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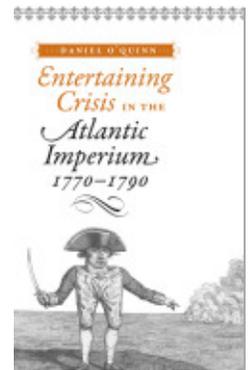
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Introduction

Entertainment, Mediation, and the Future of Empire

As with so much else, Samuel Johnson's multilayered definition of *entertainment* reveals something about a concept that is rarely considered in its full complexity:

ENTERTAINMENT. *n.f.* [from *entertain.*] 1. Conversation. 2. Treatment at the table; convivial provision. 3. Hospitable reception. 4. Reception; admission. 5. The state of being in pay as soldiers or servants. 6. Payment of soldiers or servants. Now obsolete. 7. Amusement; diversion. 8. Dramatick performance; the lower comedy.¹

Johnson's list of definitions can be divided roughly in two. The first four definitions refer to matters of sociability, to the all-important practices of hospitality, conversation, and social pleasure. These definitions of entertainment all open onto questions of affect, for it is through convivial exchange between individuals that the emotional bonds of society are woven.² The final two definitions offer a general and a specific instance of a different set of practices in which representation is mobilized not only to bring people together but also to take them away from the concerns of the everyday. These latter definitions offer amusement, whether it be in the bustling realm of farce or in a moment of more private contemplation, as a divagation from the present, where a certain distance is established between the subject and the world that allows for reflection and release.³ But these two branches of the word do not exhaust its semantic possibility, and Johnson reminds his readers that a third, now vestigial, set of concerns is implied by the word *entertainment*: namely, the state of being in pay as soldiers or servants. The incursion of this other meaning, whose implicit connection to pain and subordination is seemingly at odds with the pleasures afforded by the

other connotations of the word, has a particular resonance for this book because, in the chapters that follow, I trace the integral relationship between sociability, amusement, and the performance of martial subjectivity during the turbulent years when the American colonies successfully seceded from Britain's Atlantic empire.

This book examines the notion of entertainment at a moment when it would seem most difficult to achieve. As the men in pay as soldiers to the Crown were losing the war in America, a series of remarkable celebrations, social events, amusements, diversions, and dramatic performances were staged in London and Philadelphia that attempted to speak to the historical predicament of what amounted to a civil war in the Atlantic imperium. As numerous historians have noted, the most unsettling thing about the prosecution of the American war was that the combatants had fought side by side only fifteen years earlier in the Seven Years' War to end definitively French colonial designs on North America and to limit severely French and Spanish aspirations in South Asia and the Caribbean.⁴ Out of that first global war emerged a new kind of imperial state, beset with problems of management, and a new kind of British subject.⁵ As the problems of governing this new global empire reached a crisis in the 1770s, Britons were suddenly confronted with the perplexing situation of dealing with rebellious subjects whose investment in notions of liberty and property were almost the defining characteristics of the British polity itself.⁶ As Lord North and his Ministry attempted to put down the rebellion on the far side of the Atlantic, the political and social world of the metropole showed signs of fracturing in increasingly disturbing ways. From the political turmoil associated with Wilkite calls for reform through the truly terrifying eruption of ethnic violence during the Gordon Riots, Britain was plunged into a condition of social insecurity.⁷

What does it mean to entertain and be entertained at such a historical moment? This question is the starting point for this book, and it is asked in different ways in each chapter. The six chapters of the book present a narrative of social anxiety and cultural loss stretching from 1774 to 1784. I also trace the afterlife of some of these anxieties into the late 1780s and 1790s. In that sense it is a book about British reactions to the American crisis, but rather than tracing that reaction through political pamphlets, the argument is presented in relation to a series of performances, some social and some more recognizably theatrical.⁸ Some of these performances involved elite constituencies—such as the *Fête Champêtre* discussed in chapter 1 or the Handel Commemoration discussed in chapter 6—and some performances involved plebian constituencies—such as the celebrants of the Augustus Keppel acquittal or the mourners lining the streets

at David Garrick's funeral. But most of the social and cultural events discussed are of a mixed nature, such as the Thames Regatta or the Mischianza, and involved a wide range of participants.

However, this accounting of who took part in the events in question was not the guiding principle in the construction of the book. Each event was chosen because it generated extensive reaction in both the press and the theatre. If one looks carefully at each chapter, one discerns that my real focus is on the mediation of these events, and thus I am offering a detailed discussion of how something as exclusive as the Fête Champêtre "plays" in the media themselves. This means that the "people" are involved in this argument in a complex and wide-ranging way. The theory of reception and media convergence that drives each chapter leads to important evidentiary matters. Put simply, the argument focuses on how the rhetorical effects of print media and the performative elements of sociability and theatre feed upon one another. Thus, each chapter lives and dies on its extensive and intensive readings of the daily papers and of the archive of performance. For example, the opening chapter on John Burgoyne's Fête Champêtre offers a reading, not of the letters and memoirs of people at the party but rather of the account put into circulation in the papers and then how that account was remediated at Drury Lane. A large part of that reading focuses on how precisely the non-elite subjects reading or watching a representation of the event were hailed into a relationship with the ideological project at the heart of the celebration.

The ultimate objective of the book is to demonstrate how mediation itself became a fundamental issue in British imperial culture at this moment. I show how the papers and the theatre built a mutually constitutive mechanism for reflecting on the present. This latter point is important because each chapter examines how these particular social and cultural events deal with the problem of the future beyond the present crisis. In this sense, a thorough consideration of the repetition of media events and the replication of specific representational dynamics yields new ways of reading specific performances of plays such as Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Critic* or Hannah Cowley's *The Belle's Stratagem*. At no point do I claim to be offering an anatomy of the mentality of the age. Nor do I claim to be offering an argument that can adequately deal with distinctions between metropolitan, colonial, and provincial media and their audiences. With the exception of brief forays to Philadelphia and Plymouth, this book is about the print and performance culture of London. Because I am attending so closely to the interaction of the daily press and nightly performance, the argument looks at the breakdown in the Atlantic imperium from a metropolitan vantage point.

The argument would necessarily unfold differently if it focused on different locales. I have started in the center because, thus far, no one has attempted to draw from this kind of quotidian and blended archive a coherent account of the fantasies deployed and the practices mobilized to reconstitute British imperial culture after the disintegration of the Atlantic empire.

On the face of it, that sounds like an audacious claim, especially in light of the voluminous scholarship on this historical period, but it turns on what I mean by a quotidian and blended archive. This book assumes that theatrical representation and the representational tactics of the newspapers are both mutually constitutive and central to the stylization of social relations in this era. The argument is built from the records of transient performances and from the labyrinthine coils of the most ephemeral elements of eighteenth-century print culture—precisely those sites of cultural and social exchange beyond the purview of the recent surge of interest in book history. By blending this transient and ephemeral archive, I am also committed to troubling the distinctions between culture and society, text and context, which stabilize many forms of historical or cultural enquiry. Unlike cultural historians of the period, I am not showing how cultural products thematized important social or political developments. And unlike cultural critics, I am not seeking to contextualize autonomous works of art. Rather, I use the methods of close reading associated with cultural and literary analysis to attend to the formal qualities of how social and cultural materials are represented in text and performance. In short, I am breaking down the distinction between text and context in order to offer a mode of analysis suited to the intense integration of culture and society in this period.

In *Staging Governance*, I argued that theatrical practice in the late eighteenth century, even when it was representing foreign manners and distant places, was autoethnographic. Here, I am pushing that argument even further by being much more specific about the technologies through which Londoners came to know and comprehend themselves. In his suggestive discussion of the history of the term *entertainment*, Colin Mercer makes a distinction between entertainment and amusement. According to Mercer, entertainment is much more involved in the policing of the social body than is amusement.⁹ For my purposes here, his argument is merely suggestive because his discussion focuses primarily on nineteenth-century examples and does not elaborate on the emergence of a particular set of entertainment tactics after the important transformations in theatrical and print culture in the late 1760s.¹⁰ That the papers and the theatres were involved with regulating the social body is not in question. Via the Licensing Act of 1737, the state had long been involved not only in the legitimation or

delegitimation of performance venues but also in the direct censorship of plays.¹¹ Similarly, from the late seventeenth century onward, the state imposed strict limitations on what the papers could print. Newspapers were not allowed to report parliamentary debates, and thus the government, through occasional clamp-downs on papers that reported debates, was able to restrict the public scrutiny of its actions. In addition, many of the daily papers, notably the *Daily Gazetteer*, which was an organ of Walpole's Ministry, were simply owned by the government and thus set the terms of public discussion. This is not to say that the papers or the theatres were unable to articulate forms of public dissent but rather that everything was managed under a form of surveillance and patronage.

One of the most complex aspects of the state's scrutiny of media was that it had significant impact on questions of form. The Licensing Act of 1737 gave Drury Lane and Covent Garden exclusive rights to perform tragedy and comedy, but this also came with the responsibility of maintaining five-act tragedy and comedy as the preeminent forms of theatrical expression.¹² As Susan Staves and others have argued, the middle years of the eighteenth century were not a banner period for the composition of new tragedies, but they were crucial years in the canonization of Shakespeare.¹³ Of Garrick's efforts to consolidate Shakespeare's reputation I have much to say in chapter 4, but Garrick also oversaw the progressive legitimation of a host of new hybrid forms that drew on the entertainment strategies of pantomime, musical entertainment, and other forms of physical theatre. The innovations in set design and visual spectacle initiated by figures such as Philippe Jacques De Loutherbourg and the increasing importance of music to theatrical receipts would eventually transform the practice of tragedy and comedy at the patent theatres from within.¹⁴ All of these developments were happening in complete dialogue with the Lord Chamberlain, and thus the legitimation of low entertainment cannot be separated from state sanction. This raises the unusual question of how to think about the presence of the state in the world of entertainment. Generally, this question is handled in terms of production: what did state censorship do to the writing of plays and specifically to the content that could be presented?¹⁵ I am more interested in its effects on reception. I would like to suggest that all audience engagement with the entertainment presented at the patent theatres involved some negotiation with the state, and thus theatre always had the potential to be about governance. Even when it was not, though, the audience was in a position to ask how any particular performance was received by the state. That awareness is itself significant because audiences were also aware of how innovation, largely driven by commercial calculations, could push on the limits set by the Licensing Act.

