THE PICKERING MASTERS

SELECTED POLITICAL WRITINGS OF
JOHN THELWALL
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INTRODUCTION: THE MANY LIVES OF JOHN THELWALL

I. Thelwall’s Lives

In the autumn of 1795, John Thelwall almost killed the King. On 29 October, the opening day of the British parliament, crowds had gathered to witness the royal procession as it made its way through St James’s Park and down Parliament Street to the House of Lords. George III’s state coach was met with shouts protesting the policies of William Pitt’s Tory government, the ongoing war with France and the hugely inflated price of bread. Suddenly, as the coach drew out of the gates of the Park, at the end of Great George Street, a missile – likely a stone or a marble but thought by many (including George himself) to be a bullet – shot through the carriage window. The report that this was an attempted assassination gained further currency when later that day the carriage, this time sans monarch, was nearly smashed to pieces by another violent mob.1

It may be that the government had been awaiting such an event. An outburst of violence from the people justified the introduction of the ‘Two Acts’ or what came to be known as the ‘Gagging Acts,’ two pieces of draconian legislation – The Treasonable Practices Act and Seditious Meetings Bill – intended to vanquish the reform movement by restricting political meetings out of existence and conceptualizing treason as a thought crime.2 But what was the root cause of these extreme measures, perceived at the time to be a flagrant violation of the history of British liberty traceable back to the Magna Carta, and has since seemed to be an embarrassing constitutional aberration (at least until the first years of the twenty-first century)?

For historians now, this question cannot be adequately answered without attention to the broader context that frames the events of 29 October 1795 and the subsequent state response: to the seismic force still being felt from the French Revolution and the ‘Jacobin’ reform movement it then inspired in Britain. Yet for many in the 1790s, the answer was far simpler. The chief architect of the failed assassination and chief victim of the proposed legislation was one person: John Thelwall. For the loyalist newspaper the True Briton it was plain that
'the authors of every outrage committed by the mob' were 'constant frequenters of Mr. THELWALL'S Lectures'. After all, only three days earlier Thelwall had addressed an enormous crowd of, by all accounts, between one- and three-hundred thousand people at Copenhagen Fields. There, it was rumoured, pamphlets had been distributed that called openly for regicide. When the legislation was debated in Parliament, Thelwall's name was mentioned directly and he regarded himself as the target of it. It seems that at this time he was the most dangerous person in the country.

But late 1795 is just one of a number of flashpoints in an extraordinarily polymathic career. Indeed, Thelwall's life (1764–1834) – or perhaps 'lives' – reads like a series of thrilling narratives and the events recorded in his autobiographical writing, his poetry and his journalism are so remarkable and often so tempestuous that he seems the hero-narrator of, at different times, an eighteenth-century novel of sensibility, a work of nineteenth-century social realism or even a twentieth-century espionage film.

As a youth, Thelwall had been drawn to the lure of the arts but familial obligation and financial difficulty forced him into the daily grind of the workaday world. A succession of apprenticeships was ended when, as a legal clerk, he was sent to serve a warrant at the house of an honest but debt-ridden family, an event he later claimed was the catalyst to his taking up the cause of political reform. Although burdened with asthma and a speech impediment, he became renowned as a public orator, captivating audiences at mass outdoor meetings with a vivid rhetorical style, memorably described by William Hazlitt as that of 'a volcano vomiting out lava'.

As one of the most visible and voluble opponents of government, he became a target of Pitt's Tory administration, which did everything in its power to make his life miserable – something they succeeded in doing, even if they failed in their apparent quest to end it. In 1794 Thelwall was charged with high treason and dragged off to jail to spend arduous months of imprisonment in the Tower and at Newgate, his home was ransacked and his books and personal effects confiscated. After fighting a hard-won battle in court and press he was eventually acquitted by a jury of his peers. On the day of his release he was jubilantly carried through the streets of London as a hero of the people.

Still drawn to the call of political action, but continually pursued by loyalists and spies, he continued to lecture at his rooms in Beaufort Buildings, London. Although constrained by the government's newly implemented gagging laws, prohibiting political association, he refused to give up advocating democratic principles at his assemblies. Instead, he cleverly buttressed ostensibly politically neutral subjects like ancient history with lessons on republicanism. He also took to carrying a gun for protection.
Exhausted, harassed, and motivated by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's letters recounting the glorious 'simple life' he was then living at Nether Stowey in Somerset, Thelwall sought a more retired existence. Following a walking tour of the Southwest and Wales, farming, family and poetry in the Welsh countryside. However, three years of the simple life — with its droughts, suspicious neighbours, financial difficulties and finally the death of his beloved eldest daughter — became enough to drive him from his rural retreat back to urban life.

Largely in response to the distinctly anti-revolutionary public mood of the late 1790s, Thelwall refashioned himself yet again. The turn of the century marked the beginning of another phase of his life: in 1801, he stepped up to the public lectern as a self-described Professor of Elocution. He became an advocate for speech-impaired individuals, gave lectures on elocution and oratory and after 1808, opened the doors to his Institution for the Cure of Impediments of Speech, Instruction of Foreigners, Cultivation of Oratory, English Composition and Polite Literature, and the Preparation of Youth for the More Liberal Departments of Active Life. Never one to leave his politics far behind, however, he argued that through proper treatment, individuals previously written off as hopelessly non-functioning 'idiots' could become useful, active citizens.

Through all these episodes in Thelwall's life — if we can indulge the literary analogy just a little further — he appears to us as a Renaissance man, a polymath who was as comfortable trading poetry with such literary luminaries as Coleridge and Wordsworth as he was addressing the Physical Society at Guy's Hospital, London. He also has the air of the Romantic hero about him: much of his poetry reflects the personal tragedy and despair that mark portions of his life. He has much in common, too, with those working-class heroes of page, stage and screen — those figures who refuse to give up the good fight or to sacrifice principles in their struggles against arbitrary authority and public indifference. Perhaps above all, Thelwall appears as the model of the self-made hero: largely self-educated, he spent his career fashioning and re-fashioning himself. This, it must be emphasized, is not to say that he was politically inconsistent. Unlike most of the early supporters of the French Revolution who abandoned the cause of reform in the mid-1790s, he did not become politically disaffected, even in the face of intense government opposition and anti-revolutionary sentiment. Rather, he adapted to a tumultuous and hostile political climate in ways that allowed him to maintain not only an unwavering commitment to his political causes but to find increasingly subtle ways of keeping them always before the public eye.

Yet for all this, John Thelwall is today practically unknown.
II. Political Theorist

Indeed, to say that his legacy has been one marked by scholarly neglect would be a gargantuan understatement. This neglect is especially striking in relation to his late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century peers. In comparison to the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge, the politics of Paine, Godwin and Wollstonecraft; the social criticism of Hazlitt and Lamb; and the demotic campaigning of Cobbett and Hunt, which has been consistently republished and reinterpreted in historical, literary and political studies, Thelwall has been virtually ignored. 5

There are doubtless several reasons for this, many of them related to wholly contingent matters of academic interest. But one possible explanation concerns the very nature of Thelwall as a writer. Whereas it is possible (with varying degrees of imprecision) to reduce the political philosophies of the other most influential thinkers of the 1790s to substantive ideological positions, it is not so with Thelwall. If describing the thought of Paine as ‘liberal’, of Godwin as ‘anarchist’, of Wollstonecraft as ‘feminist’ is at all plausible, Thelwall’s writing simply resists such categorization. The collation and publication of the material that comprises this collection should provide compelling evidence of this as well as an illustration of the sheer range and suppleness of his political arguments.

The title of the collection is in one sense misleading in that it contains more than what would typically be described as his ‘political’ writings, where political is understood narrowly, to include issues of only juridical or legislative significance. But it should quickly become apparent that if the term ‘political’ is understood more capaciously, to incorporate all areas of enquiry in which relations of power and domination are contested, the title befits the contents perfectly. There is more often than not a political aspect to Thelwall’s writings, not only when the subject is the economic oppression of the labouring poor or the rights that individuals hold against governmental authority, but also when he engages in debates about ostensibly purely scientific matters or when he catalogues his observations about rural life.

Thelwall’s political writing shows his immersion in a number of different philosophical traditions, including that of civic humanism, natural rights and utilitarianism. The commitment to civic humanism – and corresponding belief that a political community requires virtuous citizens – is manifest most vividly in Thelwall’s disdain for luxuries and the corruption they create and perpetuate. Luxuries have a dual function in his political analysis: on the one hand their very existence as commodities provides indisputable evidence of the moral debilitation of an inegalitarian polity and on the other the fact that individuals regard them as objects of desire is an obstacle in the way of political reform. This concern is personified in the figure of ‘Timms’ – one of the ‘messengers' who
detained Thelwall on his arrest – who is described as in fact a member of the lower orders (the ‘discarded valet of one of our nobility’), who nevertheless furnishes his house with all the ‘ornamental luxuries’ he is able to acquire. The effect of such debased tastes is to render him ‘a bigot in religion, and a slave in principles.’ This concern with luxury also poses Thelwall with a dilemma when faced with the prospect of a tax on hair powder: how to react to a measure that will have the effect of penalizing those who indulge their vanity so brazenly, while at the same time providing the government with further economic resources for their illegitimate war with Revolutionary France.7

Thelwall’s political writing also reveals a clear commitment to the natural rights tradition. Much political argument in Britain in the 1790s centred on the issue of 1688 and what it meant: what the ‘Glorious Revolution’ entailed in terms of the relationship between sovereign and subject.8 Part of Burke’s project in Reflections on the Revolution in France is to undermine Richard Price’s contention that 1688 established the rights of the people to ‘choose’ and, if necessary, ‘cashier’ their sovereign. But several prominent writers – most notably Thomas Paine in Rights of Man – were not prepared to prize this (or any) historical event as a measure of the validity of theoretical claims. Paine was extremely blunt in his declaration that nothing that happened in 1688 had any authority over subsequent generations and that the reason for this was the existence of inviolable individual rights held by every living human.9 The assertion of an ahistorical universal moral standard vitiated any political theory that tried to appeal to the past as authoritative. Paine’s position is wholeheartedly endorsed by Thelwall when he discusses the issue.10 Thelwall also defends an ‘equality of rights’ and notes that, like Paine, an individual’s mere existence is enough to secure their rightful possession. These writings show that he is committed to universal rights, entitlements that guarantee equality of treatment for labourers, though not, as he is consistently keen to stress, any ‘levelling’ of property.

Interestingly, as well as grounding several of his claims in assumptions of natural rights, Thelwall also shows a markedly Godwinian, utilitarian commitment to justifying his arguments on the basis of nothing but human happiness and welfare. The writings herein reveal Thelwall’s striking intellectual debt to William Godwin on a variety of issues. The two were friends and Godwin had played an important role (albeit one difficult to measure) in the treason trials of 1794 with the publication of his ‘Cursory Strictures’, which attempted to comprehensively undermine the charges against the accused. The intellectual relationship between them has been noted before, yet is occasionally played down by those straining to restate caricatured and oppositional representations of their thought based on their different political activities or personal conducts. Among the most striking Godwinian themes in Thelwall’s political writings are a commitment to human progress and perfectibility and an emphasis on human welfare
and happiness as the measure of moral and political right. Thus, for example, he argues that democratic enfranchisement should be extended on the basis that it will result in the 'permanent happiness of the country' and describes instances of war as justifiable only insofar as they are 'politic', which he in turn defines as 'productive of the happiness of the people'. Thelwall's writings – though never presented as a single political philosophy – fuse these different theoretical traditions in interesting and innovative ways.

III. Journalist and Orator

The lectures contained in the second volume were composed during one of the most tumultuous years in Thelwall's life; what one commentator has termed his 'great moment in history'. After his dramatic acquittal and corresponding rise in fame and notoriety, he quickly seized the political initiative and began lecturing twice a week from his base at Beaufort Buildings on the Strand from February 1795. The lectures were taken down in shorthand and then revised by Thelwall for republication in his weekly twenty-four page periodical the Tribune. From its inception in March 1795 it allowed him a forum to express his indignation – and to rouse the indignation of his audience – about a variety of political issues. Though it did occasionally include political poems, songs or anecdotes, the majority of space was devoted to reproducing his orations on topics of the day.

In the early lectures that took place in the spring of 1795 (in Volume 1 of the Tribune), the recurring theme is the war with Revolutionary France, which was proving an increasingly expensive enterprise for the British government, partly because of the financial costs of engaging the support of the fickle states of central Europe. What made the matter of raising revenue for a controversial war – the justification for which had failed to convince many and that had lasted longer than its advocates had anticipated – especially tricky for Pitt was the way in which the economic impact had been felt by the population at large. Britain had borne witness to nationwide riots in protest at rising food prices caused by food shortages and the additional costs of maintaining war makes it difficult to imagine a situation in which John Bull would be more likely to crave the 'rights of man' if those rights were to include cheap bread. In light of this Thelwall is at his most confident and most theoretically and rhetorically dexterous as he doggedly chips away at the case for war, suggesting by turns that: the only justifiable wars are those fought in self-defence and thus, ipso facto, that this one is unjustifiable; that the war has suddenly depopulated the nation and subjected its forces of defence to numerous 'horrors' and thousands of deaths; and not only that public money is being wasted, but that the waste of money is equivalent to
'despotism' and that recent events in France show that despotism leads eventually to Revolution.

