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## Entertaining Crisis in the Atlantic Imperium, 1770–1790

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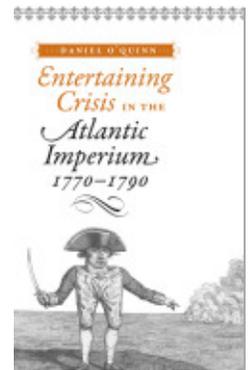
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## Out to America

### *Performance and the Politics of Mediated Space*

The duality that troubles the notion of *imperium*, the nonidentity of realm and empire so forcefully articulated by J. G. A. Pocock, would seem to be an abstract matter of political theory, except that it took on material form in the both the London and the colonial papers on a daily basis. Because information traveling between colony and metropole was relayed by ship, the experience of delayed news was fundamental to both the government and the analysis of imperial affairs. In terms of the spatial design of the papers, this meant that paragraphs on yesterday's events in Parliament or on social relations in London were adjacent to paragraphs about events that had transpired in America roughly a month earlier or events that had happened in Bengal as much as three or four months in the past.<sup>1</sup> Readers therefore were always negotiating a temporal gap coded into the spatial dynamics of the newspaper itself. And it is important to recognize how this would have impinged on one's affective relation to the emerging conflict in America. Separated from the colonies by the Atlantic, readers of the London papers were always in a state of anticipating information from America. Like any serialization of desire, this situation not only drives consumption but also makes one aware of how mediation spaces time.

The skirmishes between Colonel Francis Smith's regulars and the hastily assembled militia at Lexington and Concord on 19 April 1775 are conventionally cited as the beginning of the American war. News of the outbreak of hostilities arrived in London more than one month later on 28 May 1775, and the reports were quickly disseminated in the papers on the following day. Roughly two months later, on 25 July, metropolitan Britons received first word of their Pyrrhic victory at Bunker Hill: British forces had captured the strategic location after three advances, but in the process they lost almost half their soldiers. Both conflicts presaged the military

problems facing the British army during the ensuing war.<sup>2</sup> It was difficult to assess the true strength of the colonial military opposition. At one level, there was little martial infrastructure to discipline the Continental army, but at another it was clear that local militias would fight fiercely around matters of principle and local concern. It was also daunting to think through the problems of supplying an effort to reconquer the colonies. On top of these logistical and strategic problems, Lords North and Dartmouth were beset with metropolitan opposition to both their overall colonial policy and their specific strategic decisions. And finally, the Continental powers of France and Spain were watching and waiting for the moment when their entry into the war would transform a colonial conflict into a global war.

This two-month period between late May and late July was of crucial historical importance, and yet the newspapers seem, from our present perspective, distracted by apparently frivolous concerns. Thankfully, the *Morning Chronicle* printed what it called “A General Index to the Occurrences in June 1775, in Mock Heroic Verse,” so that we could put everything in perspective:

The trial and condemnation of the two Perreaus  
 For certain, but of Mrs. Rudd’s fate the Lord knows;  
 The counterfeit halfpence stopp’d on a sudden,  
 L[ord] N[orth] ready to give the crow a pudding;  
 With the immaculate D[artmouth]h, his coadjutor,  
 Both sensible of the present, but not of the future  
 Mischiefs thro’ their mal-administration,  
 Calculated to hurt the interest of the nation;  
 By measures against the Colonists coercive,  
 To British freedom, trade, and commerce subversive;  
 A raree-shew on the Thames called a Regatta,  
 With barges, boats, streamers, and the Lord knows what a;  
 The City resolved to petition the K[ing] on the Throne,  
 The K[ing] puzzled whether to sit thereon, or let it alone;  
 The Petition, &c. Carried up by the Lord Mayor, and many more;  
 The K[ing], as instructed (God help him) answers as before;  
 The M[inistr]y in the dumps, and making long faces,  
 To think of the scurvy situations and cases,  
 At a time when the French and Spaniards are arming  
 With hostile intentions, truly alarming  
 To the people of England, K[ing], Commons, and Lords,  
 May our sailors take their ships, and our Ministers their words.<sup>3</sup>

The poem thematizes several concerns pressing for attention in June 1775. There is the Perreau-Rudd case, North and Dartmouth's American policy, the Thames Regatta, Wilkes's inflammatory pro-American petitions to the king on behalf of the City, and potential unrest in Europe. There is no mention of Lexington and Concord, but every one of these issues is colored by anxiety regarding rebellion in the thirteen colonies.

Donna Andrew and Randall McGowan have demonstrated how and why the forgery case involving Mrs. Rudd and the Perreau brothers preoccupied the press to the point of relegating news of American matters to incidental notices. In their analysis, the Rudd case becomes anything but frivolous, because it spoke to a legion of anxieties regarding credit, social masquerade, and class prerogative.<sup>4</sup> This chapter looks at a similar distraction in the public sphere, the Thames Regatta, which is here figured as a mere raree show. But this spectacle monopolized much of the press coverage in the crucial months of June and July 1775, when the British lost control over New England. This chapter examines not only why the performance of aristocratic sociability became a locus for national concern and agitation but also how the mediation of this event in the print public sphere laid the groundwork for a whole host of critical cultural events and documents of the early Revolutionary period. The spatial dynamics of the regatta are themselves subject to politicization, and the mediation of space becomes a significant zone for political critique. In many ways, Sheridan's extraordinarily successful opera *The Duenna* poses many of the same questions for cultural analysis as the Thames Regatta: why would something this trivial warrant such extensive attention? The second section of this chapter moves into the period where the Ministry was actively attempting to reconquer the colonies and looks at the spatial allegory coded into *The Duenna* as a form of opposition fantasy not that far removed from the critiques published about the regatta. Finally, the chapter concludes by moving to the period when news of the British loss at Saratoga was working its way through the public sphere. The readings of the Thames Regatta and of *The Duenna* allow us to comprehend how *The School for Scandal* and Hannah More's *Percy* deploy spatial disjunctions to profit both financially and aesthetically from social contradiction.<sup>5</sup>

### Watching the River Flow: Mediating the Thames Regatta

Rather than coming to the Thames Regatta directly, I want to look briefly at the other more obviously political couplets of the "General Index." The poem is divided into two eight-line sections of direct political discussion: the first pertains

to perceived failures in the Ministry's American policies (3–10), and the second addresses the City's attempt to petition the king to recognize the legitimacy of the Americans' claims and adopt a less punitive course with regard to the colonies (13–20). These two sections are literally framed by the opening couplet on the Perreau-Rudd case (1–2) and the final couplet calling the sailors and ministers to action (21–22). The couplet on the Thames Regatta is the pivot that both frames and links the two larger sections on the American crisis (11–12), and as such it balances equal and opposite forces within the poem. This accounting of lines may seem formulaic, but the rigorously balanced structure of the poem raises important questions about space, which will impinge on the larger structure of my argument here. At one level, the lines on North and Dartmouth are about the flow of policy down the Thames, outward toward the sea, and across the ocean to Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, and the speaking voice of the poem is clearly dissatisfied with both the content and the direction of the Ministry's communication, which to this point had been unwaveringly coercive. Similarly, the lines on the City petition are also about the movement of information, but in precisely the opposite direction. During June and July 1775, John Wilkes, on behalf of the Common Council, was attempting to deliver a strongly worded petition, written by Arthur Lee, to the king, which not only condemned General Thomas Gage for starting a civil war but also argued in favor of the American claims to political liberty. Despite having received a similar petition on 10 April 1775, the king, following directions from North and other advisers, refused to receive further petitions on the throne, in order to block further pro-American interference from the City.<sup>6</sup> If we think about this struggle geographically, the struggle of the pro-American voices in the City against the Crown amounts to an effort to move up the Thames, from the Common Hall to Westminster, with a document that in every detail is in direct opposition to the legislation shipped downstream to the colonies by the Ministry. This movement of political documents and policy up and down the Thames, is balanced in the poem by the mocking couplet pertaining to the regatta, and thus the regatta's own negotiation of the river operates in the poem as a kind of parody of the geopolitical struggle encompassing the flow of information between Westminster, the City, and New England.

### *The Directions of Politics in June 1775*

The space of performance is crucial to how one understands the larger historical connotations of the Thames Regatta, but the politics of space are simply unreadable without a clear sense of the social network that sponsored and organized

the event. The regatta was the brainchild of Temple Simon Luttrell, a friend and supporter of Wilkes who was elected member of Parliament for Milborne Port in 1774, and Sir Thomas Lyttelton, the notorious libertine and controversial parliamentarian. Luttrell “gained some notoriety during the war against America for his attacks on the Admiralty and for campaigning against the press gang. The violence of his speeches against Lord North, however, lost him his seat” in 1780.<sup>7</sup> During much of 1774 and the first months of 1775, Lyttelton, from his position in the House of Lords, strongly supported the Ministry’s American policy. He resisted Chatham’s call for a removal of troops from Boston and stood independently in favor of further military intervention in the colonies. However, after the summer of 1775, Lyttelton returned to the Lords and quickly became the scourge of the government’s policy. By October he was loudly demanding that the Ministry rescind the Coercive Acts and adopt a more conciliatory policy. So at the time of the regatta, roughly midway between these two public positions, Lyttelton’s stance regarding America was changing direction.

These two men, whose public personae were deeply implicated with the public debate surrounding the American rebellion, joined forces with two other controversial figures to bring the regatta to fruition. Both Luttrell and Lyttelton were prominent members of the *Scavoir Vivre Club*, an association devoted to drinking, gambling, and high living, and it was through their social connections that they brought in experts in the field of sociability. Lyttelton “prevailed upon Mr. Henry Shirley, a gentleman, whose long residence in foreign Courts, excellent understanding, and other accomplishments, had gained him universal esteem, to assist in the arduous undertaking.”<sup>8</sup> In later reports, Shirley would shoulder much of the blame for the regatta’s failures, but the important element of this description from the *Gazetteer* is its emphasis on Shirley’s intimate knowledge of foreign practices. As we will see, there is a strong vein of xenophobia in the reports of the regatta, which ultimately turns on the cosmopolitanism of the managers.

Luttrell, already strongly affiliated with the *Scavoir Vivre Club* in the press, commissioned Teresa Cornelys to manage the elaborate entertainment that concluded the event. Of all the participants in the regatta, Cornelys comes under the most direct scrutiny in part because the press had a long and profitable obsession with her activities, and in part because she was the least able to defend herself in the courts because of her reputation and her class. As Gillian Russell has recently reminded us, Cornelys was a crucial figure in the economy of entertainment in the 1760s and 1770s.<sup>9</sup> An extraordinarily talented promoter, her “domiciliary entertainments” held at Carlisle House in Soho constituted a new

form of entertainment outside the purviews of the state licensing system. Her strategies for manipulating the press had a profound impact not only on the structure of aristocratic sociability but also on the power of the media to drive public taste. In a sense, she realized quite early on the full potential of the papers to mold the social and cultural life of fashionable society. The first members of the Ton, under the shield of a ticketing scheme managed by Cornelys for a number of prominent women patrons, were able to consort, gamble, and socialize in a manner that exerted considerable pressure on the conventional domains of entertainment in London. Her masquerades and concerts were the hottest tickets in town, and her journalistic acumen ensured that all of her activities were well before the public eye, except those which needed to remain in the dark. Garrick and other managers of the patent theatres found themselves competing with Cornelys and had to incorporate some of her strategies to retain their pre-eminence in the field of cultural, if not social, exchange. Her innovations were quickly picked up and developed by other impresarios, and venues such as Almack's, the Coterie, and the Pantheon flourished. However, as these new forms and sites of aristocratic sociability proliferated, so too did charges of immorality, dissipation, and corruption. Russell's superb study has tracked these scandals and argued persuasively that they were crucial to emerging arguments about the effect of luxury on the state of the nation. By the time Cornelys was taking part in the regatta, her influence was somewhat on the wane, but the mere association of the event with her name brings the entire affair into the orbit of a complex and long-running argument about the dissipation of the aristocracy. These arguments, especially at this historical moment, are inevitably linked to charges of gender insubordination, petticoat government, and compromised masculinity. These issues were central to the media response to the regatta, but Cornelys's historical affiliation with luxury was deployed in an extremely complex argument about the future of the empire.

To understand how these broader concerns are folded into the reception of the event, we need to look carefully at its structure. Like Burgoyne's *Fête Champêtre*, to which it was frequently compared,<sup>10</sup> the Thames Regatta is divided into two sections according to space. This relation to Burgoyne's *fête* is registered in one of the most biting satires of the regatta, "Rural Masquerade Dedicated to the Regatta'ites," which takes the events of the regatta and folds them into an elaborate and ridiculous hairpiece (fig. 2.1). These wig satires were quite popular during a period of extravagant hair styles, but this image has some disturbing elements specific to itself, not least of which is the fact that the wig is being worn by a grotesque elderly bearded woman trying keep up with the follies of fashion.

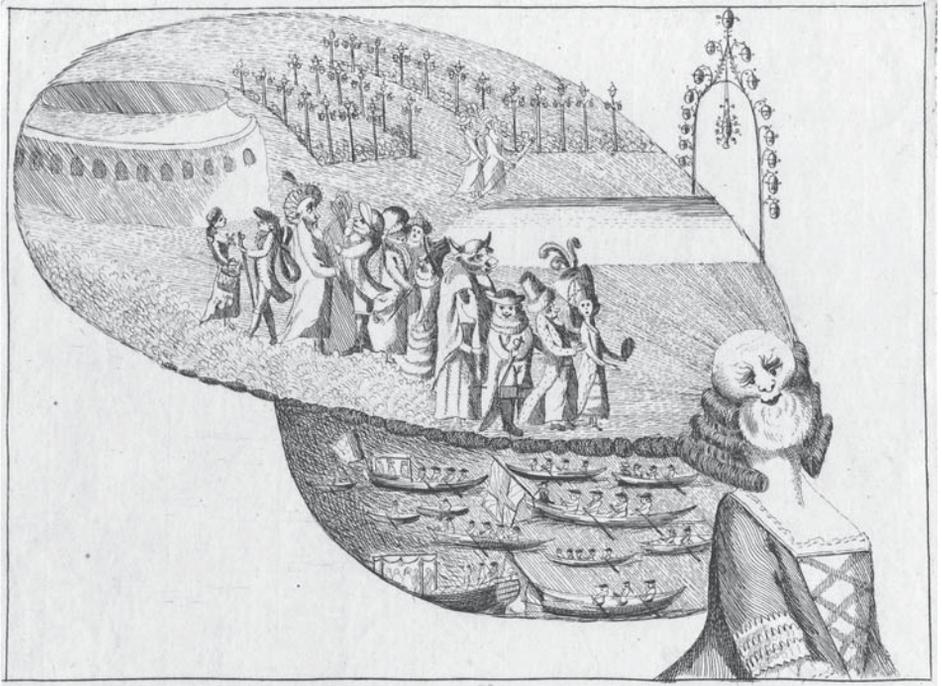


Figure 2.1. Anonymous, "Rural Masquerade Dedicated to the Regatta'ites," etching (1776). BM 5379. Department of Prints and Drawings © Trustees of the British Museum.

