

**DRAMATIC HISTORIES AND PARTY POLITICS,  
1719-1745**

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**September 2003**

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## **Abstract**

Early eighteenth-century politics were dominated by the rise to power and fall from grace of Sir Robert Walpole. This thesis examines varied responses to the Walpole regime from opposition Whig, Tory, Jacobite and pro-government writers. The discussion focuses on history plays from the period 1719-1745 and considers the role of these texts as vehicles for political comment and propaganda. Of key concern throughout the thesis is the rhetoric of patriotism. Patriot ideology pervades the texts and crosses conventional party boundaries. Alongside patriotism other themes pertinent to political commentary of the period are discussed. In chapter one, 'Ancient Britons and Liberty' texts appropriating Saxon and Celtic history are discussed in relation to contemporary concerns for maintaining the political liberty of the British nation. In chapter two, 'Kings, Ministers, Favourites and Patriot Rhetoric' plays that focus on favouritism are examined alongside contemporary criticism of Walpole as 'favourite' of the Hanoverians. In chapter three, 'Gender and Party Politics in Adaptations of Shakespeare's Histories' the updating of Shakespeare to suit contemporary taste and the impact of these alterations are reflected in a re-politicisation of the plays for party agendas. In chapter four, 'Britain, Empire and Julius Cæsar' representations of Cæsar that suggest positive interpretations of the Emperor conflict with contemporary opinion regarding his contribution to the fall of the Roman republic. Implications for Britain's own colonial endeavour are also considered in chapter five, 'Religion and the Ideology of Empire in Turkish History Plays'. This chapter examines plays in which the Scanderbeg history is appropriated to offer a model of British colonialism. Reflecting on Britain's past glories or, past failings, the plays discussed in this thesis offer not only comment on contemporary politics but also representations of an idealised Britishness. By demonstrating what Britons had once been these texts suggest what modern Britons should be.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the staff of the Department of English, University of Wales, Aberystwyth for their help during the course of my research. In particular I wish to thank Dr Paulina Kewes whose guidance and supervision has been invaluable, your commitment is greatly appreciated. I am also grateful to the department for supporting my research financially. My fellow postgraduates at the Department of English have been a great source of support and I would like to thank Dr Rebecca Lindner and Ms Caroline Bate for their friendship. The expertise of the staff at the National Library of Wales and the British Library has greatly assisted my research and I extend my thanks. Bu arbenigedd staff Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru a'r Llyfrgell Brydeinig yn gymorth mawr i mi gyda'm hymchwil ac fe hoffwn fynegi fy niolch. I would like to show my appreciation of Fred and Linda, Viv and Clive for, amongst other things, their expert babysitting services, without which this thesis would never have come to fruition.

And finally my thanks and love to, William and Alfie for being my link to the real world and to Simon – you can have a rest now, I'll read the bedtime story tonight!



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## Drama, History and Politics, 1719-1745

The centrality of literature to political debate during the eighteenth century has been identified by modern scholarship as one of the defining characteristics of British culture from this period. 'Serious writers', Bertrand Goldgar argues, 'could not escape making political choices, for politics touched and coloured virtually every aspect of life in the world of letters, even the reception of plays or poems not overtly political.'<sup>1</sup> Such a broad statement, however, raises a number of fundamental questions. Who were these 'serious writers' and what did they write? What sort of texts can we describe as 'literature'? Does all literature from this period really contribute to political debate? If we are to accept that some literature contributes to political debate, which texts are particularly valuable when discussing eighteenth-century politics? I wish to contend that drama, particularly historical drama, is one literary genre that offers modern readers insight into a range of political discourses from the early eighteenth century. Drama is often identified as a particularly topical genre. Robert D. Hume has argued that 'drama is topical enough that one can trace its response to history closely from decade to decade, and even at times from year to year'.<sup>2</sup> Despite this immediacy of response, it might be suggested that history plays, reflecting on events of the past, lack the topicality of other dramatic genres. History plays are concerned exclusively with historical events and therefore do not reflect upon contemporary politics. Conversely, I shall contend that in taking the past as their subject these plays are often explicitly topical and particularly prone to ideological use by politicians and party followers.

### Drama and Politics

The plays discussed in this thesis raise a number of the recurrent concerns that dominated British politics during the period 1719-1745. These political issues are diverse and although some texts focus on one specific political concern, others engage with a variety of issues. The nature of British identity, for example, is frequently the

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<sup>1</sup> Bertrand A. Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits: The Relation of Politics to Literature 1722-1743* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), p. 220.

<sup>2</sup> Robert D. Hume, *The Rakish Stage* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), p. 21.

subject of prologues and epilogues irrespective of the content of the play itself. Britain's colonial expansion is a narrower theme only discussed in a handful of texts. Conversely, the key terms commonly used in the rhetorical attacks of eighteenth-century political discourse, favouritism, factionalism and patriotism are liberally scattered throughout the texts discussed. By reflecting many of the concerns that dominated early eighteenth-century politics, the history plays engage with a number of current literary and historical accounts that focus on these same political issues. For this reason, the thesis is structured in such a way that each chapter will focus on a specific political theme for example, national identity or colonialism whilst some themes such as gender or patriot rhetoric will be discussed concurrently throughout all chapters. So, what are the key political issues to be discussed and how do the history plays engage with these concerns?

#### **i National Identity and Patriotism**

Issues of national identity, emphasised in the wake of the 1707 Act of Union, are a common dramatic theme throughout the period. I shall argue that in many of the plays discussed, British national identity is defined in direct relation to party agendas. J.G.A. Pocock has argued that whilst Tory models of British identity rested on ancient democracy and agrarianism, this nostalgic version of national identity was directly opposed to the Whig model of modernity:

Walpole's defenders had argued that liberty was not ancient but modern, and that the past was feudal not free. It followed that the constitution contained no principles to which return could be made and that its spirit was either pragmatic and empirical, or modern and progressive.<sup>3</sup>

These versions of national identity are clearly influenced by party politics. Such diverse accounts of a constituent element of British identity suggest that versions of Britishness are, in part at least, derived from party interpretations of the foundation of British liberty. Was liberty achieved by the Glorious Revolution in 1688 and the subsequent Act of Settlement or conversely destroyed by the forced abdication of

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<sup>3</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 247.

James II? Alternatively was liberty merely resuscitated by the accession of William and Mary? I do not wish to deny the existence of an over-arching image of the idealised Briton. On the contrary, as Hugh Cunningham observes, eighteenth-century nationalists were convinced that, ‘the English were an elect nation, that “God is English”’.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the historical figures at the centre of these plays are often those English monarchs described by Gerrard as ‘staple icons of British national identity’ – Alfred, Edward III, Henry V, and Elizabeth I.<sup>5</sup> However, this short list does not encompass the broad scope of iconographic representations of Britishness demonstrated in the history plays discussed in this thesis. As we shall see in the forthcoming chapters, playwrights and political commentators derived examples of ‘British’ patriotism from Saxon, Celtic, Roman and even Islamic histories. Given that, as Gerrard asserts, ‘dynastic self-justification was not significantly less intense after 1714 than it had been in either the sixteenth or the seventeenth century’ this broad spectrum of historical examples suggests that post-1714 commentators were searching for ways to define and, in some instances, validate the new dynasty.<sup>6</sup> A Hanoverian dynasty whose German foundation was clearly at odds with the conventional ‘staple icons’ of British identity.<sup>7</sup>

Such expressions of ‘English’ superiority, however universal – it is clear from the variety of plays discussed that this cultural self-aggrandizement was *near* universal – raises a number of problems for an attempt to analyse national identity during the eighteenth century. To what extent is a distinction made between British and English identity? Do the plays recognise a divide between these two signifiers? How do the Scottish, Welsh and Anglo-Irish national identities impinge on the emergent ‘British’ model? Whatever the political implications of such national diversity, liberty was a key term in the description of British identity and a recurrent concern of historical drama. As David Armitage suggests, liberty and patriotism were central to political rhetoric: ‘from its first appearance in English in the 1720s “patriotism” as a political slogan expressed devotion to the common good of the

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<sup>4</sup> Hugh Cunningham, ‘The Language of Patriotism’ in, *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989), vol. 1 p. 58.

<sup>5</sup> Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry and National Myth, 1725-1742* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 102.

<sup>6</sup> Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, pp. 102-3.

<sup>7</sup> The fact that at least some of these ‘staple icons’ were not from English dynasties either was a detail that historians, playwrights and political commentators frequently struggled to hide and a recurrent problem that I shall return to.



*patria* and hostility to sectional interests and became a staple of oppositional politics'.<sup>8</sup> However, the confinement of 'patriotism' to opposition polemic is to overlook the part patriotism plays in British identity. Patriotism, Cunningham suggests, constituted a 'belief in the ancient constitution', a constitution, 'located in Saxon times before the Norman yoke was imposed, when the constitution achieved perfection in securing liberty to the people'.<sup>9</sup> But this decidedly Tory rendering of patriotism, although conventional in modern perceptions of early eighteenth-century politics, is not upheld by the plays. Patriotism and British liberty were key themes in *all* of the plays discussed irrespective of the political agendas of those texts. Bolingbroke's version of patriotism, Brean Hammond contends, was grounded in the 'ancient constitution' that preserved 'the traditional political liberties of the English nation as long as it is respected by the government whose duty is to put it into practice'.<sup>10</sup> Bolingbroke's brand of patriotism, despite its endurance, was not definitive, and the securing of the 'political liberties of the English nation' was something all parties felt they could achieve irrespective of what model of national identity they subscribed to.

## ii. Favouritism and Factionalism

Modern scholars often identify the favourite as the antonym to the idealized patriot. The favourite is frequently portrayed in the plays discussed in this study, but, particularly given the cross-party appropriation of patriot rhetoric, it should not be assumed that the favourite is necessarily represented as 'bad'. Walpole's position as a favourite of the Hanoverians created a problem for the stability and credibility of British politics. Pocock has argued that, 'in the 1730s and even the 1740s oligarchy and ministerial rule could be defended by asserting the modernity of parliamentary freedom against the Tory and republican appeal to the ancient constitution'.<sup>11</sup> Is it possible to represent favouritism favourably?

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<sup>8</sup> David Armitage, 'A Patriot for Whom? The Afterlives of Bolingbroke's Patriot King', *Journal of British Studies* 36 (1997), 397.

<sup>9</sup> Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism', p. 58.

<sup>10</sup> Brean S. Hammond, *Pope and Bolingbroke: A Study of Friendship and Influence* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984), p. 132.

<sup>11</sup> Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*, p. 252.



Political factionalism and the effect of the preferment system are also prominent dramatic themes. Brean Hammond summarizes the strengthening of preferment's role in the British system of government from its rise in the late Restoration to the 1720s:

Between 1680 and 1720, all the major state departments grew enormously, particularly in the Treasury, which became a very large employer indeed, and government service became a magnet for place-hunters in search of lucrative advancement. Manipulation of such patronage as accrued from this strengthening of the executive would become the lynchpin of ministerial power.<sup>12</sup>

This 'lynchpin' is represented in the plays in various guises. Preferment is identified as detrimental to the political system in some texts yet essential to its success in others. Party factionalism and in-party opposition are seen either to destabilise parliament, leaving the government open to corruption or as a demonstration of an appropriate and necessary challenge to government supremacy. Although chapter two is dedicated to an analysis of the representation of favouritism, I shall address these issues in relation to a wide variety of texts throughout the thesis. As we shall see, favouritism and factionalism are significant issues taken up either explicitly as indicated by a reference in the play's title or coincidentally as a by-product of the main action.

### iii. Colonialism

The interplay between drama and politics is not confined to internal affairs. A number of the plays discussed consider Britain's role as a developing colonial power. Some question the validity of colonialism, others consider how far the emergent British Empire reflects an improvement both on contemporary and historic empires. Pocock has argued that such concerns echo an earlier discomfort with the policies of the Tory regime that precipitated imperial expansion:

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<sup>12</sup> Hammond, *Pope and Bolingbroke*, pp. 129-30.

Between the treaties of Rijswijk (1697) and Utrecht (1713), opposition polemic in England was directed against the regime that conducted the War of the Spanish Succession: a regime presented as a system of public credit and national debt, maintaining an ever-expanding professional army and parliamentary patronage, which waged and won great wars abroad but was held to pay for itself by imposing a land tax on the freeholders and gentry. However exact or inexact this description, the regime bears witness to the profound transformation in British politics brought about by involvement in the wars against France; the expansion of imperial power was made possible by devices that tended to the stabilization of parliamentary rule, and before the political crisis of 1710-15 we see the alliance of Godolphin and Marlborough with the Junto Whigs as anticipating the Whig oligarchy and the imperial parliamentarism of the Hanoverian reigns. The polemic against the wartime regime therefore presents itself as continuous with the polemic against parliamentary oligarchy.<sup>13</sup>

Caution with regard to colonialism is therefore represented as primarily an opposition concern transferred to whichever party was not in 'control' of this simultaneous external expansion and internal stabilization. Such an analysis is somewhat complicated by the strong opposition to Walpole's tactical inactivity with regard to the various military threats posed to British colonial interests during his time in office. However, it should not be assumed that opposition to Britain's colonialism was restricted to opposition plays, indeed, as I shall suggest in chapters four and five reticence concerning the nation's colonial endeavour was often impervious to political allegiance.

#### iv. Gender

The role of women in politics is a factor in almost every play discussed. For some texts, the adaptations of Shakespeare for example, the very presence of women on

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<sup>13</sup> Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*, p. 234.

stage is significant to the revised socio-political agenda of the texts. The question of women's role in politics is repeatedly raised. Should women be confined to a domestic sphere or can they support the political lives of their husbands, fathers, or brothers in more practical ways? In fact this question is somewhat narrow and, as I argue in chapter three, women are represented in some texts as not only active participants in politics but as *independent* political activists.

Alongside this text-based analysis of women's roles in the plays I shall also question the cultural impact of the actress. Just as women's access to the political spaces of the plays is a source of anxiety, so is the influence such representations of women's political agency may have on members of the audience. Subject to the public gaze, drama was seen as inherently political, even when claiming quite distinctly that it was not. The public nature of drama was one of the concerns aired during the anti-theatrical debate fuelled by Jeremy Collier's *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698). The debate, Jean Marsden suggests, lasted well into the eighteenth century, 'the first flood of print lasted into 1699, followed by a second burst in 1704. Similar attacks continued to be published through much of the eighteenth century, mostly, however, in the years prior to the passage of the Licensing Act in 1737'.<sup>14</sup> The fear promoted by spectatorship theory that, 'sight creates a bond between spectator and event, which of necessity implicates the observer', although primarily concerned with the effect of such voyeurism on female spectators can equally be applied to any audience member irrespective of gender.<sup>15</sup> The effect on the audience of women's presence both in the public space of the theatre and in the public spaces of the plays is an important consideration. If eighteenth-century commentators feared that by attending plays, the audience could be wooed to the behaviours demonstrated on stage, there are clear implications for the use of drama as a vehicle for political propaganda?

The wealth of political themes addressed by the plays suggests not only topicality but also an active participation in political discourse. Drama, it could be argued, was particularly suited to the purposes of disseminating political propaganda. Writing on the literary reverberations of Bolingbroke's *Patriot King* (1738), David Armitage

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<sup>14</sup> Jean I. Marsden, 'Female Spectatorship, Jeremy Collier and the Anti-Theatrical Debate' *English Literary History* 65 (1988) 879. See also Robert D. Hume, 'Jeremy Collier and the Future of the London Theater in 1698', *Studies in Philology*, XCVI, 4 (1999) 480-511.

<sup>15</sup> Marsden, 'Female Spectatorship', p. 881.



notes, 'the *Patriot King* had sprung from the soil of patriot poetry and plays in the 1730s and patriot kingship returned to the English stage in response to increased Anglo-Irish tension in the mid-1770s and to the possibility of Franco-Spanish attack during the American War'.<sup>16</sup> What is important to this study is the observation that Bolingbroke's influential political thesis is grounded in the patriot literature that preceded it. Patriot drama therefore had a profound affect on opposition ideology. Did drama have an equal effect on government ideology? I do not wish to suggest that party policy was dictated by the London stage, but rather that many texts participate in a dialogue of political ideas of which the history plays are one distinctive strand.

This dialogue existed in part because of the way in which plays were commissioned and written. Politicians, political commentators and, on rare occasions, the royal family all commissioned plays from known supporters. But, obviously, not all plays were the result of such sought-after commissions; as Hammond observes, playwrights were in fact rarely commissioned to write plays.<sup>17</sup> Some texts were written, un-commanded, by party followers, whilst those aspiring to patronage penned texts aimed specifically to aid their political and or financial advancement. Playwrights sought patronage by writing what they imagined their prospective patron wanted to hear. Indeed, authors clearly felt no obligation to necessarily promote their own political beliefs. Many wrote primarily from a financial perspective, choosing whichever political agenda was most likely to sell theatre tickets.<sup>18</sup> However, it is not simply authorial motivation that dictates the position of the dramatic text in contemporary politics. All of the plays discussed in this thesis appropriate history and it is this manipulation of largely well-known historical events rather than an individual author's political affiliations that denotes the politicisation of these texts.

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<sup>16</sup> Armitage, 'A Patriot for Whom?', p. 408.

<sup>17</sup> Brean S. Hammond, *Professional Imaginative Writing in England, 1670-1740 'Hackney for Bread'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 65.

<sup>18</sup> Hammond describes Henry Fielding's plays in these terms. My somewhat less salubrious example is James Ralph whose personal political agenda shifted as a reflection of his financial needs. For my discussion of Ralph see chapter two. For Hammond's discussion of Fielding see, *Professional Imaginative Writing*, chapter seven.

## History and Politics

History is a particularly useful medium through which to analyse literary representation of contemporary politics. According to D. R. Woolf, during the seventeenth-century history was perceived as a form of literature aimed at the gratification or education of the reader. This perception, Woolf claims, changed little during the first half of the eighteenth century:

History in the seventeenth century was conceived of as a form of literature (a term which itself is not coterminous with 'fiction'), not as a 'discipline' or, still less, a 'science'; it did not really become a discipline before the late eighteenth century and – depending on one's point of view – it may never have grown into a science.<sup>19</sup>

As Christine Gerrard has argued during the Walpole period history became an increasingly important staple of partisan discourse and as a result the people's interest in their nation's past was stirred.<sup>20</sup> Gerrard cites Bolingbroke's *Remarks on the History of England* (1730) as an example of 'the brand of history familiar to most readers: an interpretation of the recent and the remote past based on a sense of continuity and pride in what it meant to be a Briton'.<sup>21</sup> To a modern reader, Bolingbroke's anti-Walpole agenda, although clearly not coincidental, could be overshadowed by this overtly nationalistic history.

During the early eighteenth century therefore, the term 'history play' could be used to refer to any text that chose an historical theme and did not apply exclusively to the dramatisation of 'events generally accepted as having actually occurred'.<sup>22</sup> One example of this is George Jeffrey's *Edwin* (1724) discussed in chapter one. The appropriation of history, be it British, English or foreign, allows for the re-interpretation of events to suit a specific political agenda. As Woolf suggests, 'historical interest was political interest, as usual, the past held messages for the

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<sup>19</sup> D.R. Woolf, *The Idea of History in Early Stuart England: Erudition, Ideology, and 'The Light of Truth' from the Accession of James I to the Civil War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. xv.

<sup>20</sup> Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, pp. 101-2.

<sup>21</sup> Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, p.101.

<sup>22</sup> Woolf, *The Idea of History*, p. 16.



present'.<sup>23</sup> Many of the plays discussed in this thesis present distorted or even invented histories not only in alluding to topical themes but also to market specific political propaganda. It is important to consider therefore the intricate relationship between history and politics during the early eighteenth century. Karen O'Brien has suggested that:

Eighteenth-century historians had a more dynamic sense of historical writing as an arena in which both historian and reader exercise political, emotional, and aesthetic choices; together they create, not an imagined, but an interpretive community engaged in a rhetorical arbitration of their own history.<sup>24</sup>

History was, therefore, a mode of interpretation, 'a form of spectacle designed to awaken the imagination and stimulate the sensibility'.<sup>25</sup> Both author and audience were active participants in the interpretation of history plays and one important element of this interpretation was the reflection that history cast upon contemporary politics. Gerrard describes those eighteenth-century poets, playwrights and political commentators who wrote about Britain's past as 'using history as a yardstick to measure the shortcomings of the present'.<sup>26</sup> I shall argue that history proved useful not only as a tool for opposition complaint about the current state of the nation but also as a way of validating government policy. History can reflect the positive as well as the negative.

History plays are particularly caught up in politics as participants in contemporary political discourse. As Hammond suggests, 'the historian and satirist [were] joint custodians of the nation's moral and political health'.<sup>27</sup> History and politics are intertwined and by attending performances of dramatic reconstructions of history, the audience were actively participating in the interpretation of this relationship. During the early eighteenth century histories were explicitly didactic:

Many of the histories of Britain before Hume's characterised themselves in classical terms as lessons in the nation's distinctive political culture; readers

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<sup>23</sup> Woolf, *The Idea of History*, p. 172.

<sup>24</sup> Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, p. 102.

<sup>27</sup> Hammond, *Pope and Bolingbroke*, p. 160.

might learn prudent statecraft or, at least, wise public conduct by contemplating the historical workings of Britain's balanced constitution'.<sup>28</sup>

In the very act of re-writing history therefore, playwrights were in danger of declaring their political bias. They offered audiences an interpretation of history from which they should 'learn' political lessons. Such bias can often be identified merely by an author's choice of historical subject, for example the anti-Walpole propaganda demonstrated in the anonymous *The Fall of Mortimer* (1731). Often more implicit however is the way in which history is constructed by the author, the variations in the accounts of Scanderbeg in the three versions of this Ottoman history discussed in chapter five are one example of such subtle manipulation.

Narrative history became increasingly popular during the eighteenth century. Texts by historians such as Knolles, Rapin, Hill and Hume were regularly reprinted. The popularity of these conflicting versions of British and foreign histories, as O'Brien suggests, has implications for modern narratives of emergent cultural nationalism:

The popularity of Rapin in the first half of the century, and the eventual and enduring success of Hume's *History of England*, are not easily reconciled to this modern narrative of emergent national awareness except, perhaps, as evidence for the persistence of older elite, cosmopolitan ways of characterising the nation's history.<sup>29</sup>

Clearly such differing versions of English history, not necessarily written by Englishmen, or even Englishwomen, go some way towards challenging arguments for a unifying national identity. This narrative, I shall argue, can also be refuted by the plays discussed in this thesis. As historical accounts these texts engage, to varying degrees, in establishing national identity. For many of these texts, British identity is characterised by patriotism, the place of which in the political rhetoric of the period is governed by a cross-party need to 'prove' the lack of patriotic behaviour exhibited by political opponents. The popular narrative histories of the period were of course in themselves subject to political bias and often accepted or rejected by the public on this

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<sup>28</sup> O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 18.

basis.<sup>30</sup> It is therefore important that alongside the theatrical versions of these histories I should consider contemporary historical accounts. Evidence of a playwright's use of a particular narrative historian may suggest a shared political agenda; however, the disparity between dramatic and narrative versions reveals the way in which history was distorted to suit the author's own political purposes.

## The period: 1719-1745

The period spanned by this study has been chosen primarily to encompass the rise to and fall from power of Robert Walpole. Although as commentators have suggested, Walpole's ministry oversaw a period of political consolidation, 'under Walpole's management, parliamentary institutions stabilized but did not develop'.<sup>31</sup> Such assertions should not render this period as a time of political stagnation. As Pocock notes, 'the Tory party did not decline and disappear by rapid stages after 1714, but remained a stubborn active, and surprisingly radical political alternative until some time after 1745'.<sup>32</sup> I shall argue that the very existence of a loud radical alternative to the government provokes an equally vociferous conservative accord with that criticised administration. The close affiliation of the Whigs with the Hanoverians was vital to the growing political stability of the 1720s and 1730s. However, despite this crucial stabilising relationship between the Whig administration and the monarchy, party unity was far from assured. As Hammond observes, the *real* stability of the Whig administration was reliant on the industry of placemen:

In the absence of party discipline or indeed any real basis for political unity, the exploitation of industrious, often talented placemen was the only means of ensuring that administrative work was carried on. If any of the various attempts to exclude placemen from Parliament by legislation had succeeded, the result would have been administrative anarchy.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Laurence Echard is one example of an historian rejected by the public. The popularity of his *History of England* (1707-1718) waned as a reflection of the decreasing popularity of his politics. For further discussion of Echard see chapters four and five.

<sup>31</sup> Hammond, *Pope and Bolingbroke*, p. 130.

<sup>32</sup> Pocock, *Virtue Commerce and History*, p. 243.

<sup>33</sup> Hammond, *Pope and Bolingbroke*, p. 130.



This image of a government close to crisis point as a result of internal instability appears to contradict assertions regarding Walpole's ministry as a source of political consolidation. Certainly British politics during the decades of Walpole's supremacy was not lacking in a strong oppositional challenge. On the contrary, opposition to Walpole's ministry came from many quarters, not only from the Jacobites and Tories, confined to opposition from the death of Anne in 1714 until after the accession of George III in 1760, but also from disgruntled Whigs. Those in opposition to Walpole repeatedly cited favouritism and the employment of parliamentary placemen as his failings. This, coupled with his resistance to war with England's traditional Catholic European enemies, provided a powerful rhetorical base for opposition to the minister.

The strong opposition to Walpole had, I shall argue, various consequences for dramatic production, the most obvious of which was the wealth of anti-Walpole drama produced during the minister's supremacy. It has been suggested that John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) epitomised this type of play. Such a growth in direct and personal attacks on Walpole resulted, many critics have argued, in the Stage Licensing Act of 1737. Goldgar contends that the Walpole administration reacted determinedly to the threat posed by opposition literature: 'the alienation of literary figures from the world of public action was well under way in the 1730s and, above all, that such alienation was encouraged and hastened by the character of the Walpole regime'.<sup>34</sup> However, the effect Walpole and his ministry had on the drama of this period was not entirely one of circumscription. Just as some playwrights were keen to demonstrate publicly their opposition to Walpole, others were eager to show their support. Pro-Walpole drama, written either as the direct result of patronage or created in search of favour, was frequently produced on the London stage.

Critics such as Christine Gerrard have chosen to emphasise the literary opposition posed to Walpole, some going as far as to suggest that the Walpole administration was destitute of literary support.<sup>35</sup> This study is concerned with the way in which both pro- and anti-Walpole drama was received, and the way in which history was contorted to meet the requirements of these opposing political agendas. Despite his claims for the lack of pro-Walpole literature, Goldgar makes the pertinent suggestion that 'the notion of all the wit on one side was much more politically

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<sup>34</sup> Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits*, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits*, p. 218.

significant and had much more political utility than any of the works of wit themselves'.<sup>36</sup> As the aspiring Sciblerian Aaron Hill asserts in *The Roman Revenge* (1753), 'Where wit wants patronage – a state wants wisdom'.<sup>37</sup> Claims for wit and literary talent provided a party 'image' of superiority over the talentless hacks writing for the opposing party, an argument which, given the degree of contemporary and modern critical acclaim afforded to them, the Scriblerians have clearly 'won' in the long term. However, such claims to superiority are routinely made by all of the dramatists discussed, irrespective of their political affiliations. Despite Hammond's claims that the decades following 1660 marked a swift decline in the number of authors actively seeking patronage and an increase in the marketing of what he describes as 'literary products', it is clear from this study and others by critics such as Gerrard, Pettit, Orr and Hume that post-1660 the appropriation of literature for political purpose was nonetheless significant.<sup>38</sup> Indeed this consideration can be identified in Hammond's notion of the authors' active marketing of their 'product' and, as I have already suggested, it is this appropriation that has prompted modern scholars to identify the early eighteenth century as a period during which the interplay between politics and literature became increasingly explicit. For this reason, the period of Walpole's political supremacy is particularly apposite to a study of literary intervention in politics.

## The Stage Licensing Act

Critics have argued that the Stage Licensing Act of 1737 virtually put an end to the performance of politically motivated material on the London stage. To what extent is this true? Certainly some plays were refused license for public performance and others were forced to withdraw from performance but the true impact of the Act on the curtailment of politically motivated dramatic activity is far from clear.<sup>39</sup> I wish to

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<sup>36</sup> Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits*, p. 218.

<sup>37</sup> Aaron Hill, 'The Roman Revenge' in *The Dramatic Works of the Late Aaron Hill* (London, 1760), vol.2 p. 279.

<sup>38</sup> Hammond, *Professional Imaginative Writing in England*, p. 249.

<sup>39</sup> The following plays were all subject to censorship post-1737: Henry Brooke, *Gustavus Vasa* (1739), James Thomson *Edward and Eleonora* (1739), William Paterson, *Arminius* (1740), and John Kelly, *The Levee* (1741). Perhaps the most famous example of a play prohibited from performance was John Gay's *Polly*. Intended as a sequel to *The Beggar's Opera*, *Polly* was banned from production in 1729,



challenge recent claims by a number of critics for the cessation of political commentary through drama as a result of the Stage Licensing Act.<sup>40</sup> The reduction in numbers of explicitly political plays was not caused directly by the restriction on dramatic content; rather, the result of the monopoly created by the Act. The reduction in number of licensed theatres necessitated a parallel reduction in the number of new plays produced each year. The Covent Garden and Drury Lane monopoly had a serious effect on dramatic activity post-1737. The plays discussed in this thesis are taken from across the divide critics have conventionally perceived between dramatic participation in politics pre-1737 and Walpole's attempts to exclude drama from the political arena. It is therefore important to stress that the production of a smaller number of new plays post-1737 is merely an indication of the necessary curtailment of theatrical productivity rather than a sudden void of political commentary in dramatic texts.

I have chosen to focus on plays performed on the London stage rather than closet drama. Closet drama clearly filled the space left by more risqué or explicitly political plays, which, even before the Stage Licensing Act may not have been either permitted public performance by the Lord Chamberlain or selected for production by theatre managers. Clearly closet drama, by its very nature could be more defamatory in its approach to politics. However, my interest lies in those plays selected for performance on the London stage. The public nature of these texts has significance for their contribution to political discourse and to the appropriation of these histories for propagandistic purposes. As public texts subject to public scrutiny and varied interpretation these plays become active participants in the ideological debates of the period.

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eight years before the Licensing Act took effect. John Loftis has linked the prohibition of *Polly* to what he describes as a widespread clampdown by the Walpole administration on opposition literature. In reaction to the success of Gay's *Beggar's Opera* both the *Craftsman* and the *Weekly Journal* were prosecuted in 1728/9 whilst subsidies awarded to government journals increased. See John Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) p. 97.

<sup>40</sup> For example, Pettit claims that the Stage Licensing Act virtually abolished politically suggestive drama. See Alexander Pettit, *Illusory Consensus: Bolingbroke and the Polemical Response to Walpole, 1730-1737* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997), p. 21. Loftis notes that although only plays making the 'grossest kind of political allusion were banned' he identifies the cause of the failure of the development of drama as the monopolistic provisions of the Licensing Act. See John Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 150-3. Hume contends that the 'London theatre of the 1730s was hardly a hotbed of partisan political activity'. See Robert D. Hume, 'Henry Fielding and Politics at the Little Haymarket, 1728-1737' in Hume (ed.) *The London Theatre World 1600-1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), p. 104.

Arguments for the cessation of politically relevant drama post-1737 are in part responsible for the critical neglect received by these plays. In addition, throughout the period, drama is widely perceived to have suffered an aesthetic downturn particularly in contrast to the great comedies of the Restoration period. Nicoll for example, criticises the first fifty years of the eighteenth century for the poor quality of tragic plays during the period. He identifies Addison's *Cato* (1713) as one of a limited number of literary successes due to the absence of a love interest in favour of a more fittingly tragic subject. Nicoll describes Addison's hero as a philosopher 'whose nature and problems could be revealed appropriately in rhetorical dialogue, certainly more so than the natures and problems of violently passionate lovers and their mistresses'.<sup>41</sup> According to Nicoll this type of 'pseudo-classic' tragedy was the best that the eighteenth-century London stage had to offer. For the rest, Nicoll has little positive comment to make.<sup>42</sup>

This thesis is not concerned with establishing the value of the individual texts discussed in relation to a canonical notion of aesthetic literary standards. Similarly, the popularity of a particular play is not taken as an indication of the critical value of an individual text. Some of the plays I will consider were very popular, others were certainly not a financial success, some not even making a third night. However, neither contemporary nor modern aesthetic judgements impinge on the topicality of a text. The failure of a play or its rejection by modern critics as 'dramatised novels' does not negate the usefulness of the text to modern scholarship in terms of tracing literary responses to politics.<sup>43</sup>

## The Unknown Playwright

Just as many of the plays discussed in this thesis are relatively obscure, so are many of the playwrights. The authors will often be better known as historians, poets or political commentators, their contribution to drama being overshadowed by the names

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<sup>41</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama* (London: Harrap, 1978), p. 131.

<sup>42</sup> Nicoll assigns five categories to eighteenth-century drama, pseudo-classic or pathetic tragedy, ballad-opera, pantomime, sentimentalism, and domestic drama. Nicoll asserts that plays that adopted historical themes can be grouped as a 'cognate species of drama, often with echoes of Shakespeare and Otway'. I would agree with this statement but not his assessment of eighteenth-century history plays as universally poor. See Nicoll, *British Drama*, pp. 130-145.

<sup>43</sup> Loftis, *The Politics of Drama*, p. 153.

of well-known literary figures such as Henry Fielding. Aaron Hill, widely known for his Whiggish histories, features in this study as both historian and playwright. The poet James Thomson is another author discussed for his dramatic work. Conversely, some writers, such as David Mallet, are known primarily for their dramatic works. Some of these writers the modern reader may never have heard of and wherever necessary I will give some biographical details in order to support my interpretation of the politicisation of the plays. However, analysing a text in relation to the biography of its author is not my primary objective. As I have already suggested, modern scholarship has largely neglected these texts. Where scholars such as Christine Gerrard, Alexander Pettit, and Howard D. Weinbrot have discussed these plays, their analysis tends to focus on wider observations regarding the relationship between literature and politics during the period rather than considering the plays themselves in any detail. Bridget Orr whose study is dedicated specifically to drama stops short of this period. It is important that the excellent work happening in Renaissance and Restoration studies should be extended to the Eighteenth Century. Modern critical analyses of Renaissance drama are reaching outside the traditional confines of Shakespeare and Marlowe. Scholars of Restoration drama are looking beyond the canonical authors of the period and the restrictive boundaries of Restoration comedy. Early eighteenth-century drama should not be confined to the footnotes and asides of scholarly criticism. As I have already suggested, the topicality of these texts and their somewhat ambiguous position as historical 'narratives' gives them the potential, albeit one not always realised, for political agency. Given the diversity of these known and unknown authors, it seems appropriate to note that, although this study is primarily concerned with a literary analysis of the texts discussed, my approach is interdisciplinary. I will discuss these texts in terms of their contribution to political history, their position as historical accounts, and their input to a literary genre complicated by an intermingling of adaptation, appropriation and pure invention. I shall contend throughout this thesis that these various disciplines are integral to our understanding of these texts and our knowledge of the London stage during the period. Although Goldgar's assertion that the early eighteenth-century world of letters was unequivocally 'touched' by politics may be somewhat of a blanket statement, the plays discussed in this thesis are demonstrative of a contention that is not entirely incongruous with Goldgar's argument. These plays are 'touched' by politics, but it is not their status as works of literature or the seriousness of their authors that dictates



this relationship. It is through the dramatization of history that these texts engage with politics. In dramatizing the past, early eighteenth-century history plays dramatize politics.

## Ancient Britons and Liberty

Common Sense,  
In Britain, ever may it keep Possession!  
Establish'd by the Protestant Succession.  
Blest in a Prince, whose high-traced Lineage Springs  
From the famed Race of our Old Saxon Kings;  
Our Zeal for Liberty we safely own; -  
He makes it the firm basis of his Throne.  
Remember, then, the Dangers, you have past: -  
And, let your Earliest Virtue – be your Last.

Ambrose Philips, *The Briton* (1722)

'Learn hence, my Daughter, to contemn the Praise,  
The Worship of self-interested Man'

William Philips, *Hibernia Freed* (1722)

The development of a distinct British national identity during the eighteenth century has been the subject of a number of recent studies. Scholars have variously contended that a unified British identity arose, if not immediately at least over time, as a result of the 1707 Act of Union.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will consider whether modern critical debate on British identity since the Act of Union can augment readings of early eighteenth-century history plays. The process of establishing a British identity was not limited to the years immediately after 1707. The nature of Britishness was a topic contested for many decades to come. I shall argue that a number of plays from the period 1722-1740 attempt to establish versions of British identity by reflecting on Britain's ancient history. These texts not only demonstrate the importance of Celtic and Saxon British history to the nation's cultural heritage but, more importantly, identify within these

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Linda Colley in *Britons Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Vintage, 1996) argues for an increasingly inclusive and dominant British identity. Murray Pittock in *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland 1685-1789* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997) and Jim Smyth in *The Making of the United Kingdom, 1660-1800* (London: Longman, 2001) identify within such a unified model varying levels of regional dissent and dissatisfaction with this dominant identity. Overall the scholarly consensus is that some form of uniquely British identity was formed post-1707 but opinion is varied as to the strength and persistence of the national characteristics of Welsh, Irish and Scottish Britons and the regional identities of the English themselves.



histories the source of the supposed utopian democracy of modern Britain and the oft praised liberty of her people.<sup>2</sup>

Since the Glorious Revolution in 1688, political commentators had associated liberty with Britain's ancient past. The revolution, they argued, finally restored the ancient rights of Englishmen. Political rhetoric on all sides repeatedly asserted the longevity and endurance of Britain's liberty and the importance of protecting this ancient right. As Gerrard has asserted, the ancient Britons were not the property of one party. Tories, opposition and pro-government Whigs all attempted to appropriate 'British mythology' for their own political purposes.<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Phillipson observes, however, that as the eighteenth century progressed, many writers 'were increasingly reluctant to place so heavy a reliance on the authority of antiquity in validating their accounts of the revolution principles'.<sup>4</sup> By the 1720s it seems, political commentators were resisting evocations of Britain's ancient heritage. Why, therefore, did a number of plays that restaged Britain's ancient histories appear on the London stage during the period 1720-1740? In this chapter I shall discuss a small cluster of plays from the 1720s, Ambrose Philips's *The Briton* (1722) depicts ancient Britons resisting the incursions of Roman invaders. William Philip's *Hibernia Freed* (1722) again examines the struggle of indigenous peoples against foreign invasion but this time the setting is first-century Ireland and the invaders are the Vikings. George Jeffreys's *Edwin* (1724) fabricates Anglo-Saxon history, telling the story of the usurpation and restoration of an ancient dynasty. In addition to the plays of the 1720s I shall also discuss two later texts. Aaron Hill's *Athelwold* (1731), a revision of his earlier play *Elfrid* (1710), takes Saxon England and the treachery of a royal favourite as its subject. David Mallet and James Thomson's, *Alfred* (1740), like many of these plays, merges history with fantasy. In this case the subject is Alfred the Great in a distinctly pro-Hanoverian, pro-Frederick guise.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Phillipson, 'Politeness and politics in the reigns of Anne and the early Hanoverians' in J. G. A. Pocock (ed.) *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 211-245. As I shall discuss later in this chapter Linda Colley also identifies this post-1688 idealisation of British politics as the best in Europe.

<sup>3</sup> Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, p. 142.

<sup>4</sup> Phillipson, 'Politeness and politics', p. 235. Phillipson suggests Defoe, Hoadly, Addison and Steele as such writers.

<sup>5</sup> There are other examples of plays which take ancient Britain as their setting such as, Delariviere Manley's *Lucius the First Christian King of Britain* (1717). However, for the purposes of this thesis I have limited my discussion to plays premièred during Walpole's term in office.

It is clear from the span of nearly twenty years between the première of *The Briton* in 1722 and *Alfred* in 1740 that antiquity retained its attraction as a dramatic subject. However, the ways in which ancient British history is used to comment on contemporary politics are varied. Some texts make use of antiquity to validate revolution principles, others move away from such politically reflective themes. What these plays share is a concern with establishing the antiquity of British liberty. In doing so, many of these texts convey a political agenda concerned with maintaining this liberty in eighteenth-century Britain. I shall suggest that read alongside contemporary commentary such as Bolingbroke's political writings, and modern critical analysis of the formation of British identity, these plays demonstrate ways in which 'the authority of antiquity' formed a significant validation of emergent notions of national identity. Although as Phillipson suggests, many commentators were turning from antiquity to modernity in their attempts to justify the revolution principles, I contend that British 'antiquity' was fundamental to developing ideas of what it was to be *British*.

**i. The Nation's Ancient Liberty**

Thompson and Mallet's *Alfred* (1740) suggests that Phillipson's assertion regarding the movement from antiquity to modernity was not universal. *Alfred* mirrors the Bolingbrokean rhetoric of *A Dissertation upon Parties* (1736). In his account of British antiquity Bolingbroke claims that 'The ancient Britons are to us the aborigines of our island'. He asserts that although we know little of their history and culture, one thing is certain, that 'they were freemen'.<sup>6</sup> He goes on to provide an account of the modes of government of these 'British aborigines'. For Bolingbroke, the important point is the ancient Britons' tenacious protection of their liberty. Even during the darkest hours of Roman control Britons steadfastly retained their belief in constitutional liberty. It is not only the ancient Britons who receive Bolingbroke's praises, 'as far as we can look back, a lawless power, a government by will, never prevailed in Britain'.<sup>7</sup> Bolingbroke's gloss on British history is important with regard

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<sup>6</sup> David Armitage (ed.), *Bolingbroke: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); 'A Dissertation upon Parties', Letter XII (*Craftsman* 436, 9 November 1736), p. 113.

<sup>7</sup> Armitage (ed.), *Bolingbroke*, p. 114.

to the image of Britishness portrayed in *A Dissertation*. Britons would never submit to such slavery. Bolingbroke's account of the nation's ancient liberties draws upon a heritage passed on by generations of Britons. Contrary to Phillipson's observations, Bolingbroke does not reject antiquity, even 'the increasingly tarnished example of Saxon antiquity'.<sup>8</sup> In relation to the Saxon kings, Bolingbroke argues that although 'the long wars they waged for and against the Britons, led to and maintained monarchical rule amongst them', the Saxons 'persuaded, rather than commanded'.<sup>9</sup> Despite usurping power from the Celts, the Saxons maintained the nation's political liberty. Bolingbroke praises the Saxons for their public assemblies and distribution of power on the basis of individual merit. Such praise has the potential to leave Bolingbroke's argument open to criticism. First in his inexact representation of Saxon history – the Saxons adopted hereditary succession as their mode of government. Second, he does not wish to discount hereditary succession as a valid mode of rule. Guarding himself against these potential criticisms, he notes that even when the Saxon kings 'for the sake of order and tranquillity' adopted birth rather than merit as the title to the throne they continued to govern Britain, 'to the satisfaction of the people':

By what other expedient could they govern men, who were wise enough to preserve and exercise the right of electing their civil magistrates and military officers, and the system of whose government was upheld and carried on by a gradation of popular assemblies, from the inferior courts to the high court of Parliament; for such, or very near such, was the Wittena Gemote, in nature and effect, whenever the word parliament came into use?<sup>10</sup>

These ancient ancestors, both the 'wise' Celts and the 'persuasive' Saxons, were the original creators and protectors of British liberty. Bolingbroke argues that such liberty, due to its longevity and place in the nation's heritage, is the right of all modern Britons. But it is the British people themselves, like their Celtic and Saxon predecessors, who must protect their rights by monitoring and chastising their governments for any threat made to this ancient constitutional right. It could be argued that this is an exclusively Tory view of liberty. An oppositional rendering of

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<sup>8</sup> Phillipson, 'Politeness and Politics', p. 244.

<sup>9</sup> Armitage (ed.), *Bolingbroke*, p. 114.

<sup>10</sup> Armitage (ed.), *Bolingbroke*, pp. 114-5.



the revolution settlement constructed to justify transfer of allegiance from the Stuarts to the Hanoverians. Phillipson argues that it was not until the ‘historical age’ of George III that Whigs began to recover ‘the Saxon past for Whiggery’.<sup>11</sup> Certainly it could be convincingly demonstrated that other opposition commentators shared Bolingbroke’s admiration for the Saxons.<sup>12</sup> However, does this necessarily imply that the Whigs were intent on ‘shifting the focus of political argument from ancient to modern sources of authority, invoking the changing interests of modern Britain rather than the increasingly tarnished example of Saxon antiquity’?

The history plays discussed in this chapter do not support such claims. In Thomson’s and Mallet’s *Alfred* (1740), a Hermit conjures the spirits of future monarchs in an attempt to bolster Alfred’s waning morale. The last in this display of overtly ‘Whig’ heroes is William III, ‘From before his face, / Flies Superstition, flies oppressive Power, / With vile Servility that crouch’d and kiss’d / The whip he trembled at. From this great hour / Shall Britain date her rights and laws restor’d’.<sup>13</sup> Britain’s ‘rights and laws’ are, in this instance, those very rights that the Saxon Alfred is fighting for. Rights which, as the Hermit’s display demonstrates, periodically reappeared throughout Britain’s history, waxing and waning with dynastic fluctuations and were only finally restored by the ascension of William III and the subsequent establishment of the Hanoverian dynasty as the kings of ‘Great Britain’. As Alexander Pettit has suggested, drama of the 1730s repeatedly echoes ‘Bolingbroke’s cyclical theory of history and politics’. This flux in English liberty was directly attributable to the quality of the monarch and the patriotism of his or her followers. Thus Bolingbroke apportioned ‘praise for monarchs attentive to populace and Parliament, and blame for ministers who usurp the power of the constitutional monarch and so undermine the ancient English “liberty”’. The Hermit’s display clearly reflects such assertions. However, as Pettit acknowledges, ‘using Bolingbrokean rhetoric is not the same thing as promoting it’.<sup>14</sup> *Alfred*, a pompous display of self-congratulatory pro-Hanoverian propaganda, is merely ‘using’ Bolingbrokean rhetoric, transposing Bolingbroke’s assertions regarding the ancient lineage of British liberty on to overtly ‘Whig’ models of monarchy. This apparent merging of Whig and Tory political rhetoric does not, of course, suggest total

<sup>11</sup> Phillipson, ‘Politeness and politics’, p. 244.

<sup>12</sup> Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, p. 104.

<sup>13</sup> David Mallet and James Thomson, *Alfred* (London: A. Millar, 1740), p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Pettit, *Illusory Consensus*, p. 166.

agreement amongst early eighteenth-century government, opposition Whig, and Tory commentators. However, the importance of liberty as the cornerstone of the British constitution and the ancient rights of the nation was rarely disputed. As Blair Worden asserts:

Over the eighteenth century the 'Glorious Revolution' came to be widely accepted as the foundation of modern liberty, a fundamental and binding renunciation of arbitrary and non-parliamentary rule. Within that perspective the nervous uncertainties and constitutional conflicts that endured through the 1690s and beyond them were often forgotten. Only after the accession of the Hanoverian dynasty on the death of Queen Anne in 1714 and the failure of the Jacobite rising the following year, perhaps only after the defeat of the further rising in 1745, did the Revolution seem secure and its constitutional gains decisive. Even then dissentient voices remained'.<sup>15</sup>

The Revolution had, in appearances at least, secured liberty for the British people. The problem for party polemicists during the first half of the eighteenth century was not whether liberty had been salvaged but who should maintain it and how? For Bolingbroke, the answer to this question was simple. The ancient constitution would preserve the liberty of the people 'as long as it is respected by the government whose duty it is to put it into practice'.<sup>16</sup> It is this respect for the constitution and the liberty that it provides which repeatedly become the focus of the 'ancient British histories'. Inspired by his glimpse into England's monarchical future, Alfred announces, 'If not to build on an eternal base, / On liberty and laws, the public weal: / If not for these great ends I am ordain'd / May I ne'er idly fill the throne of England'(19). In this way Thomson and Mallet establish not only the ancient origins of British liberty but also assert the role of both monarch and government as protectors of this liberty. There is no doubt that in this instance the appropriate monarch and government model for fulfilling this role were represented as a Hanoverian/Whig alliance. All of the plays discussed in this chapter are, to some extent, concerned with the loss and restoration of national liberty, but not all of the texts impose such an 'establishment' model as the

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<sup>15</sup> Blair Worden, *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity* (London: Penguin Press, 2001), p. 65.

<sup>16</sup> Hammond, *Pope and Bolingbroke*, p. 132.

solution to the problem of protecting the nation's liberty. George Jeffreys's *Edwin*, for example, repeatedly asserts that hereditary right is paramount, 'Let Usurpation, that Eternal Slave / To Fear, the Tyrant's greater Tyrant, dy / Her thirsty Purple deep in native Blood, / The lawful Prince, by daring to forgive, / Asserts the great Prerogative of Heaven, / And proves his Claim Divine'.<sup>17</sup> *Edwin* not only promotes hereditary succession as the key to protecting British liberty but also makes the politically archaic claim that a good king will prove his right 'divine'. The rhetoric of 'liberty' was appropriated for a complex variety of political agenda, from supporters of divine right to the most ardent proponents of the Glorious Revolution and the Revolution Settlement.

Given the variety of political programmes which promised the protection of the nation's liberty, it is important to consider the manifest complications of appropriating a term with such diverse application. Just as Bolingbroke's rhetoric was open for appropriation by the very party it was intended to criticise - Thomson's and Mallet's *Alfred* is just one pro-Whig text to echo Bolingbroke - the rhetoric of liberty could be manipulated to suit various political agenda. As Pettit suggests, many commentators, both contemporary and modern, assume 'a consensus about the meaning of liberty' when in fact 'liberty' was, 'an indefinable term that political writers of all sorts quarrelled about endlessly in the period'.<sup>18</sup> I shall suggest that one important way of defining liberty was through religion. As Murray Pittock has asserted, 'in religious terms, eighteenth-century Britain was already a pluralist society'.<sup>19</sup> In the plays, a respect for liberty is repeatedly related to Protestantism. Playwrights resort to complex analogies in order to transpose contemporary religious conflicts onto ancient historical events. For example, in William Philips's *Hibernia Freed* (1722), the Pagan Danes (Catholics) are contrasted with the Christian Irish (Protestants). The Danes deride the Irish respect for liberty, 'Why have I fought, to what has Conquest serv'd, / But for unlimited despotic Pow'r?'.<sup>20</sup> Protestantism is associated with liberty, Catholicism with tyranny. In Ambrose Philips's *The Briton* (1722), Roman and British paganism are contrasted. As in *Hibernia Freed*, the religious practices of the transgressors of liberty have negative consequences. The Romans pray for success in impeding British liberty, whereas the Britons pray for the

<sup>17</sup> George Jeffreys, *Edwin* (London: Woodward, Walthoe, Peele, and Wood, 1724) pp. 35-6.