But Thelwall uses the Tribune not only as a platform to monitor and criticize the policies of Pitt's government and the impotent opposition of the flailing Whigs, but also to discredit it by recalling, indeed, re-enacting, the events of the last year. Seeking to maintain the spectacle of the acquittal of Thelwall and the other members of the London Corresponding Society (LCS) in the public mind, he describes in painstaking detail the treatment he received when arrested on suspicion of treason the previous May. His interrogation by the Privy Council is restaged for full dramatic effect: his captors are goons, government stooges who treat him with contempt, offer him no food, deny him the visits of his wife and young child and even object to his use of the term 'Citizen' as a mode of address; Pitt is petulant and irritable in his questioning, characterized by his continued failure to hear what Thelwall says to him and his demands that it be repeated, indicative of his deafness when faced with the voice of the people; Thelwall, by contrast, is fearless and bold, marked by his disinterestedness, fortitude and good humour, the combination of which is revealed in his jibe that were he to have the Secretary of State in his custody, he would at least provide his guest with something to eat. He reminds his audience that the government that claim to be so keen to preserve property actually confiscated his belongings and never returned them and contrasts their professed desire to defend liberty with the manner in which they incarcerated him for months in Newgate, with only a 'daily sprinkling of vinegar'.

There is a sharp break between the lectures that comprise the first volume of the Tribune, published in 1795 and those of the second the following year, marked by his retirement to the Isle of Wight for the summer to convalesce from health problems that he traced to the appalling conditions of his imprisonment. The summer of 1795 proved a difficult one for the reform movement with internal divisions and by the time Thelwall had rejoined the LCS (from which he had withdrawn because he had felt moved to choose between it and his lectures), it was the movement itself that was the subject of his lectures, with the 'friends of liberty' solemnly warned about the dangers of faction.

The nature of aforementioned intellectual relationship between Godwin and Thelwall makes the spat between the two in late 1795 (documented in the second and third volumes of the Tribune) particularly fascinating. The traditional characterization of their disagreement – which centred on Godwin's criticisms of both Thelwall personally and the LCS politically in his pamphlet on the 'Two Acts' of which he was also critical – is one that juxtaposes armchair philosopher against firebrand activist; the former either betraying the radical tenets of his work or revealing its bedrock conservatism and the latter sacrificing reasoned argument and careful thought for political ends. Such a characterization is
unsatisfactorily simplistic. Indeed, what Thelwall’s writing in response to Godwin reveals is not only his concern to refute some of the less measured, gaudier claims advanced against him but also his conscious attempt to intellectually wrestle with the arguments of his friend and take care to offer a justification for his political involvement and the utility of his oratorical campaigning both in terms of its content and form.

The sense of spontaneity and impulse is retained in the published versions of the lectures, with Thelwall glorying in both the applause and the hisses his arguments provoked. He openly calls on the ‘spies and hirelings’ in his midst to come forward and challenge him in public during what must have been mesmerizing political oratory and theatre – though, as he put it ‘a theatre of instruction; not a theatre of mischievous inflammation’. His oratorical style which as mentioned above, was described by Hazlitt as a ‘volcano vomiting out lava’ and by the Norwich lawyer Thomas Amyot as akin to the ravings of ‘a mad Methodist Parson’ – must have electrified the regular audience of five hundred that paid the sixpence admission fee.

After 1795, Thelwall’s journalism has less volcanism and more quiet introspection. His series of articles for the Monthly Magazine, which recall his peripatetic wanderings from London to Wales, are however no less penetrating than the journalism of the Tribune. In fact, Thelwall’s dexterity is perhaps most impressive in these short, little-known writings. In terms of rhetorical style, he employs everything from the subtlest innuendo to outright speechifying. In terms of content, the astuteness of his sociological analysis, his descriptions of agrarian culture and representation of national consciousness anticipate Cobbett’s much-loved Rural Rides (1821–32). And as is the case with Cobbett’s travels through the English countryside, Thelwall’s pedestrian excursions are distinctly political: his observations about village life, architecture, gardening, amusements, house paint and food and drink are also commentaries about political economy, property ownership, agricultural decline, education, religious tolerance and the politics of aesthetics. When he encounters a convent of young English Catholic novitiates in Salisbury, for example, he demonstrates his technique of weaving travel narrative with political polemic. Sandwiched between more typical descriptions of the gothic exterior of the convent and the paintings he discovers inside the chapel, are penetrating remarks about religious intolerance, education and the possibilities and limits of free choice. ‘Far be it from me to be the advocate of intolerance’, he writes, but toleration should not allow individuals ‘to enchain the consciences’ of youth ‘with oaths that prohibit the progress of inquiry, and institutions that annihilate the free agency of reason’.
IV. Scientist

One is struck, upon reading Thelwall’s medical and scientific writing, at how confidently he enters into debates on subjects that would seem to be outside his sphere of expertise and extraneous to his rather consuming political interests. This rhetorical confidence should remind us not only of the breadth of Thelwall’s pursuits – many of which have been overlooked – and also of the way in which those pursuits overlapped. Of course, the dividing lines between disciplines were not as firmly drawn in the late eighteenth century as they are now, and politics and science were two closely and complexly interconnected spheres of enquiry. Like some of the surgeons whose lectures he attended in the early 1790s at Guy’s Hospital in the Southwark area of London, Thelwall’s interest in the more unorthodox ideas in the fields of medicine, anatomy and natural philosophy was closely allied to his democratic inclinations.

In his published lecture An Essay, Towards the Definition of Animal Vitality ... in which Several of the Opinions of the Celebrated John Hunter are Examined and Controverted (1793), he strides bravely into a controversy that galvanized and polarized the most notable scientists and physicians of the day. The question of the ‘vital principle’, or the source of human life, divided the medical world. Although this was not always a clear-cut divide (the perspectives on the question of the source of human life were varied and overlapping), scientists tended to fall into two camps: that of the more conventional, conservative vitalists or the rather more radical materialists. Vitalists argued that the vital force could not be reduced to biological processes; instead, they identified a transcendent mind separate from the brain, and an immaterial soul separate from the material body. Thelwall aligned himself with the opposing view of materialists who located thought and feeling in physical bodies, elements or processes. Thelwall’s essay challenges the idea, as forwarded by the renowned vitalist John Hunter, that blood was the source of vitality. Thelwall instead proposed that scientists would discover that a biological material such as an electrical fluid is what animates matter, bringing it to life. In this respect, Thelwall has much in common with the eighteenth-century associationism of David Hartley and the materialism of Joseph Priestley. Thelwall’s Essay also anticipated early nineteenth-century debates that centred around the vitalist John Abernethy (a student of John Hunter), who argued that since dead and living bodies displayed the same ‘organization’ or structure, life had to be ‘superadded’ to the body, and the more materialist-minded William Lawrence, who argued that life depended as much on the organization and physical functions of the body.

Although Thelwall’s 1793 Essay was positively received by the Physical society, increasingly, the type of materialism advocated in his early scientific forays was perceived as politically threatening. Just how threatening is indicated by the
fact that Thelwall's second lecture, on "The Origin of Sensation", which sought to explain the 'phenomena of mind' as originating from 'principles purely Physical', was shouted down. The kind of threat materialism posed is indicated by the title of the 1820 pamphlet, The Radical Triumvirate; or, Infidel Paine, Lord Byron, and Surgeon Lawrence, colleagueuing with the Patriotic Radicals to emancipate mankind from all laws, human and divine. Materialism is here aligned with atheism, debauchery and the type of democracy that had brought France to her knees (tellingly, the vitalist Abernethy was vocal in the campaign against the 'pernicious tendency' of 'French anatomists'). That the source of human life could be the same as for other living creatures was seen as much of a levelling force as republicanism was. Materialism toppled the hierarchy implicit in the eighteenth-century model of the cosmos as a chain of being, so famously articulated in Alexander Pope's Essay on Man, thus rendering the entire social and political status quo as equally susceptible to such collapse. If human life – secure and untouchable in its category as divinely created – had become the proper material for the microscope's lens, then the very structure of society was at least as susceptible to such probing analysis.

Some years following his experiences at Guy's Hospital, Thelwall wrote these words:

"This is no place to speak of the difficulties that obstructed the early progress of my design; the prejudices I had to encounter; the hostilities I had to defeat. One unmanly and disgraceful conspiracy, it became necessary to expose to public indignation: for it left me no alternative – but the bitterness of a personal controversy, or the total abandonment of my project. I was obliged, indeed, to fight my enemies upon their own ground: – an embattled and organized host! – myself a solitary stranger. I did fight, however: What could I less? My Family and my Science were at stake. I fought, and I triumphed: and I will have the charity to believe – that, by this time, my antagonists, themselves, are more ashamed of their contest, than of their defeat." 24

One would assume that this language, which describes conspiracies, controversies, battles, antagonisms and contests, would have been uttered during Thelwall's earlier oratory as a political polemicist. This passage reads like the rousing oratory of an outdoor rally; it sounds like the angry discourse of the unjustly imprisoned patriot or the indignant response of a lecturer threatened by loyalist mobs under the influence of more than their loyalty. However, these words were not written in the heat of political battle in the 1790s, but appeared in an 1810 treatise on the causes and treatments of speech impediments. The 'Science' he refers to here, which seems far-removed from the dangerous materialism of his former days, is elocution – which he defines as the science and art of communicating thoughts as well as 'the feelings, imaginations and the passions' that attend them. 25
So what became of Thelwall's political radicalism when he re-entered the public sphere as a Professor of Elocution?

We have described how Thelwall fashioned himself into various incarnations – as political activist, lecturer, farmer, poet and scientist, among others. This practice of 'self-fashioning' as scholars have noted is crucial to Thelwall's project. Andrew McCann uses the term to refer to the disciplinary, corrective aims of Thelwall's elocutionary practice. McCann argues that Thelwall's project was a disciplinary one, as it endeavoured to fashion individuals into modern subjects according to 'the norms of public conduct [and] communication'. In some sense, this is true: Thelwall's post-1800 writing on elocution is noticeably moralizing, with words like 'restraint', 'regulation' and 'decorum' appearing often. We should be aware of how part of Thelwall's transformation into an elocutionist is a way of distancing himself from his radical politics: his series of lectures on elocution emphasize the 'civilizing influence' of refined and cultivated speech and at least part of the purpose of his lessons on oratory is to foster politeness in his patients and students.

Yet we should not underestimate the degree to which Thelwall's interest in elocution is motivated by his radical politics. There is great continuity between his early political thought and his later theorizing about speech and language. Thelwall's elocutionary pursuits are never ideologically neutral. After 1800, Thelwall may make statements about having resigned his role as politician, but these statements should be seen as obligatory in an intensely reactionary climate, particularly if one is seeking a public hearing on any subject. We should not fail to see how Thelwall's recognition of the 'performative' qualities of language (to borrow the twentieth-century linguist J. L. Austin's term) was deeply buttressed by a certain kind of political worldview. Speech might communicate thought, but it was as much an action for Thelwall as a vehicle for conveying information. His texts reveal a profound awareness of the degree to which everyday practices of identification, medical classification and diagnoses determined the life prospects of the individual. He argued against the widespread practice of labelling any kind of speech impediment as a 'constitutional defect', a term, which, at once, with great convenience, covers ignorance, and excuses neglect and, he writes, consigns individuals to lives of 'effortless despair' and 'to consequent vacancy and imbecility of mind'.

For Thelwall, language has the potential to be democratizing in numerous ways. He vehemently rejects, for example, the view of excellence as hereditary or bestowed by nature, and argues that excellence is a result of education and opportunity whilst debility often arises from prejudice and a resulting lack of resources. One of the most significant features about his elocutionary theory and practice is his insistence on considering both the physiological and the cultural, psychological reasons for speech difficulties. His diagnoses were often
startlingly pioneering. He rejects what we would now term nativism or biological determinism: in place of diagnoses which simply viewed (dis)abilities as native or innate, he proposed that we identify much more bodily and intellectual phenomena as acquired. There is clear continuity, then, between his views of people as largely 'creatures of surrounding circumstances' – a statement made in the 1790s – and the principles that grounded his elocutionary project.31 The politics of the earlier Thelwall can be seen even more clearly in an 1803 outline of a course of lectures on elocution and oratory: the listed topics, as might be expected, include enunciation, accent and gesticulation, but there are also lectures on how elocutionary training must be an integral part of a woman's education. He echoes Mary Wollstonecraft's argument, made some eleven years earlier, that the practice of enfeebling women's minds through false refinement was detrimental to all of society. If a woman was allowed access to education and conversation, instead of rendered into a 'fashion-mongering' creature fit only for 'pickling and preserving,' she would then become man's 'Intellectual Partner' – thereby increasing the 'Prospects of the rising generation.'32

V. Historian

Thelwall was not overly nostalgic for the past nor was he interested in trying to recoup the nation's 'authentic' history. He condemned blind adherence to the prejudices and precedents of 'barbarous antiquity' and was glad to leave behind 'the night of gothic ignorance.'33 He condemns those who subscribed to what he calls the 'retrospective system' that is, those who remain bound by the institutions and customs of the past.34 Yet his interest in and his knowledge of classical, medieval and early modern history is more than noteworthy. Not only did he give public lectures on these subjects, he also set his Arthurian romance The Fairy of the Lake and his budding historical epic The Hope of Albion; or, Edwin of Northumbria, in the Anglo-Saxon world. Yet this was not an indulgent, escapist, utopic or wistful excursion into the past. He clearly rejected a Burkean view of history as contiguous with the present. The past should not be used to subjugate succeeding generations or to constrain their liberties by making them obedient to the prejudices of their long-dead forebears. Instead, he saw in history a transformative potential: it could be said that he made the past answer to the ideological demands of the present. Many of his texts strategically re-enact the past in order to make statements about contemporary political questions.

