetually upon the brink of being countermined, and perpetually roused to guard my designs. The more impenetrable Mr. Falkland was determined to be, the more uncontrollable was my curiosity" (108). Elsewhere Caleb speaks of the "gratification" of his "insatiable desire of satisfaction" (122). We have already encountered eroticism in the sentimental voyeurism of Yorick, whose response to the single captive is analogous to sexual climax: "He gave a deep sigh—I saw the iron enter his soul—I burst into tears—". Caleb's experience of exciting physical sensation is predicated on the same power disparity that exists between Yorick and his prisoner, but in this case the eroticism is charged with the added frisson of de-stabilising the master-servant relation. It is as though Yorick's captive, "born to ... slavery", were suddenly reversing the gaze.

The consummation of Caleb's eroticised curiosity comes at the scene of the trial of the man who has been accused of murder, and whose case accords closely with

the rash passion of Falkland's own crime. Obviously indebted to Hamlet's strategy for catching "the conscience" of Claudius, Caleb vows to scrutinise Falkland's countenance during this trial for a betrayal of guilt, appropriating the forms of the court for his own trial of the presiding judge. The battle between Falkland and Caleb has become so essentially personal that nobody else in the room, crowded with servants and witnesses, can see what they see, or understand their charged visual communication: "Not one of them saw it in the light that I did" (130). Typically for sentimental prose fiction, Caleb and Falkland have already learned to address each other in non-verbal terms: "I shall continue to speak in my narrative of the silent, as well as the articulate part of the intercourse between us" (118). In the trial scene this silent visual intercourse is intensified: "It happened in this, as in some preceding instances; we exchanged a silent look by which we told volumes to each other" (126). Falkland's body ends, invariably, by betraying him as he cries: "while his muscles preserved an inflexible steadiness, tears of anguish roll[ed] down his cheeks" (129); and his "incessant observer", Caleb, witnesses the body's revelation of guilt with a physical "revolution" of his own. He escapes to the "most secret paths of the garden" to exclaim his joy:

While I thus proceeded with hasty steps along the most secret paths of the garden, and from time to time gave vent to the tumult of my thoughts in involuntary exclamations, I felt as if my animal system had undergone a total revolution. My blood boiled within me. I was conscious to a kind of rapture for which I could not account. I was solemn, yet full of rapid emotion, burning with indignation and energy. In the very tempest and hurricane of the passions, I seemed to enjoy the most soul-ravishing calm. I cannot better express the then state of my mind, than by saying, I was never so perfectly alive as at that moment. (129-130)

The achieved sentimental communion between observer and observed relies on a vicious power discrepancy, and Falkland balks at the power his servant has presumed to exercise. Falkland understands that the poisonous "magnetic sympathy" between himself and his servant, resulting in a "mutual" "confusion" (112) of telepathic amalgamation, has succeeded in emasculating him. Just prior to the trial, in another echo of Hamlet's rage at Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Falkland explodes: "Who gave you the right to be my confidant? ... Are my passions to be wound and unwound by an insolent domestic?" (118), but Caleb persists until he has forced Falkland's secret from him. In acknowledging that he has uncovered his master's guilt, Caleb's power over Falkland assumes its greatest form. This "total revolution" in his "animal system", this revolution of heightened sensibility, is also a social revolution because it is an inversion of dominance between master and servant. "Revolution" is always used in the novel, as

it is here, to denote intense physical sensation rather than the external revolution currently engulfing Europe. And yet this does not connote the severing of the subjective and the social, favoured by Godwin's psychological critics. Rather it reveals a privileging of the body, and the body's sensibility, as the potential locus for socio-political change.

Having pierced the countenance of his master and discovered his dreadful secret, Caleb passes his attention from Falkland's body to the crudely sexualised symbol of his trunk, which he attempts, in a fit of illogical passion, to force open. Falkland catches him before he can glimpse the contents, and this moment is the hinge upon which the counter-movement of Falkland's massive revenge against Caleb turns. The revolutionary period produced a predilection in authors to describe enormous change occurring rapidly, in a foreshortened temporal sequence. Thus we have the world changing for Burke during the October march to Versailles and the capture of the king and queen;⁶³ as well as the dramatic ruination of Rayland Hall while Orlando is away in America. Caleb's destiny is transformed in the second Falkland surprises him, wrench in hand: "But it was over now. One short minute had effected a reverse in my situation, the suddenness of which the history of man perhaps is unable to surpass" (133). And again: "This epoch was the crisis of my fate, dividing what may be called the offensive part, from the defensive" (133-134). The period of servant supremacy is dramatically terminated. The rest of the novel details the re-imposition of Falkland's gargantuan control as it develops national, even supernatural dimensions. The most striking aspect of Falkland's persecution of Caleb is the way in which it appropriates those very characteristics of sensibility deployed by the servant against the master to such stunning effect. The creation of a subject/text, the cruel penetration of that subject/text by an investigative gaze, and the heightened physical sensation of communion with an 'other', which is the telos of sensibility's dynamic, are all transmuted by Falkland and then mercilessly re-inflicted upon the renegade servant. And it is this re-appropriation of sensibility's forms, by the master, that develops into precisely the kind of modern social control associated by critics with Foucault's 'archaeology' of discipline.

If, in the flashback story, Caleb can be seen struggling to assume textual command of Falkland, Falkland's greatest weapon against Caleb is his ability to manipulate textual variations of his former servant's character. During Caleb's first trial as the accused, proceedings quickly degenerate into a verbal battle between himself and Falkland. The word of the servant is pitted against the word of the master, and the master inevitably wins. Falkland succeeds in getting Caleb convicted of a robbery he

⁶³ Seamus Deane, *Strange Country*, 7.

did not commit, and the first textual variant of Caleb, Caleb-as-thief, is born. As the novel proceeds, these textual variants develop in both their disparity to Caleb's actual character, and in their improved means of public dissemination. A handbill is published on Caleb's escape from prison, detailing the robbery "of property to a large amount" (223), which reaches the den of thieves where he is hiding and propels his eviction. Caleb's textual variant soon develops into a "notorious housebreaker", who quickly "makes talk for the whole county" (235). Caleb's most amplified, and widely circulated textual variant, however, is the potted criminal biography, sold nation-wide by street hawkers: "the most wonderful and surprising history, and miraculous adventures of Caleb Williams", "published by one of his majesty's most principal secretaries of state, offering a reward of one hundred guineas for apprehending him. All for the price of one halfpenny" (268-9). Like a deviant shadow, this textual creation of Caleb, initiated by Falkland, pursues our beleaguered hero throughout Britain, even into his Welsh retreat. By emphasising the servant's dereliction of social duty in stealing from a kind and compassionate master, the text occludes the possibility of Caleb forming satisfactory social relations, and is the basis of his expulsion from Laura's family as tutor to her children, a situation in which he has finally enjoyed happiness.

In remarkable contrast to Caleb's previous experience, the countenance of Falkland turns suddenly "impenetrable" (172) once the counter-revolution of the novel is underway. Falkland's eye proved ineffective in piercing Caleb's disguise as an innocent. In his persecution of Caleb, however, Falkland's gaze becomes omniscient, pursuing Caleb "in all [his] wanderings" (281) and piercing through all of Caleb's ingenious disguises. Caleb's resort to disguise naively presumes he can deflect the gaze of his patron and escape detection, as he did before: "why", he asks, confidently, "should I not be capable of eluding the most vigilant search?" (188) Encountering the servant of Falkland's friend, Mr. Forrester, on the road, Caleb remarks: "it was fortunate for me that my disguise was so complete, that the eye of Mr. Falkland itself could scarcely have penetrated it" (237). He is presently disabused of this fallacy. In his penultimate meeting with his master Falkland informs him: "You have taken no material step ... with which I have not been acquainted" (281). Caleb's disguises are accurately listed in the criminal biography: "[a]ll my disguises, previously to the last alarm ... were faithfully enumerated; and the public was warned to be upon their watch" (269), forcing Caleb to conclude that Falkland's eye can indeed "reach through all space" and "penetrate every concealment" (240).

Caleb's chosen "counterfeit character[s]" (256) are in turn criminalized and subject to the prosecution of the law. As a beggar, he is subject to anti-vagrancy laws. As an Irishman, he is arrested on the charge of having robbed "His Majesty's mail".

Admitting that he is innocent of the mail robbery, because he is not Irish, a justice of the peace still threatens Caleb with “hard labour as a vagrant upon the strength of [his] appearance” (244). As Caleb’s clothes are stripped, his skin (miraculously, considering what he’s been through) exhibits “all the sleekness of a gentleman” (243), echoing Smith’s confounding of romance in *The Old Manor House*, in which she ascribes to her servant heroine the delicacy of form of a romance heroine, without bestowing on her noble birth. For Caleb, sleekness of skin only renders him doubly suspicious. Such incidents are used by Godwin to criticise the institutionalisation of social prejudice in the law. The complacent assumption that any Irishman, however improbable a suspect, will do, is patently the basis for Caleb’s arrest (he is taller than eyewitness reports of the highwayman in question). The criminalisation of Caleb’s various disguises, however, also emphasises how thoroughly his persecutor has penetrated his created social layerings. Called into being in order to deflect the attention of the law, every manufactured variant of Caleb’s essential character ends by attracting the attention of that law and by threatening to reveal his true identity. Caleb cannot recreate himself and escape.

“In the peripheral ring [of the panopticon], one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen”.⁶⁴ The gaze of Falkland assumes panoptic proportions in that Caleb, aware that he is constantly being watched, cannot return the overseer’s gaze because he cannot locate it. According to Foucault, the gaze is an especially effective and efficient weapon of control because, once established as the disciplining force, it can be exercised by anyone, and because it is quickly internalised, negating the need for the overseer to be present at all.⁶⁵ In every face, Caleb sees the hidden eye of Falkland, pursuing him through the country: “In every human countenance I feared to find the countenance of an enemy. I shrunk from the vigilance of every human eye” (255).

The most debilitating consequence of this mass diffusion of the gaze against Caleb is that he can no longer partake in any form of human sociability. The exchange of silent looks between himself and Falkland, heavy with meaning, the sentimental ‘communion of souls’ conducive to such pleasure in the revolutionary first section of the novel, is forbidden. Falkland indicates the nature of Caleb’s punishment when he informs him after the trial scene: “You shall continue in my service, but can never share in my affection” (136). Hunted down by “a million of men, in arms against me” (270) Caleb avoids responding to the looks of others and becomes an unhappy recluse:

⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 202.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 202: “He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself”. See also *ibid*, 207.

I dared not open my heart to the best affections of our nature. I was shut up a deserted, solitary wretch in the midst of my species. I dared not look for the consolations of friendship; but, instead of seeking to identify myself with the joys and sorrows of others, and exchanging the delicious gifts of confidence and sympathy, was compelled to centre my thoughts and my vigilance in myself. (255-6)

Caleb may have been able to escape from the physical “Bastille” in which he has been incarcerated for theft, but he remains in prison to the end of the novel, watched by the gaze he cannot return, the object, rather than the perpetrator of, cruel scrutiny. In an echo of Yorick’s imaginary solitary captive, Caleb is made to feel “the iron of slavery grating against [his] soul” (182). And like lower-order objects of higher-class benevolence in the conservative formulation of sensibility discussed above, who merely elicit its effects without experiencing them for themselves, Caleb is similarly denied the thrilling sensations of sympathy at the novel’s close. After being forced to leave Wales, Caleb bitterly announces: “Sympathy, the magnetic virtue, the hidden essence of our life, was extinct” (308). Caleb is punished for appropriating the cruel, scientific variant of sensibility, and then inflicting it upon his social superior, by being denied access to sensibility in its most positive formulation. The phrase “delicious gifts of confidence and sympathy” returns us to the initial optimism of Shaftesbury and Hume, when the unifying capacities of sensibility were considered the crowning grace of a refined civilisation and an antidote to the rapacity of the Hobbesian pre-social individual. Caleb is outcast from this idealised milieu of human sociability, and is instead condemned to the terrifying condition of subjective isolation which the school of sentimental philosophy was invented to resist. Falkland’s revenge on Caleb for creating him as a subject/text, penetrating him as a subject text, and for daring to experience sympathetic communion with him as a subject/text, is hereby complete.

Godwin had encouraged readers of *Political Justice*, above all else, to exert “the energies of intellect”. The most effective way of being trained in examining the principles of individual conduct, with the express aim of “bow[ing] to no authority”, is by reading; Caleb’s scientific attitude to reading fulfils the Godwinian ideal. Writing on the composition of *Political Justice* after its publication, Godwin describes his intentions for the work as infinitely more ambitious than they may initially have appeared. He is not merely concerned with refuting bad laws:

The object is of much greater magnitude. It is to expose the evils which arise out of the present system of civilised society; and, having exposed them, to lead the enquiring reader to examine whether they are, or are not, as has commonly been supposed,

irremediable; in a word, to disengage the minds of men from prepossession, and launch them upon the sea of moral and political enquiry.⁶⁶

Via his extensive, carefully analytical reading, Caleb's mind has indeed been disengaged from the "prepossession" of reverencing his social superiors, and launched upon the sea of "moral and political enquiry" by presuming to scrutinize his master's moral character. Here, Godwin makes it clear he views this development in *Caleb Williams* as part of the wider political enlightenment of the populace being attempted in the 1790s. Just as Caleb and the servants of French revolutionary drama scrutinize the texts of their masters to radically destabilizing effect, the reader of *Political Justice* is invited to scrutinize this text for proof of the evils of institutional government.

Likewise in the preface to *Caleb Williams*, the reader is again encouraged to engage with the following text in a scientific spirit. The preface opens with the confident assertion that "[t]he following narrative is intended to answer a purpose more general and important than immediately appears upon the face of it" (1). Thus the reader is instructed to pierce through the superficiality of Caleb and his adventures in order to reach the weighty significance of "THINGS AS THEY ARE" (1). Godwin links an analytical method of reading, which is both a theme within the novel and the recommended style of consuming it, with the immediate political context of the 1790s, and with the moral imperative of the radical cause. Textual content, reading practice and radical political action are therefore conjoined.

This invitation to close textual examination is immediately followed with reference to things as they are in the political world, namely the current conflict between those who defend "the existing constitution of society" and those who seek "reformation and change" (1). This controversy is also a question of scrutiny, of a gaze sufficiently free of prejudice to pierce through to the actual nature of social and political control. The expression "things as they are" originated with Voltaire's tale, *L'Ingénu* (1767), which concerns a clever observer, brought up in seclusion from society, whose perception is undimmed by social conditioning.⁶⁷ This phrase, which became a kind of slogan of the radical camp,⁶⁸ seems first to have been taken up by Richard Price, in his *Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789), in which he announces approvingly: "A wise man ... will study to think of all things as they are, and not suffer any partial

⁶⁶ William Godwin, cited in Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, 181.

⁶⁷ Josie Dixon, "Revolutionary Ideals and Romantic Irony: The Godwinian Inheritance in Literature", in *Revolution and English Romanticism: Politics and Rhetoric*, edited by Keith Hanley and Raman Selden (Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 153.

⁶⁸ Cf. "We view man as he is", *The Constitution of the Society of the Friends of the People* (1792), cited in Gregory Claeys, *Thomas Paine*, 130.

affections to blind his understanding".⁶⁹ In Godwin's preface, the penetration of unprejudiced vision is implicitly contrasted with Burke's vindication of prejudice, and of ideological veils that cloak the brutal nature of government. Godwin thus links the activity of close reading to an exposé of existing political abuses. In the preface to *Caleb Williams*, Godwin proposes a model of writing, reading and subversive political action that unites all three in its emphasis on scrutiny as a revolutionary tool. Just as Caleb penetrates the veil of Falkland's reserve, the reader penetrates the veil of Caleb's adventures, and radicals penetrate the veils of political despotism. All three of these uses of scrutiny contain the possibility of shifting power into new, untested, potentially liberating formations.

The decade's most revolutionary novel did not remain uncontested for long. From 1795 to the end of the century, a flood of conservative or so-called "anti-Jacobin" fictions were published which explicitly derided William Godwin above all other radicals as the embodiment of revolutionary subversion and unparalleled wickedness. In 1801, Godwin expresses his bafflement at being thus singled out for conservative invective:

The cry spread like a general infection, and I have been told that not even a petty novel for boarding-school misses now ventures to aspire to favour, unless it contain some expressions of dislike and abhorrence to the new philosophy, and its chief (or shall I say its most voluminous?) English adherent.⁷⁰

The anti-Jacobins, as their very name suggests, were predominantly in answer-mode, reacting to the supposed outrages of the Jacobin supporters of the French Revolution within Britain by attempting to shore up patriotism and instil a nation-wide detestation for political reform. As respondents rather than initiators, they were used to stealing fire from the radical camp. The *Anti-Jacobin Review* admits in its first edition of 1797 that as no suitable original anti-Jacobin poetry was at hand, (perhaps poetry by its very nature was deemed inherently dangerous), the editors would satisfy themselves with parodies and satires of so-called Jacobin verse.⁷¹ Anti-Jacobins were similarly capable of stealing fire from their most vilified author, and of fitting central characteristics of Godwin's text to their own reactionary agenda.

⁶⁹ Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, (1789; Dublin, 1790), 8.

⁷⁰ William Godwin, *Thought Occasioned by the Perusal of Dr. Parr's Sermon* (1801), cited in *Uncollected Writings*, 310-311.

⁷¹ "We have not been able to find one good and true Poet, of sound principles and sober practice, upon whom we could rely for furnishing us with a handsome quantity of good and approved Verse—such Verse as our Readers might be expected to get by heart and to sing. ... In this difficulty, We have had no choice but ... to go to the only market where it is to be had good and ready made, that of the Jacobins—", *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, 20th November 1797, 1:32.

In my next chapter I will move on to detail the ways in which anti-Jacobin authors appropriate Godwin's extraordinary foregrounding of servitude, and then modify it to accord with their own conservative concerns. Godwin's surprisingly clever, resourceful, courageous and entirely self-motivated servant is replaced with servants of a fundamentally different character. Likewise Godwin's radical model of reading, by which the reader must scrutinise the various layers of a text in order to gain access to its meaning—a model designed to “disengage the minds of men from pre-possession, and launch them upon the sea of moral and political enquiry”—is also vociferously opposed. For anti-Jacobin authors were not content with containing their endorsement of authoritarian patriarchy to the level of plot. They extend their enthusiasm for social control to their endorsement of a strictly hierarchical relation between author and reader itself. By so doing, they indicate just how disturbed the established order was by Godwin's consistent attempts to render such a relation more fluid.

CHAPTER FOUR.

SETTING THE SERVANT FREE, LOCKING THE SERVANT UP: TERROR AND CONTAINMENT IN ANTI-JACOBIN FICTION.

If 1794 marked the publication of the decade's most politically unsettling novel, it was also a year of crippling setbacks to the reformist momentum in Britain. Although the Treason Trials resulted in acquittal by jury of all four defendants: secretary of the London Corresponding Society, Thomas Hardy; former lieutenant of Wilkes and L.C.S. activist, J. Horne Tooke; co-founder of the L.C.S. and editor of *The Tribune*, John Thelwall; and fellow novelist and friend of Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, the High Treason charge, in itself, indicated the daunting lengths to which the Government was prepared to go in order to counter radical activity. Infiltration of the London Corresponding Society by Government spies, a disheartened leadership, financial difficulties, and a further onslaught of repressive legislation targeting so-called Jacobin publications and publishing houses, ensured that the flourishing of British radicalism in the first half of the 1790s, such as it had been, became more scattered and clandestine by 1795.¹ It is unsurprising, therefore, that from 1794 onwards, in fiction as well as in politics, the impetus passed to the Conservative camp.²

From the mid-nineties, enthusiastic conservatives, mostly reticent until mid-decade, were stung into action by Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, and took up their pens in the production of anti-Jacobin novels with increasing fervency as the 1790s progressed. According to M.O. Grenby in his recent study of these fictions, as many as fifty conservative novels were published in Britain between 1791 and 1805, the vast majority after 1795.³ Until the end of the decade, British prose fiction was characterised by a derivative, highly politicised and inflexibly conservative model of novel production that brought the genre closer to the crudeness of political propaganda than it had ever been before.⁴ Even though critics had been quick to criticise *Caleb Williams*

¹ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 144-145. Pitt's repression had the immediate consequence of radicalising the L.C.S. yet further, though this did not last. "The collapse [of radical organisation] came at the end of 1796", *ibid*, 146, 182.

² Thomas Holcroft's *Hugh Trevor* (1794-97); Robert Bage's *Hermesprong; or, Man as He is Not* (1796); and Elizabeth Inchbald's *Nature and Art* (1796) were all yet to appear; as well as Mary Wollstonecraft's incomplete *Maria*, published posthumously by Godwin in 1798. Nevertheless, radical authors were increasingly disillusioned, demoralised and outnumbered as the decade wore on.

³ M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*, 1-5.

⁴ M. O. Grenby, in the main, seems to resist the idea that the anti-Jacobin novel functioned as political propaganda. His reasons are twofold: first, propaganda seeks to give its audience something they do not already possess, rather than to reinforce existing attitudes. Second, propaganda is self-contained, and is never an antidote to something else, (which anti-Jacobin

as political “dogmata” introduced to the world “in the captivating dress of fable”, the “dogmata” of anti-Jacobin fiction is far less disguised. A weak plot, crude caricature, and lengthy political asides about the evils of Jacobinism, or the glories of the British constitution, are typical ingredients in any anti-Jacobin novel. Anti-Jacobin authors were far more implicated in the charge of blurring ‘philosophy’ with fiction, than those authors they castigated upon these very grounds.

Most anti-Jacobin novels, at some stage in their unlikely narratives, assemble a crew of nefarious Jacobins, and Godwin, above all others, is consistently lampooned. In Isaac D’Israeli’s *Vaurien, or Sketches of the Times, Exhibiting Views of the Philosophies, Religions, Politics, Literature, and Manners of the Age* (1797) he is Mr. Subtile; in Elizabeth Hamilton’s *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), he is Mr. Myope; in Robert Bisset’s *Douglas; or, The Highlander* (1800), he is William Subtlewood; in George Walker’s *The Vagabond, a Novel* (1800) he is Stupeo, a philosopher so physically repulsive that the heroine of the tale, Laura, starts “with surprise at the sight of so shocking a being in human form”. At the end of his novel Walker expiates the demon Godwin by forcing him to undergo a live vivisection and then by burning him at the stake.⁵ After perusing a range of such novels, one could be forgiven for assuming that the *raison d’être* of anti-Jacobin fiction was to discredit William Godwin. Apart from his personal ubiquity in these texts, large sections of *Political Justice* are also frequently quoted, with incidents designed to render key tenets of Godwin’s political philosophy ridiculous.⁶ More so even than Paine, Godwin represents for the anti-Jacobins the essence of Jacobin evil; one senses that by striking Godwin down, anti-Jacobins felt confident that they were striking at the heart of the revolutionary threat, and rendering it impotent.

