

**MARTIAL WOMEN IN THE BRITISH THEATRE: 1789-1804**

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**ABSTRACT**

In the period of the French Revolution, the armed or martial woman comes to stand in Britain as the representative of extreme political and social disruption. She embodies, in striking form, the revolutionary chaos witnessed across the channel, which threatens to infect British culture. This thesis traces shifting representations of the female warrior, and examines the complex processes by which the threat that she personifies is handled in British tragedies and sentimental comedies, written and performed in London and Dublin between 1789 and 1804. The study presents the British theatre as an arena in which the significance of the arms-bearing woman is constantly re-modelled and re-appropriated to fulfil diverse ideological functions. Used to challenge as well as to enforce established notions of sex and gender difference, she is fashioned also as an allegorical tool, serving both to condemn and to champion political rebellion in England, France and Ireland. Combining close readings of dramatic texts with detailed discussions of production and performance histories, this thesis tells a story of the martial woman's evolution in British dramas, which emphasises her multifaceted and protean identity, and shows her development not to have followed a stable or linear pattern, but to have been constantly redirected by an expansive range of contextual factors: historical, social, and theatrical.

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### **Author's Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other University. All sources are acknowledged as references. Part of chapter 1 has been published in revised form under the title “‘Feminine Virtues Violated’: Motherhood, Female Militancy and Revolutionary Violence in Elizabeth Inchbald’s *The Massacre*’, in Birkbeck University’s postgraduate arts journal, *The Dandelion Journal*, vol.5 (Summer 2014). Part of chapter 2 has been published in revised form under the title “‘Weeping Mothers Shall Applaud’: Sarah Yates as Margaret of Anjou on the London Stage, 1797’, in *Comparative Drama*, vol.49, no.4, Special edition (Winter 2015). Part of chapter 4 has been published in revised form under the title “‘Be Mine in Politics’: Charlotte Corday and Anti-Union Allegory in Matthew West’s *Female Heroism, A Tragedy in Five Acts* (1803)’, in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research*, vol.30, no.1-2 (Winter 2015).



# **Martial Women in the British Theatre, 1789-1804**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the period of the French Revolution, the armed or martial woman comes to stand in Britain as the representative of extreme political and social disruption. She embodies, in striking form, the revolutionary chaos witnessed across the channel, which threatens to infect British culture. This thesis traces shifting representations of the female warrior, and examines the complex processes by which the threat that she personifies is handled in British dramas, written and performed in London and Dublin between 1789 and 1804. I present the British theatre as an arena in which the significance of the arms-bearing woman is constantly re-modelled and re-appropriated to fulfil diverse ideological functions. Used to challenge as well as to enforce established notions of sex and gender difference, she is fashioned also as an allegorical tool, serving both to condemn and to champion political rebellion in England, France and Ireland. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, my thesis tells a story of the martial woman's evolution in British dramas, which shows her progression not to have followed a stable or linear pattern, but to have been continually redirected by an expansive array of contextual factors, social, literary, and theatrical.

Women brandishing daggers, handling pistols and donning military garb graced the late eighteenth-century British stage in a range of dramatic genres. While the cross-dressed female soldiers that amused and titillated audiences throughout the century have received the greatest exposure in recent critical studies, my thesis is concerned with the martial woman whose troubling significance is not allayed by whimsical characterisation or humour.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on the genres of tragedy and sentimental comedy, I assess the extent to

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<sup>1</sup> These comical breeches roles have recently received considerable attention from Wendy C. Nielsen in her study *Women Warriors in Romantic Drama* (Plymouth: University of Delaware Press, 2013). See 97-134. See also Pat Rogers, 'The Breeches Part', in *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé

which the female warrior manages to elicit compassion or inspire awe from British theatergoers, and I seek to unveil the multiple methods used by those involved with theatrical creation and production to facilitate these non-hostile receptions, without being accused of subversive intent.<sup>2</sup>

Previous studies of martial women in eighteenth-century British fiction, by scholars including Dianne Dugaw, Catherine Craft-Fairchild and Dror Wahrman, have sketched out basic representational trends, and straightforward sequences of development, to which the figure's identity conforms. Customarily, female warriors are confined to one of two categories; subversive and punished, or romantic and rewarded, and transformations in their image are shown to occur collectively and successively.<sup>3</sup> Expanding and complicating this more generalised scholarship, I show the martial woman to acquire a multifaceted and unpredictably protean character in British dramas of the 1790s, owing to the vast assortment of intricate and often discordant strands of influence that feed into her representation. To achieve this, I employ a flexible methodology that allows me to exploit the analytical possibilities made available by the surviving source materials that accompany my chosen texts. Specifically, I place a consistent emphasis on contextual change, while making full use of the investigative tools of literary and theatrical criticism.

By employing this methodology, I manage to further elucidate British attitudes to the French Revolution, by revealing the remarkable degree to which depictions of arms-bearing women, and the meanings they communicate in British dramas, engage with the lively political and cultural debates characterising the revolutionary years. At the same

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(Manchester: Manchester UP, 1982), 244-258, and Beth H. Friedman-Romell, 'Breaking the Code: Toward a Reception Theory of Theatrical Cross-Dressing in Eighteenth-Century London', *Eighteenth-Century Representations*, vol.47, no.4 (December 1995), 459-479.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 1 concerns itself with Elizabeth Inchbald's sentimental comedy *Next Door Neighbours* (1791), while the remaining chapters centre wholly on tragedies.

<sup>3</sup> See Dianne Dugaw's *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650-1850* (New York: CUP, 1989), Catherine Craft-Fairchild's 'Cross-Dressing and the Novel: Women Warriors and Domestic Femininity,' *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, vol.10, issue 2 (January 1998), 171-202, and Dror Wahrman's *The Making of the Modern Self* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004). Wahrman's arguments regarding British dramas are explored later.

time, I am able to highlight the relevance of violent events occurring closer to home, both national, and surprisingly personal, in informing the heroine's image. Drawing on documents ranging from a protest for women's martial rights presented in France in 1791, visual and verbal propaganda encouraging resistance to the Irish Act of Union, and newspaper reports documenting the murder of an actress's husband in Pimlico in 1796, I uncover the impact of events spanning from international and political, to private and familial, on the meanings of plays written and performed in London and Dublin throughout the revolutionary period.

My attentiveness to social and cultural matters is combined with close textual analyses of written scripts, and detailed assessments of the plays' production and performance histories. By reading dramatic texts alongside sources including Larpent manuscripts, eighteenth-century literary and aesthetic theories, and non-fictional writings of individual playwrights, I aim to demonstrate the roles played by censorship, the demands of theatrical composition, and the authors' personal and political beliefs, in contributing to the armed woman's textual portrayal. Meanwhile, considerations of performance reviews commenting on the use of costume, set design, and acting style, advertisements disclosing information about the actress's private life, and details of the production's geographical location, are fruitful in exemplifying the significance of varying performance components in manipulating the martial woman's reception on the stage.

Intending to magnify the unique and intricately formulated meanings attached to select martial women, rather than to provide a macrocosmic overview of the period's representational norms, I offer in-depth readings of six plays and performances, each of which cast female warriors in anomalous and disparate moulds. I have chosen to privilege plays that allow me to shed light on critically neglected playwrights and actresses, and that best accommodate my dual concern with portrayal and reception. Accordingly, I analyse martial heroines presented by the author Matthew West, and the actress Sarah Yates, in

case studies that show the dramatist's national and spiritual identity, and the performer's recent widowhood, to account in large part for the excitingly novel appearance that the female warrior obtains. Moreover, I juxtapose new scripts from the period with revivals and adaptations of older plays. In so doing, I am able to trace the contrasting ways in which late eighteenth-century playwrights respond to revolutionary developments, while indicating additionally the potential for female warriors of the past to foster new cultural values when reinterpreted through the lens of the present.

In bringing together an original selection of plays and performances, each informed by varying social, literary, and theatrical factors, my thesis advances scholarly understanding of martial women in revolutionary-era British literature, by showing the female warrior to cut a more complex figure in the period's dramas than has yet been suggested. Using a multi-contextual and interdisciplinary framework, I disclose a number of intriguing and often unexpected ways in which armed heroines interact on the stage with the period's sexual and political ideals, and I show the martial woman's mutable identity across the fifteen-year period not to be dictated by any one underlying cause, but to be determined instead by a copious selection of diverse and intertwining elements.

#### 'An Unnatural and Monstrous Being': Martial Women and the French Revolution

In 1795, the author of a letter printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine* expressed his concern that a 'military furor', like that witnessed in 'a neighbouring nation', might seize on 'young and beautiful' British women, and encourage them to relinquish 'their natural timidity and amiable softness, and acquire many masculine' and 'indelicate notions'.<sup>4</sup> Insisting that this 'tendency to masculine manners', which he describes as 'highly disgusting', must be prevented in Britain, the author warns that if 'the gentle bosoms of the fair sex' were removed from 'the quiet scenes of domestic life to riot in the scenes of blood', the outcome

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<sup>4</sup> 'Letter: Strictures on Natural Vices, Follies, and Inadvertencies', in *The Gentleman's Magazine* 65 (January 1795), 103, 104.

‘would neither be pleasant nor friendly to virtue’, and would be of disastrous ‘consequence to the state’.<sup>5</sup> The letter typifies loyalist anxieties about arms-bearing women that crucially inform the female warrior’s status and reputation in late eighteenth-century Britain. First, it demonstrates the panic among conservatives that British women might adopt the ‘indecent and disgusting’ character of the warlike women inhabiting a ‘neighbouring nation’.<sup>6</sup> Second, it shows this panic to result largely from the influence that martial women were seen to exert over the state.

The ‘neighbouring nation’ to which the letter refers is of course revolutionary France. The French Revolution saw women partake in martial forms of political violence on a remarkably large scale. While a number of women had been present at the storming of the Bastille, and more still had paraded through the streets in celebration of its fall, women’s military involvement in the revolution began en masse on 6 October 1789.<sup>7</sup> As has been well documented, the date saw a host of Parisian market women march to Versailles before forcing the Royal family out of the palace and back to the capital, in protest over the rising price of bread.<sup>8</sup> British journalists were shocked to discover that the women involved in the march had been armed; the *Times* remarked with horror that a vast number of France’s female inhabitants had ‘taken up arms, some with bludgeons, some with firelocks’, and *Whitehall Evening Post* expressed its trepidation at the ‘French ladies’, who proved themselves to ‘have the courage even to take up arms’.<sup>9</sup> This display of female aggression and martial agency set the tone for things to come. In the spring and summer of 1792 French women took part in armed parades provoked by the massacre at the Champ de

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Letter’, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 103, 104.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>7</sup> On women and the storming of the Bastille see Lucy Moore, *Liberty: The Lives and Times of Six Women in Revolutionary France* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), 32-33, and Olwen H. Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 8.

<sup>8</sup> See Hufton, *Women*, 8-50; Moore, *Liberty*, 35-42, 51-52; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation* (New York: Yale UP, 1994), 265-267; Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy, ‘Women and militant citizenship in revolutionary Paris’, in *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, ed. Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine (Oxford: OUP, 1992), 83-85; James F. McMillan, *France and Women, 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 21-22, and Gay L. Gullickson, *Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune* (London: Cornell UP, 1996), 66-73.

<sup>9</sup> *Times*, 10 October 1789, *Whitehall Evening Post*, 15-17 October 1789.

Mars; in August of the same year they were actively involved in the brutal killing of the Swiss guard during the attack on the Tuileries; on 13 July 1793 republican woman Charlotte Corday stabbed and murdered the tyrannical Jacobin leader, Jean-Paul Marat, and in May 1795, armed female rioters burst into the meeting place of the National Convention following continued inflation and food shortages.<sup>10</sup> As the escalation of women's violence suggests, by the time that the letter was printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, France's female warriors had firmly established themselves as prominent agents in their country's revolution.

French women's mass participation in revolutionary violence earned them a reputation in Britain as monstrous, savage, and entirely unfeminine. The stereotype of the armed and grotesque French woman is epitomised in satirical images including Thomas Rowlandson's *The Contrast* (1792) [Fig.1] and Isaac Cruikshank's *A Republican Belle* (1794) [Fig.2]. In Rowlandson's widely distributed etching, French Liberty is represented as a bare-breasted virago with Medusa like-snakes protruding from her head.<sup>11</sup> Wielding a dagger in one hand and a trident in the other, she charges frantically towards her next victim, while callously stamping on the decapitated body of a man she has already murdered. Indicative of the famine that has driven her mad, her body appears manly yet undernourished, and is starkly contrasted with the rotund and womanly physique of Britannia, who appears opposite her, looking matronly and composed.<sup>12</sup> Cruikshank's *Republican Belle* exhibits an equally bestialised French woman, who smiles manically as she strolls nonchalantly past human bones, decapitated heads, and a man hanging from a

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<sup>10</sup> On these events see Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and their French Revolution*, trans. Katherine Streip (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 107-119; Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (California: Routledge, 1992), 81-82, and Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992), 288.

<sup>11</sup> On *The Contrast*'s popularity and wide distribution in Britain see Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996), 152.

<sup>12</sup> On the trend among caricaturists to juxtapose images of Britain and revolutionary France see Donald, *Caricature*, 151-155. The contrasting physiques with which French and British representatives were commonly endowed is discussed further in chapter 3 of this thesis.

Fig.1: Thomas Rowlandson, *The Contrast: Or which is Best?* (December 1792).  
© Trustees of the British Museum. Reproduced under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license.



Fig.2: Isaac Cruikshank, *A Republican Belle*. (1794). © Trustees of the British Museum. Reproduced under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license.





noose. Her unfeminine physique is again both muscular and emaciated, and her clawed feet and fang-like teeth render her demonic. She demonstrates her relentless appetite for violence and bloodshed by casually firing a pistol at her pleading male victim, while three large daggers emerge from her hair, and a fourth is tucked under her arm.<sup>13</sup> As the nightmarish figures indicate, France's martial women, used to personify the unnaturalness of revolutionary France, were popularly discerned and portrayed in Britain as hideously ferocious beings, who were neither properly female, nor properly human: rather, as Edmund Burke famously declared in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), they embodied 'all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women'.<sup>14</sup>

British women's emulation of their desperately aggressive and unnaturally masculine French counterparts was viewed by British loyalists as a very real and very dangerous possibility. Burke warned in his *Reflections* that as 'France has always more or less influenced manners in England' the same 'revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions' witnessed across the channel could soon extend to Britain.<sup>15</sup> The Anglican cleric Thomas Gisborne later addressed widespread fears regarding women's particular tendency to copy French trends, when cautioning in *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797) that the pattern 'exhibited at Paris has long been imitated in London', especially by the country's 'female acquaintance', who seem to relish the 'opportunity of treading' in

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<sup>13</sup> On British satirical images of French revolutionary women see Jane Kromm's 'Representations of Revolutionary Women in Political Caricature', in *The French Revolution Debate in English Literature and Culture*, ed. Lisa Plummer Crafton (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 126-131, and John Richard Moores, *Representations of France and the French in English Satirical Prints, 1740-1832* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 177-192. On *A Republican Belle* in particular see Amanda Lahikainen, "'Some Species of Contrasts': British Graphic Satire, the French Revolution, and the Humor of Horror", *Humor*, vol.28, issue 1 (February 2015), esp.99-109.

<sup>14</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: J. Dodsley, 1790), 106. On Burke's discussion of the armed women who marched to Versailles see Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender, and Political Economy in Revolution* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 164-196; Tim Fulford, *Romanticism and Masculinity: Gender, Politics and Poetics in the Writings of Burke, Coleridge, Cobbett, Wordsworth, De Quincey and Hazlitt* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 31-36, and Linda Zerilli, *Signifying Woman: Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke, and Mill* (London: Cornell UP, 1994), 60-89.

<sup>15</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, 118, 119.

‘the same steps’ as their national neighbours.<sup>16</sup> The thought of British women mimicking France’s female warriors struck horror in gender conservatives and political loyalists alike, as such women threatened both the sexual and the political order. On one level, armed female activists challenged the assumption that women were naturally domestic, nurturing, and apolitical, and thereby called into question the gendered division of labour and the gendered division of spheres. Moreover, women’s martial activity could be perceived not only as symptomatic, but also as productive of the anarchy and barbarism characterising revolutionary France.

The letter printed in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* substantiates the need for women’s military activity to be prohibited in Britain by postulating that ‘women, though they take no active share in the government of nations, have yet a mighty influence in every civilised state’.<sup>17</sup> The author’s asserted link between women and civilisation interacts with Enlightenment theories of progress. British stadial models of national development, which I discuss further in chapter one, showed femininity to exert a powerful influence over male manners and morals. Women’s softer virtues were credited with taming the rougher sex, and were therefore considered crucial components of civilised society.<sup>18</sup> During the revolutionary years, social commentators drew on stadial models in order to blame the outbreak of anarchy in France on the behaviour of the country’s women.<sup>19</sup> As Linda Colley explains, the revolution was commonly presented in Britain as ‘a grim demonstration of the dangers that ensued when women were allowed to stray outside of their proper sphere’.<sup>20</sup> French women were shown to have abandoned their femininity by intervening in the masculine realms of public life, and their example was consequently used as evidence

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London: T. Cadell jun. and W. Davies, 1797), 324. On French influence in England and the rest of Europe see Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789-1829)* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983), 43.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Letter’, 103.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of British stadial theory see chapter 1 of this thesis.

<sup>19</sup> On women’s role in prompting the revolution see Colley, *Britons*, 263-270; Katherine Binhammer, ‘The Sex Panic of the 1790s’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol.6, no.3 (January 1996), 409-434, and Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1-19.

<sup>20</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 265.

in Britain that women must ‘look, feel and behave in ways that were unambiguously womanly’ if social equanimity was to be maintained.<sup>21</sup>

It is precisely this point that is emphasised in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, which forms an explicit connection between France’s female warriors, and ‘the immoralities of modern Frenchmen’.<sup>22</sup> In accordance with Enlightenment theories of gender, the correspondent presents women’s ‘natural goodness of heart’ as essential to keeping the country’s men in check. He announces,

Softness, delicacy [...] and, I may add, timidity [...] are the most natural characteristics of women. Such endearing qualities touch the heart of the hero, awe the profligate, and extort respect from the most abandoned; while she in whom they are wanting creates only disgust; she appears to be an unnatural and monstrous being, and, instead of love and the softer passions, she excites only contempt.<sup>23</sup>

Women’s ‘endearing qualities’ are shown to foster in men the ‘love and softer passions’ that the ‘unnatural and monstrous’ character of the masculine woman is incapable of inspiring. The author deduces from this that as long as women retain their ‘natural sensibility’, then the ‘dignity, security and happiness’ of the nation will be preserved.<sup>24</sup> But, if instead of ‘the bashful air for which they are admired, women were to learn to appear in all the fierceness of a hero’, British men will grow ‘savage and unprincipled’. They will develop ‘that impatience of controul’ which too often ‘grows into turbulence and sedition’, and the nation’s ‘political excellence’ and ‘private virtue’ will be supplanted by ‘vices, follies [and] inadvertencies’.<sup>25</sup> The letter articulates a stark and serious warning: either women agree to ‘leave military duties’ to ‘their fathers, their brothers, and their

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Letter’, 103.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 103, 104.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 104, 102, 103.

countrymen’, or not only will established gender distinctions be overturned, but Britain will become home to the same ‘alarming depravity’ and ‘horrid scenes’ that characterise revolutionary France.<sup>26</sup>

‘To Shake or to Strengthen Existing Forms of Government’: The Revolutionary-Era British Theatre

In a context in which martial women were seen to threaten both the sexual and the political order, their representation on the British stage had to be carefully negotiated. During the 1790s, British dramas intended for performance were assessed not only by the relevant theatre managers, but also by John Larpent, the Chief Examiner of Plays in the Lord Chamberlain’s Office.<sup>27</sup> Larpent rigorously scrutinised the proposed play scripts, frequently amending specific scenes and dialogues, and occasionally denying the performance outright.<sup>28</sup> As British antipathy to the French Revolution increased, so too did Larpent’s expurgation of dramatic material that seemed to engage even subtly with revolutionary events or precepts.<sup>29</sup> Despite the degree of support shown for the revolution in 1789, by the summer of 1792, following the movement’s deterioration into violence, conservative attitudes reigned in Britain, and dramatic depictions of political and social subversion were rarely left untouched by Larpent.<sup>30</sup>

It was not only censorship practices that dramatists had to consider when dealing with controversial subject matter: they were under pressure also to appeal to the tastes of a vocal

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 104, 102.

<sup>27</sup> On censorship see in particular L.W. Conolly, *The Censorship of English Drama, 1737-1824* (San Marino: Huntington Library Press, 1976); David Worrall, *Theatrical Revolution: Drama, Censorship, and Romantic Period Subcultures, 1773-1832* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), and Jane Moody, ‘Inchbald, Holcroft and the Censorship of Jacobin Theatre’, in *Women’s Romantic Theatre and Drama: History, Agency and Performativity*, ed. Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Keir Elam (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 119-214.

<sup>28</sup> See Conolly, *Censorship*, 1-11.

<sup>29</sup> See George Taylor, *The French Revolution and the London Stage, 1789-1805* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 66.

<sup>30</sup> On changing attitudes to the revolution see Mark Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), 11-39; Chris Evans, *Debating the Revolution: Britain in the 1790s* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 16-21; Paulson, *Representations of Revolution*, 37-40, and Steven Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams and the Rewriting of the French Revolution* (London: Associated UPs, 1997), 89-92.

and boisterous theatre audience. Even following the Examiner's approval, a drama could still be withdrawn from the stage if, on immediate perusal, it failed to impress its spectators, who did not hold back in voicing their opinions.<sup>31</sup> Recognising this in his *Random Records* (1830), the playwright and theatre manager George Colman declared that,

Any Dramatist [...] when he first brings his play into action, exposes himself more to the attacks of malice and wanton hostility than any other description of writer. – Authors for the closet can never be absolutely discredited through such a condemnation as causes immediate and decisive failure; but the Dramatist draws a Bill upon Fame, at sight; it is acknowledged or protested at the moment it is presented.<sup>32</sup>

As Colman indicates, the playwright, whose work is judged publically and impulsively by an outspoken audience, could not afford to present material that might provoke uproar, as the play's lifespan, as well as the dramatist's reputation, were both at stake.<sup>33</sup>

Consequently, playwrights had to take special care to present their narratives in ways that would satisfy volatile theatregoers, while also passing the Examiner's strict inspection.

The need for rigid censorship to be exercised over British dramas related in large part to the perceived correlation between theatrical entertainments, and the public's conduct outside of the theatre. Social commentators of the 1790s identified close ties between events acted on the stage, and the public's acceptance of, and compliance with, established

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<sup>31</sup> On the vocal nature of Georgian theatregoers see Charles Beecher Hogan, *The London Stage, 1776-1800: A Critical Introduction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1968), cxcv-ccviii; Marc Baer, *Theatre and Disorder in late Georgian London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Leo Hughes, *The Drama's Patrons: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century London Audience* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), and John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1997), 282-286.

<sup>32</sup> George Colman, *Random Records*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), II:254-255.

<sup>33</sup> This idea is discussed further in chapter 1.

social norms. In his *Enquiry*, Gisborne drew on the ‘immorality and profaneness’ that ‘deluged the theatre’ around the time of the English civil wars, in order to demonstrate the theatre’s potential ‘to shake or to strengthen existing forms of government’.<sup>34</sup> Expressing similar sentiments in *Reflections*, Burke accused a tragedy staged in Paris between 1789 and 1790 of being partially responsible for inciting the French Revolution. The tragedy criticised by Burke is Marie-Joseph Chénier’s *Charles IX, or the School for Kings* (1788) (*Charles IX, ou, L'école des rois*), a dramatisation of the St Bartholomew massacres.<sup>35</sup> Commenting on the impropriety of allowing the ‘massacre to be acted on the stage for the diversion of the descendants of those who committed it’, Burke asks whether it is any wonder that anarchy has resulted in a nation exposed to spectacle that excites ‘savage dispositions’ in its audience, and serves to ‘stimulate their cannibal appetites’, and ‘to quicken them to an alertness in new murders and massacres’.<sup>36</sup> As Gisborne and Burke suggest, the theatre held considerable influence over national conduct, and could provide a catalyst for violent social conflict.

Plays that invited loyalist meanings were not immune to accusations of dismantling social structures. Theatre scholars including Jeffrey Cox have traced the consensus during the 1790s that theatrical exhibitions of revolutionary events, ‘even within a play that execrated them – could lead to their re-enactment in the streets’.<sup>37</sup> Engaging with this hypothesis, Julia Swindells explains that dramas seeking to disparage oppositional attitudes could be transformed during performance into radical manifestos, as the rowdy and combustible nature of Georgian theatregoers made ‘the shouting audience’ just ‘as important as [the] written script’ in constructing a play’s meaning.<sup>38</sup> In 1801, Hannah More signalled her

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<sup>34</sup> Gisborne, *Enquiry*, 163.

<sup>35</sup> On this play, and the dangers it was perceived to pose in France, see Susan Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts: Theater, Democracy, and the French Revolution* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2005), 37-56.

<sup>36</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, 210.

<sup>37</sup> Jeffrey Cox, ‘Ideology and genre in the British anti-revolutionary drama of the 1790s’, *ELH*, vol.58, no.3 (Autumn 1991), 602.

<sup>38</sup> Julia Swindells, *Glorious Causes: The Grand Theatre of Political Change, 1789 to 1833* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 140.

adoption of contemporary suspicions concerning the drama, when raising this idea in a preface accompanying a volume of her plays. More had been a successful dramatist during the 1770s, yet her increasing affiliation with the group of evangelicals later known as the Clapham Sect, whose members included Gisborne, led her to renounce her early zest for the theatre, and to join her new circle in decrying its immoral tendencies.<sup>39</sup> More warned in her preface that as ‘the danger does not lie merely’ in hearing the ‘sentiments delivered from the stage’, but ‘in seeing how favourably they are received by the audience’, a play in which scenes of vice are ‘neither professedly inculcated nor vindicated’ can still produce ‘a dreadful effect [...] little expected or intended by its author’, if such scenes are met with ‘bursts of applause’.<sup>40</sup> As More acknowledges, Georgian theatregoers were exposed not only to the sentiments conveyed on the stage, but also to the passionate reactions noisily expressed by fellow spectators, which could surpass the power of the script itself in determining the drama’s impact.

Evidence supporting this notion was provided in October 1795, by the notorious incident coinciding with a run of performances at Drury Lane of Thomas Otway’s tragedy *Venice Preserved* (1682). Otway’s tragedy dramatises a conspiracy to overthrow the Venetian Senate. It articulates seemingly royalist sympathies, by showing the play’s chief conspirators, Jaffeir and Pierre, to be punished with death in the play’s denouement.<sup>41</sup>

When staged in 1795 however, revolutionary sympathisers re-appropriated the tragedy as a protest for governmental reform, by raucously celebrating and supporting the conspirators’ plans.<sup>42</sup> The unexpected response with which *Venice Preserved* was greeted exemplifies

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<sup>39</sup> See Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 36-47, 258-259, and Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church and Nation* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 299-303.

<sup>40</sup> Hannah More, ‘Preface to the Tragedies’, in *The Works of Hannah More, in eight volumes: including several pieces never before published* (London: T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1801), III:29, 31, 28.

<sup>41</sup> See Thomas Otway, *Venice Preserved: Or, a Plot Discovered, as it is acted at The Duke’s Theatre* (London: Jos. Hindmarsh, 1682).

<sup>42</sup> See John Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-1796* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 567-569; Daniel O’Quinn, ‘Insurgent Allegories: Staging *Venice Preserv’d*, *The Rivals* and *Speculation* in 1795’, *Literature Compass*, vol.1 (December 2004) <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2004.00088.x>> [1 February 2016], and Sean McEvoy, *Theatrical Unrest: Ten Riots in the History of the Stage* (Routledge: Oxon, 2016), 35-46.

Gillian Russell's observation that 'Georgian audiences were renowned for their capacity to interpret plays in inventive and unpredictable ways', and that 'a standard practice was to take certain passages or characters out of context and apply them to contemporary events'.<sup>43</sup> As John Barrell has shown, in 1795, British radicals recognised Jaffeir and Pierre as personifications of their own reformist principles. They therefore cheered the conspirators' speeches in attempt to refashion Otway's tragedy as an anti-government polemic, with the hope of igniting oppositional sentiments.<sup>44</sup>

This reaction to the play was perceived to have a direct effect on public order. On the morning of 29 October 1795, the date of the play's third performance at Drury Lane, the King's coach was attacked while escorting George III from St James's Palace to the Houses of Parliament.<sup>45</sup> That the staging of *Venice Preserved* had played a crucial role in inspiring the assault was asserted in the newspaper *Tomahawk, or Censor General* which declared the following day that 'the abandoned opposition, encouraging in private every low assassin to be the satyrst of royalty', have now impelled the public 'to follow the advice of Jaffeir', as 'acted at Drury lane', and to make "'these wide streets run [with] blood!'". The journalist closed by listing Otway's tragedy as a fundamental 'part of the design for this week past', to incite 'the business of the 29th of October'.<sup>46</sup> The article evidences the unequivocal connection established in late eighteenth-century Britain between challenges to the social hierarchy, and attitudes transmitted in the theatre, by showing Otway's drama to have contributed significantly to the supposed provocation of attempted regicide.

The suggestion that the British radicals successfully manipulated those around them into sharing their seditious attitudes helps to elucidate the consideration of theatrical

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<sup>43</sup> Gillian Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics and Society, 1793-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 16.

<sup>44</sup> See Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, 567. See also O'Quinn, 'Insurgent Allegories', and McEvoy, *Theatrical Unrest*, 35-46.

<sup>45</sup> On the attack see *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 30 October-2 November 1795.

<sup>46</sup> *Tomahawk, or Censor General*, 30 October 1795



entertainments as more potentially explosive than alternative literary genres. In 1740, the dramatist Colley Cibber made a case for the written narrative as ‘much less dangerous’ than ‘the acted’ one, by suggesting the ease with which sentiments expressed in the theatre spread from one individual to the next. He proposed that ‘the partial claps of only twenty ill-minded Persons among several hundreds of silent hearers [...] frequently draw into their party the indifferent, or inapprehensive’, and cause them to ‘join in the Triumph!’<sup>47</sup> Unlike the experience of reading alone in the closet, the ebullient interjections from surrounding spectators, as well as the pace of the dramatic action, meant that theatregoers were denied the chance to ruminate independently on the narrative’s contents before judging its meaning. They were therefore inclined to absorb the opinions expressed by the theatre’s most outspoken attendants, making their views contagious. Echoing Cibber’s standpoint in 1793, the radical philosopher William Godwin, describing the atmosphere of a public feast, postulated that when ideas are communicated rapidly before a lively crowd, ‘sympathy of opinion catches from man to man’, and ‘actions may be determined on’, especially by ‘persons whose passions have not been used to the curb of judgement’, which ‘solitary reflection would have rejected’.<sup>48</sup> The conditions described by Godwin match those of theatrical reception. Unable to survey the narrative’s implications in a meditative environment, theatregoers are susceptible to indulging in and acting on rashly formed ideas, championed by those around them, which might have been recanted if carefully considered in private.<sup>49</sup>

Cibber and Godwin both propose that certain groups of people, namely the ‘inapprehensive’ and those who lack ‘the curb of judgement’, are most likely to be influenced by sentiments dispersed in crowded settings. Their claims further highlight the

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<sup>47</sup> Colley Cibber, *An apology for the life of Mr Colley Cibber* (London: John Watts, 1740), 170, 169.

<sup>48</sup> William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 2 vols (Dublin: Luke White, 1793), I:208.

<sup>49</sup> Connolly engages with this idea in *Censorship*. See 180-181. On Godwin’s standpoint in particular see David O’Shaunessy, *William Godwin and the Theatre* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2010), 17-27. On enhanced fears of crowd mentality in the 1790s see Barbara Darby, ‘Spectacle and Revolution in 1790s tragedy’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol.39, no.3 (Summer 1999), 575-596.

peculiar dangers of theatrical representation. The Georgian theatre united individuals from all cross-sections of society. Performances cost little to attend if viewed from the upper galleries, and they transcended the reach of prose narratives, as they did not require literate audiences.<sup>50</sup> The diversity of the theatre audience accentuated the drama's inflammatory potential. First, the theatre's inclusivity rendered it a likely arena for political altercation, by providing a venue in which opposing factions directly confronted each other. Disputes between loyalists and radicals could develop from conflicting responses to politically charged scenes, and disturbances were frequently triggered by demands made by certain sections of the audience either to sing, or not to sing, "God save the King".<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, as hinted by Cibber and Godwin, and as stated explicitly in Gisborne's *Enquiry*, the theatre's unique accessibility to 'uniformed' and 'mutable' social groups made it especially efficacious in shaping public opinion, as it catered to those who could 'be acted upon with greater facility and success than other classes of community'.<sup>52</sup> As events staged in the theatre were interpreted by particularly pliable individuals, dramatic entertainments, and the vocal reactions they aroused, were considered markedly powerful vehicles for moulding public conduct.

Through his discussion of impressionable theatregoers, Gisborne interacts with contemporary anxieties concerning female spectatorship. Along with 'the lowest orders of the people', Gisborne identifies women as being among the theatre's more malleable attendants. He conjectures that across 'the middle and upper ranks of life, young women are the persons likely to imbibe the strongest tinge from the sentiments and transactions set before them in the drama'. Justifying this claim, he explains that women's 'openness of

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<sup>50</sup> On the inclusivity of theatre audiences see Jim Davis, 'Spectatorship', in *Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730-1830*, ed. Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 57-58, and Brewer, *Pleasures*, 283. On the theatre's distinction from prose in its accessibility to illiterate audiences see Joanna Baillie's comment in her 'Introductory discourse' to *A Series of Plays: in which it is attempted to delineate the stronger passions of the mind* (London: T. Cadell jun. and W. Davies, 1798-1812), 66.

<sup>51</sup> For examples see E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books reprint, 1991), 516, 807-809, and Russell, *Theatres of War*, 16.

<sup>52</sup> Gisborne, *Enquiry*, 163.

heart, warmth of feeling’, and ‘proneness to give large scope to the influence of association and of sympathy’ renders them ‘liable, in a particular degree, to be practically impressed by the language and examples brought forward on the stage’.<sup>53</sup> The statement is significant, as it intimates the distinct hazards associated with dramatic depictions of indecorous female characters: notably, martial women. In a context in which women’s capacity for sympathetic identification is shown to encourage them ‘to pardon’, or ‘perhaps to imitate’ potentially ‘vicious character[s]’, the female warrior exhibited on the stage constitutes a markedly ominous figure, as the threat she poses to sexual norms becomes particularly potent.<sup>54</sup>

### Martial Women on the Revolutionary-Era Stage: Current Scholarship

Over the past twenty years, scholarship on British drama and theatre of the late eighteenth century has addressed a diverse variety of themes: Daniel O’Quinn has traced the relationship between the British theatre and concerns over imperial sovereignty; Jane Moody has assessed the performance histories of London’s illegitimate theatres; and Betsy Bolton is among a number of scholars to have redressed the imbalance of theatre histories devoted to male and female players and playwrights of the period, by showing the theatre to have facilitated women’s intervention in public and political debates.<sup>55</sup> Among scholars to have focused centrally on the French Revolution and British performances are Gillian

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 163-164.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 171. On theories of female spectatorship in eighteenth-century Britain see Jean Marsden, ‘Modesty Unshackled: Dorothy Jordan and the dangers of cross-dressing’, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol.22 (January 1993), 21-35; Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality and the English Stage, 1660-1720* (London: Cornell UP, 2006), and Ros Ballaster, ‘Rivals for the Repertory: Theatre and Novel in Georgian London’, *RECTR*, vol.21, issue 1 (Summer 2012), esp.15-21.

<sup>55</sup> See Daniel O’Quinn, *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 2005); Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), and Betsy Bolton, *Women Nationalism and the Romantic Stage: Theatre and Politics in Britain, 1780-1800* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001). Other studies that share Bolton’s objective include Kristina Straub’s *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992); Ellen Donkin’s *Getting into the Act: Women playwrights in London, 1776-1829* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Felicity Nussbaum’s *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theatre* (Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), and Helen Brooks’s *Actresses, Gender and the Eighteenth-Century Stage: Playing Women* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). My own thesis contributes to this trend, by devoting attention to the female dramatist Elizabeth Inchbald, and the actresses Sarah Siddons and Sarah Yates.

Russell and George Taylor. Russell examines the trend inspired by the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars for theatrical representations of military life exhibited inside and out of the theatre, and Taylor documents the staging in London of spectacular genres that interacted metaphorically with revolutionary horrors.<sup>56</sup> To date, little scholarly attention has been paid to martial women in the revolutionary-era British theatre.<sup>57</sup> Interest in the niche subject has been pioneered in valuable publications by Dror Wahrman and, more recently, Wendy C. Nielsen. Wahrman's *The Making of the Modern Self* (2000) discusses textual depictions of the Amazon's changing representation in a range of literary genres, including British dramas, spanning the early 1700s to the start of the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, Nielsen's *Women Warriors in Romantic Drama* (2012) offers a transnational comparison of female warriors in British, French and German dramas during the French revolutionary and Napoleonic years. Building on and developing the important contributions to the area of research provided by these studies, my thesis introduces an innovative angle, by investigating the persistent transformation of the martial woman's portrayal and reception in revolutionary-era British plays, from a multi-contextual perspective.

Wahrman's *Modern Self* focuses centrally on the shift in British attitudes to Amazons brought about by the American Revolution. Wahrman hypothesises that while the Amazon had been portrayed with 'relative tolerance and often positive appreciation' by early and mid-century playwrights, such celebratory portrayals of the figure 'disappeared with remarkable speed' in the late 1770s. The association of the American Revolution 'with the subversion of every basic identity category', argues Wahrman, prompted a keenness in its

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<sup>56</sup> See Russell, *Theatres of War*, and Taylor, *French Revolution*. For a study similar in approach and argument to Taylor's see Jeffrey Cox, 'Romantic Drama and the French Revolution', in *Revolution and English Romanticism: Politics and Rhetoric*, ed. Keith Hanley and Raman Selden (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 241-260.

<sup>57</sup> More commonly, discussions of physically violent women in British literature of the 1790s focus on genres including novels, poetry, and political discourse. See for instance Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003); Craciun, 'The New Cordays: Helen Craik and British Representations of Charlotte Corday', in *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, ed. Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 193-232; Dugaw, *Warrior Women*, and Craft-Fairchild, 'Cross-Dressing', 171-202.

British opponents to prove that accepted identity distinctions, including those of gender, were fixed, stable, and absolute.<sup>58</sup> In response, the female warrior, who challenged such boundaries, ‘suddenly came to be seen as irredeemably negative, signifying a disturbing affront to nature’.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, continues Wahrman, by the final quarter of the century, female warriors were unanimously dismissed ‘as “improbable”, “ridiculous”, “disgusting”, and “unnatural”. And, if they could not be dismissed – for instance, if they happened to have been immortalised in Shakespeare’s plays – then they had to be rewritten’.<sup>60</sup>

*Modern Self* indicates clearly the connection between dramatic portrayal and cultural innovation. However, the broad historical scope covered in Wahrman’s study demands a somewhat simplified exploration of this relationship. While Wahrman traces the representational modifications that occur between decades, or, more accurately, between relatively broad periods of historical innovation, he overlooks the subtle but significant shifts occurring within them. Rather than acknowledging the 1790s as an era that brought with it a whole new set of diverse and constantly evolving attitudes to gender, which are presented in the theatre, Wahrman proposes that dramas of the period reflect the simple continuity of the ‘anti-Amazon campaign’ initiated two decades previously.<sup>61</sup> His attempt to assert the significance of the American Revolution essentially causes Wahrman to underestimate the complexity and far-reaching impact of the French Revolution on British depictions of gender. The 1790s is painted as though it was a static representational period, in which all female warriors received the same derisive portrayal. As my own thesis hopes to indicate, this was far from the case.

Nielsen’s *Women Warriors* goes some way towards expanding and refuting Wahrman’s hypothesis. Nielsen’s study, like my own, offers an intricate assessment of the correlation between theatrical female warriors, and political movements in revolutionary France.

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<sup>58</sup> Wahrman, *Modern Self*, 238.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Rather than assessing the ways in which attitudes to female warriors shift and transform in response to these movements, however, Nielsen constructs an insightful comparison of the varying ways that the revolution informed representations of martial women across three European settings. Nielsen acknowledges evidence in Britain, France and Germany of the misogynistic tendency to view female warriors as ‘hybrid monsters’ who are ‘no longer true women’. Yet she challenges Wahrman’s suggestion that strong and laudable female warriors disappeared from the stage after 1780, by arguing that such women in fact became ‘recurring figure[s]’ in revolutionary-era dramas, as certain playwrights saw in them ‘the potential to represent fantasies of empowerment and issues of social justice’.<sup>62</sup> In a period of profound political change, suggests Nielsen, dramatists of feminist sympathies used the female warrior to capitalise on the opportunities opened up by the transitional moment to ‘change perceptions of women’s roles’, both inside and out of the home.<sup>63</sup>

While Nielsen locates the most radical and favourable depictions of female warriors in dramas produced and performed outside of Britain, she confines them also to dramas scripted by women.<sup>64</sup> One of the general trends identified in Nielsen’s study is ‘a gendered difference between male and female writers’ approaches to women warriors’.<sup>65</sup> Nielsen argues that in dramas written by men, ‘the woman warrior commits violence out of an excess of feeling, such as passion, rage or vengefulness’. Performances scripted by these male authors therefore support ‘stereotypes of woman’s behaviour as irrational, deceptive, and manipulative’.<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile, ‘many female writers construct female figures who fight to protect others and who sacrifice their lives in order to further political ideals’, and thereby challenge ‘conventional notions of femininity as receptive and passive’.<sup>67</sup> The assumption that portrayals of aggressive women fall into gendered author categories in this

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<sup>62</sup> Nielsen, *Women Warriors*, xv, xiii.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, vx.

<sup>64</sup> Nielsen picks out dramas by German and French playwrights Christine Westphalen, Karoline Von Günderode, and Olympe de Gouges, as those which offer the most celebratory portrayals of female warriors.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, xxix.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxi, xxvii.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxi, xxvii.

period has been cautioned against by Adriana Craciun. In her study *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (2003), Craciun argues that as similar images of violent women appear in writings by male and female authors, the contention that the figures function in texts by men as ‘misogynistic demonizations’, while they are celebrated in writings by women, does not bear scrutiny.<sup>68</sup> Craciun illustrates this claim by pointing to the animosity shown towards violent women in the political writings of Mary Wollstonecraft.<sup>69</sup> In so doing, she demonstrates additionally the inadequacy of separating representations of aggressive women into those produced by revolutionary sympathisers, and those constructed by political loyalists: though a woman, and an early supporter of the revolution, Wollstonecraft is as adamant as Burke, her political adversary, that women ought not to ‘turn their distaff into a musket’.<sup>70</sup>

Just as women of radical sympathies do not necessarily write positively of women’s martial agency, so too male opponents of the revolution do not always condemn the practice. My thesis makes this point by devoting attention to Matthew West’s critically neglected drama *Female Heroism, a Tragedy in Five Acts* (1803). Though male, and avidly hostile to French radicalism, West’s depiction of French murderess Charlotte Corday shares an affinity with the representational tendencies attributed by Nielsen to dramas scripted by women. My analysis of West’s tragedy reveals the influence of factors other than the gender of the playwright, and the extent of his or her revolutionary sympathies, in informing theatrical constructions of female warriors, by showing West’s portrayal of Corday to have been shaped largely by his theological views, and his involvement in Irish politics.

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<sup>68</sup> Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 49.

<sup>69</sup> Craciun draws attention to Wollstonecraft’s unfavourable depiction of the women who marched to Versailles in her *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794). See *ibid.*, 68-70.

<sup>70</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: J. Johnson, 1792), 28.

Like Wahrman, Nielsen adopts a predominantly literary approach to dramatic analysis. While she declares it her intention ‘whenever possible’ to ‘investigate dramas in the context of their performance histories’, she goes on to point out that ‘Romantic-era audiences never saw many of the dramas examined’. She therefore asserts that she will be ‘examining [the] dramas as literary texts’, as this is ‘consistent with the ways in which Romantic readers encountered them’.<sup>71</sup> Nielsen’s reliance on textual analysis dominates not only the substantial proportion of her book devoted to closet dramas. Her interpretations of plays that were publicly acted are also heavily informed by textual assessment.<sup>72</sup> This is particularly the case with her handling of serious dramas, in which she locates the more radical and politically charged ideologies.<sup>73</sup> Nielsen’s close readings of serious dramas are fruitful in extending knowledge of the unique and diverse ways in which Romantic authors sought to present martial women in differing European contexts, and in revealing the motives that shaped the authors’ dramatic intentions. Yet, by employing this approach, Nielsen perpetuates an analytical trend that is going out of favour in contemporary theatre scholarship.

Recent studies of Romantic theatre have drawn increasing attention to the need for the drama to be studied as a genre distinct from that of written literature. In *Glorious Causes* (2001), Swindells points out that scholars ‘of the drama have attached too much significance to the written text, failing to recognise [...] the possibility that visual, oral, and aural elements of the drama, together with audience response, are as potentially integrative of the whole form as its scripted dimension’.<sup>74</sup> Writing twelve years later, David Worrall indicates the persistence of this problem: he considers that ‘insofar as literary studies can

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<sup>71</sup> Nielsen, *Women Warriors*, xxxii, xxxiii.

<sup>72</sup> Nielsen interacts with issues including the struggles faced by certain dramatists in their attempts to have their dramas staged, and with the amendments made to specific dialogues and character portrayals by the Chief Examiner of Plays, yet her work engages less actively with the performance elements assisting the plays’ receptions.

<sup>73</sup> Nielsen engages more so with performance details in her analysis of performed comedies. See especially her exploration of Dorothy Jordan’s breeches roles, 105-114.

<sup>74</sup> Swindells, *Glorious Causes*, 141.



be described as a branch of theatre studies (or vice-versa) a situation of critical asymmetry has arisen in which playwrights and play texts have provided the primary context for scholarly enquiry'.<sup>75</sup> This method is ineffectual in assessing a play's theatrical reception, continues Worrall, as 'performance meanings are always distributed at the location of the performance venue, rather than residing principally in the fixed status of the authorial text'.<sup>76</sup> My thesis extends these claims. Textual analysis is of fundamental importance to my study, as it enables me to complicate and expand the limited literary scholarship devoted to fictional female warriors in eighteenth-century Britain, and to cast valuable light on critically neglected scripts.<sup>77</sup> Yet my thesis contributes also to theatre and performance studies, by spotlighting the power of the play's theatrical embodiment in enhancing, adding to, and sometimes entirely transforming the drama's textual meaning. Rather than pinpointing the influence of one specific component, I show multiple performance factors to play significant roles in determining a drama's reception. In so doing, I support recent calls for a multidisciplinary approach to dramatic analysis, that synthesises literature, theatre and performance studies, by championing the need to examine the script in relation to its theatrical expression, in order to adequately decipher the complex and varied meanings communicated by martial women on the revolutionary-era British stage.<sup>78</sup>

### Thesis Overview

My thesis is structured both thematically, and as far as is possible, chronologically.

Organising my material this way assists my diachronic approach, while providing the scope to explore specific playwrights, related theatrical figures, and representational trends

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<sup>75</sup> David Worrall, *Celebrity, Performance, Reception: British Georgian Theatre as Social Assemblage* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 9.

<sup>76</sup> Worrall, *Celebrity*, 10.

<sup>77</sup> This is particularly the case with West's *Female Heroism*, the textual implications of which are explored extensively in chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>78</sup> This multidisciplinary approach has been advocated recently in a special edition of *Comparative Drama*, vol.49, no.4 (Winter 2015). See Elizabeth Bradburn and Lofton L. Durham's 'Introduction', 393-397.

in depth. Chapter 1 focuses on Elizabeth Inchbald's sentimental comedy *Next Door Neighbours* (1791), and her unstaged tragedy *The Massacre* (1792). I argue that both dramas directly contest Enlightenment theories of civilisation, by indicating the necessity of women's martial combat in protecting the female sex against male violence and assault. The chapter traces the role played by censorship in expurgating controversial material from the late eighteenth-century London stage, and addresses the extent to which the demands of genre dictate the plays' meanings, as well as their forms. I show the conventions of the sentimental comedy both to facilitate, but also to fundamentally restrict the radical delineation of gender presented in *Next Door Neighbours*, and I propose that *The Massacre's* successful arousal of the emotional response intended by the tragedy depends on the drama's confinement to the closet.

Chapter 2 indicates the surprisingly novel meanings embodied by murderous Queens of the past, both fictional and real, when resurrected on the revolutionary-era London stage. Analyses of a performance of Lady Macbeth acted by Sarah Siddons in 1794, and a rendition of Thomas Francklin's Margaret of Anjou played by Sarah Yates in 1797, reveal martial heroines whose theatrical identities acquire a new degree of complexity as a result of the context in which they are staged, which freights them with allusions to contemporary figures of political and local significance. I argue that Siddons's innovative personation of Lady Macbeth, and the visual components surrounding her performance, create intriguing parallels between Shakespeare's regicidal heroine and the recently deceased Marie Antoinette, which work to transform *Macbeth* into a powerful vehicle for monarchical sentiments. In the second case study, I suggest that theatregoers' knowledge of the private affliction suffered by Yates shortly before her performance in London, encourages them to blend the actress's authentic self with that of her theatrical role. In this context, Francklin's bloodthirsty and power-hungry heroine is converted by the London audience into a devoted and sentimental mother.

The final two chapters of my thesis centre on dramatic depictions of the republican woman Charlotte Corday, who, in July 1793, stabbed to death the revolutionary leader Jean-Paul Marat. Chapter 3 offers a textual comparison of Corday's presentation in two British tragedies: John Edmund Eyre's *The Maid of Normandy; or, the Death of the Queen of France* (1794), and West's *Female Heroism*. I examine each playwright's negotiation of the relationship between female sensibility and political activism, and reveal the ways in which events occurring in France between 1794 and 1803 influence the form that this relationship takes. The chapter goes on to explore the degree to which the peculiar demands of theatrical composition shape the representational possibilities available to revolutionary-era dramatists, by juxtaposing West's heroine with a version of Charlotte Corday presented in a turn-of-the-century novel by the Scottish author Helen Craik. I hypothesise that Corday cuts a more overtly heroic figure in Craik's historical narrative than she does in West's drama, because that Craik is able to *tell* in the novel that which West is required to *show* on the stage. In my fourth and final chapter I shift my attention to the relevance of the dramas' production venues. Both *Maid* and *Female Heroism* were staged at the Crow Street Theatre, Dublin. By examining the political changes encountered in Ireland in the decade separating the tragedies' performances, I demonstrate the potential for similar narratives to acquire disparate meanings, when performed in particular locations, at precise historical moments.

These chapters work together to form a complex narrative that illustrates the female warrior's fluid identity on the revolutionary-era British stage, and suggests the varying causes behind the discrepancies in the figure's theatrical portrayal and reception. In constructing an exploration of this type, I contribute to the developing field of study that focuses on representations of armed and violent women in late eighteenth-century British dramas, by reassessing the subject from a perspective that allows a more thorough and intricate treatment than has yet been attempted. By drawing on a fuller range of contextual

material than previously considered, I am able to trace in detail the conflicting and contradictory meanings embodied by armed women in British dramas, at different stages of a historical period characterised by intense political and social transition.

# 1: ‘Unbrutifying Man’: Martial Women and Male Reform in Elizabeth

## Inchbald’s Dramas

Men allow that women are absolutely necessary to their happiness and that they “had been brutes” without them. But the poet did not insinuate that none but silly or ignorant women were to be allowed the *supreme honour* of unbrutifying man.<sup>79</sup>

Mary Robinson, *A Letter to the Women of England*, 1799

In his tragedy *Venice Preserved* (1682) Thomas Otway has his character Jaffeir declare of the female sex, ‘O woman! Lovely woman! Nature made thee/ to temper man: we had been brutes without you’.<sup>80</sup> Jaffeir’s suggestion that the male character is essentially tempered by ‘Lovely woman’ outlines a notion emphasised in Enlightenment theories of civilisation. As has been well documented, eighteenth-century stadial models of progress showed women’s ‘softness and delicacy’ to distinguish ‘a civilised age from times of barbarity’ by disarming men’s ‘fierceness and appeasing [their] wrath’.<sup>81</sup> Woman’s tender and fragile

<sup>79</sup> Mary Robinson, *A Letter to the Women of England, on the injustice of mental subordination. With anecdotes* (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1799), 14.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas Otway, *Venice Preserved: Or, a Plot Discovered, as it is acted at The Duke’s Theatre* (London: Jos. Hindmarsh, 1682), I.i.10.

<sup>81</sup> David Hume, *Essays and treatises on several subjects* (London: A. Millar, 1753), 291; James Fordyce, *Sermons to young women*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell, 1766), I:208. See also Henry Home Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man* (1775); William Alexander, *The History of Women, from the earliest antiquity, to the present time* (1779), and John Gregory, *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters*, a new edition (1774). On Enlightenment theories of gender see Sylvana Tomaselli, ‘The Enlightenment Debate on Women’, *History Workshop*, no.20 (Autumn 1985), 101-24; Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), 7-32; Karen O’Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 68-109; Mary Catherine Moran, “‘The Commerce of the sexes’: Gender and the Social Sphere in Scottish Enlightenment Accounts of Civil Society”, in *Paradoxes of Civil Society: New Perspectives on Modern German and British History*, ed. Frank Trentmann (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 61-84; Moran, ‘Between the Savage and the Civil: Dr John Gregory’s Natural History of Femininity’, in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 8-29; Silvia Sebastini, ‘Race, Women and Progress in the Scottish Enlightenment’, in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. Knott and Taylor, 75-96; John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1987), 95-167; Catherine Hall, *White, Male, and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 85-86; Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 1992), 149-176, and G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 215-286.

emotions were believed to imbue the opposite sex with sentiment, and therefore counter man's natural propensity for brutishness. Female sensibility was considered paramount to men's moral regeneration, and women were consequently credited with securing the nation's civilised character. On the one hand, as John Dwyer has proposed, the power attributed to femininity offered potential appeal to women, as it 'propagandised a privileged place for women in the moral order'.<sup>82</sup> Yet, as Sylvana Tomaselli contends, there were 'a cluster of reasons' why the theory disadvantaged women, which were readily apparent to 'those who were in the business of making the case for women as potentially no less worthy than men'.<sup>83</sup> Tomaselli's hypothesis is illustrated in Mary Robinson's proto-feminist pamphlet *A Letter to the Women of England* (1799). In the opening passage, Robinson alludes directly to Otway's tragedy in order to take issue with the implication that women must construct themselves as weak and sentimental, or, to use her own phrase, 'silly and ignorant', if they are to be credited with the '*supreme honour* of unbrutifying man'.

Robinson was not alone in expressing hostility towards the importance placed on women's 'sweet timidity' and 'emotions of delicacy' in theories of male refinement.<sup>84</sup> Scholars including Barbara Taylor and Laura Runge have shown a number of early British feminists to have contested the way in which ostensibly liberal eighteenth-century writers used stadial theories of development to confirm women's inferiority.<sup>85</sup> Taylor's study explores the argument proclaimed by writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays that authors who endorse femininity's civilising powers do so to encourage in women 'a sickly

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<sup>82</sup> Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse*, 118.

<sup>83</sup> Sylvana Tomaselli, 'Civilisation, Patriotism, and Enlightened Histories of Women', in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. Knott and Taylor, 125.

<sup>84</sup> Fordyce, *Sermons*, I:208.

<sup>85</sup> See Barbara Taylor, 'Feminists versus Gallants: Manners and Morals in Enlightenment Britain', *Representations*, vol.87, no.1 (Summer 2004), 125-148, and Laura Runge, 'Beauty and Gallantry: A Model of Polite Conversation Revisited', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol.25, no.1 (Winter 2001), 43-63.

delicacy' that serves to nullify the threat of having 'women declared [men's] equals'.<sup>86</sup> Runge's study further underscores proto-feminist opposition, by drawing attention to a corpus of early to mid-century literature which insists that men who advocate the pacifying qualities of female fragility actually endanger women, by rendering them entirely defenceless against male violence and assault. As not all men possess the chivalric sentiments from which respect for feminine virtues emanates, argues Runge, a woman's display of delicacy and sensibility cannot be relied upon to shield her against male wrath.<sup>87</sup>

During the 1790s, the idea that femininity was indeed women's surest safeguard against male aggression provided a useful tool with which British women's emulation of their warlike French counterparts could be discouraged. This is demonstrated in Harriet Piggott's anti-Jacobin novel *Robert and Adela* (1795). Countering the notion proclaimed by her sister and Amazonian foil Susan, that women ought to fight male tyrants 'sword in hand', the novel's heroine, Sabina, declares that it is not military valour which best protects women against unjust men, but rather, that 'gentleness of manners' is 'the best armour' in which 'the female frame can possibly be clothed'.<sup>88</sup> Four years later, an article printed in *The Lady's Monthly Museum* insisted that 'Warlike women', by converting 'themselves into men [...] renounce the empire which they inevitably exercised by their weakness to run vainly after the more equivocal empire of force'.<sup>89</sup> Both Piggott and the journalist suggest that women who seek sexual supremacy using physical violence in fact rid themselves of their natural and most reliable influence over men, by divesting themselves of the softer virtues from which such influence derives. The woman who

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<sup>86</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: J. Johnson, 1792), 55; Mary Hays, *Appeal to the men of Great Britain in behalf of women* (London: J. Johnson and J. Bell, 1798), 116. See Taylor, 'Feminists versus Gallants', 125-148. Also on these authors' attitudes see Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 351-396.

<sup>87</sup> Runge makes this point most clearly through her analysis of the essay signed by 'Sophia', titled 'Woman not Inferior to Man' (1739), printed in *Beauty's Triumph: or, The Superiority of the Fair Sex Invincibly Proved* (1751). See Runge, 'Beauty and Gallantry', 45-56.

<sup>88</sup> Harriet Piggott, *Robert and Adela: or, the rights of women best maintained by the sentiments of nature*, 2 vols (Dublin: P. Byrne, P. Wogan, W. Jones, and G. Folingsby, 1795), I:247, 184.

<sup>89</sup> 'Woman. An Apologue', in *The Lady's Monthly Museum, or Polite Repository of Amusement and Instruction* 30 (November 1799), 386-387.

imitates a warrior is therefore shown not to decrease her susceptibility to male-inflicted injury, but rather to enhance it, by relinquishing her powerful feminine traits.

This chapter extends scholarly explorations of British opposition to Enlightenment theories of gender, by focusing specifically on the implication that women hold greater sway over male conduct using their inherent weakness, than they could do using weapons. My study reveals the relationship between rebuttals of the refining properties of female sentiment, and endorsements of women's martial combat, in two dramas by actress, playwright, novelist and drama critic Elizabeth Inchbald: the sentimental comedy *Next Door Neighbours* (1791), and the unstaged tragedy *The Massacre* (1792). Inchbald's engagement with radical gender politics has been widely discussed. Anna Lott has defined Inchbald's literary depictions of femininity as 'boldly radical'; Amy Garnai has charted in her work an 'exuberant, libertarian impulse towards female freedom and independence'; and Anne K. Mellor has illustrated Inchbald's condemnation of the 'social construction of gender'.<sup>90</sup> Despite the interest taken in Inchbald's sexual politics however, her involvement with arguments concerning women's martial agency is a topic which, up until recently, critics have tended to overlook.<sup>91</sup> And yet, as this chapter hopes to show, Inchbald's selected dramas offer intriguing and forceful contestations of established perceptions of arms-bearing women.

I begin by arguing that *Next Door Neighbours* complicates the conventions of the sentimental comedy, by presenting woman's martial combat, rather than female delicacy, as the key to 'unbrutifying man'. Drawing parallels between Inchbald's drama and

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<sup>90</sup> Anna Lott, 'Sexual Politics in Elizabeth Inchbald', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol.34, no.3, (Summer 1994), 636; Amy Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 125; Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000), 39.

<sup>91</sup> Wendy C. Nielsen briefly refers to Inchbald's depiction of arms-bearing women in *The Massacre in Women Warriors in Romantic Drama* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2012), 116-118. Nielsen offers a more thorough exploration of the topic in her essay 'A Tragic Farce: Revolutionary Women in Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Massacre* and European Drama', *European Romantic Review*, vol.17, no.3 (July 2006), 275-288.



Robinson's *Letter*, I show both authors to suggest that woman will not succeed in softening the 'most stern and fierce of mankind' by displaying 'the emblems of a debilitated mind', and responding with 'tame submission to insult or oppression'. Quite contrarily, if man is to be cured of depravity, woman must set about 'punishing the villain', by taking 'instantly up the pistol'.<sup>92</sup> Having established the progressive implications of *Next Door Neighbours*, I trace the ways in which the drama's radical inferences are enervated by censorship, and I assess the effects of genre on the narrative's ideological force. I then turn to *The Massacre*. I propose that the tragedy interacts with a protest created in revolutionary France for women's martial rights, before postulating that *The Massacre*'s status as a closet drama enhances its emotional impact.

I should note before my analysis gets underway that both dramas studied in this chapter are adaptations: *Next Door Neighbours* is adapted from the French plays *Le Dissipateur* (1736) by Philippe Destouches, and *L'indigent* (1782) by Louis-Sébastien Mercier, while *The Massacre* is based on Mercier's *Jean Hennuyer: évêque de Lizieux* (1772). It can be argued that the practice of adaptation assists the playwrights' ability to engage openly with taboo subjects without the fear of censure. As Jane Moody has proposed, 'the split authorial identity entailed by the act of translation' provides the dramatist with 'a strategic form of theatrical disguise', as 'the politics of the translator' cannot 'be distinguished from those of the translation'.<sup>93</sup> Through adaptation, writers are able to endorse radical ideas without having to take full responsibility for the attitudes their dramas convey. They are therefore able to shield themselves somewhat against personal accusations of political aberration. Given the 'theatrical disguise' that adaptation offers, it is perhaps unsurprising that the two of Inchbald's dramas in which I locate support for martial women are both adapted works.

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<sup>92</sup> Robinson, *Letter*, 85, 15, 8, 22.

<sup>93</sup> Jane Moody, 'Suicide and Translation in the dramaturgy of Elizabeth Inchbald and Anne Plumptre', in *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790-1840*, ed. Catherine Burroughs (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 262.

It is important to consider, nevertheless, the extent to which the dramas focused on in this chapter do in fact reflect ‘the politics of the translator’. As Vita M. Mastroilvestri has shown, in her adaptations Inchbald varies ‘important features of the female characters of her source text’ in ways that shed light on the divergence between ‘established representations of femininity, and the translator’s ideal’.<sup>94</sup> My study highlights this point by reading Inchbald’s adaptations alongside the original scripts.<sup>95</sup> As I reveal, both *Next Door Neighbours* and *The Massacre* are heavily revised by Inchbald in order to present standpoints on women’s martial agency which are absent from the source texts. The adapted dramas therefore serve as effectively as Inchbald’s original works to illustrate her concern with women’s position in contemporary society.