Thelwall's democratic politics were intimately connected to his ideas about language; in turn his politics and language were intricately bound up with his view of history, and specifically his views about England's Saxon past. Part of his historical project was to trace the etymology of common English words that car-
ried great political weight. In one of his Tribune lectures, for instance, he informs his audience that:

King, then, is an old Saxon word, or rather a contraction of an old Saxon word. It is derived from the word kenning, which was sometimes pronounced kenning, and sometimes cunning – and from cunning or kenning – ken and King. Thus, then, in reality, King means the cunning man'.

In such a way, Thelwall appropriates and redefines the term 'king' by defamil-iarizing it; that is, by removing this seemingly simple term from its familiar, everyday context. He thus urges his audience to view the term with fresh eyes and to reconsider the relation between the word's origin and its modern meanings. Like other 1790s radicals, he applies similar treatment to words like 'community', 'liberty', 'national identity', 'justice' and 'equality': part of the process of deconstructing, redefining and appropriating these terms for the cause of reform includes tracing their evolving meanings from their origins. As he was to say about his elocutionary project, 'the knowledge of words leads to the knowledge of things'. Language, then, lay at the heart of his politics. By demonstrating that words are not static, he suggested that by extension, neither were the customs, conventions and institutions they upheld. Language and politics were equally susceptible to foundational change.

Another of Thelwall's historical strategies was to close the distance between past and present events, so as to reveal for his audience the ideological trajectory of political struggle through the ages. Thus on the legitimacy of hereditary monarchy, he observed that

the plain and simple fact is, that Kings, according to our ancient Saxon constitution, and according to the original meaning of the word, were persons of eminence, chosen to fill the office of first magistrate, on account of their superior wisdom – real or supposed ... I will venture to affirm that, legally speaking, the crown of this country never was hereditary, till the revolution in 1688.

This type of historical mapping raises such questions about the relationship between past and present. If hereditary monarchy had only become established as recently as 1688, would it be possible to re-establish a non-hereditary or elected monarchy? Was the 1688 expansion of monarchical power a usurpation of constitutional law? Moreover, Thelwall's historical reading implicitly prompts even wider questions: What other checks on arbitrary power had since been lost? Which other incursions on the people's constitutional rights had been made? Were there other legal protections that Britons were in danger of losing? What other examples from the past could guide current attempts to reform Britain's political institutions and to circumscribe governmental authority?
As was mentioned above, the government's 'Two Acts' of 1795 rendered verbal and written words open to the charge of inciting treason and forbade political meetings of more than fifty people. 37 This legislation, specifically targeted at figures like Thelwall, presented him with two choices: either to give up political lecturing or to lecture on subjects outside the realm of contemporary politics. He chose neither option. Instead, as his 1796 Prospectus of a Course of Lectures, to Be Delivered Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, in Strict Conformity with the Restrictions of Mr. Pitt's Convention Act outlines, he embarked on a course of lectures on the subject of classical history. The chronological and geographical distance between ancient Rome and modern Europe allowed him to address urgent political questions through the tissue of historical remoteness. Thus he lectured on the overthrow of royalty, but he spoke of the ancient Tarquin kings (and certainly not the house of Hanover). He could lecture on how the rapacity of the Roman aristocracy inspired a discontented public to demand popular representation, yet never mention how disaffected Britons were likewise disgruntled with their debauched and dissipated social 'betters.' He could compare, too, the democracies of ancient Athens and Sparta with those of the modern world – but he was careful to refer to American and France only, and not Britain. The worlds of Anglo-Saxon England and classical Rome and Greece were both familiar and unfamiliar. As a result, Thelwall could apply his methods of fashioning and re-fashioning to history. In such a way he invoked the past to serve the present. History should not be consulted 'for precedents', he wrote, but rather mined for material to inspire our 'speculations' and to provide 'landmarks to direct our course'. 38

Notes
1. For a rich and riveting account of this and similar events involving British monarchs and their troublesome subjects, see S. Poole, The Politics of Regicide in England 1760–1850: Troublesome Subjects (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
2. State Trials, XXIV, 36 Geo.III.c.7&8.
5. There are, of course, exceptions. See the list of further reading.

9. As Paine puts it ‘every age and generation must be as free to act for itself, in all cases, as the ages and generations which preceded it,’ ‘Rights of Man’ in P. Foner (ed.) The Complete Works of Thomas Paine Volume 1 (New York, 1969), vol. 1, p. 251.


15. ’Godwin’s Pamphlet,’ see Volume 2, p. 239.


17. See Volume 3 of this set, p. 35.

18. A concrete instance of the connection between science and politics can be seen in the lives of the two physicians who influenced Thelwall, Drs Astley Cooper and Henry Cline. Both supporters of the French Revolution, Cline testified in Thelwall’s defence at the 1794 Treason Trials and held a yearly dinner celebrating the acquittal for treason of reformer Horne Tooke; Cooper stayed in Paris in 1792. For more on the interrelation of poetry, medicine and politics in Thelwall’s writing, see J. R. Allard, “Great Vital Organs”: Thelwall’s The Peripatetic, Radical Materialism and the Body Politic, in Romanticism, Medicine, and the Poet’s Body, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 63–85

19. David Hartley (bapt. 1705, d. 1757), philosopher, physician; author of Observations on Man, in which he refuted mind-body duality and the idea of free will. Hartley applied Newtonian science to his explication of the functioning of the human body and the process by which ideas are formed. He took up Locke’s notion of the mind as a ‘tabula rasa’. Borrowing Locke’s phrase, he argued for the ‘association of ideas’ – not that ideas are pre-existing, but that through neurologically processes, ideas are formed when such things as sensory stimuli and emotional impressions are fused into new and increasingly complex compounds (which Hartley terms ‘decomplex’ actions). In other words, the mind was mechanistic, and could not act independently of the brain and other biological elements. This fusing of the intellectual with the biological would seem to cast Hartley as a determinist, and in large part this is true, but he also emphasized human choice in the performance of ‘decomplex’ acts.

20. Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), scientist, political reformer, theologian and natural philosopher. Priestley was philosophically and scientifically aligned with Hartley. His Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity (1777) and Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity (1778) proposed a type of mechanistic determinism. Priestley worked simultaneously on theological and political studies whilst carrying on
scientific experiments, which resulted in the discovery of ammonia gas, nitrous oxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and, most importantly, oxygen.

21. The extent of Lawrence's materialism is much debated, and critics have often pointed to his identification of 'vital properties,' which he defines as 'sensibility and irritability' as indicative of his vitalism. On this debate, see S. Ruston, Shelley and Vitality (Houndmills, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 'Introduction' and ch. 1.

22. After this event, Thelwall withdrew from the Physical Society.


27. In the 'Memoir' that proceeded his Poems Written Chiefly in Retirement, Thelwall writes that 'The Man, and not The Politician' now stood before the public and that 'The Lecturer and Leader of Popular Societies is now no more' (p. ii). He insists that 'the politician should be forgotten' and that the public consider him 'only as a candidate for poetical and moral reputation' (p. ii). He absolutely refuses, he writes, 'to vindicate [his] public conduct' from any 'misrepresentations, for political discussion would ill accord' with his role as family man-farmer-poet (pp. ii, clviii). He claims that though he remained 'unchanged in his opinions,' he refuses to address political issues as he fears for himself, 'his unoffending family' and for the general state of the public mind (pp. xxxiv, xxxv). For more on this and the politics of Thelwall's self-presentation in general, see C. Wagner, 'Domestic Invasions: John Thelwall and the Exploitation of Privacy,' in S. Poole (ed.), Radical Romantic and Acquitted Felon: Essays on John Thelwall, 1764–1834 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009).


29. See Volume 4, p. 65.

30. See Volume 4, p. 169.

31. See p. 63.

32. See M. Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792; Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999); see also Volume 3 of this set.

33. See Volume 1, p. 124.

34. See Volume 2, p. 52.

35. See Volume 4, p. 119.


37. State Trials, XXIV, 36 Geo.III.c.7&8.

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1764 Thelwall is born in Covent Garden, London (27 July).
1773 His father Joseph Thelwall dies.
1777 He takes his first job as a shopkeeper (aged fourteen), in the family business.
1780 He is apprenticed to a tailor.
1782 He contacts the artist Benjamin West, seeking an apprenticeship with an artist, but due to his family's decreasing finances, he begins a three-and-a-half year apprenticeship to attorney John Impey.
1787 Publishes Poems on Various Subjects.
1788 Thelwall enters politics as a poll clerk; begins affiliation with the radical Westminster MP John Horne Tooke.
1789–91 Edits Biographical and Imperial Magazine.
1791 Marries Susan (Stella) Vellum (27 July).
1791 Attends lectures at Guy's and St Thomas's Hospital.
1793 Delivers lecture "Toward the Definition of Animal Vitality" to the Physical Society at Guy's Hospital.
1793 Publishes the autobiographical, philosophical travelogue, The Peripatetic (April), joins the London Corresponding Society (October).
1793 Daughter Maria Thelwall is born.
1794 Along with twelve other reformers, he is charged with treason; begins a nine-month stay in Newgate prison and The Tower.
1794 Treason trials; all defendants are acquitted (December).
1795 Publishes Poems Written in Close Confinement While in the Tower.
1795 Son Sidney Algernon is born.
1795 Lectures at London Corresponding Society outdoor meetings, one of which is captured in James Gillray's cartoon 'Copenhagen Fields'.
1796 Publishes The Rights of Nature.
1796 or 1797 Second son, Hampden is born.
1796–7 Tours England on a classical history lecture series.
1797 Thelwall walks from London to visit Samuel Taylor Coleridge at Nether Stowey, Somerset and William Wordsworth in Alfoxden, Somerset (July); publishes his journey in the *Monthly Magazine*.

1798 Retires to a small rented farm at Llyswen, in the Wye Valley, Wales.

1798–9 Widespread crop failure.

1799 Six-year-old daughter Maria dies.

1801 Publishes *Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement and Daughter of Adoption* (as John Beaufort).

1801 Begins his career as elocutionist.

1801 Embarks on lecture tour on elocution and oratory, spending time in northern England and Scotland.

1810 Publishes *A Letter to Henry Cline*, a treatise on elocution.

1816 Susan (Stella) Vellum dies.

1818 Thelwall marries Cecil Boyle, an actress thirty years his junior.

1818 Takes over editorship of *The Champion* (until 1821).

1825–6 Edits *Monthly Magazine* and *Panoramic Miscellany*, literary and political journals.

1834 Thelwall dies of apparent heart failure in his sleep at Bath, England, while on a lecture tour and is buried there (February).
ODE TO SCIENCE

As the title page indicates, *Ode to Science* was written for the anniversary meeting of the Philomathian Society, 20 June 1791. When it was published as a slim pamphlet, it was partnered with 'The Song, Sung by Brother Webb, on the Same Occasion' (not included in this edition). This is one of the earliest of Thelwall's overtly political compositions: he had only officially entered the political realm the year before, when he supported John Horne Tooke in the Westminster election of 1790. Although the *Ode* is perhaps not dazzling in terms of poetic achievement, it is an important document as it testifies to Thelwall's early interest in the relationship between politics and science.

The Philomathian Society was one of several London debating clubs that met fortnightly to discuss political and philosophical issues. Although relatively little is known about this society, in his *Recollections*, John Binns, the Irish radical and one-time member of the London Corresponding Society recalls something of his time as a Philomath in the 1790s. He records that club membership was strictly limited to twenty-one in number and that, in 1793, members included not only himself, but the philosopher William Godwin and the writer Thomas Holcroft. Binns humorously recalls how, when Godwin and Holcroft gained a reputation for being 'among the most diffuse and tiresome of speakers', the society adopted a rule that no speaker could have the floor for more than fifteen minutes. To enforce this rule, a committee was formed to purchase two fifteen-minute hourglasses. From the scant evidence we have, we can also surmise that the Society was at least somewhat mixed in terms of social background. Godwin's *Prospectus for a Select Club* he planned to form in the mid-1790s indicates his preference for a more eminent group of debaters, which would include intellectuals, lawyers, medical men and key Whig parliamentarians. Yet, the fact that Binns was a plumber and that Thelwall was not yet established in his political career in 1791 points to a wider membership in the Philomathian Society.
Although he only joined the society in 1793, Godwin's journal furnishes us with a sense of the topics of debate. As William St Clair helpfully summarizes, the themes included:

original depravity versus political institution, crime, legislative power, bloodshed, treaties, a God, prostitutes versus parsons, theatres, utility of religion, fame (several times), love, marriage (several times), capital punishment, free will (many times), gratitude, aticide, self love, property, ballot, means of reform, connection of free states and despots, tribunes, soldier versus priest, Church and State, Caesar.2

We can add two more topics to this list: the diarist and lawyer Henry Crabb Robinson recorded how, on two of the occasions he attended the Philomathian Society in 1796, the members debated whether 'the actions of men form a part of the plan of providence' and what was 'the analogy between natural and moral diseases'3 It is easy to imagine how such issues – no doubt very similar to those that would have been debated when Thelwall attended – would have galvanized him, provided an arena for him to hone his fiery oratorical style and provided superb training for his days as a political lecturer.