This focus on Godwin is initially rather surprising. Paine’s *Rights of Man*, if not his *Age of Reason*, were more radical than *Political Justice*; Paine’s publications certainly reached wider audiences than Godwin’s, a fact that ensured both Paine’s

fiction clearly was). *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*, 9, 21. I disagree with his definition of propaganda on both counts. Rather than providing its audience with something they do not already possess, propaganda is most effective where some degree of receptivity to its tenets has already been established. Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell concur in defining propaganda as an attempt to reinforce existing behavioural patterns. See *Propaganda and Persuasion* (1986; London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1999), 21. Furthermore, propaganda is clearly never produced in a vacuum and is always a response to a perceived threat: Jewish conspiracy, Communism, etc.

⁵ George Walker, *The Vagabond*, 137, 222.

⁶ In George Walker’s *Vagabond*, Frederic Fenton, in the face of a fire in which both his pregnant girlfriend and her father are trapped, pauses to consider whom he should save first. Both die. *Ibid.*, 32-33. This is an obvious satiric take on *Political Justice*, in which Godwin argues that if the archbishop of Cambrai and his chambermaid (later changed to his valet) were trapped in a

prosecution *in absentia* and Godwin's escape from arrest. Paine had been instrumental in the American Revolution and, until the Girondins lost control of the National Assembly to Robespierre, had enjoyed the title of honorary French Citizen,⁷ helping to draft the constitution of revolutionary France. Godwin, by contrast, had no such links to revolutionary organisations either at home or abroad. A gradualist, opposed to British working-class political association such as the London Corresponding Society, and dubious of the benefits of extending literacy amongst the lower orders,⁸ Godwin, in many ways, was a conservative radical.⁹ Bearing his reservations about lower-class political participation in mind, Godwin is a figure somewhat at odds with the bogeyman constructed by anti-Jacobin authors as the target of their blistering invective. Why was Godwin singled out, above all other British radicals, as the personification of the Jacobin menace?

In contrast to Thomas Paine, Godwin of course turned to prose fiction as a vehicle for diffusing the ideas of *Political Justice* amongst those members of the reading public "whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach"; and this appropriation of the novel form is an important factor in his subsequent demonisation. In a letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1797, a contributor signing himself "Eusebius" announces: "Of all reading, that of novels is the most frivolous, and frequently the most pernicious".¹⁰ In *Dorothea; or, a Ray of the New Light* (1801), the eponymous heroine of the novel is introduced to revolutionary philosophy by her French governess. Rather than peruse difficult philosophical treatises, (an arduous task for any female), access to radical ideas is instead granted by novel reading, which offers the central ideas of the New Philosophy in potted form:

[Dorothea] wept over the sublime ebullitions of Godwin's dear son, Caleb Williams; and was convinced ... that her mind, teeming with energy, ought no longer to repose under the clouds of common life. ... It is true, Dorothea did not rhapsodise with Rousseau, or reason with Voltaire, nor did the arch sceptic Hume make part of her

fire, it would be imperative for the archbishop to be saved instead of his servant, because his life is of more use to humanity. William Godwin, *Political Justice*, 169.

⁷ Bertrand Russell, "The Fate of Thomas Paine", in *Why I am Not a Christian* (1957; London: Unwin, 1987), 96.

⁸ Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s*, 59-61.

⁹ This is not to underestimate the radicalism of some of Godwin's doctrines as they were perceived at the time. Many of Godwin's ideas drew understandable fire from conservatives. His opposition to wedlock is one example, (played out in his private life by the fathering of a child with Wollstonecraft before they were married), and his controversial stance on this issue is tirelessly evoked by the anti-Jacobins. Amelia Opie, erstwhile friend of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, devotes a whole novel to exposing Godwin's anti-marriage stance as both ludicrously idealist and disastrous for women. See *Adeline Mowbray*, ed. Shelley King and John B. Pierce (1805; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Cited in Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s*, 135.

library, but she drew *her* knowledge from a fund more exciting, because less dry ...¹¹

Novels, long associated by the end of the century with women, as both readers and writers, and increasingly associated with the lower orders, as readers,¹² were an insidious medium for radical ideas because they were written “to the feelings”.¹³ They were therefore viewed as more seductive than straight philosophical texts, and could be dangerously politicising in the hands of their female, and/or lower-order consumers. Sweetmeats and pieces of fruit were wrapped in the *Rights of Man* and then freely distributed, sugaring the political pill—a fact which terrified the establishment and of which much was made during Paine’s trial.¹⁴ Similarly, in novels with politics at their core, the pleasure associated with novel reading, (the excitement engendered by narrative, the association on the part of the reader with the characters and their sufferings), was seen as a sweetening of radical doctrine, rendering it frighteningly easy to swallow. Robert Bisset in *Modern Literature* makes this point in relation, again, to *Caleb Williams*: “Subtle sophistry alone could hardly establish the inutility of criminal justice, but an affecting fable setting forth the punishment of innocence, and the escape of guilt, strongly interests the feelings”.¹⁵ In his preface to *The Vagabond*, Walker delineates the danger of radical philosophy appearing in novel form, and justifies his own venture into the morally dubious territory of prose fiction as an attempt to counter fire with fire. He describes himself as writing against “the prominent absurdities of many self-important reformers of mankind, who, having heated their imaginations, sit

¹¹ Anon, *Dorothea*, 1:11-12.

¹² In his *Memoirs* of 1791, the bookseller James Lackington details the phenomenon of working-class novel readers: “The poorer sort of farmers, and even the poor country people in general, who before this period spent their winter evenings in relating stories of witches, ghosts, hobgoblins, &c. now shorten the winter nights by hearing their sons and daughters read tales, romances &c. and on entering their houses, you may see *Tom Jones*, *Roderick Random*, other entertaining books, stuck up on their bacon racks &c. If *John* goes to town for a load of hay, he is charged to be sure not to forget to bring home ‘Peregrine Pickle’s Adventures’; and when *Dolly* is sent to market to sell her eggs, she is commissioned to purchase ‘The History of Pamela Andrews’. In short, all ranks and degrees now READ”. And read novels. Cited in John Brewer and Iain McCalman, “Publishing”, in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, 197.

¹³ Sophia, the servant-villain of *Dorothea*, has been corrupted by reading authors who have written “to her feelings”, *Dorothea*, 2:26.

¹⁴ The Council for the Prosecution at Paine’s trial describes his reasons for prosecuting part two over part one of the *Rights of Man*: “But, Gentlemen, when I found that another publication was ushered into the world still more reprehensible than the former; that in all shapes, in all sizes, with an industry incredible, it was either totally or partially thrust into the hands of all persons in this country, of subjects of every description; when I found that even children’s sweetmeats were wrapped up with parts of this, and delivered into their hands, in the hope that they would read it ... I thought it behoved me upon the earliest occasion ... to put a charge upon record against its author”, cited in Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s*, 72.

¹⁵ Robert Bisset, *Modern Literature*, 3:181.

down to write *political romances*, which never were, and never will be practical". Earlier, he asserts:

[P]erhaps a *Novel* may gain attention, when arguments of the soundest sense, and most perfect eloquence, shall fail to arrest the feet of the *Trifler* from the specious path of the new Philosophy. It is also an attempt to parry the enemy with their own weapons; for no channel is deemed improper by them, which can introduce their sentiments.¹⁶

Walker abandons "the soundest sense" and "most perfect eloquence" in the pages that follow so completely that even the *Critical Review* denounced his novel as ludicrous ("[t]o correct extravagance by extravagance, and absurdity by something as absurd, is not the mode which a wise man would follow").¹⁷ Nevertheless, both his preface and his novel reveal the extent to which anti-Jacobin fictions were not only conceived as a counter to radicalism generally, but as a counter to radical prose fiction specifically. Godwin, as the most successful philosopher-novelist of the decade, in that *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams* were both acclaimed, and in that *Caleb Williams* in itself was seen as a hybrid between philosophy and fiction, was therefore their most obvious enemy.

But Godwin was also their most obvious inspiration. To the anti-Jacobins, *Caleb Williams* proved just how successfully politics and prose fiction could be meshed. And whilst this afforded cause for concern, because the politics in question was a radical politics, it also showed the way forward for their own conservative agenda: to instil widespread hostility to reform amongst their readership. The paradoxical intention of anti-Jacobin authors to counter the dangerous seduction of radical novels with prose fiction seductions of their own is just one example of the way in which political divisions in the 1790s frequently became blurred. In countering elements of the Jacobin threat, conservatives had recourse to the very tools used by the Jacobins to such disturbing effect. And controversy raged because this appropriation of radical strategies potentially implicated conservatives in the reformist agenda. Olivia Smith has already commented on the way in which conservative indoctrination of the lower orders in the 1790s unwittingly built on the foundations laid by the *Rights of*

¹⁶ George Walker, preface to *The Vagabond*, v, iii.

¹⁷ Cited in *The English Novel 1770-1829*, 1:805. Elsewhere, the *Critical Review* was happier to condone anti-Jacobin absurdities in prose fiction. On Isaac D'Israseli's *Vaurien* (1797), one reviewer remarks: "his observations on the wild notions of the modern philosophers not only appear to us, for the most part, extremely just, but are given with pointed neatness and effect", *ibid*, 712.

Man, by furthering both lower-order literacy *and* political consciousness.¹⁸ The ‘Blagdon Controversy’ of 1799-1802, in which Hannah More was accused of religious and political subversion by educating the poor, highlights the confusion of categories which conservatives invited by countering the radicals with their own weapons.

Using the novel in the same way in which their enemies have used it—as a sweetening of primary political content, albeit with an opposite politics—is not the only paradox inherent in anti-Jacobin fictions. As my analysis of both *The Old Manor House* and *Caleb Williams* has shown, servants were fundamental to a critique of existing social relations in the hands of radical novelists. Now they become equally, if not more important to the conservative side. Servants fill the pages of anti-Jacobin fictions, and they do so in conspicuously ideological roles. With *Caleb Williams* acting as the catalyst for many of the conservative novels that followed, the foregrounding of servant characters by reactionary authors may be seen as an attempt to re-establish the integrity of the master-servant relationship after the damage wrought upon it in Godwin’s novel of 1794. Nevertheless, the depiction of servants in anti-Jacobin fictions is far from straightforward. The rest of this chapter will delineate the ideological functioning of servants in anti-Jacobin novels between 1795 and the beginning of the nineteenth century, as well as the contradictions inherent in such servant depiction, and the ingenious ways in which these authors attempt to contain the surprisingly radical implications of their own texts.

Conservative authors saw themselves as rescuing the moral authority of the novel by aligning its inherently dubious nature with a restrictive socio-political code.¹⁹ This preparedness to use the very form they previously derided in order to impart their politics also reveals an overriding interest in audience. Whereas Godwin is concerned with reaching readers who are either ill equipped for, or unaccustomed to, the rigours of philosophical writing, anti-Jacobin authors usually have a specifically middle-class audience in mind. In spite of Walker’s assertion in the preface cited above that his novel is an attempt, like Godwin’s, to instruct those readers immune to “arguments of the soundest sense, and most perfect eloquence”, (implying either women, or the lower

¹⁸ Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791-1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 69. “A shoemaker who had been taught his letters in the Old Testament, would labour through *The Age of Reason*; a schoolmaster, whose education had taken him little further than worthy religious homilies, would attempt Voltaire, Gibbon, Ricardo”, E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 782.

¹⁹ “Even in 1800 Hamilton, along with many other anti-Jacobins, saw herself as writing in opposition to both Jacobinism and the main current of modern fiction. ... Anti-Jacobinism had done much to rehabilitate the novel in the eyes of many of its former critics. In part, the new respect which the nineteenth-century novel commanded was earned, like the spurs of an aspiring knight, through its service during the Revolutionary crisis”, M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*, 27.

orders, or both), anti-Jacobin authors aimed their fictions, in the main, at the master classes. Shortly after Hannah More published *The History of Mr. Fantom, the New-Fashioned Philosopher, and his Man William*²⁰ in 1795 as part of her Cheap Repository Tracts series, she re-classed this work as one of “Stories for Persons in the Middle Rank” rather than “Tales for the Common People”.²¹ For anti-Jacobin fictions are not about self-realisation and its attendant struggles, as *Caleb Williams* is. They are about social control: what it means, and how best to achieve it. As such, they are primarily addressed to the arbiters of social control, rather than its objects.

Instructing a middle-class readership in their counter-revolutionary duties, via the deployment of realistic prose fiction, embroils the anti-Jacobin authors in a further set of contradictions. More’s use of the word “Tales” above, intended for the “Common People”, is later echoed by Maria Edgeworth’s *Popular Tales* of 1804, which were similarly intended for newly literate readers, for “simpler souls”, for “children and for servants”.²² In both instances, “tales” implies exemplary tales, in which lower-order characters, such as Lame Jervis, (himself a servant at several junctures), set an admirable example to be followed by their lower-order readers. By contrast, the above “Stories” repeatedly rehearse their middle-rank audience’s worst fears. Anti-Jacobin authors were determined to reveal the horrific consequences of radical reform, as they envisaged them. And, inspired by Burke, they do this by showing what would happen to the private family, if the servant of that family, as the representative of the lower orders, were to become politicised. Consequently, we are repeatedly given scenarios in which the servant, having gained access to the *Rights of Man* and the ideas of the New Philosophy, despoils the family home. Servant behaviour is depicted in anti-Jacobin fictions as alarmingly out of control.

Anti-Jacobins characteristically take ideas from the radical side and then push them further than their original authors ever intended them to go. All Jacobins in anti-Jacobin fiction are keen to abolish private property, for example, which no radicals, excepting Thomas Spence, actually proposed. But this then leaves the anti-Jacobin authors with the problem of how to contain what they have created. By revealing the dramatically empowering effect radical philosophy has on servants, these fictions indicate the obvious: that the lower orders have the most to gain by the implementation of political reform. This potentially inscribes the lower orders with the

²⁰ Hannah More, *The History of Mr. Fantom, the New-Fashioned Philosopher and his Man William* (1795; London, 1805).

²¹ M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*, 98.

²² Maria Edgeworth, *Popular Tales* (1804; London, 1895), vii.

power to change the existing constitution of society, and attributes to them a troubling degree of political agency.

In turn, such horror must be contained. Even if anti-Jacobin authors wrote predominantly for a middle-class audience, the phenomenal sales of the *Rights of Man* demonstrated how the notion of a reading public naturally restricting lower-class access could no longer be taken for granted. There was the real possibility that these novels would reach at least *some* lower-order readers. If the only message such readers derived from these novels was that radicalism was empowering, the fires of revolution on home soil could be unwittingly fuelled. The authors of anti-Jacobin fictions are therefore trapped in a double and self-contradictory impulse: to frighten their middle-class readership away from countenancing reform by depicting the insidious conduct of domestic servants, (one presumes a successfully intimate scare tactic for the servant-employing classes). And then to quash the threat they have so uncomfortably conjured up in case the tractability of the lower orders be called permanently into question, as the radicals themselves would like it to be; in case any potential lower-order readers of these fictions were to be inspired by models of successfully subversive servant behaviour.

Furthermore, in their depiction of renegade servant activities within the household, anti-Jacobin authors demonstrate considerable insight into the ways in which an embryonic working-class consciousness came to be forged in the 1790s. In *The Making of the English Working Class*, E. P. Thompson proposes that the working class, far from being passively created by the Industrial Revolution, a side-effect of the cotton mill, was instead not only “present at its own making”, but actively involved in it.²³ The manner in which disparate labourers arrived at a unified working-class consciousness, is, paradoxically, through the solitary activity of reading, (although one of the features of 1790s agitation is the way in which the reading of radical treatises such as the *Rights of Man* became a shared, communal event). Thompson places enormous emphasis on the role played by education and books—predominantly by Bunyan and Paine—in the forging of the consciousness of the British working class.²⁴ In anti-Jacobin fictions the encounter of isolated lower-order servants with radical philosophy immediately transforms their understanding of their own social position, alerting them, for the first time, to the reality of class war. Anti-Jacobin authors therefore pre-empt Thompson’s thesis. As above, however, lest demonstrating such a development be mistaken for colluding in it, and actively promoting it, anti-Jacobin authors then deflate this process, by amending it significantly enough to dispel its

²³ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 8, 213.

menace. If the paradoxes of the remit of anti-Jacobin authors appear almost overwhelming, their consecutive strategies of depicting servants as dangerously politicised, and then containing their threat, reveals, at the very least, an impressive resourcefulness in their negotiation of the contradictions that dog their fictions.

The foregrounding of the master-servant relationship by conservative authors in the 1790s begins in 1795, with the publication of Hannah More's *The History of Mr. Fantom, the New-Fashioned Philosopher, and his Man William*. Because this is the first anti-Jacobin fiction to concentrate on a servant character, because it instigated a whole series of copycat narratives, and because it contains many of the central themes amplified in later anti-Jacobin fictions, *Fantom* is this chapter's organising text. Mr. Fantom, a retail trader from the City of London, discontented with his mediocre station in life, takes up the "pestilent doctrines" of the new philosophy and becomes an enthusiastic proselyte of the Rights of Man (3). He moves with his wife and servants into the country, bringing with him the recent addition of a new footman, William Wilson, "whom he had taken, with a good character, out of a sober family" (6), and the scene is thus set for the story's main concern: the moral disintegration of the servant under Fantom's corrupt tutelage. The first step in William's ruin is his avoidance of church on his master's orders. The crime of atheism is quickly followed by slovenliness, laziness, drunkenness, obstreperousness and theft, and he justifies his behaviour to the outraged Mr. Fantom by regurgitating those tenets of the 'new philosophy' he has continually overheard since his arrival in the Fantom household. "Why, Sir", said William, 'you are a philosopher you know, and I have often overheard you say to your company, that private vices are public benefits, and so I thought that getting drunk was as pleasant a way of doing good to the public as any, especially when I could oblige my master at the same time'" (14).²⁵ William is soon neglecting his duties. Instead of working, he is caught by Mrs. Fantom "lolling" about on tables perusing his master's "little manual of the new philosophy" (12). William finally disappears with Fantom's port and silverware. The next we hear of him he has been arrested and convicted of highway robbery; the story ends with his public execution (23). William blames Fantom for leading him astray and, throughout More's tale we are invited to sympathise with the servant, betrayed by his master into sin, crime, and a brutal and premature death.

²⁴ Ibid, 213, and *passim*.

²⁵ Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714) is hardly 'new'; indeed the 'new philosophy' so consistently attacked in anti-Jacobin texts is an amalgam of various doctrines from Mandeville, Hume, Voltaire, Paine, and Godwin, carelessly strung together and frequently misrepresented.

It would be difficult to overestimate the influence this conservative fable bore on subsequent anti-Jacobin authors. The Fantom *motif*²⁶ of a master under the spell of radical doctrine, who transmits it, frequently unwittingly, to his servant, who is then corrupted by it into a life of crime, and who is usually executed, is pervasive in anti-Jacobin fiction to the end of the century. In Elizabeth Hamilton's *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796) the servant of Doctor Sceptic, Timothy Trundle, is arrested, once again for highway robbery, and is hauled before the magistrate. Like William, he blames his master for leading him into the "specious path of the new Philosophy"²⁷, where he has lost his way. He addresses his master's friend, Mr. Axiom:

Many a time and oft, have I heard you, and my master, Doctor Sceptic, say, that all mankind were equal, and that the poor had as good a right to property as the rich. You said, moreover, that they were all fools, that would not make the most they could of this world, seeing as how there was no other; for that religion was all a hum, and the Parson a rogue, who did not himself believe a word of it.²⁸

And again, echoing Fantom, the two philosophers, Axiom and Sceptic, bear no pity towards their errant charge, consigning him to the gallows without a second's thought. The scene is repeated almost verbatim in Anon, *The History of Sir George Warrington, the Political Quixote* (1797); and later in George Walker's *The Vagabond* (1799), a servant arrested for burglary defends himself from the dock by claiming that Doctor Alogos had already convinced him "there were no such thing as dishonesty".²⁹ The dynamic played out between Fantom and William in 1795 was considered by anti-Jacobin authors to be such an effective antidote to radical sympathies that it was appropriated wholesale and regularly replayed in fictions of their own. Why, therefore, was the depiction of the servant as a victim of his or her master's mendacious doctrines considered so useful to the anti-Jacobin cause?

More's story ends with the execution of William, and with the admonishment of Mr. Fantom by his neighbour, Mr. Trueman:

Do you go home, Mr. Fantom, and finish your treatise on universal benevolence, and the blessed effects of philosophy; and hark ye, be sure you let the frontispiece of your book represent *William on the gibbet*; that will be what our parson calls a PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION. (21)

²⁶ M. O Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*, 111.

²⁷ George Walker, *The Vagabond*, iii.

²⁸ Elizabeth Hamilton, *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah, Written Previous to, and During the Period of His Residence in England*, 2 vols. (London, 1796), 2:196.

²⁹ George Walker, *The Vagabond*, 133.

The story of renegade servitude offers a “PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION” to More’s readership in several important ways. Most obviously, the practical illustration of William on the gibbet shows that the servant-turned-housebreaker-turned-highwayman has received his just desserts. The corpse of William is a practical illustration of philosophy’s lethal effect on the poor, and I will be returning to this point later in the chapter. Up until his arrest, however, William illustrates radical ideas differently by putting them into practice and by benefiting from them. William’s story before his execution, in which he breaks out of the confines of the family home, and the servitude imposed upon him by his employers, and becomes both mobile and rich through a life of crime, demonstrates how it is the servants and the lower orders who have everything to gain by applying the principles of the new philosophy to their own abject situations. This notion that servants will only gain, whereas masters will only lose, if reform gets underway, is an integral component in the initial strategy of anti-Jacobin authors to scare their middle-class readership away from radicalism.

