

A Poetics of Dissent; or, Pantisocracy in America

Colin Jager

Theory and Event 10:1 | © 2007

To know a bit more about the threads that trace the ordinary ways and forgotten paths of utopia, it would be better to follow the labor of the poets.

-- Jacques Ranciere, *Short Voyages to the Land of the People*

The past can be seized only as an image, which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.

-- Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*

1.

"Pantisocracy" was an experiment in radical utopian living, invented in England in the closing years of the eighteenth century by a couple of young poets, never put into practice, and described in later, more sober years with a mixture of embarrassment and shame by the poets and their friends, and with sanctimonious anger by their enemies. In the essay that follows I will interpret Pantisocracy as an example of what I call a "poetics of dissent" -- that is, a literary strategy that makes possible a dissenting politics. Immediately, however, it needs to be made clear that both "literary" and "politics" are understood broadly here; indeed, the politics I pursue is simply the possibility of speaking in a certain way. Moreover this essay bears a complicated relationship to a systematic exposition or exegesis, for although certain thinkers -- Derrida, Ranciere, Benjamin, Hardt and Negri -- appear here, I employ them opportunistically. The goal is to describe Pantisocracy in such a way as to create an historical "image" (in Benjamin's sense of the word) of dissent. Importantly, that image should not be understood as opposed to "criticism" or to "theory" or to systematic thought more generally but rather as intrinsic to those activities.

2.

The most readily-available interpretation of Pantisocracy is that it was an ill-conceived, impractical venture whose failure can be coordinated with the larger narrative of romantic apostasy. In that narrative, the youthful radicalism of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey, and William Wordsworth gives way first to counter-revolutionary feeling and then eventually to a full-blown conservatism. Even the early poetry and politics of these writers, goes this line of reasoning, can be read as symptomatic of their later rapprochement with the status quo. In contrast, I wish to suggest that focusing on what I call a "poetics of dissent" can reveal not only Pantisocracy but the larger movement of

romanticism upon which it verges as more complexly engaged with the relation between aesthetics and politics. Of course it is always possible to dismiss romanticism because of its troubling tendency to align aesthetics and politics. Yet if we untangle the various threads by which those abstractions are woven together, we find that oppositional politics -- understood as a form rather than a specific content -- can sometimes come by way of aesthetic practices.

3.

In an analogous way, Jacques Ranciere distinguishes his own interest in the relation of aesthetics and politics from the tradition of what he variously terms "critique" or "symptomatic reading." "As I understand it," remarks Ranciere in an interview, "critique combines a position of radical politics with a practice of interpretive suspicion guided by the idea that words always hide something profound below the surface." "My own intellectual effort," he continues, "has been to think the distance between words differently."¹ The "difference" of which Ranciere speaks here has to do with words themselves, and their ability to circulate, disrupt, and create. Words, in this sense, constitute the political as such -- or more precisely, the capacity to speak "excess words" is simply what it means to dissent from a ruling orthodoxy.² The speech act is the political act, with the result that politics must be understood outside the realm of the state, perhaps indeed as inherently opposed to the state with its "masters of designation and classification" (115). Of particular interest is Ranciere's claim that politics is in this sense literary -- part of that broader category he calls the "poetics of knowledge."

4.

One implication of this idea is that "critique," despite its self-understanding as radical, actually polices words as rigidly as does state power: by reading through words in order to get at something hidden below the surface, critique actually shares in the conservative desire to "speak correctly." Following this logic, the narrative of romantic apostasy, produced by the practice of symptomatic reading, exposes romanticism's literary ambitions as inevitably leagued with the status quo. In this way radical and conservative come together around a shared dismissal of "poetic" words. Ranciere suggests that the way out of this bind is to restore a certain poetics to our thinking of politics: "We can conclude, then, that humans are political animals because they are literary animals," he declares succinctly ("Dissenting Words" 115).

5.

I find this perspective useful but I want to push Ranciere's "critique of critique" in a romantic direction. When Ranciere speaks of the "poetics of knowledge" he uses the word in the sense of *poesis*, or making. My use of "poetics" here is slightly different, for while I wish to hold on to the sense of inventiveness and creativity carried by *poesis*, not to mention its suspicion of empiricism, I also mean "poetics" in a slightly more prosaic sense, as poetry itself -- or, if not poetry, then literary language, or perhaps most properly, "the

literary." It is particularly the capacity of figurative language to create or make possible a certain politics that catches my attention. It is a fleeting, barely-possible politics, whose utopic dimensions must be read in the very figures that it leaves behind. In this sense my analysis supplements Ranciere with a bit of "messianic" reading adopted from Walter Benjamin.

Dissent

6.

While "dissent" had been applied to disputes regarding matters of religious doctrine as early as 1536, in eighteenth-century England it had a more specific meaning. Dissenters were those who refused to subscribe to the 39 Articles of the established Anglican Church. The Test Act of 1673 prevented dissenters from holding public office and subjected them to a series of civil disabilities. Though dissenters came from across the religious and ideological spectrum, by the late eighteenth century the term was usually shorthand for Unitarian dissenters, whose politics tended to be democratic and pro-French. Prohibited from attending Oxford or Cambridge, these dissenters developed an alternate culture of schools, universities, social networks, and publishing houses. They were generally at the intellectual forefront during the later years of the eighteenth century, and tended to be especially strong among middle-class industrialists: Josiah Wedgwood, Thomas Bolton, and James Watt were all Unitarian dissenters.

7.

Various social and literary historians have traced the complicated lines of influence running from the oppositional modes of late eighteenth-century dissent to romanticism.³ Viewed as a matter of personal politics, these investigations produce romanticism as the site of apostasy, a romanticism always betraying its progressive impulses. William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey begin as youthful and idealistic republicans, supporters of the French Revolution steeped in British dissenting culture; they end as conservative apologists for the very state power they had begun by resisting. In some accounts, the creative ferment of early romanticism represents a (brief) rest stop along this increasingly conservative highway. E. P. Thompson, for example, writes that "this creative moment of early romanticism might be defined as a Jacobinism-in-recoil or a Jacobinism-of-doubt." Though Thompson's account is carefully nuanced -- "I must insist upon both sides of this definition. It is no good if we see only the recoil, or the doubt" -- the general picture is still one of an irreversible slide from radicalism into apostasy, with literature functioning as a brief moment of reflexivity along the way.⁴ Others suggest that the apostasy was there all along. Detecting the influence of Edmund Burke even in the early Wordsworth, James Chandler has argued that the poet's "major work...is conservative from the start." Chandler thus refuses the implicit distinction between poetry and politics that motivates Thompson's analysis; for him, Wordsworth's later accommodation with the status quo is

obliquely registered within the early poetry itself.⁵ In what follows I too shall be arguing that the literary and the political are entwined, though I shall also be trying to restore to the literary the potential for opposition, a resistance to things as they are in the name of things as they might be.

8.

