

Fighting for Reform

The politicisation of the *Monthly Review* in the aftermath of the French Revolution,
1791 – 1802

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Master's thesis in English literature
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Trondheim, spring 2013

Cover image:

'The Tree of LIBERTY, - with the Devil tempting John Bull'

Satirical print by James Gillray (1798)

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Acknowledgements

Spending a whole year cooped up at my reading desk for hours on end, whilst frustratingly trying to piece together the fragments of a master's thesis, was a prospect which I had not been looking particularly forward to. Fortunately, the process of writing my thesis turned out to be quite different from what I had expected. There have certainly been some ups and downs along the way, but, all in all, I have genuinely enjoyed both researching and writing my dissertation. This is partly due to the support and encouragement I have received from the people around me, and I would like to take the following opportunity to thank some of them.

First and foremost, I am greatly indebted to my supervisor Paul Goring. You have posed critical questions when they were needed, and guided me in the right direction throughout this whole process. I am truly grateful for your invaluable advice and encouragement along the way.

I would furthermore like to thank Professor Harriet Guest at the University of York for initial inspiration. Through her teaching of the module 'Femininity and Literary Culture' in the spring of 2012, I became interested in British politics and society in the 1790s. I would also like to thank Siv-Gøril Brandtzæg for taking the time to discuss my project early in the process, and for directing me to relevant literature on review journalism.

Spending all those hours on my thesis would have been much less inspiring if it were not for my friends and my loyal lunch crew. Elisabeth, Terje, Anne Lene, Susann, Atle and Silje: thank you for the countless hours spent procrastinating in the cafeteria. Our lunch breaks were definitely the highlight of my day. A special thank you to Steffen for academic input and for your attentive proofreading of my text. I would also like to thank Lina and Ingeborg for our lovely trip to York. Watching Miss Marple in my pyjamas simply isn't the same without you guys. I am especially indebted to Ingeborg for invaluable moral support, and for patiently listening to the sometimes quite elaborate details of my thesis. I promise to never again mention Thomas Holcroft in your presence.

I owe a special thank you to my family for their constant love and support, and for raising me to appreciate the value of literature and language.

Last but not least, to Martin, who is always there for me. You are thoroughly awesome, and I love you to pieces.

Johanne Kristiansen

Trondheim, May 2013

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Note

1. Reviews of novels by the *Monthly Review* in the period 1791 – 1802 constitute the empirical foundation for this project. I have compiled this primary material from an online database, namely ProQuest's *British Periodicals Collection*, which I gained access to as an exchange student at the University of York in the spring of 2012.
2. Throughout the following pages 'Review' indicates a periodical, 'review' an article.
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Introduction

1.1 Topic & thesis argument

This study explores the politicisation of the *Monthly Review's* novel section as an expression of the democratic potential of review journalism, in the politically significant decade following the outbreak of the French Revolution. The political issues of relevance to this thesis are connected to the moderate reformist claims of religious dissenters, who had been fighting for constitutional reform ever since the outbreak of the American Revolution, and to the radical political movement known as the new philosophers, who sought a drastic social and political reorganization of contemporary society.¹ Whereas a second revolution had inspired the religious dissenters into renewed action, the new philosophers were pioneers whose political ambitions were born with the French Revolution. The *Monthly Review* was the leading book-review periodical of the late eighteenth century, and it is the intention of this thesis to highlight this particular publication as an important resource for politically marginal groups in contemporary British society. Due to their restricted access to powerful positions, religious and political dissenters were forced to make use of other channels in order to promote their civic interests. While numerous histories have been written about the political turmoil of the 1790s in British politics, not all of them, however, point out the importance of print in the ongoing debates. Historians have, nevertheless, over the past twenty years become increasingly preoccupied with not only the nature of the debates themselves, but also the different *modes* of communication they involved.² One way of communicating ideas to a wider public was through print, which presented an opportunity for a larger segment of the population to voice opinions that would otherwise have been stifled by the ruling religious and political sentiment. Thus, print culture had intrinsic democratic potential. The main goal of this thesis will be to explore this democratic potential. By arguing for the growing political intervention of the *Monthly Review*, I suggest that not only was the reviewing format transformed by public debate during the political ferment of the 1790s – public debate was in turn influenced by the contributions of the dissenting *Monthly Review*.

There are many literary genres to choose from when investigating the democratic role of print culture in late eighteenth-century Britain. This thesis focuses on the field of review

1 The new philosophers, or British Jacobins, were notorious for being extreme in methods and ambitions. They were connected to the circle around William Godwin and his wife Mary Wollstonecraft.

2 Chris Evans, *Debating the Revolution – Britain in the 1790s* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p. 2.

journalism.³ The main reason for this is that reviewers played a central role in the debates of the 1790s. As H. T. Dickinson and Ulrich Broich argue, '[t]here was an ongoing and heated discussion of the nature and function of literature' in the 1790s, and 'above all in the literary journals of the period'.⁴ The significance of the Reviews in these debates is partly based on their roles as mentors of public reading habits. According to James Basker, the review journals had large circulation and popular appeal, and were 'read in coffeehouses, reading societies, and homes everywhere'.⁵ He furthermore investigates the influence of review journalism on readers, authors and booksellers, arguing that booksellers may have been led to publish certain genres or authors that had received a complimentary review, and that authors may have revised their texts according to the criticism of the Reviews.⁶ In other words, the late eighteenth-century review journal was a force to be reckoned with in the literary sphere.

During the 1790s, seven leading book-review periodicals were in circulation. These were the *Monthly Review*, *Critical Review*, *London Review*, *English Review*, *Analytical Review*, *British Critic* and the *Anti-Jacobin Review*. Taken together, these journals provide such an amount of material that it would demand a much larger project than a master's thesis to explore it, even when focusing only on the novel section in the 1790s. Consequently, when discussing the role of review journalism in the 1790s, one of the journals above had to be singled out for analysis. I have chosen to focus on the *Monthly Review*, because it was the leading journal of its day. Founded by bookseller Ralph Griffiths in 1749, it represented something entirely new in the literary world. There were at that time already some periodicals in existence which included reviews of selected works, but the *Monthly* was fully devoted to reviewing a broad range of publications 'without exception to any, on account of their lowness of rank, or price'.⁷ When the other review journals followed, they had to point out the need for their contributions in the marketplace, and establish a reason why readers should subscribe to them, rather than the already established and successful *Monthly*. However, although some journals presented small novelties, they were all based on the same pattern as Griffiths' journal.⁸ The *Monthly Review* was, furthermore, not only leading in innovation, but also in

3 For a good account of review journalism in the late eighteenth century, see James Basker, 'Criticism and the rise of periodical literature', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 4, the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Hugh Barr Nisbet, George A. Kennedy and Claude Julien Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 316-332.

4 H. T. Dickinson and Ulrich Broich, 'Introduction', in *Reactions to Revolutions – The 1790s and their Aftermath*, ed. by Ulrich Broich, H. T. Dickinson, Eckhart Hellmuth and Martin Schmidt (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007), pp. 7-29 (p. 22).

5 Basker, p. 327.

6 Ibid, p. 328.

7 Ralph Griffiths, as quoted by Wilbur T. Albrecht, in 'The Monthly Review', in *British Literary Magazines: The Augustan Age and the Age of Johnson, 1698-1788*, ed. by Alvin Sullivan (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 231-237 (p. 231).

8 Derek Roper, *Reviewing before the Edinburgh: 1788-1802* (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 20.

terms of sales figures. Based on figures from 1797, it sold 5,000 copies, whereas the *Critical and British Critic* sold 3,500 each.⁹ Thus, based on the fact that the *Monthly Review* was the first and the largest review journal, it may also be assumed to be the most influential and significant one as well. This view is supported by Joseph Hayden, who states that '[e]arly in 1802, the most important Review in existence [...] was the *Monthly Review*'.¹⁰ If it is true that the *Monthly* was the most influential Review, it stands out as a natural choice in the attempt to explore the role of review journalism in late eighteenth-century Britain.

Having established the reasons for focusing on the *Monthly Review*, further explanation is required regarding the decision to focus exclusively on novel reviews. A review journal would typically cover a broad range of texts, including not only the *belles-lettres*, but also sermons, political pamphlets, as well as books on topics such as astronomy and gardening. One might perhaps wonder why reviews of political pamphlets have not been singled out for attention, and assume that they might be more suited as primary material when investigating the political intervention of the *Monthly Review*. This assumption is the exact reason why the reviews of political pamphlets have been avoided. It is too obvious. In my research I have often come across scholarship that deals almost exclusively with political pamphlets and sermons when discussing the politics of the Reviews,¹¹ but I found that not only political pamphlets, but also the *belles-lettres*, were becoming more politically charged in this period. The reader might furthermore question the choice of *novel* reviews, at the expense of poetry and drama. This decision is based on the fact that novels reached a much wider reading public, making them more politically dangerous than, for instance, poetry. According to M. O. Grenby, '[t]he audience for new poetry was, after all, limited and specific. The readership of novels, by contrast, was almost certainly expanding'.¹² Claire Grogan also addresses the political potency of novels, arguing that fiction played 'an enormously important role [...] since the wide availability of fictional works within circulating libraries, reading clubs and associations often meant novels reached a broader reading public than polemical and philosophical pieces'.¹³ In other words, novels were cheaper and more intellectually accessible to a wider segment of the British population, notably also to the poorer classes. Considering the fact that the novel was becoming not only more political, but also more radical as a result of the French

9 Roper, p. 24.

10 John O. Hayden, *The Romantic Reviewers 1802-1824* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 40.

11 See for instance Derek Roper in *Reviewing before the Edinburgh: 1788-1802*, where he dissociates politics and fiction by separating them into two chapters: 'The Reviewing of Fiction', and 'The Reviewing of Political and Religious Writings'.

12 M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel – British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 2.

13 Claire Grogan, 'Introduction', in *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, ed. by Claire Grogan (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000), pp. 9-26 (p. 10).

Revolution, we can better understand the political significance of this intellectual accessibility. That the novel was becoming a convenient tool to present new and controversial thoughts was a development that the reviewers did not fail to recognise. Their awareness of the changing nature of the novel is a central aspect of their participation in public debate, and this is the main reason why I have chosen to focus on the reviews of novels in the *Monthly Review*.

To conclude my discussion of the parameters of this thesis, a brief explanation of my choice of periodisation – from 1791 to 1802 – is required. As Joanna Innes and Arthur Burns point out, '[a]ll periodizations have an element of arbitrariness, and threaten to distort as much as they reveal'.¹⁴ However, it is necessary to limit the scope of this study, and lines must be drawn at some point. The year 1791 marks the first change towards what will be the main focus in this thesis, namely the growing political awareness of the *Monthly* in its reviewing of fiction. Despite the focus being primarily on the 1790s, I have extended the period by three years, so that it concludes in 1802. This year marks the start of a new reviewing tradition with the establishment of the *Edinburgh Review* – a journal which has come to signal the decline of the older review journals' influence in the early nineteenth century.¹⁵

1.2 Critical practice and method

In this thesis I will employ a historicist critical approach known as new historicism. This practice originated primarily from the work of Stephen Greenblatt, who – when describing its parameters – seems intent on describing not only what new historicism *is*, but also what it is *not*. Above all, Greenblatt draws attention to the fact that it is not a systematised theory, as opposed to the American New Criticism:

[We are] deeply sceptical of the notion that we should formulate an abstract system and then apply it to literary works. We doubt that it is possible to construct such a system independent of our own time and place and of the particular objects by which we are interested.¹⁶

If new historicism is not an abstract theory, however, then what is it? Greenblatt describes the approach as a tracking of 'the social energies that circulate very broadly through a culture, flowing back and forth between margins and center, passing from zones designated as art to zones

14 Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes, 'Introduction', in *Rethinking the age of reform – Britain 1780-1850*, ed. by Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1-70 (p. 10).

15 Hayden, p. 8.

16 Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practising New Historicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 2.

apparently indifferent or hostile to art'.¹⁷ In other words, it is a practice which opens up the field which has traditionally been seen to constitute 'literary studies', by allowing for the study of material that have hitherto been ignored.¹⁸ Greenblatt describes this as a reading of 'whole cultures as texts'¹⁹, or rather, as a fascination with 'the historicity of texts and the textuality of history'.²⁰ This means that new historicism is a practice which aims not only to understand a work through its historical and cultural context, but also to gain a deepened understanding of that historical context through the study of literature. Based on this, I wish to explore not only how the revolutionary debates influenced the reviewing tendency of the *Monthly Review*, but also how the *Monthly* participated in, and contributed to the shaping of, these debates. New historicism has been described by Paul Goring, Jeremy Hawthorn and Domhnall Mitchell as a 'top-down' approach, with a typically wide scope and roots that are 'wholly or partly outside the study of literature'.²¹ Despite the roots being outside the study of literature, however, it has 'the advantage of a broader view, a sense of the way in which the writing and reading of literature fit into culture and society at large'.²² To me, this is what makes this approach valuable, because it provides a new dimension to the study of both literature and history, which moreover contributes to a heightened understanding of society as a whole.

My method of research is based on the premises of new historicism. Thus, the most important factor in my methodological approach has been a commitment to a historical perspective, and I have therefore aspired to avoid anachronisms in my reading of the primary sources. One way to avoid this has been to read sufficient amounts of secondary material, in order to acquire a deeper understanding of the period in general. Also, I have made extensive use of extra-textual evidence to support my arguments, such as information concerning Griffiths' editorial policy or specific historical circumstances, such as the 1794 Treason Trials, and how they affected the *Monthly Review*. The correspondence between Griffiths and his staff provides particularly important extra-textual data, because it discloses facts concerning the aims and motivations of the editor and specific contributors.²³ On account of my overarching historical perspective, I have furthermore stressed the significance of the reviewers' identities when analysing their contributions to the *Monthly Review*. The reviews are best understood when studied in their historical context, and thus

17 Gallagher and Greenblatt, p. 13.

18 Reasons for their exclusion from literary studies may be that they have been deemed too marginal, or that they, as nonliterary texts, have been considered to be outside the study of literature.

19 Gallagher and Greenblatt, p. 10.

20 Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to curse* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 4.

21 Paul Goring, Jeremy Hawthorn and Domhnall Mitchell, *Studying Literature – The Essential Companion* (London: Hodder Education, 2001), p. 183.

22 Ibid, p. 183.

23 I have had restricted access to this material, but further research on this correspondence is possible. The letters can be found in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and the Osborn Collection in the Beinecke Library at Yale.

the issue of authorship naturally becomes central. Who has written the different reviews in question? What motivations lie behind the evaluations that are made? In answering these questions, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and Benjamin Christie Nangle's *The Monthly Review, second series, 1790-1815: indexes of contributors and articles* have been important tools. The former gives reliable academic accounts of the lives of important contributors to the Review. Details of their political affiliations may serve to suggest motivations behind some of their political evaluations in the reviews. However, in order to gain information about these contributors, one must have identified them in the first place. In this respect, Nangle's index is a very helpful tool, and it has been essential to this study. He has based his index on manuscripts that belonged to Ralph Griffiths, which were marked with the contributors' names in codes.²⁴ These codes appear in my documents as well – for instance, 'Holc' for Thomas Holcroft, and 'E' for William Enfield – but I would not have been able to identify the reviewers from these codes alone. Thus, as Derek Roper points out, '[a]ll students of the *Monthly Review* owe a debt to Benjamin Christie Nangle'.²⁵ It must, however, be said that Nangle's index is not infallible – in some instances, reviews may have been incorrectly ascribed to the wrong author. Nangle himself acknowledges this possibility, when he states that

[m]y identification of Smyth as a member of Griffiths's staff is inferential. He was in need of money during these years; his presence in Sheridan's household while Sheridan was reviewing for the *Monthly* may well have brought him into contact with some members of the staff [...] Nevertheless, I have no evidence directly connecting Smyth with the *Monthly* [...] In the absence of any more definite evidence, however, I think that the ascription of these reviews to William Smyth is plausible.²⁶

In other words, some of his identifications are based on probability, rather than certainty. I have, however, for the most part focused my study on the reviewers who are considered to be correctly identified, and have, as a rule, based my research on the assumption that Nangle's index is as reliable as it is impressive.

1.3 The critical field

A critical debate concerning the older review journals versus new ones, such as the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, has dominated scholarship on review journalism in the late eighteenth and early

24 Roper, p. 245.

25 Ibid, p. 13.

26 Benjamin Christie Nangle, *The Monthly Review Second Series 1790-1815, Indexes of Contributors and Articles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 64.

nineteenth centuries. John O. Hayden, Anton Kirchhofer, Derek Roper, and Antonia Forster have all contributed to this critical debate. Their works have focused on the differences between the so called 'old' and 'new' ways of reviewing, with the *Monthly*, *Critical*, *Analytical* etc on one side, and the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* on the other. There has often been a tendency to downplay the significance of the old journals, based on how they relate to the newer ones – an approach which tends to neglect the importance of the former. Hayden, in particular, shows this attitude towards the reviewing practice in the late eighteenth century, when claiming that 'periodical reviewing left something to be desired' at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and that 'if the comparison is made [between the old and new review journals], something unmistakably is missing in reviewing at the turn of the century'.²⁷ Such an attitude is clearly reductive, and also anachronistic, because it judges the old reviewing practice not in terms of its own historical context, but from a comparison with something more sophisticated that evolved at a later stage of history. The claim that the old Reviews were in some way unsatisfactory is often set as a starting point for further discussion of 'the heyday of reviewing', represented by the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly*.²⁸ The *Edinburgh*, in particular, is credited for revolutionizing the reviewing format in the early nineteenth century. This revolution consists chiefly of reviewing fewer works in greater detail, compared with the pattern set by the *Monthly*, which was to consider as many works as possible, even if this meant that the notices would be very limited in scope.²⁹ Thus, it is primarily the concept of *selection* that is seen as the innovation of the *Edinburgh*.

Selection is often referred to when accounting for the increasingly politicised reviews in the early nineteenth century, because it naturally presupposes that someone is selecting certain books based on specific criteria. There is something intrinsically political in this process. Who is choosing which books to review? Why are these books selected? Anton Kirchhofer is another scholar who emphasises the shift from the comprehensive and allegedly apolitical reviewing of the old Reviews, to the more politically significant selection of the *Edinburgh Review*. Kirchhofer defines the differences between the old and the new journals based on their contrasting generic features. He argues that whereas the *Edinburgh* can be called a 'critical journal', the older Reviews were merely 'histories of literature', or 'literary journals'.³⁰ This approach suggests that the *Monthly* was only interested in giving an overview of the works that were published, whilst the *Edinburgh* singled out the ones they felt were the most interesting:

27 Hayden, p. 7.

28 Ibid, p. 7.

29 Ibid, pp. 10-11.

30 Anton Kirchhofer, 'Revolutionizing the Review? British Periodical Genres of the 1790s and the *Edinburgh Review*', in *Reactions to Revolutions – The 1790s and their Aftermath*, ed. by Ulrich Broich, H. T. Dickinson, Eckhart Hellmuth and Martin Schmidt (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007), pp. 177-201 (pp. 183-184).

The goal of 'exhibiting a complete view of modern literature' that had hitherto alone entitled a periodical to describe itself as a Review was abandoned in favour of a different criterion. Instead of the mass of new publications the Review now monitored the public debate. It would review books either because they had already become the object of public debate, or because they ought to, and it reserved the option of *using its review articles as a vehicle for intervening in this debate*.³¹

In other words, Kirchhofer argues that the innovation of the *Edinburgh* consisted in its ambition to participate in political debates, by using the review articles as a way to intervene. According to Kirchhofer, this tendency was not only less visible in the older Reviews, but, in fact, completely lacking, when he argues that 'a concern with issues of current relevance, however pressing, remained an alien element'.³² Thus, the *Edinburgh* redefined the very function of review journalism.

Derek Roper and Antonia Forster could be said to have a similar approach as Hayden and Kirchhofer, in that they stress the differences between the old and new Reviews. However, their work is also expressly opposite to the scholars mentioned above, in that they try to defend the late eighteenth-century Reviews in their work by emphasising areas which make them interesting as objects of study in themselves, and not only as a backdrop for further exploration of the innovations of the later Reviews. However, they both have different approaches to this process of rehabilitation. In his study of the late eighteenth-century review journals, Roper states that

In our own century few writers have paid serious attention to these journals. Scholars whose projects have demanded some account of reviewing before the *Edinburgh* seem to have glanced into them hastily, if at all, and then fallen back upon legend.³³

Roper lists these legends in a selection of scholarship ranging from 1912 to 1970, and concludes that the most recurrent ones are the allegations of partisanship and of hackneyed reviewing only to promote the sales of booksellers.³⁴ One example is Edgar Johnson, who in 1970 claimed that '[m]ost of the critical journals of the time were either what amounted to publishers' organs, written by hacks who sneered or rhapsodized at their employers' bidding, or unscrupulous instruments of party politics, buttering or slashing up a book in accordance with its author's political affiliations'.³⁵ Roper, on the other hand, contends that 'the eighteenth-century Reviews deserve much more attention than they have yet had, or than the above-quoted passages invite'.³⁶ A main goal for him in his work is to counteract the claims above, and to defend the older Reviews' integrity as responsible

31 Kirchhofer, pp. 177-201 (p. 184) (my emphasis).

32 Ibid, p. 185.

33 Roper, p. 27.

34 Ibid, p. 28.

35 Ibid, p. 28.

36 Ibid, p. 29.

critical organs, by stressing their impartiality and independence from booksellers and political partisanship.

Antonia Forster is also interested in redeeming the way modern scholarship considers the reviewing practice in the late eighteenth century. She argues that

[a]lthough a great deal of attention has been given to the nineteenth-century development of the review journal – often as if the earlier period did not exist, or as if, at least, it was only in the nineteenth century that reviewing learned to walk upright – it was in the eighteenth century that the business of criticism and its place in the history of the book was established.³⁷

However, whereas Roper focuses on the critical function of the old Reviews – stressing their impartiality and independence from booksellers and political partisanship – Forster is primarily interested in the early Reviews as commercial enterprises, and in exploring how they defined their role within the literary marketplace. Forster is especially concerned with what role they had in relation to booksellers and the reading public. For instance, the new concept of the review journal had great impact on booksellers, who would use extracts from complimentary reviews in their marketing strategy, whilst simultaneously dreading the consequences of antagonistic reviews.³⁸ When discussing the role of review journalism in relation to readers, Forster argues that the Reviews were 'busy making quite sure that the reading public was persuaded of the utility and indeed necessity of the reviewers' efforts'.³⁹ They were in other words ascertaining whether or not there would be a market for their product. Forster concludes that the arrival of review journals in the literary marketplace 'clearly altered the balance of book publishing, introducing a new factor into the marketing and reading of books'.⁴⁰ It must, however, be mentioned that Forster – despite focusing mainly on commercial aspects – still acknowledges the fact that politics is an important factor when studying the Reviews, especially in the 1790s, when 'the level of political engagement was much increased by periodical publications of many kinds'.⁴¹ Nevertheless, despite recognising that political debates in review journals were heating up during the 1790s, she does not explore this in depth, and she quickly reverts back to her discussion of the role of review journalism within the book market:

All [the Reviews], whatever they said, were trying to establish a commercial foothold in the literary world, to find an economically viable position in the relationship between authors, publishers and readers.⁴²

37 Antonia Forster, 'Book reviewing', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, volume 5*, ed. by Michael F. Suarez and Michael L. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.631-648 (p. 631).