A similar potential was activated by the state's control of the papers. With knowledge that certain kinds of information were not allowed to be printed, the reader was aware of the limitations placed on the experience of reading. My point here is not that these forms of government control were privative but rather that they generated productive strategies of interpretation. In other words, I am applying Foucault's notion of the repressive hypothesis to censorship in order to highlight the productive aspects of the restriction on content. The readers of eighteenth-century papers and the audiences for eighteenth-century plays were accustomed, indeed were required, to think metacritically because both media had built-in mechanisms either for interrupting simple consumption or for representing the way external forces impinged on their production. To make this more tangible, let us look at an example of a cultural production that highlights the sophistication required to navigate the world of signs cast up by the convergent media of the theatre and the papers.

The Papers on the Desk: *The Upholsterer*

Transformations in the press and in the playhouses were already under way when Arthur Murphy started his career. He is a notable figure for this study because he traveled both in the world of the theatre and in that of the papers. His work as a conservative propagandist in the Byng affair offers a convenient portrait of the political activities of the press during the Seven Years' War. In 1756, after achieving success as an actor at Covent Garden and as a playwright with *The Apprentice*, Murphy found himself writing a weekly essay sheet, *The Test*.¹⁶ In the employ of Henry Fox, Murphy's task in *The Test*, which he carried out relentlessly, was to attack the Pitt Ministry. When news of Admiral John Byng's failure to engage fully the French fleet off of Minorca reached London, Murphy was among the propagandists who mobilized public opinion against Byng and eventually celebrated in his execution. The execution of Byng was a deeply divisive affair politically, but it had the effect of galvanizing the officer class.¹⁷ In perpetual fear of court-martial, admirals and generals did everything in their power to avoid the perception of cowardice or indecisiveness for the remainder of the war.¹⁸ In a sense, the Byng affair codified the terms of national shame not only for the Seven Years' War but also for the American war. As we will see in chapter 4, memory of the Byng court-martial was a crucial component of the newspaper coverage of the Keppel court-martial in 1778.

But Murphy's work as a playwright casts much of this work in a different light. Murphy's *The Upholsterer* is about the consumption of the news and actu-

ally focuses on the material he wrote about in the papers. Written in 1757 but not staged until 30 March 1758 at Drury Lane, Murphy's play is about an upholsterer named Quidnunc who is so obsessed with the news and with newspapers that he is unable to fulfill either the demands of his profession or the obligations to his family. Lost in the media world, he descends into bankruptcy and is saved by a rather improbable love plot. The story was well known to his audience from Joseph Addison's essay on the political upholsterer in *Tatler*, no. 155, but Murphy's particular adaptation emphasized the topical components of the upholsterer's mania for the news. Quidnunc is an intriguing creation because his subjectivity is perpetually distracted by political and economic news associated with the early phases of the Seven Years' War. Byng's failure at Minorca, Rear Admiral George Pocock's victory over the French fleet at Chandernagore, and other elements of foreign policy are referred to in such a way that presupposes audience awareness of these events. The play's precise allusions to the reporting of these events in the newspapers in the month or so before the performance of the play subtly hail the audience into a similar relation to the media as Quidnunc himself. For example, Quidnunc's reference to "Letters from the Vice Admiral, dated Tyger off Calcutta" is to an actual letter, printed in the *London Gazette*, from Rear Admiral Pocock on naval operations in India.¹⁹ Quidnunc's concern over Indian affairs is amply dealt with later in the play, and again there are frequent references to the reporting on the activities of Suraj' ud Dowla and Jaffir Ally Cawn in February and March 1758.²⁰ Similarly, when Mrs. Termagant refers to the Newsman reporting the death of the emperor of Morocco, she is calling up the newspaper reports from December 1757 of Abdallah's death.²¹ As we will see in chapters 4, 5, and 6, all of these topical references have afterlives in the American war: Byng's failure to engage the French off Minorca haunts representations of Keppel's performance in the Battle of Ushant in 1778; the anxiety over the fate of British East India troops at Chandernagore emerges again after the crushing defeat at Pollilur in 1781; and the Caribbean campaigns of the Seven Years' War are the backdrop for much of the reporting of Admiral George Rodney's activities in the West Indies. But the humor of *The Upholsterer*, and its importance I would argue, lies in how it separates Quidnunc's obsessive desire for the news of global war from the audience's knowledge of these events. This amounts to a distinction between the normal and the pathological, and Murphy's play is remarkably specific in its analysis of pathological reading practices.

The play features three characters whose relations to print media and to communicative practice itself have undermined their social standing. We have Mrs. Termagant, an early precursor of Sheridan's Mrs. Malaprop, who in her attempt

to adopt the language of her betters consistently ends up saying the opposite of her intention. Her linguistic pretensions signal a series of concerns regarding the stability of rank. Her failed performance of social superiority hints at the possibility that more adept performers could well disrupt class identity, while at the same time holding up such a possibility to ridicule. Quidnunc's pamphleteer friend, Razor, played initially by Garrick, is a paranoid conspiracy theorist who sees in all events and utterances convincing proof of the overthrow of Protestant Britain by Papists. Here genuine political anxiety regarding global conflict with France is contained by its very exaggeration. Murphy is adapting directly from Addison, but it is intriguing to think through what his presentation on stage does. Razor's careening emotions are equated with politics itself, so he becomes in Murphy's hands the figure for a form of patriotism that cannot stabilize the nation. Razor's nationalism relies too much on this ascription of French alterity, and Murphy argues that it needs to be either counterbalanced or negated by a more substantive declaration of British identity.

Quidnunc is introduced hunched over a vast array of newspapers struggling to generate some kind of universal theory of political economy from the conglomeration of news before him:

[Scene *discovers* Quidnunc *at a Table, with News Papers, Pamphlets, &c. all around him*]

QUID: Six and three is nine—seven and four is eleven, and carry one—let me see, 126 Million—199 Thousand, 328—and all this with about—where, where's the amount of the Specie? Here, here—with about 15 Million in Specie, all this great circulation! good, good,—why then how are we ruined?—how are we ruined?—What says the Land-Tax at 4 Shillings in the Pound, two Million! now where's my new Assessment?—here,—here, the 5th part of Twenty, 5 in 2 I can't, but 5 in 20 (*pauses*) right, 4 times—why then upon my new Assessment there's 4 Million—how are we ruined?—²²

This remarkable speech goes on for some time, but it bears some scrutiny not only because it repeatedly asks “How are we ruined?” at a point when such a question called attention to the spiraling debt incurred by the war but also because the papers themselves materialize key problems in Quidnunc's subjectivity. Quidnunc is attempting to conjure up a scheme for raising the national supply within the year—in other words, attempting to solve the impossible task of imminently funding the war effort—by scrutinizing the information presented in the newspapers.²³ The irony here is that, at the same time that he is

carrying out this task, he has himself gone bankrupt and is receiving notification from the bailiffs. The key question is why he fails both to regulate his household economy and to formulate a scheme for the regulation of the national supply. The answer lies in the jumble of information on his desk.

That desk and the papers, as theatrical props, are everyday objects. But the papers themselves, as material documents, pose a number of intriguing problems. A typical paper from the period is a remarkable montage of information: advertisements sit adjacent to shipping news, political news is interspersed with social news, and everything is assembled to maximize the amount of print per page. What this means is that the logical links between items are not important to the production and layout of the page but become important in the paper's reception. The reader is transported, or rather is able to move from topic to topic, from nearby spaces to distant lands and, because of the delay in shipping time, from events that happened yesterday to events that happened six months ago. This means that the subject is rarely placed in a consistent relation to narrated events. Rather than readers of a continuous narrative, they are cast as arrangers of divergent threads of information. Reading the paper therefore becomes all about complex acts of dispersion and collection that vary from reader to reader and from reading event to reading event.²⁴ In short, Quidnunc is confronted with evidence that simultaneously collapses space and time and yet refuses to do so in any normative fashion. To resolve the problems of national or household economy from such an archive would require the capacity to absorb all information and give it shape and order in real time. The audience is already well aware that this is a foolhardy task; but it also knows that the desire to meet this impossible narrative demand is necessary both for the stabilization of the state finances and for the consolidation of the subject.

Murphy's characters are linked by a fundamental inability to assess and enact the correct usage of signs, whether this happens at the level of the word in Mrs. Termagant's case or at the larger level of narrative in the case of Quidnunc and Razor. Something is wrong with how they apprehend the world through its representation. Cultural and social exchange for these characters continually spirals out of control to the point where their social standing is threatened by their very distraction. In fact, one could argue that Quidnunc's subjectivity is so dispersed that he barely manages to cohere as a character. Rather, he amounts to little more than a series of interrupted citations from the papers he is reading. By the second act of the farce, it becomes clear that Quidnunc's distraction has led to his bankruptcy. He and his daughter can be saved only by the combined actions of her aristocratic suitor and a mysterious Caribbean planter aptly named

Rovewell, who turns out to be Quidnunc's long lost son. Essentially Quidnunc's speculative relation to the fate of the nation that he is searching for in the news is rendered moot by his son's injection of West Indian capital. In this sense, the play can lampoon Quidnunc's obsession with news of the Seven Years' War by asserting the continuing presence of Britain's economic gains in the West Indies that that war was striving to protect. In this sense, the play both activates and contains the anxieties generated by the war.

Quidnunc's pathological relation to the print media, the dispersion of his subjectivity, and his failure to fulfill his familial and economic obligations are all answerable in the realm of commercial exchange. As long as there is a Rovewell to save the family and the family business, then the pathology can be contained. But in expressing this, Murphy also reveals something about the merchant classes' demand for news of imperial war. Because their economic and social standing was so integrally linked to conflict and exchange in distant spaces, Quidnunc's desire for information cannot be simply brushed off as ridiculous. Murphy and his audience are well aware that the desires presented here are constitutive of the social fabric of a nation increasingly reliant on mercantile relations with its colonial holdings. Quidnunc's subjectivity is dispersed because in a time of imperial crisis—remember that in 1758 Pitt is only just beginning to turn things around in the prosecution of war—its economic base could well become as fragmented as the upholsterer appears to be.