In anti-Jacobin fictions, the masters and the servants who enthuse over the new philosophy follow opposite trajectories: servants are empowered and masters are disempowered by adopting radical principles. For the masters, new philosophy is a complete, and completely unrealisable, quasi-religious system, which renders them impotent. The very names Trueman and Fantom suggest that the key contest in *Fantom* is between the real and the phantasmal: the master of Williams exists in the fantasy realm of the Rights of Man, with catastrophic consequences for those in his care. The eponymous heroine of *Dorothea, or A Ray of the New Light*, becomes, at ten, “occupied with plans of *general emancipation*” which “agitated her fancy and whirled through her imagination with chaotic confusion”, blinding her to the realities of the “lower world” (1:11, 4). Indeed, the emphasis middle- and upper-class ‘philosophers’ invariably place on the supremacy of spirit over matter, and ideas over action, becomes a standard anti-Jacobin joke. In Isaac D’Israeli’s *Vaurien* (1797), the corpulent Lord Belfied, (who incidentally, looks just like his groom), declares optimistically to his visitor: “we are all mind, Charles, all this obesity of mine is pure spirit”; while Mr. Reverberator “says he has no doubt he shall live two or three hundred years, though the doctors have given him over”.³⁰ This idealism of the master classes, who toy with Godwinian doctrines of human perfectibility, quickly becomes a “quixotic weakness”³¹ which blinds them to three things: the realities of the body, the realities of the existing social order, and the reality of their own vulnerability should the principles of the

³⁰ Isaac D’Israeli, *Vaurien, or Sketches of the Times: Exhibiting Views of the Philosophies, Religions, Politics, Literature, and Manners of the Age*, 2 vols. (London, 1797), 1:39, 1:40.

³¹ Anon, *Dorothea*, 2:26.

inalienable rights of man ever be realised. At the end of *Dorothea*, the deluded heroine lies penniless in a wretched cottage, alone and in pain, having had her arm broken during a robbery by two of the villagers whom she has personally introduced to the *Rights of Man* (2:180-182). It is mistresses, then, and not servants, who have everything to lose by adopting the new ideas. As the monopolisers of existing property and prestige, it is only logical that any redistribution of wealth will be detrimental to the master classes.

Servants in anti-Jacobin fiction, by contrast, display no such blindness to the “lower world”; they are of the lower world exclusively, and cannot escape their selfish, practical natures. Dorothea’s governess, Madame Larolles, who proves herself as inimical to domestic peace as Burke’s Rousseauian tutor before her, is asked by Dorothea’s parents to either abandon her radical teaching methods, or leave the family. She decides to stay on, “feeling that a good house, an excellent table, and the disposal of one hundred pounds per annum, were solid and indisputable advantages; she could not justify to herself the forsaking them, in support of a thesis, which was *new enough and surprising enough*, to make its way without any further help from its author” (1:8). Dorothea, by sharp contrast, has little notion of what money is, and is nonplussed when her politicised servant friend steals ten thousand pounds from her father. If masters are rendered helpless by turning radical, in thrall to a mystical system, servants see in the new philosophy only two important, interrelated facts. First, God doesn’t exist, meaning there is no afterlife, and no lasting punishment for crimes. Second, men are created equal, and therefore any attempt to equalise wealth by stealing from masters, or murdering them, is justifiable and even necessary. Walker in *The Vagabond* makes this point with characteristic force: “a servant would be condemned if he did not assist to destroy his master in the cause of truth, by the new system”.³²

Servants have a predisposition, as members of the labouring classes, to do, rather than to think. This means that whilst their masters are incapacitated by radical reading, blind to the world, servants immediately act upon what they have learned in order to improve their situation. They steal to become richer, but there is also the desire to steal in order to show their masters what the consequences of preaching equality actually are. And so servants become their masters’ nemesis, turning up at midnight in the houses from which they have been dismissed and inflicting the consequences of radical theory on those who taught it to them in the first place. Thus the servant, Benjamin Potter, in *A History of Sir George Warrington, the Political Quixote* (1797) declares: “My master was always preaching about the rights of man, and such like ... so

³² George Walker, *The Vagabond*, 128.

I have taken the liberty to run away with his eldest daughter, and consider myself quite on a footing with him".³³ Similarly, in Walker's *The Vagabond*, a servant arrested for housebreaking gives the following eloquent defence:

Besides, and more your honour, I were near starving, having lost my playse because I would not attend church on a Sunday, nor work like a neger, as the Doctor did tell us we all were, as laboured for the rich; and so, your honour, I had nothing to do but to starve, and the day were once, when I would have starved rather than do a dishonest act: but Doctor Alogos did tell us that there were no such thing as dishonesty; that it were all a tale to cheat us out of our right, and that the poor ought to have the lands of the rich divided: so, playse your honour, I were in a strange quandary, and though my heart did misgive me, I were persuaded to begin with the Doctor, as it were but proper he should practise what he did preach. (132-133)

Reading anti-Jacobin fiction, it becomes possible to discern a paradigm that assembles masters, the mind, and theory in one constellation, and servants, the body, and practice in another. The masters' wilful ignorance of the physical is implicitly related to their ignorance of the servants in their care, or of the threat their servants pose should the rigidity of the existing class structure be relaxed. Dorothea is so blinded by the prospect of "energy of mind" becoming "omnipotent over matter" (1:42) that she is incapable of stopping a servant separating her from her husband and murdering her child. By contrast, servants in anti-Jacobin fictions are strongly associated with the corporeal. They are frequently depicted sleeping with more than one partner and producing illegitimate children whose parentage is unknowable, thereby transgressing against the sanctity of property via sex as well as by theft. In Walker's *The Vagabond*, a doctor has married his serving woman, Susan. Susan is simultaneously sleeping with the philosopher, Stupeo, with the result that when Susan falls pregnant, no one can tell who the father is. This is deemed unimportant, however, because determining paternity is of "no consequence" (110, italics in original). Sophia in *Dorothea* is sleeping with a butler and the son of her mistress simultaneously, producing a child whose paternity also cannot be proved (2:24). Such sexual promiscuity of servants is not just restricted to women. In *Modern Literature* (1804), Robert Bisset's dancing-master turned pretend Methodist, Roger O'Rourke, capitalises on the sexual power bestowed on him by enthusiastic preaching and marries an heiress, casually fathering an illegitimate child by her waiting maid before he does so.³⁴

³³ Anon, *A History of Sir George Warrington, the Political Quixote*, 2 vols. (London, 1797), 1:104.

³⁴ Robert Bisset, *Modern Literature*, 1:118-136.

The working classes had long been associated with the “lower world”: sexuality, practicality, physical industry. Such an association was used to justify the social hierarchy in the first place. In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith had already complained that the labour to which most of the British population were condemned, especially as a result of the new working practices of the early industrial revolution, destroyed their minds. In the chapter entitled “Of the Expense of the Institutions for the Education of Youth” he writes:

In the progress of the division of labour, the employment of the far greater part of those who live by labour, that is, of the great body of the people, comes to be confined to a few simple operations, frequently to one or two. But the understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments. The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations ... has no occasion to exert his understanding or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and as ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.³⁵

Smith goes on to voice concern that the condition of the lower orders, mentally stunted by labour, is irredeemably corporal, almost bestial. The populace at large is, he warns, incapable of rationality, tenderness, political engagement, or, most worryingly of all, national defence.³⁶

The association of the lower orders with the body was not something which conservatives were likely to protest. By the 1790s, however, the problem as the anti-Jacobins saw it was that if the labouring classes were naturally associated with the physical and the practical, rather than with the theoretical, and if they were then introduced to radical texts such as Paine’s *Rights of Man*, they would invariably try to enact revolution in whatever way their limited understandings would permit them. The fact that servants in anti-Jacobin fictions read the *Rights of Man* and immediately set about implementing its tenets to their own advantage, whereas their masters are only incapacitated by radical ideas, reflects engrained cultural assumptions about labour, leisure, class, and education which became critical during the heated atmosphere of the 1790s. The anxiety that teaching the working classes to read would lead to catastrophic levels of political agitation is why conservatives feared the growth of literacy amongst the lower orders, especially after the French Revolution, and why even those who were

³⁵ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. Andrew Skinner, 2 vols. (1776; London: Penguin, 1999), 2:368.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 368-369.

prepared to teach them to read, or even to write, were still desperate to emphasise that education would not render them unfit for near constant manual employment. By enacting the doctrine of the *Rights of Man*, in as personally beneficial a way as possible, servants in anti-Jacobin fictions are merely fulfilling another aspect of their inherently bodily natures. The Treason Trials themselves, and the question of censorship of radical publications more generally, were structured around the assumption played out in these fictions: namely that whereas the middle classes will ponder, debate, think, rationalise, the lower orders will simply act. And it is when the lower orders act, so the logic of the establishment goes, that the flood, fire or disease of revolution becomes unstoppable.

The anonymous author of the pamphlet entitled *Remarks on Mr. Paine's Pamphlet, Called the Rights of Man, in a Letter to a Friend* (1791), includes an interesting footnote. "There was a popular weapon", he informs his readership, "sold throughout France, at the time of the Revolution, for less than three livres—This instrument too was called the Rights of Man, (droits d'homme). ... *It was long, heavy, pointed, sharp, and cheap*".³⁷ Thomas Erskine, during his prosecution of Thomas Williams for publishing Paine's *Age of Reason* at a price the working classes could afford, asserted the following: "An intellectual book, however erroneous, addressed to the intellectual world upon so profound a subject, can never work the mischief which this Indictment was calculated to repress".³⁸ The problem with Paine, by contrast, was that the style in which he wrote, and the price at which his publications were sold, ensured that the working classes gained access to his ideas. His "erroneous" publications, therefore, broke through the class barriers that had hitherto protected the "intellectual world" and set political theory loose among the populace. The first result of this, as Robert Bisset remarks in *Modern Literature*, was the destruction of subservience amongst the lower orders:

But the work of Thomas Paine, which now made its appearance, most completely unhinged loyalty and patriotism in the breasts of great numbers of professed votaries of literature, and many others who made no claims to learning ...³⁹

The second forecast result, as our anonymous opponent of Paine's had already determined in 1791, was that intellectual theory would become bloody action. The *British Critic* could only agree. In 1796, a contributor noted darkly: "in vulgar minds the

³⁷ Anon, *Remarks on Mr. Paine's Pamphlet, Called the Rights of Man, In a Letter to a Friend* (Dublin, 1791), 81.

³⁸ Thomas Erskine, *Speeches*, cited in Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s*, 57. I am indebted here to Keen's discussion of the middle-class/working-class, theory/praxis paradigm as it informed the decade's censorship trials.

transition from contempt and dislike to acts of violence is but too easy".⁴⁰ Part two of the *Rights of Man*, published with the sub-title "*Combining Principles and Practice*",⁴¹ provided the establishment with yet another justification for state prosecution.⁴²

In a correctly functioning literary public sphere, the price of books, and access to education, would regulate admittance so that only middle- and upper-class members could engage in political debate. And in correctly functioning households, servants would never be exposed to radical ideas in the first place. After the French Revolution, the massive circulation of Paine's *Rights of Man* amongst an increasingly literate, lower-order readership broke the rules by which the literary public sphere protected itself. And by *doing* while their masters *dream*, servants in these fictions play out the same fears of the conservative establishment which informed its enactment of anti-radical legislation.

Anti-Jacobin novelists were intent on exposing the designs of the Jacobins, on adding flesh to the Jacobin monster. And one of the tactics they all pursue in order to do this is to delineate the disaster of radical theory as realised within the context of an instantly recognisable 1790s Britain. In more garish texts, such as *Dorothea*, the enactment of radical theory by the lower orders means rape, pillage and destruction on a national scale.⁴³ Anti-Jacobins were concerned to ground theory in reality in order to show what it would mean for Britain if reform were ever implemented. In their use of servant characters to delineate theory's catastrophic consequences, the embedded association of the lower classes with action as opposed to ideas, and the *raison d'être* of anti-Jacobin fiction itself, are conjoined.

Anti-Jacobin authors further underscore the Jacobin threat by depicting radicalised servants who use sensibility in order to harm their employers. Throughout anti-Jacobin fiction, the "glow of sentiment" is singled out as a particular folly of the enlightened. In *Vaurien*, one of D'Israeli's wicked philosophers is "Mr. Sympathy", "who we had observed had invented a new religion" (1:92). Several servants in these fictions have ingested the lessons of Caleb's deployment of sensibility against his master, highlighting once again sensibility's destabilising effect on the social order. Servants in anti-Jacobin fictions do not presume to 'read' their masters, as Caleb does,

³⁹ Robert Bisset, *Modern Literature*, 3:145.

⁴⁰ *British Critic*, (1796), cited in Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s*, 57.

⁴¹ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, 121.

⁴² Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s*, 63.

⁴³ In *Dorothea*, the prospect of full-scale revolution in Britain is too much to contemplate. The author turns conveniently to Ireland, and the 1798 disturbances, in order to scare her readership. The first volume ends with the storming of a prison in Kilkenny and the release of prisoners who rampage across the countryside. "To describe the horrors that ensued", we are told, "would be too revolting a task", 1:224.

but they do presume to manufacture the signs of sensibility within their own bodies in order to appropriate power. This has catastrophic consequences for the master class.

In *Dorothea*, our heroine's blindness to the real character of her servants is due to her sentimental view of them, which she has learned directly from *Caleb Williams*. The anonymous author of *Dorothea* concurs with my reading of sensibility in Godwin's novel, insofar as Sophia deliberately uses sensibility against her mistress in order to wrest control. If our sympathies are more or less with the servant Caleb as he battles Falkland with sensibility, here our sympathies rest firmly with the mistress Dorothea, as she is manoeuvred out of her authority and irrevocably damaged by the wet nurse she is foolish enough to pity.

In *Dorothea*, sensibility is linked to delusion. It is a masking force, used by the lower orders in order to blind the middle classes to their inherently evil natures. Just as Falkland fails to 'read' his servant correctly in the period of their initial confrontation, Dorothea fails to 'read' Sophia's history correctly because she is blinded by sentiment. She informs her husband of the details of Sophia's case. A young woman, educated above her station, is forced into service by the reduced circumstances of her family. There she is seduced and impregnated by the son of her mistress. Abandoned by him, and in distressed circumstances, she gives birth alone to a stillborn child. She is afterwards arraigned for infanticide and is currently in prison awaiting execution. Sir Charles Euston's immediate response to his wife's passionate tale is to question: whether she is "not misled by the fervours of sensibility?" (2:15) He suggests that by sentimentalising the lower orders, one loses sight of their true natures, and is immediately more sceptical about Sophia's professed innocence than his wife. The omniscient narrator soon steps in to clear up any ambiguity about Sophia's real character:

[I]n order to comprehend the true character of this young woman, it will be necessary to divide the story told by Lady Euston of its sentimental gloss; for though the main points of the tale were true, and the whole related much as she had received it, the spirit of it differed altogether. (2:20)

The story divided of its "sentimental gloss" reveals a servant with the blackest of personalities. It is Sophia who has seduced the son of her mistress, not the other way round. And she has done so "amidst a well-acted embarrassment, and decorated with a flood of pity-moving tears", while she has relayed a "legend" of "family misfortunes

and reduced gentility”⁴⁴ (2:21). Here the young gentleman, Howard, falls victim to her theatrical sentimental extravagance, just as Dorothea is to fall victim to Sophia after her release from prison. The child conceived by Sophia is in all probability *not* Howard’s, as she is simultaneously sleeping with his butler, yet he offers to support the child notwithstanding, and to support Sophia up to and during her confinement. The reader is also left in no doubt that Sophia murders the baby as soon as it is born. Later on in the novel, while she is slowly poisoning Dorothea’s son with “spirituous liquors” (2:47-48), Sophia attempts to seduce her mistress’s husband and is described “arranging her tears in due order” (2:39) before he calls. Dorothea fails to appreciate the true nature of the servant in her care—that of the “fiend in Paradise” (2:163)—because radical theory has taught her compassion for her social inferiors. Sophia’s performances always work beautifully, and Dorothea loses her child, her husband and her wealth because she believes them.

Another servant who uses the deceptive theatrics of sensibility to assume control over her mistress is Mary Warner in Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray*. Like most servants in anti-Jacobin fiction, Mary claims to have been persuaded into vice by the example of her mistress. Because Adeline has refused to marry, Mary decides that becoming a kept mistress must be morally acceptable, and leaves off service in order to become a prostitute. Throughout the novel, Mary Warner acts as Adeline’s nemesis, turning up unexpectedly at various junctures and exposing her former mistress’s scandalous past. During their final meeting, Adeline meets Mary just as her former servant is informed that her son has died of smallpox. Adeline forgets her hostility and rushes to embrace Mary, but this sentimental tableau between the two women quickly degenerates into a battle to the death. When Adeline realises that Mary must be infected and tries to escape her, Mary refuses to let her go:

[T]he idea, that, by being in such close contact with Mary, she was imbibing ... the disease ... recurred so forcibly to her mind, that, begging for God’s sake she would loose her hold, she endeavoured to break from the arms of her tormentor.

But in vain. —As soon as Mary saw that Adeline wished to leave her, she was the more eager to hold her fast; and protesting she should die if she had the barbarity to leave her alone, she only hugged her the closer.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ This echoes Sterne’s privileging of the fallen bourgeois as a particularly pathetic subject in *A Sentimental Journey*. Yorick pays special attention to the “*pauvre honteux*” who “had seen better days” during his encounter with the “sons and daughters of poverty” outside his inn door. As above, empty theatricality and the emotive power of reduced gentility coexist. Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*, 58-60.

⁴⁵ Amelia Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, 206.

Mary's distress here is feigned. She has a mind to "impress ... with an idea of her sensibility". Adeline has rushed over to her "in pity for a mother weeping the loss of her infant",⁴⁶ and dies a few days later as the result of this fatal embrace. As in *Dorothea* the servant's display of feigned sensibility gives her power to inflict terrible damage. The message is clear. Sentimentalising the lower orders dissolves class division and threatens those in control with extinction.

Thus far, then, we can see how the anti-Jacobins' intention of shocking their middle-class readers with horror stories of radicalised domestics brought them close to the Marxist designation of the lower orders as the true, revolutionary class. If servants in these texts, and by implication the lower orders generally, have the capacity to destroy those in authority over them, thereby making revolution a reality, this confers upon the labouring classes an enormous power. Such power is in accordance with Marx's later designation of the proletariat, rather than the middle- or upper classes, as the single body of people with "the future in its hands".⁴⁷ And yet the socio-political implications of servants at large, house-breaking, murdering, and poisoning the babies of their mistresses, all under the aegis of the New Philosophy, were too disturbing for anti-Jacobin authors to countenance for long. Terrifying as this prospect was no doubt intended to be, strategies of containment had nevertheless to be devised within the fictions themselves in order to counter the impression that revolutionaries could ever succeed, or survive unpunished. The most obvious containment device used by anti-Jacobin authors resides in their heavy-handed recourse to legal retribution to bring short the rampages of individual servants. However, the most successful way in which these authors mitigate the transgressive power of servants is by denying them agency in the first place.

After the success of the *Rights of Man*, something colossal was needed to prevent the socio-political upheaval presumed by conservatives to be this text's inevitable consequence. And so the heaviest possible penalty of the law, against High Treason, was duly called upon as a kind of desperate salvaging act after the initial breach. In anti-Jacobin fictions, the law steps in as the final defence of the establishment and exterminates servants politicised by radical philosophy. If it is servants who have most to gain from reform, the law must swing back upon them at the end of these fictions with full force, eradicating the threat of a politicised labouring class.

Because the law invariably catches up with them, and invariably makes them pay for their transgressions, servants can now be shown, counter-intuitively, to be those who suffer most from any enactment of radical philosophy. In *Caleb Williams*,

⁴⁶ Ibid, 205.

execution, or the threat of it, is always designated a legal mistake: the servant Caleb is innocent of the theft that has condemned him to the gallows. Miscarriages of justice in this novel only emphasise the sense of *Ancien-Régime* mechanisms of state power literally crushing the bodies of the poor. In anti-Jacobin fictions, by contrast, servant crime is very real. There are no false convictions here, and so it is the New Philosophy which is responsible for the executions of servants, having misled them into lives of crime, crucially leaving the British legal system itself immune from critique.

Servants are ultimately made to experience the horrific effects of radical doctrine more directly than the master classes, in spite of the benefits they initially accrue, and usually end by representing theory's earthly manifestation with their own corpses. Bodies of the executed were displayed to underscore the consequences of breaking state law. Such bodies became the physical manifestation of the law, and were shown to watching crowds as a kind of awful instructive text. Timothy Trundle's final words in *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* are these: "Ah! that I had kept to my good grandmother's wholesome doctrine of hell and damnation! ... I should not now be at the mercy of a false friend, who laughed me out of the fear of God—and now leaves me to the mercy of the gallows!" (2:197-198). In the executions of errant servants in anti-Jacobin texts, in Timothy Trundle's here, in William's above, the instructive text of the servant corpse proclaims to its readership that the new philosophy hurts those most profoundly whom it professes to help. This is the "PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION" of "*William on the gibbet*", graphically informing the anti-Jacobin readership that it is the servants, the lower orders, who are betrayed by radical doctrines into sin and crime and death. It is the servants, and the lower orders, as William's body proves, who ultimately have the most to lose.

The most significant way, however, in which the threat of the politicised servant is countered in anti-Jacobin fictions is not by the servant's summary execution at the end of the text, reassuringly definitive as this may be. It is rather in the emphasis placed upon the servant's child-like susceptibility to knowledge. As disconcerting as servants may appear in these fictions to a concerned, servant-employing readership, such texts ultimately restore confidence by stressing that servant characters are without personal agency. Servants enact radical theory because their masters have misled them, not because they have wills of their own and are intent on a realignment of the social order. Fantom, for instance, is *wholly* responsible for the crimes William commits. Trueman declares to him: "Your system, however, and your own behaviour, have made

⁴⁷ Karl Marx, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), in *Selected Writings*, 253.

that footman a scoundrel: and you are answerable for his offences" (15). And Fantom is so because it is surprisingly safer this way.