38 Ibid, p. 637.

39 Ibid, p. 645.

40 Ibid, p. 647.

41 Ibid, p. 641.

42 Antonia Forster, 'Review Journals and the Reading Public', in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century*

In other words, Forster argues that commercial concerns, rather than political or critical, were the primary business of the eighteenth-century review journals, and this is the foundation for her ambition to draw scholarly attention to the older Reviews vis-à-vis the leading journals of the nineteenth century.

By pointing to central aspects of the older review journals as opposed to the newer ones, both Roper and Forster revitalise academic interest in them as worthwhile objects of study. Like them, I am also an apologist for the late eighteenth-century review journal. After a close reading of my material, a development towards a progressively politicised style became apparent, which I found to be underestimated by previous scholarship. This is the case for both those scholars who are interested in the reorientation of review journalism by the *Edinburgh Review*, and for those who seek to reclaim scholarly interest in the Reviews of the late eighteenth century. Whereas the former point to the *Edinburgh's* participation in public debate as the very thing that separates it from the older Reviews, neither Roper nor Forster seem to stress the increasing politicisation of reviewing in the course of the 1790s in their efforts to draw attention to the older Reviews. Roper is, in fact, interested in *downplaying* their political aspects, in his project to defend them as responsible critical organs. My thesis, however, will be based on a quite opposite strategy. I will emphasise the political dimension of one of the older periodicals, the *Monthly Review*, as the very aspect which makes it an interesting object of study. I will show how the shift towards monitoring and intervening in public debate, which many scholars locate with the emergence of the *Edinburgh*, actually took place earlier, in the changing review practice of the *Monthly*. My overarching aim in this thesis is to investigate the democratic potential of review journalism in the political debates of the 1790s, in a society where the possibility of participation was very restricted. When I thus argue that the contributors to the *Monthly Review* were becoming increasingly orientated towards politics in their reviews of novels, and also how the government was afraid of this political initiative, I show how active and important the contributions of review journalism actually were in the political debates in the aftermath of the French Revolution.

1.4 Thesis outline

During the 1790s, there was a marked shift in the reviewing tendency of the *Monthly Review*. This change is the main topic of my thesis. It consisted of a heightened attention to political content in fiction compared with what had been common earlier in the history of review journalism. However,

England: New Essays, ed. by Isabel Rivers (London: Leicester University Press, 2001), pp. 171-190 (p. 179).

the majority of novel reviews in the early 1790s, indeed throughout the entire decade, did not have a political focus whatsoever. In fact, comments on political matters in novels were quite sparse throughout the period in question.⁴³ Therefore, before discussing the notable development towards a more politicised review medium, I will begin chapter 1 with a discussion of the tendency that had been – and throughout the decade continued to be – the dominant method of reviewing. This was a more formalistic approach to literature, which, throughout this thesis, I will refer to as the *belletristic* method. According to this approach, novels were judged based on how they related to certain expectations of composition – the most important of which being originality, probability and decorum. However, because this apolitical way of reviewing is not the main focus of my thesis, it will be dealt with quite briefly, and only as a backdrop for the main field of interest. Chapter 1 will therefore be concluded with a discussion of some early signs of politicisation of the *Monthly Review*. I will draw attention to the growing numbers of politically charged novels, as well as the political convictions of specific contributors, as central reasons behind the turn to a more political reviewing tendency in the aftermath of the French Revolution.

In chapter 2, the politicisation of the *Monthly Review* is further discussed as a response to contemporary debates in the aftermath of the French Revolution, and as a self-conscious wish to define the *Monthly's* political position in these debates. A close reading of the reviews between 1793 and 1798 shows a growing attention to politically controversial matters. I argue that the reason for this lies in the wish to distance the journal from the radicalism associated with the increasingly unpopular French Revolution and the so called New Philosophy, as the debate turned in favour of conservative forces. In order to back up my argument, I will give an outline of the political controversies in Britain in the period, focusing on the initial positive response to the revolution in the early 1790s, and the subsequent shift to a more critical stance later in the decade.⁴⁴ Against this historical backdrop, a selection of reviews with explicit political commentary will be analysed. I will show how these reviews, in seeking to create a distance from radicalism, stress the necessity for liberal reform through constitutional means, thus continuing the process of politicisation discussed in chapter 1.

Chapter 3 investigates developments that occurred towards the very end of the period. Based on the data I have analysed, the year 1799 represents a marked shift in the reviewing tendency of the *Monthly Review*. The most conspicuous development is that the amount of political commentary

43 See Appendix B.

44 This shift was a consequence of the degeneration of the Revolution into Terror and violence, and a result of the war with France, as well as growing government and loyalist oppression. The article 'The political context' by H.T. Dickinson, in *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s*, gives a thorough overview of the political situation in the period. See also 'Introduction' by H.T. Dickinson and Ulrich Broich, in *Reactions to Revolutions – The 1790s and their aftermath*.

is dramatically reduced, which may indicate that the *Monthly* was turning back to the belletristic method of reviewing. However, there are also some reviews that deal with political matters, but not in the same manner as in the period discussed in the previous chapter. My research shows that, compared with this period, the distance already shown towards the New Philosophy intensifies in 1799. What is interesting, however, is the fact that this heightened condemnation is not followed by the previous call for moderate reform. Instead of being motivated by the attempt to redeem their own political claims, it now seems as though this denunciation is the result of unbearable conservative opposition, threatening the very existence of the Review. In chapter 3, I will show how the call for reform in the *Monthly* seems to wane, and I will discuss what consequences this process had for the increasing politicisation earlier in the decade. In my previous discussion of the heightened attention to political matters, three factors have been central, namely the impact of conservative opposition, the significance of the personal motivations of specific contributors in their reviewing of novels, and the growth in publication of politicised novels. Here, as I discuss the opposite process which seems to take place towards the end of the decade – the return to the more apolitical belletristic approach – I will continue to focus on these factors. More specifically, I will discuss two reasons for the change in the *Monthly's* reviewing tendency. Firstly, how the government, through a growing awareness of the political potency of review journalism, made it extremely difficult to forward even the slightest reformist ambition through this medium, and secondly, how the disappearance of active liberal reviewers was a contributive factor to the decline in reformist zeal towards the close of the century. To conclude, in a discussion of how the reviewers dealt with a new literary phenomenon towards the end of the century, namely, the anti-Jacobin novels, I will show how the calls for liberal reform had completely faded away. The continuing process of politicisation of the novel posed a challenge to the reviewers, who, because of the new wave of conservative fiction, were now forced to deal with political beliefs that were intrinsically opposite to their own, in a public debate that would not allow any advancement of reformist ideas.

Chapter 1: Reviewing after the French Revolution: The belletristic approach and the turn to politics, 1791-1793

1.1 The function of the review journal: The belletristic approach to fiction

By the beginning of the 1790s, reviews of fiction usually dealt with a novel's artistic rather than political characteristics. An obvious reason for this practice is the fact that most novels had not been conspicuously political, and were not expected to be so. The majority of novels written in the late eighteenth century were sentimental love stories, largely aimed at a female audience, who were not expected to have insight into political debates in the public sphere. If novels did not contain political material, then it naturally follows that the reviewers would not point out political tendencies either, as there were none to point out. Rather, they would point out the faults and merits of each particular work, according to the established artistic standard of the day. Novels, despite their notoriously bad reputation, were still considered as part of the nation's *belles-lettres*, and reviewers judged them based on their artistic qualities, as well as on the morality they conveyed. This is the approach to criticism of fiction which constitutes the belletristic method. When following this approach, the reviewers would point out the merits and faults of a literary work, based on how it related to certain rules of composition. These rules were, according to Robert D. Mayo, derived 'from neo-classical theories of the drama and epic poetry, modified by the persuasive achievements of the new English novelists'.⁴⁵ In 1793, in a review of *The Wandering Islander*, one of the contributors to the *Monthly Review* remarks that '[i]t is impossible to refer the work to any class of writing, or to describe it under any of the characters which the laws of criticism have provided',⁴⁶ and in 1795, the same notion is echoed in a review of *The Voluntary Exile*:

This novel, though by no means to be ranked in the first class of fictitious tales, has too much merit to be wholly overlooked, or to be consigned to oblivion by indiscriminate censure. The narrative, it is true, *if examined by the rules of criticism*, appears very faulty.⁴⁷

In other words, the reviewers of the *Monthly* were firmly rooted in the belletristic tradition, and found it hard to pass judgement on works that did not correspond to their expectations. These

45 Robert D. Mayo, *The English Novel in the Magazines 1740-1815* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 192.

46 William Enfield, 'The Wandering Islander; or the History of Mr. Charles North', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 12, November 1793, pp. 338-9.

47 William Enfield, 'The Voluntary Exile', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 17, August 1795, p. 463. (My emphasis)

expectations can be summed up as a demand for originality, probability, appropriate moral tendency, competent character delineation, and a skilled use of language. The great majority of novel reviews dealt with one or more of these demands, when establishing the literary merit of a recent publication. When judging from the rules above, it was far more common for a novel to be condemned than praised by the *Monthly* reviewers. The reason for this was that most novels, in the eyes of the reviewers, failed to live up to the standard set by the rules of composition. Especially breaches against probability and originality were common, as the multitudes of novels ending up on the shelves of circulating libraries were issuing from the press in great abundance. The dejection of the reviewers, in the face of the sameness, insipidity and improbability of these popular novels, characterises the great majority of novel reviews throughout the 1790s. In the following, I will give a short outline of how the reviewers dealt with issues such as originality, probability, and moral tendency. However, because the main focus of this thesis will be on the turn to a more politicised reviewing, these issues will be considered quite briefly.

The lack of originality and the breach of probability are usually connected to the formulaic love story in the early 1790s, in which the typical plot consisted of a virtuous heroine, usually an orphan, thrown into hardship after hardship, with her lack of aristocratic pedigree as the main obstacle for marrying the man she loves. After many troubles, however, it is revealed that she is in reality the lost daughter of some very rich and noble lord, and in the end she is restored to her fortune and the man of her choice:

The orphan Marion, like the heroines of all novels, is the paragon of every female good quality. She is precipitated into wonderful distress, in order to be exalted to wonderful good fortune, by wonderful coincidences of lucky circumstances; and so all parties are left wonderfully happy!⁴⁸

The extract above testifies to the increasing weariness of the reviewers when faced with novels that seldom provided any originality of plot. When we consider the amount of novels with this exact plot line, it is not hard to imagine and sympathise with their vexation.⁴⁹ In a review of *Memoirs of Maria, a Persian Slave* in 1791, John Noorthouck comments that at 'a season when novel writing is so hackneyed a species of composition, new novels are only to be admired by new readers; – to old readers, like ourselves, nothing but a disgusting sameness appears in all these love tales'.⁵⁰

Addressing the same problem of sameness in works of fiction, Noorthouck – in a humorous “Recipe for Dressing up Novels” – advises potential novelists to go to some old book-shop that sells cast-off

48 John Noorthouck, 'The Orphan Marion: or, the Parent Rewarded', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 4, February 1791, p. 228.

49 In 1791 alone, 5 novels that were reviewed in the *Monthly* conformed to this formulaic plot construction.

50 John Noorthouck, 'Memoirs of Maria, a Persian Slave', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 4, February 1791, p. 229.

books, and

buy any old forgotten novel, the older the better; give new names to the personages and places, reform the dates, modernize such circumstances as may happen to be antiquated, and, if necessary, touch up the style a little with a few of those polite cant words and phrases that may be in fashion at the time [...] There is nothing new in [modern novels]; and though we have so expressed ourselves a hundred times, novels are pouring forth as fast as ever! We are therefore not without suspicions that this our scheme has been anticipated, and is already in practice; for, as far as recollection can reach, the characters, situations, plots, and catastrophes, are, with very few exceptions, still the same.⁵¹

Thus, it is clear that the lack of originality was a main concern for the *Monthly* reviewers. Just as important, however, was the novelist's tendency to exceed the bounds of probability. The reviewers expected authors to keep within these bounds, especially when solving the problems that had arisen as the plot unfolded. Once again, the love tale was targeted as a particular offender in this respect:

When Providence, in the general distribution of events, depresses an unfortunate individual, it is not very common for a brother, cousin, uncle, or generous friend, to start up from India, or the Lord knows where, with a princely fortune, to raise the poor sufferer to affluence; however frequent and opportunely such events appear in the records of fiction.⁵²

Despite the strong animadversions of the reviewers, however, novelists often failed to keep within realistic bounds, and in the reviews of the 1790s there are numerous examples of complaints regarding the breach of probability. In a review of *The Victim of a Vow*, for instance, the reviewer claims that '[i]f there be any ingenuity manifested in the conduct of this story, it is over-balanced by the great improbability of the whole'.⁵³ In other words, a work would fail to attain the reviewers' praise – on account of its overstepping the laws of probability – even if it did show *some* commendable features.

The lack of originality and the breach of probability were arguably seen as the main faults of modern novels, but there were also concerns about the morality of some novels. Often, novels that had disregarded the rules of originality and probability were nevertheless commended for their good morals. *The Labyrinths of Life* 'affords nothing to attract particular attention', but 'at the same time [...] it exhibits nothing to shock our feelings',⁵⁴ while *The Conflict*, with '[a] few ordinary incidents, which discover little invention in the contrivance or ingenuity in the arrangement', nonetheless can boast that its 'chief merit [...] is its morality, which is unexceptionable'.⁵⁵ Thus, a novel could partly redeem itself, if it at the very least represented good moral conduct. This points to the importance of

51 John Noorthouck, 'The Labyrinths of Life', *Monthly Review, or; Literary Journal*, Vol. 5, July 1791, p. 338.

52 John Noorthouck, 'The School for Widows', *Monthly Review, or; Literary Journal*, Vol. 5, August 1791, p.466.

53 George Edward Griffiths, 'The Victim of a Vow', *Monthly Review, or; Literary Journal*, Vol. 5, August 1791, p. 467.

54 Noorthouck, 'The Labyrinths of Life', p. 337.

55 William Enfield, 'The Conflict, a Sentimental Tale', *Monthly Review, or; Literary Journal*, Vol. 11, July 1793, p. 343.

not overstepping the established codes for moral conduct. Perhaps especially because of the target audience for fictitious tales, which mainly consisted of young and susceptible women, novels that advanced inappropriate or immoral behaviour were seen as potential threats. For instance, the reviewer of *Misogug; or, Women as they are*, points out that the work 'is *not* one of those novels which we should recommend to our young readers, for the improvement of their morals'.⁵⁶ Furthermore, *The History of Tom Weston* is 'not so chastely written, as every publication intended for general reading, ought to be; and particularly as *novels* should be, which are now so universally, and almost exclusively, perused by females'.⁵⁷ Thus, a novel would be severely reprimanded if it forwarded any sentiments that were deemed inappropriate or immoral, and this was, as we have seen, a main concern for the reviewers in the late eighteenth century.

The continued breach of probability, the lack of originality and a transgression of the established codes of moral conduct often led to harsh censure from the *Monthly* reviewers. However, despite the majority of negative reviews, there were some novelists who managed to avoid such reprimands, and actually receive praise for their compositions. Both Elisabeth Inchbald and Charlotte Smith were singled out in 1791 for *A Simple Story* and *Celestina*. According to the reviewer of *Celestina*,

The modern Novel, well executed, [...] certainly deserves a place among the works of genius [...] [The] multiplicity of insignificant or contemptible pieces, which are poured forth under this title, [ought not] to preclude from notice such as possess superior merit.⁵⁸

Thus, from time to time novels appeared evincing signs of literary genius compared with the general mass of novels. The reviewer of *A Simple Story* contends that 'truth requires that we should tell the world, the Muses have had a hand in [Inchbald's] work [...] A mind so pregnant with natural and probable incidents, has every reason to be thankful for the genius that conducts her pen'.⁵⁹ After this opening tribute to the novelist, she is further praised for her skill in the composition of plot. The reviewer is happy to find that '[t]he fable abounds with incidents, all following in a regular train, like effects springing from their causes; and yet expectation is kept alive, and, though probability is not violated, surprize [sic] is constantly awakened'.⁶⁰ In other words, Inchbald managed to create suspense and interest in the very structuring of her plot, 'without having recourse to those wonderful turns of good or ill luck, which novelists always have ready at their elbows to introduce *just* when they are wanted'.⁶¹ She managed to render her tale exciting, yet at the same time

56 William Enfield, 'Misogug; or, Women as they are', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 5, June 1791, p. 226.

57 John Noorthouck and George Edwards Griffiths, 'The History of Tom Weston', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 5, August 1791, p. 466.

58 William Enfield, 'Celestina', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 6, November 1791, p. 287.

59 George Edwards Griffiths, 'A Simple Story', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 4, April 1791, p. 435.

60 Griffiths, 'A Simple Story', p. 436.

61 John Noorthouck, 'The Follies of St. James's Street', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 4, January 1791, p.

avoiding the *deus ex machina* of many other contemporary novels, and this was a great achievement that did not go unnoticed by the reviewers.

To sum up, if we take the reviews of the early 1790s as a whole, the reviewers were almost exclusively concerned with censoring or praising a novel based on how it related to the rules of composition. Critical acclaim was rare, and there was an overwhelming majority of harsh censure on account of breaches of the rules of composition, and a resignation over the depraved state of modern novel writing. What has been most important in this respect, however, has been to show how the reviewers – regardless of their praise or censure – kept within the belletristic framework in their reviewing of fiction. My aim for the rest of this thesis will be to discuss other tendencies in novel reviewing in these years that go against the dominant belletristic approach to fiction, and which may point to a change in how the *Monthly* dealt with the practice of novel reviewing. These relate to an increased attention to political matters in novels, during the politically heated aftermath of the French Revolution.

1.2 An increased attention to politics: Thomas Holcroft and William Enfield

It is quite clear that the belletristic approach, with its focus on formal aspects of literary composition, dominated novel reviewing in the 1790s. Emphasis on content was often restricted to a concern with the moral tendency of a work and its supposed influence on young readers. If we study the reviews of the *Monthly*, however, it becomes clear that there was some degree of political commentary as well even in this early period. There seems to be not only an increasing awareness of political matters in novels in this period, but also a marked inclination towards actually dealing with this political content in the reviews themselves. Many novel reviewers in the *Monthly* at this time were religious and political dissenters, who, through their contributions, had the opportunity to voice their opinions and participate in political debate. As Paul Keen argues, 'for political dissenters especially, the question of what you could do with literature was more important than the question of what belonged to it'.⁶² If this was the case, then the belletristic framework surely must have felt limiting. This may seem to have been the case with the *Monthly* dissenters, as the development towards a more politicised orientation becomes apparent especially from 1793 onwards. We can, however, discern some traces of it already in 1791, in the review of *Lindor and Adelaïde, a moral Tale*. Here, the focus on characterisation and plot construction is largely departed from, and room is

92.

62 Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 28.

made for political comments relating to the French Revolution. Even though this is an exceptional review compared with the majority, it is significant because it shows that a novel review *could* deal with political matters as central concerns, even at this early stage. The review was written by Thomas Pearne, whom Derek Roper described as '[o]ne of the most active and able political reviewers'⁶³ in the 1790s. It clearly shows the support for radical reform:

The enemies of the Revolution are made, in every way, amiable. Their persons are handsome and attracting, their manners are artless and engaging, and their morals are pure. The favourers of the Revolution, on the contrary, are distorted in body, and corrupted in mind [...] A block of marble, in the hands of the statuary, may be made to take whatever form he pleases; and [the author] finds it frequently more easy, and generally more delightful, to work according to the fictions of his fancy, than to the realities of truth. In shaping his passive materials to his mind, he disdains all rule but that by which a King of France, before the Revolution, used to shape an obsequious people to his will.⁶⁴

In this review, Pearne attacks the author's presentation of the French Revolution, which he finds to be not only highly unsympathetic to the revolutionary cause, but also distorted and untruthful. In a defence of the tumultuous uprising that was taking place in France at the time, Pearne discusses how the king of France had shaped the people to his will, and thus points to the tyranny and despotism of the old regime:

[The protagonist] contends, that, by the Revolution, the French have quitted a stately mansion, under the roof of which they were magnificently lodged and sumptuously fed, in order to return to their hollow trees and their acorns. As to the peasantry of France, we believe the bulk of them will be great gainers by the change; and that they will find their hovels much less miserable, and their bread less coarse and unpalatable.⁶⁵

This comment positions the *Monthly* in direct opposition to the subtitle of the novel (*In which are exhibited the Effects of the late French Revolution on the Peasantry of France*) – effects which the author perceives to be grim indeed. Pearne also betrays the optimistic expectations that liberal reformers in England had towards the developments in France at this early stage of the revolution. This is even more clearly expressed later in the review, where Pearne asserts that

[a]ristocratic arrogance may wish to keep the “swinish multitude,” as Mr. Burke calls them, for ever on four legs: but a time will assuredly approach, when, in spite of every effort to keep them down, they will erect themselves, and walk on two. Not all the dragooning of all the despots on the face of the earth will be able finally to prevent it, though it may for a while retard it. Nature, as well as truth, is irresistible; and, in the end, MUST PREVAIL.⁶⁶

63 Roper, p. 175.

64 Thomas Pearne, 'Lindor and Adelaïde, a moral Tale', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 5, July 1791, p. 280.

65 Ibid, p. 281.

66 Pearne, 'Lindor and Adelaïde', p. 283.

In other words, the rights of the people, at the expense of the governing élite, will inevitably prevail. The two main points we can deduce from the arguments in the extracts above can be summed up as a 'hostility to existing forms of society, expressed by a black picture of contemporary hardship, and admiration for Man, expressed by sympathetic treatment of individual sufferers'.⁶⁷ The emphasis on these two points are typical for the liberal, optimistic and progressive thinking that characterised the call for reform in the period. They would continue to dominate, as political commentary in the *Monthly's* novel section became increasingly conventional.

