

Writing in the Long Whig Opposition: The Work of John Wilkes, Edmund Burke, and Richard  
Brinsley Sheridan, Whig Contributors to the Expansion of the Public Sphere 1762–1800

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## Abstract

In this dissertation, I identify a period in British political history as the “Long Whig Opposition,” during which the Whigs served primarily in opposition to Tory governments in the House of Commons. This period begins in the early 1760s and continues until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Long Whig Opposition succeeds the “Long Opposition” which Jürgen Habermas identifies in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) during which the Tories formed a lasting opposition to the Whig government of Robert Walpole, Britain’s longest-serving Prime Minister.

I examine the literature of the Long Whig Opposition as an extension of political discourse into the public sphere which subverted the democratic regressions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century which repressed parliamentary debate and journalism, and decreased the size of the electorate in the United Kingdom. I argue that literary works by Whig Members of Parliament disseminated reformist discourse into the public sphere, appealing to the support of a larger section of the public (including the unfranchised) because of the limitations of parliamentary opposition. These publications, comprising genres such as journalism, poetry, philosophy, and drama, contributed to the expansion of the public sphere in the 18<sup>th</sup> century which Habermas has observed in the increasing political awareness and public involvement of the middle class.

My dissertation focuses on the writings of three Whig MPs: John Wilkes, Edmund Burke, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. The three parts examine different forms of rhetorical intervention in the public sphere by Whig MPs. In the part on John Wilkes, I analyze Wilkes’s use of obscenity as a provocative rhetorical device in anonymous political journalism. The part on Edmund Burke examines the publication of a reformist ideology which challenges the Tory establishment by evoking the values of individual civic responsibility and stewardship

of the British Empire. The final part on Richard Brinsley Sheridan examines the work of a Whig politician who made a significant contribution to English drama. I analyze the expression of political opposition in Sheridan's plays, particularly during the divisive phenomena of the American Revolution and the trial of Warren Hastings.

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*Here is a ministry, and here is an opposition. Here are plots and circumstances, parties and factions, equal to those which are to be found in courts.*

—Tom Jones

Introduction

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the British House of Commons attained a public image beyond its function as a democratic institution. Writers narrated the activity of Parliament, and parliamentarians contributed to the public discourses of literature and journalism. Although the majority of British citizens were unfranchised and had no direct representation in Parliament, publications by MPs inspired interest in the affairs of the House of Commons and conveyed political awareness and influence to a nascent public. This process displayed a particularly significant expansion of the public sphere during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in which the Tories most frequently held a majority of seats in the House of Commons, and the Whigs formed opposition. This Whig opposition included several members who made significant contributions to literature and journalism as they addressed their criticism of the government toward the public.

The rise of the middle class in the 18<sup>th</sup> century created a community with leisure time. Simultaneously, increasing literacy allowed this community to reflect on politics and current events. Writers filled the demand for commentary and criticism by reflecting on political activity through diverse literary genres, disseminating information through new channels of accessible political discourse. The public gained access to political satire and commentary through periodical journalism, poetry, and drama. Periodical essays conveyed political opinions into the public sphere through pseudonymous personae. Politicians adopted several calculated personae to appeal to specific groups within the public, recognizing the increasing necessity to court

public favour to maintain political authority. Following the democratic regressions of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, such as the diminishing franchise and the Septennial Act (1716) which extended the tenure of MPs, public opinion emerged as the foundation of political authority in Britain as the public sphere became an arena of criticism against the government. This new space of literary activity allowed Members of Parliament serving in opposition to disseminate their criticism of the government through discursive channels outside formal politics and governmental control.

The leading political affiliations in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century House of Commons were the Whigs and Tories. The Whigs formed a lasting government during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, while the Tories dominated Parliament for the latter half. Prime Minister Robert Walpole led a Whig government for two decades in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century which gave way to successive Tory governments and Tory-dominated coalitions. Satire became a popular device of political opposition under a Whig government as Tory wits including Henry Fielding and Jonathan Swift reflected on the corruption of the nation and the Walpole Ministry. When the Tories formed government in the 1760s, the Whigs adopted and amplified this form of opposition as Whig parliamentarians expressed opposition in the public sphere through literary publications. The Tory ministries of Prime Ministers Bute and North invited extensive criticism from the Whigs outside of parliamentary debate as outspoken MPs in opposition directed their reformist rhetoric toward the public. This process of extra-parliamentary activity composed the literature of the “Long Whig Opposition,” a period in British history from the 1760s to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in which Whig MPs translated their ideology into literary work that transformed the public sphere and the institutions of democracy in Britain.

In this dissertation, I argue that the “Long Whig Opposition” presented a literary ecology adopting various generic conventions and resulting in a changed political landscape. During the

period of Whig opposition from the 1760s to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the works of John Wilkes, Edmund Burke, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan illustrated the communication between the Whig opposition and the public, using rhetorical conventions of journalism, poetry, and drama to appeal to the public sphere while criticizing the Tory government. These writers presented governmental corruption and ineptitude to the public through journalism, oratory, and theatre, expanding the objectives of democratic opposition beyond the constraints of Parliament. Parliamentary opposition provided an inadequate opportunity to criticize the government, as parliamentary debates were not widely publicized, and governmental authorities easily censored controversial statements by the opposition. The limitations of the democratic institutions of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain compelled opponents of the government to disseminate criticism through new discursive channels, provoking public interest in politics and inciting extra-political activity. The translation of political opposition into literature and journalism during the Long Whig Opposition created a new public space in which a diverse audience, including the unfranchised, responded to the activity of Parliament.

The literature of the Long Whig Opposition employed various lenses, including journalistic anonymity, historical allegory, and drama, to veil criticism of government officials and avoid reprisals. Criticism on 18<sup>th</sup>-century political satire and journalism has largely focused on the Tory satirists of the earlier period and on Addison and Steele's contribution to periodical journalism with no corollary account of the literature of the Long Whig Opposition and its impact in the development of the public sphere. I examine the continuing expansion of the public sphere as Whig MPs made significant contributions to the field of literature and philosophy while serving in opposition.

During the second half of the 18th century, extra-political activities such as public demonstrations, journalism, and satire became effective means of influencing legislation and changing government. Despite the large disenfranchised population of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, the public became an influential political entity capable of influencing all branches of government as prominent Whig MPs disseminated opposition to the government into the public sphere through diverse literary publications and calculated public personae.

I focus on three Whig Members of Parliament who served primarily in opposition and exemplify the reformist innovation of literary opposition in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century: John Wilkes (1725–1797), Edmund Burke (1729–1797), and Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816). John Wilkes led a movement relying on his public reputation among unfranchised merchants and freeholders, presenting himself as a provocative radical and a daring critic of the government. Edmund Burke, arguably the most resonant politician of the age due to his enduring influence on aesthetic philosophy and political thought, embellished his political oratory with literary conventions to expand the appeal of political debate and correspondence into the public sphere. Burke's parliamentary career also exemplifies the significance of public opinion and demonstrations as public unrest unseated Burke during the Gordon Riots, when the public saw Burke's Irish heritage as a bias toward Catholicism. Richard Brinsley Sheridan had a distinctive form of access to the public as his careers as a journalist, playwright, and theatre-manager preceded his political career. Sheridan staged plays with political resonance and contributed to Whig periodical journalism. In the House of Commons, Sheridan used his theatrical skills to make prolonged emotive speeches and adopt dramatic literary devices into political rhetoric. These literary expressions of opposition signal a shift toward wider political involvement and



more effective extra-political activism, which I define as public activity undertaken by unelected groups which influences the activity of government.

Jürgen Habermas used the term “Long Opposition” in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) to refer to periods in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in which the dominant factions of the Whigs and Tories each formed opposition. During these formative years, the agendas of the Whigs and Tories assumed ideological significance, and political divisions within the British public conformed to the positions of the Whigs and Tories in Parliament as the public developed increasing political awareness, involvement, and influence. The Whig and Tory affiliations originated in the Exclusion Crisis (1678 to 81), in which Parliament introduced legislation to exclude James, the Catholic brother of Charles II, from his position as heir to the throne. The conflict between Catholics and Protestants continued to be the dominant issue dividing Whigs and Tories in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the Whigs positioned themselves as defenders of the Hanoverian monarchy and accused the Tories of attempting to reinstall the Stuarts as the royal family of Britain. The conflict also assumed nationalist motivations as the Whigs portrayed the Tories as a faction advocating for the interests of Scotland over those of England and spreading disunity in the United Kingdom. In his recent biography of Edmund Burke, Jesse Norman describes the original conflict between the Whigs and Tories, recounting that “[t]o prevent [the exclusion bill], Charles dissolved Parliament and the issue was repeatedly fought over in elections, ‘Tories’—named after an abusive term for Irish rebels—supporting the king’s (and so James’s) prerogative rights, ‘Whigs’—a Scottish term for Presbyterian rebels—against them” (219). Stuart succession was the first major issue in British democracy, composing the original division between the dominant factions in the House of Commons. However, as the

Hanoverian dynasty became more securely established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Whigs and Tories developed more detailed political ideologies.

As Parliament faced the divisive issues of the Seven Years War, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the treatment of Britain's colonies in Ireland and India, the Whigs and Tories adopted the emblematic values of "liberty" and "property" to distinguish the factions from each other. In his book *Liberty and Property*, Dickinson describes the development of the Tory value of property after the Glorious Revolution installed the Hanoverian monarchy in 1688, arguing that "the events of 1688-9 had not sparked off a social revolution and a hierarchical society which conferred rank and status on men of birth and fortune had survived the revolution almost entirely unscathed. It is therefore not surprising to find that men of privilege and property were anxious to safeguard the political and social order" (43). These men of privilege adopted the Tory ideology to protect property and tradition. Conversely, Dickinson characterizes the Whig ideology as a focus on the social contract and an assertion of the limitations of the monarchy. He contends that the Whigs "agreed that the legislature was composed of King, Lords and Commons and that the power of the Crown was limited by the need to govern by the advice and support of Parliament" (80). The Whigs adopted a firm belief in constitutionalism to preserve liberty and prevent tyranny.

The dichotomy of liberty and property between the Whigs and Tories imparted a reformist sentiment to the Whigs which allowed them to make their most significant contributions to democracy and the public sphere while forming opposition. In his article "Foxite Satire: Politics, Print, and Celebrity," Robert W. Jones characterizes the Whigs as the party of opposition during the reign of George III, arguing that their reformist position was a "permanent" feature of the period. He posits that "Some of this permanence derived, unhappily

enough, from the Whigs' almost total exclusion from power after George III's accession in 1760. Only twice were they in government, in 1765–6 and 1782. Yet the Whigs remained confident despite, and because of, their exclusion from power; comfortable with a sense that even without office they were morally ascendant" (125). The Whigs espoused moral ascendancy over the corruption of government as they affirmed their belief in liberty by publicly exposing and criticizing the follies of the Tory establishment. I focus on the Long Whig Opposition of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, in which the Whigs criticized the ministry of Lord Bute and the spectre of favouritism in the court of George III before opposing the ministry of Lord North and its counter-revolutionary adamance. Critics and historians have largely focused on the expansion of discourse into apolitical literate enclaves in this period such as coffee houses and social clubs. For example, Leo Damrosch's recent work *The Club* (2019) examines the social circle of Samuel Johnson and mentions the key figures in this dissertation, although Damrosch focuses on their private social lives rather than parliamentary careers. By contrast, I examine the writings of parliamentarians during this period, positioning the House of Commons as a venue and subject of public interest that provoked public commentary and extra-political activity.

Habermas argues that the opposition in British Parliament expanded the sphere of politics by appealing to the public in order to criticize the government. He states, "The minority that did not get its way in Parliament could always seek refuge in the public sphere and appeal to the judgment of the public; the majority, held together by bribery, considered itself bound to legitimate the authority at its disposal" (63). This assertion characterizes the opposition as a branch of Parliament concerned with its alignment with public interests and the exposure of the corruptions of the government. Habermas positions the government as a group preserving the establishment to conceal its corruptions and justify its authority. The opposition represents an

antithesis to the government, taking “refuge in the public sphere” by appealing to public dissatisfaction. Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this appeal comprised literary and journalistic works which disseminated opposition to the government throughout the public sphere. Habermas describes the expansion of political journalism during the Tory opposition of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century by saying “under George I began the dominance of the Whigs [...] But it was not the Whigs who, purchasing the *London Journal* in 1722 (the most important and widely read journal at that time), created political journalism in the grand style; this was the work of the Tories” (60). Habermas presents the Tories as the first political faction to appeal to the public through literature and journalism while forming opposition to the ministry of Robert Walpole.

Habermas describes the proliferation of literary opposition to the Whig government among Tory wits like the members of the Scriblerus Club. Habermas states, “Men like Pope, Gay, Arbuthnot, and Swift combined literature and politics in a peculiar fashion comparable to Addison and Steele’s combination of literature and journalism” (59). The synthesis of literature and politics Habermas observes in the Tory opposition of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century comprises texts which satirize the government—both the ruling Whigs and the Hanoverian royal family. He provides the following examples: “In the summer of 1726 [...] there appeared as the ‘long opposition’s’ literary prelude three pieces satirizing the times: Swift’s *Gulliver*, Pope’s *Dunciad*, and Gay’s *Fables*” (60). These texts exemplify Scriblerian satire by wits loyal to the Tory opposition. The three texts Habermas mentions also display the process of Juvenalian satire, which depicts a world both corrupt and ridiculous, to caricature the prevailing values of the time.

The Whigs assumed the role of opposition in the 1760s, when the Tories came to power under Prime Minister Bute. The Whigs continued the tradition of literary opposition appealing to the judgement of the public, shifting radical journalism and political satire from the Tory to

the Whig side of British politics for the remaining decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. This project expands on Habermas's premise of literary opposition, focusing on the later decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in which the Whigs formed their own "Long Opposition."

I conceive of the Whig opposition under the leaders Grenville, Temple, Rockingham, and Fox as a second "Long Opposition," expanding the literary tradition of Tory opposition, which centred on prominent unelected wits, to include MPs who disseminated their views through literary publications during their time in office. This period encompassed the end of the Seven Years War, the American Revolution, the Gordon Riots, and the French Revolution, culminating in the first ministry of William Pitt the Younger. Though Pitt identified himself as an "independent Whig," historians remember him as a Tory and his most outspoken opponents represented rival Whig factions (including Charles James Fox). I identify Pitt the Younger's first Ministry as the extended conclusion of the Long Whig Opposition. This administration spanned the years 1783–1801. As Pitt's opponents continued to represent the Whigs, I argue that the Whig opposition persisted through Pitt's ministry as a gradual decline rather than a clear moment of transition from Whig opposition to government.

I do not assign exact dates to the Long Whig Opposition, as interim Prime Ministers such as George Grenville held Whig affiliations, and ideological factions such as the Pittites, Foxites, and Rockinghamites composed the diverse representation of Whigs in Parliament. These Whig factions formed opposition to rival affiliations such as the Grenville Ministry. As the Whigs and Tories were not formal political parties, but loosely held ideological associations, a Whig Prime Minister could assume office after the resignation of a Tory, as Grenville did after Bute's resignation in 1763. Under these circumstances, outspoken Whigs continued to oppose the government, indicating the Tory sympathies underlying Whig factions such as the Grenvillites.

Members of the Whig opposition also denounced several coalitions as means of maintaining Tory dominance.

In Part I of this project, which focuses on John Wilkes, I discuss the political implications of obscenity and public radicalism, introducing Wilkes as a provocateur advocating for the Whig opposition in the public sphere. Throughout his career, Wilkes relentlessly sought public support, even at the expense of his standing in the House of Commons when he was expelled from Parliament repeatedly. Wilkes was first expelled in 1763 after his radical periodical *The North Briton* alleged collusion between King George III and Prime Minister Bute on the king's speech at the opening of Parliament, in the infamous issue no. 45. Wilkes's expulsion from the House of Commons and arrest (during which bailiffs seized papers related to the *North Briton*) thrust Wilkes into the public sphere, as the controversy created a new object of public attention. Wilkes became an innovative figure of opposition, as representatives of an urban, middle-class public rallied behind Wilkes's persona of sincerity and radicalism in contrast to the pretenses concealing governmental corruption. "Wilkes and Liberty" was an extra-political movement in the 1760s in which freeholders and middle-class Londoners who espoused the values of liberty and constitutionalism, criticized the Tories' Jacobite sympathies as a threat to English identity. I examine the "Wilkes and Liberty" movement as a formative moment of extra-political activity in which unfranchised people rallied publicly to support an elected politician.

As Wilkes was expelled from Parliament and imprisoned in the Tower of London, he amassed a following and contrived an image of courage and sincerity, and his followers chanted "Wilkes and Liberty" in the streets. Wilkes later returned to Parliament and was expelled again for publishing the controversial poem *An Essay on Woman*, a satirical reimagining of Alexander's Pope's *Essay on Man* that frustrated the dominant social values of the 1760s. *An*

*Essay on Woman* replaces Pope's metaphysical explorations with sexual imagery and ribald humour. The obscenity of *An Essay on Woman*—a collaboration between Wilkes and the Whig MP Thomas Potter—exposed the culture of libertinism within the Tory government, exploiting the public's moral disapproval of the aristocracy. Wilkes and Potter presented themselves as provocative critics of the government by satirizing the hypocrisy of prominent Tories like Lord Sandwich and Sir Francis Dashwood, whose rumoured involvement in “Hell-Fire Clubs” presented an opportunity for the opposition to expose and ridicule the moral hypocrisy of the government.

Wilkes made significant contributions to pseudonymous periodical journalism in addition to his use of obscene satire to oppose the government. Wilkes's publication *The North Briton* addressed an audience which the author informed and influenced, cultivating a politically interested community which opposed the Tory government. Public interest in *The North Briton* created a space for extra-parliamentary opposition within periodical journalism which allowed the pseudonymous wit Junius to contribute further to an emerging tradition of openly anti-government editorials.

In my discussion of Wilkes, I refer to works of social history which illustrate the context of the literary work that emerged from the Wilkite movement. George Rudé's *Wilkes and Liberty: A Social Study of 1763 to 1774* and P.D.G Thomas's *John Wilkes: A Friend to Liberty* provide the historical context underlying my argument that Wilkes contributed to the translation of parliamentary opposition into literature, and the expansion of the public sphere. I proceed to use Arthur H. Cash's critical edition of Wilkes and Potter's *Essay on Woman* which provides a detailed comparison between Wilkes and Potter's text and Pope's *Essay on Man*. Cash also explores the implications of the scandal surrounding the *Essay on Woman*, and its connection to

democratic reform. I follow Cash's argument by presenting the *Essay on Woman* as an example of the innovative mode of public expression which Wilkes created during the Long Whig Opposition.

In Part II, which focuses on Edmund Burke, I explore some of the major texts through which Burke disseminated his political views, identifying the literary devices and subgenres Burke engaged to explore the breadth of expression in his letters and House of Commons speeches. Burke used various literary forms to construct an authorial persona which interested the public outside the confines of parliamentary debate. Burke published speeches and open letters which attempted to shape public opinion on issues such as the exploitation of British East India, and the American and French Revolutions. These publications displayed the affairs of Parliament before the public in an expression of journalistic exposure. Burke's involvement in the prolonged impeachment of Warren Hastings, the former Governor-General of East India, comprises several published speeches which provoked public outrage against Hastings and exemplify Burke's innovation of a collaborative rhetoric of civic virtue. Burke's publications use literary devices to translate parliamentary opposition into an engaging, accessible mode of public discourse in which he created a rhetoric of civic virtue which inspired his readers to espouse the Whig values of stewardship and opposition to tyranny.

Despite Wilkes' image as a radical and Burke's enduring resonance as a conservative, I argue that Burke succeeded Wilkes in the public sphere of Whig opposition. Edmund Burke was elected to Parliament amid cries of "Burke and Wilkes" by his supporters. Burke extended the legacy of the "Wilkes and Liberty" movement to encompass literary speeches and political writing, shifting the focus from radical journalism and the creation of extra-political controversy to literary genres within the sphere of elected politicians, such as open letters and parliamentary



speeches. This transition from Wilkes to Burke synthesizes the extra-political activities of satirical journalism and public demonstrations with the democratic expression of opposition in Parliament. Burke's efforts to influence public opinion exemplify the transformative communication between the House of Commons and the public during the Long Whig Opposition.

In Part II, I refer to Stephen H. Browne's *Edmund Burke and the Discourse of Virtue*, a series of essays exploring the rhetoric of civic virtue established by Burke's publications. I use Browne's argument to explain the overarching support for institutional governance and disdain for tyranny in Burke's philosophy. Burke's ostensibly conflicting ideas of justified revolution and loyalty to the institutions of state form a cohesive social contract in which citizens have the prerogative to uphold magnanimous institutions and purge corrupt ones. Browne's essays inform my discussion of Burke's political philosophy, while I refer to Franz De Bruyn to connect Burke's political writing to the literary tradition of the Long Whig Opposition. De Bruyn's *Literary Genres of Edmund Burke: The Political Uses of Literary Form* informs my examination of Burke's use of literary devices to expand political discourse into the public sphere.

Part III concerns Richard Brinsley Sheridan, whose expression of opposition as a Whig MP in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century transcended the generic and social distinctions between politics, theatre, and journalism. Sheridan's career as a dramatist overarched his political career as he wrote plays before entering the House of Commons and remained manager of the Drury Lane Theatre while serving in Parliament. I examine the reciprocal publicity of Sheridan's theatrical and parliamentary careers to explore the intersection of politics and theatre in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, as theatres espoused political affiliations and presented opportunities for playwrights and theatre-managers to address contemporary issues by staging politically resonant dramas.

Sheridan participated in Burke's public campaign to expose injustices in East India and prosecute Warren Hastings, expanding this public indictment from politics and journalism into the medium of theatre. Burke and Sheridan had vilified Hastings as an acquisitive tyrant during his impeachment in the House of Commons. Sheridan revealed his background in drama by presenting long emotive speeches which used dramatic and performative devices to present Hastings as a villain. Sheridan later published the play *Pizarro* which included a veiled representation of Hastings, cast as an exploitative Spanish conquistador. Burke and Sheridan shared a deep animosity toward Hastings and condemned his behaviour in India as ambition and profiteering. However, their view was not entirely radical as they both emphasized the benevolence of empire in contrast to personal corruption and did not condemn British colonial intervention in India or elsewhere. Sheridan's play *Pizarro* is particularly deferential to British imperialism as it translates the Hastings narrative into the history of Spanish colonialism, avoiding the representation of the British empire. I posit that Sheridan's campaign against Hastings signified a broadening of public engagement with political issues, as he used drama to present a deliberately contemptible representation of Hastings to the public.

In Part III, David Francis Taylor's *Theatres of Opposition: Empire, Revolution, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan* provides the keystone of my argument that Sheridan participated in the expansion of the public sphere by erasing the boundaries between political, journalistic, and theatrical discourses. Taylor draws relevant connections between Sheridan's publications as a playwright and journalist and the issues he faced as a Member of Parliament. I position Sheridan's distinctive public appeal within the Long Whig Opposition, a movement which translated reformist politics into public, literary media. I proceed to examine several of Sheridan's plays using a critical perspective incorporating history and rhetoric by exploring the

evocation of political outrage and advocacy which Sheridan directed toward his audience in the public sphere.

This project explores the progress of literary opposition in the public sphere of the 18<sup>th</sup> century through the generically diverse publications of John Wilkes, Edmund Burke, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. I analyze the work of these Whig MPs to examine the expansion of political opposition into the public sphere, as the Whigs assumed the task of opposing the government through literature, following the political implications of earlier 18<sup>th</sup>-century journalism and satire.

## Part I:

Wilkes and Radicalism in an Age of Unrest: Whig Opposition in *The North Briton*, *An Essay on Woman*, and the *Letters of Junius*

*He is to do what he pleases. I will have nothing more to do with that devil Wilkes.*

—George III

### Section 1: *The North Briton* 1762-63

An adage of London in the 1760s stated that “[i]f Jack Wilkes were stripped naked and thrown over Westminster Bridge on one day, you would meet him the next day in Pall Mall, dressed in the height of fashion, and with money in his pocket” (Cash, *Wilkes* 267). Over the course of his life, John Wilkes, Esq. found himself expelled from Parliament, imprisoned, and challenged to duels, but he regained the status of MP, Alderman, and Lord Mayor of London. Wilkes contrived a sympathetic persona of rebellion and personal liberty in the public sphere, and defied unfair exertions of authority through radical journalism and a provocative public image.

Wilkes’s censure and arrest thrust him into the public sphere and simultaneously created a new space of extra-political activity. Opposition was the central activity of Wilkes’s career, as he persistently antagonized Prime Minister Bute, the governing Tories, and the king. Wilkes’s opponents attempted to denounce him as a rake and a profligate. However Wilkes developed the persona of a good-hearted rake in contrast to the veiled corruption of his accusers. While Tory interests continued to represent libertinism and obscenity echoing the culture of the Restoration, Wilkes adopted the quality of irreverence as a Whig in opposition to expose the corruption of the Tory establishment to a bourgeois public who opposed the libertinism and dishonesty of the aristocracy. Wilkes used irreverence and obscenity in several of his publications to caricature the

excesses and libertinism of prominent Tories who presented themselves as dignified public servants and aristocrats.

Wilkes's triumph over the repression of the Crown and the ministry occurred on 8 April 1771 when the Tory MP John Calcraft recorded that "[t]he ministers avow Wilkes too dangerous to meddle with. He is to do what he pleases; we are to submit. So his Majesty orders: he will have 'nothing more to do with that devil Wilkes'" (Pitt 123). This statement admits the defeat of King George and Prime Minister North's cabinet in a public conflict with the charismatic Wilkes. Wilkes antagonized the establishment during his tenure as a Whig MP and his foray into municipal politics, and continued to stir public support and goad the government from his cells in the Tower of London and King's Bench Prison. Wilkes entered opposition shortly after his election to Parliament in 1757 and criticized the Tory establishment throughout his political career. Wilkes's most notable contribution to the public sphere occurred as his arrest for treason in 1763 forced him into public attention as a new symbol of opposition. This public scandal represented a form of criticism against the government outside of parliamentary discourse which commanded the interest of an urban, unfranchised public which rallied behind Wilkes.

In this section, I discuss excerpts from the early issues of Wilkes's radical periodical *The North Briton* which attack favouritism and publicly indict the corruptions of the Tory establishment under Prime Minister Bute. I argue that Wilkes's attacks on the Tories in *The North Briton* demonstrate the combination of literature and politics exemplary of the Long Whig Opposition. This examination of Wilkes's journalistic career will explore the initial stages in Wilkes's progress from an obscure MP to a critic the king considered "too dangerous to meddle with."

In Arthur H. Cash's biography *John Wilkes: The Scandalous Father of Civil Liberty*, the author asserts that Wilkes "was a master of what in present-day political lingo is called spin. But it was an eighteenth-century spin, making extensive use of sarcasm" (70). Wilkes revived the sardonic voice of Scriblerian satire from the rhetoric of Tory opposition in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century and used the device of historical allusion to conflate contemporary governmental corruption with archetypal narratives. Wilkes began his journalistic career writing anonymous entries for the periodical *The Monitor*, raising the ire of Prime Minister Bute by railing against "favourites" in the government. In *Monitor* no. 357, Wilkes defines a favourite as "one, who, without any merit or recommendation from his country, for any services performed for the public, and the glory of the crown, has found means to acquire a great and almost exclusive influence and power over the mind of his royal master" (2152). This assertion challenges the structure of British governance by subordinating the crown to the devious influence of flatterers, who have personal access to their monarch. As a close acquaintance of George III since the king's adolescence, Bute was a recognizable object of Wilkes's assault on favourites. According to Cash, "The implications were crystal clear, for Lord Bute had been the tutor to George III during his late teens" (*Wilkes* 67). Wilkes characterizes Prime Minister Bute as a manipulative leader with unjust authority, asserting that his influence is due to his attachment to the royal family rather than merit or public service. He further suggests that Bute and other favourites have the authority of "almost exclusive influence" over the king, attacking favouritism as a corruption of monarchical governance.

We may observe the resonance of Scriblerian satire in Wilkes's view of favourites and its similarity to the flappers in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* who flap the dotting rulers' ears and mouths to draw their attention to the outside world. When Gulliver encounters the great

statesmen of Laputa, he finds them accompanied by “many in the Habit of Servants, with a Blown Bladder fastned like a Flail to the End of a short Stick [...] With these Bladders they now and then flapped the Mouths and Ears of those who stood near them” (147). Gulliver discovers that the reason for this practice is that “these People are so taken up with intense Speculations, that they neither can speak, nor attend to the Discourses of others without being roused by some external Taction upon the Organs of Speech and Hearing” (147). Swift satirizes political leaders as Gulliver records the practice of the Laputan elite to retain domestics who must flap their leaders to redirect their attention from “intense Speculations” to reality. He asserts the pervasiveness of this practice in Laputa by saying “those Persons who can afford it, always keep a *Flapper* [...] in their family, as one of their Domesticks; nor ever walk abroad or make Visits without him” (147). Gulliver’s description of flappers suggests that, though they resemble domestic servants, they have close access to their masters and the unique influence of controlling their masters’ perception of reality and interaction with the outside world. Wilkes echoes the satirical archetype of the flapper when he defines a favourite in *The Monitor* as one with “a great and almost exclusive influence and power over the mind of his royal master” (2152).

*Monitor* no. 357 began Wilkes’s career as a radical journalist exposing the corruptive influence of favourites in the government. Cash describes this issue of *The Monitor* as “anonymous, as were all such political essays, but certainly by Wilkes” (67). In subsequent publications, Wilkes continued to attack Bute as a manipulative figure with unfair access to the king who sullied the relationship between the Crown and the House of Commons. Favouritism and Tory Prime Ministers remained objects of Wilkes’s satire throughout his journalistic career. Bute responded to *Monitor* no. 357 by financing a pro-government periodical called *The Briton*, enlisting Tobias Smollett as editor. The first issue of *The Briton* appeared on 29 May 1762. On 5

June, co-editors Wilkes and Charles Churchill published the first issue of the parodic periodical *The North Briton*, carrying on Wilkes's indictment of the corruptions of the government. When criticizing favourites in the *North Briton*, Wilkes avoided the 18<sup>th</sup>-century satirical practice of obscuring the name of the satirist's object with an em-dash. He instead attacked Tory establishment figures like Bute and Smollett by name. Cash tells us "Never once did Wilkes disguise a name. His protection was that the paper did not have *his* name on it" (*Wilkes* 71). However, Wilkes's anonymity did not shield him from arrest, as the ministry surveilled the press closely and recognized him as the author. Cash tells us that "[a]uthorship was hard to hide from the spies that watched the presses, and Wilkes's was known to the ministry within days" (*Wilkes* 69).

In *Wilkes and Liberty: A Social Study of 1763-1774*, George Rudé describes Wilkes's practice in *The North Briton* as "to expose and ridicule the new government's conduct of affairs; to harry the Scots on each and every occasion" (21). Prejudice against the Scots is a pervasive theme in *The North Briton*, exploiting an anxiety among the English people over Scottish uprisings, the abundance of Scots in the Tory government, and the Scottish ancestry of the previous royal family, the Stuarts. Rudé states "*The North Briton*, as its name suggests, was both a direct ripost to [*The Briton*] and a satirical commentary on the widely held belief that the new administration was over-heavily staffed with Scots and over-tender to Scottish interests" (21). Numbers 1 and 2 of *The North Briton* express Wilkes's prejudice against the Scots, indicating the abundance of Scotsmen in the Tory government and King George's favourable disposition to prominent Scotsmen like Lord Bute. No. 1 emphasizes the freedom of the press as a means of opposing corrupt government, describing the encroachments on the freedom of the press enacted by the Stuart monarchy. Mr. North Briton declares "Under the government of a Stuart, which has



been so fatal to England, the most daring encroachments have been made on the favourite liberties of the people, and the freedom of the press has been openly violated. Even a licenser of the press has been appointed. Nothing but the vilest ministerial trash, and falsehoods fabricated by a wicked party, had the sanction of this tool of power” (2). This description recalls the suppression of the press under the rule of the Scottish Stuart dynasty, emphasizing the fractious interests of the Scotland and the Stuarts by describing Stuart rule as “fatal to England.” In the decades leading up to Bute’s ministry, there had been Scottish rebellions attempting to install another Stuart monarch on the throne. These rebellions spread a foreboding anxiety through the English public that the Jacobites could restore the Stuart monarchy. Wilkes exploited this common anxiety, implicating Bute personally through his Scottish heritage and attachment to the Stuart family. Cash recounts that “Bute’s name was John Stuart, and he was closely related to the pretender” (*Wilkes* 71).

In *North Briton* no. 2, Mr. North Briton sarcastically avows his nationalism and fierce loyalty to Bute. Wilkes wrote in the satirical persona of a Jacobite Scotsman. He congratulates Bute, already Prime Minister, on his further appointment as First Lord of the Treasury, applauding the appointment of a Scotsman to oversee the finances of England. Mr. North Briton opens this issue by saying “I cannot conceal the joy I feel as a *North Briton*, and I heartily congratulate my dear countrymen on our having at length accomplished the great, long sought and universally national object of all our wishes, the planting of a *Scotsman* at the head of the *English Treasury*” (10). This statement conveys a satirical attack on Bute as a Scottish pretender with authority over the English treasury. Wilkes characterizes Scotsmen as rebels attempting to supplant English authority and gain power over the British government and its finances. He embellishes the persona of Mr. North Briton through his nationalistic identification with his

countrymen in a shared desire to gain control of the finances of the kingdom. In no. 2, Wilkes also disparages Smollett's publication *The Briton* in forthright terms, criticizing Bute's endeavour to create journalism uniting the English and the Scots under the persona of *The Briton*. Mr. North Briton declares "I must say a word of the poor Briton: he deserves something—I will not name what—for sacrificing, at the shrine of Bute, grammar, conscience, and common sense, for his lordship's *glorification*" (18). *North Briton* no. 2 exemplifies Wilkes's satire against the Tories as a party prioritizing Scottish interests over England, directed at Lord Bute and Tobias Smollett (both Scottish Tories).

Wilkes's provocative penchant became clear in *North Briton* no. 5, which presented a scandalous narrative alleging a sexual relationship between Lord Bute and the king's mother. Wilkes recalls the historical narrative of Roger de Mortimer's affair with the Queen Mother of Edward III, surreptitiously suggesting that Lord Bute may exercise the same influence over the court of King George through his alleged illicit relationship with George's mother, the Dowager Princess of Wales. During Edward III's childhood, the Queen Mother Isabella served as regent and appointed 12 noblemen to govern the kingdom of whom de Mortimer was the most influential. *North Briton* no. 5 describes this situation by saying "[England] knew what the government of a weak and imprudent king could do, but they were unexperienced as to the effects of a minority under the direction of a *Mother*, actuated by strong passions and influenced by an insolent minister" (38). Though Wilkes does not name Prime Minister Bute or Princess Dowager Augusta, he tacitly illustrates an anxiety surrounding Bute's connection to the royal family. Cash asserts "The parallels to King George in his youth, his mother the Dowager Princess of Wales, and Lord Bute the tutor of the boy king and lover of his mother (in the popular view) were obvious to all" (*Wilkes* 74). In *North Briton* no. 5, Wilkes uses a historical

allusion to present a scandalous narrative which was the subject of gossip among the public. Rudé also affirms that “[Bute’s] alleged intimacy with the King’s mother, the Princess Dowager, was a subject of constant comment” (21). Wilkes’s discussion of de Mortimer and the Queen Mother uses narrative and historical allusion to express sedition against the establishment, as Fielding did in *Jonathan Wild* (1743). Just as Fielding asserted the contemporary relevance of the biography of the infamous criminal Jonathan Wild through its parallels to the career of Robert Walpole, Wilkes presents the story of de Mortimer and the Queen Mother to malign Lord Bute. Wilkes asserts that the downfall of de Mortimer—whom Edward III hanged after his accession to the throne—relied on the exposure of his criminal relations with the Queen Mother. The epistle writer of no. 5 declares “as Mortimer was indebted for the enormity of his power to a criminal correspondence with the Queen Mother, so to honest insinuations of this given to the king must be ascribed his amazing downfal [sic]” (41). This statement expresses Wilkes’s confidence in the freedom of the press to expose the corruptions of government. He suggests that honest exposure of de Mortimer’s corruption caused his downfall.

*North Briton* no. 5 continued to express antipathy to the Scots by evoking de Mortimer’s mishandling of the Scottish invasion under Robert Bruce. The epistle writer asserts that de Mortimer “now in the zenith of his power, soon gave proofs of the weakness of his head, and the wickedness of his heart” (39) by giving treasonous aid to the enemy. *North Briton* no. 5 narrates the revolution under Robert Bruce, when the Scottish troops were repelled by Edward III, arguing that the English could have routed the Scots and secured their surrender on more favourable terms if de Mortimer had not abetted their escape. The writer states that Bruce’s “escape was generally imputed to Mortimer, and the consequences of it confirmed the suspicion; for instead of Edward’s pursuing the Scots into their own country at the head of a formidable

army, and compelling them to accept of such terms as he might think fit to grant them, a shameful *peace* was concluded for him by the influence of *Mortimer*” (40). Wilkes’s palimpsestic account of de Mortimer’s corruption not only impugns Bute and his spurious access to the royal family, but defends the Whig position on the Seven Years War. Bute and the Tories desired an armistice with France to end the Seven Years War, to which Wilkes refers tacitly by discussing the “shameful peace” negotiated by de Mortimer. Wilkes’s epistle writer proceeds to contend that the peace with Robert Bruce was beneficial to de Mortimer and the Queen Mother, emphasizing de Mortimer’s corruption and self-interest. He describes the peace agreement with Bruce as “such a *peace* as, historians say, was profitable to the *Queen Mother* and *Mortimer*, but inconsistent with the honour of the king, and the profit of the realm and people” (40).

Wilkes concludes *North Briton* no. 5 by lamenting the possibility that the historical narrative of de Mortimer and the Queen Mother may repeat itself, emphasizing the similarity to Bute and the rumours of his illicit access to the royal family. The epistle writer avows “O may Britain never see such a day again! when power acquired by profligacy may lord it over this realm; when the feeble pretensions of a *court minion* may require the prostitution of royalty for their support” (44). Though the content of *North Briton* no. 5 is salacious, Wilkes conceals his allegations against Bute within a historical narrative, using the device of allusion to present a narrative with an underlying provocative significance. Wilkes would proceed to abandon allusion and pretence when he later published the poem *An Essay on Woman*, unabashedly displaying lewdness and profanity.

Wilkes continued his assault on the royal favourites in *North Briton* no. 12, which lauded Lord Talbot and his horse for a social faux-pas during King George’s coronation. Lord Talbot intended to approach the king and salute him from horseback during the coronation, and trained

his horse to walk backwards to observe the custom that one never turns his back on a monarch. The horse instead walked backwards towards the king, humiliating the Earl of Talbot, whom Cash describes as “the athletic earl who at the coronation had been humiliated when his horse presented his rump to the king” (*Wilkes* 80).

Wilkes dedicated *North Briton* no. 12 to pensioners and includes an epistle to Mr. North Briton suggesting Talbot’s horse as a worthy pensioner. The epistle writer argues that “every species of elegance and refinement [...] may be rewarded with a pension” (108), and praises Talbot’s horse for paying “a new, and, for a *horse*, singular respect to his sovereign” (108). The epistle writer describes the hilarious lapse of feudal respect at George’s coronation, suggesting that Talbot’s horse deserves a pension for entertaining the spectators and the nation at the expense of the king. He praises the horse, saying “I appeal to the applauding multitudes; who were so charmed, as to forget every rule of decency, and to *clap* even in the *Royal* presence, whether *his* or his *lord’s* dexterity on that day did not surpass any courtier’s” (108). Wilkes presents Lord Talbot’s horse as a worthy pensioner for its disruption of a courtly ritual, asserting that “Caligula’s *horse* had not half the merit” (108) despite its supposed consulship.<sup>1</sup> Through the anonymous persona of an epistle writer, Wilkes jests at royalty and aristocracy, deftly satirizing courtly rituals; and the practice of pensioning favourites, like Talbot. An enraged Talbot challenged Wilkes to a duel, one of at least two Wilkes fought in his lifetime.<sup>2</sup>

*North Briton* no. 12 also draws a comparison between favourites and pensioners. The issue opens with the epigraph “Pensions which reason to the worthy gave, / Add fresh dishonour to the fool and knave –Anon” (100). In addition to his panegyric on Talbot’s horse, the epistle

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<sup>1</sup> Although there is a popular belief that the emperor Caligula appointed his horse Incitatus as a Consul, David Woods’s article “Caligula, Incitatus, and the Consulship” in *The Classical Quarterly* suggests this is a myth.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkes and Talbot survived their duel on 5 October 1762 and drank a bottle of claret together in good humour (Cash, *Wilkes* 82-84). Wilkes also notably duelled Samuel Martin MP (Rudé 38).

writer in this issue also comments on the problem of favouritism, arguing that “[t]he word *favourite* alone we have of late pretty full understood the force of, both from the definitions of the Monitor and the North Briton: yet give me leave to say, Sir, that neither of you have reached the force and closeness of expression in the great lexicographer, Mr. Johnson” (101). *North Briton* no. 12 inserts a new view of favourites into the dialogue between Whig and Tory periodicals, by appealing to Samuel Johnson’s lexical authority. The epistle writer refers to the definition of “favourite” in Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* as “a mean wretch whose whole business is by any means to please” (101). Wilkes’s earlier definitions of “favourite” concerns favourites’ unfair access to and influence over their masters. Johnson’s definition emphasizes the toadying by which favourites gain this authority and influence. The epistle writer proceeds to question Johnson’s similarly negative definition of “pensioner,” citing the pension Johnson received himself. He suggests a nobler definition of “pension” as “a gratuity during the pleasure of the Prince for services performed [...] to himself or to the state,” stating further “Let us consider the celebrated Mr. Johnson, and a few late pensioners, in this light” (103). Using this more flattering definition, the epistle writer cites Talbot’s horse as a suitable candidate for a pension.

John Almon’s collection *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit* (1784) includes a letter to the editor written in 1763 cataloguing the satirical targets of the *North Briton*. Almon identifies the author as an “Alderman of London,” and includes the footnote “It is certain, that it was written by Mr. Wilkes” (80). In this letter, Wilkes illustrates the distinctions between *The North Briton* and the coeval periodical *The Auditor*. Like *The Briton*, Bute financed *The Auditor* to support the Tory government. Cash describes the conflicting Whig and Tory periodicals of the early 1760s by saying “On one side was Smollett at the Briton with Murphy at the Auditor as his

partner; the opposing team consisted of Wilkes at the *North Briton* and Beardmore and others at the *Monitor*” (81). In Wilkes’s letter published by John Almon, he lists the public figures satirized in *The North Briton* and *The Auditor*, extolling the value of satirical journalism. He attempts “to do justice to the candour, as well as the acrimony, of our political writers,” avowing “Every modern controversial writer in politics sits down with encomium on the right and obloquy on the left” (81). The letter presents the congenial assertion that political writers of both Whig and Tory affiliations possess the virtues of wit and sincerity.

As the writer presents the list of persons satirized by Messrs. Auditor and North Briton, he reveals that the Whig satirist targets members of the aristocracy more frequently. The list contains two columns, organizing names according to roles in the government or the aristocracy (84–85). The rows including Earls and Lords list two names on the side of *The Auditor*, “Earl Temple” and “Lord Barrington.” By contrast, there are seven names in this section of *The North Briton*’s column, including Bute, Talbot, and Talbot’s horse. The writer asserts “I would have the noble lords and gentlemen, whose names appear in the lists to regard the perusal of them as an act of humiliation and mortification” (82), specifying “noble lords” as the salient object of satire. This letter describes the social value of controversial periodical journalism, and reveals the objective of *The North Briton* to satirize members of the aristocracy, and royal favourites. This affirmation of criticism against the establishment characterizes *The North Briton* as an expression of opposition in the public sphere of periodical journalism.

In Jürgen Habermas’s *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the author argues that the opposition in British Parliament expanded the sphere of politics by appealing to the public in order to criticize the government. Wilkes’s satirical journalism and frequent appeals to public opinion in *The North Briton* exemplify Habermas’s argument that the opposition found

opportunities in the public sphere to criticize the government and inspire public support.

Habermas states “The minority that did not get its way in Parliament could always seek refuge in the public sphere and appeal to the judgment of the public; the majority, held together by bribery, considered itself bound to legitimate the authority at its disposal” (63). Habermas argues that the government continually seeks to conceal its corruptions and justify its authority, while the opposition is concerned with its alignment with public interests and the exposure of the governmental corruption. Habermas positions the government as group preserving the establishment to conceal its corruptions and justify its authority. The opposition represents an antithesis to the government, taking “refuge in the public sphere” by appealing to the public’s dissatisfaction with the establishment. The Whig periodicals *The Monitor* and *The North Briton* maligned government officials and royal favourites to incite public dissatisfaction with the government of Lord Bute. *The North Briton* adopted a particularly radical tone, as Wilkes satirized public figures more directly than many of his contemporary journalists did.

The early issues of Wilkes’s periodical *The North Briton* challenge the conventions of 18<sup>th</sup>-century satire by directly naming the authority figures they mock. However, Wilkes retained the 18<sup>th</sup>-century journalistic convention of an anonymous persona. *The North Briton* presented essays by Mr. North Briton and anonymous letters to the same which attacked the government and drew the public’s attention to its corruption. Wilkes further embellished his journalistic persona by casting Mr. North Briton as a nationalistic Scotsman to satirize the perceived Jacobite sympathies of Lord Bute and the Tory government. This underlying accusation mobilized existing English prejudices against the Scots, such as the fear of further Jacobite uprisings, as the rebellion in 1745 was still a recent memory. Wilkes demonstrates Habermas’s view of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century opposition as a minority which takes “refuge in the public sphere” (63) and exposes the



corruptions of the government to the public. Wilkes's anonymity as the writer of *The North Briton* became the subject of great controversy after the publication of no. 45, resulting in his arrest and projecting Wilkes from the role of a satirical essayist to a hero of the opposition during the "Wilkes and Liberty" movement.

#### Section 2: *North Briton* no. 45 and Wilkes's Arrest

The early issues of *The North Briton* used conventions like historical allusion and journalistic anonymity to shield Wilkes from prosecution as he expressed opposition to the Bute Ministry, attacking royal favourites by name and broadcasting anti-Scottish and anti-Tory sentiments. However, Wilkes forfeited this anonymity when he became the idol of an extra-political movement in the 1760s amid cries of "Wilkes and Liberty!" Wilkes's very public arrest after the publication of *North Briton* no. 45 in April 1763 overshadowed his parliamentary career as the scandal inspired Wilkes's unfranchised supporters to demonstrate extra-political opposition to the ministry which had censored and imprisoned him.

*North Briton* no. 45 provoked a charge of seditious libel against Wilkes which the Tory Secretaries of State executed by arresting Wilkes and several people allegedly associated with the *North Briton* on a general warrant. Wilkes's opponents deliberately sought a public arrest to discredit the Whigs and draw attention away from their unpopular resolution of the Seven Years War. However, the Tories' plan backfired as the public abhorred the draconian measures the government took against Wilkes and the press. The scandal of Wilkes's arrest was a transformative event which presented a parliamentary conflict to a public audience who articulated opposition through extra-political activity because they had no direct representation in Parliament.

*North Briton* No. 45 appeared shortly after Lord Bute's resignation on 8 April 1763. In no. 45, Wilkes describes the king's speech closing the parliamentary session as Tory propaganda, characterizing King George and the new Prime Minister, George Grenville, as puppets of Lord Bute. This publication stirred greater controversy than the previous issues of *The North Briton*, resulting in Wilkes's sensational arrest, and the response of several partisan publications depicting Wilkes as a hero or an immoral provocateur. The periodical articles and poems which addressed the scandal of Wilkes's arrest demonstrated the expansion of public engagement in politics through publication. In this section, I examine *North Briton* no. 45 and the literature surrounding the Wilkes and Liberty affair instigated by its publication, arguing that no. 45 contributed ideas of opposition and liberty to the Whig ideology, and provoked a transformative movement of extra-political activity in the public sphere. Wilkes's argument in *North Briton* no. 45 demonstrates Habermas's insight that politicians in opposition during the 18<sup>th</sup> century sought "refuge" in the public sphere by using publications to criticize the government.

*North Briton* no. 45 inspired a foundational instance of infighting among the Whigs, which would become more common as they divided into factions during the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In this instance, Wilkes expressed opposition to the Whig Prime Minister George Grenville, who took office following Bute's resignation. Grenville sympathized with the Bute Ministry, despite having familial connections to the Whigs. Cash describes the new Prime Minister as "the Grenville who had betrayed his family to support Bute" (*Wilkes* 97). Grenville was the brother of Richard, Lord Temple and brother-in-law of William Pitt, prominent Whigs opposing the resolution of the Seven Years War. However, George Grenville led a faction of Whigs who supported the government's agreement with France to end the conflict. The Whigs and Tories disagreed on the resolution of the Seven Years War, which ended with the Treaty of

Paris in 1763. The Whigs considered the Treaty unfavourable to the interests of the British empire because of its concessions. Cash calls the Seven Years War “the great war for empire,” and emphasizes its benefit to British “commercial interests” (*Wilkes* 49). The Whigs supported the expansionist war effort, particularly within Pitt’s faction. Cash asserts that “in the midst of the Seven Years War [...] the Pittites were hawks” (49). The Tories however, considered the war a waste of resources and “the question of whether England could afford to continue it would be the paramount question in Parliament for the next five years” (Cash, *Wilkes* 49).

In the 1760s, the divisive issue between Whigs and Tories was the Seven Years War and the expansion of the British empire, as the Whigs supported territorial and commercial expansion and the Tories valued conservation. George Rudé describes the Paris Treaty ending the Seven Years War as “a peace that, by surrendering Guadeloupe and other conquests, bitterly disappointed the merchants of London and Liverpool” (20), among whom Wilkes found zealous supporters. The Whigs of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century were expansionist, desiring progress and the exertion of the colonial and commercial interests of Englishmen on the world stage. Rudé argues that the Tories attempted to use Wilkes’s arrest to diminish public scrutiny of the Paris Treaty by drawing attention to their criminal indictment of a Wilkes as a scandal for the Whigs. He recounts that “the ministers were being provided with what appeared a heaven-sent opportunity for strangling opposition to the government’s peace proposals, both by diverting public attention from that issue and by discrediting the opposition leaders for their overt or implied association with the scandalous Wilkes” (23). The Tories’ attempt to manipulate public opinion through the arrest failed as several publications valorized Wilkes as an opponent to tyranny, and he emerged as an advocate for liberty and reform in the public sphere. The scandal surrounding *North Briton*

no. 45 also drew significant attention to the document itself, which articulated vehement criticism of the Tories and the Paris Treaty.

The Whig position on the Seven Years War, and Wilkes's condemnation of the Paris Treaty in *North Briton* no. 45 anticipate the Whigs' support for the cause of American independence in the subsequent decade. As Wilkes heartily espouses the idea of English liberty, Burke later expressed support for the rebels' assertion of self-governance in America. In no. 45, Mr. North Briton asserts that Prime Minister Grenville and his Secretaries of State "have supported the most odious of [Bute's] measures, the late ignominious *Peace*, and the wicked extension of the arbitrary mode of *Excise*" (227). Wilkes characterizes the government as over-exertive, condemning its excises and suggesting that Bute's peace treaty with France was contrary to the cause of British expansion. No. 45 contains several references to the impositions of government upon English liberty, which would attain further significance as Parliament expelled and imprisoned Wilkes for the publication. Mr. North Briton asks "Is the *spirit of concord* to go hand in hand with the Peace and Excise thro' this nation?" (236), presenting a zeugmatic conflation of excises exerted by the government, and its "ignominious peace" with France. This association of terms condemns Bute and Grenville's excises and the Paris Treaty, asserting that both policies contradict "the spirit of concord" espoused by the English people.

Wilkes proceeds to express a revolutionary sentiment opposing the actions of the government that contradict the English values of liberty and natural concord. Mr. North Briton asks "Is [concord] to be expected between an insolent Exciseman, and a *peer, gentleman, freeholder, or farmer*, whose private houses are now made liable to be entered and searched at pleasure" (236)? This question illustrates a conflict between the agents of government and the public, including the unfranchised middle class. Though the farmers and freeholders mentioned

in the article were unfranchised, they remained subject to the search and seizure, and excises of the government. This assertion was also prophetic, as bailiffs ransacked Wilkes's house and the homes of his publishers after Wilkes's arrest on a general warrant. Wilkes's arrest presented an incitement to unrest to his supporters, appealing to an unfranchised urban community. Wilkes's supporters were predominantly middle-class Londoners who did not meet the forty-shilling freehold required to vote. Because there were fewer landowners in an urban setting, Wilkes's supporters mainly comprised the unfranchised. Wilkes had not been a consequential MP, but became a prominent public figure as unfranchised merchants and professionals rallied to the Wilkite movement during the scandal of *North Briton* no. 45.

When Lord Bute resigned after *North Briton* no. 44, Wilkes suspended his publication before expressing opposition to Prime Minister Grenville. In *John Wilkes: A Friend to Liberty*, P.D.G Thomas describes the objective of opposition espoused by *The North Briton* as Wilkes resumed publication to express opposition to the Grenville ministry, continuing his effort to expose the persistent influence of Lord Bute. Thomas tells us that, "on 13 April [1763] Wilkes, in the name of the *North Briton*, published a handbill, reprinted widely in the newspapers, explaining that the paper had been opposed to Lord Bute and was now holding fire to see whether his malign hand guided the new ministry under George Grenville. The pretext that it did so prompted the next, fateful, issue of the paper" (26). Wilkes's avowal of *The North Briton's* fundamental opposition to Prime Minister Bute characterizes it as literature of opposition, espousing the purpose of criticizing the government in the public sphere. *North Briton* no. 45 resumed Wilkes's campaign to discredit Bute, publicly indicating Bute's influence over the Grenville administration.

Wilkes asserts Bute's corruptive influence over the current government in *North Briton* no. 45, characterizing the Grenville Ministry as Bute's puppets. Mr. North Briton poses the question "The Scottish Minister has indeed retired. Is his influence at an end? or does he still govern by the *three* wretched tools of his power" (227), referring to Grenville and Lords Egremont and Halifax, the Secretaries of State. Wilkes renews his intention to oppose the government, saying "The North Briton has been steady in his opposition to a *single* insolent, incapable, despotic minister; and is equally ready, in the service of his country, to combat the *triple-headed*, Cerberian administration" (228). This statement emphasizes the incompetence and corruption of Lord Bute, and conflates Grenville, Egremont, and Halifax into a "cerberian" triad enacting Bute's agenda.

*North Briton* no. 45 exemplifies Habermas's argument that oppositional factions took "refuge" in the public sphere of 18<sup>th</sup>-century journalism, as Wilkes emphasizes the value of public opinion and maligns the government. This issue responded to a royal speech projecting Tory propaganda into the public sphere without an opportunity for parliamentary debate. The king's speech praising the resolution of the Seven Years War occurred at the closure of the parliamentary session in April 1763, stifling debate on a governmental proclamation. Thomas describes Wilkes's assertion of opposition in the public sphere, recounting that Wilkes "began by pointing out that whereas the King's Speech at the beginning of each session usually gave rise to debate, the one at the close of a session was a piece of ministerial propaganda on which MPs had no opportunity to comment" (27). The publication of *North Briton* no. 45 was a significant event in the expansion of democracy into the public sphere of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, as Wilkes used the document to compensate for the absence of parliamentary debate and to highlight this repressive custom to the public.

Wilkes describes King George's speech at the closure of Parliament as a despotic pronouncement that is contrary to the discursive structure of the House of Commons because it affords no opportunity for debate. Mr. North Briton asserts that this speech upholds government policy by saying "The Speech at the *close* of the session has ever been considered as the most *secure* method of promulgating the favourite court creed among the vulgar" (230). This statement asserts that the purpose of the king's speech is to propagate the views of the government before the public, conveying implications of monarchical favouritism by referring to government policy as the "favourite court creed." This term connotes the unjust collusion of the king and the ministry that is undermining the structure of British governance. Mr. North Briton explains his view of the king's speech by saying "the parliament, which is the constitutional guardian of the liberties of the people, has in this case no opportunity of remonstrating, or of impeaching any wicked servant of the crown" (230). This assertion characterizes the House of Commons as a fundamental advocate for the interests of the people through its ability to debate government policy and publicly to criticize corrupt officials.