In a vitriolic and witty response to Coleridge's 1802 essay "Once a Jacobin Always a Jacobin," William Hazlitt gave romantic apostasy its most memorable formulation:

Once a Jacobin and always a Jacobin, is a maxim, which, notwithstanding Mr. Coleridge's see-saw reasoning to the contrary, we hold to be true, even of him to this day. Once an Apostate and always an Apostate, we hold to be equally true; and the reason why the last is true, is that the first is so. A person who is what is called a Jacobin...that is, who has shaken off certain well known prejudices with respect to kings or priests, or nobles, cannot so easily resume them again, whenever his pleasure or his convenience may prompt him to attempt it.⁶

9.

To be a Jacobin one must already have been an apostate. As Jerome Christensen noted some years ago in an article on romantic apostasy, this see-saw of reversals defines apostasy as such: "at every point we examine him," writes Christensen, "even at the beginning, Coleridge is already falling away from every principled commitment -- commitments which are, indeed, endowed with significance solely by that lapse and the critical reflection it allows."⁷ Charles Mahoney's recent study of Hazlitt and the "abiding enigma" of romantic apostasy pursues these deconstructive implications to argue that apostasy is a linguistic predicament, a falling-away from an established position that adheres in figurative language as "an always-falling which can be seen to occur with reference not merely to political principle but, far more unpredictably, literary language."⁸ From this angle, to engage with figurative language is to engage in apostasy, to "fall in" with power in a manner that transcends a simple change of opinion. Like Chandler, though with a rather different inflection, Mahoney therefore locates apostasy within literary language rather than outside of it; apostasy is an uncontrollable or extra-intentional surplus of signification.

10.

I propose that we think of "dissent" as a complementary inverse to this deconstructive rendering of apostasy as a fall. As I interpret it here, dissent is a "standing away" from the mainstream which like apostasy inheres in literary language but only contingently -- rather than necessarily, as Mahoney has it -- entails a "falling in" with power. To adapt Milton in *Paradise Lost*, dissent names a condition in which we are "sufficient to stand, though free to fall." In a slightly different idiom, dissent is what Pierre Bourdieu calls a "stance" with respect to power. Stances, or what Bourdieu elsewhere calls "position-takings," are "the structured system of practices and expressions of agents," and he insists that these expressions must always be analyzed in conjunction with the array of stances made available within a given field: "the space of positions," he notes,

"tends to command the space of position-takings."⁹ To assume a stance means to deploy a set of strategies within a game whose rules are implicitly structured by power. Bourdieu's formulation has the advantage of dispensing with the familiar distinction between theory and practice; with respect to literary language, moreover, his effort to define situated agency can help us distinguish between "apostasy" as the fall that characterizes the literary and "dissent" as the stance that likewise characterizes it.

11.

My test case for this idea will be Pantisocracy, and my eventual claim will be that Pantisocracy instantiates dissent in the only way that it could be instantiated in the 1790s – as a literary endeavor or poetics, effective precisely because it could never be translated into action. What should emerge by this essay's close, therefore, is a measured defense of the literary from the charge of apostasy.

Coming to America

12.

As the embodiment of revolutionary subjectivity, America toward the end of the eighteenth-century became for British radicals one figure of a desire for change. Many dissenters imagined an America where they could realize political, economic, and religious ideals that remained merely thought experiments in their homeland. "America" named the possibility of an integrated future distinct from the alienated past they hoped to leave behind. As exciting as this possible future may be, however, actually realizing it entails a certain loss. The career of Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), Unitarian minister, theologian, scientist, and elder statesman of dissent, offers a case study in what is gained and lost in exchanging England for America. Known today as a co-discoverer of oxygen and the inventor of carbonation, Priestley was the preeminent intellectual of his generation who shaped unitarian theology, rational Christianity, and the milieu of dissent for a quarter of a century. Like many Unitarian dissenters, he believed that the Enlightenment, far from challenging Christianity, provided the best chance of purifying it of corruption and error. "The thorough examination of every thing relating to Christianity," he wrote in dedicating one of his books to his longtime friend Theophilus Lindsey, "has been as the refiner's fire with respect to it; and when it shall have stood this test, it may be presumed that the truth and excellency of it will never more be called into question."¹⁰ Priestley's form of dissent aimed for mainstream status, and it was securely part of the burgeoning middle class; his choice of a public dedication here suggests that he thinks of himself as a member of what we now call the public sphere. Yet his status as a dissenter and his fondness for metaphors like that of the refiner's fire complicates his relationship to that sphere. Some years earlier Priestley had already explored the darker implications of such rhetoric:

It may be my fate to be a kind of comet, or flaming meteor in science, in the regions of which ... I made my appearance very lately, and very unexpectedly; and therefore, like a meteor, it may be my destiny to move very swiftly, burn away with great heat and violence, and become as suddenly extinct.¹¹

13.

This may be an attempt at irony, but the aggressive passivity of the figure suggests that Priestley was not averse to thinking of himself as a martyr to truth. Like the image of the refiner's fire, that of the comet suggests that the light of critical reason and public scrutiny leads not to a Habermasian public sphere of reasoned conversation but rather to a space inflected by power, sacrifice, and the potential for violence.

14.

In the event, Priestley's rhetoric proved prophetic. By the final decade of the eighteenth century, as the established and the orthodox consolidated their hold on the political center, England's dissenting community was forced further toward the margins. Already with the failure of the Feathers Tavern petition in 1772, a number of prominent liberal churchmen renounced their livings, became Unitarians, and moved to London.¹² Some years later many of these men involved themselves in urban Jacobin movements such as the London Corresponding Society. Others became part of the group of artists and intellectuals gathered around the publisher Joseph Johnson, whose circle overlapped with that of more notorious intellectuals such as Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Paine, and who in turn were tangentially linked to networks of artisan and plebian radicals. Many prominent dissenters were at the famous meeting of the Revolution Society in November 1789, where Richard Price delivered the sermon praising the French Revolution that inspired Edmund Burke's 1790 counter-revolutionary broadside, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. By 1793 the government was cracking down on radicals and dissenters with increasing success, and by 1795 many of its leaders were dispersed, jailed, or in hiding. Over the course of two decades the tone of the dissenting community thus shifted dramatically. In the 1770s, dissenting meeting-houses like the Essex Street Chapel in London publicly hosted political reformers, Royal Society members, liberal clergy, and progressive aristocrats; by the 1790s Essex Street was one of the stops in the subterranean world of the London underground, memorably described by Burke as a network of "intriguing philosophers" whose principles threatened the very health of the state "in its most vital parts."¹³

15.

