

TOASTING, ORATORY AND PARODY IN BRITAIN DURING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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Abstract: In keeping with recent historiography on the interplay of orality and literature in Romantic Britain, this article starts from the emergence of toasting in the early phase of the French Revolution as a new form of radical discourse, in the context of a budding public-dinner sociability. The main focus bears on conservative parodies of such radical toasting, in papers such as the *Times* and especially the *Anti-Jacobin* and *Anti-Jacobin Review*. Parody enabled conservatives to mimic republican and regicidal tropes in ways that were much more outrageous than the alleged radical originals, thus testing the limits of public speech in 1790s Pittite Britain. The article ends with a close reading of a particularly ornate parody, based on an ode by Horace, of the Duke of Norfolk's notorious toast to "the Majesty of the People," which symbolized, in the eyes of the self-styled anti-Jacobins, the treachery and inconsequence of the Foxite Whigs in the 1790s.

Keywords: satire, parody, toasting, sociability, intertextuality

Oaths, odes and orations form a fruitful research field at the interface of orality, performance and texts. This article offers "toasting" as a fourth euphonic term, arguing that, in the Romantic era, especially at times of extreme tension like the mid-1790s, toasting participated in the effervescent volatility of politics. While the practice of drinking someone's health ("giving" or "pledging" healths) was widespread in early-modern Britain, the word "toast" – in the sense of "a lady who is named as the person to whom a company is requested to drink" – dates back to 1700, its first occurrence (according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*) being in William Congreve's comedy *The Way of the World*. Toasting was born in refined, aristocratic circles; it was bound up with notions of distinction and politeness, as Joseph Addison made clear in a probably fictional account of the birth of toasting

at Bath in the *Tatler*.¹ By the end of the century, toasting had become a commonplace ritual to honour men, measures and mottoes. It was a standard practice in private and public dinners, serving to defend political principles. This mundane custom also had a literary pedigree, appearing in novels by Fielding and Smollett and on stage, notably in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777), where it takes the form of the famous drinking – and toasting – song, “Here’s to the Maiden of Bashful Fifteen.”

A prominent Whig supporter of Charles James Fox, Sheridan leads us into the contentious world of 1790s Britain. In that period, toasts served as a vehicle of political communication, but they also participated in the metamorphoses and subversive reappropriations of Romantic literature. Toasting is part of the contested, fissiparous public sphere of orality and conversation which has been the subject of significant literary scholarship by John Barrell and Jon Mee, among others.² After the 21 May 1792 Royal proclamation against seditious writings and publications, and still more after the Two Acts of December 1795, dubbed “the Gagging Acts,” which effectively forbade unauthorized public meetings and societies, the complex, and increasingly ideologically policed, boundaries of a “public sphere” seemed to cave in under the stifling pressures of anti-Jacobin censorship.³ Mee has explored the negotiated and contested interplay of “conversation” and “literature,”⁴ while Ian Newman and Christina Parolin have examined the role of some key spaces of sociability, especially London taverns, in the production of a politicized literature out of oral conversations.⁵ Toasting was

¹ *The Tatler*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 1:187-90 (no. 24, 4 June 1709); Rémy Duthille, “Toasting and Gender in Great-Britain in the Eighteenth Century,” *Zinbun* 50 (2020): 37-55.

² John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); John Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), x, 320.

³ For a helpful summary of censorship and anti-sedition legislation, see David Worrall, “Freedom of Speech,” in *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism*, ed. David Duff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 233-49.

⁴ Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Jon Mee, “The Buzz about the Bee: Policing the Conversation of Culture in the 1790s,” in *Before Blackwood's: Scottish Journalism in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Alex Benichmol, Rhona Brown and David Shuttleton (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2015), 63-74.

⁵ Ian Newman, *The Romantic Tavern: Literature and Conviviality in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Christina Parolin, *Radical Spaces: Venues of Popular Politics in London, 1790-c. 1845* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010).

a central tool in the manufacturing of radical unanimity at banquets: that was the case with the Irish “patriots” of the mid-1750s, the English parliamentary reformers of the 1780s, all the way to the Chartists in the 1840s.

Originally an oral statement made, indeed performed by raising one’s glass, the toast also belongs to the sphere of written speech. Even before the French Revolution, lists of toasts were written in advance, so that guests knew on what topic they would hold forth before raising their glass. That was the case with official dinners or local festivities, but also, increasingly, with large dinners held by radical groups. From the 1790s, the proceedings of dinners, complete with toasts, songs and speeches, were published in the press and, increasingly, in pamphlet form. The publication was often closely controlled by the organisers of the dinner and it reflected an orderliness and good fellowship that was sometimes belied by other sources. Those glib “official” sources elided any disturbance or incident. A case in point, analysed in detail by Newman, is that of the self-styled “Jacobin” orator John Thelwall, who refused to toast “The Army” at a meeting of the Humane Society in 1799.⁶ The report in the *Times* is patriotic and conventional, but the incident is recorded in the Home Office Papers. The formatted publishing of toasts, adopting a stereotypical presentation of events, smooths over the particularities of dinners, and it often takes other (equally, but differently, slanted) sources, such as spy reports and private correspondences, to reconstruct episodes of dining and toasting.