The wig, like the regatta itself, is divided into two parts. The first section of the regatta involved a rowing race on the river and then an elaborate procession of barges and boats, carrying notable politicians, aristocrats and ladies, upstream from Westminster Bridge to the steps at Ranelagh at the Chelsea Embankment.

This section of the regatta makes up the lower part of the wig. Boats were positioned under the bridge by color: the twelve racing boats were under the central arch and were framed first by white vessels in the next two arches and finally by red and blue boats that were stationed under the outside arches.<sup>11</sup> As the boats progressed, the spectators would have seen the erstwhile components of the Union Jack chaotically weave their way upstream. This section of the regatta was most directly connected to Luttrell, Shirley, and Lyttelton. Once at Ranelagh, the second phase of the event began when the guests entered a temporarily built Temple to Neptune, which continued the naval theme, but the bulk of the entertainment—dancing, musical performances, supper, and gambling—was staged within the preexisting Rotunda of Ranelagh itself. The

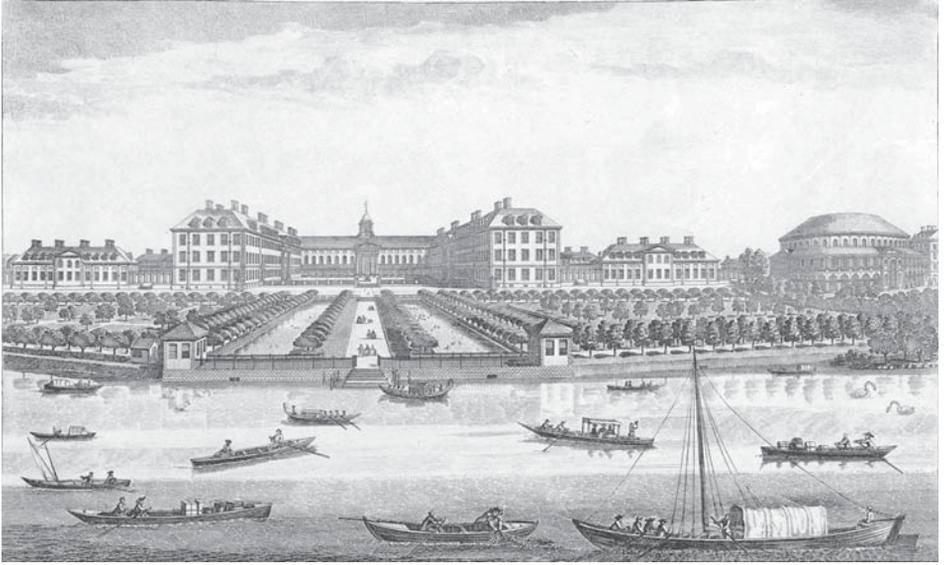
print incorporates the Rotunda into the upper portion of the wig, but like many of the papers, it represents the masqueraders as a party of fools. The attack here is aimed quite specifically at Cornelys and her associates because it was her expertise both as party organizer and as musical impresario that was most commented on in the press. But before looking at that commentary, I want to explore the representation of the action on the river, not only because it reveals a great deal about the relationship between the regatta and the city of London, but also because it demonstrates how the political wrangling over the American colonies is coded into the mediation of the event.

Like virtually any representation of the Thames following Alexander Pope's "Windsor Forest," the transit from Westminster Bridge to Ranelagh is laden with symbolic meaning. At one level, this is quite literally a journey from Parliament to London's foremost pleasure garden, a trip no doubt taken by Lyttelton and Luttrell, both parliamentarians at this time, countless times before. But on another level, it is also a journey from the War Office to the Chelsea Royal Hospital for Invalid Soldiers, which sits immediately adjacent to Ranelagh's famous Rotunda (fig. 2.2). So the participants of the regatta were involved in a journey not only from the seat of government to the seat of social diversion but also from the place where war is managed to the place where the victims of poor strategy were destined to go. What is so fascinating about the reports of the regatta is the degree to which they keep both aspects of the event in play: it is simultaneously a movement away from the pressing exigencies of the American situation *and* a movement toward a rumination on the consequences of faulty policy and corrupted character.

Considering the duality of this movement, it is perhaps not surprising to discover that the part of the regatta that took place on the river was, to all but the most forgiving accounts, a fiasco. The *Gazetteer*, for example, was predisposed to offer a favorable account of the event on nationalist grounds, because

there is no doubt but that a *Regatta*, properly managed, is a shew peculiarly adapted to the disposition, character, and local turn of us islanders, having all the advantages of an extensive river, and spacious shores, affording innumerable points of view, which, with the vicinity of the first city in the world, . . . unite in giving the preference to a *Regatta*, before any popular exhibition ever yet known, either among the ancients or moderns.<sup>12</sup>

But nevertheless, even this observer was forced to concede that the regatta did not live up to expectations, due in part to a combination of bad timing and bad weather:



*Figure 2.2.* Thomas Bowles, “Perspective Views / A View of the Royal Hospital at Chelsea & the Rotunda in Ranelagh Gardens,” etching/engraving (1751). BM 1880,113.1228. Department of Prints and Drawings © Trustees of the British Museum.

It was intended to have been given about the middle of June, then the tide would have served for the race as early as six o'clock in the evening, and the managers might have had their choice of any day when the weather should wear a favourable appearance, from the sixteenth to the twenty-second; but the public mourning for the late Queen of Denmark made it necessary to postpone the entertainment till the twenty-third, when the tide could not possibly turn till after seven o'clock in the evening, and a strong westerly wind made it hold back unexpectedly, even an hour later, so that there could have been no prospect of making up the river for Ranelagh with a procession of barges before dusk, even if the way had been clear, to start the wager boats an hour sooner than this step could possibly be effected, or even without the inconvenience of the lightermen, and others, who obstinately persisted in continually crowding the water, to the evident obstruction of the whole ceremony.<sup>13</sup>

Less sympathetic accounts of the Thames Regatta complained bitterly that much of the spectacle, like the late coronation, was contrived to take place in

darkness.<sup>14</sup> And with so many boats running aground in the low tide, the papers were provided with frequent occasion for ridicule. But the *Gazetteer's* apology for the event is more than simply a statement of regret regarding the tides and the weather. The delay in the event, which was the ultimate cause for the poor tides and the lack of flexibility on the date, is attributed to the circumstance of state mourning. And this was not any normal occasion. Princess Caroline Matilda of Wales was sister to George III and the Queen of Denmark from 1766 to 1772. Her tenure as queen was abruptly terminated when, after being arrested for adultery following a masked ball at the royal theatre at Christiansborg Castle, she was divorced and deported. Her return to England was a source of embarrassment for the king, and I would argue that the *Gazetteer* is subtly suggesting not only that her character made her undeserving of public mourning but also that the motives behind the state mourning had to do with the regatta itself.

This point is clarified later when the *Gazetteer* discusses at length the resistance to the execution of the entertainment, which was demonstrated, but not specifically declared, elsewhere in the press:

It was natural to suppose that the same malicious spirits that were at work so industriously previous to the day of the Regatta, in a fruitless endeavour to prevent it being carried into execution, and who furnished daily supplies of wit upon drowning, balsams, cork jackets, &c. would be equally industrious, when it was over, to report it in disadvantageous terms, and that they would supply a want of real mischief by their own inventions and disingenuous surmises.<sup>15</sup>

This passage is largely an indictment of the press, whose pre-event coverage was replete with half-joking, half-serious suggestions that the entire affair was dangerous and that numerous participants would drown because of inept boatmanship and poor preparation. And there is no shortage of post-event coverage that ridicules the failure to provide sufficient food for supper, and the general confusion on the water. But this is all merely a set-up to suggest that the mediation of the event has been tainted by faction:

Now, Sir, from what quarter could all this abuse and unmerited enmity spring? The scheme was at the beginning very ill received at a *certain place*, where most schemes for the public good have of late years been as ill received; the *Regatta* could expect no countenance from that quarter; it should have been on the *Tweed*, instead of the Thames, then it might perhaps have been found wise, praise-worthy, and salutary.<sup>16</sup>

This is typical of a vibrant anticourt rhetoric, which believed that the much-reviled Lord Bute maintained secret influence over the king and the Ministry, even in his Scottish retirement. The correspondent's anti-Scots rhetoric and his critique of the Crown, here figured by a "certain place," was driven by "an all-encompassing conspiracy theory that defined the ideology and manoeuvres of leading opposition groups well into the age of Lord North."<sup>17</sup> In this context, the earlier regret over the public mourning for the Danish queen, reads as a further level of critique, for it suggests that even George III's vaunted morality could be obviated to serve some greater political purpose. But what possible political purpose could the regatta serve?

One possibility for the regatta's political function is made startlingly evident as the correspondent from the *Gazetteer* continues his analysis:

The Lord Mayor, the Aldermen, and several very respectable Gentleman of the City Companies, saw the apparent merit of the design, and the advantages that must accrue from it to thousands of poor families; they wished to turn the rage of entertainments and banqueting, which prevails so much in these our days among the polished follies of high life (since it must have its course) into a more rational channel than that of midnight jubilee and masquerading: were this, Sir, to become an annual festival, under the like encouragement and countenance which was given to the City of London in a corporate capacity to this *first attempt*, and in a manner so polite and generous, there is no doubt but that it would in a few years draw over an immense resort of opulent foreigners to refund some of the large sums expended by our travelling nobility and gentry to exotic sights of far less magnificence and public utility; . . . perhaps no exhibition on record was ever so happily calculated to serve the principal great ends of all popular games and luxurious assemblies, by keeping the rich and the dissipated at home, inviting persons of a like description from abroad, and, in a word, of gratifying the great, and serving the poor in that most essential article of wholesome and innocent employment: so that the undertaking rightly understood . . . cannot be too sufficiently commended by the public in general.<sup>18</sup>

Curiously enough, this passage is very much about flow, and specifically about the flow of money into and out of the City. But the flow of the text is itself important, because it starts by setting the mayor, the aldermen, and important merchants against the ostensible cabal of the king and his former Scottish prime minister. As I have already noted, the City, led by Wilkes, and its merchants were

at this moment attempting to petition the king to adopt a more conciliatory approach to the American rebellion, so to what degree is the correspondent for the *Gazetteer* comparing great things to small?<sup>19</sup> Is the antipathy toward the regatta similar to the antipathy of the king's policy toward both the City and the colonies? Certainly the idiom in which the conflict is described would have resonated with reporting on the City petitions: much was made of the distinction between the City's political and "corporate capacity" in the king's refusal to countenance the petition on the throne.<sup>20</sup> When one looks carefully at the discussion of "the advantages which must accrue from [the regatta] to thousands of poor families," the argument quickly moves from one of economic interest—that is, the regatta will generate commerce within London—to one that indicts the profligate aristocracy for undermining the national interest. And this is where the directional flow reaches its figural destination.

The nobility is critiqued for moving capital out of the nation in its pursuit of pleasure, presumably on the Continent, and the regatta is praised for its potential to entice dissipated foreigners into dumping their money in London. The regatta is quite literally figured as an instrument capable of stemming the flow of money downriver out of the country and of drawing new wealth, from those inclined to part with it, upriver from across the Channel. As one paper reported, "It is supposed that the late regatta occasioned the spending of upwards of 50,000l. Consequently the community at large were benefited by the circulation."<sup>21</sup> What remains constant are the capacity for the "nobility and the gentry" to hemorrhage cash and the disregard in *certain places* for this perpetual loss. And it is here that the subtle political link between the American crisis and the regatta lies: basically, the *Gazetteer* is arguing that the king and his Ministry, in their attempt to manipulate reception of both events, are too preoccupied by the demonstration of their preeminence to recognize that they are not acting in the interest of the nation. The City's endorsement of the regatta, like its endorsement of the American rebels, is firmly rooted in a proto-Mandevillian analysis of historical events: because the propertied classes, in their current corrupt manifestation, are going to spend regardless of the situation, it is crucial that the money flow in rather than out.