<sup>18</sup> Pettit, *Illusory Consensus*, pp. 96-7.

<sup>19</sup> Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain*, p. 128.

<sup>20</sup> William Philips, *Hibernia Freed* (London: Jonah Bowyer, 1722), p. 25.



restoration of their liberty and the re-establishment of their pre-colonial status. In both of these plays, two types of religion are represented. The invaders practise a religion based upon aggression and despotism. Conversely, the native peoples practise a religion that promotes liberty and values freedom. Ambrose Philips and William Philips equate the conventional representation of Catholic states as tyrannous and despotic with a direct threat to British liberty. Protestantism is positioned as the guardian of liberty.

Where respect for liberty is not defined in terms of religious practices, a more political definition is often proposed. For example, in Jeffrey's *Edwin* (1724) maintaining hereditary right is identified as the primary method of protecting liberty. By contrast, in *Hibernia Freed* hereditary right is openly questioned, 'How vain is the Prerogative of Birth: / How useless to be sprung of Royal Blood; / To have Pretence to or deserve a Crown: / Depriv'd of Power to punish or reward! / How soon that Pow'r is lost too well I know' (26). Hill's *Athelwold* is perhaps the play seemingly least directly concerned with liberty. It depicts a stable Saxon Britain under the leadership of a virtuous king whose trust is misplaced. In Hill's play the abuse of trust, particularly a monarch's trust, is the key theme. Treason is the primary threat to the nation's stability and thus the liberty of the people. Liberty is threatened not by an external aggressor, but from within. Athelwold is an anti-hero. His actions are not 'evil', merely misguided. As the play begins, Athelwold's character is widely perceived to be impeccable, 'Bow, but to Heaven, / That made thee not a King, to make thee more; / And stamp't thy soul divinely!'.<sup>21</sup> He is the protector of liberty placed in opposition to the self-interested Oswald. Athelwold's 'mistake' is to fall in love and secretly marry a woman beloved by the King. This relatively minor act of 'treachery' is employed by Oswald to further his own position, and hence, indirectly, Athelwold's actions threaten the 'liberty' of the nation. In Hill's play, liberty is endangered by the actions of individuals. This play differs from the others discussed by making liberty vulnerable to the 'mistakes' of one man.

The threat to British liberty in the majority of these plays is realised through the incursions of foreign invaders. Despite the many parallels that may be drawn between these historical military threats and the fear or anticipation of Jacobite uprising during the first half of the eighteenth century, there was, for some

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<sup>21</sup> Aaron Hill, 'Athelwold' in *The Dramatic Works of Aaron Hill, Esq* (London: T. Lownds, 1760), vol. i, p. 358.

commentators, a more immediate danger, the threat posed to liberty by destructive party politics. As Brean Hammond notes, during the early eighteenth century there was an:

Ideological consensus between the Whigs and Tories, based on acceptance of such essentially Whig notions as the existence of an ancient constitution that must be protected, the legislative sovereignty of the crown, Lords, and Commons, and the post-Revolution establishment. Political conflict was now focused through court and country opposition, which were not about the nature of a desirable political establishment, but were about the forms of corruption that prevented agreed constitutional arrangements from working.<sup>22</sup>

The method of government therefore was not contested, attention had shifted to what Phillipson describes as 'the rage of party', that is, internal conflicts concerning corruption from within the government and the threat posed to the ancient constitution by such scandal-mongering.<sup>23</sup> Hammond suggests that cross-party appropriation of Britain's ancient constitution as a validation of contemporary party ideology resulted in a redirection of the political agenda. Concerns over the structure of the political establishment no longer dominated British politics and attention turned to identifying the party best suited as the guardians of these ancient rights. It is in this way that accusations of corruption became so potent in the rhetorical struggle for political supremacy. Bolingbroke argued that the British constitution protects the nation against the threat of corruption, but only to a limited extent:

Our constitution, indeed makes it impossible to destroy liberty by any sudden blast of popular fury, or by the treachery of a few; for though the many cannot easily hurt, they may easily save themselves. But if the many will concur with the few; if they will advisedly and deliberately suffer their liberty to be taken away by those, to whom they delegate power to preserve it; this no constitution can prevent.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Hammond, *Pope and Bolingbroke*, pp. 94-5.

<sup>23</sup> Phillipson, 'Politeness and politics', p. 244.

<sup>24</sup> Armitage (ed.) *Bolingbroke*, p. 112.

As Worden asserts, the number of MPs offered 'preferment' had steadily grown since the Restoration and, 'the demand that office-holders be disqualified from parliament acquired a lasting prominence'.<sup>25</sup> Fears over the increase in numbers of parliamentary placemen, particularly since the ascendancy of Robert Walpole during the 1720s meant that, 'corruption came to seem the principal threat to liberty. Bribery appeared endemic to the post-Revolutionary political culture'.<sup>26</sup> Bolingbroke's call to 'fence in' the British constitution and protect it 'against the beasts of the field and the insects of the earth' was not a unique one. However, it was not only opposition commentators who perceived party politics to be a threat to the constitution. As Pettit asserts, 'Revolution principles are clear and incontrovertible statements against "parties" (or for "liberty"); a true believer in the Hanoverian monarchy is perforce a believer in these principles; therefore, anyone professing support for the Hanoverian monarchy must endorse a political model founded on the absence of factious parties'.<sup>27</sup> It is in this way, Pettit argues, that Bolingbroke is able to uphold the principles of the 1688 Revolution yet criticise the apparently devoutly Hanoverian Walpole, who, 'by dint of his hostility to Bolingbroke's opposition, becomes the enemy of the Revolution and, even, of the Hanoverians'.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, just as liberty was established cross party as the fundamental right of all Britons, factionalism was unequivocally rejected, identified as the primary threat to liberty. Factions spawned self-interest, and self-interest, directly opposed the notion of an all-encompassing liberty, the protection of which concerned all Britons. As Hammond suggests:

It is characteristic of factions that they substitute private for public good. They are promoted and manipulated by unscrupulous men for their own ends, and their existence is an index of the corrupt state of society. Dishonest ministries will promote factions in order to destroy the concerted criticism which alone can bring them down.<sup>29</sup>

Factionalism therefore prevents the overthrow of a self-interested ministry. The threat posed by factionalism is reflected explicitly in the plays about ancient British history.

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<sup>25</sup> Worden, *Roundhead Reputations*, p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> Worden, *Roundhead Reputations*, p. 67.

<sup>27</sup> Pettit, *Illusory Consensus*, pp. 96-7.

<sup>28</sup> Pettit, *Illusory Consensus*, p. 97.

<sup>29</sup> Hammond, *Pope and Bolingbroke*, p. 133.



In *The Briton* Ambrose Philips depicts a country torn by internal division. The success of the Roman invaders is due entirely to the disunity of the British clans. As Vanoc begins to unite these disparate groups against their common enemy, the Roman tribune Valens warns, 'know this strict alliance, sought by Vanoc, / Unites three bordering nations in his cause'(10). Vanoc's enemies fear that the 'Trinobants', traditional allies of the treacherous Queen Cartismande, herself allied to the Romans, will not 'stand against this formidable union' (10). In *Hibernia Freed* the bard, Eugenius, observes, 'Fatal Disunion and intestine Strife / Have render'd us a Prey to foreign Pow'r' (2). It is not only the insatiable greed of the Danes that has led to the Viking invasion of Ireland, but the Irish people have brought subjugation upon themselves, 'The People's Crimes have drawn this Vengeance down, / Which the King's Virtue only can remove'(3). In this way these plays suggest that factionalism was responsible for these historic losses of liberty. Modern Britons should observe and take heed of these anti-faction warnings.

Jeffreys's *Edwin* further supports Hammond's assertion. The play opens with the funeral of Caduan, former king of Britain whose country was torn apart by the late usurper Elfrid and the factionalism of the disloyal Tudor. The action follows Edwin, as he discovers that he is *not* the son of Caduan. Edwin, who is in fact Elfrid's son, was swapped at birth with Leolin, Caduan's real son and true heir to the British throne, who by the start of the play is Edwin's prisoner. It is Tudor, whose disloyalty to Caduan was merely a pretence designed to ensure the safety of Leolin, who eventually reveals the truth. The old King's lack of self-interest in giving up his own son in order to ensure the downfall of the usurper by guaranteeing the rightful succession demonstrates the way in which self-denial can restore liberty lost through faction. Tudor's 'false faction' ensures the success of the plan. In reality it is Tudor's loyalty to the rightful dynasty, his protection of the heir to the throne, that re-establishes dynastic order and national unity.

Aaron Hill takes this notion further and asserts the need for patriotism alongside party unity. Writing in 1731 of his forthcoming play, *The Generous Traitor*, later renamed *Athelwold*, Hill contends:

This being my notion of the *modern patriotism*, I am in hopes to see it set right, in some *Tragedy*; that *Legion* may be bubbled no longer, by animosity, for *public spiritedness*, on one side, -- and, that *ambition*, on the other, may be

taught to measure itself, and take bounds in proportion to capacity. We should, then, have *humbler factions*, and *abler administration*.<sup>30</sup>

Hill's text is indeed 'a tragedy' that attempts to set 'modern patriotism' right. Before the Saxon King, Edgar, becomes aware of Athelwold's misdemeanours he predicts:

Statesmen shall learn, from thy deserv'd Renown,  
From Honours thou shalt owe my strengthen'd Crown;  
That, where the Monarch is not blind of Heart,  
Affection is the Favourite's wisest Art:  
While, to Self-Servers, due Contempt is shown,  
Let Friends, who seek our Int'rest, find their own (45).

The irony here is of course that Athelwold's behaviour is self-serving. Although it is in the pursuit of love rather than wealth or power, nonetheless, he is accused by his enemies of being a self-interested favourite. Hill's play, rather than merely rejecting factionalism, addresses contemporary causes of party strife. For example, in response to opposition charges of favouritism levied against Walpole, Hill's text suggests that favouritism is justified, provided the right favourite is selected – an assertion which I shall discuss in more detail in the next chapter. Countering repeated demands for an aggressive foreign policy, the text claims that a 'passive monarch' who safeguards his country rather than subjecting it to the ravages of war is just as worthy of the epithet 'Patriot' as a King who achieves success in glorious battle:

Proud of Dominion, yet enslav'd to Fear,  
Kings who love Blood, thro' one long Tempest steer,  
While the calm Monarch, who with Smiles controuls,  
Roofs his safe Empire, and is King of Souls (56).

Despite criticising contemporary party factionalism, Hill's play overtly supports not only the Hanoverian dynasty but also Walpole's policy of peace with Europe – provided that both 'partners' in this governmental relationship demonstrate their

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<sup>30</sup> Aaron Hill, 'To Dear Sir, Sept. 25, 1731', in *The Works of the Late Aaron Hill Esq* (London, 1753), vol.1, p. 77.

intent to protect British liberty. However, as the century progressed and party factionalism deepened, bringing back-bench Whig and Tory rhetoric closer together, the idea of faction as a danger to liberty intensified. Not every text therefore offers a clear representation of 'who' should be the protectors of British liberty. If factionalism, Catholicism and self-interested monarchs were represented as threats to liberty in these plays, what are the characteristics of the ancient protectors of British liberty? What models for the protection of modern liberty were theatre audiences offered for emulation? How did these ancient models relate to contemporary images of modern Britons?

## ii. National Identity

Linda Colley has suggested that after the 1707 Act of Union, an increasingly cohesive British identity became evident in contemporary art, literature and political commentary. This identity united the people of the various regions of Britain through their shared Protestantism and common system of government.<sup>31</sup> As compelling as this notion of ethnic unification appears, did British identity completely suppress national diversity? Murray Pittock has argued that, 'Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Catholic and Episcopalian difference were all to a greater or lesser degree in opposition to a post-1688 British identity which sought out incorporation rather than the multiple kingdom monarchy of the later Stuarts'.<sup>32</sup> Commentators who promoted a unified British identity were, Pittock contends, attempting to suppress the nation's ethnic diversity. Representations of non-English Britons often did little more than re-trench stereotyped regional characteristics. Such representations are more suggestive of exclusion than national unity, particularly given the strident differentiation between the inhabitants of the principalities and the inhabitants of London. As Jim Smyth suggests:

Eighteenth-century Irish, Anglo-Irish, Scottish and North British identities were richly various, complex and contingent, but they had one thing in

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<sup>31</sup> Colley, *Britons*, pp. 10-58.

<sup>32</sup> Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland 1685-1789* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 54.



common: all of them were, in either a positive or a negative way, defined by their relationship to England and the English. The English, on the other hand, were often as indifferent as they were hostile to their 'Celtic' neighbours. It is no accident that the term 'South Britain', ridiculed by the self-proclaimed Englishman Jonathan Swift, never took hold'.<sup>33</sup>

The plays discussed in this chapter offer representations of a variety of these 'Celtic' identities. Stereotyping is, of course, particularly useful for the representation of stock characters on stage, one notable example of which is the Caledonians in Philips's *The Briton*. However, as I have already discussed, the texts share an agenda. The promotion of the nation's responsibility for protecting 'British' liberty, evident in all of these plays, suggests that Colley's assessment of a sense of Britishness emerging from these disparate representations of regional characteristics may be particularly pertinent. How were these identities configured in texts that examined the sources of ethnic diversity, that is, the nation's Celtic and Saxon heritage?

In *The Briton* Yvor, described as the Prince of the Silurians, is a fiercely patriotic Welsh leader, 'He rules an untam'd, mountain race; / A nation walled, on every side, with rocks: / A fiery people; desperate foes to Rome; / Whom dangers only kindle into rage' (10). Yvor is proud of his 'native land: where Romans never enter'd' (18). Wales is depicted as 'by nature fenced; the refuge of the Britons' but, with the death of his betrothed Gwendolyn, the 'youthful progeny' imagined by Yvor to 'oppose/ These strangers, who encroach upon our rights' will never be forthcoming (18-19). As the play closes, Yvor is reduced to a shadow of his initial proud, warlike self. In *Athelwold*, another Welsh prince, Leolyn, shares many of these characteristics but, just as Yvor's character is weakened by the Romans, Leolyn is 'tamed' by the Saxons. Hill's Leolyn is a loyal Welshman and his dress and characteristics are distinct from the Saxons who make up the remaining characters of the play.<sup>34</sup> The arguments used for restricting Leolyn's power are his father's treason against the Saxon King, Edgar, his violence and his rashness:

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<sup>33</sup> Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom, 1660-1800* (London: Longman, 2001), pp. 153-4.

<sup>34</sup> Hill describes Leolyn as 'a Briton', 'Leolyn, because a Briton, ought not to have his habit Saxon; all the rest have the authority of Verstegan's Antiquities, for the ground-work of their appearance; only I need not observe to you, that some Heightenings were necessary, because beauty must be join'd to propriety, where the decoration of the stage, is the purpose to be provided for' (To Mr Wilks, Oct. 28, 1731 in, *The Works* vol. 1, p. 89).

Proud Leolyn!

Thy Father was a Rebel. – Detected Treason

Inverts the vanquish'd Traitor's Property.

And he and his lost Blood are Forfeits, all.

I love the fearless Bravery of free Spirits;

But thy blind fierceness shocks me. (32-3)

Leolyn's 'hot British blood' is restrained by the Saxons. The new 'Welsh' identity imposed by the 'English' is one of timidity, 'He sees me; now, grown tame: an humble suff'rer! / And, while he holds my lands, neglects my blood'.<sup>35</sup> Just as Hill's Leolyn talks in bitter tones of his subordination to Edgar, Philips's Yvor detests the attempted Roman incursion of his homeland. In Jeffreys's *Edwin* ethnic identities are blurred. Leolin is the true heir, son of the deposed Saxon King, swapped at birth with the titular hero Edwin, son of the usurper Elfrid. Leolin is therefore not actually Welsh and it is merely his name that suggests his heritage not his behaviour or his rhetoric. This is a distinct difference between Jeffreys's Welsh hero and the Welsh heroes of the other texts. What unites the other Welshmen is a love of their 'homeland'. The mountains of Wales are repeatedly described with fondness and depicted as an insurmountable barrier to invaders. Leolin does not demonstrate such ardent pride.

Despite their overt nationalism, these Welsh princes aim to increase their power by marrying Saxon or Briton nobility. Yvor is betrothed to Gwendolen. Leolyn's sister was intended as the King's bride, and Leolyn himself aims to marry Oswald's niece, Ethelinda. In Jeffreys's *Edwin*, Leolin is in love with Adeliza – Tudor's daughter beloved by Edwin. The failure of all of these love matches suggests the failure of unification between 'England' and Wales. Eighteenth-century Britons, Pittock suggests, identified Wales, as 'the original British nation' - the modern Welsh were 'the remnant of the Celtic Britons driven out of England by the Saxons'.<sup>36</sup> Intermarriage is not a route for the integration of national identities. However, key aspects of 'Welsh' identity are obvious elements of modern British self-perception, 'the idea of the Britishness of Wales was by no means an alien one, and indeed among

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<sup>35</sup> Hill, *Athelwold*, pp. 35-40. In Jeffreys's *Edwin*, Leolin is the captive of the King of Britain, and although his cultural background is not mentioned, his name suggests the same Welsh link.

<sup>36</sup> Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain*, p. 13.

the Anglophone political classes it is hard to discern the notion of Welsh national difference at all'.<sup>37</sup> National pride, personal integrity, and love of liberty, all clearly suggest common factors in regional versions of Britishness.

Only William Philips's *Hibernia Freed* depicts the Irish, a fact that the dedication to Henry O'Brien, Earl of Thomonde, is self-reflexive about, 'Tho' the Histories of Ireland are not writ in such a manner as to intice many Readers, (a Misfortune however, not particular to that Nation) yet none are ignorant that your Lordship is lineally descended from the Monarchs of it'. As Jim Smyth asserts, the Irish were repeatedly characterised by the English as 'inferior, lazy, feckless and warlike'.<sup>38</sup> However, in this text, the nobility of the Irish Christians is compared with the barbarous nature of the heathen Danes, 'what is so noble as to free one's Country from Tyranny and Invasion?'(53). United against a common foe, despite some factionalism, the Irish clans join to defeat the Danes. Having overthrown their invaders, the Irish are offered two versions of a future colonisation. The first is declared by Turgensis the Danish leader:

I foretell,  
Another Nation shall revenge my Rath,  
And with successful Arms invade this Realm.  
And if Hereafter be, and Souls can know,  
And taste the Pains which Mortals undergo;  
Mine shall rejoice to see thy land subdu'd,  
And Peasants Hands with Royal Blood embru'd;  
Then shall I laugh at Hell's severest Pain,  
And scorn the Tortures all thy Priests can feign. (57)

This apocalyptic version of the English colonisation of Ireland is countered by Eugenius's vision of:

Another Nation, famous through the World,  
For martial Deeds, for Strength and Skill in Arms,  
Belov'd and blest for their Humanity.

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<sup>37</sup> Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain*, p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom*, p. 138.



Where Wealth abounds, and Liberty resides,

...

They shall succeed, invited to our Aid,

And mix their Blood with ours one People grow. (57)

O'Brien's fatalistic acceptance of Eugenius's overtly positive premonition of an English 'invasion' of Ireland, 'Whatever Changes are decreed by Fate, / Bear we with Patience, with a Will resign'd. / Honour and Truth pursue, and firmly trust, / Heav'n may at last prove Kind, it will be Just', suggests an Anglo-Irish interpretation of the subjugation of Ireland (57). As Jim Smyth asserts, until the late seventeenth century the survival of Irish Protestants was dependent upon 'the English connection and English identity'.<sup>39</sup> However, as the military threat posed by the Catholic Irish waned, a 'Protestant appropriation of Irishness' developed alongside a 'sense of a privileged joint proprietorship in unique Saxon liberties'.<sup>40</sup> In *Hibernia Freed* Irish identity is aligned with English identity yet retains a sense of its own distinct historical origins.

This interpretation of the Irish heroes as overtly Anglo-Irish suggests that Turgensis's version of the English subjugation of Ireland echoes Catholic interpretations of English control. Characterised by their brutality and immoral religious practices, controlled by a demonised leader with a strong desire for absolute power and no respect for his devotees, do the Danes demonstrate the degeneracy of the Catholic Irish? Smyth goes on to suggest that, as they came to think of themselves as 'the Irish nation', Irish Protestants began to appropriate the Gaelic past'.<sup>41</sup> Philips clearly appropriates Gaelic history in order to glorify the claimed ancestor of his patron and firmly define ancient Irish heroes as the forefathers of modern Anglo-Irish Protestants. This anglicisation of ancient Irish history echoes Pittock's assertion that, 'English enthusiasm for Britain had been (and up to perhaps 1770 entirely remained) of a firmly imperialist cast, being linked to foundation-myth-derived claims of sovereignty and hegemony'.<sup>42</sup> In terms of a British national identity, the Anglo-Irish, like the Welsh, are represented in the plays by their desire for liberty, and sense of national pride, characteristics that can easily be attributed to an homogenous 'British' identity rather than the individualistic and often caricatured regional identities.

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<sup>39</sup> Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom*, p. 138.

<sup>40</sup> Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom*, p. 138.

<sup>41</sup> Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom*, p. 142.

<sup>42</sup> Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain*, p. 56.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the degree of Irish and Welsh representation in these plays, there is no representation of Scottish heroes. In *The Briton* the Caledonians side with the Romans against the Britons. They are excluded from the label of 'Briton' and are represented as heathen brutes, easily overcome by the superior military skill of the Britons. Described as, 'A swarm of Caledonians; huge-limb'd warriors; / Who wield, with sinewy arm, a deadly sword' (6), these men are represented in a way which closely corresponds to the stereotype commonly ascribed to their nation.<sup>43</sup> This of course raises a number of questions. Why were plays representing ancient Scottish heroes not produced on the London stage when so many plays concerning English, Welsh and, to a lesser extent, Irish history were? The simple answer may be that any positive representation of Scottish heroes would be considered by audiences (and, particularly post-1737, the censor) to demonstrate Jacobite sympathies irrespective of political or even apolitical agenda. An alternative response to this question could lie in the diverse interpretations of the 1707 union. As Pittock observes, 'Even those who were its [the Union's] supporters were conscious of its dual interpretation: in Scotland, a partnership; in England, possession'.<sup>44</sup> This dual interpretation could be seen as obstructive to dramatic representations of Scottish historical heroes on the London stage. If the English identified Scotland as a 'possession' plays which took as their focus Scottish nationalism would be somewhat misplaced on the London stage.<sup>45</sup>

Alongside this intermingling of regional Irish, Welsh, Scottish and national, British identities, there is a fluidity of terminology that pervades a number of these texts. The terms Briton and British are repeatedly juxtaposed. This diminishes the discrete differences between the ancient Britons and the modern British. The terms Briton and British become interchangeable. In Thomson and Mallet's *Alfred*, the peasant Corin exclaims, 'just Heaven forbid, / A British man should ever count for gain, / What villainy must earn. No: are we poor? / Be honesty our riches. / Are we mean, / And humbly born? The true heart makes us noble' (9). Clearly this proud characterisation of Anglo-Saxon virtues is made with explicit reference to the 'modern' Britons of the audience. Corin's sentiment is aligned with the characteristics already identified as particularly modern British: honesty, humility, nobility and an abhorrence of self-interest. His words act as a reminder to the audience of the qualities

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<sup>43</sup> For examples of eighteenth-century representations of the Scottish characteristic see Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom*, pp. 153-5.

<sup>44</sup> Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain*, p. 59.

<sup>45</sup> This is a subject which clearly requires research beyond the limits of this thesis.

of 'Britishness' not only by demonstrating the cultural heritage, the antiquity of such national characteristics but by explicitly conflating this stereotype with a modern term. A similar reference is made in the prologue to Jeffreys's *Edwin* written by Lewis Theobald, 'The Heroes Blood still runs in British Veins. / Of Our old Virtue there we stand possest; / Brave, when most cool; unconquer'd tho' deprest'. Theobald draws a direct link between eighteenth-century Britons and the ancient Saxons of the play. In the prologue to *The Briton* the link between ancient Britons and modern Britons is made, again, not only through their shared heritage but also through equivocation, 'Britons, you'll see, when Vanoc comes before ye, / The love of Freedom is your ancient Glory'. Taken quite literally, ancient Britons will be seen on stage, demonstrating to modern 'Britons' their love of freedom.

Do the representations of Welsh and Irish heroes in these texts counter recent critical arguments for a cohesive British identity? A number of these texts directly link positive characteristics of ancient British ancestors with models for the modern custodians of British liberty, eighteenth-century Britons, to emulate. These seemingly opposed approaches are not mutually exclusive. What is important is the proposal that all Britons play a role in safeguarding their own liberty. Welsh, Irish, Scottish, English, share responsibility for maintaining British liberty. For example in *The Briton* Philips looks beyond the history of his text and points forward to the Saxons, 'Unpolish'd – greatly Rude, Strangers to Luxury, - and Servitude, / Reviv'd the British Manliness of Soul, / That spurns at Tyranny, nor brookes Controul'. The Saxons are the 'restorers' of British liberty and revive the desire for cultural freedom, eroded from the Britons by centuries of Roman occupation. They rekindle 'British Manliness', reinstating Britishness. In these plays, the varied regional characteristics of our ancient ancestors are distinct yet conform to a broadly 'British' identity. In Philips's play this 'British' identity encompasses the Saxon and Celtic 'manliness of soul'. Is the representation of manliness as a key element of British identity echoed in other ancient British history plays?

In relation to eighteenth-century attitudes towards manliness Michèle Cohen has argued:

Politeness and conversation, though necessary to the fashioning of the gentleman, were thought to be effeminising not just because they could be



achieved only in the company of women, but because they were modelled on the French. The question is, could men be at once polite and manly?<sup>46</sup>

Clearly, the men of the ancient British history plays demonstrate an heroic manliness. But what is more significant is the way in which this manliness is characterised as particularly British and the role women play in civilizing these manly men. Cohen asserts, 'the English saw themselves as a nation with a sullen and uncommunicative disposition'.<sup>47</sup> In the plays about ancient British history this taciturn aspect of Britishness is tempered by the presence of women. Cohen observes:

The association of politeness with France had been an abiding problem for the English, sincerity, especially unpolished, resonated with echoes of a proud national ancestry, the ancient Briton'.<sup>48</sup>

In order to establish a clear definition of British men as inheritors of the masculine qualities of their ancient ancestors yet demonstrating the social 'politeness' required of modern men, these plays must negotiate an appropriate level of 'polite conversation'.

Eloquence is a key theme. In *Athelwold*, interaction with women leads the hero to practice 'eloquence' as a form of persuasion employed against the best interests of linguistically naive men and women. Ethelinda is duped by Athelwold's protestations of love:

Such was the false, the artful Eloquence,  
That lur'd me to my Ruin my heart,  
Instructed by Distress, can now read Meanings.  
Who, that is new to Passion, cou'd believe,  
That this fair Picture, of thy faded love,  
But proves, thou lovs't another. (42)

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<sup>46</sup> Michèle Cohen, 'Manliness, Effeminacy and the French: Gender and the Construction of National Character in Eighteenth-Century England' in, Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen (eds.), *English Masculinities 1660-1800* (London: Longman, 2001), p. 47.

<sup>47</sup> Cohen, 'Manliness, Effeminacy and the French', p. 49.

<sup>48</sup> Cohen, 'Manliness, Effeminacy and the French', p. 60.

Ethelinda was uneducated in such courtly arts until she is seduced by Athelwold. Leolyn is also exposed to such rhetoric from Athelwold and the linguistically manipulative Oswald. Indeed Oswald conducts all of his business through duplicitous rhetoric. He schools Athelwold to abandon his trademark manly heroism and instead to, ‘Dissemble your Concern – and I will move him / To stir in your Behalf, and reconcile you / To the King’s Pardon’ (35). In direct contrast with Hill’s earlier version of the history, Ethelinda, Athelwold’s rejected lover, and Elfrid, his wife, are represented as idealistically virtuous women. Elfrid refuses Edgar’s advances, vowing never to marry him, even if Athelwold should die. At no point is Ethelinda criticised for succumbing to her passion for Athelwold. It is not ‘women’s conversation’ that has corrupted Athelwold, rather an experience for which he is unprepared, the fickleness of his own heart, ‘The barb’rous Elegance of Man’s soft Art, / To cheat believing Innocence! – E’er long / Thy Elfrid, the resistless Charmer! – She! / Will hear thee poorly urge the same Excuse, / When some third Fool believes thee’ (58). Women’s conversation teaches Athelwold too late that he cannot act purely on natural instinct and retain his honour when it comes to matters of the heart. Love and war require very different modes of conduct.

In *The Briton* Gwendolyn, another model of feminine virtue, is contrasted with Cartismande whose ‘conversation’ has lured first Caradoc and then Vanoc to her bed and, to their destruction at the hands of the Romans. Unlike Hill’s Athelwold and Leolyn, the heroic Britons are already masters of ‘women’s conversation’. They combine politeness with manliness, demonstrating both modesty and heroism. Commending the hero Ebranc, Vanoc exclaims, ‘Thy modesty shall do thee no disservice: - / It is a virtue, of the growth of Britain. - / Boasters, and Sycophants, come from abroad’ (21). It is the Romans who ‘have the Art to glos the foulest Cause’ and are portrayed as the corrupting force in terms of linguistic manipulation or ‘eloquence’ (34):

Valens: ‘Did not the Romans civilize you?’

Vanoc: ‘No! - / They brought new Customs, and new vices over; / Taught us more Arts, than honest Men require; / And gave us wants, that nature never gave’

Valens: ‘We found you naked: -

Vanoc: ‘And you found us free!’ (35-6)

Whereas, in *Athelwold*, Saxon women are corrupted by men's manipulation of language, in *The Briton*, British freedom is threatened by Roman linguistic artifice. This might be taken to suggest that in terms of language, Celts rather than Saxons demonstrate the moral integrity required of protectors of liberty. However, this integrity can also be read as naivety. Understanding the power of language without succumbing to such artifice is a lesson which these Britons seem yet to have to learn. They need to acquire what Michael Mangan has described as 'mercantile masculinity', a masculinity that although 'polite, civilised and socialized' retains the linguistic control required for commercial success.<sup>49</sup> Conversely, In *Hibernia Freed* the destructive power of language is openly demonstrated. Sabina is reprimanded for 'talking' to the Danes; her outbursts, although honest and virtuous, are a direct threat to what small degree of liberty is still enjoyed by the colonised Irish. In this instance, women's conversation is deemed inappropriately confrontational. This is further compounded when the men dress as women in order to infiltrate the enemy camp and attack the Danish leaders. Their actions, despite being somewhat underhand, and reminiscent of a stereotypically Celtic mode of defence, are upheld as heroic.<sup>50</sup> However, the ease with which the Danes are duped by the Irish clearly demonstrates the dangers of succumbing unreservedly to women's conversation.

National identity is therefore dependent upon a variety of influences. Regional characteristics are, in these plays, distilled to heroic manliness tempered, on occasion, by women's influence, thus making the characteristics of ancient British ancestors more palatable to a modern, 'polite' audience. With the exception of the representation of the Scots in *The Briton*, what Smyth identifies as a xenophobic prejudice towards 'domestic foreigners' and Pittock describes as the people's 'more xenophobic hatred towards their fellow countrymen than to the French enemy' is not discernible in these plays.<sup>51</sup> However, this observation is not intended to counter the assertions of Smyth and Pittock regarding the fragmentation of British identity but rather to suggest that these texts attempt to elide this cultural division. Instead of recapitulating the established differences perceived as inherent in the various

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Mangan, *Staging Masculinities: History Gender, Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 166.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Smyth's analysis of xenophobic representations of Welsh, Scottish and Irish characteristics in Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom*, pp. 153-5.

<sup>51</sup> Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom*, p. 155; Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain*, p. 55.



'national' cultures of eighteenth-century Britain, in these plays an attempt is made to overcome such differences in order to create a composite British identity; an identity the origins of which are firmly rooted in Britain's ancient history and the ancient heroes of the nation. Xenophobia, however entrenched in British society, receives a gloss in these texts, which permits a universal call to modern Britons to recognise their duty to protect British liberty. A duty not merely defined in terms of moral responsibility but handed down through generations of 'Britons', the inheritance of a nation irrespective of its internal factions and divisions. This gloss is effective not only in diffusing xenophobic prejudice, but also in challenging preconceptions of gender difference. It is not only the men who must take responsibility for their freedom. British women are important beneficiaries of this national inheritance and must play their part in its protection. If women's guardianship of liberty is not equal to that of their male counterparts, then their role is important at least as a reminder to men of their social responsibility. Whatever gender, whatever nationality, all Britons are responsible for protecting British liberty.

### iii. Parliament and the Protectors of Liberty

National identity therefore is closely linked to national history. This connection is strengthened linguistically by the interchangeable use of the terms Briton and British. Although national history is important in defining national identity, a link must be established between the ancient and the modern. Hence, Celtic and Saxon manliness is softened and updated by the impact, sometimes positive, sometimes negative, of women's conversation. Similarly, commentators such as Bolingbroke attempted to draw parallels between modern and ancient modes of government. As Brean Hammond has noted, Bolingbroke's assessment of Britain's 'ancient liberty' points towards Parliament's origins in the Anglo-Saxon Wittena Gemote.<sup>52</sup>

Having argued that these texts go some way towards rejecting contemporary xenophobic tensions among the English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish, can we argue that the plays support Colley's assertion that 'Parliament fostered national unity'?<sup>53</sup> Bolingbroke identifies the Wittena Gemote as precursor to the British parliament. To

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<sup>52</sup> Armitage (ed.) *Bolingbroke*, p. 115.

<sup>53</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p. 52.

some degree the British Parliament, idealised as a privileged inheritance from the ancients, promotes a sense of unity within the nation. Colley suggests that:

After 1707, virtually every part of the island had a nearby peer who sat in the House of Lords and/or sent representatives to the House of Commons. And though Wales, Scotland and northern England were badly under-represented in comparison with the south, in practice the system worked more equitably than it appeared. Wealthy and influential men from the less favoured regions frequently got themselves elected for seats in the more abundantly represented regions, and in this indirect way their localities obtained a voice at Westminster'.<sup>54</sup>

By ensuring that even minority voices could be heard, the British parliament, according to Colley, brought the nation's regional factions together, uniting the various countries of Britain under one constitution. She identifies a 'cult of parliament', which 'became an increasingly important part of elite attitudes, and a vital part of elite patriotism' but was 'not confined to the landed classes who manned it'.<sup>55</sup> Colley further asserts that, 'Parliament's importance in Britain distinguished its government from that existing in almost every other European state. By the early 1700s, most comparable institutions had ceased to meet'.<sup>56</sup> British superiority was confirmed by the uniqueness of their mode of government:

The knowledge that the institution they served was different, that it was efficient by the standards of the time not obstructive, and that its scope and importance were actually increasing, reassured British patricians of their polity's superiority and by implication their own.<sup>57</sup>

However, despite Colley's compelling argument, such a vision of national 'unity' confirmed by the polity's superiority is not supported by the dramatic histories of 'ancient Britain' discussed in this chapter. These texts, as I have already suggested, reflect the concerns of commentators such as Bolingbroke who identified 'party

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<sup>54</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p. 52.

<sup>55</sup> Colley, *Britons*, pp. 53-4.

<sup>56</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p. 53.

<sup>57</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p. 53.

politics' and its inherent factionalism, as the greatest threat to Britain's political stability and to the liberty of the British people. As Blair Worden suggests:

Under the later Stuarts as under the early ones, political conflict had been largely about the balance of power between Crown and parliament. Now parliament – or at least the frontbenchers and their henchmen – could seem the Crown's ally against the nation.<sup>58</sup>

Parliament, the supposed check on the crown's behaviour, becomes its ally. Power is firmly ensconced in this elitist group by patronage, 'By bestowing offices ("places" or "preferment") and bribes and lands on MPs it could undermine their independence and "corrupt" them. The demand that office-holders be disqualified from parliament acquired a lasting prominence'.<sup>59</sup> Concerns regarding the integrity of statesmen are reflected in the ancient history plays. In *Edwin*, Morvid, governor of Edwin's castle, observes, 'You Statesmen are so shrewd in forming Schemes! / But often to secure some trivial Point, / And answer ends as little wise as just! / Such, Children are ye, busy, nice and anxious, / To raise a Bawble, Paper Edifice, / That by its own flight Make betray'd to Ruin, / Wants not a Breath of Air to puff it down!' (21). Gomel, chief minister to Edwin, is corrupt, willing to support whichever side looks more likely to retain or regain power. To an extent, his unpredictability makes him dangerous. Reward, therefore, was seen by some 'as the necessary instrument of national stability'.<sup>60</sup> Payment secures obligation. However, others saw such high profile 'degeneracy' as a national problem. In *Athelwold*, degeneracy is demonstrated by a national hero who acts against the King, thus breaking bonds of loyalty and friendship. Athelwold, Edgar's favourite, turns against his patron and abuses his position of trust, an action both unmanly and un-British. Bolingbroke argues:

A wise and brave people will neither be cozened, nor bullied out of their liberty; but a wise and brave people may cease to be such: they may degenerate; they may sink into sloth and luxury; they may resign themselves to a treacherous conduct; or abet the enemies of the constitution, under a

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<sup>58</sup> Worden, *Roundhead Reputations*, p. 67.

<sup>59</sup> Worden, *Roundhead Reputations*, p. 67.

<sup>60</sup> Worden, *Roundhead Reputations*, p. 154.



notion of supporting the friends of the government: they may want the sense to discern their danger in time, or the courage to resist, when it stares them in the face.<sup>61</sup>

The self-interested behaviour of degenerate men such as Athelwold is a direct threat to liberty and such degeneracy is, in eighteenth-century terms, promoted and endorsed by Parliament and party politics.

Walpole's refusal to confront England's enemies, his preference for treaty making and securing peace, Worden suggests, was judged by the opposition to confirm this sense of national degeneracy, 'Corruption, tyranny and weakness abroad were judged to go together'.<sup>62</sup> Again this is echoed in the plays with the assertion that war is a manly, and therefore a peculiarly British pursuit, 'War in a distemper'd State like ours / Lets out ill Blood; 'tis Exercise, 'tis Health' (8). Albert's words echo Bolingbroke's assertion that, 'a free people may be sometimes betrayed; but no people will betray themselves, and sacrifice their liberty, unless they fall into a state of universal corruption: and when they are once fallen into such a state, they will be sure to lose what they deserve no longer to enjoy'.<sup>63</sup> Liberty is to be fought for, any corrupt state that fails to protect its liberty, deserves to lose it. Parliament fails to address these issues of corruption; it is reliant on institutionalised dishonesty and degeneracy. However, it was difficult for commentators to argue against the factionalism endemic to parliament without becoming implicated in that same degeneracy. What was needed was a model of idealised national identity for which the protection of British liberty was paramount. This predominantly male, but as I shall suggest in a later chapter, sometimes female model combined manliness with the tempering qualities of politeness and public-spiritedness. Incorruptible by the degeneracy of parliament and immune to the lure of preferment, this model became known as the 'patriot' and, as Worden suggests, 'gave legitimacy to opposition to the government':

Like 'country', the term 'patriot' shifted the balance of ethical authority away from the Crown and court. Patriots, like the country party, represented the community at large: the ministries they attacked, corrupt and unprincipled,

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<sup>61</sup> Armitage (ed.) *Bolingbroke*, p. 111.

<sup>62</sup> Worden, *Roundhead Reputations*, p. 168.

<sup>63</sup> Armitage (ed.), *Bolingbroke*, pp. 111-12.

were the true sources of faction, division, instability. All definitions of patriotism agreed that the patriot was ‘impartial’, above ‘party’ and ‘party spirit’.<sup>64</sup>

The patriot offered a perfect model of national identity, embodying all characteristics that were necessary for the successful protection of national liberty. As the Hermit in *Alfred* suggests:

When guardian laws  
Are by the patriot, in the glowing senate,  
Won from corruption; when th’ impatient arm  
Of liberty, invincible, shall scourge  
The tyrants of mankind – and when the Deep,  
Through all her swelling waves, shall proudly joy  
Beneath the boundless empire of thy sons. (17)

To some extent by successfully restoring liberty once lost, the patriot removes the duty from the shoulders of *all* Britons. With patriots in parliament, liberty was protected with the dual security of patriotism and the constitution, and could not be ‘lost’. The use of the term ‘patriot’ in *Alfred* of course makes an important point, and one that I will consider throughout this thesis. Patriot rhetoric was not limited merely to opposition tracts. Patriotism was appropriated cross-parties, even cross-factions.

This should not completely refute Colley’s claims for a widespread national pride in the British parliament. Despite, as Worden asserts, ‘innumerable writers’ expressing concerns about ministerial corruption and the threat of the seemingly endemic bribery to Britain’s ‘balanced constitution’, the plays repeatedly call on Britons to reflect on their unique position as ‘free men and women’:

From the main land, why are we set apart;  
Seated amidst the waves; high-fenced by Cliffs;  
And blest with a delightful, fertile Soil?  
But that, indulgent nature meant the Britons,

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<sup>64</sup> Worden, *Roundhead Reputations*, p. 168.

A chosen people; a distinguish'd race;  
A nation, independent of the world:  
Whose weal, whose wisdom, it will ever be,  
Neither to conquer, nor to suffer conquest. (20)

Indeed assertions regarding the unique qualities of British liberty are not limited to the ancient British history plays. Texts reflecting upon medieval and later English history, such as those discussed in subsequent chapters also evoke images of incursions and restorations of British liberty. In these plays it is the tyrannies of Rome that threaten national liberty. The restorers of liberty are patriots who, although Catholics, demonstrate characteristics conventionally attributed to Protestants. Equally plays concerned with foreign histories draw upon contrasts between the restrictive Ottoman regime and British political freedoms or, identify parallels between the liberties of ancient Rome and modern Britain. Almost without exception the plays discussed in this thesis represent liberty as a particularly British privilege. A privilege that is frequently associated with the 'uniqueness' of the British constitution. If, as Worden suggests, 'the very frequency of eighteenth-century praises of the English constitution hints at the unease behind them, at the awareness of the frailty and instability of the constitutional balance and of the post-Revolutionary political world that depended on it, such claims are meaningless, merely proof of a deep-seated concern'.<sup>65</sup> However, when coupled with the rhetoric of patriotism that pervades even the earliest of these texts, it is difficult to read such claims as mere 'expression of unease'. Patriots, representative of an idealised version of British identity, were the ideal protectors of a national liberty that was inherited by all Britons from their ancient ancestors. Proof, for the time being, that indeed, as the epilogue to *The Briton* asserts, 'Britons, united, may defy the world!' (19).

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<sup>65</sup> Worden, *Roundhead Reputations*, p. 163.



## Kings, Ministers, Favourites and Patriot Rhetoric

Who Careless sits and nods upon a Throne  
Rules by the Will of Others not his own:  
Of every ill he justly hears the Blame;  
But all the Praise of God his subjects claim

Eliza Haywood, *Frederick Duke of Brunswick Lunenburg* (1729)

The absolute Reign of FAVOURITES is the RUIN of the State...I could bring Numbers of Examples from History to prove it; and the Historians seem to handle no Part of it with so much Pleasure as the Fall of Favourites

*The Norfolk Sting, or, the History and Fall of Evil Ministers* (1732)

The fall of the favourite is a theme that dates back to theatres of the 1590s.<sup>1</sup> Dramatic representations of history from the late sixteenth century to the early eighteenth share a pre-occupation with the favourite and a continuity of predominantly negative language associated with favouritism.<sup>2</sup> The language of favouritism, I contend, has a number of points of contact with the rhetoric of patriotism. This chapter will focus on the ways in which favouritism and patriotism interact in early eighteenth-century history plays. My discussion will begin by looking at a variety of texts that, although not exclusively concerned with favouritism, do engage with the theme. For example, Eliza Haywood's *Frederick Duke of Brunswick Lunenburg* (1729) draws on German history in depicting the difficulties of establishing a patriotic government from the ruins of a ministry embroiled in favouritism and political patronage. William Havard's *King Charles I* (1737) contrasts the monarchical favouritism of Charles with the negative effects of the favouritism of Cromwell. George Sewell's *The Tragedy of Sir Walter Raleigh* (1719) represents one of England's most famous royal favourites as a patriot brought down by the machinations of a corrupt Spaniard. Tobias Smollett's *The Regicide: or James the First of Scotland* (1749) demonstrates the

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<sup>1</sup> Blair Worden, 'Favourites of the English Stage', in L.W.B. Brockliss & J.H. Elliott (eds.), *The World of the Favourite* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 159-183. Worden cites Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* as the earliest example of a dramatic representation of a favourite.

<sup>2</sup> Terms commonly associated with the favourite are, for example, false, ungrateful, unhappy, base, upstart, greedy. Worden argues for a continuity of language from the earliest stage representations of favourites until their demise during the first half of the eighteenth century. See Worden, 'Favourites of the English Stage', p. 159.

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complexities of royal favouritism and the danger of trusting ambitious men. Despite spanning thirty years of dramatic and political activity, the language associated with favouritism in these plays varies little. As with Hill's representation of Athelwold discussed in the previous chapter, the position of royal favourite is a privilege which ambition, love or poor judgement can lead even a patriotic man to abuse. Is favouritism depicted in these plays as un-patriotic? Having assessed the attitudes toward favouritism that these plays promote, I then focus on two plays specifically concerned with the *fall* of the favourite. The anonymous *The Fall of Mortimer* and James Ralph's *The Fall of the Earl of Essex* were premièred within three months of each other in 1731. Both plays respond to current attacks on Walpole the favourite. By drawing upon the shared language of patriotism and favouritism, I will show how these idioms are employed in the plays in a reciprocal debate framing the political actions of Walpole and the Whig administration.

### **i. Favouritism and Patriotism**

By the early eighteenth century the favourite was a well-worn trope, both literary and political. As I.A.A. Thompson has demonstrated, there existed an overwhelming diversity of attributes by which favourites can be categorised.<sup>3</sup> The favourite might be identified in terms of his or her sexual, personal, familial or political relationship with the monarch. It is important to note, however, that some favourites did not gain their position directly from the sovereign. Thompson describes such favourites as 'ministers plenipotentiary...whose position did not originate in the King's choice at all'.<sup>4</sup> Examples of almost all of these types of favourite can be identified in the plays discussed in this chapter. However, whereas Thompson asserts that not all favourites were political, it is, I suggest, the politically active favourite who becomes, and remains worthy, of representation on the stage.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, Blair Worden identifies only two types of favourite represented in the numerous plays discussed in his study. Worden describes the first type of favourite as the Machiavellian 'ruthless statesman',

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<sup>3</sup> I.A.A. Thompson 'The Institutional Background to the Rise of the Minister-Favourite' in *The World of the Favourite*, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Thompson, 'The Institutional Background to the Rise of the Minister-Favourite', p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson identifies the first sixty years of the sixteenth century as the high point of this phenomenon. See 'The Institutional Background to the Rise of the Minister-favourite', p. 14.



the second, as the over-reacher 'whose inevitable doom is as spectacular as his ascent'.<sup>6</sup> Despite the diversity in type of favourite outlined by Thompson, I wish to contend that early eighteenth-century political and literary representations of favouritism are sharply focused on the minister-favourite. Although the plays depict the various types of relationship between favourite and sovereign, all of the favourites - Raleigh, Essex, Mortimer, Athol, and Gundamor - can be identified as 'ministers'. They are all active participants in the nation's politics, advising their monarchs on important issues of state. Thompson identifies the minister-favourite as 'a response to a crisis of government growth, and the attendant, increasing administrative complexity of the state'.<sup>7</sup> It is this 'crisis' and the attendant factionalism and patronage discussed in the previous chapter, that I suggest the medieval and later English history plays are responding to through various interpretations of the role of the minister-favourite. Can all of these 'ministers' be aligned with Worden's two-type description of dramatic favourites? Are they limited either to Machiavellian ruthlessness or the 'inevitable doom' of the over-reacher?

Certainly in terms of early eighteenth-century politics, representations of favouritism are more complex than the stage model proposed by Worden. The relevance of favouritism to politics during the period can be seen most clearly through oppositional responses to Walpole. The print wars of the 1730s saw Walpole attacked for, amongst other things, an alleged disregard of royal prerogative and the concentration of power in an oligarchy of parliamentary placemen.<sup>8</sup> These accusations form the basis for an oppositional attack levied against Walpole on the ground of favouritism. It should be remembered that just as favouritism was a recurrent literary trope, the political corruption associated with favouritism was by no means a theme new to politics in the eighteenth century. The 1730s was not the first decade in which such rhetoric was utilized against a minister.<sup>9</sup> Opposition commentators adopted a method of attack already proven successful by their predecessors; they apportioned

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<sup>6</sup> Worden 'Favourites on the English Stage', p. 161.

<sup>7</sup> Thompson, 'The Institutional Background to the Rise of the Minister-Favourite', pp. 15-16.

<sup>8</sup> See Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, pp. 20-5.