The attention to politics in the reviews of the *Monthly* increased in the following year. An apparent reason for this is the fact that novels with overtly political content were now being produced in greater numbers. The literary market had been dominated by sentimental and Gothic fiction in the late eighteenth century. The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, however, seems to have influenced not only non-fictional texts, but also the *belles-lettres*. According to H. T. Dickinson and Ulrich Broich, an important impact of the Revolution was that novels were politicised to a degree that had not been common earlier in the century:

These were highly political times, times in which great changes were taking place. No wonder then that the writers were highly political, too, that they were well informed about recent political events and [...] that they were not willing to keep their political commitment out of their literary texts.⁶⁸

Even a novel that drew on the standard love plot could now be used for a political purpose, for instance by referring the story to larger questions concerning the political structure of the state. These new political novels often criticised 'things as they are' and proposed societal changes in order to reach 'things as they should be'.⁶⁹ This was a development that did not go unnoticed by the *Monthly* reviewers, who on several occasions commented on the new trend of incorporating political discussions into the previously apolitical novel. However, this awareness of the political aspects of the novel was a dawning realisation rather than an instant recognition. In the review of *Things as they are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, written by the leading radical of the day William Godwin, the recent politicisation of the novel is addressed in the following manner:

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 into the world in the captivating dress of fable. It was not to be supposed that the energetic mind of Mr. Godwin [...] would condescend to employ itself in framing a whining love tale; which, after having drawn a few tears from the eyes of a number of tender virgins, would have reposed in eternal

67 Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 90.

68 Dickinson and Broich, 'Introduction', pp. 7-29 (p. 29).

69 Ibid, pp. 22-3.

peace on the loaded shelves of some circulating libraries. In [the present novel], 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.⁷⁰

The reviewer – William Enfield – questions the use of the novel as a medium to forward political discussion. He does, however, seem to recognise that the author had 'some higher object in view', namely, to 'give an easy passport, and general circulation, to some of his favourite opinions'. To a modern reader, the use of the novel medium to forward political opinions has become a convention, but the reaction seen in the extract above points to an ingrained confusion in the late eighteenth century, with regards to the use of the novel in this new manner. This is perhaps better understood if we consider the fact that novels had not previously been perceived to be politically significant. A year later, Enfield shows a similar perplexity in his review of *The Comforts of Arabella, the Daughter of Amanda*:

This small publication is a literary curiosity – a Socinian novel. The author *makes use of the vehicle of fiction* to convey to young persons, in an easy and interesting way, rational notions of religion [...]. As a story, the piece has little merit: as a theological pamphlet, it is not ill written.⁷¹

This novel was written in order to convey religious instruction, but – as Enfield points out – the author has chosen to present it in the form of a novel, rather than in a theological pamphlet. The reason for this is already brought to our attention in both of the extracts above. The novel is employed to 'give general circulation' to religious or political sentiments, by presenting them in 'an easy and interesting way'. However, Enfield still shows his bewilderment at this new trend, when he describes the publication as a 'literary curiosity'. However, it was becoming apparent that the reviewers needed to deal with this new phenomenon, as more and more political novels were issued every year. A comment by reviewer Arthur Aikin in his review of *Theodore Cyphon; or the Benevolent Jew* shows that by 1796 there had come to be a more established perception of the novel as a vehicle for political ideas:

It was formerly thought merit sufficient for a novel, if it afforded a few hours of innocent amusement; and indeed this is a merit to which comparatively but few of the numerous host of romantic fictions can lay claim. *Of late, however, it has been discovered that a novel is a very effectual and interesting vehicle for truths and speculations of the utmost importance, in moral and political philosophy*; and men of very superior abilities have employed their time and talents in cultivating this species of writing. Rousseau's *Emile*, and Voltaire's *Candide* and *L'Ingénu*, have been much more read, and the principles which they inculcate have obtained far more general notice, than

70 William Enfield, 'Things as they are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 15, October 1794, pp. 145-6.

71 William Enfield, 'The Comforts of Arabella, the Daughter of Amanda', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 18, October 1795, p. 235, (my emphasis).

they would if they had been unconnected with the narrative.⁷²

Aikin explicitly discusses the new trend of incorporating political material in the novel, and points to its suitability as an 'interesting vehicle for truths and speculations of the utmost importance'. An increasing awareness of the shortcomings of the traditional reviewing approach followed from this heightened realisation of the changing nature of the novel, and it is clear that the expanding production of political novels was central to the re-orientation of the review medium in a more politicised direction in the 1790s.

The expanding production of political novels was not, however, the only reason for the increased attention given to political matters in the novel reviews.. Having examined the different reviews closely, it becomes clear that the personal convictions and motivations of the individual contributors are important factors as well, and we need to take them into consideration when analysing the political comments in their reviews. A possible argument against this claim is that most contributors were anonymous, which meant that the reader would get the impression that the notions forwarded were those of the *Monthly Review* as a whole, and perhaps its editor more specifically, rather than those of any specific contributor. According to John O. Hayden,

Griffiths' view, inherited from his father and shared with most editors of other reviews, was that reviewers were supposed to reflect the corporate opinion of the publication for which they wrote, the editor alone being responsible for that opinion. This was one of the main reasons for the anonymity of the contributors.⁷³

The repeated use of the pronoun 'we' in the reviews contributed to the forming of this composite voice. However, despite this attempt to form one common voice, the fact remains that the articles constituting the *Monthly Review* were written by specific contributors, all with different objects in view. Despite being unknown to the contemporary reading public, the contributors to the *Monthly* have been identified by Benjamin Christie Nangle in *The Monthly Review, Indexes of Contributors and Articles*. This makes it possible for scholars to analyse the separate articles in a new context, and after reading the different reviews in this new light, it becomes clear that they cannot be satisfactorily read without keeping in mind the various individuals who have produced them. In order to show how important it is to take the identity of the different contributors into consideration, I will discuss the three politicised reviews of 1792: *Desmond*, *Anna St. Ives*, and *The Castle of St Vallery*. The two first were reviewed by William Enfield, who increased his number of novel

72 Arthur Aikin, 'Theodore Cyphon; or the Benevolent Jew', *Monthly Review, or; Literary Journal*, Vol. 20, August 1796, p. 477, (my emphasis).

73 Hayden, p. 41.

reviews from five in 1791 to thirteen in 1792, and the latter by Thomas Holcroft – his first contribution to novel reviewing in the *Monthly*. Especially the reviews by Thomas Holcroft are difficult to study out of context without bearing in mind his strong connection to radical political beliefs. Some years before the outbreak of revolution he, together with his friend William Godwin, attended clubs that debated philosophical and political issues of the day.⁷⁴ The French Revolution gave a new impetus to his political beliefs. In 1791, he joined a committee whose aim was to publish Thomas Paine's radical *Rights of Man*, when it became apparent that few publishers were willing to risk this undertaking, and in October 1792 he joined the Society for Constitutional Information, which aimed to enlighten the public, and make them politically conscious.⁷⁵ In November of the same year, his first novel review for the *Monthly* was published. In this review of *The Castle of St. Vallery*, Holcroft brings his belief in the progress of man into the discussion of a Gothic story:

[In this novel] the chief passion intended to be excited is fear. Of all the resources of invention, this, perhaps, is the most puerile, as it is certainly among the most unphilosophic [*sic*]. It contributes to keep alive that superstition which debilitates the mind, that ignorance which propagates error, and that dread of invisible agency which makes inquiry criminal [...] The labours of the poet, of the historian, and of the sage, ought to have one common end, that of *strengthening and improving man*, not of continuing him in error, and, which is always the consequence of error, in vice.⁷⁶

In the extract above, Holcroft uses conventional radical rhetoric. In his discussion of the author's character delineation he displays his own view of man's essential nature, which consists of a belief in perfectibility – the conviction that man has potential for continuous improvement. This belief together with a criticism of existing forms of society was recognised by conservatives as forming a main constituent of radical ideology.⁷⁷ The kind of sentimentalism that novelists often employed in their sentimental and Gothic novels was detested by the radicals, because they found that sentimentalism implied people were slaves to their own sensations, and not subjects to their own mental capacities for rational thought.⁷⁸ To Holcroft, the French Revolution brought with it the culmination of the teleological process of man's progress towards freedom, and the Gothic novel's emphasis on fear and 'dread of invisible agency' was seen as subversive to the spirit of free thought and to the continued 'strengthening and improving' of man. However, Holcroft does not seem to react towards any specific political content in *The Castle of St. Vallery* as such, but rather to the

74 Gary Kelly, 'Holcroft, Thomas (1745-1809)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13487?docPos=1>> [accessed 28 November 2012].

75 Ibid.

76 Thomas Holcroft, 'The Castle of St. Vallery, an Ancient Story', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 9, November 1792, p. 337, (my emphasis).

77 Butler, p. 90.

78 Butler, p. 34.

Gothic form in general. All Gothic novels tend to excite the fear of their characters and readers as an essential part of the genre. In other words, Holcroft brings a political agenda to the review of an apolitical novel, which would normally be reviewed solely according to the belletristic approach. In comparison, the 1791 review of Elizabeth Inchbald's novel *A Simple Story* had focused only on its literary merits and shortcomings, not on its political tendencies. Gary Kelly argues that Inchbald's novel, though not explicitly Jacobin, in addressing 'the influence of education, upbringing, and social position on the character of her heroine', emphasises the relationship between the individual and society.⁷⁹ Thus, she was 'a model of psychological self-examination on which [English Jacobins] could pattern their own studies of the influence of society and its institutions on the development of individual character'.⁸⁰ The fate of the individual in opposition to the workings of society was a central topic in the debates following the French revolution, and is thus intrinsically political. Still, this is not commented on by the reviewer. Arguably, *The Castle of St. Vallery* is far less political in nature than *A Simple Story* from the year before, yet it received more political attention than Inchbald's novel. It would therefore be wrong to view the increasing political attention as merely the result of the expanded publication of political novels. It is clear that the political convictions of the reviewers themselves could influence the reviewing practise.

Despite being an important innovator of the *Monthly's* reviewing style, it must be noted that Holcroft was far more radical than both Griffiths and most contributors to the novel reviewing section, and that his reviews 'did much to give the *Monthly* a reputation for hostility to the State and Church'.⁸¹ A contributor whose sentiments were more in line with Griffiths' own can be found in William Enfield, one of the most prolific reviewers for the *Monthly Review* in the 1790s. Despite being a Unitarian minister, he had been a vehement defender of both the established church and of government in the 1770s. In 1770, he attacked the religious dissenter Joseph Priestley for his aggressive defence of the dissenting cause, because he feared that this would damage the gains Unitarians had achieved through peaceful measures.⁸² However, as the years went by, he became increasingly frustrated by the slow progress of civil and religious freedom, and realised that his approach in the 1770s had been inadequate. The French Revolution served to invigorate his spirits in the call for reform, and in a letter to a friend in 1792, he stated that the newly won freedom in France surely must lead to universal equality and parliamentary reform.⁸³ Although Enfield was

79 Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 64.

80 Ibid.

81 Walter Graham, *English Literary Periodicals* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1930, repr. New York: Octagon, 1966), p. 210.

82 R. K. Webb, 'Enfield, William (1741-1797)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8804?docPos=1>> [accessed 28.11.2012].

83 Ibid.

never as explicitly linked to the radical cause as his fellow contributor Thomas Holcroft, who wrote Jacobin novels and joined societies for the advancement of radical reform, we can still clearly see his enthusiasm for change shine through in his reviews. In the review of Holcroft's Jacobin novel *Anna St. Ives*, Enfield still works according to the belletristic guidelines, but his liberal political ideals are nonetheless betrayed in his consideration of the characters. The heroine is described by Gary Kelly as 'a *sans-culotte* Clarissa',⁸⁴ a term which does not seem inappropriate if we consider the following extract from one of her philosophical flourishes:

Dare you think that riches, rank, and power, are usurpations; and that wisdom and virtue only can claim distinction? Dare you make it the business of your whole life to overturn these prejudices, and to promote among mankind that spirit of universal benevolence, which shall render them all equals, all brothers, all stripped of their artificial and false wants, all participating the labour requisite to produce the necessaries of life, and all combining in one universal effort of mind, for the progress of knowledge, the destruction of error, and the spreading of eternal truth?⁸⁵

In reply to these explicitly Jacobin notions, which Enfield himself has chosen to extract as 'a specimen of her noble sentiments', he states that '[i]n the romantic character of Anna St. Ives, there is [...] much to admire'.⁸⁶ Similarly, the male hero of the novel, Frank Henley, is described by Kelly as 'an English Jacobin St. Preux',⁸⁷ and is deemed by Enfield to be 'a character of high merit and dignity; in which, noble principles, delicate sensibility, commanding talents, invincible fortitude, and unbounded generosity, are happily combined'.⁸⁸ The nature of mankind is an important topic that characterises most of the polemic in the 1790s. According to Marilyn Butler, '[i]n the sympathy or otherwise with which he regards his hero's sensations, the late-eighteenth-century novelist is likely to reveal his partisanship in the terms of the contemporary debate on man'.⁸⁹ Arguably, this is not only the case for the novelist, but also for the reviewer who reviews the novel. William Enfield clearly shows admiration for the protagonists of *Anna St. Ives*, who are both young people of Jacobin principles, and through this sympathy he thus reveals his partisanship towards liberal politics. However, as already mentioned, these betrayals of political support for the radical cause were firmly rooted within the belletristic tradition. Only once does Enfield comment explicitly on political matters which are not connected to this approach, when he briefly states that '[i]n the midst of the business of the story, the author finds occasions of introducing moral sentiments and philosophical observations'.⁹⁰ Given the fact that *Anna St. Ives* is an explicitly

84 Kelly, p. 17.

85 William Enfield, 'Anna St. Ives: a Novel', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 8, June 1792, p. 152.

86 Ibid.

87 Kelly, p. 127.

88 Enfield, 'Anna St. Ives', p. 153.

89 Butler, p. 29.

90 Ibid, p. 154.

political novel, with advancement of radical political change arguably as its main concern, the lack of commentary on the political message of the book may strike us as remarkable. Enfield merely quotes radical passages, to point out the 'philosophical observations' he has found in the novel. He does not comment on the truth or fallacy of these political assertions, and ends his review in the following manner:

The incidents of this performance are, on the whole, well contrived, and arranged so as to keep awake the reader's attention [...] In fine, though we think this novel by no means free from defects, it has originality and excellencies which will not fail to ensure its success.⁹¹

In other words, the final judgement of the novel is based on the belletristic method of reviewing; its defects are connected to formal aspects, and not to any political ideas that it exhibits. The probable reason for this lack of political commentary is the fact that Enfield did not see it as part of his function as reviewer to comment on political content. Indeed, political novels were still uncommon in 1792. In December of the same year, however, a review of another political novel, Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*, made it clear that the belletristic framework sometimes proved insufficient when dealing with certain novels. Enfield notes that

Mrs. Smith, who has already favoured the public with several instructive as well as entertaining works of this kind, has, in the present publication, ventured beyond the beaten track, so far as to interweave with her narrative many political discussions [...] Mrs. Smith introduces, where the course of the tale will easily admit of such interruptions, conversations on the principles and occurrences of the French Revolution [...] As the novel of *Desmond* is peculiarly marked by this circumstance, and as we have formerly had repeated occasions to express our favourable opinion of Mrs. Smith's general talents for novel-writing, we shall confine ourselves, in our extracts, to two or three political passages.⁹²

This opening comment and the review which follows are highly interesting, in that they emphasise the importance of Smith's politics as primary matters of concern, at the expense of formal aspects. In this review, the belletristic guidelines are put completely aside, in order to make room for comments on the political significance of the novel. After quoting at length passages that deal with '[t]he improved condition of the people of France' and 'the present defects of the British government',⁹³ Enfield declares that '[h]aving made these large quotations from the political part of this novel, we must be brief and general in our account of the narrative part'.⁹⁴ Thereafter follows a very short plot synopsis, some praise for skilled character delineations, and an extract of an ode to

91 Butler, p. 155.

92 William Enfield, 'Desmond: a Novel', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 9, December 1792, p. 406.

93 Enfield, 'Desmond: a Novel', pp. 408-409.

94 *Ibid.*, pp. 411-12.

demonstrate the beauty of Smith's style. These aspects, which normally would constitute the whole review, only occupy one page of it, whereas the other six pages are fully devoted to the political aspects of the novel. In other words, the review of *Desmond* is an instance where the reviewer feels compelled to move away from the traditional approach, in order to include elements which seem to be of greater relevance to that specific novel.

The heightened political focus that we find in the *Monthly's* novel reviews in the early 1790s, can be attributed to both an increase in the number of political novels and to the political ambitions of the different contributors. In Holcroft's case, I argued that the attention given to political matters seems to be explicitly linked to his radical agenda. By discussing political concerns in novels that are, in fact, apolitical in nature, he wished to draw attention to political issues and forward his own radical beliefs. In Enfield's case, however, the increasing focus on political aspects seems more like a natural result of the fact that some novels were explicitly political. He clearly must have felt the need to deal with these aspects if they comprised an important part of the novel. The belletristic approach may be adequate when judging the merits and shortcomings of a love story, but it is arguably insufficient when dealing with political content, as we have seen in the review of *Desmond*. This departure from standard procedure is quite significant, and strongly indicates the *Monthly* as an important innovator of review practise in the 1790s. Although the great majority of novel reviews continued to operate within the belletristic framework, we see a clear tendency of increased political attention in novels as the decade progresses. In the following chapter, I will show how the *Monthly* is further politicised from 1793 and onwards, and argue *why* this development took place. I hope in this way to shed new light on an aspect of the 'old' Review which has been largely neglected in the study of review journalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Chapter 2: The politicisation of the *Monthly Review*: The fight for reform, 1793-1798

2.1 Debates and political clamour: The aftermath of the French Revolution

In the years following the outbreak of the French Revolution, new ideas concerning liberty, equality and fraternity dominated political debates in England, and the call for natural and inalienable rights for all men and for the sovereignty of the people inspired reformers of all kinds in Britain. It is important to keep in mind that the liberal reformers were not one homogeneous group of people, all expressing the same political aims and convictions. Some of the reformers were veterans, who had called for constitutional reform in the aftermath of the American Revolution, and who were now 'galvanized into renewed action' once again by the outbreak of another revolution.⁹⁵ The majority of contributors to the *Monthly Review* belonged in this category – they were liberal dissenters who advocated the rights of religious dissent versus the established Church of England. Others were new reformers whose political ambitions were born with the French Revolution. Members of this latter group were soon to be identified as British Jacobins, or as advocates of the New Philosophy, and were more extreme in methods and ambitions than their fellow reformists. The term British Jacobins was a name given to the radicals by their conservative opponents to link them to the most radical French revolutionaries, and was not a term that was assumed by the radicals themselves. The term was inaccurate, as most British radicals supported the more moderate revolutionary party, the Girondins.⁹⁶ Influenced by the radical rhetoric in Richard Price's *Discourse on the Love of our Country* and Thomas Paine's highly controversial *Rights of Man*, the British Jacobins promoted universal male suffrage and annual elections, and joined radical societies to spread their political convictions. The most important of these was the London Corresponding Society (LCS), which enlisted several thousand members from the lower middle classes, and produced pamphlets, newspapers and periodicals to spread radical propaganda.⁹⁷

However, while liberal reformers were animated by the developments in France, there were others who contemplated the ongoing revolution with growing concern. At the outbreak of revolution in 1789, William Pitt and his administration had no intention of interfering in the

95 H. T. Dickinson, 'The political context', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1-15 (p. 2).

96 Pamela Perkins, 'Introduction', *Hermesprong; or, Man as he is not*, ed. by Pamela Perkins (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002), pp. 9-48 (p. 11).

97 Dickinson and Broich, 'Introduction', pp. 7-29 (p. 9).

tumultuous affairs in France. In November 1792, however, the Edict of Fraternity was issued, causing a turning point in the government's policies. This decree offered military support to countries wishing to overthrow their leaders and incorporate the new French model of government. When the revolutionary army invaded the Austrian Netherlands, Pitt became aware of the threat of the revolution spreading to other European countries, possibly also to Great Britain.⁹⁸ The prospect of British radicals giving a warm welcome to French invaders served to heighten the fear of invasion. As France declared war on Britain in February 1793, governmental repression against the radical threat increased. This has later been described as 'Pitt's Reign of Terror'.⁹⁹ The Pitt administration was alarmed by the dissemination of radical ideology, which is perhaps understandable if we consider Richard Price's sermon at the annual dinner of the Revolution Society in November 1789, which was published as a *Discourse on the Love of our Country* the following year:

Be encouraged, all ye friends of freedom and writers in its defence! The times are auspicious. Your labours have not been in vain. Behold kingdoms, admonished by you, starting from sleep, breaking their fetters, and claiming justice from their oppressors! Behold, the light you have struck out, after setting America free, reflected to France and there kindled into a blaze that lays despotism in ashes and warms and illuminates Europe! Tremble all ye oppressors of the world!¹⁰⁰

To counteract such rhetoric, the Pitt administration initiated several repressive measures. In May 1792, they issued a royal proclamation against seditious publications, encouraging the public to let the government know if there were any potentially dangerous publications in circulation. In November the same year, another royal proclamation was issued, urging prosecution of the authors and distributors of seditious writings.¹⁰¹ In addition to these proclamations, the government spied on the activities of known radicals through the Home Office, which collected information from local magistrates and private individuals. However, the most important measures taken by the government were the trials for sedition and treason in Scotland and England in 1793-4. Leading radicals were prosecuted for their political activities, and though some were acquitted, many others were sentenced, and some transported to Australia.¹⁰² In some cases, when the threat to domestic security seemed especially looming, *habeas corpus* was suspended, thus allowing the government to imprison leading radicals without trial. This suspension occurred twice: between May 1794 and

98 Dickinson, 'The political context', pp. 1-15 (p.10).

99 Dickinson and Broich, 'Introduction', pp. 7-29 (p. 14).

100 Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country*, in *The Impact of the French Revolution*, ed. by Iain Hampsher-Monk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 39-55 (pp. 54-55).