### *The Floating Town, or the Present Crisis*

I have attended closely to this account in the *Gazetteer*, because it participates so thoroughly in the discourses traversed by the representations of the Thames Regatta. In the form of an apology for the event, it hits on most of the crucial

themes: the claims for the commercial benefits that may or may not accrue to the event, the intense fascination or scrutiny of the follies of high life, the relationship between the event itself and the state, and finally the persistent mobilization of xenophobia to clinch questionable conclusions about the cultural and social significance of the regatta. This latter issue is a prominent theme, whether texts are fulminating about “Scotch influence” or complaining about the infiltration of Italian practices into English life. A prominent insert in the *Morning Post* takes up the latter tack:

An ancient club of gentleman rowers present their respects to the publick, and beseech their future support against the invasion of a nickname given yesterday to a rowing match, which diversion has been a common one upon the Thames without interruption every season from time immemorial, and is now on a sudden called a *Regatta*; nobody knows why, any farther than that some travelled *ninnies* of quality, and their pocket companions, the gamblers, have named it so; . . . having caught the word *Regatta* as they have before that of *Fete Champetre*, the apprentices, servants, and all others, broke loose yesterday from their duties of various kinds . . . to see the Regatta, because it was called by that *cant* Italian name. We therefore beg to have our rowing matches be named rowing matches again, as we shall then be able to enjoy them in peace and pleasure, and the English language and inhabitants of this metropolis will be maintained against the corruption of these new fangled entertainments, and the names given them by the new fangled gaming Assemblies.<sup>22</sup>

Because the Thames Regatta was styled on the Grand Regatta of Venice, it was susceptible to this kind of attack, frequently bolstered by an implicit complaint that the event was displacing a much more “honest” English competition on the river: Doggett’s Coat and Badge Race, which was held on the first of August every summer. Raced from “The Swan” at London Bridge to “The Swan” at Chelsea, Doggett’s Race awarded a bright red coat and a silver badge bearing the White Horse of Hanover and the motto “Liberty” to the victorious waterman. Its place in the public imagination was thoroughly plebian and resolutely patriotic; thus, it offered an apt contrast for satirists wishing to impugn the organizers and supporters of the regatta. This alternative race was very much a part of the theatrical response to the Thames Regatta because Samuel Foote ran Charles Dibdin’s ballad farce *The Waterman, or the First of August* at the Haymarket at every possible occasion before and after the regatta.

The *Gazetteer* makes only subtle insinuations about the relationship between the regatta and the state, but other papers were much more direct in expressing their suspicions. The *London Evening Post*, in one of the earliest discussions of the regatta, declared that it was nothing less than a ministerial conspiracy to dupe the public: "The late *Littletonian*, or rather *Simpletonian* Regatta on the Thames, was a ministerial trick calculated to amuse the people, and divert the public from serious objects, and disappoint them from nobler Pursuits, the consideration of their own national security. There was not an individual who viewed this raree-shew but execrated most cordially this ill timed and most ill managed business."<sup>23</sup> In spite of the fact that this charge does not mention Luttrell's prominent place in the regatta's conception and management, Lyttelton's support for the Ministry before the regatta meant that this insinuation carried some political weight, which was bolstered by further allegations that he was simply angling for a patronage post.<sup>24</sup> What runs through all of this is a sense that corruption, already thoroughly embedded in the Ministry, is flowing through the channels of public life and, when combined with a corresponding dissipation of private character, is forming a dangerous flood tide.

Lyttelton, of course, was the flashpoint for all of this anxiety, because he was already a figure of personal and public disrepute. But it is the *Public Advertiser* that mounts the most complex and far-reaching critique both of the Ministry and of Lyttelton, and it is based on a firm sense of the regatta's theatricality: "Lord North, it is said, was the original Contriver of the Regatta, and with the same View that Sir Robert Walpole encouraged the Author of *Hurlothrumbo* to appear on the Stage, viz. that the Eyes of the People might be diverted from the destructive Measures which he meant to pursue."<sup>25</sup>

The confluence of history and theatre history is revealing, because the paper is modeling reception of the regatta on a prior instance of theatrical reception. Lyttelton is being compared to Samuel Johnson of Cheshire, the author of the opera *Hurlothrumbo*, who also played its most prominent character, Lord Flame, in its highly successful run at the Haymarket in 1729. It is an apt comparison because, like the regatta, the opera was rife with confusion and inconsistency. The suggestion that Lord North operates as Walpole did is already damning enough, but the full weight of the attack relies on familiarity with the controversy surrounding the "other Samuel Johnson." The insinuation that Lyttelton, like Johnson, is little more than a ministerial hack generates one valence of critique, but the alignment between Lyttelton and Lord Flame carries even more punch, because this character was the incarnation not only of confused politics

but also of suspect masculinity. In her discussion of Johnson, Susan Aspden points out that

the plot of *Hurlothrumbo* revolves around a rebellion at court, with all the questions of good government that such stories necessarily entail. Such a brief description hardly does the play justice, however. In its political machinations and complex love intrigues it contains elements familiar to audiences from both tragedy and opera seria, but it veers between Miltonic sublimity and schoolboy obscenity, punctuating heroic bombast with slapstick humour. And if the continually shifting register made comprehension difficult, this difficulty was compounded by the character of Lord Flame, played by Johnson himself, whose regular intrusions and manic railings—both sung and spoken—confused and frustrated plot and characters alike. . . . Descriptions of Johnson's performance emphasise the impression of unpredictable fluctuation, claiming that he performed 'sometimes in one key, sometimes in another, sometimes fiddling, sometimes dancing, and sometimes walking on high stilts,' like a performer in one of London's many freak shows.<sup>26</sup>

Johnson's freakish volatility is an apt figure for Lyttelton's fluctuating politics, but it is the larger connotation of suspect masculinity that is most important for subsequent discussion of the regatta. As Aspden argues, Johnson's performance style was associated with the physical abnormalities and the sexual excesses of the castrati, and thus he is also an apt figure not only for Lyttelton's libertinism but also for the overriding sense that the regatta, like *Hurlothrumbo* itself, is a sign of a debauched culture. The critiques of castrati and of Italian opera in general were tied to fears that gender insubordination was a sign of or perhaps even a cause of poor governance. In short, the *Public Advertiser's* theatrical comparison not only reads the regatta as a symptom of a perverted social order but also suggests that the perversion of the social has the imprimatur of the state.

This discourse on sexual perversion and gender insubordination is eventually extended from Lyttelton himself to the press's representation of the Town, but as the critique becomes more general, it also becomes detached from North's Ministry. Virtually every paper prints some kind of a jest or a poem ridiculing Lyttelton, Luttrell, or other participants as macaronis. Some, such as "A Macaroni Ode, written by a Macaroni Poet on the Evening of the Regatta," amount to little more than gentle satires on effeminacy and vanity:

Little Muses come and cry,  
 Put your Finger in your Eye;  
 Join the *Macaroni* Kind,  
 Demn the Rain, and demn the Wind.

Winds that rumple Powder'd Hair,  
 Winds that fright the feather'd Fair,  
 Winds that blow our Hats away,  
 And rudely with our Ruffles play.

Winds that drown the gentle Note  
 Fritter'd through a gentle Throat;  
 Winds that Clouds around us throw,  
 And spoil the Glitter of our Show.

Demn the Winds that thus have stirr'd  
 On Friday June the twenty-third,  
 To plague the *Macaroni* Kind:  
 Demn the Rain, and demn the Wind.<sup>27</sup>

But other contributions are more pointed in their representation of the social entity progressing up the river:

A Correspondent observes, that an *invitation to the Regatta* should have been conceived and expressed in the following terms:—*Lord Tinsel, Sir Harry Flutter, or Mr. Fribble*—presents his compliments to *Lady Fanny Cotillion*, and begs the honour of her company on Friday evening to see all that *can be seen* on the river Thames; to dance at Ranelagh, *as soon as the building erected for that purpose can be finished*; to find her way about the garden *without the aid of illuminations*, and to eat her supper, *if she can get any*.<sup>28</sup>

The less-than-subtle invocation of fop characters from plays such as Garrick's *Miss in her Teens* attempts to contain the threat of gender insubordination by linking it to past satires of foppery while downplaying the political implications of the *Public Advertiser's* invocation of *Hurlothrumbo*.<sup>29</sup> However, not all theatricalizations of the event aimed to contain its potential for figuring forth a topsyturvy world of effeminate men and rebel politics.

The *Morning Post's* attacks on Lord Lyttelton were especially virulent, and they demonstrate the degree to which the figuration of the event as theatre not

only allowed for an intertwining critique of both the state and the aristocratic participants in the regatta but also opened onto a different and equally important allegation of vice. Its opening salvo was imbued with sarcasm regarding his private life, but it turned on a scene of theatrical reception:

As it would have been well understood, independent of publications, that Lord L[yttelton] undertook the chief management of the Regatta from motives of patriotism, and from those refined feelings of benevolence that distinguish his character, both in public and private life; the subscribers with grateful hearts will be bold to affirm, that in case of a second exhibition more money will be collected than at the first, and that the public will receive his Lordship with louder acclamations of groans and hisses than those they so liberally bestowed on a late occasion.<sup>30</sup>

This sense of some abstract public hissing a bad play is given much more specificity the following day:

It was some time ago doubted, but it now amounts to a certainty, that Lord L[yttelton] deals with the devil, as he has the power to turn day into night.—Large sums were depending on this matter at the Scavoir Vivre, and the other clubs, but such was the power of his art and judgement that he won all his bets; for at the appointed hour of seven o'clock the day (or rather the night) on which the Regatta was exhibited, began to close with such an infernal Scotch mist, with thunder, lightening and rain, that leaves not a doubt of the deepness of his skill in the art of magick; and such was his consummate power of attraction, that he carried the whole procession from Westminster-bridge to Ranelagh, in the dark, in one general chaos of confusion, with himself in the middle of them, in his favourite Wager Gondola, to the no small mortification of the numberless spectators that filled the houses and scaffolds, and lined the shores on both sides of the water.<sup>31</sup>

The allusion to the witches from *Macbeth* carries a heavy rhetorical burden here: it figures Lyttelton's unnaturalness; it suggests that the Thames Regatta inaugurates, as the witches' speech did, a period of political mayhem; and it allows for yet another allegation of Scottish influence. As we will see, allusions to *Macbeth* serve other purposes as well, but for the moment it is enough to recognize that all of these aberrations in the right order of things are deployed to satirize one particular vice, namely gambling. The suggestion here is that the real driving force behind the regatta is a kind of unnatural economy based on the fraudulent

manipulation of wagers and bets among clubbable men and debauched women. And Lyttelton emerges as a kind Mephistophelean figure doing the devil's business by entrancing the entire Town.

Whether Lyttelton's vices are sexual or confined solely to the gaming tables is not important, because these assaults on Lyttelton's character cannot be simply ascribed to faction or to personal malevolence. Throughout this period, gaming and sexual misconduct are correlative elements of widespread criticism of the conduct of the upper ranks. For all the *Gazetteer's* or the *Morning Chronicle's* attempts to argue for the regatta's public good, it is important to recognize that even their apologies for the event express considerable anxiety about the private character of public individuals, especially those proximate to positions of state power. These anxieties were not new; they were part and parcel of the reporting of fashionable sociability throughout the 1760s and 1770s, particularly in its most commercialized forms. As Russell has argued, much of this anxiety was a result of the almost contradictory propagation of exclusivity and social mobility in entertainments at Carlisle House and the Pantheon.<sup>32</sup> These anxieties were thematized in the theatre in the early 1770s in plays such as Burgoyne's *The Maid of the Oaks* and Garrick's *Bon Ton, or, High Life Below Stairs*. Garrick's afterpiece was first staged in March 1775, and it was an obvious touchstone for newspaper accounts of the regatta, only now the scene of class mingling had expanded exponentially:

The Ladies in general were dressed in White, and the Gentlemen in undress Frocks of all Colours; and 'tis thought the Procession was seen by at least 200,000 people. In a Word, from the mixed Multitude of Lords and Liverymen, Pinks, and Pickpockets, Dukes and Dustmen, Drabs, and Dutchesses; the whole Scene afforded an admirable Picture of High Life below Stairs, and Low Life Above.<sup>33</sup>

The mingling of classes and reputations was both novel and discomfiting enough to warrant extensive press coverage, and many of the themes of aristocratic dissipation and the social diffusion of vice are rehearsed with regard to the regatta.

This was particularly pointed in the case of Samuel Foote's production of Charles Dibdin's *The Waterman, or the First of August* that ran from late May until the end of the summer at the Haymarket. Advertisements for the play indicated that it was being staged "on account of the Regatta."<sup>34</sup> Dibdin's two-act ballad opera, or ballad farce as he calls it in his preface, was first produced the previous summer and it is perhaps best described as the kind of low entertainment

that kept the Haymarket profitable in this period.<sup>35</sup> But in the context of June and July 1775, Dibdin's play offered a sort of counterdiscourse from which one can assess the Thames Regatta. It cobbles together a number of Dibdin's theatrical songs into a hackneyed story of two young men, the honest waterman Thomas Tug and the foppish theatregoing Robin, who are vying for the hand of Wilelmina, the daughter of Bundle the Gardener. Bundle believes in being true to his laboring origins and thus favors Thomas; Mrs. Bundle has pretensions to fashionability and thus favors Robin; but it is Thomas who wins Wilelmina's affection by winning Doggett's Coat and Badge Race. Wilelmina's first song takes the entire action of the play and locates it in one simple choice, and I would argue that the question she poses has a remarkably long life:

Two youths for my love are contending in vain,  
 For do all they can,  
 Their sufferings I rally, and laugh at their pain;  
 Which, which is the man  
 That deserves me the most? let me ask of my heart,  
 Is it Robin, who smirks, and who dresses so smart?  
 Or Tom, honest Tom, who makes plainness his plan?  
 Which, which is the man? (1.5.7)

The key question here, "Which is the man?" recurs with increasing urgency as the American war unfolds, only it will be asked of the leaders of the nation, and with remarkable specificity when Hannah Cowley poses the question in her complex comedy of this name. I discuss that play at some length in chapter 5, but for the moment it is important to think through the choice on offer at the Haymarket, while the rest of London is preparing for the regatta.

The two men are distinguished by their relation to their superiors. Robin and his advocate, Mrs. Bundle, are infatuated with the world of the theatre. It is at the theatre that they mix with their betters and that they have developed a desire for sentiment and, above all, class mobility. Dibdin satirizes this desire mercilessly by ridiculing Robin's affected dress and speech. His predilection for simile means that much of what he has to say to Wilelmina swirls away in a flourish of wit without substance. Tom also has little in the way of substance to offer, except his extraordinary capacity for labor. And as the opening chorus tells the audience, "Labour is the poor man's wealth" (1.1.1). He is at times referred to as a barbarian—Mrs. Bundle calls him a Vandil and a Hottentot—but this is all in aid of satirizing Robin's false civility. Tom is the epitome of the hardworking Englishman, and thus when he is confronted with the possibility of not receiving Wilelmina's hand,

he first pledges to join the navy and sail on a man of war, and then decides to show his merit by winning the Doggett Race.<sup>36</sup> The alignments are obvious: everything drives toward the rejection of false refinement and foppish masculinity, here figured by Robin, and the validation of the honest liberty of the waterman.