<sup>9</sup> See the wealth of favourites discussed in Brockliss & Elliott (eds), *The World of the Favourite*. Early examples include Robert de Vere (1362-92), favourite of Richard II. Opposition commentators appropriated the history of De Vere as a reflection of Walpole's position as favourite to the Hanoverians. For an example of such parallels see, *The Norfolk Sting, or the history and fall of evil Ministers including the lives of Roger Mortimer, Earl of March and R. de Vere, Earl of Oxford - in covert reference to Sir Robert Walpole* (London, 1732).

blame for unpopular or failed political decisions to the minister-favourite.<sup>10</sup> I do not wish to suggest that accusations of favouritism arose entirely from this political history of minister-favourites, but that the familiar language associated with favouritism provided the opposition with a powerful weapon that became increasingly difficult to contest. Walpole's position, however, was not limited merely to that of a minister-favourite. Walpole secured the favour of the Hanoverians. At the beginning of his career Walpole enjoyed the support of George I and subsequently secured the backing of George II.<sup>11</sup> In addition he also acted as 'patron' to his own band of followers or even favourites. Contemporary cartoons 'repeatedly focused on the bribery and blandishments that characterized election campaigns'.<sup>12</sup> In the anonymous *Ready Money the Prevailing Candidate, or; the Humours of an Election* (1727) folly presides whilst Justice is blindfolded and the throng of monied candidates mingles with the impoverished locals. The caption reflects on the sort of practices Walpole himself was accused of. The foolish voter:

Once paid, struts with the Gold newly put in his Britches,  
 And dreams of vast Favours and mountains of Riches;  
 But as soon as the day of Election is over,  
 His woeful mistake he begins to discover;  
 The Squire is a Member – the Rustick who chose him,  
 Is now quite neglected – he no longer knows him.<sup>13</sup>

Although the system of patronage entrenched in eighteenth-century politics was not Walpole's invention, repeated accusations of his use of benefaction for his own political advancement are not unfounded. Mock-calls for his patronage are frequently

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Queen Anne's 'bed-chamber women', see Rachel Weil, *Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England 1680-1714* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999). For Queen Elizabeth I's array of favourites see Paul E. J. Hammer, 'Absolute Sovereign Mistress of her Grace? Queen Elizabeth I and her Favourites, 1581-1592', in Brockliss & Elliott (eds), *The World of the Favourite*, pp. 38-53. Other infamous examples include Piers Gaveston and of course Roger de Mortimer.

<sup>11</sup> This was itself a careful political manoeuvre. Between 1717 and 1720 George Lewis (later George II) set up a rival court of which Walpole became a part. Having gained the trust of the future king, Walpole set about reconciling George with his father, thus securing his future position without surrendering his place in George I's affections. For a more detailed analysis of Walpole's relationship with George I and George II, and his policies during this period, see J. M. Black, *Robert Walpole and the Nature of Politics in Early Eighteenth Century Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Mark Hallett, *Hogarth* (London: Phaidon, 2000), p. 272.

<sup>13</sup> Anon, 'Ready Money the Prevailing Candidate, or; the Humours of an Election' (1727) in Hallett, *Hogarth*, p. 272.

made in the opposition poetry of the period.<sup>14</sup> In *A Familiar Epistle* (1735), Joseph Mitchell satirises Walpole the patron:

“Then nought will do (You make Reply)  
 “Without some certain Salary,  
 “Some honest, snug, Life-lasting Place –  
 Ay, now SIR, You have hit the Case;  
 And if you’d please to do the Thing,  
*Paulo Majora* how I’d sing!<sup>15</sup>

Walpole’s patronage of the arts is thinly disguised payment for services rendered in the form of good publicity. It is through this sort of corruption, Mitchell’s poem suggests, that Walpole secures his own political position. The favourites represented in the plays are repeatedly seen paying for the services of others and securing followers with grand financial gestures. However, it is not just his purportedly corrupt use of patronage that identifies Walpole as more than merely a minister-favourite. By purchasing parliamentary placemen, Walpole himself selects favourites. The employment of placemen in order to strengthen his political position suggests a shift of power away from the monarch, further than perhaps intended by the Revolution Settlement.

Contemporary representations of Walpole’s combined role as both minister-favourite and, in turn, creator of favourites, clearly demonstrate the negative implications of favouritism. As the anonymous author of *The Norfolk Sting* (1732) asserts, ‘the Absolute Reign of Favourites is always destructive to the People’.<sup>16</sup> Walpole is simultaneously purchased by the Hanoverian court whilst buying his own security in government. Worthy men are refused access to politics because their views conflict with Walpole’s self-interest. In contrast to Walpole’s rapid rise to power, *The Norfolk Sting* promotes steadily earned merit, honours should be awarded only when:

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<sup>14</sup> For example, George Sewell, ‘Walpole’, in *Posthumous Works* (1728); Joseph Mitchell, ‘The Alternative’, in *Poems on Several Occasions* (1732); William Patterson *The Poetical Works* (1728). For a critical discussion of anti-Walpole poetry, see Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Mitchell, *A Familiar Epistle to the Right Honourable Sir Robert Walpole; concerning poets, poverty, promises, places &c.* (London, 1735).

<sup>16</sup> *The Norfolk Sting*, p. 34.



Regard be had to the Quality and Sufficiency of Persons, lest a Publick charge should fall into unworthy Hands: They should rise by Degrees, from little Offices to great: No incapable Person should be admitted by any means. The only way of coming to a Post should be Vertue, Capacity and Diligence, and should not be got without for love or Money.<sup>17</sup>

This overtly anti-Walpole pamphlet focuses on the dangers of favouritism within the administration. Walpole and his followers lack not only the morality necessary for positions of national importance but also the ability to perform such authoritative roles. But is favouritism necessarily restricted to opposition rhetoric such as *The Norfolk Sting*? Can favourites be represented favourably?

J.G.A. Pocock identifies Walpole as the first statesman to impress upon the opposition the belief that his policies *and* personality were undermining the moral structure of society.<sup>18</sup> Cultivating stability through compromise, peace abroad, economic prosperity and low land taxes, Walpole was seen as a threat to the ancient social structure of England and its moral code of chivalry or politeness. Such threats, the opposition contended, would ultimately destroy the nation, either by leaving Britain open to attack from her tyrannous Catholic neighbours or by promoting internal factionalism:

For where unworthy Morals are advanc'd and insufficient Wretches prefer'd above able Persons; where those who have done no Public Services get the upper Hand of those that have; where Miscreants are honour'd, and Publick Thieves are respected like Patriots, there Men of the greatest Goodness and Merit, provided they have Spirit, will be apt to give into Sedition, sometimes to gratify their Revenge.<sup>19</sup>

As I argued in the previous chapter, factionalism was seen as a corruption of the parliamentary system and therefore a direct threat to British liberty. Here, the immorality of those subject to preferment destabilises the system of government to the extent that patriots themselves threaten rather than protect the nation's liberty. In

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<sup>17</sup> *The Norfolk Sting*, p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*, p. 234.

<sup>19</sup> *The Norfolk Sting*, p. 34.

Hubert-François Gravelot's, *The Devil Upon Two Sticks* (1741), Walpole is depicted with a group of ministerial politicians trying to negotiate an area of infested mud-land. Walpole is being carried – precariously balanced on two sticks. His followers are already besmirched by 'mud'. As he attempts to cross the mire unsullied the local villagers are being provided for with drinks and money. The source of these bribes is Britannia whose wealth is being stolen by a pickpocket.<sup>20</sup> In Gravelot's cartoon Walpole is an immoral wretch of the sort who, according to *The Norfolk Sting*, is 'prefer'd above able Persons'. Walpole's status as favourite suggests therefore a tendency to negative interpretations of favouritism in parallel with opposition representations of the minister himself. Morality is a key issue for the history plays, and moral standing is invariably attributed proportionately to demonstrations of patriotism. The plays demonstrate not only the political implications of favouritism, but also its social consequences. 'The ascent of favourites', Worden contends, is 'social as well as political'.<sup>21</sup> Repeatedly the moral implications of favouritism are compared with the altruistic qualities of patriotism. The ideals of liberty and just kingship, so often undermined by the favourite, enemy to 'true born gentry', make him or her the antithesis of the patriot.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the obvious conflict between patriot rhetoric and the language of favouritism, which identifies the patriot as selfless and heroic in contrast to the favourite who is self-interested and cowardly, in the plays of the period the favourite is not necessarily subject to negative representation. Although favouritism is associated with bribery, corruption and self-interest - the antitheses of patriotic behaviour - some plays do represent select historical favourites positively. For example, in *The Tragedy of Sir Walter Raleigh*, Raleigh is depicted as 'an English Martyr' whose presence on stage will 'Shame the Last and Warn the Present Age'.<sup>23</sup> Given the negative connotations of favouritism, how does George Sewell achieve this positive representation? Sewell overcomes his audience's notions of Raleigh, a favourite of Elizabeth, condemned to execution for treason by her successor James I, by emphasising his hero's patriotism:

Jealous of Virtue that was so Sublime,

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<sup>20</sup> For further discussion of Gravelot's *A Devil Upon Two Sticks* see, Hallett, *Hogarth*, pp. 274-5.

<sup>21</sup> Worden, 'Favourites of the English Stage', p. 162.

<sup>22</sup> Worden, 'Favourites of the English Stage', p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> George Sewell, *The Tragedy of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London: John Pemberton, 1719), prologue.

His Country Damn'd His Merit as a Crime.

The Traytor's Doom did on the Patriot Wait:

He Sav'd – and then He Perish'd by the State.(prologue)

Raleigh, although a favourite, acts in the best interests of his country. He is no Machiavellian statesman or 'self-interested' over-reacher. Gerrard observes that, 'Raleigh's close friendship with Prince Henry in his final years in the Tower enabled the Patriots, capitalizing on the identification between the two princes of Wales, to associate Frederick with Raleigh's dreams of imperial expansion'.<sup>24</sup> This somewhat obscure connection between Raleigh and Frederick Lewis does not elide Raleigh's position as a favourite. Indeed, despite this positive representation of Raleigh, Sewell's play does not unreservedly condone favouritism. Contrasted with Raleigh are the 'tribe of kissing Courtiers' (7). These favourites of the Spanish and English courts plot Raleigh's downfall out of jealousy for his position as royal favourite and an ambition to replace him. Sewell re-enforces Raleigh's patriotism by representing his enemies as distinctly un-patriotic. Gundamor uses the pretence of patriotism as a shield to guard himself from accusations of impropriety, 'I will at the last reluctantly submit / A private Injury to the public Good: / For that's the surest Mask for Statesmen's wrongs' (30). Not only is Gundamor unpatriotic but he is also Spanish and a favourite of the Spanish king. In terms of representation of the favourite, Gundamor is the obverse of Raleigh. As a Spaniard Gundamor is at a distinct disadvantage, he is unlikely to reach the levels of 'English' patriotism displayed by his 'national hero' rival. In Sewell's play favouritism and patriotism are not mutually exclusive terms. The favourite is not necessarily consumed by an un-patriotic self-interest. As a patriot Raleigh is a suitable favourite for his queen, his 'vertue, capacity and diligence' have been proven by past deeds. The language of patriotism and the language of favouritism are not therefore placed in opposition. In *Raleigh* favouritism is condoned when bestowed upon a patriot, condemned 'where Miscreants are honour'd'. Gerrard notes that Sewell's play was instrumental in promoting Raleigh's image however, his text predates Walpole's rapid rise to power in the 1720s.<sup>25</sup> Did plays produced during the Walpole era represent patriot heroes whose position as

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<sup>24</sup> Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, p. 157.

<sup>25</sup> Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, p. 158.



minister-favourite does not detract from their morality or, did favouritism – after Walpole’s rise - become exclusively unpatriotic?

## ii. The Favourite and the Sovereign

The representation of the relationship between monarch and favourite is significant for the rhetorical connections that were being forged between patriotism and favouritism. It seems reasonable to contend that the existence of a favourite who exerts political influence would necessarily reflect upon the patriotic reputation of his or her sovereign. Indeed Eliza Haywood’s *Frederick, Duke of Brunswick-Lunenburg* (1729) appears to support this assertion. Haywood’s *Frederick* is a patriotic ‘conduct’ play designed to promote Frederick Lewis, Prince of Wales as Britain’s future patriot king. Her text adopts a highly moralistic tone against monarchs ‘who careless sit and nod’.<sup>26</sup> However, Haywood’s criticism of the monarch is not echoed in other plays of the period. On the contrary, in the relationship between favourite and sovereign, the monarch is rarely represented as culpable for the actions of his or her favourite. The sovereign who ‘Rules by the will of Others’ is repeatedly shielded from criticism. Even those plays most vociferously critical of the favourite are careful to protect the sovereign. The anonymous author of *The History of Mortimer* (1731) is quick to assure readers that, in the lampooned play *The Fall of Mortimer* (1731), ‘Kingly authority is no where traduc’d’.<sup>27</sup> As ‘patriot literature’, it might be thought necessary for these texts to curtail negative commentary on the monarch. It would be difficult for these plays to retain their patriotic agenda whilst openly criticising the sovereign. As I have argued in the preceding chapter and shall discuss further in relation to the Roman and Ottoman plays, the myth of stability that shaped British identity during the first half of the eighteenth century was supported by a belief in the innate patriotism of the national character. Although the monarch was ‘contracted’ to the

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<sup>26</sup> I use the term ‘conduct play’ because Haywood’s text is reminiscent of the increasingly popular genre of women’s conduct books which she later satirised in *The Female Spectator* (1744-1746). In *Frederick*, Haywood sets out an idealised mode of patriotic conduct that, the epilogue suggests, Frederick Lewis should follow in order to rid Britain of political corruption at his anticipated ascension to the throne. For discussion of Haywood’s periodical writing, see Ros Ballaster et. al., *Women’s Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman’s Magazine* (London: Macmillan, 1991); Helene Koon, ‘Eliza Haywood and the *Female Spectator*’, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 42 (1978-9), 43-55.

<sup>27</sup> *The History of Mortimer Being a Vindication of the Fall of Mortimer Occasioned By its having been Presented as a Treasonable libel* (London: J. Millar, 1731), p. 5.

people, overt criticism of the Hanoverians is muted in these plays, even Haywood's attack on monarchs who delegate power to their favourite blames the favourite rather than the King. Despite overtly promoting Frederick Lewis as the 'patriot king' who will rid Britain and the Hanoverian court of the minister-favourite and the corruption inextricably linked with political favouritism, Haywood's play does not dwell on the faults of the administration which allowed favouritism to permeate politics. What is important is the patriotism of Frederick, not the questionable conduct of his predecessors. Unlike Haywood's play, other texts focus not on establishing the patriotism of the monarch which is invariably taken for granted, but on the conduct of the favourite. Even overtly oppositional texts engage with the myth of stability that promoted and bolstered the nation's perception of British superiority. Despite the flaws of the current administration, the British system of government was held to be eminently superior to the shambolic and tyrannical administrations of her continental enemies.

If Haywood's explicitly pro-Frederick and anti-Walpole stance results in a text which demonstrates zero-tolerance of favouritism, how is the representation of the relationship between sovereign and favourite influenced by the political agendas of other texts, both drama and political commentary? A short-lived battle of letters between Benjamin Hoadly, Bishop of Winchester and Bolingbroke presents two versions of the relationship between George II and Robert Walpole. In common with many of the plays we have discussed, and despite the authors' diametrically opposed political affiliations, these letters demonstrate a reluctance to criticise openly the King's actions. Hoadly's pamphlet, *Observations on the conduct of Great-Britain with regard to the Negotiations and other Transactions Abroad* (1729), is an example of hastily written Walpolean propaganda created with the intention of assuaging attacks by opposition commentators. An attempt to defend Walpole's policy of treaty making, the pamphlet was published between the signing of the Anglo-Spanish peace (1728) and the Treaty of Vienna (1731).<sup>28</sup> Hoadly accuses opposition writers who

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<sup>28</sup> In March 1731, in accordance with the Anglo-Spanish peace (1728), the Austrian emperor Charles VI agreed to allow Spain to occupy Parma and Piacenza (Tuscany). The resultant Treaty of Vienna offered Charles British and Dutch guarantees of the Pragmatic sanction – to secure the prior succession to the Austrian Habsburg dominions (Austria, Hungary, southern Netherlands and territories in Italy) in his future children, male or female, rather than in the two surviving children of his brother Joseph I. In addition (a further condition of the Anglo-Spanish peace), British and Dutch commercial considerations required Charles VI to terminate his profitable Ostend Company. See J.M. Black, *The Rise of the European Powers 1679-1793* (London: Edward Arnold, 1990). Hoadly's references to the Treaty of Vienna are based on the publication of the Provisional Treaty (1729).

'endeavour to incense the nation against the Government' of a 'Dangerous and wicked abuse' of their 'Liberty'.<sup>29</sup> Hoadly's aim was to counter opposition claims that because of the restrictions placed upon them by the Anglo-Spanish peace, British squadrons were forced to remain inactive and allow 'depredations committed by the Spaniards upon our Merchants in the West Indies'.<sup>30</sup> His pamphlet offers an examination of 'the most material parts of the Orders given to the Commanders of His Majesty's Squadron employed on the Coast of Spain',<sup>31</sup> which Hoadly claims vindicate the signing of the peace treaty and highlight the decisive response made by the British squadrons to subsequent Spanish hostilities. Hoadly extols the government's policy of diplomacy by praising George II as a patriot unwilling to sacrifice the nation's peace in pursuit of personal glory:

The highest Encomiums and Acknowledgements are due to his Majesty, whose Prudence and Fatherly Tenderness for his People have exalted him to resist the Temptations to which that Desire of Fame, inseparable from generous Minds, might have exposed him; and who, by his Endeavours for establishing a general Tranquillity, has shewn that he prefers the Glory of making his Subjects happy, to that Increase of Reputation which he might have had so fair a Prospect of gaining in the Field.<sup>32</sup>

Hoadly depicts George II not as an uncharismatic and passive monarch but as a patriot hero who forgoes the glory of battle for the sake of his people. The King, like all good patriots, is not self-serving. Hoadly's version of events places the glory of these political treaties firmly at the feet of George II. Although Hoadly frequently refers to 'the government', no overt mention is made of Walpole. Such praise, however, is misplaced for, as most contemporary readers would have realised, it was Walpole's ardent pursuit of diplomacy and avoidance of conflict that prevented George II from leading a British army into battle – a state of affairs which continued until 1743.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Benjamin Hoadly, *Observations on the conduct of Great-Britain with regard to the Negotiations and other transactions abroad* (London: J. Roberts, 1729), p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Hoadly, *Observations*, p. 30.

<sup>31</sup> Hoadly, *Observations*, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Hoadly, *Observations*, pp. 60-1.

<sup>33</sup> In fact, George II openly supported the army (although he did favour compromise and stability in domestic affairs). Given how significant the king's patronage was for Walpole's career, the period of peace from the end of the Spanish war (1728) to the outbreak of the War of Jenkins Ear with Spain (1739) was a significant achievement for the minister. George II did not lead an army until Dettingham



Hoadly's overt praise of the king is therefore covert praise of Walpole's policy. Is this portrayal of the monarch as war-hungry but restrained unique to Hoadly and other writers of pro-Walpole literature?

In his reply to the *Observations* in *The Craftsman* on Saturday January 4<sup>th</sup> 1729, Bolingbroke's criticism of Hoadly's lack of stylistic elegance, foregrounds a more partisan attack on the authenticity of the Bishop's sources. Bolingbroke sees little to redeem the pamphlet; he accuses Hoadly of frequently misusing terminology and completely misunderstanding the military situation. However, he retains in his own reply a regard, albeit less reverential, for the King's conduct. In Bolingbroke's version, Walpole is charged with unpatriotic treaty making and is represented as the self-interested minister-favourite. However, Hoadly's representation of George II as restrained by his own sense of patriotic duty is echoed in Bolingbroke's opposition response. As in the ancient British history plays discussed in the previous chapter, these texts attempt to find a balance between the ancient and modern constitutions. Both writers recognise a need to depict the monarch as heroic and courageous, aligning him with England's ancient monarchical heritage, whilst divesting him of the autonomous rule associated with this heritage. George II becomes at once an embodiment of the heroic qualities of a war-hero such as Henry V and a modern statesman responsive to the diplomacy required of contemporary politicians. The king's patriotism is defined in accordance with the terms of the Revolution Settlement. The British monarch, no longer a claimant of divine right, retains his or her position in contract with the people. To expect the king to go against parliamentary policy would be in breach of the constitution. The monarch's actions, both in pro and anti-Walpole texts, are de-politicised, he is a patriot figurehead. The sovereign's role is primarily one of parliamentary support rather than political action. This de-politicisation of the British monarch transfers to the dramatic representations of the relationship between sovereign and favourite.

In Hoadly's account, Walpole's perceived immorality is displaced by the monarch's overwhelming probity. George II's 'prudence' and 'Fatherly tenderness' towards the nation, his patriotism, suggest that his favourite cannot be deemed unpatriotic. With a 'good' sovereign as his or her patron the favourite himself is necessarily a patriot. This representation of the relationship between sovereign and

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in 1743. See J. Brooke (ed.), *Horace Walpole: Memoirs of King George II* (Harvard: Yale University Press, 1985).

favourite can be seen in Sewell's *Raleigh*. Raleigh asserts in his own defence the noble reputation of his monarch, 'the good Eliza' (50-1) who smiled upon him, is contrasted with James I who did not. Raleigh's moral worth, Sewell argues, is guaranteed by Elizabeth's own patriotism. His execution by James I, the obverse of the Protestant patriot Queen, reinforces Raleigh's position as patriot favourite. Having established the morality of Walpole, Hoadly challenges the integrity of the opposition, 'their real View and Design, is, to foment the divisions between England and Foreign Powers, in Hopes to reap some private Advantage from the calamities into which they endeavour to plunge their country'.<sup>34</sup> Hoadly's political bias is pertinent to my reading of Haywood's *Frederick, Duke of Brunswick-Lunenburg* (1729). Using Frederick Duke of Lunenburg, the prince regent's political predecessor, as an exemplar of patriotic behaviour, Haywood offers Frederick Lewis a dramatic warning of the instabilities inherent in a state dependent upon political patronage.<sup>35</sup> Morality is a focal point in the representation of Frederick as a patriot and the contrasting representations of his predecessor and the court favourites. The play opens with the celebrations surrounding Frederick's election as Emperor of Germany. His predecessor Wenceslaus lead a court of 'warring members, / Each to particular Interests attach'd'.<sup>36</sup> The play focuses on the attempts of the Archbishop of Mentz's envoys to remove Frederick from power before he is crowned. Favourites of the old administration, Waldec and Ridolpho have themselves attempted to sway the election, 'Tho' half the Princes gave their Votes against him. / Like Fate his presence aw'd their best Endeavours, / And hush'd their vain Objections into Silence' (9). Their next and eventually successful plot is the murder of Frederick. Frederick is represented as a patriot king. He is devoid of self-interest, his past deeds and supreme merit 'secure our future Hopes, / Restores this Empire to her former Glory' (4). This is contrasted with Ridolpho's leadership by, 'Obligations, / On Obligations heap'd,...he'll gladly / Embrace th' Occasion to repay past Favours, / And at the same Time make his future Fortune' (14). In *Frederick* not only is the favourite un-patriotic, but any monarch who adopts favouritism as a mode of government is deemed to be failing his or her people. Haywood stops short of suggesting that the Hanoverian patronage of Walpole was unpatriotic. It is the power vacuum left by the death of Wenceslaus and the

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<sup>34</sup> Hoadly, *Observations*, p. 56.

<sup>35</sup> Frederick Lewis was electoral prince of Brunswick-Lunenburg.

<sup>36</sup> Eliza Haywood, *Frederick Duke of Brunswick-Lunenburg* (London: W. Mears & J. Brindley, 1729), p. 4.

subsequent struggle for power by his favourites, over whom Wenceslaus had a precarious control, that destabilize the Empire. However, her text comes close to such a suggestion. Contrary to Hoadly's reading of the relationship between monarch and favourite, in *Frederick*, morality necessitates the rejection of political patronage. Favouritism is corrupt and potentially dangerous to the nation. Allowing those favoured undue and inevitably self-interested political sway leads to extremes of immorality, murder and regicide. For Haywood, the political morality of a nation's government is dependent upon the sovereign's unequivocal rejection of favouritism.

William Harvard's *King Charles the First* (1737), like Haywood's *Frederick*, is concerned with regicide as the consequence of favouritism. Charles I 'by Nature virtuous, tho' misled by Slaves, / By Tools of Power, by Sycophants and knaves,' is only partially responsible for his own downfall.<sup>37</sup> Cromwell is ostensibly opposed to the monarch's use of favouritism, 'Tis not my favour, Bradshaw, but thy Worth / Brings thee to light; thou dost not owe me aught' (23). He criticises the King who, 'lets one Man / Ingross the Offices of Place and Pow'r, / Who with the purloin'd Money of the state / Buys Popularity' (33). However, Cromwell employs placemen and bribes soldiers to strengthen his own political position, 'let those Sums of Money I have order'd, / Be secretly dispers'd among the Soldiers; / It will remind them of their Promises: / Gold is Specifick for the Memory' (26). Privately he confesses to various abuses of power in creating favourites of his own, 'Such are the Tools with which the Wise must work/.../ He is my proper Instrument / To operate on those below my notice' (25). Harvard represents Charles as a reformed man. He is aware of his failings as a sovereign, is clearly repentant, and expressing his regret in patriotic terms, 'spare this luckless Land, / And save it from Misfortune's rugged Hand! / My ev'ry Wish is for its Joys Increase, / And my last Pray'r shall be my Peoples Peace' (35). His concern for his subjects rather than his own welfare is indicative of his patriotism. Conversely Cromwell not only repeats Charles's past errors, but also increases them by purchasing the favour of multiple followers. Cromwell, unlike Charles, is conscious of the power he wields in his use of political patronage. Harvard draws a distinction between the monarch who selects favourites and the minister who purchases followers. Royal favourites have the potential to assist the monarch in his or her patriotic duty. Conversely, the bribery and corruption associated with political

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<sup>37</sup> William Harvard, *King Charles the First, written in imitation of Shakespear* (London: J.Watts, 1737), prologue.



placemen and the purchase of followers is devoid of justification in patriotic terms. Could Havard's play therefore be seen as pro-Hanoverian but anti-Walpole?

Havard's representation of Charles I as a man who understands and regrets his own failings, I suggest, contests this reading of the play as an opposition Whig text. Charles's reformation is represented as pivotal to the future of the Stuart dynasty. Before his execution the king requests an audience with his children. Charles addresses James with a message for the absent Prince of Wales:

King:           Bear him my Blessing, and this last Advice:  
                  .... his Promise, when once given,  
                  Let no Advantage break; nor any View  
                  Make him give up his Honesty to reach it;  
                  Let him maintain his pow'r but not increase it;  
                  The String Prerogative, when strain'd too high,  
                  Cracks, like the tortur'd Chord of Harmony,  
                  And spoils the Consort between King and Subject;  
                  Let him regard his People more than Minister,  
                  Whose Interest or Ambition may mislead him;  
                  These Rules observ'd may make him a good Prince,  
                  And happier than his Father --- Wilt thou *James*  
                  Remember this?

James:          O doubt not, Royal Sir,  
                  Can what my Father says escape my Memory,  
                  And at a time when he shall speak no more (58).

The inference is clear. Infected by his father's renewed patriotism, James (unlike his absent brother, the future Charles II) would 'remember' his last words and given the opportunity rule Britain as the rightful patriot king. Harvard's play, premièred in 1737 thirty six years after the death of James II, draws upon this image of the condemned monarch advising his sons, and extends the message beyond James's lifetime and to the exiled Stuart dynasty. Harvard depicts the English Civil War as a turning point in Stuart understanding of divine right, a promise of the potential glories of future Stuart rule. Charles's patronage of Buckingham, although immoral and unpatriotic, is insignificant in comparison to the levels of favouritism experienced in Cromwell's

commonwealth and subsequent British courts, 'Thus fell Charles! / A Monument of Shame to the present Age --- / A warning to the future' (62). Harvard suggests that Charles's reign was more patriotic than the contemporary administration and that the reinstatement of the Stuart dynasty would recapture this patriotism and probity.

Dramatic representations of the relationship between monarch and favourite are subject to extensive qualification by patriot rhetoric. The inherent immorality of states in which the monarch delegates power to favourites is demonstrated in both *Frederick, Duke of Brunswick-Lunenburg* and *King Charles the First*. However, the political agendas of these two plays lead to two very different interpretations of the relationship between monarch and favourite. Haywood focuses on the difficulty of converting an administration steeped in the corruption of patronage and favouritism. Her hero is clearly an enemy of favouritism. She appropriates the rhetoric of patriotism to stigmatise favouritism as the primary 'sin' to be avoided by the patriot king. Frederick has no favourites; his actions are patriotic and moral. His attempts to expel the self-interested members he inherits from his predecessor are thwarted by his naivety – something that Haywood wishes to arm Frederick Lewis against. Harvard's representation of the monarch's moral position in relation to favouritism falls somewhere between the partisan extremes demonstrated in Hoadly's *Observations* and Haywood's *Frederick*. Harvard excuses Charles's favouritism on two counts. First, he only has one favourite. Second, he is seen to learn from his mistakes and reform his unpatriotic behaviour. Charles was culpable, but in realising his errors and reforming, he validates the credentials of the Stuart dynasty as a patriotic alternative to the favouritism and corruption of the contemporary Whig/Hanoverian alliance.

Even after the resignation of Walpole in 1742, texts continued to attempt to represent the relationship between sovereign and favourite in a way which deflected criticism from the monarch. In Tobias Smollett's *The Regicide: or, James the First of Scotland* (1749), James's choice of the unpatriotic and rebellious Athol as his favourite is excused simply because the two men are related:

I should have found in Athol  
 A trusty Counsellor and steady Friend:  
 And better would it suit thy rev'rend Age,  
 Thy Station, quality, and kindred Blood,  
 To hush ill-judging Clamour and cement

Divided Factions to my Throne, again,  
Than thus embroil the state.<sup>38</sup>

James acted on Athol's 'false professions' (2), not out of gullibility or weakness but due to a belief in honour between kinsmen and an assumption that Athol's age, station and quality would dictate his actions. James's own patriotic code, abused by the machinations of a 'miscreant', led to misplaced trust and the king's untimely death.

Whatever the political agenda of the individual text, patriotism is key to the representation of favouritism. Patriot rhetoric is used to justify the relationship between favourite and sovereign. The sovereign's patriotism defends him or her from accusations of impropriety, or acts as protection against the formation of inappropriate relationships. That the sovereign who condones favouritism can be justified in his or her actions suggests that a carefully chosen favourite such as Raleigh can be of benefit to the nation. Even stridently oppositional texts such as *The Norfolk Sting* identify the possibility of such benefit, 'tis evident Favourites may be the Cause of as much Good as Evil in a Government; and are therefore not hurtful themselves'.<sup>39</sup> Are there any examples of these 'good' favourites in the plays premièred during Walpole's term in office? Can the *minister* who employs favourites be a patriot?

### iii. Representations of Walpole in *The Fall of Mortimer* (1731) and *The Fall of the Earl of Essex* (1731)

The brief critical discussions of the 1731 versions of *The Fall of Mortimer* and *The Fall of the Earl of Essex* have led to a broad consensus among commentators such as Loftis, Goldgar and Bertelsen for the political contexts of these plays. Readings of these plays suggest that their close premières in 1731 were due to a shared political agenda. The themes of a sovereign misled, favouritism bestowed by a queen, the corruption of justice and the policy of treaty making have all been identified as reflections on Walpole's ascendancy and his purported corruption in office.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Tobias Smollett, *The Regicide: or, James the First of Scotland* (London: J. Osorn and A. Millar, 1749), p. 43.

<sup>39</sup> *The Norfolk Sting*, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> See Milton Percival, *Political Ballads Illustrating the Administration of Sir Robert Walpole* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1916), pp. 200-4; Loftis, *The Politics of Drama*, p. 105; Goldgar, *Walpole*



Contrary to existing critical analysis I contend that although these plays have a number of common themes they respond to the political discourse of the early 1730s in disparate ways.

Roger de Mortimer (1287-1330) and Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex (1566-1601) were both political figures whose histories had been appropriated for dramatic representation many times prior to the 1731 versions.<sup>41</sup> Ralph's *Essex* is an adaptation of John Banks's *The Unhappy Favourite; or, The Earl of Essex* (1693), a play that was revived and adapted sporadically during the early eighteenth century.<sup>42</sup> The dramatic lineage of the 1731 version of *Mortimer* is less certain. Lance Bertelsen suggests a number of sources, including Ben Jonson's *Mortimer His Fall*, a fragment published posthumously in 1640 that, Bertelsen claims, was used several times as anti-ministerial propaganda during the eighteenth century. *King Edward the Third* (1691) attributed to, among others, William Mountfort and John Bancroft, is, Bertelsen contends, the most significant source.<sup>43</sup> The titular 'heroes' of these plays offer contrasting versions of minister-favourites. In accordance with the definitions of favourites proposed by Thompson and Worden, Mortimer is repeatedly represented as a Machiavellian statesman. Both historically and dramatically he is characterised as a ruthless self-interested minister-favourite. In Ralph's *The Fall of the Earl of Essex*, Essex is clearly not a self-interested favourite. His actions are not intended to, and nor do they, result in monetary gain or an increase in his standing at court. Essex may be defined as an over-reacher, but in Ralph's version Essex's representation does not demonstrate any of the negative qualities associated with this category of favourite. Although in acting against the Queen's orders, Essex exceeds his position, his action,

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*and the Wits*, pp. 108-9; Lance Bertelsen, 'The Significance of the 1731 Revisions to *The Fall of Mortimer*', *Restoration and Eighteenth Century Theatre Research* (2) 1987, 12-13.

<sup>41</sup> For a detailed account see Bertelsen, 'The Significance of the 1731 Revisions to the Fall of Mortimer'.

<sup>42</sup> Gerrard notes that the play continued to be staged in its original as well as in its revived form throughout the 1730s. See, Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, p. 165. Dobson and Watson suggest that a persistent and largely apocryphal anecdote appended to the execution of Essex in 1601 formed the basis for John Banks's immensely successful *The Unhappy Favourite; or, The Earl of Essex* (1681). In Banks's version – Essex sues for mercy but the Queen, due to treachery, does not receive his message. Ralph's *The Fall of the Earl of Essex* (1731) Henry Jones's *The Earl of Essex* (1753) and Henry Brooke's *Earl of Essex* (1761) follow similar patterns to Banks's original. Dobson and Watson note the 'flagrant fictionality' of some aspects of these versions of the Essex history for example, the secret wife – Essex's real spouse was Frances Walsingham, widow of Sidney; the unwarranted claim that the Countess of Nottingham was a spurned ex-mistress; and the frequent strategic 'forgetting' of the Essex Rebellion. See Michael Dobson and Nicola J. Watson, *England's Elizabeth: An Afterlife in Fame and Fantasy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 89-90.

<sup>43</sup> Bertelsen, 'The Significance of the 1731 Revisions to *The Fall of Mortimer*', p. 10.

far from resulting in self-advancement, is disastrous to his own preferment. The negotiation of a truce with Ireland is represented as Essex's duty and in the best interests of his country rather than pandering to the vanity of his Queen in order to advance his own career. Modern historical accounts of Essex continue to define him as a patriot whose aim to use his position as the Queen's favourite for the benefit of his country ultimately leads to his downfall:

For Essex, royal favour was not an end in itself but merely a means to the greater goal of securing delegated authority from the queen, especially in matters of war and foreign policy. Ultimately, he believed that he must pursue certain policies for the benefit of the realm, regardless of whether the queen herself was actually prepared to endorse them.<sup>44</sup>

The 1731 representation of Mortimer closely adheres to both Thompson's and Worden's models for categorising the favourite. Mortimer is an enemy to the state and all true patriots should welcome his downfall. The 1731 representation of Essex however, does not demonstrate the key characteristics of either Worden's literary favourites or Thompson's historical favourites. He is diametrically opposed to the Machiavellian Mortimer and does not demonstrate the true characteristics of an over-reacher. In the 1731 version, Essex becomes merely a titular favourite. Omitting any further reference to conduct associated with favouritism, Ralph relies on his audience's knowledge that Essex *was* indeed one of Elizabeth's many favourites to carry his political agenda. Ralph's play, I contend, was not concerned with the deserved fall of an evil favourite but the unjust fall of a patriotic minister.

*The Fall of Mortimer* was performed sixteen times after its première at the Haymarket on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1731. During the sixteenth performance, the play was shut down and the players arrested for their part in what was widely reported as an attack on Walpole and his government.<sup>45</sup> This response came at a time particularly sensitive to dramatic slander. The existing but sporadically enforced restrictions on contentious political drama were revived after the political uproar caused by John Gay's notorious

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<sup>44</sup> Paul E. J. Hammer, 'Absolute Sovereign Mistress of her Grace? Queen Elizabeth I and her Favourites, 1581-1592' in *The World of the Favourite*, p. 49.

<sup>45</sup> For discussions of the events surrounding the banning of *The Fall of Mortimer* see Bertelsen, 'The Significance of the 1731 Revisions to *The Fall of Mortimer*', p. 8; Arthur H. Scouten et. al. (eds) *The London Stage 1660-1800* (Carbondale: University of Illinois Press, 1961) Part 3 Vol 1, p. xlix; p. 148.

*Beggar's Opera* (1728) and the subsequently banned *Polly* (1729). Although as Robert D. Hume has shown, prior to the imposition of the Stage Licensing Act of 1737 these restrictions had been applied somewhat arbitrarily, the obvious topicality of *The Fall of Mortimer* demanded decisive action from the authorities.<sup>46</sup> Critics have suggested that the suppression of *The Fall of Mortimer* was due largely to allusions to political events of 1731 and the years preceding. Opinion is split as to the exact events alluded to; Worden argues that Walpole's use of placemen and mercenary parliaments was the chief target, whereas Bertelsen identifies Walpole's treaty-making as the key object of attack. There is textual evidence, I contend, that both of these aspects of Walpole's administration are criticised in the play.

Première three months earlier on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1731, James Ralph's *The Fall of the Earl of Essex* did not receive the same public attention. One reason for this apparent inattention to the play may be, as Worden claims, the slight nature of Ralph's adaptation:

A series of subtle touches conspires to adapt Banks's version to the political vocabulary of the 1730s and to hint at the resemblances between Walpole and Essex's rival in the play, Lord Burghley.<sup>47</sup>

If *The Fall of the Earl of Essex* was indeed an attack on Walpole and his administration, why was it seemingly ignored? Worden's suggestion that the parallels drawn between Walpole and Burghley are very subtle would perhaps provide an adequate answer to this question. However, this assertion is far from convincing both in relation to the text itself and current critical analysis of drama during this period. If, as Hume argues, the production of politically subversive plays was considerably reduced post-1731, why did *The Fall of the Earl of Essex*, supposedly one of the last of such plays permitted performance, receive no critical or political commentary?<sup>48</sup> Hume asserts that 'the London theatre of the early 1730s was hardly a hotbed of partisan political activity', a contention which, I hope this thesis goes some way

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<sup>46</sup> See Hume, 'The London Theatre From the *Beggar's Opera* to the Licensing Act' in *The Rakish Stage*, pp. 270-311.

<sup>47</sup> Worden, *Favourites on the English Stage*, p. 34.

<sup>48</sup> Robert D. Hume, 'Henry Fielding and Politics at the Little Haymarket 1728-1737', in John M. Wallace (ed) *The Golden and Brazen World: Papers in Literature and History 1650-1800*, (L.A.: University of California Press, 1985), 96.



towards challenging.<sup>49</sup> It is true, particularly in comparison to the theatrical activity of the preceding decades, that the 1730s was not a period of intense dramatic commentary on political affairs. Given this general trend away from the production of plays overtly critical of the Walpole administration, the lack of commentary on Ralph's *Essex* might seem to confirm Worden's suggestion that the play simply did not pose a threat. I wish to suggest an alternative. Was the failure of government supporters to attack *The Fall of the Earl of Essex* due to the play's covert criticism or because in contrast to *The Fall of Mortimer* it is in fact pro-Walpole and pro the Whig administration.

Ralph's *Essex* depicts a favourite whose loyalty towards his monarch and country is unquestionable. The play does not adopt the language of favouritism as an attack on the patriotism of Essex or the political integrity of the monarch. Accused of treason, the Earl of Essex is unjustly executed in part due to the jealousy of a woman scorned. The monarch, Elizabeth, realises her error in abandoning her favourite and Essex is eventually buried with honours. The treasonable act for which Essex is imprisoned is the negotiation of a truce with Ireland. Significantly it is the Commons, not Elizabeth, who demand his impeachment. Reflecting the signing of the treaties of Vienna and Seville and Walpole's foreign policy of diplomacy and compromise, Essex 'the favourite' is culpable for unpopular political decisions and, based on his position as royal favourite, attacked by his political opponents. Ralph represents Essex's treaty making as a patriotic act. The treaty remains in force throughout the play and there is no indication of any negative outcome. Essex is portrayed as a shrewd commander and a true patriot, a worthy favourite. He is a loving husband, who refuses the corrupt advances of the lascivious Lady Nottingham, and is equally resistant, despite the consequences of his rejection for his own position at court, to the sexual advances of his Queen. It is through this relationship with Elizabeth that Ralph draws a further parallel between Essex and Walpole. Like Essex, Walpole enjoyed the favour of the Queen. Caroline of Ansbach, consort of George II, supported Walpole's ministerial services. Furthermore, suggestions that the relationship between Caroline and Walpole was sexual were widely circulated.<sup>50</sup> The powerful treaty making Essex

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<sup>49</sup> Hume, 'Henry Fielding and Politics at the Little Haymarket', p. 104.

<sup>50</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Caroline's role in British politics and her relationship with Walpole see, R. L. Arkell, *Caroline of Ansbach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).

– minister-favourite of the Queen – is a more appropriate analogy for Walpole, than, as Worden suggests, the uncharismatic and ineffectual Burleigh.

By contrast, *The Fall of Mortimer* depicts Mortimer as a favourite who ‘lord[s] it o’er us by the Queen’s vile Favour’.<sup>51</sup> Isabella, the king’s mother, is an un-patriotic figure. Mortimer is both her favourite and her lover, which places a double emphasis on her corrupt character. As I shall show in the next chapter, women’s sexual conduct is reflective of their patriotism or lack of patriotism. Sexual and political moralities were inextricably connected in the rhetoric of early eighteenth-century patriot drama. This suggests an important difference between *The Fall of the Earl of Essex* and *The Fall of Mortimer*. In contrast to Essex’s unswerving faithfulness, Mortimer’s sexual appetite is scarcely satiable. Isabella and Mortimer are clearly engaged in a sexual relationship, but despite this Mortimer pursues the innocent Maria: ‘I want, like the Heathen Monarchs, my Seraglio to refresh me after the business of the day’ (23). In *The Fall of Mortimer* sex signifies power, corrupt and unpatriotic power, which is linked directly to the favourite. The ‘patriot band’ win the King’s trust by their use of patriot rhetoric and make no attempt to gain sexual power. Unlike Mortimer, they do not deal with Isabella, who, as guardian over her son in his minority, is the true site of power. In this play, patriotism is strictly confined to homosocial relationships; the presence of a woman as an active participant in politics merely emphasises the unnaturalness and lack of patriotism of the current administration.

In *The Fall of the Earl of Essex* attempts to exert sexual power remain unsatisfied. Lady Nottingham and Lord Burleigh are banished and the patriotic Essex does not succumb to Nottingham’s enticements. The use of sexual power by the favourite produces two very different portrayals of favouritism in these texts. Both plays represent patterns of libidinous behaviour as unpatriotic. What is significant is the opposing position of the favourite in this paradigm. Mortimer exerts power through sex. Essex rejects sexual advances even from his sovereign patron. That these two plays offer very different representations of favouritism strengthens the possibility that they should not both be seen as direct attacks on Walpole.

In Ralph’s *The Fall of the Earl of Essex*, it is clear that the audience should sympathise with Essex. However, this does not suggest that Elizabeth is represented as the antithesis of the patriot Essex. The prevalent attitude of nostalgia towards

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<sup>51</sup> *The Fall of Mortimer* (London: J. Millar, 1731), p. 2.

Elizabeth in the eighteenth century suggests it would have been imprudent, despite her role in the execution of Essex, to characterize Elizabeth negatively. Particularly amongst Protestant Britons it was impossible to incite resentment towards the queen. In terms of her political value, Gerrard asserts that although the 'Elizabethan cult of the 1730s' was in part a response to popular pressure for war with Spain, both opposition and pro-government Whigs could appropriate Elizabeth.<sup>52</sup> England's Protestant queen was a valuable political and cultural icon, certainly not an image to challenge. If it is accepted therefore that Essex can be interpreted as a positive analogy for Walpole, we have two possible versions for our reading of Elizabeth's role. Should we identify Elizabeth with George II – a cultural-political analogy – or with Caroline of Ansbach – a sexual-political analogy? Ralph struggles with this triangular correlation and the result is somewhat bland. He resorts to using Elizabeth's jealousy on discovering Essex's secret marriage to explain her anger, an amalgamation of Essex's own history and that of the more infamous Raleigh. Michael Dobson and Nicola Watson have noted that this 'enduringly popular historical fiction...carves out a secret susceptibly feminine Elizabeth from unpromising historical materials'.<sup>53</sup> This feminised Elizabeth, however compelling, is far from convincing in Ralph's version of the Essex history. Sewell's earlier representation of one of Elizabeth's favourites resolves this problem more effectively by placing Elizabeth on her deathbed. The Queen never appears on stage and both Raleigh's followers and his enemies report her physical weakness as the reason for her seeming lack of support for her favourite.

A similar problem with the representation of the relationship between sovereign and favourite can be identified in *The Fall of Mortimer*. Here the monarch is the young Edward III whose determination and patriotism could be seen as a laudatory parallel with George II. Mortimer is not the king's favourite. His position in court is secured by Isabella's recommendation to her son. By the opening scene of Act II, Edward is beginning to realise the true intent of this seemingly allied pair.<sup>54</sup> He has

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<sup>52</sup> Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, p. 150.

<sup>53</sup> Dobson and Watson, *England's Elizabeth*, p. 97. Dobson and Watson also note that in eighteenth-century versions of the Essex history the two years between Essex's execution and Elizabeth's death were usually made into a much shorter period. The Queen's death as a response to Essex's execution secured her 'sentimental femininity'. See, Dobson and Watson, *England's Elizabeth*, p. 94.

<sup>54</sup> I describe Isabella and Mortimer as 'seemingly allied' because Mortimer cannot truly be described as an ally. His relationship with Isabella is purely formed out of his own self-interest. He has no concern for her other than for her role in his own advancement.



a dream in which ‘Mortimer led in my wicked Mother, / Who snatched the Crown from me, and gave it him’ (14). The dream alerts Edward to Mortimer’s true intention and the king is quick to remove his favour from the minister. It is surely no coincidence that king and subjects reach this conclusion concurrently. The fact that Mortimer is not the king’s favourite, but the choice of an un-natural woman simply reiterates Edward’s innocence. The resultant analogy between Isabella and Caroline alludes to contemporary court gossip rather than the specific political events intimated by the Mortimer/Walpole analogy. Isabella’s actions, particularly her open sexual relationship with Mortimer, do not accurately replicate Caroline’s conduct. However, just as Caroline was censured for favouring Walpole and promoting his policies to her husband, Isabella bears the brunt of criticism for Mortimer’s elevated position and ultimately Edward banishes his mother for her conduct, thus proving his own political if not familial integrity.

As I have already suggested, the influence of a favourite on political affairs leads to a questioning of the patriotic reputation of the monarch. However, as with many of the texts discussed in this chapter, the *Mortimer* and *Essex* plays restrict censure of the sovereign. George II is not criticised by the representations of ‘Walpole the favourite’. The 1731 versions of *Mortimer* and *Essex* negotiate the favourite/monarch relationship in three distinct ways. First, by exploiting the language associated with favouritism, both plays depict royal women whose susceptibility to the charms of the favourite, although not a vindication of that conduct, justifies submission to the ‘will of others’. Second, in both plays the favourite is keenly aware that loss of his queen’s protection would lead inevitably to his own demise, ‘While *she* protects, I cannot fail’.<sup>55</sup> In addition, the sovereign is distanced from the favourite in order to detract from his own culpability. Ralph’s play depicts a female monarch, thus avoiding a direct analogy with George II, and in *Mortimer* the king is only a boy. Finally, the relationship between monarch and favourite is defended in Ralph’s play by the representation of Essex as a patriotic favourite. Essex’s patriotism outweighs his role as minister-favourite and justifies his position and the integrity of his monarch. The political agendas promoted by these texts are not only defined by the way in which they represent the sovereign/favourite relationship. In *Essex* and *Mortimer* a range of socio-political issues are debated in relation to favouritism. The

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<sup>55</sup> *The Fall of Mortimer*, p. 21. This statement could equally apply to Ralph’s Essex. His ‘failure’ is a direct result of his Queen’s withdrawal as his protector.

relationship between government and church, bribery and treaty making are contemporary opposition concerns. How does the position of the favourite in relation to these themes affect representations of favouritism and contemporary politics in these plays?

In *The Fall of Mortimer* the role of religion is given particular attention. Religious policy divided the Whigs in the 1730s. The High-Church Bishop of London, Edmund Gibson, acted as Walpole's ecclesiastical advisor between 1723 and 1736. As Christine Gerrard observes,

Gibson attempted to ensure that advancement was given only to clerics who could prove both their theological orthodoxy and their total loyalty to the Hanoverians and the Whig government, thereby cementing a closer alliance between Church and State.<sup>56</sup>

Walpole and Gibson shared an understanding of the importance of securing party placemen to ensure the stability of their political position. As J.C.D. Clark has suggested, the coalition between the Whig political establishment and the bishops was a 'formidable combination'.<sup>57</sup> This burgeoning alliance was strengthened by the exclusion of clerics not willing to compromise their political beliefs. Such practices are openly criticised in *The Fall of Mortimer*. Like Walpole, Mortimer, the minister-favourite, in turn purchases his own followers. His patronage extends through all ranks of society, 'Not the sacred Gown, nor learned Robe, / Are unpolluted with his Servile Arts' (4). Directly mirroring Walpole's religious policy, in order to preserve and strengthen his position of power, Mortimer bribes clerics, advancing those who accept his patronage. Echoing the opinions of Tories and opposition Whigs, Mountacute and his band of patriots condemn the interference of priests in political matters, 'thus luxury and Interest rule the Church' (4). The 'smooth-toung'd Prelates' (4) who succumb to Mortimer's bribery offer preferment to those priests who will promise allegiance to Mortimer and work towards securing a parliament of placemen. This episode is an overt reference to Gibson's activities, and opposition fears that the church was becoming increasingly embroiled in politics.