Notes
2. 'Prospectus for a Select Club', MSS Oxford, Bodleian Library: Abinger Deposit, C 606/2; see also William St. Clair, The Godwins and the Shelleys, p. 92 (St. Clair records the Prospectus as located at 532/4).
3. H. C. Robinson to his brother, 12 December 1796, MS Dr Williams Library, University of London.; transcribed in St. Clair, The Godwins and the Shelleys, p. 92.
ODE
TO
SCIENCE.

RECITED AT THE ANNIVERSARY MEETING
OF THE
PHILOMATHIAN SOCIETY,
JUNE 20, 1791.

TOGETHER WITH THE
SONG,
SUNG BY
BROTHER WEBB,
ON THE SAME OCCASION.

BY BROTHER THELWALL.

At ne quis modici transiliat munera Liber,
Centaurea monet cum Lapithis rixa super mero
Debellata: monet Sithoniis non levis Evius,
Quum fas atque nefas, exiguo fine, libidinum.
Discernunt avidi. — HOR.

— That none may surpass
The freedom and mirth of a temperate glass,
Let us think on the Lapithæ's quarrels so dire,
And the Thracians, whom wine can to madness inspire:
Insatiate of liquor when glow their full veins,
No distinction of vice or of virtue remains.
FRANCIS.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR THE USE OF THE MEMBERS, BY SAMMELLS AND RITCHIE,
ALBION-BUILDINGS, BARTHOLOMEW-CLOSE.
MDCCXCI.
ODE

FOR THE
ANNIVERSARY
OF THE
PHILOMATHIAN SOCIETY,1

1.1. If, Inspiration, from the radiant sphere, Where, at the threshold of the immortal throne, Thou pourest the high instructive theme, Wailing in seraphic ear Those sacred truths revealed to thee alone; While, from thy laurel'd brows, effulgent, beam The glories which thy state transcendant prove — First of the hierarch train! chief heir of Heavenly love!

1.2. If, Inspiration, from this radiant clime, Thou e'er, attentive to sublunar strain, Wert by the bard enamour'd woo'd His raptur'd fancy to sublume, And teach his feeble pinion to attain The awful height of thy beatitude, — Now, Inspiration, now, my bosom fire, While Science's hallow'd praise reverberates from my lyre.

1.3 Yes, star-crown'd Science, awful Maid! (Lov'd sister of the genuine Muse, My theme invokes) who in the shade Where philosophic Thought retires, And, as the sombre scene inspires, The moral clue intent pursues, To trace what laws great nature's plan controul, And heau'n-ward life the all-admiring soul: — Yes, star-crown'd Science, awful Maid! Who, or within this hallow'd shade Were first conceiv'd, or on the hoary height Of some stupendous rock, sublime, Where Contemplation loves to climb, And, through the still domain of night,
'Eye the blue vault', and moveless pole,  
(Round which the stars apparent roll)  
With daring thought, intent to solve  
What worlds round blazing worlds revolve;  
What systems beyond systems dwell,  
More than numeric arts can tell!  
Which angel eyes, perhaps, behold  
In boundless vision circling roll'd:  
Systems round systems infinite appear,  
And in the never-ending circle join  
To form the great eternal year: —  
Yes, hallowed Science, awful, and divine!  
'Thine is my votive theme; the praise, the triumph thine.

II. 1.  
'Twas thou, O Science! from barbaric Night  
That roused of old man's wretched race,  
And heaven-ward rear'd the grov'ling soul  
To claim its sov'reign right;  
That bad'st his savage solitude give place  
To social Joys, and Reason's calm controul.  
Thou giv'st the virtuous mind, and, Science, thou  
The god-like form erect, and soul-illumin'd brow.

II. 2.  
Each comfort too that soothes the social state;  
Refinement's arts, and all the joys of life,  
To thee, benignant pow'r! we owe,  
You wrest the shafts of angry fate;  
Subdue the raging billows hostile strife,  
And ward the angry bolts avenging Tempests throw:  
'Thine is the healing balm, the naval tower,  
And thine the temper'd rod's conducting power.

II. 3.  
Thou Traffic, proud of sordid ore,  
Ungrateful to a parent's fame,  
Pretend to scorn thy hallow'd Lore;  
Yet, wrapt in dulness while she lies,  
Or plung'd in avaricious joys,  
The faithful Muse shall loud proclaim —  
To thee, all-bounteous Science! thee, alone,  
She owes whatever supports her boastful throne.  
Who planned the oar? the masted ship,  
That wafts her o'er the subject deep?  
Who taught to mark the pilot star?  
The compass whose, that guides her course afar?  
'Twas Science plann'd the oar, the ship,
That wafts her o'er the subject deep.
'Twas Science mark'd the pilot star:
Thus Science the compass form'd that guides her course afar.
Thus Science every realm explores,
Thus Science weds the hostile shores;
From clime to clime, from strand to strand,
Wafts every boon of every land;
Gives freely to the frozen Isle
The bounties of the fervid soil;
'Een Nature's stern decree controuls,
And joins, at will, the distant poles;
And, bounding o'er the barrier main,
Blends distant worlds in Traffic's chain.
Hence 'e'en the genial board proclaims her praise;
Hence on this day our Goblets brighter shine,
And Joy smiles forth with brighter rays.
Then, hallowed power! benignant, and divine!
Thine be the votive theme; the triumph, Science, thine.

III. 1.
Such, Philomathians, such the bounteous power
To whom we consecrate our humble shrine;
To whom our humble vows are paid:
To whom awhile the genial hour
To dedicate, in friendly Mirth we join:
Yet, 'e'en in festive Mirth, her sacred aid
Invoke, to bid our festive transports rise
Above the sordid herd, profane, of vulgar Joys.

III. 2.
Hail Philomathians! then; and may the name
(As with prophetic joy my soul foresees)
'Thou' distant ages hallow'd shine.
Hail Candidates for guiltless fame!
Who Learning's bloodless palm aspire to seize, —
Whose triumphs make no widow'd heart repine,
But trophies leave to rouse succeeding youth
To deeds by Wisdom priz'd, by Virtue, Honour, Truth.

III. 3.
Nor on this day should be forgot
What names your former triumphs grace'd:
Ah! snatch'd by too severe a lot,
(By heedless Pleasure snatch'd away —
Who quench'd the bright ethereal ray.)
Their race curtail'd, their Fame efface'd,
Design'd thro' distant ages to proclaim
The Glories of the Philomathian name.
O WYNNE! O POLLARD! form'd to move
Our admiration — pity — love!
That, skill'd to please with sterling sense;
This, pour the rapt'rous stream of winning Eloquence.
O! suffer one unknown to fame,
(Who kindles at each honou'red name)
To weep your faults — proclaim your praise,
Ere yet the Memory of your Worth decays:
O suffering over your grassy bier
To shed a younger Brother's tear;
Oblivion's shades awhile controul,
And vindicate each 'limned soul;
And seize the hour, in act, to own
A rival's merits, as his own,
Can to the Muse's son appear
As sacred, and his rights as dear.
Yes, let the blazon'd monument of rhyne
(O that the Trophy might endure!) atone
For cruel Fate's malignant crime,
That to your ashes grants no honoured stone,
To make your mental stores, your promis'd glories known.

IV. I.
But other Worthies — other Hopes arise,
To spread our Institution's lasting praise,
And dignify the rising age.
These, rov'd by more indulgent skies,
 Shall live to grasp fair Learning's hallow'd bays,
And stemming hostile Envy's serpent rage,
Shall Admiration's grateful voice engage.
These, taught by past examples, shall descry
The covert rocks, and Pleasure's syren lure defy.

IV. 2.
The Bar, for manly Eloquence renown'd,
Its rising Glory's nur'reing School shall bless,
And spread our Institution's fame;
The while our Worthies, civic-crown'd,
Shall forward to its proudest Honours press.
Nor less from us the polish'd Arts shall claim.
O that the partial Muse, with sacred flame!
Might thro' this panting breast as certain glow,
And twine with laureate Bays your bard's aspiring Brow!

IV. 3.
Then, hail! ye Philomathians, hail!
Who, in your Academic shade,
With social Friendship's genial gale
Would fan the latent sparks of Worth,
And call the fires of Genius forth;
Of Genius never doom'd to fade!
Oh! may the Triumphs of this festive day,
While Mirth and Friendship waft each care away
Still firmer knit the cordial tie,
And still an added spring supply
To virtuous Emulation, and the aim
Which animates, with force confest,
Each genuine Philomathian's breast,
'To win, or merit, wreaths of virtuous fame.
Meanwhile, let Mirth and Pleasure flow;
Unbend awhile the mental bow.
Let Wine, and Wit, and Jest, and Song,
Wing swift the rosy hours along;
Let Fancy blithe, her pinions plume,
And Humour grace the jocund dome,
But chief let Friendship, void of guile,
Appear, with heart-expressive smile;
'Till, inmate of each worthy breast,
Gay Transport reigns, a blameless guest,
And (guided still by Reason's mild controul)
This truth by Philomathians may be shewn,
That even Pleasure's mantling bowl,
'Mong Learning's friends, a higher zest can own
Than e'er was yet received from Sensual draughts alone.
1. For more on Hunter and this debate, see the section on ‘Science’ in the ‘Introduction’ to this volume.
2. ‘Memoir’ to Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement.

1. ‘The Grand Alliance,’ Morning Chronicle (13 August, 1793); see Barrell, Imagining the King’s Death, p. 106.
3. Ibid., p. 108.
4. Ibid., p. 110.

3. Ibid. p. 125.

1. See the entire address in Volume 2 of this edition.

1. . Binns, Reminiscences, p. 44.

1. M. Scrivener, ‘John Thelwall and the Revolution of 1649’, p. 120.
2. C Thelwall, Life of Thelwall, p. 130.

1. . Godwin, Considerations on Lord Grenville’s and Mr. Pitt’s Bills (London: J. Johnson, 1795).
2. See P. Corfield and C. Evans, Youth and Revolution in the 1790s.

1. Anniversary of the Philomathian Society: Thelwall composed this ode in 1791 for the London Philomathian Society, a debating club that, according to the radical John Binns, allegedly allowed only twenty-one members to convene at its meetings to discuss philosophical and political issues. Besides Thelwall and Binns, its members included the philosopher William Godwin and the playwright Thomas Holcroft. See J. Binns, Recollections of the Life of John Binns: Twenty-Nine Years in Europe and Fifty-Three in the United States, (Philadelphia, PA: John Binns, 1854), p. 45.
2. ‘Eye the blue vault’: These lines are from Book VIII of Alexander Pope’s translation of Homer’s Iliad. The lines are as follows:

As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night,
O'er heaven's pure azure spreads her sacred light,
When not a breath disturbs the deep serene,
And not a cloud o'ercasts the solemn scene,
Around her throne the vivid planets roll,
And stars unnumber'd gild the glowing pole,
O'er the dark trees a yellower verdure shed,
And tip with silver every mountain's head:
Then shine the vales, the rocks in prospect rise,
A flood of glory bursts from all the skies:
The conscious swains, rejoicing in the sight,
Eye the blue vault, and bless the useful light.
1. ‘From an examination and survey ...living animal matter’: The scope and longevity of this debate and to the controversies inspired by John Hunter’s views, here is the observation of an anonymous reviewer for the Edinburgh Review, made some years later in 1814:

Those who are not much conversant in physiological studies, will probably be surprised to learn, that physiologists are not yet agreed as to the precise grounds even of that most familiar of all classifications – the arrangement of Bodies into Living and Dead; and that, in the whole science of vital economy, (if so we may venture to call it), there is not, at this moment, a term which is used with greater ambiguity than the term Life (p. 384).

For more on this debate in subsequent decades, see the introduction and chapter one of Sharon Ruston, Shelley and Vitality (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

2. Aristotle and Plato, Plutarch, Moses, and John Hunter: Thelwall links John Hunter with ancients who believed that a divine, or vital, spark animated the human body.


4. yet St. Paul ... the triune: 1 Corinthians 15:45–6.

5. For it is the life of all flesh: Leviticus, 17:14.


7. blood ... solid parts: Hunter’s A Treatise on the Blood, Inflammation, and Gun-Shot Wounds states that blood ‘would seem to be the most simple body we know of, endowed with the principle of life. That the blood has life, is an opinion I have started for above thirty years...’ J. Hunter, A Treatise on the Blood, Inflammation, and Gun-Shot Wounds (London: printed by John Richardson, for George Nicol, 1794, p. 77.

8. it is then in its second state, or vivification: Thelwall refers to Hunter’s contention that ‘the body dies without the motion of the blood upon it’ and his suggestion that the lungs imbue the blood with ‘the living principle’ (Hunter, A Treatise on the Blood pp. 86, 91).

9. ‘is owing to an action of self-preservation in the blood’: this is from Parkinson’s shorthand note from Hunter’s lecture on ‘Blood’, which reads: ‘This disposition to coagulate is a sign of the existence of the living principle in the greatest degree and greatest power’. Parkinson (ed.), Hunterian Reminiscences, p. 6. See note 7 above.