Murphy is careful to have the papers on the stage as material properties and to code actual reported events from the papers into the play. This gesture draws the audience into Quidnunc's experience of dispersion and thus allows some of the anxiety generated by it to animate the farce's satire. The audience's experience of the mediation of the war thus becomes crucial to its identification with and resistance to Quidnunc's obsession. In this light, the play's ridiculous and formulaic resolution—the missing son returns to solve all the economic problems posed by the father's distraction—has a curiously pedagogical effect. The uncertainty that drives Quidnunc's desire—and by extension the audience's past desire for information on Minorca and Chandernagore—has its roots in the anxiety regarding the continuation of primitive accumulation in Britain's colonial holdings. Quidnunc's pathological relation to print media turns out to be a clear expression of a kind of historical anxiety that is recurrently suppressed by assertions of national supremacy and class solidarity, but which really relies on the domination of subject peoples in the West Indies. What Murphy allows us to see in the jumble of papers on Quidnunc's desk is an allegory for the anxiety that enveloped Britain in the early phases of the Seven Years' War, but which was

temporarily put in abeyance after the annus mirabilis of 1759. The papers' tendency to disperse and jumble information, their lack of internal organization and coherence, and above all their unreliability offer a compelling figure for the dissolution of national identity in the face of the economic and political forces of imperial expansion. That he was so blunt in linking the cessation of that anxiety to the practice of plantation slavery should not go unnoticed.

The contribution of Murphy's farce to the cultural matrix of eighteenth-century Britain may seem slight, but even this rather insignificant play assumes a high degree of political sophistication from its audience and offers an extremely complex diagnosis of the social insecurities besetting Britain in the uncertain spring of 1758. That said, *The Upholsterer's* utility for cultural analysis only increases with time, because it is revived again and again throughout the rest of the century to satirize the mediation of national and imperial crisis. Evidence suggests that subsequent performances replaced the topical references to the Seven Years' War with references to events more immediately relevant to the time of performance. When we encounter one such revival late in chapter 5, we discover that subsequent modifications of the play alter not only its representation of imperial war and commerce but also its representation of mediation itself.

Productive Distractions, or New Media

With the end of the Seven Years' War, a new set of protocols in the realm of both politics and media began to emerge. Changes in the economic structure of the empire, in the political dynamics of the nation, and in the metropolitan media became curiously entwined. By midcentury most papers were published by commercial entities, and by the 1760s the four-page format was a firmly established commodity in London's print world. All of the papers were essentially advertisers, or publications whose primary purpose was to generate advertising revenue. However, political essay sheets like Tobias Smollett's pro-Bute *Briton* and John Wilkes's antiministerial *North Briton* continued to compete for the attention of readers. Wilkes's deployment of the press as a force for political change is a well-known story.²⁵ The government's attempt to prosecute Wilkes and forty-eight others for the publication of number 45 of the *North Briton* failed in the courts. Subsequent attempts to legislate against the publication of seditious libels and to expel Wilkes from Parliament also backfired. But more important for our purposes is the challenge set by the antiministerial Letters of Junius. Junius's letters were published in one of the most widely circulated daily papers

in the London, the *Public Advertiser*. As is well known, Junius's letter of 17 December 1769 in the *Public Advertiser* attacked the Crown directly, and the letter was instantly reprinted in the *London Museum*, the *London Evening Post*, the *Gazetteer*, and the *St. James Chronicle*. The government prosecuted all the owners but failed to gain convictions against any of the owners other than John Almon of the *London Museum*.

This victory both for the freedom of the press and for juries to decide whether an article was libelous coincided with a similar campaign for the right to publish parliamentary debates. Throughout the 1760s some daily papers defied convention and printed extracts of parliamentary debates. Each time "the printers were called to the Bar of the House of Commons where they were ordered to kneel before the Speaker before being confined to Newgate until they had each paid a fine of £100."²⁶ In 1771 three papers, the *Wilkite Middlesex Journal*, the *Gazetteer*, and the *London Evening Post*, printed debates and were served with summonses. The printers failed to appear, and the orders for arrest were traduced by the alderman Richard Oliver and the Lord Mayor, Brass Crosby, both supporters of Wilkes. As members of Parliament, they were called to account by the Commons and, when they refused to explain themselves, were consigned to the Tower. Lucyle Werkmeister summarizes the situation well, noting that,

since the courts subsequently upheld the Common's action, the result was a triumph for Parliament. The printers had figured in the plot only incidentally, for Parliament's right to suppress publication of its debates had never been questioned, and the right had certainly not been yielded. But it seemed to the people that this was the only matter in dispute, that the printers were the heroes, and that, by submitting to imprisonment, Oliver and Crosby had somehow established the justice of their cause. As it turned out, there was something to be said for this interpretation, for, rather than risk another battle with the City, Parliament delayed further action until it was too late, accounts of the debates being by then the very heart of every newspaper. All it could do thereafter was to hold the press responsible for the contents of the debates.²⁷

This story relates an important instance of where the law was obviated by the force of commerce itself. Wilkes and his supporters pushed on the limits of the law for political reasons, but the printers wanted to print parliamentary debates because they sold papers. Readers wanted access to parliamentary debate because of the intense interest in the furor surrounding events in America. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the debates on offer were not transcriptions

of oratory made in the House but rather versions of events drawn from the memory of reporters in the gallery or invented from the desks of enterprising hack writers.²⁸

With the founding of the *Morning Chronicle* in 1769, William Woodfall started a fashion for daily papers that blended parliamentary debate, advertising, letters to the printer, and sundry economic and political news into a compact whole. Woodfall, whose ability to remember vast stretches of debate earned him the nickname “Memory Woodfall,” was also the preeminent theatre critic of his generation. The collocation of detailed presentations of parliamentary debate and sophisticated theatrical reviews, or “Theatrical Intelligence,” in the pages of the *Morning Chronicle* was a crucial development because it recognized that the same audience was interested in the performances of parliamentarians and thespians alike. This recognition was pushed to its inevitable conclusion by the *Morning Post*, which “differed from its predecessors in only one respect: whereas [other advertisers] had always assumed that readers wanted to be informed, the *Morning Post* assumed from the outset that they wanted to be entertained. The *Post* therefore extended the scope of its ‘intelligence’ to include everything which might amuse people of fashion, and it presented the material in a way which was itself amusing.”²⁹ Following the innovative scandal mongering of the *Town and Country Magazine*, the *Post* entertained its readership by giving accounts of the social and sometimes private lives of wealthy or otherwise prominent people. In other words, what the *Post* added to the mix was a daily account of social performance. The *Post* was so commercially successful that virtually every other paper started including “anecdotes” and “personalities” to its columns as a way of selling advertising. As early as 1772, the daily papers offered a complex archive of social, political, and theatrical performance aimed at entertaining the readership.

This is not to say that readers did not buy papers for information but rather to insist that the flow of information was fundamentally influenced by its entertainment value. One of the upshots of this is that readers had to become considerably more sophisticated, because, as Werkmeister has argued, the practice of selling “puffs,” suppression fees, and contradiction fees became a vital part of the newspaper business, and that by 1780 “there was hardly a ‘paragraph’ in the newspaper that was not paid for by someone.”³⁰ This intense commercialization of information generated highly complex interpretive practices in which paragraphs contradicting previous reports of scandalous behavior, for instance, became almost proof that the person in question had committed the acts. In this regime of signs, silence about a prominent person’s life was a sign of wealth and influence. These developments in interpretive skill are important for any consideration of

social scandal, but they became increasingly important with the advent of the American war.

At the outset of the war in 1775 virtually every paper in London, with the all-important exception of the *Morning Post*, was against the war. From as early as 1772, all of the daily advertisers were on the side of Wilkes, and they followed his lead in resisting the war. Factionalization of the daily press arose, first, from the placement—for a fee, of course—of paragraphs in the various papers and, second, from the eventual lease of entire publications. From 1772 onward, the Tory Ministry of Lord North bought paragraphs in the *Morning Post*. The Wilkes faction “published their paragraphs in the five old advertisers and in the two new advertisers—the *General Advertiser* and the *London Courant*.”³¹ This practice continued until the publisher of the *Post*, Henry Bate, broke ranks and started the *Morning Herald* in 1780 to support the Rockingham Whigs. Because the king was set against a Rockingham administration, he “arranged for a subsidy of the *Morning Post*, and in 1781 he also acquired the *Morning Herald* by outright lease of the entire newspaper.”³² With these events, the Rockingham Whigs entered the fray and essentially assigned Richard Brinsley Sheridan the task of managing the press for the party. In Werkmeister’s words, he subsidized the *London Courant* and the *General Advertiser* with funds from prominent Whigs, sabotaged the politics of the *Morning Post*, and thus left the king entirely dependent on the *Morning Herald* during the final humiliating phases of the war.³³ The king eventually regained sufficient control of the *Morning Post* to enable his appointment of Lord Shelburne as prime minister, but his chosen minister could not survive the acrimony that swept through the press after the Peace of Paris in September 1783.

Unlike many accounts of the American debacle, Werkmeister’s summary demonstrates how the war itself was enveloped in a war of mediation. The Ministry was saddled with the unenviable task of fighting simultaneously a distant colonial war—which would eventually take on global proportions when France and Spain became allies of the Americans in 1778—and a local political conflict within a media world where it was decidedly on the defensive. The North Ministry’s reliance on the *Morning Post* for the management of public opinion poses an intriguing set of problems. As noted earlier, the owners of the *Post* sold papers through a combination of scandal and factional reporting. Despite the fact that its scandal mongering tended to avoid the Ministry, its overall representation of the dissipation of the aristocracy not only undermined the objectives of the pro-Ministry paragraphs but also resonated with similar critiques in more radical venues. Unlike Walpole’s *Daily Gazetteer*, the *Post* was mired in internal

contradictions and thus proved to be an unstable political organ. This is why it was so easy for Rev. Henry Bate to precipitate a crisis in the state when he formed the *Morning Herald*. What he retained was the entertaining combination of scandal and factional accounts of Parliament, and thus the crucial issue in sales was not which faction a paper represented but rather the combination of news with anecdotes and personages. Commerce was being driven by a crucial internal contradiction in the entertainment value of the papers: on the one hand, readers demonstrated a desire for news of public affairs, of parliamentary debate, especially with regard to the prosecution of the war; on the other hand, readers also wanted to read about the vices and errors of the Town. What is so remarkable is that for each reverse in the former realm, one could find ample cause in the latter. The newspapers all proclaimed patriotic intent, but their sales were directly linked to the daily representation of the potential connection between symptom and cause of imperial decline. So what we have is a patriotic media whose commercial success relied on the decidedly unpatriotic propagation of anxiety and doubt regarding the elite echelons of society from which Britain drew many of its military and political leaders.