Thomas asserts that Wilkes's argument concerning the king's speech was "[c]areful to emphasize that all such orations were known to be the compositions of the ministry [and] declared that both monarch and country had been the victims" (27) of Tory misinformation and Bute's influence over the government. This assertion of ministerial responsibility for misleading the Crown and the public reveals a recurring expression of criticism against the ministry during the Long Whig Opposition. Whig writers including Wilkes continually expressed loyalty to the king by portraying him as an innocent dupe of the corrupt ministry. Wilkes also emphasized the discernment and virtue of the public by affirming the responsibility of the ministry to govern its subjects fairly and openly. Wilkes contrasts the king's speech at the closure of Parliament with

his speech at its opening, describing the latter as a more democratic expression of authority. Mr. North Briton states “The ministers of this free country, conscious of the undoubted privileges of so spirited a people, and with the terrors of parliament before their eyes, have ever been cautious, no less with regard to the matter, than to the expressions of *speeches*, which they have advised the sovereign to make from the throne, at the *opening* of each session” (230). Wilkes avows the natural freedom and spirit of individual liberty of the English people, characterizing the government as fearful of the reprisal of the public, and asserting that speeches from the throne upon the commencement of Parliament are more democratic as the House of Commons may freely debate the monarch’s pronouncements. Wilkes depicts the power of Parliament to protect the interests of the people, avowing the revolutionary sentiment that a despotic government infringes on the rights of a free people.

Wilkes opens *North Briton* no. 45 with the avowal “The North Briton makes his appeal to the good sense, and to the candour of the English nation” (227). This appeal to public opinion exemplifies Habermas’s view of the public sphere as an arena in which the opposition could present their position to the judgement of the public and expose the corruptions of government. Mr. North Briton presents his criticisms of the Grenville ministry to the public, stating his intention “to venture the submitting his crude ideas of the present political crisis to the discerning and impartial public” (227). The speaker undermines his own opinion as “crude,” but submits it to the impartial consideration of the public, demonstrating the appeal of the opposition to the public to legitimate its objections to the government.

Wilkes’s accusation in *North Briton* no. 45 that Lord Bute and the Tories composed King George’s speech at the closure of Parliament characterizes the king as an instrument of Bute’s influence, further asserting Wilkes’s view of the unfair influence of favourites over their masters.



Cash tells us that Wilkes describes “the king’s speech, not as the king’s speech at all, but as the speech written by the ministers. The accepted fiction that the king spoke in his own name had never been challenged, and Wilkes’s assertion infuriated King George, who prided himself on his independence from ministers” (*Wilkes* 100). Wilkes’s accusation presents the king’s speech as a monarchical persona spuriously adopted by ministers who exercise dictatorial power behind the screen of monarchy. *North Briton* no. 45 proceeds to describe the pretence of Lord Bute’s resignation by saying “he intends only to retire into that situation, which he held before he first took the seals; I mean the dictating to every part of the administration” (228). This statement reasserts the charge of Bute’s lifelong influence over the king as a favourite, declaring that Bute held this influence “before he first took the seals” of the Prime Minister’s office, and depicting Bute’s pervasive manipulation of the government.

Wilkes describes his attachment to Whig values opposing ministerial tyranny in the description “The North Briton desires to be understood, as having pledged himself a firm and intrepid asserter of the rights of his fellow-subjects, and of the liberties of Whigs and Englishmen” (228). Liberty and English identity were central values for the Whigs, particularly the radical Wilkes, who stirred unrest over the Bute ministry’s sympathy with Scotland, evoking reminiscence of the autocratic rule of the Stuarts, and sowing mistrust of Bute’s Stuart ancestry. The succession of the Stuart dynasty was the formative issue in the divide between Whigs and Tories, and the Whigs connected liberty to English identity as they opposed the rule of an autocratic Stuart monarch like Charles I, who waged a war against Parliament. *North Briton* no. 45 invokes the Stuarts as exemplars of despotism, stating “The *Stuart* line has ever been intoxicated with the slavish doctrines of the *absolute, independent, unlimited* power of the crown” (239). Although Wilkes depicts an autocratic monarchy in this description, his accusation

continues to implicate Lord Bute, whose name was John Stuart, as a supporter of Stuart succession. Wilkes distinguishes the absolutism of the Stuart dynasty from the Hanovers to avoid criticizing the present monarchy.

*North Briton* no. 45 may appear less sensational than Wilkes's earlier publications, which defied the subtle convention of obscuring the name of an object of satire, calling Bute a tyrant, and lampooning favourites like the buffoonish dilettante Lord Talbot. By contrast, no. 45 makes a serious plea for the autonomy of Parliament and condemns ministerial interference into the monarchical branch of government. However, no. 45 is significant because it was at the centre of a public scandal resulting in the Wilkes and Liberty movement. The ministry's authoritarian detainment and prosecution of Wilkes drew greater public attention to Wilkes and the document, which presented values that were fundamental to the Whig ideology throughout the remainder of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The ministry's crackdown on *The North Briton*—in which bailiffs arrested 49 people allegedly associated with the periodical and ransacked Wilkes's house—galvanized support for Wilkes among the electorate and unfranchised Londoners.

Wilkes's trial was a public event which Wilkes took as an opportunity to broadcast a message of Whig opposition. Wilkes's counsel, Serjeant Glynn raised the issues of unjust arrest and seizure, depicting his client as a victim of tyranny. Wilkes himself used the trial as an opportunity to address the urban audience who sympathized with Wilkes as an opponent of a corrupt government. Rudé recounts that "Wilkes prefaced his remarks to the judges with words that were carefully calculated to evoke a response among the varied throng of gentlemen, shopkeepers and craftsmen that crowded the galleries" (26). This calculated address to the public inspired an enthusiastic demonstration of support for Wilkes, as the crowd applauded the defendant and chanted slogans such as "Wilkes and Liberty!" Rudé quotes Wilkes's statement

that “the liberty of all peers and gentlemen, and [...] all the middling and inferior set of people, who stand most in need of protection, is in my case this day to be finally decided” (26). Wilkes asserts that the entire population are victims of a corrupt or tyrannical government, positioning his trial as an example which could apply to anyone in his audience. He also cites the middle class as a group whose liberty demands the protection of the opposition and the free press. Wilkes notably used his trial as a public venue in which to echo his assertion of liberty and opposition from *North Briton* no. 45.

Wilkes had concluded no. 45 by asserting the freedom of the people and avowing the Whig value of liberty, quoting Dryden. Mr. North Briton declares “This is the spirit of our constitution. The people too have their *prerogative*, and, I hope the fine words of Dryden will be engraven on our hearts, / Freedom is the *English Subject’s Prerogative*” (240). Wilkes quotes Dryden’s Pindaric ode on Charles II, *Threnodia Augustalis*. This is an uncharacteristic choice for Wilkes, considering his avowed disdain for the Stuart dynasty. However, Wilkes evokes nostalgia for the licence and excesses associated with Charles II, contrasting these values with the authoritarianism of the Bute Ministry. While aristocratic libertinism was more characteristic of the Tories because of their ancestral connection to the Stuart court, Wilkes adopted the values of liberty and irreverence in opposition to governmental control. Wilkes evokes the image of Charles II as an opposing figure to the repression of free expression in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but affirms the value of liberty held by the upper class during the Restoration as the constitutional prerogative of all British subjects. Dryden’s poet-speaker recalls the quality of life during Charles’s reign, comparing it to Man’s pre-lapsarian state by saying “We liv’d as unconcern’d and happily / As the first age in Natures golden Scene” (I.12). The poet-speaker presents a

description of unfettered happiness during the Restoration, conveying an image of ancestral liberty.

Although Wilkes frequently invokes the Stuart dynasty as an example of fearful despotism, he finds Dryden's ode on Charles II useful because it depicts an ancestral quality of liberty among the English people. Dryden's poet-speaker describes the sentiment of the renewal of English liberty during the Restoration by saying "For all those joys thy restauration [sic] brought, [...] For freedom still maintain'd alive, / Freedom, which in no other land will thrive, / Freedom an English subject's sole prerogative" (X.1–10). In Dryden's litany of the gifts of the Restoration, he suggests that freedom survived the interregnum to be restored alongside the Stuart monarchy. The poet-speaker characterizes freedom as an inborn quality in the English nation, suggesting it cannot thrive in other lands, and is a foundational aspect of English identity. Wilkes's epigraph from Dryden's *Threnodia Augustalis* invokes English history to promulgate the idea that liberty and freedom of expression are central English values. Wilkes argues that King George and his "cerberean" influencers Bute, Egremont, and Halifax transgressed against the values of liberty and freedom of debate with the autocratic pronouncement of the king's speech closing the Parliamentary session of 1763.

Soon after Wilkes's assertion of English freedom in *North Briton* no. 45, the king ordered his arrest, precipitating the scandalous arrest of scores of Wilkes's alleged associates and publishers. Cash states "No doubt King George thought [Wilkes] spoke treason" (*Wilkes* 100). Though Wilkes expressed his most resonant ideas in the public sphere outside the House of Commons, his position as an MP was central to the scandal of *North Briton* no. 45; parliamentary privilege declared Wilkes immune from arrest except in cases of felony, treason, or breach of the peace. Wilkes's arrest warrant declared *North Briton* no. 45 "treasonable."

However, this was a general warrant, which instigated the arrests of 49 people, inciting a scandal. Among those arrested were two publishers, though neither was Richard Balfe, who actually published no. 45. Wilkes himself eluded arrest for several days. There were further questions of the warrant's legitimacy, as to whether no. 45 expressed treason or merely libel. MPs could not be arrested for publishing libel. However, Wilkes eventually acquiesced to arrest and interrogation by Egremont and Halifax, whom he had described as "wretched tools" (227) of Bute in no. 45. The Secretaries of State committed Wilkes to the Tower of London on 30 April 1763.

Thomas recounts the circumstances of Wilkes's arrest, demonstrating a significant instance of ministerial suppression of the opposition and the press. He refers to the interrogation of George Kearsley, whom earlier issues of the *North Briton* had cited as a publisher, which was "conducted by the two secretaries of state themselves, Egremont and Halifax" (29). The personal involvement of such high-ranking officials reveals the ministry's pressing concern over Wilkes and demonstrates the government's unjust involvement in the prosecution of a dissenter. Kearsley testified against Wilkes, Charles Churchill (a clergyman and poet who shared Wilkes's avowal of liberty), and Richard Balfe (Wilkes alleged co-publisher). Thomas recounts that none of this testimony occurred on oath, and argues that "[b]ad legal advice led to the use of the general warrant against Wilkes and the consequent political storm over the alleged attack on liberty" (29). This political tempest was a formative event in the history of parliamentary opposition, as Wilkes's criticism of the government extended into the public sphere through literature and public demonstrations against the government.

The public focus on Wilkes's arrest is a significant event in the expansion of the public sphere as representatives of the unfranchised middle-class discovered their political agency by

responding publicly to the arrest. Wilkes's unfranchised supporters espoused the value of personal freedom and opposed a government that did not represent them or value their concerns. As the public perceived the arrest as an "attack on liberty" (Thomas 29), a section of the urban middle class adopted Wilkes as an exemplar of liberty and opposition. Wilkes's arrest precipitated the Wilkite Movement, which contributed to the articulation of criticism against the government in the public sphere during the Long Whig Opposition. Habermas affirms that "those Bourgeois strata of the Protestant middle class, involved in business and commerce [...] formed something like a steadily expanding pre-parliamentary forum. Here, as a critical public soon to be aided by appropriate publicist organs, they followed the decisions and deliberations of Parliament" (62). Wilkes's arrest was a foundational parliamentary affair that drew his supporters' attention to the ministry's abuse of due process, and suppression of the opposition and the press.

Several publications emerged from the scandal of Wilkes's arrest, displaying the "appropriate publicist organs" which Habermas cites as tools of conveying the opinions of the unfranchised into the public sphere. During Wilkes's imprisonment, his supporters and opponents asserted their views on the Wilkes and Liberty affair in various periodical essays. These discursive publications exemplify literary intervention into the public sphere as politicians and extra-politically engaged citizens published their views in an effort to influence public opinion.

Lady Temple, wife to one of Wilkes's foremost supporters among the Whigs,<sup>3</sup> wrote a ballad called "The Jewel in the Tower," esteeming Wilkes as the most valuable treasure held in the Tower of London during his imprisonment. Temple's poet-speaker avows "I think not of the

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Grenville-Temple, 2nd Earl of Temple, the brother of Prime Minister George Grenville. Grenville-Temple appeared on the list of two noblemen satirized by the *Auditor*.

armoury, / Nor of the guns and lions' roar / Nor yet the valu'd library" (5), contrasting the hero Wilkes to the symbols of Britain's military and imperial dominance surrounding him during his sojourn in the Tower. The poet-speaker narrates Wilkes's resistance to the corruptions of government resulting in his arrest. She describes the "Jewel," Wilkes, by saying "With thousand methods did they try it, / Its firmness strengthened every hour; / They were not able all to buy it, / And so they sent it to the Tower" (9). This stanza illustrates Temple's view of Wilkes's resistance to the government, asserting that the ministry tried diverse methods to silence Wilkes, but, when he proved resolute, they imprisoned him. The poet-speaker espouses the Wilkite virtue of liberty as she foresees Wilkes's vindication in the final stanza, declaring "The day shall come to make amends, / Of liberty th' exulting hour / When o'er his foes, and 'midst his friends, / Shall shine the Jewel of the Tower" (17). This stanza reflects the revolutionary sentiment Wilkes aroused by his assertion of English liberty and his accusations against the corrupt excises and overreaches of the government. Wilkes would experience this vindication, as he won a large sum of money in court as restitution for his arrest, and won successive victories in the arena of public opinion.

Wilkes responded to the Countess of Temple's panegyric with his own poem "The Temple of the Muses," which John Almon included in the 1768 edition of *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit*. The poem reveals Wilkes's admiration for classical literature, and extols Lady Temple as an heiress of classical poetry and virtue. Wilkes's poet-speaker states "The muses and graces to Phoebus complain'd; / That no more on the earth a Sappho remain'd" (1). Wilkes's poem uses classical archetypes to praise Lady Temple's literary resonance and civic virtue. The poet-speaker describes these qualities as he recounts Phoebus's reply to the Muses' complaint, "To make you amends / In one fair you shall see wit and virtue good friends / The Grecian's

high spirit and sweetness I'll join / With a true Roman virtue, to make it divine" (7). This pronouncement endows Lady Temple with the qualities of literary wit, which the poet-speaker associates with Greek poetry; and virtue, which he ascribes to the Romans based on the archetypal civic engagement of the Roman republic.

Liberty and constitutionalism were pervasive themes in Lady Temple's poetry, in which she expressed similar views to the Wilkite movement. In Lady Temple's poem "To the Earl Temple, on Gardening," she praises the value of British unity and condemns the Tory resolution of the Seven Years War within a description of the gardens on her estate at Stowe. The poet-speaker narrates "A solemn temple in proportion true, / Magnificently simple, courts the view; / *Concord* and *victory* with pride proclaim" (31), referring to the virtue of concord, which Wilkes argues is central to English identity in his condemnation of the "ignominious peace" in *The North Briton*. Lady Temple's poet-speaker proceeds more directly to avow a Whig position on the Seven Years War in her description of the garden. She declares "The sculptur'd walls [Britain's] glories past declare, / In proud memorials of successful war. / No factious sacrifice to France and Spain / Those consecrated trophies can profane" (39). This description illustrates the Whig position that the Tories' peace settlement with France betrayed the purpose of the Seven Years War as an expansion of British territories and interests. The poet-speaker also asserts that the Treaty of Paris was a harmful and divisive concession, describing it as a "factious sacrifice" to Britain's enemies. Lady Temple demonstrated sympathy for Wilkes in her poem "The Jewel in the Tower," and affirmed her Whig affiliation in "To the Earl Temple, on Gardening." Wilkes expressed laudatory thanks to her in "The Temple of the Muses." Though the Countess of Temple did not have the opportunities to participate in public life as directly as Wilkes or the Earl of Temple, she contributed to the public sphere of Whig opposition through poetry, even



presenting a polemical political opinion in a poem describing the domestic activity of gardening, addressed to her husband.

Wilkes's opponents were also outspoken during his imprisonment, and impugned the Grenville-Temples for their sympathy for Wilkes. The Tory publication the *London Chronicle* attacked Wilkes's character throughout the Spring and Summer of 1763. In July it published an anonymous letter to the Earl of Temple, condemning his association with Wilkes. This epistle writer avows "It is really difficult to conceive how your Lordship could have entered into any degree of intimacy with a man of his abandoned, profligate character" (9), reproaching Temple for his friendship with Wilkes, whose irreverence made him unfit company for an aristocrat and prominent MP like Temple. The writer suggests that Wilkes does not deserve the support of Lord Temple and other Whigs. He describes Wilkes as a profane slanderer "whose ablest talents, as a writer, are those of calumny and defamation, varied by the petulance of something like wit, and every [sic] the vilest species of ribaldry and buffoonery" (9). This diatribe against Wilkes denies any value to the satire and oppositional journalism of *The North Briton*, characterizing Wilkes not as a radical journalist, but as a ribald ne'er-do-well.

The *London Chronicle's* epistle writer begins with a laudatory description of friendship between men of quality, appearing to praise Temple and Wilkes as noble public figures. However, the writer's tone changes as he asserts that Temple and Wilkes's association is a political friendship through which Wilkes manipulates Temple in an effort to preserve his own reputation. The writer declares "Such friendships, abhorred and inexorable, are honoured with the title of Ambition. But surely the desperate projects of Mr. Wilkes his ruined fortunes [sic] have as little right to this title, as your Lordship's abilities" (9). This scathing description of Temple's support for Wilkes presents Wilkes as a desperate, unscrupulous man, and Temple as

an instrument of Wilkes's ambition. The epistle writer recalls several instances in which Temple had publicly displayed support for Wilkes during the controversy surrounding *North Briton* no. 45. The writer also attacks periodical journalism itself as a lowbrow partisan activity. He asks "Is there a single person, who has held any considerable employment in the state, amidst the late too frequent changes in our administration, who has not been the subject of the Monitor's dulness and malignity" (7). The writer avows that *The Monitor* unfairly targets a plethora of government officials with dull, malign satire. He goes on to assert that *The North Briton* is much worse, stating "the Monitor, when compared with the North-Briton, seems to have as little intention as capacity to do mischief" (7).

The article proceeds to attack Wilkes's character, accusing him of profligacy. The epistle writer maligns Wilkes's conduct, recounting "his father had amassed a considerable fortune, which [Wilkes] soon squandered away in the lewdest excesses of riot and dissipation" (9). The early scandal of the Wilkes and Liberty affair surrounded *North Briton* no. 45 and its unbridled criticism of the king and the ministry. However, Wilkes's lewdness and "excesses of riot and dissipation" became the focus of the scandal as his opponents presented his earlier publication *An Essay on Woman* and details of his roguish private life to public scrutiny. As Wilkes received accusations of libertinism and dissipation, he manipulated his public image to present these qualities as a reflection of his honesty, and exposed the same follies in many of his Tory accusers. Wilkes directed public attention away from his reputation as a rake by caricaturing the hypocrisy of the Tory establishment which censured Wilkes and the opposition despite the immoral reputation of high-ranking Tory officials.

*North Briton* no. 45 demonstrates the increasing political engagement of the public as Wilkes, a radical opponent of the government, expressed his views in the public sphere,

precipitating an extra-political movement when the government precluded a political debate. As the king's speech which Wilkes protests occurred at the closure of Parliament, the Whigs aligned with Wilkes, Temple, and Pitt had no opportunity to express opposition in the House of Commons. Wilkes instead resumed his anti-Bute publication to register opposition to Prime Minister Grenville before the public. The public responded by rioting during Wilkes's imprisonment, and publishing Wilkite panegyrics like Lady Temple's "Jewel in the Tower." Anti-Wilkes publications such as the *London Chronicle* respond to Wilkes's supporters, creating a political dialogue in the public sphere. Wilkes would proceed to empower the public further by advocating for democratic reform in various levels of public office, as he evaded the government's effort to exclude him by expulsion, arrest, and imprisonment.

### Section 3: *An Essay on Woman*

Wilkes's publication of *An Essay on Woman* in May 1763 contributed further scandal to the Wilkes and Liberty affair as the scurrilous tone of the poem supported the Tories' accusations of libertinism and profligacy against Wilkes. Wilkes's reputation for libertinism reveals a distinctive anomaly in the values of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century middle class. The perception of Wilkes as a writer of bawdy verse ought to have been offensive to his urban, bourgeois supporters who associated libertinism with the aristocracy. However, Wilkes manipulated public opinion by presenting his irreverence as ingenuous in contrast to the hypocrisy of Tory aristocrats, who assumed public moral superiority despite their private libertinism. The Tories' attempt to cast Wilkes as a profligate who was unfit to hold public office was unsuccessful, and Wilkes's supporters pardoned his profanity while denouncing the moral hypocrisy of his accusers. In *An Essay on Woman*, Wilkes caricatures aristocratic libertinism, contributing to a public campaign exposing the moral dissolution of prominent Tories.

Wilkes collaborated with Thomas Potter, who preceded him as MP for Aylesbury, on the parody of Pope's *Essay on Man* in 1754. A court ruling later called it "disgusting to every virtuous ear."<sup>4</sup> The text began as a private publication circulated to the members of the Knights of Sir Francis of Wycombe, including Potter, Wilkes, and Lord Sandwich, who later prosecuted Wilkes for the publication. During the controversy of *North Briton* no. 45, the ministry discovered Wilkes's authorship of the *Essay* and attempted to use it to disgrace Wilkes and the Whigs. In his introduction to *An Essay on Woman*, Cash recounts that the bailiffs who ransacked Wilkes's house after the publication of *North Briton* no. 45 also seized the manuscript of *An Essay on Woman*. Cash states that "[t]he manuscript probably was returned" after Wilkes's acquittal, "it being no crime to own a pornographic poem which satirizes a bishop. But it would be a crime to publish it, and the ministers had good evidence that Wilkes would eventually print it" (*Essay* 57). The ministry waited for Wilkes to find an opportunity to publish the poem, which parodies Pope and satirizes Bishop Warburton.

*An Essay on Woman* is significant to Wilkes's transformative emergence in the public sphere, as the privately circulated text became part of the evidence which the Tories used in their attempt to discredit Wilkes. Thomas affirms that "[t]he *Essay* was intended only for private circulation [...] before it achieved public notoriety in 1763, when it was used as a character assassination of Wilkes for attacking the King's government" (4). *An Essay on Woman* and *North Briton* no. 45 contributed to Wilkes's prolonged emergence as a public figure, as the ministry continued to use these texts to support the charges against Wilkes five years after their publication. Thomas recounts that, in the summer of 1768, "Wilkes was given ten months in prison for the *North Briton*, because he had been two months in gaol already, and twelve months

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<sup>4</sup> Cash records that Justice Sir Joseph Yates made this pronouncement during Wilkes's sentencing in June 1768 (*Wilkes* 226). Both Cash and Thomas recount that Wilkes casually picked his teeth as Yates sentenced him.

for the *Essay on Woman*, the sentences to run consecutively” (87). During Wilkes’s prosecution, the public had access to the texts of *North Briton* no. 45 and *An Essay on Woman*, discovering the agency to reflect on Wilkes’s reputation outside the judgement of the government and the courts. Rudé argues that, while the government condemned Wilkes after the publication of the *Essay*, “Wilkes’s supporters among ‘the middling and inferior set of people’ were not so easily swayed from their loyalties” (33). He describes a public demonstration against the prosecution of Wilkes in the House of Lords in which “a large crowd of Londoners, ‘to the number of 500 and more’, gathered at the entrance of Cornhill, [and] pelted the sheriffs, Thomas Harley and Richard Blunt, with ‘hard pieces of wood and dirt’” (34). Rudé emphasizes that “Wilkes might well feel encouraged by such demonstrations of support” (34).

Wilkes’s supporters viewed the obscenity of *An Essay on Woman* as a satire directed at the Tories who persecuted Wilkes for his irreverent public expressions of opposition to the government. Wilkes used obscenity to contrive an irreverent persona in the public sphere which was more amiable to his supporters than the hidden libertinism of the Tories and the aristocracy. Wilkes and Potter’s *Essay on Woman* uses conventions of Scriblerian satire, such as stylistic parody and satiric editorial notes, to reinterpret Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man* (1733) as a work of pornography to caricature the moral hypocrisy of the Tory establishment. The full title of Pope’s poem is *An Essay on Man, or a Philosophical Enquiry into his Nature and End, his Passions and Pursuits*. The overarching conceit of Wilkes and Potter’s *Essay on Woman* replaces Pope’s philosophical reflections on human nature and society with a parodic discussion of sexuality. This satirical reversal ridiculed prominent Tory thinkers and literary figures including Pope and Henry St. John Bolingbroke. The contrast of irreverence and hypocrisy which

vindicated Wilkes in his contention with the Tory government appears in the scandal surrounding the Knights of Sir Francis, which is the focus of the next section.

Wilkes's authorship of *North Briton* no. 45 was a contentious legal issue, but his connection to the salacious *Essay on Woman* was clearer, although he was a co-author with Thomas Potter. Potter, a Whig MP who had previously held Wilkes's seat in Aylesbury, was a figure of profanity and license, whose scandals often eclipsed Wilkes's alleged sedition and profligacy.<sup>5</sup> Cash affirms in his introduction to the text that "Potter's chief part is as author of the 'Essay on Woman' proper, the parody of the 'Essay on Man.' The rest, or most of it, was written by Wilkes" (28). The *Essay on Woman* includes a long poem in three "Epistles" (the main body of text written by Potter), and an introduction and collection of shorter poems written by Wilkes. Despite Potter's reputed libertinism, Wilkes was responsible for most of the text of *An Essay on Woman*, including the shorter paratextual imitations of Pope which are arguably more profane because they more directly satirize religion; Cash avers that "[t]he shorter poems are the most blasphemous" (33). These accompanying short poems take the form of prayers or religious odes and graphically replace their address to spiritual concepts with sexual imagery. For example, Wilkes imitates Pope's spiritual ode "The Dying Christian to His Soul," in "The Dying Lover to His Prick." The *Essay* also includes copious notes that Wilkes and Potter wrote from the perspective of Bishop William Warburton.

Wilkes and Potter's parody of Pope commences with their replacement of Pope's dedication to Henry St. John Bolingbroke with a dedication to the sex worker Fanny Murray. The *Essay*'s dedication to Murray, one of Wilkes's contributions to the project, appears on the

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<sup>5</sup> The *History of Parliament* records that Potter "was said to have been responsible for plunging his young friend Wilkes into debt" though it also asserts that "accusations that he was prone to Satanism misunderstand and grossly exaggerate the character of [...] Hellfire club, of which he was a prominent member."

title page alongside the names of Bishop Warburton and various Scriblerian personae as authors and contributors. The title page declares the main author to be “Pego<sup>6</sup> Borewell, Esq.” Cash notes the name Borewell “must have evoked that of Welbore Ellis [...] currently serving as secretary at war and sitting in the House of Commons with Wilkes as the second representative for Aylesbury” (128).

Wilkes’s role as writer of the title page is evident as the paratext alludes to Wilkes’s parliamentary colleague in the borough of Aylesbury. Ellis is also a likely opponent for Wilkes as he held the portfolio of secretary at war while Wilkes voiced his opposition to the Tory and Grenvillite positions on resolving the Seven Years War. This fictional author’s name exemplifies an instance in which the *Essay on Woman* was an opportunity for Wilkes to articulate political opposition in the genre of bawdy satire. Wilkes not only impugns Ellis by associating him with the *Essay*, but the name Borewell suggests that Ellis, well-known for his oratory, bored his listeners well in the House of Commons. Below the name of the fictional author, Wilkes includes the pseudo-Latin names of contributors, adopting a Scriblerian convention and often using bawdy puns like “Rogerus Cunaeus” (which Cash translates as “Roger de Cunt” [128]). Wilkes cites Warburton’s real name in the acknowledgement “A Commentary by the Rev. Dr. Warburton” (85), continuing his practice of identifying satirical targets by name and shielding the author with a pseudonym which Wilkes used in *The North Briton*.

The voice of Mr. North Briton resonates in Wilkes’s “Advertisement” to *An Essay on Woman* as the editor presents the text to the public, satirizing the lofty poetic figures of Pope and the former Poet Laureate Colley Cibber.<sup>7</sup> Wilkes presents a trope of modesty by granting the

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<sup>6</sup> Cash notes “pego” as “a cant term for penis”

<sup>7</sup> Pope had already notably satirized Cibber in the *Dunciad* (1728), and Wilkes and Potter continue his challenge of Cibber’s literary authority.

reader authority to judge the value of the speaker's ideas, as he did when presenting his opposition to the ministry in *The North Briton*. Wilkes's fictitious editor recounts that Colley Cibber avowed Pope to be the true author of *Essay on Woman*, asserting "The author of the *Essay on Man*, according to the testimony of Mr. Colley Cibber, the late Laureat [sic], made also an *Essay on Woman*" (87). The editor submits however that Pope's authorship "must [...] be left to the gentle reader to determine, whether such a fact can be believed on such slender authority" (87). The editor carefully absolves himself of the authorship of this bawdy satire, and attributes it equivocally to Cibber or Pope. He proceeds to question Cibber's authority by saying "Poets are known to deal in fictions; and this gentleman is so much a poet, that he may justly be suspected of having given up the reins to his fiery imagination" (87). This statement satirizes poets, reminding us that, despite this foray into poetic satire, Wilkes is still a journalist, who deals in reality. The poem proceeds to upend the significance of Pope's *Essay on Man* by trivializing its sincere existential themes.

The notes from Warburton's perspective libelously connect a Bishop of the Church of England to Wilkes and Potter's ribald verse, and respond to a history of scandal and contention between Warburton and Potter. Cash describes Wilkes and Potter's separate motivations in their collaboration on *An Essay on Woman* by saying "Behind the book lies Potter's personal hatred for Warburton and the affair he had with his wife. Wilkes, on the other hand, had little animus against Warburton [...] for him the writing of the *Essay* was a game, a sort of sophomoric literary exercise" (Cash, *Essay* 19). Potter began an affair with Warburton's wife Gertrude in 1754, and later correspondence by Wilkes, Charles Churchill, and Horace Walpole avows that Potter fathered Gertrude's son Ralph in 1756. Beyond the obvious tension caused by this cuckoldry, Potter and Warburton had further animus based on Warburton's publications and



position in the Church of England. Potter's father had been Archbishop of Canterbury, his brother an Archdeacon. Warburton was an ecclesial controversialist who attacked Potter's father in print on Church doctrine. Potter struck back by ridiculing Warburton's edition of Pope's *Essay on Man* (Warburton published editions of Pope and Shakespeare in addition to his doctrinal pamphlets). Wilkes and Potter presented Warburton as the author of the commentary on *An Essay on Woman*, using the Scriblerian practice of contributing further material to a satire by adding parodic editorial notes.

Wilkes and Potter use the editorial persona of Warburton to contribute to the *Essay on Woman*'s translation of religious (or philosophical) topics into sexual imagery. Warburton's position as a Bishop and the theological tone of Wilkes's footnotes contribute to this satirical thematic reversal. The first note ascribed to Warburton adopts a theological tone to claim that "[p]hilosophers agree that the two great duties Nature has enjoined all her children, are *to preserve the individual, and to propagate the Species*" (97). While the poet-speaker provokes humour through the contrast of obscene language and close imitation of Pope's form, Warburton retains polite diction in his annotations. The separate voices of Warburton and the poet-speaker create a contrast between the poem and its editorial notes contributing to the overarching expression of parody in the *Essay*. Warburton's first note accompanies the opening lines of the poem in which the poet-speaker declares that "life can little more supply / Than just a few good Fucks and then we die" (3). Warburton adopts a morally didactic tone to justify this claim as he refers to the "great duty [...] *to propagate the Species*."

The satirical didacticism persists in Warburton's later note describing the foremost "[v]irtue of cleanliness," and affirming "Lewdness is only the second" (113). This statement satirizes Warburton's authority as a Bishop to make moral pronouncements about virtue and

vice. Warburton's reference to the virtue of lewdness precedes his description of marriage, the final note to the main text of *An Essay on Woman*. This concluding annotation states "Matrimony is a holy State, signifying unto us [...] the mystical Union that is between Christ and the Church. Now what has this to do with Fucking?" (113). This statement displays a sudden transition from religious doctrine to obscenity, characterizing Warburton as a persona satirically encompassing religious didacticism and profanity. This transition also echoes the Scriblerian practice of emphasizing bodily functions which are absent in idealized imagery of the mind and spirit.<sup>8</sup>

The *Essay on Woman* exemplifies the satirical device of parody, provoking humour through its closeness to the form and diction of the object of satire. In Cash's introduction to *An Essay on Woman*, he argues that the poem's "comedy arises in part from its audacity, but also its close, irreverent parody of high-principled piety" (31). As the *Essay on Woman* closely reflects Pope's *Essay on Man*, Cash identifies it as an *imitation*, which he defines as a "parodic mode in which a poet freely appropriates words, phrases, images and forms of the original, and uses them to express themes which complement the original, or mock it" (32). Wilkes and Potter's *Essay* is a meticulously close imitation of Pope, using the satirical device of trivializing—in this case sexualizing—sincere or solemn literary expressions. Cash compares the *Essay* to obscene satires by Rochester which closely imitate the forms of Waller and Dryden, referring to the precedent of Restoration satire in which "poetic pornography made a joke of verse forms which had been a vehicle for lofty images or tales of noble deeds" (32). Cash describes writers of similar imitations during the Restoration by saying "These poets delighted to bring low the high, but rarely did they

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<sup>8</sup> *An Essay on Woman* reflects Swift's scatological description of the Brobdingnagians in *Gulliver's Travels* which emphasizes private or offensive physical characteristics, and Pope's vivid depiction of vomit as a reflection of popular poetry in the *Dunciad*.

parody an entire poem [by contrast], *An Essay on Woman* is an exacting parody of unusual length—ninety-four lines” (32) which retain Pope’s rhyme scheme, meter, and often diction.

Cash describes the ambitious aim of Wilkes and Potter’s satire by asserting that the *Essay* is “not the work of a gentleman spoofing the verse of a friend or rival in the same circle [as in Scriblerian satire]. It undertakes to bring low the most respected poet and perhaps the most respected poem of the age” (32). Wilkes and Potter “bring low” the respected exemplars of Pope and *An Essay on Man* by replacing Pope’s exalted philosophical reflection with a central, but publicly suppressed aspect of life. Cash presents Pope as a revered poet and his *Essay on Man* as a paradigm of correctness, suitable objects of satire for provocateurs such as Wilkes and Potter. However, Pope is distinctive as an object of satire because he was, himself, a satirist. Indeed, Pope contributed to the corpus of Tory satire against Robert Walpole in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and his moral prescriptivism in *An Essay on Man* and other satires censured corruption in the Whig government of the time. In her article “Pope’s Moral, Political and Cultural Combat,” Carole Fabricant argues that Pope’s expression of moral didacticism was a component of his political satire. She contends that “Pope’s concern with self and his habit of encoding ideological issues in moral terms help to shape a body of poems whose polemical stance depends [...] precisely and exclusively on the exalted moral character of the protesting speaker” (47). The poet-speaker of *An Essay on Man* exemplifies the moral ascendancy inherent in satirizing corrupt authority figures as he invites his addressee to explore the noble paths of religion and philosophy.

Pope presents a further expression of moral authority as he dedicates the poem to Bolingbroke, a revered figure in political thought, and an outspoken Tory. Fabricant connects Pope’s presentation of moral authority to political satire by saying “The fact that the terms

‘corruption’ and ‘virtue’ were, within the context of the times, highly charged political labels, appearing regularly in Opposition propaganda to denote the pro- and anti-Walpole camps respectively, highlights the subjective and arbitrary nature of Pope’s moral categories” (47). Pope’s *Essay on Man* uses satire to affirm an ideological position and reprimand corruption among the governing Whigs. Pope uses the “moral categories” of political corruption and philosophical detachment to assert himself within an arbitrary conflict between Whigs and Tories. The tone of the poem is Horatian because the speaker affirms the natural order, and extols the virtues of humanity while identifying some instances of corruption.

Pope’s speaker asserts that conflict is a necessary aspect of society which imitates the order of the natural world. He argues, “Better for us, perhaps, it might appear, / Were there all harmony [...] But all subsists by elemental strife; and passions are the elements of life” (165-170). The poet-speaker justifies the conflicts and factions of human society, averring that strife and passions are constituent to human life although harmony appears preferable. The speaker posits a description of conflict within an image of natural order by presenting the couplet “The gen’ral order, since the whole began, / Is kept in nature, and is kept in man” (171). This description uses parallelism to depict the similitude of nature and humanity after avowing conflict as an inherent aspect of human life. The successive structure of these statements suggests that disagreement and debate are natural aspects of human interaction. The poet-speaker’s discussion of conflict validates the discursive structure of politics, characterizing opposition as an element of human nature.

While *An Essay on Man* does not directly impugn Walpole and the Whigs, Pope depicts their political corruption by using historical archetypes. The speaker refers to Caesar and Borgia (156) to illustrate monocratic transgressions against the social order, presenting the image of

“fierce ambition in a Caesar’s mind” (159). The parallel to Walpole was apparent to 18<sup>th</sup>-century readers, as opponents depicted Walpole as arrogant and ambitious, and satirists drew comparisons between the Prime Minister and historical criminals and despots. These allusions contribute to Pope’s invective against corruption and transgressions against his concept of a natural political order. Wilkes and Potter assume *An Essay on Man* as the object of their satirical imitation, ridiculing Pope’s assertion of morality, and adopting the form of a notable satire against political corruption. Wilkes and Potter position *An Essay on Woman* within a satirical counter-canon by imitating Pope’s form and satirizing his reflection on the order of human society and the natural world.

In the main text of *An Essay on Woman*, Potter immediately reverses Pope’s sincere metaphysical expression by presenting Fanny Murray as the addressee, continuing to satirize Pope’s dedication of *An Essay on Man* to Henry St. John Bolingbroke. This satirical reimagining replaces Bolingbroke, a philosopher and Tory politician, with a figure overtly connected to sex. Fanny Murray’s reputation as a sex worker and the anatomical pun of her first name contribute to this persona. Potter’s opening couplet declares the invitation “Awake, my Fanny, leave all meaner things, / This morn shall prove what raptures swiving brings” (1), imitating Pope’s opening invocation “Awake my St. John! leave all meaner things / To low ambition and the pride of Kings” (96).

Potter’s first couplet in the main text of *An Essay on Woman* retains the structure of Pope’s opening line, but distinctively alters the meaning and syntax of line two. This alteration is uncharacteristic in the nearness of Potter’s imitation as it replaces an enjambment with a couplet comprising two independent clauses, and dispenses with the objects in Pope’s second line, “low ambition, and the Pride of Kings” (2). This alteration allows the poet-speaker to create an

immediate transition from direct imitation of Pope to the overarching theme of sexuality. Potter's first line places Murray in the same syntactic position as Bolingbroke, imitating the familiarity of Pope's speaker by using the first name of his addressee. This contributes to the atmosphere of intimate conversation in which Pope's speaker engages in philosophical speculations which Wilkes and Potter satirize with lewd imitation. The second line of *An Essay on Woman* alters Pope's diction and syntax to introduce Wilkes and Potter's conceit in which sex takes the place of religion and philosophy. The poet-speaker uses the word *swive* for the first time in line two, introducing Wilkes and Potter's diction which includes several similarly profane words of Anglo-Saxon origin. Line two not only illustrates Wilkes and Potter's thematic reversal of Pope's poem, but uses bawdy language to introduce the speaker's irreverent persona.

Wilkes and Potter chose Murray as both the addressee and the dedicatee of the *Essay on Woman*, supplanting Bolingbroke, whose persona embodies philosophical authority and prescriptive morality. Henry St. John Bolingbroke was an influential conservative thinker who influenced Prime Minister Bute and Tory ideology throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. While an MP, Bolingbroke contributed to the periodical the *Craftsman*, in which he articulated his support for the Tories and the Church of England. He also supported the first Jacobite Rebellion for Stuart succession, making him a likely satirical target for Wilkes. However, Bolingbroke was not a contemporary political figure at the time Wilkes and Potter wrote the *Essay on Woman*, as he died in 1751. Bolingbroke is not a direct target of Wilkes and Potter's satire like Warburton or Ellis. He is, like Pope and Cibber, a figure embodying literary and philosophical authority, whom Wilkes and Potter satirize in their imitation. As Cash describes Wilkes and Potter's endeavour to "bring low the most respected poet of the age" (32) by replacing Pope's metaphysical

speculations with sexual imagery, the authors also “bring low” a resonant Tory thinker by recasting Pope’s addressee, Bolingbroke, with Fanny Murray.

The speaker of Pope’s *Essay on Man* begins his contemplations by inviting Bolingbroke to consider the meaning of life, saying “Let us (since Life can little more supply / Than just to look about us and to die)” (3). Wilkes and Potter reimagine this philosophical invocation, minutely changing Pope’s diction to create a bawdy couplet. Wilkes and Potter’s speaker addresses Miss Murray, saying “Let us (since life can little more supply / Than just a few good Fucks and then we die)” (3). In this transformed couplet, Wilkes and Potter’s poem introduces its overarching replacement of the metaphysical exploration of life and humanity with the physical exploration of sex. In Pope’s *Essay on Man*, the poet-speaker emphasizes the importance of existential speculations, characterizing this meditative activity as the act “just to look about us.” This commonplace phrasing characterizes spiritual and metaphysical contemplation as central to everyday life. Wilkes and Potter’s poet-speaker restates Pope’s description of philosophical contemplation, re-ascribing the significance and ubiquity of this act to sexuality by replacing people’s rational ability “to look about us” with the opportunity for “a few good fucks.”

Wilkes and Potter’s poet-speaker goes on to provide an example of his erotic reinterpretation of the existential objective of *An Essay on Man* by comparing the universe to a woman’s petticoats. This comparison also exemplifies the minute parallelism of Potter’s formal imitation of Pope. Wilkes and Potter’s speaker presents an extended metaphor of the hoops of a petticoat, replacing Pope’s description of empirically examining the universe. Pope’s text describes human beings’ proclivity for understanding the universe as the poet-speaker declares “He, who thro’ vast immensity can pierce, / See worlds on worlds compose one universe” (23). Potter rephrases this couplet as “He who the Hoops immensity can pierce, Dart thro’ the

whalebone Folds vast Universe” (23). The first line of this couplet closely reflects Pope’s diction, while the second line displays a thematic parallelism, using the metaphor of the whalebone hoops of a petticoat to represent Pope’s concentric image of the universe as “worlds upon worlds.” This couplet exemplifies Wilkes and Potter’s conceptual reversal in which they posit sexuality as the foremost human proclivity as Pope had described philosophy and empiricism. While Pope presents an image of the opacity of the universe which people may decipher through observation and philosophical investigation, Wilkes and Potter present sexuality as a world to be explored, just as Pope’s poet-speaker explores human nature.

Wilkes and Potter’s *Essay on Woman* is a satire with manifold targets. The overarching imitation of Pope overturns the respectability of a revered work in the canon of 18<sup>th</sup>-century verse. Throughout the text, there are instances of Scriblerian satire which engage Pope’s own satirical conventions. There are notable divergences from the Scriblerian voice in Wilkes’s “Advertisement,” which bears a closer resemblance to the incisive satire of the *North Briton*. The *Essay on Woman* is an example of literary imitation which evokes satire through its nearness to the diction and imagery of its object. We can observe further instances of satire in the minutiae of the poem’s dedication and fictional author, revealing Wilkes and Potter’s expression of opposition to their antagonists, Bolingbroke (an influential Tory) and Ellis (Wilkes’s contemporary political adversary). *The Essay on Woman* demonstrates the function of satire to “bring low the high,” in Cash’s description. Cash refers to the original composition of the *Essay* as a vindictive jab for Potter and an amusing exercise for Wilkes, but the publication later became more consequential during Wilkes’ trial and ascent into the public sphere. The profane tone of the *Essay* and its depiction of libertinism functioned as a caricature of Wilkes’s Tory



accusers when they presented the text to the government and the public as an indictment of Wilkes's character.

Wilkes and Potter's satirical challenge to literary authority in *An Essay on Woman* is adjacent to political opposition. As a voice of opposition under the government of the Tories and the Grenvillite Whigs, Wilkes satirized prominent Tories including the members of the Knights of Sir Francis, or the Medmenham Monks, an aristocratic enclave which was the audience of the *Essay* during its first circulation. Wilkes satirized the hypocrisy of the Knights of Sir Francis, who valorized libertinism despite holding positions of authority in the Tory establishment and prosecuting Wilkes for obscenity and seditious libel. Though Wilkes was peripherally associated with the Knights of Sir Francis, a "Hell-Fire club," he publicly denounced the more senior members to expose the hypocrisy of the aristocracy and the Tory establishment. During Wilkes's trial and imprisonment, he appeared to the public as an irreverent provocateur whose candour was in direct contrast to the hypocrisy of his opponents in the government, particularly the most prominent Knights of Sir Francis: Sir Francis Dashwood and the Earl of Sandwich.

#### Section 4: The Knights of Sir Francis

In addition to succeeding Potter as MP for Aylesbury, Wilkes assumed Potter's position in the Knights of Sir Francis of Wycombe when Potter stepped down in poor health. The Knights of Sir Francis were a secretive club of 12 inner members ("apostles"), and several peripheral members, founded by Sir Francis Dashwood, master of West Wycombe. The Knights of Sir Francis have become known as the "Hell-Fire Club" for their avowed irreligion and profanity. Although this irreputable club espoused a scandalous "combination of irreligion and sexual freedom" (Cash, *Essay* 27), it included members—such as Potter, Wilkes, Dashwood, and Sandwich—who held positions of authority in public life. The disrepute of each of these Knights

of Sir Francis varied considerably. Potter never strove for the appearance of propriety, and his presence in the Hell-Fire Club is not among the most salacious anecdotes surrounding him. Wilkes's association with the Hell-Fire Club certainly contributed to his rebellious public image. However, Lords Dashwood and Sandwich reached highly respectable positions in government despite the profane values and rituals of the Hell-Fire Club. Sandwich even prosecuted Wilkes in the House of Lords over the publication of *An Essay on Woman*, a text he likely read privately when Wilkes circulated it among his fellow Knights of Sir Francis.

While the Knights of Sir Francis inspired widespread public anxiety and disapproval, their rituals upheld the authority of the aristocracy and the Church of England by ridiculing Catholicism. Furthermore, the "irreligious" rites the Knights observed were not atheistic, but reaffirmed the dogmatic premises of Christianity. Even the scandalous *Essay on Woman* exemplifies the club's commitment to the religious establishment by satirizing Pope, a Catholic, and Warburton, a controversialist. Accounts of the Knights of Sir Francis assert that their rituals did not mock the established Church, but mocked Catholic rituals considered superstitious by the Protestant establishment. Cash asserts "The antics of the Hell-Fire Club mocked Roman Catholicism, the religion of England's enemies" (*Essay* 28).

In retaliation for an open letter<sup>9</sup> in which Wilkes exposed the excesses of the Knights of Sir Francis, Dashwood and Sandwich presented Wilkes and Potter's *Essay on Woman* for public condemnation in 1768. Dashwood and Sandwich's domineering campaign to discredit Wilkes emphasized the issue of public and private expression in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The two lords conspired with King George, no friend of Wilkes, to discredit Wilkes publicly and remove him

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<sup>9</sup> Wilkes wrote to John Almon about the rituals of the Knights of Sir Francis in 1768. Almon published the letter in *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit* (1768).

from office.<sup>10</sup> They conducted a two-pronged assault on Wilkes in Parliament and the House of Lords. Prime Minister Grenville enlisted Lord North, later a Tory Prime Minister, to lead the campaign against Wilkes in the House of Commons. The House of Commons renewed their scrutiny of *North Briton* no. 45, while the House of Lords prosecuted Wilkes based on the *Essay on Woman*.

Sandwich led the inquisition against Wilkes in the House of Lords, with the help of Bishop Warburton. Grenville arrived at the opening of Parliament with a letter from King George charging Wilkes with “seditious and dangerous libel” (Cash, *Wilkes* 150). Wilkes’s antagonists again arraigned him for the subversive assertions of *The North Briton*, returning Wilkes to the public scrutiny he had escaped through parliamentary privilege in 1763. Cash narrates this new precedent in which the government revived a matter settled by the courts, and its unjust implications by saying “In effect, the king’s letter asked the House of Commons to function as an appeals court [...] The complacency with which the House received this extraordinary commission bespeaks both the moral power of the throne and the spinelessness of the majority members who had sold their loyalty” (*Wilkes* 150).

While the House of Commons renewed its suppression of *North Briton* no. 45, Bishop Warburton complained formally in the House of Lords, that Wilkes libelled him in *An Essay on Woman*, allowing Sandwich to present the poem for the lords’ condemnation. Cash narrates these eventful proceedings by saying “Bishop Warburton lifted his tall bony self and turned to the House: his privilege had been violated and his person libelled in an obscene poem called ‘An Essay on Woman.’ Lord Sandwich rose to make the case, which he did by reading the poem aloud” (*Wilkes* 151). According to Cash, “pandemonium” followed as some lords swooned and

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<sup>10</sup> Cash, *Wilkes* 146-47

others snickered, Lyttleton<sup>11</sup> “nearly fainted,” the bishops “sat stonyfaced,” and “there were cries of ‘Go on’” (*Wilkes* 151-52). This description depicts a scene of the chaotic confusion of public and private expression, and the hypocritical assertion of moral authority.

Cash asserts the hypocrisy of Sandwich’s moralizing campaign in the House of Lords, declaring the irony that “[t]he charge of obscenity was being made by Lord Sandwich, the most notorious foulmouthed rake of the day” (*Wilkes* 152).<sup>12</sup> Sandwich’s reputation as a member of the Knights of Sir Francis contributed to the public image of his hypocrisy as a figure of moral didacticism and a deputy of the king’s moral authority. This “foulmouthed rake” was a poor choice to answer Warburton’s complaint of libel by Wilkes and Potter, as his reading of *An Essay on Woman* to the House of Lords was a ludicrous exhibition. There is a particularly conspicuous note of hypocrisy in Sandwich’s reading of *An Essay on Woman*, as when Sandwich stood in the House of Lords and quoted Wilkes and Potter’s poet-speaker to say “Awake my Fanny! [...] This morn shall prove what raptures swiving brings” (1), he addressed Fanny Murray, who had been his own mistress.

While Wilkes was enjoying the reputation of a hero of the unfranchised middle class and a defender of civil liberties, his opponents used the public exposure of an *Essay on Woman* in 1768 to malign Wilkes and reveal his membership in the Hell-Fire Club. No scandal adhered permanently to Wilkes. According to Rudé, “The *Essay on Woman*, though it had not finally discredited Wilkes, had proved disastrous to the reputation of his pursuers” (36). Sandwich and Dashwood’s moralizing campaign against Wilkes despite their prominence in the Hell-Fire Club revealed the hypocrisy of the Tory government to the public, as there was widespread anxiety

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<sup>11</sup> George Lyttelton was Lord Commissioner of the Treasury. His sensitivity is somewhat ironic as he is the dedicatee of Fielding’s *Tom Jones*.

<sup>12</sup> Sandwich also inherited his reputation as a rake, as his great-grandfather and namesake was John Wilmot, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Rochester.

about aristocratic “hell-fire clubs” throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Although the Knights of Sir Francis were far less subversive than the demonic pretences of the Hell-Fire Club suggest, they embodied qualities of aristocratic idleness and excess, which the middle-class public resented.

Although the Knights of Sir Francis of Wycombe are known commonly as the “Hell-Fire Club,” they never self-applied this name, and there were many hell-fire clubs among the British upper class in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The term “hell-fire club” describes secretive societies which espoused the values of irreverence and sexual freedom, and often practiced occult or mock-religious rituals. While the rituals of the Knights of Sir Francis were mainly comic reversals of Catholic rites, they provoked public anxiety over immorality and blasphemy. In *The Hell-Fire Clubs: Sex, Satanism, and Secret Societies*, Evelyn Lord argues that “[t]he hell-fire clubs represented an enduring fascination with the forbidden fruit offered by the Devil, and a continuing flirtation with danger and the unknown” (xx). These clubs were exclusively male and upper-class, and rumours of hell-fire clubs within the aristocracy contributed to the public image of aristocrats as dilettantish rakes who flouted morality and the public good. By the 1720s, hell-fire clubs became a popular anxiety in Britain, as the public saw them as “high-born Devil-worshippers who mocked the established Church and religion, and allegedly supped with Satan” (Lord xix).

Despite their reputation as a blasphemous cult, the Knights of Sir Francis were a club founded on the free, communal exchange of ideas exemplary of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century public sphere. Lord connects the proliferation of hell-fire clubs in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the culture of sociability in 18<sup>th</sup>-century English coffee houses. She examines the emergence of small, secret societies based on shared values and rituals as a diversification of the public sphere in 18<sup>th</sup>-century England in which people gathered to disseminate ideas outside the confines of religious and civil

institutions. Lord contends that “the hell-fire clubs were definitely an eighteenth-century phenomenon [...] due to an institution that we in the twenty-first century are very familiar with – the coffee-house” (xxiii). The coffee house was a setting of discursive exchange that Habermas cites as an example of the increasing opportunity for individuals to contribute to public opinion and participate in the public sphere. Lord states that the coffee houses “provided a space away from home and the hurly-burly of the tavern, the Houses of Parliament and the Stock Exchange” (xxiii). This description reflects the free exchange of ideas in the Habermasian public sphere of 18<sup>th</sup>-century England which Neil Saccamano describes as a society of “private persons able to articulate publicly their apolitical social needs and their rules of interaction in opposition to church and state control” (687).

Although the coffee houses provided a setting for apolitical conversations, politicians took advantage of these opportunities for the free exchange of ideas in their private lives, outside Parliament and the House of Lords. Thus, the coffee houses were an additional estate for political discussion outside the government. While the coffee-houses were publicly accessible, the secrecy of the hell-fire clubs provided an additional space outside formal political discourses in which public figures could gather inconspicuously. The freedom of expression in these concealed discursive communities reflects the public anxiety over their irreligion, as the hell-fire clubs allowed conversation and publication outside the authority of Church and State. Lord suggests that coffee-house conversations revealed ideological connections and, “from there it was but a short step to form an exclusive club which had a recognized membership and banned outsiders” (xxiii). For politicians who joined these clubs in private life, their meetings presented an opportunity to articulate opposition outside formal political proceedings.

Wilkes followed Potter into a club with a reputation for profanity, allowing him to pursue his unbridled expression of opposition through private satirical publications, a form with greater license than his radical journalism in the *North Briton*. The Knights of Sir Francis began as a community of different political affiliations representing the upper and middle classes. The members shared a distaste for the perceived puritanism of the lower classes. Despite the club's original diversity of political affiliation, ideological tensions between Wilkes and the Tory members Sandwich and Dashwood led to a public conflict and scandal. Wilkes was not a member of the aristocracy, and held less influence in government than Sandwich and Dashwood, both prominent Tories. The political differences among the Knights of Sir Francis eventually caused conflict and led to the public exposure of their rituals. The publications that emerged from Wilkes's conflict with Sandwich and Dashwood exaggerated the profanity of the club, and contribute to the enduring image of the Hell-Fire Club as a depraved secret society.

Letters by Wilkes and, later, Horace Walpole present the debauchery of the Knights of Sir Francis for public scrutiny, but the most sensational account appears in the novel *Chrysal* by the Irish writer Charles Johnstone. Lord suggests that Wilkes shared details of the practices of the Knights of Sir Francis with Johnstone.<sup>13</sup> Johnstone's veiled image of Wilkes and Sandwich vying for membership in the Knights of Sir Francis provides much of the resonant imagery of the club's excess and impiety. In the 1760s, Johnstone published *Chrysal, Or Adventures of a Guinea*. The novel's depiction of the activities of the Knights of Sir Francis contributed significantly to the club's sensational reputation. In his chapter on Johnstone in *On Novelists and Fiction*, Sir Walter Scott calls *Chrysal* a "Scandalous Chronicle of the time" (131). Scott describes Johnstone as a Juvenalian satirist who "drags into light vices and crimes, which arouse

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<sup>13</sup> Lord 99.

our horror and detestation” (132). As Wilkes’s political tension with Sandwich and Dashwood erupted into a public conflict, it exposed the vices and crimes of the aristocracy to the public. Scott describes Johnstone as a necessary censor in an age of debauchery, citing his portrayals of vice as cautionary examples. Writing in the 1820s, Scott asserts that in his time it is unlikely that the “wildest debaucheries venture to imitate the orgies of Medmenham Abbey,<sup>14</sup> painted by Johnstone in such horrible colours” (132).

