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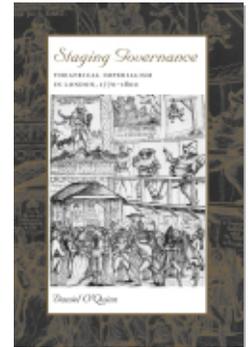
## Staging Governance

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THE HISTORICAL PROBLEMS confronted by scholars working on late eighteenth-century materials are perennially those of how to theorize change. Indeed, the careers of Romantic scholars are built on the accepted notion that something changes in the last two decades of the century. That something can be narrowly or broadly defined, but this book has argued that we can isolate fundamental changes in almost every element of social, economic, and cultural production in the late eighteenth century. If we imagine all of the forces of eighteenth-century life as vectors ebbing and flowing, then something happens in the 1780s that alters the flow of life. I use the word *life* advisedly, because I want to think through the historical turbulence of the period as the transformation in styles of living. This implies that there is a correspondence between the events and processes that we conventionally recognize as political and the practices that shape and define embodied selves in everyday life. Following rudimentary chaos theory, I want to suggest that a series of bifurcations initiated changes in the flow of life that became perceptible somewhere in the 1780s, and that the period commonly referred to as Romanticism constitutes a turbulence that found its proper margins and flow characteristics sometime in the nineteenth century. The metaphors of turbulence, flow, and the like are a useful heuristic here because they allow not only for infinite complication but also for reductively drawing attention to a field of action for research.<sup>1</sup>

One way of thinking of Romantic studies since its inception is that it has attempted to understand these changes in flow immanently. Hence, attention has been focused on the turbulence. We likely have no other choice, but the focus on nation is one of the fundamentally constraining limits on how we think through this problem. This limit above all oth-

ers obscures the bifurcations, those strange events—often minor or perhaps so major that their full import is impossible to register—that generate change. Finding the triggers for the emergence of bourgeois sexuality, of the middle and working classes, of new forms of political organization and action, and, above all, of metropolitan identity, requires that we reevaluate the flows, exchanges, and movements of all kinds of economies not simply in a national frame but in an imperial and transnational field.

It is obviously impossible for one person to follow these broad changes in their totality. It may not be possible for a generation of scholars. But we can follow particular rivulets and watch carefully how they shift from one set of attractors to another. This book has focused on the surge of discourse pertaining to the East India Company from the economic collapse in private credit in 1772 to the initial wave of interest in the trial of Warren Hastings in the late 1780s to the British fascination with Tipu Sultan in the 1790s. However, I have taken as my archive the theatrical culture of this turbulent period, in part because the theatre operates explicitly as a form of autoethnography, and in part because the fact of performance brings many of the key problematics regarding self-stylization and subjectification into crisis.

If the concept of nationhood deforms our historical sense of imperialism in this period, then we also have to acknowledge that the wealth of scholarship on the 1790s exerts undue influence on our understanding of the flow of life in this period. It is not surprising that the real advances of Romantic New Historicism have their roots in this decade, but what is often seen as an originary or disjunctive period is perhaps best understood as a midpoint in a much longer temporal arc. In terms of my earlier metaphors, the flow of eighteenth-century life sets off triggers in the seventies that initiate changes in flow in the eighties, which are in turn channeled into fairly rigid canals of identity by the nineties. What strikes me as interesting about this reductive account of eighteenth-century life is the degree to which it is an almost perfect photographic negative of the scholarship of the early decades of Romanticism.<sup>2</sup> The 1790s dominate much of our understanding of the late eighteenth-century sex and gender system, of apostasy and nationalism, and of the emergence of specifically Romantic literary production. Rather than attributing that dominance to the inherent significance of the decade, could we not argue that the task of understanding, that historical comprehension, is easier because the object of inquiry is becoming more recognizable as the subject of Romanticism. Following a series of connected bifurcations, the attractors that or-

ganize the social body have modulated and stabilized into a recognizable social system of which we are a part. In other words, our own Romanticism makes the 1790s not only accessible but also vital. To pick up the vague invocation of the sublime here, I would suggest that the 1790s offer a stabilizing compensation that acts as an as-if presentation of something altogether less threatening than the incoherence that immediately precedes it.

