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0521630525 - The French Revolution and the London Stage, 1789-1805

George Taylor

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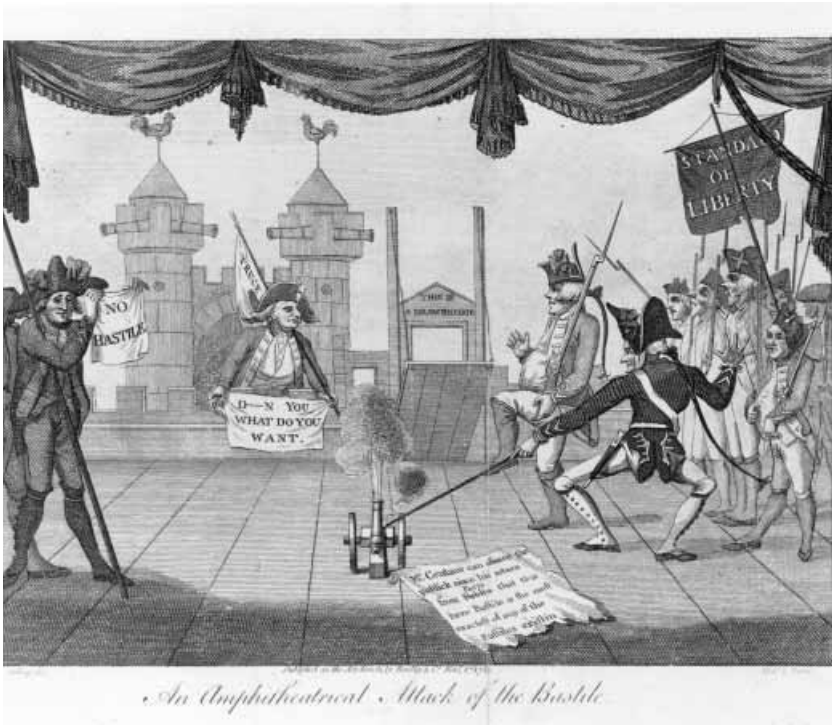
THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE LONDON STAGE, 1789–1805

During the French Revolution most performances on the London stage were strictly censored, but political attitudes found indirect expression. New and popular genres like pantomime, Gothic drama, history plays, musical and spectacular entertainment, and, above all, melodrama provided metaphors for the hopes and fears inspired by the conflict in France and subsequent European wars.

George Taylor looks at how British drama and popular entertainment were affected by the ideas and events of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. He argues that melodrama had its origins in this period, with certain Gothic villains displaying qualities attributed to Robespierre and Napoleon, and that recurrent images of incarceration and dispossession reflected fears of arbitrary persecution, from the tyranny of the Bastille to the Jacobin's Reign of Terror. By a cultural analysis of the popular entertainment and theatre performances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Taylor reveals issues of ideological conflict and psychological stress.

GEORGE TAYLOR is Senior Lecturer in Drama at the University of Manchester. He has written articles on Delsarte, Svengali, anti-slave trade plays and theatre production. He is the author of *Players and Performances in the Victorian Theatre* (1989) and *Plays by Samuel Foote and Arthur Murphy* (1984) published by Cambridge University Press in the series British and American Playwrights.

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An anonymous cartoon of the production at Astley's Amphitheatre of *Paris in an Uproar; or, the Destruction of the Bastille* (17 August 1789) entitled 'An Amphitheatrical Attack on the Bastille'.

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To Anna and Chris

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Acknowledgements

At a time when academics are being urged to set up collaborative research projects, and to use postgraduates to do the donkey work of literature searches, gathering statistics and even proofreading, I am somewhat reluctant to admit that this book is virtually all my own work. But, although I have little direct or practical assistance to acknowledge, I must record a debt to those whose insights have, over the years, informed my thinking about the content of this book. My fascination with the French Revolution dates back to undergraduate days, when the assiduity of Alfred Goodwin and the perspicacity of Brian Manning both inspired me to look behind the excitement of events to the driving forces of ideology and material interest. Similarly, Stephen Joseph, Peter Thomson, Martin Banham, Christopher Baugh and David Mayer, all from very different perspectives, fuelled my interest in the then disregarded genre of melodrama. Other scholars whose written work has subsequently enriched my appreciation of both history and theatre are acknowledged in the text.

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Only modern editions of the plays are included in the bibliography. Plays cited in the text are referenced as either from the Larpent MS Collection in the Henry Huntington Library, San Marino, California, or from early printed versions.