As state power gained the upper hand and came increasingly to control the likely outcome of events, dissenters like Priestley occasionally took refuge in a rhetoric more dedicated to the possible than to the probable. So in 1787, referring to what he hoped was the imminent political emancipation of the

dissenters, Priestley declared: "We are, as it were, laying gunpowder, grain by grain, under the old building of error and superstition, which a single spark may hereafter inflame so as to produce an instantaneous explosion."¹⁴ Within the context of the shifting boundaries that characterize dissent over the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Priestley's figure imaginatively reverses the state's monopoly on violence. But the emphasis must remain on the word "imaginatively," for the possibilities of late eighteenth-century dissent remain subversive only when they remain figurative. Attempting to translate the figure into action undoes its suspended or rhetorical quality and inserts it into an arena of power where dissent is at a disadvantage. Indeed, pro-government forces quickly made just such a translation. In 1790 Priestley's gunpowder image made its way into a House of Commons debate on the repeal of the Test Acts. Burke, intent upon showing that the dissenters represented a danger to the country, referred to the image as "a serious indication on the part of Dr Priestley, at least, of a determination to proceed step by step till the whole of the church establishment was levelled to the foundations."¹⁵ By this time Priestley was being referred to in the establishment press as "Gunpowder Joe," and kegs of gunpowder began showing up regularly in the many political prints in which he appeared. Finally, in a popular tract that appeared in Birmingham in 1790 by a pseudonymous "John Nott," Priestley's figure was turned back against him:

16.

If you ben't melancholy mad, which I guess you must be, what makes you rave so much about gunpowder. You never wrote but you tell us church people, that you're laying it grain by grain under the churches and mean to blow 'em all up together very soon. ... Now, pritheee Mr Priestley, how would you like it yourself, if they were to send you word that they had laid trains of gunpowder under your house or meeting house?¹⁶

17.

What "John Nott" imagines here is that the literalization of a figure brings that figure under the control of state power. He deliberately misreads figurative language, professing to believe that Priestley's metaphor recommends a specific course of action.

18.

In the spirit of such deliberate misreading, the state forcefully reasserted its control over the course of events. On the evening of July 14, 1791, a "Church and King" mob gathered outside a Birmingham tavern where a number of local dissenters had just finished meeting. The group broke the windows of the tavern and then moved on to Birmingham's two dissenting chapels, which they forcibly entered and then burned to the ground. Then they headed toward Priestley's house, a mile away. Forewarned, Priestley and his wife Mary fled to a friend's house; when the mob arrived, they set fire to his house and library and destroyed his scientific lab. Over the following two days, operating with a remarkable degree of efficiency and coordination, they

destroyed another dissenting chapel and the homes of six other prominent dissenters. A regiment of government dragoons finally arrived in the evening of July 17, and order was restored.

19.

In these riots, the state retains its monopoly on violence by refusing to recognize figurative language as figurative. It takes such language literally, deliberately canceling the very space in which figurative language exists. So understood, the possibility of dissent depends upon a conception of writing as a space in which the consequences of ideas and phrases will not come to pass. As Priestley uses it, metaphor is the very condition of writing, for it holds off the real world by means of a verbal displacement: we are, as it were, laying gunpowder. To literalize that metaphor means canceling the space held open by the "as it were," accomplishing the end of writing by replacing it with an event. Unlike the theory of event offered for example by Alain Badiou, this event is highly structured and suspiciously well-organized.¹⁷

20.

Of the many political prints that depict these riots, William Dent's *The Treacherous Rebel and Birmingham Rioter* stands out for its originality. The print shows Priestley in a cart, perhaps being led to the guillotine, and tied to a maypole that bears the words "Church and State." He is being whipped from behind by a devil, while a large crowd watches. This crowd appears to be in a church pew, as if they are members of Priestley's congregation, and they are clearly enjoying the spectacle. The great Whig orator Charles James Fox, in the front row, declares "My name's bold Renard, six score miles i come / To see the devil flog the doctor's bum."¹⁸ Fox's presence here may seem surprising, since his opposition to Burke and his support of disestablishment usually linked him to Priestley in the public eye. Dent's print suggests in contrast that however republican his politics, Fox is a part of what Bourdieu refers to as "the field of power," the very field that Priestley's gunpowder figure had attacked. The print instructs its viewers that there are legitimate, sober, forms of dissent that deserve a hearing; and then there are wild and unmanageable forms of dissent that deserve to be punished in the most extreme manner.

21.

Thus if the riots themselves are a study in the literalization of figurative language, Dent's print responds to Priestley in a more elaborate manner, mimicking rather than simply rewriting Priestley's own apocalyptic hopes. In the print, Fox not only enjoys the literalization and consequent reversal of Priestley's metaphorical language; he also mimics and parodies the very metaphoricity of that language. As Jacques Derrida among others has noted, such mimicry is central to the way legitimate discourse controls figurative excess. Meditating on Kant's attempt to distinguish proper philosophy from the poetic speech of philosophical pretenders, Derrida writes that "Kant does not find fault with true aristocrats, ... but only with those who ... take themselves for distinguished beings ... who elevate their voice, ... who raise the tone in

philosophy."¹⁹ Kant's disciplining of these "apocalyptic" thinkers, Derrida goes on, takes the form of mimicry, of imitating the high style of the apocalyptic tone in order to reveal its pretension and expel it from the domain of sober discourse. The high style is not permissible because it is too literary, too poetic, too attracted to metaphor; its punishment or schooling by legitimate philosophy takes the form of castration or emasculation, what Derrida calls an "unmanning." In like manner, Dent's print unmans Priestley through the act of public flogging; its mimicry of Priestley's apocalyptic rhetoric both connects the excess of that rhetoric to sexual deviance and disciplines it, translating it from the realm of ungovernable possibility into a literal realm controlled by power and official speech. The state punishes dissent by canceling the space of its linguistic possibility, forcing it into an arena inevitably inflected by state power's ability to discipline, punish, and expel.

22.

Little surprise, then, that Dent's print was historically prophetic: after three years of a somewhat tenuous existence in London, Joseph and Mary Priestley emigrated to America. "The bigotry of the country in general," wrote Priestley in his Memoirs, "made it impossible for me to place my sons in it to any advantage. My own situation, if not hazardous, was become unpleasant, so that I thought my removal would be of more service to the cause of truth than my longer stay in England."²⁰ In ways that Dent anticipates, the available avenues of dissent had simply closed down. This is the end of a dissenting stance in which linguistic freedom is the condition of political freedom. Pursuing a thought similar to Priestley's, Ranciere argues that politics is the "power to put into circulation more words, 'useless' and unnecessary words, words that exceed the function of rigid designation." "This fundamental ability to proliferate words," he continues, "is unceasingly contested by those who claim to 'speak correctly' – that is, by the masters of designation and classification who, by virtue of wanting to retain their status and power, flat-out deny this capacity to speak" ("Dissenting Words" 115). For the dissenters of late eighteenth-century England, with few civil protections, the crucial prerequisite for political effectiveness is this excess of words, cast here as metaphor, a barely-glimpsed alternative to present realities, an "as it were" that marks the space of writing and reading and the articulation of possibility.

23.