But the corollary to this argument is even more important. What has to be ejected above all else are the desires generated by the excessive mixing of plebeians and patricians.<sup>37</sup> Dibdin's harshest satire is reserved for the termagant Mrs. Bundle, whose commitment to theatrical sociability and mixed company has corrupted her sense of class identity and her use of the English language. As act 2 unfolds, virtually every speech she has contains a misused part of speech, making her Dibdin's version of Mrs. Malaprop.<sup>38</sup> Late in act 2, Lady Bundle strikes out in an air that is aimed at convincing Wilelmina of the value of "accomplishments," but which instead demonstrates that those Mrs. Bundle seeks to imitate have corrupted Englishness itself:

To be modish, genteel, and the true thing, my dear,  
 In short, to be monstrous well-bred,  
 You must ogle and simper, and giggle and leer,  
 And talk the first nonsense that comes in your head.

In grave, fusty old-fashioned times,  
 'Ere ease and deportment went hence;  
 To be bold was the vilest of crimes,  
 And deceit was an heinous offence:

But the fashions are now of another guess kind,  
 Our modes are by no means the same;  
 For, bless'd with good eyes, we pretend to be blind,  
 And with strength to run miles, appear lame. (2.6.34)

The monstrosity of indiscriminate mixing has corrupted Mrs. Bundle's and Robin's strength of body and of mind. In contrast, Tom's most elaborate song not only celebrates his skill and strength as a waterman but also emphasizes that he is impervious to class contagion, even when he is in close proximity with its most enticing avatars:

What sights of fine folks he oft row'd in his wherry,  
 'Twas clean'd out so nice, and so painted with all;  
 He was always first oars when the fine city ladies,  
 In a party to Ranelagh went or Vauxhall.



the nature of the entertainment but also by the event's monopoly on public discourse:

Nothing, Sir, can fully describe to you the situation of my animal oeconomy for this month past, on account of the promised *Regatta*; my wife plaguing me at home, my friends teasing me abroad, all conversation turning upon this one solitary subject, even politics giving place to the *Regatta*. . . . Sleeping and waking my mind has been haunted by the *Regatta*; my nerves have been afflicted, my spirits oppressed, my philosophic system disconcerted, my peace violated, and my passions tormented, with the most extravagant expectations from the *Regatta*. If I stepped into a coffee-house for a temporary relief, the *Regatta* still followed me thither. Old and young, grave citizens, with flowing wigs, and spruce Templars, with pudding curls, talked of nothing but the *Regatta*.<sup>41</sup>

In almost novelistic discourse, the reader is presented with an identifiable character, here named "НОМО," trying to navigate the public hysteria surrounding the regatta; he is a gentleman, of taste and education, open to entertainment, but deeply disappointed and troubled by the fare on offer.

He sarcastically rails against the "courteous advances of a very respectable member of society, who solicited me, in holiday phrases, to purchase a penny-worth of the very best hot spice gingerbread nuts to stuff in my guts, to expel wind, and employ time."<sup>42</sup> As the commercial advances come in from all sides, he declares that the pye-men "engaged as much of the publick attention and admiration, as any thing that was transacting on the water."<sup>43</sup> Put simply, the character represented by this letter is offended by the fact that he was led to expect a show that "unites the grand and the marvellous, the grace and the glitter of a multitude of fine objects; it feasts the imagination with concerts of Greek and Roman pageantries, drums, trumpets, banners, men, women, and children; trappings of the most brilliant devices, and everything that is more captivating than common."<sup>44</sup> But instead was presented with

a lovely collection of wherries, cutters, barges, and bumboats, promiscuously huddled together without the minutest degree of order, decency, or beauty . . . [and] a large mob of draggle-tail'd old women crouding the shores with ardent curiosity, fifty-five thousand of his Majesty's liege subjects plaistered up to the shoulders in filth of fifty complexions, and about half a million of every denomination, age, and order, piled upon the house-tops and places provided for their reception.<sup>45</sup>

Despite his demonstrable disgust with the lack of order and distinction, both in the spectacle and in the audience, the gentleman's reception of the event is not simply a harangue. He states explicitly that all of this mess prompts a different kind of aesthetic pleasure:

The first sensation of delight that operated upon my nervous system was the recollection of a favorite catch of Mr. Purcell's, called Bartholomew Fair.

Here's the Whore of Babylon, the Devil, and the Pope;  
 Here's the man just going to dance upon the rope;  
 Tut tut tut tu goes the little penny trumpet;  
 Here is Jacob Hall will jump it, jump it, &c.

This you may be sure had an elegant effect upon an enthusiastic brain for the time being; but, Sir, so many extraordinary objects kept constantly crowding and shoving, and pressing upon my passions, that my whole frame was most violently electrified with rapture.<sup>46</sup>

This is a curious gesture because it suggests that, through the distancing strategies of satire and allusion, an event as chaotic as that represented here can afford the occasion for a kind of oppositional pleasure. The allusion to Purcell allegorizes Cornelys as the Whore of Babylon, Lyttelton as the Devil, and Luttrell as the Pope, only now the attack comes with a host of other associations regarding low entertainment. The humor of the entire piece is premised on precisely this economy of ridicule, and the readers are invited to both partake of the event and separate themselves from it. As a rhetorical gesture, it places readers both inside and outside of the space of performance and thus allows them to identify with a position of exclusive distinction—I can look on this as Pope looked upon the devolution of literary taste in *The Dunciad*—and yet still be electrified with rapture like any other member of the mob. This is an important rhetorical dynamic, because, like similar gestures already discussed in relation to the “Oak Gazette Extraordinary,” it generates simultaneous fantasies of exclusivity and promiscuous inclusion. The paradoxical collocation of these two positions requires the construction of a fictional persona that enables the press to simultaneously endorse and censure the regatta.

In many cases, this fictional observer is folded into the speaking voice of the paper itself. But the vast majority of the papers sharpened the satire by carefully interweaving references to the political controversies attending the hostilities in America. Take the following description of the mustering of the barges before

the wager race and the procession to Ranelagh, which was reprinted in almost all the papers:

Before five o'clock Westminster-bridge was covered with spectators, in Carriages and on Foot, and Men even placed themselves in the Bodies of the Lamp Irons. Plans of the Regatta were sold from a Shilling to a Penny each, and Songs on the Occasion sung, in which Regatta was the rhyme for Ranelagh, and Royal Family echoed to Liberty. The tops of the houses were covered, and the sashes of many Windows taken out, and perhaps there was not one Boat disengaged, whose Owner chose to work. Before six o'clock it was a perfect fair on both Sides the Water, and bad Liquor, with short Measure, was plentifully retailed. The Bells of St. Martin were rung in the morning, and those of St. Margaret's during the afternoon.

The whole river formed a splendid Scene, which was proportionally more so nearer to Westminster-bridge. A City Barge, used to take in Ballast, was, on this Occasion, filled with the finest Ballast in the World—above 100 elegant Ladies.—The Avenues to the Bridge were covered with Gambling Tables. Occasional Constables guarded every Passage to the Water-Side, and took Money for Admission, from Half a Crown to a Penny. Soon after Six, Drums, Fifes, Horns, Trumpets, &c. formed separate little Concerts under the several Arches of the Bridge. This was succeeded by firing of Cannon from a Platform before the Duke of Richmond's, who, as well as his Grace of Montague, and the Earl of Pembroke, had splendid Companies on the Occasion. At half-past seven the Lord Mayor's Barge moved, and falling down the Stream, made a Circle towards the Bridge, on which 21 Cannon were fired as a Salute; and just before it reached the Bridge, the Wager-Boats started on the Signal of a single Piece of Cannon. They were absent near 50 Minutes, and on their Return the whole procession moved, in a picturesque Irregularity, toward Ranelagh. The Thames was now a floating Town. All the Cutters, sailing Boats, &c., in short, every Thing, from the Dung Barge to the Wherry, was in Motion.<sup>47</sup>

The collocation of gaming, elegant women, commerce, and the names of some of the foremost men of the realm is typical of the reporting of Cornelys's entertainments, but various details, when taken together, push this account into another realm altogether. At first glance, this description seems dominated by tropes of intemperate mixing: elegant ladies are figured as ballast; the floating Town includes the Dung Barge, a general term for a boat carrying all manner of sewage and rubbish; and the most elegant wherries, church bells, and "separate

concerts” come together in a cacophony of sound. This in itself is significant because it presages a confusion in ranks that can be found in more threatening forms throughout the passage. The event is described as both a “perfect fair” and a “floating Town,” and thus the distinction between low and high has been rendered obsolete.<sup>48</sup> Ballads rhyming “Royal Family” and “Liberty,” at a time when Wilkite resistance to the Crown is once again gaining momentum, are not innocuous cultural signs. No matter whether the unspoken lines reassert the Crown’s relation to ancient constitutional liberty—that is, refute Wilkite critiques—or firmly endorse Wilkes’s politics, the mere collocation of these words calls up past and present conflict.

Threading through this representation of boundary-breaking social mixture are signs of unrestrained commerce: ballads are being sold, cheap liquor is flowing from the avenues down to the river, and even access to the river was itself subject to an admission charge. But most importantly the passage gives a sense of almost ubiquitous gambling. The wager race at the heart of the river activities was the focus of betting, but as other papers indicated, vast sums were staked on whether the event would reach Ranelagh or on whether certain personages would participate. In this light, the entire scene is one of illegitimate commerce breaking down all manner of social distinctions.

Into this maelstrom of social insecurity, the account gives us four names of conspicuous celebrants: the lord mayor, the Duke of Richmond, George Montagu, and the Earl of Pembroke. The first three were prominent voices in the resistance to the Ministry’s American policies. Of Wilkes’s pro-American activities as Lord Mayor, we have already spoken. Charles Lennox, the 3rd Duke of Richmond, had been a supporter of Wilkes in the 1760s, and his biography recounts his pro-American positions:

His opposition on American questions was comprehensive and originally reflected the Rockinghamite view that, while parliament possessed legislative supremacy over the colonies (as stated in the Declaratory Act of 1766 that Richmond had supported), it should not use its power to force the colonists to submit to parliamentary taxation. He resisted the North administration at every step, speaking frequently in the upper house and offering a variety of resolutions and protests. Like many of his fellow Whigs, he believed that curtailment of American liberty would herald oppression at home. Once hostilities began he continued his opposition, and he was relentless in criticizing the ministry’s management of the war effort. He was one of the first of the Rockingham party to take the view that

the Declaratory Act needed to be repealed as a barrier to a settlement, and he was an early convert to the idea of American independence. His pertinacity made him one of the most visible members of the opposition and one of those most resented by North's supporters.<sup>49</sup>

George Montagu, the 4th Duke of Manchester, was an important member of the Rockingham opposition to North's American policies in the Lords. He supported Chatham in the early months of 1775 in order to prevent any breach in the opposition and predicted with great clarity that the colonies could not be conquered and that France would enter the war.<sup>50</sup> In other words, this description seems to suggest that the regatta was particularly patronized by the most prominent critics of the Ministry in both the City and the House of Lords. This raises the question as to whether these pro-American politicians are part and parcel of the dissolution of rank and order all around them. However, such a conclusion fails to account for the Earl of Pembroke.

Henry Herbert, the 10th Earl of Pembroke, was appointed Lord of the Bedchamber to George III in 1769 and was thus part of George III's inner circle. But he was also a notorious adulterer, whose indiscretions had been forgiven by both his wife and his otherwise prudish king. Pembroke had a disastrous affair with the actress Kitty Hunter, so in a sense he is the embodiment of precisely the dissolution of rank that pervades the passage. The fact that he is patronized by the ostensibly moral king, and is lumped together with Richmond and George Montagu, indicates that the larger argument of this representation of the regatta has less to do with partisan politics than with a universal critique of the ruling elites. This is reaffirmed later in the passage when the correspondent indicates that the king's brothers, the Duke of Cumberland and the Duke of Gloucester, were present as spectators but did not fully participate in the event, raising the question as to whether they were simply not cognizant of the regatta's subversive connotations or whether they were aware but unable to harness their authority to draw anything but the most cursory attention.<sup>51</sup> Neither possibility is especially flattering to the king. What this means is that for the papers and magazines that utilized this description, the regatta was aligned with notions of a society unraveling under the pressure of its own profligacy, with antiministerial politics and pro-American sympathies, and finally with a deep-seated anxiety that the nation and its ruling elites were not up to the challenge to authority being mounted not only in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York but also in the heart of the metropole itself.

*The Tattered Pavilion, or Lord North's Hair*

Thus far I have attended only to the river itself and to the men whose careers and reputations were most affiliated with the flow of power on the river. In this space, there is a subtle but consistent undercurrent of political commentary, either direct or allegorical, that blends the sense of crisis surrounding American affairs with suggestions that society is in a state of irrevocable decline. But there is a substantial shift in how the Thames Regatta is represented when the procession finally alights at Ranelagh. As the entertainment enters its second phase, a different set of anxieties is activated, and these turn less on the complex relationship between social exclusivity and the dissolution of rank and order than on the failure to sustain aristocratic sociability. As noted earlier, Teresa Cornelys was given the task of throwing a grand musical entertainment, a supper, and a ball in a hastily constructed Temple of Neptune adjacent to the Rotunda at Ranelagh. The following description is typical of the coverage in that it gives a rough sense of the entertainment, but the satirical gibes are considerably more muted:

The company landed at the stairs between nine and ten o'clock, when they joined the assembly which came by land to the *Temple of Neptune*, a temporary octagon kind of building erected about twenty yards below the Rotunda, lined with striped linen of different coloured flags of the navy, with light pillars near the centre, ornamented with streamers of the same kind loosely flowing and lustres hanging between each.—It happened, however, that this building was not swept out, or even finished, when the company assembled, which prevented the cotillion-dancing till after supper: this room discovered great taste, but we cannot reconcile the temple of Neptune's being supplied with musicians in Sylvan habits.