This seeming contradiction resonates with Johnson's definitions of patriotism itself. In the first (1755) and fourth (1773) editions of his dictionary, Johnson defines "patriot" as "One whose ruling passion is the love of his country." In the fourth edition, Johnson adds: "It is sometimes used for a factious disturber of the government." At one level, Johnson is merely registering the complex play of connotation in the politically unsettled times of the early 1770s. But the 1773 supplement also emphasizes that there is a crucial difference between country or nation and the state and that love of the former can be used to destabilize the latter. This crucial revision is as much an expression of the historical conflict between nation and state in British political thought as it is an expression of the potential for patriotic discourse to unravel the hard-won stability of the realm. This assemblage of divergent threads in the word itself resonates with much of J. G. A. Pocock's analysis of the American conflict.

Sheridan's role here is obviously important for this study because his assumption of manager of the press for the Rockingham Whigs represents merely a modulation in his career. As a dramatist, Sheridan had recognized early on the commercial potential of a blend of topicality, faction, and epistemophilia, even in a cultural field regulated by the Lord Chamberlain. One could argue that *The School for Scandal* offers a complex meditation on this problematic, which reaches its ultimate destination in *The Critic*. The former play is famously explicit about the role played by the commercial print media in the propagation of

scandal. But it is less frequently noted that in the context of its first production, when audiences would have been waiting in daily anticipation of news from America, scandal was in a sense rushing in to fill the vacuum that sheer distance imposed on the reporting of the war. In this regard, Sheridan's great comedy, because it so insistently focuses on the delays and gaps inherent to mediation, is intimately caught up in a structure of feeling endemic to what Mary Favret has termed "wartime."³⁴ As we will see in chapters 2 and 4, *The School for Scandal* and *The Critic* provide crucial sites for comprehending how the American crisis and the transformation in media in this period are fundamentally intertwined.

But beyond the attention to mediation in his theatrical practice, Sheridan's progressive control of the media throughout the war is remarkable. He bought Garrick's share of Drury Lane theatre in 1776 and consolidated his management by buying the remaining shares in 1778. He was thus regulating roughly half of the entertainment on offer during the theatrical season, which notably coincided with the parliamentary calendar. With his election to Parliament in 1780, he was suddenly among the speakers being reported in the daily papers. Among his tasks from 1780 onward was to channel funds to opposition writers at various papers and to destabilize the *Morning Post*. Needless to say, his management of Drury Lane was no less politicized, although there has been little sustained attempt to explore the repertoire as a continuous political argument. But this would be perhaps aside from the point. The key recognition is that during this period of national and imperial crisis, one of the earliest avatars of media convergence was not only exerting considerable political force in the metropole but also exhibiting the potential for commercial representation to influence politics itself. And as chapter 5 demonstrates, this is why Sheridan is so much in Hannah Cowley's sights when she explores the contours of martial masculinity in the late phases of the American war.

This argument need not be confined to Sheridan: he was merely taking advantage of the much-copied representational and commercial dynamic first exemplified by the *Morning Post's* collocation of social scandal and politics. As we will see in chapter 5, the *Morning Post* and Covent Garden operated collusively during the run of Hannah Cowley's *The Belle's Stratagem* to support the Admiralty. That said, theatrical intelligence was always a part of this mix, in the form of standing advertisements and regularly occurring reviews. Thus, the theatres relied on the papers for their commercial success. But the theatrical world was also deeply imbricated not only in the representation of politics but also in the abuse of people, which was so important to selling papers. Matthew Kinservik's recent study of the scandals that enveloped Samuel Foote and the Duchess of

Kingston offers a sustained discussion of precisely this phenomenon.³⁵ Aside from ridiculing various identifiable types, the theatres also supplied an easy group of targets from their own ranks, conventionally named actresses, for scandalous representation and, as Werkmeister notes, a ready source of suppression money.³⁶ Furthermore, as a site where fashionable performance and political representation were constantly on display, the theatre embodied the link between fashion and politics that the printers of the *Morning Post*—and, owing to commercial pressure, eventually all other dailies—set into type every day. In other words, the papers that circulated in the metropole during the 1770s took a preexisting performative collocation and gave it material form. What this meant was that the papers and the theatres not only were commercially linked but also provided cognate sites for conceptualizing their representational strategies.

The kind of daily paper that dominated the print public sphere after the emergence of the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Morning Post* needs to be understood as a new medium. And as Gitelman has argued, “Media represent and delimit representing, so that new media provide new sites for the ongoing and vernacular experience of representation as such.”³⁷ As the 1770s unfold, the papers become increasingly sophisticated interpreters of the theatre. Likewise, the theatre demonstrates an intense awareness of how the new daily papers operate both socially and politically. This perhaps explains why this period in theatre history does not transcend its time terribly well, and why those plays which do get restaged on a regular basis—namely, Oliver Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer* and Sheridan’s *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal*—frequently rely on a caricature of their social and historical context that is usually coded into costume and sets. It is extraordinarily rare for a modern production of these plays to give up the signs of period, and I would argue that this is not simply a matter of lack of artistic vision. In certain recalcitrant ways, these plays manifest a particular historical moment and lose their intelligibility and their intelligence when dislocated from topical details. To make up for the passage of time and the erosion of topical knowledge among audiences, later productions frequently activate a general fantasy of period in the stage properties.

This suggests that these plays and the theatre of the post-1770 era provide an auspicious site for a style of analysis attentive to the history of mediation itself. But how would we consider the theatre as a site of media archaeology?³⁸ Could we argue that the “intelligence” of theatre in this period lies not simply in its representation of social relations but rather in its complex engagement with the relationship between social performance and its mediation?³⁹ The fact that the media in question have been subsumed or replaced by different forms and

structures may help to account for the obsolescence or, to put it more positively, the situatedness of these plays. In some of the most searching plays in the period, an awareness of that obsolescence was already encoded into the formal parameters of the drama.

Beyond its intense topicality, the theatrical experience on offer at the patent houses in the 1770s and 1780s was itself stranger than theatre historians care to admit. An evening's bill included a mainpiece and an afterpiece, the former usually more serious and generically regular than the latter. Between these plays, all manners of singing and dancing were mobilized to amuse the audience. The mainpiece was framed by a prologue and epilogue that not only represented theatrical production and reception to the audience but also surfaced, in many cases, in the papers a few days after the first performance as a sort of reminder of past performance and an incitement to further production. As Gillian Russell has recently shown, these paratextual materials are extremely important because they are evidence of the high degree of metatheatrical engagement in the theatre of this period.⁴⁰ These metatheatrical gestures are also significant because they were explicitly tied to representations of the theatre as a commercial activity. In the scene of performance, actors, often speaking out of character, would remind audience members that they were consumers and, as such, had a very specific kind of agency. One of the curious effects here is that, in according consumer agency to the audience, the theatre was also constituting the audience as a social entity capable of forming itself into a mass.

Just as Walter Benjamin revised his theory of distraction from simply a negative force in the cultural field to argue that through distraction a kind of productive mass consciousness was emerging to counter fascism,⁴¹ I am arguing that the theatre and the newspapers of the 1770s and 1780s were deeply involved in the pedagogical revelation of the historical forces tearing apart the empire. And, like Benjamin, I want to argue that this politicization, although it can be found at the level of theme and plot—Hannah More's *Percy* is a good example—transforms these media at the level of their formal articulation. The strangely distracted state inculcated by the material form of the four-page advertiser or by the repeated interruptions of a night at Drury Lane or Covent Garden provides productive spaces in time where the reader or the audience can apprehend the social and economic contradictions that undergird these representations.⁴² Without underplaying the difference between the media being discussed—photography and cinema in Benjamin; newspapers and theatre here—what interests me about Benjamin's mode of analysis is the way in which he attempts to understand the relationship between media, aesthetic reception, and social his-

tory.⁴³ In his hands, what Johnson would call low entertainment is a medium for productive engagement that operates outside the validated modes of aesthetic contemplation—in this case, those associated most frequently with civic virtue. Civic virtue—that fabric from which elite forms of martial and political masculinity are woven—comes under a lot of pressure as the American war progresses. Benjamin’s point is that contemplation, already co-opted by power, does not exhaust the field of aesthetic production or political resistance and that, through distraction, the audience gains access to a different and potentially critical set of perceptions.

I am explicitly merging Benjamin’s provocative remarks on media with elements of Foucault’s methodological turn in volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality* away from considerations of repression toward the productive articulation of dispositions and effects. Transferring this methodological shift from the study of sexuality to the analysis of performance is not without its risks, but I believe it can dovetail with the shift within Benjamin’s formulation of distraction and technological reproduction. What Benjamin recognizes in the breakdown of the aura is the emergence of a different way of apprehending not only the aesthetic object but also the social world. In spite of the clearly auratic performances of Shakespeare by Garrick—and later Sarah Siddons—that defined the height of theatrical experience for some audience members, eighteenth-century Londoners were entertained in ways that contravened these auratic protocols. We could even argue that Garrick’s efforts to canonize Shakespeare were an effect of the dispersion of the aura and, provocatively, an unconscious response to his own awareness that, with his passing, that aura was in jeopardy. In the “Work of Art” essay, Benjamin argues essentially that the work of art has an aura if it establishes or claims a figurative distance from the spectator. The figurality of this distance is important, because it is primarily temporal. Jennings states that “auratic texts are sanctioned by their inclusion in a time-tested canon [and] for Benjamin, integration into the Western tradition is coterminous with an integration into cultic practices.”⁴⁴ During the era of technological reproducibility, the distance described here is traduced in ways that dissolve the distance between apprehending subject and the social or aesthetic object. For the publics reading the papers or attending the theatres, this may have allowed for the formulation of relationships among participants and audiences that were conditioned not by that which was being consumed but by the historical forces that were registered in its formal and material elements. At one level, that could be read as a loss of the fetishistic power attributed to auratic art, but it can also be understood as a release from the regulatory regime of the aura. Or, perhaps more productively, the fact

of mechanical reproducibility, felt so tangibly in the world of the press in the mid-eighteenth century, began to make mediation and its relationship to the historical forces inflecting national and imperial life apprehensible in some way. With the claims of tradition continually being interrupted and being made visible as claims, audiences and social actors had the opportunity to experience the present critically.