10. Mr. Hewson: William Hewson (1739–74), anatomist, physiologist and surgeon, often referred to as ‘the father of haematology, isolated ‘fibrin’, the key component in the process of blood coagulation.
1. **An Anecdote ... at the Capel Court Society**: this tale, which Thelwall gave in a speech to the debating society, was recorded by Daniel Isaac Eaton. Although Thelwall’s widow Cecil claims that Eaton embellished or exaggerated the story, it likely captures the substance of his meaning. The protagonist of this allegory, Chaunticlere, also makes a subsequent appearance in Thelwall’s 1795 ‘Gilpin’s Ghost’ (see p. 103, below). The allegory of Chaunticlere draws loosely on the chanticleer figure found in Chaucer’s ‘Nun’s Priest’s Tale’ and Caxton’s ‘Reynard the Fox’ and perhaps a 1793 fable in the *Morning Chronicle* that cast France as a gamecock (‘The Grand Alliance’, *Morning Chronicle*, 13 August 1793, see J. Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death*, p. 106). The radical publisher Daniel Isaac Eaton published ‘King Chaunticlere’ in the eighth number of his periodical *Politics for the People, or Hog’s Wash*, in November 1793, for which he was subsequently indicted. After being admirably defended by John Gurney (see below) and acquitted by the jury, he changed the name of his shop to ‘The Cock and Swine’ and hung a new sign, which portrayed a cock crowing over a crowd of pigs, to match. For more on this see D. I. *The Trial of Daniel Isaac Eaton, for Publishing a Supposed Libel, Intituled Politics for the People or, Hog’s Wash* (London 1794); Barrel, *Imagining the King’s Death* and Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories*.

2. **Caractacus**: also known as or Caractatus (c. AD 10 – after AD 50), was a historical British chieftain. Legend has it that he led the British resistance against the Romans, was captured and imprisoned in Rome, and was then released when the Romans recognized his virtues. Many narratives circulate around this figure, for example, the Welsh antiquarian, poet and forger Iolo Morganwg writes of how Caractatus (whom he calls Caradog) introduced Christianity to Britain.

3. **this difference between mental and muscular action**: such statements are clearly grounded in Thelwall’s interest in science and physiology and specifically his materialist views. The automatic, purely physical reaction of the tortured man – the product of a long history of social conditioning – parallels the human tendency to remain passively complicit in the face of their domination.

1. **POLITICAL LECTURES ... SPIES AND INFORMERS**: this lecture was reprinted four times, the last of which was published together with the third edition of the second lecture on the *History of Prosecutions for Political Opinion*. Most of the changes Thelwall made were minor; generally, he tidied the text slightly, spliced longer paragraphs, and removed a few of what he referred to as intemperate expressions. There were very few substantial amendments, but where they do occur they have been noted in the footnotes below.

2. **Ben Jonson’s Sejanus**: This quote is taken from *Sejanus His Fall* (1603), one of Ben Jonson’s two tragedies. For this play, Jonson had to answer to charges of sedition (of which he was acquitted), as authorities identified an allegorical representation of James I in the play’s portrayal of an immoral monarch and his vice-ridden court. The play recounts the rise and fall of Lucius Aelius Seianus, the one-time favourite of, and second-in-command to, the Roman emperor Tiberius, under whose tyrannical rule the court became deeply corrupt.
3. **INTRODUCTORY NARRATIVE**: this narrative was preceded by the following advertisement in the fourth edition:

I SEND into the world a fourth edition of my First, and a third of my Second Lecture, that it may be judged how far the character given of them in the Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Commons is consistent with truth. If my persecutors had not added to the injustice of detaining me seven months in close confinement, upon a groundless charge of High Treason, that of withholding my manuscripts, and other property, now I am acquitted, I might have added to them some others that have never yet been published: for it is a curious fact that they were in possession, mostly in my own hand writing, of all the notes of all the Lectures I ever delivered, though it was not thought fit to bring one of these notes in evidence against me: A tolerably strong presumption that they did not themselves believe the monstrous absurdities which their perjured spies were to swear against me. For though these notes, generally, contained only the sketch and outline, yet if the Lectures had really been so treasonable a nature as was represented, it is something extraordinary that no marks of this treason should be found among the memorandums.

With respect to the Lectures now republished, it may perhaps be objected, by those who are more inclined to cavil than examine, that the present edition does not exactly correspond to the former. Those, however, who take the trouble to compare them, will find the variations consist principally in corrections of the stile (which, in the former editions of the first Lecture, was certainly very defective) and not at all in the political sentiments, or anything that relates to the innocence or criminality of the compositions.

There are undoubtedly some few expressions of intemperance, and some of levity, which my cooler judgement does not approve. Those I have reprinted verbatim: because I wish my country not only to have an opportunity of judging how far I am innocent or guilty, but how far my persecutors had any foundation for that charge of guilt upon which they fought for my life. But wherever the impartial examination of this question is not concerned, I do not think myself called upon to perpetuate bombast, or to withhold the pruning knife from exuberances which were the consequences of hasty composition.

The corrections will be found principally in the first Lecture, and those who give themselves the trouble to compare it with the small edition, which is still in print, will find them to be of the nature I have described.

Upon the subject of Political Prosecutions four Lectures have been delivered; but whether the other three will ever make their appearance depends upon the decision of the previous question—Whether a man who has unjustly prosecuted for High Treason, forfeits thereby all claim to his own property?

Beaufort Buildings,
Dec. 27th, 1794.

4. **Proclamation of 1792**: this could actually refer to several proclamations, for on 19 November, France declared an Edict of Fraternity with revolutionary movements in other nations; on 13 November, the government declared its support for the United Provinces (of the Netherlands) against French invasion; on 20 November, the newspapers proclaimed that the founding of John Reeves's Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers.
5. the barbarous manifesto of the Duke of Brunswick: The Brunswick Manifesto, which was issued in Paris on 25 July 1792, warned the French people not to resist the invasion of the Duke's Prussian army. The manifesto declared the Duke's intention 'to put an end to the anarchy in the interior of France, to check the attacks upon the throne and the altar, to reestablish the legal power, to restore to the king the security and the liberty of which he is now deprived and to place him in a position to exercise once more the legitimate authority which belongs to him.' Since Louis XVI had the Manifesto published, it was construed as evidence of his siding with the enemies of the French nation, a fact that further infuriated the Assembly and resulted in panic and mob violence in Paris.

6. premeditated riot: in the fourth edition, Thelwall added this footnote:

   It is now past a doubt that this riot was premeditated; since, on the night of my arrest, Walsh, the well known itinerant confidant of Gentlemen high in office, told me, in the course of conversation, that the person who occasioned the disturbance at the King's Arms was taken there by him.

7. Sir James Saunderson: Lord Mayor of London. He prevented the 26 November meeting of the Society for Free Debate happening on the pretext that a disturbance had occurred at the previous meeting of 19 November. According to government documentation, that disturbance was actually caused by the government spy James Walsh and his associates. As Mary Thale notes, this was part of a wider programme of repression initiated by Pitt and his government. Through Saunderson's actions, a debating society that had held peaceable meetings for almost fifty years, ceased to exist. See M. Thale, ‘London Debating Societies in the 1790s’, The Historical Journal, 32:1 (1989), pp. 57–86.

8. Chairman of the Quintuple Alliance: this label refers to Prime Minister William Pitt who, in the 1780s, had been one of twenty-two reform-minded MPs from London, Westminster, Southwark, Middlesex and Surrey that formed an association, which had as one of its goals, the implementation of more representative government by ending borough-mongering. The reformers of the 1790s liked to remind Pitt of his earlier liberality and later apostasy. Horne Tooke, for instance, made much of this in his state trial for treason.

9. the story of King Chantecleer: see p. 33 in this volume.

10. no libel: the fourth edition contains the following footnote to this section:

   It was made part of the charge of [text damaged] against me, [text damaged] of the prosecution, and of the incongruity and absolute falsehood of the innuendoes: for the story is a literal fact. It was told to illustrate the difference between muscular, and what is called voluntary action; and the embellishments, without intending to fix the similitude upon any individual in particular, were introduced to shew the striking resemblance between all tyrants, whether of brute or human species and to point out, as Mr. Gurney, upon the trial, affirmed, that “The sooner they were got rid of the better; for they are generally too bad to be mended.” Whether there is not a better way of disposing even of these pests of society than by holding up the example of public murder (for every execution in fact is such) I will not now enquire: but certain it is, that if it be treason to declare that tyrants ought to be put to death, the great majority of the friends of freedom [which I should hope is the majority of people of this country] are traitors to all intents and purposes. As for the affirmation that tyrant and king are synonymous terms, and that it is impossible to mention a tyrant, even though it be tyrant game Cock, without alluding to our own most gracious Sovereign—these are libels so gross, that none but a state prosecutor could have the audacity to publish them.

11. the Bow-street runners: considered to be London's first professional police force, they were attached to the magistrate's office and were financially supported by government.
They were founded in 1749 by the author Henry Fielding, originally numbered just eight and were based around Bow Street, but extended to several other areas by an Act of Parliament in 1792.

12. The worthy successor: In 1793, Paul le Mesurier replaced Sanderson as Lord Mayor of London.

13. Paul le Mesurier: see previous note.

14. The fourth edition of this pamphlet contains the following ‘POSTSCRIPT to the Fourth Edition’ (Thelwall's own copy in the British Library also contains appended handwritten notes relating to his arrest):

AS I am now about to send a fourth edition of this Lecture, together with a third of the second, into the world, it may not be amiss to continue the narrative of the opposition which has been made to the establishment of this important right—the public investigation of political subjects: a right of which, during the period of inquisition and alarm, I have been the individual asserter, at the repeated peril of my life; and which I pledged myself to establish, or to fall a victim in the attempt. The right is established, debating societies are again conducted without interruption at each end of the town; and it may therefore be amusing to some to trace the whole history of the contest.

While my Lectures were continued in Compton-Street, several attempts were made to intimidate and interrupt me. The former was, however, impracticable, and all attempts at the latter, within the Lecture-room, were frustrated by my care to calm the irritation, and prevent the resentment of the audience. It was therefore resolved to make an attempt, from without, of the most atrocious nature. But the agents were not sufficiently secret, and it was disappointed. The landlord of a public house in the neighbourhood having told some of his customers, that a young gentleman of the name of Jenkinson, "(To whom related now avails us not, From whom descended, or by whom begot)"

had hired a room in his house for the entertainment of fifty bludgeon-men who were to disperse the people at my lecture-room, the conspiracy got wind, and means were taken to frustrate it.

For my own part, my only precaution was to render my hat crown cudgel proof, and to carry in my hand a short tuck stick to defend myself in case of extremity. Several friends, however, unsolicited by me, posted themselves in different parts of the neighbourhood, and sent out their scouts to observe what passed. At about nine o'clock, the ruffians began to assemble in a very tumultuous manner at the door; when my friends suddenly making their appearance from all parts, they took to their heels in great terror; revenging themselves for their disappointment upon such straggling individuals as, to use their own language, they suspected of being Thelwallites. One of this banditti was taken into custody by a respectable shopkeeper in the neighbourhood, whom they had treated with brutality. I need not add, that the magistrates took care he should not suffer too severely for his frolic.

This was not the first time that bludgeons had been provided for the purpose of confuting my arguments. Shortly after the affair in the Borough, one of the police ruffians who had been the most active on that occasion, was boasting about it to that respectable magistrate Sir " "; and, upon being asked if they did not some of them get kicked down stairs, replied that they had sixty or seventy good fellows, armed
with bludgeons, ready to do the business of the d—d Jacobine rascals if they had resented.

I understand that the worthy magistrate declared himself ready to prove this circumstance on the late trials if it had been thought important.

Shortly after the affair in Compton-street, I opened the lecture-room in Beaufort Buildings, where I was attended by a very respectable audience, encreasing every night in number, till the room, spacious as it is, became too small for their accommodation. The subject with which I opened was "the impossibility of attaining either public or private virtue, without the full indulgence of the liberty of speech and of the press." A subject, as those who were present will remember, in the discussion of which I dwelt very copiously upon the importance of Ben\evolence, and all the virtues of private life; and the inseparability union between these, and a genuine system of political liberty. Yet this lecture, which even persons who do not agree with my general politics, have applauded for its candour and morality, was one of those upon pretended quotations from which the charge of high treason was attempted to be supported.

Lectures in favour of Liberty, in the neighbourhood of Mr. Reeves, and upon the estate of the Attorney General, it may easily be supposed were a species of heresy not to be endured. Accordingly at the Court-Leet of the Dutchy of Savoy, held on Thursday, the first of May, an officious informer, in the neighbourhood of the Lecture-room, presented a copy of the second Lecture to the Grand Jury, and wished them to make it the foundation of a prosecution for libel. The Jury refused to be made the tools of so malignant a design, and observed, with becoming independence, that they were not, in matters of such importance, to be taken by surprise; and that the book, if it did contain any libellous matter, ought to be repeatedly read, and maturely deliberated upon by the Jury, before they pronounced a censure upon it that might subject the author to such serious consequences. This attempt was accordingly unsuccessful.

Mr. Reeves, however, the worshipful Steward of the district, did not suffer the matter to drop. A new Grand Jury for the ensuing year being sworn in his charge, as I am informed, consisted almost entirely of a declaration upon "the seditious Lectures in Beaufort-buildings; which, he said, must not be permitted to go unnoticed; they being in reality more dangerous than all the tumbling-houses in the metropolis. They were calculated," he affirmed, "to inflame the public mind against every thing great and glorious in the British Constitution;" (such as Spies, sinecure Placemen, Pensioners, unnecessary wars, inordinate taxation, and the like!!) "and that I had even agitated the passions of my auditory to such a degree, that they jumped upon the benches, and cried out, with one voice, No King—no Parliament, and no Laws!"