At half after ten the Rotunda was opened for supper, which discovered three circular tables, of different elevations, elegantly set out, though not profusely covered: the rotunda was finely illuminated with party-coloured lamps, and those displayed with great taste and delicacy; the center was solely appropriated for one of the fullest and finest bands of music, vocal and instrumental, ever collected in these kingdoms; the number being 240, in which were included the first masters, led by Giardini; and the whole directed by Mr. Simpson, in a manner that did him great credit.—It was opened with a new grand piece composed for the occasion, after which various catches and glees were admirably sung by Messrs. Vernon, Rein-

hold, &c. &c. But the illumination of the orchestra had been unfortunately overlooked which gave that part of the design a gloomy appearance.

Supper being over, a part of the company retired to the temple, where they danced minuets, cotillions, &c. without any regard to precedence: while others entertained themselves in the great room.—Several temporary structures were erected in the gardens, such as bridges, palm-trees, &c. &c. which were intended to discover something novel in the illumination style, but the badness of the evening prevented their being exhibited.

The company consisted of about 2000, among which were the first personages of distinction: viz. their royal Highnesses the Dukes of Gloucester and Cumberland, Duke of Northumberland, Lords North, Harrington, Stanley, Tyrconnel, Lincoln, their respective ladies, &c. also Lord Lyttelton, Coleraine, Carlisle, March, Milbourn, Cholmondley, Pertersham, &c. the French, Spanish, Prussian, Russian, and Neapolitan Ambassadors, &c. &c.<sup>52</sup>

There is an implicit recognition throughout the press that the Thames Regatta's structure mimicked that of Burgoyne's Fête Champêtre, in that the participants were under public scrutiny during the procession from Whitehall to Ranelagh but that the rest of the evening constituted a more "private" affair.<sup>53</sup> The event represented here is marked by its exclusivity, and, although less exalted types were in attendance, one is given the impression that the evening was dominated by a very particular strain of the Ton. The list of personages of distinction in this case is quite revealing, because it is composed largely of discredited royals, dissipated and extravagant young lords, and elderly ineffectual army officers or parliamentarians. Lord North stands out in this company, and I would suggest that he is being subtly diminished by his inclusion.

What this means is that the struggle between the City and the Ministry, which kept floating through the accounts of the procession, disappears from view, and the reporting turns its attention to the politics of pleasure, or rather, to the politics of pleasure lost. However, this does not mean that the American question is drowned out by reports of high living; rather it resurfaces in a different historical mode. If the confusion on the river seemed to allegorize the political disarray instantiated by events in America, then the disrepair of the Temple of Neptune and Cornelys's failure to provide sufficient entertainment at Ranelagh seemed to presage something even more disturbing. Many of the papers describe the pavilion and the Rotunda as mere ruins of a palace of pleasure or as a postlapsarian garden where the exalted guests are starving and isolated from one another in the dark. In a damning comparison to the similar failures

of Garrick's Shakespeare Jubilee, the *St. James Chronicle* stated that at least the "*Personae Dramatis* . . . were kept within doors by the Rain."<sup>54</sup> Even the *Gazetteer* in its most apologetic mode gives a clear sense of unfulfilled pleasure:

The violence of the wind and the rain not only hurt the shew on the water, but effectually demolished the decorations without doors at Ranelagh; the exterior part of the Rotunda was hung with near four thousand white lamps, not one of which could be kept in; and there were various obelisks, arches, paintings, illuminations, &c. all executed from the designs of the most eminent artists, and conformable to every idea of marine character, as the foundation of the whole festival, and each of which were rendered useless.—The grand pavilion which communicated with the Rotunda by arcades, was nearly finished on the preceding day, and most superbly decorated with naval trophies, pendants, ensigns, streamers, &c. but the violence of the wind, during the hurry on the 23d, not only damaged the foundation, but rent a great part of the canvas on the outside, and there was not sufficient time for the restoring it to its original state; besides which, the band of music, habited like Tritons and Nereids, which were intended for the pavilion, were kept so late on the river . . . that the managers were obliged to order one of the bands of Satyrs and Fawns to leave the garden and entertain the company under cover (from the rain) in the Temple of Neptune.<sup>55</sup>

It is clear that Cornelys's design for the entertainment at Ranelagh intended to use the aquatic occasion of the regatta to celebrate naval supremacy. This much is reflected in the remarkable tickets produced for the event in which Neptune, at Britannia's behest, adjudicates the race on the Thames with the Rotunda of Ranelagh discreetly nestled in the background (fig. 2.3). But it was precisely these naval and national emblems, due to either damage or lack of preparation, that had to be jettisoned or, worse still, retained in a ruined state. Readers of the papers were left to contemplate a scene that leant itself to a particularly gloomy allegorical reading. With the navy quite literally in tatters, and the representatives of the army struggling to scare up some supper among a host of macaronis and other people of dubious reputation, the celebration starkly emblemizes a postimperial future.

This emblematic reading of the event becomes more elaborate and more entrenched when we look carefully at the elements of Cornelys's preparations that generate the most criticism: the dissonant presence of satyrs and fawns in the Temple of Neptune, and, of course, the scanty supper. Cornelys's reputation as



Figure 2.3. Francesco Bartolozzi, “Ticket: Regatta-Ball at Ranelagh XXIII June MDCCLXXV,” engraving (1775). BM 1897,1231.369. Department of Prints and Drawings © Trustees of the British Museum.

a hostess turned, above all, on her management of musical entertainments, and the regatta celebration demonstrates that her ability to marshal prominent musicians was undiminished. As reported, the orchestra was the largest convened before the Handel Commemoration in 1784, which we will be considering in chapter 6. No less a personage than Felice di Giardini, the great violinist and conductor who revolutionized the orchestra at the King’s Theatre, was employed to oversee the music, and the evening featured famous singers, culled from the ranks of Covent Garden, such as Joseph Vernon and Frederick Charles Rheinhold. In other words, Cornelys was after a certain kind of grandeur that is reflected in the musical program itself, which is dominated by selections from Handel’s *Acis and Galatea*, *Alexander’s Feast*, and especially *L’Allegro, Il Penseroso et Il Moderato*, and supplemented by popular compositions, such as Brewer’s

“Turn Amaryllis to thy Swain” and Este’s “How Merrily we live.” The opening song from *Acis and Galatea*, “Oh the Pleasures of the Plains,” establishes the pastoral idiom of the evening’s entertainment, and it is reinforced by repeated returns to the L’Allegro passages from Charles Jennens’s 1740 adaptation of Milton’s poems. The uninhibited pastoralism of the program gives us a clue as to what was really at stake in Cornelys’s design for the evening at Ranelagh.

If the weather (and poor preparation) had not intervened, the company would have found itself strolling among physical emblems of naval supremacy and served by attendants dressed as Tritons and Nereids. The scene of entertainment would have been secured and permeated by a sense of oceanic control. This is stated explicitly in “An Ode for the Regatta, or Water Jubilee, performed on Friday night at Ranelagh,” which was widely reprinted in the papers:

BRITANNIA! blest with soft repose,  
 (Whose fields in richest repose are drest,  
 Whose vallies spread their verdant vest)  
 Thus from her peaceful palace rose,  
 And to the Deities her pray’r address!  
 “O’er my fair isle (the glory of the main)  
 This day may Love triumphant reign!”

The Goddess never prays in vain;  
 At Jove’s supreme, propitious nod,  
 Forth from the chambers of the main,  
 Quick darts the coral-crowned God!  
 Glad Tritons at his presence sounding!  
 Notes from Albion’s rocks rebounding!  
 His awful trident shakes the ground!  
 What solemn silence reigns around!  
 Nor surges lash the trembling shore,  
 Nor dare the winds tumultuous roar.  
 But slowly slide the conscious billows—  
 Softly wave the list’ning willows!  
 Whilst Neptune, with majestic smile,  
 Accosts the Goddess of our Isle!

“To crown this chosen, happy day,  
 My offspring shall my will obey;  
 The daughter of the genial main,  
 The Queen of youth and rosy smiles!

(Queen of dimple-dwelling wiles)"  
 Comes, with all her Paphian train!  
 She comes! The conscious sea subsides!  
 Neptune curbs his hundred tides!  
 Smooth the silken surface lies,  
 Where Venus' flow'ry chariot flies!  
 Paphian maids around her move,  
 Keen-ey'd Hope, and Joy, and Love!  
 Close by her side, her darling son she brings,  
 With quiver full! He claps his wanton wings!  
 He takes his aim! behold each pointed dart!  
 With pleasing anguish pierce the destin'd heart!  
     Love and Music spring from heav'n!  
         Sovereigns of the human soul!  
 And by Nature wisely giv'n  
     Ruder passions to controul.  
 Beauty's empire far extends,  
     O'er the ocean's wide domain:  
 From the world's extreamest ends,  
     To Britannia's happy plain.  
 Behold! In every youthful breast  
     (Thames' banks have nurst the flame)  
 Venus, ever-welcome guest,  
     Courts the generous Sons of Fame!  
         (FULL CHORUS)  
 Happy Island! happy King!  
     Where the free-born subjects live!  
 Where the circling seasons bring  
     All that Love and Glory give.<sup>56</sup>

What is significant here is the relationship between Jove, Neptune, and pastoral pleasure. Commanded by Jove, Neptune guarantees stability for the pursuit of love and peace. As long as the sea is calm, pastoral pleasure can flow unabated. The peace of the isle is necessarily tied to the control of the main—hardly a novel construction, but one that recognizes that the navy's control of the oceans is a prerequisite for imperial stability. Furthermore, the entertainment's nationalist gestures, like those activated in Burgoyne's *Fête Champêtre*, are not only fully aligned with pastoral images of verdant valleys but also contingent

upon a normative economy of desire, here figured by Venus and Cupid, which is itself secured by Britannia's prayer to Jove and Neptune. Thus, the erotic dynamics of the regatta entertainment, as projected both here and in the musical program, are folded into a sweeping fantasy of empire. But with the Tritons and Nereids lost somewhere on the river, the entire symbolic economy of the entertainment was destabilized; and suddenly the pursuit of pastoral love, and the nationalist imperatives attached to it in the song, turned in on themselves, and became signs of failure or, worse, perversion. This accounts for the proliferation of jokes regarding "Master-misses" and other macaroni types dominating the scene.<sup>57</sup> By the terms set out in this ode, it would appear that Britannia may have prayed in vain and that the regatta, by virtue of its failed figuration of aquatic, pastoral, and erotic stability, had the capacity to figure forth not only a state that has been abandoned by the gods but also a nation where Love and the land are stricken with barrenness.

Nowhere is this sense of barrenness more explicit than in the widespread criticism of Cornelys's supper. If the pastoral music was a dissonant presence in the ruined aquatic scene, then the scanty supper was met with particular consternation as a sign not only of poor preparation but of poverty. With Cornelys's past social successes in the background, her failure to provide food, drink, or even shelter seems to capture fears regarding the future. In a curious reversal, Cornelys's blazing masquerades and concerts at Carlisle House, which were so ruthlessly critiqued as symptoms of social decay in the late 1760s and 1770s, suddenly become signs of national health, because their very excesses are indicators of economic stability and luxury. The unwritten assumption is of course that Britain is well on the way to a commercial collapse, and that the regatta, like a canary in a coal mine, is an indicator of social and political disaster.

This disaster is once again figured in theatrical terms, and it is here that previous references to *Macbeth* gain traction:

It is allowed on all Hands that the Supper at the Regatta was execrably bad. It is true that Mrs. Cornelys possesses the Art of feasting the Eye, but affords no proportionate Entertainment to that part of the Body which the English are particularly solicitous to please. The supper only revived the memory of those which are set before the *Nobles of Scotland* in *Macbeth*, or the *Knights* in the *Installation* represented at Drury-Lane.<sup>58</sup>

Like the banquet scene in *Macbeth*, the party at Ranelagh is being figured as a turning point, or as a prophecy of sorts, in which the celebration is haunted by the ghost of the murdered friend. In the context of the American troubles, this

amounts to saying that the Macbeth-like Crown and its Ministry, out of unnatural ambition, have not only slain liberty but also had to murder their closest friend, the Banquo-like Americans. Macbeth's horror, and the audience's understanding that his actions will fail, suffuse the scene. In this context, the paltry supper, the tattered pavilion, the macaroni celebrants, and even the uncooperative weather become prophetic signs of world-historical importance presaging a future where liberty and true English values will be carried on by the progeny of Banquo—that is, by the Americans.

This prophetic reading of the regatta is presented in far more blunt terms elsewhere in the press. Dropping the specific theatrical allegory, yet retaining the affective structure of the scene from *Macbeth*, two papers became preoccupied with Lord North's hair. According to the *Morning Chronicle*, "Lord North appeared at Ranelagh, on Friday, with his hair about his ears, as if he had been frightened by the last American news."<sup>59</sup> For the jocular *St. James Chronicle*, North's hair suddenly becomes a revelatory sign:

It was thought that the Appearance of *Lord North* at *Ranelagh* would have occasioned some Fluctuation in the Stocks. He came in with his Hair in the utmost Disorder, and appeared in a State of Terror, which at once added to the Gracefulness of his Figure, and might have led the spectators to believe that he was pursued by Messrs. *Hancock* and *Adams*, with a Legion of *Bostonian Saints* at their Heels.<sup>60</sup>

John Hancock and Samuel Adams, presumably riding the Horses of War and Famine, bring the full force of Revelation onto the Ministry, and the effects will be registered on the Exchange. Lord North's hair, like the jokes themselves, betrays a certain level of fear that permeates not only the coverage of the regatta but also the representation of national and imperial affairs in the turbulent month of June 1775. This sense of fear was abiding and reached its apogee after Burgoyne's disastrous surrender at Saratoga in October 1777 and the entry of France and Spain into the war in 1778.