101 Dickinson, pp. 1-15 (p.11).

102 Dickinson and Broich, pp. 7-29 (p. 14).

July 1795, and again from April 1798 to March 1801.¹⁰³

It was not only the government who were zealous in their campaign against the spread of radical ideology. The landed gentry also had reason to fear a reconstruction of the British constitution, which had long provided them with a powerful political and economic position. Whilst barring the poorer classes from the vote, it furthermore secured the interests of the propertied class vis-à-vis the King.¹⁰⁴ Together with the repression by the government, this conservative force would prove powerful in the fight against radicalism through the establishment of private loyalist societies. The most famous of these was the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers (APLP), which was determined not only to limit the spread of radical publications, but also to produce its own cheap works and distribute them to the poorer classes.¹⁰⁵ The APLP and other loyalist societies were quite violent in their methods, and they often resorted to harassment. They warned innkeepers against allowing radicals to hold their meetings there, by telling them that they risked losing their licences. As men of property, they could refuse to rent land or offer employment to people who were suspected of having radical sympathies.¹⁰⁶ This harassment by loyalist societies, together with the repression by the government, resulted in a very difficult situation for the politically radical in Britain. By mid-decade, they seemed to have lost the political enthusiasm that characterised the first years of the revolution, which is evident from the fact that the LCS's membership declined from 3,000 to 1,000 by the end of 1796.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps even more crucial to the decline of radicalism in Britain, however, were the political developments in France. The hopes for social betterment in the early days of revolution now seemed to fade away as the revolution took a violent turn. The execution of King Louis XVI and his wife, and the bloody 'Reign of Terror' – initiated by internal conflicts between the Jacobins and Girondins – seriously damaged the radicals' support in Britain, and when the French National Convention declared war on Britain in February 1793, their status was further undermined. Large numbers of ordinary Britons were now joining the loyalist societies, which originally had consisted of landed gentry wishing to protect their own interests, and they soon grew to become the largest and most influential popular political movement in Britain. According to H.T. Dickinson,

[g]rowing violence in France, and the outbreak of war in Europe, helped to produce some 386 loyal addresses to the King in support of the existing constitution in Britain by September 1792. In the winter of 1792-3 effigies of Thomas Paine were publicly and ceremonially burned in hundreds of

103 Dickinson, pp. 1-15 (p.12).

104 Dickinson and Broich, pp. 7-29 (p. 10).

105 Dickinson, pp. 1-15 (p.8).

106 Ibid, p. 9.

107 Ibid, p. 6.

towns and villages across the country.¹⁰⁸

Thus, when the revolution proved to be a violent affair, and as conservative measures were increasingly taken by the government to counteract the spread of radical ideas, the radical cause in England lost momentum. The revolutionary zeal, which a large group of liberal reformers had shown in the early days, was now more specifically connected to a radical group known as the advocates of the New Philosophy, who were typically more extreme in their political ambitions than their more moderate fellow reformers. H. N. Brailsford characterises their political aspirations as 'beyond the prosaic demand for Parliamentary Reform', based on their radical 'programme for the reconstruction of all human institutions, and [...] the amendment of human nature itself'.¹⁰⁹ They were especially notorious for advocating not merely the reformation, but the abolition of two fundamental institutions in British society, namely matrimony and law. Such views are perhaps best expressed by the political philosopher and novelist William Godwin, who in his philosophical treatise *Political Justice* argued for the liberation of mankind from the shackles of government.¹¹⁰ Published in 1793, this avant-garde philosophical work urges the freedom of individual judgement in the pursuit of knowledge, and argues for the removal of any possible restrictions to this operation. According to Godwin's logic, government itself places restrictions on the individual's ability to think for himself. He places much importance on the power of rational thought, and argues that crimes and immoral behaviour stem from errors in reasoning or from a lack of education, not from any wish to do evil. Thus, the perpetrator should not be punished, but rather educated and enlightened, in order to avoid similar crimes in the future. Fundamental institutions in society however, such as organised religion and government, use force and authority as a means to distribute punishment and reward, rather than encourage each individual's capacity for rational reflection. Thus ignorance, and consequently crime and immoral conduct, are perpetuated. Godwin further argues that if education and knowledge are spread to a larger segment of society, government will lose its authority and be abolished by the people.¹¹¹ By impugning all social institutions, from the public state and all the way down to the private unit of family, Godwin earned an epithet as 'The founder of modern anarchism'.¹¹²

Such extreme radicalism as represented by Godwin's *Political Justice* soon became unpopular in public opinion. The attack on the British constitution and on fundamental institutions

108 Dickinson, pp. 1-15, (p. 8).

109 H. N. Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin and their circle* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 8.

110 Mark Philp, 'Godwin, William (1756-1836)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10898?docPos=2>> [accessed 10 January 2013].

111 Ibid.

112 Iain Hampsher-Monk, *The Impact of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 210.

were not in line with the growing patriotism that followed the outbreak of war in 1793. In fact, Godwin's treatise was published only two weeks after the National Convention's declaration of war, and it is very possible, as Pamela Clemit argues, that it was only the work's expensive format – and thus limited possibilities of circulation within the poorer classes – that saved Godwin from prosecution.¹¹³ The support for radicalism was continuously declining, and the advocates of the New Philosophy were abhorred and frequently ridiculed. Robert Bage, author of the politically radical novel *Hermesprong*, wrote a letter to a friend in 1793 lamenting that he had to abstain from all society, because 'respect for my moral principles is scarce sufficient to preserve me from insult on account of my political –'.¹¹⁴ Contemplating the same fact some years later, Godwin complained that

the cry [has] 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 contains some expression of dislike or abhorrence to the new philosophy.¹¹⁵

The increasing disfavour meant that people felt the need to distance themselves from any connection to radicalism, especially if they themselves harboured liberal sympathies, which might lead to the supposition that they supported the political zeal of the radicals. One example of how the vehemence of the radicals drove people towards dissociating themselves from it, is the case of George Canning, who was later to become the initiator of the magazine *The Anti-Jacobin Weekly Examiner*. Canning was born and raised in a Whig family, and was initially enthusiastic about the ideals of the French Revolution. As the decade progressed, however, he turned more conservative, and became a staunch Tory. One of the reasons why he changed his mind was, according to Sir Walter Scott, that 'he was driven into the arms of the Tories by a visit from William Godwin, who so dinned his ears that Canning's patience with the radical cause was killed stone dead'.¹¹⁶ This is perhaps an exaggerated and unreliable account, but it does suggest a sense in which the extreme rhetoric of the radicals, which we can find both in Godwin's *Political Justice* and Paine's *Rights of Man*, seemed to scare off a lot of people who in reality opted for some sort of middle ground between radicalism and conservatism, namely, the moderate reform of *some* laws and institutions.

The public ridiculing of radicals often made equal mockery of the pursuers of reform, which certainly must have increased the anxiety of the reformists. Even though there were great

113 Pamela Clemit, 'Godwin, *Political Justice*', in *The Cambridge Companion to the French Revolution*, ed. by Clemit, pp. 86-99 (p. 88).

114 Pamela Perkins, p. 10.

115 William Godwin, as quoted by Marilyn Butler in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 5.

116 Sir Walter Scott, as quoted by Graeme Stones in *Parodies of the Romantic Age Vol 1* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), p. liv.

differences between the radical and reformist agendas, public opinion tended to group them together. This attitude was 'fostered and exploited by a government determined to prevent revolution and fearful that any discussion of reform might lead in that direction'.¹¹⁷ A satirical print entitled *The Tree of Liberty*, by the famous caricaturist James Gillray, clearly illustrates this tendency:



The Tree of Liberty (James Gillray, 1798)

117 Roper, p. 174.

This sketch shows John Bull, a fictitious character symbolising the English people,¹¹⁸ who is tempted by 'the devil' in the form of Charles James Fox – the leader of the Whig party. Fox holds out a rotten apple from the 'Tree of Liberty', which Bull declines, explaining that his pockets are full of apples from the loyalist tree that he has already visited. As opposed to the tree of liberty, which is characterised by 'Envy', 'Opposition' and 'Rights of Man', the loyalist tree symbolises 'Laws', 'Religion' and 'Justice'. The juxtaposition of the rotten versus the golden apples forms a potent image, whose intention is unmistakable. What is most important in this respect, however, is how indiscriminately the sketch deals with the concepts of reform and revolution. The apples of 'Reform', 'Democracy' and the 'Whig club' are hanging side by side the apples of 'Revolution', the 'Corresponding Society', 'Treason', 'Atheism' – even 'Murder'. Note also that of all the apples on the tree it is in fact the apple of 'Reform' that is handed to John Bull. This suggests that the fight for reform had become, in the late 1790s, perhaps even more alarming to the conservatives than the calls for revolution. Its claims sounded less extreme and more reasonable than the ones posed by the British Jacobins, and they were therefore more likely to lead public opinion away from the interests of the governing élite. Thus, the increasing fear of radical association is perhaps more fully understood if we consider not only the public ridiculing, but also the national witch hunt of radicals, backed by government and loyalist societies wishing to protect their own interests. As a measure in the fight against radical enemies of the state, the Pitt administration organised a small secret service, which gathered information concerning suspicious behaviour. There was, however, no way of determining the validity of this information. It could be exaggerated as a result of the national panic following the declaration of war, or it might be motivated by spite or revenge, or even by the anticipation of financial rewards or career advancement.¹¹⁹ In this precarious situation, it was therefore not merely the sting of public ridicule that frightened liberal reformers. In the increasingly polarised debate between loyalism versus treason, religion versus atheism, and law versus social anarchy, it had become decidedly dangerous to be associated with the radical cause.

2.2 The 'New Code' of distance: The controversial Thomas Holcroft, and the links to radicalism

Like the early liberal movement in general, the majority of the review journalists had rejoiced in the face of revolution.¹²⁰ The *Monthly* and *Analytical* Reviews supported the recent developments in

118 Miles Taylor, 'Bull, John (supp. fl. 1712–)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/68195>> [accessed 14 April 2013]

119 Dickinson, pp. 1-15 (p. 11).

120 Roper, p. 182.

France, and even the traditionally conservative *Critical Review* joined in after a turn in its editorial policy following the initiation of the second series in 1791.¹²¹ J. E. Cookson describes these review journals as forming 'the basis of the liberal pre-eminence'¹²² of the press in the 1790s. The largest and most influential of these review journals was the *Monthly Review*. During the forty years from its establishment until its support for the revolutionary cause, the *Monthly* had been consistent in its political orientation. The main reason for the *Monthly's* stable political orientation is the consistency of its editorship: Griffiths was the sole proprietor and editor of the Review from its commencement until his death in 1803. He alone decided who should contribute to the journal, and he alone chose which books should be reviewed. He furthermore read through the whole copy before it was printed, and accepted full responsibility for the end result.¹²³ In other words, all political stances forwarded in the *Monthly*, independent of specific reviewers, were more or less condoned by its founder and sole editor. This is supported by John O. Hayden, who contends that Griffiths expected 'reviewers [...] to reflect the corporate opinion of the publication for which they wrote, the editor alone being responsible for that opinion'.¹²⁴ For more than forty years he had maintained the principles of 'an Old Whig and Consistent Protestant',¹²⁵ supporting the colonists during the American Revolution, and advocating the abolition of the slave trade. As an example of the latter support, the *Monthly* had a specific section of reviews under the headline 'SLAVE-TRADE' in the early 1790s. A pamphlet titled *Reflections on the Slave-trade; with Remarks on the Policy of its Abolition* was reviewed in October 1791, with the following remarks as exemplary of the *Monthly's* policies:

The slave-trade is now an old subject: but these Reflections are the dictates of a worthy heart, which estimates all other hearts according to a consciousness of its own integrity. The author considers the trade in slaves as a moral evil, a religious evil, and a political one: it is certainly all three.¹²⁶

Support for American colonists and the abolition of slave-trade aside, Roper argues that 'the *Monthly* expressed the views of moderate Dissent; and for the last twenty years of the eighteenth century its favourite causes were Parliamentary reform and the repeal of the Test Laws'.¹²⁷ He further argues that, although the *Monthly* was 'far from being a party organ', it is an 'interesting coincidence that from 1784 or 1785 until some time in the early 1790s the main Whig propaganda

121 Robert D. Spector, 'The Critical Review', in *British Literary Magazines: The Augustan Age and the Age of Johnson, 1698-1788*, ed. by Alvin Sullivan (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 72-77 (p. 75).

122 J.E. Cookson, *The Friends of Peace: Anti-war Liberalism in England, 1793-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 89.

123 Wilbur T. Albrecht, 'The Monthly Review', pp. 231-237 (p. 233).

124 Hayden, p. 41.

125 Graham, p. 211.

126 John Noorthouck, 'Reflections on the Slave-trade; with Remarks on the Policy of its Abolition', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 6, October 1791, p. 223.

127 Roper, pp. 174-5.

organisation had its headquarters in the same building as the *Monthly*'.¹²⁸ However, establishing to what extent the *Monthly* was directly associated with Whig partisanship is difficult, and will result in mere speculations at best. Its religious dissent and call for parliamentary reform, on the other hand, are easier to establish, and these were issues which the *Monthly*'s contributors pursued with great zeal during most of the 1790s.

However, despite the early enthusiasm for the French Revolution, the political opinions forwarded in the *Monthly*'s novel reviews had, in fact, never been explicitly radical. As mentioned above, the *Monthly* favoured moderate reform over radical change. Even the review of *Lindor and Adelaïde*, which was the novel review that was most celebratory of the French Revolution, stresses reform rather than revolution. Despite supporting the French revolutionaries, and despite the use of rhetoric that was later to be identified as Jacobin, it is nevertheless apparent that Thomas Pearne prefers slow and peaceful reform over the violent convulsions of revolution. In reply to the author's contention that 'alterations in government can never in themselves bring any thing but misfortune to the body of the people', Pearne responds in the following manner:

we think there would be more truth in saying, that all the political misfortunes of a people arise from a want of alteration in their government [...] certainly, all the chronic and slow-grinding diseases of established and settled despotism, as well as a very large proportion of the acute and violent disorders of convulsive revolution and rebellion, appear to have proceeded from a want of gradual alteration.¹²⁹

Pearne further argues that if there could be said to be any misfortune in this alteration, it arises from the fact that alteration is sought through tumultuous revolution instead of gradual and peaceful reform. And when this happens, it is solely due to the despotic rulers, who are responsible for forcing the people to extreme measures:

all the guilt, and all the infamy, of such tumultuary [sic] massacres, must rest with those miscreant rulers, who, instead of peaceably altering the government, so as to promote the happiness of those whom they govern, as they are bound to do, wickedly drive the people into insurrections, and compel them to make the necessary alterations for themselves.¹³⁰

So far, Pearne has been dealing with what he calls 'bad, very bad, governments',¹³¹ with France as the obvious example, but it gets interesting when he proceeds to take into consideration that not only despotic governments stand in need of reformation. This instantly brings the debate concerning peaceful reform versus violent revolution into a specifically British context, and poses the question

128 Roper, p. 175.

129 Thomas Pearne, 'Lindor and Adelaïde, a moral Tale', p. 282.

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid.

of whether Britain as well would stand to benefit from a reformation of its laws and institutions. Pearne bases his arguments on the paradigmatic Enlightenment idea of human progress, which was later to be identified with Godwin's radical notions of perfectibility. The idea that mankind is ever progressing from worse to better implies that the institutions that govern them should progress correspondingly. According to Pearne, the only question that remains is *how* this inevitable change should come about:

The question then is not whether there shall be any alterations in governments, – alterations must take place in all governments, – but, in what manner they may be best effected, whether with or without tumult and confusion? We look with dread and horror at all approaches toward revolution [...] It is this apprehension of revolution that makes us so solicitous for reformation; which, if rulers and civil magistrates duly attended to it, would avert, not only rebellion and faction, but every political evil of every state.¹³²

In other words, change was not only considered desirable, but even inevitable. In this extremely politicised novel review, Thomas Pearne presents the *Monthly's* political stance – that reform was required in order to avoid revolution – more forcibly than it was ever again to be posed in the 1790s.

The review of *Lindor and Adelaïde* made it perfectly clear that the *Monthly Review* dissociated itself from revolution, even as early as 1791, and the reforms they called for were much more moderate than the ones advocated by the more radical reformers. Despite this fact, even moderate reformers risked being silenced in the tense political climate following the outbreak of war with France. In the face of the foreign threat and national panic, the boundaries between radical and moderate reformers became blurred in the eyes of the Pitt administration. Consequently, the *Monthly* tried to distance itself more from the radical rhetoric of revolution-friendly authors such as Thomas Holcroft and William Godwin. As early as 1793, Ralph Griffiths had expressed anxiety over a possible prosecution on the account of one of their reviews.¹³³ In October 1792, Pearne had reviewed the pamphlet *Principles of Government* by Robert Nares, who was later to become the editor of the conservative *British Critic*. Here he argues against Nares, and contends that 'every man has naturally and essentially a right to govern himself',¹³⁴ and that a nation may 'dismiss or controul its king, whenever it thinks fit'.¹³⁵ The dreaded prosecution was never pursued, but Griffiths was alarmed to see how severe the consequences might be if the contributors were too incautious in their reviews. A further source of distress was the large numbers of conservative readers who read the

132 Pearne, 'Lindor and Adelaïde, a moral Tale', p. 283.

133 Roper, p. 175.

134 Thomas Pearne, 'Principles of Government, deduced from Reason', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 9, October 1792, p. 136.

135 Ibid, p. 145.

Monthly's reviews with increasing anger and resentment, and who gathered at a meeting in Yarmouth the same year 'to prevent the continuance of the M.R.'¹³⁶ These circumstances made Griffiths consider a more prudent approach to political commentary, in order to dissociate the Review from the pursuers of radical reforms.

Of course, an obvious problem with this approach was the fact that a main contributor to the novel review section was Thomas Holcroft, one of the most notorious radical figures of the period. As mentioned in chapter one,¹³⁷ Holcroft was far more radical than both Griffiths and most contributors of novel reviews, and he 'did much to give the *Monthly* a reputation for hostility to the State and Church'.¹³⁸ If we consider his contributions in 1793, namely his reviews of *Man as he is* and *The Count de Hoensdern*, we can see the same pattern of political discourse as found in his reviews the year before. In the the review of *Man as he is*, written by the radical author Robert Bage, Holcroft considers 'the influence, that novels have over manners, sentiments, and passions, of the rising generation', and it is obvious that Holcroft – as an author of political fiction himself – recognises the political possibilities of the novelistic form. Thus, when he continues the review by extracting a long passage dealing with a debate concerning religious orthodoxy versus dissent, this is not a random selection. He deliberately chooses this passage, in order to address a controversial topic from an ongoing contemporary debate. I will include a short extract from the passage, to show on which side of the debate Bage belongs:

'Ay, says Mr. Holford, this is the modern doctrine of toleration, by which all unity of Christianity is cut off from the face of the earth; and men are lead astray by pretended spiritual guides, or permitted to wander without any.
'Thou knowest that in heaven there are many mansions. Why should there not be many roads? says Miss Carlill.
'There can be but one road, madam, answered Mr. Holford; the road of truth.
'And a few there be that find it, replied Miss Carlill.¹³⁹

Through the virtuous and sincere arguments of the young Miss Carlill, which pose serious theological complication to the reverend Mr. Holford, Bage presents his political challenge to the adversaries of religious toleration. Through Holcroft's general description of the novel, he leaves no doubt as to which side of the debate *he* supports:

[W]hen a novel has the power of playing on the fancy, interesting the affections, and *teaching moral and political truth*, we imagine that we are capable of feeling these beauties, and that we have

136 Roper, p. 175.

137 See section 1.2 – An increased attention to politics: Thomas Holcroft and William Enfield.

138 Graham, p. 210.

139 Thomas Holcroft, 'Man as he is', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 10, March 1793, p. 299.

liberality enough to announce them to the world. Of this superior kind, is the novel now before us.¹⁴⁰

In other words, Holcroft views *Man as he is* as an attempt to teach moral and political truth, through the encouragement of religious and social reform, and in this context, it is obvious that plot, character delineation and style become secondary to the novel's political message. It is unlikely that Griffiths would oppose the encouragement of moderate reform at this stage, as we see similar confirmations of liberal support in later reviews. However, Holcroft's use of the phrase 'moral and political truth' is more controversial, as it is decidedly linked to the radical rhetoric of the New Philosophers, and because it presupposes that only the politically radical are led by proper moral principles. In November the same year, Holcroft reviewed the novel *The Count de Hoensdern*. Here, he once again emphasises the importance of a novel's moral message, giving the reader a deepened sense of what this morality should consist of. Not surprisingly, his idea of commendable morality is explicitly linked to a radical discourse:

The morality of this ingenious writer is [...] blameable. The continual tendency of this work before us is to persuade us that there is little else than misery on earth. Discontent, misanthropy, cowardice, apathy, debility, are each and all thus engendered; and we rise from reading, not with that animation which should make us happy in ourselves and useful to others, but, with a sensation of the wretchedness of human existence.¹⁴¹

Explicitly linking good morality to the radical political position, as he had indicated in the review of *Man as he is*, he seems to lay claim to the concept of morality *per se*. Such a claim would undoubtedly aggravate the increasingly conservative popular opinion, and draw unwanted negative attention to the *Monthly Review*. Holcroft continues his radical rhetoric in the review of *The Count de Hoensdern*, when he once again discusses the idea of human perfectibility, as we saw in his review of *The Castle of St. Vallery* the preceding year.¹⁴² In his reaction towards the author's character delineation, he claims that her philosophy is erroneous, because

Her characters are virtuous or vicious *by nature* [...] Philosophers contend that men are not vicious by nature, but that they are made so by the accidents which befall them. They will grant that, in many instances, their vices are repeated so frequently that they become habitual [...] Half reasoners tell us that it is their nature; by which [...] inquiry into the course of vice is stopped, and the knowledge and progress of virtue are impeded.¹⁴³

Again, as we saw in the review of *The Castle of St. Vallery*, Holcroft employs politically charged

140 Holcroft, 'Man as he is', p. 297, (my emphasis).

141 Thomas Holcroft, 'The Count de Hoensdern', *Monthly Review, or; Literary Journal*, Vol. 12, November 1793, p. 338.

142 See section 1.2 – An increased attention to politics: Thomas Holcroft and William Enfield.

143 Ibid, p. 338.

philosophical rhetoric when reviewing a novel that is not actually political in nature. Through the medium of the review journal, he forwards opinions regarding the nature of mankind that resemble the ones presented in Godwin's *Political Justice* – drawing attention to the *Monthly Review* as a conspicuous participator in contemporary political debates. Thus, if Griffiths truly feared to be associated with radical politics as early as 1793, Holcroft's outspoken support for the New Philosophy must definitely have posed a challenge to the editor. It is therefore interesting to note that Holcroft's contributions ceased the following year. It is tempting to interpret this as a possible indicator that Griffiths in fact did wish to fire Holcroft from his staff. However, research shows that other reasons were behind this sudden departure. In May 1794 the government suspended habeas corpus as one of the measures of Pitt's 'Reign of Terror', and Holcroft was consequently indicted for treason, and arrested together with other prominent radicals for attending political meetings and publishing seditious writings.¹⁴⁴ Holcroft's lawyer was the famous Thomas Erskine, who was Britain's leading defence lawyer at the time. Erskine's successful defence of the radicals John Horne Tooke and Thomas Hardy, which led to their acquittal, forced the prosecution to abandon the case against Holcroft, and he was consequently released from prison.¹⁴⁵ One would perhaps anticipate Holcroft's business with the *Monthly* to be at an end after this indictment for treason, considering Griffiths' already established concerns, and the fact that Holcroft was 'smeared after release as an 'acquitted felon'.¹⁴⁶ However, Holcroft in fact returned for a short period in 1795 to review the novels *The Royal Captives* and *Henry*. A possible reason for this comeback is hard to establish without turning to speculation. Griffiths arguably must have realised the unfavourable image an association with Holcroft would give his journal. However, because the contributors were, in fact, anonymous, it might be supposed that he was willing to let Holcroft continue for some time, presuming that he was in need of more manpower on his staff. Perhaps Griffiths hoped that Holcroft would tone down his political commentary in the face of the increasingly perilous situation. If this was the case, he was gravely mistaken. In the review of *The Royal Captives* in January, Holcroft continues in his familiar way:

[The author] is indeed too full of complaint, too apt to bewail instead of obviating the evils of men, and too gloomy and dispiriting for the morality which we wish to see inculcated. The endeavour of every author ought to be to inspire fortitude. To teach complaint and desponding resignation is the radical disease of sentimental masters and misses.¹⁴⁷

144 Gary Kelly, 'Holcroft, Thomas (1745-1809)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13487?docPos=1>> [accessed 14 January 2013].