*Chrysal* narrates the progress of a guinea coin as it changes hands, an instance of prosopopoeia which explores the ubiquity of currency in a capitalist public sphere. The guinea finds its way into the rakish hands of a man seeking admission to a secret society resembling the Knights of Sir Francis. While Johnstone’s depiction of the Knights of Sir Francis is fictional, he drew on Wilkes’s account of the club from private communication and an open letter<sup>15</sup> from Wilkes to John Almon. *Chrysal*, the narrating guinea, describes this club as a “society, formed of the highest persons, a burlesque imitation of the religious societies, which are instituted in other countries” (149). This description suggests that the burlesque rites of the Hell-Fire Club imitated Catholic rituals or other rites foreign to the Church of England. *Chrysal* also alludes to the high public offices held by club members like Dashwood and Sandwich by describing them as “the highest persons.” The guinea’s master during this sojourn resembles John Montagu, Lord Sandwich. Scott identifies Sandwich as a target of Johnstone’s censorious satire and describes him as “an open libertine” (136) embodying the excesses of a corrupt age.

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<sup>14</sup> Medmenham Abbey was the gathering place for the Knights of Sir Francis, also known as the Medmenham Monks.

<sup>15</sup> *Chrysal* went through two publications, first before Wilkes’s open letter describing the Knights of Sir Francis which Almon published in 1768, and again when Johnstone was able “to capitalize on Wilkes’ account” (Lord 97). I refer to the latter publication.



In a profane ritual, the guinea's current master vies for admission to the club with another initiate, resembling John Wilkes. Chrysal describes his master's antagonist by saying "The person, who had that day been his competitor [...] had such a flow of spirits, that it was impossible ever to be a moment dull in his company. His wit gave charms to every subject he spoke upon; and his humour displayed the foibles of mankind" (155). By all accounts, Wilkes was a persuasive, exuberant socialite. Chrysal describes Wilkes's reputation for wit and charm, referring also to the scathing irreverence of his satire and journalism as an ability to present "the foibles of mankind." The amiable Wilkes character loses in his contention with the guinea's master for admission to the Hell-Fire Club, and plays an iconic practical joke in retaliation. Chrysal adopts a more censorious tone by accusing the Wilkes character of spiteful, extravagant jests. This shift reflects Wilkes's reputation as a provocateur whose candour exceeds the boundaries of good humour and leads him to perform obnoxious jests. Chrysal alleges "His spirits were often stretched to extravagance to over-power competition. His humour was debased into buffoonery" (155). The most notable example of this buffoonery occurs as the Wilkes character dresses a baboon to resemble the devil and conceals it to surprise his adversary. In this jest, the jester attaches a cord to the lid of a chest in which he conceals the baboon, pulling it to release the creature upon the jestee during one of the club's rituals. Chrysal describes the reaction of the Hell-Fire Club members as genuine alarm at the apparition of a devil following their mock-religious invocations. He recounts, "Terrified out of their senses by this thought, they all roared out with one voice, *The Devil! the Devil!*" (156). The jestees' reaction to the baboon exemplifies Johnstone's satire against the fashionable immorality of the Knights of Sir Francis. Overcome, the character representing Sandwich entreats "'Spare me, gracious Devil! [...] spare a wretch who never was sincerely your servant! I sinned only from vanity of being in the fashion'"

(156). The jestee's plea before the baboon presents the Knights of Sir Francis as insincere dilettantes who adopted the pretense of devil-worship because irreligion was in fashion.

According to common sense, Evelyn Lord, and what she describes as "the logistics of hiding, dressing and putting a baboon in a chest" (105), the simian escapade never occurred. However, the episode provides a satirical image of the Hell-Fire Club, depicting its upper-class debauchery as an artifice mocking religion while profanity is in fashion. Chrysal's observation of the prank also characterizes Sandwich as a duplicitous buffoon and Wilkes as an unbridled satirist. Johnstone presents Sandwich as a hypocrite by depicting his terrified repentance upon the apparent result of a profane ritual. In reality, Sandwich demonstrated hypocrisy by adopting a persona of moral censure and indignation in his public conflict with Wilkes.

A more credible publication to expose the excesses of the Medmenham Friars was Wilkes's own letter to the journalist John Almon in 1768. The letter was a swipe at Wilkes's political opponents Dashwood and Sandwich. As the Wilkes character mocks the Hell-Fire Club in *Chrysal*, the real Wilkes described the Knights of Sir Francis in his letter to Almon. Almon published the letter in the collection *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit* (1768). Wilkes's letter "Curious Description of West Wycombe Church, &c" does not narrate the rituals of the Hell-Fire Club with the vivid imagery of *Chrysal*, but describes the provocative iconography of Dashwood's estate as a reflection of the debauchery of the Knights of Sir Francis. Wilkes suggests that drinking is a beloved practice at West Wycombe while describing the church's inscription, "memento." He avows, "I could not find the mori, or perhaps the other word was meri, from the practice as well as the precept of the noble lord" (43). The imperative statement "memento meri" translates as "Remember *wine*." Wilkes refers to Dashwood as a drunkard and indicates the reversal of religion and drunken revelry by asserting that his "conjecture, that the

other word on the outside must be meri, is farther strengthened [by Dashwood's practice] not of devotional, but of convivial rites" (43).

Wilkes provides an image of Dashwood's ritual mockery of Catholicism by describing a provocative portrait of Dashwood displayed at West Wycombe. In the portrait, Dashwood appears "in the habit of a Franciscan, kneeling before the Venus of the Medicis, his gloating eyes fixed, as in a trance, on what the modesty of nature seems most desirous to conceal" (44); he is also holding a flogger. The portrait Wilkes describes exemplifies the particular irreligion of Dashwood and the Knights of Sir Francis which profanely juxtaposes sexual and religious imagery, but carefully targets Catholicism. The portrait exoticizes the religion it ridicules, representing Dashwood as a Franciscan monk gazing at a provocative Italian statue. Nothing in the portrait is offensive to the Church of England. It was not subversive to the state religion to represent the Catholic clergy as lecherous. Wilkes suggests that this portrait of Dashwood was already commonly known, but asserts its relevance to the irreligion practiced at West Wycombe by arguing that Dashwood "keeps up the same public worship in the country, which he has been accustomed to in town" (44).

In a gesture of satirical circumlocution, Wilkes avows that he will not describe Medmenham Abbey, the setting of the rituals of the Knights of Sir Francis. He states that such a description would be inappropriate, emphasizing the secrecy of the Knights of Sir Francis. Following his suggestive depiction of the grounds of West Wycombe, Wilkes declares "I made afterwards a little tour of the celebrated abbey of Medmenham, the description of which I am sure would entertain you; but I am too fair a man to disclose to the public the English Eleusinian mysteries of that renowned convent" (46). This description conveys an image of the secretive rituals practiced at Medmenham Abbey through comparison to ancient Mystery Cults.

Specifically, Wilkes states that the Knights of Sir Francis practice an English imitation of the Eleusinian mysteries, celebrating Persephone. Rather than carry on his depiction of Dashwood as a drunkard by referring to the Dionysian mysteries, Wilkes alludes to the abduction of the young woman Persephone. This classical archetype illustrates the libertinism of the Knights of Sir Francis, characterizing club members as predatory to appeal to public anxieties around their belief in sexual freedom.

Wilkes left it to his fellow editor of *The North Briton*, Charles Churchill, to publish a direct description of Medmenham Abbey the following year. Churchill's letter on Medmenham Abbey appears in a subsequent publication of Almon's *New Foundling Hospital for Wit* in 1769. It begins with an epigraph indicting the libertinism of the Knights of Sir Francis. The epigraph begins "Whilst womanhood, in habit of a nun, / At Medmenham lies, by *backward* monks undone" (71), alluding to the libertine practices at Medmenham Abbey and the profanation of religious rituals. Churchill goes on to depict the anti-Catholic rituals of the Knights of Sir Francis in the description "Among other amusements, they had sometimes a mock celebration of the more ridiculous rites of the foreign religious orders among the Roman Catholics" (72). This presentation of the irreligion of the Knights of Sir Francis reveals a commonly held attitude toward Catholicism in 18<sup>th</sup>-century England excusing the ridicule of Catholic doctrine because it belongs to a foreign religion. Though Churchill's letter is a subversive indictment of Dashwood, a high-ranking government official, he alludes to the loyalty implicit in ridiculing Catholicism. Churchill tacitly impugns Dashwood by recounting that the Medmenham monks ridiculed "the Franciscans in particular, for the gentlemen had taken that title from the founder, Sir F— D—" (72). While Churchill uses the convention of obscuring the name of the figure he satirizes, he reveals Dashwood's first name by narrating that the club mocks the Franciscans, a namesake of

their founder. Dashwood was also identifiable as the master of West Wycombe, the setting of Medmenham Abbey.

Churchill refers to Wilkes's earlier avowal of the secrecy of Medmenham by asserting "No profane eye has dared to penetrate into the English Eleusinian mysteries of the *Chapter-Room*" (72). This statement uses the device of avoiding direct description to contrive an atmosphere of secrecy, referring again to the Eleusinian mysteries as a classical example of predatory libertinism. Churchill displays a further similarity to Wilkes's letter by describing an inscription on the entrance of Medmenham Abbey. Churchill recounts, "Over the grand entrance was the famous inscription on Rabelais's Abbey of Theleme, *Fay ce que voudras*" (72), "Do as you will." The Abbey of Theleme is a monastery founded by Gargantua in Rabelais's voluminous satire *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. It is distinguishable from many religious orders because its requirements entail freedom rather than restraint. The reference to the Abbey of Theleme further exemplifies the Medmenham Friars' irreligion safely directed against Catholicism. The inscription "Do as you will" avows the principle of freedom and irreverence. However, it refers directly to an iconic work of satire against the Catholic Church, written by a heretical French cleric.<sup>16</sup>

Churchill continues to describe suggestive inscriptions and obscene statues throughout the grounds of Medmenham Abbey which "all spoke of the loves and frailties of the *younger* monks, who seemed at least to have *sinned naturally*" (73). This description creates a Rabelaisian image of the Medmenham monks, characterizing them as a mock-religious order espousing the values of free will and license. The reference to Wilkes's publication dispels any doubt that Churchill describes Sir Francis Dashwood and the Knights of Sir Francis, by asserting

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<sup>16</sup> Rabelais was also a Franciscan. Perhaps Dashwood channelled him in the lewd portrait Wilkes describes.

that Medmenham Abbey refers to West Wycombe. Wilkes and Churchill's letters demonstrate the exposure of the secret society, as Johnstone provided a satiric glimpse of the Hell-Fire Club in *Chrysal*.

Horace Walpole contributed to the public image of the debauchery and irreligion of the Knights of Sir Francis by reproaching the club in his *Memoirs of the Reign of George III* (1762). Walpole questions whether Dashwood and Sandwich were fit for high public office, condemning their activities at Medmenham. He illustrates the secrecy of the Knights of Sir Francis, asserting that their rituals were "impenetrable to any but the initiated" (174). Walpole proceeds to describe the club's profanation of religious discourses by recounting that the members "had each their cell, a proper habit, a monastic name, and a refectory in common—besides a chapel, the decorations of which may well be supposed to have contained the quintessence of their mysteries" (174). This description contributes to the reputation of the Knights of Sir Francis for burlesque pseudo-religious rituals. Walpole illustrates the debauchery of the Knights of Sir Francis by saying "their practice was rigorously pagan: Bacchus and Venus were the deities to whom they almost publicly sacrificed" (175). Though this statement does not continue the classical evocation of the Eleusinian mysteries from Wilkes and Churchill's letters, it presents classical archetypes more commonly associated with drinking, madness, and debauchery. Walpole accuses the Knights of Sir Francis of "paganism" a more scathing description than observing their innocuous ridicule of Catholicism.

Walpole proceeds to condemn the presence of members of the Knights of Sir Francis in the government. He suggests that "their follies would have escaped the eye of the public, if Lord Bute from this seminary of piety and wisdom had not selected a Chancellor of the Exchequer" (175). Walpole refers to Dashwood in this condemnation of corruption in the Tory government.

Walpole proceeds to allege the hypocrisy of the Bute Ministry by saying “[t]he banner of religion was displayed at Court, and yet all the centurions were culled from the most profligate societies” (173). This statement condemning the debauchery of public officials reminds us that the two most senior members of the Knights of Sir Francis were prominent figures in the government. Dashwood held the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Sandwich was a Secretary of State. Walpole identifies Dashwood as an exemplar of the corruptions of government, asserting “Men were puzzled to guess at the motive of so improper a choice as this of Sir Francis Dashwood” (173).

Wilkes and Potter’s *Essay on Woman* uses bawdy satire to ridicule authority figures in politics and religion. The poem contributed to Wilkes’s emergence as a public figure during his arrest and trials. The governmental reprisals against Wilkes created a public spectacle in the mid-1760s, as Wilkes won his court case in 1763 only to be prosecuted again in 1768 for the same publications. The government’s attempt to present Wilkes’s publications *North Briton* no. 45 and *An Essay on Woman* as proof of his treason and immoral character had the consequence of disseminating these texts into the public sphere, allowing readers to form their own judgement on Wilkes. Although Wilkes’s trial in 1768 resulted in his expulsion from Parliament, his opponents in the government could not expel him from public life after he had become the figurehead of an extra-political movement opposing the Tories. Wilkes’s association with the Knights of Sir Francis did not undermine his support, as Dashwood and Sandwich intended. Instead, the attempt to denounce Wilkes’s moral character exposed the hypocrisy of his accusers. Wilkes did not return to Parliament until 1774. However, in the early 1770s, Wilkes continued to articulate opposition and reform in the public sphere while holding municipal offices in London. His unbridled journalism also created a public space for the *Letters of Junius*, an anonymous

Whig publication succeeding the *North Briton* as an expression of extra-parliamentary opposition from 1769 to 72.

#### Section 5: *The Letters of Junius*

In the years following the height of the Wilkes and Liberty controversy, the British government underwent ideological shifts including the appointment of non-partisan administrations after the resignation of Lord Bute. These coalitions prolonged the Whig opposition by dividing the Whigs into factions under Grafton, Grenville, Rockingham, and others. The coalition under the Whig Prime Minister Lord Grafton was particularly divisive as Whigs sympathetic to Pitt, Temple, and Wilkes saw Grafton as a pawn for the Tories. The general election of 1768 returned Wilkes to Parliament after his first expulsion in 1764, though Parliament again expelled and imprisoned him later that year. Amid the political tumult of the late 1760s, *The Public Advertiser*, a London daily, began printing letters by the provocative journalist Junius, who avowed Whig sympathies and occupied a position in the public sphere created by Wilkes in *The North Briton*. Samuel Johnson wrote that “Junius burst into notice with a blaze of impudence which has rarely glared upon the world before, and drew the rabble after him as a monster makes a show” (55). Junius presented a persona concerned with liberty and constitutionalism, opposing tyrannical assertions of monarchical and ministerial authority. Naturally, the speculation arose that Junius was John Wilkes. If Wilkes were Junius, he would begin writing from the King’s Bench Prison in January 1769 and continue for three years into his foray into London’s municipal politics. There is also private correspondence between Junius and Wilkes in which Junius expresses some of his most incendiary criticism of the monarchy, suggesting that Wilkes was not Junius.



The *Letters of Junius* conveyed radical journalism opposing the Tories to the English public between 1769 and 72, following in the footsteps of the *North Briton*. While Junius occupied the public space created by the *North Briton*, Wilkes continued to oppose the government outside Parliament through the channel of municipal politics. The *Letters of Junius* Junius present a cohesive expression of Whig principles and an attack on the royal family and its favourites within the Tory ministry of Lord North and the coalition of Lord Grafton. Junius's assertions of liberty and constitutionalism reflect the radicalism of *The North Briton*, and Junius frequently avows his support for Wilkes and denounces the Tories who supported his expulsion from the House of Commons in 1768. While Junius's political opinions reflect those of Wilkes, and his letters criticize many of the same injustices described in *The North Briton*, Junius bears a greater resemblance to Scriblerian satire by adopting a classical pseudonym and conveying sardonic humour through footnotes. Through these Scriblerian conventions, Junius revives aspects of Tory satire against Robert Walpole, adding these conventions from the early 18<sup>th</sup>-century to those of Wilkite journalism.

The *Letters of Junius* begin by criticizing the coalition led by Lord Grafton. Grafton succeeded Prime Minister Pitt in 1768, and incited opposition from the Whig factions of Temple and Rockingham. Junius characterizes Grafton as a nominal Whig who pandered to the Tories, and whose government led to the appointment of the Tory Prime Minister Lord North in 1770. Like Wilkes, Junius condemns the presence of the king's favourites in the ministry, and accuses Lord Bute of exercising devious influence over the king and the ministry. In Junius's 12<sup>th</sup> letter, addressed to Grafton on 30 May 1769, the author alleges Grafton's betrayal of the Whigs and profane alliance with Bute. Junius avows "Lord Chatham [Pitt] was the earliest object of your political wonder and attachment; yet you deserted him [...] and when the favourite was pushed

to the last extremity, you saved him, by joining with an administration, in which Lord Chatham had refused to engage” (69). Junius refers to Bute bitterly as “the favourite,” contending that Bute had nearly exhausted his unlawful influence when Grafton betrayed his Whig patron, Pitt, by joining a coalition with the Tories. While Grafton was a Whig, Junius accuses him of enacting Lord Bute’s agenda, extending Wilkes’s accusation in *The North Briton* that Bute continued to exercise authority by manipulating his successors. In their introduction to *Junius and His Works*, Cordasco and Simonson review Bute’s unsympathetic public image in the description “he had forced an unpopular peace; he had displaced the popular idol Pitt; he had insulted and ousted many of the chiefs of the great Whig houses and cruelly deprived their nominees of their places; he was hated as a court favourite” (10).

In his 15<sup>th</sup> letter, Junius describes favourites as a ubiquitous blight on past ministries, and identifies Lord Grafton as a suitable pawn for Bute’s corruptive influence on the government. He presents the premise that “[t]he spirit of the Favourite [Bute] had some apparent influence upon every administration; and every set of ministers preserved an appearance of duration, as long as they submitted to that influence” (82). Junius goes on to identify Whig statesmen who justly resigned to oppose the influence of Bute and the Tories, contrasting the admirable Whigs Pitt, Grenville, and Rockingham to Grafton. He asserts “Lord Bute found no resource of dependence or security in the proud, imposing superiority of Lord Chatham’s abilities, the shrewd inflexible judgement of Mr. Grenville, nor in the mild, determined integrity of Lord Rockingham” (82). This laudatory description identifies Whig leaders who avoided Lord Bute’s manipulations, opting to leave office rather than yield to the influence of favourites. Junius posits that these exemplars preceded a dissolute coalition which pandered to Bute. Junius states, “A submissive administration was at last gradually collected from the deserters of all parties and connexions”

(82). Junius describes the members of Grafton's coalition as dissolute traitors and panderers, identifying Grafton as a suitable leader of such a spurious ministry. Referring to the admirable qualities he saw in Pitt, Grenville, and Rockingham, Junius argues that "[Bute's] views and situation required a creature void of all these properties" (82). He addresses Grafton, saying "Stand forth, my Lord, for thou art the man" (82). This accusation not only asserts that Grafton lacks the judgement and integrity of his predecessors, but characterizes him as a supine puppet, appointed by Bute to solidify the influence of favourites over the ministry. Junius asserts that Grafton has enacted the whims of this vilified Tory and served as a placeholder for the next Tory Prime Minister, Lord North.

Junius's letter of 19 December 1769 voices the sentiment with which Wilkes provoked such furor in *North Briton* no. 45, exposing the manipulative influence of monarchical favourites. Junius presents the same candid assertion of King George's submission to Bute. Junius addresses the king, saying "Sir, It is the misfortune of your life, and originally the cause of every reproach and distress, which has attended your government that you should never have been acquainted with the language of truth, until you have heard it in the complaints of your people. It is not, however, too late to correct the error of your education" (160). This is a subversively humanizing address to the king, contending that a manipulative education has formed his attitudes toward governance. Junius attaches a footnote identifying the source of King George's erroneous education: the looming favourite, Lord Bute. The note states "The plan of tutelage and future dominion over the heir apparent [...] by the Princess Dowager and her favourite the Earl of Bute, was as gross and palpable [...] in effect to prolong his minority until the end of their lives" (160). The main text of Junius's letter refers to the king's education, diminishing his monarchical persona by acknowledging his external influences. The footnote

carries this accusation further, citing “tutelage” to evoke the image of the king as an inexperienced pupil of his tutor, Lord Bute. Junius asserts that Bute’s tutelage attempted to prolong King George’s minority, rendering him submissive to Bute’s influence after reaching the age at which he could govern the kingdom.

Junius’s footnote concludes that Bute’s conspiracy to perpetuate his influence over the king “was the salient point, from which all the mischiefs and disgraces of the present reign, took life and motion” (160). This statement presents Bute’s influence over the king as a fundamental perversion of governance leading to all the corruptions of the present age. The confusion of powers between the monarchy and the ministry was a source of public anxiety during the reign of George III, who found favourites among the Tories, and the presence of royal favourites in government was anathema to committed Whigs like Junius. Cordasco and Simonson describe this issue of meddlesome favouritism by saying that “on the accession of George III, the Tories and the old Jacobite families now flocked to Court, and became thorough supporters of all the policies of the king. To this small but compact body of Tories were added a smaller number of venal and subservient Whigs: all these forming a group known as the ‘King’s Friends’” (11). Junius illustrates the exclusive enclave that formed around King George, as favourites swayed their sovereign toward Tory values. He condemns favouritism as a corruption of the monarchy, maligning Bute as “the Favourite,” surely numbered Grafton among the “venal and subservient Whigs.”

In private correspondence with Wilkes, Junius presents invectives against the monarchy which more clearly impugn the royal family. These letters illustrate Junius’s rhetorical influence and Wilkes’s charismatic ability to provoke public unrest. In a letter to Wilkes from October 1771, Junius asserts that he does not see King George as merely a submissive foil to Lord Bute,

but as a malign influence over the nation. Junius declares to Wilkes that his public letters have treated the king with “undeserved moderation” and asserts that “It is not Bute, nor even the Princess Dowager. It is the odious hypocrite himself whom every honest Man should detest, and every brave man should attack” (430). This avowal of King George’s culpability treats the king more harshly than any assertion of the corruptions of court in Junius’s writing for *The Public Advertiser*. Junius even expresses treason by suggesting that the public should detest and attack the king.

Junius conveys this revolutionary invocation to Wilkes in more pragmatic terms in a letter of the following month. He displays a callous tone while discussing the terminal illness of the Princess Dowager and the Duke of Gloucester, the king’s brother. Junius describes the king’s grief, saying “The princess D<sup>e</sup> and the D of G<sup>l</sup> cannot live, & the odious hypocrite is *in profundis*. Now is your time to torment him with some demonstration from the City” (435). Junius again uses the subversive epithet “odious hypocrite” for the king as he invites to Wilkes to incite a demonstration of unrest in London. This invocation illustrates the disparate personae of Junius and Wilkes. Junius shared Wilkes’s disavowal of favouritism and monarchical interference in government. However, he never revealed his identity to become a valorized public figure. Wilkes forfeited the identity of Mr. North Briton, and became a sensational provocateur as the public observed his criticism of the government, his association with the Knights of Sir Francis and the *Essay on Woman*, and his expulsion from Parliament. Junius, an anonymous journalist, did not have this appeal of public spectacle. As Londoners chanted “Wilkes and Liberty” in the streets, Junius appealed to Wilkes’s celebrity, acceding that Wilkes, a public figure of opposition, could provoke a demonstration against the royal family and its favourites.

Both assertions of monarchical corruption in Junius's letters to Wilkes refer to the Princess Dowager, whom Whigs vilified alongside Bute as a manipulator of the king. As in *North Briton* no. 5, Junius asserts the Princess Dowager's corruptive influence over the king. In a letter in which Junius adopts the alternate pseudonym Domitian, he boldly expresses his denunciatory view of the monarchy, impugning King George's mother as a complicit influence in Lord Bute's indoctrination of the king in his minority. Domitian asks "How long is this great country to be governed by a boot and a petticoat?—by the infamous tools of a Scotch exile, and her Royal Highness the Princess Dowager of Wales" (481). This question evokes the derisive image of Bute as a Jacobite and alludes to public expressions of subversion against Bute and the Princess Dowager. Cordasco and Simonson attest that "when Bute was often burned in effigy under the symbol of a jack-boot,—a pun on his name and title [John, Lord Bute],—a petticoat was usually thrown into the fire as an allusion to the Princess of Wales" (11). Princess Augusta received a great deal of the public distaste for the corruption and favouritism of the Hanoverians.

The second letter of Domitian offers an unbridled accusation of the Dowager's malign influence. The author avows "I consider her not only as the original creating Cause of the shameful and deplorable condition of this Country, but as a being whose Operation is uniform and permanent; who watched, with a kind of providential Malignity, over the Work of her Hands" (483). This scathing description depicts Princess Augusta as a keystone of the corruptions of the court of George III. Domitian's second letter mentions Lord Bute only as a co-conspirator with the Princess Dowager, casting the petticoat into the flames before the boot. Domitian posits that the Princess Dowager contrived the appointment of the ministries of Grafton and North to subvert the spirit of democracy in Britain. He asserts "Her Royal Highness's Scheme of Government, formed long before her husband's death, is now

accomplished. She has succeeded in disuniting every party, [...] and, by the mere Influence of the Crown, has formed an Administration, such as it is, out of the refuse of them all” (482). This accusation describes the dilution of the discursive institution of the House of Commons, a democratic body founded on debate. Domitian contends that the Princess Dowager conspired to establish a coalition government to dissolve the ideological affiliations of the ministry.

The second letter of Domitian absolves King George of personal blame for the alleged corruption of democracy, describing him as obedient to his mother’s ambition and avarice. He asserts “I love and respect our Sovereign too much to suppose it possible that *He* should be anything more than passive in forming and supporting such a ‘System of Government’” (482). In this statement condemning the coalition, Domitian asserts his loyalty to the institution of the monarchy by absolving the king of blame. Domitian refers to the influence exerted over Charles I by his wife Henrietta Maria as an example of the familial manipulation of a monarch. He describes this malign influence over the king as “the filial virtues of our Sovereign” recalling that “Charles the First had the same implicit attachment to his Spouse” (483). Domitian proceeds to reverse his earlier assertion of “love and respect” for King George, presenting a tacit invitation to revolution in the statement “It were wished that the Parallel held good in all the Circumstances” (483), intimating the event of Charles’s execution for treason after challenging the authority of Parliament.

The letters of Domitian mention other favourites who unfairly influence the ministry, drawing comparison to the nefarious followers of Jonathan Wild. In his first letter, Domitian recalls that “[t]he private convivial Hours of Jonathan Wild were happily unbent in the Company of the lower Adepts in pilfering and petty Larceny. In public, he resumed his State, and never appeared without an attendant Knot of Highwaymen and Assassins” (480). Domitian compares

the courtiers of George III to the criminal supporters of Jonathan Wild, recalling Fielding's allegory for the career of Robert Walpole. The letter describes King George's favourites by saying "A Prince of the House of Brunswick searches for the Endearments of private Sociality and Friendship in the loyal Hearts of Jacobites, Tories, and Scotchmen" (480). Domitian proceeds to state that King George has unfairly appointed these partisan courtiers to government offices. He identifies the corrupt members of the ministry, contending that the king "intrusts the public Government of his Affairs to Grafton, North, Halifax, and Sandwich" (480). Domitian alleges Jacobitism among these figures, and aligns them with the Prigs who upheld the authority of Jonathan Wild. Domitian evokes Fielding's political allegory *Jonathan Wild*, an example of Tory satire from their opposition to the Walpole ministry. This allusion illustrates the ideological reversal of literary opposition in the public sphere, as Whigs carried on a tradition of literary opposition practiced by Tories earlier in the century.

Domitian condemns Prime Ministers Grafton and North as dissolute leaders who pander to the influence of favourites, and impugns Lord Sandwich, a Secretary of State, as a figure of moral hypocrisy. Domitian depicts Sandwich as a profligate who does not merit the dignity of public office, recalling the hypocrisy Sandwich displayed during the impeachment of Wilkes. He asks "What opinion are we to entertain of the Piety, Chastity, and Integrity of the best of Princes, when, in the face of England and all of Europe, [King George] takes such a man as Sandwich to his Bosom" (485)? This question laments the public image of the king, who has betrayed the dignity of the monarchy by associating publicly with Lord Sandwich, an Apostle of the Knights of Sir Francis. Domitian illustrates the hypocrisy of Sandwich's position in government by saying "To talk of Morals or Devotion in such Company is a scandalous Insult to Common Sense, and a still more scandalous Mockery of Religion" (485). In the letters he published as



Domitian, Junius more bluntly expresses his opposition to the government, condemning coalitions as corrupt and inequitable, and personally impugning the royal family and the ministries of Grafton and North.

Junius vilifies Lord Bute in his letters as a corruptive influence over the ministry as well as the king. The 36<sup>th</sup> letter of Junius appeared in the *Public Advertiser* in February 1770, just after Grafton resigned as Prime Minister, transferring the office to Lord North, a Tory. In this letter, Junius accuses Grafton of being manipulated by Lord Bute, averring that Grafton's tenure was harmful to the public good. Junius renews Wilkes's allegation that Bute manipulates his successors by asserting Bute's corruptive influence over Grafton. Junius's rhetorical denunciation of Grafton demonstrates the schism forcing outspoken Whigs into opposition to each other in the late 1760s. Junius begins the letter with the following address to Grafton: "My Lord, If I were personally your enemy, I might pity and forgive you. You have every claim to compassion, that can arise from misery and distress. The condition you are reduced to would disarm a private enemy of resentment [...] But in the relation you have borne to this country, you have no title to indulgence" (173-4). In his opening statement, Junius characterizes Grafton as a lapsed Whig, contending that he still feels a pitying affinity for Grafton, but that this sympathy cannot overrule the harm Grafton has done to the public.

Junius describes Grafton's obligation to Lord Bute as a wretched, pitiable condition, and follows this description by asserting Grafton's irredeemable abuse of his office. Junius presents a scathing summary of Grafton's career by asking "What then, my Lord, is this the event of all the sacrifices you have made to Bute's patronage" (174). This letter reflects on Grafton's departure from office in January 1770, which installed Lord North as Prime Minister. Junius presents a scathing assessment of Grafton's political career as Grafton granted the office of Prime Minister

to a Tory. North had also led Wilkes's impeachment in the House of Commons in 1763. Junius positions himself safely in the vanguard of public opinion as he suggests that he would forgive Grafton personally for his corruptions, but that an individual cannot forgive the corruption of a public figure. He asserts, "In your public character, you have injured every subject of the empire; and though an individual is not authorised to forgive the injuries done to society, he is called upon to assert his separate share in the public resentment" (174). Junius contends that he has the responsibility publicly to denounce Grafton's corruptions, voicing his share of the "public resentment." In his 36<sup>th</sup> letter, from February 1770, Junius demonstrates his opposition to the Graftonite Whigs, and presents rhetorical appeals to public opinion to accuse Grafton of corruption and treachery.

Junius's letter on 3 April 1770 caricatures Prime Minister North quite literally. Junius depicts the Prime Minister as a manipulative favourite of the monarchy, resembling Wilkes's depiction of Lord Bute in *The North Briton*. He describes North's unfettered manipulations of the government, characterizing him as "a minister [...] whose presence was to influence every division;—who had a voice to persuade, an eye to penetrate, a gesture to command" (189). This description indicates North's manipulative qualities of persuasion and command, presenting an image of the Prime Minister as ambitious and dictatorial, resembling the autocratic exemplars of Bute and Robert Walpole. Junius accompanies this avowal of North's Machiavellian persona with an adjacent description of North's appearance. In a sardonic footnote exemplary of Scriblerian satire, Junius declares "This graceful minister is oddly constructed. His tongue is a little too big for his mouth, and his eyes a great deal too big for their sockets. Every part of his person sets natural proportion at defiance. At this present writing, his head is supposed to be much too heavy for his shoulders" (189).

A comparison between Junius's descriptions of North's political power and his physical appearance suggests that this caricature endows North with physical features representing his moral corruptions. Junius describes North's "voice to persuade" alongside his note that North's "tongue is a little too big for his mouth," suggesting that North would experience difficulty restraining his tongue, and describing his proclivity to persuade and command. He describes North's eyes as "eyes to penetrate," reflecting North's pervasive access to the proceedings of government. The image of North's eyes as "too big for their sockets" suggests that North wantonly exceeds the authority of his office. Junius does not assert the disproportion of North's head as plainly as his other descriptions; he avers that North's "head is *supposed* to be much too heavy for his shoulders" at the time of his writing. This anecdotal description suggests that the public perceive North's head as too heavy, a symbol of his arrogance and excessive authority. This collection of disproportionate imagery accompanies Junius's assertion that North's appearance "sets natural proportion at defiance," accusing North of transgressing against the principles of balance and equality. Junius conveys his satirical comparison of North's political corruptions and ill-proportioned appearance through a footnote, using the Scriblerian convention of editorial satire. His tacit suggestion of the "supposed" disproportion of North's head uses the journalistic convention of deferring the speaker's opinions to the view of the public, creating authority by appealing to an imagined public opinion.

The polemical *Letters of Junius* succeed Wilkes's *North Briton* in the journalism of the Long Whig Opposition. The *North Briton* was absent from the public sphere of political journalism in late 1760s and early 1770s. Wilkes had also been expelled from Parliament during this period. However, he continued to practice opposition to the government by advocating for parliamentary reform. In the "Printers' Case" of 1771, Wilkes defied a parliamentary privilege

against reporting the proceedings in the House of Commons to increase public awareness of governmental affairs. Wilkes's reform of parliamentary privilege in the Printers' Case and Junius' anonymous criticism of the government represent parallel instances of public opposition in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Wilkes was unable to regain his seat in the House of Commons immediately after his release from King's Bench Prison in 1770. However, Rudé recounts that upon his release, Wilkes lived "within a stone's throw of Parliament" (149). Wilkes recognized his enduring support among middle-class Londoners, and stood for election to Council of Aldermen for the City of London. As an MP, Wilkes conducted opposition to the Tory government in the public sphere by disseminating criticism through publication, transcending the limitations of parliamentary opposition. Wilkes continued to expand parliamentary discourse into the public sphere during his career in municipal politics in the 1770s. The positions of municipal authority—alderman, then Lord Mayor of London—which Wilkes held from 1770 to 75 allowed him to circumvent the hegemonic influence of the ministry through activities in the public sphere. Wilkes used his municipal offices to pressure the ministry into allowing greater public access to parliament, further expanding the discourse of parliamentary opposition into the public sphere. As a parliamentarian, Wilkes had used publications to criticize the ministry, while as a municipal politician, he enabled journalists to expose the affairs of the House of Commons more openly.

Before 1771, the government had exercised strict control over the publication of the proceedings of the House of Commons. Rudé recounts that "[t]he publication of parliamentary debates in the newspapers had long been forbidden—most recently by Commons resolutions of 26 February 1728. It was such a time-honoured and cherished privilege of Parliament that only

such reports of its proceedings should percolate to the public as had been authorized by its own officers” (155). Wilkes undermined the privilege that shielded MPs from public scrutiny by upholding the rights of parliamentary reporters in the Printers’ Case of 1771. During this affair, Wilkes used his municipal authority to protect parliamentary reporters from prosecution as they defied the long-standing prohibition against unauthorized publication of the proceedings of the House of Commons.

During the “Printers’ Case,” Wilkes circumvented the control which the government exercised over the dissemination of parliamentary discourse by affirming the rights of parliamentary reporters in court. The opinion of the Ministry and the Crown firmly opposed granting journalists greater access to Parliament. By thwarting this privilege, Wilkes transformed his municipal office into a tool of opposition to the government. Thomas recounts that “Wilkes, in his capacity as Alderman, would be able to act as a City magistrate, and the support was obtained of other City officials, among them Lord Mayor Brass Crosby” (129). Wilkes was aware that any journalist arrested for violating parliamentary privilege would be brought before him or a like-minded municipal official such as Crosby. Wilkes and Crosby conspired with a handful of reporters, including John Wheble of the *Middlesex Journal*,<sup>17</sup> to provoke the public, controversial arrest of a reporter, whom Wilkes would exonerate. There was a royal proclamation for Wheble’s arrest, which Wilkes denounced in his role as magistrate, as he vindicated the reporter. Thomas notes that “Wilkes established that Wheble was a freeman of London [...] and that the cause of the arrest was merely the proclamation and not any felony or breach of the peace” (131). As Wilkes freed Wheble and challenged the grounds of his arrest, he

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas cites *Middlesex Journal* as an example of the “significant expansion of the metropolitan press” from 1768 to 1770. The full title, the *Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty* suggests the publication’s sympathy for Wilkes, the former MP for Middlesex.

used his authority as an alderman to wrest authority away from the government by deciding a case which affected parliamentary privilege. Wilkes's decision protected a parliamentary reporter from governmental reprisal, defending the dissemination of parliamentary discourse into the public sphere.

Wilkes successfully precipitated parliamentary reform as an alderman, claiming that the House of Commons was within his jurisdiction, and asserting that parliamentary reporters were free citizens of London subject to the judgement of municipal authorities rather than Parliament itself. Thomas describes Wilkes's campaign on behalf of parliamentary journalists as "a deliberate attempt to pit against the power of the House of Commons the privileges of the City of London, which claimed an exclusive right under its charters to all jurisdictions within its boundaries" (129). Habermas cites Wilkes's effort to expand journalistic access to parliament as a significant event in the expansion of political discourse into the public sphere of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. He argues that "[o]nly in the year 1771 did Wilkes, as the alderman of London, succeed in nullifying, in fact if not in law, the parliamentary privilege" (61). During Wilkes's period of exclusion from Parliament, he used his position as alderman to open the proceedings of the House of Commons to journalists and the public. In the Printers' Case, Wilkes took revenge on the public body which reprimanded and expelled him by ensuring that the public estate of journalism could expose governmental affairs to the scrutiny of the public.

Thomas characterizes the Printers' Case at the outset of Wilkes's municipal career as a victory for Wilkes and the Whig opposition. While Wilkes acted outside of parliamentary opposition during this affair, his emancipation of parliamentary reporters challenged the secrecy of the government, echoing the Whigs' criticism of the king's speech at the closure of parliament which offered no opportunity for debate. The Printers' Case was an act of defiance to the

government continuing Wilkes's campaign of opposition to the collusive power of the Crown and the Tories. Thomas affirms that "[t]he whole episode had been a public humiliation for the King's government. Although Lord North had known a month beforehand that some resort would be made to the City's privileges, the administration had been outmanoeuvred by Wilkes" (138). Not all Whigs supported Wilkes in the Printers' Case. Edmund Burke favoured publishing speeches after the parliamentary session.<sup>18</sup> Burke presented his speeches as literary texts which appealed to a public audience outside of their interpretation by journalists. However, Wilkes's contribution to parliamentary journalism was particularly useful to the Whig opposition from the late 1770s into the 1780s, as Richard Brinsley Sheridan conveyed resonant, theatrical expressions of opposition to the public through the mediation of parliamentary reporters. As a playwright, Sheridan could manipulate reporters' engagement to convey greater resonance and influence through their publication of his speeches.

Wilkes affirmed the rights of parliamentary reporters during an ongoing expansion of political journalism in the late 1760s and early 70s. Taylor describes the proliferation of parliamentary journalism during these years, citing the emergence of several periodicals which commented on the affairs of the House of Commons. However, he argues that "[t]o contemporaries [...] the outstanding feature of the political press during these years was not the cautious and slow development of Parliamentary reporting, but the polemical writing, in the daily *Public Advertiser*, of the anonymous Junius" (126). Junius's notable expression of opposition in the public sphere knits together the increased journalistic access to parliament after the Printers' Case and the model of unreserved public criticism of the government in the *North Briton*. Wilkes provided two distinct contributions to the journalism of opposition by opening the

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas 128

House of Commons to reporters during the Printers' Case, and publishing unreserved criticism of the Ministry in the *North Briton* which set a precedent for the *Letters of Junius*.

While Junius invites comparison to Wilkes, he demonstrates a contrast to Edmund Burke, a successor of the Wilkite movement who expressed Whig ideas through correspondence and political oratory, rather than radical journalism. Burke disavowed Junius's sensationalism, stating for the House of Commons, "when I read his attack upon the king, I own my blood ran cold," and asking "How comes this Junius, to have broke through the cobwebs of the law and to range uncontrolled, unpunished through the land" (13)? Burke proceeded to articulate public opposition during his career as a Whig MP which diverged starkly in form and tone from the provocative public expressions of Wilkes and Junius.



## Part II: Edmund Burke and the Publication of Whig Ideology in an Age of Revolution

*All's Whiggery now,  
But we old men are massed against the world.  
The First. American colonies, Ireland, France and India  
Harried, and Burke's great melody against it.*

—William Butler Yeats<sup>19</sup>

### Section 6: Satire and Political Ideology in Burke's *Vindication of Natural Society*

In 1765, shortly after the Wilkes and Liberty controversy, Edmund Burke, a Whig loyal to the Marquess of Rockingham, became the Member of Parliament for Wendover, a pocket-borough belonging to the Rockingham Whig Lord Verney. Burke is an unlikely successor to Wilkes in the new sphere of public opposition. John Wilkes's legacy comprises public ridicule of the government, and the unbridled assertion of individual liberty. By contrast, Burke is a significant figure in conservative thought whom none of his contemporaries thought to call "that devil Burke." At the outset of Burke's parliamentary career, Whig opposition diverged from criticism and exposure of the government, as Burke's patron, Rockingham, served as Prime Minister from 1765 to 1766.<sup>20</sup> Following the brief Rockingham Ministry, Whig opposition no longer centred on criticizing the actions of the government and censuring corrupt public figures, but required the Rockingham Whigs to dispute with the rival factions of Grenville and Fox as the Whig ideology became further divided.

Amid the Whigs' disagreement on the treatment of Ireland and the American colonies, Catholic emancipation, and the Gordon Riots, Burke expressed views which appear inharmonious while presenting his position on these issues in the House of Commons. He developing a multifarious political persona based on the values of liberty and authority. Burke

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<sup>19</sup> Yeats 17

<sup>20</sup> Jesse Norman recounts that Rockingham had recently "engaged [Burke] as a private secretary," who was "thus capitulated from near-obscurity into the very cockpit of power" (78)

has not left as consistent an ideology as other political thinkers of the Enlightenment. However, his inconsistency responded to his dynamic political surroundings, as the Whigs disputed issues of governance and revolution amongst their rival factions. Winston Churchill summarized Burke's multifarious political legacy by writing "History easily discerns the reasons and forces which actuated him, and the immense changes in the problems he was facing which evoked from the same profound mind and sincere spirit these entirely contrary manifestations" (32). Churchill proceeds to account for Burke's allegiance to both liberty and authority, asserting "His soul revolted against tyranny, whether it appeared in the aspect of a domineering Monarch and a corrupt Court and Parliamentary system, or whether [...] in the dictation of a brutal mob and wicked sect" (32) Churchill's praise for Burke reveals the sympathy of a politician working through vast conflicts and ideological schisms. Churchill himself crossed the floor between the Whigs and Tories and left a multifarious political legacy. Burke continued Wilkes's legacy of opposition to tyranny and corruption, even rousing the support of the public outside the sphere of governance. However, Burke diverged from the riotous Wilkite movement by appealing to a diverse reading audience to whom he ascribed the authority of public opinion. Burke opposed rioting, but evoked extra-political activity in the public sphere by inviting his audience to form political opinions.

While Burke exercised opposition, he endeavoured to speak from a position of unity, asserting common values of civic virtue and stewardship among British subjects regardless of their affiliation with the Tories or the various Whig factions. Burke not only presented his ideas in the context of a fractured and contentious Whig movement, but struggled to retain his own identity as an Irishman in the British government. Though he was Protestant, Burke demonstrated sympathy to Ireland by supporting early legislative measures toward Catholic

emancipation. Burke's background also drew accusations that he sympathized with Irish Catholics, contributing to the public furor against Burke during the Gordon Riots. In *The Intellectual Life of Edmund Burke*, David Bromwich describes the influence of Catholicism in Burke's family, recounting that Burke's father "may have conformed to the established church as late as 1722 [eight years before Edmund's birth] and under a semblance of coercion" (28). Burke's mother and his siblings remained Catholic, and Bromwich argues that the obligatory conversion of his father influenced Burke's reformist politics. He contends that "we may count the early humiliation of compelled conformity among the motives of Edmund's later dedication to political reform" (28). Although Burke advocated for Irish rights and opposed the anti-Catholic campaign of Lord Gordon in 1780, He carefully embodied the persona of a British public servant preserving magnanimous governance of the United Kingdom. Bromwich indicates that Burke's advocacy for Irish rights and religious toleration was an example of his revulsion against tyranny rather than Irish patriotism. Bromwich asserts that Burke's "appeal for Catholic rights [...] was not an appeal for national liberation; it was a protest against a human injustice" (28).

In the following chapter, I explore the values of individual liberty and social responsibility in the works of Edmund Burke, as he revolted against tyranny to present a cohesive ideology comprising the values of liberty and authority. Burke conveyed this ideology through resonant publications presenting his support for the American rebels, criticism of the corrupt administration of Warren Hastings in East India, and condemnation of the revolution in France. Burke continued to expand Whig opposition into the public sphere by addressing political issues before a calculated audience outside the electorate, in whom he evoked interest and support through rhetorical speeches and publications.

In the present section, I argue that Burke's philosophy asserts the necessity of social order as an underlying principle of his politics. The philosophy Burke conveyed in his anonymous satirical pamphlet *A Vindication of Natural Society* introduces the ideas of collective security and responsibility that Burke later articulated in his political speeches and letters. In 1756, before he entered politics, Burke published the anonymous pamphlet *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756), satirizing the deist philosophy of Lord Bolingbroke and the notion of apolitical human society. In his chapter "Unravelling the Threads in Burke's 'Vindication of Natural Society,'" Ian Crowe outlines the circumstances surrounding the composition of this satirical pamphlet in the print culture of the 1750s, and in the context of Burke's politics and background. Crowe explains that the pamphlet "purported to advance the claims of the state of nature against those of 'artificial,' or political, society in the style of the statesman Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke. Bolingbroke had died five years earlier, and his works had appeared in a cluster of volumes over the period from 1752 to 1754" (73). Bolingbroke's popularity and the promotion of deism and natural society were antithetical to Burke's beliefs in civil society and stewardship.

Burke satirized Bolingbroke to convey an affirmation of civil society to the reading public. Crowe identifies Burke personally as a suitable agent of satire against Bolingbroke by saying "Edmund Burke, the young Irish immigrant, had evidently been an ideal choice for the project" (74). Crowe proceeds to identify Burke's ambivalent background as an Irish Protestant as a relevant aspect of the *Vindication*. Crowe argues that Burke's childhood in Dublin, "where issues of public order and public spirit, religious toleration and irreligion, and the use of history for partisan politics existed in concentrated form" (75), focused Burke's attention on the tensions between religion, patriotism, and social order. With this focus, Burke satirized the resonant

deism of Bolingbroke, which denounced order in favour of natural religion and society. Citing the tense atmosphere of Dublin during Burke's childhood, and the Catholic and Protestant influences in Burke's own family, Crowe identifies a tension underlying Burke's ideology of stewardship and civic virtue, "between loyal agitation for greater civic independence and anxiety over the potentially explosive social and political pressures posed by an excluded Catholic majority" (76). In this satire against Bolingbroke and "natural society," Burke affirms the necessity of social organization. Burke translates Bolingbroke's belief in natural religion into a satirical portrayal of natural society to affirm the necessity of organized society. Burke's assertions of the primacy of social organization and the stewardship of magnanimous authority compose the manifesto of a conservative Whig opposing corruption and disorder.

Burke revealed his authorship of the *Vindication* in 1765, shortly after his election to Parliament. Lord Bolingbroke was an ecclesial controversialist, who avowed the natural revelation of religion to individuals and refuted the necessity of religious institutions. Burke satirizes this radical belief by presenting a parodic speaker who argues in favour of natural society and suggests that the institutions of government are corruptive and needless. Bolingbroke had presented his view of natural religion in his *Essay LXXVI*, in which he argues that knowledge of God derives only from natural revelations of divinity. Bolingbroke states that "all the knowledge we can have of this kind is derived originally from [God's] works, and the proceedings of his providence. All the ways of acquiring a more direct knowledge [...] are too ridiculous to deserve the regard of common sense" (539). Burke satirizes this emphatic denunciation of religious institutions as his speaker avows the parallel falsehood of civil authority in *A Vindication of Natural Society*. In Burke's preface, he describes his endeavour to satirize the deism of Bolingbroke by saying "if we were to examine the divine Fabricks by our

Ideas of Reason and Fitness, and to use the same Method of Attack by which some Men have assaulted Revealed Religion, we might with as good Colour, and with the same Success, make the Wisdom and Power of God in his Creation appear to many no better than Foolishness” (11). Burke proceeds to translate Bolingbroke’s argument against organized religion into a satirical condemnation of organized society, arguing for the rejection of social institutions in favour of “natural society.”

Burke’s satirical avowal of “natural society” suggests that collective responsibility is central to human nature. Burke’s satire indicates the importance of the social contract, arguing that the public have a responsibility to preserve their constitutional agreement with the government. By caricaturing the argument for natural society, Burke reveals his allegiance to the notion of a social contract. The social contract comprising common rights and values underlies Burke’s opposition to tyranny and assertion of individual responsibility to preserve social institutions. His assertion of the values and responsibilities common to all members of society demonstrates an appeal to the public sphere in which Burke, a politician and political thinker, addressed the public as an effectual group including those who could not vote or hold office. In his biography of Burke, Jesse Norman indicates the emphasis on social organization in Burke’s philosophy by saying “Unlike Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau [...] Burke begins not with a state of nature, but with what is given – that is, with the fact of human society itself” (198). Burke espoused the Aristotelian view that human beings are inherently political, characterizing political engagement as a common aspect of life. While Burke did not actively seek to expand the franchise, his view of the pervasiveness of politics attributes political involvement to the general public. In the *Vindication*, Burke refutes the notion that humans can form benevolent communities without the authority of institutions.

The speaker of Burke's *Vindication* describes the origin of natural society by saying "Man [...] judged that he would find his Account proportionably in an Union of many Families into one Body politick. And as nature has formed no Bond of Union to hold them together, he supplied this Defect by *Laws*" (14). For Burke, political institutions such as laws arise intrinsically within communities. This political depiction of human interaction challenges the existence of "natural society" by ironically indicating a "defect" in the unity of human beings despite the speaker's description of their inherent organization into families. Burke conceives of society as a collection of families which the creation of laws endows with social responsibility. The speaker proceeds to describe this social contract as the origin of the institutions of Church and State; however, he argues that, in every nation, these institutions have devolved from their original magnanimity into artifices of corrupt authority. The speaker proceeds to argue satirically that every state and society should be dismantled in favour of natural society, hyperbolically valorizing the state of nature. This argument satirizes the anarchic view that "natural society" is preferable to the authority of institutions.

The satirical hyperbole of Burke's argument for natural society reveals his allegiance to social organization. Through his speaker's refutation of all institutions, Burke expresses disdain for tyranny by censuring social movements which corrupt the magnanimous influences of Church and State. Burke conceives of superstition as a tyrannical corruption of religion and governance which exploits the loyalty of the general population. The speaker addresses superstition by saying "We begin to think and to act from reason and from nature alone. This is true of several, but still is by far the majority in the same old state of blindness and slavery [...] whilst the real productive cause of all this superstitious folly, enthusiastical nonsense, and holy tyranny, holds a reverend place" (16). This description of the malignant influence of superstition

demonstrates Burke's simultaneous avowal of individualism and communal responsibility. Through the speaker's satirical disavowal of all organized religion, Burke denounces the corruption of organized religion, tacitly affirming the authority of religious institutions and the responsibility to preserve them from corruption.

Burke extends this indictment of corruption to civil society by suggesting that the institutions of religion and government can be misused simultaneously to propagate superstition. The speaker avers "Civil government borrows a strength from ecclesiastical; and artificial laws receive a sanction from artificial revelations" (16). The speaker suggests that organized society is based on the premise of false authority, satirizing the idealization of natural society as a state of freedom from artificial restraints. Bromwich positions Burke's *Vindication of Natural Society* within a tradition of social satire that presented the speaker as the object of satire, citing Swift's *A Modest Proposal* as an example. He recounts that "[t]he device of rigging a public exposure by having the contents of a satire spoken by the person satirized had been used by Swift, among others" (43). This technique is particularly relevant to reformist politics because it simultaneously caricatures the speaker and the argument as objects of satire. Bromwich proceeds to assert that "Burke's *Vindication of Natural Society* is a Utopian hoax—a mock proposal by a mad projector, which explodes the doctrine of natural society by displaying an excess of credulity to [...] that system" (43). By hyperbolizing the speaker's trust in natural society, Burke provokes his audience to question the belief systems of deism and self-government. However, Burke rejected the absolute authority of institutions, arguing that individuals have the responsibility to oppose corruption. While natural society was an object of derision for Burke, the natural rights and responsibilities of institutions and citizens within a social contract are central to Burke's politics.



Despite Burke's satirical denunciation of Bolingbroke's deist philosophy and religious individualism, Burke agreed with Bolingbroke's espousal of individual liberty in his view of revolution and constitutionalism. In Letter XVII of his *Dissertation upon Parties*, Bolingbroke asserts that the public has the prerogative to overthrow tyrannical governments to uphold the constitution between the sovereign and the governed. Bolingbroke argues that infringements upon the rights of the people "would break the bargain between the king and the nation [...] and would dissolve the constitution. From hence it follows, that the nation which hath a right to preserve this constitution, hath a right to resist an attempt, that leaves no other means of preserving it" (166). While Burke disputes Bolingbroke's argument for the absence of religious institutions, he subscribes to Bolingbroke's assertion of the collective responsibility to uphold the social contract (including the rights of individuals) even through revolution. Burke's satire in the *Vindication* affirms the necessity of revolution by citing examples of corrupt states, but the speaker also indicates that revolution can be corruptive by sarcastically advocating for constant rebellion.

Burke's speaker characterizes governments as artificial institutions which too often exceed their authority and incite rebellion by presenting examples of historically tumultuous states. He describes Sicily, saying "You will find every Page of its History dyed in Blood, and blotted and confounded by Tumults, Rebellions, Massacres, Assassinations, Proscriptions, and a Series of Horrors beyond the Histories perhaps of any other Nation in the World; though the Histories of all Nations are made up of similar matter" (21). Presenting the example of a historically turbulent state, Burke's speaker suggests that the atrocities he mentions, including massacre and assassination, are symptoms of every society. The speaker contends satirically that "the greatest Part of the Governments on Earth must be concluded, Tyrannies, Impostures,

Violations of the Natural Rights of Mankind and, worse than the most disorderly Anarchies” (33), calling for rebellion in every society. This sardonic assertion of the preference of anarchy over government anticipates Burke’s condemnation of the French Revolution, which endeavoured to supplant a long-established government with a revolutionary state which Burke considered a “disorderly anarchy.” Before he responded to actual revolutions, however, Burke explored the morality of revolution in *A Vindication of Natural Society*. While the speaker contends that all governments are corrupt and incite rebellion, his inclusion of examples, such as Sicily, reminds the reader that corrupt states exist individually, and revolution can be justified in individual cases.

Burke’s *Vindication of Natural Society* is a provocative satire which conveys an underlying polemical statement of his views on the foundation of society while satirizing a deist philosopher who disputed the necessity of organized religion. William Godwin later described it as a satirical illustration of the flaws of organized society which unintentionally conveyed an accurate portrayal of pervasive corruption. In his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), Godwin describes Burke’s objective by saying that, in Burke’s pamphlet, “the evils of the existing political institutions are displayed with incomparable force of reasoning and lustre of eloquence, while the intention of the author was to show that these evils were to be considered as trivial” (22). Godwin suggests that, as he attempted to satirize the theory of natural society, Burke revealed the real malignancy of social institutions. Godwin argues that Burke’s hyperbolic description of corrupt governments composes an accurate reflection of society. Burke uses satirical hyperbole to challenge Bolingbroke’s scepticism of ecclesial institutions and argue the necessity of an organized Church and State. The speaker condemns governance broadly by stating that “all Governments must frequently infringe the Rules of Justice to support themselves

[...] Truth must give way to Dissimulation; Honesty to Convenience; and Humanity itself to the reigning Interest” (29). The speaker’s emphatic denunciation of organized society reflects Bolingbroke’s controversial challenges to organized religion, and avows Burke’s belief in social institutions and inherent organized society through satire.