Servants in literature had long been depicted contaminating the families by whom they are employed with the nasty habits of the poor. In a tract entitled *Serious Advice and Warning to Servants* distributed at the end of the century, Thomas Broughton speaks of servants "infest[ing] ... Houses with their loose, dishonest and disorderly behaviour".⁴⁸ What is initially so odd about servants in anti-Jacobin fictions is that such contagion is frequently depicted working the other way. It is the middle-class masters and mistresses who infect the servants in their care with erroneous philosophical doctrine, and the consequences of this reversal are twofold. First, the power of influence is transferred from the servant character to the master or mistress, which works to strip servants of personal agency. Second, the role of the middle classes as guardians of the lower orders is heavily emphasised. If the master classes are in the position of influence, rather than the other way round, and if servants do whatever is taught to them, incapable of personal direction, then the middle- and upper classes are back in the comforting position of being able to regulate whoever is in their care, be it the servant in their house, or the 'people' more generally. The unsettling notion that it is the labouring classes who are actually in control of the national destiny is therefore forestalled.

In Helen Craik's *Adelaide de Narbonne* (1800), the female servant of the heroine, having encountered a new "system of equality",⁴⁹ decides to dress up as her mistress. Her disguise is nearly fatal, however, as she immediately falls victim to an assassination attempt, from which she is lucky to escape alive. The fault, as in *Fantom*, lies with her master, who has spouted the new philosophy within earshot and corrupted the servant's natural subservience. Unlike her fellow servants in anti-Jacobin fiction, she learns her lesson without being actually murdered. "The jargon they talked about equality, will make me hate the world, I am sure, as long as I live" (1:209), she announces, having reflected on the "folly and danger of stepping aside from the path Providence has assigned to [her] proper station" (1:219).⁵⁰ Later on in the novel, the culpability of the master classes is again highlighted. A servant is instructed by his master to murder. We are given a detailed account of the extent of his culpability: "This man, not naturally bad, but corrupted by the example and precepts of his vile superiors, was ... seized with remorse at the atrocious extent of the intended crime" (3:96). During

⁴⁸ Thomas Broughton, *Serious Advice and Warning to Servants, More Especially Those of the Nobility and Gentry* (London, 1800), iv.

⁴⁹ Helen Craik, *Adelaide de Narbonne, with Memoirs of Charlotte de Cordet*, 4 vols. (London, 1800), 1:208.

the *Fantom*-like trial scene in *The Vagabond*, Walker is as eager as More had been to blame the master for the crimes of the servant, when he has the judge declare: “in fact, Doctor Alogos, this man appears to me less guilty than yourself”. (133).

Such child-like psychological imprinting of servant characters plays out Locke’s theory of the *Tabula Rasa* in socio-political terms. The lower orders, these fictions assure us, are like children, who, from birth, are inscribed for good or ill by the environmental conditions in which they find themselves.⁵¹ This view of the lower orders as impressionable children was deeply engrained, and informed the conservative response to radical publications in the 1790s. The establishment feared that newly literate readers of the *Rights of Man* would be seduced by this text into violent action against the state. And the pivotal assumption behind this fear was that the lower orders, lacking any capability to question doctrine or to subject it to rational analysis, would believe anything taught to them, like children. A little learning quickly became more dangerous than none at all. Thomas Erskine, erstwhile legal defender of Thomas Paine, now turned prosecutor, justified legal action against Paine’s *Age of Reason* on the grounds that it “stirs up men, *without the advantages of learning, or sober thinking*, to a total disbelief of every thing hitherto held sacred” (my italics).⁵² If the *Age of Reason*, like the *Rights of Man* before it, was the only political text the lower orders read, this text would then determine their political character irrevocably. This is analogous to servants in anti-Jacobin fictions happening to overhear their masters declare everyone free and equal, and thereby being condemned to courses of radical action that are frequently fatal.

The very fact that these servants *overhear* their masters spouting radical doctrine is, in itself, an important way of further denying them agency. For these servants may pre-empt Thompson’s thesis of working-class consciousness as derived through the solitary activity of reading, by losing their subservience to their superiors upon encountering radical ideas. But the way in which such encounters are carefully staged in anti-Jacobin fictions does much to disarm the threat to the social order as Thompson describes it. Arriving at working-class consciousness via reading and self-education in the 1790s was a slow, painful, exhausting struggle. The length of the working day, the expense of candles and spectacles, not to mention the scarcity and expense of books themselves, all ensured that those with a desire to educate themselves

⁵⁰ This sentence is spoken by the Republican, Charlotte de Cordet, the woman responsible for murdering Marat in his bath in an attempt to rescue the Revolution from his sanguinary influence.

⁵¹ Locke says famously of children: “They are Travellers newly arrived in a strange Country, of which they know nothing”, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 184.

⁵² Thomas Erskine, *Speeches*, cited in Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s*, 57.

had to be fully conscious of the nature of their undertaking and unfailingly resolute. In *Fantom*, by contrast, William's encounter with his "master's little manual of the new philosophy" is entirely casual: Fantom has thoughtlessly left it behind in the parlour. One is deliberately made to feel that William would be equally as amenable to More's *Village Politics* (1793), for example, had that been left lying around instead. And William is unusual among servants in anti-Jacobin fictions in even being depicted reading at all. Elsewhere, servants only overhear radical doctrine. William himself declares to his master that he has "often over-heard you say to your company, that private vices are public benefits" (14). The female servant of the heroine in *Adelaide de Narbonne* overhears her master "inculcating" his "system of equality" "to all around him"; Timothy Trundle similarly overhears his master "say, that all mankind were equal, and that the poor had as good a right to property as the rich". Overhearing radical ideas, instead of actively seeking them out and studying them, denies the intellectual agency of servants, associating them exclusively with orality, and placing them firmly back in the pre-literate, infantilising, paternalistic world.

Caleb's voracious appetite for reading, his intellectual application, his insatiable curiosity to acquaint himself with the secrets hidden in "books of narrative and romance" (4) could not provide a starker contrast to William "lolling" around on tables and idly perusing his master's copy of the *Rights of Man*. Both Caleb and Monimia grow up through reading, and by so doing threaten the existing power structures within their respective families. Servants in anti-Jacobin fictions are simultaneously more destructive, and less culpable, because their actions are clearly designated as those of children. If both Monimia and Caleb, by becoming adults and sloughing off servitude, mirror Novalis's analysis of the French Revolution as the violent onset of sexual maturation in the lower orders, anti-Jacobin authors indicate their conservatism by re-inscribing the servants of their fictions as infants of the master classes, to be moulded as those masters see fit.

In *Fantom*, Mrs. Fantom complains to her husband that he has neglected his duty to instruct their servants on religious matters:

I wonder you don't let your own servants be taught a little. The maids can scarcely tell a letter or say the Lord's Prayer, and you know you won't allow them time to learn. William too has never been to church since we came out of town. He was at first very orderly and obedient, but now he is seldom sober of an evening, and, in the morning, when he should be rubbing the tables in the parlour, he is generally lolling upon them, and reading your little manual of the new philosophy. (12)

In this passage, teaching servants “a little”, how to read their bibles, how to recite the Lord’s Prayer, is depicted as a successful counter-tactic to William lolling around and discovering little manuals of new philosophy for himself; that is to say a prophylactic against the politicisation of the lower classes. If Fantom hadn’t neglected to instruct his servants in basic reading skills, to be used exclusively for the perusal of religious materials, William would never have reneged on his duties in the first place, or dared to countenance a doctrine that inculcated insubordination. The connection between lower-order reading, religious instruction and the integrity of the existing social order, urged by Mrs. Fantom, articulates More’s own conviction that reading skills must be taught to the lower orders so that their conservative political indoctrination can follow. The assumption behind Mrs. Fantom’s complaint to her husband, and anti-Jacobin fiction generally, is that servants will learn from their masters whether the masters are conscious of their role as instructors or not. Fantom’s crime is to fail to realise he is teaching his servants with every sentence he utters, even though he has reneged on his duty to instruct them formally. He has failed, that is, to regulate his personal behaviour with his servants in mind. And because it is inevitable that the middle classes, as parents, lead the way and that the lower orders, as children, follow, the middle classes are in a uniquely powerful position to influence the behaviour of their social inferiors. They must therefore seize every opportunity to turn unconscious influence over those in their care into conscious regulation and control.

In William’s confession, handed round at the place of his execution, he saves his harshest invective for those employers who fail to pay sufficient attention to their conversation in the presence of their domestics:

I mention this as a warning to all masters and mistresses to take care what they converse about while servants are waiting at table. They cannot tell how many souls they have sent to perdition by such loose talk. (22-23)

Those exceptional servants who managed to partake in the literary public sphere during the eighteenth century by publishing pamphlets,⁵³ concur with *Fantom’s* author in underlining the power of example the middle classes invariably exert over their domestics. The footman-author, who designates himself simply “J.B. A Brother of the

⁵³ I am aware of only two such servant-pamphlets, both of which were written by footmen: J.B., *The Footman’s Looking-Glass: or, Proposals to the Livery Servants of London & Westminster, &c. For Bettering their Situations in Life, and Securing their Credit in the World, to which is added, an Humble Representation to Masters and Mistresses* (London, 1747); and R.D., *The Footman’s Friendly Advice to his Brethren of the Livery, and to all Servants in General* (London, 1731). Even these could of course be impersonations.

Cloth”, in his pamphlet entitled *A Footman’s Looking-Glass* (1747), similarly accuses masters and mistresses of being responsible for damning the servants in their care, but in even more chilling tones:

[M]any of you, by whose Example we have been encouraged to Vice, will have much to answer for; and if there be a future State, certainly you must Share of the most dreadful Torments, which shall be inflicted upon any of our Race; and I sincerely wish that every one of you would consider how you will answer your Creator for encouraging or instructing so many of his Creatures in the Way to Utter Ruin and Destruction.⁵⁴

This is a fascinating example of how a servant’s acknowledgement of his dependence on the master classes, as the child of those classes, can be used to sanctify scathing critique of his social superiors. By the 1790s, emphasising the critical instructive function of the middle ranks in conservative fiction became the favoured way of countering the prospect of revolution. The spectre of working-class political agency had reared its head. Bringing the servants and the lower orders “to school”⁵⁵ both re-infantilised them, and distinguished the middle ranks as the true legislators of the social order. This was an extraordinarily self-conscious position adopted by the middle classes; one which put faith in the extensive influence of the self-disciplined middle-class individual as the prerequisite for social control.⁵⁶

Conservative authors of the 1790s, for the most part, strive to ensure that our sympathy lies with the servants betrayed by their masters into radical action. This represents a re-invigoration of the paternalist ethic in the wake of the French Revolution, though this is a paternalist ethic now divorced from the aristocracy and firmly in the hands of the middle classes. The British establishment in the 1790s was gripped with the fear that the ‘natural’ subordination of the poor had been demolished by events across the Channel and by the circulation of radical treatises at home. And yet conservative

⁵⁴ J.B., *The Footman’s Looking-Glass*, 20-21.

⁵⁵ The phrase is Seamus Deane’s, speaking of Edgeworth’s attitude to the native Irish in *Strange Country*, 32.

⁵⁶ This privileging of the middle classes as the regulators of the social order, and of the lower classes particularly, is the subject of Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Superintending the Poor: Charitable Ladies and Paternal Landlords in British Fiction, 1770-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Tobin concentrates, however, on the relationship between the aristocracy and the middle classes in their struggle to assume control of the labouring classes. She admits that the “under classes are represented only as the object of contention” (6), and are not extensively discussed. By contrast, I am focusing here on the tension between an embryonic working-class consciousness and middle-class paternalism, in evidence in this tract by More and in ant-Jacobin fictions more generally. Both struggles of the middle classes were interconnected and coterminous. There is a great deal of anti-aristocratic invective in other works by Hannah More, for example.

authors attempt, by and large, to steer clear of demonising servant characters as irrevocably ‘other’ or deranged.⁵⁷ Instead, they stress the vulnerability of servants as pseudo-children of middle-class families, and conjure a whole mesh of reciprocal duties and responsibilities that tie masters and servants together in an essentially pre-Capitalist bond. The implication is that without these structures of loving control, the servant is irrevocably lost. Part of the master’s responsibility to the servant is to save her from herself. In *Adolphus de Biron* (1795) a French master, Monsieur D_____, offers a servant his freedom upon escaping from revolutionary France. Like Paulo in *The Italian*, however, this servant does not comply, seeing not freedom, but lack of protection, in any release from the structures of subservience:

Le Fevre, said I to him, I am no longer your Master. ... I must dispense with your Services. He looked astonished, and begged to know in what he had offended, that I should withdraw my Protection which would render him miserable. Do not you know, Le Fevre, said I, that my Protection can no longer be of service to you. —You are my Equal, therefore Patronage would be absurd; nor can I expect your Obedience, since that would be still more absurd, to suppose that my Equal can, or ought, to render me Obedience; therefore we must part. He instantly threw himself at my feet and conjured me not to impute to him any of the mad and ruinous Schemes of Faction. I gave him my Hand—⁵⁸

Here old-regime patriarchy is happily salvaged, despite the attempts of the French Revolution to destroy it. The servant who refuses to forfeit the protection of the master/father against his own dangerous self flees with his master to England, where “Stations” are enforced, in spite of “new Systems”, and where “Liberty exists in reality” (2:131). Elsewhere in anti-Jacobin fiction, authors are more concerned to emphasise the importance of maintaining social “Stations” by depicting the mayhem that is unleashed when they are dissolved. In *Dorothea*, the novel’s feckless heroine fails to enact her social duty towards her dependent, Sophia, when she encourages her to consider herself as a victim. Sophia has murdered her own illegitimate child, and yet Dorothea absolves her of guilt by maintaining that she has been unjustly punished and by campaigning for her release from prison. Dorothea’s fervour lays the axe to Sophia’s dependence, swelling her notions of self-importance and deserved equality. Her servant, we are told, “seized with avidity on the idea of being the *offended* instead

⁵⁷ *Dorothea* is an exception to this rule. It attempts both to render the master class more responsible than the servants for the damage servants inflict, *and* to depict servant character as inherently wicked. Anti-Jacobin fictions tend to emphasise either one or the other, and most opt for servant characters who begin as innocents and whom their employers then corrupt.

of the *offender*, and held the right to retaliation as a balm to her heart, feeding the natural corruption of her disposition with new stimulants to evil" (2:29). Dorothea has failed to protect Sophia from her own hazardous desires:

In the hour of thankfulness for her deliverance, debased and wicked as this girl had proved herself, had Dorothea presented to her view the genuine prospect of religious repentance, in place of rhapsodising on the glow of sentiment and the natural bias of human nature to goodness; had she taught her to doubt herself, and rely on the mercy of God, instead of attempting to call forth the energy of her own virtue, it is very probable Sophia's regret might have been effectual and sincere. (2:26)

And so the opposite trajectory is enacted from that of *Adolphus de Biron*: the paternalistic bond between master and servant is shattered, rather than upheld, as the servant plots to murder her mistress's baby and to wreck her happy marriage. Irrevocable damage is inflicted on the family, but, true to the general anti-Jacobin directive, the servant Sophia is ultimately made to suffer the most as the result of her mistress's failure to teach her to "doubt" herself. Being forced to rely on the mercy of God is another means of forestalling personal agency. As a result of the madness of presuming to act for herself, when she is ill-equipped to make appropriate judgements, Sophia is later to die alone and penniless in a German prison, abject and eaten with remorse (2:160).

A third way in which the story of William offers a "PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION" to More's readership concerns precisely this reinvigorated, middle-class paternalism as a means of preventing revolution. Whilst Fantom fantasizes about the dawning of universal benevolence, ignorant of the dissolution of order in his own house, Trueman is constantly alert to his social responsibilities. Almost as soon as Trueman is introduced, he sets about rescuing an apprentice in his parish who is being cruelly used (10). "While [Fantom] was contriving grand schemes which lay quite out of his reach", we are told on the opening page, "he neglected the ordinary duties of life, which lay directly before him" (3). Trueman, however, is "too busy for projects, and too contented for theories" (10), helping out his friends and setting a good example to the servants in his care, meanwhile avoiding public commendation for any of his actions. When Fantom declares: "I despise the man whose benevolence is swallowed up in the narrow concerns of his own family, or parish or country", and Trueman counters: "I think it is natural to love one's own family, and to do good in one's

⁵⁸ Ann Thomas, *Adolphus de Biron, a Novel Founded on the French Revolution*, 2 vols. (Plymouth, 1795), 2:129-130.

neighbourhood, as to anybody else" (13), we are witnessing the staging of a critical tenet of the *Reflections*. Burke bore a contempt for those revolutionaries who demonstrated a universal love for mankind, over and above, and often at the expense of, the normal predisposition in the human animal towards one's "little platoon", one's immediate birthplace, and one's nation. Burke's contempt is re-enacted in More's narrative in order to emphasise the inhumanity, the unnaturalness, of anyone who supports the call for constitutional reform. And More's endorsement of Trueman's parish-orientated vision of social responsibility at the expense of institutional political change, of the micro over the macro, necessarily involves a heavy emphasis on the master-servant relationship as the most intimate form of contact between the lower orders and their socio-political governors.

In *Fantom*, the duties of the master are foregrounded over the duties of the husband, or the duties of the father, as the primary arena of social responsibility for the middle-class male. To worry about social control in general terms is to be guilty of the same tendency to universalise to which the radicals consistently fall prey. It is also rather unhelpful. The servant, by contrast, offers the perfect opportunity to reassert one's threatened social position in immediate, practical terms. The servant is within one's household, under one's nose (if one bothers to look) and almost a member of one's "little platoon". Servants are intimately connected with the master class. In contrast to the distant, vaguely apprehended 'people', now threatening to stir, servants can be talked to and instructed directly. Even more crucially, servants, though absorbed into their masters' households, remain connected to the body of the labouring poor, and can exercise a vital influence over them in unsettled times. In his poem *Contentment; or Hints to Servants on the Present Scarcity, a Poetic Epistle*, published in 1800, Christopher Anstay emphasises the cosseted position of servants within middle- and upper-class households: "... alike appear/To you the barren, and the fruitful year;/The same you're fed, the same are cloth'd and paid,/And like the lilies of the field arrayed ..."⁵⁹ But he goes on to emphasise the mediatory role servants can play between the master- and the lower classes, when he specifically asks servants to prevent food riots amongst the rural poor:

Nor when the Prong and Pitchfork they prepare
And all the implements of rustick war,
Advice from you to whome their ways are known,
Their modes of life congenial with your own,
In kind persuasive language may prevail,

⁵⁹ Christopher Anstay, *Contentment; or Hints to Servants on the Present Scarcity. A Poetic Epistle* (London, 1800), 4.

When e'en the mandates of the Justice fail:
Tell them what ills unlawful deeds attend,
Deeds, which in wrath begin, and sorrow end,
That burning barns, and pulling down a mill,
Will neither corn produce, nor bellies fill.⁶⁰

Regulating servant behaviour represented a concrete way to forestall revolution; this is the third “practical illustration” suggested by More’s story. Servants embodied the local over the universal and the real over the theoretical which the anti-Jacobins were keen to endorse. But with the servant, the anti-Jacobins could also have it both ways, for servants were additionally a necessary hinge between classes in the social order. One could maintain cohesion in one’s own house by instructing and watching over one’s servant; but this inevitably extended to keeping order more generally because servants could diffuse lessons of deference amongst the broader labouring population. Servants *stand in* for the lower orders generally in anti-Jacobin texts, even whilst they are valued as embodying the essence of the particular. Trueman may dismiss any attempt to enact universal principles as empty idealism, but behind his concentration on the servants in his care, there exists the ironic assumption that by regulating their behaviour successfully, order on a national level will consequently be maintained.

If anti-Jacobin fictions were keen to re-inscribe paternalism (now commandeered, however, by the middle classes and not by the aristocracy) between master and servant, they were equally keen to assert a form of old-order paternalism between author and reader. Anti-Jacobin fictions say exactly what they set out to say: it is impossible for the reader of these works to deviate from her allotted responses: to have sympathy for a Godwin caricature, for example. Omniscient narrators are always preferred over the risky subjectivity of first-person narrators. Lengthy asides are continually drawing the moral of preceding episodes. And should either of these devices fail to convince the reader of the correct response to political radicalism, the violent outworkings of the plots themselves can usually be relied on to distinguish beyond doubt the errant from the virtuous.

Anti-Jacobin fictions operate in a black and white universe in which evil is instantaneously recognisable. In Walker’s *The Vagabond*, the barn housing a meeting of agricultural labourers listening to political speeches by “a little ... dark complexioned man, with a most hypocritical countenance” (read Thelwall) is “guarded by some ill-looking fellows” (36). In *Dorothea*, the wicked Jacobin, Thomas Williams, shrinks from the sight of Dorothea’s fiancé, “not liking the contour of his face, and his anti-Republican air” (1:139). Nothing is left for the reader to work out for herself; the

political implications of every action are enthusiastically explained. In her study of political fiction, Susan Rubin Suleiman explores this autocratic attitude towards the reader characteristic of ideological fiction, or of the *roman à thèse* (her preferred term). If such a paternalist attitude treats the reader like a child, it can also be rather comforting to be told exactly what to think:

The *roman à thèse* is essentially an authoritarian genre: it appeals to the need for certainty, stability, and unity that is one of the elements of the human psyche; it affirms absolute truths, absolute values. If, in this process, it infantilises the reader ... it offers in exchange a paternal assurance.⁶¹

And because the *roman à thèse* “flourishes in national contexts, and at historical moments, that produce sharp social and ideological conflicts”,⁶² the solid paternal assurance it offers is particularly welcome. One could go further and claim that the readership’s need for certainty during times of social and political upheaval, such as the 1790s, is the impetus behind political fiction and even a prerequisite for its success.⁶³ The reverencing of a paternalist model of master-servant relations by anti-Jacobin authors, their appropriation of such a model as the antidote to the misery and chaos of revolution, is mirrored by the patriarchal relation they also sought to re-establish between author and reader. Both of these manifestations of paternalism bespeak a profound distrust of the self that is the hallmark of conservative politics in this period.

In conclusion, servant characters were eagerly deployed by anti-Jacobin authors and used to fulfil a range of reactionary ideological functions. Stealing fire from radical novelists, especially from Godwin, meant stealing the servants used in

⁶⁰ Ibid, 14.

⁶¹ Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions*, 10-11.

⁶² Ibid, 16.