But the dose was too strong. The good sense of the Jury, nauseated at the absurdity; and the charge of nuisance being brought by the same loyal gentleman, who presented the pamphlet, and being supported by the voluntary testimony of a Mr. Scott, a brandy merchant in the buildings, the Jury determined, this being an affair upon which every one might have an opportunity of forming his own judgment, that they ought to be witnesses of the fact, before they pretended to decide. The Court being, therefore, held over, by adjournment, to Thursday, May 8, the foreman and other jurors attended at the Lecture-room during the two intervening nights, to make their observations. The result was, that being perfectly satisfied of the legality of the meeting, and the good order with which it was conducted, they returned the following answer—"On hearing and duly considering the complaints of several of the
inhabitants of Beaufort-buildings, respecting the Lectures delivered by Mr. Thelwall, the Jury are of opinion, that they cannot present the meeting at the said Mr. Thelwall’s Lectures as a public nuisance."

This was a very unexpected stroke to certain honourable protectors of the LIBERTY and PROPERTY of placemen and pensioners; for infinite pains had been taken, by canvassing from house to house, to collect a heap of complain[ants] together; and Mr. Steward Reeves, after an awful pause, that excited the tender feelings of the assembly, began, with some hesitation, to remonstrate that sixteen respectable GENTLEMEN in the neighbourhood had complained of nuisance, upon oath; but the foreman replied, in his former language, that the Jury had maturely considered the whole of the circumstances, and that THEY FOUND NO NUISANCE.[*]

It is worth while, perhaps, to observe, that the foundations, or rather pretences for the charge of nuisance were, that upon the lecture nights, four or five hundred people went up and down my stairs; and that a number of persons collected about the door, who behaved in a rude and improper manner, and therefore there might be a riot. The good sense of the Jury could not observe the tendency of this might be evidence: since if a man is to be indicted, because it is possible a riot may hereafter happen at his door, he may, by a similar mode of calculation, be hanged, because there is a possibility that murder may be committed be some desperado under his window.

Thus frustrated on every hand, the enemies of political investigation had recourse again to their old expedient—an attempt to produce a riot. A swarm of police officers attended the ensuing night, together with two coal-heavers, who interrupted the Lecture, by beginning to roar out the good old Song. I had the good fortune, however, not only effectually to restrain the indignation of the audience, and over-awe the rioters, but even to make zealous converts of the two deluded labourers; who, after having joined very loudly in the applause that was given to the Lecture, departed with many imprecations against their employers for having "misrepresented the good sort of gentlemen so, and misled them into such a "business."

On the Tuesday after this I was apprehended on a charge of treasonable practices: and it is a little curious that the Lectures which many thousand people have attended, which the magistrates, by conniving at attempts of violence and practicing under-handed intrigues, instead of exerting their open authority, have tacitly confessed to be legal; and which Grand Juries have refused to present either as libels or nuisances, should be made part of a charge of high treason upon the single testimony of a perjured spy, of the most notorious and profligate character.

The wickedness of this attempt, however, has secured the triumph of Reason. The eyes of Britons are opening. They see they have rights, which, if they have courage they may vindicate; and the popular prerogative, if I may so express myself, of free investigation, will not I trust be shortly again disputed.

No. 2, Beaufort Buildings, Dec. 27th, 1794.

* Some representations of nuisances of this sort had been made.

15. derived: In the fourth edition, Thelwall deleted the text from the end of this sentence to the beginning of the next paragraph, which begins 'It is, however, a fortunate circumstance' (he also deleted the poem).

16. the path of duty...paradise: in the fourth edition, this part of the sentence reads: 'the path of duty, and seek for Wisdom, where, wedded with eternal Truth, she sheds her mingled radiance through the regions of the intellectual paradise.'
17. It is mind alone ... natural enmity: Thelwall substantially alters this passage in the fourth edition, by deleting much of the text and in its place writing:

To illustrate this by a course of Political Lectures, is a task, which, if properly executed, could not fail to render you better members, not of the community only to which you belong, but of the world at large, which it is our duty to love and benefit, whatever State Hypocrites may preach about hostile interests, patriotism, and natural enmity.

18. Natural enmity ... your doctrines: in the fourth edition, Thelwall tempers the stridency of this passage by shortening it to:

'Natural enmity!—How long are our intellects to be abused by this unintelligible jargon?'

19. 'When', as Ben Johnson expresses it ... prince and state: Thelwall misspells Jonson's name here and either misquotes or quotes from a faulty edition of Jonson's 'A Panegyre, on the Happy Entrance of James, Our Sovereign, to His First High Session of Parliament in This Kingdom, the 19 of March, 1603': Lines 99–106 of the text read:

Where laws were made to serve the tyr'an will;
Where sleeping they could save, and waking kill;
Where acts gave licence to impetuous lust
To bury Churches, in forgotten dust,
And with their ruins raise the panders bowers:
When, publique justice borrow'd all her powers
From private chambers; that could then create
Laws, Judges, Consellors, yea Prince, and State.

20. When every coffee-house: in the fourth edition, this paragraph begins with an extra sentence:

'From these private chambers proceeds a system of inquisitorial tyranny never equaled but in the degenerate days of Roman slavery, under the administration of Sejanus and Rufinus.'

21. unguarded moments: in the fourth edition, Thelwall adds the following footnote: 'See the case of Mr. Muir.'

22. Hirelings who: in the fourth edition, this phrase is replaced with the longer passage:

'Citizens! The boasted freedom of Britons is no more; and every man of intellect and virtue lies at the mercy of the pimps and lacqueys of courtiers and court expectants. Wretches that—'

23. 'Hirelings ... as he varies': from the opening discourse of Act 1 of Ben Jonson's Sejanus. See note 20, above on Thelwall's political interest in this particular play.

24. 'We that know ... the dead': from Act 1 of Ben Jonson's Sejanus. See previous note and note 20, above.

25. Rather than relinquish...productions: in the fourth edition, Thelwall replaces the reference to Africa, with one to Newgate, as follows:

'Rather than relinquish, therefore, the free exercise of this noble attribute; let us brave the dungeons of Newgate and the inhospitable regions of New Holland; for better are these with fortitude and virtue than palaces and luxuries with a base and abject spirit.'

26. best intentioned individuals: the fourth edition contains the following footnote to this passage:

I insert the following note written in the margin of a former edition by a philosophical friend, because reflection has convinced me that the doctrine is partly true: 'No. You recommend caution, but it is not wanted. You tell us to look before and behind
for spies before we speak, but we need only look to ourselves. In telling the truth it is scarcely possible there should be danger; but we express sarcasm, resentment, contempt and vengeance: these are not truth, but falsehood. Our danger almost wholly lies in our vice. Boldness, and not caution, would remove it, the boldness that excited us to conquer our own mistakes. Here lies the radical falsehood of your lecture."

27. Swinish Multitude: also see note 6, to Tribune, vol. 1, in Volume 2 of this set.

28. commands: the fourth edition ends this paragraph with an additional sentence: ‘Nor must all the warmth of the heart be at all times uttered.’

29. ‘We ... what is needful’: Ben Jonson, Sejanus, Act 1. The full passage is ripe with political meaning:

   We must abide our opportunity:
   And practise what is fit, as what is needful.
   It is not safe t’ enforce a Sovereigns Ear:
   Princes hear well, if they at all will hear.

30. coffee-house keeper: the fourth edition contains the following footnote: ‘Case of Pigot and Hodgson.’

31. ‘Every ministering spy ... treason’: from Ben Jonson, Sejanus, Act 1. The full passage has much to say about political tyranny, corruption, the loss of liberty and the practical definition of treason and crime under a deceitful government:

   Well, all is worthy of us, were it more,
   Who with our Riots, Pride, and civil Hate,
   Have so provok’d the Justice of the Gods.
   We, that (within these fourscore Years) were born
   Free, equal Lords of the triumphed world,
   And knew no Masters, but Affections;
   To which betraying first our Liberties,
   We since became the slaves to one Man’s Lusts;
   And now to many: every ministering Spy
   That will accuse, and swear, is Lord of you,
   Of me, of all our Fortunes, and our Lives.
   Our looks are call’d to question, and our words,
   How innocent soever, are made Crimes;
   We shall not shortly dare to tell our Dreams,
   Or think, but ’twill be Treason.

32. Swift: Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), satirist, essayist and political pamphleteer (first for the Whigs and then for the Tories); famous for sharply incisive and politically astute writing on government, as found in such works as Gulliver’s Travels, A Modest Proposal, The Battle of the Books and A Tale of a Tub.

33. the crime of dreaming sedition: Thelwall is mocking the fact that according to British law, it was high treason to ‘imagine’ the king’s death – a legal idiosyncrasy that allowed the government to see potential regicides everywhere. See Barrell, Imagining the King’s Death.

34. Blackstone: William Blackstone (1723–80), legal writer and judge, he established English law as an academic discipline at Oxford and became the foundation Vinerian professor of common law. He published the greatly influential, widely-acclaimed 2000-page Commentaries on the Laws of England, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1766–9). This work of legal scholarship – arguably the most important ever published in the nation’s history – depicted England’s constitution and laws as part of the natural order of things as well
as products of national history, like 'an old Gothic castle, erected in the days of chivalry, but fitted up for a modern inhabitant' (Blackstone, *Commentaries*, 3.268).

35. **Strange**: Sir John Strange (bapt. 1696 d. 1754), judge, longstanding MP for Totnes, Devon, appointed master of the rolls in 1750. The compilation of his *Reports of Adjudged Cases In the Courts of Chancery, King's Bench, Common Pleas and Exchequer*, which was published at his death, was an important legal work.

36. **Plowden**: Francis Peter Plowden (1749–1829), lawyer, historian, legal and political writer, author of the *Jura Anglorum: the Rights of Englishmen* (c. 1793) and the *Historical Review of the State of Ireland* (1803) and several anti-Pitt pamphlets. He was called to the bar at the Middle Temple in 1796 when the restriction disallowing Roman Catholics from pleading cases was repealed.

37. **'Coke upon Littleton'**: Sir Edward Coke (1552–1634), lawyer, legal writer, colonial entrepreneur and politician, whose writings on the English common law were definitive for three centuries. As attorney-general he prosecuted several trials for treason, including that of Sir Walter Ralegh. As chief justice of the king's bench he exercised great political and legal influence. In 1628 Coke published the *Commentarie upon Littleton* (thereafter referred to simply as *Coke on Littleton*) which addresses property law as well as other topics of law. Among Coke's more positive legacies is his defence of Magna Carta against unchecked monarchical power, and his advocacy of individual liberty and judicial independence.

38. **French bow**: the following footnote is added here in the fourth edition:

The levity of this expression must be admitted to be perfectly inexcusable. Whatever may be the crimes of the individual; the privation of life is no proper subject for a jest; it is a cruel and dire necessity: and if Justice must have its victim, Humanity ought to shed the tear. But I republish these lectures to shew the foundations of the charge brought against them; and am not therefore at liberty to strike out the exceptionable passages.

39. **reward?**: Thelwall inserts the following footnote here in the fourth edition:

This reasoning was exemplified upon my Trial, by Taylor, alias Roberts, whose whole testimony was a tissue of barefaced forgeries and misrepresentations, the greater part of which could have been confuted by persons who were in court when he gave his testimony. One of the things nearest to truth that he uttered was that which predicted the approaching dissolution of despotism throughout Europe; yet, the passage to which this referred had been taken down by Ramsey, the short hand writer, who happened to be present when the Lecture was delivered; and he has declared that it was essentially different from what this worthy confidant of gentlemen high in office represented.—My Council, however, were of opinion, that, having proved two distinct perjuries against him, to enter into a confutation of particulars, which, if true, would have amounted only to sedition, and therefore had nothing to do with a charge of High Treason, would have been an insult to the understanding of the Jury.

40. ‘Tell the words … to them’: Ibid.

41. ‘We that … to many’: Ibid.

42. If others…my motives!: Thelwall removed this sentence in the fourth edition.

43. ‘Times? … of all that race’: Ibid.

44. **Gerald**: Throughout this section, Thelwall apostrophizes the members of the ‘Edinburgh Five’ or ‘Scottish Martyrs’ and their associate Charles Sinclair. Joseph Gerrald (1763–96), attorney and LCS member, was arrested in December 1793 for participation in the Convention in Edinburgh. He was known for his role as a delegate at the Edinburgh Con-
vention and for his feisty style. He was skilled in the use of historical precedent to argue for contemporary reform. He used his knowledge of Anglo-Saxon law to argue for the modern necessity of public conventions and in his three-hour speech at his trial, to urge legal reforms. He was sentenced to transportation in March 1794, which eventually took place in May 1795. He developed tuberculosis and was an invalid from his arrival in Australia in November 1795 until his death the following March in 1796.

45. **Sinclair**: Charles Sinclair, an Edinburgh Convention delegate from the Glasgow Societies, was instrumental in instituting new convention procedures, including adopting the title ‘Citizen’ and using the name ‘British’ convention (Goodwin 299). He was indicted, but the case against him was dropped.

