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## THE CATO STREET CONSPIRACY, 1820: A STUDY IN TERRORISM

PROFESSOR VIC GATRELL

Two hundred years ago this Sunday, on 23 February, the Cato Street conspiracy was outwitted by one of the most repressive tory governments this country has known. Led by a faded gentleman named Arthur Thistlewood<sup>1</sup>, its ambition was spectacular. There had been no such plot to destroy British government since Guy Fawkes's adventure in 1605, and it was the last such plot before the IRA's bombing of Mrs Thatcher and her party in Brighton in 1984.

I focus on its story for two reasons. One is personal. I am writing a book on the subject, and, as I do so, I confirm my belief that the historical imagination thrives on the devil that lies in the micro-historical detail. Of course broad contexts matter, but my sense of those times, my sense also of London's back streets and alleys and tenements, its taverns, of the plights of poor people in it, even of its sheer walkability in 1820, has been hugely advanced by writing about the conspiracy minutely in its London context. The simple, unavoidable materiality of some of the places<sup>2</sup> and artefacts I'll be showing you will I hope speak for itself.

More to the *argumentative* point of this talk, secondly. As any novelist will tell us, a small focused story can still carry large implications. The scenario I'll describe this evening may seem to belong to a remote and more barbarous history, yet it resonates into our own time. Although much has changed since 1820, modernised versions of the power, class and property structures that outwitted the conspirators then, and the inequalities that angered them, are still broadly in place. So, it's unavoidable that the story will illuminate both continuities and discontinuities in what political terror now signifies for us all.

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Let me remind you of the story first.

In 1975 the London County Council added to its collection a photo of a small workshop in the mews-alley of Cato Street, just behind the Edgware Road. It's now converted into a modern dwelling, but in the 1970s we see it battered and bruised after nearly two centuries' use<sup>3</sup>. It was first erected around 1803 as a gentleman's stable and coach-house, and it stood in an unpaved lane of cottages for labourers on Paddington's new building developments. This shows what it looked like in 1820<sup>4</sup>, and what it looks like now.

In late 1819 the stable was let to an ex-soldier who said he wanted to keep his horse and cart there. He was really looking for somewhere for himself and his friends to meet before they ventured forth in hope of changing the course of history. And so it was that on the bitterly cold evening of 23 February 1820 twenty-five or so unemployed

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or under-employed craftsmen, some of them very hungry, and led by Arthur Thistlewood, assembled in the stable's hayloft<sup>5</sup> in order to commit what we'd now call a terrorist atrocity.

Several of the men knew a fair bit about violence. They'd all grown up in wartime and some had served in the army or the militias, Thistlewood included. So even though they wore sword belts made of string or left-over leather from ladies' shoes, they knew how to hammer out pike-heads<sup>6</sup>, and they knew how to make hand-grenades and fire-balls, even if their techniques had a touching domesticity about them<sup>7</sup>:

“Take 2 oz of Resin, 2 oz of Mutton suit, 2 oz of Horse Turpentine, melt together, add 2 oz saltpetre. Make it into a ball with a fuse fixed in from the centre...”

These things, along with swords, blunderbusses and pistols, they brought to the stable. What we witness in these artefacts is a cottage industry poised to do battle with the world's dominant military state. They even wrote out their advertisements by hand, like this<sup>8</sup>. And invented naive secret codes like this one, now in the Home Office papers<sup>9</sup>.

After bread and cheese, the men were set to walk a mile south through the dark streets to Lord Harrowby's mansion in Grosvenor Square<sup>10</sup>. Harrowby was Lord President of the Privy Council, and the men understood that he was about to entertain the twelve members of the British cabinet to their regular cabinet dinner. The conspirators were to burst into the house and murder not only the servants but also the twelve men most hated men by plebeian England – Castlereagh, Sidmouth and Canning in particular, whose cheering deaths even caricaturists like Cruikshank looked forward to as something to be desired<sup>11</sup>. James Ings the butcher would hack off their heads, and these trophies would be stuck on pikes and paraded through the streets. Cannon would be stolen and deployed to seize the Bank of England, the Royal Exchange and the Tower of London. A Provisional Government would be set up in the Mansion House. The northern districts and Scotland would rise up in support. And a revolution would be launched that would emulate the French one of 1789.