When that space disappears, dissent as such ceases to exist. In Priestley's case, this means that dissent has nowhere to go but across the ocean, to America, the land of new opportunity. Among the number of emigration schemes afoot during this period, the most important were those of Priestley's friend and disciple Thomas Cooper, who recommended Pennsylvania, and of Gilbert Imlay, Mary Wollstonecraft's American lover, who recommended Kentucky. The possibility of emigrating was entertained and discussed among the radical and dissenting circles of Bristol, Birmingham, London and Paris. In this network of friends and correspondents, almost

everyone knew someone who had left for America. Cooper, whose land speculation along the Susquehanna made Priestley's emigration possible, had been in Paris in 1792 and '93 along with Priestley's son William, as part of a set that included Wollstonecraft, Imlay, and Jacques-Pierre Brissot, the Girondin leader. Priestley's account in the *Memoirs* suggest this general context of middle-class enlightened radicalism:

At the time of my leaving for England, my son, in conjunction with Mr. Cooper and other emigrants, had a scheme for a large settlement for the friends of liberty in general, near the head of the Susquehanna, in Pennsylvania. ... We hope, after some time, to be joined by a few of our friends from England...(133).

24.

To be a "friend of liberty" in 1794 can have only one meaning. Yet what I want to emphasize here is that however republican or radical in orientation, these utopian emigration schemes implicitly accept the world of violent literalization created by events such as the Priestley riots. Both "John Nott" and the emigrating dissenters, that is, cross out the metaphorical space of the "as it were" in favor of its literalization. Appropriately, Derrida notes the longstanding connection between apocalyptic rhetoric and eschatological desire; despite appearances, he suggests, apocalyptic discourse is committed to a conservative unveiling of the truth that actually seeks to shut down linguistic proliferation (59). E.P. Thompson's delineation of romantic apostasy likewise takes it for granted that literalization is the natural destiny of all language: "How far, " he asks, "is it possible for men to hold on to aspirations long after there appears to be no hope of inserting them into 'the real world which the world of all of us'?" (65). As if in answer to this rather plaintive query, Priestley's own dedication to what he calls "the cause of truth" demands that he remove himself to distant shores, and his own favorite metaphors of burning comet and refiner's fire find their literal, eschatological home in the "real world" across the ocean.

25.

The endgame of Priestley's dissent therefore involves a double loss. For if its metaphorical space of possibility cannot be sustained within the structures of state power in 1790s England, dissent's eventual terminus in America likewise means closing down a space in which history might be imagined differently. Abandoning the literary space of metaphor, dissent in America seeks to insert its aspirations into the real world. In this regard it is not the opposite of romantic apostasy but its double, for it plays by the same logic: if apostasy exchanges dream for reality, so too do the emigrating dissenters. "Real world" dissent, that is to say, gives up its commitment to the circulation of words, falling back on what Ranciere calls the symptomatic reading of "critique."

26.

Is it possible, however, to retain the commitment to realization and stand away from it at the same time, to be apocalyptic without an apocalypse, to

be always coming to America without ever quite arriving? At the end of his "Apocalyptic Tone" essay Derrida meditates on this possibility, analyzing the word "come" as an open-ended call that exceeds the place to which it beckons the listener; he wonders whether that excess marks the possibility of an apocalypse cut free from eschatology – cut free, that is, from the realization toward which it nevertheless gestures: "an apocalypse without apocalypse, an apocalypse without vision, without truth, without revelation, ... addresses without message and without destination, without sender or decidable addressee, without last judgment, without any other eschatology than the tone of the "Come...." (66). This "apocalypse without apocalypse" could serve as another gloss on the literary space of dissent I have describing, a space that resists the conservatism of apocalyptic discourse by deferring the closure it nevertheless desires. In this respect, Derrida's analysis of the *differance* of "come" nicely glosses a vision of an America to which one comes but never arrives, in which the excessive call of the place, not the place itself, becomes a ground upon which to stand. To grasp this vision of America, we need not Priestley's eschatological version of dissent but the version that stayed behind when he left: Pantisocracy.

Pantisocracy

27.

Two months after Priestley left London for the banks of the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania, the young Samuel Taylor Coleridge, unable to settle down at Cambridge and about to embark on a lengthy walking tour, met the radical poet Robert Southey in Oxford. Over several weeks they talked about Godwin and Rousseau and Priestley and eventually formed a utopian plan for which Coleridge coined the term "Pantisocracy," meaning an "all-governing society." Their friend Thomas Poole, a Bristol-area tanner of republican sympathies, gives this portrait of their planning in early September 1794:

Twelve gentleman of good education and liberal principles are to embark with twelve ladies in April next. ... Each man should labour two or three hours in a day, the produce of which labour would, they imagine, be more than sufficient to support the colony. ... The produce of their industry is to be laid up in common for the use of all, and a good library of books is to be collected, and their leisure hours to be spent in study, liberal discussion, and the education of their children.²¹

28.

The plan was to settle near Priestley on the banks of the Susquehanna. Of course there is something wildly impractical about the whole idea, as Poole himself realized. At any rate, and for many reasons -- finances, impending marriages, and growing differences between Southey and Coleridge -- Pantisocracy was doomed. By the summer of 1795 Coleridge knew it, and by

that fall he was married, contemplating a career as a lecturer and journalist in Bristol, and writing poetry more seriously.

29.

It is easy to interpret Pantisocracy as escapism. It can also be interpreted as the very opposite of escapism, namely an attempt to realize in a practical sense the political and social dreams of the dissenters.²² As I suggested above, however, these are really two versions of the same analytic move, since both depend on exchanging the figurative for the real. We can get closer to the dissenting core of Pantisocracy by dwelling on the eschatological threat encoded in its flight toward the literal. The very literalness of Pantisocracy -- the chance that *it might really happen* -- in fact accounts for Coleridge's hesitancy regarding the scheme, and his consequent invention of a Pantisocracy that was more talk than action. In his biography of Coleridge, Richard Holmes notes that "there was always an element of humorous fantasy in Coleridge's Pantisocracy which quite escaped Southey's earnestness."²³ Coleridge's letters to Southey during this period bear Holmes out: they are full of puns and word-play, and they take obvious joy in verbal inventiveness. "Pantisocracy" was his own coinage, as was the less mellifluous "aspheterism" (meaning common property). To Southey's frustration, Coleridge seems to have enjoyed talking about Pantisocracy, and talking around it, more than actually planning for it: Holmes details one instance in early 1795 in which Southey, determined to start making plans, demanded that Coleridge return from London to Bath; Coleridge meanwhile was absorbing London's radical culture, visiting Godwin and Charles Lamb, writing poetry and letters like mad. He nevertheless promised to return, but when, predictably, he failed to appear, Southey eventually had to track him down in London four days later; "Coleridge was discovering his genius for prevarication," notes Holmes wryly (85).

30.