Squeezed, Bored, and Anxious

We can be much more specific about this process by looking momentarily at one of the most famous meditations on the pleasures of the newspaper in eighteenth-century literature: William Cowper's *The Task*. Book 4 of Cowper's deeply influential poem has been the subject of important recent discussions by Julie Ellison, Kevis Goodman, and Mary Favret.⁴⁵ Composed during the period in 1783 when Britain was negotiating peace with the Americans and entering into a constitutional crisis regarding the governance of the East India Company, Cowper's poem not only thematizes current events but actually remediates key elements of specific newspapers.⁴⁶ After the appearance of the much-anticipated postboy, "the herald of the noisy world,"⁴⁷ the speaker seems to welcome the newspapers in much the same spirit as Murphy's Quidnunc:

But oh th'important budget! ushered in
 With such heart-shaking music, who can say
 What are its tidings? Have our troops awaked?
 Or do they still, as if with opium drugg'd,
 Snore to the murmurs of th' Atlantic wave?
 Is India free? and does she wear her plumed
 And jewelled turban with a smile of peace,
 Or do we grind her still? the grand debate,
 The popular harrangue, the tart reply,
 The logic and the wisdom and the wit
 And the loud laugh—I long to know them all;
 I burn to set th'imprison'd wranglers free,
 And give them voice and utt'rance once again. (4.23–35)

Like Murphy's Quidnunc in his opening speech in *The Upholsterer*, the speaker surveys "This folio of four pages" in search of information, but his subjectivity does not swirl out of control into a vortex of dissociation and citation. Rather, the act of remediating the news in Miltonic blank verse specifically pro-

vides the occasion for the consolidation of the auratic speaking subject. Cowper represents and delimits representation in a manner that allows us to see two things simultaneously. The medium of blank verse is an auspicious site for contemplation and argument; thus, the remediation of the news in *The Task* instantiates a distance between the spectator/speaker and the news/event akin to that described by Benjamin's definition of auratic art. That distance is thematically registered in the poem by the intermediary function of the newsboy and by the fact that the speaker is at a geographic remove from the represented events. But that distance is also figuratively registered by the repeated expressions of longing and desire for immediacy. What the remediation of the press in blank verse makes visible is the desire not only to be present for the communicative actions of the grand debate, the popular harangue, and the tart reply but also to "free" them through a further act of remediation. In the terms laid out by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, Cowper is poised between the desire for immediacy and hypermediation, and that desire opens onto very specific forms of agency unavailable to someone like Quidnunc.⁴⁸

That the speaker of *The Task* is no less a fictional construction than Quidnunc is important, because they are complementary figures. Quidnunc's distraction is a direct result of an inability to find the appropriate location from which to assess both the political situation of the empire and the status of his own finances. In contrast, the speaker's retreat grants him purchase not only on world historical events but also on the transient hubbub of theatrical and political performance in the metropole. Significantly, Cowper's speaker defines his experience of the papers by contrasting it with the experiences of theatrical and political life in London that are referenced in the daily press:

Not such his evening, who with shining face
 Sweats in the crowded theatre, and squeezed
 And bored with elbow-points through both his sides,
 Out scolds the ranting actor on the stage.
 Nor his, who patient stands 'till his feet throb
 And his head thumps, to feed upon the breath
 Of patriots bursting with heroic rage,
 Or placemen, all tranquillity and smiles. (4.42-49)

The violence of Cowper's language stands in stark contrast to the peacefulness of the time of reading, but more importantly the speaker separates himself from the intense embodiment of the representative theatregoer's experience. In a remarkable contrast, "The sound of war / Has lost its terrors 'ere it reaches" the

speaker of the poem (4.100–101), but the audience member is “bored” in both senses of the word—quite literally pinioned by the crowd. This theatregoer is buffeted by those around him, but he also competes with the actor on stage. Similarly, the patient activist is trapped at the political meeting but also feeds on the breath of patriots. These subjects are not simply witnesses to theatrical and political performance; they are themselves infused by the cultural and social forces around them to the point of becoming actors themselves.

What interests me here is that in the midst of representing how the performance of theatre and politics dissolves the distinction between subjectivity and the social, Cowper also indicates that the penetration of the outside world into the inner life of these performers happens in moments of distraction or boredom. Notice how the activist’s incorporation of the patriot’s rage occurs only after a period of patient waiting. This collocation of distraction and penetration is nowhere more evident than in the wonderful condensation of Cowper’s pun on bored: the audience member “out scolds” the actor not only because he is squeezed and penetrated on all sides but also because the tediousness of the “rant” itself demands that he become the actor. It is these experiences that Cowper holds at bay but which are at the core of the vibrant cultural matrix explored in this book.

As Mary Favret and Kevis Goodman have demonstrated, the distanciation presented in the opening verse paragraphs of book 4 of *The Task* is a complex matter because Cowper’s famous “loophole of retreat” provides an avenue through which to access the affective life of wartime. Paradoxically, it is through figural distance that Cowper’s speaker is able to structure key involutions in the feeling of global war. Crucial to these arguments is the temporality of newspaper reading itself. Everything is pegged to the circulation of the papers; thus, the loophole of retreat also marks a space in time for a specific mode of reading and writing whereby the health of the speaker and, by extension, the nation is reconstituted. As Favret has argued, building on Benedict Anderson’s account of newspaper circulation, the iteration of this temporal experience has profound implications for Romantic discourse.⁴⁹

But I am also struck by the degree to which Cowper’s remediation of the news replaces the decoding of spatial disjunctions on the page of the papers with a series of spatial figures that attempt to bring sense to the chaotic world of the four-page advertiser:

Here runs the mountainous and craggy ridge
That tempts ambition. On the summit, see,

The seals of office glitter in his eyes;
 He climbs, he pants, he grasps them. At his heels,
 Close at his heels a demagogue ascends,
 And with a dextr'ous jerk soon twists him down
 And wins them, but to lose them in his turn. (4:57–63)

As the public man makes his way across the press, the newspaper is eventually figured as a prospect:

Cataracts of declamation thunder here,
 There forests of no-meaning spread the page
 In which all comprehension wanders lost;
 While fields of pleasantry amuse us there,
 With merry descants on a nation's woes.
 The rest appears a wilderness of strange
 But gay confusion . . . (4:73–79)

With the translation of the material page into a figural landscape, the speaker identifies certain zones with the discourse of the sublime—"cataracts of declamation"—and others with the beautiful—"fields of pleasantry"—and this aestheticization carries with it key political ramifications.

It is useful to specify precisely what this prospect allows the speaker to see and what it occludes, for the speaker's figural distance from the text affords insight as well as blindness. He can see the cataracts of declamation and the satiric remarks regarding national decline, and they can be aesthetically processed as products of the sublime and the beautiful respectively. But there remain "forests of no-meaning," which turn out to be thickets of advertising whose tendrils extend to the farthest reaches of the empire and into the lowest forms of spectacle and entertainment (4:79–87). Julie Ellison has usefully traced the catalog that specifies the "wilderness of strange / But gay confusion" and finds an array of products and events culled from issues of the *Morning Chronicle* and the *General Evening Post* from September 1783.⁵⁰ What interests me is that Cowper's metaphors of "forests of no-meaning" and "wilderness of . . . confusion" refer us specifically to the opaque components of the daily press—those elements that Bolter and Grusin associate with hypermediation. Through the distancing power of metaphor Cowper can contain these dispersive elements of the papers, and thus the auratic control implied by the "loophole of retreat" is maintained by a careful containment and abjection of the promiscuous exchanges written directly into commercial print culture and associated with the hustle and bustle of London itself.

What I think this points to are two divergent relationships to cultural distraction in the latter phases of the American war. Cowper, writing from the realm of deep melancholia after a serious bout of depression, deploys the auratic utterance to heal subjectivity, but in doing so his remediation of the newspapers separates himself from the very commerce that defined his privilege.⁵¹ Thus, Cowper's great innovation in the disclosure of the affective experience of war specifically occludes the economic and political adequation that secured his utterance. It is from this complex act of remediation that Cowper crafts what I am tempted to call the first great post-American work of art and, as Favret argues, the crucial text for the Romantic comprehension of "wartime." But Cowper's strategies do not exhaust or even epitomize the cultural reaction to the American war. Like Favret, I tend to see *The Task* as a harbinger. Her exploration of the notion of the "meantime" and of prophecy in Cowper offers one of the clearest avenues for comprehending much of Wordsworth and Coleridge's practice in the 1790s. My sense is that this is because Cowper's poem is attempting to reflect on the ruptures in his own life and in the imperial world at the close of the American war. The performance culture I am exploring in this book is located within a much less controlled situation because it cannot afford, in all senses of that word, the distance that enables Cowper's utterance and is everywhere inscribed in the formal discipline of blank verse.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Hannah Cowley, with arguably an even more intense attention to the play of remediation than that exhibited by Cowper, write for "the crowded theatre" and thus are by necessity involved in a much more sociable and commercial intervention. Furthermore, their practice has much more in common with the work of mourning than with melancholia. Likewise, the very task facing journalists, "the dissemination of ignorance in the form of facts which must be continually renewed so that no one notices," means that they are repeatedly shoring up a discursive system on the verge of collapse.⁵² Their engagement with social and political crisis is marked by a certain imminence that opens the audience to feelings of critical insecurity. In both media, topicality is engaged in a fashion that bores and bores into their consumers. As I argue extensively in chapters 4 and 5, Sheridan and Cowley deploy distraction to negate obsolete styles of subjectification and, in so doing, embrace the commercial dynamics of the theatre itself as a force for social critique and as a way for working through loss. If *The Task* allows the reader to witness the emergence of a new kind of lyric subject and hence a model for historical contemplation, then the late comedies of Sheridan and Cowley discussed in this book establish

the conditions for their audiences to accede to a new kind of critical subjectivity suited to the precarious moment of the late 1770s and early 1780s. It is for this reason that I believe that post-American British culture starts in the middle of the American war with *The Critic*.

