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0521803519 - The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution

M. O. Grenby

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THE ANTI-JACOBIN NOVEL

The French Revolution sparked an ideological debate which also brought Britain to the brink of revolution in the 1790s. Just as radicals wrote 'Jacobin' fiction, so the fear of rebellion prompted conservatives to respond with novels of their own, indeed, these soon outnumbered the Jacobin novels. This is the first survey of the full range of conservative novels produced in Britain during the 1790s and early 1800s. M. O. Grenby examines the strategies used by conservatives in their fiction, thus shedding new light on how the anti-Jacobin campaign was understood and organised in Britain. Chapters cover the representation of revolution and rebellion, the attack on the 'new philosophy' of radicals such as Godwin and Wollstonecraft and the way in which hierarchy is defended in these novels. Grenby's book offers an insight into the society which produced and consumed anti-Jacobin novels, and presents a case for re-examining these neglected texts.

M. O. GRENBY is Hockliffe Research Fellow in the English Department at De Montfort University. He recently held the Fulbright-Robertson Professorship of British History at Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri. He has written for a number of scholarly journals, and has been a regular contributor to *History: the Journal of the Historical Association*. This is his first book.

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To my parents

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Preface

Numerous novels appeared in Britain in the years after 1789 addressing the debate on the French Revolution and the ideas emanating from it. Some novels sympathising with the radical cause have received significant scholarly attention, but those which took a conservative line have so far escaped any sustained analysis. These were the anti-Jacobin novels.

Close to two hundred late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels have been consulted in my quest to identify the extent and varieties of the conservative fiction published in Britain in the decade or so on either side of 1800. Yet this survey still covers only a small fraction of the fiction produced in the period. There are, therefore, almost certainly many more anti-Jacobin novels, of varying degrees and types, which remain undetected. Finding those anti-Jacobin novels which do appear in the following pages has been essentially a three-stage process. First, there are several existing works of scholarship which, together, have discerned between fifteen and twenty anti-Jacobin novels, and these form the foundation of this research. These ‘tip-offs’ sometimes occur in unlikely places: in biographies of figures who were maligned by the anti-Jacobins, perhaps, or in studies of the early Evangelical movement. Second, and in the attempt to place this survey on the basis of at least a degree of nominal comprehensiveness, I have made a thorough search of the major periodicals of the age – the *Monthly*, the *Critical* and the *Analytical Reviews*, the *British Critic* and the *Anti-Jacobin Review* – all of which contain a mixture of reviews and short notices of recently published novels, and which have proved invaluable for pointing out previously unknown conservative fiction. The latter two publications, of course, delighted in finding new anti-Jacobin novels, and so proved especially useful.

The third, and much less scientific, method of hunting anti-Jacobin novels is to track them down in the places in which they congregate – the forgotten holdings of the major research libraries – where they can be traced by means of clues in their titles, imprints or attributions. This

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might most properly be characterised as serendipity, but access to new CD-ROM databases of publications and library catalogues, with their powerful search engines, has enabled a slightly more systematic approach. Promising-looking titles can be picked out, located and read, and although many have proved to be false leads, several important finds have been made. Any success achieved with this method of detection must always be accompanied by a degree of frustration, however, for the more anti-Jacobin fictions one finds by chance, the stronger the suggestion that there remain many more as yet undiscovered.

This survey might have been larger than it currently is, but I have decided not to include novels translated into English even though they might contain much that is anti-Jacobin. I have, though, included works published by Americans in America as well as some novels which are no longer extant. For the latter I have had to rely on contemporary reviews, with their extensive quotations. Where I have done this, I have endeavoured to make this clear. It should also be pointed out that I have paid more attention to the less well-known novels of the period. There is much that might usefully be said, and in some cases has been said, of the political orientation of the novels of Ann Radcliffe, Frances Burney, Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth, Matthew Lewis and so on, but I have opted to bring more obscure material (at least to the modern reader) to light.

In most cases, I have preserved the traditional attributions of works by anonymous authors, using the names supplied, often for no obvious reason, by the major library catalogues. Indeed, I have spent little time investigating the authors, or supposed authors, of the novels which I consider, preferring, as will become apparent, to see the anti-Jacobin novel as a coherent body of texts rather than as a collection of novels by separately motivated individuals.

Some of the novels under consideration in the following chapters are of much literary merit, and do, I feel, deserve to be rescued from the obscurity into which they have fallen. The same cannot be said for all the novels. But in any case, this book is not the place to make claims for them as great literature. Rather I have sought to use these neglected novels as a lens through which to examine the ideological fabric of British society in the age of revolution.

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A version of my Introduction has already appeared in *History: the Journal of the Historical Association*, volume 83 (July 1998). I am grateful for the permission of its editor to reproduce it here.

I would like to record my gratitude to those who encouraged and advised me in this research at various stages in my academic career – to the late Paul Edwards, to Nick Phillipson, Frances Dow, Geoffrey Carnall, Gary Kelly and Iain McCalman, and above all, to Harry Dickinson, a model tutor, post-graduate supervisor and mentor.

It has been pointed out to me – and I know it to be true – that these acknowledgements would not be complete without recognition of those who have given me friendship and support, sometimes accommodation, and usually only mild harassment about what I have been doing all this time. Thank you to Henry, Jenny, Lizzie, Patricia and Stephen in Edinburgh, to Hugh, Liz, Malcolm, Mary and Tim in London, to Dave, Rebecca and Sam in Fulton, and to my family in St Albans.