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<sup>56</sup> Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, p. 25.

<sup>57</sup> J. C. D Clark, *English Society 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics During the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 99.

The purchasing of followers and bribery are themes common to both plays. *The Fall of the Earl of Essex* opens with Lady Nottingham's vow to exact revenge for Essex's rejection of her sexual advances. She bribes Lord Burleigh to assist her, promising him sexual gratification once her desire for vengeance is satisfied. Nottingham is yet another example of a libidinous un-patriotic woman. Her sexual urges distort her natural feminine desire to protect, preserve and nurture her country.

Mortimer is repeatedly shown either accepting bribes or purchasing followers and, in the instance of Maria, even mistresses. Bribery is clear evidence of the prioritising of private interest over public welfare. The prominence of bribery and political placemen as the tools of the favourite clearly establishes Mortimer as unpatriotic. The rhetoric of patriotism makes clear the need to eradicate financial enticement from contemporary politics. For parliament to consist of carefully selected members who will pose no challenge to the favourite's power is clearly un-patriotic and un-constitutional. According to the opposition, Walpole constructed such a parliament. Conversely, Essex openly rejects such tools. Unlike Mortimer his aim is not self-advancement but the prosperity of the nation. Such a minister, argued his supporters, was Walpole.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps the most contentious political theme in these plays is that of treaty making. *The Fall of Mortimer* is unreservedly anti-treaty. In order to secure peace with Scotland, Mortimer arranged the marriage of Princess Joan to Robert of Scotland. This marriage forms the basis for the tavern gossip that introduces the subplot at the beginning of Act I Scene ii. Initially as Oldstile, Felt and Frame discuss these political events, opinion of Mortimer is divided. However, when Bumper reveals that Mortimer and Isabella have promised to supplement Joan's dowry ten times over, opinion turns against him. The 'Shameful Peace' of 1328 did indeed turn the country against Mortimer and awaken the people to the plight of their king. When Bumper encourages the men to join Mountacute if the need should arise, they respond in the affirmative, claiming 'they are honest Men – they have the true *English Spirit* about them – Mortimer's Crew are of the Mongril Breed' (12). This drunken and bawdy scene is largely comic in its effect, but the anger and sense of betrayal felt by

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<sup>58</sup> See, for example, George Sewell, 'Walpole; or, the Patriot' in *Posthumous Works* (London, 1728), pp. 43-56. Sewell identifies Walpole as a moral minister without personal ambition. In pursuing a policy of peace Walpole denies himself military glory. In contrast Sewell suggests Walpole's critics would, 'riot in Blood, / Unpeopling Nations for Another's Good' (lms. 172-3, p. 55). As I discuss in chapter four, Colley Cibber makes a similar observation with regards to Julius Cæsar in *Cæsar in Ægypt* (1724).



these men align the play not only with its historical period but also with the contemporary political situation. Walpole's policy of peaceful trade with Spain and France, intended to release Britain from costly European wars, was viewed by Tories and opposition Whigs as a threat to British liberty – a dishonourable, un-patriotic bargain. In *The Fall of Mortimer* treaty making amounts to bribery. Just as Mortimer is seen to use the public purse to purchase followers, he exploits the same funds to buy off aggressors. Walpole, chief proponent of diplomacy, is accused of the same unpatriotic bargaining. His actions squander public and private money by allowing French and Spanish warships to take liberties with British merchants transporting goods from the colonies.

In *The Fall of the Earl of Essex* an apparently oppositional agenda is promoted in the relationship between treaty making and treason. By negotiating peace with Ireland, Essex commits treason – an offence for which he is ostensibly executed. This seems at variance with my reading of the play as pro-Walpole drama. However, throughout the text, Elizabeth expresses her desire to acquit Essex. She recognises that his actions are in the best interests of the country. It is not until she learns of Essex's secret marriage that her passion and anger induce her to sign a warrant for his execution. In appealing for mercy, the Countess of Essex reminds Elizabeth of her own patriotic duty:

'Tis Great,  
 'Tis Godlike to forgive, but *Essex* sure  
 Was never Guilty, never could offend  
 So kind, so good a Queen; 'tis Malice all,  
 'Tis Calumny that taints his manly Deeds,  
 And labours to subvert his Fame (33).

The Countess's use of patriot rhetoric is successful; however, the reprieve comes too late. The Queen's responses are key to understanding the political agenda of the play. At no time should the audience consider Elizabeth's motives to be anything but patriotic. She is not portrayed as a weak monarch. Unlike the youthful Edward of *The Fall of Mortimer* or the misguided Charles or James of Havard's and Smollett's respective plays, Ralph's Elizabeth lacks even the 'pliability' commonly seen as the monarch's failing in relation to his or her choice of favourite. Her error in ordering the

execution of Essex arises from her jealousy and is driven by the envy of the unmistakably unpatriotic Nottingham and Burleigh. Therefore, although Elizabeth is initially angered by Essex's treaty with Ireland, she subsequently endorses his actions as patriotic and not treasonable. Essex's death is portrayed as a great loss for both his monarch-patron and his country.

*The Fall of Mortimer* positions Walpole and his policies as un-patriotic. His deployment of parliamentary placemen, his use of bribery, even his purported sexual conduct are contrary to the best interests of the nation. Like Mortimer, Walpole should be overthrown by a 'band of patriots' for the well being of the state. In *The Fall of the Earl of Essex* the rhetorical link between patriotism and favouritism shifts. The tropes are not connected by their opposing values, but by the representation of patriotic favouritism. Ralph employs the Essex history to parallel Walpole's career in order to create political panegyric.<sup>59</sup> The bribery and corruption practised by Nottingham and Burleigh are punished just as the more serious machinations of Mortimer and Isabella. Essex however, does not participate in such un-patriotic activities. Essex falls not because of his own ambition but because of the malicious behaviour of those jealous of his position. In Ralph's play favouritism does not imply corruption. Royal patronage of carefully selected favourites can be in the best interests of the country. If Ralph's representation of Essex is identified with Walpole, the ensuing image of 'Walpole the favourite' is very favourable indeed. Walpole is aligned with an historical figure who although not faultless (it should be remembered that in brokering the peace deal, Essex disobeys the Queen's orders) acts in the best interests of the country. Ralph repudiates accusations of bribery and corruption levied against Walpole by representing him as a stalwart patriot, an idealised favourite. Walpole should not be judged on the basis of malicious accusation – the nation should not repeat past mistakes and 'execute' another patriot minister. In denying himself the military glory associated with successful battle (the conventionally patriotic method of safeguarding English liberty) Essex prioritises England's economic prosperity. Ralph's play mirrors Whig concerns for maintaining the commercial supremacy of Britain as opposed to the nation's military pre-eminence. By paralleling Walpole with

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<sup>59</sup> The *DNB* notes that Ralph was a hack writer. Amongst other enterprises he acted as co-editor for Fielding's anti-ministerial paper the 'Champion' in 1741. However, there is evidence that prior to this period, Ralph attempted to gain Walpole's patronage. Horace Walpole's *Memoirs of George II*, (iii) 345, claims that Walpole rejected Ralph. Pope insisted in the 1743 edition of the 'Dunciad' that Ralph deserted Walpole in 1742.

Essex, Ralph depicts a patriotic minister subscribing to the Protestant ethic of placing the common good, in the form of the promotion of trade, above personal profit.<sup>60</sup> His patriotism is overtly commercial but nonetheless his actions *are* beneficial to the nation. Ralph's play, it seems, defends Walpole by manipulating the very rhetoric so often used against the minister. Walpole becomes a 'patriotic favourite'. Contrary to opposition representations of Walpole as minister-favourite, his policies and actions, Ralph suggests, are not driven by self-interest.<sup>61</sup> He is a modern example of the 'good' favourite repeatedly hinted at in the excuses made for sovereigns whose choice of favourite is not as prudent as the Hanoverians' favour of Walpole.

#### iv. The Fall of the Favourite

In the English history plays I have discussed, the conventional rhetorical link between favouritism and un-patriotic corruption is paramount. However, by manipulating patriot rhetoric, some texts offer an alternative version of the favourite. Whereas opposition texts represent the favourite exploiting his position for corrupt motives, Ralph's *Essex* shows the favourite rejecting the conventional role of ambitious minister. In these plays the representation of favouritism is influenced by the depiction of the favourite as either a patriot or a self-interested minister. If these alternative versions of favouritism relate directly to the political agenda of the text, why are the plays always concerned with 'the fall' of the favourite? Bertelsen's assertion that, 'because negative political allusion sold papers (and theatre tickets) authors interested in turning a profit tended to attack rather than defend those in power' could be seen as the reason for the 'Pleasure' historians demonstrate retelling 'the Fall of Favourites'.<sup>62</sup> Does the term 'fall' suggest to prospective audiences that the play has scandalous potential? Is the use of 'fall' in the title of a play merely a marketing strategy? Ralph's *The Fall of the Earl of Essex* certainly did not earn the

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<sup>60</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Eighteenth Century Debate – Virtue, Passion and Commerce' in *The Machiavellian Moment, Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 462-505.

<sup>61</sup> There is of course a certain irony here; Ralph's play is written in an attempt to gain Walpole's patronage – Ralph's motives are purely financial and hence self-interested. He wants to contribute to the body of propaganda created to secure Walpole's position – exactly the sort of opposition accusation he defends Walpole from in his play.

<sup>62</sup> Bertelsen, 'The Significance of the 1731 Revisions to *The Fall of Mortimer*', p. 19.



same sordid and subversive reputation as *The Fall of Mortimer*. The notoriety gained by *The Fall of Mortimer* must in part be attributed to the public closure of the play and arrest of the players. Ralph's *Essex*, party to no such scandal, received little attention. The persistent focus on the 'fall' of the favourite, I suggest is simply related to the lack of examples of successful favourites. In terms of English history, favourites have consistently 'fallen' either as a result of their own ambitious over-reaching, or due to the intervention of those jealous of their position. By the beginning of the eighteenth century favourites had received a consistently bad press for centuries. Any attempt at altering the language associated with favouritism would inevitably meet with little success. However, just as Essex's position is jeopardised by false accusations of self-interest prompted by his position as favourite, Ralph's representation of Walpole as a patriotic favourite is destabilised by the incongruities of this manipulation of language. Working against the established rhetoric to create positive representations of favourites that would counter the opposition's appropriation of such language to defame Walpole was somewhat beyond Ralph's skills as a playwright. Favouritism was too deeply associated with unpatriotic behaviour to permit either a convincing or a lasting representation of Walpole as a patriot favourite.

Despite Ralph's representation of Essex as a patriot favourite and Sewell's representation of Raleigh as a patriot worthy of being favoured by his queen, all of these plays continue to appropriate and represent the negative connotations of favouritism. The rise and fall of favourites cannot be rhetorically distanced from corruption, bribery and threat to national liberty. In contrast to Clark's observation that 'England's constitution was praised by comparison with other monarchies; was admirable because it was a *libertarian* monarchy', these texts share a concern for the perceived decline in England's 'ancient liberties'.<sup>63</sup> In all of the plays the relationship between monarch and favourite is justified or condemned on the basis of patriotic rhetoric. Like the adaptations of Shakespeare discussed in the next chapter, these appropriations of history reflect contemporary fears for Britain's moral, political and military superiority. Although many of the texts attempt to support audience perceptions of the innate stability of Britain and the British government, fears for the permanence of the political system (particularly given the active role played by

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<sup>63</sup> Clark, *English Society*, p. 105.

Walpole in securing and promoting the myth) remain prominent. In order to protect British supremacy, politicians should be patriots. The welfare of their country must be their primary concern, not their own political advancement. Resentment and revenge are corrupting influences that disrupt the patriotic code and threaten the liberties of all Britons. Favouritism, repeatedly responsible for breeding such discontent, works against public happiness and ultimately national stability. The representation of Walpole as a patriotic minister-favourite was never going to be a truly successful piece of party propaganda.

## Gender and Party Politics in Adaptations of Shakespeare's Histories

*Foreign Foes could never make us bow  
While to our selves w'are true, The World must own,  
England can never be, but by her Self, Undone.*

Theophilus Cibber, *King Henry VI* (1724)

Adaptations of Shakespeare can arguably be regarded as reconstructions of the plays for the contemporary stage. In her account of Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare Jean Marsden argues that the original texts are altered to focus on themes of love, family and marriage, all subjects befitting the presence of women on stage.<sup>1</sup> Can this concern for the domestication of Shakespeare be observed in later adaptations? Did fifty years of the presence of women on stage reduce the need for adaptors in the 1720s to make use of what Marsden identifies as a key theatrical commodity of Restoration theatre? In this chapter I will discuss a series of adaptations of Shakespeare's history plays which premièred during the period which encompassed Walpole's rise to and fall from power between 1719 and 1742. Unlike the other chapters of this thesis which focus on a relatively short time period or, very specific dramatic themes, and in some cases both thematic and chronological links, the scope of this chapter, both chronological and thematic, is much broader. My intention here is quite simple. Adaptations of Shakespeare were a staple of the eighteenth-century repertoire – the volume of plays adapted even when limited to the comparatively less popular history plays is striking. By choosing to discuss a broad time span with no thematic limitation other than generic I aim to demonstrate not only the significance of Shakespearian adaptation to the London stage but also the role of Shakespeare in validating contemporary political discourse.

Michael Dobson has demonstrated that the canonization of Shakespeare during the eighteenth century profited from a 'bewildering multiplicity of contingent

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<sup>1</sup> Jean I. Marsden, 'Re-written Women: Shakespearean Heroines in the Restoration', in *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post-Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth*, ed. Jean I. Marsden (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), at p. 43.



appropriations carried out between the Exclusion Crisis and the Jacobite Uprisings'.<sup>2</sup> Adaptations, particularly of history plays – the appropriations Dobson refers to are predominantly historical – are often written in direct response to political events.<sup>3</sup> The plays are adapted to suit the sensibilities of a modern audience and their political concerns.

In his analysis of eighteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare John Loftis suggests that such texts had an overtly political rather than domestic agenda. He asserts that, as *all* eighteenth century adaptations of Shakespeare depict faction and uprising, there is a clear relationship between adaptation and the fear of Jacobite rebellion.<sup>4</sup> The implication of Loftis's analysis that *all* adaptations of Shakespeare are anti-Jacobite, by association anti-Tory and thus a form of government propaganda, is restrictive. I contend that, in relation to the adaptations of Shakespeare's English histories discussed in this chapter, the political and domestic agendas converge.

Between 1719 and 1745, ten adaptations of Shakespeare's English histories and Roman plays were premièred on the London stage. Of these, two anonymous plays, *The History of King Henry the VIII and Anna Bullen* (1732) and *The History of King John* (1736) were performed but not published. The remaining eight plays were all published in the years in which they premièred: John Dennis, *The Invader of His Country* (1719) adapted from *Coriolanus*; Charles Molloy, *The Half Pay Officers* (1720) adapted from *Henry V* and *Twelfth Night*; Lewis Theobald, *The Tragedy of King Richard II* (1720) adapted from *Richard II*; Thomas Betterton, *The Sequel to King Henry the Fourth* (posth. 1721) adapted from *2Henry IV*; Aaron Hill, *King Henry the Fifth; or, The Conquest of France by the English* (1723) adapted from *Henry V*; Ambrose Philips, *Humfrey Duke of Gloucester; a Tragedy* (1723) adapted from *2Henry VI*; Theophilus Cibber, *The Historical Tragedy of King Henry VI* (1724) adapted from *2&3Henry VI*; and Colley Cibber, *Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John* (1745) adapted from *King John*.<sup>5</sup> These adaptations document a multiplicity of political concerns, including but not limited to the perceived Jacobite threat. In

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<sup>2</sup> Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 96-7.

<sup>3</sup> Robert D. Hume has argued that drama's topicality provides readers with a contemporary response to historical events. See Hume, *The Rakish Stage*, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Loftis, *The Politics of Drama*, p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> In addition, John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham published *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* (London: J. Barber, 1722) and *The Tragedy of Marcus Brutus* (London: J. Barber, 1722), a two-part revision of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. For a brief discussion of these plays see Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, p. 95.

addition, through the introduction of new female characters and by expanding existing female roles, the scope for action focused on women in the adaptations is increased. This development is not, as feminist critics have suggested, restricted to domestic affairs. In common with other plays discussed in this thesis, the adaptations of Shakespeare are not limited to one party agenda or to one political point of view.

This cross-party appropriation of the adaptations was in part due to the position of Shakespeare in the cultural heritage of the nation. The concept of 'updating' Shakespeare to comment on contemporary political events was a recurrent concern of eighteenth-century literary theory.<sup>6</sup> As the century progressed, Shakespeare came to represent 'English Liberty' and a resistance to neo-classical rules and decorum.<sup>7</sup> The works of Shakespeare were therefore relevant to modern Britons not only because playwrights adapted these texts to comment on current political crises but also due to a developing image of Shakespeare as both literary and political exemplar. During the late 1730s a public row developed over the erection of Shakespeare's statue at Westminster Abbey. By 1735 the opposition had already enshrined Shakespeare in William Kent's Temple of British Worthies.<sup>8</sup> When the 'establishment' unveiled their own monument in 1741 the 'empty scroll' caused considerable consternation in the London press. As Dobson points out, the scroll could be seen as indicative of 'Shakespeare's availability for multiple appropriation', a circumstance which this battle over his image adequately confirms.<sup>9</sup>

By the end of the eighteenth century Shakespeare was represented as an idealised Briton. His plays were viewed as educational texts, well suited to encourage appropriate British behaviour. Commentators such as Elizabeth Montagu whose *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* (1796) devotes a whole chapter to 'the historical drama', makes claims for Shakespeare as moral philosopher. Montagu

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<sup>6</sup> For an overview of eighteenth-century criticism and theory concerning Shakespeare and the adaptation of his plays for the 'modern' stage, see Catherine M. S. Alexander 'Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century: Criticism and Research', *Shakespeare Survey* 51 (1998), 1-15.

<sup>7</sup> Jean I. Marsden, 'Daddy's Girls: Shakespearian Daughters and Eighteenth-Century Ideology', *Shakespeare Survey* 51 (1998), 17.

<sup>8</sup> The Temple of British Worthies was home to sixteen busts depicting exemplary Britons - fourteen historical and two contemporary. Included were, Alfred, Edward the Black Prince, Elizabeth I, William III, Raleigh, Drake, Hampden, Bacon, Newton, Locke, Shakespeare, Milton, Inigo Jones, and Thomas Gresham. See, Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, pp. 135-46.

<sup>9</sup> Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, p. 145. Gerrard observes a clear distinction between the ways in which Shakespeare's image was appropriated for partisan purposes. Patriots emphasized Shakespeare's proud and patriotic independence. Court writers emphasized the dominant cultural values of an age in which court and nation united behind the monarch. See Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, p. 106.



suggests that the history plays are ‘excellently calculated to correct’.<sup>10</sup> History is representative of the manners of the times and the characters of the most illustrious persons concerned in a series of important events. In terms of eighteenth-century literary theory, the history play provides an ideal vehicle for political comment and more importantly political, not just moral, correction. Such ideas were neither unique nor indeed new to Montagu. As discussed in the previous chapter, the author of *The History of Mortimer* (1731) defends the prohibited adaptation *The Fall of Mortimer* on the ground that the play is an account of history. The purpose of the history play is not, the author claims, to incite sedition but to bring ‘the Transactions of past Ages to the present view and of exploring Vice (be it found in what Character or Regime so ever) and rewarding Virtue’.<sup>11</sup> Adaptation of history is given a clear didactic motivation. These plays are designed to educate audiences by representing past events. History, however is open to various interpretations and however ardently vindicated by its supporters, *The Fall of Mortimer* is clearly anti-Walpole. Adaptations of history are not devoid of agenda and versions of British history were integral to party ideology during the period. As I argued in relation to plays representing ancient British history, all sides sought to derive authority for their positions by claiming historical precedents. The adaptations of Shakespeare’s histories are clearly susceptible to re-politicisation. As part of England’s cultural heritage, the original texts lend credibility to the revised versions and uphold the integrity of any political agenda proposed.

All of the plays discussed in this chapter make use of patriot rhetoric. They are, as Alexander Pettit has suggested, ‘participants in a noisy debate about liberty, populism, kingship and the succession’.<sup>12</sup> As we have seen in the preceding chapters patriotism was frequently used by commentators as a stick with which to beat their rivals. Political opponents were attacked for their lack of patriotism, which, as J.G.A. Pocock suggests, became the rhetoric ‘that outsiders use to comment on insiders and how the latter keep them out’.<sup>13</sup> It is, I suggest this representation of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ that forms the basis of the re-politicisation of Shakespeare’s texts. The adaptations are not, I shall argue, merely a response to the threat of Jacobite uprising

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Montagu, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970), p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> *The History of Mortimer* (London: J. Millar, 1731), p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Pettit, *Illusory Consensus*, p. 188.

<sup>13</sup> Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, p. 245.



or to the feminisation of the acting community, but rather, a reaction to broader ideological concerns. They offer audiences versions of Britishness. Their status as adaptations of Shakespeare, particularly Shakespeare's history plays, contributes to contemporary attempts to provide an homogenous national identity. Through revising Shakespearean histories, English patriot heroes are resurrected for the education of modern men and women. Such education repeatedly has a political bias but do the plays, as Loftis argues, inevitably adopt an anti-Jacobite stance?

### **i. Political Volatility and Dramatic Responses to the Jacobite Threat**

How far does the threat posed to the Hanoverian regime by the Jacobites and the exiled Stuart dynasty influence these plays? Nicholas Rogers has argued that, 'despite the continuing unpopularity of the new regime, an English insurrection in favour of the Stuarts was never a serious possibility. Outside Catholic and non-juring circles, Jacobite militancy relapsed into nostalgia'.<sup>14</sup> Does Loftis therefore overstate the extent of responses to the Jacobite threat in the adaptations? Contrary to Rogers, many scholars of Jacobitism suggest that Jacobite rhetoric was a prominent part of political discourse during the period. Fears of Jacobite insurrection at home and invasion from abroad can be discerned in pro-Hanoverian literature and government policy. Daniel Szechi contends that 'By the 1720s there would have been few plebeians or patricians disenchanted with the current order who could remember another discourse of opposition'.<sup>15</sup> Arguments such as these might suggest that Loftis's analysis of the adaptations of Shakespeare is correct. However, the adaptations of the English histories come from cross-party agendas and do not merely respond negatively to the Jacobite threat. Some texts demonstrate Jacobite sympathies despite the inherent problem associated with writing pro-Jacobite literature – accusations of treason levied against the author. The representation of faction and uprising in many of these texts is not unquestionable evidence of an anti-Jacobite agenda but rather demonstrates a concern shared by all parties for establishing constitutional permanence. Stability

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<sup>14</sup> Nicholas Rogers, 'Riot and Popular Jacobitism in Early Hanoverian England' in Eveline Cruickshanks (ed), *Ideology and Conspiracy: Aspects of Jacobitism, 1689-1759* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1982), p. 82.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Szechi, *The Jacobites: Britain and Europe, 1688-1788* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 33.

could only be guaranteed by taking heed of Britain's political legacy, and Britain's varied history provided polemicists with examples which could be used to support any party line.

Despite the apparent stability secured by the Hanoverian succession and Walpole's Whig ministry, the period of Walpole's supremacy was, as I have discussed in previous chapters, a time of political volatility and shifting alliances. Opposition to Walpole came from a variety of quarters; Tories, Jacobites and opposition Whigs all protested vociferously against his policies. However, domestic factionalism was not the only threat to political stability. During the first half of the eighteenth century Britain witnessed two failed Jacobite invasions in 1715 and 1745. Despite the fifteen-year Anglo-French alliance (1716-1731), Protestant fears for the security of the realm were fuelled by the widely held (not entirely unfounded, but certainly exaggerated) belief that the Jacobites received support from the French monarchs, Louis XIV in 1715 and Louis XV in 1745. The French insistence that James II and his son were the rightful heirs to the British throne, and the raising of an invasion fleet in 1743 had, however, less to do with the Stuart claim than a 'worldwide struggle for commercial and imperial primacy between France and Britain'.<sup>16</sup> The commercial community in particular saw the potential restoration of the Stuart dynasty as a direct threat, primarily due to fears that such a restoration would ultimately result in the imposition of French power and French interests upon British commerce. Political fear of the Stuart dynasty can be seen most clearly in the legislation that preceded the succession of George I. In accordance with the 1701 Act of Settlement, George Lewis of Hanover ascended to the British throne at the death of Queen Anne in 1714. Years earlier, faced with an ageing and heirless Queen, parliament embarked upon the difficult task of obtaining a Protestant successor. Over fifty blood relations had to be overlooked due to their Catholicism. George, whose claim to the throne was distant and derived through his mother Sophia (niece to Charles I) was 'a German with only a smattering of the English language, a plain middle-aged, un-charismatic man, with no great appeal except the essential one. He was Lutheran, not Catholic'.<sup>17</sup> The early Hanoverians were not notably popular; they held their position 'because they catered to the religious bias of the bulk of their subjects'. Protestantism therefore was constitutionally more important than concerns

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<sup>16</sup> Colley, *Britons*, pp. 83-4. See also Clark, *English Society*.

<sup>17</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p. 82.

for hereditary succession or nationality. The Hanoverians were a 'convenient and functional dynasty' and it was not until the reign of George III that people began to conceive of their monarchy as 'an attractive and ceremonious one'.<sup>18</sup>

In 1720 Robert Walpole joined the Whig ministry. His rise to a near monopoly of power was accompanied by a proliferation of pro- and anti-government propaganda.<sup>19</sup> The rhetoric of patriotism became a trope within political and literary circles and was adopted by Whigs, opposition Whigs and Tories alike. Patriotism became a yardstick by which to gauge not only national pride, but also the morality of individuals, particularly those individuals in power. As representatives of British patriotism neither George I nor George II was particularly impressive; their close ties with Hanover were repeatedly brought to the public's attention.<sup>20</sup> The Hanoverian / Whig alliance, identified by opposition polemicists as a threat to British liberty, further damaged public perception, in opposition circles at least, of their monarch's patriotism.

Despite the Hanoverians' fundamental lack of charisma, particularly in comparison with the more flamboyant Stuarts, national stability was clearly a more pressing concern for political commentators and the British people than the magnetism of the monarch. Although claims for the patriotism of George I and George II were largely unsupported by their actions, Howard Erskine-Hill argues that:

Bolingbroke's rhetoric depicting a prevailing social and political corruption and the need for a Patriot King was not only an appeal to a large political public including committed Jacobites, but also a weapon nicely judged to turn in either direction. If George II or Prince Frederick could indeed prove the patriot prince...well and good. If a patriot prince appeared more likely to come from over the water, Bolinbroke's portrait would serve very well. In that case

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<sup>18</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p. 49. For a more favourable reading of the early Hanoverians, see R. Hatton, *George I: Elector and King* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); see also Brooke (ed.), *Horace Walpole*.

<sup>19</sup> In 1722 the prime-ministerial role was created for Walpole from his combined offices of Chancellor of the Exchequer, Leader of the Commons and the King's Adviser.

<sup>20</sup> After his coronation George I visited Hanover five times and was buried there. Similarly George II visited Hanover frequently. In 1741 he intervened in foreign policy by breaking his alliances and making Hanover neutral without consulting the British ministry. As Linda Colley notes, neither king visited Wales, Scotland, the Midlands or the north of England. See Colley *Britons*, pp. 216-19; John Brewer comments upon the lack of allegorical and heroic representations of George I and II as an indication not only of the two kings' personal tastes in art but also the images they projected to their people. See John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), pp. 21-2.



gestures towards a patriot prince might in the meantime, though with a ludicrousness that only the idealising mode of panegyric could entirely overcome, be directed (for safety) at Prince Frederick.<sup>21</sup>

The political affiliations of Bolingbroke's idealised patriot king were essentially irrelevant. Jacobite, Whig or Tory, mattered little, provided he was a patriot. To this end all sides were keen to promote their own patriotic worth whilst besmirching the patriotism of their opponents. For example, Walpole's policy of treaty-making was represented by pro-Walpole Whigs as a patriotic response to foreign threat, calculated in the best interests of the nation (hence Ralph's *Essex* (1731) depicts treaty-making as a patriot policy), whilst Tories and opposition Whigs criticised the minister for an unpatriotic Mortimer-like collaboration with 'the enemy' which would ultimately result in the nation's downfall. In fact, Walpole's ardent pursuit of diplomacy was in part a response to the perceived Jacobite threat. Foreign powers intent on attacking British interests could easily engage Jacobite assistance both as part of an invasion force and for the invaluable support of British Jacobites at home. The British government was 'well aware of the implicit threat effective use of the Jacobite card posed to the established order, they were eminently blackmailable on the subject'.<sup>22</sup> Ironically, Walpole's treaty making was intended as defence against the very opponents who criticised such unpatriotic bargaining.

Although the adaptations discussed in this chapter reflect the political volatility of the period, the plays are unified in their representation of Britain and the British people as superior to their European neighbours. The trope of patriotism is adopted by all of the texts and used to defend what Alexander Pettit describes as the period's 'own myths of stability'.<sup>23</sup> Britain's supremacy over foreign powers is unquestioned so long as internal unity is maintained: 'Foreign Foes could never make us bow, / While to our selves w'are true, The World must own, / England can never be, but by her Self, Undone'.<sup>24</sup> Patriotism is key to sustaining the nation's stability. The question is, which party or faction boasts the greater number of patriots and is hence best equipped to maintain British supremacy?

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<sup>21</sup> Howard Erskine-Hill, 'Literature and the Jacobite Cause: Was there a Rhetoric of Jacobitism?' in Cruickshanks (ed.), *Ideology and Conspiracy*, p. 56.

<sup>22</sup> Szechi, *The Jacobites*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>23</sup> Pettit, *Illusory Consensus*, p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> Cibber, *Henry VI*, prologue, p. iii.

Ambrose Philips's dedication of *Humfrey Duke of Gloucester* to William Pulteney suggests a pro-government response to such a question:

It is the Happiness of England, that, in the Age wherein You flourish, the nobles enjoy all their valuable Privileges; and yet, the Commons are neither Poor, nor Distrest: Whereby Liberty and Property become universal in Great Britain; the Government acquires a double Support; and every Representative of the People has yearly Opportunities to distinguish Himself as a Patriot!<sup>25</sup>

Philips urges 'every representative of the people' to adopt a patriotic stance, to follow the example of his hero and protect Britain's liberty. This dedication was written whilst Pulteney was chairman of the Committee of Inquiry into the Atterbury Affair (1722). Philips's play is clearly pro-Walpole. First performed in 1723 when Bishop Atterbury's arrest for treasonable correspondence with the Pretender and his subsequent exile were common fodder for the press, *Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester* supports not only Walpole's government but also this public demonstration of what Katherine West Scheil describes as 'the need to maintain control of disruptive social influences'.<sup>26</sup> *Humfrey Duke of Gloucester* is, as Loftis suggests, a representation of public concern about the threat of Jacobite rebellion. His pro-Walpolean exaltation is overtly couched in the language of patriotism.<sup>27</sup> The evil Cardinal Beaufort, a version of Atterbury, although impeded by the patriotic British character, identifies a constitutional weakness ripe for exploitation, 'the free, stubborn, Spirits of the *English!* / Tenacious of their ancient Rights and Customs, / They will not be Controll'd, but by their laws: / Nor, is the King without his Parliament, secure' (32). By controlling parliament, Beaufort can control both King and country. Beaufort and the Queen's supporters are the 'other', the un-patriotic, the non-English and it is the 'ancient virtues of liberty and self-mastery' that thwart Beaufort's plans and ultimately lead to his death. Beaufort is racked by guilt for the murder of his nephew and dies without absolution for his sins. Gloucester, leader of the 'Band of Patriots' (26), dies a hero's death, murdered by his enemy whilst fighting for an idealised future England:

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<sup>25</sup> Ambrose Philips, *Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester* (London: J. Roberts, 1723) p. i.

<sup>26</sup> Katherine West Scheil, 'Early Georgian Politics and Shakespeare: The Black Act and Charles Johnson's *Love in a Forest* (1723)', *Shakespeare Survey* 51 (1998), 51.

<sup>27</sup> The political analogy is explored further in Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits*, pp. 29-32.

The happy Day,  
 When *Rome*, no more, usurps Tyrannic Sway! -  
 Or, That deny'd; may our Descendants see  
 The Land throughout, from Superstition free:  
 With Kings who fill an independent Throne,  
 And know no Power Supreme beside their Own! (43)

This Protestant utopia is overtly Hanoverian and supports the government's stance against the Jacobite traitor Atterbury who threatens this ideal. However, the last lines of this vision suggest a need to curb Walpole's increasing power within the government. Philips desires 'Kings who fill an independent Throne, / And know no Power Supreme beside their Own'. Hanoverian rule and thus, by implication, the Whig government are preferable to the Tory or Jacobite alternative, but power must remain in the hands of an independent patriot and not become the province of a self-interested minister.

Lewis Theobald's *Richard II* (1720) also condemns insurrection; however in this play political uprising is staged against a Jacobite rather than a Whig hero. Richard II was forced to relinquish his throne by the usurper Henry Bolingbroke (later Henry IV). According to Jacobite commentators, his resignation, 'because exacted by force, had no validity'.<sup>28</sup> Richard II and James II were similarly abused. Richard was one of many English kings who, 'Jacobites and Non-Jurors considered, proved the religious and political right of hereditary kings'.<sup>29</sup> In Theobald's version, Richard's Englishness and his patriotism are compromised by the self-interest of his French queen. Isabella persuades Richard to vacate his throne, and abandon his hereditary right to 'this Thief, this Traytor Bolingbroke'.<sup>30</sup> Bolingbroke's actions are represented as unpatriotic. His usurpation of the throne is directed by the self-interested Northumberland who is described by Richard as that, 'Ladder by whose steps / The mounting Bolingbroke ascends my Throne' (58). Theobald does not excuse unreservedly either Richard or Bolingbroke. The King admits his fondness for sycophants and admiring courtiers. Bolingbroke is a traitor, banished from England and seeking revenge on his monarch.

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<sup>28</sup> Erskine-Hill, 'Literature and the Jacobite Cause', p. 52.

<sup>29</sup> Erskine-Hill, 'Literature and the Jacobite Cause', p. 51.

<sup>30</sup> Lewis Theobald, *The Tragedy of King Richard III* (London: G. Straham, 1720), p. 9.



Northumberland is the real villain. Orchestrator of Bolingbroke's uprising, Northumberland is yet another example of a self-interested minister, 'Let me confirm the yet unsettled Crown / To Bolingbroke; and Fortune then is mine: / The Means will be to move King Richard hence, / And, by his Absence, cool the People's Love' (56). Northumberland's tactics for securing the stability of Bolingbroke's reign and hence his own position at court reflect what some critics have described as the inevitable 'marginalisation' of Jacobitism from mainstream British politics:

Inevitably, as Hanoverian-Whig rule became 'normal', and hence developed ideological and emotional roots in the hearts, minds and pockets of Britain's population, Jacobitism was further and further marginalized.<sup>31</sup>

Written on the eve of Walpole's dramatic rise to power, Theobald's *Richard II* warns that the stability secured by the Whig/Hanoverian alliance is driven by the unpatriotic self-interest of the politicians concerned. The 'absence' of the exiled Stuarts leaves modern Britons with no alternative other than what by 1720 must have seemed an increasingly safely ensconced Hanoverian dynasty. However, history, Theobald suggests, has shown such public acceptance of the status quo to be short lived, 'Tho' Vengeance may a while withhold her Hand, / A King's Blood, unatton'd must curse the Land' (61). In contrast to this 'home-grown' threat to British stability, Philips's *Humfrey Duke of Gloucester* focuses instead on the 'otherness' and lack of patriotism associated with Catholicism as the primary threat to British stability. For Philips the Hanoverians are the only viable option if national order is to be maintained. Both of these texts exploit stereotypes of French national characteristics as the obverse of British patriotism. However, this representation of the French as self-interested and repressive as opposed to the egalitarian British does not necessarily limit the political discourse of these texts to an exclusively pro-Hanoverian, anti-Jacobite agenda.

The heroic foci for the adaptations of Shakespeare's history plays are definitively English men and women - kings and queens - whose public displays of patriotism fulfilled the audience's 'hunger for a sentimental, highly coloured royalism that the early Hanoverians left unsatisfied'.<sup>32</sup> The staging of Jacobite sympathy offered audiences an alternative spectacle distanced from the reality of a drab

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<sup>31</sup> Szechi, *The Jacobites*, p. 86.

<sup>32</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p. 216.

functional monarchy – a spectacle which provided entertainment beyond the confines of party and sovereign allegiances. It could be suggested that this was the limit of the effect Jacobite sympathies had on the political agendas of the adaptations of Shakespeare's history plays. In creating a dramatic spectacle from the misfortunes of the Stuart dynasty rather than engaging with the realities of the contemporary Jacobite cause, these texts simply capitalise on a general dissatisfaction with the mediocre image of the Hanoverians. However, I feel that Jacobitism had more influence on the adaptations than merely acting as an alternative to an aesthetically unattractive monarchy. Jacobitism had a direct influence on representations of British identity in the adaptations.

### ii. Catholic France and Protestant Britain

It has been suggested by a number of scholars that Protestantism was a crucial element of British identity. However, it would be misleading to argue that all Britons were convinced either by Protestant supremacy or the importance of Protestantism to an idealised version of Britishness. Nicholas Rogers has observed that, 'Since the revival of their fortunes in 1710, the Whigs had persistently asserted that the Tory party was prey to Jacobite proclivities and that their own return to power was absolutely essential to secure the Protestant succession and Revolution settlement'.<sup>33</sup> However, Whig arguments against the Tories and Jacobites that emphasised the threat they posed to British Protestantism and the liberties secured by the Revolution Settlement were not unchallenged. As Daniel Szechi asserts, 'Jacobitism gave the opponents of the established order a common cause to rally around'.<sup>34</sup> The enduring image of British identity as, first and foremost, Protestant, is challenged by this alternative Jacobite version of Britishness. Are critics predisposed to the Whig version of national identity simply because this is the version that has stood the test of time? Szechi argues, 'Vehemently Protestant anti-Jacobitism thus became the first touchstone of British Patriotism'.<sup>35</sup> Protestantism and patriotism are practically synonymous. The political 'other' and the religious 'other' were therefore inextricably

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<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Rogers, 'Riot and Popular Jacobitism', p. 72.

<sup>34</sup> Szechi, *The Jacobites*, p. 137.

<sup>35</sup> Szechi, *The Jacobites*, p. 137.

linked. This close relationship between Protestantism and patriotism poses a problem for texts in which Catholic monarchs are being heralded as the patriot ancestors of a redoubtably Protestant nation.

Many of the plays position the French, particularly French women, as the 'other' to British patriots. Despite the Anglo-French alliance which, as Jeremy Black observes, was crucial to the establishment and consolidation of the Hanoverian regime because throughout its duration, 'the French government refused to heed widespread pro-Jacobite sympathies with France', common perception of the French as enemies of the English, prevailed.<sup>36</sup> Aaron Hill's *Henry V*, Lewis Theobald's *Richard II*, Ambrose Philips's *Humfrey Duke of Gloucester*, and Theophilus Cibber's *Henry VI* all represent the French as the obverse to British patriotism. However, these plays do not necessarily all promote the Whig/Hanoverian administration. Some of these texts demonstrate Jacobite sympathy, others have an overt opposition agenda.

In Theophilus Cibber's *Henry VI* (1724) and Ambrose Philips's *Humfrey Duke of Gloucester* (1723), the un-patriotic Queen Margaret exerts divisive control over English politics. In both plays, the Queen uses her power against the King: 'Henry is beset with Priests and Sycophants; / And that imperious Margaret wrests the Sceptre, / From his weak Hand' (26). Cibber and Philips depict the French Margaret as a character who embodies unpatriotic iniquity. Both Cibber's and Philips's versions of Queen Margaret portray her adulterous relationship with the Duke of Suffolk. In these texts, sexual behaviour is a clear identifier of a woman's value and is closely linked to her patriotic worth. As Murray Pittock observes, 'Jacobite disorder can be equated with immoral wantonness'.<sup>37</sup> Margaret is the 'political other'; her otherness comes from her unnaturalness. She denounces her femininity and participates in the political world as a self-proclaimed masculine woman. In *Humphry Duke of Gloucester*, Margaret acts as the antithesis of the English heroine, Eleanor. She is driven by self-interest. Unlike Eleanor, who publicly sacrifices her own reputation for the sake of the peace of the nation, the Queen's actions are calculated to further her own political advancement. She has no concern for the well-being of king and country. Margaret's own vision of her future is vainglorious:

Is Fortitude, and Wisdom,

<sup>36</sup> Jeremy Black, *A System of Ambition*, p. 155.

<sup>37</sup> Pittock, *Jacobitism* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 81.



Given to Man Alone? - Prove me, in Council;  
Prove me, in the Field! - In Policy, let *Salisbury*,  
In War, let *York*, oppose me. - But, my Lords;  
Be sure you over-match this slighted Woman! -  
Urge me to all Extremes! - Friendship and Favour,  
I neither ask nor grant. - Success is Mine:  
If Courage claims Success! - Yet if We fail;  
Your Chronicles Shall witness to my Fame;  
Your Daughters boast, your Sons all emulate,  
A Woman's Glory; and the World avow,  
England, once, had a Queen deserv'd to reign (81-2).

Margaret's words portend the conflict that is to come in *Henry VI* (Part 3), the historic events of regicide and civil disorder that Philips chooses not to portray, preferring rather to leave his audience with a vision of a political future governed by the rules of patriotism. Margaret's claim is of course denied historically and her imagined place in England's chronicles is supplanted by the more appropriately Protestant Queen of fortitude and wisdom, Elizabeth I. Cibber's Margaret embodies the battle-hungry self-interested woman hinted at by Philips at the end of *Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester*. In Cibber's text, Margaret again controls a weak-willed King. Although Cibber's adaptation varies little from Shakespeare's original *Henry VI* (Parts 2&3), he emphasises Margaret's monstrous nature.<sup>38</sup> She taunts York with the body of Rutland, wiping his tears with his son's blood; she is the 'She Wolf of *France*' and the 'false *French* Woman'; her nationality and her failure to adopt the patriotic behaviour demanded of a Queen of England contrast with the politically less active but morally superior Lady Grey.

As I have already suggested, Isabella in Theobald's *Richard II* is depicted encouraging her husband to relinquish his throne in order to secure their domestic peace. In contrast to Isabella's Frenchness emphasised throughout the text as the source of her weakness, Richard's nationality is elided. Born in Bordeaux in 1367 Richard did not come to England until 1371 after the death of his elder brother

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<sup>38</sup> Marsden asserts that whereas Shakespeare's women are often represented as monstrous versions of femininity, the women of the adaptations are meek and passive - repeatedly represented as the inverse of Shakespeare's originals. See Jean I. Marsden, 'Rewritten Women', p. 46. My reading of the female characters discussed in this chapter does not altogether support Marsden's claim.

Edward. The legend that Richard was the son of a French canon was presumably disseminated as pro-Bolingbroke propaganda. Nevertheless, Richard's French connections are overlooked in Theobald's play. In Aaron Hill's *Henry the Fifth*, a more confrontational approach to the 'problem' of French influence on British royalty is taken. Capitalizing upon popular nationalistic feeling during what Gerrard describes as 'a decade of mounting pressure for war against Spain – anti-Catholicism and anti-French sentiments', Hill's text is overtly Francophobic.<sup>39</sup> The Dauphin is not only treacherous but effeminate. His sexual overtures towards Harriet – who is disguised as a man – are a source of comedy. The French response to the threat posed by the English is deception and murder rather than military combat. In contrast, Catherine the French princess who, despite her political allegiance, falls in love with Henry, is forthright and resolved in her patriotism. Initially Catherine refuses to comply with her father's commands to marry Henry. She sees such an alliance as 'treaty-making' and a compromise of French authority. However, Catherine's hatred of her nation's foreign aggressors does not lead her to resort to clandestine or immoral measures. She abhors her brother's treacherous plan to murder Henry. Catherine acts to prevent the plot, saving Henry's life. Her subsequent marriage to Henry is justified because she is a patriot and her actions are worthy of an English queen.

Although exceptions such as Catherine do exist, in general Frenchness is depicted in these plays as the antithesis of Britishness. The French are unpatriotic, self-interested and treacherous. The British are patriotic and heroic. Although some texts, such as Colley Cibber's *Papal Tyranny* are overtly anti-Catholic, on the whole the subject of religion, particularly the religious practice of the monarch, is overlooked. When direct reference is made to the Catholicism of a character, it signals negative characteristics such as in Philips's Cardinal Beaufort or the representations of Margaret. Does this support Szechi's assertion that as the century progressed, Hanoverian rule became normalised and thus Jacobitism was rejected? Certainly repeated calls to the Stuarts to renounce their Catholicism suggest a belief that their religion and association with the perceived tyranny of the European Catholic dynasties would prevent a Stuart return to the British throne. British national identity,

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<sup>39</sup> Christine Gerrard, *Aaron Hill the Muses' Projector, 1685-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 154. Gerrard asserts that, 'Hill equates King Harry's victory over France with his own hoped-for dramatic victory over French and Italian imports'. He was interested in 'cultural' not 'military conquest'. See Gerrard, *Aaron Hill*, p. 154. Katherine West Scheil makes a similar argument in 'Early Georgian Politics and Shakespeare: The Black Act and Charles Johnson's *In A Forest* (1723)' *Shakespeare Survey* 51, (1998), 45-56. For my comment see p. 107.

despite the diverse political agendas promoted in these texts, is represented as primarily Protestant. The Catholicism of England's historical heroes is repeatedly obscured by the need to distinguish 'this Land of Liberty' (*HDG*: 55) from her Catholic neighbours. However, I do not wish to imply that the adaptations of Shakespeare's history plays merely revisit the obvious tension between Britain's Catholic past and Protestant future. Through representations of 'patriot women' these texts assert British superiority. Unlike the self-interested French women, Margaret and Isabella, these heroines demonstrate an unequivocally British patriotism. They are, I shall suggest, representative of Britain's self-perceived pre-eminence in Europe and as such become central to the nationalistic political agendas promoted by the plays.

### iii. Patriot Women

Although Marsden's assertion regarding the domestication of Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare – she describes the plays as feminised versions of the originals – cannot be directly applied to the adaptations discussed in this chapter, I do not wish to underestimate developments made to women's roles in these plays. Modern scholarly consensus holds that in the early eighteenth century actresses were seen merely as objects for the voyeuristic titillation of audiences.<sup>40</sup> This restrictive interpretation of the roles assigned to women, I shall argue, is not supported by the plays discussed in this chapter. Women in these texts are clearly defined according to their patriotic or un-patriotic conduct. Their function, we shall see, is repeatedly political in that they are either given open access to political processes and public space or their actions serve to exemplify a patriotic ideal of public behaviour. Feminist critics have suggested that the relative novelty of the actress during this period led to a profusion of women's roles and, more particularly, breeches roles that provided the added titillation of displaying an immoderate amount of leg.<sup>41</sup> I do not wish to contest the observation that 'conventionally attractive female bodies sell tickets'; this is clearly one motivation for the development of women's roles in

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<sup>40</sup> For example, Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> See Jean I Marsden, 'Daddy's Girls', 17-26.



Shakespearean adaptation during the eighteenth century.<sup>42</sup> This theory of titillation does not, however, account for the extensive presence of women engaging in public activities. Of the adaptations premièred and published between 1719 and 1745, only one, Thomas Betterton's *The Sequel to King Henry the Fourth*, fails to enhance the roles available to women. Some playwrights chose to increase the speaking part of a female character (for example, Catherine and Harriet in Aaron Hill's *King Henry the Fifth*). Others increased the significance of a woman's actions. Two strong examples are the representations of Margaret; as I have already discussed, both Philips's and Cibber's texts emphasise Margaret's influence on the political action of the play alongside her libidinous character. By contrast, the asexual Volumnia in John Dennis's *The Invader of his Country* is shown to exert a powerful influence over her son, extending beyond that suggested in the original text. The implication of these revisions and additions is two-fold. First, as feminist critics have argued, the increase in women's prominence on stage confirms an actress to be an economic asset to a production.<sup>43</sup> Second, and more pertinent to my discussion, female characters are crucial to any attempt at politicisation undertaken during the process of adaptation.

The presence of politically active women on stage challenges critical perceptions of early eighteenth-century literature which stress the 'lack of social and political recognition afforded to women'.<sup>44</sup> Although this discussion has been limited to representations of women in the adaptations of Shakespeare's history plays, it is significant that politically active women can be found in other plays of the period. For example, as Nicoll notes, James Thomson's *Sophonisba* (1730) depicts a heroine whose actions are 'dominated by patriotic sentiment, intent to benefit her native land'.<sup>45</sup> Of course, in Nicoll's esteem, the absence of a love interest in Thomson's play significantly raises its literary merits. This somewhat formulaic aesthetic judgement aside, *Sophonisba* demonstrates the potential for patriotic women outside the confines of Shakespearean adaptation. Marsden has asserted that developments in women's theatrical employment are 'closely linked to the definition of women as

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<sup>42</sup> Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, p. 128.

<sup>43</sup> This is of course not limited to the adaptation. For further discussion of the commercial importance of the actress and of women as the 'stars' of the theatre see Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 171.

<sup>44</sup> Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 115.