In order to test this somewhat Foucauldian approach to Benjamin's concept of distraction, the first three chapters of this book, rather than address canonical works of theatre, look at seemingly trivial social events and related, often minor, theatrical performances. And yet nestled within each analysis of sociability lies an engagement with social and artistic tradition. Gillian Russell has already demonstrated why this analysis of sociability is necessary, and I want to build on her insight by arguing that the kind of attention we are used to paying to works of art needs to be directed at the formal qualities of social diversion, amusement, and entertainment.⁵³ During my analysis of Burgoyne's Fête Champêtre, the Thames Regatta, and Captain André's Mischianza, I use all the tools of close reading to scrutinize the social effects of distraction in order to develop a mode of analysis that will then be employed to deal with more supposedly auratic productions in the theatres. That word *supposedly* is important because, even in the attempts to eulogize Garrick or commemorate Handel, the commercial forces at play begin to impinge on the formal experience of these performances. The analyses of Sheridan's "Verses to the Memory of Garrick, spoken as a Monody" and *The Critic* in chapter 4, of Cowley's post-1780 comedies and George Colman's *Inkle and Yarico* in chapter 5, and of the 1784 Handel Commemoration in chapter 6 are explicitly poised on the recognition that, with the loss of the American colonies, Britain was faced with the real possibility that it could become disconnected from the tradition that consolidated not only its economy but also the auratic effects of the art used time and again to articulate the power of its dominant class. While close reading remains a vital tool, throughout this enquiry it is put in the service of uncovering the historical perceptions afforded by these performances and artifacts. Whether I am able to demonstrate that playwrights such as Sheridan and Cowley are effectively pioneering new perceptual experiences in the mediascape of eighteenth-century life or that the organizers of the Handel Commemoration were performing a rearguard action to harness the auratic power of art for the ruling classes remains to be seen. But I do want to suggest that the questions of perception, of historical consciousness, and of temporal rupture that Benjamin associates so vividly with the formal qualities of cinema and with Baudelaire's verse can be seen in nascent form in the heavily commercialized world of London's theatres and newspapers after the Seven Years' War.

None of this is to suggest that playwrights did not write about other media in the past or that the theatre was not always already the topic of commentary in print culture. However, I do want to demonstrate that the particular developments in the commercial press in the 1770s and the convergence of media during the American war were a crucial development in national and imperial subjectification. And as overstated as that perhaps sounds, I want to argue further that the printers of the papers, the managers of the theatres, and their shared audiences were well aware of this process. This much is evident from Arthur Murphy's *News from Parnassus*, a brief prelude staged to celebrate the remodeling of Covent Garden. Murphy's prelude was widely understood to be a response to Garrick's retirement in June 1776.⁵⁴ As Dunbar summarizes,

When the theatres opened in September, the managers of both houses determined to present dramatic preludes. That presented at Drury Lane was Colman's *New Brooms*, meant to introduce the new managers, to compliment Garrick, and to amuse by witty criticism of the opera. Covent Garden presented *News from Parnassus*, written by Murphy, presumably at the request of Harris and his partners, evidently for the purpose of congratulating Garrick and of presenting a dramatic satire to rival *New Brooms*.⁵⁵

Thus, at the outset of the war, both houses opened their seasons with satires on their place in the commercial culture of London. These two plays, *New Brooms* and *News from Parnassus*, have the rather strange status of being the first productions staged in the patent houses after the reception of the news of the Declaration of Independence. Significantly, both plays pay homage to the passing of one era in British theatre by commemorating Garrick's retirement, while recognizing the emergence of a new matrix of culture workers. In Murphy's play, the great Italian satirist Boccalini resurfaces in London and meets with a poet, a bookseller, an actor, a critic, and a pantomime poet. Each of these men gives an account of his trade. In response to Boccalini's curiosity as to how the newspapers carry "News from all parts of the kingdom," the bookseller, Vellum, describes the activity of the press by referring to the same bees that Cowper would employ in *The Task*:

VELLUM: A printing house is like a bee-hive: some drones there are; the busy fly and buzz abroad in a morning, and return loaded at noon: but they never bring enough; we supply the rest. Troops in America! A letter from thence is writ in my garret.⁵⁶

In Cowper, the bee metaphor is used capture the way that the newspaper “travels and expatiates . . . /sucks intelligence in every clime, /and spreads the honey of his deep research /At his return, a rich repast for me. / He travels and I too” (4.107–14). But in Murphy the bees of the press fail to collect enough information, and this dearth is supplemented by fictional paragraphs. It should come as no surprise that the fictional letter writ in Vellum’s garret pertains to war in America: Murphy is dramatizing the desire for information about America and emphasizing that the commercial system of the press will supply the material to fill that vacuum.

Significantly, Murphy’s representative poet Rebus worked for Vellum for five years and his career in the papers has had a deep impact on his aspirations as a dramatist. His comedy, like the news from America in Vellum’s paper, is not based on observations of manners or men but rather on a cynical calculation of how to avoid censure. As he states,

REBUS: My notion is that there should be sound doctrine throughout; in every scene good and generous sentiments; rising in a climax to some usefull moral in every act.—Now observe—my first act ends with “honour your father and mother.” II Act, “love your neighbour as yourself.”—III. Act, “do as you would be done by”—IV. Act, “charity covers a multitude of sins”—V. Act, “God save the king”—No audience can hiss such sentiments.⁵⁷

Like his direct critique of the status of the news from America, Murphy’s attack on false patriotism in the theatre is given teeth by the subsequent account of Rebus’s plays. His comedy is a pastiche of sentimentalism, but its subject is the corruption of the law. In a remarkable turn, Rebus underscores not only the improbability of any kind of sentimental resolution of those abused by corruption but also the unlikelihood of any kind of filial generosity. With the representation of Rebus’s tragedy, Murphy pushes the satire even further. Rebus has chosen to dramatize the shameful events surrounding the death of the Indian financier Nandakumar, which had left a lingering stain on the reputation of the East India Company, and thus what we have is a dramatist, however ineptly, stepping into the debate on imperial governance.⁵⁸ Like Vellum’s “letters on America,” however, Rebus proves to be a less than reliable source for information from the colonial world, and his tragedy ends up blending orientalist spectacle and moral nostrums against forgery, precisely the allegation Nandakumar made against the East India Company.

Murphy’s satire is notable both for how it underlines the interconnectedness of the newspapers and the theatre and for how it assumes that the audience

already comprehends the moral criteria by which Boccalini will judge Vellum, Rebus, and the corrupt critic Catcall. When Boccalini delivers the News from Parnassus—that is, Apollo’s judgment of each of the men he meets—Murphy emphasizes that his condemnation of each character’s cynical relation to both culture and society will be incorporated into their cultural productions. Boccalini declares the newspapers to be a poison to the soul; Vellum tells Boccalini to “Look into Poets Corner next Saturday for an epigram upon yourself.” Boccalini gives specific—and predictable—instructions for the reform of comedy and tragedy, but intriguingly he remains open to the entertainment of pantomime. Despite the manifest corruption of culture in the play, and the clear invocation of an empire unraveling in America and India, Boccalini does not condemn the convergent media of theatre and the newspapers. Rather, he concludes by celebrating the commercialization of culture itself:

BOCCALINI: In a word, let [Theatre] Managers consider themselves at the head of a great warehouse; procure the best assortment of goods, get proper hands to display them; open their doors, be civil to the customers, and Apollo foretells that the generosity of the public will reward their endeavours.⁵⁹

It is an apt celebration of the commercial theatre pioneered by Garrick, and yet it is a panegyric haunted by the recognition that in other warehouses and zones of exchange this kind of ameliorative vision was far from secure. In Boston only two years earlier, rebellious colonists made the link between the politics of trade in India and the taxation of America explicit in something that would only retrospectively be termed a party.⁶⁰

Both the metropolitan theatre and the London papers recognized that the operations of the media were themselves of interest to audiences and thus the object of commercial calculation. For example, letters to the printer, prologues and epilogues to plays, theatrical gossip, and even documents as seemingly arcane as David Garrick’s will were circulated because they generated custom for both media. Remediation, the replication and circulation of mediated representation, itself started to emerge as a way of testing representation. The chief topoi of these metropolitan representations, fashionable sociability and parliamentary politics, were importantly enacted by a small and relatively exclusive community, but their performances, whether they took place at the Pantheon or in the House of Commons, were replicated both in print and on stage. And this is entertaining, in Johnson’s complex definition, because it strikes to the heart of the

political problematic enveloping the nation and empire. And that, of course, had to do with representation in a different sense.

Necessary Turbulence, or New Empires

J. G. A. Pocock's influential account of the political crisis in the Atlantic traces the dilemma of imperial governance back to two key problems: the lack of any coherent theory of confederation in British political thought and the troubling duality of the term *imperium*. As he states, "the primary meaning in English of 'empire' or *imperium* had been 'national sovereignty': the 'empire' of England over itself, of the crown over England in the church as well as state, the independence of the English church-state from all other modes of sovereignty."⁶¹ Empire in this sense denoted sovereignty of the British realm over itself. This primary meaning came crashing into another meaning of empire following "the momentous if transitory establishment on an English-speaking universal empire in the North Atlantic and Alleghanian America" after the Seven Years' War.⁶² This more recent meaning saw

the extension of its sovereign's authority over a diversity of subject dominions in the Atlantic archipelago, the Caribbean and the North American continent. "Realm" and "empire" were therefore non-identical without being distinct, and the over-riding necessity of maintaining the unity of the crown and parliament dictated that the primary meaning of "empire" should be this institution's sovereignty over its "realm." Since all subjects within the realm were held to be represented by the parliament in which the crown exercised empire, it was an easy step to assuming that all subjects within the "empire" were under the authority which represented the realm, and it was to prove hard to assert otherwise without compromising the unity and sovereignty of the realm itself.⁶³

The colonies were not represented in Parliament, and resolving their ambiguous status was the subject of a host of tracts and pamphlets on both sides of the Atlantic. But Pocock's crucial recognition is that as soon as the ambiguous status of the colonies was recognized, the unity of the king and Parliament, and thus the sovereignty of the realm, was put into jeopardy. This was because the autonomous colonial legislatures began to pass resolutions asserting that the empire must be seen as an enlarged confederacy of many legislatures each separately connected by the Crown.⁶⁴ This effectively separated the king from each legislature

to make him the linchpin uniting all of the constituent elements, and thus the notion of King-in-Parliament was traduced.