This article builds on previous research on political toasting, which has established the potency – but also some pitfalls – of toasting as a form of political communication. Toasting is central to the articulation and dissemination of radicalism, “radicals” being here defined pragmatically as individuals and groups contesting key aspects of the established order and proposing to overhaul it, either by thorough reform or revolution. Political radicals, reformers and “patriots” had resorted to toasts since the mid-eighteenth century to publicize their grievances and demands.⁷ The practice of publishing political toasting in the press started in

⁶ Ian Newman, “The Anti-Social Convivialist: Toasting and Resistance to Sociability,” in *British Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Valérie Capdeville and Alain Kerhervé (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2019), 219-36.

⁷ Martyn J. Powell, “Political Toasting in Eighteenth-Century Ireland,” *History* 91, no. 304 (2006): 508-29; Rémy Duthille, “Political Toasting in the Age of Revolutions: Britain, America and France, 1765-1800,” in *Liberty, Property and Popular Politics: England and Scotland 1688-1815. Essays in Honour of H.T. Dickinson*, ed. Gordon Pentland and Michael T. Davis (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 73-86; Rémy Duthille, “Toasting and the Diffusion of Radical Ideas, 1780-1832,” in *Radical Voices, Radical Ways:*

the revolutionary margins of the British Empire. In the mid-1750s, Irish “patriots” drank toasts against the Money Bill and published them in the press. This practice was taken up by the American Insurgents from the Stamp Act crisis (1765). The French, in turn, started to publish lists of toasts in the early stages of the Revolution, the 14 July 1790 Festival of the Federation being the first occasion for publishing toast lists in the press.⁸ From the Directory to Napoleon’s Empire, the authorities celebrated France’s military advances and friendship with the “Sister Republics” by banquets and toasts, which were duly published and disseminated. In Britain, public celebrations of the French Revolution, starting with the large dinner given at the Crown and Anchor, London’s largest tavern, on 14 July 1790, and in several towns and cities across Britain, were covered in the press, some papers including lists of toasts and speeches.⁹

The Romantic era saw the steady rise, and institutionalization, of the publication of toast lists, by Whig and radical, but also conservative groups. In 1793 the first Pitt Club was founded in London to celebrate the Prime Minister William Pitt.¹⁰ After Pitt’s death in 1806, clubs affiliated to the London club were founded in many localities across Britain. By the 1820s, the *Times* reported the proceedings of dinners of the London Pitt Club, with detailed lists of toasts and corresponding speeches. Local Pitt clubs also published their proceedings in the form of pamphlets, which consisted usually of an annual dinner reported in great detail, highlighting the authority and hierarchy of local and national leaders, and the club’s commitment to conservative values.¹¹ Dozens of local clubs published the toasts and speeches given at celebrations of Pitt’s birthday, usually in the local press and sometimes as pamphlets as well.¹² Chartist papers like the *Northern Star*

Articulating and Disseminating Radicalism in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Britain, ed. Laurent Currelly and Nigel Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 170-89.

⁸ Duthille, “Political Toasting in the Age of Revolutions,” 79.

⁹ Powell, “Political Toasting in Eighteenth-Century Ireland;” Duthille, “Political Toasting in the Age of Revolutions.”

¹⁰ Cecil Powney, *History of the London Pitt Club, 1793-1925* (London: Harrison, 1925); J.J. Sack, “The Memory of Burke and the Memory of Pitt: English Conservatism Confronts Its Past, 1806-1829,” *Historical Journal* 30, no. 3 (1987): 623-40.

¹¹ Peter Brett, “Political Dinners in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain: Platform, Meeting Place and Battleground,” *History* 81, no. 264 (1996): 527-52; Keisuke Masaki, “Within the Bounds of Acceptability: Tory Associational Culture in Early-19th-Century Britain,” *Parliamentary History* 37, no. 3 (2018): 389-414.

¹² Among dozens of examples, see *The Anniversary Meeting of the Leeds Pitt Club: From a Revised Report of the Proceedings Published in the Leeds Intelligencer of May 31* (Leeds: Robinson and Hernaman, 1827).

devoted several columns to major dinners, which enabled James Epstein to conduct a Geertzian “thick description” of one dinner, decoding the multiple symbolic meanings of toasting.¹³

While there has been critical attention on radical toasting in the revolutionary decades and early nineteenth century,¹⁴ less is known about political drinking in Tory and conservative circles in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. One valuable area of research on anti-Jacobinism since the 1980s is the interlocking nature of “Jacobinism” and its counterrevolutionary foe: both discourses (and practices) fed on each other. As Mark Philp observed, while anti-Jacobins often parodied radical discourse, they were “similarly vulnerable, [...] open to subversive readings and lampooning by pamphleteers on the other side.” Possibly the most parodied text of the 1790s was Edmund Burke’s purple passage eulogizing Marie-Antoinette in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).¹⁵ This article will examine extreme cases comparable with that of John Reeves, the self-appointed defender of the constitution, who was prosecuted for libel in 1795. Philp notes that in Reeves’s case, “it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish parodies and propaganda.”¹⁶ I will use other material published by self-styled anti-Jacobins to show that they elaborated written forms of toasting, resorting to strategies, including parody and intertextuality, which radicals also used, hence certain forms of mirror effects. But parody also had its limits, because some texts, on either ideological side, were perceived as so extreme that they defied parody.