Of course, none of this happened. A government spy named George Edwards<sup>12</sup> had infiltrated the group and been reporting their every move for months past. This is the only image we have of him – it's probably no more trustworthy than he was himself. Directed by the Bow Street police office and the undersecretary at the Home Office, it had been Edwards who had inserted a false advert in a newspaper to announce the fictitious dinner in Harrowby's house. It was a trap of course. Harrowby and the cabinet had no intention of dining in Grosvenor Square, though it was typical of something or other that nobody warned the cooks and servants about this ploy until the danger was past.

So it was that just after eight o'clock that night Bow Street police officers surrounded and raided the stable. A detachment of Life Guards who were supposed to help them got lost on the half-mile walk from the Portman Square barracks and arrived after the hard work was done. An almighty candle-lit battle ensued<sup>13</sup>. George Cruikshank's iconic etching staged it as a stereotyped melodrama, but he also claimed that it faithfully represented the scene as the constables described it and that the interior was 'correctly sketched on the spot', as indeed it was.

Bullets whizzed, powder fizzed, smoke billowed, and someone shouted, 'Kill the buggers; throw them downstairs!' Thistlewood, incongruous in his top hat, killed officer Smithers with a single thrust of his sword, and Constable Wright was saved from a sword thrust only by the thickness of his braces. Candles were extinguished, and a rush

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of escaping men forced the constables back down the ladder. That night and next day most were arrested, imprisoned and indicted for treason and murder. The conspiracy was blown.

For a while the polite world was unnerved by it. Castlereagh began to carry loaded pistols at his own dinner table. Even the duke of Wellington had a sword ready in his coach to repel possible attacks down Piccadilly. Yet through their *provocateur* it was the government that had pushed the conspiracy onwards even more than the conspirators themselves. The Cato Street men were coolly manipulated and sacrificed to the interests of an insecure, frightened and misgoverned aristocratic state. William Cobbett had noted long before that the government ‘sighed for a PLOT’:

“Oh, how they sigh! They are working and slaving and fretting and stewing; they are sweating all over; they are absolutely pining and dying for a Plot!”

And as Ings the butcher said before his sentence was delivered:

“I am sold as a bullock that is driven into Smithfield-market; depend upon it, gentlemen, I am sold like a bullock driven to Smithfield-market.”

The Cruikshank print<sup>14</sup> of the ministers and judges dancing round the conspirators’ decapitated heads while Edwards fiddled the tune on the hillside show that the rest of the world knew it too:

“Dance away my Friends, I have been the cause of all this fun by your Help and Money. Edwards the Instigator.”

Forcing troublemakers to over-reach and expose themselves to a well-controlled prosecution is a timeless government manoeuvre. And sure enough, the Cato Street arrests offered government a trump card for the coming election. The trials would expunge the stain of the Peterloo massacre in Manchester in August 1819 by making it seem justified. They would justify the suspension of habeas corpus and imposition of harsh punishments for sedition. And the punishments inflicted would be gruesome enough to end fantasies about a British revolution for a century. As indeed they more or less did.

What followed in April was a series of skilfully skewed trials for murder and treason. The Crown spent five or six weeks preparing for them. It marshalled 160 witnesses, packed its juries, and un-gently persuaded several of the conspirators to turn King’s evidence. At the same time, it made sure that defence counsel was appointed only a day before the trials began. As a result, far more evidence was heard from the prosecution than from the defence. And there was a lot of evidence to listen to. In an age when death sentences at the Old Bailey were sometimes inflicted after five-minute trials, the Cato Street trials lasted two weeks. The account published the State Trials amounts to 350,000 words of verbatim evidence.