Bolingbroke declares his opposition to religious institutions in a letter to fellow Tory and religious controversialist Alexander Pope outlining the deist view of the natural revelation of religion to individuals. In his *Letter to Mr. Pope*, Bolingbroke contends that individuals should be sceptical of religious institutions, advocating “private examination of the Christian system [...] that every man, who is able to make it, should make for himself” (499). Burke ridicules this avowal of individualism in *A Vindication of Natural Society* as his speaker argues against statehood and constitutionalism. Bolingbroke presents an antithesis in his deist assertions to Pope, describing the view of dependence on “that holy order, which was instituted by God himself, and which has been continued by the imposition of hands in every Christian society, from the apostles down to the present clergy” (499). This antithesis describes the dominant view of organized religion as a necessary conduit between humanity and God. Bolingbroke counters this argument by declaring it “repugnant to all the ideas of wisdom and goodness to believe that the universal terms of salvation are knowable by the means of one order of men alone” (499). This statement challenges the assertion of truth by religious factions and the prescriptive mediation of a clergy as Bolingbroke presents the deist argument that religion is “universal.” Burke’s depiction of the state of nature in *A Vindication of Natural Society* satirizes Bolingbroke’s view of natural universal religion.

By denouncing social institutions and states, Burke contends that individuals may form a preferable natural society. This satirical argument implicitly asserts Burke’s view of the

necessity of social organization. Burke satirically applies Bolingbroke's avowal of universal religion to the institutions of state. The speaker of his pamphlet argues "You may criticize freely the *Chinese* Constitution [...] But the scene is changed as you come homeward, and Atheism or Treason may be the Names given in *Britain*, to what would be Reason and Truth if asserted of *China*" (45). This statement of cultural relativism suggests that the constitutional principles of each society are arbitrary and may be disputed freely outside the nation. The implication of this argument is that there are no absolute principles underlying a nation's constitution. The speaker suggests that "reason and truth" and "atheism and treason" are matters of perspective, indicating satirically that Britain and other societies enforce arbitrary relative social values.

By satirizing an anarchic argument against the institutions of state, *A Vindication of Natural Society* reveals the conclusion of the necessity of organized society. Burke's revulsion against tyranny may appear contradictory to his resonance in conservative thought. However, his insistence on the primacy of politics and authoritative institutions to human nature demonstrates Burke's values of personal responsibility and stewardship. When Burke entered the House of Commons, he opposed tyranny through the formal channels of open correspondence and political oratory, demonstrating his respect for the dignity of empires and institutions while censuring their mismanagement. As Burke's *Vindication of Natural Society* is a satire affirming the necessity of social institutions, the pamphlet encompasses Burke's values of authority and liberty. Burke exercises the liberty of expression exemplary of Wilkes and Junius by imitating the voice of Lord Bolingbroke and satirizing his deist religious philosophy. This anonymous pamphlet targets an established Tory thinker while displaying the safe satire of ridiculing an ecclesial controversialist. Just as Wilkes and Potter's ribaldry targeted the controversialist Bishop Warburton and the Knights of Sir Francis ridiculed the rituals of Catholicism, Burke's satire

affirms the state religion by satirizing the dissenting philosophy of deism and upholds British governance by satirizing arguments in favour of anarchy.

Crowe describes the *Vindication* by saying “Many facets of Bolingbroke's life and philosophy appear here: lofty but sharply defended elitism; a philosophy that privileged politics over religion” (74). Bolingbroke served Burke as a similar target to Dashwood, Sandwich, and the Hell-Fire Clubs. Through an anonymous satirical pamphlet, Burke exposed the irreligion of the ruling class, challenging the recent popularity of Bolingbroke’s ideas, and influenced his audience to reject deism and natural society. Crowe states that, “ultimately, the satire is played out against a type of intellectualism that confounds intellectual authority, moral character, and social status. The joke lies as much on those who are persuaded as on the persuader” (74).

Burke’s satire directed against Bolingbroke supports the Church of England and asserts the value of the institutions of Church and State, demonstrating loyalty to established authorities. Burke’s *Vindication of Natural Society* is a noteworthy foray into the public sphere of anonymous journalism created and inhabited by Junius and Mr. North Briton. Burke’s first public assertion of his political views appeared as an anonymous satire. Burke published this satire as a pamphlet, a form which proceeded to take the place of the periodical essay in public political disputes. Burke’s *Vindication of Natural Society* has the distinctive characteristics of a work of satire asserting the value of institutions, encompassing the seemingly binary values of liberty and authority. This anonymous pamphlet prognosticates Burke’s ideology opposing tyranny and corruption in despotic authorities and dissolute revolutions.

#### Section 7: Civic Virtue and Burke’s Rhetorical Public in “On Parties” and *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*

Edmund Burke continued to refute Lord Bolingbroke by contesting his view of democratic debate. Bolingbroke had opposed the division of British legislators into Whigs and

Tories. Burke affirms the value of opposition in the British House of Commons in his 1757 essay “On Parties.” This text describes the value of parties in democracy and the institution of debate in British politics. However, Burke laments the lack of unity within the Whig and Tory affiliations, characterizing them not as cohesive ideological parties but “factions” motivated by the ambitions of their members. In “On Parties,” Burke describes opposition as the definitive activity of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century House of Commons, and argues that appealing to the public is a necessary means of maintaining authority. “On Parties” (1757) is an unpublished essay providing an insight into Burke’s views unbridled by the constraints of patronage and his affiliation as a Rockingham Whig. The essay “On Parties” was published in a collection of Burke’s manuscripts in 1957 after being discovered among the notebooks of Burke’s close friend William Burke.<sup>21</sup> In the article, “Party, Parliament, and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts,” Richard Bourke states “The collection [including “On Parties”] did indeed illuminate important aspects of Burke’s formation during a period of his life that has commonly been treated as virtually lost” (619).

In 1770, Burke published his *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, in which he carries out the activity of opposition he had outlined in the essay “On Parties,” appealing to public opinion by denouncing the corruption of the governing faction. In the present section, I examine Burke’s essay “On Parties” in conversation with his *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, arguing that Burke posits opposition as a necessary democratic activity which seeks public approval by criticizing tyranny and corruption. These texts display the development of Burke’s political ideology from the unpublished manuscript “On Parties,” which Burke wrote before his parliamentary career, to his public expression of opposition in *Thoughts on the Present*

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<sup>21</sup> Norman recounts that Burke referred to William Burke as “Cousin Will,” but they were likely unrelated (21).

*Discontents. Thoughts on the Present Discontents* presents Burke's perspective on public unrest after the Wilkite movement demonstrated the efficacy of rioting as an extra-political activity. Burke clearly asserts the value of public appeal, but presents a different position on public unrest than Wilkes. Burke argues that public opinion and reputation are foundational aspects of political power, but contends that inciting public discontent is a precarious undertaking. As Burke conducted political opposition in the public sphere, his publications display the dangerous subversion of authority within the Foucauldian concept of "parrhesia," in which a speaker precariously addresses someone with greater authority. This concept underlies Burke's elevation of public opinion, as his publications appeal to an authoritative audience while criticizing powerful government officials.

In his essay "On Parties," Burke laments that the Whigs and Tories do not resemble cohesive political parties. He suggests that individuals manipulate political factions for their own ambition, dissolving the ideological unity of their parties. Burke declares "We have at the present no Party properly so called among us [...] they are mere factions: without any Design" (102). Burke refers to political ideology as the "design" underlying a party, characterizing Whigs and Tories as factions motivated by personal ambition rather than agreed policies. He describes the Whigs and Tories as "a junction of People intreagu[ing] [sic] for their own Interest" (102). As Burke espoused loyalty to social institutions, he avowed that communal interests benefit society more than individual ambitions. Burke's view of the necessity of social organization applies to political parties as he argues that parties should rely on a shared ideology which motivates their political interests.

The unpublished essay "On Parties" presents Burke's elevation of political institutions over individual interests, a principle underlying his later avowals of stewardship and civic virtue.

Bourke states that “the position which the essay on parties staked out would later appear as a notorious intellectual innovation of Burke’s” (624). Burke proceeded to practice opposition by criticizing ambitious individuals and dissolute political movements which corrupted established systems of government. However, Burke did not confine this practice to criticism of individual government leaders but presents, according to Bourke, “a plea for an analysis of underlying causes in public affairs to replace the standard procedure of ascribing responsibility for political difficulties to the actions of individual leaders” (631). Burke posits a solution to the excessive focus on individuals in democracy by replacing factions with cohesive parties. Bourke states that this argument “is notable for its qualifications of both Bolingbroke and Hume” (631).

Burke responded to David Hume’s essay “Of Parties in General” (1742) by drawing a distinction between parties and factions. Hume describes parties as corruptive associations based on personal interest, principle, or admiration. Hume does not distinguish between “faction” and “party” as he denounces political affiliations as a perennial corruption. He argues that “Factions subvert government, render laws impotent, and beget the fiercest animosities among men of the same nation, who ought to give mutual assistance and protection to each other. And what should render the founders of parties more odious is, the difficulty of extirpating these weeds, when once they have taken root in any state” (34). Burke accepts Hume’s premise of the corruptive influence of personal factions, but contradicts Hume by arguing that ideological parties benefit society by expanding the constitution. While Hume aligns parties founded on “principle” with those focused on individual reputation and self-interest, Burke identifies this influence as the distinction between party and faction.

In “On Parties,” Burke’s speaker describes the objective of political parties as “the Real Aggrandizement of some of the Powers which form the Political Constitution” (101). This



argument posits that parties must uphold the contract between government and subject instead of expanding the authority of their individual members. However, Burke contends that factions devolve into instruments of self-aggrandizement as individuals attempt to expand their authority. He denies that “any body will rest satisfied with any definite portion of Power” (101). The solution Burke presents to this dissolution of political affiliations is opposition. He contends that parties may deter corruption through their scrutiny and criticism of each other. Burke presents his view of the structure of government, arguing that “the Constituent Parts will each have its Party & it is absolutely necessary that it should [...] There is a watchful Eye on every side & the result of the workings of opposite Ambition whilst any sort of Equality subsists creates the Appearance at least of something like moderate Counsels” (101). This argument indicates that even ambition, a motivation Burke denounces as corruptive, can counteract tyranny and corruption by creating a *détente* between the opposition and the governing party. Burke indicates the utility of ambition as a tool of opposition in a publicly accountable democratic institution. Burke asserts that the increasingly public activity of political debate encourages fair governance through the “watchful Eye” of public scrutiny.

Burke proceeds to describe the ideological divisions underlying British politics, which led to the formation of the dominant Whig and Tory factions. He acknowledges that the issue of Stuart succession precipitated the division between Whigs and Tories and led to the Whigs’ long period in government under Robert Walpole. The speaker of “On Parties” declares “The Jacobite interest was what really kept Life in both Partys [sic], they gave a real Design to what was only Speculation in the Tories, & the Whigs had thereby a real ground to oppose them” (101). Burke contends that allegiance to the Stuarts was only an abstract “speculation” in Tory ideology until the revolutionary Jacobites entrenched this movement within the party. He contends further that

the Tories' perceived commitment to the Jacobite interest allowed the Whigs to form a unified opposition. Through their opposition to Jacobitism, the Whigs developed a public image of loyalty and nationalism, leading to the dominant and enduring government of Robert Walpole. Burke's speaker describes the decimation of the Tories during the reign of George II and the Walpole Ministry by saying "a long Exclusion, frequent Disappointments, numerous Desertions, an odious Cause, Court Influence & two unsuccessful wars has absolutely annihilated that Party" (101). This description indicates many of the corruptions which Wilkes and Junius exposed in Whig journalism during the 1760s and early 70s. Burke similarly identifies the malicious influences of Jacobitism and favouritism while narrating the decline of the Tories in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

Burke describes the Tories' loyalty to the Stuarts as an archaic view which prevented their election during the reign of the first two Hanoverian monarchs. He states: "The Tory Party could not subsist without [Jacobitism], their shaking off their old Prince, & both their Submission & their opposition to those who successively came in his place left them without Scheme or Principle & the destruction of the Jacobites completed their Ruin" (101). In "On Parties," Burke reflected on the Tories' experience in opposition in 1757 shortly before the Whigs formed the opposition to the Bute ministry. The Whigs courted public favour successfully through their loyalty to the Hanovers as Jacobitism became anathema to the public. Burke proceeds to ask how the Whigs could continue to rule without exploiting the issue of Jacobitism by saying "without these [Tory policies] how could the Whigs subsist" (101)? The ruin of the Tories was not permanent, and the Whigs entered a long period of opposition during the reign of George III. While revolutionary loyalty to the Stuarts composed the primary policy of the Tories in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Whigs' definitive characteristic was opposition to

Jacobitism. Burke's discussion of Jacobitism as the foundational issue of division between the Whigs and the Tories echoes Hume's argument against political affiliations in "Of Parties in General." In the aftermath of the Jacobite uprising of 1745, Hume's argument illustrates the conflict between Whigs and Tories which persisted as Jacobitism became irrelevant later in the century. Hume states "Nothing is more usual than to see parties, which have begun upon a real difference, continue even after that difference is lost. When men are once enlisted [sic] on opposite sides, they contract an affection to the persons with whom they are united, and an animosity against their antagonists: And these passions they often transmit to their posterity" (35). Animosity toward Jacobite antagonists persisted strongly in the Whigs' opposition to the Tory government in the 1760s and 70s.

Following the schism over Stuart succession, the positions of the Whigs and Tories evolved into an ideological divide comprising the values of liberty and property. The Whigs' support for Hanoverian succession translated into constitutionalism and the belief in liberty as an English value. The Tories' Jacobite sympathies contributed to their affirmation of tradition and property rights, associating an antecedent dynasty with traditional values. In his article, "The Tory Interpretation of History in the Rage of Parties," Mark Knights identifies the historical perspectives underlying the Whig and Tory ideologies of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Knights argues that divergent perspectives on crises of succession and rebellion beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century informed the subsequent Whig positions. He states, "Whereas the Whigs saw a popish conspiracy against the rights, liberties, and property of the individual, the Tory interpretation rested on the belief that there had been a prolonged and coordinated attempt to undermine the two institutions of order, the church and the state" (31). Knights's argument presents both the Whigs and Tories as objects of public anxiety through the perception of the Tories'

conspiratorial history and the Whigs' opposition to church and state. These public images composed the foundation of propaganda wars in the mid-18<sup>th</sup>-century in which the Tories sought to preserve their authority and the Whigs conducted opposition in the public sphere. Knights argues that “[a]s a result of the Tories' conspiratorial outlook and hostility to ‘revolution principles,’ their interpretation was highly sensitive to the ways in which the people could be misled, either through the manipulation of their fears or through the slogans deployed by those who sought to use the power of the people to undermine the church and state” (32).

While in opposition, the Whigs expanded the sphere of democratic debate by publicly scrutinizing the governing Tories and the enduring influence of Lord Bute upon the ministry. Whig publications such as Burke's *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* disseminated opposition into the public sphere by examining the causes of public discontent and casting the blame on the Tories and royal favourites. Burke emphasized the necessity of cohesive ideological parties in his essay “On Parties,” and proceeded to affirm the importance of an organized opposition in *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* (1770). Bromwich posits that “*Thoughts on the Present Discontents* amounts to an argument for the keeping alive of civic conscience and the maintenance of an honest party in opposition” (188). According to Bromwich, Burke connects his conception of a political party to the expression of opposition in the public sphere by arguing that a political ideology must develop support by appealing to the public and criticizing authority. Bromwich asserts that “[a] party, in Burke's view of it here, prevails by accumulating extensive support. It is conceived as existing almost wholly in opposition; it intervenes to recover something that has been lost” (189). Burke distinguishes between the activity of a ministry, which is concerned with the consolidation and maintenance of power, and an

opposition, which can present a reformist ideology to the public and oppose concessions to the government.

In *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, Burke describes the appeals to public opinion by provocateurs like Wilkes and Junius, who maligned corrupt public figures. Burke characterizes the provocation of popular discontent as a precarious endeavour, but emphasizes the value of manipulating public opinion. He describes the diplomacy of journalists and satirists who express public opposition by saying “It is an undertaking of some degree of delicacy to examine into the cause of public disorders. If a man [...] touches the true grievance, there is a danger that he will come near to persons of weight and consequence” (112). Burke illustrates the danger of exposing public dissatisfaction with those in power. Wilkes, for example, touched “a true grievance” of the public by exploiting an anxiety over favouritism and Jacobite sympathies in the Bute Ministry, and faced censure and imprisonment as he vilified “persons of weight and consequence” like Lord Bute, other prominent Tories, and the royal family.

Burke observes that the expression of opposition in journalism is a subversive act in which the exposure of a public grievance places an author under the threat of institutional censure. Burke continues to describe the precarity of a commentator on public discontent by saying “If he should be obliged to blame the favourites of the people, he will be considered as the tool of power; if he censures those in power, he will be looked on as an instrument of faction” (112). This description portrays the consequences of partisanship in the public sphere, emphasizing the value of reputation and public opinion, which Burke goes on to describe as necessary elements of political authority. Burke asserts that the danger of publicly expressing discontent is to be “looked on as” a partisan instrument by the public. Burke begins by indicating the threat of suppression from hegemonic authorities, but proceeds to suggest that a greater

precarity rests in the response of the public. He describes the voice of public opinion by saying “as long as reputation, the most precious possession of every individual, and as long as opinion, the great support of the state, depend entirely upon that voice, it can never be considered as a thing of little consequence either to individuals or to governments” (112). This argument posits public opinion as the foremost component of authority, contending that no one can maintain a position of authority or contrive an influential persona without public favour. Burke asserts that the government is concerned with public opinion in the statement “Government is deeply interested in everything which, even the medium of some temporary uneasiness, may tend finally to compose the minds of the subject, and to conciliate their affection” (112). As Burke attributes opinion and reputation to “every individual,” his description of the “subject,” does not distinguish between the electorate and the unfranchised. Instead, Burke avows that every seemingly insignificant instance of public unrest or “temporary uneasiness” threatens those in power by contributing to public opinion. Burke’s conflation of the unfranchised and the electorate into an extra-political community of “subjects” echoes Wilkes’s appeal to the unfranchised and his manipulation of popular unrest to influence public opinion.

Burke displays parrhesia by performing the very public commentary he describes as dangerous. Michel Foucault argues that parrhesia “is linked [...] to a difference of status between the speaker and his audience, to the fact that the *parrhesiastes* says something which is dangerous to himself” (13). While Burke’s political rhetoric may appear unlike parrhesia because he held the authority of an elected representative, the authority which he ascribes to public opinion elevates the status of his audience. Burke’s avowal of the precarity of expressing opposition before the public as the speaker risks gaining the reputation of a tool of power or

faction emphasizes the authority of public opinion. A speaker who exposes the corruptions of government risks incurring the reprisals of government officials and public opinion.

There is an instance of the subversive exposure of corrupt leaders in *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, as Burke accuses Lord Bute and the Tories of undermining the cohesion of political ideologies to preserve their own power. Burke argues that Bute's supporters follow the principle "[t]hat all political connexions are in their nature factious, and as such ought to be dissipated [...] and that the rule for forming administrations is mere personal ability, rated by the judgment of this cabal" (133). This argument denounces favouritism, accusing royal favourites such as Lord Bute of conspiring to subvert democratically elected governments and compose administrations based on personal favouritism. Burke refers to a proclamation Lord Bute made against the Rockingham Whigs in which he called for the dissolving of party allegiances. He states that the doctrine of eliminating political connections "was solemnly promulgated by the head of the court corps, the Earl of Bute himself" (133). Burke characterizes this avowal as an attempt to undermine the democracy of the House of Commons by ceding control of the ministry to royal favourites. He notes that Bute issued this statement in 1766, "against the then [Rockingham] administration, the only administration which he has ever been known directly and publicly to oppose" (133).

Burke characterizes Bute as a prominent political figure conspiring to increase his power by subverting the democratic structure of British governance. Although Burke presents this allegation while Bute opposes the governing Rockingham administration, Burke's criticism of Bute exemplifies opposition. Burke implicates the former Prime Minister by name and writes while the dissolution of political parties is a present concern. He also maintains that the Rockingham administration was the only government that Bute was "known directly and

publicly to oppose,” indicating that Bute had been able to contrive unjust influence over other ministries such as the coalition of Lord Grafton, which led to the appointment of Lord North in 1770.

Stephen H. Browne argues that Burke’s *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* engages with public opinion by contriving a rhetoric of collaboration between the author and his audience, positing that “the meaning of Burke’s text is not the sum of its recoverable propositions; its meaning, rather, derives from the collaborative experience wherein author and reader reward each other within the terms of the arguments itself” (53). According to Browne’s argument, *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* exemplifies Burke’s avowal of social responsibility. In the text, Burke elevates the public by inviting his readers to analyze the causes of social discontentment, conveying to his readers the virtues of reason and social responsibility. Browne argues that this “collaborative experience” emerges as Burke evokes the expectation that his readers resemble the image of civic virtue he presents. Browne states “The rhetorical action in Burke’s text is its invitation to collaborate in a strategic interpretation of the meaning of political virtue” (53). Burke’s *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* composes a vindication of political society much like his avowal of the necessity of parties. Burke’s description of social responsibility entails the duty of citizens to uphold social institutions which maintain the benevolence of government. Browne describes Burke’s view of the virtue of social responsibility by saying “For Burke virtue was an expression of enlightened public action, of political will tempered by such values as prudence, right reason, forbearance, magnanimity, order and collective commitment” (53).

Having reflected on the value of public opinion and the precarity of expressing opposition in the public sphere, Burke proceeded to assert his view on contemporary public



unrest, presenting opposition to underlying issues in British politics. Burke distinguishes between the ubiquity of public dissatisfaction and the exceptional discontent of his own time by saying “Nobody, I believe, will consider it merely as the language of spleen or disappointment, if I say, that there is something particularly alarming in the present conjecture” (113). Burke describes grievance and disagreement as pervasive aspects of organized society, but asserts that the state of British politics in 1770 is distinctly fractured and contentious. He avers “that disconnexion and confusion in offices, in parties, in families, in parliament, in the nation, prevail beyond the disorders of any former time” (113). Burke contends that the reason for this confusion is the breakdown of the Whig and Tory ideologies, referring to his argument in “On Parties” that political ideologies remain coherent through opposition to each other. The speaker of *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* argues that “the great parties which formerly divided and agitated the kingdom are known to be in a manner entirely dissolved” (114). Burke returns to his argument in “On Parties” that the divisions in British society do not comprise parties espousing converse ideologies, but ambitious individuals forming factions to pursue their own interests.

Burke posits a solution to the corruption of individual ambition in government by arguing for the increased accountability of the House of Commons. Burke appeals rhetorically to his audience as an effective body of political engagement by inviting the public to form an organized opposition to tyranny and corruption in government. Burke’s conclusion to *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* illustrates the injustice of favouritism and addresses the public as a deterrent of tyrannical governance. Burke states, “If the reader believes that there really exists [...] a faction ruling by the private inclinations of a court, against the general sense of the people [...] he will believe also, that nothing but a firm combination of public men against this body, and that, too, supported by the hearty concurrence of the people at large, can get the better of it”

(140). This assertion concludes Burke's argument in favour of organized political parties by illustrating the distinction between a party united by a shared ideology and a faction motivated by private interests. Burke also invites the public to form an organized opposition to the ruling faction which can deter a government that ignores the public good. This appeal demonstrates Burke's collaborative rhetoric by presenting an image of the public as an adherent of liberty and fair governance. This deferential address to the public conveys the responsibility to embody the social virtue of opposing tyrannical and corrupt factions to Burke's audience.

Burke continues to vilify the governing faction of self-interest and favouritism he has revealed by stating that it destabilises British democracy, undermining the interests of the empire and causing internal unrest. He alleges that the faction "pursues a scheme for undermining all the foundations of our freedom [...] rendering us abroad contemptible and at home distracted" (140). Burke's solution to this corruption entails public scrutiny of the government, which will preserve the accountability of the House of Commons and ensure that Parliament does not assume any unconstitutional powers. Burke argues that with increased awareness of politics, "[t]he people will see the necessity of restoring public men to an attention to the public opinion [...] Above all, they will endeavour to keep the House of Commons from assuming a character that does not belong to it" (140). This avowal demonstrates Burke's esteem for social institutions, stating that the corruptions of self-interest and favouritism do not belong to the character of the House of Commons. He rather asserts that public accountability is the natural foundation of the authority of Parliament. Burke presents his view of the necessary accountability of Parliament by saying "When, through the medium of this just connexion with their constituents, the genuine dignity of the House of Commons is restored, it will begin to think of casting from it [...] all the false ornaments of illegal power, with which it has been, for some time, disgraced" (140). Burke

positions the public as a necessary antithesis to tyranny without specifying the electorate. He refers to “the hearty concurrence of the people” rather than “the will of the electorate.” Burke’s rhetorical invocation that the public stand in opposition to corrupt governing factions exemplifies the developing political agency of the unfranchised public in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This appeal illustrates the entrance of the unfranchised into the public sphere of political discourse during the Long Whig Opposition.

Burke’s essays “On Parties” and *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* express advocacy for organized political ideologies. He distinguishes between parties and factions, alleging self-interest as the motivation of factions, and lamenting that a dissolute faction without ideological cohesion can manipulate the British government. “On Parties” extends Burke’s refutation of Lord Bolingbroke, who, despite his ideological significance to the Tories, argued against ideological divisions in politics. The unpublished essay also refutes Hume’s conflation of party and faction as corruptive associations. Burke argues that ideological divisions preserve the institution of democratic debate. Burke argues further that the institution of Parliament can only preserve its natural authority through loyalty to the will of the people, positing public opinion as the foundation of democratic authority. The rhetoric Burke employs in *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* expands the sphere of politics into the realm of public opinion by endowing the reader with the agency to scrutinize the corruption of government. This collaboration between the speaker of *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* and his audience, the British public, exemplifies Burke’s assertion of public responsibility to demand fairness in government and ensure the preservation of magnanimous democratic institutions. Burke avers that the House of Commons is an inherently benevolent institution based on its responsibility to follow the will of its constituents. In “On Parties,” he cites opinion and reputation as constituent aspects of

authority, illustrating the expanding political consciousness and efficacy of the public. Burke does not confine political engagement to the electorate, but regards the public as a body of political agency, as the public sphere incorporated the democratic value of public responsibility and the dissemination of political views in public discourses such as journalism. Burke proceeded to rally the attention and emotion of the public on resonant political issues of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, including revolutions and the exploitations of commerce and empire.

#### Section 8: Rhetorical Appeals to the Public Sphere in Burke's Commentary on the American Revolution

Edmund Burke continued his rhetorical public appeal to civic virtue as he responded to the revolutions of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Burke's sympathy for the American rebels and condemnation of the French Revolution contribute to the perception of inconsistency in his politics. However, Burke's dissonant reactions to the American and French Revolutions conform to his affirmation of the liberty and responsibility of individuals in a social contract. Burke declares in his political treatises "On Parties" and *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* that citizens must uphold the benevolence of social institutions by holding governments accountable, and that governments must act according to the public good to maintain their natural magnanimity. Churchill's axiom that Burke revolted against the tyranny of a monarch or a mob illustrates Burke's justification of rebellion against an oppressive government and condemnation of a corrupt faction overthrowing societal institutions. The following two sections illustrate the contrast between Burke's responses to the American and French Revolutions. Burke continued to disseminate his political views into the public sphere by developing a rhetoric of civic virtue as he invited sympathy for American independence and contempt for the overthrow of the French monarchy. Amid the conflict between the British government and American colonists, a new dividing issue emerged between the Whigs and the Tories. The Whigs and Tories, who first

diverged on the issue of Stuart succession now espoused rival positions on the sovereignty of American colonists. As the Whigs and Tories assumed the binary emblems of liberty and property, the Whigs supported the cause of American independence and the Tories sought to retain control of the colonies.

In 1775, in an atmosphere of open hostility between the 13 American colonies and the British government before the *Declaration of Independence*, Burke presented his *Speech on Conciliation with America* in the House of Commons. In this speech, Burke advocates sympathetic diplomacy with the American colonies, characterizing them as partners in English liberty and constitutionalism. The *Speech on Conciliation* demonstrates the public dissemination of political oratory, as Burke employs literary devices exemplary of rhetoric and poetry to kindle public interest in his statement to the House of Commons. Two years later, during the military phase of the American Revolution, Burke published his *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol*, asserting more starkly that Britain was unjust to resist American independence and that the counter-revolution incited public discontent in Britain. Burke's *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* is also a document depicting the expansion of politics into the public sphere. Unlike the *Speech on Conciliation*, the letter represents local politics, as Burke appealed to his constituents in Bristol. Though Burke advocated for the accountability of government, he was not an accessible representative for the people of Bristol, visiting the constituency only twice in his six years as its MP.<sup>22</sup> However, Burke addresses local concerns in his *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol*, describing the domestic impacts of the war with America such as public discontent and languishing trade. Both the *Speech on Conciliation with America* and *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* exemplify

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<sup>22</sup> Norman 86

Burke's public avowal of liberty and social responsibility as a response to the American Revolution.

Burke's *Speech on Conciliation* expands the collaborative rhetoric of his *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* by inviting his audience to share Burke's sympathy for the autonomy of the American colonies. The audience of the speech comprises the House of Commons, the rhetorical public Burke addresses, and the reading public with access to the publication. This text is a distinctive instance of the deliberate publication of a political speech to render Burke's ideas accessible to a broader public. Jesse Norman tells us that Burke's *Speech on Conciliation* "marked a small but important watershed in political communication" (71) in which Burke disseminated parliamentary rhetoric into the public sphere to contribute to his public persona. This expansion of the sphere of political oratory conforms to Burke's belief in public opinion as the basis of political authority. Norman states that "[s]peeches by parliamentarians had been published before, but these were some of the earliest occasions on which they had been self-consciously used to build a basis of knowledge and shared education within politics, a reputation outside Parliament" (71). Through this shared knowledge and education, Burke presents his rhetoric that the public holds the responsibility to preserve democracy and defy tyranny.

Burke appealed to an audience within the reading public of the late 18th century. While Burke and Wilkes both appealed to an emerging space of extra-political activity in the public sphere, Burke's publication strategy and rhetoric of civic virtue appealed to a different section of the public. While Wilkes focused on his support in the urban centre of London, Burke addressed an audience which was less geographically specific and more ideologically connected. By printing his speeches in the form of pamphlets, Burke contributed to the increasing dissemination of political rhetoric to a national reading public. In his book *The Reading Nation in the Romantic*

Period, William St. Clair describes the proliferation of political pamphlets throughout 18th-century Britain by saying, “Although most of the pamphlets were printed in London in modest editions, many apparently at the expense of their authors [...] they circulated nationally through subscription libraries and book clubs” (256). This circulation allowed Burke to avoid inciting a concentrated urban movement like Wilkes and Liberty, and appeal to a reading audience who could influence politics by shaping public opinion.

St Clair proceeds to describe the individuals in Burke’s reading audience, indicating their authority outside formal politics: “The members of the reading societies were the leaders of local life, a social, economic, and intellectual elite. The societies were a flowering of intellectual confidence, a boom in serious reading to match the boom in serious writing, the embodiment of local and civic as well as national pride” (258). The communal responsibility affirmed by this readership reflects Burke’s rhetoric of civic virtue. The elite members of Burke’s audience were not political officials, but significant figures in the sphere of public opinion. Burke appealed to the civic leadership of the unfranchised to broadcast his position on the American Revolution into the national public sphere. Burke’s views of the accountability of democratic institutions and the civic virtue of the public to safeguard its own liberty aligned with the constitutionalist assertions of the American rebels.

Burke opens his speech by referring to the return of Lord North’s bill to restrict the American colonies’ trading partners only to include Britain. The House of Lords returned the bill to the Commons for further review. Upon the prospect of further debate over North’s bill, Burke declares “I do confess I could not help looking on this event as a fortunate omen. I look upon it as a providential favour, by which we are put once more in possession of our deliberative capacity upon a business so very questionable” (4). This statement avows the discursive

accountability of Parliament, stating that the House of Commons comprises a “deliberative capacity” to debate legislation. Burke avows further that North’s bill is dubious or “questionable,” indicating that it is the responsibility of Parliament to scrutinize proposed legislation which may be unjust. As Burke published this speech, he declared the return of North’s bill “a fortunate omen” and “a providential favour” not only before his fellow MPs, but to the public, describing the moral responsibility of government. Burke conveys this notion into the public sphere to emphasize the responsibilities of elected leaders to follow the will of their constituents and adhere to the public good, including the good of the American colonies.

The rhetorical demonstration of the responsibility of government in the *Speech on Conciliation* exemplifies Burke’s collaborative rhetoric of holding his audience accountable to his doctrine of civic virtue. In the introduction to his book *Edmund Burke and the Discourse of Virtue*, Stephen H. Browne defines Burke’s expression of virtue as “an active principle, best conceived as a dynamic commonplace, energized by the force of public controversy and validated by the public will. As an inventive resource, it summons shared perceptions of the good to authorize action” (6). Burke created a rhetoric of civic virtue by which he evoked sentiments of responsibility and stewardship in his audience and cultivated the image of himself as a dutiful public servant. The audience of this rhetorical appeal includes elected legislators and the public comprising the electorate and the unfranchised. By stating that the return of North’s restrictive trade bill provides a “providential” opportunity for Parliament to review its hostile policies toward America, Burke affirms the moral responsibility of the government and invites public support for conciliation between Britain and America. By appealing to providence, Burke suggests that God has guided the democratic institution of Parliament to reconsider Britain’s hostility toward America.



Burke's *Speech on Conciliation* adopts poetic conventions to evoke interest in the cause of conciliation with America, revealing the intermingling of public and private discourses in Burke's political speeches. Poetic discourse in the 18<sup>th</sup> century encompassed the private activities of patronage and subscription publishing, limiting the population that could create and appreciate poetry to select literate enclaves. In an essay exploring the binary opposition of public and private expression in 18<sup>th</sup>-century poetry focusing on Gray and his contemporaries, William Levine posits that poets of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century wrote from a position of retirement and exclusion based on a solitary poetic tradition. He states, "Such postures of isolation are part of a poetic tradition, especially the view of society from the elect, the retired, or the imaginatively transported speakers in, respectively, Milton, Horace, and Pindar. But these traditions are reinterpreted so as to resist the limiting conditions of commercial writing and public disenfranchisement of lyric poets" (238). This argument describes the isolation of 18<sup>th</sup>-century poets as a contrivance of traditional poetic solitude which poets reinterpreted as a reflection of their disenfranchisement in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century literary economy.

By adopting poetic devices into his speeches and political pamphlets, Burke translated a private, old-fashioned mode of literary expression into an emerging public discourse. In his book *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, Jon P. Klancher posits that "The eighteenth-century English public has always seemed distinctly modern in contrast to an older, more homogenous public fostered by patronage and bound together by the common code of classical rhetoric" (19). In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, poetic solitude encompassed not only the isolation of the poet-speaker, but the limitations of subscription publishing and the adherence to classical forms which isolated the poet from the contemporary public. As Burke addressed the House of Commons using poetic devices and expanded his audience through publication, he disseminated the conventions of

Neoclassical poetry to a broader public. Burke adopts poetic solitude as he uses pastoral conventions in the *Speech on Conciliation*. However, his translation of these poetic devices into political oratory reveal the dissemination of the previously isolated and exclusive discourses of poetry and parliamentary rhetoric into the public sphere.

Franz De Bruyn identifies formal devices and imagery exemplary of 18<sup>th</sup>-century prospect poems in Burke's *Speech on Conciliation* in his chapter, "Gentlemen's Prospects: Viewing the World from the 'Elevation of Reason,'" comparing the speech to James Thomson's poems *The Seasons*. Burke engages the pastoral imagery of *The Seasons* and the implied aristocratic identity of Thomson's poet-speaker to convey an image of responsible citizenship and stewardship of the British empire. Burke adopts the perspective of the observational speaker of Thomson's prospect poems to support his political rhetoric, invoking a poetic exemplar of civic virtue. De Bruyn describes the spatial imagery of Thomson's *Seasons*, indicating the relevance of this poetic device to Burke's conception of national identity. Examining Thomson's poem *Summer*, De Bruyn states "The elevation of the viewer's vantage point and its location on the aristocratic estate signal the ideal of embracing the nation in all its multifarious aspects and of identifying the national interest with those of the gentleman" (112). This analysis of the perspective of Thomson's poet-speaker indicates that the poems depict the observations of a gentleman belonging to the aristocracy. Burke disarticulates this elitist view of British identity by sharing the perspective of the poet-speaker with the House of Commons and the public. Burke exposes the image of a rural estate to his diverse readership as he addresses an audience of legislators and private citizens sharing a national identity.

Burke employs pastoral conventions from 18<sup>th</sup>-century prospect poems in his florid overarching image of life in the British empire and America. This geographical and social

description also appeals to historical rhetoric and pathos. In his *Speech on Conciliation*, Burke describes the ingenuity of people of the American colonies by saying “Whilst we follow them among the tumbling mountains of ice, and behold them penetrating into the deepest frozen recesses of Hudson’s Bay and Davis’s Straits, whilst we are looking for them beneath the arctic circle, we hear that they have pierced into the opposite region of polar cold, that they are at the antipodes, and engaged under the frozen serpent of the south” (24). This glacial image of the pervasive expansion of the American colonies uses poetic conventions to evoke admiration for the resilience and ingenuity of the people of British North America. Burke uses anaphora to convey an expression of cohesion with his audience. He repeats “Whilst we” to position his audience alongside him as he admires the expansion of the American colonies. The rhetorical figure of the observer which Burke employs from the prospect poem contributes to his espousal of liberty as a Whig. Burke does not treat America as property of the British empire but positions himself and his audience as observers of the liberty and expansion of the American colonists. The detailed social and geographical prospect in Burke’s *Speech on Conciliation* implies that his audience in Britain may admire the progress of the American colonies without controlling them. The image of America as an untameable landscape also echoes Burke’s reference to providence by illustrating the nation as an object beyond human control.

Burke affirms the admirable progress of British North America by saying “Falkland Island, which seemed too remote and too romantic an object for the grasp of national ambition, is but a stage and resting-place in the progress of their victorious industry” (24). This statement uses hyperbole to emphasize the distant exoticism with which Burke characterizes the expansion of the American colonies. De Bruyn cites this passage as an exemplum of the conventions of the prospect poem in Burke’s speech. However, Burke’s embellishment of the historical

achievements of America also exemplifies his rhetoric of historical narration. Burke's appeals to history contribute to the collaborative rhetoric he contrives with his audience by providing the premise of historical awareness from which Burke and his audience observe the character of the American colonies. Browne characterizes Burke's evocative narration of the prosperous expansion of British North America as a rhetorical appeal to history. He states that "[n]owhere in the speech is this sense of historical perspective so dramatically portrayed as in Burke's account of colonial commerce" (55). Burke's detailed image of the prosperity of the American colonies conveys a historical perspective of the value of America within the British empire to his audience. This assertion contributes to Burke's overarching statement of the shared social values of England and British North America.

Burke's engagement with the conventions of the prospect poem contributes to his appeal for social responsibility by expanding the awareness of his audience. In his *Speech on Conciliation*, Burke invites his audience to observe a survey of the character of Britain and British North America, depicting their shared values to urge conciliation with the American colonies. The view of Britain and America which Burke presents elevates the perspective of his audience to form a vast social and historical prospect. In the speech, Burke declares "We stand where we have an immense view of what is and what is past" (20). This statement presents a shared perspective between Burke and his audiences in the House of Commons and the reading public. De Bruyn connects this shared perspective to the prospect of Thomson's poet-speaker in the *Seasons* by saying "The vantage point of the viewer permits an extension in time as well as in space: the historical and political associations aroused by the surrounding estate carry the mind's eye [...] as though events in time were laid out spatially before the surveyor" (112). This description places the speaker in an estate belonging to the landed aristocracy. The speaker may

or may not be the proprietor of the estate, but his vantage-point rests on the hierarchical distribution of land in Britain. Burke expands this privileged perspective to include the audience of his speech. He addresses the public collectively by saying “We stand where we have” a prospect of historical knowledge and social awareness. The image of the estate is also relevant to Burke’s avowal of the responsibility of stewardship, in which he characterizes the British empire as an estate which requires preservation. He proceeds to argue that the hostility between the British government and the American colonies is a dissolution of the value of liberty underlying English identity.

Burke’s sympathy for the American revolution relied on the argument that the rebels’ effort for independence did not contradict the values of the British empire. Burke avowed further that the Americans’ motivation for liberty cohered with English values. He declares in the *Speech on Conciliation* that “the people of the colonies are descendants of Englishmen [...] They are therefore, not only devoted to liberty, but to liberty according to English ideas” (28). Burke reveals his dissatisfaction with the present state of British governance by suggesting that the American colonists retain a strong allegiance to liberty which has waned in Britain. Burke’s denunciation of the corruptions of faction and favouritism in the British government contributes to his sympathy for the Americans’ resistance to overbearing colonial policies. He asserts to the Speaker of the House of Commons, “England, Sir, is a nation, which still I hope respects, and formerly adored, her freedom. The colonists emigrated from you when this part of your character was most predominant; and they took this bias and direction the moment they parted from your hands” (28). Burke refers literally to the Speaker, the conventional addressee of a parliamentary speech. However, he proceeds to address the nation of Britain, speaking to the broader audience to whom Burke shared his ideas by publishing the speech. Burke addresses Britain as a dual

audience encompassing the House of Commons and the public as he describes the shared value of liberty between Britain and America.

Burke declares to the nation that America espouses a stronger dedication to liberty than England herself. This emphatic assertion of sympathy for the American revolution challenges the British government in a statement openly addressing the government and the public. Although Burke expresses admiration for the prosperity, commerce, and expansion of the American colonies, he carefully distinguishes between the American value of liberty and its British antecedent. By describing liberty as “a part of your character” while addressing an English audience, Burke expresses patriotism and appeals to the English definition of liberty as a more moderate value than its American counterpart. Bromwich argues that Burke saw conciliation with America as a necessity to preserve the value of English liberty which developed in America to emphasize the rights of the individual more firmly. Bromwich asserts that Burke concluded “that English liberty could only flourish if it established terms of concord with its radical counterpart across the ocean—the liberty of a people who, if they became a nation, would be in some ways England’s completion and in some ways her antithesis” (234). While Burke emphasizes the ideological kinship between Britain and America, and advocates for a diplomatic relationship acknowledging American autonomy, he directs his criticism toward the hostile policy of the government to maintain his loyalty to the British empire.

In 1777, Burke continued to disseminate commentary on the American Revolution into the public sphere by publishing *A Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol*. This text displays the publication of political correspondence directed toward Burke’s constituents in Bristol. As a centre of trade with British North America, Bristol held a distinct reliance on the American colonies and sympathy for their interests. In the article “Bristol and the American War of

Independence,” Peter Marshall recounts that “[t]his colonial connection seemed stronger than ever before in 1774 when Bristolians [...] had chosen as their members of parliament Henry Cruger, a New York-born merchant, and Edmund Burke, already distinguished as an unequalled defender of American rights” (1). In Burke’s *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol*, he expresses his sympathy for the American Revolution to an audience that shares his support for the American colonies. Burke declares “We are heartily agreed in our detestation of a civil war” (212). This statement presents Burke’s argument that Britain’s hostility to America provokes division and discontent in the empire. Burke proceeds to condemn the division of the American revolution by invoking his aesthetic philosophy to argue in support of imperial unity and magnanimity. This letter does not display the rhetoric of opposition that appears in Burke’s House of Commons speeches, but instead applies ideas of Burke’s abstract philosophy to theories of governance to justify his position on the American Revolution to the people of Bristol. The letter exemplifies public opposition by aligning the perspective of the speaker with his audience, evoking a sympathetic response which opposes the counter-revolutionary position of the British government.

Burke evokes sympathetic identification with the American colonists by depicting their commitment to liberty against the threat of an overbearing, exploitative empire. In his article “Edmund Burke’s Sublime Cosmopolitan Aesthetic,” Matthew W. Binney describes the letter by saying “[Burke] points to the diversity and complexity of the colonists in order to awaken a sense of connection to the North Americans” (655). The notion of sympathetic connection is central to Burke’s argument in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. The text, which I refer to hereafter as *A Philosophical Enquiry*, begins with an assertion of the shared tastes and sensory experiences which unite human beings. Binney states

that “Burke’s positive morality—connecting the subject to the external object by beginning with sense experience—demonstrates how he anticipates features of an aesthetic and moral cosmopolitanism” (654). Burke indicates the value of social responsibility by positing a common human weakness in comparison to the magnitude of the sublime which evokes the necessity of collaboration. Burke’s cosmopolitanism relies on the argument that the common sensory and moral responses of human beings invoke the responsibility to preserve organized society.

In *A Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke describes the observation of distress as a sublime experience encompassing sympathetic fear and the delight of personal safety. He states, “The delight we have in such things hinders us from shunning scenes of misery; and the pain we feel prompts us to relieve ourselves in relieving those who suffer” (40). Burke argues that human beings are inclined to observe suffering while in a position of safety and feel sympathetic identification through the experience, which leads to the responsibility to relieve the suffering of others. This conception of sympathy differs from Adam Smith’s description of the sympathetic imagination in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Smith argues that “[a]s we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected [...] Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers” (13). Smith argues that sympathy originates in the imagined suffering of the subject rather than the pain which impels an observer to relieve the suffering of another person. He states that “[our senses] never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations” (14). Burke reflects on Smith’s premise of observing suffering from a position of safety, but argues that human beings’ shared sensory responses create a more immediate sympathetic identification than imagining personal suffering.



Burke's concept of the sublime underlies his description of sympathy and the observation of suffering, as he identifies suffering as a source of the sublime. In *A Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke states "Whatever is fitted to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects [...] is a source of the *sublime*" (33). Burke connects the experiences of sympathy and the sublime by identifying the observation of suffering, which precipitates sympathy, as a source of the sublime. Binney describes the Burkean sublime by saying "we feel compelled to relieve the suffering of others through the pain and terror that follow our imagination's unsuccessful attempts to determine the limits of the sublime magnitude" (652). The Burkean sublime has the effects of unification and equalization by appealing to a shared inborn response among human beings. In *A Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke's description of the overwhelming terror which the sublime evokes in human observers, indicates a cosmopolitan morality in which human beings share a subaltern position and must collaborate to survive the pressures of natural and political sublimity.

In his *Speech on Conciliation*, Burke presents an image of America as a sublime immensity which the British empire cannot tame, and which Britons and Americans observe from an equal position of powerlessness in contrast to the natural sublime. Burke's poetic description of the expansion of American commerce and agriculture provides a sublime image of the landscape of British North America. In the *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol*, Burke describes a different manifestation of the sublime which individuals observe in the tyrannical impositions of a government. The speaker opposes a bill which would force people alleged with treason in America to face trial in England. His description of the proposed act exemplifies the sublimity of an empire unjustly persecuting individuals, as he argues that "to try a man under that act is, in effect, to condemn him unheard. A person is brought hither in the dungeon of a ship's hold;

thence he is vomited into a dungeon on land; loaded with irons, unfurnished with money, unsupported by friends” (214). Burke opposes the impositions and excises the British empire forced onto its American colonies by describing the terror evoked by the political sublime. A domineering, tyrannical government embodies the terrifying vastness of the sublime in contrast to the subaltern exposure of individuals.

For Burke, the sublime can be isolating and unifying. The grandeur of nature and empire in contrast to the weakness of an individual is isolating, as in the case of the American charged with treason and deported under the terrifying power of the British empire. However, Burke uses this description of isolation to unify his audience in the collaborative sympathy evoked by the sublime. The sublime evokes an admission of human weakness and a shared responsibility among its observers. Burke presented an image of the natural sublime in the *Speech on Conciliation* to portray America as landscape outside of the British empire’s control. He proceeded to inspire terror in response to the sublimity of the British empire by illustrating the mistreatment of citizens in the American colonies. Binney describes Burke’s avowal of the sublime as an impulse toward sympathy and social responsibility, arguing that, according to Burke, “[t]he experience of the sublime object motivates the subject to engage others through natural sympathy while avoiding sectarian interest” (654). For Burke, the experience of the sublime is a natural impulse toward unity.

Binney observes the resonance of Burke’s theory of cosmopolitan morality in the *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* by saying “Burke provides an example of this open-ended moral approach by prodding the English to recognize their obligations to American colonists and Indians: both possess distinct cultural manners, practices, and beliefs” (654). According to Burke, human beings’ shared response to the sublime reveals their minute social distinctions and

unites them through collective sympathy. Burke's conception of sympathy does not preclude imperialism. Burke rather argues that empires should govern colonies diversely, according to the traditions of different societies. Burke argues against the imperial exploitation of America by saying "in the comprehensive dominion which the divine Providence had put into our hands [...] it was our duty, in all soberness, to conform our government to the character and circumstances of the several people who composed this mighty and strangely diversified mass" (54). Burke presents a sublime image of infinity to depict the diversity of British North America. He argues in *A Philosophical Enquiry* that "[i]nfinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime" (60). Burke also positions America beyond control and comprehension by identifying "divine Providence" as the original connection between America and the British empire, connoting the injustice of an empire assuming the authority of the divine.

Immanuel Kant reflected on the sublime in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790), dividing the concept into the *mathematical* and the *dynamic* sublime. Kant's argument implies that Burke's depiction exemplifies the mathematical sublime, as Burke illustrated the complexity of the landscape and society of British North America. In *A Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol*, Burke states that "several people" (54) *compose* American society, using the verb *compose* to connote the collective establishment of a society of diverse individuals. The description "strangely diversified mass" depicts the sublimity of the geography and society of British North America. Although Burke describes the immeasurability of the American landscape, his description exemplifies the mathematical sublime by illustrating an immense object beyond our capacity to measure. Kant describes this expression of the mathematical sublime by saying "where it is considered an absolute measure beyond which no greater is possible subjectively (i.e. for the

judging subject), it then conveys the idea of the sublime, and calls forth that emotion which no mathematical estimation of magnitudes by numbers can evoke (except in so far as the fundamental aesthetic measure is vividly preserved for the imagination)” (82). Burke does not limit his sublime description to the geography of America, but describes its society as “strangely diversified,” presenting the sublime connotation of social diversity. Burke’s description of the admirable vastness of British North America exemplifies Kant’s concept of the mathematical as Burke presents an object which overwhelms the comprehension of the reasoning subject.

Burke continues to engage the concept of the sublime as an expression of political responsibility in his *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* by evoking the rhetorical concept of the greater good. The greater good connotes sublimity through its unifying rhetorical appeal. Stephen H. Browne states that in the *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol*, Burke “gave rhetorical force to a conception of virtue rooted in civic vision, a capacity on the part of the speaker to see beyond the sweep of immediate events and toward the greater good” (67). Although Burke addresses the constituents of Bristol, who audience sympathized with the American rebels, he does not emphasize an ideological division between Bristol and the rest of England. Instead, Burke opposes the greater division of hostility within the British empire by advocating for conciliation with America. Burke agrees with his audience’s perspective on the revolution as he declares “we feel exactly the same emotions of grief and shame in all its miserable consequences; whether they appear [...] in the shape of victories or defeats, of captures made from the English on the continent, or from the English in these islands; of regulations which subvert the liberties of our brethren, or which undermine our own” (212). In this letter, Burke characterizes the military and political events of the American Revolution as inconsequential. Burke looks rhetorically toward the greater good by stating that all of the hostilities of war with

America subvert and undermine the liberty of British subjects, including American colonists. Browne argues that Burke's rhetorical address to his constituents in Bristol "negotiates a series of conceptual tensions or conventional disjuncts: text and context, particular and general, expedience and principle" (68). Burke's reduction of the divisive events of the American Revolution in favour of the greater good of unity in the British empire exemplifies the tensions of "particular and general," and "principle and expediency." Burke speaks in general terms to unite his audience through the expectation that they agree with his desire for conciliation with America. He privileges principle over expediency by affirming the shared value of liberty between the English and the Americans, neglecting to describe specific actions within the American Revolution, which was in its military phase in 1777. Burke's general view of the harms to the public good caused by Britain's hostility to America displays the unifying rhetorical concept of the greater good. Burke presents this sympathetic description to urge his audience to conform to his advocacy for a diplomatic resolution to the war with America.

As Burke responded to the American Revolution in the 1770s, he deliberately expanded his rhetoric to address a broader audience in the public sphere, appealing to political awareness and civic virtue. The rhetoric of Burke's *Speech on Conciliation with America* and *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* addresses a multifarious audience including legislators and the reading public, comprising the electorate and the unfranchised. Burke speaks to the nation while addressing the Speaker of the House of Commons within the conventions of a parliamentary speech in the *Speech on Conciliation*. He presents a sympathetic address to his constituents in Bristol in an open letter addressing the sheriffs of that constituency. Both texts display the expansion of political discourse to invite public interest and disseminate Burke's position on the American Revolution into the public sphere of England. During the revolutions of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century,

English politics became further polarized as the Whigs supported the protection of liberty and the Tories supported the preservation of property, leading to their contrary positions on revolution. The Whigs experienced ideological tensions as they divided into factions with rival positions on the American and French Revolutions. Burke expressed opposition in this tense political landscape, entreating for conciliation with America and later decrying the support for the French Revolution among the Foxite Whigs. These public expressions of opposition comprise many of Burke's most prominent publications. Burke translated devices and archetypes from Neoclassical poetics and his own aesthetic philosophy to contribute to his rhetorical public statements on revolution. Burke's statements on the American Revolution also surround the most politically consequential period of his career, in which he represented Bristol, the third largest constituency in Britain, and a prominent centre of commerce in Britain's trade with America. Burke became a more polarizing figure a decade later when he continued his public editorial on revolution by responding to the French Revolution, disputing with prominent Whigs and deviating from his sympathy for the rebels during the American Revolution.

#### Section 9: Burke's Tragicomic Reflections on the French Revolution

Edmund Burke's commentary on the French Revolution comprises publications which adopt diverse literary conventions to assert Burke's opposition to the revolution and the Foxite Whigs. Some of Burke's most notable publications which invoke literary conventions to express his opposition to the French Revolution are *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, and *Letters on a Regicide Peace*. These publications span the pivotal early years of the French Revolution, 1790–97. Burke persisted in his opposition to the French Revolution until his death in 1797, observing the Reign of Terror and the execution of Louis XVI, though he did not live to see the revolution's imperialist aftermath. Burke's

responses to the French Revolution contribute to the literature of the Long Whig Opposition, adopting the conventions of drama, rhetoric, and poetry into political commentary to illustrate the extremism of the revolution before the public. The overarching motivations of the French Revolution diverged fundamentally from the American Revolution of the previous decade. While Burke observed in the American Revolution the assertion of independence and liberation from a domineering colonial government, he opposed the radical transformation of revolutionary France, which overthrew the monarchy, deposed the Church, and executed the king and queen.