This article will review the interplay between toasting, oath-taking and other forms of symbolic communication in the revolutionary decade. The first section focuses on the earliest conservative parodies of radical toasts, which happened when sympathisers of the French Revolution celebrated the 14th of July in 1790 and 1791, prompting hostile parodies in retaliation. The analysis of conservative toast parodies is an opportunity to investigate the limits of political expression in the revolutionary decade, anti-revolutionary parodists indulging in visions of regicide and massacre that would be actionable were they uttered by radicals. The last section will consist of a closer reading of one particular parody of the Duke of

¹³ James Epstein, “Radical Dining, Toasting and Symbolic Expression in Early Nineteenth-Century Lancashire: Rituals of Solidarity,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 20, no.2 (1988): 271-91.

¹⁴ Besides Epstein (see preceding note): Duthille, “Toasting and the Diffusion of Radical Ideas.”

¹⁵ David Duff, “Burke and Paine: Contrasts,” in *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s*, ed. Pamela Clemit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 50-51.

¹⁶ Mark Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 64.

Norfolk's "radical" toast to the "Majesty of the People" in 1795. The mock-account in the *Anti-Jacobin Review* shows how the toast form enabled conservative parodists to deploy the whole range of intertextual and metalinguistic strategies.

Toasting the Fall of the Bastille: Revolutionary Performance and Conservative Counter-Performance in the London Press, 1790-91

The celebrations of the French Revolution in London give an excellent illustration of the generic transmutations and slippages between several forms of oral and written speech, since a toast could take up a motto, the name of one or several persons, a wish-list or political agenda and, quite often, book titles and quotations. On 14 July 1790, radical societies joined efforts to put up a large festival at the major tavern on the Strand, the Crown and Anchor, to celebrate the Storming of the Bastille.¹⁷ Centrally located off the Strand, this was London's largest upmarket tavern, and it had associations with London's colonial and mercantile interests.¹⁸ The London stewards paid attention to the near-simultaneity of their dinner with the festivals in France. The French saw the *Fête de la Fédération*, held in Paris and in all French towns, as the emblem of "a Revolution that is still open, still filled with hopes;" the festival was meant to channel energies and stabilize the revolutionary dynamic.¹⁹ The London reformers saw it rather as a way to proclaim their sympathy with the values of the Revolution, as they understood it. Prominent among the stewards of the London dinner were members of the Revolution Society, which was nominally instituted to celebrate the Glorious Revolution of 1688 but had become famous for Richard Price's sermon to the Society on 4 November 1789 (subsequently printed as a pamphlet) praising the French Revolution as a continuation of those of Britain in 1688 and America in 1776.²⁰ Both on 4 November 1789 and on 14 July 1790, many toasts were drunk to the French Revolution, taking up its values and mottoes wholesale. On 14 July, the second toast, "The Nation, the Law, and the King," was the French motto reflecting the hierarchy of constitutional powers, and it was also the text of the

¹⁷ Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), 121-22.

¹⁸ On the Crown and Anchor, see Newman, *The Romantic Tavern*, 37-107.

¹⁹ Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 23-24. I have contributed a chapter on British reactions to the Festival of the Federation in a forthcoming volume on revolutions in the early-modern period, to be published with University of Virginia Press.

²⁰ Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country, Delivered on Nov. 4, 1789, at the Meeting-House in the Old Jewry, to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain* (London: T. Cadell, 1789).

oath sworn by Lafayette and the guards during the Federation on the Champ de Mars in Paris (see Francesco Buscemi's essay in the present volume). That an oath in Paris could become a toast in London suggests an affinity between the two forms, and the malleability of the toast form.

Another blurring of oral forms occurred when an ode led to a toast, in a moment of communion that took on the solemnity of a revolutionary oath-taking ceremony. The poet Robert Merry, known for his "Della Cruscan" style, penned an *Ode for the Fourteenth of July* for the occasion. It was recited during the dinner and one of its stanzas remained famous as a classic of radical enthusiasm:

*Fill high the animating glass,
And let the electric ruby pass
From hand to hand, from soul to soul;
Who shall the energy control,
Exalted, pure, refin'd,
The Health of Humankind!*²¹

The guests sang the chorus, which ended in a toast, as the *Edinburgh Herald* noted on 18 July:

The two concluding lines of the Ode;

Assert the hallow'd rights which nature gave,
And let your last best wish be FREEDOM or the GRAVE,

Were sung as in chorus, and afterwards given as a toast.