**‘It’s Not Myself I’ll Kill – ’Tis You’: The Pistol-Bearing Heroine and the Reformed Rake in the Sentimental Comedy *Next Door Neighbours***

The sentimental comedy was introduced at the turn of the eighteenth century as part of the attempt to secure Britain’s reputation as a principled and civilised nation.<sup>96</sup> In contrast to the amoral and crude comedies of the Restoration period, which were considered incongruent with Britain’s polite and refined aspirations, the sentimental comedy attempted a moralising function: it celebrated the triumph of virtue over vice, and it showed female sentiment to play an important role in enabling this conquest.<sup>97</sup> A stock character of the sentimental comedy was the penitent rake, a male character who is immoral and dissolute at the drama’s outset, but reformed and virtuous by the close.<sup>98</sup> In agreement with

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<sup>94</sup> Vita M. Mastroilvestri, ‘Elizabeth Inchbald: Translation as Mediation and Re-Writing’, in *Women’s Romantic Theatre and Drama: History, Agency and Performativity*, ed. Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Keir Elam (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 168, 167.

<sup>95</sup> In each case, it is a literal English translation of the French source text to which I refer.

<sup>96</sup> See Aparna Gollapudi, *Moral Reform in Comedy and Culture: 1696-1747* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 1-18; Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 55-64; Joseph Wood Krutch, *Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration* (New York: Columbia UP, 1949), 151-155, and Robert D. Hume, *The Rakish Stage: Studies in English Drama, 1660-1800* (USA: Southern Illinois UP, 1983), 46-81, 138-175.

<sup>97</sup> On the immorality of Restoration comedies see Krutch, *Comedy and Conscience*, 155-156.

<sup>98</sup> Robert Hume acknowledges that the ‘penitent rake’ appears in a number of Restoration comedies, yet ‘there are few sentiment-laden reforms [...] until the eighteenth century’. See *The Rakish Stage*, 167. See also Paul E. Parnell, ‘The Etiquette of the Sentimental Repentance Scene, 1688-96’, *Papers on Language*

Enlightenment theories of civilisation, which, as we have seen, credited female delicacy with remedying male coarseness, sentimental dramas showed distressed and weeping heroines to enable the rake's transformation. Colley Cibber's early sentimental comedy *Love's Last Shift* (1696) epitomises this trend. The comedy's debauched spendthrift, Loveless, is transformed into an affectionate husband after Amanda's 'piercing tears' and 'trembling lips' rouse him from his 'deepest lethargy of vice', and encourage him to 'wash [his] crimes in never ceasing tears of penitence'.<sup>99</sup> Reinforcing this plot at the end of the century, Lady Wallace's comedy *The Ton* (1788) shows the reformation of Lord Raymond, a gambler and adulterer, to be exhorted by Lady Raymond's 'tears of anguish', which imbue her husband with the 'remorse, tenderness and gratitude' needed to inspire him to 'forswear the follies of fashion'.<sup>100</sup> Amanda and Lady Raymond corroborate the observation made by G.J. Barker-Benfield that sentimental fiction shows female characters to 'mitigate and even reform male licentiousness and rudeness'.<sup>101</sup> Inchbald's *Next Door Neighbours* is no exception to this rule: it too shows an insensitive man transformed into a man of feeling, and emphasises 'women's role in men's conversion'.<sup>102</sup> Inchbald's comedy departs from the sentimental tradition however, by depicting an arms-bearing woman, rather than a weeping heroine, as the agent of male reform.

*Next Door Neighbours* was first performed at George Colman's Haymarket theatre on the 9 July 1791.<sup>103</sup> Of the two French plays from which the comedy is adapted, Mercier's *L'indigent* is of most interest to my study, as it is from Mercier that Inchbald takes her

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*and Literature*, vol.14 (Spring 1978), 205-217; Gollapudi, *Moral Reform*, 1-6, 14-15, and Misty Anderson, 'Genealogies of Comedy', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737-1832*, ed. Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 365-366.

<sup>99</sup> Colley Cibber, *Love's Last Shift: or, the Fool in Fashion* (London: H. Rhodes; R. Parker; and S. Briscoe, 1696), V.ii.90, 92.

<sup>100</sup> Lady Wallace, *The Ton; or, Follies of Fashion* (London: T. Hookham, 1788), V.ii.92.

<sup>101</sup> Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 266. On this convention see also Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse*, 141-167, and Stanley Williams, 'The English Sentimental Drama from Steele to Cumberland', *The Sewanee Review*, vol.33, no.4 (October 1925), 405-426.

<sup>102</sup> Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 250.

<sup>103</sup> All information regarding performance dates and venues is taken from Ben Ross Schneider Jr., *Index to The London Stage: 1660-1800*, ed. William Van Lennep, Emmet L. Avery, Arthur H. Scouten, George Winchester Stone Jr., and Charles Beecher Hogan (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1979). For *Next Door Neighbours* see 445.

armed heroine. Female aggression plays a far more active role in shaping the narrative progress of *Next Door Neighbours* than it does *L'indigent*, as my comparison hopes to reveal.<sup>104</sup> *Next Door Neighbours* and its source text tell the tale of a depraved man of fashion who is converted into a sentimental hero following his attempted rape of the comedy's heroine. The young and impoverished heroine of *Next Door Neighbours* is Eleanor, a sentimental paragon, who displays filial sentiments in abundance: she recalls how she began to 'weep with affection' when her father thanked her for her 'kindness to him', and she weeps again at the thought of giving her 'dear father liberty', who is currently in a debtors' prison.<sup>105</sup> During the course of the play Eleanor is confronted by two unfeeling men. The first of these is Blackman, the scandalous lawyer of the play's wealthy protagonist, Sir George Splendorville. Blackman is sent to Eleanor's home to demand rent from herself and her brother Henry. Despite knowing that the siblings are poor, Blackman threatens that unless he receives the rent by tomorrow, Eleanor and Henry will be forced to leave their apartment. Eleanor responds to the threat like the typical sentimental heroine. 'Weeping', she pleads,

Are you resolved to have no pity? You know in what a helpless situation we are – [...] Oh! Do not plunge us into more distress than we can bear; but open your heart to compassion.<sup>106</sup>

The heroine's display of helplessness and distress normally succeeds in arousing man's humanity. This indeed is the case in Mercier's *L'indigent*. When Mercier's heroine, Charlotte, begs Blackman's equivalent, Du Noir, that he must 'see [her] tears' and 'yield to the emotions of gentle pity', Du Noir claims that he 'can feel [his] heart softening', and is

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<sup>104</sup> In her essay 'Suicide and Translation', Moody identifies an anonymously written literal translation of Mercier's *L'indigent*, titled *The Distressed Family: a drama in four acts* (London: C. Elliot and T. Kay, 1787). See 273. It is this translation from which I quote.

<sup>105</sup> Elizabeth Inchbald, *Next Door Neighbours* (1791), in *Eighteenth-Century Women Playwrights, Volume 6*, Elizabeth Inchbald, ed. Angela Smallwood, gen. ed. Derek Hughes (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001), I.ii.139, 140.

<sup>106</sup> Inchbald, *Next Door Neighbours*, I.ii.142.

encouraged to ‘see what [he] can do’ about the rent.<sup>107</sup> While Mercier reinforces the ability of woman’s tears to vanquish male obduracy however, Inchbald repudiates the stance entirely. Unmoved by Eleanor’s display of sentiment, Blackman responds that pity ‘is a thing [he] never’ felt ‘in [his] life’, before reiterating his demand for the rent.<sup>108</sup>

Having indicated the futility of female sensibility when trying to reason with unsympathetic men, Inchbald has Eleanor respond very differently when confronted by the play’s villainous protagonist: Sir George. George lures Eleanor into his home by expressing his ostensible willingness to provide the funds needed to free her father from jail. It soon becomes clear however that George’s charity will come at a cost. Taken by her beauty, George locks Eleanor in a room with him, and hints at his intention to sexually assault her, by referring to her as Lucretia.<sup>109</sup> The reference to Lucretia reminds audiences of the common fate of eighteenth-century heroines when confronted by licentious villains: typically, the sentimental heroine either softens her assaulter with tears and quivers, or, like Lucretia, she commits or contemplates self-slaughter.<sup>110</sup> Differing from her predecessors however, Eleanor does not weep, nor consider taking her own life. Rather, she maintains her chastity using martial combat. Taking up Sir George’s pistol, Eleanor informs her assaulter ‘it’s not *myself* I’ll kill – ’Tis you’. She demands that Sir George ‘Dare not [...] insult [her] again’, but let her return to her ‘wretched apartment’, before she ‘*passes by him, presenting the pistol*’, and frees herself from his home.<sup>111</sup>

A similar scene of female aggression had been dramatised in *L’indigent*. Yet there are significant differences between Charlotte’s and Eleanor’s actions, and the consequences

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<sup>107</sup> Mercier, *Distressed Family*, I.iii.27.

<sup>108</sup> Inchbald, *Next Door Neighbours*, I.ii.142.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, II.i.148.

<sup>110</sup> See for example Eliza Haywood’s *Idalia: or, the Unfortunate Mistress* (London: D. Browne Junior, 1723), 17; Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa, or, the history of a young lady*, 7 vols (London: A. Millar, 1748), V:36, 159, and Richardson’s *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), ed. Peter Sabor, intro. Margaret A. Doody, 2 vols (London: Penguin Books, 1980), I:211.

<sup>111</sup> Inchbald, *Next Door Neighbours*, II.i.148.

they provoke. When De Lys, George's equivalent, attempts the seduction of Charlotte, Mercier's stage direction explains,

*Charlotte runs to the chair where the double-barrelled gun is, and takes it up. [...] She runs to the door and beats against it with the gun, crying out Open the door – Open the door. The gun goes off, and then drops from her hands.*<sup>112</sup>

While armed with the gun, Charlotte lacks the composure and physical authority portrayed by Inchbald's Eleanor. Her frantic behaviour, and her act of dropping the pistol, imply the physical debility of women who attempt martial agency. Mercier accentuates the disharmony between women and armed activism by having Charlotte's gun accidentally fired, and narrowly missing De Lys's ear.<sup>113</sup> The unintended firing of the gun suggests women's inherent lack of military prowess, and hints at the lethal potential of their inability to control firearms. Mercier therefore depicts woman's martial experience as unpleasant, unnatural, and almost calamitous.

Just as Eleanor's authority and composure while handling the pistol departs from Mercier's source text, so too do the consequences shown to result from her masculine endeavour. In the pistol scene's immediate aftermath, George conveys clear signs of a transformation in character. When Eleanor's father Willford discovers the unethical conditions under which his liberty has been secured, he confronts Sir George for his baseness. Arriving at Sir George's home moments after his encounter with the armed Eleanor, Willford finds his daughter's assaulter stood 'abashed, like a culprit'. Evidencing the disgrace that he feels, George cannot look Willford 'in the face', and instead '*looks on the floor*'. Witnessing George appearing 'thus confounded' and overwhelmed with 'shame', Willford is encouraged 'to rejoice' that the 'unthinking, dissipated man' who has indulged for so long

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<sup>112</sup> Mercier, *Distressed Family*, II.v.52.

<sup>113</sup> See *ibid.*, II.vi.53.

in ‘insolence and cruelty’, is perhaps no longer ‘a hardened libertine’.<sup>114</sup> As Willford’s comments imply, George’s encounter with the comedy’s heroine seems to have prompted a change in his character, much like that exhibited by Cibber’s Loveless and Wallace’s Lord Raymond. Like them, George indicates the awakening of his conscience, by communicating contrition.

This hint at George’s reformation is fully developed in the play’s subsequent scenes, in which George displays a moral compass and a capacity for sentiment that he had previously lacked. When George is suddenly plunged into debt, Blackman comes up with a plan to steal the half of George’s father’s estate which has been reserved for his estranged sister. Though George attempts at first to cooperate in the scheme, he soon decides that it ‘is too much’ and that he ‘can bear no more’, before refusing outright to be ‘the tool of so infamous a deceit’.<sup>115</sup> Discovering later that the sister to whom the money is rightfully owed is in fact Eleanor, George, speaking like the orthodox man of feeling, exclaims,

My sister – with the sincerest joy I call you by that name – and  
while I thus embrace you, I offer you a heart that beats with [...]  
pure and tender affection.<sup>116</sup>

While George’s initial dialogue with Eleanor had characterised him as a deceitful and unfeeling rake, the sincere and tender emotions that he now articulates strongly imply his completed conversion from ‘hardened libertine’ into man of sensibility. Unconventionally, it is not the heroine’s exhibition of ‘trembling lips’ or ‘tears of anguish’ that stimulate this change.<sup>117</sup> Rather, it is Eleanor’s use of the pistol that can be pinpointed as the catalyst. Eleanor’s aggressive attack is shown to shock Sir George into a state of contemplation. By assuming the pistol, Eleanor reverses the direction of the original threat, making herself the

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<sup>114</sup> Inchbald, *Next Door Neighbours*, II.i.150.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, III.ii.159,160.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, III.ii.161.

<sup>117</sup> Cibber, *Love’s Last Shift*, V.ii.90; Wallace, *The Ton*, V.ii.92.

assaulter, and Sir George the ‘*starting*’ and ‘*trembling*’ victim.<sup>118</sup> Providing George with a taste of what it is to feel helpless and defenceless in the face of danger, Eleanor forces George to reflect on the barbarity of his actions, and thereby exhorts him to relinquish his ‘former folly’.<sup>119</sup> Interpreted this way, *Next Door Neighbours* can be added to the trend of late eighteenth-century literature which Adriana Craciun shows to rewrite ‘the ubiquitous seduction plot by offering a counter example that rejects the equation of women’s strength with weakness’.<sup>120</sup> In place of female delicacy, Inchbald shows woman’s armed violence to preserve the heroine’s chastity, and to reform the promiscuous villain.

Mercier’s script also follows the transformation of De Lys from unfeeling tyrant to man of sensibility. Yet the agent of De Lys’s reformation is not the armed heroine. De Lys is furious when he discovers Charlotte to be his sister, as he is desperate to retain all of his father’s estate. He continually displays ‘avaricious and contemptible sentiments’ until the final scene of the play, when he is encouraged by a notary to ‘Forget the luxury, the splendour, the dissipation, that corrupted you, and give yourself up to the feelings of nature’.<sup>121</sup> Only in response to this speech, from a figure of masculine and legal authority, does De Lys finally exhibit his ‘genuine and tenderest emotions’, learn to love his estranged family, and agree to share his father’s inheritance with them.<sup>122</sup> Mercier’s drama therefore maintains the value of female delicacy, by having Charlotte’s tears prompt compassion in Du Noir, while showing male authority to enable the conventional reformation of the rake. In contrast, Inchbald’s adaptation indicates man’s immunity to the softening influence of female weakness, and credits a pistol-bearing heroine with the task of ‘unbrutifying man’.

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<sup>118</sup> Inchbald, *Next Door Neighbours*, II.i.148.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, III.ii.162.

<sup>120</sup> Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 52.

<sup>121</sup> Mercier, *Distressed Family*, IV.iv.94.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.iv.94.



*Next Door Neighbours* consequently anticipates the radical hypothesis communicated in Robinson's *Letter*. In her address to English women, Robinson relates a tale in which she praises a 'foreign lady' for her decision to 'take instantly up the pistol' against a promiscuous lover who has demanded that she give herself to him prior to marriage. Robinson defines the woman's behaviour as a 'heroic act of indignant and insulted virtue', and shows it to exemplify the model of female conduct needed to rid the nation of sexual aggressors: echoing *Next Door Neighbours*, Robinson argues that it is not the woman who 'trembles at every breeze, faints at every peril, and yields to every assailant' who is best capable of 'unbrutifying man'.<sup>123</sup> Rather, it is she who chooses to 'resent and punish' her persecutor, acknowledging that 'men will be profligate, as long as women uphold them in the practice of seduction'.<sup>124</sup> Promoting the strength of the female warrior over the fragility of the sentimental ideal, both Robinson and Inchbald champion the pistol as woman's surest defence against licentious villains, and as the greatest deterrent of male vice.

#### From Page to Stage: Censoring *Next Door Neighbours*

Given the heightened controversy surrounding martial women in the wake of events in France, it is unsurprising that *Next Door Neighbours* did not pass unscathed through the hands of John Larpent. Larpent made two significant amendments to Inchbald's depiction of Eleanor's violent conduct, before deeming the play fit for performance. First, he downplayed the necessity of her aggressiveness, by omitting Inchbald's criticism of the judicial system's inadequate treatment of sexual assault against women. Second, he detracted from Eleanor's agency in the pistol scene, by providing her with a male accomplice. The first modification occurs following Eleanor's escape from Sir George's home. A speech delivered by George's compassionate servant Bluntly, expressing his lack

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<sup>123</sup> Robinson, *Letter*, 20, 22, 25, 90, 14.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 75.

of surprise at George's attempted seduction of the heroine, is removed from the published play script. Originally, Bluntly had informed Sir George,

Youth and innocence such as hers, I was afraid were enticements  
that might tempt you to play the thief – and then I was afraid, even  
a jury of your countrymen, might acquit you, and the poor girl  
obtain no redress.<sup>125</sup>

The theft to which Bluntly refers is that of Eleanor's chastity. His speech alludes to the low conviction rate of male rapists in eighteenth-century England. As Anna Clarke has explained, while the law recognised that 'the rapist deserved to be punished because he had attacked female chastity, a valuable possession', justice for his victim was rarely received, as 'the violated woman [...] lost her credibility as a prosecutor along with her chastity'.<sup>126</sup> By alerting audiences to the frequency with which rapists are condoned, and their victims considered unworthy plaintiffs, Inchbald emphasises the justness of Eleanor's martial combat: Eleanor appears entirely vindicated in punishing Sir George for his licentious tendencies, as theatregoers recognise that the law would not have done so. Inchbald thereby embeds the dangerous implication, prohibited by Larpent, that women ought to take the law into their hands in order to compensate for a very real, and very inadequate legal system.

The second alteration concerns the pistol scene itself. In *L'indigent*, Charlotte's escape from De Lys's house had been assisted by Felix, who unlocks the door to the room in which Charlotte is trapped, after hearing her scream to be let out.<sup>127</sup> While Inchbald had refused a male figure this same intervention in Eleanor's rescue, Larpent reverses this

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<sup>125</sup> BL Microfiche 253/670, *Next Door Neighbours*, II.i.45. In 'The Larpent Collection of MS Plays from the Huntington Library, San Marino, California'. Microfiche edition. British Library, London.

<sup>126</sup> Anna Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770-1845* (London: Pandora, 1987), 47. For full argument see 47-50. See also Jane Moody's discussion of this topic in relation to *Next Door Neighbours* in 'Inchbald, Holcroft and the Censorship of Jacobin Theatre', in *Women's Romantic Theatre*, ed. Crisafulli and Elam, 203.

<sup>127</sup> See Mercier, *Distressed Family*, II.v.52.

revision, using the character of Bluntly. In the licensing script, Bluntly's exit from the pistol scene is related in a stage direction which explains, '*Bluntly [...] after looking at Eleanor retires*'.<sup>128</sup> Larpent lengthens this instruction, so it reads: '*Bluntly looks at Eleanor aside, and points to the pistol, then bows humbly, and retires*'.<sup>129</sup> By having Bluntly point to the pistol, Larpent denies Eleanor full responsibility for her actions. Her armed attack on George is prompted not by her own intuition, but instead by Bluntly's instruction. In adding this detail, Larpent brings *Next Door Neighbours* closer to the conventional damsel in distress narrative, which, as Katherine Binhammer summarises, portrays the endangered heroine as 'the passive victim' who is 'in need of protection' from a heroic male figure.<sup>130</sup> Inchbald expressed her disdain for narratives of this type in her essay 'To the Artist', in which she humorously advised aspiring novelists that when the 'heroine is in danger of being drowned, burnt, or [having] her neck broken by the breaking of an axle tree', it is more desirable 'to suffer her to be rescued from impending death by the sagacity of a dog, a fox, a monkey, or a hawk', than it is a man.<sup>131</sup> While the licensing copy of *Next Door Neighbours* complies with this advice, reviews of the performance corroborate the effectiveness of Larpent's amendment in establishing Bluntly as Eleanor's protector: the *General Evening Post* described how Sir George's 'passion for Eleanor' is 'disappointed by the interference of Bluntly', and the *World* similarly explained that Eleanor's chastity 'is saved by [Bluntly's] virtue and honesty'.<sup>132</sup> By assigning Bluntly this heroic role, Larpent reinforces ideas of female dependence, if not physical, then mental: while Eleanor is proven capable of acting like a man, she is denied the right to think like one, and the comedy therefore implies women's inability to defend themselves militantly without male guidance.

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<sup>128</sup> BL Microfiche 253/670, II.i.42.

<sup>129</sup> Inchbald, *Next Door Neighbours*, II.i.148.

<sup>130</sup> Katherine Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747-1800* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 139.

<sup>131</sup> Elizabeth Inchbald, 'To the Artist', in *The Artist* 14 (13 June 1807), reproduced in appendix to Elizabeth Inchbald's *Nature and Art* (1796), ed. Shawn Lisa Maurer (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005), 162.

<sup>132</sup> *General Evening Post*, 9-12 July 1791; *World*, 11 July 1791.

‘A Good Jest is No Argument’: Comedy and Radicalism in the Sentimental Drama

Along with the efforts made by Larpent to sanitise Inchbald’s narrative, the conventions of comedy can also be seen to have affected the drama’s ideological force. *Next Door Neighbours* was praised by reviewers for successfully fulfilling its comic requirements. The *World* lauded the comedy for exhibiting ‘many strokes of poignant humour’, and the *Public Advertiser* told how the drama’s ‘lively [...] and humorous’ scenes merited ‘distinguished tokens of approbation’.<sup>133</sup> Misty Anderson has argued that ‘taboo material can explode into public discourse through jokes’ with far greater ease than it can in more serious genres, as humour is seen to annul the threat of radical proclamations.<sup>134</sup> Raising this idea in 1821, the novelist Sir Walter Scott declared of seditious, yet comical literature,

As we are far from being of the opinion that the youngest and most thoughtless derive their serious opinions from productions of [a comedic] nature, we leave them for our reader’s amusement, trusting that he will remember that a good jest is no argument.<sup>135</sup>

According to Scott, the presence of comedy in radical literature cleanses the narrative of its harmful potential. As the subject matter is not portrayed in a way which encourages readers to take it seriously, the comic genre is ineffectual in influencing public opinion, and should therefore be regarded as nothing more than ‘a good jest’.

While Scott’s hypothesis holds certain weight when applied to the eighteenth-century ‘laughing comedy’, which, to use Oliver Goldsmith’s definition, aims simply to ‘excite [...] laughter’ by exhibiting ‘human absurdity’, to interpret *Next Door Neighbours* in the context

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<sup>133</sup> *World*, 11 July 1791; *Public Advertiser*, 11 July 1791.

<sup>134</sup> Misty Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the London Stage* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 204.

<sup>135</sup> Walter Scott, *The Lives of the Novelists* (1821), ed. Ernest Rhys (London: Everyman’s Library, 1910), 290.

of Scott's theory is to oversimplify the function of the sentimental sub-genre.<sup>136</sup> The aim of the sentimental comedy was to combine humour with moral efficacy. Defining the genre's requirements in 1771, the *Whitehall Evening Post* insisted that the sentimental comedy should 'introduce laughter without dismissing sentiment', and prove 'morality and mirth to be far from incompatible'.<sup>137</sup> Inchbald's drama did just this. The *Public Advertiser* labelled *Next Door Neighbours* as a 'very pleasant comedy' which is 'tinged with the solemnity of the mournful muse', and the *London Chronicle* defined the piece as an 'entertaining and affecting dramatic picture in which the serious and the comic relieve each other'.<sup>138</sup> The presence of these solemn and mournful elements deny Inchbald's drama from being received simply as 'a good jest', by providing moments in the play that call for an entirely sober response.

The mixture of humorous and affecting content presented in *Next Door Neighbours* was facilitated by casting choices. The drama's cast combined players skilled in both comic and moving roles, and decisions regarding which of the roles to be personated by which kind of performer had important consequences for the comedy's ideological impact. Inchbald strongly indicated the ways in which each role ought to be received through her use of character names. The jocular surname 'Splendorville' explicitly identifies Sir George as a caricature of the ostentatious man of fashion. Meanwhile, the non-suggestive name assigned to the comedy's heroine intimates the more serious response that Eleanor merits. Casting choices complemented these implications. While famous comic actor John Palmer

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<sup>136</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, 'An Essay on the Theatre; or a Comparison between laughing and sentimental comedy', in *The Westminster Magazine* 1.1 (January 1773), 5, 4. For full essay see 4-6. The phrase 'laughing comedy' was coined in this essay. On the differing comedic sub-genres see Robert D. Hume, 'Goldsmith and Sheridan and the Supposed Revolution of "Laughing" against "Sentimental" Comedy', in *Studies in Change and Revolution: Aspects of English Intellectual History, 1640-1800*, ed. Paul J. Korshin (Yorkshire: The Scholar Press, 1972), 237-276; Richard Bevis, *The Laughing Tradition: Stage Comedy in Garrick's Day* (London: George Prior Publishers, 1980), 43-98, and Lisa A. Freeman, 'The social life of eighteenth-century comedy', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730-1830*, ed. Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 73-86.

<sup>137</sup> *Whitehall Evening Post*, 9 February 1771.

<sup>138</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 11 July 1791; *London Chronicle*, 9 July 1791.

encouraged audiences to direct laughter and ridicule towards the satirical Sir George, the actress chosen to play Eleanor demanded a very different reception.<sup>139</sup>

Inchbald's armed heroine was acted by Mrs Stephen Kemble (nee Elizabeth Satchell), an actress renowned for 'exquisitely pathetic' performances.<sup>140</sup> Mrs Kemble excelled in exhibitions of 'melting distress' and 'pathetic graces', and her acting was praised for having the most powerful 'influence over the affections'.<sup>141</sup> That her pathetic prowess was on show during *Next Door Neighbours* is confirmed in the play's reviews. The *Public Advertiser* described Kemble's portrayal of Eleanor as 'pathetically interesting', and remarked that she had played the role 'feelingly'.<sup>142</sup> The *Diary, or Woodfall's Register* added that Eleanor's 'virtues and goodness were so powerfully displayed by Mrs Kemble' that the audience acquired a 'superior interest' in Eleanor, which placed her 'so pre-eminently in the foreground of the picture'.<sup>143</sup> As the reviews imply, unlike the caricatures surrounding her, Inchbald's pistol-bearing heroine was by no means interpreted as a ludicrous or farcical figure. Rather than eliciting laughter, Eleanor's sentimental display of 'virtues and goodness' enabled her to inspire strong sensations of pity and admiration. By arousing this superlative emotional investment in the comedy's heroine, Mrs Kemble deepened the possibility that theatregoers might sympathise too intimately with Eleanor, and thereby perceive her violent conduct as entirely righteous and worthy of acclaim, or even emulation.<sup>144</sup> Consequently, the character chosen to accommodate the drama's more sombre elements, and the actress by whom she was personated, rendered the drama's celebration of female militancy all the more troubling.

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<sup>139</sup> On John Palmer's comic prowess see 'Memoirs of Mr. John Palmer', in *Monthly Visitor, and Pocket Companion* 5 (December 1798), 329. Confirming Palmer's comedic portrayal of Sir George, on 11 July 1791 the *Morning Herald* wrote that Palmer provided the drama's 'comic humour' by 'befriend[ing] [his] character with [his] usual skill'.

<sup>140</sup> James Boaden, 'Memoirs of Mrs Elizabeth Kemble', in *The General Magazine and Impartial Review* (August 1789), 337.

<sup>141</sup> Boaden, 'Memoirs of Mrs Elizabeth Kemble', 338, 337.

<sup>142</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 11 July 1791.

<sup>143</sup> *Diary, or Woodfall's Register*, 11 July 1791.

<sup>144</sup> On women's perceived tendency to emulate dramatic characters see my Introduction.

Inchbald's amalgamation of humour and sentiment therefore renders *Next Door Neighbours* far less innocuous than the narratives described by Scott. Yet comic conventions are not entirely ineffectual in mollifying the drama's iconoclasm. A number of theatre scholars have emphasised that it was difficult for comedies to uphold forcible contestations of established gender roles, as 'comic closure insists upon restored domestic tranquillity and social order', which commonly involves 'the androgynous figure' being 're-sexed and absorbed into a more traditional gender role' through marriage.<sup>145</sup> Anderson expatiates that while gender liberal comic playwrights were able to challenge social codes momentarily, and offer utopian images of women defying patriarchal restraint by achieving ascendancy over male characters, the woman's eventual absorption into the conventional marriage plot, at a time when marriage held oppressive implications for women, ensured her ultimate retreat into a position of accepted subservience.<sup>146</sup> Inchbald's comedy reflects this constraint. Once it is discovered that Henry is not in fact Eleanor's sibling, Inchbald suggests through the voice of Sir George that Henry will soon 'learn to love [Eleanor] by a still nearer tie' than that 'of brother'.<sup>147</sup> Adhering to the customs of comic closure, Inchbald indicates Eleanor's safe return to the realms of decorous femininity by hinting at her forthcoming marriage to Henry. Eleanor's masculine authority is thereby rendered ephemeral. The drama offers a glimpse of female rebellion, yet it is ultimately neutralised by its ending, and relates the fate of a heroine who, unable to transcend the conventions of genre, is equally incapable of upholding her defiance of sexual mores.

As my analysis has attempted to show, *Next Door Neighbours* opposes Enlightenment theories of gender by celebrating the reforming properties of women's martial combat. Unsettling the conventions of the sentimental comedy, Inchbald shows Sir George's

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<sup>145</sup> Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings*, 162; Jean Marsden, 'Modesty Unshackled: Dorothy Jordan and the dangers of cross-dressing', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol.22 (January 1993), 22.

<sup>146</sup> See Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, 3-4, 45-72. On the eighteenth-century marriage contract see Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988), and Susan Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property in England, 1660-1833* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990).

<sup>147</sup> Inchbald, *Next Door Neighbours*, III.ii.162.

reformation to be prompted not by female weakness, but instead by female violence. It is a pistol, rather than a tear, that enables the heroine to fulfil her standard role of ‘unbrutifying man’. The play’s subversive potential is mitigated however by the script amendments made by Larpent, and by the rules of comic closure, which demand all instances of sexual transgression to be resolved in the denouement. The efforts made to curb the radicalism of *Next Door Neighbours* indicate that restrictions were already being placed on Inchbald’s deviant portrayals of gender in 1791. A year later, Inchbald was faced with even greater restraints when attempting to stage her politically charged tragedy *The Massacre*. It is to the portrayal of revolutionary violence and women’s martial rights in *The Massacre* that I now turn my attention.

**‘Tragick Composition on the Subject of the Late Gallic Massacre’: Revolutionary**

**Violence and Women’s Martial Rights in *The Massacre***

In 1792 Inchbald wrote her only tragic drama: a bloodthirsty and politically charged composition titled *The Massacre*. While scholars have paid substantial attention to the tragedy, there remain two dominant assumptions regarding the motivation behind the drama’s creation, and its status as an unperformed text, which my reading seeks to revise. I begin by building on prior explorations of the tragedy’s historical provenance, by reading the play alongside a petition produced in France for women’s martial rights. Then, exploring eighteenth-century theories of horror and terror in literature, I complicate previous explanations regarding Inchbald’s contentment to have her drama printed, rather than performed, by suggesting the connection between *The Massacre*’s form, and its intended emotional impact.

*The Massacre* is set in 1572. It depicts the violent and bloody spectacle of the St Bartholomew massacres, while alluding explicitly to the ‘unhappy state’ of Britain’s



‘neighbouring nation’.<sup>148</sup> Inchbald outlines in a footnote the similarity between the massacres of 1572 and those occurring in present day France, exclaiming,

Shocking, even to incredibility, as these murders may appear, the truth of them has been asserted in many of our public prints during the late massacre at Paris.<sup>149</sup>

The inclusion of this footnote has caused many scholars to assume that Inchbald scripted *The Massacre* in direct response to the Paris massacres of September 1792.<sup>150</sup> This contention seems to have been shared by Inchbald’s contemporaries: an extract printed in the *Diary* on 20 October 1792 declared that ‘Mrs Inchbald has made a bold attempt of tragick composition on the subject of the late gallic massacre’.<sup>151</sup> When one observes the date by which Inchbald had drafted *The Massacre* however, it becomes clear that the events of September 1792 could not possibly have inspired the tragedy’s creation, and that all references to the contemporary massacres must have been added to the script subsequent to its initial completion.

A letter written by George Colman regarding Inchbald’s tragedy confirms that he had received the script by 7 February 1792, months before the September massacres.<sup>152</sup> One of few scholars to have acknowledged *The Massacre* to predate the September crisis is Amy Garnai. In her analysis of the tragedy, Garnai proposes that *The Massacre* was written in response to equally violent preceding events, including the great fear of 1789, the attacks

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<sup>148</sup> Elizabeth Inchbald, *The Massacre: taken from the French. A tragedy, of three acts, in prose* (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1792), vi.

<sup>149</sup> Inchbald, *Massacre*, I.i.9.

<sup>150</sup> See Nielsen, ‘A Tragic Farce’, 279-280; Terrence Allan Hoagwood, ‘Elizabeth Inchbald, Joanna Baillie, and Revolutionary Representation in the Romantic Period’, in *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, ed. Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 303; Anna Jenkins, *I’ll Tell You What: The Life of Elizabeth Inchbald* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2003), 138; and George C. Grinnell, ‘Timely Responses: Violence and Immediacy in Inchbald’s *The Massacre*’, *European Romantic Review*, vol.24, no.6 (October 2013), 646 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10509585.2013.845772>> [1 March 2013].

<sup>151</sup> *Diary*, 20 October 1792.

<sup>152</sup> See letter from George Colman to Elizabeth Inchbald, 7 February 1792. Forster collection. National Art Library. Victoria and Albert Museum. MS 116.

on refractory priests, the massacre at the Champ de Mars, and the food riots which broke out in Paris early in 1792.<sup>153</sup> While the incidents outlined by Garnai certainly could have encouraged Inchbald to write the tragedy, my analysis draws attention to a further source which might have fuelled the script's creation.

Several scholars have identified the victimisation of women to be a prominent theme in *The Massacre*. Daniel O'Quinn argues that the portrayal of female suffering 'constitutes the phantasmatic core of the play's political intervention', and suggests that Inchbald's main intention is to illuminate 'that it is women who primarily suffer the violence of homosocial relations'.<sup>154</sup> Garnai similarly interprets the tragedy as a criticism of the limitations placed on female action, and Nielsen reads *The Massacre* as a warning against the consequences which result when women 'do not share the same privileges as their male counterparts'.<sup>155</sup> In 1791, concerns matching these were publicly raised by French radical Pauline Léon. Léon was a member of the Cordeliers Club, a French revolutionary group which promoted the founding of a Republic based on universal suffrage. She went on to become president of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, an extremely militant women's club, formed in France in 1793, which brought together a number of female sans-culottes.<sup>156</sup> On 6 March 1791, a year before Colman received his draft of Inchbald's tragedy, Léon offered the National Assembly a document petitioning for women's right to bear arms. The petition proved popular with Léon's fellow French women, and acquired over three hundred signatures.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings*, 171.

<sup>154</sup> Daniel O'Quinn, 'Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Massacre*: Tragedy, Violence, and the network of political fantasy', in *British Women Playwrights around 1800* (June 1999)

<[http://www.etang.unmontreal.ca/bwp1800/essays/oquinn\\_massacre.html](http://www.etang.unmontreal.ca/bwp1800/essays/oquinn_massacre.html)> [22 February 2013].

<sup>155</sup> See Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings*, 176; Nielsen, 'A Tragic Farce', 283.

<sup>156</sup> On Léon and the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women see Lucy Moore, *Liberty: The Lives and Times of Six Women in Revolutionary France* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), 27-45, 223-241.

<sup>157</sup> The petition is translated and reproduced in *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1795: Selected Documents translated with notes and commentary*, ed. Harriet B. Applewhite, Darline G. Levy and Mary Durham Johnson (USA: Illini Books, 1980), 72. For discussions of the petition see Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy, 'Women and militant citizenship in Revolutionary Paris', in *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, ed. Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine (New York: OUP, 1992), 88; McMillan,

Whether Inchbald was familiar with Léon's protest is debatable, yet not unlikely. Inchbald was well connected with figures knowledgeable about events occurring in revolutionary France. In 1791, Inchbald was in frequent communication with the British radical Thomas Holcroft, who was assisting her with the completion of her novel *A Simple Story* (1791).<sup>158</sup> Holcroft had spent time in Paris in 1783 and 1784, and had formed strong and lasting relationships with the subsequent revolutionary sympathisers Louis-Sébastien Mercier (author, as we have seen, of Inchbald's translated source texts, and the uncle of Holcroft's future wife, Louisa Mercier), and Nicholas de Bonneville, who would acquire a close friendship with Thomas Paine, and become spokesman for the revolutionary club the Cercle Social.<sup>159</sup> Both men were involved in formally commentating on revolutionary activity: in 1790 Bonneville set up the Social Cercle's thrice-weekly Parisian newspaper, the *Bouche de Fer* (October 1790 - July 1791), for which Mercier was recruited as a journalist.<sup>160</sup> Mercier also joined Bonneville in contributing to the club's monthly journal *La Chronique du Mois*, which ran from 1791 to 1793, and was devoted to political

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*France and Women*, 20, and Fauré, *Democracy without Women*, 109. Léon was not the only radical French woman to pioneer women's martial rights. The argument was also raised by the Jacobin Théroigne de Méricourt, and in May 1793 Léon was accompanied by Claire Lacombe and fellow members of the Republican Revolutionary Women in an attempt to convince the Jacobin Club to let the Society form an armed body of women. See Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy, 'Women, radicalization and the fall of the French Monarchy', in *Women and Politics in the Age of Democratic Revolution*, ed. Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy (USA: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 81-108; Christine Fauré, *Democracy without Women: Feminism and the Rise of Liberal Individualism in France*, trans. Claudia Gorbman and John Berks (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991), 108-110; Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Madness and Revolution: The Lives and Legends of Théroigne de Méricourt*, trans. Martin Thom (London: Verso, 1991), 92-95, 109; Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and their French Revolution*, trans. Katherine Streip (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 108-120, and James F. McMillan, *France and Women, 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 20.

<sup>158</sup> See Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What*, 312, and James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald, including her familiar correspondence with the most distinguished persons of her time* (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), 265.

<sup>159</sup> See *Memoirs of the Late Thomas Holcroft*, ed. William Hazlitt, 3 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1816), II:38-40, 55. See also Gary Kelly, 'Holcroft, Thomas (1745-1809)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: OUP, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13487>> [2 July 2013]. For a detailed account of Bonneville's friendship with Paine, and his involvement with the Cercle Social see the extensive 'Introduction' to Nicholas de Bonneville's *Illuminati Manifesto to World Revolution* (1792), ed. and trans. Marco Di Luchetti (USA: Booksurge Publishing, 2011), 1-208. See also David V. Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières: John Oswald and the British in Paris, 1790-1793* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 109-114, 121-122.

<sup>160</sup> See Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières*, 121, and Jonathan Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution, from The Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014), 136.

topics.<sup>161</sup> Connected through the club and its journals with radical French figures and revolutionary developments, either one of these men is likely to have known of Léon's protest, and could have communicated news of it to Holcroft.

Furthermore, by 1791 Holcroft was virtually inseparable from the radical author and philosopher William Godwin, who went on to establish an intimate friendship with Inchbald, after officially meeting her in October 1792.<sup>162</sup> Godwin was kept well-informed of events in France by his frequent presence at debates in the House of Commons, as well as his relationship with men including Paine, Richard Price, John Horne Tooke and Charles James Fox.<sup>163</sup> These British revolutionaries not only sympathised with, but also interacted with the Friends of Liberty in France, and thus acquired a firm knowledge of the activities occurring in their neighbouring country.<sup>164</sup> In the early 1790s Holcroft was dining with Godwin almost daily, and regularly conversing with him and his circle on the progress of the revolution.<sup>165</sup> It is entirely feasible that the subjects discussed by Holcroft with either Godwin, or with his acquaintances in France, were subsequently shared with Inchbald.

If not from Holcroft, Inchbald could have learned of Léon's petition through émigré gossip. While Inchbald was composing *The Massacre*, London was witnessing a vast

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<sup>161</sup> See Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières*, 121, 129-132.

<sup>162</sup> In *Memoirs of the Late Thomas Holcroft* Hazlitt notes that Holcroft was first acquainted with Godwin in 1786. See II:221. The date of the first meeting between Godwin and Inchbald is recorded in *The Letters of William Godwin, Volume 1: 1778-1797*, ed. Pamela Clemit (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 95. Godwin and Inchbald were by no means strangers prior to this. Godwin 'read and criticised' a draft of Inchbald's *The Simple Story* in December 1790, and attended a performance of *Next Door Neighbours* in July 1791. See Godwin's diary entries for 31 December 1790, and 9 July 1791, in *The Diary of William Godwin*, ed. Victoria Myers, David O'Shaughnessy and Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford Digital Library, 2010) <<http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>> [1 September 2013]. On Inchbald's friendships with Holcroft and Godwin see Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What*, 310-316.

<sup>163</sup> See C. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: His friends and Contemporaries*, 2 vols (London: Henry S. King & co., 1876), I:65. See also Godwin's diary entries for 5 November 1789, and 4 November 1790, in *Diary of William Godwin*, ed. Myers, O'Shaughnessy and Philp.

<sup>164</sup> See Kegan Paul, *William Godwin*, 62. Godwin's knowledge of events in France is indicated in his diary entries for 19 June 1790; 7 August 1790, and 17 July 1791.

<sup>165</sup> See Kegan Paul, *William Godwin*, 63. For examples of the political discussions had by Godwin and Holcroft see Godwin's diary entries for 1 January 1792; 2 January 1792, and 5 August 1792. On Holcroft's contact with radicals including Paine and Fox see Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 3-4, and Godwin's diary entries for 28 May 1792, and 20 January 1793.

influx of French émigrés.<sup>166</sup> Kirsty Carpenter has explained that members of fashionable society ‘took pleasure in entertaining the exiled French’, who provided them with numerous stories about contemporary France.<sup>167</sup> Inchbald was linked to fashionable circles through her career as an actress.<sup>168</sup> Her knowledge of Léon’s petition could therefore have been provided either through direct conversation with an émigré, or through the contact she held with British elites who served as their hosts.<sup>169</sup> While I cannot determine unequivocally the source of Inchbald’s information, *The Massacre*, intentionally or not, can certainly be seen to support the arguments presented in Léon’s petition. At this juncture, it is necessary to outline the rebuttal of contemporary arguments against arms-bearing women proclaimed in Léon’s protest.

‘The Care of our Families and Home’: Mothers, Warriors, and Pauline Léon’s Petition

Throughout the 1790s, women who partook in martial activism were commonly accused of abandoning their domestic and familial duties. In 1793 French radical Pierre Chaumette asked in response to the rise of women’s engagement in military activity, ‘Since when is it permitted to give up one’s sex? Since when is it decent to see women abandoning the [...] cares of their households, the cribs of their children?’<sup>170</sup> A year later, in a compilation of *Interesting Anecdotes* (1794) published in Britain under the pseudonym ‘Mr Addison’, the incongruity between arms-bearing women and the domestic ideal was similarly outlined. The author protested that ‘we want not female warriors’, but women who give pleasure ‘by acquitting themselves with dignity and grace in their domestic apartments’.<sup>171</sup> Statements

<sup>166</sup> See Kirsty Carpenter, *Refugees of the French Revolution: Émigrés in London, 1789-1802* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999).

<sup>167</sup> Carpenter, *Refugees*, 21.

<sup>168</sup> On Inchbald’s links with fashionable society see Jenkins, *I’ll Tell You What*, 259-264, and Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel*, 5.

<sup>169</sup> Carpenter lists Horace Walpole among members of fashionable society who enjoyed entertaining the exiled French. See *Refugees*, 21. On Inchbald’s link to Walpole in particular see Jenkins, *I’ll Tell You What*, 259-260, and Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald*, 261.

<sup>170</sup> Pierre Chaumette, 1793, trans. and quoted in Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of The French Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1992), 120.

<sup>171</sup> Mr Addison, *Interesting Anecdotes, Memoirs, Allegories, Essays and Poetical Fragments, tending to amuse the fancy and inculcate morality*, 12 vols (London: The Author, 1794), XI:148-149.

like these appeared frequently in both nations, owing to the particular importance attributed to the role of motherhood in shaping the nation's future generations. As Harriet Guest has shown, the revolutionary years were 'characterised by a new emphasis on the values of the private, domestic and familial, as the basis for public morality'.<sup>172</sup> Both supporters and opponents of the revolution represented the domestic sphere as the arena in which women could perform valuable patriotic duties. Writers as diverse as Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah More and French radical Louis Prudhomme all insisted that women could best contribute to their country's improvement not by turning 'their distaff into a musket', to quote Wollstonecraft, but by imbuing their children with the principles needed to grow into valuable citizens, and thus by acting as mothers of the nation.<sup>173</sup>

Women who adhered to the image of the loyal and devoted mother were often considered immune to threats of male violence. The belief that femininity softened men's tempers was occasionally carried as far as to suggest that displays of maternal affection could literally put a stop to war. In his drama *The Battle of Hexham* (1789), George Colman has a number of soldiers left unable to continue fighting after being 'softened at the scene, and dulled with pity', by the sight of their enemy, Queen Margaret, hugging and kissing her baby son.<sup>174</sup> Margaret's display of maternal sentiments pacifies her enemies and deters them from their military task. The scene epitomises the idea that a woman's familial loyalty is enough to awaken man's compassion, and thus to shield women against entire armies of men.

The prevalent contention, as these sources demonstrate, was that the nation's idealised woman both should not and need not bear arms. Allowing woman to do battle would detract from her familial sentiments, which, when maintained, offered her a form of self-

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<sup>172</sup> Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 159. See also Rendall, *Origins*, 33-72.

<sup>173</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 28. See also Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1799), I:2. For Prudhomme's promotion of this model of motherhood see Hunt, *Family Romance*, 122, and McMillan, *France and Women*, 28-29.

<sup>174</sup> George Colman, *The Battle of Hexham, a comedy. In three acts* (Dublin: P. Byrne, 1790), I.iv.19.

defence against male violence which made weapons unnecessary. Both of these arguments are challenged in Léon's petition. Léon begins her protest by outlining the vulnerability of the nation's women if denied the use of weaponry. She exclaims,

Patriotic women come before you to claim the right which any individual has to defend his life and liberty. [...] Gentlemen, we need arms, and we come to ask your permission to procure them [...]. You cannot refuse us, and society cannot deny the right nature gives us, unless you pretend the Declaration of Rights does not apply to women, and that they should let their throats be cut like lambs, without the right to defend themselves.<sup>175</sup>

Léon pleads that by refusing women the right to bear arms, men are essentially withholding them the right to live: a right which should be granted by nature, and not by man. Aware that her proposal would be rejected immediately if it seemed to suggest that women ought to supplant their domestic responsibilities with military duties, Léon does not deny that a woman's first obligation should be to her family. Yet she contests the notion that the domestic ideal requires no physical form of self-defence. Léon assures her listeners,

Do not believe, however, that our plan is to abandon the care of our families and home, always dear to our hearts, to run to meet the enemy. No Gentlemen, we wish only to defend ourselves the same as you.<sup>176</sup>

Léon's request is not that a woman should leave the home in favour of the battlefield, and go out of her way to meet with the enemy. Rather, if the enemy is brought to the woman, she should be given the right to defend herself with a more reliable shield than that of her

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<sup>175</sup> Pauline Léon, 'Adresse individuelle à l'Assemblée Nationale par des citoyennes de la capitale, le 6 Mars, 1791', in *Women in Revolutionary Paris*, ed. Applewhite, Levy and Johnson, 72-73.

<sup>176</sup> Léon, 'Adresse', 73.

femininity. In *The Massacre*, Inchbald dramatises the necessity of Léon's plea, by suggesting that a woman's ability to fulfil the celebrated role of devoted wife and mother goes hand in hand with her right to bear arms.

'Feminine Virtues Violated': Unarmed and Defenceless Mothers in *The Massacre*

As mentioned previously, Inchbald's *Massacre* is an adaptation of Mercier's *Jean Hennuyer: évêque de Lizieux*.<sup>177</sup> It is the revisions made by Inchbald to Mercier's source text which illuminate most overtly her preoccupation with woman's right to martial forms of self-defence. Therefore, as with *Next Door Neighbours*, I shall accompany my exploration of Inchbald's adaptation with a brief analysis of Mercier's tragedy.<sup>178</sup> Like its adaptation, *Jean Hennuyer* is set during the St Bartholomew massacres. Arsenne, the drama's Protestant hero, manages to escape being slaughtered by the political mob which rages through Paris, yet his wife's mother and uncle are not so fortunate. Having seen his relatives killed, Arsenne seeks vengeance against the enemy, and demands, 'to arms, to arms! [...] Let us sell our blood most dearly'. Though Arsenne had directed the demand to his male accomplices, when his wife Laura decides that she too must arm herself against the enemies, and show herself 'equal to their furies', her decision is accepted without reproach, and the tragedy proceeds to a somewhat optimistic conclusion.<sup>179</sup> In the final scene, Jean Hennuyer puts a stop to the war which has broken out between the opposing parties, when delivering a speech which promotes the Christian precepts of charity over those of violence.<sup>180</sup> The drama ends with the hopeful implication that future generations

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<sup>177</sup> Patricia Sigl was first to identify Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *Jean Hennuyer* as the source for *The Massacre*. See Sigl, *The Literary Achievement of Elizabeth Inchbald*, Ph.D. thesis (Swansea: University of Wales, 1980), 185.

<sup>178</sup> In 1773 a literal British translation of Mercier's play was produced, titled *Jean Hennuyer, Bishop of Lizieux: or, the massacre of St. Bartholomew* (London: S. Leacroft, 1773). All references to Mercier's tragedy come from this translation. Nielsen offers an enlightening comparison of *The Massacre* and this literal translation in 'A Tragic Farce'. See 280-282. I am greatly indebted to Nielsen's comparison for assisting the formation of my argument.

<sup>179</sup> Mercier, *Jean Hennuyer*, II.iv.39.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, III.iii.64.



shall go on to live by Hennuyer's pacifistic ethics. Adhering to her role as mother of the nation, Laura, having heard Hennuyer's speech, declares,

I will teach our children his name after that of God: this dear name,  
forever engraved in our hearts, shall be blessed in their mouths  
every day of their lives.<sup>181</sup>

Laura's children, symbolic of France's future inhabitants, look set to share the Christian principles endorsed by Hennuyer. The drama therefore concludes with the suggestion that the days of massacres and civil wars are over, and that France can look forward to a future of social tranquillity.

Inchbald's adaptation maintains much of Mercier's original content. Yet the modifications made by Inchbald are significant in their indication of the suggested relationship between motherhood and women's martial activism. The heroine of Inchbald's tragedy is Madame Tricastin, a woman whose 'heart swells' with love for her husband, and who is 'a tender mother to [her] children'.<sup>182</sup> The vulnerability of women like Madam Tricastin when exposed to political violence is revealed early on, when the heroine's husband Eusebe returns from the scene of the massacre. Eusebe informs his company that the blood on his clothes 'came from the veins' of his wife's mother, who he had 'tried in vain to defend'. He goes on to describe how he 'saw poor females' try 'to ward off that last fatal blow, then sink beneath it'.<sup>183</sup> Eusebe himself is 'not wounded', and when asked how he managed to protect himself against the enemy who killed his mother-in-law, he responds that 'my sword in my hand, reeking with blood' meant that 'I passed unmolested'.<sup>184</sup> Despite knowing his sword to have saved him from the fate received by his mother-in-law, when it is suggested that Eusebe give his wife 'an instrument of death to defend herself', Eusebe

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, III.ix.77.

<sup>182</sup> Inchbald, *Massacre*, I.i.7.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, I.i.8,9.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, I.i.8.

retorts, ‘No – by heaven, so sacred do I hold the delicacy of her sex, that could she with a breath lay all our enemies dead, I would not have her feminine virtues violated by the act’.<sup>185</sup> Eusebe’s decision marks the major difference between Mercier’s original play, and Inchbald’s adaptation. While Laura’s request to arm herself is accepted without debate, and both she and her children remain alive and unharmed in the drama’s final scene, *The Massacre* illustrates the tragic results to ensue when women are denied the martial agency exercised by men.

In the closing scene of *The Massacre*, the dead bodies of Madame Tricastin and her children are brought into view. Rochelle, the bearer of the corpses, exclaims,

My soldiers, bear a lovely matron butchered, with her two children by her side. [...] The eldest, to the last, she held fast by the hand – the youngest she pressed violently to her bosom, and struggling to preserve, received the murderers blow through its breast, to her own.<sup>186</sup>

This description of Madame Tricastin’s loyalty to her children even when placed in the midst of terror fashions her explicitly as the maternal ideal lauded by reformists and loyalists alike. Her display of familial love is reminiscent of that exhibited by Margaret in *The Battle of Hexham*. The difference is that while Margaret’s opponents were moved by her maternal virtues, and consequently left unable to harm her, Madame Tricastin’s enemies prove themselves entirely impervious to her display of familial sentiments. Observing that within *The Massacre*, ‘mothers and wives are legitimate targets for political wrath’, Nielsen identifies Inchbald’s tragedy as one which ‘shows contempt for the promise of chivalry’.<sup>187</sup> Eusebe believes that his wife’s feminine virtues will protect her

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, II.i.14-15.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, III.ii.30.

<sup>187</sup> Nielsen, *Women Warriors*, 117.

against the political enemy, as femininity is respected and revered by the male sex. Yet the men to whom Madame Tricastin is exposed lack her husband's chivalric virtues, and she is therefore left totally vulnerable to their attacks.

As a result of the death of Madame Tricastin and her children, *The Massacre's* denouement is devoid of the optimism that concludes *Jean Hennuyer*. *The Massacre's* final scene sees Glandeve, Hennuyer's equivalent, deliver a speech almost identical to that articulated by his French counterpart. Glandeve convinces both parties to cease war after convincing them to supplant their violence with 'peace and charity'.<sup>188</sup> Unlike Hennuyer's speech however, Glandeve's words lack force, as they look set to be forgotten. While Laura had promised to pass down Hennuyer's teachings to her children, Madame Tricastin cannot fulfil this patriotic role, as neither she nor her children live to hear Glandeve's words. The tragedy's melancholy conclusion thus implies that in a nation of warring, ungallant men, a mother's ability to fulfil her role as educator of the nation is dependent on her right to defend herself militantly. Unlike Mercier's Laura, Madame Tricastin is refused the right to bear arms, and as a result, she is denied the ability to shape the principles of her country's forthcoming generations.

In 1793, Chaumette, railing against the French women who had involved themselves in their country's violent activism, declared,

As much as we venerate the mere de famille who puts her joy and glory in raising and caring for her children, [...] we must despise and spit on the woman [...] who dons the masculine role and makes the disgusting exchange of the charms given by nature for a pike.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Inchbald, *Massacre*, III.ii.25.

<sup>189</sup> Pierre Chaumette, 1793, trans. and cited in Candice Proctor, *Women, Equality, and the French Revolution* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 165.

Chaumette reinforces the view that if women are granted the right to bear arms, the country will become destitute of venerable mothers, as the acquisition of a pike necessitates the exchange of maternal loyalty for the disgusting characteristics of the masculine warrior. As Inchbald suggests through the death of Madame Tricastin however, it is not the possession of weaponry, but rather, the inability to access it, which is to blame for the county's depletion of devoted mothers and wives. Like the literature analysed by Runge, Inchbald's tragedy criticises the system of gallantry, by suggesting that femininity, 'the very source of male attraction that is supposed to guarantee safety [...], leaves women vulnerable to male brutality'.<sup>190</sup> By exposing the ineffectiveness of women's familial sentiments in deterring male violence, Inchbald's tragedy echoes Léon's protest: if women committed to the 'care of [their] families and home' are to be prevented from having their 'throats cut like lambs', they must be permitted to defend themselves with arms.

#### 'Unfit for the Stage': *The Massacre* as Closet Drama

*The Massacre* was not performed on stage during Inchbald's life time. In her advertisement for the drama, Inchbald informs her readers that *The Massacre* was 'never intended for representation', and that when she 'first undertook the foregoing scenes', she 'never flattered herself that they would be proper to appear on the stage'.<sup>191</sup> In fact, as her memoirist James Boaden notes, Inchbald had contemplated staging the drama, but it was rejected for performance by both Thomas Harris at Covent Garden, and George Colman at Haymarket, on account of its depiction of 'so disagreeable a subject'.<sup>192</sup> Owing to the greater economic rewards of writing for the stage, as well as the ability to reach expansive audiences through theatrical compositions, it was common for dramatists to send their scripts on to alternative theatre managers – especially provincial theatre managers –

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<sup>190</sup> Runge, 'Beauty and Gallantry', 55-56.

<sup>191</sup> Inchbald, *Massacre*, i.

<sup>192</sup> Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald*, I:303.

following rejection in London.<sup>193</sup> Yet Inchbald sent her script to Colman and Harris only, before agreeing with them that the piece was poorly suited for theatrical representation. Inchbald explained in the tragedy's advertisement that *The Massacre* was unlikely to 'give satisfaction to an audience', and, as the *Diary* documented in October 1792, 'the fair author' consequently 'determined to convey her drama to the world through press', realising that it was 'unfit for the stage'.<sup>194</sup>

Scholars including Beth Friedman-Romell and Patricia Sigl have argued that Inchbald's contentment to suppress *The Massacre* from theatrical exhibition resulted from her fear of upsetting her fans. Friedman-Romell argues that 'above all, Inchbald was a pragmatist, more interested in maintaining her independence' by upholding a loyal fan base at the theatre, than she was in 'changing the world'. Therefore, Inchbald accepted the decision not to stage her politically charged tragedy, as she worried that the performance of unpleasant scenes might offend theatregoers, and damage her reputation as a dramatist.<sup>195</sup> In line with this opinion, Sigl writes that 'Mrs Inchbald had an important comedy coming out at Covent Garden in the 1792-93 season', and she did not want to lessen audience's anticipation for the comedy by causing them to fear that, like *The Massacre*, it too might convey the sentiments of 'a political extremist'.<sup>196</sup>

That Inchbald was fiercely defensive of her reputation and popularity as a dramatist is undeniable. It was of the utmost importance to Inchbald that she was considered congenial by the public, and throughout her career she went out of her way to ensure that she

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<sup>193</sup> Inchbald informed Godwin that she had 'frequently obtained more pecuniary advantage by ten days labour in the dramatic way, than by the labour of [...] ten months' worth of novel writing. See letter from Inchbald to William Godwin, 3 November 1792, MS. Abinger c.1, Dec.509, Fol.115. On the wide audiences reached by theatrical compositions see Joanna Baillie, 'Introductory discourse', in *A Series of Plays: in which it is attempted to delineate the stronger passions of the mind* (London: T. Cadell jun. and W. Davies, 1798-1812), 66. On the tendency for dramatists to send their scripts to provincial theatres following rejection in London see John Galt's 'Preface' to *The New British Theatre: A Selection of Original Dramas not yet acted*, 4 vols (London: A. J. Valpy, 1814), I:xi.

<sup>194</sup> Inchbald, *Massacre*, i; *Diary*, 20 October 1792.

<sup>195</sup> Beth Friedman-Romell, *Producing the Nation: Nationalism and Gender in the Theatre of Hannah Cowley, Elizabeth Inchbald and Joanna Baillie*, Ph.D. thesis (Evanston: Northwestern University Illinois, 1999), 120.

<sup>196</sup> Sigl, *Literary Achievement*, 188.

maintained an unsullied reputation in both her private and professional life.<sup>197</sup> She expressed her intense fear of having theatrical compositions booed during performance in her preface written for Joseph Addison's *Cato* (1713), in which she stated,

The sound of clamorous plaudits raises [the dramatist's] spirits to a kind of ecstasy; whilst hisses and groans, from a dissatisfied audience, strike on the ear like a personal insult, avowing loud and public contempt for that, in which he has been labouring to show his skill.<sup>198</sup>

It was largely as a result of her sensitivity to unforgiving audiences, as well as her familiarity with the stringency of theatrical censorship, that Inchbald considered novelists to have far greater liberty than dramatists. She declared in *The Artist* that the 'novelist is a free agent', who 'lives in a land of liberty', where 'nothing is forbidden'. Contrarily, the 'dramatic writer exists but under a despotic government. – Passing over the subjection in which the author of plays is held by the Lord Chamberlain's office, and the degree of dependence he has on his actors – he is the very slave of the audience'.<sup>199</sup> The control that Inchbald acknowledges theatregoers to exert over the dramatist's success illustrates Catherine Burroughs's identification of the 'playwright's unique vulnerability as a writer whose work is assessed in real time at the very moment of introduction'.<sup>200</sup> As the drama's success was contingent upon the audience's immediate and public approval, the dramatist was under great pressure to evade subject matter capable of giving offence or eliciting jeers from vocal and impulsive spectators.

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<sup>197</sup> See Ben Robertson, *Elizabeth Inchbald's Reputation: A Publishing and Reception History* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), esp. 11-46, and Harriet Guest, *Unbounded Attachment: Sentiment and Politics in the Age of the French Revolution* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 7-8, 84. Inchbald's reputation consciousness becomes most evident in 1797, when she falls out with Godwin following his marriage to Mary Wollstonecraft. For documentation of the fall out see Kegan Paul, *William Godwin*, I:279.

<sup>198</sup> Inchbald, 'Remarks' on Joseph Addison's *Cato*, in *The British Theatre; or a Collection of Plays*, 25 vols (London: Longman, 1808), VIII:5.

<sup>199</sup> Inchbald, 'To the Artist', in appendix to *Nature and Art*, 165-166.

<sup>200</sup> Catherine Burroughs, 'The Stages of Closet Drama', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre*, ed. Swindells and Taylor, 451.

While I do not deny that Inchbald's consciousness of her reputation and success as a dramatist may have influenced her decision to suppress her tragedy from the stage, to argue that her concern with popularity entirely dictated this choice is to overlook the interrelatedness between *The Massacre*'s form and its intended emotional response. Thomas Crochunis has suggested that one of 'many reasons' that Romantic playwrights created 'dramas to be read' was in order to 'exploit the formal, aesthetic and psychological potentials' of the written form.<sup>201</sup> In agreement with Crochunis's theory, Melynda Nuss argues of *The Massacre* that Inchbald's act of 'shifting from stage to closet' indicates primarily her concern with 'choosing the form that would make the most effective political impact'.<sup>202</sup> While I depart from Nuss in my interpretation of *The Massacre*'s political meaning, I concur that Inchbald's decision to present her tragedy as a written text was a tactic strategically employed in order to ensure an emotional reaction from readers, that the tragedy could not have achieved in the theatre.<sup>203</sup> Essentially, I view the tragedy's confinement to the closet as fundamental to its forcible communication of women's right to bear arms.