145 Ibid.

146 Ibid.

147 Thomas Holcroft, 'The Royal Captives', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 16, January 1795, p. 113.

This ingrained distrust of sentimentalism is, as discussed earlier, fundamental to the radical ideology, and Holcroft seems unable to resist commenting upon it in his reviews. His betrayal of his political orientation continues, when he actually brings to the review of this novel a discussion of the levelling of social classes. This highly controversial issue was, according to Dickinson, 'discussed by only a few British radicals – the vast majority were content to advocate parliamentary reform'.¹⁴⁸ It also did much to alarm and infuriate the conservatives, hence the attention to the principle of anti-levelling in the title of the leading loyalist association discussed above. In other words, only a few of the British radicals were supporters of social levelling, and if we consider the following quotation, it seems as though one of them was a contributor to the novel review section of the *Monthly Review*:

The struggles of a powerful mind, to overcome the obstacles which result from the want of early instruction, are such as ought to interest every spectator [...] Of this description is Mrs. Yearsley. Nurtured in ignorance, yet eager to be informed; bearing her milk-pail, and studying her alphabet; confined to the intercourse of the illiterate, while panting for the society of the wise; her spirit fighting at the prospect in view, yet not yielding, but enduring neglect, and shaking off despondency; we contemplate strife like this with lively emotions in favour of the combatant'.¹⁴⁹

For a man so adverse to sentimentalism, such language may strike us as unexpected. Holcroft is clearly affected by his own modest upbringing – his father being a shoemaker, and his mother a costermonger.¹⁵⁰ After experiencing financial distress, both his parents became itinerant pedlars. When Holcroft learnt to read, this was partly thanks to the cheap chapbooks which his family had access to. As a young boy, he had to work to contribute to the family's finances, and his health was permanently impaired by the poor living conditions they had to endure during this difficult period. Despite these challenging obstacles, Holcroft was eager to learn, and he read everything he could come across, even broadsheets pasted on the walls of alehouses and cottages.¹⁵¹ He considered himself to be intellectually superior to his friends, and was constantly trying to rise professionally and socially. The details of his path to becoming one of the leading intellectuals in the 1790s, however, are too extensive to be included here. The point is that knowledge of his background certainly influences our understanding of his quote above concerning the '[confinement] to the intercourse of the illiterate, while panting for the society of the wise'. It furthermore helps to explain his radical ambitions of social and parliamentary reform.

How Griffiths might have responded to the review of *The Royal Captives* is impossible to

148 Dickinson, pp. 1-15 (p. 4).

149 Holcroft, 'The Royal Captives', p. 112.

150 Gary Kelly, 'Holcroft, Thomas (1745-1809)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13487?docPos=1>> [accessed 14 January 2013].

151 Ibid.

establish, but Holcroft's last novel review for the *Monthly* may indicate that Griffiths had felt the need to restrain the radical contributor. In the review of *Henry* in June 1795, Holcroft seems to have changed his reviewing tendency slightly. Instead of pursuing the same revolutionary rhetoric as before, he concentrates on pointing out the vices and moral shortcomings of the politically conservative author of *Henry*:

No man appears to be a greater friend to religion than the author of *Henry*: nor to have a more marked antipathy to infidels and free-thinkers: yet we cannot well imagine how he can conceive it honourable to the Deity to write such loose and undigested sentiments, on such subjects as we find in this work [...] From an author who is so angry, not only with immorality, but with that which he perhaps supposes to be still worse, a deviation from that creed which he deems orthodox, we should expect purer doctrine, and better examples.¹⁵²

Instead of meeting – as he had done earlier in his career – the criticism of the political opponent by pleading the case for the deviation from religious and political orthodoxy, Holcroft rather points out that the doctrine of the opposition is not perfect either, despite being built on the authority of long traditions and established institutions. In this new method of forwarding his political sentiments, Holcroft seems much less confident in his ability to sway public opinion with the arguments of radical politics. He seems to recognise the fact that public opinion has turned against both the revolutionary principles and the New Philosophy:

That *Henry* should kill Frenchmen will possibly accord with the feelings of most readers; and Mr. C. is not one of those “*new fangled*” philosophers who roundly declare that killing in any case is murder: – but that the author should make *Henry*, as we recollect he does all his heroes, consider duelling as one of the requisites for a virtuous man, is, we own, in our apprehension, a dangerous circumstance for those who may make his works their moral guide.¹⁵³

Though still managing to present himself as opposed to the conservatives, Holcroft has realised that this political resistance will not be achieved through pleading the case of the “*new fangled*” philosophers', who have lost all support in public opinion. The result is a novel review that still is heavily focused on political issues, but which shows clear signs of disillusion and resignation in the face of declining support for the radical cause. The imprisonment for treason seems to have taken its toll on the once resolute radical, and though he is far from abandoning his radical principles, it seems obvious that he finds it hard to argue his political opinions in the same manner as before. Whether this seeming resignation is the result of Griffiths' new editorial policy, which instructed him to be politically cautious, or just a response to the growing tide of anti-Jacobinism in Britain at the time, is difficult to establish. It was, however, most probably a combination of the two. In

152 Thomas Holcroft, 'Henry', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 17, June 1795, pp. 136-7.

153 *Ibid*, p. 137.

1796, Griffiths acted on the fear he had showed in 1793, and introduced his staff to a 'new code' when dealing with political issues. This new code would ensure that the *Monthly Review* would take a much more moderate stance in the Revolution controversy, in order not to be accused of siding with the violent French revolutionaries. Interestingly, this new code of dealing with political matters corresponds with the disappearance of Holcroft from the Review. Derek Roper suggests that Holcroft possibly 'refused to work within this code, for [his] contributions ceased early in the same year'.¹⁵⁴ Based on my discussion above, however, I find it equally reasonable that Griffiths may have dismissed him from his staff.

The loss of Holcroft as a main contributor would arguably help to distance the journal from unpopular radicalism, but getting rid of Holcroft was not the end of the *Monthly's* support for liberal reform. The dismissal of Holcroft gave more room to the more moderate reformers, such as William Enfield, Arthur Aikin and William Taylor. However, even though Holcroft had been the most politically radical of the *Monthly* contributors, the rhetoric of the other reviewers also betray sentiments that easily could be claimed to be similar to radicalism, and they were increasingly perceived to be so by conservative opinion. Two main features of radical and moderate reformers that coincided, were the criticism of existing forms of society and the belief in mankind's potential for continuous improvement. These notions are connected to liberal reformers in general, including modest as well as radical ones. As the decade progressed, however, they were so specifically associated with the rhetoric of the British Jacobins that they became what the anti-Jacobins would '[sniff] out as sure symptoms of infidelity'.¹⁵⁵ One of the *Monthly* contributors who through his political rhetoric signals support for liberal reform was William Taylor. In the late 1780s, Taylor had become a prominent advocate for whiggish and dissenting politics, and he openly supported key liberal causes such as the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and the abolition of the slave-trade.¹⁵⁶ In the radical novel *Hermesprong*, the hero is a Native American who suddenly arrives in a small English village, questioning the soundness of the social system he encounters. Such a character, with his lack of civilised education and manners, was not usually reckoned to be the most capable political commentator, and is certainly not deemed so by the conservative antagonists in the novel. Bage nonetheless speaks political truth through the voice of this naïve and sincere speaker, as he does through the young Miss Carlill in *Man as he is*:

You have built cities, no doubt, and filled them full of improvement, if magnificence be

¹⁵⁴ Roper, pp. 175-6.

¹⁵⁵ Butler, p. 90.

¹⁵⁶ David Chandler, 'Taylor, William (1765-1836)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27092?docPos=5>> [accessed 18 April 2013].

improvement; and of poverty also, if poverty be improvement. But our question, my friend, is happiness, comparative happiness, and until you can trace its dependence upon wealth, it will be in vain for you to boast your riches.¹⁵⁷

By choosing such an extract, which sincerely and straightforwardly formulates the shortcomings of the British system, Taylor signals his political support for social reform. When he furthermore explicitly recommends the character of an uneducated Native American, in opposition to his highly educated conservative opponents, he shows himself to be a supporter of the belief in the progress of man, and of the possibilities that lie in exercising free rational thought rather than limiting oneself to the established prejudices of society. Thus, by characterising Hermsprong as 'accomplished, firm, frank, and generous' and as having an 'elevated soul' – 'worthy to be impressed as a model for imitation',¹⁵⁸ Taylor reveals his partisanship towards liberal politics, in the same way as Enfield did in the review of *Anna St. Ives* in 1792. The following year, in the 1793 review of Gilbert Imlay's *The Emigrants*, Enfield proves still to be an advocate for reform. Contemplating Imlay's novel, the moderate reformer Enfield declares that

Reflections frequently occur, in the course of the narrative, which discover a mind inured to philosophical speculation. On the general subject of politics, Mr. Imlay expresses himself with the freedom of an enlightened philosopher, and advances sentiments which will be generally approved by those, who are capable of divesting themselves of the powerful prejudices arising from self interest.¹⁵⁹

Enfield is delighted at Imlay's attempt to reform society, and places emphasis on the freedom of enlightened thought as the means to achieve an improvement of man's conditions. In other words, the two main characteristics of radical and reformist ideology are expressed by this statement, as it poses man's striving for continuous improvement as a prerequisite to the achievement of social betterment. Enfield claims that everyone should be able to approve such innovation, unless they stand to gain from preventing social change. The propertied elite is the obvious target of this remark, since they more than anyone else wished to preserve the British constitution and the advantages it afforded them on behalf of the bourgeoisie and poorer classes. Thus, an important factor in the contemporary debates is introduced into the reviewing of novels, namely the focus on the power relations between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. In his review of *Arthur Fitz-Albini*, written by the conservative author Samuel Egerton Brydges, Taylor throws himself into this debate. After introducing the novel as one that '[pleads] the cause of birth against fortune', and that

157 William Taylor, 'Hermsprong; or, Man as he is not', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 21, September 1796, p. 22.

158 Taylor, 'Hermsprong; or, Man as he is not', p. 21.

159 William Enfield, 'The Emigrants', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 11, August 1793, p. 469.

represents 'loftiness of sentiment, and disinterestedness of character, as exclusively allotted to the high-born', Taylor contends that this representation is 'contradictory to experience'.¹⁶⁰ At one point the author argues that a poor man who works his way upwards in society will necessarily acquire a corrupted heart, interested sentiments, and a debased understanding, and that this will be passed on – almost genetically, he seems to argue – to his successors for at least a century. Comparatively, a man who has enjoyed hereditary fortunes and honours for centuries, is placed above what is 'low, servile, and meanly ambitious', and has 'a much greater probability of being distinguished by elevated ideas, and pure independent souls'.¹⁶¹ Taylor, the son of a merchant, and originally intended for a mercantile career,¹⁶² retorts in the following manner:

In reply to this assertion, it would suffice to point into the world. Where is independence more scarce than among the high-born? What class is more regularly prodigal in youth, and more frequently dependent in age, than the nobility?¹⁶³

It is perhaps with arguments such as Brydges's in mind that one can best understand the modesty of the liberal claims for constitutional reform, posed by the contributors to the *Monthly Review*. They called for no revolutionary levelling of the social classes, or for the confiscation of private property – instead they fought for increased rights to participate in society, for a larger segment of the British people. Despite this fact, the political instability of the 1790s meant that even these modest calls for reform were viewed with suspicion and apprehension. The focus on the rights of the bourgeoisie versus the aristocracy – which was an important driving force behind the call for reform – gave the *Monthly* an air of radicalism to the increasingly alarmed elite, despite their claims being comparatively moderate. There was no reason why these calls for reform should be so violently repressed by the conservative opposition, since they were modest and posed no threat of revolution. In the increasingly paranoid situation in England, however, not even such slight calls for reform went unchallenged.

2.3 Defining a political position: 'We are no friends to the sanguinary democrats of France'¹⁶⁴

The extracts above are only *some* examples of how liberal reformist notions are expressed through the novel reviews. When close-reading and analysing the reviews in the period 1793-1798, I

160 William Taylor, 'Arthur Fitz-Albini', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 27, November 1798, p. 318.

161 Taylor, 'Arthur Fitz-Albini', p. 321.

162 David Chandler, 'Taylor, William (1765-1836)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27092?docPos=5>> [accessed 16 January 2013].

163 Taylor, 'Arthur Fitz-Albini', p. 321.

164 Bryan Edwards, 'The Democrat', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 19, February 1796, p. 207.

recorded all the reviews that had some kind of political commentary, and further tried to place them according to which political standpoints they forward. In addition to the three notions discussed above, which, because of conservative exaggeration, can be said to link the *Monthly* to a radical discourse, I found two recurring concerns that seemed to stand out. These are not characterised by being similar in ambition to any radical programme, in fact they are the exact opposite. The first consists of an opposition to the radical ambition of abolishing the legal system in its entirety, and the second of a marked disagreement with the radicals on the institution of matrimony. In the following, I will discuss how these two main points are dealt with by the *Monthly* contributors, in a selection of novel reviews in the period 1793-1798. Based on the political commentary and focus in these reviews, I will show how the *Monthly Review* became increasingly politicised as a result of the ongoing political debates, which they felt had linked them less to their own actual reformist ambitions, and too much to the unpopular radical movement, which they no longer identified with.

As previously mentioned, the British Jacobins were notorious for criticising core social establishments, such as matrimony and law – and in some extreme cases, they wished to abolish these institutions altogether. One or both of these politically controversial topics often dominated the political novels of radical authors in the period, and when these novels were reviewed in the *Monthly*, it seems as though the contributors felt the need to address these controversial matters in order to establish their own political stance. In 1794, two of the most important political novels of the period were published, namely William Godwin's *Things as they are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, and Thomas Holcroft's *The Adventures of Hugh Trevor*. William Enfield reviewed them both in the October issue, and despite praising them for their extraordinary artistic merits, he could not help but disapprove of their political leanings. In the review of *Caleb Williams*, Enfield comments that this narrative seems 'intended to give the author an opportunity of making an indirect attack on what he deems vulgar prejudices respecting religion, morals and policy'.¹⁶⁵ More specifically, Godwin attacks the institution of law:

Striking pictures are drawn, in various parts of the work, of the oppression which is often practised under the form of law [...] Law is said to be better adapted for a weapon of tyranny in the hands of the rich, than for a shield to protect the humble part of the community against their usurpation.¹⁶⁶

The novel's protagonist is a young man who discovers that his employer, Lord Falkland, is guilty of murder. When Falkland tries to threaten him into silence, Caleb flees the estate, but is later brought back and arrested. After escaping from prison, he spends the remainder of his days in constant fear

165 Enfield, 'Things as they are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams', p. 148.

166 Ibid, p. 148.

of detection, despite the fact that he is innocent, and his persecutor is the guilty party. Through this account, Godwin shows how the British legal system can be manipulated by the rich to serve their own interests, and how it can potentially lead to the suffering of innocent people. Although sympathising with the hero, Enfield feels compelled to profess that he cannot agree with Godwin's ambition to tear down the British legal system – at least not until some alternative is effected:

[B]efore the old fences of law be broken down, we hold it prudent that some effectual provision should be made for taming the ferocious passions of those animals, who have never yet been turned loose into the wilds of nature without biting and devouring one another.¹⁶⁷

Apparently, Enfield does not share Godwin's conviction that people are capable of self government through their capacities for rational thought. He rather views them – at least some of them – as 'animals' with 'ferocious passions', who need to be governed in order to avoid chaos. In *Hugh Trevor*, Enfield finds opinions that are similar to those expressed in Godwin's novel:

In these volumes, [...] the professions of divinity and law are the principal objects of animadversion; and it must be owned that portraits are drawn of divines and lawyers [...] sufficiently disgusting, could they be supposed to be fair specimens, to cast a general odium on the professions themselves [...] It can scarcely be necessary to say, however, that, from individual characters, even though drawn after the life, it would be unfair to deduce an indiscriminate conclusion against any body of men.¹⁶⁸

It seems as though Holcroft bases his political designs in his novel on the claim that not only the law, but also the practitioners of the law, are corrupted. This, however, is a contention that Enfield is not willing to acknowledge. He furthermore draws parallels between Godwin and Holcroft, and points to their erroneous reasoning in wishing to abolish, rather than reform, the legal system:

On the subject of law, too, Mr. Godwin's peculiar opinions are adopted by Mr. H. in their full extent; and it is maintained that law itself, in its origin and essence, is unjust. To state the reasonings, however, on which this paradox is founded, and to endeavour to detect its fallacy, would carry us too far: we must therefore, for the present, take our leave of a performance which displays great abilities and very peculiar tenets.¹⁶⁹

Although clearly positioning the *Monthly's* political position in opposition to Godwin and Holcroft, the rejection of their political aims is not aggressive in its tone, as opposed to the criticism of the conservatives. Enfield merely dismisses their radical notions as 'peculiar tenets' and 'insinuations

167 Enfield, 'Things as they are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams', p. 149.

168 William Enfield, 'The Adventures of Hugh Trevor', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 15, October 1794, p. 150.

169 Ibid, p. 153.

which [he is] at a loss to understand'.¹⁷⁰ Enfield was a liberal reformer himself, and was thus more inclined to sympathise with some of the radical notions. Apart from this, another obvious reason for his leniency was the fact that Holcroft was a co-contributor to the Review. Too harsh criticism of his political convictions could potentially lead to a difficult work situation. Later, however, it seems as though Enfield more fully understands the extent of the radical change that the new philosophers propose. As his understanding develops, so does his opposition towards the doctrines of the British Jacobins, which he clearly expresses in his review of the second part of *Hugh Trevor* in 1797:

We cannot express equal satisfaction with all the speculations of this ingenious writer. To his fundamental principle, that universal benevolence is the first law of social order, we have no objection: but we cannot admit every conclusion which he seems inclined to deduce from it. We cannot suppose that this law ought to supersede all written precept, and that all attempts to subject men to authority of specific injunctions are injurious to society [...] In a work of this kind, where there are various interlocutors, it is not easy to learn with certainty the sense of *the author*, but we think that we cannot mistake his meaning, when we suppose that he not only disapproves of many of the laws in our statute book, [...] but law itself, as a fruitless and even wicked attempt to bring individual actions under the limitations of general rule.¹⁷¹

At this point, Holcroft was no longer associated with the *Monthly*, and Griffiths' new code for dealing with politically controversial topics had been initiated. Judging from the extract above, it seems as though these developments greatly affected Enfield, and led him to take a much firmer stand when it came to the speculative tenets of the new philosophers. Though still supporting the idea of universal benevolence, he cannot sanction the radicals' claim that men should be guided only by their own sense of right and wrong, and that the English law in its essence is an 'injudicious restraint on the exercise of the principle of universal justice'.¹⁷²

To all that he has repeatedly suggested to this purpose, it may, we think, be satisfactorily replied, that the great use of knowledge is to enable us to form general rules from individual facts; and that, though general rules may not always exactly suit particular cases, or may not be always faithfully or judiciously applied, it is better for mankind to have an imperfect guide, than none at all [...] Till all men shall be perfectly wise and good, they must be governed.¹⁷³

By repudiating the political tenets inherent in these two novels in such a clear manner, Enfield shows not only that he personally disagrees with the British Jacobins on quite fundamental issues – he furthermore demonstrates how important it is for him and the journal to counteract such notions, to prove that their own moderate calls for reform should not be associated with the dangerous

170 Enfield, 'The Adventures of Hugh Trevor', p. 152.

171 Ibid, p. 287.

172 Ibid, p. 287.

173 Ibid, p. 287.

political speculations of the new philosophers.

In the increasingly polarised debate, it was dangerous to forward any reform-oriented notions at all. However, the *Monthly* actually does argue for alterations in core British institutions, even if these are not as extreme as those argued by Godwin or Holcroft. An indication of how the *Monthly's* contributors *actually* positioned themselves in relation to the British legal system can be found in the review of Charlotte Smith's *Marchmont* in 1797. It was reviewed by Arthur Aikin, who, as the son of John Aikin and nephew of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, came from a family with strong ties to the liberal reform movement. Both John and Anna had fought for the repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts, and the latter had hailed the French Revolution as 'sublime evidence of human improvement'.¹⁷⁴ According to Aikin, Smith's leading design is to show '[t]he tediousness, chicane, and uncertainty of many of our law-proceedings, and the ease with which they may be perverted, by the rich and unprincipled, till they become engines of the most cruel oppression'.¹⁷⁵ Her focus on the shortcomings of British law

give rise to scenes and situations much more interesting than the vaulted galleries and castle-dungeons of some modern romances, by chilling the heart with the dreadful conviction that, even in this land of comparative freedom, similar acts of cruelty and injustice not only *may be* but actually *are* perpetrated.¹⁷⁶

The leading characteristic of the Gothic novel was to create a feeling of terror in the reader, when imagining the horrors of the fictional universe. In the extract above, Aikin extends these horrors to the actual world – to contemporary British society – by comparing the injustice and cruelty that actually happen to real people, to the distress felt by a Gothic heroine. Because this suffering is real, it is much more dreadful than the horror one can find in a fictitious tale, and even though *Marchmont* arguably is fiction, it deals with issues that were very real indeed. Importantly, however, in addressing these issues of human suffering, Aikin does not argue for the abolition of the institution of law itself. Rather, he draws attention to the deficiency of the contemporary political system and the need to improve it through reform.

The notion of abolishing the legal institution, and letting each individual follow his or her own judgement of right and wrong, seems extremely radical even to a modern reader, and it is not difficult to imagine the disbelief commentators must have felt when reading the works of Godwin and Holcroft. However, when discussing another central ambition of the radicals, namely the radical reform – if not complete elimination – of the institution of matrimony, the modern reader would

174 William McCarthy, 'Barbauld, Anna Letitia', (1743-1825)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1324?docPos=1>> [accessed 20 January 2013].