Burke published the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1790, during the “Liberal Phase” of the revolution when many Englishmen, particularly among the Whigs, sympathized with the French Revolution as an uprising against a corrupt and tyrannical state. Burke narrates pathetic scenes of mutiny and violation, and appeals to the remembrance of history to dissuade the public from their sympathy for the French Revolution. Burke continued to condemn the French Revolution as he opposed revolutionary sympathy among the more radical Whig factions in his publication *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*. This epistle adopts distinctive rhetorical conventions to vindicate Burke’s avowal of opposition within the Whig party, providing an insight into the multifarious expressions of public opposition in Burke’s political career. Burke’s *Letters on a Regicide Peace* responded to the “Radical Phase” of the French Revolution, in which the Jacobin party precipitated the Reign of Terror from 1793 to 94 and executed Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. In 1797, when Burke published the *Letters*, public opinion in England aligned with Burke’s denunciation of the French Revolution. Only the most

obstinate Whigs led by Charles James Fox continued to support Jacobins after the Reign of Terror and the execution of the king.<sup>23</sup>

The popularity of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* illustrates Burke's dissemination of his political ideology into the public sphere, influencing public opinion. William St. Clair describes the abundance of political pamphlets in the final decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, recounting that the "*Reflections*, with the possible exception of Paine's *Rights of Man*, was printed in far larger numbers than any of the others—20,000 during its first fifteen years, compared with 500 or 700 each for most of the others" (257). St. Clair compares the readership of the *Reflections* to the popularity of Thomas Paine's pamphlet *The Rights of Man*, though he proceeds to describe an act of censorship which ended the competition between the texts, allowing the *Reflections* to become the dominant English argument on the French Revolution. He recounts that, "[w]hen *The Rights of Man* was outlawed and withdrawn, *Reflections* was left triumphant in the field as the main political text of the time, becoming more widely available at ever cheaper prices and reaching virtually every reading society" (257). St. Clair's argument suggests that Burke's tact and aversion to civil disobedience allowed the *Reflections* to become a pervasive influence over Britons' opinion on the French Revolution because the more controversial treatise was lost to censorship. He posits that it is "likely that the many tens of thousands of influential readers who discussed the implications of the French Revolution did so on the basis of having read Burke's *Reflections* and of no other pamphlet" (257).

Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* presents a denunciation of the French Revolution comprising devices of historical rhetoric and 18<sup>th</sup>-century drama to evoke public

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<sup>23</sup> Norman recounts that Fox refused to read Burke's *Reflections*, and argues that Fox "insisted on seeing the French Revolution as a re-run of 1688, with Louis XVI as James II" (149). Norman indicates that Burke's commentary on the French Revolution sowed doubt in Fox's leadership among the Whigs in the early 1790s.



interest in Burke's political stance against the revolution. Burke asserts that the French Revolution will become a historical exemplar of corruption. Throughout the *Reflections*, Burke illustrates a contrast between the progressive history of Britain and the anarchical deviation from history of revolutionary France. In his article "Burke's Vehemence and the Rhetoric of Historical Exaggeration," Steven Stryer posits that Burke illustrates an idealized past in contrast to a corrupt present that is anomalous to historical progress. Stryer contends that Burke's "notorious sweeping generalizations about the evils of his own time tend to arise from explicit or implied contrasts with earlier periods of English history" (178). Burke appealed to sentiments of nostalgia and nationalism among his audience in the British public as he argued that the institutions of democracy in Britain depend on historical traditions of hereditary authority in contrast to the corrupt state of revolutionary France.

Burke's avowal of an idealized British history as an antithesis to the French Revolution influenced the nostalgic undercurrent of Romantic poetry at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. William Wordsworth's poetry from the early 1800s reflects Burke's idealization of history in contrast to the corrupt present. Wordsworth's political views also notably shifted from radical sympathy for the French Revolution to concur with Burke's condemnation of the revolution in the 1790s. In his article "'Wordsworth's 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty' and the British Revolutionary Past,'" Philip Connell examines the shift in Wordsworth's disposition toward the French Revolution. He argues that *Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty*, a collection of sonnets and odes from 1802 to 03, reveal the author's admiration for the innovations of liberty and constitutionalism in English history following the Glorious Revolution in contrast to the "despotic, morally impoverished" (749) state of pre-Napoleonic France. Connell argues that Burke's description of the inheritance of English liberty and democracy influenced

Wordsworth's representation of history. Connell argues that the poems "draw rhetorical strength from Burke's critique of French Revolutionary ideology" (760). Sonnet XVI in this collection describes "the Flood / Of British freedom, which to the open Sea / Of the world's praise from dark antiquity hath flowed" (1). Though Wordsworth refers to the obscurity of "dark antiquity," his image of the flow of British liberty to the praise of other nations conveys a nostalgic view of the valued inheritance of British history. Connell describes this sonnet by saying "There is a general concern here, shared with Burke, to privilege the customary and the heritable elements of English national identity" (759).

By contrast, Wordsworth's sonnet XIV (titled "London, 1802) expresses sorrow over the corrupt present in an address to Milton as an exemplar of the achievements of English history. The poet-speaker invokes Milton, saying "England hath need of thee: she is a fen / Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen [...] Have forfeited their ancient English dower / Of inward happiness" (2-6). Wordsworth's valorization of history and reference to Milton reflect the rhetoric of civic virtue underlying Burke's commentary on the French Revolution in the previous decade. In his article "Placing the Places in Wordsworth's 1802 Sonnets," Stephen C. Behrendt argues that Wordsworth "reverts back to the model provided by Milton [...] in grounding his uneasy optimism about the future in a faith in an informed and appropriately self-aware British citizenry" (642). Wordsworth's *Poems Dedicated to National Liberty and Independence* display the Whiggish belief that the progress of British history endows the public with liberty and responsibility. Wordsworth shares Burke's depiction of an idealized British past in contrast to the dissolute French Revolution, echoing Milton in his poetic reflection while Burke had adopted dramatic conventions into his response to the French Revolution. The valorization of British

history in Burke's commentary on the French Revolution contributed to the expression of nostalgia during Romanticism which contrasts modern injustices against an idealized past.

Stryer argues that Burke embeds this historical dichotomy into the syntax of his publications. He posits that “[t]hese contrasts are expressed within a topos which employs a series of syntactical patterns in order to push apart past and present through the rhetoric of exaggeration” (178). For example, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke presents a syntactic contrast between history and the present by illustrating benevolent hereditary authority in Britain and the abandonment of historical security in France. Burke cites constitutional examples within his generalized history of England by saying “You observe that from Magna Charta to the Declaration of Right it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties as an *entailed inheritance*” (29). This statement associates the values of historical progress and hereditary authority by characterizing the constitutional freedoms of Britain as an “inheritance” and an entailed necessity. Burke expands this statement of historical rhetoric by conflating English institutions of hereditary authority and democracy. He states, “We have an inheritable crown, an inheritable peerage, and a House of Commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties from a long line of ancestors” (29). This description of British society characterizes liberty and democracy as benefits of history, yoking democratic values to a history of hereditary authority. Burke's association of the House of Commons with the hereditary institutions of monarchy and peerage characterizes the liberty and freedom of a democratic society as inherited values because they depend on historical progress.

Burke proceeds to cite this premise of British history as an exemplar against support for the French Revolution. In the *Reflections*, Burke addresses revolutionary France by saying “You had all these advantages in your ancient states, but you chose to act as if you had never been

molded into a civil society and had everything to begin anew. You began ill, because you began by despising everything that belonged to you” (31). Burke asserts that the rebels have forsaken the benefits of history and progress by attempting to fabricate a new society. The successive avowals of Britain’s inherited democratic freedoms and the abandonment of established society in revolutionary France compose a syntactic denunciation of the French Revolution exemplary of Burke’s historical rhetoric. Burke describes the generalized history of Britain as a period of progress toward democracy necessarily retaining the institutions of monarchy and peerage. He asserts that the democratic rights of British citizens are an inheritance of their history. Burke goes on to describe the unjust present of the French Revolution as a relinquishment of the parallel inheritance of French history in favour of illicitly contriving a new society.

Burke represents the French Revolution as an affront to tradition and historical progress, persuading his audience to share his opposition to the revolution. Burke emphasizes this perception of the rebels by presenting pathetic depictions of the violence and barbarism of the Revolution. In the *Reflections*, Burke initiates his translation of the events of the French Revolution into a rhetorical drama by presenting a generic description of the revolution. He states that, “[i]n viewing this monstrous *tragicomic* scene, the most opposite passions necessarily succeed and sometimes mix with each other in the mind: alternate contempt and indignation, alternate laughter and tears, alternate scorn and horror” (9). Burke describes the French Revolution using a generic classification from drama and illustrates the emotions the revolution evokes in its audience. Although Burke distinguishes between “opposite passions” in these emotional evocations, the responses he describes share the quality of condemnation. Burke lists these passions as “alternate contempt and indignation, alternate laughter and tears,” and “alternate scorn and horror.” Many of these passions appear too similar to form oppositions, but

Burke invokes the experiential distinctions between them to illustrate the diverse emotional evocation of the drama of the French Revolution.

According to Burke's description of the sublimity of political power in *A Philosophical Enquiry*, "contempt" responds to the perception of a corrupt power. In the text, Burke identifies contempt as a response to political favouritism by saying "we shall all along observe the sublime the concomitant of terror, and contempt the attendant on a strength that is subservient" (55). As contempt responds to an object which is small and disagreeable, this form of contempt indicates that favouritism corrupts and diminishes political authority. Burke's description of "laughter and tears" corresponds to his characterization of the French Revolution as a tragicomedy. He specifies further that these emotional responses comprise "scorn and horror," positing scornful laughter as a response to the regicidal ideology of revolutionary France and "horror" as a reaction to the violence of the revolution. Burke's treatment of the French Revolution as a drama underlies his public denunciation of the revolution throughout the *Reflections* as he disseminates opposition to the French Revolution into the public sphere. In his chapter "*Theatre and Counter-Theatre in Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France*," De Bruyn asserts that "[t]he metaphor [...] of revolution as grand, tragic theatre must be one of the most sustained leitmotifs running through the outpouring of letters, pamphlets, speeches, and treatises that the events in France provoked from Burke" (165). Burke insightfully saw the French Revolution as a theatrical spectacle, observing the passionate reactions of the English public comprising horror, scorn, and Jacobin sympathy.

Burke conceives of tragicomedy as the most appropriate genre in which to convey the radicalism and regressive ideology of the French Revolution. While there is no direct comedy in Burke's tragic rendering of the French Revolution, he appeals to the realism and emotional

resonance of this genre to evoke the disapproval of his audience. By depicting the revolution as a misguided campaign of personal ambition, Burke invokes the conventional depiction of error and confusion alongside tragedy in tragicomedy. The 18<sup>th</sup>-century satirist William Kenrick reflected on the genre of the tragicomedy in his “Defense of Tragicomedy,” published in Oliver Goldsmith’s *Essays and Criticisms* (1798). Kenrick asserts, “That the mingled drama may convey all the instruction of Tragedy or Comedy cannot be denied; because it includes both in its alterations of exhibition, and approaches nearer than either to the appearance of life, by shewing how great machinations and slender designs may promote or obviate one another [...] by unavoidable concatenation” (65). During the French Revolution, the “great machinations” of establishing an egalitarian state coincided with the base or “slender designs” of terrorizing the royal family and the aristocracy. Burke observes the events of the French Revolution as a tragicomedy, illustrating the concatenation of revolution and regicide, reflecting on his sympathy for revolution and opposition to radical disestablishment.

In his discussion of Burke’s *Reflections*, Klancher argues that Burke’s depiction of the French Revolution as a tragic spectacle includes confusion exemplary of the downfall of great machinations in tragicomedy. He asserts, “The French Revolution could be imagined theatrically, Edmund Burke shrewdly reminded his readers in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, as an erratically authored spectacle for the benefit of a bewildered English audience” (103). Burke depicted the revolution as an expression of anarchy which was antithetical to the values of his reading audience. His emphasis of the violence and injustice of the revolution presented a caricature which was exemplary of the confusion and disappointment in tragicomedy. Klancher proceeds to argue that “Burke turns the French revolutionaries into failed world-historical authors, playwrights of a tragedy that spills off the stage, thus negating the laws

of Aristotelian dramatism by failing to resolve their violent struggles in any satisfyingly symbolic way” (103). The lack of resolution in Burke’s depiction of revolutionary furor in France clarifies his reference to the revolution as a tragicomedy, as he argues that the revolutionaries’ design to establish a new state inevitably fails.

Restoration dramas surrounding the theme of revolution loomed in the English consciousness in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, during the revolutions in America and France. Thomas Otway’s *Venice Preserv’d* is not an overt tragicomedy, but it evokes the scorn and horror of revolutionary furor that Burke expresses in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. There is a parallel expression of revolutionary corruption in the plot of Otway’s *Venice Preserv’d* and the French Revolution as Otway’s protagonist, Jaffeir, defies the rebels upon discovering that their uprising would entail the murder of the Venetian senate. Jaffeir condemns the revolution he had conspired to support as he entreats in Act II, “I but half wished to see the devil, and he's here already! Well! What must this buy? Rebellion, murder, treason? [...] which way I must be damned for this” (2.111)? Jaffeir repents his participation in the rebellion by affirming that he had attempted to “see the devil” in his conspiracy with the rebels and observes him amid the revolution. Jaffeir proceeds to characterize revolution as a crime by conflating “[r]ebellion, murder,” and “treason,” syntactically aligning rebellion with murder and treason.

*Venice Preserv’d* retained its popularity during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and caused significant controversy during the French Revolution. Daniel O’Quinn’s article “Insurgent Allegories: Staging *Venice Preserv’d*, *The Rivals*, and *Speculation* in 1795” examines the controversy of *Venice Preserv’d* amid its performances during the French Revolution. O’Quinn’s article concerns a brief period between October and November of 1795, in which the Tory government of William Pitt the Younger suspended performances of Otway’s play. O’Quinn states that,

“during this brief period the license for one of the most popular and successful plays in the traditional repertory, Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*, was revoked and the play was consigned to theatrical oblivion because it was deemed too incendiary for the London stage” (2). The interest in *Venice Preserv'd* taken by the Pitt Ministry demonstrates not only that the play was controversial, but that its popularity was sufficient to influence public opinion. The Pitt Ministry actively supported the counter-revolution in France and enacted legislation to repress Jacobinism and revolutionary sentiment in Britain. According to O'Quinn, “There was widespread public consensus, especially among the lower orders, that the famine which had swept through the country was integrally related to the economic hardships incurred by the war” (2). This description indicates that Britain's involvement in France's counter-revolution had an adverse effect on the lower classes in Britain. O'Quinn tells us that, as opposition to Britain's policy on the French Revolution spread throughout the public, “the Ministry was losing the propaganda war against reform and was desperate for a means to justify not only its foreign policy, but also its incursion on the rights of dissident citizens” (3). This controversy surrounding *Venice Preserv'd* occurred five years after the publication of Burke's *Reflections*, revealing that Otway's play was a salient dramatic expression of rebellion during the French Revolution. *Venice Preserv'd* provided an exemplar of the dramatic interpretation of revolution for Burke's *Reflections*. The disparity between Burke's response to the French Revolution and that of the Pitt Ministry is also noteworthy because it displays the binary adoption and suppression of revolutionary drama. While Burke's *Reflections* engage dramatic conventions and echo the censure of rebellion in Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*, Pitt undertook to silence the dramatic performance of revolution.



In the *Reflections*, Burke presents a synthesis of his historical rhetoric and dramatic devices as he illustrates the licentious excess of the French Revolution by narrating the rebels' invasion of the bedrooms of King Louis and Marie Antoinette. This depiction portrays the king and queen as innocent victims of the brutality of the revolution. Burke narrates the monarchs' moments of private tranquility preceding the rebels' illicit invasion by saying "the king and queen of France, after a day of confusion, alarm, dismay, and slaughter, lay down, under the pledged security of public faith, to indulge nature in a few hours of respite" (62). This description first affirms the rightful authority of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette by identifying them formally as "the king and queen of France." Burke asserts further that their safety relies on the pledge of "public faith." This statement implies that invading the personal security of the king and queen breaks the faith of the public and violates the social contract. Burke does not describe the revolution as a struggle against tyranny, but narrates an instance in which the rebels violate the personal security of individuals, rather than defy a corrupt government. Burke's depiction of the precarious respite of the king and queen as an indulgence of "nature" conveys an image of the royals as human beings whose natural rights the rebels disregard. Burke narrates the rebels' violent incursion into the residence of the king and queen as he recounts:

A band of cruel ruffians and assassins [...] rushed into the chamber of the queen and pierced with a hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed from whence this persecuted woman has but just time to fly almost naked, and, through ways unknown to the murderers, had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a king and husband not secure of his own life for a moment. (62)

This depiction carefully presents Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette as victims of revolutionary bloodlust. Burke does not ascribe authority to the king and queen, but instead describes Marie

Antoinette as a “persecuted woman” and Louis as “a king and husband not secure of his own life.” These descriptions present the implication that the rebels have overturned the authority of the French monarchy and become tyrants holding the power of life and death over their opponents. Similarly, Burke does not suggest that the rebels are downtrodden or disdainful of tyranny. He rather describes them as “ruffians, “assassins,” and “murderers.”

Burke concludes this narrative by presenting the binary opposition of the rightful security of the royal family and their expulsion by the unbridled rapacity of the revolution. Burke states that the French royal family “were then forced to abandon the sanctuary of the most splendid palace in the world, which they left swimming in blood, polluted by massacre and strewed with scattered limbs and mutilated carcasses” (62). Burke reveals his allegiance to institutional authority by depicting the violation of the French monarchy as a “splendid palace” rendered into a grotesque scene of murder and indignity. Burke presents this pathetic narrative of the violation of the domestic security of the king and queen of France as a device of historical rhetoric, suggesting that the rebels will leave a shameful example to posterity. He states that “history, who keeps a durable record of all our acts and exercises her awful censure over the proceedings of all sorts of sovereigns, will not forget either those events or the era of this liberal refinement in the intercourse of mankind” (62). Burke avows that history passes censure over tyranny, indicating that the revolutionary state of France acts as a corrupt sovereign by threatening and abducting the royal family. Through his avowal that history will condemn the French Revolution, Burke contends that the principles of the revolution are inharmonious with the advancements of the Enlightenment toward liberty and fairness. Burke’s gesture toward the historical condemnation of the revolution indicates the binary objectives of the French and American Revolutions. While

Burke supported the American rebels' endeavour for liberation, he condemned the objective of the French Revolution as regicide.

Burke's image of the rebels personally threatening the Queen of France in the *Reflections* displays the resonance of Restoration tragedy. The scene of the rebels' infringement into the royal family's home and rapacious threat to Marie Antoinette reflects the revelation of the attempted rape of Belvidera, Jaffeir's wife in *Venice Preserv'd*. This scene demonstrates a pathetic condemnation of the rebellion, as the play reveals the abject villainy of the chief rebel, Renault. Jaffeir reviles Renault's attack on Belvidera as he declares "Renault, (That mortified, old, withered, winter rogue,) [...] I've found him out at watering for my wife; he visited her last night, like a kind guardian" (3.401). Jaffeir presents a similar instance of the violation of domestic security to Burke's narration of the rebels' incursion into Marie Antoinette's bedroom by accusing Renault of attempting to "take the freedom of a lady's chamber." This accusation reflects Burke's portrayal of the depravity of the French rebels as he recounts that "[a] band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with blood, rushed into the chamber of the queen." Burke reiterates the overarching condemnation of the rebellion in *Venice Preserv'd* by presenting a heinous portrayal of the rebels in France. In *Venice Preserv'd*, Jaffeir conflates Renault's lecherous predation with the corruption of the rebellion by saying "our cause is in a damned condition: for I'll tell thee, that canker-worm, called lechery, has touched it; 'Tis tainted vilely" (3.400). Burke's depiction of the French revolutionaries in the scene of their abduction of Marie Antoinette and King Louis characterizes the French Revolution not as an organized effort of reform, but an uprising based on violent and corrupt motivations. The reflection of *Venice Preserv'd* in Burke's tragicomic rendering of the French Revolution exemplifies Burke's use of dramatic conventions to convey his opposition to the revolution to a public audience.

Burke's publications surrounding the French Revolution attempted to shift public opinion as the Pitt Ministry actively supported the counter-revolution while the Whigs split into factions opposing the revolution and avowing Jacobin sympathy. Charles James Fox led a faction of Whigs who retained their sympathy for the French Revolution even during the "Radical Phase" and the Reign of Terror. Burke published *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* in 1791, expressing opposition to the radical Foxites and urging unity among the Whigs. Jesse Norman describes Burke's *Appeal* as an argument that his views "spring directly from the founding Old Whig principles of the 1688 revolution, while those of Fox and his New Whig acolytes are dangerous innovations based on French revolutionary ideas" (147). In his *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, Burke describes himself in the third person in a rhetorical gesture defending his position on the French Revolution. The speaker of Burke's *Appeal* intercedes before Burke's audience to vindicate Burke's opposition to his rivals among the Whigs. The imagined distance between Burke and the speaker of the *Appeal* discourages the impression that Burke is aggravating dissent within his own party. Norman states that "[t]he *Appeal* opens with a highly personal *exordium* or introduction defending 'Mr Burke' [...] then moves to a relatively spare and forensic examination of old Whig principles" (147).

In the *Appeal*, Burke proceeds from the personal justification of his stance on the French Revolution to an objective analysis of Whig principles supporting his position. Franz De Bruyn's chapter "Gentleman's Prospects: Viewing the World from the 'Elevation of Reason'" describes Burke's embodiment of Whig values in the speaker of the *Appeal* alongside his discussion of Burke's *Speech on Conciliation*. De Bruyn's argument examines Burke's appeals to logos and ethos as he supports his argument with reason and embellishes the character of the speaker as a "gentleman" embodying Burke's values of liberty and stewardship. De Bruyn argues that in the

speaker of the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, Burke has “shouldered the role that the ‘natural aristocrat’ is called upon to play [...] In the process he emerges, ironically enough, as an early exemplar of a new breed, the professional politician” (157). The speaker of Burke’s *Appeal* is not a politician, but an impartial gentleman; however, De Bruyn notes Burke’s rhetorical adoption of an impartial persona to justify his views as a Rockingham Whig. De Bruyn describes Burke’s party allegiance, arguing that his “professionalism can be concealed [...] by its subordination to the direction of the Rockingham party, which now embodies corporately the gentlemanly attributes of disinterest and comprehensiveness” (157). By adopting the persona of an anonymous gentleman in the *Appeal*, Burke espouses the disinterest of a speaker un beholden to a political affiliation. He defends his position by claiming impartiality and reason through an intermediary speaker.

The speaker of Burke’s *Appeal* espouses comprehensiveness and impartiality in his advocacy of Burke’s principles as he declares “Taking in the whole view of life, it is more safe to live under the jurisdiction of severe but steady reason, than under the empire of indulgent but capricious passion. It is certainly well for Mr. Burke that there are impartial men in the world. To them I address [...] the appeal which on his part is made from the living to the dead, from the modern Whigs to the antient” (684). This avowal characterizes the speaker of the *Appeal* as a tertiary advocate interceding for Burke’s view of the value of institutions of “severe but steady reason.” The speaker appeals to the impartiality of his audience, diminishing Burke’s bias as a Rockingham Whig by suggesting that Burke’s position benefits from appeals to an impartial public. The speaker of the *Appeal* conveys Burke’s sedulous opposition to tyranny in the description of “the empire of indulgent but capricious passion.” The speaker of the *Appeal* proceeds to characterize Burke’s denunciation of the French Revolution as a virtuous extension

of British values to the corrupt state of revolutionary France. He describes Burke's public condemnation of the French Revolution by saying "He proposed to convey to a foreign people, not his own ideas, but the prevalent opinions and sentiments of a nation, renowned for wisdom, and celebrated in all ages for a well-understood and well-regulated love of freedom" (684). This statement creates further distance between Burke and the argument of the *Appeal* by characterizing Burke as a benevolent statesman attempting to share the benefit of British constitutionalism with the misguided proponents of the French Revolution. The speaker emphasizes that Burke's position on the French Revolution is not entrenched in a political faction and does not comprise Burke's personal ideas. He rather attributes sober disinterest to Burke, contending that Burke's opposition to the French Revolution is a diplomatic extension of the "well-regulated love of freedom" in Britain.

In the last year of Burke's life and the penultimate year of the French Revolution—1796—Burke published *Letters on the Proposals for Peace with the Regicide Directory of France*, a series of four letters deterring conciliation with the state of revolutionary France. De Bruyn describes the *Letters* as "the final notes of a dying man beset by personal bereavement and public despair [...] and deeply disturbed with the troubled course of the anti-revolutionary struggle against France" (209). Burke published the *Letters* shortly after his son, Richard, succumbed to tuberculosis in 1794. Near the end of his life, Burke also became alienated from the Whigs. Norman cites the summer of 1791 as the beginning of the dissolution of the Rockingham Whigs, whom he describes as a "proto-political party [...] intellectually and organizationally shaped by Burke" (145). As Fox emerged as the leading Whig, Norman recounts that Burke was "[n]ow in a minority of one, exiled from his own party" (146). Burke's *Letters on a Regicide Peace* presented a capstone to his opposition to the French Revolution, as

he experienced personal and political turmoil. Despite their tragic context, De Bruyn posits that the *Letters* display the resonance of Scriblerian satire. He argues that “Burke’s rhetorical strategy in *Letters on a Regicide Peace* is deeply indebted to the satiric discourse of his illustrious predecessors [Pope and Swift]” (211).

The *Letters on a Regicide Peace* exemplify the revival of Tory satire undertaken by the Whigs during their time in opposition in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The *Letters* display a distinctive instance of Burke using raillery to express his opposition to Jacobinism, interspersing scathing satire into his formal political rhetoric. De Bruyn argues that Burke’s use of Scriblerian satire is “evident in his dismissal of the revolutionaries as atheists, enthusiasts, projectors; [...] his contrast of the heroic with the burlesque and mock-heroic, the high with the low, the courtly with the criminal” (212). In the *Letters*, Burke illustrates the contrast of the splendour of the French monarchy alongside the ignominy of its downfall. He recounts that “[t]his fall of the monarchy was far from being preceded by any exterior symptom of decline. [...] A very little time before its dreadful catastrophe, there was a kind of exterior splendour in the situation of the Crown, which usually adds to government strength and authority at home” (842). Burke presents a rhetorical description of the flourishing state of France just prior to the revolution to evoke the satirical contrast between an admirable nation and a perverse state founded on regicide.

We may observe the influence of Scriblerian satire upon Burke as he echoes the apocalyptic condemnation of declining culture and morality in Pope’s *Dunciad*. De Bruyn asserts that “in drawing on the apocalyptic idiom of *The Dunciad*, with its gloomy prophecy of the return of Chaos [...], Burke is groping for a language adequate to express his sense of the unprecedented, unassimilable character of the historic events in France” (213). Burke uses syntactic Scriblerian forms such as the chiasmus to lament the overwhelming corruption of the

French Revolution, avowing his fear that the tyrannical state of revolutionary France projects the corruption of Jacobinism into Britain. Burke asserts that “[t]o a people who have once been proud and great, and great because they were proud, a change in the national spirit is the most terrible of all revolutions” (840). The sardonic chiasmus in this statement indicates the frailty of a great society by suggesting that greatness relies on pride and dissipates when a people no longer take pride in their society.

Throughout *The Dunciad*, Pope presents chiasmic associations of high and low culture to satirize the popular verse of his time. However, Pope’s satire in *The Dunciad* extends beyond poetastery to evoke political implications. The poet-speaker criticizes the political culture of his time, dominated by Prime Minister Walpole and the favouritism of George II. An exemplary chiasmus of the speaker’s satire against political favouritism asserts “princes are but things / Born for first ministers, as slaves for kings” (4.602). Like Burke’s chiasmus presenting pride as the foundation of greatness, this statement undermines political authority by associating positions of authority with favouritism, using the metaphor of slavery. Pope’s chiasmus juxtaposes authoritative and subaltern positions, presenting “princes” and “kings” as the A terms and “things” and “slaves” as B. In this syntactic association, the poet-speaker indicates the power of ministers to manipulate their royal patrons, asserting that princes are the things of first ministers. This chiasmus in *The Dunciad* prognosticates the expression of Whig opposition criticizing the corruption of favouritism in government later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The voice of Scriblerian satire echoes in Burke’s chiasmus conflating greatness and pride. As Burke presents this sardonic conflation, he affirms that “a change in the national spirit is the most terrible of all revolutions.” This statement characterizes the satire of the *Letters* as a Juvenalian lamentation of pervasive corruption. Burke describes the transformation of French governance as an unnatural revolution



and gestures toward the implication of Jacobinism in Britain by mentioning “a change in the national spirit” without referring explicitly to France.

According to De Bruyn, Burke’s “recourse to the themes and imagery of metamorphosis, unnatural transformation, and the monstrous” (213) further exemplifies his translation of Scriblerian satire into the context of the French Revolution. Burke presents a macabre description of the radical transformation of the state of France leading to a looming threat of revolution throughout Europe in a statement that displays the Juvenalian tone of finality which pervades Scriblerian satire:

“deprived in all manner of government, France fallen as a monarchy, to common speculation might have appeared more likely to be an object of pity or insult, according to the disposition of the circumjacent powers, than to be the scourge and terror of them all: but out of the tomb of the murdered monarchy in France has arisen a vast, tremendous, unformed spectre, in a far more terrific guise than any which ever yet have overpowered the imagination, and subdued the fortitude of man.” (843)

As Burke indicates the threat of pervasive revolutionary sentiment emanating from the French Revolution, he uses sublime imagery and the Scriblerian theme of unnatural transformation. Burke’s description of the scourge of the fallen French monarchy reflects the apocalyptic depiction of the triumph of Chaos in Pope’s *Dunciad* as Pope’s poet-speaker recounts “drowned was sense, and shame, and right, and wrong— / O sing, and hush the nations with thy song” (4.625). This description illustrates the abandonment of reason and morality, setting a precedent of chaos for other nations. This lamenting satire against the world surrounding Pope’s poet-speaker resonates in Burke’s portrayal of the fall of the French monarchy as a threat surpassing anything “yet to have overpowered the imagination, and subdued the fortitude of man.” Burke’s

ominous portrayal of the precedent of the French regicide also displays the association of the sublime with tyranny. Burke invokes his conception of the passions from *A Philosophical Enquiry* by asserting that the revolution in France is not “an object of pity” to other nations, but instead inspires terror.

Burke’s commentary on the French Revolution comprises some of his most resonant literary expressions of opposition. During the French Revolution, Burke found himself in the position of opposing the revolution and Jacobin sentiment among his fellow Whigs. Burke did not sympathize openly with the Tory government of Pitt the Younger, which supported the counter-revolution, but appealed to the public to disdain the tyranny and excess of the overthrow of the French monarchy. Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, and *Letters on a Regicide Peace* adopt diverse conventions to appeal to a public audience. Burke diminishes the political context of these publications to disseminate his opposition to the French Revolution into the public sphere. He appeals to the resonance of Restoration tragedy in the *Reflections* by portraying revolution as a tragicomic endeavour based on personal corruption and ambition. Burke manipulates the discursive implications of political oratory in his *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* by justifying his position on the French Revolution from the perspective of a detached third party, embodying the aristocratic qualities of impartiality and sober second thought. In his “swan-song,”<sup>24</sup> *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, Burke engages conventions of Scriblerian satire to present a pathetic depiction of the corruption and tyranny of the French Revolution. The *Letters* exemplify the revival of a tradition of Tory satire from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century which Burke translates into the context of Whig opposition. As Burke reflected on the revolutions in France and America, he disseminated opposition into the public

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<sup>24</sup> De Bruyn 209

sphere by engaging literary conventions to contrive a public appeal for his political ideas. Burke forayed into literary genres and diverse rhetorical appeals to address a public concerned with foreign conflicts and their domestic implications. Burke's public opposition to the controversial figures Lord Gordon and Warren Hastings also displayed the theatricality of politics as Burke used dramatic conventions to render the scandalous Gordon Riots and Hastings impeachment into public spectacles appealing to controversy reminiscent of the public trials of the charismatic John Wilkes.

#### Section 10: Burke's Public Disavowals of Gordon and Hastings

Burke's responses to the revolutions in France and America demonstrate the public articulation of political views on conflicts which impended over the British public. Burke observed the American Revolution as a liberation from oppressive colonial policies and excises. He regarded the French Revolution as the anarchical tyranny of mob rule overthrowing a well-established society in a misguided effort to fabricate a new state. In addition to responding to revolutions, Burke also observed the political resonance of individuals, publicly opposing figures who transgressed against his beliefs in collective responsibility and stewardship. In the early 1790s, Burke expressed opposition to two public figures embodying corruption and disorderly tyranny: Lord George Gordon and Warren Hastings. For Burke, both figures represented the corrupt pursuit of individual interest perverting the dignity of the British Empire.

Edmund Burke's denunciation of tyranny extended to sympathy for downtrodden nations. Burke sympathized with the American colonists as a sovereign people exploited by foreign taxation and governance, and opposed colonial exertions in Ireland and India. Burke characterized Gordon and Hastings as public exemplars of tyranny over, respectively, Catholics and East Indians. Burke himself was a victim of the furor of the Gordon Riots, and he

condemned the fanaticism of Lord Gordon in his *Reflections* as an augury of mob rule in France. Burke also pursued a campaign against Warren Hastings, asserting before the public that Hastings oversaw a corrupt administration in East India, which exploited the locals in pursuit of commercial advancement. Burke's reference to Gordon in the *Reflections* and prolonged campaign to impugn Hastings exemplify the manipulation of public opinion as Burke presented the figures of Gordon and Hastings as exemplars of corruption and disorder. During the Gordon riots, Burke opposed a widely popular anti-Catholic movement which targeted Burke personally for his support of legislation which made modest concessions to Catholics. Burke later cited Gordon as an enemy of British order and governance after Gordon's transformation from a populist Protestant organizer to a radical activist against the establishment, during which Gordon converted to Judaism. Gordon's erratic, rebellious persona provided an exemplar for Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, as Gordon's incitement to unrest in England prefigured the anarchy of the French Revolution. Similar to his portrayal of Gordon, Burke presented an image of Warren Hastings as a corrupt manipulator of the social order who exploited the British presence in India to enrich himself. In 1788, Burke gave his *Speech in Opening the Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, addressing the House of Lords. The speech (published eight years after the Gordon Riots and two years before his rendering of Gordon in the *Reflections*) cited Hastings as an antagonist to civic virtue who, like Gordon, dishonoured the institutions of British governance.

The Gordon Riots occurred in 1780, following the circulation of a petition by Lord George Gordon to repeal the Catholic Relief Act, which Burke had supported in the House of Commons. The riots display a tumultuous public reaction to politics eclipsing the Wilkite movement as a scandal and public spectacle. Norman's biography of Burke narrates the events of

the Gordon Riots by recounting that, after Gordon's petition, "[t]here followed a week of violence in which the mob raided distilleries, released prisoners from Newgate Prison, made a sustained attempt to capture the Bank of England and rampaged drunkenly around the streets destroying property associated with Catholicism" (100). While the Wilkite movement demonstrated the political function of rioting and set a precedent of large unfranchised groups valorizing a charismatic public figure, the Gordon Riots display anarchy rather than radicalism. Norman indicates that Gordon's followers targeted Catholic property, but his description of the rioting suggests that the Gordonites prioritized drunkenness and vandalism over opposition to the Catholic Relief Act.

Burke observed the disorder of the Gordon Riots as a prognostication of the chaotic disestablishment of revolutionary France, noting in the *Reflections* that Gordon disparaged the institutions of justice and monarchy. Norman goes on to describe the public anxiety surrounding the Gordon Riots by saying "Wild rumours began to circulate: that the King had been burned to death in Buckingham House, the Queen murdered, Lord North hanged in Downing Street" (100). The rumoured murders of the royal family and the Prime Minister illustrate the resonance of extra-political activism in 18<sup>th</sup>-century London, echoing the Wilkite movement, as a political decision resulted in a public uprising. The scandal of the Gordon Riots was not confined to sensational rumours, as mayhem erupted in the city of London and more than 400 people died during the rioting.<sup>25</sup> The Gordon Riots were symptomatic of an emerging sphere in which the general public used rioting as a means to articulate political dissent,<sup>26</sup> displaying a confluence of public opposition and anarchy. The Wilkite movement used rioting as a political tool, leading

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<sup>25</sup> Browne 71

<sup>26</sup> According to Norman, Gordon's supporters "included an estimated one in five adult male Londoners" (100), illustrating the breadth of his appeal among the public.

Gordon's followers to demonstrate opposition to the prospect of Catholic emancipation. However, the Gordon Riots assumed the additional aspect of rioting for the sake of causing unrest, providing an example of mob rule or disorderly tyranny in the years leading up to the French Revolution. Bromwich tells us that "[t]his catastrophe would fix the danger of popular tumults in the mind of Burke ever after. Indeed, the London crowd of June 1780 would shadow his thoughts about the Paris crowd of July 1789" (383).

Diane Long Hoeveler's *Gothic Ideology: Religious Hysteria and Anti-Catholicism in British Popular Fiction* presents a connection between the Anti-Catholic sentiment underlying the Gordon Riots and Habermas's conception of the public sphere in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. She states, "Within this extremely tense religious atmosphere, the flames of prejudice were fanned by what Habermas has labelled the manifestations of the newly developed bourgeois public sphere" (25). The public sphere of political awareness and extra-political activity, such as rioting, provided an arena for Gordon to oppose Parliament's early steps toward Catholic Emancipation. Burke addressed this public sphere by vilifying Gordon in his *Reflections*, appealing to a reading public which included the unelected and unfranchised Londoners who had observed the Gordon Riots in 1780, during the similar demonstration of public unrest in revolutionary France. Burke presents Gordon as an exemplar of the treachery of the French Revolution and compares him to Judas Iscariot. Burke suggests that the French revolutionaries would identify with because they share a traitorous profanation of civil society. Burke states that "[Gordon] may then be enabled to purchase with the old hoards of the synagogue and a very small poundage on the long compound interest of thirty pieces of silver [...] the lands which are lately discovered to have been usurped by the Gallican church" (498). Burke satirizes Gordon's denunciation of the Catholic Church within a passage denouncing and ridiculing Gordon's conversion to Judaism.

However, the comparison to Judas Iscariot and the description of Gordon's erroneous belief in the Church's usurpation of lands in Britain do not simply attack Gordon's faith but liken his conversion to betrayal. By characterizing Gordon as a traitor within his overarching denunciation of the French Revolution in the *Reflections*, Burke appealed to the public to recognize the symptoms of blasphemy and anarchy in the figure of Lord Gordon.

In contrast to his depictions of the French Revolution, Burke does not examine the chaos of the Gordon Riots as a detached observer; his condemnation of the riots reflects on his own insecurity during Gordon's movement. In his discussion of the Gordon Riots in the *Reflections*, Burke states "When I assert anything else as concerning the people of England, I speak from observation, not from authority" (498). As Burke reveals his personal observation of the Gordon Riots, he temporarily discards the persona of a detached public servant and appeals to the authority of immediate experience. De Bruyn recounts that "[d]uring the Gordon Riots of 1780, [Burke] experienced at first hand the fury of the mob, whipped up into an anti-Catholic frenzy; as an outspoken supporter of the Catholic Relief Act (1778), he had become a direct target of the rioters" (171). Burke espoused the cause of religious toleration, supporting the bill in 1778 which repealed some measures of Anti-Catholic legislation.<sup>27</sup> However, Burke's opposition to the Gordon Riots reflected his distrust of mob rule rather than sympathy for Irish Catholics. Another occasion in which Burke condemned the suppression of Irish Catholics was during the "Whiteboy protests<sup>28</sup>" of the 1760s when he criticized the response of "Protestant landlords and Dublin authorities" (Norman 42). Both these occasions involved rioting and violence, suggesting that Burke was more concerned with preventing anarchy than advocating Catholic emancipation. De Bruyn cites the Gordon Riots as context for Burke's disavowal of mob rule in the *Reflections*,

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<sup>27</sup> De Bruyn 171

<sup>28</sup> Norman 42

arguing that Burke's vivid depictions of public unrest "originate in his experience of the Wilkite disturbances and the Gordon Riots in London" (171).

Burke diverged from the form of opposition practiced by his fellow Whig John Wilkes by disseminating his ideas through the channels of political rhetoric and oratory rather than public movements. Burke observed the Wilkite movement in the 1760s, opting not to emulate it, and experienced the Gordon Riots of 1780 much more closely. In his chapter on the Gordon Riots, Nicholas Rogers recounts that Wilkes opposed Gordon and sided with Burke on the Catholic Relief Act, arguing that "Wilkes believed the modest concessions granted to Catholics in 1778 to be quite unexceptional" (157). Although Wilkes and Burke shared opposition to Gordon and moderate sympathy for Catholics, Rogers argues that the Wilkite movement in the 1760s facilitated the Gordon Riots by demonstrating the political efficacy of public unrest. He describes the expression of radicalism in the public, urban sphere of London in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century by saying "Since the mid-century, and certainly since Wilkes, there had been a rough and often fruitful concordance between crowd action and progressive elements in the metropolis" (170). He describes the connection between rioting and the political ideals Wilkes asserted into this new public sphere by saying "Crowds helped to create the space for libertarian politics; their interventions tipped the political balance of forces in ways which helped to amplify arguments about liberty and parliamentary reform" (170).

While Burke espoused the value of British liberty, he believed in the magnanimous responsibility of institutions to grant liberty and the collective responsibility of the public to preserve governing institutions. Burke was not libertarian, and he diverged from Wilkes over the practice of unsanctioned public opposition. Burke instead used his publications to influence public opinion. The circulation of Burke's pamphlets incited a passive form of extra-political



engagement by encouraging a diverse audience throughout the nation to consider Burke's ideas and oppose the Tory government. Habermas argues that Burke presented public opinion as a necessary element of political power by saying "Only publicity inside and outside the parliament could secure the continuity of critical political debate and its function, to transform domination, as Burke expressed it, from a matter of will, into a matter of reason" (100). Burke not only cited publicity as a way to oppose the government by preserving critical debate but also affirmed that public opinion can ensure governance based on reason. While Burke's audience could not oppose the government by voting or rioting, their collective opinion attained significance in politics. Habermas argues that, in Burke's lifetime, "[t]he opinion of the public that put its reason to use was no longer just opinion; it did not arise from mere inclination, but from private reflection upon public affairs" (94).

There is a notable similarity between the public image of the Gordon Riots in England and Burke's depiction of the revolution in France a decade later. In the *Reflections*, Burke lauds Britain's suppression of the Gordon Riots in a contrasting portrayal of British stability and the anarchy of revolutionary France. He states "We have Lord George Gordon fast in Newgate; and neither his being a public proselyte to Judaism, nor his having in his zeal against catholic priests and all sorts of ecclesiastics, raised a mob [...] which pulled down all our prisons, have preserved to him a liberty" (497). Burke cites Gordon as an exemplar of anarchy and disorder, praising the British penal system for relegating Gordon to Newgate Prison. Burke draws a comparison between Gordon and the French Revolution by describing Gordon's disloyalty to the institutions of religion and justice. In addition to disseminating anti-Catholic fervour, Gordon had a tense and erratic relationship to organized religion. Norman recounts that "[i]n the late 1780s he was excommunicated for defying the Church in an ecclesiastical lawsuit, converted to

Judaism and was imprisoned for defamation” (99). Gordon’s controversy appalled Burke, who espoused the values of authority and responsibility. In his article, “Mad Lord George and Madame La Motte: Riot and Sexuality in the Genesis of Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France,” Iain McCalman contends that “Lord George Gordon is the archetypal revolutionary figure who stalks through the pages of the *Reflections*” (346). In the *Reflections*, Burke compares the rioters’ invasion of Newgate Prison during the Gordon Riots to the liberation of the Bastille during the French Revolution. Following the Gordon Riots, Gordon advocated for radical prison reforms, continuing to embody the quality of zealous disestablishment which contradicted Burke’s loyalty to institutions. While Burke rarely referred specifically to Gordon in his publications, he includes Gordon as a component of his opposition to the French Revolution, suggesting that Britain experienced a precursor to the anarchy of revolutionary France amid the Gordon Riots. McCalman argues that “Burke’s interpretation of the Gordon Riots and their leader, Lord George Gordon, crucially informed his thinking about the nature of revolution and its potential threat in Britain and abroad” (346).

Burke continues his denunciation of Gordon in the *Reflections* by referring to Gordon’s incendiary and libellous publications of the late 1780s. Gordon was convicted for libel in 1787 in a scandal reminiscent of the impeachment of John Wilkes. The publications at issue presented various principles that were anathema to Burke. In his pamphlet “The Prisoners’ Petition to the Right Honourable Lord George Gordon,” Gordon argued that British law was too severe to cohere with the principles of Judaism. The court found Gordon to be the true author of this publication, though he had engaged the convention of journalistic anonymity by addressing himself through the persona of an anonymous prisoner. Additionally, Gordon was convicted of libelling Marie Antoinette in an article in the *Public Advertiser* describing the Queen of France

as a tyrant. This publication appeared in 1787 at the outset of the French Revolution. In the transcript of Gordon's trial, Mr. Justice Ashhurst [sic] summarizes Gordon's convictions for libel as attempts "to propagate in the minds of his Majesty's subjects an hatred, contempt and abhorrence of the criminal laws of this country (of all others the most famed for their lenity) [and] most daringly to asperse the character of Her Most Christian Majesty the Queen of France by imputing to her great tyranny and oppression" (2). Burke denounced Gordon's unbridled criticism of British justice and revolutionary slander of the Queen of France as treason and subversive libel, addressing Gordon as an enemy of British society.

Burke includes a broadside against Gordon's libel, disloyalty to British law, and religious apostasy in the *Reflections* as he declares "We have prisons almost as strong as the Bastille [sic], for those who dare to libel the queens of France. In this spiritual retreat, let the noble libeller remain. Let him there meditate on his Thalmud, until he learns a conduct more becoming his birth and parts, and not so disgraceful to the ancient religion to which he has become a proselyte" (498). Burke's description of Gordon's imprisonment was particularly resonant after the storming of the Bastille in 1789, as Burke asserts that Britain has "prisons almost as strong," such as Newgate, which held Gordon after his conviction for libel. Burke avows that Gordon's foremost crime was libelling Marie Antoinette by calling Gordon the "noble libeller," exemplifying Burke's portrayal of the queen as a noble victim of the revolution. Burke then denounces Gordon for proselytism from Christianity, satirically representing Newgate Prison as a "spiritual retreat" where Gordon may "meditate on his Thalmud." Burke's criticism of Gordon becomes even more scathing as he may refer to Gordon's ritual circumcision upon his conversion to Judaism by suggesting that Gordon learn to practice a "conduct more becoming his birth and parts." In Burke's reference to Gordon in the *Reflections*, he presents a figure

embodying the anarchical disavowal of the established institutions of justice and religion in Britain. Burke posits Gordon as an antithesis to the values of responsibility and stewardship preserving the dignity and magnanimity of British society.

Burke observed disdain for the institutions of justice, religion, and monarchy in the figure of Lord Gordon. For Burke, the Gordon Riots demonstrated the destructive influence of radical ideas of disestablishment. At the same time that Burke referred to Gordon in the *Reflections*, he led a public campaign of indictment against Warren Hastings, another individual whom Burke saw as an exemplar of corrupt ambition. Hastings was the Governor General of India from 1774 to 1785. The British government accused Hastings of corruption and exploitation in a prolonged public impeachment from 1787 to 1795. Norman describes Burke's opposition to the appointment of Hastings as Governor General. He recounts that, in response to the crash of the East India Company in the 1760s,<sup>29</sup> "the North government passed the Regulating Act. This capped the Company's dividends at 6 per cent until it repaid its government loans [and] streamlined its administration under the control of a new Governor General, Warren Hastings, based in Calcutta" (109). Norman notes that "opposition included Edmund Burke" (109) as the Tories introduced this bill in the House of Commons.

Initially, Burke's opposition to the Regulating Act was based on his liberal economic principles. However, this introduction to Hastings and the East India Company kindled Burke's interest in the affairs of East India and precipitated his ardent public campaign against Hastings. Burke's role in the impeachment of Warren Hastings demonstrates the appeal of political oratory as a public spectacle. Browne states in his chapter "Staging Public Virtue in the Impeachment of Warren Hastings" that "Burke's pursuit of Warren Hastings was and remains most vulnerable to

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<sup>29</sup> Norman 108

charges of grandstanding” (83). Burke relied on publicity and pathos to disseminate a popular image of Hastings as an exemplar of corruption and indignity to the British empire, as he used the figure of Hastings to present an argument for civic responsibility. Browne argues that, “[i]n Hastings, Burke discovered a metaphor of imperial disorder; under him the distinctive fusion of commercial and political interest driving the East India Company was made intolerable” (95). Burke avows in his *Speech in Opening the Impeachment of Warren Hastings* (1788) that Hastings’s greed and self-interest corrupted the institution of British Rule in East India. Burke presented Hastings as an antagonist to his belief in civic virtue and imperial stewardship.

Throughout his speech on Hastings in 1788, Burke adopts a trope of modesty, characterizing the impeachment of Hastings as the will of the British empire. He diminishes his personal role in the impeachment, adopting the voice of a judicious third-party presenting the malevolence of Hastings’s actions to the public. Burke addressed the House of Lords in his *Speech in Opening the Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, acting as a representative of the House of Commons which had voted to allow the impeachment to proceed before the Lords. Burke opens his speech by establishing distance between himself and the objective supporters of the impeachment in Parliament. He begins, “My Lords, [t]he gentlemen who have it in command to support the impeachment against Mr. Hastings, have directed me to open the cause with a general view of the ground upon which the Commons have proceeded in their charge against him” (403). Burke speaks as a deferential intermediary between the House of Commons and the House of Lords who addresses the cause of impeachment against Hastings based on the authority of Parliament. He prefaces the accusations against Hastings by referring to the “gentlemen” in the House of Commons who oversaw the impeachment before it reached the House of Lords and directed Burke to convey a “general” image of the grounds for the impeachment. Browne

describes Burke's deference to the Lords and appeal to the authority of the House of Commons by asserting that "Burke's artful bow before the Lords reaffirms his own identity as a public servant; his charge to them redirects our gaze from speaker to audience, [...] to the solemnity of enlightened judgment" (87). Burke diminishes his personal authority by deferring to the judgement of Parliament and the House of Lords, speaking from the persona of an impartial liaison between the House of Commons and the House of Lords. This characteristic of public service presents Burke's impartial speaker as an agent of the benevolent institutions of government. Browne states eloquently that "the time-honoured defacement of speaker before audience is deployed with cunning; the image of a man simply doing his duty is glorified by the enormity of the circumstances" (87). From this position of duty to the government and the public, Burke continues his trope of elevating the virtue of his audience by exposing Hastings's transgressions to public censure. Burke presents himself as a dutiful public servant and invites the public to inhabit a role of public service in contrast to Hastings who has forsaken his responsibility to serve the public.

Burke addresses the House of Lords with the awareness that his audience included a large representation of the general public,<sup>30</sup> providing this dual audience with the authority to judge the actions of Hastings. Browne states that, in Burke's speech, "[e]vents have magnified the terms of moral action and have elevated everyone—except Hastings—to a position of supreme importance" (87). Burke presents a broad view of Hastings's crimes, illustrating the enormity of his transgression against the British empire and exploitation of India. Burke accuses Hastings of dismantling established British authority in East India and appointing corrupt native authorities

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<sup>30</sup> Browne notes that Burke's speech to the House of Lords was unusually well attended, citing a *Times* article stating that Burke "drew a more numerous assemblage to Westminster Hall, than had attended on any of the previous days" (86).

as puppets. He avows that “Mr. Hastings’s government was one whole system of oppression, of robbery of individuals, of destruction of the public, and of suppression of the whole system of the English government, in order to vest in the worst of the natives all the power” (413). While Burke accuses Hastings of crimes exploiting the people of India, he displays awareness that his audience comprises the British government and public. He portrays British imperial rule as a victim of Hastings’s acquisitive campaign in India. Burke emphasizes the necessity of a “system of English government,” asserting that Hastings’s crimes include vesting authority in corrupt locals. However, Burke does not argue that the people of India are incapable of self-governance; he instead suggests that Hastings has deliberately appointed corrupt members of the native population to oversee the administration of the East Indian colonies. Burke describes Hastings’s appointment of Gunga Govin Singh as revenue administrator of Bengal by saying “instead of putting one of the best and most reputable of the natives to govern it, he takes out of prison this excommunicated wretch, [...] this mismanager of the public revenue in an inferior station” (414). Burke accuses Hastings of installing a criminal, who had previously demonstrated his corruption, in a position of authority over the finances of the colony of Bengal. Burke conveys an image of Hastings’s administration as a corrupt regime exploiting the colonial governance of East India for their personal advancement and enrichment. As Burke accuses Hastings of “suppression of the whole system of British government,” he identifies Hastings as a saboteur of the magnanimity of government, who has dishonoured the institutions of the social contract between the British empire and its subjects.

Burke asserts the resonance of Hastings’s corruption throughout the British empire, implicating the interest of his auditors in the House of Lords and the British public. He asserts that, in the impeachment of Hastings, “[i]t is not only the interest of India, now the most

considerable part of the British empire, which is concerned, but the credit and honour of the British nation itself [...] We are to decide by this judgment, whether the crimes of individuals are to be turned into public guilt and national ignominy” (404). This statement illustrates Burke’s assertion of individual responsibility to preserve social institutions. He avows that Hastings’s impeachment will determine whether an individual can dishonour the government and the public of the British empire by abusing a position of authority. Burke’s assertion of the significance of the colonies in East India illustrates the enormity of Hastings’s crimes, implying that he has subverted a considerably valuable component of the British empire and implicating his audience as victims of Hastings’s corruption. As Burke addresses legislators and private individuals, he synthesizes the spheres of government and the public, recounting the accusations against Hastings to a comprehensive audience. Burke asserts that Hastings has transgressed against the governing institutions of Britain and against the public of British subjects. Burke expands the figure of Hastings’s accuser, embodying the House of Commons, which voted to impeach Hastings and the public whom it represents.

As he presents the charges against Hastings, Burke demonstrates the rhetorical objectivity of his accusations. Burke states “I impeach [Hastings] in the name of the Commons of Great Britain in Parliament assembled, whose Parliamentary trust he has betrayed. I impeach him in the name of all the Commons of Great Britain, whose national character he has dishonoured” (419). Burke maintains his persona as a public servant by speaking on behalf of the “Commons;” as he communicated the opinion of the House of Commons, which voted to impeach Hastings, to the House of Lords. Burke describes the structure of public accountability in British governance by stating that he acts “in the name of all the Commons in Great Britain,” characterizing Parliament as a representative assembly of the interests of all British subjects. Burke contends that Hastings



has “dishonoured” the “national character” of Britain, indicating that his crimes violate the interests of the entire British public. Burke’s *Speech in Opening the Impeachment of Warren Hastings* demonstrates his overarching belief in a social contract in which individuals have the obligation to honour the magnanimous authority of governing institutions. Burke speaks as a public servant, displaying reverence for his audience in the House of Lords, and deferring to the authority of the House of Commons. From this premise of allegiance to governing institutions, Burke accuses Hastings of corrupting the system of British government.

While Burke used rhetorical objectivity to present Warren Hastings as an enemy of the British empire, his focus on Hastings as an individual embodiment of imperial corruption created the appearance of grandstanding during the impeachment. In *The Rhetoric of English India*, Sara Suleri argues that the personal contention between the public figures of Burke and Hastings overshadowed the indictment of corrupt British rule in India, ultimately failing to inform the public of colonial injustices. Suleri argues that, “in the context of his desire to arouse some understanding of the implications of colonialism, Burke’s failure was bitter, since the trial itself was regarded not as an indictment of one culture’s ability to obliterate the other but as a theatrical exercise in single combat between Hastings and Burke” (50). Burke’s rhetoric of civic virtue assumed a scapegoat by personifying the antithesis of imperial magnanimity and civic responsibility. He described Lord Gordon as a foreboding representation of rebellion in England before the French Revolution. Similarly, he attempted to attribute responsibility for corrupt colonial rule in India to Warren Hastings, but Hastings’s acquittal was a successful rebuke of Burke’s accusations. Hastings presented himself as a victim of larger systemic corruption, repudiating Burke’s representation of Hastings as an individual embodiment of corruption and treachery.

Burke lived through the Gordon Riots of 1780, experiencing anarchic public demonstrations firsthand. He retained the figure of Gordon as an exemplar of the looming threat of revolution throughout Europe, referring to him in the *Reflections* in 1790 as a precursor to the disorder of the French Revolution. In the late 1780s Burke led an impassioned campaign against the controversial Governor General Warren Hastings, portraying Hastings in public oratory as an antagonist to the order of British governance. Gordon and Hastings both provided an antithesis to Burke's allegiance to the authority of institutions. Burke refers to Gordon's ostracization and erratic personal life—including imprisonment, radical political views, and zealous religious conversions—to depict the consequences of subverting the established authorities of Parliament, British law, and the Church of England. Burke supported British governance of the East Indian colonies, but avowed that a corrupt individual, Warren Hastings, had subverted the colonial government to his own advantage. As he began the prolonged impeachment of Hastings in the House of Lords, Burke deftly embodied the persona of an impartial public servant encompassing the interests of all British subjects whose trust Hastings had betrayed. Burke's speeches during the impeachment drew great crowds as he addressed an expansive audience including unfranchised British subjects with a growing interest in politics. Burke's role in the impeachment of Hastings demonstrates the expansion of politics into public spectacle. Burke shared the cause of indicting Hastings with his fellow Whig MP Richard Brinsley Sheridan, a playwright and theatre-manager. Burke's rhetorical appeals to a large audience within the public sphere exemplify the sensational dissemination of political discourse surpassing the sphere of formal politics. Sheridan further expanded the public spectacle of politics during the period of Whig opposition in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century by drawing on his theatrical experience, adopting dramatic

conventions to sensationalize political issues, such as Hastings's impeachment, and display them before the public.