At last ten of the conspirators were sentenced to traitors’ deaths in the old-fashioned way. They were to be taken...

“from the goal from whence you came, to be drawn on a hurdle to a place of execution, and be there hanged by the neck until dead; and that afterwards your heads shall be severed from your bodies, and your bodies divided into four quarters, to be disposed of as his Majesty shall think fit.”

This is Abraham Wivell’s moving depiction of Thistlewood in the dock as he listened to his fate<sup>15</sup>.

In the event five of the men had their sentences transmuted to transportation for life to Australia. Happily, one of them became the chief constable of Bathurst. But on Monday 1 May, 1820, Thistlewood and four of his fellows – the two shoemakers Brunt and Tidd, the butcher James Ings, and William Davidson, the Jamaica-born cabinet-maker everyone called ‘the man of colour’, were hanged and decapitated outside Newgate prison before a crowd

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said to be of 100,000 people. Surrounded by constables and mounted soldiers, the crowd hissed and shouted ‘Murder!’ at the sheriff and hangman and cried out for Edwards’s head too.

Popular depictions of the executions were stereotyped<sup>16</sup>. The most effective was produced overnight by George Thompson’s shop in Long Lane - it’s pretty roughhewn but it gives a sense of the crowd, the excitement, the soldiers, the gentlefolk on rooftops getting the best of the views. A cheaper and more bloodthirsty print<sup>17</sup> show a masked man hacking off each head with a surgeon’s knife after their hanging. The hangman holds up each dripping object to proclaim it the head of a traitor. The greatest of all depictions, by the French Romantic Géricault, I’m going to leave till the end.

For some decades now, quartering had been remitted in the interests of civility; but the heads still came off every so-called traitor – Despard and his six co-conspirators in 1803, the three leaders of the Pentrich rising in Derbyshire in 1817<sup>18</sup>, and again the three Scottish weavers who had led the so-called Scottish rising in April 1820. The Scots were the very last Britons to be decapitated. All the same, one has to say – so much for the civility and sensibility of the age of Jane Austen.

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It’s not difficult to explain the men’s’ behaviour. The most immediate provocation was Peterloo. As we all know, at a peaceful reform meeting in St Peters Field, Manchester, six months before Cato Street, sabre-slashing yeoman cavalry and hussars and truncheon-wielding constables killed 16 unarmed men and women and a child, as well as injuring 670 more. Both the local magistrates and Lord Liverpool’s government denied all culpability, while the Prince Regent endorsed their reaction. Here<sup>19</sup> Cruikshank shows that deeply unloved man accepting loyal thanks from his toadies on the left while farting at the petitioners for a Peterloo enquiry on the right, the smell knocking them over.

The anger the massacre provoked across the country makes Thistlewood’s insane fury intelligible if not intelligent. It also delivered a conclusive message that no mere public assembly could defeat bullets, sabres and artillery, and that faith in crowd protests was misplaced. Only assassination would change things. ‘High treason was committed against the people at Manchester,’ Thistlewood said in court<sup>20</sup>; ‘but justice was closed against the mutilated, the maimed, and the friends of those who were ... indiscriminately massacred ... The blood of the [Manchester] victims should be the watch-word to [our] vengeance on their murderers.’

In his concluding speech, John Brunt agreed. He and his colleagues had planned the death of his majesty’s ministers, he said; but he insisted that the king’s reign was never called into question, and that assassination was what the ministers deserved:

“the circular [letter to the magistrates] issued by Lord Sidmouth was nothing but a thing sent out to instigate the cavalry to murder those men at Manchester; and if a man murders my brother, I have a right to murder him. What does the scripture say ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth’ ... Try me for murder – hang me – draw me – quarter me – but let me have justice, that is all I have to say.”