In this light, the incessant creation and disintegration of the Romantic subject—I am thinking especially of Wordsworth here—begins to look like the metropolitan symptom of a series of traumatic events in the colonies that remain unresolved to this day. It also suggests something about the importance of performance to a full understanding of Romantic subjectivity. The relative lack of scholarship on oratory, theatre, and other forms of performance may be a function of a kind of self-protective reluctance to go to the very scene of instability, to the place where the hole rent in British subjectivity is least effectively patched over—least, because performance is so transitory and what the imperial imaginary is striving for at this time is some kind of permanent solution to the injury inflicted by the American war and by other setbacks in the colonies. Perhaps this is why the latter decades of Romanticism turn to the East in a far more genocidal fashion. The biological state racism that eventually dominates the imagination of empire in the nineteenth century is subtended not by the defensive performances outlined here, but rather by the kind of rigid phantasmatic projections indulged in by Thomas De Quincey and others.<sup>3</sup> The turbulent flow and flux of the 1770s and 1780s finds itself channeled into discursive pathways whose very violence depends on the sharp management of the flow of life between the nation and its colonial holdings.

FROM SUCH A RECOGNITION, this book has focused attention on the hole rent in British political subjectivity by the perceived breakdown in imperial sovereignty in the 1770s and 1780s. I have argued that, like many traumatic events, the crises in imperial governance are everywhere evident but yet in many ways unsusceptible to direct analysis because the strategies used to reconsolidate national and imperial subjectivity appear unconnected to the constitutional and economic questions posed by Britain's accession to global dominance. Transformations in the sex and gender system, in class relations, in the performance of embodied sociability each in their own way and sometimes in concert build temporary tissues to cover the traumatic wound. But it is my sense that this healing process was both

interminably delayed and deformed by events in France. P. J. Marshall has argued that interest in India declined in the 1790s, and if one consults the Parliamentary Register or the newspapers, there is clear evidence of such an abatement in direct public concern. But this need not be read as a sign of apathy regarding colonial affairs.<sup>4</sup>

One can argue that the ideological and military engagement with France is a kind of anodyne moment: one that suspends certain global problematics but never fully solves key ruptures in British identity. This is not to downplay the role played by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars in the consolidation of British national identity, but rather to ask whether the national subject that emerges so forcefully during this conflict is at all equipped to deal with the earlier anxieties that remain active at a subterranean level until they explode in times of later crisis. This would help to explain, however tentatively, the overdetermined responses to events such as the Indian mutiny. And this would imply that two economies of alterity remain incommensurable right through the dissolution of the British Empire. On the one hand, a form of national fantasy congeals in response to the self-consolidating alterity of France, and on the other, a myriad of disjunctive imperial fantasies not only fails to demonstrate any internal coherence but also eventually attempts to contain scenes of colonial alterity through the mechanisms of segregation and blunt assertions of racial supremacy. In this scenario, the national subjectification developed during the conflict with France becomes an impediment to further engaging with colonial alterity because it so successfully obfuscates the proliferation of British domination in the empire and of the increasing incursion of the state into everyday life in the metropole.

This would suggest that the 1780s and the period immediately following the Napoleonic Wars constitute zones of instructive instability. If Burke exemplifies the strange adjacency of India and France in the phantasmatic legislation of British identity for the 1780s, then Hazlitt's essay "The Indian Jugglers" may sketch in one instance how these competing forms of alterity are temporarily reconciled in fearsome, yet symptomatic ways. As we have seen, many of Burke's difficulties are directly related to the geographical and cultural distance between Britain and India. That distance requires a rhetoric that ultimately undermines Burke's political objectives. For Hazlitt, it is the close proximity of four Indian men that instantiates a related resituation not only of the French but of his self.