Even more resonantly, Coleridge connected Pantisocracy more to talk than to action when he wrote to Southey in July of 1794 that "I preached Pantisocracy and Aspheterism with so much success that two great huge Fellows, of Butcher like appearance, danced about the room in enthusiastic agitations."²⁴ The sense of Pantisocracy as a rhetorical exercise with radical possibilities, so clearly on display here, needs to be placed in the context of dissenting emigration, and the manner in which the necessity for emigration arose because rhetorical suspension and experimentation (Priestley's "we are, as it were...") no longer existed in England. Emigrating is not so much an escape as it is a literalization of a rhetorical possibility, and this is why it appealed so strongly but so contradictorily to Coleridge. On the one hand, it seemed to offer the chance to bring into being something that could only be imagined in England; on the other, only by *not* realizing it could dissent maintain its commitment to the open space provided by figurative language. After describing the "two great huge Fellows" who danced to his speech, Coleridge concludes with a vagueness characteristic of his unwillingness to nail things

down: "Southey! Such men may be of use" (88). The dissenting quality of Pantisocracy hinges on that "may." Like Priestley's "as it were," Coleridge's "may" sketches a radical possibility implicitly linked to revolutionary violence, brought into being through the sheer, excessive power of words. But it also works to maintain a theoretical space of possibility rather than offering prescription for definitive, probable, action. To preach Pantisocracy until the audience dances is decidedly different from getting on a boat and sailing to America.

Pantisocracy as metaromanticism

31.

The narrative of romantic apostasy, linked as it is to a symptomatic method of reading, no longer seems quite as compelling as it did a few decades ago. Yet that narrative, and its cognates, nonetheless continues to encapsulate a desire for political effectiveness that still exerts influence within the academic Left. In some respects symptomatic reading simply reduces to an accusation of inactivity or complaisance: when what we needed was action, the targets (romantic poets, theoretically-inclined professors of the humanities) were content to sit around -- and worse, to invent justifications for just sitting around. Our most familiar version of this desire is the oft-remarked distinction between "theory" and "practice" -- a distinction usually invoked in order to celebrate the latter at the expense of the former.²⁵ As David Simpson noted some years ago, theory, once upon a time associated with radical politics, has become "itself the target of radical critique."²⁶

32.

A bit more recently, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's book *Empire* (2000) was quite clear on this point: "No ... blueprint for action will ever arise from a theoretical articulation such as ours," they declare of their effort to describe a possible post-nationalist political order. "It will arise only in practice," they continue, in the "new figures of struggle and new subjectivities that ... express, nourish, and develop positively their own constituent projects."²⁷ *Empire's* crossover success in the United States was in some measure due to this practical orientation; it gave voice simultaneously to a certain desire for action and to a suspicion directed against aesthetic and representative activity that remains in the realm of "theory."

33.

Romantic apostasy has served as a paradigmatic instance of the supposedly disabling consequences of "theory," and it has for that reason licensed a certain methodological suspicion of literary language or of the aesthetic more generally. In contrast, I have described Pantisocracy as a movement whose dissenting quality hinges on its prevarication, a hesitation itself performed and understood as literary. This entails reading Pantisocracy non-symptomatically. Or, what amounts to the same thing, to insisting that

Pantisocracy, and the larger movement of romanticism it spurs, is not adequately described in terms of a theory/practice binary.

34.

Consider what Bruce Robbins (not necessarily friendly toward romanticism) has provocatively termed the "sweatshop sublime." "Defending the significance to society at large of work performed in the domain of the aesthetic," Robbins notes that work carried out within that domain is frequently characterized by "inaction, or hesitation when action seems called for." And yet, he notes, such "hesitation" is an accurate reflection of the messy circumstances that moralistic calls to activism like the anti-sweatshop movement tend to flatten out. The "sweatshop sublime," in other words, is how Robbins formulates his desire to escape the binaries of "politics and aesthetics, scholarship and commitment, that have become irritatingly familiar of late to progressives working in and around the humanities."²⁸ Of particular interest here is that Robbins turns for his descriptive language to the Kantian sublime, although he leaves the possible romantic implications of this move largely unremarked.

35.

Meanwhile, a number of recent books situated centrally within romantic studies evince a dissatisfaction similar to Robbins's. Paul Hamilton's *Metaromanticism*, for example, seeks to rescue romanticism's progressive spirit from accusations of apostasy and bad faith by analyzing a habit of generalizing discursive practices that he finds to be characteristic of romantic texts. According to one romantic argument, as put forth for instance by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, literature simply *is* theory – though in a more responsive and bewitching key.²⁹ But in an important departure from Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, Hamilton makes metaromanticism restless; unsatisfied and incomplete, romantic writing is always, for Hamilton, fashioning departures from itself. Importantly for my argument here, those departures are attempts to imagine and to articulate a multicultural, republican future that cannot yet come into being. At its best, metaromantic writing does not long wistfully for better days but rather sketches, in Hamilton's words, "the currently hypothetical state in which the better life is logically obliged to exist, for the moment" (13). Thus metaromanticism begins with the aesthetic, but it doesn't end there. More particularly, the literary space of metaromanticism -- "The area where we make ourselves up," Hamilton calls it (173) -- does justice both to theory and to the possibility of departing from theory toward something else.

36.

Hamilton's *Metaromanticism* joins several recent studies of romantic literature in a measured defense of aesthetic work. James Chandler's *England in 1819* argues for the exceptional "case" as an instance of romantic writer's anticipation of their own later historical transvaluation; William Galperin's *The Historical Austen* sets the probability of realistic fiction and Austen's mastery of it against the pervasive sense of possibility that her earliest readers found so

compelling; Jerome Christensen's *Romanticism at the End of History* argues that the persistent presence of historical anachronism in romantic-era writing becomes "the herald of the future as yet unknown" (3). Together, these studies focus our attention not on "things as they are" (the original title of William Godwin's 1794 novel *Caleb Williams*) but rather on "things as they might be": "an interval," in Galperin's words, "when other prospects were abroad" (215), or what Christensen calls romanticism's "openness to unforeseen consequences" (2). I don't mean to flatten the differences among Galperin, Hamilton, Chandler, and Christensen, for these books assemble different histories of romanticism and reach different conclusions about the possibilities of oppositional writing. What they share, however, is an orientation toward their material, and an aspiration for that material, that brings them close to Robbins's desire to defend aesthetic work even or perhaps especially when that work leads to Coleridgean hesitation rather than to action.

37.

This analysis of romantic writing should help to undo the populist power of the theory / practice binary in which books like *Empire* trade. Indeed, a closer analysis of romanticism might have considerably complicated Hardt and Negri's analysis. For if, in the form of symptomatic reading, the theory / practice binary has tended to structure recent debates within the academic left, it also structured political discourse in England in the 1790s. David Simpson's study of what he calls the "revolt against theory" during the romantic age observes that commentators on both left and right agreed that the French Revolution was a product of "ideas." The conservative reaction to the Revolution in England thus took the form of defending English common sense against the incursions of radical French theory. Burke's *Reflections* returns to this theme again and again: the French may have built a new government in theory, but the English have been building one in practice from Magna Carta onward. As Burke's example particularly demonstrates, an anti-theoretical posture was central to the creation of nationalist discourse. The elevation of practice over theory in the Anglo-American world, in other words, has its own specific, and specifically romantic, history. One might hazard, then, that Hardt and Negri's rather dismissive analysis of romanticism has the ironic result of turning their anti-theoretical posture into an example of the very nationalism whose demise they take themselves to be narrating. What they fail to see, in other words, is the degree to which their own brief against theory has been historically determined by an earlier revolutionary moment coded as theoretical.