This problem was crucial because “Englishmen could see that the American program entailed the separation of crown from parliament, threatening the unity of ‘empire’ which was the only guarantee against civil war and dissolution of government, those deep and still bleeding wounds in their historical memory.”⁶⁵ The recent experience of the historical trauma of civil war and the hard won sense of stability after the Glorious Revolution and the quelling of the Jacobite Rebellion inflected all of the responses to the American crisis. This history proved to be decisive for Britain, because it meant that “the heart of the American problem for Britain was less the maintenance of imperial control than the preservation of essentially English institutions which the claims of empire were calling into question.”⁶⁶

The core of Pocock’s argument merits this attention for two reasons: it helps to shift our thinking about empire to terms appropriate to the historical moment in question, and it isolates an important discursive phenomenon that I believe can be used heuristically beyond the archive of political theory. The problem faced by the theorists of politics that Pocock is reading, figures such as Thomas Pownall, Josiah Tucker, and Edmund Burke, is how to accommodate the two definitions of empire—that is, empire understood as sovereign monarchy over the realm and empire understood as “extensive or enormous monarchy.” The problem comes down to how to bring the outside into the inside without exploding the identity of the latter. In each case, the theorist in question is confronted with three key obstacles. First, the “outside” is itself multifarious, but its constituent parts are lacking in any clear governmental relation to each other. The colonies are composed of separate, autonomous legislatures. Second, the “inside” is dualistic. King-in-Parliament is a dyadic structure, and thus any simple subsumption of the outside into the purview of the inside had the potential to separate Parliament from the king and precipitate a regression to either absolute monarchy or republicanism. And, third, most commentators agreed with Benjamin Franklin’s demographic prediction that the thirteen colonies, already much larger than the British Isles, were soon going to eclipse its population. The obvious implication was that center and periphery might switch places.

These inside-outside problems are fundamental to representation itself. All representational systems maintain their coherence by maintaining a constitutive outside. The notion of *maintenance* here is a complex one, because as soon as one becomes aware of what must be ejected from a system to maintain its representational integrity, that integrity is radically undermined. Within the po-

litical theory of sovereignty presented by Pocock, it is the term *colony* that plays this strange role. It is the concept that must be ejected, yet maintained, to secure the integrity of the realm. The unification of Scotland and England, and all that that means politically, relies on the alienation of the notion of colony to locales across the sea. But the enhanced imperial sovereignty precipitated by the Seven Years' War raised the status of this alienated term in ways that drew attention to its necessary exclusion from the language of King-in-Parliament. As Pocock demonstrates, American secession allowed for the maintenance of "colony" as a constitutive outside for British sovereignty because America acceded to the condition of a state. Thus, one of the crucial adjustments in the era after the American war was a redefinition of coloniality itself such that colonial governance was carried out not by legislatures but rather by governors, "often military men, [who] directly exercised their sovereign's authority, representing him in his personal, imperial and parliamentary character."⁶⁷ This new imperial regime stabilized both the notion of King-in-Parliament and the new global economic networks that it enabled.⁶⁸

From this awareness of the centrality of inside-outside dynamics to the political history of this era in British politics, I want to suggest that the complex play of inclusion and exclusion that animates so much of this book's archive is not an incidental matter but a deep-seated sign of history.⁶⁹ As every chapter in this book demonstrates, much of the entertainment in this period turned on complex rhetorical effects aimed at giving readers and audiences the sense of being simultaneously inside and outside of a public. The pleasures and anxieties associated with this type of representation are not the sole domain of this period, but the convergence of the theatres and the papers and the commercial explosion of the daily press meant that these emotional experiences could be activated on a hitherto unimagined scale. And it is my sense that they are being activated in much the way that Pocock suggests that political theorists attempted to resolve the predicament besetting British politics. In a variety of ways, Britons were exploring the problem of bringing the outside into the inside and ultimately decided to consolidate fantasies of sovereignty, whether that is understood in terms of politics or in the more expanded terms of culture and society. This is perhaps axiomatic in a play such as *The Nabob* (1772), which, as I have shown elsewhere, formally resolves the problem of colonial governance by refiguring the debt incurred by the metropolitan aristocracy to its colonial holdings as a financial and familial obligation that unites the aristocracy with its commercial relations.⁷⁰ Eventually plays about India would operate differently, but I would argue that the problem of bringing the outside inside permeates the convergent

media of the period. In the material form of the papers, the outside world began to permeate domestic space. And theatregoers left their domiciles on a regular basis in order to come together as a public in their contemplation of the comic representation of domestic affiliation.

One way of thinking of this inside-outside dynamic is through the notion of identity. Dror Wahrman's account of "the subversion of every basic identity category" during the American war offers a compelling picture of transformation that seeks to describe the emergence of modernity as a historical bifurcation with the American Revolution as the crucial point where social and cultural turbulence becomes suddenly organized such that we can see a juncture between the ancien regime of identity and the new modern subjectivity.⁷¹ Crucial to his argument is a wide-ranging discursive analysis of how tropes of race and gender are deployed in the pamphlet literature and novels of the period. What he finds is a remarkably unstable regime of signs. Of these destabilizing tropes and figures, Wahrman accords special significance to the deployment of gendered tropes, and his argument for social disjunction relies heavily on a chronology derived from a reading of the shift from gender play to gender panic in prologues to plays in the patent theatres. His analysis of the prologue to Hannah More's *Percy* is powerful, but in many ways it turns first on a crucial reduction of the audience's agency as readers and spectators and second on an isolation of the utterance from the scene of performance itself. As we will see in chapter 2, comprehending *Percy's* prologue requires an analysis of the relationship between the paratext, the politics of Hannah More's tragedy, and the historical situation of the performances in question. Without belaboring the point, for his analysis of this transient text to carry the weight placed on it, one would like to have a firm sense not only of its relation to the mainpiece but also of its reception.

But more importantly, I want to take issue with Wahrman's analysis on a different level. Much of his evidence regarding the figuration of relations between colonies and metropole is more convincingly understood in terms of kinship relations than gender insubordination as such. As Wahrman states,

The belief that this was indeed an unnatural civil war was frequently expressed through images of an unnatural family affair or domestic strife: historians long ago suggested that the language of disrupted family relations was "the very lingua franca of the [American] revolution." Not that this fact is very surprising. But its consequences are worth noting: for it was but a short step from the anxiety about a malfunctioning family to that about proper gender roles within the family, whether between hus-

band and wife or between parent—especially mother—and child. Was Great Britain a caring or an unnatural—and unfeminine—mother to the colonies? Was King George an unnatural father? This was a question, as Jay Fliegelman has brilliantly shown, that reverberated with considerable consequences throughout the American crisis. . . . Such invocations of well-functioning family relationships were inevitably also references to proper gender roles. . . . Inadequate gender identities fused together the harmful consequences of civil war both in disrupting family relationships and in disrupting identity categories; as a critique of the war they therefore packed a double punch.⁷²

I agree with Wahrman and Fliegelman on the ubiquity of this deployment of the family.⁷³ But the sudden assertion of the “inevitable” link between the performance of proper gender roles and the maintenance of sound familial relations relies on a specific deployment of sexuality that may impede analysis of these materials.⁷⁴ What family is being talked about here? Everything about Wahrman’s analysis suggests that the normative tropological family in question has reproduction as its defining characteristic. But this effectively eliminates models of the family based on notions of alliance.⁷⁵ I am invoking Foucault’s distinction between deployments of alliance and deployments of sexuality not to argue for the particular chronological point when one model was replaced by the other, but rather to indicate that by understanding the family in terms of reproduction Wahrman has effectively guaranteed the outcome of his argument. If we back out from this teleological set of assumptions, then we are left with a more complicated situation, one where familial tropes may invoke relations of aristocratic alliance or those of reproductive sexuality increasingly affiliated with the middling orders. In other words, I am imagining a world where both notions of familial relation retain their significance, because it is clear from the widespread concern about aristocratic alliance well past the American war that it is socially and historically still active at the same time that the middle ranks are deploying sexuality to such far-reaching effects. And this returns us to the complicated problem of kinship, which seems to trouble all discussions of the American crisis.

Critical Futures

What happens if we think through the problems of kinship in their most basic form—that is, as a structuralist? If we follow Levi-Strauss and argue that all kinship systems rely on the exclusion of incest, then the argument comes back to

questions of systematicity and the need for a constitutive outside. If, as I have suggested, *colony* operates as the constitutive outside for the realm of King-in-Parliament, then how is this term tropologically excluded from kinship discourse? Of all the examples pulled by Wahrman of the subversion of identity, those figurations that sexualize the relationship between England and America, such as John Cartwright's "A Letter to Edmund Burke, Esq; Controverting the Principles of American Government," also have to separate America from a kinship relation with England.⁷⁶ If, following Johnson, we understand patriotism as a species of love, then it is worth considering what has to be done to prevent normative parent-child or sibling tropes from infelicitous sexualization. Patriotism itself would need to be channeled away from erotic connotations of love toward parental care or sibling bonds. Fliegelman and Wahrman have shown the ubiquity of these latter figures, but it is important to recognize that, because we are in the realm of figures, we can equally understand the American crisis as a conflict between competing suitors for the hand of Liberty. For the colonists, Wilkite radicals, Shelburnites, Rockingham Whigs, and their supporters—all of whom claimed British identities—the ruling elite as represented by Lord North's Ministry had become an unsuitable match for very particular idealizations of the constitutional past. The intense patriotism that fueled, in different ways, the Continental army, the pro-Wilkes mob, and the oratory of Charles James Fox laid claim to specific representations of the past. North's Tory Ministry was not a terribly compelling suitor, because it already felt that it was a husband. Its commitment was not to an idealization of Liberty—that was primarily a Whig fantasy—but rather to ownership pure and simple. The colonies belonged to the Crown, the marriage had already taken place, and thus the conflict had much the same dynamic of the wounded husband trying to rein in his errant wife. Whigs and radicals in Parliament never tired of pointing out that the Ministry was undeserving of the colonies' love and dedication either because it treated them with too much harshness or because it was itself unworthy of respect because it had undermined its own national heritage. All of these arguments rely both on notions of corrupted civic virtue and on the all-important attribution of child status to Liberty.