## *The Use of Pleasure*

As a concluding gesture for this book, I want to consider the remarkable feats of dexterity and bodily regimen put on display for London audiences by a group of Indian jugglers from Seringapatam in the fall of 1815 and the winter of 1816<sup>5</sup>—the same jugglers who came to Hazlitt's attention. I believe that Hazlitt's aesthetics of power coalesces not only with a series of raciological fantasies regarding the distinction between the machinic and the human, but also with a historically specific fantasy of vulnerability that accompanied Britain's accession to global supremacy in the early years of the nineteenth century. To make that argument, however, requires that we attend both to transformations in the practice of warfare and to the consolidation of national subjectivity in the illegitimate theatre during and immediately following the Mysore Wars. These topoi are linked by a fascination with bodily discipline, whether it be on the battlefield or in London's various entertainment venues. As we have already seen in our discussion of precinematic technique in the representation of the Mysore Wars, the mobilization of the body itself at this time of imperial supremacy becomes a matter of xenophobic concern. This earlier discussion allows us to gain some purchase on how the bodies of the jugglers' audience are hailed into a complex economy of recreational alterity.

At one level, the audience at the rooms in New Bond Street was deeply involved in calibrating the limits of human capacity. The jugglers' feats of balancing, sword swallowing, and prestidigitation all rely on precise training of the body, but these skills, as remarkable as they are, are overshadowed according to Hazlitt by the near miraculous circulation of balls:

Coming forward and seating himself on the ground in his white dress and tightened turban, the chief of the Indian Jugglers begins with tossing up two brass balls, which is what any of us could do, and concludes with keeping up four at the same time, which is what none of us could do to save our lives, nor if we were to take our whole lives to do it in. . . . It is the utmost stretch of human ingenuity, which nothing but the bending the faculties of body and mind to it from the tenderest infancy with incessant, ever-anxious application up to manhood can accomplish or make even a slight approach to.<sup>6</sup>

The opening sentence of Hazlitt's essay establishes a comparative mode that takes on structural implications when he turns the comparison on his own practice:

I ask what there is that I can do as well as this? Nothing. What have I been doing all my life? Have I been idle, or have I nothing to shew for all by labour and pains? Or have I passed my time in pouring words like water into empty sieves, rolling a stone up a hill and then down again, trying to prove an argument in the teeth of facts, and looking for causes in the dark, and not finding them? Is there no one thing in which I can challenge competition, that I can bring as an instance of exact perfection, in which others cannot find a flaw? The utmost I can pretend to is to write a description of what this fellow can do.<sup>7</sup>

This expression of self-doubt and vulnerability is superseded later in the essay when Hazlitt argues that it is precisely the nonmechanical quality of working with language rather than with objects that elevates writing to the status of art and derogates juggling as a triviality. However, there is a key conundrum put on stage in these seemingly trivial actions: the distinction between the body of the juggler and the body of the audience member, which characterizes the chief effect of the performance, relies on the continual assertion of similitude. As John Whale argues, “juggling effaces the recognition of difference. At the same time as triumphing over the limits of the body, it triumphs over an overdetermined awareness of ethnic difference.”<sup>8</sup> In the process of ignoring ethnic difference in the essay, David Bromwich nevertheless captures this paradox in his reading of Hazlitt’s panegyric on Cavanagh, the fives player:

“The Indian Jugglers” offers Cavanagh as a test case for distinguishing the artist from the mechanic. The truth is that only Hazlitt’s ability to see depth of art in the surface of mechanical skill . . . has made the question an interesting one. The practiced eye more than finds, it invents the glory of the things that concern it. In this sense one might say that Hazlitt does for Cavanagh what the essayist does for his own experience all the time. His gift of immortality to one player marks his ascendancy over a limited contest, only as much as it marks his kinship with the contestant.<sup>9</sup>

Similitude is necessary to make comparison possible, but difference is crucial for the essay’s act of sublation. The jugglers now come forward as a surface from which the essayist not only projects his own depth of character but also subtly proclaims his genius. Unlike a number of newspaper articles that contested the “Superiority” of the Indian jugglers by of-

fering European counterexamples, Hazlitt recognizes their superiority and then turns that recognition into the epitome of his overcoming of mere physical perfection.<sup>10</sup>