⁶³ M. O. Grenby has argued that anti-Jacobin novels, rather than an attempt by conservative authors to impose reactionary views on the reading public, were simply adhering to the desired formula for prose fiction in the unsettled period following the French Revolution. Anti-Jacobin novels were “not creating, nor even seeking to create, an anti-Jacobin rectitude in their readers, but writing to re-inforce existing convictions. Fiction was perfectly adapted to reinforce anti-Jacobin nostrums without appearing to ram them home”, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*, 9. I concur with Grenby in his depiction of 1790s Britain as broadly conservative, in the grip of a “sort of communal psychosis” (7). There is also no doubt that the commercial success of anti-Jacobin fiction proves that its politics were welcomed by the reading public. The similarities between anti-Jacobin fictions, and the sheer volume of them produced, also show that conservative fiction had become the generic model for the novel by the end of the decade. But it is swinging too far against the case for anti-Jacobin fiction as propaganda to argue that these novels “reinforce anti-Jacobin nostrums” without ramming them home. The hysterical pitch of many anti-Jacobin fictions, their crude plots and simplistic characterisation, their relentless ideological instruction, testify to their authors’ desire to impose their politics on a readership which is potentially less convinced than they are of the dangers of the radical disease.

such fictions to place pressure on existing social relations, and then putting them firmly back in their place. The servant returned to pre-revolutionary paternalism re-strengthens the entire class fabric of 1790s Britain. The use of servants in anti-Jacobin fictions exposes radical theory as practically disastrous, for all classes of society, and valorises the middle ranks as Britain's most effective legislators and protectors of the social order.

Because the political ideology informing anti-Jacobin fiction is both less disguised and more central to the text than the political ideology informing novels by radical authors, domestic service in conservative novels is also more explicitly politicised. Servitude was seen by anti-Jacobins as the rock upon which the new philosophy foundered. Conservatives realised the paradox between preaching equality on the one hand, and keeping a scullery maid on the other, and exploited this paradox in order to accuse any radical who employed servants of hypocrisy. Radical authors, perhaps aware of the truth in such a charge, were more wary than their conservative counterparts of enforcing a direct link between the servants in their novels and actual domestic servants: distancing devices are used by both Smith and Godwin in order to distinguish their servant protagonists from the body of ordinary domestics within their respective households. In *Dorothea*, the heroine's refusal to be presented to the queen because she denounces the superiority of royalty, elicits this response from her mother-in-law:

'My dear girl,' said Lady Audley, half smiling, 'if you carry this abstracted reasoning into every common affair of life, you will certainly ere long oblige your cook to abdicate his culinary throne, and dismiss your housemaids from the domination of the pails and brushes. Come, come, you shall be as democratic as you please, till you have worn the fancy to tatters, but you shall go to Court for all that.' (1:171-172)

Nowhere else in the literature of the decade is this correlation as explicitly made. The system of domestic service, in which nearly everyone in Britain was involved, as either a master or a servant, contradicts revolutionary philosophy. The connection is drawn here by an anti-Jacobin novelist, not to suggest that cooks and housemaids should be liberated—a preposterous “fancy”—but to show that radical theory is inapplicable in its entirety and therefore founded on hypocrisy.

In *The Old Manor House* and *Caleb Williams*, Smith and Godwin show sympathy with political radicalism by moving servant characters out of their usual position in the margins of texts and by turning them into protagonists. Large proportions of these novels delineate the subjective experiences of two servants,

Monimia and Caleb, and this, in itself, could be interpreted as a radical move. For all their emphasis on servant characters, anti-Jacobin novelists were unwilling to position servants centre stage in their fictions to anything like the same extent. A related difference between servants in radical and anti-Jacobin fiction is that conservative authors rarely allow servants the use of direct speech. Interpolated servant narratives do exist within the pages of anti-Jacobin novels, but they exist exclusively in the form of repentant confessions. Thus we have William, a shadowy figure throughout *Fantom*, only spoken of by other characters, suddenly given his own narrative in the form of his published declaration of guilt which ends the tract. Similarly Sophia in *Dorothea* is allowed to pen a letter, included in its entirety, but only one in which she describes herself as a “fiend in Paradise”, having realised the error of her ways. Conservative authors were inherently wary of servant narrative, as though they understood that crediting servants with subjectivity would move their fictions and, crucially, readers’ reactions to those fictions, into uncontrollable territory. In my final chapter I will examine the ways in which Maria Edgeworth’s use of first-person servant narrative in *Castle Rackrent* does exactly this.

CHAPTER FIVE.

SERVANT NARRATIVE AND THE BOUNDARIES OF AUTHORIAL CONTROL IN MARIA EDGEWORTH'S *CASTLE RACKRENT*.

On the 9th July 1798, the final issue of *The Anti-Jacobin, or, Weekly Examiner* went to press. As it boldly announced, the war with British Jacobinism had now been won. No doubt aided by the outpouring of anti-Jacobin fictions since 1795, not to mention the continuance of repressive legislation against any form of perceived radical activity, the editors felt that by 1798 they had “completed our Engagement with the Public.—The ANTI-JACOBIN has been conducted to the close of the Session in strict conformity with the Principles upon which it was first undertaken”. “The SPELL of *Jacobin invulnerability*”, they informed their readership, “is now broken”. “Here then We rest.”¹

But if vanguards of the British establishment, such as *The Anti-Jacobin's* editor, George Canning, were beginning to relax by the summer of 1798, the situation in Ireland was very different. In 1798, indigenous unrest which had been simmering throughout the decade erupted into open rebellion by members of the United Irishmen, followed by the landing of a supporting French army on Irish soil. It seemed as though revolution, successfully prevented in England, had now broken out in her neighbouring country, potentially sandwiching Britain between two hostile revolutionary states. The Rising, however, quickly proved abortive, successfully crushed by British military forces and by internal disorganisation. What is significant to note in terms of prose fiction, nevertheless, is the way in which Ireland is made to serve as a convenient example of the horrors unleashed by popular rebellion in post-1798 anti-Jacobin fictions.² And when Anglo-Irish novelist Maria Edgeworth comes to recount the events of 1798 within her own fiction, there is also evidence to suggest that some of the patterns at the heart of the conservative depiction of servant characters, discussed in my previous chapter, are re-echoed here.

In Edgeworth's *Ennui* (1809), the domestic servant Joe Kelly is a secret member of the United Irishman who plots to bring his master, Lord Glenthorn, over to the side of the revolutionaries, or, failing that, to murder him. Lord Glenthorn's nurse, Ellinor, stresses the intimate nature of the servant threat: “What villains am I talking of? Of him, the wickedest of all, who is now living in the very house with you, that is now

¹ *The Anti-Jacobin*, 2:615, 2:616, 2:622.

² In *Dorothea*, the Irish Rising of 1798 is depicted as the work of one of the novel's insidious ‘new philosophers’ who, discontented with the muted reception of his radical ideas in England, travels to Ireland to incite revolution more successfully. Other anti-Jacobin fictions with Ireland as a revolutionary backdrop, rather than France, include Charles Lucas, *The Infernal Quixote* (1801) and Robert Bisset, *Modern Literature*. M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*, 58-60.

lying in the very next room to you”.³ As with anti-Jacobin authors before her, Edgeworth focuses on the servant in the household as the most effective weapon against the master classes, should the servant in question ever become contaminated by the radical disease. And yet also like anti-Jacobin authors before her, Edgeworth is still keen to contain servant agency by stressing the culpability of those masters who relinquish domestic control. Lord Glenthorn is a sufferer of chronic *ennui*, and so, too bored to regulate the servants in his care, is consequently left to their mercy. With the benefit of hindsight, Lord Glenthorn notes how “ruined by indulgence, and by my indolent, reckless temper, my servants were now my masters. In a large, ill-regulated establishment, domestics become, like spoiled children, discontented, capricious, and the tyrants over those who have not the sense or steadiness to command”.⁴ “Perhaps *ennui* may have had a share in creating revolutions”, notes Lord Glenthorn, in one of the novel’s most salient sentences.⁵ The message is again quite clear: to allow your servants (who are as children) control by negligence of one’s own domestic power has potentially devastating personal consequences. Meanwhile for the greater (e)state of either England or Ireland, lack of servant regulation can be catastrophic.

Like William in Hannah More’s *Fantom*, and the many servants of anti-Jacobin fictions who followed him to the gallows, the final glimpse we are given of Joe Kelly shows this renegade servant captured, destined for execution, “upon his knees, and, in the most abject terms ... implor[ing] our mercy”.⁶ Following the anti-Jacobin model, containment of the servant monster is more or less successful here, and Edgeworth is similarly loyal to her anti-Jacobin predecessors in severely restricting the use of direct servant speech in *Ennui*. In an earlier Edgeworth novel, however, partly composed during the 1798 disturbances and published just two years later in 1800, dispelling the servant threat is not nearly as successful. In *Castle Rackrent*, the anti-Jacobin rule of thumb about disallowing servant narrative is disobeyed, with more far-reaching revolutionary implications than this later tale of direct servant involvement in armed uprising. The ways in which the boundaries of authorial control come to be confounded by servant narrative in *Castle Rackrent*, as well as the effects of this confounding on ruling-order ideology of the paternalist family, are the subjects of my final chapter.

Because the discourse of servitude is broadly applicable not only to the condition of subordinate *classes*, but also to the condition of subordinate *peoples*, servants in Irish texts are both prevalent and hermeneutically complex. Political

³ Maria Edgeworth, *Ennui* (1809), in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth, Volume 1*, ed. Jane Desmarais, Tim McLoughlin and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 258.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 264.

allegories depicting the relationship between England and Ireland as familial were common throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with an earlier representation of Ireland as England's younger brother or sister⁷ giving way to the dominant model of Ireland as England's jilted girlfriend or wife. By 1800, the Act of Union between England and Ireland was almost exclusively depicted as a heterosexual marriage between male England and female Ireland.⁸ Modern literary criticism and cultural studies has focused on the gender implications behind this depiction of the two nations,⁹ just as the fraught position of women in 1790s Britain as a result of the French Revolution has also received ample critical attention. I have argued throughout this dissertation that servants merit an equal place in the study of 1790s prose fictions, and I would also argue here that servants are foregrounded in these prose allegories of sexual union between England and Ireland to a degree that is overlooked by current scholarship.

In 1707, as legislative union between England and Scotland was being negotiated, Jonathan Swift wrote, though did not publish,¹⁰ *The Story of the Injured Lady, Written by Herself, in a Letter to Her Friend; With His Answer*. The complaint of the injured lady (Ireland) is that her seducer (England) has jilted her and married her rival (Scotland). Here we have the heterosexual model of representation that was to dominate depictions of England and Ireland by the century's end. More, however, servants fill this tale of Ireland's betrayal and downfall. England's behaviour within Ireland's household with regard to her own domestics has undermined Ireland's authority over them; eventually England forces Ireland into a position of servitude herself. The first incursion of Ireland's liberties occurs when England "finds fault with the government of my family" and supplants Ireland's domestic servants with his own:

I consented that his Steward should govern my House, and have Liberty to employ an Under-Steward, who should receive his directions. My Lover proceeded further, turning away several old Servants and Tenants, and supplying me with others from his own

⁷ Oliver Ferguson, *Jonathan Swift and Ireland* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 6.

⁸ Willa Murphy, "A Queen of Hearts or an Old Maid?: Maria Edgeworth's Fictions of Union", in *Acts of Union: The Causes, Contexts and Consequences of the Act of Union*, edited by Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 187.

⁹ "The union was a heterosexual marriage because it was effected to alleviate the anxiety caused by the French threat to Britain's 'rear end' and because the British tried to end the narrative of Irish nationalism as in a Jane Austen novel. It was a heterosexual marriage because it aimed ... both to preserve and suspend inequality, to admit the Irish to sovereignty in order to establish sovereignty *over* them. It was a heterosexual marriage because it both denied and reified difference. ... It was a heterosexual marriage because it turned coercion into consent through the forced hegemony known as matrimony". And so on. Jane Elizabeth Dougherty, "Mr. And Mrs. England: The Act of Union as National Marriage", in *ibid*, 202-3.

¹⁰ *The Injured Lady* was published posthumously in 1748.

House. These grew so domineering and unreasonable, that there was no Quiet ...¹¹

The injured lady's story ends as England, having now married Scotland instead, forces Ireland either to become "Sempstress to his Grooms and Footmen" within his own household, "or starve".¹²

Throughout the course of the narrative, the plantation of Ulster, the evils of absenteeism, as well as broader events outside Ireland, such as the execution of Charles I, are all exclusively rendered by describing the behaviour of domestic servants.¹³ If England and Ireland, as man and woman, represent the heads of two respective households, their estates conveniently become two nation states while domestic servants within these (e)states can be made to represent a range of national components: kings, prime ministers, landlords, subjects, even colonised nations themselves. The discourse of mastership and servitude is not only an appropriate ingredient in descriptions of Ireland's subjugation to England. Its very suitability as a metaphor for the colonisation of other peoples, as well as for the control of subordinate classes, ensures that the wide range of its application can make the precise meaning of the literary servant in an Irish context hard to ascertain.

As discussed at the end of my first chapter, Burke's writings on Ireland involve many more references to servants and servitude than his writings concerning England. Such references also end by expressing a political radicalism at odds with the counter-revolutionary invective for which he became most famous, and this indicates the extent to which the deployment of servant discourse, especially within an Irish context, becomes difficult to control. If Burke was primarily concerned with the liberation of Irish Catholic gentlemen, rather than with all Irish Catholics and hence with the vast majority of the Irish labouring poor, his passionate outcry against the division of the Irish nation into "two distinct bodies, without common interest, sympathy or connexion; one of which bodies was to possess *all* the franchises, *all* the property, *all* the education" while "[t]he other was to be composed of drawers of water and cutters of turf for them",¹⁴ nevertheless implicated the body of the Irish people in his calls for Irish political reform. A Dublin journal published in the run up to the passing of the Act of Union, *The Anti-Union*, makes a similarly extensive use of servants as Swift and Burke, while the precise meaning of servants here, as earlier, remains impossible to fix.

¹¹ Jonathan Swift, *The Story of the Injured Lady, Being a True Picture of Scotch Perfidy, Irish Poverty and English Partiality* (1748), in *Irish Tracts and Sermons 1720-1723* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948), 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5, 6, 4.

The *Anti-Union's* political position was inherently paradoxical. Inspired by the confident assertions of the *Anti-Jacobin* that it had been instrumental in quelling radicalism in Britain, and obviously in accord with the reactionary sentiments of its chosen prototype, the *Anti-Union* launched itself on 27th December 1798 with the following mission statement:

A few loyal and literary men in London, considerably checked the progress of French philosophy, and domestic disaffection, by joining in a Periodical Publication, called the *Anti-Jacobin*.

This work was written with much ability, and held up the principles of disloyalty to constant detestation and ridicule.

It is conceived by some well-wishers to Ireland, that the success of the Union, now under discussion, is intimately connected with the triumph of Jacobinism, Rebellion, and French Fraternity, and therefore, that every man who loves his King and Country is bound to counteract it with all the means in his power. For this purpose, a Periodical Paper, called the ANTI-UNION, will continue to be Published *three times a week* ... so long as this fatal measure is in agitation.¹⁵

The Union was conceived of by the British Prime Minister, William Pitt, as well as by many of its Irish adherents, as a *stay* against the “triumph of Jacobinism, Rebellion and French Fraternity”, precisely the inverse of the *Anti-Union's* above-stated point of view. But the contradictions of the *Anti-Union's* position extend further. Whilst in accord with the conservatism of the *Anti-Jacobin*, and vociferously opposed to the kind of violent revolutionary uprising which had just erupted across Ireland, the *Anti-Union*, by critiquing the intentions of the British state towards her neighbouring nation, simultaneously flaunted the injunction of the *Anti-Jacobin* against any form of oppositional political activity. The *Anti-Union* was thus caught between conservative sympathies, and a commitment to Irish parliamentary independence that could only be interpreted as an expression of political radicalism by the terms of the discourse it was attempting to emulate.

For the *Anti-Union* agitators, the threat facing Ireland in the form of union with Great Britain was nothing less than the blotting out of Ireland's name from the “catalogue of nations”,¹⁶ for which Britain was to be held directly responsible. Burkean rhetoric, lifted wholesale from the *Reflections*: “Every tie of public and private obligation, the love we owe to our country, the gratitude we owe to our ancestors ... the duty we owe to our posterity”,¹⁷ fills the pages of the *Anti-Union*, but this is clearly a conservative language appropriated for seditious purposes. Evoking the patriotic

¹⁴ *Writings and Speeches*, 9:597.

¹⁵ *The Anti-Union* (Dublin: 1798-1800); Issue 1, 27th December 1798, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 1.

defence of the organic, sacral nation, may work to seal the English body politic against revolutionary contagion. Once the same partisan spirit is appropriated in defence of *Irish* nationhood, however, England, as Ireland's coloniser and as Ireland's impending sole parliamentary power, replaces France as the principal enemy. Transposing nationalist conservative discourse from an English context into an Irish one immediately muddies its intentions: what would be termed conservatism in England becomes subversion in Ireland. The *Anti-Union* swings accordingly between anti-revolutionary outrage, and radical assertiveness, as in its spirited defence of a free press.¹⁸

Two short stories, published within the pages of the *Anti-Union*, make full use of the applicability of the master-servant analogy to Ireland's relations with England. Both of these stories depend on the same personification of Ireland as a woman, and of England as her gentleman suitor, introduced by Swift in *An Injured Lady*. But whereas Swift rails against the failure of Britain to enact a union with Ireland at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the stories of the *Anti-Union* depict the forthcoming marriage between England and Ireland as an unfair deal, a scandalous appropriation of Ireland's wealth and resources, a union with rape at its base.¹⁹ These anonymous contributors to the pages of the *Anti-Union* change the ending of Swift's tale, as well as the nature of the marriage planned between England and Ireland, but they follow Swift in rendering the political relationship of the two nations through an allegory of sexual-marital relations in crisis. They also adopt Swift's vision of corrupted domesticity by paying scrupulous attention to the behaviour of the servants within the households of the respective male and female protagonists. Here, servitude is once more appropriated as an apposite analogy for every significant relationship. The young woman of the first of the *Anti-Union* stories suffers from being treated as "a mere dependent" by her relation, Mr. Bull.²⁰ Mr. Bull in turn is being brought to the brink of financial disaster by the "ill-advised, chimerical plans" of a servant "in his office", (read William Pitt).²¹ Another villain of the piece is a "Cook ... in Mr. Bull's

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 2: "We may congratulate ourselves that the Press is still free, and before this organ of the public voice become silent for ever, it should be employed in the public service". British radicals throughout the 1790s turned to the principle of a free press in their defence of such publications as Tomas Paine's *Rights of Man*. In Ireland, freedom of the press was an even more contentious issue. Several newspapers of the United Irishmen were banned as engines of sedition and revolution prior to the Rising in 1798: the *Northern Star* was suppressed as early as 1796; its successor *The Press* in 1797. Marilyn Butler, General Introduction to *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 1:xxxv.

¹⁹ The first story alludes to rape as a malicious smear against Ireland's reputation. See the *Anti-Union*, January 1st, 1799, no. 3, 11: "he has actually been base enough to publish an advertisement, informing all my friends, that I have been debauched by Mr. Bull". In the second story Mr. Britton actually rapes Ierne. The *Anti-Union*, January 17, 1799, 27.

²⁰ The *Anti-Union*, January 1st, 1799, 9.

²¹ *Ibid*, 10.

family”, whom Ireland is required to hire as a “shop-boy” in her own household, and who in turn wrecks havoc between her domestics, by sowing amongst them “the most virulent animosities”:

Some of my servants he has persuaded (by infusing groundless fears and jealousies into their minds) to put on orange liveries, and to threaten death and destruction to the rest; those others again, by familiar misrepresentations, he has induced to array themselves in green, and to commit the most horrible excesses, and others he has actually and openly paid with my own money, to aggravate and perpetuate the quarrels between the two former—²²

Perhaps the most striking disjunction of the pro-*Anti-Jacobin Anti-Union* is the fact that, here, the British state behaves precisely like an archetypal villain of late-1790s anti-Jacobin fiction: rupturing the Irish domestic sphere and threatening its fair neighbour with military, economic and cultural destruction. The quotation above reveals the extent to which the master-servant relationship has become a ubiquitous, even clichéd metaphor, applicable to Ireland herself as a colonial dependent; to ministers in the British government, who are servants to the king; to the Irish lower classes themselves, as they split during the 1790s into the twin sectarian camps of Orangeism versus Catholic Defenderism.²³ If servitude is an obvious symbolic resource when writing of Ireland, it also functions simultaneously on a number of political levels, becoming pressurised into a diverse range of possible meanings, and threatening the text itself with ultimate illegibility. Given both the aptness of featuring servant characters in texts which set out to articulate Irish realities, and the unpredictability of the meaning attached to servant protagonists within these texts, it is unsurprising that the most famous early Anglo-Irish novel²⁴ should be both narrated by a servant character, and end as a work of “startling incoherence”.²⁵

Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent: an Hibernian Tale taken from the facts and from the manners of the Irish squires before the year 1782*, published in 1800, has generated critical controversy since its initial reception. One of the novel’s first

²² *Ibid.*, 10, 11.

²³ The Orange Order was established in 1795.

²⁴ In ‘The Nature of the Irish Novel’, Thomas Flanagan writes of the novel that it is: “the first fictional narrative of Irish life to be written in the English language”, in *Family Chronicles: Maria Edgeworth’s Castle Rackrent*, ed. Coilín Owens (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1987), 48. Ian Campbell Ross, however, in his discussion of Irish prose fiction produced since the 1750s, has convincingly scotched the prevalent view of *Castle Rackrent* as the first Anglo-Irish novel. See his introduction to “Fiction to 1800”, in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Volume I*, ed. Seamus Deane (1991; Derry: Field Day Publications, 1992), 682.

²⁵ Seamus Deane, *Strange Country*, 39. Ina Ferris comments on how “*Castle Rackrent*, notoriously, has yielded to contradictory readings”, in *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 114.

reviewers admitted he found *Castle Rackrent* “of so peculiar and singular a cast” it rendered normal reviewing “impracticable”.²⁶ Modern critics divide themselves over many aspects of the novel’s interpretation. Historical time proves contentious in a work often designated as the first historical novel.²⁷ While Barry Sloan finds the “sense of historical process which emerges from this deceptively easy tale”, “astonishing”,²⁸ W. B. Coley argues that there is “scarcely a whisper” of history in *Castle Rackrent*; that the text is fundamentally ahistorical.²⁹ Similarly Thady himself is alternately loyal to the point of exhibiting a slave mentality, a servant “faithful to the end”,³⁰ or a devious plotter, feigning loyalty whilst sealing the demise of the Rackrent line via the legal machinations of his own son.³¹ Tom Dunne has produced excellent readings of *Castle Rackrent* as a colonial novel, and of Thady as a colonised ‘other’, which have been taken up by other modern critics, including Suvendrini Perera.³² The colonial reading has, in turn, been questioned by critics such as Julian Moynahan and Marilyn Butler, who contest either the colonial nature of post-Union Ireland, or the designation of Thady’s relationship with his masters as primarily a colonial one.³³

No matter how divided modern literary criticism may find itself over precisely *where* the text’s significance may reside, there is no doubt that the accumulated mass of criticism on this slightest, and strangest, of Maria Edgeworth’s

²⁶ *Monthly Review*, (May 1800), cited in Marilyn Butler’s introductory note to *Castle Rackrent* in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 1:xii.