But as the war unfolded and the Americans demonstrated their capacity for independence, a key problem emerged.⁷⁷ If Britain were to lose the war—and after Saratoga this looked extremely likely—the Whigs, no less than the Tories, would be alienated from the object of their desire. Liberty, as embodied by the colonist's rebellion, was thriving elsewhere and did not need to marry. In a sense, Tories were in a better position to deal with the loss because their patrio-

tism was grounded in the land itself and in the mythical body of the king. Whigs and reformers, with their vision of a mobile liberty and of limited monarchy, were faced with a rejection that separated them momentarily from their past. Suddenly, all they had was Britain and a king who did not care for them. In the turbulent period between the fall of Saratoga in September 1777 and the emergence of the Pitt Ministry in 1784, the performance of patriotism was vexed because its relation to the mythic national past was destabilized. It is for this reason that the performances and representations I look at in chapters 3 through 6 are so vitally concerned with the future. And it is this complex engagement with what was to come, what could not be known, that is ultimately the core of this book. I explore some of the strategies and tactics deployed to figure forth a post-American British imperium. To reengage the romance trope, I want to know what Britons did to make themselves attractive after the divorce, so to speak. And it is crucial to recognize that in the pages of the newspapers and on the boards of the theatre, the audiences I discuss in this book were searching for new subjectivities and new social contracts suitable for the time to come.⁷⁸

Wahrman's analysis of the American Revolution as a point where the ancien regime of identity fractures and opens onto a new set of social and cultural relations builds its argument from an archive different from Pocock's and handles the question of discourse differently, but at least part of his argument needs to be addressed here. In a useful survey of pamphlet literature and political journalism, Wahrman demonstrates that writers of all factions attempted to explain the American crisis in terms of past social and political upheavals. It is hardly surprising to see the present being read as a rehearsal of the English Civil War or in terms of the recently quashed Jacobite Rebellion. What is important, and Pocock makes a similar point, is that not only did historicist analysis of the problem fail to demonstrate the necessary internal coherence to become persuasive, but also this lack of coherence meant that claims of patriotism—and all factions claimed to be operating out of a love of country—increasingly were grounded on often contradictory rhetorical tropes and figures. This is where Wahrman's analysis of gender becomes both illuminating and distracting. By suggesting that something changes in gender itself, Wahrman is able to link the American crisis to a problem within the public. But as noted, that argument hinges on a key redefinition of tropes pertaining to kinships into those of "gender roles." This effectively moves us from questions of social and familial relations to questions of identity. I am reluctant to move so quickly here, because, in spite of the heuristic value of Wahrman's thesis, it relocates the entire political problematic to the domain of the subject. And various important thematics,

such as the fate of civic virtue in the performance of masculinity, are occluded. Pocock's analysis of this problematic demonstrates why this fracturing of historical narratives' explanatory power took place and how American secession moved the entire discursive assemblage away from a historical problematic to a future-oriented resolution not only in governmentality but also in subjectification. This keeps the question of the political open and yet does not foreclose on identity effects. I would argue that Wahrman's argument is powerful because we know what happened next. In the field of cultural criticism this new era goes by the name of Romanticism. One of the things I want to do here is attempt to look at the social and cultural forces of this period in a way that does not see the emergence of the modern self as an inevitable outcome of these historical formations. In other words, I want to give a sense of a moment when it was unclear what Britain and Britons would become.

This perhaps impossible desire to isolate the pre-Romantic arises out of a fundamental observation regarding the materials I discuss in the book. For all the invocation of past national, imperial, and cultural glory in the period, it is extremely difficult to chart a pattern of mourning or melancholia in the mass media archives. Tragedies get performed, nostalgic accounts of the past get printed, but it is in the realms of comedy, mixed entertainments, and the papers that the anxieties of the period are most profoundly explored.⁷⁹ Audiences did not respond particularly well to Richard Cumberland's lugubrious tragedy *The Battle of Hastings* or to Colman's resuscitation of John Fletcher's *Bonduca* in the summer of 1778. At this particularly low point in British fortunes audiences were far more drawn to the combination of farce and spectacle in Sheridan's *The Camp*.⁸⁰ This may be because this war is not simply about loss but may be more accurately apprehended as a recalibration of the right disposition among people and things.⁸¹

There is a harshness in that last sentence because it implies that governmentality operates counter to the protocols of remembrance, and frequently it is the material bodies of those who have died in service of the state that have to be effectively forgotten. These bodies, whether they be buried in Westminster Abbey, as David Garrick's was, or invoked in the same space during the Handel Commemoration, are critical to a process of mourning through which the loss of the American colonies will be politically and emotionally contained so that a very different social and cultural future can proceed. As we will see in the ensuing chapters, I trace a complex deployment of the future in the entertainment culture of London, and I argue, sometimes bluntly, sometimes more implicitly, that the drive forward implied by the projection of future states is itself integrally

related to the dynamics of commerce. Because commerce is the defining objective of the media I am discussing, this amounts to arguing that the commodity form and the social function of these media are tightly intertwined, if not mutually constitutive. Furthermore, I am arguing that the deployment of the future in these media was part of the consolidation of post-American polity in the British Isles, and thus the plays, papers, and social events I examine are not simply representing existing patriot positions but entertaining, in the sense of considering, patriotisms not yet realized. I contend that only through understanding this restylization of both the subject and the social world can we understand, first, how the nation reinvigorated its relationship to its cultural heritage—that is, to itself—and, second, how a new model of empire would work. And I demonstrate that this was explicitly undertaken in relation to a necessarily unknown future.

Mary Favret has identified a similar dynamic in the wartime writing of early Romanticism, and again her insight emerges from a subtle reading of *The Task's* remediation of the news. Because there is always a gap between the text of the papers and the reported event—and I would add a fundamental temporal disjunction between paragraphs within any given newspaper—the speaker in book 4 of Cowper's poem is frequently caught in what Favret calls the "meantime." It is in this hiatus that the affective experience of distant war suffuses the poem, and it is from these interruptions in the mediation of war that a certain predilection for prophecy emerges in Cowper's discourse. In one of these moments, the speaker looks through the window of his rural retreat and sees tomorrow:

To-morrow brings a change, a total change!
 Which even now, though silently perform'd
 And slowly, and by most unfelt, the face
 Of universal nature undergoes.
 Fast falls a fleecy show'r: The downy flakes,
 Descending and with never-ceasing lapse
 Softly alighting upon all below,
 Assimilate all objects. (4: 322–29)

Favret's commentary here is illuminating:

The never-ceasing lapses of time are perhaps welcome, convincing signs of a world-to-be-changed. But they are also signs of a world erased. . . . Here, in the never-ceasing lapses of falling snow, the future appears muted and nearly illegible: like and unlike the newspaper, it is a blank page "that

assimilates all objects” into a vast sameness. It could be a figure of time redeemed, a new time, or, in its frozen stillness, the end of time.⁸²

This sense of a pivot point in time between the erasure associated with the past and the redemption—or apocalypse—associated with the future receives its canonical elaboration in the discourse of Romantic prophecy, and, like Favret and others, I feel that it is a crucial legacy of this period of instability. But I want to draw attention to one aspect of the passage perhaps occluded by the figural link between the falling snow and the blank pages of the newspaper in Favret’s argument. The press is a great engine of assimilation, but Cowper’s lines explicitly state that the future disclosed in the changes wrought by the present is “silently performed / And slowly, and by most unfelt” (4.323–24). This attention to performance is, I believe, important, because it not only draws us to the way that the present subtly acts on the past and the future simultaneously but also indicates that not everyone “feels” historical change precisely because the changes from day to day, from moment to moment—the very iterative quality of the press that drives the mediation of wartime—quickly becomes the sediment of everyday life. As we will see when we come around to Cowper again in the coda to this book, performance is a crucial matter for his understanding of historical time.

Because performance happens in the transient present, in a moment that is always receding into the past and yet opening onto the future, temporality is always on the horizon of analysis. The vast majority of scholarship on performance focuses on the relationship of performance to history. This is in part because the analysis of performance is itself caught in this temporal dynamic. As a performance recedes into the past, we are at least left with its traces. The archive itself lends itself to a consideration of the past, of the passing of time, and of loss. It is not surprising therefore that mourning and trauma are such insistent thematics in the analysis of performance. However, as Judith Butler’s work on performativity and Pierre Bourdieu’s work on the habitus demonstrate, each performance, although always a re-presentation, also impinges on the future.⁸³ Social and cultural propagation, not to mention social change, rely on the capacity for repeated performances to call forth and thus condition the time to come. The problem, of course, is that any single performative moment is only part of a complex flow of social and cultural activity into the past and on to the future. It is in this sense that change, as Cowper suggests, is silently performed and by most unfelt.

Performance offers a particularly portentous site for thinking about these historical and temporal problematics because it is necessarily engaged with the

passage of time itself. This book pays close attention to the way that social and theatrical performances shape both the participants' and the audiences' experience of time, especially the strange apprehension of the time to come. However, grasping that experience, or discussing that apprehension, cannot be achieved directly. Rather, it has to travel indirectly through the material archive of what remains from this turbulent period. As we will see, that material archive throws up rather strange shadows, and often small details will open up ways of perceiving that which has been obscured by history. At times, the tension between microhistory and the macrological demands of the overall arc of the argument will surface to remind us of the complex genealogical task I have set for these readings. What I hope will become apparent is that this same tension was felt by the audiences and participants I discuss, and that their negotiation of the ground between minor details of representation and world historical forces was a remarkable act.

In moments of social and cultural crisis, many potential outcomes are possible. With the hindsight of history, we are in a position to recognize the futures that did not take place. But from the critical standpoint adopted in this book, it is important to uncover this sense of potentiality at the heart of reception itself and to recognize the emotional impact of experiencing a performative invocation of the future that is not always already conditioned by the past or drawn into the discourse of prophecy. Uncovering the futurity of performative time in relation to specific historical moments is, I believe, crucial to understanding, for instance, the profundity of Sheridan's intervention in *The Critic*, or the extraordinarily considered representation of mediation in Cowley's late-war comedies, or the complex mobilization of Handel's vocal music in the immediate postwar period. It is my hope that the style of analysis I bring to bear on these theatrical productions and the way I read the mediation of social performances in the newspapers offer a way of reactivating our appreciation of historical change.

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