46. **Margarot – a ‘second Sydney’**: Maurice Margarot (1745–1815), wine merchant, founding member and chairman of the LCS and member of the ‘National Convention’ held in Edinburgh, which led to his trial and conviction for treason. Another member of the Edinburgh Five, Margarot was sentenced to fourteen years in Botany Bay, but in reality spent sixteen years in exile, likely due to his protests against corruption in the colony and his agitations for prison reform. At any rate, he was the sole martyr to return to England. Upon his return, he immediately campaigned the Home Office for the return of funds he had entrusted to Thomas Hardy (but which had been impounded when Hardy was himself arrested for treason in 1794). Whilst this demand was successful, his claim for compensation for the additional two years he served was not. Margarot was known for his eloquence, pugnacity, intelligence and the colourful figure he cut in court, dressed in his ‘French fashion.’ ‘Second Sidney’ is a reference to Algernon Sidney (1623–83), politician, critic of absolute monarchy and author of *Discourses Concerning Government* who was convicted and executed for treason. (Thelwall also named his son Algernon Sidney). Interestingly, Kenneth Johnston refers not to Margarot, but to Gerrald as fancying himself a ‘second Sidney’, in ‘The First and Last British Conventions’, *Romanticism*, 13:2 (2007), pp. 99–132, p. 128.

47. **The intercourse...attachments**: Thelwall removed this sentence in the fourth edition.

48. **Skirving...Muir...Palmer**: William Skirving (d. 1796), political reformer, farmer. Skirving was involved with the Association for the Abolition of Patronage and a Repeal of the Test and Corporation Statutes before becoming a founding member and secretary of the (Scottish) Society of the Friends of the People (1792). He was a delegate to the movement’s Scottish conventions, at the first of which he proposed that the Scottish radicals should join with English reformers. He was indicted for sedition together with Margarot, Gerrald, Sinclair and another reformer, Alexander Scott. Acting in his own defence, he was found guilty in January 1794 and sentenced to fourteen years’ transportation. He died from dysentery in Port Jackson on 16 March 1796.

Thomas Muir (1765–99), political reformer, advocate, founding member and vice-president of the Association of the Friends of the People in Edinburgh. At the 1792 Edinburgh convention, he read out a printed address from the United Irishmen, a circumstance that led to his arrest on a charge of sedition on 2 January 1793. He was eventually sentenced to fourteen years’ transportation on 31 August 1793. In 1796, he escaped Australia on an American ship, whereupon he began an almost unbelievable series of adventures. He crossed the Pacific via Hawaii to Nootka Sound, Canada, where, after a skirmish with British ships, he was captured by coastal aboriginals. He was rescued by a Spanish ship, taken down the coast to southern California, where he crossed Mexico and took another Spanish ship to Havana. He then embarked to Cadiz on a Spanish frigate on 25 March 1797 but before he could reach land the ship was attacked by two Royal Navy warships on 26 April. He was horribly wounded in the melee and lost his left eye...
and part of his cheek. He was so disfigured that the British could not identify him until an old school-friend recognized his Bible. He was then sent on shore with the wounded Spanish enemy. The Spanish then identified him as the English enemy and imprisoned him. The French finally intervened and after several months, he was released and arrived to a hero’s welcome at Bordeaux in late November 1797 and then as the feted guest of the Directory in Paris. His wound had become infected by this time, however, and at the end of January 1799, he was found dead. Thomas Fyshe Palmer (1747–1802), a privileged, educated, Anglo-Scots, Unitarian minister and theologian, his order of the printing of a thousand copies of a 'Friends of the People' address led to his arrest, trial and sentencing to seven years transportation at Botany Bay. Neither public demonstrations nor the intervention of friends like Charles Fox, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Lord Lauderdale and Lord Stanhope could overturn or lessen Palmer’s conviction and he was shipped out in February 1794. After serving his sentence, he set off on the return voyage to Britain, but died of dysentery on the way, in Guam.

49. *Voltaire ... Henriade*: François-Marie Arouet (1694 – 1778), pen name Voltaire, French Enlightenment writer, deist and philosopher; hugely influential figure for revolutionists, used satire to criticize religious dogma and political corruption and to advocate civil liberties. The *Henriade* is a long Virgilian epic poem.

50. *Boethius ... in his Consolations of Philosophy*: Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (AD 480–524/5), Roman Christian philosopher, was executed on suspicion of conspiring with the Byzantine Empire. Whilst in prison awaiting execution, Boethius composed what is largely a Socratic dialogue, *Consolation of Philosophy*, which elevates the spirit of philosophy as a force more powerful than political adversity and personal hardship.

51. *Epictetus*: (c. AD 55–135), a Greek Stoic philosopher, who taught that by determining between that which we can and cannot control or have power over, we could have greater mastery over our own existence.

52. *the fabulist *Æsop*: John Barrell and Jon Mee make the point that in the eighteenth century, *Æsop’s* Fables were often put to political use, including in this decade, by such radicals as Thelwall, D. I. Eaton and Thomas Spence. See Barrell and Mee, *Trials for Treason and Sedition, 1792–1794*, 8 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto), vol. 1, p. 300 and especially editorial notes 353–4.

53. *to a height of intelligent perfection*: in this section and in adjoining sections, Thelwall’s debt to Godwin is striking; in this case, he articulates Godwin’s ideas about human perfectionism.

54. *Come then...for ever!: This final paragraph is absent in the fourth edition.*
Crossfield (who was charged in the popgun plot of 1796) and Arthur O’Connor (in 1798).

4. *libels against game cocks*: see *King Chaunticlere* in this volume.

5. *John Udall*: (c. 1560–92/3), religious polemicist, for a work heavily critical of ecclesiastical practices, he was indicted for writing ‘a wicked, scandalous libel’ (the statute of 23 Elizabeth). Although many associates petitioned the queen to lower his death sentence to banishment, she refused to sign the pardon and Udall died in prison.


7. *condemned them… It is to be observed*: between the end of his paragraph and the beginning of the next, Thelwall inserted the following substantial section in the third edition, with a further footnote, as indicated:

   It must be admitted that the prevailing party did not enjoy their triumph with the most uniform moderation. – I pass without censure the punishment of the Judges and ministers of Charles; nor can I perceive how any man can be an advocate for any degree of Liberty whatever, or even a friend to the present family on the Throne, who condemns the execution of Charles himself; whatever he may think of the manner of conducting the trial. For what is to prevent that Monarch from becoming absolute whom neither the aggregate nor representative body of the people can control or punish? and by what title does the house of Brunswick hold the British Sceptre, if it had not been forfeited by the tyranny of the Stewarts. [Here Thelwall inserts the following footnote: ‘I shall treat these subjects at greater length when I deliver (as I intend shortly) the Course of Lectures prepared during my confinement in the Tower.’]

   But the succeeding prosecutions were not all of them equally justifiable. Liberality will condemn the treatment and execution of Hamilton; and it is impossible to peruse the Trial of John Lilburne, without admiration of the virtue and energy of the man, abhorrence for the extravagance (though by no means singular) profligacy of the Judges, and contempt for the usurping and intolerant spirit of the existing Government.

   The erection (after this acquittal) of a Revolutionary Tribunal, to try political offenders, *without the intervention of a Jury*, it is impossible to reflect upon with patience. It is sufficiently characteristic of that Coercive Liberty which the usurping fragment of a House of Commons, then remaining, was desirous of imposing upon the Country.

   In short—the fact is incontrovertible, that the Government then established had not the approbation of the majority of the people; and when that is the case, *legalized murders*, and *illegal prosecutions* must be the consequences. Opinion is the sole prop of all Governments; and when the sentiment of approbation fails, the sentiment of terror must be inspired—or farewell to the tottering fabric. Add to this that the intolerance of religious sects, and the visions of Fanaticism had poisoned the judgment and imbittered the spirit of the Republicans (as they called themselves) of the day, and we shall wonder no longer at the imperfections of their theory, or the deformities of their practice.]

8. *‘If my government … paper bullets’*: James Harrington (1611–77), political theorist, wrote the anti-Hobbes treatise *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, which promoted classical republican ideas and proposed a model commonwealth that, although hierarchical,
emphasized equality and popular sovereignty: in Harrington’s commonwealth, authority depended on consent. Whilst *Oceana* was being published, Oliver Cromwell ordered it to be confiscated, but then restored the work to Harrington, who added a dedication to Cromwell in 1656.


10. ‘When the Earl …entirely’: from Burnet, *Bishop Burnet’s History*, vol. 1, p. 163.


12. ‘from the first proclamation’: Largely in response to the popularity of Paine’s *Rights of Man* and the popular political associations that proliferated as a result, the government issued a royal proclamation against seditious writings on 21 May 1792. In the same month, Paine’s publisher J. S. Jordan was arrested, and after some months of a fierce government propaganda campaign against ‘Mad Tom,’ Paine was himself tried and found guilty in absentia.

13. ‘the press … vigilant police’: not traced.

14. ‘About this period, says Hume: this long quote is from volume five of David Hume’s 6 volume *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688.*

15. ‘Then it was … seditious libel!!!’: The Stuarts are being condemned here for the great number of unconstitutional cases it brought before the Star Chamber. In this section, Thelwall quotes from (but adds his own italics and exclamation marks) Eaton, *The Trial of Daniel Isaac Eaton*, p. 45–6; reprinted in Barrell and Mee, *Trials for Treason and Sedition*, vol. 1, pp. 305–6.


17. ‘Muir … Gerrald: On the Edinburgh Five, see note 46, to *Political Lectures* above.

18. ‘the judges who: in the third edition, Thelwall expands the sentence slightly to read: ‘…and the judge who, like another JEFFERIES, could declare…’


21. *LIBERTY* is preferable to *SLAVERY*: The famous and much-debated passage from Hume’s *Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic*, is worth quoting at length here:

   It is well known, that every government must come to a period, and that death is unavoidable to the political as well as to the animal body. But, as one kind of death may be preferable to another, it may be enquired, whether it be more desirable for the BRITISH constitution to terminate in a popular government, or in absolute monarchy? Here I would frankly declare, that, though liberty be preferable to slavery, in almost every case; yet I should rather wish to see an absolute monarch than a republic in this island. For, let us consider, what kind of republic we have reason to expect. The question is not concerning any fine imaginary republic, of which a
man may form a plan in his closet. There is no doubt, but a popular government may be imagined more perfect than absolute monarchy, or even than our present constitution. But what reason have we to expect that any such government will ever be established in GREAT BRITAIN, upon the dissolution of our monarchy? If any single person acquire power enough to take our constitution to pieces, and put it up a-new, he is really an absolute monarch; and we have already had an instance of this kind, sufficient to convince us, that such a person will never resign his power, or establish any free government. [Hume refers to Cromwell here] Matters, therefore, must be trusted to their natural progress and operation; and the house of commons, according to its present constitution, must be the only legislature in such a popular government. ... If the house of commons, in such a case, ever dissolve itself, which is not to be expected, we may look for a civil war every election. If it continue itself, we shall suffer all the tyranny of a faction, subdivided into new factions. And, as such a violent government cannot long subsist, we shall, at last, after many convulsions, and civil wars, find repose in absolute monarchy, which it would have been happier for us to have established peaceably from the beginning. Absolute monarchy, therefore, is the easiest death, the true Euthanasia of the BRITISH constitution.

22. opponents: the third edition includes this footnote:

The matter of this discourse was originally delivered in one lecture; but after it was drawn out in its present form, it was delivered as two; and the second began with the persecution of the Lollards.

23. the Lollards: A group of religious and political reformers who, from the mid-fourteenth century to the English Reformation, demanded the reform of the Roman Catholic Church, believing that piety should be emphasized over church hierarchy, and Scriptural authority over the authority of priests.

24. Some passages ... be himself had: from Burnet, Bishop Burnet's History, vol. 1 pp. 25–6. See note 9 above.


26. As Sir John Brute says of marriage: Thelwall is referring to a character from J. Vanbrugh, The Provok'd Wife: A Comedy (London: Printed for J. Brindley et. al., 1753). The passage, from I. i. p. 7, is as follows: 'What cloying meat is love, when matrimony's the sauce to it! Two years' marriage has debauched my five senses! Everything I see, everything I hear, everything I feel, everything I smell, and everything I taste, methinks has wife in't.'


28. hinc ill lacraymae: 'hence those tears' (Latin). Thelwall is emphasizing Gurney's argument that the government was most concerned with the cheapness of the pamphlet, believing that accessibility was part of Eaton's crime. See Eaton, The Trial of Daniel Isaac Eaton, p. 35, Barrell and Mee, Trials for Treason and Sedition, p. 295 and n. 353.

29. Judge Jeffries upon the trial of Sidney: George Jeffreys, first Baron Jeffreys (1645–89), judge, Chief Justice of the King's Bench, 1683–5; presided over the treason trial of Algernon Sidney, the most renowned of the Rye House plotters (for more on Sidney, see note 46, to Political Lectures). During the trial Sidney challenged Jeffreys's rather shaky legal knowledge, particularly over the necessity of having two witnesses to treason (there was only one). But, according to Jeffreys, who famously pronounced 'scribere est agere', or 'to write is to act' (see State Trials, 9.889), Sidney's unpublished 'Discourses' were effectively
a second witness. In less than half an hour, the jury found Sidney guilty and Jeffreys pronounced the sentence of death.

30. *continually*: in the third edition, this sentence is followed by one that does not appear in earlier editions:

   ‘This very defence, however, was blasphemy to the mitred apostles of the time.’


32. *Sir John Oldcastle Lord Cobham*: (d. 1417), soldier, knight and a Lollard who was found guilty of heresy (and thus treason), for which he was executed. He was the first layperson of prominence to be publicly accused of heresy.

33. *that after ... were spoken*: quoted from *A Complete Collection of State Trials*, vol. 1, pp. 225–68, pp. 242–3.