A larger catalyst, secondly, were radical traditions that had ancient and deep roots. The antique notion that Saxon liberties had been suppressed by the so-called Norman Yoke (aristocracy in other words) was rekindled in the 1790s by the French example. The artisan-radical London Corresponding Society steeped itself in the writings of Tom Paine, though government prosecutions for sedition and treason eventually silenced them. But when Thistlewood arrived in London from Lincolnshire in 1811, he began mixing with the veterans who still used this language, as well as with Irish revolutionaries. He joined the small but influential Society of Spencean

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Philanthropists that sustained the insurrectionary tradition throughout the Regency. He was no ideologue, though. He never talked overtly about the redistribution of property and political rights. His repeated denunciations of injustice and privilege were more visceral and personally driven.

Finally, at issue were the era's vast political and economic provocations. Jane Austen's England was a deeply unlovely place for the common people, even for skilled males. You don't have to be on the political left today – just read the Romantic writers and poets – to know that inequalities were grotesque, censorship of press and opinion was severe, and the deprivations endured by the poor were in some part wilfully imposed.

After the peace of 1815, the financial and landowning interests, already fat from wartime demand, benefited further from the ending of wartime income tax while the poor continued to pay heavy taxes on everything from candles and malt to soap and salt – and most cruelly on bread, thanks to the 1815 Corn Law. Craftsmen suffered under the collapse of the apprenticeship controls that had long checked the influx of unskilled labour. Trade failures were worsened by falling demand, paper inflation and national debt. With mass demobilisation and the freezing winters of the little ice age, beggars multiplied, and poor rates escalated. The prison-like workhouse at the foot of St Martin's Lane took up twice the area of Newgate prison and was almost as big as Leicester Square. Britain then was no more a spontaneously consensual society than ours is today. The building of military barracks and prisons was a growth industry. London and the provincial towns were sprinkled with almost as many of them, new built, as they were with pilastered mansions.

Finally, a word or two about the Cato Street conspirators themselves. In view of these conditions, it'll come as no surprise that they were a long way from being the lumpen sans-culottes or young tearaways of conservative people's imaginings<sup>21</sup>. Thistlewood was the son of comfortable tenant farmers in Lincolnshire, but the rest were mature craftsmen in their late twenties, thirties and forties, married, and with children. Seven of the ten men who were hanged or transported had 26 dependent children between them. Most were immigrants to London, but the intimacies of tenement and courtyard, and craft clubs and taverns, rooted them quickly. In Abraham Wivell's prison portraits none is caricatured as a monster. None displays anger or madness. All are respectably dressed, even if in borrowed clothes. The allegedly thuggish butcher Ings<sup>22</sup> looks as mild as anyone else one might pass in the street. Wivell allows Thistlewood a handsome profile. Moreover, the men were literate, and their handwriting was well-practised. Here is butcher Ings's writing<sup>23</sup>, and the others were similar. Tidd was the least educated – 'Sir I am a very bad hand at Righting': but even he didn't do badly<sup>24</sup>.

Most knew something about Magna Carta, Watt Tyler, and the freeborn Englishman; they read radical newspapers, and Thomas Spence, and Tom Paine, and went to Spencean debates. On the scaffold they all rejected religious ministrations, with the exception of the one-time Methodist Davidson. The largest trade group consisted of under- or unemployed shoemakers – each of them down on his uppers, to use their own idiom. Indeed, had a revolution been achieved, it would have been a down-at-heel shoemakers' revolution, and shoemakers who swung it.

The big thing they had in common was worklessness and deprivation. Brunt and his son had walked to Paris and back to find work in Wellington's barracks in 1816. They were away so long that his wife was admitted to St Luke's Hospital for Lunatics because she believed they had died. Butcher Ings had to send his family back home to Hampshire to avoid starvation. Most lived with their families in squalid one- or two-room lodgings – 'hovels', the police called them. They were all in debt, and at least three knew the insides of debtors' prisons. The 33-year-old Scots shoemaker, James Gilchrist, turned up at the Cato Street stable because he was starving and someone had offered him food if he came:

"I had nothing to eat ... and none to help me ... I went to the place at six o'clock at night, and met four or five men I did not know... I borrowed a halfpenny, and bought some bread at a shop; ... I followed them in, not knowing what I was going about; ... and when I went upstairs, in a very little time came in bread and cheese; I took an old sword and hacked it down; the men came round seemingly as hungry as I was."