### Part III: Sheridan and Political Spectacles During the Long Whig Opposition

*It is certainly not chance that directed the patriotic Patentee of Drury Lane Theatre to get up with such uncommon splendour a play so disgraceful to public morals*

*I should have hoped gratitude to the Monarch, whose servant he is, would have caused him to suspend a performance which now democrats call well-timed.*

—An Eye-Witness<sup>31</sup>

#### Section 11: Sheridan's *Englishman*: A Journal of the Long Whig Opposition

In the preceding discussions of John Wilkes and Edmund Burke, I have focused on the expression of Whig opposition in the theatres of journalism, public demonstrations, and political oratory. Wilkes manipulated public opinion by disseminating his accusations against the Tory government into the public sphere and defying censorship with radical and obscene publications. He also created a sphere of extra-political activity in which his unfranchised supporters provoked political change through rioting and public demonstrations. Burke presented speeches and correspondence in the sphere of formal politics that used literary and rhetorical conventions to appeal to an audience including elected politicians and the unfranchised public, whose opinion increasingly contributed to political authority. In the approaching sections, I address the venue of the theatre, the setting in which Richard Brinsley Sheridan MP translated his ideology as a Whig in opposition into the accessible, appealing medium of dramatic performance.

Sheridan's tenure in the House of Commons lasted from 1780 to 1812. His career as a playwright and theatre-manager began when he published *The Rivals* in 1775 and continued during his decades in politics. Before Sheridan entered the House of Commons, he had a brief career in journalism, as an editor of the *Englishman*, a Whig periodical that succeeded *The North*

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<sup>31</sup> This somewhat prolonged epigraph comes from an account of the furor raised by Sheridan's staging of *Venice Preserv'd* in 1795 written by "An Eye-Witness" in the patriotic pamphlet *A Narrative of the Insults Offered to the King*.

*Briton* and the *Letters of Junius* in the sphere of periodical journalism during the Whig opposition. Sheridan contributed to the *Englishman* alongside Charles James Fox from March to June 1779, commenting on the American Revolution as the salient issue dividing Whigs and Tories. As Fox was a prominent Rockingham Whig in 1779, Sheridan collaborated with him to present a persona to the public reflecting Whig values such as English identity and the liberty of the press. In his book *Theatres of Opposition: Empire, Revolution, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, David Francis Taylor recounts that Sheridan and Fox both “pseudonymously contributed articles to [the *Englishman*],” exemplifying the “use of print as a means of mediating class power, and of the writing of political and national identities” (38). Sheridan’s contributions to the *Englishman* foreran his comedy *The Critic* (October 1779), which explores the themes of journalism and commentary on imperial conflicts.

Sheridan continued Wilkes and Burke’s endeavour to expand the discourse of politics by expressing opposition in accessible modes of publication. Wilkes’s satires and radical public image conveyed his indictment against the censure and corruption of Lord Bute and the Tories to the unfranchised public, kindling their interest in the affairs of government. Burke proceeded to embellish his speeches and correspondence with literary devices to evoke public interest and sympathy for his position on issues of revolution and institutional authority. Richard Brinsley Sheridan contrived a persona encompassing Wilkes’s controversial publicity and Burke’s literary resonance by conflating the medium of theatre with the oratory of parliamentary opposition. Sheridan used the dramatic proclivity for emotional evocation to influence public opinion by addressing the diverse audience of the theatre.

Sheridan followed Wilkes and Junius in the periodical journalism of the Whig opposition through his contributions to the *Englishman*, and his reflection on political journalism and the

theatre in his comedy *The Critic*. As Sheridan's persona encompassed the roles of journalist, playwright, and Whig politician, his publications surveyed these concomitant interventions into the public sphere. Taylor introduces Sheridan as "the playwright, theatre manager, and reformist politician who most completely embodied that overlap" (2). Sheridan disseminated politics into the public sphere through the overlap across his careers in Parliament, journalism, and the theatre, using literary and theatrical devices to expand the range of his political statements as a Whig in opposition.

In the following sections, I explore Sheridan's contributions to the public sphere of Whig opposition in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, including his journalism, plays, and political oratory. Sheridan used these various modes of publicity to convey political commentary to the public, as journalism and politics composed salient themes in Sheridan's plays, and the performances he staged as a theatre-manager inspired controversy and political awareness. Before examining Sheridan's dramas, I analyze his contribution to 18<sup>th</sup>-century political journalism which followed the *North Briton* and the *Letters of Junius*. I proceed to examine Sheridan's dissemination of politics into the public sphere of theatre through his translation of political discourse into the plays *The Critic* (1779), *The School for Scandal* (1777), and *Pizarro* (1799). Additionally, I discuss Sheridan as a parallel figure to Burke, as both MPs pursued a campaign of public opposition to Warren Hastings. In impassioned speeches in the House of Commons, Sheridan revealed his theatrical background by engaging rhetorical conventions to evoke emotional responses in his audience of MPs and an increasingly politically-aware public. Sheridan's expression of drama and political commentary also occurred as his staging of Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* in 1795 stoked controversy and provoked governmental censure over theatrical performances during the French Revolution.

Taylor addresses the spheres of politics and theatre that Sheridan inhabited by saying “To trace the trajectory and concerns of Sheridan’s professional life is thus repeatedly to traverse the spaces of state and stage in which he maintained a powerful and transformative presence over the course of three decades, and to uncover new ways of discussing and conceptualizing the symbiosis of theatre and parliament in Georgian London” (2). Taylor identifies Sheridan as a “reformist politician” whose tenure as a Whig MP placed him primarily in opposition. Sheridan’s “transformative presence” in the theatre and the House of Commons contributed to the connected public spheres of theatre and politics in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. I complement Taylor’s argument by exploring Sheridan’s contribution to the literature of the Long Whig Opposition as his transformative persona as a playwright and an MP in opposition enhanced the political engagement of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century public sphere.

In the present section, I argue that Sheridan’s periodical the *Englishman* (1779) demonstrates his entrance into the public sphere as a critic of the Tory government: a persona he embodied as a journalist, a playwright, and an MP. As Sheridan began his career, the Whigs had forged new discursive channels in the public sphere through the sensational controversy of the Wilkite movement, Burke’s literary political rhetoric, and the anonymous reformist journalism of Junius. In the *Englishman*, Sheridan criticizes the Tory government of Lord North, focusing on the American Revolution as a divisive issue between Whigs and Tories. In *Theatres of Opposition*, Taylor presents the *Englishman* as a calculated address to readers who were likely to support the Whigs. Taylor posits that “the *Englishman*’s opposition polemic targeted, and sought to create, a specific social readership” (38). Taylor describes the *Englishman* as a periodical criticism of the government which sought to create a new public space of “specific social

readership” to articulate Whig values and disseminate opposition to Prime Minister North and the Tories

Sheridan’s *Englishman* is a departure from Wilkes’s creation of an audience of unfranchised Londoners and Burke’s more comprehensive address to the nation because Sheridan’s periodical addressed franchised readers. Sheridan directed the first issue of the *Englishman* toward freeholders, or independent land-owners. Those who possessed a 40-shilling freehold had the right to vote in parliamentary elections. Sheridan addresses freeholders in his first issue as his speaker says “I think it necessary to repeat, that this introductory paper is addressed to, and solely calculated for such of you plain freeholders [...]” (1). Though Sheridan includes this direct address in the first issue of the *Englishman*, the title of the periodical suggests that it appeals to a more comprehensive audience than Joseph Addison’s periodical the *Freeholder* (1715-16), which addressed the same community. While the *Englishman* did not necessarily expand the scope of public opinion to include the unfranchised, it exemplifies the use of discursive channels outside the sphere of politics to disseminate criticism of the government publicly.

Sheridan created an imagined audience of freeholders to present his speaker, the Englishman, as an advocate for this community. He appealed to the language and identity of freeholders by positioning this community in opposition to political leaders. In the *Englishman*, Sheridan creates an addressee who belongs to the landed middle class, speaks plain English, holds Whig values, and has been neglected by the Tory government. Sheridan emphasizes the government’s neglect of this community, and asserts the relevance of freeholders, provoking this audience to follow the *Englishman*. The *Englishman* represents Sheridan’s manipulation of the public sphere, as he continued the journalism of Junius, Wilkes, and Burke, before more



creatively engaging the connection between politics and the theatre as a means to articulate opposition. Taylor states that, “[i]n directing its essays at the middle classes, the *Englishman* consciously modelled itself on earlier eighteenth-century political journals” (39). While Sheridan shifts the address of earlier periodicals to an audience with more immediate political agency, he expresses extra-parliamentary opposition through journalism, following the work of Wilkes and Junius. Taylor argues that Sheridan drew on a tradition of Whig journalism appealing to the middle class to court the approval of public opinion, saying “the explicit class agenda of the project was not only a matter of reinvigorating a liberalist, bourgeois-oriented tradition of journalism: it was also a calculated political manoeuvre” (39). Echoing Burke’s presentation of his core values to the public in *A Vindication of Natural Society*, Sheridan used the form of the anonymous periodical essay in the *Englishman* to present his views to a literate section of the public sphere.

Sheridan’s first issue of the *Englishman* (March 1779) addresses freeholders as a discerning, independent community whom the government has ignored and misled. The periodical-speaker, the Englishman, addresses his audience as “such of you plain Freeholders as have just sense enough to comprehend facts, when they are stated in plain language, just spirit enough to form an opinion of your own from them, if you believe them to be true” (1). This description appears to deny the freeholders’ ability to understand sophisticated concepts, but endows them with the necessary discernment to participate fully in a democratic society. The assertion that the reader has “just sense enough to comprehend facts [...] stated in plain language” also denounces the sophistry of the government, affirming its responsibility to provide plain facts to the public. While the statements “just sense enough to comprehend facts” and “just spirit enough to form an opinion of your own” express minimal terms, they describe the

fundamental qualities of understanding and independent thought. The *Englishman* expresses confidence in his readers by conferring this intellectual proficiency upon his audience. His reference to “plain language” and the ability to form an opinion based on facts “if you believe them to be true” introduces the assertion that the government has misled and ignored this audience with sophistry and condescension.

Taylor describes the project of the *Englishman* by saying that, “[i]n harnessing a language at once accessible and class-specific, the paper projected and strove to construct its readership as an ideal nation of critical subjects who would be prepared, individually and collectively, to confront corrupt or ineffectual government” (39). The emphasis on plain language in the *Englishman* is a rhetorical device allowing Sheridan to address readers through the persona of a modest, sympathetic speaker. Sheridan projects the activity of democratic opposition onto his audience by characterizing his readers as “an ideal nation of critical subjects” who have the authority to oppose an unjust government. As Sheridan deliberately addressed freeholders and the middle class, he cultivated an audience of supporters by using language and rhetoric to inspire opposition to the government of Lord North. Sheridan’s expression of opposition in the *Englishman* reflects the rhetorical virtue Edmund Burke inspired by avowing the corruption of the government and the civic responsibility of his audience. Similarly, Sheridan created an audience of supporters through a rhetorical denunciation of the government before a section of the public likely to sympathize with his position. Echoing Burke’s rhetoric of civic virtue, Sheridan granted his audience the agency and responsibility to oppose a corrupt government.

The *Englishman* proceeds to avow his intention to inform the community of freeholders, as the government has neglected their political awareness. He asserts “that no Party has ever

thought it worth while [sic] to give you *plain* and *authentic information* of facts and events from time to time” (2). The Englishman repeats the word “plain,” revealing a contrast between the freeholders and the government by asserting that the government has withheld plain facts from an honest and discerning community. In this statement, Sheridan simultaneously conveys a criticism of the government and avows the intention of his publication. The Englishman depicts the government as corrupt and secretive, proposing to counteract this deception through honest journalism. As the Englishman states that no party has shared authentic information “from time to time,” he describes the endeavour of periodical journalism regularly to provide an honest record of affairs which are significant to the public. The Englishman’s assertion of his readers’ discernment and his intention to inform a community whom the government has neglected composes a rhetorical reciprocity which avows the honesty of the Englishman, and the expectation that his audience will command the sense and spirit to be politically engaged and think freely. The Englishman imposes this rhetorical appeal on a contrived audience within the middle class through a collaborative rhetoric relying upon plain language.

The first issue of the *Englishman* provides an example of the importance Sheridan ascribes to plain language as the speaker introduces the issue’s primary concern, the acquittal of Admiral Augustus Keppel. Keppel’s sympathy for the American Revolution provoked reprisal as the government charged him with misconduct in 1779.<sup>32</sup> The Whigs, including Burke and Sheridan, firmly supported Keppel and celebrated his acquittal. The public also sympathized with the admiral; Taylor states, “The public trial was widely perceived as the political scapegoating of an exemplary commander” (64). In the *Englishman*, Sheridan cites this sympathy for Keppel as an example of the unity and discernment of his audience. The

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<sup>32</sup> In *The British Isles and the War for American Independence* (2000), Stephen Conway asserts that “Keppel, well-connected with the parliamentary opposition, was against the American war” (149).

Englishman praises “the manner in which the whole Country testified its sentiments on the acquittal of Admiral Keppel [...] as a free people, you were accustomed to express against treachery and oppression” (3). Sheridan distinguishes this unified sympathy for Keppel from a political response, suggesting that his audience responded to the plain facts of the case without the manipulative influence of the government. Sheridan declares, “The plain cause, then, of your appearing so suddenly roused on a particular question is, that it was a question of which you were made masters by distinct and regular information” (3). In his discussion of the Keppel affair, Sheridan associates the qualities of political engagement and public opinion with honest journalism, presenting the need for the plain record he proposes to supply in the *Englishman*.

Sheridan does not embellish his discussion of Keppel by commenting on the admiral’s personal qualities. He succinctly discusses Keppel’s acquittal, describing the event as a victory for Whig values and a significantly unifying event for freeholders. Sheridan praises the plain records of Keppel’s trial, describing “[t]he proceedings of the court-martial, published accurately enough as to facts in all the news-papers” (3). Sheridan’s reference to Keppel in the opening issue of the *Englishman* privileges facts over sophistication and exemplifies his adoption of plain language to address the freeholders in familiar terms in contrast to the propaganda and condescension of the government. Taylor argues that Sheridan saw the public celebrations of Keppel’s acquittal as a mobilization of the public in favour of the Whig opposition. He affirms that Sheridan’s account of the Keppel affair in the *Englishman* “contended that the theatre of the trial served to re-engage the political public, and that the popular celebrations of Keppel’s acquittal [...] became a vehicle through which a community of critical political subjects could be generated and the operations of power opened up to public interrogation” (64). Sheridan argues

that presenting the Keppel affair through honest journalism demonstrates the power of plain language to create an audience of critical subjects necessary to the political opposition.

Sheridan's avowal of plain language in the *Englishman* aligns the values of the Whig opposition with the overarching endeavour to simplify the English language in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

John Locke asserted the connection between language and sensory experience in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which he subordinates language to observation and thought, suggesting that simplicity of expression is necessary to articulate ideas clearly.

Additionally, the Royal Society attempted to eliminate the pretensions of the English language in academic discourse, beginning in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke identifies language as a method in which ideas "might be made known to others, and the thoughts of men's minds be conveyed from one to another" (265). This statement indicates that sharing ideas is the purpose of language, presenting an argument against unnecessary complexities which impair communication. Locke argues further that language must be uniform so that ideas can be accessible. He states, "This is so necessary in the use of language, that [...] the knowing and the ignorant, the learned and the unlearned, use the words they speak (with any meaning) all alike" (265). This argument opposes linguistic distinctions based on class, asserting that simplicity and plainness are necessary for clear expression.

In the article, "The Epistemology of Metaphor", Paul de Man refers to Locke's denunciation of linguistic complexity as a rejection of misleading rhetorical forms. According to de Man, Locke posits that there is no "question about what it is in language that thus renders it nebulous and obfuscating: it is, in a very general sense, the figurative power of language. This power includes the possibility of using language seductively and misleadingly in discourses of persuasion" (15). Locke concludes that language is imprecise because of the exuberance of expression. His

argument that rhetorical forms result in misleading language implies that complex or figurative modes of communication create gaps in public awareness.

Locke's argument for the uniformity and equality of language conveys the political connotation that governments must use the same language as their constituents. As the "knowing and the ignorant" must express their ideas uniformly, the government and the governed must share the same language to preserve accountability and democracy. In her article "Locke's Theory of Language and Johnson's *Dictionary*," Elizabeth Hedrick connects Locke's argument to Samuel Johnson's effort to codify the English language in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. She states that Johnson and Locke both believed "that the ultimate source of all ideas is the world of sense; and that accuracy and complexity in both thought and speech depend upon just observation of what our senses tell us" (423). This description aligns the theories of language and observation espoused by Johnson and Locke with Sheridan's statement of the freeholders' intelligence and discernment in the *Englishman*. Sheridan declares that the freeholders possess "just sense enough to comprehend facts" (1), emphasizing their proclivity for observation, which Locke had emphasized as the original source of knowledge and Johnson avowed as the foundation of language.

Members of the Royal Society also strove to expunge the pretensions of the English language during the Restoration and the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In his account *The History of the Royal Society of London for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge*, Thomas Sprat presents a distinction between knowledge and sophisticated language, hoping to reform the English language to express ideas more plainly. He laments the profuse sophistications of the language by saying "Who can behold, without indignation, how many mists and uncertainties, these specious Tropes and Figures have brought on our Knowledge? How many rewards [...] have

been still snatch'd away by the easie vanity of fine speaking?" (112). This statement exemplifies the conflict between knowledge and complexity as the Royal Society advocated for plain language at the outset of the Enlightenment. This tension with complex language is particularly relevant to politics as democratic institutions entail the value of public accessibility. As Parliament became more accountable to their constituents, Sheridan's assertion of plain language in the *Englishman* indicated the government's responsibility to address communities like the freeholders in familiar discourse, echoing the condemnation of sophisticated language during the Enlightenment.

In addition to his specific language and direct address to freeholders, Sheridan identifies a key issue to evoke opposition to the Tory government among the readers of the *Englishman*: sympathy for the American Revolution. Sheridan's focus on the revolution is a further device with which he creates an audience with economic and ideological connections. In the periodical, Sheridan identifies the American Revolution as a wedge issue against the counter-revolutionary government. During the revolution, the positions of conciliation and counter-revolution supplanted the earlier dividing issues between the Whigs and Tories to become the primary ideological contention in British politics. Taylor emphasizes the divisive issue of the revolution in journals such as the *Englishman* by recounting that, "[i]n the bitter contestation of ideologies and political identities that arose in print media as Britain sought to respond to and interpret the American Revolution, ink did indeed become a kind of metonymic blood" (37). The sanguinary metonymy that Taylor identifies in print media during the American Revolution indicates not only the intensity of the conflict between revolutionary sympathizers and opponents, but that the revolution had become a vital issue in political ideologies. The *Englishman* asserts the primacy of the revolution to his audience in his first issue, petitioning the freeholders to regard the war

with America as a pressing concern. Having characterized his audience as plain and discerning, he introduces this argument by saying “Now if ever there was a crisis when *you*, who are neither Scholars nor Gentlemen, might claim a right to judge, or even to act a little for yourselves, it is the present” (1). The Englishman continues to address the middle class, distinguishing his audience from elite groups whom the author argues that government privileges over freeholders. He invokes the rhetoric of virtue and responsibility by indicating that the audience ought to oppose the government that oppresses them and damages the nation.

The Englishman identifies the present crisis as “this American *Rebellion* (as it used to be called before his Majesty, God bless him! Altered his tone)” (2). The speaker asserts loyalty to the Crown as he decries the ministry, indicating that the king disagrees with the policy of counter-revolution. The Englishman carefully highlights the term “rebellion,” which connotes sympathy for the government because the word more frequently refers to a failed uprising, in contrast to “revolution.” Johnson’s *Dictionary* defines “rebel” as “One who opposes lawful authority” (430), indicating that, in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the word “rebellion” connoted unjust insubordination. Conversely, Johnson’s entry for “revolution” includes the definition “Change in the state of a government or country. It is used among us for the change produced by the admission of king William and queen Mary” (435). The word revolution connotes the successful overthrow of a government and the establishment of a new regime. Johnson cites the Glorious Revolution as a favourable example which successfully replaced a government. At the time of Sheridan’s publication, the word “rebellion” evoked the example of the Jacobite Rebellions of 1715 and 1745 as failed uprisings. The Englishman asserts that King George justly changed his position by no longer referring to the war with America as a rebellion. By stating that His Majesty does not regard the American war as a “rebellion,” the Englishman indicates that the



king sympathizes with the revolution as a just endeavour to form an independent government. This tacit statement of the king's sympathies allows Sheridan's audience to assert their loyalty to the Crown while opposing the government.

Sheridan's first issue of the *Englishman* focuses the publication by addressing an audience of freeholders and discussing the American Revolution. The periodical vilifies the government by illustrating its mismanagement of the revolution and deception of the public, as the author presents an expression of extra-parliamentary opposition to a calculated section of the public sphere. The *Englishman* depicts the nation as diminished and avows the culpability of the government by describing "the wonderful speed with which the country has been reduced to its present distressed and contemptible situation by one sett [sic] of ministers" (1). This assertion plainly blames the present ministry and its mishandling of the American war for the lamentable state of the nation. He presents this governmental failure as a relevant, incendiary issue for his audience by describing the counter-revolution as a debacle which has cost "near forty millions of your money, and near forty thousand of your fellow-subjects lives for this strange war" (2). This description exemplifies the plain language in which the *Englishman* reveals the corruption of the government to his audience. He refers to the expense of the counter-revolution to British taxpayers and the deaths of British subjects in an unjust war as plain facts which inspire opposition to the government's response to the revolution. Having stated the great costs of the war to the British public, the *Englishman* describes the counter-revolution as a series of "miserable blunders and impractical plans" (2). He denounces the ministry's handling of the revolution, depicting damage to the nation alongside governmental incompetence.

The *Englishman* speaks directly to his middle-class audience to inspire public criticism of the government, describing "your money" and "your fellow-subjects." The *Englishman*'s

indictment of the government and empowerment of an unfranchised, middle-class audience expands the activity of parliamentary opposition into the public sphere. The *Englishman* goes on to suggest that the ministry of Lord North has concealed the weighty issue of the American Revolution from the freeholders. He protests that, during the revolution, the government has never provided “a simple detail of facts put into your hands, *containing* the direct assertions of his Majesty’s ministers [...] and on the other hand, the assertions of those who opposed them, with the events uniformly proving those ministers in the wrong” (2). This statement continues the *Englishman*’s assertion that the government has withheld relevant information from freeholders, and proposal to remedy this negligence through honest journalism. The statement also affirms that an impartial record of the government’s behaviour will vindicate the opposition because objective observation will expose the ministry’s errors. The *Englishman* proposes to communicate the failures of the government to an audience which the government has blinded to its corruption. This dissemination of opposition attempts to create an informed section of the public sphere to sympathize with the Whig opposition in Parliament. The *Englishman*’s act of exposing governmental corruption and incompetence also reflects the depiction of politics in theatre, as politically relevant plays directed their audiences’ attention toward particular issues, and evoked emotional responses which contributed to public opinion. Sheridan’s claim to inform the audience of the *Englishman* by exposing the government prefigures his staging of plays which drew public attention to the American Revolution and British India, courting public opinion through theatre.

In the late 1770s, Richard Brinsley Sheridan entered the public sphere of Whig opposition which Wilkes and Burke had expanded in the previous decade by appealing to unelected and unfranchised supporters. Sheridan positioned his persona within the sphere of

political journalism by publishing the *Englishman* shortly before his election to Parliament for the borough of Stafford, proceeding to address the public through a persona encompassing theatre, journalism, and politics. The *Englishman* represents a public appearance at the outset of Sheridan's career, in which he identified a specific audience of supporters among unfranchised freeholders. Sheridan's selection of this audience within the middle class reflects Wilkes's mobilization of unfranchised, urban opponents to the Tory government, and Burke's avowal that political authority rests upon public opinion outside of formal political institutions. Sheridan continued this tradition of articulating Whig opposition in the public sphere by creating an implied addressee who opposed the ministry of Lord North and sympathized with the Rockingham Whigs' policy of conciliation with America. Sheridan used the rhetorical device of addressing a plain audience in plain language to evoke the virtues of honesty and humility in his addressee, in contrast to the secrecy and artifice of the government. The *Englishman* echoes the rhetoric of Burke's political oratory, in which he avowed a reciprocal expectation of civic virtue by cultivating the persona of a dutiful public servant addressing an audience of concerned citizens. Burke asserted the expectation that his audience had the right and responsibility to preserve the magnanimity of democratic institutions by opposing a corrupt government. This sentiment of civic virtue resonates in Sheridan's address to the freeholders as an astute section of the public that the North Ministry has misled and neglected. The *Englishman* also echoes the voices of Junius and Mr. North Briton by articulating Whig opposition in the public sphere through pseudonymous periodical journalism. During the same year in which he contributed to the *Englishman*, Sheridan published *The Critic*, a comedy which explored the relevant themes of journalism and military conflict while reflecting on Sheridan's foray into political journalism and approaching career in public office. Sheridan's depiction of politics on stage demonstrates the

relevance of the theatre as a sphere of extra-political public interest. The theatre was already a public setting which expressed ideas and emotional evocations to an audience which included diverse social classes and political affiliations. This diversity characterizes the theatre as a suitable expansion of the dissemination of politics and opposition into the public sphere of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. As Wilkes and Burke inspired political interest by directing their rhetoric toward an audience including the unfranchised, Sheridan used the theatre as a setting in which to express Whig opposition to a diverse section of the public sphere.

#### Section 12: The Politician, the Journalist, and *The Critic*

Sheridan emerged as a public figure in the late 1770s, as the Whigs formed the opposition to the enduring North ministry, and the American Revolution provoked controversy and division in British society. In this same lustrum (1775 to 80), Sheridan staged his first plays, became the manager of Drury Lane Theatre, and was elected to Parliament for the borough of Stafford. The comedy *The Critic* (1779) introduced Sheridan's conflation of drama and political oratory by reflecting on contemporary issues and periodical journalism. *The Critic* also presents a metatheatrical demonstration of war, providing a satirical image of the commentary which the government and journalists provided on the recent Seven Years War and the ongoing American Revolution. This dramatic representation of armed conflict demonstrates Sheridan's importation of political commentary into the sphere of theatre, contributing to his persona as a public figure encompassing the roles of dramatist and politician. The play's representation of contemporary journalism also reflects on the dissemination of politics into the public sphere through Whig periodicals like Sheridan's *Englishman* and the *Letters of Junius*.

In *The Critic*, Sheridan satirizes political journalism through comparison to the theatre and the overarching conceit of "theatrical politics." This theatrical representation of politics

aligns commentary on political issues in the spheres of theatre and journalism. In the present section, I argue that Sheridan's play *The Critic, Or a Tragedy Rehearsed* represents commentary on theatre and politics, presenting Sheridan's persona as a dramatist and politician, and conveying criticism of the government through drama. *The Critic* associates theatre and politics by presenting discussions about the public relevance of theatre and journalism, and gesturing toward contemporary political issues by staging a dramatic representation of a historical conflict reflecting contemporary anxieties in Britain.

During the divisive controversy of the American Revolution and the Invasion Crisis, Sheridan conveyed a representation of war in *The Critic* that provoked his audience to reflect on the revolution and its representation by journalists and the government. In his chapter "Newspapers, Theatre, and the Propaganda War," Taylor posits that *The Critic* translates the journalism of opposition into a dramatic medium opposing the government's campaign of counter-revolutionary propaganda. He states that in "*The Critic*—Sheridan contributed in active and sophisticated ways towards this contestation of images and words [...] and challenged the popularized constructions of nationalism that underwrote this propaganda war" (34). Taylor conceives of the theatre as an element of the "contestation of images and words" composing the national debate over the American Revolution. This conception portrays the theatre as a public medium which presents language and imagery to manipulate the passions and opinions of its audience.

Taylor's conception of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century theatre as a provocative venue of public discourse indicates the significance of the theatre in the expansion of politics and opposition in this period. As the theatre can communicate narratives and evoke emotions, it can inspire political interest and participation. This rhetorical function of drama presents an opportunity—outside of

journalism and political debate—for politicians to disseminate their views into the public sphere and garner support from the theatre-going public. The political resonance of the theatre is a particularly useful mode of expression for politicians in opposition, who counteract government propaganda and risk censure for admonishing government officials in more overt publications, though an increase in censorship during the French Revolution in the following decade reveals the government's awareness of the theatre as a medium which can inspire opposition and unrest. Sheridan's portrayal of the relationship between dramatic criticism and armed conflict in *The Critic* publicly conveyed an expression of opposition to the Tory government's position on the American Revolution. Sheridan avoided censure by obfuscating the current conflict between Britain and America through historical and dramatic lenses.

The opening scene of *The Critic* depicts a conversation between Dangle and his wife which introduces the themes of journalism and politics. As Dangle reads aloud from a newspaper, he asserts his interest in news of the theatre while his wife admonishes him for ignoring the more pressing affairs of war and politics. Dangle begins to read an article exemplifying the pseudonymous journalism of Whig opposition written by Junius, reading aloud, "BRUTUS to LORD NORTH" (1.1.1). The names Junius and Brutus both refer to Lucius Junius Brutus, adopting the persona of an assassin of Julius Caesar to express loyalty to democracy and disdain for tyranny. As Dangle continues to scan the periodical, he reveals that the author is criticizing the government's handling of the military by reading "Letter the second, on the STATE OF THE ARMY [...] To the first L—dash D of the A—dash Y" (1.1.1). Dangle repeats the author's journalistic convention of obscuring the name of the official he satirizes, the First Lord of the Admiralty, which, at the time, was Lord Sandwich. Dangle's reference to Sandwich, the prominent Tory and appointee of Lord North, continues to evoke Sheridan's representation of

oppositional Whig journalism, as North and Sandwich had been targets of the journalistic accusations of Junius and Wilkes. The author's reference to the "STATE OF THE ARMY" and address to Sandwich in his position of First Lord of the Admiralty characterize the letter as a criticism of the government's military policies, prognosticating Sheridan's conflation of dramatic criticism and political opposition through a satirical representation of war.

Sheridan's overarching conflation of politics and theatre in *The Critic* begins with Dangle's axiomatic assertion "I hate all politics but theatrical politics" (1.1.6). This statement conveys a double-entendre indicating Sheridan's argument for the relationship of theatre and politics. Dangle's avowal refers to his interest in the affairs of the theatrical community as he casts away his newspaper, searching for an article of "theatrical intelligence" (1.1.10). In addition to its reference to dramatic criticism, the term "theatrical politics" may refer to the engagement of theatrical devices in formal politics. Dangle simultaneously denounces news of anything but the theatre and asserts that he hates political discourse which does not include theatrical devices. Dangle's avowal of "theatrical politics" precedes his introduction of Mr. Puff's play, *The Spanish Armada*, the metatheatrical representation of war in *The Critic*. As he pores over the morning papers, Dangle utters "Pshaw! Nothing but about the fleet, and the nation! [...] So, here we have it. 'Theatrical intelligence extraordinary,' 'We hear there is a new tragedy in rehearsal at Drury-Lane Theatre, call'd the Spanish Armada'" (1.1.6–10). This statement conveys an ironic description of Dangle's disdain for news about "the fleet, and the nation" alongside his enthusiasm for a new play dramatizing Britain's historical conflict with the Spanish Armada.

Mrs. Dangle continues this expression of irony as she responds to her husband, declaring "you will never read anything that's worth listening to: you hate to hear about your country;

there are letters every day with Roman signatures, demonstrating the certainty of invasion, and proving that the nation is utterly undone” (1.1.28). Mrs. Dangle refers to Junius and the journalism of the Whig opposition by describing open letters with “Roman signatures” which draw attention to external threats to the British empire and the corruption of the government. Mrs. Dangle evokes the resonance of Whig journalism during the Seven Years War, which decried concessions the Tory government made to France and Spain. As the Whigs criticized the government for disregarding the security of the British empire, they evoked the fear of invasion, which Mrs. Dangle observes in the newspapers. As the letters also assert that “the nation is utterly undone,” they reflect journalism by Junius and Wilkes which described the corruption and favouritism of the ministries of Lord Bute and Lord North. The assertion also echoes Sheridan’s statement in the *Englishman* that the government’s mishandling of the American Revolution has provoked a national crisis. Dangle searches through the papers, disdaining news of politics and foreign affairs, until he finds a reference to a new play depicting a past conflict in the medium of theatre. Dangle’s reference to “theatrical politics” and Mrs. Dangle’s complaint that he ignores relevant journalism and pressing national concerns introduce the play’s conflation of politics and theatre.

In *The Critic*, Sheridan represents political journalism and warfare onstage as the American Revolution and the Invasion Crisis were the predominant issues facing his audience. Taylor tells us that “[t]he barrage of political references with which *The Critic* opens would have been immediately comprehensible to its first spectators” (46). This assertion characterizes the conversation between Dangle and his wife as an evocation of the controversy of the American Revolution, as the Whigs and Tories disputed between their positions of conciliation and counter-revolution. Taylor goes on to describe this overarching indication of the American



Revolution as an instance of the conflation of theatre and politics. He argues that “Sheridan dramatizes a metropolis which experiences the American War as a discursive event, a world in which the habitual presentation and fetishization of warfare for consumption by a public audience has eroded the boundaries between politics and entertainment” (46). Taylor describes the perception of the American Revolution among Londoners as a “discursive event,” referring to the polarizing contention in Parliament and among the citizens who composed Sheridan’s audience.

The American Revolution presented an immediate threat to the British public during the Invasion Crisis of 1779, as Britain’s historical enemies France and Spain, posed a threat to divert resources from the conflict in America by invading Britain.<sup>33</sup> The revolution and the Invasion Crisis created divisions in British society, as politicians and journalists emphasized the positions of conciliation and counter-revolution to the public. The prior armed conflicts of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century prompted contrary responses by the Whigs and Tories, but did not evoke the public division over British identity caused by the American Revolution. The Seven Years War was a campaign for British dominion, and the Jacobite uprisings threatened to upend British governance. These conflicts more simply evoked sympathy for the British establishment. The American Revolution elicited the more ambivalent responses of sympathy for British America and loyalty to the monarchy. As opinions on the revolution proliferated throughout the British public, Sheridan satirized the fetishization of war while provoking his audience to consider political affairs and armed conflicts by depicting journalistic and theatrical representations of war in *The Critic*. As the Dangles continue to argue the merits of following the affairs of theatre or state, their conversation implies the similarity of these fields. Mrs. Dangle continues to express

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<sup>33</sup> Taylor records that the state of the navy was “a central Whig concern” (60) during the Invasion Crisis, indicating the genuine fear of invasion at the time.

concern over foreign conflict, and ridicules her husband's apathy by saying "I believe if the French were landed to-morrow, your first enquiry would be whether they brought a theatrical troop with them" (1.1.80). Dangle responds by asserting the merits of dramatic criticism, and by arguing that critics are useful because of their influence over stage managers. Mrs. Dangle refutes his point about the value of critics by saying "The Public is their Critic without whose fair approbation they know no play can rest on the stage" (1.1.92). This statement avows the similarity between theatre and politics, aligning the public's influence upon the theatre with public opinion as the foundation of political authority.

The Dangles' conversation about the representation of theatre and politics in journalism precedes the play's depiction of politics as a theatrical spectacle. Acts II and III occur in Drury Lane Theatre, where Dangle and his companion Sneer observe the rehearsal of Puff's politically resonant play, *The Spanish Armada*. Taylor describes the scenes at Dangle's home and the Drury Lane Theatre as adjacent satirical depictions of politics in journalism and theatre, arguing that "*The Critic's* three-act structure is crucial to both its overlapping of theatrical and political discourses, and to its twofold satiric focus, allowing the drama to confront the politics of, first, the press, and, second, contemporary performance practices" (46). *The Critic* presents an overarching theme of representations of politics to the public; comprising journalism, which attempts to disseminate the affairs of government and shape public opinion; and theatre, which can comment on politics and contribute to public opinion by dramatizing resonant political issues. Acts II and III present a metatheatrical depiction of the translation of politics into drama, as a politically resonant play commands the attention of Dangle, despite his disdain for politics. Dangle and Sneer discuss the performance of Puff's *Spanish Armada*, comparing realistic perceptions of warfare to theatrical conventions. As these critics discuss the implications of

staging a historical conflict, Sheridan contrasts the dissemination of public affairs, like armed conflicts, through the media of journalism and theatre.

As Dangle and Sneer observe Puff's play, they inhabit the role of journalists or politicians commenting on conflicts such as the American Revolution and the Seven Years War. Puff asserts the relevance of historical drama by saying "when history, and particularly the history of our own country, furnishes anything like a case in point, to the time in which the author writes, if he knows his own interest, he will take advantage of it [...] I call my tragedy *The Spanish Armada*; and have laid the scene before Tilbury Fort" (2.1.3). In this preface to his rehearsal, Puff suggests that relevant historical events provide an opportunity for dramatists to comment on contemporary issues, contending that history may furnish a "case in point" of a current event. Puff presents a play set during the war with Spain in which Elizabeth I gave the *Speech to the Troops at Tilbury* in 1588 against the threat of invasion by the Spanish Armada. Puff's avowal that dramatizing the invasion of the Spanish Armada invokes a relevant historical event echoes Mrs. Dangle's concern in Act I as she describes the "certainty of invasion" affirmed by the newspapers. The representation of the Spanish Armada and the theme of invasion in *The Critic* manipulated the audience's anxieties during the Invasion Crisis. Sheridan used the example of the Spanish invasion in 1588 to evoke the renewed enmity of his audience toward Spain during the Invasion Crisis. Similarly, Mrs. Dangle's speculation, "if the French were landed to-morrow," renews a concern from the Seven Years War, in which France was Britain's primary adversary. Sheridan does not address the American Revolution directly, but explores resonant examples provoking his audience to consider the conflict. Puff's argument for the relevance of historical drama describes Sheridan's underlying endeavour to comment on the American Revolution without explicitly depicting a contemporary political issue.

Dangle and Sneer's commentary on Puff's play highlights the irony of Dangle's disdain for political journalism and contributes to Sheridan's conflation of politics and theatre in *The Critic*. As the play opens on Tilbury Fort against the threat of a Spanish invasion, Puff's conversation with Dangle and Sneer introduces Sheridan's evocative conflation of theatre and war. Dangle and Sneer's criticism illustrates the public's disparate perceptions of war in drama and journalism. Dangle asks "pray, are the centinels [sic] to be asleep?" (2.2.9) and Sneer adds "Isn't that odd tho' at such an alarming crisis" (2.2.11)? Puff answers these concerns by appealing to dramatic convention. He states, "To be sure, it is, but smaller things must give way to a striking scene at the opening; that's a rule" (2.2.12). Sneer and Dangle express concern over the realism of Puff's play, arguing that soldiers would not sleep at their posts under the threat of an invasion. This reaction exemplifies a response to current military conflicts, in which Englishmen such as Sneer and Dangle would have faith in the competence of British soldiers. Puff considers the sentinels sleeping at their posts as an insignificant detail leading to a "striking scene." He appeals to dramatic convention by suggesting that the audience will not notice the sleeping soldiers who foreground a pathetic opening scene. However, Dangle and Sneer's failure to suspend their disbelief indicates the reaction of audiences to dramatizations of war during actual armed conflicts. They observe "an alarming crisis," and challenge a disorderly portrayal of British soldiers, revealing their foremost concerns while observing a dramatic representation of war during the Invasion Crisis. Sheridan depicts a metatheatrical representation of a historical conflict, presenting Dangle and Sneer's commentary as a timely reflection of audiences in the 1770s, in the aftermath of the Seven Years War and during the open conflict of the American Revolution.

Mrs. Dangle's claim that her husband is oblivious to the threat of a French invasion characterizes Dangle and his fellow dramatic critics as ignorant dilettantes who eschew alarming realities such as the Invasion Crisis. In his article "Sheridan and the Theatre of Patriotism: Staging Dissent during the War for America," Robert W. Jones discusses Sheridan's plays written and performed during the American Revolution, arguing that these plays satirized the composure of British society, the government, and the military. Jones asserts that Sheridan's plays *The Critic* and *The School for Scandal* "represent British culture—the armed forces in particular—as dubious, effete, and luxuriant and, as such, wholly unready to face invasion" (26). The claim that Sheridan portrays the military as ineffectual evokes the example of the soldiers asleep at their post in Puff's play. When Dangle asks why a sentinel would sleep at his post during a crisis, Puff responds "I must either have sent them off their posts or have them asleep" (2.2.16). Puff asserts that, for the purposes of his play, he must present a disorderly portrayal of the military, either by leaving a post unattended or portraying sleeping watchmen during an impending invasion. This metatheatrical expression avoids presenting a controversial depiction of the British military, allowing Sheridan to criticize the government's handling of the American Revolution and the Invasion Crisis. Dangle's ignorance of the threat of invasion, and Puff's portrayal of sleeping sentinels before the invasion of the Spanish Armada reflect Jones's argument that Sheridan depicts the British empire as "wholly unready to face invasion." This sentiment presented opposition to the government's management of ongoing military crises to the audience of *The Critic*.

As Dangle continues to speculate on Puff's dramatization of war, his commentary on the play presents an ironic contrast to his earlier disavowal of news about the military, and emphasizes his interest in "theatrical politics." Dangle expresses eagerness to see a military

skirmish dramatized on stage, asking Puff, “But are we not to have a battle” (2.2.423)? As Puff answers “Yes, yes, you will have a battle at last, but egad, it’s not to be by land but by sea and that is quite a new thing in this piece” (2.2.424), Dangle reacts by asking “What, Drake at the Armada, hey” (2.2.227)? Dangle expresses enthusiasm for seeing a dramatization of the battle against the Spanish Armada as Puff declares the novelty of representing naval battles on stage. This exchange presents an ironic portrayal of Dangle, who had scoffed at news of the fleet in the newspapers. In contrast to his response to journalistic discussions of naval warfare, Dangle expresses excitement over the concept as a theatrical novelty. Sheridan satirizes the fetishization of war before the public during the American Revolution. Dangle’s eagerness to see a battle on stage also reflects the public’s appetite for spectacular theatrical effects which often supplanted any interest in real current affairs. Jones tells us that Sheridan was “passionately concerned with the government’s inadequate preparations for war and by the ways in which patriotism was stage-managed in times of crisis” (26). Sheridan portrays the British public as ignorant of the surrounding crises of war and invasion. He portrays the British military as unprepared to defend the empire. These adjacent depictions criticize the government for mishandling the American Revolution and misleading the public with “stage-managed” propaganda. Sheridan satirizes the government’s presentation of war and patriotism to the public by representing armed conflict as a theatrical spectacle, which Dangle observes as a dramatic critic.

Sheridan’s distinctive portrayal of a naval battle on stage as a metatheatrical spectacle reflected his interest in the state of the military and criticism of the government’s mishandling of national defense. The audience of *The Critic* witnessed both a naval battle and a theatrical commentary upon its representation as Sheridan had commented publicly on the state of the navy in the same year. Act III of *The Critic* is a prominent example of Sheridan’s convergence of

theatre and politics as the representation of a naval battle onstage provoked the audience to consider his criticism of Lord Sandwich as the First Lord of the Admiralty. In the article “Sheridan, Politics, the Navy and the Musical Allusions in the Final Scene of *The Critic*,” Eric S. Rump describes Sheridan’s public criticism of the state of the navy at the time he published *The Critic* by referring to *The General Fast: A Lyric Ode*, a poem Sheridan published satirizing Sandwich and the North Ministry. Rump tells us that Sheridan’s “concerns about the rapid decline of the navy and Lord Sandwich’s responsibility for that decline, do not surface until 1775 with the publication of *The General Fast: A Lyric Ode*. In that poem, amongst other things he portrays the navy as now overrun by ‘rank impotence’ and ‘dire disease’ and Lord Sandwich [...] as ‘the scourge of this fair isle’” (30). Sheridan’s scathing assessment of the navy under Lord Sandwich in *The General Fast* presented this criticism of the government to the public at the same time Sheridan published *The Critic*. The public who composed Sheridan’s audience were aware of the playwright’s views on the state of the military under the Tory government as they witnessed the staging of a naval battle and observed Dangle and Sneer’s commentary on this metatheatrical scene.

As Puff introduces the naval battle concluding his play, *The Spanish Armada*, Sneer asks “What, you bring that in at last” (3.1.266)? Puff emphasizes the importance of this scene by saying “Yes, yes you know my play is called the *Spanish Armada*, otherwise, egad, I have no occasion for the battle at all. Now then for my magnificence! my battle! my noise! and my procession!” (3.1.267). This assertion indicates that the novelty of depicting a naval battle onstage is Puff’s primary objective. He refers to the dramatization of the Spanish Armada as an *occasion* for “battle, magnificence, and noise.” Sheridan’s directions proceed to illustrate the spectacle of this scene, describing a “[f]lourish of drums, trumpets, cannon [...] the fleets

engage, the musick plays ‘Britons strike home.’ Spanish fleet destroyed by fire—ships, &c. English fleet advances, musick plays ‘Rule Britannia’” (84). This stage direction illustrates the spectacle of Puff’s final scene. The description of fire and ships suggests imposing artifices on stage which convey the grandeur of the scene. Sheridan also includes specific musical directions which illustrate Puff’s expression of patriotism and contribute to the irony of depicting a naval battle, having criticized the state of the British navy during the Invasion Crisis.

Sheridan follows the performance of “Britons Strike Home” and “Rule Britannia” with directions for a procession which “begins with Handel’s water musick, ends with a chorus, to the march in Judas Maccabaeus” (84). Rump identifies the inclusion of Handel’s *Judas Maccabaeus* as a tacit criticism of George III and the government’s failures during the Invasion Crisis. He describes the oratorio as a celebration of the Duke of Cumberland’s victory over the Jacobite uprisings. Rump argues that “in Handel, Sheridan found not only a method of allusion but also a hero who had, in contrast to the present weak-kneed leaders, decisively vanquished the menacing forces of Catholicism” (31). This allusion represents a parallel historical instance to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in Puff’s play, and an affirmation of Whig values by evoking the resonance of the victory over the Stuarts during the Jacobite Rebellions. Rump’s argument indicates that Sheridan also used this musical reference to contrast the inept response of Lords North and Sandwich during the Invasion Crisis to the heroism of the Duke of Cumberland. Rump describes the musical flourish of the final scene of *The Critic* as “a suitable epilogue to Sheridan’s career as a dramatist, for soon, as an M.P., he was to become a critic of the government in more than just the name of what is, essentially, his final play”<sup>34</sup> (33). Sheridan’s turn to political life did not

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<sup>34</sup> Rump ignores *Pizarro* (1799), which Sheridan wrote while serving in Parliament. His description of *The Critic* as “essentially” Sheridan’s last play may allude to *Pizarro*’s reputation as a weak drama because of its close imitation of Sheridan’s political speeches.



conclude his career as a dramatist, and his criticism of the government did not commence with his election. Sheridan had criticized the Tory government in his journalism and plays, and proceeded to adopt dramatic conventions to criticize the government as a member of the opposition.

Sheridan's play *The Critic* dramatizes the dissemination of politics into the public sphere through journalism and theatre. He depicts a conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Dangle which juxtaposes the journalism of the Whig opposition and "theatrical politics." This opening conversation evokes the overarching conflation of theatre and politics in the play. Journalism and theatre are similar contributions to public opinion. Editorial journalism, such as the *Englishman* and the *Letters of Junius*, attempts to expose the reality of political issues to influence readers' perceptions of public affairs and the government. Theatre presents a mimetic depiction of reality to manipulate the emotional response of its audience. Both of these endeavours entail the representation of resonant issues, and influence over the public. Theatre and journalism are adjacent discourses in the public sphere of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in which Whig MPs appealed to media outside of formal politics to share their position with the public. Sheridan continued the expansion of politics into the public sphere during the Long Whig Opposition by translating political issues into drama. His play *The Critic* explores the reciprocal discourses of theatre, journalism, and politics which characterized Sheridan's career as a playwright and a Whig MP in opposition. *The Critic* presented a public declaration of Sheridan's politics as a Whig in opposition alongside his play *The School for Scandal*, which did not address political issues as overtly as *The Critic*. *The School for Scandal* rather conveyed a tacit criticism of government propaganda and the ideological hierarchy underlying British society, supporting public

expressions of opposition and allowing Sheridan to comment on the state of the nation and the military in more overtly political terms in *The Critic*.

### Section 13: *The School for Scandal*

*The Critic* addressed the British public during the American Revolution, presenting a parallel reflection on political journalism to Sheridan's periodical the *Englishman*. Prior the wartime journalism of the *Englishman* and the depiction of wartime journalism in *The Critic*, Sheridan published the comedy *The School for Scandal* (1777), which did not evoke political issues as directly as *The Critic*, but commented on British society and government propaganda. In *The School for Scandal*, Sheridan presents the archetype of upper-class Englishmen who are ignorant of the crises facing the British empire, a role that Dangle would inhabit in *The Critic*. As *The Critic* presents aristocratic characters who eschew journalism and politics in favour of theatre, *The School for Scandal* focuses on personal conflict and reputation. These plays present a collective depiction of a superficial, hypocritical upper class, satirizing British society's ignorance of international conflicts while the North ministry conducted a campaign of propaganda during the American Revolution. Sheridan's representation of aristocratic ignorance and gossip in *The School for Scandal* criticized the Tory establishment by depicting hypocrisy and misinformation during the government's campaign of counter-revolutionary propaganda. These political implications also allowed John Leacock to publish his own rewrite of *The School for Scandal* in 1779 which more directly explored the issues of Whig opposition by recasting the characters as political figures including King George and Lord Bute.

Sheridan's plays from the late 1770s often conveyed a veiled satire of the state of British society and its awareness of pressing international concerns. Sheridan presents this criticism through a disorderly portrayal of the military in Puff's play in *The Critic* and the depiction of

superficiality and hypocrisy in British society—particularly the upper class—in *The School for Scandal*. These examples of politically relevant satire exemplify Robert W. Jones’s argument that Sheridan’s plays “represent British culture [...] as dubious, effete, and luxuriant” (26). *The School for Scandal* represents the two underlying threats to the stability of the British empire as superficiality and misinformation. The depiction of duplicity and superficiality among the upper class in *The School for Scandal* satirizes the complacency of ignoring the impacts of the American Revolution upon the British empire and economy. *The School for Scandal* centres on the exposure of characters’ true motivations and dispositions in contrast to their public personae. This dramatic expression of public revelation and hypocrisy functioned as a device of political opposition while the government attempted to manipulate the public through propaganda. Taylor describes the North ministry’s propaganda campaign as an attempt “to neutralize protestations against its management of the American War and to refashion a politically polarized metropolis into a consolidated public unwavering in its endorsement of the administration” (43). Sheridan countered this public manipulation by denouncing rhetorical “surfaces” in *The School for Scandal*.

*The School for Scandal* depicts the contrast between the archetypal good-hearted rake and the hypocrite claiming moral ascendancy. Charles Surface emerges as a sympathetic character as he demonstrates the values of honesty and familial loyalty despite his reputation as a profligate. By contrast, his brother Joseph leads a selfish and indulgent private life in contrast to his public esteem. Joseph’s hypocrisy satirizes the Tory establishment as the revelation of his dissolute character exposes the corruption of the upper class, reflecting the contrast between Wilkes and Sandwich.<sup>35</sup> Before the climactic revelation of Joseph’s affair with Lady Teazle, he discloses his

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<sup>35</sup> The contrast between Charles and Joseph Surface, as with Wilkes and his accusers in the Knights of Sir Francis, reflects the public perception that prefers vice to hypocrisy.

hypocrisy to the audience in Act II by saying “I begin now to wish I had not made a point of gaining so very good a character, for it has brought me into so many confounded rogueries, that I fear I shall be exposed at last” (1036). Sheridan satirizes superficiality by emphasizing the corruption underlying Joseph’s pretension as a “man of sensibility,” in contrast to his rakish, but honourable brother, Charles. In Fintan O’Toole’s biography of Sheridan, *A Traitor’s Kiss*, the author connects the exposure of Joseph in *The School for Scandal* to the exposure of Tory corruption in the Whig journalism of the Wilkite movement. He argues that “the analogy to politics [...] was made unmistakably plain to the audience with barbed references to Benjamin Hopkins,<sup>36</sup> opponent of the radical hero John Wilkes” (124). Sheridan renewed public admiration for Wilkes as a hero of Whig opposition by depicting the Tories as superficial and duplicitous in contrast to the reflection of Wilkes’s sincerity in the character of Charles. O’Toole proceeds to assert that “[i]f in the play the feckless Charles Surface, rather than his apparently upright brother Joseph, could emerge as the triumphant hero, then so too could Wilkes the good-hearted rake be a fit hero for the people” (124).

In *The School for Scandal*, Sheridan satirizes the pretences of the upper class, echoing Wilkes and Junius’s ridicule of the moral hypocrisy of prominent Tories. Taylor argues that “Sheridan’s satire is directed against the societal codes that governed the conduct and conversation of the aristocracy and aspiring bourgeoisie in such a way as to promote performances of politeness as a cover for moral hypocrisy and sexual aberrance” (35). This representation of the upper class renewed the contrast between the provocative sincerity of the Whigs and the corrupt hypocrisy of the Tories exemplary of Whig journalism in the 1760s and early 70s. The climactic exposure of hypocrisy in *The School for Scandal* occurs as the screen in

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<sup>36</sup> Hopkins stood against Wilkes for the office of Chamberlain during Wilkes’s time in municipal politics (O’Toole 124).

Joseph's library collapses to reveal Lady Teazle to her husband, Sir Peter. The screen represents a metaphorical reflection of Joseph's character as he develops an upright, sentimental persona to conceal his private life of selfishness and adultery. Sir Peter indicates the artifice of the screen as he observes "why even your screen is a source of knowledge—hung round with maps I see" and Joseph replies "Yes, I find great use in that screen" (1054). This exchange occurs as Sir Peter finds Joseph pretending to read a book while Lady Teazle hides behind the screen. Taylor describes the screen as "a prop for sexual seduction and adultery: a device which, by concealing the presence of Lady Teazle, serves to protect its owner's carefully constructed public persona as 'a man of sentiment'" (36).

Later in the scene, Charles and Sir Peter upend the screen, revealing Lady Teazle and dispelling Joseph's upright persona. Lady Teazle disavows Joseph's attempt to explain her presence to Sir Peter, saying "As for that smooth-tongued hypocrite, who would have seduced the wife of his too-credulous friend [...] I now view him in so despicable a light, that I shall never again respect myself for having listened to his addresses" (1058). Much of the dialogue of this scene consists of Lady Teazle's honest admission of guilt amid Joseph's protestations, juxtaposing sincerity and artifice to emphasize Joseph's hypocrisy. Sir Peter ultimately condemns Joseph after he pleads "heaven is my witness—" as Sir Peter responds, "That you are a villain [...] damn your sentiments" (1058). In this statement, Sir Peter upends Joseph's persona as a "man of sentiment," condemning sentiments as empty pretenses. O'Toole argues that the simultaneous collapse of the screen and Joseph's persona reflected the transformation of authority in the public sphere as the perception of virtue no longer relied on the artifices of government and aristocracy. He asserts that "the play's concerns—reputation and reality, appearance and emotion—were vital not just to private behaviour but to political life. The idea of

reputation was at the heart of the Enlightenment's attempts to understand what, in the late eighteenth century, it meant to be modern" (124). O'Toole connects the exposure of Joseph Surface to the increasing social mobility of the public sphere, which diminished the connection of personal character to class, clothing, and reputation.