175 Arthur Aikin, 'Marchmont', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 22, April 1797, p. 468.

176 *Ibid*, p. 468.

perhaps be less shocked. The British Jacobins forwarded opinions concerning matrimony that have become commonplace in our time, but which were viewed with suspicion and reproach by Godwin's contemporaries. In the 1790s, it seems as though the calls for the abolition of matrimony and law were equally preposterous. Even divorce, which today has become increasingly accepted, was difficult, if not impossible, to attain in the late eighteenth century. The holy institution of matrimony was perceived to be ordained by God, and it was held in high regard in the 1790s. Even David Hume, who was a religious sceptic, argued in defence of contemporary British matrimony in his essay 'Of Polygamy and Divorces'.¹⁷⁷ The contributors to the *Monthly Review* seems to join in this defence of the marriage institution. In the 1793 review of *The Emigrants*, William Enfield brings the discussion of matrimonial law into the review medium, when commenting that

[T]he principal design of the work appears to be to turn the public attention toward the present state of society with regard to marriage. It is an opinion, which this writer seems to think it of great importance to communicate and support, that the female world is at present, in consequence of the rigour of matrimonial institutions, in a state of oppressive vassalage; and that it would greatly increase the happiness of society, if divorce could be more easily obtained.¹⁷⁸

This notion that women were being exploited, that they were 'in a state of oppressive vassalage', as a result of the present state of matrimonial law, was the main argument when the Jacobins argued the need to radically alter this institution. This is perhaps better understood if we contemplate women's subjugated position in contemporary society. Women were not allowed to own land, thus, when becoming somebody's wife, a woman's property was automatically transferred to her husband. In effect, this meant that the woman herself was also considered as his property, to be wielded in any way he might see fit.¹⁷⁹ Enfield had expressed delight at Gilbert Imlay's vigour to defend social reform, in order to secure a more equal and disinterested society. However, despite this initial praise, Enfield quite explicitly expresses political disagreement when considering Imlay's attack on the institution of marriage:

After all, however, that Mr. I. has advanced on the subject, it may, we apprehend, be maintained that the inconveniences, which have flowed from the existing laws respecting marriage, have proceeded more from the depraved manners of the age, than from the institutions themselves; and that the perpetuity and inviolability of the marriage contract contribute essentially toward the virtue and the general happiness of society, – however unfortunate may be the lot of individuals.¹⁸⁰

177 Russel Nieli, 'Against Divorce: David Hume Defends Traditional Marriage', in *The Public Discourse* <<http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2011/04/2956/>> [accessed 23 January 2013].

178 Enfield, 'The Emigrants', p. 469.

179 Karen Offen, 'A Brief History of Marriage', in *International Museum of Women* <<http://imow.org/economica/stories/viewStory?storyId=3650>> [accessed 23 January 2013].

180 Enfield, 'The Emigrants', p. 469.

Even at this early stage – in a period when Enfield was more prone to sanction the rhetoric of change – he states his support for marriage. However, much in the same manner as when dealing with Godwin's proposal to abolish law, Enfield's repudiation of Imlay's claims was not aggressive in its tone. It is difficult to say whether this leniency was a result of Enfield as an individual, or whether it resulted from an increasing opposition to radicalism as the decade progressed. One reason why this is difficult to establish, is the fact that the novel section was dominated by Enfield in the years 1793-4,¹⁸¹ and thus we do not know whether other contributors would have been less mild in their dismissal of these doctrines. However, his increased severity when reviewing the second part of *Hugh Trevor* in 1797 may indicate that he, as well as others, grew more displeased with the radical claims as the years passed. This same year Imlay's illicit attachment to Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the most famous political women of the period, was exposed. He had abandoned her, leaving behind a child which William Godwin, after marrying Wollstonecraft, later raised as his own.¹⁸² When details of the affair were made public through Godwin's publication of *The Posthumous Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, public opinion was shocked. Whatever support Imlay, or other leading radical writers in the period, might have had in the past on the subject of marriage had by now completely evaporated. The *Monthly's* support of the matrimonial law increased, being especially visible from the same year as the publication of Wollstonecraft's *Posthumous Works*. When reviewing the novel *Abstract; a Character from Life*, Aikin shows his contempt for the radicals' aspirations regarding matrimonial law:

The great object of the author is to combat certain opinions with regard to marriage, that have lately become fashionable among many of our modern speculatists [sic]. As far as these opinions are erroneous and mischievous, so far the present writer deserves praise for his intentions: we wish that we could say as much for his *literary* merit.¹⁸³

Praising the author's intentions to combat the Jacobin attack on marriage, which he terms 'erroneous and mischievous', Aikin evinces a decidedly antagonistic attitude, and clearly distances himself from the doctrines of the New Philosophy. Other reviews, whilst showing much the same antagonism to the radical claims, still acknowledge that the laws governing the marriage contract are not entirely exempt from criticism. We can see this, for instance, in Taylor's review of the French novel *Emily de Vermont; or Divorce dictated by Necessity*:

181 Based on my research, Enfield wrote 8 out of 17 novel reviews in 1793, and in 1794 the remarkable amount of 22 out of 27. See Appendix A, tables 3-4.

182 Barbara Taylor, 'Wollstonecraft, Mary', (1759-1797), in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10893?docPos=1>> [accessed 21 January 2013].

183 Arthur Aikin, 'Abstract; a Character from Life', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 22, January 1797, pp. 91-2.

Mr. Hume's essay on Polygamy and Divorce has long ago settled, with English philosophers, the expediency of the extant system of matrimonial law. Perhaps a complete separation ought to be rendered less expensive, now that the corrupt manners of the higher orders are beginning to taint the inferior classes: – perhaps those cases of confirmed insanity, in which the lawgiver withdraws from the patient all dominion over his property, ought also to dissolve the marriage contract.¹⁸⁴

To say nothing of the recurring animosity towards the aristocracy, which we discussed above, Taylor in this review cautiously admits that the laws governing marriage are not perfect, and that it in some rare cases perhaps *should* be easier to obtain a divorce. However, he still reaches the same conclusion as Enfield did five years earlier:

[B]ut, in general, the victims of an unhappy union must be taught to bear with their personal inconvenience, and to consider themselves as martyrs to an [sic] useful institution; the dissolubility of which would domesticate strife in almost every household, and expose the morals of the rising generation to all the evils of negligent culture and mischievous example.¹⁸⁵

In other words, despite individual suffering, it is ultimately better to deny these people the right to end their marriages, than to risk any damage to the 'useful institution' that matrimony was perceived to be. This is a notion that is echoed in the review of Wollstonecraft's *Posthumous Works* the same year, by Christopher Lake Moody. Moody was a clergyman, and Griffiths' friend and neighbour.¹⁸⁶ Wollstonecraft's posthumous works included *Maria; or the Wrongs of Woman* – an unfinished fragment of a novel, that Godwin nonetheless decided to publish after her death in 1797. This novel tells the story of a rich heiress marrying a man who later turns out to be a despot. In order to appropriate her fortune, he gets her committed into an asylum, despite her not being mentally ill – an act which signals the immense power and control husbands possessed over their wives in the late eighteenth century. The vulnerability of women as they enter the marriage contract is the main concern of Wollstonecraft's novel:

[T]he incidents are designed to justify an opinion respecting marriage, which circumstances of her own history, together with her husband's system, might have impressed deeply on her mind, viz. that it is the source of the greatest evil in society, and that women particularly suffer by it.¹⁸⁷

Reading *Wrongs of Woman* today, one might be more inclined to admit that no woman should have to endure such a marriage as presented in this novel. Moody, however, agrees with his fellow contributors, and contends that 'it is better to persuade the sex to submit to some inconveniences,

184 William Taylor, 'Emily de Varmont; or, Divorce dictated by Necessity', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 26, July 1798, pp. 327-8.

185 Ibid, p. 328.

186 Nangle, p. 45.

187 Christopher Lake Moody, 'Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 27, November 1798, p. 326.

than to encourage them to break down all the barriers of social virtue'.¹⁸⁸ Despite acknowledging that 'the laws concerning [matrimony] are far from being perfect, and might be much improved',¹⁸⁹ he still argues that one should

beware of lessening the respect that is due to this legitimate bond of love; and of so blackening the picture of married life, as to leave an impression on the public mind favourable to love unrecognized [sic] by the law.¹⁹⁰

How the existing laws governing matrimony could be improved is never specifically addressed by Moody. His main concern seems to be to reproach the radical notions concerning marriage, which he finds in the novel, thus dissociating himself from such political ambitions. In a closing paragraph, Moody founds his arguments on the same apprehension as we saw above, when discussing the ambition to abolish the legal system in its entirety:

We offer these remarks not because we wish to abet tyranny in husbands, and to persuade wives, under the most cruel treatment, to think of nothing but tame unconditional submission, but because we think it a pernicious doctrine that a woman, when she deems herself ill-used by her husband, has a right to leave him, and to select another man to supply the husband's place. In all connections, evils or disagreeable circumstances may arise: but society is at an end if every individual be permitted to redress his own grievances.¹⁹¹

Thus, one could argue that the *Monthly* contributors' opposition to the radical change of the legal system in general, and the laws governing matrimony specifically, correlate in one joint characteristic, namely the unwillingness to permit individuals to take justice into their own hands. This is a fundamental point of discordance between the *Monthly* reviewers and the British Jacobins, which is recurrently being evoked in order to dissociate the journal's reformist ambitions from the radical claims of the new philosophers.

When analysing some central novel reviews in the period, we find an increased focus on political matters, where the tendency is to mark out the differences between the *Monthly's* and the Jacobins' political positions. What the political commentary in these reviews reveal, however, is not that this process of distancing drove the *Monthly* in a conservative direction. Rather, it exposes the extent of diversity that could actually be found in the liberal camp. The outbreak of revolution seems to have delighted all liberal reformers, but as the initial commotion subsided, it became apparent that there were great differences between the atheistic social anarchy of William Godwin, and the modest call for abolition of the Test and Corporation Acts by the dissenting minister

188 Moody, 'Posthumous Works', p. 326.

189 Ibid, p. 326.

190 Ibid, p. 326.

191 Ibid, p. 326.

William Enfield. So when public opinion started to turn against the radicalism of Paine and Godwin, the contributors to the *Monthly Review* were anxious to distance themselves from rhetoric connected to the radical cause, but, importantly, nor did they support conservative views. Rather, they evinced a clear *reformist* attitude in their reviews of novels, and showed themselves to be open to reforms that would encourage civil and religious liberty. In December 1792 William Enfield wrote a letter to Griffiths, describing this reformist attitude:

At present [...] I see nothing to expect but either the horrors of civil commotion, or the *dead calm of terror*, produced by inquisitorial oppression. We must not, however, suffer ourselves to be deterred from speaking the truth, with temper and moderation, as honest and prudent citizens. The sentiments we inculcate, and the language we hold, ought not to give offence; and I think we may safely persevere in maintaining, to the fullest extent, the doctrine of *Reform*.¹⁹²

Apparently, this letter was endorsed by Griffiths, who had written the words 'A good letter' on the sheet.¹⁹³ In other words, from 1793 and onwards, the *Monthly Review* was distancing itself from the violent rhetoric of the revolutionary cause, but still promoting reformist ideas through its reviews. The result was a review practice that was much more political in its motivation than it had been since its foundation in 1749. It is nevertheless clear that the call for reform was a very careful project, and none of the calls for support in the years 1794-1798 were as strong and audacious as the one we find in the extraordinary review of *Lindor and Adelaïde*. Because of the strong governmental and loyalist oppression, it was far more difficult to promote reform in the mid-1790s than in the optimistic early days of the revolution, and it was never again so strongly enforced in a novel review in the 1790s as in Thomas Pearne's review of *Lindor and Adelaïde*. This review expresses quite clearly the political stance of the majority of *Monthly* reviewers, and I believe this to be a continued belief throughout the period, as we can see traces of in the reviews discussed above. However, the suppression by the government made this defence of reform very difficult to advance, and in the last years of the decade it seems as though the reviewers and Griffiths abandoned their reformist stance in order for the Review to survive.

192 Roper, p. 172.

193 Ibid, p. 172.

Chapter 3: A return to the belletristic mode: The abandonment of liberal reform, 1799-1802

3.1 The stifling of liberal reform: The *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*

The Pitt administration had tried to suppress liberal voices ever since the outbreak of the French Revolution, and they were fully aware of the potential threat of the press in this respect. This is evident from secret service accounts which show that Pitt had spent as much as 5000 pounds a year on press subsidies during the early years of the Revolution.¹⁹⁴ Despite these subsidies, however, their suppression of radicalism was nonetheless primarily conducted through non-literary measures, as discussed in the preceding chapter. But in 1797 the seven most influential newspapers were opposed to the government's policies,¹⁹⁵ and the field of review journalism was equally dominated by the liberal *Monthly*, *Critical* and *Analytical* Reviews.¹⁹⁶ In other words, there was a massive dominance of liberal periodicals in society at this time – a problem which the Pitt administration needed to address. Part of their strategy was the founding of the periodical *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner* in 1797. The fact that it was financed by the government, and that William Pitt himself contributed articles,¹⁹⁷ shows how seriously the Pitt administration took this literary venture. *The Anti-Jacobin* was a periodical that was 'for both politics and literature [...] among the most effective and influential periodicals ever published',¹⁹⁸ and it marks a turning point in the successful use of the Press for political propaganda. Through parodying and misrepresenting the agents of radical reform, the periodical became an instant success, which is perhaps not surprising, considering the growing wave of popular conservatism taking place in England at the time.

Despite the success of the *Weekly Examiner*, however, it only lasted for a year. Its successor, *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, was also financed by the government, but has become less renowned for its literary merit than for its extreme witch hunt of all things 'Jacobin'. According to Derek Roper, *The Anti-Jacobin Review* was 'not a critical journal but a vehicle for government propaganda'.¹⁹⁹ This decision to employ a review journal to counteract dissemination of radical ideas suggests that the government recognised not only the importance of the press in general, but the review journals in particular, as vitally important distributors of political thought. This

194 Arthur Aspinall, *Politics and the Press, C. 1780-1850* (Michigan: Home & Van Thal, 1949), p. 68.

195 Stones, p. xlix.

196 Roper, pp. 180-1.

197 Stones, p. lii.

198 Ibid, p. xlvii.

199 Roper, p. 12.

awareness of the influence of review journalism was, however, not entirely new. As early as 1793, Pitt had taken some measures to exert influence through this medium by financially supporting the launch of the *British Critic* to counteract the three dominating liberal review journals of the period. However, this financial aid was not sustained, and the *British Critic* depended solely on its own income after the initial help from the government.²⁰⁰ In 1798, however, it seems as though Pitt once again realised the importance of review journalism in influencing public opinion when the *Anti-Jacobin Review* was launched with an explicit purpose to 'review the *Monthly*, criticise the *Critical*, and analyse the *Analytical Reviews*, on the principle already adopted by the WEEKLY EXAMINER, in its comments on the daily prints'.²⁰¹ *The New Morality*, a satirical print by James Gillray, published in the first volume of the Review, supports this aim.



The New Morality (James Gillray, 1798)

The print shows the names of the *Monthly*, *Critical* and *Analytical* inscribed on a giant yellow horn called 'The Cornucopia of Ignorance', in the centre of the image. From this horn, a heavy flow of printed matter is pouring, for instance Godwin's *Enquirer* and Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs of Woman*, while a poor man in ragged clothes eagerly reads them as they come.²⁰² The sketch is echoed in the

200 Roper, p. 36.

201 Unknown reviewer, 'Prospectus', *Anti-Jacobin review and magazine, or, Monthly political, and literary censor*, Vol. 1, July 1798, p. 3.

202 Anton Kirchofer's 'Revolutionizing the Review? British Periodical Genres of the 1790s and the *Edinburgh Review*', in *Reactions to Revolutions – The 1790s and their Aftermath*, made me aware of this print.

Prospectus, where it is claimed that '[t]he torrent of licentiousness, incessantly rushing forth from [the Jacobins'] numerous presses, exceeds, in violence and duration, all former examples'.²⁰³ The satirical sketch and the *Prospectus* form a strong image, explicitly targeting the Reviews, and pointing to their role and responsibility in fostering the production of Jacobin texts. The *Anti-Jacobin* sees itself as an institution that will counteract this 'torrent of licentiousness':

At such a time, what friend of social order will deny, that *the Press* requires some strong controul? And what controul is more effectual than that which *the Press itself* can supply? [...] That the channels of criticism have long been corrupted; that many of the Reviews have been rendered the mere instruments of faction; that the Reviewers, sinking the critic in the partisan, have insidiously contributed to favour the designs of those writers who labour to undermine our civil and religious establishments [...] is a fact which may easily be established by an attentive perusal of their works since the year 1788. To counteract the pernicious effects of this dangerous SYSTEM [...] will constitute the grand, the prominent feature of the present publication.²⁰⁴

The establishment of the *Anti-Jacobin Review* was fatal to the *Monthly's* project of reform, which we can see from the marked shift in their reviewing tendency in 1799. The most obvious way to avoid the censoring gaze of the *Anti-Jacobin*, at least in their novel section, would be to keep strictly within the belletristic framework. Although this was the dominant method of novel reviewing throughout the period, there had been a growing tendency to circumvent this formula when reviewing novels that had other qualities of particular interest. In his review of the politically radical novel *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, William Taylor explains that he '[refrains] from minute criticisms on plot, incident, or character, in a work which is marked by such uncommon features as those which characterise the present volumes'.²⁰⁵ Towards the close of the decade, however, the *Monthly* appears to have returned to the more politically safe belletristic approach as a part of Ralph Griffiths' new editorial strategy. His son, George Edward Griffiths, wrote three articles for the novel review section from 1799-1802, and his contributions were typically belletristic:

This work contains a mixture of improbabilities and *novel common places*, conveyed in a style more humble and ungrammatical than we usually discover even in the common productions of this class. The author appears to be desirous of aiding the cause of morality, but he certainly cannot support the interests of literature.²⁰⁶

Through his emphasis on improbability, decorum, and ungrammatical style, Griffiths follows the

203 Unknown reviewer, 'Prospectus', p. 1.

204 Ibid, pp. 2-3.

205 William Taylor, 'Memoirs of Emma Courtney', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 22, April 1797, p. 449.

206 George Edward Griffiths, 'The Runaway; or, the Seat of Benevolence', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 34, February 1801, p. 204.

apolitical approach discussed in chapter one.²⁰⁷ In 1801, the same year as the review above was published, George Griffiths was in charge of most of the practical work connected to the running of the *Monthly*, due to his father's old age and failing eyesight.²⁰⁸ Arguably, George Griffiths was determined to protect his family business in a precarious political situation. It is therefore significant that he chooses to review exclusively according to belletristic guidelines, and not mention any controversial topics relating to contemporary politics. By implication, it is suggested that this should be the standard for future novel reviewing in the *Monthly*. In other words, the politically charged language of Holcroft, as well as Enfield's focus on the shortcomings of contemporary laws and institutions, should be avoided.

However, the reviewers still faced a challenge when dealing with explicitly political novels. In such cases, some remarks considering their political messages were necessary. When reviewing *Men and Manners* in 1800, Elizabeth Moody – Christopher Lake Moody's wife – was faced with a categorically conservative novel. Despite the novel's political air, her focus remains on apolitical concerns almost throughout the entire review. However, in her discussion of the *dramatis personae*, the plot is simultaneously addressed. Revolving around the politically controversial theme of social mobility, the plot makes it impossible to avoid *some* political commentary, even whilst keeping within the belletristic framework. Moody explains that *Men and Manners* relates the story of Gilbert Oxmondeley, who, from having 'been bred to the trade of a glover and hosier in Cheapside, is turned round on the sportive wheel of fortune, and thrown into the rank of a baronet'.²⁰⁹ Seeing as this is the work of a conservative writer, the main tendency of the novel is naturally to ridicule Oxmondeley, who has been thoroughly corrupted by his ascension into the privileged ranks. What is interesting in this respect is that – despite the reviewer focusing primarily on artistic aspects – political issues are inevitably introduced into the review through her description of the plot, which was characteristically intertwined with contemporary political issues. In such situations, when dealing with politically charged material became unavoidable, it was important for the reviewer to show extreme caution. The result is a review tendency which, in its anxiety to avoid affiliation with any liberal notions whatsoever, might rather strike us as fostering conservative interests:

[W]e readily acknowledge that we have occasionally received pleasure from the comic powers of Mr. Lathom; and that we have met with scenes not unworthy of the drama, where the ridicule is well painted which results from pride, ostentation, and vanity, grafted on low birth, mean education, and defective intellects.²¹⁰

207 See section 1.1 – The function of the review journal: The belletristic approach to fiction.

208 Antonia Forster, 'Griffiths, Ralph (1720?–1803)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11621>> [accessed 6 February 2013].

209 Elisabeth Moody, 'Men and Manners', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 31, February 1800, p. 136.

210 Moody, 'Men and Manners', p. 141.

The ridiculing of social ambition was a favourite subject for conservative authors, who strictly opposed the notion of social mobility. This was also the main subject in Brydges' *Arthur Fitz-Albini* two years earlier, as discussed in chapter two.²¹¹ Comparing the notions expressed by Moody above to the ones we find in William Taylor's review of *Arthur Fitz-Albini*, however, it is striking to see how comprehensibly different they are from one another. As opposed to Taylor, who argues in favour of social advancement, Moody seems to be supporting the conservative mockery of social mobility. In doing so, she helps to reinforce the conservative stereotypes that liberal reformers had laboured for years to abolish.

Moody's review of *Men and Manners* above points to an important new tendency in the *Monthly's* reviewing practice towards the close of the century. Rather than distancing the Review from radicalism in order to forward reform, they now only seem to dissociate themselves, without emphasising the shortcomings of British laws and institutions. We can see this, for instance, in Thomas Wallace's review of Charlotte Smith's *The Young Philosopher*. In this review, a recurring objection to radical politics can be found:

The profession of Law, in particular, seems to rouse, in a high degree, the angry passions of the author; and, accordingly, Lawyers of every rank are not only held up to contempt as men of narrow understandings and contracted souls, but to hatred, as knaves by profession [...] We must deny the propriety of thus reprobating in the aggregate a numerous class of men, because we question the truth of the general charge brought against them [...] [It is not] just and useful to attempt to render odious a description of persons, without whom it is doubtful whether society in any advanced stage of civilization can exist: – for no society can exist without laws.²¹²

This paragraph shows a familiar disavowal of the radicals' criticism directed against the law. Throughout the review, however, possible improvements to the existing system – which had been forwarded by several reviewers around mid decade – are never suggested. As the rejection of radicalism intensified towards the end of the century, it seems as though all calls for reform were fading away. We see the same tendency in John Ferriar's review of Denis Diderot's *The Natural Son*. Before explicitly stating that 'we disapprove the principles',²¹³ he rejects the author's radical notions without forwarding any claims for a more moderate reform of the current system:

He never fails to attack some principle of morality, under the title of prejudice [...] He [looks] with a prejudiced eye on established doctrines; and he may be regarded as one of the chief teachers of the libertine philosophy, which excuses all actions to which natural temptations can be assigned.