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The court believed him. He was the only one who was freed.

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I'd like now to stand aside from the details of the story and reflect on its larger meanings.

I have to say at once that the Cato Street men weren't the first terrorists. As Richard Evans pointed out in his Provost's lecture for 2018, Edmund Burke in 1795 had already referred to the Jacobins as 'those hell hounds called terrorists' as he condemned their reign of terror. Guy Fawkes and Co apart, the Civil War was in some sort a reign of terror; Irish insurgents were called terrorists in 1806; and English Jacobins like Colonel Despard, hanged and decapitated in 1803 for plotting to kill the king, anticipated the Cato Street men too. Still, in the 1820 conspiracy we aren't far distant from the modern idea's origins.

Despite this, however, and despite the story's cinematic energy, most Britons today haven't heard of it. Those who have tend to register 'Cato Street' as a shorthand signifier of something vaguely nasty in the past. Peterloo has always been far better known. And I think this is because the Cato Street men have been treated with contempt by historians at both ends of the political spectrum. Conservative historians think of their story as underdog history at its purest. At least the Gunpowder Plot was about god-fearing gentlemen, which is why they far prefer to write about it. In recent times, the Cato Street men have been written off as 'ruffianly guttersnipes' or as 'psychopaths' driven by 'personal neuroses'. One of the latest books in this territory refers comfortably to 'Thistlewood and his band of feckless absurdly inefficient co-conspirators'.

The Left haven't been keen on them either. This is partly because the conspirators failed miserably and were foolish enough to be duped by a spy, but it's also because the conspiracy led nowhere. By that I mean that it has no place in the narratives that once animated social historians – about the onward and upward march of labour, or about the making of the English working class. It seems to belong in the dustbin of history.

Well, let me repeat that there are large satisfactions to be had from getting up close and personal to past people and habitats, regardless of their significance or otherwise for a progressive narrative. But, more to the point now, let's turn to the bigger questions. They connect with the illusion we may have nowadays about the conspiracy's seeming modernity, and how, if at all, we judge these violent and desperate men.

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In one definition, a 'terrorist' is a member of a secret organisation which uses violence and intimidation against a government or its subjects to advance its own political or religious aims. In this sense it's not difficult to regard Thistlewood and his men as terrorist prototypes. Two years ago one Naa'imur Zakariyah Rahman, aged 20, from north London, was gaoled for thirty years for planning to bomb down Downing Street's security gates, to storm the front door of Number 10 with a pepper spray and to kill Mrs May with a knife – to 'take her head off, yeah'. In his witless ambition, as in a hundred other cases we could think of, Cato Street seems to rise again.

Parallels between past and present suggest themselves at every turn. For a start, Thistlewood and Rahman had much in common. They shared a sense of the world's vast injustice – sharpened by Peterloo in the first case and by the West's Middle Eastern interventions in the second. Both were prepared to die in their attacks. Both were angry about their marginalisation and deprivation, and both consort narrowly with like-minded friends. Victims of their own and others' rhetoric and posing as their people's champions, they were gifted attitudinisers. Thistlewood had told recruits that he had been in three or four revolutions and had fought for the Jacobins – all lies. People like this seem to have explosive tempers and a hysterical narcissism. They are said to be unempathetic, detached from reality, and socially inadequate. Shared nationalist, racial or religious commitments usually intensify these dispositions, though not, we note, in Thistlewood's case.

The trouble is that these characteristics are widespread in common life and predict nothing; in other contexts they may pass as virtues. So, attempts to profile the extremist personality invariably founder on numberless exceptions





as well as on our own projections and prejudices. The modern state checks terror not through profiling but through the surveillance, infiltration and manipulation of disaffected networks and the exemplary punishment of transgressors, as Cato Street well shows.