38.

The way out of this irony is to acknowledge that if the romantic era witnesses the powerful fusion of "practice" with nationalism, it also witnesses, in such metaromantic forms of dissent as Pantisocracy, a crucial complication of that process. In particular, Pantisocracy complicates the nationalist picture because its very mode is to hesitantly distance itself from one nation without ever quite embracing another. Within the context of a resurgent nationalism

whose ideological reference points were practicality and common sense, revolutionary theory could not cross the English channel wholesale but rather took hold indirectly, and what remains most enduringly radical about such transformations is their metaromantic literariness -- their ability to reflexively generalize particular modes of representation in order to make them available for reactivation at other times and in other climates. Hamilton writes of the aesthetic as "the currently hypothetical state in which the better life is logically obliged to exist, for the moment" (13). When we add that this hypothetical state is marked by restlessness, so that it is always fashioning departures from itself, it is hard to imagine a better definition of Pantisocracy. This formulation allows us to revalue the hesitation built in to Pantisocracy: the desire to depart for America but never arrive there -- "addresses without message and without destination," Derrida calls it -- becomes not a mark of bad faith but an extraordinarily nuanced response to the actual historical situation.

"Similes forever"

39.

The conservative revolt against theory in the 1790s aimed to preserve the English "national character" - literal, commonsensical, practical - from Continental influences. Simpson shows how the 1980s-era theory was ritually reenacted this gesture of purification. As Derrida's analysis of the apocalyptic tone suggests, however, this conservative gesture, though sometimes performed in order to defend "literature" from "theory," ironically expels the literary (understood metaromantically as a site of reflexivity, heightened self-awareness, and possibility). Equally ironically, when theory becomes an object of radical critique the gesture gets repeated from the left. If Dent and the Church and King mob represent the conservative revolt against theory, the emigrating dissenters themselves, waiting expectantly in Pennsylvania for other "friends of liberty," represent the radical revolt against theory. From this perspective, a Pantisocracy that never arrives in America and so remains merely "theoretical" becomes a metaromantic revolt against the "revolt against theory," a revolt moreover that can be sustained only through the practices -- of figure, prevarication, and reflexive generalization -- that I have been describing as literary.

40.

At this point Hardt and Negri's analysis becomes helpful as a way to imagine the dissenting content of Pantisocracy. For if the revolt against theory that they stage in *Empire* suggests the presence of a certain residual and unanalyzed romantic nationalism, one strength of that romanticism is that it yields a metaromantic vision of America that slots nicely into the visions of America afoot among the very pantisocrats and dissenters who in the 1790s were experiencing the oppressive results of England's revolt against theory. In other words, we can coordinate Hardt and Negri's America with the pantisocrat's

America, for both are ideals that resist the conservative and the radical revolts against theory.

41.

What is metamorphic, then, about the vision of America that Hardt and Negri share with Pantisocracy? Consider one of Coleridge's Pantisocracy poems of 1794:

No more my Visionary Soul shall dwell
On Joys that were! No more endure to weigh
The Shame and Anguish of the evil Day,
Wisely forgetful! O'er the Ocean swell
Sublime of Hope I seek the cottag'd Dell,
Where Virtue calm with careless step may stray,
And dancing to the moonlight Roundelay
The Wizard Passions weave an holy Spell.
Eyes that have ach'd with Sorrow! Ye shall weep
Tears of doubt-mingled Joy, like theirs who start
From Precipices of distemper'd Sleep,
On which the fierce-eyed Fiends their Revels keep,
And see the rising Sun, and feel it dart
New Rays of Pleasance trembling to the Heart.³⁰

42.

It is not accidental that America is figured here as a place in which the passions can dance and in which a "careless step may stray" without fear of reprisal, for the chance to stray could be described as the very condition of America as this poem envisions it. We can grasp the political import of this figuring of space by referring to the distinction that Hardt and Negri make between the "modern sovereignty" of the European states and the "imperial sovereignty" of America. Modern sovereignty, they argue, attempts to resolve the struggle between desire and order by appealing to the concept of the nation-state in which the maintenance of borders is a central administrative task; thus the ideas of boundedness and limitation become, from a political perspective, central to the experience of modernity. American imperial sovereignty, by contrast, depends upon open borders and the possibility of endless expansion. Its power is renewed not by imposition from above but internally through the conquest and appropriation of the frontier. Though Hardt and Negri are ultimately critical of the direction that America's imperial sovereignty took, they pause along the way to describe, in lyrical tones, the early years of the American experiment. "Liberty and the frontier stand in a relationship of reciprocal implication," they write. "Every difficulty, every limit of liberty is an obstacle to overcome, a threshold to pass through. From the Atlantic to the Pacific extended a terrain of wealth and freedom, constantly open to new lines of flight" (169). In such lyricism we glimpse the America that attracted the

dissenters. A territory that is always open is a territory that can be remade by the desires of the multitude; its defining feature is not history but nature, and nature can be transformed. No wonder Coleridge feels such relief when he imagines an America in which he can stray without fear.

43.

Importantly, though, this imagination of America is just that -- a fantasy of possibility rooted not in the realities of the new world (where movement is of course constrained in various ways) but in the realities of the old world. This becomes clear in one of the 1794 letters to Southey in which Coleridge describes why he has coined the term "asphesterized" and along the way links the Pantisocratic project itself to the possibilities of unconstrained physical movement: "When the pure System of Pantocracy [sic] shall have aspheterized the Bounties of Nature, these things will not be so! I trust, you admire the word 'asphesterized' ... we really wanted such a word -- instead of traveling along the circuitous dusty, beaten high-Road of Diction you thus cut across the soft, green pathless Field of Novelty! -- Similies forever! Hurra!"³¹ Adopting Hamilton's terminology, we can say that at this moment Pantisocracy is not so much romantic as it is metaromantic, for it not only puns on political freedom and poetic freedom through the link between straying steps and straying feet, it actually proposes that such literary activity as the coining of new words can, sufficiently generalized, yield the political activity of coining new subjectivities and new economies of distribution. An America in which a "careless step may stray" is an aspheterized America, in which nature's bounties are somehow free gifts. This is not possible under modern sovereignty, based as it is upon boundedness, limitation, and scarcity, but only under what Hardt and Negri call imperial sovereignty: post-nationalist, post-historical, borderless. And yet the image of its originality -- leaving the road to cut across the field -- actually takes its reference from the bounded system of land management in the old world. Here literariness, in the form of Coleridge's wordplay, verbal inventiveness, and linguistic self-consciousness, only seems possible within the context of a departure from England that never actually arrives in America.