The song turned into a toast, and in the process of communal singing and drinking, acquired the quality of an oath: "freedom or the grave" echoed the French motto "Liberty or Death" (which itself recalled Patrick Henry's celebrated speech in Boston, in 1775). *Vivre libre ou mourir* was the motto of the *Club des Amis de la Constitution*, better known as the Jacobin Club: on 14 July 1790, some 600 "friends of liberty" gathered at the Crown and Anchor sang, then gave as a toast, a phrase that had a long pedigree and had long been familiar with the English reformers.²²

²¹ Robert Merry, *Ode for the Fourteenth of July, 1791, the Day Consecrated to Freedom: Being the Anniversary of the Revolution in France*. By Robert Merry, A.M. Member of the Royal Academy of Florence (London: J. Bell, 1791), 6-7.

²² On the idea's long pedigree, from ancient Greece to Addison's *Cato* (1712) and Patrick Henry's 1775 speech, see Michel Biard, "Introduction," in *La Liberté ou la mort. Mourir en député, 1792-1795* (Paris: Tallandier, 2015), 9-20.

The guests were binding themselves on the values of the natural rights of man. Jon Mee notes that the festivities were marked by a “heady blend of poetry and radical politics;”²³ the metaphor of electricity, favoured by radicals, gave Merry’s ode a more radical turn than his earlier Della Cruscan poetry.²⁴ Merry’s ode understands itself as part of his multifaceted commitment to the Federation: he had also co-authored (with Charles Bonner) a pantomime, *The Picture of Paris, Taken in the Year 1790*, which had premiered in December 1790 at Covent Garden and presented an idealistic picture of the Federation, complete with French patriotic songs.²⁵

By July 1790, then, the slippage between odes, oaths and French revolutionary mottoes was already manifest. Conservative satire did not bite until the next year. The conjunction of alcohol-fuelled sociability, a large crowd of merchants and disgruntled intellectuals, and heady revolutionary rhetoric, alarmed Edmund Burke, who identified the danger of subversion in Britain in the Crown and Anchor rather than in the London underworld.²⁶ In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, published on 1 November 1790, Burke lambasted the Revolution Society and warned that its “after-dinner toasts” did not represent Britain’s voice. The constitution lay in parchments, not in the befuddled songs and toasts of the middling orders; it was enshrined in aristocratic country houses, not upstart taverns.²⁷ Beyond Burke’s well-known ideological case against the Revolution, his contribution to counterrevolutionary parody of toasting was two-fold. He alerted the self-styled “Loyalists” and “anti-Jacobins” to the danger of revolutionary toasting, especially when it was published in the press. Secondly, the *Reflections* provided counterrevolutionary weapons in the form of a rich imagery and demonology centring around the seventeenth-century Puritan rebels.

Conservative satirists were quick to use this arsenal against the most conspicuous manifestation of radicalism: a monster dinner announced for 14 July 1791. The dinner took place, again, at the Crown and Anchor; it was mired in controversy before, during and after the proceedings. Not only was the occasion cause for concern, but the conveners were mostly Dissenters partly drawn from the Revolution

²³ Jon Mee, *Print, Publicity, and Popular Radicalism in the 1790s: The Laurel of Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 50. See more generally Chapter 3 on Robert Merry.

²⁴ Mary Fairclough, *Literature, Electricity and Politics, 1740-1840: “Electrick Communication Every Where”* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 113.

²⁵ Cecilia Feilla, “Performing History: Harlequinades of the French Revolution on the Popular London Stage,” *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 45 (2016): 61-81.

²⁶ Ian Newman, “Edmund Burke in the Tavern,” *European Romantic Review* 24, no. 2 (2013): 125-48.

²⁷ *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, Vol. 8: *The French Revolution, 1790-1794*, ed. L.G. Mitchell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 81.

Society, including Dr Price, and the Society for Constitutional Information (SCI), which advocated universal manhood suffrage and the end of parliamentary corruption. Burkean imagery raised the dire prospect of a resurgence of seventeenth-century Puritan extremism. On 7 July, the *Times* published “A List of Toasts and Sentiments for the Revolution Society Dinner.” This paper, conservative though not ministerial, took a hard line against all British sympathisers with France. The “List of Toasts and Sentiments” was a parody of radical toast lists, as the adoption of radical tropes made clear. The list starts with:

The glorious and immortal glory of those true friends to liberty and the Rights of Man – *Voltaire* – *Wat Tyler* – *Oliver Cromwell* and *Mirabeau*.

The 14th of July.

The 2d June, 1780.

The 30th January, 1625.

May the Rights of Man flourish, when the Rights of Kings are no more.

The Memory of *Jack Cade* and *Sam House*.

Interestingly, the list follows two lines, the succession of glorious events (from the execution of Charles I to the 1780 Gordon Riots and the Storming of the Bastille) and the pantheon of heroes: those are two cardinal modalities of the construction of radical memory.