²⁷ The list of firsts claimed for *Castle Rackrent* is impressive. Maurice Colgan, “The Significant Silences of Thady Quirk”, in *Family Chronicles*, 57: “It is the first family saga, the first historical novel, and the first novel to use a narrator who is a minor character, and who can therefore assess as well as describe events. This narrator ... is also the first to use demotic speech”.

²⁸ Barry Sloan, *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction 1800-1850* (Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1986), 3.

²⁹ W. B. Coley, “An Early ‘Irish’ Novelist”, in *Family Chronicles*, 40.

³⁰ John Cronin sees Thady as a “magnificently realised slave, a terrifying vision of the results of colonial misrule”, cited in Ann Owen Weekes, *Irish Women Writers, an Unchartered Tradition* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 41; Patrick Rafriodi, *Irish Literature in English: The Romantic Period*, 2 vols. (Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1980), 1:101.

³¹ Robert Tracy, “Maria Edgeworth and Lady Morgan: Legality versus Legitimacy”, in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 40:1 (1985), 4: “But Thady is not naïve. He is well aware that the more foolishly the Rackrents behave, the more he and his family will prosper”.

³² Tom Dunne, *Maria Edgeworth and the Colonial Mind* (Dublin: National University of Ireland Press, 1984); “Haunted by History: Irish Romantic Writing 1800-1850”, in *Romanticism in National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 68-89. Suvendrini Perera, *Reaches of Empire: The English Novel from Edgeworth to Dickens* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 15: “Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* ... is probably the first significant English novel to speak in the voice of the colonised”.

³³ Julian Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), xii-xiii; Marilyn Butler, “Edgeworth’s Ireland: History, Popular Culture and Secret Codes”, in *Novel, A Forum on Fiction*, 34:2 (2001), 267-268; Marilyn Butler in her introduction to *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 1:xl: “Thady’s relationship with his masters never was that of one of the colonised with the

novels, bears testament to its perceived importance to a host of interrelated discourses: discussions of *Castle Rackrent* may be found in works on the historical novel; on colonial fiction; on women's fiction of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; and on Anglo-Irish fiction. I would argue that the magnitude *Castle Rackrent* has assumed in literary studies, is due, in large part, to Edgeworth's deployment of a servant narrator. For such weighty critical statements as the claim that *Castle Rackrent* provides "the most convincing expression of [Ireland's] problems"³⁴ are due almost entirely to the vast symbolic resonance of Thady Quirk, of all he can possibly stand for in an Irish context. Even if it was the dissolute Rackrents who were primarily in Edgeworth's view as she wrote *Castle Rackrent*,³⁵ it is Thady Quirk, and the contentious issue of his loyalty, which has dominated all subsequent discussions of the text.³⁶ And criticism has focused so fruitfully, and yet so contentiously, on the servant, both because he potentially articulates so much about class, regional culture and colonialism generally, and because his precise hermeneutic function is so variable as to be impossible to pin down. Like Swift's *Injured Lady*, like Burke's Irish writings, like the stories included in the *Anti-Union*, servitude characterises this early "Hibernian Tale". And, as is also the tendency of these texts, the servant in *Castle Rackrent* resonates with significances beyond the remit of his creator, to the extent that the text narrated by Thady Quirk spins drastically out of control.

Reading *Castle Rackrent*, puzzles immediately arise and immediately proliferate. Before Thady Quirk's extraordinary idiom is unleashed, the reader is presented with a preface,³⁷ pointing out precisely where the value of the impending servant-narrated text lies. "A plain unvarnished tale is preferable to the most highly ornamented narrative", we are told, because "[w]here we see that a man has the power, we may naturally suspect that he has the will to deceive us".³⁸ The servant biographer is better, so the preface goes, than the aristocratic biographer, because the servant, lacking

colonisers". I will be discussing the appropriateness of colonial readings of *Castle Rackrent* in detail later.

³⁴ Elizabeth Harden, "Transparent Thady Quirk", in *Family Chronicles*, 95.

³⁵ Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth, A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 306: "[Edgeworth] found it unpalatable that she had made the quaint, archaic narrator more interesting than the Rackrents, who as landlords had in reality a more significant part to play in Irish life. Her motives in taking to fiction were not to act as an amanuensis to John Langan ..."

³⁶ Seamus Deane speaks of the "peculiar interrogatory form of this novel's subsequent interpretations", and notes in particular the dominance of queries about Thady's true intentions: "Does Thady approve or disapprove? Does Thady consciously know whether he does either of these?" *Strange Country*, 41.

³⁷ It is commonly assumed that Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Maria's father, wrote the preface to *Castle Rackrent*. Marilyn Butler's introduction to *Castle Rackrent and Ennui* (1800 and 1809 respectively; London: Penguin, 1992), 8.

³⁸ Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth, Volume 1*, ed. Jane Desmarais, Tim McLoughlin and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 6. All subsequent references to *Castle Rackrent* are to this edition of the text and will appear parenthetically in the main body of the chapter.

both education and the influence attendant upon social standing, is incapable of deceiving his readership:

For these reasons the public often judiciously countenance those, who, without sagacity to discriminate character, without elegance of style to relieve the tediousness of narrative, without enlargement of mind to draw any conclusions from the facts they relate, simply pour forth anecdotes, and retail conversations, with all the minute prolixity of a gossip in a country town.

The author of the following Memoirs has upon these grounds fair claims to the public favour and attention; he was an illiterate old steward ... (6).

In other words simple servant narrative allows a readership direct access to the Truth. This seems radical enough, but it is difficult to determine if it is seriously meant. For Marilyn Butler, the preface is an ironic send-up of populist sentimental writing of revolutionary times.³⁹ Perhaps in a deliberate re-working of William Godwin's preface to *Caleb Williams*, which informs the reader that the following story, narrated by a servant, lays bare the "modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism",⁴⁰ the invasiveness attendant upon such servant-scrutiny is instead stressed in the Edgeworth preface. Throughout the 1790s, a typical anti-Jacobin tactic was to discredit radical philosophy, (indeed *all* philosophy was distrusted, to the extent that the word itself became derogatory), as an absurd discourse which twisted reality in order to justify a monstrous invasion of the private realm. When Edgeworth's preface boasts that the current taste of the public for "private anecdotes" is evidence of the "good sense and profoundly philosophic temper of the present times" (6), the disjunction between common nosiness, and the elevated claims made for it, alerts our attention. The potential irony here becomes more explicit, when the publication of the familiar letters and private diaries of an individual "by his enemies, after his decease", renders them "important literary curiosities" (6). The fact that servants are privy to intimate domestic detail, and are prepared to publish their findings to the world, is rather disturbing and unsavoury than laudatory. Enlightenment-coloured claims that invert the social order for the sake of Truth are potentially shaken here by the distaste generated by servant gossip-mongering.

The first claim of the preface is destabilized by irony, but the privileging of the servant over the aristocratic biographer is undercut more definitively as a result of the means by which the servant affords access to the Truth. For the narrator is only more valuable because his prejudices are more glaringly present. They are therefore

³⁹ Marilyn Butler, introduction to *Castle Rackrent and Ennui*, 8.

⁴⁰ William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 1.

easily detected by the canny reader: "That the ignorant may have their prejudices as well as the learned cannot be disputed; but we see and despise vulgar errors; we never bow to the authority of him who has no great name to sanction his absurdities. The partiality which blinds a biographer to the defects of his hero, in proportion as it is gross, ceases to be dangerous" (6). Thady's value as a more truthful witness is therefore raised, only to be re-subverted by a rigidly asymmetrical power relation between reader and author. A philosophic love of Truth, which transfers authorship, and with it an important form of authority, from the master classes to the people, gives way in turn to the establishment of a colonial-type relationship between reader and author, between the educated and the illiterate,⁴¹ which aims to contain the authority so conferred.

Critical attention has tended to focus on the public history/private biography dichotomy contained in the preface, and on the varying degrees of insight afforded by each mode. But, more interestingly, the preface also addresses power, the power enabled, specifically, by literacy, and it links the power of literacy directly to socio-political influence. In all of this, the reader is positioned as being potentially disempowered by the texts s/he consumes, if the author of those texts is educated enough, and socially influential enough, to predetermine the reader's response. Thus it is that the polished literary productions of "her grace the Duchess of Newcastle", who is both an accomplished writer, and a member of the social elite, are to be distrusted. And thus it is that this aristocratic authoress is shunned in favour of narrators "without sagacity to discriminate character, without elegance of style to relieve the tediousness of narrative, without enlargement of mind to draw any conclusions from the facts they relate" (6). The narrator who is simultaneously ineffectual as an author because he is ill educated, and politically ineffectual because of his menial social position, converge conveniently in Thady Quirk: "The author of the following Memoirs has upon these

⁴¹ Many critics have followed Marilyn Butler in assuming that the description of Thady as "illiterate" in the preface means that he is literally unable to write, and that the text of *Castle Rackrent* is therefore dictated. I am unconvinced that this is the case, especially given the prevalence of the term "illiterate" specifically to mean lacking a classical education, so pertinent to the political debates of the 1790s. Thady himself "completed the narrative which is now laid before the public", having overcome his "habitual laziness" (6); there is no suggestion here of a third party acting as his amanuensis. Thady can obviously read, and while the ability to write did not automatically accompany an ability to read, the extent of Thady's reading makes his inability to write, even at basic level, unlikely. He wears reading glasses, carries a ballad book about with him, and frequently inspects his masters' correspondence, with such easy grasp of legal terminology, for a peasant, that a footnote comes supplied in an attempt to explain it. Furthermore, while attention is drawn to the illiteracy of Judy Quirk, with an illustration of her 'mark', the cross that stands for a signature, Thady is described as smoothly "witnessing" a paper of Sir Condy's with his own pen (40); there is no mention anywhere in the novel of Thady's 'mark'. Thady is later dismissed as an unreliable witness to another document, not because he can't write, but because he was "crying like a child" (45). Of all the servant occupations, the position of steward would have required the ability to read and write. The difference, however, between being ill educated, and being able to write, is essentially one of degree; it remains crucial to the text that Thady, if able to read and write, has not received extensive schooling, and that the level of education in his readership far surpasses his own.

grounds fair claims to the public favour and attention; he was an illiterate old steward” (6). Bad writing is to be actively welcomed as long as the precarious status of the reader is protected and deception forestalled. Thady has no “name”, as the Duchess of Newcastle has, to “sanction his absurdities”, and is therefore a much more congenial an author to the writer of the preface because, on both counts of education and social standing, he fails to threaten his readership with disempowerment through deceit.

If Thady’s narrative offers the reader not Truth, but prejudice, which must be actively pierced by the reader, in order to arrive at Truth, there is a sense in which his story functions as a corollary to raw materials undergoing the process of industrial manufacture. Imagery of economic production envelops Thady’s tale. Edgeworth refers to writing as “literary manufacture” (6) in the preface, and closes with the supposition that the drain of “gentleman of education” Ireland will invariably suffer in the aftermath of the Union, may be mitigated by the “introduction of British manufacturers in their places” (54). Thady’s voice becomes equivalent to raw materials, which the more educated, but not aristocratic, and therefore specifically middle-class reader, works on to produce Truth, just as raw materials are transformed via manufacture, again primarily by the middle-classes, into wealth. Such an analogy strengthens the social inequalities resultant from education enshrined in the preface: raw materials occupy the bottom of the chain of production, because they have not yet been transformed into value via labour, and therefore demand the lowest price.

The relationship between raw materials and manufacture has a colonial aspect also: raw materials from the Empire fuelled Britain’s meteoric industrialisation in the early nineteenth century.⁴² In the context of *Castle Rackrent*, the analogy between Thady’s tale and raw materials bears a specifically colonial resonance, because Thady’s voice, in the Irish idiom, relating exclusively Irish concerns, (the Anglo-Irish are conspicuously absent and the Rackrents themselves belong to the native Irish squirearchy), is to be worked on by a specifically English reader in order to produce Truth, or value. The preface, the footnotes, the glossary, all work to render Thady intelligible to an English reader. They therefore attempt to eradicate the difference between the native Irish ‘other’ and the English; indeed this dissolution of national difference as a result of the Union is hailed at the end of the preface in positive terms: “When Ireland loses her identity by an union with Great Britain, she will look back with a smile of good-humoured complacency on the sir Kits and sir Condys of her

⁴² Taking the pivotal case of cotton manufacture, the first of Britain’s industries to be “revolutionised”, E. J. Hobsbawm writes: “But the cotton manufacture had other advantages. All its raw material came from abroad, and its supply could therefore be expanded by the drastic procedures open to white men in the colonies—slavery and the opening of new areas of cultivation—rather than by the slower procedures open to European agriculture”, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848* (1962; London: Sphere Books, 1977), 53, 52.

former existence" (7). Marilyn Butler has dismissed the possibility of a colonial reading of the novel on the grounds that Thady's masters are not, simultaneously, his colonisers.⁴³ This is undoubtedly the case. However, I would argue that the colonising impulse is nevertheless present in the text, not between the Rackrents and their domestic staff, but between the editor of the text, who bears her English audience constantly in mind, and its Irish narrator. Colonial readings of *Castle Rackrent* are appropriate because the process of colonisation, the drive to adopt a native 'otherness' and to try and efface its difference to the mother culture, is explicit in the editorial material surrounding Ireland's native voice.⁴⁴

This colonial-type relation between the editor of *Castle Rackrent* and its narrator is intimately connected to an anxiety over servant literacy. Throughout the 1790s, in the wake of the French Revolution, concerns over literacy levels amongst the lower orders took on crisis proportions. In my introduction, I showed how Richard Lovell Edgeworth was in a minority of 1790s educationalists, in that he advocated teaching the poor to write, as well as to read, albeit in a strictly lower-class hand. By thus extending access to education amongst the populace, he argued, socio-political unrest could be forestalled.⁴⁵ By contrast, the novelists of the 1790s, on both sides of the divide, consistently adopted a more radical view of education, as opposed to the notion of education as a conservative hegemonic tool, and chose to depict familial relations unsettled by servant literacy. In novels of the 1790s it is the servants who can read and write, as I have shown, who succeed most graphically in disrupting the social order. Curiously, this also seems to be the concern of the writer of the preface to *Castle Rackrent*, in which the revolutionary potential of literate servants is apprehended. The revolutionary potential of literate servants is why the emphasis on the illiteracy of Thady is there in the first place. It works to guarantee the supremacy of the novel's readership and to ensure that Thady remains literarily, and socially, inferior.

And yet the question remains: why allow Thady to speak in the first place? Why risk a servant narrator telling the politically provocative tale of the downfall of a landed family? An analogy may be drawn at this point between allowing Thady the chance to tell his side of the story, and attempts by some conservatives in the 1790s, including the Edgeworths, to preclude lower class radicalism by educating the poor. For

⁴³ See footnote 33.

⁴⁴ In making this case for the appropriateness of a colonial reading of the novel, I accord with Mary Jean Corbett who warns against over-generalisation: "attending to the local in the nineteenth-century English-Irish context means acknowledging that the history of colonial Ireland in the nineteenth century can no longer be written in the sweeping terms of a simple opposition between colonised and coloniser: it is just not (and never was) that simple". With her, again, however, I agree that attention to the peculiarities of the Irish situation "need not mean ... we relinquish the interpretative perspective that postcolonial theories of discourse and representation can provide", *Allegories of Union*, 8.

⁴⁵ Introduction, 27.

just as lower class literacy, with all its potential for social subversion, became an area of such concern for British conservatives, Thady's voice, as the unadulterated expression of class, cultural, and regional difference, also embodied an area of concern for those advocates of the Union, such as the Edgeworths, who wished to see Irish difference annulled by a political and legislative union with Britain. As Terry Eagleton has already noted, "[f]or any state, the greatest test of its hegemonic powers is posed by its colonial subjects".⁴⁶ Liz Bellamy has argued that within nascent British bourgeois culture in the eighteenth century "there was considerable anxiety about manifestations of cultural and geographical diversity, particularly within the realm of language".⁴⁷ This anxiety intensified as the Union between Ireland and Britain loomed. And just as teaching the poor how to read was advocated by conservatives in the 1790s solely as a defence mechanism, allowing *what* they read to be ever more tightly controlled, Thady's voice is introduced only to be inhibited by the extraordinary amount of editorial material surrounding his language. The figure of a native Irish servant, at the end of the revolutionary decade, immediately after the Irish Rising of 1798, and on the eve of Ireland's Union with Britain, is also to be paid scrupulous attention. It represents, after all, the capacity to disrupt both the social order *and* the internal cohesion of an amended British nation. It must be brought into the public realm, and then disarmed, neutralised by the explicatory footnotes and glossary, so that its meaning is made transparent to an English readership and its distinctiveness eradicated. Another term for this process is colonisation.

The preface, the glossary and the footnotes to *Castle Rackrent* are intended to do to the native voice of an Irish illiterate servant, Thady Quirk, what the Act of Union was to do to the Irish nation: eliminate Irish difference.⁴⁸ *Castle Rackrent*, completed whilst the Union vote was actually being conducted in Dublin, is a remarkable example of a text incorporating a broader political aspiration into its very structure. The Act of Union, in effect, did not work to bring Ireland peaceably within a redefined British body politic; rather it was responsible for "reactive and often reactionary formulations of 'national' identity"⁴⁹ which asserted Ireland's uniqueness. Joep Leerssen has described Irish feeling about the Union as "overwhelmingly negative". Hostility to the

⁴⁶ Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), 28.

⁴⁷ Liz Bellamy, "Regionalism and Nationalism: Maria Edgeworth, Walter Scott and the Definition of Britishness", in *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland 1800-1990*, ed. K. D. M. Snell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 55.

⁴⁸ Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 391: "her strategy is not to prove that the Irish are unique, and therefore worthy of nationhood, but to show them in essence the same, and therefore worthy of equality". I would qualify this to argue that Edgeworth's project was to show that the native Irish *could be made* the same. Sir Walter Scott famously declared that Maria Edgeworth's Irish fictions did more to promote the Union than any legislative enactment. Marilyn Butler's introductory note to *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 1:xiii.

Union was only exacerbated by the subsequent failure of the British legislature to emancipate Irish Catholics.⁵⁰ This consequence of the Union is at odds with Edgeworth's confident prediction in the preface that: "When Ireland loses her identity by an union with Great Britain, she will look back with a smile of good-humoured complacency on the sir Kits and sir Condys of her former existence" (7). And just as the Act of Union ultimately failed to function in the way it was intended to, Thady Quirk also subverts his creator's intention: he shatters the complacency of the preface writer by being *unreadable*.

The act of allowing Thady to speak subverts the power relation between reader and narrator which the preface is at such uneasy pains to uphold. The strained inversion of private over public, uneducated over educated, openly prejudiced over artificially disinterested, vernacular over standard English, spontaneity over reason, rural over urban, servant over master, is designed to allow the reader guaranteed interpretative powers over an almost abjectly humbled story-teller. Yet allowing the servant the freedom to narrate the downfall of his masters, in his own words, is still an act of potentially subversive licence. The preface-writer appears confident that this is not dangerous: the servant's voice is presented within the context of a colonial-type interpretative apparatus, which ensures that power remains weighted on the reader's side. In the ensuing struggle for interpretation, so the preface goes, Thady's prejudices will be easily pierced and the reader will win. What is so interesting about the text that follows is that it has become the site of such a monumental struggle for interpretation. Thady cannot be so easily read, or so easily dismissed, after all. In *Castle Rackrent*, the old order may collapse and be taken over by the children of servants on the level of plot; but the existing power structures suffer an even more interesting defeat in the ultimate illegibility of Thady himself.

A number of unassailable contradictions divide the text as it is foretold in the preface, from the text as it actually unfolds. If we follow the logic of the preface-writer, Thady, though unreliable, is, with a little bit of attention, rendered transparent, allowing the reader to witness the Rackrents in their true, deplorable colours, which is Edgeworth's point. This means that the tale is ultimately told in a mimetic language, a language intended to represent a reality exterior to itself, and that *Castle Rackrent* aspires to the condition of a realistic novel. This realism occurs when Thady's voice, which represents Irish 'otherness' to the British mother culture, has been rendered intelligible and its uniqueness eradicated. This suggests, in turn, that realism becomes the natural means of expression for a successfully colonised Ireland. As Seamus Deane

⁴⁹ Tom Dunne, "Haunted by History", 69.

⁵⁰ Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), 9.

puts it: "Reality will be restored to that phantasmal country only through the introduction into it of that kind of civic stability which is characteristically British".⁵¹

Leerssen has argued: "a tale that is both Irish and a Novel [as opposed to a romance] is ... a contradiction in terms".⁵² The text of *Castle Rackrent* divides itself dramatically from the assertions of the preface and substantiates this point. For rather than being transparent, a glass to reflect the Rackrent world, Thady's voice, by being so different from standard English, instead makes itself glaringly visible, which means that Thady himself becomes the primary object of the reader's attention and not the Rackrents. This is a consequence that Marilyn Butler has argued Edgeworth found "unpalatable",⁵³ and is one of the reasons why she never allowed a servant such extensive narrative powers again. More, Thady's prejudices are not so easily perceived, penetrated or dismissed, as the preface-writer would have us believe. *Castle Rackrent* is anything but "a plain unvarnished tale" (5), and Thady's agency within that tale, anything but straightforward. For Thady fails to cohere. 'Reading' Thady's irregularities—the dismissal of his own son at the beginning followed by the help he gives Jason at key moments to facilitate his takeover of the estate; his professions of loyalty to people whom he is constantly exposing as selfish, thoughtless and cruel—is always complicated by an irresolvable tension between personal intention and the dictates of national character. Does Thady mean what he says, for example, when, at the funeral of Sir Patrick, he declares: "happy the man who could get but a sight of the hearse!" (11)? Is the only good landlord, a dead landlord? Or is this merely an idiomatic expression of the native Irish which shows just "how much [they] are disposed to metaphor and amplification" (62), as one of Edgeworth's glossary notes blithely informs us; a mingling of joy and grief which characterises *all* Irish funerals?