44.

So we do not have to squint too hard to see in Coleridge's image of America, and in the pantisocratic and dissenting construal of the new world, a de-territorializing impulse that strikes a chord with Hardt and Negri's analysis. This is of course more an imagined America than a real one, just as Pantisocracy is more the fantasy of a new order of things rather than a blueprint for how to bring that new order into being. But new subjectivities are nourished, however briefly, by that fantasy; the invitation they extend remains open, and may be answered at some other place and in some other time. Ranciere speaks, analogously, of "all those who set out on the voyage of words never to return."³² If Pantisocracy is permanently filed under "unfinished business," then, this very lack of closure makes it something of a choose-your-own-adventure

story, and invites what Christensen calls anachronism, a resistance to normal change in the name of "unrecognized possibility."³³

The Voyage of Words (two anachronistic endings)
1. Northumberland, Pennsylvania: June 10, 2003

45.

Reading America as a space perpetually open to new lines of flight, as a proleptic anticipation of the post-national nourishment of new subjectivities, seems rather too utopian for an emigration scheme that ended in disappointment and a literary movement that ended perhaps equally badly. In the 1790s America may have seemed a site of production for new subjectivities and new economies. But history does not disappear so easily. This is something Coleridge perhaps understood already in his 1794 sonnet, whose most obvious feature is the very precariousness of its achievement. The sonnet's description of England as a bad dream from which one awakens seems secure enough, and yet the very fact that sleep returns nightly poses a problem for the linear narrative that typically orders emigration schemes. The morning light that stands for America is both "doubt-mingled" and "trembling," again suggesting that old models of sovereignty are a dream from which the speaker must be continually shaken awake. By the time we arrive at the sonnet's close, the speaker's claim that he can "wisely forget" the past seems like wishful thinking: the past may be officially forgotten, but it returns to haunt the unconscious. Like the devil who drives Priestley out of England in Dent's satiric print, the fiends of British sovereignty, particularly those unleashed in the aftermath of the French Revolution, continued to shadow dissenters on both sides of the Atlantic.

Like most dreams, Priestley's dream of an enlightened community for the friends of liberty ended in disappointment, buried in the Pennsylvania wilderness. By the time he finally moved into his newly-constructed house, his wife was dead and he himself was ailing. It took six days to reach Philadelphia from Northumberland, and though Priestley knew and corresponded with Washington, Jefferson, and Adams, he never had the influence or standing among them that he anticipated. Ben Franklin, an early supporter, died before Priestley ever reached America. Priestley continued to resist invitations to join the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania, for he seemed to think that isolated Northumberland would come into its own. But the college he hoped to found never materialized; in 1806, two years after Priestley died, Harrisburg rather than Northumberland was made the capital of Pennsylvania; by 1811 Joseph Priestley Jr., who had invested heavily in land around Northumberland, gave up and returned to England, selling off most of his father's library and his scientific instruments. The chance to help shape the subjectivity of a new, post-colonial nation -- a final act of dissent from the old nation that Priestley had left -- seemed to evaporate too.

46.

If, as Priestley once did, you turn your back on New York City and head west across northern New Jersey and into Pennsylvania, you experience within a few hours a microcosm of contemporary America. You travel from floodplain to woodland, from urban to rural, from blue counties to red counties. When you leave Route 80 to follow the Susquehanna River south, the signs that read "Support our Troops" suggest the power of a new and specifically American model of Empire. Northumberland lies where the North and West branches of the Susquehanna meet, and at the edge of it, looking out over the slow-moving water, sits Joseph Priestley's American home.

47.

Despite the radical changes wrought in this landscape over the past 200 years, I like to think that Priestley would have recognized it: the Little League diamond and the old railroad track that now separate his house from the river, the trailer parks and fast food joints at the edge of town, the tour guide who tells me that four visitors count as a busy day. 200 years later Northumberland remains a slightly shabby place a long way from the action, and Priestley's house a little-visited stop on Pennsylvania's "Trail of History." Nostalgia seems almost required here: it is hard not to think that things could have been different, though imagining that difference takes greater effort. Yet nostalgia is the privilege of romanticism, and because one is standing in America, one strives for another emotion, something more literal and pragmatic. Pantisocracy never made it to Northumberland the first time around; were it to show up now, we would probably send it back where it came from.

2. "...with careless step may stray"

48.

There is little point in fetishizing dissent's brief flourishing; it was never fully autonomous, its stances always determined beforehand by state power. Pantisocracy's constitutive inability to adjust to the facts on the ground, meanwhile, mark it as a necessarily temporary discursive space. This need not mean, though, that dissent disappears when a particular player leaves the game, changes his mind, or switches teams. What dissent left behind when Priestley left for America was the sense of possibility located in a phrase like "as it were": the sense of untapped potential for which the literary remains our dominant form of expression.

49.

Recall, then, the 1794 letter to Southey in which Coleridge describes his coinage of "aspheterized": "we really wanted such a word -- instead of traveling along the circuitous dusty, beaten high-Road of Diction you thus cut across the soft, green pathless Field of Novelty! -- Similies forever! Hurra!" Three years later, with Pantisocracy behind him and the *Lyrical Ballads* before him, Coleridge walked to see William and Dorothy Wordsworth where they were

living in a cottage at Racedown. Many years after that William's wife Mary, taking dictation from William himself, gave this account of Coleridge's arrival in a letter to Coleridge's daughter Sara:

50.

"Your father," William says, "came afterward to see us at Racedown, where I was then living with my sister. We both have a distinct remembrance of his arrival. He did not keep to the high road, but leaped over a gate and bounded down a pathless field, by which he cut off an angle. We both retain the liveliest possible image of his appearance at that moment."³⁴

51.

If in the first instance similes are the means for leaving the high road, in the second Coleridge himself leaps the gate, apparently embodying his own theory of figurative language: within the bounded English countryside he becomes his own image of an America in which a "careless step may stray." This, perhaps, is what aspheterism came to. Not utopian socialism in Pennsylvania, not even a steady commitment to radical causes within England, but to further meetings, further figures and, eventually, to a volume of poems named *Lyrical Ballads*, a self-declared "experiment" with poetic diction and poetic subjects, in which feet stray even within the well-defined boundaries of British national culture. Of course this is not a literal Pantisocratic community, but it is not nothing, either.

52.