#### 'The Subject is so Horrid': Terror, Horror, and the Eighteenth-Century Drama

Inchbald held an astute understanding of the suitability of a script for either performance or perusal, as is demonstrated in the commentaries she offers of contemporary British dramas in *The British Theatre; or a Collection of Plays* (1808). On numerous occasions, Inchbald suggests that plays written for performance would have functioned more effectively in the closet. Inchbald writes of *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766) by George Colman and David Garrick, that the drama is 'pleasanter to read than to see'; she declares similarly of Garrick's adaptation of *The Winter's Tale* (1756) that the script 'seems to class among

<sup>201</sup> Thomas C. Crochunis, 'The Function of the Closet Drama at the Present Time', *Romanticism on the Net* (December 1998) <<http://www.ron.umontreal.ca/>>[1 August 2014].

<sup>202</sup> Melynda Nuss, *Distance, Theatre and Public Voice* (USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 35.

<sup>203</sup> Nuss proposes that the drama's intention for private perusal, as opposed to public exhibition, reflects the tragedy's central hypothesis that while 'the private world is imprisoning, the public one might be ineffectual'. See Nuss, *Distance*, 39. For full argument see 36-44.

those dramas that charm more in perusal than in representation', and she observes of the version of *Antony and Cleopatra* (1758), produced by Garrick and Edward Capell, that there are things in the play 'so diminutive' that 'they cannot be perceived in a theatre; whilst in a closet, their very smallness constitutes their value'.<sup>204</sup> As her comments suggest, Inchbald was well aware that a drama's impact could be influenced largely by the playwright's decision either to stage or to print the dramatic material.<sup>205</sup>

In the advertisement printed in *The Massacre*, Inchbald further demonstrates her knowledge that plays have 'a very different effect upon the stage and in the closet'.<sup>206</sup> Quoting Horace Walpole's postscript to his unstaged tragedy *The Mysterious Mother* (1768), Inchbald writes that while she values *The Massacre* for being 'so truly tragic in the essential springs of terror and pity', she appreciates that the narrative is not 'proper to appear on the stage' as 'the subject is so horrid' that 'it would shock, rather than give satisfaction to an audience'.<sup>207</sup> The advertisement outlines the tendency among eighteenth-century literary and aesthetic theorists to assign contrary functions to scenes that inspire 'terror', and those which are simply 'horrid'.<sup>208</sup> Inchbald's contemporaries were widely agreed that while tragic authors should strive to inspire terror in their audience, the arousal of horror should be avoided at all costs. Drawing on Aristotelian theory, drama critics merited terror for its ability to prompt intense emotional reactions.<sup>209</sup> In 1774 Edward Taylor declared that 'the end of tragedy' must produce 'terror and pity', as 'these only can inspire that sympathetic distress' and 'that delicate melancholy which we feel for the

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<sup>204</sup> Inchbald, 'Remarks' on George Colman and David Garrick's *The Clandestine Marriage*, in *British Theatre*, XVI:5; Inchbald, 'Remarks' on *The Winter's Tale*, in *ibid.*, IX:4; Inchbald, 'Remarks' on *Anthony and Cleopatra*, in *ibid.*, IV:4-5.

<sup>205</sup> On the differences between the closet and the stage see Philip Cox, *Reading Adaptations: Novels and Verse Narratives on the Stage, 1790-1840* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), 1-24, and Catherine Burroughs, *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theatre Theory of British Romantic Women Writers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 85-90.

<sup>206</sup> Inchbald, 'Remarks' on Edward Moore's *The Gamester*, in *British Theatre*, IX:4.

<sup>207</sup> Inchbald, *Massacre*, i.

<sup>208</sup> On eighteenth-century conceptions of horror and terror see Devendra Varma, *The Gothic Flame: Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England* (New York: Russell, 1966), 129-130.

<sup>209</sup> For Aristotle's theory see *Poetics of Aristotle*, ed. S.H. Butcher, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan and co., 1917), 23-49.



misfortunes of others'.<sup>210</sup> Two decades previously, John Home's tragedy *Douglas* (1756) had been complimented precisely for agitating theatregoers 'to a very high degree of emotion', by causing 'the true tragic passions' of 'terror and pity' to 'reign in every breast'.<sup>211</sup>

While terror was considered productive of powerful emotions, horror was believed to have a contrarily benumbing effect. This distinction is aptly summarised in Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Burke suggests that while anything 'terrible' is 'productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling', horror creates astonishment, which 'is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended'.<sup>212</sup> Echoing Burke in a posthumously published essay, notorious gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe similarly declared that,

Terror and horror are so far opposite, that [while] the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a higher degree of life: the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates it.<sup>213</sup>

Burke and Radcliffe theorise that while terror works to enlarge the spectators' emotional faculties, horror freezes and suspends them, by repulsing the spectator and provoking an emotional withdrawal from the represented action.

In the latter half of the century, drama critics were widely agreed that one of the greatest provocations to horror was the spectacle of dead bodies on stage. In May 1796, the Edinburgh periodical the *Ghost* printed an article complaining that 'the English have no conception of a tragedy' in which 'the spectators do not witness the stage strewn with

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<sup>210</sup> Edward Taylor, *Cursory remarks on tragedy, on Shakespeare, and on certain French and Italian poets, principally tragedians* (London: W. Olwen, 1774), 1.

<sup>211</sup> *London Chronicle*, 14 March 1757.

<sup>212</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1757), 13, 41.

<sup>213</sup> Ann Radcliffe, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', in *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 16 (January 1826), 149.

dead bodies'. When the spectator is exposed to such morbid spectacle, continues the author, 'he is shocked with horror at a sight so obnoxious to human nature'.<sup>214</sup> Supporting this view, the actor Thomas Wilkes declared that the sight of Cordelia's corpse in *King Lear* 'raises disgust' and 'excites horror', and Francis Gentleman complained that the scene in *Macbeth* in which the dead bodies of Macduff's wife and children are placed 'in view of the audience is, if we can be allowed the phrase, farcically horrid'.<sup>215</sup>

Gentleman's use of the term 'farcically' draws attention to a second potential problem with the portrayal of dead bodies on stage: this being the arousal of laughter. In her preface to Colley Cibber's *The Careless Husband* (1704), Inchbald writes that the audiences' 'sensations of pain' are often disabled during stage representation 'by the vain endeavours of performers to display, by imitation, that which only real life can show, or imagination portray'.<sup>216</sup> The essayist and theatre commentator Charles Lamb raised a similar point in his essay 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare' (1811), when proposing that the witches in *Macbeth* fail to elicit fear when performed by actors in the theatre, as they are turned 'instantly into so many old women, that men and children are to laugh at'. He continues, 'Contrary to the old saying that "seeing is believing", the sight actually destroys the faith'.<sup>217</sup> Lamb theorises that the actor's inability to match the theatregoer's perception of a witch annihilates the suspension of disbelief. Once the plausibility is lost, audiences can no longer take the drama seriously, and the tragedy becomes a farce. Lamb uses the example of supernatural creatures to express this idea, yet other critics cautioned that the inadequate representation of corpses on stage could have this same comic effect. In 1771 George Stevens warned David Garrick that 'those who die on stage too often excite merriment',

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<sup>214</sup> *Ghost*, 14 May 1796, cited in Yael Shapira 'Shakespeare, *The Castle of Otranto*, and the Problem of the Corpse on the Eighteenth-Century Stage', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 36, no.1 (Winter 2012), 7.

<sup>215</sup> Thomas Wilkes, *A General View of the Stage* (London: J. Coote, 1759), 31; Francis Gentleman, *The Dramatic Censor; or, Critical Companion*, 2 vols (London: J. Bell, 1770), I:97.

<sup>216</sup> Inchbald, 'Remarks' on Colley Cibber's *The Careless Husband*, in *British Theatre*, XIV:5.

<sup>217</sup> Charles Lamb, 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare. Considered with reference to their fitness for stage representation' (1811), in *Poems, Plays and Miscellaneous Essays of Charles Lamb*, ed. Alfred Ainger (London: Macmillan & co., 1902), 236.

while the *Ghost* similarly observed that when a theatregoer sees an actor imitating a corpse, he ‘laughs at the impossibility of the actor’s executing it’.<sup>218</sup>

As these arguments suggest, the representation of dead bodies on stage was accompanied by two risks: first, the sight of an accurately depicted corpse threatened to horrify the audience and cause them to disengage from the dramatic action, preventing the arousal of pity. Second, the sight of a dubious corpse was liable to provoke the audiences’ disbelief, and thereby excite laughter, as opposed to the desired pathos. Inchbald’s tragedy, as we have seen, concludes with three dead bodies on stage: Madame Tricastin, and her two children, who have all been brutally murdered. In order for the tragedy to inspire audiences to share Inchbald’s view that women must be allowed to shield themselves against violent enemies, it is essential that the sight of the dead bodies imbues the audience with compassion. For such a response to be achieved, the corpses must be depicted accurately, while not appearing horrible. To offer a credible exhibition of three ‘butchered’ corpses, without exciting horror, seems an almost impossible task. It is debatably for this reason that Inchbald expressed the fear in her tragedy’s advertisement that *The Massacre*, when performed in the theatre, might arouse horror as opposed to terror, and thus fail to achieve the required sympathetic response.

One could argue that Inchbald’s depiction of Eusebe following his confrontation by his dead wife and children is representative of the reaction that Inchbald worried she would excite in the theatregoer. Eusebe’s response to the sight of the corpses corresponds with Burke’s and Radcliffe’s suggestion that horror freezes and contracts the emotions of the viewer. Once the bodies of his wife and children are brought into view, Eusebe appears

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<sup>218</sup> George Steevens to David Garrick, Hampstead, 1771, cited in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Brian Vickers, 6 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), V:457; *Ghost*, 14 May 1796. Inchbald’s contemporary Thomas Campbell recalls how the heroine’s death in a performance of Fanny Burney’s tragedy *Edwy and Elgiva* (1795) was considered a ‘ludicrous circumstance’, and her body ‘was carried off amidst roars of mirth’. Cited in Rodger Manvell, *Sarah Siddons: Portrait of an Actress* (London: Heinemann, 1970), 191.

literally frozen: he stands ‘like a statue of horror at the sight’.<sup>219</sup> He is so pained and repulsed by the image, that he does not feel pity or compassion for the sufferers, but rather, he pities himself for having been exposed to them. He exclaims that all his previously unpleasant experiences were ‘far, far less horrible than this!’ and he informs his father, in a similarly self-pitying speech, that ‘your son was born for greater anguish than human nature can support’.<sup>220</sup> Eusebe had been equally distressed by the ‘horrid pile’ of ‘dead bodies’ witnessed during the earlier massacre: afflicted by the sight of mutilated corpses in Act I scene I, Eusebe had begged, ‘Oh, that I could forget them all – banish the whole forever from my memory! – That all who were spectators could do the same’.<sup>221</sup> The spectacle of death repels Eusebe to the extent that he cannot bear to reflect on it. He wants not to engage with the sight, but to forget the scene entirely. Representative of the theatregoer who has witnessed action so atrocious that it prompts disgust, Eusebe experiences desperation to extricate himself from the morbid event, and to erase it completely from his mind.

If Eusebe’s response denotes that which Inchbald feared she would excite in a theatregoer, what kind of response did she believe she could provoke from a reader? The late eighteenth century saw numerous theatre critics denounce the same violent scenes on stage, which they had praised when presented in writing. Thomas Davies commented in 1784 that ‘the slaughter of characters in the last act’ of *King Lear* is ‘really so afflicting to a mind of sensibility in the closet’, but, when viewed ‘in action’ at the theatre, ‘unutterable horror’ would be ‘raised in the breast of a spectator’, who would not be able to ‘endure to look for any considerable time at the agonising woe’.<sup>222</sup> Writing of the same tragedy, Gentleman exclaimed, ‘we heartily wish that the insignificant, cruel, offensive scene, where Gloucester’s eyes are put out had been left to narration. The subject of it, while in

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<sup>219</sup> Inchbald, *Massacre*, III.i.29.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, III.i.30.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, I.i.7.

<sup>222</sup> Thomas Davies, *Dramatic Miscellanies: consisting of critical observations on several plays of Shakespeare*, 3 vols (Dublin: S. Price et al., 1784), II:171.

action, is shocking’, would ‘have approached well in description’.<sup>223</sup> As these examples suggest, upsetting scenes that were considered horrible on stage, were credited with the ability to operate profitably when presented in writing.

In her posthumously published essay, Radcliffe offers an explanation as to why this is. Radcliffe proposes that the ‘great difference between horror and terror’ lies in the latter’s ‘uncertainty and obscurity’. She continues,

[an] image imparts more of terror than of horror [when] it is not distinctly pictured forth, but is seen in glimpses through obscuring shades, the great outlines only appearing, which excite the imagination to complete the rest.

Radcliffe argues that an image which is only vaguely seen invites ‘the imagination to act upon the few hints that truth reveals’.<sup>224</sup> The mystery surrounding the image creates anticipation which encourages spectators to engage fully with the picture, thus preventing their withdrawal from the action or vision conveyed. The importance of obscurity considered, Radcliffe contends that a written description is more likely to produce terror than is a grotesque sight. She theorises that poets ‘strike and interest a reader by the representation even more than a general view of the real scene itself could do’, as written descriptions, more so than visual forms, leave a lot ‘to the imagination’.<sup>225</sup> Radcliffe again echoes Burke here, who had similarly argued that the very clarity of tangible spectacle lessens the emotional impact that the scene is able to have upon its viewers. According to Burke, ‘a great clearness helps but little towards affecting the passions, as it is in some sort an enemy to all enthusiasms whatsoever’. Justifying this theory, Burke explains that ‘uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy’ than those which are ‘clear and

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<sup>223</sup> Gentleman, *Dramatic Censor*, I:362. Inchbald similarly wrote in her ‘Remarks’ on *King Lear* that ‘an audience finds horror prevail over compassion on Gloucester’s loss of his eyes’. See *British Theatre*, IV:5.

<sup>224</sup> Radcliffe, ‘Supernatural’, 150.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 151, 150.

determinate', as 'it is our ignorance of things' that 'chiefly excites our passions'.<sup>226</sup> Like Radcliffe, Burke resolves that in order 'to make anything truly terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary', and as 'verbal description' raises 'a very obscure and imperfect idea' of its object, the poet has the 'power to raise a stronger emotion by the description', than the artist 'could by the best painting'.<sup>227</sup>

While Radcliffe and Burke show the verbal to surpass the obscurity of the visual, written descriptions should by no means be considered incapable of exciting horror. The poet and dramatist Samuel Taylor Coleridge illustrated this point in his review of Matthew G. Lewis's gothic novel *The Monk* (1797). Coleridge remarked of Lewis's novel, which presents macabre and graphic images of death and bodily grievance, that the author has created 'a tale of horror', and that 'the sufferings which he describes are so frightful and intolerable that we break with abruptness from the delusion'.<sup>228</sup> For offering his readers 'images of naked horror', continues Coleridge, Lewis 'deserves our gratitude almost equally with him who should drag us by way of sport through a military hospital, or force us to sit at the dissecting table of a natural philosopher'.<sup>229</sup> Coleridge compares the repulsion experienced by readers of *The Monk*, to that suffered by individuals confronted involuntarily by unmediated gore. In both cases, the scene offered is one of 'naked horror': that is, horror unaccompanied by obscurity.

While the macabre descriptions of death presented in Lewis's novel corroborate the written text's lack of immunity from arousing horror, Inchbald ensures the tolerability of her own textual portrayals of morbid subject matter, by replacing 'images of naked horror' with a portrayal of death that leaves a lot to the imagination. In the printed copy of *The Massacre*, the entrance of the corpses is related in a stage direction which reads,

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<sup>226</sup> Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 46, 49, 47, 48.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 43, 45.

<sup>228</sup> See for instance the description of Ambrosio's expiring body in Matthew G. Lewis, *The Monk* (1797), ed. James Kinsley and Howard Anderson (Oxford: OUP, 1980), 442.

<sup>229</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Review of *The Monk*', in *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook, 1700-1820*, ed. E.J. Clery and Robert Mills (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), 188, 186-187.

*A bier is brought in, followed by several domestic attendants and some soldiers. – On the bier is laid the dead body of Madame Tricastin, and two children, dead by her side.*<sup>230</sup>

The description lacks any specific details regarding the blood, gaudy wounds, or potential mutilation that one would expect to constitute a ‘butchered’ corpse. The portrait’s obscurity ensures emotional engagement with the scene, as readers are impelled by anticipation to form their own mental image of the sight described. As a result, *The Massacre* is prevented from having the same disengaging effect on the page that it would have done on the stage, and thereby operates effectively as a political protest: by deterring readers from breaking ‘with abruptness from the delusion’, emotional investment in the tragedy is ensured, and it is compassion, as opposed to repulsion, that is excited in the reader in the play’s final scene. Pity for the tragedy’s victims encourages audiences to consider the circumstances that led to their deaths, and thus to contemplate women’s lack of protection against male violence. Consequently, by printing the tragedy as a closet drama, devoid of ‘naked horror’, Inchbald produces a composition which, on account of being ‘so truly tragic in the essential springs of terror and pity’, serves as a powerful manifesto for women’s martial rights.

‘Unwilling to involve Herself in Political Disputes’: Writing and Revolution in 1792

Despite its political potency, *The Massacre* was never able to intervene in contemporary political debates. Though an edition of the tragedy was printed in September 1792, it was shortly afterwards withdrawn, and not released to the public until Boaden reprinted it in 1833, in the appendix to his *Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald*.<sup>231</sup> If Inchbald’s decision not to stage her tragedy was dictated by concerns over emotional response, *The Massacre*’s removal from publication resulted from politics catching up with it. Though Inchbald’s

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<sup>230</sup> Inchbald, *Massacre*, III.i.29.

<sup>231</sup> See Robertson, *Inchbald’s Reputation*, 95.

tragedy was written prior to the September massacres, its publication would have coincided with the crisis. Inchbald was well aware of the dangers of alluding in fiction to politically resonant historical events. She wrote in her preface to Edward Malone's edition of *Julius Caesar* (1790), a tragedy deemed unfit for performance in 1790 owing to its representation of regicide, that,

When men's thoughts are deeply engaged on public events, historical occurrences, of a similar kind, are only held proper for the contemplation of such minds as know how to distinguish, and appreciate, the good and the evil with which they abound.

As 'such discriminating judges' are not necessarily the general public, continued Inchbald, 'when the circumstances of certain periods make certain incidents of history most interesting, those are the very seasons to interdict its exhibition'.<sup>232</sup> Though Inchbald writes here of theatrical performance, she was forced to learn in 1792 that the same rules applied to her written text.

Both Godwin and Holcroft implored Inchbald not to publish *The Massacre* on account of its political overtones, and her subsequent agreement to keep the material concealed was welcomed in the press.<sup>233</sup> The pro-government newspaper the *Diary* declared in November,

Mrs Inchbald has translated a French drama on the subject of the late dreadful massacres in France; but, unwilling to involve herself in political disputes, or incur political prejudices, she has prudently

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<sup>232</sup> Inchbald, 'Remarks' on *Julius Caesar*, in *British Theatre*, IV:3. On the refusal to stage *Julius Caesar* see Terrence Allan Hoagwood, 'Romantic Drama and Historical Hermeneutics', in *British Romantic Drama: Historical and Critical Essays*, ed. Terrence Allan Hoagwood and Daniel Watkins (London: Associated UPs, 1998), 25.

<sup>233</sup> See Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald*, I:303-304.



suppressed the work in question after she had suffered the expense of printing an edition.<sup>234</sup>

The journalist's comment indicates that dramas engaging with events in revolutionary France had come to be deemed objectionable even when confined to print. As the enforced retraction of *The Massacre* from both performance and publication implies, by September 1792, neither writers for the stage nor writers for the closet, lived in 'a land of liberty', where 'nothing was forbidden'.

### **'Newgate Before My Eyes': The Demise of Inchbald's Martial Women**

In 1808, Inchbald declared in a review of Susanna Centlivre's drama *The Busie Body* (1709),

When a man follows the occupation of a woman, or a woman the employment of a man, they are both unpleasing characters, if they are guided in their pursuits by choice; but, if necessity has ruled their destinies, they are surely objects of compassion, and mercy should be granted.<sup>235</sup>

The statement epitomises somewhat the arguments presented by Inchbald in *Next Door Neighbours* and *The Massacre*. While Inchbald does not advocate that women should go out of their way to partake in warlike endeavours, she protests in her dramas that 'if necessity has ruled their destinies' – that is, if a woman's chastity or life is endangered – she should not be prohibited from taking up arms in order to preserve it. In contrast to her conservative contemporaries, who were adamant that martial women rid themselves of their control over male manners, and abandoned their familial duties, Inchbald's dramas suggest that if depraved men are to be tamed, and if devoted wives and mothers are to survive the

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<sup>234</sup> *Diary*, 10 November 1792.

<sup>235</sup> Inchbald, 'Remarks' on Susanna Centlivre's *The Busie Body*, in *British Theatre*, XV:3.

event of violent revolution, women must be granted the right to defend themselves with weapons.

The communication of this ideology was short lived in Inchbald's dramas. As the expurgation of *The Massacre* from both stage and page suggests, the escalation of revolutionary violence in the summer of 1792 profoundly influenced the subject matter that could be published and staged in Britain throughout the remainder of the decade. As animosity towards the revolution increased, so too did the scrutiny of dramatic texts and performances. Inchbald discovered this first hand in January 1793, when she was reprimanded in the press following a performance of her comedy *Everyone Has His Fault* (1793).<sup>236</sup> The comedy was defined in the *True Briton* as 'highly objectionable', and the reviewer claimed that 'in several sentences the democrat displays a cloven foot'.<sup>237</sup> Inchbald protested that she never intended 'to have written anything of the nature' of which she was accused, and in the years following the newspaper's 'malicious falsehood' she displayed a heightened preoccupation with evading future censure.<sup>238</sup> She informed Godwin in 1794 that she was now writing her dramas with 'Newgate before [her] eyes', and she expressed her paranoia regarding the frequency with which reviewers 'hastily condemn' literature 'as of immoral tendency, and rob it of [...] popularity'.<sup>239</sup> Already a reputation-conscious author in the early 1790s, as the decade progressed, Inchbald's desperation to avoid both private and professional condemnation was pushed right to the forefront of her mind, and, though her dramas continued to challenge women's role in 'unbrutifying man', overt celebrations of arms-bearing women, and campaigns for women's martial rights, disappeared from her plays.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> On this play see Katherine S. Green, 'Mr Harmony and the Events of January 1793: Elizabeth Inchbald's *Everyone Has His Fault*', *Theatre Journal*, vol.56 (March 2004), 47-62.

<sup>237</sup> *True Briton*, 30 January 1793.

<sup>238</sup> Letter from Inchbald to William Woodfall, 1 February 1793, in Jenkins *I'll Tell You What*, 328.

<sup>239</sup> Letter from Inchbald to Godwin, 1794, in Kegan Paul, *William Godwin*, 141; Letter from Inchbald to Godwin, 1794, MS. Abinger c.2, Dec.509, fol.77.

<sup>240</sup> Inchbald's maintained engagement with women's role in 'unbrutifying man' is exemplified in her sentimental comedy *Wives as they Were, and Maids as they Are* (1797). The play offers a scene similar to

The indictment of *Everyone Has His Fault* reflects Moody's observation that the years surrounding France's Reign of Terror constituted an age of 'intense theatrical surveillance', which enhanced the difficulties faced by British playwrights wishing to stage material considered even remotely subversive.<sup>241</sup> Despite the accentuated vigilance with which performances were judged however, portraits of women brandishing weapons that invited sympathetic responses continued to appear on the British stage both during and following the Terror. It is the ways in which such representations are negotiated in the theatre that the remainder of my thesis explores.

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that depicted in *Next Door Neighbours*, when Bronzely, the narrative's rake, attempts the rape of Lady Priory. Like Eleanor, Lady Priory deters the attack using a display of intrepidity and composure, as opposed to feminine weakness. Rather than arming herself with a pistol, however, Lady Priory '*calmly takes out her knitting*' and '*sits down to knit a pair of stockings*'. In both comedies the heroine pacifies her assaulter and thereby preserves her chastity by failing to present the debilitating sensibility of the orthodox damsel in distress, and offering instead a display of self-assurance, resolution, and composure. While in 1791 however it was courage combined with armed combat which was credited with preventing male assault, in 1797, courage is combined instead with feminine propriety and domesticity. See Elizabeth Inchbald, *Wives as they Were, and Maids as they Are* (1797), in *Eighteenth-Century Women Playwrights, Volume 6*, ed. Smallwood, V.i.207.

<sup>241</sup> Moody 'Inchbald, Holcroft and the Censorship', 205.

## 2: ‘The Ruthless Queen’: Lady Macbeth and Margaret of Anjou on the London Stage

The final quarter of the eighteenth century witnessed theatrical representations of two ‘ruthless Queen[s]’ made notorious by the pen of William Shakespeare: Lady Macbeth, and the warrior Queen Margaret of Anjou, famously presented in Shakespeare’s *King Henry VI* (1592).<sup>242</sup> Both characters were personated during the period by the celebrated tragedienne Sarah Siddons, around whom this chapter largely revolves. My study assesses the ways in which Siddons’s innovative acting style and visual appearance on stage, as well as the appropriation by a lesser-known actress of Siddons’s strategies for dramatic self-representation, influenced responses to performances of each ‘ruthless Queen’, staged at Drury Lane and Haymarket, in 1794 and 1797. I look first at Siddons’s depiction of Lady Macbeth in John Philip Kemble’s 1794 production of *Macbeth*. I indicate the ways in which costume, set design and Siddons’s unique interpretation of the role liken Lady Macbeth to widely disseminated portrayals of the recently deceased Marie Antoinette. Engaging with the complex role attributed to ghosts in literature of the 1790s, I show how this pairing of real and fictional Queens enables Siddons’s character to operate as both a symbol of revolution-related guilt, and as a form of propaganda encouraging England’s war with revolutionary France. I then explore a 1797 rendition of Thomas Francklin’s tragedy *The Earl of Warwick* (1766). The drama’s heroine, Margaret of Anjou, was played by the little-known actress, Sarah Yates. I hypothesise that the details of Yates’s private life, and the publicity these received in British newspapers, and in an address spoken at the close of *The Earl of Warwick*, substantially impacted Margaret’s reception, and transformed her from a ‘ruthless Queen’ into a sentimental mother.

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<sup>242</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, part 3*, ed. John D. Cox and Eric Rasmussen (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2001), I.iv.220.

**‘Death in so many Frightful Shapes’: Shakespearean Ghosts, Revolutionary Sentiments, and Sarah Siddons’s Lady Macbeth**

Terrific visions hover near!  
 He sees an awful form appear!  
 [...] ‘Now Favor’d mortal, now behold!  
 To Soothe thy Captive state.  
 [...] Did ever earth a scene display  
 More glorious to the eye of day  
 Than millions with according mind  
 Who claim the rights of human kind?’<sup>243</sup>

Helen Maria Williams, ‘The Bastille: A Vision’, 1790.

An association of ideas made the tears flow insensibly from my eyes when I saw Louis [...] going to meet death. [...] I have been alone ever since; and [...] I cannot dismiss the lively images that have filled my imagination. [...] I have seen eyes glare through a glass-door opposite my chair, and bloody hands shook at me. [...] Death in so many frightful shapes has taken hold of my fancy. – I am going to bed – and, for the first time in my life, I cannot put out the candle.<sup>244</sup>

Mary Wollstonecraft, Letter to Joseph Johnson, 26 December 1792.

In these two passages, British Girondist sympathiser Helen Maria Williams and former revolutionary sympathiser Mary Wollstonecraft both employ ghosts in order to comment on the revolution at varying stages of its development. In ‘The Bastille: A Vision’,

<sup>243</sup> Helen Maria Williams, ‘The Bastille: A Vision’, in *Julia: A Novel, interspersed with some poetical pieces*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell, 1790), II:219, 221.

<sup>244</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, Letter to Joseph Johnson, 26 December 1792, in *Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 4 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1798), IV:93-95.

included in Williams's *Julia: A Novel* (1790), a ghost appears in the midst of the Bastille's ruins, and instructs its listener to join the revolutionaries responsible for the prison's collapse, in their battle to secure 'the rights of human kind'. Two years later, in a letter to the publisher Joseph Johnson, Wollstonecraft describes being confronted by 'frightful shapes' which have 'taken hold of [her] fancy', since witnessing the French King on his way to execution. The differing uses made of ghosts adhere to contemporary trends. In literature of the revolutionary period, ghosts were regularly modelled on two contrasting archetypes, each fulfilling distinct literary functions, and communicating specific political meanings.

In his essay 'Gothic Shakespeares', Dale Townshend explains that the roles assigned to ghosts in late eighteenth-century literature were heavily influenced by Shakespeare. Shakespeare provided authors with 'precedents for two distinctive modes of ghost-seeing, the one tragically figured in *Hamlet* and the other in *Macbeth*, and each one serving to define and lay down the differences between heroism and villainy, virtue and vice respectively'.<sup>245</sup> While ghosts which are modelled on Hamlet's father materialise 'so as to prompt, through the act of vengeance, the reestablishment of truth and justice', ghosts which replicate the apparition of Banquo in *Macbeth* are coupled with 'moral culpability', and serve as 'the externalised projection of a conscience that is riddled with guilt'.<sup>246</sup> Essentially, 'the virtuous encounter ghosts as if through Hamlet, the villainous by way of Macbeth': while ghosts resembling Hamlet's father inspire heroic feats of vengeance, ghosts mimicking Banquo remind the guilty of their crimes, by appearing before those held accountable for their deaths.<sup>247</sup> The opening extracts epitomise the ghost's dual function: while it is the ghost of Hamlet's father which is invoked in 'The Bastille', it is the ghost of

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<sup>245</sup> Dale Townshend, 'Gothic Shakespeare', in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 43.

<sup>246</sup> Townshend, 'Gothic Shakespeare', 47, 45.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

Banquo which surfaces in Wollstonecraft's letter to Johnson, and will emerge again in Williams's later work, *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France* (1795).

'The Bastille' demonstrates Williams's early optimism for the revolution.<sup>248</sup> Williams rejoices at the destruction of the Bastille, which she perceives, like most enlightenment thinkers, as the emblem of royal despotism and cruelty.<sup>249</sup> She recalls how the Bastille had previously stood as a 'drear cell [...] unvisited by light' where 'mercy never came'. She then implies the brutality exercised within the Bastille, by invoking the imagery of murder, when describing the building's ruins as a 'hideous pile, which stains of blood defile'.<sup>250</sup> She goes on to narrate an encounter between a visitor to the prison's ruins and a host of 'troubled phantoms' that lurk inside. The 'fierce shapes' that confront the poetic subject are paralleled with the ghost of Hamlet's father.<sup>251</sup> Like Hamlet Senior, who is 'confin'd' to the 'prison-house' of perjury, and 'doom'd [...] to walk the night' while 'the foul crimes done in his days of nature' wait to be 'burnt and purged away', the ghosts of the Bastille are similarly trapped within the 'lonely bounds' of a 'living tomb', as the crimes performed in that 'black cell', 'unfit for mortal ear', are yet to be requited.<sup>252</sup>

Drawn further into the 'haunted walls', the visitor is addressed directly by one of the Bastille's ghosts, who extends the allusion to *Hamlet*, by issuing an explicit call to vengeance.<sup>253</sup> Referring to the brutally restrictive policies exercised under the Ancien Regime, the phantom instructs the persona to avenge the occurrence of 'scenes so foul' and

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<sup>248</sup> On Williams's early views see Deborah Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution* (London: Associated UPs, 2002), 46-47.

<sup>249</sup> On Williams and the Bastille's symbolism see Halina Adams, 'Imagining the Nation: Transforming the Bastille in Williams's *Letters Written in France*', *European Romantic Review*, vol.25 (2014), 723-741 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10509585.2014.963844>> [3 April 2015], and Steven Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams and the Rewriting of the French Revolution* (London: Associated UPs, 1997), 120-138.

<sup>250</sup> Williams, 'The Bastille', 218, 219.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 220, 219.

<sup>252</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Arden edition, ed. and intro. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen & co., 1982), I.v.216; Williams, 'Bastille', 218, 220.

<sup>253</sup> Williams, 'Bastille', 219.

to 'soothe thy captive state', by assisting the erection of 'Freedom's sacred temple'.<sup>254</sup> He insists,

'Tis [Freedom's] awak'ning voice commands  
 Those firm, those patriot bands  
 Arm'd to avenge her cause  
 And guard her violated laws! [...]  
 'Tis thine all human wrongs to heal  
 'Tis thine to love all nature's weal  
 To give each gen'rous purpose birth  
 And renovate the gladden'd earth.<sup>255</sup>

Writing in 1790, at a time when she welcomed the revolution, and was keen to extol its progress, Williams fashions her poem's revolutionary advocate in the style of Hamlet's father. By communicating her demands for reform through the voice of a restless spirit, Williams accentuates the necessity of the war that she wages against the nation's oppressive regime. The defeat of 'tyranny's stern rod' is needed not only to better the lives of France's future inhabitants, but also to lay to rest the victims of its past despotism.<sup>256</sup>

In the extract from Wollstonecraft's letter, ghosts serve not as a call to vengeance, but as manifestations of the author's own guilt. Wollstonecraft is among a number of British radicals, Williams included, to have become disillusioned by the revolution following its deterioration into violence.<sup>257</sup> While she continued to admire the principles on which the revolution was based, Wollstonecraft felt betrayed by the movement, which she saw to

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 221, 223.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>257</sup> On Wollstonecraft's and Williams's shifting views see Blakemore, *Crisis*, 89-101, 153-235. On changing attitudes more generally see my Introduction.



have deviated from its proper course since declining into ‘murderous fury’.<sup>258</sup> As indicated in her letter, by December 1792, Wollstonecraft cannot help but pity the individuals cast as the revolution’s victims, and she finds that tears ‘flow insensibly from her eyes’, as she witnesses Louis XVI on his way to execution.

Steven Blakemore has argued that in both her letter to Johnson, and her *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794), Wollstonecraft ‘acknowledges tacitly feelings of guilt’ for the monarchical suffering she has witnessed in France, by framing ‘the King’s death and the revolution’s blood in the theatrical terms of *Macbeth*’.<sup>259</sup> Recalling the bloodiness of the Terror in her *Historical and Moral View*, Wollstonecraft exclaims mournfully,

It be impossible to erase from the memory these foul deeds, which,  
like the stains of deepest dye revived by remorse in the conscience,  
can never be rubbed out. [...] we cannot “out the damn’d spot”.<sup>260</sup>

Wollstonecraft aligns her perceived complicity in the revolution’s ferocity with the role played by Lady Macbeth in the murder of King Duncan. Like Shakespeare’s heroine, who is plagued with remorse since assisting her husband in the act of regicide, Wollstonecraft’s early support for a revolution that has turned violent means that she too cannot out the ‘damn’d spot’ that stains her conscience. Lady Macbeth is invoked again in Wollstonecraft’s letter to Johnson. Following her crime, Lady Macbeth is haunted by the image of the deceased King Duncan, whom she recalls as having ‘had so much blood in him’ that she fears her hands will be ‘ne’er clean’. The hallucinations she experiences are such that she is afraid to be in darkness, and ‘she has her light by her continually’.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution; and the effect it has produced in Europe* (London: J. Johnson, 1794), 457.

<sup>259</sup> Blakemore, *Crisis*, 112, 117.

<sup>260</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Historical and Moral View*, 258-259.

<sup>261</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth: written by Shakespeare. As Represented by Their Majesties Servants, on Opening the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, on Monday, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1794* (London: C. Lowndes, 1794), V.i.56.

Troubled by the French King's impending execution, Wollstonecraft is similarly tortured by 'bloody hands' and 'frightful shapes' which 'have filled [her] imagination', and like Lady Macbeth, she too cannot 'put out the candle'.<sup>262</sup> Wollstonecraft's hallucinations, as with those experienced by Shakespeare's heroine, indicate psychological anguish.

Wollstonecraft envisages the King's ghost owing to her sense of accountability for his forthcoming execution. Unlike the phantoms depicted in 'The Bastille', the 'frightful shapes' described by Wollstonecraft do not excite feelings of vengeance, but signify the possession of a guilt-ridden conscience.

This 'Macbethian coupling of ghosts and moral culpability' arises again in Williams's *Letters Containing a Sketch*.<sup>263</sup> Since writing 'The Bastille', Williams's perception of the revolution was tainted by a number of occurrences that affected her personally. Williams endured brief imprisonment in 1793 as a result of the decree against all British inhabitants of France, and, more shatteringly, she witnessed the brutal executions of a number of her Girondin companions under Jacobin demand.<sup>264</sup> Expressing regret for the initial support she had shown for the revolution, Williams alludes to Macbeth's sighting of the ghost of his murder victim Banquo, when recalling the number of casualties she has seen 'dragged to execution'. She laments,

Those scenes, connected in my mind with all the detail of domestic sorrow, with the feelings of private sympathy, with the tears of mourning friendship, are impressed upon my memory in characters that are indelible. They rise in sad succession like the

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As this is an accurate copy of the script performed in 1794, all quotations from *Macbeth* are cited from this version.

<sup>262</sup> Wollstonecraft, Letter to Johnson, 95.

<sup>263</sup> Townshend, 'Gothic Shakespeare', 45.

<sup>264</sup> See Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams*, 107-109. On the Girondins' executions see Patrice Higonnet, *Goodness beyond Virtue: Jacobins during the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998), 35-44.

shades of Banquo's line and pass along my shuddering  
recollection.<sup>265</sup>

By comparing herself with Macbeth, Williams similarly casts herself as the villainous ghost-seer, and suggests the indirect role she has played in the deaths of those who 'rise in sad succession'. As she had pioneered the revolution so ardently in its early stages, Williams is left with a sense of responsibility for the suffering endured as a result of its violence, and consequently, she too is harassed by the 'frightful shapes' of death.

By 1794, ghosts of the kind depicted in both 'The Bastille' and the letters had become ubiquitous in revolutionary discourse.<sup>266</sup> Possibly, the correlation established in the 1790s between ghosts, vengeance, and moral culpability, facilitated the political poignancy of John Philip Kemble's 1794 production of *Macbeth*. Staged to open the new Drury Lane theatre on 21 April 1794, Kemble's production was performed just six months after the execution of Marie Antoinette: an event which greatly intensified British antipathy to the revolution.<sup>267</sup> *Macbeth* was a dangerous tragedy to perform at the time, due to its dramatisation of regicide and political conspiracy.<sup>268</sup> Despite its explosive potential however, a prologue delivered by Kemble at the start of the play credited the tragedy with defending the nation against the influence of revolutionary France. Kemble assured audiences that 'while discord reigns' through 'ravaged Europe', Drury Lane, and the productions it stages, will keep the country 'safe from danger', by deterring 'the storms of faction, and the strides of power', that constitute 'barbarian rage'.<sup>269</sup> I propose that the

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<sup>265</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France*, 2 vols (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1795), I:2-3.

<sup>266</sup> On Shakespearean allusions in literature of the 1790s see Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism, 1730-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

<sup>267</sup> See Harriet Guest, *Unbounded Attachment: Sentiment and Politics in the Age of the French Revolution* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 55-63.

<sup>268</sup> See Michael Dobson, 'John Philip Kemble', in *Great Shakespeareans: Garrick, Kemble, Siddons, Kean*, ed. Peter Holland (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 74-75.

<sup>269</sup> 'Occasional Prologue', in *The European Magazine, and London Review* 25 (May 1794), 385.

extent to which this purpose is achieved in *Macbeth* is determined largely by the role played by ghosts.

Drawing on the binary function attributed to apparitions in literature of the 1790s, and interpreting Kemble's drama alongside widespread portrayals of Marie Antoinette, I make a case for reading *Macbeth* as a tragedy that communicates two contrary, yet equally monarchical meanings: dependent on their political sympathies, theatregoers are either instilled with vengeful sentiments against revolutionary France, or they are forced to consider the state of their own 'bloody hands'. My analysis centres on the depiction of the play's murderous heroine, Lady Macbeth, performed by Sarah Siddons.<sup>270</sup> I begin by exploring the degree to which Siddons's affecting portrayal of Lady Macbeth assists the production's compliance with the objectives proposed in Kemble's prefatory speech. I then suggest that it is not pity alone, but the duality of pity and terror excited by Siddons during her final scene on stage, which most forcefully dictates the drama's political meaning. I reach this conclusion by theorising that Siddons's depiction of Lady Macbeth reflects Marie Antoinette's transition in British representations from controlling monster to virtuous victim. Having united the two Queens, I reveal how Siddons's resemblance in Act V scene I to the 'frightful shape' of death enables the tragedy to function both as an incitement to England's war with revolutionary France, and as a complex psychological viewing experience, which leaves audiences as desperate as the play's heroine, to out the 'damn'd spot' of royal blood.

#### 'Beauty in Distress': Siddons's Lady Macbeth as an Afflicted and Sentimental Queen

Revered tragic actress Sarah Siddons was renowned throughout her career for her prowess in eliciting pity and compassion from her audiences. In 1784, Siddons's Irish admirer

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<sup>270</sup> The life and career of Sarah Siddons has received considerable attention from both theatre and art historians. The second half of this chapter engages with the numerous studies focused on the connection between Siddons's private and public image, and her careful negotiation of the period's gender expectations.

Thomas Young produced a poem lauding the actress's ability to make 'globul'd drops o'er fairest faces roll'.<sup>271</sup> Three years later, J. Boyne produced the image *For the Benefit of Mrs Siddons* (1787), which shows six weeping audience members left visibly distraught after witnessing a performance in which the actress had starred [Fig.3].<sup>272</sup> Given her fame for exciting pity, theatre critics cautioned that Siddons's affecting portrayals of infamous characters could misdirect audiences' sympathies. In 1796, a journalist writing for *Bell's Weekly Messenger* warned of the potentially nefarious effect of allowing Siddons to transfer 'all her interesting powers' in support of a 'dramatic monster'. When Siddons plays a criminal, suggests the journalist, audiences are encouraged to sympathise with the villainess, and are consequently made to decide that 'in the same situation, they would have gone and done likewise'.<sup>273</sup> The following decade Elizabeth Inchbald expressed similar anxieties concerning Siddons's presentation of morally questionable characters. On Siddons's role as the avaricious Mrs Beverley in Edward Moore's *The Gamester* (1753), Inchbald remarked that,

An auditor, deluded into pitying the inimitable acting of a Mrs Siddons [...], weeps with her, [...] and conceives [her] to be a most amiable, though unfortunate [woman]. But a reader, blurred with the common reflection which reading should give, calls [...] the wife a very imprudent woman.<sup>274</sup>

As both the journalist and Inchbald suggest, the emotive power of Siddons's acting was such that she was capable of inspiring sympathy for characters that ought to have been

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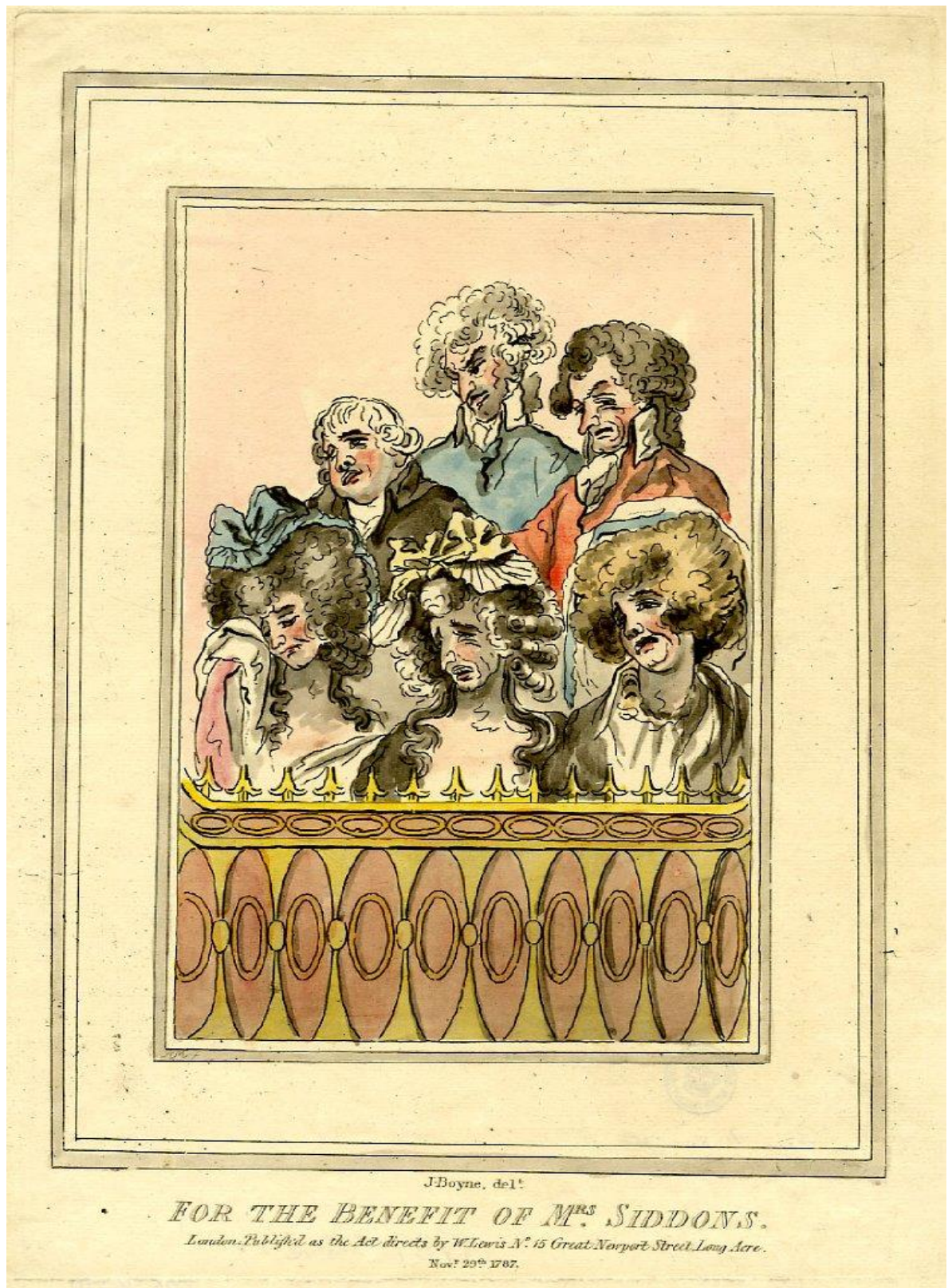
<sup>271</sup> Thomas Young, *The Siddoniad: a characteristical and critical poem* (Dublin: R. Marchbank, 1784), 16.

<sup>272</sup> See also John O'Keefe's humorous 'Account of Mrs Siddons first reception in Dublin', in *Edwin's Pills to purge Melancholy: containing all the songs sung by Mr. Edwin, Of Covent-Garden Theatre*, second ed. (London: William Holland, 1788), v-vi.

<sup>273</sup> *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 4 December 1796.

<sup>274</sup> Elizabeth Inchbald, 'Remarks' on Edward Moore's *The Gamester* (1753), in *The British Theatre; or a Collection of Plays*, 25 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808), IX:3-4.

Fig.3: J. Boyne, *For the Benefit of Mrs Siddons* (1787). © Trustees of the British Museum. Reproduced under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license.



perceived with abhorrence. Her capacity for redeeming even the most villainous characters was confirmed in a review of one of her early performances in London of Lady Macbeth. Before Siddons had adopted the role, Lady Macbeth had been performed in the capital by the successful tragedienne Hannah Pritchard. Pritchard had excited nothing other than animosity for Shakespeare's murderous Queen, playing her throughout as a 'kind of angry Hecate'.<sup>275</sup> In 1785, however, the *Morning Chronicle* recorded Siddons's departure from Pritchard's characterisation, when telling how her performance of Lady Macbeth had 'wrung the hearts of every individual in the house'.<sup>276</sup>

Given the sympathetic response that she had received as Lady Macbeth in the previous decade, Siddons's portrayal of this same character in 1794 carried with it great risk. Of all the dramatic monsters appearing on stage in the 1790s, Lady Macbeth was certainly perceived as one of the worst. Not only did her involvement in the killing of a King connect Lady Macbeth with French revolutionary politics, but so too did her status as an unsexed woman. In her first scene on stage, having decided that she must do all in her power to ensure that the witches' prophecies are fulfilled, and that her husband is crowned King, Lady Macbeth delivers a speech in which she demands, 'spirits [...] unsex me here; and fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full/ of direst cruelty!'<sup>277</sup> John Drakakis and Dale Townshend have suggested that by 1794, this speech identified Lady Macbeth explicitly with 'the revolutionary spirit', as the term 'unsexed' was frequently used to refer to women who were 'threatening to run amok in Britain in the wake of recent events in France'.<sup>278</sup> 'Unsexed' women were detested and feared by gender conservatives and political loyalists alike. Not only did they sympathise with French revolutionary politics, but they also abandoned the characteristics of their sex: making this point in his poem *The*

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<sup>275</sup> James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Siddons: Interspersed with anecdotes of Authors and Actors* (London: H.C. Carey & I. Lea, 1827), 263.

<sup>276</sup> *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 3 October 1785.

<sup>277</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I.v.16.

<sup>278</sup> John Drakakis and Dale Townshend 'Unsexing Macbeth: 1623-1800', in *Macbeth: A Critical Reader*, ed. Dale Townshend (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 200.

*Unsex'd Females* (1798), the prominent anti-Jacobin Richard Polwhele described 'unsex'd' women as 'Gallic freaks' who preach 'Gallic faith', and defy 'Nature's law' by renouncing 'their softer charms'.<sup>279</sup> Given the reputation of the 'unsex'd' woman in 1794, sympathetic identification with Siddons's character threatened to inspire both sexual and political aberration.

Despite these risks however, Siddons's performance seems to have been interpreted in agreement with the political intentions outlined in Kemble's prologue. Jonathan Bate has argued that throughout the 1790s, Siddons and 'the Shakespearean plays in which she excelled, served as guardians of the principles of patriotism and monarchy'.<sup>280</sup> Evidence exists to suggest that *Macbeth* was no exception. Siddons's rendition of Lady Macbeth was praised by staunch anti-revolutionary theatregoers including Edmund Burke and Edward Gibbon; it was a lasting favourite with members of the Royal family, and it was unanimously acclaimed in pro-government British newspapers.<sup>281</sup> It seems reasonable to assume therefore that Siddons's performance was perceived less as an incitement to political and sexual rebellion, than it was, to quote Bate, as a 'bulwark against the French Revolution'.<sup>282</sup>

One explanation for these optimistic responses relates to Siddons's creation of two contrasting personas for Lady Macbeth. Laura Rosenthal has suggested that 'in one role,

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<sup>279</sup> Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females: A Poem, addressed to the author of The Pursuits of Literature* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798), 7, 6.

<sup>280</sup> Jonathan Bate, 'Shakespeare and the Rival Muses: Siddons versus Jordan', in *Notorious Muse: The Actress in British Art and Culture, 1776-1812*, ed. Robyn Asleson (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003), 100.

<sup>281</sup> Siddons lists Burke and Gibbon among 'great men [who] would often visit my dressing room after the play to make their bows and to honour me with their applause'. Cited in Roger Manvell, *Sarah Siddons: Portrait of an Actress* (London: Heinemann, 1970), 98-99. See also Russ MacDonald, *Look to the Lady: Sarah Siddons, Ellen Terry and Judi Dench on the Shakespearean Stage* (London: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 47. The year of Siddons's London debut as Lady Macbeth, the King declared that 'I am an *Enthusiast* for her [...] there was never *any* player, in my time, so excellent'. Recorded in Francis Burney's *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay, Author of Evelina, Celia, &c.*, ed. by her niece, 7 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1854), II:337. Siddons's rendition of Lady Macbeth was later requested for performance by Princess Charlotte. See Charles F. Partington, *The British Cyclopaedia of Biography, containing the lives of distinguished men of all Ages and Countries*, 2 vols (London: W.M.S. Orr and Co., 1838), II:955. For favourable newspaper reviews see *World*, 22 April 1794, and *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, 22 April 1794.

<sup>282</sup> Bate, 'Rival Muses', 100.



[Siddons] performed both a masculine sublime subject and a feminine beautiful object'.<sup>283</sup> Rosenthal's vocabulary alludes to eighteenth-century aesthetic theories regarding the sublime and the beautiful, an examination of which casts valuable light on Siddons's contemporary reception. In his *Philosophical Enquiry* (1757), Edmund Burke famously described the sublime as that which is of 'great stature and strength', 'fierce as ten furies' and 'terrible as hell'.<sup>284</sup> The beautiful, on the other hand, was said to be 'gentle and amiable', possessing 'a delicate frame', and 'always carr[ying] with it an idea of weakness' and 'even sickness'.<sup>285</sup> Burke explains that while the sublime never 'touches us with pity', but rather 'fill[s] the mind with strong emotions of horror', 'beauty in distress' is 'most affecting'.<sup>286</sup> By reading Siddons's rendition of Lady Macbeth in the context of Burke's theory, the loyalist meaning communicated by her character starts to become clear.

Describing Siddons's Lady Macbeth in the scene in which Duncan is murdered, Siddons's biographer, James Boaden, labelled her 'a fiend-like woman', and proposed that 'a figure so terrible had never bent over the pit of a theatre'.<sup>287</sup> William Hazlitt, recalling the same scene, described Siddons's exhibition of a 'turbulent and inhuman strength of spirit'. Her 'unrelieved fierceness', he continued, yielded 'no intercourse with human sensation or human weakness. Vice was never so solitary and so grand'. She appeared like 'a being from a darker world, full of evil'.<sup>288</sup> Boaden and Hazlitt draw clear parallels between

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<sup>283</sup> Laura Rosenthal, 'The Sublime, the Beautiful, the Siddons', in *The Clothes that Wear Us*, ed. Jessica Munns and Penny Richards (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 74. On this dual persona see also Laura Engel, 'The Personating of Queens: Lady Macbeth, Sarah Siddons and the Creation of Female Celebrity in the late Eighteenth Century', in *Macbeth: New Critical Essays*, ed. Nick Moschovakis (London: Routledge, 2007), 251-2; Fiona Ritchie, *Women and Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: CUP, 2014), 120, and Frederick Burwick, 'The Ideal Shatters: Sarah Siddons, Madness, and the Dynamics of Gesture', in *Notorious Muse*, ed. Asleson, 137.

<sup>284</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1757), 163, 45.

<sup>285</sup> Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 104, 91. On eighteenth-century aesthetic theories of the sublime and the beautiful see *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Andrew Ashfield and Peter De Bolla (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 1-16.

<sup>286</sup> Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 163, 13, 91

<sup>287</sup> Boaden, *Memoirs*, 259, 258.

<sup>288</sup> William Hazlitt, cited in Marvin Rosenberg, 'Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', in *Focus on Macbeth*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 77.

Siddons's acting in this early scene of the play, and the components of the sublime, by emphasising her exhibition of 'strength', 'fierceness', and 'darkness'.

Later on in the tragedy, these sublime characteristics are seemingly relinquished. In her 'Remarks on the Character of Lady Macbeth', a study composed by Siddons after achieving notoriety in the role, Siddons explains that she had intended for the 'perfectly savage creature' presented in the opening scenes, later to appear 'fair, feminine, nay perhaps even fragile'.<sup>289</sup> From the banquet scene onwards, declares Siddons,

[Lady Macbeth] is no longer the presumptuous, the determined creature that she was before the assassination of the King. [...] Her feminine nature, her delicate structure are [...] overwhelmed by the enormous pressure of her crimes. [...] Her frailer frame and keener feelings have now sunk under the struggle.<sup>290</sup>

By referring to her 'feminine nature', 'delicate structure', and 'frailer frame', Siddons identifies Lady Macbeth with the vulnerability, weakness, and fragility associated with the beautiful. That this transition from fierce and terrifying, to 'beautiful and mournful', was observed during performance is confirmed by George Bell.<sup>291</sup> In his detailed account of Siddons's acting, thought to have been written around 1809, Bell describes how Siddons's depiction of Lady Macbeth as a 'fell monster', who exhibits 'great and imperial dignity', is subsequently supplanted by her display of 'the disappointment, the remorse, the sickness and despair of guilty ambition'.<sup>292</sup> Once she is made Queen, writes Bell, Lady Macbeth becomes 'very mournful' and 'very plaintive'.<sup>293</sup> No longer 'Loud, triumphant', and 'self-

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<sup>289</sup> Sarah Siddons, 'Remarks on the Character of Lady Macbeth', in Thomas Campbell, *Life of Mrs. Siddons*, 2 vols (London: Effingham Wilson, 1834), II:18, 11.

<sup>290</sup> Siddons, 'Remarks', 22, 33.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>292</sup> Bell's review is printed in H. C. Fleeming Jenkin's 'Mrs Siddons as Lady Macbeth and as Queen Katherine' (1878), in *Papers on Acting*, intro. and ed. Brander Matthews (New York: Hill & Wang, 1958), 81, 87, 79.

<sup>293</sup> Jenkin, 'Mrs Siddons', 91.

collected', she 'speaks sweetly to [her] company' while 'secret agony' agitates 'her whole frame'.<sup>294</sup> Bell's employment of the vocabulary of sweetness, weakness and distress attests to Lady Macbeth's discernible conversion from sublime to beautiful, and goes some way towards explaining the political meaning communicated by her character.

Laura Engel has highlighted that it is only once 'Lady Macbeth becomes the legitimate Queen' that 'her persona undergoes' its 'significant transformation'.<sup>295</sup> By rendering the royal Lady Macbeth beautiful, in Burkean terms, Siddons potentially manages to elicit a very different response for the tragedy's Queen than she had done for the 'unsexed' regicide. Reserving her exhibition of beauty until the later scenes, Siddons ensures that while audiences fear the sublime murderess, they pity the suffering Queen. Interpreted this way, *Macbeth* can be viewed as a play which adheres entirely to the tragic model of drama eulogised in Burke's *Reflections* (1790). Burke considered the theatre to be 'a better school for moral sentiments than churches', as it could teach audiences how to respond correctly to monarchical anguish.<sup>296</sup> Justifying this homage in *Reflections*, Burke attributes the tears that were 'drawn from [him]' when he heard of the attack on Marie Antoinette, to the 'tears that [...] Siddons' had 'extorted from [him]' in the theatre.<sup>297</sup> Throughout her career, Siddons depicted numerous Queens on stage.<sup>298</sup> As Christopher Reid has shown, late eighteenth-century tragedies regularly positioned the monarchy as 'the principal object' of the audience's pity, by representing the Queen as an 'image of suffering female virtue'.<sup>299</sup> Burke believed that the sympathies Siddons aroused for these distressed fictional Queens could serve an active purpose outside of the theatre. He argued in his *Philosophical*

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 83, 93, 92.

<sup>295</sup> Laura Engel, *Fashioning Celebrity: Eighteenth-Century British Actresses and Strategies for Image Making* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2011), 46.

<sup>296</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: J. Dodsley, 1790), 120. On this subject see Christopher Reid, 'Burke's Tragic Muse: Sarah Siddons and the "Feminization" of the *Reflections*', in *Burke and the French Revolution: Bicentennial Essays*, ed. Steven Blakemore (USA: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 1-27, and Elizabeth Samet, 'Spectacular History and the Politics of Theatre: Sympathetic Arts in the Shadow of the Bastille', *PMLA*, vol.118, no.5 (October 2003), 1305-1319.

<sup>297</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, 120.

<sup>298</sup> Queens depicted by Siddons include Elizabeth in *Richard III*, Katherine in *Henry VIII*, Gertrude in *Hamlet*, and Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*.

<sup>299</sup> Reid, 'Burke's Tragic Muse', 3.

*Enquiry* that ‘the pain [audiences] feel’ when witnessing ‘scenes of misery’, ‘prompts [them] to relieve [them]selves in relieving those who suffer’.<sup>300</sup> Essentially, if audiences are made to weep for a Queen on stage, they will feel impelled to prevent royal suffering in real life. According to this theory, by withholding her affecting portrayal of Lady Macbeth until her husband is made King, Siddons ensures that audiences’ leave the theatre not sympathising with the sublime and inhumane regicide, but equipped with the desire to assuage the anguish of an afflicted and beautiful Queen.

Thus far I have proposed that it is Siddons’s pity-inspiring abilities alone which nullify *Macbeth*’s politically subversive potential. This reading is complicated, however, by reviews of Siddons’s acting in the sleepwalking scene (Act V scene I), which deny her simple transition from sublime to beautiful. In his *Memoirs*, Boaden employs the phrase ‘lovelily dreadful’ to describe Siddons’s presence in Act V scene I.<sup>301</sup> His description epitomises the ambivalence of beauty and sublimity that Siddons was seen to embody in her final scene on stage. As I discuss in more detail later, evidence exists to suggest that Siddons maintained to the end of her performance some of the fear-inducing qualities that she presented early on. The most dramatic reports of the terror inspired by Siddons while sleepwalking are offered by the playwright and actor James Sheridan Knowles. Writing of the effects of the scene in his *Lectures on Dramatic Literature*, Knowles tells how,

Though pit, gallery and boxes were crowded to suffocation, the chill of the grave seemed about you when you looked on her; – there was the hush and damp of the charnel house at midnight; [...] your flesh crept and your breathing became uneasy.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 25.

<sup>301</sup> Boaden, *Memoirs*, 263.

<sup>302</sup> James Sheridan Knowles, *Lectures on Dramatic Literature: Macbeth* (London: Francis Harvey, 1875), 21-22.

In a subsequent conversation with American tragedian Edwin Forrest, when asked to describe ‘in a plain blunt phrase’ the impression that Siddons produced on him in the scene, ‘Knowles replied, with a sort of shudder [...] “Well Sir, I smelt blood! I swear I smelt blood!”’<sup>303</sup> Knowles’s reaction suggests that it was not simply a virtuous and enervated Queen that was exhibited by Siddons in the closing half of the play, but something far more frightening.<sup>304</sup>

In her essay on Siddons’s reinvention of Lady Macbeth, Heather McPherson suggests that Siddons transforms Shakespeare’s heroine throughout the tragedy ‘from a bloodthirsty virago’, into an ‘almost supernatural being’.<sup>305</sup> This suggested affiliation between Lady Macbeth and the supernatural crucially informs my interpretation of the play. It is this, I argue, that enables Siddons’s agitation of both pity and terror in Act V scene I, and furnishes the tragedy with its most forcefully transmitted anti-revolutionary meaning. I theorise that Siddons was recognised in the sleepwalking scene not simply as a suffering and fictional Queen, but as the ghost of the recently deceased Marie Antoinette. To elucidate this reading, I begin by tracing the numerous parallels drawn between Siddons’s Lady Macbeth, and representations of Marie Antoinette produced in and around the revolutionary years.

#### ‘A Woman who becomes Queen changes her Sex’: Two Unsexed Queens

While Drakakis and Townshend are certainly justified in arguing that Lady Macbeth’s ‘unsex me’ speech strongly identifies her with the revolutionary women provoking chaos in France, there is perhaps an alternative ‘Gallic freak’ with whom Lady Macbeth’s character resonates. In his anti-Jacobin poem *The Pursuits of Literature* (1797), Thomas

<sup>303</sup> James Sheridan Knowles, quoted in Dennis Bartholomeuz, *Macbeth and the Players* (Cambridge: CUP, 1978), 121.