This is why the essay both stresses the everydayness of particular actions and emphasizes that “the precision of the movements must be like a mathematical truth.”<sup>11</sup> At one level, Hazlitt is merely picking up on the geometric discourse that characterizes the advertisement’s attempts to identify the physical manipulation of balls as something otherworldly:

The next feat of the Juggler is, to perform a series of evolutions with four hollow brass balls, about the bigness of oranges. His power over these is almost miraculous. He causes them to describe every possible circle horizontally, perpendicularly, obliquely, transversely, round his legs, under his arms, about his head, in small and in large circumferences, with wondrous rapidity, and keeping the whole number in motion at the same time.<sup>12</sup>

The Euclidean discourse employed to describe the juggler’s actions insinuates a degree of ideality to the performance that effectively makes it a figure for mathematical rationality. Hazlitt emphasizes the mathematical precision of the juggler’s motions and thus paradoxically argues that their corporeal skill has attained the status of abstraction. They are other to the audience in the same way that a geometric abstraction is an idealization of the physical world.

And yet we have to speak here of a racialized abstraction or an abstract racial alterity because in the years preceding the performance in New Bond Street mathematical rationality as exhibited in precise bodily regimen has carried the connotation of racial and national superiority in the theatre of imperial warfare. The very presence of these jugglers from Seringapatam poses the question of alterity in an entirely different register: one now focused less on cultural difference than on xenophobic notions of national and racial distinction. As I have argued in the previous chapter, the military spectacles at Astley’s Royal Amphitheatre redeployed the performer as part of well-oiled action in order to activate specific fantasies of national consolidation both in the scene of performance and in the audience. As the audience was hailed into the scene of conflict, it too became militarized. Defeating Tipu Sultan at Astley’s involved the shedding of individuality in order to become part of the spectacle of imperial supremacy.

This performative manipulation of the viewing subject serves as a back-

drop to Hazlitt's response to the Indian jugglers, but the scene in New Bond Street is also traversed by the more proximate national enthusiasm of post-Waterloo London. As the Napoleonic Wars unfolded, the extraordinary technological leap from the clockwork army to the motorized qualities of the Grand Armée meant that supremacy could no longer be figured by the body-machine complex but, according to De Landa, had to mobilize the subject itself in new ways.

The basis for the new tactics was the creation of versatile, responsive soldiers. But this implied that the lower ranks of the war machine had to be given more responsibility, and this ran counter to all the tendencies of the mercenary-based armies of the eighteenth century. In order to break away from this impasse, a reservoir of loyalty had to be tapped: the external mechanical connection between ruler and ruled . . . was replaced by an internal link, one tying up the population as whole with the nation of which they were sovereign citizens. Besides using nationalism as a source of loyalty, the difference between friend and enemy had to be taken out of the context of a duel between Christian armies and transformed into a more radical form of difference: a kind of xenophobia capable of transforming a war from a contest between rulers into a clash between nations.<sup>13</sup>

The instigation of this xenophobic imperative at the heart of the new warfare not only supplemented rank and column discipline but also accelerated the importance of writing to the practice of war. Rank and column organization, although ubiquitous, was no longer sufficient to deal with tactical innovations. The new tactical flexibility of the French army required an intensification of data flow, and in this transitional period, written orders become a crucial part of military communications. These two developments are crucial because the widely disseminated proclamation of Wellington's ostensible "genius" and Hazlitt's own reverence for Napoleon were based not only on their ability to instill unit consolidation through patriotic individuation but also in their recognition of the importance of communicative prowess.<sup>14</sup>