<sup>45</sup> Nicoll, *British Drama*, p. 132. Later in his career, according to Nicoll, Thomson loses this edge, reverting to the more popular dramatic theme of love in *Edward and Eleonora* (1739) and *Trancred and Sigismunda* (1745).

inhabitants of the private or domestic sphere and their exclusion from the public world of politics and commerce.’<sup>46</sup> On stage, she suggests, women are precluded from participating in the male-dominated world of politics. Marsden’s assessment of eighteenth-century dramatic representations of women echoes analyses of women’s social position during the period. Linda Colley has argued that male anxiety about female aspirations towards political activity reached a crescendo during the eighteenth century. Throughout the period, British law assigned to women a negligible independent status:

Stripped by marriage of a separate identity and autonomous property, a woman could not by definition be a citizen and could never look to possess political rights....A female Briton could be punished for plotting against the state, but – in law – she could never play the part of an active patriot within it.<sup>47</sup>

Women had no active role in the political processes of the nation. Given this denial of women’s political agency, it is surprising that male dramatists created roles that depicted women participating in politics. As Rachel Weil has argued, women’s legal status bears little relation to the real opportunities available for women’s legitimate political action or commentary.<sup>48</sup> Political events of the period work against the social restrictions placed upon women. For example, Murray Pittock has argued for the significance of women’s role in supporting the Jacobite cause, both domestically and politically: ‘not only was there a romantic appeal to Jacobite outlawry; it also offered the opportunity for action in a wider public sphere, from the running and defence of estates which might be forfeit to the recruitment and even the leadership of troops, if not actual fighting itself’.<sup>49</sup> The effect of political events upon domestic arrangements forced women into public action. Pittock’s image of Jacobite women rising to fill the void left by their menfolk is perhaps somewhat romanticised, however, his argument confirms Colley’s assertion that men were anxious to prevent women’s political activity. Were the fears of Protestant men regarding women’s participation in politics connected with their fear of Jacobitism? Are representations of politically active

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<sup>46</sup> Marsden, ‘Re-written Women’, p.43.

<sup>47</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p. 253.

<sup>48</sup> Weil, *Political Passions*, pp. 162-4.

<sup>49</sup> Pittock, *Jacobitism*, p. 78.

women necessarily confined to un-patriotic women with Jacobite proclivities in pro-Hanoverian texts, or, patriot heroines in texts with Jacobite sympathies?

There are a number of ways in which the women of these plays move from the domestic spaces conventionally designated as female into the male-dominated public sphere of politics. One of the most frequently documented ways by which playwrights created politically active female characters was cross-dressing.<sup>50</sup> In Aaron Hill's *King Henry V, or; The Conquest of France by the English* (1723) Harriet, Henry's rejected lover, dresses as a man in order to gain access to the French camp at Harfleur and assist the Dauphin in his plot to murder Henry. Harriet's belief that Henry has toyed with her affections and tossed her aside in order to move on to bigger and better conquests (both romantic and political) fuels her desire for revenge. Her presence creates a sexual tension that is full of ambiguity. Dressed as a young man she addresses the Dauphin and Princess Catherine. The French Prince welcomes Harriet enthusiastically:

Come to my Arms, thou more than manly Spirit!  
Dress'd in a Woman's Softness! Why, Thou Charmer!  
Thou Angel of a Traitor! What a Treasure  
Of Honour and Reward does All *France* owe Thee!<sup>51</sup>

This passage is reminiscent of the rhetoric of a courtship ritual, and the comedy of his unwitting double entendre should not be overlooked. The Dauphin's caricature carries a more serious implication by demonstrating a level of anti-French feeling that, as I have already suggested, resonates throughout the play.

Harriet and Catherine provide examples of the way in which women's presence in the political space threatens masculine sexuality. Straub relates this threat directly to cross-dressing:

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<sup>50</sup> For example, Kristina Straub asserts that 'the cross-dressed actress came into a fashion that lasted, not without changes, throughout the century. Whereas obvious travesty was crucial to the acceptance of male cross-dressing on the early eighteenth-century stage it seems to have become so for female cross-dressers only in the second half of the century' See Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, p. 127.

<sup>51</sup> Aaron Hill, *King Henry the Fifth; or, The Conquest of France by the English* (London: W. Chetwood, 1723), p. 18.



The encroachments of the cross-dressed actress upon the territory of masculine sexuality are especially threatening since they seem to imply the inability of men to hold that territory.<sup>52</sup>

As a cross-dressed woman Harriet challenges the Dauphin's sexuality; his representation is not only Francophobic, but also homophobic. His emasculation undercuts his ability to defeat the English. Harriet's apparent masculinity gives her access to the political arena. She utilises this access to satisfy her desire for revenge. Harriet's plot is thwarted, however, due to the intervention of another woman, the unashamedly feminine Catherine. Henry quickly recognises his would-be assassin as his ex-lover. But when Harriet is forced to discard her disguise, the threat she poses to Henry does not diminish. As a woman, Harriet has a more significant effect on the politics of the play than as a 'pretend man'. Joan Riviere has suggested that 'women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men'.<sup>53</sup> This motif can be discerned in Harriet's actions. Dressed as a man, she is feared by Henry for the harm he believes she is capable of inflicting. As a woman, she 'guards herself from attack by wearing towards him the mask of womanly subservience, and under that screen, performing many of his masculine functions herself – for him'.<sup>54</sup> In this instance the 'masculine function' performed by Harriet is not sexual; instead, she fulfils a patriotic function. In a dual assault, Henry's patriotism is threatened by Harriet's presence and bolstered by her eventual self-sacrifice. In an intensely private yet publicly heroic episode Harriet kills herself to free Henry's heart:

I have one new Discovery, yet, to make You, [feeling in her pocket]  
Containing the last Secret of my Soul;  
I did not think, so soon, to have disclos'd it:  
But since, without it, you can ne'er be happy,  
I send it, thus---directed to my Heart [draws a dagger, and stabs  
herself] (43-4).

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<sup>52</sup> Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, p. 127.

<sup>53</sup> Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 35.

<sup>54</sup> Riviere, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', p. 42.

Harriet's action mirrors and exceeds the king's patriotic virtue. Her presence diminishes Henry's altruism. His concerns for establishing his claim to the French crown are overshadowed by his desire for his ex-lover, 'O! Let me kiss away that mournful Sound'(43). Harriet's death restores Henry's ability to act selflessly, he is free to marry in the best interests of England. Harriet's real encroachment upon masculine territory is achieved not through cross-dressing, but in her representation as a patriotic woman.<sup>55</sup> It is significant that in this way Harriet becomes a tool for the promotion of ideal kingship. She forces Henry to abide by his own rules:

Kings must have no Wishes for Themselves!  
We are our People's Properties! Our Cares  
Must rise above our Passions! The public Eye  
Shou'd mark no fault on Monarchs; Tis contagious! (42).

Like the honorary Briton Catherine, Harriet exemplifies the patriotic ideals expected of a just monarch. The representations of these two women influence the public arena by reflecting an idealised version of kingship, which, within the confines of the play, is emulated by their monarch/lover/husband. The subject of the play, England's conquest of France and Hill's own political allegiances do not support the notion that politically active women were derided by the pro-Hanoverians. This play is steeped in Protestant ideology yet, contrary to that ideology, women are not only active participants in politics, they also bring about positive results.

Are the women in adaptations of Shakespeare, as Marsden contends, 'paragons of domestic virtue' who 'support England by supporting their fathers'? Do the actions of these women simply reinforce 'the hierarchical structure of the family

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<sup>55</sup> Cross dressing in eighteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare's history plays is not limited to plot-furthering disguises – female characters adopting male dress as a form of concealment. The *Dramatis Personae* of the 1745 edition of Colley Cibber's *Papal Tyranny* lists the part of Arthur played by Miss J. Cibber. It could be argued that the role of the youthful and patriotic Arthur is feminised in order to achieve a realistic representation, but why not simply cast a young man? Cross-dressing in order to signify an exchange of gendered character traits was relatively common. As Emmet L. Avery states in his introduction to *The London Stage*, men often played the more vulgar female roles in comedy and for a brief time plays performed entirely by a female cast were popular. However, in these cases, cross-dressing has less significance in terms of the politicisation of women's roles and therefore supports my assertion that Harriet's real political agency is achieved through her patriotism rather than her cross-dressing. See Emmet L. Avery (ed.), *The London Stage* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), part 2, vol. i, p. cxxiv.

and by extension the basis of patriarchal society’?<sup>56</sup> Family, I suggest, is not the primary concern of women such as Catherine in Hill’s *Henry V*. For the patriotic women of these histories, the welfare of the state is of greater significance than filial obedience or wifely duty. Catherine angrily objects when her father commands her to marry Henry in an attempt to secure peace between England and France: ‘Let that Duty, which I owe my Country / Inspire me to confess, what fix’d Aversion / What rooted Hatred, Nature bids me bear / To Him of all Mankind, the most abhorid’ (30). Her primary ‘duty’ is to her country not her father. When she finally comes to admire Henry for his valour and patriotic virtue, she turns against her brother and not her country. Catherine sees her family’s honour as inextricably linked with that of her country. Her brother’s plot is treacherous; only a military victory secured by patriotic duty can lead to an honourable conclusion to Henry’s invasion of France. Political manipulation through marriage or murder can only reinforce France’s inferiority to England. To term her ‘a paragon of domestic virtue’ does not describe Catherine with any accuracy. Nor does it prove an adequate assessment of Philips’s Lady Eleanor or Cibber’s Lady Grey. All of these women privilege country over family. Eleanor endures public humiliation, preferring to be paraded through London as a witch rather than becoming ‘the Cause of civil discord!’ (15). Lady Grey initially refuses her King’s offer of marriage to secure the welfare of her children on the ground that, ‘You mean Dishonour to yourself; / I am as much unworthy to be Queen / As I’m above serving an ill Design’ (37). Her eventual marriage to Edward does not negate this sense of patriotic duty. As civil war erupts, the Queen acts to protect their son and future heir to England’s throne.

Are women who participate in the political worlds of these adaptations therefore stripped of their femininity and seen either as manly-women or un-patriotic ‘others’? Pittock’s assessment of pro-Hanoverian representations of Jacobite women as ‘the bold Amazon[s] of the North’, created by the ‘the sexual vigour, alien threat and role-altering qualities of an all too contemporary revolutionary movement’ is, in part at least, supported by the adaptations.<sup>57</sup> On the whole such masculine women are French not Scottish but they are certainly represented as alien and threatening to their male patriot opponents. In her examination of popular representations of eighteenth-century actresses, Straub suggests that these women are positioned in an ‘emergent

<sup>56</sup> Marsden, ‘Daddy’s Girls’, p. 26.

<sup>57</sup> Pittock, *Jacobitism*, p. 80.



role as the other to masculine sexuality, the commensurate image against which masculinity is defined'.<sup>58</sup> Straub's statement is relevant not only to contemporary accounts of actresses but also to the roles these women depicted on stage. Whether they are real or merely dramatic representations, women who gain access to the public space are often endowed with traditionally masculine characteristics. However in the adaptations, politically active women are not confined to this image of masculinity; they cross the divide between feminine and masculine spheres, adjusting their image as required. Constance in Colley Cibber's *Papal Tyranny* (1745) represents just such a woman who is able to move between the extremes of feminine and masculine conduct. She is power-hungry and participates vicariously in the battle:

Hark!

The wafting Winds, in audible Perception,

Set all the Terrors of the Field before me!

This Jar of Drums! The lofty Trumpets Ardour!

The vaunting Echoes of the neighing Steed!

This Clang of Armour! These sky-rending Shouts

Of charging Squadrons speak the Battle raging!<sup>59</sup>

Constance is inflamed by this imagined scene. She cannot actively contribute to this masculine activity and her image of war is somewhat romanticised, but her desire for and enjoyment of the conflict are not responses usually associated with femininity. In direct contrast, eight lines on Constance turns suddenly to thoughts of maternal care:

Hear, Heav'n, my Pray'r! If thy dread Will decrees,

Our House must fall, let not my riper Sins

On hapless *Arthur's* Head be visited!

O! spare, protect his youthful Innocence!

That Life prolong'd may propagate his Virtues! (10)

She is fearful for the safety of her son, and although it may be argued that these fears are connected with her own desire for victory and fear of subjugation, her prayer for

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<sup>58</sup> Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, p. 21.

<sup>59</sup> Colley Cibber, *Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John*, (London: J. Watts, 1745), pp. 8-9.

his survival *irrespective* of the outcome of battle presents an image opposed to her earlier demonstration of conventional masculinity. A further example of the way in which women achieve political agency through the manipulation of traditional gender roles can be identified in representations of asexual women. For example, in John Dennis's *The Invader of His Country* (1719), Volumnia, mother to Coriolanus, clearly has a sexual past. However, as an older woman, her sexuality is irrelevant within the confines of the play. Volumnia is neither feminine nor masculine. Her asexuality and the respect she commands from Coriolanus validate her political influence. In this text Volumnia's political agency is linked to the hierarchy between mother and son and the sexual inactivity of the matriarch. Volumnia is granted access to the public sphere not because she demonstrates masculine qualities or because she performs an act of self-sacrifice but because she is represented as genderless. Her power comes from her status as mother. I do not wish to suggest here that such characterisation of gendered stereotypes was new to these adaptations. There are many earlier and contemporaneous examples of women who are both masculine and feminine.<sup>60</sup> However, in these plays, women who emulate both masculine and feminine characteristics gain privileged access to the public space, and become active participants in both the public and the domestic arenas.

I am concerned to pre-empt the criticism that these women essentially provide their leading men with a love interest. Marsden has argued that women's presence in the public space in eighteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare is 'simply an extension of their domestic function' as dutiful daughters and wives.<sup>61</sup> Are these women ultimately represented as domestic patriots whose influence in politics is merely the result of their relationships with powerful men?

Feminist readings of these adaptations, such as those offered by Schiel and Marsden, hold that 'women have no power beyond the masochistic ability to arouse sympathy by their suffering'.<sup>62</sup> Women's role is simply to reinforce an oppressive patriarchal system. These adaptations, however, do not follow this pattern. Women are shown to be politically active; their power is constrained by social hierarchy, not gender restrictions. Such a statement, although seemingly out of step with contemporary accounts of early eighteenth-century restriction of women's political

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<sup>60</sup> Some obvious examples are the representations of Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots and the allegorical representations of women created by Aphra Behn, Delariviere Manley and Eliza Haywood.

<sup>61</sup> Marsden, 'Daddy's Girls', p. 20.

<sup>62</sup> Marsden, 'Rewritten Women', p. 46.

activity, has much in common with modern scholarly analyses of the lives of Jacobite women during the period:

Thrust out as it was from public action, Jacobitism was strong in the private sphere: passed on through marriage alliances and families, and by determined women who had to take responsibility for running property their menfolk had left to fight. More remarkable than this, perhaps, is the evidence for the direct involvement of women in the campaigns, and not always as camp-followers either.<sup>63</sup>

Women, Pittock suggests, were pivotal in sustaining the Jacobite following within both the domestic and the public settings. However threatening such women might have seemed to pro-Hanoverian observers, were women necessarily represented in pro-Hanoverian texts as dutiful domestic goddesses?

It is important to note that these women are not criticised for their political involvement. Despite repeated claims made in Hanoverian propaganda regarding 'the unnaturalness and threat of Jacobite women', the patriotic women of the adaptations are revered as equals of their male counterparts.<sup>64</sup> This lack of criticism is not confined to the texts themselves, but is also characteristic of contemporary critical comment. For example, in the anonymous poem 'To Mr Philips, on his *Humphrey Duke of Gloucester*; by a Gentleman of the House of Commons', Margaret's political involvement is not condemned. Rather she is pardoned as a victim of Beaufort's manipulation; 'When *France* and *Rome* mislead the reigning Queen, / Feign both would guess at him behind the Scene'.<sup>65</sup> If women's participation in politics is more than 'simply an extension of their domestic function' as dutiful daughters and wives, what is the effect of creating explicitly political roles for women and, more importantly, specifically patriotic roles?<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Pittock, *Jacobitism*, p. 8

<sup>64</sup> Pittock, *Jacobitism*, p. 80. Pittock cites as an example, a print showing Jacobite women 'being attacked by British army soldiers with drawn swords at Culloden, apparently in a spirit of self-congratulation'.

<sup>65</sup> 'To Mr Philips, on his *Humphrey Duke of Gloucester*; by a Gentleman of the House of Commons' *The British Journal* No. XXV, March 9th 1723, pp.2-3. This is again contrary to Marsden's argument that women who participate in the political realm face scathing criticism, see Marsden, 'Daddy's Girls', p. 20.

<sup>66</sup> Marsden, 'Daddy's Girls', p. 20.



The sentimental language employed by Blanche in *Papal Tyranny* appears to support the assertion that women are confined to a domesticated version of the traditionally masculine political sphere:

Princes, born to Passions not their own,  
Are Slaves in Love, where happier Subjects reign:  
The Hearts of royal Maids, like publick Treasure,  
Are to the Exigents of State assign'd  
While private Comfort is referr'd to Virtue.  
Of this had I been train'd in Ignorance,  
Then yielding thus my Hand had dy'd these Cheeks  
With Shame; but conscious what I owe the Publick,  
With the same joyful Pride I seal this Peace. (16)

Blanche's actions and her motives are comparable to those of Henry V in Hill's adaptation. She puts aside her personal romantic desires and privileges the needs of her country. She acts with self-sacrifice characteristic of patriotic behaviour, but also essential to women's role as dutiful daughters and wives. Blanche conforms, sensitively yet rationally to the strictures of patriot kingship. As J. C. D. Clark has suggested, the 'patriot king' was an ideal that appealed to Tories and Whigs alike by articulating 'the conveniently unspecific aspiration that a charismatic prince's accession would somehow bring about national regeneration or healing'.<sup>67</sup> These are Blanche's concerns, she sacrifices her domestic happiness in return for the nation's peace. Her actions are ideologically unspecific, Whig and Jacobite doctrines of kingship were, Clark claims, generically similar.<sup>68</sup> Blanche's conformity to the ideal of patriot kingship is not, as modern readers may be led to suppose, an affirmation of Tory doctrine. The appropriation of patriot kingship by the Tories was largely due to the publication of the 1749 edition of Bolingbroke's *Letters*, four years after the première of *Papal Tyranny*.<sup>69</sup> Prior to this date patriot kingship was a trope suited to cross-party appropriation. However, the lack of partisan specificity attributable to

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<sup>67</sup> Clark, *English Society*, pp. 114-15.

<sup>68</sup> Clark, *English Society*, p. 118.

<sup>69</sup> 'On the Spirit of Patriotism' was written as a letter to Henry Hyde, Lord Cornbury in 1736. It was not published until 1749. *The Idea of a Patriot King* was written in response to George Lyttelton's request for literary counsel for Frederick, Prince of Wales. See Armitage (ed.), *Bolingbroke*, pp. xl-xliv.

Blanche's overtly patriotic actions does not imply the domestication of her political influence. Blanche represents a patriotic ideal, a version of kingship open to cross-gender representation.<sup>70</sup> Blanche's femininity does not limit the impact of her patriotism or restrict her influence upon the political action of the play.

In Theobald's *Richard II*, Lady Piercey's actions serve as a counter to Isabella's obsession with domestic healing. Piercey's role is developed as a love-interest for the heroic Yorkist Aumerle. Theobald's desire to '*heighten Aumerle's Character in making him dye for the Cause*' places Piercey central to the action.<sup>71</sup> It is in part due to Aumerle's love for Piercey and his hatred of her father for commanding the cessation of their courtship that he devotes himself to Richard's cause, an act that ultimately leads to his execution. Piercey's function in the plot is therefore restricted to the domestic sphere of the play. Her influence, however, is not limited to this domestic space. Although her action is induced by her father's command, the cessation of her courtship with Aumerle has public as well as private significance:

We must no more indulge the Theme of Love:  
 Time's Severity hath interpos'd  
 A strong Correction: Now Allegiance calls thee,  
 A Subject's Duty, and a suff'ring Prince,  
 Demand the Care of thy collected Soul;  
 And must extinguish ev'ry lighter Thought. (13)

Piercey identifies Aumerle as Richard's and England's only hope. She does not see her action as one of rejection, merely as a temporary cessation until peace is restored. But what does this passage say about her political allegiance and her sense of duty to her father? Piercey is not represented as a dutiful daughter, but a dutiful subject. Her father, Northumberland, is an ally of Bolingbroke. Piercey allies herself with Richard.

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<sup>70</sup> Rachel Weil argues for a similar cross-gendered perception of monarchs in relation to criticism levied at Anne. Despite being perceived as a weak and pliable monarch, Anne's failings, Weil contends, were never considered to be the result of her sex. See Weil, *Political Passions*, pp. 162-70.

<sup>71</sup> Lewis Theobald, *King Richard II*, preface. Peter Seary describes Theobald's *Richard II* as 'a relatively unpopular play'. It ran for seven performances in 1720 and three more in 1721. In reference to Theobald's alteration of Shakespeare's original text Seary notes that, 'Theobald, like Dryden, was prepared to believe that observance of the rules might intensify dramatic impact'. I would suggest that if Theobald's alterations 'intensify dramatic impact' the heightening of Aumerle's and Piercey's roles play a significant part in this intensification. See Peter Seary, *Lewis Theobald and the Editing of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 39-40.

She repeatedly demonstrates contempt for her father's commands, 'Hold, cruel Lord, reverse that needless Order. / I will not meanly linger, like a Slave, / To be, by Vassal Hands dragg'd from your Presence' (53). Lady Piercey prioritises her public duty over her domestic function. Unlike Isabella, she does not use her influence to protect her domestic welfare. In placing herself firmly within the public sphere, Piercey risks losing her domestic peace. Her attempts to secure the re-establishment of Richard as rightful monarch privilege public over domestic welfare, a choice which Aumerle's execution and her own suicide prove a genuine sacrifice. Piercey inverts the usual trope of just kingship, the monarch's sacrifice for his/her people. Piercey and Aumerle, the subjects, sacrifice everything for their king.

Playwrights use female characters to carry their political agendas. In terms of contemporary politics, Hill's *Henry V*, despite an overt endorsement of Francophobia, tentatively supports Walpole's foreign policy of treaty-making.<sup>72</sup> Historically, Henry secured English control of Normandy and gained recognition as heir to the French throne by his marriage to Charles VI's daughter Catherine of Valois. In Hill's adaptation, Catherine's initial reluctance to marry in order to secure peace and her eventual acquiescence on the ground of Henry's patriotic virtue sit uncomfortably with the closing images of heroic England overcoming the barbarous French. This tension remains unresolved and disrupts the political consistency of the play. Catherine's version of patriotism, the play suggests, does not allow for the element of compromise required for effective government. Walpole's treaty-making may not be conventionally heroic; however, his policy of 'compromise' is patriotic and like the death of Harriet, a necessary evil.

The analogous representations of Margaret in Cibber's *Henry VI* and Philips's *Humfrey Duke of Gloucester* contribute to very different political agendas. Philips's play is, as I have argued at the beginning of this chapter, pro-government and openly in support of Walpole's response to the Atterbury affair. Bertrand A. Goldgar notes that the play immediately became the centre of controversy in the political press. It was seen as an attempt by Philips to gain preferment from Pulteney and Walpole – a political faux pas as the relationship between the two ministers was becoming

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<sup>72</sup> Rather unconvincingly, Katherine West Scheil limits the political purpose of Hill's adaptation to an attempt to discourage his audience from attending French entertainments. See Scheil, 'Early Georgian Politics and Shakespeare, 45-56.



increasingly antagonistic.<sup>73</sup> Margaret, the un-patriotic other, manipulates the immoral cardinal Beaufort, thus clearly declaring the political allegiance of the text. The tone of *Henry VI* is less obsequious. Cibber's version of Margaret is used to criticise weak kingship and advocate the interminable duty of the monarch to his or her people.

Colley Cibber's professed motive for writing *Papal Tyranny* was 'to inspire *King John* with a Resentment that justly might become an English Monarch, and to paint the intoxicated Tyranny of Rome in its proper Colours'.<sup>74</sup> Constance's fear of political subjugation by the French reflects this aim. The première of *Papal Tyranny* on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1745, five months before the Jacobite uprising, suggests the topicality of Cibber's intention and Constance's fears. However, the play was written eighteen years earlier in 1727 and is therefore chronologically closer to the attempted invasion of 1715 than the '45. Although Cibber had plentiful opportunity to alter his text during this period I have found no evidence to suggest he made any extensive revisions.<sup>75</sup> The apparent topicality of *Papal Tyranny* is therefore a complex issue. The play's relevance to the political situation in February 1745 was perhaps little more than a happy coincidence for Cibber – a coincidence which finally saw his play performed. Constance's maternal fears and her imagined participation in the battle are experiences which a significant proportion of the contemporary audience, reflecting on the past invasion and the implications of the Young Pretender's assembling army on the continent, could well relate to. Constance shares the fears experienced by Protestant Britons, fears that Clark identifies as common amongst dissenters and High Churchmen alike, and which remained prominent for the two decades between the writing of Cibber's adaptation and its first performance.<sup>76</sup> Representations of patriot women are not therefore confined to plays with a specifically anti-Hanoverian agenda. Patriotic and un-patriotic women gain access to the public sphere in pro-Hanoverian plays as well as in plays with Jacobite sympathies. As Pittock suggests, 'there were also women active on the other side'.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits*, pp. 32-3.

<sup>74</sup> Cibber, *Papal Tyranny*, dedication to Philip, Earl of Chesterfield, p. i.

<sup>75</sup> See Helene Koon, *Colley Cibber: A Biography* (University of Kentucky Press, 1986), pp. 142-4. *Papal Tyranny* was abandoned twice. At first 'disagreeable apprehensions of a first day' (Koon p.142) prevented its production. Then in 1737 Cibber withdrew his text from rehearsal due to public criticism of his endeavours. Emmett L. Avery cites some interesting examples of Cibber's attempts to quell this attack in 'Cibber, King John, And the Students of the Law', *Modern Language Notes* 53 (1938), 272-75.

<sup>76</sup> Clark, *English Society*, p. 102.

<sup>77</sup> Pittock, *Jacobitism*, p. 81.

These representations of patriotic and un-patriotic women are integral not only to the political plots of the plays but also to the political agendas of the texts. Women's behaviour has direct implications for the political stability of the nation, whether the England of the plays or contemporary Britain. In these plays women's responsibility to their country is clearly outlined in terms of patriotic duty and although some women's patriotism will be determined by their domestic role as mother/daughter/sister, for others, their patriotism will be judged in terms of an active participation in the political arena. Despite actively influencing the political situations re-enacted on stage and engaging with the political agendas of the texts, the language, desires and the expectations of these women are evidence of their continued involvement in the private sphere. By participating in politics these women are not excluded from domestic cares. However, this continued emphasis on conventionally feminine concerns does not limit their actions to a domestic imitation of their male counterparts. Conversely, the ideological power behind these representations of patriotic women is strengthened by their ability to influence both arenas. Are patriotic women therefore representative of an idealised version of Britishness?

#### **iv. Patriotic Women as Idealised Britons**

The female characters in Shakespearean adaptations are given a didactic purpose, either as role models or representations of un-patriotic individuals. This moralistic function, I suggest, has both a domestic and a public purpose. Rachel Weil contends that the boundary between public and private spheres was not fixed and immovable but shifting and malleable. Exclusion from or inclusion in the public sphere was 'a matter of perspective'.<sup>78</sup> In the adaptations, women's domestic relationships with kings, princes and courtiers, and, in some cases, their own social status, grant them political agency. This is not to suggest that women are represented as the facilitators of men's political function. Their political role is not simply an extension of their domestic status. By utilising the shifting boundaries between the domestic and the public, dramatists created female characters whose participation in public political activity is legitimate if not always patriotic. Women in these adaptations are portrayed

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<sup>78</sup> Weil, *Political Passions*, p. 231.

as cross-party patriots and idealised versions of Britishness that can be appropriated for Whig, opposition Whig, Tory or Jacobite propaganda. It is important to note that the gap between Tory, Whig and Jacobite policy was not always clear. As I have already noted, Jacobite, Tory and Whig versions of kingship were not entirely disparate and, according to Erskine-Hill:

It is as hard to distinguish Jacobite from Tory rhetoric as it is to tell a Jacobite from a Tory. All its most potent rhetorical gestures are shared, as are its positive values: its nationalism, its ideal of monarchy, its cult of moral integrity and independence....The slippery art of innuendo is as unavoidable problem for the modern scholar as it was, for its authors, a vital means of expression.<sup>79</sup>

Similarly, links between Tory, Whig and opposition-Whig agendas lead to much shared rhetoric. Although, as Bruce Lenman argues, modern scholars have over-emphasised the universality of 'an enduring triumphalist British identity based on imperial trade, imperial swagger, and Protestantism', some elements of British identity were, nonetheless, idealised cross-party.<sup>80</sup> Such elements are reflected in the patriotic women of the adaptations.

Marsden's claim that demonstrations of filial duty and domestic obedience allowed women in Shakespearean adaptations to represent the 'ideal Briton' does not take account of representations of women participating in politics.<sup>81</sup> My argument that these women are not merely domestic patriots but active participants in the political sphere suggests a very different and more dynamic image of the 'ideal Briton', certainly in terms of its female manifestation. It is this image of the ideal citizen, male *or* female, that gives these adaptations a wider cultural significance. These plays gave playwrights, actors, actresses and audiences the opportunity to participate in the formation and revision of national identity with reference, positive or negative, to England's varied history. As Benedict Anderson has observed, print-capitalism was a key element in the creation of what he describes as 'imagined communities' of nationality. The rapid growth in numbers of readers and the corresponding growth of

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<sup>79</sup> Howard Erskine-Hill, 'Literature and the Jacobite Cause: Was there a Rhetoric of Jacobitism?' in Cruickshanks (ed.), *Ideology and Conspiracy*, p.59.

<sup>80</sup> Bruce Lenman, *Britain's Colonial Wars 1688-1783* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), p. 77.

<sup>81</sup> Marsden 'Daddy's Girls', pp. 18-19.



print-capitalism allowed consumers to think about their own identities and to relate themselves to others in new ways.<sup>82</sup> The drama, I contend, participated in this exploration of national identity. Like readers, theatre audiences were given the opportunity to relate to representations of Britons. Adaptations, particularly adaptations of Shakespeare's history plays, are significant contributions to this search for a national identity. The plays provoked audiences into thinking about themselves in relation to the characters on-stage, not by presenting something new, but by reconfiguring well-known historical circumstances to suit current political events. In addition, the incipient image of Shakespeare as the father of English drama gave credence to a national identity inspired by his plays.<sup>83</sup>

Read as participants in a cultural debate concerning national identity, these adaptations depict a British nation made distinct from its European neighbours by a perceived historical superiority. Contemporary military failures are insignificant when compared with this illustrious past. Lenman observes that:

Defeated by Spain, thrashed by France, and humiliated by the very Protestant Scottish Episcopalian Jacobites the British monarchy staggered out of wars which had highlighted the violent clashes of interest within the devolved, multi-national Atlantic, and global web of interests it ruled or had ruled or hardly ruled at all.<sup>84</sup>

Such factual analysis should not detract from the insistence present in all of the adaptations on British superiority. This perceived pre-eminence arises from a long line of predominantly English patriots whose very histories are being rewritten and re-politicised in the plays themselves. The adaptations impart to these historical figures the political and social morality of a modern patriot. These 'ideal Britons' form part of a cultural and political heritage central to the formation of a British national identity. Ambitious modern politicians and seemingly politically inactive monarchs who do not have the pedigrees of these men and women threaten this ancient heritage. It is therefore necessary for the cultural debate about national identity to transcend the

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<sup>82</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 36.

<sup>83</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the rise of bardolatry during the eighteenth century see J. B. Kramnick, *Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700-1770* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1999).

<sup>84</sup> Lenman, *Briatin's Colonial Wars*, p. 77.

usual divisions between masculine and feminine, public and private, and embrace politically active women as key proponents of 'a national ideology of liberty and truth'.<sup>85</sup> Whichever side of the party divide(s) these texts occupy, frequent calls for liberty, freedom and heroic victory make a clear and homogenous demand. In order to secure an illustrious British future, modern Britons must emulate the glories of England's past.

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<sup>85</sup> Marsden 'Daddy's Girls', p. 17.

## Britain, Empire and Julius Cæsar

When awful Rome became the savage spoil  
Of wild Ambition, and of factious Broil;  
When by the Ruin Tyrant Nero rose,  
Lucan found Cause for Triumph from her Woes:  
He pardon'd all the Civil Sword had done,  
And bless'd the War, which fix'd That Nero's Throne.

Lewis Theobald, prologue to *The Fall of Saguntum* (1727)

When Empires are at Stake, nothing is Just,  
Or Great, but what implicitly maintains 'em.

Colley Cibber, *Cæsar in Ægypt* (1725)

Thus far this thesis has concentrated on English histories. With the exception of Haywood's foray into European history, all of the plays discussed in the first three chapters focused on historical events of particular importance to the British nation. This chapter and the one that follows, move away from plays concerned with English or British histories and look at the ways in which playwrights appropriated foreign histories as commentary on contemporary British politics. With this objective in mind, this chapter will discuss plays that re-enact the history of ancient Rome which, as D. R. Woolf has argued, 'serves as a kind of mirror for attitudes to English history'.<sup>1</sup>

The manipulation of ancient Roman history for the purposes of political discourse during the early-modern period has been well documented.<sup>2</sup> Restoration and Eighteenth-century commentators identified the Roman Republic as a gauge by which England and Britain could be judged. Perhaps one of the most infamous examples is Thomas Gordon's and John Trenchard's *Cato's Letters* published in *The London Journal* during the early 1720s. Gordon and Trenchard's Cato wrote about the interrelated problems of opinion, faction and ministerial corruption. Nicholas Phillipson observes that according to Gordon and Trenchard:

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<sup>1</sup> Woolf, *The Idea of History*, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Howard D. Weinbrot, 'History, Horace and Augustus Cæsar: Some Implications for eighteenth-century Satire' *Eighteenth Century Studies* 4 (1974), 395-6; Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage*; Philip Ayres, *Classical Culture and the idea of Rome in eighteenth-century England*.



What was needed was a new understanding of the principles of human nature and new histories of Rome and England to teach citizen to distrust all ministers, as a matter of principle, even those who held office in a country which was governed by ‘a wise and beneficent prince, a generous and public-spirited Parliament and an able and disinterested Ministry.’<sup>3</sup>

This updated version of ‘Catoic liberty’ presented its readers with a political model that idealised the Roman republic and identified parallels between the present British constitution and its ancient Roman predecessor. Despite its enduring success *Cato’s Letters* was not the only interpretation of Rome as a model for British emulation. As Bridget Orr has noted, between 1660 and 1714 English theatre presents a variety of perspectives on the Roman Republic and Empire, ‘from Tory celebrations of Augustan absolutism to classical-republican critiques of Tyranny’.<sup>4</sup> Philip Ayres has argued that imaginative literature ‘frequently insists on the connection between 1688 and the Roman Republic’.<sup>5</sup> Political drama of the period, Ayres contends, was one of the dominant participants in a debate in which connections were continually made between contemporary political events and ancient Rome.<sup>6</sup> Political discourse after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 focused on liberty and virtue, subjects that, as Ayres argues, were not confined to Whig discourse but were:

Current within most of the political tendencies of the first half of the eighteenth century, including Court Whig, dissident Whig (or ‘Patriot’) Opposition, Tory and even to an extent Jacobite. Because the discourse was so avowedly moral and civic-minded it seemed *ipso facto* self-legitimising; and of course its terms were rich in classical overtones, lending it authority.<sup>7</sup>

As I have already shown, liberty and the virtues of patriotism were cross-party terms appropriated in order to validate a variety of political ideologies. If, as modern scholars have suggested, the Roman Republic was adopted as justification for the Glorious Revolution and became the model to which all parties, indeed all factions

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<sup>3</sup> Nicolas Phillipson, ‘Politics and Politeness’, p. 231.

<sup>4</sup> Orr, *Empire on the English Stage*, p. 253.

<sup>5</sup> Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome*, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome*, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome*, p. 1.

aspired, is this reflected in the history plays? During the period 1719 to 1745 nine plays that took ancient Rome as their subject were premièred on the London stage. John Dennis, *The Invader of his Country* (1719), William Philips, *Belisarius* (1724), Colley Cibber, *Caesar in Aegypt* (1724), Philip Frowde, *The Fall of Saguntum* (1727), Samuel Madden, *Themistocles, The Lover of his Country* (1729), James Thomson, *Sophonisba* (1730), William Bond, *The Tuscan Treaty* (1733), William Duncombe, *Junius Brutus* (1734), and William Havard, *Regulus* (1744). In addition Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar* was staged throughout the period, and five new operas based on Roman history were produced and a popular song, Purcell's *Let Cæsar and Urania Live* (1737) was performed repeatedly. However, only one of the plays discussed in this chapter focuses on the Roman Republic, the remainder are all set in post-first triumvirate – imperial – Rome. This is an important distinction because although the Roman Republic was obviously a colonial power, eighteenth-century commentators often ascribed a more expansionist outlook to the Roman Empire from the rule of Julius Cæsar onwards. For the purposes of this discussion therefore, imperial Rome seems a fitting description. The implications of this shift in focus away from 'the virtuous Republic' to the Rome of insatiable military expansion are, I suggest, significant to representations of British national identity during a period of political and social conflict regarding Britian's own colonial endeavour.

Writing about British imperialism during the eighteenth century, Kathleen Wilson argues for a merchant-led desire for colonial expansion:

Walpole's Eurocentric policy was resented by many who felt it served Hanoverian rather than British interests; it was also incompatible with the demands for a bellicose foreign policy geared to colonial expansion that emanated from merchant groups in London and the outports, especially those involved in the West Indian and North American trade, where the monopoly companies held little sway.<sup>8</sup>

Wilson suggests that the 'aggrandizing imperial policies of France and Spain' caused British merchants to perceive a growing trade imbalance between Britain and her

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<sup>8</sup> Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 153.

European rivals.<sup>9</sup> It could be argued that to some extent these plays are involved in an aggrandizement of British imperialism through a comparison of British and Roman colonial growth and aspiration. It has been suggested by a number of critics that although the classical ideals of liberty and virtue remained dominant concepts in eighteenth-century political debate, only Roman-republican models were held in any esteem. As Howard D. Weinbrot suggests, 'Julius Cæsar himself was the chief republican exemplar of Roman expansion, and thus...the chief architect of the world's hatred for Rome'.<sup>10</sup> Eighteenth-century commentators almost unanimously rejected imperial Rome, that is Rome from the rise of Julius Cæsar, as a political model:

There is plenty of literary evidence to suggest that particularly after the establishment of the constitutional monarchy of William and Mary and the triumph of Whig libertarian ideas associated with it there was little official or public sympathy for Augustus insofar as he represented monarchical absolutism, territorially aggressive Roman imperialism and morally dubious overseas adventure.<sup>11</sup>

Critics such as Norman Vance depict a dominant body of literature that was explicitly anti-imperial Rome. Such assertions have obscured those texts that resist this seemingly unanimous denouncement of Rome. This chapter will focus on examples of early eighteenth-century dramatic texts that define 'Imperial Rome' and Julius Cæsar in a more favourable light. These persistent anomalies, I shall suggest, undermine such a polarised view of early eighteenth-century representations of ancient Rome. As Weinbrot has argued, eighteenth-century attitudes to Augustus Cæsar have been repeatedly over-simplified in modern literary and historical analyses of the period. I shall argue that critical assessment of eighteenth-century perceptions of Julius Cæsar is similarly flawed. Critics have identified Julius Cæsar as the representative of the obverse of eighteenth-century pro-Roman values. To eighteenth-century Britons, Julius Cæsar was notorious for his part in the demise of the Republic, he was representative of all that was wrong with Ancient Rome. Cæsar's actions lead,

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<sup>9</sup> Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, pp. 140-1.

<sup>10</sup> Howard D. Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 244.

<sup>11</sup> Norman Vance, 'Imperial Rome and Britain's Language of Empire, 1600-1837' *History of European Ideas* 26 (2000), p. 2.



inevitably, to the dissolution of the Republic. This view we shall now see, is belied by a number of plays from the period.

### i. Julius Cæsar: Imperialist Hero

To many readers of early eighteenth-century accounts of ancient Roman history, the description of Julius Cæsar as a hero might appear somewhat oxymoronic. Philip Ayres's observations are typical of the majority of modern critical analyses of the subject:

It is important to note that by 1720 men of all political persuasions, not just the Whigs, were regularly identifying their causes with the Roman Republic. The great majority in the articulate political nation until mid-century is pro-senatorial and anti-Cæsarian, though far more anti-Julian than anti-Augustan.<sup>12</sup>

There are however, as Ayres's account hints, prominent exceptions. Colley Cibber's *Cæsar In Ægypt* and Handel's *Giulio Cesare* are two examples. Handel's opera and Cibber's play focus on the events following Cæsar's defeat of Pompey at Pharsalia, the action commencing with Pompey's arrival in Egypt requesting asylum from Ptolemy, his supposed ally. *Giulio Cesare* premièred on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1724 and was enormously successful. Winton Dean and John Knapp have claimed, 'It may be some indication of the success of the opera that Colley Cibber produced his *Cæsar in Ægypt*, dealing with the same episode, at Drury Lane on 9 December; it was a failure, enjoying only six performances'.<sup>13</sup> In *Giulio Cesare* Cæsar is depicted as 'a man of action' and of just moral perspective. Dean and Knapp describe Cæsar's reaction to 'The gift of Pompey's severed head' as a denouncement of Tolomeo's barbarity 'full of angry scales and burst of that prolonged coloratura, narrow in compass, low in pitch, and intensely energetic'.<sup>14</sup> Cibber's play depicts Cæsar as a hero. His tyranny is, according to Cibber, misunderstood:

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<sup>12</sup> Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome*, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Dean & Knapp, *Handel's operas 1704-1726* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) p. 501.

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed interpretation of Handel's score and a full plot summary of *Giulio Cesare*, see Dean & Knapp, *Handel's operas 1704-1726* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 483-526.

Men one Day, may change their Thoughts of Cæsar  
The Time may come when his destructive Arms  
Shall well repay this Ravage of the World,  
And force them by Obedience to be happy.<sup>15</sup>

Howard Weinbrot's brief analysis of the play claims that Cibber concurs with the 'growing consensus' that Julius Cæsar was 'the chief architect of the world's hatred for Rome'.<sup>16</sup> According to Weinbrot, Cibber's text merely reiterates the predominant anti-Cæsar stance of contemporary political commentators. This reading is not entirely convincing. Weinbrot bases his interpretation on the words of Decius, 'If Cæsar is oppos'd, he knows his Course, / 'Tis forward; thro' your Walls, with Wasteful War' (21). This anti-war sentiment is unfortunately taken out of context. Firstly is it not curious that Decius, one of Cæsar's Lieutenants, adopts such pacifist terminology? Secondly, Decius' warning is followed by an aside, 'How will the Heart of Godlike Cæsar glow, / Folding his Arms around the vanquish'd Pompey!' (21). Cibber's text, from the outset, challenges contemporary depictions of Julius Cæsar as an ambitious, ruthless tyrant. Why is the representation of Julius Cæsar in Cibber's play so seemingly out of step with those of his contemporaries? Kathleen Wilson's description of British attitudes to colonialism during the first half of the eighteenth-century has parallels with the words of Cibber's Cæsar:

From the perspectives of the pro-imperialists, the British Empire was imagined to consist of flourishing and commercially viable colonies, populated largely by free (white) British subjects and supplemented by commercial outposts in "exotic" climes, which served as bulwarks of trade prosperity, naval strength and virtue of the parent state. The imperial project existed to maximize trade and national power, in other words, and colonies were considered crucial to the "empire of the sea" that contemporaries believed Britain had, or should have, dominion over.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Colley Cibber, *Cæsar in Ægypt* (London: J. Watts, 1725), p. 30.

<sup>16</sup> Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue*, p. 244.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, pp. 155-7.

Cibber's Cæsar therefore, can be seen to exemplify this pro-colonial vision – a position in keeping with Cibber's own pro-Hanoverian, pro-Walpole politics. If Britain's 'destructive arms', through the supposed mutual benefits of colonialism, will 'repay the ravaged world' surely Julius Cæsar is an appropriate model for British colonial aspiration. If, as Karen O'Brien suggests, 'Eighteenth-century British writers in general held a peculiarly cosmopolitan image of their colonial and trading empires as peaceful and mutually beneficial consumer communities', negative representations of Julius Cæsar, particularly an expansionist Cæsar, would be counter-productive in a pro-colonial text.<sup>18</sup>

Another example of a pro-Cæsar text is John Sheffield's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*. Sheffield, a disgraced Jacobite, divided the original play into two parts, posthumously published as *The Tragedy of Julius Cæsar* (1723) and *The Tragedy of Marcus Brutus* (1723). According to Michael Wilding the plays are de-politicised.<sup>19</sup> Wilding claims that Sheffield's alterations are the result of:

Neo-classic demands for rationality, decorum and orderliness...Shakespeare's varieties of political character and motive are reduced, and the emphasis is shifted from his consideration of political themes and commitment to action, to a specific focus on one historical event.<sup>20</sup>

This is true so far as it goes. Sheffield's manipulation of *Julius Cæsar* in order to force the text into conformity with Aristotelian poetics has a considerable impact on the structure of the play. Wilding's reading of the adaptations however, does not take into account the full impact of Sheffield's alterations. Many of the alterations allow for a more positive interpretation of Julius Cæsar. Michael Dobson cites Sheffield's adaptations as part of 'the whole batch of topical revisions of Shakespeare which appeared in the wake of the Jacobite rebellion of 1715'. Sheffield's adaptations were, 'largely designed to counter the Whig view of the play' which positions Brutus as a 'freedom-loving patriot' whose suicide is an act of defiance rather than apology.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Wilding (ed), *John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, The Tragedy of Julius Cæsar and The Tragedy of Marcus Brutus* (London: Cornmarket, 1970), p. ii.

<sup>20</sup> Wilding, *John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham*, p. i.

<sup>21</sup> Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, pp. 94-5. See also Michael Dobson, 'Accents Yet Unknown: Canonisation and the Claiming of Julius Caesar' in Marsden (ed.), *The Appropriation of Shakespeare*, 11-28.



Conversely, Sheffield's version bemoans the assassination of Cæsar. The senatorial chorus at the end of Act III in *Marcus Brutus* warns of the consequences of such 'unnatural' actions:

We little thought when Cæsar bled  
That a worse Cæsar wou'd succeed...  
...Heark to all Rome's united Voice!  
Better that we a while had born  
Ev'n all those Ills which most displease,  
Than sought a Cure far worse than the Disease (407-8).

Despite Wilding's assertions these plays are clearly political, particularly when considered in relation to Sheffield's political affiliations; although he acquiesced in the Glorious Revolution he did not promote it. He assisted James II and voted for conjunctive sovereignty. A similar sentiment, albeit with a very different political agenda, is presented in Cibber's *Cæsar in Ægypt*, 'Is there a Crime / Beneath the Roof of Heav'n that Stains the Soul / Of Man, with more infernal Hue than Damn'd Assassination' (27). Sheffield identifies the assassination of Cæsar as a parallel for the ill-fortune that had beset the Stuart dynasty in more recent times. This rejection of assassination is echoed in Cibber's representation of Cæsar. For Cibber however, it is not the death of the Emperor that is important but his leadership of Rome. With the exception of this brief allusion to his untimely demise - ironically and purposefully spoken by Brutus - Cæsar's assassination is not dwelt upon in Cibber's text. This pro-Hanoverian representation of Julius Cæsar celebrates the Emperor's colonial success offering Cæsar as a model for the Whig ministry and British colonial aspirations. All of these texts represent Julius Cæsar as a hero, not the traditionally maligned villain, destroyer of the glorious Roman Republic. The dual focus on Rome as both a pro- and anti-imperialist model, identified by Norman Vance and others, is echoed in these bipartisan representations of an heroic Julius Cæsar. Cæsar, like Rome, can be appropriated for any political agenda.

Pro-Cæsar dramatists were not an isolated group. Ayres identifies the Whig writers John Dennis and Aaron Hill as commentators who, through their narrative histories, demonstrate an admiration for Julius Cæsar 'precisely for understanding that

this once-admirable institution [the Republic] had become an empty shell'.<sup>22</sup> Another example of a pro-Cæsar narrative historian is Laurence Echard. Echard's *The Roman history: from the beginning of the city, to the prefect settlement of the Empire by Augustus Cæsar* (1695) had reached its sixth edition by 1707 and continued to be reprinted into the 1720s.<sup>23</sup> Although, as Weinbrot notes, Echard's 'pro-Augustan royalism' became increasingly unpopular', his depiction of Julius Cæsar as a hero retained authority during the periods in which it may be assumed both Sheffield and later Cibber were writing their dramatic accounts of Roman history.<sup>24</sup> Echard writes of Cæsar:

A person of the greatest Soul, the most magnanimous Spirit, and of the most wonderful Accomplishments and Abilities that Rome, or perhaps the World, ever saw; whether we consider him in his Care and Vigilance, in his Valour and Conduct, or in his knowledge and learning; all which noble Qualities made him belov'd and reverenc'd by the People, honour'd and ador'd by his Friends, and esteem'd and admir'd even by his Enemies. And setting aside his Ambition, which was the Fault of the Times, as well as his Temper, he was never much justly tax'd with any great Vice, but that of Women.<sup>25</sup>

This analysis of Julius Cæsar as a caring, vigilant and honourable leader contrasts with the normative description of Cæsar as a tyrant. But Echard was not the only commentator to describe Cæsar in such a positive light. The French historian, Paul de Rapin-Thoyras' *Histoire d'Angleterre*, translated into English between 1721 and 1731

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<sup>22</sup> Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome*, p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> In reference to Echard's *Roman History* Joseph Levine comments, 'the work was very popular, judging by the number of editions that were quickly printed'. Levine also cites John Tomlinson's opposing opinion. Tomlinson suggests that the work was not usually applauded, although the first two volumes were thought better than the rest. Echard's *History* ran to five volumes in total, the last three of which were published anonymously. This suggests the validity of Tomlinson's analysis of the perceived inferiority of the later volumes however, as Levine notes the rapid re-printing of the first two volumes suggests a positive reception. See Joseph Levine, *The Battle of the Books History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 345.