<sup>304</sup> Further evidence that Siddons excited both pity and terror in this scene is provided in Heather McPherson’s ‘Tragic Pallor and Siddons’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol.48, no.4 (Summer 2015), 494.

<sup>305</sup> Heather McPherson, ‘Masculinity, Femininity, and the Tragic Sublime: Reinventing Lady Macbeth’, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol.29 (2000), 303.

James Mathias defined ‘unsexed female[s]’ as women who ‘instruct or confuse us and themselves in the labyrinth of politics’.<sup>306</sup> As the definition reveals, it was women’s invasion of the public sphere, as much so as political creed, which classified them as ‘unsexed’. Consequently, it was not only political radicals who were at risk of being branded with the title. Lynn Hunt has shown that during the Ancien Regime there existed a ‘fundamental anxiety about Queenship as the most extreme form of woman’s invading the public sphere’.<sup>307</sup> Given the anxieties surrounding queenly power, it is unsurprising to observe, as Adriana Craciun does, that in misogynistic accounts of her character, ‘Marie Antoinette was unsexed’.<sup>308</sup> In one such account, published in 1792, French radical Louise de Keralio drew on Marie Antoinette’s involvement in governmental affairs in order to corroborate her accusation that ‘a woman who becomes Queen changes her sex’.<sup>309</sup> Keralio forms an explicit connection between Marie Antoinette and Lady Macbeth: like her fictional counterpart, the French Queen is shown to have renounced the biological features of her sex, by stepping too far into the ‘labyrinth of politics’.

As Craciun explains, from the 1780s through to the King’s execution, Marie Antoinette ‘was the most notable femme fatale of the period’.<sup>310</sup> Her vilification took many forms. As well as accusing her of incest, lesbianism, and of possessing a voracious sexual appetite, misogynistic literature published in France and Britain also aligned Marie Antoinette with past rulers who, like Shakespeare’s heroine, committed murder to secure power.<sup>311</sup> Among

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<sup>306</sup> T.J. Mathias, *The Pursuits of Literature: a satirical poem in dialogue. With notes. Part the fourth and last* (London: T. Becket, 1797), ii.

<sup>307</sup> Lynn Hunt, ‘The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution’, in *Marie Antoinette: Writings on the Body of the Queen*, ed. Dena Goodman (New York: Routledge, 2003), 123.

<sup>308</sup> Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 10.

<sup>309</sup> Louise de Keralio, *Les Crimes constitutionneels de France, ou la desolation fraicaise, decretee par l’assemblee dire Nationale Constitutante, aux annees 1789, 1790, et 1791* (1792), trans. and cited in Hunt, ‘Many Bodies’, 131.

<sup>310</sup> Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 78.

<sup>311</sup> On derisive and pornographic presentations of Marie Antoinette see Katherine Binhammer, ‘Marie Antoinette was “One of Us”’: British accounts of the Martyred Wicked Queen’, *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, vol.44 (2003), 233-256; Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 220-226; Chantal Thomas, *The Wicked Queen: The Origins of the Myth of Marie Antoinette*, trans. Julie Rose (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 105-136, and Hunt, ‘Many Bodies’, 117-136.

the derogatory names associated with Marie Antoinette were Frédégonde, former Queen of Austria, who had come to rule through murder; Semiramis, Queen of Babylon, who used a combination of sexual enticement and, again, murder, to achieve her position of authority; and Agrippina, Roman Empress who murdered her husband so that her son could become emperor.<sup>312</sup> Not only was she portrayed as a murderess, but Marie Antoinette was also shown to embody the same demonic characteristics presented by Siddons in the opening half of *Macbeth*. In 1790 Joseph Priestley told how the French had ‘discovered [her] snaky hair’ and found ‘her to be a mere Medusa’, and British journalists frequently compared Marie Antoinette to a vampire, describing her as ‘the scourge and bloodsucker of the French’.<sup>313</sup> Like Siddons’s heroine then, Marie Antoinette was similarly presented as a ‘fiend-like’ woman, who belongs to a ‘darker world, full of evil’.<sup>314</sup>

Marie Antoinette’s character was rehabilitated in Britain following the death of Louis XVI and the Queen’s own imprisonment and execution.<sup>315</sup> When the revolution turned bloody, British loyalists sought to emphasise the barbarity of French radicalism, by enhancing the virtue and innocence of its victims. Thus it was that formerly derisive portrayals of Marie Antoinette had to be ameliorated. Commenting on Marie Antoinette’s exoneration in British literature, Craciun observes that the French Queen went from embodying ‘the worst excesses of the Ancien Regime’ to personifying ‘the best virtues of the new bourgeois moral order’.<sup>316</sup> Katherine Binhammer similarly shows how British ‘commentators evoked sympathy’ for Marie Antoinette after 1793, by transforming her from a ‘political abomination who was the corrupt head of an oppressive political state’, into a symbol of

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<sup>312</sup> See Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 79, and Hunt, ‘Many Bodies’, 117-138.

<sup>313</sup> Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, occasioned by his Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Dublin: J. Shepherd, 1791), 16; see ‘Trial of Marie Antoinette, Queen of France’, in *The Scots Magazine* 55 (November 1793), 521; ‘Trial of the late Queen of France. The Act of Accusation presented against Marie Antoinette of Austria’, in *Walker’s Hibernian Magazine; or Compendium of Entertaining Knowledge* (November 1793), 460, and ‘Authentic trial at large of Marie Antoinette’, in *The Weekly Entertainer* 22 (2 December 1793), 543. These accounts also demonstrate the comparisons made between Marie Antoinette and Messaline, Brunehaut, Frédégonde, and Medicis.

<sup>314</sup> Hazlitt, in Rosenburg, ‘Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’, 77.

<sup>315</sup> However, echoes of the criticisms levelled against her lived on in works including Wollstonecraft’s *Historical and Moral View*.

<sup>316</sup> Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 81.

‘victimised womanhood’.<sup>317</sup> The parallels created between the French Queen and Siddons’s Lady Macbeth are consequently enhanced, as both women are converted from power hungry and sublime, to feminine and beautiful.

In Kemble’s 1794 production, a stark visual resemblance between Marie Antoinette and Lady Macbeth was provoked by use of costume. Commenting on the new clothing worn by Siddons in Act V scene I, Boaden described Siddons as being wrapped in a ‘quantity of white drapery’.<sup>318</sup> The costume is captured in images by George Henry Harlow [Fig.4], and Richard Westall [Fig.5], both of which show the sleepwalking Siddons enveloped from head to foot in a flowing and loose fitting white gown and veil. Popular images recounting Marie Antoinette’s captivity and trial show the Queen to be dressed in almost identical clothing. Robert Sayer’s *The Death of Marie Antoinette Queen of France and Navarre* (1794) [Fig.6], William Hamilton’s *Marie-Antoinette conduit a son execution* (1794) [Fig.7] and Domenico Pellegrini’s engraving of Mariano Bovi’s *The Trial of Marie Antoinette Queen of France* (1796) [Fig.8] all show Marie Antoinette dressed in white robes interchangeable with those presented by Harlow and Westall.<sup>319</sup>

The veil worn by Siddons accentuated her visible likeness to Marie Antoinette. Not only was the French Queen often depicted wearing a veil in images of her trial (as in Bovi’s engraving), the veil also served to hide Siddons’s long dark hair, and gave the illusion of a pure white mane. The whitening of Marie Antoinette’s hair, believed to have been brought on by the stress of the revolution, was widely commented on in sympathetic accounts of her character. In her *Monody to the Memory of the Late Queen of France* (1793), Mary Robinson described the Queen’s ‘fair tresses’ as ‘silv’ry waves that mock the Alpine snow’, and in a song delivered by actress and vocalist Anna Maria Crouch at the Covent

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<sup>317</sup> Binhammer, ‘Marie Antoinette was “One of Us”’, 234.

<sup>318</sup> Boaden, *Memoirs*, 263.

<sup>319</sup> Guest discusses the iconography used in these images in *Unbounded Attachment*. See 57-60.



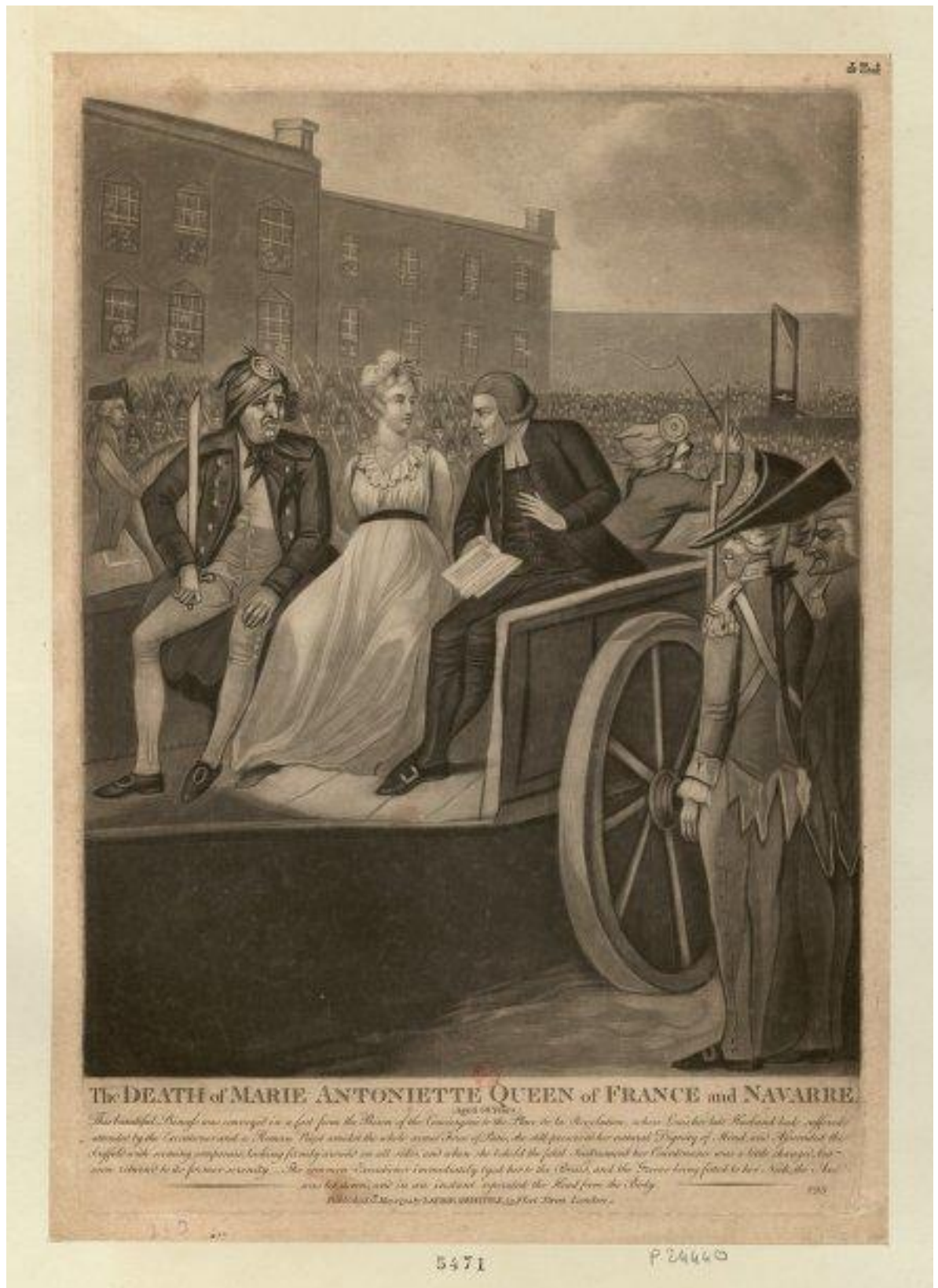
**Fig.4:** George Henry Harlow, *Mrs Siddons as Lady Macbeth, sleepwalking scene, Act V, from Macbeth by Shakespeare* (1814). Courtesy of the Garrick Club, London.



Fig.5: Richard Westall, *Macbeth, act 5, scene 1, Lady Macbeth sleepwalking* (1797). © Folger Shakespeare Library.



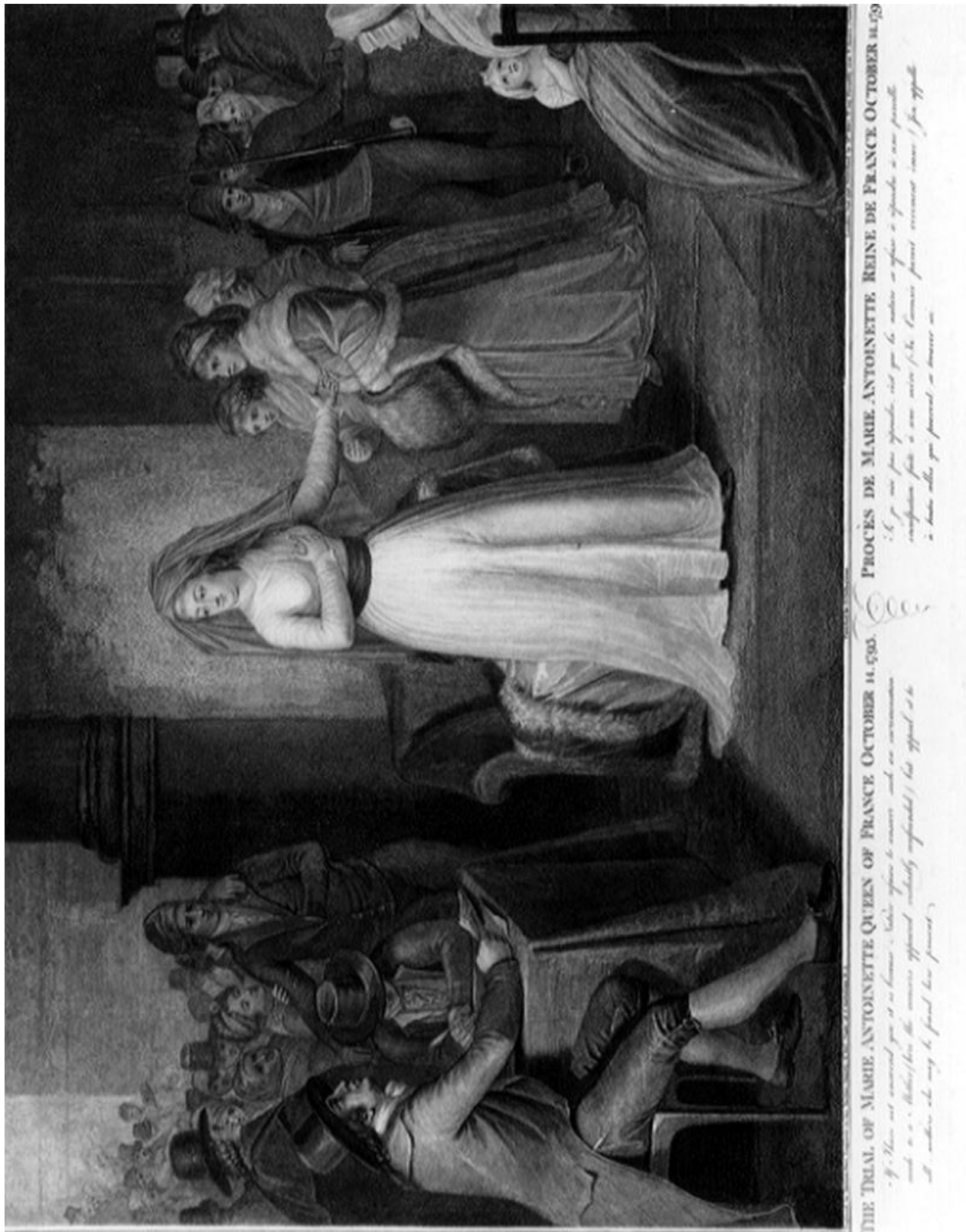
**Fig.6: Robert Sayer, *Death of Marie Antoinette Queen of France and Navarre (1794)*. French Revolution Digital Archive. <<http://purl.stanford.edu/qm057nd2026>> [accessed 12 March 2015].**



**Fig.7: William Hamilton, *Marie-Antoinette conduit a son execution, 16 Octobre 1793 (1794)*.  
© Coll. Musee de la Revolution Francaise/Domaine de Vizille.**



**Fig.8: Mariano Bovi, engraving after Domenico Pellegrini, *The Trial of Marie Antoinette Queen of France October 14, 1793/Proces de Marie Antoinette Reine de France October 14, 1793* (1796). French Revolution Digital Archive. <<http://purl.stanford.edu/wy288rs0618>> [accessed 11 March 2015].**



Garden theatre in 1793, attention was again drawn to the way in which ‘grief has changed [the Queen’s] flowing hair’.<sup>320</sup>

Siddons’s appearance certainly causes the nexus between Lady Macbeth and Marie Antoinette to become most overt in Act V scene I, and, as I reveal later, it is this point in the play which I consider to be of superlative significance to the tragedy’s political meaning. Before focusing on the sleepwalking scene however, it is necessary to elaborate on the multiple traits shared by the two figures right from the tragedy’s outset. While the Lady Macbeth performed at the start of the play exhibits dissimulation and ascendancy over her husband – two flaws for which Marie Antoinette was often condemned – in the subsequent scenes, Lady Macbeth acquires a strong resemblance to post-1793 depictions of the French Queen, as she is presented as a figure of wifely and pious devotion, who is physically and mentally debilitated by grief.

#### ‘The Penitential Sigh’: Reforming the Villainous Queens

During her reign as Queen, Marie Antoinette acquired a reputation for deceit. In her *Historical and Moral View*, Wollstonecraft, an exception to the rule in that she continued to vilify Marie Antoinette’s character beyond 1793, expressed the opinion that the French Queen ‘smiled but to deceive’, and that ‘her compliments were so artfully adapted to flatter the person she wishes to please or dupe’.<sup>321</sup> Later, the *Monthly Museum* recalled how Marie Antoinette was always concealing her feelings ‘under the mask of distant politeness’, and has therefore ‘been accused, and perhaps not unjustly, of dissimulation’.<sup>322</sup>

These same deceptive tendencies are presented by Lady Macbeth in Kemble’s 1794

<sup>320</sup> Mary Robinson, *Monody to the Memory of the Late Queen of France* (London: T. Spilsbury, 1793), 9; ‘Captivity: Supposed to be sung by the Unfortunate Marie Antoinette during her Imprisonment in the Temple’, in *The Hampshire Syren: or Songster’s Miscellany* (Southampton: T. Skelton, 1794), 121. On the Queen’s hair see Amy Garnai, “‘One Victim from the Last Despair’: Mary Robinson’s Marie Antoinette”, *Women’s Writing*, vol.12, no.3 (2005), 391, and Judith Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry and Spectatorship* (New York: Cornell, 1997), 106.

<sup>321</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Historical and Moral View*, 131, 134. On Wollstonecraft’s criticisms of Marie Antoinette’s theatricality see Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality*, 102.

<sup>322</sup> *Monthly Museum: or Dublin Literary Repertory of Arts, Science, Literature and Miscellaneous Information* 1 (March 1814), 232.

production. In Act I scene V of the play, Siddons's character proves herself to be skilled in the art of deception, when teaching her husband how to mislead his subjects. Insistent that Macbeth's 'false face must hide what the false heart doth know', Lady Macbeth tells her husband to 'bear welcome in your eye,/ your hand, your tongue', and 'look like the innocent flower/ but be the serpent under it'.<sup>323</sup> Putting her own teaching into practice, Lady Macbeth fools King Duncan into believing that she is a 'fair and noble hostess', when she has in fact invited him to her home with the sole purpose of having him killed.<sup>324</sup> In 1833 the theatre commentator Anna Jameson suggested that Siddons had emphasised Lady Macbeth's deceptive qualities through the deliverance of her speech. Recalling 'the look[s]' and 'the tone[s]' conveyed by 'Siddons in her glory', Jameson tells how,

Her compliments when she is playing the hostess or the Queen are elaborately elegant and verbose: but when in earnest, she speaks in short, energetic sentences, sometimes abrupt, but always full of meaning; her thoughts are rapid and clear, her expressions forcible.<sup>325</sup>

Jameson implies that by modifying her manner of speech, Siddons conveyed a discrepancy between Lady Macbeth's public and private personas, and thereby foregrounded her character's artfulness.

As well as sharing the trait of dissimulation, Marie Antoinette and Lady Macbeth are both portrayed as the driving forces behind their husband's actions. It was commonly suggested that Marie Antoinette held considerable influence over the King's decisions, and was culpable for many of his mistakes. In the summer of 1788, the *Times* blamed Marie Antoinette for her country's political ailments, when stating that everything had 'been

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<sup>323</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I.vii.21; I.v.17.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, I.vi.18.

<sup>325</sup> Anna Jameson, *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical and Historical* (1833), ed. Cheri L. Larsen Hoeckley (Plymouth: Broadview Press, 2005), 369, 362, 374.

going on quietly in France until her majesty thought proper to advise [the King], and from advising to request, and from requesting to direct'.<sup>326</sup> The paper later adjudged that too many of Louis's political manoeuvres had been 'forced by the Queen's instigation', and expressed the consequent concern that the French King had become victim to the 'great ascendancy of the Queen'.<sup>327</sup>

Siddons's commanding portrayal of Lady Macbeth resonates with this depiction of Marie Antoinette as the manipulator of her husband's wrongdoing. Numerous reviewers note the dominion that Siddons's character exercised over Macbeth in the scene preceding Duncan's murder. Boaden describes how 'she assails [Macbeth] with sophistry and contempt and female resolution, seemingly superior to all manly daring', and Knowles correspondingly remarks that 'she reproves her vacillating husband and absolutely shames him into resolution'.<sup>328</sup> An equal degree of authority over her husband is displayed by Siddons in the murder's aftermath. Commenting on the moment at which Macbeth refuses to return the bloody daggers to the chamber in which Duncan lies dead, Bell writes that Siddons seizes 'the daggers very contemptuously [...] turns towards [Macbeth] stooping, and with the finger pointed to him with malignant energy [...] strikes him on the shoulder, pulls him from his fixed posture', and 'forces him away'.<sup>329</sup> Bell's description is visually represented in Henry Fuseli's painting *Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers* (1812) [Fig.9]. Created the year that Siddons played Lady Macbeth at her farewell performance in London, Fuseli depicts Shakespeare's heroine ominously lunging towards her vulnerable looking husband, while he fearfully backs into the corner of the stage. Bell and Fuseli show Siddons's character to hold both mental and physical authority over her husband: not only was she able mentally to manipulate Macbeth into killing Duncan, she now physically dictates his movements, by driving him off the stage.

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<sup>326</sup> *Times*, 30 June 1788.

<sup>327</sup> *Times*, 30 August 1788; *Times*, 1 September 1788.

<sup>328</sup> Boaden, *Memoirs*, 258; Knowles, *Lectures*, 20.

<sup>329</sup> Jenkin, 'Mrs Siddons', 90-91.



**Fig.9:** Henry Fuseli, *Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers* (1812). © Tate, London.



While Lady Macbeth and Marie Antoinette are initially connected by their flaws, the characters of both women are subsequently redeemed. In British portraits of the Queen presented after Louis's death, emphasis shifted onto Marie Antoinette's familial sentiments. Numerous images of the King's separation from his family were published in Britain in and following 1793, each of which illuminated the Queen's spousal tenderness. In Isaac Cruikshank's *The Last Interview between Louis XVI, King of France, and his Family* (1793) [Fig.10], Marie Antoinette is so upset by her husband's departure that she cannot even bring herself to look at him. Rather, she sits in the corner of the picture dressed in mourning garb, weeping with her head in her hands. A similar scene is recorded in Mather Brown's *The Final Interview of Louis the Sixteenth with his Family* (1795) [Fig.11]. Marie Antoinette leans in towards her husband, offering a dramatic display of anguish, by tearing at her hair, and waving her free arm up towards the sky, as if protesting to God for help. Literary representations also stressed the Queen's familial affections. In *Monody* Robinson tells how the Queen's 'domestic virtues' could be seen 'glitt'ring round the throne'.<sup>330</sup> A year later, in John Bartholomew's tragedy *The Fall of the French Monarchy* (1794), the character of Marie Antoinette indicates her 'domestic turn' by declaring it her ambition to 'soothe and solace her lov'd King', before suffering from a 'broken heart' which 'melts [her] soul', when she is informed of her husband's imprisonment.<sup>331</sup>

These same spousal sentiments are exhibited by Siddons in the latter half of *Macbeth*. While Pritchard's Lady Macbeth had consistently displayed 'indignation, and contempt' for her husband, by directing 'reproving and angry looks' towards him from start to finish of the play, Siddons perceived the dynamic between the two characters to alter after

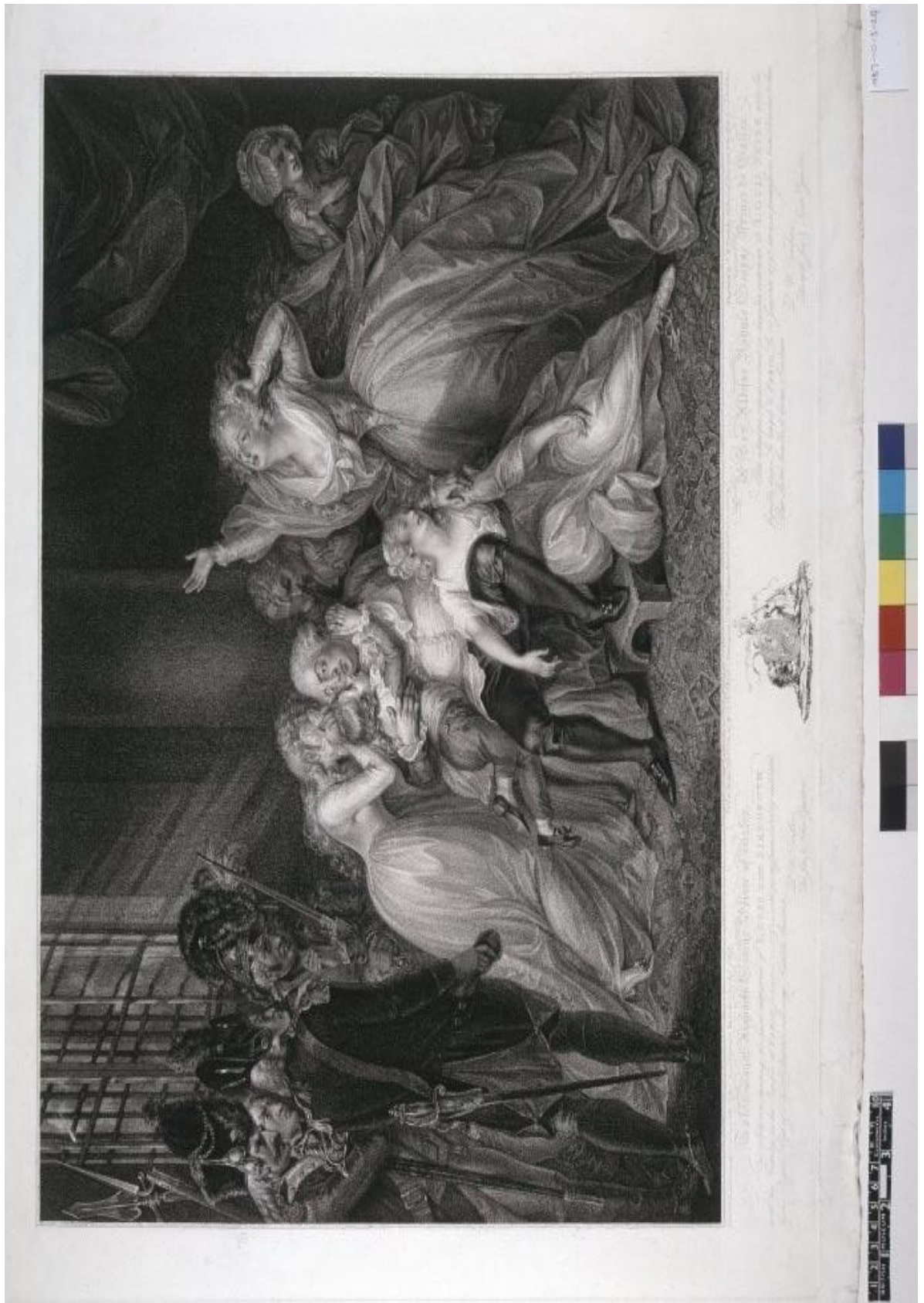
<sup>330</sup> Robinson, *Monody*, 5. On the Queen's domesticity in this poem see Garnai, "'One Victim'", 388-394, and Guest, *Unbounded Attachment*, 55-56.

<sup>331</sup> John Bartholomew, *The Fall of the French Monarchy; or, Louis XVI. An historical tragedy. In five acts.* (London: E. Harlow and W. Richardson, 1794), I.iii.9; II.ii.27; IV.v.76.

**Fig.10: Isaac Cruikshank, *The Last Interview between Louis XVI, King of France, and his Family* (1793). © Trustees of the British Museum. Reproduced under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license.**



**Fig.11: Mather Brown, *The Final Interview of Louis the Sixteenth with his Family* (1795).  
© Trustees of the British Museum. Reproduced under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license.**



Duncan's death.<sup>332</sup> She writes in her 'Remarks' that while the Lady Macbeth of the early scenes 'appears to have known no tenderness' for her husband, she later 'devotes herself entirely to the effort of supporting him'.<sup>333</sup> Commenting on Lady Macbeth's show of domesticity during the banquet scene, Siddons explains,

On the approach of her husband, we behold for the first time striking indications of sensibility, nay tenderness and sympathy [...]. She knows [...] the torment which [Macbeth] undergoes and endeavours to alleviate his sufferings [...]. You perceive that she now listens to his complaints with sympathising feelings.<sup>334</sup>

In accordance with the dramatic intentions outlined in 'Remarks', Bell notes of the banquet scene that in the place of Lady Macbeth's former ambition, it is now 'intense love of her husband' which 'animate[s] every word'. Her 'contemptuous reproach' gives way to 'sorrow and sympathy with [Macbeth's] melancholy', and when her husband is startled by the hallucination of Banquo's ghost, she 'comes up to him and catches his hand'.<sup>335</sup>

Likened further to British portrayals of Marie Antoinette, Siddons's character is comparably transformed from a powerful villainess, who dictates her husband's actions using 'the force of her revilings' and 'contemptuous taunts', into a sentimental and devoted wife, who grants her husband 'delicate and unremitting attention'.<sup>336</sup>

Depictions of Marie Antoinette as a devoted and domestic wife were accompanied from 1793 by accounts of the Queen's imprisonment, which showed the extremity of her grief to have resulted in physical and mental affliction. The song 'Captivity', delivered by Crouch at Covent Garden, and the rival performance given by Master Walsh at Haymarket, both

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<sup>332</sup> Thomas Davies, *Dramatic Miscellanies: consisting of critical observations on several plays by Shakespeare*, 3 vols (Dublin: S. Price et al., 1784), II:106, 105.

<sup>333</sup> Siddons, 'Remarks', 34, 24.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>335</sup> Jenkin, 'Mrs Siddons', 91, 93.

<sup>336</sup> Siddons, 'Remarks', 17, 24.

present Marie Antoinette as a ‘victim of anguish and despair’, who conveys a ‘haggard face’, ‘wan [and] wasted cheek’, and ‘fever’d brain’.<sup>337</sup> In a poem printed in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* titled ‘Stanzas supposed to be written whilst the late Queen of France was sleeping’ (1793), Marie Antoinette is similarly described as a ‘wither’d beauty’ with a ‘faded face’ consumed with ‘wayward madness’.<sup>338</sup> The songs and the poem show Marie Antoinette’s mental anguish to manifest itself in ghostly hallucinations, which plague her most severely at night.<sup>339</sup> Crouch’s Marie Antoinette exclaims,

Oft’ in the dread of silent night  
I start with frantic wild affright,  
whilst ghastly shapes appal my sight.  
[...] Then fancy paints my murder’d Lord  
I see th’assassin’s blood stain’d sword.<sup>340</sup>

In ‘Stanzas’, ‘grief’s haggard phantoms’ are again shown to ‘haunt the midnight calm’. The author declares that not even ‘sleep’s oblivious balm stills the sick pulse’, or fills ‘the cheek with health’s rekindling rays’, as the sleeping Queen is struck with ‘wild affright’ by the sight of her ‘headless husband, spouting gore’.<sup>341</sup>

The ‘ghastly shapes’ and ‘haggard phantoms’ described in the verses can be aligned with those presented in Wollstonecraft’s letter to Johnson. As indicated in the *Times*, many shared the opinion, later expressed by Wollstonecraft, that ‘had the hapless Louis

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<sup>337</sup> ‘Captivity’, in *The Hampshire Syren*, 121; ‘The Captive: Sung by Master Walsh, at the Oratorios King’s Theatre Haymarket: Said to be Written by Marie Antoinette’, in *The Scots Magazine* 55 (February 1793), 89. Both songs are discussed in Guest’s *Unbounded Attachment*. See 56.

<sup>338</sup> ‘Stanzas supposed to be written whilst the late Queen of France was sleeping’, in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* 74 (October 1793), 941. Similar portraits of the Queen are offered in Anna Maria Jones’s ‘Marie Antoinette’s Complaint in Prison’, in *The Poems of Anna Maria* (Calcutta: Thomas and Ferris, 1793), 49-52; Ann Yearsley’s *An Elegy on Marie Antoinette of Austria* (Bristol: J. Rudhall, 1796); William Thomas Fitzgerald’s *The Tribute of an humble Muse to an Unfortunate Captive Queen, the widowed mourner of a Murdered King* (London: Hookham and Carpenter, 1793), and Singor Buonaiuti’s *Lamentation of Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, A Cantata* (London: John Sivrac, 1794).

<sup>339</sup> This is also the case in Jones’s and Yearsley’s poems, cited above.

<sup>340</sup> ‘Captivity’, 122.

<sup>341</sup> ‘Stanzas’, 941.

possessed any decision of character’, and not allowed his wife to acquire such ‘unbounded sway’ over his mind, he ‘might have saved his life by regulating his future politics’.<sup>342</sup> The verses acknowledge these criticisms, by employing *Macbeth*-type ghosts: Marie Antoinette is confronted by the vision of her ‘murder’d lord’ as she is tormented with guilt for the indirect role she has played in provoking her husband’s death. Unlike Wollstonecraft however, the verses seek not to create animosity for the Queen, but to elicit compassion for her, by emphasising her repentance, piety and acute sensibility. Crouch’s Queen heaves ‘the penitential sigh’ as tears fall from her ‘streaming eye’, and her ‘suppliant hands’ are ‘to Heav’n [...] spread’.<sup>343</sup> Likewise, in ‘Stanzas’, Marie Antoinette’s heart ‘throbs with cureless woe’, she conveys ‘bitter streams of agony’, and she too prays to ‘thy sainted Lord’ that she might soon see ‘th’angelic train of light’, and hear the ‘heav’nly harmonies’ that will lead her to ‘happier slumbers’.<sup>344</sup> By offering these sentimental depictions of the Queen’s suffering and contrition, the verses exonerate Marie Antoinette from her past failings, and leave audiences and readers lamenting her deterioration into sickness and madness.

These moving portraits of a devout, mad, and ailing Queen, tortured by phantoms during the night, correspond strikingly with Siddons’s performance of Lady Macbeth sleepwalking. Indicative of Siddons’s replication of the piety bestowed on Marie Antoinette in the contemporary songs and poems, Harlow’s painting shows Lady Macbeth standing with her hands clasped together and her eyes raised upwards as if in prayer [Fig.4].<sup>345</sup> Moreover, Siddons’s display of physical and mental pathology is noted by Bell, who describes her as appearing ‘feeble now’, as if ‘preparing for her last sickness and final doom’. He then recalls her enactment of a ‘convulsive shudder’, and notes that ‘a tone of

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<sup>342</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Historical and Moral View*, 135.

<sup>343</sup> ‘Captivity’, 122.

<sup>344</sup> ‘Stanzas’, 941.

<sup>345</sup> On this image’s ‘iconography of Christian martyrdom’ see Guest, *Unbounded Attachment*, 57.

imbecility' was 'audible in the sigh'.<sup>346</sup> The resemblance between Lady Macbeth and the captive Marie Antoinette is demonstrated further in Siddons's 'Remarks'. Like Crouch's French Queen, who conveys a 'wan [and] wasted cheek' while tortured by a 'blood stain'd sword', Siddons describes the sleepwalking Lady Macbeth as exhibiting a 'wasted form' and 'wan and haggard countenance', while 'her ever restless spirit wanders in troubled dreams', and 'innocent blood incessantly haunts her imagination'.<sup>347</sup> As this comparison suggests, by the close of *Macbeth*, Siddons's character displays redemptive qualities similar to those embodied by Marie Antoinette in British sympathetic accounts. While the two women were aligned previously by their exertions of power and vice, they are united now by their correspondent displays of spousal sentiments, religious appeal and infirmity. In both instances, the public's initial hostility towards the woman is transformed into pity, as, to quote Burke, scenes of 'weakness and [...] sickness [...] engage our hearts' with 'compassion'.<sup>348</sup> Siddons's performance can therefore be understood as an addition to the trend of post-1793 representations which sought to ameliorate the public's attitude towards Marie Antoinette by underscoring her compunction: ensuring a visual allusion to the French Queen at this point in the play, by dressing in a white gown and veil, Siddons's arousal of pity for a once villainous fictional Queen, provokes simultaneous condolence for the impeached Queen of France.

While the similarities between Lady Macbeth and Marie Antoinette have thus been rendered clear, what is not yet evident is why it was that Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene elicited anything other than pity. It is worth recalling here that by the time the play was staged, Marie Antoinette had been dead for six months. Her presence before an audience therefore carried with it an inevitable sense of ghostliness, which is emphasised in the sleepwalking scene by Siddons's acting style and the performance's visual elements.

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<sup>346</sup> Jenkin, 'Mrs Siddons', 95, 96.

<sup>347</sup> Siddons, 'Remarks', 31.

<sup>348</sup> Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 91-92.



As I will now contend, Siddons's appearance in Act V scene I arouses the duality of pity and terror, as her presentation of weakness and sickness is combined with a portrayal of ghostliness, which styles her as the incarnation of the French Queen's haunting apparition.

'What Ghastly Shade Attracts my Sight!': Lady Macbeth and Marie Antoinette's Ghost

Numerous reviewers employ the imagery of death when describing Siddons's presence in the sleepwalking scene. Edwin Mangin describes her as having a 'corpse-like aspect'; Leigh Hunt says she is 'deathlike' and 'sublime'; Boaden claims that she embodies 'the majesty of the tomb', and Knowles, as we have seen, encountered the 'chill of the grave' while watching Siddons perform.<sup>349</sup> Knowles extends his use of deathly tropes when, alluding to Act V scene III of *Richard III*, he exclaims that 'the tithe of horror that attends the silent woman, Lady Macbeth, walking in her sleep' is as great as that excited by 'the ghostly group that enter the tent and surround the couch of Richard'.<sup>350</sup> Sharing Knowles's opinion, Hazlitt similarly compares Siddons to a ghost in the sleepwalking scene, when describing how,

Her eyes were open but the sense was shut. She was like a person bewildered, and unconscious of what she did. [...] She glided on and off the stage almost like an apparition.<sup>351</sup>

Knowles and Hazlitt indicate clearly the resemblance between Siddons's character and contemporary perceptions of ghosts. The resemblance they acknowledge is far from subtle. Three weeks before the opening performance of *Macbeth*, an article printed in *The New Wonderful Magazine*, outlining 'popular opinions respecting ghosts', described the

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<sup>349</sup> Edwin Mangin, *Piozziana; or, Recollections of the late Mrs. Piozzi, with remarks, by a friend* (London: Edward Moxon, 1833), 85; Leigh Hunt, 'Mrs Siddons's Farewell Performance', 5 July 1812, in *Leigh Hunt's Dramatic Criticism, 1808-1831*, ed. Lawrence Hudson Houtchens and Carolyn Washburn Houtchens (London: OUP, 1950), 72; Boaden, *Memoirs*, 146; Knowles, *Lectures*, 21.

<sup>350</sup> Knowles, *Lectures*, 21.

<sup>351</sup> William Hazlitt, 'Mrs Siddons', in *The Examiner* (16 June 1816), reproduced in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1930-4), V:313.

creatures as figures ‘clothed all in white’, who ‘carry tapers in their hands’, and ‘hover’ rather than walk, causing them to appear like ‘aerial beings, without substance’.<sup>352</sup> During the sleepwalking scene, Siddons fulfils each of these criteria: she appears in a white gown and veil, carrying ‘*a taper*’, and she glides around the stage.<sup>353</sup>

These ‘popular opinions’ of ghosts were customarily adhered to in late eighteenth-century gothic dramas, as indicated in two productions staged in London the same year as Kemble’s *Macbeth*. In May 1794, an adaptation of Ann Radcliffe’s gothic novel *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), produced by Sarah’s son Henry Siddons, was staged at Covent Garden. The drama sees Martin fooled into believing Alinda to be a ghost, when she ‘*comes down with a taper*’, and presents Martin with the sight of ‘a figure all snow! [...] pale as death!’ and illuminated by ‘a light!’<sup>354</sup> Alinda’s identification as a ghost is enabled by the same visual components that accompany Lady Macbeth while sleepwalking: both characters are presented as ‘figure[s] all snow’, and both are illuminated by light from the taper.<sup>355</sup> While costume and props cause Siddons to mirror her son’s pseudo-apparition, it is her act of gliding onto the stage which aligns her with the ghost presented in James Boaden’s gothic drama *Fontainville Forest* (1794), again indebted to Radcliffe, and performed at Covent Garden in March 1794.<sup>356</sup> Noting the act of gliding to be that most heavily associated with apparitions, Boaden commented of his drama’s ghost scene that ‘the great contrivance’ was to ‘convert the moving substance into a gliding essence’.<sup>357</sup> This preference is recalled in the published play script, which describes how ‘*the phantom here glides across the dark*

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<sup>352</sup> ‘A Curious and Whimsical Dissertation on Ghosts’, in *The New Wonderful Magazine and Marvellous Chronicle* 3 (1 April 1794), 138, 137.

<sup>353</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V.i.56.

<sup>354</sup> Henry Siddons, *The Sicilian Romance: Or, the Apparition of the Cliffs* (London: J.Barker, 1794), III.ii.36, 37.

<sup>355</sup> Heather McPherson observes that Siddons was renowned for naturally pale skin, which would have intensified her ghostly image. See McPherson, ‘Tragic Pallor’, 491-496.

<sup>356</sup> Boaden’s drama is adapted from Ann Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791).

<sup>357</sup> James Boaden, *Memoirs of the Life of John Philip Kemble, Esq., including a history of the stage from the time of Garrick to the Present period*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1825), II:117.

*part of the chamber*'.<sup>358</sup> These two gothic plays, staged in London in the months either side of *Macbeth*, acquainted theatregoers with a set of conventions specific to the stage ghost; the stark duplication of these in *Macbeth*'s sleepwalking scene strongly encourages the interpretation of Lady Macbeth as a supernatural being.

Siddons's ghostly image was augmented by the gothic elements with which the new Drury Lane theatre was furnished, and the way in which Kemble capitalised on the building's newfound potential for spectacular display. When Drury Lane was renovated in 1794, Kemble employed William Capon, an artist with a background in medieval revival architecture, as the theatre's chief scenic artist.<sup>359</sup> As Nathalie Wolfram has shown, Capon's devotion to antiquarianism dictated Drury Lane's revived image, and when the public re-entered the theatre in April 1794, they found 'a highly gothicised interior', with scenery 'modelled after medieval church architecture'.<sup>360</sup> The innovations made to the theatre's design rendered it the perfect home for a ghost, as its medieval ornamentation mimicked the haunted buildings in which gothic ghosts were traditionally known to wander.<sup>361</sup> The theatre's suitability for the inhabitancy of a ghost was amplified by Kemble's own incorporation of an abundance of supernatural chicanery. Francesca Saggini has explained that, keen to make the most of the theatre's aptitude for gothic exhibitions, Kemble 'significantly increased the number of spectacular effects originally introduced' to *Macbeth* in eighteenth-century productions. Though choosing to omit the ghost of Banquo,

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<sup>358</sup> James Boaden, *Fontainville Forest: A Play, in five acts (founded on The romance of the forest), as performed at the Theatre-Royal Covent-Garden* (London: Hookham and Carpenter, 1794), III.iv.40. On ghosts in these dramas see Nathalie Wolfram, 'Gothic Adaptation and the Stage Ghost', in *Theatre and Ghosts: Materiality, Performance, Modernity*, ed. Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 46-61, and Diego Saglia, "'A Portion of the name": Stage adaptations of Radcliffe's fiction, 1794-1806', in *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic*, ed. Dale Townshend and Angela Wright (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), 219-236. On representations of the supernatural in late eighteenth-century gothic literature see Emma J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995).

<sup>359</sup> On Capon's work at Drury Lane see Ralph G. Allen, 'Kemble and Capon at Drury Lane, 1794-1802', *Educational Theatre Journal*, vol.23, no.1 (March 1971), 22-35; Kathryn R. Barush, 'Painting the Scene', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1732-1832*, ed. Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 278-279, and Frederick Burwick, *Romantic Drama: Acting and Reading* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 152-153.

<sup>360</sup> Wolfram, 'Gothic Adaptation', 58.

<sup>361</sup> On gothic architecture see Nicole Reynolds, 'Gothic and the architectural imagination, 1740-1840', in *The Gothic World*, ed. Glennis Byron and Dale Townshend (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 85-97.

a decision I explore later, Kemble complemented the theatre's gothic design by adding dramatic novelties including 'over 50 singing witches dancing to the potent music of a full orchestra, Hecate and other devilish spirits flying backwards' and the sound of 'deafening thunderclaps'.<sup>362</sup> Having become accustomed to witches, devils and spirits, audiences' expectations are geared towards the fantastical, and their alertness to Lady Macbeth's ghostly iconography is consequently intensified.

While Siddons's Lady Macbeth has much in common then with the living Marie Antoinette, her appearance six months after the Queen's death, dressed, equipped, and moving like an apparition, in an elaborately gothicised setting, is more immediately analogous to representations of Marie Antoinette's ghost. Multiple accounts of the ghost of Marie Antoinette circulated outside of the theatre in the months following her death.<sup>363</sup> In 1793, the Queen's ghost was presented in a poem printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, signed with the name 'Eliza'. The ghost bears a remarkable likeness to the version of Lady Macbeth later performed by Siddons. Showing Marie Antoinette's spectre to exhibit the same mental and physical maladies depicted in the captivity songs and poems, Eliza exclaims,

And soft! What ghastly shade attracts my sight!

Skims o'er the glade with looks of wild affright!

[...] Oh! My full heart; 'tis Gallia's hopeless Queen!

Distraction, grief and horror in her mien!

[...] See the poor mourner wildly stare around,

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<sup>362</sup> Francesca Saggini, 'Contextual Hauntings: Shakespearean Ghosts on the Gothic Stage', in *Shakespeare and the Culture of Romanticism*, ed. Joseph M. Ortiz (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 173. For reviews commenting on *Macbeth's* spectacular elements see *London Pocket, or New Lloyd's Evening Post*, 21 April 1794, and *Morning Chronicle*, 22 April 1794. The sound effects and visual innovations accompanying the performance are outlined in *John Philip Kemble's Promptbook of William Shakespeare's Macbeth*, printed as vol.V of *John Philip Kemble Promptbooks*, ed. Charles H. Shattuck, 11 vols (USA: UP of Virginia/Folger Shakespeare Library, 1974).

<sup>363</sup> These include the anonymously authored *A Ballad on the death of Louis the unfortunate [...] and A description of the appearance of Marie Antoinette's ghost* (Bristol: John Rose, 1793), and Edward Holland's 'Elegy on the death of the late Queen of France', in Holland's *A Poetical Miscellany* (Cork: J. Connor, 1794). Both are discussed later.

talk to the walls and madly strike the ground!

[...] the quivering lip, short breath and stretched out arm,  
starting convulsive at each dread alarm.

View in terrific forms before her eyes

A headless group of shrieking forms arise!

[...] Oh I am sick! – sick! – sick! – and worn with grief.<sup>364</sup>

The poem could almost have been written to describe Siddons's character in the sleepwalking scene: like 'Gallia's hopeless Queen', Lady Macbeth's 'heart is [so] sorely charged' that she too produces 'convulsive shudders' and 'horrible' sighs.<sup>365</sup> She too 'talk[s] to the walls' when instructing her absent husband to 'wash [his] hands', and 'look not so pale'.<sup>366</sup> She is similarly haunted by the 'terrific forms' of 'bleeding victims', which are 'for ever present' in her mind, and she too resembles a 'ghastly shade' as she 'skims o'er' the stage.<sup>367</sup> Lady Macbeth's allusion in the sleepwalking scene to the ghost of Marie Antoinette has a profound impact on the play's political meaning. In order to demonstrate this, I return now to my earlier exploration of the varying roles acquired by ghosts in revolutionary-era literature.

#### 'The Visionary effects of a Guilty Conscience' or a Call to 'Mighty Vengeance': The Ghost's Dual Function

A month before Kemble's *Macbeth* was performed at Drury Lane, the *Times* recorded the death of the revolutionary leader George Jacques Danton, executed under Robespierre's demand for opposing the Terror. The journalist makes reference to the ghost of Banquo,

<sup>364</sup> 'An Elegy. Written on Reading the Melancholy separation of the Dauphin from the Queen of France – by Eliza', in *The Gentleman's Magazine* 63 (November 1793), 1037-1038. Pascoe discusses this poem in *Romantic Theatricality*, 111-113.

<sup>365</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V.i.57; Bell, *Mrs Siddons*, 313.

<sup>366</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V.i.56, 57.

<sup>367</sup> Boaden, *Memoirs*, 261.

declaring that ‘Danton’s ghost will be to Robespierre what Banquo’s was to Macbeth’.<sup>368</sup> By forming this overt connection between Robespierre and the troubled psyche of Shakespeare’s regicidal protagonist, the journalist seeks to deter British readers from sympathising with revolutionary principles, by warning them of the psychological anguish endured by those affiliated with Jacobinism.<sup>369</sup> While the *Times* utilises the Macbethian mode of ghost-seeing to convey its anti-Jacobin stance, in a poem written by Edward Holland, published that same year, it is the ghost of Hamlet’s father which is employed for political ends. Now fashioned less commonly as the revolutionary advocate presented in Williams’s ‘Bastille’, the ghost of Hamlet Senior became a familiar figure in British loyalist literature. In his ‘Elegy on the death of the late Queen of France’ (1794), Holland reminds readers of the barbaric manner in which the French King and Queen have been ‘torn to a scaffold’ by their ‘murd’rous foes’. He then summons up their ghosts, when issuing a call to vengeance against revolutionary France. He commands,

European powers now all your force unite  
 Appease their ghosts, avenge with all your might;  
 Oh may your vet’rans regicides destroy,  
 Laying guilty Paris low as ancient Troy.<sup>370</sup>

By suggesting the readers’ need to ‘appease’ the royal spirits, Holland pairs the apparitions with the ghost of Hamlet’s father: the French King and Queen are not presently at peace, as the culprits responsible for the ‘damn’d defeat’ made upon their ‘most dear li[ves]’ are yet to be chastised.<sup>371</sup> The poem therefore instructs its readers that in order to placate the ‘perturbed spirit[s]’, efforts must be made to punish ‘guilty Paris’.<sup>372</sup> The article and the poem reinforce the dual political function attributed to Shakespearean-type ghosts in

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<sup>368</sup> *Times*, 14 April 1794.

<sup>369</sup> On this article see Matthew S. Buckley, *Tragedy Walks the Streets: The French Revolution in the Making of Modern Drama* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2006), 107.

<sup>370</sup> Holland, ‘Elegy’, 39.

<sup>371</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II.ii.271.

<sup>372</sup> Holland, ‘Elegy’, 39.

revolutionary-era literature. The ambiguous apparition of Marie Antoinette, presented by Siddons in Kemble's *Macbeth*, can be identified with either one of these ghosts. Whether Siddons's character is aligned with the ghost of Banquo, or with the ghost of Hamlet's father, depends on the political sympathies of the individual audience member, as I shall now explain.

By 1794, ghosts modelled on Banquo were becoming prevalent in British gothic fiction. Robert Reno has shown that by the mid-eighteenth century, portrayals of supposedly corporeal spectres had become unpopular with literature and theatre critics, owing to the public's increased credulity about supernatural creatures.<sup>373</sup> As Michael Gamer has documented, in response to changing attitudes to fantastical figures, gothic authors including Radcliffe, Horace Walpole, and Joanna Baillie chose not to 'debunk supernaturalism' altogether, but rather 'to move it into the minds of [their] characters, as a means of revising existing models of psychology and subjectivity'.<sup>374</sup> In accordance with Wollstonecraft's 'frightful shapes', and the 'haggard phantoms' presented in 'Captivity' and 'Stanzas', ghosts now served less often as material beings, than as psychological manifestations of internal grievances.

Kemble's production sought to emphasise this new 'way of ghost-seeing', in which it is 'the guilty mind of the villain' which 'conjures up spectres'.<sup>375</sup> Kemble's greatest innovation in his 1794 production was the removal of Banquo's ghost from the banquet

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<sup>373</sup> Robert P. Reno, 'James Boaden's *Fontainville Forest* and Matthew G. Lewis's *The Castle Spectre*: challenges of the supernatural ghost on the late eighteenth-century stage', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol.9 (1984), 95-103.

<sup>374</sup> Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 140. Gamer shows the popularity of psychological spectres to increase further in the latter half of the decade, following British hostilities to German melodramas. For full argument see 129-142. See also Dale Townshend, 'Gothic Shakespeare,' 45-46; Terry Castle, 'The Spectralisation of the Other in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*', in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York: Methuen, 1987), 231-253, and Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Riffs: Secularising the Uncanny in the European Imaginary, 1780-1820* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2010), 57, 106-108.

<sup>375</sup> Townshend, 'Gothic Shakespeare', 46.

scene.<sup>376</sup> In a diary entry dated 10 November 1811, Kemble's acquaintance, the artist Joseph Farington, recalls a discussion the two men held over dinner 'respecting Shakespeare's play of *Macbeth*', in which Kemble declared that he was 'decidedly not for introducing the figure of Banquo in the feast scene', as the vision ought to be recognised 'as the image of [Macbeth's] disturbed imagination'.<sup>377</sup> As his explanation for the ghost's erasure suggests, Kemble was keen for the apparition to be interpreted, like the bloody dagger that appears before Macbeth, as 'a false creation/ proceeding from the heat oppressed brain'.<sup>378</sup> Reviews of the tragedy confirm that Kemble achieved the desired effect. One journalist described the apparition's physical absence as confirmation that 'the troubled spirit [is] visible only to the mind's eye of the guilty and distracted tyrant', while the theatre commentator W.C. Oulton insisted that 'it is the ghost of the mind, and the appearance of it to the audience' would have 'absolutely destroy[ed] the visionary effects of a guilty conscience'.<sup>379</sup> As the reviews demonstrate, by refusing to have an actor depict the ghost on stage, Kemble encouraged audiences to recognise the spectre as a mental apparition, which is visible only to 'the guilty and distracted'. Theatregoers appreciate that they do not see Banquo's ghost, as they hold no responsibility for Banquo's death. Only the guilty see ghosts, and as the audience were innocent spectators of Banquo's murder, they lack Macbeth's troubled conscience, and do not share his haunting vision.

Recognising ghosts to operate as signifiers of guilt, it becomes possible to view Siddons's ghostly Queen as a figure intended to awaken in former and current revolutionary sympathisers a degree of compunction similar to that experienced by Macbeth in the banquet scene. Imitating the ghost of Banquo, the spectral image offers a quasi-projection

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<sup>376</sup> On the omission of Banquo's ghost see Saggini, 'Contextual Hauntings', 161-182, and Gamer, *Romanticism*, 135.

<sup>377</sup> Entry for 10 November 1811, in *The Diary of Joseph Farington: Vol. XI, January 1811–June 1812*, ed. Kathryn Cave, 16 vols (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983), XI:4029.

<sup>378</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, II.ii.23.

<sup>379</sup> 'The Opening of the Drury Lane Theatre: 1794', 22 April 1794, reproduced in *Romantic and Revolutionary Theatre, 1789-1860*, ed. Donald Roy, comp. and intro. Victor Emeljanow; Donald Roy; Kenneth Richards, and Laura Richards (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 90; W.C. Oulton, *A History of the theatres of London*, 2 vols (London: Martin & Bain, 1818), I:93.



of the spectator's own tormented conscience. The allusion to Marie Antoinette's ghost forces theatregoers of reformist affiliations, either past or present, to accept implicit accountability for her death. Acknowledging her murder as the repercussion of a movement they had extolled, audiences are imbued with contrition and self-reproach, and are impelled to distance themselves entirely from revolutionary principles. Read this way, the fusion of Lady Macbeth and Marie Antoinette enables Siddons's character to function in the sleepwalking scene as both a manifestation of guilt, and as a representation of the guilty: Lady Macbeth haunts the audience through her likeness to the deceased Queen of France, while she herself is haunted by the blood of a murdered monarch. She therefore both prompts and mirrors the emotional experience encountered by the theatregoer: rather than passively observing her display of mental grievance, audiences actively partake in the heroine's desperation to out the 'damned spot' of royal blood, as they are made to recognise, by the heroine's very image, that their 'hands are of [her] colour'.<sup>380</sup>

While it is this way that the Queen's ghost might be interpreted by theatregoers of radical sympathies, there is a variant meaning on offer to spectators who had opposed the revolution right from its outset. Like the psychological spectres, of which Banquo is the prototype, ghosts like that depicted in Holland's poem were also commonly presented in contemporary gothic fiction. In *Fontainville Forest* for instance, the appearance of the heroine's murdered father is understood immediately as the prompt for 'a great' and 'a mighty vengeance'.<sup>381</sup> The sleepwalking Lady Macbeth can similarly be interpreted as a catalyst for revenge. Unlike Boaden's ghost however, she inspires vengeance not against an individual, but against an entire nation. While Kemble's tragedy was being performed, England was at war with revolutionary France. Enthusiasm for the war was not unanimous,

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<sup>380</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V.i.56; II.ii.26.

<sup>381</sup> Boaden, *Fontainville Forest*, IV.ii.43. On Hamlet Senior's ghost in Romantic-era gothic fiction see Dale Townshend, 'Gothic and the ghost of Hamlet', in *Gothic Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis and Dale Townshend (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 60-97, and Townshend, 'Gothic Shakespeare', 47-48.

and anti-war demonstrations were becoming frequent.<sup>382</sup> British loyalists were therefore under pressure to justify the war with France, in order to ensure the continued enlistment of British troops. Siddons's allusion to Marie Antoinette's ghost debatably contributes to this purpose. As in Holland's poem, the spectre of the French Queen signifies unpunished vice: Marie Antoinette is 'doomed' to 'walk the night' as her murderers are yet to be reprimanded for their crimes.<sup>383</sup> Her appearance consequently acts as a call to arms against revolutionary France: in order to pacify the ghost of Marie Antoinette, revenge must be sought against Britain's neighbouring nation, and the surest way to enact such revenge is to defeat the country at war.

*Macbeth* therefore ensures its anti-revolutionary meaning using a far more poignant means of coercion than the simple arousal of pity. The audience's confrontation by an image resembling the recently deceased Queen of France endows them with an active role in the drama. They are cast as ghost-seers, and, by extension, as either Macbeth, or Hamlet. Acknowledging their role in the narrative, attention is turned away from the characters on stage, and directed instead towards the audience's own psyches. While those of a clear conscience acknowledge themselves as virtuous ghost-seers, and interpret the Queen's spectre as a call to avenge her murder, those representing the villainous ghost-seer leave the theatre infused with the desperate desire to 'wash [the] blood clean from [their] hand[s]', by retracting their revolutionary sympathies.<sup>384</sup>

#### 'Politics Confound my Senses': Siddons, Politics, and Dramatic Intentions

Before I conclude my analysis of *Macbeth*, I want to consider Siddons's own agency in shaping the reading that I have proposed. Siddons was greatly perturbed by events in

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<sup>382</sup> See Emma Vincent Macleod, *A War of Ideas: British Attitudes to the Wars against Revolutionary France, 1792-1802* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 187-195; Clive Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars, 1793-1815* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 16-40, and Philip Shaw, *Romantic Wars: Studies in Culture and Conflict, 1793-1822* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 4-6.

<sup>383</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.v.216.

<sup>384</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, II.i.25.

France. In September 1792 she referred to the country as ‘the land of slaughter’, and two months later, she expressed the extent to which she was distressed by the revolution’s occurrences, when declaring in a letter,

Politics confound my senses [...]. My head aches incessantly with the furious and senseless jargon which for the most part assails one’s ears at this important crisis [...]. The people in general seem very well affected to the King and Constitution, but all cry Reform!<sup>385</sup>

As the letter demonstrates, Siddons was greatly distressed by political affairs. Her anxiety concerning the revolution was such that it threatened to make her ill, by causing her head to ache incessantly. Given her desperation to cease the ‘furious and senseless jargon’ of reform, it is certainly likely that Siddons was intent in 1794 on assisting the new theatre’s objective of deterring the ‘barbarian rage’ plaguing ‘ravaged Europe’.<sup>386</sup> It is less certain however whether her character’s allusion to Marie Antoinette was an intentional part of this process.

In his notes preceding Bell’s review, Charles Henry Fleeming Jenkin remarks that Siddons’s portrayal of Lady Macbeth is ‘more the creation of Siddons than of Shakespeare. There is nothing in the text to contradict it, but little to indicate it’.<sup>387</sup> Indeed, while the dissimulation and ascendancy presented by Siddons in the first half of the play are inherent in Shakespeare’s heroine, Siddons amplifies these traits, using in the former instance vocal variation, and in the latter an exaggeration of commandeering gestures. Similarly, while Shakespeare definitely hints at Lady Macbeth’s increased sensibility and weakness in the

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<sup>385</sup> Letter from Sarah Siddons to Elizabeth Barrington, 13 September 1792, and 7 December 1792, in Barrington Papers, vols cxc1-cxc2, ‘Letters from Sarah Siddons mostly addressed to Elizabeth Barrington (nee Adair) Wife of George Barrington, 5<sup>th</sup> Viscount, Concerning Health, Family, the Theatre, etc.; Before 1788-1824’, Add MSS 73736. British Library, London.

<sup>386</sup> ‘Occasional Prologue’, in *European Magazine*, 385.

<sup>387</sup> Jenkin, ‘Mrs Siddons’, 80-81.

tragedy's closing scenes, Siddons's portrayal of the heroine's abundant love for her husband, and the extent of her concluding display of madness, sickness, contrition, and perhaps most significantly, ghostliness, surpasses the script's instruction.