In this light, Hazlitt's engagement with the Indian jugglers takes on a new aspect, for he sees the jugglers shortly after Waterloo, and the essay is published at roughly the time of Napoleon's death.<sup>15</sup> Just as he shows at Astley's projected obsolescence onto the armies of Mysore by emphasizing their lack of clockwork organization, so too does Hazlitt construct the juggler's cultural obsolescence by negatively comparing their mechan-

ical art, first, with Reynolds's mimetic art and, second, with the linguistic art of the essay writing subject. What is so startling here is that the excessive individuation that was formerly understood as a symptom of antiquated weakness in the soldier of Mysore is revalued as a sign of both national and aesthetic preeminence in the British observer. Like the clockwork army, the jugglers simply redirect motion along a predetermined path, but the Napoleonic essayist generates energy from even the most banal materials by mobilizing his own subjectivity. Hazlitt's performance of conflicted subjectivity in writing is a sign of his and, by extension, Britain's capacity for tactical versatility in the struggle between imperial nations. However, it is a versatility or a singularity learned from the Napoleonic example, and thus it implies both an identification with and a sublation of the very qualities Hazlitt valorizes in Napoleon.

In the winter of 1816, British imperial and national fantasy began to coalesce into a global and hence universalist phantasm. This emergent global unconscious in Hazlitt's essay is at variance with the patriotic cult of Wellington and hence with establishment forms of nationalism in that it locates genius in "defeat."<sup>16</sup> That both the logistics of warfare and the practice of writing should turn on a desire to overcome the limitations of subjectivity is chilling, especially when one recalls that Hazlitt's theorization of genius and power is figured in purely combative terms in the essay. It is as though the modulations of imperial conflict up to this historical moment have brought the desire for supremacy not only into the very definition of the political and aesthetic subject, but also into the fabric of everyday life such that an evening's entertainment at New Bond Street is intimately tied to xenophobic fantasies of ascendancy. If the shows at Astley's were all about maintaining effective distance to enable audience consolidation, then Hazlitt's close proximity to the Indian jugglers instantiates what amounts to an imposition of superior distance from within the subject itself. The now-regulated flow of metropolitan life would appear to be carving increasingly deep channels not only in the social but also in the phantasms of one of its exemplary radical constituents.

But Hazlitt's essay is also notable for what it does not write about. As the performance unfolds, the bodily exercises extend far beyond the dexterous movement of objects and begin to test the boundaries between the exterior and the interior of the body:

The next performance is that of passing a steel hook (representing a large fish hook) through one of the nostrils into the mouth, a piece of string is then threaded through the hook, there being a small hole

at the end of it like the eye of a needle, the hook is then drawn out with one end of the string through the nostril and the other in the mouth, a large stone of twenty pound weight is then made fast to the string, and suspended in the air by the upper jaw, and afterwards, what is most surprising, the stone is swung to and fro, and is thrown off at some distance without the string being either cut or broken.<sup>17</sup>

It is tempting read this scene allegorically and muse upon the spectacle of the burden of colonial identity. This temptation becomes even more insistent during the performance's final scene of sword swallowing, for it brings the specter of death into representation. Hazlitt offers no commentary on these aspects of the show except to say that sword swallowing should not be allowed. One could argue that his silence reveals a profound unease with the jugglers' ability to put pain and death fully in abeyance. In these feats, the jugglers seem to overcome the physicality of the flesh. Hazlitt's exclusive focus on the action of circulating balls draws attention away from the body of the juggler by emphasizing the mathematical perfection of his performance. But what are we to make of this other side of the evening's entertainment, which lies beyond Hazlitt's discourse? Does the flesh, especially the flesh of the subjugated colonial other, itself constitute that which will ultimately call phantasmatic projection to account? Or to put the question more polemically, does Hazlitt's care of the self in this essay, like the other moments of self-consolidation in this book, rely not only on the displacement of the pain of the colonized but also on the suppression of the potential for similar pain in the body of the colonizer. Hazlitt's abhorrence of the scene of an Indian man swallowing a sword may well derive from the recognition that the performance literalized a world-historical situation, in which, as one magazine reported some months later, the conquered are blamed for the very pleasures they afford the conquerors when things go horribly wrong:

The Indian Juggler, who astonished the town a year or two back by his dangerous feat of passing a drawn sword down his stomach, has unfortunately fallen a sacrifice to his presumption, at an exhibition in Scotland; the sword, taking a wrong direction, wounded the ventricle of the stomach, and he died almost instantaneously.<sup>18</sup>