As one can imagine, these faux prophecies regarding the regatta are just one strain of a number of dire predictions for the outcome of the dispute with the American colonies. In Parliament, opposition leaders such as Charles James Fox in the House of Commons and the Dukes of Richmond and Manchester in the Lords argued vociferously that the colonies could not be conquered. But the representation of the regatta offers a comprehensive survey of the causes, not for the conflict, but for the lack of confidence in the patrician elites charged with defending the national interests. And the regatta provides a useful key for

analyzing not only the representation of the Ton's fascination with camp culture in 1778 but also the primary strategies for the political satire on aristocratic folly in plays such as Sheridan's *The Camp* and Frederick Pilon's *The Invasion*. These plays and their relationship to reporting of the sociability of the camp at Coxheath have been the subject of superb readings by Gillian Russell and Robert Jones, so I am not going to rehearse these issues here. In the ensuing chapters, I turn to other performances from 1778 and 1779 in part to explore the proliferation of diffidence in the imperial imaginary and in part to offer a retroactive justification for the microhistory of performance you have just read.

The microhistories of performance presented in chapter 1 and in my reading of the Thames Regatta share an acute awareness of how space can be deployed to build complex political arguments about sociability itself. In this light, it is not surprising that the mediation of these events is so attentive to the spatial dynamics of performance and of the potential for space to signify a whole range of social concerns. Despite their status as temporary structures, Robert Adam's pavilion—and De Louthembourg's remediation of it—stand in stark contrast to the “Tattered Temple” of the regatta. And it is clear from the newspaper reporting that the “stability” of the former and the fragility of the latter are directly linked to an argument that was seeking to shore up the masculinist institutions represented by someone such as Burgoyne from the incursion of forms of sociability, exchange, and culture associated with Cornelys and the other organizers of the regatta. And yet it is also evident from the press that there was a fascination with entropy, with the collapse of structure, with the disintegration of the “inside” world. This fascination, I would argue, is directly linked to the social insecurity prompted by the American war and it plays a crucial role in some of the most aesthetically effective theatre of the period. As we will see in the following example, questions of the relationship between inside and outside, kinship, and above all the capacity of the family romance to figure for the state lay at the core of a remarkably trivial distraction by one of the foremost political operators of the age.

### Declaring Dependence: Opposition Fantasy in *The Duenna*

In light of the American crisis, how could a play such as Sheridan's *The Duenna* so radically and insistently take the town by storm? Sheridan's collaboration with Thomas Linley was first performed in the Covent Garden Theatre on 21 November 1775 and was staged 75 times in its first season. By the end of the century, it would have been performed 254 times. Written expressly for Covent Garden, the

preferred site of musical theatre, it is arguably the epitome of Johnson's definition of entertainment as diversion or lower comedy. Linda V. Troost persuasively demonstrates that the power of Sheridan's opera lies in the music's capacity to add substance to otherwise stock characters.<sup>61</sup> But unless one is simply willing to attribute its extraordinary success to sheer musical genius, one has to confront the strangeness of its appeal. This has proved to be a real challenge for most scholars of Sheridan's work, who find it, in the words of John Loftis, "most innocent of thought on serious subjects."<sup>62</sup> But when Durant defends the opera on the grounds that it addresses significant themes, such as the "superior worth of individual freedom, especially freedom of mind and will, in its struggles against arbitrary counter-authority," it is difficult not to hear political connotations that resonate with Sheridan's own Rockingham principles.<sup>63</sup>

But this kind of thematic defense moves too quickly away from the opera's formal concerns, on the one hand, and from its particular historical situation, on the other. *The Duenna* has the auspicious distinction of being the first and unquestionably the most successful new mainpiece mounted in the patent theatres after the outbreak of war in the skirmish at Lexington and Concord. It was in almost constant performance until 1 June 1776 and then returns to the stage 9 November of the same year. In the hiatus between theatrical seasons, news of the Declaration of Independence swept through the press. Looked at in relation to these events, *The Duenna* seems best understood as an escape from history rather than a sign of it. But if we look carefully at *The Duenna's* structure, what we discover is a very careful management of space that figures for a complex negotiation with the political problematics posed by American secession. Louisa flees the patriarchal authority of her father's house and finds herself in the carnivalesque danger of the streets. Sheridan mutes the danger of her situation, but the instability of the outdoors world, inherited from the Spanish honor play, serves Sheridan's interest well, because it allows him to explore the corruption of the interior spaces. The inside world is dominated by Don Jerome and Don Isaac Mendoza, two ancient figures whose escalating fantasies of acquisition drive the plot. For his part, Don Jerome wants to maximize the exchange value of his daughter by coercing her to marry Mendoza. Mendoza wants to acquire his prize at the lowest possible rate. Mendoza's attempt to outwit Don Jerome and avoid a settlement for Louisa backfires and he ends up not only enabling Louisa's and Clara's marriages to their preferred suitors but also marrying the Duenna himself.

What kind of questions should we be asking of a play like this? Should we be looking for a direct thematization of history, or evidence of attempts to avoid all

reference to the crisis enveloping the empire? Neither of these approaches yields much. Both ways of handling the play run aground almost immediately because in the first scene both Don Jerome and Don Isaac Mendoza are figured as warriors. In act 1, scene 1, Don Jerome chases off Antonio with a blunderbuss, but, more significantly, Don Isaac is described as “an unskillful gunner” who “usually misses his aim, and is hurt by the recoil of his own piece.”<sup>64</sup> Eighteenth-century theatrical audiences were highly attentive to topical allegory, and there is much to support an allegorical reading of the opera—especially because such an allegory makes frequent comparisons between the family and the state. In the opening act, war is invoked as a figure for the struggle of parents and suitors to control the objects of their desire. Mendoza and Jerome see Louisa primarily as a commodity over which they fantasize sovereign authority. Both men want to maximize her exchange value—Don Jerome wants as much as he can get for her, Don Isaac wants to get as much as possible for as little outlay. In a sense, the play works to ameliorate Louisa’s commodity status, not by taking her out of the realm of exchange, but by ensuring that she is transferred to an owner of her choosing. That transferral is dramatically satisfying because her sojourn outside her father’s protection, in the marketplace of the external world, is fraught with insecurity and potential threat.

With the commencement of hostilities at Lexington and Concord, Britain found itself in a curious position. Rebellious colonists, rather than following the precepts of their king, had taken up arms against his forces. In a remarkable way, the rebellious colonists had opened up an outside space within the empire. This performance of rebellion has its linguistic counterpart in the Declaration of Independence. Sheridan’s play, pitched between the act of rebellion and the Declaration of Independence, approaches these events obliquely in order to lay out a series of wishful scenarios—the kind of oppositional response not taken by the Ministry and thus a kind of future not taken. If we wish to flesh out this allegory, Louisa’s rebellion can be understood in a similar way to events in America, not simply because she is referred to as a “Virginia nightingale” (2.1, 248), but because she retires to a hidden space on stage and reemerges not as herself but as her *Duenna*. Masquerading as someone external to the family, Louisa is able to move from the inside to the outside world, from the palazzo to the piazza.<sup>65</sup> Once outside her doors, she can then become fully herself. It is only in the outside world that she can retroactively assert her independence from both her father and her *Duenna*. In this case, that independence is qualified because it is merely a transference to the object of her desire. It is more properly

understood as a declaration of dependence. But perhaps we should not underestimate the radicality of that choice.

The Duenna herself embodies at least one strain of the opposition to the Ministry's response to colonial rebellion. Like many opposition figures in Parliament, she is inside the patriarch's house but excluded from Don Jerome's family at the play's outset. A trusted servant, she betrays Don Jerome and is explicitly recognized as a traitor to his interests twice in the play: first, when "she"—actually Louisa—is thrown out of his house for lack of loyalty and, second, when she—dressed as Louisa—is married to Don Mendoza. Remember this is a period when opposition members were regularly lampooned for "treason." Although she is able to pass as Louisa, her complex alterity is registered to the audience by her age and her supposed ugliness. When she accuses Don Jerome of tyranny in act 1, scene 3, he unleashes a vitriolic attack on her that makes much of her "dragon's front"; but his outburst ends with a very specific comparison to the Witch of Endor from 1 Samuel 28:7 (1.3, 239). Again the specificity seems to call for allegorical reading because it refers to one of the most potent political allegories in the history of dramatic music. This is no ordinary witch, for she plays a crucial role in one of the most important political allegories of the eighteenth century, namely Handel's *Saul*. Tragic in structure, *Saul* takes the confusing narrative of succession from the Bible and charts the transformation of King Saul's jealous antipathy for David into full-blown mania in which he inadvertently kills his son. In the final act of the oratorio, Saul breaks his own religious proscription and seeks the prophecy of the Witch of Endor before going into battle on Mount Gilboa with the Amalekites. She raises Samuel from the dead, and he reminds Saul of an earlier prophecy that declared that he would be destroyed by the Amalekites for his disobedience. Saul goes into battle and is killed by an Amalekite, whom David slays in turn. The oratorio ends with a remarkable funeral for both slain father and son that points to the emergence of David as the new king who will unite the tribes of Israel. As Ruth Smith and others have argued, the slaying of Saul by the Amalekite had always been read politically. In initial productions, the allegory was to the execution of James II.<sup>66</sup>

Here I would argue that the Duenna shares much with the Witch of Endor: she is a prophet who discloses the disintegration of one regime and ensures the emergence of another. Only here the new regime is basically a Whig fantasy of an Atlantic imperium ruled by a new Ministry and built of an alliance of states, rather than an empire ruled by a despotic king. The Duenna's specific charge of tyranny is part of a tactic to get her thrown out of Don Jerome's house and thus

allow for the substitution of Louisa for the Duenna. Thus, she is able both to predict the dissolution of Don Jerome's control over Louisa and to effect her marriage to Antonio because her actions cause these events. She has been described by critics as a grotesque, and her physical repulsiveness is crucial to much of the play's humor, especially in the scenes where Don Mendoza pays her suit.<sup>67</sup>

These scenes are intriguing because two figures marked by their physical alterity are deployed to ensure that Louisa's passage from inside Don Jerome's house to the outside world and then to the arms of her husband is fully achieved. These two outsiders are brought together to liberate Louisa from parental tyranny. But it is important to note that Don Mendoza and the Duenna are opposite versions of the same prophetic figure and that their "entertainment value" turns on their relation to the future. Mendoza acts and the future turns out to be just the opposite of what he arrogantly predicted. The Duenna acts and her intentions are always fulfilled. The crucial recognition is that the combined efforts of Mendoza and the Duenna—the warrior suitor and the witch who can see how history will unfold—not only liberate Louisa but also ensure that the errant father is replaced by the new patriarch. Antonio and Louisa emerge as the new David and Michal, and a reconciliation is effected that guarantees the continuation, with a difference, of the nation. It is very tempting to read allegorically Don Jerome as a composite figure for Lord North and the king and Mendoza as a figure for the hapless military led by the already compromised George Sackville. In such an allegory, the Duenna emerges as the oppositional public already fully aware of the necessity of Louisa/America's transit from her father's house. In this allegory, the opposition—and notably Sheridan—finds itself in the position of the grotesque: a hybrid position from which both to observe and to assist in the dismantling of the father's tyranny. The key dramatic question is which grotesque relation to the future will be legitimated in the end. This is why the play refers to the reconciliation of the love plots as treason (234). Marriage to Antonio inaugurates a new patriarchal regime, and the audience is put in the position of watching and, in its desire for comic closure, abetting Louisa's rebellion. Because the play achieves this closure, Sheridan and the opposition find that their relation to the future is akin to that of the Duenna. She emerges more prosperous than before, but she is not separated from her "soldier" husband; rather Mendoza will clearly be subject to her petticoat government.

As the play moves from one patriarchal regime to another, literally reinaugurating patriarchal authority, the caricature of Mendoza remains an unrelenting constant in the structure of the play. His Jewishness was played for maximum effect by John Quick, but Sheridan's critique of Mendoza goes beyond typical

eighteenth-century anti-Semitism by attacking Mendoza's delusion that he can outwit and outstrategize all those around him. *The Duenna's* key satirical move turns on the fact that all of Mendoza's actions bring about the opposite of their intent. By marrying "Louisa," he ensures that she can marry her true beloved. It is helpful to see his actions as failed performatives, because in each case, but most obviously in the marriage, his actions formalize a discontinuity within Don Jerome's family that ultimately makes a mockery of his own marriage. If we understand Don Jerome and Mendoza as co-conspirators in the containment of Louisa's rebellion, then their failure needs to be considered first, as an effect of their own performance and, second, as a remarkable victory for Louisa and the Duenna's strategy.

Basically, Louisa and the Duenna enact a conspiracy of their own that not only declares their independence from the men who attempt to control them but also enacts a new kind of shared sexual sovereignty. At a certain level of allegorical signification, we could argue that, by masquerading as each other, they enact the emergence of a new kind of subject from a state of paternal and potential marital tyranny. At this level, they look similar to the "people," who, in declaring themselves independent, became sovereign. In other words, the allegory has the potential to get out of hand and figure for a complete revolution, not simply a shift from one Ministry to another. *The Duenna* plays out a simple fantasy wherein the American crisis is countenanced in its most benign form, because, of course, the disruptive potential of this allegory is contained by the fact that Louisa's marriage is in the end sanctioned by her father. She is brought back inside the family—and the play returns indoors—but in a significantly changed form. She is no longer a daughter-commodity, but now the property of another—that is, a wife-commodity. Whatever we might want to say about her performance of agency in the lead-up to her marriage, the play ends with a sort of diplomatic relation between her father's house and the house of her husband. Here is a post-American fantasy remarkably similar to that which would eventually come to pass. What Sheridan saves his audience from is the horrible period of all-out warfare, carnage, and loss that would precipitate Britain's eventual recognition of a new state on the far side of the Atlantic. And he offers instead a remarkable closing scene where the formerly decisive distinction between inside and outside, palazzo and piazza, dissolves into a wedding celebration where masqueraders traverse the threshold of Don Jerome's house.

