Coleridge first defended himself against the charge of Jacobinism in 1802, when, as a leading voice on the *Morning Post*, he came under increased attack from the *Anti-Jacobin*. But Coleridge’s involvement with the *Morning Post* had placed him at the centre of the increasingly dangerous political climate considerably earlier, beginning in the first months of 1798. The original *Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner* was founded in 1797 precisely to counter the perceived liberal bias of the London press, and in particular the *Morning Post* and her sister paper the *Morning Chronicle*. Under the political direction of George Canning, then a junior minister in the Pitt government, and the editorial direction of William Gifford, the *Anti-Jacobin* set out to ‘examine’ the newspapers each week, and to check the spread of Jacobin principles. Coleridge was an obvious target of this examination. One of his first pieces for the *Morning Post* was a reprint from *The Watchman*, entitled ‘Queries’, which asked a series of inflammatory questions including:

1. Whether the wealth of the higher classes does not ultimately depend on the labour of the lower classes?

and,

6. Whether hungry cattle do not leap over bounds?¹

The levelling implications of these questions were clear enough, and the proposed justification of a rebellion of the ‘cattle’ must have particularly enraged Ministerial circles. Coleridge’s implicit threat to the ruling orders took the form of an instinctual response to oppression, and thus one that would naturally and inevitably occur. No appeal to reason would
remove the desire to ‘leap over bounds’. The uncontrollable realm of human feeling became contested terrain in the propaganda war, as each side attempted to use the fear of violence to their rhetorical advantage.

The first specific charge of Jacobinism against Coleridge came in early March 1798. The examiner section of the Anti-Jacobin was divided under the headings ‘Lies’, ‘Misrepresentations’, and ‘Mistakes’. Under ‘Misrepresentations’ for 5 March, they attacked an article by Coleridge from the 24 February Morning Post which assessed the various political crises engulfing Europe including the invasion of Rome by the French army and the ‘dying convulsions of the Swiss Republics’.

The editors of the Anti-Jacobin took particular offence to Coleridge’s presumption in characterizing the British ‘Public Temper’ towards these events. They quoted Coleridge’s opinion that: ‘We read without emotion, that the Armies of France have entered Rome’, along with their rejoinder:

Where he found this ‘insensibility’ we know not, unless among the Patriots of the Corresponding Society.—For our parts, we have a very lively feeling of the transaction, which, for perfidy and inhumanity, surpasses whatever we have yet seen.

This sneer at the lack of ‘feeling’ amongst radicals was coupled with a more pressing fear. With horror they noted that Coleridge had explicitly linked these European crises with conditions in Britain:

In the midst of these stupendous Revolutions, the Nobility and Gentry, and Proprietors of England, Make NO EFFORTS to avert that ruin from their own heads which they daily see falling on other Countries.

This judgement provoked the charge of Jacobinism: ‘Never, probably, in any period, in any Country, were such Efforts made, by the very descriptions of men this worthy tool of Jacobinism has pointed out as making no exertions.’ Of course, the ‘efforts’ Coleridge had in mind were reforms, while the ‘exertions’ favoured by the Anti-Jacobin were those of the war policy. As a political slur the charge of Jacobinism did a paradoxical double duty. It accused the individual of excessive rationalism (considered to be a French disease), and tarred him with the violent chaos of the Terror. Coleridge’s lack of ‘feeling’ made him a monster in the eyes of the editors, his ‘insensibility’ the sign of the dangerous ideologue. I draw attention to the details of this initial exchange because March 1798 was a telling month. The Morning Post had agitated against the corrupt Swiss Oligarchies, but that changed dramatically on