211 See the end of section 2.2 – The 'New Code' of distance: The controversial Thomas Holcroft, and the links to radicalism.

212 Thomas Wallace, 'The Young Philosopher', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 28, March 1799, p. 347.

213 John Ferriar, 'The Natural Son', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 30, September 1799, p. 40.

In the ardour of hostility against oppression, Diderot became the defender of crimes.²¹⁴

Not only the calls for *radical*, but also *moderate*, reform are here given negative connotations by linking them to crimes and immorality. Ferriar's rhetoric is similar to that of Moody's review above, which may strike us as decidedly conservative. As Zeynep Tenger and Paul Trolander argue, this may be attributed to the 'successful politicization of the language of philosophical reform by the conservatives'²¹⁵ towards the end of the decade. Words such as 'prejudice', 'liberal', 'enlightened' etc, were targeted by conservative critics as 'Jacobin' in essence. They had been used by the advocates for moderate reform earlier in the period, before becoming inextricably linked with the radical creed. The reservation towards the radicals' use of such words, as we can trace in Ferriar's review above, is repeated the following year. In the review of *The Victim of Prejudice* – by one of the most radical authors of the period, Mary Hays – Christopher Moody complains that:

By the novels which issue from this school, love, which is a transient passion, is to be complimented, in all cases, at the expence [sic] of the regulations and institutions of society; and a respect for virtue and decorum is to be classed in the list of vulgar prejudices [...] [The heroine descending] from a mother who was both a prostitute and a murderer, and who expatiated her crimes on the gallows, shall we term the objection of the Hon. Mr. Pelham's father to the marriage of his son with her a mere prejudice?²¹⁶

Judging from such sentiments, it seems as though the contributors to the *Monthly* not only avoided such words in the late 1790s, but that they also reprobated authors for using them to forward reform. Thus, the *Monthly* seems by the end of the decade to be contributing to the increasingly conservative dominance, by abandoning the reformist cause, and adopting to some extent a more conservative style.

This change in reviewing tendencies – both the return to the belletristic mode, and the abandonment of the pursuit of reform – did not go unnoticed by the conservatives. In 1799, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* itself acknowledged the change:

Of the *utility* of our past labours [...] a full conviction may be acquired by a careful comparison of the late numbers of the *Monthly* and *Critical Reviews*, with any of those that were published previous to the month of August last, when our first number appeared.²¹⁷

214 Ibid, pp. 39-40.

215 Zeynep Tenger and Paul Trolander, 'The Politics of Literary Production: The Reaction to the French Revolution and the Transformation of the English Literary Periodical', *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, Vol. 24, 1995, pp. 279-295 (p. 286).

216 Christopher Lake Moody, 'The Victim of Prejudice', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 31, January 1800, p. 82.

217 Unknown reviewer, 'Prefatory Address to the Reader', *Anti-Jacobin review and magazine, or, Monthly political, and literary censor*, Vol. 1, July 1798, p. iv.

According to this claim, the changes in the *Monthly's* reviews were caused by the pressure they felt in the face of the *Anti-Jacobin's* censure. The *Anti-Jacobin* does not, however, specify any categories of book reviewing where the change was supposed to have taken place. Thus, it is difficult to establish whether the novel section had also been affected by this turn in reviewing practice. However, if we take into consideration the sudden return to the belletristic approach, this may indicate that something had happened to make Griffiths rethink the running of the Review. Also, if we compare the review of Smith's *The Young Philosopher* to the review of her *Marchmont* in 1797,²¹⁸ it is conspicuous how the latter forwards reformist claims that are completely absent in the former. Thus, it may seem as though the censure of the *Anti-Jacobin* had also affected the reviewing of novels. In other words, it seems as though the branding of the *Monthly* as Jacobin had caused the latter to give up its reformist programme. The question may be raised as to why they would suddenly give up in 1799 and not earlier, after all the efforts made by the government to stop the dissemination of radical and reformist ideas in society. One possible reason is that the *Monthly Review* had now become directly targeted, and accused of furthering Jacobin notions by being suddenly put under scrutiny by a Review that pointed out – and labelled as 'Jacobin' – explicit quotes and paragraphs made by the *Monthly* reviewers. If we consider Griffiths' concern for prosecution as early as 1793, it becomes clear that the risks of continuing to promote reform in the late 1790s were simply too high. According to Tenger and Trolander, 'as announcements proliferated trumpeting partiality to all things British – including nation, temperament, constitution, and political regime',²¹⁹ the will to forward reformist ideas towards the close of the century had been severely halted. There was by this time simply no room in the public sphere to advance even reformist ideas about law and government. Tenger and Trolander do not, however, specify the *Anti-Jacobin Review* as the main agent behind this change in political climate. Marilyn Butler, on the other hand, points to the important role of the *Anti-Jacobin Review* in this development. She calls the increasingly conservative dominance a 'reaction headed in 1798 by the *Anti-Jacobin*',²²⁰ and also claims that it 'gave definition to the conservative creed'.²²¹ It is therefore reasonable to argue that the establishment of the censoring *Anti-Jacobin Review* definitely contributed to putting an end to explicit promotion of liberal reform in England at the turn of the century.

218 See chapter 2, section 2.3 – Defining a political position: 'We are no friends to the sanguinary democrats of France'.

219 Tenger and Trolander, pp. 281-2.

220 Butler, p. 105.

221 Ibid, p. 103.

3.2 The importance of the contributors: The withdrawal of Enfield, Aikin and Taylor

Despite the influence of the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, the departure of central politically liberal contributors – such as Enfield, Aikin and Taylor – was also a contributive factor to the decline in the forwarding of reformist politics towards the close of the century. In 1796, Griffiths had implemented the 'new code' of reviewing, which aimed to reduce the risk of falling into political controversy. Not all contributors to the *Monthly* were happy about this proposed change. William Enfield, in particular, was troubled by the new code, which made him 'sigh over the *departed spirit* of British Liberty'.²²² Evidently, he wished to continue to fight for reform, despite Griffiths' concerns. However, from completely dominating the novel reviewing section in the period 1793-1795, his contributions started to dwindle in 1796. A possible reason for this decline in contributions could be related to his despondency over Griffiths' new editorial policy, and he might have been unwilling to work under the new conditions. However, whether Enfield's contributions would have continued to taper off, or whether they would have increased at a later stage, we will never know, because he died suddenly from an intestinal obstruction on 3 November 1797.²²³ As one of the most prolific political novel reviewers of the period – with a strong will to forward social reform – Enfield's death was arguably decisive for the *Monthly's* abandonment of the reformist cause towards the close of the century.

Enfield had been a major contributor to the novel section around mid decade, and his death meant that Griffiths was in desperate need of a competent replacement. He found this in Arthur Aikin and William Taylor, who had both begun their contributions to the novel section in 1795, and who – as Enfield's contributions ceased – dominated it from 1796 to 1797. In the course of these years, they both contributed articles that dealt with – and explicitly supported – reformist notions, such as social mobility and constitutional reform, as discussed in the preceding chapter. Thus, despite the termination of Enfield's contributions, the reviews still addressed controversial political issues, and still showed a will to forward reform, even after the implementation of the new code. Despite this fact, however, there is no doubt that the new code represented a much more prudent editorial policy than what had hitherto been followed, and towards the close of the century the situation had become so precarious that all calls for reform had vanished. Simultaneous with this process, both Aikin and Taylor disappeared from the *Monthly*. Aikin's contributions had already diminished quite significantly in 1798, and by 1799 he was completely gone from the pages of the

222 William Enfield, as quoted by Derek Roper, in *Reviewing before the Edinburgh: 1788-1802* (London: Methuen & Co, 1978), p. 175.

223 R. K. Webb, 'Enfield, William (1741–1797)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8804>> [accessed 11 February 2013].

Monthly Review. The reason for this is difficult to establish, but in the same year he started giving private lectures on chemistry, which might suggest that he was too busy to contribute to the *Monthly*.²²⁴ As for Taylor, he was still responsible for a fair share of the articles in the novel section in 1798, namely six out of thirty-three. However, the following year, he only contributed one article. Considering the fact that he had been the most prolific contributor of the previous three years, his sudden disappearance in 1799 is quite striking. According to David Chandler, Taylor left the *Monthly* in 1799 because of a quarrel with the *de facto* editor, George Edward Griffiths.²²⁵ This supports my argument above, that George Griffiths preferred the contributors to adhere to belletristic reviewing and avoid politically controversial matters. Taylor was, however, unwilling to accept this policy. He 'always took the "liberal" side on political and religious questions',²²⁶ and we can certainly see this politically oriented method in his reviews in the period 1796-1799, as discussed in chapter two. After leaving the *Monthly*, Taylor contributed to other literary ventures, such as the *Annual* and *Critical Reviews*, but he was especially involved with the newly founded *Monthly Magazine*.²²⁷ This magazine was edited by Arthur Aikin's father John,²²⁸ and was founded in 1796 in order to advance the reformist cause. Its political sentiments

could not be relished by those who think, that the best way of preventing the dangers of innovation, is to check all spirit of improvement, to stifle all research, and to preclude all information concerning foreign institutions which might possibly suggest unfavourable comparisons with our own.²²⁹

Judging from the extract from the *Monthly Magazine's* preface above, it was more willing than the *Monthly Review* to risk the possible dangers that might ensue from forwarding reform towards the end of the decade. Thus, by leaving the *Monthly Review*, and joining the *Monthly Magazine*, Taylor showed that he was still willing to fight for reform. However, only two years later, even Taylor seems to have recognised the difficulties of this political venture. In a letter in November 1801, in reply to Robert Southey's suggestion to found a new Review, he writes that '[both] the *Monthly* and the *Critical* are in the main well conducted, and *as low in their politics as the times will yet patronize* [...] To vie with the *British Critic* or the *Antijacobin* will not be the amusement of *my*

224 H. S. Torrens, 'Aikin, Arthur (1773–1854)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/226>> [accessed 12 February 2013].

225 David Chandler, 'Taylor, William (1765–1836)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27092>> [accessed 12 February 2013].

226 Ibid.

227 Ibid.

228 Marilyn L. Brooks, 'Aikin, John (1747–1822)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/230>> [accessed 12 February 2013].

229 Preface to the *Monthly Magazine and British Register* vol. 5, as quoted by Zeynep Tenger and Paul Trolander in 'The Politics of Literary Production: The Reaction to the French Revolution and the Transformation of the English Literary Periodical', p. 286.

leisure'.²³⁰ In other words, the almost absolute monopolization of political discourse by the conservatives had made it all but impossible to champion liberal politics at the close of the century. As argued by M. O. Grenby, the debate concerning societal reform

withered away, not because every champion of radical doctrine had been utterly converted by the logic of the conservatives, but because few of them, with just one or two exceptions, could be found who wished to defy a near unanimous and highly militant anti-Jacobinism to put forward what had suddenly become dangerously unorthodox opinions.²³¹

Thus, even such a resolute critic as William Taylor might have been forced to restrain his political commentary, had he stayed on as a *Monthly* reviewer.

With the withdrawal of Aikin and Taylor, it seems as though George Griffiths struggled to fill the void they had left behind, and 1799 was an uncommonly chaotic year for novel reviewing in the *Monthly Review*. In the previous years, the tendency had been to split the articles between few reviewers.²³² For instance, the reviews had been written almost exclusively by Holcroft and Enfield from 1793 to 1795, whereas Aikin and Taylor dominated from 1796 to 1797. In 1799, however, there is a marked shift: this year, the articles were divided between as many as ten different contributors, six of whom only reviewed one novel each.²³³ This deviation from the previous pattern points to the challenge of filling the staff with permanent contributors now that the *Anti-Jacobin* was scrutinizing their every word. However, the following years were less chaotic, as the number of contributors declined to six in 1800, and to five in 1801. The main contributors these years were Captain James Burney, Oliver Wood, John Ferriar, and Christopher and Elisabeth Moody. They all seem to have little interest in forwarding any claims for liberal reform whatsoever.²³⁴ This favouring of apolitical reviewing, interspersed with some comments that would prove their disinclinations towards the radicals, could be the result of prudence in the face of the precarious political situation. This is not surprising, considering the fact that the pursuit of Jacobinism had become

a national pastime, a witch-hunt in the course of which individuals like Charles Lamb, who was largely apolitical, and his friend Charles Lloyd, in most respects an orthodox moralist, awoke to find themselves branded as a threat to national security.²³⁵

Particularly disconcerting in this respect, however, was the fate of the most radical review journal of

230 Hayden, p. 44, (my emphasis).

231 Grenby, p. 5.

232 A notable exception was the year 1796, when an uncommon amount of novels was reviewed. See Appendix A, table 6. It may appear as though there was a need for more reviewers to deal with the work load.

233 See Appendix A, table 9.

234 Their seeming lack of reformist zeal will be analysed later, when discussing their response to the anti-Jacobin novels.

235 Butler, p. 88.

the 1790s, the *Analytical Review*. It was founded and edited by the Unitarian bookseller Joseph Johnson. Not only was he a close friend of several known dissenters – such as Joseph Priestley and John Aikin – he was also on friendly terms with the notorious triumvirate Paine, Godwin, and Wollstonecraft.²³⁶ According to Derek Roper, Johnson had by 1798 'made himself sufficiently obnoxious for the Government to welcome a chance to prosecute'.²³⁷ He was convicted and imprisoned for publishing a seditious pamphlet against the conservative Bishop of Llandaff. Thus, it became impossible for him to manage the *Analytical*, and the journal consequently ceased publication in June 1799.²³⁸ In a prefatory address to its readers, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* takes full credit for the *Analytical*'s downfall. After pointing out the changes in the *Monthly*'s and *Critical*'s tendencies, it claims that

The other object of our immediate attacks, the *Analytical Review*, has received its death-blow, and we have more reason to congratulate ourselves upon the share which we have had in producing its dissolution, than it would be expedient here to unfold. But neither the destruction of the one, nor the affected moderation of the other, shall occasion the smallest diminution of our vigilance or exertion. We know the spirit of Jacobinism too well to be deceived by any appearances which it may assume that are foreign from its nature; we know its purpose to be fixed and determined; though vanquished in one shape, it will rise up in another [...] We shall, therefore, continue to watch its motions, with anxious solicitude, and incessant attention.²³⁹

In other words, the reviewers of the *Monthly* were still not safe from the excessive censuring of the *Anti-Jacobin*, and it is thus perhaps not surprising that they wished to avoid trouble on account of their political inclinations. In other cases, however, alternative factors than political affiliations were decisive for their choices. For instance, economic concerns could often exceed political ideals in precedence, as we have seen in the case of George Griffiths' attempt to protect the family business. This could perhaps also be the reason for Mr. and Mrs. Moody's lack of ardour in the pursuit of reform, considering the fact that Moody, according to his obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, was 'supposed to have taken, for some time past, an active share in the composition and conduct of the *Monthly Review*'.²⁴⁰ Whatever the reason, it is obvious that the withdrawal of the old reviewers, and entrance of the new, had an impact on the reviewing tendency of the *Monthly*. As Holcroft, Enfield, Aikin and Taylor disappeared from the journal, so did the calls for liberal reform. The question remains whether they left the journal because there was no room to forward liberal reform, or whether the calls for reform vanished because of their departure. It was probably a combination of the two.

236 Roper, p. 178.

237 Roper, p. 178.

238 Ibid, p. 179.

239 Unknown reviewer, 'Prefatory Address to the Reader', p. iv-v.

240 Nangle, p. 45.

3.3 Responding to conservative fiction: The challenge of anti-Jacobin novels

One development in the late 1790s would pose a particular challenge to the reviewers of the *Monthly*, concerning their treatment of controversial political issues, namely the emergence of explicitly conservative political novels. In general, the *Monthly's* new reviewing policy had been to follow the belletristic approach in order to avoid falling into political controversy. In some cases, however, it became apparent that this method alone was inadequate, because it afforded little room for discussing the central characteristics of the novel in question. In a political novel, the most interesting features were not necessarily its plot or character delineation, but rather its political sentiments. During the 1790s, reviewers had become increasingly aware of the political aspects of fiction, and when the politicisation of the genre continued in the late 1790s, this did not go unnoticed. In his review of Godwin's *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century* in September 1800, Christopher Moody comments on the suitability of the novel as a medium to forward philosophical and political speculations:

Novels and romances have often been chosen by theorists, as most convenient vehicles of philosophical sentiment. Opinions, when artfully interwoven in the thread of an interesting story, assume a fascinating and imposing form; and speculations, however wild and extravagant, then appear under the semblance of *truths* supported by *facts* [...] the mind is seduced into an admission of certain statements as the very truth of nature, which perhaps neither have nor can have any existence in reality.²⁴¹

Moody reacts specifically to how *radical* authors often used the novel to forward their political doctrines. This is perhaps not surprising, considering the fact that – in the years immediately following the outbreak of revolution – the novel had been employed to forward chiefly radical ideology, as in *Anna St. Ives*, *Desmond*, and *Man as He Is*. However, apart from some exceptions, the publication of radical novels came to a halt around mid-decade, with very few appearing any later than 1796.²⁴² An obvious reason for this was the fact that, as popular opinion turned in favour of King and Constitution, the booksellers became increasingly apprehensive about publishing unpopular and potentially dangerous material. As discussed above, the bookseller Joseph Johnson had been convicted for sedition, and, according to Marilyn Butler,

Other publishers were unwilling to risk the same fate. The pressures that led to censorship of the novel were greater than for any other art-form. Apart perhaps from the courageous Godwin, no novelist eventually resisted them.²⁴³

241 Christopher Lake Moody, 'St Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 33, September 1800, p. 24.

242 Grenby, p. 2.

243 Butler, p. 121.

In other words, the trend of publishing radical novels that had thrived during the early 1790s was now declining. This did not, however, mean that political novels disappeared from the literary market. Indeed, they thrived as never before. An important difference, however, was that it had become far more common to forward conservative, rather than radical, ideology, through the novel form.²⁴⁴ Thus, Moody's comment above, linking the use of the novel to a specifically radical discourse, is somewhat unfounded, because Moody and his fellow contributors in the late 1790s increasingly had to engage with fiction that advocated not *radical* but overtly *conservative* politics.

Although Griffiths and his staff were decidedly antagonistic towards radicalism, they did not personally endorse conservative politics. Whereas the Griffiths family had close connections with the Whigs, many of the *Monthly* contributors were religious dissenters to whom the conservative politics were manifestly disadvantageous.²⁴⁵ Thus, the *Monthly* found itself in a difficult situation when having to review anti-Jacobin novels. As discussed above, political issues were inevitably brought up through descriptions of plot and characters, and furthermore, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* would place heavy emphasis on a novel's political content, and keep an eye on how the other review journals dealt with the same matters. Thus, it became impossible to overlook the political dimension of some novels. Judging from the reviews in the period 1799-1802, it seems as though the *Monthly* attempted to solve this challenge in three different ways, all of which involve an abandonment of reformist claims for a more equal and fair society. The first strategy was to keep their political commentary as short as possible before returning to the belletristic approach. Even the reviews dealing with controversial political matters typically concluded with a comment relating only to the novel's artistic qualities. For instance, the review of *The Libertines* ends with a remark on the interspersed poetry, which is 'too flimsy to relieve the irksomeness of the general plan',²⁴⁶ whereas the review of *Men and Manners* ends with the following lamentation:

Prolixity is the great fault of this author, and it is indeed too common an error. It is to be wished that writers of all descriptions would study the *multum in parvo*, and the happy art of compressing. *How to begin*, and *how to finish*, are points of difficulty: but *when to finish* requires the most resolution.²⁴⁷

In other words, though the reviewers felt compelled to address political issues in certain novels, they kept their political commentary to a minimum, and focused largely on artistic aspects. The second strategy was to mark an even greater distance from radicalism than earlier in the decade, when dealing with explicitly political novels. Anti-Jacobin novels tended to create a

244 Grenby, p. 2.

245 Roper, p. 174-5.

246 William Smyth, 'The Libertines', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 29, May 1799, p. 91.

247 Moody, 'Men and Manners', p. 141.

distance from radical politics through satire, by caricaturing leading agents of the New Philosophy as selfish villains, whose utopian convictions were only a scheme in order to seduce innocent young women.²⁴⁸ This ridicule provided an opportunity for the *Monthly* reviewers to show their own disagreement with the despised agents of the New Philosophy. It therefore became natural for them to support the anti-Jacobins' satire instead of pointing out the injustice of charging a specific political group for such moral wrongdoings. This is an approach we have already considered in Elisabeth Moody's review of *Men and Manners* above, but which is repeated throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For instance, the reviewer of *A Tale of the Times* remarks that

The characters are well drawn; and the lesson to married ladies, warning them against male confidants, is important and well urged. The delineation of Fitzosborne, an unprincipled *soi-disant philosophe*, shews at least an honourable wish in the author to expose the selfish and dangerous principles of some modern ethics.²⁴⁹

Godwin and his radical colleagues had become especially abhorred after the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Posthumous Works*, in which the details of her illicit affair with Gilbert Imlay had contributed to the association of radicalism with immorality towards the end of the century.²⁵⁰ In the paragraph above, the 'selfish and dangerous principles of some modern ethics' are explicitly linked to the advocates of Godwinianism, and thus the *Monthly Review* contributed to the perpetuation of conservative stereotypes concerning the advocates of social and political liberty. This is typical for the *Monthly's* reviewing practice in the late 1790s, and had not been prevalent earlier in the decade. In 1797, William Taylor reviewed one of the first anti-Jacobin novels, namely *Vaurien; or, Sketches of the Times*:

This writer attacks modern philosophy, republicanism, socinianism, &c. with wit and vivacity [...] but we consider as reprehensible his holding up to ridicule, almost by name, persons of no inconsiderable respectability: the species only, not the individual, being the fair game of the satirist. This licentious proceeding becomes truly cruel, when to the individual thus attacked and indicated, fictitious crimes are attributed.²⁵¹

As mentioned, the main concern of anti-Jacobin novels was to attack the advocates of the New Philosophy – not only for their foolishness, but perhaps especially for their imagined danger to

248 Grenby, p. 11.

249 William Smyth, 'A Tale of the Times', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 29, May 1799, p. 90.

250 Barbara Taylor, 'Wollstonecraft, Mary (1759–1797)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10893>> [accessed 8 March 2013].