The list of heroes, used by all radical and reform movements to buttress their claims to legitimacy, is particularly meaningful in this conservative parody. While the middle-class, dissenting reformers presented their ancestors as respectable and non-revolutionary, the *Times* took up Burke’s web of allusions in the first pages of his *Reflections*. They summoned up medieval troublemakers (Wat Tyler and the ringleaders of the 1381 Peasant Revolt), and more especially the Puritans of the seventeenth century. Cromwell provided a link with the eighteenth-century Dissenters and was a classic brush to tar them with infamy. It is unclear whether the *Times* got the wrong date unwittingly (30th January corresponds to the “martyrdom” of Charles I, but his execution took place in 1649, not 1625, which was the first year of his reign) or to mock the alleged historical ignorance of the Bastille Day revellers.²⁸ In the *Times* list, the English leaders are sandwiched

²⁸ Peter J. Kitson, “‘Not a Reforming Patriot but an Ambitious Tyrant’: Representations of Cromwell and the English Republic in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,” in *Radicalism in British Literary Culture, 1650-1830: From Revolution to Revolution*, ed. Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 183-200.

between two French figures: Voltaire was almost universally detested in England for his alleged atheism,²⁹ while Mirabeau, by 1791, had lost most of his patriotic credentials and was thought to be corrupt and a libertine. This list thus conflates a ragtag of English and French philosophers and men of action with a chiasmus of English and French ignoble rabble-rousers (*Voltaire – Wat Tyler – Oliver Cromwell* and *Mirabeau*) to suggest anarchy. It was supposed to build a summary review of the mental furniture of the Jacobins, made up of materialism (Clayton), libertinism (Rochester), and finally “The Rights of Man, and the Woman of Pleasure,” which conflates Paine’s pamphlet with John Cleland’s erotic novel *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749). Sam House, the last in the pantheon of radical infamy, was a publican notorious for his role in the 1784 Westminster election: his name symbolized the plebeian, unrespectable supporters of Charles James Fox and the Whigs.³⁰

The Toast, a New Genre Serving to Tease Out the Limits of Admissible Speech in the 1790s?

The *Times* parody, replete with historical and intertextual references, signals that the radical toast list had become, by 1791, an identifiable piece of news, almost a genre with an established rhetoric. The physical layout of the list, with its indentation and italicized words, made the toasts leap out of the newspaper page. (This is very helpful for the researcher who browses through periodicals in search of toasts!) By the mid-1790s, the list form was a recognizable feature of British newspapers. In the early nineteenth century, the long account of dinners became standard, with toasts standing out in bold or larger font isolated on the page. The typography retained something of the oral origins of the toast, mimicking the solemn moment of silence and unanimity that toasting produced in the actual dinner room.

However, the *Times*’s rather crude strategy of systematic inversion leads to unanticipated effects. Sometimes toasts have an uncanny way of anticipating events. The toast to Wat Tyler in the *Times* confirms that conservative parody often went further than radical discourse in print. To the best of my knowledge, nobody in the circles favourable to the French Revolution toasted Wat Tyler in 1791, nor did he appear in the printed productions or manuscript records of the London Corresponding Society (LCS), the SCI, the Revolution Society or the Scottish

²⁹ Bernard N. Schilling, “The English Case Against Voltaire: 1789-1800,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4, no. 2 (1943): 193-216.

³⁰ Callum D. Smith, “The ‘Republican’ Publican: ‘Honest’ Sam House, Visual Culture, and the General Election of 1784,” *Parliamentary History* 41, no. 2 (2022): 240-78.

network of Friends of the People in 1792-1793. Wat Tyler became caught up in a longstanding conflict of appropriation, which had many parodic, and some ridiculous, episodes. The Loyalists seem to have invoked Tyler first: as early as 1793, an anti-Jacobin association published a booklet meant to be distributed among the poor entitled *A Dialogue between Wat Tyler, Mischievous Tom and an English Farmer*.³¹ Some radicals later praised Tyler as an early defender of mankind's equality, like John Baxter, who proudly presented himself as a member of the LCS (but that was in 1796, after the Gagging Acts).³² In the 1840s, "the leader of the Peasants' Revolt was a Chartist favourite."³³ Already in the mid-1790s, praise of Tyler was a sure mark of radicalism, and political renegades regretted their former loves. Famously, Robert Southey published the tragedy *Wat Tyler* at the height of his "Jacobin" phase in 1794, only to try and suppress a pirated edition in 1817, after he had become a Poet Laureate.