<sup>24</sup> Weinbrot cites Fielding as one of Echard's most prominent critics. Fielding attacked Echard's *Roman History* in *Voyage from this World to the Next* (1743). By 1771 *Roman History* was labelled 'a tasteless, hurriedly composed work', 'lame and defective'. See Howard D. Weinbrot, 'History, Horace and Augustus Cæsar', 395-6.

<sup>25</sup> Laurence Echard, *The Roman history: from the beginning of the city to the prefect settlement of the Empire by Augustus Cæsar* (London: Bonwick, Tonson et al., 1707) vol. I, p. 366.

was immensely popular.<sup>26</sup> Rapin's 'profess'd design was the Information of Foreigners, to let them see by what Steps and Degrees England has grown up to that Height of Power and Grandeur it is in at present'.<sup>27</sup> Indeed such pro-English, pro-Whig, rhetoric, whether intended by Rapin, as O'Brien suggests, or imposed by Nicholas Tindal's editorial hand, ensured that 'During the first half of the eighteenth century, Rapin's history played a role in the political education of the nation'.<sup>28</sup> Rapin's account of the Roman Invasion of Britain, although lacking the overt approbation of Julius Cæsar demonstrated in Echard's text, is hesitant to represent Cæsar as an ambitious self-server, 'Some have accus'd him, but how truly is uncertain, of aiming in this Enterprize at nothing but his own private Interest, and enriching himself with the Spoils of the Island'.<sup>29</sup> Rapin goes on to describe Cæsar's military manoeuvres during the invasion in some detail. He questions the dominance of Rome over Britain, using accounts from Lucan, Dion, Horace and Tibullus to substantiate his assertion that the:

Reputation *Cæsar* acquir'd by these two Expeditions was not near so great as it is represented to be in his *Commentaries* – But be this as it will, certain it is the Advantages that accrued from them to the Commonwealth were inconsiderable; which no doubt was the reason of *Tacitus* saying, Cæsar had rather shewn the *Romans* the way to *Britain*, than put them in Possession of it'.<sup>30</sup>

In this way Rapin both defends Cæsar against accusations of self-interest and positions Britain as a colony that was not only non-compliant, but, through the nation's lack of contribution to the commonwealth, does not adhere to contemporary understanding of the mutual benefits of the colonizer/colony relationship. In effect, Rapin removes the indignity of Britain's past as a Roman colony by suggesting that

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<sup>26</sup> See O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, pp. 17-20. O'Brien suggests that it was adopted as a Whig text. Rapin was a Huguenot lawyer and fought for William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne. For his services he was granted a pension from the King.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Rapin-Thoyras, *The History of England, as well Ecclesiastical as Civil. By Mr De Rapin Thoyras*, ed. Nicholas Tindal, (London: James and John Knapton, 1726) vol.1, prologue.

<sup>28</sup> O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 18.

<sup>29</sup> Rapin, *The History of England*, vol.1, p. 31. Colley Cibber makes an opposing observation in his play by devising a scene in which Caesar is seen to reward his troops with military honours and the spoils of their battle, keeping only the glory of military achievement for himself. William Philips creates a similar image of Belisarius as a beneficent leader.

<sup>30</sup> Rapin, *The History of England*, vol. 1, p. 40.



Britain was never beholden to Rome and that Rome did not benefit from Britain. As O'Brien suggests, Rapin's popularity, 'could be regarded today as a complicating factor in our understanding of national self-awareness in this period'.<sup>31</sup> Rapin's success is, 'not easily reconciled to this modern narrative of emergent national awareness except, perhaps, as evidence for the persistence of older elite, cosmopolitan ways of characterising the nation's history'.<sup>32</sup> What Rapin's account of Julius Cæsar does suggest is a softening in representations of Cæsar himself and an adjustment in the representation of British history. To what extent do other commentators adopt and adapt Rapin's reconfiguration of Cæsar and Roman Britain in order to suit pro-colonial discourse?

Aaron Hill's *An Enquiry into the Merit of Assassination* (1738) is an example of another pro-Cæsar Whig narrative. In a letter to Bolingbroke, Hill criticises contemporary accounts of Cæsar, and recommends his 'impartial' account:

The mistakes of his modern accusers, men of inflexible, unarguing prejudice: who, having accustom'd themselves to think Cæsar a tyrant, sacrifice reason and facts to opinion; and condemn the great martyr of popular liberty, as one, who was for trampling on the rights of his country. The injustice of this lazy concession in writers, and the original cause...shewn in as obvious a light as, at this distance of time, I was able to throw on the subject --- I wish may have had strength enough to travel so far, as to the honour of your Lordship's notice, in a late enquiry into the merit of Assassination, with a view to the character of Cæsar, and his designs on the Roman republic.<sup>33</sup>

Hill was aware that his account of Cæsar and the demise of the Roman republic, in direct opposition to already popular representations of Roman history such as Addison's *Cato* (1713), would require, if it were to succeed, impressive support. Writing to his brother, Hill comments, 'I shew Cæsar in a light which, though unexceptionally just, will appear so very new, as to provoke, I hope, the curiosity and attention of the public'.<sup>34</sup> Bolingbroke's response upon reading the tract suggests at

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<sup>31</sup> O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> *The Works of the Late Aaron Hill Esq.*, 'To Lord Bolingbroke, June 25, 1738' (London, 1753) vol.1, p. 284.

<sup>34</sup> *The Works of the Late Aaron Hill Esq.*, 'To my Brother, Oct. 3, 1737' (London, 1753) vol.2, p. 57.

least sensitivity to Hill's feelings, and at most a discernable shift, in Tory opinion of Cæsar:

If the treatise has not entirely convinc'd me, that CÆSAR was a Patriot, it has convinc'd me, at least, in spite of all ancient and modern prejudices, that he was so, as much as POMPEY; and that liberty would have been as safe in his hands as in the others.<sup>35</sup>

Hill's tract represents Cæsar not as the villain, tyrant, destroyer of the republic but as the man whose intentions were genuinely pro-Republic. Cæsar, whose plan was to save Rome from herself, was merely misunderstood.<sup>36</sup> Hill rejects Addison's representation of Cæsar as a tyrant who, 'ravaged more than half the globe, and sees / Mankind grown thin by his destructive sword'.<sup>37</sup> Addison's negative depiction of Cæsar's military expansion has obvious connotations for British colonialism, 'While Cato lives, Cæsar will blush to see / Mankind enslaved, and be ashamed of empire'.<sup>38</sup> If the colonial expansion of Rome is shameful, what implications does this have for Britain as a developing colonial power? Hill and Cibber both attempt to reconfigure Addison's version of history in order to suit their pro-colonial agendas. Cibber blatantly uses Cato as evidence for Cæsar's status as an Imperial hero:

Cato woul'd term it but a specious Bribe  
For power: That Pompey's Blood was, in regard  
To Rome, reveng'd, to court her Senate's Favour:  
That Cleopatra's beauty, not her Cause,  
Regain'd her Crown: Yet Cato has his Merits:  
And Men one Day may change their Thoughts of Cæsar (30).

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<sup>35</sup> *The Works of the Late Aaron Hill Esq.*, 'From Lord Bolingbroke, July 21, 1738' (London, 1753) vol.2, p. 417.

<sup>36</sup> For a further example of the representation of Caesar as pro-republican see, Gio Battista Coniuzzi, *Political Observations on the Moral Characters of the Roman Emperors, Commencing from the Reign of C. Julius Cæsar, and finishing with that of Constantius Chlorus* (London, 1755). Coniuzzi defends Cæsar's moral character, identifying his downfall as the result not of ambition or greed but his misplaced trust in his so-called friends and supporters.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Addison, *Cato*, I.i.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Addison, *Cato*, IV.i.

Cibber's Cæsar pre-empts Cato's criticism. But Cato, despite such error in judgement has some virtues, and likewise, the actions of Cæsar may, one day, be properly understood. However, for Cæsar to become accepted as a 'hero' rather than a tyrant, more evidence was necessary than simply the suggestion that commentators have erred in their judgement of him. In summarizing recent critical accounts of the formation of national identity during the eighteenth century, Karen O'Brien notes:

A national self, it is often held, needs a negative counter-image of the 'other' to give it definition and psychological purchase. In Britain for example, a growing sense of a Protestant, robust, masculine British self is said to have affirmed itself in opposition to a projected image of a Catholic, superstitious, effete French other.<sup>39</sup>

This type of self image has already been identified in earlier chapters – British patriots throughout history are contrasted with their feminised European enemies. Rome, I suggest, occupies the space of both 'counter-image' and model for British identity. For example, in William Philips's *The Briton* (discussed in chapter one), the Romans are characterised by their effete manipulation of language. Cæsar in particular occupies a space that traverses both spheres. In order to generate a convincing case for Cæsar and Imperial Rome as models for British colonialism, Cæsar had to be transformed not only into an imperialist hero but also into that model of political probity – a patriot.

## ii. The Patriot Cæsar

By representing Julius Cæsar's military exploits as heroic achievements expanding the Roman Empire, the plays of Cibber and Sheffield, although challenging traditional perceptions of Cæsar during the period, do not make unprecedented statements.<sup>40</sup> Cæsar's foreign campaigns, fought under the Republican government, were seen by

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<sup>39</sup> O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> For example, Plutarch offers a complex portrayal of Julius Caesar, emphasizing his heroic qualities but condemning his ambition.



most commentators as proof of military excellence.<sup>41</sup> Cæsar's involvement in the civil war however was not so easily justified. To suggest that Cæsar was not only a military hero but also a patriot conflicts with the majority of contemporary representations of Rome's first Emperor. Julius Cæsar was repeatedly represented as a tyrant, the antithesis of a patriot. In Addison's *Cato* (1713) Cæsar threatens the liberty of Rome and the Roman Empire. In Rowe's translations of Lucan's *Pharsalia* (1718), 'Cæsar is the incarnation of ruthless ambition operating to the destruction of the res publica, Cato is the most glorious of the republican heroes'.<sup>42</sup> The challenge such entrenched representations of Cæsar posed to alternative accounts was recognised by Hill. In a letter to his Brother outlining plans for his own Roman play, Hill asserts, 'the reputation of Mr Addison's *Cato* upon our stage, has made it an indispensable necessity, that whoever, in the same place, would see justice done to an opposite character, must proceed with a great deal of caution and delicacy'.<sup>43</sup> Hill took his own advice by publishing *An Enquiry into the Merits of Assassination* which he intended to act as a precursor to his play *Cæsar* an adaptation of Voltaire's *La Mort de César* (1731).<sup>44</sup> It is this detachment from negative representations of Cæsar that makes these texts particularly significant to a study of the patriot drama of the period. Indeed, Cibber in particular, depicts Cæsar's participation in the civil war as an act of patriotism, not the result of unfettered ambition.<sup>45</sup> As Ayres has argued in relation to the rhetoric of patriotism:

Like all political discourses, that current in the century after 1688 was about power and self-promotion. The attractiveness of its central terms led to its being assimilated by all the major parties. This was its success and its limitation. Any opportunist could use it.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Even Rapin's account of the Roman Invasion of Britain suggests some level of military achievement on the part of Caesar.

<sup>42</sup> Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome*, p. 24.

<sup>43</sup> *The Works of the Late Mr Aaron Hill Esq.*, 'To My Brother, Oct. 3, 1737' (London, 1753) vol. 2, p. 57.

<sup>44</sup> For further discussion of Hill's *Cæsar* which premiered as *The Roman Revenge* in 1747 see Gerrard, *Aaron Hill*, pp. 191-2.

<sup>45</sup> On the contrary, Cibber depicts Julius Cæsar as the avenger of tyrants; 'Tremble, ye Tyrants for your impious Power! / The Gods are just and send their Cæsar's arms, / T'avenge the Injured, on the guilty Head' (19).

<sup>46</sup> Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome*, p. 19.

I do not wish to suggest that Cibber and Sheffield were necessarily opportunist in their appropriation of patriotism, although as we have already seen, patriotism was a popular dramatic as well as political trope. Plays with a political agenda, whether acknowledged or denied, proved popular crowd pullers. However, the opposing political allegiances of these two dramatists suggest that a patriot Cæsar, however unconventional, could be represented to suit any partisan position.

Although the aim of those engaging in the discourse of patriotism was inevitably to amass 'power and self-promotion', it is exactly these terms that must be obscured from a representation of Julius Cæsar as a patriot. Echard's clumsy attempts at this culminate in the dismissal of Cæsar's oft-chastised ambition as 'the fault of the times'. Cibber's methods, if not more convincing, are certainly more complex. *Cæsar in Ægypt* juxtaposes two politically volatile states, Egypt and Rome. The rule of Egypt, their father anticipated and the Roman senate decreed, should be shared equally between Cleopatra and Ptolemy. In reality the Queen, 'the people's Idol' (2), is powerless in her brother's court. She is perceived by her subjects to have political sway, but this perception is merely a contrivance of Ptolemy to safeguard his position. Fearing the people might revolt should they become aware that the young King and his counsellors control Egypt, 'The Force of Ægypt wou'd not curb their Rage, / Nor Ptolemy were safe upon his throne' (2), Ptolemy therefore allows Cleopatra a degree of outward freedom.

The Roman republic is also suffering internal conflict albeit of a more palpable nature. Ptolemy and his counsel see the civil war between Cæsar and Pompey as an opportunity for shaking off the Roman control of Egypt:

The Storm of civil War, now rais'd by Cæsar,  
Withdraws their insolence from foreign Realms,  
To waste their Valour on their proper Subjects!  
Their distant Care of us, is but their Pride,  
And Wantonness of Power; intestine Jars  
May humble them to Justice, and reduce  
Their Empire to its old Italian Bounds (3).

This analysis not only underestimates Rome's hold over its dominions but also contrasts with Julius Cæsar's justification for the war with Pompey and his envisaged

conclusion of the conflict. Upon hearing of Pompey's assassination Cæsar is moved to tears, 'With what transporting Joy, the harrass'd World, / Had, in one peaceful, public Chariot seen / Pompey, and Cæsar, o'er their Jars triumphant!' (28). Cæsar's intention was not to overcome Pompey but to persuade his enemy to join with him against those responsible for the decay of the Republic. Cæsar identifies Pompey as a good man whose ambition coupled with that of the Tribunes turned him against Cæsar and by association the values of the Republic. Civil war, according to Cæsar, was the only option:

Had Rome her ancient Virtue, with her Power,  
Cæsar had trembled at her Civil Wars:  
But Luxury, Corruption, Vice and Fraud  
Have drain'd her down, ev'n to the Lees of Rome.  
Her Honours, now by publick Price are bought;  
Her Magistrates, by Blows, not Votes, elected:  
Thus is the Carcass of her Freedom torn  
By Beasts of Pray, each scrambling for his Share.  
Where Men are Wolves, what Wretch wou'd be the Lamb?  
Where Laws are violated, Arms are Virtue. (33)

This justification of his actions denies all accusations of personal ambition. Cæsar is a patriot, protector of republican ideals, acting in response to violations of Roman law. Therefore, when Achoreus questions Cæsar on his 'famed' ambition Cæsar replies, 'Where it opposes Virtue, charge me freely! / Be bold If I am justify'd to one / Good Man, the Millions I offend are Railers. / Virtue, like the Sun, shines not for Applause' (32). Cæsar's ambition is for Rome, accusations of self-interest are merely 'Wherewith thy Enemies asperse thy Fame' (32).

Sheffield's representation of Julius Cæsar demonstrates a similar focus on the patriotism of Cæsar's actions. Sheffield transforms Casca's report of Cæsar refusing the crown from Shakespeare's original descriptive passage to a dramatic scene. In giving Cæsar a voice, Sheffield questions conventional representations of the Emperor as an ambitious tyrant, 'tis the Tyranny, not Name, ye fear; / And that my Soul abhors, as much as you. / Witness, ye Gods, I have no other Aim / Than to advance



your Good, and my own Honour ' (223). Wilding again denies any significance to Sheffield's alterations except that of conforming to the unities:

Casca's description of Cæsar's refusing the crown – with its contemptuous description of the crowd and its jaundiced interpretation of Cæsar's behaviour providing an important strand in the political themes – is replaced by a direct and decorous representation of the episode, without Cæsar's collapse. (ii)

By removing Cæsar's collapse, Sheffield reverses the negative impact of the scene. In Shakespeare's text Casca claims, 'the rabblement hooted, and clapped their chopped hands, and threw up their sweaty night-caps, and uttered such a deal of stinking breath because Cæsar refused the crown, that it had, almost, choked Cæsar, for he swooned, and fell down at it'.<sup>47</sup> In Sheffield's version, Cæsar's commitment to Republican ideals remains untarnished. His refusal of the crown is staunch and his physical strength uncompromised. Instead of swooning at the 'stench' of the crowd, Sheffield's Cæsar challenges and refutes their judgment of him:

How have I us'd my Pow'r, that you should fear it?  
Then, to be more secure, here take my Life;  
I freely offer it to every Roman.  
Let out that Blood, you think boils with Ambition,  
I'd rather lose it, than out-live my Fame;  
Nor would accept of Pow'r, unless to please. (225)

I do not wish to suggest that Sheffield's *Julius Cæsar* represents Cæsar as entirely faultless. His personal struggle with his ambition and desire for power is intimately portrayed. However, these alterations do clarify Cæsar's position. Whatever his faults, Sheffield's Cæsar is clearly a patriot. In a statement about the role of kings, comparable to that of Henry in Aaron Hill's *Henry V*, Cæsar declares his intentions towards the people of Rome, 'I'll guard them from themselves, their own worst Foes; / And will have Pow'r to do whate'er I please; / Yet bear my Thunder in a gentle Hand. / Like Jove, I'll sit above; but 'tis to show / My Love and Care of all the World

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<sup>47</sup> William Shakespeare, *Julius Cæsar*, (London: Penguin, 1991) I.ii.241-6, p. 62.

below' (225-6). Cæsar accepts the power of a dictator in order to safeguard his people from the vice and corruption that have polluted the ideals upon which the glorious Republic was founded. When, after the assassination, Antony finds a scroll on Cæsar's body, he reads the contents to the assembled citizens:

Behold this Scroll, the very hand of Cæsar!  
In it he notes this firm and settled Purpose,  
First to subdue the Parthians, our worst Foes,  
And then restore Rome to her ancient Freedom.  
"I'll keep the Pow'r, saith he, of Rome's Dictator,  
"Till I have vanquish'd all her Enemies:  
"Then, O ye Gods! May she be free for ever,  
"Tho' at th' expence of all our dearest Blood!  
That precious Blood is here indeed let out,  
But where's the Liberty we purchase by it?  
Slaves as we are the Murderers and Villains. (324-5)

Cæsar's intentions were honourable, his ambition was for Rome, not himself. Sheffield's version of the reading of Cæsar's will departs from Shakespeare in that, rather than granting the citizens of Rome money and land (II.2.2.p.112), the will reveals his patriotic intention to restore to them their liberty – a freedom which by implication is, as Cæsar, forever lost.

In *Cæsar in Ægypt* Julius Cæsar is again depicted refusing a crown. Cibber uses the trope to highlight contrasting attitudes to arbitrary rule. In advising Ptolemy to refuse assistance to Egypt's ally Pompey, Photinus rejects obligation and gratitude as guiding principles for a monarch. In contrast Achoreus urges Ptolemy, 'To guard your Crown, Sir, is our eldest Duty: But what are Crowns that are not worn with Honour?' (5). Ptolemy, settling for the self-serving advice of Photinus, rejects Pompey's plea for help and offers his crown to Cæsar. Cæsar's response reinforces the moral position of Achoreus and further undermines the role of monarch, 'What Heirs from Heirs receive, blind Fortune gives, / Where Birth prefers the Infant to the Man! / While heritable Crowns entail not Virtue, / The Boast were greater to bestow, than wear them' (25). Cibber appropriates Cæsar's republican attitude towards monarchy, 'Crowns are the Trophies of Tyrannick Sway. / Romans may conquer, but

disdain to wear ‘em’ (25) in order to valorise the British constitution as determined by the Revolution Settlement. Cibber’s Cæsar condones modern Britain’s parliamentary monarchy and safeguarded Protestant future. As Ayres has suggested, ‘The Court Whigs under Walpole, desirous of presenting themselves as the defenders of liberties their party had secured, liked to picture the English as slaves until 1688....Their party, they insisted, had created the balanced constitution with the Glorious Revolution, and their models and analogies were generally classical’.<sup>48</sup> Cibber’s text contrasts the Egyptian arbitrary monarchy with the ideals of republican Rome in order to highlight the superiority of the British, Whig government. Is the fact that he does so through the representation of Julius Cæsar as a patriot more than a mere quirk of dramatic licence?

Favouritism is, as we have already seen, a recurrent theme in patriot drama of the period. Favourites and the consequences of favouritism are, unsurprisingly, important motifs in these pro-Cæsar plays. Unlike in the English histories however, favouritism is used by Cibber and Sheffield both to impugn the villains and to justify the actions of the patriots. When Cæsar’s enemies are accused of favouritism, it is a sign of their weak leadership and lack of patriotism. When Cæsar’s favourites turn against him, Cæsar is merely too trusting, placing a disproportionate emphasis on military honour as a measure of a man’s character.

In Cibber’s *Cæsar in Ægypt* Ptolemy’s counsellors demonstrate the danger favouritism represents to the nation. Having received Pompey’s letter requesting support, Ptolemy turns to his advisors. The King directs his request for counsel as a ‘challenge’. His counsellors vie for his approbation. Achoreus, the first to speak, responds with the voice of reason and his position is summarily rejected. From then on, each counsellor’s response ‘improves’ upon the sycophancy of the previous one until finally Photinus asserts:

What Laws of Nations, Justice, or of Honour,  
 What Contracts, Leagues, or Treaties bind us down,  
 To prop this falling Pompey with our Bones,  
 To be by Cæsar crush’d and trampled into Ashes? (7)

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<sup>48</sup> Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome*, p. 5.



Ptolemy's own ambition is awakened by Photinus. Photinus plays with the King's desire to retain absolute power over Egypt; failure to act against Pompey would, he argues, allow Cæsar to 'veil his vengeance, in an Act of Justice...T' invest her [Cleopatra] solely with the sov'raign Power' (13). In serving Ptolemy's ambition and greed Photinus secures his position as royal favourite and in accordance the remaining counsellors are commanded to 'obey / The Orders of Photinus' (8).

Such transfer of sovereign power has, as we have already seen, far-reaching consequences. In this instance it is not entirely clear what motivation Photinus has for this abuse of power. His advice is not tailored to assist his own promotion, he does not demonstrate machiavellian ambition like a Mortimer, nor is he a patriot manoeuvring his monarch for the good of his country. Photinus's advice is simply bad, stemming, initially at least, merely from the desire to outdo those whose counsel went before him. When, in accordance with his counsel Ptolemy presents Cæsar with Pompey's head on a stick, the outraged and grief stricken 'Tyrant' grants Ptolemy a reprieve for his 'youth and inexperience' and declares he will 'turn the Eye of Vengeance / On elder Criminals, thy Flatterers' (29). Photinus exerts his influence over Ptolemy with renewed vigour and motivation. When Ptolemy commands his followers to act like 'men' and give themselves up to Cæsar in order to save their King and country, Photinus's response is a model of patriotic resolve, 'Our Sovereign's Will, not Cæsar, shall condemn us' (47). By massaging the King's ego in this way Photinus paves the way for his own survival, or so he thinks. Despite Ptolemy's initial caution, 'What vaunting Project brooding in thy Brain, / To save thy self, wou'd plunge thy Prince in Ruin? (49), he is quickly swayed by Photinus who evokes images of the victorious Cleopatra aided by Cæsar, 'Wanton, and toying with the Fate of Ægypt' (49). Photinus presses all the right buttons, 'To give your Vengeance Choice, on whom to fall! / Whether on us, whose Arms wou'd set you free, / Or on this wasteful Tyrant, that enslaves you' (49). He incites revenge in the King and presents him with the means, the catacombs beneath the city in which Egyptian troops are hidden ready to pounce on Cæsar. As a favourite, Photinus is forced to exercise his influence not for self-aggrandizement but for self-preservation. Of course this second, more urgent reason for Photinus to sway Ptolemy is fruitless. Photinus is killed fighting against the united forces of Cæsar and Pompey. Not only is Photinus an ineffectual favourite, he is also a poor soldier.

In Cibber's play it is not the favourite who is at fault but the monarch. Adopting a familiar Whig defence - assuming the favourite is carefully chosen, favouritism is not in itself unpatriotic – *Cæsar in Ægypt* hints at the potential for patriotic favouritism. Cleopatra firmly places blame with her brother, not his favourites, 'I thought thy Youth misguided by thy Creatures, / That they alone had wrought thee, to the Tyrant; / But find thy Nature to their Hands, had form'd thee' (74). It is Ptolemy's tyrannous nature, his greed and unrestrained ambition that have led him to endanger the safety of Egypt and his people. It is ironic therefore that Ptolemy's death is depicted as an involuntary act of regicide. In their desperate attempts to escape the Romans, the Egyptians clamber aboard the King's bark. Ptolemy is killed by his own followers, the over laden vessel, 'Sunk floundring down, and perish'd in the Deep' (75).

In contrast, Sheffield's play depicts favouritism as Cæsar's 'fatal flaw'. It is a flaw that Cæsar himself is aware of:

I confess my Weakness, I am frail  
 Like other Men, and partial for a Friend;  
 Yet that's a fault Heav'n easily forgives.  
 Be thou, my best lov'd Brutus, Chief of Praetors:  
 And, Cassius may accept the second Place,  
 Not only in the State, but my Affection (277).

For Cassius, second place is intolerable. Sheffield depicts Brutus hovering between the extremes of supporting his patron or following Cassius in turning against Cæsar, 'What, kill the best, and bravest of Mankind, / Only for Jealousy? Of being Slaves. / Oh dismal Sound! Who can dread that too much? / The fear of Slavery is Fortitude.' (249). When Brutus finally resolves to reject Cæsar's patronage, he justifies this rejection on the grounds of his abhorrence of favouritism, 'Frowns had not frightened me, nor shall his Favours / With all their Syren Voice entice me to him' (278-9). Brutus justifies his treachery by accepting that the slavery of Roman citizens will be the undoubted result of Cæsar's rule. Brutus turns Cæsar's favouritism against him, portraying Cæsar as the purchaser of allies whereas in fact by 'purchasing' Brutus Cæsar has offended Cassius, the more likely subject for opportunistic acquisition.

Favouritism is a key concern of many of the Roman histories, not only those texts which focus on Julius Cæsar. In Phillip Frowde's *The Fall of Saguntum* (1727), a play set during time of the Roman Republic, the high priest Eurydamas and his co-conspirator Lycromas attempt to curry favour with Hannibal in order to secure their own safety when the inevitable Carthaginian victory occurs. It is significant that their attempts to secure the favour of Hannibal are based on the sacrifice of Fabius and Curtius the Roman heroes, protectors of Saguntum. In William Philip's *Belesarius* (1724), a play concerned with a history which for many, confirmed the demise of the Roman Empire, the tragic hero is Justinian's favourite.<sup>49</sup> As the play opens the Emperor decrees that Belesarius shall marry his sister Valeria, 'Pow'r and Honour will attend the Gift'.<sup>50</sup> Justinian divests himself of imperial power, choosing to follow academic pursuits whilst Belesarius acts in his absence. This relegation of power is a familiar theme and the consequences of such absenteeism are as serious in the Roman histories as in the English histories discussed in previous chapters. Ambition, favouritism, and factionalism epitomise the failings of Rome. The representations of Julius Cæsar in the texts of Cibber and Sheffield are akin to that of Echard's *Roman History*, 'A person of the greatest Soul, the most magnanimous Spirit, and of the most wonderful Accomplishments and Abilities that Rome, or perhaps the World, ever saw'.<sup>51</sup> Cæsar is not a violent war-hungry villain but the protector of Rome, who, had he not been so brutally prevented, would have reasserted the ancient rights and liberties of that once great Empire.

### iii. Cæsar and Rome: Models for British Colonialism?

Writing about representations of the Roman Republic and Empire on the English stage between 1660 and 1714, Orr suggests, 'the ideological emergence of the first Empire is legible in the often ambivalent fashion in which English playwrights identified their nation's ancient accession to civil society, true religion and domestic propriety'.<sup>52</sup> What Orr defines as an interest in England's 'own heroic age' is, she

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<sup>49</sup> Although Belisarius was successful in returning the city of Rome to the Roman empire (albeit an Eastern Empire) Justinian's plan to retake the Western Roman states never came to fruition.

<sup>50</sup> *Belisarius, a Tragedy* (London: T. Woodward, 1724), p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Echard, *The Roman History*, p. 365.

<sup>52</sup> Orr, *Empire on the English Stage*, p. 271.



claims, demonstrated in dramatic representations of Britain's 'original struggle with Europe's then dominant power'.<sup>53</sup> This interest, she suggests, began in 1688 and continued well into the first half of the eighteenth century. However, the British histories discussed in chapter one are, unlike the seventeenth-century texts discussed by Orr, not exploring Britain's heritage as a Roman colony and the struggle of Britons against Roman power. It is not the specifics of the Roman invasion of Britain that are of interest, but the actions of heroic Britons themselves. The plays that do discuss Roman history during this period are, I contend, more interested in the obvious parallels between the ancient Roman Empire and the developing British Empire. Despite the evident shortcomings of Rome at the time of Julius Cæsar, depicted not only by dramatists but also by historians and politicians as a rejection of the ideals of the once glorious Republic, Imperial Rome could still offer Britons an obvious model, albeit not an entirely flawless one, for their own colonial interest. O'Brien suggests that, 'Modes of national self-awareness imply or include concrete political ideas about what a state has been and should be; the journey, however, from political ideas to modes of awareness is an imaginative one, entailing, in the case of narrative history, a process of literary implementation'.<sup>54</sup> In order to determine through a figuration of Imperial Rome, what colonial Britain 'should be', a degree of literary implementation is required. Both narrative histories and dramatized histories, are instrumental in the transformation of Rome and particularly Julius Cæsar as models for British colonialism. Cibber's *Cæsar in Ægypt* strengthens this parallel by presenting a pro-Cæsar challenge to conventional portrayals of Julius Cæsar. As I have already suggested, Cæsar is represented as a hero. His expansionist agenda was motivated by patriotism not tyranny. To some extent this differentiation is achieved by a shift in focus away from viewing Roman conquest from the position of a 'colonised nation' to that of a colonial power, a shift suggested in part at least by Rapin's account of the Roman invasion of Britain. Cibber not only uses this shift to his advantage but further justifies Roman expansion by representing the Egyptians as willing participants in the subjugation of their country, 'From Ear to Ear, a joyous Murmur flies, / Bursting, anon to Shouts! Lo! Cæsar comes' (19). As the play closes Cæsar justifies his military actions to the widowed Cornelia:

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<sup>53</sup> Orr, *Empire on the English Stage*, p. 271.

<sup>54</sup> O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 4.

The Laws they [Scipo, Cato, Pompey's Sons] fight for, Cæsar will maintain;  
 Nor are they safer in their Hands than his!  
 When I look round the World and see  
 What Miseries attend Abuse of Power,  
 I judge my Conquests by the Gods assign'd,  
 To give their Laws new Force, and mend Mankind!  
 If then Ambition prompts me to excel  
 The greatest Patriot fam'd for ruling well,  
 Let foul-tongu'd Envy burst her swelling Heart,  
 My conscious Virtue shall perform its Part.  
 Cæsar his Period to the Gods shall trust,  
 Nor can, 'til Gods forsake him, think his Arms unjust (77).

As Howard Weinbrot has argued, 'For several commentators, the pax Romana was not only inherently offensive nor even a residual and continuing offence to British pride; it was also based on an ethic of war which was opposed to the ethic of trade'.<sup>55</sup> It is curious therefore that, through his representation of Julius Cæsar, Cibber chooses to attempt to justify this 'pax Romana'. In Cibber's text, Cæsar is depicted as the protector of Republican Rome not its assailant. Philip Ayres suggests that 'As Britain's power increased abroad, analogies with the classical world became less and less deferential, developing a strongly expansionist aspect' Cibber's text does just this.<sup>56</sup> As I have already noted, Cæsar upholds the ideals of the Republic, but has realised that 'this once-admirable institution had become an empty shell'.<sup>57</sup> Cibber's Cæsar responds to the disintegration of the republic by adopting an 'expansionist aspect'. Cibber represents Cæsar as the rightful commander of the Roman Empire, subduing Egypt into submission with the aim of ruling as the republicans had intended. Howard Weinbrot has asserted that, 'relevant literary works could not exclude themselves from this feverish and ongoing rejection of Roman military expansion in favor of British commercial expansion'.<sup>58</sup> This assertion is undermined by Cibber's and Sheffield's representations of Julius Cæsar. In *Cæsar in Aegypt*, and the tragedies of *Julius Cæsar* and *Marcus Brutus*, Cæsar's expansionism is depicted

<sup>55</sup> Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue*, pp. 250-1.

<sup>56</sup> Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome*, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome*, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue*, p. 275.

not as immoral or barbaric but as patriotic and honourable. The Roman intervention in Egypt served to exact vengeance for the murder of Pompey and, more importantly, to secure the rule of Egypt as both the Senate and the old King had decreed. Thus Cæsar's actions are justified by both patriarchal and constitutional law. Although this text appears to deny Ayres's analysis that analogies with Rome became less deferential, in fact, Cibber positions those responsible for the degeneration of the republic in opposition to Cæsar. As with Sheffield's adaptations, Cibber's play suggests that in Cæsar the Roman world loses not only a patriot hero but ultimately the hero who, had it not been for his assassination, could have restored Rome to her former glories.

It is important to note that not all Roman plays of the period overtly positioned ancient Rome as a model for British colonialism. The history upon which Philip Frowde's *The Fall of Saguntum* is based suggests the potential for an anti-Roman model of empire. Saguntum was seemingly abandoned to its fate by the Romans when Hannibal lay siege to the city for eight months. The inhabitants, not to fall into the enemy's hands, destroyed themselves in the conflagration of their houses and of all their effects. Rome made complaints to Carthage but to no avail. It was not until Hannibal directed his military threat to Italy that the Romans began to act against him and the second Punic war began. Clearly, this version of their history suggests that the Romans are not model colonialists. However, it is intriguing that Frowde chooses to criticise Roman colonialism through her Republican rather than Imperial history. The dictator Fabius, whose prudent measures in the face of this mighty enemy were labelled cowardice by the Roman counsel, is the hero of Frowde's play. His role however is somewhat different to that ascribed to him in history. Frowde's Fabius is a young Roman in love with the governor's daughter Timandra. Fabius and his fellow Roman Curtius are represented as the epitome of Roman nobility and heroism. Fabius curses, 'th' eternal Infamy of guilty Rome' and Curtius declares, 'We must not live to see the City taken; / But, bravely dying in Saguntum's Cause, / May our Blood expiate our Country's Shame'.<sup>59</sup> Throughout the play Fabius, Curtius and Theron, the chief priest of Hercules, are the only morally upright characters to voice criticism of 'Rome's Offence' (17) in failing to support Saguntum. Eurydamas and his confederate Lycormas, spread lies and insinuations about the Romans in order to

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<sup>59</sup> Philip Frowde, *The Fall of Saguntum* (London: W. Feales, 1727) pp. 13-14.



secure Carthaginian favour. The message to Britain is clear. Rome, despite the glorious virtue of individuals, forsakes her colony and in doing so neglects the implicit duty of a colonising nation to protect its dominions:

We did e'er to our own Honours fail;  
 If e'er unhappy Counsels did prevail  
 To let a brave Confed'rate miss our Aid,  
 Be That ill-fated Period thrown in Shade!  
 Or, to ease the memorable Blame,  
 Lets mend by Glory what we can't disclaim! (prologue)

To 'mend by glory', certainly in terms of military victory is, it could be argued, exactly what the Romans did after the fall of Saguntum. Frowde's play therefore can be seen to offer the Roman Empire as an example not only of the failure of colonial duty but also to signify the importance of reasserting imperial authority and by doing so, saving face. The analogy between the Roman loss of Saguntum and Britian's loss of St. Lucia to the French in 1723 could not have been missed by a contemporary audience.<sup>60</sup> Britain, the new colonial power should make amends for past indiscretions by asserting the nation's true glory, 'Our British Arms this gen'rous Pride avow, / To guard Allies, - and Empires to bestow' (prologue).

In William Philips's *Belisarius* the hero is depicted, like Cibber's and Sheffield's Cæsars, as a Roman hero greatly wronged by his countrymen. For Belsarius, however, it is the actions of his Emperor that promote the jealousy and factionalism which bring about his tragic demise. Belisarius is compared favourably with both Julius Cæsar and Fabius:

Not the first Cæsar as in his Resolves  
 More firm or flew more swift to execute.  
 Not Fabius was more wise, more circumspect.  
 Never was Man more lavish of his Blood  
 In Glory's hot Pursuit; the Conquest gain'd  
 Joyful he gives the Soldier their just Fame,

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<sup>60</sup> As Kathleen Wilson suggests, the St. Lucia fiasco reverberated throughout the decade continuing to be an issue for political debate well into the 1730s. See Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, pp. 137-205.

He shares the Fame, but yields them all the Spoil. (3)

Belesarius's virtues eclipse those of the Roman military heroes who have gone before him. Roman imperialism is again applauded.<sup>61</sup> The tragic end to Belisarius's life is not as the result of his expansionist outlook. Belisarius's military prowess harks back to the heroes of the Republic. It is the envy of his fellow Romans, the absenteeism of Justinian, the failings of Imperial Rome that secure his fate. When Belisarius returns victorious 'adorn'd with Conquest' his friend Proclus declares:

He were no Friend to Honour, Justice, Truth,  
No Friend to Cæsar, or the Roman Name,  
If Joy dilated not his Breast this Day.  
Again the Roman Name is great in Arms,  
To Heav'n ascends, with former Splendor shines,  
And Rome again obeys her rightful Lord. (5)

His words, ironically spoken to the very people who do *not* feel such joy at the success of Belisarius, are in stark contrast to the preceding and subsequent vitriolic discussions between Hermogenes and his brother Macro, 'Already I have spy'd the Path which leads / To gratifie Ambition and Revenge' (5). Hermogenes and Macro typify the unpatriotic behaviour identified by eighteenth-century commentators as the catalyst for the downfall of the Roman Republic. Self-serving ambition was not only the scourge of the Republic but also the affliction of Imperial Rome. Belisarius, like Julius Cæsar of Cibber's and Sheffield's plays is a model patriot, a hero despised for his success and his emulation of republican political ideals.

If these texts can be seen to identify the Roman Empire as an appropriate model for the British Empire, what prevents them from asserting the Roman model as the definitive one for British emulation? Obviously contemporary resistance to the suggestion that Imperial Rome should be viewed as an exemplar was hard to

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<sup>61</sup> Philips dedicates his text to 'the Honourable General Webb'. Webb was apparently shot at Wincaunton in Somerset and according to Philips's dedication is royalist, 'A victory which gave Preservation to the whole Confederate Army, added Glory to Your Country, and confers on You immortal Reputation' – given the circumstances of Belisarius's demise I'm not sure how flattering this comparison is meant to be.



overcome.<sup>62</sup> These texts do this by identifying individuals who, at moments of crisis, act with a profound patriotism. In selecting individuals who were great leaders, these texts demonstrate the way in which Rome failed to reach the great heights promised by these men, thwarted by the factionalism and self-centred ambition of those around them. It is not however only factionalism and ambition that are blamed for the demise of the Roman Empire. Religion is a significant factor too. Roman paganism, and for some writers Roman Christianity, disturb the pro-colonial, pro-Cæsar narratives of these texts.

Cibber overcomes this lack of Protestantism by highlighting the paganism of the Egyptians. Cibber's Romans evoke their gods very infrequently, no prayers are offered by Cæsar or his followers. Conversely the Egyptians criticise both their religious leaders and their gods, yet repeatedly demand favours for a myriad of different political reasons. Does this suggest that Cibber makes Cæsar more acceptable by not pursuing images of Roman religious beliefs? The prayers of the Egyptians repeatedly have a negative effect. For example, when Ptolemy invokes the 'Pharian' gods to 'Incline this Day propitious to our Vows!' (51), the lack of divine intervention during the subsequent action of the play reminds the reader of the Egyptian counsel's earlier disrespect for the 'holy function' (6) of Achorus. In addition, the irony of his thanksgiving, 'Gods! I thank you! / This Hour has well repaid the Wrongs of Empire' (70) followed shortly by the news that 'Pharos is in Flames' (72), is not lost. Cæsar merely mentions the gods in relation to his own fate, 'Cæsar his Period to the Gods shall trust, / Nor can, 'till Gods forsake him, think his Arms unjust' (77). In order to retain a sense of Cæsar's appropriateness as a British colonial model Cibber elides the fact that Cæsar is clearly not Protestant. Similarly Sheffield strips *Julius Cæsar* of references to Cæsar's paganism. Sheffield eradicates the soothsayer and omens from *Julius Cæsar* but retains the more palatable ghost of Cæsar in *Marcus Brutus*.

In Frowde's *The Fall of Saguntum* it is the pagan priests, Eurydamas and Lycormas, who are the villains. The paternalistic Thereon, Chief Priest of Hercules, contrasts with the ambition and self-interested scheming of Eurydamas and his associate. Thereon scolds the crowds for their gullibility in listening to the libel spread

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<sup>62</sup> Aaron Hill's *The Roman Revenge* (1747) is a good example. The play was not popular and Hill's representation of Cæsar as a patriot was commandeered by the pro-government press to their own advantage. See. Gerrard, *Aaron Hill*, p. 192.



by Eurydamas against Fabius. As the play draws to a close, Thereon has a vision of a new Saguntum arising phoenix-like from the ashes of the city. To some extent Thereon can be seen as a device designed purely for the purpose of reporting this vision. His place in the action of the rest of the play is insignificant, serving only to establish his 'morality' – he is essentially a Christian dressed in pagan clothing. According to Thereon, the new Saguntians shall maintain liberty and their faith until the time:

When as circling Years have roll'd their Round,  
 O'er various Realms shall Tyranny abound;  
 A mighty Nation then shall Heav'n ordain  
 To curb th' Oppressor, and to break his Chain;  
 A gen'rous People, that delight to save  
 Pleased from the Tyrant to set free the Slave,  
 Polite as Romans, and as Romans brave.  
 Hail, glorious Warriours! Wellcome to our Shore;  
 With Joy I hear your future Engines roar;  
 With these combin'd shall mighty Deeds be done,  
 I see Iberia's Empire soon o'er run (72).

This vision of Britain as a colonising yet liberating power suggests a moral role for colonial expansion. Protestantism is the key to this moralised version of colonialism. Britain as a Protestant nation is free from the tyranny imposed on her Roman Catholic neighbours. According to Thereon's vision, Roman-like Britons will free Spain from Catholic tyranny; the British Empire will expand as an act of liberation achieved by the conversion of infidels.

Thereon's vision conforms to what O'Brien describes as the imagined, 'peaceful and mutually beneficial consumer communities' of the British Empire.<sup>63</sup> Which, in part at least, was envisaged to include the introduction of Protestantism to the 'heathen' world. What else makes the British Empire better than her European

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<sup>63</sup> O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 19.

counterparts but Protestantism?<sup>64</sup> As Wilson suggests, the imperial project, ‘was immensely attractive to domestic publics, who seemed fervently to subscribe to its view of the essentially fair-minded, just and paternalistic nature of the British, as opposed to the French or Spanish, empire, and the formers ability to “Tame the fierce and polish the most savage”, civilizing the world through commerce and trade’.<sup>65</sup> Given Britain’s colonial losses to the French during the 1720s and the growing threat perceived posed by Spain, not only to British colonies but also to British trade links, the representation of Britain as the successor to the glorious Roman Empire was clearly attractive – if not, as we shall see in the next chapter, to everyone, at least to a large proportion of an increasingly commercial-minded population of colonial investors.<sup>66</sup>

According to these texts therefore, the Roman Empire failed because of the ambitious self-interest of its citizens and, perhaps more importantly, the Empire’s lack of religious purpose. Rome, even when converted to Christianity, was not the ‘Heav’n ordained’ nation. These plays are not ‘underscored’ by the ‘cultural and political anxieties’ that Gerrard identifies in James Thomson’s *Liberty* (1734-6). Cibber, Sheffield, and Philips ignore ‘the gloomy possibility that Britain may and perhaps must go the same way as Rome’.<sup>67</sup> Protestant and free, Britain will be, these texts suggest, more successful. Colonial endeavour is valorised in these Roman histories as the province of a libertarian Protestant nation. Of the plays discussed in this chapter, only one pauses to question the validity of colonial expansion. In *The Fall of Saguntum* Candace the Amazonian Queen remarks: ‘How poor a thing is Empire! And how vain, / To pride ourselves upon its short-liv’d Glories! / The mightiest Monarchs of the peopled Earth / Are still the Subjects to Capricious Fortune’ (24). It is this questioning of the motivation for empire-building, almost ignored by these pro-Cæsar, pro-expansion plays, that I wish to consider further in the next chapter. As we shall see, in turning our attention to a different ‘infidel’, Britain’s success as a colonising nation and the justification for her colonial endeavour often hinged almost entirely on her Protestant pedigree.

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<sup>64</sup> Such claims for the envisaged ‘mutual benefits’ of empire, are of course a generalisation and, as I shall discuss further in the next chapter, some commentators of the period produced overtly anti-colonial texts.

<sup>65</sup> Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, p. 157.

<sup>66</sup> For a detailed account of the level of investment in colonial activities during the period see, Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, p. 160.

<sup>67</sup> Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, pp. 132-3.

## Religion and the Ideology of Empire in Turkish History Plays

Are we turned Turks, and to ourselves do that  
Which Heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?

William Shakespeare, *Othello* (1604)

The Mahometan Religion is also one of the prodigious products of Reasons superstitions, which hath brought forth nothing good, not rational in it's production, more then the concession of one God....It is strange to consider, that Nations who have been admirably wise, judicious and profound in the Maximes of their Government, should yet in matters of Religion give themselves over to believe the Tales of an old Woman.

Sir Paul Rycout, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1668)

I also hope that none civil think that I am an Advocate for the Saracens, Arabs, or Moors (the Reader may call them as he pleases) when I bestow on them the honourable Epithet of *Warlike*....since in Eighty Years Time or, less, that Martial Nation erected an Empire of incomparably larger Extent than the Romans were ever able to do in eight hundred.

John Morgan, preface to *Mahometism Explained* (1725)

Popularised in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Turk became well established in the repertoire of stock characters on the eighteenth-century stage.<sup>1</sup> As Daniel Vitkus has asserted, in early modern 'scripts for the stage and in other accounts, the facts about Islamic or Ottoman Culture are often imbedded within or distorted by demonising fantasies.'<sup>2</sup> Late seventeenth-century drama remodelled these earlier demons and portrayed a Turkish Empire that would 'remind English audiences of the unique advantages of their own free, law-abiding, Protestant polity.'<sup>3</sup> In contrast to these representations in which the Turks were typified by cruelty and lasciviousness, the early eighteenth century witnessed a growing tolerance in attitudes towards the Near East demonstrated by the influence of Islam upon literature, art and

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<sup>1</sup> As Samuel Chew has noted, records of eighteenth-century theatre properties show that the 'Turk's head' was a common theatrical prop during this period. See Samuel C. Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 469-490.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel J. Vitkus (ed.), *Three Turk Plays From Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Orr, *Empire on the English Stage*, p. 66.



fashion. As John Sweetman has observed, 'Through illustrated books and the work of artists, Europeans in the years 1700-1750 were in fact to have vastly enhanced resources of knowledge and awareness of actual Muslim life placed at their disposal.'<sup>4</sup>

In the 1730s two new plays based on the history of Scanderbeg were performed on the London stage.<sup>5</sup> William Harvard's *Scanderbeg* premièred at Goodman's Fields in 1733. George Lillo's *The Christian Hero* premièred at Drury Lane in 1735. Written some time in the 1720s, Thomas Whincop's unperformed *Scanderbeg; or Love and Liberty* was published posthumously in 1747.<sup>6</sup> Why were these three plays all concerning the anti-Islamic hero Scanderbeg written, and in the case of Lillo and Harvard's texts, performed, in such close proximity during the 1730s?<sup>7</sup> As I have already suggested, the Turk was well established as a dramatic character typified by his cruelty and lasciviousness.<sup>8</sup> However, this small cluster of Scanderbeg plays represents more than a simple continuation of the recurrent theme of the subjugation of Islam by Christian moral supremacy. The almost contiguous appearance of these plays suggests a shared response to a cultural or political issue. In contrast to previous critics, I shall contend not only that these texts have political resonance but that they can also be read as contributions to the debate concerning the maintenance of empire and the effect of empire on government and religion.<sup>9</sup> As

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<sup>4</sup> John Sweetman, *The Oriental Obsession: Islamic Inspiration in British and American Art and Architecture 1500-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 61. In addition, Sweetman observes that 'fancy-dress' had a traceable factual background: for example, Thomas Jeffery's masquerade pattern-book of 1757 took plates from Vanmour's portraiture of sitters wearing Turkish dress. Linda Colley has asserted that captivity, commerce and Christian scholarship combined to inform, or mis-inform, British curiosity about Islam. See, Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002) p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> Scanderbeg or George Castriota (1405-68) gained fame for leading Albania in rebellion against the Turks.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that these were not the earliest examples of plays concerning the history of Scanderbeg. An entry for E. Allde in the *Stationer's Register* dated July 3, 1601 cites 'The True historye of George Scanderborge as yt was lately playd by the right honorable the Earle of Oxenforde his servants.' The text has not survived. See E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923, repr. 1945), vol. iv, p. 400; Samuel C. Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose*, pp.475-78. Chew dismisses suggestions that Marlowe was the author.

<sup>7</sup> Whincop died in 1730 at which time, according to his widow Martha, his play was unfinished. Martha herself is credited with completing her husband's work. See introduction to Thomas Whincop, *Scanderberg; or Love and Liberty* (London: W. Reeve, 1747).