Costume, as we have seen, also contributed greatly to the proposed interpretation. In a letter to her friend Elizabeth Barrington, composed shortly before the production's debut, Siddons wrote approvingly of the garments designed for her role, declaring that 'the dresses' are 'all new and as superb' and as 'characteristic as it is possible to make them'.<sup>388</sup> Whether Siddons's fondness for her clothing was influenced by its resemblance to that worn by Marie Antoinette is undetectable. Yet, Siddons was certainly aware of the political implications that costume could create on stage. In 1809 Siddons wrote to her friend Hester Thrale Piozzi to inform her of the fire at Covent Garden, in which she had 'lost every stage ornament of many years collecting'. She announced that the most valuable item 'lost in the fire' was 'a toilette of the poor Queen of France, a piece of beautiful [...] lace, which having belonged to so interesting a person', she 'regret[s] more than all the other things'. Siddons explains that she had always worn the lace 'in the final scene of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*', and that it had 'dressed her all over from head to foot'.<sup>389</sup>

Judith Pascoe postulates that the 'use of the piece of lace for this particular scene' indicates Siddons's creation of 'a number of intriguing parallels' between 'the Shakespearean heroine, and the French Queen': Siddons wore the lace during Hermione's trial, a scene in which the heroine is wrongly accused of treason. Staged subsequent to Marie Antoinette's own trial, in which the Queen protested her innocence against a number of barbarous crimes, Siddons creates a connection between the two persecuted figures, and, by illustrating the innocence of the former, manages to exonerate the latter.<sup>390</sup> Siddons's performance of Hermione suggests that she was no stranger to appropriating roles for the

<sup>388</sup> Siddons to Elizabeth Barrington, 11 April 1794, Barrington Papers, Add MSS 73736.

<sup>389</sup> Sarah Siddons to Hester Lynch Piozzi, 29 January 1809, Folger, Y.c.432 (11), in 'Letters of Sarah Siddons, 1783-1820, Folger MS Y.c.432', Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC.

<sup>390</sup> Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality*, 95. Siddons first performed as Hermione in 1802.

purpose of political allusion. It reveals also her willingness to embody, and to defend ‘so interesting a person’ as Marie Antoinette within the theatrical arena. It might therefore be concluded that the intentional parallel drawn between real and fictional Queens in *The Winter’s Tale*, echoes Siddons’s objective in *Macbeth*: in both instances, Siddons ensures a palpable likeness to Marie Antoinette, in order for her redemptive depiction of an indicted and fictional Queen to enhance the public’s sympathy for the real, and similarly prosecuted, late Queen of France.

‘Antoinetta’s Hapless Fate’: Concluding Remarks on Siddons’s Ghostly Queen

In the anonymously written *Ballad on the death of Louis the unfortunate* (1793), Marie Antoinette’s ghost materialises to recall the readers’ wrongs to them, with the objective of re-awakening their humanity. The author declares,

I look with pity on a crew,  
so desolate, so lost as you,  
and warn you leave your crimes.  
  
Let Antoinetta’s hapless fate  
Teach you humanity, tho late,  
and point to future times.<sup>391</sup>

The ghost reminds readers of their prior crimes, before forcing them to remedy their errors, by practising ‘humanity’ in ‘future times’. While the ballad fashions the Queen’s spectre as the ghost of Banquo, by equating its appearance with the readers’ wrongdoing, Holland’s ‘Elegy’ casts the ghosts of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in the role of Hamlet’s father, and uses their appearance to impel his readers to ‘avenge with all [their] might’ the fate to which ‘the hapless parents’ have been subjected by the ‘murd’rous foes’ of ‘guilty

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<sup>391</sup> Anon., *A Ballad on the death of Louis*, 23.

Paris'.<sup>392</sup> The two differing functions attributed to Marie Antoinette's ghost exemplify the contrary modes of interpretation to which Siddons lends herself in the sleepwalking scene. Intentionally or not, Siddons's portrayal of Lady Macbeth alludes both visually and verbally to popular depictions of the deceased Marie Antoinette. Representing the Queen's ghost, Siddons is able to instil a sense of guilt in audience members who had welcomed the revolution, while encouraging those of a clear conscience to support the war against France. Whether interpreted as the ghost of Banquo, or as the ghost of Hamlet's father, the message communicated by Siddons is one of fervent loyalism: theatregoers must either 'revenge [the Queen's] foul and most unnatural murder', by contributing to the war effort, or 'raze out the written troubles of the brain', and 'cleanse the foul bosom of that perilous stuff/ which weighs upon the heart', by recanting and regretting their radical sympathies.<sup>393</sup>

This chapter has proposed that Lady Macbeth's theatrical identity was revised and re-appropriated in 1794 by the combination of Siddons's innovative acting style, the performance's visual components, and the audience's familiarity with popular portrayals of Marie Antoinette circulating inside and out of the theatre. As I have demonstrated, the contemporary relevance acquired by Lady Macbeth fundamentally derived from her fusion with the recently deceased Queen of France. In the performance of Margaret of Anjou, to which I turn next, it is the actress herself with whom the 'ruthless Queen' is merged, and it is this relationship between actress and character which furnishes the female warrior with a unique and modern identity that neutralises her subversive potential.

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<sup>392</sup> Holland, 'Elegy', 39.

<sup>393</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.i.217; Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V.ii.59.

**‘Blood Thirsty, Cruel, Savage and Revengeful’: Reinventing Margaret of Anjou  
in 1797**

Like Lady Macbeth, Margaret of Anjou, the French-born medieval warrior Queen of Lancastrian England, found frequent representation on the late eighteenth-century British stage. Margaret’s notoriety in Britain was owed centrally to Shakespeare, who had famously presented the figure in his historical tragedy *Henry VI*. Shakespeare had emphasised the ‘amazonian’ tendencies of his ‘warlike Queen’, and described her in thoroughly masculine terms, as ‘stern, obdurate, flinty, rough’ and ‘remorseless’.<sup>394</sup> Recently, scholars including Dror Wahrman and David Worrall have contended that the ‘she-wolf of France’ popularised in Shakespeare’s tragedy underwent a radical transformation in late eighteenth-century British dramas.<sup>395</sup> Wahrman argues that in the final quarter of the eighteenth century, anxieties over correct female behaviour, sparked initially by the American Revolution, and accentuated by events in France, meant that the Amazon was ‘unceremoniously driven out’ of British literature, ‘and replaced by her more properly gender-conformist counterpart’: the mother.<sup>396</sup> Wahrman draws on dramatic representations of Margaret of Anjou to substantiate this conjecture. He suggests that despite the preservation and even intensification of Margaret’s obduracy and military prowess in early eighteenth-century dramas, ‘when Margaret returned to the stage’ at the close of the century, ‘gone was the feisty Amazonian behaviour, gone (almost) was the intrepid female warrior charging into battle, gone was the woman who disguised nature in order to encourage the men to fight’.<sup>397</sup> In place of her formerly Amazonian and manipulative characteristics, continues Wahrman, precedence was now given to Margaret’s strong maternal sentiments, which ‘completely eclipsed any other aspect of her

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<sup>394</sup> Shakespeare, *Henry VI, part 3*, I.iv.217; II.i.228; I.iv.219.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, I.iv.217.

<sup>396</sup> Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 15. For full argument see 7-44.

<sup>397</sup> Wahrman, *Modern Self*, 15-16.

performance'.<sup>398</sup> In a more recent study, Worrall similarly traces Margaret's theatrical reformation from brutal warrior to sentimental mother. Worrall argues that Margaret's feminisation on the British stage reached its apex in and after 1793. During this period, he suggests, dramatisations of Margaret's captivity and separation from her husband 'spoke powerfully of the fate of Marie Antoinette', who, as we have seen, had become an object of compassion in Britain, following her suffering at the hands of the Jacobins.<sup>399</sup> As a result, portrayals of Margaret and her parallel circumstances sought to elicit pity for the Queen, by foregrounding her familial loyalties, and employing 'the emotive rhetoric of Burke's *Reflections*'.<sup>400</sup>

Instances of Margaret's deviation in late century dramas from Shakespeare's 'warlike' Queen are evident in plays such as George Colman's *The Battle of Hexham* (1789), Edward Jerningham's 'Margaret of Anjou: An Historical Interlude' (1777), revised for the Covent Garden theatre in 1793, and Richard Valpy's *The Roses: Or King Henry VI* (1795). Colman's musical indicates Margaret's emotional fragility and maternal tenderness by having her weep on the battle field out of fear for her son's safety; Jerningham's 'Interlude' ignores Margaret's Amazonian qualities entirely, and presents her as the archetypal damsel in distress, concerned solely with protecting her son; and Valpy's adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy further downplays Margaret's status as a 'warlike Queen', by omitting all scenes in which Margaret herself either speaks of, or partakes in armed conflict, and by providing her with an exhibition of maternal affliction following her son's death, which exceeds that scripted by Shakespeare in both length and emotiveness.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>399</sup> David Worrall, *Celebrity, Performance, Reception: British Georgian Theatre as Social Assemblage* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 183. Worrall's study focuses primarily on Edward Jerningham's 'Margaret of Anjou: An Historical Interlude, with alterations and additions', staged in 1793 and 1794.

<sup>400</sup> Worrall, *Celebrity*, 183.

<sup>401</sup> See George Colman, *The Battle of Hexham, a comedy. In three acts* (Dublin: P. Byrne, 1790), I.iv.19; Edward Jerningham, 'Margaret of Anjou: An Historical Interlude', in *Fugitive poetical pieces* (London: J. Robinson, 1778); and Richard Valpy, *The Roses: Or King Henry VI, An Historical Tragedy* (Reading: Smart and Cowslade, 1795), II.iii.47-48.



Given the panic instilled in British conservatives by armed and masculine women at the close of the eighteenth century, it is unsurprising that the ‘amazonian trull’ originally depicted by Shakespeare became increasingly rare on the British stage.<sup>402</sup> In London in particular, where theatre censorship was especially stringent, dramatisations of maternal and sentimental Margarets were certainly more likely to be tolerated than ominous replicas of Shakespeare’s savage ‘she-wolf’.<sup>403</sup> Despite these anxieties, however, portrayals of Margaret that reinforced her previously ‘warlike’ and ‘ruthless’ characterisation did not disappear entirely from the London stage. In 1766 British playwright Thomas Francklin produced the historical tragedy *The Earl of Warwick* (1766), an adaptation of French dramatist Jean-François de la Harpe’s *Le Comte de Warwick* (1763). Unlike the later portrayals, Francklin’s heroine was recognised for her resemblance to Shakespeare’s ‘lofty [...] commanding’ and ‘spirited matron’.<sup>404</sup> Francklin’s ‘haughty Queen’ has ambitions to ‘conquer men’; she claims to ‘enjoy’ scenes of ‘blood and horror’, manages to raise ‘a pow’rful army’, and commits, then boasts of, a ‘base/ Blood thirsty, cruel, savage and revengeful’ murder of the eponymous Earl.<sup>405</sup> In spite of the incongruity of Francklin’s heroine, and the reincarnations of Margaret which emerged in late eighteenth-century dramas, an unrevised version of *The Earl of Warwick* was performed at the Haymarket theatre on 9 February 1797.<sup>406</sup>

The presentation of a warrior Queen who, as Inchbald wrote in her preface to the tragedy, possesses ‘such ferocious mind and manners’, seems to challenge the contention that Margaret’s fierce and ‘Amazonian tendencies were overshadowed’ in performances of the

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<sup>402</sup> Shakespeare, *Henry VI, part 3*, I.iv.217.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, I.iv.217. On censorship practices in London see L. W. Conolly, *The Censorship of the English Drama, 1737-1824* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1976), 83-106.

<sup>404</sup> Review of Thomas Francklin’s *The Earl of Warwick*, in *Theatrical Inquisitor and Monthly Mirror* 9 (December 1816), 447.

<sup>405</sup> Thomas Francklin, *The Earl of Warwick: A Tragedy* (London: John Bell, 1766), V.ii.64; I.i.8, 11; IV.iii.51; V.iii.69.

<sup>406</sup> The Haymarket performance was the only full length version of the tragedy staged in London in the 1790s, though a condensed version of the play was staged at Covent Garden in May 1796. This three act version is discussed later.

1790s by her new characterisation as a ‘protective’ and ‘aching mother’.<sup>407</sup> To propose this argument, however, is to assume that script and performance accord, which is not necessarily the case. While, at a textual level, Francklin’s Margaret might adequately be perceived as the threatening antithesis of the period’s feminine ideal, it is impossible to confirm, through a reading of the text alone, that she appeared this way during performance. As I will show, the harmony between Margaret’s textual identity and her performed identity was challenged in 1797, by audience’s insight into the private circumstances of the actress embodying the role.

The pertinence of the individual actor or actress in translating, and in some cases entirely transforming a character’s identity on stage has been explored by Marvin Carlson. In *The Haunted Stage* (2000), Carlson proposes,

The common view of theatrical production as the embodiment of a pre-existing literary text tends to take the actor as a more or less transparent vehicle for that text, physically congruent with the stated requirements of the text and possessing adequate vocal and physical skills to deliver the text effectively to the audience. This simplified view, however, does not take into account what the actor creatively adds to the literary text.<sup>408</sup>

As Carlson suggests, the actor or actress personating a role is more than a passive medium through whom the words on the page are communicated. The performer exerts significant influence over the way in which the role is perceived on stage, making the text alone an inadequate source of evidence for the character’s theatrical identity. While I previously showed the performer’s unique interpretation of a role, and the visual elements

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<sup>407</sup> Inchbald, ‘Remarks’ on *The Earl of Warwick*, in *The British Theatre*, XIX:5; Wahrman, *Modern Self*, 16.

<sup>408</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (USA: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 52-53.

accompanying her performance, to provide one means by which the drama's meaning could be redefined on stage, the remainder of this chapter spotlights the importance of the performer's personal and private life, in determining theatrical reception.

Works by Michael Quinn and Felicity Nussbaum are particularly useful in elucidating the relationship between the actor's authentic and theatrical self. In his theoretical essay, Quinn proposes that the 'link between the life of the performer and the knowledge of that life that the audience brings to performance' prevents the actor 'from disappearing entirely into the acting figure or the drama', as the audience consciously or unconsciously merge 'the actor's references to the fictional events', with those occurring in the performer's personal life.<sup>409</sup> Decisions regarding which aspects of the performer's life to share with the public are therefore crucial in mediating responses to the theatrical role embodied by the performer: 'the information transmitted by entertainment news about the actor's life', continues Quinn, is 'brought to the performance as a way to fund perceptions', and is capable, in certain instances, of displacing 'authority from the creative genius of the author'.<sup>410</sup> Nussbaum shows this interplay between performer and text to acquire particular pertinence in the eighteenth century, owing to the vast 'circulation of celebrity news and gossip'.<sup>411</sup> Nussbaum explains that 'anecdotes circulating about [actresses'] private lives' received wide dissemination from the early 1700s onwards, and constituted 'an imagined off stage personality' that 'served as a theatrical substitute for authentic knowledge' about the actress's private self. Access to this knowledge encouraged theatregoers to blend 'the actress's putative personality with the assigned character's emotions and thoughts', by inspiring them to 'speculate about which portion of the inner consciousness of the actress was shared with the [fictional] character'.<sup>412</sup> This actor-centred model of dramatic

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<sup>409</sup> Michael Quinn, 'Celebrity and the Semiotics of Acting', *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol.6, Issue 22 (May 1990), 156,155.

<sup>410</sup> Quinn, 'Celebrity', 157, 166

<sup>411</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theatre* (Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 21.

<sup>412</sup> Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, 16, 20, 21.

reception explored by Quinn and Nussbaum is fundamental to my reading of *The Earl of Warwick*. Drawing also on a recent study by Helen Brooks, which shows the ‘relationship between the personal and the performed’ to have intensified in the 1790s, due to revised definitions of selfhood and identity, I hypothesise that Francklin’s tragedy, when performed in 1797, presented audiences with yet another portrait of Margaret in which maternity superseded savage masculinity as the heroine’s focal trait, owing largely to the selection of actress.<sup>413</sup>

My analysis sheds light on the life and career of the actress Sarah Yates, namesake through marriage of the period’s more notorious performers, Richard and Mary Anne Yates.<sup>414</sup> I propose that theatregoers’ knowledge of the familial grief suffered by Yates in the summer of 1796 substantially governed the audience’s perception of both Yates as an actress, and Margaret as a character. While her private circumstances served to defend Yates against the charges of unwomanly ambition frequently directed against the eighteenth-century actress, they concurrently nullified the challenge posed by her character’s military endeavours, by manipulating audiences into perceiving Margaret, like Yates herself, as a desperate and devoted mother. Having illustrated the connection between Yates’s personal life and her character’s reception, I conclude by drawing brief attention to the role played by Margaret’s theatrical reformation on the late eighteenth-century London stage, in facilitating the audience’s unique interpretation of Francklin’s warrior Queen.

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<sup>413</sup> Helen Brooks, *Actresses, Gender and the Eighteenth-Century Stage: Playing Women* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 96.

<sup>414</sup> Before *The Earl of Warwick*, Sarah Yates performed twice in London in 1794. She belonged to Tate Wilkinson’s Yorkshire circuit for the 1794-1795 season, and performed in Bath and Bristol from 1796-7. Between 1797 and 99 she was based at the Crow Street Theatre, Dublin; she later performed at Liverpool, then returned to London in 1800 to play Angelica in Matthew G. Lewis’s *The Castle Spectre* (1798). See *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and other Stage Personnel*, ed. Philip Highfill, Kalman Burnim and Edward Langhams, 16 vols (USA: Southern Illinois UP, 1993), XVI:339.

‘A Delightful Proteus’: The shift from Disguise to Authenticity in Late Eighteenth-Century Acting Theory

In 1759, English actor Thomas Wilkes declared that,

To do justice to his character [the actor] must [...] make a temporary renunciation of himself and all his connections in common life, and for a few hours consign all his private joys and griefs to oblivion [and] forget [...] his own identity.<sup>415</sup>

Wilkes’s suggestion that the actor is able ‘to make a temporary renunciation of himself and to forget his ‘own identity’ while he performs echoes Richard Flecknoe’s earlier celebration of the actor as ‘a delightful Proteus’, capable of ‘wholly transforming himself into his part’.<sup>416</sup> It supports also the claim made in 1744 that skilled actors become so ‘lost in character’ when they perform that they will not ‘once betray a passion of their own’.<sup>417</sup> All three statements exemplify Joseph Roach’s observation that during the early and mid-eighteenth century, the actor was seen to possess ‘not only the power of self-alteration’, but also the ‘power of self-abdication in favour of the role’.<sup>418</sup> It was widely understood that when performers took to the stage, all private and personal aspects of their lives became irrelevant. During their enactments of theatrical roles, actors transformed themselves into beings entirely separate from themselves, and retained no trace of their off-stage identities. Towards the end of the century, the possibility of the individual’s temporary abandonment of his or her authentic self became a problematic concept. As political historians and theatre scholars have shown, the closing half of the century witnessed ‘a typically

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<sup>415</sup> Thomas Wilkes, *A General View of the Stage* (London: J. Coote, 1759), 92.

<sup>416</sup> Richard Flecknoe, *A Short Discourse of the English Stage* (1664), cited in Wahrman, *Modern Self*, 170.

<sup>417</sup> Anon., ‘Essay on the Theatres: or, the Art of Acting, in Imitation of Horace’s Art of Poetry’, in *The Harleian Miscellany or, a collection of rare, curious and entertaining pamphlets and tracts*, 8 vols (London: T. Osbourne, 1744), V:548.

<sup>418</sup> Joseph Roach, *The Player’s Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (USA: University of Michigan Press, 1985), 41. See also Shearer West, *The Image of the Actor: Verbal and Visual Representation in the Age of Garrick and Kemble* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), 58-61, and Wahrman, *Modern Self*, 167-171.

Romantic bias against the actor's violation of his own integrity through his performance of a dramatic role'.<sup>419</sup> Eighteenth-century social theorists argued that the pressures and possibilities of commercial society had encouraged and enabled individuals to 'adopt the strategic poses of actors', and to 'pass [themselves] off as something or someone' they were not, through the consumption of material goods.<sup>420</sup> The ensuing anxiety about external disguise and disingenuousness led to attempts to redefine the meaning of identity along more internal, personal and stable lines. As Wahrman explains, the final quarter of the eighteenth century witnessed the demise of earlier theories which perceived identity as 'mutable, assumable, divisible, or actively malleable', and encountered a contrary focus on models of selfhood that emphasised 'psychological depth', and 'one's unique inner truth'.<sup>421</sup> No longer protean and disposable, the self was reconfigured in the late 1700s as constant, essential, and incapable of being shed at will.

This reinterpretation of the self had an inevitable impact upon contemporary acting theory. As Lionel Trilling has shown, the actor who, like Wilkes's archetype, supplants his own identity with that of another, partakes in the very 'attenuation of selfhood' that, by the turn of the century, was considered entirely incongruent with modern conceptions of identity.<sup>422</sup> This clash between the definition of the actor as 'a delightful Proteus', and emergent theories of inherent subjectivity, led to revised accounts of the art of acting, which, as Brooks has observed, attempted 'to establish a relationship between actresses' selves and their theatrical performance of character', in order to align contemporary accounts of acting with the 'Romantic notion of self'.<sup>423</sup> Brooks explains that with 'the earlier mode of performance in which the actor transformed [him/herself] into another' having become

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<sup>419</sup> William Worthen, *The Idea of the Actor: Drama and the Ethics of Performance* (Surrey: Princeton UP, 1984), 85.

<sup>420</sup> E.J. Hundbert, 'The European Enlightenment and the History of the Self', in *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1997), 78; Wahrman, *Modern Self*, 203. See also Matthew H. Wikander, *Fangs of Malice: Hypocrisy, Sincerity and Acting* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 74-76.

<sup>421</sup> Wahrman, *Modern Self*, 275, 290, 291. Wahrman shows this re-conception of identity to account for the Amazon's decline in popularity.

<sup>422</sup> Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: OUP, 1972), 64.

<sup>423</sup> Brooks, *Actresses*, 164.

‘increasingly at odds with prevailing discourse’, the late eighteenth century witnessed ‘a new cultural moment’ that sought to bring ‘character and actress together in one unambiguous and coherent identity’.<sup>424</sup> Rather than renouncing their offstage identities in order to immerse themselves in their theatrical roles, actor’s performances were reconfigured ‘as expressions of their own emotions and authentic selves, through the medium of the character’.<sup>425</sup>

Epitomising this paradigm of acting as self-revelation in 1798, while struggling to come to terms with her daughter Maria’s impending death, Siddons wrote to her friend Penelope Pennington of her forthcoming performance in *The Gamester*,

I must go dress for Mrs Beverley – my soul is well tun’d for scenes  
of woe. [...] I can [...] upon the stage give a full vent to the heart  
which [...] swells with its weight almost to bursting.<sup>426</sup>

Siddons’s statement exemplifies the tension between performance as disguise and performance as display. Rather than defining acting as a process that forces the suppression of her genuine sentiments beneath the veneer of contrived and transient emotions, as was often the case with her mid-century forerunners, Siddons anticipates the disclosure, through her fictional character, of her sincere and personal feelings. Mrs Beverley’s artificial distress at the death of her husband furnishes Siddons with the opportunity to give ‘full vent’ to her authentic domestic woe.<sup>427</sup> By anticipating this communication of her own psychological anguish through the medium of a stage role, Siddons typifies the contemporary understanding of performance as a divulging art form, in which, as Brooks

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>426</sup> Sarah Siddons to Penelope Pennington, August 1798, in *An Artist’s Love Story: Told in the letters of Sir Thomas Lawrence, Mrs. Siddons, and her daughters*, ed. Oswald G. Knapp (London: George Allen, 1905), 59.

<sup>427</sup> Jan MacDonald notes that this model of acting foreshadowed ‘what Stanislavsky over a century later was to call the technique of “emotion memory”, that is the use of the recollection of one’s own deeply felt experiences in the creation of a theatrical persona’. See MacDonald, ‘Acting and the Austere Joys of Motherhood: Sarah Siddons performs Maternity’, in *Extraordinary Actors: Studies in Honour of Peter Thompson*, ed. Jane Milling and Martin Banham (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 60.

explains, the actress is recognised not for ‘sinking herself into the character, but rather for foregrounding herself through it’.<sup>428</sup>

As indicated previously, this fusion of self and character was by no means unpractised, or unrecognised, in performances prior to Siddons’s period. Nussbaum argues convincingly that the growth in the early 1700s of ‘fictions that circulated around actress’s lives’ meant that performers’ biographical circumstances were largely ‘interwoven with their dramatic performances’ long before the 1790s.<sup>429</sup> What is significant about the later decades, however, is the perceived inevitability of this conflation, and the dominant influence it exerted over theatregoers’ expectations. Having rejected the possibility that the actress makes ‘a temporary renunciation’ of all her ‘private joys and griefs’ when taking to the stage, the impact of her personal life on the nature of her performance becomes seemingly unavoidable. The public therefore attend the theatre actively anticipating a collision between the actress’s own emotions, and her character’s fictional circumstances. As a result, information regarding the actress’s private life acquires accentuated power over the audience’s interpretation of her theatrical figure. This newly dominant theory of acting as an unmasking of private emotion is pivotal to my interpretation of Yates’s performance in Francklin’s *Earl of Warwick*, to which I now turn my attention.

#### ‘The Fell Serpent’: Francklin’s Margaret on the pre-1790s London Stage

Francklin’s *Earl of Warwick* takes place following the deposition of Margaret’s husband, King Henry VI, and his replacement on the throne by Edward IV. In the course of the play, Henry is imprisoned in a dungeon, and Margaret endures confinement in the King’s palace. Margaret’s son is also held captive by Edward, who has ‘torn [him] from his mother’s

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<sup>428</sup> Brooks, *Actresses*, 98-99. Commenting on Siddons’s disclosure of herself through her acting, in 1794 Mary Robinson wrote to John Taylor that Siddons’s performances saw ‘the soul beaming through every veil of fiction’. See Mary Robinson to John Taylor, 13 October 1794, in *Catalogue of the Collection of Autograph Letters and Historical Documents formed between 1865 and 1882*, by A. Morrison, ed. A.W. Thibaudeau, 6 vols (London: Strangeways and Sons, 1891), V:287.

<sup>429</sup> Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, 10.



arms'.<sup>430</sup> As in Shakespeare's tragedy, Margaret's violent and vengeful response to her situation is central to Francklin's narrative. Margaret's speech is predominantly made up of powerful expressions of hatred for both Warwick and Edward, the first of whom was instrumental in 'robb[ing] [her] of a crown', and the latter having gained that crown.<sup>431</sup> The characteristically scornful tone of Margaret's speech is exemplified during a dialogue with Clifford. Having boasted of fooling Warwick into believing Edward to be his enemy, and herself his ally, Margaret discloses her plan to use Warwick as her 'instrument' and 'necessary tool', and to 'make him draw/ his trait'rous sword, to sheath it in the breast/ of him he loves, then point it to his own'. She claims to have twined herself 'round his heart', and, 'like the fell serpent crept into his bosom/ that [she] might sting more surely'.<sup>432</sup> Margaret later defines herself as 'sharp and cruel', and declares it her duty to 'judge and punish', while her enemies 'hear and tremble'.<sup>433</sup> The duplicity and truculence conveyed in Margaret's speech shows Francklin to have maintained much of Shakespeare's original emphasis, and exemplifies his heroine's stark contrast to the sentimentalised Margarets scripted in the 1790s.

Reactions to London performances of Francklin's Margaret staged before 1790 suggest a close resemblance between 'the fell serpent' presented in the script, and the equivalent figure exhibited on the stage. When Francklin's tragedy was first performed at Drury Lane in December 1766, Margaret was played by Sarah Yates's aunt through marriage, the acclaimed tragic actress Mary Anne Yates. Mary Anne was renowned for depicting the 'harsh and coarse' traits of 'Virago's characters'.<sup>434</sup> In line with this, her rendition of Margaret highlighted the Queen's 'grandeur of mind, pride of behaviour' and 'resentment of injury', and added to her repertoire of performances that attempted to overawe her

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<sup>430</sup> Francklin, *Earl of Warwick*, I.i.7.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, V.iii.69.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, III.i.36.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, V.iii.70, 68.

<sup>434</sup> See Francis Gentleman, *The Theatres: A Poetical Dissection* (London: John Bell, 1772), 80, and F.B.L., *The Rational Rosciad. On a more extensive plan than anything of the kind hitherto published* (London: C. Parker, 1767), 26.

audience, rather than ‘gain the soul’ or ‘steal into the heart’ of her spectators.<sup>435</sup> When revived in 1784, despite being played by Siddons, who, as we have seen, was notorious for sentimental performances, Francklin’s Margaret continued to be perceived unsympathetically by her London audiences.<sup>436</sup> Though one reviewer acknowledged brief moments during Siddons’s performance when ‘the distracted mother breaks through’, Margaret was perceived primarily as a ‘haughty Queen’ who ‘walked as if she trod her enemies beneath’, and conveyed such ‘malicious contempt and indifference’ towards her victims, that she managed to ‘destroy the impression of pity on [the audience’s] minds for [her] distresses’.<sup>437</sup>

In contrast to the ‘want of the pathetic’ acknowledged in these earlier performances however, when a textually unmodified version of Francklin’s tragedy was revived for the Haymarket theatre in 1797, compassion for the Queen dominated the audience’s viewing experience.<sup>438</sup> a review printed in the *London Chronicle* on 9 February 1797 told how Sarah Yates’s portrayal of Margaret ‘was received with much feeling’, and ‘drew tears from almost every eye’.<sup>439</sup> This novel response to Francklin’s heroine reflects the magnification in 1797 of the more maternal facet of Margaret’s character that in both the script, and the preceding performances, had been recognised as peripheral. If in 1784, ‘the distracted mother’ had been obfuscated by ‘the fell serpent’, in 1797, the case was reversed, and it was maternity, as opposed to malignity, that became Margaret’s defining feature. This shift in interpretation, I argue, can best be understood in the context of the domestic affliction suffered by Yates in August 1796.

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<sup>435</sup> Thomas Davies, *Memoirs of the life of David Garrick, Esq. Interspersed with characters and anecdotes of his theatrical contemporaries. The whole forming a history of the stage, which includes a period of thirty-six years*, 2 vols (Dublin: Joseph Hill, 1780), II:95; F.B.L, *Rational Rosciad*, 26.

<sup>436</sup> Siddons’s reception therefore clashes with Wahrman’s suggestion that sentimental Margarets dominated after the American Revolution.

<sup>437</sup> Lady of Distinction, *The Beauties of Mrs Siddons: or a review of her Performance of the characters of Belvidera, Zara, Isabella, Margaret of Anjou, Jane Shore and Lady Randolph* (London: John Strahan, 1786), 39, 32, 33, 40, 39.

<sup>438</sup> Review of *The Earl of Warwick*, in *Monthly Review; or Literary Journal* 35 (December 1766), 484.

<sup>439</sup> *London Chronicle*, 9 February 1797.

'A Most Shocking Circumstance': Sarah Yates's Widowhood and her Benefit Performance

On 23 August 1796, the *General Evening Post* printed an article reporting a shooting which had occurred at a home in Pimlico the preceding afternoon. The report read:

Yesterday afternoon, between 4 and 5 o'clock, a most shocking circumstance took place at the house of the late Mr. Yates, comedian, on the terrace in Pimlico. Mr [Thomas] Yates, his nephew, after he had dined, took a walk in the garden at the back of the house; on his return to the door, he found it fast, and could not gain admittance till the servant girl formed a plan to get him in at the kitchen window. The persons who were in the house, and had fastened Mr. Yates out, [...] went into the kitchen, and finding that Mr. Y was likely to gain admittance, one of them fired a pistol, the ball from which entered right side of Mr. Y. [...] Three persons who were in the house were secured, one of whom is a young woman. [...] Mr Yates [...] was living at the time of the examination, [...] but supposed to be mortally wounded.<sup>440</sup>

Lieutenant Thomas Yates, the subject of the report, was Sarah Yates's husband. He died shortly after the shooting, from a wound to his liver.<sup>441</sup> Mr Yates's murder came as a result of a dispute over the rightful ownership of the house in Pimlico, which had previously belonged to Thomas's uncle, the famous comedian Richard Yates. Elizabeth Jones, the 'young woman' mentioned in the report, believed that she was the rightful inheritor of the home. Jones had been an actress in Richard Yates's theatre company in Birmingham, and

<sup>440</sup> *General Evening Post*, 20 August 1796.

<sup>441</sup> See 'City of Westminster's Coroner's inquests into suspicious deaths', 24 August 1796. Westminster Abbey Muniment Room. *London Lives, 1690-1800* <<http://www.londonlives.org>>, WACWIC652360498 [22 March 2015].

she claimed that the comedian and she shared a father-daughter type relationship.<sup>442</sup>

Thomas Yates was adamant that he too had a claim to the house, and in the absence of legal documents confirming either way, both Jones and Yates inhabited the home together for a period of several months.<sup>443</sup> Sarah Yates had been living in Bath, where she was employed as a provincial actress. It was the day after Sarah joined her husband in Pimlico that the murder took place. On the night of 21 August, two men, named Sellers and Footney, were sent by an Attorney to the home in Pimlico, with the supposed intention of looking after Miss Jones. Jones was believed to be under threat from Mr. Yates, who had lost his temper with her in the past.<sup>444</sup> Both men considered Jones to be the rightful owner of the house, and, on 22 August, shortly after the heavily pregnant Sarah Yates went out in a coach to get some air, Sellers and Footney locked Thomas Yates out of the house, and when he tried to re-enter, Sellers shot him dead.<sup>445</sup>

Thomas Yates's death left Sarah with a number of children to look after, and another on the way.<sup>446</sup> In direct response to her husband's murder, permission was given by the Lord Chamberlain for *The Earl of Warwick* to be performed at George Colman's Haymarket theatre, outside of its regular summer season, for the benefit of Mrs Yates.<sup>447</sup> Yates had previously acted Francklin's Margaret in performances staged at York and Bath in 1795

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<sup>442</sup> See *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 18 September 1796; *Morning Chronicle*, 17 September 1796. On Jones's acting career see *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Highfill, Burnim and Langhams, VIII:232-233. Jones is recorded to have performed just once in London in 1794.

<sup>443</sup> See *Evening Mail*, 16-19 September 1796.

<sup>444</sup> An account given in *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 18 September 1796, states that Mr Yates had once attacked Miss Jones with a poker and knocked her to the floor.

<sup>445</sup> See *Evening Mail*, 16-19 September 1796; see also Society of Gentlemen, *The Counsellor's Magazine; or a Complete library for barristers, conveyancers, attornies, solicitors, clerks, students and others* (London: W & J Stratford, 1796).

<sup>446</sup> On 27 August 1796, the *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* claimed Sarah to be 'far advanced in her pregnancy of a sixth child' at the time of her husband's murder. Yet, in an interview with Mr Aaron Graham, a family friend, it was remarked that Yates had just two children. See 'John Sellers, Old Bailey Defendant', in 'Old Bailey Proceedings: Accounts of Criminal Trials', 14 September 1794, Harvard University Library. *London Lives, 1690-1800* <<http://www.londonlives.org>>, t17960914-5 [24 March 2015].

<sup>447</sup> Haymarket's Royal patent was valid only during the summer season. Conventionally therefore, Colman had to await the close of the winter theatres, Drury lane and Covent Garden, before staging any dramas. However, permission was given by the Lord Chamberlain on exceptional occasions for benefit performances to be staged at Haymarket out of season, particularly if the benefit was for a charity or for a family in distress. See Charles Beecher Hogan, *The London Stage, 1776-1800: A Critical Introduction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1968), cxxxii. See also William J. Burling, *The Summer Theatre in London, 1661-1820: The Rise of the Haymarket Theatre* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2000).

and 1796. It was a role with which, in the provinces, Yates had made a name for herself, and it was presumably for this reason that it was selected for her benefit performance in London.<sup>448</sup> Inviting the widowed Yates to London to perform the role of a savage and bloodthirsty French woman carried with it two potential risks: first, Yates's decision to leave her children without a parent in her hometown of Bath, in order to perform in the prestigious London theatre, rendered her liable to accusations of unwomanly ambition and domestic neglect: second, Yates's portrayal of a heroine who, like Lady Macbeth, resembled a 'Gallic freak', threatened to sit uncomfortably with gender conservatives and political loyalists, who feared British women's emulation of their 'unsex'd' neighbours.<sup>449</sup> These risks were annulled, however, by the publicity given to Yates's private circumstances, in both an address delivered at the close of *The Earl of Warwick*, and in advertisements printed in British newspapers prior to the tragedy's revival. It is to the address, and the defence with which it provided Yates against charges of feminine impropriety, that I direct my attention first.

'To you the Little Innocents Appeal': Unwomanly Ambition, Maternal Devotion, and the Eighteenth-Century Actress

The eighteenth-century actress's subversion of prescribed female behaviour has received considerable attention in recent theatre scholarship. In her pioneering study of the actress's position and perception in eighteenth-century society, Kristina Straub comprehensively illustrates the female performer's violation of the established divide between the public world occupied by men and the private realms allocated to women, and traces her possession of a form of 'professional ambition' considered a 'refusal' or 'perversion' of

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<sup>448</sup> See *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Highfill, Burnim and Langhams, XVI:339; see also *Theatre Royal Bath, The Orchard Street Calendar 1750-1805*, ed. Arnold Hare (Bath: Kingsmead Press, 1977), 161. As far as I am aware there are no surviving reviews of these provincial performances that detail Yates's acting.

<sup>449</sup> Polwhele, *Unsex'd Females*, 7.

‘normal feminine sexuality’.<sup>450</sup> While it was the province of men to aspire to greatness and to establish themselves in the public world, women were praised for their modesty, reserve, and contentment in their private setting. Hence, in his *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797), Thomas Gisborne instructed his readers that ‘female ambition’ is acceptable only when directed towards ‘attaining those virtues which are the principal ornaments of your sex. Cherish your instructive modesty: and look upon it as your highest commendation not to be the subject of public discourse’.<sup>451</sup> Acknowledging that ‘women in any profession were subject to suspicion for their unwomanly ambition’, Celestine Woo proposes that the actress’s public aspirations ‘needed to be countered with vigorous assurances’ of ‘femininity in other areas’.<sup>452</sup> By the final quarter of the century, these assurances were most commonly provided by the actress’s depiction of herself as a loving and devoted mother.<sup>453</sup>

The image of the actress and that of the maternal ideal were in one sense entirely incompatible: the very nature of her profession required the actress to abandon the home in favour of the stage. As a consequence, the actress was frequently accused of abnegating her maternal duties, and thus of being a bad mother. An instance of this charge is illustrated in Ann Catherine Holbrook’s memoirs *The Dramatist* (1809), in which the author declares,

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<sup>450</sup> Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), 98. See also Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, 1-30, and Gill Perry, ‘Ambiguity and Desire: Metaphors of Sexuality in Late Eighteenth-Century Representations of the Actress’, in *Notorious Muse*, ed. Asleson, 57-80.

<sup>451</sup> Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London: T. Cadell jun. and W. Davies, 1797), 326. Gisborne quotes the advice given by Pericles in Book II of *Thucydides*. This passage was regularly reproduced in eighteenth-century conduct literature. See for instance the anonymously authored *The Female Aegis; or the Duties of Women from childhood to old age, and in most situations of life, exemplified* (London: Sampson Low, 1798), 121-122.

<sup>452</sup> Celestine Woo, *Romantic Actors and Bardolatry: Performing Shakespeare from Garrick to Kean* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 89.

<sup>453</sup> A number of recent publications have explored the relationship between actresses and maternity. See in particular the compilation of essays in *Stage Mothers: Women, Work, and the Theatre, 1660-1830*, ed. Elaine McGirr and Laura Engel (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2014).

An actress can never make her children comfortable; [...] the poor infants, when the theatre calls, must be left in the care of some sour old woman, who shakes and scolds them into fits.<sup>454</sup>

Directing a similar criticism against herself that same year, famous breeches actress Dorothy Jordan lamented in a letter to the Duke of Clarence that ‘in endeavouring to perform one duty’, her role as an actress, ‘I have, I feel, neglected one still more splendid’: her responsibility to her children.<sup>455</sup> As Holbrook and Jordan suggest, the performing mother necessarily sacrificed her familial loyalties, in order to maintain, and advance, her theatrical career. Unable to be in two places at once, the mother had to choose between the theatre and the home, the public and the private, and if she chose the former, she could expect to be indicted for sexual transgression and maternal neglect.

Despite the evident discrepancies between the ambitious eighteenth-century actress and the devoted mother, however, the two roles were not entirely incompatible. As Brooks has observed, ‘rather than being contradictory, the image of the actress as a “good mother” and her professional identity’ were able to work ‘together to offer a more complex image of maternity’ in which being a good mother was ‘compatible with economic and physical labour’.<sup>456</sup> If the actress could prove her professionalism to be fuelled by maternal incentives, she could evade accusations of unwomanly ambition and domestic abandonment, by negotiating a symbiotic relationship between her success as an actress, and her duties as a mother. Nowhere was this demonstrated more explicitly in the late eighteenth century than in Siddons’s famous ‘Three Reasons’ speech, delivered at the Theatre Royal Bath in 1782, following her performance in Ambrose Philips’s *The Distressed Mother* (1712).

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<sup>454</sup> Ann Catherine Holbrook, *The Dramatist, or Memoirs of the Stage* (Birmingham: Martin and Hunter, 1809), 60.

<sup>455</sup> Letter from Dorothy Jordan to William Duke of Clarence, June 1809, quoted in Helen Brooks, “‘The Divided Heart of the Actress’: Late Eighteenth-Century Actresses and the Cult of Maternity”, in *Stage Mothers*, ed. McGirr and Engel, 33.

<sup>456</sup> Brooks, “‘Divided Heart’”, 35.

*The Distressed Mother* marked Siddons's farewell performance in Bath, which came as a result of her decision to leave the provincial theatre to join Drury Lane. Aware that the lucrative move to London rendered her susceptible to charges of unfeminine ambition, Siddons prepared an address which framed her employment in London as a choice made wholly for the sake of her children. At the close of the performance, a visibly pregnant Siddons was joined on stage by her three young children, while she spoke the lines,

These are the moles that heave me from your side,  
 [...] Ye little magnets, whose strong influence draws  
 Me from a point where every gentle breeze  
 Wafted my bark to happiness and ease;  
 Sends me advent'rous on a larger main,  
 In hopes that you may profit by my gain! –  
 Have I been hasty? Am I then to blame?  
 Answer all ye who own a parent's name.<sup>457</sup>

As Jan MacDonald has suggested, the speech fashions Siddons 'as a good and caring mother who in happier circumstances would have shunned public life and relished domesticity, but whom financial restraints had forced into employment in the theatre in order to support the offspring she adored'.<sup>458</sup> Owing to her husband's tendency to ill health, Siddons was the main provider of her family's income.<sup>459</sup> Placed under pressure to secure independently her family's financial stability, Siddons's advancement of her public profession was requisite to her role as a good mother. As her address insists, it is not for

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<sup>457</sup> 'An Address: Written and Spoken by Mrs Siddons, when she Produced to the Audience her Three Reasons for Quitting the Bath Theatre', in *The Scots Magazine* 45 (January 1783), 41.

<sup>458</sup> MacDonald, 'Acting', 62. On Siddons's performances of authentic motherhood on stage see Linda Buchanan, 'Sarah Siddons and her Place in Rhetorical History', *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, vol.25, no.4 (Autumn 2007), 428-434; Brooks, *Actresses*, 117-141; Brooks, "'Divided Heart'", 19-42; Shearer West, 'The Public and Private Roles of Sarah Siddons', in *A Passion for Performance: Sarah Siddons and her Portraitists*, ed. Robyn Asleson (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1999), 6, and Woo, *Romantic Actors*, 99-100.

<sup>459</sup> See MacDonald, 'Acting', 62.



herself that she is becoming ‘advent’rous on a larger main’ but for the benefit of her children, who she appreciates will ‘profit by [her] gain’. By painting her deviation from feminine norms as an extension of her indefatigable loyalty to her family, Siddons’s biographer, Thomas Campbell, was later able to declare that Siddons’s success as an actress derived in large part from her being ‘too affectionate a mother not to be anxious for the gains that were to secure [her children’s] independence’.<sup>460</sup> As Campbell’s statement suggests, Siddons’s career choice was viewed not as a rejection of her maternal loyalties, but as an active reinforcement of them.

Just as Siddons was under pressure to defend her motives when deserting Bath for the London stage in 1782, the widowed Yates could similarly be accused of indecorum when she acted in London in 1797. Leaving her children parentless in Bath to perform in the acclaimed London arena, Yates was liable to the very criticisms levelled against Holbrook’s acting mother, as she too proved willing to place her children in the hands of a non-parental guardian, as soon as ‘the theatre call[ed]’. Yates distinguished herself from Holbrook’s image however, using a form of self-dramatisation strikingly reminiscent of that employed by Siddons a decade previously. Added to the 1797 performance of *The Earl of Warwick* was an address spoken by Yates, alerting audiences to her status as a widowed mother. Returning to the stage at the close of the play, dressed in mourning garb, Yates delivered the lines,

Fain would I speak: – alas! these rising tears  
 Must plead the Orphan’s cause, the Widow’s tears.  
 To you, the little innocents appeal,  
 And lift their trembling hands with grateful zeal:  
 Robb’d of a parent, ere they knew his worth,  
 Each pleasing prospect clouded in its birth;

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<sup>460</sup> Campbell, *Mrs Siddons*, I:133-134.

Oh, may their hard and hapless lot attain

Your kind protection.<sup>461</sup>

As in Siddons's 'Three Reasons', attention is turned towards Yates's dedication to her family. It is not the masculine desire for public approbation that has positioned Yates on the stage, but rather, her desperation to provide independently for her 'little innocents', who have been subjected to a 'hard and hapless lot', since being 'Robb'd of a parent'. Exemplifying Ellen Donkin's observation that throughout the eighteenth century 'family emergency was a necessary precondition for many women to justify their venturing outside the home', both Siddons and Yates cultivate an image of themselves as self-reliant parents, impelled to advance in their public careers through no choice of their own, but through the necessities of familial circumstance.<sup>462</sup>

These same maternal sentiments that secure Yates's respectability as an actress, condone her character's foray into battle. Francklin's Margaret can be seen to personify the two contrary types of eighteenth-century actress outlined in this discussion: power hungry and masculine on the one hand, Margaret can alternatively be viewed, like Yates herself, as a devoted and desperate mother, whose masculine role is carried out for entirely feminine purposes. While it is the former characterisation which takes precedence in the script, and was suggestively foregrounded in the earlier performances, knowledge of Yates's genuine status as a widowed mother, forced into the public arena out of love for her children, enables her character to be interpreted in this same acceptably feminine mould. In order to substantiate this theory, I precede my return to Francklin's script with an exploration of Yates's presentation in advertisements for the tragedy printed in British newspapers. Then, analysing her depiction in the press in light of late eighteenth-century acting theory, I show

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<sup>461</sup> 'Occasional Address, Spoken by Mrs Yates, After the Tragedy of *The Earl of Warwick*. By Mr Roberts, The Artist', in *True Briton*, 11 February 1797.

<sup>462</sup> Ellen Donkin, *Getting into the Act: Women playwrights in London, 1776-1829* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 14.

how the same familial circumstances that excuse Yates's unfeminine behaviour, simultaneously justify Margaret's unwomanly actions on the battlefield.

'The Melancholy Catastrophe of Mr Thomas Yates': Sarah Yates's Domestic Distress and its Publicity in British Newspapers

Theatre-goers' knowledge of Yates's private grief was not withheld until the end of *The Earl of Warwick*. Rather, the actress's domestic situation was communicated previously in advertisements for the tragedy. Newspaper articles publicising the play emphasised Yates's recent widowhood, and exhorted audiences to attend the tragedy with the express aim of 'succour[ing] the distresses of [Mr. Yates's] widow and orphan children'.<sup>463</sup> Announcing the upcoming production on 7 February 1797, an article printed in the *Oracle and Public Advertiser* read,

With the circumstances attending the death of her husband the public are sufficiently acquainted. [...] They interested all who could feel for misfortune. [...] The widow of Mr Yates is shut out from the pecuniary provision that was concluded to have been made for her. [...] Mrs Yates has powers as an actress; the public are never insensible to suffering merit, fairly submitted to their humanity. On Thursday therefore, at Colman's Theatre in the Haymarket, *The Earl of Warwick* will be performed [...] for her benefit.<sup>464</sup>

As with the address, the advert assures readers of Yates's feminine propriety, despite her public occupation, by illuminating her need to compensate for the 'pecuniary provision' from which both she and her children have been 'shut out'. It is not simply the perception

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<sup>463</sup> *London Chronicle*, 9 February 1797.

<sup>464</sup> *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, 7 February 1797.

of Yates as an actress which is determined by the article, however, but the perception of her character too. In the context of late eighteenth-century acting theory, the emphasis placed on Yates's personal 'misfortune' preconditions theatre audiences to pity her character before the performance has even begun. Anticipating Margaret's embodiment of the actress's genuine affliction, to which 'all who [can] feel' cannot be 'insensible', audiences premeditate a response to Yates's character which befits the 'suffering' performer, regardless of the role she is set to exhibit on stage.

A similar advertisement for the tragedy was printed in the *Morning Chronicle* on 8 February. Again foregrounding Yates's domestic grief, the advert declared,

The public cannot have forgot the melancholy catastrophe of Mr Yates. His death devoted his widow and his family to ruin; [...] A play is to be performed for their benefit tomorrow evening, at the Haymarket Theatre, in which Mrs. Yates is herself to appear in the principal character. We sincerely hope that she will experience in public kindness some consolation for her heavy loss.<sup>465</sup>

Implored to show 'kindness' and 'consolation' to the actress following her 'heavy loss', audiences' expectations are once more geared towards the pathetic: the audience attend the theatre envisaging not the exhibition of a savage and villainous Queen, but the emotional outpourings of an afflicted widow and struggling mother. Consequently, the aspects of Margaret's identity which are aligned most closely with this anticipated characterisation strike a chord with the audience: keen to detect in Margaret sentiments that allude explicitly to Yates's own situation, audiences dwell upon Margaret's expressions of familial distress more than they do her less compatible character traits, and her sentimental protestations of maternal anxiety resultantly overshadow her unfeminine attributes. With these expectations

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<sup>465</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 8 February 1797.

in mind, I now return to Francklin's script, and demonstrate the potential for Margaret to be interpreted, in accordance with Yates, as a grieving wife, and unflinchingly loyal mother.

'Weeping Mothers Shall Applaud': The Actress, The Warrior, and the 'Desp'rate Mother'

As suggested earlier, Francklin's Margaret embodies the dichotomous identities on offer to the eighteenth-century actress. On the one hand, she is a woman hungry for fame and public approbation. She is described by Warwick as an 'enterprising woman' whose 'active mind is ever on the wing/ in search of fresh expeditions to recover/ the crown she lost'.<sup>466</sup> Consonant with this, Margaret's motivation to have Warwick and Edward killed is shown to rise fundamentally from her desire to win back the authority she held before Warwick 'robb'd her of a crown,/ and plac'd it on a proud usurper's head'.<sup>467</sup> Intimating her lust to regain her queenly privileges, Margaret confesses that 'crowns/ are dazzling meteors in a woman's eye; such strong temptations, few of us,/ I fear, have virtue to resist'.<sup>468</sup> She later informs Clifford of her desire to see 'one or both' of her enemies fall, so that 'Marg'ret [shall] rise triumphant on their ruin', before expressing her aspiration to regain 'the throne of England', and grow 'superior in the lists of fame'.<sup>469</sup> Driven by the wish of establishing herself as 'the people's idol', and declaring that there is nothing that 'unrestrained ambition will not do,' Margaret raises 'a pow'rful army', and 'elate with pride' and 'almost sure of victory', enters into battle with Edward's troops.<sup>470</sup>

While this characterisation of Margaret likens her to the selfishly ambitious actress, whose actions are motivated by yearnings for public notoriety, it is possible to locate in Margaret a concurrent, though less explicit affiliation with the respectable and selfless eighteenth-century actress, whose public role is fuelled by maternal incentives. Margaret's savage proclamations of merciless ambition are sparingly interspersed with tender references to

<sup>466</sup> Francklin, *Earl of Warwick*, IV.ii.50.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*, V.iii.69.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, II.iii.32.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, I.i.11; II.iii.35.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, III.i.36; IV.ii.51; V.ii.63.

her young son. Early on in the play, Margaret hints at her strong maternal sentiments, when demanding King Edward that he must ‘give me back my son –/ or dread the vengeance of a desp’rate mother’.<sup>471</sup> Later, when Clifford asks Margaret ‘what becomes of the young Prince?’ Margaret again evidences her maternal concerns, when begging nature to ‘hear/ a Mother’s prayer!’ and ‘teach [her] how to save [her] darling boy’.<sup>472</sup> While occupying less room in the text than Margaret’s expressions of rage and ruthlessness, the Queen’s referrals to her son imply that her masculine behaviour is not entirely destitute of feminine motivation: the war she goes on to wage against Edward’s troops seeks not only to restore ‘Lancaster’s great name’, but also to ‘save [her] darling boy’ from Edward’s captivity.<sup>473</sup>

Margaret’s characterisation as a ‘desp’rate mother’ is conveyed most explicitly following the battle against Edward’s army, during which her son is killed by Warwick. Her child’s murder at the hands of the protagonist provides Margaret with a dual cause for vengeance, which again amalgamates unfeminine covetousness with maternal affection, and, in this case, bereavement: justifying her slaughter of the man who has not only left her ‘bereft of honour’ and ‘fortune’, but has also ‘basely mutrher’d [her] sweet boy’, Margaret declares,

Thou wilt call me base,  
 Blood thirsty, cruel, savage and revengeful,  
 But here I stand acquitted to myself,  
 And evr’y feeling heart that knows my wrongs. –  
 To late posterity dethroned Queens  
 And weeping mothers shall applaud my justice.<sup>474</sup>

Margaret’s brutal slaughter of Warwick is incited by his role in positioning her as both a ‘dethroned Queen’, *and* a ‘weeping mother’. The binary incentives prompting the murder

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<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*, I.ii.13.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, III.i.38.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, II.vi.35.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, V.iii.69.

attest to Margaret's resemblance to both the subversive eighteenth-century actress, who seeks public praise and power, and the dutiful acting mother, who reluctantly transgresses feminine norms in order to fulfil her maternal responsibilities. If, in previous performances, Margaret had been aligned most closely with the former figure, and had failed to 'steal into the heart' of the audience on account of her transcendent conceit and malignity, in 1797, it is not 'the haughty Queen', but the 'desp'rate mother', that takes centre stage.

The details of Yates's domestic circumstances published in the newspapers encourage each scene in which Margaret appears to be viewed through a sentimental lens. In her opening scene, the audience's shock at Margaret's communication of her savage 'hope of vengeance' and her plan 'to conquer men' is subordinate to the pity they feel when she references the 'dark cloud of grief' and lists herself among 'the daughters of affliction': these melancholy expressions stand out when delivered by Yates, as the audience recognise the authentic foundation from which the emotions spring.<sup>475</sup> Similarly, while Warwick is being artfully 'flatter'd, sooth'd, provok'd/ and wrought' to Margaret's purpose, the audience are less appalled by Margaret's dissimulation, than they are moved by her communication of spousal grief: Margaret's claim during the dialogue that she has grown 'inur'd to wretchedness' and 'familiar with misfortune' since Henry was consigned to 'languish in a dungeon', enables the audience to blend Henry's imprisonment with Thomas Yates's death, and thus to conflate the 'life of woe' described by Margaret, with that experienced by Yates.<sup>476</sup> By extension, when Margaret beholds 'the pale corpse of [her] poor bleeding child', then draws 'a poniard forth, and plung[es] it in [Warwick's] heart', audiences interpret her not as a 'base,/ Blood thirsty, cruel' and 'savage' Amazon, but rather, like Yates herself, as a relentlessly loyal and 'desp'rate mother', who, having been

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<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, I.i.8, 7, 8.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, III.i.35; II.v.28, 33.

deprived of a husband, must herself venture into the public sphere, and transgress sexual boundaries, for the sake of her ‘little innocents’.

Essentially, while informing audiences of Yates’s familial devotion subsequent to the performance ensures Yates’s own reputation as a decorous actress, the circulation of these same details prior to the performance dictates Margaret’s characterisation as a family oriented, and therefore acceptably feminine, female warrior. In 1790, *The Aberdeen Magazine* printed an article titled ‘On Fortitude’, written by James Beattie. Describing two contrary types of martial woman, Beattie declared that,

Masculine boldness in a woman is disagreeable; the term virago conveys an offensive idea. The female warriors of antiquity [...] were unamiable personages. [...] But female courage exerted in defence of a child, [or] a husband [...] would be true fortitude, and deserve the highest encomiums.<sup>477</sup>

Beattie makes a clear distinction between the ‘disagreeable’ and ‘offensive’ female warrior, who, like the ‘unsexed’ women of France, shuns the character peculiar to her sex, and the commendable female soldier, whose military actions indicate her loyalty and dedication to her family. On account of casting choices, it is the latter figure with whom Francklin’s Margaret is aligned. Aware of Yates’s genuine domestic suffering, Margaret’s parallel sentiments elicit a superlative emotional response from theatregoers, who forget that it is Margaret, and not Yates herself, towards whom their sympathies are being directed. As in Nussbaum’s theory, ‘the actress’s character on stage’ is ‘confused with the woman herself’, and both Yates and Margaret become objects of compassion, whose unwomanly actions are seen not to prohibit, but contrarily, to enable the fulfilment of their

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<sup>477</sup> James Beattie, ‘On Fortitude’, in *The Aberdeen Magazine, Literary Chronicle and Review, 1788-1790*, 3 vols (Aberdeen: J. Chalmers, 1790), III:107. Family oriented warriors are discussed further in chapter 3.



assigned familial duties.<sup>478</sup> With the real and the illusory having fused together, Margaret evades association with the ‘unamiable’ virago, as it is maternal affection for her son which is foregrounded as the primary catalyst for her military exertions.

#### ‘Interesting and Pathetic Graces’: Margaret’s Theatrical Reformation

While I consider Yates’s private circumstances to have exerted the greatest influence over her character’s reception, Margaret’s reformation in dramas performed in contemporary London can also be seen to have assisted the innovative response. In *The Haunted Stage*, Carlson argues that ‘the expectations an audience brings to a new reception experience are the residue of memory of previous such experiences’. Each dramatic portrayal, contends Carlson, is ghosted by the memory of earlier, related portrayals, and it is this ‘memory that supplies the codes and strategies that shape reception’.<sup>479</sup> Carlson’s theory indicates a potential connection between Margaret’s shifting depiction in late eighteenth-century dramas, and the novel response elicited by Francklin’s Margaret in 1797.

Throughout the early and mid-eighteenth century, British dramas had unanimously presented Margaret as a fierce and cruel warrior Queen. Popular plays including Theophilus Cibber’s *King Henry VI* (1724) revived Shakespeare’s depiction of Margaret as an ‘amazon queen’ of ‘valiant spirit’ who possesses a ‘tiger’s heart’ wrapped ‘in a woman’s hide’.<sup>480</sup> Ambrose Philips’s tragedy *Humphrey: Duke of Gloucester* (1723), exhibited a similarly ‘Imperious Margaret’, intent on ‘a more fatal vengeance/ than ever injur’d woman did accomplish’; and Paul Hiffernan’s unstaged tragedy *The Earl of Warwick; or, the King and Subject* (1764), another adaptation of La Harpe’s *Le Compte de Warwick*, depicted Margaret as ‘a tygress’ and ‘a monster’ in ‘human shape’.<sup>481</sup> These

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<sup>478</sup> Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, 45.

<sup>479</sup> Carlson, *Haunted Stage*, 5

<sup>480</sup> Theophilus Cibber, *King Henry VI. A Tragedy* (London: W. Chetwood, 1724), III.i.28; V.iv.56; II.iii.22.

<sup>481</sup> Ambrose Philips, *Humphrey: Duke of Gloucester. A Tragedy* (London: J. Roberts, 1723), II.v.26; III.vii.38; Paul Hiffernan, *The Earl of Warwick; or, the King and Subject* (London: J. Kearsley, 1764), V.iii.60.

works informed Margaret's dramatic reputation as a woman of 'deadly mischief'.<sup>482</sup>

Consequently, when audiences attended Francklin's tragedy in the 1760s and 80s, their perception of Francklin's heroine was haunted by the monstrous figure exhibited in these scripts.

A very different figure haunted performances of Margaret, however, by the time that Sarah Yates appeared in the role. By 1797, savage and ferocious Margarets had been usurped by the feminine and sentimental equivalents described by Wahrman and Worrall. Attendants at Yates's performance were likely to have been acquainted with Colman's Margaret, who 'is by no means distinguished' for her 'daring ambition and masculine ferocity', but is painted instead with maternal softness, and 'interesting and pathetic graces'.<sup>483</sup> They had potentially witnessed also Jerningham's revised 'Interlude', which, as the *Oracle* proclaimed, had presented 'the sorrows of Margaret' in a manner considered to be 'amongst the most touching appeals of the scenic art'.<sup>484</sup> These recent and recurring London performances created a context in which Margaret's humanity received recognition, and it was this humane and maternal Margaret that theatregoers came to envisage when attending Francklin's tragedy in 1797.

The expectation of a maternal and sentimental Margaret was strengthened in 1797 by the role's newly acquired association with a notorious London actress. In 1796, a condensed, three act version of *The Earl of Warwick*, constituting the play's only other performance in London that decade, was staged at Covent Garden.<sup>485</sup> The role of Margaret was played by Elizabeth Pope (nee Younge), an actress regarded at the time as 'the most valuable woman' at Covent Garden, and highly regarded for her ability to draw 'gentle affections'

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<sup>482</sup> Hiffernan, *Earl of Warwick*, V.iii.58.

<sup>483</sup> Review of George Colman's *The Battle of Hexham*, in *The General Magazine and Impartial Review* (August 1789), 339.

<sup>484</sup> *Oracle*, 9 May 1794.

<sup>485</sup> Adverts for this shortened tragedy appear in *The Sun*, 18 May, 1796; *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 23 May 1796, and *Morning Chronicle*, 24 May 1796. This condensed version of the play was performed just once, on 24 May. It is unclear which parts of the play were cut.

from the audience, and ‘to guile them of tears’.<sup>486</sup> Pope performed the role of Jerningham’s Margaret in 1793 and 1794, and, as affirmed in the *Oracle*, she provided a ‘touching’ portrayal.<sup>487</sup> Pope’s moving performance of Jerningham’s Margaret potentially influenced her subsequent reception in *The Earl of Warwick*. To quote again from Carlson,

The recycled body of an actor [...] will almost inevitably in a new role evoke the ghost or ghosts of previous roles if they have made any impression whatever on the audience, a phenomenon that often colours and indeed may dominate the reception process.<sup>488</sup>

Considering Carlson’s theory that ‘each new performance is conditioned by inevitable memories’ of the actor ‘playing similar roles in the past’, Pope’s rendition of Francklin’s Margaret was quite possibly haunted by the actress’s prior performances of this same historical figure in Jerningham’s dramatisation.<sup>489</sup> Recalling the ‘touching appeals’ previously exhibited by Pope, regular London theatregoers anticipate and look out for these same pathetic tendencies during *The Earl of Warwick*. Therefore, as with Yates’s successive performance, the maternal facets of Francklin’s Margaret provoke greater emotion in 1796 than they might have done in previous decades, as they allude, intentionally or not, to Pope’s affecting portrayal of the ‘weak’ and ‘feeble’ mother, depicted in Jerningham’s ‘Interlude’.<sup>490</sup>

The parallels formed in 1796 between Jerningham’s sentimental Margaret and Francklin’s ‘haughty Queen’ have repercussions in 1797. Prior to Pope’s performance, Francklin’s

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<sup>486</sup> *Oracle*, 10 March 1794; Anon., *A Trip to Parnassus; Or, the Judgment of Apollo on Dramatic Authors and Performers. A Poem* (London: John Abraham, 1788), 12.