In the 1790s, the most outrageous toasts were not drunk by the middle-class Society for Constitutional Information, not even by the more socially mixed London Corresponding Society, but at the two extreme sides of the political divide. From 1791, as we saw, the *Times* started to publish conservative parody: anti-Jacobin toasts were published but most probably not drunk. At the other extreme of the political spectrum was the self-professedly unrespectable "ultra-radical" underworld, mostly disciples of the utopian, republican thinker and publicist Thomas Spence. After the Two Acts of December 1795 closed down venues of radicalism, spies carefully noted down toasts drunk by the Spenceans in shadowy alehouses. Ian McCalman has shown how drinking, singing and toasting contests, involving outrageous, blasphemous and political extreme language, served to maintain the morale and identity of the "ultra-radical" groups.³⁴

Troubling affinities link conservative parody and ultra-radical toasting. Some of the parodic toasts in the *Times* articles bear comparison, several years in advance, with outrageous Spencean toasts. One *Times* toast, "May the dagger of Brutus be tempered on the anvil of French Republicanism," is a deft parody of the violent republicanism and tyrannicide dressed in Roman garb which became fashionable in revolutionary France and from 1792 was imitated by some English radicals. Another toast published in the *Times* in July 1791, "May the purple stream of Royalty be soon visible at Paris," reads like an uncanny premonition of 1793.

³¹ Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain*, 61.

³² John Baxter, *A New Impartial History of England* (London, 1796).

³³ Matthew Roberts, *Chartism, Commemoration and the Cult of the Radical Hero* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 9.

³⁴ Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 120.

This is a toast no-one drank in 1791, and very few dared to by 1793. The parody is hardly distinguishable from later examples of ultra-radical rhetoric quoted by McCalman: "May the guillotine be as common as a pawnbroker's shop and every tyrant's head a pledge;" "May the Skin of the Tyrants be burnt into Parchment and the Rights of Man written upon it."³⁵ Such Spencean toasts outlived the French Revolution crisis and nurtured extreme radical rhetoric until the 1830s. In 1820, another gory metaphor, possibly inspired by the Marseillaise, informed the following toast: "May the barren land of our country be manured with the blood of our Tyranny."³⁶

The toast was amenable to parody because of its formulaic nature (which made the parodied hypotext recognized) and because it was compatible with solemn, as well as playful, moods, and in many cases it was possible to brush aside accusations by claiming a toast was ironic, and not to be taken straightforwardly. The redactor of the *Times*, in 1791, and later "anti-Jacobin" writers played on those ambiguities, their unassailable loyalty authorizing utterances which, in any reformist paper, would be deemed regicidal and actionable. The *Times* could imagine the King's death almost literally in July 1791, its loyalty being secure. From 1792, hardening legal interpretations rendered most criticism of the king and constitution treasonable.³⁷ The toast, then, was a vehicle for saying without saying, for projecting fantasies or wishes without presenting it as serious, but without disclaiming them altogether either.

If the *Times's* mock-list of Bastille Day toasts parodies (in advance) a radical, republican discourse, the Loyalists who emerged as a political force in 1792 also took inspiration from the radicals to coin their own toasts.³⁸ Examples are extremely scarce, partly because of a lack of sources; there were no government informers to take down notes during Loyalist meetings. A stronger reason is that the published and manuscript records show that Loyalist and conservative clubs, instead of inventing toasts, often preferred to drink the King, the royal family and

³⁵ McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 122, 120.

³⁶ Iain McCalman, "Ultra-Radicalism and Convivial Debating-Clubs in London, 1795-1838," *English Historical Review* 102, no. 403 (April 1987): 317.

³⁷ Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, 604-42.

³⁸ On the "Loyalist" movement: Robert R. Dozier, *For King, Constitution and Country: The English Loyalists and the French Revolution* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1983); H.T. Dickinson, "Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism 1789-1815," in *Britain and the French Revolution, 1789-1815*, ed. H.T. Dickinson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 103-25; Kevin Gilmartin, *Writing against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

dignitaries in order of precedence.³⁹ An example is to be found, however, in a letter to the editor of the *Anti-Jacobin Review* in 1806 which includes a list of “anti-Jacobin toasts” at least two of which are serious, and presumably expected to be taken at face value:

May all conspirators, persecutors, as also fomenters and promoters of conspiracy and persecution, be held in exemplary detestation and abomination.

May wilful perjury, and subornation of perjury, be deemed capital crimes, as hostile to the community.⁴⁰

The toasts are solemn, even dour, in tone, and clearly assume the moral high ground. Precisely for that reason, they lack force and at odds with the general tone of the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, which contains much satirical material. The self-styled “anti-Jacobins” were at their sharpest and most pungent in satire and parody.

The Duke of Norfolk’s Democratic Toast and its Conservative Transformations

This last section explores the longest and most complex anti-Jacobin elaboration of a “radical” toast, the notorious one given by Charles Howard, Duke of Norfolk, on 24 January 1798.⁴¹ The Duke had given a toast to “Our sovereign’s health – the majesty of the people,” provoking a major scandal and prompting the outraged King George III to strip Norfolk of all his commissions, especially as lord lieutenant and as colonel of a regiment in charge of national defence.