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Vitkus identifies the key characteristics of the Turk as, 'aggression, lust, suspicion, murderous conspiracy, sudden cruelty masquerading as justice, merciless violence rather than "Christian Charity", wrathful vengeance instead of turning the other cheek' see Vitkus, *Three Turk Plays*, p. 2. Later in this chapter I shall consider the ways in which the 1730s plays use these familiar characteristics in representing Turks yet also challenge such stereotypes.

<sup>9</sup> For example, J. L. Steffensen has asserted that Lillo's *Christian Hero* has no political significance. Whilst I am willing to concede that if read in isolation the political commentary shared by these texts may not be so immediate, I do not find Steffensen's assertion wholly convincing. See, J. L. Steffensen & Richard Noble (eds.) *The Dramatic Works of George Lillo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

voices in the debate about the growth of the British Empire these texts are far removed from the deprecating representations of Turkish culture which dominated dramatic and factual accounts of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

David Armitage has argued that the 1730s were central to the formation of an ideology of British Empire:

It is now a historiographical commonplace that the 1730s and early 1740s marked a watershed in the history of the British state and empire. Both British and American historians take the decade on either side of 1740 as a pivotal moment in the histories of nationalism, patriotism and national identity.<sup>10</sup>

I shall contend that by representing in microcosm the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, the three Scanderbeg plays participate in the construction of Britain's national and increasingly imperial identity. In addition, these texts have their own party political agendas, which influence and frequently problematize issues of empire. Patriotism, as I have already discussed and as Armitage reminds us, formed the rhetorical currency of party politics during this period. If the rhetoric of patriotism is utilised in the Scanderbeg plays, how does it inform these constructions of empire? Unlike the English histories discussed in previous chapters, in which the French are repeatedly represented as the antithesis of English patriotism, un-patriotic behaviour is not indiscriminately associated with the religious 'other.' Vitkus argues, adducing convincing examples, that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century religious polemic linked Turk, Pope and Antichrist in a way that 'became a commonplace feature of Protestant historiography.'<sup>11</sup> This connection, we shall see, is eroded in the Saracen drama of the 1730s. During the early eighteenth century popular taste was at variance with the Church of England's stance on Islam.<sup>12</sup> Turkish style and customs were fashionable

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<sup>10</sup> David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 170.

<sup>11</sup> Vitkus, *Three Turk Plays* p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Sweetman has identified a wealth of examples in support of his argument for the growing eighteenth-century taste for 'la Turquie.' Some prominent examples of the literary interest in the near and far east are, John Ogilby, *Asia Atlas* (1673); Antoine Galland's French translation of *The Arabian Nights*, (1704-7); Simon Ockley *History of the Saracens* (1708-18); Thomas Shaw, *Travels in Barbary and the Levant*, (1737); Richard Pococke *Description of the East* (vol I, 1743; vol II, 1745); Frederick Lewis Norden, *Travels Through Egypt and Nubia* (1755 – French; 1757 – English). In addition Sweetman identifies the popularity of coffee, Turkish baths and flowers, Turk costumes at masquerades and a



thus creating a barrier to the anti-Islamic polemic disseminated by the church. In these plays, concerns for the costs and benefits of maintaining empire lead to questions about religious intolerance and, in common with contemporary accounts of Ottoman culture, result in unresolved contradiction. I shall examine the position of these plays as anti-Islamic in relation to contemporary accounts which created 'a picture of Islam as at once splendidly luxurious, admirable in its severity, sombre in its cruelty and sensuality and terrible in its strength.'<sup>13</sup> As Vitkus asserts, the beginning of the eighteenth century can be identified as a point of closure for the demonization of Islam so prominent in early modern drama. However, as we shall see, the erosion of Christian prejudice against Islam the beginnings of which can be traced to the early eighteenth century is a process requiring more than the downfall of an empire to reach any certain conclusion. As Vitkus remarks, the demonization of the Islamic East by the Christian West remains embedded in our supposedly enlightened culture of the twenty first century. The Scanderbeg plays of the 1730s were participants in a discordant social and political debate the rhetoric of which continues to echo in present day commentary regarding British national identity.

### **i. Towards an Ideology of Empire: The Ottoman Influence**

As they were coming to terms with the implications of the 1707 Act of Union, Britons began to consider what David Armitage has described as the formation of an ideological empire.<sup>14</sup> In the early eighteenth century Great Britain was expanding beyond the boundaries of a single unified nation and experiencing the simultaneous benefits and costs of colonial power.<sup>15</sup> It is as a part of this negotiation that contemporary accounts of the Ottoman Empire, both factual and dramatic, identify moral and political principles crucial to the success of the burgeoning British Empire.

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proliferation of London societies whose interests covered a range of Eastern topics, as further evidence of this fascination.

<sup>13</sup> Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose* p. 541.

<sup>14</sup> Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of British Empire*, pp. 170-198.

<sup>15</sup> It is important to note here that as critics such as Linda Colley have argued, the notion of early eighteenth-century Britain as a 'single' nation is clearly unconvincing. For my purposes however, set against the broader spectrum of colonialism, Britons can be identified as a community distinct from the inhabitants of the British controlled colonies.



During the eighteenth century the Ottoman Empire, once described as 'the scourge of God and present terror of the world,'<sup>16</sup> was experiencing stagnation caused by internal conflict and an erosion of power and influence.<sup>17</sup> Before the eyes of Britons this once terrifying Islamic empire was beginning to disintegrate. Like ancient Rome, the Ottoman Empire demonstrated that political instability at the heart of an empire could only herald its demise. Unlike Richard Knolles who wrote in the early seventeenth century of a threatening and potent adversary, commentators of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were faced with the need to revise this inherited anti-Islamic polemic and consider instead the implications of the downfall of this once great empire for British colonialism. I do not want to give the impression that by the beginning of the eighteenth century the Ottoman Empire had fallen apart. As Linda Colley has noted, the empire was not in serious decline by the end of the seventeenth century:

The British, like other western Europeans, were certainly more attentive by 1700 to signs of incipient Ottoman decay and they were also aware that Ottoman control over the three North African regencies, Algiers, Tunisia and Tripoli, was slackening. But although the Ottoman empire was now increasingly condescended to in prose, western European governments remained diffident about challenging it in any more substantial fashion, and early modern Britain never seriously contemplated doing so.<sup>18</sup>

The Ottoman empire had certainly not fallen, but there were signs of its faltering if not of its actual disintegration. Christine Woodhead has argued that Knolles and his contemporaries had perhaps over-emphasized the threat posed by the Ottoman empire to Europe:

Indeed, much of his purpose in writing the *Historie* was to bring home to Englishmen the strength of the Muslim adversary, and to encourage Christians to unite in their own defence....The seemingly monolithic, regimented society of the Ottoman Empire had to strive as hard in its own way to maintain

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Knolles, *The generall historie of the Turkes* (London, 1606).

<sup>17</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Pain and Grace: A Study of Two Mystical Writers of Eighteenth-century Muslim India* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), pp. 1-27.

<sup>18</sup> Colley, *Captives*, p. 66.

political, economic and cultural standards, and to conserve military and administrative efficiency, as did the states of Europe in theirs.<sup>19</sup>

Such assertions are of limited value – whatever the reality of the threat posed by the Islamic nations it is the common perception of the immediacy and strength of this threat that is significant.

The Ottoman Empire, Colley observes, was ‘one vast, alarming bloc’ the dimensions of which ‘provoke[d] awe, especially in a small, under-populated country like early modern Britain’.<sup>20</sup> As a consequence of repeated reiterations of ‘the strength of the Muslim adversary’, and despite any sense commentators may have had of the political instability of the Ottoman Empire, Britons continued to perceive the Turks as a danger to their own nation’s security and prosperity.<sup>21</sup> During the first half of the eighteenth century the activities of the corsairs based in the ports of the Barbary States of Morocco, Algiers and Tunis became synonymous with the increasingly frequent capture and enslavement of European traders. Anti-Islamic propaganda disseminated via sermons and royal proclamations designed to raise ransom money to free British captives, ensured that for many Britons, ‘North African Islamic society stood for tyranny, brutality, poverty and loss of freedom, the reverse and minatory image of Britain’s own balanced constitution, commercial prosperity, and individual liberty’.<sup>22</sup> The Muslim powers, including Turkey, were perceived as effective and dangerous predators.<sup>23</sup> As Colley has demonstrated, this was compounded by British colonial

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<sup>19</sup> Christine Woodhead, ‘The Present Terrour of the World’? Contemporary Views of the Ottoman Empire c.1600’ *History* 72 (1987) p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Colley, *Captives*, p. 66. Colley suggests that this attitude remained dominant even after the Battle of Waterloo in 1816 when Britain’s ‘European and global primacy seemed assured’.

<sup>21</sup> Woodhead, ‘The Present Terrour of the World’, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> Colley, *Captives*, p. 101.

<sup>23</sup> Western commentators repeatedly failed to distinguish between the distinct cultures that existed within the Islamic nations – this confusion predates the period of discussion and can be seen for example in the conflation of Negro/Arab representations of Othello. Frequently North African Muslims, Turks, Arabs and even Chinese Muslims were conflated into one culture. Sweetman has suggested that the Turk ‘was representative of a faith that – vaguely for most Europeans in the eighteenth century – stretched into Asia but which, through him, had stood out against Christianity for centuries on the battlefields of Europe’. See Sweetman, *The Oriental Obsession*, p. 64. In his 1725 translation of Mahomet Rabadan’s *Mahometism Explained*, Joseph Morgan demonstrates the etymological complexities that compounded the lack of distinction between various Islamic cultures. Morgan’s terms are confused throughout his text. His initial focus on the history of the ‘Moors of Spain’ decays into a vague account of unspecified ‘Saracen’ activity in Europe. Similarly Aaron Hill identifies all Muslim inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire as Turks and marvels at the religious ‘factions’ that exist across this vast Empire (*A Full and just account*, pp. 38-46). This conflation of different Islamic cultures into one unified people was fuelled by the threat it was imagined Muslims posed to Christians.

interests. The Ottoman Empire was a crucial source of trade for the supply of Britain's own Mediterranean empire.<sup>24</sup> Those fears were, at least in the case of the Barbary States, far from unfounded. In only one year, 1711, North African privateering was directly responsible for British losses amounting to £100,000 in ships and cargo.<sup>25</sup> Increasing pressure, particularly from the Church, to redeem slaves led to the release and procession through London of 150 British captives in 1734. This high profile acknowledgement of the very real threat posed to Britons involved in trade in the Mediterranean coupled with the role of the Church in disseminating an antagonistic view of Islam resulted in a paradoxical conflation of interest in and fear of Islamic nations.<sup>26</sup>

Modern scholars have conventionally assumed that despite the predatory successes of the North African privateers, in reality the Ottoman Empire did not fare well during this period.<sup>27</sup> Recently however Linda Colley has challenged the conventional view that, 'in the tides of history, the eighteenth century is usually considered to be the time of lowest ebb for the Islamic peoples and certainly by the end of the century Ottoman power was in decline'.<sup>28</sup> According to Colley, the Ottoman Empire was 'emphatically not in serious decline in the seventeenth century, or even, in some respects, for much of the eighteenth century'.<sup>29</sup> Colley's argument is certainly persuasive however, for the purposes of this discussion it is not the actual state of the Empire that is important but the perceptions of contemporary commentators. It is clear that relations between Britain and Turkey if not exactly congenial remained at least cordial in order to facilitate trade interests. Is this mutually beneficial relationship reflected in contemporary accounts of the Ottoman Empire?

Early eighteenth-century commentators began to recognise that their predecessors had underestimated the internal difficulties plaguing the Ottoman

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<sup>24</sup> Colley, *Captives*, p. 69; p. 103.

<sup>25</sup> Linda Colley, BSECS Annual Lecture, 1999. See also, Colley, *Captives*, pp. 65-72.

<sup>26</sup> This intertwining of fear of and interest in Islam and Islamic culture can be identified in many of the factual accounts of the Ottoman Empire and is echoed in the dramatic texts.

<sup>27</sup> It has been suggested, for example, that the Austro-Turkish wars which dominated South-Eastern European political history from 1526 to 1791 saw, in their final ninety years, a clear domination of the Turks by the Austrians. For a more detailed discussion of the history of the Ottoman Empire during this period see, Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), vol. I; Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), vol. I.

<sup>28</sup> Schimmel, *Pain and Grace*, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Colley, *Captives*, p. 65.



Empire. Aaron Hill's analysis in *A Full and Just Account of the present of the Ottoman Empire* (1709) departs from those of his predecessors such as Richard Knolles and Sir Paul Rycout in that Hill identifies within the floundering empire a colonial policy deemed worthy of envy, albeit an envy focused on the impressive size of the Ottoman dominions.<sup>30</sup> Hill makes repeated reference to the political, religious and social divisions that he claims caused the current decline and likely fall of the Ottoman Empire:

A conspicuous Probability of the approaching Downfal of the Turkish Empire, which has grown by gradual Acquisitions, to a most amazing Bulk, and Constitution, but at present seems so weaken'd by the Natural Corruption and Infirmities of Age, that Terrible Convulsions shake its Frame as if 'twere hastning onwards, towards a Sudden Period.<sup>31</sup>

According to this, the Ottomans 'have certainly built the most absolute Empire, and Arbitrary Monarchy, that has ever flouris'd since the Worlds Original.'<sup>32</sup> It is not however the securing of this empire and the related atrocities that interest Hill. He is quick to remind his reader that Britons are quite capable of emulating the immorality associated with Ottoman colonial policy. Christians can be as immoral as infidels; 'My native BRITAIN cou'd produce as Barbarous and Sordid wretches, as I ever met with in my Conversation with the Infidels'.<sup>33</sup> As Gerrard notes, both Defoe and Montagu criticised Hill for his erroneous and salacious narrative. Hill 'is undoubtedly more interested in projecting himself into the picture as an adventure hero than in attempting a serious synthesis of political, religious and geographical observation'.<sup>34</sup> Despite this sensationalist agenda, Hill's *Ottoman empire* is not entirely devoid of fact and has a lot to say about contemporary British opinion regarding Ottoman culture, history and politics. I would suggest therefore that Hill's focus on the means by which the Turks maintain their faltering Empire is significant. Writing in 1709, before the

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<sup>30</sup> Gerrard describes Hill's *Ottoman empire* as 'a luxury publication designed to establish its author's social and literary credentials'. See, Gerrard, *Aaron Hill*, p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> Aaron Hill, *A full and just account of the present of the Ottoman Empire in all its branches: with the Government, and Policy, Religion, Customs and Way of living of the Turks in General*, (London: John Mayo, 1709), p. 338.

<sup>32</sup> Hill, *A full and just account*, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Hill, *A full and just account*, p. i.

<sup>34</sup> Gerrard, *Aaron Hill*, p. 22-4.

irrevocable disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Hill identifies potential for the resurrection of the military prowess of the once victorious Ottomans:

Yet, notwithstanding the Inglorious reigns of several Modern Emperors, have added nothing to their Territories, they still continue in a full Possession of their former Acquisitions, and are not only able to Defend their own, but Conquer other Countries, shou'd the Warlike Spirit of some more Active Sultan once lead 'em out to Action. (4)

Hill's claim that if the Ottomans had 'active' leaders, they could regain their position as an imperial power should not be construed as suggesting that his 'Serious Observation' is entirely commendatory of Turkish political and social customs. Hill repeatedly criticises Turkish morality and religious belief. However, his text defines a Turkish model of empire that is offered as an example to Britain and her empire-builders.<sup>35</sup> Hill's *Full and just account* is not an isolated example of literary approbation of Ottoman culture. In *Letters from the Turkish Embassy* (1716-18), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu frequently commends Turkish government, law and social etiquette.<sup>36</sup> Other lesser-known texts, such as David Jones' *A Compleat History of the Turks* (1701 reprinted 1718), praise the Turks for their colonial prowess.<sup>37</sup> It could be argued that these texts are merely capitalizing upon the British public's fascination with the Near East rather than advocating British emulation of Turkish politics. The Roman plays discussed in the preceding chapter could be viewed in a similar way, as could the adaptations of Shakespeare. Although the taste for Islam was at the very least a significant commercial motivation for the composition and publication of factual and fictional accounts of Turkish culture, I do not think that this excludes such texts from participating in the ongoing debate about British and Ottoman colonial

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<sup>35</sup> In her study of dramatic representations of the Ottomans, Bridget Orr contends that oriental despotism 'served as a negative exemplar not simply of statehood but of empire.' This might suggest that Hill's admiration for Turkish colonialism, however limited, was unusual so early in the century, alternatively Orr may be placing too much emphasis on the widespread acceptance of a connection between oriental tyranny and British colonialism. See Orr, *Empire on the English Stage*, p. 66.

<sup>36</sup> For example, letter xxvii 1<sup>st</sup> April 1717, Montagu's description of the Bagnio at Sophia favourably compares Turkish women with their European counterparts; letter xxxix 4<sup>th</sup> January 1718, 'I am also charm'd with many points of the Turkish Law, to our shame be it spoken, better design'd and better executed than Ours'. See Malcolm Jack (ed.), *Lady Marty Wortley Montagu; Turkish Embassy Letters* (London: Pickering, 1993), p. 108.

<sup>37</sup> For other examples see, Daniel Defoe, *The history of the wars, of his late majesty Charles XII King of Sweden, from his first landing in Denmark, to his return from Turkey to Pomerania* (1720); Edmund Shishull, *Travels in Turkey and back to England* (1747).

policy. Indeed, despite growing support for the adoption of some aspects of Turkish culture and politics, authors continued to guard themselves against charges that they were over-enthusiastic in their portrayals of the traditionally maligned Ottoman Empire. In his translation of Mahomet Rabadan's *Mahometism Explained* (1725), Joseph Morgan seeks to anticipate and refute such criticism:

I also hope that none civil think that I am an Advocate for the Saracens, Arabs, or Moors (the Reader may call them as he pleases) when I bestow on them the honourable Epithet of *Warlike*....since in Eighty Years Time or, less, that Martial Nation erected an Empire of incomparably larger Extent than the Romans were ever able to do in eight hundred.<sup>38</sup>

There is an intrinsic contradiction evident in all of these texts that arises from attempts to reconcile inherited accounts of Turkish atrocities with an admiration for their colonial policy and success. This contradiction is crucial to texts involved in the promotion of colonial policy modelled on the Ottoman Empire. The division between Briton and Turk, repeatedly positioning the Christian Britons as superior to the Muslim Turks, suggests that unlike the dwindling Ottoman Empire, the developing British Empire has the potential not only to flourish but also to survive. The Ottoman Empire is a valuable model only if Britons recognise both its failings and its successes and in doing so identify and address these issues in relation to their own developing colonial policy.

## ii. Liberty and Consent

William Havard's *Scanderbeg* (1733) and George Lillo's *The Christian Hero* (1735) provide opposed constructions of the Ottoman model for the British Empire. Bruce McLeod argues that eighteenth-century colonial commentators such as Swift, Defoe and Johnson had to navigate a myth based upon 'liberty, homogeneity, commerce and natural laws' disrupted by 'the reality of dissenting politics, alterity, conquest and

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph Morgan, 'Some remarks on the work by the translator,' in Mahomet Rabadan, *Mahometism Explained* (London, 1725), pp. 229-30.



systematized exploitation.’<sup>39</sup> This fracture between the myth of empire and the facts of colonialism has much in common with the myth of stability discussed in previous chapters and can be seen in the Scanderbeg plays of Lillo and Havard.

Lillo’s version of idealized empire is carefully grounded in the patriotic rhetoric of liberty.<sup>40</sup> Lillo’s Christian Hero, Scanderbeg, is characterised as a patriot. Paralleling Western European perceptions of rebellious Ottoman colonies, such as the Romanian principalities, which saw in the decline of the Ottoman Empire the opportunity for regaining their independence, Lillo’s Scanderbeg accepts as his duty the liberation of Epirus from Turkish rule:<sup>41</sup>

I arm’d my subjects for their common rights.  
The love of liberty that fired their souls,  
That made them worthy, crown’d them with success.  
I did my duty – ‘Twas but what I ow’d  
The Heaven, and injured people and myself.<sup>42</sup>

Lillo makes an important moral distinction between the Christians and the Turks. Whereas Scanderbeg is the restorer and guardian of liberty, the Sultan deprives both his colonised peoples and his fellow Turks of their freedom. Aaron Hill identifies the subject’s lack of liberty as the major flaw in the Ottoman model of empire:

Depriv’d of that indulgent Liberty we taste in Britain, and sometimes sacrific’d to the mercenary Interest of a brib’d Decider, he [the Turkish subject] has yet this Happiness superiour to us, that he always loses a Cause

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<sup>39</sup> Bruce McLeod, *The Geography of Empire in English Literature, 1580-1745* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), p. 218.

<sup>40</sup> In this sense Lillo utilizes the same patriot themes identifiable in the English histories. As in adaptations of Shakespeare’s histories and the anonymous *The Fall of Mortimer* (1731) and James Ralph’s *The Fall of the Earl of Essex* (1731), Lillo adopts patriotic rhetoric that historicizes liberty as an ancient and lamentably diminishing right of all Englishmen.

<sup>41</sup> See for example, Defoe, *The history of the wars, of his late majesty Charles XII King of Sweden, from his first landing in Denmark, to his return from Turkey to Pomerania* (London: 1720). For an Islamic anti-Turk account see, Dimitrie Cantemir, *The History of the Ottoman Empire* (1714-16).

<sup>42</sup> James L. Steffensen & Richard Noble (eds.), *The Dramatic Works of George Lillo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 278.

before the melancholy Consequences of a tedious Controversy has disabled him to support that loss.<sup>43</sup>

Hill's disapproval of the oppressive Turkish regime is a thinly disguised criticism of Britain's own political system. In highlighting the corruption underlying British and Turkish politics he targets Britain's self-professed superiority. British liberty is identified as one of the myths of empire. The 'indulgent Liberty' enjoyed by Britons and promised to the British colonies is not only a colonial falsehood, a promise made to British colonies but never kept, but is also overstated as an advantage of British society. For the Turk, justice is swift and decisive; for the Briton justice is slow and its consequences are irrelevant in comparison to the resultant social infamy. The ideology of empire that positioned liberty as a governing value was however untenable, 'Such a theory had to reconcile the paradox of a mercantilist colonial system informed by post-revolutionary political ideology, which promised the Anglo-British rights of Englishmen to all free inhabitants of the colonies while subordinating their economic activities to the needs of the metropolis.'<sup>44</sup> As Armitage has asserted, government-supported theories for a mature colonial system based on the promise of liberty never came to fruition. Restricting the economic self-control of the colonies through inordinate taxation for the benefit of Britain inevitably undermined the myth of liberty.<sup>45</sup> In Lillo's play, however, liberty is crucial to the success of empire. The Turks lose the territories they have conquered because the liberty of these colonised people is infringed. Forced to adhere to Islam and terrorised by their Turkish masters, the Albanians rebel under the leadership of their rightful king.

Lillo identifies no parallel between the lack of liberty granted to Ottoman colonies and the empty promises of liberty made to British territories. Although in reality Britain's colonies received little benefit from the 'Protestant, commercial, maritime and free' principles upon which the Empire was purportedly based, Lillo's play clearly upholds this precept.<sup>46</sup> For Lillo, liberty is the foundation of empire and, as Christians, Britons should grant their colonized peoples the same rights as those

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<sup>43</sup> Hill, *A full and just account*, p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, p. 176.

<sup>45</sup> This is evidenced for example by the New England Colonies described by John Morgan Dederer as 'the hotbed of sedition and revolutionary foment in the 1760s and 1770s' and the infamous Boston Tea Party in 1773. See John Morgan Dederer, *War in America to 1775* (New York: New York University Press, 1990); B.W. Labaree, *The Boston Tea Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

<sup>46</sup> Armitage *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, p. 182.

enjoyed by free Englishmen. Conversely, in Havard's *Scanderbeg* the patriotic rhetoric of liberty is rejected as a myth of Empire. Havard's text reflects instead the facts of colonialism. In Havard's play liberty is an abused term which the tyrannical Vizier uses to coerce his followers into rebellion:

How must the glorious Change transport us all,  
When into Freedom Tyranny is turn'd?  
When each may say his Fortune is his own,  
And sleep in Fullness of Tranquillity?  
Then shall we taste the Sweets of Life, and Ease,  
Which happier Climes have known: then, enjoy  
That Liberty, which *Britain's* smiling Isle  
So long has boasted thro' a Length of Years.<sup>47</sup>

The Vizier is clearly well-versed in the application of patriotic rhetoric. In his attempts to raise followers for his planned rebellion against the Sultan, the Vizier suggests that the Ottoman Empire under his rule would enjoy British liberty. However, the Vizier's promises are empty; his followers would clearly never experience true liberty under his rule. The Vizier's disingenuous use of the ideal of British liberty demonstrates the way in which patriot rhetoric can be abused. Not only does this have implications for claims of Whig patriotism but also casts doubt upon the notion of liberty itself. In terms of colonial jingoism liberty is a powerful rhetorical tool. In Havard's play patriotism is reduced to an empty construct of partisan rhetoric.<sup>48</sup>

Although Havard's *Scanderbeg* pursues the liberation of his country 'the double Cause of love and Liberty' (5), he makes no promises of liberty or freedom to either his people or those he has conquered. Havard draws a link between Britain and Albania by positioning Scanderbeg as the political leader of a developing colonial power. As such rather than claiming to grant liberty, both Britain and Scanderbeg must exert control over their new territories. In searching for the political stability so obviously absent from the disintegrating Ottoman Empire and thus demonstrably

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<sup>47</sup> William Havard, *Scanderbeg* (London, 1733), p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> Havard's text is particularly significant in relation to my discussion of the partisan appropriation of patriotic rhetoric, in that here patriotism is overtly applied for an un-patriotic purpose. I shall consider the implications of this later.



crucial to successful colonial expansion, Britain and Scanderbeg must address the facts of colonialism. As McLeod has noted, post-South Sea Bubble commentators began to acknowledge that 'Only accurate, enlightened, and responsible geo-politics in proportion to the task of subjugating the "natives" would provide Britain and its Colonies with stability'.<sup>49</sup> The Ottoman Empire as model for British colonialism offers exemplary subjugation but lacks 'proportion'. In Havard's text, enlightened and responsible colonialism necessitates the consent of the colonised nation. To this end Deamira, 'the beauteous Cause of Ruin and Destruction' (5), is positioned as Scanderbeg's consenting conquest. Deamira is desired by representatives of the three political factions dominating the play; Scanderbeg, the Sultan and the seditious Vizier. All three parties fight to possess her, 'Why flows the Blood of Millions on the Plain / But all for thee?' (70). Deamira, the desired woman, becomes an analogy for the desired territory. She must be fought for and conquered. More importantly, Havard introduces the concept of consent through his portrayal of this desirable woman. All three parties demonstrate a concern for securing her consent, but only Scanderbeg is the fortunate possessor of her promise. Despite the common concern for securing her consent, various attempts are made to violate Deamira. The Sultan exercises restraint by limiting his sexual advances to verbal coercion:

---tho' to Man the Sultan's Temper  
Be fierce, revengeful, terrible and bold;  
Yet to the Fair that Haughtiness subsides,  
And sinks in due Proportion to their Softness:  
He wou'd not rudely violate the Will,  
And force the Bondage of Constraint upon it:  
He scorns to take, what his Compulsion drags;  
The gentle Wing of tender Inclination,  
Reluctant, flies from Force: Nor wou'd the Sultan  
Barely possess her Person, not her Mind. (5-6)

The Vizier is persuaded that 'to force her to your Arms --- 'tis no new Doctrine' (48). Both he and his subordinate advisor Heli attempt to rape Deamira, the latter driven by

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<sup>49</sup> McLeod, *The Geography of Empire*, p. 215.

greed and envy, the former wishing to enjoy her as payment for rescuing her from her first attacker, 'to him who sav'd thee from a Slave's Pollution' (69). As McLeod has observed, commentators in the early eighteenth century argued that in terms of colonial endeavour 'there was an alternative...to sheer force.'<sup>50</sup> In Havard's version of the Scanderbeg history such an alternative is established by the entwining of consent and coercion.

Deamira is little more than a commodity, desired by each centre of power but resistant to coercion and force. Ultimately Scanderbeg takes possession of Deamira because she consents. Having rescued her from the Vizier and in effect succeeding where his opponent failed, Scanderbeg returns to battle with the promise that: 'The Care of thee / Shall be my first Concern, and Conquest next' (73). Before his conquest of Deamira, Scanderbeg must take care of his 'colony' and protect her from the remaining prospective invader. As an allegorical colonial power Scanderbeg must accept both the role of subjugator and protector. Havard's *Scanderbeg* demonstrates the 'vacillation between consent and coercion characteristic of colonizing power'.<sup>51</sup> Various attempts are made to coerce Deamira into accepting conquest. The success of Scanderbeg's advocacy of Christian doctrine and her resultant conversion arm her against the subsequent coercion of the Turks. In order to secure consensual colonization the colonial powers must employ coercion, but coercion based upon empty promises of 'liberty' and 'freedom,' as opposed to the tangible benefits of religious conversion, ultimately leads to instability and insurrection.

Deamira is not the only object of attempted colonization, Scanderbeg has himself been captured by the Turk, suffered conversion, physical and emotional abuse and has ultimately rebelled against his oppressor.<sup>52</sup> Amurant attempts to persuade Scanderbeg into re-establishing Albania as part of the Turkish Empire:

Her Will, you must confess,  
Has the best Title to dispose her Person;  
Yet still to let you see how dear thou art,

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<sup>50</sup> McLeod attributes this assertion to Trenchard and Gordon who, in *Cato's Letters*, wrote in support of the type of empire endorsed by Swift in *Gulliver's Travels* and Defoe in *Robinson Crusoe* as well as later commentators such as Samuel Johnson. See McLeod, *The Geography of Empire*, p. 218.

<sup>51</sup> McLeod, *The Geography of Empire*, p. 218.

<sup>52</sup> Scanderbeg histories relate the murder of his brothers by Amurath and the Sultan's dismissal of the treaty between Turkey and Albania which secured Scanderbeg and his siblings as successors to the Albanian throne upon the death of their father.

That I remember still what once you were;  
Take back your Kingdom, be the Second here. (29)

Although the Sultan shrouds his coercion behind an alledged concern for obtaining Deamira's consent, he barter for her by attempting to bribe his primary opponent. Similarly Scanderbeg's reply, although dismissive of the Sultan's bargain, focuses not on consent but on a rejection of compromise:

Woud'st thou barter thus  
For Love and Justice---No, the Pow'r above,  
Who at one Look sees all the Riches here,  
Sees nothing that can equal the Exchange--- (29)

Scanderbeg will not jeopardize his colonial ambition by accepting a territory considered inferior to his consenting conquest. In matters of empire, compromise is not an option. The 'vacillation between consent and coercion' may be an alternative to 'sheer force' but ultimately the best interests of the colonizing power cannot be infringed.

In common with the Roman histories discussed in the previous chapter, these texts analyse an historically magnificent empire in an attempt to create a model appropriate for application to British colonial development. In extrapolating an isolated moment of defeat from Ottoman history, and dramatizing it in the context of the Empire's present decline, the 1730s Scanderbeg plays manipulate an historical parallel in order to reflect upon current political events and in doing so maximise the relevance of these texts to Britain's empire-in-the-making.<sup>53</sup> Lillo and Havard offer the reader revised versions of earlier dramatic interpretations of the Ottoman Empire. Reflecting a change in attitude towards Turkish culture, and rejecting the traditional characterisation of the Turk as fundamentally evil, these plays attempt to create a model for what McLeod identifies as the systematisation or 'proper management' of empire.<sup>54</sup> In the case of Lillo, systematic colonialism is idealised by reiterating the

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<sup>53</sup> It is important to note that in modern histories of Scanderbeg and in versions available to eighteenth-century readers, Scanderbeg rebels against the Ottoman Empire but does not liberate Albania from Turkish rule. See for example, Richard Knolles, *Historie* (1606) and Dimitrie Cantemir, *The History of the Ottoman Empire* (1973).

<sup>54</sup> McLeod, *The Geography of Empire*, pp. 173-233.



myth of consenting liberation on the part of the colonised people. Conversely, in the case of Havard, colonialism is demystified by fact, colonialism and liberty do not go hand in hand. As we shall see however, for both playwrights, the political factionalism and instability, shown to be ultimately destructive to the Ottoman Empire, must be overcome. Both texts identify the need to replace party divisions over the nation's colonial endeavour with a unified ideology for the government of a *British Empire*.

### iii. Political Threats to Empire

Fundamental to the creation of an 'ideology of empire' was the establishment of an appropriate mode of government for the distant territories of the British Empire. As McLeod has argued, the 'ancient-liberty' ethos shared by Tories and opposition Whigs roused fears that 'the fate of Rome' would befall the developing British Empire. Persistent and uncontrolled expansion, loss of political control and loss of legal and cultural identity were repeatedly identified as the key failings of the Roman political system.<sup>55</sup> The applicability of the fate of Rome to the British Empire was, as I have already suggested, heightened by observations of the floundering Ottoman Empire. This section will extend this analysis of the fall of Rome to the disintegrating Ottoman Empire. 'Weaken'd by the Natural Corruption and Infirmities of Age,' Ottoman modes of government were, in part at least, responsible for the contemporaneous demise of that once great Empire.<sup>56</sup> Fears for the loss of political control of the burgeoning British Empire, strengthened by increasing political factionalism, were being realised in Ottoman politics, and were seen by some commentators as a direct warning to Britain and her political leaders. The shared fate of the ancient empires of Rome and Turkey, both doomed by internal faction resulting in the successful rebellions of their colonized peoples, could easily be extended to Great Britain whose colonial expansion proceeded against a backdrop of political factionalism. This is not to suggest, however, that the Ottoman Empire offered commentators nothing but warnings or negative examples. Despite Vitkus's assertion that 'the actions of the Turkish royal family gave the anti-Islamic polemicists of

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<sup>55</sup> McLeod, *The Geography of Empire*, p. 173.

<sup>56</sup> Hill, *A full and just account*, p. 338.

Western Europe plenty of material to confirm their preconceived notions of oriental despotism', many early eighteenth-century writers commended Turkish government and law.<sup>57</sup> The image of 'oriental despotism' requires qualification when applied to eighteenth-century factual and dramatic accounts of Ottoman government. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, Sir Paul Rycaut wrote in *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* of a Turkish government that was wise, judicious and profound.<sup>58</sup> In 1709 Aaron Hill described the Turkish government as a 'Tall Oak' with 'Rooted Depth'.<sup>59</sup> In 1718 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu asserts that 'the Turkish Law, to our shame be it Spoken, [is] better design'd and better executed than Ours'.<sup>60</sup> However, none of these texts is consistent in its condemnation or recommendation of Turkish government. Rycaut's representation of the 'judicious' Turkish government is contradicted by an earlier passage:

The Turks have but one sole means to maintain their Countries, which is the same by which they were gained, and that is the cruelty of the sword in the most rigorous way of execution, by killing, consuming and laying desolate the Countries, and transplanting the people...being wholly destitute and ignorant of other refined Arts, which more civilised Nations have in past made serve in the place of violence. And yet the Turks have made this course alone answer to all the intents and ends of their Government.<sup>61</sup>

Here the Turks are barbarians, lacking the sophistication of other colonial powers. Their 'course,' the depopulation of the remoter parts of their Empire, not only lacks Western sophistication but also demonstrates a single-minded approach to government that, in Rycaut's opinion, signifies the assured downfall of the Empire. Hill's text is riddled with inconsistencies and, as I suggested earlier in this chapter, criticism and approbation of Turkish colonial policy and government can often be interpreted as reflections on British strategies for overseas expansion. Montague's admiration of Turkish law contrasts with her observation, in an earlier letter that, 'There is no possibility for a Christian to live easily under this Government but by the

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<sup>57</sup> Vitkus, *Three Turk Plays*, p. 21.

<sup>58</sup> Sir Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, (London: 1668) p. 117.

<sup>59</sup> Hill, *A full and just account*, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> Isobel Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Selected Letters* (London: Penguin; 1997), p. 168.

<sup>61</sup> Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 67-8.

protection of an Ambassador, and the richer they are the greater their Danger'.<sup>62</sup> This ambiguity and the shifting of opinion with regard to the morality of Turkish culture are endemic to late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century 'factual' representations of Turks. Despite the growth in available knowledge, many Britons, including those who had experienced the cultures first-hand, remained confused and undecided in their attitude towards the Islamic nations. This vacillation is reflected in the Scanderbeg plays of the 1730s.

Just as the myth of empire and the facts of colonialism competed in the construction of an ideology of empire so did opposing models for the appropriate government of that empire. As P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins have argued, the rise of the moneyed interest, which funded colonial expansion, was the subject of one of the principal controversies of British politics during the eighteenth century:

To some observers, the new financiers were patriots whose expertise in organising low-cost credit funded the defence of the realm, overseas expansion and domestic employment. To others, they were upstarts who threatened to undermine the established social order by importing 'avarice' into a world that depended on 'virtue' to guarantee good government.<sup>63</sup>

Once the empire has been established, how should it be governed? Whig, Tory and opposition Whig representations of overseas expansion manipulated patriotic rhetoric in order to advocate party policies for the 'good government' of empire. Should a British colony be subject to an 'avaricious' law based on the commercial, and, in Whig terms, patriotic interests of Great Britain or should patriot ideals of political selflessness be adhered to in the government of the colonies? McLeod suggests that 'the weight of self-interest, which spawned the decadence of elites and dissent of the lower orders, made for a tottering Empire'.<sup>64</sup> Certainly, as my discussion of liberty, consent and coercion has shown, there is an inherent difficulty in assimilating the theories of colonialism to the rhetoric of patriotism. The contradiction characteristic of 'factual' accounts of Ottoman government (such as Montague's, Rycout's, Hill's)

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<sup>62</sup> Grundy, *Selected Letters*, p. 158. Obviously as the Ambassador's wife, Montagu may have had a self-interested motive in making this statement.

<sup>63</sup> P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914* (London: Longman, 1993) p. 65.

<sup>64</sup> McLeod, *The Geography of Empire*, p. 216.



and echoed in the 1730s Scanderbeg plays, is further complicated by partisan opinion with regard to British modes of colonial government. Whilst admonishing against political factionalism, which they figure as a threat to the stability of the developing Empire, these texts promote their own partisan agendas and in doing so contribute to and exacerbate the political conflict and factionalism they so ardently condemn.

J. L. Steffensen's assertion that there is no real political significance behind Lillo's *Christain Hero* is clearly flawed.<sup>65</sup> As I have argued above, Lillo engages in the debate about empire offering a patriotic libertarian solution to moral concerns regarding the ethics of colonialism. In terms of political commentary, the loss and restitution of liberty are at the centre of this play. In the prologue, Lillo deplors the 'declining art' of writing plays in which:

Nations destroy'd revive, lost Empires shine,  
And Freedom glows in each immortal Line.  
In vain would Faction, War, or lawless Power,  
Which mar the Patriot's Scheme, his Fame devour;  
When Bards, by their Superior Force, can save,  
From dark Oblivion and defeat the Grave.  
Say, Britons, must this art forsake your isle,  
And leave to vagrant apes her native soil?  
Must she, the dearest friend that freedom knows,  
Driv'n from her seat, seek refuge with her foes?  
Forbid so great a shame, and save the age  
From such reproach, you patrons of the stage. (259)

The patriot hero who succeeds against all odds, is emblematic of a greater threat to British freedom than the loss of good patriot drama. Lillo's more pressing agenda is the place of sovereignty in a free nation. The 'art' forsaking the British Isle is true patriotism, devoid of factionalism and unhindered by arbitrary power. Scanderbeg frequently takes tyranny and abuse of power as his topic:

The abject Slave, to his Reproach, shall see,

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<sup>65</sup> J. L. Steffensen and Richard Noble (eds.), *The Dramatic Works of George Lillo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 214.

That such as dare deserve it, may be free:  
And conscious Tyranny confess, with Shame,  
That blind Ambition wanders from her Aim;  
While Virtue leads her Votaries to Fame. (259)

Lillo's theory of colonialism identifies liberty as the reward of virtue. Slavery is acceptable (owing to its commercial benefits) and does not preclude liberty, as virtuous slaves will be rewarded with their freedom in heaven if not before. Equally, only *conscious* or deliberate tyranny, motivated by personal ambition is inexcusable, unconscious tyranny is not presumed to be devoid of virtue and does therefore not necessarily constitute a threat to liberty.

Scanderbeg's advocacy of absolute rule over conquered territories suggests an ideological connection between Ottoman and British colonial policy. It could be argued that this reflects the contemporary British tolerance for and justification of Turkish political tyranny. However, tyranny and ambition within government are recurrent themes in Lillo's play and subject to the contradiction so often characteristic of 'factual' accounts of Turkish modes of government. In a later passage, Arantes, hostage to the Turk, attacks Amurath's perceived abuse of power, 'The most accurs'd, perfidious and ungrateful, / Are those, who have abus'd the sovereign power' (269). Amurath's reply is clearly an avocation of divine right, 'The unprincely meanness of thy soul, / Who would by law restrain the will of kings' (269-270). It is the Sultan's un-patriotic closing assertion, 'I fight to reign and conquer for myself' (270), that indicates that the authoritative voice belongs to Arantes, 'The name of Prince, of Conqueror and King, / Are gifts of fortune and of little worth' (275). The abuse of sovereign power threatens liberty. This threat becomes more immediate with the ambition of 'sordid Souls, who know no joy but wealth' (275).

A distinction is made between the appropriate government of the colonies and the government of the imperial nation. In the colonies absolute government is appropriate. In the metropolis the liberty of subjects is a more pressing concern. Lillo establishes a hierarchy between the citizens of a colonial power and the colonised peoples. The liberty of Britons should not be threatened, but the liberty of the inhabitants of the territories may be restrained in the interests of the Empire as a whole.

Similarly Hill advocates the establishment of arbitrary government for the protection of an Empire which 'must be supported strongly by some uncommon Policy'.<sup>66</sup> Arantes' warnings against unfettered sovereign ambition seem to cross Whig/Tory political agendas. The lack of partisan affiliation is reiterated in the epilogue. The Patriots (Tories) and Courtiers (Whigs) are criticised for their lack of moral principle. Britain is portrayed as a country in which ambition and financial gain are the only motivation for 'patriotic' duty: 'A statesman rack his brains, a soldier fight – / Merely to do an injur'd people right. / What! Serve his country, and get nothing by't?' (320). Britons are encouraged to emulate Scanderbeg's patriotism, relinquish their partisan affiliations and unite 'To do their king and injur'd country right' (320). It could be argued, contrary to my discussion of empire, that this suggests an anti-imperial stance. Party politics and factionalism are depicted as morally destructive. However, as Hill observes, factionalism is destructive to empire and the Ottoman Empire is a prime example of this, 'the daring Ambition of aspiring Princes, and the formidable violences of intestine Discords, would like some surprising Earthquake, break fiercely thro' the Bands of Duty, and by their factious Consequences involve the Empire in most inevitable Ruin.'<sup>67</sup> In common with Hill, Lillo's text is not against empire. Rather, it is concerned with the maintenance of empire and advocates an unpartisan approach to governing British territories. This distancing from Whig, Tory and Opposition Whig political agendas is not however achieved throughout the play, whatever grandiose claims are made to incite the audience to a non-partisan patriotism. There are points at which a more partisan political agenda can be observed.

In Act V of *The Christian Hero* in accordance with the last request of the dying Hellena, Scanderbeg releases the captive Amurath:

Heaven is heavy on thy crimes,  
And deals thee forth a portion of those woes,  
Which thy relentless heart, with lawless lust  
And never sated avarice of power  
Has spread o'er half the habitable earth. (274)

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<sup>66</sup> Hill, *A full and just account*, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> Hill, *A full and just account*, p. 5.



This reference to Turkish atrocities committed in the process of erecting the Ottoman Empire can be related to the colonial policies promoted by Walpole and his administration. Accusations of an avaricious control of power maintained by his possession of key ministerial posts, coupled with a strengthening of power through the securing of parliamentary placemen and political favouritism, were, as I discussed in chapter two, repeatedly made against Walpole by Tories and Opposition Whigs. The spread of British power 'o'er half the habitable earth' through the Chartered Trading companies was, given the close ties between companies and government, indicative of an avaricious policy of imperial expansion not dissimilar to that which had once helped build and maintain the now disintegrating Ottoman Empire. As Armitage has argued, in the 1730s a conception emerged that defined Britain and the British Empire as 'Protestant, commercial, maritime and free'. This conception 'provided a counter argument to the supposed pusillanimity of Walpole's government, which had patiently refused to be drawn into commercial war with Spain until 1739'.<sup>68</sup> To augment this critical commentary on Walpole's exercise of power, Lillo positions the Christian Scanderbeg as the antithesis of the political and moral policy of the Turkish Sultan. Although the Sultan's actual behaviour is not *always* represented as reprehensible - as with most Turkish narratives some aspects of Turkish behaviour are admired - Scanderbeg is a faultless patriotic hero. Representative of ideal government, he is a patriot king dismissive of his father's disastrous policy of maintaining peace with the Turks at any cost, 'The amorous prince - I know his haughty soul / Ill brooks his subtle father's peaceful schemes' (281). Lillo's representation of Scanderbeg as the patriot champion of the Christian Near East points to Frederick Lewis, Prince of Wales, patriot champion of the British opposition. Critical of George II's co-operation with Walpole's policy of peace with Europe, Frederick Lewis, like Scanderbeg, 'ill brooks his subtle father's peaceful schemes'. Frederick, the text suggests, will rescue Britain from those elements of Walpole's policy that are, like Turkish tyranny and avarice, unpatriotic and immoral.

Havard also makes claims for his text's non-partisan agenda. In the prologue he asserts:

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<sup>68</sup> Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, p. 173.

*I ask not any to espouse my Cause,  
For I shou'd blush at Party-made Applause:  
The Man who claps an undeserving Line,  
Betrays his Weakness in approving mine.*

Having drawn our attention to the problems of party affiliation, Havard uses the Scanderbeg history to demonstrate the shortcomings of British partisan politics. Mirroring the political structure of Britain, Havard introduces three factions to his play, first the Sultan Amurant, second the 'late revolted' Vizier, Hali-Vizem, and third 'The dreaded' Scanderbeg. Such factionalism is ultimately dangerous, providing opportunities for traitors:

But who shall tax successful Villany,  
Or call the rising Traitor to account?  
Sublimely seated in the Pomp of State,  
Greatly beyond the Malice of his Fate;  
He laughs at each Cabal and idle Jar,  
The Rage of Factions, and their Party-War;  
By Friends surrounded, happy, and unseen,  
Safely he rides, and drives the great Machine (15).

The Vizier's criticism of the Sultan can be applied to the British political situation. Driving 'the great Machine' of British politics, Walpole, surrounded and protected by his parliamentary placemen, may, like the Sultan, be unaware of a treacherous threat to his power. Factionalism promotes favouritism and self-interest. The ensuing political instability results in an inherently self-destructive government, unfit to control and maintain an empire.

Scanderbeg defends himself against accusations of un-patriotic self-interest in fighting to secure his possession of Deamira:

Yet those who never felt what we describe,  
May censure us as Triflers, who wou'd waste  
The Hours of Action in a fond Discourse  
Of Love, and Softness---Idle Murmurers!

Where strictest Virtue, softest Love unite,  
How fierce the Rapture! and the Blaze how bright!  
True Joys proceed from Innocence, and Love,  
Th'unsteddy by this Lesson may improve,  
Disclaim their Vices, and forget to rove. (20)

His assertion that his virtuous love for Deamira has elicited a constancy that others should observe and learn from has implications for my reading of Deamira as analogous to a colonized nation. Scanderbeg's professed constancy relates not only to love but also to government and religion. Engaged in 'fond discourse' rather than 'action', the Imperial power does not use force but governs by 'virtue'. The resultant relationship permits 'true joys' rather than hierarchical subjugation. Scanderbeg's perceived self-interest is therefore rhetorically transformed into virtuous patriotism governing both imperial and colonised nations. In contrast to these 'true joys' shared between Scanderbeg and Deamira, the hierarchical relationship between Scanderbeg and Amurath is destructive and commercial. Scanderbeg, denied Deamira by the enraptured Sultan, demands:

Have I not led his Armies to the Field?  
How seldom have I fought without Success?  
Adorn'd his Crescent with so bright a Blaze,  
That it outshone the Sun that gaz'd upon it?  
And all to be despis'd: One Boon deny'd---  
Dismiss'd the Presence like the meanest Slave---  
These are such Wrongs, my Friend, as who can bear  
That owns Mortality: Our great Example  
Was sensible of Wrongs, tho' he forgave 'em. (25)

Scanderbeg sees the Sultan's detainment of Deamira as a denial of the 'debt' owed by the Turk. For Scanderbeg Deamira is recompense for his past services to Amurath. In figuring Deamira as reward, Scanderbeg's words, 'One Boon deny'd,' thus echo the Vizier's demand for 'payment' upon rescuing Deamira from her would-be rapist Heli.

The contrast between these two representations of colonial relationships is significant. First, unlike Lillo's Scanderbeg, Havard shows the hero to be imperfect,



affected by his position in the colonial hierarchy. Governed by an inconsiderate, commercially driven imperialist power, Havard's Scanderbeg, although self-liberated, resorts to commercial negotiation with the Sultan. As the governing power, however, Scanderbeg bases the political control of his colonies on virtuous intent and mutual agreement.

This is not to suggest, however, that Havard unreservedly recommends patriotism as a political model for colonial government. Scanderbeg's success against the Turks is the result of a strategy of military scavenging:

Tis as I wish'd; the Hand of Heav'n is in it,  
And points this easy Way to Victory;  
Wonder with me, *Lysander*, at the Pow'r,  
That turns th'injurious Stroke upon themselves;  
At once the Sufferers, and our great Avengers. (62-3)

The Albanian troops have nothing to do but watch the Turks fight amongst themselves and then pick over the bones of their enemies once the heat of battle is over. Scanderbeg takes the 'easy way to victory' by allowing the two Turk factions to destroy themselves on the battlefield.<sup>69</sup> Havard's text suggests that by emulating such un-patriotic or conventionally un-heroic methods of warfare, the Tories could strengthen their position in the British government. The Tories, like Scanderbeg, have only to stand back and wait until the Whig factions destroy themselves thorough internal conflict. As McLeod observes, 'The predatory was seen to have over-taken the paternalistic, where calculation undermined community and where mythification obscured materiality'.<sup>70</sup> Havard's text goes some way towards rejecting patriotism in favour of a more 'predatory' political and commercial policy. The words and actions of Heli, perhaps the most insidious character of the play, reflect the 'reality' of politics and commerce:

How ignorant thou talk'st! what, Honesty!