An Irish voice, by being so distinctive and so illogical, so caught between these invariable contradictions, can never be rendered transparent, despite the efforts of the footnotes and the glossary to make it so. Indeed the footnotes and the glossary only complicate the task of interpretation further. Layer upon layer is added to the original utterance, multiplying ambiguity. Thady introduces himself as an old man wrapped in a great coat used as a cloak. The extensive footnote attached to this straightforward enough statement weights the cloak both with the *gravitas* of being derived from "high antiquity", and with the stigma of rebellion, as described by a disconcerted Spenser during the Elizabethan wars (9). By striving to 'explain' Thady, the editor of his language reveals a double attitude towards native Irishness, typically colonial in that it

⁵¹ Seamus Deane, *Strange Country*, 18.

⁵² Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, 52.

⁵³ Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 306.

describes the native culture as both barbarous and seductive simultaneously.⁵⁴ The resultant disjunction between the text, the footnotes, and the contradictions inherent within the footnotes themselves, renders Thady and his language impossible to decipher. A consequence of all of this difficulty, in defiance of the preface, is that a tale told in an Irish voice cannot aspire to the condition of a realistic novel, because the language in which that tale is told is always more notable and more problematic than the plot it explicates. Via the footnotes and the glossary, which are the Union's textual corollary, the narrative voice of pre-Union Irish national character was to become realistic, at the same time as the distinctiveness of that Irish national character was to be cancelled out. The actual text, as Thady tells it, defies realism and by so doing occludes such easy assimilation of one nation into another.

In thus delineating the irregularities between preface and text, I do not mean to argue a solid case for one side over the other. Instead, I want to emphasise the stalled nature of the novel, as it attempts to negotiate a series of irresolvable contradictions. As W. J. McCormack has warned: "It is not easy—perhaps it is not advisable—to decide categorically whether *Castle Rackrent* is a radical work or not a radical work".⁵⁵ Categorical assertions about any other of the important questions raised by Thady's narrative are potentially just as unwise. The text is stalled between an Irish voice, an Anglo-Irish editor and an English readership; stalled between versions of Ireland pre- and post-Union; stalled between the straightforward language of realistic prose fiction and a language infinitely more contradictory and complex; and stalled, in addition to all of these formidable tensions, between two competing modes of family life, which Thady's fraught position—as servant to the Rackrents and as father to their nemesis—exemplifies. On the question of radicalism, however, there is also the sense in which the act of rendering something ambiguous, or of clouding its force, is a subversive act, particularly if that something is a mainstay of conservative post-revolutionary ideology, such as the Burkean family. The ambiguity of *Castle Rackrent*, that "doubleness ... at the heart of Anglo-Irish literature"⁵⁶ which is overwhelmingly present within the novel's structure, also incorporates a questioning of the construction of the family, and of the place of the servant within it, that destabilises the Burkean model at the heart of conservative politics in the 1790s. Edgeworth's intention may be difficult to determine, and yet I would still argue that her text assumes a political radicalism in the fact that its very volatility ends by throwing into question the suitability of the family as the lynchpin of the existing socio-political order.

⁵⁴ Tom Dunne, *Maria Edgeworth and the Colonial Mind*, 14.

⁵⁵ W. J. McCormack, *From Burke to Beckett: Ascendancy, Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994), 97.

⁵⁶ W. J. McCormack, *Ascendancy and Tradition*, 122.

Towards the novel's close, a crisis of loyalty in Thady, which has been simmering from the novel's opening paragraph, is brought to a head by two of his female relations, his sister and Judy Quirk. Where should Thady's most natural allegiance lie, with his master, or with his own son? Thady is dumbstruck by the force of their juxtaposition:

'I'll tell you no more of my secrets, Thady,' says [Judy], 'nor would have told you this much, had I taken you for such an unnatural fader as I find you are, not to wish your own son preferred to another.' 'Oh, troth, *you* are wrong now, Thady,' says my shishter. Well, I was never so put to it in all my life: between these womens, and my son and my master, and all I felt and thought just now, I could not, upon my conscience, tell which was the wrong from the right. So I said not a word more ... (52)

According to the feudal ideal of master-servant relations, this dilemma should never arise: servants were sealed within the boundaries of the families for whom they laboured as subsidiary members; loyalty to masters was not to be compromised by a pre-existing loyalty to servants' kin. In the first chapter of this thesis, I delineated the ways in which this paternalist model was shaken by the French Revolution, responsible, as it was, for highlighting the unsettling potential of extra-familial servant allegiances to their own relations, and/or to their own class. Burke's two servants pre- and post - 6th October, 1789—the loyal Versailles guard, and the revolutionary tutor—exemplify the damage wrought on the old master-servant dynamic by political radicalism. The Sir Condy section of *Castle Rackrent* was composed in the years 1796-1798, when Ireland underwent a radical and violent uprising of its own,⁵⁷ and it is this section also in which Jason rises menacingly from the background of the text in order to plot his legal takeover of the Rackrent estate. Thady's painful confusion over which 'family' to be true to, *the* family or his own, highlights, even more explicitly than Burke's rival formulations of servitude, the crisis inflicted on old-order master-servant relations by revolution.

Castle Rackrent has been read as a critique of Thady's fidelity to a decadent régime, as a manifesto of sorts which sets out to re-harness traditional feudal loyalties to a more progressive and enlightened set of colonial rulers.⁵⁸ Such a reading depends,

⁵⁷ For details of the novel's composition see Marilyn Butler's introduction to *Castle Rackrent and Ennui*, 5.

⁵⁸ Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 358-359: "The pathetic circumstances of the generous Sir Condy's death, almost alone and unmourned at his own gate, makes it possible to read *Castle Rackrent* as a not unsympathetic account of the passing of old-fashioned landlordism. This was just what the Edgeworths were afraid of". Seamus Deane also speaks of Edgeworth's desire to lose feudalism and move towards "a more rational and prosperous economic regime", though like Butler he also acknowledges that if this is Edgeworth's intention, it is still undermined by

of course, on the tortured question of whether Thady is loyal to his corrupt masters or only acting a part. Leaving this aside, there is evidence elsewhere in the text of a critical attitude to old-order feudalism, with its powerful mix of economic wastefulness, display, family relations extending to servant members, and of masters and servants bound together, essentially, by sensibility. As Seamus Deane has noted of the novel: “feudal sentiment is all”,⁵⁹ and it is not intended to be endorsed as a viable method of social rule.

Sir Patrick, founding father of the degenerate Rackrents and “a monument of old Irish hospitality” (24), leads a dissipated existence of extravagant parties and extensive hosting: “He had his house, from one year’s end to another, as full of company as ever it could hold” (10). Having drunk himself to death in the midst of exuberant company, his funeral is suitably swarming with mourners of all classes, (the kind of funeral Sir Condy later aspires to and fails pointedly to obtain). The fine ‘whillaluh’ (funeral cry) by the attending women sparks an extensive glossary notation with some noteworthy statistics. According to Edgeworth, there are three basic problems with contemporary Irish funerals: they depend on an overly extensive definition of family; the theatricality associated with them is emotionally insincere; they waste money. “The lower Irish are wonderfully eager to attend the funerals of their friends and relations”, making their “relationships branch out to a great extent” (57); mourners mourn without even knowing for whom they cry. Meanwhile, the overall cost to the Irish nation of “time spent attending in attending funerals” is reckoned by Edgeworth to be “half a million” per annum (57).

The world of old Sir Patrick Rackrent, the ethos his life and death exemplify, are characterised by false sentiment and economic waste: shedding theatrical tears and shedding money for theatrical purposes are conflated. Implicitly, a message is given that restricting the limits of the feudal family is compatible with financial economy. And in a sense the Rackrent family falls because it fails to do either of these things: it falls, obviously, because it spends too much; but it also falls because the boundaries of the family are not sufficiently defined and therefore protected against the servants within its margins. Edgeworth writes a text which accords with Edmund Burke’s dark prophecies of post-revolutionary servant design—a design that takes advantage of the intimacy between master and servant, implicit in the feudal model, in order to appropriate power.

“Stopgap” was the original title of the family in Edgeworth’s text, not “Rackrent”. From the death of Sir Tallyhoo Rackrent, who uses the “stopgap” of a

the text she wrote, and its sympathetic depiction of the last of the Rackrent line. *Strange Country*, 38.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 47.

carriage instead of a gate at the entrance to his estate, and is killed when his horse runs into it, to the Rackrent estate under Sir Condy, ruined and patched up with inappropriate materials, the name “Stopgap” signifies a family estate and a family line fraying visibly around its edges. The family eventually dies out when the dividing line between master and servant has not only become indistinguishable, but interchangeable. In *Practical Education*, first published in 1798 while the Sir Condy section of *Castle Rackrent* was being composed, Edgeworth explicitly warns her readership against intimacy between servants and the middle- to upper-class children in their care.⁶⁰ In this she is following a tradition first established by John Locke in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, published over a century earlier; but Edgeworth expands on John Locke’s criticism of servants as harbingers of superstition and immoral practices. Servants are additionally dangerous, according to Edgeworth, because they inculcate children with overstated notions of their family’s munificence:

[Servants’] method of shewing attachment to a family is usually to exaggerate in their consequence and grandeur; they depreciate all whom they imagine to be competitors in any respect with their masters, and feed and foster the little jealousies which exist between neighbouring families.⁶¹

Thady fills Sir Condy’s head with “stories of the family, and the blood from which he was sprung” (25) when he is a little boy, fostering in Sir Condy the desire to emulate the grand old profligate Sir Patrick should he inherit the estate. This is disastrous psychological imprinting, resulting in precisely the kind of dissolute financial (and alcoholic) mismanagement that seals the end of the Rackrent line. Condy exemplifies the dangers of miseducating children by allowing them to foster an overly intimate relationship with the servant classes, expressly forbidden in Edgeworth’s pedagogical system.

Condy represents “a remote branch of the family” (25) and is described as “far from high” (26). As a boy, he not only sits on the knee of his second father-figure, Thady Quirk, (“[a]s for me, he was ever my white-headed boy” [25]), being schooled in dissolute habits, but is friends with Irish boys of the tenant class, including Jason, with whom he runs through the street of O’Shaughlin’s town⁶² “bare footed and headed” (25). The dangerous familiarity between Sir Condy and his future servant does

⁶⁰ Maria and R. L. Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, 1:183-206.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 187.

⁶² The name of the town has Catholic connotations, associating Condy with the Irish tenantry still further. O’Shaughlin was the original name of Sir Patrick, which he was obliged by law to

not end in childhood. Sir Condy, like Thady, uses vernacular language: “Merciful Jasus!” (42), which allies him more comfortably with the lower orders; he stands “in the servants’ hall all alone” with Thady, as was “often his custom” (28)—a significant detail given the tendency of novelists who employ servant protagonists, (Pamela, Monimia, Caleb), to carefully distinguish them from the rest of the servant body by emphasising the distance they keep from designated servant quarters. The blurred line between the master and servant classes is again made apparent by Sir Condy’s flipping a coin to see if he will marry Thady’s niece: he is prepared to allow only chance, and not concerns about class difference, to stand in his way.

The association of Sir Condy with Thady’s own son, Jason, almost assumes the proportions of fairy-tale when the two swap houses and respective social positions. Jason moves in to the Rackrent estate; Condy tricks Jason into allowing him to stay at the hunting lodge: the pauper and the prince exchange places. This romance trope is more fully elaborated in *Ennui*, in which the protagonist, an absentee landlord of a considerable Irish estate, discovers he was swapped at birth by his tenant-nurse and subsequently resigns ownership to the man who has been raised in her cottage as her natural son. In *Castle Rackrent*, although the inverted change in the respective fortunes of Sir Condy and Jason is dramatic enough, and neat enough, for fairytale, the cause is instead depicted as frighteningly real. Jason takes full advantage of the education given him; Sir Condy wastes every opportunity to learn. It is evidence of how things have changed when the son of the Rackrent servant helps the heir to the Rackrent estate with his lessons: “He went to a little grammar-school with many others, and my son amongst the rest, who was in his class, and not a little useful to him in his book-learning, which he acknowledged with gratitude ever after” (25). In the old days of a more cohesive social order, servants were taught to read by the master classes, in order to fulfil their servant duties more successfully.⁶³ The contrast between Sir Condy’s ignorance and Jason’s knowledge is most painfully emphasised when Jason leans over the former’s shoulder and teaches the head of the estate how to read the noughts in the final figure of crippling Rackrent debt (43).

In a text composed during the “literacy crisis” of the 1790s, the native Irish squirearchy, by neglecting education, lose hold of the powers traditionally vested in

change in order to inherit the Rackrent estate, suggesting that Sir Patrick was also originally Catholic.

⁶³ During the literacy crisis of the 1790s, emphasis was heavily stressed on a more complete form of servitude as the telos of working-class education. Hannah More wrote: “My plan of instruction is extremely simple and limited. They learn, on week days, such coarse work as may fit them for servants. I allow of no writing for the poor. My object is not to make fanatics, but to train up the lower classes in habits of industry and piety”, cited in Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism*, 85. Children were to be instructed in the “Duties of Servants, and Submission to Superiors”, in *An Account of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* (1801), cited in *ibid*, 66.

them. Conversely, the lower orders, hungry for and receptive to knowledge, harness education as a class weapon in order to effect a meteoric rise in their own social position. There is an instructive contrast in *Castle Rackrent* between the litigious Sir Murtagh, literally paralysed by the extent of his legal knowledge: “How I used to wonder to see Sir Murtagh in the midst of the papers in his office! Why he could hardly turn about for them” (13), which only succeeds in vast tracts of the Rackrent estate being sold out of the family, and the dazzlingly effective weapon into which knowledge of the law is transformed by the son of a domestic servant. The non-landed, up-and-coming “men of ability” of Burke’s *Reflections* are embodied here in the self-made Attorney Quirk, who fulfils Burke’s darkest warnings in his brilliant assault on property via his takeover of the Rackrent estate. Sir Condy is too close to those whom he is later to govern, and too careless of acquiring knowledge, which up until this crisis point has been unnecessary to landlordism anyway, to forestall the inroads made upon his tenure by his servants. The failure of the Rackrents is, simultaneously, a failure to live up to the Burkean aristocratic ideal, as well as a fulfilment of Burke’s predictions about what follows when this ideal becomes compromised.

But Thady’s narrative goes even further in its destabilisation of the Burkean model of power relations structured around the aristocratic family. In *The Servant’s Hand*, Bruce Robbins argues that servant dialogue *always* carries subversive political messages, usually at odds with the conservatism of its creators. Giving the servant room, however limited and however controlled, to express herself, brings the experience of the disenfranchised sharply into focus. Even momentarily, this glimpsed, hitherto unthought-of reality works to subvert the power differentiation upon which the institution of servitude is predicated, and gestures towards a more egalitarian realignment of existing social division.⁶⁴ In accordance with this theory, the radical implications of the servant’s voice become uncontrollable as soon Thady is allowed to speak. Reading about the demise of the Rackrents from the servant’s point of view, we not only learn that the old paternalist relation between master and servant is over: severed by a realignment of familial loyalty which places the servant’s fidelity to his masters in conflict with obligations to his own children; severed by working-class education. We also learn that that very Burkean ideal was fictional to begin with.

For when Thady speaks, he speaks about money: where it comes from; how he gets it; what happens when masters are ignorant of the true source of their income, (which all the Rackrents, except Sir and Lady Murtagh, are); what happens to those from whom wealth is pitilessly extracted. Money—from sums on contracts to coins in the air—dominates Thady’s tale. This focus on money affords various insights into the

⁶⁴ Bruce Robbins, *The Servant’s Hand*, 12, and all of chapter two: ‘Impertinence: The Servant in Dialogue’, 53-90.

inequities inherent in the feudal agrarian mode of production. Burke would only gloss over such painful inequalities with one of his necessary veils, with an ideology that strives to make power more lovely than cruel. Thady's much more radical narrative incorporates, by contrast, a scathing critique of rackrenting Irish landlords. Of the tenants under Lady Murtagh, Thady writes:

They knew her way, and what with fear of driving for rent and Sir Murtagh's lawsuits, they were kept in such good order, they never thought of coming near Castle Rackrent without a present of something or other—nothing too much or too little for my lady—eggs, honey, butter, meal, fish, game, grouse, and herrings, fresh or salt, all went for something. (12)

And describing the tenants during the reign of Sir Kit, Thady warms to his theme: "The agent was one of your middle men, who grind the face of the poor, and can never bear a man with a hat upon his head: he ferreted the tenants out of their lives; not a week without a call for money" (15-16). Oliver MacDonagh has argued that:

Edgeworth treated the Big House, her own environment, as the only source of drama. Its interest was intrinsic, its significance self-contained. The surrounding peasantry formed a mere backcloth. They were fixed in situation, unmoving and anonymous as the fields and limestone walls. It is true that the narrator of *Castle Rackrent*, Thady Quirk, has stepped out from their ranks and become (formally at least) a person. ... But Quirk is scarcely more than a literary device, a mode of exposition of the Rackrent greatness. He accepts the family's mastery as part of the natural order: in the ordained hierarchy of function, the Rackrents are the drastic element, their dependents purely passive.⁶⁵

Not only is MacDonagh out of step with most subsequent critics, as well as any serious close reading of the text, in describing Thady as "scarcely more than a literary device"; it is equally inaccurate to claim that the peasantry surrounding Castle Rackrent form "a mere backcloth". In fact, the effects on the tenantry of every successive Rackrent regime are carefully recorded by the family steward. Like the servants addressed in Christopher Anstay's poem, *Contentment* (1800), discussed in my previous chapter, Thady, positioned between the masters of the estate and the tenantry, attempts to mediate between the master classes and the labouring poor. Thady is frequently positioned as the Rackrents' interpreter, in much the same way as the editor in the footnotes and the glossary acts as Thady's interpreter to an English readership. In the distinctively ambiguous situation of all domestic servants, being of the family served

⁶⁵ Oliver MacDonagh, *The Nineteenth-Century Novel and Irish Social History: Some Aspects* (Dublin: National University of Ireland, 1970), 4.

and of the people simultaneously, Thady is called on by the tenantry to explain the causes of their successive landlords' cruelty. The hardships of the tenantry constitute the *leitmotiv* of his story, bringing to the reader's attention consequences of property ownership which a better-born narrator would never have considered, much less have actively incorporated into his tale.

In conjuring the voice of a poor old illiterate Irish steward as realistically as she could, Edgeworth has attempted a kind of literary ventriloquism that has brought her politically out of her depth. By appropriating a constant concern over money, which all servants, by necessity, were conditioned by, in order to 'catch' Thady's true voice, a re-evaluation of the landed order is risked, far more extensive than anything she could have intended. For Thady's critique has the potential to extend beyond the particularly corrupt version of Irish landlordism, typified by the Rackrents, and to question landlordism more generally; threatening, in turn, the validity of Edgeworth's own social position as a member of the Anglo-Irish landowning class.

Thady's concern with money does more than expose the feudal power base as radically unfair. It also works to debunk the notion that sentiment binds servants to their masters, inherent in the Burkean old-order archetype; the notion that "feudal sentiment" is indeed "all". Thady's discourse is split between sentimental declarations of loyalty to "the family", and a canniness about money which works to expose that very sentiment as comically hollow. In Thady's opening statement: "Having, out of friendship for the family, upon whose estate, praised be Heaven! I and mine have lived rent-free, time out of mind" (9), "rent-free" introduces money into an otherwise sentimentalised relation between Thady and his employers and unsettles the feudal ideal. Here we have two discourses at odds with each other: that of money and self-interest; and that of sentiment and loyalty, a disjunction that characterises the entire text.

"The family" of the Rackrents is the primary construct of Thady's narrative. His feelings for the "*honour of the family*" (6) are the impetus behind his composition. In other texts with servant narrators, (*Pamela* and *Caleb Williams* are two examples), the extraordinary fact of servant authorship is undertaken in the spirit of self-assertion against masters who have excessively transgressed. By contrast, *Castle Rackrent*, an intended vindication of the Rackrents, seems ostensibly safer and more conservative. But this narrative of vindication immediately unravels. One of the first things Thady tells us about himself is that the successive Rackrents have all referred to him differently, but that not one of them has used his real name. "My real name is Thady Quirk", he informs his readership in the second sentence, "though in the family I have always been known by no other than '*honest Thady*', —afterwards, in the time of Sir Murtagh, deceased, I remember to hear them calling me '*old Thady*', and now I'm

come to 'poor Thady' ..." (9). Thady's real self soon intrudes, and in a way which pits that real self against the fictional Thady to which 'the family' have ascribed and in which they have believed. The first implication of an untrammelled servant voice is that the master classes are ignorant of the reality of those in their employ.

In spite of the significance with which '*the family*' is weighted in Thady's story, it rapidly becomes clear that '*the family*' is a mythical construct, falsely associated with immortality, ("time out of mind"), at odds with the actual Rackrents and the actual Thady Quirk. It is the Burkean prelapsarian familial ideal, intended to capture the essence of the feudal relation between master and servant before the Revolution, exposed as a fiction. We soon realise that there is no such thing as '*the family*', because Thady invents the family as he goes along. And he invents it in very specific terms: Thady polices the borders of '*the family*' according to whether characters are prepared to give him money or not.