The toast provoked a storm of criticism, verbal and visual. In *The Loyal Toast*, published on 3 February 1798, less than two weeks after the event, James Gillray represented the Duke giving a toast to a disorderly company including Charles James Fox (Fig. 1). Overturned bottles give an impression of disorder and moral laxity that was absent from the real meeting, but are vaguely reminiscent of the skulls in another well-known Gillray cartoon, *Un Petit Souper à la Parisienne* (1792). Above the chair decorated with a red cap of liberty, a just deity in the clouds uses scissors to deprive the Duke of his offices, materialized by a long scroll bearing the list of his dignities.

³⁹ Masaki, “Within the Bounds of Acceptability.” Examples include the minutes and published accounts of the Pitt Clubs.

⁴⁰ “Anti-Jacobin Toasts. To the Editor of the *Anti-Jacobin Review*,” *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine; or, Monthly Political and Literary Censor* 24 (1806): 104.

⁴¹ Loren Reid, *Charles James Fox: A Man for the People* (Harlow: Longmans, 1969), 365.



Fig. 1. James Gillray, *The Loyal Toast*. Published 3 February 1798. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

An anonymous poem published in the *Evening Mail* and in the *Times* on 10 February compared Norfolk to the Duke of Orléans, who had led a faction in the early days of the French Revolution. This was an ominous comparison because Orléans was guillotined in 1793 despite his support for the Revolution. The implication was that the Duke of Norfolk consorted with low-bred artisans of the London Corresponding Society and would only meet a condign punishment if the rabble put him to death.

The *Evening Mail* published on 12 February an “Epistle from Citizen Thelwall to Citizen Norfolk.” Thelwall, the star orator of the LCS, avowed republican and one of the very few self-styled “Jacobins” was a conservative bugbear. The parody deploys mock-heroic tropes reminiscent of the first witches’ scene in *Macbeth* (1.3):

Great NORFOLK hail! Health and respect I send
To thee, whom now I joy to call my friend.
Great NORFOLK hail! Accept thy THELWALL'S lays,
Attun'd to sing bright innovation's praise.
All hail, great NORFOLK, in fair Freedom's name,
Those whom Equality shall raise to fame!⁴²

The ruffians rally behind the Duke, and the toast serves as an envoi, the acme of the poem. Formally, this is interesting because it is similar to the actual proceedings at dinners, where the toast ends a speech, and also similar to poems like Merry's ode, which ends with a toast:

So Gallic freemen, form'd a pious band,
And back'd by ORLEANS, sav'd their native land;
Timid at first they lurk'd in mean retreats,
But ORLEANS fir'd them on to daring feats:
His festive board with Revolution rung,
And Patriot Chiefs of future blessings sung.
Glee, toast, mirth, sentiment, and jest combin'd,
To light the flame of freedom in the mind;
And that in him no coldness they might see,
He gave their Sov'reign health – the People's Majesty.⁴³

The most developed satire was published on 12 March 1798 in the ultra-Tory *Anti-Jacobin; or Weekly Examiner*. The writers of the ode have been identified as George Ellis and George Canning.⁴⁴ The toast had long been out of the news, but it lingered in memories, so that references were not lost on the readership. The poem, entitled simply "Ode," presents itself as an imitation of ode 25 of Book III of Horaces's odes ("Quo me Bacche rapis, tui"), in which the poet finds himself carried away by Bacchus, the god of wine, to praise Caesar. The introduction also stipulated that the "Ode" was received in an envelope bearing a ducal coronet; such an introduction serves to prepare the satirical attack on Norfolk and to enhance the literary credentials of the performance. Each stanza corresponds to a part of the Latin poem, part some of the pleasure being that the educated reader can compare the two and enjoy the parody the more.

⁴² *Evening Mail* (12 February 1798).

⁴³ *Evening Mail* (12 February 1798).

⁴⁴ *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner* (1799), ed. Edgar Mertner, 2 vols. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1970), 1:xiii. Quotations below are from this facsimile edition 1:626-29.

In the ode, Bacchus leads the poet to toast “new measures to combine / The Great and Little Nation,” a jibe on the “Grande Nation,” France’s expansionist ambitions and Norfolk’s and the Foxites’ alleged ambition to submit Britain to France. The poetic persona then muses over Fox’s future triumph, his absolute rule, when he makes “TERROR the *Order of the Day*” and tramples over the king and the Tories. The toast is finally announced in the following stanza:

My mighty Feelings must have way!
A Toast I’ll give – a Thing I’ll say,
 As yet unsaid by any, –
“OUR SOVEREIGN LORD!” – let those who doubt
My honest meaning, hear me out –
 “His MAJESTY – THE MANY!”

The toast echoes the Duke of Norfolk’s notorious toast to “The Majesty of the People,” but while “the people” are endowed with dignity in republican thought, “the many” – the rabble, plebs or *hoi polloi* – are unrespectable and unworthy of being “sovereign.” Republicanism gives way to sheer mob rule. Another implication is that the Duke was drunk and wanted to be original and conspicuous. He blurted out a silly toast. Ironically, this stanza can be read as an exculpation for a drunk man, a strategy used by radicals like Thelwall claiming that a man may drink foolish toasts without being persecuted for it.⁴⁵ Perhaps the noble peer could still come to his senses and return to his king’s allegiance?