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<sup>69</sup> Havard's Scanderbeg can be compared to William Philips's Irish heroes in *Hibernia Freed* discussed in chapter one. Philips's heroes also defeat their enemies using conventionally un-heroic means yet their struggle against a militarily superior but pagan (and hence religiously inferior) opponent ensures that their patriotism is not questioned.

<sup>70</sup> McLeod, *The Geography of Empire*, p. 168.

A Name, scarce Echo to a Sound:---Honesty!  
Attend the stately Chambers of the Great---  
It dwells not there, nor in the trading World:  
Speaks it in Councils? No; the Sophist knows  
To laugh if thence: Why shou'd we waste the Time  
In dull Discourse on nothing?---Come, no more---  
Let me not take what I wou'd have a Gift---  
Hence with Resistance--- (67)

Although clearly not advocated by the text, this course is acknowledged as the only realistic way forward for the Tory party. Of course when Walpole did finally resign in 1742, the resultant Whig scramble for power left the Tories in opposition until the accession of George III in 1760.<sup>71</sup> Havard's advice, we may assume, was not adhered to.

In the search for a model of the government of Empire, these texts propose two very different ideologies: Lillo reiterates the myth of empire, identifying liberty and patriotism as the primary concerns of an imperial government yet he condones the absolutist government of the colonial power over its territories. Conversely, Havard rejects liberty and patriot kingship, focusing rather on the balancing act between virtuous and immoral modes of governing an empire. Despite these political differences, however, both texts share an entrenched fear of or concern about factionalism. For both texts, 'a stable imperial centre' is imperative and the Ottoman Empire an appropriate warning against factionalism. For Havard, however, factionalism is a source of political gain. The ideologically divided Whig party is inherently unstable, Whig factionalism can be seen to provide opportunity for the Tories. Factionalism becomes a double bind, incorporating fears for the safety of the Empire and a desire to overturn the Whig supremacy. These concerns with political factionalism are intertwined with the problem of religion. The religious difference between Britain and her prospective colonies is considered in these plays through comparative analyses of Islam and Christianity.

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<sup>71</sup> Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, p. 12. George III, who did not see himself as a monarch of party, 'inaugurated an administration drawn from both Whigs and Tories, an end to the narrowly Whig ministries of the previous forty-six years' Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, p. 45.

#### iv. Religion and Empire

In *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, Rycout rejects Islam as superstitious nonsense, ‘the Tales of an old Woman’.<sup>72</sup> Sixteenth- and earlier seventeenth-century attitudes to Islam were even more extreme and, Vitkus asserts, lead to the widely held belief that the success of the Ottoman Empire was not the consequence of wise and judicious government, but rather ‘a divine chastisement or “scourge” to punish backsliding Christians’.<sup>73</sup> In what ways does this fear for ‘Mahometan Religion’ as idle fantasy influence eighteenth-century perceptions of Islam? Interest in Eastern culture, as I have already suggested, was widespread in early eighteenth-century Britain. Contemporary representations of Turkish culture were an amalgamation of accurate reports of Islamic life and ubiquitous fantasy. This taste for the Near East was, however, constrained by a history of religious antagonism that maintained the divisions between East and West.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, antagonism towards the Turks was expressed predominantly in religious rather than cultural terms.<sup>75</sup> Linda Colley has argued that British Catholics were more antagonistic towards Islam than British Protestants because they identified with the European Catholic states often at war with the Ottoman Empire. Conversely she suggests that the Quakers were particularly sympathetic towards the Turks because of their shared experience of persecution for religious difference.<sup>76</sup> Antagonism towards the Turks was therefore the result of a complex entwining of religious difference and political threat. The Turks were simultaneously admired and abhorred for their otherness. Vitkus has argued that there was no definitive ‘Oriental other’ in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama.<sup>77</sup> Although eighteenth-century accounts of the Near East fail to distinguish between the various cultures of the oriental world, there is nonetheless a definitive oriental other

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<sup>72</sup> Rycout, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, p. 117.

<sup>73</sup> Vitkus, *Three Turk Plays*, p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> John Sweetman has argued that cultural interchange between Europe and Turkey in the early eighteenth century points to a lowering of the cultural barriers that had previously divided the two. To some extent his assertion is valid. However, I think it is important to distinguish European acceptance and occasional approval of Islamic cultures from attitudes towards religious practices. See Sweetman, *Oriental Obsession*, p. 60.

<sup>75</sup> For more detailed discussion of anti-Islamic propaganda in English see Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose*, pp. 402-6, 441. It was widely known that from 1710 the entourage of George I included two captured and, importantly, *converted* Turks. Linda Colley asserted in, “Britain And Islam 1660-1760: Different Perspectives on Difference” (BSECS Annual lecture, Oxford, January 1999) that anti-Islamic polemic was disseminated by the church.

<sup>76</sup> Linda Colley: “Britain And Islam 1660-1760”.

<sup>77</sup> Vitkus, *Three Turk Plays*, p. 44.



identified almost exclusively by his or her adherence to Islam. Tolerance of secular aspects of Islamic life was one thing, acceptance of the religious doctrine of Islam was another.

Scanderbeg is particularly significant for anti-Islamic propaganda because, though educated according to the tenets of Islam, he reconverts to his original Christian faith. His history is in direct contrast with the popular dramatic trope of Christian turned Turk.<sup>78</sup> Contemporary historical accounts of the Life of George Castriota tell how, taken hostage at the age of eight by Amurath II and educated as a Turkish son, Scanderbeg, as the Turks named him, rebelled against his Muslim indoctrination and reconverted to Christianity, reclaiming his native land of Albania and fighting against the Turks who had enslaved him.<sup>79</sup> Scanderbeg was therefore represented as an almost unique figure, a complex amalgamation of Turkish and European culture.<sup>80</sup> He has experience of both Islamic and Christian mores and the opportunity to adopt and practise the wisdom of both societies. The literary convention of the wise Muslim, frequently seen to offer criticism of Western society, is therefore of particular pertinence to the history of the Christian/Turk Scanderbeg.<sup>81</sup> In the Scanderbeg plays of the 1730s, audiences were offered a proactive version of the wise Oriental, a Christian with an Islamic education who acts upon his wisdom, rather than simply offering criticism. These texts suggest the potential for a fusion of the best cultural elements from the Islamic and Christian worlds.

In Havard's play, criticism of Islam is expressed initially through the conventional Christian attack on Islamic ideas of paradise. Seventeenth-century dramatic texts identified the lascivious Muslim paradise as a threat to the more sedate Christian heaven.<sup>82</sup> Promises of unfettered sexual activity were the impetus that prompted Christian men to convert. Such anxiety about apostasy is shared by Havard's text which instead highlights the falsity of Islamic doctrine, ironically through the words and actions of the Sultan. Amurant's repeated invocations of his

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<sup>78</sup> Christian men were repeatedly depicted as turning Turk in response to the financial and lascivious attractions of Turkish culture. See Vitkus (ed.), *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England*.

<sup>79</sup> See for example, 'The Life of Scanderbeg' – inscribed to the spectators of *The Christian Hero*; Richard Knolles *The generall historie of the Turkes* and David Jones, *A Compleat History of the Turks, from their Origin in the Year 755, to the Year 1718* (London: J. Darly, 1718).

<sup>80</sup> In this way the 1730s representations of Scanderbeg can be seen to echo earlier dramatic representations of the Christian renegade – another cocktail of European and Turk.

<sup>81</sup> For a more detailed discussion of what Sweetman describes as a growing literary tradition see *Oriental Obsession*, pp. 64-5.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Vitkus (ed.), *Three Turk Plays*, p. 12.

'Immortal Prophet' are interspersed with denouncements of his 'Ungrateful Prophet.' The Sultan's unanswered pleas contrast sharply with Deamira's prayer, 'Hear me, some Angel, wing to my Relief!--- / Take my sad Life, but spare the Violation' (71). Scanderbeg's intercession on her behalf occurs directly after these lines. This 'divine intervention' in response to Deamira's display of Christian humility re-enforces the falsity of Islamic belief. However, representations of Islam and Christianity in Havard's text are complicated by the simultaneous criticism of both religions for their shared doctrinal intolerance of other systems of belief. Havard's text emphasises one fundamental difference between Christianity and Islam. Scanderbeg's demonstrations of forgiveness in freeing captured Turks are juxtaposed with Amurant's desire for revenge:

All Means of Comfort are cut off but One,  
No Avenue left open but Revenge:  
My Wrongs and Insults call for warmer Work,  
Than the cool Measures of decisive Judgment,  
And the weak patient Impotence of Reason. (56-7)

That the Sultan identifies judgement and reason as Christian weakness is not entirely unsupported in Havard's text. Lysander also sees Scanderbeg's mercifulness as a potential weakness:

Tis god-like to forgive; yet oftentimes  
That Mercy sinks into a Weakness, as it gives  
A second Opportunity to those  
Who miss the first; and as the Wrong  
Was offer'd to your self--- (16)

For Lysander, the Turks are not worthy of Scanderbeg's forgiveness, they are not trustworthy and will use their freedom to mount another attack on the Christians. However, Scanderbeg's reply, whilst maintaining the superiority of Christianity, promotes a restrained religious tolerance:

Shall I cut off the Means of their Repentance,

As by their Deaths I shou'd? No, Heav'n forefend!  
Heav'n can again o'ertake them, if their Crimes  
Deserve a second Blow (16).

Scanderbeg's position is morally superior in comparison to both that of his fellow Christian Lysander and the Muslim Sultan. Lysander is intolerant and unforgiving. Amurant is vengeful. Scanderbeg demonstrates strength of religious conviction moderated by a toleration of the beliefs of others.

Although Havard's text does not deploy the trope of 'Christian turn'd Turk', conversion is significant to the hierarchy of Christianity and Islam. Conversions and denouncements of religious belief are restricted to disillusioned Turks and the reconverting Scanderbeg.<sup>83</sup> Deamira describes her conversion to Christianity with fervour:

New Force inspires me, and my strengthen'd Soul  
Feels Energy divine: The fair Example  
Of steadfast Martyrs and of dying Saints,  
Has warm'd me into better Thoughts: I now  
Can with a Smile behold Misfortune's Face,  
And think the Weight of Miseries, a Trial.  
....  
A Beam divine directs our Steps aright,  
And shews the Moral, in the Christian Light. (11)

This enthusiasm for her new faith suggests the superiority of Christianity over Islam. However, Havard demonstrates the rhetorical subtlety of this hierarchy. Many of the experiences Deamira perceives to be derived from her conversion to Christianity are just those concepts that the Turks revile, 'not inclin'd, or able to resent, / Think'st Suffring meritorious' (26). Deamira's conversion has obvious significance to her

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<sup>83</sup> Although I wish to demonstrate a distinction between seventeenth- and eighteenth-century dramatic texts on the basis of this shift in focus from the conversion of Christians to the conversion of Muslims, I do not want to suggest that the conversion of Christians to Islam was of no concern to eighteenth century audiences and commentators. However, the Scanderbeg plays are not the only examples of this shift. John Edwards, *The Christian indeed: described in a letter from Gaifer on his conversion to Christianity in English to Aly-Ben-Hayton, his friend in Turkey* (1757), had reached its seventh edition by 1767.



position as a disputed territory. Her rejection of Islam is symbolic of her acquiescence to Scanderbeg's Christian authority. In contrast, Heli pretends to convert in order to gain Scanderbeg's protection, 'think me as a Friend, a Friend convinc'd, / Who wonders at thy Virtues, and wou'd join 'em' (42). Although the thought of converting infidels appeals to Scanderbeg's sense of power, he is only momentarily deceived and quickly recognises Heli's falsity, only true converts are granted his protection. Havard's text updates the seventeenth-century preoccupation about Christian conversions to Islam. His play does not focus on the conversion of Christians but reverses this trope to focus instead on the imperial problem of the forced and false conversion of infidels.<sup>84</sup> Havard rejects sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anxiety regarding Christian apostasy and Ottoman aggression in order to update the dramatic trope of the 'lascivious Turk' for an eighteenth-century audience aware of the diminishing power of the Ottoman Empire. Religious intolerance in an Empire is challenged, although no alternative solution is reached.

Lillo's *The Christian Hero* establishes a clearer division between Christianity and Islam. In the opening scene, Hellena observes that by pursuing 'the ever victorious hero / Of Epirus' (262) her father will 'Provoke the malice of his adverse stars, / And urge his own destruction' (262). Echoing Rycout's analysis of Islam, Lillo identifies superstition as the governing aspect of Islamic belief. The religious difference between the two protagonists is quickly established. Amurath follows a religion characterised by malice and cruelty; conversely, Scanderbeg's faith is represented as patriotic and just.<sup>85</sup> The concept of a particularly British patriotism is inextricably linked to Christianity. Christian morals such as selflessness and forgiveness are depicted as a staple of patriot rhetoric. Capitalising upon the shared morality of patriotism and Christianity Lillo's play conflates Christian and patriotic rhetoric. However, such moral superiority is not restricted to Christian belief and the identification of patriotism as a form of uniquely *Christian* morality is not the only

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<sup>84</sup> The threat of false conversion is also reflected in later texts such as John Edwards, *The Christian Indeed* (1757).

<sup>85</sup> This division is nowhere made more evident than in the Turkish attempts to agree a bargain for the safety of the Christian hostages. Amurath demands that Scanderbeg relinquish his newly reclaimed control of Albania and recognise the Sultan's conquered provinces in Europe. The hostage motif has powerful implications for a British audience. The growing threat to Europeans posed by the Barbary pirates in the Mediterranean was a prevalent concern. The association by religion of Turkish and North African Muslims allowed this real threat to extend beyond its actual geographic limits. The Muslim pirates of the Barbary States renowned for their hostage taking are conflated with the Muslim Turks who become tarred with the same brush.

possible reading of the relationship between patriotism and religious doctrine in this play. It is possible to identify Turkish patriots, or at least to identify isolated acts of Turkish patriotism, for example the self-sacrificing Helena. However, these isolated occurrences do not diminish the superiority of Christianity. The focus for patriotic morality is Scanderbeg.

Lillo's hero utilises the propagandistic power of patriot rhetoric to motivate his troops before battle, 'You fight the cause of liberty and truth, / Your native land, Arantes and Althea' (309). Lillo successfully appropriates patriot terminology to create a 'pious hero and a patriot king' (259). Although the love interest (Scanderbeg's passion for, in this instance, Althea) remains central to the action, it is not Scanderbeg's primary motivation for battle with the Turks. As the play closes there is a notable increase in the hostility of representation of the Turks. Islam is denigrated and the resultant conservative reading of Turkish culture does not sit comfortably with earlier references to Turkish wisdom and patriotism. Most significant in this progressive vilification is Scanderbeg's assertion, 'Be witness, heaven! I pity and forgive him' (316). Forgiveness characterises the Christian hero; Scanderbeg becomes a representative of both idealised patriotic and idealised Christian behaviour without compromising either principle.

The Turks fail to emulate this patriotic and religious idealism. Lillo further enhances this distinction between Muslim and Christian through Amurath's bitter denouncement of his prophet 'false Mahomet' (317) and his vengeful attacks on those he holds responsible for his downfall. In contrast with Scanderbeg's Christian forgiveness, Amurath condemns the treacherous Amaise to death, 'See him impal'd alive, we'll let him know / As much of hell as can be known on earth, / And go from pain to pain' (317). Lillo's text clearly defines Islam as a false religion, based on spurious precepts and deceit, 'False or ungrateful prophet! Have I spread / Fell devastation over half the globe, / To raise thy crescent's pale, uncertain light, / Above the Christian's glowing crimson cross, / In hoary age to be rewarded thus!' (317). Amurath reaches a level of self-awareness that to some extent redeems his character. He renounces his religion and gains an awareness of the severity of his crimes and their consequent brutal punishment:

Can this be true! Am I cast down from that  
Majestick Height, where like an earthly God,

For more than half an Age, I sate enthron'd,  
To the abhor'd Condition of a Slave?  
A pardon'd Slave! What! live to be forgiven!  
And all this brought upon me by *Hellena!*  
Shou'd our Prophet return to Earth and swear it  
I'd tell him to his Face that he was perjured.  
Hell wants the Power and Heaven wou'd never curse  
To that Degree a doating, fond, old Man.---  
What make my Child! my loving, gentle Child!  
The Instrument and Author of my Ruin! (74)

However, not only does Amurath continue to place blame for his failure upon others, thus eliding his own responsibility; his concern for his own sovereign status suggests a failure to learn from Christian demonstrations of patriotic selflessness. In renouncing his religion Amurath merely identifies the 'falsities' of Islam; he blames his Prophet, his daughter and his followers, but does not recognise his own failings as an un-patriotic sovereign. Lillo's representation of Islam as a false and unforgiving faith does not permit the Sultan's redemption. Despite his earlier depiction as an astute observer of Christian culture, Amurath degenerates into an example of un-patriotic sovereignty whose private behaviour and political activities are reduced to tropes of anti-Islamic propaganda.

Havard's and Lillo's *Scanderbeg* plays can be identified as anti-Islamic. Both texts utilise dramatic conventions that highlight the falsity of Islam. However, this antagonistic polemic not only presents an anti-Islamic statement but also forms the basis of the texts' political agendas. For Lillo, Islam is a vehicle for demonstrating the consequences of colonial expansion unrestrained by patriotism. *The Christian Hero* espouses government colonial policy, albeit modified by patriotic rhetoric. For Havard, the atrocities committed by colonising Ottomans in the name of Islam are mirrored in the British Protestant myth of empire. Havard's *Scanderbeg* rejects government policy and challenges colonial propaganda. Anti-Islamic rhetoric is evident in both plays, yet it contributes to differing perspectives on a shared political agenda.



Thomas Whincop's *Scanderbeg; or, Love and Liberty* offers a third approach to the issues of empire, government and religion. Written some time after the South Sea Bubble in 1721 and before Whincop's death in 1730, the play was completed by his widow Martha Whincop and finally published in 1747.<sup>86</sup> Whincop's *Scanderbeg; or Love and Liberty* contains perhaps the most transparent and unrefined political commentary of these three plays. The prologue, ostensibly written by Martha Whincop, is largely concerned with the 'tragic' history of the playwright himself, making an 'appeal to Britons' on behalf of his widow:

He sunk, when young, beneath the Weight of Cares,  
By that full Scheme, that ruin'd half the Land:  
When robbed of all, Death lent his friendly Hand.<sup>87</sup>

The 'Scheme' referred to is of course the South Sea Company in which Whincop invested and subsequently lost a considerable sum of money. The financial devastation caused by the South Sea Bubble, the prologue suggests, is a concern expressed in Whincop's text through the theme of liberty, 'The Cause of Liberty his Muse inspir'd, / And by chaste love her warmest Thoughts were fir'd' (xix). Loss of liberty is significant to the *Scanderbeg* history both figuratively and literally. The various combinations of hostages and the battles for Albanian freedom are linked to a spiritual repression experienced in turn by both Christians and Muslims. Whincop's *Scanderbeg* not only highlights the significance of liberty by using the term in the title of the play, but also transposes the struggle for literal and figurative freedom onto the aftermath of the South Sea Bubble. After the stock market crash concerns grew about the dangers of speculation, which commentators such as George Berkley, saw essentially as a form of gambling.<sup>88</sup> The artificiality of the stock market was dangerous, a threat to real tradesmen and merchants. The financial independence of these citizens had implications for public liberty. By not submitting to slavery as peasants – financially dependent upon the good will of their masters, or adopting

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<sup>86</sup> A degree of scandal was caused by Martha Whincop's claim that Lillo's *The Christian Hero* was a plagiarised version of her husband's text. Martha claimed that she took her deceased husband's unfinished manuscript to Lillo and asked if he would finish the piece. Lillo refused the offer, but some time later wrote *The Christian Hero* instead. See introduction to the 1747 edition.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Whincop, *Scanderberg ; or Love and Liberty* (London, W. Reeve, 1747), p. xviii.

<sup>88</sup> George Berkeley, *An Essay towards preventing the ruine of Great Britain* (London: J. Roberts, 1721).

tyranny, as aristocracy – financially dependent upon the industry of their vassals, commercial men were protecting British liberty. In rejecting the mutual financial dependency of this outdated feudal model of society tradesmen and merchants formed the firmest base for public liberty. The South Sea Bubble stripped honest men, such as Thomas Whincop, of their funds, leaving them destitute and desperate, deprived of the freedom that their modest fortunes had secured. In Act V, Scanderbeg compares the Ottoman Empire and the Turks with Bedlam and its inmates, ‘Such a sad abject view of human greatness / (Now in this high tide of our prosperous fortune) / May check our pride, and teach us we are men.’ (82). Without proper care for their liberty, Britons will succumb to further financial temptations. Inevitably this would result in the degeneration of the British Empire. For Whincop’s *Scanderbeg*, the Turks represent something to be feared by Britons, not a fear arising from a religious or military threat but from the concurrent fall of this once great Empire. A fate that, as demonstrated by the experiences of the South Sea Bubble, Britain could all too easily replicate.

In common with Lillo’s *The Christian Hero*, liberty is utilised in Whincop’s *Scanderbeg* as a patriotic trope. However, despite its titular significance, liberty is given only cursory attention in the action of the play itself. It is personal not political liberty that dominates the protagonist’s concerns. The rhetoric inspired by patriotic notions of liberty is condensed into a mechanism of defence against bribery. Ariant refuses to command his daughter to comply with the Sultan’s demands in return for a share in the Ottoman Empire because ‘Slavery’s liberty / Whilst the free mind’s unfetter’d’ (37-8). In a dual assault, Arianissa is chided by the Sultan for her lack of filial duty, itself a curtailment of women’s personal liberty. Amurath urges Arianissa to ‘repay / Paternal tenderness with filial duty’ (45). In giving herself to the Sultan, a loss of not only liberty but also reputation, Arianissa would save her father’s life and obtain his freedom. Ariant’s resolution not ‘to buy a life with infamy’ (48) has obvious Christian overtones of self-sacrifice; he will not enter into a bargain of sinful prostitution of his daughter to secure his own freedom. But why does not Amurath simply rape Arianissa? Particularly when considered in conjunction with contemporary accounts of the libidinous nature of Turkish culture and the atrocities committed against conquered nations by the Turkish government, rape seems to be the obvious solution to the Sultan’s dilemma. Amurath repeatedly attempts to persuade Arianissa into bed, but he never uses force. There are a number of possible reasons for



this apparent anomaly. Whincop chooses not to defile his heroine, as this would preclude the happy conclusion based upon the reunion of Scanderbeg and his lover. However, as in Havard's version of the history, he could have portrayed attempted rape. Even so, the author was reluctant to assign such violent transgressive behaviour to the Turks. Kidnapping is an appropriate Turkish vice but rape is too extreme. Does the failure of Whincop's text to explore the issue of rape in relation to Arianissa and the Sultan suggest a more liberal interpretation of Turkish culture than those demonstrated in the plays of Lillo and Havard? One possible answer to this question lies in the text's inversion of the conventional Christian/Muslim religious hierarchy.

In *Scanderbeg or; Love and Liberty*, the hero appears initially as a patriot warrior defending his country from Turkish barbarians: 'Behold me first, never to sheath the sword / Till Albany shines forth in all its pristine glory' (2). Conversely, his Turkish enemy Amurath, is portrayed by the Christian princes as a foul creature, guilty of the avaricious murder of Scanderbeg's brothers: 'justice will not spare / His monst'rous crimes, tho' for a while it sleeps' (3). This explicit Christian-dominated hierarchy is quickly reversed. Despite repeated calls from the Christians for 'justice' in reaction to Turkish barbarities, in reality Scanderbeg's chief concern is not his country or his defiled religion but his beloved Arianissa: 'O! were I *sure* to find that charming maid, / .../ I'd rush *impetuous* on the tyrant's camp' (6 my emphasis). This passage demonstrates not only the Sultan's sexual depravity in taking a maiden hostage and demanding sex in return for assurances of the safety of her loved ones, but also Scanderbeg's unpatriotic priorities. His private anguish overwhelms his sense of public duty, which requires a rational and considered response to the Turkish threat. This is further emphasised by the discovery of an intercepted letter containing orders for Arianissa's execution. The letter confirms that she has not yielded to the Sultan's sexual demands, 'For having made me sigh So long in vain; / The remnant of my flame her blood shall quench' (9-10). Assured of her constancy Scanderbeg cries for Vengeance, 'Seize, tear him, rend him, drag him, headlong drag him / To dungeons, tortures, racks' (10) and is assured by his advisors that, 'Just is thy wrath, and righteous is thy vengeance' (12). Despite this endorsement of Scanderbeg's desire for vengeance, it is clear that Whincop's Scanderbeg is driven to action by desire.

The Turks are the restrainers of liberty, but also the tools by which the patriotic concept of freedom is challenged. Arianissa cannot experience personal freedom whatever decision she makes, or, more pertinently, whatever decision is



made for her. As the Sultan's concubine she would enjoy more liberty than as a Christian daughter or wife. This double-bind is reiterated and extended in a comical tableau in which Arianissa, stolen by the 'licentious villain' Alibec, is carried across the stage with Scanderbeg and Christians in pursuit from one direction and Chahasan and Turks in pursuit from another. Caught in a stalemate the Turks and Christians decide to work together to secure her freedom.<sup>89</sup> After momentary indecision, the heretofore-inactive Arianissa struggles and strikes her assailant down, running to safety and 'freedom' symbolized by her 'hero' Scanderbeg. Confronted with her partiality for his comrade/enemy, Chahasan begs Scanderbeg to kill him mercifully rather than abandoning him to the pain of unrequited love. When Scanderbeg refuses on moral grounds, 'Would'st thou degrade me to a ruffian's baseness? / To triumph o'er the wretched is a crime' (62), Chahasan challenges him and is disarmed in the ensuing scuffle. The Turk kills himself saying a last farewell to the silent woman. Arianissa is a poor example of female empowerment. In fighting off her assailant, she asserts her right to liberty yet immediately places herself under the protection and authority of Scanderbeg. Although she unsettles homosocial relations and is the site of political and religious conflict, Arianissa is responsible for her own loss of liberty.<sup>90</sup> An inverted Turk/Christian hierarchy transforms liberty as a patriotic term. When controlled by the Turks, Arianissa has no actual freedom, but is at liberty to choose her fate. Controlled by the Christians, she is ostensibly free but her personal liberty is limited by cultural constraints.

Further undermining the broader significance of a nation's political liberty, the newly emancipated Christians are irrelevant in comparison to Scanderbeg's joy at being reunited with Arianissa. Indeed, the death of Amurath, rather than becoming the focus of a celebrated Christian victory, is a non-event and has no bearing on the closure of the play which is entirely concerned with Scanderbeg's happiness who 'lives unhurt, aveng'd on all his foes' (79). Scanderbeg's lust for revenge has been satiated and, importantly, Arianissa is returned to his keeping, 'Conquest and love to bless my reign combine, / Albania free, and Arianissa mine' (86). During the course of the play liberty is progressively divorced from patriotic rhetoric. Scanderbeg's

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<sup>89</sup> The irony of this alliance should not be lost. Even working together, the Christians and Turks are ineffectual and as soon as Arianissa procures her own freedom, the alliance is broken and hostility returns.

<sup>90</sup> Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

motivations lack patriotism. He is driven by selfish desires; and Arianissa is his trophy, 'behold my Arianissa's beauty / The price of dangers, and the pay of war' (85). This denigration of Scanderbeg's status as a patriot is inflected in his own use of rhetoric. When leading his troops to fight against the Turks, Scanderbeg's battle speech imposes a hierarchy of terms completely at odds with patriotic rhetoric, 'Love, honour, justice, liberty, revenge / All call aloud, and spur us on to Victory.' A true patriot leader, such as Lillo's Scanderbeg, would not evoke such self-serving sentimental rhetoric, placing justice and liberty beneath love and acting not for the benefit of his country but for revenge. Does Whincop divest Scanderbeg of the patriotism conventionally associated with this Christian hero in order to prioritise a sentimental rendering of this staple of anti-Islamic Christian history?

By contrast Whincop's use of religious rhetoric is striking. Scanderbeg is repeatedly represented with near divine characteristics. He expresses dissatisfaction with the inaction of the 'coercive; but recording heav'ns' (13) and relates this lack of divine intervention to his own defeatist followers, 'The daring foe / Too long already arrogantly vain, / By our delay, hath triumphed o'er your valour' (17). Scanderbeg's response is to adopt the role of avenger; he becomes the minister of divine vengeance. Scanderbeg the patriot saviour of his homeland has a *divine purpose* that transcends the usual boundaries of religious morality.

The threatened murder of Arianissa, so crucial to the opening scenes of Whincop's play, never takes place. Significantly, her reprieve is secured as a result of Amurath's remorse rather than due to any Christian intervention. In terms of Christian rhetoric Amurath's feelings of guilt are morally superior to Scanderbeg's desire for revenge. Thus the moral high ground is attributed to the Turk. This inversion of the expected religious hierarchy in favour of Islam echoes the simultaneous inversion of the expected patriotic hierarchy. Guilt is the key in the representation of Islamic culture rather than Christian culture. The Sultan and Scanderbeg are both characterised by their desire for revenge, but the Christian fails to demonstrate any subsequent feelings of remorse. Justification for Scanderbeg's actions is offered by his sense of divine purpose. He experiences what is presumed to be divine assistance on the battlefield. Despite the greater strength of the Turkish troops Scanderbeg is victorious, with little loss of life on the Christian side. Conversely, Amurath is repeatedly thwarted in his attempts to avenge himself. In Act III, having vowed vengeance against Ariant, the Sultan is again beset by guilt and self-doubt:

Destiny

Hath mark'd me out, inevitable fate

Still drives me on: my shipwreck'd soul is lost

Amid the billows of outrageous passions;

Whilst hope, despair, love, grief, rage and remorse

By turns distract me. (39)

Amurath's rage is simultaneously a distraction from and cause of his 'shipwreck'd soul'. As if to further his own destruction, Amurath rejects the humbling sentiment of this soliloquy and threatens Arianissa with the death of her father if she does not comply with his sexual advances. Whincop's representation of the Islamic faith is confusing and contradictory. The seemingly subversive inversion of the expected Islamic/Christian hierarchy created by positioning Amurath as a Christian-like penitent in contrast to the anger driven un-patriotic Scanderbeg is counteracted by Amurath's repeated inability to apply his own wisdom. As I have already suggested, Whincop positions the Turks and the Christians in a battle of libidinous rather than religious purpose. Arianissa is the trophy of this war, not the more conventionally sought freedom of Albania or protection of the Christian faithful from the tyranny imposed by the Ottoman Empire. Whincop brings together versions of Christianity to contrast with versions of Islam and play out an extended battle of morality. In some ways whatever Whincop's intent, this text reiterates that, in *all* its diverse forms, Christianity is morally superior to Islam. Whatever his doctrinal failing Scanderbeg is victorious and the Christians remain unharmed. Conversely, the deaths of both Amurath and his heir Chanhassen leave the Turks leaderless and in disarray. The Turks experience guilt, but are unable to restrain their behaviour. In keeping with the inconsistencies of other contemporary accounts of Islamic culture, Whincop creates Turks who demonstrate an admirable religious zeal and, at the same time a fundamental lack of morality.

Each of the Scanderbeg plays reveals a different approach to empire. Despite repeated claims made in all three texts for a non-partisan political agenda, the variations in the representation of the Scanderbeg history allow each text to present the audience/reader with a politically and religiously biased model for the maintenance and/or strengthening of the burgeoning British Empire. The plays



suggest through their figuration of Turkish politics, government and culture a reading of aspects of British colonial policy. The representation of the Turk is central to this comparative analysis, especially through the Muslim/Christian model of Scanderbeg. In comparing these two religions, the texts participate in the contemporary discussion evolving out of Christian encounters with Islamic culture in which the Turk is seen to be simultaneously part of yet distanced from Western European cultural and political experience.

Whincop's *Scanderbeg* is distinct from its 'predecessors' in that unlike the plays of Havard and Lillo, and the 'factual' accounts of commentators such as Aaron Hill, Whincop's text is not primarily concerned with the ways of maintaining an empire.<sup>91</sup> Perhaps in part a reaction to his investment losses, Whincop rejects patriotism as an appropriate model for successful colonialism. Equally, his text does not promote non-partisan politics as a pre-requisite for the formation of sound imperial government. In contrast to Havard's and Lillo's versions of the Scanderbeg history, Whincop's text depicts the arbitrariness of colonial success. Scanderbeg is, at times, unpatriotic, Christianity is not morally superior to Islam, both sides are skilled in battle. The Christians win merely as the result of good fortune not religious, moral or military superiority. Whincop's *Scanderbeg: or, Love and Liberty* not only rejects the notion of a model for successful colonialism; but it also denies any morally acceptable motivation for empire-building. Scanderbeg acts primarily on personal inclination rather than in his nation's best interest. The Turks use morally reprehensible methods of colonialism; and Amurath shares Scanderbeg's libidinous motivation. Liberty cannot be secured through colonialism and the liberty of both citizens and colonized peoples is threatened by the pursuit of empire. Colonialism 'undermines the established social order.' The building of an empire can only result in the increased 'avarice' of government, entirely to the detriment of good citizens.<sup>92</sup>

The Scanderbeg history is appropriated for the promotion of widely differing political and ideological perspectives on empire. The dramatists manipulate the 'factual' history, disseminated by writers such as Richard Knolles and David Jones, to suit their own political motivations. The chronological proximity of these plays, and their shared historical subject-matter, provide a clear example of the pliability of

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<sup>91</sup> I use the term 'predecessors' cautiously as in terms of conception rather than publication and performance, Whincop's play is the earlier text.

<sup>92</sup> See Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, p. 65.

history for political appropriation. This is not, however, the most significant aspect of these texts. The Scanderbeg plays of the 1730s demonstrate a marked change in the dramatic interpretation of the Turk. In rejecting the Turkish trope popularised in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these texts participate in a political and cultural sea change in British attitudes to the Ottomans. Contemporary concern for the welfare of the British Empire and the sustainability of religious and political ideals within this new imperial ideology are heightened by the geographic and historical proximity of a declining empire. The Scanderbeg plays share a political immediacy that distinguishes them from the thematically similar Roman histories and gives these neglected texts political currency heretofore overlooked in critical analyses of the development of the ideology of British Empire in the early eighteenth century.

## History and the Staging of Britishness

*Concord*, whose Myrtle Wand can steep  
Ev'n *Anger's* blood-shot Eyes in Sleep:  
Before whose breathing bosom's Balm,  
*Rage* drops his Steel, and Storms grow calm;  
Her let our Sires and Matrons hoar  
Welcome to *Britain's* ravag'd Shore,  
Our Youths, enamour'd of the Fair,  
Play with the Tangles of her Hair,  
Till in one loud applauding Sound,  
The Nations shout to Her around,  
O how supremely art thou blest,  
Thou, Lady, Thou shalt rule the West!

William Collins, *Ode to Liberty* (1746)

The call for 'concord' in Collins's *Ode to Liberty* (1746) has much in common with earlier patriot rhetoric that focused on the Walpole regime. Collins's poem reflects on the cabinet divide over the Breda peace negotiations – Pelham sued for peace whilst Newcastle and George II argued for war.<sup>1</sup> The nation was all too familiar with such ministerial conflict. The diverging agendas of the first minister and his secretary of state echoed the mounting pressure put on Walpole during the 1720s and 1730s for war with Spain. Bolingbroke's solution to this lack of concord took the form of the abolition of party in favour of a patriot king. Earlier in the century another call for concord was made in *Cato's Letters*. Gordon and Trenchard created a Cato who:

Showed how factions manipulated parliaments and ministries in the hope of persuading them to create monopolies in trade, commerce and religion. He showed how these had a tendency to exclude those in possession of property from access to political power. Frequent parliaments and frequently rotating ministries, such as those which had preserved Roman and Harringtonian liberty, would put an end to such corruption. But this would be impossible

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of Collins's poem see David Fairer & Christine Gerrard (eds.), *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 349-353.



without a party system which was free from faction and purged of the opinions which distorted a true understanding of the public interest.<sup>2</sup>

Concord, therefore, was repeatedly evoked but never achieved. Factionalism, party-politics and ministerial self-interest rendered 'agreement' practically impossible. However, a type of concord did exist in the language of patriotism and party appropriation of patriot kingship. As Gerrard asserts:

The messianic language of Patriot kingship focusing on a revival or 'redemption' in the person of a prince can also be seen to parallel certain forms of Jacobite rhetoric....It is not surprising that many of the 'Patriot King' writings...exploit royalist myths formerly associated with the Stuart monarchy. The revival of Arthurian chivalry in a Hanoverian context did not await the Garter splendours of George III and his Windsor festivals. It was there in the 1730s in the court of his father Frederick.<sup>3</sup>

If the language of patriotism could be appropriated cross-party and agreement had been reached over the historical precedents for British patriotism, could the parties agree on a homogenous British identity? Did concord also exist in the shape of a unified version of Britishness?

The plays discussed in this thesis focus on a diverse array of histories and political agendas. This diversity, although providing abundant scope for literary interpretation, suggests a number of problems for a reading of these plays as a body of material engaging in the negotiation of a homogenous British identity. If, as I have argued, these texts engage in such a discourse, why do the historical themes range from ancient British to English to European to ancient Roman and even Islamic pasts? Similarly if the political foci are so varied, party politics, favouritism, domestic politics, politics of colonialism, how can these diverse agendas be seen as offering representations of a shared British identity? Given this multiplicity of historical themes and political agendas these plays, it seems, are unlikely to provide evidence of partisan concord regarding Britishness. However, if no definitive version of British

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<sup>2</sup> Phillipson, 'Politics and Politeness', p. 231.

<sup>3</sup> Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole*, p. 107.

identity had been formed, who were the BRITONS so frequently addressed in the prologues and epilogues of eighteenth-century history plays?

### **i. The Appropriation of History**

A number of modern critics have attempted to define eighteenth-century versions of Britishness. Murray Pittock summarises the variety of interpretations of what it was to be an eighteenth-century Briton and asserts the tenacity of resistance to the term.<sup>4</sup> Linda Colley has defined early modern Britons in relation to their perception of otherness:

Characterising other peoples, whether European or non-European, as morally and politically defective and/or oppressive, while simultaneously vaunting their own achievements and virtues, was – for early modern (and perhaps some modern) Britons – as much a defence mechanism as an expression of serene superiority or considered aggression.<sup>5</sup>

Certainly, many of the plays discussed represent non-Britons as ‘politically defective’ or ‘oppressive’ but this is not a universal given that can be applied to every text or even every representation of a non-Briton. Some texts such as *The Fall of Mortimer* fit Colley’s contention well, others, such as Aaron Hill’s *Henry V* merely substitute British for English and thus align with Pittock’s less unified interpretation of early eighteenth-century British cultural identities. What does connect all of the plays however are the repeated references to liberty and patriotism. I would like to suggest therefore that, for the plays considered in this thesis at least, these are the defining characteristics of Britishness. Liberty and patriotism are British traits so strong a part of a uniquely British way of life that they can be traced back to our ancient ancestors. However, this brings me back to my original problem – why such a diversity of historical representation?

The diversity of themes in these historical narratives and the diversity of political agenda for which these narratives are appropriated suggests that Britishness

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<sup>4</sup> Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain*, pp. 54-59.

<sup>5</sup> Linda Colley, *Captives*, p. 105.

was an unstable term, then just as now. Although patriotism and liberty are the defining characteristics of the Britons on stage and the projected Britons in the supposed audiences who gather to watch representations of their cultural, political or religious ancestors, this apparently homogenous version of British identity is undermined by the varied attempts to appropriate Britishness. On the stage Britons re-enact the nation's past, in the face of various political, religious and ideological opponents – Britain's Roman Catholic neighbours, the Jacobite threat, predatory Islamic nations – a foreign foe suited to every potential xenophobic agenda.

To some degree British was merely a term by which Britons could define themselves in opposition to one or more of these imagined or real threats. Irrespective of political agenda or national or regional allegiance, Britishness itself was, to appropriate Colley's assertion, a sort of 'defence mechanism', an umbrella term of self-definition that provided an imagined barrier, a virtual sea that would defend the island from foreign aggressors. The multifarious appropriation of the defining characteristics of Britishness leads to rhetorical instability. Qualities deemed to be definitively British, could be used to promote any number of political agendas and this loss of stability was self-perpetuating. By capitalising upon contemporary feelings of nationalism in response to various threats from abroad, texts – particularly those that enjoyed dramatic success - promoted the use of this British image in subsequent plays. So what is Britishness according to these plays? How is the British character represented in these texts?

### ii. Dramatic Versions of Britishness

The ancient British history plays represent the varied struggles of Britain's Celtic and Saxon peoples to protect the liberty of their homeland, their Britain. These ancient Britons are characterised by their moral justness in contrast to the immoral incursions of their aggressors, be they Romans, Vikings, or even rebel fellow Britons. The heroes and heroines of Britain's ancient past demonstrate a moral perspective that is not only Christianised but often overtly Protestant. For example, in *Hibernia Freed* William Philips depicts the indigenous Celtic Irish battling for their freedom against the heathen Danes; Philips's Irish, however, are explicitly Anglo-Irish. These Celtic ancestors are the creators of an incipient Protestant not Roman Catholic Church. In



many of these plays an overtly Protestant morality is ascribed to the pre-Christian inhabitants of Britain.

In the ancient British history plays proto-Protestantism is not the only evidence for the source of eighteenth-century Britishness. The 'manliness' of the British character is also demonstrated in these ancestors. British manliness is contrasted with the barbarism or feminised actions of the foreign aggressors. In *The Briton* for example, Ambrose Philips characterises the Romans with elaborate dialogue – their speech is feminised by their manipulation and contortion of language. The Britons express themselves simply and directly, without artifice – their strength lies in their physical not linguistic prowess.

Representations of Britishness in the ancient British history plays focus on the origins of British culture, the foundation of modern British society and modern British politics. As I argued in chapter one, such references suggest a need to connect contemporary political action with a return to a purer version of the British nation – a Britain that preceded the Norman conquest and was therefore devoid of the corrupting influences of institutionalised Catholicism. Given the clear connection between these various representations of Britishness and the shared focus on liberty and patriotism, what makes Britishness unstable in the ancient British history plays? These histories are idealised versions of events, verging on the mythical. They evade the fact that however patriotic, however in favour of liberty and freedom, and however ardently they protect their own liberty and freedom, ultimately these people lose – the Romans conquered Britain, as did the Normans. Further compounding this sense of the instability of the representations of Britishness in these plays is the lack of any attempt to explicate the position of the Scottish within the British identity. Where are the Scottish Britons? The heroic Celtic ancestors of these texts are Welsh or Irish but not Scottish yet it is Scotland with which England and Wales united in 1707. The Scots are seemingly excluded from these versions of Britishness.

It is clear that Colley's and Pittock's assertions can both be applied to these plays. Britishness is represented as a homogenous or shared identity based on the patriotism and liberty of the British people and their desire to protect the latter by exercising the former. However, these texts are also evasive and exclusionary in the way in which Britishness is conferred. The reality of Britain's varied history is elided in order to promote Britishness positively and a key ethnic component of the nation is sidelined, ignored or even vilified as an enemy to our illustrious ancestors. Thus the

notion of Britishness is destabilised and undermined but is this effect limited to this particular group of plays? Do the other histories discussed share a similarly problematic representation of Britishness?

The threat to England/Britain from her Catholic neighbours is repeatedly the subject of the medieval English history plays. In these plays the dangers of factionalism and favouritism to modern British liberty are compared with the threat posed to England by favourites such as Mortimer, Catholic nations such as France and Spain, and the combined misogynistic and religious prejudice evidenced by the hatred of foreign queens. In many of these texts, particularly the adaptations of Shakespeare's history plays, there is a move away from the characteristic 'manliness' of Britishness demonstrated in the ancient British history plays. In the adaptations by Aaron Hill, Ambrose Philips and Theophilus Cibber, British women are represented as the patriotic equals of characteristically British men. Women participate in politics and have the power to influence the public sphere both negatively and positively. These texts make a cross-gender call to all Britons. Men *and* women have responsibility for maintaining the Protestantism and patriotism of their nation. Men *and* women are held accountable for the security of British liberty.

Ironically, these apparently cohesive representations of Britishness are destabilised by their own universality. Representations of patriot women are inconsistent with the contemporary legal status of women. Even within the confines of the theatre itself, images of politically active and effective women are at variance with audience expectations. Breeches roles were conventionally aimed at titillation not empowerment. Can women be successfully incorporated into a definition of Britishness? Women can be Britons too but their representation as political activists directly threatens the masculinity synonymous with Britishness. Women who act politically not only in order to combat (not in the physical sense but rather acting as a counter representation to politically active unpatriotic women) the threat of foreign queens but as independent patriotic Britons threaten one of the fundamental characteristics of Britishness. Similarly, partisan inversions of the linguistic and dramatic tropes of favouritism have a destabilising effect on the definition of Britishness. Although Sewall and Ralph propose their patriotic favourites, Raleigh and Essex, as models of Britishness, the terms patriot and favourite were firmly opposed and ultimately these representations, particularly Ralph's Essex, are flawed and unconvincing. Yet again, in attempting to establish the superiority of the British



and the homogeneity of Britishness, these texts reveal the inherent conflicts within this nationalistic image.

Britishness is also described against a background of emergent imperialism and it is perhaps in this context – as Colley argues – that the image of Britishness reaches its most stable form. In these plays desire for and fear of empire frequently coexist, perhaps mirroring attitudes to the creation of Britain itself and the consequent demand for establishing the characteristics of Britishness. Roman and Ottoman empires both threaten Britain – one historically the other contemporaneously. What is important here is the way British colonialism is conceptualised in contrast to these ‘other’ empires. British colonialism, according to commentators such as Aaron Hill, is founded on trade not military expansion. But was this really the case? Was the image of British colonialism as a liberating, improving, developing force successfully conveyed in the plays concerning colonial endeavour? How did colonialism effect the stability of the dominant version of Britishness – a version of Britishness that relied on its fundamental basis in liberty and patriotism to shore-up its otherwise tottering self-aggrandizement?

The Roman and Ottoman history plays serve not only to emphasise the differences between these two great empires and Britain’s own emergent empire but also to hint at the similarities. In some texts these similarities are positively embraced. The Roman histories attempt to establish ancient Rome as a model for British colonialism. In plays such as Colley Cibber’s *Cæsar in Ægypt* and John Sheffield’s adaptations *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* and *The Tragedy of Marcus Brutus*, Julius Cæsar becomes the focal point for this model. The imperfections of Rome, the factionalism and irresponsible colonial expansion would have been checked if only Cæsar had not been assassinated. For other texts, less contentious models of imperial leadership are identified, for example Belisarius in William Philips’s *Belisarius* or Fabius in Phillip Frowde’s *The Fall of Saguntum*. Whoever the hero, ancient Rome serves as a model for British colonial expansion, albeit a model whose history provides an important warning.

The Islamic history plays also establish a model for British colonialism - the Ottoman Empire. Again similarities between Britain’s colonial endeavour and the colonialism of what was conventionally regarded as an enemy to British liberty can be elided by asserting British superiority or even celebrated as evidence of Britain’s inevitable success. For example, in Lillo’s *The Christian Hero*, Scanderbeg is first and



foremost, as the title makes clear, a Christian hero. Religious intolerance on the part of the Muslim Ottomans is represented as an affront to morality and sense. Religious intolerance on the part of Scanderbeg is acceptable; after all he shares with modern colonising Britons knowledge of the Christian truth. The conversion of heretics to Christianity by Scanderbeg and modern Britons is not religious tyranny or indoctrination but liberation through religious enlightenment. For others, such as Havard, the similarities between Ottoman and British colonialism are more problematic. British religious intolerance in dealing with her colonies is presented by Havard as a counter to the nation's purported colonial intent. The British and Ottoman empires, despite their geographical and political differences are, Havard argues, both governed by greed, intolerance and fear, not the repeated claims of liberation and co-existence associated with the British colonial myth. These plays challenge the notion of Britishness by drawing comparisons between contemporary Britain and her imperial predecessors. The audience is assured that inevitably, the qualities of Britishness, will either allow Britain to attain similar successes or will protect Britain from similar failures. However, the gap between the British colonial myth, the realities of colonialism and the definitive characteristics of Britishness – patriotism and liberty – is too wide to support a version of British identity that can be applied to Britons variously dispersed across a developing maritime empire.

Ultimately, the history plays discussed in this thesis demonstrate a degree of concord regarding British identity. In all of these texts liberty and patriotism define the British. This definition is not limited to modern Britons but is an inheritance traceable to their recent, medieval and their ancient ancestors. Even foreign heroes such as Frederick Duke of Lunenburgh or Scanderbeg are endowed with these qualities so firmly associated with Britishness – how else could their histories be pertinent to the eighteenth-century British audience? Whatever the political or ideological agenda of these history plays, the representation of Britishness rests on these simple characteristics. However unstable the term Britishness may be as a result of the varied attempts at appropriating these characteristics to promote partisan agendas, these core characteristics remain untouched and constant. Whether Britishness is perceived broadly or narrowly, deemed to include the entire population of the British Isles or simply substituted for Englishness, liberty and patriotism are central and immovable characteristics. Despite strong historical evidence to the contrary, the contemporary audiences were persuaded by these plays that they could

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rest assured - Britons, thanks to their patriotism and their tenacious protection of their liberty, were, are, and will be free. A myth easily countered by Britain's own history, but a powerful and compelling one that may have served this burgeoning maritime empire very well indeed.

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