This transformation of public life allowed journalists to expose the corruption, hypocrisy, or incompetence of authority figures, expanding literature and journalism as media of political opposition. In his chapter "Foxite Satire: Politics, Print, and Celebrity," Robert W. Jones argues that Sheridan expressed "the need to oppose the excessive claims of the Crown, the reform of libel legislation and the freedom of the press" (138) in *The School for Scandal*. The Whigs proposed limitations on the power of the Crown and the ministry, and advanced the interest of the press as a tool of criticizing the government throughout their Long Opposition. Sheridan's public depiction of a collapsed "screen" of authority and reputation in *The School for Scandal* illustrates the duty of the parliamentary opposition to expose the corruption of the government to the public. Taylor asserts the further political resonance of the collapsed screen, noting that "the fall of the screen also brings down the motif of the known world pasted to its unstable surface" (36). Sir Peter describes the screen as "a source of knowledge—hung round with maps" (1054), while it is in fact, the collapse of the screen which conveys knowledge of Joseph's hypocrisy.

Joseph's pretense of reading in his library next to a screen covered with maps conveys a respectable representation of his lifestyle to his guests and Sheridan's audience. The breakdown of this pretense challenges the audience's attitude toward authority and hierarchy. Taylor describes this ideological implication of *The School for Scandal* by saying "The ethical and imperial epistemologies through which Sheridan's characters, and indeed many of his audience, understand the world and their relations to it are here exposed as artificial constructions. The

screen stands as a perfect icon for the politics of misrepresentation” (36). Joseph does not study his maps, but instead uses them to present a false presentation of political awareness. The presence of the maps in Joseph’s library conveys an image of his ignorance of imperial affairs, a fault which Sheridan recognized among the British public during the American Revolution.

Sheridan encourages his audience to avoid ignorance and complacency by satirizing the public’s acceptance of misinformation. Gossip is a major theme in *The School for Scandal*, representing a parallel discourse to journalism which disseminated news and politics throughout the public sphere. Sheridan’s depiction of gossip reflects the misinformation of government propaganda during the American Revolution, identifying a source of the ignorance and superficiality threatening the public. Taylor identifies Snake as an embodiment of misinformation who appears at the beginning and the end of the play. Snake serves as Lady Sneerwell’s propagandist in her effort to meddle in the lives of Sir Peter Teazle and Charles Surface. As Snake enters the play, Lady Sneerwell declares her intention to spread libel by saying “I’ll not deny the pleasure I feel at the success of my schemes [...] I confess nothing can give me greater satisfaction than reducing others to the level of my own injured reputation” (1023). Lady Sneerwell employs Snake as an agent of misinformation to damage the reputation of her opponents. There is a clear similarity between this expression of personal manipulation, and the manipulation of the public sphere undertaken by government propagandists. Taylor describes Snake’s significance to the structure of the play by saying “the stage presence of a con-artist at the beginning and end of the play’s action serves to frame its detailed consideration of modes of representation” (35).

Snake appears again in Act V, having turned against Lady Sneerwell and circulated gossip to confound her scheme of slandering Sir Peter. Snake describes his opportunistic gossip-

mongering as he tells Lady Sneerwell “I must own you paid me very liberally for the lying questions, but I have unfortunately been offered double for speaking the truth” (1068). While Snake ultimately serves the play’s revelation of truth, his character evokes condemnation of gossip as a form of manipulative misinformation. Snake asserts the criminality of his role as a purveyor of gossip in his final line, “I live by the badness of my character, and if it was once known that I had been betrayed into an honest action, I should lose every friend I have in the world” (1068). This line not only affirms Snake’s dedication to deception, but indicates the pervasiveness of misinformation as he suggests that he would lose friends by lapsing into honesty. This indication of pervasive gossip during the American Revolution satirized the propaganda campaign of the North ministry as a manipulative deception of the public. Sheridan also presents Snake as a satirical image of journalism by depicting gossip and journalism as adjacent products of the public sphere and characterizing Snake as an amoral purveyor of information or misinformation at the will of his patron.

*The School for Scandal* illustrates the complex satirical function of drama, in which characters may express disparate ideologies which do not compose a cohesive political expression in the play. However, rather than embodying a political message within a particular character, Sheridan depicted the themes of superficiality and misrepresentation, appealing to the concern of the British public during the American Revolution, and evoking their dissatisfaction with governmental control and misinformation. These political implications allowed John Leacock to publish a satirical reimagining of *The School for Scandal* in 1779, reinterpreting the drama about personal reputations to refer directly to the issues of political conflict and favouritism. Taylor describes Leacock’s *School for Scandal* as “a polemical counterblast to the propagandistic distortions of the British government” (37). Leacock reimagines the intrigue of



*The School for Scandal* as a drama surrounding the misinformation of royal favouritism, depicting Lord Bute's infamous manipulation of the king. Taylor describes Leacock's recasting of Sheridan's characters:

This parody carefully matched the key political players in Anglo-American relations to the comedy's original dramatis personae: Joseph and Charles Surface become, respectively, the Machiavellian Lord Bute (former prime minister and tutor to the king) and George III, the misguided but ultimately benevolent monarch. Snake, meanwhile, is played by William Fraser, editor of the London Gazette (37).

Leacock's rewrite translates Sheridan's *School for Scandal* into a dramatic portrayal of Whig opposition by staging the corruptions of the Tory government and opposing their counter-revolutionary propaganda. Leacock, who published the tragicomedy *The Fall of British Tyranny; or American Liberty Triumphant* in 1776, was a supporter of the American Revolution, and affirmed the Whig values of freedom of the press and opposition to tyranny in his version of *The School for Scandal*.

Leacock represents King George and Lord Bute as Charles and Joseph Surface, reimagining their concern for personal fortune and reputation as the imperial conflict of the American Revolution. In his article "'The Fate of Empires': The American War, Political Parody, and Sheridan's Comedies," Taylor states that in Leacock's *School for Scandal*, "the drama of national and colonial crisis is reduced to, and ridiculed as, a drama of household misfortunes" (389). In this domestication of the American Revolution, Joseph manipulates his brother, Charles, representing Lord Bute as the underlying influence behind the counter-revolutionary position of the Crown. Leacock represents the king as an innocent dupe and blames the Tory government for Britain's hostility toward America. Leacock first avows King

George's innocence in the play's dedication by saying "The gentleman from whom I drew the character of Charles, I hold in the greatest esteem, for the goodness of his heart" (iv). This expression of sympathy for the king in a publication which decried the counter-revolutionary policy of the Tory government echoes Sheridan's gratitude that the king no longer refers to the revolution as a "rebellion" in *The Englishman*, in which Sheridan's speaker states that "his Majesty, God bless him! Altered his tone" (2). Leacock echoes this deference to the Crown while narrating the corruption of the ministry and the illicit influence of favouritism during the American Revolution.

Lord Bute emerges as the villain in Leacock's allegory of the British government in *The School for Scandal*, which depicts Joseph's Machiavellian influence over his brother's estate. Leacock illustrates Joseph's manipulation of Charles, who represents the king, as Joseph flatters his brother by saying "O my dear master! How happy am I in your presence, and in being honoured with your confidence" (2). Charles replies "Ever since I came into possession of my estate, I have blindly and implicitly followed your advice, in everything relative to the management of my family" (2). This representation of the relationship between a proprietor and a manipulative advisor illustrates the Whiggish belief that ambitious Tories such as Lord Bute endeared themselves to the Hanoverian court to exercise influence over the king. During the American Revolution, the Whigs suggested that this Tory influence precipitated the counter-revolutionary policies of the Crown. Sheridan indicates the king's innocence in the *Englishman*, suggesting that the Tories were responsible for the impact of the revolution on Britain and its economy. Leacock alludes to the government's mishandling of the American revolution as Charles continues, "in place of bettering my fortune, and retrieving my losses, every day's post brings me news of a d-f-at" (2). Leacock presents the loss of Charles's property as a microcosm

of the colonial struggle of the American Revolution, asserting that the deceitful council of Joseph and Snake, representing the ministry and the Tory press, leads Charles to mishandle his property overseas.

Charles complains of the loss of “sugar-houses,” reflecting Britain’s loss of colonial property and revenue during the revolution. Joseph embodies the position of counter-revolution as he counsils Charles to devote more resources to protecting the sugar-houses, and diminishes the losses they have already experienced. He asks “Have I not often told you, Sir, that to have a true relish of the pleasures of prosperity, it is necessary to taste the bitters of adversity? [...] but you know well enough my plans were not prosecuted—I told you in the beginning to send over treble the number of servants and cockboats, which would have crushed the hypocrites in the bud” (9). In Leacock’s *School for Scandal*, Joseph fulfills the role of a royal favourite within the ministry, who manipulates the king into exhausting British resources in an unjust war. Snake also continues to represent a government propagandist as he attempts to misrepresent the loss of the sugar houses by falsely suggesting that the locals had murdered hundreds of Charles’s servants. Snake argues that “the m-rd-ring in cold blood draws the attention of the tenants off the loss of the sugar-house; and redoubles their hated of the Gasconades” (17). This misrepresentation of the seizure of the sugar-house illustrates the government’s attempt to vilify the American rebels as enemies of the British empire. Leacock uses Sheridan’s characters of the hypocrite Joseph and the amoral gossip Snake to satirize government attempts to justify the counter-revolution to the British public by diminishing the loss of British lives and resources and maligning supporters of the revolution. Leacock repurposes Sheridan’s play as a more direct expression of political opposition counteracting the government’s attempt to mislead the public into passively approving the policies of the ministry. Taylor’s article “The Fate of Empires” affirms that

Leacock's play "is concerned with the governmental discourses that, in expurgating and fictionalizing the news, seek to engender a passive nationhood. The North ministry, like the political parodists, willfully inverts one text in order to create a second-but where the satirists do so as a means of exposure and illumination, the statesmen seek concealment and denial" (390).

Sheridan's play *The School for Scandal* is a comedy of manners with underlying political implications within the literature of the Long Whig Opposition. Though Sheridan presents apolitical characters concerned with reputation and familial relations, *The School for Scandal* satirizes the ideology upholding the Tory establishment and justifying Britain's war with America. The collapse of the screen and the resulting exposure of Joseph Surface draw the audience's attention toward pretense and hypocrisy. This central revelation in the play reflects the function of literature and journalism to expose the corruption of public figures and ridicule their hypocrisy. Sheridan's portrayal of Joseph echoes Wilkes's exposure of the corruption of prominent Tories like Lord Sandwich and Sir Francis Dashwood. Though Sheridan's *School for Scandal* does not satirize a specific public figure, the play illustrates the function of literature to articulate opposition through the contrast of sincerity and hypocrisy. The political implications of this contrast are more explicit in John Leacock's translation of *The School for Scandal* into a patriot drama depicting the deception underlying Britain's counter-revolution against America. Sheridan's comedies *The Critic* and *The School for Scandal* portray British society during the American revolution, focusing on theatre and reputation as diversions from a pressing international crisis. Through the satirical portrayal of war in *The Critic* and the exposure of Joseph's hypocrisy in *The School for Scandal*, Sheridan invites his audience to consider the conflict facing the British empire, and question the ministry's campaign of counter-revolutionary propaganda. These plays demonstrate Sheridan's tacit criticism of the government by drawing

attention to political issues through theatre. However, Sheridan more clearly synthesized drama and political reform by using the devices of tragedy to oppose Britain's exploitation of East India and publicly indict Warren Hastings as an embodiment of corrupt colonial practices.

#### Section 14: The Spectacle of Warren Hastings

Sheridan's presentation of "theatrical politics" in *The School for Scandal* and *The Critic* introduces a form of public expression which characterized his career as a playwright and a Member of Parliament. Sheridan's display of theatrical politics encompassed his translation of relevant political issues into drama and his adoption of theatrical devices into political oratory. As Edmund Burke distinguished himself by using rhetorical appeals in his speeches and correspondence, Sheridan used the evocative devices of the theatre to expand his appeal into the public sphere. Sheridan's theatrical politics represent a mode of communication by which an MP in opposition appealed to the emotions of the public. Sheridan manipulated the passions of his audience to expose corruption and evoke disapproval of the Tory government. The most salient example of Sheridan's theatrical politics is his participation in the prolonged impeachment of Warren Hastings. The prominent Whigs Burke, Sheridan, and Fox vilified the former Governor-General of East India, presenting him as an embodiment of the commercial exploitation of the East Indian colonies. During Hastings's impeachment in the House of Commons, Burke and Sheridan presented the figure of Hastings as an ambitious profiteer who embodied and aggravated the government's corrupt colonial policies. Sheridan performed emotive orations during this impeachment which presented the exploitation of East India as a tragedy and Hastings as a villain. Taylor subtitles his chapter on Sheridan's commentary on Hastings and British India "Britain's Character Lost. A Tragedy," indicating Sheridan's translation of a parliamentary process into a dramatic spectacle.

Sheridan's denouncement of Warren Hastings encompassed both forms of theatrical politics, as Sheridan rendered the impeachment into a tragedy in the theatre of public opinion, and later staged a tragedy which represented Hastings as the historical villain Pizarro. The impeachment of Hastings in Parliament began in 1787 and resulted in his conviction a year later. The lengthy public spectacle of Hastings's impeachment continued before the House of Lords until his acquittal in 1795. During the impeachment, Sheridan used the method of theatrical politics to prosecute Hastings before the public. Although the public could not observe Sheridan's speeches in Parliament firsthand, journalistic accounts evoked public interest by presenting the speeches as theatrical spectacles. The mediation of Sheridan's oratory by parliamentary reporters merged journalism and dramatic criticism, as accounts of Sheridan's speeches described his performance and the reactions of his audience. These accounts provoked significant public interest during the impeachment of Hastings, in which Sheridan borrowed conventions from tragedy to present a passionate denunciation of Hastings's corruption. Sheridan disseminated his portrayal of Hastings as an affront to the nation and an embodiment of the corruption of the government, exemplifying the rhetorical communication between Whig MPs and the public sphere during the Whigs' Long Opposition.

During the impeachment, Sheridan emoted dramatically in the House of Commons, demonstrating his theatrical ability and the influence of his father, an elocution teacher.<sup>37</sup> In her article "Trying Sheridan's Pizarro," Julie A. Carlson argues that the theatrical reiteration of Sheridan's rhetoric from the impeachment of Hastings in his tragedy *Pizarro* (1799) reflects the expansion of political oratory into the public sphere through a dramatic representation of colonial relations in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Carlson also emphasizes the importance of elocution in

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Sheridan was also the godson of Jonathan Swift, a friend and correspondent of Dr. Thomas Sheridan, Richard's grandfather.

Sheridan's rhetoric, indicating the influence of his father's elocutionary career as a precursor to Sheridan's amalgamation of political oratory and theatre. She argues that "In his chosen occupations, Thomas Sheridan embodies the close alliance between oratory and theater, as does his lifelong plan to open a school for oratory as an annex to the theater" (364). Thomas Sheridan's vision of theatre and elocution as literally adjacent spaces foregrounds Richard Brinsley Sheridan's performative practices in theatre and politics. Carlson affirms that "[t]he emphasis on delivery makes oratorical training indispensable to both houses of representation in which Sheridan performs" (364). Carlson also indicates that Thomas Sheridan's theory of public speaking informed Sheridan's emphasis on plain language as Thomas believed in performativity as a more direct form of expression than written language, and used Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in his lectures. Carlson argues that Thomas Sheridan presented elocution as a solution to the sophistry of 18<sup>th</sup>-century prose by teaching that "[c]ultivation of speech generally, especially arts of delivery, is the remedy for Britain's "dissocial" condition. Acquiring skill in the language of looks and gestures [...] guarantees a wider and more receptive audience than that convoked by print" (364).

During the impeachment of Warren Hastings, Sheridan used performance as a form of social commentary by conveying a provocative condemnation of Hastings's role in the commercial and colonial exploitation of East India. The length of Sheridan's speeches and his use of performative and elocutionary devices distinguished his involvement in the impeachment as an expression of theatrical politics. Sheridan presented accusations against Hastings which elicited the sympathy of other Members of Parliament and sensationalized the impeachment as journalists disseminated Sheridan's speeches into the public sphere. Reporters published several accounts of the Begums Speech (1787), in which Sheridan alleged that Hastings seized assets

from deceased Indian noblemen which rightfully belonged to their widows. Transcripts of this speech evoked notable public attention and contributed to Sheridan's portrayal of Hastings as acquisitive and unscrupulous. Sheridan did not publish his parliamentary speeches as Burke did. With his theatrical experience, Sheridan could use gestures and performative devices to control parliamentary reporters' perception and experience of his speeches. This mediation allowed Sheridan to disseminate his political rhetoric into the public sphere in the form of entertaining accounts of his speeches in the House of Commons.

Parliamentary reporters observed Sheridan's speeches, and wrote third-person accounts describing the arguments, oratorical expressions, and the reactions of his spectators. This record of Sheridan's speeches provided a distinctive view to the public in which readers could observe the emotional evocations of Sheridan's rhetoric and the theatrical resonance of his oratory. The public gained awareness of the impeachment of Hastings through these journalistic accounts, which resembled theatrical reviews. Taylor identifies Sheridan's role in the impeachment as an example of the overarching amalgamation of politics and theatre in Sheridan's career and in the public sphere of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. As he describes Sheridan's speeches against Hastings, Taylor argues that, "in providing moments in which the already oblique distinctions between political oratory and dramatic performance collapsed, Sheridan's rhetoric elicits the tensions and pressures embodied in, and serving to inflect, a theatricalized politics" (67). Sheridan's erasure of the distinctions between politics and theatre allowed him to develop a rhetoric in which he used theatricality to articulate opposition.

Sheridan and the Whigs presented Hastings to the public as an embodiment of the corrupt colonial policies of the Tory government. Taylor affirms the prominence of Hastings in the ideological division between Whigs and Tories, recounting that Sheridan "employed a tragic



narrative to stage the fantasy of a nation imperilled by the horrors of a Tory empire but finally rescued through the redeeming, and emphatically masculinist, spirit of Whiggism” (113). While Hastings was not a politician, Sheridan presented him as a personification of Tory corruption by describing the exploitation of East India as a tragedy in which Hastings was the villain, embodying the corruption and avarice of the Tory establishment. Taylor refers to the gendering of Whig politics by describing Sheridan’s tragic narrative surrounding Hastings as “emphatically masculinist.” By emphasizing the exploitation of the Begums, Sheridan identified a group of female victims to Hastings’s campaign of self-advancement and profiteering. This focus allowed Hastings’s accusers to inhabit a benevolently masculine role by delivering a tragic heroine from a villain’s exploitation. Sheridan’s emphasis on the victimization of the Begums contributed to his appeal to the genre of tragedy as he presented Hastings as an archetypal villain.

In his representation of Hastings as a villain, Sheridan borrows conventions from the genre of “she-tragedy” by depicting Hastings’s violation of a tragic heroine. Sheridan echoes Burke’s pathetic description of the rebels’ pursuit of Marie Antoinette by describing Hastings’s financial victimization of the Begums to illustrate his immorality. Tragedies which focused on female victims and the violation of innocence and domesticity assumed political implications during the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a villain’s pursuit of a tragic heroine reflected national threats and scandals such as the Jacobite rebellions and the exploitation of East India. Whigs such as Sheridan adopted conventions of the she-tragedy to evoke pathetic responses to national and imperial concerns. In his article “Jane Shore and the Jacobites: Nicholas Rowe, the Pretender, and the National She-Tragedy,” Brett Wilson describes the translation of she-tragedy into politics as “a new attempt to associate the spectacle of the woman in pain with state politics, and in particular with the threat of Jacobitism to the welfare of the British nation” (823). Wilson

argues that the association of she-tragedies and the Jacobite rebellions reimagined this genre as a defense of national interests. He states that “[t]he apparent precariousness of the Protestant succession pushed Whig writers to confront a crisis that would put the whole nation at risk; they frequently responded by depicting that risk as sexed” (823). The connection between she-tragedy and the succession crisis during the Jacobite uprisings firmly aligned this subgenre with Whig interests. During the later 18<sup>th</sup> century, the conventions of she-tragedy adhered to the Whiggish values of civic virtue and imperial stewardship as speakers like Burke and Sheridan used these conventions to illustrate rebellion and corruption as violations of a feminine, domestic sphere. The Whigs inhabited a heroically masculine role by prosecuting ambitious, corrupt villains and defending victims such as the Begums and the embattled institutions of India and France.

In February 1787, Sheridan delivered the Begums speech in the House of Commons, providing an example of his performative oratory and dramatic accusations against Hastings. Sheridan’s *Speech in Bringing Forward the Fourth Charge Against Warren Hastings, Esq. Relative to the Begums of Oude* indicted Hastings for the mistreatment of Indian noblewomen (or Begums) under his governorship. The speech demonstrates Sheridan’s performative political oratory by commanding the attention of his audience and evoking their disdain for Hastings and the nefarious exploitation of the East Indian colonies. Sheridan recounted scenes of “criminality, tyranny, treachery, corruption, oppression and cruelty” (10) for five and a half hours,<sup>38</sup> evoking the sympathy of his fellow MPs and the public. The speech evoked awe and approbation; Taylor states that the Begums speech “was considered, by all who witnessed it, to be an unprecedented display of oratory” (69), citing the praise of other MPs and the *Times*. A reporter of Sheridan’s speech in the House of Commons also recounted that “Mr. Sheridan [...] commanded the most

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<sup>38</sup> Taylor 70

profound attention and admiration of the House. His matchless oration united the most solid argument with the most persuasive elegance” (2) in his publication of the speech. Sheridan’s emotive parliamentary speeches represent his shift from the plain language of journalism in the *Englishman* to the persuasive exuberance of theatre. The Begums speech succeeded in convicting Hastings in the House of Commons. However, the impeachment dragged on in the House of Lords and resulted in acquittal. The success of the Begums speech can also be observed in the responses of its auditors as the speech aroused the admiration of the press and Sheridan’s fellow MPs.

The Begums speech commences with Sheridan’s rhetorical appeal for the unified concern of the House of Commons over Hastings and the exploitation of East India. He unites Parliament as an audience of the tragedy of the corruption and tyranny of Hastings’s colonial administration. Sheridan commences by challenging the view that Parliament was unjustly or vainly persecuting Hastings. Sheridan describes “persons, without doors, who affected to ridicule the idea of prosecuting Mr. Hastings [...] by affecting that Parliament might be more usefully employed” (4). Sheridan presents this criticism as an opposing view to the will of the majority, as he proceeds to argue that the public is united with Parliament to condemn Hastings as a criminal and a traitor. In response to the counterpoint, Sheridan asks “Was Parliament misspending its time, by enquiring into the oppressions practiced on millions [...] in India, and endeavouring to bring the daring delinquents, who had been guilty of the most flagrant acts of enormous tyranny and rapacious peculation, to exemplary and condign punishment” (5). As Sheridan poses these questions, his rhetoric unifies his listeners as an audience of the atrocities perpetrated by Hastings. Sheridan begins to present Hastings’s misconduct as a tragedy by describing the extensive oppression practiced by the ambitious malefactors of the colonial government of East

India. He asserts that the case involves “oppression practiced on millions,” and refers to the perpetrators as “daring delinquents.” The description of Hastings as “daring” indicates his conventional qualities of a tragic villain, emphasizing Hastings’s ambition and rapacity in contrast to his public image as a loyal administrator. Sheridan’s reference to “exemplary and condign punishment” exemplifies his translation of the impeachment into a morally didactic tragedy as he illustrates the case of Hastings as a rightful exercise of punishment by a democratic authority against a “daring delinquent.” The term “exemplary” evokes the connotation of the moral example of the villain’s downfall in a tragedy.

Sheridan continues to unite his listeners into a cohesive audience of Hastings’s villainy by affirming the collective disapproval of Hastings among the public. Sheridan asserts that “the people of England collectively, speaking and acting by their representatives, felt as men should feel on such an occasion; that they were anxious to do justice by redressing injuries and punishing offenders, however high their rank, however elevated their station” (6). This description characterizes Hastings as a villain by affirming his culpability for the national indignity of the mistreatment of British East India. Sheridan presents Hastings as an enemy of the British people whose high rank and elevated station shield him from scrutiny. Sheridan states that it is the will of the people for their elected representatives to redress and punish Hastings.

As Sheridan continues to depict Hastings as a villain, he presents and elaborates the gravity and diversity of his crimes. Sheridan’s litany of accusations against Hastings depicts his crimes as heinous and far-reaching, as Sheridan indicates the number of people Hastings has victimized and the several authorities he has betrayed. As Sheridan introduces the accusations against Hastings, he presents “a charge, replete with proof of criminality of the blackest die [sic], of tyranny the most base and unprecedented, of treachery the most vile and premeditated, of

corruption the most open and shameless, of oppression the most grinding and severe, and cruelty the most unmanly and unparalleled” (10). In this accusation, Sheridan illustrates the pervasive impression of Hastings’s crimes. Through zeugma and parallelism, Sheridan asserts that Hastings has transgressed against several authorities and harmed several victims. The parallel syntactic position of each crime with which Sheridan charges Hastings balances the accusations, suggesting their equal gravity and drawing attention to the diverse victims and accusers. The first charge is “criminality,” which asserts that Hastings has transgressed against the law. Sheridan proceeds to allege “tyranny” and “treachery,” referring to crimes against humanity and the British empire. Tyranny denotes the exercise of unjust authority and the violation of human rights, while treachery connotes betrayal and subversion of a just authority. These accusations portray Hastings as an ambitious traitor, who has betrayed the values of liberty and constitutionalism upholding the British empire by becoming a tyrant in India. Sheridan cites “corruption” as a parallel crime, by which Hastings has abused his position in the colonial administration of East India to acquire profit and authority. Finally, Sheridan charges Hastings with “oppression” and “cruelty,” asserting that Hastings has unfairly subjugated the people of India and brought undue suffering.

Sheridan’s enumeration of accusations uses zeugma to attribute the various forms of misconduct to Hastings and emphasize his individual responsibility. Sheridan presents “*a* charge” which encompasses the diverse crimes he describes. This multifarious expression focuses Sheridan’s denunciation on Hastings as a figure embodying the various corruptions of the Tory government’s unjust colonial policies. In the enumeration, Sheridan attributes a parallel superlative description to each crime he includes. These adjectives vilify Hastings further by reflecting on his personal character and asserting the enormity and distinction of his crimes. The

terms “base,” “vile,” and “unmanly” affirm Hastings’s personal culpability and attribute the crimes to his immorality. The description “grinding and severe” illustrates the severity of the crimes, and the terms “unparalleled” and “unprecedented” connote the outstanding infamy of Hastings and contribute to his portrayal as an affront to the British empire.

Sheridan’s primary accusation against Hastings in the Begums speech concerns the exploitation of female Indian aristocrats called Begums. Begums were royal widows who corresponded to princess dowagers in Britain. The noble birth of the Begums contributed to Sheridan’s depiction of East India as an empire akin to Britain. This avowal of the established authority of Indian society underlies Sheridan’s portrayal of Hastings as an enemy of legitimate authority. The Begums’ status as widows also characterizes them as subaltern, as Hastings had allegedly exploited them by misappropriating the estates of the Begums’ husbands. The reporter of the speech recounts that Sheridan had “in the most pathetic and forcible manner given an affecting description of the distresses of these unfortunate princesses” (61). Sheridan focuses on this charge to embellish his portrayal of Hastings’s villainy with tragic conventions. He further illustrates the tragedy of Hastings’s misconduct by accusing him of plundering the inheritance of the Begums. This accusation furnished a pathetic account of Hastings’s corruption of imperial governance and predation of a tragic heroine. Burke echoed these sentiments during the French Revolution as he decried the rebels’ subversion of a recognised society and narrated the persecution of Marie Antoinette. Similarly, Sheridan presents Hastings as an ambitious criminal who has pillaged the Indian empire and focuses his condemnation on Hastings’s persecution of the Begums, who embody the qualities of royalty and tragic femininity.

Sheridan narrates Hastings’s alleged extortion from the Begums of Oude to fund his corrupt colonial administration. He recounts that Hastings “thought proper to exact, by his sole

authority, thirty lacks of rupees, for the use of the Nabob Vizier of Oude, out of the treasures bequeathed to the Begum by her late husband” (12). Sheridan decries any defense for this behaviour, asserting that Hastings has falsely claimed that this instance was the fault of the previous administration. Sheridan denies Hastings’s “affirmations, that the seizure of treasures from the Begums, and the exposition of their pilfered goods to public auction [...] were in any degree to be defended by those incroachments [sic] on their property, which had taken place previous to his administration” (13). To repudiate this defense, Sheridan calls Hastings’s excises on the Begums of Oude “unparalleled acts of open injustice, oppression and inhumanity” (13). This refutation of Hastings’s defense contributes to Sheridan’s depiction of Hastings as an “unparalleled” criminal, whose exploitations in East India represent unprecedented misconduct in the British Empire.

Sheridan presents the case against Hastings as a tragedy in which the ambitious Governor-General has abused the Begums, whom Sheridan characterizes as dignified tragic heroines. During the speech, Sheridan reads from a letter illustrating Hastings’s villainous indignity toward the Begums. The letter states, “If it is your pleasure that the mother of the late Nabob, myself, and his other women and infant children, should be reduced to a state of dishonour and distress, we must submit” (14). This description illustrates Hastings’s exploitation of a vulnerable section of the Indian aristocracy. The writer of the letter identifies herself as the “mother of the late Nabob,” asserting her authority as a member of the Indian aristocracy, and her vulnerability after her son’s death. The letter describes a group of women with the dignity of noble birth but the insecurity of subordination to Hastings without the protection of male nobility. The letter-writer describes the “other women and infant children” of the late Nabob’s family and avows their submission to Hastings. She reveals her concern that they “should be

reduced to a state of dishonour and distress.” This statement presents a pathetic contrast between the nobility of the Begums and their precarity under the authority of Hastings.

Sheridan appeals to respect for monarchy and tradition as he includes this letter illustrating Hastings’s dispossession of the Begums’ property and security. The letter-writer addresses Hastings by saying “If it is your pleasure [...] we must submit” to this wretched state. This address identifies Hastings as the arbiter of the Begums’ fortune, illustrating their subordination and Hastings’s excessive authority. The letter-writer conveys the implication that Hastings is responsible for the Begums’ protection and has betrayed his responsibility by neglecting the precarity of women and children. Having depicted the tragic precarity of the Begums, Sheridan portrays Hastings as the precipitator of their unhappiness. This accusation presents Hastings as the villain of the tragedy by emphasizing his individual culpability and immorality. The reporter of Sheridan’s speech recounts that the purpose of the letter was “to prove the controuling [sic] power of Mr. Hastings in Oude [...] and to prove that every circumstance of oppression and extraction, practiced on these Princesses, was done by orders, consent, and approbation of the Governor, who was supposed to be paramount in Oude” (15). This description illustrates the tyranny that Hastings practised as he oversaw the “oppression and extraction” of the Begums, asserting that Hastings was the paramount authority in this corrupt state. Sheridan’s speech portrays Hastings as a despotic oppressor of women and children among the Indian nobility. Sheridan presents Hastings as a villain who exploits a foreign land and tragic heroines to fulfill his ambition.

Sheridan presents Hastings as a traitor to various authorities, contrasting his behaviour to the expectations of Indian society, the magnanimity of the British empire, and the will of the British people. He attests that “it must be clear to every member that the princesses were entitled



to our protection; and that every hostile attempt, to wrest their property from them, was unjust and disgraceful” (18). This statement describes the equitable relationship between the British empire and India. Sheridan acknowledges the authority of ancestral royalty in India by referring to the Begums as “princesses,” avowing their similitude to hereditary authorities in Britain and other empires. He also indicates the responsibility of the British empire as a guardian of the East Indian colonies by stating that Indian royalty are “entitled to our protection.” This avowal of the obligation of British authorities to guard and uphold the institutions of East Indian society condemns Hastings for transgressing against his responsibilities as a representative of the British empire. Sheridan further acknowledges the established authority of Indian culture by arguing that “the Mahomedan law did not authorize the seizure of the Princesses property” (16). This statement avows Hastings’s culpability for disregarding the religious and cultural laws of the population he governed. Sheridan appeals to various authorities to establish the guilt of Warren Hastings, accusing him of disrespecting East Indian hierarchy and society, and violating the complaisant relationship between Britain and India. By presenting East Indian hierarchies and customs as concomitant to the British empire, Sheridan asserts the dignity and authority of Hastings’s victims. He focuses on the exploited Begums of Oude, who embody the dignity and submission of Hastings’s accusers. By depicting India and its traditions as casualties of Hastings’s unbridled ambition, Sheridan renders the accusations against Hastings into a tragedy in which an immoral villain exploits a foreign land and its tragic heroines.

In June 1788, as the impeachment of Hastings concluded in the High Court of Parliament, Sheridan delivered his *Speech on Summing Up the Second Charge Against Warren Hastings*. This speech demonstrated the theatrical spectacle of Sheridan’s accusations, as it continued for three days, captivating MPs and journalists, and eclipsing the five-hour Begums speech. A

reporter who recorded Sheridan's speech recalls that, "[i]n the seats for the Commons, so generally deserted, there appeared upwards of three hundred Members. Those in fact who did not then see the Court, can scarcely form a judgment of the spectacle" (1). This description illustrates the support Sheridan had roused among his fellow MPs, as they crowded Westminster Hall to hear his summary of the impeachment. The reporter also evokes the reader's interest by indicating that the public cannot adequately imagine the magnitude and spectacle of Sheridan's speech without being present. The reporter describes the reaction of Sheridan's audience by saying "When Mr. Sheridan had concluded the admiration of his Auditors was too great for silent approbation. It unanimously burst forth in a tumult of applause" (28). The reporter describes the reaction of Sheridan's audience to convey an image of the emotional resonance of the speech, which he cannot adequately describe to his readers.

As a celebrated playwright, Sheridan elicited the expectation that his speech would be resonant and engaging. This perception permeates first-hand accounts of the speech and inclined the public to imagine Sheridan's oratory in the context of dramatic performance. As reporters and spectators disseminated accounts of the speech in which they described Sheridan's evocative theatrical devices and the reactions of the audience, they inhabited the role of dramatic critics. The reporter narrating the tumultuous applause goes on to praise the speech as "a tribute of Feeling to Genius, such as Form could not constrain, nor inferior Consideration subdue" (29). This statement echoes the enthusiasm of a dramatic critic describing a particularly resonant play. The reporter praises Sheridan, a prominent playwright, for delivering a political speech in which his emotional expression defied the formal constraints of the setting. Taylor emphasizes the public's perception of the theatricality of Sheridan's role in the impeachment, arguing that "the oratory of the impeachment proper was presented on an emphatically public stage and within an

already theatricalized matrix of public interest” (71). In 1788, Sheridan had participated in the impeachment in the House of Commons for the past year, inviting public interest by presenting himself as a theatrical orator, and presenting the case of Warren Hastings as a tragedy. His speech at Westminster Hall culminated the campaign of theatrical oratory characterizing the impeachment, as Sheridan restated his dramatic indictment of Hastings, and his audience witnessed a performative demonstration of his commitment to the impeachment.

During his speech summarizing the accusations against Hastings, Sheridan depicts Hastings’s crimes as heinous and unprecedented. He declares that, “[i]n all the Annals of human Tyranny or human suffering—in the accurate illustrations of a Tacitus, or the luminous Pages of a Gibbon, there did not occur such an instance of unexampled iniquity” (22). Sheridan emphasizes the enormity of Hastings’s crimes by asserting that they are historically unprecedented. He argues that Hastings’s villainy eclipses the excess and tyranny of the Roman empire, by citing Tacitus and the “luminous Pages of Gibbon,” a fellow Whig who sat in the audience of Sheridan’s speech. Gibbon describes the speech, in a letter to Lord Sheffield, as “one of the closest chains of argument I ever heard [...] and a compliment, much admired, to a certain historian of your acquaintance” (172). This letter affirms the strength of Sheridan’s argument and attests to his theatricality.

Gibbon proceeds to narrate an instance in the speech in which Sheridan used an evocative theatrical gesture to illustrate the wickedness of Hastings’s conduct and Sheridan’s exhaustive dedication to the impeachment. He recounts that “Sheridan, in the close of his speech, sunk into Burke’s arms; but I called this morning, he is perfectly well. A good Actor!” (172). This theatrical gesticulation contributed to the drama of Sheridan’s speech. Sheridan depicted Hastings as the villain of a tragedy and, after narrating his villainy for three days, swooned into

the arms of Edmund Burke, a fellow accuser of Hastings. Gibbon communicates his experience in the audience of Sheridan's speech, revealing that the observers witnessed Sheridan fall into Burke's arms with enough vehemence to provoke their concern. Gibbon demonstrates this concern by recounting that he visited Sheridan shortly thereafter to confirm that he was "perfectly well." We may observe Gibbon's concern that Sheridan was overcome by his evocative description of Hastings's villainy and his energetic oration. Gibbon concludes that Sheridan's swoon was a successfully resonant theatrical device, declaring him "[a] good Actor!" In his letter to Lord Sheffield, Gibbon illustrates Sheridan's theatrical appeal to his audience by describing an instance in which Sheridan used a dramatic pose and gesticulation to command the attention and sympathy of his audience.

Sheridan was an enthusiastic participant alongside Edmund Burke in the Whigs' impeachment of Warren Hastings. The oratory with which Sheridan and Burke condemned Hastings reveals their adjacent strategies to promote opposition in the sphere of public opinion. Burke employed rhetoric to incite public interest, presenting himself as a dutiful public servant and presenting Hastings as an antithesis to the virtues of stewardship and civic responsibility, manipulating his audience to condemn Hastings's corruption. Sheridan used his public persona as a playwright to incite interest in the spectacle of the impeachment and depict Hastings's crimes as a resonant tragedy. In contrast to Burke, Sheridan did not publish verbatim editions of his speeches that would allow his audience to examine his rhetoric and language. Instead, he relied on the accounts of parliamentary reporters to describe his oratory to the public. These secondary accounts describe Sheridan's rhetoric and illustrate the response of the audience. The journalistic reports of Sheridan's speeches resemble dramatic criticism because they reiterate moments of emotional resonance, evaluating Sheridan's rhetoric and performance, and narrating

the audience's reactions. This instance of the similitude between theatre and politics allowed Sheridan to contrive a persona encompassing the roles of playwright and politician. Sheridan used the attention he provoked as a playwright to express opposition to the Tory government and incite public opposition to Warren Hastings as a figure personifying the Tories' corrupt colonial practices. Sheridan presented the exploitation of East India as a tragedy and Hastings as a villain in the theatre of public opinion. His expression of this tragedy through political oratory exemplifies the conflation of theatre and politics underlying Sheridan's persona as an opposition Whig playwright. After the impeachment failed in the House of Lords, Sheridan continued to vilify Hastings using theatrical politics by staging the tragedy *Pizarro*, in which a historical villain represented Hastings's campaign of exploitation and profiteering.

#### Section 15: *Pizarro* and the Tragedies of India and Ireland

Despite Sheridan's poignant rhetoric and resonant theatrical politics during the impeachment of Warren Hastings, the House of Lords acquitted Hastings in 1795. However, Sheridan revived his theatrical rhetoric of impeachment as he staged the tragedy *Pizarro; or the Spaniards in Peru* in 1799. Sheridan adapted the text from the German playwright August von Kotzebue, recognizing it as a politically relevant play in the context of Britain in 1799.<sup>39</sup> Puff's declaration in *The Critic* that "when history [...] furnishes anything like a case in point, to the time in which the author writes, if he knows his own interest, he will take advantage of it" (2.1.3), foreshadows the political allegory of *Pizarro*. While *Pizarro* dramatizes an event in the colonial history of Spain, the allegory allowed Sheridan to address contemporary issues in Britain as an opposition Whig and an Irishman in Parliament (though, like Burke, Sheridan was

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<sup>39</sup> O'Toole notes that "[s]ome of Sheridan's motivations in turning to the work of [Kotzebue] were undoubtedly commercial," citing the success of two other adaptations of Kotzebue's plays at Drury Lane and Covent Garden in the late 1790s.

Protestant and spent most of his life in England). Sheridan uses the parallel narrative of the conquistador Pizarro to represent the issue of colonial exploitation in the context of Britain's mistreatment of East India and Ireland. *Pizarro* was particularly germane in the aftermath of the Irish Rebellion of 1798. The final two decades of the 18th century included demonstrations against the colonial policies of the British government such as the American Revolution and the impeachment of Hastings. The Whigs sympathized with these examples of the assertion of independence and the resistance to tyranny. Sheridan was an ardent participant in the impeachment of Hastings and proceeded to denounce the exploitation of Ireland amid the government's violent suppression of the Rebellion of 1798. Sheridan restated many of his arguments from the impeachment of Hastings in *Pizarro*, renewing public opposition to the government's colonial policies, and reiterating his vilification of Hastings after the former governor had presented himself as an innocent public servant.

As Sheridan translated his rhetoric against Hastings into the tragedy *Pizarro*, he used layers of theatrical adaptation to denounce the government's treatment of India and Ireland. I argue that Sheridan's tragedy *Pizarro; or the Spaniards in Peru* stages a historical narrative of colonial exploitation to represent the oppression of Ireland and revive Sheridan's accusations against Warren Hastings. *Pizarro* exemplifies the utility of theatre for a reformist politician by evoking pertinent issues through the dramatic representation of a historical allegory. Sheridan presents the tyrannical figure of the Spanish conquistador Pizarro as a parallel figure to Warren Hastings. This representation of Hastings as a tragic villain responds to Hastings's public campaign to exonerate himself during his impeachment. As Hastings had endeavoured to portray himself as a dispassionate administrator in contrast to his irate accusers, Sheridan reaffirmed Hastings's corruption by comparing him to the focalized malefactor of the tragedy *Pizarro*. The

play represents the corruption of Hastings in the context of the Irish Rebellion of 1798, drawing public attention to the issue of the exploitation of Ireland without inviting government censure by presenting the issue explicitly. *Pizarro* differs from Sheridan's earlier politically relevant plays as it is a tragedy. While *The Critic* introduced the adjacency of politics, journalism, and theatre; and ridiculed the complacency of British society during the Invasion Crisis, *Pizarro* used tragedy to evoke the sorrow and outrage of the public over the prominent issue of colonial exploitation and the suppression of the Irish Rebellion of 1798.

*Pizarro* followed Hastings's acquittal by continuing Sheridan's theatrical politics in a more publicly accessible venue. Sheridan used tragedy to oppose Hastings's exculpation and express dissent on Britain's relations with Ireland. Like Edmund Burke, Sheridan experienced alienation and voiced dissent as an Irishman in the British House of Commons. Burke and Sheridan both assumed the personae of Protestant politicians representing English constituencies. However, sympathy for their Irish countrymen led Burke and Sheridan to condemn oppression and persecution against the Irish Catholic minority in Britain. Burke rebuked Lord Gordon for his provocation of anti-Catholic furor in London, while Sheridan addressed the issue of Britain's treatment of Ireland in the context of the Irish Rebellion of 1798 and the motion for union with Ireland in 1799. O'Toole describes Sheridan's definitive opposition to British intervention in Ireland by saying that Sheridan delivered "an astonishing defense of the rebels" in the House of Commons and "[w]hen he was accused of being unwilling to assist in the crushing of the United Irishmen, he effectively accepted the accusation" (324). During the French Revolution, Sheridan's alignment with the interests of the Irish rebels presented him as a controversial figure for the English public and the counter-revolutionary government.

In her article “Theatricality, Legalism, and the Scenography of Suffering: The Trial of Warren Hastings and Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s *Pizarro*,” Julie Stone Peters recounts that “Sheridan’s support for the French Revolution and Irish Rebellion put him in constant danger of arrest for treason in the last years of the century” (68). To counteract this threat of government censure, Sheridan translated his reformist oratory against Hastings and sympathy for Irish independence into the historical tragedy *Pizarro*, using history and theatricality to avoid controversy. Taylor describes *Pizarro* as “a considered intervention in Britain’s occupation of colonial Ireland” (121). Sheridan avoids presenting any direct denunciation of British imperialism by staging an exemplary narrative of Spanish colonialism to address the issue of Britain’s exploitation of Ireland and India. Taylor asserts that “Sheridan staged the brutal spectacle of Spanish colonialism as a means of critiquing the suspect ideologies and terrifying apparatus of British imperial power that threatened the landscapes of India and Ireland alike” (122). This veiled criticism of Britain’s treatment of Ireland and reaffirmation of Sheridan’s condemnation against Hastings protected Sheridan from the appearance of treason or radicalism.

*Pizarro* presents an expression of opposition to the government encompassing criticism of Britain’s treatment of India and Ireland. *Pizarro*’s pillaging and disregard for Peruvian society exemplify Hastings’s exploitation of East India, while the Spaniards’ genocidal intent more closely reflects the ongoing suppression of Irish culture and identity in Britain and Ireland. Despite Sheridan’s outcry against Hastings, who was not involved in colonial Ireland, and the more obscure representation of Ireland in *Pizarro*, James Morwood argues in his article “Sheridan and the Legacy of His Irish Parents,” that sympathy for Ireland was a fundamental motivation in Sheridan’s political career. Morwood asserts that “Sheridan’s obsession with what he saw as justice in Ireland was the driving force behind his lengthy political career. It even led



him to high-risk dabbling in treason. Sheridan's preoccupation with his native country led to his inclusion of an Irish element in his work for the stage which is plainly visible” (1). The description of Sheridan’s “dabbling in treason” refers to the vehemence of Sheridan’s public opposition, as his criticism of the government drew accusations of radicalism and Jacobinism from the Tory press. Morwood also argues that Irish interests compose a “plainly visible element” in Sheridan’s politically resonant plays, and proceeds to indicate that *Pizarro* is among the most political of Sheridan’s works. He states that, in *Pizarro*, Sheridan “penned everything in the same high style with which he had by then become accustomed to electrify Parliament and Westminster Hall [...] Its interest is more or less exclusively political” (13) This argument, while challenging the literary quality of *Pizarro*,<sup>40</sup> suggests that the play is a useful example of Sheridan’s fusion of theatre and politics because it represents the style and perspective of Sheridan’s parliamentary activity.

Sheridan’s presentation of *Pizarro* in 1799 comprised a reflection of his parliamentary oratory against Hastings and his theatrical expression of political reform. This reiteration of the impeachment of Hastings into a dramatic expression of advocacy for India and Ireland synthesizes Sheridan’s translation of drama into political oratory and representation of politics in the theatre. Julie Stone Peters argues that *Pizarro* followed Hastings’s resistance to Sheridan’s theatrical politics; she asserts that during the impeachment, “Hastings began to emerge as the representative of forensic anti-theatricality; his demeanor to be contrasted with that of the histrionic managers” (55). Sheridan did not ultimately convict Hastings in a formal legal process, and Hastings resembled a sober public official in contrast to the theatrical vehemence of his accusers. Sheridan renewed his vilification of Hastings by portraying him as a historical tyrant in

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<sup>40</sup> Morwood proceeds to call the play an “aesthetic disaster” (13).

*Pizarro*. This depiction allowed Sheridan to criticize imperialism and exploitation, implicating Hastings and addressing the present turmoil of Britain's oppression of Ireland. Peters tells us that, in the context of Hastings's impeachment and the government's suppression of the Irish Rebellion, "Sheridan could recast Hastings as an imperial villain, and simultaneously reclaim the power of theater to perform legal truth, only through the reenactment of the trial onstage in *Pizarro*" (59). Sheridan represents Hastings as the conquistador Pizarro, distancing Hastings from his image as an innocent public servant.

Sheridan restates his accusations of Hastings's treason against British values and exploitation of a foreign land by depicting him onstage as a notorious Spaniard, who personifies tyranny and ambition. In Act I, as Elvira, Pizarro's mistress; and Valverde, his secretary, introduce the character of Pizarro, Valverde illustrates Pizarro's tyrannical ambition by saying "Shame from his late defeat, and burning wishes for revenge, again have brought Pizarro to Peru" (1.1.25). This statement describes the selfish qualities of shame and revenge underlying Pizarro's occupation of Peru. Valverde proceeds to describe the precarious state of the Spanish army, "[e]ncamped in a strange country [...] while Pizarro decorates with gaudy spoil the gay pavilion of his luxury" (1.1.27). The depiction of Pizarro as luxuriant and unmanly reflects Sheridan's assertion that Hastings had betrayed the benevolently masculine role of a British public servant. Valverde's assertion of Pizarro's weakness and vanity presents him as a tyrant exploiting a foreign land for his own ambition and neglecting the security of his countrymen. This depiction challenges the perception of Hastings as a disinterested public servant, presenting him as a tyrant and a traitor to his empire and his subordinates.

Hastings's public campaign to recast himself as an innocent administrator in a corrupt system disputed the Whigs' accusations of his personal corruption and subversion of institutional

benevolence. The belief that Britain ought to provide liberty and civilization to colonies such as Ireland and India while respecting existing empires and traditions did not conform to the innocent image of Hastings, as he shifted blame onto the British empire. Sheridan contests Hastings's image as an innocent public servant by emphasizing the barbarity of Pizarro in contrast to the civility of the Peruvians. In her article "The Stranger Next Door: Identity and Diversity on the Late Eighteenth-Century Stage," Francesca Saggini argues that Sheridan attributes familiar British values to the Peruvians, while presenting Pizarro as savage and despotic. She states that the Peruvians in *Pizarro* display "the loyalist sentiments of a nation like England which had been for decades at arms to defend the freedom of its inhabitants" (7). The Invasion Crisis was still a recent memory to Sheridan's audience, as he emphasized British values in a precarious state at the mercy of Pizarro and the Spaniards. This comparison renews Sheridan's assertion of the similarity between the empires of Britain and India during the impeachment of Hastings.

In *Pizarro*, Sheridan presents Peru as a civilized, established state which espouses the British values of freedom and loyalty, evoking sympathy for the populations of colonies such as India and Ireland. Sheridan presents Pizarro as threat to British values as he attempts to subjugate the noble Peruvians and rule them as a despot. Saggini describes this contrast as an instance in which "the by-then established moral hierarchy of settlers and settled is inverted" (7). Sheridan represents Hastings as the foreign, tyrannical villain Pizarro and emphasizes the Peruvians' nobility to evoke sympathy for colonized populations during the controversy of Hastings's acquittal and the suppression of the Irish Rebellion. This depiction also condemns the autocratic mismanagement of colonies by ambitious governors, advocating for more benevolent administration over people who share common values with the British.

Having represented Hastings as the tyrannical conquistador *Pizarro*, Sheridan restates his accusations, translating his earlier political oratory into the dialogue of a tragedy. These accusations assumed the significance of condemning Britain's suppression of the Irish Rebellion as a despotic colonial act, as the government undertook a campaign of counter-revolutionary propaganda. Sheridan's expression of advocacy and reform in *Pizarro* exemplifies the significance of theatre to an MP in opposition who had exhausted formal means of criticizing the majority. Taylor argues that *Pizarro* "recycles the tropes of both the impeachment and 1798 rebellion-propaganda as part of an extended meditation on the powerlessness of the orator in his attempt to inscribe accountability within the apparatus of colonialism, and of the inability of eloquence, however applauded, to counter regimes of despotism and torture" (126). Taylor refers to the approbation of Sheridan's speeches during the impeachment, but acknowledges that his eloquence failed to emend the government's support for a despotic "apparatus of colonialism," as aggressive colonial policies continued and intensified after Hastings's acquittal.

Sara Suleri describes the renewal of Sheridan's rhetoric against Hastings after the failure of the impeachment, asserting that "[h]owever readily eighteenth-century England seemed to bury such a trial on its imperial imagination, the impeachment was to make one literal return and, in a complex act of cultural barter, pay back to the theater what it had borrowed of its mode" (68). In renewing Sheridan's accusations against Hastings, *Pizarro* illustrates a shift from the venue of parliamentary discourse to the theatre as a means of drawing public attention toward a political issue and evoking public outrage. Suleri describes Sheridan's involvement in the impeachment by saying "as playwright he was able to internalize the theatricality of the proceedings and, after the reception of the Begums speech, realize that spectacular success deserves repetition" (68). Sheridan not only reaffirms his accusations against Hastings in

*Pizarro*, but reuses the Begums Speech. While the speech failed to convict Hastings and reform the colonial policies of British East India, Suleri notes its success as a spectacle. Sheridan repurposed the speech in *Pizarro*, characterizing the theatre as a more effective venue to denounce colonial policies through emotional appeals. Suleri affirms that “[A]s a rewriting of the trial, *Pizarro* represents a retrospective acknowledgment of the naivete of eloquence within a colonial framework” (68). Although the Begums speech did not effect any political change, its translation into drama demonstrates the successful expansion of reformist political oratory into the public sphere.

Sheridan’s theatrical restatement of his accusations from the impeachment of Hastings exemplify his turn to the medium of theatre to express opposition in the public sphere. For example, Sheridan reiterates his opposition to unjust imperial intervention through the dialogue of Rolla, a righteous Peruvian commander who attempts to thwart Pizarro’s ambitious exploitation. In Act II, Rolla gives a rousing speech to his countrymen in which he denounces Pizarro’s pretense as a benevolent colonial administrator. This speech restates Sheridan’s accusations against Hastings in Parliament. Rolla declares that Pizarro’s conquistadors “boast, they come but to improve our state, enlarge our thoughts, and free us from the yoke of error! [...] They offer us their protection—Yes, such protection as vultures give to lambs—covering and devouring them!” (2.2.24–27). This statement defies the justification for imperialism that an empire offers protection, advancement, and civility to its colonies. During the impeachment, Sheridan had contested the argument that Hastings was a protector of East India, avowing “his protection is [...] like that of a Vulture to a Lamb” (98). In his speech in Act II, Rolla assumes the role that Sheridan inhabited during the impeachment of Hastings in the House of Commons. Sheridan presents Rolla as an orator exposing the tyranny and corruption of Pizarro, and

appealing to the liberty and conscience of his people. In addition to Sheridan's translation of this parliamentary speech into the dialogue of *Pizarro*, he republished the text as a speech in 1803 during the Napoleonic Wars, demonstrating the resonance of this expression of solidarity against a malevolent invader.<sup>41</sup>

As Sheridan uses Rolla to restate his disavowal of Hastings's role as a protector of East India, he expands the statement to contrast the liberty and dignity of a colonized people to the oppression of an occupying force. Rolla avows that the Spaniards falsely claim to protect and improve the people of Peru, extending the comparison to vultures by illustrating the oppressive presence of Pizarro as "covering and devouring." Rolla proceeds to assert the inherent liberty and dignity of his people by refuting Pizarro's pretense of colonial improvement. He declares "They call on us to barter all of the good we have inherited and proved [...] Be our plain answer this; The throne WE honour is the PEOPLE'S CHOICE—the laws we reverence are our brave father's legacy" (2.2.28–30). This assertion of the freedom and civility of the Peruvian people reflects Sheridan's rhetoric in the impeachment of Warren Hastings by aligning the values of an empire with the pre-existing society of its colony. Sheridan illustrated the dignity of East Indian society by portraying the Begums as tragic heroines while describing Hastings's disregard for the Indian aristocracy. Rolla indicates the hereditary authority of Peruvian society by saying "the laws we reverence are our brave father's legacy," attesting to his confidence in the authority and tradition of his government. Rolla also describes the Peruvians' values of liberty and constitutional democracy, likening their society to English principles. As Rolla asserts "The throne WE honour is the PEOPLE'S CHOICE," he aligns monarchy and democracy, reflecting

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<sup>41</sup> The title of the 1803 publication is *Sheridan's Address to the People: Our King! Our Country! Our God!* The pamphlet reimagined the threatened population as the English, while it had previously referred to the East Indians and the Peruvians. Taylor notes that *The Times* also reprinted the speech in 1940 (123).

the synthesis of democracy and heredity underlying British governance. Rolla's further reference to the hereditary authority of Peruvian laws echoes the Whiggish belief in the development of constitutional liberty through the institutions of monarchy and aristocracy. Sheridan appeals to Burke's argument that the constitution and the House of Commons are liberal institutions brought forth by the enduring traditions of the House of Lords and the monarchy.

In contrast to the innocence and dignity of the Peruvians, Sheridan portrays Pizarro and the conquistadors as rapacious criminals, emphasizing the malice and ambition underlying Hastings's misconduct. A discussion between Pizarro and his followers in Act I illustrates their pusillanimous tactics as Pizarro proposes to attack the Peruvians on their day of religious observance. He declares "Confident in security, this day the foe devotes to solemn sacrifice if with bold surprize we strike on their solemnity—trust to your leader's word—we shall not fail" (1.1.135). This proposal presents the Spaniards as war-criminals by revealing Pizarro's disregard for the Peruvians' culture and community. The response of Pizarro's followers illustrates their desire to commit genocide against the Peruvians. Almagro and Davilla, Pizarro's lieutenants, applaud this plan, demonstrating their equal contempt for the Peruvians. Almagro declares "Battle! Battle!—then death to the arm'd, and chains to the defenceless," and Davilla responds "Death to the whole Peruvian race!" (1.1.139). Almagro and Davilla echo Pizarro's ruthless intention to surprise the Peruvians on their sabbath, revealing their further intent to enslave the unarmed Peruvians and conduct genocide against their race. The genocidal rhetoric of the Spaniards in *Pizarro* is a multifarious representation of colonial abuses at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, evoking a connection between Sheridan's tragic depiction of abuse in distant colonies and the continual effort to suppress Irish culture and identity. Sheridan reprised the impeachment

of Hastings in the venue of the theatre, as the suppression of the Irish Rebellion demonstrated further colonial mistreatment.