The toast forms the climax of the poem, but this time it is placed in the middle, not at the end, of the poem. The rest is concerned with the poet’s dive into the low life of London, and his exploration of the “various charms” of Covent Garden, a neighbourhood notorious for prostitution. In the last stanza, the poet addresses Bacchus again, telling him that for his sake he would not hesitate to resign his military commissions to the King.

The *Anti-Jacobin* ode flaunts its literariness with a complex apparatus (Latin, translation, introduction, mythological references). The poem strives to define anti-Jacobin satire as literate and cultivated and to construct an implied reader who is conversant with the classics: in other words, to raise a sociological and cultural barrier between the anti-Jacobins and the plebeian radicals. John Halliwell suggests that the poetry section of the *Anti-Jacobin* was meant to “negate the influence of radical print culture” and to “appropriate the discursive power” of its

⁴⁵ John Thelwall, *The Natural and Constitutional Right of Britons to Annual Parliaments* (London, 1795), 84.

satire.⁴⁶ However, anti-Jacobin satire needed Jacobinism to feed on. Cultural gatekeeping needs the rabble: it would not make any sense if everyone was exquisitely cultivated, so the negation of the radical cultural sphere is perhaps an avowed ideal, but one that would lead to the extinction of anti-Jacobinism itself. The Bacchic ode can be interpreted as a way for anti-Jacobins to castigate the Duke of Norfolk's ignoble drinking and to show mastery of an appropriate, Horatian, classical way of drinking. It might be noted, however, that the chosen mode of satire is Horatian, not Juvenalian. The Duke is treated with the milder, more urbane, worldly and smiling form of Horatian satire, and he is spared Juvenalian lashes.

Conclusion

This article has suggested the toasting emerged in the 1790s as a recognizable political form, which, in the heated debates around the Revolution, gave rise to parody, appropriations and rewritings. Because toasts were heard at large-scale dinners attracting several hundred guests, but still more because toasts were readable in the press, they soon became a familiar form of political propaganda, akin to a list of men and measures or a manifesto. Because particular toasts were controversial, toast lists could be subject to parody by conservatives targeting the allegedly seditious principles of pro-French liberals. While the "French Revolution debate" has long been reconfigured in literary criticism as an "intertextual war" between pamphlets,⁴⁷ intertextuality also operated in and across other genres, and in the custom of toasting. The slippages between oaths, odes and toasts at Bastille Day dinners, and the satirical comments by Gillray, the anti-Jacobins and *Times* journalists testifies to the vastness of this intertextual and intermedial field.

This article has looked mostly at written evidence, glancing only briefly at graphic satire, and commenting on lists of heroes and historical events published in the press. The analysis could be extended. Parody did not just exploit ideology and rhetoric. Non-verbal communication, starting with the body language of the toastmaster, the erect pose and thrust of the glass, contrasting with the (allegedly) slouching, befuddled audiences, was a godsend to graphic caricaturists. While this article has touched on one of Gillray's great dinner scenes, *The Loyal Toast*, further work could be carried out on the interface of orality, text and graphic material. For instance, William Dent's *Revolution Anniversary, or, Patriotic Incantations* (1791),

⁴⁶ John Halliwell, "Loyalist Satire, Parody, and The Anti-Jacobin," in *The British Periodical Text 1797-1835: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Simon Hull (Tirril: Humanities-Ebooks, 2008), 38.

⁴⁷ Steven Blakemore, *Intertextual War: Edmund Burke and the French Revolution in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, and James Mackintosh* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997).

another cultural production born in the context of the Whig-radical celebration of 14 July 1791, was inspired by a reference to *Macbeth* in Burke's *Reflections*.⁴⁸ Some graphic scenes of toasting conjure up several layers of intertextuality and intermediality, echoing other prints (the cauldron motif, found in *Revolutionary Anniversary* being a recurring pattern for later conservative criticism of Whig and radical plotters).

The most important conclusion of this study may be the notion that parody and subversion operated with several degrees of complexity, from a mere list of funny toasts, with easy inversions, e.g., in the *Times*, to the highly self-conscious, (over?)-educated version of the Bacchic Ode in the *Anti-Jacobin*. Even if the anti-Jacobins deployed satire for their ideological purposes in brilliant fashion, they were never able to monopolize satire and parody. They attracted satirical retorts in liberal papers like the *Morning Chronicle*. Radical satire continued long after Canning and his colleagues tried to discredit it and impose a monopoly of conservative sentiment on the public sphere. This is good, not just for the sake of political pluralism and the survival of enlightened values, but also because the perennially contested nature of political life and the public sphere in Britain ensured the relevance and continuance of parody, satire and the fun that went with them.

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⁴⁸ On graphic satire and the world of the Foxites, see Callum Smith, "Radical Socialites, or Sociable Radicals? The Foxite Whigs in Caricature, 1783-1806" (PhD diss., Bristol University, 2022).

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