The propagation of the opposition fantasy is effected by Louisa and the Duenna's ability to gull the play's tyrants, but that does require a sacrifice of sorts. The Duenna must marry Mendoza, and we need to consider the complexity of

this union. What kind of a marriage is this? At one level, the marriage is financially lucrative for the Duenna, but it is somewhat jarring that the Duenna's intelligence and independence will be yoked to one as superficial and arrogant as Mendoza. I would argue that their age is a critical issue for understanding their ultimate significance. If we are reading allegorically, the Duenna steps in to preserve Louisa from the greed of both her father and his chosen Jewish suitor. In marrying Mendoza, she avails herself of his fortune, and thus what remains constant is her desire to maximize her social and economic advantage.

As one not provided for in Don Jerome's world and eventually thrown out of it, she builds an alliance that both secures her own standing and enables Louisa's liberation from and eventual reconciliation with her father. A necessary hinge in the plot, she is rendered old and unattractive as a way of registering that which the play is so careful to suppress: namely, that the transition afforded by the conspiracy of Louisa and the Duenna comes at great risk. The Duenna is grotesque because all of the violence and all of the fear unleashed by the rebellion of the American colonists in 1775 is tightly wound inside her. She is a sign of the disruption necessary to take Louisa and the colonies from one state to another. That Sheridan could understand her as a comic figure, as one able to act as the constitutive outside required for his audience to be productively distracted by their historical predicament, was wishful thinking. And it ensured that the play would survive as more than a simple diversion. After news of the Declaration of Independence reached London and *The Duenna* surged in popularity, the audience found itself able to imagine an end to the conflict that did not spell the end of its own way of life. In short, it could imagine a future that was not simply prescribed by the Ministry. That the audience could do so at such an early point in the conflict and via such indirect means cannot be proved, but I would like the reader to consider the possibility that such allegorical work was possible at this time of intense media saturation.

Whether or not the above allegorical reading of *The Duenna* is persuasive—and I would hope that it seems strained to readers familiar with the play—the reviews in the newspapers make no mention of it. Direct evidence that anyone experienced the opera in this way just does not exist. More could be done through an internal reading of the script to shore up the reading, but it is worth considering what did catch the papers' attention. As one might expect for such a popular production, the reviews are laudatory. But if one looks across the papers, virtually all of the papers register some discomfort with the relationship between the music and the spoken script. In some cases, this takes the form of a lament that Sheridan was contaminating the moral objectives of comedy by playing to the

audience's low desire for musical entertainment. This discomfort with the hybridization of genre and with the threat to theatrical legitimacy was not uncommon, and in the hands of a correspondent to the *Morning Chronicle* named "Adelphos," it takes the form of a backhanded compliment in which Sheridan is chastised, first, for "driving the comic muse off the stage" by indulging her "childish music sister" and then, second, for wasting his obvious talent when he could be crafting a great tragedy or comedy.<sup>68</sup> Adelphos goes so far as to suggest that the "musical appendage" should be amputated and the play run as a comedy. The *London Packet* concurred: "*The Duenna* is more like a comedy than any piece exhibited in either theatre since Mess. Garrick and Colman clubbed their wits to produce that excellent play *THE CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE*."<sup>69</sup> So here we have an opera, which everyone recognizes as the finest production of its kind since John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, actually being referred to as an engine for the reformation of comedy. William Woodfall in the *Morning Chronicle* states this most succinctly by starting his opening-night review with the declaration that *The Duenna* "might very aptly . . . be stiled a COMEDY interspersed with an OPERA."<sup>70</sup>

What interests me about this generic concern is the degree to which it supplants any discussion of the production's narrative or its meaning. Critics declare that it is funny or that it is pleasing. The king and queen demand back-to-back command performances.<sup>71</sup> But the press is most interested in the precise ways in which the songs and the script are knitted together. In the *Morning Chronicle* this is referred to first as an act of "interspersion," but later Adelphos argues, "The spirited dialogue of that piece is interrupted by the songs."<sup>72</sup> This sense of interruption takes on a life of its own when various reviewers recognize that the role of Carlos, played by the great singer Michael Leoni, has no function other than to provide the occasion for a demonstration of his virtuosity at the end of act 1.<sup>73</sup> The press is also quite intrigued by how the songs work as entertainment in and of themselves. Thomas Linley provided much of the music and some of the words for the songs, but the press was interested in two things: first, that the opera was composed of an amalgamation of new and old airs and, second, that some "airs were rather ill-adapted to the words they accompanied. Those that were composed did not please so much, and not for want of innate merit, but on account of their being more serious than the subject seemed to require."<sup>74</sup> Because many of the tunes were compiled from famous Scotch and Irish airs, well known to audience members, much of the amusement afforded by the opera lay in the way that Sheridan's words invoked, parodied, or commented on their precursors. This sense of the difference between the precursor

song and present performance set up a dynamic historical gap within the music itself that was picked up by all the reviewers. Whether they were commenting on the difference between the style of performance between the songs in opera and their traditional counterparts, or the poor fit between words and melodies, or the jarring solemnity of much of the music composed for seemingly light situations, the press is indicating that the music is not only interrupting the “Comedy” but also eliciting a sense of disjunction throughout.<sup>75</sup> The *Morning Post* went so far as to suggest that the music did not do justice to the words.<sup>76</sup> And yet, for all of the unanimity on this point, the reviewers repeatedly attest to the pleasures afforded by the songs and the singers.

We know from the accounts of the composition of *The Duenna*, that the inter-spersion of opera into Sheridan’s comedy was an extraordinarily difficult task.<sup>77</sup> We could argue that these remarks about the music are simply a sign of the harsh conditions of production Linley had to work under: Sheridan knew little about music and was basically improvising the libretto right to the last moment.<sup>78</sup> But I would prefer to understand them as signs of certain unrest coded directly into the formal structure of the opera. These interruptions and disjunctive performance moments were pleasurable in and of themselves, but they also interfered with the progress of the “spirited dialogue” of Sheridan’s comedy. In an almost Brechtian fashion, both the interruption and the montage of airs prevent the play from unfolding as a legitimate comedy. The “opera” works as a kind of critical interference that is crucial to the production’s popularity. When we recognize that the comedy has the potential to act as an allegory either for the successful secession of the thirteen colonies from the increasingly untenable Atlantic imperium, or for the transferral of power from North’s Ministry to the Rockingham opposition, then the musical interruptions have the effect of keeping the disclosure of that allegory from overwhelming the audience. In effect, the allegory is attenuated so that the audience can gain some purchase on the emotions it has the potential to unleash.

If I am correct about this, the formal effects of interruption and bricolage that lay at the heart of Linley’s and Sheridan’s compositional strategies carry the affective burden of the allegory revealed through close reading of Sheridan’s script. At the level of evidence, the remarks on music stand in lieu of commentary on the allegorical or thematic possibilities of the play. What is crucial is that Linley and Sheridan devised a method for staging disjunction that registered with the audience, but which did not escalate into a full-blown thematic or allegorical treatment of the historical situation. In other words, they devised a procedure whereby the audience could retain a certain subjective purchase on its

historical position at a moment when imperial subjectivity was anything but stable. In a moment where the uncertain future of the Atlantic imperium had the potential to unravel the social fabric of the British nation and generate hitherto unseen disruptions in national subjectivity, this seemingly trivial entertainment offered a place where these historical conditions could be perceived, if need be, on a nightly basis until they could be fruitfully resolved. This is what I think is at stake in Benjamin's productive notion of distraction, for it is through these indirect but productive strategies that a new social body could emerge. Benjamin referred to this as a mass in order to deflect the problematic away from the identity effects traditionally associated with aesthetic contemplation. A similar deflection is helpful for this book's argument, especially when we look at Sheridan's remarkable treatment of Garrick's auratic performances in chapter 4, at Hannah Cowley's and George Colman's experiments with theatrical remediation in chapter 5, and at the suturing of Handel's Israelite oratorios in chapter 6. And as we will see in chapter 3, these kinds of disjunctive strategies can also be found in Captain John André's remediation of the Thames Regatta in Philadelphia in the spring of 1778.

### How Far Away Is the Past?

As is well known, Sheridan's *School for Scandal*, which had taken the town by storm in the spring of 1777, dominated the theatrical calendar for the remaining years of the war.<sup>79</sup> It was presented forty-five times in the 1777–78 season and thirty-one times in 1778–79. Gillian Russell has recently provided an in-depth account of its critique of the mode of fashionable sociability pioneered by figures such as Teresa Cornelys, and, as such, it plays an important role in the cultural struggle over the dissipation of the upper orders.<sup>80</sup> Implicit in her argument is a recognition that this struggle is not simply about gender roles or hypocrisy, but rather that the incursion of women into the public sphere and the ensuing commercialization of fashionable sociability prompted widespread anxiety about the stability of the ruling elites. The charges of gender insubordination, of indiscriminate mixing of ranks, and of failed leadership surface frequently in the discourse surrounding the war, thus Sheridan's engagement with these issues is always already involved in the debates surrounding the American colonies.

In this light, it is intriguing that the play's explicit engagement with questions of empire is thoroughly oriented toward the East. As I have argued elsewhere, Sheridan offers a counter to Foote's highly successful excoriation of the East India Company in *The Nabob* that is remarkable for its realignment of the

class dynamics of nabobry.<sup>81</sup> Although Sheridan's play is literally secured by East Indian capital, its representative of the East India Company is not a merchant or a man from the middle ranks. One of the most important elements of the portrait scene is that Charles is knocking down portraits that, in their specific details and in their totality, represent the landed gentry of England.<sup>82</sup> Thus, Sir Oliver witnesses the disposal not only of the aristocratic past but also of a chain of patriotic associations with the Duke of Marlborough and Britain's first empire. This fascinating scene quite literally presented the audience with an enactment of cultural and social disintegration that was not only perfectly apposite with Sheridan's attack on domiciliary sociability but also easily recognizable as part of the critique of the patrician elites running the war effort. Two questions are posed quite directly: How distant is the present moment from the glorious past of the Duke of Marlborough's martial fame? And can the connection to these ancestors be reclaimed in anything other than a nostalgic mode? Remember Charles demands that Sir Oliver exercise great care for the pictures because they are accustomed to veneration. Thus, transferring the pictures from Charles to Sir Oliver ironically amounts to putting Britain's cultural and social patrimony into safe storage in a time of emergency.

But even as it was activating this anxious relation to the first British empire, the play also promulgated a misrecognition of Britain's adventures in India: here the nabob is an aristocrat, not a merchant, whose capital is secure even when India no less than America was a site of intense contestation in this period. This is important because it mirrors the play's remarkably equivocal final scenes: all the signs of social disintegration routinely aligned with critiques of the aristocracy and the Ministry continue unabated at the end of the play, and the reclamation of truth and good English character is projected into the future. That these are so directly associated with the difference between the crisis in the Atlantic empire and the yet-to-be-realized fantasy of a burgeoning economy in the Asian subcontinent means that the play's two "outside" spaces exert remarkable pressure on the play's moral economy. As a play rigorously set in the interior spaces of fashionable London, it is as though Sheridan is arguing that these distant outside realms permeate British society to such a degree that proximate relations are themselves disrupted. In Pocock's terms, the empire has reconfigured the realm to such an extent that British identity is itself being turned inside out. What is fascinating is that the play locates all of these anxieties in the mediation of character, event, and situation. This is a play where ascertaining the truth requires a vigilant negotiation with how representation operates to separate intention and action, character and reputation, value and currency.<sup>83</sup> In the world

of *The School for Scandal* it is impossible to measure the ethical relations between characters without thinking through how the distance between individuals is mediated, deformed, and interrupted by the commercial economies of sociability at home and empire abroad.

What Sheridan brings to the theatre in this period is a kind of social diagnostic that turns not only on an explicit derogation of suspect forms of sociability but also on a series of unresolved formal and thematic disjunctions that keep the anxiety that runs through his representation of the present from being resolved.<sup>84</sup> In other words, I would venture that the play's success lies in part in its capacity to productively engage with the social insecurity of the audience. What the mediation of the Thames Regatta brings to the forefront is the way that the press was able to generate a complex web of associations that do not directly impinge on government policy but which impugn the broader social world of London at this historical juncture. The press attacks not simply those involved in the event but also those who came down to the banks to watch it. Because this latter group included the speaking personae of the commentators in the press, the desire to witness fashion in all its glory or dissipation became a crucial part of the critique. It is not simply the scandal that is being explored by the press but also the fascination with scandal itself.

As the coverage of the Thames Regatta demonstrates, the press was interested in the way that fashion seemed to engage both its adherents and its observers into one large social symptom. I would argue that a similar gesture is crucial to *The School for Scandal* because so much of Sheridan's attention is placed on having the audience watch differential responses to moral and social corruption.<sup>85</sup> This is most obvious in the masquerade of Sir Oliver Surface: whether he is performing as Mr. Premium with Charles or Mr. Stanley with Joseph, he acts as an intermediary between the audience and the moral decay of his nephews. Watching Sir Peter Teazle react to the calumny of the scandalmongers in act 2, scene 2 operates in a similar fashion, but it also offers an important counterexample. Because he is less normative than Sir Oliver, the audience's judgment of his responses is far more complex and equivocal. This problematic perhaps reaches its most intense form with Lady Teazle in the screen scene, because the audience is forced to look at the ethical dilemma posed by the scene from both inside and outside her subject position. The play's equivocal treatment of her after the revelation carries the clear implication that scandal will not go away: it inheres in conversation, in print, and in the very theatre in which the audience sits. In this sense the comedy is a spectacle of reception and thus is not at all distant from Sheridan's and De Louthembourg's more obvious experiments with

theatrical spectacle in *The Camp*, “Verses on the Death of David Garrick, Spoken as a Monody,” or *The Critic*.<sup>86</sup>

But, as my reading of *The Duenna* suggests, Sheridan was extremely cognizant of the way that the thresholds between spaces on stage could allow the opportunity for not only great comedy but also the potential for activating the deep-seated anxieties about the relationship between political inclusion and exclusion. The screen scene, for instance, is justly famous for its comic effect, but what really happens when the screen comes down? The barrier between two scenes of colloquy dissolves, and a radical leveling of the social landscape takes place. This device is hardly novel, but in light of the way that Sheridan dissolved the threshold between inside and outside in the marriage celebration of act 3, scene 7 of *The Duenna*, it represents not an opposition fantasy of imperial reconciliation according to Whig principles, but rather a recognition that resolving the social insecurity of the play and the empire is not going to occur so easily. In short, if *The Duenna* can be read as a form of wishful thinking on the part of the opposition, then *The School for Scandal* indicates that that reconciliation is a fantasy. It is from that recognition that Sheridan instantiates the critique of British society required for imagining a post-American world. In this regard, I argue in chapter 4 that *The Critic* is the final stage of a critical arc that emanates from *The Duenna*’s fantasy of reconciliation and proceeds through *The School for Scandal*’s diagnostic exemplification and then concludes with an extraordinary turning of the space of the theatre on itself.