The Spaniards' motivation to commit genocide against the Peruvians in *Pizarro* reflects Britain's campaign of assimilation in Ireland, evoking the recent issue of the Irish Rebellion and other instances of suppression in British colonies. Sheridan presents an image encompassing commercial exploitation and cultural genocide in the malice of Pizarro and his followers, representing the figure of Hastings alongside other instances of colonial misconduct unrelated to Hastings and East India. In her article "Darkness Visible: The Early Melodrama of British Imperialism and the Commodification of History in Sheridan's 'Pizarro,'" Dana Van Kooy indicates Sheridan's diverse representation of injustice in British colonies. She states, "As the primary locus of these crises, the figure of Pizarro provided Sheridan with a vehicle for allusions to the genocidal violence that marked Britain's conflicts with the Irish, the Bengalese, and the Jamaican Maroons, among others" (189). This argument indicates the usefulness of *Pizarro* as a dramatic commentary on the exploitation of British colonies at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Van Kooy aligns assimilative efforts in Ireland and the suppression of the Irish Rebellion with the exploitation of distant colonies, characterizing Ireland as a colonized territory akin to India and Jamaica.

Van Kooy goes on to describe the Irish Rebellion as a prominent consideration in the political commentary of *Pizarro*. She argues that "[t]he immediate historical context for the play, of course, was the Irish Rebellion" (189), noting a speech in which Sheridan described Britain's response to the rebellion as "one continual scene of the most grievous oppression" (189). Van Kooy demonstrates that the Irish Rebellion was a pressing issue for Sheridan which he incorporated into *Pizarro* by presenting an emblematic depiction of colonial abuses, including



Hastings's misconduct in India and the violent suppression of the Irish Rebellion. Van Kooy asserts that "Pizarro embodied the ideological contradictions inherent in the twinned projects of colonization and empire-building" (189). Sheridan's representation of colonial abuses in *Pizarro* encompasses Hastings's plundering of India and the British government's annexation of Ireland. This versatile political commentary addresses the abuses of benevolent governance Sheridan noted in the policies of the Tory government.

As Sheridan translated his opposition to colonial abuse from a formal political process to the public venue of the theatre, he reiterated his former accusations against Hastings to affirm the Whig values of liberty and benevolent governance before the public. Peters describes the political function of *Pizarro* by stating that outside "the technical constraints of the Hastings trial, it embeds legal argument in broader discussions of the legitimacy of imperial conquest and revolution" (66). In staging this discussion, Sheridan presents characters who certainly represent real people, but also embody the ideologies of colonialism, counter-revolution, and Whiggish opposition to unbridled colonial expansion. Pizarro and his accomplices represent Hastings and his administration, and display the shared sentiments underlying Hastings's abuse of East India and the British government's occupation of Ireland. Sheridan uses the characters Rolla and Las Casas to represent the Whigs' denunciation of colonial oppression. Las Casas is a Spanish priest who implores Pizarro to exercise reason and mercy throughout the play. In Act I, Las Casas challenges the incitement to stage a surprise attack on the Peruvians' sabbath by describing Pizarro's cruel treatment of the Peruvians. He asserts "Generously and freely did they share with you their comforts, their treasures, and their homes: you repaid them by fraud, oppression, and dishonor. These eyes have witnessed all I speak—as gods you were received; as fiends have you acted" (1.1.157). This condemnation of Pizarro's treatment of the Peruvians reaffirms Sheridan's

portrayal of Hastings as an overbearing tyrant who exploited the vulnerability of the East Indian population. Las Casas's avowal that Pizarro had unfettered access to the Peruvians' "treasures, and their homes" reflects Sheridan's description of Hastings's unjust supremacy over the Begums.

During the impeachment, Sheridan portrayed the Begums as tragic heroines over whom Hastings possessed overwhelming authority. He argued that Hastings exploited the Begums and misappropriated the wealth of their families while he exercised power over them as a colonial administrator. Las Casas describes the innocence of the Peruvians as they treated the conquistadors with hospitality, reflecting the Begums' supplicating reliance on Hastings. The contrast between the Peruvians' hospitality and Pizarro's "fraud, oppression, and dishonour" represents Sheridan's description of Hastings's abuse of a vulnerable population to enrich himself. The letter Sheridan read during the impeachment to illustrate Hastings's abuse of the Begums reveals their reliance on Hastings as an absolute authority. Sheridan asserted that Hastings violated his role of provider while he possessed unilateral authority over the people of British India. The letter to Hastings from the mother of the late Nabob states "if [...] you call to mind the friendship of the late blessed Nabob, you will exert yourself effectually in favour of us, who are helpless" (14). This petition suggests that Hastings had a relationship with the late Nabob which reflected Pizarro's welcome by the Peruvians. The speaker indicates that her people are "helpless" and rely on the whims of Hastings. The recorder of the Begums Speech recounts that Sheridan read the letter "to prove the controuling [sic] power of Mr. Hastings" (14) and illustrate his authority as "Governor, who was supposed to be paramount in Oude" (15). This image of Hasting as a tyrant and a corrupter of the benevolent role of a colonial governor resonates in Las Casas' denouncement of Pizarro's mistreatment and betrayal of the Peruvians.

As Las Casas declares “As gods you were received; as fiends you have acted,” he depicts the conquistadors as influential authorities who exploited the Peruvians’ hospitality and violated their role as benevolent governors.

In addition to representing the figure of Hastings as a historical exemplar of colonial tyranny and corruption, Sheridan adapted the drama of *Pizarro* to represent the current issues of exploitation in East India and Ireland in tragic and heroic terms. Sheridan staged *Pizarro* as a tragic spectacle which represented political issues through the illustrative conflicts between the characters. Sheridan used this engaging theatrical representation to influence the imagination of the public and evoke their disapproval of the Tory government and corrupt public officials. *Pizarro* depicts a familial conflict in which resistance to tyranny and sympathy for the downtrodden Peruvians lead Pizarro’s closest followers to overthrow his campaign of oppression. Pizarro’s adopted son Alonzo denounces Pizarro and unites with Rolla to fight on behalf of the Incas. They conspire with Pizarro’s mistress, Elvira, to liberate the Peruvians from the tyrannical Spaniards, and Alonzo ultimately kills Pizarro. This tragic drama provokes the sympathy and grief of the audience, drawing public attention to the issue of corrupt colonial regimes through a provocative theatrical spectacle. Peters identifies the significance of familial conflict in *Pizarro*, arguing that Sheridan uses a tragic convention of domestic conflict to illustrate analogous corruption at the level of empire. She states that “[t]he drama [...] was the ideal genre for reflecting this relationship, offering spectacles of private family life in public spaces where the local lesson might be transferred to the collective (the “nation,” which the theatrical audience was often felt to represent)” (80). In Act V, Pizarro has taken Alonzo’s child captive, and declares his intention to hold the infant hostage. He avows “when I shall meet Alonzo in the heat of the victorious fight—think'st thou I shall not have a check upon the valour

of his heart, when he is reminded that a word of mine is this child's death?" (5.2.35). Pizarro disregards the paternal responsibility he has assumed over Alonzo, as he threatens the child of his adopted son to prevent Alonzo from challenging his authority. Sheridan's portrayal of Pizarro as a familial tyrant in addition to a corrupt colonial governor contributes to his depiction of Hastings as a tragic villain.

As Hastings defended himself during the impeachment, he contrived the public image of a dispassionate public servant in contrast to the histrionics of his accusers and shifted blame onto a larger imperial system. Peters describes Hastings's campaign of counter-impeachment, in which he defended himself in newspaper articles, presenting a neutral persona to the public, and drawing his readers' focus toward systemic corruption and away from his personal culpability. Peters states that "the spectators blamed the empire for Hastings's crimes (the difficulties of Asiatic administration and East India Company necessities), using collective guilt as a justification for exonerating him and thus effectively preventing responsibility from settling on any particular individual" (56). By depicting Pizarro as a tyrant toward his own family, Sheridan circumvents Hastings's avowal of innocence. While the play depicts an oppressive colonial regime, the theme of familial betrayal directs the audience's attention toward the individual villainy of Pizarro. The conflict between Pizarro and his adopted son displays Sheridan's synthesis of imperial and familial corruption, aligning domestic and political discourses. This representation encompassing personal and administrative criminality allows Sheridan to present Pizarro unquestionably as a villain. The assertion of culpability underlying *Pizarro* conveyed the statement that Hastings was personally responsible for the atrocities Sheridan recounted during the impeachment, and not a victim of a corrupt system.

Sheridan challenged Hastings's public declarations of innocence by renewing his accusations in the venue of the theatre and embellishing the impeachment with the provocative devices of tragedy. This public conflict displays the relationship between theatre and print journalism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as Hastings used the newspapers to contrive a public image and Sheridan opposed this campaign by denouncing Hastings in *Pizarro*. Peters describes this public confrontation between journalism and theatre by saying "Hastings learned (over the trial's long course) to exploit public anti-theatricality. Investing more than £6000 on newspaper publicity-in what might be considered the first media trial in British history-he seemed implicitly to understand how to use the sphere of textuality to overcome the seductions of theatricality" (54). Hastings's substantial personal expense allowed him to appeal broadly to the public sphere and repudiate the Whigs' accusations against him. Hastings used the rhetoric of plain speaking, which Sheridan used to address freeholders in the *Englishman*, by engaging the medium of print-journalism as a sober presentation of truth in contrast to the emotional evocation of the theatre.

Sheridan vilified Hastings in the public sphere by representing him in an immensely popular tragedy, which included a well-known cast, and elaborate sets and costumes. In her article "Caricature, Cultural Politics, and the Stage: The Case of *Pizarro*," Heather McPherson relates the commercial success of *Pizarro*, citing the substantial revenue the play produced for the Drury Lane Theatre, and the attendance of George III and his family in June 1799. McPherson asserts that "Pizarro's extraordinary public reception can be attributed to a combination of factors-the stellar acting of John Philip Kemble and Sarah Siddons, the heroic plot and spectacular staging, and, above all, its patriotic appeal, epitomized by Rolla's moving address to the Peruvian army" (608). This argument suggests that Sheridan's theatrical indictment of Hastings, in Rolla's condemnation of Pizarro and the Spaniards, conveyed a

“patriotic appeal” to the public, provoking the audience to see Hastings as an enemy of the nation.

McPherson also identifies Rolla’s speech in Act II as a salient example of the play’s stirring patriotism. By revealing a principle of British governance in the play’s depiction of the Peruvians, this speech allowed Sheridan to vilify Hastings as he evoked patriotism in his audience. McPherson describes *Pizarro* as “a multilayered melodramatic spectacle that, despite its apparent loyalist rhetoric, actually celebrated the principles of the opposition” (613). Rolla’s speech reflects the foundational principle of the Whig opposition which asserted loyalty to the nation by opposing the government’s betrayal of the nation’s principles. In *Pizarro*, Sheridan conflates patriotic loyalty with his criticism of the British government’s current exploitation of East India and Ireland. Rolla’s speech in Act II exemplifies the simultaneous avowal of British values and denouncement of Hastings, as Sheridan appeals to the civic responsibility of his audience to oppose tyranny and corruption. While *Pizarro* was widely popular, the play provoked controversy by opposing the government. Responses to the play included accusations that Sheridan was a radical and a Jacobin. McPherson recounts that “[a]lthough the scenic effects and patriotic speeches were widely applauded, *Pizarro* elicited an extraordinary range of critical responses, from extravagant praise to withering denunciation, in the case of the *Anti-Jacobin Review*” (609). The substantial public reaction to *Pizarro* exemplifies the political significance of Sheridan’s theatrical career.

The “range of political responses” McPherson attributes to *Pizarro* includes a scathing assessment of the play in *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, which exemplifies the representation of Sheridan as radical and treasonous in the Tory press. The review criticizes the aesthetic quality of the play, describes its political commentary as pandering, and denounces Sheridan for

translating a German play to represent British politics. The writer denies the value of *Pizarro*, arguing that the play “has no other appearance, than that the author has thrown together a jumble of characters, somewhat in the form of a dramatic piece, in order the more successfully to foist his sapping principles on the undiscerning multitude” (210). This description of the aesthetic failure of *Pizarro* aligns with most critical assessments of the play which diminish its aesthetic value in contrast to its political relevance. *The Anti-Jacobin Review* identifies Sheridan as an enemy of the Tory establishment and its counter-revolutionary position on France. The writer of this review accuses Sheridan of deceiving the public and presenting Jacobin propaganda on stage. He proceeds to accuse Sheridan of dishonesty and disloyalty by describing his endeavour “to promote the views of his party, by a gradual dissolution of the most sacred ties of society” (210). This statement characterizes Sheridan as a party hack who disregards democratic conventions to advance the interests of the Whigs.

The editorial also indicates Sheridan’s treachery of importing a German play to provide commentary on British politics. *The Anti-Jacobin Review* communicates a common anxiety over the popularity of foreign plays since successful English adaptations of Kotzebue had given the British public some familiarity with the German dramatist. In his article “Linguistic Instability in R.B. Sheridan’s *Pizarro*,” Michael Wiley indicates the accessibility of Kotzebue’s drama when Sheridan staged *Pizarro* by saying “Sheridan expected his audience to see or read his version in relation to the original, or at least in relation to the two English translations of the original that were available” (604). *The Anti-Jacobin Review* denounces Kotzebue’s popularity as an infringement on a tradition of British drama. The writer states “My blood boils with indignation when I see my beloved Shakespeare, Otway, Rowe, and all those ornaments of my native

country, thrust aside, to make way for the filthy effusions of this German dunce!” (210).<sup>42</sup> This expression of contempt for *Pizarro* displays a reversal of Whig writers’ appeal to English identity. English values are central to the rhetoric of publications such as the *Englishman* and *The North Briton*. In this instance, *The Anti-Jacobin Review* criticizes Sheridan for presenting a foreign drama and contrasts his translation of *Pizarro* to the work of celebrated English dramatists. This statement implies Sheridan’s treasonous disregard for a tradition of English drama. The writer concludes with a national invocation to repress *Pizarro*, saying “Forbid it Britons!—forbid it common sense!” (210). The article on *Pizarro* in *The Anti-Jacobin Review* represents an impassioned response to Sheridan’s play. The vehemence of this response demonstrates the political significance of the play as Sheridan disseminated opposition to the government into the public sphere through the medium of theatre. *Pizarro* exemplifies Sheridan’s expression of opposition as a playwright, as he also expressed similar political appeals and elicited governmental censure by staging plays as a theatre-manager.

The *Anti-Jacobin Review* is not the only scathing assessment of *Pizarro*. Most criticism of the play echoes the editorialist’s description of *Pizarro* as “a jumble of characters, somewhat in the form of a dramatic piece” (210) to spread political rhetoric. However, the significance of *Pizarro* can be observed in the play’s successful translation of political issues into drama. O’Toole argues that “[a]s a work of art the finally delivered version of *Pizarro* was no masterpiece, but as a political act it was astonishing [...] to conjure up a public event that would not so much appeal to the public mind as conquer public sensibilities” (347). The popularity and political relevance of *Pizarro* at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century reveal an insight into the expansion of

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<sup>42</sup> O’Toole notes that the *Anti-Jacobin Review* also characterized Kotzebue’s plays as contemptuous misrepresentations of the upper class, and that “[a]dapting Kotzebue could thus be seen as a subversive act” (345).



politics into the public sphere through theatre, a venue which could inform and influence a diverse audience.

Suleri argues against aesthetic denunciations of *Pizarro* by saying “to read a play of such loaded political and dramaturgical consequences solely for its literary merits is to misapprehend its status as a cultural artifact [...] in that it disseminates the colonial guilt surrounding a trial whose implications were too soon repressed, converting them into a spectacle hugely to be enjoyed for the next hundred years” (69). Sheridan’s repurposing of his rhetoric against Hastings from parliamentary discourse to drama reveals that the theatre provided an opportunity to create public awareness of issues that political institutions ignored. Despite the literary obscurity of *Pizarro*, it is an artifact revealing the political function of drama and public spectacle during the Long Whig Opposition.

In *Pizarro*, Sheridan adapts a historical drama relevant to the issues of colonialism and revolution at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The impeachment of Warren Hastings exceeded the boundaries of political process, as Hastings appealed to the public by purchasing space in the newspapers in which to articulate his defence. Julie Stone Peters has argued that the objectivity Hastings projected in the newspapers was an antithesis to the theatricality of his accusers. Hastings sought to exonerate himself by adopting the persona of the victim of a corrupt system to refute Burke and Sheridan’s assertions of his ambition and culpability. Sheridan responded to Hastings’s journalistic protestations of innocence and his acquittal in the House of Lords by renewing his accusations against Hastings in the venue of the theatre. Sheridan used the popular spectacle *Pizarro* to re-articulate his accusations against Hastings in the genre of tragedy. Sheridan’s representation of Hastings as the villain Pizarro uses tragic conventions and historical drama to provoke public disapproval of Hastings and the government which appointed,

empowered, and acquitted him. *Pizarro* is a careful representation of politics through drama in which Sheridan adopted the relevant historical drama of a tyrannical Spanish conquistador. In *Pizarro*, Sheridan retained the characteristics of nationalism and patriotism by depicting the villainy of the Spanish in the aftermath of the Invasion Crisis. By representing Hastings as a historical, foreign villain, Sheridan was able to criticize the colonial oppression of East India and Ireland without directly implicating the British Empire. He instead focused his accusations on Hastings as an embodiment of colonial oppression through the lens of historical drama. Sheridan further embellished his accusations in *Pizarro* with rousing patriotic speeches and a tragic narrative of familial corruption. While Sheridan evaded government reprisals through patriotic assertions and historical narratives in his plays, his politics composed a clear expression throughout his career as a playwright and theatre-manager. Sheridan's roles as a dramatist and an opposition Whig are indivisible. The synthesis of drama and politics underlying Sheridan's career appears in *Pizarro* as a politically resonant play, and across the various plays he staged as manager of the Drury Lane Theatre.

Section 16: Theatrical Politics and Theatrical Management: Staging *Venice Preserv'd* and *The Rivals* in 1795

*Pizarro* was the last play that Sheridan wrote. Indeed, McPherson emphasizes that it was the only play that Sheridan wrote after his election to Parliament.<sup>43</sup> However, Sheridan's career as a dramatist continued during his three decades in the House of Commons as he was also the stage-manager of the Drury Lane Theatre during this period. Sheridan staged plays that provoked controversy and addressed political issues, conveying his views as an opposition MP to the theatre-going public. Dramatic productions in other theatres, such as Covent Garden, conveyed support for the Tory government. The Pittite Thomas Harris was the owner of Covent Garden

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<sup>43</sup> 613

during the last three decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Harris was a supporter of the Tory government and had held a post in the Treasury.<sup>44</sup> The politics of theatrical management created a sphere of political debate, as Sheridan and other stage-managers produced plays which addressed the contemporary issues of revolution and imperialism.<sup>45</sup> Sheridan's twofold persona as a dramatist and Whig in opposition developed during the American and French Revolutions, as he combatted the counter-revolutionary propaganda of the government. During the French Revolution in particular, Sheridan provoked controversy and accusations of Jacobinism, as public unrest occurred alongside his staging of controversial plays. As an impresario, Sheridan staged plays during the French Revolution which expressed his criticism of the Tory government by illustrating the values of liberation and independence before the public.

As a theatre-manager, Sheridan conflated drama and politics by staging plays such as *Venice Preserv'd*, which explored the themes of revolution and patriotism. Sheridan broadcast Whig opposition into the public sphere by conveying political statements to his audience at Drury Lane. In 1795, Sheridan's persona became intensely polarizing, as his staging of Otway's tragedy *Venice Preserv'd* at Drury Lane and the subsequent reprisal of his own comedy *The Rivals* at Covent Garden contributed to a political crisis in which the public demonstrated revolutionary sentiments and the Tory government suppressed the representation of revolution and political satire on the stage. Sheridan's staging of *Venice Preserv'd*, and Harris's production of *The Rivals* soon after, occurred during a tense period of public discontent with the government in which there were demonstrations against Prime Minister Pitt and King George.

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<sup>44</sup> Baer 106

<sup>45</sup> The plays staged at Covent Garden under Harris included *Venice Preserv'd*, *Julius Caesar*, and Villiers's *The Rehearsal*, as well as a revival of Sheridan's comedy *The Rivals* from a Tory perspective.

In 1795, the public increasingly saw the ministry's counter-revolutionary effort in France as damaging to the British economy. O'Quinn asserts that "[t]here was widespread public consensus, especially among the lower orders, that the famine which had swept through the country was integrally related to the economic hardships incurred by the war" (3). On two occasions, an angry mob surrounded the royal coach in a violent protest against the monarchy and the government.<sup>46</sup> From the government's perspective, these demonstrations were an exposure of Jacobin sympathies in England. Amid these tensions, the government banned the performance of Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* while Sheridan staged it at Drury Lane. Sheridan's comedy *The Rivals* also assumed new significance during the French Revolution as the Tory theatre-manager John Harris reinterpreted the play as an affirmation of patriotism counteracting Sheridan's persona of Whig opposition and revolutionary sympathy. The king demonstrated his partisanship by attending *The Rivals* at Covent Garden while the government suppressed Sheridan's production of *Venice Preserv'd*.<sup>47</sup>

Otway's tragedy *Venice Preserv'd; Or, a Plot Discover'd* was popular and controversial in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. During a period in which revolutions were a salient issue for the British public, revivals of *Venice Preserv'd* could express either a scathing indictment against rebellion or a vindication of revolt against corrupt powers. *Venice Preserv'd* originally satirized aristocratic libertinism during the Restoration by depicting an affair between Antonio, a senator; and Aquilina, a courtesan. Antonio did not appear as a heroic rake, as the play depicts his submission to Aquilina and presents the senator as effeminate and debauched in contrast to Aquilina's lover, Jaffeir. However, Antonio's hedonism appears preferable to the villainy of the rebel Renault who attempts to rape Belvidira, whom Pierre, a fellow rebel, had trusted Renault to

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<sup>46</sup> O'Quinn 3

<sup>47</sup> Taylor 181

protect. While audiences in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century most often saw a bowdlerized version of *Venice Preserv'd* which excised the scenes between Antonio and Aquilina, the play continued to evoke political controversy because of its ambiguous depiction of a flawed government and a corrupt rebellion.

*Venice Preserv'd* had diverse political implications amid the revolutionary anxiety of 1795, and provoked controversy during its staging at Drury Lane, as Sheridan had been far more tolerant of the French Revolution at its outset than Burke.<sup>48</sup> The controversy of *Venice Preserv'd* surrounded the radical interpretation of the play as a denouncement of corrupt authority and a vindication of rebellion. The play provided an inspiring archetype for anti-monarchist protests in the 1790s. Taylor tells us that, amid “the escalation of civil unrest throughout England in the early 1790s, Otway’s representation of a distracted time [...] was appropriated by radicals searching for an aesthetic that could articulate and authorize their political disenchantment” (172). A staging at the Tory-sympathetic Covent Garden theatre in 1794 provoked radicals to applaud the rebels in *Venice Preserv'd* in the streets outside the theatre, though the play allowed Harris to express Tory loyalty by emphasizing the villainy of the rebels. Despite the political affiliation of Covent Garden, Taylor recounts that “[d]uring a performance of the piece at Covent Garden in February 1794, a group of republican intellectuals had applauded the very passages that the spectators at Sheridan’s playhouse would celebrate again in October 1795” (175). Otway’s tragedy includes provocative revolutionary speeches which originally condemned rebellion by associating sedition with the immorality of the play’s villains. However, these speeches inspired some audience members in 1795 to demonstrate against the British monarchy and articulate their sympathy for the French Revolution. Despite the themes of patriotism and

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<sup>48</sup> Peters 68

loyalty that inspired the popularity of *Venice Preserv'd* during the Restoration and the 18<sup>th</sup> century, these expressions became reversed during the 1790s, as the Pitt ministry censored the play and radicals seized upon its depiction of governmental corruption and deviance.

The rebels in *Venice Preserv'd* provided an archetype of revolutionary corruption to Edmund Burke, but during the performance at Drury Lane, audience members who sympathized with the French Revolution ignored the rebels' corruption and embraced the rousing revolutionary speeches of Pierre. Taylor narrates an attack on the king's coach on 29 October 1795 "by a large number of protestors crying, with a defiance uncomfortably similar to the curses of Otway's villain, 'Down with George, No King, No Pitt, No War!'" (174). This audience saw *Venice Preserv'd* as a denunciation of monarchy and Tory values, and a disavowal of the government's enmity toward Revolutionary France. The crowd of anti-monarchists articulating "defiance uncomfortably similar" to the rebel Pierre reveals an insight into the reception of Pierre's speeches during this staging of *Venice Preserv'd*. While Pierre exemplifies the ambition and immorality which Burke censured in the brash French revolutionaries, his honesty and opposition to a corrupt establishment presented him as a sympathetic figure to anti-monarchists.

Pierre's candour and assertion of the inherent corruption of an established hierarchy provided an exemplar for Jacobins and anti-monarchists. For example, in Act I, Pierre declares "I am a villain [...] a most notorious villain; / To see the sufferings of my fellow creatures" (1.1). This statement of vilification and sympathy for the suffering presents Pierre as an outcast who denounces oppression and inequality. He continues, "To see our Senators / Cheat the deluded people with a shew / Of liberty" (1.1) Pierre identifies the senators as his antagonists, who oppress the lower classes while claiming to uphold democracy. Pierre presents himself as a

figure opposing tyranny by contrasting his candid admission of infamy to the deceptive despotism of the senate. He presents a rousing condemnation of the senate by saying “They say, by them our hands are free from Fetters, / Yet whom they please, they lay in basest bonds” (1.1) This revolutionary assertion inspired audience members to disregard Pierre’s villainy and echo his speeches during anti-monarchist demonstrations. The perception of Pierre as a flawed, but inspiring revolutionary archetype represents the political ambiguity of Otway’s play leading to its controversial reception in 1795.

Revolutionary sympathizers also responded to the depiction of the sexual deviance of the authoritative upper class in *Venice Preserv’d*. Otway’s portrayal of authority could express a revolutionary statement by caricaturing the debauchery of government officials, and his depiction of sexual liberty elicited a more conservative reaction from audiences in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century than during earlier performances. *Venice Preserv’d* depicts several explicit and deviant trysts between the senator Antonio and the courtesan Aquilina, whom he calls “Nicky Nacky.” In his article “Insurgent Allegories: Staging *Venice Preserv’d*, *The Rivals*, and *Speculation* in 1795,” Daniel O’Quinn follows the progress of the political implications of Otway’s satire of authority, as the values of 18<sup>th</sup>-century audiences diverged from those of the Restoration. O’Quinn states that the Nicky Nacky scenes “were highly popular with Tories on the play’s initial production. This is because [...] sexual libertinism was seen as a sign of anti-Puritan identity and hence as a sign of loyalty in Charles II’s court” (6). While controversial, these scenes upheld the establishment by contrasting the satirical portrayal of the private ribaldry of authority figures with the insidious corruption of revolutionaries. However, O’Quinn describes the contrary perception of the Nicky Nacky scenes among audiences in the 1790s by saying, “with the transition to the Hanoverian Kings, this patriotic interpretation of sexual libertinism became

obsolete and this aspect of the play suddenly allowed for critiques of the Senate to unfold on terms eloquently expressed by the conspirators Pierre and Jaffeir” (6). As audiences increasingly disapproved of rakish characters like Antonio, they viewed rebels who opposed debauched authorities as sympathetic characters.

The controversy of staging *Venice Preserv'd* during the French Revolution included the sympathetic perception of the play’s villains, as sympathizers with the French Revolution ignored Pierre’s villainy and Jaffeir’s tragic deception, identifying the characters as revolutionary martyrs. To this audience, Antonio was an exemplar of the exploitative corruption of the upper class. The play not only depicts the senator’s sexual deviance, but also illustrates his disregard for the lower orders because his mistress is in love with Pierre. Act III contrasts Antonio with the eloquent rebel Pierre as the senator pleads for Aquilina’s attention. Antonio repeatedly asserts his authority as a senator and states “I can make a Speech in the Senate-house now and then—wou'd make your hair stand on end [...] I hope 'tis not too late with this to gain reception for my Love—there's for thee my little Nicky Nacky” (3.1). As Antonio boasts of his authority and eloquence, Aquilina expresses her apathy toward him. Antonio’s reference to his eloquence in the senate and attempt to make a speech that will flatter Aquilina evoke a contrast to Pierre’s effective revolutionary speeches. While Antonio fails to gain Aquilina’s attention by flattery, Pierre’s speeches succeed in persuading Jaffeir to join the rebellion, and inspired audience members in the 1790s to express their revolutionary sentiment publicly.

*Venice Preserv'd* had been the subject of censorship throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century despite its significant popularity. O’Quinn tells us that the Nicky Nacky scenes “had to be excised in productions later in the century, not only because they were deemed obscene, but also because they thoroughly muddied patriotic readings of the play” (6). Antonio’s attempt to flatter Aquilina



in Act III does not include the bawdy dialogue of the Nicky Nacky scenes, but expresses a provocative disavowal of authority by subordinating the authority and eloquence of a senator to the rhetorical candour of a rebel. Otway's bawdy portrayal of authority, exemplary of Restoration satire, assumed greater controversy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as audiences increasingly disdained Antonio and sympathized with Pierre. The contrast between Antonio, the corrupt politician; and Pierre, the inspiring rebel, contributed to the play's hostile reception by the government, as the Pitt Ministry suspended its performance in 1795.<sup>49</sup>

We may discern an insight into the popular understanding and controversy of *Venice Preserv'd* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century from Samuel Richardson's prominent reference to the play in his novel *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1748). Though Richardson's allusion to the play occurred before the French Revolution and before the period of Whig opposition overarching this project, his representation illustrates the evolving controversy and significance of the play during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Clarissa attends *Venice Preserv'd* with Lovelace partway through his plot to corrupt her and lure her away from her family. Richardson alludes to Otway's play as an evocative device which presents the themes of libertinism and corruption reflecting Lovelace's predatory relationship with Clarissa. This allusion to Otway's tragedy reveals the connotations of Restoration drama for readers in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and the particular controversy of *Venice Preserv'd*.

In her article "A Plot Discover'd; or, The Uses of *Venice Preserv'd* within *Clarissa*," Janet E. Aikins describes parallels between Otway's tragedy and the narrative devices of *Clarissa*. Aikins argues that Richardson invoked archetypes from *Venice Preserv'd* in the characters of Clarissa and Lovelace, as the play depicts the rakish villain Renault; and Belvidera,

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<sup>49</sup> O'Quinn 2

a tragic heroine whom he victimizes. These reiterations illustrate the play's connotations of libertinism and political ambiguity in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as Renault opposes a corrupt regime though he is, himself, an exploitative villain. Aikins argues that the parallels to *Venice Preserv'd* constitute a central narrative device in *Clarissa*, saying "a closer consideration of the theatrical presentation reveals a telling analogy between the disturbing process of reading Richardson's narrative and the psychological warfare that constitutes the very 'action' of its plot" (219). This argument focuses on the experience of reading *Clarissa*, examining Richardson's literary communication to the public in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Aikins analyzes the significance of *Venice Preserv'd* to Richardson's contemporary readership, indicating that "[s]ince *Venice Preserv'd* was the fourth most popular play of its time, Richardson could count on his readers' familiarity with it and on their readiness to consider its implications within his novel" (222). Aikins describes the significant placement of this moment in the novel and in Lovelace's manipulative advancements upon Clarissa, arguing that "[t]he performance of *Venice Preserv'd* marks the temporal centre of the novel, suggesting its importance. [...] At this time the heroine is in Lovelace's power, having run away from home, but she has not yet been sexually violated by him" (220). This significant reference to *Venice Preserv'd* in *Clarissa* reveals the play's reputation among 18<sup>th</sup>-century audiences for the themes of domestic and sexual violation, and the aristocratic ethos which vindicated libertinism.

There is a reciprocal significance between the reference to *Venice Preserv'd* in *Clarissa* and the connotations Richardson contributed to the play by making this allusion. Readers in 1748 observed a reference to a particularly popular tragedy at the time, noting the similarity between Lovelace's predation upon Clarissa and the themes of corruption and violation in *Venice Preserv'd*. When Sheridan staged the play in 1795, his audience's awareness of Richardson's

reference to *Venice Preserv'd* enhanced the play's depiction of corruption and libertinism. The resonance of Richardson's allusion to *Venice Preserv'd* contributed to the controversy of the play and its depiction of corrupt authorities and sexual violence. While 18<sup>th</sup>-century censors targeted the Nicky Nacky scenes, the play retained its depiction of Renault's attempted rape of Belvidera, and Pierre's stirring revolutionary speeches.<sup>50</sup> These contrasting portrayals of a wicked rebel and a noble one created an ambiguity in the play's depiction of revolution when Sheridan staged the tragedy in 1795. During this performance, Taylor tells us that "its opening night was primarily remembered for the repeated applause awarded to the words—words that surprisingly remained in the acting edition of the text—of the recalcitrant Pierre" (172). The controversy of *Venice Preserv'd* persisted into the 1790s, as Sheridan presented the villainy of Renault alongside the sympathetic recalcitrance of Pierre. This ambiguity became scandalous during the French Revolution, as Sheridan's audiences cheered Pierre's revolutionary speeches, and radicals quoted the play during the attack on King George's coach on 29 October 1795.<sup>51</sup>

The politics of theatrical management received notable public attention in late 1795, as Sheridan's staging of *Venice Preserv'd* inspired an attack on the king, while His Majesty attended a performance of Sheridan's comedy *The Rivals* at Covent Garden. Taylor recounts that King George attended a "command performance of *The Rivals*" (181) the day after the attack on the royal coach. Tory journalists affirmed the radicalizing Jacobinism of Sheridan's production of *Venice Preserv'd*, as republican protestors had quoted Pierre's speeches, conveying a clear connection between the play and the public unrest. The managers of Covent Garden positioned *The Rivals* as a monarchist antithesis to Sheridan's subversive staging of *Venice Preserv'd*. Taylor describes this dialogic conflict by saying "The Toryist management and patrons of the

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<sup>50</sup> Taylor 171

<sup>51</sup> Taylor 173

playhouse staged the political fantasy of an obedient Sheridan, misreading his play just as the Drury Lane audience had misread and radicalized Otway's" (182). This presentation of *The Rivals* attempted to reverse Sheridan's dramatic expression of opposition by reimagining the play as an expression of Tory loyalty, emphasizing its expression of patriotism, as the revolutionary speeches in *Venice Preserv'd* had excited public sympathy.

*The Rivals* is a distinctive antithesis to the political implications of *Venice Preserv'd*, as the selection was not only a comedy, but Sheridan's earliest play. Sheridan published *The Rivals* in 1775, before his election to Parliament, and before the American and French Revolutions radically altered the representation of rebellion and patriotism in 18<sup>th</sup>-century drama. Taylor introduces the context of *The Rivals*, describing the play's first performance "at Covent Garden on 17 January 1775, less than a month before parliament declared Massachusetts to be in a state of rebellion" (24). The play's reprisal at Covent Garden in 1795 translated the themes of patriotism and loyalty into the context of the French Revolution, responding to Sheridan's staging of *Venice Preserv'd* and the perception of its Jacobin consequences.

The plot of *The Rivals* follows Captain Absolute—the son of the wealthy Sir Anthony—who disguises his aristocratic background to court his mistress Lydia, who has been prejudiced by sentimental novels. Captain Absolute adopts the persona of the underprivileged Ensign Beverley, with whom Lydia is in love. Absolute also objects to the arranged marriage that his father suggests, and various instances of mistaken identity lead Absolute to fight a duel over Lydia. This comedy of manners does not express overt political themes. However, the play's complex depiction of loyalty could be staged as a patriotic allegory. Absolute experiences various competing forms of loyalty, including loyalty to Lydia, filial loyalty to his father, and his duty as a soldier. The resolution of the play allows Absolute to embody these divergent loyalties.

For example, in Act III when Absolute discovers that the marriage arranged for him by his father is, in fact, to Lydia, he renounces his former objections, and can express loyalty to Lydia and Sir Anthony. Absolute declares to his father, “I have been likewise weighing and balancing what you were pleased to mention concerning duty, and obedience, and authority [...] the result of my reflections is—a resolution to sacrifice every inclination of my own to your satisfaction” (37). Though this resolution actually fulfills the wishes of Absolute, it allows him to express filial loyalty. At the end of the play, Absolute affirms his loyalty as a soldier by declaring “I serve His Majesty” (92) as he casts off the persona of Ensign Beverley to assert his service as Captain Absolute. This expression of patriotism was useful in Harris’s Tory-sympathetic staging of *The Rivals* at Covent Garden in 1795.

Amid the ubiquitous anti-monarchist protests during this period, the performance of *The Rivals* at Covent Garden was a timely reversal of Whig opposition for its Tory audience members and the Tory press. In Act V, Absolute resonantly declares “I serve His Majesty” (92), as a series of guiles and misunderstandings have led him to duel with Acres and Sir Lucius over his beloved Lydia. This line conveys an expression of patriotism as Absolute at last prioritizes his identity as a soldier over the persona, Ensign Beverly, he had assumed to court Lydia. Absolute is an imperfect exemplar of patriotism and loyalty, but asserts his duty to the king above the competing interests of his desire for Lydia, his obedience to his father, and his honour in a duel. His avowal “I serve His Majesty—” who sat in the audience—inspired patriotic approbation from the Tory spectators.

During the contrapuntal stagings of *Venice Preserv’d* and *The Rivals* by Sheridan and Harris, King George only attended plays at Covent Garden.<sup>52</sup> O’Quinn examines a description of

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<sup>52</sup> O’Quinn 15

the king's attendance at the theatre in the *Morning Chronicle*, observing that the press "indicat[ed] that the King's passage to and from the theatre was itself a form of political theatre" (17). In addition to the royal family, the audience of Covent Garden comprised public officials likely to hold Tory sympathies. During this performance, a predominantly Tory audience celebrated the speech of Captain Absolute as an expression of patriotism as the audience at Drury Lane had focused on the revolutionary proclamations of Pierre. O'Quinn describes the expression of Tory loyalty at Covent Garden, citing "the presence of the King himself and a largely loyalist audience, assembled by issuing special tickets to officers of the Government and the police" (16). However, his admission that "there is evidence of audience protest in the form of hissing the King" at the same performance illustrates the tense political atmosphere of British theatres at the time.

The political significance of Captain Absolute's assertion of service to the king mirrors the revolutionary provocation of Pierre's speeches in *Venice Preserv'd*. O'Quinn compares the patriotic reception of *The Rivals* to the expression of protest inspired by *Venice Preserv'd*, indicating that both events display the political ambivalence of drama and illustrate the divergent connotations of plays based on their authors' politics and their audiences' reactions. He states, "If the crowd is applauding the phrase as a sign of loyalty, then their approbation is comparable to that expressed for Pierre's democratic principles on the previous evening at Drury Lane for it reverses the traditional view of the author's intention" (17). The political implications of *Venice Preserv'd* evolved throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century from an overarching statement of loyalty to the Stuarts to an ambivalent depiction of revolution as a flawed resistance to corrupt authorities. In the context of the 1790s, as the American Revolution had inspired sympathy among the Whigs and the French Revolution demonstrated a radical, corrupt culmination of republicanism,

Otway's play assumed greater controversy by inspiring sympathy through revolutionary speeches. Similarly, *The Rivals* assumed new political implications as its performance during the French Revolution and a particularly tense ideological conflict in Britain conveyed an antithesis to Sheridan's expression of opposition as a Whig theatre-manager.

The conflicting performances of *Venice Preserv'd* at Drury Lane and *The Rivals* at Covent Garden in late 1795 exemplify the expansion of politics into the sphere of theatre. Sheridan and Harris expressed their allegiances to the Whigs and Tories by staging plays which evoked partisan reactions to the pervasive issue of the French Revolution. Theatrical productions which affirmed the political affiliations of London playhouses projected parliamentary debate into the public sphere, particularly as theatre-managers like Sheridan and Harris held positions in the government and the opposition. In *Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London*, Marc Baer explores "[t]he triangular relationship between politicians, the press and the theatre" (106) in which theatrical management, patronage, and dramatic criticism influenced the dissemination of political debate to the public through the medium of theatre. Baer asserts that "Drury Lane was aligned with the opposition, with Sheridan—who owned the theatre and was simultaneously a leading Whig MP—the most important link" (106). As Sheridan served primarily in opposition, he experienced limitations to his reformist agenda including the acquittal of Warren Hastings and the counter-revolutionary commitment of the government toward America, France, and Ireland. Sheridan addressed political issues on stage to express his views to the public beyond the limitations of parliamentary debate. Taylor defines "Drury Lane as a theatre of opposition" which "operated as an extension of [Sheridan's] radical parliamentary activities in complex and unpredictable ways" (161). I argue that the public sphere of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century became a "theatre of opposition" in itself, in which media such as theatre, journalism, oratory,

and open correspondence became means for outspoken Whigs to defy the long-standing Tory government by articulating opposition before a diverse public audience surpassing earlier franchised and politically-aware communities.

Sheridan's dual persona as a politician and dramatist persisted throughout his tenure as an MP despite the fact that he stopped writing plays between his publications of *The Critic* in 1779 and *Pizarro* in 1799. The controversy sparked by the performance of *Venice Preserv'd* in 1795, including anti-monarchist protests which echoed the play and the patriotic staging of *The Rivals* at Covent Garden in response, demonstrates that Sheridan continued to use the theatre as a venue for criticism against the government while he was no longer an active playwright. The productions of *Venice Preserv'd* and *The Rivals* in 1795 involved the overt partisanship of theatre-managers and the emphasis on characters expressing revolutionary or patriotic sentiments. Sheridan's role in this public dialogue demonstrates his expansion beyond the function of a politician or a playwright, as his activity as a theatre-manager disseminated political activity throughout the public sphere of Britain during the French Revolution. As Fintan O'Toole describes the Lord Chamberlain's suspension of the license for *Venice Preserv'd* after the attack on the king's coach, he argues that "[t]he correspondence between theatre and reality had become dangerously close" (299). The theatre is one of several spaces of public expression which became means for criticizing the government outside of parliamentary debate in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Sheridan mobilized an audience in the public sphere and appealed to public opinion through drama, as Wilkes had inspired opposition in an urban public through journalism and satire, and Burke influenced a reading audience throughout the nation by publishing his political oratory.



## Conclusion

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, English literature assumed political connotations and significance, as literary commentary conveyed greater awareness of parliamentary affairs to the public. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, literary reflections on politics began to conform to divisions in the British House of Commons, as Tory wits like Fielding and Pope used satire to criticize the government of Robert Walpole. These critics opposed the enduring Walpole Ministry, satirizing the Whig establishment through literary forms such as the novel and the mock-epic. Following the Walpole Ministry, this expansion of politically relevant literature continued during the Long Whig Opposition in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, elected Whig politicians disseminated their criticism of the government into the public sphere through the channel of literary publication, primarily in the genres of journalism, satire, and drama.

Jürgen Habermas characterized the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a transformative expansion of the public sphere in which political discourses transcended the limitations of church and state. This expansion included the exchange of ideas in social enclaves and a new channel of communication between elected politicians and the unfranchised public. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas examines the events in Britain leading to the transformation of public discourse which allowed the press and literary commentary to grant political influence to the public. He argues that “[t]he elimination of the institution of censorship marked a new stage in the development of the public sphere. It made the influx of rational-critical arguments into the press possible and allowed the latter to evolve into an instrument with whose aid political decisions could be brought before the new forum of the public” (58). This discursive evolution created a critical space in which governmental policy and activity received public scrutiny through informed, literate reflections. While Habermas proceeds to discuss the

dangerous scrutiny of the government posed by “coffee-house discussions” (58), the new political awareness of the public also presented an opportunity for MPs in opposition to expand their criticism beyond parliamentary debate and into the transforming public sphere. As the 18<sup>th</sup> century progressed, the discourses of parliamentary opposition and publicly accessible literature criticizing the government formed a symbiotic expression of political engagement in the public sphere.

The binary activities of representative democracy in which the government seeks to justify its actions and the opposition attempts to expose governmental corruption and incompetence rendered the new communicative space a channel of opposition. The government had no need to appeal to the public beyond the electorate, while the opposition began to use public opinion as a means to criticize the government outside parliamentary debate. The Walpole Ministry, which solidified the Whig government in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, preserved its authority through bargaining and conciliation while Walpole’s most vocal critics outside the House of Commons used satire to represent the nation undone by corruption and cronyism. In the following decades, Lord Bute assumed considerable personal authority as a Tory prime minister and a favourite of the king, continuing to exercise Machiavellian influence over the government after leaving office in 1763. The subsequent ministries comprised the Tory government of Lord North, and nominal coalitions which preserved the Tory establishment. During this prolonged period of Whig opposition, outspoken Whig MPs turned to the channel of criticizing the government through publication, opened by the Tories during their Long Opposition, to vilify Bute and prominent Tories, and present Tory corruption and incompetence to an emerging extra-political public.

Following the Whigs' campaign of literary opposition, the spheres of politics and journalism ascribed greater importance to the concerns of the unfranchised. This stage in the progress of democracy relied on rhetorical addresses to unfranchised audiences in documents such as *The North Briton*, the *Letters of Junius*, and *The Englishman*. The genres of journalism, oratory, and drama provided a distinctive form of access to the public to writers who held seats in the parliamentary opposition. 18<sup>th</sup>-century journalism allowed public figures to adopt pseudonymous personae to criticize the government and rouse public disapproval, avoiding governmental reprisals. This expression of political opposition directed toward calculated public audiences contributed to the increasing significance of public opinion as a keystone of democracy. Habermas tells us that "the ongoing commentary on and criticism of the Crown's actions and Parliament's decisions transformed a public authority now being called before the forum of the public" (60).

The discourse of the House of Commons attracted a more diverse audience during the Long Whig Opposition, as individuals outside elected office and the franchise began to consume parliamentary speeches and correspondence as literary publications. This generic expansion encouraged the public to follow the affairs of Parliament, leading to the development of parliamentary reporting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>53</sup> This unelected and unfranchised audience could not assist the government in maintaining power or passing legislation. However, individuals without direct representation were consequential to the opposition by inspiring discontent with the government and valorizing eloquent reformists such as John Wilkes, Edmund Burke, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

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<sup>53</sup> Habermas cites the developments of parliamentary reporting in which the Speaker began to reserve a place for journalists in the gallery in 1803 and the House of Commons installed stands for reporters after its reconstruction in 1834 (62).

The venue of the theatre also provided an opportunity for parliamentarians in opposition to articulate criticism of the government in the public sphere. The theatre, long a means of evoking emotion and provoking controversy, exemplified the public's increasing interest in politics in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, as playwrights expressed and inspired political views through drama and playhouses espoused political affiliations.

The Whig MPs John Wilkes, Edmund Burke, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan have very different intellectual legacies. However, they all contributed to the literature of the Long Whig Opposition and transformed the public sphere by kindling interest in the affairs of the House of Commons among unfranchised communities.

Wilkes retains some distinction for his wit and scandalous reputation, but now belongs primarily to legal history because of the precedents set by his censorship and arrest. The circumstances of Wilkes's arrest and imprisonment following *North Briton* no. 45 compose a significant event in the history of the press and censorship. Wilkes' arrest included the seizure of his papers and property, and the arrest of his alleged co-publishers, setting the example of an invasive governmental reprisal. Donald A. Dripps discusses this arrest and scandal in his article "‘Dearest Property’: Digital Evidence and the History of Private ‘Papers’ as Special Objects of Search and Seizure" in *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*. Dripps quotes Cobbett and Hansard's *Parliamentary History*, recounting that after Wilkes's release "his supporters introduced a resolution: 'That a General Warrant for apprehending and seizing the authors, printers, and publishers of a seditious libel, together with their papers, is not warranted by law'" (63). This proclamation from the Wilkites is a significant event in the history of civil liberties. While Wilkes and his followers upheld the free speech and privacy rights of individuals, Wilkes had the reverse effect on elected politicians as he endorsed the right of reporters to publish the

proceedings of the House of Commons. Habermas relates that, as British newspapers recorded parliamentary debates, “Parliament saw itself repeatedly forced to renew the injunction against publication. [...] Only in the year 1771 did Wilkes, as the Alderman of London, succeed in nullifying, in fact if not in law, the parliamentary privilege” (61).

Wilkes also contributed to the significance of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century periodical by creating the persona of Mr. North Briton, using the device of calculated anonymity to ridicule the government and manipulate the public’s anxiety over Jacobitism and distrust in the governance of George III and Lord Bute. By developing the conventions of pseudonymous periodical journalism and provoking public interest, Wilkes carved out a space within the public sphere for other critical personae such as Junius and Sheridan’s Englishman. Junius’s reputation as a founder of unrestrained editorial journalism opposing the government continues to resonate in the free press of democratic nations.<sup>54</sup> Habermas also cites Junius as an exemplar of the journalistic expression of opposition in the public sphere. He states that “the public sphere’s development was measured by the state of the confrontation between government and the press,” positing that the “*Letters of Junius* [...] marked this state in a highly visible manner” (60).

Edmund Burke is a resonant figure in the fields of philosophy and politics. Burke’s aesthetic philosophy provided a prominent contribution to the concept of the sublime. Burke also continues to be a hero of the conservative movement.<sup>55</sup> While Burke’s academic and political legacies diverge sharply from those of Wilkes, both figures used public literary expression to criticize the government, provoking the expansion of the extra-political public sphere during the Long Whig Opposition.

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<sup>54</sup> Junius’s dictum “The subject who is truly loyal to the Chief Magistrate will neither advise nor submit to arbitrary measures” appears on the editorial page of the *Globe and Mail*.

<sup>55</sup> The front cover of Jesse Norman’s biography of Burke displays the following accolade from Boris Johnson: “Jesse Norman has brought back Burke in triumph – and not before time.”

Burke forged a connection between Parliament and the public by publishing speeches and open letters which narrated the activity of the House of Commons from a Whig perspective. This communication between an elected politician and the public transgressed the mediation of journalism to present a direct characterization of political affairs from a partisan insider. Rather than engage in journalism through an anonymous persona as Wilkes did, Burke cultivated the persona of an honest public servant by presenting rhetorical accounts of the issues before Parliament and the public in published speeches and letters. While Burke's own publication of his political rhetoric circumvented political journalism, he left an example for political journals such as Sheridan's *Englishman* by illustrating parliamentary affairs such as the impeachment of Warren Hastings to a concerned audience which Burke identified and cultivated.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan most clearly personifies the intersection of politics, literature, and journalism during the Long Whig Opposition. His opposition to the government encompasses public expressions as a playwright, periodical journalist, theatre-manager, and MP. Sheridan is also the only primary figure of this project whose work is prominent in the field of English literature. Richard Brinsley Sheridan followed the generic innovations of Wilkes and Burke by inhabiting the public sphere in the shared positions of journalist, playwright, and member of the opposition. As a writer, Sheridan used the diverse genres associated with these public roles to address the issues of revolution and colonial injustice in the public sphere.

Despite the resonance of Wilkes, Burke, and Sheridan in different academic disciplines, they share a contribution to the function of journalism and literature to challenge the government and express opposition. Their interventions into the public sphere during the Long Whig Opposition contributed to a transformation of politics and journalism which expanded public interest, influence, and representation in parliamentary democracy. A shared characteristic

among the activities of Wilkes, Burke, and Sheridan is the extension of political agency to unrepresented communities, as Wilkes amassed a public following of merchants and freeholders, Burke disseminated his political speeches into the public sphere, and Sheridan appealed to the political engagement of his audiences as a playwright.

Wilkes's political career relied heavily on the unfranchised as he inspired public demonstrations and commanded support from the mercantile class of London. Wilkes contrived a public image of radicalism, courage, and sincerity, provoking his unfranchised supporters to view John Wilkes as an antithesis to governmental corruption and despotism. Burke published his political oratory as literature, increasing the public consumption of political discourse by cultivating an unfranchised readership. Burke's commentary on the American and French Revolutions examined the two most significant reformative events in democracy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Burke's gesture of conciliation toward America and denouncement of the French Revolution conveyed impactful statements to the British public, influencing public opinion on the authority of a democratic government and the responsibility of its citizens.

Sheridan cultivated an audience among the unfranchised by affirming their political value and rousing their interest in specific public affairs such as the Invasion Crisis and the impeachment of Hastings. Sheridan first addressed the unfranchised in his periodical *The Englishman* which spoke directly to freeholders and discussed relevant issues to this unfranchised rural community. Sheridan's translation of political rhetoric into drama used the setting of the theatre to broadcast Whig opposition to a diverse public including the unfranchised middle class. Sheridan's public criticism of Britain's treatment of East India and Ireland exemplifies activism against unjust imperial intervention and colonial assimilation. He affirmed

the existing authority of the peoples of India and Ireland and criticized British efforts of assimilation in Ireland and exploitation in India.

Sheridan and Burke provided an antecedent to later activist publications which condemned slavery and affirmed the rights of women and labourers. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Whig MPs and unelected individuals used the channel of literary opposition to support causes such as Abolitionism and women's rights. The Whig MP William Wilberforce published reflections on slavery which contributed to the discourse of Abolitionism in the new public sphere of political awareness. The literature of the Abolitionist movement also comprised publications by unfranchised individuals appealing to elected officials or commenting on the issue of slavery. Through these publications, activists such as Hannah More and Anna Laetitia Barbauld shaped public opinion on slavery and exerted influence on elected MPs. Political movements such as Abolitionism appealed to a large section of the public who were unfranchised, extending the appeal to public opinion underlying reformist politics, exemplary of the Long Whig Opposition.

The activist publications of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century not only extended political agency to the unfranchised, but allowed women to influence legislators and policy. For example, Mary Wollstonecraft and Burke engaged in an exchange of ideas through the publications of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Men* and *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. This exchange of ideas demonstrates the participation of women in 18<sup>th</sup>-century politics despite their exclusion from public office and the franchise.

The literature of the Long Whig Opposition contributed to the development of democracy and created an extra-political space later occupied by the movements to abolish slavery and establish human rights throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup>



century, unfranchised and unrepresented communities in Britain became involved in public life as their opinion began to influence legislators and policy. Throughout the Whigs' time in opposition, politics and literature became symbiotic as MPs attempted to provoke opposition to the government outside of parliamentary activity by publishing their views as literature. The Long Whig Opposition included the radical journalism of opposition exemplary of John Wilkes and Junius, resonant works of rhetoric and philosophy by Edmund Burke, and the translation of politics and social issues into drama in the plays of Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

In addition to the primary figures of this project, several other Whig MPs attained literary significance during their Long Opposition, including Edward Gibbon, Horace Walpole, and Matthew Lewis. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is a significant text in the genre of historical writing, but is also relevant to Gibbon's politics as a Whig in opposition. In the chapter on Gibbon in Leo Damrosch's *The Club*, the author affirms that, at "the time [Gibbon] tackled the project in earnest, the American colonies were breaking away, and the subject of empires and their decline had become intensely topical" (331). The political relevance of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, while Parliament focused intently on the present turmoil of the British empire, demonstrates the generic diversity of the writing of the Long Whig Opposition. Matthew Lewis, elected to Parliament in 1796, contributed to Gothic literature through his novel *The Monk* and a series of plays. Lewis created a resonant subgenre within the Gothic mode emphasizing shock and scandal. The controversy of an MP writing an incendiary Gothic novel echoed the irreverence of John Wilkes, who developed a reformist persona by antagonizing the Tory establishment and caricaturing its corruption.

The contributions to diverse literary genres by Whig MPs during their Long Opposition exemplify the innovative connection between literature and public life in the transformation of

the public sphere in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. The literature of the Long Whig Opposition contributed to the development of public discourse and democracy as literature expanded political awareness and allowed MPs in opposition to address an audience which was interested in governance though they lacked representation.

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