251 William Taylor, 'Vaurien; or, Sketches of the Times', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 24, September 1797, p. 33.

society. Thus, novel after novel appeared, fitting this precise pattern.²⁵² Judging from the extract above, however, Taylor questions the satire of the anti-Jacobins, which he considers to be injurious not only to a distinct political group, but also to specific individuals. Later in the review, he continues his argument, forwarding an unambiguous statement against the conservative strategy:

[The novel] abounds with shrewd observations on the prevailing manners, morals, politics, parties, and *fanatics* of the times: but we think that the ingenious and piquant satirist is wanting in candor [sic] towards those persons whose religious or political creed is not in concord with his own. He seems to hold the Dissenters from our Church-establishment in no small degree of abomination; especially the Anti-trinitarians; and he has no mercy on the Godwins, the Priestleys, and the Holcrofts of the age.²⁵³

In 1799, this claim for the individual's right to its own religious or political creed, including liberal or dissenting ones, had been totally abandoned by the *Monthly* reviewers, as we can see for instance in the reviews of *Men and Manners* and *A Tale of the Times* above. As opposed to Taylor, John Ferriar takes a much more antagonistic position towards 'the Godwins, the Priestleys, and the Holcrofts of the age'. In a discussion of the New Philosophy in his review of the conservative *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, he claims that 'the name of philosophy [has been] degraded by misapplication, and vilified by misrepresentation':²⁵⁴

From the title of this publication, the reader might be inclined to expect memorials of those men who have extended the boundaries of natural science [...] or of those who have thrown unexpected light on the doctrines of mind [...]. Where such an idea had been excited, some disappointment will ensue, when it is found that the modern philosophers here celebrated are only heroes of Grub-street, deluding their followers with the ignis fatuus of Godwinianism, and deserving the fate of Stephano and Trinculo in the Tempest; – that is, to conclude their adventures in a horse-pond.²⁵⁵

In other words, it is quite clear that Taylor's attitude in his approach to the anti-Jacobin novels was profoundly different from those voiced in the *Monthly* only a few years later. It is improbable that Taylor's successors actually condoned the severity of the attacks made by the conservatives, but it seems as though they felt compelled to show their approval nonetheless, as part of the new editorial strategy.

The third and final strategy in the *Monthly's* approach to the anti-Jacobin novels, seems to have been to avoid certain key issues that would most definitely cause political strife, and thus draw unwanted attention to the *Monthly Review*. The calls for constitutional reform and religious liberty were particular matters of dispute. When dealing with conservative fiction, the reviewers avoid

252 Butler, p. 103.

253 Taylor, 'Vaurien; or, Sketches of the Times', p. 36.

254 John Ferriar, 'Memoirs of Modern Philosophers', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 34, April 1801, p. 414.

255 Ibid, p. 413.

these issues, placing focus rather on areas of ideological concurrence. A main field of agreement seems to have been the shared concern for female virtue. The new doctrines of the radicals threatened to jeopardise everything that had been considered virtuous in female conduct. In his novel *St. Leon*, William Godwin, in a familiar style, comments that '[f]ew women of regular and reputable lives have that ease of manners, that flow of fancy, and that graceful intrepidity of thinking and expressing themselves, that is sometimes to be found among those who have *discharged themselves* in a certain degree *from the tyranny of custom*'.²⁵⁶ This sentiment is highlighted by Christopher Moody as a 'dangerous tendency [which] ought not to pass without animadversion'.²⁵⁷

How does this insidious remark tend to diminish the love of virtue in the female breast! The irregular fair have, it should seem, *discharged themselves from the tyranny of custom*. Dangerous sentiment! O ye fair readers, believe it not!²⁵⁸

To a modern reader, Godwin's attraction to independent women, and his ambition to free them from certain traditional conventions, may stand out as commendable. His contemporaries, however, felt quite differently, and his attempt to reform the customs that shaped conduct between the sexes became an easy target for the anti-Jacobins. Godwin and his followers were constantly represented as villainous men, masquerading as political and philosophical zealots, while aiming to dissolve the institution of marriage only in order to gratify their own libertine inclinations. This is the plot of numerous anti-Jacobin novels, such as *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, *A Tale of the Times*, and *The Picture of the Age*. If we consider the reviews of some of these novels, it becomes apparent that the reviewers latched on to this topic in order to show agreement with the conservative creed. In the review of *The Picture of the Age*, John Ferriar shows this ideological consent in the following manner:

[T]his production may be considered as a picture of our times; it exhibits vicious characters, dressed out in the most amiable and attractive colours which the author's pencil can supply: temptation is with him an excuse for crime, and all his personages have a most accommodating sympathy for each other's frailties. This is truly the spirit of some modern novelists, who delight in palliating error, and in reconciling their readers to false and extravagant delineations of character and conduct. Hence, we are taught to seek for virtue among felons in a gaol, and for wisdom in Bedlam; and hence, as in the composition before us, we are told that the violation of some of our most important duties proceeds from 'grandeur of mind,' and superiority of talents.²⁵⁹

256 William Godwin, as quoted by Christopher Lake Moody in '*St Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century*', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 33, September 1800, pp. 27-8.

257 Moody, '*St Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century*', p. 27.

258 *Ibid*, p. 28.

259 John Ferriar, '*The Picture of the Age*', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 35, August 1801, p. 430.

In this passage, Ferriar explicitly criticises Godwinian philosophy for its disregard of established systems, and for basing right and wrong conduct only on poor individual judgement. We saw the same disapproval expressed by Christopher Moody in his review of Mary Hays' *Victim of Prejudice*, where he criticises the author for valuing romantic love at the expense of the regulations and institutions of society. Furthermore, we can trace the same concerns in a review of *The Daughter of Adoption* in 1801. Oliver Wood condemns the novel's morality, where '[s]cenes of debauchery and libertinism, in which the hero acts as a principle character, are too frequently brought to our view, and described in language too impassioned and prurient'.²⁶⁰ The novel's heroine, an amiable and beautiful young woman, falls victim to this libertinism, and becomes his unrepentant mistress. What is especially interesting in this review is how the novel's morality is condemned on grounds that had become inextricably linked to political discourse:

It is perhaps less difficult to discover that the author is a Godwinian in principle, and that he is an advocate for the doctrine that individuality of affection and possession constitutes a sacred bond in the sexual union, independently of legal forms and social compacts; than it is to reconcile the conduct of his heroine with the profession of such a principle [...] Be the intended moral of this novel, however, what it may, we cannot but condemn a work which represents the loss of female chastity as a matter of light concern, and only to be regretted because it incurs the loss of social respectability; and which tends to lessen the dread of vice by [...] endowing the frail and guilty with every other quality that can command love, esteem, and admiration of mankind.²⁶¹

In other words, the morality of the novel is found to be intolerable because it follows the Godwinian guidelines for proper moral conduct, which by the end of the eighteenth century were abhorred by a large segment of British society. As discussed in chapter two, even Enfield, Aikin and Taylor had supported important societal institutions, such as matrimony and law, and they reproached Godwin and his circle for being too radical in their political aims. Because this was an issue with such broad ideological unanimity, it was a much safer topic to address, than the more disputable issues of religious dissent and constitutional reform. The *Monthly* reviewers used this as an opportunity to stay out of political controversy when reviewing novels that represented political contrasts to their own personal convictions.

When analysing some central novel reviews in the period 1799-1802, it becomes quite clear that the reviewing tendency of the *Monthly* changes in a more conservative, but perhaps especially apolitical, direction. In this chapter, I have discussed two possible reasons for this change. The government, through conservative propaganda and the scrutinizing of the *Monthly's* responsibility in the dissemination of politically dangerous novels, was successful in silencing the support for the

260 Oliver Wood, 'The Daughter of Adoption', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 35, August 1801, p. 356.

261 Ibid.

reformist cause in the *Monthly Review*. The disappearance of central reform-oriented contributors also helped to further this desertion of reformist claims. To show how the calls for reform vanish towards the close of the century, I have discussed how the reviewers dealt with the emergence of explicitly conservative novels in the late 1790s. Despite forwarding political sentiments that were essentially opposite to their own interests, the *Monthly* contributors were conspicuously acquiescent in their treatment of these novels, especially when compared with the more politically zealous reviews of William Enfield, Arthur Aikin, and William Taylor earlier in the decade. This submissive attitude towards conservative propaganda does not suggest that the *Monthly Review* had abandoned its liberal orientation, but rather it shows how difficult the political situation had become towards the close of the century. In order for the *Monthly* to escape the fate of the *Analytical*, it sought to avoid political controversy, and this prudence may very well have been the reason for its preservation.

Conclusion

The argument of this thesis is that the *Monthly Review*, in the decade following the outbreak of revolution in France, became increasingly concerned with political issues in their reviewing of fiction – demonstrating how a literary journal could be used as a medium for presenting political dissent. The belletristic criteria still dominated the reviewing practice throughout the period, but we do, however, see a clear tendency towards a heightened political attention among the reviewers.²⁶² Three main reasons for this development have been suggested. Firstly, the growing production of explicitly political novels; secondly, the contributions of specific reviewers who were seeking to voice their political opinions through the review medium; thirdly, the pressure from the government, backed by popular conservative opinion, prompting the contributors to address contemporary issues in their reviews in order to avoid affiliation with the disfavoured radical movement.

The political focus in many novel reviews in the 1790s can be traced back to one or more of these factors. In some of the reviews, the marked attention to politics comes as a natural response to the political nature of the novel itself. In the reviews of novels such as *Lindor and Adelaïde* and *Desmond*, it would be a conspicuous omission to focus only on their formal aspects. The political issues which they both raise are, arguably, their most interesting aspects. It would furthermore have been impossible for the reviewer to overlook their political dimensions, considering the fact that their plots and characters were so closely connected to the revolution controversy. These novels thus demanded an approach that allowed for *some* commentary on political factors. In other words, the belletristic framework which the reviewers usually operated within proved insufficient when reviewing these politically charged novels. This was a problem that the reviewers themselves acknowledged. William Enfield, in his review of *Desmond* in December 1792, explained that as the novel was distinctly marked by its political character, he would confine himself to the discussion of 'two or three political passages'.²⁶³ In other words, Enfield explicitly points out to the reader that this particular novel could not be reviewed satisfactorily by referring to belletristic criteria alone.

Other reviews discussed in this thesis show extensive attention to contemporary issues, without the novel itself being particularly political. In this respect, the reason for the political edge of the reviews could be found in the agendas of their authors, rather than in the nature of the novel in question. As discussed in chapter one, the reviews by Thomas Holcroft are particularly difficult

262 See Appendix B, which shows a distinct politicisation as the decade progresses, from 1 political review in 1791 to 10 in 1798.

263 William Enfield, 'Desmond: a Novel', p. 406.

to study out of context, without bearing in mind his close connection to the radical camp. Holcroft's reviewing style is conspicuously characterised by an orientation towards political and ideological content, rather than an attention to the work's formal aspects. This is evident even in his reviews of *The Castle of St. Vallery* and *The Count de Hoensdern* – novels belonging to the Gothic and sentimental traditions. Such novels were not generally believed to bear any political significance, but Holcroft still distinctly employed a politically charged rhetoric when dealing with them. It may seem as though he was using the *Monthly Review* as a medium for presenting his own political programme, rather than fulfilling his role as a responsible critic. Thus, his contributions not only did 'much to give the *Monthly* a reputation for hostility to the State and Church',²⁶⁴ but they also pushed the Review in a more political direction in the mid-1790s.

The attention to politics may have started partly as a reaction to the growing number of politicised novels, as in Enfield's case, whereas Holcroft's eagerness to bring political discussions into the reviewing of even apolitical novels must also have influenced the *Monthly's* review practice. However, I believe that the continued focus we see in novel reviews between 1793 and 1798 is not only a reaction to political novels, or a result of Holcroft's enterprise. It may also be attributed to the *Monthly's* reaction to contemporary debates in the aftermath of the French Revolution, and a self-conscious wish to define its position in these debates. As the radical cause became increasingly unpopular, the contributors to the *Monthly Review* felt compelled to emphasise – by repeatedly denouncing radicalism – that their own reformist policies were nothing like the radical claims of the new philosophers. There were two recurring concerns, in particular, where the *Monthly* wished to mark a distance to the controversial opinions of Godwin and his followers. These were an opposition to the radical ambition of abolishing the legal system in its entirety, and a marked disagreement with the radicals on the institution of matrimony. These two correlate in one joint characteristic, namely the notion that individuals should not be permitted to take justice into their own hands, as this could potentially lead to social anarchy and chaos. This was a fundamental point of discordance between the *Monthly* reviewers and the radicals, and it was a difference that was often and forcefully highlighted in order to dissociate the journal's reformist ambitions from the unpopular claims of the new philosophers.

The result of these three factors was a review practice that was much more political in its motivation than it had been since the foundation of the *Monthly Review* in 1749. The very function of novel reviewing had been significantly altered, from only commenting on the form of a literary work – with the notable exception of the work's moral tendency – to a larger focus that included questions concerning how it related to issues in contemporary society. However, the pursuit of

²⁶⁴ Walter Graham, p. 210.

reform-oriented claims was always a very careful project, and the calls for reform in the years 1794-1798 tended to be less forceful than what they had been in the early years of the decade. The strong governmental and loyalist oppression made it increasingly difficult for the *Monthly* reviewers to promote reform, and, as discussed in chapter 3, they had become completely stifled towards the end of the decade. The year 1799 signalled a return to a more politically neutral position, and the reviewers aimed to stay within the belletristic framework, when this was possible. These developments contributed to giving the *Monthly* an apolitical air, which may give the impression that reviewing before the *Edinburgh* was not at all political in its tendencies. This may further help to indicate why so many scholars seem to underestimate the political importance of the older review journals in relation to the newer ones in the years leading up to the founding of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802. It is true that the majority of novel reviewing in the 1790s was still closely connected to the more politically neutral belletristic approach, and also that the *Monthly* was no way near as political as the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, or the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* Reviews in the early nineteenth century. Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that there undoubtedly had been a growing political awareness, and an increased will to participate in current debates in the *Monthly*'s reviewing of fiction in the 1790s.

The fact that the *Monthly Review* was increasingly politicised in the aftermath of the French Revolution points to two significant conclusions. Firstly, that the innovation which many scholars accredit to the *Edinburgh Review* really began with the changing tendencies of the *Monthly* in the preceding decade. As novels with explicit political content were issuing from the press, the reviewers found themselves in a position where the old approach proved insufficient. As governmental measures to stop the spread of radicalism were set in motion, some reviewers – especially those who had strong political convictions and were willing to fight for them – were provoked to step out of their traditional boundaries as critics. By transgressing their original function, the *Monthly Review* thus set the standard for the later *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* Reviews. In other words, the politicised Reviews of the early nineteenth century did not spring up from nowhere, and should therefore not be read in opposition to their predecessors, but rather as a continuation of the process already started by the *Monthly Review*. Secondly, the politicisation of the reviewing format shows how the book-review periodical presented an opportunity for participation in political debate – an intervention which the government had to, and definitely *did*, take seriously. The *Monthly Review* had become a force to be reckoned with towards the end of the eighteenth century, based on its ability to influence the production and consumption of literature. Based on the practice of new historicism, my main focus throughout this thesis has been to study the *Monthly Review* in its historical context, through a discussion of how society influenced it in a

more politicised direction, but, importantly, a key premise has also been to be aware of how the journal itself influenced public debate through its reviews . Whether readers were in fact affected by review journalism in their reading habits is hard to determine, but according to Antonia Forster, 'there is plenty of evidence of a general belief that the public did listen to reviewers'.²⁶⁵ One thing is certain, however, and that is that the government was conscious of review journalism as a vitally important distributor of political thought. The governmental measures discussed in chapter three are a testimony to the public influence of the journals, and support the notion that the critics were not only regarded as impartial and responsible, but that their reviewing practice in fact had become notably political in character. They were now perceived to have the ability to set the ideals not only for public *taste*, but also for public *opinion*.

A main goal in this study has been to investigate the democratic potential of the book-review periodical in the political ferment that followed the outbreak of the French Revolution. While the stifling of the *Monthly Review* during the most difficult years to some extent shows the political limitations of print, the development in a politicised direction during the 1790s nevertheless suggests how print culture could afford opportunities for people on the fringes of society to participate and have their voices heard in contemporary political debate.

²⁶⁵ Forster, 'Review Journals and the Reading Public', pp. 171-190 (p. 187).

APPENDIX A:

List of contributors to the novel section in the 1790s, and the amount of novels they reviewed

Table 1: 1791

Name of contributor	Amount of novels reviewed
John Noorthouck	18
William Enfield	5
George Edward Griffiths	3
Elisabeth Moody	1
Thomas Pearne	1
Ralph Griffiths	1

Table 2: 1792

Name of contributor	Amount of novels reviewed
William Enfield	13
John Noorthouck	7
Thomas Pearne	2
Thomas Holcroft	1

Table 3: 1793

Name of contributor	Amount of novels reviewed
William Enfield	8
Thomas Holcroft	7
John Noorthouck	1
George Edward Griffiths	1

Table 4: 1794

Name of contributor	Amount of novels reviewed
William Enfield	22
Thomas Holcroft	1
George Edward Griffiths	1
Captain James Burney	1

Moody	1
Not identified	1

Table 5: 1795

Name of contributor	Amount of novels reviewed
William Enfield	20
William Taylor	3
Thomas Holcroft	2
Captain James Burney	1
Arthur Aikin	1

Table 6: 1796

Name of contributor	Amount of novels reviewed
Arthur Aikin	23
William Taylor	4
William Enfield	3
Captain James Burney	2
Thomas Holcroft	1
George Edward Griffiths	1
Bryan Edwards	1
John Aikin	1
John Gillies	1
James Bannister	1

Table 7: 1797

Name of contributor	Amount of novels reviewed
William Taylor	15
Arthur Aikin	10
William Smyth	2
James Bannister	2
Contributor not identified	2
William Enfield	1
George Edward Griffiths	1

Table 8: 1798

Name of contributor	Amount of novels reviewed
Thomas Wallace	7
William Taylor	6
James Bannister	6
William Smyth	6
Arthur Aikin	2
Christopher Lake Moody	2
Alexander Hamilton	1

Table 9: 1799

Name of contributor	Amount of novels reviewed
William Smyth	5
Captain James Burney	5
James Bannister	4
Alexander Hamilton	2
George Edward Griffiths	1
Thomas Wallace	1
William Taylor	1
John Ferriar	1
Robert Woodhouse	1
Oliver Wood	1

Table 10: 1800

Name of contributor	Amount of novels reviewed
Captain James Burney	12
Christopher Lake Moody	2
Thomas Wallace	2
John Ferriar	1
Oliver Wood	1
Elisabeth Moody	1

Table 11: 1801

Name of contributor	Amount of novels reviewed
Oliver Wood	8
Elisabeth Moody	3
John Ferriar	2
George Edward Griffiths	1
Ralph Griffiths	1

Table 12: 1802

Name of contributor	Amount of novels reviewed
'Man' ^{*266}	6
Oliver Wood	2
John Ferriar	1
Christopher Lake Moody	1
George Edward Griffiths	1
'T:ke'*	1

266 * I have been unable to identify these reviewers. Their reviews are, however, only short belletristic mentions in the catalogue section, and have therefore not been of great importance to this study.

APPENDIX B:

List of reviews with significant political focus²⁶⁷ in the period 1791-1802

Year	Reviews with significant political focus	Amount of political reviews from total amount of reviews that year
1791	<i>Lindor and Adelaïde, a moral Tale.</i>	1 out of 26
1792	<i>Anna St. Ives</i> <i>The Castle of St. Vallery</i> <i>Desmond</i>	3 out of 23
1793	<i>Man as he is</i> <i>The Old Manor House</i> <i>The Emigrants</i> <i>The Count de Hoensdern</i>	4 out of 17
1794	<i>Things as they are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams</i> <i>The Adventures of Hugh Trevor</i> <i>Edward de Courcy, an ancient Fragment.</i>	3 out of 27
1795	<i>The Royal Captives</i> <i>The Banished Man</i> <i>Henry</i> <i>The Motto; or, History of Bill Woodcock</i> <i>Robert and Adela; or, the Rights of Women best maintained by the sentiments of Nature</i> <i>The Comforts of Arabella</i>	6 out of 27
	<i>The Democrat</i> <i>The Abbey of Clugny</i>	

²⁶⁷ By 'significant political focus', I mean comments relating to the French Revolution and its impact on the calls for social and parliamentary reform.

1796	<i>Theodore Cyphon; or, the Benevolent Jew</i> <i>Hermesprong; or, Man as he is not</i> <i>The History of Ned Evans</i> <i>Edward – Various Views of Human Nature</i> <i>The Black Valley, a Tale</i>	7 out of 38
1797	<i>Abstract; a Character from Life</i> <i>A Gossip's Story</i> <i>The Life and Opinions of Sebaldus Nothanker</i> <i>Memoirs of Emma Courtney</i> <i>Marchmont</i> <i>The Adventures of Hugh Trevor</i> <i>Vaurien; or, Sketches of the Times</i>	7 out of 33
1798	<i>The Castle on the Rock</i> <i>Adeline de Courcy</i> <i>Ellinor; or, the World as it is</i> <i>Waldorf; or, the Dangers of Philosophy</i> <i>Emily de Varmont; or, Divorce dictated by Necessity</i> <i>Derwent Priory; or, Memoirs of an Orphan in a Series of Letters</i> <i>Count Donaman; or, Errors of Sensibility</i> <i>Henry Willoughby</i> <i>Arthur Fitz-Albini</i> <i>Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i>	10 out of 30
	<i>The Young Philosopher</i>	

1799	<p><i>Letters written from Lausanne</i></p> <p><i>Helen Sinclair</i></p> <p><i>Human Vicissitudes; or, Travels into Unexplored Regions</i></p> <p><i>A Tale of the Times</i></p> <p><i>The Libertines</i></p> <p><i>The Aristocrat</i></p> <p><i>The Natural Son</i></p>	8 out of 23
1800	<p><i>The Victim of Prejudice</i></p> <p><i>Men and Manners</i></p> <p><i>The Force of Prejudice</i></p> <p><i>St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century</i></p> <p><i>Filial Indiscretions; or, the Female Chevalier</i></p>	5 out of 19
1801	<p><i>Memoirs of Modern Philosophers</i></p> <p><i>The Daughter of Adoption; a Tale of Modern Times</i></p> <p><i>The Picture of the Age</i></p>	3 out of 15
1802	<p><i>Belinda</i></p> <p><i>Percival; or, Nature Vindicated</i></p> <p><i>Dorothea, or, a Ray of the New Light</i></p>	3 out of 10

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