In his 1794 sonnet about Pantisocracy, Coleridge figures new life across the ocean as a sort of magic, a "holy spell" woven by "Wizard Passions." This is celebratory but ambivalent language, as if even in the midst of his idealization of America Coleridge understood that the choice was not between bondage and freedom but between one kind of powerful myth and another. Positioned between the "Fiends" of the old model and the "Wizards" of the new, Coleridge remained in the liminal place of dissent as long as his words held out - - which, as it turned out, was not that long. If we are to read this as a strategy of dissent, it will come in the form of a poetics: the memory of what might have been, the future that might have arrived, must be read in the figures that remain. "The past can be seized only as an image," writes Walter Benjamin, "which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again." And he goes on: "For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably."³⁵ How to recognize the image of Pantisocracy? Feet stray, and a man with flashing eyes and disheveled hair leaps a fence and runs across the field. "We both," say the aging poet and his aging sister, "retain the liveliest possible image of his appearance at that moment." The image outlasts even life itself.

Colin Jager is Assistant Professor of English at Rutgers University, where he specializes in romanticism. He is the author of *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Recent essays have appeared in *Modern Language Quarterly* and *Public Culture*.

NOTES

1 Davide Panagia, "Dissenting Words: A Conversation with Jacques Ranciere" *diacritics* 30.2 (2000), pgs. 113-26; 114.

2 See Jacques Ranciere, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, trans. Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1994), esp. "The Excess of Words," pp. 24-41.

3 Among the most notable: Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background, 1760-1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, revolutionaries and pornographers in London, 1785-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and E.P. Thompson's various writings on romanticism, collected posthumously as *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age* (New York: the New Press, 1997).

4 E.P. Thompson, "Disenchantment or Default? A Lay Sermon," *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age*, pp. 33-74, p. 36.

5 James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) xviii. Chandler's basic approach is congruent with other major books of the 1980s that together made up the first phase of new historicism in romantic studies: Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), and Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), esp. 407-452 on the question of apostasy.

6 William Hazlitt, "Illustrations of the Times Newspaper: On Modern Apostates," orig. pub. in *The Examiner*, December 15, 1816. In *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt in Twenty-One Volumes*, ed. P. P. Howe (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1932), vol. 7, p. 135.

7 Jerome Christensen, "'Like a Guilty Thing Surprised': Coleridge, Deconstruction, and the Apostasy of Criticism," *Coleridge's Biographia Literaria: Text and Meaning*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989), 171-190, p. 175.

8 Charles Mahoney, *Romantics and Renegades: The Poetics of Political Reaction* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 4, 2. See especially Mahoney's reading of Coleridge, pp. 33-79.

9 Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 105. Understanding dissent as a stance (or set of stances) within the overlapping fields that make up state power suggests how it might be structurally given to the pursuit of strategies simultaneously conciliatory and radical. Comparing the concept of field to a poker game, Bourdieu remarks on this variety: "players can play to increase or conserve their capital... in conformity with the tacit rules of the game...; but they can also get into it to transform, partially or completely, the immanent rules of the game" (99).

10 Priestley's dedication to Lindsey, in *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity, in Two Volumes* (London: J. Johnson, 1792) v-vi.

11 Priestley, *Philosophical Empiricism*, qtd. in F. W. Gibbs, *Joseph Priestley: Adventurer in Science and Champion of Truth* (London: Nelson, 1965) p. 96.

12 The Feathers Tavern petition, signed by over 200 Cambridge divines, would have repealed the 39 Articles. It was defeated in Commons by a vote of 217 to 71.

13 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 11, 13.

14 Priestley's appendix to *The Importance and Extent of Free Inquiry in Matters of Religion*, in *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works, & c., of Joseph Priestley, L.L.D., F.R.S. & c. with Notes, by the Editor*, ed. J. T. Rutt (London, 1818; New York: Krause, 1972) vol. 18, p. 544.

15 *Parliamentary History*, 2 March 1790; quoted in Maurice Crosland, "The Image of Science as a Threat: Burke versus Priestley and the 'Philosophic Revolution'," *British Journal for the History of Science* 20 (1987) 286.

16 John Nott, *Very Familiar Letters Addressed to Dr Priestley*, (Birmingham, 1790) p. 13. Quoted in Maurice Crosland, "The Image of Science as a Threat," 287.

17 There was much contemporary speculation that the entire affair was a government plot, from "John Nott's" incendiary language to the leisurely deployment of the dragoons—and there is some circumstantial support for this possibility. For Badiou, see *Being and Event* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005).

18 Indeed, Fox is shown conspiring with Priestley, Price, and Sheridan in numerous prints during this same period. On the allusion to flagellation in the context of 1790s radicalism, see Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, "The Affective Revolution in 1790s Britain," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34.4 (2001) 491-521.

19 Jacques Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy," trans. John P. Leavy, Jr., in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) 25-71; 34.

20 *Autobiography of Joseph Priestley; Memoirs written by Himself*, ed. Jack Lindsay (Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1970) 132. Orig. pub. 1806.

21 Thomas Poole and his Friends (2 vols., 1888); reprinted in S. T. Coleridge: *Interviews and Recollections*, ed. Seamus Perry (New York: Palgrave, 2000), p. 33.

22 For the latter, see Kenneth R. Johnston, "The Political Sciences of Life: From American Pantisocracy to British Romanticism," *Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Sciences of Life*, ed. Nicholas Roe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 47-68. See also Nigel Leask, *The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge's Thought* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988) 38, and Leask's discussion of "retirement," p. 13.

23 Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions, 1772-1804* (New York: Pantheon, 1989) p. 64.

24 *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols., (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956-71); Coleridge to Southey, 13 July 1794, Volume 1, p. 88

25 See, for example, Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London and New York: Verso, 1992), and its critique of what Ahmad calls "a new mystique of leftist professionalism" (1). See also Wendy Brown's defense of "theory" in *Politics out of History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), esp. 41. For a different set of issues, see Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, "Against Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 8.4 (1982): 723-742.

26 David Simpson, *Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt Against Theory* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993) 13.

27 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000) 206, 61.

28 Bruce Robbins, "The Sweatshop Sublime," *PMLA* 117.1 (2002): 84-97, 86, 89, 85.

29 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (New York: SUNY Press, 1988).

30 *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (London: Penguin, 1997) 57-8. Coleridge included this sonnet in a letter to Southey dated 18 September 1794. It remained unpublished until 1852, and Coleridge's authorship has been questioned. See Keach 448.

31 Coleridge to Southey, 13 July, 1794; Letters, Vol.1, pg. 84.

32 Jacques Ranciere, *Short Voyages to the Land of the People*, trans. James B. Swenson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 5.

33 *Romanticism* 11. See Ranciere's very similar comments on anachronism: "It is imperative to revoke the authoritative principle derived from the succession of historical events. ... To conceptualize the 'contemporaneity' of thought requires the reliance on a certain anachronism or untimeliness," "Dissenting Words" 121. For an example of such untimeliness, see Paul Muldoon's book-length poem *Madoc: A Mystery* (New York: Noonday, 1991), which imagines what would have happened had the pantisocrats actually come to America.

34 Mary Wordsworth to Sara Coleridge, November 7, 1845. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth; The Later Years, Volume 3, 1841-50*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939) p. 1263.

35 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 255.

Copyright © 2007, Colin Jager and The Johns Hopkins University Press