So who is and who isn't a Rackrent? Thady, who never mentions his own mother, or the mother of Jason, has a marked antipathy to women, ultimately allowing neither Sir Murtagh's, nor Sir Kit's, nor Sir Condy's wife active Rackrent membership. His usual defence of the Rackrents to their appalled tenantry is to blame the Rackrent mistresses. Of the Murtaghs he writes: "I was ashamed myself, and knew not what to say for the honour of the family; but I made the best of a bad case, and laid it all at my lady's door, for I did not like her any how" (11). When Lady Murtagh leaves the estate after the death of her husband, Thady watches to see her safely expelled from the Rackrent domain and name:

I never said any thing one way or the other, whilst she was part of the family, but got up to see her go at three o'clock in the morning. 'It's a fine morning, honest Thady,' said she; 'good bye to ye,' and into the carriage she stept, without a word more, good or bad, or even half a crown; but I made my bow, and stood to see her safe out of sight for the sake of the family. (14)

Her refusal to give Thady a tip is her last, and greatest offence, leading directly to the ambiguity of Thady's final act: decorously bowing a goodbye whilst ensuring that she is safely on her way, never to return. The new Sir Rackrent sweeps in just as Lady Murtagh sweeps out, and Thady, grieving inconsistently for the Murtaghs, immediately declares himself hostile to the new regime. Hostile, that is, until Sir Kit throws him a guinea, whereupon the new heir is suddenly and enthusiastically welcomed into the Rackrent inner sanctum by its volatile doorkeeper:

But one morning my new master caught a glimpse of me as I was looking at his horse's heels, in hopes of a word from him. 'And is

that old Thady?’ says he, as he got into his gig: I loved him from that day to this, his voice was so like the family; and he threw me a guinea out of his waistcoat pocket, as he drew up the reins with the other hand, his horse rearing too; I thought I never set my eyes on a finer figure of a man, quite another sort from sir Murtagh (15).

Surely the humour here is not directed at Thady’s absurd loyalty, but at how superficial that loyalty is: at how it can be switched on and off, at will, with half a crown. Again and again, Thady’s profusions of sentiment towards his masters are rendered hollow by their basis in financial reward, while his definition of who and who isn’t a Rackrent according to family members’ financial generosity, throws the existence of an *a-priori* Rackrent dynasty itself into question.

It is unsurprising that Thady destabilises the Burkean ideology of the family by his constant references to money, for money equals the death of pre-Capitalist, feudal sentiment. As Mrs. Rayland has railed in Charlotte Smith’s *The Old Manor House*, “Money does every thing—money destroys all distinctions! ... Money, money does every thing” (164). In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, composed during the summer of 1844 but not published until 1932, Marx pays tribute to the alchemical power of money to change, dissolve, and even invert social binaries:

Money is the universal means and power ... to turn imagination into reality and reality into mere imagination. ... This description alone suffices to make money the universal inversion of individualities that turns them into their opposites and gives them qualities at variance with their own. ... It changes fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, slave into master, master into slave, stupidity into intelligence and intelligence into stupidity.⁶⁶

Certainly money’s ability to enforce a reversal of social hierarchies is present within *Castle Rackrent*, in which Jason Quirk’s knowledge of money, contrasted with Sir Condy’s ignorance of it, ensures that the son of a domestic servant takes control of the Rackrent estate, whilst the former master is forced to become a tenant on his own land. But Thady’s tendency to define the family to whom he ostensibly belongs according to those who throw money at him, and those who do not, is equal evidence of money’s maverick influence, for it successfully inverts the power relation between master and servant (“slave into master, master into slave”) by allowing Thady to define his own employers.

If the ponderous ideological construct of ‘*the family*’ is deflated by being delineated on the basis of servant vails, it is undermined still further by the dizzy

⁶⁶ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1932), in *Selected Writings*, 119.

succession of Rackrent heirs. Significantly, there is no direct descent whenever new masters inherit. More, everything changes every time a new Rackrent steps in, rendering the immortality of old families and traditional customs ridiculous. The joke is funniest with the whirlwind arrival of Sir Kit, “who came amongst us before I knew for the life of me whereabouts I was”, and who “harum-scarum called for every thing as if we were conjurers, or in a public house” (15). Whilst Thady strives in vain to establish a time-honoured Rackrent sense of tradition, to which he can be true, and by which he can structure his narrative, the shifting reality of life at Castle Rackrent continually thwarts his efforts. The story of the first three Rackrents unfolds with phenomenal speed: Sir Patrick gets three pages (half of these describe his funeral); Sir Murtagh four. The Rackrents have a tendency to die young, and to die issueless: Thady’s “time out of mind”: “I live under [Sir Condy], and have done so these two hundred years and upwards, me and mine” (34), doesn’t stretch back all that far. Confronted with Sir Kit’s Jewish wife, Thady, who has enough problems accepting women as it is, is horrified by such an exotic bride: “Mercy upon his honour’s poor soul, thought I; what will become of him and his, and all of us, with his heretic blackamoor at the head of the Castle Rackrent estate!” (18) Thady is panicking over Lady Kit’s reproductive function in an established, white, Christian, Rackrent dynasty. Predictably such concerns are rendered irrelevant when the couple bear no children; Sir Kit dies four pages later; and his wife sails back to England, taking her jewels with her, thereby sealing Thady’s irrevocable dislike. Even Thady’s sense of himself as a kind of Rackrent archetype, whose service within the same family stretches back time immemorial, is contradicted by the fact that he wasn’t even born in the reign of Sir Patrick, and that details of Sir Patrick’s life and death are relayed to him later by his grandfather (11). Thady emerges, suddenly, in Sir Murtagh’s time, immediately old, and immediately a Rackrent authority to the surrounding peasantry. These and other textual inconsistencies enforce the sense of a narrative divided between valiant efforts to attain the Burkean familial ideal, and an actuality which consistently exposes that ideal as impossible —the confused fictional construct of a servant with a lively imagination and time on his hands.

Servants have always played a vital role in defining both the contours and the prestige of family groups. The word *family* itself is derived from the Latin for servant, ‘famulus’.⁶⁷ In the eighteenth century, income, and the family’s social status, were both assessed in terms of how many servants one was able to employ.⁶⁸ However the servant’s role in familial definition is usually intended to fix the servant ever more firmly in his or her subservient place. Ownership of extra labour, and access to the

⁶⁷ Christopher Flint, *Family Fictions: Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain 1688-1798* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 21.

display of one's wealth and prestige afforded by domestic servants, announces one's precise social position to an exterior public in terms of the attendant subjugation of the servant 'other'. The role played by servants in familial definition, therefore, is disempowering rather than empowering. Thady, by contrast, renders the etymology of 'family', as it derives from the word for 'servant', literal. The almost abjectly humbled narrator of the preface is replaced by a servant who enacts a revolution within the pages of his own narrative by daring to define his masters in the first place.

If Thady's erratic narrative exposes the reality that there isn't really a 'family', in the Burkean sense of the term, to which he can be loyal, what else does it expose? By saying more than his original brief permits him to, does he also give himself away as other than what he professes to be? Are certain critics correct, in other words, in seeing him as essentially scheming and duplicitous, with the fall of the Rackrents and the rise of the Quirks constantly in mind? There are certainly some startling passages in *Castle Rackrent* that might bear such an analysis out. Perhaps the most sinister of these is Thady's discussion with a debt-collector during Sir Condy's election to the Dublin parliament. Most of Thady's remarks can be read with, at the very least, an ominous double edge to them, ("I thought I should have died in the streets for joy when I seed my poor master chaired, and he bareheaded, and it raining as hard as it could pour"). In this conversation his hostility to Sir Condy emerges in its frankest form. The debt-collector, introducing himself to Sir Condy's steward, shows Thady the warrant in his pocket for Sir Condy's arrest, leaving Thady in no doubt about his identity. The two then spend the afternoon drinking together, as though they are both on the same side, and when the debt collector makes a joke at Sir Condy's expense, Thady rejoinders with the imagined decapitation of his "white-headed boy":

'To be sure,' says he, still cutting his joke, 'when a man's over head and shoulders in debt, he may live the faster for it, and the better, if he goes the right way about it; or else how is it so many live on so well, as we see every day, after they are ruined?' 'How is it,' says I, being a little merry at the time; 'how is it but just as you see the ducks in the chicken-yard, just after their heads are cut off by the cook, running round and round faster than when alive?' At which conceit he fell a laughing, and remarked he had never had the happiness yet to see the chicken-yard at Castle Rackrent. 'It won't be long so, I hope,' says I; 'you'll be kindly welcome there ...' (35).

Here Thady's homespun comparison, intended to be comic by reminding the reader just how restricted Thady's world is to paltry domestic detail, opens up into a vision of violent social reorganisation reminiscent of the Terror. A servant decapitates a bird,

⁶⁸ Edward Copeland, *Women Writing About Money: Women's Fiction in England 1790-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 27-31.

which in Thady's conceit stands for Sir Condy flailing in debt. Extend this analogy outwards to its immediate political context, and we have the people guillotining their social superiors in a revolution sparked by the impossible debt of the French aristocratic regime after its military support for the American Revolution. We also have Burke's faction of murderous domestics eager to hang their masters from the nearest lanterne. Significantly, Sir Condy finally dies after drinking a horn of alcohol filled for him by Thady Quirk (53).

How much of this radicalism was actually intended by Edgeworth, as she sat down to mimic the Edgeworth family steward, John Langan? How drastically did *Castle Rackrent* assume a variant life of its own? One possible reading of the footnotes and the glossary is as an attempt to render Thady much less sinister than he became within the context of his own undisciplined text. Marilyn Butler has investigated the contradiction between the "self-conscious intellectuality and *Englishness*" of the glossary and the "light entertainment" of Thady's tale, which is Irish, chaotic and unpolished.⁶⁹ She argues that the impending Union suddenly put "the onus ... on the Irish to prove that the English were getting a bargain".⁷⁰ The glossary and the footnotes thus strive to disassociate the Edgeworths, and Anglo-Irish like them, from Thady's more primitive attitudes.⁷¹ But the footnotes and the glossary also attempt to "explain away" Thady's ambiguous language, and ambiguous agency, by ascribing his peculiarities to Irish national character. And by doing so, the glossary and the footnotes become self-defeating.

Irish national character is used in order to dispel the significant threat to the social order Thady's narrative of decapitated masters and inheriting tenants implies. For Irish national character nullifies the possibility of malign intention in Thady by assigning his linguistic peculiarities to the linguistic peculiarities of the lower Irish generally. What is so remarkable about such a strategy is that, far from neutralising the threat of a single servant in a single tale, recourse to Irish national character inadvertently leads Edgeworth to the possibility that the lower Irish *en masse* may pose precisely the same threat to their colonial rulers that Thady poses to the Rackrents. For if the glossary and the footnotes are an attempt to render Thady less threatening to his English readership on the eve of Ireland's Union with Britain, this intention is thwarted by an editorial apparatus which unwittingly admits that Irish national character is not formed in a vacuum, but that it is dependant on social and colonial conditioning. Thady's ominous linguistic ambiguities lie open to being read exclusively within the context of his design on the Rackrents. As such they must be intentionally subversive.

⁶⁹ Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 355.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 355.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 355.

Ascribing his pointed, at times brutal remarks instead to *the way the lower Irish speak generally* seems one way out of Edgeworth's dilemma. However *the way the lower Irish speak generally*, as it is actually quoted, only proves that Irish vernacular, and Irish national character alongside it, cannot be separated from the personal intentions of the speaker, or the inequality between speaker and listener which determines what is said and how it is said in the first place. If there is an at times threatening ambiguity to the native Irish voice, it may not be quite so random after all.

When Thady remarks of Sir Murtagh's failed law suits: "Out of forty-nine suits which he had, he never lost one but seventeen" (13), the likelihood that he is being disparaging about Sir Murtagh's legal failures, implicitly contrasted with Jason's success, is ignored by the glossary: "Thady's language in this instance is a specimen of a mode of rhetoric common in Ireland. An astonishing assertion is made in the beginning of a sentence, which ceases to be in the least surprising, when you hear the qualifying explanation that follows" (59-60). Other glossary notes make similar assertions, thwarting a reading of Thady's language as an indicator of devious personal intention. Nevertheless, in the many examples of native Irish vernacular, expressive of Irish national character, which Edgeworth supplies, she unintentionally subverts her own design by quoting the Irish as they have always appeared to her: as servants speaking to masters, tenants to landlords, plaintives to judges. We therefore cannot trust this language as a 'pure' example of Irish speech, unfettered by the power relation within whose confines it is uttered, and devoid of the possibility of canny objectives on the speaker's part.

A good example of how Irish speech is 'naturally' disposed to "amplification" (62) could be the footnote to Thady's mention of "middle men":

[T]he poor detested this race of beings. In speaking to them, however, they always used the most abject language, and the most humble tone and posture. —'Please your honour; and please your honour's honour,' they knew must be repeated as a charm at the beginning and end of every equivocating, exculpatory, or supplicatory sentence ... (16)

Here "abject" power inequalities result in a language marked, among other things, by equivocation, (at which Thady himself is remarkably adept). The passage serves as a reminder that expressions of Irish vernacular cannot be analysed in isolation from socio-political conditions, like an object in a laboratory. It gestures instead towards the admission that an immutable essence of Irishness does not exist. Rather Irish national character is created and determined by its relation to the governing power, be it the landed Irish squirearchy or English colonial rule. An implication of this is that England

becomes responsible for the degraded state of colonial Ireland, a state of play Edgeworth elsewhere strives vigorously to deny. As Seamus Deane has argued, “Edgeworth believed that Ireland was backward, unenlightened, poor, ill led, even romantic, not because it was a colonial culture, but because it was Ireland”.⁷²

In fact, the fraught issue of Irish national character, as it pre-exists, versus as it is colonially determined, destabilises all of Edgeworth’s Irish works. The contradictions inherent in her position are too manifold ever to be resolved successfully. Her very enthusiasm for the Union, as well as her Lockean approach to education, which assumes that character is formed by what people learn, presupposes that the imposition of a more direct form of English rule in Ireland will amend the problems inherent in Irish national character. As Deane again puts it, according to the Edgeworthian literary system, “Irish national character was to be brought to school”.⁷³ Irish national character is therefore capable of being transformed by a change in socio-political conditioning. And yet if this is the case, Ireland’s experience of being conquered by her English neighbour must previously have wrecked detrimental effects on the national character of the nation, given how it now stands. This would suggest, in turn, that the Union might fail to amend, but only exaggerate, the problems, as Edgeworth sees them, of the native Irish. Support for the Union as a solution to the condition of the country therefore becomes a peculiarly self-defeating exercise.

This is a hopeless dynamic, with controlling mechanisms only intensifying the problems they are designed to contain and improve. As such, it is rather like the hopeless dynamic of attempted clarification in operation between the editorial apparatus of *Castle Rackrent* and its ambiguous expositor. The more Thady’s wildly unmanageable language is reined in and neutralised—the more it is colonised—the deeper Edgeworth’s text sinks into a radical quagmire at odds with her intended effect. Servants are a significant feature in all of Maria Edgeworth’s oeuvre, but after *Castle Rackrent*, they are given comparatively minor roles in the action; direct dialogue with servants is always limited; and all of them can be definitively classed as either loyal or devious. Joe Kelly in *Ennui* may go much further than Thady Quirk in actually joining the United Irishmen and plotting the death of his master and the liberation of his country, but his cunning ploys, in comparison to those of his predecessor, are easily pierced; the threat which he embodies is totally, and reassuringly, dispelled. The destabilising effect inherent in allowing servants to speak for themselves, the questioning which Thady Quirk’s tale engendered of far more than Edgeworth herself ever bargained for, was never to be risked again.

⁷² Seamus Deane, *Strange Country*, 32.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 32.

CONCLUSION.

Since its publication, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) has been read as a reworking of William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, and not only because of the author's initial dedication of the novel to her father. Conservative critics were quick to criticise *Frankenstein* on the grounds of its "Godwinian heresies", while Percy Shelley, in an anonymous review, drew attention to the novel's similarities to Godwin in both its style and subject matter.¹ Indeed, reading *Frankenstein* after a perusal of the novels discussed in this thesis, one is struck by the indebtedness of the work, not only to *Caleb Williams*, but also to the prose fiction landscape of the 1790s more broadly. And one discovers that many of the themes relating to the depiction of servants in the final decade of the eighteenth century are re-echoed here, as though the servant, or what the servant represents, is, by the second decade of the nineteenth, literally no longer human.

As in all of the novels discussed above, literacy and sensibility are two of *Frankenstein*'s dominant concerns. Like the passive servants in anti-Jacobin fiction, the monster learns to read by overhearing, and spying upon, a foreigner as she is being taught English.² He then practices his reading skills on books which happen to cross his path, and, like most of the servants throughout this thesis, is deeply affected by what he reads. Having struggled implausibly through Volney's *Ruins of Empires*, Plutarch's *Lives*, Goethe's *Sorrows of Werther* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the monster's pain at being excluded from human society becomes unbearable. "I can hardly describe to you the effect of these books", he later relates. "Increase of knowledge only discovered to me more clearly what a wretched outcast I was".³ Human sympathy, or the horror of existence without it, could be described as a *leitmotif* in Shelley's tale. Caleb was punished by being denied sympathy at the end of *Caleb Williams*. Here, the sufferings of the monster are similarly the sufferings of irrevocable social exclusion. The monster longs throughout "for the love and sympathy of man",⁴ and is driven to murder innocents in revenge for the loneliness inflicted on him by those who shun his hideous form.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the shifting boundaries of what the monster stood for in the Frankenstein "myth"⁵ came to include the industrial working class. In *Mary Barton* (1848), Elizabeth Gaskell explicitly relates the politicised working class to

¹ Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 57.

² Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818; London: Penguin, 1994), 114.

³ *Ibid*, 123, 126.

⁴ *Ibid*, 142.

“Frankenstein, that monster of many human qualities, ungifted with a soul, a knowledge of the difference between good and evil”.⁶ In a Tenniel cartoon published in *Punch* in 1866, the disenfranchised working class is represented in the towering figure of a dissatisfied proletarian, while an MP proposing electoral reform cowers beside his boot strings.⁷ If aspects of servants from prose fictions of the 1790s, such as their relation to literacy and sensibility, have been appropriated by Shelley’s monster, then it seems true to say that their function of representing the lower orders generally is also later usurped by the ever-expanding myth of Frankenstein. The servant ceases to be a suitable metaphor for the working class once that class becomes both more consolidated and more self-conscious in the nineteenth century, making the working-class presence, by 1832, “the most significant factor in British political life”.⁸

The marginalisation of servant characters within Maria Edgeworth’s fiction after 1800 is typical of the new century’s unease over dominant and politically contentious literary servants. Leaving aside Charlotte Dacre’s excessively ‘Gothic’ *Zofloya; or, The Moor* (1806),⁹ in which the devil manifests himself in the seductive form of a beautiful black servant, titular servants all but disappear in the nineteenth century, while the servants who remain return to the background of texts and to their more limited literary functions. The all-but-invisible domestic servants of Jane Austen’s fictions, for example, contrast sharply with the prominent servants in the fictions that immediately precede them. If not actively silenced, the politicised literary servant of the 1790s is taken over in the nineteenth century by the monstrous. Those servants who remain to claim our attention tend to become “gentrified into governesses”,¹⁰ as in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847).¹¹

In the 1790s, the stirrings of working-class political agitation impacted on the novel, turning the eighteenth-century literary servant into a more obvious corollary to the ‘people’, now clamouring for a stake in the British body politic, than the servants who appeared before them. But the domestic servant can only function as an appropriate metaphor for the ‘people’ if paternalism still infuses relations between the lower orders and their governors. If it does, the master/father of the servant/child in a novel can easily represent the socio-political elite and their relation to the populace

⁵ Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein’s Shadow*, 3-9.

⁶ Cited in *ibid*, 86.

⁷ Reproduced in *ibid*, 85.

⁸ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 11.

⁹ Charlotte Dacre, *Zofloya; or, The Moor*, ed. Adriana Craciun (1806; Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Literary Texts, 1997).

¹⁰ Bruce Robbins, *The Servants Hand*, 79.

more generally. But if paternalism is no longer in force, if the lower orders have somehow disassociated themselves from their rulers' interests and are now asserting interests of their own, then the servant in the house can no longer speak for them.

After the Revolution, Burke distrusted the intimacy that a paternalistic ethic fostered between rulers and ruled, because he believed that the lower orders had been irrevocably transformed and were no longer to be trusted. Indeed, lower-order agitation in Britain in the 1790s signalled the fracture of old-order ideology: Paine's *Rights of Man* actively discouraged deference and sold more copies than any book ever had. Anti-Jacobins, in an attempt to bolt the house after the robbery, strove to reassert middle-class paternalism over the poor as a means of forestalling a British revolution. And yet by 1818, the same year as *Frankenstein*'s publication, the meaning of social paternalism had changed completely. No longer seen as a viable method of social control, paternalism was now re-invented as a means of saving the working population from the most brutal excesses of factory existence.¹²

As the Industrial Revolution gathered speed, face-to-face inter-class relations diminished under a factory system that realigned working and social space. The idea of reciprocal duties between the working classes and their socio-political governors was an impediment to the vast profits that could be accrued from unregulated factory conditions, and industrialists were eager to divest themselves of paternalist ideology.¹³ In *Claims of Labour*, published in 1844, Arthur Helps writes:

Those amusements which used to be shared by all classes are becoming less frequent: the great lord has put away his crowd of retainers: the farmer, in most cases, does not live with his labouring men: and the master has less sympathy and social intercourse with his domestics.¹⁴

Helps believes in once again "strengthening the social intercourse" between the classes as a means of improving industrial relations.¹⁵ And yet paternalism was dead, damaged by the French Revolution, and then irrevocably destroyed by the working conditions of the Industrial Revolution. The notion of bringing master and servant somehow back

¹¹ For a discussion of the Victorian 'governess novel', see Millicent Bell, "Class, Sex and the Victorian Governess", in *The American Novel: New Essays on Daisy Miller and the Turn of the Screw* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 91-119.

¹² Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form 1832-1867* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1985), 18.

¹³ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 216.

¹⁴ Cited in Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, 116.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 117.

into intercourse with one another remained a nostalgic and chimerical antidote to the unstoppable looms of Capitalism.

The 1790s, then, marked both the beginning and the end of the overtly politicised literary servant. Not only did a unique literary servant appear during these years; the literary servants I have discussed throughout the course of this thesis could *only* have appeared in these years. Before the 1790s, before the founding of the London Corresponding Society and, most crucially of all, before Thomas Paine, the labouring classes were not yet articulating a class-consciousness of their own. Once they started to do so, paternalism was the ethic most threatened by such articulation. And yet paternalism, though fractured, was still intact enough to allow the master/servant relation at its heart to tell the story of class antagonism initiated in Britain by the French Revolution. And so literary servants become conduits of revolutionary energy, to be persecuted or to persecute, according to their authors' political intention. Already however, working conditions were compounding the damage inflicted on paternalism by lower-order political agitation, and would kill it off entirely during the early years of the nineteenth century. The possibilities for the radical representative function of literary servants in the fictions of the 1790s explored above, therefore, could not last.

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