<sup>487</sup> *Oracle*, 9 May 1794. Pope had also performed this role in the 1770s. On her performances in the ‘Interlude’ see Worrall, *Celebrity*, 184-200.

<sup>488</sup> Carlson, *Haunted Stage*, 8.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>490</sup> Jerningham, ‘Historical Interlude’, 6, 3.

tragedy had not been staged in London for fourteen years.<sup>491</sup> Therefore, frequent attendants at the London theatre are likely to recall Pope's performance most vividly, as it is freshest in their minds. With the memory of Pope's Margaret acquiring precedence among a portion of the London audience, theatrical expectations regarding Francklin's heroine are renegotiated in 1797, and made to accord with the preconceptions of the role created in the tragedy's advertisements: operating in alignment with the publicity surrounding Yates's domestic grief, the memory of Pope's performance causes certain theatregoers to arrive at Haymarket anticipating the sentimental and feminine Queen associated with the earlier actress. As a result, the more maternal traits of Margaret's character are again accentuated: this time, not by knowledge of Yates's melancholy circumstances, but by the recollection of the domestic sorrows previously exhibited by Pope. Consequently, the repertoire of performances in which Margaret appeared in London throughout the 1790s can be seen to have facilitated the Queen's maternal characterisation in 1797: with *The Earl of Warwick* now haunted by the sentimental Margarets frequently exhibited on the late eighteenth-century stage, and pervaded most explicitly by the ghost of Mrs Pope, an additional context is created in which it becomes possible for Francklin's heroine to be 'received with much feeling', and to draw 'tears from almost every eye'.<sup>492</sup>

To conclude, despite the disparity between Francklin's script, and the sentimental depictions of Margaret that rose to prevalence in dramas of the 1790s, *The Earl of Warwick*, when performed in 1797, can be identified as yet another drama which emphasises the Queen's 'redeeming maternal side', and in so doing, enhances her compliance with the period's feminine ideal.<sup>493</sup> On account of both casting choices, and, less centrally, theatre repertoire in London, Yates's Margaret is distinguished from the 'ruthless Queen' depicted in Francklin's script, as familial sentiments dominate her

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<sup>491</sup> This point is made in the advert for the three act tragedy printed in *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 23 May 1796.

<sup>492</sup> *London Chronicle*, 9 February 1797.

<sup>493</sup> Wahrman, *Modern Self*, 17.

characterisation. Just as Yates is forced by motherhood to abandon the feminine realms of the home for the masculine province of the public sphere, the audience perceive Margaret as a woman who is comparatively impelled to cross sexual boundaries, not because that she is unfeminine or 'unsexed', but because that, like the actress embodying her, she too is a 'weeping' and 'desp'rate mother'.

### **3: ‘The Merit of her Patriotism’: Charlotte Corday in British Drama, 1794-1804**

Those who mourn my loss, will rejoice to see me enjoy an eternal repose in the Elysian fields with Brutus and other patriots among the ancients.<sup>494</sup>

Letter from Charlotte Corday to Charles Barbaroux, 1793

On 13 July 1793, Charlotte Corday, a twenty-five year old republican woman from Caen, Normandy, stabbed and killed the Jacobin leader Jean-Paul Marat, while he sat naked in his bath tub, nursing a skin disease.<sup>495</sup> The assassination of Marat was politically inspired. Corday’s loyalties lay with the Girondins, a loosely aligned political faction made up of moderate republicans who advocated a constitutional government. Marat belonged to the radical Montagnard faction, who were engaged in a violent struggle to overthrow the Girondins, on account of the latter’s disapproval of the bloody turn that the revolution had taken.<sup>496</sup> Corday killed Marat to protect her compatriots, or, to use her own words, ‘to deliver [her] country from a conspiring monster’.<sup>497</sup> She was aware that she would be guillotined for her crime, yet she was not deterred. In a letter addressed to fellow Girondin Charles Barbaroux, written from her cell, Corday declared that ‘she that saves her country

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<sup>494</sup> Letter from Corday to fellow Girondin Charles Barbaroux, trans. and published in *London Chronicle*, 1 August 1793.

<sup>495</sup> On the murder see Lucy Moore, *Liberty: The Lives and Times of Six Women in Revolutionary France* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), 196-199; Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 729-731, 734-741; Chantal Thomas, ‘Heroism in the Feminine: The Examples of Charlotte Corday and Madame Roland’, in *The French Revolution 1789-1989: Two Hundred Years of Rethinking*, ed. S. Petrey (Lubbock: Texas Tech, 1989), 69-72; Catherine R. Montford and Nina Corazzo, ‘Charlotte Corday: Femme Homme’, in *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1789*, ed. Catherine R. Montford (USA: Summa Publications, 1994), 33-35, and Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992), 293.

<sup>496</sup> On the Jacobin/Girondin conflict see Patrice Higonnet, *Goodness beyond Virtue: Jacobins during the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998), 35-44; Schama, *Citizens*, 715-718, and Moore, *Liberty*, 174-177.

<sup>497</sup> From account of Corday’s trial, trans. and published in *Finn’s Leinster Journal*, 17 August 1793.

never minds what it costs’, before proudly listing herself, along with Brutus, as one of few ‘true patriots who know how to die for their country’.<sup>498</sup>

By comparing herself to Brutus, Corday demonstrated explicitly her devotion to the republican cause. Brutus was heralded in France as the revolutionary ideal. A painted image of Brutus stood in the meeting place of the National Convention, alongside a sculpture of his bust, identical to that which appeared in the meeting house of the Jacobin Club.<sup>499</sup> As Cecilia Feilla notes, Brutus was ‘hailed as the Father of Liberty’. His image ‘provided the standard of revolutionary devotion and civic virtue’, and, consequently, ‘to invoke or uphold Brutus’s example’ was ‘to identify oneself as a patriot and defender of the nation’.<sup>500</sup> Corday was certainly justified in considering her murder of Marat as a defence of her country’s welfare. In the months leading up to Marat’s death, the Montagnards were viewed by French royalists and moderate republicans as a tyrannical faction, who sought to acquire for themselves the very sovereignty that the revolution had intended to destroy, using barbaric and savage means.<sup>501</sup> Recording this opinion in May 1792, the *Evening Mail* translated and printed a question addressed to the National Assembly by French speaker M. Beugnet, which asked, ‘How is it possible’ to ‘expect that order and tranquillity should be restored, whilst so many infamous missionaries preach openly insurrection, carnage, and murder – such as Marat?’ In September of that same year, the *General Evening Post* printed extracts of a letter from Paris, in which it was declared of ‘the hellish faction of

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<sup>498</sup> Corday to Barbaroux, *London Chronicle*, 1 August 1793.

<sup>499</sup> On the idolisation of Brutus in revolutionary France see Schama, *Citizens*, 169-174; Jonathan Sachs, *Roman Antiquity: Rome in the British Imagination* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 15; Edward Andrew, *Imperial Republics: Revolution, War and Territorial Expansion from the English Civil War to the French Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 142; Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), 126; Higonnet, *Goodness*, 138, and Jesse Goldhammer, *The Headless Republic: Sacrificial Violence in Modern French Thought* (USA: Cornell UP, 2005), 34.

<sup>500</sup> Cecilia Feilla, *The Sentimental Theatre of the French Revolution* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 164.

<sup>501</sup> On French attitudes towards Marat and the Montagnards see Ian Germani, *Jean-Paul Marat: Hero and Anti-Hero of the French Revolution* (Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 2-3, 65-98, and Higonnet, *Goodness*, 204.

Robespierre, Marat, Chabot and others' that 'either this desperate band of ruffians must fall, or they will immolate every man of the Assembly that they distrust'.<sup>502</sup>

Strong antipathy to the Montagnards led to concrete plans being formed to bring about the fall of the radical faction. Just one month before Corday's murder of Marat, the city of Marseilles issued a manifesto urging that Marat and 'the den of Jacobins at Paris' must receive a 'speedy and severe punishment' for their provocation of 'monstrous and pre-concerted anarchy'. The manifesto pleaded that 'every man capable of bearing arms is summoned in name of the law, of general and individual interest, and of humanity', to 'unite in a body to effect the annihilation of the factious in their crimes'. It closed with the plea,

Republicans, the signal has been given [...]. Follow the traces of the blood of your brethren, they will conduct you to the bottom of [Paris's] walls, from which have proceeded those murderous scourges, the sanguinary plots and destructive manoeuvres – the sources of all our misery. There you will restore liberty to our good citizens [...]. The villains will disappear, and the Republic will be saved.<sup>503</sup>

By venturing into Paris and murdering Marat, Corday behaved exactly as the manifesto had demanded: she killed a villain to save the Republic. And yet, Corday was rarely painted by her contemporaries as a heroic republican patriot.

Representations of Charlotte Corday took a range of different forms. French radicals, whose hostility towards Corday was fuelled by their loyalty to Marat, commonly presented her as a detestable and monstrous she-devil. On 20 July 1793, Jacobin Deputy Fabre

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<sup>502</sup> *Evening Mail*, 11-14 May 1792; *General Evening Post*, 20-22 September 1792.

<sup>503</sup> 'Manifesto of the city of Marseilles to the French Republicans - 12 June 1793', in *Hibernian Journal*, 17 July 1793.



d'Eglantine, writing on behalf of the revolutionary government in the *Gazette de France Nationale*, chastised Corday for throwing 'herself outside her sex'. He claimed that Corday's 'philosophic mania' and concern with 'the politics of nations' had rid her of the feminine characteristics of 'sentimental love and its soft emotions'. He closed by warning that 'sensible and amiable men do not like women of this type', and defined Corday as 'a remarkable example of the seal of reprobation with which nature stamps those women who renounce the temperament, the character, the duties, the tastes and the inclinations of their sex'.<sup>504</sup> As d'Eglantine's criticism suggests, Corday's sex offered the Jacobins the most effective means of articulating their outrage at Marat's death. By appealing to her gender, the Jacobins were able to depict Corday's crime as fundamentally wrong, as entirely unnatural: had the laws of nature been obeyed, Corday would not have abandoned her sex, and Marat would not have been killed.

It was not only Marat's supporters who were troubled by Corday's political and 'philosophic mania', but his enemies too. The prevalent loyalism in Britain following the outbreak of Terror in France meant that, by the time of his death, Marat was largely perceived in Britain with the same abhorrence expressed by the people of Marseilles.<sup>505</sup> As Marat stood for all that British conservatives opposed, British depictions of Corday tended to be more favourable than those offered by her Jacobin compatriots. Though a French republican, Corday's aversion to the Montagnards' extreme radicalism meant that she could be imagined to embody loyalist British sentiments. In their effort to mould her into a conservative British icon, Marat's British enemies often ignored Corday's association with the Girondins entirely, and presented her instead as an anglicised enemy of French

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<sup>504</sup> *Gazette de France Nationale*, 20 July 1793, trans. and quoted in Michael Marrinan, 'Images and Ideas of Charlotte Corday: Texts and Contexts of an Assassination', *Arts Magazine - New York*, vol.54, issue 8 (April 1980), 161.

<sup>505</sup> Marat appeared frequently in British patriotic songs and magazines as a villainous and demonic character. See *The Anti-Levelling Songster. Number 1* (London: J. Downes, 1793), 13; *The Anti-Gallican Songster. Number 1. The Contrast. English Liberty...French Liberty...Which is Best?* (London: J. Downes, 1793), 7, and *Britannic Magazine; or entertaining repository of Heroic Adventures*, 12 vols (London: The Author, 1793-1807), I:62.

republicanism.<sup>506</sup> In his caricature *The heroic Charlotte La Cordé, upon her Trial* (1793) [Fig.12], James Gillray has Corday's three condemning judges seated on a throne on which is inscribed the words 'Vive la Republique'. The gaping crowd wear liberty caps, and the figure of justice stamps on a crown, indicative of Corday's royalist sympathies. While Corday appears matronly and robust, Marat's naked body has been rendered so thin by illness that his ribs are clearly visible. The contrast in size and stature between the two figures assists Corday's anglicisation, by recalling the trend among British caricaturists to juxtapose images of stout and well-fed Britons with starving and emaciated French reformers.<sup>507</sup> The caption to the image further distances Corday from French radicalism: Gillray praises Corday for ridding the world of 'atheism', 'murder' and 'regicide', three terms that had come to be recognised in Britain as the defining principles on which the revolution was based.<sup>508</sup>

Appropriated by British loyalists as the enemy of French republicanism, Corday was able to stand in Britain as a symbol of the nation's anti-Jacobin precepts. Yet, even when presented as a conservative, Corday's actions remained problematic. As Robin Ikegami has aptly pointed out, regardless of what they achieved, 'when women entered the political arena, whether to defend the status quo or to overturn it, they threatened the very foundations of society, because their publicness contradicted deeply held beliefs about the

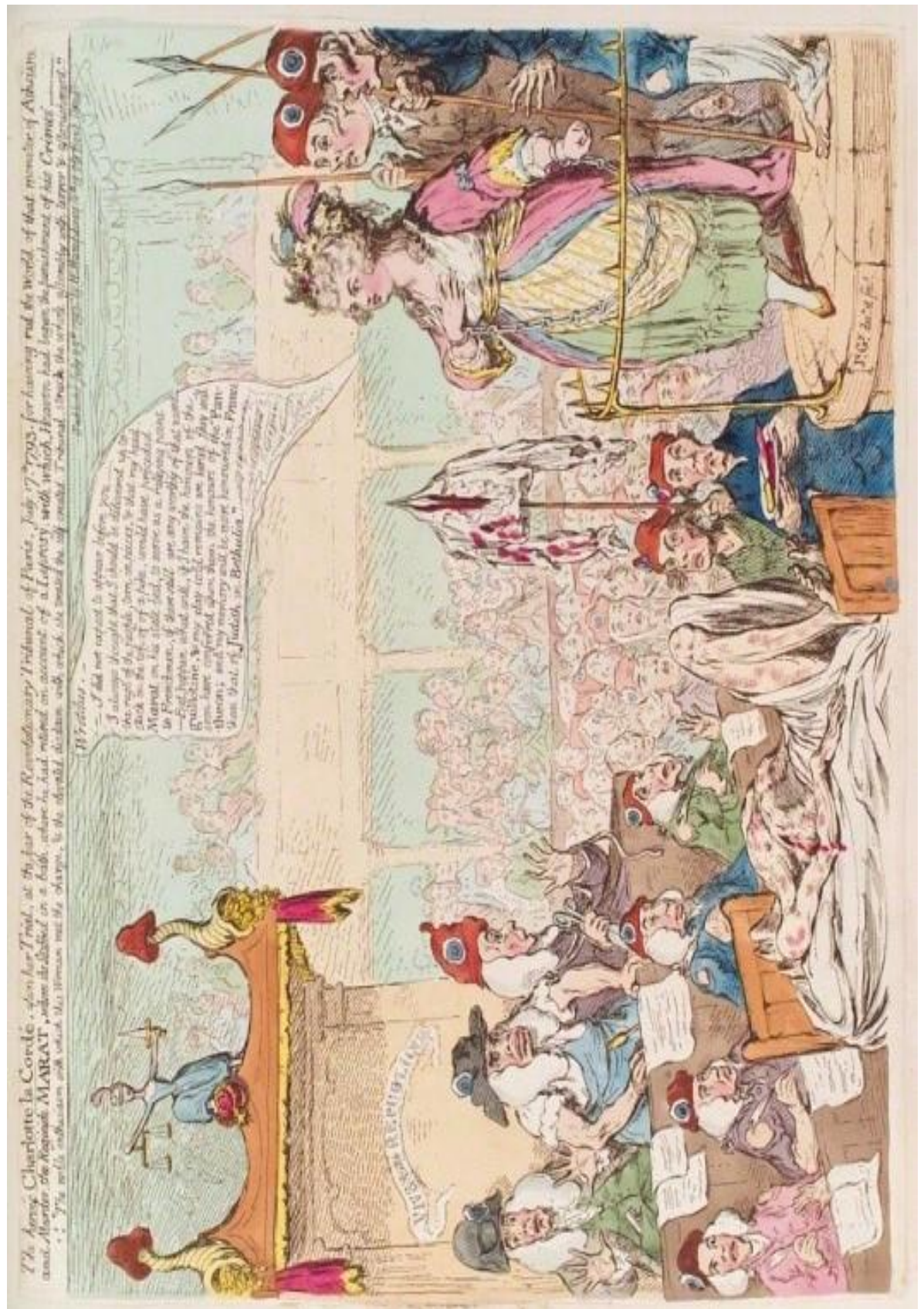
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<sup>506</sup> Billie Melman discusses the anglicisation of Corday in *The Culture of History: English Uses of the Past, 1800-1953* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), see 50-52.

<sup>507</sup> On this trend see Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996), 151, and John Richard Moores, *Representations of France in English Satirical Prints, 1740-1832* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 25-50. For examples see Isaac Cruikshank's *French Happiness/English Misery* (1793), and Gillray's earlier cartoon *French Liberty/British Slavery* (1792), both discussed in Donald, *Age of Caricature*, 151.

<sup>508</sup> Similar terms are used to describe French Liberty in popular etchings including Thomas Rowlandson's *The Contrast* (1792), and John Nixon's *French Liberty* (1793). Both are discussed in Donald, *Age of Caricature*, see 150-153. *The Contrast* is reproduced in my Introduction [Fig.1]. On Corday, loyalist politics, and Gillray's caricature see James A. Leith and Andrea Joyce, *Face à Face: French and English Caricatures of the French Revolution and its Aftermath* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1989), 19-21; Adriana Craciun, 'The New Cordays: Helen Craik and British Representations of Charlotte Corday', in *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, ed. Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 203, and *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions*, ed. Lisa Moore, Joanna Brooks and Caroline Wigginton (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 313.

Fig.12: James Gillray, *The heroic Charlotte La Cordé, upon her Trial* (1793). © Trustees of the British Museum. Reproduced under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license.



natural order of gender'.<sup>509</sup> Despite fulfilling the patriotic task encouraged by the people of Marseilles and welcomed by British loyalists, Corday could not be celebrated for her political activism, as it was not her place to perform it. The Marseilles manifesto was addressed not to women, but to 'every *man* capable of bearing arms'.

As has been well documented, French and British moralists of the late eighteenth century sought to uphold a clear distinction between the sexes by insisting on 'the immense gulf between men and women's virtue: the one public, the other private'.<sup>510</sup> While male virtue was defined by 'participation in the public world of politics', to quote Lynn Hunt, female virtue 'meant withdrawal into the private world of the family'.<sup>511</sup> These polarised definitions of male and female virtue led to equally distinct conceptions of male and female heroism. As Dorinda Outram has shown, 'whereas the male heroes', like Brutus, were seen to possess a 'remorseless control over body and emotion' which enabled them to devote themselves entirely to national concerns, women partook in 'heroic acts' by allowing 'married love or family affections of other kinds' to prompt in them 'warm and generous outrage', which animated them to 'perform acts of courage and sacrifice'.<sup>512</sup> Given the antithesis between accepted forms of male and female heroism, the one political, the other familial, to celebrate Corday as a female Brutus was to condone gender transgression, by vindicating the interchangeability of the two. Consequently, in order to present Corday in a way that complied with Britain's political and social standards, authors were required both to erase her republicanism, and to depoliticise her actions, by fabricating a private motive for her crime.

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<sup>509</sup> Robin Ikegami, 'Femmes-hommes, She-bishops and Hyenas in Petticoats: Women Reformers and Gender Treason, 1789-1830', *Women's Studies, An inter-disciplinary journal*, vol.26 (April 1997), 236.

<sup>510</sup> Outram, *The Body*, 126.

<sup>511</sup> Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of The French Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1992), 121. See also James F. McMillan, *France and Women, 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 28; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Yale UP, 1992), 254-255, and Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and their French Revolution*, trans. Katherine Streip (London: University of California Press, 1998), 270-271.

<sup>512</sup> Outram, *The Body*, 84.

The problem of Corday's gender and its negotiation in British literature has been explored in studies by Adriana Craciun and Wendy C. Nielsen. In her account of representations of Corday offered in a range of literary genres during the revolutionary era, Craciun explains that while Jacobins, like d'Eglantine, tended to depict Corday as 'a monstrous woman unsexed by her violent crime and intellect', British conservatives commonly presented Corday as 'an angelic royalist beauty' whose murder of Marat was viewed not as a form of political activism, but rather, as 'a crime of passion to avenge her murdered lover'. Craciun adds that representations which celebrate Corday's adherence to a traditionally male model of republican heroism are not entirely absent from the period's literature, yet they are 'hard to come by'.<sup>513</sup> She names just two British authors, both female, who celebrate Corday as a 'heroic and republican' activist: Girondist sympathiser Helen Maria Williams, and little-known Scottish author Helen Craik. While Williams's heroic depiction of Corday is offered in her *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France* (1795), Craciun identifies Craik's rarely studied novel *Adelaide de Narbonne, with Memoirs of Charlotte de Cordet* (1800) as 'the sole British fictional account of Corday in the Romantic period' to diverge from conservative norms, by exhibiting Corday as a 'new type of heroine' whose 'desire is justice, not love', and whose concerns are 'political, philosophical and public'.<sup>514</sup>

Echoing Craciun, Nielsen suggests that in Romantic-era dramas, Corday tended to be depicted as either an 'androgynous monster' who 'blurred the lines between masculinity and femininity', or as an apolitical 'heroine engaged in romance'.<sup>515</sup> Nielsen similarly acknowledges that there are rare exceptions to this rule, which see dramatists celebrate Corday as a heroine who manages to maintain her feminine virtues while fulfilling the role

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<sup>513</sup> Craciun, 'New Cordays', 201, 194, 201.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, 194. The term 'fictional' here is used to distinguish between genres relied on to relate facts to their readers, with the primary purpose of informing and educating (i.e. newspapers, political pamphlets), and genres that narrate a story which, even if founded on factual events (as in historical narratives) are most commonly read/watched for entertainment purposes (i.e. novels, plays). For Craciun's analysis of Williams's *Letters* see 205-209. On Craik's *Adelaide de Narbonne* see 194-201, 212-223.

<sup>515</sup> Wendy C. Nielsen, *Women Warriors in Romantic Drama* (Plymouth: University of Delaware Press, 2013), 4.

of ‘a female Brutus, an avenger against tyranny’.<sup>516</sup> Yet Nielsen is unable to list any British dramas which fall into this category. According to Nielsen, ‘Corday found her most enthusiastic admirers’ in Germany, particularly in and around 1804, when, ‘for German readers, Marat might well have evoked [...] Napoleon, whose troops occupied Hamburg’.<sup>517</sup> Having outlined Corday’s popularity in Germany, it is unsurprising that Nielsen names a German writer – Christine Westphalen – as the only playwright of the period whose dramatisation of Corday ‘follows a distinctive heroic model’.<sup>518</sup>

The final two chapters of my thesis build on these studies, by exploring representations of Charlotte Corday offered in two dramas performed in Dublin between 1794 and 1804: *The Maid of Normandy; or, the Death of the Queen of France* (1794), by English playwright John Edmund Eyre, and *Female Heroism, a Tragedy in Five Acts* (1803), by Irish author Matthew West. Reserving the significance of each play’s exhibition in Dublin for the final section of my thesis, this chapter assesses the literary trends, and political and cultural evolutions occurring in Britain and France, that shape Corday’s depiction and reception. Primarily, I investigate the ways in which both writers negotiate the relationship between female sensibility and political activism. I begin by showing Eyre to nullify the threat posed by his heroine’s gender transgression, by adopting the romantic characterisation outlined by Craciun and Nielsen. Exploring Eyre’s presentation of Corday alongside his parallel portrayal of Marie Antoinette, I reveal how the sentimentalised figures enable his tragedy to communicate an explicitly anti-Jacobin meaning, while concurrently discouraging women’s martial activity. Eyre diverges from conventional portraits of loving martial women presented in eighteenth-century dramas, by negating the possibility of a skilled female warrior. I argue that his departure from literary norms reflects enhanced anxieties in Britain regarding innate sexual difference. In my subsequent analysis of

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<sup>516</sup> Nielsen, *Women Warriors*, xxviii.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, 26. See also 27-30.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

*Female Heroism*, I illuminate the apparent, though ambiguous parallels formed between West's Corday, and the traditionally male republican hero. West was a Church of Ireland Protestant, stationed in the 1800s as vicar of the Union of Clane.<sup>519</sup> I propose that West's theological views facilitate a likeness between his tragedy's heroine, and the heroic and republican protagonist commonly presented in the early nineteenth-century British theatre. In so doing, I question the accuracy of the suggestion made by Craciun and Nielsen that heroic and republican Cordays were solely the product of female authors, that the figure appeared only once in British Romantic fiction, and never on the British stage. Having contrasted the two dramas, I offer a brief comparison of the differing ways in which Corday is presented in West's *Female Heroism*, and Craik's historical novel *Adelaide de Narbonne*. By juxtaposing the two texts, I highlight the influence of genre on the authors' representational choices, and suggest why it is that radical portrayals of Corday are detected more commonly in literature intended for the closet, than they are in performed plays.

**'My Streaming Tears shall Swell the Great Account of Dire Revenge': Royalist Heroines, Romantic Motives and Debilitating Sensibility in John Edmund Eyre's *The Maid of Normandy***

This unfortunate victim of fanaticism and disappointed love [...] had lost her lover during these sanguinary times, amidst the horror of the revolution, and was never seen to smile afterwards. This [...] prompted her to the desperate deed she achieved.<sup>520</sup>

*La Belle Assemblée*, 1813

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<sup>519</sup> See *Clergy of Meath and Kildare: Biographical Succession Lists*, comp. Canon J. B. Leslie; rev., ed. and updated W. J. R. Wallace (Dublin: Columba Press, 2009), 831.

<sup>520</sup> *La Belle Assemblée, or Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine* 50 (1 October 1813), 136.

The above account of Corday's murder of Marat, offered in British women's magazine *La Belle Assemblée*, reflects the trend among British authors to fabricate narratives which allowed them to excuse Corday's assassination of one of the country's greatest foreign enemies, without condoning gender transgression. Rather than a woman of 'philosophic mania', concerned with 'the politics of nations', the magazine portrays Corday as a sentimental victim of 'disappointed love', whose violent actions are motivated by Marat's murder of her male partner.<sup>521</sup> By presenting Corday this way, the newspaper distinguishes Corday from the masculine Brutus, whose character clashed with that encouraged of British women, and likens her instead to an alternative, acceptably feminine Roman role model: Brutus's wife, Portia. In the final decades of the century, British authors frequently eulogised Portia for allowing her strong familial affections to provoke in her an exceptional degree of fortitude. In 1793 *The Wonderful Magazine* quoted as an example of supreme female virtue Portia's willingness to make 'a deep wound in her thigh' to prove to Brutus that out of devotion to him she 'could undergo with courage any grief and torments', and that she could even die 'with and for [her] husband'.<sup>522</sup> A similar panegyric on Portia's courage and spousal devotion was offered the following year by British author and philanthropist Priscilla Wakefield, who congratulated Portia for allowing her wifely sentiments to stimulate her 'to a degree of fortitude and virtue superior to [her] sex!'<sup>523</sup> Portia's actions epitomised heroic female behaviour in revolutionary-era Britain. In an article printed in *The Ladies Monthly Museum* in 1803, all five examples chosen to exemplify 'instances of female heroism' encountered 'during the period of the late revolution in France', relate to women who, like Portia, show themselves willing to risk

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<sup>521</sup> A similarly romantic account is given in *New Annual Register* (January 1802), 45.

<sup>522</sup> 'Instances of the Singular Love of some Wives to their Husbands', in *The Wonderful Magazine and Marvellous Chronicle; or, New Weekly Entertainer* 1.1 (1 January 1793), 463.

<sup>523</sup> Priscilla Wakefield, *Leisure hours: or entertaining dialogues; between persons eminent for virtue and magnanimity*, 2 vols (London: Darton and Harvey, 1794-96), I:29.



their own safety, and even to end their own lives, out of love and loyalty to their male partners.<sup>524</sup>

As the example of Portia suggests, for female fortitude to be deemed heroic in late eighteenth-century Britain, it had to be inspired by familial love. As long as women acted on private sentiments, even the most masculine displays of intrepidity and strength could be deemed entirely compatible with female duty and propriety. As we saw in the preceding chapter, British conduct authors tended to distinguish between two contrary types of female warrior: the abominable virago, who abandoned her female responsibilities and ‘conveyed an offensive idea’; and the woman whose warlike actions were ‘exerted in defence of a child or a husband’, and ‘deserve[d] the highest encomiums’.<sup>525</sup> While French Jacobins painted Corday in the image of the former figure, it was the latter model that appealed to British conservatives, including John Edmund Eyre.

English playwright and provincial actor John Edmund Eyre was a staunch conservative. Throughout the 1790s he wrote several poems expressing his hatred of the French revolutionaries, and his fears of Jacobinism spreading to Britain.<sup>526</sup> In 1797 he communicated his monarchical sentiments in his poem ‘The Captive Queen’, which offers an emotive description of the suffering imposed on Marie Antoinette by the Jacobins. The poem reads,

Her rosy-cheeks, of crimson-hue,  
Now moisten'd by Affliction's dew [...].  
What, is the cruel lot decreed,

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<sup>524</sup> ‘Instances of Female Heroism’, in *Lady's Monthly Museum, or Polite Repository of Amusement and Instruction* 11 (December 1803), 373-376. On Portia and British women in the 1790s see Philip Hicks, ‘The Roman Matron in Britain: Female Political Influence and Republican Response, 1750-1800’, *The Journal of Modern History*, vol.77, no.1 (March 2005), 35-69, and Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 231-249.

<sup>525</sup> James Beattie, ‘On Fortitude’, in *The Aberdeen Magazine, Literary Chronicle and Review, 1788-1790*, 3 vols (Aberdeen: J. Chalmers, 1790), III:107.

<sup>526</sup> See for instance John Edmund Eyre, ‘On Mr Pitt's Two Bills to Prevent Seditious Meetings’, in *Miscellaneous poems by E. Eyre* (Yarmouth: Downes, 1798), and *The Two Bills! A Political Poem: with well-meant effusions on mischievous delusions* (Bath: G. Robbins, 1796).

And must the Royal-Mother bleed? [...]

The Mother's pangs – the Children's cries

No friend to grace her obsequies.<sup>527</sup>

As seen in chapter two, this affecting depiction of Marie Antoinette as an ailing and sentimental mother is typical of conservative literature written following the Queen's execution, which, to use Christopher Reid's phrase, 'applies the stereotypes and conventions of pathetic and domestic tragedy to a scene of specifically royal distress'.<sup>528</sup> Such 'stereotypes and conventions' can be identified also in Eyre's *Maid of Normandy*, which seeks to elicit sympathy for its two royalist heroines – Charlotte Corday, and Marie Antoinette – while simultaneously enforcing conservative attitudes towards women and martial activism.

*The Maid of Normandy* depicts both of its heroines as sentimental victims of damaged familial units. On her introduction, the captive Marie Antoinette is seen grieving for her husband who has been sentenced to death by the Jacobin government. She explains that her 'never-ceasing tears must flow', as no 'sov'reign balm/ can heal a wound so deeply torn' as her own, other than knowledge that '[her] Lord – [her] King – [her] husband live[s]'.<sup>529</sup> The Queen's love for her husband is matched by her love for her children. When a Jacobin officer comes to separate her from her offspring, she experiences 'tormenting grief' and 'bitter pain' that is 'worse than death'. She protests that 'e'en Stones would weep at such a scene as this', before begging the Jacobin officer that if he knew 'what agonies' she felt, he and his 'vile employers would relent'.<sup>530</sup> By stressing the Queen's strong familial

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<sup>527</sup> John Edmund Eyre, 'The Captive Queen: An Elegiac Ode', printed in Eyre's *The Fatal Sisters: or, the Castle of the forest: a dramatic romance, of five acts. With a variety of poetic essays* (London: J. Plymsell, 1797), 119-120.

<sup>528</sup> Christopher Reid, 'Burke's Tragic Muse: Sarah Siddons and the "Feminization" of the *Reflections*', in *Burke and the French Revolution: Bicentennial Essays*, ed. Stephen Blakemore (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 9.

<sup>529</sup> John Edmund Eyre, *The Maid of Normandy; or, the Death of the Queen of France. A tragedy, in four acts* (Dublin: Zacharia Johnson, 1794), II.i.19.

<sup>530</sup> Eyre, *Maid*, III.i.31.

affections and keen sensibilities, Eyre assists his tragedy's anti-Jacobin meaning, by ensuring that audiences pity the amiable and virtuous Queen, while hostility is directed towards the obdurate Jacobins responsible for her suffering.

Marie Antoinette is not the tragedy's only royalist heroine: like the figure depicted in Gillray's image, Eyre's Corday is also shown to nurture royalist sentiments. She declares that 'the worst of tyrants is a Democrat', and she labels Marat as 'thou destroyer of a monarch's life/ thou vile tormentor of a suff'ring Queen/ and chief abetter of rebellion's crew'.<sup>531</sup> Owing to her royalist affiliation, it is integral to *Maid*'s anti-Jacobin bias that Corday too is presented as an object of compassion. Eyre enables this by paralleling Corday's circumstances with those of Marie Antoinette's, and depicting both women as feminine casualties of Jacobinism. Like the Queen, Corday is first seen on stage mourning the death of her lover, Alberto, who she believes to have been killed by Marat. She exhibits 'throbs of life-consuming anguish' which cause 'the crimson blush' on her 'beauteous cheek' to be 'moisten'd by [...] tears'. She then speaks of the 'bitter drops/ which from the cup of sorrow overflow' as she remembers 'the horrid day/ when, by the sev'ring axe Alberto died'.<sup>532</sup> Indicating both her strength of feminine feeling, and the familial drive behind the crime that she is plotting, Corday exclaims:

T'were needless to repeat how much I've borne

Since the sad tidings of Alberto's death; [...]

My woes I will convert to special use –

My streaming tears shall swell the great account

Of dire revenge.<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, II.ii.22; I.ii.17.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, I.ii.13, 14.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, I.ii.15.

By foregrounding the ‘streaming tears’ and ‘life-consuming anguish’ provoked by the murder of her lover, Eyre challenges d’Eglantine’s portrayal of Corday as a woman who has renounced the feminine qualities of ‘sentimental love and its soft emotions’, by implying that these very impulses inspire her aggressive actions. Consequently, Eyre deters audiences from perceiving Corday as an abominable virago, and thus from siding with her Jacobin adversaries, by showing her domestic and sentimental virtues to remain very much intact.

Eyre’s feminised portrayal of Corday is assistive not only of his tragedy’s anti-Jacobin ideology, but of a concurrently misogynistic standpoint. As well as defending her against charges of gender transgression, Corday’s exhibition of acute sensibility indicates the incongruity between women and military activism. In accordance with the version of Corday presented in *La Belle Assemblée*, Eyre portrays his heroine as both a loyal lover, and as an ‘unfortunate victim of fanaticism’. This ‘fanaticism’, derived from Corday’s overwrought sensibility, creates a divergence between Eyre’s martial heroine, and the romantic female warrior more commonly presented on the late eighteenth-century stage: a divergence possibly inspired by the heightened emphasis placed on theories of biological difference between the sexes, at the time of the play’s production.

‘As Handy a Lad as ever was’: Skilled and Loving Female Warriors in Late Eighteenth-Century Literature

Corday’s declaration of her love-inspired military quest provided theatregoers with a familiar scene. Female warriors spurred on by spousal affections were common on the late eighteenth-century stage. Typically, the romantic heroines, and the plots in which they appeared, adhered to a standard set of narrative conventions. In her study of eighteenth-century female warrior ballads, Dianne Dugaw explains that the martial woman who goes to war to perform ‘loving ministrations’ is ‘not only a good woman’, but ‘a good soldier’

too, whose ‘unfeminine inclinations are invariably applauded and get the heroine’ the ‘man of her choice and a celebrated, secure and happy marriage’.<sup>534</sup> These same narrative tendencies are observable in late eighteenth-century British dramas. Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s *The Camp* (1778), and Robert Benson’s musical *Britain’s Glory; or, a Trip to Portsmouth* (1794) exemplify this. In *The Camp* Nancy joins her lover’s regiment in order to share ‘each peril’, ‘every toil’, and ‘all hardships’ that he endures.<sup>535</sup> Proving herself well suited to the art of ‘storming and wounding’, Nancy is commended for the aptitude with which she performs her military exercise, and she is described by the Sergeant as being ‘as handy a lad as ever was’.<sup>536</sup> Nancy is subsequently rewarded for her military efforts when her lover, William, welcomes her ‘into his arms’, and insists that he could have been granted nothing greater than Nancy’s smile as ‘the reward of [his] toil’.<sup>537</sup> In *Britain’s Glory*, Harriet is similarly encouraged by ‘cupid’ to support her ‘intended husband’, Captain Freeman, who is serving on board with the Royal Navy.<sup>538</sup> Again, demonstrating her masculine abilities, Harriet resembles ‘the skilful seaman’ by managing to endure the challenges posed by ‘the winds and waves’. When reunited with her lover, Captain Freeman cannot find ‘words to express [his] joy’ at Harriet’s arrival on board. He refers to Harriet as his ‘dearest love’, and claims to feel ‘indebted to [her] for this proof’ of ‘constancy and affection’.<sup>539</sup> Epitomising the narrative conventions outlined by Dugaw, both Nancy and Harriet are presented as heroines ‘deserving in romance, able in war, and rewarded in both’.<sup>540</sup>

<sup>534</sup> Dianne Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650-1850* (New York: CUP, 1989), 153, 5.

<sup>535</sup> Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Camp: A Musical Entertainment* (1778), in *Sheridan’s Plays*, ed. Cecil Price (Oxford: OUP, 1975), II.ii.327.

<sup>536</sup> Sheridan, *The Camp*, II.ii.320

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*, II.ii.330. On theatrical depictions of gender dynamics in military camps see Gillian Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics and Society, 1793-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 33-50. On *The Camp* specifically see 43-45.

<sup>538</sup> Robert Benson, *Britain’s Glory; or, a trip to Portsmouth: A Musical Entertainment* (London: J. Baker, 1794), I.i.15, 32

<sup>539</sup> Benson, *Britain’s Glory*, I.i.16, 31. Other theatrical narratives that adhere to these conventions include *Nootka Sound: or, Britain Prepar’d* (1790) and *Love and Honour: or, Britannia in Full Glory at Spithead* (1794). On these performances see David Worrall, *Celebrity, Performance, Reception: British Georgian Theatre as Social Assemblage* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 124-135.

<sup>540</sup> Dugaw, *Warrior Women*, 1.

By acting on behalf of men, rather than independently of them, women like Nancy and Harriet differentiate themselves from the transgressive and vile virago. Despite the degree of decorum accompanying these women's actions however, their behaviour is not devoid of radical implications. Dugaw has shown that while the loving female warrior's familial motive 'justifies what might otherwise be considered unusual behaviour for a woman', her successful fulfilment of a masculine occupation 'invites us to rethink the immutability and "naturalness" of gender', by highlighting 'the extent to which gender markers are actually customary and principally external'.<sup>541</sup> By effortlessly excelling in her martial role, the warrior proves herself capable of assuming a masculine identity, and thereby suggests the fluidity of established gender categories. It is potentially for this reason that adept and loving female warriors began to sit less comfortably with gender conservative commentators during the revolutionary years.<sup>542</sup>

In the 1790s, theories of inherent sexual difference were pivotal to the preservation of patriarchal norms. Thomas Lacquer has famously traced the replacement in late eighteenth-century medical theory of a 'one-sex model', in which 'men and women were arrayed according to their degree of metaphysical perfection', by a 'two-sex model' which stressed 'radical dimorphism' and 'biological divergence' between the sexes.<sup>543</sup> As scholars including Catherine Craft-Fairchild and Kathleen Wilson have pointed out, 'such an oppositional model of gender depended for its stability upon the maintenance of a clearly visible line of demarcation between the roles of men and women': a demarcation that, during the revolutionary era, was being constantly contradicted.<sup>544</sup> The political and

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid., 143, 144.

<sup>542</sup> Dugaw locates the decline of the skilled female warrior in British ballads in the mid-nineteenth century. At this point, she writes, authors began to replace the 'sturdy women of the earlier ballads' with heroines whose 'retiring sensibilities and delicate bodies' prohibit them from excelling in their military roles. If, as Dugaw suggests, it was not until the Victorian period that the accomplished female warrior was expurgated from the 'lowbrow world of commercial songs', her usurpation by a 'restrained heroine' of 'idealised delicacy' seems to have been initiated over half a century previously in alternative literary genres. See *ibid.*, 68, 85, 67.

<sup>543</sup> Thomas Lacquer, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (USA: Harvard UP, 1992), 6.

<sup>544</sup> Catherine Craft-Fairchild, 'Cross-Dressing and the Novel: Women Warriors and Domestic Femininity', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, vol.10, issue 2 (January 1998), 177. See also Kathleen Wilson, 'Nelson's

military mobilisation of women during the French Revolution provided ample opportunity for speculation over the naturalness of gender difference. In 1793, a journalist writing for the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, declared that,

The bold exertions to which women have been roused [...] have a tendency to persuade us that the timidity so generally remarkable in them, is rather an artificial than a natural trait [...]; men affect to have more, and women less courage than in reality belongs to them.<sup>545</sup>

Acknowledging the large scale on which women are proving themselves capable of ‘bold exertions’, the journalist is able to query the proposed incommensurability between the sexes, by raising the possibility that the weakness associated with the female sex is artificial rather than natural. As the article intimates, by 1793, women like Nancy and Harriet could not be brushed off as innocuous fictional creations, who represent rare, if not entirely fantastical female figures. Rather, examples of real life women who accomplished masculine roles with ease were growing rapidly, and were jeopardising the theories of sexual polarisation on which society’s patriarchal structure had come to depend.

Wilson has shown how British panic over the ‘ubiquitous spectacle of women out of place and out of control’ led to desperate attempts to vanquish the conception that gender was ‘a cultural rather than biological phenomenon’, in order to uphold ‘proper distinctions between men and women’.<sup>546</sup> Evidence of this is observable in the corpus of revolutionary-era journalism which hints at women’s psychological incompatibility with the demands of war. In 1791, the British newspaper the *World* published an article updating readers on the fate of the British female soldier Hannah Snell. Snell had served on board a ship in the

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Women: Female Masculinity and Body Politics in the French and Napoleonic Wars’, *European History Quarterly*, vol.37, no.4 (October 2007), 564-568.

<sup>545</sup> ‘Anecdotes of Female Heroism’, in *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* (February 1793), 99.

<sup>546</sup> Wilson, ‘Nelson’s Women’, 565, 568, 564.

British navy in 1745. Her story was first presented to the British public in Robert Walker's memoirs of Snell, titled *The Female Soldier, or, The Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell* (1750). In Walker's narrative, Snell is depicted in accordance with the female warriors exhibited in *The Camp* and *Britain's Glory*: like them, she embarks on her military mission for familial reasons, and proves herself to be a skilled female soldier. Walker explains that Snell joined the navy to track down her husband, who, 'when she was seven months with child', made 'an elopement from her'.<sup>547</sup> Thriving in her masculine role, Snell performs her 'military exercise' with 'as much skill and dexterity as any Sergeant or corporal in his Majesty's service'. She 'soon became expert' in 'fight[ing] at small arms', and she was able to 'keep watch [...] day and night', despite being 'inexperienced with these kinds of hardships'.<sup>548</sup> Walker closes his narrative by congratulating Snell for dealing with 'the greatest dangers and hardships' with 'no difficulties, no pains, no terrors', and no 'prospect of future calamities'.<sup>549</sup> As far as Walker is concerned, Snell flourished as a soldier, and was in no way afflicted either during or following her military expedition.

In 1791 however, the *World* corrected Walker's suggestion that Snell's martial endeavours led to no 'future calamities', when printing the details of an ailment which had lately befallen her. Rather than merely relating the facts of her illness, the *World* sought to explain the cause of Snell's malady too, by drawing a connection between her medical complaint, and her previous military experience. The journalist tells how 'Hannah Snell' who 'served on board ship as a common sailor, though a woman', has 'been lately committed to a mad house!' The author then defines her misfortune as 'a sad proof' of how her 'singular exertions' have led 'to insanity'.<sup>550</sup> In contrast to her mid-century biographer, who presented no biological discrepancy between women and war, either physical or mental, the *World* hints at the innate inability for women to deal psychologically with

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<sup>547</sup> Robert Walker, *The Female Soldier, or, The Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell* (1750), ed. Dianne Dugaw (Los Angeles: The Augustan Reprint Society, 1989), 6.

<sup>548</sup> Walker, *Female Soldier*, 7, 11.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, 40, 41.

<sup>550</sup> *World*, 16 September 1791.



military experiences, by implying that Snell's soldierly exploits have destroyed her mental faculties, and rendered her insane.

The *World* was not alone in suggesting the destructive impact of war on a woman's mental state. In 1795 *The Weekly Entertainer* recorded the story of another family oriented female warrior, Madame de Benness from Normandy, who, since fighting alongside her husband in 'the infantry of the Legion of Damas', is said to have been plagued with 'the utmost distress', for which she can find 'no resource'.<sup>551</sup> *The Weekly Entertainer* later printed a similarly mournful account of British woman Mary Anne Talbot, who disguised herself as a man to accompany her male guardian on board with the British navy. Again, differing from Nancy and Harriet, Talbot is shown to be unsuited to her military role: her exploits cause her to suffer from 'the most excruciating' forms of 'fatigue and distress', for which 'medical men' have 'not yet made a perfect cure'.<sup>552</sup> The emphasis placed in these articles on the female warrior's mental torment indicates increasing anxieties about women's perceived aptitude for military exertions. Keen to counter theories of gender performativity, the articles do not celebrate the female warrior for allowing her feminine sentiments to propel her to martial excellence, as Walker had done with Snell. Rather, they encourage readers to 'commiserate her misfortunes', by showing her masculine exploits to have resulted in severe psychological affliction.<sup>553</sup>

The suggestion that women were particularly susceptible to mental disorders was a theory that was being endorsed long before the 1790s.<sup>554</sup> Yet, as Anne C. Vila has shown in her study of Enlightenment France, during the revolutionary era, and particularly following

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<sup>551</sup> 'Singular Instance of Female Heroism', in *The Weekly Entertainer: or Agreeable and Instructive Repository* 26 (28 December 1795), 512, 513.

<sup>552</sup> 'Account of Mary Anne Talbot, otherwise John Taylor', in *The Weekly Entertainer* 44 (17 September 1804), 233, 235, 236. On Talbot and similar depictions of suffering female warriors see Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 22-24.

<sup>553</sup> 'Mary Anne Talbot', 236.

<sup>554</sup> See for instance John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: the Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 110-113, 201-233; Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986), 18-20, and G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1-36.

1793, the nexus formed between women and mental feebleness ‘gained new force as it was incorporated into emerging evolutionary theories’, which were ‘explicitly designed to establish the rightful place of men and women respectively’.<sup>555</sup> Desperate to justify women’s exclusion from the public realms, writers in this period often theorised that when female passions became over excited, they imperilled not only the health of the woman who embodied them, but they jeopardised also the safety of those around her. Before I reveal the extent to which Eyre’s portrayal of Corday aligns itself with this position, it is necessary to expand on the political significance attributed to female sensibility in and around 1793.

#### ‘Ungoverned Sensibility’: Women’s Dangerous Emotions

In 1797, Church of England clergy man Thomas Gisborne produced a conduct manual addressed to Christian women, in which he lectured his female readers on the advantages and disadvantages of female sensibility. In accordance with standard evangelical doctrine, Gisborne praises sensibility for enhancing women’s piety.<sup>556</sup> He claims that as women exercise ‘quicker feelings’, and are ‘more susceptible of lively impressions’ than men, they are ‘on the whole, more disposed to religious considerations’.<sup>557</sup> Despite valuing female sensibility for its connection with devoutness however, Gisborne also shows sensibility to be a hindrance to women. He declares that ‘the acute sensibility of women, [...] singularly engaging and amiable as it is’, is ‘liable to sudden excesses’ which often result in ‘particular weaknesses and errors, whether in judgement or action’.<sup>558</sup> Gisborne’s ambivalent angle on female sensibility echoes the attitude presented by Tory author

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<sup>555</sup> Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1998), 242, 243.

<sup>556</sup> On evangelicalism and women see Catherine Hall, *White, Male, and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 73-88, and Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 1992), 114-118, 167-180.

<sup>557</sup> Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (T. Cadell jun. and W. Davies, 1797), 249, 248.

<sup>558</sup> Gisborne, *Enquiry*, 34, 35, 39.

Laetitia Matilda Hawkins, in her anti-revolutionary treatise *Letters on the Female Mind* (1793). Like Gisborne, Hawkins celebrates the ‘delicate texture’ and ‘glowing heart’ that distinguishes the female sex, while warning that women’s ‘extreme irritability of the nerves’ renders them prone to acquiring ‘confused intellects and a disturbed imagination’.<sup>559</sup> Aptly summarising the paradoxical properties attributed to female sensibility in the period’s conduct literature, Hawkins proclaims that woman’s ‘irritable nerves’ constitute both ‘our torments and our grace’:<sup>560</sup> considered on the one hand as ‘the glory of the female sex’, woman’s ‘sympathising sensibility’ and ‘warmth and tenderness of attachment’ was associated also with an ‘unsteadiness of mind’, which placed women ‘in especial danger’ of thinking and acting irrationally.<sup>561</sup>

As both authors reveal, while delicate emotions were viewed as a confirmation of female virtue, women’s excessive passions were linked concurrently with pathology.<sup>562</sup> It was owing to this connection with mental debility that theories of female sensibility acquired such political force during the revolutionary era, particularly in and around 1793. The need to re-establish proper gender boundaries achieved its apex in 1793, when French women’s political intervention reached disturbing heights. The turbulent year witnessed the female-led grocery riots of February and May; the formation of the Society for Revolutionary Republican Women on 10 May; the substantial role played by sans-culotte women in assisting the fall of the Girondins in the summer, and of course, Corday’s shocking murder of Marat in July.<sup>563</sup> French historians including Sean Quinlan and Ludmilla Jordanova

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<sup>559</sup> Laetitia Matilda Hawkins, *Letters on the Female Mind, its powers and pursuits. Addressed to Miss H.M. Williams, with particular reference to her letters from France*, 2 vols (London: Hookman and Carpenter, 1793), II:24-25; I:36, 37. On women and sensibility in this work see Steven Blakemore, ‘Revolution and the French Disease: Laetitia Matilda Hawkins’s Letters to Helen Maria Williams’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol.36 (July 1996), 673-691.

<sup>560</sup> Hawkins, *Letters*, I:10.

<sup>561</sup> Gisborne, *Enquiry*, 23, 34, 39.

<sup>562</sup> On this topic see Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 201-233.

<sup>563</sup> On women’s political activity in and around 1793 see Olwen H. Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 20-37; Dominique Godineau, ‘Masculine and Feminine Political Practice during the French Revolution, 1793 - Year III’, in *Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution*, ed. Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy (USA: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 61-80, and Gutwirth, *Twilight*, 288. On the Society for Revolutionary Republican Women see Moore, *Liberty*, 189-206, 225-254.

have shown that these troubling occurrences led to a trend among politicians and medical theorists to identify women's inherent and excessive emotion as a governing tool which could validate the biological distinction between the sexes, and justify women's return to the private sphere.<sup>564</sup> The political significance assigned to women's hypothetically destructive sentiments is epitomised in a speech delivered by French radical André Amar in November 1793, which led to the prohibition of all French women's political clubs. Addressing the National Convention, the Jacobin spokesman declared that all 'clubs and popular societies of women, whatever name they are known under', must be forbidden, on account of the mental instability of the female sex.<sup>565</sup> Hypothesising that women inherently lack the 'intelligence, capability', and 'profound and serious thinking' needed to partake in politics and war, Amar announced,

Women are disposed by their organisation to an over-excitation which would be deadly in public affairs. [...] Interests of state would soon be sacrificed to everything which ardour in passions can generate in the way of error and disorder.<sup>566</sup>

Amar's statement illustrates Chantal Thomas's observation that 'once the equivalence of women and sensibility is asserted, it is logical to conclude on the incompatibility of women and revolution'.<sup>567</sup> By invoking the sensibility/pathology nexus, Amar sanctions both the gendered division of labour and the gendered division of spheres, by suggesting that it is essential to the welfare of the nation that women do not involve themselves with political matters. Prone to an 'ardour in passions', women are more likely than men to allow their

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<sup>564</sup> See Sean M. Quinlan, 'Physical and Moral Regeneration after the Terror: Medical Culture, Sensibility and Family Politics in France, 1794-1804', *Social History*, vol.29, no.2 (May 2004), 139-164, and Ludmilla Jordanova, *Nature Displayed: Gender, Science and Medicine, 1760-1820* (New York: Longman, 1999), 163-182.

<sup>565</sup> André Amar, *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, November 1793, trans. and reproduced in *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1795: Selected Documents translated with notes and commentary*, ed. Harriet B. Applewhite, Darline G. Levy and Mary Durham Johnson (USA: Illini Books, 1980), 217.

<sup>566</sup> Amar, *Réimpression*, 215, 216.

<sup>567</sup> Thomas, 'Heroism in the Feminine', 67.

feelings to derange their judgement, and thus to provoke ‘error and disorder’, which in public settings ‘would be deadly’.

Amar’s theory was reinforced in Britain. In 1799 the loyalist evangelical author Hannah More surpassed the urgency with which Gisborne and Hawkins had written of the injurious nature of women’s extravagant sentiments, in her conduct book *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799). *Strictures* offers a revised version of More’s earlier conduct manual, *Essays on Various Subjects* (1777). The former publication had itself cautioned against the tendency for ‘young women of strong sensibility’ to be ‘carried by the very amiableness of this temper into the most alarming extremes’.<sup>568</sup> Yet, writing twenty two years later, in a decade which saw women aspiring to ‘the most disgusting and unnatural character[s]’ of ‘female warriors’ and ‘female politicians’, More drastically intensified her previous admonition against woman’s overwrought sensibility.<sup>569</sup> Insisting on the need for women to remain within their proper sphere, More suggests in *Strictures* that female passions, when overindulged, can lead to crimes as severe as murder.

Like Gisborne, More praises women’s ‘quickness of perception’ and ‘tender and lively’ feelings for giving them ‘a keener taste for the spirit of religion, and a quicker zeal in discharging its duties’.<sup>570</sup> Having insisted at length that ‘susceptibility of heart’ is ‘highly commended’ in the female sex, More similarly warns of the possible tragedies to result from women’s too lively feelings.<sup>571</sup> She declares that an ‘ungoverned passion’ has the potential to ‘terminate in criminal excesses’, and that ‘the remote cause of some of the

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<sup>568</sup> Hannah More, *Essays on Various Subjects, principally designed for young ladies* (London: J. Wilkie, 1777), 102.

<sup>569</sup> Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1799), I:6. For a comparison of *Essays* and *Strictures* see Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church and Nation 1712-1812* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 271-303. On More’s conservatism and gender politics see Harriet Guest, ‘Hannah More and Conservative Feminism’, in *British Women’s Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 158-170; Kevin Gilmartin, *Writing against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790-1832* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 55-95, and Kathryn Sutherland, ‘Hannah More’s counter-revolutionary Feminism’, in *Revolution in Writing: British Responses to the French Revolution*, ed. Kevin Everest (Buckingham: Open UP, 1991), 27-64.

<sup>570</sup> More, *Strictures*, II:25, 31, 97.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*, II:96, 98.

blackest crimes which stain the annals of mankind', among which are listed 'profligacy, murder', and 'suicide', can all be traced 'back to this original principle, an ungoverned sensibility'.<sup>572</sup> Having illustrated the calamities likely to result from women's unrestrained emotion, More is able to propose that women must remain 'secured from those difficulties and temptations to which men are exposed in the tumult of a bustling world', as the public sphere is no place for a character whose 'delicate [...] texture' renders her excessively 'agitated by the passions'.<sup>573</sup>

More and Amar both substantiate the need for sphere division by aligning women's 'highly commended' sensibility with criminality, or deadly error. Affiliating sensibility with wrongdoing produces an interesting paradox, as it enables the female offender to be viewed as the perpetrator of vice, yet the embodiment of virtue. It is on account of this binary that the sensibility/pathology nexus appealed so greatly to Eyre. As I shall now illustrate, Eyre dramatises the suggestion that women's 'ardour in passions' renders them liable to 'error and disorder', and even to misguided murder. In so doing, he upholds his tragedy's anti-Jacobin agenda, while additionally advocating women's exclusion from political and military affairs.

#### 'A Tyger's Hungry Fury': Corday's Excessive Sensibility and *Maid's* Unhappy Ending

Soon after audiences learn of Corday's plans to kill Marat in order to avenge the death of Alberto, her intention is rendered superfluous, as it is revealed that there is in fact no death to avenge. Alberto appears before Dumiel, Corday's loyal friend, who has accompanied her to Paris. He explains that rather than being killed, he has been forced to flee his home and assume a disguise as 'Theodore', after being threatened with death on account of his allegiance to country and King.<sup>574</sup> Not to detract from Marat's villainy, Eyre assures

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<sup>572</sup> Ibid., II:99, 100.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., II:35, 38, 35.

<sup>574</sup> See Eyre, *Maid*, I.i.10.

audiences that a murder was committed, yet its victim was not Alberto, but an equally innocent ‘victim of the self-same name, and country’, who ‘suffered for his loyalty’.<sup>575</sup> Alberto/Theodore declares it his intention to come out of hiding and return to his ‘ador’d Corde’, whom he describes as a woman of ‘lasting constancy’ and ‘exalted, matchless virtue’.<sup>576</sup> News that Alberto is alive and plans to reunite himself with Corday, whom he evidently still loves, provides audiences with hope of the happy ending presented in *The Camp* and *Britain’s Glory*. Yet the anticipated denouement is denied by Eyre, who shows Corday’s rashness of emotion to deprive her of the reward commonly bestowed upon the loving female warrior.

Eyre indicates immediately the resemblance between Corday’s ardent feelings and the model of ‘ungoverned sensibility’ later described by More. Proving that ‘her sorrows’ have become ‘indulg’d’, Corday demands that one might just as well ‘forbid the ocean to assault the beach’ as talk to her of ‘cool indifference’, as her grief has driven her ‘reason mad’.<sup>577</sup> Corday’s speech takes on the form of ‘frantic ravings’, and she describes the ‘fiery sparks of raging indignation’ which are set to ‘burst, with consuming wrath upon the head/ of that detested homicide, Marat’.<sup>578</sup> Dumiel, acting as the voice of reason, begs Corday not to let ‘misguided zeal’ cause her ‘to stain [her] spotless soul with blood’, and advises that she recall ‘banish’d reason to [her] aid’ before ‘it is too late’. The strength of Corday’s emotion is such however that Dumiel’s words fail to calm her, and she continues to insist that the pain of her ‘sad, complaining heart’ can ‘be extinguish’d but by blood!’<sup>579</sup> Spurred on by emotions as insurmountable as a ‘tyger’s hungry fury’, Corday does not delay in her mission, and in the space of just a day she has succeeded in her plan to kill Marat.<sup>580</sup> The story of Charlotte Corday subsequently proceeds to a melancholy conclusion. She and

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<sup>575</sup> Ibid., II.iii.24.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., II.iii.25, 26

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., I.ii.14.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid., I.ii.15-16.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid., I.ii.16, 17.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid., III.ii.32.

Alberto ‘meet to part so soon’, as shortly after their reunion, Jacobin officers have Corday ‘drag’d like a common culprit to the block’, to be ‘mangled by the axe’ and ‘expos’d a public spectacle’.<sup>581</sup> Eyre’s drama therefore departs from the traditional tale of the loving female warrior. Unlike Nancy and Harriet, who are shown to be ‘deserving in romance, able in war, and rewarded in both’, Corday’s inability to control her emotional zeal denies her the accolade of military prowess, and prohibits her from enjoying a romantic future with Alberto.

‘The Modest Matron, and the Spotless Maid’: Women and Loyalist Politics

Eyre’s depiction of Corday is at once sympathetic and misogynistic. On the one hand, Eyre presents Corday, like Marie Antoinette, as a paragon of idealised femininity. In so doing, he enables his tragedy to function as a powerful form of anti-revolutionary propaganda. In *Maid*’s penultimate scene, after the Jacobins have sent both Corday and Marie Antoinette to the guillotine, Alberto/Theodore delivers a monologue, in which he declares,

The modest matron, and the spotless maid,  
The guard of virtue and the prop of age,  
E’en all that man can hold most dear, and precious,  
Will be the spoil of our imperious traitors.<sup>582</sup>

As the monologue reveals, by pairing the deaths of Charlotte Corday, a ‘dearest Lady’ of ‘exalted matchless virtue’, and Marie Antoinette, a ‘wife’ who ‘but obey’d [her] husband’, and a ‘mother’ who ‘but pursu’d affection’, Eyre intimates the urgency with which Jacobin practices must be defeated, by suggesting that the fate of the nation’s ‘most dear, and precious’ women is at stake.<sup>583</sup> As long as the ‘vulture like’ Jacobins continue to ‘prey on

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<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*, III.ii.35.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.iii.40.