That said, there is, arguably, a stronger trait that extremists commonly share. That is the innocence of ignorance. Some modern terrorist successes have been appalling and deadly. We live with them almost daily; eleven people were killed in a German town last night. All the same, it's a bleak consolation, but is a consolation, that in the West failures have outnumbered successes. Most perpetrators have been innocent of the ways in which advanced politics operate. Like Thistlewood, they have had little sense of the surveillance powers that oppose them and have been less skilled at clandestine organisation than governments are. Nor have they known quite what to do after their attacks, should they survive them. Butcher Ings was going to head the Provisional Government in the Mansion House, but nobody thought how to get rid of the king, let alone the army. Would-be terrorists' ignorance and incompetence so far gives the state its best advantages over them.

So much for similarities. But what about the *differences*? Social scientists will try to ellude difference and concentrate on similarity. To historians, though, difference will be more interesting. The closer you get to the Cato Street men the more obvious it becomes that historical time matters. Let's list the obvious.

First, the Cato Street failure pretty well ended English revolutionary fantasies for nearly a century, while Islamists' or rightists' failure have not ended theirs.

Secondly, neither the conspirators nor the Chartists nor other nineteenth-century British insurrectionists could anticipate the tactics later adopted by republicans, Islamists, or the extreme right. The uses of tactical cruelty hardly occurred to them – the spreading of terror by random killing to win publicity and/or salvation, the delivery of shock and awe to mobilise like-minded opinion and/or to cow the others. They didn't think of the lone-wolf attack or suicide bombing either. The first was doubtless inhibited by the sense of collectivity that necessarily suffused subversion in past times, the last was doubtless inhibited by the unexamined fantasy that the dead body's integrity was a condition of resurrection.

So, it was in Britain that the 'physical force' recommended by some Chartists in the 1840s aimed at soldiers, constables and property rather than civilians. And although the Irish Fenian bomb that was placed against the wall of Clerkenwell gaol in 1867 killed twelve people and injured many more, it was meant only to free two Fenians from the prison. The Fenian dynamite campaign in the 1880s injured many but caused only one death – the dynamiter himself; thereafter the Fenians targeted police and military targets.

It was long after Cato Street that European anarchists and the Zionist Irgun began to attack innocent targets at random in peacetime. France saw the first anarchist killing in 1894. The Irgun began bombing Palestinian Arab civilians in 1938. An anarchist bomb killed one and injured sixty in London in 1897, but it was only in 1939-40 and again after 1972 that Irish republicans brought random bombing to mainland civilians with deadly effect. None of these tactics was foreshadowed in Regency England.

Nor, thirdly, were the Cato Street conspirators prompted by offended religious, ethnic or patriotic identity. It is true that they drew support from London's Irish communities, that the black Jamaica-born cabinet-maker William Davidson had been a Methodist preacher, and that Regency ultra-radicals were energised by the millennial socialism of Thomas Spence. Still, they never inflicted on the nation the claim that a God was on their side. They left that to their betters and declared themselves deists.

And this faces us with their main distinction. Ultra-radicalism in the Cato Street era had religious roots, but its expression was secular, Enlightened and rationalist. It had its mythologies. 'I am a descendant of the ancient Britons,' shoemaker Brunt declared during the Cato Street trials. 'Albion is still in the chains of slavery,' said Thistlewood. And in their own defence both Davidson and Ings the butcher cited Magna Carta. But in London more probably than in the promises, ultra-radicalism was chiefly nurtured in tavern clubs rather than in chapels, and in quests for trade solidarity, political rights and economic justice that aimed at mass enfranchisement and equality (for women too, in some cases).



One has to wonder finally, given these considerations, whether our best response to the Cato Street men should not be judgemental, but compassionate and pitying – however misguided they were, and even if they did kill a policeman and would have killed more.

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<sup>25</sup>I want to end by showing you an artwork that suggests the value of this empathetic position. It might well be Cato Street's only happy outcome. It is this ink-and-wash sketch of the Cato Street hanging by Géricault. Pity, empathy, and horror seem to be its essence.