One of the corollaries of this argument is that the paying customer of Drury Lane during the great run of Sheridan’s comedy was at some level seeking to engage with this diagnostic. With the crisis of the American war raging, social critique was not only desired but commercially successful. This is an important point because the runaway success of *The School for Scandal* at Drury Lane prompted a very specific and intriguing response from Covent Garden. Once Sheridan’s play hit the boards in May 1777, Covent Garden struggled to find a competing show. After the summer layoff, the managers of Drury Lane did not bring *The School for Scandal* back to the stage until 22 October. It was paired with *The Quaker* for much of the season and continued to generate extraordinary receipts. Covent Garden fell back on the stock repertoire for much of the fall until its new comic opera *Love Finds the Way* by Thomas Hull was presented on 18 November. The play was mounted twelve times but did not survive the season. Hull’s adaptation of Murphy’s *School for Guardians* was mercilessly ridiculed by both the papers and the opening-night audience.<sup>87</sup> On its second night, a slightly improved version ran against *The School for Scandal*, and the managers at Drury Lane decided to supplement Sheridan’s comedy with Dibdin’s *The Waterman*

complete with a reenactment of the Thames Regatta tacked on the end that was most likely designed by De Louthembourg. The Haymarket performances of *The Waterman* were intermittent in the period after its composition and confined to the spring and summer, but at Drury Lane the augmented show was frequently mounted to much acclaim, and I would argue that the reenactment of the regatta was vital to its success.<sup>88</sup> But on the evening of 19 November, the Thames Regatta was remediated yet again to maintain the dominance of Sheridan's critique of fashionable society. The regatta's reenactment at this late date reminded the audience not only of the chaotic failures of the event, and especially its disastrous celebration of naval power at Ranelagh, but also of the fact that this distraction coincided with the onset of the war. It is as though the afterpiece traces many of the problems explored in *The School for Scandal* to a specific moment and style of social performance. In this pairing of main- and afterpiece, it is possible to discern a consistent critique of suspect forms of fashionable sociability that is rooted in the dis-ease over indiscriminate mixing of ranks and sexes that was manifest in the lead-up to the war with America.

It was not until 10 December, with the opening of Hannah More's *Percy*, that Covent Garden found a suitable competitor for *The School for Scandal*. The plays were offered head to head on 12 December and generated comparable receipts; when the plays were next paired, this time with the same afterpiece—*Comus*—on 17 December, Sheridan's play had already reasserted its commercial dominance in spite of the fact that this was its thirty-sixth night. As anyone who has read *Percy* can attest, it is a considerably less entertaining play than *The School for Scandal*; but it was a major critical success that propelled Hannah More into the forefront of literary London. Set in the Middle Ages, the play's eponymous English hero returns from defeating the Saracens in the Crusades to find that his beloved, Elwina, has married his Scottish rival Douglas. Elwina still loves Percy but was forced to marry Douglas out of duty to her father. Despite her loveless marriage, Elwina is a paragon of virtue and resists her desire for Percy. However, her husband is a study in jealous rage and suspicion. Douglas kills Percy in a duel, but Elwina believes that it is her husband who has died. In the event of his death, Douglas has prepared a poison to ensure that Percy will never have his wife. Elwina, in a suicidal expression of chastity, takes the poison, but in a key reversal, the audience discovers Douglas has killed Percy. Douglas for his part discovers that his suspicions have been ill founded, and thus he has killed Percy and precipitated the death of his blameless wife. He too kills himself in remorse, and Elwina's father Raby closes the play by declaring that the tragedy was instantiated by his earlier coercion of his daughter to marry Douglas.

On the face of it, *Percy* would appear to be the opposite of *The School for Scandal*, but it is remarkable the degree to which it engages with many of Sheridan's primary concerns. First, More's deployment of virtue engages with the social mores of Georgian London. The play was critically hailed because it presented the discourse of chivalry in a manner that allowed More to explore the effects of domestic tyranny.<sup>89</sup> Both the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Gazetteer* opened their reviews by indicating that the play does not explore specific historical events even as they are mediated in the play's source texts, the ballad of Chevy Chase and the Belloy's tragedy *Gabrielle de Vergy*.<sup>90</sup> More's target in the tragedy is the abuse of domestic power. In an act of spite, Elwina's father forces her marriage to Douglas because of a trifling affront from Percy's servants during a hunt. For his part, Douglas strives for total domination of the marriage state to the point where his judgment is so clouded that he cannot even communicate with his wife. Both father and husband ignore the words and desires of Elwina, and this fundamental lack of respect ends in disaster. In that regard, *Percy's* critique of the power dynamics of the patriarchal household is devastating, but the play also engages in a specific critique of global politics as well that bears comparison with *The School for Scandal's* engagement with the East.

More's tragedy reveres the martial past of these crusading knights, yet argues explicitly that their bellicosity must be tempered. When, in the second act, Percy's messenger Sir Hubert declares, "The king is safe, and Palestine subdued," Elwina goes so far as to argue that the Crusades are misguided policy masquerading as religion and thus thoroughly offends her father.<sup>91</sup> More's tragedy thus simultaneously praises female virtue and critiques excessive violence when it presents itself as duty, whether that be understood in familial or political terms. In other words, when her father and husband pursue their hatred of Percy in the name of filial piety or marital fidelity, More is implying that they are no different from the Crusaders who pursued avarice in the name of religion. The potential allegorical link between America and Palestine is explosive, and the play backs away from it to concentrate most insistently on its domestic components.

In spite of this restraint, however, the play is extremely attentive to questions of mediation that open onto one of the most important emotional experiences of life during wartime. All of the violence in the play, as one might expect, happens offstage, but Elwina's knowledge of the outside world and of Percy's actions in particular, whether they be in Palestine or during the duel in act 5, are mediated through her servants or lesser characters. Although their motivations are radically different, Elwina's servant Birtha is the tragic version of Lady Sneerwell's Snake: she moves between the enclosed world of her employer's realm and the

dangerous exterior where reputations and bodies are in peril. In fact, it is the delay—and the potential for misconstrual—inherent to the reporting of the duel between Douglas and Percy that opens the space for Elwina's suicide. Elwina's desire for information, her anticipation of news regarding the conflict between Douglas and Percy, would have tapped into an affective pattern familiar to readers of the press anticipating news from America. And this activation of the anxiety of anticipation is as fundamental to More's practice in tragedy as the careful handling of the anxiety about the mediation of reputation is to Sheridan's practice in comedy.

If we begin to see how More is capitalizing on the anxiety inherent to the temporal delay in mediation itself, then it also becomes clear that the Gothic past is being mobilized in much the same way that Nietzsche envisaged critical history: as that which undermines both the self-deluding claims of monumental history and the quietism of antiquarianism.<sup>92</sup> Elwina's critique of the Crusades can operate as an attack on both the Ministry's policy in America and the policies of the East India Company, which had so troubled Parliament in the early 1770s. No less than Sheridan, More is engaging the theatre to intervene in the social and political crisis enveloping the nation. And her target, like Sheridan's, is hypocrisy: especially the hypocrisy of the avatars of power in both the domestic and the political realms. As we will see in the next chapter, a similar deployment of the Gothic past occurs when John André stages *Douglas* in Philadelphia, a play that in many ways operates as a precursor for More's tragedy.

But how do we understand the paratexts that framed More's allegory? Garrick in a rather unusual move composed the prologue and epilogue for the Covent Garden show. And they are themselves notable in that the prologue, normally spoken by a man, was written for performance by Mrs. Bulkeley, and the epilogue, normally spoken by a woman was performed by Mr. Lee Lewes. Dror Wahrman's extended analysis of the prologue and epilogue rightly sees them as an exercise in gender play.<sup>93</sup> The prologue addresses the fact of More's female authorship by going through a catalog of masculine roles now being performed more admirably by women. Likewise, the epilogue gives Mr. Lee Lewes the opportunity to send up the effeminacy not only of men of fashion but also of soldiers and statesmen. The framing materials for More's tragedy figure forth a historical condition where a critical reversal has taken place: women for men, men for women. And crucially, it is More's play that stands as evidence of this reversal. The performance of *Percy* that follows Garrick's remarks on Amazonian playwrights in the prologue is evidence that the world is turned upside down.

What this means is that regardless of the effectivity of More's allegory, the play's enactment testifies to the corruption of present society.

What needs to be recognized is that this is one of the arguments of the play itself, because by situating her model of normative familial and governmental relations in the Gothic past, More is suggesting that this normativity is no longer present. As the theatregoer is incited to mourn not only for Percy—the obvious avatar of true patriotism—but also for the original marriage contract between him and Elwina, More has mobilized all the devices of sentimental tragedy to elicit tears for a fantasy of just domestic governance based on virtue and true piety. In this context, the entire performance becomes a symptom or a diagnostic in much the same way as *The School for Scandal*, only here the critique is amplified not by a set of internal thematic and formal disjunctions but by an overall rupture between the play and the framing paratexts. The spatial distinction between inside and outside that is so crucial to the scenography of Sheridan's plays is here mapped onto the distinction between play and paratext. So strangely, the patriotic script of *Percy* is deployed to recognize the unviability of patriotic subjectivity in a culture where virtue and sympathy have been hollowed out by the refinements of fashionable sociability.

This forces a rather different reading of the prologue and epilogue and indeed of the play itself than that put in motion by Wahrman. Here so-called “gender play” is deployed to make the audience aware that norms of social and civic behavior are dropping off the horizon of history, and thus exist only in fantasies of past greatness. When Mr. Lee Lewes declares that he will “drive these ballad-heroes from the stage,” he is also indicating that what remains—namely himself and other men of fashion—are fundamentally separated from the manly arts of hunting and warfare. As he states:

What! Shall a scribbling, senseless woman dare  
 To your refinements offer such *coarse* fare?  
 Is Douglas, or is Percy fir'd with passion?  
 Ready for love or glory, death to dash on,  
 Fit company for modern still-life men of fashion?  
 Such madness will our hearts but slightly graze,  
 We've no such frantic nobles now a-days.<sup>94</sup>

Garrick had used this device before when he had Thomas King, playing an aristocratic fop, interrupt Garrick's performance of the “Ode” at the Shakespeare Jubilee to complain that such rough fare as Shakespeare was incompatible with good breeding.<sup>95</sup> Only on that earlier occasion the “Ode” itself was staged to

discredit the interruption. Here the epilogue concludes with a rather harsher indictment of its speaker:

We wear no armour now—but on our shoes.  
 Let not with barbarism true taste be blended,  
 Old vulgar virtues cannot be defended,  
 Let the dead rest—we living can't be mended.<sup>96</sup>

Alienated from virtue, Mr. Lee Lewes points to the very problematic that pamphleteers and analysts of the American war were attempting to negotiate: how to govern the imperium when the language of republican virtue had migrated to the side of the colonists. Here the combined force of Garrick's epilogue and More's tragedy suggest that corruption has come too far to be corrected. It is that predicament, with its attendant anxieties that constitute the core of the entertainment on offer not only at Covent Garden on that evening but also when Drury Lane staged *The School for Scandal*, for in both instances the audience is called upon to assert its difference from the representation of the present. In other words, the two nights where these plays ran against each other need to be understood as synchronous expressions of an overall imminent critique of British society. Sheridan's critique is arguably a totalizing one because even the play's positive characters are less than compelling. With the character of Percy, More's play seems to raise the possibility of resuscitating past models of virtue, but that potential renovation is put under serious pressure by the epilogue. Garrick's frame for More's play salvages it from nostalgia and orients it toward a critique of the present.<sup>97</sup> Gender insubordination was a crucial tactical tool or rhetorical device for signaling this reorientation. And it is remarkable that, at this moment in history, this was precisely what audiences for the commercial theatre desired.

By January 1778, the news of the British loss of the Battle of Saratoga had rocked the Ministry, and the entire strategic plan for reconquering America was being hastily rejected. The social insecurity latent in the reports of the Thames Regatta and realized in the dramatic innovations of *The School for Scandal* and *Percy* became palpable elements of the public's response to the Ministry's prosecution of the war. The patent theatres attempted to mobilize British history to bolster the war effort in plays such as John Home's *Alfred* and Richard Cumberland's *The Battle of Hastings*.<sup>98</sup> *Alfred* was a critical and commercial disaster, and although Cumberland's play was initially "received with uncommon applause . . . and [Palmer's] heroic exclamation—"all private feuds should cease when England's glory is at stake" was so sensibly felt by the audience that a repetition was

called for, but judiciously refused, as out of character in a tragedy," it was also widely recognized that the play was an aesthetic failure.<sup>99</sup> At the height of the success of *The Battle of Hastings* in January and February 1778, *The School for Scandal* and *Percy* still generated greater or comparable receipts, thus suggesting that audiences were drawn to the complex critique of contemporary society promulgated in the work of Sheridan and More. By March, Cumberland's lugubrious patriotism had lost its appeal. As we will see in chapter 4, Sheridan would put the shortcomings of traditional patriotic discourse, and specifically *The Battle of Hastings*, to good end in his last great play, *The Critic*. But for the moment, it is important to recognize that the groundwork was being laid for a thorough restylization of the social order *before* events in America would confirm Whig views that the colonies were unconquerable.