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*, I.ii.12; II.iii.26; IV.ii.38.



the entrails of our bleeding land', warns Eyre, virtuous women, like Corday and Marie Antoinette, 'no longer shall be known'.<sup>584</sup>

While Eyre's sentimental depiction of Corday assists the creation of this anti-Jacobin protest, Corday's strength of feeling is also pivotal to Eyre's discouragement of women's involvement in violent activism. Corday's erratic murder of a man who, though a monster, was not the culprit of the crime that she set out to avenge, confirms the errors to result from women's overwrought passion, and therefore defends arguments endorsing women's confinement to the private sphere. Ultimately, Eyre dissuades women's intervention in revolutionary politics, without distorting his political agenda: because of her contempt for democrats and her murder of Marat, Eyre's Corday could not be depicted as unsexed and monstrous, as this would confuse the tragedy's loyalist stance. By presenting her instead as a thoroughly virtuous heroine, impeded in her mission by the very sentimental tendencies embodied by the period's feminine ideal, Eyre inspires sympathy for his loving, yet misguided heroine, while arousing hatred for the 'execrable wretch' responsible for her death.<sup>585</sup>

**'The Heroism that distinguishes it': Debating Female Heroism in Matthew West's**

**Female Heroism**

Nine years after *The Maid of Normandy* appeared on the Dublin stage, Irish vicar and occasional author Matthew West published *Female Heroism, a Tragedy in Five Acts* (1803), performed in Dublin in 1804. In the play's preface, West explains that the drama was initially 'commenced in December 1793', yet discontinued when he discovered that Eyre had produced 'a play on the same subject'. It was 'on a perusal of Mr Eyre's performance', however, that West was inspired to continue with his drama, as he

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<sup>584</sup> Ibid., IV.iii.40.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid., III.ii.34.

considered *Maid* to be ‘defective in form’ and ‘censurable in other respects’.<sup>586</sup> Justifying the alterations made to Eyre’s historical drama, West declared in the preface to *Female Heroism*,

Mr Eyre has taken an unwarrantable liberty with the well-known character of Charlotte Cordé. He pourtrays her as a Royalist: and degrades her conduct, by ascribing to the influence of private resentment an act, really the result of public [...] zeal. To represent her attack of Marat, as originating in despair at the death of a favoured lover, is to strip her character of the Heroism that distinguishes it. The merit of her Patriotism consisted in her sacrificing [...] the endearments of natural affection [...] to [...] the interests of her country.<sup>587</sup>

As his criticism makes clear, West was most averse to Eyre’s erasure of the political sentiments inspiring Corday’s crime. By insisting that her actions were motivated by romantic love, suggests West, Eyre denies Corday’s character of ‘the Heroism that distinguishes it’. He conceals ‘the merit of her Patriotism’, which lay in her willingness to sacrifice ‘the endearments of natural affection’ to ‘the interests of her country’. Correcting Eyre’s characterisation of Corday as a romantic and royalist heroine, West describes her in his tragedy’s advertisement as ‘a Republican of the Brissotin or moderate party’ whose murder of Marat was fuelled by his position as ‘leader of the faction of the Mountain’.<sup>588</sup> In offering this account of her character, West paints a radical portrait of Corday as the personification of the traditionally male republican hero, who is guided to act by public zeal.

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<sup>586</sup> Matthew West, *Female Heroism, a Tragedy in Five Acts, founded on revolutionary events that occurred in France in 1793* (Dublin: William Porter, 1803), v.

<sup>587</sup> West, *Female Heroism*, v-vi.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*, vi.

The extent to which West's heroine conforms to this heroic model however is debatable. Initially, West shows Corday's strength of feeling to assist her emulation of the republican activist, by enhancing her desire for justice. Yet, during her final scene on stage, Corday's likeness to the republican hero is arguably enervated, as she responds emotionally to her sacrifice of private sentiments. I propose that, on an initial reading, Corday's remorseful response to her murder of Marat intimates women's inability to cope with the demands of disinterested philanthropy, and thereby refutes the possibility of a heroic and republican female patriot. I then counter this interpretation, by complicating the understanding of republicanism as anti-sentimental. I hypothesise that when read in the context of West's religious views, and the accordance of these views with early nineteenth-century attitudes towards stoicism, sentiment and gender, the tragedy's denouement, rather than implying female weakness, can be understood as a confirmation of Corday's heroic republican virtue.

'It is not Cruelty, 'Tis Pity arms me thus': Feminine Sensibilities and Republican Activism

In her assessment of the defining characteristics of 'heroic and republican' versions of Charlotte Corday, Craciun explains that 'Corday's politics, given the charges that they had unsexed her', had 'to be balanced with equal amounts of feminine sensibility', in order to work 'against Jacobin accounts that portrayed her as a monstrous virago'.<sup>589</sup> Craciun suggests that Corday had to be depicted as both a 'heroic republican and a figure of sensibility' if she was to avoid accusations of androgyny.<sup>590</sup> This was a difficult blend, as the notion of a woman who was at once political and sentimental seemed impossible to Corday's conservative contemporaries. During the late eighteenth century, it was widely accepted that women surpassed men's delicacy and strength of feeling precisely because that they were debarred from the world of politics: while men had their characters

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<sup>589</sup> Craciun, 'New Cordays', 215, 207.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

hardened by the toils of business and politics, women, devoted to caring for their families within the domestic sphere, were trained purely in the exercise of love and tenderness.<sup>591</sup>

As long as they remained within their proper sphere, women's sensibility was kept intact. Yet, if women ventured into the world of politics, they were seen to relinquish their feminine virtues. Exemplifying this idea in 1792, a journalist writing for the *World* suggested that French women's engagement in political activism had caused them to renounce the 'humanity and feminine softness' for which they were 'heretofore distinguished', and to acquire instead 'a degree of ferocity unparalleled'.<sup>592</sup> This 'degree of ferocity' finds visual representation in Gillray's caricature *The New Morality* (1798) [Fig.13], which juxtaposes the female figures of 'Sensibility' and 'Justice'. Gillray's 'Sensibility' is portrayed as a woman of feminine physique with long brown hair and tear-filled eyes. She weeps over a dead bird which she cradles in her hand, while demonstrating her detachment from public and political matters by her seeming obliviousness to the decapitated head of Louis XVI which lies at her feet. The female figure of 'Justice' presents an antithetical image. Concerned with securing 'Egalitie', she appears entirely devoid of the feminine characteristics of pity and sympathy. She exhibits snake-like hair, pointing in different directions, suggests that her ferocity is indiscriminate and knows no bounds.<sup>593</sup>

In *Female Heroism*, West similarly alludes to the contrasting female figures of sensibility and justice. Yet, rather than confirming their disparity, West shows Corday to amalgamate the characteristics of the two. Like Eyre, West endows Corday with a lover, Clerville.

Unaware of why it is that Corday has fled her home, Clerville seeks her out in Paris. Alone on stage, Clerville expresses his concern for Corday, who he describes in thoroughly

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<sup>591</sup> See Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), 27-32, 73-90; Guest, *Small Change*, 313-324, and Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 149-192, 357-396.

<sup>592</sup> *World*, 21 August 1792.

<sup>593</sup> On this image see Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 192-197.

Fig.13: James Gillray, *The New Morality: or the promis'd installment of the high-priest of the theophilanthropes, with the homage of Leviathan and his suite* (1798). © Trustees of the British Museum. Reproduced under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license.



feminine terms. He presents her as an ‘angel form’ and declares that ‘the scenes/ of this deprav’d and bloodstain’d capital’ are ‘ill-suited to [her] purity of mind and gentleness of temper’.<sup>594</sup> While Clerville’s description of Corday matches Gillray’s picture of ‘Sensibility’, the Corday with whom he is reunited corresponds more to the figure of ‘Justice’. Corday ‘coldly meet[s]’ her lover with ‘half-averted looks’. Her ‘eye no longer beams with its accustom’d mildness’ and ‘a sterner lightning plays in ev’ry glance’. After locating Corday’s dagger, and learning of her intention to ‘rid the Republic of its greatest foe’, Clerville exclaims,

Is it my Charlotte, She, whose gentle breast  
 Still melted at a tale of woe, whose eyes  
 A sparrow’s fate has oft suffus’d with tears,  
 That wears the assassin’s badge, and boasts a purpose  
 Our sterner sex might shrink from?<sup>595</sup>

By distinguishing the sentimental Corday who had wept at the ‘sparrow’s fate’ from the ferocious assassin that he now encounters, Clerville supports the notion popular among the Jacobins that Corday’s preoccupation with politics has rendered her callous, and has effectively unsexed her.

This contention is quickly undermined however by the suggestion that Corday’s concern with political justice has not extinguished her sensibility, but has in fact sprung from it. In *A Letter to the Women of England* (1799), Mary Robinson articulated the idea shared by a number of West’s contemporaries that women’s natural propensity for empathy rendered them more willing than men to respond to political evils. She theorised that as women ‘feel every wrong more acutely’ than men, and as their ‘sense of injuries received’ is such that their bosoms ‘ache with sensibility and burn with indignation’, their inclination to ‘resent

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<sup>594</sup> West, *Female Heroism*, II.i.10.

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid.*, II.i.11-12.

and punish' tyrants surpasses that of their male counterparts.<sup>596</sup> Robinson's hypothesis is dramatised in *Female Heroism*. In response to Clerville's accusation, West's heroine replies,

Dost thou wonder  
 That woman, apt to feel, more promptly kindles  
 At others' wrongs? It is not cruelty,  
 'Tis pity arms me thus – Who does not bless  
 The well-aim'd shaft that [...]  
 Piercing the falcon, from his murd'ring pounces  
 Rescues the trembling dove?<sup>597</sup>

West refashions the image of the woman concerned with the dying bird in order to counter portraits of Corday as an insensible virago, by showing her to have maintained her sensibility despite her turn to violence. It is because of her compassion for the 'trembling dove' that Corday is inspired to pierce the predator that is Marat. Corday's sentimental virtues are therefore shown to strengthen her political aspirations: her assassination of Marat is motivated not by 'cruelty', but by the pity and sympathy she feels for her fellow creatures.

In this instance then, sensibility defends Corday against charges of monstrosity while simultaneously encouraging her intervention in social reform. The relationship between feminine feeling and republican activism however does not always appear so harmonious.

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<sup>596</sup> Mary Robinson, *A Letter to the Women of England, on the injustice of mental subordination. With anecdotes* (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1799), 8. Similar connections between female sensibility and political justice are presented in works by Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft. On these see Orienne Smith, *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution, and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786-1826* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 99-128; Deborah Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution* (London: Associated UPs, 2002), 25-39, and Catherine N. Parke, 'What kind of Heroine is Mary Wollstonecraft?', in *Sensibility in Transformation: Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics*, ed. Syndy McMillen Conger (London: Associated UPs, 1990), 103-119.

<sup>597</sup> West, *Female Heroism*, II.i.12. A similar justification for Corday's crime is offered in Helen Craik's *Adelaide de Narbonne, with Memoirs of Charlotte de Cordet*, 4 vols (London: Minerva Press, William Lane, 1800). See IV:278.

In her attempt to fulfil the patriotic duty of familial sacrifice, Corday's female sentiments become a hindrance, and threaten her emulation of the republican hero. I turn now to an exploration of the model of civic virtue advocated in France in the revolution's early stages, and reveal the extent to which Corday's familial affections clash with republican precepts.

'Prefer the Calls of Justice to the Dearest ties of Kindred': Gender, Universal Benevolence and the Classical Republican Hero

Recounting the principles instilled in French radicals in the early stages of the revolution, British anti-Jacobin John Bowles explained in 1800,

All the affections, which were the first and strongest impulses of the heart, should be subordinate to patriotism; [...] the example of Brutus [...] should animate them to prefer the calls of justice to the dearest ties of kindred; – and [...] it would be a most meritorious virtue to sacrifice parents and relations, whenever the welfare of the country might require such a sacrifice.<sup>598</sup>

According to Bowles, French revolutionaries were expected to do precisely that with which West credits Corday in his tragedy's preface: sacrifice 'the endearments of natural affection' to 'the interests of [their] country'. French radicals admired the classical republican model of civic virtue, a model characterised by the forfeiture of private interest for the benefit of the public weal. Advocates of this classical model taught that nothing was to be held dearer than the welfare of the country, and that even familial bonds were to be sacrificed if the nation's health required it.<sup>599</sup> Brutus was heralded by French radicals as the

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<sup>598</sup> John Bowles, *Reflections on the political State of Society at the commencement of the year 1800* (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1800), 44-45.

<sup>599</sup> On classical republicanism in revolutionary France see Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship and Authenticity in the French Revolution* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 32-36; Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (London: California Press, 2004), 75-80; Andrew J. S. Jainchill,



epitome of republican heroism, because he acted in perfect accordance with the tenets of civic virtue when sentencing his own sons to death, upon discovering their involvement in a conspiracy to overthrow the Roman Republic.<sup>600</sup>

Classical values were celebrated more ardently in revolutionary France than they were among contemporary British radicals. The austere virtues of Rome and Sparta had been popularised in Britain at the close of the seventeenth century by the political writings of authors such as James Harrington, and the event of the Glorious Revolution. Yet Britain's growing preoccupation with the ideology of politeness, sparked by the increasing importance of the ethos of commercial society, meant that by the 1790s, the classical tenets were often resisted by revolutionary sympathisers, who acknowledged their incongruity with British notions of civility.<sup>601</sup> There were however exceptions to this rule. Jonathan Sachs has shown that the classical republican patriot was kept alive in revolutionary-era Britain by a minority of radicals who 'actively sought to align themselves with the Roman example'.<sup>602</sup> At least for a short period in the 1790s, the radical philosopher William Godwin seemed an avid supporter of Brutus's utilitarianism. In his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) Godwin celebrated Brutus's willingness to prioritise the welfare of

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*Reimagining Politics after the Terror: The Republican Origins of French Liberalism* (New York: Cornell UP, 2008) 1-61; Higonnet, *Goodness*, 101-209; Keith Michael Baker, 'Transformations of Classical Republicanism in Eighteenth-Century France', *The Journal of Modern History*, vol.73, no.1 (March 2001), 32-53; J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), 215-310, and Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republic Tradition* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1975) 462-505.

<sup>600</sup> Feilla tells how during a meeting held in August 1792 at the Club des Jacobins, the Jacobin society secretary Louis Pierre Manuel, standing by Brutus's bust, announced to his listeners, 'here is Brutus, who will remind you [...] that in order to be a good citizen, it is always necessary to be ready to sacrifice everything, even your children, to the welfare of the state'. See Feilla, *Sentimental Theatre*, 186.

<sup>600</sup> See Mark Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), 142; Philp, 'English republicanism in the 1790s', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol.6, no.3 (1998), 235-262; Pocock, *Virtue*, 28-48; Philip Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 1-47; Gregory Claeys, *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-Politics in early British Socialism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 28-29; Claeys 'The French Revolution Debate and British Political Thought', *History of Political Thought*, vol.11, Issue 1 (Spring 1990), 59-80; Paul A. Rahe, 'Antiquity Surpassed: The repudiation of classical republicanism', in *Republicanism, Liberty and Commercial Society, 1649-1776*, ed. David Wooton (California: Stanford UP, 1994), 233-269, and Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: Political Ideology in late Eighteenth-Century England and America* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990), 164-168. On Roman ideals celebrated on the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century British stage see Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 35-57.

<sup>602</sup> Sachs, *Romantic Antiquity*, 16.

the nation over that of his sons, when defining his decision to put ‘his sons to death in the first year of the Republic’ as an act that ‘contributed more than any other cause to generate that energy and virtue for which his country was afterwards so eminently distinguished’.<sup>603</sup> During the early years of the revolution, Godwin’s close friend Thomas Holcroft was equally enthusiastic about the strict model of civic virtue espoused by French radicals. In his *Memoirs of the Late Thomas Holcroft* (1816) William Hazlitt tells how Holcroft viewed his perfect society as one dominated by ‘mutual philanthropy and generous undivided sympathy with all men’. Within this ideal community, ‘family attachment’ and ‘exclusive friendships’ would ‘be weakened or lost in the general principle of benevolence’, as the existence of partial affections ‘interfere[s] with the claims of justice’.<sup>604</sup> As Holcroft and Godwin indicate, for the classical republican patriot recognised in Britain and idolised in France, there was no room for familial affections. Love of individuals had to remain secondary to love of the nation if the republican was to prove himself heroic.<sup>605</sup>

It was owing precisely to the republican patriot’s necessary devaluation of private and familial sentiments that his character was considered inaccessible to women. As Nancy Fitch has shown, while his renouncement of familial ties rendered Brutus the male personification of republican heroism, ‘his exercise of civic virtue depended upon

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<sup>603</sup> William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 2 vols (Dublin: Luke White, 1793), I:87. Godwin also espouses the virtues of ancient Rome in *The Enquirer. Reflections on education, manners, and literature. In a series of essays* (Dublin: J. Moore, 1797). See 41. For more on Godwin and classical republicanism see Sachs, *Romantic Antiquity*, 51-74.

<sup>604</sup> *Memoirs of the Late Thomas Holcroft*, ed. William Hazlitt, 3 vols (London: Longham, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1816), I:179.

<sup>605</sup> On the idiosyncratic models of universal benevolence espoused by Godwin and Holcroft, and on their deviation from more conventional British models (explored later in this chapter) see Mary Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture* (New York: CUP, 2013), 82-106; Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993), 89-102; Evan Radcliffe, ‘Arguing Benevolence: Wordsworth Godwin and the 1790s’, in *The French Revolution Debate in English Literature and Culture*, ed. Lisa Plummer Crafton (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 59-81, and Radcliffe, ‘Revolutionary Writing, Moral Philosophy, and Universal Benevolence in the Eighteenth Century’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol.54, no.2 (April 1993), 221-240.

obliterating and destroying' the domestic virtues of women.<sup>606</sup> This point was stressed emphatically throughout the 1790s in both Britain and France. It was commonly insisted by gender conservatives that women both should not and could not nurture disinterested sentiments of the type displayed by Brutus. In 1790 John Adams adjudged that as women's position in society demands that their cares do not extend 'beyond their own family', the patriot who is required to 'prefer the state to his family' provided an impractical role model for women. Women's devotion to their families, wrote Adams, rendered them 'so susceptible' of 'benevolence to individuals' that it would prove impossible for them to 'elevate themselves to that patriotism, or disinterested love of one's country, which embraces all its citizens'.<sup>607</sup> Supporting Adams's stance in 1791, in order to justify the denial of female citizenship, French radical Louis Prudhomme similarly asserted that as 'the only occupations and the real duties of a woman' are 'to serve as company for her mother, to sweeten the cares of her husband, to feel, and look after her children', women 'have been endowed only with private virtues', and lack 'the civil and political' sentiments which prompted men to 'so many great deeds', and 'so many heroic actions'.<sup>608</sup>

Women's perceived incapability to nurture impartial sentiments was regularly dramatised on the late eighteenth-century British stage. In Hannah Cowley's tragedy *The Fate of Sparta; or, the Rival Kings* (1788), the drama's heroine, Chelonice, is unable to join forces with her male compatriots, who seek to put an end to the tyranny that her father exercises over the state, as her filial loyalties outweigh her national sentiments. She declares, 'I would be great/ and bear the cares of thousands. – But ambition/ and ev'ry lofty sentiment

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<sup>606</sup> Nancy Fitch, "'Speaking in the Name of the People": Joseph Fouché and the Politics of the Terror in Central France', in *Essays on the French Revolution, France and the Provinces*, ed. Steven G. Reinhardt and Elisabeth A. Cawthon (USA: University of Texas, 1992), 101.

<sup>607</sup> John Adams, *Woman. Sketches of the history, genius, disposition accomplishments, employments, customs and importance of the fair sex, in all parts of the world* (London: G. Kearsley, 1790), 9, 136, 137. An identical argument is offered in William Russell's *Essay on the character, manners, and genius of women in different ages. Enlarged from the French of M. Thomas*, 2 vols (London: G. Robinson, 1773), II:48-53. On these works see Hilda L. Smith, *All Men and Both Sexes: Gender, Politics and the False Universal in England, 1640-1832* (USA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2002), 138-140, and Guest, *Small Change*, 181-182.

<sup>608</sup> Louis Prudhomme, *Revolutions de Paris*, 12 February 1791, quoted and trans. in MacMillan, *France and Women*, 28.

it gives,/ sinks to the earth when weigh'd against his life/ from whom I drew my own'.<sup>609</sup>

Sophia Lee's tragedy *Almeyda: Queen of Granada* (1796) suggests a similar idea. When Queen Almeyda is separated from her husband, she demonstrates her inability to fulfil the public duties required of a monarch, as her 'heart flies back to hover near [her] love/ and envies ev'ry slave who daily sees him'.<sup>610</sup> Almeyda goes on to distinguish between the universal sentiments made available to men, and the narrower affections embodied by women, when exclaiming,

Nature here makes a distinction;  
Forms man's large heart for many a various duty,  
And blends his passions into a Republic –  
While woman, born for love and softness only,  
Delights to feel love's absolute dominion!<sup>611</sup>

Almeyda implies that while men's passions naturally take a republican form, women are inherently more loyalist: women have a greater capacity for monarchical feeling than they do the general philanthropy practised by republicans, as they habitually allow love for the individual to exercise 'absolute dominion' over their hearts. By demonstrating women's innate propensity for personal attachments, both tragedies reinforce the implausibility of a female Brutus. Women cannot 'bear the cares of thousands', because those to whom they are closest will always take priority. In *Female Heroism*, West both challenges and supports the views articulated in these works. Though West shows Corday capable of imitating the civic-minded republican, his depiction of the emotional struggle she faces in the process suggests that while women may be able to *act* like men, they will always *feel* like women, and their sacrifice of private affections will therefore always result in unbearable contrition.

<sup>609</sup> Hannah Cowley, *The Fate of Sparta; or, the Rival Kings. A tragedy. As it is acted at the Theatre-Royal, in Drury-Lane* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1788), II.i.22.

<sup>610</sup> Sophia Lee, *Almeyda: Queen of Granada. A Tragedy* (London: W. Woodfall, 1796), I.i.10.

<sup>611</sup> Lee, *Almeyda*, I.i.13.

'Filial Love Flies on the Wings of Duty': Masculine Stoicism, Feminine Feeling, and the  
Impossibility of a Female Brutus

Corday's devotion to a model of disinterested patriotism similar to that outlined by Bowles is conveyed explicitly in Act II scene I. When Clerville urges Corday to think of her 'parents and friends' before performing a crime destined to send her to the guillotine, Corday responds,

Friends dost thou say? And parents?  
Know that poiz'd  
In reason's balance, France outweighs them all!  
She is our dearest parent. Filial love  
Flies on the wings of duty to her succour,  
And feeling only for her danger, slights  
All meaner ties. [...] Hence Brutus stabb'd his friend;  
Timoleon hence his brother slew.<sup>612</sup>

The seeming ease with which Corday is able to prioritise national duties over private affections renders her the antithesis of Cowley's Chelonice and Lee's Almeyda, and flies in the face of the suggestion that women are incapable of performing acts of universal benevolence. When left alone on stage however, it becomes clear that Corday's stoic character is enabled more by an effort of will, than it is by nature. Watching Clerville exit, Corday exclaims,

Adieu then, object of my earliest love.  
[...] Few have been more belov'd: and fewer still  
So well deserv'd that love! – Back, foolish tears,

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<sup>612</sup> West, *Female Heroism*, II.i.12-13.

Back to your source; nor with dissolving softness

Unnerve me for my task.<sup>613</sup>

The monologue, reminiscent of Lady Macbeth's 'unsex me' speech, indicates the affectedness of Corday's stoicism: the sentiments she displays in public are evidently at odds with those that she feels and expresses in private.<sup>614</sup> Consequently, while her feminine sensibilities may have been suppressed, they certainly have not been extinguished. It is owing precisely to the constancy of Corday's strong familial ties that her successful sacrifice of 'natural affections' is subsequently shown to fill her not with the patriotic pride and satisfaction that she had anticipated, but rather, to plague her with compunction, and thus to create a visible divergence between herself and the classical republican ideal.

The archetypal Roman patriot was shown to uphold his stoic demeanour both during and following private sacrifice. His steadfast character is exemplified in two early dramatisations of Cato and Brutus. In Joseph Addison's *Cato* (1713), performed repeatedly in Britain through to the 1790s, the eponymous protagonist exemplifies his fortitude when refusing to weep for his son who has died for Rome. Remarking on his display of insensitivity, his spectators observe, 'with what strength, what steadiness of mind/ he triumphs in the midst of all his sufferings!'<sup>615</sup> At the one point in the tragedy when the protagonist does give way to emotion, it is not for his child, but for the nation that he cries: his commentators note that 'Rome fills his eyes/ with tears that flowed not o'er his own dead son'.<sup>616</sup> The tears that he sheds for Rome clarify the cause of Cato's former

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<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, II.i.13.

<sup>614</sup> On Lady Macbeth see chapter 2.

<sup>615</sup> Joseph Addison, *Cato. A tragedy. As it is acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane, by Her Majesty's servants* (London: J. Tonson, 1713), I.iv.10. For performance dates see Ben Ross Schneider Jr., *Index to the London Stage, 1660-1800*, ed. William Van Lennep, Emmet L. Avery, Arthur H. Scouten, George Winchester Stone Jr., and Charles Beecher Hogan (USA: Southern Illinois UP, 1979), 4-5.

<sup>616</sup> Addison, *Cato*, IV.i.53.

insensibility: it is because that his love for the nation surpasses that felt for the individual that Cato cannot weep for an event which he knows to have benefited the public weal.

In Nathaniel Lee's *Lucius Junius Brutus* (1681), the eponymous hero displays a similarly stoic attitude towards private sacrifice suffered for the general good. Though Brutus briefly mourns the son that he has sentenced to death, the tragedy ends on a tone of triumph, when Brutus refers to his action as 'some sudden execution, fierce and great/ such as may draw the world to admiration'.<sup>617</sup> Following his demonstration of equanimity, Lee's protagonist is heralded as an 'excellent' man, and as 'half a God'.<sup>618</sup> This praise is directed towards Brutus not following his decision to execute his son, but rather, following the composure he displays in the execution's aftermath. By withholding this praise, Lee suggests that the response to private sacrifice is just as important as the sacrifice itself, in defining the patriot's heroism. This idea is supported in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Justifying Cato's 'heroic magnanimity', Smith observes that,

Cato [...] never shrinking from his misfortunes, never supplicating with the lamentable voice of wretchedness those miserable sympathetic tears, [...] but on the contrary, arming himself with manly fortitude, [...] appears [...] a spectacle which even the Gods themselves might behold with pleasure and admiration.<sup>619</sup>

As with Lee's tragedy, Smith's eulogy suggests that the republican's 'heroic magnanimity' is measurable not only by his willingness to suffer personal loss for the benefit of the nation, but also, by his ability to uphold his 'manly fortitude' while dealing with private

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<sup>617</sup> Nathaniel Lee, *Lucius Junius Brutus; Father of his Country. A Tragedy* (London: Richard Tonson and Jacob Tonson, 1681), V.ii.66. Lee's tragedy was first performed in London in 1680, and was still being printed as late as 1796. See Schneider, *Index*, 500. On stoicism and republicanism in Lee's and Addison's tragedies see Ellison, *Cato's Tears*, 35-57.

<sup>618</sup> Lee, *Lucius Junius Brutus*, V.ii.68.

<sup>619</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759-1790), ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Oxford: OUP, 1976), 48.

grief.

It is here that Corday's heroism falls short. Having sacrificed her familial obligations in order to succeed in her patriotic task, Corday responds not with 'manly fortitude', but with a display of mental anguish. Following her execution of Marat, Clerville contemplates how to break the news of Corday's impending execution to her father. At this point, Corday is overwhelmed with 'regret and unavailing softness'. She confesses,

There – There indeed

This heart is wrung with anguish – O my father,

Who now shall watch o'er thy declining years

[...] and gently smooth the passage to thy grave?

[...] Now strangers shall perform that pious office!

Now, far, far distant from those lov'd remains

Shall rest thy luckless child!<sup>620</sup>

This picture of Corday hysterically lamenting the abandonment of her filial duties emphasises the disparity between herself and the stoic republican hero, and reinforces the established polarity between male and female sensibilities. In 1789, radical French artist Jean-Jacques David produced the painting *The Lictors Bring to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons* (1789) [Fig.14]. The painting offers contrary images of Brutus and his wife, at the moment that the bodies of their dead sons are carried through their home. While Brutus displays a stoic demeanour by sitting with his feet crossed and not even turning to face the bodies of his sons, his wife is seen comforting her daughters who cling to her for support, while expressing despair in her face, and reaching out to the corpses. The gender-divided canvas implies women's inability to adopt the heroic composure of their male counterparts

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<sup>620</sup> West, *Female Heroism*, IV.iii.39.



**Fig.14: Jacques-Louis David, *The Lictors Bring to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons* (1789).  
© RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/Gérard Blot/Christian Jean.**



when faced with familial grief, and suggests that women will always feel more for their families, than they will for the nation.<sup>621</sup> Corday's closing exhibition of sentiment confirms this division of feeling, and strips her of the heroic characterisation that the tragedy's preface had promised: by responding to private grievances with 'miserable sympathetic tears', Corday separates herself from Lee's Brutus and Addison's Cato, and therefore fails to qualify herself as a 'heroic and republican' patriot.

This is not the point on which I wish to conclude however. I want now to contend that while Corday's emotional outburst distinguishes her from the classical republican patriot, it brings her closer to the Christian hero advocated by West in his *Sermons on Various Subjects* (1819). West's Christian martyr shares a certain affinity with the Roman protagonists celebrated by Addison, Lee and Smith. Yet the heroes are fundamentally distinguished by the former's necessary exhibition of private sentiments in the face of familial sacrifice. Read in the context of the increasing affinity between West's Christian hero, and revised definitions of republican virtue, I argue that Corday's display of sensibility can be seen to confirm, rather than deny, her 'heroic and republican' portrayal.

'That Conscious and Benevolent Heart which Bled for National Calamities felt likewise for Private Distress': West's *Sermons* and the Sentimental Christian Hero

Persons, in pronouncing on the respective claims of different charitable institutions, should be guided in their decisions by [...] the advantages that an alleviation of [...] distress promises [...] to society at large.<sup>622</sup>

Matthew West, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1819

<sup>621</sup> On this image see Denise Amy Baxter, 'Two Brutuses: Violence, Virtue and Politics in the visual culture of the French Revolution', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol.30, no.3 (Summer 2006), 56; Hunt, *Family Romance*, 37-40, and Moore, *Liberty*, 75.

<sup>622</sup> Matthew West, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, dedicated by permission to the Right hon. Bishop of Kildare, 2 vols (Dublin: Hibernia Press Office, J. Cumming, 1819), I:208.

In his posthumously published *Sermons*, West advocates a form of universal benevolence not dissimilar to that previously heralded by British radicals Godwin and Holcroft. Insistent that partial sentiments must remain subservient to one's devotion to society, West instructs his readers that 'our charity should be comprehensive and impartial – should listen to no distinctions or prejudices'.<sup>623</sup> Accordingly, we must not 'fix our affections firmly on a single object', whether 'it be a father, a husband, or a child', as such private ties 'occupy and engross the faculties of the soul' and distract it from the general good.<sup>624</sup> West's view of benevolence echoes the abstract idealism often associated with revolutionary France. And yet, West was entirely hostile to the French Revolution. In his *Sermons*, West accuses the revolutionaries of transforming France into 'the seat of sorrows and theatre of horrors'.<sup>625</sup> He describes 'the treacherous, the impious race that pollutes the unhappy soil of France' as 'Monsters' whose 'patriotism was regicide', and as 'apostles who denied their Maker' and 'revived the absurd worship of pagan times'.<sup>626</sup> As his antipathy to the revolution suggests, West's model of philanthropy was in no way inspired by 'that levelling disposition' which 'constitutes the guilt and forms the punishment' of 'a neighbouring kingdom'.<sup>627</sup> Rather, it reflects his devotion, as a vicar, to Christian doctrine, and thereby indicates the parallels between republican and Christian attitudes to universal love.

In *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), William Hazlitt defended William Godwin against the charges directed against him for undervaluing personal relationships in his early edition of *Political Justice*, by pointing out that 'volumes of sermons have been written to excuse the founder of Christianity for not including friendship and private affection among its golden

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<sup>623</sup> West, *Sermons*, II:157.

<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.*, I:57, 319.

<sup>625</sup> *Ibid.*, I:283.

<sup>626</sup> *Ibid.*, I:292-293.

<sup>627</sup> *Ibid.*, II:77.

rules'.<sup>628</sup> As Hazlitt suggests, despite the frequent comparison made by conservatives between republican principles and 'the absurd worship of pagan times', when it came to universal philanthropy, a close connection in fact existed between republican and Christian positions.<sup>629</sup> Outlining this nexus in 1789, Dissenting Minister Richard Price asserted that, through both his actions and his teachings, God 'recommended [...] universal benevolence' as an 'unspeakably nobler principle than any partial affections'.<sup>630</sup> Six years later, Presbyterian author Joseph Fawcett insisted that conduct dictated by 'the capricious preference of this or that peculiar man', was 'not entitled in any degree to the appellation of goodness or charity' practised by true Christians.<sup>631</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given his theological background, Godwin's *Political Justice* also exemplifies the correlation between Christian and republican precepts. Born into a family of religious Dissenters, and having himself trained as a Dissenting Minister, Godwin was deeply influenced by the language of religion.<sup>632</sup> *Political Justice* illustrates Godwin's engagement with theology, in its renowned passage on François Fénelon, archbishop of Cambrai. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, author and theologian François Fénelon published a number of works advocating disinterested love as a fundamental Christian virtue.<sup>633</sup> Fénelon implored his readers to follow the Lord's example by emulating that 'forgetfulness of self and disinterestedness' which characterise the 'most

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<sup>628</sup> William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age, or Contemporary Portraits to which are added free thoughts on public affairs and a letter to William Gifford* (1825), fourth edition, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt (London: George Bell and Sons, 1894), 28.

<sup>629</sup> West, *Sermons*, I:293.

<sup>630</sup> Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (London: George Stafford, 1789), 8.

<sup>631</sup> Joseph Fawcett, *Sermons Delivered at the Sunday evening lecture, for the winter season, at the old Jewry*, 2 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1795), II:153, 154. The congruity between republican and Christian ideals is explored in Michael Murphy's 'Coleridge and Atheism in the 1790s', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, new series, no.11 (Spring 1998), 57-59.

<sup>632</sup> On Godwin's religious background, and its influence on his writing, see 'Introduction' to *The Letters of William Godwin, Volume 1: 1778-1797*, ed. Pamela Clemit (Oxford: OUP, 2011), xxxv-xxxviii; Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986), 15-37, and William Stafford, 'Dissenting Religion Translated into Politics: Godwin's *Political Justice*', *History of Political Thought*, vol.1 (1980), 279-299.

<sup>633</sup> On Fénelon's theory of disinterestedness see Benjamin Thompson and Robert Lamb, 'Disinterestedness and Virtue: "Pure Love" in Fénelon, Rousseau and Godwin', *History of Political Thought*, vol.32, no.5 (2011), 799-819. For a philosophical study of impartiality and Christianity see Gene Outka, 'Universal Love and Impartiality', in *The Love Commandments: Essays in Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy*, ed. Edmund N. Santurri and William Werpehowski (Washington: Georgetown UP, 1992), 1-103.

divine' forms of love.<sup>634</sup> Promoting this idea in his didactic novel *Telemachus: Son of Ulysses* (1699), Fénelon has the mentor of his eponymous protagonist declare that those who practise 'humanity [...] and disinterestedness', by 'promoting the good' of the greatest 'number of people', can 'expect an eternal reward from the Gods', who honour such demonstrations of 'true virtue'.<sup>635</sup> Godwin became acquainted with Fénelon's writings during his time spent in Norwich in 1772. His indebtedness to these writings is indicated in *Political Justice*.

Benjamin Thompson and Robert Lamb have argued that *Political Justice* advocates a 'Fénelonian understanding of disinterested love', which is illustrated 'somewhat ironically', by 'the iconic place Fénelon has in the notorious discussion of impartiality'.<sup>636</sup> *Political Justice* offers the famous hypothetical scenario in which the author's chambermaid and Fénelon are trapped together in a burning house. Putting Fénelon's Christian theory into practice, Godwin declares that as his loyalties lie not with 'one or two percipient beings', but with the welfare of 'a society, a nation, and in some sense', the 'whole family of mankind', he would choose to save Fénelon over his chambermaid, even if the chambermaid were his wife or his mother, as 'the life of Fénelon' is 'more valuable' to society than that of his relative. Justifying his decision further, Godwin protests that had he saved Fénelon 'at the moment he conceived the project of his immortal *Telemachus*', he 'should have been promoting the benefit of thousands who have been cured by the perusal of that work, of some error, vice and consequent unhappiness'.<sup>637</sup> Essentially, Godwin enacts the form of benevolence promoted in *Telemachus*, in order to endorse it. He chooses to save Fénelon, as opposed to his chambermaid, as the teachings presented in *Telemachus* provide a transcendent benefit to society at large: they are capable of saving 'thousands'

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<sup>634</sup> François Fénelon, *A Dissertation on Pure Love*, trans. unknown (Dublin: Isaac Jackson, 1739), 7.

<sup>635</sup> François Fénelon, *Telemachus: Son of Ulysses* (1699), ed. and trans. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 325, 324.

<sup>636</sup> Thompson and Lamb, 'Disinterestedness', 816. On Godwin's reading of Fénelon while in Norwich see 814.

<sup>637</sup> Godwin, *Political Justice*, I:77.

from ‘error, vice and [...] unhappiness’. As his eulogy of *Telemachus* and its Christian author implies, Godwin’s thesis on benevolence is embedded as much in religious doctrine, as it is in rationalist philosophy. It is owing to the theological grounding of Godwin’s utilitarian stance, that echoes of it are observable in West’s *Sermons*.

The model of impartiality presented in *Sermons* is forthrightly Biblical. *Sermons* reiterates the scriptural teaching that affection for an individual should never compete with the love of God. This conception is outlined explicitly in Matthew 10:37, in which God declares: ‘He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me’.<sup>638</sup> West overtly recalls this passage when warning his readers that they must refrain from loving a family member too passionately, as this kind of ‘idolatry’ is ‘offensive in the sight of heaven’. Christianity, insists West, ‘condemns a devoted attachment to any temporal blessing’, as ‘God alone should be the object of our warmest love’.<sup>639</sup> Illustrating further the disharmony between personal bonds and Christian loyalties, West states that as God cares for the entire human race, and would never ‘check the animated zeal and ardour of his charity, till he has first coldly enquired [...] “who is my neighbour”’, he will often instruct his earthly disciples to emulate his impartiality for the sake of the general good.<sup>640</sup> The devout Christian must therefore be willing to relinquish ‘at the Divine command all that is dear to him’, and to fulfil ‘the sacraments [God] has ordained’, without allowing his religious fervour to be ‘combated by human attachments’.<sup>641</sup> As is clear, West promotes the forfeiture of partial affections as requisite to the commendable accomplishment of the tasks allocated by God. Debatably, Corday’s conduct in *Female Heroism* dramatises this model of Christian magnanimity.

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<sup>638</sup> Matthew 10:37, *King James Bible*.

<sup>639</sup> West, *Sermons*, I:57.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*, I:217.

<sup>641</sup> *Ibid.*, I:114; II:40.

Like many of his contemporaries, West presents Corday as an agent of God.<sup>642</sup> He compares her to the Biblical assassins Judith and Jael, both of whom were instructed by God to rid the world of male tyrants.<sup>643</sup> Justifying her plans to kill Marat in an early conversation with Fauchet, West's Corday declares,

I'm not the first weak instrument of vengeance  
That Heav'n selected from our feebler race  
To blast the triumph of its guilty foes.  
By Jael's hand the warlike Sisera  
Inglorious died: Bethulia's honour'd Matron,  
Ev'n in the midst of his victorious host,  
Slew Holofernes, and redeem'd her country!<sup>644</sup>

Like Jael and Judith, Corday views her task as a Christian mission: she must kill Marat as she has been selected by God to do so. Intensifying her portrayal as a Christian martyr, Corday is later paralleled with Joan of Arc, when referred to as 'th'immortal Maid of Orleans', and after stabbing Marat she declares that 'Heav'n's offended justice nerv'd/ this arm, and guided to his heart the blow!'<sup>645</sup> Viewed as a Christian disciple, instructed by

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<sup>642</sup> Corday is compared to Judith in Gillray's *The heroic Charlotte La Cordé, upon her Trial* [see Fig.12], and Isaac Cruikshank compares her to Joan of Arc in his image *A Second Jean d'Arc or the assassination of Marat by Charlotte Cordé of Caen in Normandy* (1793) [see Fig.15]. In his poem *July Thirteenth. Charlotte Corde executed for putting Marat to death* (1798) Robert Southey also depicts Corday as an agent of God. He claims that she embodies the 'present Deity', and refers to her as the 'Martyr'd Maid'. See *Robert Southey: Poetical Works, 1793-1810*, ed. Lynda Pratt, Tim Fulford and Daniel Roberts, 5 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2004), V:220-221.

<sup>643</sup> Under God's instruction, Judith beheaded the tyrant Holofernes, and Jael stabbed Sisera in the skull with a tent peg. Both women are discussed in Nielsen, *Women Warriors*, xiii-xiv. For more on biblical female assassins see Margarita Stocker, *Judith: Sexual Warrior, Women and Power in Western Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998).

<sup>644</sup> West, *Female Heroism*, I.ii.9.

<sup>645</sup> *Ibid.*, I.ii.10; III.i.28. Whether Joan of Arc was inspired by God or the devil had been a matter of contention in eighteenth-century Britain. A mock epitaph for Joan, published in 1790, began with the claim: 'here lies Joan of arc, the which/ some count saint, and some count witch'. See *Frobisher's new select collection of epitaphs: Humorous, Whimsical, Moral and Satirical* (London: Nathl Frobisher, 1790), 105. Joan was eventually accepted as a 'delegate of heaven', however, after being labelled as such in Robert Southey's *Joan of Arc: An Epic Poem* (Bristol: Bulgin and Rosser, 1796), see 64. On Joan's changing reputation in Britain see Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (London: Vintage, 1991).

Fig.15: Isaac Cruikshank, *A Second Jean d'Arc or the assassination of Marat by Charlotte Cordé of Caen in Normandy* (1793). French Revolution Digital Archive. <<http://purl.stanford.edu/rm620hm7797>> [accessed 2 February 2014].





God to save the fate of France, Corday's effort to think only of her country and to 'slight all meaner ties' renders her entirely compatible with West's Christian ideal:<sup>646</sup> appreciating that Christianity 'condemns a devoted attachment to any temporal blessing', as obedience to God is too often disrupted 'by human attachments', Corday 'banish[es] each thought that combats duty', and thinks only of 'France and Liberty'.<sup>647</sup>

By depicting his heroine as a Christian martyr, intent on ridding the nation of 'the fell defacer of the Maker's image', West softens the incongruity between Corday's gender and her actions in multiple ways.<sup>648</sup> Emma Major has shown that 'the cause of women and that of the Church elide at the end of the eighteenth century', as authors including Hannah More, Jane West, and Henrietta Maria Bowlder increasingly depict 'women as the protectors of the nation's religion', and encourage in them a more vigorous and militant form of Christian activism than previously prescribed.<sup>649</sup> Major explains that while the Christian example held up to women in the 1770s 'had been civilising and polishing in its reform, in the 1790s the exemplary role is couched much more in terms of active battle' against irreligion.<sup>650</sup> As More insists in *Strictures*, these authors were of course not proposing that the nation 'train up Amazons' to assist the Christian cause.<sup>651</sup> Yet, their ideas nevertheless created 'possibilities of equality through religion'.<sup>652</sup> The task of religious salvation provided women with a decorous motive for combative exertion. It was woman's duty to defend the nation against impious foes, and the more ardently a woman devoted herself to this cause, the more valuable she was to her country. In the context of the relationship between women and religion, West's Corday can be interpreted less as a

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<sup>646</sup> West, *Female Heroism*, II.i.13.

<sup>647</sup> West, *Sermons*, I:57; II:40; West, *Female Heroism*, II.i.14.

<sup>648</sup> West, *Female Heroism*, III.i.26.

<sup>649</sup> Major, *Madam Britannia*, 275. While the selection of authors offered here are all loyalists, Major notes that authors including Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Mary Wollstonecraft also used religion to create enhanced possibilities for women. See 275. See also Barbara Taylor, 'The Religious Foundations of Mary Wollstonecraft's Feminism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 99-118.

<sup>650</sup> Major, *Madam Britannia*, 276. For full argument see 272-303.

<sup>651</sup> More, *Strictures*, I:69.

<sup>652</sup> Major, *Madam Britannia*, 275.

transgressive and sexually defiant heroine, than as a somewhat extreme version of the Christian ideal to which women were encouraged to aspire at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Additionally, and most importantly for the purpose of this study, Corday's Christian characterisation frames her exhibition of sensibility as an indication of piety, as opposed to feminine weakness. If Corday's emotional outburst following familial sacrifice had hindered her emulation of the classical republican ideal, her adherence to the image of West's Christian hero is in fact confirmed by her sentimental display. In *Sermons* West carries his strict belief in universal benevolence as far as to suggest that the Christian who is unremitting in his service to religion should be willing both to abandon, and even to kill a family member, if required to do so by God. He begins,

Nothing is more delightful to me than [...] the attachment of blood [...]. Yet should my God say to me [...] "get thee [...] from thy kindred and from thy father's house", I shall [...] depart for the destination he shall please to allot me!<sup>653</sup>

Extending the severity of his statement, by alluding to Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac, and drawing also on God's own immolation of Jesus, West continues,

Nothing can be so afflicting as an eternal separation from so dear a relative: but above all, nothing can excite so much anguish and horror in me, as the circumstance of [...] my own hands divorcing me from him, of my own hands plunging a dagger into a heart still dearer to me than my own! Yet should it please God [...] I will [...] seize on this son, this object of my tenderness.<sup>654</sup>

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<sup>653</sup> West, *Sermons*, I:322.

<sup>654</sup> *Ibid.*, I:323. For the story of Abraham and Isaac see Genesis 22:1-18, *King James Bible*.

West's endorsement of familial sacrifice echoes Godwin's Fénelon passage, and paints the Christian hero as a Brutus-like figure, prepared to kill his own child if necessary. Yet, there is a major difference between West's Christian protagonist and the stoic patriot championed by Godwin: while Godwin's ideal citizen regards compunction prompted by personal loss as being among the 'imperfections of human nature', West presents emotional torment following private grievance as a defining characteristic of the virtuous Christian hero.<sup>655</sup>

West writes that 'the virtuous man is rarely blessed with a stronger constitution or more impassive nerves' than his less virtuous counterpart. 'On the contrary, his very tenderness and benevolence for his fellow creatures plants additional thorns in his bosom'.<sup>656</sup> Acknowledging that the more virtuous the individual, the more pain he is likely to experience when performing his Christian duty, West postulates that it is not at all unreasonable for the Christian hero to weep for the friends or relations that he sacrifices at God's command. He proclaims,

To shed a few tears over those we justly loved is so far from being a crime that it is in some measure a duty – Jesus wept. That conscious and benevolent heart which bled for national calamities felt likewise for private distress.<sup>657</sup>

As the statement makes clear, West's Christian hero nurtures both public and private sentiments. Unlike the stoic republican, whose heart 'bled for national calamities', but not for 'private distress', West's Christian hero possesses such love for individuals, that, like his tragedy's heroine, he cannot endure private sacrifice without shedding tears. While the sentimentalism of West's Christian hero distinguishes him from the classical Roman patriot

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<sup>655</sup> Godwin, *Political Justice*, I:79.

<sup>656</sup> West, *Sermons*, II:221.

<sup>657</sup> *Ibid.*, II:343.

who was recognised in the early 1790s as the embodiment of republican heroism, by the time that West's tragedy appeared on the British stage in 1804, the Christian ideal, and the republican ideal, had to a large extent converged.

'Forgive this Agony of Grief – My Heart is Bursting': The Sentimentalised Republican Hero

In 1800, Godwin indicated a change in the sentiments he had endorsed in 1793, when writing that the first edition of *Political Justice* had been 'blemished principally' by its emphasis on 'stoicism', and its 'unqualified condemnation of the private affections'.<sup>658</sup> Godwin's apology for the features that had shaped his original treatise reflects the extreme denigration by 1800 of models of patriotism that, to quote Edmund Burke, encouraged citizens to be 'lovers of their kind' yet 'haters of their kindred'.<sup>659</sup> While the republican virtues exhibited by figures like Brutus had already clashed with British manners and morals in the years leading up to the 1790s, by 1800, in the aftermath of France's Reign of Terror, they were perceived as repugnant. As historians including Mark Philp have shown, the traditions of ancient Rome and Sparta were used during Robespierre's Republic of Virtue to justify political violence and brutality. As a result, classical values 'became anathematised' in both Britain and France 'as an integral part of the Jacobin Terror'.<sup>660</sup> With stoic precepts falling entirely out of favour, the image of the austere republican patriot was rejected, and a new type of hero appeared in his place.

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<sup>658</sup> William Godwin, 1800, quoted in Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice*, 142. Godwin's attitudes to sensibility were by no means static up until this point. On his shifting views see *Godwin's Political Justice*, 120-159, 193-228. See also Ian Ward, 'A Man of Feelings: William Godwin's Romantic Embrace', *Law and Literature*, vol.17, no.1 (Spring 2005), 21-46; Gregory Claeys, *The French Revolution Debate in Britain: The Origins of Modern Politics* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 129-134, and Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, 89-103.

<sup>659</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Letter from Mr. Burke, to a Member of the National Assembly; in answer to some objections to his book on French affairs* (London: J. Dodsley, 1791), 37.

<sup>660</sup> Philp, *Reforming Ideas*, 120. See also Evan Radcliffe, 'Saving ideals: Revolution and Benevolence in "The Prelude"', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol.93, no.4 (October 1994), 534-559; Radcliffe, 'Arguing Benevolence', 71; Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, 101-109, and Baker, 'Classical Republicanism', 46-53.

As the language of republican virtue was so deeply entrenched in classical values, the Roman models could not be jettisoned entirely. Rather, they were revised to take on more acceptable forms. J.G.A. Pocock has observed that when ‘the world of ancient politics’ began to ‘seem rigid and austere’ in eighteenth-century Britain, the ‘new world of the social and the sentimental’ was ‘made to proliferate with alternatives to ancient *virtus* and *libertas*’.<sup>661</sup> This sentimentalisation process, which was underway in Britain long before the revolution, was accelerated in the mid-1790s in Britain and France alike, and led to the firm establishment of a softer, more family oriented republican hero. As Denise Amy Baxter has shown, post-Thermidor republicans amended the classical ideal of ‘austere stoic masculinity’ in order to embrace ‘the affective bonds of home and community’.<sup>662</sup> While ‘the Reign of Terror had been the reign of Brutus’, and had privileged ‘stoicism above sentiment’, the era of republicanism that followed maintained its underlying precepts, but emphasised familial and private sentiments as integral components of virtue.<sup>663</sup>

Cecilia Feilla has argued that this new importance placed on tender and familial emotions prompted a change in the way that republican heroes were characterised on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century stage. Feilla observes that while the republican protagonist who endures familial sacrifice for the nation’s welfare continued to appear in the theatre, he was now deemed ‘heroic not for his stoic action but for the suffering he endures as a consequence of his great sensitivity’.<sup>664</sup> Only if he experienced distress when placing national duties before private sentiments could the republican hero distinguish himself from his savage predecessor, who could ‘cast away his children’ without ‘one natural pang’.<sup>665</sup> Therefore, continues Feilla, by the close of the eighteenth century, the

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<sup>661</sup> Pocock, *Virtue*, 50.

<sup>662</sup> Baxter, ‘Two Brutuses’, 55.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*, 68. Also on post-Thermidor family orientated models of republican patriotism see Desan, *Family on Trial*, 249-255.

<sup>664</sup> Feilla, *Sentimental Theatre*, 179. See also Feilla’s ‘Sympathy Pains: Filicide and the Spectacle of Male Heroic Suffering on the Eighteenth-Century Stage’, in *Staging Pain, 1580-1800: Violence and Trauma in British Theatre*, ed. James Robert Allard and Matthew R. Martin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 151-167.

<sup>665</sup> Burke, *Letter from Mr Burke, to a Member of the National Assembly*, 35.

virtuous patriot came to be ‘defined less by the stoic resolve and self-mastery he exhibits, than by the visible pain and heroic suffering’ occasioned ‘by the painful sacrifice required of republican politics’.<sup>666</sup> Ultimately, while the protagonist continued to practise civic virtue, he no longer did so with a display of ‘manly fortitude’.

Feilla’s study focuses primarily on French literature. Yet this modified depiction of republican heroism is observable also in early nineteenth-century British dramas, including Charles Kemble’s tragedy *The Point of Honour* (1800), performed in London in 1800. The play’s protagonist, St Franc, is an army officer who is forced by his duty to his country to sentence his son to death. Attempting to uphold a stoic demeanour, St Franc convinces himself that he must perform his task, as ‘justice is inflexible and knows no distinction’.<sup>667</sup> Like West’s Corday however, St Franc struggles to relinquish his familial sentiments. Standing before his fellow officers, in the moments leading up to his son’s execution, St Franc conveys the tension between his national duties and his paternal affections, declaring,

It is decreed that he who basely quits the colours of his country  
merits death [...] – Oh! God! oh! God! – Must I then struggle  
with the fondness thou hast placed about my heart, banish the  
father from my heaving breast? [...] horrible!<sup>668</sup>

St Franc subsequently condemns his fellow soldiers for their ability to ‘coldly stare and see a father murder his own son’, before diverging further from the classical ideal, by ‘*fall[ing] exhausted into his son’s arms*’. Witnessing his display of overwhelming despair, Valcour, a spectator of the scene, identifies in St Franc the quality of ‘heroic virtue’.<sup>669</sup> As with Lee’s Brutus and Smith’s Cato, it is again the protagonist’s response to the task of familial

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<sup>666</sup> Feilla, *Sentimental Theatre*, 182.

<sup>667</sup> Charles Kemble, *The Point of Honour, a play, in three acts, taken from the French, and performed with universal applause at the Theatre-Royal, Hay-Market* (London: A. Strahan, 1800), II.ii.36. Kemble’s play is adapted from Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s *The Dessertier* (1770).

<sup>668</sup> Kemble, *Point of Honour*, III.iv.60.

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, III.iv.60, 61.

sacrifice that defines him as heroic. Yet, in contrast to the earlier examples, it is not St Franc's stoic resolve, but rather, his emotional torment, that is shown to constitute his heroism.

In the following decade, John Howard Payne staged a revised dramatisation of Lee's *Brutus* (1818) on the London stage, which again depicted an afflicted protagonist. Following his son's execution, Brutus gives way to debilitating grief. A stage direction reads, '*the voice of Brutus falters, and is choked, and he exclaims with violent emotion*' ,

Romans, forgive this agony of grief – my heart is bursting

– nature must have way.

I will perform all that a Roman should.

I cannot feel less than a father ought.<sup>670</sup>

Brutus then '*drops in his seat, and shrouds his face with his toga*' , before falling to the floor as the fellow '*characters group around him*'.<sup>671</sup> Like St Franc, Brutus too experiences psychological torment when faced with the conflicting duties of a politician and a father. And again, he is commended for his private sentiments: though *Brutus* was received largely unfavourably in the *Quarterly Review*, Payne was nonetheless lauded for presenting in the place of the 'strained and severe punctilio in Brutus', with which audiences have 'become dissatisfied', a Brutus who proves himself virtuous by giving 'scope to the most solemn strains of moral declamation'.<sup>672</sup>

The displays of mental anguish for which both St Franc and Brutus are celebrated offer a striking comparison to the lamentation exhibited by West's Corday at the close of *Female Heroism*. When read in the context of these contemporary dramatisations of heroic

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<sup>670</sup> John Howard Payne, *Brutus: or the Fall of Tarquin* (1818), in *Cumberland's British Theatre with Remarks Biographical and Critical, printed from the Acting Copies as performed at the theatres-Royal, London, vol.XI* (London: John Cumberland, 1826), V.iii.48, 49.

<sup>671</sup> Payne, *Brutus*, V.iii.50.

<sup>672</sup> *Quarterly Review* 22 (January 1820), 405, 406.

republican protagonists, it becomes possible to read West's denouement as a defence of Corday's heroic virtue. Had Corday exhibited the stoic resolve of Lee's Brutus or Addison's Cato in 1803/1804, she would have been aligned with the monstrous Jacobins responsible for the Terror. Her exhibition of familial sentiment is therefore requisite to her heroic characterisation, as it illustrates her possession of the humanity and sensitivity which, in the early nineteenth century, were deemed vital components of both male and female models of republican virtue. Essentially, the repudiation of austere classical values in the later years of the 1790s facilitated a connection between femininity and traditionally male versions of republican heroism. As a result, West is able to produce a heroine who embodies the emotional qualities of his own Christian hero, and therefore evades charges of androgyny and monstrosity, while additionally conforming to the image of the 'heroic and republican' protagonist.

**'Sentiments of Disinterested Patriotism': Helen Craik's *Adelaide de Narbonne* and Heroic and Republican Cordays on the Turn-of-the-Century Page and the Stage**

As my analysis has suggested, *Female Heroism* arguably challenges the implied incongruity between women and political activism, by proving its heroine capable of fulfilling a traditionally male form of republican heroism. I do not wish to overstate the extent of the tragedy's radicalism, however, by failing to acknowledge its ideological ambiguities. My initial reading of *Female Heroism* was not simply a straw man to be knocked down, but an indication of the complexity I perceive as a necessary part of understanding West's play. With the definition of republican heroism still in a state of flux at the turn of the nineteenth century, Corday's sentimental outburst can be seen to constitute both magnanimity and weakness simultaneously. While audiences' acquaintance with the tearful protagonists exemplified by Kemble and Payne enables Corday's sensibility to be viewed as a heroic republican trait, audiences' concurrent familiarity with the classical protagonists presented by Addison and Lee renders the tragedy's meaning indeterminate: it



leaves theatregoers to decide for themselves whether Corday's emotional struggle reflects female fragility, or republican virtue. It might be suggested that the uncertainty surrounding Corday's portrayal and reception was unavoidable at such a transitional moment, and that West could not have offered a more explicitly heroic depiction of his heroine without stripping her of her feminine virtues. To propose this argument however is to imply that the republican mould in which West cast his heroine was the only one available to him at the time, and, by extension, that British authors writing in the earlier stages of the revolution had been without a means of reconciling feminine sensibilities and patriotic feeling. And this is not the case.

Godwin and Holcroft's insistence in the early 1790s that partial affections hindered the development of national concerns was idiosyncratic. More commonly, British political theorists considered public affections to derive from private sentiments.<sup>673</sup> In 1792, revolutionary sympathiser Mary Wollstonecraft declared that 'few have had much affection for mankind who did not first love their parents, their brothers, their sisters' and those 'whom they first played with'. Sentiments of this kind are 'the only way to expand the heart', and 'to make good citizens', as 'public affections [and] virtues, must ever grow out of the private character'.<sup>674</sup> Departing from the strict model of civic virtue espoused by fellow radicals Godwin and Holcroft, Wollstonecraft presents local affections as the starting point for public cares. Only if one nurtures affections for an individual, can these then develop into love for mankind in general. Wollstonecraft rejects the idea that personal and tangible attachments detract from one's social concerns, and indicates instead the fundamental connection between patriotism, and domestic and familial relations. In so doing she promotes a patriotic model which differs from that later associated with Jacobin

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<sup>673</sup> The mutual dependence of private and public ties was promoted in both radical and conservative literature. For an example of the latter see Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: J. Dodsley, 1790), 68-69. On this model of universal philanthropy see Fairclough, *Romantic Crowd*, 59-106; Evan Radcliffe, 'Burke, Radical Cosmopolitanism and the Debates on Patriotism in the 1790s', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol.28 (1999), 311-339; Radcliffe, 'Revolutionary Writing', 221-240, and Guest, *Small Change*, 185-192.

<sup>674</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: J. Johnson, 1792), 373.

cruelty, and which is readily available to women.<sup>675</sup> By linking one's capacity for national feeling with familial and local ties, Wollstonecraft offers women the ability to intervene in political matters, without neglecting their inherently female sensibilities.<sup>676</sup>

Wollstonecraft's standpoint on universal benevolence therefore indicates that even in the early stages of the revolution, a framework existed which challenged women's perceived incapacity for public feeling, and aligned virtuous femininity with revolutionary activism.

The feminist possibilities of this framework did not go unnoticed by radical Scottish author Helen Craik, whose portrayal of Charlotte Corday as a heroic republican, offered in her novel *Adelaide de Narbonne*, is enabled precisely by her utilisation of the theory of expansive sympathy outlined by Wollstonecraft. The novelist and poet Helen Craik, whose works are yet to receive the attention they deserve, is best known for the friendship she held with the famous author Robert Burns.<sup>677</sup> During the 1790s, Burns was acquainted also with Wollstonecraft.<sup>678</sup> As Liam McIlvanney has identified, Burns was in the habit of discussing and circulating his own literature, as well as that of his peers', among his literary friends.<sup>679</sup> It is possible to speculate therefore that Burns introduced Craik to Wollstonecraft's political theories, and that his relationship with Craik played a consequent role in inspiring the model of female heroism promoted in *Adelaide de Narbonne*.

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<sup>675</sup> Godwin would go on to adopt this same model, following the enhanced censure directed against classical republican values. See Claeys, *French Revolution*, 130-134.

<sup>676</sup> Guest makes this point more extensively in *Small Change*. See 180-187.

<sup>677</sup> Burns was introduced to Craik in 1790 by Robert Riddell. Their friendship reached its height in 1792, as Burns moved closer to Craik's home at Arbigland. See James Mackay, *A Biography of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1992), 487, 528-529, and Ian McIntyre, *Dirt and Deity: A Life of Robert Burns* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 325. A concise though informative biography of Craik, including a record of her publications, is offered in *The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women, from the earliest times to 2004*, ed. Elizabeth Ewan, Sue Innes, Sian Reynolds, and Rose Pipes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006). See 82-83. Matthew Grenby acknowledges Craik's *Adelaide* in *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), see 36-39, 144-145, and in his essay 'Novels of Opinion', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s*, ed. Pamela Clemit (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 160-174. As far as I am aware however, Craic is the only scholar to have devoted extensive attention to Craik and *Adelaide*. See both 'New Cordays', 193-232, and Craic's discussion of Craik alongside more notorious female authors of the 1790s in *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 117-130.

<sup>678</sup> On Burns's friendship with Wollstonecraft see Robert Crawford, *The Bard: Robert Burns, A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), 397, and Liam McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Scotland: Tuckwell Press, 2003), 196-197.

<sup>679</sup> McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical*, 197-199.

Like West's Corday, Craik's heroine is presented as a woman of a 'democratical creed'. She despises Marat for initiating governmental 'reforms that were only to serve as a cloak for partial and additional abuses'.<sup>680</sup> Though Charlotte's strong political sentiments cause her to be perceived early on as a character who is 'entirely divested of all narrow prejudice and solely attached' to 'the good of the nation', Craik subsequently shows that it is from her personal affections that Corday's concern for humanity has arisen.<sup>681</sup> Moved by 'the former and recent sufferings' of her friend Adelaide, 'those her father still groaned under' and 'the probability of a similar fate having likewise decided the destiny' of her husband, Charlotte's sentiments expand to encompass 'every quarter' which is 'writhing in tortures', under 'the barbarous hand of that ruthless and inhuman monster'.<sup>682</sup> Enraged by 'the suffering of those individuals' with whom she is 'more particularly connected', Charlotte's 'country's situation' wrings her heart with 'inconceivable agony', and it is with 'sentiments of disinterested patriotism and the purest philanthropy', that Charlotte resolves to assassinate Marat, and to alleviate the suffering of 'mankind in general'.<sup>683</sup>

Craik's adoption of the model of universal benevolence previously communicated by Wollstonecraft enables her to anticipate West's creation of a heroine who is heroic, republican and feminine, and to do so in wholly unambiguous terms. Unlike West's Corday, Craik's heroine betrays no debatable signs of female weakness, as her emotions are kept firmly in check. On trial following her murder of Marat, Charlotte exhibits 'the kind of heroism' associated with the Roman patriot. She conveys 'attention and composure', and presents an 'unaffected serenity' which has her audience 'awed into silence', before inspiring them to give way to 'loud tokens of applause'.<sup>684</sup> By showing her partial affections to have motivated her crime, Craik substantiates Corday's feminine virtues

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<sup>680</sup> Craik, *Adelaide*, I:53, 31.