Its subject-matter has been contested. The Rouen museum catalogues it as '*Le supplice*' (the 'torment' or 'agony') and dates it '1820-1824'. Only three men hang here, so the hesitation is understandable, because were not only hanged but also decapitated. All the same, I've gone to some lengths to establish that this does indeed depict the Cato Street executions. I must be brief..

Let's remember first that this *is* only a sketch for a larger work that was never begun, and that Géricault wasn't reporting, but merely playing with motifs in his own notebook. That it was a partial view therefore is neither here nor there.

Secondly, Géricault was in London at the time looking for a heroic subject, and thirdly, most heart-stoppingly, he lodged in and off the Edgware Road a minute or two from Cato Street itself. From countless conversations as well as newspapers he would have known the story intimately.

Finally, this beetle-browed man<sup>26</sup> fixedly staring past the chaplain into the void (or at us?) has to be Thistlewood – and is dressed like him. It may be that Wivell's engraving was its model.

Though the drawing is unfinished, in my view it's one of the more extraordinary works of its age. In all of art history I know of no previous depiction of a hanging as uncompromising and intimate as this. In its empathy, pity and horror it has only one equivalent<sup>27</sup>. That is Goya's *Execution of the Rebels on the Third of May 1808*, painted in 1814.

Géricault here presents us with an icon of all people numbed by and incredulous at their imminent and dreadful endings, but also an icon that demonstrates the possibility of a defiant personal strength. <sup>28</sup>For in an age when most felons were brought to the scaffold weeping, urinating or defecating in terror, four of the five Cato Street men showed contempt for false justice and its presiding deity. As one Whig-radical MP reported, they 'died like heroes.'

So, some questions to end with. Do the Cato Street men's impoverishment, ignorance and democratising intent help excuse their rush to desperate and bloody violence? For what larger good – in whose name – did they believe they acted? And, their motivations aside, was it an act of justice that five were hanged and decapitated for treason, or are they better seen as the deluded victims of a frightened and reactionary aristocratic state? I'm sure we'll each answer those questions in our own way.

### **Further reading:**

The most accessible primary sources are:

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T. B. Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (1826), vol. xxxiii, cols. 681-1566; and  
G. T. Wilkinson, *An Authentic History of the Cato-Street Conspiracy* (Kelly, 1820).

E. P. Thompson's seminal *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) gave Cato Street ten of its 958 pages. Iain McCalman's *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (1988) brilliantly excavates the scurrilous 'blackguard' tradition of radical and utopian argument among London's disaffected plebeians. But it mentions the conspiracy briefly. Malcolm Chase's *The People's Farm: English Radical Agrarianism, 1775-1840* (1988) is indispensable on the Spencean socialists, but his single-year study of *1820: Disorder and Stability* (2013) gives Cato Street no more than eight core pages. David Worrall's *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1790-1820* (1992) contextualises the 'culture' that framed the Cato Street story, but Cato Street itself gets thirteen pages. The stimulating conference papers in J. McElligott and M. Conboy (eds.), *The Cato Street Conspiracy: Plotting, Counter-Intelligence and the Revolutionary Tradition in Britain and Ireland* (Manchester, 2020) profess to tackle Cato Street through 'the comparisons and contrasts between the underexplored British insurrectionary tradition and the history of Irish violence'.

Other influential works are: I. J. Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (1979), esp. pp. 89-133; J. A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London 1796 -1821* (Oxford, 1982); J. Belchem, *'Orator' Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working-Class Radicalism* (1985); D. Tiffany, *Infidel Poetics: Riddles, Nightlife, Substance* (Chicago, 2009).

The popular narratives of the conspiracy published a half-century ago avoid complexities, contexts and footnotes: J. Stanhope, *The Cato Street Conspiracy* (1962); D. Johnson, *Regency Revolution: the Case of Arthur Thistlewood* (1974).

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