34. *confessions*: Thelwall inserts the following footnote here, in the third edition: ‘N.B. As this was first published more than eight months ago, it could have no possible allusion to the Confession of Watt the spie!!’

35. ‘And when ... INSURRECTIONS’: Ibid., p. 251.

36. *commonwealth*: Thelwall includes the following footnote in the third edition:

   It is remarkable that among the modern advocates, as they call themselves, for our ancient Constitution, Republicanism, or attachment to the Commonwealth, should be considered as High Treason, though all the ancient writers uniformly agree in calling England a Commonwealth, and regard the King only as the Chief Magistrate of that Commonwealth; not as the proprietor of an Imperial Crown—a jargon unheard of till the unfortunate period of the Restoration!

37. ‘The complaint ... priests’: Ibid., p. 252.

38. ‘And this ... stronger’: Ibid., p. 251.


40. ‘heretics ... land’: Ibid., p. 252.

41. ‘in him ... Christian’: Ibid., p. 255.


43. *Gerald and Margarot, of Skirving, Muir and Palmer*: on the Edinburgh Five, see note 46 to *Political Lectures*, above.

1. Thelwall includes the following postscript to the third edition:

   P.S. As the notes of my Lectures (and indeed all my manuscripts – the labours of my life) are still in the hands of government, and as I have twice applied, without getting any sort of answer, for their restoration, I cannot promise the immediate publication of the three discourses that ought to follow this. But as it is a subject of growing importance, it is not my intention that its continuance should depend on the uncertain recovery of my papers. The seven months of leisure and retirement with which it has lately pleased the Minister to indulge me, has enabled me to render myself still further acquainted with the essential facts; and as soon as the completion of my promised Narrative permits me to return to the subject, it shall be resumed – perhaps with advantage from the delay.

2. *Hardy*: Thomas Hardy (1752–1832), shoemaker, radical and a founder of the London Corresponding Society. The Bow Street Runners arrested him on 12 May 1794, the first in a line of such arrests (including Thelwall’s) and after questioning he was remanded to the Tower of London on the charge of high treason. Whilst imprisoned, his house was attacked
during a celebration of Lord Howe's naval victory over the French and his heavily pregnant wife had to be pulled through a back window by neighbours. As a result of her injuries, she died on 27 August whilst giving birth to a stillborn baby. At the end of October Hardy was taken to Newgate and formally arraigned on treason charges, to which he pled not guilty. He was expertly defended by Thomas Erskine and the jury found him not guilty. On his release, his coach was drawn through the streets by crowds of celebrating supporters.

1. **John Gilpin:** the character is a comical linen-draper in William Cowper's 'The Diverting History of John Gilpin.'
2. **King Chanticleer, or the Fate of Tyranny:** reprinted in this volume. On Eaton's acquittal for publishing it, see the headnote to that text.
3. **Oakham:** Thelwall's mail to his brother-in-law (which contained **King Chanticlere** and details of Eaton's indictment) was intercepted in Oakham, the town where he and his wife Stella were married in 1791. While this satirical ballad was published after his trial for treason in 1795, it was written before it and somehow escaped being seized with the rest of his papers.
4. **great men of Oakham:** Among Thelwall's list of Oakhamites is the loyalist William Combes (or Combe, 1742–1823), satirist, historian and hack writer. For at least the early 1790s, Combes was on the Treasury payroll, earning £200 per year from Pitt for such pro-ministerial writings during the Regency crisis and in the aftermath of the French Revolution as his *Letter from a Country Gentleman to a Member of Parliament on the Present State of Public Affairs* (1789), *History of the Late Important Period; from the Beginning of his Majesty's Illness* (1789), and *Word in Season to the Traders and Manufacturers of Great Britain* (1792).
6. **Biggleswade:** a market town in Bedfordshire.
7. **pop-guns:** this is a mocking reference to the 'popgun plot' of late September 1794. This was a plan, allegedly hatched by members of the LCS, to assassinate King George III with an airgun that would fire a poisoned arrow at the king whilst he was pottering around the grounds at Windsor or sat in his box at Covent Garden Theatre. The details and subsequent arrests for this plot immediately preceded the October treason trials, a fact that was not lost on the opposition, some members of whom suggested the government had manufactured some of this plot. See Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, ch. 14, 'The Pop-Gun Plot: A Tragicomedy by Thomas Upton'.
8. **Joey White:** Joseph White, the Treasury Solicitor, was instrumental in extorting and publicizing incriminating information against Thelwall at his trial.

1. **Mason's Elfrida:** William Mason (1724–97), poet of the 1752 historical tragedy Elfrida.
2. **An Act ... Assemblies:** one of the infamous 'Two Acts'; see 'Introduction'.
3. **Attorney General and Chancellor of the Exchequer:** John Scott, first Earl of Eldon (1751–1838), Lord High Chancellor, presided over the treason trials; William Pitt (1759–1806)
simultaneously held office as Prime Minister and as Chancellor of the Exchequer, from 1783 to 1801 and then from 1804 until his death.


5. Locke, Sydney, and Harrington: On Locke, see note 19 to the Introduction of this volume; on James Harrington (1611–77), political theorist, author of the anti-Hobbes *Oceana*, see note 46 above.

6. Barlowe, Paine, and Callendar: Joel Barlow (1754–1812), American poet, radical pamphleteer and diplomatist, member of the London Society for Constitutional Information, author of *Advice to the Privileged Orders* (1792 and 1793). For Paine, see note 12 to the second Political Lecture, above; James Thomson Callender (1758–1803), political writer, journalist and radical; member of the Edinburgh Friends of the People, author of the anti-war, anti-imperialist *The Political Progress of Britain* and friend of Thomas Muir. In the mid-1790s, he fled to America, where he put his vitriolic pen to work on such political figures such as Washington and Alexander Hamilton, as well as other journalists, including the expatriate William Cobbett.

7. Rapin: Paul de Rapin de Thoiras (1661–1725), army officer and historian; author of *Dissertation sur les Whigs et les Tories* (1717), praised the mixed system of government (parliamentary and constitutional) of the Saxons and describes how, since then, English history has struggled to achieve liberty by establishing the correct balance between the ‘prerogatives’ of the crown and the ‘privileges’ of the people.

8. Socrates … Suetonius: Thelwall’s point here, in listing these classical philosophers, historians and political writers, is that although they were critics of war and corrupt government, the distance of time makes them all ‘safe’ subjects for lecturing.

9. VERTOT, MONTESQUIEU: Réné-Aubert Vertot (1655–1735), French historian. Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (1689–1755), French Enlightenment figure, political philosopher, author of *The Spirit of the Laws*, in which he outlined his theory of the separation of government powers; interestingly, there are some points in common between Montesquieu’s ideas and that of the classical historian Tacitus, whom Thelwall lists above as one of the ‘safe’ writers under Pitt’s (on climate and national identity for instance).

10. REEVES … EDWARDS: see notes 4 and 14, to Political Lectures, above.

11. country lodging: on Thelwall’s ‘lodging’ in the Tower whilst awaiting his trial for treason, see note 45, to Political Lectures, above.

12. My second commenced: Thelwall was moved from the Tower to Newgate.

1. *There is something rotten in the state of Denmark*: oft-quoted phrase from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

2. *Pitt or Fox, of Paine or Brunswick*: Thelwall makes the point, as he does elsewhere, that politics must be a question of principle, not political faction or party. In other words, politics should not be about supporting either the Tory Prime Minister Pitt or the Whig Leader of the Opposition Charles James Fox; nor should the question be about choosing the popular hero, Tom Paine, or supporting the notorious defender of monarchy, the Duke of Brunswick (see note 5, to Political Lectures, above). It is possible, too, that ‘Brunswick’ may refer to the royal family in general.

4. The city of Norwich: in the 1790s, Norwich was a centre of radicalism and dissent. Norwich was the Many reform-minded families and acquaintances met, corresponded and contributed to the Norwich’s radical journal the Cabinet, including members of the Pattison and Amyot families, William Enfield, William Dalrymple and Henry Crabb Robinson. See P. J. Corfield and C. Evans (eds), Youth and Revolution in the 1790s: Letters of William Pattison, Thomas Amyot and Henry Crabb Robinson (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1996).

5. Septembrizers of France: refers to the waves of fear and violence the surged through Paris in late summer 1792. The September Massacres, as they quickly became called, were initiated by several things: political confusion, the failure of the Constitution of 1791, the storming of the Tuileries, the weakness of the Legislative Assembly, the growing extremism and power of the newly-formed Paris commune, the Brunswick Manifesto and news of the Prussian Army moving toward Paris (see note 5, to Political Lectures, above).

6. Cammon Money: may refer to John Money (1739/40–1817), a balloonist and military theorist.

7. the books from which the lecture was delivered: these titles give us a sense of how Thelwall could discourse on contemporary political subjects by lecturing on classical history. ‘Roman Antiquities of Dionysius of Halicarnassus,’ Dionysius of Halicarnassus (60 BC–after 7 BC), Greek historian and rhetorician; the methodology of his early Roman history, Roman Antiquities, would have attracted Thelwall: Dionysius used historic examples to illustrate philosophic principles; similarly, Plutarch’s Lives or Parallel Lives, the great work of Greek historian Plutarch (46 AD–120 AD) uses biographies of famous Greeks and Romans to illustrate human virtue and vice; in An Essay on Lacaedemonian Government (1698), the radical Whig Walter Moyle (1672–1721) gave a positive portrayal of Lycurgus’s Sparta, a nation that owed its stability and liberties to the checks and balances built into its ancient constitution.

8. lord Spencer: George John Spencer, second Earl Spencer (1758–1834), politician and first lord of the Admiralty to the office of privy seal. Although Spencer had been a Whig and supporter of the opposition leader Charles James Fox, the course of the French Revolution impelled him to join William Pitt’s Tories in 1794. That same year he unsuccessfully attempted to persuade the Austrians to increase their campaign in the war against France. By December, he had taken over the office of the privy seal, where he demanded navy officers recognize the civilian authority of his office.

9. Robespierre: Maximilien François Marie Isidore de Robespierre (1758–94), a key figure of the French Revolution. He was one of the most popular orators in the Convention and his carefully prepared speeches often made a deep impression. His panegyrics on revolutionary government and his praise of virtue demonstrate his belief that the Terror was necessary, laudable and inevitable. It was Robespierre’s belief that the Republic and virtue were of necessity inseparable. He reasoned that the Republic could only be saved by the virtue of its citizens, and that the Terror was virtuous because it attempted to maintain the Revolution and the Republic. However, he took his principles to extremes and became a powerful force in the Terror of the mid-1790s, which saw immense numbers of French citizens sent to the guillotine.
10. *Sir Edmund Lacon*: Sir Edmund Knowles Lacon, (1780–1839), second Baronet of Great Yarmouth, Norfolk. At the time of Thelwall’s visit, Lacon would have been High Sheriff of Norfolk.

11. *lettres de cachet*: to many observers, these were the definitive symbol of the entwined nature of political tyranny and familial degradation under the Old Regime in France. Through these legal orders – which bore the king’s signature – individuals could have family members and acquaintances arrested and jailed for an indeterminate period of time. *Lettres de cachet* demonstrated how, under the authority of corrupt laws and the sanction of a distant father-king who cared little for his subjects, family members were entitled, even encouraged, to persecute their own flesh and blood. As one pro-revolutionary British pamphleteer wrote, ‘It was not uncommon, to see sons or daughters, actuated by the unnatural ambition of appropriating to themselves a fortune … to confine [their parents] for life, on the false pretence of insanity.’ By the same means, ‘a troublesome husband or an unpleasant wife’ or ‘an inhuman mother, jealous of the growing beauty of her daughter’ could rid themselves of inconvenient family members. M. du Fresnoy, *An Address to the National Assembly of France; Containing Strictures on Mr. Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Cambridge: J. Archdeacon, 1792) in Claeys, vol. 2, pp. 30–58, p. 40.

12. *Robespierre*: a perhaps purposeful misspelling of Robespierre, see note 123, above.

13. *Mr. Windham*: William Wyndham Grenville, Baron Grenville (1759–1834), prime minister (1806–7), cousin of William Pitt, friend of Edmund Burke. During his reign as leader of the House of Lords and Foreign Secretary (1791–1801), he became satirized for not only his anti-Jacobinism, his part in Britain’s questionable war policies against France and the Treason Trials, but also for his dumpy appearance, his sizeable head and even more sizeable backside, which earned him the moniker ‘Bogey’. Wyndham famously called Thelwall ‘an acquitted felon’.

14. *Chalk Farm*: The famous open-air meeting at Chalk Farm, north Camden in April 1794, organized by the LCS, attracted 2000 petitioners for parliamentary reform. This meeting preceded the May arrests of Thelwall, Horne Tooke and others as well as Pitt’s ‘Two Acts.’ Also see ‘Introduction’ to this volume.

15. *St. George’s fields … Mary-la-bonne fields*: Other LCS rallies were held in St. George’s Fields, Southwark in June 1795 and an allegedly 150,000–200,000-strong meeting at Copenhagen House, Islington in November 1795 and at Marylebone Fields in 1795. The Copenhagen House meeting is represented in James Gillray’s 1795 caricature ‘Copenhagen house,’ which portrays Thelwall delivering a fiery oration from the platform. The reformers John Gale Jones, Joseph Priestley and William Hodgson are also represented.


17. *Scots and Mitfords*: possibly this refers to the Mitford family, an ancient family of Scotland, who had their land unfairly confiscated and after generations of agitation, finally had their land returned to them.