<sup>681</sup> *Ibid.*, I:160.

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid.*, IV:276, 258; III:150.

<sup>683</sup> *Ibid.*, I:69, 70; IV:279, 280.

<sup>684</sup> *Ibid.*, IV:282, 281, 282. Craik borrows directly from the account of Corday's trial offered in Williams's *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France*, 2 vols (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1795). See I:131-135.

without having to subject her to the emotional torment suffered by West's heroine. Craik's Corday displays the heroic composure of Lee's Brutus and Addison's Cato, while her femininity is confirmed by the emphasis placed on the domestic foundation of her national and worldly anxieties. Devoid of the duality of meaning which accompanies West's tragedy, *Adelaide de Narbonne* arguably presents a more convincing defence of women's ability to cope with the demands of disinterested patriotism than is presented in *Female Heroism*.

I want to conclude by proposing that the contrasting portrayals of Corday offered by Craik and West are less indicative of the authors' different political allegiances, than they are the demands of genre. It is my contention that West's ambivalent depiction of Corday derives largely from the dramatist's need to demonstrate visually, that which the novelist can verbally narrate. In his study of dramatic adaptations, Philip Cox argues that while the novel can adequately concern itself 'with the mind rather than the body, with private emotion and feeling rather than public deeds', the play struggles to deal with 'psychological or imaginative' themes, as the only truth that can be conveyed sufficiently on stage is that which 'can be publicly revealed'.<sup>685</sup> Cox's hypothesis alludes to the distinction between showing and telling, or, mimesis and diegesis.<sup>686</sup> In novels, readers are granted insight into a character's private thoughts by the presence of a narrator. The narrator mediates the reader's perception of a character by *telling* him or her exactly what that character is thinking or feeling. In the theatre however, characters are without a narrator to expose their internal thoughts, and therefore, if a character's psychology is to be realised, it must be *shown* to its spectators.

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<sup>685</sup> Philip Cox, *Reading Adaptations: Novels and Verse Narratives on the Stage, 1790-1840* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), 18, 35.

<sup>686</sup> For definitions and discussions of mimesis and diegesis see Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (USA: Cornell UP, 1978), 32-34; Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, foreword by Jonathan Culler (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980), 162-170, and Dan McIntyre, *Point of View in Plays, A Cognitive Stylistic Approach to Viewpoint in Drama and Other Text-types* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2006), 58-60.

In his essay 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare' (1811) Charles Lamb engages with this theory. Lamb states that narratives which focus on introverted and meditative characters are not well 'calculated for performance on a stage', as 'the internal workings and movements of a great mind', and 'the motives and grounds of [a] passion' are intangible entities of which 'the actor can give no more idea by his face or gesture, than the eye [...] can speak or the muscles utter intelligible sounds'.<sup>687</sup> Though Lamb acknowledges that a character's suppressed thoughts can acquire narration of types in the theatre, in the form of an insightful soliloquy or dialogue, he considers words alone far less powerful on stage than scenes which 'arrest the spectator's eye'. While a written text need not make a character's feelings visible, as it relies on the reader to picture the emotional state described, in the theatre audiences engage much more so with that which is 'presented to [their] senses', than 'that which is unseen', as 'the imagination is no longer the ruling faculty'.<sup>688</sup> Consequently, the actor must be 'thinking all the while of his appearance, because he knows' that 'the spectators are judging of it'.<sup>689</sup> Having established the importance of visibility to theatrical representation, Lamb suggests that on the stage, sentiments which are private and internal must be made public and external. Within 'the scenic art', he writes, the actor must 'personate passion, and the turns of passion; and the more coarse and palpable the passion is', the easier it is for the spectator to gain 'possession of that knowledge of the inner structure and workings of the mind in a character, which he could otherwise never have arrived at in that form of composition, by any gift short of intuition'.<sup>690</sup> In summary, while the novel is able to disclose the hidden facets of a character's identity using the art of diegesis, within the theatre, mimesis acquires supremacy, as appearance is requisite to the audience's comprehension of a character's intended identity.

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<sup>687</sup> Charles Lamb, 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare. Considered with reference to their fitness for stage representation' (1811), in *Poems, Plays and Miscellaneous Essays of Charles Lamb*, ed. Alfred Ainger (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902), 223, 221.

<sup>688</sup> Lamb, 'Tragedies', 223, 225, 235.

<sup>689</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>690</sup> *Ibid.*, 223-224.

Lamb's theory of drama is helpful in illustrating my hypothesis concerning the differing portrayals of Corday offered by Craik and West. While Craik's heroic portrayal of Corday works upon the page, it would not have done so on the stage. The virtue and femininity of Craik's heroine is clarified solely by the input of the novel's omniscient narrator. Readers know that Corday's 'sentiments of disinterested patriotism' arise from her love of those 'beings dearest to her heart', because the narrator *tells* them this is the case.<sup>691</sup> Without the textual interjections of the narrator, Corday's acceptability as a woman engaged in politics becomes contentious, as the sentiments and motives behind her actions never gain visibility. Readers are told that Corday is a woman of 'heartfelt compassion and sympathy', yet they are shown a woman who responds to the heinous act of murder with 'composure' and 'unaffected serenity'.<sup>692</sup> Therefore, in the theatre, Corday becomes liable to accusations of insensibility, and acquires a potential likeness to the unfeeling virago depicted by d'Eglantine.

It is the very visibility of her femininity which distinguishes West's heroine from that of Craik's. The major difference between Craik's and West's heroines is the manifest sensibility of the latter. Though it is precisely this which causes *Female Heroism's* ideological ambiguity, Corday's palpable display of grief fundamentally shapes her reception in the theatre as a virtuous heroine. During her final scene on stage, audiences are not simply told that Corday's 'heart is wrung with anguish'. Rather, her tears and exclamations enable them to see that this is the case. West therefore creates a heroine whose virtuous identification cannot be misinterpreted by theatregoers: Corday's filial affections are revealed in a manner 'coarse and palpable' enough to communicate 'a vast quantity of thought and feeling to a great portion of the audience, who otherwise would never learn it'.<sup>693</sup> As this reading of *Female Heroism* indicates, the visibly afflicted

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<sup>691</sup> Craik, *Adelaide*, IV:278.

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.*, I:40.

<sup>693</sup> Lamb, 'Tragedies', 223, 225.

protagonist identified by Feilla provided dramatists like West with a model of republican heroism accessible to women, which lent itself perfectly to the theatre. By offering Corday's emotions mimetic representation, West provides both spectators and readers with equal insight into Corday's private passions. He thereby enables his heroine's political yet feminine characterisation to be detected both on the stage, and in the closet.

This chapter has proposed that the differing portrayals of Charlotte Corday offered by Eyre and West reflect the changing social and cultural contexts in which both authors were writing, as well as the dramatists' distinct political and theological standpoints. Eyre emphasises the debilitating nature of Corday's sensibility, in order to enforce theories of inherent sexual difference, while additionally confirming the virtue of his royalist heroine. Contrarily, West paints Corday in the image of his Christian ideal, who, by 1803, embodies the emotional sensitivity required of the republican hero. Meanwhile, the contrasting representations identified in *Female Heroism* and *Adelaide de Narbonne* are informed to an extent by genre. Craik communicates an overt contestation of women's perceived inaptitude for revolutionary activism, by exploiting the representational possibilities made available by the novel. Writing for the stage however, West is restricted in his ability to oppose conservative notions of gender difference, without imperilling his heroine's perceptible femininity. Conclusively, while Eyre purposefully denies women's capacity for martial activism, the ambivalence surrounding West's depiction of Corday is perhaps less indicative of the author's intentional enervation of the tragedy's radicalism, than it is his awareness of the demands of theatrical composition.

#### **4: ‘Be Mine in Politics’: Irish Radicalism, The Act of Union, and**

##### **Charlotte Corday on the Dublin Stage**

John Edmund Eyre’s *The Maid of Normandy* (1794) and Matthew West’s *Female Heroism* (1803) were both performed at the Crow Street Theatre, Dublin. While West, an Irish native, had his tragedy performed in Dublin out of choice, Eyre had planned to stage his drama at the Theatre Royal in Bath, yet it was rejected for performance by John Larpent. Focusing mostly on West’s drama, this final chapter of my thesis proposes that *Maid* and *Female Heroism* each acquire specific political meanings when interpreted in the context of the Irish theatre. While Eyre’s tragedy becomes an adventitious contestation of the principles encouraged by the United Irishmen, a radical faction who sought national autonomy and republicanism, *Female Heroism* communicates a subtle yet arguably intentional indictment of Anglo-Irish relations, and therefore reflects the author’s national and transnational grievances.<sup>694</sup>

West’s attentiveness to the French Revolution, explored in the preceding chapter, coincided with his more immediate experience of equally volatile domestic insurgence. In the 1790s, West resided in the Irish town of Clane in County Kildare.<sup>695</sup> Clane was one of the areas worst affected by riots during the Irish rebellion of May 1798, led by the United Irishmen.<sup>696</sup> Numerous lives were lost during the uprising, and West himself became a victim of the event, when his residence – Vicar Hall – was damaged by the rioters.<sup>697</sup>

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<sup>694</sup> On the United Irishmen, discussed more extensively later in this chapter, see Ian McBride, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: the Isle of Slaves* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2009), 359-368; McBride, *Scripture Politics: Ulster Presbyterians and Irish Radicalism in the late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 165-206; Nancy J. Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 38-66; Marianne Elliot, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982), 1-74, and Georges Denis Zimmerman, *Songs of Irish Rebellion: Political Street Ballads and Rebel Songs, 1780-1900* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 36-43.

<sup>695</sup> See *Clergy of Meath and Kildare: Biographical Succession Lists*, compiled by Canon J. B. Leslie; revised, edited and updated by W. J. R. Wallace (Dublin: Columba Press, 2009), 831.

<sup>696</sup> On the rebellion of ’98 see Curtin, *United Irishmen*, 228-229; McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 165-206, and Elliot, *Partners*, 163-240.

<sup>697</sup> See Richard Sullivan, ‘Clane ’98’, in *Fugitive Warfare: Conflict and Rebellion in North Kildare 1792-1798*, ed. Seamus Cullen and Hermann Geissel (Clane: Clane Historical Society, 1998), 163-173. On the damage to West’s home see 170. For more on Clane in 1798 see Seamus Cullen, ‘The History of Clane:



West's absorption in political matters pertaining to France and Ireland alike possibly inspired him to compose a tragedy that combines an explicitly Francophobic narrative, with a covertly embedded strain of Irish oppositional politics, which, while differing fundamentally from the position heralded by the liberal United Irishmen, echoes the faction's advocacy for Irish independence.<sup>698</sup>

**'The Baneful Poison of Republican Principle': Irish Radicalism and *The Maid of***

**Normandy**

When Eyre's *Maid of Normandy* was examined by John Larpent and his wife Anna Margaretta Larpent on 14 April 1794, it was concluded that the tragedy was 'devoid of poetry and judgement' and 'highly improper just now were it otherwise'.<sup>699</sup> The Larpents' decision that the drama lacked poetical merit and presented 'improper' subject matter was reiterated in reviews of the script printed in London. The *British Critic* declared that 'some

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Earliest Times to 1945', in *Clane: The Village We Knew*, ed. Bryan Sammon, Paddy Behan, and Liam Burke (Dublin: Nonsuch Publishing, 2006), 18-19.

<sup>698</sup> The varying ways in which debates over Irish independence in and around 1800 manifested themselves in novels and in art has received considerable scholarly attention. On the union's depiction in novels see Claire Connolly, *A Cultural History of the Irish Novel: 1790-1829* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012); Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002); Mary Jean Corbett, *Allegories of Union in English and Irish Writing, 1790-1870: Politics, History and the Family from Edgeworth to Arnold* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), esp. 21-50, and 51-81, and Willa Murphy, 'A Queen of hearts or an old maid?: Maria Edgeworth's fictions of union', in *Acts of Union: The Causes, Contexts and Consequences of The Act of Union*, ed. Daire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 187-201. On the union's representation in art see Nicholas Robinson, 'Marriage against inclination: the union and caricature', in *Acts of Union*, ed. Keogh and Whelan, 140-158; L. Perry Curtis, 'The Four Erins: Feminine Images of Ireland, 1780-1900', *Eire-Ireland; A Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 33/34 (1998), 70-102, and Adele Dalsimer and Vera Kreilkamp, 'Re/Dressing Mother Ireland: Feminist Imagery in Art and Literature', in *Re/Dressing Cathleen: Contemporary Works from Irish Women Artists*, ed. Jennifer Grinnell and Alston Conley (Boston College: McMullan Museum of Art, October 5-December 7, 1997), 37-42. The union's delineation in dramatic genres however has been granted far less notice. A recent and comprehensive exploration of Irish politics played out on the eighteenth-century Irish stage is offered in Helen Burke's *Riotous Performances: The Struggle for Hegemony in the Irish Theater, 1712-1784* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), and expanded in her essay 'Jacobin Revolutionary Theatre and the Early Circus: Astley's Dublin Amphitheatre in the 1790s', *Theatre Research International*, Issue 01 (March 2006), 1-16. While the historical scope of Burke's book does not extend to 1800, her latter study, which shows Philip Astley's Dublin Amphitheatre to have become a site for Irish radicalism throughout the 1790s, adopts a more extratextual approach than I employ here, and focuses primarily on the years preceding the union debate. Other studies which explore the correlation between national politics and the eighteenth-century Irish stage, yet fall short of engaging with the union, include Christopher Morash's *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 30-93, and Susan Cannon Harris's 'Clearing the stage: Gender, class and the freedom of the scenes in eighteenth-century Dublin', *PMLA*, vol. 19, no. 5 (October 2004), 1264-1278.

<sup>699</sup> Anna Margaretta Larpent, diary entry for 14 April 1794, in *A Woman's View of Drama, 1790-1830: The Diaries of Anna Margaretta Larpent in the Huntington Library*, 16 vols (Marlborough: Adam Matthews publications, 1995), vol. I. Microfilm edition, reel 1 of 9. Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York.

other title should have been chosen for it, instead of the dignified one of tragedy', as 'it has so little of plot', and 'not much that can be called character'.<sup>700</sup> Meanwhile, the *Analytical Review* warned that the tragedy's theme was capable of 'inflaming party rage', and the *Monthly Review* concurred that by recounting 'recent events', Eyre 'converts the stage from instrument of amusement into a field of political altercation'.<sup>701</sup> Describing at length its aversion to *Maid*'s subject matter, the *Monthly Review* continued,

we should be inclined to censure the play before us on account of its design alone, without any regard to its literary merit: for we cannot perceive any one valuable end, either of amusement or instruction, which is likely to be answered by so soon acting, on the dramatic stage, the shocking tragedy which has so recently been performed on the political theatre of France.<sup>702</sup>

The journalist's reproach reflects contemporary anxieties regarding theatrical representations of the French Revolution, even in performances that conveyed loyalist sentiments. As exemplified previously with reference to *Venice Preserved*, the political meaning intended for a play could be overwritten entirely by the audiences' vocal and public reactions to certain speeches and characters.<sup>703</sup> By responding enthusiastically to scenes of political radicalism, theatregoers were able to transform dramas designed to deter and denigrate revolutionary zeal into vehicles for opposition. Therefore, despite Eyre's explicit attack on Marat and Robespierre, one cheer in favour of the Queen's execution, and the tragedy threatened to become a celebration of the monarchy's demise.

The likelihood of Eyre's tragedy provoking an unintended, anti-royalist reaction was enhanced by a local incident that coincided with the play's proposed performance. David

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<sup>700</sup> *British Critic, and Quarterly Theological Review* 4 (September 1794), 304.

<sup>701</sup> *Analytical Review, or History of Literature Domestic and Foreign* 18.4 (April 1794), 481; *Monthly Review, Or Literary Journal* 14 (August 1794), 467.

<sup>702</sup> *Monthly Review*, 467.

<sup>703</sup> See my Introduction.

Worrall has traced a stampede that broke out at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in 1794, which left a number of audience members dead. Following the tragic event, an anonymous activist circulated a handbill which criticised the British King and Queen for showing a lack of respect for the deceased theatregoers: while the Royal family had refused to show up to any public entertainments following the execution of Louis XVI, they continued to attend theatrical amusements uninterrupted subsequent to the Haymarket crisis.<sup>704</sup> Worrall postulates that the public's dissatisfaction with the Royal family's behaviour made 'staging the death of the Queen of France [...] too provocative in attempting to enlist the sort of sympathy declared wanting amongst the British monarchy for the dead Londoners at Haymarket'.<sup>705</sup> Frustrated by the perceived lack of compassion demonstrated by the monarchy for the stampede's victims, *Maid*'s potential to incite insurgency was accentuated, and the need to keep the tragedy suppressed from the English stage was consequently increased.

Responses to *Maid* indicate the agreement between Larpent and London's theatre commentators that dramatisations of revolutionary violence were not to be tolerated on the stage. This opinion, however, did not extend to Ireland. Political dramas thrived on the Irish stage, which was outside of the Lord Chamberlain's control.<sup>706</sup> John Hall Stewart has shown that the most popular play performed in Dublin between 1791 and 1794 was William Preston's *Democratic Rage; or, Louis the Unfortunate* (1793), a tragedy which ran from June to December 1793 at the Crow Street Theatre.<sup>707</sup> Like *Maid*, *Democratic*

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<sup>704</sup> See David Worrall, *Theatric Revolution: Drama, Censorship, and Romantic Period Subcultures, 1773-1832* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 130. Also on the stampede see Charles Beecher Hogan, *The London Stage, 1776-1800: A Critical Introduction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1968), xxix. Anna Larpent records the King and Queen's absence at the theatre following Louis's execution in her diary entry for 23 January 1793, in *A Woman's View of Drama*, vol.I.

<sup>705</sup> Worrall, *Theatric Revolution*, 130.

<sup>706</sup> On theatre censorship in eighteenth/nineteenth-century Ireland see Christopher Murray and Martin Drury, 'National Theatre Systems: Ireland', in *Theatre Worlds in Motion: Structures, Politics and Developments in the Countries of Western Europe*, ed. H. Van Maanen and S. E. Wilmer (Rodopi: Amsterdam, 1998), 329-382.

<sup>707</sup> See John Hall Stewart, 'The French Revolution on the Dublin Stage, 1790-94', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol.91, no.2 (1961), 188-189. Also on revolutionary spectacle staged in

*Rage* recounts events in revolutionary France including the imprisonment of the Royal family, and the execution of Louis XVI.<sup>708</sup> While Eyre's tragedy was censured in London for its potential provocation of revolt, Preston's drama was praised in Ireland for providing Dublin's theatregoers with a valuable piece of conservative propaganda. The author of a letter published in the Irish periodical *Jones's Magazine* asserted that,

Nothing can be better timed than the publication of this poem, at a season when so much pains have been taken to disseminate the baneful poison of republican principle, so that, abstracting from the poetical merit, which it possesses in a high degree, I would recommend this production to your readers as a judicious and useful political pamphlet.<sup>709</sup>

In direct contrast to the *Monthly Review's* account of *Maid*, the Irish periodical celebrates Preston's tragedy as a well written and entirely necessary antidote to revolutionary ideas. Nothing but good can be seen to result from the tragedy's condemnation of 'the baneful poison of republican principle', and the drama is thereby commended as a 'judicious and useful' form of literature.

When Eyre's tragedy was performed in Dublin in 1794, it too was received optimistically. The *Hibernian Journal* described Eyre's 'celebrated new tragedy' as an 'admired performance', which offers 'a great deal of pleasure', and incited 'universal applause' from its audience.<sup>710</sup> The contrasting opinions of *Maid* printed in the *Monthly Review* and the *Hibernian Journal* intimate the differing attitudes to political dramas fostered in London and Dublin. Arguably, Irish theatre commentators responded more enthusiastically to plays

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Dublin see Hall Stewart, 'The Fall of the Bastille on the Dublin Stage', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol.84, no.1 (1954), 78-91.

<sup>708</sup> See William Preston, *Democratic Rage; or, Louis the Unfortunate* (Dublin: Graisberry and Campbell, 1793).

<sup>709</sup> Letter signed by Criticus, printed in *Jones's Magazine* (June 1795), cited in Hall Stewart, 'The French Revolution on the Dublin Stage', 190.

<sup>710</sup> *Hibernian Journal*, 5 May 1794.

like *Rage* and *Maid*, because Ireland was more in need than England's capital of widely disseminated anti-Jacobin propaganda. By 1794, when the treason trials were underway, and authors and distributors of radical literature were being threatened with prosecution, London radicalism was beginning to wane.<sup>711</sup> Yet the emergence of the United Irishmen meant that the situation in Dublin remained politically turbulent. The United Irishmen avidly supported the French Revolution even after the Terror. They decried Britain's war with France and communicated with the Jacobin club and the Convention about the formation of an Irish Republic.<sup>712</sup> They were keen to instil their opinions in their compatriots, and their propaganda took many forms. They expressed their views in newspapers, they produced seditious poems and ballads, radical pamphlets were distributed through the country, and handbills denigrating the government and endorsing reform were nailed to the doors of houses and dispersed in the streets.<sup>713</sup>

Owing to the nation's constant exposure to United Irish principles, conservative propaganda for the masses was desperately required.<sup>714</sup> For this reason, as Wendy C. Nielsen has argued, Eyre's theatrical disparagement of Jacobin cruelty was relished in Dublin. Nielsen aptly explains that 'for the conservative, literate Protestants of Dublin', who were 'fearful of native Irish support for the French Revolution', *Maid* provided a valuable 'tool in the Anglo-Irish aristocracy's propaganda war'.<sup>715</sup> The abundance of radical activity occurring in Ireland in 1794 meant that Dublin had less to lose, and more to gain than England's capital from the exhibition of a play that voiced, yet fundamentally rebuked revolutionary precepts. By berating Jacobinism on the Irish stage, *Maid* countered

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<sup>711</sup> On the decline of London radicalism see Gregory Claeys, *The French Revolution Debate in Britain: The Origins of Modern Politics* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 79-80, 92-97.

<sup>712</sup> See McBride, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 359-368; McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 165-206; Curtin, *United Irishmen*, 38-66, and Elliot, *Partners*, 1-74.

<sup>713</sup> On United Irish propaganda see McBride, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 383-387, and Curtin, *United Irishmen*, 228-253. A number of street ballads produced by the United Irishmen are recorded in Zimmerman's *Songs*. See esp. 125-126.

<sup>714</sup> R.B. McDowell stresses this point in *Irish Public Opinion: 1750-1800* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975). See 225.

<sup>715</sup> Wendy C. Nielsen, 'Edmund Eyre's *The Maid of Normandy*; or, Charlotte Corday in Anglo-Irish Docudrama', *Comparative Drama*, vol.40, no.2 (Summer 2006), 182, 183.

United Irish arguments, and nullified the force of the faction's propaganda. Therefore, while theatre commentators in London feared the tragedy's re-ignition of reformist sentiments that seemed to have declined, in Dublin, the drama was interpreted in alignment with *Rage*, as a much needed reproof of 'the baneful poison of republican principle', vehemently preached to the Irish public.

**'A Strict Adherence to Truth': Historical Inaccuracies and Political Motives in**

**West's *Female Heroism***

In her discussion of *Maid*'s reception in Dublin, Nielsen makes brief reference to *Female Heroism*. Nielsen describes West's tragedy as being 'nearly identical' to *Maid*, before merging the two dramas' political meanings. She argues that both 'Eyre and West dramatise Corday's assassination of Marat as a pro-British event', and that each 'translate Corday as England's liberty'.<sup>716</sup> While I support Nielsen's reading of *Maid*, and value her mere recognition of West's critically neglected drama, I feel her interpretation of *Female Heroism* requires both expansion and revision. To suggest a homogenous reading of Eyre's and West's tragedies is to ignore not only the substantial narrative contrasts between the two, but it is to overlook also the differing cultural contexts within which the plays were read and staged.<sup>717</sup> It is to dismiss, in particular, the way in which Ireland's relationship with England had altered in the years between 1794 and 1803/4, as a result of the Act of Union. For the remainder of this chapter, I propose that when situated firmly within a post-1800 Irish context, West's Corday, rather than a symbol of English liberty, can be recognised as the personification of Irish independence, and the drama's villain, Marat, becomes the unlikely embodiment of tyrannical British rule.

My interpretation of *Female Heroism* is formed centrally of a close reading of Act III scene I; Marat's attempted rape of Charlotte Corday. My particular interest in this scene is

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<sup>716</sup> Nielsen, 'Edmund Eyre's *The Maid of Normandy*', 185.

<sup>717</sup> On the narrative contrasts see chapter 3.

dictated by two primary factors. First, the scene exhibits West's most suggestive use of anti-unionist vocabulary: second, it represents a curious historical fabrication, in a play that West otherwise claimed to be historically accurate. As shown in chapter 3, West was averse to *Maid*'s divergence from fact. He stresses in the preface to *Female Heroism* that 'An historical play, especially when founded on recent events, should be distinguished' by 'a strict adherence to truth'. Despite his promise to stick 'comfortably to fact' however, West refuses to overwrite Eyre's attempted rape narrative, which is itself a fabrication.<sup>718</sup> West's willingness to violate truth for the inclusion of the rape plot implies the scene's particular appeal to the author's dramatic purposes, and consequently, to the tragedy's intended meaning. Building on this conjecture, I theorise that West retained the fictionalised rape narrative as he identified its rich potential for political appropriation. As Worrall has recently observed, older texts were frequently adapted and re-staged by late eighteenth-century playwrights, with the intention of being 're-territorialised by new audiences in determinable, temporal, and spatial locations, where new political and ideological meanings' were capable of emerging.<sup>719</sup> Possibly, West acknowledged a political potency in Eyre's dramatisation of attempted rape, that the scene had lacked a decade previously, and it is for this reason that the historically inaccurate incident is restaged before an Irish audience in 1804.<sup>720</sup> To corroborate this argument, I turn now to an analysis of the rape narrative, and to an assessment of the implications of dramatising rape on the turn-of-the-century Dublin stage.

#### 'Her luscious sweets I will enjoy by force': Charlotte Corday and the Rape Narrative

Marat's attempted rape of Charlotte Corday was presented initially in Act III scene II of Eyre's *Maid of Normandy*. Upon meeting Corday, Eyre's Marat describes how 'her charms

<sup>718</sup> Matthew West, *Female Heroism, a Tragedy in Five Acts, founded on revolutionary events that occurred in France in 1793* (Dublin: William Porter, 1803), vi.

<sup>719</sup> David Worrall, *Celebrity, Performance, Reception: British Georgian Theatre as Social Assemblage* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 86.

<sup>720</sup> For the play's performance dates see John C. Greene's *Theatre in Dublin, 1745-1820: A Calendar of Performances*, 6 vols (Plymouth: Leigh UP, 2011), V:3383, 3411, 3412, 3413.

engross'd [his] am'rous thoughts', and he resolves that 'her luscious sweets [he] will enjoy by force'. During their second encounter, Marat attempts to put his plan into action, informing Corday that 'thou must be mine', before '*laying hold of her*'.<sup>721</sup> Eyre's incentive behind the rape narrative can be considered congruent with his decision to provide Corday with a romantic motive for her crime: Eyre's fabricated love story detracts from Corday's political agency, by ascribing her actions to 'the influence of private resentment'.<sup>722</sup> The rape scene further depoliticises Corday's behaviour, by making her murder of Marat appear less like a self-determined form of public activism, than a desperate attempt to preserve her chastity.<sup>723</sup>

If the rape scene was motivated initially by the desire to confine Corday's behaviour within acceptably feminine bounds however, it seems unlikely that West would recreate the scene in order to serve this same depoliticising function. As we have seen, West was adamant to prove that Corday's actions were impelled by public, as opposed to private zeal, and thus to illuminate 'the merit of her Patriotism'.<sup>724</sup> It appears probable therefore that West replicated Eyre's rape narrative for purposes contrary to the original. A number of scholars have shown rape to function on the Restoration and eighteenth-century stage as an allusion to national or political wrongdoing.<sup>725</sup> Among them, Margarita Stocker suggests that 'in the fundamental plot of tyranny the female body [...] symbolised the body politic', and thus, 'when a tyrant indulged in rape he was figuratively performing rapine upon the nation

<sup>721</sup> John Edmund Eyre, *The Maid of Normandy; or, the Death of the Queen of France. A tragedy, in four acts* (Dublin: Zacharia Johnson, 1794), II.ii.23; III.ii.34.

<sup>722</sup> West, *Female Heroism*, v. On Corday's romantic motives in *Maid* see chapter 3.

<sup>723</sup> This is how Nielsen interprets *Maid*'s rape scene. See Wendy C. Nielsen, *Women Warriors in Romantic Drama* (Plymouth: University of Delaware, 2013), 17.

<sup>724</sup> West, *Female Heroism*, vi.

<sup>725</sup> See for instance Jennifer L. Airey, *The Politics of Rape: Sexual Atrocity, Propaganda Wars, and the Restoration Stage* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2012); Airey, 'Staging Rape in the Age of Walpole: Sexual Violence and the Politics of Dramatic Adaptation in 1730s Britain', in *Interpreting Sexual Violence, 1660-1800*, ed. Anne Greenfield (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), 95-106; Susan J. Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 175-182; Owen, "'He that should guard my virtue has betrayed it": The Dramatization of Rape in the Exclusion Crisis', *RECTR*, vol.9, no.1 (Summer 1994), 59-69, and Owen, "'Suspect my loyalty when I lose my virtue": Sexual Politics and Party in Aphra Behn's Plays of the Exclusion Crisis', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, vol.18, no.1 (Spring 1994), 37-47.



itself'.<sup>726</sup> This allegorical interpretation of the rape narrative becomes particularly pertinent when applied to literature which, like *Female Heroism*, appeared in Ireland in the years surrounding the Act of Union.

'A Trial for A Rape': The Rape Narrative and Allegories of the Irish Union

The Act of Union was driven by English trepidation of an Irish revolution. In the aftermath of the 1798 rebellion, England feared political altercation with Ireland, and believed that the surest way to vanquish the possibility of any further insurrection was to form a political union between the two nations.<sup>727</sup> Pro-unionists were insistent that they acted with Ireland's best interest at heart. They claimed that it was owing to their affection for Ireland that they wished to see the nation partake in the glories of the British constitution.

Proponents of this stance depicted the union as wholly advantageous to Ireland, and envisaged Ireland's voluntary entrance into the partnership. Anti-unionists, however, suspected dissimulation, and argued that England's claims of fondness and promises of future prosperity were simply used to mask the ulterior motive behind the union: this being the destruction of the Irish parliament. Fearing disingenuousness, anti-unionists expressed Ireland's unwillingness to enter into the partnership, and saw the union as a measure that could only be achieved by coercion.<sup>728</sup>

The differing attitudes towards the relationship that the Act of Union had or would form between Ireland and England found frequent representation within allegories of the event. As has been well established, the union tended to be depicted in domestic terms. Elizabeth Dougherty has shown how 'the Act of Union was consistently depicted as a marriage, with

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<sup>726</sup> Margarita Stocker, *Judith: Sexual Warrior, Women and Power in Western Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998), 93.

<sup>727</sup> On the motives behind the union see James Kelly, 'The Act of Union: its origin and background', in *Acts of Union*, ed. Keogh and Whelan, 46-66, and Kelly, 'The Historiography of the Act of Union', in *The Irish Act of Union, 1800: Bicentennial Essays*, ed. Michael Brown, Patrick M. Geoghegan, and James Kelly (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), 5-36.

<sup>728</sup> See Thomas Bartlett, 'Britishness, Irishness and the Act of Union', in *Acts of Union*, ed. Keogh and Whelan, 243-258, and Jane Elizabeth Dougherty, 'Mr and Mrs England: The Act of Union as National Marriage', in *ibid.*, 202-215.

England as the groom and Ireland as the bride'.<sup>729</sup> Unionists portrayed the marriage as a loving and happy partnership, in order to imply the verity of England's promises, and to justify the legitimacy of the merger, by intimating Ireland's consent. The nuptial imagery was employed quite differently, however, by anti-unionists, who, intent on proving the union to be illicit, preferred the trope of forced marriage or rape.<sup>730</sup> An example of this can be identified in the image *A Trial for A Rape!!!* (1799) [Fig.16], published by William Holland in 1799. The image sees Hibernia declaring charges of intended sexual assault against William Pitt, suggestive of England's willingness to act without Ireland's permission. The rape metaphor appears again in a satirical anti-union playbill published in 1800. The playbill announces the fictitious performance of a drama titled *The Rape of Ierne; or Fidelity Betrayed*, and lists among its cast members 'Mr Bull (from the British theatre)' as the perpetrator of the rape, and 'Mrs Ireland' as the assaulted Ierne, again implying the unjust manner in which the union has been achieved.<sup>731</sup>

A thorough dramatisation of the union as a coerced and unhappy domestic partnership is offered in Peter Pindar's play *The Triple Alliance: or, John Bull's disappointment* (1799). The drama has the tyrannical John Bull confine Hibernia to a cave, in 'galling chains', before attempting to force her into marriage, despite her insistence that she 'will not to Johnny Bull be wed: nor force shall drag [her] to his hated bed'.<sup>732</sup> There are numerous parallels between Pindar's depiction of John Bull and Hibernia, and West's portrayal of

<sup>729</sup> Dougherty, 'Mr and Mrs England', 202. One of the most familiar uses of this allegory appears in Sydney Owenson's novel *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806). The marriage of the English protagonist, Mortimer, to the Irish girl, Glorvinia, is described in political terms, as being 'prophetically typical of a national unity of interests and affections between those who may be factiously severe, but who are naturally allied'. See Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806), ed. Claire Connolly and Stephen Copley (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000), 241.

<sup>730</sup> See Nancy J. Curtin, 'Women and eighteenth-century Irish Republicanism', in *Women in Early Modern Ireland*, ed. Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O'Dowd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1991), 133-136; Jim Hansen, *Terror and Irish Modernism: The Gothic Tradition from Burke to Beckett* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009), 15-17, and Curtis, 'Four Erins', 73.

<sup>731</sup> *An Entirely New Change of Amusements: At the Royal Circus, near College Green, for the benefit of the great Mrs Britain, on Monday, February 3d, will be performed a grand serio-comic Pastichio called the rape of Ierne or Fidelity Betrayed* [A political squib on the Union between Great Britain and Ireland.]. (Dublin: anon., 1800).

<sup>732</sup> Peter Pindar, *The Triple Alliance: or, John Bull's disappointment* (Dublin: anon., 1799), I.ii.10, 15.

Fig.16: Anon., *A Trial for A Rape!!!* (February 1799). © Trustees of the British Museum. Reproduced under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license.



Marat and Corday, which I want now to explore. Though comparing the scripts however, I mean not to imply that Pindar and West were at all congruent in their political sympathies, or that their literary motivations were in any way similar. Peter Pindar, the pseudonym used by English writer John Wolcot, was a satirist renowned throughout the 1780s and 90s for writing disdainfully of the monarchy and the government, to the alarm of British loyalists.<sup>733</sup> Despite the seditious tone of his writing, however, Pindar's political sentiments were far from democratic. In fact, as John Barrell suggests, Pindar was 'half-heartedly monarchist': while he had no qualms with Britain's governmental structure, he took issue with certain authority figures within that structure, and he made his feelings known in his writings.<sup>734</sup> Though fairly ruthless in his mockeries, Pindar was no iconoclast. His satires were claimed to embody 'more of the buffoon than the libeller', and were thus understood to be more farcical than they were propagandist.<sup>735</sup> Pindar's *Triple Alliance* is comparable with West's *Female Heroism* in that both dramas chastise the English government's conduct during the union, by employing conventional anti-union motifs. Yet, while Pindar's drama offers but another comical exposé of English vice, West's tragedy can be read as a forceful political protest, which actively encourages the rectification of Ireland's mistreatment by the abusive and conniving England.

'Be Mine in Politics': Marriage, Rape and Union in *Triple Alliance* and *Female Heroism*

*Triple Alliance* indicates early on the selfish motives fuelling John Bull's desire for a union with Hibernia. Just as England viewed Ireland as a political threat, and sought the union in

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<sup>733</sup> John Barrell has shown that Pindar's satires became particularly anti-government in the summer of 1795. Then, in 1796, Pindar was bribed with the promise of a state pension to alter the political tone of his writing. On the heightened anti-Toryism and anti-royalism of Pindar's satires in 1795 see Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 137-138. For details of the bribe, see 139-141. Despite government efforts, Pindar was still upsetting loyalists at the turn of the century. See for instance the conservative Richard Polwhele's note on Pindar added to the American edition of *The Unsex'd Females: A Poem, addressed to the Author of the Pursuits of Literature. To which is added a sketch of the private and public character of Peter Pindar* (New York: William Cobbett, 1800), 51-68.

<sup>734</sup> Barrell, *Spirit of Despotism*, 137. Barrell's statement is backed up by Pindar's declaration that 'far from despising Kings, I like the breed', but only 'provided King-like they behave'. See 136-137.

<sup>735</sup> Author of Hist. and Lit. Tour, 'John Wolcot: A Biographical and Literary Sketch', in *The Living Poets of England: Specimens of the living British poets with biographical and critical notices, and an essay on English poetry*, 2 vols (Paris: L. Baudry, 1827), I:24.

order to gain control over a potential national adversary, a song delivered in Pindar's play tells of John Bull's fear of Irish rebels, and his consequent desire to 'make all the Croppies lie down'.<sup>736</sup> Keen for Hibernia to agree to the union, John Bull aligns himself with the dissimulative England, by feigning his love for Hibernia. He informs Hibernia that he loves her 'more than mortal ever, ever lov'd before'. He then '*kneels to her*', before asking 'wilt thou consent – and drive off sorrow, by being Johnny Bull's [...] wife tomorrow?' Representing oppositional attitudes towards the union, Hibernia is disgusted by John Bull's plea to marry her. She expresses her disdain and distrust of her suitor, when, '*looking at him with the utmost contempt*', she demands 'away thou fiend', and accuses him of having a 'serpent-guiling tongue'. When John Bull proves unable to achieve his conquest by consent, the nuptial metaphor is supplanted with that of rape. The tyrant threatens Hibernia with the reminder that 'the lad who courts [her...] could sink [her], and turn all his love to hate'.<sup>737</sup> Then, proving the force of his words, '*John Bull is heard inside the cave, struggling with Hibernia*', while she demands 'loose me! Unhand me ruffian!' before repeating, 'I'll never wed, nor shall you force me to the marriage bed'.<sup>738</sup> Pindar's substitution of the marriage metaphor with the trope of attempted rape counters perceptions of the union as an equal and mutually beneficial partnership, and illuminates the unlawful lengths to which England will stretch in order to gain control over Ireland.

The imagery of marriage and rape utilised by Pindar is employed almost identically in *Female Heroism*. Like Hibernia to John Bull, Corday poses a political threat to Marat because that she is 'a Brissotin, and a Girondist'.<sup>739</sup> Desperate to eradicate the challenge, Marat – like England – requests a union with Corday, in the form of a marriage proposal.

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<sup>736</sup> Pindar, *Triple Alliance*, I.i.5. 'Croppies lie Down' is a loyalist folk song which emerged during the 1798 Irish rebellion, in celebration of the rebels' defeat. It is re-reproduced in *The Patriotic Songster: Containing a choice collection of the most admired loyal, patriotic and constitutional songs* (Strabane: Joseph Alexander, 1815), 29-30. The song is discussed in Burke, 'Jacobin Revolutionary Theatre', 13.

<sup>737</sup> Pindar, *Triple Alliance*, II.ii.12.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*, II.ii.28. On representations of John Bull see Tamara Hunt, *Defining John Bull: Political Caricature and National Identity in late Georgian England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

<sup>739</sup> West, *Female Heroism*, III.i.25.

Having informed the audience in an aside of his motive to ‘devote [Corday] to the axe’ if she will not be pacified, Marat reveals his fraudulent character when attempting to convince Corday that he is ‘in love’ with her, and that ‘’tis happiness [he] offer[s]’. Like John Bull, Marat then ‘*kneels and attempts to take [Corday’s] hand*’, while proposing that she ‘Be mine in politics, and share at once/ the heart, the hopes, and greatness of Marat’.<sup>740</sup> The language of the proposal is strongly reminiscent of the terms in which the union was negotiated: by amalgamating the language of politics and love, and issuing the promise of shared ‘greatness’, Marat pledges to Corday precisely that which was being vowed to Ireland by the unionists. Like Hibernia, Corday is not fooled by her wooer’s declarations, and she responds to the proposal with animosity. Wise to Marat’s ‘delusive theories’, Corday retorts, ‘away thou miscreant – thy love is insult and thy touch pollution’.<sup>741</sup> Again, the play’s tyrant subsequently resorts to rape. After threatening that ‘thou shou’dst dread my pow’r!’ Marat demands that Corday must ‘dismiss this virgin coyness, that belies/ thy secret wishes’, before leading her to the couch, and ‘*laying hold on her*’.<sup>742</sup>

The similarities drawn between Pindar’s *Triple Alliance* and West’s *Female Heroism* indicate the latter’s reiteration of the domestic tropes conventionally found within anti-union allegories. Consequently, there is evidence to suggest Corday’s intended embodiment of Ireland’s coercion into an illegitimate partnership with England. This allegorical reading of the play can be extended further: if Corday is interpreted in the former part of the rape scene as a symbol of post-union Ireland, the military character she acquires at the close of the scene can perhaps be viewed optimistically, as foreboding Ireland’s restoration of its native strength. A number of historians have shown how early representations of Ireland depicted the nation as a strong and aggressive female warrior. Lisa M. Bitel writes that ‘images of hostile and powerful women’ who ‘haunted the

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<sup>740</sup> Ibid., III.i.27.

<sup>741</sup> Ibid., III.i.28, 24.

<sup>742</sup> Ibid., III.i.28.

battlefields, dealing terror and bloodlust to men in combat' were prevalent within early allegories of Ireland.<sup>743</sup> Adele Dalsimer and Vera Kreilkamp similarly observe that Mother Ireland was traditionally depicted as a 'voracious warrior queen', or a 'female goddess [...] who haunts the battlefield'. It was only following 'the final defeat of Jacobite hopes at the battle of the Boyne', they explain, that a 'new female image emerged to represent the defeated and colonised land', and that 'instead of a powerful warrior Queen, nationalist sentiment envisioned an icon of defeat, surrender and helplessness'.<sup>744</sup> West's rape scene inverts this allegorical transformation, by turning Corday from sufferer into warrior: when Marat threatens Corday with rape, Corday does not succumb to victimisation, but rather, she eradicates the tyrant, by raising her knife and stabbing him.<sup>745</sup>

West's conversion of Corday from victim to warrior can be seen to reflect the trend among more zealous anti-unionists to endorse and prophesy Ireland's resistance to British rule. The years on either side of 1800 saw a number of anti-unionists resurrect the allegory of Ireland as a military woman in order to remind their compatriots of Ireland's indigenous valour, and inspire their country to fight against England's illegitimate conquest. In the image *Loyalty Rewarded* (1800) [Fig.17] George III is seen lunging towards Hibernia with a phallic looking rifle, imitating the threat of rape. Like West's Corday, Hibernia does not submit to George's advances, but challenges George by raising her spear to him. A similar picture of violent female resistance is offered in the street ballad 'The Patriot Queen', popular in the early years of the nineteenth century. The ballad traces Ireland's mistreatment by the 'bigoted tyrant' of England, before foreshadowing the return of the country's vigour, when having Mother Ireland declare,

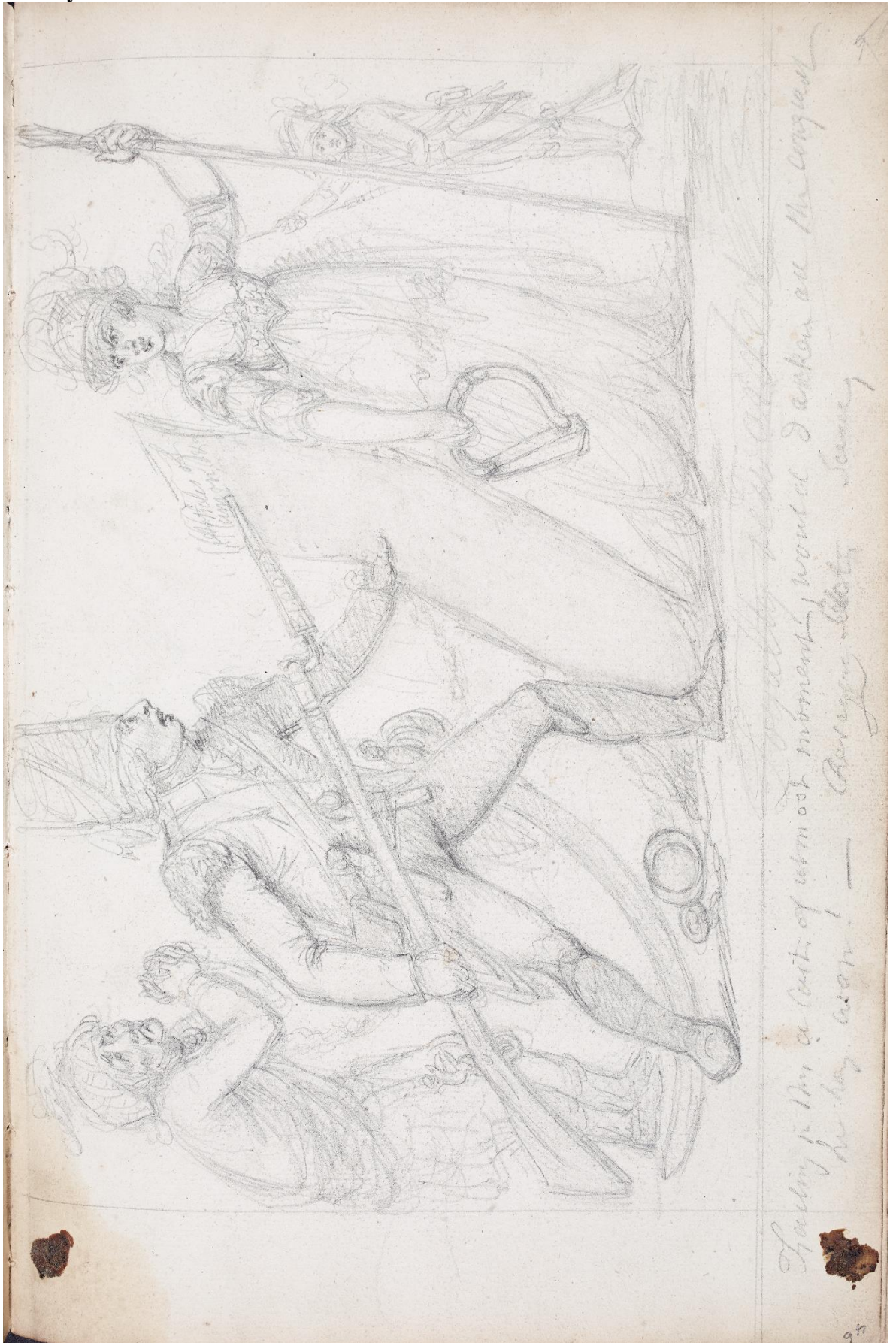
My strength has been daily increasing,  
[...] I'll brandish my weapons once more;

<sup>743</sup> Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* (New York: Cornell UP, 1998), 204.

<sup>744</sup> Dalsimer and Kreilkamp, 'Re/Dressing Mother Ireland', 37.

<sup>745</sup> See West, *Female Heroism*, III.i.28.

Fig.17: James Henry Brocas, *Loyalty Rewarded* (1800). Image Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.





With valour undaunted I'll conquer,  
 My fetters like thunder shall roar.  
 [...] Like Pompey or Caesar in battle  
 I'll ceaselessly fight for my own.<sup>746</sup>

Again, the author justifies the need for insurrection, by depicting Ireland as the victim of English despotism, before reviving the nation's image as a female warrior, in order to infuse Irish patriots with the courage needed to seek justice against England.

Considering the manner in which the Act of Union was portrayed by its antagonists, contemporary interpretations of *Female Heroism* as an anti-union allegory seem a strong possibility. By reproducing, and subtly modifying Eyre's fabricated rape narrative, West constructs a political drama which fashions Corday not as the personification of English liberty, but of Ireland's rightful independence from its unsanctioned union with England. While the Corday presented in the opening half of the rape scene imitates the contemporary image of Hibernia as a violated and oppressed nation, the military Corday depicted at the close of the scene resembles the warlike Hibernia, who became a popular motif among anti-unionists looking both to substantiate and to incite Irish resistance to British dominion. Situated within its historical and geographical context then, *Female Heroism* surpasses the oppositional potential of its forerunner, by serving as a vindication of Ireland's right to challenge, and reverse, the recently passed Act of Union.

'Serviceable to [his] Country': Matthew West and Anti-Union Politics

Whether or not this anti-unionist reading of *Female Heroism* accurately reflects West's dramatic intentions is debatable, yet not unlikely. A letter written in 1802, printed in *Female Heroism*, reveals that West dedicated his tragedy to John La Touche, a companion with whom he had held 'a friendship, almost paternal' for 'near thirty years'. La Touche

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<sup>746</sup> Anon., *The Patriot Queen*, reproduced in Zimmerman, *Songs*, 177.

was an Irish Whig politician from West's home county of Kildare, who had voted against the Act of Union during the debate at the House of Commons in February 1800.<sup>747</sup> West evidently respected La Touche's political leanings: he concludes his letter by declaring that La Touche, for whom he holds the 'sincerest respect and affections', deserves a soothing and pleasant retirement, as 'the exertions of [his] past life have been honourable to [him]self, and serviceable to [his] country'.<sup>748</sup> West's admiration for La Touche as a politician suggests that the two men nurtured congruent political sympathies. Moreover, the play's dedication to La Touche intimates West's belief that the tragedy's political implications would appeal to the man who, just two years previously, had fought to defend Ireland against the Act of Union.

Additionally, *Female Heroism* was printed by William Porter, an Irish native from Wexford, who, in 1792, had joined the United Irishmen.<sup>749</sup> Porter printed numerous anti-union protests in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, including two editions of John Humfrey's hostile response to Edward Cooke's pro-unionist pamphlet, *Arguments for and Against a Union Between Great Britain and Ireland Considered* (1798). Humfrey's pamphlet offers a thorough rebuttal of Cooke's standpoint, arguing that 'the proposed measure of an union would neither [...] remedy the disadvantages stated by [Cooke's] pamphlet', nor 'produce the advantages which the pamphlet has supposed to arise from it'.<sup>750</sup> In the 1780s and 90s Porter also printed several poems by Pindar, whose anti-royalist

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<sup>747</sup> See Ireland. Parliament. House of Commons, *A Report on the Debate in the House of Commons of Ireland, on Wednesday and Thursday the 5 and 6 of February 1800* (Dublin: J. Milliken and J. Rice, 1800), 90. See also Letter from Lord Camden to Lord Castlereagh, Arlington Street, 15 January 1799, in 'Castlereagh Papers', Volume 2. The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. *Act of Union Virtual Library* <<http://www.actofunion.ac.uk>> [1 June 2014]. The La Touche family's anti-unionism is discussed in Liam Chambers's *Rebellion in Kildare, 1790-1803* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998). See 107.

<sup>748</sup> West, *Female Heroism*, iv.

<sup>749</sup> See Bridget Hourican, 'Porter, William', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, ed. James McGuire and James Quinn (Cambridge: CUP, 2009) <<http://dib.cambridge.org>> [2 August 2014].

<sup>750</sup> John Humfrey, *Strictures on a pamphlet, entitled Arguments for and Against an Union Between Great Britain and Ireland* (Dublin: William Porter, 1798), 13. Porter published editions of this work in 1798 and 1799. Humfrey's *Strictures* is one of many anti-union responses to Cooke's *Arguments*. On the union/anti-union pamphlet wars see Daniel Mansergh, 'The union and the importance of public opinion', in *Acts of Union*, ed. Keogh and Whelan, 126-139.

satires were popular at the time among the United Irishmen, and were celebrated in the radical Irish newspaper *The Northern Star*.<sup>751</sup>

The fact that West's tragedy was both dedicated to, and printed by figures who held associations with Irish independence, certainly adds weight to the suggested deliberateness of his anti-union allegory. By interpreting *Female Heroism* this way however, I by no means intend to align West's sentiments with those of the progressive United Irishmen who similarly sought detachment from England. In all likelihood, West was entirely hostile to the rebellious sect who extolled the revolution he despised, and caused such devastation in his hometown of Clane during the '98 rebellion. That West and the United Irishmen were unanimous in their opposition to the union can be deemed illustrative of Liam Chambers's observation that 'the anti-union group' in Ireland was 'composed of strange bedfellows'.<sup>752</sup> Ardent Irish liberals who admired republicanism and sought a reformed Irish parliament were joined by far more conservative anti-unionists, including Kildare's John Wolfe and, significantly, John La Touche. These Whig politicians fervently opposed United Irish activity, and contested the union in order to secure the ascendancy's control over Irish affairs.<sup>753</sup> Consequently, as James Kelly has shown, while the differing camps constituting the anti-union cause 'were at one in believing that a union was not to Ireland's advantage, [...] they agreed on little else, and they existed in largely discrete and ideologically antagonistic spheres'.<sup>754</sup> West's previously discussed antipathy to the French Revolution, his victimisation at the hands of the United Irish rioters, and the details of his tragedy's dedication, strongly suggest his accordance with the conservative strain of anti-

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<sup>751</sup> Mary Helen Thuente shows Pindar's writing to have been praised for its 'bitter-biting muse' and 'unparalleled wit and humour' in *The Northern Star*, 13 June 1792. See Thuente, "'The Belfast Laugh": The Contexts and significance of United Irish Satires', in *Revolution, Counter-Revolution and Union: Ireland in the 1790s*, ed. Jim Smyth (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 69. Porter printed Pindar's *The Lousiad: an heroi-comic poem* (1786), *Ode upon Ode, or a Peep at St James's* (1787), and *Peter's Prophecy: or the president and poet* (1789).

<sup>752</sup> Chambers, *Rebellion in Kildare*, 107.

<sup>753</sup> See *ibid.*, 45-46. Chambers shows Wolfe and La Touche to have been among a number of anti-unionists from Kildare who sought to defend their county against the United Irishmen's attacks in May 1797, by petitioning to place the area under martial law.

<sup>754</sup> James Kelly, 'The Failure of Opposition', in *The Irish Act of Union*, ed. Brown, Geoghegan, and Kelly, 113.

unionism advocated by Wolfe and La Touche, rather than that exalted by the more renegade United Irish nationalists.

‘Peaceable and Zealously Loyal’: *Female Heroism*’s Reception and Irish Conservatism in 1803/4

It is impossible to detect whether or not *Female Heroism*’s anti-unionism was acknowledged during performance. As far as I am aware there are no surviving accounts of the play which record its reception in the theatre. If it had been recognised as an anti-union polemic however, it is perhaps unlikely that audiences would have responded to its oppositional undertones. Writing in 1803, Leonard MacNally, an Irish playwright and government spy, reported to Dublin Castle that

The theatre is tolerably attended. The audience [is] peaceable and zealously loyal in their plaudits on every occasion that offers, and [...] every sentiment in favour of the British constitution [...] is received and marked with the most zealous approbation.<sup>755</sup>

MacNally’s account implies a greater willingness among Dublin’s theatregoers to react vocally to celebrations of Britishness, than to express an approval of the kind of anti-unionist implications identified in *Female Heroism*. As MacNally himself considers, it is probable that the overriding loyalism of the theatre audience offers a stronger reflection of the demands of the political situation in Ireland in 1803, than it does an accurate insight into the theatregoers’ genuine sentiments.<sup>756</sup> July 1803 witnessed Robert Emmet’s anti-

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<sup>755</sup> Letter from Leonard MacNally to A. Marsden, 3 December 1803, in Michael MacDonagh, *The Viceroy’s postbag: correspondence hitherto unpublished of the Earl of Hardwicke, First Lord Lieutenant of Ireland after the Union* (London: John Murray, 1904), 441. On MacNally’s identity see ‘MacNally, Leonard’, in Alfred Webb, *A Compendium of Irish Biography, comprising sketches of distinguished Irishmen, eminent persons connected with Ireland by office or by their writings* (Dublin: M.H. Gill & Son, 1878) <<http://www.libraryireland.com/biography/index.php>> [22 July 2014].

<sup>756</sup> MacNally considers the possibility that ‘a general hypocrisy prevails, and veil[s] the real sentiments of the people’. See MacNally to Marsden, 3 December 1803, in MacDonagh, *Viceroy’s Postbag*, 441.

union uprising.<sup>757</sup> Marianne Elliot notes that there was an ‘intensification of vigilance after Emmet’s rebellion’, which placed the Irish public under greater pressure to suppress any union related discontent.<sup>758</sup> Jacqueline Hill similarly explains that the years following Emmet’s rebellion and execution were marked by an overwhelming sense that ‘counter-revolutionary forces had triumphed’. Acknowledging that ‘loyalism was in the ascendant’, anti-unionists, keen to avoid the sentence suffered by Emmet and his assassinated followers, ‘had little choice but to [...] keep silent’.<sup>759</sup> Silence indeed prevailed in Dublin, both in and out of the theatre. MacNally explains that Dublin ‘has been, ever since [Emmet’s uprising], perfectly tranquil, neither robbery, riot, tumult, nor indication of sedition, or even private quarrels, having appeared’.<sup>760</sup> MacNally’s report of Dublin seems to confirm the public’s alertness to the risks associated with even the smallest hint of insurgence. Within a city dominated by a necessary veil of political contentment, it would have required great bravery for theatregoers to respond favourably to West’s subtle encouragement of Irish resistance to British authority.

One could interpret the reigning conservatism in Ireland at this point as evidence against the likelihood of West’s anti-union allegory being formed intentionally. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that West would have considered it too risky to publish and stage a drama, in 1803 and 1804 respectively, advocating sentiments which had only recently seen Emmet and his followers receive severe punishment. Yet, it is important to note that at face value, West’s tragedy offers precisely that which Irish loyalists were keen to promote: a castigation of French Jacobinism. A rare review of *Female Heroism* published in *Biographica Dramatica; or A Companion to the Playhouse* (1812) lauds the way in which ‘the characters of the different Republican tyrants are accurately delineated; particularly

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<sup>757</sup> Unlike the rebellion of 1798, which was directed against the Irish government, Emmet’s uprising, like the resistance detected in *Female Heroism*, was directed against the British administration. On Emmet’s uprising see Marianne Elliot, *Robert Emmet: The Making of a Legend* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2003).

<sup>758</sup> Elliot, *Partners*, 317.

<sup>759</sup> Jacqueline Hill, ‘Irish Identities Before and After The Act of Union’, *Radharc*, vol.2 (November 2001), 61.

<sup>760</sup> MacNally to Marsden, 441.

that of Robespierre, and the sorrows and persecutions of the widowed Queen and the Royal family are pourtrayed in a very affecting manner'.<sup>761</sup> As the review affirms, that which primarily struck and appealed to the tragedy's contemporaries was West's condemnation of France's 'Republican tyrants', and moving portrayal of the French monarchy. The review implies that West's decision to embed his anti-union protest within an anti-Jacobin narrative was a very artful move. By uniting his national and transnational commentaries, West manages to disguise his insinuated rebuke of the union, beneath an explicit chastisement of Marat and Robespierre, reminiscent of that offered in *Maid*. In so doing, he produces a drama that gratifies British loyalists, while concurrently enabling the possibility of a less detectable, and therefore less censurable, anti-unionist meaning.

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<sup>761</sup> David Erskine Baker, Isaac Reed, and Stephen Jones, *Biographica Dramatica; or A Companion to the Playhouse*, 3 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1812), II:236.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis has travelled from a sentimental comedy staged in London in 1791 to a tragedy performed in Dublin in 1804, with the intention of providing a detailed picture of the contrasting roles acquired by martial women in pathetic and serious dramas, written and performed in different capital cities, at various stages of the revolutionary period. My thesis has produced a number of original, and often surprising results, that develop and occasionally contradict the limited scholarship currently devoted to this rich area of enquiry. A glance at the periodicals, political pamphlets, and graphic satire produced in Britain throughout the 1790s indicates clearly the growing hostilities directed towards martial women in the wake of events of France. Despite this, I have found that armed heroines are frequently depicted in the British theatre in ways that allow them to be condoned, and even celebrated, by liberals and conservatives alike. Fashioned varyingly as agents of male reform, as devoted wives and mothers, and as loyal disciples of God, women waving pistols and thrusting daggers are repeatedly dissociated from the monstrous ‘furies of hell’ presented in Burke’s *Reflections*, and made to acquire surprisingly harmonious relationships with the feminine ideals championed in the period’s conduct literature.<sup>762</sup>

The plays in which martial women appear are shown to contain multiple and ambiguous meanings. This indeterminacy is often dictated by the discrepancy between the female warriors’ literal and allegorical identities. Heroines who allude overtly to the armed women provoking chaos in contemporary France are prevented from being interpreted simply as embodiments of revolutionary energy, on account of the unlikely characters with whom they are concurrently aligned. In 1794, for instance, the unsexed and regicidal Lady Macbeth acquires an astonishing likeness to the haunting apparition of Marie Antoinette, and serves as a powerful deterrent of Jacobin sentiments; three years later, the ferocious

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<sup>762</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: J. Dodsley, 1790), 106.

Amazonian Queen Margaret of Anjou is conflated with the actress Sarah Yates, and becomes an admirably selfless and sentimental mother; and, in 1803, the French republican Charlotte Corday is transformed into a symbol of the warlike Hibernia, encouraging resistance to the Irish Act of Union. These richly layered allusions to figures of political, local and national significance render the heroines' identities ambivalent, and suggest the intricate meanings often embedded beneath the dramas' surface narratives.

My readings of the plays in which these fascinating characters appear are informed by a complex assortment of paratextual factors, the multiplicity and importance of which I have attempted to emphasise throughout the course of this study. I have analysed my selected dramas from a range of contextual perspectives, in order to demonstrate the many threads that interweave to shape the martial woman's intended and received meanings. By employing this methodological framework, I hope to have highlighted abundant and exciting opportunities for scholarly expansion of this stimulating field of research. My relatively short study of martial women in the British theatre has disclosed a diverse, yet far from exhaustive sample of social, literary and theatrical factors which combine to endow the female warrior with a multifaceted identity, and with an elaborate set of ideological meanings that are revised and contradicted from one performance to the next. Armed with this multi-contextual approach to dramatic analysis, I hope that future scholars will uncover many more, and that a whole new cast of martial women will be brought centre stage, and will follow my own in taking a bow.



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